Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally

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ABSTRACT

The recent invention and popularity of mobile navigation devices have increased the possibility of unplanned, serendipitous travel. To better understand the independent travel market, this study developed a scale for the construct "Style of Independent Travel" (SIT) in order to explore the serendipitous and organized dimensions of travel and their relationship to relevant travel behavior. The scale was included in a survey of visitors to the Rocky Knob area of southwest Virginia. Findings revealed that tourists had a higher preference for travelling spontaneously than following a fixed and organized itinerary and that serendipity and organization in travel was related to travel planning and visitor activities. However, there was no significant relationship between SIT, past visitation, and role of the destination as primary destination or stopover.

Keywords: *independent travel, serendipity, travel planning.*

INTRODUCTION

The recent invention and popularity of mobile navigation devices (e.g., GPS units and smartphones with map applications) have increased the potential of personalized, independent travel (Tumas & Ricci, 2009). The notions of novelty and surprise are important travel

motivations, especially in the independent travel and self-drive tourism market (Lee & Crompton, 1992). However, the independent tourism market is not homogeneous. For example, some independent travelers may plan and make reservations beforehand while others choose to explore and visit random places. According to Basala and Klenosky (2001), travel style affected tourist preference and subsequent travel behavior greatly. As tourists engage in different styles of independent travel, be it planned, spontaneous, or both, their different preferences for organization versus serendipity may be related other travel behavior. Therefore, it was necessary to study the different travel styles within the independent tourism market and how they relate to travel behavior so as to better understand the complexity of the independent travel.

Being part of a larger study on the travel preferences of current and potential visitors to the Rocky Knob area of southwest Virginia, this paper focused on the results of a survey of current visitors. The purpose of this paper was to explore the different dimensions of independent travel and their connection to relevant travel behavior. The specific objectives were: 1) to develop a scale for the construct "Style of Independent Travel" (SIT), 2) to understand tourists' preferences for organized and serendipitous travel, and 3) to explore the relationship between SIT and other travel behavior, including past visitation, destination role, travel planning, and visitor activities. In accordance with the objectives and a review of the literature, the following research questions were posed:

1. Do tourists differ in their preference for serendipitous and organized travel?
2. Do first-time visitors and repeat visitors differ in their Style of Independent Travel (SIT)?
3. Is there a relationship between the two dimensions of SIT and the number of previous visits?
4. Do (primary) destination visitors and stopover visitors differ in their SIT?
5. Do visitors with different travel purposes differ in their SIT?
6. Is there a relationship between the Organized dimension and trip planning time (hours)?
7. Is there a relationship between the Organized dimension and the number of information sources used by visitors?
8. Is there a relationship between the two dimensions of SIT and the number of visitor activities?
9. Is there a relationship between the two dimensions of SIT and types of visitor activities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

People of different personalities engaged in different styles of travel. Plog (1974) first suggested that traveler personality falls on a spectrum from allocentrism to psychocentrism. Being more confident and curious, allocentric personalities tended to choose exotic locations and prefer independent travel. On the contrary, psychocentric travelers were more insecure, and would rather visit familiar destinations and take part in package tours (Plog, 1991). Building on Plog's allocentrism-psychocentrism continuum, Madrigal (1995) considered travel style as one type of travel behavior and divided it into two categories: group tour and independent travel. Becken (2003) further categorized the tourists in New Zealand into six types: coach tourists, visiting friends and relatives tourists (VFR), auto tourists, backpackers, campers, comfort travelers. Among the list, auto tourists, backpackers, campers, and VFR tourists were generally considered independent travelers. Basala and Klenosky (2001) also distinguished between two

types of travel-style preferences. Although they used the terms "novelty-seeking" and "familiarity-seeking," the basic notion corresponded to allocentric, independent travelers versus psychocentric tour-takers.

