HOLIDAY TRIPS: CONVENIENCE, EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide an understanding on the decision making process that guide tourism trips based on the various strategies developed by the airlines. The primary research data was analysed using factor analysis as a pertinent statistical tool for grouping variables in order to understand common consumption behaviours. The results of the study are indicative and suggest that tourists are classified in accordance with 'customer service' that include ground and in-flight service. Then, the second factor is 'price sensitive and Internet', which refers to dimensions such as the airline ticket and the frequency of trips. Finally, 'selection in travel behaviour' is associated with the choice based on the operation of the airlines, for instance the airports.

Keywords: airports, airlines, consumer behaviour, factor analysis, Cyprus

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1. INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to describe the airline industry briefly, it is interesting to note that its past was rather 'monotonous-monopolistic' and restrictive (Adrangi 1999), in contrast to the present, which is liberal, deregulated and competitive (Inglada, Rey, Rodriguez-Alvarez & Coto-Milan 2006). The hallmark for the recent state of the industry was the introduction of deregulation policies, with a starting point in the USA, in 1978, which was followed up by Australia, in 1990, and then the European Union with gradual procedures and final completion in 1997 (Smit 1997). Naturally, the behaviour of the airlines has changed dramatically, and newcomers gained the privilege to enter the market. Consequently, competition was introduced and substantial structural changes (Starkie 2002) occurred in the aviation industry in terms of flexibility concerning the operations, the fares, the routes and the capacity (Frenken, Terwisga, Verburg & Burghouwt 2003).

This paper aims to explore the critical issues or the situation of the global airline industry and to identify the effect on tourists' behaviour in relation to the tourism industry. This will be achieved by an in-depth analysis of the situation that emanated from airline deregulation, as being the endogenous impetus behind the 'new era' in the industry. That forced the proliferation of new carriers and more specifically low-cost carriers (LCCs) by the establishment of new strategies (Papatheodorou & Lei 2006). In particular, the aviation industry became flexible, generous in offering low air fares (Williams 2001; Pels & Rietveld 2004) and alert to technological changes (Buhalis 2003).

2. AIRLINE STRATEGIES – INAUGURATION OF NEW BUSINESS MODELS

This part of the article will describe the airline business starting with the definition of the airline product. In addition, will add an understanding on the current policy formulation of the aviation industry with particular reference to the European Union. To begin with, the airline product is '... characterised by specific service features such as the immateriality, no storability and synchronicity of production and consumption (uno-actu-principle)' (Groß & Schroder 2007:44). Furthermore, it is homogenous and involves the '... transportation of the passengers from A to B that is the core service of an air trip' (Groß & Schroder 2007:44). Admittedly, the only features that differentiate one airline from another are the services that '... may be offered before, during or after the journey' (Groß & Schroder 2007:44).

The status of the airline industry it is characterised by the introduction of deregulation policies that instigate a free market and the opportunity of new carriers to enter the market and set new strategies (Dennis 2007). The immediate aftermath of liberalisation was the emergence of LCCs, which forced an alteration in production and consumption patterns and shifted the industry's structure as such (Schnell 2003). In particular, LCCs '... have created new markets by inventing new products' (Bley & Buermann 2007:52; Dennis 2007) with the introduction of low-cost fares and the expansion to new destinations (Alves & Barbot 2007; Hasson, Ringbeck & Franke 2003). This had as a consequence, an alteration of the operations of the incumbent carriers or legacy or network carriers, with attempts being made to reduce costs in order to become flexible and able to confront their no-frills counterparts (Tretheway 2004; Dennis 2007; Duval 2007; Franke 2007; Mason & Alamdari 2007). In general, the effect on the production side or product development was on service and non-service as the main axes of differentiation (Williams 2001). Legacy carriers tried to implement and deploy a number of strategies in an attempt to confront the competition (Schnell 2003; Franke 2007).

