

Travel Agency and its Image – Factor Influencing the Attitude of Tourism Client towards the Choice of a Holiday Package

Dr. Martina Ferencová, PhD.

Univerity of Presov in Presov, Faculty of Management
Konštantínova 16, 080 01 Presov
Slovakia, Europa

Abstract

On choosing a holiday, the client of tourism is influenced by several factors: a price, destination, the purpose of a holiday, accommodation, catering services, transport, ancillary services as well as the travel agency offering holiday packages. The article examines tourism clients' attitudes towards choosing a holiday based on the travel agency reputation and its image. It gives the results of a survey conducted by means of a questionnaire filled in by respondents from Poland and Slovakia.

Keywords: Tourism. Travel agency. Image of the travel agency. Holiday package.

JEL Classification: L83, M31.

Introduction

After a difficult period of recession in 2009 the travel agencies in the United States of America saw growth in 2010 and 2011; now their bookings account for a third of the \$284 billion United States travel market (Higgins, 2012). Experts maintain that this change is associated with changing preferences of clients as well as political and economic situation in the country. Tourism clients do not care about unlimited options, they long for shopping as well as personal experience. When choosing a holiday they need “companionship” of the trusted-screener of experience. The overwhelming scope of tourism industry products created on the Internet is often unclear; orientation on on-line browsers is increasingly difficult and time-consuming. Steve Peterson, a travel expert of IBM's Institute for Business Value, told The New York Times, ‘It's come to a point that it's too much information to be confident that they have the ability to book the lowest fare. Consumers are hungry for that one-and-done shopping experience.’ (Peterson In Belsky, 2012).

The question is – how travel agents can successfully compete in today's environment. The best alternative is to market the image of a travel agency. The focus is selling the image of the agency that is able to decrease travel and client costs (individual client costs), has the skills, knowledge, and the clout to make the perks happen (Gebhart, 2012). Many clients choose their holidays based on travel agency reputation, image itself. They are interested in good reputation and/or corporate culture of the travel agency, as well as corporate identity and loyalty of employees to the institution (cf. Lamb et al., 2007; Bednářová – Ali Taha, 2010). Deliberately cultivated image of the travel agency presented to target groups – image – might lead to success of the travel agency in travel market and a significant competitive advantage. Moreover, it might considerably contribute to creating a good tourism destination image (cf. Frías and com. 2007).

The travel agency operator and the scope of its activities are determined by legislation in specific countries. In Slovakia these are defined by Act No. 281/2001 Coll. on Tours, Business Conditions for Tour Operators and Travel Agencies, § 3). The travel agency offers tourism products (in terms of tourism defining phenomena of clients' motivation; for a more detailed account see Čuka, 2011, p. 57) and it provides a whole range of services, at a desired time and for an appropriate price (Matušíková, 2011, p. 57). Its image is determined by the quality of provided services. American Society for Quality Control defines quality as a summary of the characteristics of service crucial for its ability to meet stated or implied needs (Miller, 1993). The definition implies that quality is offered if client's expectations are satisfied or exceeded. Tourism client's satisfaction with travel agencies services is the basis of its reputation, image.

1. Objective and methods

The aim of a survey was to determine whether and how the travel agency and its reputation, image affect clients' – students at higher education institutions with an economic orientation in Slovakia and Poland – choice of a holiday as well as to compare survey results in both countries. The survey was conducted during the period from February 2012 to May 2012 and the sample was made up of 52 students at the Faculty of Management of University of Presov in Presov (Slovakia) and 132 students at the Faculty of Management of Czestochowa University of Technology (Poland). At both faculties data were collected through a 36-item questionnaire. For the purpose of this paper we selected 7 items relating to the influence of the travel agency (TA) on clients' attitude towards the choice of holidays in both countries (dependent variables). The items were associated with the following areas:

- A reputation, image of TA
- B personal experience with TA
- C acquaintances' recommendations on the choice of TA
- D the way of choosing a holiday
- E using ancillary services of TA
- F using ancillary services of TA at a holiday destination
- G the greatest competitive advantage of TA.

