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Exploring Unplanned/Impulsive Travel Decision Making

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ABSTRACT

Travelers are often open to the possibility of spontaneous decisions and changing specific plans en route, because of personal impulsiveness, sensation seeking desire, certain travel contexts, new information obtained during the trip, diverse preferences of travel party member, or the occurrence of unexpected constraints. Many decisions about travel components, hence, may be made without prior planning. However, the study of unplanned or impulsive travel behavior has drawn little attention. This study tries to fill this gap in the literature. The results show that travelers who are male, who travel to visit family/friends, shop, or who are without past experience to the destinations make a majority of their decisions after arrival at the destination. Implications of the study's results and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Key words: *impulsiveness, unplanned travel, travel decision making.*

INTRODUCTION

Much research on travel decision making adopts an information processing approach (Bettman, 1979; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Studies in this tradition examine the information sources travelers use and often attempt to measure the incremental change in travel behavior due to exposure to a specific information source (Jun, Vogt & MacKay, 2007). However, travel scholars have long recognized that while the information processing paradigm is a very useful tool, it does not account for all travel decisions. For example Purdue (1986) explored some aspects of unplanned travel behavior among travel-through tourists. Similarly, even in situations where the major contextual travel decisions such as destination and travel date were determined via information search many subsequent decisions such as the attractions to be visited, activities, and secondary destinations may be made without prior planning (Fesenmaier & Jeng, 2000). In addition, travel plans are subject to change, so that a case-based approach to understanding unplanned travel behavior may be appropriate (Stewart & Vogt, 1999).

The goal of this study is to begin to explore the role played by unplanned travel decisions. First, this study analyzes several secondary data sets to gauge the extent of unplanned travel behavior and to identify important factors on unplanned travel behavior across several different settings. Second, this study identifies several personality traits as explanatory variables which are related to the propensity to take a trip without prior planning. Third, drawing from a number of literatures the study proposes a measurement scale for unplanned travel decision making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted, although many studies have been conducted into tourists' behavior, the study of unplanned or impulsive travel behavior has drawn little attention. In contrast, impulsiveness has been developed as a vital concept in psychiatry, clinical psychology, and social psychology. Several scales of impulsiveness as a trait have been developed in clinical psychology (e.g., Patton, Stanford & Barratt, 1995) as well as in consumer behavior (e.g., Puri, 1996; Rook & Fisher, 1995). While traditional views of impulsiveness in psychology have regarded it as a negative trait associated with immaturity, primitivism, foolishness, lower intelligence, and social deviance and criminality (Freud, 1911; Mill, 1909), current consumer behavior research considers it as a personality trait which induces spontaneous buying.

Impulsiveness is defined as involving spontaneous and unreflective desires to do, without thoughtful consideration of why and for what reason a person should do (Rook 1987; Rook & Fisher, 1995). Note that impulsive buying is generally considered to be synonymous with unplanned buying (Kollat & Willett, 1969), that is, both impulsive and unplanned behavior can be described as any behavior without planning in advance (Stern, 1962). Furthermore, in the tourism literature, Purdue (1986) also considered impulsive attraction visits as unplanned behavior by travel-through visitors. Impulsive buying involves a hedonic or affective component (Cobb & Hoyer, 1986; Piron, 1991; Rook, 1987; Rook & Fisher, 1995; Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982). Impulsive and unplanned behavior will be used synonymously in this study.

Interestingly, few tourism studies have addressed this issue. Computer databases (EBSCOhost Research Database, ProQuest, and Google scholar) were used to identify relevant research in travelers' impulsiveness. By searching the computer databases and tracking papers citing several pioneering studies two papers (Hong & Jang, 2004; 2005) were found in the tourism literature to have addressed the impulsiveness issue and both of these used Barratt's Impulsiveness Scale (Patton, Stanford & Barratt, 1995) to explain pathological gamblers' behavior. The Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11) is the most commonly administered self-report measure specifically designed for the assessment of impulsiveness in both research and clinical settings (Stanford, Mathias, Dougherty, Lake, Anderson, & Patton, 2005). The Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11) is a 30 item self-report instrument designed to assess the personality/behavioral construct of impulsiveness. BIS-11 has been used extensively in psychological, sociological, and educational research. In addition, it has been identified that BIS-11 is correlated with other trait measures, such as, sensation seeking, risk taking, sensitivity to punishment and sensitivity to reward (Conner, 2005; Torrubia, Ávila, Moltó, & Caseras, 2001; Stanford et al., 2005).

