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On the Choice of Tourism Destination versus Tourism Experience: Insights from an Analysis of Past Choice and Future Interest

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ABSTRACT

Tourists make two fundamental decisions when they travel: where to go (destination) and what to do (experience). Tourism marketers would benefit from simple, parsimonious methods which provide insight into the interests and past observed behaviour of tourism consumers with regard to their behavioural profile on these two important choice issues. The purpose of this research was to examine the potential information content of an analysis of past choice and future interest, and the use of such information as a useful marketing 'dashboard'.

Keywords: *destination choice, experience choice, marketing 'dashboard'.*

INTRODUCTION

A number of possible variables of recent tourism choice behavior could potentially serve as a basis for parsimonious prediction of future choice. For the purpose of this study, we focussed on two such fundamental decisions: a) the choice of destination, and b) the choice of the vacation experience. We wished to assess how useful knowledge of recent behavior for each variable would be as indicators of future interests in various tourism experiences and destinations.

The literature shows a relative abundance of research which has examined the destination choice decision. Some selected examples include Alegre and Cladera (2007), Bigné, Sánchez and Andreu (2009), Changuk Lee (2001), Crompton (1992), Gyte, Phelps (1989), Hong, Lee, Lee and Jang (2009), Lam and Hsu (2006), McKercher and Guillet (2011), Morais and Lin (2010), Oppermann (1998), Seddighi and Theocharous (2002), Um and Crompton (1990), and Woodside and Lysonski (1989). In comparison, relatively fewer studies have examined tourism experience choice behaviour. Selected examples of such research includes Backman and Crompton (1991), Bello and Etzel (1985), Lehto, Jang, Achana and O'Leary (2008), and Mazursky (1989).

Notwithstanding the need for novelty and variety, one should expect to find a significant correlation between past choice and future interest. This pattern of correlations and cross-

correlations could provide a powerful, insightful, relatively simple, and parsimonious basis for predicting future choice behaviour. This study set out to explore this potential further.

SURVEY AND DATA

Data were collected using an online survey. Therefore, two survey versions were produced – one covering the choice of destination and the other covering the choice of vacation experience. The two survey versions focussed on a list of either eight destinations or eight types of tourism experiences.

The nine destinations comprised three metropolitan areas (Melbourne, Perth and Sydney) each of which had one regional (intrastate) destination located a few hours drive, at most, from the main urban centre (Yarra Valley, Margaret River and Hunter Valley, respectively). These three regional destinations each have their own image but are somewhat similar in overall profile (with a focus on nature and food & wine), which makes the three samples (studies) more comparable. In addition there were three overseas destinations, with different types of appeal (Bali, Bangkok and New Zealand) and associated with different typical experiences.

The survey on experience preferences provided eight categories utilizing the definitions employed by Tourism Australia (Australian Experiences Toolkit, 2007), as follows: arts, culture, history and heritage; entertainment, nightlife and shopping; festivals and events; food and wine; indigenous culture; nature (beaches, waterways, wilderness and wildlife); relaxation, health and indulgence; and sports, outdoors and adventure.

Respondents indicated which of the destinations (or experiences) they would be interested in choosing (maximum of three), and for all eight options they were asked to indicate if they had visited the destination (or if any of the experiences had been a major part of any holiday trip undertaken) over the last five years.

In total, data were obtained from 1,919 completed surveys sample from a Melbourne population (997 on destination choice and 922 on experience choice).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In each table we record the relationship between the expressed future interest (rows) in either various tourism destinations (table 1) or various tourism experiences (table 2) and whether such destinations or experiences have featured in recent past choice behaviour (columns).

An examination of these two tables indicates interesting and insightful patterns. Space limitations in this extended abstract prevent a full discussion of these patterns and their potential interpretation and implications for marketing. But in summary, there was a significant link between interest in visiting a particular destination, and visitation in the recent past to various destinations for a holiday. The results displayed a pattern of positive and negative influences that impact on travel interest. A respondent's past engagement in a travel experience was related to a continued interest in that experience for future travel. Moreover, the results indicated that there are clusters of experiences that are either congruent or incongruent with individual travel motives and interests.

