

## **Integrating Psychology into Tourism: Understanding Tourist Behavior, Motivation, and Experience for Effective Practice**

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### **Abstract**

The main objective of the paper is to critically and bring out the importance of the psychological and sociological knowledge applied in the area of contemporary tourism practice. Specifically, this work focuses on the significance of acquiring insight into other intricate motivational factors and behavioral patterns of the tourist population, such as the factors that trigger a predisposition to visit this or that destination, how a client perceives and utilizes the existing tourism services, and how their multiple needs are met to get high satisfaction levels. The key to this exploration is the discussion of individual human needs and how they are organized in a hierarchy as illustrated in the theory of needs by Maslow as they offer a useful guide to how the physiological needs can be followed to higher needs like self-esteem and self-actualization. Also, the paper identifies the gap between the theoretical possibilities of psychological approaches and their practical implementation in tourism management. Although mega businesses and other regional tourism agencies are increasingly capable of incorporating psychological understanding into the service design, marketing and customer relationship management, the smaller tourism business owners, which are majority of the businesses in this industry are not always able due to time, resources and expertise. Consequently, these smaller operators are more likely to be interested in information that is faster and more practical as opposed to theoretical frameworks that are complex. On the whole, the research highlights the importance of using psychological and sociological knowledge to increase tourist satisfaction and experience, as well as to educate the development of service, marketing strategies, and conflict management in tourism, so as to eliminate the gap between the research and practice.

### **Introduction**

As different stakeholders that participate in the tourism sector, such as individual entrepreneurs, travel agencies, government and public bodies, non-profit institutions and other related organizations tend to focus on tourism mainly in terms of economic viability and efficacy in management. Instead, they are inclined to think about the maximization of profits or to find solutions to destination management issues, disregarding such an important social and psychological aspect of tourism. It should be noted that tourism is not just a transactional or managerial process. Travelling will give us a glimpse into the personality, lifestyle, attitudes and the value systems of individual tourists. Moreover, tourism is essentially a matter of human

interaction, and, in some cases, interpersonal intercultural conflicts may arise. Such conflicts can be observed not only between tourists but also between tourists and the inhabitants of the country. Such tensions are usually caused by the difference between attitudes, cultural practices, and traditional ways. Social frictions that go unresolved can even eclipse the good that tourism will offer in severe cases. This paper, therefore, aims to highlight the significance of the application of psychological and sociological knowledge in tourism activities in a practical setting. With the knowledge of the reasons that tourists have when selecting specific destinations, their preference with regard to specific services offered, the level of their needs and satisfaction, tourism practitioners could improve both the quality of the tourist experience and the effectiveness of delivery services.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Psychology of Tourism and Psychology of Tourism**

Psychology is a scientific field that is concerned with the study of human behavior, human experiences and interpersonal relationships. Social psychology is a subfield of this discipline that considers the effects exerted on different individuals by the presence or behavior of others, whereas environmental psychology is a discipline that explores the effect of the physical environment on human behavior (see further at). In the tourism industry, both the social and environmental psychology findings are extensively used in the study of tourist behavior, attitudes and motivations. In addition to this, the wider concept of cognitive psychology that concerns the processes of human thinking and processing of information has offered useful conceptual framework to the study and analysis of tourism. As an example, the works of Fridgen (1984) on socio-environmental processes in tourism have identified the intricacy of the relationship between the tourist and the environment. Issue of human behavior is one of the major concerns of many tourism investigators. Crotts and Raaij (1994) have studied the economic psychology of tourism, and Dyer et al. (2007) were concerned with modeling tourism impacts. Crouch et al. (2004) and Jakubikova (2012) have carried out research on leisure activities and consumption systems of tourists and their decision-making processes. Ross (1994), Dolnicar and Leisch (2004) conducted studies on tourist motivation related to market segmentation and Pearce and Jafari (2011) also made a contribution to the topic. Moreover, the studies on the attitude of residents to the tourism impacts also involve the study by Aref (2010) and Stoeckl et al. (2006). Last but not least, Uysal et al. (2012) have performed studies that explore the connection between tourism and quality of life. All these studies prove that tourism is not only an economic phenomenon but also an aspect that has significant social, psychological, and cultural aspects (Villamira, 2001).

