

THE INFLUENCE OF HABITS AND CUSTOMS AS ELEMENTS OF CULTURE ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE SECTOR OF TOURISM

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Abstract: *The aim of this research is to determine whether habits and customs as elements of culture affect the behaviour of consumers in the sector of tourism, that is, whether they affect the process of re-searching tourist arrangements and their use, as well as visiting travel agencies and consumers' loyalty towards them. For this purpose, empirical research was conducted on a sample of 237 subjects. The results indicate that habits and customs have an impact on the above-mentioned aspects of consumers' behaviour in the tourism sector, which confirms research hypotheses. Travel agencies should consider the relationships between habits and customs of consumers and research and purchase of touristic arrangements, consumer's visit and their loyalty, in order to create and implement the most appropriate marketing strategies.*

Keywords: *habits, customs, consumers' behaviour, tourism sector*

1. INTRODUCTION

One social factor which has the strongest and most important influence on consumers' behaviour is culture. Culture is a phenomenon which determines the activities of individuals and provides a framework of acceptable behaviour. Culture has the influence on the behaviour of individuals which is achieved through values, rituals, heroes and symbols that are different in cultural groups [1]. Hence, consumers coming from different cultural groups have a different attitude towards economics, politics, technology and society.

For the sake of successful business, manufacturers must familiarize themselves with the culture of a particular market and monitor changes in culture that can affect the strategies and the way of conducting business in that market. Many businesses had to centralize their activities and marketing because of previously ignoring the culture and its impact, and thus they lost their sense of local market, which, instead of increasing efficiency, has led to a decline in profitability [2], [3].

Researching habits and customs of consumers is of great importance for understanding their behaviour. Purchase and consumption are repeated, in most of the cases, that is, consumers tend to buy the same brands, in the same quantities, in stores that they visit again [4]. Consumers belonging to different cultures have different habits and customs regarding these aspects. Thus, for example, the habits of Serbian consumers differ from the habits of German ones. Serbian consumers often perform small purchases in local stores, while German consumers mostly visit hypermarkets and perform large purchases. When observing the tourism sector, the habits and

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customs of the consumers differ in the selection, purchase or consumption of a tourist product. According to the results of the research of the Tourist Organization of Serbia in 2015 [5], regarding the behaviour of Serbian tourists, it is typical for them to visit destinations in Serbia once a year, mostly over the summer period, they do that after informing themselves by asking relatives or friends or choosing a destination based on personal experience, by independently organizing their trip, travelling by car or rarely by bus, using sports-recreational facilities, going to fieldtrips in the countryside and so on.

The main aim of this research is to explain the behaviour of consumers in the tourist sector through the analysis of the influence of habits and customs as elements of culture. In particular, the things which we examined are the influence of habits and customs on the behaviour of consumers when researching and buying tourist arrangements, when visiting tourist destinations, as well as their loyalty to tourist agencies. It will also be examined whether consumers of different demographic characteristics have different habits and customs in the tourism sector.

The paper consists of several parts. After introductory considerations, the second part of the paper presents a review of the literature, based on which we set the research hypotheses. The third part of the paper explains the methodology of the research and the structure of the surveyed sample, while in the following part the obtained results are presented, together with their discussion. In the last part of the paper, we made the most important conclusions about the results of the research, we outlined the limitations of the study, as well as the guidelines for the future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Habits and customs as element of culture in tourism

Culture is a widely studied term which many researchers have attempted to define. Certainly, the greatest importance in the study of culture was given by Gert Hofstede, who defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” [6]. Culture can be described as a set of everyday habits and customs which take place automatically [7]. In order to properly understand cultural differences, one must respect specific customs and habits characterized by a particular society, that is, the cultural climate. The diversity that exists among individuals belonging to different cultures arises precisely from diverse cultural habits and customs and their various interpretations.

Customs are one of the main features of the human community, when it is observed as a collective. One way of defining customs is that they represent “a set of rules which arise in the social group by a long-lasting reflection of behaviour that is considered obligatory for members of that group” [8]. Customs are very significant for the functioning of the society, because a certain life order is maintained through them. They allow individuals to affirm their belonging to the community, to get in touch with people (for example, greeting other people), to mark important events (celebrations) and they enable the tradition to be maintained with all the new things and changes that are happening. They change over time because of the effects of ethnic, political, regional and social changes (especially as a result of changing the style of life and changing times).

