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Examining the Relationship between Travelers' Decision-Making Styles and Trip Planning

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ABSTRACT

Decision-making styles have been used to explain a variety of consumer behaviors. The goal of the study presented in this paper was to apply the decision-making style instrument to the context of advance trip planning. The results suggest that an intuitive decision-making style influences the extent of trip planning while a spontaneous style influences the length of the advance planning period; however, the relationships found were not very strong. Also, no significant relationships were found for dependent decision-making style, lack of innovativeness and sensation seeking. The findings indicate that decision-making styles are less influential with respect to advance trip planning than expected. The limitations of the study and implications for further research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Trip planning is generally seen as essential since it not only reduces uncertainty and risk, but also increases tourist satisfaction through added excitement, expectation, foreseeable enjoyment, and anticipation (Zalatan, 1996). Trip planning refers to information acquisition for selecting destinations, accommodations, transportation and tours (Perdue, 1985). For the majority of tourists, a trip of one week or longer is often considered as a major decision which requires planning. Decision-making styles have received a significant amount of attention over the years because they are inextricably linked to not only decision outcomes (Durvasula, Lyonski, & Andrew, 1993; Mitchell & Bates, 1998), but also segmentation and targeting (Decrop & Snelders, 2005). However, despite the importance of trip planning, relatively little empirical research has investigated how travelers' decision-making styles influence trip planning behavior. This issue is important as more decision support tools and opportunities to provide en route information become available. If decision-making styles have an influence on trip planning behavior, differences in styles should be taken into account when creating and marketing information services to travelers.

Sproles & Kendall (1986) define a consumer decision-making style as a patterned, mental, cognitive orientation towards shopping and purchasing, which constantly dominates the consumer's choice, resulting in a relatively-enduring consumer personality. Numerous studies have found decision-making styles to be relatively stable (Hafstrom, Chae, & Chang, 1992; Durvasula et al., 1993; Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003; Mitchell & Walsh, 2004; Tai, 2005). Scott & Bruce (1995) argued that it is the learned habitual response pattern exhibited by an individual when confronted with a decision situation. Recently, Thunholm (2004) found that decision-making styles are not only reflective of habits and thinking practices, but also involve basic self-evaluation and the general ability to initiate and maintain self-regulation.

In this study, decision-making styles are defined as mental orientations that determine a tourist's approach to making decisions regarding various trip components. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether decision-making styles influence the extent of trip planning and the timing of trip planning.

RESEARCH METHODS

Respondents for the study were recruited using an intercept survey at 10 different visitor information centers along a major traffic corridor in the Midwest United States during an 8-week period in the Fall of 2006. Tourists were randomly stopped when they entered the information center and were given a paper-based survey that asked them to answer questions about their trip and travel party and to indicate whether they would like to participate in a follow-up study. A total of 739 respondents agreed to respond to an additional survey. A survey kit was sent to them, followed by a reminder postcard and a second survey kit two weeks later. Of those who participated in the follow-up mail survey, 317 actually completed the questionnaire and 25 letters were undeliverable, leading to a response rate of 45.9 percent.

This study included five decision-making styles which were adapted from the General Decision-Making Styles (GDMS) inventory (Scott & Bruce, 1995) that is considered to be a promising instrument in assessing decision-making styles (Loo, 2000). The scale for the Sensation Seeking style was adapted from Sproles & Kendall (1986). The adapted items were modified to fit the context of trip planning. Table 1 presents the five decision-making styles included in this study. The survey instrument included a 3-item Intuitive style, 3-item Spontaneous style, 3-item Dependent style, 3-item Lack of Innovativeness style, and 4-item Sensation Seeking style. The decision-making style items were measured using 7-point Likert scales. Extent of trip planning was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1-Plan in great detail and do not enjoy change to 5-Make almost all decisions while on vacation. Timing of trip planning was measured on an 8-point scale ranging from 1-During trip to 8-More than 6 months in advance.

Table 1. Proposed Decision-Making Styles

<i>Decision-making style</i>	<i>Description</i>
Intuitive style	The use of hunches and feelings in decision-making
Spontaneous style	A sense of immediacy and desire to complete decision making as soon as possible
Dependent style	A search for advice from others
Lack of Innovativeness style	A deficiency of trying new things
Sensation Seeking style	The need to leave decisions open

FINDINGS

Cronbach Alpha scores ranged from 0.56 to 0.82 for the GDMS and Sensation Seeking scales used in the study. Although Lack of Innovativeness scored below the recommended 0.6 level (Table 2), overall the reliability was acceptable and the items clearly loaded onto the respective factors. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted for each construct to test whether the scales were uni-dimensional. The factor loadings were all higher than 0.60 and the variance explained was greater than 50 percent for each of the factors. The results also suggest that the identified six-factor structure has a high discriminant validity. In all instances, the

average extracted variance for each factor was higher than the shared variance between factors (Table 3).

