

2001

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### Recommended Citation

Wu, Tsung-Chiung (2001) "An Investigation of Tourist Involvement on International Tour Type Choices," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 19 : No. 4 , Article 4.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol19/iss4/4>

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# AN INVESTIGATION OF TOURIST INVOLVEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL TOUR TYPE CHOICES

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Involvement theory derived from social judgment theory has raised great research interests for leisure scholars since 1990s. The study issues for leisure involvement range from its conceptualization, measurement, antecedent and consequence factors, building causal relations, testing variations of leisure involvement among different recreation activities, and management and marketing applications. Although several inconclusive arguments exist, leisure involvement theory provides solid bases to explain leisure participation behavior, especially in the cases of participation patterns, message processing, and decision-making patterns.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the appropriateness of applying involvement theory on international tour type choices. Ex post Facto experiment design is used. In the research design, "travelers selected package tours" are defined as low/median involvement group and "travelers selected DIY tours" as high involvement group. Study results show involvement theory can be employed to analyze and explain travel purchase behavior successfully. First, travelling abroad decision belongs to median/high involvement. In terms of overall

involvement degree, DIY tour travelers is significantly higher than package tour travelers. Secondly, the level of involvement has great influences on travelers' information searching behavior, travel decision making factors, and decision making processes. Third, based on Kapfer and Laurent's CIP model, this study successfully structured tourist involvement scale under five constructs, "importance", "rewards", "sign", "risk importance" and, "risk probability". Finally, five constructs independently and effectively measure the tourist involvement. However, various constructs function differently. "Importance", "rewards", and "sign value" constructs generally show apparent influences on tour purchase decision patterns. Comparatively, the impacts of "risk importance" and "risk probability" are not consistent.

## INTRODUCTION

International pleasure travel market has sprung up very quickly in Asia countries. In Taiwan the changes of outbound travel market are not limited to the increasing number of trips. The patterns of travel are also altered. Different from traditional all-in-one package tours, nowadays more and more people choose DIY tours. For the DIY types

of tours, travel agents provide limited tour services, only making lodging and airplane arrangement. Based on 1998 Taiwan Tourism Bureau Statistics, the ratio between choices of package tours and DIY tours is about 1.22. In order to better understand travelers' decision-making processes among tour type choices, several previous travel behavior studies had described the travelers' characteristics and their travel decisions for package tours and DIY tours (5, 34). However, those studies were not able to provide a theoretical base to explain the traveler's purchasing decision patterns. After carefully reviewing previous researches, based on the fundamental differences between two types of tours, demanding efforts from travelers, this study proposed to analyze the choice patterns of package tours and DIY tours based on "involvement theory".

Involvement theory is developed from social judgment theory (29). Involvement commonly is defined as an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreation activity or associated product. It is evoked by a particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties (adapted from Rothschild 1984). Involvement generally is conceptualized as a social psychological term; however, Engel et al. (7), Stone (30) and Kim, Scott, & Crompton (19) draw attentions to the importance of behavioral involvement. Involvement theory has raised great research interests for leisure scholars since 1990s. The study issues for leisure involvement range from conceptualization (8, 12, 35), measurement (11, 13, 27), antecedent and consequence factors (21, 24), building causal relationships (3, 15, 23), testing variations of leisure involvement among different recreation activities (9, 26), and management and marketing applications (1, 6). Although some inconclusive arguments exist, leisure involvement theory provides solid bases to explain leisure partici-

