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ABSTRACT

This study presents a model hypothesizing that intention to travel is influenced directly by two major elements of tourism marketing: responses to advertising and the respondent's use of the official tourism website for a destination. To test the model, data from two Web-based surveys concerning travel to Prince Edward Island (PEI) in 2008 were used: a survey of travel intentions and a follow-up conversion survey. There are four important findings. First, the intention to travel is directly influenced by two major elements of tourism marketing: responses to advertising and the respondent's use of the official tourism website. Second, actual visitation is influenced directly by travel intentions and indirectly by responses to advertising and potential visitor's use and reaction to the official website. Third, there is a clear difference in terms of the influences on intentions to visit a destination between potential or actual first-time and repeat visitors. For first-time visitors, advertising recall was the most powerful predictor of intention to visit PEI; for repeat visitors it was the number of times the respondent visited the website. Fourth, the results of this paper clearly indicate that generating intention to visit leads to actual visits.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of most tourism marketing strategies is to increase the number of visitors to a destination. These marketing campaigns attempt to influence behavioural intentions and increase the probability that travellers will visit. Thus, predicting travellers' future behaviours is a critical part of planning for and forecasting of visitor numbers for destination marketers. For many tourist destinations, tracking intentions to visit with actual visits is an important measure of the effectiveness of a marketing strategy.

Intentions to travel are articulated and examined in the scope of trip planning behaviour, which is regarded as part of a complex decision-making and behavioural process. These processes involve multiple determinants or components which are interrelated (Decrop, 1999). Many of the decision-making process and destination choice models have emphasized that travel stimuli (marketing communication, travel literature, word of mouth, and travel trade suggestions and recommendations), personal and social determinants of travel behaviour (socioeconomic status, personality features, social influences, and attitudes and values), and external variables (confidence, image of destination, past travel experience, assessment of objective/subjective risks, and

constrains of time, cost, etc.) play an important role in creating destination awareness, influencing travel intentions, and/or selecting choice sets (destination, accommodation, activity, attraction, transportation mode, route, shopping, eating, etc.). Selected papers supporting these findings include Mathieson and Wall (1982), Middleton (1988), Moutinho (1987), Reisinger and Mavondo (2005), Schmoll (1977), Um and Crompton (1991), Woodside and Lysonski (1989), and Woodside and MacDonald (1994).

Of the factors influencing intentions, many tourism studies have suggested that advertising as a promotional campaign "stimulates" intentions or visits to a particular destination (Burke & Gitelson 1990; Kim, Hwang, & Fesenmaier 2005; McWilliams & Crompton 1997; Messmer & Johnson 1993; Woodside 1996). This approach has generally focused on evaluating individuals' responses to advertising campaigns within the context of destination awareness and intentions to visit. It is primarily concerned with the flow of events, from the tourist stimuli to the purchase decision (Moutinho, 1987).

More recently, the Internet has revolutionized the way a destination provides its travel information and the manner in which it communicates and interacts with potential travellers and practitioners (Wöber, 2003). Furthermore, Web-based tourism marketing has become a reality for almost every destination and simultaneously constitutes a great opportunity and a great challenge. Potential travellers expect a destination to have a well constructed Web presence that provides relevant and timely information in an engaging manner. In addition, frequent visitors to a website expect the information to be updated on a regular basis. An informative website has become an imperative part of the marketing mix for a destination and for the individual tourism operators (Gretzel, Yuan, & Fesenmaier, 2000; Park & Gretzel, 2007), and may influence travellers to visit. Vogt, Fesenmaier, and MacKay (1993) and Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) found the top reason for collecting travel information is to help decide on a destination and for planning the trip to the destination. Kaplanidou and Vogt (2006) found that the website usefulness was a significant predictor of intent to travel to the destination.

This study focuses on the relationship between responses to advertising, behaviour on the destination's website, intentions to travel, and actual visits. It was assumed that, holding other factors constant, exposure to destination marketing campaigns such as an advertisement for a destination and effectiveness of the website is more likely to increase the intention to travel to the destination.

