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The hybrid tourist

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ABSTRACT

Inspired by the recent emergence of the hybrid consumer in the marketing literature, the present article defines hybrid tourists and assesses empirical evidence of their existence. Results indicate that hybrid tourists—tourists whose segment membership for the next trip cannot be predicted from their segment membership of their last trip—are the norm, rather than the exception. Only one quarter of tourists remain in the same motivation segment across more than one trip. Results are similar for expenditure segments. Tourist hybridity exists both with respect to travel motivations and expenditure. Personal characteristics predict hybridity. New approaches of market segmentation are needed to cater for the hybrid tourist.

Introduction

Market Segmentation is a critical component of strategic marketing planning and forms the basis of most marketing action. Market segmentation assumes that buyers can be categorised in groups—referred to as market segments—which contain people with similar characteristics while at the same time being distinctly different from people in other market segments (Smith, 1956). Similarities among segment members allow tourist destinations and businesses to customise their offer to best meet the market segment's needs. This also holds in cases where distinct market segments do not naturally exist in data, but are instead created via segmentation analysis (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2010)

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which is exploratory in nature. Customization increases the likelihood of consumers purchasing, enjoying and recommending the product. Customization also reduces marketing cost because marketing communications and promotions can be targeted. Given these benefits, it is not surprising that market segmentation is seen as "essential for marketing success" (Lilien & Rangaswamy, 2002, p. 61) and is widely adopted in commercial marketing, including tourism marketing.

The recently emerged concept of the hybrid consumer fundamentally challenges the value of market segmentation. The hybrid consumer, as described by Ehrnrooth and Gronroos (2013, p. 1793) "buys cheaper generics and low-end brands on some purchase occasions, and then on other occasions trades up to premium, high-end brands and happily pays for them. None of these consumers' behaviours fit pre-specified consumer segmentation criteria".

If hybrid consumers exist in tourism and if they represent a substantial proportion of the market, the value of market segmentation as the strategic cornerstone of tourism marketing is in question. Dependent or independent of their last purchase each consumer could fall into a different segment for each one of their trips, a phenomenon observed by Bieger and Laesser in 2002. In such circumstances, market segmentation based on static segmentation criteria would fail. Instead, either a more dynamic type of market segmentation would be required or organisations would be forced to return to mass marketing. Another possibility would be to take completely different segmentation approaches, such as segmenting visitor flows (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2014 or Beritelli, Reinhold, Laesser, & Bieger, 2015).

The key aim of the present study is to offer a definition of the hybrid tourist and to determine whether there is empirical evidence of their existence. In so doing, the study challenges the currently implicit assumption in strategic marketing that regularly repeating segmentation studies using one off cross-sectional studies is an acceptable approach to accounting for consumer heterogeneity in the market. Findings have major implications for strategic marketing: they require tourism destinations and businesses to critically rethink the suitability of static segmentation studies as basis for marketing action. If hybrid consumers indeed exist and do not represent a neglectably small market niche, destinations and tourism businesses may need to fundamentally rethink their offers and the ways they communicate them to consumers.

Literature review

Industry has embraced the concept of the hybrid consumer. The Rabobank Group, an international financial services provider, published a report titled "Rise of the 'Hybrid Consumer' to polarise the food sector" which has formed the basis of the discussion of hybrid consumers in industry. Rabobank describes the hybrid consumer as "trading up to premium, high-end products that matter most from an emotional and social perspective, such as premium brands in supermarkets and fine dining" with money "saved by trading down on staples" (Rabobank, 2013).

Rabobank uses growth rates of retailers to support their findings, stating that retailers "geared towards the mid-market are showing lower growth rates over a longer period than their peers at the extreme ends of the spectrum. Between 2007 and 2012, above average performers in the US were either hard discounters, such as Aldi, or premium formats, such as Whole Foods and HE Butt Grocery. Similar trends exist in Western Europe. Growth rates at mid-market operators, such as Morrison's, Tesco, Sainsbury and Asda, have been clearly lower than at discounters such as Aldi and Lidl as well as upmarket retailers, such as Waitrose" (Rabobank, 2013). The definition used in most industry documents relating to the hybrid consumer view is consumer's hybridity with respect to their willingness to pay a wide range of prices as the key defining criterion.

Hybrid consumption has received surprisingly little attention in the academic literature. The original theoretical foundation can be traced back to household production theory (Becker, 1965; Betancourt & Gautschi, 1992; Muth, 1966). Household production theory postulates that households allocate income and other resources (such as time etc.) across different goods where different goods have different levels of utility. A vacation is one such good. As a consequence, the household must make resource allocation decisions which imply sacrifice. This has been illustrated in the tourism context for discretionary income (Crouch et al., 2007; Dolnicar et al., 2008; Laesser & Crouch, 2006).