pation behavior, especially in the cases of participation patterns, information search behavior, and decision-making patterns. Kim, Scott, and Crompton (19) reported that involvement was positively correlated with activity-specific reading. Venkatraman (31) found positive relationships between involvement and movie theater attendance. Perdue (25) noted that involvement levels were positively related to importance of information among recreation anglers. McCarville, Crompton, & Sell (22) reported that highly involved aerobic dancers more often indicated higher intentions to participate in the future than did less involved respondents. Some other recreation behavior researchers had similar thoughts, although they may not use the same terms. Wash (32) emphasized the importance of "self-sufficiency" as analyzing the benefits of recreation participation. He believed that the "outcomes" (benefits) of recreation participation not only were influenced by attributes of travel products and supplies, but also determined by how much participants were involved. Bryan (4) proposed his theory of "recreation specialization" in that he explained there are several stages for people's recreation participation from a tryout to a professional. In each stage, people have different level of involvement and their behavior outcomes are also varied.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the appropriateness of applying involvement theory to theorize international tour purchase patterns. Four study objectives are specified: (1) to produce and examine tourist involvement constructs; (2) to describe the characteristics of travelers and their tourist involvement level; (3) based on high/low involvement design, to compare the level of involvement between package tour travelers and DIY tour travelers; and (4) based on leisure involvement theory, to ex-

amine the influences of involvement level on tour purchase design patterns.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

Based on involvement theory, a research design is proposed as Figure 1.

In this study, Ex post Facto experiment design is used. First, two types of international tour (package tour and DIY tour) are employed to differentiate general patterns of traveler's involvement level. Second, two groups are defined, "travelers selected package tours" as low/median involvement group and "travelers selected DIV tours" as high involvement group. Third, three types of antecedent variables, personal factors, product factors, and situational factors are considered in the research design. Fourth, information searching, information processing and purchase decision patterns are used to determine the behavioral outcome of high/low involvement.

### **Sampling and Measurement Instruments**

Two groups, "package tour groups" and "DIY tour groups" were separately sampled. Package tour travelers were randomly sampled in the airport, and surveyed by interviewers on site. Total 150 valid questionnaires were completed. DIY tour travelers were randomly sampled from the list provided by travel agents, and surveyed by telephone interviewers. Total 122 valid questionnaires were received. Same form of questionnaire was used for both groups. Questionnaire included several portions: (1) socio-economic characteristics, (2) past travel experiences, (3) travel product attributes, (4) product involvement variables, (5)

message involvement variables, (6) purchase decision involvement variables, (7) product preference attributes, and (8) post purchase behavior.

## **RESULTS**

Total 272 questionnaires, from two groups, were used and analyzed. Among them, 64% were female. The average age is 32 years old. In terms of marital status, most of them were single (56%) or married with children (31%). Comparing with national statistics, their education level and income level were slightly higher. For this paper, study results will be illustrated and discussed in three major sections: (1) conducting and evaluating tourist involvement; (2) comparing antecedent and consequence variables between high involvement group (DIY tours) and low involvement group (package tour); and (3) illustrating the influences of involvement on travel product decision making patterns.

### **Conducting and Evaluating Tourist Involvement Constructs**

This study applied CIP (Consumer Involvement Profiles) to measure traveler's involvement level. CIP was proposed by Laurent and Kapferer in 1985 (17) and had been tested by many empirical researches. CIP measures involvement through five constructs: 'importance', 'reward', 'sign value', 'risk importance', and 'risk probability'. The basic statistics for each construct is presented in Table 1. This study also generated a total involvement by summing up the scores of five involvement constructs. (figure 2) The results showed that total involvement scores for 66.9% of respondents were distributed between 16 and 29; and the other 18.3% were distributed between 21

and 25. In other words, for international trip as a purchasing product, the involvement level of travelers usually ranged from middle to high. As examining the correlation between total involvement score and each constructs, the correlation coefficients ranged between 0.62 and 0.52. It shows that each individual construct contributes significantly to total involvement. In terms of inter-correlations among constructs, the results of correlation analyses showed that each construct perform quite independently, except for the relative high correlations between "reward" and "importance", and "reward and "sign".

Figure three displays the results of comparing the total involvement level between package tour travelers and DIY tour travelers. As the results, the total involvement level of DIY tour travelers was significantly higher than package tour travelers, that was met the treatment design requirement for this study.

