

## Cross-cultural Differences in Tourism Product Preferences

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### Abstract

Tourists can discover a variety of benefits in tourism products, which are intended to satisfy their needs. However, their preferences differ according to travelers' characteristics. The current study tries to examine favored choices made by tourists as well as their preferences regarding package holidays, and more precisely internal tourism product attributes (i.e. package tour attributes) and external tourism product attributes (i.e. destination attributes). The study attempts to answer the following questions: How are the motives behind traveling and tourism products preferences affected by cultural differences? How do the tourists perceive the importance of particular product attributes depending on the country of their origin? The surveyed sample of 463 tourists spent their holiday on coach tours in Poland in 2014–2015. They participated either in English-guided tours or Spanish/Portuguese-guided tours. Two sample groups differ with respect to travel motivations. The US, Canadian, and Australian travelers indicated Polish origins, interest, and family member as main factors influencing their decision to visit Poland, whereas tourists from Spain, Brazil, Portugal, and Argentina listed interest as the most important travel motive. Moreover, such factors as recommendations, tourist catalogues and travel agents influenced significantly Spanish and Portuguese speaking tourists' decisions. All surveyed tourists attach high importance to such tour attributes as tour leader, organization and attractiveness of the program, and to the following destination attributes: safety, cleanliness, tourist attractions, and tourist information. However, a great number of product attributes was more important for English speaking tourists (e.g. social factors such as opportunity to meet new people, entertainment, possibility to communicate in English). Managers can draw many conclusions from this study. The most important one, however, is that they should concentrate on offering their clients a tailor-made, and culturally customized packages and adapt product sales strategies and communication strategies to selected target segments. Moreover, it is important to consider cultural differences in the product development process and to emphasize cultural sensitivity and competence as an important factor in providing services for tourists.

**Key words:** tourism product, tourism product attributes, package holidays, tourist motivation, cross-cultural differences.

**JEL classification:** L83, M31.

### 1. Introduction

Travel & Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest growing industries worldwide influencing the development of other industries, such as: construction, agriculture, transport and others. The growth of the Travel & Tourism sector in 2015 (2.8%) outpaced that of the global economy (2.3%). In total, Travel & Tourism generated 9.8% of global GDP. The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in Poland was 1.7% of total GDP in 2015 and it is forecasted to rise by 3.0% in 2016, and to rise by 5.0% from 2016 to 2026 (World Travel & Tourism Council). Tourism development depends on the availability of attractive natural and/or man-made resources in a specific region which tourists demand and pay for (Briassoulis & van der Straat, 2000). Attractive tourist locations can enjoy a growing number of visitors. They also gain competitive advantage over other regions and thus can become the regional financial engines supporting the economy. The most common attributes of tourism destinations, according to Dwyer and Kim (Dwyer & Kim, 2003), consist of: cultural/heritage resources (e.g. historical monuments), functional/physical resources, (e.g. accommodation, transportation, food), and natural resources (e.g. climate, countryside).

Over the years package holidays have become one of the most popular ways of travelling. Tour operators develop packages based on destination attributes for package holiday makers. Thus, package holidays comprise tour attributes as well as destination characteristics, as tourists expect not only natural and cultural resources but also services associated with leisure, such as

infrastructure, accommodation, etc. (Park & Jang, 2014). Moreover, because consumer purchases are influenced strongly by cultural, social, personal and psychological characteristics, holiday packages need to be customized to tourists' specific needs and wants. Ethnicity and cultural differences are among factors that strongly influence customers' preferences, therefore they require thorough examination. Furthermore, taking into account a fact that Poland is not perceived as a typical tourist destination (Johann, 2014), development of customized tourism products would enhance the value of packages as well as travelers' holiday experience. The Polish Tourist Organization has commissioned several empirical studies in Poland concerning the analyzed matter. However, their limited scope has become the reason why in the current work the author compares the preferences of two traveler groups who use package holidays due to their ethnic background.