The assessment of utilities and sacrifices occurs across products of different kind, but also across components of one product, such as a vacation which consists of travel, accommodation, activities and many more components. These assessments inevitably lead to trade-offs. For example, a tourist may choose to fly with a discount carrier and invest the savings into staying at a nicer hotel. Utility assessments are likely to depend on the context of the product purchase. For example in tourism, the hotel preference may be tightly linked with the travel party: if a couple celebrates their anniversary they may assess a higher utility to a fancy hotel. If the same couple travels with their five children the utility of "fancy" may decrease and the utility of "child-friendly" may dramatically increase. As a consequence, it can be expected that within-subject purchase behaviours might be quite heterogeneous or hybrid.

Heterogeneity in within-subject purchasing behaviour has first been discussed in detail in the academic literature by Wind, Mahajan, and Gunther (2002), coining the phenomenon "consumer hybridity". Wind and colleagues postulated—at the turn of the millennium—that we are entering the age of the centaur. Centaurs are consumers who represent the convergence of old and new, online and offline, traditional and revolutionary consumer behaviours. They act across multiple channels in various situations. Instead of suggesting that there are three separate segments (traditional, cyber consumer and centaur), Wind and colleagues believe that all consumers are moving toward becoming centaurs. The authors acknowledge, however, that centaurs are heterogeneous, thus not postulating that market segmentation will become redundant.

In 2006, Silverstein and Butman presented their core thesis of market bifurcation, providing evidence for consumers both trading up and paying premium prices for some products and services, especially those that have emotional value, and trading down to cheap products and services for basics. This concept has recently been picked up under the term "consumer hybridity" by Ehrnrooth and Gronroos (2013). They define a hybrid consumer as a person who buys premium brands on some purchase occasions and budget brands on other occasions. Hybrid consumers—according to the authors—do not fit into any particular market segment defined in traditional marketing literature. Ehrnrooth and Gronroos (2013) conduct an exploratory study in order to analyse the phenomenon of hybrid consumption and propose viewing hybrid consumption patterns on a continuum between the extreme ends of omnivorous and polarised hybrid consumers. Fig. 1—reproduced

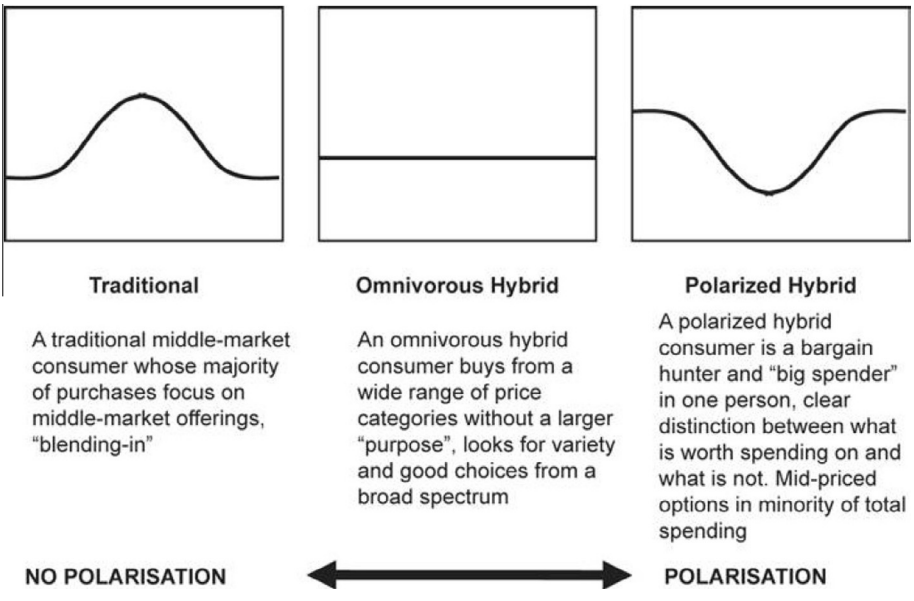

Fig. 1. Classification of purchasing patterns as a continuum. (*Source:* Ehrnrooth and Groonroos (2013)).

from Ehrnrooth and Gronroos (2013)—shows hybrid consumption patterns and how they differ from traditional consumption pattern. The y-axis represents volume, and the x-axis shows the relative price of purchases.

As shown in Fig. 1, consumers can be classified along a purchase pattern continuum into three consumer types. At one end of continuum is the traditional consumer who exhibits a non-polarised consumption pattern. The traditional consumption pattern is represented in Fig. 1 by a bell curve in which most purchases are in the mid-price range, relative to the person's income. The other two patterns are examples of hybrid consumption. Polarised hybrid consumers predominantly purchase at the low and high price extremes. Omnivorous hybrid consumers display less extreme purchase patterns, depicted in the relatively flat curve (Ehrnrooth & Gronroos, 2013).

In addition, Ehrnrooth and Gronroos identify drivers of trading up versus trading down. Trading up is attributed to motivations such as taking care of oneself and connecting with others, to self-actualisation, experience-seeking, pampering, and aesthetics. Trading down is attributed to motivation of devoting money to what matters most. Regarding demographic characteristics, polarised hybrid consumption occurs more frequently among young, urban socialites with a sense of fashion. Hybrid consumers are generally well-educated, outgoing self-fulfillers, who do not try to blend in and may be opinion leaders for their reference groups.

