Revisiting choice sets for overseas pleasure vacations: comparison of long-haul and short-haul destinations

Abstract

This study was designed to identify how the number of destination choice sets is influenced by travel distance, perceived constraints, and intensity of decision-making facilitators and information searchers. The sample population was drawn from mainland Chinese tourists who have been to various destinations for a pleasure vacation. Results confirm that short-haul tourists manifested more choices within choice sets in considering short-haul destinations than they did in considering long-haul destinations. Results also imply that the hierarchical model of constraints may not be acceptable in a time-sequential choice process. The magnitude of decision-making facilitators was not significantly different according to choice sets, whereas that of information searchers was significantly different with regard to three of four information searchers, according to choice sets.

Keywords: choice set, mainland Chinese, decision-making, constraints, pleasure vacation

Introduction

Because of the availability of alternative destinations that offer similar products or services, the notion of choice sets was introduced into consumer behavior literature in the 1960s (e.g., Howard, 1963; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Nicosia, 1966). To date, there have also been an increasing number of both conceptual and empirical studies in the literature that focus on tourism and leisure decision-making. One of the popular studies depicts the context of decision sets (i.e., consideration set, evoked set, etc.) and was applied in the field of tourism and leisure in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Woodside & Sherrell, 1977). That line of research was then developed and empirically tested by Crompton and his colleagues in the early 1990s (e.g., Crompton, 1992; Um & Crompton, 1990). With the continuous efforts of scholarly research in tourism, the investigation of destination choice sets has also registered progress up to the present day (Crompton & Kim, 2001; Decrop, 2010; Hong, Lee, Lee, & Jang, 2009; Jang, Lee, Lee, & Hong, 2007; Karl, Reintinger, & Schmude, 2015; Perdue & Meng, 2006).

A main research theory this study will adopt is destination choice set. Woodside and Crompton are recognized as two pioneers who have extended the application of choice sets as described in consumer behavior literature. Of those choice sets, Woodside and Sherrell (1977) have considered evoked, inept, and inert sets. Furthermore, Crompton (1992) has developed a taxonomy of destination choice sets by introducing the awareness set, the initial consideration set, the late consideration (evoked) set, the action set, the interaction set, and the final choice. In a more recent study, Crompton and Ankomah (1993) revisited the structure of choice sets by offering a set of proposals that refer to the awareness set, the initial consideration set, the late consideration set, the action set, and the final choice. Crompton, Botha, and Kim (1998)

suggested two steps of choice sets (namely, initial and late consideration sets) and empirically justified the way in which the average number of destinations in the late consideration set is smaller than that of the initial set, as was proposed in Crompton and Ankomah (1993).

Even though the destination set theory has been popularly adopted to expounding tourists' destination choice behavior, it has been not extended to identify whether the theory fits well into diverse situations, cases, regions, type of tourists. In addition, the model was underresearched to examine interrelationships with other concepts, constructs or variables. More specifically, research gaps were found on the basis of a thorough literature review of previous studies on destination choice behavior. As explained before, even though destination choice set studies have expanded upon the influence of diverse factors on the set size, efforts to explore the function of the influential factors on choice sets have been very scanty. Most studies have calculated choice set sizes for all samples in their studies, regardless of the sets' characteristics. Therefore, they require empirical verification through an assessment of the destination choice set model, by using influential factors in destination decision-making, such as travel distance, perceived constraints, family decision-making structure, and the efforts of information searchers. For example, previous studies have neglected the influence of travel distance in their analyses of destination choice sets. Likewise, the magnitude of perceived constraints can vary according to choice sets. The choice sets can be determined by the intensity of influences of decision-making facilitators and information searching of information searchers. Unfortunately, studies to explore the role of these factors on choice sets in a decision-making process according to time sequence are lacking, in spite of the influence of the kaleidoscopic variations of the aforementioned determinants on choice sets.

From a destination management perspective, destination marketers want to know destination competitiveness and tourists' decision making process considering the role of constraints, influential factors on choice size, destination-making facilitators, and active information searchers. International tourists' choice on travel distance, that is, a long-haul or short-haul destination leads to a different competition situation between destinations (Kozak, Kim, & Chon, 2017). This study is interested in mainland Chinese overseas tourist market. The sample population is mainland China's outbound tourist market, which ranks highest in the global outbound tourism market. Mainland Chinese people's demand for outbound tourism has increased dramatically within the last decade, from 57,386,500 in 2010 to 135,100,000 in 2016 (UNWTO, 2017). These figures indicate an annual increase of approximately 18% to 22.4%. The total expenditures by Chinese outbound tourists was US$258 billion in 2017, with China now being the number one country in outbound tourism spending (UNWTO, 2018).

Consequently, this study has been designed to achieve multiple objectives: 1) to investigate how the number of alternative destinations is likely to vary from one choice set to another, between long-haul and short-haul destinations; 2) to understand how the influence of constraints is likely to differ according to choice sets; and 3) to demonstrate the role of influential decision-makers and information searchers within a family context, according to choice sets.

Literature review and hypotheses

Although there has been no consistent support from previous studies that confirms a proper list of choice sets for tourist destinations, the awareness choice set, initial choice set, and late choice set have been used popularly in the destination choice model (Decrop & Kozak, 2014; Jang et al., 2007; Kim, Crompton, & Botha, 2000). As Figure 1 shows, however, this study

employed a revised three-set structure consisting of an early choice set, a middle choice set, and a late choice set. This study did not adopt the awareness choice set but instead coined the early choice set. In the early stages of travel research (1970s to 1990s), when choice set theory was proposed in the tourism field, a potential traveler suffered from insufficient information because information technology was not advanced. However, contemporary people live in a world that provides abundant worldwide tourism information through diverse TV channels, online/offline information search platforms, their own travel experiences, and information from their reference groups.