The European airline scene is dominated by network carriers or the traditional flag carriers that are divided into mega (Big Three) and medium (Tier 2) transatlantic carriers and European (Tier 3) regional carriers (intra European) and LCCs (Low Cost Carriers) (Ringbeck et al. 2007). Traditional or network carriers offer first class or business class and economy class products that are defined by the extent of the airline service that is offered (executive lounges, catering supplies) and by the price of the ticket. The LCCs entered in the market with a total exclusion of in-flight services and a concentration on point-to-point operation with simplified procedures and lower fares (Bjelicic 2007). In addition, they employed e-commerce procedures with a ticketless service that enables the offer of cheap fares (Pender & Baum 2000; Dobruszkes 2006; Franke 2007).

Historically, in 1986, the first low-cost or no-frills airline in Europe was Ryanair, an Ireland-based company that entered the prosperous London–Dublin route and offered a decrease in fares by '... 55% from £208IR (€264) to £95.99IR (€121)' (Barrett 2004a:90). This new fare policy is directly opposed to the British Airways and Aer Lingus bilateral cooperation agreement (Barrett 2006). In 1995, EasyJet entered the UK market with 12 new 737 Boeing aircraft (Civil Aviation Authority 1998; Sull 1999).

The period between 1965 and 1989 was characterised as a 'phase of growth' because of the technological advancement of air travel and an increase in the available disposable income. This phenomenon is directly related to the aviation industry as the fastest-growing mode for travelling worldwide. As has been argued by Law (1997 as cited in Buck & Lei 2003), any destination that seeks to stimulate the interest of tourists must have close relations to charter airlines. Furthermore, strategic responses in terms of mergers and acquisitions, or an increase in aircraft capacity or a decrease in fares, immediately affect the movements of people and of tourism arrivals (Forsyth 2008).

Historically, the charter airlines' role has been to meet the increased seasonal demand of leisure travellers and to serve the tourism industry, since they are vertically integrated with major tour operators and primarily serve the leisure market (Lafferty & Fossen 2001). Air fares were cheap and were included in the whole tourism package, which was an assemblage of the destination, the flight and the accommodation. The first two airline liberalisation packages did not affect charter airlines' operations within Europe. The main impact was when the 'Third Package' came into effect and allowed scheduled operations (William 2001; Buch & Lei 2003; Williams 2008). This had a direct effect on charter airlines and the restriction that the whole holiday package should be bought was abolished. The consumer gained the privilege of buying only the air ticket (Dagtoglou 1994; Buck & Lei 2003; Duval 2007). Thus, the charter airlines reappeared in the market, with a new hybrid strategy, and were able to confront legacy and schedule carriers.

Low-cost carriers (LCCs) have metamorphosed the relationship between the airlines and the tourism industries (Schroder 2007; Forysth 2008; Graham 2008).In particular as it was stated by Wong (2006) that '... low cost travel is becoming a norm rather than the exception'. The LCCs' evolution has contributed even further to the changing pattern of demand and the consumer now determines the consumption patterns (Page 1999) of the tourism domain and, instead of purchasing the whole package, tailors the travel arrangements to his or her own needs. LCCs have revolutionised European inbound and outbound tourism, and air travel has made tourism an activity that is accessible to more people (Wong 2006). According to Kua and Baum (2004:262):

Low cost carriers, otherwise known as budget carriers or no frills airlines, can be seen as one of the most dynamic developments within recent travel history in the United States and Europe.

As is emphasised by O'Connell and Williams (2005:259): "Low cost carriers have reshaped the competitive environment within liberalized markets and have made significant impacts in the world's domestic passenger markets, which had previously been largely controlled by full service network carriers".

The emergence of LCCs has provided flexibility in terms of the frequency of operations and the expansion to more destinations. These have provided the traveller with the opportunity to seek shorter breaks or even day return trips (Wheatcroft 1994; Williams 2001; Debbage 2002; Papatheodorou 2002; Buck & Lei 2003; Forsyth 2003; Schroder 2007). After the entrance of the low-cost carriers (LCCs), the number of passengers recorded an abrupt increase, and more people are engaged in leisure travel (Forsyth 2003; Schroder 2007; Deloitte & Touche n.d.).

