

Examining perceptions of the importance of travel websites' value-added services: age, gender, and travel motivations

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Abstract

Travel motivations have been regarded as essential in understanding customer behaviour in travel and tourism. As the importance of Internet has grown in tourism marketing, it is important to understand customers' online behaviour. This study aims to examine the little researched field in connecting travel motivations to online behaviour. Quantitative data is collected on three Finnish rural tourism websites during summer 2011. In the examination of tourists' perceptions of the importance of value-added services on travel websites it is found that age, gender, and travel motivations have an effect on which value-added services people regard as important. Theoretical and managerial contributions of the study are discussed.

Keywords: value-added services, travel motivations, Internet, website design

1 Introduction

Travel websites are an important part of their Internet marketing strategy for many tourism companies. Websites are a key part of Internet marketing in creating and maintaining an online presence (Chaffey et al. 2006) and an effective website delivers relevance and experiences to its audience. According to Turban and Gehrke (2000), the success of electronic commerce, especially for less well-known companies, is largely dependent on the appropriate design of its website. Chaffey et al. (2006) quote Alison Lancaster, head of marketing and catalogues at John Lewis Direct, when stating that a good website should begin with the user and understanding the customer and how they use the channel to shop. Analysing the needs of the website audience helps to answer such questions as (Chaffey et al. 2006, pp. 312):

- Who are the key audience for the site?

- Why should they use the site (what will appeal to them)?
- What should the content of the site be and which services will be provided?
- What are the main marketing outcomes the site should deliver (registrations, leads, sales)?

This analysis can be conducted by using different marketing research techniques. In tourism marketing research travel motivations have been regarded as one of the main explanations for travel behaviour. According to Pearce and Caltabiano (1983), travel motivations are the widely accepted as the significant push factors for travel behaviour. Travel motivations have been used especially to segment tourists in several earlier studies (e.g. Park & Yoon, 2009; Boksberger & Laesser, 2009).

Tourism has been adapted as a growth tool in many rural areas (Park & Yoon, 2009). Modern market mechanisms are dominated by communication and promotion strategies and techniques, also in rural tourism (Park & Yoon, 2009). Value-added services on travel websites add value to the process of searching for and purchasing tourism products on the Internet. Earlier research suggests that providing value-added services at travel websites increases their competitiveness in different parts of the search and purchase process (Lexhagen, 2005).

Despite the importance of website design and usefulness in understanding travel motivations, these two topics are very rarely discussed together in the academic literature. In this study the effects of travel motivations on the tourists' perceptions of the importance of travel websites' value-added services are examined. The results will help rural tourism companies in their efforts to design and target their websites for tourists motivated by different push factors.

This study is structured into four parts after the introductions. In the first part the major principles of segmentation theory and earlier studies, and also the three research questions are presented. In the next part data and research methods are introduced. In the third part of the study, the segmentation results and a comparison of segments are presented. Finally, the results and limitations of this study are discussed and ideas for future research proposed.

2 Background of the study

Earlier research has shown that travel motivations seem to explain many choices tourists make before and during their holidays. In the market segmentation literature in particular travel motivations have often been used. For example, Park and Yoon (2009) found four segments of rural tourists based on motivation factors of Relaxation, Socialization, Learning, Family Togetherness, Novelty, and Excitement. Boksberger and Laesser (2009) segmented the senior travel market by means of travel motivations using 25 different motivation statements measured on a 4-point Likert scale. Bieger and Laesser (2002) clustered the Swiss travel market into four motivation-based segments (Compulsory Travel, Cultural Hedonism, Family Travel and Me(e/a)t Marketing) using 10 distinct motivation factors. Beh & Bruyere (2007) found three visitor segments in three Kenyan national reserves based on motivations factors of Escape, Culture, Personal Growth, Mega-fauna, Adventure, Learning,

Nature, and General Viewing. Pesonen (2012) found four motivation-based rural tourism segments in Finland: Social Travellers, Wellbeing Travellers, Home Region Travellers, and Family Travellers. As can be seen from these studies, travel motivations have an irrefutable connection to tourist behaviour. People motivated by different motivations differ from each other in many ways.

