THE CONSUMER CHOICE OF TOURISM PRODUCTS – SUSTAINABLE CRITERIA FOR MARKET SEGMENTATION

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to empirically identify relevant and sustainable criteria[3] for segmentation of Bulgarian consumers of tourism products in the process of making purchasing decisions. The study draws on original data gathered through an online survey of 898 Bulgarians, which was analysed using a range of statistical tests. Segmentation was performed using cluster analysis (hierarchical and non-hierarchical clustering). The analysis suggests that Bulgarian consumers of tourism products can be adequately and consistently segmented on the basis of five criteria: (1) their preferred mode of travel, (2) mode of planning and organising tourist trips, (3) the type of tourism they prefer, (4) the budget they normally spent for tourism and (5) their preferences regarding used sources of information. The market segments identified are directly related to a specific aspect of consumer choice in the purchase decision process. The results of this study can be used by providers of tourism services (tour operators, travel agencies, etc.) when defining the parameters of the tourist services they offer in order to influence consumer choice in the purchasing decision process.

Key words: tourist market, market segmentation, segmentation criteria, cluster analysis, Bulgarian tourists.

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[3] Segmentation criteria that are generally applicable (universal) and valid for a long period of time (stable over time).

Introduction

Consumers of tourism services are different, but there are similarities between them in terms of their attitudes and behaviour. These similarities provide opportunities for grouping (segmenting) of consumers which can facilitate the development of differentiated approaches to the offer of tourism products (Dolnicar, 2006; Smith, 1956; Kotler, Ph., & Keller, K., 2009). The economic advantages of applying such a differentiated approach has led to significant interest in segmentation studies. The majority of those studies use common criteria for segmentation such as mode of tourists travel, nationality of consumers, type of tourist destinations visited, the sought benefits/motives for practicing different types of tourism, preferred type of tourism and price readiness (Rogerson, 2013; Vinerean, 2014; Egresi, 2017; Promnil, 2020; Marchevski, Grigorova, Yordanov, & Neykova, 2022). Each of those criteria has its advantages and disadvantages and serves a different segmentation purpose. As a result, the search for criteria with sufficiently broad application is an ongoing pursuit and the present study seeks to contribute to this endeavour. Assuming the presence of national particularities in consumer behaviour (Bieger, 2002; Pesonen, 2016; Park, D.B.& Yoon, Y.S., 2009; Formica, S., & Uysal, M., 1998), the study zooms in on Bulgarian consumers specifically as the subject of analysis. The paper consists of three main parts. Firstly, it offers an overview of the existing information base supporting marketing decisions in the Bulgarian tourism sector. Secondly, it outlines the main problems associated with segmentation of the tourist market. Thirdly, based on the empirical analysis of original survey data, the study puts forward a set of criteria applicable for the segmentation of consumers in Bulgaria.

1. Problem Statement

The successful use of a differentiated approach in the offering of tourism products requires correct segmentation of the market from a methodological and practical point of view. An overview of the literature studying the tourism market in Bulgaria reveals three main gaps that deserve further attention.

Firstly, the institutions at the national level, which are involved in data collection and processing, focus primarily on tracking the flow of tourists in

the country, grouping tourists according to socio-demographic variables, emitting markets, visited tourist destinations, purpose of trips, tourist expenses trips, etc. This demonstrates the ongoing shortage of reliable information regarding the expectations and attitudes of customers, which is essential for reliable segmentation.

Secondly, a review of the existing scientific and business literature studying the Bulgarian tourist market highlights two distinct strands. The first strand primarily consists of studies analysing the market structure, monitoring trends in the practice of tourism, examining the problems faced by providers (tour operators, travel agencies, etc.) of tourism services and tracking changes in government policies affecting the tourism industry (Penerliev, 2016; Kusheva, 2015). In the second group of studies, authors group tourists mainly on the basis of their nationality or practiced type of tourism (Genchev, 2016; Ilieva, 2017). While such studies are undoubtedly informative, they do not address the key question regarding the motivations of consumers in the process of making a purchase decision. Segmentation based on expectations and/or customer attitudes towards different tourism services remains poorly developed, despite its critical importance for effective marketing.