A major debate in tourism is whether LCCs are the new innovative form of charter airlines, albeit with some differences (Williams 2008) that have appeared in the market to satisfy the contemporary tourism demand, along with the emergence of the new tourists, who are experienced and able to arrange the tourism package on their own (Poon 1998). The immediate aftermath has been the redirection of tourism demand from charter airlines to LCCs and the move towards independent travel (Mintel 2006a). This derives from the preference of the consumers to compose their own 'holiday puzzle' independently, using the Internet (Poon 1998; Williams 2003; Doganis 2006; Williams 2008).

To conclude, recent developments in the airline industry, with the entrance of more carriers and the diversification of airline services, have had a notable effect on tourism. New forms of consumption on the part of tourists are directly related to the airline industry network. Direct selling methods with regard to airline tickets have provided the consumer with the opportunity to enjoy cheaper fares. An expanded airline network to more destinations on a year-round basis has stimulated the interest in making more trips to unexplored destinations. This has led to an increase in competition between destinations, and survival is synonymous with a strong focus on consumer demand through better planning and innovation.

3. CONSUMING IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

This part will provide an understanding on the way that destinations are chosen and consumed based on the variety of services offered within the broader context of tourism services with the aim to satisfy the consumers. Urry (2000:141) argues that

'... there is an omnivorous producing and "consuming [of] places" around the globe' (Urry 2000:141) and that tourism experiences are an amalgam of several sectors on the supply side and many users on the demand side. Commonly, the new pace of tourism development worldwide is associated with '...new product development and innovation' (Cooper et al. 2006:19) and '...as the amalgamation of places generating experiences' (Snepenger et al. 2007:310). Interestingly, a destination is the place in which both consumption and production trends are taking place, and it is characterised by an intangible nature that is associated with the acquisition of a tourism experience (Britton 1991; Svab 2007; Shaw & Williams 2004; Ioannides & Debbage 1998; Agarwal et al. 2000; Dallen 2005). Tourism has entered the era of neo-Fordism, which features flexibility, tailored and focused products and uniqueness that necessitates an alteration or inauguration of a re-development in tourism (Ioannides & Debbage 1998; Coles 2004; Torres 2002).

Interestingly, the 'tourism package' has tended to become obsolete and has been replaced by direct methods of selling. The consumer has the 'role of the tour operator' and is capable of devising tourism itineraries. The contemporary way of living is characterised by the 'superabundance' of goods and the consumer has access to a large number of commodities that exist to satisfy his/her needs. Notable examples are the diffusion of DIY (do it yourself) products (Watson & Shove 2006:6), with the consumer willing to assemble the product or undertake the whole production of the product (Ritzer 2004). In the case of tourism, ICTs (Information Communication Technologies) have made possible the creation of the tourism package by the consumer, through direct methods of distribution (Buhalis 2003).

The EU tour operators' market has witnessed major companies merging, such as the case of TUI and First Choice and Thomas Cook with My Travel (Williams 2008). The elimination of tour operators has led to the emergence of mega-brands that gain increasing power in the market, a phenomenon that naturally leads to lower costs (Burns 1999). Additionally, the scale of development refers to smaller groups of people travelling to diverse geographical places and the existence of niche marketing (Lew et al. 2004; Williams 2004). Consumption is associated with experiencing and collecting memories with well-known brands that offer customised products that fulfil human needs. Put another way, the consumer prefers well-known brands that have built a story of success. Consumers buy not only a product, but also something that has been experienced by many people.

Additionally, new forms of consumption are linked to flexible packages with the consumer becoming more independent and able to arrange holiday trips (Torres 2002; Williams 2004). Both private and public organisations are engaged in a continuous search for new products that will satisfy modern society (Urry 2000; Torrers 2002; Coles 2004). Travellers are 'thirsty' and willing to be engaged '... with a never ending range of experiences' (Ioannides & Debbage 1997:229). The quest of the new tourist is demand 'for independent holidays' (Poon 1993:17) away from the mass movement of purposeless tourism has impacted on tourism development. Thus, production and consumption have moved from mass production to neo-Fordism, which indicates a concentration of power on the part of the consumer. An important market trend is attributable to the proliferation of new business models, as the aftermath of a free economy. Notable is the example of LCCs that have impacted on tourism consumption in terms of an increase in the number of holiday trips as well as a geographical expansion (Schroder & Groß 2007). LCCs offer better and greater flexibility and enable the consumer to compose travel itineraries with the best possible deals.

