Consumers' Behavior in the Travel Services Markets of Asia-Pacific Region

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ABSTRACT

The article states that the relevance of cross-cultural researches increases in the globalization period. The methods for assessing the impact of different cross-cultural characteristics on consumers' behavior on business-to-consumer (B2C) markets has not been developed so far yet. The purpose of this research is to develop the method for assessing the impact of cross-cultural characteristics on consumers' behavior on the travel services market of the Asian-Pacific Region countries. The culture model, including cultural values, material and social environment components, has been developed. The features of the culture model formation and building were identified during the process of the research taking into account the travel services market specificity. The results of the developed method evaluation were demonstrated in terms of some Asia-Pacific Region countries (China, Russia, South Korea, Japan). The novelty of the research is the development of methodical tools for assessing the culture model impact on consumers' behavior on the travel services market (contingency matrix). The developed procedural guidelines can be applied to assess the impact of cross-cultural features on the consumers' behavior on the B2C markets.

Keywords: Cross-culture, Consumers' Behavior, Methodology, Travel Services Market, Culture Model
JEL Classifications: L83, F69, M39

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and international trade development increases the flow of goods (services, ideas) cross the borders of countries and cultures, reducing the technological barriers, which increases the relevance of cross-cultural researches. Crossing geographical boundaries countries is less risk than crossing cultural boundaries. It's due to higher inertia and the resistance of the national culture values to changes in comparison with technologies and other factors influencing on the consumers' behavior.

The impact of cross-cultural features on the formation of the consumer behavior model is due to the fact that a consumer often decides to purchase products not on basis of their functionality but on the basis of their symbolic content. In the modern context, the culture influences all stages of the consumer decision to buy, including problem recognition, information searching, options evaluation, and others, with the consumer's choice being defined by the peculiarities of the cultural environment, as well as by the process of cultures interpenetration.

The researches of the impact of cross-cultural differences on consumers' behavior are relevant, required by the international scientific and business community. They are of a transdisciplinary character. Moreover, the necessity of such researches is due to need for multinational companies in the alignment of corporate, functional and instrumental strategies to the features and originalities of different cultures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The researches of cross-cultural differences are the main investigation topics for biologists, psychologists, ethnic psychologists, cultural scientists, managers, marketing specialists and other scientists. Cross-cultural characteristics are analyzed in the works of such authors as Adler (2011), Aleshina (2011),

Lebedeva (2010), Matsumoto (2002), Agarwal et al. (2010), Allen et al. (2005), Beaudreau (2006), Bond et al. (2004), Brettell and Sargent (2012), Cheung et al. (2011), Choi and Geistfeld (2004), Chuah et al. (2009), Cornwell and Drennan (2004), Dana (2014), Divine and Lepisto (2005), Gardiner and Kosmitzki (2010), Ger and Belk (1996), Gesteland (2012), Goodwin and Verhage (1998), Graham (2009), Harrison (2006), Inglehart and Baker (2000), Kilbourne et al. (2005), Leiser et al. (1990), Lewis et al. (2009), Luna and Gupta (2001), Minkov (2012), Moven (1995), Murphy-Berman et al. (2002), Owe et al. (2013), Pepermans and Verleye (1998), Rigby et al. (2009), Solomon (2012), Sutter (2004), Thomas (2008), Willinger et al. (2003). The works of the above mentioned scientists demonstrate the specificity of the culture and personality interactions (Adler, 2011; Matsumoto, 2002; Cheung et al., 2011; Dana, 2014), the development of the methods for studying the nature of their relationship (Cheung et al., 2011), the investigation of the culture influence on consumers' behavior (Choi and Geistfeld, 2004; Divine and Lepisto, 2005; Goodwin and Verhage, 1998; Graham, 2009). The empirical approach dominates in the cross-cultural research practice nowadays: The most part of the theoretical conclusions is based on the field studies materials (Chuah et al., 2009; Murphy-Berman et al., 2002). Varieties of approaches and methods have been developed in the sphere of the culture models investigation. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used (Brettell and Sargent, 2012; Cheung et al., 2011; Gardiner and Kosmitzki, 2010), each of them being unique, having its own characteristics, advantages and disadvantages. Thus, the methods for the cultural values register (Aleshina, 2011; Lebedeva, 2010; Moven, 1995), the consumers psychological differences description (Adler, 2011; Matsumoto, 2002; Cheung et al., 2011) are used in the cross cultural features investigations; the Rokeach'es method is successful in practice (Malhotra, 2010). The disadvantage of the above mentioned approaches is the fact that their individual usage underdraws the comprehensive picture of the culture model as a whole. Another problem is the choice of the comparison basis while studying the cross-cultural values. One more problem is associated with the reliability and objectivity of the information and the necessity of huge resources expenditures (time, human capital, material resources).