The examples above also demonstrate the wide variety of travel motivations used in the tourism literature. Most of these are mainly or partly based on the Leisure Motivation Scale (Beard & Ragheb, 1980, 1983) and its application to tourism (Ryan & Glendon, 1998). Based on 14 items, Ryan and Glendon (1998) found four components of travel motivations: Relaxation, Social, Intellectual, and Mastery. Pearce and Lee (2005) found that a core of travel motivation factors including escape, relaxation, relationship enhancement, and self-development seem to comprise the central backbone of motivation for all travellers. However, despite extensive research on the topic, there is no best way or items to measure travel motivations. Countless numbers of different motivation items have been used in the tourism literature, varying from one study to another. Some authors have divided travel motivations into two categories, namely push and pull motivations. According to Baloglu and Uysal (1996) push motivation pushes people to make a travel decision and then destinations attract people with pull motivations. Dann (1981) also states that tourists are pushed by their own needs and pulled by the destination itself. Most studies measure travel motivations using a Likert scale, making them susceptible to response style effects (Dolnicar & Grün, 2007).

Bieger and Laesser (2002) used lifecycle theory to introduce depth into travel motivation segmentation. According to lifecycle theory, as people get older and as their needs and social roles change, so too does their travel motivation change over time (Horna, 1994). For example, young people without children are hardly motivated to spend time with children during their holiday. As lifecycle affects travel motivations it is also important to understand age as an underlying factor when examining the effects of travel motivations.

However, research on the connections between travel motivation and ICT usage and/or eTourism is not common. For example, in studies profiling motivation based segments the Internet is rarely included or examined at all, despite the importance of electronic channels in tourism marketing. It is not enough just to segment and profile tourists. Gommans et al. (2001) argue that a website has to be designed for a targeted customer segment, and, according to Chaffey et al. (2006) the information usage behaviour of each segment needs to be known, especially in order to be able to create value for the customers in the Internet.

Website design in travel and tourism has been studied in numerous scientific papers. Well-designed websites provide tourism companies with an inexpensive and effective platform for marketing and advertising, thus increasing their competitive advantage in the marketplace (Parets, 2002). Effective website design engages and attracts online consumers (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005). According to Garrett (2003), there are six classifications for user experience in website design: visual design, information architecture, information design, navigation design, content and interaction design. According to Huizingh (2000) there are two components in website design. *Content*

refers to the information, features, or services that are offered in a website and *design* refers to the way the content is made available to the users of a website.

In this study the focus is on website content, especially value-added services. There are several studies that examine value-added services in the tourism industry (see e.g. Lexhagen, 2005). Value-added services provide information, applications for communication and other kinds of support that make it easier for a customer to search for, make decisions about, and buy tourism products (Lexhagen, 2005).

Lexhagen (2005) lists altogether 18 value-added services in her study: address, telephone/fax, e-mail address, multimedia, search engine, FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions), availability in different languages, links to other sites, community (such as a forum), map, decision support (such as currency converters and different types of automatic agents), price comparison, personalization, push-based services (sending information on request, for example e-mail, SMS, printed information etc.), mobile access, SMS services, booking form, and on-line booking.

Earlier studies have not been interested in a potential connection between travel motivations and tourists' perceptions of the importance of travel website attributes, not to mention value-added services. There has, however, been research on the effects of socio-demographics on importance of website attributes. For example, Turban and Gherke (2000) found that men and women differ from each other regarding certain website design elements. Women, for example, seem to consistently feel that certain issues are significantly more important than do men. They also reported that age affects the opinions of website attributes. Younger participants in their study valued determinants such as browser compatibility and security more than others. Cyr and Bonanni (2005) likewise found significant differences between genders regarding perceptions of website design and website satisfaction.

