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**Gender Differences in Tourism Destination Choice in Malaysia**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the criteria that males and females when choosing their tourism destination and whether such differences result in different destination preferences. Gender is an important variable in shaping consumer behaviour. As Aitchison (2003) posits holiday experience can be evaluated as a process, wherein gender relations are “constructed, legitimated, reproduced and reworked”, gender differences are an important aspect for tourist destination. Given that tourism is an important sector in Malaysia, the study intends to examine the gender differences in tourism destination choices. Based on online survey among 134 males and females young travelers ranging from 20-40 years old, responses were analysed using systematic analysis to understand the gender differences when choosing preferred tourism destination. The study found that gender differences had some influence on tourist preferences and the justifiability of destination decisions. This finding strengthens the theory by Bem (1981) and Spence (1986) that gender is significantly linked to different consumer variables such as leisure activities and preferences including tourism destination choices. As gender has been accepted as a functional factor in tourism especially for market segmentation, it is recommended that marketers as such recognise that there are gender differences in information processing when designing tourism destination marketing campaigns.

*Keywords: gender differences destination, choice, decisions making, Malaysia*

**1. Introduction**

This paper outlines a study attempted to decide the criteria that females and males used to settle on the tourism destination choices and whether contrasts in the criteria will give a result in various inclinations of different preferences. Generally, males and females are more likely to differ in information processes and decision making. Studies have been carried out to examine similarities and differences between multiple groups in relation to vacation travel patterns and attitudes towards specific tourist destinations (Richardson & Crompton, 1988; Sussmann & Rashcovsky, 1997). Tourism, by nature, is an information-oriented phenomenon due to structural reasons (Schertler, Schmid, Tjoa, & Werthner, 1995). For consumers, decision-making and consumption are isolated in time and spaces. These separations must be overcome by the data about the item, which is accessible ahead of time and which can be gathered by the consumer (Werthner & Klein, 1999). As a result, information quality has

emerged as a major research topic and providing a relevant and meaningful information search experiences is perceived as essential the success of tourism organizations.

Destination images had influenced tourist's travel decision-making, cognition, and behaviour at a destination as well as satisfaction levels and recollection of the experience (Jenkins, 1999). The definition for what tourist wants to consume are most commonly cited as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has a destination (Crompton, 1979). Understanding why people travel and what factors influence their behavioural intention of choosing a travel destination is beneficial to tourism planning and marketing. Nevertheless, the decision-making process leading to the choice of a travel destination is a very complex process (Lam & Tsu, 2006). This paper is an attempt to examine an issue that is rarely investigated, of how men and women differ in the process of decision-making in choosing travel destination.

Essentially, a tourist is "a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change" (Smith, 1989: 2). One topic of interest among scholars of tourism has been to trace the motives, social profiles, and activities of these "leisured persons" over time. As Aitchison (2003) posits, holiday experience can be evaluated as a process; wherein gender relations are "constructed, legitimated, reproduced and reworked", gender differences are an important aspect for a tourist destination. One of the reasons men and women may want different things from a tourism experience are that they 'getting away from' different things in the home environment (Swain, 1995). Thus, given that tourism is an important sector in Malaysia, the study intends to examine the gender differences in tourism destination choices. The study can contribute in parallel with the efforts of the Malaysian government to leverage on the country advantage, namely tropical climate, lush greeneries, political stability and various tourism offerings, and it is done by introducing various programs to encourage tourists to visit local destination for both domestic and foreign visitors (Mageswari & Badaruddin, 2010).

## 2. Literature Review

According to Harisson (2003), tourist shared similar professional and educational backgrounds and parallel aspect in the family histories. Thus, they tend to have different needs and motives in traveling. Generally, there are two groups of tourists' motives; the tourist attractions to visit tourism destinations, which Dan (1981) define it as a 'wanderlust', that describe the tourist desire to visit the unusual places, and the second one 'sunlust', which

describe as a tourists' desire to experience the specific facilities that do not exist in the tourist's own place. In addition, Reisinger and Turner (1997) mentioned that culture is another important factor in the development of tourist motives. The study done by Domecq & Perez (2011) revealed that mostly females' attributes show higher interest in culture compared to males as they are keen on culture. Apart from that, it has been well established that there are differences in leisure behaviour between men and women (Gentry and Doering 1979; Hawes 1978; Ragheb 1980; Kleiber and Hemmer 1981 and Hirschman 1984; White and Gruber 1985). It is also supported by Espinoza (2009) that sees tourist motives as the reflections on social activities in the societies. This was also supported by the result from the gathered data, which give the significant results between males and females to enjoy and experiences their leisure activities while having a holiday.

