

THE SPECIFIC INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONS ON TOURIST BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

The tourism business is specific and is affected by a number of changes, both dictated by digitalization and by changes in the behavior of consumers and tourists in particular, and by the ever-changing competitive environment. After the changes that occurred during the COVID – 19 crisis, the tourism sector is witnessing the specific impact of emotions on the behavior of tourists, which often requires a specific reorganization of the various processes that form the company's strategy. An important goal in the management of this type of business is the presence and management of building and maintaining competitive advantages and the reshaping of different approaches to the presence of different tourist markets through the prism of emotional impact.

A major emphasis in the evaluation of tourist behavior and success is precisely the achievement of a high degree of tourist satisfaction and amazing and memorable experiences.

Keywords: Emotions, Tourism, Business, Digitization, Strategic decisions, Tourist behavior

1. INTRODUCTION

Even in the era of digitization, consumers have numerous desires for purchasing a variety of goods and using services, but often these desires are latent. Within the human organism, there is always a conflict and understanding between the emotional and the rational. The rational mind is the way of thinking that we usually consciously perceive: it is stronger when it comes to attention, reflection, judgment, and reasoning. However, alongside it exists another cognitive system, impulsive and powerful, sometimes even illogical – the emotional mind. The dichotomy between the emotional and the rational approaches the popular division of "heart" and "head". Knowing something "in your heart" gives you a different confidence, a deeper sense of security than just thinking with your rational mind. There is a continuous gradation between rational and emotional control over the mind, the more intense the feeling, the stronger the emotional mind becomes – and the weaker the rational one. This scheme seems to be attributed to the millennia-old evolutionary advantage of emotions and intuitions unlocking an immediate response in situations where our lives are exposed to danger, and even a moment of thought could cost us dearly (Goleman, D., 2011).

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These two sides of the mind – the emotional and the rational – work in complete harmony for most of the time, combining their different cognitive methods to guide us through the world. Usually, there is a balance between them – emotions provide information to the operations of the rational mind, and it, in turn, nuances and sometimes restrains the emotional impetus. Nevertheless, the two sides of our mind are only partially independent.

In most moments, these two sides are in delicate harmony, where emotions are of paramount importance to thought, and thought is crucial for emotions. However, when emotions run wild, the balance disappears: the emotional mind rises and overpowers the rational one (Goleman, D., 2011).

The aim of the article is to present the specific influence of emotions on tourist behavior.

2. Content aspects of emotions

In the rational model of consumer behavior, it is explained that consumers are not emotionally influenced by the products available on the market, and there is no emotional context in the shopping process. Studying the emotions of consumers is crucial as it helps marketers interpret perplexing aspects of consumer behavior by understanding emotional influences.

By its nature, emotion could stimulate interest and desire for a product, influencing intentions and decisions for future product purchases.

Jon Elster dramatically summarizes the significance of emotions as follows: "Without emotions, nothing would matter. People without emotions would have no reason to live, nor to die. Emotions are the essence of life. Emotions are the most important asset and what connects us to other people. Objectively speaking, emotions aid in understanding many forms of human behavior, and it could not be understood if not viewed through the prism of emotions" (Elster, J., 1998).

Elster suggests that spending on museums, operas, and the use of sports facilities can be justified from the perspective of the emotional experiences they provide to the wider public. Emotions permeate all consumer purchasing decisions, even when compromises are made. He posits that studying consumer behavior without considering emotions is based on simpler approaches and calculations. This understanding holds true even in situations where consumers purchase goods primarily driven by their emotions.

For all consumers, emotional experiences shape the system of values. These values reflect what consumers strive to preserve or enhance, such as freedom, justice, survival, the desire to be wealthy, and to have high self-esteem. The presence of any discrepancy between what consumers desire and the actual reality generates the potential for arousing their emotions.