Regarding the areas A – C the variables such as age, gender, the size of respondents' town or city an average monthly income of a respondent were used as predictors. Possible responses were defined using 5-point Likert scale (very important, important, neither important nor unimportant, unimportant, not at all important). Concerning the areas D – G respondents could select from 3 or more response options. The gathered data were processed by SPSS software using the categorical regression method and descriptive statistical methods. The article analyses the results of statistical tests at the significance level of $\alpha = 0,05$ or $0,10$ and it presents the findings in tables and graphs.

2. Search results and discussion

In total 66 males (36%) and 118 females (64%) participated in the survey. As Table 1, shows the sample consisted of 17 males (32.7%) and 35 females (67.3%) in Slovakia and 49 males (37.1%) and 83 females (62.9%) in Poland.

A. reputation, image of a travel agency

With regard to this area we examined the significance of reputation, image of the travel agency for the respondent when he/she chooses a holiday.

In Poland a significant impact of a 'population' predictor (p-value= 0.009 at the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$) was found. **Thus, the larger the city the Polish respondents come from, the more significant the reputation, image of TA is.** In Slovakia there was a significant impact of an 'income' predictor (p-value = 0.066), at the significance level of $\alpha = 0.10$. **Thus, the higher the income of the Slovak respondents is, the more significant the reputation, image of TA is for them when choosing a holiday.**

B. personal experience with a travel agency

In that regard we investigated whether the personal experience of every respondent with TA is important for him/her or not when choosing his/her holiday offered by the TA. **In Poland no relationship between predictor and a stated item was found.**

In Slovakia this item is affected by the following predictors 'gender of respondents' (p-value = 0.002 at the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$) and 'age of respondents' (p-value = 0.053 at the significance level of $\alpha = 0.10$). **For Slovak women the personal experience with TA is more important than for men.** It was also revealed that **the personal experience of Slovak respondents with TA is becoming less important with increasing age.**

C. acquaintances' recommendations on the choice of a travel agency

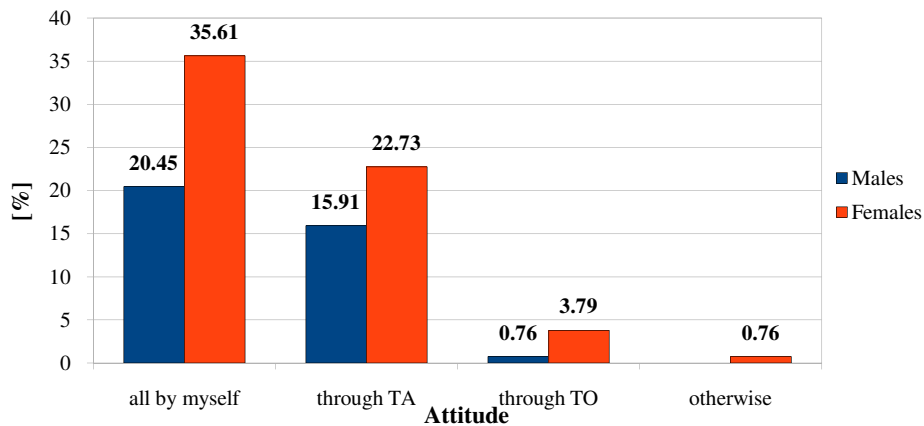
In asking whether recommendation by acquaintances is important when selecting TA we found the following facts.

In case of Poland no relationship between responses and age, population and average monthly income was found, therefore the effect of these predictors may be considered insignificant. Concerning Slovakia only the predictor ‘population’ (p-value = 0.064 at the significance level of $\alpha = 0.10$) seems to have a significant impact on the choice of TA on the basis of recommendations by acquaintances. **We may state that the larger the town a Slovak respondent comes from is; the less important the choice of TA on the basis of recommendation is for him/her.**

D. the way of choosing a holiday

As Graph 1 shows the respondents from Poland stated they chose their holiday by themselves most frequently. Almost 36% of women and over 20% of men selected this response option. Nearly 23% of Polish women and 15.91% of Polish men arrange their holiday through the travel agency. Other response options were selected by the respondents less frequently.

