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Authors: Arch Woodside, Roberta MacDonald, International Conference on Decision Making Processes and Preference Changes of Tourists: Intertemporal and Intercountry Perspectives (1993: University of Innsbruck)

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/3020

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Published in Spoilt for choice, pp. 31-59

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GENERAL SYSTEM FRAMEWORK OF CUSTOMER CHOICE PROCESSES OF TOURISM SERVICES

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Abstract

Given that leisure, travel destination choices and choices of other tourism-related services are interdependent in varying degrees, a gestalt research approach is necessary to learn the major causal paths, networks of relationships, among the tourism-related choice subsystems. We describe a general systems framework of how leisure visitors may make choices. Eight leisure traveler choice subsystems are identified: destinations, accommodations, activities, visiting attractions, travel modes/routes, eating options, destination areas and routes, and self-gifts and other durable purchases. From the framework, we develop propositions suitable for empirical testing. An intensive, long-interview, research method for examining the propositions is described. An empirical application of the method is illustrated on a sample of visitors to an maritime Canadian Province. Compared to linear models, we conclude that the proposed general systems framework is a rich, contextual foundation for deeper knowledge and insights of why and how specific traveler-related decisions and behaviors occur. Such knowledge and insight is useful for both theory-building and travel industry-related strategy. Empirical applications of the framework are likely to help strategists in specific travel-related industries, for example, marketers in the airline, restaurant, attraction, gifts-crafts-arts, car rental, and sports and other activities industries.
example, Michie (1986) and van Raaij (1986) propose that travelers construct their preferences for alternative destinations from their awareness and affective associations toward a consideration set of destinations. Woodside and Lyonski (1989) propose a path model of direct and indirect relationships leading to destination choice.

While useful, such models fail to capture the rich interactions of decisions and behaviors of the travel party and the destination environment experienced by the travel party. Assuming that many, important-to-the-traveler, trip experiences and purchases are not planned before the start of the trip, situational influences on what the traveler experiences and what s/he buys with her time and money need to be learned. We propose that a Lewinian view (Lewin 1936, 1951; Belk 1975; Woodside and Bearden 1978) is needed to learn the interaction effects of the person and destination situations: we need to capture time dimensions in the "life spaces" experienced by travelers while moving toward, while in, and while leaving their destinations. To gain such a view, to learn why experiences occur, and to learn how multiple-choices relate to each other that include but go beyond destination choices, we likely need thick descriptions about what, when, where, how, who did what and with what outcomes in the traveler's own language and cultural interpretations.

Clearly, overnight travel to new or previously experienced destinations activates a series of choice-sets. Eight major sets of choices are summarized in Figure 1. A substantial number of hypothesized relationships among the eight choice-sets are included in Figure 1; additional relationships may be considered for specific empirical studies, for example, travel in search of folk-art or antique furniture may trigger destination choices (linking box 11 to box 4, an arrow showing this link is not included in Figure 1). The intent of the double-headed arrows in Figure 1 is identify an initial set of primary hypotheses for empirical examination.

The proposed general system framework may be viewed as a rudimentary model for building expert systems of travel decisions (see Mazanec, undated) or as an initial policy map of influences (see Hall 1978, 1983), or as a first-step to causal mapping (see Huff 1990).
FIGURE 1

GENERAL SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK OF CUSTOMER CHOICE DECISIONS OF TOURISM SERVICES
As described in Figure 1, four principal start nodes may activate the eight choice-sets. The following general propositions relate to relationships a, b, c, and w depicted in Figure 1.

**P1:** (arrow a) Both leisure and business travel are influenced strongly by levels of income and education, and the value systems of household members. Discretionary travel, in general is an activity participated-in particularly by upscale households with print versus broadcast media orientations (see Woodside, Cook, and Mindak 1987).

**P2:** (arrow b) Family, friends, and group influence strongly affects the activation of choice sets and the selection of particular options in the choice sets.
For many destination areas, visiting family members is a sizable visitor segment for most travel destinations; friends and family members communicate about their travel experiences, and often make and follow recommendations of others. Such influence includes recommendations regarding specific accommodations to stay at, and not stay at; and restaurant, activity and attraction recommendations.

**P3:** (arrow c) For some travelers, marketing influences in the form of (1) travel agent recommendations, (2) scheduled media advertising, (3) direct mail, especially visitors information guides, and (4) travel shows have substantial influences on activating traveler choice sets and the selection of specific options.
While for most travelers, the effect sizes of marketing variables (box 3) on travel choices are smaller than the effects of boxes 1 and 2, the view more useful to adopt in building causal maps is to recognize that specific customer-types occur in boxes 1 and 2 that permit marketing influences to be effective, for example, the upper-income couple subscribing to *National Geographic* magazine and having a friend who recently visited Austria will be more sensitive to responding to offers for free literature on travel to Austria, than a lower-income household not subscribing to any publications.

**P4:** (arrow w) Intentions+ toward returning to a destination visited previously affect traveler decision-choices.
Regarding destination choices, some travel segments report, "the reason we come here is because we always come here, we are familiar with the place, this is where we come to relax," while other travel parties report, the reason we are not going there is because we've been there, we've seen it, we've done [destination's name]." Learning the share of travelers holding each of these views, as well as the causes for these beliefs, is an important research objective for destination marketing. The plus sign with intentions+ is to differentiate prior behavior-based intentions+ from intentions formed by first-time visitors (see intentions in Box 15; Howard and Sheth 1969).
P5: (arrow x) Travelers search and use of information have dramatic impacts on their travel choices: destination visitors who are high information users participate in more activities, spend more money per day in the destination area, have more positive evaluations about their experiences, and have higher intentions compared to low information users and nonusers (see Woodside, MacDonald, and Trappey 1994). Note that arrow x is bi-directional because travel-related choices also affect search and use of information. In fact, the impacts of information search and use of information by visitors while in the destination area is an important topic under-researched in the field of leisure travel. For example, when Province and State government travel agencies provide extensive visitors' information guides (VIGs), how do travelers use these guides regarding the eight choice issues in Figure 1? What do travelers attend to in messages in the VIG's? How to they go about comparing and evaluating competitive offerings written-up in VIG's on specific pages in the guides? Given the substantial use of VIG's by both first-time and repeat leisure visitors (see Woodside et al. 1994), the answers to these, and related questions, have important theoretical and strategy implications.