In particular, for the tourism industry, prominent practitioners praise the appearance of a new dimension as argued above, with regard to both the consumption and the production pole (Urry 1990; Sharpley 2001; Shaw & Williams 2004). This new and modern tourist society connotes that '... objects become representations and are commodified, packaged and consumed' and that '... the tourist consumes images or representations of a society' (Pretes 1995:2). Primarily, technology has changed the industry in a wide range of different dimensions, such as the application of new strategies, or the change in business–customer relations and the inauguration of new products. Tourists do not consist of parts of '... a particular homogeneous group' (Burns 1999:131) but rather represent characteristics of different segments with diverse needs.

In conclusion it should be further emphasised that societal dynamics have forced a change in tourist behaviour that, in turn, alters and affects the tourism industry's suppliers (Ateljevic 2002). Thus, the suppliers have become more creative in an attempt to gain an advantage in the face of the changing patterns of the new globalised business environment, which is characterised by relentless competition (Shaw & Williams 2004; Shaw & Williams 2008). The consumers are powerful and are in search of new and innovative products that can offer a rewarding experience. Pre-Fordism and Fordism can take the form of an all-inclusive holiday to a popular and crowded area, whereas post-Fordism is the exploitation of a new destination with online booking and interaction with several activities. Neo-Fordism instigates a tourism choice with the consumer having control and becoming even more powerful and with the supply chain focusing on niche forms of tourism developments (Williams 2004). However, particular, emphasis should be given to Torres's (2002:88) statement regarding: "... many of the world's tourism landscapes embodying a complex melange of pre-Fordist, Fordist, post-Fordist and neo-Fordist elements, coexisting over time and space".

5. METHODOLOGY

Having set the theoretical background of the article, this part will sketch the methods used in order to identify the criteria set for the tourists as consumers to choose an airline for their holidays. The questionnaire used in this research was designed in such a way that it tried to obtain information regarding the airline and the tourism industries as the main themes of investigation, and to answer the related research questions. The questions were primarily 'open ended' with a variation of formats such as dichotomous (Yes/No), multiple and Likert Scale 1 to 5 (Definitely Yes – Definitely No) (Ryan 1995) and the level of measurement is nominal. The use of a Likert Scale seem most appropriate in this particular piece of research because it aims to generate '...a degree of agreement or disagreement with each of the statements (Likert 1932 as cited in Schmidt & Hollensen 2006:120).

The particular sample includes 300 structured administered questionnaires to the British tourists departing from the international airport of Larnaca (200) and the International airport in Paphos in Cyprus. The questionnaire included 26 airline attributes as the main forces behind choosing the airline for the particular tourism trip. The period of data collection was between July and September 2007. The aim of the study was to examine the key factors that affect attitudes with regard to consumption in terms of the decision making and the behaviour of British tourists.

In order for this to be achieved, it is important to employ factor analysis as a popular method for segmentation in tourism (Juaneda & Sastre 1999; Frochot & Morrison 2000; Dolnicar 2002; Dolnicar 2004; Frochot 2005). According to Dolnicar (2002:17), '... segmentation enjoys high popularity in tourism marketing, and so does data-driven segmentation'. In particular, factor analysis, '...looks at the relationships between variables among the set of cases' (Kent 1999:180).

A major concern in the use of factor analysis is the number of factors that should be obtained (Bryman & Cramer 1990). This dilemma can be solved by a set of two criteria. The first is the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) criterion and Bartlett's test, which indicate that the valid factors are those that have an eigenvalue greater that 1 (Bryman & Cramer 1990; Schmidt & Hollensen 2006). The second one is the graphical 'scree test' as proposed by Catell (1996 as cited in Patton 2005), in which the graph illustrates '... the descending accounted for by the factors initially extracted' (Bryman & Cramer 1990:277). In the case of the KMO criterion, it is suitable for fewer than 30 variables with an average communality of 0.70, or when the respondents exceed 250, which means that the mean communality is more than 0.60 (Stevens 1996 as cited in Bryman & Cramer 1990). A correlation greater than 0.5 is regarded as 'high' (Schmidt & Hollensen 2006). If, for example, the correlation between two variables is .65, this means that they have more than two-thirds of the variance in common (Schmidt & Hollensen 2006). In other words, the two variances have a 65% 'overlap' or a tendency to tab into those of similar members (Schmidt & Hollensen 2006:273) or the scale (i.e. 1–7).