### **Characteristics of Package Tour (Low Involvement) and DIY Tour (High Involvement) Travelers**

For package tour travelers, study results showed that their average age was 31. Most of them were female (64%) and single (55%). Fifty-three percent had college degree and 68% of them monthly earned from NT\$20,000 to NT\$60,000. The average number of international trips took in past three years were 2.9 trips. Comparatively, for DIY tour travelers, their average age was 33. Most of them were female (64%) and single (58%). Sixty-seven percent had college degree and 43% of them monthly earned from NT\$20,000 to NT\$40,000. About 46% of them worked in business sector. They in average took 4.5 international trips in the past three years. The re-

sults of t tests or chi-square tests showed that two groups were significantly different in terms of marital status, occupation, income, and the number of international trips in the past three years. *This study result confirmed that personal characteristics contribute to the differences of tourist involvement.*

For package tour travelers, over 90% of them purchased from travel agencies. Private vacation (66%) and company incentives (20%) were primary reasons to participate the tour. Few of the respondents (17%) played the role of main trip planner. Comparatively, for DIY tour travelers, only 70% purchased this strip from travel agencies. Private vacation (65%) and visiting friends and relatives (11%) are primary reasons to take this tour. Over 50% of the respondents played as the primary organizer for the trip. The results of t tests and chi-square tests showed that two groups were significantly different in terms of types of tour supplier, role of tour planning, and motivation. *This study result confirmed that situational factors contribute to the differences of tourist involvement.*

About 87% of package tour travelers had local guides for this trip and their accommodation arrangements usually were in four-star hotels (91%). The average length of trip was 6.5 days, and the average tour expenditure was NT\$32,261. On the contrary, about 695 of DIY tour travelers did not use local guide. Regarding their accommodation selection, 22% were five star hotels and 50% were four star hotels. The average length of trip was 9.5 days, and the average tour expenditure was NT\$42,980. The results of t tests and chi-square tests showed that two groups were significantly different in terms of using local guide, accommodation selection, length of trips, and tour expenditure. *This study result confirmed that*

*product factors contribute to the differences of tourist involvement.*

For package tour travelers, seventy-five percent of them did collect some information for this trip. Travel agency (63%), friends/relatives (28%), newspaper/magazine (21%) and travel books (21%) were their main information sources. Comparatively, for DIY tour travelers, eighty-nine percent of them did collect some information for this trip. Travel books (49%), travel agency (45%), friends/relatives (28%), and newspaper/magazine (26%) were their main information sources. The results of t tests and chi-square tests showed that two groups were significantly different in terms of collecting travel information, source of information, and number of information sources used. *This study result confirmed that tourist involvement level is significantly related to traveler's information searching behavior.*

In this study, respondents were asked to rate their agreement level on product preferences (18 items). For package tour travelers, 'cleanness', 'map', and 'flexibility of tour date arrangement' were the three most important factors they concerned; 'number of itinerary stops', 'class of flight seat', and 'price' were the three least concerned factors. Comparatively, for DIY tour travelers, 'cleanness', 'map', and 'flexibility of tour date arrangement' were the three most important factors they concerned; 'class of flight seat', 'price', and 'airport-hotel service' were the three least concerned factors. The t tests results indicated that two groups were significantly different in terms of 'recreation facility', 'free time arrangement in the itinerary', 'needs for tour guide', and 'needs for local guide'. *This study result somewhat confirmed that tourist involvement level is significantly related to product preferences.*

In this study, respondents were also asked to rate their agreement level based on attributes of purchase decisions (9 items). For package tour travelers, 'consider multiple factors', 'continue to collect information', and 'read related information carefully' were rated relatively higher as describing their purchase decisions. They did not rate 'tour arrangement ability' and 'foreign language ability' highly and would not feel uncomfortable to 'let other people make tour arrangements for them'.