Although travel style was generally divided into two types, or two ends of a spectrum, there were still differences within each type. In their study on independent travel, Hyde and Lawson (2003) pointed out that independent travelers may differ in the amount of research and planning before the trip. Some travelers liked to plan out their "flexible" itinerary while others preferred to be adventurous and explore rather than making plans. McKercher, Wong, and Lau (2006) also distinguished between different styles of tourist activities. They divided fully independent pleasure travelers (FITs) visiting main destinations into three types: wanderer, tour-taker, and pre-planner. Wanderers had broad objectives but no set plans, and were open to change. Pre-planners designed detailed itineraries and travel systematically. Tour-takers, as the name suggested, purchased multiple tours during their trip.

To better understand the differences within independent travelers, this study attempted to develop a scale for the construct "Style of Independent Travel," which consisted of at least two dimensions: a Serendipitous dimension and an Organized dimension. The word "serendipity" was first coined by Horace Walpole in 1754 from a fairy tale entitled *The Three Princes of Serendip*, in which three princes "were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of" (Jewell & Abate, 2001, p. 1556). More recently, serendipity had been defined as "the natural talent that some people have for finding interesting or valuable things by chance" (Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary, 1987, p. 1319), "an assumed gift for finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for" (Gove, 2002, p. 2072), and "the making of happy and unexpected discoveries by accident or when looking for something else" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 2002, p. 2762). From these definitions, serendipity in the context of travel referred to the ability or tendency to make unexpected discoveries and find interesting or valuable things by chance during the course of one's journey.

Serendipity and organization represented two different styles of independent travel, and the literature indicated that the difference in travel style was associated with travel-related behavior, such as pre-trip planning. Luo, Feng, and Cai (2004) pointed out that tourists' pre-trip information search behavior on the Internet was influenced by their personality and attitude. Lee and Crompton (1992) developed a scale to identify novelty and surprise seeking tourists who "don't like to plan a vacation trip in detail because it takes away some of the unexpectedness" and would prefer to "take off on a trip with no preplanned routes in my mind" (p. 742). The style of independent travel was also related to visitation activities. Hyde and Lawson (2003) found out that among independent travelers, 80% of their vacation elements, including sub-destinations, attractions and activities, were neither specifically nor generally planned. Most independent travelers preferred to remain flexible. Examining the gap between planned and actual travel behavior, March and Woodside (2005) revealed that the number of planned tourist activities was less than that of realized activities. That is, tourists tended to participate in more activities and visit more attractions than their original plans. Therefore, tourist activities were generally an unplanned behavior.

A review of the literature on travel styles revealed that the style of independent travel might be related to different travel behaviors. Since the notion of serendipity and organization as two dimensions of independent travel was a rather new concept, this study sought to explore, rather than predict, the relationship between the style of independent travel and other variables on travel behavior as suggested by the literature.

METHODOLOGY

The scale items for the construct "Style of Independent Travel" (SIT) were developed from the different activity styles of fully independent pleasure travelers presented by McKercher, Wong, and Lau (2006). A total of ten items were generated from their qualitative findings. The scale was included in a survey as part of a study on current visitors to the Rocky Knob area of southwest Virginia, USA. The study participants (N=311) were all self-drive, independent travelers, selected through systematic random sampling, who visited the Floyd and Patrick Counties section of the U.S. National Park Service's Blue Ridge Parkway in 2008.

The survey for the visitors to Floyd and Patrick Counties, Virginia included demographic questions, as well as questions on their Style of Independent Travel and other travel characteristics, such as past visitation, length of stay, number in travel party, visitor activities, planning time, information sources, Internet usage, and basic demographic information. In addition to construct development, the relationship between SIT and other variables in the survey were also examined to determine how SIT was related to other travel behavior and preferences.

DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

In terms of education level, the respondent population was fairly well-educated, with more than 80% completing at least some college, which exceeded the national average of 52.5%. Respondents were also somewhat older than the general U.S. population, with a mean age of 55 years. Approximately 60% of respondents were between the ages of 50-69. In terms of gender, the sample was nearly evenly split, with slightly more male (51.2%) than female (48.8%) respondents.