This study is intended to, among others:

- 1) determine the main reasons for English speaking tourists as well as Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists to visit Poland,
- 2) discover the role of marketing communication in tourists' decision making process,
- 3) clarify the significance of tourism products (such as services provided by the tour operator, as well as additional destination attributes) that is appraised by the two groups of package holiday travelers,
- 4) explain the differences regarding preferences of the acclaimed tourism product attributes that appear among the two groups of tourists.

It is believed that cultural differences are the basis for distinct perception of the significance of the acclaimed tourism product attributes among these two groups of travelers. What is more, it has been considered that English speaking tourists and Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists have statistically diverse attitudes toward internal and external tourism products.

## 2. Literature Review

Culture is the fundamental determinant of a consumer's wants and behavior, and each culture consist of subcultures that include nationalities, religions, racial groups, and geographic regions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Ethnicity refers to a shared distinctive culture and way of life that can be reflected in language, religion, customs, material culture (e.g. clothing and food), and cultural products (e.g. music and art). National culture has been proved to influence significantly individual values and attitudes (Hofstede, 1984), and to have a significant impact on consumer decision-making style (Leo et al, 2005). Thus, marketers need to attend to cultural values, as well as to cultural differences in order to understand how to best market their products.

The growth of international travel over the last decades has stimulated an interest in cultural influences on travel behavior and enhanced the body of knowledge in this field. The concept of national culture or cultural traits is one of the most researched areas in the field of tourism research (Reisinger, 2009). The researchers have investigated such topics as influence of national culture on tourist motivations (e.g. Kozak, 2002), information search (e.g. Litvin et al., 2008), satisfaction and complaining behavior (e.g. Baker, Crompton, 2000), as well as perceptions (e.g. Tsang & Ap, 2007). Numerous studies have shown that there is a relation between cultural values and tourism product purchase behavior. Moreover, given the complex character of tourism products and the fact that they offer multiple value to tourists in order to satisfy their various needs including physiological, safety, social, and esteem needs, as well as self-actualization needs (Johann & Panchapakesan, 2015), cultural differences should be taken into consideration in the tourism product development process.

An understanding of tourist motivations and its association with destination selection is crucial in predicting future travel patterns. It could also help marketers to design appropriate marketing programs which would attract tourists to certain destination (Jang & Cai, 2002). Tourist

behaviors and travel motivations are generally explained by ‘theory of push and pull motivations’ (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979). While push factors refer to motives that drive a tourist away from home (e.g. desire to escape from routine, need to experience adventure, expectation of social interaction), pull factors are the motivations arousing a person to visit a particular destination (e.g. image, natural beauty, culture) (Dann, 1977). According to Kozak (2002) tourist motives differ between nationalities and place visited, however, some similarities can be observed. His findings were based upon ‘pull’ and ‘push’ motivations of British and German travelers visiting Mallorca and Turkey. Whereas relaxation and pleasure were ranked as the most significant motivations for both sample groups, German tourists were more likely to have cultural, relaxation and pleasure, as well as physical motivations. On the other hand, British tourists were more strongly motivated by seeking/fantasy factors and had a higher need for exploration and adventure.

According to many researchers tourists’ perceptions differ across cultures (e.g. Tsang & Ap, 2007), however, other researchers claim that there is a limited indication that national culture influences tourists’ perceptions of travel services (e.g. Crotts & Erdmann, 2000). In fact, national cultural differences should be perceived as one of many forces affecting consumer decision making. Tsang & Ap (2007) examined cultural differences between Asian and Western tourists’ perceptions of relational quality service delivered by guest contact personnel. The surveyed group of international tourists visited Hong Kong. It was found that Asian tourists (high power distance cultures) gave lower ratings for all the relational quality service attributes compared to Western tourists (low power distance cultures). Yu and Ko (2012) found significant differences among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean tourists with regard to medical tourism destination choice, discomfort, and preferred products. Koreans placed most significance on selection factors whereas Japanese attached importance to inconveniences related to medical and care services, stay and cost, as well as information and insurance. Research results indicating that cultural values have a significant impact on tourist decisions and perceptions provide reasons for pursuing further studies in this area.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Design of Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was developed based on findings from literature, interviews, discussions with experts, as well as on the results from previous studies regarding tourist satisfaction with package holidays. The questionnaire was constructed using 1 - 7 Likert scale. Also, it contained various types of questions, such as the closed-ended ones on socio-demographic characteristics, customers’ perception regarding internal and external tourism product attributes, their comprehensive satisfaction and fulfillment, as well as open-ended questions where the visitors could openly articulate their opinion in relation to the holidays spent in Poland.

