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TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE NOVELTY SEEKING  
DRIVE IN PLEASURE TRAVELERS

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The novelty drive as an underlying motivation for pleasure travel is an enduring concept in travel research (Bello & Etzel 1985, Cohen 1984, Crompton 1979, Snepenger 1987). Even though tourists vary in the degree of novelty motivations (Cohen 1984), attempts at explaining these variations have until recently received only modest attention (Bello & Etzel 1985).

It is believed that behaviors are the consequence or manifestation of attitudes (Rokeach 1973, Pitts & Woodside 1984). However, understanding consumer preferences and behaviors through attitudes is problematic since individuals may have numerous resident attitudes underlying a particular behavior (Munson 1984). Focusing on the personality constructs which determine attitudes (Rokeach 1973) provides a logical step in explaining consumer preferences and behaviors. Drawing from the field of social psychology, the identifiable constructs of personality provided an intuitively appealing means of explaining the degree of novelty associated with vacation preference and eventually behavior.

This study explores individual differences of people in an effort to explain their novelty seeking behaviors. The analysis assumes that people will find the incongruity associated with novel situations interesting and will be motivated to take some cognitive elaboration to resolve it. Such an orientation towards novelty (e.g., incongruity) seems most likely among people who are nondogmatic (Rokeach 1960) and have a high need for cognition (Cacioppo & Petty 1982).

Consistent with this view concerning dogmatism, Shaffer and Hendrick (1974) argued that "The open mind is regulated by a need to know and understand, whereas the closed mind is oriented to defend against anxiety and threat" (p. 602). Likewise Jacoby (1971) reported that across a variety of product categories, nondogmatics made more innovative selections than did dogmatics. Thus, we speculated that dogmatics simply may avoid or ignore situations that may lead to incongruity, whereas nondogmatics will find the incongruity associated with novel situations

interesting and will engage in the cognitive work necessary to take it into account.

Need for cognition has been found to be inversely related to dogmatism (Cacioppo & Petty 1982) and it has been shown to be positively related to recall of incongruent information (Srull, Lichtenstein & Rothbart 1985). Thus we anticipated that in contrast to people low in the need cognition, those high in need for cognition will be more likely to prefer and undertake the cognitive work associated with novel vacation experiences.

## METHODS

### PROCEDURES

The hypotheses were examined in two (2) analyses. In step one, subjects' individual differences were tested for relationship with the novelty of their vacation preferences. Step two was extended by examining subjects who have made a vacation decision. The two step procedures in this research controlled for the mixed and sometimes contradictory findings measuring the underlying continuity between preferences (attitudes) and behaviors (Pieters 1988, Horn & Wells 1984, Kahle 1984, Fishbein & Ajzen 1975, Cohen 1968).

### SUBJECTS

Subjects for this investigation were limited to residents of a small neighborhood of a South Atlantic MSA. The neighborhood was chosen because it was perceived as having a broad diversity of residents in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. Of these seventy-six households asked to participate, sixty-four completed the questionnaire yielding a response rate of 83 percent. Sixty-one percent of the subjects indicated they would take a summer vacation during the next three months, 16 percent indicated they would not, and 23 percent were uncertain. Given the fact that vacations are of often quickly planned and executed, the percentages of adults taking vacations compared favorably with the U.S. Travel Data Center's (1989) estimate that two-thirds of all U.S. adults take vacations. Regarding subjects who indicated plans to take a summer vacation, 46 percent reported their vacation would be associated with visiting friends and relatives. This figure was not unlike existing estimates that indicate approximately one-half of all vacations are spent visiting friends and relatives (Reed Travel Market Reports 1989).

Pleasure travelers whose main motivation was to visit friends and relatives were excluded from the second step of the analysis because such a specific social motivation will likely be associated with the familiar or commonplace (Crompton 1979) and would therefore mask the true relationship between personality and consumer behavior (Schiffman & Danuk 1987). Since the purpose of this study is to understand psychographic differences among people who find enjoyment in, versus anxiety in, novel travel experiences, the sample was delimited to those pleasure seeking

individuals who vacation decision was not associated with visiting friends and relatives.

## MEASURES

### NOVELTY

Destination marketers have benefited from the several conceptual models of pleasure travelers novelty seeking behaviors (See Pearce 1982 & Cohen 1984 for a literature review). However, the purpose of these models have been to define, describe and categorize degrees of novelty seeking. Hence they were highly descriptive in nature (Cohen 1984) and do not easily generate empirically testable hypotheses (Smith 1990, Snepenger 1987).

