RESEARCH NOTE

SINS OF THE FATHERS: THE HOLOCAUST AND THE LEISURE TRAVEL DECISION AMONG AMERICAN JEWS

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Understanding the ethnicity and how it affects the tourism decision process is important for a better understanding of key demographic segments of travelers. This research explores the effects of past ethnic conflict on the tourism decision process for leisure travel. Specifically, this study looks at the Holocaust and the propensity for Americans of Jewish descent to choose Germany as a leisure destination. Evidence appeared to indicate that those travelers who had family members involved in the Holocaust were less likely to travel to Germany on leisure than those who did not, but that American Jews in general were no less likely to travel to Germany on leisure than non-Jews.

Key words: War and tourism; German tourism; Equity theory; Jewish

Introduction

As immigration continues to be on the rise in the US, and as immigrants account for a growing proportion of affluent consumers with the disposable income required for leisure travel, understanding how consumer culture and past ethnic conflict affect the tourism decision is becoming more important to the industry looking to better understand the key demographic segments of their target markets. Short of Hirschman’s (1981) study that related some selected aspects of Jewish ethnicity to consumer behavior, almost no attention has been focused on this comparatively affluent group of Americans: American Jews. Although there has been study of Israeli tourism patterns in relation to conflict (Mansfeld, 1999; Pizam, 1999; Pizam, Fleischer, & Mansfeld, 2002), there has been little significant research in the area of American Jewish leisure travel that has investigated avoidance behavior to Europe, more specifically Germany, because of past ethnic conflict (the Holocaust).

Ever since its inception as a nation, citizens of the US have traveled on vacation to Europe. For the most part, Americans have little reason to resist traveling to nations that were once deemed enemies of the US. Clearly, Americans flock to the
Vatican in Italy, visit the temples of Japan, and even take a walk through Red Square in the former Soviet Union. There is still a question, however, as to whether or not the ethnic group that felt the brunt of “ethnic cleansing” in the early 20th century has made the conscious decision to return to travel to the nation that was responsible for their highly organized and government-sponsored would-be demise—that group being, Americans of Jewish decent.

Ethnic Conflict and Tourism

Past research in regard to the Jewish traveler and travelers seeking to travel to Jewish-related destinations has largely looked at Israelis and Israel, and the ongoing effects of terror. The first academic work to incorporate the theoretical and the applied aspects of terrorism and ongoing war was compiled by Pizam and Mansfeld (1996), after earlier study of the global consequences of the Gulf War and similar related terror activity that affected Europe and the Mediterranean (Hollier, 1991). Additionally, Mansfeld (1999) has looked at specific security situations that have affected Israeli tourism, which resulted in guidelines for crisis management.

There has also been study of the role of tourism and its effects after ethnic and religious based violence. Anson (1999) explored the role of tourism in the aftermath of violence using the example of Northern Ireland. Mihalic (1996) examined the consequences of the ethnic conflict in Slovenia and the former Yugoslav republics. Pizam et al. (2002) looked at Israelis visiting Jordan post conflict. The goals and implications of these works was that of the exploration of peace building between the affected parties. As in these studies, there has been a great deal of elaboration on the implications of war and its consequences; however, there has not been significant study that looks at the long-term effects of ethnic conflict, decades after the cessation of violence. Additionally, other than the underlying reasons of specific ethnic conflicts (which may or may not have been resolved), no general theory has attempted to explain why a group of tourists might, intrinsically, hold animosity towards the host nation so long after the conflict has been concluded.

Jewish Travelers

The Jewish Population in the US differentiates itself from other ethnic groups in one key area, which is the fact that many Jewish immigrants that arrived in the US during the 20th century did so to flee systematic genocide perpetuated by the Nazi-controlled German state. What makes the American Jewish population attractive to tour operators and tourism bureaus is the fact that the American Jewish consumer has a great deal of buying power. In part, this is due to a higher education level of Jewish consumers, which has lead to higher paying jobs (Jewish Virtual Library (2000–2001)).

The connection between ethnicity and consumer decision making is especially important among the American Jewish population, as Jewish ethnicity is believed to exert a stronger effect on individual behavior when compared to other ethnic groups in the US (Herman, 1977). Furthermore, it has been found that American Jewish consumers show a comparatively high degree of product information seeking prior to the purchase decision. It should also be noted that both marketing and management literature has overwhelmingly considered American and European Jews to have comprised a distinct culture—irrespective of religious beliefs.

Theoretical Framework

This research, using Equity Theory as its framework (Adams, 1963), asserts that American Jewish consumers directly or indirectly seek to use their economic power to create “a restored equity” between themselves and their former oppressors, the nation of Germany, by purposely avoiding leisure travel to Germany. In other words, because Jews were so strongly on the negative side of the relationship between Germans and Jews during World War II (and the preceding time before that conflict), Jews today (who wield substantial disposable income) seek to regain balance in the “inputs/outputs” equation by opting to travel to other leisure destinations in Europe, and thus restore the balance that was clearly lost in the past dynamics of the relationship.