Therefore, an awareness choice set is also not meaningful. For example, information on a destination can be easily shared through various social media channels developed by destination marketers or pre-experienced travelers (Shao, Li, Morrison, & Wu, 2016). If a potential traveler is interested in traveling to a destination, a lack of information is presently no longer a cogent travel constraint (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Kim, Choe, & Lee, 2018; Kim, Kim, & Heo, 2016). Methodologically, it is not clear when an awareness set should be measured in a situation for which an individual did not have a substantial motivation to travel overseas. In contrast, an early choice set indicates the viability of alternative options in a situation in which the person has an interest in overseas travel in the near future. In addition, because the initial choice set is similar to the early choice set, this study newly developed a middle choice set, between the early choice set and the late choice set and representing the middle stage of approaching a final decision.

[Figure 1. Here]

In Figure 1, the early choice set may involve the number of possible alternative destinations with which a potential tourist is un/likely to become familiar in the early stage of decision making. As the choice set moves forward, the tourist may drop some alternatives and/or include new ones, through the assistance of an information search and either internal or external sources. The early choice set is characterized by a large choice set, a mixture of long-haul and short-haul destinations, the inclusion of ideal destinations, and changeable decision-making. However, as the destination choice process nears a final decision, potential tourists' choice set sizes become smaller, and tourists are likely to choose short-haul destinations instead of discarding long-haul destinations when their perceived constraints are greater than their motivations. During this stage, a potential tourist is likely to choose realistic destinations and to consider constraints very prudently. Additionally, a particular destination may include any of the former sets (Crompton, 1992).

Despite the lack of empirical evidence supporting this notion, potential tourists' preferences for each destination are likely to differ from one set to another. Although a particular destination may exist in the early choice set, depending on what the decision-maker looks for primarily, that destination can be dropped in the later sets and therefore will be represented with a lower proportion, or its representation may move upward from the early to the late choice set. Because distance is considered to be an important element of tourism demand (e.g., Ankomah et al., 1996; Etzo, Massidda, & Piras, 2014; Nicolau & Más, 2006; Peng, Song, & Crouch, 2014) and of the size of the geographical area perceived as a destination (Dolnicar & Grün, 2017), it can also be an influential factor in the representation of one destination in each choice set. For instance, depending upon the structure of short- or long-haul destinations, one short-haul destination can perform upward, commencing from the early choice set, once the choice

destination is also a short-haul alternative, or it may perform in a declining proportion once the choice is a long-haul destination. The same rule applies to any other destinations within the long-haul distance.

A model that is purely within the context of tourism, conceptualized and empirically tested by Um and Crompton (1990), consists of external and internal inputs in a destination choice process. More meticulously, in their model, external inputs are the total of social interactions and marketing communications that are classified as significant stimuli, symbolic stimuli, and social stimuli. Social interactions refer to the visitor's own experience at the destination, whereas marketing communications include promotional materials such as words, pictures, and sentences provided by the media. Social stimuli include a personal experience of social interaction with other people during a vacation (e.g. Bertella, Cavicchi, & Bentini, 2018). Internal inputs are formed by the socio-psychological set of a potential visitor, including personal characteristics, motivations, values, and attitudes. The influential factors represent an integration of both internal and external inputs into the early choice set and the produced set of destinations.

Some studies (Hong et al., 2009; Jang et al., 2007) have attempted to discuss the influence of notions such as novelty-seeking, constraint, first visit/revisit, and honeymoon couples' decision-making on the determination of destination choice. In a more recent study based on the findings of previous qualitative research, Decrop (2010) validated the formation of destination choice by proposing four sets: the awareness set, the evoked/exclusion set, the available set, and the final choice. Karl et al. (2015) compared four destination choice set sizes and identified the effects of educational level, age, and travel frequency on the set sizes.

Tourists' decisions regarding overseas vacation locations vary according to their personal characteristics, such as the influence of decision-makers (Decrop, 2010; Jang et al., 2007; Karl et

al., 2015), motivations (Botha et al., 1999; Crompton et al., 1998; Kim & Prideaux, 2005; Prayag, Chen, & Del Chiappa, 2018), and constraints (Botha et al., 1999; Decrop, 2010; Hong et al., 2009; Um & Crompton, 1990). Tourists' decisions also differ according to factors such as information searches (Botha et al., 1999; Crompton & Ankomah, 1993), cognitive distance (Ankomah, Crompton, & Baker, 1996; Crompton & Kim, 2001; Dolnicar & Grün, 2017), and travel experiences (Hong et al., 2009; Karl et al., 2015). As a result, those characteristics and factors determine the destination choice consideration set.

Short-haul versus long-haul destination choice sets

International travel involves diverse risks or constraints (e.g., cost, health issues, time consumption, unfamiliarity, language, weather, terrorism, and different cultures) (Pearce & Lee, 2005). Moreover, less experienced travellers have a strong tendency to choose short-haul tourism destinations, and only select a long-haul destination after they have had experiences with short-haul travel (Crompton et al., 1998). It is also consistent with a specialization theory that a travel starts to participate in activities requiring easy or familiar decision and extend to join activities needing complicated or unfamiliar decision (Kim et al., 2010; Kim, Kim, & Ritchie, 2008; Li, Meng, Uysal, & Mihalik, 2013). These habits are explained by a tourist motivation ladder theory or a travel career model (Pearce, 1982; 1993; Ryan, 1998).

