

Family Identity Bundles and Holiday Decision Making

Abstract

As the main contributor to leisure vacations, family travel is an important topic in academia; however, limited tourism research has addressed the subject. Most family travel studies have focused on who makes the decision with comparatively little attention paid to how. The present study argues that family travel decision making is determined by interactions between different individual, relational, and family identities using various communication approaches. Based on the family identity bundle framework, this research employs a longitudinal qualitative approach to examine 28 Chinese families' summer holiday decision-making processes. The results indicate that two moderators (relationships with extended family and involvement in social groups through social media) strengthen the influence of identity bundles on decision making, as do different communication forms on decisions. Findings from this study contribute to the body of knowledge on family tourism decision making and provide suggestions for family tourism promotion.

Keywords:

Family identity bundle; family travel decision making; communication approaches; Chinese family; young children

1. INTRODUCTION

Family, as a consuming and decision-making unit, represents a central phenomenon in marketing and consumer behavior (Epp and Price 2008). Family is considered the main participant unit in leisure vacations. Families arguably form the consumer base of many tourist resorts and attractions in the world (Carr 2011), thus contributing substantially to the vacation economy. Moreover, family vacations are often thought to carry significant social implications in addition to economic roles. Family travel has been found to be associated with family health, well-being, and lifestyle and has become a necessity rather than a luxury (Li, Wang, Xu, and Mao 2017). However, many researchers have contended that family tourism has not received equal attention in academia compared with other forms of tourism (Obrador 2012). Research has mainly covered family travel decision making, ranging from decision-making processes (Decrop and Snelders 2004) to roles of family members including the husband, wife, and children (Gram 2007). Some studies have explored the family life cycle and disagreements during decision making (Bronner and De Hoog 2008).

Studies on family vacation decision making have largely been informed by family decision-making theories. Relevant literature has been criticized for oversimplifying the decision-making process by focusing on who makes the decision while ignoring the decision process itself, which involves a series of interactions and dynamics among family members.

With few exceptions (Smith, Pitts, Litvin, and Agrawal 2017; Rojas-de-Gracia, Alarcón-Urbistondo, and González Robles 2018; Rojas-de-Gracia and Alarcón-Urbistondo 2018) family decision making has been consistently conceptualized as an individual behavior rather than a collective one, which may underestimate the importance of understanding how families come to shared travel decisions as a collective unit. Structured cross-sectional surveys have constituted the primary means of data collection in relevant studies; however, this approach does not allow for in-depth investigation of decision formation (Decrop 2008). In addition, previous work has suggested that children's influences on family decision making vary by process stage (Flurry and Veeck 2009). Young children are labor-intensive (Kapinus and Johnson 2003) and require a greater amount of attention and care from parents. Studies have shown that young children greatly influence families' decision making simply by their presence (Khoo-Lattimore 2015; McWayne, Downer, Campos, and Harris 2013). Even so, the importance of young children in guiding families' decisions has not been well-acknowledged in the literature.

Epp and Price (2008) pointed out that exploring family identities and interactions between identity bundles could address some limitations in family decision-making theory. Their proposed framework noted that when families make decisions, they draw on identity bundles including the identities of individuals, couples, smaller collectives, and the family as a whole. An understanding of the social and cultural identities of a family and its members, as well as changes in identities during the decision-making process, could offer additional insight into the process of constructing family decisions (Parkinson, Gallegos, and Russell-Bennett 2016).

Grounded in Epp and Price's (2008) family identity framework, the present study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of vacation decision making for families with young children based on longitudinal data. By addressing the aforementioned research gaps, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on family vacation decision making by acknowledging the collective nature of family decisions, adopting a process-oriented perspective, employing longitudinal data, and focusing on families with young children (who are more labor-intensive than older children).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Family travel decision making

Family has long been one of the most preferred travel companions, occupying about 30% of the leisure travel market (Schänzel and Yeoman 2015). This proportion is expected to

continue growing given the increasing importance of family relationships (Yun and Lehto 2009). Family leisure travel can facilitate family communication and emotional connections (Lee, Graefe, and Burns 2008), family bonding and cohesion (Lehto, Choi, Lin, and MacDermid 2009), family members' subjective well-being (Gram 2005), and childhood socialization and development from children's perspectives (West and Merriam 1970). Recent studies on travel motivation from parents' points of view have indicated that family leisure vacations can foster children's physical, intellectual, and emotional development, enhance their adversity quotient, and enrich family connections by creating pleasant collective memories and spending quality time together (Li, Wang, Xu, and Mao 2017). Family travel decision making is thus a popular topic among tourism academics. Generally, family holiday decision-making studies have focused on three typical decision-making stages: problem recognition, information search behavior and evaluation of alternatives, and final decisions (Decrop 2005; Lederhaus and King 2015; Rojas-de-Gracia and Alarcón-Urbistondo 2018). Other studies have discussed family members' roles in decision making. For example, Nanda, Hu, and Bai (2007) outlined a conceptual framework of family travel decisions and identified numerous family roles in making decisions, including that of a gatekeeper, information searcher, influencer, decision maker, purchaser, and user. The roles of each family member also differ across decision-making stages (Kim, Tanford, and Choi 2019). Therkelsen (2010) mentioned the dynamic nature of role distribution in the family holiday decision-making process, although certain roles are most often held by parents and children, respectively. Recent studies have suggested dividing the decision-making process into sub-decisions (e.g., those related to accommodations, activities, budget, dates, destinations, food, and information searches) to better understand "who makes what decisions" (Barlés-Arizón, Fraj-Andrés, and Martínez-Salinas 2013; Kancheva and Marinov 2014; Ashraf and Khan 2016). However, no consensus has been reached regarding different family members' roles in sub-decisions.

Scholars have long agreed upon women's dominant decision power in family travel (Rojas-de-Gracia and Alarcón-Urbistondo 2018). In studies of families' vacation decisions, common decision-making types include husband-dominant, wife-dominant, and joint. Recently, an increasing number of studies have revealed that couples engage in holiday decision making jointly through various sub-decisions (Rojas-de-Gracia and Alarcón-Urbistondo 2018), during the problem recognition and final decision stages (Rojas-de-Gracia and Alarcón-Urbistondo 2018), or throughout all three stages (Ashraf and Khan 2016; Kancheva and Marinov 2014). Cheng, Su, Liao, Lorgnier, Lebrun, Yen, Lan, and Huang

(2019) and Coskun (2019) identified similar shared influences between parents in the family vacation decision-making process.

Kim et al. (2019) stressed the differences between couples' and families' decision-making processes by investigating how the same add-on information could differentially influence their decisions. Family travelers undergo a more complex decision process when considering all family members' demands and expectations (Kim et al. 2019). Thus, research on family travel decision making should incorporate other family members in addition to couples because family members can shape the process and outcomes. Bronner and De Hoog (2008) asserted that vacations and travel are normally joint economic decisions involving different members of the household. Although the final decision maker may be a group leader, whether the mother or father, the outcome is derived from consultation with other group members (Decrop 2006).

