

# OPINIONS OF TRAVELING AGENCIES' MANAGERS REGARDING THE TRAVELING BEHAVIOR OF PEOPLE FROM BRAŞOV

E. UNTARU<sup>1</sup> O. ŞEITAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The adaptation of tourism businesses to the needs of the consumers they address to by means of their offer cannot be achieved without in-depth knowledge of consumer and purchase behaviour. Acknowledgement of consumer behaviour involves identifying, anticipating and meeting consumers' needs in a profitable manner. This article represents a qualitative survey conducted by the semi-directive in-depth interview method among travel agencies in the city of Braşov, with the purpose of revealing managers' views regarding the opinions of people in Braşov towards tourist trips. The results of the qualitative research will form the starting point in the achievement of a quantitative research among people in Braşov, with focus on their opinions, attitudes and behaviours towards travelling, in general.*

**Key words:** *tourist behaviour, qualitative research, semi-directive in-depth interview.*

## 1. Introduction

Knowledge of consumer behaviour is, for any business in tourism, the starting point in formulating appropriate marketing strategies. But this objective cannot be reached without conducting marketing research which should sketch the main features that define the segments of consumers that the company aims at.

This qualitative research was conducted among managers of travel agencies in the city of Braşov in order to seek their opinion regarding the travel behaviour of Braşov people. Of the multitude of techniques for qualitative research, the chosen method was the *semi-directive in-depth interview*.

The objectives associated with the qualitative research were set to allow detailed knowledge of the views of managers of travel agencies as to consumer behaviour of Braşov people regarding tourism products and services.

In this respect, the major objectives envisaged were:

1. Identifying the behaviour of Braşov people towards trips;
2. Identifying the buying behaviour of packages by Braşov people;
3. The reasons for choosing the services offered by travelling agencies;
4. Travel behaviour predictability of Braşov people.

In order to meet the goals set for this research, in accordance with the

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Marketing, Tourism and International Relations, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

requirements of the theory and practice, specialized tools were developed, namely the Selection Questionnaire of potential respondents and the List of Themes and Sub-themes of the semi-directive in-depth interview.

The screening questionnaire comprised a factual question regarding the number of years the travelling agency has been operating on the market, and an identification question on the period of time as CEO of the travelling agencies.

The respondents' answers were registered with a recorder, and stored in electronic files. These files were then transcribed and the primary data were subject to a processing technique called Qualitative Content Analysis.

The following is a summary of the Content Analysis results arising from the in-depth interviews conducted among managers of travelling agencies.

## **2. The Behaviour of Braşov People Towards Trips**

Regarding the behaviour of Braşov people towards trips in general, it can be said that the *preferred areas* for Braşov people for holidays or vacations in the country are the Black Sea - reasoned choice of the specific area of origin of mountain tourism demand – and spa resorts, for treatment, demand for these destinations belonging usually to older persons.

Regarding the choice of people from Braşov for foreign destinations, the preferences are for "conventional" destinations, such as Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, Egypt, Italy and Tunisia as a result of the lower tariffs they require, including a greater number of services in the same package holiday (all-inclusive holidays), the quality of the service provided and/or favourable weather conditions compared with those in our

country (during the season). It is also believed that there are a relatively low number of Braşov people seeking expensive vacations, exotic, remote circuits or longer trips.

Concerning the time preferred by Braşov people as tourists for holidays or vacations, it is deemed to be concentrated in high season, June to August. The motivation for choosing this period is determined primarily by the fact that this time is for holidays and vacations and, secondly, the existence of a diversified offer, a greater number of promotions or incentives offered. Moreover, tourists begin to reorient to periods of low season (May, September, and October) for spending holidays or vacations as a result of lower rates and / or favourable weather conditions in other areas compared to our country.

The criteria identified by the managers interviewed as being used by tourists from Braşov in choosing destinations was the price, quality, services included in the package travel, distance from home, weather conditions at destination, the sights that can be visited, trust in agencies, preferences for certain destinations.

As information sources used by Braşov people for choosing holiday destinations, it is considered that the Internet is the main way of informing Braşov people, followed by information transmitted by word of mouth or through friends, acquaintances who visited certain tourist destinations, or through travel agencies that have information and experience to guide tourists in the choice of destination, so as to meet their expectations at a high level.

There are views that the media plays an important role in informing tourists, just like the brochures offered by agencies, or the promotion of tourism destinations through emails sent to potential customers.

### 3. Buying Behaviour of People From Braşov towards Travel Packages

Regarding the composition of the package tour that Braşov people request when leaving on vacation or holiday, tourists choose one or maximum two components of the package when entering a travel agency, or they seek a full package of services, of the all-inclusive type. The choice of either of the two proposed options will depend on several factors related mainly to age, family life cycle, the form of tourism practiced and even the distance to the destination requested by tourists. It was also stated that Braşov people do not require optional excursions in agencies (they are required directly at destination by tourists); the kind of services like car rental, treatment (spas) etc. are required to a lesser extent.