Research data was gathered among selected participants of summer holidays coach tours in Poland in 2014-2015 who were also supposed to decide and select the subjects. The organized tours were sold by tour operators and travel agents (under their own brands) in the form of package vacations to American, Canadian, Australian, Spanish, Brazilian, Argentinean and Portuguese tourists. From the Polish side it was handled by Mazurkas Travel, Polish Incoming Tour Operator, which took part in arranging the services for visitors. The examined group of travelers took part in guided tours with either English or Spanish/Portuguese speaking guides. The tours’ itinerary included visiting most important venues and tourist attractions in Poland.

#### **3.2. Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed in order to identify tourism product attributes which are significant for both English and Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists. Moreover, the factors that influence visitors’

holiday experience were also investigated. Taking into consideration complex nature of tourism products and the effects of the former research study, tourism product attributes were classified into two following groups:

1) internal tourism product attributes that were combined of program's attractiveness, organization, hotels, restaurants and meals, bus standard, tour escort, price/quality relationship, and

2) external tourism product attributes that consist of characteristics of the destination, including climate/atmosphere of the visiting place, tourist attractions, nature, shopping opportunities, safety, possibility of meeting new people, weather, cleanliness, reasonable prices, entertainment, tourist information, kindness toward foreigners, possibility to communicate in English.

In order to determine whether any statistically crucial variations arouse between English and Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists' perceptions of the tourism product attributes' importance, and as a result of data's asymmetry, the Mann-Whitney test was implemented.

### 3.3. Respondents and Their Characteristics

Travelers that spent their summer vacations on coach tours in 2014-2015 in Poland were under the investigation in this research study. After each tour, tourists received questionnaires in a paper-and-pencil form and answered one of 463 sample set of questions. According to the surveys' results, which are shown in Table 1, females were represented by 64.1% of tourists, and males by 35.9%. When taking into consideration respondents' age, they were represented by the following age groups: 2.4% - under 20; 3.9% - between 21–30 years old; 4.3% - between 31–40 years old; 7.6% - between 41–50 years old; 19.0% - between 51–60 years old; 36.5% - between 61–70 years old; 16.8% - over 70. Taking into consideration visitors' country of residence, tourists were coming from the following countries: 56.1% - United States, 13.2% - Spain, 10.4% - Australia, 7.8% - Canada, 3.7% - Brazil, 1.9% - Portugal, 0.9% - Argentina, 4.3% - other countries.

Description			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Valid	Female	297	64.1	64.1	64.1
		Male	166	35.9	35.9	100.0
		Total	463	100.0	100.0	
	Missing	System	0	0.0		
		Total	463	100.0		
Age	Valid	under 20	11	2.4	2.6	2.6
		21-30	18	3.9	4.3	6.9
		31-40	20	4.3	4.8	11.7
		41-50	35	7.6	8.4	20.1
		51-60	88	19.0	21.0	41.1
		61-70	169	36.5	40.3	81.4
		over 70	78	16.8	18.6	100.0
		Total	419	90.5	100.0	
		Missing	System	44	9.5	
	Total		463	100.0		

Country of residence	Valid	United States	260	56.1	57.1	57.1
		Spain	61	13.2	13.4	70.5
		Australia	48	10.4	10.6	81.1
		Canada	36	7.8	7.9	89.0
		Brazil	17	3.7	3.7	92.7
		Portugal	9	1.9	2.0	94.7
		Argentina	4	0.9	0.9	95.6
		Other countries	20	4.3	4.4	100.0
		Total	455	98.3	100.0	
		Missing	System	8	1.7	
	Total		463	100.0		

*Table 1. Sample Characteristics*

Tourists indicated Polish origins (46.7%), interest (30.5%), family member (28.7%), a travel agent (7.1%), tourist catalogues (4.8%) as the most important factors influencing their decision to visit Poland. The majority of package holiday tourists travelled with their spouse/partner (52.1%), family members (34.6%), friends (20.7%), or alone (5%).

