

What drives leisure travel decisions? Exploring contextual, instrumental and evaluative aspects of fun shopping location, timing and transportation mode choices

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Abstract

The rising need for leisure activities in developed countries over the past four decades raised the number of trips generated by this pastime (Kiiskilä & Kalenoja 2001; Schlich et al. 2004). In order to reduce travel related energy consumption caused by leisure trips and to lower pressure on urban infrastructure, many attempts have been made to enforce Travel Demand Management measures (TDMs) that would influence travel behaviour of individuals towards a more sustainable form (Gärling et al. 2002; Loukopoulos & Scholz 2004; Stauffacher et al. 2005). However, TDMs can be implemented in more effective and efficient manners if these policies connect with contextual, instrumental and evaluative factors that affect the actual decision process of people when making a trip. Thus, to increase the behavioural impact of TDMs, travel choices should be studied on a disaggregate level, as the outcome of each individual's decision process (Stauffacher et al. 2005; Dellaert, Arentze & Timmermans 2008). The aim of this study therefore is to develop a better understanding of individuals' mental representation of the different components involved in leisure travel decisions.

Current research has shown that shopping is one of the most culturally revealing activities performed by human because it shows individuals' motivations, values and lifestyles (Snepenger et al. 2003). It is also considered as a significant economic, psychological and social pursuit (Gunn, 1988; MacCannel, 2002; McIntosh & Goeldner, 1990 in Snepenger et al. 2003). In scientific literature, shopping as pastime is referred to

in different ways such as recreational shopping (Westbrook & Black 1985; Guiry, Mägi & Lutz 2006), active shopping (Lesser & Hughes 1986), new-type shopping (Boedeker 1995) and fun shopping (Sinha & Prasad 2004). Despite this varying terminology, all emphasize on shopping as part of recreational activities from which people can draw enjoyment and pleasure. This is not necessarily related to actually buying some goods. The main intention can simply be the enjoyment of walking around the town (Dellaert, Borgers & Timmermans 1995), or collecting some information for finding the balance between price and quality in the individual's search for value (Lesser & Hughes 1986).

Considering the importance of shopping as a recreational activity and the impact of its related travel decisions on urban infrastructure, this research addresses individuals' reasoning behind and complex relationships between transport mode choice, destination choice in the city centre, and choice of day to conduct the activity. The research setting chosen is the central outdoor shopping area in the typical, historical European town of Hasselt in Belgium.

Existing studies indicated the importance of individuals' characteristics, specifically age and gender, in shaping people's shopping behaviour (Rabolt & Drake 1985; Solomon 2007). For instance, young adults tend to shop more than older ones (Martin, 1976 in Seock & Sauls 2008). Besides, it is shown that individuals in the same age group share distinctive norms and values that trigger the similarity and homogeneity of this behaviour (Assael 1998). Therefore, a homogeneous sample of 26 young adults (age 22-23 years old) was chosen in this study.

In order to reveal contextual, instrumental and evaluative aspects that condition respondents' fun-shopping travel behaviour, this research applies CNET (Causal Network Elicitation Technique), a qualitative semi-structured interview method (see Arentze, Dellaert & Timmermans 2008). CNET allows us to describe individuals' mental representation of the decision problem, taking into account: (1) contexts and constraints surrounding individuals, (2) different considerations of attributes related to choice alternatives, and (3) benefits, values or utilities attached to action outcomes (Dellaert, Arentze & Timmermans 2008). We define these aspects as contextual, instrumental, and evaluative, respectively.

In the interviews, the research setting was explained to respondents. Next, their thoughts and deliberations in the actual decision making process regarding transport mode, shopping location and selection of day were elicited. Respondents were asked to mention all influencing factors such as weather, companionship, etc. (contextual aspects); vehicle speed, presence of shelter, etc. (instrumental aspects); and having comfort, efficiency, etc. (evaluative aspects). In the interview, respondents were free to bring up any consideration they could think of. This elicitation process took about 60 minutes to complete for each respondent.

Using the method described above, this study shows that decisions made within the context of fun shopping are not always fully based on deliberation among different aspects of choice alternatives (instrumental aspects) but also constricted by other forces,

typically contextual and constraint dependent (contextual aspects). This is in line with previous research in transportation (by Gärling et al. 2002; Gärling & Axhausen 2003; Schlich & Axhausen 2003; Stern & Richardson 2005) and in tourism (by Dellaert, Ettema & Lindh 1998). Contextual aspects were very important in decisions regarding the transport mode used to get to the city centre, the actual shopping location and the time to do such an activity. First, with regard to individuals' choice of transport mode, results show that decisions for this type of activity strongly depended on situational constraints (e.g. weather) and coupling constraints (e.g. companionships). Second, destination choices in the city centre were determined by pre-defined purchases in mind, companionships and time availability (capability constraints). Finally, activity scheduling was conditioned by the weather and the necessity of doing the activity.

Besides instrumental and contextual factors, this study also detailed different evaluative aspects that contribute to the overall utility of fun shopping travel decisions. In general, individuals mostly wanted to maximize efficiency, happiness and enjoyment. When making a transport mode decision, comfort and saving money were important additional benefits. Besides, we were able to map out the most important instrumental factors related to these mentioned benefits. They were: presence of shelter and cost for transport mode decision; type of store and shops arrangement in the area for shopping location decision; companionships and time availability for scheduling activity. Furthermore, individual similarities and differences in decision problem representation could be addressed. Jointly, these findings are an important source of information for developing high impact policy measures to improve urban quality of life in the context of leisure activities.

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