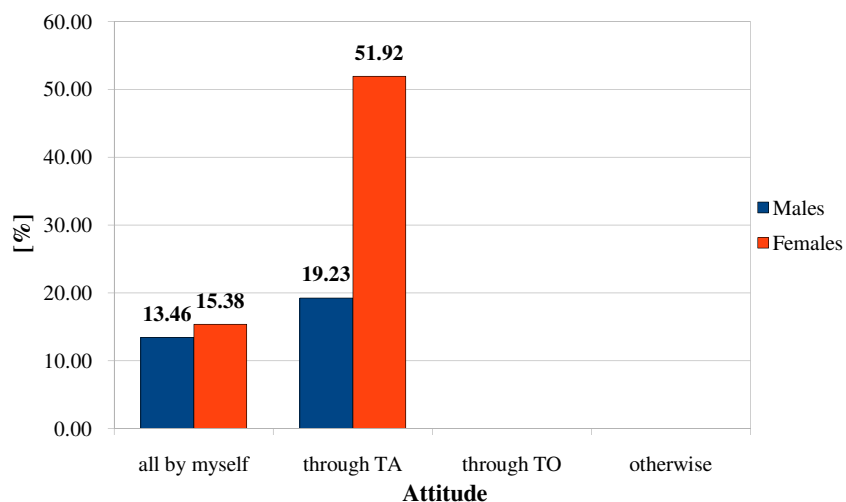
Graph 1: Attitude of respondents from Poland towards the choice of a holiday



Source: own processing, 2012

As can be seen from Graph 2 in Slovakia respondents most frequently choose and arrange a holiday through the travel agency. As many as 51.92% of Slovak women and nearly 20% of Slovak men selected this option. Regarding other response options Slovak respondents selected just individual choice of a holiday (I choose and arrange a holiday all by myself). Other response options were not selected.

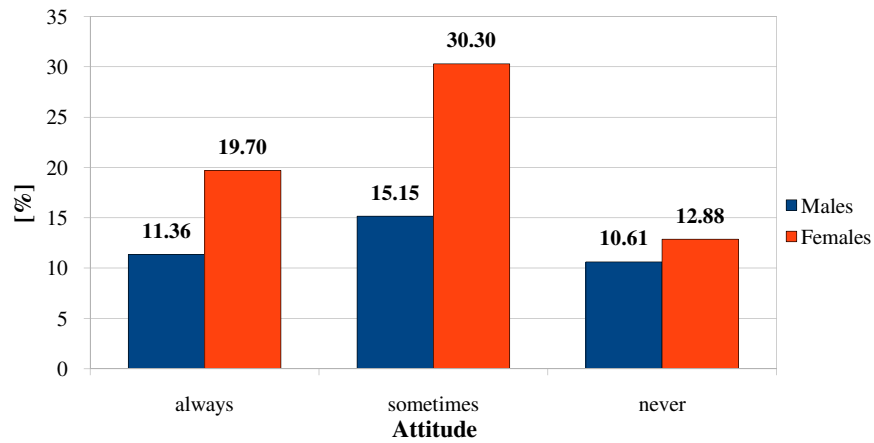
Graph 2: Attitude of respondents from Slovakia towards the choice of a holiday



