Personality Traits and the Use of Word Of Mouth Communication as a Source of Travel Information among Inbound Tourists who Visited Isfahan

Bahram RANJBARIAN
Professor of Marketing, Department of Management, Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Economics, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

Mohammad Hossein FORGHANI
MA. Student, Department of Management, Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Economics, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

Mohamad GHAFARI
Ph.D. Candidate of Marketing, Department of Management, Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Economics, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
E-mail: m_gh261@yahoo.com

Abstract

The growth of tourism destinations depends on the quality and logicality of its development plan. A tourism development plan should be prepared with emphasis on its target market. Tourist’s personality trait is a variable that could be used to segment tourism market. This article aimed to study tourist’s personality traits (extroverted vs. introverted, and risk taking vs. risk avoiding) relationship with extend of word of mouth communication (WOM) used by them as a source of travel information. The statistical population of the study is inbound tourists who visited Isfahan in 2011. A sample of 200 tourists has been selected by convenience sampling method. In order to analyze the data, one-sample t-test, analysis of variance, and simultaneous regression analysis were used. The results indicate that the tourists who visited Isfahan used WOM communication to find information about their travel destination. Also the results indicate that extroverted and risk takers used more WOM communication than others.

Sampling is one of the limitations identified by the study. It means that the results are not transferable to other tourism destinations. The study should be replicated for other tourism destinations. Marketers should notice that different tourists segment may prefer different information sources for their travel information and planning.

Keywords: Tourism, Word of Mouth Communication, Personality Traits and Isfahan.

Introduction

In the global economy, tourism is an important source of income for both developed and developing countries. So, that is why considerable part of planning and investment efforts is
drawn to tourism industry throughout the world. According to World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) statistics for 2008, the number of international tourists was 992 million and its income has been estimated to be 994 billion US$ which constitutes almost 30% of global market of services. Tourism industry provides for 9.3% of global GDP. Tourism has provided 2.5 million jobs in the world, making for 4.7% of total global employment (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2008). According to the report of World Tourism Organization (2011), despite new challenges emerging since the beginning of the year 2011, international tourist arrivals increased by 4.5% between January and April 2011, compared to the same period of the 2010. Growth was positive in all regions, with the exception of Middle East. Some sub-region achieved double-digit growth: South America (17%), South Asia (14%), and South East Asia (10%). Europe which was the main tourist receiving mainland since 1950 will continue to be in the first and exceeded the expectation (6%) and posted the highest growth rate in the first four months of 2011 (WTO, 2011). In spite of the fact that Iran is ranked at the top ten countries with respect to the ancient and historical sites, experts believe that its natural attractions have remained untapped because tourism industry either has been ignored or given too little attention by the government. (Jalilvand, 2012: 177). In twenty-first century, technological advances will result in more wealth and free time for individuals, thus they spend more time for recreation and leisure (Jalilvand, 2009: 10). In fact, the latter half of 21th century has been named after tourism industry. In order to succeed, it is not only enough for a tourist destination to be friendly to visitors, but also there is need to plan for attracting tourists and introducing their capabilities and condition to global markets. In fact, in order to take the best advantage of tourism industries’ opportunities, destinations need to be well conditioned to host foreign tourists. Although domestic tourism is significant for economy, it just increases the flow of factors within the country, not adding value to the nation. Market segmentation and market study are essential for effective market planning and offering appropriate services for tourists. Using personality traits for market segmentation is a widely known method. According to Plog (1974), tourists can be categorized as having either introverted or extroverted behavioral tendencies (Plog, 1994: 215). Also risk taking traits could be used for tourism market segmentation in order to offer appropriate services and planning for their needed activities accordingly. Based on the importance of WOM and personality traits, this article aimed to study the impacts of word of mouth communication on attracting foreign tourists. In addition, it will determine which type of personality (introverted vs. extroverted and risk-taker vs. risk-averter) use this form of communication more than others.

**Word of Mouth Communication**

Word-of-mouth communication plays an important role in consumer’s purchasing behavior and had been studied by many authors and researchers. Kirtin and Taxi defined the word of mouth communications (WOM) as unofficial communications, exchanged in the society and related to business or product characteristics. Researches generally support the claim that WOM is influential on consumer behavior more than any other marketing-controlled sources (Buttle, 1998: 245). Also word-of-mouth communications have been described as an especially potential form of communication (Dann and Dann, 2001: 35), the most cost-effective form of marketing a business can use (Misner, 1994: 40), the dominant force in the marketplace for
services (Mangold and others, 1999: 18) and one of the most powerful force in the marketplace (Silverman, 2001: 17). However, most of the past studies on word-of-mouth communications have focused on the goods rather than services (Engel, et al. 1969) and on negative word-of-mouth communications rather than positive ones. Because these researchers believe that negative WOM is stronger than the positive one. This belief could be true, but we shouldn’t ignore the positive WOM. That is why this study aimed to examine extend of using WOM communications by inbound tourists who visited Isfahan. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the study formulated as following.

