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A qualitative research on travellers' destination choice behaviour

Pedram Keshavarzian [ID] | Cheng-Lung Wu

School of Aviation, UNSW, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Correspondence
Pedram Keshavarzian, School of Aviation, UNSW, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.
Email: Keshavarzian@Gmail.Com

Abstract

The repertory grid technique was used in this paper to investigate the decision-making process of travellers. Results showed that both destination physical attributes and the travellers' feelings towards the destination play a significant role in the choice of holiday destinations. Notably, a distinct choice pattern emerged from the analysis, which showed some travellers begin their planning process not based on the destination features but on the availability of air tickets on sale. This observation suggested the potential influence of the "sequence" of receiving or searching for transport and tourism information on the choice of a holiday destination.

KEYWORDS

affective association, attribute salience, destination choice, domestic tourism, repertory grid technique

1 | INTRODUCTION

There have been a number of important studies on customer behaviour within the context of travel and tourism. These studies have shown that the travel decision-making process is multifaceted with many subdecisions, initiated long before even deciding where to go and continuing through to on-site decisions and beyond (Pan, 2015; Smallman & Moore, 2010). It is during this process that travellers answer questions such as whether to travel at all, where to travel and what to do, when to travel, how long to stay, and how much money to spend (Oppewal, Huybers, & Crouch, 2015).

Dealing with the above questions, travellers need to evaluate competing destinations to choose a place to spend their next holiday. During this process, both cognitive components (the physical features of the destination) and the affective components (relating to the tourists' values and motives) are being considered and analysed by potential travellers (Baloglu, 2000; Mutinda & Mayaka, 2012). It is believed that for holiday destinations to appeal to tourists, they need to appeal to travellers' perception (both cognitive and affective) of the destination's attributes (Mussalam & Tajeddini, 2016).

In addition, the trend of customers becoming independent of traditional intermediaries such as travel agencies and tour operators and using more direct sales channels and online booking services (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012) has brought new challenges for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). Around 86% of Americans query search engines to plan their travel (Pan, 2015), so marketers have to present travellers with the information that they deem important in a concise manner. In a study about the role of search engine ranking on the clickthrough for a number of destinations, Pan (2015) concluded that not only destination advertisements have to be on top of search engine results but also they need to present tourists with meaningful and relevant information to attract attention in an increasingly attention-poor era.

Given the developments in information technology and the availability of online search engines that influence the decision-making process, and also strong relationship between destination attributes and selecting a holiday destination, it is of utmost importance to understand how tourists evaluate the ever-increasing information and arrive at a decision for their holiday trip. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to determine the way that travellers consider the destination choice issue and to understand how they compare and contrast different features to make a final choice.

In doing so, the paper pursues two main objectives. First is to determine the factors that travellers perceive to be important about a destination when they are evaluating various alternatives and to compare this list with the factors that have been considered as important in the literature. Second is to understand the influence of decision makers' feelings towards a destination and/or their perceptions about destinations on the decision-making process.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. It provides a review of the relevant literature in the field of tourism destination choice behaviour. Then it follows a section providing the details of the methodology and sampling method used in the study. In the next

section, the results of the study are presented and discussed. The paper ends with presentation of some concluding remarks and an indication of future research directions.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

According to neo-classical economic theory, the travel decision-making process is believed to happen in a "multistage" manner (Song, Dwyer, Li, & Cao, 2012; Syriopoulos & Thea Sinclair, 1993). In this framework, the decision maker first makes broad decisions on budget allocation, and then after making the decision to take a holiday, the decision about the type of holiday (i.e., domestic vs. international) is made. Finally, the decision maker will come to the specific decision about trip location.

In a similar fashion, Nicolau and Mas (2005, 2008) argue that given the vast amount of information available in travel decision-making, travellers follow a multistage decision process. In this approach, they argue that travellers initially make a broad decision about whether or not to take a holiday at all, and then they contemplate on the motivational aspect of the travel. An example of these aspects includes decisions about a domestic versus foreign trip or a coastal versus a city excursion. The above steps are then followed by the final decision, that is, the destination choice.

Specific aspects of choice behaviour of travellers in selecting their holiday destinations have been addressed in the literature, offering "substantial conceptual and empirical works" to describe tourists' destination choice processes (Decrop, 2014; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). These include models discussing travel motivations, destination image, in addition to models depicting a broader picture of travel decision-making efforts.

Examples include the "reasoned action theory" of Ajzen and Fishbein (1975, 1980) explaining the attitudinal aspects of the decision-making processes of tourists, the model proposed by Woodside and Lysonski (1989) depicting the decision process of travellers, and the general systems framework of consumer choice decisions developed by Woodside and MacDonald (1994). More recently, Decrop (1999, 2010, 2014) has also discussed various tourism decision-making models.