Thirdly, there are a few of recent national studies which utilise empirical data in order to assess similarities between users of different tourism products and group them according to market-based criteria (Marchevski, Grigorova, Yordanov, & Neykova, 2022; Dogramadjieva, 2022; Marchevski & Neykova, 2022). At the same time, the topic of segmentation in tourist markets has received significant attention in international scholarship (Dolnicar, 2020; Promnil, 2020; Lee, Jan, Tseng & Lin, 2018; Pesonen, 2016; Paker, N. & Vural, C., 2016; Pesonen, J., Tommi L. & Komppula, R., 2011; Valdez, Tamagni, & Zanfardini, 2008; Zhang, J. & Marcussen, C., 2007).

Therefore, the development of a reliable toolkit for market segmentation based on robust empirical data on consumer characteristics, attitudes and expectations is of key importance for the implementation of a successful marketing approach in the offering of tourism services.

2. Data collections and methods

The study utilises data collected via an online survey carried out through the platform QuestionPro[4]. The data was collected in the period July

[4]The online survey represents a non-probability data source as it relies on an “opt-in” sample.

- September 2021 through social networks and email marketing platforms (Mailchimp, Sender, Benchmarkemail and Mailrelay). Eleven email campaigns were conducted, within which a total of 17,249 unique survey invitations were sent. Before the start of the analysis, completed questionnaires were checked for completeness, correctness and correspondence of the respondents with the target audience of the study. The total number of usable responses was 898[5].

The survey included a standardised questionnaire comprising 30 questions eliciting information about the socio-demographic profile of respondents, their behavioural and psychometric characteristics as well as their geographic location[6].

In the analysis, a posterior approach was used for segmentation, which is in line with the approach in similar studies in the literature (Hajibaba, H., Grün, B. & Dolnicar, S., 2019). Segmentation was performed using cluster analysis, which implies making consistent decisions in three main directions: (1) *choice of segmentation variables,* (2) *choice of procedure for clustering and* (3) *determination of an optimal cluster solution.*

Five groups of variables were utilised in the analysis according to the prevailing practice in similar research on the subject (Haley, 1968; Bieger, 2002; Kotler, 2005; Dolnicar, 2006; Dolnicar, 2007; Pesonen, J. et al., 2011; Marchevski, Grigorova, Yordanov & Neykova, 2022). Those included three groups of ***behavioural variables****:*

- Mode of travel (*intensity, frequency and duration of trips)*;
- Mode of planning and travel organisation (*who plans and how they plan and organize travels, with whom they travel*);
- The type of tourism practices *(holiday, spa and wellness, hobby, adventure, rural tourism etc.)*

In addition, two groups of ***psychographic variables*** were also utilised:

- Money spent (budget) for tourist activities *(daily and annual)*;
- Preferred sources of information during trips planning *(TV, radio, magazines, booklets, digital channels, personal experiences, opinions and reviews of relatives and friends, etc.).*

[5] The raw data is accessible through the following link: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1e2-yiOHwZVum5OXogTqNUdmJgwsUDZ23/edit?usp=share_link&ouid=104379193327968573728&rtpof=true&sd=true

[6] The questionnaire is accessible through the following link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_Y-nKG60a6DI_qrsxXIfL5OyD1a3W-FJ/view?usp=sharing .

When dealing with a sample size of less than 500 cases and/or in the absence of prior expectation about the number of potential clusters, hierarchical clustering is performed as a first step in the analysis and is then followed by non-hierarchical clustering. The size of our sample is 898 responses, which exceeds the minimum recommended threshold. Nevertheless, the hierarchical procedure was applied due to the absence of expectations about the number of applicable market segments and with a view to exploring potential optimal cluster solutions. Various methods and metrics were used to measure the (dis)similarities between the objects - square Euclidean distance, Rogers and Tanimoto coefficient, Lance and Williams distance. The latter two are recommended for variables measured on a dichotomous scale, which are widely used in the present research (Krastevich & Smokova, 2010).