Tourists feel as though they are taking a greater risk when they travel to a country with a cultural background that is different from their own, because of the subsequent language barrier and cultural hiatus (Matzler, Strol, Stokbuger-Sauer, Bobovnicky, & Bauer, 2016). A short-haul tourist feels afraid to travel to a long-distance destination. On the one hand, because long-haul tourists are experienced or specialized, their preferences for a destination are more easily determined than are those of short-haul tourists (Jiang, Scott, & Ding, 2015; Kim, Guo, &

Agrusa, 2005). In this case, short-haul destinations as choice alternatives are in tourist's mind and thus their short-haul set size is large, instead of considering less possibility to desire to choose long-haul destinations.

However, because long-haul tourism is accompanied by more risks than short-haul tourism is (Williams & Balaz, 2013), the number of alternatives in the choice set for long-haul tourists is likely to be smaller than that of short-haul tourists, who can easily envisage multiple nearby destinations as vacation places within a short period. Moreover, those who want to travel to a long-haul destination with a purpose of pleasure tourism in the near future are likely to consider long-haul destination options as far as their motivation for long-haul tourism is strong.

As previous studies support those who desire to choose a long-haul destination as pleasure tourism place have different characteristics from those who choose a short-haul destination (Chen, Chen, & Okumus, 2013; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Williams & Balaz, 2013).Thus, multiple factors, including tourists' travel experiences, motivations, and constraints, operate differently between short-haul and long-haul tourist groups. That is, short-haul tourists are likely to prefer to choose a nearby destination within their own territory, where fewer constraints are involved (Decrop, 2010; Kim & Agrusa, 2005). In contrast, after increasing their travel experience, those tourists are likely to prefer to travel to a long-distance destination. Thus, both short-haul and long-haul destinations are competing with one another in order to gain a short-haul tourist market. As a consequence of that competition, the following three sets of hypotheses can be suggested:

Hypothesis 1a: The destination choice set size of short-haul tourists is larger than that of long-haul tourists.

Hypothesis 1b: In a group of short-haul tourists, the short-haul destination choice set size is larger than the long-haul destination choice set size is.

Hypothesis 1c:In a group of long-haul tourists, the long-haul destination choice set size is larger than the short-haul destination choice set size is.

Constraints

Constraints involve a variety of negative factors that restrict tourists' formation of preferences for a particular group of travel activities and destinations; constraints also limit travel participation (Fredman & Heberlein, 2005). These factors are also referred to as inhibitors (Um & Crompton, 1990) and barriers (Smith, 1987). As such, for a tourist, the decision on where to go and how and what to do involves the evaluation of a series of personal choices, based on economic and demographic factors, including the budget allocated for vacations and the time available to vacation, and so on; one factor can also be more influential than the others (Alegre & Pou, 2006; Gokovali et al., 2007; Um & Crompton, 1990). Types and amounts of such constraints are differently perceived, according to potential international tourists.

In order to address the multifaceted characteristics of travel decision making, many prior studies have classified travel constraints into three different elements (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Gilbert & Hudson, 2000; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008): intrapersonal (e.g., personality, interest, and mood), interpersonal (e.g., the difficulty of finding an accompanying person for a vacation), and structural elements (e.g., a lack of time, money, and/or accessibility). According to the hierarchical theory of constraints, the influence that constraints exert varies according to the point in time of the decision-making (Crawford et al., 1991; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008). That is, intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints are more influential at earlier stages of the decision-making process. Structural constraints occur more prominently at later decision-making stages. They are also classified as situational constraints that occur due to unexpected events, such as weather, unfit schedules, sudden sickness, and family matters, can

intervene during a late consideration set or a final choice set (Botha et al. 1999; Decrop 2010; Um and Crompton 1990). Therefore, the influence of these constraints varies according to choice sets. As a result, the following hypotheses are developed:

Hypothesis 2a: The magnitude in perceiving constraints is different in each choice set.

Hypothesis 2b: The magnitude in perceiving constraints is different across the three choice sets.

Decision-making facilitators

Several lines of investigation suggest that family members are usually keen to have vacations together (syncretic decision) and follow a joint decision-making procedure in their final choices (e.g., Kang & Hsu, 2005; Kozak, 2010; Nichols & Snepenger, 1988). Furthermore, family decision-making about a vacation can differ according to whether or not it includes children (Kim et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2004). For example, Wang et al.'s (2007) study found that seniors' purchasing decisions in group package tours show that husbands tend to have the most influence regarding the final purchase; husbands also have more influence in decisions related to the amount of time and money spent. In terms of the distribution of roles among family members, males tend to search for information for a potential vacation or a destination (Decrop, 2009) and overwhelmingly dominate the decisions regarding routes taken (Myers & Moncrief, 1978). Women, on the other hand, may be less likely to handle financial matters but do have an immense amount of influence on a final destination choice (Zalatan, 1998).

Wang et al. (2004) identified that parents' influences are stronger than those of a child in the problem recognition and final decision stages, when children are included. According to Kim et al. (2010), among 15 festival travel-related activity decisions, children showed the highest mean score for the degree of posting the tour experience on the internet, compared with their

parents. However, children showed the lowest mean score on 14 other travel-related activity decisions. In the context of honeymoon travel, choice set size was not found to differ greatly between husband and wife, thereby implying that these results are likely to arise from a collective culture within Korean society (Jang et al., 2007). It has been widely identified that the influence of intermediate actors (such as travel agencies and the media) on potential tourists, in regard to destinations and the dissemination of information, largely determines the tourists' choices of destinations. Recently, the role of social media has been stressed with regard to the promotion of vacation destinations (Ho, Lin, & Chen, 2012; Pan, Santos, & Kim, 2017). Conclusively, the magnitude of the family effect in making a travel-related decision differs according to decision-making stages or activities.

