

*Special Issue on*

Consumer behavior in travel and  
tourism

*Guest Editors*

Manuela Epure, SpiruHaret University, Romania

and

Maria D. Alvarez, Boğaziçi University, Turkey



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*An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*

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*The paper examines the antecedents of visitors' attitudinal loyalty to a place, introducing the concepts of brand experiences and place identity that have not been conceptualized in the tourism context. The available literature on place identity, brand experiences, satisfaction and loyalty was reviewed, leading to this conceptual model. The paper discusses the use of brand experiences and place identity in the tourism sector in order to further enhance the knowledge of visitors' loyalty. This is an area, relatively understudied and not fully developed in the tourism sector. Brand experiences and place identity can be significant elements in explaining attitudinal loyalty in the tourism sector. The examination of their role can lead to important implications for marketers of a company or an organization, since it can provide a better understanding of the visitor's consumer behavior. This paper presents a conceptual model of visitors' loyalty incorporating place identity, place brand experiences and satisfaction as antecedents of loyalty, further enhancing our knowledge of visitors'*

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*Accordingly, considering that rural destinations are calling both for cooperative and creative offerings and communication strategies, this paper discusses the potential of using sensory-informed themes in profiling tourists, a process that assists rural destinations in the planning of the integral tourist experiences aiming at the optimal use of local resources.*

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*This paper is an exploratory research of the tourist motivations of lesbians in a context different from those previously studied. Evidence from Western countries suggests that sexuality plays a quite important role in tourism by homosexuals, at least for gay men. By recognising that males and females experience tourism differently, this study aims to contribute to an expanded and more specific understanding of lesbians as tourists in the context of Mexico. Based on qualitative interviews – unlike previous findings based on empirical evidence – this study suggests that sexuality is not as important for determining lesbians' tourism experiences as has been commonly argued. In this study, other aspects, particularly cultural experiences, seem to dominate in lesbians' tourism motivations. While this study does not, by any means, discard the importance of sexuality in lesbian tourism motivations, it does postulate that other factors are as important as sexuality in shaping the tourism experiences of lesbians, at least in a non-Western context.*

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This study evaluates the perceptions of cultural tourists regarding the importance and performance of Penang's attributes. Both activities-based analysis and importance-performance analysis were used. The former was applied to identify cultural tourists from all international tourists to Penang; whereas the latter evaluated their perceptions concerning Penang's attributes.

The findings reveal that Penang's cultural tourists primarily perceive the image of Penang according to its World Heritage Site status.

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*A deeper analysis of the waiting experience may contribute to enhanced strategies for managing waiting in theme parks, improved evaluations of the service and increased customer satisfaction. Finally, some practical tips for practitioners are proposed in the form of management takeaways.*

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*Incentive programs are a common tool used by businesses and other organizations to encourage specific behavior in customers and employees. This research note provides detailed information on how incentive programs may be an effective tool for encouraging sustainable travel-related purchases. A discussion outlining the existing research on green consumerism and consumer-driven solutions for encouraging sustainability is followed by industry and academic information on incentive programs. A focus group study then builds on this existing knowledge by looking at young professionals from Raleigh and Greenville, North Carolina to determine the effectiveness of incentive programs at encouraging green consumerism while traveling. Analysis of the resulting dialogue confirmed incentive programs may be an effective tool for encouraging sustainable travel-related purchases. Based on this result, recommendations provide design and logistical considerations that are important to take into account when trying to create an effective incentive program for sustainable tourism marketed to young professionals.*

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## EDITORIAL

Although the study of consumer behavior spans many decades, today's changed environment requires that marketers revise existing theories and frameworks to a new world in which resources are finite and consumers are more spending savvy (Kotler, 2011). On the one hand, it is necessary to recognize that individuals may behave differently in diverse situations, and may consume various products in distinct ways. On the other, consumer behavior is dynamic: the environment within which consumers behave is constantly changing- social attitudes vary. Therefore marketers should base their understanding, segmentation and targeting of consumers on personalized data about these individuals (Evans, Jamal, Foxall, 2009).

In addition, the world is getting smaller in terms of travel, communication, trade and population movements, so market diversity should be taken into consideration, especially the cultural differentiations coming from cognitive elements and beliefs, values and norms, as well as signs, signals and symbols (Johnson, 1962). The services market, including travel and tourism services, is shaped by cultural characteristics of consumers, as well as guest countries' cultural specificities. Thus, travel and tourism, due to their particular characteristics, may be shaped by different factors and relationships (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999). The need to understand the unique dimensions and consumer behavior in these industries is paramount in order to effectively compete in an increasingly challenging environment (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1999).

Research on consumer behavior in travel and tourism is growing, but the knowledge and understanding achieved in this area is not yet in line with the economic importance of this industry (Crouch, Perdue, Timmermans and Uysal, 2004). In addition, many studies in consumer behavior, including those in tourism, investigate the perceptions, attitudes and behavior of individuals in limited geographical contexts. This is a concern because despite the global access to information, products and services that technological breakthroughs have brought about, a divergence of cultural values and consumption systems around the world continues to be prevalent (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2002). Thus, we should ask ourselves to what extent theories and frameworks derived from and tested in specific countries and environments may be relevant to other geographical contexts. Knowledge that can be applied by practitioners in a particular situation

requires comprehensive research that covers not only varied geographies, but also diverse consumer groups.