After the determination of the number of factors, the next step it to label and explain these factors (Bryman & Cramer 1990; Pallant 2005). Thus, in terms of better labelling, factor rotation is employed (Pallant 2005). Factor rotation is a method used in an attempt to enable better interpretation and explanation of the variables (Bryman & Cramer 1999). The two rotation methods are: a) orthogonal rotation, which reflects factors that do not relate to each other, and b) oblique rotation, which indicates the relation of the factors (Bryman & Cramer 1999). In this particular research, both approaches were employed and then the interpretation was based on the one that had the clearest meaning (Pallant 2005).

6. RESULTS

As mentioned above, factor analysis is an effective method for segmenting British tourists in terms of a set of different airline attributes and for identifying different patterns among the sample. The main theme of the investigation is to understand the criteria for airline choice. Factor analysis groups together variables 'by reorganising and reducing the amount of output' by 'data reduction' (Schmidt & Hollensen 2006). There are 26 variables, thus the total correlation matrix is 676 (26*26), which was reduced to 24 meaningful constructs (Jang et al. 2004:37).

Table 1: Factor analysis (Varimax rotation) 'Airline attributes - holiday trips

Factor 1 = Customer Service			
I always travel first class on my holidays	.724		
My choice of airline is determined by the loyalty scheme	.683		
My choice of airline is determined by the weight allowance (sports equipment, luggage)	.676		
I receive email alerts for special airline offers to different destinations	.575		
I always travel with the same airline company on my holidays because I feel safer	.545		
The airport from which my flight is flying is irrelevant to me	.508		
My choice of airline affects my choice of accommodation (e.g.. Low Cost Carrier and Budget Hotel)	.450		
I travel with the same airline for my holidays as I use for business travel	.385		
Factor 2 =Price sensitive & Internet			
I often decide to go on extra holidays or mini-breaks to different destination because of a low cost carrier fares		.652	
I travel more frequently in comparison to the past because of the availability of more cheap flights		.647	
I prefer to travel with the cheapest airline on my holidays		.629	
I often decide to go on holidays because of cheap/promotional fares and/or last minute offers found while searching the internet		.579	
I travel more frequently in comparison to the past because of more choice terms of airlines		.540	
I always travel economy on my holidays		.414	
The brand image of the airline I fly with on my holidays is not important		.381	
I always book the airline ticket for my holidays directly from the internet		.367	
Factor 3 = Selection in travel behaviour			
I always choose airlines with a positive brand image			.632
I always travel with scheduled carriers for my holidays			.570
I always travel with charter airlines on my holidays			.557
I prefer to travel from main hub airports on my holidays			.535
I travel with Low Cost Carriers on my holidays			.462
I prefer to travel with airlines which fly from the nearest airport to my place of residence			.370
I prefer to travel with airlines which offer full service meals			.314
I prefer to travel from regional airports on my holidays			.286
Eigen Value	4.315	2.828	2.031
Common Variance explained	13.627%	11.116%	10.542%
Cumulative Variance explained	13.627%	24.743%	35.285%

Notes: a) negative Factors were reversed, b) statistics are associated with each number of the statements to indicate correlation and co-efficiency of each factor explained for every attribute)

The results of the factor analysis suggest that leisure travellers' decisions regarding airline trips are guided by three important parameters (Tables 1 and 2). The first is based on 'customer service', which includes attributes in terms of seat classification, loyalty schemes, weight allowances and safety. The second factor relates to airline price and online bookings and how they are related. In the final factor, the main parameter in terms of airline booking is 'travel behaviour', such as the different airline models and airport. The three factors publicised that the consumer is familiar with the airline strategies concerning the development of several products and services. The results confirm that consumers have changed and tourism destinations must be able to adapt to their demands and to offer a variety of services and products in order to survive in a competitive global market. In the case of the airline industry and holiday trips, convenience and the airport that the airline is flying from are more important than the cost of the ticket.

