

‘Sunbed Wars’: A Holiday Nuisance and Its Impact on Holiday Satisfaction



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1 Introduction

Significant literature on the topics of customer satisfaction and service quality is available; yet the issue of ‘sunbed wars’ between vacationers is not addressed. In general, the phenomenon of sunbed wars is regarded as a typical German matter and it is amongst the most annoying holiday nuisances in hotel resorts and on cruise lines. The usual practice starts early in the morning. Vacationers ‘reserve’ sunbeds with their towels and other objects, to secure the most favourable places under the sun for the whole day. Other guests who have not been that ‘proactive’ arrive at the pool area and find all sunbeds already reserved. This is frequently results to frustration, verbal conflicts and even physical violence. Providers’ attempts to regulate this kind of guest misconduct are often ignored and thus no further countermeasures are taken.

A survey undertaken in 2002 revealed that guests prefer using the hotel’s facilities for relaxation and sunbathing (cf. Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis 2007, p. 3). People travel because of so-called ‘push factors’, which refer to the various motives for travel. People are in search of relaxation and want to escape from their routine day-to-day life (Costa et al. 2004, p. 120). Accordingly, people spend a lot of time in facilities such as the pools provided by hotels and cruise lines. As a result, the seemingly insignificant aspect of sunbed availability, may actually have a disproportionately negative influence customers’ level of satisfaction.

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1.1 Relevance

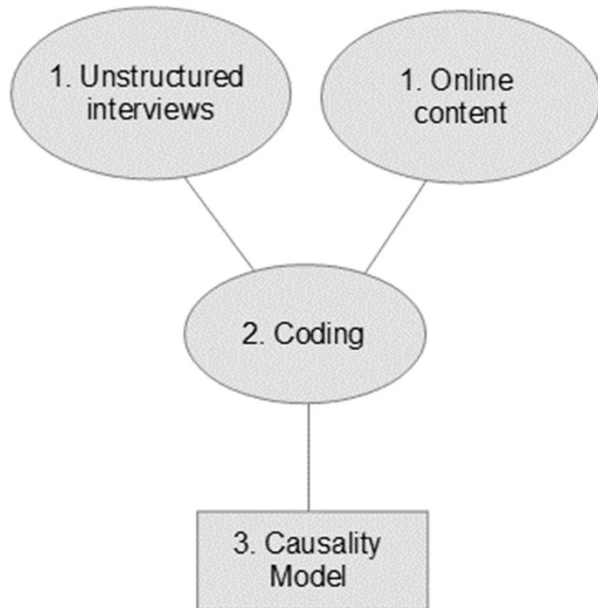
In relation to the above-mentioned concept of tourists' satisfaction, the relevance of this paper will be discussed. Accommodation represents the main element of the tourism value chain (cf. Devi Juwaheer 2004, p. 120) and accommodation providers face the challenge of constantly having to keep their guests 'happy'. Reaching and maintaining high levels of satisfaction has resulted to a fierce competitive landscape (Otto and Ritchie 1996 cited in Costa et al. 2004, p. 117). Furthermore, it is '*the key variable for gaining a competitive advantage*' (Honomichl 1993 cited in Kozak et al. 2008, p. 44). The quality of service, including a functional management of sunbeds, is supposed to result in customers' satisfaction. Customers' satisfaction is amongst the most important aspects when it comes to the hotel and cruise industry and should no longer be neglected (cf. Costa et al. 2004, p. 124). The present research aims at analysing vacationers' behavioural/perception-formation patterns related to the sunbed war phenomenon, whilst exploring its possible influence on customers' satisfaction level. Afterwards, the consequences for accommodation providers will be extracted to serve as further input for a possible counter-measures and strategies.

2 Research Methodology

Since there is no literature available touching on the sunbed war topic, an explorative—qualitative approach is adopted. More specifically, we opted for a Grounded-Theory approach. Grounded-Theory is based on '*generating theory and doing social research*' (Glaser 1987 cited in Strauss and Corbin 1994, p. 273). The main difference of Grounded Theory to other approaches is that the theory envelops during the actual process of data gathering and analysing (cf. Strauss and Corbin 1994, p. 274). As depicted in the following figure (see Fig. 1), the approach consists of three steps. During the first step, relevant data was collected. A total of 117 online content sources were mined and 28 unstructured interviews were completed; consisting of a diverse sample of German and foreign holidaymakers. Additionally, 14 online blogs/articles and the comments of 74 online users on online rating platforms like tripadvisor.de, etc. and forums like kreuzfahrten-treff.de, etc. were included for in the sample for subsequent coding. In the second step, the collected data was coded, interpreted and constantly compared to each other. Actually, the two processes of data collection, comparison and interpretation was carried out simultaneously and iteratively (cf. Charmaz and Belgrave 2002, p. 354).

The data collection and interpretation stopped once the saturation in qualitative data was observed (cf. *ibid.*, p. 359). In the last step, a causality model, with implicit tentative hypotheses, was extracted. The data analysis during the first and in the second step were aimed at discovering categories. Subsequently, these categories were connected to each other in order to build up relationships among them, as to

Fig. 1 Research methodology



establish a pattern, a causality model (cf., *ibid*, p. 359), which could serve as input to further practically-relevant research on this particular topic (see Fig. 1).