Adams’ (1963, 1965) theory is the most explicit (Campbell & Pritchard, 1976) and rigorously developed (Mowday, 1979) theoretical model that
can create a stream of research of ethnic conflict and as those processes that impact the American Jewish consumer’s tourism decisions. This type of research has significant implications for both researchers and managers alike, because it would explain, even if only in part, the particular choice decisions that ethnic consumers enact irrespective of other tourism-related factors.

The majority of the literature in regard to equity theory revolves around the workplace effort/fair pay relationship; however, there have been many indications that equity theory and its implications can extend far beyond the employment context (Carrell & Dittrich, 1978). In general, it is theorized that when ratios are unequal, the party whose ratio is lower is generally feeling anger (Greenberg, 1990). Equal ratios are believed to yield equitable states and associated feelings of satisfaction between all parties (Greenberg, 1990). Additionally, “individuals are theorized to adjust their own or the comparison other’s actual or perceived inputs or outcomes in order to change unpleasant inequitable states to more pleasant and equitable ones” (Greenberg, 1990, p. 401). Walster, Walster, and Berscheid (1978) indicate that these reactions may be classified as being behavioral.

The fact that American Jewish consumers do have a great deal of disposable income allows them to have a great deal of freedom of choice. In other words, because they can afford to travel to a variety of destinations, they are not forced to buy “budget travel packages,” which yield little choice in the marketplace. In many cases, Jews can afford to travel to Germany for a leisure trip, and therefore, Germany would ordinarily become a part of their consideration set, all else equal.

A Model of the Tourism Decision

The model presented in Figure 1 looks to explore the question: Has the Holocaust deterred the American Jewish Traveler from traveling to Germany as a tourist on vacations, and does the level of involvement in the Holocaust affect this process? The argument advanced is that ethnic subculture and history of experiential ethnic conflict (meaning that there are current generations still living that experienced the actual conflict), in relation to a specific tourist destination inhabited and controlled by members of an ethnic group directly involved in the past ethnic conflict influence the tourism decision.

In this model, the independent variables are Ethnic Subculture and Political Country. The response variable is the consumer tourism decision, which is simply “to travel, or not to travel.” It is assumed that the prospective tourist has an intrinsic desire to travel abroad. That is, respondents were only selected if they indicated that they would ever consider traveling to a foreign country outside of the US.

This model proposes that ethnic subculture, history of past ethnic conflict, and the political boundaries of the tourism destination affect the tourism decision. The literature thus far has looked at specific parts of this proposition, but not the entire model together as a whole within the context of a conflict that occurred over half a century ago.

This particular study and application of the model makes the same assumptions. The first is that self-described Jewish Americans are more cognizant of the former political situation in the tourist destination. There are still members of the Nazi party alive and well in Germany. There are still people who participated in the Holocaust and killed Jews residing in all areas of the host nation. With a significant number of Jews who survived the Holocaust still living, it is believed that the forced labor, mass slaughter and government-sponsored genocide are still salient in the minds of the Jewish traveler when considering a tourist destination.

Method

Ethnicity was measured using an emic approach. Using the emic approach, the respondent describes his/her own ethnicity. Research in this area has determined the emic approach to be the most appropriate (Hirschman, 1981; Ogden 2002; Valencia, 1985), and will therefore lead to the most accurate classification of study participants. In this study, two questions were used to measure ethnicity. First, subjects were asked, “What is the ethnic/cultural group you most strongly identify with?” Second, subjects were asked how strong their identification was with the ethnic group they had
selected. A scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 being very strong, and 5 equal to very weak was used to record responses. These are the same questions used for the same purpose by Ogden (2002). Based on the work by Bhavnani and Backer (2000) a scale was created to measure degree of ethnic conflict. Additionally, as with the measurement of ethnicity, an emic approach was also used as the personal degree of effect of the Holocaust—best measured by the respondent’s own perception. The respondents were asked, specifically, which friends and relatives experienced the Holocaust. Additionally, respondents were asked which friends and relatives served in WWII (European Theater) to see if there was any additional effect.

The universe of interest is American Jewish consumers currently residing in the US. The sampling frame for American Jewish consumers was composed of names and addresses given by a number of various Jewish religious and cultural organizations. Cultural organizations were used in addition to religious organizations so that the population being studied would not tilt towards the “religious” end of the American Jewish population. Names and addresses for all non-Jewish American consumers were obtained through a local marketing firm. The 300 names and addresses were comprised of not only Anglo-American consumers, but consumers of any ethnicity. Additionally, a local Philadelphia organization with a large number of African-American consumers was given 50 surveys for distribution. Of 950 total surveys sent, 450 were returned and 436 were usable. This yielded a response rate of 47%. The high response rate might be largely attributed to the $1 donation to charity for each completed survey.

