Factors Affecting Information Search Behavior in Purchasing an Outbound Package Tour: A Thematic Analysis

Bahram Ranjbarian[1*], Vahid Ghasemi[1], Zahra Shekarchizadeh[2]

1. Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Economics, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
2. Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

Abstract

The present study seeks to examine the factors affecting information search of heads of households in purchasing an outbound package tour. A sample of 60 academics and non-academics in the field of tourism was chosen. Sampling methods were judgmental and snowball sampling. In order to gather data, we used a semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis was applied for data analysis, and the collected data were codified and analyzed under four main categories. The findings showed that personality traits of heads of households, their preference for sole decision-making over collective decision-making, their motivation for providing family satisfaction, their motivation for taking better advantage of opportunities and their familiarity with the travel destination were among influencing personal factors. Familial demographic factors, social class, and family's familiarity with the travel destination were among influencing familial factors. Situational factors included social factors, travel importance and time constraints; and travel agents factor encompassed their reliability.

Keywords

---

* **Corresponding Author, Email:** b.ranjbarian@ase.ui.ac.ir

Introduction

Tourism is a great industry and one of the key exports of most countries bringing foreign currency savings and employment (Niekerk & Saayman, 2013). Increasing trends of foreign travels and development of various touring packages indicate a boost in tourism even despite global economic crisis. On the other hand, increasing rivalry among various travel destinations, and an increase in tourism information sources have created the need, on the part of travellers, for an understanding of information search methods. Understanding tourists' information search provides useful information for the practitioners in this industry for the purpose of planning their marketing activity (Erawan, Krairit, & Khang, 2011). Since families are the main users of touring service, understanding whose decision-making process is a key factor for marketers' success, it seems necessary to understand their information search behaviours which call for much research.

The related literature review indicated that different stages of family life cycle such as having children or entering the retirement period affected many aspects of family travel decisions (Davison & Ryley, 2010), because children might play an ever-important role in their families' decision-making including familial travels decisions. Therefore, parents' decisions about vacation and travel are in part influenced by the opinions of their children.

Before planning for a vacation, people usually search for information in internal and external sources. They first rely on the internal sources and use their prior knowledge and experience for decision-making. If the internal search provides no current and adequate information, travelers will use external sources like travel brochures, published media, the Internet, TV, travel agencies and word-of-mouth communications (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004).

Previous studies showed that various factors affected tourist information search behavior. One of these factors is personal factors consisting of the socio-economic status of travelers, their involvement with the destination and their previous experience of traveling to the destination. Income and age also affect information search (Ip, Lee, & Law, 2012). Tourists who have experience with a destination, are highly involved with the destination and it is worth paying attention to their information.

Situational variables such as available time for decision-making and necessary time for information search also affect information search (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). Although media provide valuable information for travelers, they prefer to gain their main information from such informal sources as relatives, acquaintances, friends and those individuals who have no interest in it.

Moreover, since intangible products such as tourism, which is chosen based on the quality of beliefs of travelers, cannot be easily examined before purchasing (Ranjbarian, Jalilvand, & Fathi, 2011), word of mouth communications, which affect the decision making process and contribute to the reduction in the perceived risk of travelers, serve as an important informational source for travelers.

As far as researchers' findings show, there have been few studies on information search behavior of travelers in Iran, and mostly they have classified information sources into internal and external. While the present study distinguished family members' information from other external information sources since such information is not considered specifically internal or external from the head of the household's standpoint.

The service nature and special features of tourism cause travelers to adopt an information search quite different from purchasing other products and services. On the other hand, there is a general consensus among most experts over the necessity of studying and analyzing the structure of tourism information search and identifying the factors affecting it (Kah & Lee, 2015; Carneiro & Crompton, 2010). Therefore, this study seeks factors affecting tourism information search behavior. In contrast to the previous studies which have examined information search in the two categories of internal and external sources, this study will examine information search of heads of households through the personal information of heads of households, the family members' information and information which is considered external to households.

Review of Literature

One of the most important issues ever dealt with in the studies on consumer behavior is information search. When a consumer faces a problem, information is needed to reach a decision. In the decision-making process, consumers gather the required information about the

existing solutions according to their own needs, compare and contrast it, and finally make decisions (Nasco & Hale, 2009). Moreover, marketing managers need to understand the tourism information search in order to develop effective promotional plans and deliver appropriate service because marketers can affect consumer decisions about information search (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). Thus, information search is an obviously outstanding subject studied about consumer behavior.