In understanding the choice behaviour of travellers, it is first essential to contemplate models depicting a more general conceptual view of the process. Among the general models and frameworks, the "choice-set theory" has attracted a great deal of attention among researchers in this field (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Woodside and his colleagues (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Woodside & Sherrell, 1977) and Crompton and his colleagues (Ankomah, Crompton, & Baker, 1996; Crompton, 1992; Crompton & Ankomah, 1993; Um & Crompton, 1990) have contributed to the development of the choice-set theory.

2.1 | Choice-set theory

Based on the general model developed by Woodside and Lysonski (1989), two types of exogenous variables, traveller variables and marketing variables, influence the traveller destination awareness set,

which consists of the *consideration set*, the *inert set*, the *inept set*, and the *unavailable or aware set* (see Figure 1).

According to this definition, the *consideration set* represents destinations that the traveller considers visiting among all the holiday destinations available. The *inept set* consists of destinations that the traveller has rejected from their purchase consideration, and the *inert set* is the category of destinations for which the traveller has made neither a positive nor a negative evaluation. And *unavailable* and *aware sets* are destinations considered by the travellers but are temporarily unavailable because of particular situational constraints.

This destination awareness set combined with affective associations is used by travellers to construct their preferences for alternatives. Finally, it is proposed that the destination choice is influenced by both the intention to visit and situational variables (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989).

Um and Crompton (1990), in contrast, propose a destination selection framework comprising three stages, namely, the composition of awareness set, evoked set, and final destination selection. Their framework, which was originally developed to identify the role of attitudes in the holiday destination choice process, concludes that

> Potential travellers may interpret a complex array of perceptions of destination attributes by simplifying them into facilitators and inhibitors in formulating their destination choice decisions.

Further analysis of choice sets is presented by Crompton (1992), in which a similar arrangement of mental choice sets is used with greater detail. In this model, the awareness-available and awareness-unavailable sets are reconceptualized, and more sets such as action, inaction, and interaction are introduced into the model. This model is illustrated in Figure 2.

In the above-mentioned and other similar studies, the role of choice sets has been investigated in the context of decision-making for tourism destinations. The result is a body of knowledge about the way that travellers compare and analyse a huge number of competing destinations in order to select a single holiday destination. According to these studies, decision makers initially categorize the alternatives in their minds into a number of sets, and the number of remaining alternatives decreases over time. This process is believed to help the travellers to organize their thoughts and to make the planning process more efficient. The notion of forming sets has also provided practical benefits for destination marketers, helping them to align their marketing efforts more efficiently.

Based on the choice-set concept, the decision-making behaviour of travellers can be summarized as follows (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005):

1. Consumers follow a funnel-like procedure in which they narrow down their choices among the alternatives. It is shown that choices of destinations are influenced by a number of psychological or internal factors, such as attitudes, images, motivation, beliefs and intentions, and personality characteristics. These are collectively called push factors. External variables (pull factors) such as destination attributes and marketing mix and situational
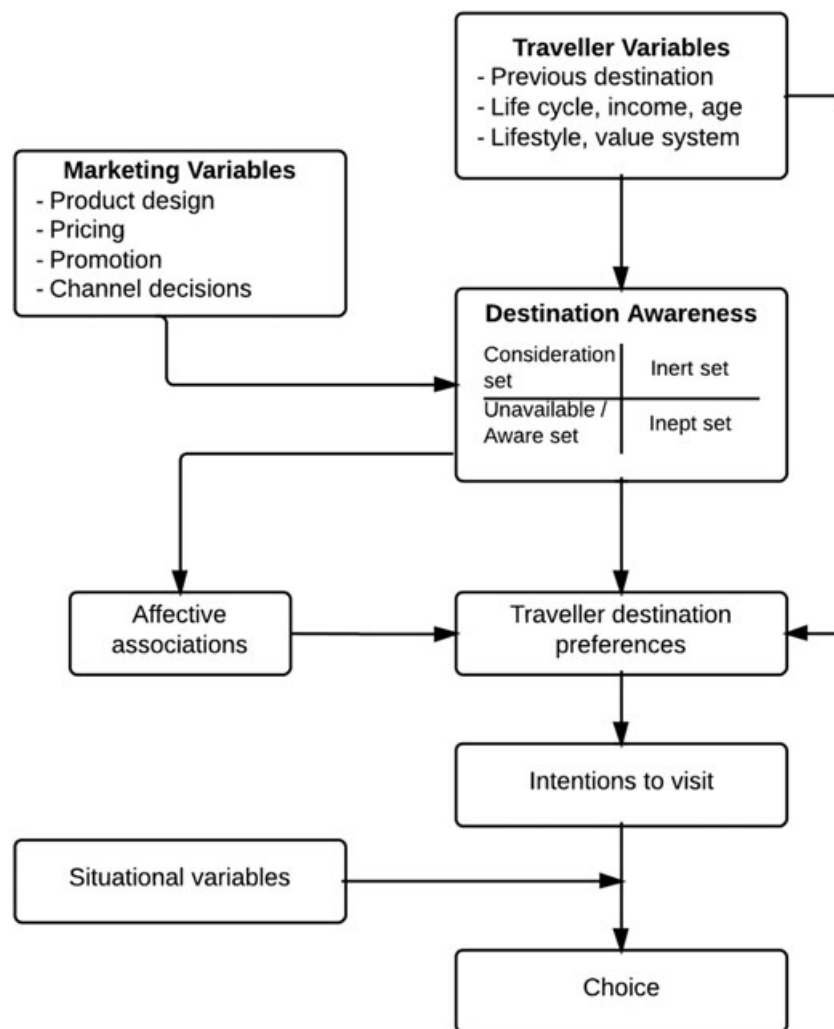
FIGURE 1 General model of destination choice by Woodside and Lysonski (1989)