The psychology of tourism is based on the general principles of psychology but is aimed at finding specific answers to the following question: How should the definition of tourism be? Who qualifies as a tourist? What is the reason why a person travels? What are the requirements of the tourists in terms of age, social status or personal conditions? What is the decision-making process of tourists on their traveling plans? In a manner illustrated by Villamira (2001), tourism psychology has a particular focus on people as tourists. Thus, it is not enough to look at tourism in terms of economic or geographic point of view. It is imperative to understand tourist behavior according to emotional factors in order to safeguard their health, wellbeing, and general travel experience. Tourists usually want to get out of daily life and alleviate stress. They seek the chance to explore different aspects of life, acquire some inimitable experiences, and find themselves in unusual or exceptional circumstances. Viridi and Traini (1990) note that all the activities that a tourist engages in do not only indicate his personal and social interest in leisure time but also his motivations. Notably, every move is not only an economic investment, but also a personal and emotional investment. Given the fact that tourists usually spend their leisure time in an environment that may not be their day-to-day settings, tourism psychology is concerned with examining the behavior and actions of tourists in the alternative setting. The behavior of tourists is determined by a complex of social,

emotional, motivational, and cognitive factors, which provide enormous possibilities to evaluate their psychology and track it (Ryglová et al., 2011). The main aspects in the lens of the tourism psychology perspective are the motivation, and the motivation is associated with the needs of individuals, it is necessary to manage the expectations, comprehend the process of decision-making, the degree of satisfaction, the analysis of the overall experiences of the tourists (interpersonal and social experience) (see Figure 1).

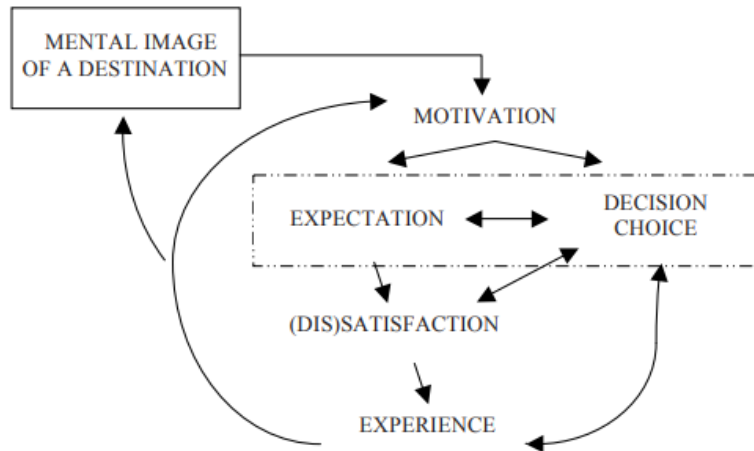


Figure 1: Network of relationships forming a mental image of a tourism destination

As seen in the chart above, a detailed and in-depth knowledge of human needs cannot be underestimated in the process of analyzing and evaluating the experiences that a client gains through involvement in tourism. On the one hand, such experiences are influenced and conditioned by the information that is received by clients using different communication sources, such as press articles, brochures, travel blogs, and online advertisements. Conversely, close involvement of the client with tourism provisions, the actual use of facilities provided, involvement in activities and experiencing the local environment is also a major factor that determines the total experience. Therefore, tourism experiences are not only to be analyzed through motivation, but, more specifically, the recognition of the interdependence of various personal factors. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction when looked back at are what make up a mental representation or perception of a destination in the mind of the client. This thought map then plays a significant part in the future needs, motivation, and further choices of behavior of the client with respect to travel. The hierarchy of needs (Kotler, 2000), which is a theory advanced by Maslow who holds that people tend to achieve the lowest levels of needs before advancing to the upper levels, proves to be a very helpful theory in explaining and studying how tourists behave. This model enables the tourism practitioners and psychologists to explore the influence of varying degrees of needs such as physiological needs to self-actualization needs on the choices and activities of the tourists. Nevertheless, this raises a crucial question, which is the following: to what extent do personal levels of Maslow hierarchy relate to the main factors that are usually examined in the psychology of tourism?

#### A. Physiological and Safety Levels (Level 1 and 2 of Maslow Pyramid)

It is general knowledge that any tourism destination has to satisfy the two simplest human needs first and foremost, the physiological needs and the safety needs.

