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Gender Differences in Tourism Destination Choice: Some Implications for Tourism Marketers

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Gender Differences in Tourism Destination Choice: Implications for Tourism Marketers

Abstract

This paper examines the criteria that males and females use to make tourism destination choices and whether such differences result in different destination preferences. Males and females may apply different criteria to make tourism destination choices. Respondents were asked to rank eight popular WA holiday destinations, using twelve attributes. Comparisons between males and females were conducted using t-tests, perceptual mapping and external preference analysis. Females rated each attribute consistently more important than males and, overall, consistently high. This finding is interpreted with reference to Meyers-Levy's (1986) selectivity hypothesis and related to other research in the marketing context on information processing. It is recommended that marketers recognise that there are gender differences in information processing when designing tourism destination marketing campaigns.

Introduction

The present paper outlines a study undertaken to determine the criteria that males and females use to make tourism destination choices and whether differences in the criteria result in different preferences. Gender was identified as a potentially useful variable for cost-effective market segmentation as it meets three of Rossiter's (1987) four criteria for segmentation as the resulting segments are *substantial* enough to be worth developing marketing strategies for, relatively *easy to measure* and relatively *easy to access*.

The fourth criteria, *differential potential*, is the subject of the present study that examines whether there are sufficient differences in the criteria used by males and females to warrant developing segmented tourism marketing strategies along a gender dimension. The research has implications for marketers of tourism destinations and retail travel. It may be that information about the tourism destination should be presented differently, depending on whether males or females are likely to be the travel decision-makers. The research also has implications for consumer behaviour researchers interested in tourism choice.

Gender and tourism

A tourist destination image consists of both objective knowledge and subjective perceptions, making up a 'personalized, internalized and conceptualized understanding of what we know' (Markin, 1974, cited in Telisman-Kosuta, 1989). However, as tourism is often the 'selling of otherness' (Swain, 1995, p. 250), 'what we know' may be powerfully influenced by the presentation of objective knowledge (e.g., by marketers) because subjective perceptions (e.g., memories, experience) may be minimal or missing. In any case, product evaluations may differ according to the gender-based knowledge and perceptions associated with male and female roles in society (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991).

One of the reasons men and women may want different things from a tourism experience is that they are 'getting away from' different things in the home environment (Swain, 1995). An example, based on the conventional division of labour, is that a self-catering camping holiday may be experienced differently by males, for whom it represents a change, and by females, for whom it may be a variation on a (too) familiar theme. Further, product evaluations may differ according to the different relative importance each gender assigns to individual characteristics of a product (Holbrook, 1986, cited by Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991). For example, tourism remembrances appear to have more psychological importance for women than for men and the majority of souvenir purchases are made by women (Anderson and Littrell, 1995).

This paper does not advocate that tourist destination marketers should try to appeal to either males or females; that is, promote single-sex destinations, but rather that, in order to appeal to both males and females, it may be advisable to emphasise certain characteristics important to each gender. The emphasis may vary depending on whether the primary purchase decision-maker is likely to be a male or a female. Anderson and Littrell (1995) found that women are often the primary planners and decision-makers of their trips.

The present paper examines male and female attitudes, perceptions and preferences toward eight popular holiday destinations in Western Australia in an attempt to examine gender differences. The methodology and data used in this study are outlined in the following section.

Survey and Methodology

The survey that provided the data used in the present study was conducted with Perth, Western Australia (WA) residents. A total of 246 females and 150 males were included in the sample. Respondents were asked to rank eight popular WA holiday destinations (Attachment 1) using a simple ranking from the most preferred to the least preferred holiday destination. Their perceptions of these holiday destinations were gathered using twelve attributes (listed in Table 1) derived from the literature (discussed in Ryan and Soutar, 1997), and collected using a series of seven point semantic differential scales. Respondent fatigue was reduced by asking respondents to provide perceptions of the four holiday spots they knew the best from the eight included in the study. A set of general lifestyle statements, attitudes to holidays, leisure activities and commonly collected demographics was also included in the questionnaire.