The connection between travel motivations and value-added website attributes has not been studied before. Thus, based on the literature review, the goal of this study is to examine if there are differences between travel motivations, age and gender regarding perceptions of value-added services on travel. For managers this study provides important information on which value-added services on travel websites are important for potential rural tourists. Theoretically this study contributes to travel motivations as an explanation for customer behaviour and website design and enhances the understanding of value-added services regarding age and gender.

Based on the literature review this study poses three research questions. Research questions are formulated as follows:

- 1) What are the differences between men and women regarding the perceptions of importance of value-added services on travel websites?
- 2) What are the differences between different age groups regarding the perceptions of importance of value-added services on travel websites?
- 3) What is the connection between travel motivations and perception of importance of value-added services on travel websites?

3 Data and Methods

To answer these research questions quantitative data on potential Finnish rural tourists was collected. A banner advertisement for the questionnaire was placed on three different Finnish tourism web sites. Data was collected during a six-month period, from 4 March to 3 August 2011. The banner advertisements were clicked altogether 3,684 times, resulting in 2,131 responses. After deleting empty responses and duplicated responses from the same user altogether 1,967 usable questionnaires were obtained.

To measure travel motivations a list of ten items from a study by Bieger and Laesser (2002) was used. To avoid response style effects caused by Likert scales (Dolnicar & Grün, 2007) respondents were asked to select up to three most important travel motivations for them. These ten statements are general travel motivations found in many other tourism studies (abbreviations in parentheses):

- Participating in nightlife (nightlife)
- Enjoying comfort, spoiling myself (comfort)
- Taking and having time for my partner (partner)
- Taking and having time for my family (family)
- Enjoying landscape and nature (nature)
- Broadening my mind, enjoying sightseeing (culture)
- Being able to make flexible and spontaneous decisions (liberty)
- Doing something for my looks and well-being (body)
- Sports activities (sports)
- Enjoying the sun and water (sun)

To measure the importance of the value-added services of a travel website, a list of 17 items adapted from Lexhagen's (2005) study was used. One item, languages, was omitted because for managerial reasons this study was conducted among Finnish customers only. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of different value-added services on a travel website using a 7-point Likert scale (1=Not at all important, 7= Extremely important) A complete list of the value-added services used in this study can be found in Table 1.

Data analysis is done in three parts. First, the respondents' socio-demographic profiles are examined. Second, importance of value-added services for men and for women is compared. Third, the importance of value-added services for different age groups is examined. In the final part of the analysis the connection between value-added website services and travel motivations is examined using ANOVA. Respondents who rated a motivation as one of the three most important motivations to travel are compared to those who did not choose that motivation. As one respondent can belong to several motivation groups, it is not feasible to compare motivations against each other. Those website users who rated the motivation among three most important motivations are compared to those who did not.

4 Results

4.1 Sample profile and largest age/gender groups

In total 1,967 respondents are included in the sample for this article. Of the responses 1,776 came from the site www.lomarengas.fi, 150 from www.savonlinna.travel and 41 from www.tahko.com. Of the respondents 26 percent were men and 24 percent of all respondents were between 40-49 years of age. The rest of the sample was distributed as follows: 5 percent under 20 years of age, 23 percent 20-29 years of age, 23 percent 30-39 years of age, 16 50-59 years of age and 8 percent over 59 years of age. The three largest age/gender groups were 40 to 49 year-old women (19%), 20 to 29 year-old women (19%), and 30 to 39 year-old women (17%).

4.2 Gender and importance of value-added services

Table 1 describes the differences between men and women regarding their opinions of the importance of value-added services on a travel website. As can be seen from Table 1, there are several statistical differences between men and women. Women seem to rate several different services, including FAQ, links to other websites, map, booking and contact information more important than men. Men on the other hand regard mobile access as a significantly more important attribute than women.

