Author: Verena Tichy

The conscious customer. Is that even a real thing?

06.03.2020

We here at the conscious tourism academic argue yes it is a real thing. Read on for research and practical take aways on how to get to know and identify your customers' green attitudes

Research Summary

The degradation of the environment, limited resources and pollution are environmental factors individuals are apprehensive about (Han et al., 2009; Paço & Raposo, 2009). Paço and Raposo (2009) state that concerns about the various aspects of environmental problems are generated by personal experience, experiences of other people and communication produced by the media. Further the mentioned individuals' environmental concerns are likely to result in environmentally conscious behaviours in everyday lives as well as in consumption situations (Paço & Raposo, 2009).

As consumers increasingly include the environment in their personal values, believes and behaviours, customers develop a pro-environmental attitude. In the literature customers, considering the effects of their attitudes and purchasing behaviour towards the environment, are given different names. For example, researchers mirror customer's environmental concerns along a "green" continuum, ranging from "green rejecters" to "super greens" (Bennet & Williams, 2011). Therefore, customers can be distinguished into different shades of "green", environmentally conscious, environmentally friendly or "green" customers (Ataljevic & Doorne, 2000; McDonald, et al., 2006). Sub segments exist. An example for a sub segment is the ecotourist who is researched to belong to the segment of the environmentally friendly customer (Dolnicar, Crouch & Long, 2008). According to an evaluation of the terminology's wording, used to describe the customers, the environmentally conscious customer can be identified as a preliminary stage to the environmentally friendly or "green" customer, as customers have to be aware and conscious of the environment first before being friendly toward it. As a result, the environmentally conscious customer can be seen as the lightest shade of "green", or the only form which can be detected in all environmentally friendly or green customer shades. Therefore, the environmentally conscious customer will be focused at within the posts of this blog, due to its common appearance.

© 2019 – 2020 the conscious tourism academic. All Rights Reserved.

Robert and Bacon (1997), Samdahl and Robertson (1989) and Zimmer, Stafford and Stafford (1994), already researched this topic 30 years ago and refer to the term environmentally consciousness as a tendency to mentally reflect on the environment in concordance with psychological states and behaviour reflecting environmental commitment. Laroche, Bergeron and Barbaro-Forleo (2001) further explain that the environmentally conscious customer is becoming increasingly aware of the gravity of environmental problems, is becoming more ecologically conscious, is seeking to purchase eco-friendly products and services and prefers firms that favour environmental practices. Barbarossa and Pastore (2015) add the environmentally conscious customers' awareness of the effects of their own purchasing behaviours towards the environment. In addition, environmentally conscious customers seek to achieve environmental change by their choice of purchase and by acting according to their moral obligation (Barbarossa & Pastore, 2015; Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008).

What does it mean for the tourism industry?

Providing successful tourism services highly depends on the attitudes and preferences of the customers we as tourism providers engage with. First, we need to understand which customers we are engaging with in order to customise our services and consequently design conscious tourism services. Therefore, analysing our existing customers is a good starting point for understanding the degree of customers' green consciousness and green values. Be aware that a customer's green consciousness comes in many different shades of "green" as explained above. In order to identify your customers' shades of green engage and communicate with them to find out more. Try to listen to insights about their thoughts and attitudes when it comes to for example the use of resources in general and their individual actions of "greenness" in their homes and daily lives. Try to find a way on how to "speed date" your customers on that topic without disturbing them. Be transparent about your reasons. Once you have identified your existing customers' level of "greenness" compare the results with your provided tourism service. Which levels of "greenness" can be identified and are your customers' green intentions met by your service?

Not sure how to go on about this or incorporate this practically? Stay tuned for upcoming posts.

© 2019 – 2020 the conscious tourism academic. All Rights Reserved.

References:

- Ataljevic, I., Doorne, S. (2000). Staying Within the Fence: Lifestyle Entrepreneurship in Tourism. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 8 (5), 378-391.
- Bennett, G., Williams, F. (2011). Mainstream Green: Moving sustainability from niche to normal. The Red Papers. No. 4, Ogilvy & Mather.
- Dolnicar, S., Crouch, G., Long, P. (2008). Environment-friendly tourists: what do we really know about them? Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 16 (2), 197-210.
- Dolnicar, S., Leisch, F. (2008). An investigation of tourists' patterns of obligation to protect the environment. Journal of Travel Research, 46 (4), 381-391.
- Han, H., Hsu, L. T. J., Lee, J. S. (2009). Empirical investigation of the roles of attitudes toward green behaviors, overall image, gender, and age in hotel customers' eco- friendly decision-making process. International Journal of Hospitality Management, 28 (4), 519-528.
- Laroche, M., Bergeron, J., Barbaro-Forleo, G. (2001). Targeting consumers who are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products. Journal of Consumer Marketing, 18 (6), 503-520.
- McDonald, S., Oates, C., Alevizou, P. J., Young, W., Hwang, K. (2006). Communication strategies for sustainable technologies: Identifying patterns in consumer behaviour. Paper presented at the Greening of Industry Network's 13th International Conference Interaction and Communication: A Clear Route to Sustainability? 2–5 July, University of Cardiff.
- Paço, A., Raposo, M. (2009). "Green" segmentation: an application to the Portuguese consumer market. Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 27 (3), 364-379.
- Robert, J.A., Bacon, D.R. (1997). Exploring the subtle relationships between environmental concern and ecologically conscious consumer behavior. Journal of Business Research, 40 (1), 79–89.
- Samdahl, M. E., Robertson, R. (1989). Social determinants of environmental concern: specification and test of the model. Environmental Behaviour, 21 (1), 57–81.
- Zimmer, M. R., Stafford, T. F., Stafford, M. R. (1994). Green issues: dimensions of environmental concern. Journal of Business Research, 30 (1), 63–74.

© 2019 – 2020 the conscious tourism academic. All Rights Reserved.