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Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2981

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Published in Journal of Travel Research, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 2-7, winter 1988

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Travel and Tourism Research Association

JOURNAL of TRAVEL RESEARCH

VOLUME XXVI NUMBER 3

WINTER 1988

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Consumer Decision Making And Competitive Marketing Strategies: Applications For Tourism Planning

ARCH G. WOODSIDE AND JEFFREY A. CARR

Evidence is presented on the concurrent validity of three individual-level measures of consumer decision-making variables. The results of a small-scale empirical study support the hypotheses that first-destination awareness (measured using unaided awareness), preference (measured using a constant-sum scale), and choice (measured using conjoint analysis) are related positively. Support of the hypotheses indicates that vacation travelers can be segmented meaningfully by consumer decision-making variables. Travel and tour-ism marketing strategists for specific state, province, city, and local destinations may want to consider doing annual tracking studies using unaided awareness, constant-sum preference, and conjoint analysis measures.

Several marketing strategists have called attention to the importance of learning how consumers make decisions. Bronner and de Hoog (1985) have described the decision styles of a small sample (n = 40) of residents participating in an experiment to learn how consumers make destination choices for their holiday travels. "Decision style" refers to the way people decide: how many alternatives are considered, what attributes are considered in developing preferences, what heuristics-choice rules- are applied to make choices among the alternatives, and what choice is made. Bronner and de Hoog (1985) note that their research findings support the hypothesis proposed by Woodside and Sherrell (1977) that buyers make the effort to evaluate only a few (4 ± 2) alternatives among a much larger set of available choices. Thus, most consumers making vacation plans "actively consider" (evaluate the pros and cons of) about four vacation destination choices (Bronner and de Hoog 1985; Woodside and Sherrell 1977; Thompson and Cooper 1979).

Evidence from an individual-level analysis of a smallscale exploratory study is presented in this article. The purpose of the study was to examine the degree of relationships among levels of consumer awareness and preferences toward visiting alternative vacation destinations. Two scales are examined for measuring preferences: constant-sum and conjoint analysis. The results of the study suggest substantial concurrent validity among unaided awareness measures of competing destinations, constant-sum scales, and conjoint analysis in estimating consumer preferences toward competitive destinations.

Davidson (1985) proposed that "if we are going to influence a decision, a change in behavior, we need to know how that decision is made. There must be an increasing focus in the research and in planning in our industry [travel and tourism] on how decisions are made. It means we need to know more than demographics. The terrain is in the buyer's mind; not in just who he or she is" (p. 106).

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If consumers actively consider only about four alternatives, then gaining entry to, or not being eliminated from, this short list becomes a goal of the marketing strategist. Davidson (1985) provided an example: "We did some work for the State of Montana that found people thought it was a nice place up there, lots of mountains, good terrain, but nobody ever thought of it in terms of a vacation. Nobody was planning to go there, nobody was considering it, nobody was thinking about it. Their [Montana's] marketing task was obvious" [gaining a space on the short list within one or more segments of vacation travelers' minds] (p. 106). Canadian marketing strategists concluded from 1985 research findings on how Americans make destination choices that lack of awareness was the biggest problem faced by Canada in attracting American vacation travelers; most Americans just don't think about Canada when planning their vacations (Taylor 1986).

Rusk (1974) was the first to observe that the same consumer, or household buying center, may consider a short list of vacation destinations that are distinctly different from one another, such as skiing in Austria, sunning on the beach in Hawaii, touring ancient cities in Guatemala, or shopping and attending theater productions in New York. In real life, while consumers associate one particular benefit with each destination, they are willing to substitute one benefit-destination combination with a competing benefit-destination package, depending on the value perceived in each alternative and the decision rule applied in making choices.

