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Satisfaction with summer holidays in Croatia: Factors of intention to return and of recommendation for stay

Abstract

Given that the intention of clients to return may be regarded as a manifestation of their future buying behaviour, it is useful to identify those factors, which are related to that intention. A questionnaire of satisfaction with holidays was constructed and, with the help of factor analysis, three factors of satisfaction with summer holidays were identified: satisfaction with the destination, satisfaction with prices in destination and satisfaction with transport to the destination. On a sample of 110 Slovak holidaymakers to Croatia (in summer 2012 holiday season) and with the use of logistic regression, the relationship of seven predictors of the intention to return and to their recommendation of the holidays in the given area were examined. It was detected that, out of seven predictors (gender, age, marital status, number of holidays taken with the travel agent, satisfaction with the destination, satisfaction with prices and satisfaction with transportation to the destination), the only significant predictor appeared to be the satisfaction with the destination. This finding applies to the intention to return as well as to the tourists' recommendation of summer holidays to others; it was confirmed repeatedly on a sample of 132 holidaymakers from Slovakia in the same tourist destination in 2013 summer holiday season. The paper discusses the possibility of verifying the general validity of the prediction model by conducting research among holidaymakers in other tourist destinations.

Key words: factors of satisfaction; summer holidays; intention to return; logistic regression; Croatia; Slovakia

Introduction

The intention of holidaymakers to return for vacation to the same destination has been studied extensively under the assumption that it is closely related to the future buying behaviour (Dmitrovič, Cvelbar, Kolar, Brenčič, Ograjenše & Źabkar, 2009). Typically, several factors are related to the "Intention to return", such as overall destination satisfaction (Marcusen, 2011), the number of previous visits and friendliness of the locals (Alegre & Cladera, 2006), accommodation satisfaction (Som & Badarneh, 2011) and prices (Campo & Yagüe, 2009). This study deals with the "Intention to return" to Croatian holiday destinations by the Slovakian tourists. For Slovaks, Croatia is an important tourism destination. Each year, about 20% of total Slovakian outbound tourists spend holidays in Croatia, and Croatia is third in popularity, right after Turkey and Bulgaria (Slovakian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). In 2013, Slovakian tourists realised 337 thousand arrivals and 2.2 million overnights (3.2 and 3.7% of total foreign arrivals and overnights respectively) in Croatia (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

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According to the travel market survey conducted by the Institute for Tourism (Tomas Summer, 2010), Slovakian tourists visit Croatia mostly for rest and relaxation, entertainment and natural attractions. A large proportion (95%) are repeat visitors. About 27% of them organise their holiday in Croatia via travel agency, although only about 5% purchase full package (travel and accommodation), while the majority used travel agency for accommodation booking only. Since Slovakian travel agencies are very much dependent on the sale of holiday packages to Mediterranean destinations, including Croatia as a very important one, this study is focused on identifying predictors of "Intention to return" to Croatia for summer holidays among Slovakian tourists purchasing full-package summer vacation for this country.

Literature review

The existing empirical evidence suggests that tourist satisfaction is a strong predictor of the "Intention to return" to a destination (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Kozak, 2001; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Alexandris, Kouthouri & Meligdis, 2006; Chi & Qu, 2008). Baker and Crompton (2000) found that satisfied tourists are most likely to return to a destination and are willing to share their pleasant experience with their relatives and friends, thus promoting destination through the word of mouth. Dmitrović *et al.* (2009), examining tourists' satisfaction through a set of destination attributes revealed that, besides "Intention to return" and positive word of mouth, satisfaction was also related to the willingness to pay more. Similarly, Marcusen's (2011) study confirmed the relationship between satisfaction and "Intention to return". However, the results of this study indicate that the familiarity with a destination and friendliness of local residents are stronger predictors of the "Intention to return" than the overall satisfaction.

It is clear that relationship between satisfaction and "Intention to return" is complex. To deal with this complexity, Sam and Badarneh (2011) proposed a comprehensive model of the relationship between satisfaction factors, destination image, perceived value and novelty and the distance of the destination with the "Intention to return". In a similar vein, Oom do Valle, Correia and Rebelo (2008) investigated influence of motivation, expectations, travel characteristics and tourists' socio-demographic profiles on the "Intention to return". Their results confirmed the complexity of this relationship. "Intention to return" was higher among those motivated by rest and relaxation, escape and socialisation. It was also higher among older tourists and those belonging to the upper social class. Other factors, including destination prices, did not have a bearing on the "Intention to return".

