

SEGMENTING TOURISM MARKETS ON THE DUAL BASIS OF VISITORS' INCOME LEVELS AND THE ATTRIBUTED IMPORTANCE TO SELECTION CRITERIA. GUIDELINES FOR MARKETERS AND TOUR OPERATORS

Ourania Vitouladiti

University of West Attica, Athens Greece

Alexandra Ntaka

Greek Ministry of Internal Affairs, Athens Greece

The present paper, through the formulating and testing of research hypotheses and by using as a case study the city of Athens, attempted to correlate demographic variables and specifically the income levels with the city's characteristics, which are considered important and influence its choice by tourists. The findings revealed which income categories of customer markets considered several criteria to be important and whether these criteria have influenced or not their decision to visit the destination. The characteristics/criteria studied were the available information on the destination, climatic conditions, nightlife, history and culture, the no terrorism effect, flight and accommodation availability, general reputation of the destination, proximity to other countries that tourists also visit etc.

The findings of the above analysis indicated the degree of influence or not of several criteria for the selection of Athens as a tourism place. With the demographic variable of income being proven to be correlated or not with various destination selection criteria, marketers of various tourism organizations, tour operators and travel enterprises are given the possibility to design effective tourism marketing strategies. They can focus on those criteria that indicate the behavior of potential customers and promote them in advertising campaigns. As a result, they can make a much better use of available funds and the potential of internet and new technologies.

Keywords: *tourism market segmentation, demographics, selection criteria, tourism and travel marketing.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism market segmentation as well as finding ways, for it, to become more effective is always one of the most important strategies of tourism marketing. However, selecting target-markets based on some demographic variables, as the single criterion and ignoring the correlation of these variables with the destination's characteristics, which act as destination selection criteria, does not lead to remarkable results, according to several scholars. At the same time, regarding visitors who choose various places, evidence suggests that is relatively difficult for a series of demographic variables to be correlated to destination characteristics and their impact on the final buying decision, based on the importance attributed to them by tourists. This is precisely why the correlation of these criteria is a research challenge. The results from such a research approach will reveal the criteria which indicate behavior in correlation with the tourists' income levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Market segmentation is a marketing tool that allows the recognition and separation of different consumer target groups using specific and objective criteria. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2005) market segmentation can be defined as the division of a market into distinct groups of buyers who have distinct needs, characteristics, or behavior and who might require separate products or marketing strategies.

An organization, whether tourism destination or business, cannot address effectively the needs of all consumers. Consequently, it has to recognize the most attractive, lucrative and suitable market segments to serve effectively (Kotler, 1991; Kotler et al., 2006; Middleton et al, 2009; Pickton & Broderick, 2005).

Market segmentation and focus on distinctive target markets is a necessity since, as Morrison (2001) suggests, a non targeted approach can prove too costly because it is certain that there are target markets that have no interest in buying specific products and services. According to Lewis et al (2013) a destination may be attractive and fashionable for a specific target market but at the same time have no appeal or be downright avoidable for another. This knowledge is valuable for the marketing departments of tour operators charged with designing and promoting tour packages but also for all relevant stakeholders.

Segmentation allows the marketing departments of tour operators and travel agencies to have a better understanding of the various markets but also of their competition. Segmentation leads to effective marketing planning because it allows registering the demands of specific target groups (Dibb & Lyndon, 1991).

Of great importance though are the criteria used to achieve an effective market segmentation. Researchers have applied different variables through time, in order to segment the tourism market, like demographic, economic, geographic, psychographics, benefits sought segmentation, usage, lifestyle, activities, behavioral and/ or product-related factors etc. (Camilleri, 2018; Hsieh, O'Leary, & Morrison, 1992; Middleton et al. 2009; Jang, Morrison & O'Leary, 2002; Petrick & Sirakaya, 2004; Silverberg, Backman, & Backman, 1996; Ziff, 1971).

Benefits sought segmentation is considered an element of product related factors. In the current study product related factors are the destination characteristics that operate as benefits sought and are influencing factors for the destination choice.

Regarding benefits sought from target markets when they choose a destination, Kotler (2000) supports that knowing them assists us in segmenting and promoting tourist services more effectively. The benefits sought by a potential tourist are simultaneously influencing factors for the destination choice.