**Examples of basic physiological needs are:**

**Gastronomy:** Tourists demand a great selection of food items and are looking at a high-quality cuisine experience, which in many cases may be subject to the impact of local gastronomy. The availability of regional products or specialty products does not only increase the uniqueness of destination but contributes cultural and experiential value to the visitors.

**Accommodation:** The accommodation quality is a very crucial factor since it guarantees the safety of health, comfort, and well-being of the tourist. Accommodation High standards used in accommodation will assure the tourists that their basic physiological needs are being met in a reliable and consistent manner. Safety needs refer to the general nature of the place such as social surroundings and risks involved. Such risks can be criminal acts like stealing, abusing drugs or alcohol or even cultural and ecological vandalism. The perceived and actually actual safety of the destination has a significant effect on the overall satisfaction of the tourist and the chances of returning to the destination and making a positive word of mouth. The hierarchy levels of Maslow are more likely to be contextual and differ depending on the goals that the tourist has and the kind of vacation being taken. These upper needs could involve cultural investigation (e.g., local history, local art or traditions exploration), energetic actions (sports, hiking, outdoor recreation), adventure tourism (e.g., activities with adrenaline rush), alignment (preferred and familiar activities), rest and wellbeing (e.g., visits to spa, healthcare tourism), and social prestige (luxury or VIP travel) (Kotler, 2000).

**B. Social Needs (Level 3 of Maslow's Pyramid) Satisfaction.**

Social needs are those that are innately human and are the wants to be a part of a group or community. When applied to tourism, these needs go beyond the activities between tourists to include activities of the local residents and communities that are involved in tourism. Within the framework of tourism psychology, the focus is made on the promotion of effective hospitality practices, positive social interactions, and avoiding or solving possible conflicts between individuals or groups. Social needs can also be associated with a feeling of belonging to the local culture, following the community customs, or engaging in group practices in the society. To the tourists, especially those who are on a trip together in case of an occasion like a holiday or a particular event, the social needs are realized by a new feeling of belonging to the group. The possibility of getting acquainted with individuals, representing different countries, regions, and cultures, and exchange experiences, attitudes, and values is one of the essential driving powers of traveling. Group travel may however cause some stress, especially where people have to stick to tight schedules or where people have to accommodate others who may be physically inactive, elderly or may be differently abled. This may sometimes lead to antisocial behavior or poor interpersonal relationships and as such good management and psychological understanding can be crucial in group tourism.

**C. Self-Esteem Needs and Self-Actualization (Level 4 and 5 of Maslow's Pyramid)**

Self-esteem and self-actualization are the fourth and fifth levels of the Maslow hierarchy, which is especially applicable to tourism experiences, since they are connected to the aspects of personal fulfillment, recognition, and achievement of personal goals. The tourism service provider and the client have specific relationship since the service majors in fulfilling the personal and emotional needs of the client, and not just the provision of a tangible product or activity. As a result, client satisfaction presents a decisive factor of loyalty with a service, destination or a provider. The expectations of a tourist are fulfilled, and one is likely to experience a sense of personal realization and the fulfillment of self needs. This experience is positive and adds to the total satisfaction, as well as reinforcing the idea of a perfect holiday. On the other hand, dissatisfaction may also lead to personal disharmony, which will adversely influence the perception of the service or destination

by the tourist. The quality and structure of tourism services, the uniqueness of the destination and the degree or intensity of the experiences provided are some factors that determine the degree of self-actualization that one goes through as a tourist. Experiences that are too intense or not well managed can have counterproductive effects, in some cases causing discomfort or stress, which can be manifested as issues that one may have like; Is everything all right? (Kotler, 2000). Thus, psychology is an important practice in differentiating tourism experiences to match the personal needs and wants of the clients as much as possible and make the most out of the experience and ensure a pleasant experience.

