

FRENCH FAMILIES IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET ON THEIR INFORMATION SEARCH BEHAVIOUR AND THEIR DECISION-MAKING CRITERIA.

Cécile Woolford

Master of Science in Marketing – Dublin Business school

ABSTRACT

The consumers' behaviour is in permanent change, it especially has changed very fast in the tourism industry with the growing influence of internet and social media. Many French tourism companies have suffered from the fast evolution of consumers' expectations and needs. The aim of the study is to understand further the information search process of consumers when planning their holidays and what are their decision-making criteria.

A cross sectional mixed methods research has been used. First, semi-structured interviews or the qualitative research and online questionnaires for the quantitative research.

Findings, define the different sources of information that they use, which on is the most influential, analyse the relation between internet/social media and holidays information search. Plus, they identify the decision-making criteria for holidays and the role of family members in holidays planning.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers' behaviour have changed with the development of social media and the use of the internet. Indeed, information from social media is now part of the decision-making process. Especially concerning the tourism market, the importance of social media and internet has been growing (Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. 2010). Many academic studies prove the importance of the role of social media in the decision making process for holidays (or hospitality). As a matter of fact, according to Aymankuy, Y., Soydas, M. E. and Sacli, G. (2013) social media highly influence decisions of people about holidays and accommodations. Furthermore, social media have a growing influence because consumers look for reviews generated by other consumers who have experienced the service (Bronner, F. and De Hoog, R. 2010). Indeed, they want to know the opinion of people like them and that they can trust.

How the influence of social media/internet have changed the way French families with high school children look for information to choose their holidays abroad and what are their decision making criteria?

Objectives

- To analyse if social media/internet are strongly related to information search in the tourism market or not.
- To explore what resources or websites do they use to search for information and which one is the most influential on their decision making.
- To define what are their decision-making criteria to choose their holidays/destination abroad.
- To investigate if reviews by other customers have an important impact on decision-making.
- To identify the role of family members for the information search and the decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

A cross sectional **mixed methods** research has been used. First, for the **qualitative research**, semi-structured interviews have been conducted among two marketing managers of French tourism companies. The, 12 travellers with children have also been interviewed. Concerning the **quantitative research**, an online questionnaire has been administrated to 111 travellers with high school children.

RESULTS

Qualitative findings

The big consumers' behaviour changes are:

- The need of **"customized" holidays** to be more flexible and get the best offers.
- The important need to **compare offers** a lot
- The **importance of reviews** and their influence on the decision.
- The **increasing use of mobile device** for information searching.

Three holiday makers typology:

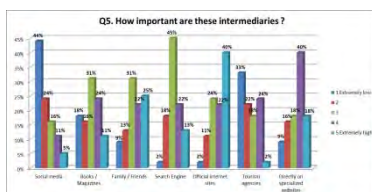
- **"Truly Internet Connected holidays maker"**: do everything online, are internet "savvy", like to get advice from other travellers, seek the best quality, know where to search and have habitual websites.

- **"Bargain Hunters holidays maker"**: they do offline and online research, pay more attention to prices and offers than on consumers' reviews.

- **"Lazy travellers"**: they do not like to plan, prefer to let the professionals take care of everything or their companion, do not consider reviews.

Quantitative findings

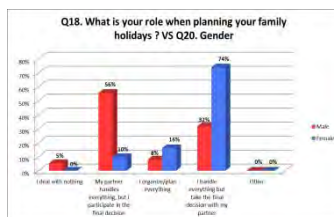
- **Internet has definitely a key role** for consumers when searching for information
- **The most influential sources of information** are respectively official websites, comparison websites, friends/family and travellers' reviews



- **The most influential decision criteria** are: price with 94% of respondents who think it is very important, location (91%) and benefits (77%).

- **The consideration of reviews** occurs once the choice is made, but **before the purchase** to confirm the choice.

- **Women have a central role**, they do all the research and pre-selection



- Partners almost always take the **final decision together**

- **Children do not participate** in planning holidays or in the decision-making

DISCUSSION

French families spend now more time on the internet when searching for information to plan their holidays but some sources stay the same, they have just changed their medium (official websites and online tourism agencies). Then, with all those information available travellers are also more comparison minded, they compare prices, benefits, reviews, photos,... In fact, that is also why they like comparison websites, so they have everything on the same website to be able to find the best offers for their expectations and needs. Obviously the influence of internet and social media have also made holidays makers use a lot more intermediaries than before as everything is so easily available. Plus, concerning the decision criteria, the most important for holidays makers to choose their holidays are generally the price, the location and benefits. In other words, they want the best quality/price ratio offers. Moreover, another important variable is reviews. Effectively, they are not important for selecting but they are important to validate the purchase, comfort the consumers choice. To finish, it is mostly the women or the most internet savvy partner who do all the research and pre-selection, before doing the final choice together with their partner.

The research indicates guidance for tourism companies to have more visibility, increase their awareness and meet travellers' expectations. It indicate also directions for further researches to investigate a wider population sample, the different role of children for holidays planning according to their age and the cross devices consumer's behaviour for information search and the buying act.

CONCLUSIONS

The main sources of information are online sources but **offline sources are still important**. However, the **most influential sources are official websites, comparison websites, friends/family and travellers' reviews**. Plus, several decision criteria have being highlighted and the importance of reviews underlined. Reviews do not have a high important for choosing the holidays but they have a strong influence as an element of reinsurance to purchase the holidays chosen. Finally, findings show that children have no importance in holidays planning and that women have a central role for both information search and decision-making.

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