Table 1 - Cross-Tabulation Pearson Chi-Square Significance Measures: Destination Behavior

INTEREST IN VISITING	PAST VISITATION TO									
	Bali	Bangkok	Hunter Valley	Margaret River	Melbourne	New Zealand	Perth	Sydney	Yarra Valley	Not visited any of these destinations
Bali	+ 0.000	+ 0.005	+ 0.517	- 0.330	NA	- 0.561	- 0.746	- 0.836	+ 0.422	- 0.276
Bangkok	+ 0.001	+ 0.000	+ 0.472	+ 0.313	NA	+ 0.035	+ 0.109	+ 0.014	+ 0.199	- 0.001
Hunter Valley	- 0.211	- 0.240	+ 0.322	+ 0.381	NA	+ 0.610	+ 0.546	- 0.636	+ 0.021	+ 0.798
Margaret River	- 0.184	- 0.130	+ 0.018	+ 0.150	NA	+ 0.000	+ 0.284	- 0.934	+ 0.053	- 0.219
Melbourne	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
New Zealand	- 0.002	- 0.049	- 0.577	+ 0.587	NA	- 0.348	- 0.612	- 0.358	+ 0.151	+ 0.548
Perth	- 0.067	- 0.007	- 0.038	- 0.046	NA	- 0.228	- 0.005	- 0.179	- 0.009	+ 0.062
Sydney	- 0.245	- 0.356	- 0.032	- 0.681	NA	- 0.168	- 0.963	- 0.724	- 0.013	+ 0.153
Yarra Valley	- 0.082	- 0.174	- 0.171	- 0.914	NA	- 0.689	+ 0.551	- 0.587	+ 0.013	+ 0.164
No interest in above destinations	- 0.917	+ 0.808	+ 0.798	- 0.952	NA	- 0.093	- 0.832	- 0.467	- 0.725	+ 0.246

Note: 1. White cells indicate positive associations and black cells indicate negative associations.
2. Large font size indicates statistical significance at the 5% level and small font size indicates statistical significance at the 10% level.
3. Grey cells indicate results that are not statistically significant at the 10% level.

Table 2 - Cross-Tabulation Pearson Chi-Square Significance Measures: Experience Behavior

INTEREST IN EXPERIENCING	PAST ENGAGEMENT IN EXPERIENCE								
	Arts, culture, history & heritage	Entertainment, nightlife & shopping	Event & festival	Food & wine	Indigenous culture	Nature	Relaxation, health & indulgence	Sports, outdoors & adventure	None of these activities
Arts, culture, history & heritage	+ 0.000	- 0.144	+ 0.544	+ 0.207	+ 0.000	- 0.607	- 0.007	- 0.000	- 0.707
Entertainment, nightlife & shopping	- 0.023	+ 0.000	+ 0.038	- 0.243	- 0.338	- 0.000	- 0.290	- 0.018	+ 0.744
Event & festival	+ 0.685	+ 0.087	+ 0.000	+ 0.873	+ 0.833	- 0.159	- 0.000	- 0.231	+ 0.230
Food & wine	- 0.948	- 0.119	- 0.163	+ 0.000	- 0.359	- 0.192	+ 0.121	- 0.000	+ 0.531
Indigenous culture	+ 0.006	- 0.013	+ 0.779	- 0.319	+ 0.000	+ 0.951	- 0.417	+ 0.821	- 0.484
Nature	+ 0.685	- 0.000	- 0.008	- 0.000	+ 0.984	+ 0.000	- 0.390	+ 0.120	- 0.176
Relaxation, health & indulgence	- 0.001	- 0.182	- 0.001	+ 0.197	- 0.024	+ 0.879	+ 0.000	- 0.044	- 0.030
Sports, outdoors & adventure	- 0.000	- 0.677	- 0.325	- 0.000	- 0.001	- 0.330	- 0.170	+ 0.000	- 0.318
None of the above	- 0.498	- 0.413	- 0.196	- 0.170	- 0.419	- 0.084	- 0.256	- 0.178	+ 0.000

Note: 1. White cells indicate positive associations and black cells indicate negative associations.
 2. Large font size indicates statistical significance at the 5% level and small font size indicates statistical significance at the 10% level.
 3. Grey cells indicate results that are not statistically significant at the 10% level.

CONCLUSION

The analyses and results reveal insightful and very useful information for tourism marketing purposes. They provide a very useful 'fingerprint' or 'dashboard' of information which can direct marketers toward the most useful target markets and away from the least promising market segments. The other key attraction in this type of analysis and data concerns the relative simplicity of the data required. Both types of data (recent travel destinations/experiences and future travel interests) can be readily and easily obtained through simple surveys, yet they provide quite rich findings that can be readily interpreted and understood by practitioners.

In all research the aim is to provide explanatory power. However, in much research, often there is not an equal emphasis on doing so parsimoniously. This study has demonstrated that indeed one can learn a great deal from very limited information and simple analyses without necessarily reverting to complex methods required data covering a large number of variables which are often difficult to measure or obtain from respondents. The proposed presentation will elaborate on the findings and implications in greater detail.

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