The deep concern that consumers express in the market when purchasing goods gives rise to emotions, energy, motivation, and compels them to want and defend their values. Emotional excitement arises from everything that affects us in our daily lives. This does not mean that people cannot resist emotions, but rather that when it comes to ethics, emotions are strong and challenging to overcome. In many cases, consumer behavior is

rationalized through emotions. Emotions signal the meaning or personal significance of things. When consumers say something is meaningless, it means it lacks emotional significance. Emotions, along with trust, equate to loyalty (Dimova, N., 2013).

The human mind in the Western context is understood from two different perspectives. In the first one, the human mind is seen as consisting of separate and independent abilities or faculties that reflect individual processes, each with its own inherent physical properties that are innate.

The second perspective considers the human mind as something that constitutes a continuous flow of physical activity or sequences of mental states caused by a set of common processes (Barrett, L.F., Russell, J.A., 2015).

Emotion is defined as a "complex reaction of a person, arising from evaluations of significant interactions with the environment, leading to states of arousal, attentional focus, facial expression, action readiness, and behavior" (Lazarus, R.S., 1991; Levine, E.L., 2010).

Emotions are short-lived, intense, and typically associated with a specific referent that can activate responsive behavior (Cohen, J., Areni, C. 1991). Emotions are a crucial part of the human experience and play a critical role in an individual's psychological state and physical well-being (Pressman, S.D., Gallagher, M.W., Lopez, S.J., 2013; Richman et al., 2005). In the tourism industry, one of the most sought-after outcomes of travel is the elicitation of positive emotions such as joy and happiness (Filep, S., Deery, M., 2010; Hosany, S., Prayag, G., 2013; McCabe, S., Johnson, S., 2013). While many tourism experiences are positive, tourism can also evoke negative emotions such as sadness or anger, especially for travelers engaging in specific types of tourism activities (Biran, A., Poria, Y., Oren, G., 2011).

3. Relationship „emotions – tourist behavior“

The research question is related to the possibility to account for the influence of emotions on tourist behavior by indicating a literature review on the essence of emotions, the factors that influence the development of tourism business and the role and importance of emotions in the behavior of tourists.

Research limitations are related to the inability to make a comprehensive analysis of consumer behavior worldwide

The practical contributions of the authors are related to offering a different view of the influence of emotions on tourist behavior, through the prism of the different behavior of tourists in Europe.

The reasons and consequences of emotions in tourism are not always accurately assessed.

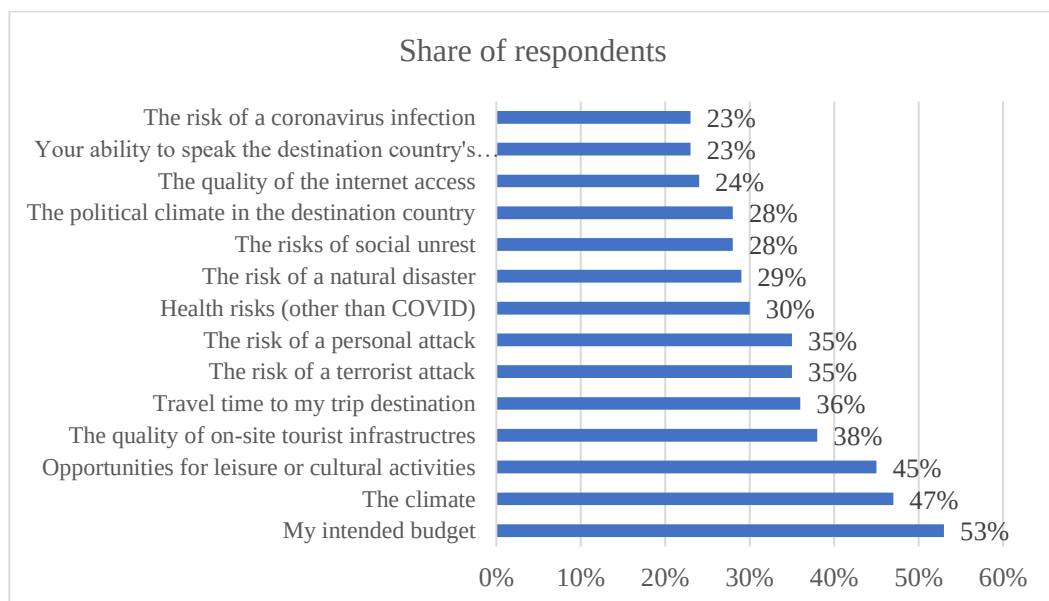


Fig. 1. Main factors that play an essential role when choosing a destination for a summer holiday trip according to adults in Europe as of April 2023