P6: (arrow d) Mode/route choices may cause destination choices, and vice versa. For example, a planned trip to a primary destination near another destination the traveler is aware of may cause the traveler to add the second destination to his/her trip. In travel and tourism research we do not have a deep understanding of the impact of multiple-destination trips on visiting any one destination included in the trip. For example, in Canada a leisure trip to New Brunswick (a maritime Province) by an Ontario resident may lead to visit to Prince Edward Island (another maritime and Canada's smallest Province) after the traveler reaches New Brunswick "because its close to New Brunswick and I haven't seen it before." Such decision processes have important implications for designing promotional strategies, for example, setting information displays and opening visitor centers in locations in New Brunswick to attract visitors to P.E.I.

P7,8: (arrows e and p) For some important leisure traveler segments, mode/route choices often cause activity choices and eating choices, and vice versa. An axiom to this proposition concerns mode: airline visitors from the same origin have patterns of destination activities different from car versus tour-bus visitors from the same origin. A change in the route or mode-of-travel has important impacts beyond the immediate impact on airline, bus, and ferry revenues.

P9-13: (arrows i, l, m, n, q) For some important traveler segments, local destination-area choices and travel routes in the destination area have bidirectional influences on activity choices, eating choices, self-gifts and other durable purchases, attractions-visited choices, and accommodations choices.
The multiple influences of box 9 in the general framework indicates the substantial impact situational influences on the visitors experiences, purchases, and use of time. Certainly some planned-before-traveling attraction choices affect destination area routes, but also additional attractions are visited because of the route and destination area choices selected that were not pre-planned. Mistakes are made often by tourism strategists related to building attractions in destination areas that are unable to draw the necessary visitor traffic to sustain their enterprises. Most likely the impacts of destination area choices and local routes taken by travelers (box 9) on the other seven major choice decision-areas are receiving the least attention by travel researchers among the relationships depicted in Figure 1.

A finding continually surprising to some operators of tourist attractions (e.g., clothing stores and small restaurants) is the impact of their storefront road-signs in influencing visits to their attractions; yet, the revenue generated from such visits is often the difference between an annual profit or loss. Given the relative impacts of just-driving-by-and-saw-the-sign and other information sources can be learned by asking visitors how they first learned about the store or attraction, such data should be collected as an integral part of the greeting ritual in many stores and attractions. The bi-directional relationship of importance for some destinations between boxes 4 and 9 is shown by arrow o in Figure 1. This two-way relationship, for example, may start with the desire for scenic road-touring causing travelers to form a consideration set of destinations with particularly attractive, scenic drives (e.g., the government creation of the Cabot Trail causing visit-consideration to Nova Scotia); or the desire to visit the area of the world that includes Nova Scotia may cause learning about the Cabot Trail.

The marketing strategy of creating scenic roads and map designations that highlight unique points of interest often influence destination choice directly. For some destination areas that have no major attractions compared to other locations of the general destination being visited, traveling a scenic route may become the prime reason for adding-on the area as a place for visit. For example, the dominating reason travelers have for visiting the western portion of P.E.I. (Prince County, one of the three counties of P.E.I.), Canada, is to drive the "Lady Slipper Scenic Drive." Driving the route causes attraction choices, eating choices, gift-buying, activity choices, and accommodation choices.

Based on research findings from applications of the long interview, the facts-of-life-and-death for tourism strategists working for West Prince include: (1) tourism is a major industry for the region, (2) relatively few P.E.I. tourists visit West Prince, (3) tourists who do visit rarely return for a second area visit, (4) the most effective marketing tool found to gain customers and revenues for West Prince is promoting the unique, scenic tour of the county to first-time P.E.I. visitors.

Thus, using the general systems framework as a guide for data collection, and the results from several long interviews of visitors to West Prince, provide a vision and
objectives for the marketing strategy for the local West Prince destination area. Considering issues relating destination area choices and routes to other choice decisions helps increase understanding of the complexity, and spur-of-the-moment responses, in travelers' decisions.

P14-16: (arrows f, h, z) Substantial bi-directional influences occur between destination choices with accommodations choices, attraction choices, and activity choices, for some important leisure traveler segments. For example, for arrow f, the desire to stay overnight in a castle built in the 1500's may trigger a destination choice of Maastricht, the Netherlands; or, the desire to visit Maastricht may trigger an overnight stay in a nearby castle. The decision to visit Disney theme park may trigger the decision to visit Paris, or more likely, Orlando (arrow h); for some travelers, the decision to visit Orlando by trigger a visit to Disney World. An example of the dynamics related to arrow z: the desire to water-ski as an activity choice may trigger the destination choice of P.E.I. among Ontario residents in Canada for whom the beaches and warm waters of P.E.I. first-come-to-mind; or, the choice of P.E.I. as a destination may trigger water-skiing as an activity.

For the tourism researcher and the tourism strategist, the general systems issues that need to be examined include learning the principal directions of influences in the patterns of choices made by different leisure traveler segments, as well as learning the specific influence motivators causing visits to specific tourism enterprises.

P17-19: (arrows i, j, and n) For some important leisure traveler segments, accommodation choices, attraction choices and destination area choices substantially affect one another. For example, for one leisure travel party, beaches as a primary attraction may lead to destination area choices that include the most inviting beaches and to accommodations nearby the beaches. In this hypothetical case, beaches as an attraction (box 9) is the triggering cue leading to destination choices (box 9) and accommodation choices (box 5). If this pattern dominates for a given destination among a major visitor segment, then this visitor-choice behavior may become the most effective positioning strategy for the marketer (for a detailed development of these points applied to Province of Nova Scotia, Canada, see Woodside 1982).

