

## CONSUMER MISBEHAVIOR IN TOURISM MARKET

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**Abstract:** The activities of misbehaving customers represent a significant problem for organizations across diverse sectors and industries. Their need for satisfaction is the most important driver of consumer behavior with the consumer choosing how they fulfill this need. Unfortunately, consumer decisions often lead to consumer misbehavior and negative effects on the service provider or on other consumers. Consumer misbehavior is difficult to control. First, it is not always possible to prove misbehavior of a particular consumer. On the other hand, preventive actions, like social campaigns, may not always reach the target audience. Moreover, neither service provider regulations nor monitoring of infrastructure sufficiently prevents consumers from misbehaving in every case. It seems, however, that the consumers who reject the fraudulent behavior of others have a crucial role in the fight against consumer misbehavior, as they are constant observers of this phenomenon and can react immediately. The aim of this article, therefore, is to present the concept of consumer misbehavior with examples relating to the tourism market. Moreover, the attitudes of consumers towards consumer misbehavior are examined through ethnographic research.

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### Introduction

Tourism involves a very complex and sophisticated market, which includes and relates to a combination of various sectors and fields of industries, worldwide. In an era of globalization, the tourism market is acquiring new dimensions. With development of technologies, consumers have access to unlimited sources of information. Moreover, the transportation infrastructure allows consumers to travel to almost any place within the world, and as a result, consumers gain new possibilities to satisfy their needs. Their need satisfaction is the most important driver of consumer behavior, and a consumer can choose a way of fulfilling this.

Unfortunately, consumer decisions often lead to consumer misbehavior, and these have negative effects on service providers or other consumers. It is difficult to control consumer misbehavior. First, it is not always possible to prove that a particular consumer misbehaved. On the other hand, preventive actions, like social campaigns, may not reach the target audience. Moreover, neither service provider regulations nor monitoring of infrastructure are enough to prevent consumers misbehaving in every case.

It seems, however, that the consumers who do not accept fraudulent behavior of others have a crucial role in the fight against consumer misbehavior, as they are constant observers of this phenomenon and can react immediately. The aim of this article, therefore, is to present the concept of consumer misbehavior with examples relating to the tourism market. Moreover, the attitudes of consumers towards consumer misbehavior are examined through ethnographic research.

### Consumer misbehavior on tourism market

Consumer violation of the generally accepted norms of conduct in consumption situations, and thus disruption to consumption order, defines consumer misbehavior in general. The consumer misbehavior is a part of people's conduct in their role as consumers within exchange situations, which are a key component of the overall culture of consumption. Negative consumer behavior is a significant phenomenon, which affects both companies and consumers (Fullerton & Punj, 2004, 1239).

Consumer misbehavior may be divided into four main groups, among which particular behaviors have common reasons and characteristics (Solomon, 2010, p. 31):

- a) Consumer terrorism;
- b) Addictions;
- c) Consumed consumers;

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d) Consumer fraud.

In a general sense, the phenomenon of consumer terrorism occurs in the case of consumers who set out to destroy the image of a particular brand. Such behavior can occur as a response to poor consumer service or dissatisfaction. In this case, consumers express their dissatisfaction publicly, among friends, relatives, or on blogs and webpages. There are several forms of consumer terrorism. One is where consumers purposely insert unwanted items or substances into food they intend consuming just to avoid payment or to receive reimbursement from the seller. Another form of consumer terrorism involves consumers spreading unjustified negative information about service providers, for example, to harm their image, intentionally.

Addictions are another problem in the field of consumer behavior. Consumer addiction is a physiological or psychological dependency on products or services (Solomon, 2010, p. 31). In the tourism market, the addictions of consumers can have a significant impact on service providers. For instance, research highlights that alcohol-related aggression and assaults occur regularly in bars and restaurants (Haines & Graham, 2009), and “drink drivers” often originate from alcohol-serving venues (O’Donnell, 1985). Consumers’ excessive alcohol consumption in alcohol-serving establishments has negative effects on their social and physical wellbeing. For owners of alcohol service establishments, alcohol-related incidents often generate tremendous costs and their company’s positive image is at risk if such situations continue on a daily basis. The addictions also boost the drug tourism, which involves consumers traveling to countries where drugs, like marijuana, are legal, e.g. Spain, Portugal, Netherland, Canada, and Uruguay (Higher Perspective, n.d.).

One other pathology of consumer behavior is compulsive consumption. This term refers to repetitive shopping, often excessive, as an antidote for tension, anxiety, depression, or boredom (Solomon, 2010, p. 32). Compulsive consumption is a kind of addiction, in terms of an addiction to shopping. This behavior appears frequently because of low self-esteem, where consumers treat shopping as a way of reaching some social level and respect (Shoham & Makovec Brencic, 2003, p. 127). Such a disorder also appears in the tourism market (Apostolopoulos, Leivadi & Yiannakis, 2013, p. 291). Consumers focus on shopping rather than on touristic attractions, excessively buy souvenirs, and often make a purchase of counterfeit products. An interesting phenomenon in terms of the tourism market that could be treated as a form of compulsive consumption is the collecting of a hotel’s mini hygienic products, with consumers often collecting them up to every day when items are unused. One other misbehavior under this category is excessive consumption of food and beverages during “all-inclusive” holidays.