A growing body of research has begun to focus on the power of women and children in family decision-making processes (Gram 2007). Such work has revealed that decision making involves changes in family members' power and social status. For example, women's gradually improving social position has contributed to changes in previously male-dominant decision-making models. In addition, travel decisions can be largely altered by the arrival of new life in the family. Children's roles in family vacation decisions have been investigated for years, but these family members' importance in such decisions remains mostly neglected.

Niemczyk (2015) examined the roles children play in family holiday decisions and found that children can serve as initiators, advisors, and decision makers to varying extents. Therkelsen (2010) agreed that children play multiple roles, even serving as the final decision makers in certain cases. Children's participation in family tourism decisions also increases dynamically as children grow (Therkelsen 2010). Seaton and Tagg (1995) noted that the degree of children's influence differs according to age. This trend suggests that children shape the social structure of the family, which can also influence holiday decisions and experiences (Small 2008). Most studies have involved children in middle childhood (7 to 10 years old) or adolescence (11 to 18 years old), who possess better linguistic and cognitive abilities to express their needs regarding vacation. However, infants (birth to 2 years old) and children in early childhood (3 to 6 years old) are generally thought to play more passive roles in vacation decisions (Poria and Timothy 2014). Although these children may lack cognitive ability and expression to some extent, their impact on family decision making should be considered in light of their contribution to a changing family structure.

Although many studies have explored children's influences on travel decision making, scholars have determined that children's roles in family decisions change as children age (Li et al. 2017). Children under age 7 might not be able to participate in decision making directly and have thus received little attention in the literature, as they are more passive in terms of final decisions. Additionally, little tourism research appears to have considered young children's perceptions. Einarsdottir (2005) and Sheridan and Samuelsson (2001) pointed out that young children enjoy making decisions on an individual level and often have their own ways of communicating and expressing themselves. Therefore, involving young children in relevant research could provide a broader picture of family decision making.

The rationale around which variables and factors influence the family decision-making process constitutes another research focus. According to Rojas-de Gracia and Alarcón-Urbistondo (2016), sociodemographic and economic variables such as age, education level, family type, and work status, as well as travel behavior variables such as planning time and information sources, were prominent in prior studies (Chen Y. S., Lehto, Behnke, and Tang 2016; Smith et al. 2017). More recently, several researchers began focusing on the influence of family communication styles in family relations and socialization (Ndubisi 2007; Watne, Brennan, and Winchester 2014) or on psychographic factors such as family members' values, lifestyles (Barlés Arizón, Fraj Andrés, and Martínez Salinas 2011; Barlés-Arizón et al. 2013; Cheng, Su, Liao, Lorgnier, Lebrun, Yen, Lan, and Huang 2019), and motivations (Sato, Kim, Buning, and Harada 2018; Laesser 2019).

Of all variables, cultural values exert important influences on travelers' behavior, particularly travel decision making (Correia, Kozak, and Ferradeira 2011). Chinese culture is considered highly collectivistic, focusing heavily on kinship ties and close personal relations (Hofstede 2004). Scholars have also found that China tends to value group decisions and harmonious group relations (Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams, and Neale 1996). Family members are likely to suppress conflict and dismiss contradictory information. However, China's social structure and family identities have transformed considerably in recent years. Economic growth has also contributed to evolving education levels and family structures. More urban young parents are highly educated and have been exposed to Western and Chinese culture. Several social changes have also occurred that may influence family decision making. For example, Chinese women have become more educated and economically independent, thus holding more power in family decisions. Growing social competition has led to increased parental concern regarding their children's education; many young parents

aim to increase children's opportunities from an early age. Societal changes have been accompanied by corresponding shifts in social values and cultural beliefs, all of which exert significant effects on family decisions. Conversely, under the influence of Confucianism, individuals still view society as an extension of the family and believe that people must first successfully navigate their familial obligations and relationships before they can succeed in the larger social sphere (Zhang 2008). Thus, in Chinese families, children may be granted less autonomy than in other cultures while parents maintain more control over decisions.

2.2 Framework of family identity interplay

Gentry and Commuri (2005) asserted that the literature on family decision making is grounded in the assumption that decisions are personal, and family decisions reflect how individuals negotiate outcomes by influencing other family members. However, this assumption overlooks the truly collective system of the family. Epp and Price (2008) contended that most family researchers have neglected the complex interplay between individual, relational, and collective identity practices in the family. They also suggested that when studying family consumption and decisions, the family should be considered a collective entity composed of family identities and their interplay. The framework of identity interplay was thus proposed to emphasize families' communicative practices. This framework includes three interrelated factors that are essential to an understanding of family consumption: family identity bundles, communication forms, and symbolic marketplace resources. The relationship among these features is moderated by factors including the adaptability of communication forms, member agreement, member commitment, synergy among identity bundles, disruptions and transitions, and similar characteristics (Epp and Price 2008).

Family identity is an enduring topic in diverse disciplines including marketing, sociology, communication studies, family studies, and psychology and carries relevant implications for consumer studies (Epp and Price 2018), including those in tourism contexts. Defined as a family's subjective sense of its own continuity, present circumstances, and core, family identity can be conceptualized through individual and relational family discourse. As such, family identity is composed of three elements: structure, generational orientation, and character (Bennett, Wolin, and McAvity 1988). *Structure* defines the in-group and out-group and reflects the boundaries, hierarchy, and roles of family members. *Generational orientation* describes the inheritance of family traditions and rituals across generations. *Family character* captures the daily characteristics of family life as represented by activities, traits, tastes, or

values. Family identity bundles define *we* (i.e., the structure of the family, members' past experiences, and day-to-day characteristics of family life); this factor can be understood through familial, relational, and individual identities.

Rituals, narratives, social dramas, intergenerational transfers, and everyday interactions constitute communication forms that build, manage, and pass on a collective family identity. These forms of communication draw on shared consumption symbols as resources for constructing and managing relational identities (Arnould and Price 2006; Arnould and Thompson 2005; Maffesoli 1996). Marketplace resources, such as symbols, brands, activities, and services, are embedded in communication forms in everyday life. Tourism scholars have tended to use general decision-making models to understand decision making, including family decisions, in an effort to identify influential factors such as those of a personal and environmental nature (Bronner and De Hoog 2008; Decrop 2006). However, these decision-making models often neglect “many critical and interesting aspects of processes” (Poole, Van de Ven, Dooley, and Holmes 2000), which could contribute to a clearer picture of the discrete phases of family travel decision making. In other words, underpinned by realist ontology, family travel decisions are widely considered a static result of *Homo Economicus*' rational reasoning. The family identity framework is positioned to fill this theoretical gap. Although this framework has been widely cited and applied with respect to general consumer behavior (Kumar and Reinartz 2016), most studies have focused on the definition of family identity and its influence on behavior; none have provided examples of how to apply the framework. Additionally, incorporation of the family identity framework into the tourism literature is rare. This study thus aims to apply this framework to family vacation studies to develop a more constructive understanding of family vacation decision making as a collective task. Moreover, the study endeavors to contribute theoretically to the application of the family identity framework in the tourism arena.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Past research on family vacation decision making has adopted mostly quantitative approaches, which revealed decision-making styles and influential variables. However, situated within Epp and Price's (2008) family identity interplay framework, the main purpose of this study is to evaluate individual, relational, and family identity bundles and analyze how these identities affect holiday decision-making processes. In line with this objective, qualitative discourses on family identity bundles were collected in this study to explain family members' interactions in decision-making processes. A longitudinal research design was

employed using data gathered through unstructured and semi-structured in-depth interviews with 28 nuclear families. This longitudinal research design was intended to afford the researchers prolonged engagement with participants to accumulate rich information.