Comparatively, for DIY tour travelers, 'consider multiple factors', 'continue to collect information', 'read related information carefully', and 'compare and analyze different tours' were rated relatively higher as describing their purchase decisions. The t tests results indicated that two groups were significantly different in terms of 'read information carefully', 'continue to collect information', 'ability to arrange tour', 'foreign language ability', and 'not comfortable to let other arrange trip for them'. *This study result confirmed that tour involvement level is significantly related to decision-making patterns.*

In this study, high-low involvement experimental design was used. DIY tour travelers represented the high involvement group, and package tour travelers represented low involvement group. Based on systematic comparisons between two groups, study results showed that DIY tour travelers and package tour travelers were significantly different in involvement antecedent factors, personal characteristics, product factors, and situational factors; and involvement consequence factors, information searching, produce preferences, and decision-making patterns. These demonstrated that the overall research design, with high-low involvement groups, performed reasonably well.

## **The Influence of Involvement Level on Travel Produce Decision-making**

Based on the theory, the involvement level should influence consumer's decision-making patterns. This section is intended to examine the relationships between decision-making factors and the involvement level. The relationships will be examined with total involvement score and five involvement dimensions to demonstrate various influences by individual constructs. Table two demonstrated the relationships between involvement level and information searching behavior. Results showed that the correlations between total involvement and 'number of information sources used', 'collect information from newspaper/magazine', 'collect information from travel books', and 'actively collect information' were significant. Examining individual influences of five involvement constructs, the "risk probability" construct has the least impacts on information searching patterns.

Secondly, table three examined the relationships between involvement level and purchase decision process. Results showed that the correlations between total involvement and 'participating discussion for planning the trip', 'compare and analyze collected information', 'read collected information carefully', 'able to differentiated various tours', 'consider multiple factors', 'continue to collect information', 'ability to arrange itinerary', and 'foreign language ability' were statistically significant. Examining individual influences of five involvement constructs, the "risk probability" and "risk importance" constructs had the least impacts on purchase decision process patterns.

Finally, table four illustrates the relationships between involvement level and tour product preferences. Results showed that the correlations between total involvement

and 'flexibility of tour date arrangement', 'high quality', 'importance of price', 'accessibility of hotel', 'cleanness', 'one destination', 'self-arrangement for itinerary', 'more free-time arrangement', 'needs for tour guide', 'needs for local guide', and 'map' were statistically significant. Examining individual influences of five involvement constructs, the "risk probability" and "risk importance" constructs had the least influences on tour product preferences.

In summary, for international tour participants, the tourist involvement level has evident influences on their decision-making patterns. Consistent with previous researches, this study results support that involvement scores are positively related to tourist search behavior, and purchase decision process (2, 3, 16, 18, 25). Besides that, study results also illustrate the significant correlations between involvement level and preferences for product attributes, although few leisure/tourism empirical studies investigated and reported this relation. Echoing the suggestions by Havitz and Dimanche (11, 12), this study investigates the influences of tourist involvement by the multidimensional approach. This study finds that individual dimension of tourist involvement functions variously. In general, the dimensions of 'importance', 'rewards', and 'sign value' perform stronger and more consistent in affecting tourist's tour decision-making patterns than dimensions of 'risk importance' and 'risk probability'. In other words, risk dimensions only influence certain aspects of tour decision-making patterns, such as 'continuing to search information' and 'ability to arrange itinerary'.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is intended to employ involvement theory to analyze the travel product purchase patterns. Several important conclusions can be reached as following. First, both package tour and DIY tour travelers consider that international travel trip require middle to high level of involvement. For most people, the international trip is a hedonic and expensive leisure activity. This result bears out this nature of international trips. Second, the involvement level of DIY tour travelers is significantly higher than the package tour travelers. In other words, the choices of travel product types are related to travelers' involvement level. Third, package tour travelers and DIY tour travelers are significantly different in terms of several essential involvement antecedent factors and involvement consequence factors, such as personal characteristics (past travel experience, marital status, income, and occupation), product attributes (length of trip, cost of tour, tour provider, product attributed re-