In order to validate the results of the hierarchical clustering (checking the stability of the cluster solution), disaggregation methods (non-hierarchical clustering) were subsequently applied using K-means Clustering and Two-Step Clustering. The market segments profiling was performed using descriptive analysis and ANOVA (one-way analysis of variance).

The segmentation was carried out following the four-steps procedure outlined below.

Firstly, the database was analysed using the different hierarchical clustering methods available in SPSS 27. After analysing the generated cluster solutions based on the hierarchical clustering a final choice of one of them was made. The selection of a cluster solution based on hierarchical clustering was carried out through a selection process based on a methodology used in similar studies (Marchevski, Grigorova, Yordanov& Neykova, 2022).

Secondly, the K-means method was applied. When utilising this method, it is necessary to specify the desired number of clusters in the cluster solution in advance. For this purpose, the initialised calculated values of initial cluster centres, generated in the previously applied hierarchical clustering, were used.

Thirdly, a Two-Step Clustering procedure was applied. The option to automatically determine the number of clusters was used in most cases, but in some cases, where relevant based on empirical and theoretical expectations, it was also experimented with predetermination of a specific number of segments.

Fourthly, the degree of similarity and reliability of the cluster solutions derived by all applied clustering methods was analysed and evaluated.

3. Main findings

Based on the initial analysis, three main findings emerged.

Firstly, in all cluster decisions (for the five groups of variables) the most meaningful and logical conclusions are reached by applying Ward's hierarchical clustering method.

Secondly, for the segmentation criteria “mode of planning and organising tourist trips”, “budget" and "preferred sources of information”, similar conclusions and findings are reached regardless of the segmentation procedure used (Ward's hierarchical clustering, K-means Clustering and Two-Step Clustering). The number and the size of clusters as well as the description of the market segments were unambiguous.

Thirdly, regarding the criteria “mode of travel” and “type of tourism practices”, the generated cluster solutions (the number, size and description of clusters) based on Ward's hierarchical clustering and K-means clustering were similar. In the Two-Step Clustering, the aggregated results from the analysis were contradictory. Notably, the number and size of the different segments differed from those obtained through the other two methods. The description of the segments was also different making it difficult to draw clear conclusions about how different user groups travel or what type of tourism they practise.

3.1. Behavioural segmentation based on preferred mode of travel

Three nominal variables were used for segmentation within the “mode of travel” criterion. They relate to the way tourists travel, the frequency and the duration of their tourist trips. From the comparative analysis of the cluster means (cluster centres/cluster means), it was established that through two alternative methods - Ward's hierarchical clustering and K-means - similar cluster solutions are generated, i.e. no difference in centroids was observed (see Table 1).

Table 1.
First group of behavioural variables: main results of Ward's method and K-means

Cluster Centres								
	K-means				Ward			
Cluster	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
I mostly travel:								
– on weekends and/or holidays	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.94	0.03
– during my annual leave (one or several main vacations)	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.93
– during my annual leave, but sometimes also on weekends and/or holidays	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.01	0.03
– at every opportunity (every weekend, holidays, vacations, etc.)	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.05	0.01
Up to 3 times a year	0.18	0.35	0.28	0.79	0.17	0.35	0.29	0.81
From 4 to 6 times	0.32	0.48	0.38	0.20	0.33	0.49	0.36	0.18
From 7 to 12 times	0.23	0.11	0.21	0.01	0.23	0.11	0.22	0.01
Over 12 times	0.27	0.06	0.13	0.00	0.27	0.06	0.13	0.00
1 day without overnight stay	0.13	0.05	0.16	0.02	0.11	0.05	0.20	0.02
1 day with overnight stay	0.05	0.03	0.09	0.03	0.05	0.02	0.06	0.10
From 2 to 3 days	0.40	0.37	0.58	0.31	0.42	0.38	0.56	0.29
From 4 to 7 days	0.36	0.48	0.13	0.55	0.37	0.48	0.12	0.51
Over 7 days	0.06	0.08	0.04	0.09	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.09
Cluster size	37%	35%	16%	11%	38%	35%	16%	11%

The cluster solution derived from the Two-Step Clustering procedure did not confirm the solution from the other two methods[7] (see Figure 1).