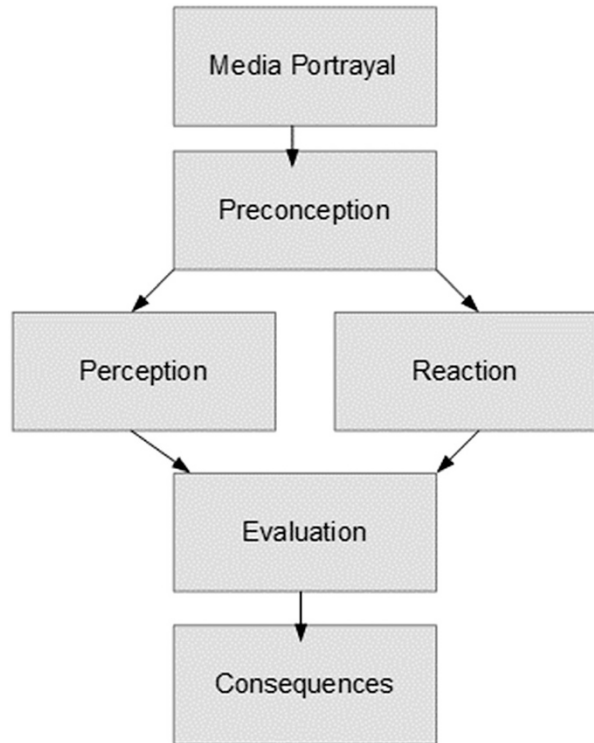
2.1 Interviews: Overview

Initially, 28 interviews were held and transcribed (see Table 1). The interviewees, that participated in this research, were of diverse demographic backgrounds and were purposively-chosen in order to examine the phenomenon in all its particulars and various angles. The age-range of the participants was supposed to cover as many age-groups as possible. As depicted in Fig. 2, the youngest interviewee is 15 and the oldest 83. Furthermore, the interviewees' occupational areas vary in terms of position, industry and salary classes; students but also housewives, teachers, a project manager, a parquet layer, etc. were surveyed. Additionally, the participants represented different nationalities: 22 Germans, one Polish, one Colombian, one Moroccan, one Greek, one French and one Indian. Moreover, 19 interviewees were in the position to provide first hand experiences, while 9 interviewees could report from second hand experiences (e.g. word-of-mouth, YouTube Videos), that was shown to give them an impression of this phenomenon (YouTube 2012). Another interesting observation was that 5 interviewees admitted openly their active involvement in sunbed wars, while all the rest (i.e. 23) denied any participation.

Table 1 Interviews—Overview

Interviewee	Nationality	Age	Profession	Participant	Experience
A	Deutsch	26	Student	Non	1st hand experience
B	Deutsch	28	Student	Non	2nd hand experience
C	Deutsch	17	Student	Non	2nd hand experience/ YouTube video
CH	Deutsch	28	Social Insurance Clerk	Non	1st hand experience
D	Deutsch	54	Guitar Teacher	Non	2nd hand experience/ YouTube video
E	Deutsch	28	Forwarding Merchant	Non	1st hand experience
F	Deutsch	25	Office Clerk	Non	1st hand experience
E	Deutsch	28	Programmar	Non	1st hand experience
H	Deutsch	27	Project Manager	Participant	1st hand experience
I	Deutsch	28	Student	Non	2nd hand experience
J	Deutsch	50	Parquet Layer	Non	1st hand experience
K	Deutsch	46	Teacher	Non	1st hand experience
L	Deutsch	17	Student	Non	1st hand experience
U	Deutsch	25	Student	Participant	1st hand experience
N	Polen	21	Student	Non	2nd hand experience/ YouTube video
D	Deutsch	65	Teacher	Non	1st hand experience
P	Deutsch	29	Housewife	Participant	1st hand experience
Q	Deutsch	15	Student	Non	2nd hand experience
R	Deutsch	83	Pensioner	Non	2nd hand experience
S	French	21	Receptionist	Non	2nd hand experience/ YouTube video
SCH	Deutsch	21	Receptionist	Non	1st hand experience
T	Deutsch	24	Student	Non	1st hand experience
U	Deutsch	41	Travel Agent	Non	1st hand experience
V	Columbia	31	Chemical Engineer	Non	2nd hand experience/ YouTube video
W	Deutsch	59	Manager	Non	1st hand experience
X	Greek	37	System Architect	Participant	1st hand experience
Y	India	29	System Architect	Non	1st hand experience
Z	Marokko	34	Bricklayer	Participant	1st hand experience
				<i>(5) participants</i>	<i>(19) 1st hand experience</i>
				<i>(23) non-participants</i>	<i>(9) 2nd hand experience</i>
					<i>(5) YouTube video</i>

Fig. 2 Causality model



3 Limitations

Grounded-Theory is a highly subjective approach to qualitative analysis (cf. Charmaz and Belgrave 2002, p. 359). Therefore, one has to have an open mind during the whole process of collecting and interpreting data as to not miss out any important points. Prejudices have to be kept at bay, staying clear from any influence and/or expectations regarding determinants. Another limitation is the relatively high proportion of German holidaymakers included in this research paper. Another critical point can be the scope of data collected, which is limited to sunbed wars in hotel pools. The dynamics and politics of sunbed allocation at public beaches were not examined and are potentially subject to higher complexity.