So, the methods above are often used, the majority of the methods for comparative cross-cultural studies are based on them. However, it should be noted that researchers rather seldom use their combination or complex methods, although this may be the most successful approach to solving such a comprehensive issue as consumers cross-cultural research. All this shows the importance of developing a comprehensive method for assessing the impact of the cross-cultural differences on the consumers' behavior.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the research is to offer a comprehensive method for assessing the cross-cultural differences impact on consumers' behavior on the travel services market of Asia-Pacific countries. While developing the cross-cultural research method it is necessary to determine the basis for the comparison of different cultures, to develop the research tools, to choose the methods of data collecting and processing. Analysis of the scientific literature on

the research issue showed that there was a considerable amount of different methods for comparing cultures. All of them are based on the application of quantitative or qualitative methods. Our research offers an integrated approach combining quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods.

First, it is necessary to define the list of grounds for comparing the cultures of different countries. For this purpose we suggest to use the culture matrix (Moven, 1995), adapted to the travel services market, which includes such culture model elements as the cultural values, social and material environment characteristics. While designing the system of cultural values the following values classification was used: Physical values (sports, wealth, appearance, health, working conditions, strength, activity, travelling, attractiveness, financial stability); emotional values (responsibility, emotional constancy, prestige, competitiveness, religion, security, trust, love, friendship, passion, openness, efficiency, help); intellectual values (education, creativity, wisdom, complexity, skill to disregard, independence, improvement, planning, reading, communication, intelligence, accuracy, decision-making) (Adler, 2011).

The elements of culture within the social and physical environment (Aleshina, 2011; Moven, 1995), adapted to the travel services market include the following characteristics:

- Social (institutional) environment (level of the government regulation of the tourism industry development in the country; the level of the tourism safety ensuring for citizens, society and state; the level of political stability in the country; the level of the political system influence on the tourism development; the level of the business environment development; the level of the religious persuasions influence on the development of the tourism industry, the level of various subcultures development in the country, the population living standard in the country);
- Material environment (the level of the country economic development; the level of science and technology development; the level of the transport system development and safety; the level of public catering development; the level of health and leisure institutions development; the level of the hotel chain development; the level of the education system development; the level of the infrastructure development for holding conventions and exhibitions; the level of the unique natural resources endowment attractive for tourists; the level of the ecological safety; the level of the health system development).

The culture model has been developed on the basis of the elements above. To compare the culture models of different countries the model elements were estimated by respondents in accordance with the Likert scale (Malhotra, 2010), where 1: Means - disagree completely, 2: Means - disagree, 3: It's difficult to answer, 4: Means - agree, 5: Means - agree completely. Then the averaged estimates were calculated, upon which the radar plots were constructed, allowing visual assess similarities and differences of the culture models by their superposition.

The sources of the initial information were the results of consumers' questionnaire survey. 300 respondents were the sampling size to carry out the questionnaire survey. The following

factors were considered while developing the sampling frame: Age and education, nationality, knowledge of the Russian language.

The proposed method of the culture model assessment was used in identifying differences in the consumers' behavior in the terms of the travel services markets of some Asia-Pacific countries (South Korea, China, Russia, Japan).

The culture model elements and the consumers' behavior parameters were compared by constructing the contingency matrix (Table 1).

