

# Visions in Leisure and Business

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Volume 20 | Number 1

Article 3

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2001

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### Recommended Citation

Smith, Russell K. and Olson, Lorene S. (2001) "Tourist Shopping Activities and Development of Travel Sophistication," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 20 : No. 1 , Article 3.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol20/iss1/3>

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**TOURIST SHOPPING ACTIVITIES AND DEVELOPMENT OF TRAVEL  
SOPHISTICATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

An ethnographic research approach was used to investigate shopping and consumption behavior of international tourists. This research informed a model that positions a tourist's market-place activity as an evolving process that parallels and supports their advance in travel sophistication. The model illustrates that shopping and consumption may originate as a leisure-recreational pursuit for tourists but is transformed into a learning activity that facilitates their assimilation of a host culture. This, in turn, plays an important role in the tourist's development of travel self-efficacy, as well as their motivation for return trips.

**INTRODUCTION**

Market segmentation plays an important role in strategically positioning and marketing

tourist destinations, just as it does in marketing more traditional products and services (8, 11). Although a number of different approaches to segmentation have been considered in marketing literature, tourism segmentation has traditionally focused on tourist characteristics that mark individual distinctions along dimensions such as demographics, lifestyles, and value systems. This tradition has relied heavily on tourist typologies and classification schemes, (5, 6, 9, 10) which assume that the partitioning of markets into discrete groups adequately reflects differences in tourist needs and wants (7). The current study proposes that this perspective overly simplifies our understanding of the benefits that tourists seek and depicts the individual tourist as being static in his or her motivation for travel.

The current project was an ethnographic study specifically undertaken to better understand the shopping and consumption

patterns of different types of tourists. It was based on the assumption that there were different tourist segments that were distinct in their motivations for travel. However, this perspective was modified in order to be more consistent with the data as the study progressed. The model that emerged depicts tourists as being more fluid in their motivations, as well as the benefits they seek during travel shopping and consumption experiences. This model posits that, rather than falling into discrete groups, the tourist progresses along a behavioral continuum that is marked by their level of cultural assimilation and development of travel skills. It further reflects that their assimilation of a host culture is both advanced by and reflected in their shopping and public consumption activities.

## **THE STUDY**

### **Ethnographic Method**

This project employed an ethnographic research approach comprised of participant observation and in-depth interviews. Interviews involved seventeen informants who were on holiday in Australia (Sydney, Byron Bay), Fiji (Nadi) and the US (Portland, Oregon) during the spring of 2000. Informants were selected for diversity in age, national origin, length of stay and apparent lifestyle in order to compare and contrast findings. As well, they were selected for their willingness to participate. Interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed for coding. Coding techniques described by Straus and Corbin (12) were used to identify themes, locate "central categories," and uncover phenomena. The research process was iterative (4), moving between interviews, coding and investigator interpretation. The design and nature of the interview was also

adaptive as new themes were uncovered that required additional testing or detail.

### **Findings**

The model that describes the findings of this investigation is summarized in Table 1. It represents a tourist's advance in "travel sophistication," defined here as the level of travel skills a tourist has developed, along with his/her knowledge of a host country's culture. The model also considers various tourist shopping and consumption activities that were found to support and parallel a tourist's advance in travel sophistication.

"Travel self-efficacy" was identified as an important construct used to explain the findings of this study. It contributes to the underlying motivation that influences one's initial decision to travel, choice of travel destinations, and selection of travel activities. Travel self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in his or her travel capabilities, as well as his or her ability to negotiate a different culture. It serves as a unifying theme that integrates the various elements of the model, accounting for the concurrent development of a tourist's travel skills and cultural knowledge as they are reflected in shopping and consumption activities.

Different "stages" that the tourist passes through in developing travel sophistication are shown in Table 1. However, it should be kept in mind that these stages reflect the social text of an underlying continuum. Accordingly, an individual may not fit neatly within a single stage. As well, progress may not be uni-directional. That is, an individual could move back and forth depending on the frequency with which they travel and their perceived level of success in the travel ventures. Finally, one may not complete the process. He or she may simply elect to sus-

pend their progression at any point in time, or he or she may complete the travel episode before moving completely along their continuum.