The *claims* of Braşov tourists regarding the tariffs of holiday packages are unreal, according to most managers interviewed, as regards the price-quality ratio, which would mean that tourists are expected to receive a higher quality product at a low price, which of course entails a number of dissatisfactions with the requested vacation package. However, there are categories of travellers who are not guided strictly by price in choosing a holiday destination, requesting specific areas and packages of services to ensure a certain quality of serving, which is the result of accumulated experience.

The claims of Braşov people are related to certain components of the package such as accommodation, considering that, as the experience of interest increases, the people from Braşov require more expensive hotels (4 and 5 stars) showing a greater safety and comfort, and also catering services.

According to other managers, the claims raised by Braşov tourists are determined by the preparation of the guide accompanying them at the destination. There are also opinions that the high demands of Braşov people start with the unrealistic promotion

of holiday destinations in the media or from overbooking that can occur inevitably at a certain time in accommodation or transportation, and even the lack of information of tourists, considering that they do not read the whole contract and the conditions imposed by it (there are situations in which travel agencies do not provide sufficient information on the holiday destination requested, which, of course, justifies the tourists' high expectations).

Regarding *the satisfaction* felt by Braşov people through the consumption of tourism services and products, travel agencies' managers are satisfied, justifying their position by offering accurate, real information to tourists on the services included in packages, and on the quality of those services. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction is determined, according to managers of travel agencies, on the one hand by tourists' perception on the ratio between the price paid and the quality received and, secondly (and perhaps as a consequence of this perception), by Braşov tourists' expectations regarding services at destination and / or up to it. Expectations however, are caused, according to managers of travel agencies, by tourists' awareness of the services included in the package and the quality of those services. The information provided to tourists by tourism agencies is designed to reduce the gap between what is offered and what is received at destination as much as possible. The smaller the differences, the greater the satisfaction felt by tourists, and vice versa.

### 4. The Reasons for Choosing the Services Offered by Travel Agencies

In what follows, we give some of the reasons for which the people from Braşov choose the services of travel agencies when contracting a holiday package:

- Transaction is safe compared to the information from the Internet;

- Visual contact is made directly between buyer and travel agent, which increases the latter's confidence in the product/service provided by the agency, and meets an optimal level of expectations. Also, the travel agent is well prepared, holding a number of tourist information needed to choose the desired destination;
- The satisfaction felt after choosing one agency increases the loyalty of consumers towards the respective agency;
- Travel agencies offer tourists the possibility of paying in instalments until departure on holiday without paying any interest or additional fees;
- Travel agencies offer security payment, eliminating the risk of loss or theft of amounts paid;
- Potential tourists turn to a travel agency services either because they are comfortable (benefit of immediate information required by the purchase decision), or because they are undecided on the choice of tourist destinations.

Among the reasons for not calling the offer of travel agencies when buying a package / various services or components of the package, reference is made, first, to the wrong perception of potential customers that travel agencies' services use high fees for the travel packages offered and, secondly, the fact that potential tourists were familiar with online payment services / tourism packages, which often is less than that required by a travel agency. But there are also situations in which tourists look for some information about the intended destination on the Internet but, finally, contact a travel agency to complete the transaction, or the traveller does not establish a direct meeting with the travel agent, but requires package / other travel services to it via the Internet (the site of the agency).

The ideal behaviour of buying a travel package is defined from two perspectives:

1. The way tourists have to be treated when entering a travel agency. From this point of view the tourist should comply with one or more of the following conditions:

- Be very well informed, so as to know what he wants, and be open. From this perspective, managers have quite different opinions, so some of them consider that the tourist should have complete information on tour packages, namely the desired location, means of accommodation preferred, ideally, the budget; others consider that at least one of the items listed would be sufficient to design an appropriate holiday package. Meanwhile, the tourist ideally should accept a tip, an indication of the travel agent regarding the choice of package holidays according to his/ her needs.
- To decide quickly on the package tour or services required, so that the travel agent should succeed to make the necessary appointments in time.
- To have a feedback of tourists returning from holiday so that the travel agent may improve, change or, as appropriate, recommend to other tourists that location. Moreover, the experience for tourist holiday destination should exceed his/ her expectations so that, in the future, the tourist should return to the same travel agency to purchase other packages.
- To have a relationship of mutual respect with the travel agents. Also, the tourist should use efficiently the time of the travel agent so that it can serve more customers in less time, increasing the efficiency of travel agents.
- Request a package for an organized group, of 20-30 people, and also to conclude the sales contract for the package of the travel agency which has been recommended.

