

THEORIES OF DECISION-MAKING IN TOURISM

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Abstract: *This paper presents the main theories related to decision-making in tourism. First, a distinction is made between decision-making in general and decision-making in tourism in particular. Then the main models/theories related to decision-making in tourism are presented – actor-network theory, attribution theory, choice set theory, demand theory, expected utility theory, nudge theory, process theory, the theory of planned behavior, and the theory of reasoned action – all based on a very rich Romanian and foreign bibliography. The conclusions emphasize the importance of understanding these models/theories for tourism managers/professionals and for tourism businesses.*

Key words: *models/theories, decision making, decision making in tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Decision making is a process in which choices are made between different options based on information, intuition and reasoning, and which is done by going through the following steps [8,24,25,26]: identifying the decision, i.e. recognizing that a choice must be made; gathering information, i.e. collecting relevant data, facts and perspectives; evaluating alternatives, i.e. considering different options and weighing the pros and cons; making a decision, i.e. selecting the best option based on intuition and/or logical reasoning; taking action(s), implementing the decision taken; and reviewing the outcome, i.e. assessing the impact and making adjustments (if necessary).

In contrast, tourism decision-making is a complex process involving factors that influence where, when and how people travel [1,3,5,9,10,13,14,15,16,19,21,22,28,30,32]: financial considerations, as the budget plays a crucial role in determining the type of activities, accommodation or travel; group dynamics (colleagues, friends, relatives), because many of the decisions related to a trip are made in a group, which complicates the decision-making process because constraints and preferences vary from one member of the group to another; the image of the tourist destination and its unique characteristics, because tourist attractions, local culture and landscape have a significant role in making tourist decisions; social influences, because recommendations from family, friends or online reviews have a decisive impact on travel decisions; interest in sustainable tourism, i.e. for recycling, reducing waste, reducing pollution; marketing and promotion, because travel blogs, advertisements and social networks influence the perception of the tourist destination/s; decision-making levels, as these can be made according to criteria such as the tourist destination, the existence of local ceremonies/events, the existence of souvenir shops, the level of accessibility (from a budget perspective, traffic routes), the type of public catering (bar, restaurant), the type of accommodation (hostel, hotel, guesthouse), the type of transport, the type of holiday, etc.; new trends in tourism (e.g., alternative tourism); personal preferences, as tourists choose their tourist destination according to their interests (e.g., adventure, cultural experience, relaxation, etc.); the tourist profile, i.e. socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, level of education, net monthly household income, children, place of residence), previous knowledge about the tourist destination, emotions, external information, travel motivation (push and pull motivators), perception of the risk/risks of the trip, perception of the value of the trip.

In this study, the most important methods/theories for studying decision-making in tourism are presented, emphasizing the benefits of knowing these methods/theories by tourism managers/professionals.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material used in this study consists of 32 articles and books on decision-making methods/theories in tourism, and the research method consists of content analysis of the results presented in these researches.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Research in the field has focused mainly on consumer decision-making and has led to the emergence of theories such as actor-network theory, attribution theory, choice set theory, demand theory, expected utility theory, nudge theory, process theory, the theory of planned behavior, and the theory of reasoned action [24,25,26].