4 Coding Results: Categories

The coding process resulted in 1.519 open codes, which are allocated to 32 axial codes. Hereby, the open codes are considered as the essential properties of the axial codes (cf. Charmaz and Belgrave 2002, p. 359). The axial codes were grouped into

six thematic areas (selective codes): Media portrayal, preconception, perception, reaction, evaluation and consequences. The Open-, Axial and Selective codes are illustrated in Table 2.

4.1 Key Findings

In total, six thematic areas have been identified. Obviously, the majority of open codes are allocated to the thematic area of preconception. It consists of 543 open codes (35.3%) in a total of 1.540 open codes. On the contrary, the category 'consequences' has a mere 15 open codes (1%) of the 1.519 total codes (see Table 2). It becomes apparent, that 'preconception' plays a critical role in that matter. Stereotyping, perceived as a form of preconception, causes vacationers to judge Germans for reserving sunbeds. Actually, it is not a German-specific phenomenon; other nationalities have also been reported to systematically reserve sunbeds. Guests arriving late at the pool area and being unable to find an available place (because all sunbeds are occupied by towels), don't dare removing towels, because of a potential unpleasant confrontation with a returning 'sunbed-blocker'. Nevertheless, some vacationers who have removed towels in the past, reported that confrontational-incidents were a rarity. The returning 'sunbed-blocker' accepted the situation and remained wordless; as opposed to confronting the guest who removed their towel. Another assumption is that participants involved, may tend to deny to reveal their sunbed-reservation behaviour during interviews. This assumption did not hold with our research, since interviewees openly admitted to having engaged in this type of behaviour in the past. The reservation happens, because of the biased belief, that all other guests will act similarly. The option of implementing counter-measures was met positively by the respondents, while the lack of intervention was associated as the underlying cause of complaints/grievances. Especially in forums, the vacationers of cruise lines seemed to regard a functional management concept for sunbeds an essential part of their pre-holiday research, potentially influencing their booking decision. Hotel guests tended to complain about the masses of German tourists, and therefore would avoid such resorts.

5 Causality Model of Sunbed Wars

On the background of the seven thematic areas, a causality model can be constructed, reviewing the variables and their interconnectedness (see Fig. 2). The relationships will be explained in depth in the following pages.

Table 2 Coding results

Open codes	References	Sources	Axial codes	References	Sources	Selective codes	References	Sources
Typical German	14	9						
Discussion of worst nationality	2	1						
Not only Germans	1	1						
The British	3	3						
Italians and the Spanish	1	1						
German stereotype	3	8	Judged nationality	30	13			
Unused sunbeds	10	3						
Early morning reservation	5	4						
Return to bed	3	3						
Before daily trip reservation	1	1						
Fight for limited sunbeds	1	1						
Running vacationer	1	1						
Armed with towel	1	1						
Discussing and violence	3	2						
Place of Occurrence	6	2	Illustrated manner	37	13			
Typical do-nothing holiday	1	1						
Sawing best places	6	5						
Disadvantaged latecomer	3	2						
Ignored regulations	1	1						
Annoying custom	9	6						
Declared battle zone	3	3						
Ruined holidays	1	1	Prevailing opinions	24	13			
Frequent topic	2	2						
Difficult separation	2	1						

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Open codes	References	Sources	Axial codes	References	Sources	Selective codes	References	Sources
Media exaggeration	2	1						
Immediate evaluation	1	1						
Increased phenomenon	1	1						
Influential factor	2	1						
Pre holiday worries	1	1	Influential factor	12	4	Media portrayal	103	15
Typical German	7	5						
Judged German stereotype	12	9						
The British	2	1						
All nationalities	12	11	Accused nationality	33	20			
Limited sunbeds	23	15						
Greed and egoism	64	23						
Entitlement	28	15						
Best places	36	13						
Security and daily routine	44	14						
Fear of failure	22	10						
Convenience	21	4						
Social status	6	3	Decisive motives	251	50			
Good course of holidays	3	2						
Sunbed importance	10	7						
Purpose of holidays	14	6						
Pessimistic vacation	3	2	Holiday intentions and expectations	30	9			
Complaints about others	3	3						
Considered inappropriate behavior	6	3						

