ABSTRACT

The research examined a relationship of depth of experience and perceived importance of culture with travel characteristics and demographic profile of international cultural tourists in Bhutan. Consequently, the cultural tourism market was segmented based on a two-dimensional model of depth of experience and perceived importance of culture.

The survey research method was used for the collection of data. Two hundred and ninety seven respondents from 13 different countries filled out the questionnaires following their cultural tour in March and April 2003. Data were processed with the help of SPSS version 11. Descriptive statistics were used for the presentation of data on sample profile in the form of percentages and bar charts. Chi -square test was used to examine relationship of depth of experience and importance of culture with travel characteristics and demographic profile. Non-parametric correlation test of Spearman rho was used to examine the relationship of depth experience and perceived importance of culture with the demographic variables of age and monthly income of the respondents.

Participation in cultural activities were mainly in the form of attending religious mask dances, taking part in local festivals such as folk dances, wearing Bhutanese costumes and participating in local sporting events. A high proportion of 82.82 percent of the respondents participated in cultural activities. As much as 52 percent of the

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respondents found mask and folk dances the most mesmerizing attraction followed by museums and fortresses with 34 percent, religious sites with 12 percent and the rural community with 2 percent. Sixty one percent visited sites known to them. Forty percent of the respondents stated cultural tour as their future purpose of visit, 36 percent with ecotourism, 23 percent with self-esteem and only 1 percent for sports such as white-water rafting and skiing.

The research findings confirmed a presence of significant relationship of depth of experience and perceived importance of culture with travel characteristics. However, demographic profile did not show any relationship with the aforesaid dependent variables other than level of education. A priori market segmentation approach was applied where five market segments were identified using a two dimensional model. The highest proportion of international cultural tourists belonged to the segment of purposeful cultural tourists with 69.36 percent. The smallest segment of 2.02 percent was casual cultural tourists.

Recommendations based on findings were a creation of an array of avenues for participation in cultural activities, popularize rural community tour, create cultural phenomenon and artifacts, dissemination of information, extend the geographical coverage of tourism and diversify alternative tourism.