Habits can be explained in many ways. On the one hand, habit is behaviour that we exhibit often, mostly without previous thinking about it. When it comes to habits which we consider to be good, we tend to incorporate them in our overall behaviour. However, there are also bad habits that we are trying to get rid of, to abolish them, but they still strongly affect our behaviour [9]. The habit, from the angle of psychology, is the learned behaviour that has become an automatic response to specific signs and is functional for achieving certain goals [10]. Habit is a routine or behaviour that is repeated regularly. Old habits are difficult to change, and new ones are difficult to form, and it takes several times to repeat a certain action to achieve that.

Differences in habits and customs reflect on the consumers' behaviour. Consumers who come from different cultures have different habits and customs. Respecting local habits and customs refers to getting to know the differences among consumers in how to use the product, about the place of use, and about how to purchase the product [11]. For different type of companies, the consumer habits connected to the products they offer are of special significance. Consumers' habits are also different in the way of purchasing. Purchasing habits are a repetition of well-trained responses or reactions that are triggered automatically in certain repetitive circumstances. A tendency to repeat past purchases occurs with a wide range of products and services [12].

Tourism, as a significant sector of industry, has experienced a series of changes in its development - it changed its structure and features, and gained some new functions. In the theory of economy, tourism is seen as a kind of consumer movement aimed at meeting people's specific needs (tourist needs) [13]. When observing habits and customs, specifically, consumers or tourists have different habits regarding travel methods, number of trips (monthly, yearly), way of informing themselves, travel motivation, etc. In [14], the habits and preferences of tourists towards Costa Rica's tourist destination are examined. Similarly, in [15], the habits of "wine tourists" (tourists going to wine tours) are observed. In the [16] authors identified three segments of older tourists, depending on their socio-demographic characteristics, the habits on their holidays and reasons for travelling to Lisbon, and these segments are friendly tourists, spiritualists and innovative tourists. Habits and customs of tourists often differ between tourists of different socio-demographic characteristics. Authors in [17] (through their research which takes into account the gender structure of tourists) indicate that certain habits of female and male tourists can vary, mostly in terms of travel motivation, as well as in the way of informing themselves about tourist arrangements.

In scientific literature, there are several classifications of tourists, according to their habits and customs and regarding their choice of travelling and way of travelling. Tourists can be categorized into several types, according to their habits, and they are characterized in the following way [18]:

- The first type are *tourists who like safety*, who do not travel often, who prefer shorter trips and choose well-planned tours, buy a lot of souvenirs, often visit same destination, if it was a good choice in the past, and stay in cheaper hotels or motels;
- The second type are *bold tourists* who prefer to travel and explore, who go on longer trips, avoid crowds, like independent trips, active holidays, like to take part in the customs and habits of the destinations they visit,
- The third type are tourists who have similar habits as in the previous two categories, depending on which category they are closer to.

Tourists can be divided into different profiles, depending on whether they organize their own trips independently or contact the travel agency for that and go on pre-arranged trips. The following tourist profiles can be distinguished in this aspect [19]:

- *Tramps* do not want to have any contact with travel agencies, do not like to travel according to some planned or predetermined routes;
- *Explorers* independently organize trips and tend to deviate from plans, but still try to stick to some safe things like reliable transport or comfortable accommodation;
- *Individual mass tourists* enjoy mass tourism with small changes. They go on trips that are completely organized by travel agencies. During any activities or tours, they stick to their group and their guide;
- *Organized mass tourists* visit destinations that are not much different from their homeland, they prefer pre-prepared arrangements and do not like to have contact with local people when they travel.

