

FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS REGARDING YOUTH AND THEIR DECISION TO PRACTICE TOURISM

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ABSTRACT: Tourism is an activity carried on by individuals, which is usually enjoyed, and to better understand this economic phenomenon we must understand the person's behaviour – the psychology of tourists and of those who could become tourists. Knowing how individuals make decisions and how they structure their acquired experience can give important advantages in the business practice and how we generally understand the experience in tourism.

Key words: the travel decision process; decisional patterns in tourism.

JEL codes: M31 Marketing, L83 Sports, Gambling, Recreation, Tourism

Introduction

The decision of choosing a destination where to spend a vacation has a high risk, because the potential tourist can't "try on the product" before buying it. His previous experience can't help him either, even if he was satisfied with his choice in the previous years, this doesn't guarantee the same will happen with future vacations. Due to the perceived risk, the decision making process is long (for example, in Western Europe, planning a summer vacation usually starts in January).

At personal level, the demand for tourism services can be seen and approached as a consumption process, which is influenced by a series of factors. These are actually a combination of needs and desires, time and money availability, or images, perceptions and attitudes. Practically, from this point of view there are no two individuals alike, and the differences regarding attitudes, perceptions and motivations have an extremely important role in making the decision to travel. The attitudes depend on the perceptions of each individual about the surrounding world, and perceptions are fuelled by the mental impressions about the visited places, the travel conditions, etc., gathered since childhood or rounded in time by the family experience and by work. Just by themselves the attitudes and perceptions are not enough to explain why people want to travel. The inside impulse to begin a travel is given by motivations. For any individual, the starting point in making the decision to practice tourism is formed by his needs and desires, which compose the person's motivation. While the needs are rather intrinsic, reflecting a gap, a physical or psychological discomfort (the need for rest, for example), desires are extrinsic, being the real, external form of display for needs.

The decisional process in tourism

The decisional process in tourism has as main components the tourist, the destination and the information sources (see chart no. 1).

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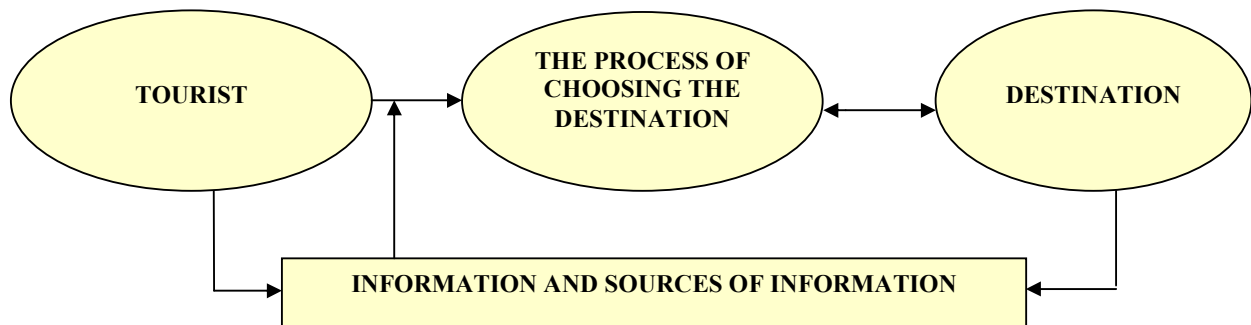


Fig. no. 1 The travel decision process

Knowing the way tourists use different sources of information, you can better understand the entire decisional process, namely: choosing the information sources used by tourists, the interdependence relation between different information sources and, not lastly, the implications of the way in which experts in tourism marketing can use different source of information to promote their products.

The process covered by tourists to make the decision to practice tourism has changed little along the time (chart no. 2), in parallel with other specific notions, such as: the image of the destination, the tourist's features and the actual destination. These are notions that help understand the reason why people travel and the way the decision is made about whether and where to travel. This decisional process was one of the most discussed concepts in the specialized literature, being considered the pivotal concept in tourism (Moscardo, et al, 1996, p. 109-122).