Table 1. Gender differences in importance of value-added services on a travel website

	Men	Women
Address	6.12	6.53
Telephone/fax	6.13	6.56
E-mail	5.23	5.49
Search engine	5.23	5.49
Multimedia	4.04	3.93
FAQ	4.98	5.21
Links	4.61	4.86
Community	3.79	3.73
Map	5.87	6.07
User reviews	4.92	4.96
Price comparison	5.48	5.51
Personalization	5.04	5.21
Push-based services	4.09	4.01
Mobile access	3.84	3.56
SMS confirmation	4.58	4.61
Booking form	5.62	6.01
On-line booking	5.84	6.11

*Bold face denotes higher mean ($p < 0.05$)

4.3 Age and importance of value-added services

As can be seen from Table 2, there are many differences between age groups regarding the perceptions of the importance of value-added services on a travel website. It seems that young people under 20 do not consider contact information as important as do other age groups. For them, however, multimedia and user reviews are more important than for other age groups. Generally, for all age groups, contact information was the most important value-added service. A search engine seems to be less important for people between 20-29 years of age than for other respondents. A map is more important for older users than for young users, likewise push-based services.

Table 2. Age differences in importance of value-added services on a travel website

	<20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	>59	F	Sig.
Address	6.07	6.38	6.45	6.49	6.55	6.50	3.43	p=0.004
Telephone/fax	6.17	6.37	6.49	6.54	6.53	6.46	2.84	p=0.015
E-mail	5.87	6.24	6.37	6.33	6.36	6.40	3.18	p=0.007
Search engine	5.43	5.13	5.36	5.49	5.66	5.64	4.96	p<0.001
Multimedia	4.40	3.97	3.87	4.01	4.03	3.43	3.77	p=0.002
FAQ	5.59	5.19	5.14	5.11	5.06	5.02	1.79	p=0.113
Links	4.73	4.66	4.85	4.86	4.89	4.59	1.64	p=0.146
Community	4.04	3.83	3.73	3.58	3.66	3.69	1.71	p=0.129
Map	5.71	5.82	5.91	6.07	6.36	6.22	10.13	p<0.001
User reviews	5.24	5.08	4.98	4.80	4.90	4.76	2.85	p=0.014
Price comparison	5.65	5.41	5.44	5.50	5.55	5.65	1.10	p=0.359
Personalization	5.16	5.11	5.00	5.17	5.34	5.37	2.74	p=0.180
Push-based services	3.83	3.54	3.84	4.16	4.54	4.49	14.93	p<0.001
Mobile access	3.68	3.51	3.59	3.63	3.72	3.64	0.44	p=0.820
SMS confirmation	4.63	4.35	4.57	4.65	4.76	4.84	2.34	p=0.040
Booking form	5.90	5.96	5.94	5.93	5.83	5.74	0.89	p=0.485
On-line booking	6.08	6.08	6.10	6.07	5.96	5.92	0.67	p=0.650

4.4 Travel motivations and importance of value-added services

In Tables 3 and 4 travel motivations and importance of value-added services are compared. According to the results presented in Tables 3 and 4, some travel motivations seem to have a clear connection to perceptions of the importance of value-added services.

