

Chapter 27

Gender and Other Factors That Influence Tourism Preferences

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ABSTRACT

The consumption process of travel decision making, is influenced by a number of factors and a substantial body of decision making literature in the form of the broader ‘models of consumer behaviour’ has been adapted to attempt to describe this process. Existing ‘foundation models’ present variables such as personal characteristics and attitudes as factors that affect the vacation decision making process, but fail to discuss the extent to which gender and technology preferences influence decisions and destination choice. Economic models are based on utility theory as a decision making framework, however, they do not allow for the other consumer oriented variables. Current models (economic or otherwise) focus on individuals and their decision making process without a combined consideration of information search and technology gendered preferences and the impact they have on choosing a destination for a vacation.

GENDER, TECHNOLOGY AND TOURISM BUYING BEHAVIOUR

Models of buying behaviour have been developed since the 1940s in order to understand customers and potential customers through describing and predicting consumer behaviour. The comprehensive ‘multivariable’ models produced, best capture the dynamics of consumer decision making as consumer’s motivations are complex and satisfaction is sought at deeper levels than purely economic (Howard, 1963). Models are a particularly important subcategory of conceptual schemes since visually-portrayed links between variables tend to have considerable power as a mechanism for the communication of ideas (Blalock, 1969).

The major theories developed into ‘grand models’ of consumer behaviour were those of Nicosia (1966), Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1968, and with Miniard, 1990) and Howard and Sheth (1969, 1963), these theories have been subsequently utilised or transformed by authors interested in tourism choice (Gilbert, 1991; Engel, Kollat & Blackwell, 1968; Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1990).

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Understanding how technology impacts consumer behaviour (and tourism choices) can aid as a foundation for all businesses to identify and, importantly, create effective marketing communication strategies. Pre-trip travel planning, including consumer information search, can be considered a fundamental component of the trip experience in that a traveler often needs to obtain a substantial amount of information in order to develop a travel plan. As such, information available to individual travelers has significant impact on various aspects of the traveler's decision making, especially when choosing a destination to visit (Xiang, Magnin & Fesenmaier, 2015).

Travellers' use of the Internet and other technologies provides great opportunities for businesses to offer various kinds of services targeted to particular markets. Nearly every tourism organisation had developed a website by the early 2000s, and many had gone from a simple "electronic brochure" to a highly interactive system that supports reservations, search, and virtual tours; importantly, a website has become the primary (and in many circumstances, the only) source of contact with potential visitors (Zach, Gretzel, & Xiang 2010). There is an emerging breed of travelers who engage through social media, use of mobile devices, and shop for their travel needs through multiple both online and offline channels. The development of information technology will continue to shape the traveler population and sustained success in the online travel world can only be achieved by understanding and leveraging these emerging areas (Xiang, Magnin & Fesenmaier, 2015). Most importantly, businesses must recognise differences in preferences in both internet use and destination attributes for travel planning among different demographic groups.

Kim, Lehto and Morrison (2007) have contributed to the relative dearth in literature on gender differences during this decision-making process in terms of attitudes toward Web travel information sources and information search behaviour. Their research revealed that men were likely to have more vacation trips and nights away from home than their female counterparts and significantly more business trips. Primary decisions for trips were made by women (63%), significantly higher than their male counterparts. Females spent more time on the Internet per week and had stronger positive attitudes toward both on/off-line information sources. In terms of online travel channels, females attached more value to general and official destination websites (Kim, Lehto and Morrison, 2007). There are significant differences between females and males in terms of attitudes toward travel Website functionality and scope as well as actual online information search behaviour. While most Websites may be gender-neutrally designed both in terms of functionality and content, women may actually be likely to use them more than men do, since men in general do not resort to external information as much (Kim, Lehto & Morrison, 2007).

These differences in preference by gender have been investigated previously in a tourism context, and yet hasn't appeared on any of the travel decision making models. Ryan, Henley and Soutar (1998) considered implications for marketers and gender differences for tourism destination choice, finding males and females apply different criteria to make tourism destination choices. Importantly for destination marketers, research reveals that significant gender differences exist about the perceived importance of destination attributes and travel values when potential tourists consider destination choices (Meng & Uysal, 2008) as was found in the case study presented in this chapter.

Recently, there has been a call to investigate the important interaction between technology and gender and associated historical changes. Zhang and Liu (2015) propose gender is in fact a factor in technology shaping and that the development of technology was constructed to some extent by gender discourse. This is further explored by Wu, Fan and Mattila (2015), building on the theoretical frameworks of technology objectification effects, sensitivity bias and gender stereotypes, finding that wearable technology has a differential impact on service evaluations based on employees' gender.

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