Table 1:
Attributes of Holiday Destinations

Facilities for water sports
Facilities for golf, tennis
Historical & cultural interests
Scenic beauty
Friendliness of people
Opportunity to rest and relax
Shopping facilities
Variety of food
Availability of entertainment
Availability of accommodation
Transport costs (distance)

Comparisons between males and females on the ten general attitudes to holiday questions were undertaken using t-tests. Responses to the importance of certain attributes in choosing between the eight local holiday destinations were also compared using a t-tests. In previous research on these data, multiple discriminant analysis was used to construct a three dimensional perceptual map (space) (Ryan and Soutar, 1997). The eight destinations were found to be statistically different from each other, generally at least at the one-percent level, with the exception of Geraldton and Busselton, which were different at the six-percent level. The resulting three dimensional solution was used in the present study to compare male and female perceptions by placing each “group” (male and female) in the obtained space using their “gender” group centroids (means) on the three functions. Male and female scores on the three dimensions were compared using Cliff’s (1966) factor matching algorithm.

Preference rankings were also examined to determine if there were any gender differences. Carroll and Chang's (1967) PREFMAP program estimated each respondent's preference vector within the already obtained three dimensional perceptual space. A multivariate analysis of variance was used to compare male and female preferences on these vectors. The results of the various analyses are presented in the following section.

Results

General Views on Holidays

As already mentioned, *t*-tests were used to examine differences between males' and females' general views about holidays. Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements shown in Table 2, using a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). There were some significant differences between males and females, as shown in the Table.

Table 2:
Male and Female Responses to 10 General Holiday Statements

Holiday statement	Mean score Males	Means score Females	T value
<i>On a holiday, I just want to rest and relax</i>	5.2	5.4	-1.3
<i>I like a holiday area with a lot of sea, sun and sand</i>	5.3	5.3	-0.21
<i>Families should take holidays away from the home</i>	5.9	6.2	-2.34*
<i>I would rather save money than spend it on holidays away from home</i>	3.3	3.2	0.44
<i>I like experimenting with new and different things</i>	5.0	5.0	-0.32
<i>For a really good Holiday, couples should try to get away without children</i>	4.7	4.8	-0.49
<i>I like adventure</i>	5.7	5.1	3.98**
<i>The suitability of the climate of the holiday spot is of primary importance to me</i>	5.4	5.3	0.17
<i>One should see his/her own country first before visiting foreign countries</i>	4.8	5.1	-1.34
<i>I usually look for unique native items and/or souvenirs to buy that will remind me of the holiday place I visited</i>	3.9	4.8	-4.45**

* = $p < 0.05$

** = $p < 0.0001$

Females were more likely than males to agree that “*families should take holidays away from home*” and that they “*usually look for unique native items and for souvenirs to buy that will remind me of the holiday place I visited.*” Males, on the other hand, were more likely than females to agree that they “*like adventure.*” A female preference for tourism remembrances is consistent with previous research that found women make the majority of souvenir purchases (Anderson and Littrell, 1995). A male preference for adventure is consistent with Meyers-Levy and Sternthal’s (1991) suggestion that product perceptions (in this case, the tourism experience) are influenced by males’ and females’ different gender-based roles in society. It is interesting, in that same context, to speculate about females’ agreement that holidays should be taken away from home, as females are traditionally primary carers and home-based.

The Importance of Attributes to the Choice of Holiday Destinations

Respondents were also asked how important each of the included attributes was in deciding between the eight holiday destinations in the study. Table 3 shows the male and female mean scores and t-tests for these attributes. A higher score indicates a more important attribute.

Females rated each attribute consistently higher (more important) than males and, overall, consistently high. Significant differences between males and females were found on seven of the twelve statements, with females indicating that each of these attributes were more important. It is interesting to consider this finding in the context of Meyers-Levy’s (1986) information processing selectivity hypothesis, that males typically process information using selective, heuristic devices, involving the use of single, salient cues, serving as surrogates for more comprehensive processing, while females are comprehensive information processors, who attempt to assimilate all cues, including those which are less salient and less relevant to the self. The implications for marketers are discussed further below.