METHODOLOGY

Source of Data - This study used data from two Web-based surveys concerning travel to Prince Edward Island that were implemented in 2008. The surveys were developed by the Atlantic Canada Tourism Partnership (ACTP) and were housed on the official provincial government tourism website. The first survey concerned travel intentions to PEI and the invitation to complete the survey was through an embedded pop-up request triggered by every fourth click on one of the main website pages. The survey asked how respondents had learned about the PEI Visitors website, the main reason for visiting the site, current place of residence (province, state, or international), recall of advertising for PEI in any form (TV, magazines, radio, online sites, etc.), the likelihood of visiting PEI, and the timing of a visit.

A request to complete a follow-up conversion survey was sent by e-mail to all those who were deemed to have completed the first survey, and who agreed to participate in the

follow-up study. For this survey, participants were asked about recollection of their intentions to visit PEI, search behaviour for travel information, trips taken in 2008, many trip-related questions for those who had visited PEI, and basic respondent demographics. For those who had not visited PEI, the focus was on reasons for not travelling to PEI, and the intention to visit during the next two or three years.

Sampling Process - Data collection for the travel intentions survey took place over eight months from February to September, 2008. Over this period of time, a total of 39,663 surveys were completed. During the second week of October 2008, the relevant respondents were sent an e-mail invitation to complete the online Conversion Study. The survey was available on a dedicated website for 30 days. For this follow-up conversion study, a total of 8,124 surveys were completed.

The two data sets were merged based on the survey number. After analyzing missing values and descriptive statistics, 5,373 surveys (66.1%) completed by residents of Canada and the US were useable. A sub-sample of 30% of this data (1,612 observations) was randomly selected using the SAS Enterprise Miner (data mining) program. This number was used to ensure a random and representative sub-sample of observations was used for the tests. There is a very high rate of repeat visitors to PEI. The results from the 2007/08 exit survey reports that 78% of visitors to PEI had previously visited and fully 65% had visited PEI within the past year (Tourism Research Centre, 2008). To ensure consistency of this sample with actual visitor data and ensure a reliable sample size, first-time visitors were over-sampled and make-up 30% of the sample (484) used for the paper; 70% (1,128) of the sample were repeat visitors. Table 1 provides demographic characteristics of the sample by potential visitor type. It is important to note that these respondents were potential or actual visitors, some people actually visited, others only intended to visit. From this point in the paper, these respondents will be referred to a first-time or repeat visitors.

The Proposed Model - The proposed model identifies the causal relationships between the constructs of concern in this study. In brief, intention to travel is influenced directly by two major elements of tourism marketing: responses to advertising and the respondent's use of the official tourism website. Reponses to advertising consist of the recall of advertising and the specific media sources recalled. Use of the website includes four constructs: the number of times the official PEI website was visited, the length of time between the latest visit to the website and the planned travel date, the type of information searched while on the website, and satisfaction with the website. Further, a visit is influenced directly by travel intentions and indirectly by responses to advertising and behaviour on the website.

Advertising recall was measured by binary scales: "0 (= not recalled)" and "1 (= recalled)" and eleven media sources were rescaled as one measure (0 to 11) by using the number of media sources recalled. The number of times the official PEI website was visited in the previous 9 months was scaled from 1 to 11, where 11 is more than 10 times. For timing of the website visited, respondents were asked how far in advance of the actual departure date they began to look for travel information using the official tourism website (1 = less than 2 weeks before travel, 2 = 2 to 4 weeks before, …., 6 = more than 6 months before travel). The conversion survey asked which of a possible 19 types of specific travel information was searched using the website, and this was coded from 0 to 19. Satisfaction with the website was measured by a 10-point scale (1 = not at all satisfied and 10 = very satisfied). Intention to travel was measured by a 5-point likelihood scale (1

= definitely not going to visit and 5 = definitely going to visit). Finally, respondents reported whether they actually visited PEI, and this was measured using a binary scales (0 = not visited and 1 = visited).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample.