One of the mostly used paradigms of culture refers to the one defined by Hofstede, according to which the culture consists of four dimensions and it is universally applicable in different countries [20]. Actually, Hofstede established the existence of four dimensions of national culture - the distance of power, individualism / collectivism, male / female values and the avoidance of uncertainty. According to the values of the cultural dimension for the Republic of Serbia, it can be concluded that the value of the distance of power is very high. The value of the dimension of individualism is low, which means that Serbia is a collectivist country. This implies that loyalty, relationships between people, and care of family members and groups that individuals belong to are of great importance. Serbia is a society with relatively feminine values, which means that individuals “work to live”, people value mutual solidarity and tend to improve the quality of life. Finally, Serbia is a country with a very high value of the dimension of avoidance of uncertainty, which means that people respect rigid patterns of behaviour, with intolerance to unusual ideas and behaviour, and there may also be resistance to innovation. Such results have been confirmed by other studies that have focused on the analysis of cultural dimensions in general, as well as in the Republic of Serbia [21], [22], [23], [24], [25].

Having in mind that habits and customs are elements of culture, there is an interrelation between the dimensions of culture and the habits and customs of the members of the culture. The dimensions of the culture for the Republic of Serbia, which are connected to the profiles of the users of services of tourist agencies in this survey, are the avoidance of uncertainty and collectivism, because they can shape habits and customs in terms of how tourists make decisions about their travels and how they organize their trips. Based on the characteristics of the dimensions of culture mentioned above, the work starts from the fact that Serbian tourists belong to a group of safe tourists and mass tourists which are characterized by the avoidance of uncertainty and by group decision making regarding purchases.

2.2. Customer loyalty in tourism

Customer loyalty can be expressed as “a deep commitment to re-purchasing or repatronisation of the desired product / service, consistently in the future, causing a repetition of the same brand purchase, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause moving to other companies” [26]. While there is a lot of research with a focus on customer loyalty towards tourist destinations, loyalty of tourists towards intermediaries or tourist agencies has not been significantly addressed, yet. Although it is obvious that intermediaries have a significant impact on the behaviour of users of tourist arrangements, the role of intermediaries and other decision makers has not been sufficiently considered in researching loyalty [27]. The quality of travel agency services is often analyzed as a predictor of loyalty of tourists to

agencies, using SERQUAL as an instrument for measuring the quality of the services of these service companies [28], [29], [30].

Different studies have focused on researching the loyalty of users of travel agencies. The research conducted by [31] showed that the gender generally does not have a significant impact on the nature or the intensity of the relationship between service quality and analyzed aspects connected to loyalty to travel agencies, but that the intensity of relationships depends on age, education, income and frequency of travelling of the respondents. In addition, some studies have investigated the loyalty of users of travel agencies in the online context [32], [33], as a result of the quality of services, perceived value and customer trust. In the study [34], the influence of the experience of users of the services of tourist agencies on the quality of relationships between them and users was determined. Other studies also discussed the loyalty of the users of travel agencies, where different participants were analyzed, such as image of the agencies, customer satisfaction and affective commitment of the users [35], but also promotional prices and perceived service prices [36].

In relevant scientific literature in the field of tourism, it is accepted that travelling represents a form of previously learned behaviour [37], [38], [39], [40], [41], [42]. In fact, in [37] it is suggested that a pre-set level of inertia for past actions can dictate future choices, regardless of the fact whether learning came from an individual or as a result of adopting patterns that reflect broader cultural and social norms. He also points out that “behaviour becomes reflexive as a consequence of the culture in which this happens and experiences gained from a certain behaviour” [38]. When considered on the level of society or country, then behaviour in travelling can become extremely constant over time [39]. In [41], it is considered that patterns of behaviour can be changed to a small extent, especially in individuals older than 45 years, because it is difficult to break the habit, even if there is an intention to do so [43]. Such patterns of behaviour in terms of the importance of habits when it comes to consumers’ choice of travel were analyzed in other studies [44], [27] and [45], which confirm the importance of the habits and customs of travelers during the journey, as well as in the creation of their loyalty to tourist destinations and travel agencies.

In accordance with theoretical framework and results of previous research, the following hypotheses can be defined:

- H1:** Habits and customs of consumers have positive and statistically significant impact on the research and purchase of travel arrangements.
- H2:** Habits and customs of consumers have positive and statistically significant impact on the visiting tourist destinations.
- H3:** Habits and customs of consumers have positive and statistically significant impact on the loyalty towards tourist agencies.
- H4:** Research and purchase of travel arrangements have positive and statistically significant impact on the loyalty towards tourist agencies.
- H5:** Visiting tourist destinations has positive and statistically significant impact on loyalty towards tourist agencies.