### **Psychology in Tourism in Practice**

The intricate influence of the tourist, tourist motivation, and the high number of variables affecting the choice process are the keys that will enable psychologists to develop a lucrative communication strategy, as well as to improve experience at the destination. The knowledge of these factors enables tourism experts to design specialized services and engagements that would satisfy the wishes and anticipations of customers. It is a process that involves verbal and non-verbal communication, social perception of interpersonal behavior, intercultural communication, which are all thoroughly considered by Strnadova (2011). Besides targeting the tourists and people who are living in the locality, tourism psychology also encompasses the issue of personnel in the industry. In the modern tourism markets where supply is often relatively higher than demanded, the value addition of the services provided more often lies in the quality of the employees, particularly in the cases where the employees are educated, trained, and able to offer high-quality interactions (Ryglová et al., 2011; Hošková-Mayerová, 2011). The essential competencies of the tourism staff are:

- The verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Great insight into the way people act and socialize.
- Client needs and expectations awareness.
- Loyalty and devotion to the high service standards.
- Problem-solving and the capacity to deal with situations that may arise unexpectedly or in a challenging manner,

Professionally trained staff members are expected to be the kind of people who listen, pay attention to clients, detect the most crucial problems, and address them at the first signs of dissatisfaction or worry. Significantly, this should be in a manner that does not undermine client privacy/comfort. This form of intelligence approach will entail having the personnel respond quickly to the information, learning through experience and changing strategies as need arises. The psychology of tourism must therefore be able to find out the similarities, typologies and capabilities that staff have to have in order to operate efficiently in the tourism sector.

Despite the fact that psychological research plays a crucial role in tourism practice, there exist tremendous challenges of applying this research practically. Most of the tourism entrepreneurs, especially those with small or medium-sized businesses (SMEs) appear to be lowly educated and financially endowed. Technical lingo and technical methods employed in psychological studies might be hard to interpret or applied by practitioners. In a dynamic business environment, SMEs, which make a major part of tourism business, tend to be more concerned with operational management than with the development of the advanced and client-oriented strategies. As a result, SMEs often become self-educational companies, which use experience instead of research information.

## **There are a number of constraints to the capability of SMEs to make use of tourism psychology:**

- The process of collecting information on the behavior and preferences of clients is time-consuming and expensive.
- Psychological research findings are normally intricate and inapplicable in generalization.
- Theoretical models can be too abstract or glamorized that they cannot be applied in day-to-day operations. Practical tourism management entails definite step-to-step processes, more like that of a cookbook which could be adopted in a very reliable manner.

Nevertheless, the limitations notwithstanding, applied psychology provides precious information about the needs of tourists, which are not obvious. Its contributions include:

- Building of psychological profiles of destinations in more than one way,
- Research on the expectations of tourists on the quality of services,
- Analyzing the connection between the quality of services and prices,
- Client satisfaction in selected destinations,
- The tourism analysis of the life cycle of destinations,
- Assessment of the general appeal of destinations,
- Motivation and decision-making when choosing the destination by tourists.

Considering the practical limitations of SMEs, it is possible that the most successful applications of tourism psychology would be in bigger companies, towns, or tourism regional authorities. The problem of data collection is also one of the primary challenges that will involve close cooperation with specialists in the field of tourism information management in order to guarantee accuracy and applicability.

## **Conclusion**

This discussion paper illustrates the huge and practical contribution of psychological methodologies and understanding in the field of tourism. The experience and other studies accessible publicly reveal that psychology has a special and irreplaceable role in the tourism industry. Marketing, however, is the so-called most important part of modern tourism (Palatková, 2006), but marketing with no in-depth knowledge of the motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of tourists, can hardly produce the real interest or sustainable practices of tourism.

Tourism promotion and destination management cannot be done effectively without an in-depth understanding of the tourists, and this cannot be achieved through the application of marketing alone. Moreover, the marketing strategies are not able to counter the environmental effects; the environmental responsible programs should also incorporate psychological knowledge in order to promote sustainable behavior. It can be achieved through a systematic approach, which involves psychological, social, and environmental aspects, and which will be able to offer a complete mental image of a destination, which will eventually boost the experiences of the tourists.

With these benefits, the application of psychology practically in the tourism sector is still mostly restricted to large organizations and local institutions. The tourism industry heavily relies on practical recommendations as opposed to theoretical frameworks by most entrepreneurs who constitute the backbone of the industry. In addition to enhancing satisfaction, psychology is needed to detect and avoid conflicts that result due to unfavorable tourist behavior. Nevertheless, complex managerial and psychological approaches are mostly not accessible to SMEs, and therefore there is little application of these models in small businesses.

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