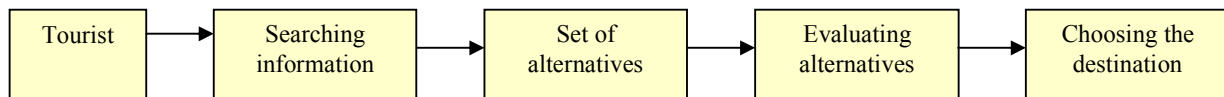


Fig. no. 2 Basics of the destination decision process

The tourist starts to look for information that will allow establishing a set of alternatives, from where the destination is picked.

The main elements of the decisional process are clearly outlined in the consumption behaviour of the tourists and define the theory of solving problems according to which a tourist will use the available information to choose the destination that better satisfies his needs. Some decisional patterns include the hedonistic consumer through the emotional components in order to have a comprehensive approach. Still, there is a consensus that the factual demands of taking a decision are within the decisional process, while the hedonistic elements are external. The models shown in figure no. 3 and 6 are examples of models provided by the specialized literature and show there are many details that influence the basic decisional process, as it is underlined in figure no. 2. These factors include the tourist's previous experiences and the individual characteristics; the features of the destinations; the promotional efforts and the resulted image; various information sources; the nature of the trip; and constraints like time, costs, perceived risks and even cognitive distance.

Literature review

The literature dedicated to identifying and assessing the theoretical coordinates of the consumer's behaviour has known many evolution phases, such as:

The first stage covered a decade between 1930 and 1940 and was marked by researches with an *empirical, commercial feature*. These researches mostly studied the manufacturing area, with the purpose to assess the consequences of the distribution, promotion and advertising decisions;

- The second stage was marked by the studies that laid emphasis on the *motivational aspect*. By implementing specific research techniques, it was managed to highlight more clearly the real reasons behind the person's actions, including his decision to buy or not to buy touristic services. The studies of A. H. Malow belong to this stage.

- The third stage is the *forming* stage, which proliferated after 1970, although some papers already appeared in 1968 (Engel, et al, 1968) and 1969 (Howard, et al, 1969).

During the forming stage, the researchers tried to bring together the disparate economic, social and psychological information in a macro-model that suggested the reasons behind making the decision to travel or to buy certain touristic services. These models had a few common proprieties, such as:

- They showed the behaviour of the touristic consumer as a decisional process;
- The attention was mainly focused on the individual consumer;
- The consumer was seen as being rational;
- The decision to travel or to buy occurs as a result of the accumulated and stored information during a certain time frame;
- Based on this information, the consumer manages to go gradually from general notions to formulating specific selection criteria for the destination;
- These models included the feedback concept, meaning the actual acquisition will impact future buying.

Models for the tourists' behaviour

Some researchers believe that a decision model for travelling is not just a theoretical exercise, but it must be based on strong motivations, on aspirations, needs and personal drives that come from the economic and social environment in which the potential tourist lives and works.

According to the model designed by G.A. Schmoll, the eventual decision (choosing a destination, the length of the stay, the mean of transportation, the accommodation, etc.) is actually the result of an entire process where are involved four consecutive stages:

1. The travel stimuli. These are generally of external nature and refer to advertising, the strategies used by the tourism agencies to promote their products or on recommendations.

2. Certain external variables. They involve the perspectives offered by the trip, the trust in the services' quality, the image the client has about the destination, the accumulated experience from previous trips, the touristic objectives he wants to see, the taken risks and the time and cost constraints.

3. Personal and social factors that could influence the behaviour of the touristic consumer, such as: social status, personality traits, aspirations and attitude towards certain natural, cultural and artistic values.

4. The features of the touristic services that are discovered when reaching the destination.

All these stages can be brought together in a synthetic form like the one in figure no. 3.