inhibitors or constraints such as available time and money are also believed to influence destination choice decisions.

2. Destination choice decisions are made sequentially and include sets. The sets diminish in numbers over time until the final choice is made. The degree of influence of internal and external variables varies during this "reduction" stage.

As noted earlier, destination decision-making is a complex process involving many subdecisions. Travellers compare and contrast various factors to narrow down the list of alternatives to arrive at their final destination place. It is, however, believed that emotions and intuitions play a significant role in decision-making (Antónia, Metin, & Manuel, 2013).

Furthermore, previous studies have shown that people make decisions based on their perceptions of reality rather than reality itself (Hong, Kim, Jang, & Lee, 2006). In this regard, travellers' perceptions of a destination are believed to consist of cognitive and affective components (Baloglu, 2000; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1994; Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993; Young, 1995). Although cognitive components are said to represent the physical features of a destination (Hanyu, 1993) and are usually derived from facts, affective components relate to the emotional quality of a destination.

Affective associations, defined as the specific feelings (positive or negative) linked with a destination, are believed to play a significant role in the destination choice during the decision-making process (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Despite the interplay between affective and cognitive elements in the perceptual process, research on consumer perceptions tends to overlook the role of the former in the studies about the travellers' decision process (Cohen, Prayag, & Moital, 2014).

On this subject, Koppelman (1980) also argues that

> The critical factor present in consumers' decision-making, but absent in traditional demand models, is consumers' perceptions which mediate the relationship between system characteristics and travel choice behaviour.

McCabe and Chen (2015) argue that travellers take various strategies in different stages of travel decision-making, some intuitive, rapid, automatic, and effortless, and others rational, slower, deliberate, and effortful. In this view, especially with respect to the first category of decisions (i.e., rapid, automatic, and effortless), travellers are heavily influenced by the emotions and perceptions rather than by deliberate assessment of facts and figures. Therefore, problems in the travel consumers' response to a choice situation among a number of alternatives could be the result of individual alternative attributes, consumer (mis)
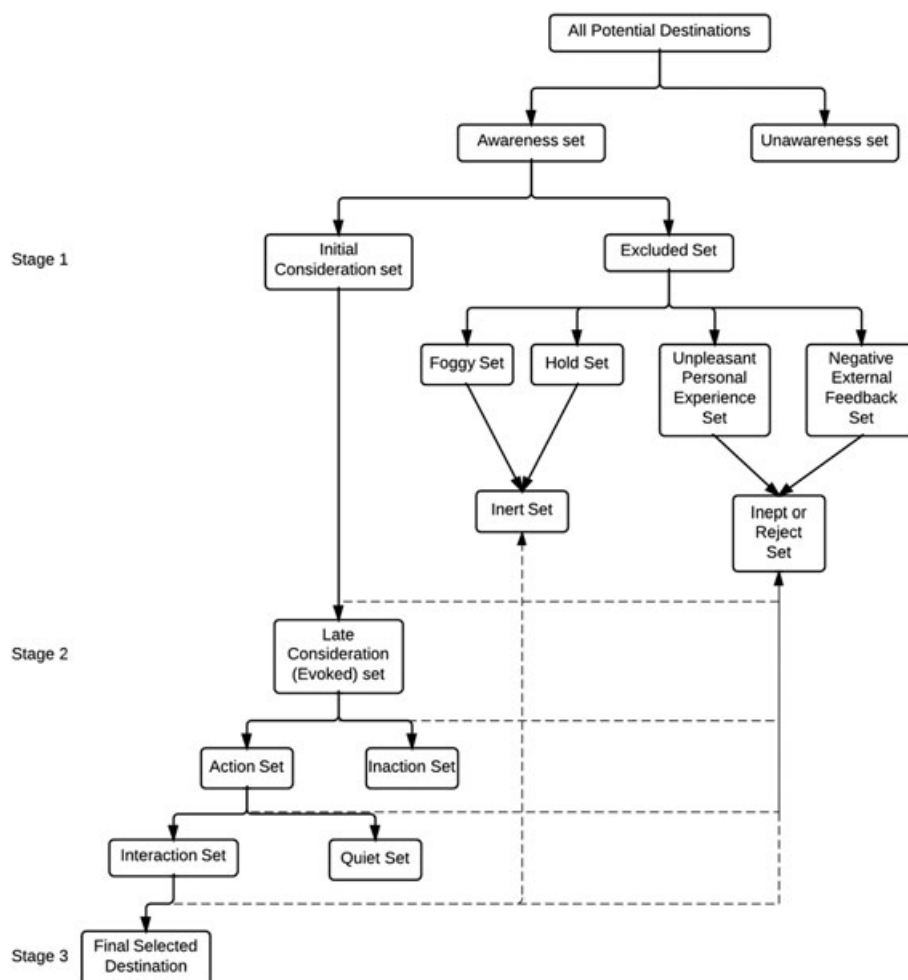
FIGURE 2 Destination choice model by Crompton (1992)