Data were collected in Hangzhou and Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, China. These two cities were selected mainly due to access to research participants, as suggested by the epistemological assumption of qualitative research (Creswell and Poth 1998). One of the researchers was born and raised in Hangzhou and now works and lives in Ningbo. Being a mother of two preschool children afforded her the accessibility and ability to approach and understand research participants as an insider. In addition, Hangzhou and Ningbo are economically and sociologically developed cities in China. Young parents in these cities are well-educated and financially well off. They, like their counterparts in many other large cities around the world, believe in the role parents play in children's education and are keen to provide their children various extracurricular activities, including travel.

According to IRsearch (2017), over 87% of urban parents in China reported having sent their preschoolers to certain types of learning centers. This figure has continued to climb throughout the past two years. As learning centers have access to a large number of preschoolers and their parents who believe in the benefit of out-of-school education, these locations were deemed appropriate settings for approaching and recruiting research participants. Researchers contacted more than 20 of the top learning centers in Ningbo and Hangzhou and decided to acquire data from three (one in Hangzhou and two in Ningbo) according to their popularity and accessibility. When this study was conducted, the center in Hangzhou had more than 500 members, and the two centers in Ningbo had around 300 members each.

Supported by center managers, one of the researchers approached parents on site to obtain initial permission to participate. Within a month, 67 qualified parents were approached and were asked to invite their partners to join the study. In total, 28 couples agreed to be interviewed. Their children were also involved in informal conversations with their parents present. The 28 families had a total of 32 children between 2 and 7 years old. To build rapport with research participants, one researcher organized various weekend activities and invited these families to come along before data collection started and throughout the research process. These relationship-building efforts were extremely useful, as children are likely to respond with more openness and trust toward individuals who have built a connection with them (Dockett and Perry 2007). The researchers believed that prolonged engagement and

persistent observation enhanced the scope and depth of this study, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Before data collection, the researchers consulted a child psychologist regarding the design of interview questions and selection of appropriate research methods to use with children participants. Per the child psychologist's explanation, young children prefer brief and straightforward questions, and they need a fairly long engagement process before being introduced to the research topic. The psychologist recommended allowing children to draw to express their thoughts if their language development was rudimentary.

Three rounds of in-depth interviews were conducted with families. The first round was carried out in February and March 2017. Parents were interviewed separately in-person to discuss basic family information, family relationships, and travel plans for upcoming holidays. Individual informal conversations with children were also included in this round to understand their initial involvement in decision making and their trip expectations.

The second round of interviews took place in May and June 2017 before families went on summer holiday. Seven husbands declined face-to-face interviews but agreed to phone interviews. Detailed travel plans, family communication, relationships with family members, and effects of other factors were explored in this round. This information-gathering process was also important for understanding identity bundles during decision making. Children were involved in this round as well; the researchers designed entertaining activities at the chosen learning centers with the 28 families split into five groups (based on children's ages). Activities began with ice-breaking games in which the children were asked to draw pictures about their expected travel activities and destinations with the help of guided questions. After the drawing activity, the researchers held individual unstructured conversations with each child for 10–15 minutes.

The final round of interviews was conducted soon after each family's holiday to elicit tour details, plan changes during tours, negotiations around said changes, and pleasant and unpleasant memories from the holiday. In the final round, children were asked to draw pictures again about their travel stories and discuss some memorable moments from their trips. Each round of interviews generated 1.5 hours of discussion on average. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to in-depth interviews, research participants' posts on WeChat Moments were followed to observe how families shared the process of travel decision making. Posts

during families' respective holidays reflected the images and stories they wished to present publicly. Participants' posted content may not have reflected the reality of their holiday perfectly but was useful in analyzing the identities they sought to portray on social media.

Information collected from interviews, drawings, and WeChat posts was incorporated into analysis. Following Waitt (2005) and Grimwood, Yudina, Muldoon, and Qiu (2015), the analysis began with an open reading of the transcript back and forth to become familiar with qualitative and visual data. Independently, each researcher identified emergent themes within texts and drawings, including information that was present or absent. Next, the researchers' chosen themes were compared and synthesized in relation to the research objectives. This process was structured using six broad themes: family relationships, family identity, travel arrangements, decision-making processes, communication with family members, and factors influencing family decisions.

Both researchers in this study come from a middle-class background, are mothers of two, in their thirties, and self-identify as Chinese. Their demographics provided some advantages in this study, especially when interviewing young children; the researchers are skilled in using "kids' language" and may thus seem more approachable to this age group. Both researchers considered themselves major decision makers for family vacations given their background as tourism scholars. As such, a certain degree of comparability existed between the researchers and female study participants, as they shared some commonalities. Throughout the fieldwork, the researchers found themselves empathizing more with mothers; female participants also had a mutual understanding with the researchers based on their gender and role in the family. Recognizing the potential influence of the researchers' self-position on participant interactions and discourse interpretation, the researchers made a concerted effort to remain neutral but concede that data may have been interpreted differently had the researchers been either male or childless. Research participants' backgrounds are detailed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

4. RESULTS

4.1 Individual, relational, and family identities

Fathers. Transcript analysis identified multiple paternal identities. Some fathers considered themselves "planners," "risk controllers," and "safety guardians" of their family during holidays. They tended to interact with mothers regarding final travel choices and were involved throughout the decision-making process. These fathers were thus labeled *active*

involvers. They were likely to be more engaged or exert control over choices of destinations, transportation, and hotels and paid more attention to emergency contacts for the destination. One father explained, “*As a father and husband in the family, I need to make sure the trip is safe first of all, [so] I [will] pay extra attention [to] the choice of airline company. I would prefer paying more for a reliable airline company. Hotel choice [in] the destination is also important. My wife makes the reservation. But she knows me; I only choose five-star international chained hotels, which have better service quality for family stays*” (Husband 6).

One father pointed out that his wife would consult him regarding destination choices: “*My wife loves to choose emerging destinations such as Laos, Vietnam, [and] Tibet for holidays. Although I also love to go, I don't think it is [appropriate] to bring our kids there. Maybe when they grow older, as currently, these destinations have too [many] risks in travel*” (Husband 3). This rationalization demonstrates that these fathers were more involved and had more input into pre-travel decision making but were less active in itinerary coordination; in that respect, their wives took the reins. Additionally, despite these fathers’ substantial involvement in pre-travel decision making and their role as risk evaluators during the trip, few considered themselves the budget controller. Although they expected to pay most of the travel bill, their wives were fully entrusted with holiday budget expenditures.