Jang, Morrison & O'Leary (2002) underline that benefits sought are substantial bases for segmenting the tourism market. Already, on the subject, Mill and Morrison (1985) had argued that the benefits sought by potential tourists should, at the same time, be important to them, meet needs and desires and thus to act as factors influencing the purchasing decision.

Therefore, it is essential to gather a variety of information for potential travelers in order to recognize target markets. A combination of criteria is necessary in order to have a broad view of the market (Vasileiadis, 2003). Moreover, as Sergopoulos and Karagianni (2018) underline, customer data must be collected and analyzed by categorizing them, in order to interpret the customers' behavior and offer the required services and products.

At the same time, demographic variables play a major role in formulating a decision to travel (Tsartas, 1996). All analyses are based initially on the demographic profile of market segments. Every potential traveler, with regard to his/her demographic characteristics, falls within specific subcategories in terms of education, income, occupation, etc.

One of the demographic variables, this of income, is undoubtedly an initial safe indicator of a person's ability to travel but also of the range of choices that this person has, regarding the particular characteristics of the journey eg. organized trips, exotic and long journeys, business trips etc. Additionally, the variable of income affects the number of trips that a potential tourist could make on an annual basis (Tsartas, 1996).

Regarding the economic factors that affect the characteristics of tourists, such as travel behavior, it is widely accepted that income is one of the basic variables that initially influence the decision to make a trip in today's era. But apart from the decision to make a trip, this factor also influences and develops a series of purchasing criteria and 'directs' the potential tourist to seek various benefits. In every period and in times of crisis, as our times, there is tourist mobility.

Therefore, this factor is becoming particularly important nowadays and needs further analysis and focus.

With income considered the basic demographic factor and taking into consideration that benefits sought by potential travelers affect the buying behavior, results that a combination of the two (income level combined with benefits sought) could provide valid variables for tourism market segmentation. Such a correlation would reveal significant dimensions for segmentation strategies, for tour operators that organize travel and tourism packages, based on the tourism destination's offer and on their clientele's financial capabilities. Also, it could guide the marketing managers of various tourism organizations in designing strategies and policies of communication and promotion at international level.

CASE STUDY: ATHENS

Identifying effective target markets and thus making better use of available funds for promotion and advertising is a matter of concern for many tourism businesses and regions. In particular areas which, due to the economic crisis, have experienced a decline in their tourist arrivals and income, despite the fact that they possessed a series of characteristics as a well-known historical and archaeological heritage, very good infrastructure, sunshine for most of the time, easy accessibility, etc.

These characteristics, apart from being tourism's offer elements, act as important motives for tourist travel and benefits sought from various target markets. However, these motives and benefits are offered by other tourism destinations as well, in a highly competitive environment.

A tourism destination that gathers all of the above features is the city of Athens. It is a historic capital, attracting both leisure travelers and business travelers due to the wide range of activities it offers.

Statistically most visitors are from EU (Great Britain, France and Germany). It is also a favorite of Russians (www.insete.gr). The city offers a variety of archeological and historical sites. It is gastronomically varied with even some creative Greek cuisine restaurants receiving Michelin stars. Over 220 hotels and at least 300 more registered accommodation options can be found around the city center with more added every year.

Athens also has another set of characteristics, such as a favorable climate, air links with many countries and cities, various shopping options, extensive night life etc. Another advantage of the city is that it has been classified as a safe metropolis that has not suffered from terrorist attacks against its residents or visitors. The feeling of safety, especially nowadays, is very important for every kind of travelers.

Despite all the above, it experienced a decrease of 40-60% in arrivals, mostly in the years of the economic crisis. However, in recent years, from 2015 onwards, it experiences an increase in arrivals, an increase in accommodation occupancies, in the visits of cultural sights, in the demand for various services (tours, guided tours, gastronomy, etc.) and consequently an increase in the revenues of the respective companies, etc.

Both tourism businesses and public bodies are making efforts to promote the city's tourism offer. From time to time, the efforts made by the competent bodies have been criticized in terms of their content, their effectiveness, their targeting to various market groups, etc.

At the same time competition is strong from other city break destinations offering similar product like Rome, Barcelona, Istanbul etc. that support their offering with extensive campaigns in media and social media.

Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the ideal target markets for the city of Athens and subsequently consider the application of such knowledge to other destinations. Tourism is the major economic sector of the Greek economy with Athens as a main attraction.

Therefore, issues related to effective market segmentation strategies and consequently to the maintenance and increase of the

number of visits, recorded in recent years, are the main objectives of the decision makers. Athens, therefore, could be an interesting case study for implementing and testing the above concept through primary research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on the above considerations the research of this paper aims at:

- correlating the various income categories of the visitors of Athens with the importance they attribute to the various characteristics of the city,
- finding the effect of these characteristics / criteria / benefits on the customer's decision to choose the destination

DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

The above theoretical framework and the objectives set lead to the development of research hypotheses that are based on visitors' different income levels in order to identify possible differences between them and as a consequence to identify differences among the respective market segments.

Afterwards, the different destination characteristics (destination selection factors or benefits sought) are taken into account and their effect on the tourists' behavior is examined.

Therefore, the general statement of the hypotheses to be tested (with a level of significance 0.05) was as follows:

H₀= There is no correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criteria.

H₁= There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criteria.

Subsequently, the above hypotheses are tested for each selection criterion, and in correlation to each income level.

The selection criteria used in this paper were the historical and archaeological character of Athens, the no terrorism effect, the climate, the range of choices the tourist had regarding the accommodation, Athens as a well-known tourism destination, as an economic destination, the frequency / flight availability, proximity to other countries that tourists also visit and the nightlife of Athens. For each of these factors, separate research hypotheses were developed and tested, as presented in the following sections. Moreover, the importance that respondents attribute to each factor is tested according to the income level they belong to.

PRIMARY QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

Sampling and data collection

The sample consisted of foreign tourists who had at least one overnight stay in the city of Athens. Data collection took place at the Athens International Airport ‘‘Eleftherios Venizelos’’, following a special permit. One hundred and fifty-nine (159) completed questionnaires were gathered (Ntaka, 2017).

Questionnaire design – analysis

The types of questions that were used for the purposes of this paper were closed multiple answer questions. The main question of this analysis was ‘‘the degree of importance of the selection criteria in the tourists’ decision to visit Athens’’. A five-point scale of importance, ranging from Very Important to Very Unimportant, was used for this question.

Closed questions were also used to record demographics.

Profile and description of the sample

Analyzing the demographics of the sample (Ntaka, 2017), it can be seen that women are slightly more compared to men (54.1% women, 45.9% men) and most of the population belong to the age groups of 18-24 and 25-34, by 26.4% and 36.5% respectively. In addition, age groups 35-44 and 45-54 give, cumulatively, a percentage of 23.9%. Regarding the geographical origin of visitors Europe comes first (44%) followed by America (38.4%). The entry of the Asian market is impressive with the visitor rate reaching a percentage of 15.1%.

With regard to the annual income, 23.3% indicates an amount of less than 15.000 € (which is affected by the 18.9% of the students who participated in the survey). A percentage of 45.3% declared an income of 15,001-35,000 €. A percentage of 31.4% declared an income over 35.000 € and 22% declared an income which exceeds 45.001 €. The main reason for the trip was pleasure with 89.3% while 8.1% visited Athens for business and only 2.5% to visit relatives.

Data statistical analysis and test of the hypotheses

It follows a comparative statistical analysis for possible correlations between the factors which were investigated by Pearson's χ^2 test (Chi-Square test) whose mathematical formula is:

$$X^2 = \sum (f_o - f_e)^2 / f_e$$

Comparative statistical analysis

Comparative analysis of variables offers the advantage of more sophisticated conclusions to be drawn and contributes to an effective market segmentation which interests all the stakeholders. For this research, the constant variable analyzed is the annual income in correlation to the destination selection criteria and their importance and impact on this choice.

Annual income and destination's selection factors

The following tables (Ntaka, 2017) present (with frequencies and percentages) the answers to the questions about the importance of the criteria/factors to be examined in correlation to the participants' annual income.

The annual income was divided into low / medium and high-income levels. The participants who declared annual income of over 45.001€ were categorized on the high scale (high-income levels). Also, the results of the χ^2 test and the test of the research hypotheses are presented (Ntaka, 2017).