### **Self-Efficacy**

While a variety of motivations or "push factors" may underlie the tourist's initial choice of travel destination and activities, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory can contribute to an understanding of the extent to which a tourist assimilates a new culture and concurrently realizes, or fails to realize, his/her stated travel goals and objectives.

Self-efficacy is a context-specific construct that has been defined as "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (1, p. 2). Within a travel context, self-efficacy would suggest the belief in one's ability to successfully negotiate a travel experience. Bandura (2, 3) acknowledges four interactive sources of efficacy information through which one assesses his/her competencies related to a specific task or range of tasks: 1) personal mastery or performance accomplishment, 2) modeling or vicarious experience, 3) verbal persuasion and 4) physiological or emotional arousal.

Opportunities for exposure to all four sources of efficacy information are inherent in travel-related experiences and activities. The following scenario involving a day of shopping and consumption activities within a host culture is illustrative of this point.

Upon the recommendation of a hotel concierge, a tourist elects to venture into an area of a city known for its unique shops, eateries and street attractions (verbal persuasion). While strolling through the market place,

interacting with vendors, and purchasing snacks and souvenirs, the tourist is bombarded with sensory stimuli. He/she reacts with excitement and enthusiasm (physiological/emotional arousal). During the late afternoon, the tourist pauses in front of an outdoor café. He/she observes that the café's patrons appear to be enjoying themselves in a pleasant, relaxing atmosphere (vicarious experience). Based on this observation, the tourist chooses to dine at the outdoor eatery. As anticipated, he/she has a pleasant experience. After a day of perceived-as-successful, shopping and consumption activities (performance accomplishment), the tourist returns to his/her hotel feeling satisfied.

One's level of self-efficacy has been demonstrated to affect one's choices, participatory and avoidance behaviors, and persistence in the face of adversity. In the scenario described above the individual received positive exposure to the various sources of efficacy information. This would likely contribute to a heightened state of self-efficacy in relation to the individual's capabilities to successfully negotiate a new culture and plan for future encounters and even more challenging travel experiences. Conversely, if the individual in the given scenario would have had a collection of unpleasant first experiences in the host culture (i.e. sources of efficacy information were generally negative), it is likely that his/her perception of his/her travel related competencies would have been temporarily lowered. A collective perception of negative experiences would help explain a subsequent reluctance to select and explore additional challenging travel activities. Rather, this tourist's travel related goals along with his or her assimilation of the host culture, might (temporarily), stagnate or regress.

## THE MODEL

### Stage One

Initial interviews focused on the early travel experiences of the informants. Tourists were asked to recall their first trips abroad, to describe positive and negative aspects of the trip and to explain the types of activities in which they participated. Two notable themes were uncovered that inform the current model. First, other than organized, "mass tourist" events which had been planned by others (e.g., package tour activities), descriptions of individual leisure/recreational initiatives recalled commonplace and routine types of events. Much of the inexperienced tourist's time was spent doing what he/she might well have been doing at home during a typical weekend. For example, it was characteristic for eating and shopping to dominate the informant's first trip abroad. These rather ordinary itineraries did not seem purposeful but were often characterized as decisions made by default. For example, many informants explained that the motivation for planning their first venture abroad was to "...meet new people and experience new cultures," however most had ended up devoting their time to shopping in tourist areas and interacting with their own travel companions.

The second theme considers the difficulties associated with the travel experience itself. Many informants related the frustrations and difficulties they encountered when securing transportation and accommodations during their early travel ventures. The first-time or inexperienced tourist negotiated a number of hurdles that were difficult, effortful and time consuming. Requirements and preparations that were commonplace for experienced tourists (e.g., obtaining passports, booking flights, finding lodging) required far more involvement and mental activity for the

novice. These issues, for many of the informants, were described as exhausting.

The intersection of these two themes may describe a tourist whose initial goals are more adventure or culture-exploration based, but someone who is soon motivated to seek out familiarity and constancy in the face of physical and mental fatigue. This is probably accompanied with a temporary decrease in one's perception of travel competency. Accordingly, rather than following one's stated purpose of cultural immersion for the sake of learning, the inexperienced tourist may revise his or her initial goal to simply surviving the travel ordeal and safely returning home within pre-determined time and cost constraints. Rather than continue to challenge him or herself by taking full advantage of new cultural and adventure opportunities, the novice tourist retreats into consumption activities that represent more familiar forms of recreation. The following example illustrates this point.

