

Review

by Prof. Ph.D. Yonka Baltadzhieva,
Member of the Scientific Jury for the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor",
approved by order of the Rector of BFU, 17/03.10.2022
of the dissertation on the topic: "Factors for the formation of consumer attitudes in the
selection of tourist products"
presented by PhD student Sonia Stefanova
for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.2.
Psychology, Doctoral Program "Social Psychology",
Scientific Leader Ass. Prof. Ph.D. M. Prodanov

The documents submitted to me on the protection (dissertation work, author's, list of publications, etc.) meet the requirements of the IARB and its Implementing Regulations, as well as the Rules of Procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and taking academic positions at BFU. This gives me reason to review the dissertation.

General description of the dissertation work

The dissertation work is in a volume of 290 printed pages. The work is composed in three chapters, accompanied by an introduction, conclusion, bibliography and applications. The resulting research material is presented in 70 tables and 15 figures. The list of literature used contains 244 titles, of which 232 are cited. Of the sources cited, 107 are in Cyrillic and 125 are in Latin, 26 internet addresses are present, of which resources are also used. Less than 50% of titles have been published in the last 15 years. 8 standalone applications are attached in a volume of 30 pages. The applications are clear and readable and present the main research tools through which the study was conducted in five languages – Bulgarian, Russian, French, German and English.

Topicality of the topic and appropriateness of the assigned goals and tasks

The dissertation work is an attempt to insight into the theoretical and scientific application level in the essence of consumer behavior in the dynamic and diverse market for tourist products and services in the 21st century in Bulgaria. In the introduction to the dissertation, Sonia Stefanova argues the topicality of the topic developed, based on four main characteristics of the social psychological phenomenon studied: 1. The influence of psychological factors on the overall tourist activity; 2. Differentiation of factors influencing consumer behaviour, which is dictated by the diverse typology of users and the different signs on which it takes place; 3. The needs of modern tourism activity to develop science-based models to support its successful functioning; 4. In-depth knowledge of the attitudes and expectations of modern tourists to the proposed tourist product or service. These arguments set the direction and need for scientific and applied research in this field.

The theme of the dissertation work is current and significant mainly in a scientifically applied and applied aspect. One goal of the dissertation work and one main research objective of the study is formulated, which is "revealing the mutual links and influences of the factors that determine the attitudes of the users of the tourist product or service". The idea of the PhD student is clearly defined, representing a synthesized expression of the review of the existing

theoretical and experimental productions in chapter one - "the production of a model of consumer behavior" that takes into account the diversity of factors determining consumer attitudes. This idea was implemented through the implementation of 5 research tasks.

The presented theoretical model of the relationship between the output work structures (motivation, attitudes, subjective norm, perception of control, intent, realized behavior) shows that consumer behavior is influenced to varying degrees by them. The results of the realized empirical study enrich the existing research products and reveal the influence of sociopsychological factors on the formation of consumer attitudes consumer behavior in the field of tourist activity. The derived theoretical and empirical influence models provide a new insight into the phenomena studied in Bulgaria.

I believe that the topic chosen for development is dissertable, up-to-date and socially significant.

Knowledge of the problem

The PhD student presents an in-depth analysis of the problems, which is related to two areas of scientific knowledge – social psychology and tourism. The dissertation interprets and summarizes the main theoretical ideas for: attitudes, subjective norm, perception of control, intent, realized behavior and the specific content of consumer attitudes and consumer behavior in the field of tourist activity.

The PhD student knows the state of the problem, assesses creatively and interpretively the theoretical material and its transfer in an applied aspect.

Methodology of the study

The formulated research objective and the assigned tasks have determined an adequate choice of theoretical and scientifically applied research, which includes – theoretical (conceptual) basis of the study, selection of methods and actual experimental research.

A theoretical (conceptual) model for the study of consumer behavior has been developed. It is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985), taking into account the factors influencing consumer attitudes when choosing a destination.

The selected psychological tools for research build on this model. They make it possible to achieve the objective set and to obtain an adequate response to the tasks decided in the dissertation work. Three tools for examining the structures under consideration and their mutual influences are included. Two of them are an author's product and the choice is correctly justified by the PhD student:

- a survey (author's product),
- a personal questionnaire for the study of self-efficacy (as part of the survey), for the Bulgarian version the successful adaptation of the scale was used, in which the original factor decision by M. Prodanov was replicated,
- a structured interview (author's product) containing a number of questions and statements, for which the person under study must assess whether he or she is concerned and to what extent.

The organization of the study is presented in detail. For data collection within the empirical survey, the application of a non-random sample model composed of Bulgarian, Russian, English, German and French tourists is preferred. The survey was conducted in July, August and September 2019, as well as in July and August 2020. The collected data are subjected to mathematical and statistical processing, which includes descriptive analysis,

correlation analysis, dispersion analysis, factor analysis and class analysis. Data processing was performed with the IBM SPSS statistical software suite and Microsoft Office.