Table 3. Travel motivations and value-added services on a travel website

Motivation	Nightlife (N=133)		Comfort (N=615)		Partner (N=713)		Family (N=721)		Nature (N=1141)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Is the motivation item important for the respondent?										
Address	6.29	6.43	6.47	6.40	6.49	6.39	6.49	6.38	6.52	6.29
Telephone/fax	6.40	6.45	6.50	6.42	6.53	6.40	6.50	6.41	6.53	6.33
E-mail	6.15	6.31	6.34	6.28	6.34	6.28	6.34	6.28	6.37	6.20
Search engine	5.45	5.42	5.52	5.38	5.50	5.38	5.48	5.39	5.46	5.38
Multimedia	4.29	3.93	4.21	3.83	3.84	4.02	4.10	3.87	3.86	4.09
FAQ	5.41	5.12	5.33	5.05	5.11	5.17	5.19	5.12	5.11	5.19
Links	4.97	4.79	4.88	4.76	4.72	4.84	4.94	4.71	4.83	4.76
Community	4.18	3.71	4.03	3.61	3.66	3.79	3.74	3.74	3.64	3.89
Map	5.80	6.04	6.06	6.01	6.07	6.00	6.04	6.01	6.14	5.85
User reviews	5.27	4.92	5.16	4.85	4.98	4.93	4.94	4.95	4.84	5.11
Price comparison	5.67	5.49	5.62	5.45	5.49	5.51	5.57	5.46	5.48	5.54
Personalization	5.30	5.16	5.37	5.08	5.20	5.15	5.29	5.10	5.13	5.23
Push-based services	4.16	4.03	4.27	3.93	3.93	4.10	4.15	3.97	4.00	4.08
Mobile access	3.88	3.60	3.90	3.49	3.59	3.64	3.66	3.60	3.57	3.70
SMS confirmation	4.74	4.59	4.75	4.53	4.53	4.64	4.66	4.56	4.57	4.63
Booking form	5.82	5.91	5.99	5.87	5.95	5.88	5.98	5.86	5.92	5.89
On-line booking	6.12	6.04	6.12	6.01	6.10	6.01	6.05	6.04	6.07	6.00

*Bold face denotes higher mean than the other option (p<0.05)

Table 4. Travel motivations and value-added services on a travel website

Motivation	Culture (N=713)		Liberty (N=399)		Body (N=63)		Sports (N=138)		Sun (N=539)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Is the motivation item important for the respondent?										
Address	6.49	6.39	6.50	6.40	6.43	6.42	6.33	6.43	6.38	6.44
Telephone/fax	6.46	6.44	6.51	6.43	6.48	6.45	6.33	6.46	6.48	6.43
E-mail	6.35	6.27	6.38	6.28	6.35	6.30	6.43	6.29	6.25	6.32
Search engine	5.33	5.49	5.46	5.42	5.35	5.43	5.43	5.43	5.48	5.41
Multimedia	3.95	3.96	3.79	4.00	3.72	3.96	3.80	3.97	4.06	3.91
FAQ	5.10	5.17	5.18	5.13	5.29	5.14	5.27	5.13	5.19	5.12
Links	4.80	4.80	4.91	4.77	4.45	4.81	4.69	4.81	4.75	4.82
Community	3.71	3.76	3.57	3.79	3.82	3.74	3.55	3.76	3.81	3.72
Map	6.17	5.94	5.96	6.04	6.13	6.02	6.04	6.02	5.89	6.08
User reviews	4.92	4.96	4.87	4.97	5.05	4.94	4.75	4.96	5.09	4.89
Price comparison	5.49	5.51	5.55	5.49	5.60	5.50	5.57	5.50	5.56	5.48
Personalization	5.12	5.20	5.04	5.21	5.27	5.17	5.22	5.17	5.23	5.15
Push-based services	3.90	4.12	3.85	4.09	4.02	4.04	4.01	4.04	4.11	4.01
Mobile access	3.45	3.72	3.68	3.61	3.53	3.63	3.63	3.62	3.54	3.66
SMS confirmation	4.53	4.64	4.74	4.56	4.85	4.59	4.54	4.60	4.60	4.60
Booking form	5.92	5.90	5.99	5.89	5.95	5.91	5.79	5.92	5.93	5.90
On-line booking	6.09	6.02	6.15	6.01	6.15	6.04	5.96	6.05	6.06	6.03

*Bold face denotes higher mean than the other option ($p < 0.05$)

From Tables 3 and 4 we can see that people motivated by Nightlife value multimedia content more than do other respondents, likewise FAQ, community, and user reviews. People motivated by Comfort are very similar to those motivated by Nightlife except

that they also think that price comparison, personalization, comfort, mobile access and SMS confirmation are more important than for people not motivated by Comfort.