Two young English women were interviewed during their stay at a youth hostel in Nadi, Fiji. They had embarked on an ambitious travel itinerary in celebration of their recent graduation from high school. The interview took place on a rainy afternoon when they were encountered drinking coffee, playing cards, and talking with one another on an open veranda attached to the hostel. These women related they had been planning their trip for quite some time and that obtaining parental consent had required considerable persuasion. Their determination to travel was due to a stated desire to meet new and different people and an eagerness to explore different lands and geography. However, upon further probing it was deter-

mined that these young women had under-estimated the time, money and difficulties associated with exploring new worlds and that the reality of their trip was falling short of their goals. The majority of their time had been spent shopping for souvenirs and for product brands unavailable at home in England. Further, they failed to have significant interaction with anyone new and spent virtually all of their time within the confines of hotels and youth hostels. Their primary recreational activities consisted of what they were doing when approached by the researchers of this project--drinking coffee, playing cards, and talking to one another. After leading the discussion to how they spent their free time at home, it was determined that these activities--shopping, talking, playing cards and drinking coffee characterized their normal routine. It was also noted that these women were aware of the inconsistency between their stated goals and what they were actually doing. They were frustrated with themselves and their lack of progress in "plucking up the courage" to meet their objectives.

Ironically, by retreating to shopping activities and familiar forms of social consumption (e.g., having lunch with a travel companion), the tourist inadvertently takes an important first step toward acclimating to the culture and assimilating local customs, norms and habits. That is, while shopping provides the tourist with an "easy" leisure activity, it also exposes the individual to cultural objects and symbols. Purchases made during these early shopping events are predictably focused on products symbolic of the country. However, souvenirs and other tourist-oriented products/services provide an

important exposure to a host culture. For example, first time tourists in Australia characteristically purchased stuffed kangaroos, diggery-dooos and bush-hats. They also purchased a myriad of objects embedded with images of cultural significance (e.g., t-shirts, ball caps and ashtrays). Though somewhat artificial and even stereotypically exaggerated, the symbolic value of these objects seemed to provide a cursory learning experience that advanced their assimilation of the culture.

The shopping activity associated with these purchases was also observed to require significant social interaction on the part of the tourist. The market place afforded tourists the opportunity to unobtrusively observe the customs, habits and language of local people as well as engage in basic forms of social interaction, such as market-place transactions. Shopping required the tourist to form goals, negotiate unfamiliar processes, and resolve procedural problems within a new cultural context. As such, shopping served as an important acculturating agent, as well as a vehicle for enhancing one's perception of his or her own competency with regard to the travel experience (i.e., self-efficacy).

Cultural assimilation was not the primary motivation that tourists gave for their shopping activities. Their stated purpose for shopping was gift giving. Two forms of gift giving--gifts for others and self-gifts were identified. Both types of gifts seemed to serve as symbols of the tourists' travel achievements and having achieved higher levels of cultural and travel self-efficacy. For example, several tourists described self-gift souvenirs as trophies that they kept and displayed in conspicuous places at home or at work. Despite these objects being often characterized as inexpensive or "cheap," they still held somewhat honored places on office desks or on living room shelves. It is

likely that these objects were used as a means of communicating to others that the tourist had ventured beyond the bounds of the known and successfully negotiated an arduous journey into the less familiar. Gifts given to others served a similar purpose. The gift signaled that the tourist had chosen adventure over familiarity and was bringing back native items (e.g., an ashtray) to validate his or her claim.

### **Stage Two**

Through repeated exposures and/or extended stays in the same culture a tourist eventually progressed in his or her level of travel sophistication by developing travel skills unique to the host country. Higher levels of cultural aptitude and travel self-efficacy were noted to develop concurrently with enhanced travel sophistication. Interviews revealed two principal themes that were useful in characterizing this tourist. First, this individual had identified some component of the host culture that they had found to be personally relevant to their sense of identity and/or lifestyle. This interest was specifically reflected in the tourist's shopping/purchasing behavior. The second theme that characterized this tourist was a desire to differentiate one's self from the inexperienced or novice traveler. Likewise, this motive was also reflected in shopping and consumption behavior.