Source: own processing, 2012

E. using ancillary services of a travel agency

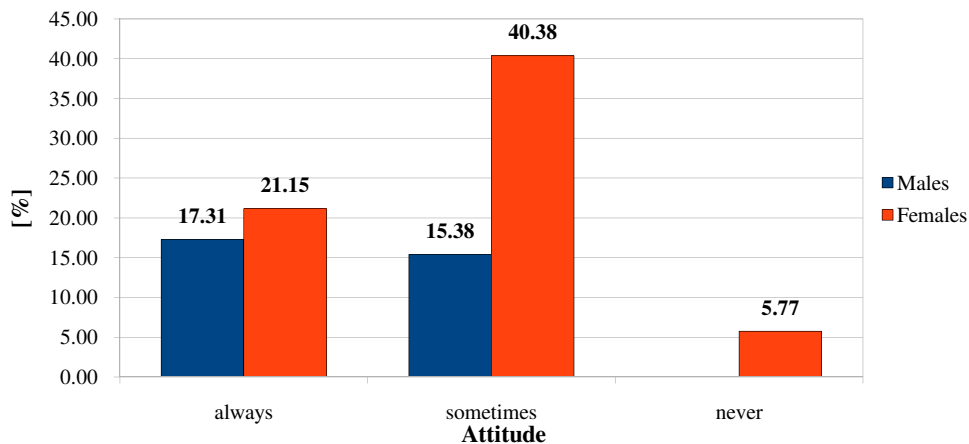
Graph 3: Attitude of respondents from Poland to using ancillary services of TA



Source: own processing, 2012

From Graph 3 and 4 we can see that the respondents from Poland as well as from Slovakia use additional services of TA – insurance, information service, recommendations on holiday choice and the like. According to responses women use ancillary services of TA more often than men. The response always was selected by nearly 20% of Polish women and 22% of Slovak women. The option sometimes was selected by more than 30% of Polish women and over 40% of Slovak women. The response never was selected by women and Polish men less frequently; Slovak men did not select it at all.

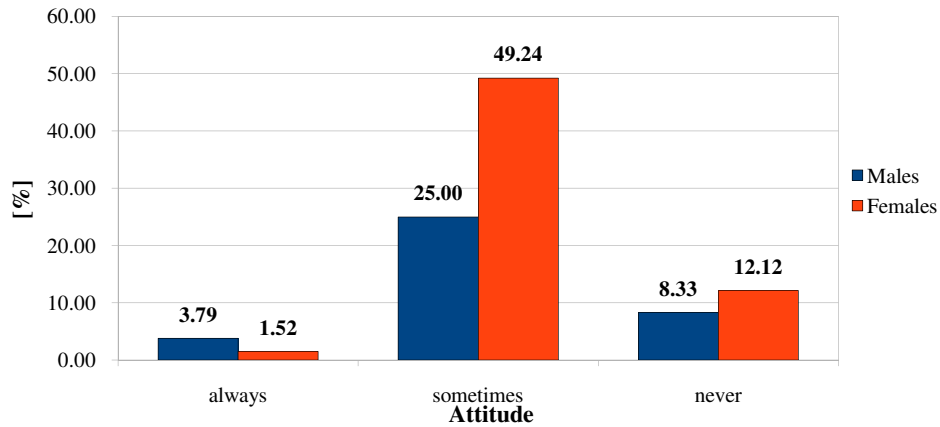
Graph 4: Attitude of respondents from Slovakia towards using ancillary services of TA



Source: own processing, 2012

F. using ancillary services of travel agency at a holiday destination

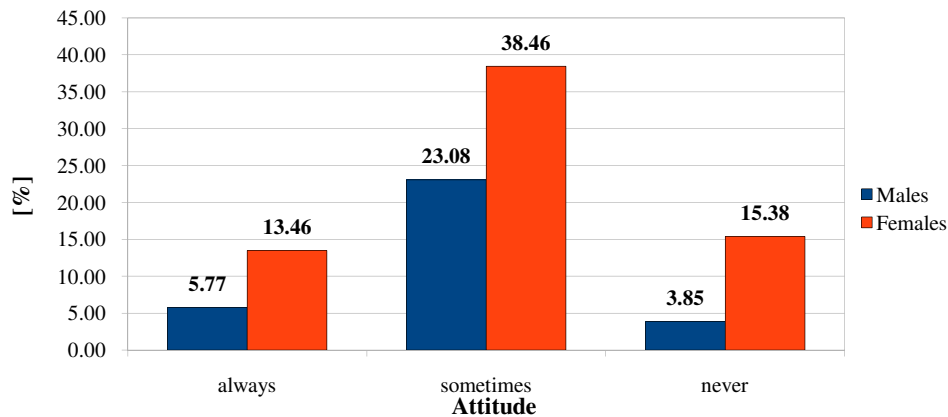
Graph 5: Attitude of respondents from Poland towards using ancillary services of TA at a holiday destination



Source: own processing, 2012

When focusing on using additional services of TA at a holiday destination we found that nearly 50% of the interviewed Polish women and 25% of Polish men sometimes use them, that is almost – 75% of the interviewed. Just 5.31% of the Poles (Graf 5) selected the response always. In Slovakia nearly 62% of the respondents selected the response sometimes. 19.23% of the Slovaks always use ancillary services of TA at a holiday destination. The same applies to the response never (Graph 6).