## Results

The research tasks included the identification of tourists' perceptions of the importance of tourism product attributes with respect to their cultural background. Hence, two groups of package holiday travelers have been distinguished. The first group comprised 344 tourists from the USA, Australia, and Canada who participated in English-guided tours, and the second group consisted of 91 tourists from Spain, Argentina, Brazil, and Portugal who participated in Spanish/Portuguese-guided tours. Females constituted 66% of English speaking tourists and 60.4% of Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists. In the analyzed group of English speaking tourists 18.5% were below 50 years old; 19.8% were between ages of 51–60; 41.3% between 61–70; and 20.4% were over 70. In the group of Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists 26.6% were below 50 years old; 26.5% were between ages of 51–60; 37.5% between 61–70; and 9.4% were over 70. The two sample groups were not completely homogenous, however, they were to a large extent similar with respect to gender and age.

English speaking tourists indicated Polish origins (46.7%), interest (30.5%), family member (28.7%), recommendation (8.0%), a travel agent (7.1%), tourist catalogues (4.8%), books and publications (2.6%), and spiritual needs (2.2%) as most important factors influencing their decision to visit Poland, whereas Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists listed the following factors: interest (25.3%), recommendation (17.6%), tourist catalogues (16.5%), a travel agent (16.5%), spiritual needs (11%), publications and books (7.7%), family member (5.5%), and Polish origins (3.3%). It is important to note that interest was listed among the most important travel motives for both sample groups while other motivations differ significantly. These findings concur with the study results of Klenosky (2002) and Jang & Wu (2006) who claim that push factors should be considered in conjunction with pull factors rather than in isolation. They are also in line with Kozak's studies (2002) which revealed that tourist motives differed between nationalities and place visited, however, some similarities could be observed. Moreover, the study results show that marketing communication, as well as word of mouth, significantly influenced tourists' decisions.

The two sample groups differ also with respect to travel companions as tourists participating in English-guided tours tend to travel with more relatives than the latter group. The majority of English speaking tourists travelled with their spouse/partner (49.7%), family members (40.7%), friends (21.5%), alone (3.8%). Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists indicated that they travelled with their spouse/partner (52.7%), family members (16.5%), friends (22%), alone (8.8%). This reinforces the finding that family and friend togetherness was more important travel motive for English speaking travelers.

As it was specified before, tourism product attributes were classified into two groups - internal and external ones - whose importance was determined using 1 - 7 Likert scale. Table 2 presents the perception of English and Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists' perception regarding the importance of tourism product attributes. According to data in Table 2, English speaking tourists pay the greatest attention to: tour leader (6.69), organization (6.44), attractiveness of the program (6.39), and price-quality relationship (6.38). The most important destination attributes consist of the following measures: safety (6.52), cleanliness (6.41), tourist attractions (6.33), and tourist information (6.25). Meanwhile, for the Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists the most important are: tour leader (6.53), organization (6.39), and attractiveness of the program (6.16). Moreover, for those travelers the most important destination attributes are: cleanliness (6.23), safety (6.19), tourist attractions (6.16), and tourist information (6.12). These conclusions are in alignment with the results of Jang & Cai study, which was undertaken in 2002, and showed that cleanliness and safety were recognized as the most significant motivational determinants.

