

SLOW TOURISM CONSUMERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract

Tourism represents a sector in an economy within which consumers – tourists – readily share their personal impressions, thoughts, attitudes and experiences regarding a tourist offer. They do it through interpersonal communication, both face to face, i.e. offline, and with the aid of contemporary information and communication technologies, i.e. online. Such communication, referred to as Word of Mouth communication - WOM in Marketing literature, is considered to be the most reliable source of information about products and services. This paper presents the results of the research which links a special form of tourism – slow tourism with consumer motivations and one of the main outcomes of travel – consumer recommendations. The main aim of the study is to explore the influence of motivations on consumer recommendations as one of the outcomes of slow travel. Recommendations refer to interpersonal communication which is generated independently of business and occurs spontaneously between the consumers. The research was conducted on a sample of 320 respondents in the Republic of Serbia at the end of 2017. The data were analysed by one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Key words: Slow tourism, motives, recommendations, word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth.

ПРЕПОРУКЕ ПОТРОШАЧА УСЛУГА SLOW ТУРИЗМА

Апстракт

Туризам представља сектор економије унутар којег потрошачи (туристи) веома често деле своје личне импресије, размишљања, ставове и искуства о туристичкој услузи. То чине како лично (офлајн) тако и применом савремених информационо-комуникационих технологија (онлајн), употребљавајући интерперсоналну комуникацију. Овакав вид комуникације, у маркетинг-литератури познат као комуникација од уста до уста (енгл. *Word of Mouth* комуникација – WOM), сматра се најпоузданијим извором информација о производима и услугама. У раду су приказани резултати истраживања које је повезало посебан облик туризма – *slow* туризам, мотиве потрошача и један од главних исхода путовања – препоруке потрошача. Основни циљ рада је да се истражи утицај мотива на препоруке потрошача као један од исхода *slow* путовања. Под препорукама се подразумева интерперсонална комуникација која се генерише потпуно независно од предузећа и преноси спонтано између потрошача.

Истраживање је спроведено у Републици Србији крајем 2017. године на квотном узорку који је обухватио 320 испитаника. У анализи прикупљених података примењена је једнофакторска анализа варијансе (ANOVA).

Кључне речи: *slow* туризам, мотиви, препоруке, комуникација „од уста до уста”, електронска комуникација „од уста до уста”..

INTRODUCTION

A large number of different motivations, which represent the triggers of tourist movement, have led to the creation of new, specific forms of tourism. Robbins & Cho (2012) note that modern and fast paced life increases stress in individuals, hence creating the need to “slow down” and escape everyday routine. In such circumstances slow tourism, as a specific form of tourism, offers a solution to fulfil such need (Georgica, 2015).

Tourism is a sector in which consumers share their opinions widely, offline and online. This interpersonal influence is important because of the intangible nature of tourist products and the fact that these products cannot be evaluated before purchase (Confente, 2015; Philips et al., 2013). Wu Shu Fen (2017) emphasizes that interpersonal communication, at its core, represents the spreading and sharing of personal tourist experience, and as such shapes the demands on the tourist market. Thus, the primary task of hospitality and tourism marketers is to gain thorough understanding of the way recommendations work and influence consumer behaviour.

The current research in the field of tourism lacks empirical evidence that would fully explain slow tourism as a particular form of tourism. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to explore the influence of motivations on consumer recommendations as one of the outcomes of slow travel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Contemporary Concept of Tourism - Slow tourism

The concept of slow tourism as a relatively new concept has developed from two social movements: “slow food” and “slow cities”, which emerged in Italy in the 90s of the 20th century (Fullagar, Markwell & Wilson, 2012). Slow tourism is based on the idea that one could “slow down” and genuinely enjoy the visit (Conway & Timms, 2012). Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) are of the opinion that slow tourism involves consumers who want to travel “more slowly” and stay at the chosen destination longer, where they use local forms of transport, consume local products – authentic cuisine, and visit local cultural landmarks. By doing so, consumers become a part of life of the local community (Georgica, 2015). Thus, longer stays and building relationships with people, culture, tradition and surroundings represent essential principles that this specific form of tourism is based on

(Caffyn, 2012; Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011). Defined as such, slow tourism benefits the local community on the one hand, and, on the other hand, brings enjoyment and creates a new kind of experience for consumers.