In the SIT scale, the items that received higher scores were all in the Serendipitous dimension (Table 1). Specifically, the items ranked highest by respondents were "Being able to wander" (M=3.02) and "Exploring the area" (M=3.01). In the Organized dimension, the item with the highest score was "Being able to get from place to place quickly" (M=2.26), and the lowest scoring item was "Being able to take an organized tour" (M=1.34).

Table 1
Style of Independent Travel Scale Results

Items[1]	Mean	SD
Serendipitous Dimension		
Being able to wander	3.02	0.95
Exploring the area	3.01	0.99
Being able to escape crowds	2.97	1.06
Being able to find your way around	2.87	0.99
Accidentally discovering places not on your planned itinerary	2.77	1.01
Organized Dimension		
Being able to get from place to place quickly	2.26	1.07
Not having enough time	2.11	1.05
Keeping to your plans	1.85	0.94
Following a planned itinerary	1.62	0.88
Being able to take an organized tour	1.34	0.73

Among survey respondents, 78% had visited Floyd and Patrick counties before, and the average number of visits in the past two years was 7.55 (Table 2). For approximately two-thirds of the visitors, the area was their primary destination, and the most popular reason for visiting was "Driving the Blue Ridge Parkway" (26.6%). In terms of travel planning, respondents spent an average of 0.98 hours planning for their trip, using an average of 1.1 information sources. In addition, the average number of activities that they participated in during the trip was 5.79.

Table 2
Travel Characteristics

	Frequency	Percent
Past Visitation		
Have visited Floyd or Patrick counties before	231	78%
Have not visited Floyd or Patrick counties before	65	22%
Primary Destination		
Floyd and Patrick counties were the primary destination of trip.	197	67.2%
Floyd and Patrick counties were NOT the primary destination of trip.	96	32.8%
Main Reason for Trip to Floyd and Patrick Counties		
Driving the Blue Ridge Parkway	55	26.6%
Sightseeing	27	13.0%
Visit friends and relatives	22	10.6%
Attend festival/special event	18	8.7%
Other	18	8.7%
Passing through	15	7.2%
Vacation	15	7.2%
Visit attractions	12	5.8%
Outdoor recreation	12	5.8%
Shopping	9	4.3%
Visit second home/camp	2	1.0%
Business related	2	1.0%
	Mean	SD
Past Visitation		
Number of visits in the past two years	7.55	12.07
Travel Planning		
Trip planning time (hours)	0.98	1.50
Number of information sources used	1.10	1.37
Visitor Activities		
Number of activities participated	5.79	4.36
Number of "Sightseeing" activities participated	3.27	2.53
Number of "Outdoor Sports" activities participated	0.66	0.95
Number of "Entertainment" activities participated	1.72	1.75

Based on preliminary face validity, the ten items of the SIT scale represented two different dimensions. Exploratory factor analysis of the scale was conducted to identify the underlying dimensions. Principal Axis Factoring with varimax rotation resulted in two factors, which combined to explain 43.6% of the variance. Nine out of the ten items loaded highly on one of the two factors (Table 3). Factor 1 represented the Serendipitous dimension, with five items, and factor 2 represented the Organized dimension, with four items. One item (i.e., "Not having enough time") was discarded from the analysis because its factor loading score was below 0.40.

Table 3
Principal Axis Factoring Rotated Factor Matrix (Varimax Rotation)

	Factors[1]	
Style of Independent Travel Statements[2]	1	2
Being able to wander	0.748	
Exploring the area	0.746	
Accidentally discovering places not on your planned itinerary	0.725	
Being able to find your way around	0.518	
Being able to escape crowds	0.406	
Keeping to your plans		0.747
Following a planned itinerary		0.604
Being able to get from place to place quickly		0.586
Being able to take an organized tour		0.489
Eigenvalue	2.281	1.639
% Variance explained	25.3%	18.2%

[1] Only factor loading scores of items 0.40 or higher are shown.
[2] Items are measured on a 4-point scale (1-Not important; 2-Somewhat important; 3-Moderately important; 4-Very important).