P20-21: (arrows l and r) For some important leisure traveler segments, self-gifts and other durable purchase, destination area choices/routes, and eating choices substantially affect one another. Learning the synergistic effects among boxes 9, 10, and 11 can be very helpful in designing an effective marketing strategy. For example, the Dunes Studio Gallery is an upscale studio selling expensive arts and crafts (box 11) on P.E.I. that is
located near the most popular beach destination (box 9) on the most used route (Route 15) between P.E.I.'s capital city, Charlottetown, and the prime beaches (route, box 9). The Dunes Studio Gallery is also a fine-dining restaurant (box 10). Most of the revenues from this enterprise is generated from fine-dining. This brief case is intended as an illustration of one choice-area triggers others; many travelers first learn of the Dunes by traveling by its location on Route 15. The marketing strategist creating the Dunes took care to have it noticed: the complex is architecturally striking.

Leisure travelers evaluate the quality of many of their choice experiences (arrow s connecting the 8 choices to box 12); choice experiences influence the leisure traveler's overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the total trip/visit experience (arrow t connecting the choice experiences with box 13). The quality perceived of each choice experience and the individual service quality acts, and responses by the visitor, included in each choice experience may be evaluated by the leisure traveler.

Woodside, Frey, and Daly (1989) have proposed a multiple-step model relating customer perceptions of service encounters in forming their overall judgment of service quality of the service experience, and overall satisfaction, and finally behavioral intention to use the service again. This model is summarized as Figure 2; we propose the model is applicable for understanding outcomes to the leisure traveler's judgements.

The traveler encounters (experiences) several services each day related to one or more of the eight choice experiences shown in Figure 1. Using script theory (see Abelson 1976; Solomon Surpreant, Czepiel and Gutman 1985;) each choice experience encountered can be examined by specific scenes in specific acts. Thus, for experiencing an overnight stay, several scenes and acts occur: for example, telephoning for a reservation, driving to the accommodation, checking-in, walking to the room, unpacking and hanging clothes, using the bathroom, watching tv, using the mini-bar, sleeping, using the restaurant, buying a newspaper, checking-out. Each of these acts represent potential epiphanies, "moments-of-truth," that may cause judgements by the traveler of high versus low quality: unusual scenes (i.e., events and talk unexpected by the traveler in the drama) may be cause for judgements of high/low quality of the particular choice experience (e.g., service quality act C in Figure 2).

Such quality judgments affect the traveler's overall evaluation of satisfaction with the service quality of Act C. While service quality perception by the customer is a special form of belief; satisfaction-with-the-act is a special-type of attitude that follows from important or unusual experiences.

For arrow t: sometimes travelers may judge a particular trip/visit to be very satisfying, or be a very dissatisfying experience, but can point to no single quality evaluation related to any choice experiences. One example might be the following
response to a question about trip/visit dis/satisfaction, "The trip and visit to destination X was great one for me, nothing much happened, and the weather was okay, and I just relaxed."

![Diagram of Service Encounters and Customer Satisfaction](image)

**FIGURE 2**

**GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF CUSTOMER EVALUATION, SATISFACTION, AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTION OF SERVICE EVENTS, ENCOUNTERS, AND PROVIDERS**

P24-25: (arrows u and v) Evaluations quality of experiences affect intentions+ through dis/satisfaction.
Intentions are a special form of belief held, in this case, by the traveler concerning the likelihood of his/her returning destination X within some specific time period on a leisure trip. While quality evaluations might be modelled to affect intentions directly, including satisfaction as an intervening variable likely increases variance explained in intentions. For an application of this model to another service category, overnight hospital stays and medical service, see Woodside et al. (1989).

Research Method

To examine the 25 propositions and the usefulness of the general systems framework, we developed a 22-page, open-ended, questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested on four travelers visiting P.E.I. in the summer months 1993. The instrument was revised based on the pretest results; pre-tested a second time; and revised a final time. Forty minutes to one-hour interviews were required to complete the final survey form.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered in face-to-face interviews in July and August 1993 with 84 leisure travel parties visiting P.E.I. These two months include more than 70 percent of leisure traveler visits to P.E.I. Close to 98 percent of all leisure travelers visiting P.E.I. arrive by ferry and airlines; the remainder arrive by cruise ships. Data for the study only includes visitors arriving road vehicles and airlines.

Three data collection methods were used: exit interviews were held at the two ferry terminals on the island and at the main airport on the island (near Charlottetown). Also, data were collected at 17 locations/enterprises visited by leisure travelers in the Charlottetown metropolitan area.

A total of 26 trained interviewers were used to collect the data. Four interviews each made 7 to 12 completed interviews (43 total interviews); for these 43 interviews, questions and responses were audio tape-recorded to complement written answers. The interviewers made written records of most responses, in a few instances, the respondents wrote down a few answers to some of the questions. Each interviewer wore a button identifying him/herself as a member of the University of Prince Edward Island Visitor Research Program. Each respondent was provided with a gift for completing the interview (a University of P.E.I. T-shirt).

Prince Edward Island and Its Leisure Visitors

P.E.I. is the smallest province in Canada, both in population and geographic size. Figure 3 is a map of P.E.I. showing how it relates to two other Canadian provinces: Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Charlottetown is the Provincial Capital; the city
is a port city located in the south central region. P.E.I. National Park is located on the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the north central region of the Island. Close to 90 percent of first-time leisure visitors visit Charlottetown and the National Park during their stays on P.E.I.
The setting for Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, and related teenage fiction book series, is the village of Cavendish, a crossroads location near the National Park. Most Japanese visitors visit "The Land of Anne," a tourism-designated region covering one-sixth of the Island (the north-central region). This Japanese market segment is small in numbers but high in average revenues per party-visits for the Island.

