

THE HOSPITALITY CONSUMERS-HOW TO INFLUENCE THEM IN OUR DAYS

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Abstract

The hospitality domain is an area widely researched with high implications for the economy of each country in the world. Hospitality service providers must sell services to consumers according to their needs. In order to satisfy these needs and to offer them what they want the service providers must understand the behavior of the consumers. This behavior depends on needs and can be influenced by internal factors and also by external factors. Although important scientists from the domain have tried to understand the behavior of people it is still a hard subject to explain because people are subjective to different factors. Selling what the consumer wants lead to consumer satisfaction and this can only be achieved by offering exactly what the consumer desires. Hospitality service providers offer services to people from different countries so it is crucial to create services that satisfy all these people.

Keywords: service, consumer behavior, factors, hospitality.

Classification JEL: Z00,Z3

1. Introduction to the concept of human needs and behavior

Each individual is defined by a certain behavior, behavior that influences his position in the society and in the interaction with family and unknown people. That is why it is necessary for hospitality service providers to understand the behavior of their buyers. Knowing their behavior can provide help at the creation of new hospitality services or to their improvement in cases when consumers are not satisfied.

First of all we have to understand what "behavior" stand for and what it is necessary to understand. "Behavior is the broad set of actions undertaken to fulfill various needs and wants. It is formally defined as " anything a person does, such as talking, walking, thinking, or daydreaming"(Ivancevich et al. 1997,p.752). Behavior does not necessarily have to be conscious or planned "[3].

This definition brings to our attention the concept of needs. Each human being has different needs according to inner thoughts and actions. These needs vary from person to person, some needs are more important than others. "Needs lead to motivation, which leads to behavioral intentions, which ultimately lead to observable behavior"[5].

As we can notice from the figure number 1 the five categories of needs discussed by Maslow are the basic needs, safety needs, belonging, ego-status, self-actualization.



Figure no.1. Abraham Maslow' hierarchy of needs
Source: Montana , P., Charnov, B., *Management* , fourth edition, Barron's, 2008, p.238

"The very lowest, consisting of physiological needs, reflects the individual's concern for survival. Next we move up to the safety rung, reflecting concern for safety and the avoidance of harm. The third rung represents the belonging needs, the normal human desire to be accepted and appreciated by others. The fourth is the level of ego-status needs, which motivate a person to contribute his or her best to the efforts of the group in return for the numerous forms of reward that recognition can assume. The highest rung on the ladder stands for the self-actualization needs, which are realized when the individual can experience a sense of personal growth and achievement, of satisfaction and self-fulfillment through doing"[4].

Thinking in terms of hospitality services we can offer as example in order to understand needs the following situation when a tourist goes to a vacation:

1. the physiological needs refer to hunger, thirst;
2. his safety needs refer to the fact that he wants a secure location where he can relax without any problem;
3. the belonging needs, the tourist can choose an accommodation that is liked by other people he knows.

The purpose of the paper is to present the importance of the study of consumer behavior in the creation of quality services.

2. Factors influencing the behavior of consumers

As we have discussed above, to understand consumer behavior it is vital for any business that wants to survive the economic environment, that wants to maximize profitability. In the hospitality industry it is even harder to understand consumers because this industry sells services and services are characterized by intangibility. Hospitality consumers buy services before they arrive at destination desired, the services are created and delivered once they arrive at the destination and even if they have five wonderful days, maybe in the last day something bad happens and all the good things that have happened before are deleted.

Consumer behavior has been highly researched by many important scientists from the marketing area. The factors influencing the consumer behavior are different depending on each person taken into consideration. "James McNeal in his classic book Consumer Behavior, advances the idea that human behavior is influenced by several factors:

1. "Social setting. All consumers make decisions and take actions within the larger social setting and, in doing so, are influenced by their peers. In addition, the same consumers will, in turn, influence the actions of other consumers. Social settings will vary greatly. For example, the social setting of a consumer living in New York City is very different from that of someone living in Ames, Iowa; Paris, France; or an Eastern European country.
2. Social forces. Forces within the society set the standards of acceptable behavior. These rules are both written and unwritten, and they are established by those within the society with the most influence. For example, the behavior that a college student exhibits at a party on campus is likely to be quite different than the behavior exhibited while at home during break. Different social forces are at work in these two situations.
3. Roles. A role is a pattern of behavior associated with a specific position within a social setting. Each of us assumes a variety of role, some professional, other personal. Each role brings with it a set of expectations for behavior.
4. For example, when an individual is in a position of authority, such as the manager of a hotel, employees look to the manager to provide direction, make decisions, and help the operation to run smoothly. However, when this manager leaves work and goes home, he or she may assume a less active decision-making role when interacting with his or her children.
5. Attitudes relative to roles. Within each of these roles that we play are attitudes and knowledge that we gain about the setting. Attitudes are defined as consistently favorable or unfavorable evaluations of objects or situations. Knowledge is defined as facts that we gain about objects or situations. Attitudes are directly tied to a consumer's needs. These needs, which are the cause for all consumer behavior, are linked to an individual's attitude and knowledge "[5].