4. ANALYSIS RESULTS

The results of the respondents survey indicated that the cultural values were considerably important for the representatives of all cultures (Figure 1).
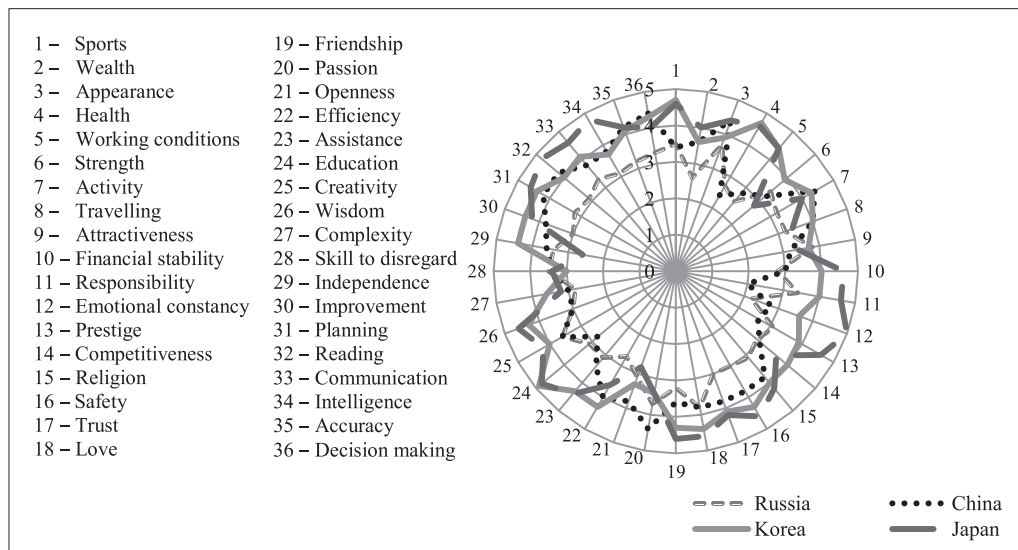
Maximum cross-cultural gaps in the physical values assessment were observed in the following parameters: "Health," "working conditions" (mostly typical for the representatives of the Korean and Japanese nations). Minimum gaps in the physical values assessment were found in the parameter "attractiveness" according to the respondents' of different cultures opinions. Maximum gaps in the respondents' assessments of different cultures were found in the following emotional values parameters: "Responsibility," "emotional constancy," "prestige" (more typical for the representatives of the Korean and Japanese nations). Minimum gaps in the emotional values assessment were recorded in the parameters "religion," among the representatives of Chinese, Korean and Japanese nations. Maximum gaps in the intellectual values assessment were found in the parameter "training," "reading," "intelligence" (less important for the respondents of the Chinese and Russian nations).

Table 1: Matrix for estimating the culture model elements impact on the tourism products consumption in the Asia-Pacific region countries

Features of consumers' behavior	Elements of the culture		
	Cultural values	Social environment (institutional)	Material environment
Product (range of services, qualifications of the tour operators, individual approach to a client, reliability of the operator and others) Price (cost of a service, credit payment, availability of discounts, "hot" tours, etc.) Sales (location of a tour company, interaction marketing channels for tourism products, conveniences for purchasing tourism products, intermediaries at tourist services rendering and others) Promotion (advertising, PR, sales promotion, personal sales, brand, the tour operator image, etc.)		Assessment of the consumers' behavior features conformity to the culture model elements	

Figure 1: Distribution of the respondents' average scores of the cultural values by the Likert scale in the context of the analyzed countries, the author's development

1 – Sports
2 – Wealth
3 – Appearance
4 – Health
5 – Working conditions
6 – Strength
7 – Activity
8 – Travelling
9 – Attractiveness
10 – Financial stability
11 – Responsibility
12 – Emotional constancy
13 – Prestige
14 – Competitiveness
15 – Religion
16 – Safety
17 – Trust
18 – Love
19 – Friendship
20 – Passion
21 – Openness
22 – Efficiency
23 – Assistance
24 – Education
25 – Creativity
26 – Wisdom
27 – Complexity
28 – Skill to disregard
29 – Independence
30 – Improvement
31 – Planning
32 – Reading
33 – Communication
34 – Intelligence
35 – Accuracy
36 – Decision making

Russia   China
Korea   Japan

The respondents' assessments in different countries according to the parameters of social (institutional) environment were considerably different (Figure 2).

The Japanese respondents showed the highest level of the social environment influence on the formation of the culture model which is clearly seen by such parameters as "The level of providing the tourism safety for citizens, government and society," "The level of political stability in the country," "The level of the business environment development," "The level of the population living standards in the country." It is worth noting that the most important parameter of the social environment influence on the formation of the culture model and in its turn defining the consumers' behavior on the travel services markets was the "living standard" for the representatives of the Chinese and Korean nations. The respondents from Russia stated the lowest level of the social (institutional) environment parameters influences on the culture model and the consequent consumers' behavior. Minimum cross-cultural gaps in the social environment elements assessment were fixed by the parameters of the "political system."

Material environment was characterized by the considerable gaps in the respondents' assessments in comparison with the cultural values and the parameters of the social environment (Figure 3).

Maximum cross-cultural gaps in the respondents' assessments of the material environment elements were stated by the following parameters: "Level of the country economic development," "level of the science and technology development," "level of the transportation system development and safety," "level of the education system development." Minimum gaps were found in the parameter "level of the environmental safety." It may be noted that the most considerable effect of the material environment elements on the formation of the culture model, defining the consumers' behavior on the travel services markets was reported by the representatives of the Japanese and Chinese nations.

The contingency matrices of the elements forming the culture model of a particular country and of the consumers' behavior on the travel services market were constructed in accordance with the questionnaire results (Tables 2-5).

