EXPLORING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN INFORMATION SEARCH AMONG DOMESTIC VISTORS TO YELLOW MOUNTAIN AND GUILIN, PRC

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Abstract.—In the dynamic global environment of today, understanding how consumers acquire information is important at the micro level for marketing management decisions and at the macro level for public policy decisions. Gender has been identified as a factor influencing information search and other meaningful consumer behavior constructs. Therefore, understanding gender differences in information search is critical. Based on the questionnaire survey on domestic tourists in Yellow Mountain and Guilin, China, this article explored the gender differences in tourist information search behavior by using independent sample t-tests and Chi-square analysis. Results indicated that male and female tourists differ significantly in terms of 1) the number of information topics searched; 2) which information topics are searched; and 3) which information sources are searched ($p<.05$). No significant differences were observed in the number of information sources searched ($p>.05$).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Information search has been one of the most enduring issues in consumer behavior research (Beatty & Smith, 1987). In today's dynamic environment, understanding how consumers acquire information is important at the micro level for marketing management decisions and at the macro level for public policy decision-making (Srinivasan 1990). For marketing departments, it is crucial to understand the determinants of information search behavior for designing effective marketing communication. Information search is the primary stage of the purchasing process; at this step consumers' decisions are influenced by marketing deliveries (Wilkie & Dickson 1985). Information search when purchasing tourism products is even more important than information search before buying manufactured goods. Tourism products and services are seldom routine purchases (Swarbrooke & Horner 1999). Choices of tourism products usually involve considerable emotional significance and perceived and actual risk for the individual. As a result, individuals usually carry out extensive information search before they make their final purchase decisions (Swarbrooke & Horner 1999).

Previous research on information search behavior has identified a number of factors affecting this construct, such as, the nature of decision making (Fodness & Murray 1999), residency (Pennington-Gray & Vogt 2003), family life cycle (Fodness 1992), socio-economic status (Fodness & Murray 1999), involvement (Cai et al. 2004), travel expenditures (Snepenger et al. 1990) , prior knowledge (Kerstetter & Cho 2004), and search cost (Gursoy & McCleary 2004).

Gender has been identified as a factor influencing information search and other meaningful consumer behavior constructs (Putrevu 2001). However, this issue has been relatively neglected in the context of tourism. Consequently, this research tried to explore gender differences in tourist information search behavior based on a questionnaire survey on domestic tourists in Yellow Mountain and Guilin, China.

2.0 GENDER DIFFERENCE IN INFORMATION SEARCH BEHAVIOR

According to Social Role Theory (Eagly 1987), to accommodate gender-specific roles, each gender tries to acquire specific skills and resources for successful gender role performance and adapt its social behavior to meet the requirements set by gender roles. Previous research (e.g., McKee & Sherriffs 1957, Broverman et al. 1970) identified a series of traits differentially ascribed to men and women, among which McClelland's work (1975)

is especially relevant to information search behavior. According to McClelland (1975), males tend to be assertive, independent, and self-centered; females tend to seek approval from others, create nurturing relationships with others, and maintain interpersonal harmony. These observations yielded the following implications: 1) males spend less effort in information search, thus probably searching fewer information sources and topics, due to their higher confidence; 2) females are more inclined to seek information from friends and relatives because of their greater inclination to gain approval from others.

Further evidence of gender differences in information search includes the reported male/female dichotomy in processing information. As indicated by some research (e.g., Haas 1979, Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran 1991), females are more subjective, intuitive, comprehensive, and relational processing while men are more logical, analytical, selective and item-specific processing. Males' selectivity and item-specificity predict that they may search less comprehensively than females and focus on certain information sources and topics.

Based on the reasoning above, we made the following hypotheses:

H1 There are gender differences in terms of the number of information topics searched.
Females search more information topics than males do.

H2 There are gender differences in terms of the number of information sources searched.
Females search information from more sources than males do.

H3 There are gender differences in terms of which information sources are searched.
Females are more inclined to search from personal information sources.

Despite a lack of evidence from previous studies, we expected females to differ from males in terms of the information topics of interest, owing to differences in perceptions of social roles and information-processing characteristics. Therefore, we made our last hypothesis as below:

H4 There are gender differences in terms of which information topics are searched.

3.0 METHOD

Data in this research come from a domestic tourist questionnaire survey in Yellow Mountain and Guilin, Peoples' Republic of china. Yellow Mountain and Guilin are two famous Chinese destinations. While dominated by nature-based tourism resources, these two destinations offer comprehensive tourist attractions. In Yellow Mountain and Guilin, data were collected at major tourist sites in November and December 1999 and at the airport and railway station in April 2004. In both surveys, survey staff approached the tourists and asked for their willingness to complete the questionnaire. Tourists finished the questionnaire with the help of survey staff. In Yellow Mountain, 149 out of 200 valid questionnaires were obtained, with a rate of 74.5 percent[1]. In Guilin, 531 out of 950 valid questionnaires were obtained for a response rate of 55.9 percent.