perceptions of that attribute, personal feelings (biases) towards an alternative, or the importance that consumers place on various perceptions.

2.2 | Influencing factors on destination choice

As Papatheodorou (2001) argues, among the destination choice studies, there have been cases in which the approach taken was to justify the direction of the observed flows by relying on the analytical framework provided by the traditional demand theory. According to this view, in line with the underlying assumptions of the neo-classical demand theory, these models assume that a representative consumer first allocates financial resources among tourism and nontourism products, in a way that maximizes their utility given the existing constraints.

In the next step, the decision is made about the amount of the budget to allocate to each tourism product on a similar rational basis. In Papatheodorou's view, tourism demand models rooted in traditional demand theory—despite their contribution to and prominence in tourism research—suffer from a number of serious drawbacks as they ignore "the particularities of the product."

Therefore, to overcome these shortcomings and to offer a holistic answer to this challenging problem, Lancaster's (1966) characteristics approach has been embraced by some researchers in the context of tourism. According to Lancaster's theory of consumer

choice, in contrast to the conventional neo-classical assumption, it is not the goods that provide utility. Rather, it is the characteristics or attributes of the commodities that give rise to the utility. By choosing the bundle of goods that produces the optimum bundle of attributes, the maximum utility is derived. In other words, consumers derive utility from the characteristics, and consumers' preferences for goods are indirect in a sense that those goods are needed to produce attributes.

Rugg (1973), whose work on consumers' choice of journey destination was the first attempt to apply the Lancasterian characteristics approach to tourism, postulates that

> A traveller does not derive utility from possessing or consuming travel destination, rather, the traveller derives utility from being in the particular destination for some period of time (see Rugg, 1973, p. 65).

This line of thought has been pursued by many scholars in the tourism context, which has resulted in studies analysing the behaviour of travellers in choosing their vacation destinations among the multitude of places available. A number of these studies are presented in Table 1, illustrating the type of destinations studied (i.e., countries vs. domestic destinations), type of data (revealed preference vs. stated preference), and the mathematical models used for estimation purposes.

TABLE 1 Overview of destination choice studies

Authors	Type of destinations	Data	Model
Rugg (1973)	Countries	RP	Least squares regression
Haider and Ewing (1990)	Countries	SP	MNL
Morley (1994)	Countries	SP	Binomial – logit or probit
Huybers and Bennett (2000)	Countries	SP	MNL
Huybers (2003b)	Domestic destinations (Australia)	SP	NL
Huybers (2003a)	Domestic destinations (Australia)	SP	NL
Nicolau and Más (2006)	Domestic destinations (Spain)	RP	RCL
Lyons, Mayor, and Tol (2009)	Countries	RP	Conditional logit
LaMondia et al. (2010)	Countries	RP	Joint MNL
Oppewal et al. (2015)	Domestic destinations (Australia)	SP	MNL

Note. MNL = MultiNomial Logit; NL = Nested Logit; RCL = Random Coefficient Logit; RP = revealed preference; SP = stated preference.