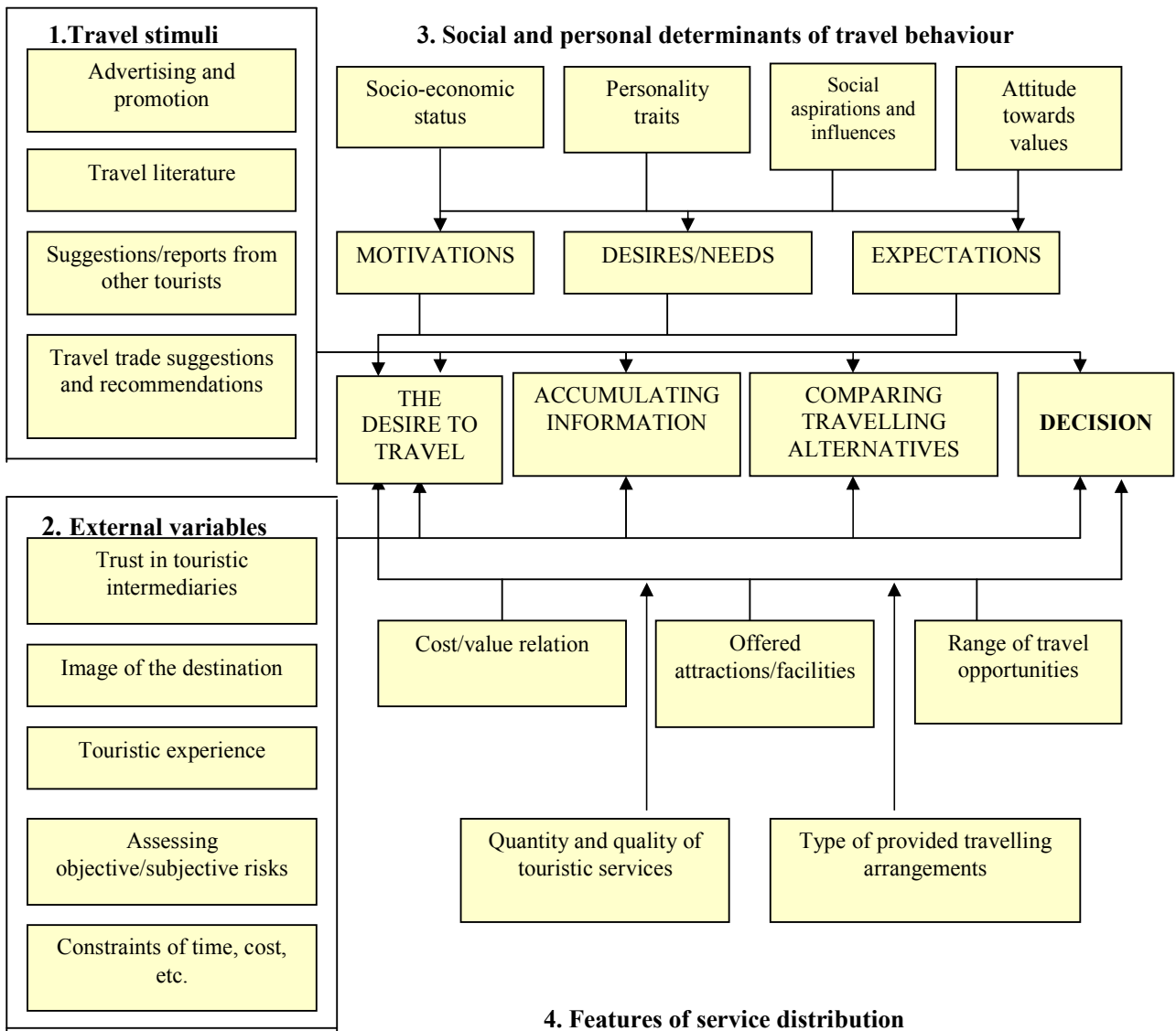


Fig. no. 3 Travel decision process model by G.A. Schmoll, 1977.