2.1.Internal and external factors influencing hospitality consumers

Once human behavior has been discussed we must move further to discussing about the factors that influence hospitality consumers. These factors can be external and internal. The external one and are represented by culture, reference groups, family and social class and they refer to the influence that have nothing to do with how the individual is created, feels or thinks. The internal ones refer to personality, lifestyle, gender, age, income and education. All these factors must be taken into consideration by hospitality service providers because they represent a starting point in creating services adapted to the needs of the consumers.

As we can see from figure number 2 the factors mentioned influence the consumer behavior and lead to the decision making process." Mayo and Jarvis (1981) believe that individual travel behavior can be explained by the length of the decision process and by the influence of psychological factors on a person's choices"[2]. This idea leads to another point of discussion, how hard it is to research the influence of psychological factors on consumers because this type of factors are not noticeable as the external ones.

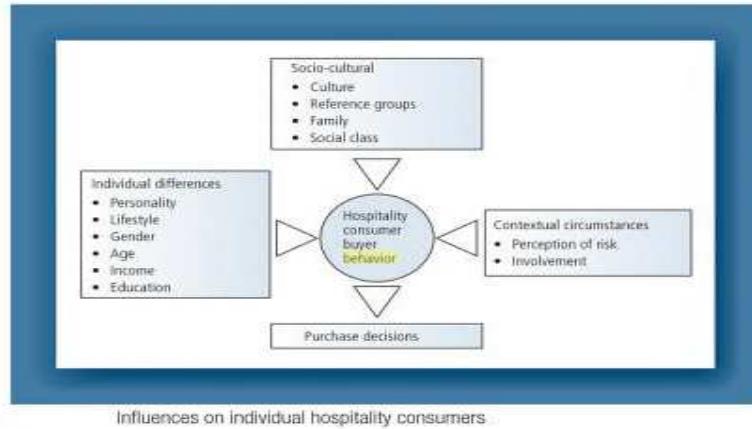


Figure no.2. Factors influencing consumers

Source: Bowie D, Buttle F Hospitality marketing principles and practice, second edition, Butterworth Heinemann, Elsevier, p.68

3. The consumer behavior in the industry of hospitality

The tourism activity is among the few phenomena that have been imposed, particularly, worldwide, its spectacular development constitutes one of the characteristic features of our century and, in particular, of the second half of it.

The purpose of any business activity in the private or public field is to obtain profit and to develop economic activities in terms of economic profitability. We can speak of the return of an activity when the effects are the net income, the profit. We can speak of economy when the effects are in the form as economy savings. We have to distinguish between the concept of return on assets seen as a theoretical concept which involves the quality of a system to produce useful economic effects and the profitability measure which is achieved by comparing the effects with the effort. The meaning of the profitability of the productive activity, the use of resources, varies depending on the organizational levels of the economy, the interests pursued and the place where the action is carried out. Thus, profitability is expressed by the increase in the net national product per unit of effort and at the company's level profitability is expressed by the level of labor productivity and unit costs of production.

Profitability is an important quality synthetic indicator, which expresses the ability of a company to obtain net income. In other words, the return can be defined as a company's capacity to produce a surplus over the expenses. The absolute expression of profitability is represented by the mass profit. Profitability reflects the margin of income that exceeds expenses, and in relative expression it must always appear over-unit.

Profitability can be highlighted in different ways by combining three factors:

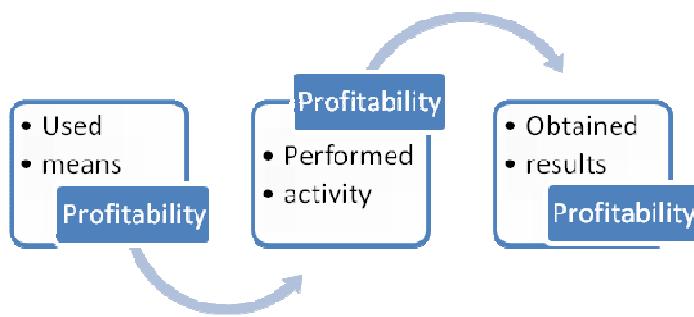


Figure no. 1 Factors with which profitability can be highlighted

By combining the three factors, it may appear two types of reports:

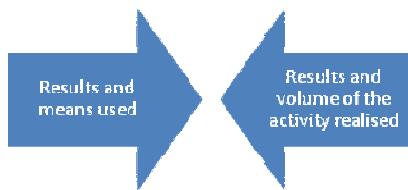


Figure no. 2 Reports resulting from combining the profitability factors

4. Conclusions

The study of consumer behavior is important in any industry of the economy, especially in a industry as hospitality where services delivered depend on the attitudes and beliefs of consumers. Understanding consumer behavior is crucial for companies that want to have a proactive attitude towards the business environment. Satisfied consumers are the key to the profitability of any business. Managers that understand that the consumer should be treated with special attention, so that they will return or they will tell other people about their experience, will obtain competitive advantage for their companies. Many businesses present different advantages but obtaining a competitive advantage is a difficult task.

The article aimed at introducing the reader in the concept of "behavior", with accent on the hospitality industry. Taking all of the things discussed into consideration we must conclude that the process of studying the behavior of consumers is a complex one and it must be given a special attention in order to retain consumers.

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