The principal market segments for P.E.I. include: (1) visitors from the two large nearby Provinces (New Brunswick and Nova Scotia), (2) Ontario Province visitors, (3) Quebec Province visitors, (4) U.S. New England visitors, (5) U.S. mid-Atlantic states visitors, (6) other U.S. state visitors, (7) other Canadian province visitors, Japanese visitors, (8) and European visitors. The results of the study indicate that the choice experiences and outcomes of leisure travelers do differ by the origins of visitors. The majority of leisure visitors to the Island come from the first five segments listed. The Ontario visitor market is the single largest visitor origin market, but each of the eight segments are recognized by the P.E.I. Tourism Marketing Council as distinct customer groups.

**Data Analyses**

Long narrative summaries were written of responses in each of the interviews. To examine the dimensions and taxonomies of each of the eight choice experiences, one of the five cognitive mapping procedures described by Huff (1990) was used: maps that show dimensions of categories and hierarchies among concepts (see Huff 1990, pp. 21-27). A map-shell of the eight decision choice areas related to four issues was used to construct these category maps; the four issues include: (1) consideration set and choices; (2) motives, (3) information search and use; and (4) outcomes of the choice experience. Exhibits 1 through 5 are examples completed map-shells for five visiting parties.

**A few Results**

The data permit a micro-analysis of the choice experiences of trip and destination experiences for each leisure travel party. The Appendix is an example narrative summary of one of interviews. Exhibit 1 is a category-map summary of the narrative summary in Appendix. Exhibits 2 through 5 are summary category-maps for other visitor parties interviewed for the study.
Exhibit 1: Summary of husband, wife, and child's 14-year-old daughter's 3-night trip to PEI. Home is Ontario, husband is attorney, annual income $125,000. Total expenditures on PEI equalled $1,050. Visitor Segment: Secondary-Destination, Medium-Distant Domestic Family Touring Market.

Decision Area
- Destinations
- Route/Mode to and in PEI
- Accommodations during PEI stay
- Activities in PEI
- PEI regions visited
- Attractions visited including restaurants
- Gifts and purchases leaving PEI with

Consideration set and choices
- New Brunswick and PEI versus Cape Breton
- Visit father in N.B., show wife PEI or C.B.; Cavendish attractions
- Borden ferry, Pathfinder (private vehicle)
- Cavendish and Charlottetown motels; choice Charlottetown
- Amusement Park, Wax Museum, King Tuts, tour West Prince
- Cavendish, West Prince, Charlottetown, Highway 1
- Cavendish family, children attractions, all meals eaten out, Dunes Restaurant
- $30 doll for daughter, nothing else

Motives
- Visit father in N.B., show wife PEI or C.B.; Cavendish attractions
- "Freedom to go where and when I want"
- Cavendish has attractions for daughter but no vacancies, want "****"
- Fun for daughter, tour of West Prince for H&W for scenery
- Reach attractions and to tour West Prince
- Fun for daughter, eating out most convenient
- She asked for it

Information Search and Use
- Read V.I.G. in N.B.; learned about attractions in Cavendish for daughter
- Map "I look at the map and go"
- Extensive use of V.I.G. Only 3-star motels are acceptable to husband
- Read about attractions in V.I.G.
- Toured coastline road in West Prince on map
- V.I.G. for attractions and Dunes
- None

Outcomes
- As expected for destination visit, enjoyed unique scenery
- Route and mode experiences as expected
- Worse than expected, "dated" room
- As expected; "We may buy property on the Island"
- As expected, daughter likes all such attractions everywhere
- As expected, meals okay but not praised
- Daughter pleased
Exhibit 2 Summary of husband, wife, and three children's visit (2 nights) to PEI, home is New Brunswick, annual family income about $85,000. Total expenditures on PEI were less than $50. Visitor Segment Primary Destination Near Domestic. VER Sponges.
Exhibit 4 Summary of a couple, Censor, from New Jersey, Income Range: $75,000 - $100,000, stayed two nights in Charlottetown, Expenditures about $500 mostly accommodations, first time visitors, July 29, 1993, Interview at Wood Islands, Visitor Segment: Medium Distant, Foreign, Touring, Senior Market

**Decision Area**
- Destinations
- Route/mode to and in PEI
- Accommodations during PEI stay

**Consideration set and choices**
- Experiences
  - Fly or drive; fly and rent; car chosen because of limited time available
  - Scenic tours, areas that seemed interesting and nearby
- Motives
  - Explore new culture
  - Relax
  - See Culture
  - Relax
- Information Search and Use
  - Travel agent, good tourism guides
  - A friend
  - AAA booklet
  - Used books on trip, not to plan
- Outcomes
  - Enjoyed "Beautiful countryside"
  - Not likely to return in 1994/95

**Activities in PEI**
- Touring
  - Walking in town bus tour
  - Small cafe dining
- See culture
  - Relax
  - Learn about area

**Attractions visited including restaurants**
- Craft stores:
  - Dune, Gallery
  - Green Gables
  - Island Preserves
  - Gonda Cheese Lady
- Southeast Kings (Montague to Chitown)
- National Park Chitown
- Tourism Experience
  - Culture
  - Observation nature
  - Sea green Gables

**PEI regions visited**
- Craft stores
- Southeast Kings
- National Park

**Accommodations**
- CP Hotel, Rodd, Best Western, Inn On Hill (all in Chitown)
- CP chosen as preferred
- Got Inn themselves for 1 night
- Quality high
- Central locale for walking & touring

**Route/mode to and in PEI**
- Fly or drive; fly and rent a car
- Focused on limited time available

**Activities**
- Walking in town
- Bus tour
- Small cafe dining

**Attractions**
- Craft stores
- Dune, Gallery
- Green Gables
- Island Preserves
- Gonda Cheese Lady

**Unplanned**
- Gifts for family
- Unplanned, except to buy gift, various craft shops, chose sweaters at gallery

**Outcomes**
- Enjoyed
- Satisfied
- As expected, satisfied and have no changes to suggest
- Enjoyed
- Beautiful scenery only the wait at ferry seemed negative
- Sweaters were beautiful, hand-made & a value
- Unplanned, did see VIG info on places

**Use**
- Little preplanning
- Little planning
- Little
- Little

**Decision Area**
- Destinations: PEI major destination plus (secondary) parts of NS, NB and Quebec. No other choices were considered. These are part of a round trip.
- Route/mode to and in P.E.I.:
  - Direct and convenient car route from Ottawa to PEI
  - Direct route to all destinations chosen.