As previous studies indicate, differences in the influence of family decision-makers and intermediate facilitators can be explored according to the activities currently taking place in the tourism process. However, the influence of family decision-makers and intermediate facilitators has not been actively tested in the context of the different points in time during the decision-making process for selecting a travel destination, even though some studies have implied the possibility that family or intermediate actors influence the choice sets (Crompton & Ankomah, 1993; Jang et al., 2007). In other words, a longitudinal approach to identifying the influence of family or intermediate actors on selecting an overseas holiday place has not been implemented. Even though those entities can differentially influence tourists' decisions regarding an international vacation destination, their influence may not vary according to choice points in time. This is due to the way in which the power dynamics of decision-making facilitators are not supposed to be volatile, regardless of the time flow regarding decision-making. As such, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

Hypothesis 3a: The influential magnitude of decision-making facilitators is different in each choice set.

Hypothesis 3b: The influential magnitude of decision-making facilitators is similar across the three choice sets.

Information search

It has been well established that decision-makers tend to search for information about their possible options in order to edit and simplify any likely problems before they begin a choice process (Kozak & Karadag, 2012; Ricci & Werthner, 2002). A tourist may consider the power of "heuristics" used as short-cuts by potential decision-makers in order to alleviate time, effort, and psychological risk (Tversky, 1972; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; 1982). The amount of effort put into information searches in order to choose a tourism destination is dynamic according to family structure (Kang & Hsu, 2005; Kim et al., 2010). For example, parents are likely to participate in information searches more actively than their children do, because the parents are responsible for all travel problems, including family travel costs and the itinerary. Thus, the effort put into information searches in a family decision-making process is likely to be different according to the individual level of activity of the family information searchers.

There is the empirical evidence suggesting that the Internet is better choice prior to preparation for the trip due to its larger quantity of information (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2000) and tourists welcome centers, sign posts, or mobile devices for enroute planning due to demanding little cognitive efforts (Ratchford, Talukdar & Lee (2001). As a result, the efforts of information searching are more elaborate and active according to the final destination choice set (Botha et al., 1999; Crompton & Ankomah, 1993). At the point of early choice sets, simple website or recommendation searches will be considered. However, as the final decision nears, efforts to collect information are augmented in order to minimize potential risks. For example, more

detailed information about travel cost, currency, itinerary, safety, transportation, and political situations will be searched for and reviewed. Because all family members are commonly involved in diverse risks, the role of information searchers will be more active and intensive.

Hypothesis 4a: The magnitude of the activeness of information searchers is different according to decision-makers in each choice set.

Hypothesis 4b: The magnitude of the activeness of information searchers increases as the final choice set nears.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach, using a sample of mainland Chinese overseas tourists traveling with the primary purpose of pleasure. Questionnaire operationalization, item measurement, and data collection are described below. Because this study's respondents were mainland Chinese people, items of perceived constraints were developed according to a hierarchical theory of pleasure tourism constraints that indicates the inclusion of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints (e.g., Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991). Unlike their hierarchical constraint model, this study excluded interpersonal constraints because samples for this study were mostly group tourists. Chinese tourists' propensity of accompanying tourists is more explanatory in case of long haul tourism because tourists are not well known about language, culture or geography (e.g., Chen et al., 2013; Huang & Hsu, 2009). As a result, now that they travel with others and do not strongly feel interpersonal constraints resulting from the presence or absence of others who might accompany them. Additionally, because the page length in the questionnaire is long, due to the inclusion of the same items for each of the three choice sets, the items regarding constraints were reduced as much as possible. Responses of the

perceived constraints were measured using 5-point Likert-type scales, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

To develop the questions relevant to destination choice sets, previous studies were thoroughly reviewed (e.g., Botha et al., 1999; Crompton, 1992; Crompton & Ankomah, 1993; Decrop, 2010; Hong et al., 2009; Jang et al., 2007; Um & Crompton, 1990). First, a question designed to determine destination choice sets was as follows: *"Your overseas pleasure travel was made during May to September this year. When you thought of overseas pleasure travel ____ months before your actual overseas trip, which overseas destinations occurred to you? Please write the names of these countries."* Then, respondents were asked to fill in the blank space with the destinations they wanted to travel to at that point in time. The months prior to travel, indicating the point-in-time of decision-making in the three choice sets, were classified into three categories: a) eight months for an early choice set; b) five months for a middle choice set; and c) three months for a late choice set.

The point-in-time of decision-making in the three choice sets is controversial. Results of reviewing previous choice set literature (Crompton, 1992; Crompton & Ankomah, 1993; Crompton et al., 1998; Um & Crompton, 1990) were helpful in deciding the time frame. For example, Um & Crompton (1990) used three samples (undergraduate students, workshop participants, and employees working for government agency) through purposive sampling method. Their longitudinal surveys were conducted in February and May to ask potential tourists' choice sets, who would travel in "summer" or "fall" in the same year. The decision making influencers have been dramatically changed from word-of-mouth to digital devices such as smart phone, Internet, video clip or web (Kim et al., 2018; Ratchford et al., 2001).