However, in accordance with common practice applied elsewhere we accept that since more than one clustering method reaches unambiguous results, the four-cluster solution can be confirmed as valid (Krastevich & Smokova, 2010, p. 284). Overall, results suggest that individuals of distinct market segments display inherently different behaviours regarding their travel preferences. Based on the preferences of their members, the clusters are divided into „*Travelers*", "*Active Traveling Vacationers*", "*Weekend Tourists*" and "*Vacationing Tourists*".

[7] Initially, the option to automatically determine the number of clusters was implemented. The analysis of the results show that the optimal cluster solution is the solution with nine segments, which, on the one hand, is illogical and, on the other hand, did not correspond with the results obtained through the K-means and hierarchical clustering methods. Next, we experimented with pre-defining the number of segments to be displayed as a result of the performed procedure, in this particular case - four. Despite this iteration, the description of segments is impossible due to the lack of clear differentiation in the responses of respondents falling into different market segments.

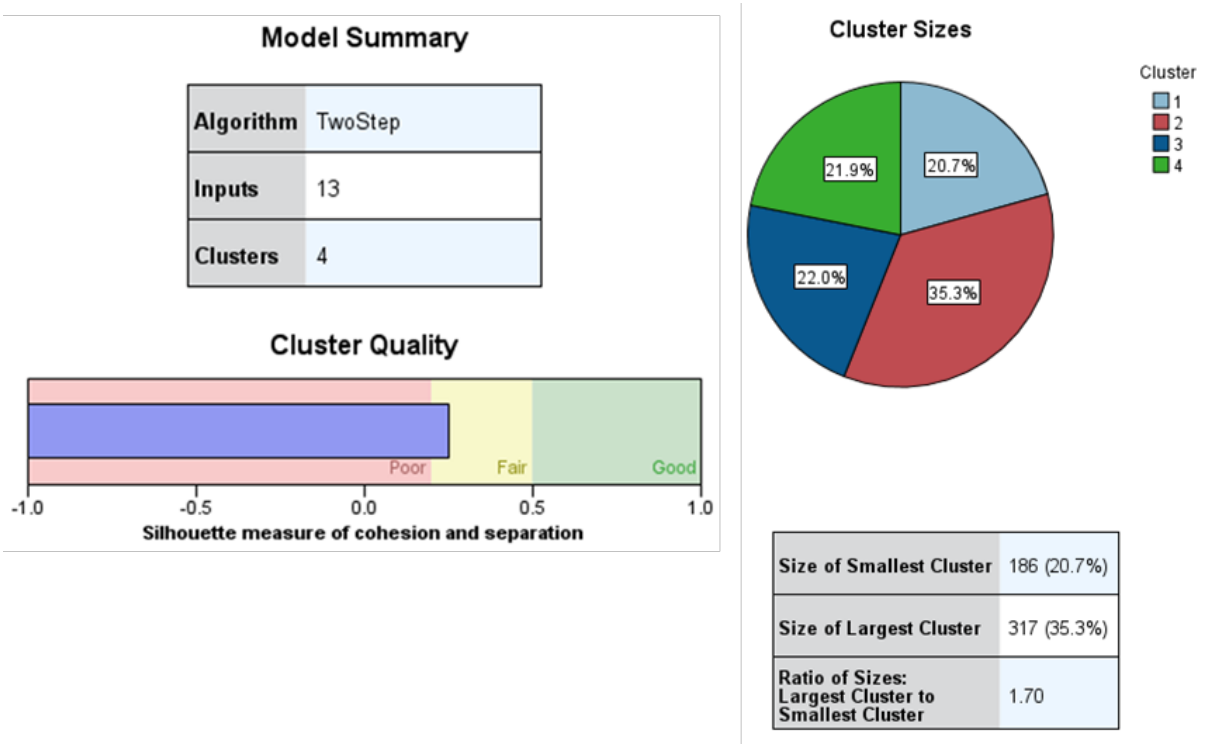

Figure 1. First group of behavioural variables: main result of the Two-Step Clustering procedure (defined number of clusters 4)

People falling into the "*Travelers*" segment travel at every opportunity (every weekend, holidays, vacations, etc.). Their estimated number of tourism trips is the largest compared to the other segments, ranging between 4 to 12 times a year. This group of tourists mainly take short trips of two or three days. They also represent the largest segment – approximately 37%.