Information search is the initiating process for activating the internally-saved knowledge or for acquiring information from the outside source (Nurmi, 2013). A three-stage process has been presented for travel information search by researchers; that is, identifying a travel information need (problem identification), searching for information about airline companies and related choices, and evaluating the selected choices. The problem identification precedes the information search process which theoretically directs information search (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004), so that in this step, the traveler identifies what information needs to be collected, analyzed and calculated.

A study of the tourism literature indicated that some factors affect information search behavior, and any change in them through time can affect the process of trip planning (Grigolon, Kemperman, & Timmermans, 2013). Studies have shown that there are three main theoretical foundations related to the behavior of consumer information search. In motivational-psychological approach, individuals combine product category and task-related variables. Based on this approach, the degree of information search of consumers is affected by two factors: Motivation and capabilities of an individual. According to Erawan et al. (2011), the ability to search has a significant impact on external information search. It is influenced by the level of education, subjective and objective knowledge of the product (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996). While tourists with lower education usually rely on their previous experiences and word of mouth for information search, those with higher education use active sources (Chang, Stylos, Yeh, & Tung, 2015). On the other hand, it seems that tourists who have subjective and objective knowledge of a destination may be more involved with the destination. Therefore, they are able to deal with new information thus being engaged in external information search.

Motivation for information search reflects the person's desire to

exert efforts to collect and process information (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996) which is related to the person's desire for the product. It seems that desire for the product is influenced by familiarity with and expertise in it. Results of earlier researchers partly confirm the effect of familiarity and expertise on information search (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Teichmann, 2008; Carneiro & Crompton, 2010). According to Teichmann (2008), product expertise is positively related to travel information search. On the one hand, tourists with sufficient expertise in the destination have a greater ability to analyze given data. Therefore, the cost of internal search may decrease and the desire to obtain information from internal sources may increase. On the other hand, as tourists' expertise increases, their ability to obtain information from external sources increases. In addition, high level of tourists' familiarity with the destination reduces the cost of internal information search and the probability of external information search.

The economic approach adopts the cost-benefit framework for information search. In other words, according to the economic approach, the degree of perceived value may affect the extent of information search. As long as the perceived benefits of information search are more than the perceived costs, motivation for information search is more likely to increase. The effect of perceived costs and benefits on information search has been shown in previous researches by Punjand and Staelin (1983), Schmidt and Spreng (1996), Heaney and Goldsmith (1999), Gursoy and McCleary (2004) and Santosa (2010). Tourists are usually looking for information to make informed decisions. They calculate the expected value of collected information which is called utility in the economy. This approach sees consumers as rational individuals who evaluate costs and benefits while searching. Perceived costs of search have a negative effect on search, and perceived benefits of search are positively affected by search activity.

The third approach is information processing which emphasizes the memory and cognitive limitations of the information processing of individuals (Erawan et al., 2011). This approach suggested by Batman (1979) considered the information processing theory for consumer choices. Based on this approach, motivated consumers serve as information processors searching for information to reach their objectives (Erawan et al., 2011). Results of previous research by Carneiro and Crompton (2010), and Ip et al. (2012) indicated that the extent of involvement with the destination, as one of the most important

stages of information processing, has an important influence on information search behavior. Highly involved tourists use several external sources of information because they need to add information for decision-making and want to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the available options. Therefore, they carry out a wider process of information. In low involvement situations, tourists choose their most widely known option as the best destination because they know it and are more familiar with it than other destinations. According to Gursoy and McCleary (2004), tourists' involvement with a destination increases with an increase in the number of previous visits to the destination.

These approaches are significantly related in that the motivational-psychological approach is also based on information processing because motivation component from the motivational-psychological approach and capabilities component from information processing approach are related. On the other hand, information processing approach and economic approach are significantly related in that the perceived benefits of information search increase the motivation for information search, and the perceived costs of information search decrease the motivation for information search (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996).

A review of the tourism literature indicated that information search behavior is affected by some family variables such as socio-economic status (Flurry, 2007) and family structure (Lotfizadeh & Heidarzadeh Hanzaee, 2014). Ip et al. (2012) believe that the probability of using websites for travel information search is higher by young people with high education and high incomes. It can be understood from previous studies that families from high social classes mainly use cognitive criteria and those with lower social classes mostly use objective criteria and less subjective criteria to evaluate products.

On the other hand, in families with traditional structure, the husband is the only decision-maker that usually uses internal information search for decision-making, while in modern families, a high level of joint decisions is noticed. Therefore, desire for internal information search in modern families is less than traditional ones.

Studies have been conducted with emphasis on the relationship between big five personality traits and information search behavior (Gul, Mahajan, Shah, & Nisa, 2014; Jani, 2011; Halder, Roy, &

Chakraborty, 2010). It can be understood from such studies that openness to new experience and extroversion are positively related to motivation for tourist external information search behavior. Researchers believe that among big five personality traits, agreeableness and conscientiousness have the least and the most relation to information search, respectively (Schmidt & Wolff, 2016).