Similar to the categories used by LaMondia, Snell, and Bhat (2010), the influencing factors derived from the studies mentioned in Table 1 are categorized into three types of independent variables: personal characteristics, destination characteristics, and trip characteristics. As LaMondia et al. state, personal characteristics include factors such as income, age, gender, presence of children in the household, and employment status. Destination characteristics represent attributes such as climate, accommodation, the range of activities, environmental conditions, economic indicators, type of attraction, and season. Trip characteristics include holiday duration, travel distance, costs, travel times, and trip motives (see LaMondia et al., 2010, p. 141). These factors are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Determinants of destination choice from literature

Category	Factor name	Number of studies
Destination characteristics	Climatic factors	5
	Cost of accommodation	4
	Crowdedness	4
	Cost of living at the destination	3
	Type of attractions	2
	Variety of activities	2
	Size of accommodation	1
	Rarity of natural attraction	1
	Quality and range of accommodation	1
	Proximity of accommodation to attractions	1
	Number of national museums	1
	Location of accommodation	1
	Events or festivals	1
	Destination area size	1
	Conditions of environment	1
	Availability and proximity of airport	1
Travellers' variables	Income	10
	Age	7
	Affective association	5
	Education	5
	Gender	5
	Marital status	3
	Presence of children	2
Trip characteristics	Total cost of travel	12
	Transport cost	7
	Travel time or distance	5
	Season	3
	Duration of trip	2
	Travel purpose	1
	Airline	1

3 | METHODOLOGY

The repertory grid technique (RGT) is based on George Kelly's personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), in which he contends that people make every effort to make sense of the world they live in by developing personal construct systems. Although the technique offers unique features that can be utilized in the tourism field, the application of RGT in tourism research has been rare, and the method is believed to have been underused in this field (Coshall, 2000).

Elements and constructs are the main components of RGT. The objects under investigation are called elements, and for this study, they are different cities in Australia outside of New South Wales. These cities together comprise an individual's evoked set of interstate domestic holiday destinations. The attributes that individuals associate with these elements are called constructs. Personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955) states that a person's construct system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs representing contrasts rather than absolutes of reality and what the individual makes of this reality. For instance, in an individual's personal construct system, the safety of a destination might be a factor influencing their decisions. The individual therefore believes that some destinations are "safe" and that other destinations are "dangerous."

3.1 | RGT study

In this study, the RGT was utilized to elicit the construct systems employed by travellers when choosing their interstate holiday destinations in Australia. Nine destinations were used as elements, and for eliciting as wide a variety of attributes as possible, the selected destinations represented a varied range of holiday experiences as well as a wide geographical spread. The destination cities comprised Melbourne, Perth, the Gold Coast, Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart, the Sunshine Coast, Darwin, and Alice Springs.

Elements were presented to participants in a series of triads using individual cards showing the name of each destination. Applying the balanced incomplete design method (Burton & Nerlove, 1976), we decreased the number of triad combinations from 84 to 24 with each pair of elements appearing twice. Upon showing each triad to a respondent, the respondents were asked:

Take a moment to think about the three destinations for your next trip and tell me some important way(s) in which two of the three destinations mentioned are alike, and thereby different from the third. Try to think of anything connected to these destinations which you might think of when deciding on a holiday.

Follow-up questions were asked to list all possible constructs for each triad. Duplicate constructs were not recorded. This procedure continued until no new constructs were elicited. If the construct elicited seemed ambiguous or vague and more details were needed, the following probing questions were asked for clarification:

1. What defines this pole?
2. What sort of thing do you have in mind when you say "…"?
3. How do you mean, "…"?
4. "…", now. What characteristics does a destination which is … have, that's different from those lacking "…"?
5. Can you suggest a particular and important way of "…"?
6. Can you give me an example of one and the other?

In this approach, there were no prior assumptions or hypotheses about the constructs used by travellers in choosing their holiday destinations. Rather, the method helped the authors to elicit the constructs used by travellers in their decision-making processes about choosing a destination among competing locations with minimum researcher bias.

3.2 | Sampling method

Recruitment of participants for this study was conducted in January 2013. An online recruitment questionnaire was designed with a series of screening questions to determine the eligibility of the participants based on the objectives of the study, as well as some questions about the participants' prior experiences in domestic interstate holidays. The survey link was then promoted in different online channels including the University of New South Wales webpage, Facebook, and Google Ads. Participants who were eligible for the study were then asked to indicate the name of the interstate destinations they have visited in the past 2 years and whether they would be willing to participate in a face-to-face interview.

In the screening questions, the participants were asked whether they

1. Were Australian citizens or permanent residents aged 18 years or above.
2. Lived in Sydney.
3. Had been to an interstate destination in the previous 2 years, where the primary purpose of the trip was solely for a holiday (leisure and recreation), rather than to visit friends and/or relatives.
4. Had taken the above trip by air.
5. Were the main decision maker for the above trip arrangements.

With respect to the minimum sample size required for the study, RGT methodology does not require a minimum sample size, and the methodology suggests that sampling be carried out to achieve redundancy of significant data from additional participants (Pike, 2003). Previous applications of RGT have shown that a large sample is not required to reach this point of redundancy and destination studies, using this technique, have used a range of sample sizes, as small as one participant, 10 participants, and 25 participants (Pike, 2003).