Table 1. Income levels / The wealth of information I had on Athens.										
Annual income			Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value	
	Low/	Count	27	49	31	12	5	124		0.005
		%	21.8%	39.5%	25%	9.7%	4%	100%		
	High	Count	1	11	19	4	0	35		
		%	2.9%	31.4%	54.3%	11.4%	0%	100%		

As shown in Table 1, the criterion "the wealth of information I had on Athens" was considered very important, 21.8%, and important, 39.5%, (which give a percentage of 61.3%) by the respondents who belonged to the low / middle income level, to their decision to visit the city. On the contrary, 54.3% of the high-income level respondents reported that this factor had a neutral effect on their decision to visit Athens, while only 25% of the low- and middle-income respondents state neutral to this factor.

A finding that may be attributed to the greater travel experience that people with higher income may have, and therefore, greater confidence in their own choices. In addition, lower-income travelers examine in depth the tourist offer and destination information and look for the best possible coverage of their needs. Their purpose is to ensure the correctness of their choice.

By implementing the χ^2 test it was found that there is a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level correlates with the criterion/factor under consideration. The income level indicates the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection criterion "the wealth of information I had on Athens"
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criterion "the wealth of information I had on Athens"

For the criterion "the wealth of information I had on Athens" with $p\text{-value} = 0.005 (<0.05)$, the null hypothesis

H_0 is rejected and the alternative hypothesis H_1 is supported.

Table 2. Income levels / The no terrorism effect									
Annual Income			Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value
	Low/ Medium	Count	44	37	26	8	9	124	0.017
		%	35.5%	29.8%	21%	6.5%	7.3%	100%	
	High	Count	6	6	14	6	3	35	
		%	17.1%	17.1%	40%	17.1%	8.6%	100%	

As shown in Table 2, and concerning the criterion/factor ‘‘the no terrorism effect’’, a percentage of 35.5% of low / medium income levels and a percentage of 29.8% consider it as very important and important respectively (which give a percentage of 65.3%), in their decision to visit the city while again, respondents who belong to the high-income levels with a percentage of 40% say that they are neutral for this factor. At the same time, only 21% of low- and middle-income levels state that this is factor is neutral for them. Perhaps once again people with higher incomes have greater travel experience, so they feel safer with destinations and trips. They realize that the risk is minimal.

By implementing the χ^2 test it was found that there is a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level correlates with the criterion under consideration. The income level indicates the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection criterion “the no terrorism effect”
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criterion “the no terrorism effect”

For the criterion “the no terrorism effect” with p-value = 0.017(<0.05), the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected and the alternative hypothesis H_1 is supported.

Table 3. The income levels / The climate										
Annual Income			Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value	
	Low/ Medium	Count	31	55	23	8	7	124		0. 012
		%	25%	44.4%	18.5%	6.5%	5.6%	100%		
	High	Count	16	7	11	0	1	35		
%		45.7%	20%	31.4%	0%	2.9%	100%			

According to Table 3. 25% of the low / medium income group considered the “climate” criterion/factor very important and 44.4% (from the same group of respondents) important, (which give a percentage of 69.4%) while the high-income participants considered it very important at a rate of 45.7 % and important at a rate of 20% and influenced their decision to visit Athens (which give a percentage of 65.7%). It can be noticed that the high-income participants appear to be influenced by the specific factor more than they were affected

by the other factors analyzed above. It is clear that what the tourists are looking for is the good climate to enjoy their holidays.

By implementing the χ^2 test it was found that there is a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level correlates with the criterion under consideration. The income level indicates the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection factor ‘‘the climate’’
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection factor ‘‘the climate’’

For the criterion ‘‘the climate’’ with p -value = (0.012) <0.05), the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected and the alternative hypothesis H_1 is supported.

Next, apart from the aforementioned criteria, were also analyzed and the other criteria that construct the question ‘‘what was the degree of importance of the following selection criteria in your decision to visit Athens?’’ and specifically the criteria: Athens’ historical & cultural character, the range of choices the tourist had regarding the accommodation, Athens as a well-known tourism destination, as an economic destination, the frequency / flight availability, proximity to other countries that tourists also visit and the nightlife of Athens.