Source: INDUSTRIES & MARKETS Vacation travel behavior in Europe (<https://www.statista.com/>)

Therefore, for example, Figure №1 illustrates the main factors that play a significant role in the choice of a summer vacation destination for adults in Europe as of April 2023. Clearly highlighted are the anticipated budget and climate, followed by various types of risks associated with tourist travel, which, in turn, evoke different emotions in tourists.

A series of studies categorize tourists' evaluations of their experience, representing the main sources or determinants of emotions (Hosany, S., 2012; Watson, L., Spence, M., T., 2007; Zheng et al., 2019). Additionally, previous research applies the destination attribute model (Kim et al., 2020) and the regulatory focus theory (Song, J., Qu, H., 2019) to investigate the causes of emotions. Regarding the consequences of emotions, existing studies show a close connection between tourists' emotions and their behavior at all stages of the decision-making process. In the pre-travel stage, tourists' emotions affect their inclination toward imagination (Hosany, S., Buzova, D., Sanz-Blas, S., 2020) and decision-making behavior. On-site emotions during travel influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty behavior, such as the intention to revisit/reconsider and positive/negative word-of-mouth transmission.

The emotion of tourist consumers is a measure of how they feel during a tourism journey. It is important to note, however, that the dynamics behind customer emotions are extremely complex to analyze. The growing significance of tourist consumer emotions can be summarized as follows: customers often do not remember the quality of individual services, but they always remember how they felt during their visit to a destination. Typically,

the difference between good and excellent business results is expressed precisely in these experiences.

Furthermore, it should be clarified that customer emotions inspire their travel purchase decisions. Modern research indicates that the emotions of tourists are important indicators not only for individual trips but also for the likelihood of inspiring other consumers to undertake the same journey.

According to a study of tourist consumers, emotionally-driven travel purchases lead to spending twice as much as customers who are merely satisfied with the respective trip. Additionally, customers with strong emotional connections to the brand are 52% more valuable than customers who are simply satisfied (Magids, S., Zorfas, A., Leemon, D., 2015).

Understanding the emotional engagement of customers with a particular brand helps in building loyalty and high lifetime value.

According to a study on consumer experiences, the emotions customers experience when interacting with a business vary from positive emotions to negative emotions and include adoration, gratitude, ambivalence, excitement, and anger. Additionally, people experiencing negative emotions are 30% less likely to buy another product, but adoring customers make repeat purchases, expressing a 93% trust level (Qualtrics, <https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/?rid=ip&prevsite=en&newsite=uk&geo=BG&geomatch=uk>).

Defining the moments when customers experience these emotions during travel allows managers to better leverage emotional connections to improve business outcomes. In this sense, the focus is on identifying moments that contain the highest emotional load, whether these emotions are positive or negative. For instance, if customers frequently express excitement during the payment process, it may discourage them from making repeat purchases. Conversely, if they feel gratitude after receiving a loyalty discount code, they might be inclined to spend more on future travels.

Next, it should be noted that tourist customer *satisfaction* cannot be considered a complete reflection of how effectively an organization meets their expectations. Establishing a clear link between customer satisfaction and the success of the corporate strategy for generating experiences is complex. For instance, customers may be very satisfied but entirely unmotivated to undertake additional travels or recommend the company to others. In this case, the combination of satisfaction and building an emotional connection is crucial – this way, both sales and recommendations from satisfied customers who remain loyal to the brand over time are increased.