Examples of cultural dimensions in which tourists to Australia developed specific interests included particular groups of people or sub-cultures (Aborigines), a period of time in the host country's history (Colonial Period), a geographic area (Great Barrier Reef), or an artistic style (Pacific-Island art forms). These cultural dimensions seemed to develop personal relevancy for the individual because they were in some way ex-

pressive of the individual's own value system. Shopping and consumption had been central to the development of these interests. Many related that specific shopping activities had been planned for the express purpose of obtaining objects that reflected a cultural dimension. In turn, the act of pursuing these objects served to further develop higher levels of travel sophistication. For example, in searching for and obtaining an "authentic" art form the tourist may have desired to visit original places of production and deal directly with original artisans, requiring them to develop more complex travel and negotiation/communication skills. This motive also required them to engage in higher levels of evaluation and selection, as well as develop more knowledge and competency in the cultural dimension of interest. In general, these tourists paid greater attention to detail and tended to invest more time and money into shopping experiences than the novice tourist.

The second theme that characterized this group was their desire to distinguish themselves as experienced travelers. This was largely accomplished by the cultural knowledge base they had accumulated concerning that dimension which had captured their interest. Purchases they had made of representative cultural objects served as symbolic displays of their knowledge and communicated their level of sophistication. Although learning from prior travel and shopping experiences as novice tourists had enabled this competence, they now struggled to distance themselves from being identified as simply a "tourist." Several informants at this level actually seemed somewhat contemptuous of those tourists who bought souvenirs and would often refer to their inexperienced counterparts as "tourists," being careful to avoid using that term in reference to themselves.

Example:

An Australian woman related her many travel experiences to Europe and Asia. She provided, in detail, her plans to purchase a hand made table crafted by an artisan in Milan. Although the furniture maker was locally known for his unique style of craftsmanship, as a non-native she had to do a considerable amount of investigation and "mingling" with locals, who were knowledgeable about local craftsmen and fine furniture to locate him. When speaking of her plans, she subtly communicated that this level of participation in a culture was beyond the ability of a novice tourist. She also told of other objects she owned and displayed in her home that were the result of similar accomplishments in other countries.

The woman in this example, not unlike the novice tourist/shopper, used the objects she purchased as symbols of her experience. Their conspicuous display was important to the individual, serving to symbolically communicate status and accomplishment. However, unlike the novice tourist, the point of these symbols was not to communicate that she had traveled into the "unknown." Ironically, their symbolic value had changed to that of communicating just the opposite--that the individual's travels took her to places of familiarity, which she had come to know and understand quite well. In fact, she had understood the culture well enough to identify and negotiate the more specialized cultural dimension represented by the purchased objects.

### Stage Three

Until this point in travel "growth," the tourist has been motivated by opportunities to enter a new culture, identify a cultural dimension of interest and develop some level of expertise in that dimension. As well, travel skills and travel self-efficacy have been enhanced through repeated travel to and within the host country. The tourist's achievements in stages one and two have focused on the exploration and mastery of the new and unknown. However, informants who were most experienced in travel discussed recent or current thoughts and feelings with a different disposition. Those tourists who had accumulated the most experience within a single host country seemed to shift away from interests in and investigations of novelty. Also, the need or desire to communicate their travel cultural expertise to others appeared to subside. As this tourist approached a higher stage of sophistication, he or she began forming goals that served to expand his or her comfort level within a previously explored context. Time and effort was notably devoted to activities that deepened one's knowledge of cultural components with which they were already familiar. This was principally accomplished through the consumption of extended stays and shopping activities that were more "local" in nature. This tourist began to characterize that which was normal or typical of the local people, while relinquishing preoccupation with what was exotic and out of the ordinary.

For example, "stage three" informants described daily shopping and consumption behaviors that were largely indistinguishable from the routines of local community members. Food and personal products were purchased at grocery stores or common markets. Non-tourist clothing was purchased for functional reasons and without symbolic



display. Inexpensive accommodations were sought and they developed knowledge of more efficient and cost-effective travel systems used by residents. Also, their dependency on tourist-oriented information provided by the travel/tourism sector of the economy was diminished.

This behavior is significantly different from the "stage two" tourists whose objectives were to distance themselves from novice tourists. While less sophisticated tourists focused on shopping for objects that were uniquely authentic or exotic in nature, the more advanced tourists purchased products for their functional value. Their goal appeared to be that of blending in and participating in typical market activities, as any other community member would.