To overcome the vagueness of determining the time frame and reflect the industrial trends this study conducted interviews with 30 mainland Chinese overseas tourists who were visiting Hong Kong, Seoul, Taiwan, and Turkey. The interview method with actual tourists is a good approach to surmount weakness caused by researchers' arbitrary decision. Eight months prior is a time at which a decision regarding international pleasure travel is consolidated, whereas five months is the time at which travel plans are more certain. Three months prior is the time at which a decision is made regarding a final destination and air tickets and hotel rooms are booked individually or through a travel agency. If an interval between the early choice set and actual overseas travel exceeds eight months, it is an uncertain point in time with regard to whether or not overseas travel will occur eight months later, due to various elements that might inhibit the overseas travel.

A question was designed to identify the magnitude of influence of decision-making facilitators in decision-making: *"When you were deciding on an overseas travel destination eight months before your actual overseas trip, who was most influential?"* Eight types of influential people/media in regard to their decision-making were described in the questionnaire: husband; wife; kids; husband and wife; husband, wife, and kids; travel agency; mass media; and social media. Influential actors in overseas travel decision making are related to family structure (Kim et al., 2010; Kozak, 2010; Kozak & Karadag, 2012) or promotional effort of external sources such as travel agency or social media (Ratchford et al., 2001; Shao et al., 2016). The answers were then placed on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly not influential" (1) to "strongly influential" (5).

A question was operationalized in order to identify the level of activeness of information searching of information searchers: "*During the process of collecting information eight months*

before your actual overseas trip, who collected information on travel destinations most actively?" People who are influential in collecting information included husbands, wives, kids; many respondents also described the way in which they collected information together with another person. The question was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of (1) being "strongly not active" to (5) meaning "strongly active."

The samples for this study were mainland Chinese tourists who had experience in traveling to international destinations, including to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao, within the previous four years. Additionally, another important qualification of the sample participants was that a main purpose of their overseas travel was pleasure. The reason for selecting tourists with the purpose of pleasure is that those individuals try to garner their preferred destinations and search information, and they compare that information in terms of perceived constraints. Unlike individuals with the purpose of traveling for business or to visit friends or relatives (VFR), pleasure travel allows a prospective tourist to freely participate in a decision-making process.

The data were collected by using an online panel survey. The survey company is the largest in mainland China, having more than 2.6 million panel members. The sample pool was those who had experience to travel overseas including Macao, Hong Kong, Taiwan within four years. Reasons why this study adopted the online panel survey are as follows. First, the online panel survey for this study needed to be completed within a given, short period of time, by people who had travelled abroad. If the data-collection period had been long, diverse factors influencing tourism demand and supply would have been hard to control. Second, if a survey is administered while respondents are at their final tourism destinations, destinations aside from the surveyed place in which a respondent is travelling would have been ruled out in a list of survey places. However, online panel survey is vulnerable to bias such as trustworthiness on data or no

opportunity to converse with respondents in person (Zikmund, 2003). To compensate the weaknesses detailed introduction to explain how to answer sincerely was offered and three screening questions were provided: (1) those who travelled overseas including Macao, Hong Kong, Taiwan within four years; (2) purpose of pleasure travel; (3) 20 years or older.

Among a total of 315 respondents who took part in the online panel survey, 302 questionnaires were used for further data analyses after ruling out questionnaires having insincere answering.

Results

Regarding the question about the month in which the respondents' undertook their travel, in 2014, they indicated different months: May (4.6%), June (7.6%), July (10.3%), August (36.8%), September (14.6%), and October (26.1%). Respondents' residences included Shanghai (18.5%), Guangdong Province (18.2%), Beijing (17.9%), Jiangsu Province (6.3%), Zheijing Province (5.0%), and others (34.1%). In a question asking with whom respondents travelled, the most frequently given response was with family (66.2%), followed by friends and relatives (22.8%), alone (10.6%), and with others (0.3%). Respondents' ages were distributed in the following categories: 26-30 (38.7%), 31-35 (30.8%), 20-25 (15.2%), and 36 or older (15.2%). Regarding the educational level of respondents, college graduates (84.4%) and others (15.6%) were indicated. Profile of the samples is similar with socio-demographic characteristics of the rising population of outbound Chinese tourists (China Breaking, 2015).

Approximately 59% of the respondents were males. With regard to occupational information, the biggest category was company employee (53.3%), followed by professional (15.6%), technician (9.6%), and self-employed (5.6%). Regarding the respondents' income level,

the categories chosen were 12,000 to 98,000 Yuen (12.9%), 98,001 to 140,000 Yuen (19.5%), 140,001 to 180,000 Yuen (20.6%), 180,001 to 220,000 Yuen (21.5%), and 220,001 Yuen or more (25.5%). Responses to a question asking about the frequency of overseas travel since January 2010, excluding this time, included zero times (3.3%), once (5.3%), twice (16.9%), three times (23.2%), and four times or more (51.3%).

All respondents reported that the main purpose of this trip was pleasure. Concerning a question asking the frequency of visiting this overseas travel destination, responses consisted of this being the first time for visiting this destination (26.8%), the second time (27.5%), the third time (19.7%), or more than the third time (26.0%). With regard to the number of nights the respondents stayed at the destination, responses consisted of one to two nights (5.3%), three nights (21.2%), four to five nights (41.7%), and more than five nights (31.8%). Concerning a question identifying the year in which the first consideration of making a trip to this overseas destination occurred, the current year (57.3%), last year (16.2%), and two years ago or earlier (26.5%) were reported. Regarding the type of travel, the highest percentage was reported to be a combination of package tour and individual tour (38.1%), followed by an individual tour (34.4%), and finally by a package tour (27.5%). Concerning the level of satisfaction, 96% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied by their vacation.