Another common feature of these fathers was their close relationships with their children and high engagement in their children’s lives. When asked about their daily relationship with their families, these fathers expressed interest in their children’s rearing. Their wives corroborated that these fathers enjoyed significant father–child bonding time. Many fathers considered travel an important part of their children’s lives and were willing to be more involved in the travel-related decision-making process. One father said, “*I am very busy with work, but during the weekend and holidays, I try my best to spend time with my family. Travel is important for us as a family*” (Husband 11). These fathers’ close bonds with their children also extended to travel; the fathers considered themselves and their children collective “fun-seekers” and “explorers,” distinguished from mothers as a unique identity. One father explained, “*As a father, I should [be] the father figure and become my daughter’s role model. Every time during holidays, I find opportunities to take my daughter [to explore somewhere fun]. This should just belong to me and my daughter*” (Husband 15).

On the contrary, nearly half of interviewed fathers were passively involved in travel-related decision making and maintained passive attitudes about holidays in general. This group was labeled *passive involvers*. Passive involvers considered themselves followers in the

family, particularly for holiday planning. Many noted that their wives arranged everything for a holiday; all they needed to do was be present during the particular time period. These fathers also appeared more relaxed while traveling. One indicated, *“I am very busy with work. Thus, I don't have time to consider these ‘minor things.’ My wife can arrange all of them. I trust her decisions”* (Husband 17). Although these fathers tended to consider holidays “small things,” they saw themselves as decision makers for “major and important issues,” such as buying property, moving, and changing jobs. Passive involvers were also found to engage in little father–child bonding during travel, resulting in a weak collective identify for them and their children. A shared feature of active involvers and passive involvers was that they all considered themselves busy with work but held completely different attitudes toward holidays. This finding suggests that all fathers considered themselves the main financial contributor to the family even though some earned less than their wives.

Mothers. Mothers interviewed for this study were relatively homogeneous in their decision-making identities; almost all summarized their identities as “budget holder,” “caregiver,” “planner,” “implementer,” and “relationship enhancer.” Regardless of whether the mothers were employed, they all considered themselves the controller of general travel spending. They especially cared about how much would be spent during the holiday and how to arrange the budget for each travel component.

Additionally, no matter fathers’ level of involvement during the pre-trip stage, mothers were the final implementers. This finding aligned with previous literature indicating women’s dominance in family decision making. One mother explained, *“My husband would be picky on choice of transportation. For example, we are planning to go to Singapore for holiday, and he [insisted on] using Singapore Airlines rather than China Eastern. I respect his choice. But I am the one who makes the [final] booking”* (Wife 1). Mothers were both “planners” and “implementers,” such that nearly all travel needs were initiated by them rather than fathers. The mothers also served as “relationship enhancers” for their families; they tended to be more bonded than fathers with their children. They took care of their children most often and participated in every moment of their children’s lives. Compared to fathers, mothers were more likely to consider holidays important for young children in many aspects. One mother said, *“Through holidays, I hope my kids can experience different cultures and people at a very early age to broaden their horizons. This is important for the future society”* (Wife 4). Another mother added, *“Holidays are important for enhancing our family*

relationship, not only for parents and kids, but also for husbands and wives” (Wife 11). Many of them hoped holidays would be an important component of the familial relationship.

All mothers expressed spending more time with their children than their husbands and therefore cultivated unique joint identities such as “learner,” “explorer,” and “artistic family.” One mother indicated, *“I think me and my children have quite different stands compared to other mothers and children. We like to try new and different things. Thus, during holidays, I always arrange something [that] suits us. We don't go to popular attractions but may try some boutique museums, gardens, exploring hidden gems in the destination”* (Wife 7). Another mother said, *“I make sure the holiday has something meaningful for my kid. We are in the learning process. Through the holiday, he can grow a lot in terms of knowledge, self-identification, and the like. Although he is only 5, he already knows a lot about geography. He is very into geography”* (Wife 17).

Children. Analyses of children’s drawings and follow-up interviews revealed children’s unawareness of their involvement in travel-related decision making. Among all children participants, only two (ages 4 and 6) clearly mentioned their parents had asked where they wanted to go before decisions were made. Eight children indicated their parents did not ask them where they wanted to go. The remaining 12 did not recall whether they were involved in the initial decision-making process. However, parents’ interviews suggested otherwise, as most mothers reported considering children’s needs a priority before choosing a destination. One mother explained, *“Every time before holiday decisions, I ask my girl where she wants to go. Of course, she cannot give me any destination names; she is only 3. But she [can] tell me something like, ‘Mommy, I want to dig [in the] sand ... lots of sand.’ This is why the first destination [that came to] mind was Sanya, where there is a nice beach”* (Wife 23). Another mother shared, *“My daughter, aged 5, [has wanted] to go to Disneyland for a long time, so we are planning to go to Hong Kong for holiday”* (Wife 17).

In the second stage, children were asked to illustrate their expectations about the trip; Figure 1 presents some of their drawings and suggests that children's expectations tended to focus on trip activities. For example, Figure 1-1 indicates seeing a tiger (zoo), Figure 1-2 is about riding an elephant, Figure 1-3 depicts seaside activities, and Figure 1-4 is a lavender field. As many children were told by their parents where they would go for holiday, most children appeared to have received the message clearly from their parents. Although few were consulted directly regarding destination choices, the children were nevertheless well-informed about their family’s travel plans.

Insert Figure 1 here

Analysis of drawings from the final stage revealed that children participants' experiences could be completely different from their expectations, as their attention might be diverted. Children generally expressed themselves as "fun-seekers," as exemplified in drawings depicting activities such as "digging in sand," "eating noodles," "seeing big boat," "seeing Mickey Mouse," and "wearing a princess dress." Younger children's happiness was more expressed through rich colors in their drawings: "sunshine" and "flowers" were recurring elements used to symbolize happiness and excitement about their trips.

Children generally expressed their family identity bundle as "explorer" or "fun-seekers" and tended to perceive their family as a whole entity even if one parent was a passive involver. As shown in Figure 2, most drawings included both parents. Analysis of the interviews further confirmed the importance of family togetherness. Children with actively involved fathers even perceived themselves as being closer to their father than to their mother and had an identity bundle of "explorer." Although many children respondents indicated stronger bonds with their mothers, such bonding was limited to the domain of everyday life wherein mothers were perceived as "guardians" and "caregivers." Contradicting mothers' accounts, which depicted the mother-child identity as "explorer" and/or "learner," few children mentioned exploring destinations with their mothers.