The next negative phenomenon is the “consumed consumers”. Consumed consumers are consumers who are treated as commodities and who become subjects of businesses (Solomon, 2010, p. 32). In the tourism market, prostitution can take a form of sexual tourism, which, including child-sex tourism, involves an increasingly large segment of the world market. An estimated 25% of sex-tourism customers are from the United States. This group helps support a multi-billion dollar illegal commercial sex trafficking industry (Fight Slavery Now, n.d.). Traditionally, this phenomenon is associated with middle-aged males. However, for example in the Caribbean, it is also common among female tourists (Herold, Garcia & DeMoya, 2001, p. 979). An interesting example of the “consumed consumers” phenomenon is the trade of organs, blood, or other parts of the human body. Purchasing such “goods” is illegal in the majority of countries. However, there are some countries, where the trade of organs is allowed, for example in Iran, where compensation for living organ donors is not only legal, but also facilitated by the government. The organ transplantation is available only for Muslim patients, but still makes Iran a destination of medical tourism (Tober, 2007, p. 155). The last example of consumed consumers involves the sale of babies. Surrogate mothers agree to be medically impregnated for an agreed amount of payment. Commercial surrogacy arrangements now cross borders, with developed-world couples contracting, for example, Indian surrogates to gestate their children (Panitch, 2013, p. 274).

Finally, consumer theft and fraud must be mentioned. One of the biggest problems in every market is shoplifting (Solomon, 2010, p. 31). Consumers can often decide to steal a product instead of purchasing it. The reasons are different each time. However, surprisingly, it is not only because of financial hardship. Shoplifters are often quite rich people seeking some excitement. Frequently, the

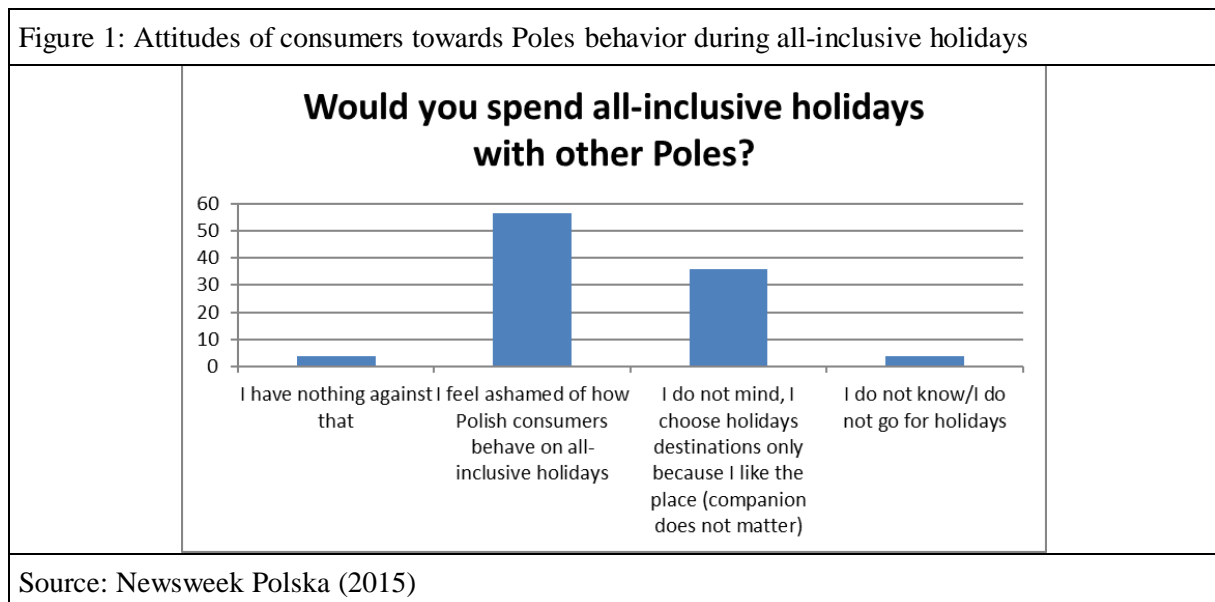
thieves are teenagers, aiming to obtain the respect of their peers. The problem is common and can cause serious losses for companies. Another type of consumer theft and fraud is an illegitimate complaining behavior. This term refers to a deliberate post-service attempt to gain monetary reimbursement or reparation without justification through appealing in writing to centralized customer service departments (Harris & Reynolds, 2004, p. 344). Consumers in the hospitality market can quite often submit an illegitimate complaint in order to receive a reimbursement. They especially search for inconsistencies between the service promised and that provided or create such inconsistencies just to create the background for unjustified claims.