With regard to the final choice of an overseas pleasure destination, Korea was the most preferred destination (29.1%), followed by Japan (13.9%), Thailand (13.6%), France (9.9%), the US (8.6%), Australia (5.0%), the UK (5.0%), Singapore (3.3%), Hong Kong (2.0%), and Malaysia (1.7%). Short-haul tourism destinations were defined as Asian countries located within five airline travel hours from Beijing and eastern/southeast region in China. Those countries include East Asia, North Asia, Southeast Asian countries, Southwest Asian countries, India,

Middle Eastern Asia, and Guam/Saipan. Turkey and countries in Europe, and countries in Africa, Oceania, and America, were considered to be long-haul tourism destinations.

Factor analyses and reliability tests

Table 1 shows the results of exploratory factor analyses using a varimax rotation for perceived constraints. Results of a factor analysis using the 12 constraint items generated three underlying domains, in which eigenvalues were greater than 1.0 on the scree plot. All constraint items were maintained in the factor structure. The factor solution explained 63.44% of the variance. Bartlett's test of sphericity produced 1,767.05 (p=.000), confirming that one or more factors existed. Analysis using the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (.85) validated the factor structure. Factor loadings were greater than .75 on all items. The factors were labelled "intrapersonal concerns," "cost," and "destination-born concerns." The latter two factors are related to structural constraints. Because the reliability alphas within the three domains were .69, .70, and .72, respectively, the domains were considered to have the internal consistency of items for each domain. The mean values on the 12 items ranged from 2.44 to 3.96. Mean scores regarding the domain of intrapersonal concerns, except for "I have a busy schedule," were relatively low: 2.44 to 2.80.

Table 1 Here

Choice set size analysis

When comparing the choice set sizes of short-haul tourists and long-haul tourists, significance at the .05 level was not found in any of the three choice sets. Thus, Hypothesis 1a

was not supported. However, when the data were analysed after extracting only short-haul tourists, the tourists showed a high tendency to choose more short-haul destinations than long-haul destinations, in all three choice sets. Hypothesis 1b was therefore supported. Interestingly, according to the late choice set, set sizes between short-haul destinations and long-haul destinations revealed larger discrepancies.

In a similar manner, long-haul tourists indicated that results of paired *t*-tests to compare set sizes between short-haul and long-haul destinations produced significance at the .001 level. Respondents who chose a long-haul tourism destination as a final choice reported a high tendency to consider more long-haul destinations than short-haul destinations, in all three choice sets. The pattern revealed that a group of long-haul tourists preferred long-haul destinations as time drew closer to final decision-making. There is, therefore, sufficient evidence to support Hypothesis 1c. Results are described in Table 2.

Table 2 Here

Constraints according to choice sets

The results of GLM analyses, with repeated measures to compare the perceived magnitude of constraints in each of the three choice sets, are reported in Table 3. First, in the early choice set, mean differences among the three constraint domains reported significance at the .001 level. Respondents showed the largest amount of hesitation in choosing a destination that would incur a high level of costs, including the costs of accommodation, travel, and spending at the destination. Respondents showed a tendency to be reluctant to decide on a destination that had structural constraints such as crowding, no information, inaccessibility, and

crime. However, intrapersonal concerns, including insufficient confidence, health, or a busy schedule, were less significant in the process of choosing a destination. Likewise, the magnitude of mean scores of perceived constraints in the early choice set showed a consistent pattern in the other two choice sets. Hypothesis 2a was therefore supported.

In analyses exploring a change in the magnitude of perceived constraints over the three choice sets, no significant mean differences were found at the .05 level in all three constraint domains. That is, the respondents' perceived constraints were persistent according to the passage of time. These results indicated that Hypothesis 2b was not accepted.

Table 3 Here

Roles of decision-making facilitators and information searchers

With regard to the roles of decision-making facilitators and information searchers, significant mean differences were found at the .001 level in all three choice sets. In the early choice set, the most influencer in deciding on an overseas pleasure destination was "husband, wife, kid(s)" (mean=4.88), followed by "husband and wife" (mean=4.83), "wife" (mean=4.81), and then "husband" (mean=4.66). On the one hand, the influence of "travel agencies," "mass media," and "social media" was relatively low, with a mean score of less than 4.0. This indicates that, when deciding on an overseas pleasure travel destination, mainland Chinese tourists are likely to depend more on family members' direct decisions than on other sources of information. A dynamic power structure between influencer in making a decision on a destination was similar in all three choice sets. Consequently, Hypothesis 3a was accepted.

To compare the level of influence of decision-makers over the three choice sets, a GLM

method with repeated measures was adopted. The results are reported in Table 4. Analyses designed to identify variations in the influence of decision-makers according to three points in time resulted in no significant mean differences at the .05 level. This indicates that the influential power of decision-makers is consistent, regardless of the passage of time. Consequently, Hypothesis 3b was accepted.

According to the results of the GLM analyses with repeated measures designed to compare the levels of activeness of information searchers in each of the three choice sets, significant mean differences at the .01 level were found in all three choice sets. Regarding the active participation of information searchers, "wife" (mean=4.72) and "husband" (mean=4.52) were the most active information searchers, whereas "kids" (mean=4.00) were the least active contributors of information in this regard. A similar pattern in mean values among active information searchers was observed in two other choice sets. This empirical evidence supports Hypothesis 4a.