Insert Figure 2 here

Father-mother identity and family identity. The father-mother identity aspect was not readily apparent in this study. Although some couples exhibited strong bonds and considered themselves "romance seekers" or "fun-seekers" during holidays, most couples frequently discussed their children but seldom mentioned their relationship; hence, their relational identities were difficult to detect. Family identity bundles can be summarized from the aforementioned relational and individual identities. Typical family identities included "explorers," "learners," "regular travelers," and "fun-seekers"; however, many families demonstrated a weak shared identity, as fathers and mothers often told different stories. Figure 3 indicates all identity bundles mentioned in travel decision making.

Insert Figure 3 here

As shown in Figure 3, the study did not reveal weak identity expression from either mothers or children; the remaining individual or relational identities corresponded to various degrees of expression, exemplifying either weak or strong identities. Understanding these

identity bundles can clarify the decision-making process and reasons behind families' travel decisions.

4.2 Communication forms and their adaptability in the marketplace

Studying communication forms is important to “constitute, build, manage and pass on collective family identities” (Whitchurch and Dickson 1999). Epp and Price (2008) explained that family life is composed of interactive communication forms and symbolic marketplace resources that shape families' collective identities. For example, staying at Park Hyatt Hotel every time during a holiday may become a family ritual that conveys a certain level of trust in the brand. Similarly, visiting the seaside for every summer holiday represents a family's consumption symbol. Consumption symbols contain memories or feelings that link individuals to their sense of the past (Curasi, Arnould, and Price 2004). In this section, we examine how the family identity bundles discussed above are communicated during the travel decision-making process and contribute to the construction of a family identity. Many forms of communication exist in the family, but only the following forms were identified in this study as pertaining to travel-related decision making.

Everyday interactions. As Baxter (2010) indicated, everyday interactions form the basis of family communication and relational identities over time. Everyday interactions can occur anytime and anywhere within the family, such as at the dinner table, when watching TV, or while cleaning the house. In this study, everyday interactions served as the main communication form when family members exchanged ideas about holiday planning. For example, mothers preferred to use the time after children went to bed to discuss travel plans with fathers, as this part of the day was considered private for couples. Additionally, when mothers and fathers used mobile devices and social media, they often suggested travel ideas or itinerary arrangements. Social media content facilitated new types of dialogue in the family. One mother recalled, “*I remember that when I was sitting on the sofa reviewing travel comments on Qiongyou (a travel social media site), my kid [was] playing in front of me. And my husband [was] also playing [on] his mobile phone near the dining table. I found some interesting places with [highly] positive comments and [told] my husband that ‘We need to go there, I have discovered somewhere fun’*” (Wife 21).

One father said, “*My wife [belongs to] many WeChat groups that include a lot of travel information. Whenever she finds something interesting, she talks to me immediately*” (Husband 26). Everyday interactions were frequent in some families but not others. The interviews indicated that only families with strong unified and relational identities (e.g.,

father–mother, father–child, or mother–child) engaged in routine everyday interactions. Larson (1983) explained that frequent interactions within families generally provide a positive and socially healthy way of life. Everyday interactions can also be associated with the consumption of objects and activities, such as choices of attractions, destinations, accommodations, and restaurants, many of which fathers might consider mundane; thus, fathers may tend to be more passive in everyday interactions.

Rituals. We found rituals to be a form of communication in travel decision making, but not a popular one. A few families indicated that travel arrangements and destination choices were partially determined by rituals. For example, one family mentioned they spent every summer holiday in Australia because both parents had studied there and wanted their children to share their memories. Another family indicated that the father had certain family rituals when choosing destinations, such as not going to beach resorts before their children turned 5 years old. These rituals explained the continuity in identities over time for their family, whether relational or individual (Curasi et al. 2004).

Narratives. Individual, relational, and family identities are built through the communicative construction of narratives (Bennett et al. 1988; Bochner, Ellis, and Tillmann-Healy 2000; Langellier and Peterson 1993; Sillars 1995; Stone 1988). Narratives are stories that family members create based on their individual understanding of a given object. Other family members' stories regarding the same objects continue to mold consumption stories as well. As Epp and Price (2008) explained, family stories are never complete. In terms of holiday decision making, narratives can be found in all planning stages (i.e., pre-, during, and post-trip). For example, one mother said, "*We all look forward to the summer holiday trip. My daughter loves animals, and I bet that she will be so excited when we arrive at Chimelong Paradise. We are going to stay in the resort hotel, where we can have close contact with tigers and giraffes*" (Wife 9). Contrarily, her husband stated, "*We decided to go to Chimelong for our summer holiday as I don't have many off days during summer. ... I am not so excited about the hotel. It might stink because of those animals, haha*" (Husband 9). As shown, mothers and fathers can have extremely different expectations and narratives about the same trip. In this case, the mother was more focused on her and her child's identities and assumed the father would feel the same.

Hirsch (1997) argued that family photos or posted information on websites could express joint family stories and meanings of the pictured objects. In this study, family photos and narratives communicated the family's interpreted meanings of the holiday along with

their individual, relational, and family identities. Respondents' WeChat posts showed that fathers preferred to convey a "fun-seeker" individual identity, whereas mothers liked to construct a harmonious family picture through narratives. Family photos or photos of their children's smiling faces were often seen on mothers' WeChat accounts, whereas pictures of pubs and amusing posters/signposts frequently appeared in fathers' WeChat posts.

4.3 Moderators

Two moderators emerged from interviews in addition to the seven moderators identified by Epp and Price (2008). The first was **relationships with extended family**. The above identities and relationships were discussed in the context of the nuclear family; however, participants' relationships with their extended family could also affect identity bundles and influence the decision-making process. Chinese families traditionally have close relationships with their extended family, such as grandparents. Many grandparents are heavily involved in childrearing, and some may live in the same household as their children and grandchildren. There is a historical tradition for Chinese seniors to provide care for their grandchildren (Chen Feinian, Liu, and Mair 2011). Although grandparents do not necessarily travel with their nuclear family during summer holidays, they can still affect the relational identity within the family through their daughter or son. When ties between grandparents and the nuclear family are strong, travel decisions might be influenced accordingly. For example, one family indicated that their 3-year-old was in the care of her maternal grandparents. When the parents discussed holiday travel plans, the grandmother questioned the mother about the potential harm of a long-haul flight on the child's ears. The mother then changed her mind about an overseas trip and decided to visit Hong Kong instead, which was only a 2-hour flight.

Close relationships with grandparents may influence the family identity bundle. One mother reported, "*My parents are living with us. They help take care of our two children. We respect them, and even on the issue of holidays, we try to ask them to go with us. But they refuse because they think it is too expensive. ... My mum always asks us to save as we have two children. ... When I make travel plans, I mean, unconsciously, I consider the budget first, haha. ... I think I am influenced by her*" (Wife 10). For this mother, her individual identity could be altered by her mother's feedback and thus color the family's decision making.