Consumers from clusters "*Actively Traveling Vacationers*" and "*Weekend Tourists*" have roughly similar behaviour in terms of the frequency of their trips - between 4 to 7 times a year. The main difference between clusters is observed in terms of the length of trips. For the cluster "*Actively Traveling Vacationers*" the usual trip duration is 4 - 7 days, while "*Weekend Tourists*" typically engage in shorter trips - anywhere between a single day (without an overnight stay) and two to three days.

The segment "*Vacationing Tourists*" includes users who usually organise their trips primarily during their annual leave (one or several main vacations), travel up to three times a year, but make relatively longer trips – between 4 and 7 days. In contrast to expectations, this segment is the smallest one.

These results suggest that the solution with four segments differentiated on this basis of mode of travel is relevant for the segmentation of the Bulgarian tourists' market.

3.2. Behavioural segmentation based on mode of planning and travel organisation

Two nominally scaled variables were used to describe the ways respondents plan and organise their tourist trips. These variables were subsequently converted into nine dichotomous variables stressing the identity of the primary planner of tourist activities as well as the mode of planning and organisation of trips. For this group of behavioural variables, the results of all procedures - Ward, the K-means method and the Two-Step Clustering - were similar (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Second group of behavioural variables: main results of Ward, the K-means method and the Two-Step Clustering

Cluster Centres									
	K-means			Ward			Two-Step		
Cluster	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
I plan my tourist trips by myself.	0.62	0.00	0.18	0.64	0.00	0.18	0.00	0.17	0.68
Me together with other members of the household.	0.00	1.00	0.36	0.00	1.00	0.36	1.00	0.34	0.00
Another member of the household.	0.02	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.09	0.00
Other people (friends, relatives, colleagues, etc.) who are not members of the household.	0.07	0.00	0.07	0.07	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.13	0.00
Me together with other people (friends, relatives, colleagues, etc.) who are not members of the household.	0.29	0.00	0.30	0.30	0.00	0.29	0.00	0.27	0.32
I personally book.	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.02	1.00	0.07	1.00
I use the services of an intermediary (tour operator, travel agency, etc.).	0.00	0.00	0.38	0.00	0.00	0.37	0.00	0.35	0.00
Someone else booked for me.	0.00	0.00	0.35	0.00	0.00	0.35	0.00	0.33	0.00
I don't usually make reservations.	0.00	0.00	0.27	0.00	0.00	0.27	0.00	0.25	0.00
Cluster size	32%	33%	35%	32%	33%	35%	33%	37%	30%

With all three methods, the solution with three segments, whose size and description were also unambiguous, was derived as the optimal cluster solution. The segments were labelled: "*Self-initiating Tourists*"; "*Self-initiating Family Tourists*" and "*Non-initiating Family Tourists* ".

The "*Self-initiating Tourists*" segment includes people who plan and organise their tourist trips personally and independently. The term planning here refers to the process of deciding where, with whom and for how long the

trip will take place. From the descriptive analysis of the data, it appears that these are users of tourism products who usually travel with friends.

The segment "*Self-initiating Family Tourists*" is distinct due to the fact that the decisions regarding the destination and duration of trips as well as travel companions are made jointly with other household members, with respondents organising their trips independently. Members of this segment usually travel exclusively with other family members, without friends, colleagues or other companions.

The "Non-initiating Family Tourists" segment is similar to the previous segment in terms of who typically plans trips for the purpose of tourism. Representatives of this group are differentiated from "Self-initiating Family Tourists" in terms of who organises their trips and with whom they travel. They usually use the services of an intermediary (tour operator, travel agency, etc.) or another service provider and typically travel with family friends.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates the instrumental validity of the three-segment solution suggesting that the mode of planning and travel organisation is a meaningful criterion for the segmentation of Bulgarian tourist.