Table 4. Income levels / Athens’ historical & cultural character									
Annual Income			Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value
	High/Low/Medium	Count	73	31	15	2	3	124	0.062
		%	58.9%	25%	12.1%	1.6%	2.4%	100%	
High	Count	12	13	9	1	0	35		

		%	34.3%	37.1%	25.7%	2.9%	0%	100%	
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According to Table 4. it is obvious that the criterion “Historical and archaeological character of Athens” is an important factor for both income categories, with lower incomes showing more interest (a cumulative percentage of 83.9% for the low/middle income levels and a cumulative percentage of 71.4% for the high-income levels). By studying the numbers, it can be seen that a higher percentage of high-income level is neutral to this factor, than lower- and middle-income levels. Typically, people with high incomes are a more demanding and difficult clientele to attract.

However, by implementing the x2 test it was found that there is not a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level does not correlates with the criterion under consideration. The income level does not indicate the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection criterion “Historical and archaeological character of Athens”
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criterion “Historical and archaeological character of Athens”

For the criterion “Historical and archaeological character of Athens” with p-value = 0.062 (>0.05) the alternative hypothesis H_1 is rejected and the null hypothesis H_0 is supported.

Table 5. The income levels / The plethora of options regarding accommodation

Table 5. The income levels / The plethora of options regarding accommodation								
Annual		Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value

	Low/ Medium	Count	23	34	41	18	8	124	0.189
		%	18.5%	27.4%	33.1%	14.5%	6.5%	100%	
	High	Count	2	7	17	5	4	35	
		%	5.7%	20%	48.6%	14.3%	11.4%	100%	

According to Table 5. the criterion “The plethora of options regarding accommodation” appears to be an important factor for lower incomes, but not by the percentages gathered by factors previously examined. In addition, 48.6% of high income and 33.1% of low / medium income maintain a neutral attitude towards this factor in their decision to visit the city. One observation at this point is that the Unimportant and Very Unimportant options show higher rates in relation to the factors which have been studied previously. Findings that may be related to the certainty of the visitors, that a big European capital city will have many choices in terms of residence.

By implementing the χ^2 test it was found that there is not a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level does not correlates with the criterion under consideration. The income level does not indicate the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection criterion “The plethora of options regarding accommodation”
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criterion “The plethora of options regarding accommodation”

For the criterion “the plethora of options regarding accommodation” with p -value = 0.189 (>0.05) the alternative hypothesis H_1 is rejected and the null hypothesis H_0 is supported.

Table 6. Income levels / Athens is a well – known tourist destination

			Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value
		Annual Income	Low/ Medium	Count	34	44	34	7	5
%	27.4%			35.5%	27.4%	5.6%	4%	100%	
High	Count		5	11	14	3	2	35	
	%		14.3%	31.4%	40%	8.6%	5.7%	100%	

According to Table 6. it is obvious that the criterion ‘‘Athens is a well – known tourist destination’’ is an important factor for both income categories, with lower incomes showing more interest (a cumulative percentage of 62.9% for the low/middle income levels and a cumulative percentage of 45.7% for the high-income levels). A percentage 40% of high income and 27.4% of the lower/middle income levels were not influenced by this factor in their decision to visit the city.

By implementing the χ^2 test it was found that there is not a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level does not correlates with the criterion under consideration. The income level does not indicate the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection criterion ‘‘Athens is a well – known tourist destination’’
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criterion ‘‘Athens is a well – known tourist destination’’

For the criterion “Athens is a well – known tourist destination” with p-value = 0.402 (>0.05) the alternative hypothesis H_1 is rejected and the null hypothesis H_0 is supported.

Table 7. Income levels / Cheap destination									
Annual Income			Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value
	Low/Medium	Count	7	48	48	13	8	124	0.782
		%	5.6%	38.7%	38.7%	10.5%	6.5%	100%	
	High	Count	3	10	16	3	3	35	
%		8.6%	28.6%	45.7%	8.6%	8.6%	100%		

According to Table 7. a percentage 45.7% of the high-income level participants were not influenced by this factor in their decision to visit the city, while 38.7% of the low / medium income respondents considered it equally as important and neutral in their decision to visit Athens. Also, it can be observed that a percentage of low / middle income (17%) indicates that the specific factor is unimportant and very unimportant. It is worth underlining this finding, mainly because in times of economic crisis, it is considered that a non expensive destination would have a decisive impact on the purchasing decision. This finding may reinforce the view that tourists are interested in the experience that a destination will offer, and not simply in a cheap purchase.