The reliability of the scale and the two dimensions were tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the most commonly used test of reliability (Churchill, 1979). According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), a modest level of reliability (0.7) was suffice for early-stage, exploratory research. Reliability testing of the scale resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.761 for the Serendipitous domain, 0.689 for the Organized domain, and a total scale reliability of 0.727 (Table 4).

Table 4
Eigenvalues, Variance Explained, and Cronbach's Alphas of the Scale

Factor	Number of items	Mean	SD	Eigenvalue	Variance (%)	Alpha
Serendipitous	5	2.87	0.72	2.281	25.3%	0.761
Organized	4	1.73	0.64	1.639	18.2%	0.689
Total Scale	9	2.33	0.54		43.6%	0.727

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on a review of the literature, the two dimensions of the SIT scale were tested against other measures in the survey. Specifically, the variables examined included past visitation, destination role (as primary or secondary destination), travel purpose (e.g., sightseeing, vacationing, visiting friends and relatives, attending events and festivals, etc.), travel planning

(i.e., hours spent and sources used), number of visitor activities, and different types of activities (i.e., sightseeing, entertainment, and outdoor sports).

RQ 1. Do tourists differ in their preference for serendipitous and organized travel?

Paired t-test indicated a significant difference in the two dimensions (t=19.915, p<.001). On a scale of 1=Not important to 4=Very important, the respondents' score for the Serendipitous dimension (M=2.87) was significantly higher than that of the Organized dimension (M=1.73). The result showed that tourists had a higher preference for travelling spontaneously than following a fixed and organized itinerary.

RQ 2. Do first-time visitors and repeat visitors differ in their Style of Independent Travel (SIT)?
RQ 3. Is there a relationship between the two dimensions of SIT and the number of previous visits?

Findings revealed that with regard to past visitation, there was no significant difference between first-time visitors (N=65) and repeat visitors (N=231) in both the Serendipitous dimension (t=-1.687, p=.094) and the Organized dimension (t=-.006, p=.995). Both new and repeat visitors scored higher on the Serendipitous dimension than on the Organized dimension. The Organized scores of the two groups were almost exactly the same (first-time: M=1.72; repeat: M=1.72). However, the Serendipitous score for new visitors was somewhat higher than that of repeat visitors (first-time: M=3.02; repeat: M=2.86). Although the difference in Serendipity was still not significant, the result coincided with the literature in that first-time tourists were more adventurous and willing to explore (Lau & McKercher, 2004). There was also no significant correlation between the number of past visits and the two dimensions (Serendipitous: r=.020, p=.761; Organized: r=.042, p=.527).

RQ 4. Do (primary) destination visitors and stopover visitors differ in their SIT?
RQ 5. Do visitors with different travel purposes differ in their SIT?

In terms of destination role, there was no significant difference between primary destination visitors and stopover visitors in both their Serendipitous score (t=.543, p=.587) and Organized score (t=.335, p=.738). However, destination visitors scored slightly higher than stopover visitors in both Serendipitous (primary: M=2.91; stopover: M=2.86) and Organized (primary: M=1.74; stopover: M=1.71). With regard to their purpose of travel, the purposes listed in the survey included: Outdoor recreation, Visit friends and relatives, Shopping, Passing through, Attend festival/special event, Visit second home/camp, Business related, Vacation, Visit attractions, Sightseeing, and Driving the Blue Ridge Parkway. Comparing visitors with various travel purposes (n=11), there was also no significant difference in their Serendipitous score (F=1.480, p=.151) and Organized score (F=1.230, p=.276).

RQ 6. Is there a relationship between the Organized dimension and trip planning time (hours)?
RQ 7. Is there a relationship between the Organized dimension and the number of information sources used by visitors?

The correlation between the two dimensions and the amount of pre-trip travel planning was also tested. The literature suggested that the Organized dimension of travel style would be positively related to the amount of time spent on travel planning (McKercher, Wong, & Lau, 2006). The result revealed that Organized was positively correlated to the hours spent on pre-trip planning at the 0.05 level of significance (two-tailed) (r=.167, p=.012), while the correlation between Serendipitous and planning time was not significant (r=.104, p=.112). However, in the number of information sources used by visitors, the situation was reversed. There was no significant correlation between Organized and number of sources (r=.041, p=.561), while there was a positive correlation between Serendipitous and number of information sources (r=.188, p=.007).