**Hypothesis 1:** Inbound tourists who visited Isfahan used WOM communication as a source of traveling information.

**Personality Traits (extroverted vs. introverted, Risk taker vs. Risk averter)**

Although the study of personality traits does not resemble the study of types (Pervin, 1985: 120), the type approach has provided much of the language and framework used in prescribing personalities. In addition, many researchers have focused on personal values such as Barrick and Mount (1991: 20). Social researchers of every discipline have acknowledged the importance of the impact of personality on human behavior dating back to Aristotle. Although many studies have been undertaken over the last 30 years to investigate potential links between personality and job performance, there has been much less study of the impact of personality traits on consumer behavior and using communications types. As we know, while introverted individuals seek for peace and prefer solitude to appearing in groups, extroverted individuals are more social and prefer to spend more time with people and in society. Furthermore, in order to gather enough information to decide on the destination, different types of individuals will turn to different sources such as the internet, tourism books and journals, consulting agents, advertisement and word of mouth. So this study aimed to study that what mentioned type of personality use WOM communication more than other tourists and based on this second and third hypothesis of this study formulated as follow.

**Hypothesis 2:** Tourists who considered as extroverted use more WOM communications to gathering information about their travel destination than introverted.

**Hypothesis 3:** Risk takers use more WOM communication as a source of information about travel destination than risk averters.

**Research Methodology**

In order to examine the role of personality traits in using WOM as a source of travel information, a questionnaire with 23 items (7 items for demographic characteristics, 6 items to measure extroversion trait, 5 items to measure risk taking behavior, and ultimately 6 items to measure the extend of WOM used by respondents) was designed. The statistical population of the study is inbound tourists who visited Isfahan in 2011. A sample of 200 tourists was selected by convenience sampling method. To analyze the data, one sample T-test, analysis of variance,
and simultaneous regression analysis has been used. One sample T-test has been used to examine the extent of WOM used by tourists as a source of travel information, simultaneous regression analysis used in order to analyze the relationship between personality traits and extend of WOM, and analysis of variance has been used to examine the relations of demographic characteristics and personality traits with WOM.

Table 2: Sample demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>employed</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>self-employment</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>retired</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45-55</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55-95</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Post graduate</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Previously travel to Isfahan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>married</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

The sample member’s demographic is presented at table 1. One sample t-test has been used to test whether WOM has been used as source of travel information by inbound tourists who visited Isfahan. As indicated at table 2, Isfahan inbound tourists had used WOM communication to gather information about their travel destination and decision making. Since the significant level is lower than 0.05 and the mean value of questions was 3.859, then first hypothesis has been confirmed. Summary of this hypothesis test presented at table 2.

Table 2: One sample T test for WOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word of Mouth</td>
<td>3.859</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simultaneous regression analysis has been used to examine the relations of personality traits and the extent of WOM use. WOM communication considered as a dependent variable and risk taking and extroversion traits of respondents considered as independent variables. As indicated in table 3, models’ R Square is 0.334, which means two independent variables explained 0.334
of variance of dependent variable (WOM). Since the significant level of the model was 0.029 (lower than 0.05), therefore H2 and H3 has been confirmed. Durbin-Watson test has been used to examine the fit goodness of regression model. Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.855 indicating that no auto-correlation exists between independent variables.

Table 3: Personality and WOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted Square</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
<th>Durbin-Watson</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.588</td>
<td>0.334</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>1.75613</td>
<td>1.855</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of data analysis about demographic characteristics of tourists indicate that tourists who had previous travel experience of Isfahan and also women used more WOM communication than others. Also, the results indicate that those with higher educational level were more extroverted than others and also among men and women those had previous travel experience to Isfahan took more risks than others.

Conclusion and recommendation

The aim of this article was to studying word of mouth communication and its relationship with personality traits (extroverted vs. introverted, and risk taker vs. risk averter). Statistical population of the study includes inbound tourists who traveled to Isfahan in 2011. In order to collect the data, a questionnaire with 23 items has been used. A sample of 200 tourists has been selected by convenience sampling method. Results of the data analysis indicate that tourists who had visited Isfahan used WOM communication as a source of travel information. This finding supported by Fig et al. (1999) and Jalilvand et al. (2012) findings that word of mouth affects tourists’ decision for traveling to tourism destination. So, it is recommended that tourism marketers and professionals have especial attention about how tourists are treated and being satisfied with their stay in Iran especially Isfahan since they speak about their experience with their relatives. This requires providing memorable experiences for them through offering appropriate and suitable services. So WOM communication could be considered as one of the most powerful instruments for Iran’s tourist industry. So it is recommended that suitable services such as transportation and hotel services should be provided for them and also educated individuals appointed as tour guides. Because these services not only lead to increase the tourists’ satisfaction and motivating them to revisit Iran, but also they will be means for transmitting good information to their relatives. Also it is recommended that some handbooks, CDs, and leaflets offer to tourists, so that they can take home information about Iran and Isfahan. Also the results indicate that tourists with extroverts and risk takers used more WOM communication than others. Also results about relationship demographic variables and WOM indicate that tourists who had previous travel experience to Isfahan and also women used more WOM than others. Results also indicate that higher educated tourists are more extroverted and men and those who had previous travel experience
to Isfahan are more risk taker. Also tourists who previously traveled to Isfahan and also women used more WOM communication than others. Therefore, marketers and professionals should focus on this group as a means of transmitting information about Iran and especially Isfahan.

References

Kim, T. , Kim , W. G. & Kim, H.B. ,(2009), The effects of perceived justice on recovery satisfaction, trust, word of mouth and revisit intention in upscale hotels, Tourism Management, 30 (October), pp 51-62.