**Consideration, set and choices**
- PEI major destination plus (secondary) parts of NS, NB and Quebec. No other choices were considered. These are part of a round trip.
- To show the family Anne of Green Gables, other tour a new area for culture, nature and a family holiday.
- To visit the Maritimes in about 7 days and tour more in Que Economical to drive.

**Motives**
- Active search from provinces, travel agent and CAA-office plus colleagues. Used VIG on PEI - Use to plan trip.
- Same; used CAA maps.
- Used VIG on Island for data.

**Information Search and Use**
- Enjoyed scenery on PEI. Somewhat disappointed in Cavendish, but may be due to poor weather.
- As expected, waiting time at W.I. ferry "awful."
- "Fresh clean air, kind people, and green foliage everywhere."

**Outcomes**
- As expected, waiting time at W.I. ferry "awful."
- Very satisfied with B & W.
- As expected, satisfied in general.

**Activities in PEI**
- Visiting Cavendish was priority and picture taking there. Tour Charlottetown Visits beaches.
- See green Gables - experience culture.
- See nature on drive.
- To show family G.G.

**PEI regions visited**
- Charlottetown
- Cavendish
- W.I. ferry

**Attractions visited including restaurants**
- Green Gables
- Wax museum
- Island Preserves
- Fisherman's Wharf
- Comment Room
- Golden Walk
- Charlottetown stores

**Route/mode to and in PEI**
- Direct route to all destinations chosen.
- To visit the Maritimes in about 7 days and tour more in Que Economical to drive.
- Value for dollar; central location.

**Economical to drive**
- Same

**As expected.**
- Satisfied in general.

**Satisfied and believe gifts will be liked.**
- As expected except Cavendish. Since weather was poor, they couldn't do much.
- Restaurants good.

**Gifts and purchases leaving PEI with**
- Souveniers and liked products.
- Unplanned Gifts for friends and selves ($70).
- Small items (jams, T-shirts).
Understanding of the rich mosaics of spreading activations among the choice experiences is gained by examining the completed category-maps. However, the specific heuristics used in making decisions are not included in these maps. Thick descriptions that document the dynamics in the system and the causal reasoning employed by the travel party are needed. Generalizations can be reached by categorizing the decisions and behaviors of travel parties starting from different subsystem perspectives, for example, beginning with visitors to West Prince who used the V.I.G. while traveling in West Prince. Thus, in this manner the general systems framework may be useful as an inductive approach to theory construction of leisure travel decisions-behaviors.

Our purpose here is only to describe a useful research approach and illustrate some results applicable to the general system framework. We plan a monograph-length report of the detailed examination from the total sample of 84 traveler parties. However, let us consider a few findings from each of the five travel parties shown in the exhibits.

**P.E.I. as an Add-On Destination: the Young Family from Ontario**

From the Appendix and Exhibit 1 we learn that the primary triggers causing the visit to P.E.I. included the husband's decision to visit his father living in a near-by Province; for this trip, P.E.I. had to beat-out a competing destination on the family's short-list of destination choices. The family made use of the P.E.I. to help them make the final choice between P.E.I. and Nova Scotia. Support can be found for many of the propositions in the general systems framework, for example, local route travelled affected their visit to specific attractions.

**Visiting Family in P.E.I.: Young Family on a Very Low Cost Trip**

Note in Exhibit 2 that less than $50.00 was spent in P.E.I. on this trip; the family stayed at accommodations owned by a relative, ate the relative's food, and mainly visited the near-by beach. The impact of demographic factors (box 1 in Figure 1) is a strong influence on destination choice: visit relatives; the impact of marketing influence (box 3) occurs slightly: the visiting family visits a near-by diary but buys nothing.

**Foreign Seniors Visiting from New York**

The details in Exhibit 3 illustrate the profound impact the island's V.I.G. had on making decisions to visit local attractions. Even though these seniors had visiting P.E.I. before, the V.I.G. was used extensively. They made extensive use of a professional travel firm (TIC) to help plan details of their trip. For this travel party, destination choice preceded most other travel subsystem choices.

**Foreign, Middle-Aged Couple, No Children from New Jersey**

Note in Exhibit 4 under Destinations that the couple was first stimulated by an article in newspaper to visit P.E.I. Thus, the importance of marketing activities
(publicity) was a major triggering event for the trip. The couple used the V.I.G. during their visit to select P.E.I. regions to visit. Supporting P20-21 gift buying followed from areas visited.

**Couple from Japan Living in Ontario**

In Exhibit 5 *Anne of Green Gables* is mentioned for the first time (among the five travel parties described here). Much detailed planning occurred prior to the start of the trip. Many small gift items were purchased. This case study illustrates the cultural and educational impact represented by *Anne of Green Gables* on overseas visitors decision to come to P.E.I., and specifically to visit Cavendish (Anne's hometown in the novel). Note that specific attributes are uncovered and reported in Exhibit 5 of why-how the family selected their accommodation choice: pool, central island location, and good value for the dollar.

**Summary**

We have proposed a general systems framework as a theoretical grounding for examining the categories and dynamics of leisure traveler choices, their causes, and outcomes. The spreading activation of causes and effects among choices is the global proposition emphasized in the framework. Most research reports on leisure travel decisions and behavior do not include theory or empirical results on how choices-experiences in one travel-visit category affect choices-experiences in other travel-visit categories. Given that much leisure travel-visits are self-designed on-the-spot (during the unfolding drama of the travel-visit), we need to build theory and collect data that captures the real-life designs--maps--of travel/visits.