Feelings of shame	2	2					
No confession	6	3	Denied sunbed reservation	17	7		
Comparative thinking	45	19					
Power games	22	9					
Experienced vacationer	2	1					
Provider's mismanagement	20	12	Inevitable participation	89	27		
Internal rule	2	2					
Towel signals reservation	4	2					
No permission	1	1					
Permitted reservation	5	3	Erroneous pool regulations	10	6		
Undesired stress factor	21	12					
Furious sunbed blocker	10	7	Anticipated consequences of towel removal	36	16		
Conflicts of all sets	5	2					
Reservation practice	26	21					
Reckless manner	11	7					
Territorial behavior	5	1					
Wasted sunbeds	13	15	Inappropriate reservation practice	61	25		
Corrupt employees	3	3					
Corrupt room neighbors	1	1					
Monetary means	2	2					
Alternative means	4	3	Suspected bribery	15	5	Preconception	64
Typical German	14	9					
Discussion of worst nationality	2	1					
Not only Germans	1	1					
The British	3	3					
Italians and the Spanish	1	1					
German stereotype	9	8	Judged nationality	38	13		

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Open codes	References	Sources	Axial codes	References	Sources	Selective codes	References	Sources
Unused sunbeds	10	8	Illustrated manner	37	13			
Early morning reservation	5	4						
Return to bed	3	3						
Before daily trip reservation	1	1						
Fight for limited sunbeds	1	1						
Running vacationer	1	1						
Armed with towel	1	1						
Discussions and violence	3	2						
Place of Occurrence	6	2	Illustrated manner	37	13			
Typical do-nothing holiday	1	1						
Saving best places	6	5						
Disadvantage latecomer	3	2						
Ignored regulations	1	1						
Annoying custom	9	6						
Declared battle zone	3	3						
Ruined holidays	1	1	Prevailing opinions	24	13			
Frequent topic	2	2						
Difficult separation	2	1						
Media exaggeration	2	1						
Immediate evaluation	1	1						
Increased phenomenon	1	1						
Influential factor	2	1						
Pre holiday worries	1	1	Influential factor	12	4	Media portrayal	103	15
Amusing entertainment	19	11						

Holiday nuisance	59	31	General evaluation	102	44	
Denied opportunity	14	12				
Sunbed importance	10	6				
Accepted situation	9	7				
Irritated vacationer	17	12				
Complaints	31	22	Level of nuisance	81	30	
Active countermeasures	68	36				
Available sunbeds	4	4				
Equal chances	3	3	Positive feedback	75	41	
Intervention required	16	14				
Regulation required	7	6				
More sunbeds required	3	3	Requirements	25	20	Evaluation 259
Sunbed taker's right	9	4				82
Unworried sunbed taker	11	6				
Towel removal	27	19				
Reaction of sunbed blocker	25	14				
Support from hotel staff	5	3				
Refused towel removal	13	8				
Intended provocation	7	3	Sunbed takeover	97	36	
Participants' motives	79	17				
Reservation practice	27	11				
Adapted participants	10	4	Confessed participation	116	19	
Non-participants' motives	17	10				
Search for free sunbed	8	7				
Situational adaptation	6	6				
Search for alternative places and plans	10	5				
Balcony	4	4				

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Open codes	References	Sources	Axial codes	References	Sources	Selective codes	References	Sources
No sunbed needed	6	5						
Beach preference	5	5	Refused participation	56	28			
Derided seats	6	2	Tip money advantage	6	2	Reaction	275	58
Absent sunbed blocker	34	18						
More towel than human	23	14						
No return	4	3						
Unused sunbed	17	11	Ineffective sun bed usage	78	29			
Server Occurrence	21	14						
Mitigated Occurrence	3	3	Frequency of occurrence	27	16			
Germans	5	4						
Majority of Germans	9	5						
The British	8	4						
The British and Russians	2	2						
Greek	1	1						
French	1	1						
Nordic Countries	1	1						
Americans	1	1						
Appearance in masses	2	2	Practicing nationality	32	15			
Animal behavior	1	1						
Running and pushing	15	11						
Gathering before opening	6	4						
Armed vacation	2	2	Perceived competition	25	16			
Discussions	7	3						
Pushing each other	3	3						
Aggressive sunbed blocker	3	3	Unpleasant confrontation	13	9			
Hotel owned towels	3	3						

Meaning of personal belongings	3	3						
Modify sunbed	1	1						
Occupied with towels	21	12						
Occupied with personal belongings	14	9						
Known towels	1	1	Marked territory	43	19			
Free sunbed	21	13						
No available place	29	20						
Challenging find a sunbed	3	3						
Inconvenient pool area	6	3	Availability of sunbeds	59	33			
Before breakfast reservation	16	12						
Whole day reservation	7	7						
Before daily trip reservation	1	1						
Double reservation	3	3						
Reservation for others	7	6						
Long discussion	3	1	Reservation practices	37	26			
Provider Ignorance	1	1						
Lack of monitoring	10	10	Lack of Intervention	11	11	Perception	325	67
Decisive prebooking research	5	4						
Influenced booking decision	3	3	Consequences for cruise operator					
Cruise-holiday avoidance	2	2		10	8			
Unaffected booking behavior	3	2						
Cheap-offer avoidance	1	1	Consequences for hotel operator					
German-holiday-resort avoidance	1	1		5	4	Consequences	15	11

5.1 Media Portrayal and Preconception

An obvious relationship can be established between the variables ‘media portrayal’ and ‘pre-conception’. In general, the ‘sunbed-war’ phenomenon is portrayed as being stereotypically German: German vacationers reserve the best places very early in the morning and then go back to bed or take a daily trip, before actually using the sunbed. Fights for a limited sunbed supply and vacationers who are racing against each other, armed with a towel, in order to get a sunbed, is a popular image, giving the impression, that a severe competition is taking place at pools. After the reservation is done, the sunbed remains empty, in some cases, for the rest of the day. According to media portrayals, late-comers, guests who haven’t been that proactive, have a considerable disadvantage in comparison to the early morning sunbed-blocker.