Figure 2: Distribution of the respondents' average scores of the social environment by the Likert scale in the context of the analyzed countries, the author's development
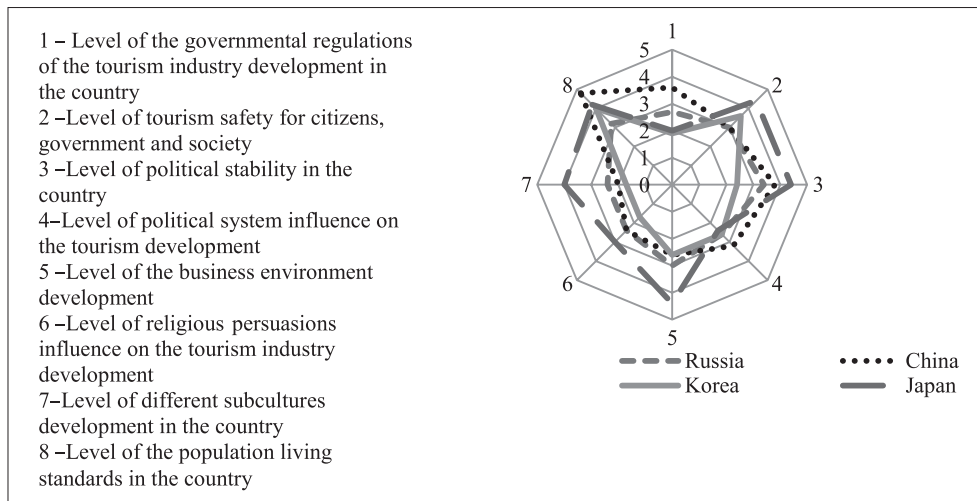

1 – Level of the governmental regulations of the tourism industry development in the country
2 –Level of tourism safety for citizens, government and society
3 –Level of political stability in the country
4–Level of political system influence on the tourism development
5 –Level of the business environment development
6 –Level of religious persuasions influence on the tourism industry development
7–Level of different subcultures development in the country
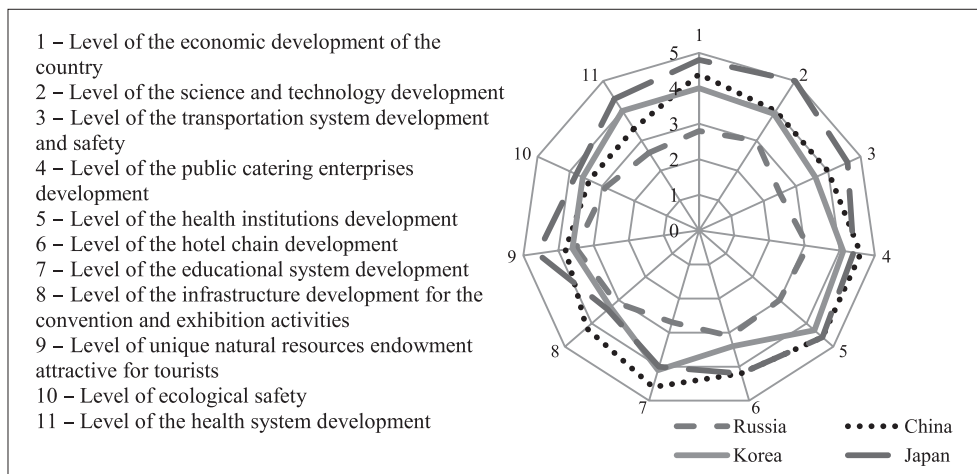8 –Level of the population living standards in the country

Figure 3: Distribution of the respondents' average scores of the material environment by the Likert scale in the context of the analyzed countries, the author's development

1 – Level of the economic development of the country
2 – Level of the science and technology development
3 – Level of the transportation system development and safety
4 – Level of the public catering enterprises development
5 – Level of the health institutions development
6 – Level of the hotel chain development
7 – Level of the educational system development
8 – Level of the infrastructure development for the convention and exhibition activities
9 – Level of unique natural resources endowment attractive for tourists
10 – Level of ecological safety
11 – Level of the health system development

The analysis of the contingency matrix of the consumers' behavior and the culture model elements features on the travel services market of South Korea showed a high degree of the cultural values influence on the consumers' behavior features in the product selection and the terms of its purchasing (the values by the Likert scale are 4.12-4.32).

The detailed characteristics of the selected tourist product were shown in the survey tools (Table 1). They included a range of services, qualification of a tour operator, individual approach to a client, tour operator reliability and others.