In her paper, Caffyn (2012) lists five key dimensions of slow tourism (place, people, time, travel and individual) and summarizes the basic elements of this form of tourism (minimizing travel distances; maximizing the length of stay; psycho-physical relaxation; meeting local culture and customs; emphasis on local products including local restaurants and shops; creating authentic experience). A destination is considered “slow” if it encompasses a larger number of the elements mentioned above.

Slow tourism, as a specific form of tourism, offers a three-dimensional solution to the development of contemporary tourism: sustainability, economic benefits for the local community and destination, and tourist satisfaction (Conway & Timms, 2010).

WOM in Tourism

Hanna and Wozniak (2009) define interpersonal communication as personal communication between individuals, where one communicator performs the role of a recipient of a message, while the other acts as the source of a message, which is considered non-commercial and refers to products or services. Similarly, Solomon (2011) perceives interpersonal communication as transmission of information about products and services from one individual to another. This process allows consumers to share information and opinions that direct them towards and away from specific products and services (Hawkins et al., 2004).

Interpersonal communication has long been described as influential in the field of tourism. According to Litvin et al. (2008) word-of-mouth (WOM) is ranked the most important information source when it comes to making purchase decisions, especially in hospitality and tourism industry. Murphy et al. (2007) note that WOM represents one of the most important sources of information that influence the choice of a tourist destination. Also, it is a predominant source of information in developing a destination image (Ishida et al., 2016). The significance of WOM derives from specific characteristics of the hospitality and tourism product offering – intangible goods that cannot be evaluated before their consumption and that are seen as high-risk purchases (Lewis & Chambers, 2000). For this reason, consumers often engage in WOM in order to gain information that will reduce the risk and help them to compare different tourist products.

In her paper, Confente (2015) presents the results of the research on WOM in the field of tourism, according to which 92% of consumers trust recommendations from friends and family members more than they trust traditional marketing messages which come from tourist companies and destinations. Thus, not only does a positive WOM shape the destination image, but also increases the recognizability of the destination on the

tourist market (Philips et al., 2013). The greater the satisfaction with the quality of the tourist offer, the greater the possibility that the feeling of satisfaction will be transferred to other consumers – potential tourists. In addition, Lai et al. (2018) note that during the process of planning a trip and choosing a destination, tourists primarily rely on WOM experiences of other tourists.

Nowadays WOM has evolved into a new form called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). With the expansion of Internet technologies there is an increasing number of tourists who use the Internet in order to seek destination information (Litvin et al., 2008). According to Jalilvand et al. (2011), eWOM enables consumers to obtain information from a vast, geographically dispersed group of tourists who have experience with different tourist products and destinations. EWOM allows consumers to share their opinions and experiences with others via electronic communication channels (e-mails, blogs, networks, chat rooms, online reviews and websites) (Ishida et al., 2016). In contrast to traditional WOM, eWOM spans more widely due to the fact that it is anonymous, available 24/7 and has a more powerful impact than traditional WOM (Jeong & Jang, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

The current research in the field of tourism lacks empirical evidence that would fully explain slow tourism as a particular form of tourism. Therefore, the authors of this paper examined the impact of motivations on slow travel outcomes - more concretely, on consumer recommendations.

The research was based on a model by Oh, Assaf and Baloglu (2016), who identified six motivations of slow tourism (relaxation – being free from pressure, stress, and tension; self-reflection – the need to connect to self; escape – the need to get away from everyday routine; novelty seeking – the need to experience new places, new people; engagement – immersing oneself in local culture and environment; discovery – the need to learn and understand something new), two goals (revitalization – physical and mental refreshment; self-enrichment – broadening one's perspective), and three travel outcomes (satisfaction; future return intention; referral intention).

Park and Yon (2009) point out that in the context of travel motivation, it refers to a set of needs that encourage an individual to travel, and as such, represents the most important determinant of consumer, i.e. tourist behaviour (Wong et al., 2017). According to the studies in the field of tourism, the concept of motivation implies that individuals travel because they are “pushed away” or “pulled” by certain factors (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Push factors (internal, psychological) encourage consumers to travel, while pull factors (external, cognitive) influence the destination

choice (Xu & Chan, 2016). The concept of slow tourism places a special emphasis on the need to “slow down” the pace of everyday life (a push motive) by discovering possibilities of reducing stress through choosing a slow destination (a pull motive). The authors of this study perceive motivations such as relaxation, self-reflection, escape and discovery as push motives, and motivations such as novelty seeking and engagement as pull motives.