According to the 2022 Global Consumer Trends, modern consumers want brands to build an emotional connection with them and demonstrate an understanding of how they feel. More than 60% of surveyed individuals indicate that they want companies to care more about them, which would increase their purchases. Measuring customer satisfaction is not as challenging as measuring emotions. Often, consumers cannot clearly and fully describe how they feel, as they may not always understand their own unconscious emotional reactions and experiences. As a result, organizations need to use omnichannel platforms for analysis to clarify the emotional connection that customers establish with a specific company and journey. This is possible through the collection of extensive data on consumer emotions through surveys and subsequent precise analyses of moods,

experiences, and overall behavior in tourist destinations. The key *recommendations* here are focused on several key actions aimed at creating stable emotional connections with tourist consumers – understanding their emotions, improving their experiences, authenticity, trust, empathy, and customer care.

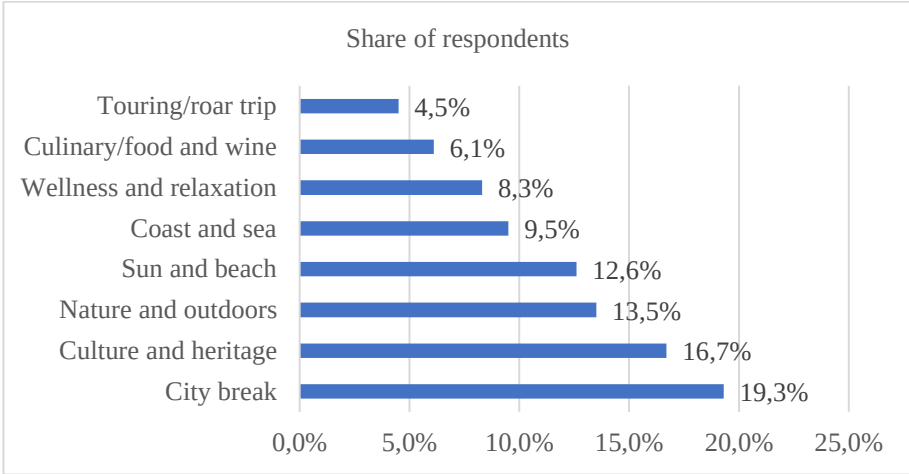


Fig. 2. Share of Europeans planning to take a leisure overnight trip domestically or in Europe in the next six months as of September 2023, by type of trip

Source: INDUSTRIES & MARKETS Vacation travel behavior in Europe (<https://www.statista.com/>)

For instance /according to Fig. 2/ the percentage of Europeans planning to take a leisure trip with an overnight stay in the country or Europe in the next six months as of September 2023 varies. The reasons that will evoke different emotions are diverse and clearly stand out in the figure.

On the other hand, it should be noted that in refining the understanding of tourists' emotional experiences (both positive and negative), the emotions themselves vary from one type to another (Hosany, S., Gilbert, D., 2010; Parkinson et al., 2005).

For example, cultural differences impact the way communication, affect, and the emotional significance of tourist services are perceived, shaping the ways in which tourists experience, express, organize, and modulate their emotions (Parkinson et al., 2005). Existing research on cross-cultural assessments of consumer emotions shows significant differences between Western and Asian consumers (De Mooij, M., Hofstede, G., 2011). Specifically, consumers from collectivist (e.g., Chinese consumers) and individualist (e.g., American consumers) cultural value systems differ in emotional expression (Oyserman, D., Coon, H.M., Kimmelmeier, M., 2002), experienced emotions (Davis, L., Wang, S., Lindridge, A., 2008), and emotional accessibility (Markus, H. R., Kitayama, S., 1991).

Negative emotions themselves can vary across different directions, even in individual leisure trips and medical tourism.

The relationship between the perceived cause of a particular result or event (negative experience in tourism) and its emotional consequences (negative emotions) and behavioral outcomes (blog post about the negative experience in tourism) is indirect and depends on the perceived characteristics or dimensions of the cause (e.g., service failure or rude staff) (Hareli, S., 2014).

From another perspective, it is important to study tourists' perceptions of the impact of tourism.