Table 3:
Importance Ratings of Factors when deciding between 8 Local Holiday Destinations

Factor	Mean Score Males	Mean Score Females
<i>Water Sport Facilities</i>	4.27	4.31
<i>Facilities for other sports e.g. golfing, tennis</i>	3.71	3.63
<i>Places of historical and cultural interests</i>	4.48**	4.89**
<i>Ability to sightsee</i>	5.43*	5.66*
<i>Friendly local people</i>	5.66**	5.93**
<i>Opportunity for rest and relaxation</i>	5.76**	6.05**
<i>Shopping facilities</i>	4.00***	4.76***
<i>Wide range of food</i>	4.74	4.87
<i>Wide range of entertainment</i>	4.47	4.53
<i>Plenty of suitable accommodation</i>	5.63	5.82
<i>Transport cost</i>	5.14**	5.53**
<i>Transport time</i>	4.55**	4.98**

* = $p < 0.10$ ** = $p < 0.05$ *** = $p < 0.0001$

Perceptions of the Eight Holiday Destinations

As discussed earlier, a previous multiple discriminant analysis of the perceptions data found a three dimensional perceptual space of the eight destinations. Tables 4 and 5 provide descriptors of the relationship between the destination and the discriminant functions for males and females respectively.

**Table 4:
Male Perceptions of Eight Holiday Destinations**

Destination	<i>Historical & Cultural Interest</i>	<i>Shopping/food facilities</i>	<i>Water sport facilities/scenic beauty</i>
Rottneſt	-.085 (average)	-1.03(very low)	-.046(average)
Augusta/Margaret River	-.037(average)	.014(average)	.485(high)
Mandurah	-1.50(very low)	.570(high)	-.526(low)
Kalgoorlie	2.32(very high)	.904(high)	-3.132(very low)
Broome	1.44(very high)	-.756(low)	.145(average)
Albany	.640(high)	1.02(very high)	.027(average)
Geraldton/Kalbarri	-.180(average)	.032(average)	-.362(low)
Busselton	-.56(low)	.31(average)	-.26(low)

**Table 5:
Female Perceptions of Eight Holiday Destinations**

Destination	<i>Historical & Cultural Interest</i>	<i>Shopping/food facilities</i>	<i>Water sport facilities/scenic beauty</i>
Rottneſt	.07(average)	-.83(low)	.31(high)
Augusta/Margaret River	-.56(low)	.039(average)	.66(high)
Mandurah	-1.28(very low)	.878(very high)	-.604(low)
Kalgoorlie	2.36(very high)	.838(very high)	-.707(low)
Broome	.8869(very high)	.33(high)	.209(average)
Albany	.68(high)	1.00(very high)	.346(high)
Geraldton/Kalbarri	-.182(average)	.388(average)	-.199(average)
Busselton	-.410(low)	.503(high)	-.156(average)

Marketers of tourism destinations need to be aware that different perceptions of destinations seem to be held by males and females. For example, females scored consistently high on the Shopping/food facilities dimension, with only Rottneſt (an island resort with few facilities) scoring “low” on this dimension. It seems that even the destinations with relatively poor shopping facilities are rated higher by female than male respondents, perhaps indicating that females view *any* shopping facilities in a more favourable light.

Cliff's (1966) matching algorithm was used to determine whether the two spaces (perceptions of males and females) were different. An overall goodness of fit of 0.91 suggested the two spaces were highly correlated. The dimensional correlations suggested that the "Historical & Cultural Interest" and "Water Sport facilities/ Scenic Beauty" dimensions were highly correlated (0.96 and 0.97 respectively). Interestingly, perceptions on shopping/food facilities were slightly less correlated (0.81), perhaps indicating that the differences in the importance placed on the shopping experience in a holiday is reflected in males' and females' perceptions of the holiday destination.