This paper presents a part of the research results which explain the impact of motivations on consumer recommendations as one of slow travel outcomes (“I recommend the destination to others”, “I talk positively about the destination”). A recommendation implies interpersonal communication which is generated independently of business, and occurs spontaneously and autonomously between consumers. In contemporary conditions, interpersonal communication does not solely refer to a personal contact between consumers or face to face interaction, but it increasingly uses various forms of electronic media. In that way, impressions and advice regarding various products and services are exchanged.

The research, based on online questionnaire, was conducted from October to December 2017. The sample involved 320 respondents from five cities in the Republic of Serbia (Belgrade n=58; Novi Sad n=76; Niš n=64; Kragujevac n=54; Subotica n=68). The only precondition for completing the questionnaire was that the respondent had visited a destination in Vojvodina labelled as “a slow place” - Palić, a grange in Vojvodina or Fruška gora, in the past two years.

The questionnaire used in the research was adjusted to a measurement scale employed by Oh et al. (2016) (Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient for motivations > 0.944; Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient for goals > 0.968; Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient for outcomes > 0.832). The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section contained questions regarding general sociodemographic characteristics of respondents. The second section consisted of questions concerning the trip and the visit to a destination, while the third section contained questions regarding motivations, goals, and outcomes of a visit to a slow destination. This, last section was composed of statements to which participants had to respond within a five-point Likert scale. For recommendations as a slow travel outcome, the following options were offered: 1 – very unlikely; 2 – unlikely; 3 – neutral; 4 – likely; 5 – very likely (Oh et al., 2007).

As the focus of this study was to examine the impact of motivations on consumer recommendations as a slow travel outcome, the following hypothesis was put forward:

H: There is a statistically significant impact of motivations on recommendations from consumers of slow tourism.

The statistical software IBM SPSS version 20 was used for data processing and hypothesis testing.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses performed on a sample of 320 respondents showed that there were assumption violations, so the cases having atypical features were excluded from the sample. Further preliminary analyses proved that the assumptions of normality, multicollinearity and homogeneity were not violated.

In order to assess the model, the adjusted coefficient of determination was set up, which explained 20.3% of variance in recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism.

Table 1. Model description^b

	R	R Square	The adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Recommendations	.468 ^a	.219	.203	.689

a. Predictors: relaxation, self-reflection, escape, novelty seeking, engagement, discovery

b. Dependent variable: recommendations

Source: *Authors' calculation*

The level of statistical significance of the adjusted coefficient of determination is shown by one factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) (Table 2). The null hypothesis was set up where r^2 applied to population equals 0. Since the calculated level of significance (Sig. = 0,000) was lower than 0.05, the null hypothesis could not be rejected. It was therefore concluded that the research model had statistical significance.

Table 2. ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Recommendations	Regression	40.564	6	6.761	14.220	.000 ^b
	Residual	145.005	305	.475		
	Total	185.570	311			

a. Dependent variable: recommendations

b. Predictors: relaxation, self-reflection, escape, novelty seeking, engagement, discovery

Source: *Authors' calculation*

In order to determine which slow tourism motivation has the strongest impact on recommendations as a slow tourism outcome, a standard multiple regression analysis was applied. Table 3. shows to what extent individual slow tourism motivations contribute to predicting recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism.