Meanwhile, Dann (1977) proposed two stages in a travel decision that are known as push and pull factors. Accordingly, push factors are internal factors that considered as the motive that desires a tourist away from home and aims to satisfy various psychological needs, while pull factors (also known as external factors) focuses more on the benefits of a particular destination and how it influenced a person's decisions on travel destination. Apart from that, Crompton (1979) identifies seven push motives which include: escape from perceived mundane environment, exploration and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships, facilitation of social interaction and two pull factors novelty and education in his study. Most push factors are intrinsic motivators, such as the desire for resting and relaxation, adventure and social interaction.

According to the data gathered, it is shown most of the females have a desire to choose a tourism destination that has a comfort and relax atmosphere as they want to get rid of their daily routines as they have a higher concern for an environment and sustainable development (OECD, 2008). This was supported by Gnoth (1997), who define the push factors as internal motives or forces that cause tourists to seek activities to reduce their needs and having some relaxation.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 134 Malaysian. The participants consisted of 61 (45.5%) males and 73 (54.5%) of females; age ranged from 20 to 40 years old ( $M= 25.21$ ,  $SD = 5.03$ ). The

majority of participants (n= 104, 77.6%) were still studying in a tertiary education institution, while the rest were working. Among the participant, 88 (65.7%) of them were Malay, 40 (29.9%) of them were Chinese, 1 (0.7%) of them was Indian, and 5 (3.7) of them were from another ethnicity, such as Punjabi, Kadazan, and Iban. Detail demographic characteristics of participants are shown in Table 1.

### *Instruments*

Participants' experiences of travelling were gathered using eight attributes: motives of travel (Q17), elements (Q18), challenges (Q19), characteristics of travel destination (Q20), choices of accommodation (Q21), choices of transportation (Q22), criteria of travel destination (Q23a-g), and budget allocation (Q24a-e). Q represents the Question. Data was collected through online survey method. Items in the online questionnaire were adopted from: 1) online market survey website such as Survey Monkeys and Marketest, 2) government official website such as Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, Republic of Slovenia, and 3) non-government organization website such as Arillas Business Association.

### *Procedure*

Survey data were collected online through Google Forms. Three research assistants in Centre for Research on Women and Gender participated in data collection. Potential participants at age 18 or above were briefed on the research procedure, the participants' rights to withdraw, risks and benefits and guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality of the study before the participants begin their questionnaire. Once they chose to participate in the research, they were lead to the participant declaration and the questionnaire. Participants spent about 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey. They were instructed to submit their completed survey by clicking the "Submit" button. Participants volunteered without any monetary rewards.

The Internet link to the online questionnaire was distributed through several social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). The survey data collection process lasted for a week. Responses after the deadline were not accepted. The total number of collected data was 137. After excluding 3 incomplete questionnaires, the size of the final sample used was 134. Among them, 100 were recruited through Facebook, 24 from personal contacts (i.e. e-mail), and 10 were recruited through Instagram.

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*Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants*

Demographic Characteristics	Total Sample, N = 134 n (%)
Gender	
Male	61 (45.5)
Female	73 (54.5)
Ethnicity	
Malay	88 (65.7)
Chinese	40 (29.9)
Indian	1 (0.7)
Others	5 (3.7)
Working status	
Working	30 (22.4)
Studying	104 (77.6)
Level of Education	
Diploma	9 (6.7)
Bachelor Degree	81 (60.4)
Master's Degree	21 (15.7)
PhD	22 (16.4)
Missing value	1 (0.7)
Marital Status	
Married	28 (20.9)
Never married	106 (79.1)
Source of Travelling Funds	
Loan	10 (7.5)
Parents	30 (22.4)
Project	1 (0.7)
Scholarship fund	25 (18.7)
Self-funded	66 (49.3)
Talk invitations	2 (1.5)
Destination of travel	
Own country	18 (13.4)
Abroad	13 (9.7)
Both abroad and own country	103 (76.9)
Preference to travel on peak or off-season	
Off-season	123 (91.8)
Peak-season	11 (8.2)
Preference to travel with or without tour guide	
With tour guide	115 (85.8)
Without tour guide	19 (14.2)