On the other hand, tourists from different cultures and nationalities have a distinct information search behavior. Uncertainty avoidance is one of the most important cultural characteristics related to the information acquisition process since activities done by tourism create high uncertainty situations which require tourists to be aware of product details and travel services. While in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, people use travel agencies instead of personal resources; and in individualist cultures with a low power distance, individuals acquire information through media and friends (Yacout & Hefny, 2015).

Travelers use various information sources for making their travel-related decisions, which show their particular predispositions and link to economic activity (Zhao, Ye, & Zhu, 2016). In other words, tendencies and affordability of travelers can influence the information sources they use.

Based on the literature, information search can be divided into internal and external, but the present study will examine information search behavior of heads of households through the personal information of heads of households, the family members' information and information external to households. Internal and external information searches are conceptually divided, but they are related since the external information search depends on the memory of consumers (Barber, Dodd, & Kolyesnikova, 2009). It is because of traveler's use of his/her memory information to find out which external sources can be used.

Information search generally occurs when travelers identify a need for decision-making. Every traveler has knowledge of products in his/her memory which is based on previous experiences and cultural background. Internal information search is based on retrieving information from the long-term memory, probably gathered from previous experiences or searches (Money & Crotts, 2003). In the case of consumer's low involvement, individuals tend towards internal information search mechanism more than the external one because information search from the memory is quicker and requires relatively

limited cognitive effort (Ghalandari, Norouzi, Masoudi, Amin poor, & Taheri, 2016). Whenever consumers want to make decisions about their trips, they first rely on internal information sources.

Even if consumers have complete knowledge of products and the market, they need to search for information in external sources such as advertisements and friends, called external information search (Seied, javadain, & Esfidani, 2014). In other words, when the internal information search cannot provide adequate information, consumers will search for information through external sources (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004) such as relatives, friends, acquaintances, media and travel agencies.

Information held by family members is considered an important source of information for heads of families to make a decision or to plan a trip. Researchers and marketers are concerned about the understanding of consumers in households because as consumption and decision-making units, families are evidently important for them. Usually, family members influence one another's behaviors and also affect activities that are part of consumer's decision-making process. Thus, the study of preferences of couples and their decision-making methods in their families are important issues dealt with in marketing (Lotfizadeh & Heidarzadeh Hanzaee, 2014). While marketers strive to convince their customers, sometimes they seem to neglect the fact that customer's word-of-mouth communications have the greatest impact. This is especially true in family decision-making because family members see the opinions of their own family members, friends and relatives as impartial and trustworthy (Podoshen, 2008). Therefore, family members are the most important individuals who can influence consumer information search and decision-making. On the other hand, travel agencies are other most important external sources of information search behavior. According to Tajzadenamin (2016), the pattern of choosing a travel agency is influenced by product features, how to serve the staff, price, advertisement, physical evidence and the location of travel services offices.

A review of previous studies showed that most researchers examined only some of the factors that have influenced tourism information search. As a matter of fact, most researchers conceptualized information search in terms of internal and external information search. Since familial travels are collective activities, family members can be the

source of travel information. Therefore, this study intends to study factors affecting information search behavior for outbound package tour purchase with an emphasis on family members as an information source using thematic analysis.

Research Methodology

The present study aims to examine factors affecting outbound tourism information search behavior emphasizing family member participation. Due to its heuristic nature, a qualitative method was used. In qualitative research, there are no specific rules for determining the sample size, and sampling continues to the extent that theoretical saturation is achieved (Patton, 2002; Mahmoodi et al., 2015). Accordingly, a sample of 60 academics in the fields of tourism and sociology from Tehran and Isfahan Provinces of Iran and some experts (non-academics) in the field of tourism from Isfahan Province was obtained. Of the total sample, 20 were academics and the rest were experienced managers and staff members working in travel agencies and individuals who were considered experts in tourism marketing. Sampling was done through judgmental and snowball sampling methods. To carry out this study, after conducting a review of the prior literature, two open-ended questionnaires were designed for academics and non-academics, and data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Accordingly, the researcher not only asked pre-designed questions, but also inquired new questions based on their answers. To analyze data, thematic analysis was used as the method for classifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data. Thematic analysis is data coding and data analyzing to understand what the data are saying (Mohammadpur, 2013). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis consists of familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. In this study, thematic analysis was used based on Wolcott's (2008) 3-part model consisting of description, analysis and interpretation. Accordingly, after reaching theoretical saturation, the researcher attempts to sort, categorize and organize the collected data and finally interpret them.