METHODOLOGY

In order to address the study's first goal several secondary data sets were analyzed to explore the extent of unplanned travel decision making. These include two advertising conversion studies of Baltimore, an on-site visitor intercept study set in Berks County, PA, and four visitor surveys for events in Philadelphia. The two Baltimore studies and the Berks County intercept study asked respondents "On this trip, did you make most of your decisions about attractions to visit, places to stay, where to eat, etc., before you arrived, after you arrived, or did you make about as many decisions before you arrived as you did after you arrived?" and the answers were listed as "I made most of my decisions after I arrived.", "I made most of my decisions before I arrived.", and "I made about as many decisions before I arrived as I did after I

arrived.” In addition, as part of four three on-site event visitor surveys respondents attended Welcome America Festivals were asked how they learned about the event. Guests who answered that they “Just drove by” were contrasted with those guests who had used any of the listed information sources as part of their decision making process. Respondents attended Global Fusion Festival were asked their planning horizon. Respondents who answered that they “planned within the last week” were contrasted with those guests who “planned more than a week before.”

In order to determine whether any travel context variable or demographic characteristics influence the propensity of participants to take unplanned pleasure trip, the study regressed travel decision making variable using binary logistic regression (Welcome America Festivals and Global Fusion Festival Studies) and multinomial logistic regression (Baltimore I/II and Berks County Studies). Using the maximum-likelihood method, logistic regression were used to attempts to build a regression model that best describes unplanned traveler group membership (Lussier, 1995). This study used this analysis method to assess the relevance of the various explanatory variables such as demographic characteristics and travel context for further empirical research among other benefits. In order to address the study’s second goal several personality trait measures were identified in the psychology, consumer behavior and tourism literature. Finally, for the study’s third goal extensive review of literature will be conducted to identify a method to measure unplanned/impulsive decision making

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Goal 1

The two destination conversion studies and the on-site intercept survey found that substantial numbers of visitors made a majority of their decisions about attractions to visit, places to stay, where to eat, etc. after their arrival (Table 1). Across the four festivals about 7% of festival survey respondents reported that they attended the festival because they just drove by and saw it. Additionally, data from one festival showed that even when information sources were consulted prior to attendance many (49.8%) respondents were working on a very short planning horizon in that they made their decision on the day before or the day of the festival.

Table 1
Timing of Trip Decisions across 3 Studies

Survey	Sample size	Timing of trip decision		
		Before arrival	After arrival	Both
Baltimore A	239 (68 missing)	100 (58.5%)	25 (14.6%)	46 (26.9%)
Baltimore B	674 (21 missing)	184 (28.2%)	275 (42.1%)	194 (28.8%)
Berks County, PA	576 (3 missing)	340 (59.3%)	167 (29.1%)	66 (11.5%)

In addition, the logistic regression analyses show that gender among demographic characteristics, and trip purpose, companions, past experience with the destination, and travel mode among travel context variable were identified to influence unplanned travel decision making. Specifically, with regards to demographic characteristics, male tourists were more likely to make decisions with short planning horizon than were female tourists. In terms of travel

context, the study identified that tourists whose purpose of visit with shopping, visiting friends/relatives, or without past experience to the destination did not make the majority of decisions until arrival. These characteristics also described travelers more likely to take a trip with a short planning horizon.

Table 2
Logistic Regression Result of Factors on Unplanned Decision Making

		Results				
		Baltimore I	Baltimore II	Berks County	Welcome America Festivals	Global Fusion Festival
Dependent variable		When decisions were made	When decisions were made	When decisions were made	Just drove by and saw it	Planning horizon
Factors						
Demographic	Gender	(U)Male
Travel context variable	Trip purpose		(P)Special event	(U)Shopping	.	.
			(P)Day trip	.	.	.
			(U/M)VFR	(U)VFR	.	.
	Companions	(M)Kids (13-18 yo) (M)Friends	(P/M)Kids (less 12 yo)	.	(P)Kids (less 10 yo) (P)Kids (11-20 yo)	.
	Past experience	.	.	(U)First time visitor	.	.
	Transportation mode	.	.	.	(P)Taxi	.