Source: Schweda, A., *Marketing WA to the UK Pleasure Travel Market through Interactive Television Applications*, Murdoch University, 2004.

Subsequently, based on the model designed by G.A. Schmoll, other models were published. These models presented the information related to the destination and the features of the provided touristic products as being the most important components of the travelling decision and of the

consumer's behaviour. In accordance to this point of view, the process of making a travelling decision includes five stages (Postelnicu, 1998):

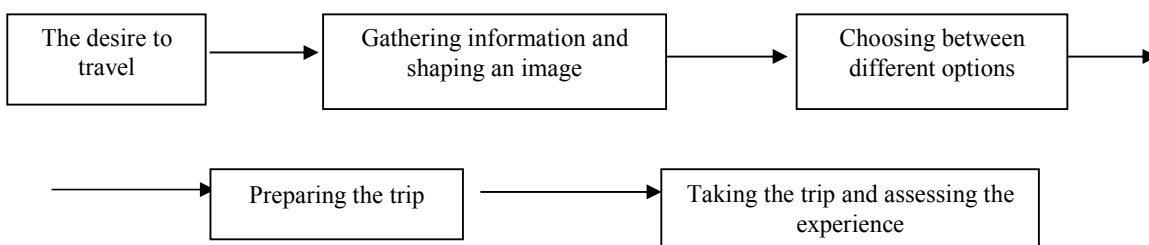


Fig. no 4 The youth's travel decision process

Source: Postelnicu, G., *International Tourism – realities and perspectives (Turism internațional – realități și perspective)*, Ed.Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj Napoca, 1998.

The sequence of the five stages is decisively depended on the information held by youth and the image they shape about the touristic objective/destination in question. The information can be gathered from the most various sources, starting with the ones supplied by the middlemen in tourism (tourism agencies) and finishing with the experiences of friends, acquaintances and other people who visited that destination (see figure no. 5).

| Information sources | Types of information | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| | Formal | Informal |
| Commercial | Brochures Tourism offices Touristic guides National tourism guides | Television Radio Internet Auto clubs Tourism agencies Tour-operators |
| Non-commercial | Magazines Newspapers | Friends/relative Personal experience |

Fig. no. 5 The distribution of the information sources in youth tourism

Source: Adaptation after Fodness and Murray, 1997; and Nielsen, 2001.

Afterwards, this information is compared with the restrictions and constraints of time and budget and, this way, the accessibility of the various options is determined and the tourists must chose one of them. An important role in taking the final decision is played by the type and quality of the transport, accommodation, food and recreation services. Organizing the departure might add some additional details, favourable or unfavourable (for example, obtaining visas and other travelling documents). At the end, the assessments of the results will decisively influence the desire to travel in the future.

Young people who travel tend to be as informed as possible, checking a wide range of information sources before leaving, but the Internet is the main source, followed by friends and family. The Internet's domination as a source of information is underlined by the fact that in the last years there was considerable growth in the importance of the touristic information provided by tourism offices, and this growth was partially owed to tourism web sites. This shows that the Internet is not only the most looked for source of information, but also that tourists research a wide range of sites to find the information they need. Turning to tourism agencies and touristic information points also recorded a growth lately, which shows they adapted to the new market conditions, by offering, for example, many information through the Internet. Regarding the features of tourism web sites, youth appreciates the most the one that provides information about the price and about the destination. Their characteristics are considered more important than functionality, such as the option to make all the reservations on a single site (for example, flights,

accommodation, transport) or retaining the results of the search for future reservations. They do not consider the web sites dedicated especially to young tourists as being just as important for obtaining touristic information.

Another model for the tourist's behaviour belongs to A. Mathienson and G. Wall and was designed in 1982. According to it, the desire of the youth to travel is determined by four overlapped factors (see figure no. 6):

- The tourist's profile (age, education, income, attitudes and touristic experience);
- The picture he has in his mind about the destination and the provided services, based on the credibility of the sources;
- The features of the touristic services;
- The main features of the trip (duration, distance, risks, etc.).