In order to test validity, Maxwell's (1997, 2004) descriptive and theoretical validity and Neuman's (2006) member validation were used.

Descriptive validity is obtained through the researcher's

triangulation, and involves the use of multiple researchers in collecting, analyzing and interpreting data, while the theoretical credibility that has been increased through theoretical triangulation implies the use of multiple theories or approaches to help interpret data. Finally, member validation is obtained when the researcher returns the results of fieldwork to members to judge about their adequacy (Mohammadpur, 2013). To this end, the prior literature was reviewed by the researchers to identify categories, then the participants' responses were analyzed, and finally the results of the fieldwork were provided to some participants, and their feedback on data accuracy was obtained.

Research Findings

Sample Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of respondents in the study are presented in Table 1. The results show that 66.7% of research sample were non-academics and 33.3% were academic experts. The gender distribution of the respondents was 46.7% male and 53.3% female. Over half of those who responded were married. The highest percentage of respondents had less than 5 outbound travels. Regarding age, most of the respondents were 25-35 years old. The highest percentage of respondents was highly educated (Bachelor's Degree and higher).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency	percent
	Academic	20	33.3
	Non- academic	40	66.7
	Total	60	100
Gender	Male	28	46.7
	Female	32	53.3
	Total	60	100
Marital Status	Married	43	71.7
	Single	15	25
	Divorced	2	3.3
	Total	60	100
Age	Less than 25	5	8.3
	25-35	24	40
	36-45	13	21.7
	46-55	11	18.3
	More than 55	7	11.7
	Total	60	100
Education	Less than Diploma and	3	5
	Diploma	4	6.7
	Associate degree	16	26.7
	Bachelor's degree	20	33.3
	Master's degree	17	28.3
	Phd	60	100
	Total		
Number of Outbound Tours	<3	20	33.3
	3-5	23	38.3
	5-10	10	16.7
	>10	7	11.7
	Total	60	100

Thematic Analysis Findings

Based on the thematic analysis of responses, factors affecting information search behavior of heads of households for purchasing an outbound package tour include four categories of personal factors, familial factors, travel advisors and situational factors, as discussed below.

Personal Factors

Personal or internal factors are those that are related to personal characteristics of individuals. As finding of the present study, personal factors include five subcategories of personality of head of family, head

of household's preference for sole decision-making over collective decision-making, motivation to fulfill family members' satisfaction, motivation to take advantage of opportunities and head of household's familiarity with travel destination.

Personality Factors

Based on the analysis of the responses given by the respondents, personality factors consisted of extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to new experiences, neuroticism, and agreeableness. The respondents believed that if heads of households enjoy high public relations, are interested in consulting others and are open to new experiences and/or need a greater understanding of the travel destination, they will be more likely to obtain information from the external sources and their families. Moreover, if heads of households have a poor self-confidence and inner peace and based on their trust in external sources and their families, they will tend to use the external sources and their families' information.

Head of household's preference for sole decision-making over collective decision-making

According to the respondents, if heads of household is a conservatism and patriarchy individual and/or trust in his own personal capabilities and information, he/she will tend to prefer individual decision-making. On the other hand, if heads of household believe in cooperative and consultative decision-making and believe that travel information is specialized information which needs to be obtained from specialists, they will tend to use the external sources and if heads of household trust in their family members' capabilities, and if their familial norms and their dominant family atmosphere are based on democracy, solidarity and empathy, they will have a preference for the family participation in decision-making.

Motivation to fulfill family satisfaction

According to the respondents, when the head of household as a decision-maker seeks interests of his/her family members and tries to

provide learning opportunities for them and develop their decision-making skills, especially for young members, he/she considers collective decision-making a way to reduce conflicts.

Motivation to take advantages of most opportunities

The respondents believed that while personal information can help to make decisions compatible with individuals' interests and facilities, travel agents' specialized information can contribute to better management of the existing facilities. In other words, travel agencies may offer new travel opportunities which the head of household has not been aware of.

Head of household's familiarity with travel destination

According to the respondents, if heads of households know enough about the travel destination, they will use their personal information in their decision-making. In addition to the mastery of language, the Internet and touring websites and intelligence can lead heads of households towards individual decision-making.

Familial Factors

Familial factors are those related to family features and, as findings indicate, they consist of three sub-factors: Familial demographic factors, social class and family members' familiarity with travel destination.

Familial demographic factors

The respondents believed that those families in which traditional norms prevail are more likely to rely on head of household's personal information for choosing the travel destination.

Social class

According to the respondents, it will be more likely for those heads of households who have higher education than others to use their family members' views in their decision-making. Indeed, if family members agree in terms of social status, heads of households will probably use their views as an information search source.