Another father said, "*My mother is living with us. For holidays, I try to ask her to come along. But my wife is not happy. We always argue about this. ... This summer, my mum is not going with us. ... This makes me sad. I think she deserves to have a long holiday with us, as taking care of my two sons is a hard job*" (Husband 6). His wife countered, "*I would*

definitely give a 'no' to having my mother-in-law to go with us. This is our family holiday, not including her. My husband always has lots of consideration about her, but less for me or the children. ... This is my principle. That's why I arrange all the travel details. I don't care whether he is happy or not" (Wife 6). For this family, the father–mother relational identity could be weakened due to the husband's relationship with his mother. Conversely, the wife might express a stronger individual identity, along with a stronger relational identity with her child, to weaken the relationship with her mother-in-law. She said, *"I have arranged a lot of museums and galleries for me and my kid. He is very curious about many historical things. I like them as well. We always like to explore historical stuff during trips. ... My husband? He might feel [bored]. But he accepts it. ... [He has] to accept it, haha"* (Wife 6). Although many grandparents are living with their nuclear family or otherwise exert a strong influence on the family, it is not appropriate to include them in family bundles. The nuclear family identity bundle could change due to grandparents' influence rather than absorbing grandparents' identities into a nuclear family's identity bundle; therefore, grandparents were considered a moderator in this study.

The second moderator was **involvement in social groups through social media**. Our findings revealed that parents were often involved in certain chat groups/forums on social media, namely via WeChat in this case. All mothers interviewed reported being involved in more than one child-centered chat group on WeChat. These groups include various members interested in the same topic (e.g., buying child-related products, traveling with children, cooking for their children, and discussing education-related problems involving their children). Members, typically mothers, can converse with peers and acquire information or help. They can also make friends through these groups and by browsing each other's WeChat posts. One mother commented, *"These chat groups really influence me. If they all talk about holidays, showing pictures of where they have been with their children before, I could be really thinking where we should go then. ... [and about] what pictures I should show in the group to stand out"* (Wife 11). Another mother said, *"I did consult some mums in the group before making travel decisions. Some of them have been there before. Especially [since] they all have children the same age, they have experiences about whether the destination is suitable for little ones, and whether the place [is] worth visiting"* (Wife 17).

These participants admitted that they enjoyed showcasing their experiences at high-end hotels, interesting galleries, and kid-friendly activities to communicate their unique tastes in holiday arrangements. They were eager to share their identity with others in the group. One

mother explained, “*I want other mothers to perceive me as a fun-seeker. I am a sophisticated traveler, and I can find a lot of hidden gems that are suitable for little kids*” (Wife 19).

Mothers who were regularly involved in these groups were intent on constructing their family identity and conveying their family identity bundles to the outside world. Social groups had less influence on fathers, as fewer participated in child-related groups; most preferred to be involved in chat groups with their families or close friends.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, family identity bundles and their relevant communication forms and applications in different marketplaces appeared to shape ultimate holiday decisions. In the decision-making process, moderators strengthened the influence of identity bundles on decision making as did different communication forms on decisions. In this research, we discovered two main moderators, namely relationships with extended family and involvement in social groups through social media. Figure 4 summarizes findings related to family identity interactions in the process of holiday decision making. This model explains how family travel decisions are shaped by family identity bundles.

Insert Figure 4 here

Consistent with previous research, mothers were found to exhibit a strong individual identity in the family. They served as the primary trip planners, budget controllers, and activity proposers in family travel decisions. By contrast, fathers had less input in the family domain and a relatively weaker individual identity. In a few exceptional cases, fathers did demonstrate stronger individual identities and were thus more likely to be involved in decision making; in these instances, their influence often revolved around destination choice, hotel and transportation selections, and onsite risk control. However, despite mothers’ *de facto* dominance, they expected more engagement from fathers in terms of family travel. This attitude reflects an ideological shift from the traditional “men managing external affairs, women internal” to a shared family responsibility among Chinese women in general and well-educated middle-class women in particular.

Discourse analysis revealed that mothers possessed stronger relational identities with their young children, and they expected their spouses to develop the same level of bonding with their children during family trips. A stronger father–child bond could enhance the father–mother relational identity. This finding is consistent with Kwok, Cheng, Chow, and Ling (2015) in that, due to family spillover effects, fathers’ involvement with children has become

increasingly influential to mothers' perceptions of marital satisfaction. For Chinese mothers, co-parenting plays a more important role in perceived life satisfaction compared with their Western counterparts (Kwok and Wong 2000). This trend was exemplified in this study, as 25 out of 28 mothers interviewed worked full time, and some earned a higher income than their husbands. All 28 mothers were highly educated with bachelor's degrees or above. These mothers are considered the so-called "new female figures" in contemporary China. Fathers' missing identity in family decision making also exemplifies a current social problem in China, often called "widowed parenting" (丧偶式育儿), referring to families in which one parent (often the mother) bears most of the responsibility for raising children.

Chinese parenting ideology also affects holiday decision making. Research has indicated that Chinese parents tend to exert more control over their children compared with European parents (Chao and Tseng 2002; Pomerantz, Ng, and Wang 2008). Cheung and Pomerantz (2011) also found Chinese parents to be more involved in their children's learning versus their Western counterparts. Therefore, it was unsurprising to discover that Chinese parents exhibited a child-centered family identity when making holiday-related decisions. This could be explained by a strong mother-child relational identity as well as by mothers' strong individual identity in the family. This pattern may also explain why family travel arrangements consisted of mostly children-centered activities, such as at beaches or theme parks.

Accounts from children's interviews and drawings revealed that preschoolers could demonstrate strong relational and family identities; however, their viewpoints were more often communicated through mothers than fathers. Through their closeness with mothers, young children could express what they wanted before and during trips, particularly in terms of preferred destinations and activities. Children's activities on family trips were quite limited, largely involving the beach, sand, animals, and theme parks. Sports-related activities were also popular among families with older children. However, young children's influences on travel decisions appeared mostly indirect. This finding coincides with previous studies (Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, and Cheah 2015; Therikelsen 2010) arguing that children younger than 13 years old have relatively indirect participation in family decision making. Parents could make decisions about destinations, hotels, and catering based on their understanding of their children without direct consultation.

Having young children in the family did change these families' travel decision patterns. Our study revealed a few common travel patterns. First, two types of

accommodations were most popular among families: quality hotel chains and mid- to high-range bed-and-breakfast establishments. Second, destinations with beaches or theme parks were families' main choices. Third, travel-related uncertainties were high during family trips due to children's sickness or changing moods.

This study is among the first to explore the family holiday decision-making process through the lens of family identity bundles. Family members were found to construct identity bundles through discourse and communication, which then affected their decision-making power and reflected why and how they made decisions. These findings differ from those outlined in most other research, which often overemphasize the notion of "who did what." Our second contribution relates to the emphasis on different communication approaches, particularly everyday interaction, rituals, and narratives for Chinese families with young children. These communication forms substantiate family holiday decision making as a complex process. Holiday decisions were clearly determined by family identity bundles and how these identities interact. Communication methods appeared similarly important because they could reflect the interplay between identities and decision types. For instance, mothers might influence fathers more, as mothers preferred everyday interactions. Topics raised during daily interactions could include new ideas or suggestions for destination searching. This pattern also explains why mothers were the primary decision makers in terms of travel activities in our sample.