Tourism product attributes	English speaking tourists			Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists		
	N	Mean	Standard deviation	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Attractiveness of the program	340	6.39	0.751	90	6.16	0.847
Organization	344	6.44	0.817	90	6.39	0.612
Hotels	343	6.07	0.871	90	6.02	0.749
Restaurants and meals	344	6.15	0.840	89	5.76	1.066
Standard of the bus	341	6.17	0.870	90	6.09	0.816
Tour leader	344	6.69	0.555	88	6.53	0.586
Price/quality relationship	341	6.38	0.813	90	6.06	0.853
Climate/atmosphere of the visit	339	5.88	0.984	88	5.63	1.021
Tourist attractions	341	6.33	0.789	91	6.16	0.885
Nature, countryside	342	5.88	1.077	91	5.81	0.930
Shopping opportunities	340	5.11	1.404	90	4.76	1.211
Safety	341	6.52	0.765	90	6.19	0.873
Opportunity to meet new people	344	5.41	1.277	91	4.77	1.564
Entertainment	343	5.27	1.247	91	4.77	1.351
Weather	343	5.48	1.089	91	5.46	1.177
Cleanliness	343	6.41	0.728	91	6.23	0.857
Reasonable prices	344	6.15	0.897	89	5.83	1.100
Tourist information	342	6.25	0.836	89	6.12	0.877
Kindness toward foreigners	344	6.15	0.911	90	6.00	1.071
Possibility to communicate in English	343	5.93	1.164	90	5.36	1.486

**Table 2. English Speaking Tourists' and Spanish/Portuguese Speaking Tourists' Perceptions of Tourism Product Attributes Importance**

The Mann-Whitney test was introduced in order to determine whether the English speaking tourists and Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists pay attention to different tourism product attributes. The test's results are presented in Table 3. In the result of Mann-Whitney test it was acknowledged that there is no apparent difference ( $p > 0.05$ ) between the two groups of examined tourists regarding organization and hotels. However, there appeared to be statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) in tourists' perception of importance of other tour features. What is more, such destination attributes as: tourist attractions, nature/countryside, weather, cleanliness, tourist information, along with kindness toward foreigners proved in the test to be as much important for English speaking tourists as for Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists. Nevertheless, it turned out that other destination features have different importance among the

two examined groups of visitors.

Internal tourism product attributes							
	Attractiveness of the program	Organization	Hotels	Restaurants and meals	Standard of the bus	Tour leader	Price/quality relationship
Mann–Whitney U	12762.000 16857.000	13872.000 17967.000	14644.00 0	12261.500 16266.500	14357.00 0	12911.00 0	11668.000 15763.000
Wilcoxon W	–2.678	–0.798	18739.00	–3.080	18452.00	16827.00	–3.848
Z	0.007	0.425	0	0.002	0	0	0.029
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)			–0.798		–2.657	–4.010	
			0.425		0.008	0.000	

Significance level at 0.05

External tourism product attributes							
	Climate/atmosphere of the visit	Tourist attractions	Nature/countryside	Shopping opportunities	Safety	Opportunity to meet new people	Entertainment
Mann–Whitney U	12780.500 16696.500	13795.00 0	14488.000 18674.000	12891.500 16986.500	11961.00 0	11942.000 16128.000	12432.000 16618.000
Wilcoxon W	–2.185	17981.00	–1.062	–2.368	16056.00	–3.591	–3.074
Z	0.029	0	0.288	0.018	0	0.000	0.002
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		–1.782			–3.706		
		0.075			0.000		

Significance level at 0.05

External tourism product attributes						
	Weather	Cleanliness	Reasonable prices	Tourist information	Kindness toward foreigners	Possibility to communicate in English
Mann–Whitney U	15296.500	13856.500	12710.000	13929.000	14575.000	11767000
Wilcoxon W	74292.500	18042.500	16715.000	17934.500	18670.000	15862.000
Z	–0.303	–1.823	–2.636	–1.339	–0.913	–3.631
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.762	0.068	0.008	0.180	0.361	0.000

Significance level at 0.05

### Table 3. Mann-Whitney Test

According to the research results, the following product attributes: attractiveness of the program, restaurants and meals, standard of the bus, tour leader, and price/quality relationship, as well as the following destination features: climate/atmosphere of the visit, shopping opportunities, safety, opportunity to meet new people, entertainment, reasonable prices, possibility to communicate in English, are of a greater importance among English speaking visitors than among Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists. Other tourism product features are of the same significance for both examined groups of package holiday travelers. It needs to be acknowledged that there are apparent differences among these two groups' assessments in the matter of such tourism product attributes as opportunity to meet new people, entertainment, and possibility to communicate in English. This outcome strengthens the research results of Yu and Ko that took place in 2012 and proved cultural differences to influence tourists' perceptions

of tourism product attributes.