3. METHODOLOGY

For this study, research was conducted in the city of Kragujevac and in several districts of Central Serbia, during the period of August and September 2018. During the research, 237 questionnaires were randomly collected. The structure of the sample based on the socio-

demographic characteristics is shown in Table I. It can be noticed that most of the respondents in the sample are men (56.1%). In addition, the highest percentage of respondents are members of the younger and middle generation, with secondary education.

Division		Percent (%)
Gender	Male	56.1
	Female	43.9
Age	18-35	46
	36-55	36.7
	Over 56	14.3
Education	Secondary education	33.7
	Undergraduate studies	20.3
	Graduate studies	46

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents
 Source: Authors' calculation

The data was obtained by distributing questionnaires, with seven-point Likert scale statements (where the points are 1 – strongly disagree, 7- strongly agree). Statistical analysis of the data was performed using the software package SPSS (23.0) and the software AMOS 23. By using the confirmatory factor analysis, we measured the validity of the suggested model, through relevant indicators. After this analysis, using the structural equation modelling (SEM), we analyzed the relationships between the variables in the observed model. In this way, the testing of the hypotheses was performed. At the end of the study an analysis of descriptive statistics and percentage participation of two types of tourist profiles in the total number of respondents was performed, as well as the t test for determining statistically significant differences in terms of different characteristics of these profiles of tourists, between two groups of respondents.

4. RESULTS

Measurement of the model fit was tested by using the confirmatory factor analysis. In the case of an adequate model, the χ^2/df ratio is smaller than the threshold value of 3 recommended by [46], GFI, IFI, TLI and CFI values should be over 0.9 [47], whereas RMSEA value should be lower than 0.08 [48]. The values of the fit indices are given in Table 2, which indicate the adequacy of observed model.

Indicators	Measurement model	Recommended value
χ^2/df	1.524	<3
GFI	0.903	>0.9
IFI	0.936	>0.9
TLI	0.908	>0.9
CFI	0.933	>0.9
RMSEA	0.072	<0.08

Table 2. Fit indices of the model
 Source: Authors' calculation

By analyzing the results of confirmatory factor analysis shown in the Table 5, it can be seen that all the values of the Average variance extracted – AVE are above the recommended value of 0.50 [49]. This suggests the conclusion that the model meets the requirements for convergent

validity. The values of the composite reliability (CR) of all the variables in the model have high values, and more accurately, higher than the recommended value of 0.7 [49]. Based on the intercorrelation values between the variables and the values of the average variance extracted, it was determined that the AVE values for all the variables, are higher than the squared values of correlations of the given variables with other variables, which meets the requirements for the discriminant validity of the model. The analysis of the Cronbach's α determined that all the variables have the appropriate level of internal consistency, which is higher than 0.7 [50].

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>α</i>
Habits and customs		0.520	0.812	0.709
1. You always go shopping in the same place as usual	0.749			
3. You always inform well before going shopping	0.688			
4. You prefer to go shopping where you know the sales staff.	0.718			
5. You prefer shopping in objects recommended by your family, friends or acquaintances.	0.728			
Research of and purchasing travel arrangements		0.513	0.803	0.727
7. You mostly inform yourself about tourist destinations by asking your family, friends or acquaintances.	0.575			
8. You mostly inform yourself about tourist destinations in tourist agencies.	0.847			
9. You never buy a travel arrangement without being previously well-informed.	0.564			
10. You usually buy a tourist arrangement in a travel agency.	0.829			
Visiting tourist destinations		0.513	0.759	0.760
11. You always visit the tourist destination which you got used to.	0.711			
12. You always visit the hotel which you got used to in the place where you spend your holiday.	0.763			
14. You mostly choose arrangements with previously organized visits.	0.671			
Loyalty towards tourist agencies		0.747	0.854	0.848
15. You habitually recommend travel agencies if you were satisfied with their arrangements.	0.915			
16. You habitually buy again arrangements in those travel agencies that have highly satisfied your requirements.	0.810			

Table 3. Confirmative factor analysis and reliability analysis
Source: Authors' calculation

By analyzing the results in the Table 3, it can be seen that all the values of the Average variance extracted – AVE are above the recommended value of 0.50 [49]. This suggests the conclusion that the model meets the requirements for convergent validity. The values of the composite reliability (CR) of all the variables in the model have high values, and more accurately, higher than the recommended value of 0.7 [49]. Based on the intercorrelation values between the variables and the values of the average variance extracted, it was determined that the AVE values for all the variables, are higher than the squared values of correlations of the given variables with other variables, which meets the requirements for the discriminant validity of the model. The analysis of the Cronbach's α determined that all the variables have the appropriate level of internal consistency, which is higher than 0.7 [50] and are between 0,709 and 0,848.