RQ 8. Is there a relationship between the two dimensions of SIT and the number of visitor activities?

RQ 9. Is there a relationship between the two dimensions of SIT and types of visitor activities?

Finally, there was a positive correlation between Serendipitous and the number of activities that visitors participated in (r=.166, p=.009), but the correlation between Organized and number of activities was not significant (r=-.099, p=.133). Visitor activities were then divided into three types: Sightseeing, Outdoor sports, and Entertainment (Hsieh, O'Leary, & Morrison, 1992) (Table 5). For Sightseeing activities, there was a positive correlation between Serendipitous and activity number (r=.158, p=.014) and a negative correlation between Organized and activity number (r=-.137, p=.037). For Outdoor sports, there was only a significant correlation between Serendipitous and number of activities (r=.218, p=.001), but not for Organized (r=.018, p=.780). For entertainment activities, there was no significant correlation between the two dimensions and activity number (Serendipitous: r=.079, p=.218; Organized: r=-.071, p=.281).

Table 5
Activity Clusters: Sightseeing, Outdoor Sports, and Entertainment

Sightseeing	Outdoor Sports	Entertainment
-Wildlife viewing -Observing scenery/views -Driving for pleasure in a vehicle other than a motorcycle on the Blue Ridge Parkway -Driving for pleasure on other roads in Floyd and Patrick Counties -Driving a motorcycle for pleasure -Visiting historical or cultural sites -Learning about Native American heritage -Visiting Mabry Mill -Visiting art/craft studios or centers -Visiting farms/gardens -Visiting covered bridges -Visiting natural sites	-Hiking -Walking -Biking -Swimming -Hunting/fishing -Camping -Golfing	-Picnicking -Festivals -Dining out -Sampling local foods -Shopping -Wine tasting -Observing/talking with local artists and craft persons -Listening to local musicians

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to explore the relationship between SIT and travel characteristics. Among the variables examined, the analyses did not reveal a significant relationship between SIT, past visitation, and role of the destination as primary or stopover. However, there was a relationship between pre-trip planning and SIT. As suggested by literature, travelers who were high on the Organized dimension spent more time on travel planning (McKercher, Wong, & Lau, 2006). On the other hand, travelers with a high Serendipitous score used more information sources prior to travel. Moreover, those who were more Serendipitous participated in more activities, particularly sightseeing and outdoor sports, while those who were Organized actually participated in fewer activities, in spite of their planning. This survey did not take into account the amount of time that visitors spent on each activity. It was possible that Serendipitous travelers were willing to try a variety of things, while Organized travelers might spend more time focusing on one activity, hence the difference in their number of activities during the trip.

This study served as an exploratory analysis on the construct of SIT and its two dimensions. Findings suggested that people have a higher preference for Serendipitous rather than Organized travel. And contrary to common belief, the analysis revealed that travelers who were high on the Serendipitous dimension do not wander without knowledge and planning. They also engaged in some information search and planning before traveling, and in fact used more information sources than the people who were more Organized. This study had practical implications to the travel and tourism industry. With the growth of the independent travel market, it was necessary to understand the style of these travelers and their preference for serendipity. In particular, serendipitous travelers' need for trip planning and information sources was useful in determining the marketing strategies for independent travel. For example, destination marketing organizations could make use of "en route" information sources, such as road signs and billboards, to attract serendipitous travelers, and they could also design marketing campaigns and slogan that created a sense of mystery and discovery.

The findings of this paper were limited to the visitors of a specific area. However, this paper was part of a larger study that included both current and potential visitors. As the SIT scale needed further refinement and purification, a survey of potential visitors also made use of the SIT scale and tested it on a more general population as well as against other travel characteristics. The results of that survey will be the topic of future analyses.

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