While the Oom do Valle's study focused more on travellers' characteristics, Alegre and Cladera (2009), in the context of Balearic Islands, investigated the relationship between "Intention to return" with satisfaction with various aspects of a destination - beach scenery, climate, quality of accommodation, quality of the environment, cleanliness of public spaces, cost of food and beverages and of leisure activities, hospitality of the local residents, safety, nightlife, cultural attractions, silence and serenity and the level of noise. Their study confirmed that the satisfaction and number of previous visits relate to the "Intention to return". Furthermore, through the structural equations model, they identified the existence of two causal branches of the model – the number of previous visits influences the overall satisfaction and, simultaneously, has a direct impact on the "Intention to return".

This short overview of a selection of recent studies suggests that there is an ample evidence that satisfaction with a destination has a significant influence on the intention to return. Other factors include

destination familiarity and, possibly, some socio-demographic variables. This study, in essence a replication of the previous studies, is focused on specific segments of tourists – those on package holidays. The choice of Slovakian tourists spending summer holidays in Croatia was made for pragmatic reasons, as Croatia is an important package-destination for Slovakian travel agencies and Slovakian tourists are important generating markets for several Croatian tourism regions.

Method

To fulfill the aim of the study, primary research was conducted during the 2012 summer holiday. Two main constructs of this study were satisfaction and the "Intention to return".

In this context, satisfaction was defined as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of satisfaction with various aspects of a destination. In essence, the Alegre and Cladera's (2009) approach was adopted. Thus, the satisfaction scale consisted of items dealing with the beach scenery, climate, quality of accommodation, quality of the environment, cleanliness of public spaces, cost of food and beverages in the destination, cost of leisure activities, hospitality of the local people, nightlife, cultural attractions, peace, quietness or the level of noise. Given the specific context of packaged tour, additional items related to the quality and safety of transportation to the destination were added. The responses ranged from 1 = "fully dissatisfied" to 4 = "fully satisfied".

Finally, the satisfaction was also measured indirectly through tendency to promote a destination via recommendation, under assumption that only satisfied tourists will be willing to do so. It was measured by the question: "Would you suggest the same or a similar holiday to your acquaintances?" with the response of 1 = "yes" and 0 = "no". The "Intention to return" was operationalised through a single question: "For your summer holiday next year again, would you buy the same or a similar holiday?" with yes/no response options.

The population for this study was defined as Slovakian outbound tourists purchasing Croatian holiday package from a travel agency. The population frame for this study was difficult to construct, given that the travel agencies have to safeguard privacy of their clients. Thus, only clients from one travel agency participated in this study. However, the downside of this is that all respondents purchased the same package and, thus, they all stayed in the same hotel in one destination only.

Data were collected via a questionnaire designed for self-completion. The tour-leader handed the questionnaire in an envelope to each participant on the day before his/her departure and collected the completed survey the next day. Placing the completed questionnaire in a sealed envelope before handing it over to the tour-leader insured respondents' anonymity and confidentiality.

Initial sample consisted of 243 respondents, what represents 25% of clients purchasing the agency's Croatian summer holiday package. Of those, 110 usable responses were obtained. The average age of respondents was 44. As Table 1 shows, there was an overrepresentation of females and an even split in terms of marital status. Such response rate, as well as prevalence of females in the sample, can be attributed to the fact that questionnaire was handed to each tour participants, but only one member of the immediate travel party responded. For the majority of respondents it was their first visit to this destination. This is in a sharp contrast to the results of Tomas Summer 2010 where 95 of Slovakian tourists were repeat visitors.

Table 1
Socio-demographic profile of respondents

Responders	N	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	77	70.0
Male	33	30.0
Marital status		
Married	56	50.9
Single	54	49.1
Number of previous visits to the destination		
First	76	69.1
Second	19	17.3
More	15	13.6

To investigate relationship between destination satisfaction and the "Intention to return", two statistical methods were used. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to reduce the number of items on the satisfaction scale. Correlations between items were verified by the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity which was significant (Chi-Square = 571.45, $p = 0.000$). On the basis of the scree plot, three factors were identified (eigenvalue higher than 1): satisfaction with destination (Destination), satisfaction with the transport to the destination (Transportation) and satisfaction with prices in the destination (Prices). Three factors explained 52% of total variance. The three subscales achieved sound internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 for Destination, 0.75 for Transportation and the same for the Prices sub-scale. Next, the relationship between the "Intention to return" and satisfaction was tested through logistic regression (method Forward LR).