Moreover, media declare pool areas as primary holiday ‘battlefields’, because of the high occurrence of conflicts and violence, evoked by altercations about sunbeds. This mainly occurs in Spanish and Turkish holiday resorts and is a typical German-issue. Because of the media’s great influence, viewers may become influenced and biased, feeding their own prejudices and misconceptions, as stated by Interviewee T. More particularly, interviewee T revealed, that a holiday could start without being worried about getting a sunbed, and subsequently begin to worry about it once they hear about it.

5.2 Preconception, Perception and Reaction

The variable ‘preconception’ covers various prejudices towards the sunbed phenomenon. Preconceptions, amongst other biased opinions, include alleged motives, explaining the reasons behind vacationers’ early-morning reservation. Such motives are related to the provision of limited sunbeds, character traits such as egoism and greed, entitlement, the need for security and daily routine, feelings of fear of failure, the pursuit for convenience and the demonstration of social status. Moreover, a sunbed is deemed to be of utmost importance for every vacationer. They just want to spend their time relaxing at the pool area and it seems as if they don’t have other holiday interests. Because of the previously-mentioned motives and the assumed holiday intentions, the biased vacationer presumes that all other vacationers are going to get up early, rendering a competition in sunbed-reservations inevitable. This means that non-participants may be disadvantaged, when arriving later at the pool area. This assumption does not only impact on perceptions, but also stimulates behaviour and reactions.

5.2.1 The Prejudiced Opinion May Influence Vacationer's Perception

According to the biased presumption, that all vacationers react in the same manner and are going to reserve sunbeds early in the morning, it is believed that sunbeds will be blocked, to keep the '*open possibility*' (Interviewee K), denying other vacationers the opportunity to have a sunbed (cf. Interviewee S). This may cause vacationers to perceive the sunbeds as unused, but nonetheless blocked. Furthermore, sunbeds are believed to be limited and 29 open codes are suggesting that vacationers couldn't find any available sunbed. On the contrary, 21 open codes revealed vacationers' perception of sufficient free sunbeds. They could find a sunbed, but their demands regarding the particular spot, were low in comparison to other vacationers' demands towards their sunbed, was mentioned by Wendy, online user. In comparison to the contention, that a competition is happening at the pool area, vacationers perceived other holidaymakers as if they were running for the best places and pushing each other. They further witnessed discussions related to sunbeds. Mainly, the phenomenon is perceived as endemic to all-inclusive holidays, offered in the Turkish Riviera and Mallorca. Referring to the bias related to nationality, the reservation practice is regarded as being typically German, but also other nationalities are mentioned. The Germans are perceived to appear in masses and but other nationalities such as: French, Greek and the British, have also been reported reserving sunbeds. Another bias is reflected by the assumption, that people 'behave like animals' and that their behaviour is the equivalent animal territorial behaviour. Animals mark their territory with urine (cf. Merkur 2015) and vacationers' with towels. Indeed, the vacationers' behaviour was described as an animal behaviour by online user Mendacium, and the sunbeds are perceived as marked with towels and personal belongings, according to 43 open codes. Furthermore, another preconception accuses the provider, for not having a functional management concept. Hence, particular vacationers may attribute the problem to the provider's lack of intervention.

5.2.2 The Prejudiced Opinion May Influence Vacationer's Reaction

Actually, it is assumed that every single vacationer is participating in the sunbed-war phenomenon, leading to the bias that active involvement in this misbehaviour is inevitable. Vacationers are going to imitate the expected behaviour of other vacationers, waking up in the break of dawn to reserve a sunbed before anyone else can, in order to achieve their personal goal of getting a sunbed. The reaction is stimulated by the motive, that everyone else is going to do the same (as stated by Interviewee Z). This means that non-participants may be disadvantaged, when arriving later at the pool area. On the contrary, prejudice can cause other vacationers to avoid the participation in the sunbed-war phenomenon altogether. They would rather prefer to take the least favourable places or to search for alternative places at the beach, than to participate in such a petty activity, and in the worst case, let their holidays get spoilt by the accompanying stress. On the expectation of unnecessary stress and fuelled by

the media image of a pool area as a battlefield, some vacationers will refrain from removing towels of unused sunbeds, because they fear the confrontation risk with furious sunbed-blocker, more than the risk of not getting a suitable sunbed. Moreover, bias refers to the prevalence of erroneous pool regulations. An informal rule amongst vacationers is that a towel may signal a reservation and that it cannot be removed. Nevertheless, some vacationers who removed towels, did not experience any drawbacks. Rarely, did a confrontation take place, was argued by interviewee CH. In case the sunbed-blocker became aggressive, the hotel staff would be asked to mediate. The hotel staff would then decide on behalf of the towel-remover (online user of Discuss). Both variables, 'perception' and 'reaction' can be further linked to 'evaluation'.