The material environment elements also influence on the consumers' behavior model on the travel services market of South Korea (the values by the Likert scale are 3.84-4.08).

The analysis of the contingency matrix of the consumers' behavior and of the culture model elements on the travel services market in China (Table 3), shows a high degree of the material environment elements influence on the consumers' behavior features in the choice of the tourist product, its price, purchasing features and promotion (the values by the Likert scale are 4.0-4.3). The social environment elements influence on the travel services consumers' behavior to a lesser extent in the analyzed countries.

The analysis of the contingency matrix of the consumers' behavior features and the culture model elements shows the less impact of the cultural elements on consumers' behavior on the travel services market of Russia (the values by the Likert scale are mainly up to 3.5 points) (Table 4).

According to the respondents' opinion, it is mostly explained by the underdevelopment of the hotel chain, of the health institutions, the infrastructure for congress and exhibition activities, the low level of the transportation system development and safety.

The analysis of the contingency matrix of the consumers' behavior features and the culture model elements on the travel services market in Japan showed the moderate effect of the culture model elements on the choice of the tourism products (the values by the Likert scale are 3.51-3.70) (Table 5).

The elements of the Japanese culture model influence on the tourist product purchasing features to the least extent (the values by the Likert scale are 2.74-2.92).

Thus, the influence of the culture model elements on the travel services consumers' behavior characteristics is clear, that requires their considering by the tourist companies while the decisions making relating to the features of the product offer, its sales, pricing and the choice of the discounts system, as well as while promoting the tourism products both to the domestic and the external market.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The following factors were developed in the framework of this research:
1. A comprehensive evaluation method for assessing the cross-cultural differences influence on consumers' behavior was developed, which was evaluated in the terms of the travel services markets of some countries in the Asia-Pacific Region.
2. The features of the culture model formation and building, including a list of cultural values, elements of the social (institutional) and material environment, adapted to the travel services market of some countries in the Asia-Pacific Region were determined. The differences in the cultures of China, Russia, Japan and South Korea were defined in the framework of the cross-cultural analysis. It was found that the largest gaps in the cultural values forming the culture model were found in such parameters as "health," "conditions of work," "responsibility," "emotional constancy," "training" and "reading." The Japanese respondents showed the highest level of the social environment influence on the culture model formation. Maximum cross-cultural gaps in the material environment elements were stated in such parameters as the "level of the country economic development," "level of the science and technology development," "level of the

Table 2: The matrix for assessing the culture model elements influence on the consumers' behavior on the travel services market in South Korea, 2015, the author's development

Model elements	Parameters of consumers' behavior			
	Product	Price	Sales	Promotion
Cultural values	4.12	3.41	4.32	3.98
Social environment	3.41	3.05	3.41	3.27
Material environment	4.08	3.92	3.98	3.84

Table 3: The assessment matrix of the culture model elements influence on the consumers' behavior on the travel services market in China, 2015, the author's development

Elements of the model	Parameters of consumers' behavior			
	Product	Price	Sales	Promotion
Cultural values	3.80	4.00	3.80	3.90
Social environment	2.80	3.70	3.50	3.60
Material environment	4.10	4.30	4.20	4.00

Table 4: The estimation matrix of the culture model elements influence on the consumers' behavior on the travel services market in Russia, 2015, the author's development

Elements of the model	Parameters of consumers' behavior			
	Product	Price	Sales	Promotion
Cultural values	3.70	3.33	2.88	3.47
Social environment	3.51	3.51	2.74	3.56
Material environment	3.56	3.29	2.88	3.29

Table 5: The estimation matrix of the culture model elements on the consumers' behavior on the travel services market in Japan, 2015, the author's development

Elements of the model	Parameters of consumers' behavior			
	Product	Price	Sales	Promotion
Cultural values	3.70	3.33	2.92	3.47
Social environment	3.51	3.54	2.74	3.56
Material environment	3.56	3.29	2.88	3.28

transportation system development and safety," "level of the education system development."

3. The methodical tools for assessing the impact of the culture model elements on the consumers' behavior on the travel services markets of some Asia-Pacific Region countries (contingency matrix) were suggested. They allowed defining the cross-cultural gaps in the consumers' behavior in different countries, which should be considered when developing the strategies for companies' entrance to the international markets that will enhance their competitiveness.

6. LIMITATIONS

The developed methodical guidelines can be applied to assess the impact of the cross-cultural features on consumers' behavior on the business-to-consumer (B2C) markets, as the fundamental distinction of the culture model building, which determines the consumers' behavior on the B2C markets is to replace the block "personality cultural values" by the block "the country business culture values."

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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