Table 3. Coefficients of a recommendation as an outcome of slow tourism

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence interval for B			Correlations		Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero order	Partial Correlation	Semipartial Correlation	FVU (1-r ²)	VIF
Recommendations (Constant)	3.310	.148		22.319	.000	3.019	3.602					
Relaxation	.114	.053	.189	2.134	.034	.009	.219	.333	.121	.108	.325	3.076
Self-reflection	-.108	.055	-.161	-1.957	.051	-.216	.001	.249	-.111	-.099	.378	2.643
Escape	-.065	.046	-.111	-1.397	.163	-.156	.026	.241	-.080	-.071	.407	2.456
Novelty seeking	.004	.050	.006	.084	.933	-.095	.103	.302	.005	.004	.449	2.227
Engagement	.183	.056	.262	3.259	.001	.072	.293	.392	.183	.165	.397	2.518
Discovery	.186	.061	.279	3.079	.002	.067	.305	.422	.174	.156	.312	3.207

Source: Authors' calculation

The model assessed six regression parameters and a constant. Unstandardized coefficients were applied so as to develop the model. They were expressed in the following regression equation:

$$\text{Recommendations} = 3.310 + 0.114 \text{ Relaxation} - 0.108 \text{ Self-reflection} - 0.065 \text{ Escape} + 0.004 \text{ Novelty seeking} + 0.183 \text{ Engagement} + 0.186 \text{ Discovery}$$

The constant is 3.310. If all parameters in the model had the value 0, the recommendation as an outcome of slow tourism would be 3.310. In order to compare the contribution of all independent variables, a standardized coefficient (Beta) was applied. In this case, beta coefficient for the motivation "relaxation" is 0.189, for "self-reflection" 0.161, for "escape" 0.111, for "novelty seeking" 0.006, for "engagement" 0.262, and for "discovery" 0.279. This means that discovery as a motivation contributes to explaining recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism to the greatest extent, if we remove the variance that is explained by other variables. Therefore, one can conclude the following: if the impact of discovery is increased by 1, the recommendation as an outcome of slow tourism will be increased by 0.279.

Since any value lower than 0.05 is considered statistically significant, the conclusion is that variables such as relaxation, self-reflection, engagement and discovery make a significant and unique contribution to predicting the main variable, i.e. recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism, while variables such as novelty seeking and escape do not make a significant and unique contribution to predicting recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism.

In the model, the semipartial coefficient of correlation for "relaxation" variable is 0.108. When squared, it equals 0.0117, indicating a unique contribution of 1.17% in explaining the variance in recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism. The semipartial coefficient for "self-reflection" variable is 0.099. When squared, it equals 0.0098 and suggests that there is a unique contribution of 0.98% in explaining the variance in recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism. The semipartial coefficient for "engagement" is 0.165. When squared, it equals 0.0272, indicating a unique contribution of

2.72% in explaining the variance in recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism. The semipartial coefficient for “discovery” variable is 0.156. When squared, it equals 0.0243, indicating that there is a unique contribution of 2.43% in explaining the variance in recommendation as an outcome of slow tourism.

Based on determining the strength of impact of motivations of slow tourism (motivation 1 – relaxation, motivation 2 – self-reflection, motivation 3 – escape, motivation 4 – novelty seeking, motivation 5 – engagement, motivation 6 – discovery) on recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism, one can conclude that discovery, engagement, relaxation and self-reflection have a significant impact on predicting the recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism $F(6, 305) = 14.220, p = 0.000 < 0.05$, while, escape and novelty seeking as slow tourism motivations are not significant predictors of recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism. Having in mind that four out of six motivations of slow tourism make a significant contribution to predicting the dependent variable, i.e. recommendations as an outcome of slow tourism, it can be concluded that the hypothesis H is accepted, i.e. there is a statistically significant impact of motivations on recommendations made by consumers of slow tourism.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Lai et al. (2018) note that in the process of planning a visit to various destinations consumers primarily rely on experiences and recommendations of other consumers gained through WOM communication. In the research, they conclude that the nature of the relationship between the tourists and the local population (motivation: engagement) influences consumer satisfaction, especially consumer recommendations (WOM) as an outcome of travel. The results of the aforementioned research regarding the impact of motivation “engagement” on recommendations from slow tourism consumers are in line with the results of our study. Similarly, Agapito et al. (2011) concludes that culture (motivation “engagement”) represents one of the most important attributes which explains tourists’ recommendations.