**Consumers’ attitudes towards misbehavior in the tourism market**

In order to understand the attitudes of consumers toward misbehavior during holiday trips, netnography research was conducted. Netnography is a new form of ethnographic research that analyzes online behavior of individuals in order to provide useful insights (Jemielniak, 2013, p. 97). Netnography is adapted for the study of outstanding conditions of today's social worlds, mediated by computer use. It is faster, simpler, and less expensive than traditional ethnography. Moreover, it is more naturalistic and unobtrusive than focus groups or interviews. Netnography provides information on the symbolism, meanings, and consumption patterns of online consumer groups (Kozinets, 2002, p. 61).

Several internet forums were chosen for assessing the attitudes of Polish holidaymakers towards particular consumer misbehaviors, such as overuse of all-inclusive food and drinks, overuse of free alcohol, and noisy or rude behaviour towards hotel staff. First, articles concerning Polish consumer misbehavior on holidays were found on the most-read online sites like “Onet”, “Na temat”, and “Newsweek”, with three sites chosen based on their sequence of appearance in Google search engine results, after entering keywords of “Polak All Inclusive”. Then, the internet forums relating to these articles were analyzed.

A Newsweek article from 5 July 2015 titled “W "Newsweeku": Jak Polacy zachowują się na wakacjach?” [How Poles behave during holidays] (Newsweek Polska, 2015) raised an emotional discussion with 63 comments. The Newsweek author conducted a short survey with four questions asking about consumers’ attitudes towards spending time with Poles on all-inclusive holidays. The results are shown in Figure 1.



According to the comments and the survey, attitudes can be divided into three main categories: consumers who agreed that polish consumers misbehave during all-inclusive holidays and felt ashamed of such; consumers who defended polish consumers’ behavior during holidays; and consumers who did not mind the problem. However, according to the survey results, the majority of

Polish consumers felt ashamed of how Poles behave on all-inclusive holidays. Almost half of the comments expressed positive attitudes towards Polish consumers, with commenters defending them. In some of the comments, consumers tried to dilute the problem by giving examples of how consumers from other nationalities misbehave during holidays. Some comments concern English tourists in Cracow who were perceived as noisy and distracting. Consumers using these examples tried to show how harmless Polish overuse of all-inclusive food is compared to other nationalities' misbehavior during their stay in Poland. Some comments tried to uncover the article as unreliable.

These consumers, using "smart" words, tried to present a case that no nation can be regarded as having one type of consumer only and that in every nation there are some consumers who behave according to rules and some who do not. In contrast, comments that showed consumers felt ashamed of Poles' misbehavior during all-inclusive holidays usually indicated some detail about their experiences. Some consumers shared the feeling that Polish consumers misbehave while they are in groups. Other consumers shared the experience of their holidays during which they observed loud behavior of Poles during holidays, teaching foreigners how to speak derisive words in Polish, or overfilling their plates with food resulting in mess in the eating area. As described in the previous part of the paper, consumer misbehavior is regarded and described as unacceptable. Comments expressed regarding the attitudes of consumers by people, who did not mind the problem, usually focused on the general Polish attitude to complain as the explanation for negative comments. Consumers underlined that the aim of holidays is to relax and everything is for human satisfaction, so there is no reason for such a discussion around the topic.

An article on "natemat.pl", published in May 2013, titled "Picie w samolocie, picie na plaży, picie w hotelu – Polak na wycieczce all inclusive w Egipcie" [Drinking on the plane, drinking at beach, drinking in hotel – Pole on all-inclusive trip in Egypt] had 13 comments (Gašior, n.d.). Based on these comments, there are two main consumer attitudes indicated: consumers who perceive misbehaving as global characteristics of every tourist and consumers who perceive using alcohol and other privileges during holidays as understandable and normal. Consumers, who agreed that certain misbehaviors are typical during all-inclusive holidays, indicated that other nations also commit such misdemeanors and "misbehaving is not only a Polish thing". Consumers, who perceived it as normal, used words like "alcohol is for people" or "people work all year to go for holidays so he/she can use privileges it offers".

An article published on "Onet.pl" on 3 July 2014, titled "Skarpetki w sandałach, czyli Polak All Inclusive" [Socks in Sandals – Pole All Inclusive], has the most vivid and active discussion with 1984 comments (Kim, 2014). However, six basic attitudes observed in the previous article were also observed in these comments, with there being no additional ones. The most common attitudes of consumers were of feeling ashamed of Polish consumers' misbehavior and feeling it is not a national feature, but more a human characteristic to overuse privileges. Consumers shared their different holiday experiences of misbehaving Polish or misbehaving foreigners.

### **Conclusions**

To summarize, it cannot be claimed that the majority of consumers feel ashamed of Polish consumer misbehavior during all-inclusive holidays. There is a group of consumers who either defend them or treat their behavior as a feature of tourists in general, with there being no difference among nationalities. Some consumers do not mind how other consumers behave, as they regard the most important aspect of a holiday is to experience nice places, while other consumers perceive overuse of privileges as a normal reaction to stressful job environments. The minority of consumers do not have any opinion on holidays in their home country or at home. However, it has to be underlined that a vast majority of consumers are aware of overuse of privileges, noisy behavior, and other misbehavior examples of Polish consumers during all-inclusive holidays.

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