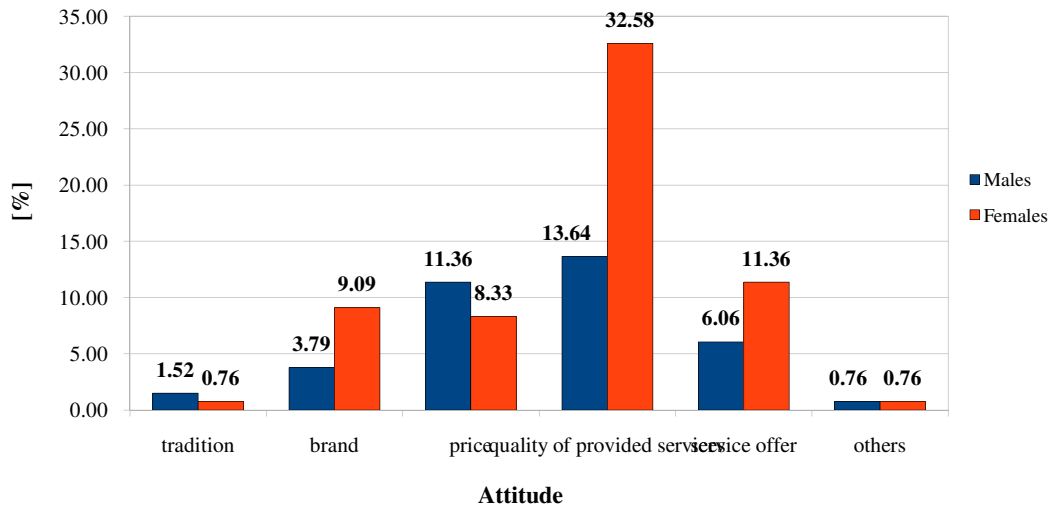
Graph 6: Attitude of respondents from Slovakia towards using ancillary services of TA at a holiday destination



Source: own processing, 2012

G. the greatest competitive advantage of TA

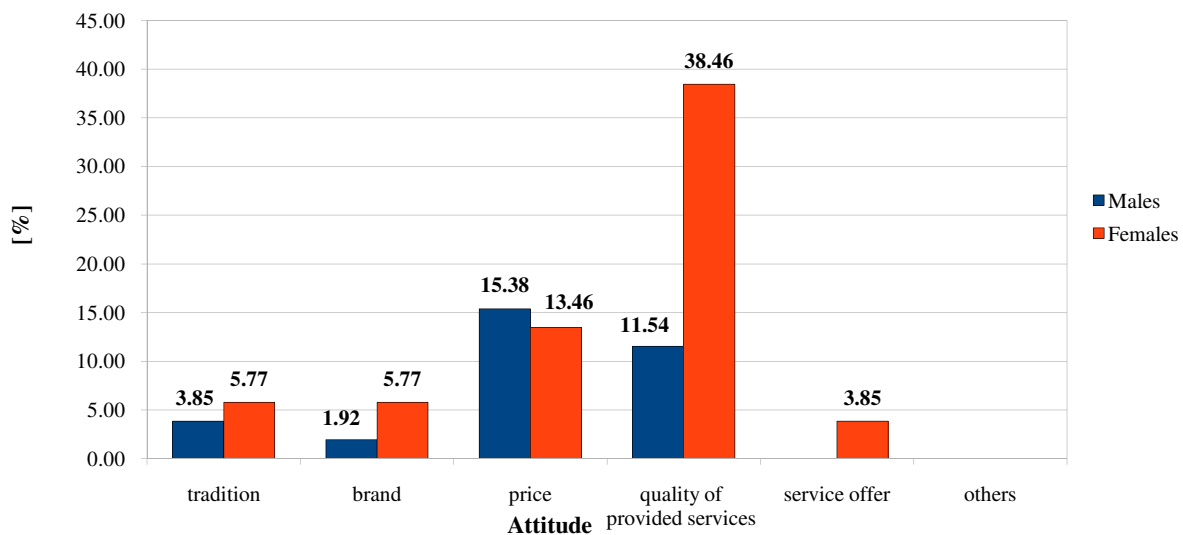
Graph 7: Attitude of respondents from Poland towards a competitive advantage of TA