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Appendix

Interview Responses for a Three-Person Family
Traveling From Ontario, 3-Night P.E.I. Visit

Synopsis

This interview report includes responses by a young family, the Dasti family, visiting PEI for pleasure for 3 nights in mid-July 1993. The family includes a husband, wife, and 4-year old daughter. Relaxing and escaping from daily concerns was the principal motive for the trip. A trip through Cape Breton was the competing activity considered and rejected. A major portion of visiting time was spent by the Dasti family in attending private attractions in the Cavendish area of the Island. Total expenditures on PEI during the visit was $1,050. PEI criticism: accommodations were "dated" at several motels on the island. The family was a heavy user of the PEI Visitors' Information Guide during their visit. When asked about intentions of near term return visits, Mr. Dasti reported that the family is very unlikely to return to PEI in 1994 or 1995.

Description of the Family Visiting PEI and Interview Site/Day

Demographics
The travel party interviewed included Harvey Dasti (HD), his wife, and 4-year old daughter. HD answered all the questions. HD and his wife are both in their 30s. Both have post-graduate, masters-level, formal educations. HD is a self-employed attorney. The family's annual income before taxes is between $100,000 and $150,000. They live in Sudbury, Ontario.

Interview Site/Day
The interview was completed at the Borden Ferry Terminal as the family and Pathfinder were waiting in-line to exit PEI. The interview occurred between 11:30 am to 12:20 pm. The interview was completed while both interviewer and interviewee sat on a park bench 30 meters from the Pathfinder and HD's wife and daughter. The wife and daughter were inside the Pathfinder through the interview. The sky was sunny and the temperature was 21 C during the interview.

Trip Decisions for the Total Trip
This trip that included PEI for HD and family was planned to include 22 nights away from their Ontario home. Their plan included an initial destination visit of a one-week stay in New Brunswick. HD's father lives in New Brunswick and the family stayed at the father's home for 7 nights. PEI was the family's next destination; they planned and stayed on PEI for 3 nights. They made plans on
visiting PEI during the first two days of their visit to New Brunswick. **Marketing Management Implication (MMI):** such travel parties likely represent an important target market of maritime PEI visitors; planning time before the visit is very brief; thus, advertising media schedules should include in-season advertising placements and messages to reach this market.

**Planning Horizon**
HD reported little planning time before making the trip to PEI. However, the trip to visit his father in New Brunswick was made several months prior to the July visit to New Brunswick. Note that the PEI visit was an add-on, somewhat unplanned visit for the Dasti family. They almost went to Cape Breton instead of PEI in July. **MMI:** promoting add-on destinations within destinations in the Atlantic Maritime Provinces may be a viable marketing strategy. Note that visiting PEI complements New Brunswick, while Cape Breton competes with PEI for this family's pleasure travel expenditures.

**Assistance by Travel Professionals**
The Dastis did not contact or use professional help in planning or arranging any portion of their trip or accommodations. The family would likely have benefitted from such help: HD phoned several accommodations in the Cavendish area but was informed no vacancies were available. Thus, the family stayed in the Charlottetown area each night on PEI.

**Requesting Information from Travel Offices Before Visiting**
HD and family did not at a Visitor's Information Center and picked-up a copy of the VIG (Visitor's Information Guide) while traveling, but before arriving to PEI. They did not receive a VIG before the start of the trip.

**PEI Planning Questions**

**First Learning About PEI**
HD reported first learning about PEI from a friend. "I heard it was a nice place to see." When asked, he responded that he had not read the book nor watched the video of *Anne of Green Gables*.

**PEI Recommended for this Trip? Why was PEI included?**
HD reported that no one recommended PEI to him or wife for this trip. HD had visited PEI 20 years ago with his father; Tracey, his wife, had never been to PEI prior to this trip. The main reason for the trip was to show Tracey PEI, according to HD.
Using the VIG
HD reported extensive use of the VIG while on PEI. Uses of the guide included things to see in the area surrounding Cavendish; reading about the Dunes and its art gallery before visiting it; reading about King Tut's Tomb before visiting; and reading and telephoning accommodations listed in the guide.
HD prefers to refer to accommodations ratings. He wants to stay at accommodations "with at least 3-stars." He read the accommodations descriptions carefully when selecting specific accommodations to telephone.

PEI Competitor Considered but Rejected
While in New Brunswick on the trip, visiting the Cabot Trail instead of PEI was considered by HD and his wife. The deciding factor was their conclusion that the Cabot Trail would be mostly "too long" a car ride for their daughter and she would enjoy the attractions on PEI more than the Cabot Trail.

Involvement in the PEI Destination Decision
HD reported equal involvement between his wife and him in the PEI destination choice decision.

Conclusions
Note that all three family members were involved directly or indirectly in the planning of the Dasti's visit to PEI. They did rely extensively on professionally prepared promotional literature (the VIG) before making the final decision to visit PEI. The information on activities and attractions in the VIG may have tipped-the-scale in favor of PEI versus Cape Breton, but this conclusion is implied and was not stated by HD.

PEI Visit Questions
The Dastis stayed three nights on PEI. The Island was a secondary destination for them for this trip; visiting HD's father in Bathurst, N.B., was the primary motivation leading to the add-on visit to PEI.

Main Motives for PEI Visit
HD reported having 3 motives for visiting PEI. He assigned 5 votes to the chance to relax and escape from daily concerns motive, 3 votes to the family vacation motive, and 2 to the touring about motive.

PEI Trip Route and Destinations
Cavendish was the principal destination for the Dasti's PEI visit. They sought accommodations in Cavendish and stayed three nights in Charlottetown only after being turned away (by telephone) by 3 accommodations in Cavendish (no
vacancies). Their first full-day on PEI was spent in Cavendish doing several activities for the enjoyment of their daughter. On their second full-day on PEI they toured the road by the coast on west Prince.

Cavendish "had a lot of things for my daughter to do that I read about in the [VIG], reported HD. MMI: Cavendish appears to have a critical mass of attractions for the Dasti family to the area to become the major PEI region attracting this family. Increasing the concentration of attractions in an area the size of Cavendish may be necessary to attract families similar to the Dastis.