In the field of tourism, the study of attitudes of local residents towards tourism is one of the most systematic and well-researched areas. The positive impacts vary from better access to festivals, fairs, and events to improvements in public health and safety for tourists. On the negative side, impacts range from increased traffic and crowds to higher living costs, environmental degradation, and health consequences for local residents.

As a whole, tourism activities related to experiences are extremely diverse, as production conditions dynamically change. The production is highly strategic, products are customer-oriented, and experiences are generated as added value to consumption. At the core of memorable moments for tourists lies innovation, which we consider as a systematic activity characterized by specific organization. This way, new economic activities are created. In this sense, we will outline the trends in the experience economy during tourist travels and present various theoretical claims and models derived from real empirical cases, focusing on the example of the European region.

We cannot overlook the fact that over the last four years (2020-2023), the tourism market has undergone a significant transformation in its essence, and this change was not anticipated. Tourists are traveling *more frequently, to both shorter and longer distances, including exotic destinations. They express interest in less-known tourist spots and undeveloped destinations, show a particular attitude towards food, and seek recreational effects. There is a considerable focus on experiences*, meaning everything that turns into pleasant memories and remains in their long-lasting memory.

Emotions themselves create specific experiences.

It is important to emphasize the strong connection between the tourism sector in recent years, which is established with the experience economy. The development of the tourism industry occurs in continuous interaction with the development of the experience economy, as emotions play a significant role in motivating travel consumers.

In this context, it should be noted that the experience economy is developing extremely rapidly. According to a study by Momentum Worldwide, 76% of surveyed consumers worldwide prefer to spend their money on experiences rather than goods. This economy aims to provide high-quality value and highly differentiated services. While it is a well-known fact that tourism providers are the main entrepreneurs in the experience economy, the sector is quickly expanding, encompassing brands, pubs, restaurants, and other activities that aim to build better relationships with consumers by providing them with memorable moments. To make an experience unique, it must include the following characteristics: escape from everyday life, exclusivity, connection with others, meaning, and digital sharing (Momentum, We Know Experiences 2.0).

We must take into account that experiences can be created by various industries beyond tourism, including culture, art, information technology, entertainment, and others, often accompanying the production of goods and services. According to the founders of the concept in specialized literature, Pine and Gilmore (1999), experiences are a widely applicable economic activity associated with every form of production. Our perspective on this matter is that the creation of experiences primarily serves a creative-artistic function. In the context of business, when conditions for it evolve – such as productivity, technology utilization, innovations, and experience generation – it remains invisible. These opportunities, driven by intense competition, facilitate the individualization of experiences and the specialization of management, innovation, and production systems.

The EU, being the largest tourism counterpart in the world and simultaneously possessing the greatest potential for international tourism spending, has reshaped understandings of successful tourist packages. At the core of customer orientation and the systematic organization of innovative activities in the tourism offerings of companies are the new values in tourism. This includes perceiving the product as a whole, built from experiences, added value, and high-quality service. Strategic thinking in increasing productivity is crucial here, aiming to meet consumer expectations and respond to price competition.

In this context, it is noteworthy that there exists a project named "Experience", valued at 24.5 million euros, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (16.9 million euros) through the Interreg France (Channel) England program. This initiative, spanning the period from 2019 to 2023, aims to attract visitors beyond the active season through an innovative approach, creating "sustainable experiential tourism". The project covers six areas in England and France: Norfolk, Kent, Cornwall, Pas-de-Calais, Compiègne, and Brittany (Experiential tourism to extend the visitor season, <https://www.tourismexperience.org/>).

Furthermore, it is essential to note that tourists are losing interest in mass package tours as they seek individual, unique, and authentic experiences that they can share with their families and friends. Authentic experiences are original, memorable, involve active participation, and show respect for residents and nature (Good Tourism Institute, <https://goodtourism.institute.com/library/experience-economy/>).

A successfully designed experience has the following characteristics: it evokes pleasure, positive emotions, or sensations; provides an opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills; encourages beneficial interactions with other people.