By implementing the χ^2 test it was found that there is not a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level does not correlates with the criterion under

consideration. The income level does not indicate the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection criterion "Cheap destination"
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criterion "Cheap destination"

For the criterion "Cheap destination" with p -value = 0.782 (>0.05) the alternative hypothesis H_1 is rejected and the null hypothesis H_0 is supported.

Table 8. Income levels / Frequency / Available flights										
Annual Income			Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value	
	Low/ Medium	Count	25	40	41	11	7	124		0.350
		%	20.2%	32.3%	33.1%	8.9%	5.6%	100%		
	High	Count	4	8	14	5	4	35		
%		11.4%	22.9%	40%	14.3%	11.4%	100%			

In Table 8. it is noted that for both categories of income the factor under consideration is of importance but with lower rates than the previous factors. Also, for a part of middle and low incomes, this criterion is equally important and neutral.

High incomes, with a percentage of 40% indicate neutrality in the matter. This finding may also be related to the certainty of tourists about the availability of flights to and from European cities.

By implementing the χ^2 test it was found that there is not a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level does not correlate with the criterion under consideration. The income level does not indicate the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection criterion ‘‘Frequency / Available flights’’
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criterion ‘‘Frequency / Available flights’’

For the criterion ‘‘Frequency / Available flights’’ with p-value = 0.350 (>0.05) the alternative hypothesis H_1 is rejected and the null hypothesis H_0 is supported.

Table 9. Income levels / The proximity to other countries I'm visiting									
Annual Income			Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value
	Low/ Medium	Count	34	28	31	10	21	124	0.528
		%	27.4%	22.6%	25%	8.1%	16.9%	100%	

	High	Cou nt	9	4	13	3	6	35
		%	25.7%	11.4%	37.1%	8.6%	17.1%	100 %

Table 9. indicates that 50% of the low- and middle-income respondents attributed importance to this criterion and 25% of them show neutrality. High-income respondents (37.1%) maintained a neutral attitude towards this factor in their decision to visit the city, but with the same percentage they also declare its importance. It is worth noting that the examination of this criterion has particularly high rates for the options unimportant and very unimportant from both, low / middle and high incomes respondents.

By implementing the χ^2 test it was found that there is not a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level does not correlate with the criterion under consideration. The income level does not indicate the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection criterion “ The proximity to other countries I’m visiting”
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criterion “ The proximity to other countries I’m visiting”

For the criterion “The proximity to other countries I’m visiting” with p -value = 0.528 (>0.05) the alternative hypothesis H_1 is rejected and the null hypothesis H_0 is supported.

Table 10. Income levels / Athens' night life and clubbing

		Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total	p-value	
Annual Income	Low/ Medium	Count	16	13	35	29	31	124	0.479
		%	12.9%	10.5%	28.2%	23.4%	25%	100%	
	High	Count	2	3	13	11	6	35	
		%	5.7%	8.6%	37.1%	31.4%	17.1%	100%	

Table 10. indicates that both groups, low / medium and high-income participants, with 28.2% and 37.1% respectively, were not affected by this factor in their decision to visit Athens. It is noteworthy that both, low / middle-and high-income respondents consider this criterion unimportant and very unimportant with percentages (48.4% and 48.5% respectively) that have not been recorded in this point of the scale for the so far examined criteria. It seems that travelling for pleasure (as opposed to business) does not equate with night life entertainment.

By implementing the χ^2 test it was found that there is not a statistically significant correlation between the variables, meaning the income level does not correlate with the criterion under consideration.

The income level does not indicate the behavior of the respondent in relation to this criterion.

Specifically, the hypotheses tested were:

- H_0 = There is no correlation between the variable annual income and the destination selection criterion ‘Athens’ night life and clubbing’
- H_1 = There is a correlation between the variable annual income and destination selection criterion ‘Athens’ night life and clubbing’

For the criterion ‘Athens’ night life and clubbing’ with p-value = 0.479 (>0.05) the alternative hypothesis H_1 is rejected and the null hypothesis H_0 is supported.