	First-Time Visitors (*n* = 484; 30%)		Repeat Visitors (*n* = 1,128; 70%)		Total (*n* = 1,612)	
Gender						
Male	150	31.0%	379	33.6%	529	32.8%
Female	334	69.0%	749	66.4%	1,083	67.2%
Age						
18 to 24	28	5.8%	45	4.0%	73	4.5%
25 to 34	75	15.5%	135	12.0%	210	13.0%
35 to 44	100	20.7%	255	22.6%	355	22.0%
45 to 54	118	24.4%	339	30.1%	457	28.3%
55 to 64	120	24.8%	257	22.8%	377	23.4%
65 and over	43	8.9%	97	8.6%	140	8.7%
Education Level						
Graduated high school or less	28	5.8%	113	10.0%	141	8.7%
Some community/technical school	54	11.2%	90	8.0%	144	8.9%
Graduated community/technical school	82	16.9%	255	22.6%	337	20.9%
Some university	51	10.5%	133	11.8%	184	11.4%
Graduated university	159	32.9%	335	29.7%	494	30.6%
Completed a Master or PhD	104	21.5%	186	16.5%	290	18.0%
Other	6	1.2%	16	1.4%	22	1.4%
Employment Status						
Employed	342	70.7%	809	71.7%	1,151	71.4%
Temporarily unemployed	9	1.9%	17	1.5%	26	1.6%
Retired	82	16.9%	191	16.9%	273	16.9%
Student	19	3.9%	30	2.7%	49	3.0%
Stayed-at-home parent	20	4.1%	45	4.0%	65	4.0%
Other	12	2.5%	36	3.2%	48	3.0%
Annual Household Income						
Under $25,000	23	4.8%	40	3.5%	63	3.9%
$25,000 to $49,999	87	18.0%	191	16.9%	278	17.2%
$50,000 to $74,999	109	22.5%	276	24.5%	385	23.9%
$75,000 to $99,999	98	20.2%	237	21.0%	335	20.8%
$100,000 to $124,999	74	15.3%	179	15.9%	253	15.7%
$125,000 to $149,000	38	7.9%	91	8.1%	129	8.0%
$150,000 and over	55	11.4%	114	10.1%	169	10.5%
Place of Residence						
Canada	248	51.2%	922	81.7%	1,170	72.6%
United States	236	48.8%	206	18.3%	442	27.4%

RESULTS

Measurement Intercorrelations - The correlation matrixes for the two measurement sets (first-time vs. repeat visitors) are presented in Table 2. As proposed in the model, all of the relationships between the six constructs and intention to visit are significant at the 0.05 level for repeat visitors, while five of the six are significant at the 0.05 level for first-time visitors. The one exception was for X4, the timing of the website visit in relation to the planned travel date.

Table 2. Measurement Intercorrelations.

Measurement	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8
X1. Advertising recall	1.00	.676	-.015[a]	-096	-.055	.063	.373	.200
X2. Number of media sources recalled	.818	1.00	.039	-.073	.005[a]	.076	.355	.219
X3. Number of visits to the website	.781	.078	1.00	.187	.230	.096	.474	.333
X4. Time between website visit and travel date	-.050	-.017[a]	.003[a]	1.00	.145	.064	-.422	-.293
X5. Type of information searched	-.035[a]	.004[a]	.156	.123	1.00	.086	.450	-.203
X6. Satisfaction with the website	.059	.052	.201	.056	.123	1.00	.064	.053
X7. Intention to visit PEI	.639	.551	.572	-.002[a]	.242	.362	1.00	.573
X8. Actual visit to PEI	.291	.273	.410	.176	.023[a]	.138	.576	1.00

Notes: Correlations above the diagonal (1.00) are for repeat visitors and those below the diagonal are for first-time visitors; [a] indicates that correlation coefficients are not significant at the 0.05 level; other correlation coefficients are significant.

Path Analysis - A path analysis was used to test the model for both first-time and repeat visitors. Using a LISREL program, all possible relationships between the variables are estimated simultaneously. Thus, the method allows all the interrelationships between the variables to be examined in the same decision context. Model 1 is for first-time visitors, Model 2 for repeat visitors. Path-analysis models were assessed by goodness-of-fit measures and direct effects in the model by examining the completely standardized parameter estimates and their *t*-values (Jöreskog, 1993). Each model was estimated with eight observed variables composed of six exogenous and two endogenous variables, and seven direct paths. Figure 1 and Figure 2 display the results for both path-analysis models.