One woman described how she had decided to spend entire afternoons at local coffee shops, far away from tourist locations. She took a great deal of pride in describing conversations she had with local community members and local friends made through this type of consumptive activity. Another couple described how they had traveled a significant distance in order to spend time in a particular non-tourist community with which they had developed ties. They looked forward to participating in an annual community event they had learned about through their contact with "locals." Although the event was community oriented and was designed as an opportunity for locals to interact, these tourists had achieved sufficient knowledge and understanding of the event, as well as acceptance within the community to participate. They talked about extending their stay within this community in order to spend more

time with friends they made during past visits.

This type of tourist was also more frugal. He or she talked about being more price conscious and avoiding unnecessary purchases. This economically efficient behavior appeared to be related to the goal of maximizing time spent within a culture through extended stays. Budgets relative to the duration of one's trip and strategies for saving money and maximizing the efficiency of one's possessions were developed. Luxury items, novel products, and gifts were eliminated, as these tourists became sensitive to the logistical difficulties of storing and transporting goods over extended periods. Simply, their purpose was to spend unencumbered time within the culture, free of the expense and physical restrictions imposed by the accumulation of specialty objects.

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Destination marketing has traditionally emphasized the importance of identifying different segments of a tourist market, along with the core benefits these segments seek in selecting travel destinations. Justifiably so, as this information is important to tourist organizations in the development of demand generators and positioning strategies that attract tourists (11). However, while this approach is useful for developing markets comprised of first time visitors, it may be insufficient to develop subsequent "brand loyalty" among these same groups.

The current project describes a tourist whose travel itineraries evolve, along with the benefits they are seeking. Repeat tourists represent moving targets whom alter their expectations and continually revise the criteria by which they evaluate destination alter-

natives. Although consistent in their desire to achieve mastery of their tourism situation, the means by which this goal is obtained changes. The "stage three" tourist finds satisfaction in continuing to identify new types of activities and by emphasizing different aspects of the travel experience. This implies that a first-time visitor segment may splinter into multiple groups as they evolve in travel sophistication and develop personal interests in different facets of a culture. Evaluating success in achieving brand loyalty among this group will require the development of measurements that are based on the tourist's current state of mind, as opposed to the amenities and attractions that predisposed their initial visit.

Travel organizations that are mindful of this issue will differentiate between market strategies that initially attract first-time visitors and those intended to foster repeat business over time. Although many aspects of the tourist's experience should be considered to this end, the present study has paid particular attention to shopping and leisure/recreational consumption venues. These activities are fundamental to the development of a tourist's specific interest in a host country, as well as the skills required to pursue that interest. Future research should consider how tourist organizations could provide repeat tourists with the type of information they need to pursue these types of goals.

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Table 1

Stages of Tourist Sophistication and Self-Efficacy Development

Stages of Travel Sophistication	Principle Shopping and Consumption Activities	Goals and Objectives	Points of Travel Self-Efficacy
Stage One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourist area shopping and restaurant patronage;</li> <li>• Gift buying for self and others purchased at souvenir &amp; tourist shops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low involvement leisure &amp; recreation;</li> <li>• Cultural objects and souvenirs purchased as symbols of travel accomplishment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior travel experiences are limited or unsuccessful;</li> <li>• Perception of personal travel competency is low;</li> <li>• Superficial or guarded interaction with locals and vendors</li> </ul>
Stage Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoidance of mass tourist areas and tourist shopping/purchasing activities;</li> <li>• Shopping for and purchasing unique and/or "authentic objects and symbols of host culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursuit of cultural dimension that holds personal interest or relevance;</li> <li>• Purchase of objects or symbols that represent higher levels of cultural knowledge and travel skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful experiences in host culture begin to accumulate;</li> <li>• Perception of personal travel competency is enhanced;</li> <li>• More inclined to initiate social interaction with locals and vendors</li> </ul>
Stage Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchasing and consuming common goods;</li> <li>• Shopping and consumption activities that maximize opportunities for community interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extended stays with a local cultural context;</li> <li>• Developing personal connections with the community and local residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has extensive successful experiences in host culture;</li> <li>• Perception of personal travel competency is high;</li> <li>• Freely initiates contact, and develops social relationships with, locals and vendors</li> </ul>