The frequent traveler, e.g., a consumer or household member taking three or more trips of three nights or longer per year, may include in his or her chosen set destinations and experiences very different from one another. Different choice criteria, i.e., attributes used by the traveler in making the destination choice, and different choice rules, e.g., conjunctive, lexicographic, and compensatory, are likely to be applied for each trip. Davidson (1985) provides a telling example:

Consider the example of a businessman who appeared in one of our studies. He is the chief financial executive of a Fortune 500 corporation who, when describing the trip that he took to a company location in Florida, reported that he flew first class, he rented a Lincoln on arrival, and stayed at the VIP floor of one of the major upscale hotels, He said, in fact, in an interview, "I worked to get to this position and I deserve it!" But later on we talked about a vacation trip that he took to Florida with his wife. They flew People Express, their car was a Rent-A-Wreck, and they stayed at the Days Inn.

The gentleman was the same, the psychographics were the same, his demographics were the same, he was the same person. These trips were in fact three weeks apart. But they were entirely different occasions, different events, and different decisions. We must, in looking at strategic planning in our business, be more concerned about how the decision is made, not just the person who made it (p. 106).

While the same frequent traveler may make several dissimilar trips, he or she may also *not* make several other classes of trips; e.g., the golfer who is not a camper, the big city shopper who is not a small-game hunter. Certain demographics and psychographics are associated with specific benefits relevant to specific destinations. For example, Bronner and de Hoog(1985) found culture seekers, compared with nature seekers, to be more highly educated, lower in age, lower in opinion leadership, more likely to apply more than four choice criteria in making destination choices, and less reliant on professional help in making their choices. For the marketing strategist, the research findings by Davidson (1985) and Bronner and de Hoog(1985) show the value of doing microsegmentation studies on segments of vacation travelers' decision styles.

KEY QUESTIONS IN MICRO-SEGMENTATION OF DECISION STYLES

The key question in micro-segmentation of consumer decision styles include the following: What alternatives, e.g., destinations, accommodations, rental car firms, and attractions, are actively being considered by the traveler? What specific alternative first comes to mind? What characteristic, experience, or benefit most often first comes to mind with each alternative considered? What decision rules are applied by the consumer in making choices among the considered alternatives? Is the consumer sensitive to changes in characteristics, experiences, and benefits associated with considered alternatives, e.g., price changes and changes in promotional themes? Can consumers be grouped or segmented according to their decision styles—the alternatives considered, benefits sought, decision rules used, and sensitivities to changes in attributes?

Evidence from several consumer research studies (Axelrod 1968, 1986; Wilson 1981; Woodside and Wilson 1985; Bronner and de Hoog 1985) is substantial that "first brand awareness" (Axelrod 1968) or "top-of-mind-awareness" (Woodside and Wilson 1985) is a sensitive predictor of brand preference and purchase. Axelrod (1968) found that the initial unaided recall question, "What brand first comes-tomind when you consider buying product category X?" was the most sensitive and reliable predictor of brand purchase when compared to nine other questioning methods. Using similar unaided measurements, Woodside and Wilson (1985) found that the first brand mentioned had a greater purchase preference compared to the second or third brands mentioned for soft drink brands, fast-food hamburger chains, and banks/ savings and loans.

Woodside and Sherrell (1979) and Thompson and Cooper (1979) found that vacation destinations mentioned by consumers (in unaided questioning) as places they would consider visiting receive higher average intention-to-visit ratings than other destinations mentioned after prompting. Bronner and de Hoog (1985) found that their subjects' relative levels of preferences for competing vacation destinations varied directly with the order of destinations mentioned.

In 31 of the 40 cases the preference order [using compensatory decision models] is equal or nearly equal to the subjects' intuitive order.... If we consider the most preferred destination, we find that 27 subjects had a highest preference for one of the six holidays selected from the booklet before the computer session. In 21 cases this highest preference turned out to be number one in the computed rank order (Bronner and de Hoog 1985, p. 113).