The above analysis proved something very important for the decision makers in marketing departments of either tourism organizations, or tour operators and other tourism enterprises. It proved that several solid characteristics of the city do not indicate the buying behavior of the tourists, even if they are recorded as important criteria by the visitors themselves. Only some of these criteria can actually influence the behavior. Therefore, much more effort and focus are needed in order to persuade the potential tourist to choose a tourism place.

With the demographic variable of income being proven that is not correlated with all of the aforementioned destination selection criteria, remain all the other demographic variables to be studied in order to indicate for them their correlation with various factors and criteria. Such knowledge allows the design of marketing strategies capable of approaching several target segments.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey involved 159 participants completing a questionnaire of closed-ended questions, which generated quantitative findings that attempted to study the behavior of the customer market.

A comparative statistical analysis of variables was carried out where the different levels of the annual income of the participants were tested in terms of their correlation or not with several destination selection criteria that have also different level of importance and influence on the buying behavior either as criteria/characteristics or benefits.

The conclusions drawn from the comparative statistical analysis are:

Destination selection factors such as ‘‘the wealth of information available for destination’’, ‘‘the absence of terrorist threat’’ and ‘‘climatic conditions’’ seem to affect the behavior of the respondents to varying degrees depending on their annual income and are correlated with it.

There were also selection factors such as ‘‘Athens’ historical and cultural character’’, ‘‘the range of choices the tourist had regarding the accommodation’’, ‘‘Athens as a well-known tourist destination’’, ‘‘as an economic destination’’, ‘‘the frequency / flight availability’’, ‘‘proximity to other countries’’ that tourists also visit and ‘‘the nightlife of Athens’’ which were not correlated with the annual income of sample members and did not indicate the behavior of the target groups.

It can be observed that people with low / medium income are most affected by factors such as ‘‘wealth of information for Athens’’ and ‘‘lack of terrorist threat’’, with high-income respondents being more neutral towards the same factors, still affected though. But ‘‘climatic conditions’’ seem to affect high-income participants and pull them out of their neutral attitude. In any case, these factors should be taken into account in the design of a communication policy with the customer markets affected by them in their purchasing behavior. Of course, both the substance and the content of communication should be supportive and valuable to the recipient of the message, and, certainly, in order to be effective, the communication also demands continuity (Sergopoulos & Karagianni, 2018).

The findings seem to reinforce the traditional picture of Athens and Greece in general as a sunny, favorable weather destination. It is like a self fulfilled expectation riding on the ad campaigns of Greek National Tourism Organization and of local businesses and tour operators. Specific characteristics and benefits are proving to be constant values and sought-after experiences from various customer markets with different financial profiles. It is proven that they are criteria with an impact on purchasing behavior and should be taken into account either by local organizations or by tour operators who design the relevant tourism packages.

Moreover, valuable information from the above analysis concerns the element of safety, especially in terms of terrorism, and of the necessity of promoting this advantage. Especially for lower to medium income travelers, that represent the majority of travelers, that coincide with already established market segments.

Another interesting finding, related with the age of information we live at, is the importance that target markets attribute to information about a destination. This finding, again, concerns more the lower to medium incomes established markets that require a wealth of information to reassure themselves for the suitability of their choices.

The importance that visitors attribute to various factors, as outlined in the above findings, could guide the marketing managers, of all the tourism bodies involved, in their effort to target more effectively specific markets. Promoting the factors that seem to affect potential visitors in their decision may result in increased arrivals and revenue for the destination. Eventually, the general objective of a business or organization is to find, attract and win new customers, support and maintain the existing customers, bring back former customers, and reduce the marketing costs for customer service (Sergopoulos & Karagianni, 2018).

All the above can prove useful for tourism enterprises, tour operators, incoming and outgoing and local stakeholders in order to

design focused promotional strategies by using all the advantages of new technologies and gain their benefits as well.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This paper attempted to study a correlation between the different levels of income and a set of variables that act as selection criteria for a destination and at the same time constitute benefits that the tourists seek when they visit a place.

However, the size of the statistical sample used in this paper and the increased percentage of young ages and therefore low incomes, are elements that have an effect on the results.

In any case, the findings provide guidance for further research in the future.

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Ourania Vitouladiti (ouraniavitouladiti@gmail.com) University of West Attica, Athens Greece.

Alexandra Ntaka (alexntak@hotmail.com) Greek Ministry of Internal Affairs, Athens Greece.