The papers, included in this special issue, are chosen in order to provide an overview of some of the significant consumer behavior topics that are more meaningful in tourism and travel. This collection of papers discuss a wide range of topics that include place branding, sensory experiences, tourist motivations, sustainable tourism behavior, etc., providing insights into the ways that individuals choose, perceive and experience tourism and travel. The collection of articles is also valuable in that it discusses examples that are based on different geographical contexts, including Spain, Mexico, Canada and Malaysia. The insights obtained are not only relevant from a theoretical perspective, as they advance the state of knowledge of consumer behavior in tourism, but they are also useful for practitioners. The cases discussed are a good example of bridging the gap between theory and practice, by offering practical suggestions to destination managers based on sound research. The following section will present the outline of this special issue.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE**

The special issue starts with the topic of place branding, which represents an important theme in the tourism consumer behavior literature. Place Brand is seen as a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design (Keller, 1993; Zenker and Braun, 2010). In the first article, Kavoura and Stavrianea present a conceptual model of visitor's attitudinal loyalty to a place, discussing how brand experiences and place identity provide an enhanced knowledge of consumer's loyalty behavior in tourism. The authors proposed model builds on the sense of place literature and provides insights into how tourists experience brands and convey identity to a place. In order to successfully market a destination, a better understanding of the factors that lead to loyalty towards a place is paramount.

Continuing with the topic of place branding, Plumed Lasarte, Iñiguez Berrozpe and ElbojSaso delve into the issue of how residents' perceptions of the destination need to be taken into account for a successful place branding strategy. These authors present an empirical model that examines the factors influencing the local population's acceptance of the territorial

brand, and how these perceptions of the inhabitants concerning the place in turn affect the brand image of the destination. This study, carried out in Zaragoza, Spain, reinforces the importance of engaging residents in the place branding activities and calls for further research to be carried out in other different geographical and cultural contexts.

Following this article, the topic of sensory experiences in tourism is next introduced. Agapito, Mendes, Pinto and Almeida discuss rural tourism experiences focusing on the dimensions pertaining to the five senses. The authors propose that examining sensory aspects of the tourist experience in the rural environment may provide a better understanding of how tourists perceive the countryside, which in turn may be used to better market rural destinations. According to Dean MacCannell (1989) contemporary tourism constitutes a modern ritual, one that is analogous to the performance of sacred rites in premodern societies and it entails the Western subject's search for 'authenticity' in 'other cultures', 'other places', and 'other historical periods'. The article proposes a model based on the sensory appeal of the destination. In this regard, focusing on the perceptions of the destination by the tourists through all five senses may also help create memorable tourism experiences that are essential to the success of the destination.

The study of tourist motivations is another mainstream topic in the tourism consumer behavior literature. However, although many investigations into tourist motivations exist, not many of them have attempted to explain the rationales of homosexuals' travel. Additionally, most of the research in this area has focused on consumers from Western developed countries. Thus, with their exploratory research, Monterrubio and Barrio provide an important contribution to the literature as they expand the understanding of the motivations of lesbian tourists as a specific traveler group, taking into consideration the culture of Mexico as the background for the research. Using in-depth interviews, the study distinguishes itself from previous research by suggesting that sexuality is not as important in determining tourist experiences of lesbian tourists as stated in prior research in Western-based contexts. In this sense, the authors argue that travelers' behavior, and in particular that of homosexual travelers, needs to be studied in developing countries, as new insights different from those obtained from samples from developed countries may be obtained in this manner.

In addition to motivation, tourism destinations may use different types of segmentation methods to help them address diverse tourist markets. This is the focus of Omar, Aboali and Mahomed's study, as it evaluates the perceptions of cultural tourists and attempts to classify them according to cultural-activities based segmentation. The authors also use an importance-performance analysis in order to analyze the attributes of Penang in Malaysia, identifying those aspects of the destination that may be used to target tourists more effectively.

The next paper deals with the topic of visitors' satisfaction in animal parks, through the case study of Parc Safari in Quebec, Canada. While consumer satisfaction is an important variable, widely studied both in the general consumer behavior and tourist behavior literature, Khomski and Lapointe offer a different perspective as they analyze the issue within the context of animal parks in which wildlife is free. Although the research provides conclusive evidence concerning the importance of the proximity of the visitors to the animals as a source of satisfaction, it also determines that price and appearance and cleanliness of the park remain the foremost explanatory constituents of satisfaction.

While the previous papers have dealt with the behavior of leisure and cultural tourists, Malek's study is concerned with the post-participation behavior of conference attendees. The author tests a model of post-purchase behavior, determining that performance and satisfaction are significantly related to the intention of the attendees to recommend the conference and participate again in the future. The research is based on a sample of international attendees to several conferences in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, providing significant insights to conference organizers and suggestions for future marketing of international conferences.

In their paper on waiting times at theme parks, Hernandez-Maskivker, Ryan and Pàmies evaluate this important topic from the perspective of the managers and their particular interpretation. The research, based on a qualitative study of theme park managers' opinions, not only emphasizes the importance of negative perceptions of waiting but also considers the strategic implications and the practical aspects of dealing with the issue. Thus, several challenging issues related to the problem of waiting are identified, and managerial implications are suggested.

Finally, the special issue closes with a research note that addresses the role of incentives in encouraging sustainable travel behavior. In their study on consumer driven solutions in sustainable tourism, Harris and Cline investigate in detail the perceptions of young professionals concerning incentives programs that address green consumerism while traveling. The research is qualitative in nature, based on focus groups, and aims to answer the question of whether incentive programs are effective tools for encouraging sustainable travel purchase decisions, and which specific programs are most appealing. The authors conclude that there is a market readiness for such programs and call for further research on this important topic. Following Kotler (2011), Harris and Cline defend the need to create marketing solutions that address the sacrifices that consumers necessarily make to select sustainable travel products.

## CONCLUSION

This special issue considers a wide-range of interesting topics related to contemporary marketing perspectives of the tourism and travel industry, and reveals trends in consumer behavior studies. Together, these papers provide a meaningful overview of the state of research in consumer behavior in travel and tourism and constitute an important source of knowledge in the field.

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