To be considered eligible for the study, participants needed to answer "yes" to all of the above questions. Among those who were identified as eligible for the study, 77 noted their willingness to participate in a face-to-face interview. Of these, 39 were invited to participate in an interview. These participants had been to four or more interstate destinations for holidays. After interviewing 33 participants, the survey terminated as a redundancy point had been reached; that is, no new constructs were being provided by new participants but a duplication of constructs that had already been stated by previous participants.

The demographic characteristics of the 33 participants of the RGT interviews are provided in Table 3. The average age of the participants was 42 years, ranging from 23 to 75 years, with 73% of participants aged between 18 and 49 years. Male participants accounted for 39% (13) of the sample, and female participants accounted for 61% (20). Further information about the Employment status and household income range of the participants are presented in Table 4.

4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 | Influencing factors

To analyse the results obtained from the RGT interviews, the approach adopted by Pike (2003) was used to categorize the generated statements into similar "themes." For instance, statements such as "exploring nature," "natural features for photography," "natural ambience," "natural landscapes," "natural landmarks, outback adventure," "natural beauty, outdoor experience," and "cool nature" were categorized under one theme.

Upon completion of this stage of analysis, 652 statements were categorized into 101 themes. Although similar constructs were grouped into themes representing similar concepts, there were still overlapping concepts among different themes. To further group the same concepts expressed in different ways by various participants, a content analysis was conducted to classify different themes into homogenous categories.

TABLE 3 Demographics of RGT participants

Parameters		Male	Female	Total sample
Gender		**13 (39%)**	**20 (61%)**	**33 (100%)**
Age				
	Range	23–75	26–70	23–75
	Mean	43	41.8	42.4
	SD	16	14.6	15
Age category				
	18–49 years	8	16	24
	50 years and above	5	4	9

Note. RGT = repertory grid technique.

TABLE 4 Employment and income information of RGT participants

Parameters	Categories	%	Number
Employment status			
	Employed (casual or part time)	20	8
	Employed full time	50	16
	Employer	12.5	4
	Full-time home duties	7.5	2
	Retired	7.5	2
	Other	2.5	1
Household income			
	$60,000 or less	15	5
	$60,001–$90,000	20	7
	$90,001–$120,000	15	5
	$120,001–$150,000	15	5
	$150,001–$180,000	7.5	2
	More than $180,000	15	5
	Rather not say	12.5	4

Note. RGT = repertory grid technique.

Themes were grouped into different categories, each representing a unique phenomenon. Then all constructs under the grouped themes were listed, and categories were named based on the most frequent wording of the allocated constructs. For instance, themes about "nature," "bushwalking," "wildlife," and "scenery" were grouped together and named as "visual beauty."

A sample of the results of this phase (top 10 most frequent categories) is shown in Table 5. The number of subjects mentioning each category group in their statements is shown in the last column of the table. For instance, 23 out of 33 participants mentioned the first category, visual beauty, in their elicited constructs.

Using the definition of cognitive and affective factors, discussed earlier in the paper, the list of factors shown in Table 2 was reassessed and separated into the "cognitive aspects" and "affective aspects" of the destinations. Results are summarized in Table 6. These factors are coded with initials C and A for cognitive and affective constructs respectively. Alongside the constructs extracted from RGT interviews, the list of influencing factors from the analysis of previous studies is also listed.

A comparison of the factors obtained from the interviews to the factors extracted from previous destination choice studies reveals that although there are some overlaps between the two lists, the importance (ranking) of the factors (the third column) on both sides is not equal.

For instance, although participants in the RGT study placed a high importance on the climatic conditions of the destination, less than half of the papers reviewed for this study used this variable in their destination choice analyses. Variables such as visual beauty, dining opportunities, modernity, and entertainment features of a destination—despite being on the top of the list from the travellers' point of view—were not considered in the past destination choice studies. Moreover, the results in Table 6 show that the majority of constructs elicited by the participants are related to the cognitive (physical) aspects of holiday destinations. This highlights the importance of the cognitive aspects in travellers' decision-making,

suggesting that these features must be recognized and highlighted in destination choice studies.

In contrast, affective constructs represented almost one third of the elicited constructs. This is in line with Woodside and Lysonski's (1989) general model of destination choice, where it was shown that affective associations act as a mediating factor in assessing and reducing the number of alternatives in a traveller's awareness set. However, affective components are not among the factors frequently used by scholars in the past destination choice studies reported in Tables 1 and 2.

4.2 | A different approach in travel decision-making

From the course of conducting interviews to elicit participants' personal construct system and the underlying mechanisms that they used to plan their holidays, an interesting decision-making behaviour was identified. In response to the question about the steps participants had taken in planning their most recent domestic trip, some participants stated that they followed the multistage decision-making concept introduced at the beginning of this paper (Song et al., 2012). After making a decision to travel domestically, participants chose their destination and then made arrangements for air tickets, accommodation, and other parts of their trip.