Characteristic and evaluation of the dissertation work

First chapter of the dissertation work (in a volume of 73 pp.) is essentially a theoretical analysis of the problem, a review of published theoretical ideas on the subject and results of experimental studies that are related to the interpreted problem. The content of this chapter is oriented towards the "theoretical foundations of the study of consumer attitudes when choosing a tourist product". Consistently, some of the main theoretical paradigms for the "attitude" structure are presented (cognitive balance theory, cognitive dissonance theory, theory of social judgments, theory of I-perception), the theoretical frameworks of the concepts of "consumer attitudes" and "consumer behavior" in tourism are defined. There is a focus on the variety of factors that determine the choice of the tourist service or activity (motivation perceptions, abilities and knowledge, beliefs, I-concept, culture, economics, social roles, status and demographic characteristics)

The analytical thought of the author is evident, its ability to interpret and summarize the available theoretical information, to extract and apply adequately, and scientifically soundly, correctly and innovatively in its work the achievements of other authors.

The second chapter of the dissertation work (in a volume of 15 p.) is devoted to the methodology of the study. The aggregated content of the work structures at theoretical level and the determination of the likely mutual influences between them (chapter one) outline the transition to the theoretical model of the study developed in chapter two. The purpose, tasks, hypotheses and research toolkit are presented sequentially.

A precise description of the object and subject of the study has been made. The formulated research objective and the hypotheses are logically related to the overall conceptual model of the study. The two hypotheses are specified by 4 subhypotheses. Of these, five specific tasks arise, which are solved in and through the subsequent experimental study, as well as the choice of the research toolkit.

The research toolkit is described readable and correct, with an indication of incentives, procedure and method of evaluation. The representativeness of the survey was also determined by the number of persons surveyed at the different stages – 316 respondents (294 respondents and 22 interviewed) from five different nationalities.

Chapter three (in a volume of 100 p.) presents the results of the study. Summaries and conclusions have been drawn which focus on the practice and with evidence of the situations raised. The detailed and analytical presentation of the results of the study in chapter three, their correct interpretation proves that Sonia Stefanova has the skills to extract and analyze rich in volume and content. Its statements, conclusions and summaries are reliably substantiated and based only on actual quantitative values obtained. This gives them weight and persuasiveness.

The style of exhibition is clear, accurate and scientific. There is a good knowledge of the scientific field of the scientific field being developed. The main ambition of the PhD student has been achieved – to discover, research, summarize and illuminate the main social psychological factors that determine consumer attitudes, and through them consumer behavior when choosing a tourist product or activity. This ambition is not self-ed, but directly related to the needs of tourism as the main economic resource in Bulgaria. Quite correctly, the PhD

student has also pointed out the limitations of the survey, which are probably multiplied on the conclusions and summaries.

Contributions and importance of the development for science and practice

The PhD student has determined 6 contributing points in the dissertation work. They are brought to the author's age. Two of them have a scientifically applied character: research, analysis and summary of the essence of consumer attitudes when deciding on the selection of a tourist product (through the eyes of various theoretical paradigms and socially psychologically studied); socio-cultural and psychological differences between tourists of different nationalities. Four of these contributions are mainly practical and applied and can be used to improve the quality of the tourist products and services provided and to ensure compliance between the requirements and their supply; the groups of users of the tourist product and service formed, forming the market environment in the region under investigation. Especially significant for the practice are the three research tools through which the PhD student collects empirical data - a survey and an interview (they are an author's development), as well as an adapted test for the study of self-effectiveness. They enrich existing models for the study of consumer attitudes in tourism.

Assessment of the publications of the dissertation work

The attached 8 articles are on the topic of the dissertation study. They are published in the period 2019-2022. 6 of them are presented as reports at international and national conferences at BFU and at the University of "Prof. Dr.Sc.(Econ.) Asen Zlatarov, M.D.", Burgas, and are printed as articles in reference editions of the two universities. Two publications are in the Academic Journal "Management and Education" – Humanities and Social Sciences of the University "Prof. Dr.Sc.(Econ.) Asen Zlatarov, M.D."

Author's Report

The author's Report is in a volume of 48 pages. It reflects correctly and precisely the content of the dissertation work and includes the main graphic material. The formulated contributions and publications on the subject correspond to those listed in the dissertation.

The research on the dissertation is a personal work of the PhD student

The research, which was conducted by Sonia Stefanova, was carried out in July, August and September 2019, as well as in July and August 2020. The PhD student points out in the author's study that "The representativeness of the survey conducted is guaranteed by the methodology of the survey by surveying samples from the respective target groups, as well as through personal interviews with a limited number of respondents" (p. 17, Author's Report).

The anonymity of all persons surveyed has been maintained. I accept that all the studies are the personal work of the PhD student and there is no evidence of plagiarism.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation work contains scientific and applied and applied results, which represent a contribution to science practice. They meet the requirements of the Law on Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (IRASRB) and the Rules of Application of the IARB. The dissertation work shows that the PhD student Sonia Stefanova possesses theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Social

Psychology", showing qualities and competencies for independent conducting of scientific research.

The scientific production presented by Sonya Stefanova is in full compliance with the minimum national requirements for the scientific and research activities of the candidates for the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Social Psychology".

I give my positive assessment of the survey presented in the reviewed thesis, author's report, results achieved and contributions. With worthy protection, I propose to the respected scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Sonia Yordanova Stefanova in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Strand 3.2. Psychology, Doctoral Program "Social Psychology".

25.10.2022

Prof. Ph.D. Yonka Baltadzhieva