In identifying a variation in intensity of information searching by information searchers across the three choice sets, significances at the .001 or .05 level were discovered for "husband," "kids," and "together," with the exception being "wife." However, all information searchers showed a tendency toward more active participation in gathering information as time drew close to a final decision. These results confirmed the acceptance of Hypothesis 4b.

Table 4 Here

Discussion and conclusion

In contributing to the current body of research on choice sets, constraints, influential facilitators in decision-making, and information searchers, within the context of the family, this study provides the following theoretical implications.

First, this study adds to the current body of knowledge by differentiating between short-haul and long-haul destinations. It provides empirical evidence for each type of destination to suggest that the size of the choice sets differs between short-haul and long-haul destinations. Regardless of the type of any destination chosen during the final stage, the number of destinations listed in the early choice set (ranging between 4.99 and 5.09) is greater than the number listed both in the middle choice set (ranging between 2.15 and 3.66) and the late choice set (ranging between 2.11 and 2.36). Interestingly, the range of the set sizes found in this study is wider than that in findings of previous studies (Jang et al., 2007; Karl et al., 2015; Um & Crompton, 1990). The choice set size can vary according to characteristics of destinations (including only domestic destinations) and characteristics of samples.

As expected, tourists' choices form a funnel-down structure, moving from a larger size at the early choice set to a smaller size at the late choice set. The findings of this study are consistent with the propositions of earlier studies (Botha et al., 1999; Crompton & Ankomah, 1993; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005) and of empirical findings (Crompton et al., 1998; Jang et al., 2007; Kart et al., 2015). It is interesting to assess the ration of the early choice set size to the midfle choice set size and the ratio of the middle choice set size to the late choice set size, in order to clearly understand the decision-making process. In this study, those values for a group of short-haul tourists were placed at 0.72 and 0.64, whereas a group of long-haul tourists indicated 0.45 and 0.94. That is, a group of long-haul tourists eliminated unfeasible destinations during the early choice set but maintained promising destinations to the final stage of the

decision-making process. This is understandable, because a consumer tends to discard unrealistic options, especially when higher costs and risks are involved, but that consumer also tends to negotiate constraints that influence the actual travel in less important ways (Crompton & Kim, 2004; Plous, 1993; Williams & Balaz, 2013). Accordingly, long-haul tourists have a smaller early choice set and have less variety to bring them to a final decision point, compared to short-haul tourists.

Unlike proposed hypothesis 1a, the size of choice sets for short-haul destinations is not significantly different from that of their long-haul counterparts. It means that the size of sets for those visiting short-haul destinations is not much wider than the size of their choice sets for long-haul destinations. However, as results of testing hypothesis 1b address, those visiting short-haul destinations have larger choice sets for short-haul destinations than the size of their preferences for long-haul destinations. Likewise results of analysing hypothesis 1c indicated that those visiting long-haul destinations have larger choice sets for long-haul destinations than the size of their preferences for short-haul destinations. It means short-haul destinations compete with short-haul destinations, while long-haul destinations rival with long-haul destinations.

As the literature suggests (e.g., Botha et al., 1999; Karl et al., 2015; Um & Crompton, 1990), the results of this study indicated that for international tourism, travel-borne costs are one of the major constraints over the choice sets, whereas personal constraints are less important. The findings here of different magnitudes among constraint domains show a consensus with most of the previous literature on travel constraints. However, the magnitude of perceived constraints was consistent over the three choice sets. This finding is different from those of previous studies, which adopted a hierarchical model of constraints (e.g., Crawford et al., 1991; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008).

With a specific focus on family-based consumer behavior, a joint decision made between husband, wife, and kids has the greatest influence on final pleasure travel decisions, and consultation with travel agencies has been shown to be the weakest dimension of destination choice. Additionally, wives are more dominant in regard to information searches, followed by the cooperation of partners or the inclusion of kids. All of these findings correspond to those of earlier studies (e.g., Fodness, 1992; Kang & Hsu, 2005; Kozak, 2010; Nichols & Snepenger, 1988), thereby confirming that neither destination attributes, nor constraints and roles, have varying positions across the early, middle, and late choice sets.

Additionally, wives frequently take on the role of searching for information regarding overseas holiday tourism; wives are more influential in decision-making regarding the choice of a destination than husbands or kids are. This reflects the general family power dynamic in China and is consistent with previous studies, which have emphasized the importance of wives in modern Chinese culture (Kang & Hsu, 2005; Wang et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2007).

Theoretical and practical implications

As discussed before, important academic contributions were generated. This study ascertained their consideration set, influential factors in pleasure tourists' destination choice, and the dynamic nature of destination competitiveness. Thus results of this study naturally lead to creation of other research questions in destination marketing. According to outcomes of this study various practical implications are provided. The number of alternative destinations for potential tourists is likely to increase, so the decision-making task may become more difficult with regard to both short- and long-haul destinations. In such a context, grouping destinations into these two distance categories may enable the development of more specific positioning

strategies. Depending upon a destination's exact location and on customer perceptions of that destination as a short- or long-haul destination, each place may be better able to identify its competitors and hence to position its products to cater to the Chinese market. Second, as costs become the most influential constraint across all three choice sets, authorities should think about efficient ways to attract the attention of potential customers by minimizing costs.

Third, the study's respondents indicated that constraints from the early choice set to the final choice set are important. Therefore, a destination marketer must proactively promote a destination, ranging from attracting potential tourists to reducing costs. For example, a destination marketer needs to be able to respond to any enquiries when potential tourists seek general information and information regarding constraints, beginning with the initial stage of their decision-making. For example, information concerning expected risks or uncertainty in an international travel destination should be posted and continuously updated online, in order to alleviate concerns about risks that potential tourists might perceive in advance (Williams & Balaz, 2014). Otherwise, without that information, tourists are likely to eliminate a place from a list of destinations during the early choice set or middle choice set.