However, some participants revealed that they embarked on that trip solely because they found an air ticket to that destination on sale, and they had not planned to visit that destination before seeing the offer. For instance, one female participant mentioned

> [My travel planning] usually starts from transportation. Maybe because I'm quite open-minded about where I go so I'm not so caring about when I do and I know eventually I'll do it. So it's more like, oh this city is now on sale for example Gold Coast. Oh it's on sale, good. And then next time I'll go to Perth when it's on sale. I mean it has to be on a list that I want to go to, but because my list is quite broad I'm happy to wait for when the sale comes on. I don't say I want to go to Perth this month, no.

Another participant, who seemed to have specific destinations in mind for her next holiday, also mentioned that when it comes to travel planning, she is willing to "switch" her location of interest due to ticket price and leave the original destination for some other time:

> [Interviewer:] What happens, if for example that you want to go to a specific destination next year and you cannot find a ticket with the price that you're looking for? [Participant:] Then, I'll probably explore other destinations. Yeah, so it's just very much depending on, you know, what destination is on sale. [Interviewer:] And what defines the level that you would switch? [Participant:] The ticket price.

A further participant, who had the intention of visiting Perth because of the local wineries and coastal scenery unique to that area, mentioned that he had chosen to go to Perth in February (after school holidays and before the busy business period) because airfares were

TABLE 5 Top 10 constructs elicited from the RGT interviews

Number	Category	Definition	Participants
1	Visual beauty	Visually dramatic, scenic routes, and natural landscapes	23
2	Relaxing destination	Relaxing destination	21
3	Nice weather	More temperate and four-season weather	21
4	Dining opportunities	Variety of cuisines, restaurants, cafes, and pubs	21
5	More cultured	Good or famous art galleries, museums, etc.	17
6	Better tourist facilities	Variety of accommodation options and easier travel	16
7	Somewhere new	A place not been to before	15
8	Breadth of activities	Lots to do	14
9	More entertaining	More active, vibrant city, and the city that never sleeps	14
10	Other than the main destination	The opportunity to go to nearby destinations	13

Note. RGT = repertory grid technique.

lower during that time. Therefore, this participant had traded off the timing of the trip with the airfare cost in a way that he could align his trip timing to take advantage of reduced airfares. He also acknowledged that he and his partner had made adjustments to their planned activities according to the newly chosen time of travel.

Results from an online survey conducted by the authors about travellers' decision-making styles also support this trend. The purpose of the survey, which was conducted prior to the current study, was to understand various decision-making patterns employed by travellers while making their holiday destination choices. A total of 249 participants (92 male participants and 152 female participants) responded to the online survey, which was advertised through various online channels, including the University of New South Wales Facebook page, student, and local free listing websites.

One of the questions in the study asked participants to indicate the importance of the cost of an air ticket when they selected their most recent interstate holiday destinations. Of the 249 participants, 120 (48%) indicated that air tickets being on sale had an important effect on their destination choice decision. Of 120 participants, 46 (38%) stated that their decision to choose the destination was simply due to the fact that air tickets are on sale for those destinations.

The conventional belief is that travellers first fix their destination and then shop around for an airline ticket to the chosen destination. Within this context, it has been shown by Fuleky, Zhao, and Bonham (2014) that demand for a specific destination is inelastic to airfare. Conventionally, it is also believed that travellers' destination choice is only influenced by "offerings of free nights, attraction packages, and the overall desirability of the destination." As far as airfare is concerned, travellers will try to find the cheapest option, but this will not have a "switching effect" on the destination choice, and hence, there would be an "inelastic" demand. Smyth and Pearce (2008), however, argue that travellers may be induced to choose their holiday location first based on air ticket offerings and then, upon booking the flight, begin to consider the other costs associated with travel. This paradigm has been referred to as a "two-stage" decision-making process.

However, the results of the present study and observations by Smyth and Pearce (2008) contradict this traditional view. For travellers who make their destination choices based on the cheapest airfare, the destination demand will be elastic to a nontourism factor, that is, the airfare. Therefore, any changes to the airfare of specific destinations might result in a significant "swing" of demand between different destinations, possibly leading to substantial differences for the tourism bodies and also airline companies around the world.

This new paradigm, that is, the two-stage decision-making process, also implies that destination choices could be affected by the sequence of receiving information about the destination and transport choices. The effect of the sequence of processing information relevant to the decision was discussed in the study conducted by Oppewal et al. (2015). The authors showed that the sequential introduction of the destination versus experience (activities or attractions) details in the choice task affected the choice outcomes. Observations of this study show that this effect could be extended to the destination versus transport factors. That is, the choice outcome would be different for travellers who gain knowledge about the destination features first compared to travellers who gain knowledge about air ticket information first.