### Conclusions

The research results can lead to new ideas regarding tourism product strategy and may be also applied by product managers. The thorough analysis shows some similarities and differences in terms of the two distinguished groups' characteristics. Tourists participating in either English-guided tours or Spanish/Portuguese-guided tours are relatively homogenous with respect to gender and age, however, noticeable differences can be observed when taking into consideration the main factors influencing travelers' decisions to visit Poland. While English speaking tourists list Polish origins, interest, family member among the main reasons to come to Poland, Spanish/Portuguese travelers indicate interest, recommendation, tourist catalogues, and travel agent. Moreover, English speaking tourists tend to travel with more relatives than the other group, which can be explained by their Polish origins and willingness to visit the country of their ancestors with close relatives. This finding reinforces the research results of Klenosky (2002) and Jang & Wu (2006) who claim that push and pull factors should be considered simultaneously.

Furthermore, there are correlations between the two distinguished groups with respect to travelers' perceptions of tourism product attributes' importance. English speaking tourists as well as Spanish/Portuguese speaking tourists attach high importance to such tour attributes as tour leader, organization and attractiveness of the program; and to the following destination attributes: safety, cleanliness, tourist attractions, and tourist information. Dissimilarities that appear among these two groups are, nevertheless, mainly connected with a rather diminished relevance of a great number of tourism product attributes for Spanish/Portuguese speaking visitors. However, it should be taken into account that there are significant dissimilarities between the two groups' assessments regarding social factors that include opportunity to meet new people, entertainment, and possibility to communicate in English. Again, this outcomes prove to be similar of those obtained by Kozak (2002) and Yu and Ko (2012), which proved travel motives and perceptions to vary across nationalities and cultures.

The empirical results of the study lead to several conclusions of practical importance. Given the differences between the two distinguished groups, tourism managers have to focus on providing tourists with well suited packages to meet their specific needs. For instance, tourists from the USA, Canada, and Australia tend to be more demanding, so excellent customer service could be emphasized as one of the points of differentiation. Customer service should be also regarded as one of the most important skills required from tour leaders, hotel and restaurant staff, bus drivers and other partners performing services. Core competencies of product managers should include the ability to develop attractive tour programs and thoroughly planned itineraries. Moreover, it is important to consider cultural values and differences in the product development process and to emphasize cultural sensitivity and competence as an important factor in providing services for tourists. These findings concur with the study of Tsang an Ap (2007), who put emphasis on cultural training for tourism and hospitality industry employees, yet, they give new insights into the tourism product development process.

Furthermore, product managers should cooperate with sales managers and marketing managers to adapt product sales strategies and communication strategies to selected target segments. As stated by Jang and Wu (2006), developing pull factors to suit the push factors of tourists would better satisfy their needs. As tourists from the USA, Canada, and Australia are mostly motivated by their Polish origins and family members to visit Poland – cultural heritage, traditions, customs, traditional food, and homely atmosphere could be emphasized in the communication message. In case of tourists coming from Spain, Brazil, Portugal, and Argentina, it is also important to enhance cultural heritage in the communication message but in a broader context, highlighting the historical significance of Poland as well as contemporary



achievements. Considering other communication techniques, trade promotion as well as sales promotion and personal selling would be effective means of communication when targeting this group of tourists.

### Limitations and Future Scope of Research

This study has considered only package holiday travelers' preferences based on their ethnicity. Hence, conclusions can be limited to the distinguished groups of tourists. Moreover, it is hard to formulate implications concerning general issues, such as research impact on business practice, public policy and society. In order to indicate a broader context, future studies may duplicate the current research by incorporating tourists who travelled on their own. Cultural, social, personal and psychological characteristics of travelers can be taken into consideration when examining tourism product preferences. Additionally, the analysis of research outcomes is eligible based on correlation between two groups of package vacation tourists staying in Poland. For future reference, comparisons could be carried across cultures in order for the research to overcome the mentioned limitations.

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