Good experiences also stimulate the five senses, and to become memorable, they need to focus on engaging multiple senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. For example, the sounds of birds or local musicians, the aroma of herbs or plants, and the taste of local dishes.

The intensity of the experience is gaining increasing importance for tourist satisfaction. The same applies to any form of satisfaction that allows consumers to fulfill their deeper internal ambitions and dreams, as well as to affirm their social success or *savoir-vivre* during travel. At the core of the trend toward the pursuit of luxurious experiences by tourists is the idea that recreational activities contribute to the development of new skills, cultural enrichment, the formation of different awareness, or even personal character (Foresight

Factory, 2019). We can assert categorically that first-class pleasant experiences have a lasting impact on personal perspective and transformation, viewing them as an investment in personal development.

Indeed, in the end, one should not overlook the revenues that companies in the tourism industry can generate by leveraging emotional messages that influence tourist behavior.

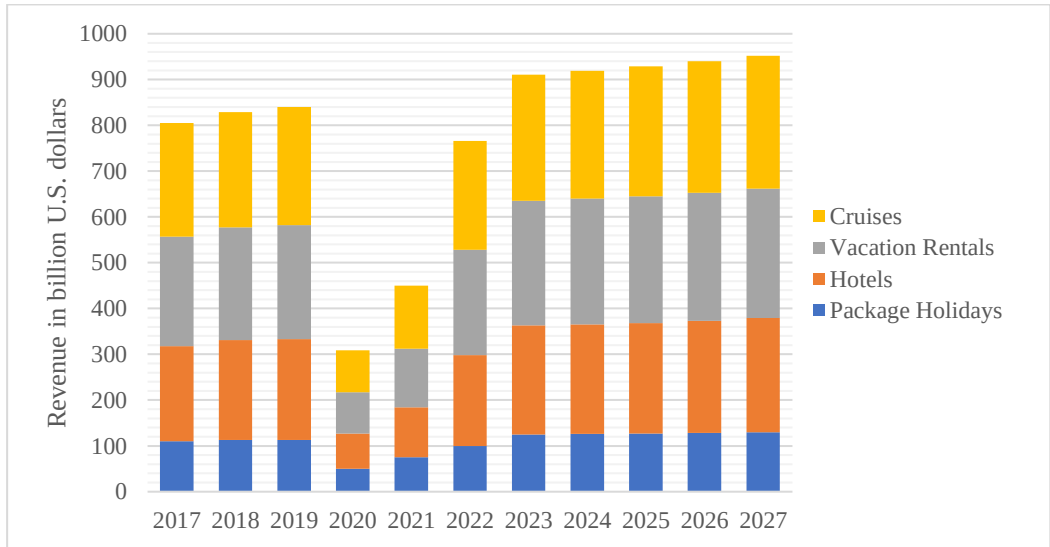


Fig. 3. Revenue of the travel and tourism market in Europe from 2017 to 2027, by segment (in billion U.S. dollars)

Source: INDUSTRIES & MARKETS Vacation travel behavior in Europe (<https://www.statista.com/>)

The chart clearly shows the revenues of the travel and tourism market in Europe from 2017 to 2027, with a particular dynamic evident in various types of tourism.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research directions are linked to conducting a study related to emotional travel in different regions of Bulgaria and Western Europe. Concurrently, the concept of tourists' emotional experiences can be further developed in the context of sustainable development in various countries and tourist destinations.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, if we were to forecast, *future business models* in tourism will be based on the "good experience". Creating experiences and emotions is the powerful catalyst that will stimulate and enhance the tourism offering. Tourists are highly informed and have high expectations, necessitating the introduction of a differentiating factor. Creativity in creating experiences is part of the solution to this challenge. The quest for innovative and

experiential travel connects tourists emotionally to the destination. Tourist circuits, interactive programs, and personalized services are just some of the possibilities to enrich added value for tourists. Through a creative approach and offering unique experiences, tourism revenues increase, and responsible destination visits are promoted.

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