5.3 Perception, Reaction and Evaluation

In accordance to the constructed causality model, 'perceptions' and 'reactions' related to the sunbed-war phenomenon discussed here. Thereby, the vacationers' general opinion can be categorised between seeing it as a holiday nuisance or as simply amusing entertainment. On the one hand, the perception of and the reaction to the reservation of sunbeds may lead vacationers to evaluate the phenomenon as holiday nuisance as stated in 59 open codes. Accordingly, the unavailability of sunbed stimulates various forms of nuisance. Sunbeds are perceived as being unused, resulting in a limited availability of sunbeds. Mentioned as really annoying, is the blocking practice of people who tend to be absent for long periods of time. This is encountered with frustrations by vacationers who are in search of a free sunbed. Furthermore, they get upset and state that their opportunities of enjoying their holiday is impaired, due to the unavailability of sunbeds (cf. Interviewee CH). On the contrary, some vacationers seem to accept the situation as given, and don't want their holidays to be spoilt by participating in the 'sunbed-wars' (cf. Interviewee O).

A travel agent (interviewee U) stated that, the sunbed-war is not regarded as a criterion, that would lead a vacationer to avoid a particular hotel. Those holiday-makers would rather tend to complain about other guests' behaviour and the mass tourism in general, than file complaints addressing directly the sunbed reservation phenomenon. On the other hand, this phenomenon is regarded as amusing/entertaining in 19 open codes. Some vacationers make a fun out of the phenomenon and this somewhat, presumably, enriches their holiday experience. Interviewee G confessed that altercations, due to a towel removal are, from his point of view, an extremely positive holiday-highlight. Other vacationers declared, that the phenomenon offers them a great entertainment while on vacation (cf. Interviewee K).

Furthermore, counter-measures are considered as positive interventions by the accommodation provider; giving equal chances to everyone. Counter-measures such as a 'towel police' and the removal of unattended things by an employee are considered positive. It is argued, that these counter-measures inhibit sunbed reservations, because if the things are removed, it becomes pointless to block any sunbed

(cf. Interviewee SCH). As a result, vacationers do not have to worry anymore, because every customer is treated equally and fairly. Participants don't have to wake up in the break of dawn, can sleep longer, and non-participants are also capable of getting a sunbed.

5.4 Evaluation and Consequences

The consequences for cruise operators seem to be significantly higher than hotel operators. This may be due to the differences between hotels and cruise ships. On board a cruise ship one cannot escape the masses, while during hotel stays one has the alternative of going to the beach as stated by an online user Marthamuse. Absent counter-measures cause online users to write negative comments on forums and that in turn, may influence other potential vacationers, having a huge impact on booking behaviour. Moreover, some potential customers would avoid holidays on cruise ships altogether.

6 Tentative Hypotheses

On the basis of the causality model, tentative hypotheses can be derived. The following four tentative hypotheses will be detailed with the aid of academic literature.

- Hypothesis: Media portrayals are generating biased preconceptions.
- Hypothesis: The generated preconception stimulates vacationers to perceive sunbed shortages and an ongoing competition at hotel pools.
- Hypothesis: Due to the formed preconceptions, vacationers are reserving sunbeds.
- Hypothesis: The absence of counter-measures drives online users to write negative comments on forums and this may in turn influence booking decisions.

6.1 Hypothesis: Media Portrayals Are Generating Biased Preconceptions

The sunbed reservation phenomenon is a frequent topic of media coverage in television, articles and the social media, conveying and reinforcing stereotypes (cf. Dovidio et al. 2010, p. 8). These stereotypes '*are socially supported, continually revived and hammered in, by our media of mass communication—by novels, short stories, newspaper items, movies, stage, radio, and television*' (Allport 1954 cited in Mutz and Goldman 2010, p. 1). Stereotypes evolve over time and result to human

beings immediately assessing related information individually, and using those *collected beliefs* at a later point in time for the interpretation of social and emotional signals (cf. Nelson 2004, p. 4). Furthermore, people have the tendency to evaluate the received information by television as *real-world* and *first-hand* experience. The experience, watched on television is almost similar to an experienced event that has happened in real life (cf. Mutz and Goldman 2010, p. 11). A large television screen for example, supports the broadcast to remain longer in one's memory. The greater the pictures the closer and more real is it perceived by its receiver (cf. *ibid* 2010, p. 12). One reason for the popularity of television is that the information can be received considerably easier than print (cf. Krendl 1986; Salomon 1983b, 1984; Salomon and Leigh 1984 cited in Cennamo 1993, p. 35). This is due to the oral language used by television, which is complemented by lifelike illustrations (cf. Cennamo 1993, p. 35). These illustrations are generating pictures in our minds (cf. Lippmann 1922 cited in Mutz and Goldman 2010, p. 11).