Note. (U) : unplanned/short planning horizon; (M) : somewhat planned and unplanned; (P) : planned/long planning horizon; (yo) : years old; (VFR) : Visit friends/relatives

*Dependent variable: decision making time unplanned/planned/mixed (Baltimore I and II, Berks county); 1=just drove by, 0=other (Welcome America Festivals); 1=planned within the last week (short planning horizon), 0=planned more than a week (Global Fusion Festival)

*Significance at $p < 0.05$

Goal 2

Although an instrument measuring impulsiveness in the tourism context does not exist, several related concepts and their associated measurement scale have been used in the tourism literature. Optimum Stimulation Level (OSL) is an umbrella concept used to explain some of the tourist's exploring behavior. The literature on optimum stimulation level (Hebb, 1955; Berlyne, 1960; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974, Zuckerman, 1979) suggests that individuals have a preferred or optimum level of environmental stimulation and behavior is motivated to achieve that optimum level. Several measurement scales were used in OSL (e.g., Novelty Seeking, Sensation Seeking). Novelty Seeking is defined as the degree of contrast between present perception and past experience (Jenkins 1969; Pearson 1970). It is a motive to break away from routines (Cohen,

1972) and has an opposite meaning to familiarity. Sensation seeking behaviors are defined as the seeking out of a variety of different, complicated, and powerful experiences, and the willingness to take the risks associated with such experiences (Zuckerman, 1994). These two measurement scales are considered as a trait to drive to certain behavior without consideration of the planning horizon. In addition, Variety Seeking is defined as tendency to seek diversity in purchase choice. Switching behavior is often based on the variety seeking theory (McAlister & Pessemier, 1982). This concept also has common components with Novelty Seeking and Sensation Seeking in regards to exploration seeking tendency. In addition, Sensitivity to Punishment and Sensitivity to Reward also has been considered to have a relationship with the impulsiveness trait (Torrubia et al., 2001). It includes two psychometric systems, Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS) and Behavioral Activation System (BAS). The BIS normally functions as a comparator, taking control of behavior in response to signals of punishment, frustrative non-reward, and novel stimuli (Torrubia et al., 2001). The BAS is a conceptual system responsible for approach behavior in response to incentives (signals of reward or non punishment). Individual differences in the functional capacity of the BAS are related to the impulsivity dimension of personality. Risk taking can also be useful explanatory trait for understanding unplanned/impulsive behavior, since the impulsive/unplanned behavior can involve risks. Risk taking trait has been defined as a tendency to select inherently dangerous actions (Keinan, Meir, & Gome-Nemirovsky, 1984) or to seek out stress-inducing situations (Robinson, 1985). Knowles (1976) developed a 20 item scale, the Risk-Taking Questionnaire, to reliably assess risk motivation and Roehl and Weber (1999) shortened the original 20 item questionnaire to a 10 item version. While there is some correspondence between these traits and impulsive/unplanned behavior they are not substitutes. These related personality traits are related to the tendency for impulsive decision making but deal with more specific domains, such as escape, thrills, experience, surprise, disinhibition, and boredom, rather than with general views on impulsive/unplanned behavior. In sum, even there exists intersection among the related traits, impulsive/unplanned behavior should be measured directly and other traits also should be considered as possible explanatory variables.

Goal 3

This study proposes a travel appropriate unplanned/impulsive decision making measurement scale. First, from the extensive literature review in Consumer Behavior the study identifies that it is hard to measure unplanned decision making as a binary category (e.g., planned or unplanned) (Stern, 1962; Wilkie, 1994). For example, Wilkie (1994) categorized degree of planning as: specifically planned, generally planned, substitute, and unplanned purchases, and Stern (1962) classified impulsive purchase as: pure impulsive buying, suggestion impulsive buying, reminder impulsive buying, and planned impulsive buying. Since travel behavior involves complex decisions with multiple features, this study propose an approach asking the amount of trip planning based on the timing of decision making (e.g., from 100% prior to departure to 100% at the destination). In addition, multiple trip features will be measured separately, while an aggregated measurement asking single question regarding the timing of planning will also be incorporated to be compared with trip feature measurement. Second, the role of context will be explained by asking about typical trip planning style and asking about the most recent trip in order to minimize a possible error according to the level of abstraction. Third, multiple pretests using student samples and a panel sample of consumer will be conducted to finalize the measurement scale development.

CONCLUSION

This study identified that some travelers do not make some decisions until arrival. Unfortunately, a valid and reliable instrument measuring unplanned travel decision making has yet to be developed. The factors influencing unplanned/impulsive travel decision making and the outcome of impulsive travel also have been under researched. This paper proposes the development of an instrument to assess the tourists unplanned decision making while on travel or before the trip.

On a practical level, understanding unplanned/impulsive travel behavior provides fruitful implications to marketers for attracting more walk-in visitors. For example, identifying what specific stimulus attracts more unplanned tourists will increase the number of visitors. Furthermore, information centers in destinations may provide effective information to better serve uninformed (impulsive) tourists.

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