Table 2: Factor analysis

Factor 1 Customer Service	Factor 2 Purchase Decision	Factor 3 Choice of Airline business model/ Airport type
First class seats	Low cost carriers fares	Positive brand image
Weight allowance (sports equipment, luggage)	More frequently because of availability of more cheap flights	Schedule carriers for my holidays
receive email alerts for special airline offers	Cheapest airline fare for my holidays	Charter Airlines for my holidays
Safety	Go on holidays because of cheap/promotional fares and or/ last minute offers found while searching the internet	Low Cost Carriers for my holidays
Airport is irrelevant	More frequently in comparison to the past because of more choices in the airline service	Airlines with Full service (bar & meals)
Affects the choice of accommodation (i.e. Low Carrier and Budget Hotel)	Economy seats for my holidays	Nearest airport to my place of residence
travel with the same airline for my holidays as I use for business travel	Brand image is not important	Hub airports
	book the airline ticket for my holidays directly from the internet	Regional airports

The above results revealed the ability of tourists to create ideal package deals by using the Internet both to retrieve information and to book holidays. The results of the factor analysis are indicative and prove that tourists value customer service on the part of the airlines. Additionally, airline choice is guided by price, which leads to an increase in the frequency of holiday trips with the destination being an important pull factor. In general, consumer behaviour with regard to the airline attributes has proved to be diversified, and indeed tourists are well informed about recent airline developments. The airport from which the airline operates is an important indication that determines the choice of a specific airline.

The role of the airline in holiday trips is documented by using factor analysis to suggest three main forces influencing holiday trips: 'customer service', 'price sensitive' and 'selection in travel behaviour'. In spite of the fact that these profiles have been adequately theorised (see Debbage & Ioannide 1998; Mowforth & Munt 1998; Torres 2002), this study sets out for the first time some of the 'real-life' features of the neo-Fordist tourist.

The factor analyses support the existing literature by suggesting that the profile of the new consumer is characterised by an eager desire to be offered diversified choices. In addition, the results suggest that the decision-making process of consumers' judgement is based on the provision of pertinent information. The research provides a further insight into the concept of Fordism and, in particular, neo-Fordism, by arguing that current production patterns are flexible, and businesses, via the utilisation of the Internet, have managed to access individual needs and to provide additional services for the consumer. The consumers exert enormous power over suppliers, given the existence of multiple choices and alternatives in a neo-liberal economic environment.

7. CONCLUSION

The results suggest that tourists have become more destination-oriented and tend to value experience as a priority in their holidays. Plurality in the airline services provides the opportunity for escapism, and the 'tourism gaze' (Urry 1990) becomes a reality and a fact. Additionally, the results enrich the existing theory which attempts to profile the consumer under the Fordism concept (Torres 2002, Ioannides & Debbage 1997, Mowforth & Munt 1998). The main platform for consumers to access relevant information is the internet, which is considered to be the most effective and up-to-date source of information, and which, at the same time, enables the consumer to plan and devise travel itineraries. Tourists travelling to Cyprus use a diverse range of airline companies, which include scheduled airlines, charters, LCCs, and a Hybrid Model.

The research provides a further insight into the concept of Fordism and, in particular, neo-Fordism, by arguing that current production patterns are flexible, and businesses, via the utilization of the internet, have managed to access individual needs and to provide additional services to the consumer. The consumers exert enormous power over suppliers, given the existence of multiple choices and alternatives in a neo-liberal economic environment. Destinations of the future will be the ones that will manage to be proactive in consumer behaviour and succeed in developing innovative products in the tourism context. Tourism practitioners should more thoroughly consider the developments in the airline industry and act accordingly.

The internet is a powerful tool in business transactions that had affected airline and tourism industries. The role of the tour operators has been redefined in response to new technological jigsaws that have led to direct contact of airlines with the consumer and the capability of online travel arrangements. This corresponds to the entrance of LCCs that have introduced direct-booking methods through the internet as the sole way for making bookings. Thus, tourism destinations should maintain an attractive stance in the market with continuous online access that will enrich and diversify consumer choices.

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