Recognizing the difficulty associated with operationalizing novelty, this research approached the problem from the perspective of the consumer and their varying degrees of experience with comparable vacation attractions. The less experience these people have in the actual and similar situations, the more novel the vacation decision is to them. Hence novelty is defined here as the lack of experience individuals have in similar and identical purchase situations (McQuiston 1989, Bello & Etzell 1985, Faison 1977). The summation of these values into one novelty score provides a means of identifying the level of novelty in the vacation purchase decision.

### PERSONALITY

To determine subject's optimal level of stimulation, two measures were drawn from the personality and social psychology literature. First was a measure to identify the degree of differences among individuals in their tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking. The Need for cognition Scale developed by Cacioppo and Petty (1982) was chosen because it has shown an ability to distinguish individuals' attitudes towards complex and simple cognitive tasks.

Secondly, measurements of the differences in individuals' belief systems incorporated the Dogmatism Scale developed by Rokeach (1960). The differences can vary between an open belief system on one extreme to a closed system on the other. The scale is not a measure of ideology since, for example, individuals who are left or right of center politically are shown to have the same reasonably high dogmatism score. Thus the dogmatism scale measures the rigidity associated with an individual's belief system, not the orientation of their beliefs.

The need for cognition and dogmatism scales were originally developed as 45 and 40 item instruments respectively. The measures have had minimal applications in field settings because each takes approximately 20 minutes to administer. A short form was developed for this study following the suggestions of Troidahl and Powell (1965) and

## RESULTS

Subjects varied in terms of the novelty associated with their vacation preferences and behaviors. In regards to vacation preferences, subjects reported on average they had visited 4.3 (S.D.: 5.2) identical and/or similar vacation destinations previously. Subjects who had made a decision to vacation reported on average 10.4 (S.D.:8.8) previous experiences in identical and/or similar vacation destinations.

Simple correlation analysis revealed three (3) significant non-zero relationships in the directions predicted. The need for cognition was found to be inversely related to the degree of dogmatism (D.F.:62,  $r=.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The higher the degree of dogmatism, the less subjects preferred novelty in their vacations (D.F.:62,  $r=.42$ ,  $p < .0008$ ). The greater subjects' need for cognition, the more they preferred novelty in their vacations (D.F.:62,  $r=-.267$ ,  $p < .04$ ). Combined, the degree of dogmatism and the need for cognition accounted for nineteen percent of the explained variance associated with subjects novelty seeking preferences (D.F.:62,  $R=.438$ ,  $p < .003$ ).

There was no linear relationship between the degree of novelty in subjects' vacation decisions and their degree of dogmatism (D.F.:19,  $r=.32$ ,  $p < .227$ ) and need for cognition (D.F.:19,  $r=.19$ ,  $p < .48$ ). The inability of the two personality constructs to explain actual behavior once the social motivating forces of visiting friends and family were blocked, indicate other intervening or moderating variables influenced the ultimate vacation decision. When asked where applicable the reasons why their most preferred vacation destination was not the one ultimately decided upon, 55 percent indicated it was due to the lack of time, 27 percent lacked sufficient money, 18 percent were influenced by children, and 18 percent were influenced by their spouse ( the percentages do not sum to 100 percent due to multiple responses).

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Subjects were shown to differ as to their interests in novelty in pleasure travel situations. In terms of pleasure travel preferences, the degree of novelty in part could be explained on the basis of the study's two social psychological measures of personality (e.g., need for cognition, degree of dogmatism). In this data set, the more closed a person's belief system, the greater their preference for a commonplace travel experience. Conversely, the greater an individual's tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking, the greater their preference for a new or novel travel experience.

These same personality constructs had no linear relationship with the novelty associated with the intended vacation purchase decision. Mediating forces in the environment may wedge themselves between a preference (i.e., attitude) and behavior. The weak relationship between

an attitude and unanticipated behavior does not invalidate the attitude. Instead it suggests that attitudes may interact with each other to produce an unpredicted outcome. For example, the double income couple interacting their needs for self fulfillment with a desire to provide an optimal experience for their children may produce a compromise in ultimately where to vacation.

Attempting to make predictive leaps between an attitude and a behavior without fully understanding the environment in which the attitude and behavior occurred is problematic. An understanding of the modifiers and inhibitors in the environment is critical to marketing and advertising planners. For example, if we know the personality traits of individuals high in need of stimulation are not being satisfied in their vacation decisions, the practitioner may be able to evaluate the barriers and determine if they can be negotiated. If surmountable, those consumers who have higher interests in stimulation might be expected to respond favorable to products, services and information campaigns that stress more novelty; while the reverse would be true for those consumers needing lower levels of stimulation. Thus an understanding of individuals personality traits can be used for competitive advantage but only when barriers that wedge themselves between attitudes and behaviors are understood and reduced.