



Università della Basilicata  
L.M. Natural & Cultural Resources Economics

## Destination Information Search Strategies

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# *Tourism Destination Marketing & Management*

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# Introduction

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Understanding information search behaviour and the information search strategy utilization of consumers is crucial for developing and designing effective marketing communication strategies and campaigns.

Certainly, understanding consumers' information source utilization strategies can help marketers to effectively tailor their promotional mix of offerings.



**Information search or information acquisition is one of the first steps in the vacation decision-making process.**



# Introduction

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The way that travellers search for information and the importance that they place on it is likely to be significantly different from the way consumers search for information

1. Services are mostly intangible
2. They are heterogeneous. In other words, they differ substantially from producer to producer.
3. They are inseparable. In some instances, purchase and consumption of services occur at the same time



# Introduction

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The consumer deals with a high perceived risk because of high personal investment of time, effort and money.

The consumer is likely to be more involved in the information search for tourism product purchases than for many other product purchases.

All of these factors are likely to influence the information search strategies utilized by travelers and the importance that they place on each information source.

Travellers to international and unknown destinations are more likely to utilize external information searching than travellers to domestic or known destinations



# Information Search Strategies Utilized by Travellers

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Information search can be defined as **'the motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory or acquisition of information from the environment'**



Internal search is based on the retrieval of knowledge from memory.

External search consists of collecting information from the marketplace



# Information Search Strategies Utilized by Travellers

An information search strategy refers to the combination of information sources utilized by a traveller when planning travel.



Initial information search is likely to almost always take place internally, such as when previous experiences and knowledge are used as the basis for planning a repeat visit

In the case of most travel decisions, the search is predominantly external, involving considerable effort and a variety of information sources

1. family and friends
2. destination specific literature
3. the media
4. travel consultants



# Factors Affecting Information Search Strategies Used by Travellers

Psychological/motivational approach, which suggests that a combination of individual, product class and task-related variables such as beliefs and attitudes and involvement are likely to determine search strategy utilization

The second is the economics approach, which uses the cost–benefit framework and the economics of information theory to examine information search strategy utilization

The consumer information processing approach, which suggests that consumers' memory and cognitive information processing capabilities are likely to influence search strategy utilization



# Factors Affecting Information Search Strategies Used by Travellers

Information search strategies



Combination of information sources used

## *Strategic Model*

The main focus is the number and combination of information sources utilized by travellers, but it does not help us to understand why travellers utilize those particular external information sources and ignore others.





# Factors Affecting Information Search Strategies Used by Travellers

Some studies have attempted to differentiate travelers who utilized different external information sources, although the differentiation was only based on sociodemographics

## *Contingency Model*

Information search is influenced from individual characteristics, effort, the number of sources used, situational influences, product characteristics and search outcomes.

The impact of individual characteristics on travellers' information search strategy utilization



Operationalized travel-specific lifestyle



Individual's travel-specific lifestyle



# Factors Affecting Information Search Strategies Used by Travellers

<i>Contingency Model</i>	<i>Comprehensive Model</i>
To examine several factors that are likely to influence the information search behaviour of travelers	The cost of external information search represents the financial and time costs of external search activity
To understand travellers' information search strategy selection	The cost of internal search represents the cognitive effort required and the expected outcome of the internal search
To assume that travellers who are familiar withand/or are experts on the destination	An increase in the cost of external information search is likely to result in a decrease in the level of external search activity
Prior product knowledge and expertise are measured by a single indicator	The costs of both the external and internal information search are likely to moderate the effects of a traveler 's familiarity and expertise
To ignore the motivational factors that are likely to influence travellers' information search behavior	Learning is examined as having two dimensions: intentional learning and incidental learning



# Impact of culture on information search strategies

.... plays a vital role in determining the type of information search strategies that are likely to be utilized by travelers.



.... determines what forms of communications are acceptable, and the nature and the degree of external search that travellers from any particular culture utilize.

- (i) the 'power distance' element, showing that the less powerful individuals accept the fact that power is distributed unequally;
- (ii) 'individualism versus collectivism' elements, representing the degree of interdependence that a society maintains;
- (iii) the 'masculinity versus femininity' element, revealing the difference in societal roles between genders;
- (iv) the 'uncertainty avoidance' element, indicating the extent to which individuals feel threatened by uncertainty and attempt to prevail in these circumstances;
- (v) the 'long-term orientation', element symbolizing the extent to which a society demonstrates a pragmatic future-oriented view rather than a normative or short-term perspective.



# Communicating with the Tourist Market

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The factors that are likely to influence travellers' information search strategies

The importance of the perceived cost of information search



Travellers' levels of prior product knowledge (familiarity and expertise) as a segmentation tool to develop communication strategies that are most appropriate for each segment.



Communication materials developed for expert travelers should include detailed information about the attributes that are important to the target market.



# Communicating with the Tourist Market

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- ➔ To identify the value of actual visitation to a site for improving marketing outcomes
- ➔ To examine travellers' perceptions of a destination to make sure that those perceptions reflect reality
- ➔ To take corrective actions, destination marketers first need to identify what causes those negative perceptions
- ➔ To understand the cultural values held by travellers



# Directions for Future Research

Travellers are likely to continue searching for information by utilizing external sources as long as they believe that the benefits gained from the search exceed the cost of search.



- Researchers need to consider utilizing experimental research designs rather than survey methods in order to truly understand the influence of cost on travellers' utilization of information sources.
- Most research in the area has focused on the time spent searching for information, and most data were collected through self-instructed survey instruments.
- An increasing number of researchers are conducting studies to understand the impact of the Internet on information search behaviour and how best to utilize it.



# Conclusion

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The studies reviewed revealed that the type of information search (internal and/or external) a traveler conducts is likely to be influenced directly by the perceived cost of an internal information search, the perceived cost of an external information search and the level of travellers' involvement.

Travellers' prior product knowledge, the way they learn the information, and previous visits are likely to have indirect effects on travellers' information search behaviour.

That travellers' prior product knowledge of a destination has two components, familiarity and expertise

The studies reviewed further suggest that the cost of information searching is likely to mediate the relationship between prior knowledge and information search behaviour

Studies suggest that as travellers' familiarity with a destination increases they are more likely to make their vacation decisions based on what they know about that destination

Culture plays a significant role in determining which external information sources a traveller utilizes.