3.3. Behavioural segmentation based on type of tourism practiced

The type of tourism usually practiced was categorised via a set of 12 dichotomous variables. The results obtained using Ward and K-means clustering were similar, which leads to similar inferences about the size and description of distinct segments. The solution with six clusters emerged as optimal (see Table 3).

There were some differences in the results obtained through the hierarchical and non-hierarchical clustering procedures. The characteristics of the segments obtained by Two-Step Clustering were different when compared with those obtained troughs the K-means and Ward methods. A similar description of clusters was available only for five of the six distinct market segments. Despite this inconsistency, the fact that similar findings were reached with more than one method (K-means and Ward methods) confirms the instrumental validity of the six-cluster solution.

The segments differ in the combinations of types of tourism in which members engage. It is important to note that the majority of respondents practice vacation tourism (at sea and/or in the mountains) and the

differentiation between segments was based on the other types of tourism which participants practice alongside vacation tourism. Some example combinations could be vacation and adventure, vacation and spa, vacation and rural, etc.

Table 3.
Third group of behavioural variables: main results of Ward's method and K-means

Cluster centres							
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Vacation tourism (at sea and/or mountain)	K-means	0.92	0.80	0.76	0.81	0.64	0.78
	Ward	0.93	1.00	0.60	1.00	0.66	0.78
Ski tourism	K-means	0.24	0.02	0.13	0.01	0.03	0.05
	Ward	0.37	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.00
Adventure/extreme tourism	K-means	0.08	0.02	0.00	0.05	0.59	0.04
	Ward	0.07	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.53	0.04
Cognitive tourism	K-means	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.68	0.61	0.42
	Ward	0.16	1.00	0.87	0.67	0.53	0.53
Ecotourism	K-means	0.07	0.03	0.18	0.03	0.10	0.12
	Ward	0.01	0.00	0.26	0.00	0.05	0.14
Rural tourism	K-means	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.01	1.00
	Ward	0.09	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.09	1.00
Gastronomy and wine tourism	K-means	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.08	0.03	0.05
	Ward	0.05	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.01	0.05
Festival and event tourism	K-means	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.10
	Ward	0.00	0.00	0.07	1.00	0.03	0.13
Spa and wellness tourism	K-means	0.43	1.00	0.00	0.16	0.00	0.09
	Ward	0.32	1.00	0.20	0.12	0.11	0.00
Hobby tourism	K-means	0.05	0.02	0.00	0.06	0.55	0.08
	Ward	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.06	0.59	0.00
Another type of tourism	K-means	0.04	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.00
	Ward	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00

The biggest segment is the so-called "*Explorers*" (21,7% of all) who practice mainly vacation and educational tourism. People from this group are primarily interested in opportunities to visit cultural-historical, natural and other sights as well as in getting to know foreign places and cultures.

The second biggest segment comprises the people who practice exclusively vacation tourism (at sea and/or mountain). A total of 21,5% of all respondents can be classified as such "*Vacation tourists*". This group of tourists is mainly looking for relaxation and rest.

Another segment can be labelled "*Relaxing explorers*" as representatives of this group commonly practice a combination of three types of tourism - vacation, cognitive and wellness tourism. In addition to relaxation and rest, such tourists are also looking for recreation and a chance to visit cultural-historical, natural and other sights.

An additional segment of so called "*Festival tourists*" also emerges from the data. This group differs from others as in addition to recreation and rest, its members seek more intense emotional experiences and often combine vacation tourism with the attendance of festivals or other events. Such tourists represent the smallest share of the sample – merely 11.58% of all respondents.

The fifth segment comprises those labelled "*Adventurers*", who typically practice three types of tourism - vacation, hobby tourism and adventure/extreme tourism. They are motivated by desire for fun, adventure, strong sensations as well as by a preference for more active recreational activities such as hiking.

The sixth segment, the so called "*Agro-tourists*", represents the third largest group of respondents (17.04%). Representatives of this group usually engage in a combination of rural and vacation tourism. These are tourists who, in addition to relaxation and rest, also look for a change of scenery and/or an escape from everyday life.