quired), information searching behavior, and purchase decision patterns. Fourth, the five involvement constructs developed from CIP and summed score of total involvement level can effectively measure the degree and dimensions of involvement for international tour decisions. Fifth, the relations between involvement level and information searching and purchase decision patterns are mostly confirmed in this study. It shows that applying involvement theory can properly explain the travel product purchase behavior. Sixth, multidimensional measure of tourist involvement provide more precise interpretations. As examining the relationships between involvement and travel product purchase decision, 'importance', 'rewards', and 'sign value' constructs generally show apparent influences, comparing to the impacts of 'risk importance' and 'risk probability'. Finally, in this study, single variable is used to measure one dimension of CIP construct. It leads to some reliability and validity concerns for the measurement. The further researches should focus on refining tourist involvement constructs.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was funded by grant NSC-86-2418-H128-002T from the National Science Council, Taiwan, R.O.C.)

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TABLE 1  
Involvement Constructs

	Mean	Sd
This trip is important to me	3.60	0.77
This trip is a reward to myself	3.93	0.76
Tour selection reflect one's character	3.72	0.85
Care about if the tour selection is correct	3.60	1.00
Sure about the tour selection is correct	3.25	1.00

\* measurement scale: 5 point scale, 1 is for very disagree, 5 is for very agree.

TABLE 2

## Relations Between Involvement Level and Information Searching

Information Searching	importance	rewards	sign value	importance of purchase risk	probability of purchase risk	total involvement
no of sources	0.099 p= .117	0.191 p= .002	0.155 p= .014	0.194 p= .002	0.115 p= .068	0.263 p= .000
newspaper/magazine	0.156 p= .012	0.046 p= .464	0.139 p= .027	0.113 p= .074	-0.038 p= .548	0.134 p= .036
friends/relatives	0.034 p= .391	0.031 p= .622	0.080 p= .204	0.070 p= .267	-0.014 p= .823	0.070 p= .273
tv/radio	-0.025 p= .694	0.037 p= .560	0.007 p= .910	0.013 p= .835	0.119 p= .059	0.108 p= .090
internet	-0.021 p= .742	-0.021 p= .735	0.016 p= .796	0.158 p= .012	0.017 p= .792	0.081 p= .202
airline	-0.041 p= .520	0.069 p= .276	0.063 p= .319	0.023 p= .722	0.045 p= .477	0.068 p= .285
travel agent	-0.040 p= .522	-0.010 p= .872	-0.156 p= .013	-0.007 p= .918	-0.016 p= .802	-0.065 p= .312
travel books	0.097 p= .123	0.189 p= .002	0.222 p= .000	0.154 p= .015	0.089 p= .157	0.252 p= .000
DM	0.124 p= .049	0.191 p= .002	0.029 p= .643	-0.010 p= .874	0.091 p= .148	0.109 p= .087
others	-0.042 p= .506	-0.071 p= .260	0.025 p= .699	0.003 p= .960	0.019 p= .769	-0.042 p= .506
length of collecting	0.150 p= .032	0.119 p= .091	-0.045 p= .530	0.070 p= .326	0.083 p= .237	0.098 p= .171
actively collect	0.146 p= .021	0.203 p= .001	0.218 p= .001	0.129 p= .042	0.179 p= .004	0.314 p= .000