More information is needed on the sensitivity of top-ofthe-mind awareness of vacation destinations (TOMA d) as a predictor of destination preference, intention, and visiting behavior. If TOMA d is related substantially to preference and visits, then tracking a given destination's mind share—the proportion of consumers in a given travel segment mentioning the destination first in the mind—may serve as a useful indicator of the effectiveness of tourism segmentation, advertising, packaging, and pricing strategies. Advertising Age and SRI Research Center, Lincoln, Nebraska, conduct monthly TOMA d studies for 30 product and service categories. A summary of significant results and trends appears in one issue each month in Advertising Age's "AdWatch" column.

MEASURING PREFERENCE TOWARD COMPETING DESTINATIONS

The constant-sum method of asking consumers to divide 10 votes among the three alternatives that first come to mind has been found to be an effective measure of consumer preferences in buying competing brands or services for two reasons (Hughes 1971). First, the constant-sum scale is a relative measure, and is less sensitive to individual response styles such as "yea-saying" or "nay-saying"; also, it is less sensitive to interpretation problems that occur when using adjectives in a semantic differential scale. Second, the constant-sum scale measures the psychological differences between stimuli (destinations); in addition, the data have properties of interval data.

Evidence on the construct validity of constant-sum results in predicting brand purchase behavior in several product categories is provided by Wilson (1981). Woodside and Wilson (1985) found that TOMA for brands of soft drinks, fast-food hamburger chains, and banks was associated strongly with brand preferences measured by constant-sum of 10 votes. Thus, finding that TOMA d is associated strongly with preferences for competing destinations provides concurrent validity for using both research methods in travel and tourism research.

Conjoint (trade-off) analysis is a third research method found to be sensitive in predicting consumer brand/service preferences and behavior (cf. Green and Srinivasan 1978; Wright and Kriewall 1980; Montgomery 1986). In conjoint analysis, subjects rank competing brand/service offerings according to their preferences. The brand/service offerings are orthogonal combinations, usually of three to five levels including three to 10 choice criteria.

O'Shaughnessy (1985) and Montgomery (1986) point out that conjoint analysis has been applied most often to consumer and industrial product categories using physically observable properties. While some applications to services are available in the literature (cf. Wright and Kriewall 1983 for an application to choice of college among high school seniors), the validity of applying conjoint analysis to choices of competing services, e.g., competing vacation destinations, has not been examined previously.

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were developed based on the discussion of TOMA d, preferences measured by constantsum, and conjoint analysis.

- H1: The mind position of a destination perceived by a consumer (measured by unaided awareness) is related positively to preference toward the destination (measured by constant-sum).
- H2: The mind position of a destination perceived by a consumer is related positively to the estimated utility of the destination for that consumer (measured by conjoint analysis).
- H3: Consumer preference for a destination is related positively to the estimated utility of that destination for the consumer.

Support for the hypotheses would help establish the validity of using conjoint analysis in travel and tourism research. Given the findings that destination preferences measured by conjoint analysis are associated strongly with measures previously found to be valid in several contexts, i.e., destinationmind-position and constant-sum measures, then the usefulness of conjoint analysis in travel research applications is supported. Conjoint analysis provides additional information not evident from measures of travelers' evoked sets of destinations, first-destination awareness, and constant-sum scales. Estimates of how consumers make trade-offs, i.e., their sensitivities to different destination attributes, can be made using conjoint analysis. For a specific destination, the utilities of alternative positioning strategies can be tested against competing destinations using conjoint analysis.

METHOD

Foreign travel destinations of U.S. vacation travelers was selected as the focus of the study. Foreign travel by Americans has "skyrocketed to \$22.5 billion [in 1984], another new record and a 16 percent increase over 1983" (World Tourism Overview 1985, p. 20). Of the total, \$16 billion was spent in destination areas and \$6.5 billion on transportation fares to foreign carriers. Thus, foreign travel by Americans is big business and growing rapidly.