Moreover, it doesn't require a high level of intellectual effort (cf. *Ibid* 1993, p. 36); compared to print media that provide *only text and still pictures* (*Ibid* 1993, p. 35). Therefore, if the media portrays the hotel pool environment as discussed above, it may stay in the memories of human beings and generate pre- and during-holiday biases and/or negative expectations. Interviewee T stated: 'Media has a great influential role, and a holiday could begin without being worried if a sunbed would be available.' Therefore, vacationers are subjected and reinforce stereotypes, which is regarded as a form of preconception (cf. Dovidio et al. 2010, p. 5).

6.2 Hypothesis: The Generated Preconception Stimulates Vacationers to Perceive Sunbed Shortages and an Ongoing Competition at Hotel Pools

Stereotyping, and all other forms of pre-conception, is a mechanism helping human beings to put different kinds of information and events that they constantly encounter in their daily lives into categories (Nelson 2004, p. 4). '*We cannot possibly avoid this process*' (Allport 1954 cited in Nelson 2004, p. 5). Vacationers are doing the same: organising information and first hand-experience into categories. These categories are generating *beliefs* and *expectations* (*ibid* 2004, p. 4). In the case of sunbed-wars, vacationers develop personal opinions, including beliefs and expectations, towards their holiday experience. Furthermore, *stereotypes guide our social behaviour and often govern what information we seek, heed and remember* (Fiske 1988 cited in Nelson 2004, p. 4). That gives rise to an individual evaluation system, in which unrelated variables are forced to a relationship (cf. *Ibid* 2006, p. 26). This is decisive in terms of guiding individuals on how to perceive people and other happenings in their environment; based on their previously established characteristics which are fitting to their individual developed categories (Nelson 2004, p. 5). *In general, stereotypes produce a readiness to perceive behaviours or characteristics that are*

consistent with the stereotype (Dovidio et al. 2010, p. 7). Human beings tend to quickly apply those characteristics at the first phases of their individual perception and the impact is regarded as purposeful (cf. Dovidio et al. 2010, p. 7). Hence, stereotypes are pictures in one's mind, which are guiding their individual perception. If vacationers are bombarded over and over again with the 'battlefield' image of pool areas, as presented by media, where sunbeds are limited and an intense competition for the best places under the sun is taking place, they will most likely perceive the illustrated behaviour more intensely while on vacation than a vacationer who hasn't been prejudiced by media. According to the coding results in the category 'perception', 29 open codes were connected with the instance of vacationers not being able to find a sunbed, while 21 open codes revealed that sufficient sunbeds were free. This coding result could support the idea, that vacationers tend to perceive things rather selectively, depending to their media-exposure.

6.3 Hypothesis: Due to the Formed Preconceptions, Vacationers Are Reserving Sunbeds

Preconceptions are biased opinions that are subjective in nature. Cognitive biases are subjective or predisposed opinions that may emanate from specific heuristics (Bazerman 1990; Busenitz and Lau 1996 cited in Simon et al. 2000, p. 115). Furthermore, such biases are considered as erroneous and rigid *generalisations* (Allport 1954 cited in Dovidio et al. 2010, p. 5). Referring to biases, it is already stated that they have a huge influence on an individual's perception. Therefore, its great influence on a person's behaviour should not be underestimated. Accordingly, people actions are based on their biased opinion (cf. Schwenk 1986, cited in Simon et al. 2000, p. 127). Moreover, such biased opinions are considered as erroneous and rigid *generalisations* (Allport 1954 cited in Dovidio et al. 2010, p. 5). As a result, the decisions of vacationers are less *rational* (cf. Barnes 1984 cited in Simon et al. 2000, p. 115). This causes a negative attitude and a derived negative behaviour towards a particular target group (Dovidio et al. 2010, p. 5). In this case, the target group consists of all other vacationers, who are concurrently at the same holiday destination. The perceived competition as discussed previously, is the decisive reason that reinforces the development and reinforcement of biased opinions (cf. *ibid* 2010, p. 5). In other words, the prejudice that a competition is occurring at hotel pools, causes vacationers to act competitively. Moreover, such biased opinions stimulate vacationers to anticipate problems and an impaired holiday experience (cf. Barnes 1984; Hogarth 1980; Schwenk 1984 cited in Simon et al. 2000, p. 117). Referring to sunbed wars, vacationers fear not getting a sunbed if they don't participate in the reservation practice. Conclusively, they engage in this practice, believing that everybody is doing it. They seem to feel in competition with all other vacationers, contributing to negative attitudes and behaviour towards other holidaymakers.