Ehrnrooth and Gronroos (2013) postulate that hybrid consumption transcends category boundaries. One explanation is that products and services have different meanings (different utilities) for consumers in different contexts, as discussed previously in the context of household production theory. Another explanation is that hybrid consumption could be based on evaluation of best value-for-money (optimising the allocation of sacrifices) as opposed to what is seen as an important category or situation. This dimension is influenced by both category and situation dimensions but is not restricted to either. Category, situation and value-for-money perception are three interrelated factors that can influence hybrid behaviour. It can be concluded that hybrid consumption can exist within one product category.

According to Stamer and Diller (2006) households search for price information and focus on low prices in some categories to reduce their financial risk. At the same time they may have high reservation prices in other product categories. Stamer and Diller (2006) empirically assess price segment stability across eight product categories and identify five types of price behaviour. In order to investigate the effect of product category on price behaviour for every consumer, they divide the sample for two products into four sub-groups. They find that only a third of all consumers are assigned the same segment for both products. Stamer and Diller's findings suggest that homogeneity of product categories in terms of perceived risk drives price behaviour consistency across categories.

If hybrid consumers are seen as consumers whose segment membership is not stable, the segmentation literature is a source for additional insights. A number of segmentation studies have investigated stability of segment membership over time emphasising segment membership stability as a time related issue. This body of literature states that individuals do not remain in the same segment because consumer's attitudes and the environment change over time.

Investigating stability of benefit segments in retail banking market, Calantone and Sawyer (1978) find individuals are very unlikely to remain in the same benefit segment over a two-year period. They observe considerable segment switching; only 29% of consumers remain in the same segment across two waves of analysis. This observation is explained by the fact that importance weights (essentially again utilities) are situation specific and individual situations change over time. This dynamic view of market segmentation is not in line with the definition of the hybrid consumer if it implies a lifetime consumer development. If, however, it implies a context-specific change in importance weights, it relates very closely to the idea of a hybrid consumer.

The latter interpretation is taken by Yuspeh and Fein (1982) who attempt to reclassify respondents to benefit segmentation study two years after the original study was undertaken. Their results show that only 40% of the original "core" respondents can accurately be reclassified. The authors provide the following explanation for their observation: responses to particular benefits or attribute items are greatly influenced by the context of the surrounding question battery and survey environment.

Farley, Winer, and Lehmann (1987) also find a high degree of instability in segment membership of households segmented based on their consumption patterns. Half of the households switch segments

in two successive years. The authors believe that changing use situation, variety seeking, promotional activity, and household lifestyle changes cause observed change patterns. Müller and Hamm (2014) use confirmatory cluster analysis to examine stability of segments based on customers' attitudes and purchase habits of consumption. They find that the membership of all clusters change considerably within a three-year period of time. In all clusters more than one third, and in some clusters almost half, of the original members have switched to another cluster.

Some authors of market segmentation studies relax restrictive assumption of static segment membership over time. They assume, instead, that segment membership is not stable due to the fact that individual's preferences change over time. As a consequence, they use dynamic latent change models. Such models allow the study switching behaviour of individuals over time retrospectively. More specifically, they allow individuals to switch from one preference state to another in different time periods thus allowing for analysis of changes in individual's preference (Bockenholt & Langeheine, 1996; Brangule-Vlagsma, Pieters, & Wedel, 2002; Poulsen, 1990; Ramaswamy, 1997). It can be concluded, therefore, that people change segment membership because their needs change over time.

The only study that investigates the characteristics of people who change segments is that by Hu and Rau (1995). The authors track changes in segment membership of usage segments over a period of one year. They conclude that "shifting" consumers share some similarities in terms of their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. "Non-shifters" do not display those similarities. The authors also identify variables that discriminate between segment members who "shift" and those who do not. The key insight from this study is that it may be possible that "shifters"—people whose segment membership does not remain the same over time—form their own segments and could be targeted as such.

In sum, the key characteristic of hybrid consumption is not instability of segment memberships over long periods of time which is attributable to a person's changes in life circumstances. Rather it is the instability of segment membership across purchase occasions which all occur in a relatively short amount of time.

Finally, to conclude the review of prior literature, tourism researchers have also made initial contributions to the hybridity of consumers in the tourism context. Bieger and Laesser (2002) segment the Swiss travel market according to travel motivations. They implement a situational segmentation which focuses both on people (described in terms of socio-demographic and motivational factors) and trips undertaken. They find that travel profile (including attraction of certain destination, number of participant persons and type of trip) determines travellers' motivational structure to a higher degree than their socio-demographic characteristics. According to Bieger and Laesser, it is not the individual's needs or benefits sought in travelling that become important but the total structure of the travel group as well as the context in which they travel.

Variation in push motivation is observed in a study by Jamezroy and Uysal (1994) who show push motivation varies for different travel groups (travelling alone, in friendship groups, families, couples of German overseas travellers). They suggest using travel units as target segments. Both these studies, while not explicitly discussing the phenomenon of the hybrid tourists, point to the fact that tourists do not neatly fall into market segments and do not remain members of a segment for as long as they are tourists, thus suggesting that hybrid tourists exist.