Measurement model from the confirmatory factor analysis was turned into structural model, for the purpose of examining the relationships between the variables themselves [51]. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to test the hypothesized relationships among the variables. Results are shown in the Table 4.

Hypothesis	Relationships between variables	β (S.E.)	p	Result
H1:	Habits and customs → Research and purchase of tourist arrangements	0.364	0.002	Supported
H2:	Habits and customs → Visiting tourist destination	0.271	0.024	Supported
H3:	Habits and customs → Loyalty towards tourist agencies	0.287	0.016	Supported
H4:	Research and purchase of tourist arrangements → Loyalty towards tourist agencies	0.664	0.000	Supported
H5:	Visiting tourist destination → Loyalty towards tourist agencies	0.037	0.649	Not supported

Table 4. Testing of the hypothesized relationships
 Source: Authors' calculation

The results of the model of structural equations show that four hypotheses have been confirmed, out of a total number of five hypotheses which had been initially defined. Namely, habits and customs as cultural elements have a positive and statistically significant influence on the research and purchase of tourist arrangements ($\beta = 0.364$, $p = 0.002$), and this confirms Hypothesis 1. Also, habits and customs have a positive and statistically significant impact on visiting tourist destination ($\beta = 0.271$, $p = 0.024$), thus confirming Hypothesis 2. In the end, habits and customs have a positive and statistically significant influence on loyalty towards tourist agencies ($\beta = 0.287$, $p = 0.016$). This result confirms Hypothesis 3.

Apart from the influence of habits and customs on various aspects of consumers' behaviour, we analyzed the influence of research and purchase of tourist arrangements and visiting tourist destinations on loyalty to tourist agencies. Namely, the analysis confirmed that the research and purchase of tourist arrangements have a very strong, positive and statistically significant loyalty effect to agencies ($\beta = 0.664$, $p = 0.000$), while visiting tourist destinations does not have a statistically significant influence on loyalty towards tourist agencies ($\beta = 0.037$, $p = 0.649$). In accordance with these results, it can be concluded that Hypothesis H4 can be accepted, while hypothesis H5 cannot be accepted.

Apart from testing the hypothesis, the survey also analyzed the profiles of tourists, according to the previously mentioned and analyzed tourist classifications. Namely, according to the findings from the questionnaire, two profiles of tourists were selected: tourists who like safety and organized mass tourists. For these groups of questions, we carried out an analysis of descriptive statistics, in order to obtain information regarding the profiles of Serbian tourists. In addition, a t test of independent samples was carried out, in order to examine statistically significant differences between the attitudes of women and men regarding the observed statements. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 5.

Tourist profiles	% (Mark>4)	AS	SD	M		Sig.
				Female	Male	
<i>Tourists who like safety</i>						
You mostly inform yourself about tourist destinations by asking your family, friends or acquaintances.	51.6	4.490	1.633	4.656	4.244	0.214
You never buy a travel arrangement without being previously well-informed.	55.9	4.147	1.947	4.213	4.049	0.678
You always visit the tourist destination which you got used to.	92.2	5.637	1.440	5.557	5.756	0.497
You always visit the hotel which you got used to in the place where you spend your holiday.	71.6	4.813	2.095	4.492	5.292	0.058
<i>Organized mass tourists</i>						
You mostly inform yourself about tourist destinations in tourist agencies.	44.1	3.205	1.649	3.328	3.024	0.365
You usually buy a tourist arrangement in a travel agency.	37.3	3.088	1.813	3.016	3.195	0.628
You mostly choose arrangements with previously organized visits.	46.1	3.509	1.733	3.721	3.195	0.134