Results

Overall, Slovakian tourists were satisfied with their summer holidays in Croatia. Most of them (89 percent) were willing to recommend the same or similar holidays to their friends and relatives. Likewise, 77% of respondents said that they were willing to purchase the same or similar package next year, indicating thus a high rate of "Intention to return".

The satisfaction with various aspects of their holiday destination is presented in Table 2.

Respondents were extremely satisfied with their holidays in Croatia. In particular, they were satisfied with hotel facilities; staff and local people in general; and the natural beauty. About fifth of them were dissatisfied with the entertainment opportunities. However, there was a relatively large proportion dissatisfied with prices, in particular restaurant prices. Finally, the only destination related aspects attracting dissatisfaction of nearly 43% of respondents was noise in the surrounding, what is most likely results of a high tourist density in the peak season.

Table 2
Satisfaction with various aspects of destination

Satisfaction item	Mean*	%	%	%	%
		1 Completely dissatisfied	2	3	4 Completely satisfied
Hotel staff behaviour	3.58	0.0	5.5	30.9	63.6
Natural beauty of the surroundings	3.39	0.0	4.6	51.8	43.6
Cleanliness in the hotel	3.34	2.8	10.9	34.5	51.8
Quality of accommodation	3.31	3.6	8.2	41.8	46.4
Behaviour of the local people	3.25	0.8	8.2	55.5	35.5
Hotel room equipment	3.25	2.7	11.8	43.6	41.9
Possibilities of entertainment	3.01	2.7	18.3	54.5	24.5
Beachs and their facilities	3.00	0.0	20.9	58.2	20.9
Cost of entertainment during the day by the sea	2.73	0.9	34.5	55.5	9.1
Prices of food in shops	2.71	3.6	31.8	54.5	10.0
Prices of meals in restaurants	2.58	5.4	38.2	49.1	7.3
Level of noise in the surroundings	2.55	14.5	28.3	44.5	12.7

As already explained, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) identified three factors. Variables were well defined by this factor solution. The factor loadings, communalities, percentage of variance and measures of reliability of factors are presented in Table 3. A factor loading of 0.30 was adopted for the inclusion of variables in the factor and, on this basis, variables which did not reach up to this level were deleted from the factor solution. The items that compose each factor were sorted out into three scales: Destination (Mean = 3.21, SD = 0.48), Transport (Mean = 3.31, SD = 0.50) and Prices (Mean = 2.70, SD = 0.48).

Table 3
Factor loadings, communalities (h^2), Cronbach alpha (Varimax rotation)

Factor	Destina- tion	Transporta- tion	Prices	Commu- nalities
Hotel room equipment	0.88			0.59
Cleanliness in the hotel	0.79			0.29
Quality of accommodation	0.77			0.58
Hotel staff behaviour	0.64			0.51
Level of the noise of the surroundings	0.58			0.56
Natural beauty of the surroundings	0.44			0.24
Behaviour of the local people	0.40			0.77
Possibilities of entertainment	0.32			0.42
Behaviour of drivers		0.75		0.43
Comfort during transportation		0.74		0.58

Table 3 Continued

Factor	Destina- tion	Transporta- tion	Prices	Commu- nalities
Safety during transportation to the destination		0.72		0.56
Cleanliness of the bus		0.71		0.58
Prices of meals in restaurants			0.76	0.43
Beachs and their facilities			0.72	0.61
Prices of food in shops			0.71	0.64
Cost of entertainment during the day by the sea			0.69	0.59
Variance explained (%)	29	12	11	
Cummulative variance	29	41	52	
Cronbach's alpha	0.80	0.75	0.75	

To test the relationship between satisfaction and the "Intention to return", logistic regression was used. The three independent variables were Destination, Transport and Prices. The results are presented in Table 4.

With the help of logistic regression analysis we tried to examine which of the variables predict the intention of the respondents to return to the destination and the recommendation of the same holidays to others. Table 4 presents the results of the logistic regression for the "Intention to return".