While the concept of hybrid consumers has not been explicitly discussed in the tourism literature to date, the observation has been made that some tourists do not behave in the way one would expect them to when on vacations. One term used to describe a specific kind of tourists with such unpredictable travel behaviour is "flashpacker". Hannam and Diekmann (2010) define flashpackers as older backpackers who stay in a wide variety of different accommodations depending on where they travel to. Flashpackers have high disposable incomes, travel off the beaten track and engage with the mainstream backpacker culture. But they carry a laptop (or, at the very least, a flash drive) and a mobile phone. According to Jarvis and Peel (2010) flashpackers do not have distinct travel motivations, nor do they use specific travel routes or infrastructure. However, due to their higher travel budget and increased demand for comfort, they prefer higher standard accommodation and spend more on their meals and tours. The flashpacker, therefore, is an excellent example of hybrid vacation behaviour among tourists.

Methodology

Definition of the hybrid tourist

The essential characteristic of the hybrid tourist is that the features of the product the hybrid consumer purchases can vary dramatically from one buying occasion to the other. It is proposed, therefore—based on Ehrnrooth and Gronroos's (2013) description of a hybrid consumer—to define hybrid tourists as follows:

> Hybrid tourists do not follow an established pattern of tourism consumption. Instead, they consume a range of tourism products with different characteristics during a period of time where their life circumstances remain unchanged. For hybrid consumers, segment membership for their next trip cannot be predicted by the segment membership of their last trip.

Based on this definition, an empirical study is conducted to determine whether there is empirical evidence for the existence of hybrid tourists and—if so—how high the proportion of such tourists is in the marketplace. In this empirical study hybridity is operationalised in the following ways for two constructs of interest:

Motivation: (1) the trips of a given subject during one year are in one and the same motivation segment (low hybridity), (2) at least one trip of a given subject during one year is in a different motivation segment (medium hybridity), or (3) every single trip of a given subject during one year is in a different motivation segment (high hybridity).

(Daily) trip expenditure: (1) 60% and below of the value from the median of the standard deviation of the expenditure paid per day and per person (low hybridity), (2) 61%-139% of the value from the median of the standard deviation of the expenditure paid per day and per person (medium hybridity), or (3) 140% and above of the value from the median of the standard deviation of the expenditure paid per day and per person (high hybridity).

Data collection

The study is based on outbound travel behaviour data from a survey conducted in 2011/2012 on the Swiss resident population. Data collection took place via self-administered, structured written diary-like interviews with a representative sample of households. All household members participated.

Data collection and sampling was administrated by a commercial market research company on behalf of one of the authors who was in control of the survey instrument and research design. From the fourth quarter of 2011 until the end of the third quarter of 2012 each study participant completed one questionnaire for each private trip with at least one overnight stay.

Participants were recruited in two ways: by telephone and through an online panel. Recruiting only via the internet or only via telephone leads to samples which are not representative of the total population. By using both recruitment channels this problem is avoided. Participants could choose how to complete the questionnaire; online or by paper and pencil. The process of completing the questionnaire was independent of the sampling process. The 1748 participants recruited by telephone were quota sampled by region, size of household, and type of household. Contacts were drawn from a national database which is representative of 98% of all households in Switzerland. The additional 1655 households were recruited through an online panel consisting of 45,000 members representative of the Swiss resident population.

The final sample of 3403 households consisted of 7818 people who undertook 6445 trips. The trips were weighted according to size of household, region of residence, size of municipality, gender, and age of the persons undertaking them. For the investigation of tourist hybridity only 1609 participants were used; those who have undertaken at least two vacations in the year of data collection. Of those, 1055 people took two, 388 took three, 108 took four, 41 took five, and 17 took more than five vacations.

The data contains information from Swiss residents relating to all their vacation travel between October 2011 and September 2012. Specifically, study participants provided information about each vacation trip they took, including motivation, sources of information, duration of trip, date of departure and return, choice of destination, choice of transportation and accommodation, activities pursued, whether it was a package trip or an individual trip, travel expenses per person, and many more.

In addition, participants provided information about themselves, including their gender, year of birth, relationship status, citizenship, level of education, occupation, income, number of people in the household, and personality (using Malhotra's 1981 scale). Furthermore respondents answered a number of general questions about their vacation behaviour, including how many trips they take per year with at least one overnight stay away from home, how many trips they take per year with at least four overnight stays, and which information sources they use to inform their travel planning in general.

Data analysis

Data were analysed in multiple steps. First travel motivations were used to group participants in post hoc (Myers & Tauber, 1977), a posteriori (Mazanec, 2000) or data-driven (Dolnicar, 2004) market segments. Individuals who were placed in different segments with different trips were classified as being hybrid. Next, study participants were split according to the variance of expenditures per person across multiple trips. A slightly stricter version of the rule proposed in the Rabobank study (premium price defined as 120% of the product category median price; budget price defined as 80% of the product category median price) was used: we chose a value of 40% above and below the median. This larger band is selected to ensure that the sample sizes of subgroups are sufficient for further analysis.