Fourth, our findings suggest that a practice of joint decision-making exists, with the participation of all family members, such as husband, wife, and kids, or with cooperation between husband and wife, so that broader promotional activities can be designed to address their combined interests. More specifically, because wives tend to be both active information searchers and decision-makers, marketing activities should be designed to capture their interests. Finally, the need for information searches becomes more intense at the late consideration set, so that tourism authorities or businesses may wish to develop messages that are more direct, and

simpler but more efficient, and that emphasize their distinctive values, in order to reach the target market by using effective information sources.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Several limitations are evident in this study and require comment. First, one useful approach is the segmentation of travel markets according to trip purpose (e.g., pleasure vacation, visiting family and friends, or business travel). According to this approach, decision-makers in those different segments might have dissimilar methods of decision-making. For example, a potential traveler who is interested in visiting friends and relatives might consider a different number of choices than would a person who is taking a honeymoon vacation trip to a familiar or unfamiliar destination.

Next, this study considered eight months (divided into three, five, and eight month increments) as the total length of time of the choice set. However, the time period for each choice set may be likely to differ on the basis of various environmental factors that can affect tourist behavior, such as travel host country, tourist-generating country, and international (global) situations. Additionally, this study collected survey data from people who had participated in international pleasure travel during a five-month period in a summer. Therefore, future research needs to investigate whether these results are consistent with the results from research regarding tourists who travel during other months. Finally, this study was conducted to reflect mainland Chinese tourists' preferences of choice sets; the number of alternatives may change from one nation to another, because China is a very emerging market in international tourism.

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Table 1. Results of factor analysis of perceived constraints

Domains and items	Factor loading	Mean	Eigen value (Explained variance, %)
Factor 1: Intrapersonal concerns (reliability alpha=0.69)			
I have poor health.	.79	2.44	3.46 (26.61%)
I am concerned about my health.	.78	2.80	
I am scared of traveling so far.	.76	2.47	
I lack self-confidence.	.76	2.62	
I have a busy schedule.	.75	3.46	
Factor 2: Cost (reliability alpha=0.70)			
The destination requires expensive accommodation.	.83	3.94	2.54 (19.52%)
The destination involves expensive attractions.	.83	3.87	
The destination requires expensive travel to be visited.	.82	3.96	
Factor 3: Destination-borne concerns (reliability alpha=0.72)			
The destination is crowded.	.87	3.54	2.25 (17.31%)
The destination does not offer information.	.79	3.84	
The destination does not have good accessibility.	.75	3.58	
I am scared of crime there.	.75	3.61	

Note: Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale: “strongly disagree” (1), “neutral” (3), “strongly agree” (5).

Table 2. Destination choice set size for short-haul destinations and long-haul destinations

Choice sets	Short-haul tourists (n=201)	Long-haul tourists (n=101)	*T*-value	*P*-value
Early choice set	5.09	4.99	.32	.75
Middle choice set	3.66	2.25	.14	.89
Late choice set	2.36	2.11	.79	.43
Choice sets	Short-haul tourists (*N*=201)		Paired *T*-value	*P*-value
	Short-haul destination	Long-haul destination		
Early choice set	3.30	1.75	7.70	.000
Middle choice set	2.65	1.20	9.02	.000
Late choice set	1.97	.54	12.82	.000
Choice sets	Long-haul tourists (*N*=101)		Paired *T*-value	*P*-value
	Short-haul destination	Long-haul destination		
Early choice set	1.79	3.31	-5.98	.000
Middle choice set	1.01	2.43	-7.62	.000
Late choice set	.39	1.69	-12.75	.000

Table 3. Differences in perceived constraints among the three choice sets

Constraint domains	Early choice set	Middle choice set	Late choice set	Within-subject *F*-value	*p*-value
Individual constraint	2.76	2.73	2.72	.72	.487
Cost constraint	3.92	3.94	3.87	2.98	.054
Destination-borne constraint	3.64	3.63	3.62	.24	.754
Within-subject *F*-value	203.53	199.25	174.31		
p-value	.000	.000	.000		

Table 4. Decision-making facilitators and active information searchers

Decision-making facilitators	Early choice set	Middle choice set	Late choice set	Within-subject *F*-value	*p*-value
Husband	4.66	4.63	4.67	1.09	.334
Wife	4.81	4.77	4.80	.90	.407
Kid(s)	4.09	4.11	4.15	.80	.439
Husband and wife	4.83	4.82	4.82	.06	.938
Husband, wife, and kid(s)	4.88	4.88	4.92	.09	.411
Travel agency	3.44	3.50	3.55	2.41	.094
Mass media	3.37	3.32	3.43	2.70	.074
Social media	3.97	3.99	4.00	.47	.613
Within-subject *F*-value	138.8	137.5	130.4		
p-value	.000	.000	.000		
Active information searchers	Early choice set	Middle choice set	Late choice set	Within-subject *F*-value	*p*-value
Husband	4.52	4.60	4.63	8.07	.002
Wife	4.72	4.72	4.75	.44	.619
Kid(s)	4.00	4.19	4.25	15.79	.000
Together	4.37	4.47	4.49	5.637	.004
Within-subject *F*-value	26.2	17.75	16.2		
p-value	.000	.000	.000		

Figure 1. Destination choice set model