TABLE 3

## Involvement and Decision Making Attributes

purchase decision patterns	importance	rewards	sign value	importance of purchase risk	probability of purchase risk	total involvement
participate discussion	0.232 p= .000	0.149 p= .018	0.159 p= .012	0.137 p= .032	0.095 p= .234	0.247 p= .000
compare/analyze information	0.202 p= .001	0.213 p= .000	0.249 p= .000	0.082 p= .180	0.106 p= .082	0.235 p= .000
read information	0.227 p= .000	0.280 p= .000	0.308 p= .000	0.062 p= .317	0.179 p= .003	0.323 p= .000
influenced by ads	0.166 p= .007	0.190 p= .002	0.177 p= .004	-0.100 p= .107	-0.056 p= .362	0.092 p= .139
distinguish various	0.197 p= .001	0.230 p= .000	0.198 p= .001	0.093 p= .131	0.075 p= .222	0.232 p= .000
consider multiple factors	0.184 p= .002	0.221 p= .000	0.315 p= .000	0.144 p= .019	0.117 p= .056	0.275 p= .000
continue to collect	0.218 p= .000	0.258 p= .000	0.318 p= .000	0.166 p= .007	0.176 p= .004	0.356 p= .000
itinerary arrangement	0.150 p= .014	0.026 p= .676	0.143 p= .020	0.156 p= .011	0.310 p= .000	0.288 p= .000
foreign language ability	0.096 p= .120	-0.006 p= .922	0.194 p= .002	0.049 p= .434	0.296 p= .000	0.219 p= .000
not comfortable let	0.005 p= .933	-0.158 p= .010	-0.001 p= .992	0.001 p= .984	0.100 p= .103	-0.003 p= .958

TABLE 4

## Involvement and Product Preferences

Product Preference	importance	rewards	sign value	importance of purchase risk	probability of purchase risk	total involvement
flexibility of tour date	0.204 p= .001	0.308 p= .000	0.273 p= .000	0.165 p= .008	0.126 p= .040	0.318 p= .000
high quality	0.158 p= .010	0.121 p= .050	0.281 p= .000	0.012 p= .853	0.055 p= .375	0.174 p= .005
price	0.119 p= .053	0.192 p= .002	0.072 p= .245	-0.059 p= .344	-0.003 p= .956	0.103 p= .099
accessibility to hotel	0.086 p= .164	0.124 p= .045	0.218 p= .000	0.132 p= .033	0.074 p= .228	0.193 p= .002
recreation facility	-0.076 p= .216	-0.029 p= .644	-0.087 p= .160	-0.066 p= .289	-0.062 p= .312	-0.112 p= .071
cleanness	0.139 p= .023	0.046 p= .455	0.073 p= .240	0.177 p= .004	0.088 p= .152	0.181 p= .004
local cuisine	0.037 p= .551	0.105 p= .090	0.059 p= .340	-0.025 p= .684	-0.006 p= .925	0.023 p= .712
more stops	0.068 p= .272	0.152 p= .013	-0.062 p= .315	-0.056 p= .371	-0.128 p= .037	-0.032 p= .611
stay at one place	0.050 p= .416	0.129 p= .035	0.293 p= .000	0.044 p= .483	-0.021 p= .733	0.173 p= .005
self arrangement for itinerary	0.085 p= .171	0.151 p= .014	0.285 p= .000	0.085 p= .174	0.099 p= .111	0.244 p= .000
free-time arrangement	0.047 p= .44e	0.082 p= .184	0.340 p= .000	-0.057 p= .360	0.054 p= .382	0.135 p= .030
accept possible risk	0.064 p= .304	0.094 p= .128	0.171 p= .005	0.006 p= .927	0.000 p=1.000	0.091 p= .147
needs tour guide	-0.081 p= .191	-0.012 p= .848	-0.168 p= .006	-0.039 p= .534	-0.150 p= .015	-0.165 p= .008
needs local guide	-0.107 p= .082	-0.022 p= .721	-0.113 p= .066	0.001 p= .984	-0.131 p= .033	-0.151 p= .015
map	0.163 p= .008	0.201 p= .001	0.231 p= .000	0.126 p= .042	0.181 p= .008	0.274 p= .000
airline image	0.141 p= .021	0.032 p= .602	-0.069 p= .262	0.232 p= .000	0.035 p= .569	0.113 p= .069
classes of flight seat	0.017 p= .778	-0.050 p= .414	-0.107 p= .084	0.013 p= .831	-0.036 p= .564	-0.076 p= .226
airport-hotel services	-0.121 p= .048	-0.027 p= .665	-0.023 p= .710	0.007 p= .910	-0.057 p= .351	-0.087 p= .161