The distribution of expenditures per day per person in the data is very broad. Study participants in the high variance groups were classified as being hybrid. We assume that holiday trip as one single decision (not a bundle of products where we make the decision cheap or expensive every single time). This is especially true for a packaged tour, where a tourist has to pay a single price for the package. As we do not analyse absolute expenditures per trip, but the deviance between the trips for one decision maker, we look at a relative measure within all trips for a single tourist, so the term expenditure hybridity is even stronger than comparing absolute expenditures.

A cross-tabulation was developed to see if study participants determined to be hybrid with respect to travel motives were more likely to be hybrid with respect to price. Finally, the size of the hybrid consumer segments was determined and hybrid segments were profiled to determine if they differed in their characteristics from non-hybrid study participants.

For the data-driven segmentation of participants, fifteen travel motivation items were used. This number of variables is suitable for the sample size of 1609 in view of the recent sample size recommendation for data-driven segmentation studies of 70 times the number of variables derived from simulation studies with artificial data sets (Dolnicar, Grün, Leisch, & Schmidt, 2014).

To determine how many groups participants should be split into, the stability of segmentation solutions containing between two and 20 segments was assessed. Specifically—following the data structure analysis procedure proposed by Dolnicar and Leisch (2010)—fifty repeated calculations were run for each number of clusters using the k-means algorithm (Hartigan & Wong, 1979) and different bootstrap samples. Stability was calculated using the Adjusted Rand Index (Rand, 1971). The Rand Index measures how similar two groupings of data are; the adjustment corrects for the probability of similar groupings given different numbers of groups or market segments. Higher values of the Rand Index point to higher levels of stability which is desirable in market segmentation as it indicates that the obtained market segmentation solution is not just a random partition of the data. Fig. 2 shows a bar chart of Adjusted Rand Index values for two to 20 segments.

As can be seen in Fig. 2, three numbers of clusters stand out in terms of stability: the two-cluster solution with a median Rand Index above 0.9, the six-cluster solution with a median Rand Index of above 0.8 and the eight-cluster solution with a median Rand Index of above 0.6. The eight cluster solution was selected because it offers more distinct clusters.

Note that—because the data set contains only study participants who have undertaken two or more trips in one calendar year—the resulting clusters are not market segments in the traditional sense.

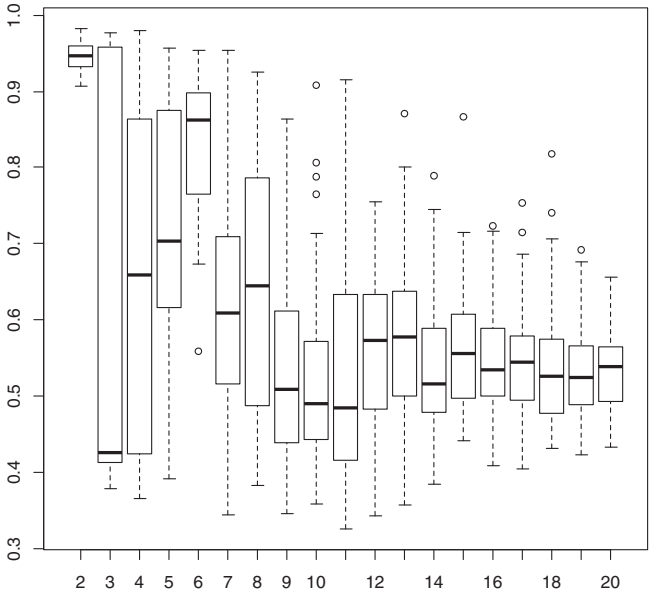

Fig. 2. Stability of results across 50 repeated *k*-means calculations.

Rather than each person being allocated to one segment, each person-trip combination is allocated. A person can, therefore, be part of one single segment in the case where all trips fall into this same segment. A person can, however, also be a member of different market segments. This occurs when different trips are assigned to different segments. The clusters therefore represent—in the first instance—generic travel motivation positions for vacation trips. Segments are identified at a later stage by determining patterns of distribution of people's vacation trips across those generic motivation positions. This kind of analysis is referred to as Perceptions Based Market Segmentation (Mazanec & Strasser, 2000).

Extreme group comparisons of consumers with high versus low hybridity patterns were undertaken by calculating binary logistic regressions with backward selection of independent variables. Thirty personal characteristics were entered in the first step of analysis. For the motivation hybridity extreme group comparison 558 study participants were available, for the expenditure hybridity extreme group comparison 445 participants and for the combination hybridity extreme group comparison 115 participants. The remaining participants had to be excluded because the full set of personal characteristics was not available for them.

Results

Travel motivation hybridity

The eight-cluster solution of study participants who undertook at least two vacation trips in one year based on their travel motivations is illustrated in Fig. 3. Fig. 3 uses graphical statistics to simplify the interpretation of clusters (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2013); it includes one bar chart for each cluster. Each cluster represents one generic travel motivation position and is interpreted by comparing the bars with the horizontal lines with the dot at the end. The bars show to which degree each generic position is characterised by each of the motives, the horizontal line with the dots indicates the average values for all travel motivations as accessed by all study participants for all vacation trips. The larger the difference between the bar and the line value, the more distinct is a generic motivation position with respect to that particular attribute. Bars in colour indicate high distinctness.