Two questions in the questionnaire relate to current research (See Appendix 1). The first question asked for the information sources the respondents searched before visiting Yellow Mountain or Guilin. The options for this question are generally consistent. The second question, only appearing in Yellow Mountain's survey, asked for the information topics the respondents searched before visiting Yellow Mountain. Independent sample t-tests and Chi-square analysis were used to test the gender differences in terms of information search variables.

4.0 RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of the tourists surveyed are listed in Table 1.

4.1 Number of Information Topics and Information Sources Searched

Table 2 showed that females searched significantly more information topics than males in Yellow Mountain (p=.020). As for the number of information sources searched, no significant gender differences were observed in either Yellow Mt. (p=.112) or Guilin (p=.287). Therefore, H1 is accepted, while H2 is rejected.

[1]The response rate for two questions are different in the Yellow Mountain survey

Table 1.—Sample demographic characteristics

Gender	Yellow Mt. (%)	Guilin (%)	Education	Yellow Mt. (%)	Guilin (%)
Female	39.2	33.7	Junior or below	6.6	9.9
Male	60.8	66.3	High school	18.9	28.8
Age			Secondary school	30.1	32.9
Below 18	3.4	3.0	Bachelor	36.4	
18-40/35	72.4	60.6	Graduate school	8.0	28.4
41/36-60	20.3	33.4			
Above 60	3.8	3.0			

Table 2.—Independent sample t test for gender difference in No. of information topics searched ($N_{Yellow\ Mt.}$=75)

Sample	Gender	*n*	Mean	*SD*	*Df*	*t*	*p*
Yellow Mt.	Female	30	3.37	1.40	46.66	-2.40	**.020**
	Male	45	2.33	2.06			
Independent sample t-test for gender difference in No. of information sources searched ($N_{Yellow\ Mt.}$= 149; N_{Guilin}=531)							
Yellow Mt.	Female	64	1.85	.89	113.11	-1.60	.112
	Male	85	1.58	1.18			
Guilin	Female	177	2.61	1.39	529	-1.07	.287
	Male	354	2.47	1.46			

4.2 Information Sources Searched

Table 3 showed that "Other persons" is associated with gender with a p value of .002 in Yellow Mountain and .022 in Guilin. In both destinations, females are more inclined to obtain information from "other persons" than are males. "Travel agency" is associated with gender in Guilin (p=.005), but not in Yellow Mountain. Therefore, H3 is accepted.

4.3 Information Topics Searched

As presented in Table 4, three information topics, namely "travel cost," "lodge and food," and "travel route," were associated with gender with respective p values of .039, .019, and .018. Females are more inclined to search these topics than are males. Therefore, H4 is accepted.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study made an initial exploration on gender differences in tourist information search and found that male and female tourists differ significantly in terms of 1) the number of information topics searched; 2) which information topics are searched; and 3) which information sources are searched (p<.05). No significant differences were observed in the number of information sources searched (p>.05). Compared to males, female tourists search more information topics and are more inclined to search topics related to travel cost, lodging, and food and travel route. Moreover, female tourists are more inclined to ask for information from other persons than males are (in Yellow Mountain and Guilin) and from travel agencies (in Guilin). These results confirmed females' comprehensiveness and tendency to obtain others' approval in the process of information search. These findings are consistent with previous theories (e.g., McClelland 1975, Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran 1991).

Gender is the only independent variable considered in this research. Therefore, the size of gender's effect may not be correctly measured because other possible determinants were ignored. Future research should try to examine gender's effect on information search by using multivariate approaches and should try to explore gender's effect on other meaningful information search behaviors. Moreover, cross-cultural comparisons of gender differences will be interesting since gender role and stereotypes vary across cultures.

6.0 MARKETING IMPLICATION

According to this research, gender differences should be considered when marketing messages are delivered. More

Table 3.—Pearson chi-square analysis for gender difference in which information source is searched