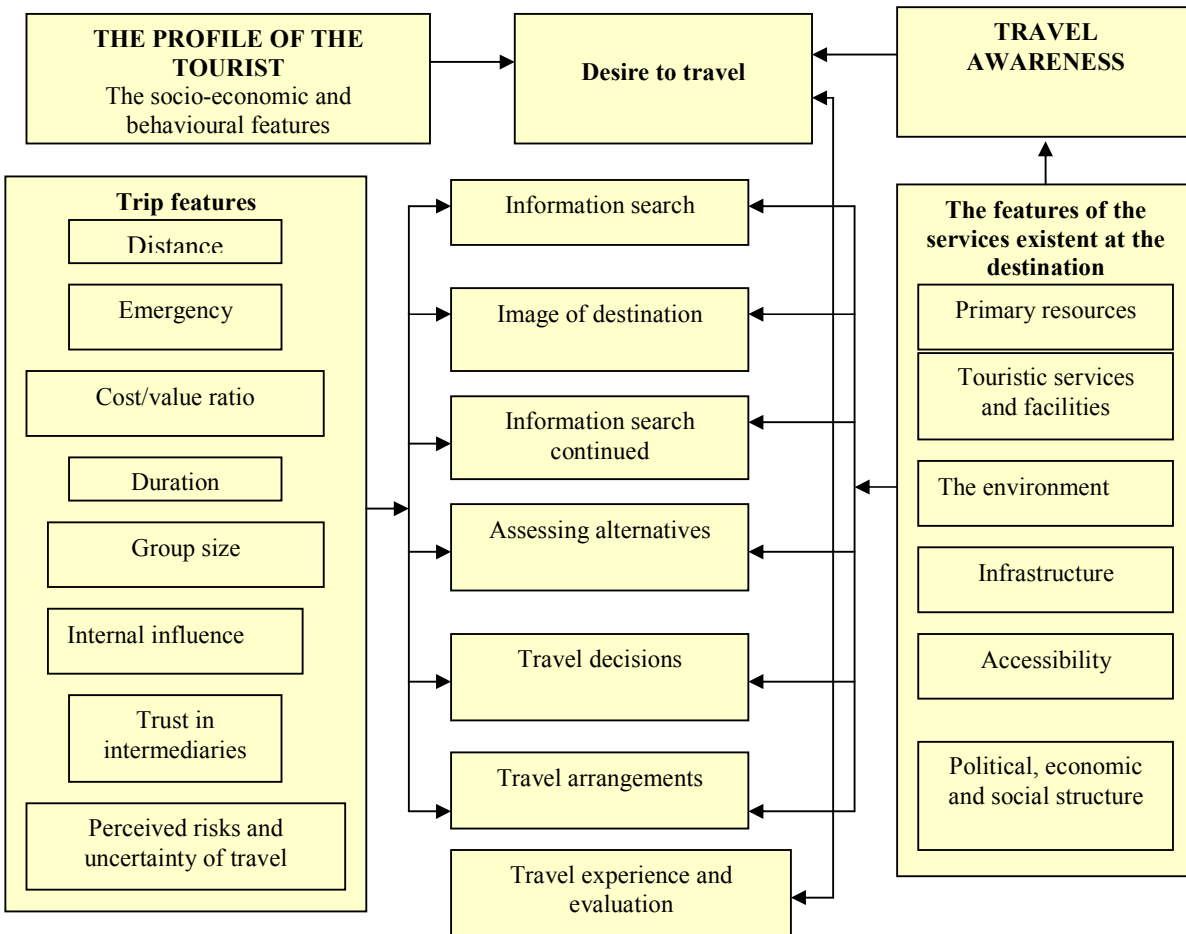


Fig. no. 6 The tourist decisional process by Mathienson and Wall, 1982.

Source: Schweda, A., *Marketing WA to the UK Pleasure Travel Market through Interactive Television Applications*, Murdoch University, 2004.