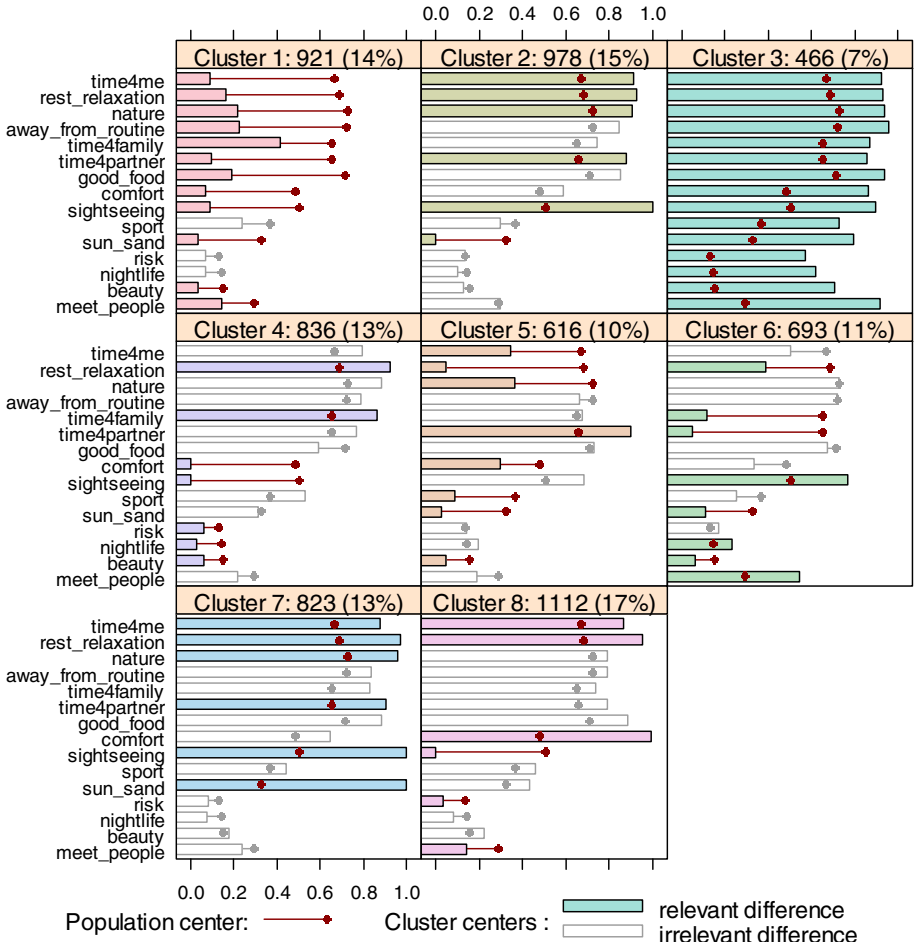

Fig. 3. Travel motivation segment profiles.

As can be seen, the travel motivation segments have very distinct profiles: cluster 2 represents trips motivated primarily by sightseeing, spending time with a partner, having time for one self, resting, relaxing and enjoying nature. Cluster 4 trips are motivated by rest and relaxation and having time for the family; cluster 5 trips are driven by spending time with a partner; and cluster 6 trips by sightseeing and meeting people. Trips assigned to cluster 7 are motivated by sun and sand activities, sightseeing, spending time with the partner, having time for one self, resting and relaxing and enjoying nature and cluster 8 trips by comfort, rest and relaxation and time for one self. Finally, cluster 3 represents trips for which people are motivated by all listed motives; cluster 1 in contrast represents trips for which people are not motivated by any of the listed motives, a phenomenon already noted by an earlier similar study by Bieger and Laesser (2002). Such trips would for example include visits of relatives (with no further holiday type activity) or routinized trips such as spending weekends in second homes. In addition, note however that a fraction of those trips may represent response styles.

The profiles of these segments, however, are not of primary interest for this study. Rather, it is of interest which tourists have undertaken multiple trips which are all driven by the same motives or set of motives. Those tourists would be seen as not being hybrid and being perfectly suited for a classic and static market segmentation approach. Hybrid tourists, on the other hand, are expected to undertake vacation trips which are driven by different sets of motives, so their annual vacation trips would

be spread across multiple of those generic motivation positions. Table 1 provides information about the motivation hybridity of our study participants.

Results indicate that travel motivation hybridity is the norm, not the exception. In the present data set, 57% of all study participants who undertook more than two vacation trips in one year display a different travel motivation patterns for each of those trips. A further 20% display the same travel motivation pattern for two of three or more trips, but a different motivation pattern for at least one trip taken in the same year. Only a quarter of study participants display the same travel motivation pattern for all the trips undertaken in one year.