Family members' familiarity with travel destination

The respondents believed that as long as family members have enough familiarity with and experience in the travel destination and are aware of travel issues, heads of households will use the family members' views in choosing the travel destination.

Travel Advisors

In this study, travel advisors are travel agencies which help heads of households as travel information search sources. Travel advisors' reliability is also considered here.

Travel advisors Reliability

According to the respondents, if travel agencies perform well in tours and succeed in earning the trust of heads of households in the case of financial and security issues, heads of households will tend to consult them. Since touring information is specialized, heads of households will tend to consult specialized and experienced travel agencies. Therefore, if travel agencies want to succeed in attracting travelers, they need appropriate promotional tools such as advertisements, high public relations and economic travel packages in addition to the mastery of language, the Internet and touring websites.

Situational Factors

Situational factors are temporary environmental factors that create a context for touring activity.

Social factors

They involve travel companion composition. The respondents believed that heads of households are more likely to use the views of travel companions in family tours than in tours with friends or colleagues.

Travel importance

It is related to the destination image and involvement of heads of households. According to the respondents, those heads of households who have a positive picture of a certain travel destination and who are interested in traveling there are more likely to use their own personal information and experiences.

Time constraint

The respondents believed that those heads of households who have enough time to look for information more probably use external factors such as travel agencies and family members in their decision-making. In Table 2, factors affecting information searching are summarized.

Table 2.Factors Affecting Information Search Behavior in Buying Overseas Tourism Package

Main theme	Class	Subclass	Codes
Factors Affecting Information Search Behavior in Buying Overseas Tourism Packages	Personal Factors	Personality factors	Extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to new experiences, neuroticism, agreeableness
		Head of household's preference for individual decision-making over collective decision-making	Belief in conservatism and patriarchy, trust in one's own personal capabilities and information, belief in cooperation and consultation with others, power distance, uncertainty in non-family sources
		Motivation to fulfill family members' satisfaction	Reducing family conflicts, awareness of the interests of family members, providing opportunities for family members to collaborate in decision-making as a kind of learning
		Head of household's motivation for taking better advantage of opportunities	Better management of the existing facilities, better management of time
		Head of household's familiarity with travel destination	Heads of households' experience, familiarity and expertise about travel destination, heads of households' mastery of language, the Internet and touring websites, intelligence
	Familial Factors	Familial demographic factors	Family size, history of family life, the family life cycle, values, religion

Travel Advisory		Social class	Education, career, income, social harmony
		Family members' familiarity with travel destination	Experience, familiarity and expertise of family members about travel destination, family members' mastery of language, the Internet, touring websites and matters related to travel
		Travel advisor's reliability	Previous good performance of agency, successful performance in earning, experience, familiarity and expertise of agency about travel destination, the members' mastery of language, the Internet, touring websites, appropriate promotional tools such as brochures, high public relations, providing economic travel packages, the amount of available funds, responsiveness
	Situational Factors	Social factors	Travel companion composition
		Travel importance	Involvement, image
		Time constraint	Enough time to collect information from others