Model 1: First-Time Visitors. Figure 1 presents the relationships between the six variables and intention to visit, and between the intention to visit and the actual visit for first-time visitors. At the bottom the Figure are three types of fit statistics, indicating that most of the fit measures are acceptable levels. This confirms that the data was a good fit for the model and that all eight constructs had nomological validity (Hu & Bentler, 1995).

A review of Figure 1 indicates that for potential or actual first-time visitors to PEI both the destination's advertising and the official tourism website significantly influenced the intention to visit. Of the two advertising variables, advertising recall had the most significant influence on intentions. The number of advertising media recalled also had a significant and positive influence on intention to visit, though the level was not as high as the former variable.

Turning to the use of the official visitor website, all four variable are significant, all four strongly influenced the intention for first-time visitors to visit PEI. Satisfaction with the website had the most pronounced impact on travel intentions for these first-time visitors, respondents who felt high levels of satisfaction with the website had much higher intentions to visit PEI. In order, the type of information searched, the number of visits to the website, and timing of the visit to the website in relation to the planned travel date also had significant and positive influences on travel intentions for these first-time visitors. Finally, the relation between these first-time visitors reporting the intention to visit PEI and an actual visit was extremely positive and significant (a coefficient of 0.787 and a t-statistic of over 26). It is clear that for this sample of potential first-time visitors, generating a positive interaction through advertising or through driving traffic to a well designed and informative website will result in actual visitation to PEI.