Expenditure hybridity

Table 2 shows the results relating to expenditure hybridity. As can be seen, about one third of study participants display low expenditure hybridity, another third medium expenditure hybridity and 39% high expenditure hybridity.

While there is an argument for high travel motivation hybridity based on the very nature of the tourism product which involves—to different degrees for different people—a sensation seeking element, this is not the case in relation to expenditure hybridity. Rather, independent of the travel motivations for a trip, the usual assumption in tourism marketing is that some segments spend a lot of money and others do not (budget travellers). It is assumed that expenditure behaviour is stable within those segments.

The results, therefore, are surprising. To illustrate, two examples of low expenditure hybridity are that of Traveller A, who spent 71 Swiss Francs per day per person on the first vacation and 53 Francs on the second vacation or that of Traveller B who spent 90 Francs on the first and 67 Francs on the second trip. High expenditure hybridity is illustrated by Traveller C who undertook four trips in one year. For three of the trips the expenditures per person per day ranged between 105 and 130 Francs, on one of the trips, however, they had expenses of 570 Francs per person per day. Similarly, Traveller D who spent 33 Francs on one and 260 on the other trip per person per day.

Combination hybridity

The term combination hybridity is used to refer to a cross-over of both travel motivation and expenditure hybridity groups, as shown in Table 3. Table 3 contains the cross-tabulation of motivation hybridity and expenditure hybridity segments. These results indicate that all combinations of travel motivation and expenditure hybridity exist, but that there are cells which point to particularly frequent combinations, most notably that of high travel motivation hybridity and high expenditure hybridity which contains more than one fifth of all study participants.

Another 19% of study participants display high motivation hybridity, but low expenditure hybridity, a pattern which is consistent with the idea of sensation seeking in tourism. Interestingly, however, only 11% are neither expenditure nor travel motivation hybrid; these are the people which are assumed to form the entire population when market segmentations studies are undertaken. Approximately 50% of the high expenditure hybrids have high motivation hybridity as well, which

Table 1
Tourist motivation hybridity.

	Study participants	Average number of trips
Low motivation hybridity (All trips in one motivation position)	381 (24%)	2.24*
Medium motivation hybridity (At least one trip in a different motivation position)	318 (20%)	3.80*
High motivation hybridity (Every single trip in a different motivation position)	910 (57%)	2.23*

* Note that to determine low and high motivation hybridity at least two trips are required per study participant. To determine medium hybridity at least three trips are required.

Table 2
Tourist expenditure hybridity.

	Study participants	Average number of trips
Low expenditure hybridity (60% and below of the value from the median of the standard deviation of the expenditure paid per day and per person)	555 (35%)	2.30*
Medium expenditure hybridity	443 (28%)	2.59*
High expenditure hybridity (140% and above of the value from the median of the standard deviation of the expenditure paid per day and per person)	608 (39%)	2.64*

* Note that to determine expenditure hybridity at least two trips are required per study participant.

Table 3
Travel motivation and expenditure hybridity (number and percentage of study participants who have undertaken at least two vacation trips in a year).

	Low expenditure hybridity	Medium expenditure hybridity	High expenditure hybridity
Low motivation hybridity	183 (11%)	91 (6%)	105 (7%)
Medium motivation hybridity	65 (4%)	110 (7%)	143 (9%)
High motivation hybridity	307 (19%)	242 (15%)	360 (22%)

means that half of the high expenditure hybrids travel with more or less the same motivation, but spend quite different amounts on their vacation.

Are hybrid consumers a segment in their own right?

The findings reported above provide strong evidence for consumer hybridity occurring in tourism. The above findings do—however—not offer conclusive evidence about whether there is a new segment of hybrid consumers which can be targeted, or whether segmentation as a concept is no longer of value because people can no longer be classified into segments at all. Rather—depending on the context—they fall into different market segments every time they undertake a trip. We investigate this question by testing whether there are distinct differences between the extreme groups of high versus low motivation and expenditure hybridity segments.

Results for this extreme group comparison of travel motivation hybridity segments are provided in Table 4. As can be seen, only a very small number of personal characteristics discriminates between high and low hybrid tourists with respect to travel motivations: more hybrid tourists are older and use more travel-related advertising as an information source. Interestingly, however, there are significant differences in four personality traits of these tourists: hybrid tourists describe themselves as more calm, organised, colourless and modest. Overall, using these personal characteristics improves the ability to predict tourist hybridity correctly to 73.7% classification.

Table 4
Extreme group comparison for motivation hybridity (binary logistic regression).

	Regression coefficient	Standard error	Sig.	Exp(B)
Year of birth	0.017	0.007	0.011	1.017
Use of travel-related advertising	0.642	0.225	0.004	1.900
Personality "excitable – calm"	0.125	0.063	0.048	1.133
Personality "organised – unorganised"	−0.130	0.063	0.040	0.878
Personality "colourless – colourful"	−0.112	0.057	0.050	0.894
Personality "modest – vain"	−0.121	0.064	0.061	0.886
Standard deviation of travel expenditures per person per day	0.002	0.001	0.065	1.002
Constant	0.137	0.607	0.822	1.147

Tables 5 and 6 which are provided in the Online Supplementary Materials offer the same analysis for expenditure and combination hybridity. In both cases, personal characteristics were successfully identified which discriminate between levels of hybridity among tourists.