*Note.* Participant's mean age = 25.21 (*SD* = 5.03)

*Analysis*

Differences between males and females on motives, elements, challenges, characteristics of travel destination and choices of accommodation were analysed using cross tabulation chi-square, a test of difference with dichotomous Independent Variable (IV) and categorical Dependent Variables (DV). While the differences between males and females on criteria of travel destination and budget allocation were analysed through t-test, a test of difference for dichotomous IV and continuous DV. The results of both analyses are presented in the following criteria.

4. Findings and discussions

*General Views on Tourism Destination Choices*

As already mentioned, participant’s experiences of traveling were analysed using cross tabulation chi-square. The attributes are motives of travel (Q17), elements (Q18), challenges (Q19), characteristics of travel destination (Q20), choices of accommodation (Q21) and choices of transportation (Q22). From these attributes, respondents need to choose only one main item that they feel important while deciding on the tourism destinations. The result from Table 2 shows that there are no significant gender differences in the above-mentioned attributes.

*Table 2. Results of Chi-square Test and Descriptive Statistics for Selecting Criteria for Tourism Destination (TD), Main Elements of TD, Challenges at TD, Preference of TD, Type of Accommodation, and Type of Transportation by Sex*

Variables	Sex		$\chi^2$	df
	Male	Female		
<b>Selecting Criteria for TD</b>				
Adventure	30 (43.5)	39 (56.5)	10.63	10
Night life	16 (53.3)	14 (46.7)		
Culture	38 (46.9)	43 (53.1)		
Health	5 (55.6)	4 (44.4)		
Nature	48 (45.7)	57 (54.3)		
Religion	13 (59.1)	9 (40.9)		
Sport	11 (68.8)	5 (31.2)		
Rest	33 (45.2)	40 (54.8)		
Visiting friends/relatives	23 (57.5)	17 (42.5)		
Visiting places on social media	23 (47.9)	25 (52.1)		
<b>Main Elements of TD</b>				
Accommodation	6 (46.2)	7 (53.8)	1.68	5
Transport	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)		
Place of Interest	36 (42.4)	49 (57.6)		
Holiday Package	6 (42.9)	8 (57.1)		
Others	7 (58.3)	5 (41.7)		

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*Table 2. Continued*

<b>Challenges at TD</b>				
Quality of Accommodation	11 (64.7)	6 (35.3)		
Local language(s)	9 (52.9)	8 (47.1)		
Transportation services	9 (47.4)	10 (52.6)	7.62	6
Personal safety and security	23 (44.2)	29 (55.8)		
Overall Cleanliness	5 (25.0)	15 (75.0)		
Others	3 (37.5)	5 (62.5)		
<b>Preference of TD</b>				
Adventurous	3 (25.0)	9 (75.0)		
Cultural	9 (45.0)	11 (55.0)		
Foods	9 (40.9)	13 (59.1)	4.89	5
Historical	9 (64.3)	5 (35.7)		
Nature	31 (47.7)	34 (52.3)		
<b>Type of Accommodation</b>				
Budget Hotel / Motel	26 (41.3)	37 (58.7)		
Homestay	8 (36.4)	14 (63.6)	5.24	3
Hotel	27 (56.3)	21 (43.8)		
<b>Type of Transportation</b>				
Bus	9 (50.0)	9 (50.0)		
Rental Vehicle	27 (38.6)	43 (61.4)	4.35	4
Taxi	5 (55.6)	4 (44.4)		
Train / Subway	19 (52.8)	17 (47.2)		

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate row percentages.  $\chi^2$  = chi-square value, *df* = Degree of Freedom. \**p* < .05; N = 134.