While Schmoll's (figure no. 3) and Mathienson's and Wall's (figure no. 6) models show the decision-making process as a whole, together with the variables that influence it, other models focus more on the rational process of choosing a destination. Nevertheless, all these models imply that before choosing the final destination the tourists will start a search for information, whose result will be used next to compile lists of potential travelling destination. They include important aspects regarding the youth's behaviour, however, approached in a different manner, becoming stimulating

forces that determine the potential tourist to make a decision regarding his future trip and shaping his behaviour at the same time. As a result, all these are reduced to outlining the motivations behind turning a potential travel demand into an actual travel demand.

If the models represent the essence of choosing a destination, the details of a trip, such as accommodation and travel attraction, are also subjected to a decision process, though, often, not at the same time with the main choice of the destination. Although most tourists make the decisions regarding their activities at the destination before leaving, an important percentage of them, approximately 25%, make these kinds of decisions only after arriving at the destination (Crotts, et al, 1993, pp. 4-10). This happens especially with tourists who visit remote destinations and become better informed after arriving at the destination.

Factors that influence the tourist's behaviour

The behaviour of the tourist is influenced – just like the behaviour of a merchandise consumer – by a series of factors whose action could be independent or associated. These factors can be grouped as follows (Kotler, 1997):

- *Psychological factors*, intrinsic to the tourist, among which the most important are: motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes. Analyzing, for example, the motivation, we can distinguish in tourism numerous types of motivations. The forms of tourism were created based on them: physical motivations (rest, sport, health, etc), cultural motivations, motivations regarding group affiliation, etc.;
- *Personal factors*, namely the personal traits of tourists: personality, self image, economic status, occupation and life style, age and life cycle stage; they decisively influence the tourist's behaviour. The tourist's personality, defined as a set of characteristics, beliefs, convictions, attitudes and habits that represent an answer to the environment and which set individuals apart, represents one of the most important factors that define behaviour towards tourism companies and towards the services they provide. A good knowledge of these factors is absolutely necessary. For example, certain business men, who have wealth, ask for the best services, people who make less money are less demanding and practice an inexpensive tourism; high school and university students are mostly searching for recreation, fun, etc.
- *Cultural factors*, namely the norms and values system that governs the way individuals behave in society can be different from case to case. A certain behaviour can be considered normal in one country or geographical area and totally inappropriate or illegal in a different country (for example, a western tourist who visits an Arab country with a seaside should know that, in most cases, it is forbidden to share the same beach with women);
- *Social factors*, namely family, social groups and classes, opinion leaders influence decisively the travel behaviour. Thus, in a procreation family the parents make the decisions regarding the travels of their children (expeditions, camps, etc.). On the other hand, in the created family, the decision to travel towards a certain destination is made together, by the husband and wife. Children can also play an important role in making a decision; also, the rise of the number of active women in many countries influences their growing role in making buying decisions. Affiliation to a certain group or social class influences the travel behaviour, tourists from the upper class travel towards exotic destinations, in fancy means of transportation (airplanes, limousines, yachts) and demand additional services, while tourists from the middle class focus on less luxurious offers (for example, they look for accommodation in campings, pensions, one or two stars hotels, etc.).

In tourism, the analysis of the consumer's behaviour represents a difficult process for marketing experts because of the services' characteristics that make up the travel product, as well as because the factors that influence the behaviour are not as obvious. Nevertheless, the conclusion was that the most influential socio-cultural factors over consumer behaviour are culture, social class, family behaviour and the affiliation group.

When making travelling decisions, young people must take into account various factors to plan the vacation, such as:

- ◆ The destination country/city;
- ◆ The time of the departure and the duration of the stay;
- ◆ The reservation method;
- ◆ The type of the consumed services;
- ◆ The price of the touristic product, etc.