Third, this research contributes to the original model of family identity bundles by identifying new moderators and applying them in a tourism context. These moderators reflect current social circumstances in China and may have implications for subsequent holiday studies in China or other Asian countries. Chinese grandparents often care for their grandchildren, especially while children are young. This arrangement is partly due to high working pressure on both parents in China, a limited number of qualified nurseries, and principles underlying Chinese culture. Given the country's collectivistic culture, the Chinese prioritize extended family. Grandparents have a particularly strong influence on family decisions related to destination selection, such as in terms of distance and potential safety issues. Families with young children also often choose to bring grandparents along on family trips to help with caretaking. Frequent social media use exposes parents to new travel information and has constructed social groups for mothers and fathers; the influences of these groups (particularly those related to parenting and travel) on identity shifts remain under-

researched, particularly among Chinese mothers, who may alter their individual or relational identities to conform to social media groups.

Fourth, this study focused on a specific group of parents with young children under age 7, a developmental period that has received scant attention in family holiday research. However, within the family travel market, scholars have identified a growing number of families with young preschoolers in many countries such as China (Tuniu Corporation 2018). Our work employed creative approaches in treating young children as active agents in travel decision making. Although young children could not fully understand the concept of identity, they appeared to exert indirect yet strong influences over family travel decisions. These findings also suggest the possibility of involving young children in tourism research using more diversified and advanced methodologies.

Findings from this study could inform the marketing of destinations/resorts/hotels to the family travel market. Results could also facilitate the design of family-friendly products at resorts and hotels. Mothers, as major decision makers, preferred to observe father–child(ren) bonding through travel (irrespective of fathers' extent of involvement in family decision making). Therefore, marketing materials featuring paternal figures and activities uniquely geared toward fathers and their children should appeal to Chinese families with young children. Such messages should be distributed frequently to permeate daily communication between couples and mothers. In addition, marketers should engage with potential consumers via social media, particularly by promoting themselves in relevant social groups, to influence mothers in family decision making. This study's findings indicate that father–child(ren) bonding could directly affect parents' marital satisfaction and family cohesion. Tourism products designed specifically to enhance such bonding will therefore likely be favored by Chinese families, especially mothers.

The study is not without limitations. Participants were relatively homogeneous in their financial status and educational backgrounds. The researchers could thus focus more on identity bundles and family communication while ignoring potential influences on decision making from income and education. However, this sample also presented a limitation in that participants' similarities might reflect similar family identities or similar communication approaches within the family. It would be worthwhile for future researchers to explore the influences of identity bundles and family communication with a more diverse participant group. It would be also interesting to perform a comparison study between families from

Eastern and Western cultures to identify pertinent differences in family identities through vacation decision making.

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Figure 1: Sample Drawings: Expectations of Trips



Figure 2: Sample Drawings: Travel Experiences

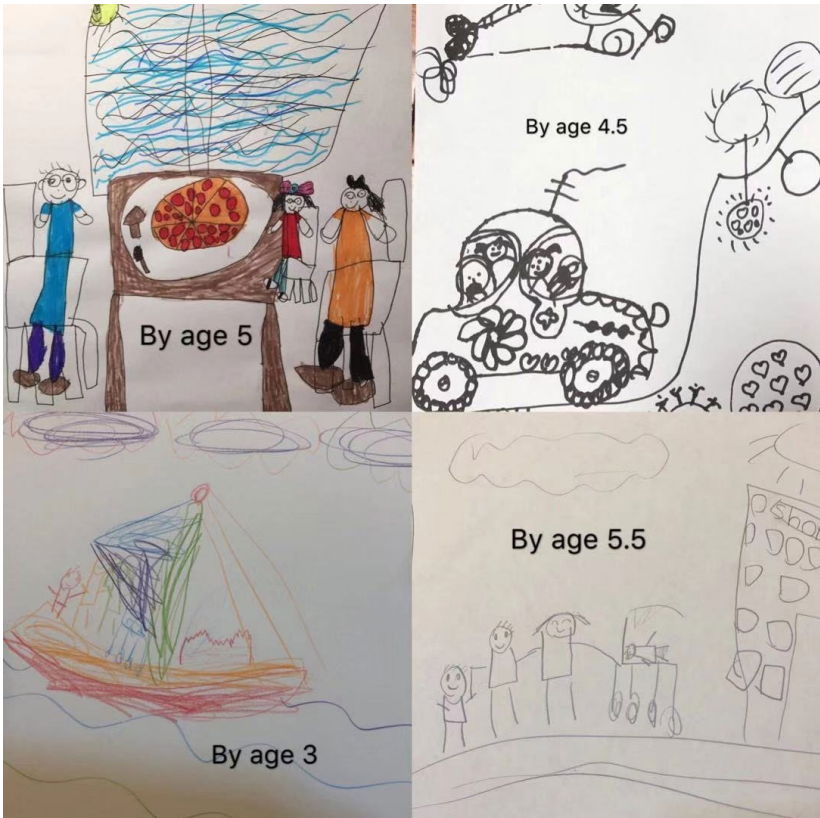


Figure 3: Family Identity Bundles

	Weak Identity Expression	—————>	Strong Identity Expression
Father identity	Passive follower; supporter	—————>	Risk controller; planner; safety guardian
Mother identity		—————>	Budget holder; caretaker; planner; implementer; relationship enhancer
Kid identity			Fun-seekers
Father-kid identity	Weak bonding	—————>	Fun-seeker; explorer
Mother-kid identity	Weak identity (kids' perspective)		Learners; explorers (mums' understanding)
Father-mother identity	Weak bonding	—————>	Romance seeker; fun-seeker
Family identity	Weak bonding	—————>	Explorers; learner; regular traveler; fun-seeker; artistic family