Total U.S. visits to foreign destinations amounted to 27.5 million in 1984, up 20% from 1981. In contrast, the number of foreign visitors to the U.S. fell to 20.8 million in 1984, down 5% since 1981. "The net result is a soaring travel deficit of \$8.6 billion for the U.S. in 1984, a \$3 billion increase over 1983" (World Tourism Overview 1985, p. 20). Thus, information on how (and why) Americans choose foreign destinations may be important to marketing strategists of U.S. destinations concerned with attempting to increase travel in and to the U.S. by foreign visitors.

Subjects

A convenience sample of 30 adults living in New Orleans was selected, using a quota scheme that required each subject to have traveled to one or more foreign destinations within the past five years. To be included in the study, subjects also had to report being somewhat to very likely to travel to foreign destinations within the next five years. Persons with completed plans to travel to foreign destinations in the immediate future were excluded from the study.

All of the subjects were homeowners, 25 to 55 years old, with household incomes ranging from \$35,000 to more than

\$100,000. The data were collected in personal interviews following an initial telephone screening. These personal interviews were completed in the subjects' homes five days to two weeks after the telephone screening.

Questionnaire

Unaided Awareness. In the unaided awareness destination-mind-position question, care was taken to include the four specific factors recommended by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) when measuring specific attitudes and intentions. The four factors are: the behavior, the target object at which the behavior is directed, the situation in which the behavior is to be performed, and the time at which the behavior is to be performed. The following question was used to measure TOMA d and countries mentioned second and third: "What countries outside of the United States first come-to-mind for you to visit on a vacation of five days or longer sometime within the next five years?" The behavior focused on by the question was vacation travel; the target object was countries for foreign travel; the situation was five days or longer; and the time period was within the next five years.

If necessary, the subjects were prompted to mention at least three countries. A minimum of three was desired based on Wilson's (1981) observation that more than 90% of most consumers' purchases are restricted to the three specific brands they mention first in answering unaided-awareness questions. This observation may or may not hold for highly involving purchases, such as the purchase of foreign vacation travel.

The order in which destinations were mentioned by each subject was recorded after the third destination was mentioned. Also, subjects' answers were tape-recorded with their prior permission; all 30 subjects agreed to have their answers tape-recorded.

Preference. Immediately following the unaided awareness question on foreign destinations that first came to mind, each subject was asked what thoughts came to mind when thinking about destination alternatives. Each subject responded with thoughts on each destination mentioned previously. The purpose of asking about the thoughts that came to mind was to learn about characteristics of the destination and experiences or benefits that subjects associated with specific destinations. Second, the thought protocol question provided information on the decision rules used by subjects in calling up foreign vacation destinations from memory. Third, answering the thought protocol question required five to 10 minutes, and the time taken was likely to reduce the subjects' ability to associate their order of answer to the unaided awareness question and the constant-sum preference question.

A 30-day constant-sum question was used to measure preferences toward the three destinations mentioned in the unaided awareness responses. Each subject was asked, "If you had 30 days of vacation time to divide between the three countries you have mentioned, how would you allocate the 30 days?"

This 30-day constant-sum question was pretested and selected for use after an unsuccessful pretest of a 10-vote constant-sum question, with each vote representing one trip to a destination. Most of the five subjects in the pretest using the 10-vote constant-sum question reported that the question was unrealistic; they reported having difficulty thinking about making several trips to the three destinations they had mentioned, for a total of 10 trips. In a second pretest, none of the five additional subjects reported difficulty in understanding and allocating 30 days among the three destinations. The subjects' responses to the 30-day constant-sum question were converted to proportions for further analysis. Thus, 15 days allocated to destination in Country Z, 10 days to Y, and 5 days to Z were normalized to .500, .333, and .167.

Conjoint Analysis. Three vacation trip attributes were selected for conjoint analysis with three levels for each attribute:

- (1) destinations—the three countries mentioned by the subject in response to the unaided awareness question
- (2) major activity on the trip—attending cultural and local events; sightseeing; and visiting with friends and family members
- (3) total trip cost—\$1,800; \$2,800; and \$3,800.