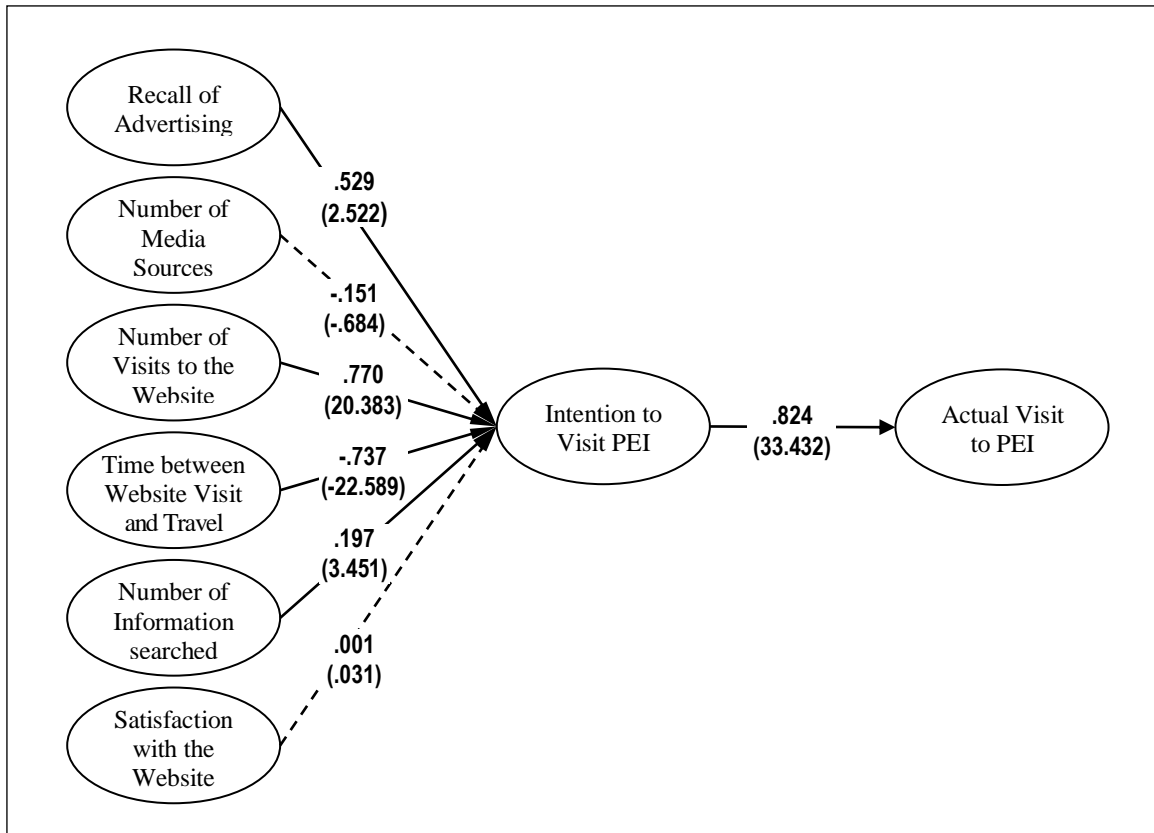**Figure 1. A Path Diagram for the First-time Visitors.**
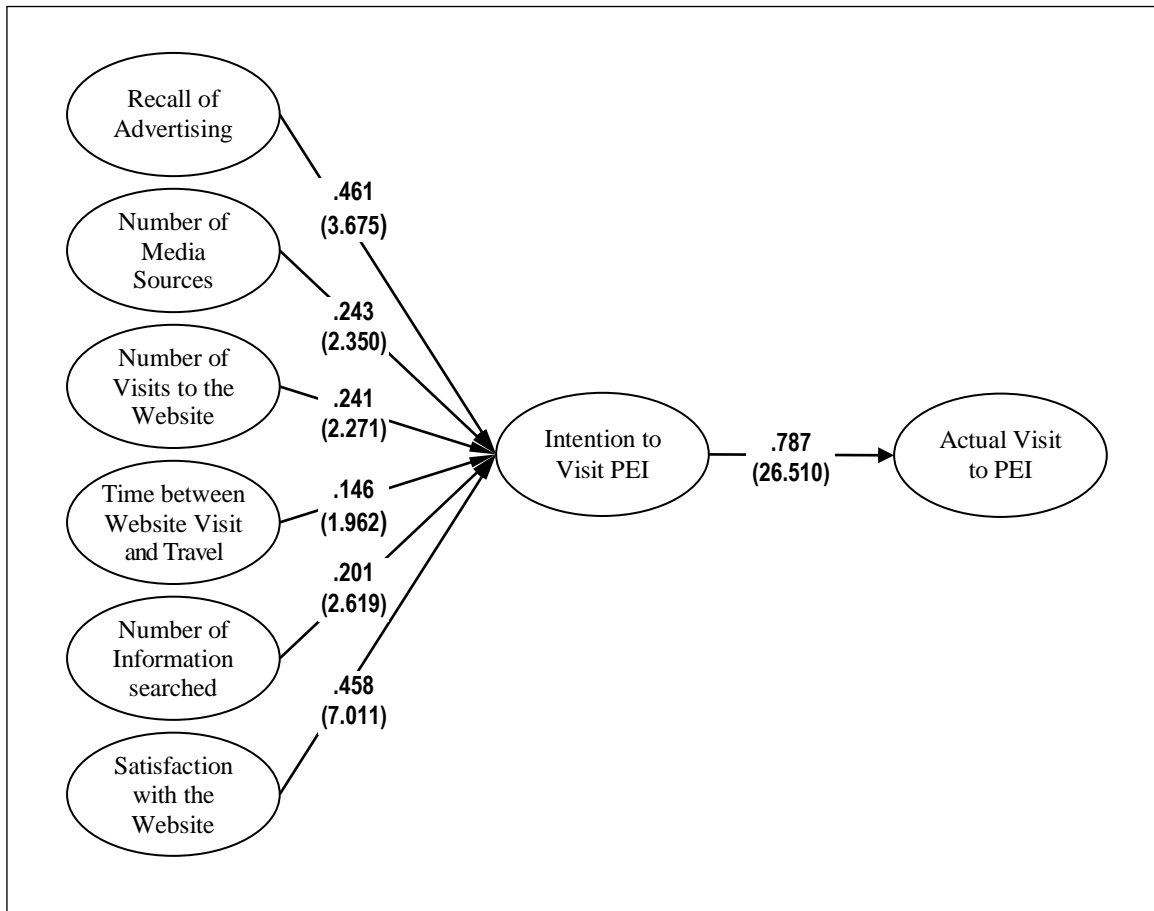
Goodness-of-Fit Statistics	Absolute Fit Measures				Incremental Fit Measures				Parsimonious Fit Measures			
	Chi-square	GFI	RMR	RMSEA	NULL Chi-square	AGFI	NFI	NNFI	PNFI	CFI	IFI	RFI
	$\chi^2_{(8)} = 176.51$ p = 0.00	0.95	0.125	0.209	$\chi^2_{(28)} = 1625.29$	0.92	0.89	0.83	0.65	0.89	0.90	0.82

Notes: All parameters are significant at $p < 0.05$ (t-values ≥ 1.96); Numbers in parentheses indicate t-values for each path parameter.