Conclusions, limitations and future work

Inspired by the recent emergence of the hybrid consumer in the marketing literature, the present article set out to define hybrid tourists and to assess empirical evidence of their existence. The key contribution of the study is that it challenges market segmentation as we know it. The way market segmentation is currently used, it is assumed that people neatly fall into market segments and—conveniently for marketing managers—remain in those segment. The present study shows that this is not the case: individuals can change segments from one purchase occasion to the next. Our current approach to market segmentation cannot detect such changes and thus leads to suboptimal marketing recommendations. With about five percent of studies in the academic marketing literature using market segmentation, suboptimal conclusions represent a serious problem to knowledge development and marketing practice.

Note, however that the present study is not challenging market segmentation per se. It continues to make sense—both from a social science knowledge development perspective and a pragmatic marketing perspective—to acknowledge that people are different and that they can be catered for better is differences between them are understood and accounted for. However, we need to move to differentiating tourists the vacation behaviour of whom can be modelled validly using traditional market segmentation (for example, German tourists spending their annual summer holiday at an Austrian lake, as they have been doing for the last 25 years) and tourists where the traditional segmentation approach fails to predict future types of holidays. The latter will apply to the segment of hybrid consumers, who—depending on situation and travel party—will take very different types of holidays.

Results from the empirical study conducted in this study provide strong evidence for the existence of hybrid tourists. In fact, the analysis of data from Swiss residents suggests that hybrid tourists are the norm, rather than the exception. In terms of travel motivations, only a quarter of study participants who have undertaken more than one vacation trip in the year in which the study was conducted report similar motivations for these trips. One fifth of study participants placed one trip in a different motivational position than the others, and nearly 60% of study participants provide distinctly different motivation patterns for the trips they have undertaken in one year.

It can be argued that taking vacations is all about experiencing new things. Therefore, hybridity in terms of motivations is not really hybridity, but rather a reflection of the nature of the service. A supporting argument for that could be that the more trips one takes in a given time period, the higher the degree of motivation hybridity. However, this assumption is not supported by the results (refer to Table 1). Moreover, the same cannot be argued for expenditure hybridity, which is the basis of the original conceptualisation of the hybrid consumer. Both expenditure hybridity and combination hybridity are evident from the analysis of data from Swiss residents, supporting the findings of the original authors on the hybrid consumers, Ehrnrooth and Gronroos.

Results further suggest that hybridity is associated with personal traits (reflecting findings by Laesser & Zehrer, 2012) as well as situational attributes of travel (in line with prior findings on travel motivation and destination choice; cf. Bieger & Laesser, 2002). It can therefore be assumed that personal traits are more stable, although there are certain personal traits which foster hybridity, including excitable, colourful, and unorganised types of personality. And as destination choice can vary with the motivation, which again determines the situational settings of any travel in the first place, serious limitations of existing market segmentation approaches in tourism become apparent.

Does this mean market segmentation is dead? It does not, because hybridity of tourists is predictable, as was illustrated by binary logistic regressions which identified specific characteristics of people who are more likely to display hybrid behaviour. These results are in line with the conclusions drawn earlier by Hu and Rau (1995). It can therefore be concluded that traditional market segmentation approaches are still of value when non-hybrid tourists are selected for targeting. However, this group appears to be rather small. For hybrid tourists—who seem to form a much larger

segment of their own—new marketing action plans based on a situational approach of visitor behaviour need to be developed that leverage the hybrid purchasing patterns of this group. The focus needs to shift to what people want to do in certain situations, dynamically, rather than what their static socio-demographic profile is or what their motivation or vacation activity pattern was on a single randomly chosen trip in their past. It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at why people are at a given (tourist) spot at a specific time and what they do in this very specific travel situation. Or, as Beritelli et al. (2015) put it, maybe we should just simply ask them: "Tell me: how come you are/would like to be here today?"

To account for the dynamics in segment formation, existing and prospective tourists will have to be segmented according to their degree of hybridity before segmenting them by other criteria. Moreover, it may be necessary to turn away from static ways of segmentation towards more dynamic and situational approaches. It is well understood that this implies substantial new research as well as a change in practical approaches to market segmentation.

This study is limited in that the empirical data analysed are from a mature tourist market only. Mature markets may in fact display higher levels of hybridity because they are more experienced travellers and are more aware of the full range of options they can choose from. It would be of great interest, therefore, to replicate this study in less mature travel markets. Future research is urgently needed to identify ways how hybrid segmentation patterns can be recorded. The Swiss data that forms the basis of the present study is the result of very involved and expensive longitudinal fieldwork (costing approximately $250,000), which would be difficult for most national or regional tourism organisations to implement and fund. It may be possible that online booking data could provide information about hybrid vacation consumption patterns, at least for tourists who use the internet regularly to book vacation components.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2015.07.006.

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