The major activity and total trip cost attributes were selected based on responses of the 10 subjects participating in the pretests. These two attributes were judged most often as very important criteria they would consider in choosing between alternative foreign vacation destinations. The three levels of each attribute were intended to be distinct and to cover a wide range of alternative types of vacation experiences.

For each subject, nine cards were prepared, with each of the three country destinations mentioned previously by the subject placed on three of nine cards. The countries were associated with specific price and major activity combinations, as shown in Table 1.

Each country appears once in each row and column of Table 1. Conjoint analysis applied in this study includes the estimation of the utility perceived by the each subject of all 27 country-activity-cost combinations from the subject's ranking of the nine combinations shown. Conjoint analysis permits the estimation of the utility of level for each factor, e.g., the utility of a vacation in country X regardless of the trip cost and major activity.

TABLE 1 PLACEMENT OF DESTINATIONS X, Y, AND Z IN CONJOINT ANALYSIS DESIGN

Maior	Total Cost of Trip			
Activity	\$1,000	\$2,800	\$3,800	
Attending cultural and local events	x	Y	z	
Sightseeing	z	х	Y	
Visiting with friends and relatives	Y	z	x	

The interviewer printed the names of the three countries (mentioned by the subject previously in answering the unaided awareness question) on each of the appropriate three cards, using Table 1 as a guide. The nine cards were then presented in a random order to each subject. The subject was asked to order the cards from the vacation most to least preferred.

Each subject's ranking was converted to utility (cf. Green and Srinivasan 1978). The estimated utility of each factor level was calculated.

RESULTS

Testing the Hypotheses

H1. The first hypothesis was supported. A country's vacation destination-mind-position measured by unaided awareness was associated with destination preference measured by the 30-day constant-sum question (F = 3.68, d.f. = 2/58, p < .05, W² = .14). The omega-squared (W²) results indicate that the effect size of the association between desti-

nation awareness and preference is moderately strong (cf. Hays 1972; Sawyer and Peter 1983).

The average proportions of days selected for the first, second, and third destinations mentioned were .40, .32, and .27, respectively. Additional details are provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2 DESTINATION-MIND-POSITION AND CONSTANT-SUM PROPORTION OF DAYS PREFERRED

Destination- Mind-Position		Average Proportion of Days Preferred	Standard Deviation
First		.40	.139
Second		.32	.113
Third		.28	.158
Analysis of Variance Re	sults:		
Source	MS	F	p
Fror	.129	3.68	< .05
d.f. = $2/58$, w ² = .14	.000		

H2. The second hypothesis was supported. A country's destination-mind-position measured by unaided awareness was associated strongly with the utility of vacation travel to the country estimated using conjoint analysis (F = 7.18, d.f. = 2/58, p < .005, W² = .27).

The average utilities for the first, second, and third destinations mentioned were .68, .54, and .43, respectively. The total average utility for the three destinations was higher than the total average utilities for major activities and trip costs. This additional finding may indicate that the subjects considered their destination preference to be a more important factor than trip cost and major activity engaged in while at the destination. Additional research is needed on this issue. Details of the findings related to the second hypothesis are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 AVERAGE UTILITIES FROM CONJOINT ANALYSIS FOR THREE DESTINATION-MIND-POSITIONS

Average Utility	Standard Deviation
irst .68	
.54	.189
.43	.201
S F 71 7.18 66	p <.005
	Average Utility .68 .54 .43 .43 .55 F 71 7.18 .56

H3. The third hypothesis was supported. The subjects' preferences (measured using the constant-sum scale) for the three destinations were associated strongly with the destinations' utilities estimated using conjoint analysis (r^{2} 's were .46, .43, and .32 for the first, second, and third mentioned destinations, respectively, p < .001 for all three destinations).

