

Marketing Innovations for Sustainable Destinations

12 The Concept of Travel Horizon Revisited: Toward More Relevance of Past Travel Experience

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Leisure Studies**

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Introduction

The fact that prior knowledge is a key issue in consumer decision making has long been recognized in the literature (e.g. Hirschman and Wallendorf, 1982). Whereas some studies conceptualized prior knowledge as a unidimensional construct (Snepenger et al., 1990), others identify past experience, expertise and familiarity as dimensions of prior knowledge (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Gursoy and McCleary, 2004b, 2004a; Kerstetter and Cho, 2004). In the tourism context, familiarity has generally been conceptualized as destination-related experiences (i.e. the number of times individuals previously visited a destination) (Baloglu, 2001). Familiarity thus encompasses behavioural aspects. Expertise, however, is cognitively based and represents accumulated skills that enable information acquisition and processing (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). Due to more sophisticated cognitive structures experts can deal with complex problems more easily than novices can (Kerstetter and Cho, 2004). Past experience refers to an individual's accumulated travel experience with different destinations and activities. Past experience is thus one of the crucial determinants of travellers' decision-making (Snepenger et al., 1990).

More than 10 years ago, Oppermann (1998) stated that studies investigating travel experience and its influence on destination choice as well as studies dealing with travel patterns were almost absent in tourism research. He based his study on Schmidhauser's (1976) conceptualization of travel horizon defined as the maximum achieved distance zone in the past. For instance, if an individual has a high travel horizon this indicates that she or he has travelled far and has been exposed to a different country or culture. Schmidhauser and Oppermann discussed the phenomenon of cumulative travel experience under the headline of travel and destination horizon incorporating the issue of distance: particularly geographic and cultural aspects thereof. The basic premise was that individuals follow an expanding travel/destination horizon in the course of their lives.

Schmidhauser used four categories of travel horizon for Swiss residents: domestic, neighbouring countries, other Europe, and outside Europe. As Oppermann (1998) discussed in his study, these categories are a mixture of geographic and cultural distance factors. In contrast, he distinguished six different destination zones for New Zealand (NZ): same NZ island, respective other NZ island, Australia, Pacific Islands, Europe, and other countries. This categorization of destination zones is, again, to a large degree based on

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