Information source		Gender F (n/%)	Gender M (n/%)	N	χ^2	df	p
Yellow Mountain							
Internet	Search	20(13.4%)	31(20.8%)	51(34.2%)	.442	1	.506
	Not search	44(29.5%)	54(36.2%)	98(65.8%)			
TV/Broadcasting	Search	23(15.4%)	33(22.1%)	56(37.6%)	.130	1	.719
	Not search	41(27.5%)	52(34.9%)	93(62.4%)			
Newspaper	Search	12(8.1%)	13(8.7%)	25(16.8%)	.312	1	.576
	Not search	52(34.9%)	72(48.3%)	124(83.2%)			
Magazine	Search	13(8.7%)	9(6.0%)	22(14.8%)	2.743	1	.098
	Not search	51(34.2%)	76(51.0%)	127(85.2%)			
Travel agency	Search	15(10.1%)	15(10.1%)	30(20.1%)	.761	1	.383
	Not search	49(32.9%)	70(47.0%)	119(79.9%)			
Books/Brochure	Search	14(9.4%)	17(11.4%)	31(20.8%)	.078	1	.780
	Not search	50(33.6%)	68(45.6%)	118(79.2%)			
Other persons	Search	44(29.5%)	76(51.0%)	120(80.5%)	9.944	1	.002
	Not search	20(13.4%)	9(6.0%)	29(19.5%)			
Guilin							
Internet	Search	5(0.9%)	22(4.2%)	27(5.1%)	2.768	1	.096
	Not search	171(32.3%)	332(62.6%)	503(94.9%)			
TV	Search	108(20.4%)	197(37.3%)	305(57.7%)	1.231	1	.267
	Not search	69(13.0%)	155(29.3%)	224(42.3%)			
Broadcasting	Search	33(6.21%)	66(12.4%)	99(18.6%)	.000	1	1.000
	Not search	144(27.1%)	288(54.2%)	432(81.4%)			
Books	Search	98(18.5%)	206(38.8%)	304(57.3%)	.385	1	.535
	Not search	79(14.9%)	148(27.9%)	227(42.7%)			
Maps	Search	46(8.7%)	95(17.9%)	141(26.6%)	.043	1	.835
	Not search	131(24.7%)	259(48.8%)	390 (73.4%)			
Travel agency	Search	44(8.3%)	53(10.0%)	97(18.3%)	7.726	1	.005
	Not search	133(25.0%)	301(56.7%)	434(81.7%)			
Newspaper & Magazine	Search	62(11.7%)	104(19.6%)	166(31.3%)	1.753	1	.186
	Not search	115(21.7%)	250(47.1%)	365(68.7%)			
Telephone	Search	7(1.3%)	8(1.5%)	15(2.8%)	1.235	1	.266
	Not search	170(32.0%)	346(65.2%)	516 (97.2%)			
Other persons	Search	70(13.2%)	105(19.8%)	175(33.0%)	5.221	1	.022
	Not search	107(20.2%)	249(46.9%)	356(67.0%)			

information, especially information related to travel cost, food and accommodations, and travel route, should be delivered to female tourists for better decision-making and marketing effectiveness. Another implication is that marketing with a personal communication approach is more effective with female tourists than with male tourists. Therefore, marketing managers should create opportunities for such personal communication, for example, increasing face-to-face sales to female customers, or encouraging current customers to introduce the product to others by giving them incentives.

Table 4.—Pearson chi-square analysis for gender difference in which information topic is searched

Information topic (Yellow Mountain)		Gender					
		F (n / %)	M (n / %)	N	χ^2	df	p
Travel cost	Not search	15(20.0%)	33(44.0%)	48(64.0%)	4.253	1	.039
	Search	15(20.0%)	12()16.0%	27(36.0%)			
Lodge & food	Not search	14(18.7%)	33(44.0%)	47(62.7%)	5.471	1	.019
	Search	16(21.3%)	12(16.0%)	28(37.3%)			
Transportation	Not search	20(26.7%)	29(38.7%)	49(65.3%)	.039	1	.843
	Search	10(13.3%)	16(21.3%)	26(34.7%)			
Site	Not search	14(18.7%)	30(40.0%)	44(58.7%)	2.969	1	.085
	Search	16(21.3%)	15(20.0%)	31(41.3%)			
Public security	Not search	25(33.3%)	36(48.0%)	61(81.3%)	.132	1	.717
	Search	5(6.7%)	9(12.0%)	14(18.7%)			
Travel route	Not search	20(26.7%)	40(53.3%)	60(80.0%)	5.556	1	.018
	Search	10(13.3%)	5(6.7%)	15(20.0%)			
Whether & climate	Not search	14(18.7%)	20(26.7%)	34(45.3%)	.036	1	.850
	Search	16(21.3%)	25(33.3%)	41(54.7%)			
Local culture	Not search	17(22.7%)	34(45.3%)	51(68.0%)	2.951	1	.086
	Search	13(17.3%)	11(14.7%)	24(32.0%)			

7.0 CITATIONS

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APPENDIX 1 QUESTIONNAIRE

Question 1

Which information sources did you search before visiting Yellow Mountain?
1) Internet; 2) TV/broadcasting; 3) newspaper; 4) magazine; 5) travel agency; 6) books/magazine/brochure; 7) other persons
Which information sources did you search before visiting Guilin?
1) Internet; 2) TV 3) broadcasting; 4) books; 5) maps; 6) travel agency; 7) newspaper/magazine;
8) telephone; 9) other persons

Question 2

Which information topics did you search before visiting Yellow Mt.?
1) travel cost; 2) lodge and food; 3) transportation; 4) site/resort; 5) public security; 6) travel route;
7) weather/climate; 8) local culture