Model 2: Repeat Visitors. Figure 2 provides the results of the model for repeat visitors, those respondents who had visited PEI in the past. As with Model 1, the three types of fit statistics indicate that that the data was a good fit for the model and that all eight constructs had nomological validity. The results indicate that as with first-time visitors, being able to recall advertising for PEI had a positive and significant impact on travel intentions. However, other than that, there are four surprising differences in the results for first-time visitors. First, both the number of media sources recalled and the timing of the visit to the website in relation to the planned travel date variables had negative coefficients. While the former variable's coefficient is not significant, the latter is highly so. This implies that repeat visitors using the website shortly before the planned travel date had lower intentions to visit PEI. Perhaps these were potential repeat visitors looking for something new to do on PEI or were looking for a particular activity and did not find what they were looking for on the website. This implies that for destinations like PEI with very high levels of repeat visitors, maintaining a "What's new" or "What's on this week/weekend" section on the website is important.

Figure 2. A Path Diagram for the Repeat Visitors.

Goodness-of-Fit Statistics	Absolute Fit Measures				Incremental Fit Measures				Parsimonious Fit Measures			
	Chi-square	GFI	RMR	RMSEA	NULL Chi-square	AGFI	NFI	NNFI	PNFI	CFI	IFI	RFI
	$\chi^2_{(8)} = 398.02$ $p = 0.00$	0.94	0.113	0.208	$\chi^2_{(28)} = 2419.92$	0.93	0.84	0.81	0.64	0.84	0.84	0.62

Notes: Dashed arrows (parameters) are significant at $p < 0.05$ (t-values ≥ 1.96), whereas dotted arrows are not significant; Numbers in parentheses indicate t-values for each path parameter.

Second, for first-time visitors, the level of satisfaction with the website had the most pronounced influence on travel intentions. For repeat visitors, the relationship is non-existent, the coefficient is 0.001. It appears that repeat visitors who may have used the website a number of times, satisfaction with the site had little influence on the intentions to visit. Third, the type of information used on the official tourism website had a positive and significant impact influence on intentions; in fact it is the second most important variable influencing intentions. Fourth, the most significant variable for repeat visitors is the number of visits to the website (a coefficient of 0.77 and a t-statistic of more than 20).

It is clear that the more times repeat visitors use the official tourism website, the higher the intention to visit. This combined with the previous two results paints an odd picture for repeat visitors to PEI; the number of visits to the official tourist website and the type of information reviewed had powerful impacts on intentions, but the satisfaction level with the website had no influence. This is an odd result and may reflect familiarity with and acceptance of the website, satisfaction seems to be a secondary concern. It also implies that this relationship should be the subject of further research. It seems that in the mind of repeat visitors, website satisfaction does not affect the actual use of the website.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

There is a clear difference in terms of the influences on intentions to visit a destination between potential or actual first-time and repeat visitors. For first-time visitors, of the six exogenous variables (constructs), advertising recall was the most powerful predictor of intention to visit PEI; for repeat visitors it was the number of times the respondent visited the website. It is safe to assume that informative, well structured, and easily navigable official tourism websites are important to all visitors who use the web.

However, there is a clear difference between first-time and repeat visitors regarding the influence satisfaction with the website has on intentions to visit. For repeat visitors, it is vital to have them frequently return to the website. Increasing traffic to the website appears to increase the probability of repeat visitors. Finally, generating intentions does leads to actual visits.

This paper suggests that destinations around the world continue to devote resources to marketing; both advertising and improvements in the quality and content of the official website for the destination. Work on both fronts seems to appeal to different types of visitors. Overall, the paper provides support for the efforts of tourism marketers in attracting both first-time and repeat visitors.

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