Table 2. Measurement Properties of Scales of Decision-making Styles

Factor Name	Mean	SD	Factor Loadings	Eigen Value	Variance Expl.	Alpha
Factor 1- Intuitive style	3.41	0.81		2.08	69.21%	0.77
- Rely on instincts	3.36	1.04	.80			
- Tend to rely on my intuition	3.36	0.99	.87			
- Trust my inner feelings and reactions	3.55	0.89	.82			
Factor 2 – Spontaneous style	2.58	0.87		2.01	67.13%	0.75
- Make decision on the spur of the moment	3.00	1.05	.80			
- Generally make snap decisions	2.34	1.03	.84			
- Often make impulsive decision	2.41	1.10	.83			
Factor 3- Lack of innovativeness style	3.03	.50		1.59	52.83%	0.56
- Reluctant to try new things	1.10	1.00	.79			
- Rather visit a destination I know	2.50	1.07	.68			
- Cautious about new things	2.50	1.17	.71			
Factor 4 – Dependent style	2.30	0.87		1.85	61.54%	0.70
- Rarely make decisions without consulting others	3.00	1.05	.78			
- Need the assistance of other people	2.34	1.03	.80			
- Use the advice of other people	3.30	0.98	.78			
Factor 5- Sensation seeking style	2.81	0.92		2.65	66.25%	0.82
- Like to have new and exciting experiences	3.05	1.07	.84			
- Like doing things just for the thrill of it	2.73	1.10	.86			
- Enjoy getting into new unpredictable situations	2.62	1.11	.87			
- Like to explore	2.86	1.28	.67			

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Assessment

	AVE*	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Factor 1	.692	-	-	-	-
Factor 2	.673	.404	-	-	-
Factor 3	.528	.044	.070	-	-
Factor 4	.615	.028	.151	.104	-
Factor 5	.662	.274	.400	.011	.136

* The statistics in the second column are the average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor. The remaining statistics represent the correlation coefficient between two factors. Discriminant validity exists between two constructs if the average variance extracted of both constructs is greater than the variance shared by the two (i.e., the correlation coefficient).

Descriptive analyses indicated that some differences exist in decision-making styles regarding demographic characteristics. Females are more likely to lack innovativeness and have a more dependent decision-making style than males. Older (<45 years) trip planner are more spontaneous and engage in greater sensation seeking than younger travelers. Surprisingly, no differences were found for income.

A regression model was run to examine the influence of the five decision-making styles on respondents' trip planning behavior. While Intuitiveness and Spontaneous decision-making styles were significantly related to trip planning ($p < 0.05$), the relationships are rather weak (Figure 1). The results suggest that the more intuitive a person is, the less likely they are to plan their trips in great detail. Also, the more spontaneous the decision-making style of a traveler, the shorter the advance trip planning period. Interestingly, no significant relationships were found for Lack of Innovativeness, Dependency, and Sensation seeking styles.

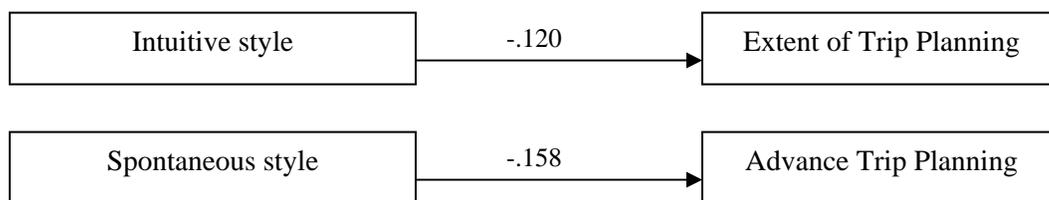


Figure 1. Significant Influences of Decision-making Styles on Trip Planning

APPLICATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although decision-making styles have been suggested as segmentation variables and can be linked to demographic variables, they seem to only marginally influence the extent of advance trip planning and the timing of advance trip planning. Since there is a strong theoretical basis for the relationship between decision-making styles and trip planning, more research is needed to develop specific travel decision-making style scales, investigate what specific elements of trip planning are influenced by these habitual patterns, and examine whether situational factors can force travelers to engage in trip planning which does not reflect their decision-making style. Such findings are important for marketers to successfully target specific consumer personalities.

Advance trip planning is inherently linked to the type of destination selected for the trip. The study was conducted at a destination which mostly attracts short-term getaway visitors. Since such trips generally require less advance trip planning, the specific sample of travelers used for this study might have influenced the results. Also, it is a fairly risk-free and familiar destination in the Midwest United States. Spontaneous and intuitive styles might gain in importance for more unfamiliar and riskier destinations.

CONCLUSION

Recent research suggests that tourists do not always plan their trips in great detail or even if they do, they often change their plans (March & Woodside, 2005). It is of great importance to scholars and practitioners in tourism to better understand what drives trip planning and unplanned travel behavior and what roles situational and personal factors play.

Decision-making styles as habitual patterns of consumers have been studied extensively in the general consumer behavior literature. They currently receive little attention in tourism research and marketing practice. The study presented in this paper could not find a clear relationship between travelers' decision-making style and overall trip planning behavior.

However, the strong theoretical basis and preliminary findings suggest that at least some influence exists. More research is needed to clarify whether decision-making styles need to be considered when providing information to travelers.

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