HD also reported that everything turned-out better than expected. He and his wife particularly enjoyed the scenery. "We may buy property here," he reported. His daughter especially enjoyed the amusement park, but "she enjoys amusement parks everywhere." Thus, the daughter's enjoyment of attractions may not be a major motivator for a return trip to PEI for the Dastis, but certainly was a motivator in getting them here.

Trip Mode and Route
The Dasti's trip to PEI was made by Pathfinder motor vehicle. HD reported not considering any other mode of travel. We can go where we please and time spent traveling in the vehicle is time for us to relax, he reported.

For the route, "I look at the map and go," reported HD. For the choice of ferry, the shortest route from Bathurst clinched the choice of ferries for HD. Evaluation of the ferry trip: as he expected. MMI: "shortest route" is the major motive for some, possibly most, travelers coming from New Brunswick into PEI; thus, the western, Borden, ferry-crossing is the preferred choice.

PEI Activities and Attractions Visited

Walking on the North Rustico beach was the first activity on PEI reported by HD, when asked about specific activities and attractions visited (aided recall questions). The main reason for walking on this beach was "just to see it," he reported. "It was just there [next to] the road," he said. Thus, this beach stop was not an activity planned as a specific stop for the Dasti family.

HD reported visiting the wax museum on PEI; curiosity was the motive mentioned when asked for the main reason for visiting this attraction. Other attractions charging an entrance fee visited by the Dastis included King Tut's Tomb and Ripley's Believe-It-or-Not Museum, as well as the Go Carts at Burlington Amusement Park. Thus, doing activities with, and for, their daughter was how the Dastis used a substantial amount of their visit to PEI. HD reported that their visits to these attractions were as expected.

The Dunes Gallery was mentioned when HD was asked about art galleries visited on PEI. He read about the Dunes in the V.I.G. before visiting. MMI: visits to
specific attractions are offered caused by reading about them in the V.I.G. However, the Dastis reported no purchases on this visit to the Dunes.

**Evening restaurant dining**
HD reported having all evening meals in restaurants but he stated that he could not recall the names of any restaurants visited.

**Activities not engaged-in**
Available PEI activities not engaged-in by the Dastis include golfing, deep sea fishing, live theater, farmer markets, lobster suppers, and pubs and bars. **MMI:** note that families with young children (under 6 years of age) would be less likely to participate in such activities; other market segments are likely to be more responsive target markets.

**The Accommodation Decision and Experiences**

Unlike attractions and most activities, the accommodation decision is non-discretionary for overnight visitors, and usually more than 20 percent of their total purchases. Details of how young families from Ontario go-about selecting a specific accommodations would be of substantial interest for many members of the PEI accommodations industry.

HD and his wife **did not** attempt to make an accommodation reservation before arriving on PEI. They drove to the Cavendish area and then made telephone calls locally for a reservation. HD reported telephoning four motel/inn operators. He used the V.I.G. extensively in evaluating which firms to telephone and the published telephone numbers in the guide. He made the telephone calls in his car, sometimes driving down the roadways.

HD stated that he relies on accommodations ratings extensively when selecting accommodations. "I do not want to stay at any place that is rated less than three stars," he reported. "I go by the rating system [in making my selection]."

HD began calling motels in the Charlottetown area after finding no vacancies in the Cavendish area. He selected Wandlyn Inn because it was rated three stars in the VIG, had a vacancy, and a heated pool was mentioned in the VIG. HD reported that he alone made the accommodations choice decision.

HD reported his family's stay at Wandlyn to be "worse than expected" because the "room was dated for a three star accommodation." When asked how the room was dated, HD stated that the carpet was old, and no convertor was attached to the tv set, "only eleven stations were available." HD also reported that he stopped into other motels in the Cavendish area and they were dated too. **MMI:** HD reported that he "would like to see the rooms updated at Wandlyn. The hospitality was great," when asked if there was something or an activity he would like to see changed at his accommodation on PEI for this trip. Certainly for HD,
the rating system is a real plus in aiding his accommodation selection decision. HD represents one vote in favor of an accommodation being included in the rating system and achieving at least a three star evaluation.

This case illustrates that no substitutes are available for assessing customer satisfaction by continuing monitoring their experiences and evaluations; such monitoring systems need to go beyond asking persons, "how was your stay" when customers are departing. Useful insights may not be forthcoming at such moments since customers may: (a) want to appear to be nice, (b) avoid a disagreement, and (c) be on their ways. Thus, frank customer assessments may be learned best at PEI exit points. Customer evaluations that appear to be minor events may cause major switches in accommodation choice decisions and recommendations. This observation likely holds also for restaurant choice decisions. Note that HD was not asked by the interviewer if he reported his assessment of his stay and room to Wandlyn; he likely did not mention his negative evaluation to a member of Wandlyn's staff.

Gifts and Other Purchases Returning Home With

A baby doll costing $30.00 was the only item purchased by the Dastis for taking off PEI. HD could not remember the name of the store where the doll was purchased. Somewhere in the Cavendish area, he reported. The motive: his daughter saw the doll and requested it.

Expenditure Breakouts

HD reported his family's total expenditures to include the following amounts:

- $280.00 accommodations
- $350.00 recreation/entertainment
- $300.00 meals in restaurants
- $30.00 food and alcohol purchases (one bottle of liquor)
- $30.00 gifts, one doll
- $60.00 in gasoline.

Thus, the family's total purchases are estimated to equal $1,050.00 for the three night stay on PEI. This amount does not include expenses related to the Dasti's ferry crossings.

MMI: visits by Canadian families similar to the Dasti’s visit represents an important "product bundle" for PEI. Such 3-day visits by 1,000 similar families represents more than $1 million expenditures on PEI. The market segment represented by the Dastis, young families living in Ontario prone to travel in the
summer months, is likely to meet the requirements for PEI to select as a primary
target market. This market segment is likely to be substantial in size, measurable,
with the purchasing power and sensitivity to a specific marketing mix designed by
PEI. The Island should consider designing a unique marketing strategy to appeal
for some of this segment's travel expenditures. The Cavendish area does appear to
meeting the needs and motives of visitors that match the Dasti visiting profile.