The contribution of this research lies in the fact that it proves the importance of recommendations (WOM) in the travel decision-making process. Since consumers have the ability to exert influence over other consumers, hospitality and tourism marketers have to manage interpersonal influence. Besides, with the expansion of electronic technologies, virtual interactions between consumers have proliferated. Nowadays, the increasing number of consumers use the Internet to seek information about destinations and to conduct transactions online (Jalivand & Samiei, 2012). Thus, Marić et al. (2018) explored the effects of eWOM on choosing a slow destination and concluded that decisions are largely based on recommendations found on the Internet. According to Sigala et al. (2012), one of the main challenges that

hospitality and tourism marketers face is the rise of social media and networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace and Instagram), which allow tourists to interact and share their experiences. In order to meet the challenges of modern world hospitality and tourism, marketers should recognize all the benefits of eWOM, because its characteristics allow a high level of flexibility related to accessibility and the possibility of reaching a huge audience (Lončarić et al., 2016).

The results of this research (while taking into account its limitations in terms of sample size, temporal scope of the research, the need to repeat the study and prove the results, etc.) offer further theoretical explanation of WOM as a marketing phenomenon and improve the theoretical framework regarding tourism as a type of service industry by explaining, understanding and hence predicting the behavior of tourists, i.e. consumers of tourist offers and destinations. Managerial implications of this research are very concrete – marketing decision makers, especially those who deal with slow tourism, must accept the principle that it is most profitable for a company to retain the existing customers, and let them attract new customers through positive WOM in a form of recommendations. Since the research showed that there are four motivations of slow tourism which lead to positive recommendations, the marketers have to focus on helping tourists escape everyday pressure and stress by creating adequate offers.

Some tourists get rid of stress through fun activities and adrenaline addiction. However, having in mind that the research identified self-reflection (finding inner peace and discovering the self) as the second motivation, stress relief should not occur through too aggressive forms of relaxation, but through engagement such as immersing oneself in local culture and novelty seeking, which represent motivations of slow tourism that lead to positive recommendations. Cultural heritage and tradition of the locality represent the starting point for shaping the slow tourism offer. It needs to be emphasized that WOM is actually a double-edged sword, which means that a failure which occurs in previous steps can lead to WOM, but in a form of negative comments and impressions, which have an unfavorable impact on interested parties not only in tourism, but other economic sectors as well.

Some studies on the effectiveness of tourist recommendations demonstrate the influence of both positive and negative WOM (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2008; Jalivand & Samiei, 2012; Park & Allen, 2013). Similarly, this paper demonstrates that positive WOM (“I recommend the destination to others,” “I talk positively about the visited destination”) creates a positive image of a slow destination and, in addition, increases awareness of the slow destination to those who are unfamiliar with it.

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ПРЕПОРУКЕ ПОТРОШАЧА УСЛУГА *SLOW* ТУРИЗМА

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Резиме

У раду су приказани резултати истраживања које је повезало посебан облик туризма – *slow* туризам, мотиве потрошача и препоруке потрошача. Основни циљ био је да се истражи утицај мотива на препоруке, као један од исхода *slow* путовања.

Потреба да се успори свакодневни живот препун стреса и рутине и да се ужива у путовању довела је до настанка посебног облика туризма – *slow* туризма. Основна идеја овог облика туризма јесте да се у једној дестинацији остане што дуже и да се током боравка користе расположиви, локални облици транспорта, да се конзумирају производи локалне кухиње и да се посете све локалне знаменитости. На тај начин, потрошачи, накратко, постају део локалне заједнице. Након повратка са путовања, потрошачи причају о својим искуствима и дају препоруке другим потрошачима о избору одређене туристичке дестинација. На овај начин укључују се у процес интер-

персоналне комуникација тзв. *word-of-mouth*. Емпиријско истраживање спроведено је крајем 2017. године на узорку од 320 испитаника из пет градова у Србији (Београд, Нови Сад, Ниш, Крагујевац и Суботица). Истраживање је засновано на моделу аутора Oh, Assaf и Baloglu (2016), у оквиру којег су аутори идентификовали шест мотива slow туризма (релаксација, саморефлексија, бег, откриће, ангажовање и учење) и три исхода slow путовања (задовољство, поновни долазак у дестинацију и препоруке). Резултати истраживања су показали како значајан утицај на препоруке потрошача, као један од исхода slow путовања, имају следећи мотиви: учење, ангажовање релаксација и саморефлексија.