Table 5. Tourist profiles
Source: Authors' calculation

By observing arithmetic meanings and standard deviations, it can be noticed that respondents, on average, gave better ratings to the statements regarding the characteristics of tourists who like safety, compared to the characteristics of organized mass tourists. The highest mark was given to the statement which refers to visits to destinations to which tourists are accustomed ($M = 5,637$, $SD = 1,440$). In addition, the percentage of respondents who rated the statements with marks higher than 4 is higher in the case of a group of statements which are connected to the characteristics of tourists who like security, compared to the characteristics of organized mass tourists. This claim also confirms that the percentage of respondents who prefer safety when travelling is higher than the percentage of respondents who belong to organized mass tourists. As in the previous case, the percentage of respondents belonging to the group of mass tourists is the highest in statement which refers to the visit to tourist destinations to which tourists are accustomed (92.2% of the respondents rated with mark higher than 4).

When it comes to statistically significant differences between the rating of statements by women and by men, it can be noted that there are statistically significant differences at the level of $p < 0.1$ only in the case of a statement regarding the visit of tourists to the hotels to which they are accustomed, in the place where they spend their holiday (Sig. = 0,058). It should be noted that on average, men rated this statement with a higher grade ($M = 5.292$) compared to women ($M = 4.492$).

5. CONCLUSION

Empirical research was conducted with the goal of proving that habits and customs, as important elements of culture, affect the behaviour of consumers in the tourism sector. In particular, we examined the influence of habits and customs on researching and using tourist arrangements, as well as consumers' loyalty to travel agencies. Starting from the results of structural equations models, it has been established that four hypotheses have been proven, out of five hypotheses which were initially set. Habits and customs have an impact on exploring and buying tourist arrangements, then, on visiting tourist destinations, as well as on loyalty towards travel agencies. In addition, research and purchase of tourist arrangements has a positive impact on loyalty towards travel agencies, while visiting tourist destinations does not have such an impact on loyalty towards travel agencies. Bearing in mind that previous research mostly investigated the impact of quality, image and price on the loyalty of consumers [28], [29], [30], [32], [36], the current study has great scientific contribution, since novel variables are introduced and researched.

The conducted research and the obtained results have their scientific contribution, which is reflected in supplementing and developing the existing scientific literature regarding the observed problem of research, both in general way and in the segments of consumers. Also, the obtained research results may be useful for travel agencies to formulate appropriate marketing strategies depending on the cultural environment in which they operate, i.e. depending on the habits and customs that are common in these markets. Travel agencies should consider the causal relationships between habits and customs of consumers and research and purchase of touristic arrangements, consumer's visit and their loyalty, in order to establish the most appropriate marketing strategies to encourage consumer's actions towards them [32]. For instance, travel agencies should acquire knowledge about the ways in which their consumers are informed about arrangements, whose recommendations they are listening to and in which way they choose destinations. Furthermore, established causal relationships in this study can help travel agents to better understand how to achieve high customer loyalty [27], [29], [35]. However, the research has its limitations. Primarily, a sample of 237 subjects is not representative and the obtained results cannot be generalized. The research covers a narrow geographical area, that is, only the territory of the city of Kragujevac, which neglects the views of the respondents from other parts of the country. Furthermore, the survey covers only some aspects of consumers' behaviour, namely, only searching for and researching the arrangement, visiting destinations and loyalty of consumers.

In order to overcome these constraints, recommendations for future research can be given. The first recommendation would be about the size of the sample, i.e. it is desirable to interview a larger number of respondents. This recommendation is connected to another which implies the extension of the geographical area of research. Also, it would be good that other aspects of consumers' behaviour (attitudes, motives, satisfaction) are added to the research so that the impact of habits and customs on consumers' behaviour is examined in greater detail. It is also advisable to give recommendations to travel agencies, and that would be that prior to presenting themselves on a particular foreign market they should be familiar with its cultural environment, especially the habits and customs that consumers most often manifest in their behaviour, and to adapt their strategies to these markets in these specific habits, in order to make their tourist products, as well as their company, closer to their target consumers. Finally, travel agencies should pay attention to different types of tourists, such as tourists who like safety and organized mass tourists, because their habits and customs regarding travel arrangements and choice of accommodation are different, and therefore, they require different marketing strategies.

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