Source: own processing, 2012

Respondents from Poland consider the quality of provided services to be the biggest competitive advantage of TA (Graph 7). Almost 33% of Polish women and over 13% of Polish men (nearly 47%) selected this option. Price took the second place, service offer the third one and brand the fourth one.

Graph 8: Attitude of respondents from Slovakia towards a competitive advantage of TA



Source: own processing, 2012

Regarding the Slovaks the results were similar to the ones concerning the Poles (Graph 8). As well as the Poles, the Slovaks consider the quality of provided services to be the greatest competitive advantage – 38.46% of women and over 11.54% of men, in total 50%. The price ranked the second. Compared with the respondents from Poland there are changes regarding the third and fourth place. Nearly 10% of the Slovaks consider tradition and almost 8% of them brand to be the greatest competitive advantage of TA.

3. Conclusion of the search results

In regard to the survey results it may be stated that:

A. travel agency reputation

Regarding the respondents from Poland it applies that the larger the city they come from is, the more important the choice of holiday through a specific travel agency with good reputation, good image is. Concerning the Slovak respondents the importance of reputation of TA increases with the growing income. We may thus state that in Poland – the larger the town, the more important the reputation of TA when choosing a holiday is and in Slovakia – the higher the income, the more important the reputation of TA is.

B. personal experience with a travel agency

In Slovakia personal experience with TA is more important for women than for men and with an increasing age it is becoming less important. In Poland no relationship between predictor and this item was found.

C. acquaintances' recommendations on the choice of TA

In case of Poland no relationship between responses and age, gender, population and average monthly income was found. With regard to the Slovak respondents results indicate that the larger the town the respondent comes from, the less important the choice of TA on the basis of recommendation by acquaintances is.

D. the way of choosing a holiday

In Poland over 65% of women and men arrange a holiday completely by themselves and almost 39% of them use services provided by the travel agency. In Slovakia over 71% of the respondents most frequently select and arrange a holiday through a travel agency.

E. using ancillary services of a travel agency

Nearly 46% of the interviewed Poles and almost 56% of the Slovaks use additional services of TA (insurance, information service, recommendations on holiday choices and the like) only sometimes. Over 31% of the Polish people and nearly 39% of the Slovaks opted for the response always.

F. using ancillary services of a travel agency at a holiday destination

Over 74% of the Poles and nearly 62% of the Slovaks only sometimes use ancillary services of TA (programme, a guide, excursions and the like). Approximately 20% of the Polish people and the Slovaks never use TA services at the holiday destination. 19.23% of the interviewed Slovaks and just 5.31% of the Poles always use them.

G. the greatest competitive advantage of TA

The Polish and Slovak respondents definitely consider the quality of provided services to be the biggest competitive advantage – 24 men and 63 women in total.

Summary

The survey presented in this article has confirmed that reputation, image is an important part of a decision-making process of tourism clients (compare research Kangasmäki – Koskelainen, 2006). On the basis of the survey results it may be stated that the larger the city the Polish respondents come from, the more important the reputation, image of TA is for them when choosing a holiday. Regarding Slovakia, the higher the income the respondents have, the more important reputation, image of TA is for them. Personal experience with TA is more important for women than for men in Slovakia. The bigger the city the Slovaks come from, the less important the recommendation by their acquaintances is when choosing a holiday. The Polish people more often choose a holiday by themselves, while the Slovaks through TA. More Slovaks use additional services of TA than the Poles. Both the Poles and the Slovaks use services at the holiday destination only sometimes. They also consider the quality of provided services to be the greatest competitive advantage. Survey results have an informative character considering the sample size. They may serve as a starting point for further scientific investigation in the field of management and marketing of tourism.