2. Managers of travel agencies considered that an ideal tourist should have at least one of the following features:

- To be undecided, that is hard to decide on the destination and / or other travel services.
- To contradict the travel agent on tourist destinations, quality of services provided at destination etc.

With regard to the outline of a general profile of customers according to the way they are served, most managers of travel agencies have decided that this is not feasible because the offers are designed to meet all requests coming from customers.

The most important aspect that emerges from the above could be summarized that, at least in the travel agencies included in this analysis, there is a segmentation of tourists to whom they address and therefore an appropriate offer should be adapted to their needs. The reason for the overall approach of the potential tourist demand can be determined, according to the authors, by the small number of customers calling a travel agency services – the statistics in the field show that only 20% of the Romanians use the services of a travel agency when buying a package holiday; the others go on their own or never/almost never go on holiday/vacation.

Managers who have attempted a description of consumers entering the travel agency have found that they have one or more of the following features:

- Are undecided or, conversely, know what they want, or demand too much time of the travelling agent by the multitude of offers required; easily accept information from an agent or, conversely, do not accept any information (assuming they have correct and complete information);
- Call holiday offers for home study, but never come back to buy the travel package they want. Also, do not communicate enough with the travel

agent so as to find the most appropriate solutions for the desired vacation or holiday;

- Seeking high quality holiday deals as cheap as possible;
- Are becoming more demanding on the required destinations and additional basic services within the facility.

## 5. Conclusions and Predictions

The worldwide economic crisis has a more or less significant impact on the travel behaviour of Braşov people. In addition to the lowering of the number of tourists, travel agencies managers identified a number of changes that occurred in the attitude and behaviour of tourists from Braşov in the last year, such as:

- Refocus towards cheaper holiday destinations or to services with lower prices. Furthermore, in terms of holiday destinations, there are opinions that the request for cheaper locations does not necessarily mean the shift from external to those offered internally and with respect to services, the claims for quality destination of Braşov people have not decreased in the current economic crisis.

From this perspective, the interviewed managers identified several categories of tourists, with different behaviours:

1. The segment of those seeking information on holiday destinations offered but not purchased;
2. The segment of those seeking information on tourist destinations but looking for packages offered at low prices (this segment chooses the destination depending on the budget and is part of mass tourism);
3. The segment of business tourists who have an unchanged behaviour, being influenced by the current economic crisis.

- Request to book early or buy travel package in low season.
- Restricting the number of holidays during a year.

Regarding the *predictable behaviour* of tourists from Braşov to further destinations, it is considered that, in time, the demand for various destinations will not change, thus maintaining "classical" holiday destinations due to at least two reasons:

1. People from Braşov are conservatory; they try a new destination only after it was first "tested" by other tourists;

2. The current economic crisis affected the tourism sector by lowering the number of tourists due to cuts in wages, layoffs etc.; generally, amid the uncertainty existing in many spheres, people from Braşov will prefer familiar destinations, geographically close, cheaper, or providing at least the same level of quality in point of services. However, some shifts in demand are projected to other tourist destinations, exotic ones, such as cruises and some tourist areas in Asia.

The views of managers of travel agencies converge to keep the number of tourists (lower than in previous years) but also to attract others by promoting attractive packages in terms of price, number of services included, facilities attached to them, without diminishing the quality of the package offered, but by adjusting supply to the claims of any segment of consumers entering the travel agency.

On the other hand, appreciating the emergence of changes in tourism behaviour, meaning they have become more comfortable, some managers expect a

gradual transition from classical direct meeting between the travel agent and the consumer, to meetings elsewhere (at home or at the consumer's work place) or even virtual meetings via the computer for submission of tenders and orders for a travel package.

The issues from the review of content and the interpretation of the qualitative research findings will be used to build a descriptive quantitative research with the aim of knowing the opinions, attitudes and behaviours of people from Braşov regarding travelling within the country and abroad.

## References

1. Balaure, V., Cătoi, I., Vegheş, C.: *Marketing turistic*. Editura Uranus, Bucureşti. 2005.
2. Bruhn, M.: *Marketing*. Editura Economică, Bucureşti. 1999.
3. Cătoi, I., Teodorescu, N.: *Comportamentul consumatorului*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Editura Uranus, Bucureşti. 2004.
4. Florescu, C., Mâlcome, P., Pop, N. Al.: *Marketing. Dicţionar explicativ*. Editura Economică, Bucureşti. 2003.
5. Lefter, C.: *Cercetarea de marketing. Teorie şi aplicaţii*. Editura Infomarket, Braşov. 2004.
6. Lefter, C. et. al.: *Marketing*. vol.1, Editura Universităţii Transilvania din Braşov. 2006.
7. Kotler, P. et. al.: *Principiile marketingului*. Editura Teora, Bucureşti. 1999.