Table 4
Logistic regression analysis of "Intention to return"

Independent variable	B	se	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Destination	2.463	0.612	16.174	0.000	11.734
Constant	-6.366	1.846	11.897	0.001	0.002
Model Chi-square =	21.501	p = 0.000			
Pseudo R ² =	0.27				
n =	110				

Note: Destination: higher scores indicate a higher degree of the variable. "Intention to return": 1 – yes, 0 - no.

It is clear from Table 4 that if all predictors (gender, age, number of previous visits to the destination, marital status, satisfaction with destination, transportation and prices) were inserted into the equation, the "Intention to return" predicted significantly only the satisfaction with the destination (Chi-square = 21.501, df = 1, p = 0.000). Generally speaking, the more people were satisfied with the destination, the more frequently they expressed their "Intention to return" to the same destination. In particular, Nagelkerke R-Square = 0.27 points to the fact that satisfaction with the destination accounts for 27% variance of the "Intention to return", and so a significant part of the criterion has not been explained by this predictor. In spite of that, this predictor can be considered as significant: the Exp (B) value, which represents the odds ratio, can be explained in the sense that visitors who were satisfied with their stay are twelve times more probable to return in comparison with those who were less satisfied.

In order to verify the effect of these predictors on the recommendation of the holiday to others, we calculated a logistic regression for the criterion "Recommending to others". The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Logistic regression analysis of "Recommending to others"

Independent variable	B	se	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Destination	3.501	0.949	13.605	0.000	33.139
Constant	-8.208	2.648	9.610	0.002	0.000
Model Chi-square =	21.845	p = 0.000			
Pseudo R ² =	0.36				
n =	110				

Note: Destination: higher scores indicate a higher degree of the variable. "Recommending to others": 1 – yes, 0 - no.

In the event that all predictors (gender, age, number of previous visits to the destination, marital status, satisfaction with destination, transportation and prices) were inserted to predict recommendation of the holiday to others (Table 5), the result was similar to that of the "Intention to return": only the satisfaction with destination (Chi-square = 21.845, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$) proved to be a significant predictor. The more people were satisfied with the destination, the more often they were willing to recommend the holidays to others. In particular, Nagelkerke R-square = 0.36 means that in this case satisfaction with the stay accounts for 36% of variance of the criterion "Recommending to others". "The Exp(B) value points to the fact that visitors who were satisfied with their stay are 33 times more likely to recommend the destination to others than those who are less satisfied, which underscores a significant weight of the predictor.

Conclusion

In order to verify the relationship of client satisfaction with their summer holidays to their "Intention to return" and to their recommendation of the holiday to others, a questionnaire of satisfaction with holidays was constructed. Its three scales identified with the help of factor analysis, viz. satisfaction with the destination, satisfaction with transportation to the destination and satisfaction with prices in the holiday destination, demonstrate a high degree of reliability (Cronbach's alpha between 0.75 and 0.80). We found out that out of seven tested predictors, viz. gender, age, number of previous visits to the destination, marital status, satisfaction with the destination, transportation and prices, the only significant predictor appeared to be satisfaction with the destination. This finding applies to the "Intention to return" as well as to the tourists' recommendation of summer holidays to others. No significant relationship of the previous visits to a destination (Marcusen, 2011), age and marital status (Oom do Valle *et al.*, 2008), or the number of previous visits to a destination (Alegre & Cladera, 2008) was detected.

Although this finding has certain limitations which are related to the size of the sample, the replicated research in the same destination in 2013 summer holiday season conducted on a sample of 132 people generated the same results (we do not quote them in this study), which indicates its stability. It is the

question of further research to ascertain whether the satisfaction with the stay will be the only significant predictor, from among all verified predictors, of the "Intention to return", or of the willingness to recommend the holiday to others in the case of summer holidays spent in a different destination. In other words, to what extent is the structure of predictors dependent upon the destination. Next, given that the percentage of the variance explained by the significant predictor was relatively low (Nagelkerke = 0.27), in further research it is necessary to consider a possibility of extending the set of the examined attributes of satisfaction with summer holidays. It is possible to consider as appropriate the recommendations made by Som and Badarneh (2011) who proposed a comprehensive model which encompasses destination image, perceived value, possibility of exploring something new and distance to the destination.

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Submitted: 27/01/2014

Accepted: 19/06/2014