People who want to spend time with their family regard links to other websites as more important than do other respondents, likewise push-based services. Also, a booking form is more important for them than for other respondents. For respondents motivated by Nature, contact information is very important. Culture and nature motivated people regard maps as more important than do other tourists.

There are hardly any statistical differences in importance regarding value-added services among Liberty, Body, Sports, and Sun motivated respondents and those not regarding those motivations as important. Statistical differences are mostly found in the motivations Nightlife, Comfort, Partner, Family, Nature, and Culture.

5 Conclusions, limitations and further research

There seems to be a strong connection between travel motivations and perceptions of the importance of value-added services on travel websites. However, it is still unknown whether this connection is because of what people need (and what motivates them) or because of who they are. This topic needs further research and more complex analysis. Theoretically this study does not prove whether travel motivations directly affect the perceptions of importance of value-added services, but only that a clear and important connection between some travel motivations and value-added services would indeed appear to exist. This contributes to the earlier literature, meaning that travel motivations may have an even larger role in travel decision-making than has been previously assumed. By examining age and gender effects regarding the topic together with travel motivations, it is possible to draw a more precise picture of this connection. This study also confirms the results of Turban and Gherke (2000) and Cyr and Bonanni (2005) in that there seem to be several differences in Internet usage between men and women.

For managers the results are extremely relevant. Especially in terms of website content, many rural tourism companies may benefit from the results, as they help rural tourism companies to develop their websites in a direction that creates value for the users (Chaffey et al. 2006). The results also support the notion that a website has to be designed for a specific market segment or segments (Gommans, 2001).

Generally speaking, women seem to regard value-added services on travel websites as more important than men. This is an interesting result, as most of the respondents in this study are women and women are very keen Internet users in Finland. For example, women use social media more than men (Statistics Finland, 2011). The results also concur with Statistics Finland (2011) in terms of mobile usage, which is more important for men because of wider adoption of mobile technologies. According to the results of this study it seems that women need more detailed information than men to make purchasing decisions. The more female users a website has, the more important it is to develop value-added services.

Age also has an effect on perceptions of different value-added services. Companies targeting younger users should focus on multimedia content such as videos and pictures. User reviews are also useful in pushing young people to purchase online. It

is also interesting to note that the older people get, the more interested they are in push-based services. Companies targeting older customers especially should explore how they could utilize push-based services.

Companies offering services connected to Nightlife should have a great deal of multimedia on their websites. Focusing on community and user reviews would also benefit the users. Family destinations on the other hand would do well to provide links to other websites that would interest their users. Providing more information as well as personalization and push-based services would also benefit family destinations. Companies offering these value-added services to their target groups could gain potential competitive advantage over competitors without these value-added services.

The results also demonstrate the importance of customer research for tourism companies. It is possible to collect a wide range of information on customers using, for example, click stream analysis and programs such as Google Analytics, but it is very difficult to get information on why customers behave the way they do without market research. Understanding travel motivations, for example, seems to provide tourism companies ways to improve their website design and focus on the value-added services that benefit their customers most.

Several motivations, such as Liberty, Body and Sports, have almost no connection to push-based services whereas some, such as Nightlife, Comfort and Family have a decisive effect on the importance of push-based services. Future studies could examine why some motivation items are connected to push-based services and Internet use whereas others are not. The motivations items used in this study are primarily push-motivations (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996) but similar study could also be conducted using pull-motivations. More detailed data analysis is also required. Clustering of users to motivation segments could provide additional information on the topic.

There are some limitations to this study. A self-selecting data collection method was utilized which may be a reason why there are more women respondents than men. Based on an interview with marketing manager of Lomarengas there are indeed more women visitors to their website than men, but not quite so markedly as in this study. Lomarengas.fi is the largest Finnish rural tourism website and most tourists seeking information about rural holidays in Finland will at some point of their information search process visit the website.

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