Figure 4: Framework of Family Identity Interaction in Holiday Decision Making

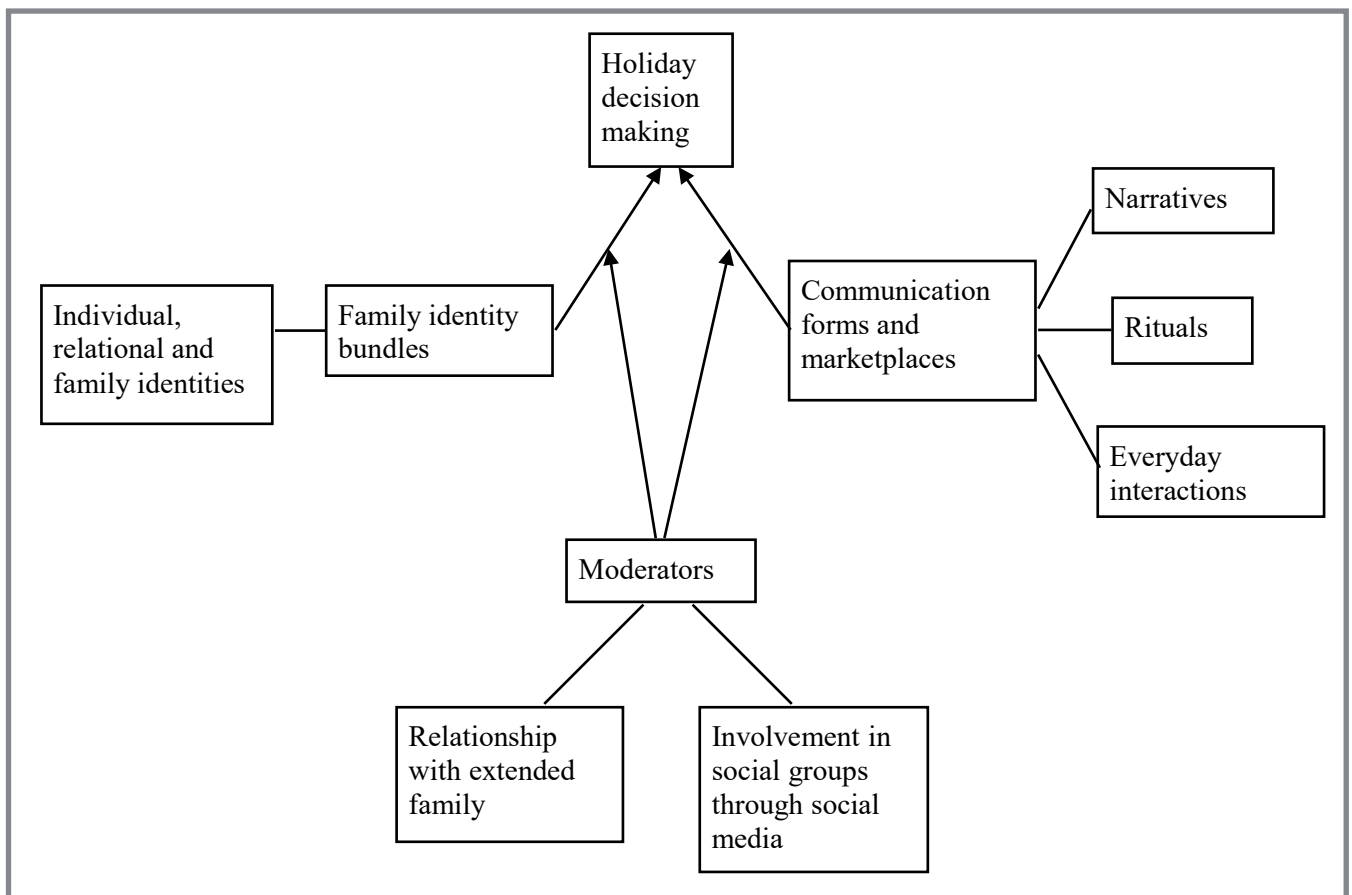


Table 1: Basic information of 28 families

Name	Age	Education	Job	Income	Family cycle
Husband 1	43	PhD	Lecturer	500,000 RMB	Two children, ages 2 and 5
Wife 1	42	PhD	Lecturer	500,000 RMB	
Husband 2	33	Degree	Sales	240,000 RMB	One child, age 5
Wife 2	33	Degree	Secretary	100,000 RMB	
Husband 3	33	Master	Architecture designer	Over 500,000 RMB	One child, age 5

Wife 3	28	Degree	Shop owner	300,000 RMB	
Husband 4	31	High school	Trade business owner	Over 1 million RMB	One child, age 5, and currently expecting
Wife 4	30	Degree	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 5	33	Degree	Construction company owner	Between 700,000–1 million RMB	One child, age 5
Wife 5	30	Degree	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 6	39	PhD	Lecturer	500,000 RMB	One child, age 5
Wife 6	38	PhD	Lecturer	500,000 RMB	
Husband 7	31	Degree	Business trade owner	1 million RMB	One child, age 4
Wife 7	29	Degree	Lecturer	100,000 RMB	
Husband 8	34	Degree	Construction worker	60,000 RMB	One child, age 6
Wife 8	33	Degree	Online business owner	100,000 RMB	
Husband 9	32	Degree	Trade	300,000 RMB	One child, age 5
Wife 9	32	Degree	Trade	500,000–1 million RMB	
Husband 10	38	PhD	Lecturer	500,000 RMB	Two children, ages 4 and 7
Wife 10	37	Degree	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 11	33	Degree	Company office person	100,000 RMB	One child, age 4
Wife 11	34	Degree	Office worker	100,000 RMB	
Husband 12	31	Degree	Factory worker	100,000 RMB	One child, age 3
Wife 12	30	Degree	Office worker	Below 100,000 RMB	
Husband 13	34	Vocational school	Trade	100,000 RMB	One child, age 5
Wife 13	32	Degree	Insurance	300,000 RMB	
Husband 14	31	Degree	Trade	60,000 RMB	One child, age 2
Wife 14	30	Degree	Trade	60,000 RMB	

Husband 15	32	Degree	Journalist	150,000 RMB	One child, age 4
Wife 15	32	Degree	Journalist	200,000 RMB	
Husband 16	35	Degree	Trade	Over 1 million RMB	One child, age 4
Wife 16	30	Degree	Office worker	100,000 RMB	
Husband 17	38	Master	International trade	Over 1 million RMB	One child, age 5
Wife 17	38	Degree	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 18	41	PhD	Lecturer	500,000 RMB	One child, age 6
Wife 18	37	Master	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 19	38	Master	Industrial designer	Over 1 million RMB	Twins, age 6
Wife 19	38	Degree	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 20	36	Master	Shop owner	Over 1 million RMB	One child, age 5
Wife 20	36	Master	Landscape designer	300,000 RMB	
Husband 21	38	MBA	Computer game design company owner	Over 1 million RMB	One child, age 2
Wife 21	30	Master	lawyer	600,000 RMB	
Husband 22	33	Degree	Trade	Over 1 million RMB	Two children, ages 3 and 6
Wife 22	33	Master	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 23	31	Degree	Trade	Over 1 million RMB	One child, age 3
Wife 23	29	Degree	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 24	38	Degree	Factory owner	Over 1 million RMB	Two children, ages 1 and 4
Wife 24	38	Degree	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 25	38	Degree	Army	200,000 RMB	One child, age 5
Wife 25	37	Master	Administrator	400,000 RMB	

Husband 26	34	Degree	Army	200,000 RMB	One child, age 5
Wife 26	32	Degree	School teacher	150,000 RMB	
Husband 27	32	Degree	Trade	200,000 RMB	One child, age 3
Wife 27	28	Degree	Housewife	N/A	
Husband 28	41	Degree	Trading manager	200,000 RMB	Two children, ages 2 and 4
Wife 28	32	Degree	Journalist	150,000 RMB	