In terms of the implications of this finding for tourism and airline marketing, findings of this research indicate that there are segments in the travelling public pursuing a different path in making their travel arrangements. Some travellers, although still concerned about the travel experiences and destination attributes, are willing to embark on a journey simply because there was an airline ticket on sale, thus reducing the overall transport cost of a trip. The fact that among tourists, there are segments for which transport options influence their decisions more than destination factors highlights the importance of more collaborations between DMOs and airline companies.

Based on the findings of the current study, the authors argue that strategic alliances should be made between the DMOs and airline companies to better address the needs of the market and to better utilize their resources in reaching a wider audience and influencing traveller decisions more effectively. This collaboration will lead to the development of products that will suit the needs of specific segments of the market and will focus on marketing campaigns to promote these products to the relevant segment.

For instance, instead of destinations independently developing products and promoting them to a broad mass market, DMOs would be able to develop and offer products that appeal to specific groups of travellers based on these travellers' airline ticket purchase behaviours. This would mean destination marketers could differentiate their marketing messages to travellers who have purchased their air ticket

TABLE 6 Influencing factors

Number	Factor name	Number of subjects	From literature	Number of studies
C1	Visual beauty	23		
C2	Nice weather	21	Climatic factors	5
			Season	3
C3	Dining opportunities	21		
A1	Relaxing	21	Crowdedness	4
C4	More cultured	17	Number of national museums	1
			Size of accommodation	1
	Better tourist facilities	16	Quality and range of accommodation	1
A2	Somewhere new	15		
C6	Breadth of activities	14	Variety of activities	2
A3	More entertaining	14		
C7	Other than the main destination	13		
A1	Modern	12		
			Type of attractions	2
C8	Variety of attractions	11	Rarity of natural attraction	1
			Conditions of environment	1
A5	Local experience	11		
C9	Indigenous culture or people	10		
C10	Major events	10	Events or festivals	1
			Total cost of travel	12
			Transport cost	7
C11	Cheaper destination	10	Cost of accommodation	4
			Cost of living at the destination	3
A6	Getaway	10		
C12	Beach or sea	9		
C13	Richer history	9		
C14	Easier to get to	9	Travel time or distance	5
A7	Ambience	8		
C15	Easier to get around	7	Proximity of accommodation to attractions	1
			Location of accommodation	1
C16	Good wine regions	7		
A8	Not touristy	7		
C17	Water activities	6		
C18	Shopping opportunities	6		
C19	Adventure activities	6		
A9	Unique experience	6		
A10	Safety	5		
A11	Service quality	4		

because of low cost and those who are comparing a number of different destinations. In the case of the former, the traveller might prefer to receive specific information that will help them to decide on the other components of the trip, including accommodation and local experiences. The marketing effort for the latter group would be to position the destination favourably among the competition.

5 | CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

In this paper, the results of the study on travellers' decision-making processes have been reported. Applying George Kelly's RGT through a series of interviews, a list of salient factors considered to be

important by travellers in choosing their holiday destinations was developed. It was shown that both emotional aspects and physical features play a significant role in shaping travellers' destination choice decisions. Another important finding of the study is that the factors that participants perceive to be important for their domestic holiday trip in Australia are different to factors examined in past studies. There are some overlaps in the important factors from previous studies with the findings reported in the current paper, but the order of significance is different. There were also factors examined in previous studies but not mentioned by participants in this study.

The results of this study also suggest an emerging travel planning paradigm in which the travel planning decisions do not start with "where to go," but with "which destination has air tickets on sale?" In

this paradigm, travellers are willing to embark on a journey to a destination solely because air tickets are on sale, rather than because they had previously planned to visit that destination. This has profound implications for destination marketers and airline companies. Being aware of the existence of a group of travellers following this line of thought, marketers do not need to focus all their efforts on destination-specific promotions, as these travellers are more likely to be attracted to visit these destinations due to reduced airfares. Although this may not be the case for all travellers, the identification of some groups of travellers who follow a different decision-making paradigm highlights the importance of understanding the behaviours and characteristics of these market segments.

Future studies are required to explore the two-stage decision-making process further. This can be achieved by testing the hypothesis that the importance of destination and transport factors vary depending on the order in which the decision makers receive the information, that is, destination and then transport, or vice versa.

In conclusion, the authors believe that the number of travellers who follow this newly identified paradigm will significantly increase for the following reasons. First, the open skies agreements around the world have made it much easier for airlines to enter into and disrupt markets, leading to more unbundling of products and lower airfares. Second, travellers are increasingly utilizing search engines and social media sites to make their travel decisions and plan their holidays, making it easier to find reduced airfares themselves and plan their trip accordingly. This suggests that in travel planning, it is important to be aware of the role of each part of travel, namely, destination features and transport factors. Therefore, the success of attracting travellers to a destination depends on the efficient collaboration between airlines and destination marketers, rather than individual efforts of airlines and destinations in designing appealing packages.

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