When choosing a travel destination, the large number of factors that come into play makes even more difficult to understand the process of making a buying decision. Schematically, the three stages of the travel consumption are:

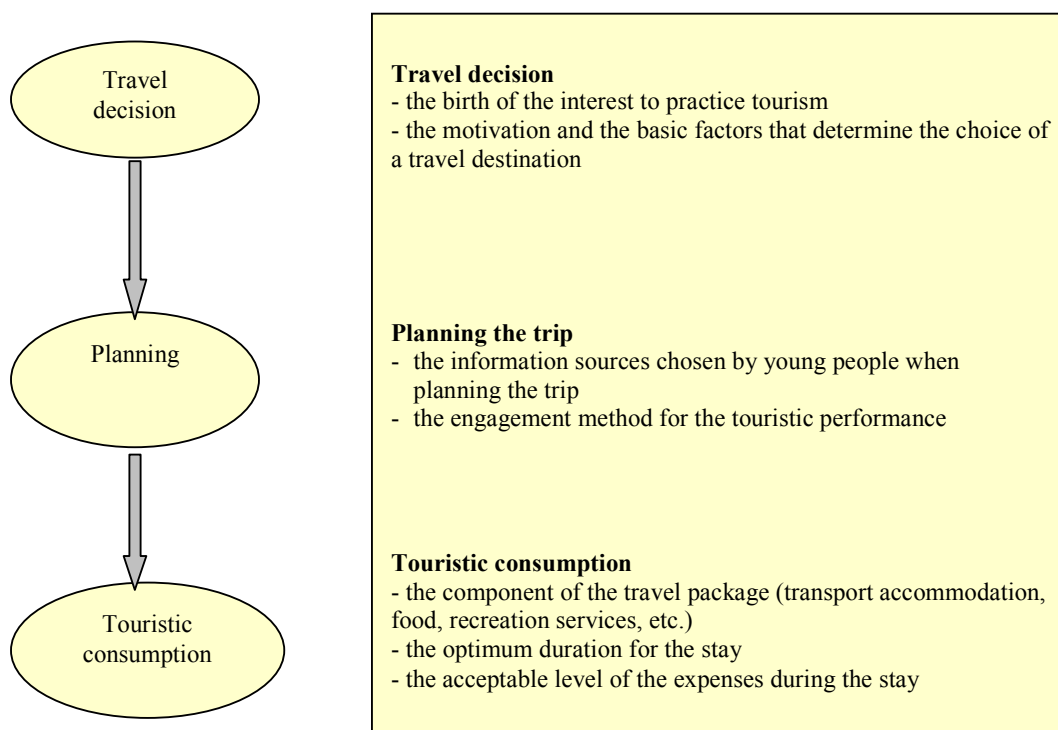


Fig. no. 7 The stages of the touristic consumption

Source: author's contribution

If destination, price and comfort are the main selection criteria for young people during the travel decision process, ensuring the safety and security measures during the stay, the price of the travel product and carried out the activities are the main criteria that motivate the parents' decision.

Considering the small income and the travelling budget of many young tourists, it's not surprising that most of them rely their travel plans on the possibility of travelling as cheap as possible and they also rely on their ability to explore the destination. Ensuring the safety conditions at the destination is an important criterion for youth in the planning stages, although the real or presumed risks don't determine them to quit practicing tourism, compared to other categories of tourists. Similarly, the possibility to experience something different and to participate in "non-touristic" activities is seen with a great interest by most young tourists. Because of this, the ability to speak the language and to go somewhere not very different from home, are not factors with a major influence when planning a trip.