Preferences of the Eight Holiday Destinations

Respondents' preferences for the eight locations were also examined to see if they were different for males and females. A multivariate analysis of variance, in which the ideal vector scores on each of the three perceptual dimensions were the dependent variables and gender was the independent variable, revealed that male and female preferences did not differ significantly across the eight destinations for the "historical and cultural interest" and "water sports/ scenic beauty" dimensions. The "shopping/food facilities" dimension differed at the 10 percent level, suggesting that, overall, male and female preferences were very similar.

Discussion

The present study found some differences in male and female attitudes to holidays, as well as their preferences and perceptions of the eight holiday locations included in the survey although, in most cases, these differences were small. Females rated each destination attribute as more important than males and, overall, consistently high. Males were more selective in their ratings. This appears to be consistent with the gender differences in information processing found by Meyers-Levy (1986) and explained by her in terms of a 'selectivity hypothesis.' The present study did not present respondents with information about the destination to process but, rather, relied on respondents' processing their own perceptions, made up of prior knowledge, memories and experience. However, it would appear that the selectivity principle holds in relation to this task as males were selective about what was important, whereas females regarded all attributes as important.

The importance of the selectivity hypothesis for marketers has yet to be fully researched. Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran (1991) explored the conditions under which information processing differences are likely to occur when males and females are processing advertising messages, while Meyers-Levy and Sternthal (1991) examined the different elaboration of message cues by males and females and the effect on product evaluation. Darley and Smith (1995) tested a model for gender differences in processing objective and subjective advertising claims for low and moderate-risk products. Generally, the information processing model was

supported in the advertising context used. The present study also suggests that it is worth considering this model when marketing tourist destinations to males and females. Further research needs to be carried out to determine whether the information processing model influences destination choice behaviour. Findings in this study revealed few differences between male and female preferences, with the exception of perceptions of the shopping/food facilities dimension used in the study.

Conclusions

Perceptual, preference and attitudinal gender differences exist and should influence how marketers present destination information to holiday decision makers. Important attributes for “ideal” holiday destinations for one gender are not the same as for the other. Information on holiday destinations may be processed differently and may need to be presented differently to each gender. Females are likely to process all information comprehensively whereas males are likely to be influenced by selected attributes. While it is true that “no one encounters the world strictly as a woman or as a man” (Frye, 1990 cited by Henderson, 1994, p.133), this study suggests that tourism marketers should consider targeting males and females differently when presenting information on tourism destinations.

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ATTACHMENT 1

**Table A:
Description of the Eight Population
Western Australian Holiday Destinations**

Destination	Description
Rottneest	An Island 18kms off the coast of Perth, (W.A.). Rottneest has a resident population of 200, and enjoys a moderate climate.
Augusta/ Margaret River	Both coastal towns are some 300kms south of Perth (W.A.). Both towns have populations of 1,000 (approx.) which rise to over 30,000 during holiday periods.
Mandurah	The city of Mandurah lies 74 kms south of Perth, on the coast. A mediterranean climate with a population of approx. 30,000 which doubles during holiday season.
Kalgoorlie	A famous "gold-rush" town of W.A..Kalgoorlie is a mining town 600 kms east of Perth, with a hot-dry climate.
Broome	Located on the coast in the North-West of Western Australia over 2,000 kms from Perth. Broome enjoys a tropical climate, with a population of 8,500 (approx).
Albany	With a population of 15,000, Albany lies 400 kms south of Perth. Coastal scenery, beaches & National Parks provide a variety of activities for visitors.
Geraldton/ Kalbarri	Geraldton is 420 Kms North of Perth (W.A.). Kalbarri is 166kms north of Geraldton. The coastal town of Geraldton is relatively large with 20,000 people. Kalbarri is a smaller tourist centre, situated where the Murchison River meets the Indian Ocean.
Busselton	A coastal town 220kms south of Perth (W.A.). Situated on the calm waters of Geographe Bay, with a population of 1,500.