Observations about Customer Choice Processes

Many aspects of the Dasti’s 3-day visit to PEI were planned separately from each
other. For example, the choice of PEI was made on a day different from the day
their accommodation choice decision was made.
The Dasti's travel decision routines, thought processes in making choices, did
involve direct comparisons of competing alternatives in the decision to select PEI
and not Cape Breton, and the decision to select Wandlyn versus competing
accommodations. Other aspects of their decision processes appear to include little,
if any, evaluations of alternatives. The choice of restaurants and the doll purchase
appears to be more of an impulse purchase, unplanned by any family member;
being located at the right place and time is important particularly for marketers
having customers who mostly make such unplanned purchases.
Note that Mr. and Mrs. Dasti did appear to have sat down and weighed the pros
and cons of decided on PEI versus Cape Breton. The perception of a more
enjoyable visit with more activities, on PEI for their daughter is what clinched the
deal, won the trip, for PEI. Describing and showing the complete family enjoying a
unique combination of attractions/activities on PEI may be the point-of-the-arrow
for attracting this target market for PEI. While the destination choice was made
with some amount of deliberation, the choice did not involve days of deliberation,
nor loss of sleep. Thus, promoting customers to make direct comparisons of
competing destinations and consider, and weight, several criteria in making the
decision would not be fit with such customers' choice processes. Thus, promoting
comparisons of destination alternatives is not likely to be an effective promotional
strategy.

Having information available, when customers are ready to be used it in making
choices, appears to be lesson to learn from studying the Dasti destination choice
process. The Dastis were not ready to consider a visit to PEI until after their
arrival to New Brunswick. Having promotional literature available in many
gateway locations in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick is likely a sound marketing
tactic for PEI. Helping potential visitors like the Dastis to deepen their knowledge
about PEI may be a necessary step to gain customers; the VIG appears to be an
effective tool in gaining conviction and commitment to visit PEI versus alternative
destinations being evaluated by these customers.
**Promoting Island Route Tours**

Unfortunately, the interview did not include a description of how the decision was made to visit west Prince County, the far western portion of the Island. The motive for this portion of the visit was to tour a portion of the Island along the coastline. Thus, the product concept of designing and promoting specific route tours on the Island (as found in the VIG does appear to be an effective marketing tool influencing the behavior of some customers).

How to help cause visitor expenditures while touring such outlying areas as west Prince County likely needs further attention. If western Prince County did want to increase expenditures by visitors among this target market of young families, what attractions, events, or other products could the area offer? The question points to the need for developing specific products for specifically identified target markets.

**Promoting the Cavendish Area**

The opportunity of doing several activities, and visiting attractions, available in the Cavendish area as a family appears to have been the driving motive for clinching the deal for PEI versus the alternative, a tour in the family's Pathfinder around Cape Breton. HD showing portions of PEI to his wife appears to have been an important, but secondary, motivator. Though not known with certainty, examining the PEI VIG appears to have influenced the Dasti's choice of a PEI visit versus the alternative Cape Breton visit.

Promoting several attractions/activities in the Cavendish area matches with the motives expressed by this particular target market. Note that the market segment represented by the Dasti's is not responsive to a marketing strategy related to *Anne of Green Gables*. Theme parks and other attractions appealing to families with young children are tourism product features that are attributes essential for attracting families like the Dastis. **PEI as a Valuable, Secondary, Destination Choice.** The fact that this PEI visit by the Dasti's occurred as part of the family's visit to Mr. Dasti's father in New Brunswick should be emphasized. The number of young families from Ontario, Quebec, and central Canadian visiting family members in the maritime Provinces is likely to be substantial. Promoting four-day, three-night, package PEI visits to these young families with several activity and accommodation options may be a successful strategy for reaching this target market.

**The VIG and PEI Map as Marketing Tools**

Mr. Dasti reported use of the VIG before entering PEI and upon several occasions while in PEI. The VIG did serve multiple functions: likely helped to clinch the choice of PEI versus Cape Breton; the principal cause agent for the visit to the Dunes; created knowledge and motivated visits to attractions in the Cavendish area; use in evaluating accommodation alternatives and in contacting these accommodations. The description of the coastline tour on the visitor's map of PEI
likely was effective in helping to cause the Dasti's family coastline tour of west Prince County.

Note that the customer, Mr. Dasti, did make use of the accommodation rating system included in the VIG. Offering such rating information is recommended, given that its use is confirmed in additional long interviews of PEI customers.

Limitations

This report is based on a long interview of one member of one travel party visiting PEI in July 1993. Data from additional interviews are needed to confirm the observations and tentative conclusions offered in this report before planning and implementing specific marketing actions.

Interviewing Mrs. Dasti, Tracey, as well as Mr. Dasti, would have likely increased the amount and quality of the data collected. Such two-person interviews done at the same time, or separately, are recommended.

Recommendations for Future Research

In-depth descriptions of visitors' trip behavior and thinking processes made available by long interview research studies are likely to result in a deep understanding and knowledge of such behavior. Detailed reports of how decisions, interactions of people, and activities/events that occur during pleasure trips are related to each other and lead to other activities/events are missing from travel research reports based on cross-sectional data. The long interview method allows us to develop thick descriptions of streams of behavior and decisions. Such descriptive data leads to insights and understanding of both the nitty-gritty moments that occur during the trip, as well as the gestalt of the visiting and travel experience.

Thus, the substantially amount of travel and interview time and expense to conduct long interviews compared to mail or telephone surveys may be justified. Such face-to-face interviews helps reduce respondent self-editing of answers and permits the pursuit of following a line-of-thought to learn insights in both customer choice and evaluation processes. While face-to-face long interviews are less efficient than mail and telephone surveys for collecting data from large samples, the long interview does appear to be a uniquely valuable research tool.