Secondary data analysis

The ranking of the factors considered as being important or very important in planning the most recent trip of young people, at the level of the year 2007, is as follows:

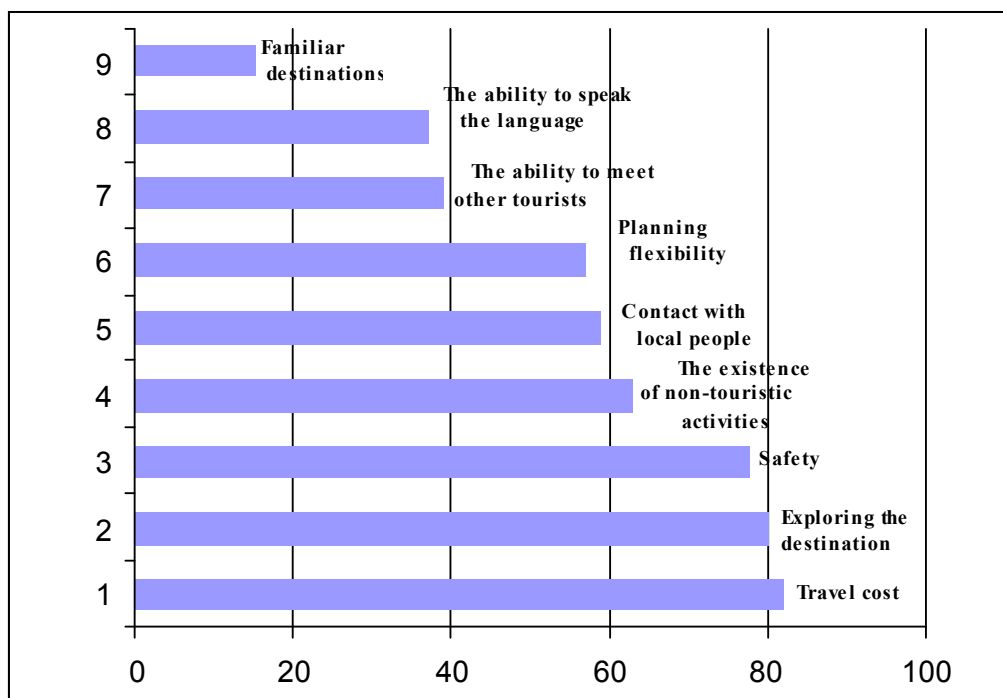


Fig. no. 8 Influence factors for the most recent important travel taken by young people in 2007

Source: Richards, G., *New Horizons II – The Young Independent Traveller 2007*, WYSE Travel Confederation, Amsterdam, 2007.

If tourists with much more experience prefer to use travelling guides and the Internet to plan their vacation, less experienced travellers tend to rely more on friends, family and tourism agencies to gather information. Generally, young tourists choose to visit more “difficult” or more “complicated” places for a longer period of time, which requires a more detailed planning of the trip.

There are some differences between tourists coming from different countries regarding the type of the informing sources they use before going on vacation. For example, young people in Canada prefer friends and family, while young Europeans prefer to use the information they gathered about a destination as a result of a previous trip or after checking the Internet and travelling guides.

Regarding the destinations visited by young tourists, those who plan to visit countries like Germany, France or the USA prefer to get information from friends and relatives, the travelling guides are used predominantly by tourists who want to visit Italy and France, but they are not cared for by tourists of Greece, Great Britain, Germany and Spain. Young people who plan a trip to Western Europe (particularly Austria, France, Great Britain, Netherlands and Ireland) use the information they gathered on a previous trip, unlike those who want to see remoter destinations (Mexico, Australia and Thailand), where the probability to make repeated visits is low.

Conclusions

Regarding the intensity of searching information in the planning process of the travel, most young tourists use a wide range of information sources, which suggests that this process is detailed, those who want to travel check four different sources of information before going. The number of sources increases in direct ratio with the duration of the travel; therefore more experienced tourists check a significantly higher number of information sources.

The tourists who turn to the highest number of sources are experienced travellers and those under 26 years old, because the latter use the personal recommendations of their travelling buddies. People over 26 years old check more information sources than young tourists, which indicates that a lot of experience regarding tourism doesn't necessarily lead to a less detailed planning.

Thus, the idea of an elaborate planning for long-term trips taken by young tourists is shaped. Youth tends to be better informed and is more experienced regarding the places it visits.

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