Discussion and Conclusion

Considering the importance of tourism information search for policy makers in travel and tourism and other related areas, and since family is an important consumer of tourism service, this study attempted to examine the factors affecting the overseas tourism information search focusing on participation of family members. Since the researcher seeks to create a consistent conceptual model of the qualitative concepts used in the study, thematic analysis method was used as the most suitable method for analyzing the qualitative data. After examining the factors affecting information search of travelers in selecting outbound travel packages, the simulated model (Figure 1) was presented.
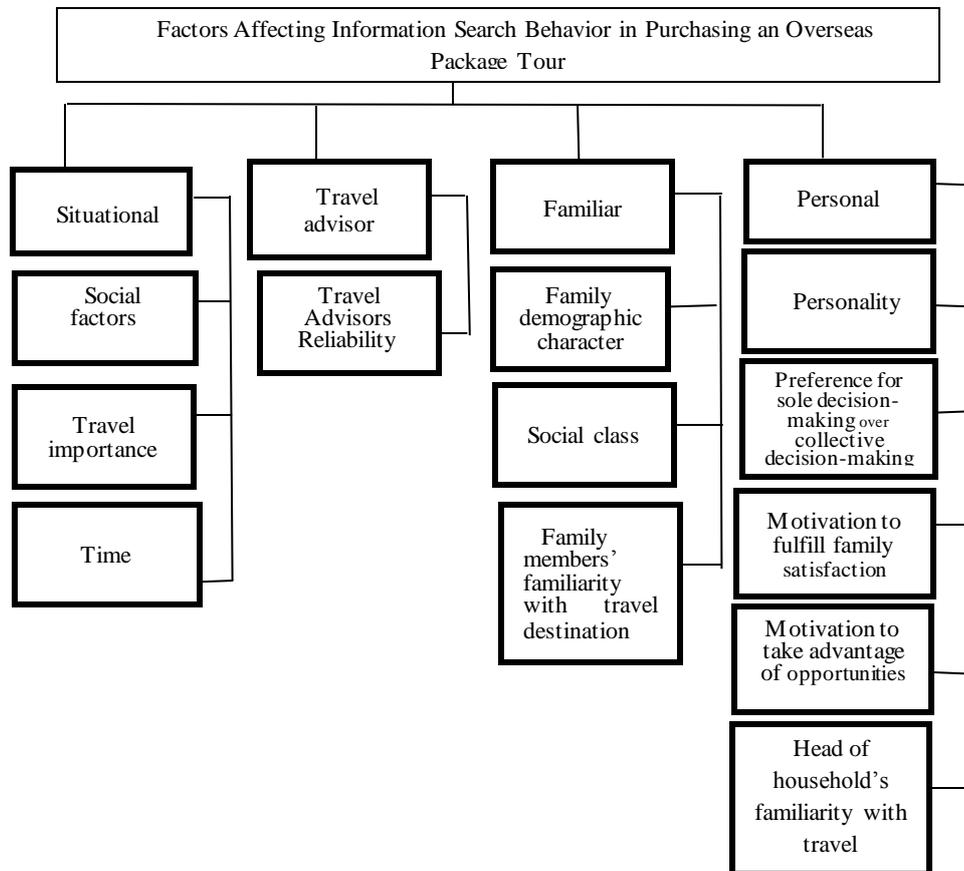
```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Factors Affecting Information Search Behavior in        │
│   Purchasing an Overseas Package Tour                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Situational	**Travel advisor**	**Familiar**	**Personal**
Social factors	Travel Advisors Reliability	Family demographic character	Personality
Travel importance		Social class	Preference for sole decision-making over collective decision-making
Time		Family members' familiarity with travel destination	Motivation to fulfill family satisfaction
			Motivation to take advantage of opportunities
			Head of household's familiarity with travel

Figure 1. Factors that affect information search behavior in purchasing an outbound Package tour

There are some interesting findings for this study. The analyses revealed that factors affecting overseas tourism information search behavior can be viewed in terms of four major categories: Personal factors, familiar factors, travel advisor and situational factors. Although several studies have been conducted on the factors affecting overseas tourism information search behavior, such a comprehensive classification is rarely seen. Moreover, in contrast to previous studies, the present study has considered family members an important source of information alongside internal and external sources of information.

The data obtained in the study showed that personal factors affect information search of travelers. One of the most important personal factors which influence information search is personality. This finding

was in line with those of Jani's (2011) and Amaro and Duarte's (2012). Jani believes that personality traits are effective in information search behavior and the travelers' information needs for their preferred sources regarding their information searching. The findings of Amaro and Duarte's (2012) showed that five main personality traits affect the online information search behavior. It seems that every type of personality is interested in a particular touring attraction, which causes individuals to look for the related information in sources available to them. On the other hand, the results of Gersoy and McCleary's research (2004), which focused on the effect of familiarity with the travel destination, are consistent with the findings of this study. It is inferred that if an individual has complete subjective and objective knowledge of a particular travel destination, he/she prefers to use his/her own memory. In addition, the findings of Zu et al.'s study (2015) and Yacout and Hefny's research (2015) were also in line with the finding of this study about the head of household's preference for the individual decision-making over the collective decision-making. Although the sub-classes of personality, preference for sole decision-making over collective decision-making and familiarity with travel destination have been considered in previous studies, it seems that some sub-classes which have been identified by the present study, such as head of household's motivation to fulfill family members' satisfactions, has rarely been studied. Of course, it could be due to family norms which exist in Iran compared to other countries. The family is an important institution in Iranian society, and family members are trying to provide satisfaction for each other. On the other hand, in the earlier classifications, the sub-class of "motivation to take better advantage of opportunities", it seems that this issue has not been directly referred to in previous studies.

The present study also emphasizes the role of familial factors in information search of travelers in purchasing an outbound package tour. This finding was consistent with those of Gersoy and McCleary's (2004), Fluri's (2007), Tarek and Ramadan's (2013) and Lotfizadeh and Heidarzadeh Henzaee's (2014) about the effect of the demographical factors and social class on information search behavior. Since family has a pivotal role in Iranian culture, and it is considered sacred, and since Iran is located in the midpoint in terms of patriarchy and matriarchy according to Hofstede (1991), it seems that familial features

for Iranian families have a vital role in every purchase situation and in information search for purchasing a package tour. It seems that the influence of family members' familiarity with travel destination has not been considered in previous studies. It could be due to lack of attention to family members as an important and separate source of information.