References

- Batra, S., Kohli, M. (2007). Tourism Industry – Prospects for Development. In: Pratiyongita Darpan 2/11 AP, Swadeshi Bima Nagar, AGRA 282 – 002, July, 2007, p. 65 – 68. Ph. : 2530066, 2531101, 3208693/94; www.pratiyogitadarpan.org
- Ferencová, M. (2011). Spôsobilosti budúcich manažérov cestovného ruchu požadované na vybraných webových portáloch. MANECO 2/2011, roč. 3, 12 s. ISSN 1337-9488.
- Miller, C. (1993). U.S. Firms Lag in Meeting Global Quality Standards In: Marketing News, 15.february 1993. Reference to a book:
- Bednárová, L., Ali Taha, V. (2010). Interkulturálny manažment a podniková kultúra. Prešov: Fakulta manažmentu PU v Prešove, 2010. 150 s. ISBN 978-80-555-0262-5.
- Čuka, P. (2011). Základy teórie, metodológie a regionalizácie cestovného ruchu. Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity, 2011. 93 s. ISBN 978-80-555-0471-1.
- Lamb, Ch. V., Hair, J. F., Mcdaniel, C. (2007). Marketing. Thomson Higher Education, Mason, OH 45040 USA. Printed in Canada. P. 671. Student Edition ISBN 13-978-0-324-36208-4.
- Matušíková, D. (2011). Základy turizmu pre manažérov I. časť. Prešov: Bookman, s.r.o. 2011. 82 s. ISBN 978-80-89568-02-4.
- Belsky, G. (2012). Why Travel Agents Are Back From The Dead (And Why You Should Care) In: Time Business. News and views on the economy, markets and business. [Online] Available: <http://business.time.com/2012/05/07/why-travel-agents-are-back-from-the-dead-and-why-you-should-care/#ixzz23szjBeGr> (August 18, 2012)
- Frías, D. Ma. and com. (2007). Internet vs. travel agencies on pre-visit destination image formation: An information processing view. Tourism Management 29 (2008), p. 163–179. [Online] Available: <http://ftur.uh.cu/intra/ftp/Materiales%20docentes/4to%20a%F1o/Asignatura%20Ocio/Tema%20IV/%28%20GOLF%29/CD%20-%20Golf%20y%20AAVV/Viajes%20y%20Productos/INTERN~1.PDF> (August 18, 2012)
- Gebhart, F. For Biz Travel Success, Sell Image, Not Tickets In: Travel Marketet. The voice of the travel seller report, (2012). [Online] Available: <http://www.travelmarketreport.com/articles/For-Biz-Travel-Success-Sell-Image-Not-Tickets> (August 18, 2012)
- Higgins, M. (2012). Are Travel Agents Back? The New Yourk Times. Travel. [Online] Available: http://travel.nytimes.com/2012/04/22/travel/are-travel-agents-back.html?pagewanted=all&_moc.semityn.levart (August 18, 2012)
- Kangasmäki, H., Koskelainen, M. (2006). How Important Is an Image? University essay from Karlstads universitet, 2006. [Online] Available: <http://www.essays.se/essay/60940241c6/> (August 18, 2012)
- Zákon 281/2001 Z. z. o zázajdoch, podmienkach podnikania cestovných kancelárií a cestovných agentúr a o zmene a doplnení Občianskeho zákonníka v znení neskorších predpisov SR. Predpis 186/2006 Z. z. [Online] Available: www.economy.gov.sk/zakon-o-zajazdoch-5865/127550s (August 19, 2012)

Table 1: Gender of respondents

Gender	Slovakia		Poland	
	Number	[%]	Number	[%]
Males	17	32.69	49	37.12
Females	35	67.31	83	62.88
Total	52	100	132	100

Source: own processing, 2012