*The Importance of criteria of Travel Destination Choices and Reducible Budget by Sex*

Respondents were also asked on how important of each of the criteria of travel destination choice when they were at the holiday destinations. Table 3 shows the males' and females' mean scores and *t*-test. For this purposed, an independent-sample *t*-test was conducted to compare male and female preferences in criteria of travel destination choices and reducible budget. In criteria of travel destination choices, there are a significant difference in the scores between male (*M*= 4.18, *SD*= .89) and females (*M*=4.58, *SD*=.64) for "Enjoying various leisure/fun activities"; *t* (107.29) = -2.90, *p*< .05. In reducible budget, there are a significant difference in the scores between male (*M*= 3.43, *SD*= 1.20) and female (*M*= 3.86, *SD*= .95) for "Accommodation"; *t* (112.98)= -2.30, *p*< .05. These results suggest that female significantly had more interests in enjoying various leisure/fun activities at travel destination and they more likely to reduce their budget on accommodation than a male counterpart.

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*Table 3 Results of t-test for Criteria of Travel Destination Choices and Reducible Budget by Sex*

Research Items	Sex		t	df
	Male	Female		
<b>Criteria of Travel Destination Choices</b>				
Having the least transport cost as possible	4.18 (1.00)	4.07 (.81)	.72	130
Experiencing a new/different culture and increasing your knowledge	4.25 (.81)	4.45 (.78)	-1.50	132
Local cuisine and new / different foods	4.18 (.96)	4.19 (.88)	-.07	132
Interesting and friendly local people	4.13 (.78)	4.33 (.69)	-1.55	132
Discovering new/different climate, landscape and nature	4.41 (.62)	4.56 (.73)	-1.29	132
Having some rest, getting pleasure from a calm and relaxing atmosphere	4.34 (.96)	4.58 (.67)	-1.58	103.55
Enjoying various leisure/fun activities	4.18 (.89)	4.58 (.64)	-2.90*	107.29
<b>Reducible Budget</b>				
Transport	3.71 (1.14)	3.73 (1.02)	-.11	132
Accommodation	3.43 (1.20)	3.86 (.95)	-2.30*	112.98
Leisure activities	2.95 (1.13)	3.18 (1.20)	-1.12	132
Cultural visits	3.21 (1.24)	3.01 (1.49)	.97	132
Food	2.72 (1.34)	2.99 (1.38)	-1.12	132

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate standard deviation. *t* = t-values, *df* = Degree of Freedom. \**p* < .05; N = 134

It is interesting to consider this finding because females wanted to escape from their ordinary routines, and they want to visit more of nature place, having the chance to rest and getting pleasure from a calm and relaxing atmosphere. In addition, females were more likely to visit cultural places during their holiday, more than males. These findings were consistent with the study done by Domecq & Perez (2011) that females are keen on culture while they were on trips. In addition, females also tends to put more focus on other things from tourism products such as souvenirs and cultural activities. Thus, female buying decision process is different from male buying decision process (Jaffe, 2006). This lead to the finding on why females were more likely to save on the accommodation budget.

Respondents were asked to rate which budget they could reduce to spend less for their holidays, using the scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important). The result show that there were some significant differences between males and females, as shown in Table 3. The mean score results indicated that there are basically similar ideas of males and females in the transport budgeting. As mentioned above, research has shown that female has a higher level of concern for the environment and sustainable development (OECD, 2008). However, the



findings of this paper suggested that both males and females are gradually putting more concern on the environment when they travelled.

## 5. Conclusion

As gender has been accepted as a functional factor in tourism especially for market segmentation, it is recommended that marketers as such recognise that there are gender differences in information processing when designing tourism destination marketing campaigns. From this study, data on holiday destinations might be handled diversely and may need to be exhibited distinctively to cater each gender preferences. Findings in this study revealed few differences between males and females preference, especially in attributes that includes enjoying leisure/fun activities. Reducible budget in accommodation also has some significant differences between males and females. In addition, further research needs to be carried out to determine whether the gender differences have some influences on tourism destination choices in Malaysia.

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