The results obtained in this study confirmed the impact of travel agencies on information search behavior which was in line with the findings of Erawan et al.'s (2011) about the effectiveness and availability of the external information sources and Tajzadehnamin's study (2016) about travel agencies. Tourists need information for every travel planning stage which can be obtained from different sources including personal experience, friends and acquaintances, and travel agencies based on the type of the information and the degree of access to them.

Finally, the findings of this research stressed the role of the situational factors in tourist information search in selecting overseas tourism packages. This finding was in line with those of Gersoy and McCleary's (2004) and Sirakaya and Woodside's (2005). They believe that the available time for information searching is the most important external cost for it, which is of higher value for those individuals who attach greater importance to time. In addition, the results of Jun and Holland's study (2012), which focused on the effect of consumer's involvement level on information search behavior, resulting from the importance the individual attaches to a travel, were consistent with the findings of this study. When a travel is not so important for an individual, his/her involvement level is low and the individual selects the most readily available tourism destination option as the best option. However, when a travel is important for an individual, his/her involvement level is high and the individual strives to search for and retrieve travel-related information.

Overall, it can be concluded that it is impossible for a marketer in travel and tour business to consider all elements influencing consumer's information search (personal factors, familial factors, situational factors, and travel advisors), but taking into account these factors for market segmentation, planning more reliable strategies would be possible. We can use the results of this study in organization of tourism, tourism agencies and the family. These factors not only can be very helpful to policy-makers in the organization of tourism to improve the tourism plans, but also by considering tourists' behavior, they can help

managers of travel agencies provide suitable facilities for holding specialized tours. Furthermore, the results of this study have led families to obtain necessary information for selecting the most appropriate tourist packages.

References

Amaro, S., & Duarte, P. (2012). A proposed model of the role and impact of personality in online travel information search and travel purchases. *Proceedings from 2nd advances in hospitality and tourism in marketing and management conference, Grecotel Corfu Imperial hotel.*

Barber, N., Dodd, T., & Kolyesnikova, N. (2009). Gender differences in information search: Implications for retailing. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 26(6), 415-42.

Bettman, J. (1979), *An Information Processing Theory of Consumer Behavior, Reading*: MA: Addison-Wesley.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Carneiro, M. G., & Crompton, J. L. (2010). The influence of involvement, familiarity and constraints on the search for information about destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 2(1), 1-20.

Chang, L., Stylos, N., Yeh, S., & Tung, Y.Y. (2015). How do motivation, pre-visit information search and destination image affect post-visit behavioral intention? The case of an island destination. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 9, 8-23. Retrieved from http://www.researchgate.net

Davison, L., & Ryley, T. (2010). Tourism destination preferences of low-cost airline users in the East Midlands. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 18(3), 458-465.

Erawan, T., Krairit, D., & Khang, D. B. (2011). Tourists' external

information search behavior model: The case of Thailand. *Journal of Modelling in Management*, 6(3), 297-316.

Flurry, L. A., (2007). Children's influence in family decision-making: Examining the impact of the changing American family. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(4), 322-330.

Ghalandari, K., Norouzi, A., Masoudi, S., Aminpoor, H., & Taheri, A. (2016). Information search behavior scale development: Internal and external search. *The Caspian Sea Journal*, 10(1), 118-123. Retrieved from http://csjonline.org

Grigolon, A., Kemperman, A., & Timmermans, H. (2013). Facet-based analysis of vacation planning process: A binary mixed logit panel model. *Journal of Travel Research*, 52(2), 188-197.

Gul, S., Mahajan, I., Shah, T. H., Nisa, N. T. (2014). Influence of personality traits on information seeking behaviour: A case study of research scholars in the field of botany. Proceedings from International Conference on the Convergence of Libraries, Archives and Museums (ICLAM 2015), *Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts*, New Delhi, India.

Gursoy, D., & McCleary, W. K. (2004). An integrative model of tourists' information search behavior. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(2), 353-373.

Gursoy, D., & Umbreit, W. T. (2004). Tourist information search behavior: Cross-cultural comparison of European Union member states. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 23(1), 55-70.