Countries in the Subjects' Unaided Awareness Sets

While representative samples of U.S. foreign travel segments are necessary before estimating specific countries' TOMA d and preference levels, the specific countries mentioned by the 30 subjects in the present study provide some face validity that their perceptions were related to reality and preferences regarding specific countries. For example, given that the U.K. has the largest share of American overseas foreign travel, 17% in 1984 (*WTO* 1985), the U.K. would be predicted as the country included most often by the 30 subjects in their unaided awareness set. It was.

France was second in market share of American overseas foreign travel in 1984, with 13%. France was also second in total mentions by the 30 subjects.

The United Kingdom received the most total mentions (16/90 = 18%) by the 30 subjects. The U.K. also had the most TOMA d mentions (8/30 = 27%). France was second in total mentions (16%), but had a TOMA d share of only 10%; France had more third mentions as a foreign destination than any other country mentioned (33 of the subjects mentioned France third).

China (9%) and Australia (8%) were third and fourth in total mentions among the 30 subjects. If verified by representative samples of American foreign travel segments, these results would indicate a strong latent demand for China and Australia.

Canada received only 3% and Mexico 1% of the total mentions. Both destinations may suffer from what Davidson (1985) identifies as "the lack of urgency." "If you are not considered a priority destination the chances of your coming up on someone's travel plans are poor" (Davidson 1985, p. 107). The findings among the 30 subjects reflect the major problem identified by Rusk (1986) for Canada: most Americans never think about Canada when making vacation destination choices. If Canada does have low TOMA d and preference shares, and TOMA d and preference shares are lead indicators of market share, then specific marketing and advertising goals to increase TOMA d and preference shares to levels X and Y may need to be identified for this country.

LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several limitations to the research study. A small, convenience sample was used. This sample may not be representative of more general populations. Large samples of relevant travel market segments should be used in replicating and extending the research study.

Second, a longitudinal design should be used that includes measures of actual travel behavior. Are destination-mindposition and preferences measured by constant-sum and conjoint analysis actually associated with travel to foreign destinations? Research with a moderate-size sample of 200 to 300 households over a three- to five-year period would be helpful in answering this question. Unaided awareness, constant-sum, and conjoint analysis data could be collected on an annual basis, along with data on intended and actual travel behavior.

TOURISM RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The results of the present study support the value of measuring unaided awareness as an indicator of foreign travel destination preference. Share of TOMA d for a specific destination is likely to be related to the destination's preference compared to preference for competing destinations, i.e., if substantially more travelers mention destination X than Y as a vacation destination that first comes to mind, then destination X is likely to be preferred by more travelers than Y.

Possibly, TOMA d share is a lead indicator of market share. If a country such as Canada cannot create a successful marketing and advertising strategy to increase its TOMA d, then continued erosion in Canada's share of American foreign visits might be expected.

The findings provide concurrent validity for applying conjoint analysis in travel and tourism research. Prior research findings on first-brand awareness, unaided awareness of destinations, and constant-sum measures reviewed in this article indicate that the measures are sensitive and valid measures of brand choice, intentions to visit, and purchase behavior. In the present study, conjoint analysis has been found to be associated strongly with the order in which destinations are called up from memory, and with destination preference measured by constant-sum. Thus, conjoint analysis appears to be a relevant research method to apply to travel and tourism research.

Conjoint analysis provides more sophisticated information on alternative destination offerings-products or "packages"- and information on the utility (traveler-perceived value) of each offering measured against the utilities of competitive destination offerings. Conjoint analysis may be a useful new initial "product" test for marketing strategists of competing destinations. For example, Ireland might estimate the utilities of several alternative destination offeringscombinations of specific price, activities, length of stay, and advertising messages-against the two to five competing destinations most often mentioned by travelers who mention Ireland when answering unaided awareness questions. The utilities of the alternative destination offerings can be compared with each other, and with research results from focus groups and other methods used more often in travel and tourism research. The combined use of conjoint analysis, unaided awareness measures, and constant-sum measures, along with data collection on demographic, psychographic, benefits sought, intentions to visit, and reported recent travel behavior, is likely to provide valuable insights into understanding and forecasting future vacation travel behavior.

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