6.4 Hypothesis: The Absence of Counter-Measures Drives Online Users to Write Negative Comments on Forums and This May Influence Other Potential Vacationer's Booking Decision

The internet is a powerful medium as it is used constantly by billions of people, enabling online word-of-mouth communication between online users. Unlimited *communicative space* is provided to write about each and every topic (cf. Sun et al. 2006, p. 1105). Opinions concerning diverse topics are discussed or shared with other people, who are not physically present (cf. Dennis et al. 1998; Ridings and Gefen 2004 cited in Sun et al. 2006, p. 1106). Even topics such as 'sunbed-war' are discussed online and have been included in this research. There are numerous relevant comments found online in online forums and on rating platforms. Due to impersonal communication, people are encouraged to write honest opinions without being afraid of facing other persons' reactions (cf. Roed 2003 cited in Sun et al. 2006, p. 1105). Furthermore, these opinions are more *influential* than a usual conversation between a limited number of participants. One online comment can reach high numbers of readers in a very short time (cf. Phelps et al. 2004 cited in Sun et al. 2006, p. 1106). More specifically, online users are in search for advice on unknown-to-them topics, such as the sunbed provision in hotel resorts, and on cruise ships for example. Online opinions are very influential here, because inexperienced online users tend to solely base their decision on others', rather than their own; experiences (Murray 1991; Ohanian 1990; Rodgers and Chen 2005 cited in Sun et al. 2006, p. 1105). Therefore, potential vacationers' decision to book a holiday could be aborted, if they happen to encounter criticism and/or negative information. If they find out, for example, that sunbeds are blocked and that the responsible staff is not intervening, they would probably look for alternatives. As previously-mentioned, in the online forum Kreuzfahrten-Treff, experienced online users are recommending cruise lines on which a functional sunbed management concept is implemented.

7 Conclusion

The first objective of this paper was to gain an understanding of the behavioural/perception-formation aspects of the sunbed-war phenomenon, from a vacationers' perspective. In total and following a coding process, six thematic areas could be identified, reflecting different determinants. The highest percentage of codes corresponded to 'preconceptions', also known as prejudgements. In general, the sunbed-war phenomenon is presented on numerous media channels and thus viewers/listeners are frequently confronted with this topic. Particularly, television is using real images, that remain like pictures in one's mind, shaping stereotypes. This stereotype, which is indeed a form of preconception, may influence vacationers' prejudices, perception and reaction. Eventually, their overall holiday evaluation will

be based on their biased experience. Among these stereotypes, is also the one of 'the German holidaymaker', who is supposed to be the sun-bed blocking nationality number one. But our research reveals that other nationalities are doing the same.

Allegedly, it is believed that among other reasons, the limited provision of sunbeds, character traits such as egoism and greed, entitlement, the need for security and daily routine, feelings of fear of failure, the pursuit for convenience and the demonstration of social status, all stimulate other vacationers to reserve sunbeds early in the morning and keep them for the whole day, regardless their actual use. Involvement in this type of misbehaviour seems to be inevitable, because it is believed that every vacationer is doing so. Based on this prejudice, other vacationers tend to imitate such behaviours. Accordingly, they reserve sunbeds early in the morning or already in the previous evening, blocking more than one sunbed, for group and family members. Afterwards, they leave the sunbed, and sometimes the bed stays empty for the rest of the day. Other vacationers, who haven't been that 'proactive' and refrain from participating in sunbed wars, arrive later at the pool area to find all sunbeds reserved. They hesitate removing the towels, of unused sunbeds in the fear of a confrontation with a furious sunbed-blocker, who could return and reclaim their 'reservation'. This is accompanied with a feeling frustration, because they cannot find any available place. Alternatively, the 'courageous ones' remove the towels, stating that just on rare occasions someone confronted them directly. The level of nuisance differs amongst vacationers. Some vacationers are annoyed and upset by this practice, and immediately look for alternatives. Other guests are entertained by it, seeing their holiday enriched by the excitement of a confrontation. The second objective of this paper was to determine possible strategies for accommodation providers, to ensure the guest's level of satisfaction. On the one hand, counter-measures were evaluated positively, because they give equal chances to all vacationers and ultimately results to always available sunbeds. On the flipside, the lack of intervention leads to complaint; especially in forums, where the vacationers of cruise lines seem to regard a functional sunbed management concept a key question of their pre-holiday research and booking decision. As a consequence, customers may avoid booking a holiday with a specific holiday-provider. Hotel guests would rather complain about the masses of German tourists, and avoid such resorts altogether. Therefore, this paper proposes that accommodation providers should not ignore the issue, and they are urged to apply practicable counter-measures. As discussed in the beginning of this paper, customer satisfaction is a competitive advantage. Counter-measures for holiday-nuisances, such as 'sunbedwards', are directly connected to vacationers' level of satisfaction. If countermeasures are adapted properly, guest satisfaction would increase, resulting in positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

8 Topics for Further Research

This research is the basis for further quantitative research, in which the tentative hypotheses can be tested. Furthermore, it offers a plethora of unexplored topics, as for example, that the Germans generalise, attributing particular negative character traits and holiday-behaviour to their own nationality. This piece of research challenges such stereotypes, showing that it is not only Germans who are reserving sunbeds. The interesting questions here is: To what extent does tourist misconduct and misbehaviour is affected by (and affects) cultural stereotypes?

Furthermore, the underlying behavioural pattern of the sun-bed wars phenomenon is not merely applicable for sun-beds, but also for a variety of other holiday-encounters as: buffets, bus excursions, airport check-in areas and gates, etc.

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