An Investigation of the Information Sources Used by International Tourists of Different Age Groups in Fiji

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed to investigate the relationships between the age groups of international tourists and the information sources they prefer on the island of Fiji. The study used correspondence analysis to achieve its goals. The results showed that the 18-29 age group was more likely to obtain tourism information from travel guidebooks and friends/relatives. The 30-49 age group preferred to seek travel information on websites. Older adults, 50-64 and over, primarily relied on travel agencies and tour operators. This study helps tourism industry practitioners in Fiji understand more accurately how international tourists plan their trips and how to better-predict these tourists’ behavior. It further suggests some marketing strategies to effectively communicate with existing and potential tourists.

Keywords: Travel information sources; Information search; Age groups, Fiji, Correspondence analysis

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Introduction

Tourism has known to be information intensive (Sheldon, 1993). Many industry practitioners and scholars have realized the importance of information sources through which potential tourists get to know the destination and its tourism products (Goossens, 2000; Santos, 2004; Weaver and Lawton, 2011). The exposure of the information sources is an igniter of the subsequent processes of information search and attitude change that ultimately leads to travel decisions (Weaver and Lawton, 2011). Understanding tourists’ information source choices is particularly important for international trips, considering the high travel costs and risks (Gursoy and Chen, 2000). Snepenger and Snepenger (1993) summarized four primary information sources for trip planning, including family and friends, destination promotional materials, mass media, and travel consultants. Since the emergence of the World Wide Web, the internet also has an influence on tourists’ information search behavior (O’Donnell and Dan, 2000). Tourists now refer to tourism websites, blogs, and other social media for their trip planning (Kozak, 2002).

The information sources tourists use for trip planning are influenced by several primary factors, including environment (e.g., access to an attraction, distance to a destination) (Gursoy and Chen, 2000), situational variables (e.g., satisfaction with previous trips, time constraints) (Fodness and Murray, 1999), and demographic information (e.g., age, gender, education) (Leventhal, 1997; Luo and Naveen, 2006; Smith and Mackay, 2001). Among the demographic factors, previous studies have investigated information sources used by tourists of specific age groups, such as college students (Dolnicar, 2004; Howe and Strauss, 2003), middle-aged adults (Harmon, Webster, and Weyenberg, 1999), mature tourists (Boksberger and Laesser, 2009; Horneman, Carter, Wei, and Ruys, 2002), etc. These studies have argued that these studies’ marketing implications may be biased because industry practitioners can’t make an overall judgment of tourists’ preferences of information sources on the basis of the respective research on an individual age segment of a destination. The application of a holistic approach to the comprehensive investigation of the relationships between age segments and their preferences on information sources for a destination was needed. This study aimed to fill this research gap.

Thus, the general purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between four age groups of international tourists and their choices of 10 information sources in Fiji. The four age groups included 18-29, 30-49, 50-64, and over 64 (e.g., Moschis, 2003; Schewe and Noble, 2000). The 10