Halder, S., Roy, A., & Chakraborty, P. K. (2010). The influence of personality traits on information seeking behavior of students. *Malaysian Journal of Library & Information Science*, 15(1), 41-53.

Heaney, J. G., & Goldsmith, R. E. (1999). External information search for banking service. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 17(7), 305-323.

Hofstede, G. (1991). Cultures and organizations: *Software of the mind. London*, UK: McGraw-Hill.

Ip, C., Lee, H., & Law, R. (2012). Profiling the users of travel websites for planning and online experience sharing. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 36(3), 418-426.

Jani, D. (2011). The influence of personality on tourist information behavior. *E-Review of Tourism Research* (eRTR), 9(3), 88-95. Retrieved from http:// 3ws1wk1wkqsk36zmd6ocne81. wpengine.netdnacdn.com/files/2012/11/0_eRTR_ARN_Dev-Jani.pdf

Jun, S. H., & Holland, S. (2012). Information-processing strategies: A focus on pictorial information roles. *Journal of Travel Research*, 51(2), 205-218.

Kah, J. A., & Lee, S. H. (2015). A new approach to travel information sources and travel behavior based on cognitive dissonance theory. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 30(1-2), 1-21.

Kerstetter, D., & Cho, M. H. (2004). Prior knowledge, credibility and information search. *Analysis of Tourism Search*, 31(4), 961-985.

Lotfizadeh, F., & Heidarzadeh Hanzaee, K. (2014). Family structure and decision making styles among Iranian couples. Journal of Islamic Marketing, 5(2), 241-257. Mahmoodi, S., Mohamed, B., & Fathi, S. (2015). Identifying Iran's image dimensions as a tourist destination using content analysis. e-*Review of Tourism Research* (eRTR), 12(3/4), 172-190.

Maxwell, J. (2004). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3th ed). London: Sage publications.

Mohammadpur, A. (2013). *Qualitative research method counter method2: The practical stages and procedures in qualitative methodology*. Tehran: Sociologists Publications

Money, R.B., & Crotts, J. C. (2003). The effect of uncertainty avoidance on information search, planning, and purchases of international travel vacations. *Journal of Tourism Management*. 24(1), 191-202.

Nasco, A. S., & Hale, D. (2009), Information search for home, medical, and financial services by mature consumers. *Journal of Services Marketing,* 23(4), 226-235.

Newman, I. (2006). *Social research methods*: *Quantitative and qualitative approach* (3th ed). London: Allyn and Bacon.

Niekerk, M., & Saayman, M. (2013). The influences of tourism awareness on the travel patterns and career choices of high school students in South Africa. *Tourism Review*, 68(4), 19-33.

Nurmi, E. (2013). *Tourist motivation and information search behavior case: Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma* (Unpublished Tourism Bachelor's thesis). Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed).

Podoshen, J. S. (2008). The African-American consumer revisited: brand loyalty, word of mouth and the effects of the black experience. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 245(4), 211-222.

Punjand, G., & Staelin, R. (1983). A model of consumer information search behavior for new automobiles. *Journal of Consumer Research,* 9(4), 66-380.

Ranjbarian, B., Jalilvand, M. R., & Fathi, S. (2011). The effect of word of mouth to attract foreign tourists: The Case of Isfahan. *Journal of Geographical Research*, 26(4), 47-66. Retrieved from http://www.sid.ir/fa/VEWSSID/J_pdf/553139010303.pdf

Santosa, P. I. (2010). Cost and benefit of information search using two different strategies. *Indonesian Journal of Electrical Engineering*, 8(3), 195-206.

Schmidt, J. B., & Spreng, R. A. (1996). A proposed model of external consumer information search. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science. 24(3), 246-256. Schmidt, T., & Wolff, C. (2016). Personality and information behavior in web search. *Association for Information Science and Technology*, 53(1), 1-6.

Sirakaya, E., & Woodside, A. G. (2005). Building and testing theories of decision making by travelers. *Journal of Tourism Management*, 26(6), 815-832.

Tajzadenamin, A. (2016). A pattern of travel agency choice. *Journal of Business Management Researches*, 8(15), 83-107.

Tarek, A. A., & Ramadan, A. K. (2013). Impact of information sources on the decision making process of travel to the Egyptian tourist destination after January 25, 2011. *Journal of Tourism*, 61(4), 395-423. Retrieved from http://hrcak.srce.hr/113261

Teichmann, K. (2008). Expertise, experience and self-confidence in consumers' travel information search. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 5(2), 184-194.

Wolcott, H. F. (2008). *Writing up qualitative research* (3th ed). USA: Sage Publications Ltd.

Yacout, O. M., & Hefny, L. (2015). Use of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, demographics and information sources as antecedents to cognitive and affective destination image for Egypt. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 21(1), 37-52.

Zhao, D., Ye, Q., & Zhu, K. (2016, May). The influence of consumers' information search behavior on purchase decisions for experience goods: Empirical evidence from hotel industry. Proceedings from the Fifteenth Wuhan International Conference on E-Business－ Mobile Technologies and Ubiquitous Service, AIS Electronic Library.