



TOURISM PRODUCT AND SERVICES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

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ABSTRACT

Having considered the motivators and determinants of tourist behaviour in the previous two chapters, it is now time for us to look at the purchase decision-making process as a whole. Before that, we need to spend a little time looking at the characteristics of the product that tourists purchase.

Tourism products are complex because they exist at two different levels:

- the package holiday which is a combination of the products of individual sectors such as accommodation, transport, destinations and visitor attractions
- the products of these individual sectors which can be sold as stand-alone products such as an air ticket or a theme park visit as part of a day trip.

Tourism products are largely services. Marketing theorists have attempted to define services in relation to their intangibility and the fact that purchase of a service never results in the ownership of anything. They have attempted to clarify the differences between products and services by stating the characteristics of services:

- Intangibility – services have the characteristics of being intangible in that they cannot be seen, tasted or smelled before purchase. Tourism companies have tried to overcome this problem by offering the consumer videos of the holiday locations to make the experience seem more ‘real’. The use of advanced technology such as Virtual Reality is also predicted to overcome the problem. Despite these advances, the consumer still has to take considerable risks when choosing their tourism product because of the intangible nature.
- Inseparability – services have the characteristic of overlap between the production and performance of the service and the consumption of it. A service in its purest sense has the provider and customer face to face. This will influence consumer buying behaviour and mean that consumers may change their behaviour patterns, according to their experiences.
- Heterogeneity – it is very difficult for the tourism provider to give the same level of service at every consumption time. The mood that the consumer is in will also affect their appraisal of the service. It will never be the same twice. This means that it is very difficult for the consumer to judge the potential quality of experience they will gain when they purchase the tourism product. It also means that it is dangerous for them, when considering a repeat purchase, to rely on past experiences. What was a happy experience in the past may turn out to be the complete opposite this time. The consumer may have changed and have different

perceptions and expectations. Similarly, the service may have changed over time.

- Lack of ownership – the consumer only has access to the activity or facility when he or she buys the service. The consumer never owns anything at the end of the transaction. Service often leads to feelings of satisfaction rather than the ownership of a tangible item. This means that the purchase of a service will have a considerable emotional significance for the consumer.

The behaviour of consumers when they are purchasing tourism products and services demonstrates a high involvement in the process and high levels of commitment because of the nature of the products and services. This means that the behaviour patterns during purchase are not routine and every purchase occasion will show different approaches. The consumer will be actively involved in the buying process and will 'shop around' before coming to a decision. Therefore, the decision process will take longer. Consumers will also change their behaviour patterns according to the type of holiday to be taken, their motives for the particular purchase occasion and their position in the family life cycle.

The intangible nature of tourism products and services means that the consumer can often have high levels of insecurity during purchase. They cannot try out the product or service before purchase and will therefore be looking for reassurance about their choices. This will mean that their behaviour patterns will be complex and will probably involve many people and agencies.

The purchase of a holiday will be a major event in an individual's life. It is the holiday which is going to let the individual escape from the work environment and grey skies to renew his or her flagging spirits. The choice of holiday may also affect other close members of the family and compromises might have to be made during the decisionmaking process. The consumer might also be considering other substitute products and services in place of a holiday. They might, for example, be thinking about the purchase of other major items such as a car or home, rather than spending money on a holiday. This type of decision has particular emotional significance for individuals and their close associates.

Individuals are likely to be strongly influenced by other people during the decision-making process for tourism products. If we take an example of individuals choosing a holiday product, they are likely to be influenced by other members of their family, and members of other reference groups. This makes their behaviour patterns very complex and difficult to study. The people who influence their decision will also change their views over time.

Despite the growth in the last-minute holiday bargain, most decisions that individuals make about tourism products are made a long way in advance. This means that individuals might be in a completely different frame of mind when they make their purchase decision than when they actually go on holiday. It also means that individuals will be trying to predict what they want to do in the future. This means that the decision itself may have an immediate effect on them. We all know the hope and anticipation felt when, in the depths of winter, we book a holiday in sunny climes!

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