After survey administration and tabulation, cross-tabulation was performed, as were extensive descriptive statistical tests. The decision to use a specific technique was based on the type of data being analyzed, as the survey used multiple scale types and multiple measures of dependent variables. Post hoc tests were conducted when necessary. In addition, demographic information such as age, income, education level, and marital status were collected and cross-tabulated to determine whether demographic variables contributed to any of the results found.
Results and Discussion

The results of the study show that in terms of past travel to Germany, American Jewish travelers were no less likely to travel to Germany for leisure than non-Jewish travelers. It should be noted, however, when respondents were asked if they were going to avoid travel to Germany in the future, the results look somewhat different, as the majority of Jewish travelers indicated that they would not desire to travel to Germany. The possible explanation for the difference is the Hawthorne Effect. Jewish travelers may have been to Germany in the past, but wanted to show on the survey that they are looking to avoid travel to Germany in the future or that they are still upset over the actions during WWII. It could also mean that potential travelers wanted to present themselves in a positive light, and wanted to appear to act and think in a way that the respondent believes is “appropriate” for his or her culture. There is also the possibility that Jewish travelers may have considered travel to Germany to witness the relics of the Holocaust as “leisure travel.”

The results also showed a difference between those whose parents were involved in the Holocaust and those who had no members involved in the Holocaust ($F = 2.274, p = 0.038$) in terms of travel avoidance preferences; however, there was no significant difference found between the other groups in terms of closeness to the Holocaust. In terms of reported travel to Germany, there was no significant difference between Jewish travelers and non-Jewish travelers ($F = 0.604, p = 0.727$).

Although the variable “past reported travel to Germany” does not yield significant results, the variable “avoidance of travel to Germany” does. The results have shown that as respondents move away from the Holocaust in terms of closeness, avoidance of travel to Germany decreases.

Conclusion and Discussion

The most significant implication is that there are indeed many American Jewish consumers that still harbor some resentment toward, and feel “a lack of equity” in relation to Germany for its involvement in WWII. This itself should sound an alarm, not only for German tourism agencies, but for agencies and operators of any nation that have involved themselves with a political cause that adversely affects a group of potential customers. There is no doubt that not every German citizen supported the Nazi cause; in fact, it is common fact that many Germans despised the Nazi regime. There is no doubt that every German company did not, or does not, support the Nazi regime; however, the perception among many Jews is that the German population-at-large who were around the time of WWII did have a significant role in the Holocaust and the systematic extermination of the Jews. Additionally, over 50 years later, the Jewish population in the US still harbors a great deal of resentment towards these firms.

There are many reasons to study our history, as humans. Not all of our history is pretty. World War II was probably the most systematically barbaric atrocity in the history of the world. World War II veterans often describe the time as “madness.” Certain things happened during that time that ordinarily would not happen, but that does not preclude the fact that, as humans, we still have to make choices of “right and wrong,” “good and evil.” Although dwindling in number, there are still thousands of victims of this war machine alive today. Some still have tattoos of numbers that were branded on them while in the concentration camps. These victims are alive and are telling their story. These victims still obviously feel pain, and although they are not about to embark on a battle to bring all former Nazis to justice anymore, they still can easily dispense their own form of justice—with their wallets.

If firms in the world today (which is still filled with ethnic conflict, ethnic cleansing, and war) can take anything away from the Holocaust, it is that they should be very careful about which side they choose to support, and to think about how involved they want to get in the conflict itself. One can wonder today what future generations of Iraqis will think of American firms such as Halliburton or other manufacturers that have provided weapons used in the Iraqi conflict. Conversely, French firms involved in building the Saddam Hussein regime and becoming part of the U.N. “oil for food scandal” should think about the consequences of their actions if they want to do future business with constituents in the US and members of its coalition.

Unlike the newer waves of American immigrants, American Jews can largely trace their an-
cestry back to the European continent. Although countries like Mexico and Puerto Rico are enjoying a great deal of tourist activity (and dollars) from new Americans going back to these countries to reconnect with their roots, Germany finds itself in a position where its former ancestors are specifically avoiding travel back to the “old country” of their former relatives, some of which may have lived there for hundreds of years before the Holocaust. Magnifying this effect on German tourism is the large amount of disposable income that American Jewish consumers have amassed in their time of residence in the US.

The major theoretical contribution here is that there is a possibility that Equity Theory can be applied to certain situations in the field of tourism. Equity Theory has been applied in many fields of business (such as organizational theory, human resources, and management theory) but has, to this time, been largely neglected in tourism. Further study might reveal that the loss of equity and its subsequent attempt at restoration may go much further beyond the realms of decisions based on past ethnic conflict. Animosity occurs in a great number of arenas, with varying levels of results and attitudes generated from both personal and group experiences. Some actions such as boycotts might very well be grounded in equity theory, as in the Texaco and Denny’s boycott among African Americans in the 1990s. The possibility of the application of Equity Theory is significant and virtually endless in today’s global society where goods move from one nation to another at a very rapid rate. Unfortunately, today’s ethnic conflicts are also found in great abundance throughout the world, lending many additional opportunities for study in this area.

References