Based on the outlined results, it appears that the types of tourism in which consumers engage represent another useful criterion for the segmentation of Bulgarian tourists**.**

3.4. Psychographic segmentation based on consumer budget

Information about acceptable budget (the daily and annual amount of money consumers are willing to spend on tourist trips) was collected through two nominal variables. The results of the data analysis showed that both the hierarchical and non-hierarchical clustering procedures produced similar results revealing three segments. The segments differentiate between consumers exhibiting "*Low Price Readiness*", "*Average Price Readiness*" and "*High Price Readiness*" (see Table 4).

Respondents belonging to the "*Low Price Readiness*" segment tend to spend between BGN 26 and BGN 50 per day when travelling, and their annual budget for tourist trips is between BGN 500-1,000. This group mainly includes people who self-identify as employees/workers. This cluster is the second largest, bringing together approximately 34% of the sample.

Table 4.
First group of psychographic variables: main results of Ward, the K-means method and the Two-Step Clustering

Cluster Centres									
	K-means			Ward			Two-Steps		
Cluster	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Up to BGN 25	0.00	0.00	0.31	0.04	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.31	0.00
BGN 26 - 50	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.89	0.00	0.07	1.00	0.00	0.00
BGN 51-100	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.05	1.00	0.03	0.00	0.00	1.00
BGN 101 - 200	0.00	0.00	0.43	0.01	0.00	0.40	0.00	0.43	0.00
Over BGN 200	0.00	0.00	0.26	0.01	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.26	0.00
Up to BGN 300	0.06	0.02	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.19	0.06	0.09	0.02
From BGN 301 to BGN 500.	0.16	0.04	0.08	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.16	0.08	0.04
From BGN 501 to BGN 1,000.	0.31	0.20	0.12	0.30	0.22	0.12	0.31	0.12	0.20
From BGN 1,001 to BGN 1,500.	0.22	0.26	0.16	0.21	0.27	0.15	0.22	0.16	0.26
From BGN 1,501 to BGN 2,500.	0.17	0.27	0.17	0.16	0.29	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.27
From BGN 2,501 to BGN 3,000.	0.04	0.09	0.13	0.04	0.09	0.12	0.04	0.13	0.09
Over BGN 3,000.	0.04	0.11	0.25	0.04	0.12	0.25	0.04	0.25	0.11
Cluster size	33.7%	40.9%	25.4%	35.6%	38.2%	26.2%	33.7%	25.4%	40.9%

The "*Average Price Readiness*" segment comprises the largest share of respondents and includes users who tend to spend anywhere between BGN 50 and BGN 100 per day while on tourism-related trips. The annual tourism budget of members of this group is between BGN 1,000 and BGN 1,500. In terms of professional profile, the people belonging to this segment self-identify primarily as experts/specialists.

The last distinct segment includes respondents with "*High Price Readiness*" who tend to spend over BGN 100 per day and over BGN 3,000 annually for tourist trips. As expected, the size of this cluster is the smallest – approximately 26% of all respondents. Members of this segment are predominantly managers and business owners.

In light of these findings, it appears that price attitudes provide a robust basis for segmentation of Bulgarian consumers of tourist products.

3.5. Psychographic segmentation based on preferred sources of information for travel planning

For the purposes of this part of the analysis, a single variable measured on a pseudo metric scale was used. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of 11 sources of information using a 7-point Likert scale. The results from the hierarchical procedure, the K-means method and the Two-Step Clustering yielded similar results on this criterion, namely a three-segment solution. Because the variable is measured on a pseudo metric scale a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out. The results confirmed that with all three methods applied, the differences between cluster centroids were statistically significant (see Table 5, column Sig.).