- *Actor-network theory* (actor-network theory) [29]:
 - analyzes how interactions between visitors and activities, workshops, interpretations emerge and evolve;
 - highlights the role of materiality (art forms, digital tools, historical sites) and multiplicity (the different ways in which experiences are lived);
 - offers a fresh perspective on tourism management;
 - allows for a better understanding of how tourism is co-produced by different stakeholders and how innovations spread in the tourism industry;
 - emphasizes the interconnected relationships between ideas, places, people, and objects;
 - sees tourism as a dynamic network in which different actors (cultural artifacts, travelers/tourists/visitors, local communities, digital platforms) continuously shape and redefine experiences.
- *Theory of rational action* (theory of reasoned action) [4,2]:
 - helps to understand and predict tourists' behavioral intentions;
 - can be applied to the intention to revisit a tourist destination, to tourist decision-making, to promoting the destination's image, to marketing strategies;
 - suggests that individual behavior is influenced by people's attitudes toward behavioral and subjective norms (i.e., social pressure to engage in a certain behavior or not).
- *Attribution theory* (attribution theory) [12]:
 - examines how tourists explain their experiences (e.g., positive or negative), which suggests that people attribute events to either internal factors (skill or personal effort) or external factors (environment or luck);
 - helps tourism managers understand how tourists perceive their experiences – positive, if they feel that their delight comes from commitment and creativity, or negative, if they attribute dissatisfaction to external factors such as poor organization or useless staff – which is called attribution bias (meaning that they attribute positive experiences to themselves and blame external factors for negative ones).
- *Demand theory* (demand theory) [27]:
 - helps to understand how tourists' desires and preferences to pay shape the development of unique experiences;
 - can be applied as consumer preferences (tourists seek immersive and personalized experiences like art workshops, cooking classes, heritage storytelling), market segmentation (i.e. identifying different segments of tourists – experience seekers, cultural

enthusiasts, digital nomads), pricing strategies (given that the elasticity of demand influences the pricing decision), sustainability and growth (by analyzing demand trends).

- *Theory of planned behavior* (theory of planned behavior) [11,20]:
 - helps predict and influence tourist behavior based on attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms;
 - includes factors such as experience, motivation and perceived value in understanding tourist behavior;
 - can be used in analyzing the tourist's intention to revisit a tourist destination.
- *The push theory* (nudge theory) [17]:
 - it influences the tourist without restricting his freedom of choice;
 - shapes the tourist's purchasing decision by offering personalized interventions in real time;
 - promotes responsible and sustainable tourism (e.g., resource conservation, waste reduction, respect for cultural heritage);
 - It is based on economics and behavioral psychology, using small interventions (nudges) to encourage the desired action.
- *Choice set theory* (choice set theory) [6,7]:
 - helps to understand how tourists make decisions about destinations and experiences, suggesting that they go through a process of reducing the number of options until they reach a decision;
 - can be applied as experience organization (tourists select activities based on their creative aspirations – art workshops, culinary experiences, heritage stories), destination selection (based on accessibility, cultural attractiveness, personal interests, etc.), or marketing strategies (tourism managers position their offerings to ensure they fit into tourists' preferences through targeted promotions and personalized recommendations).
- *Process theory* (process theory) [31]:
 - offers a structural approach to understanding how creativity unfolds in tourism experiences;
 - emphasizes the stages of creativity (e.g., idea generation, experimentation, and refinement);
 - focuses on the dynamic and evolving nature of creativity.
- *Expected utility theory* (expected utility theory) [23,18]:
 - helps stakeholders make informed decisions in cases of uncertainty (e.g., internal factors – demand fluctuations, economic changes; external factors – geo-political events, pandemics)
 - it is useful in marketing and pricing strategies;
 - provides a framework for evaluating choices based on expected benefits.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding these patterns:

- helps tourism managers/professionals to design experiences that promote engagement, innovation and learning; to design experiences that stimulate visitor satisfaction and encourage repeat participation; to design offers that maximize perceived value and minimize uncertainty; to design more effective strategies for attracting and retaining tourists; to formulate the offer in such a way that it meets the interests of tourists; to invest in sustainable tourism initiatives; to understand what motivates tourists to visit and revisit a tourist destination; to better understand how tourism is co-produced by

different stakeholders and how innovations spread in the tourism industry; to understand how tourists perceive risks and rewards (e.g., through loss aversion, framing effects and risk preferences); to predict consumer behavior; to predict future needs; and better design their marketing strategies;

- allows the business to assess how tourists perceive rewards and risks, adjusting pricing models or promotional efforts accordingly (e.g., offering flexible booking policies, incentives); encourage sustainable tourism; promote marketing strategies; improve their experience design; optimize their revenues;

- allows tourism professionals to: design compelling experiences; design pricing models, marketing strategies, experiential structures; improve the attractiveness of the tourist destination; optimize their strategies for sustainable growth.

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