Table 5.
Second group of psychographic variables: results of ANOVA

ANOVA						
	Ward		K-means		Two-Step	
	F	**Sig.**	F	**Sig.**	F	**Sig.**
Advertising on radio and television	20.173	<.001	186.907	<.001	220.909	<.001
Fliers	16.577	<.001	301.277	<.001	316.283	<.001
Advertising on the Internet	12.046	<.001	180.2	<.001	145.408	<.001
Advertising in newspapers/magazines	20.809	<.001	275.059	<.001	288.519	<.001
Books about tourism, travel and vacations	11.719	<.001	141.527	<.001	111.041	<.001
Travel sites and blogs	33.759	<.001	199.95	<.001	154.44	<.001
Tour operators and travel agencies	305.944	<.001	143.878	<.001	104.663	<.001
Social networks and forums	220.9	<.001	395.613	<.001	339.845	<.001
Online reviews and ratings	233.147	<.001	439.054	<.001	391.45	<.001
Opinions, reviews and recommendations from relatives and friends	37.884	<.001	81.241	<.001	133.761	<.001
Personal experiences	5.883	0.003	35.56	<.001	81.308	<.001
	Cluster size					
1	35.7%		31.40%		33.18%	
2	31.1%		30.62%		33.07%	
3	33.2%		37.97%		33.74%	

A number of meaningful findings emerged from the analysis.

Across all respondents the *most preferred* sources of information are: (1) personal experiences; (2) the opinions, reviews and recommendations of friends and acquaintances and (3) travel websites and blogs. Tourists from

all segments indicate newspaper and magazine advertising, television advertising and advertising brochures as the *least preferred* sources of information.

Importantly, market segments were differentiated according to the *intensity of preference* for the different sources of information, which respondents reported. The representatives of one market segment report particularly intensive preference (significantly above the average for the sample) for consulting the listed sources of information. This segment was called "*Active Information Seekers*" as its members actively seek information in order to make informed decisions when planning tourist trips.

The representatives of the other distinct market segment give significantly lower than average scores regarding their preference for consulting each of the listed sources. This segment was labelled "*Potentially Uninformed Tourists*" as it can be assumed that its representatives do not actively and purposefully search for information while planning their trips

Within the last segment, respondents' ratings gravitate around the average for the sample for the listed sources of information. Consumers belonging to this group can therefore be called "*Informed Tourists*".

The instrumental confirmation of the three-segment cluster solution and the fact that the segments differ mainly in the intensity of participants' preference for the various sources of information suggest that the degree of reliance on external information during planning can also be considered a relevant segmentation criterion.

3.6. Profiling the market segments

A descriptive analysis was performed to profile the established market segments. For this purpose, various socio-demographic variables (age, gender, education, marital status, disposable income, etc.) as well as a locational variable were used.

The results show that for all five groups of segmentation variables the socio-demographic profile of tourists does not appear to be associated with membership into any particular market segments. Accordingly, people who fall into different market segments such as "*Travelers*", "*Active Traveling Vacationers*", "*Weekend Tourists*" and "*Vacationing Tourists*" cannot be reliably differentiated according to their marital status, income, education level, location, etc. The same is valid for the segments derived from the rest of the segmentation variables.

Conclusions

Overall, the results of this study indicate that there are relevant and sustainable criteria for the segmentation of Bulgarian consumers of tourist products. The analysis suggests that Bulgarian consumers can be adequately and consistently segmented on the basis of five criteria: (1) their preferred mode of travel, (2) mode of planning and organising tourist trips, (3) the type of tourism they prefer, (4) their budgetary preferences and (5) the intensity of information search during the planning of trips. Importantly, their socio-demographic profile or location do not appear to provide a useful basis for segmentation.

Since belonging to those different market segments is likely to directly affect individual aspects of consumer choice in the process of making purchasing decisions, the findings would be relevant for a range of practitioners engaged in the tourism sector in Bulgaria. Notably, the results indicate that tourism service providers (hotels, tour operators, travel agencies, etc.) would benefit from using a more differentiated approach when defining the parameters of their services and offering them to consumers. Such differentiation has to account for the customer characteristics outlined in the above-mentioned clusters and would enable a greater impact on consumer choice in the purchasing decision process.

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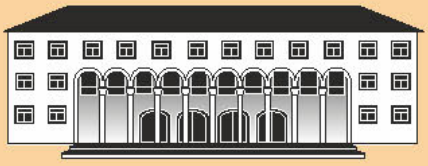

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