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## **The Influence of Personality on Tourist Information Behaviour**

The purpose of this article is to propose a model that links broader general personality and travel personality traits with tourists' information behaviour. The model asserts that both types of personality traits will have an influence on tourist information behaviour. Furthermore it is asserted that tourist information needs will have an influence on other tourist information behaviour, including travel information source preference, information type, temporal aspects, and effort of search. Results from a study adopting such a model will have implications to tourism marketers that use both conventional channels as well as those using the Internet means of communicating with the potential tourists.

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## **Introduction**

With the hyper competition in the tourism market, destination and tourism marketers are always looking for ways of influencing tourists to favour and to select their products. In the process of selection or decision making, information has been noted to play a significant role in facilitating tourist decision making and thus a critical point for marketers to intervene while the tourists are planning for their travel. This fact has attracted many researchers into elucidating the factors that influence tourist information search (e.g. Gitelson and Crompton, 1983), including situational, socio-demographic, and personal factors. Albeit the presence of studies on personal factors, few have focused on the influence of personality (Leung and Law, 2010). This relegation of personality is alarming given its significance in accounting for consumer behaviour and information behaviour (Landers and Lounsbury, 2006).

Previous studies that related personality or its sub-components and information behaviour (Heinstrom, 2005) in general and specifically related to tourism (Kah, Vogt, and MacKay, 2008) have noted a significant relationship between personality constructs and information behaviour. Nevertheless, previous studies have used specific personality traits like innovativeness (Kah et al., 2008) and need for cognition that do not reflect broader personality nor travel personality types (Gretzel et al., 2004) or preferred travel activities. Research on the influence of personality on travel behaviour (or travel personality) have been noted (Leung and Law, 2010) but none have utilized the big five factors (BFF), a model that is perceived to be global. Furthermore, there appears to be no study that has jointly utilized personality (BFF) and travel personality in understanding tourists' information behaviour.

This article aims at reducing the literature gap by conceptually exploring the relationship between different personalities and travel information acquisition. Specifically, this article focuses on answering the following questions: What is the influence of personality (Big Five Factors-BFF) on travel personality? What is the impact of the BFF and travel

personality (TP) on travel information needs? What is the influence of the BFF, TP and information needs on information behaviour? How does the use of the different Internet channels differ with the BFF, travel information needs and TP?

## **Literature Review and Conceptual Development**

### **Travel Personality**

Personality refers to the distinctive and enduring patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that characterize each individual's adaptation to the situations of his or her life. Personality, being a broad concept, has been adapted to different contexts with the aim of providing specific predictions of behaviour under the specific context. Travel personality is such an adaptation of personality in the travel/tourism context that refers to travel activities-related personality types (Gretzel et al., 2004). The adoption of travel personality in this study follows McGuiggan's (2001) argument for the use of personality constructs that reflect travel and leisure behaviour. McGuiggan (2001) using the Myers-Briggs type indicators for personality noted a relationship with leisure activities; albeit the relationship does not include all personality variables. Since the broader personality types like the big five factors (BFF) are assumed to be elemental traits that are responsible of much behaviour (Mowen, 2000) including travelling and leisure, this article puts forward a proposition that the BFF has a significant influence on the TP (**P1**).

### **Tourist Information Behaviour**

Information needs is an aspect of information behaviour that represents the root of information search behaviour (Wilson, 1997). An understanding of tourists' information needs or the reasons for collecting information is essential for the provision of information to the tourists. Contemporary researchers have identified tourists' information needs to include

not only the functional needs that assist in immediate travel decisions but also non-functional needs that are used for other purposes like hedonic, aesthetic, innovation, and sign needs (Vogt and Fesenmaier, 1998) and might influence future decisions. Previous studies in consumer behaviour indicate information needs to relate with personality (Bosnjak, Galesic, and Tuten, 2007), but few studies have related personality and travel personality with tourists' information needs (e.g. Schul and Crompton, 1983). Schul and Crompton (1983), who related travel-specific lifestyle including preference for travel activities with information search, noted a relationship between travel lifestyle and the length of time the information search prolonged as well as the activeness of that search. In affirming the influence of the BFF and TP on tourists' information needs, this article puts the following propositions forward:

**P2:** The BFF has a significant influence on tourists' information needs.

**P3:** TP has a significant influence on tourists' information needs.

Apart from information needs, tourist information behaviour includes preferred and used information sources, type of information (content), temporal aspects of information search (ongoing vs. pre-purchase), depth and breadth of information search, and the degree of effort used in searching (active vs. passive). In non tourism contexts, source of information used (Mourali, Laroche and Pons, 2005), temporal aspects of information search, depth and breadth, and the effort used in the search (Heinstrom, 2005) have been noted to relate to personality traits. In extending these findings into the tourism context, the following propositions are relevant:

**P4:** The BFF has a significant impact on tourist information behaviour.

**P5:** TP has a significant influence on tourist information behaviour.

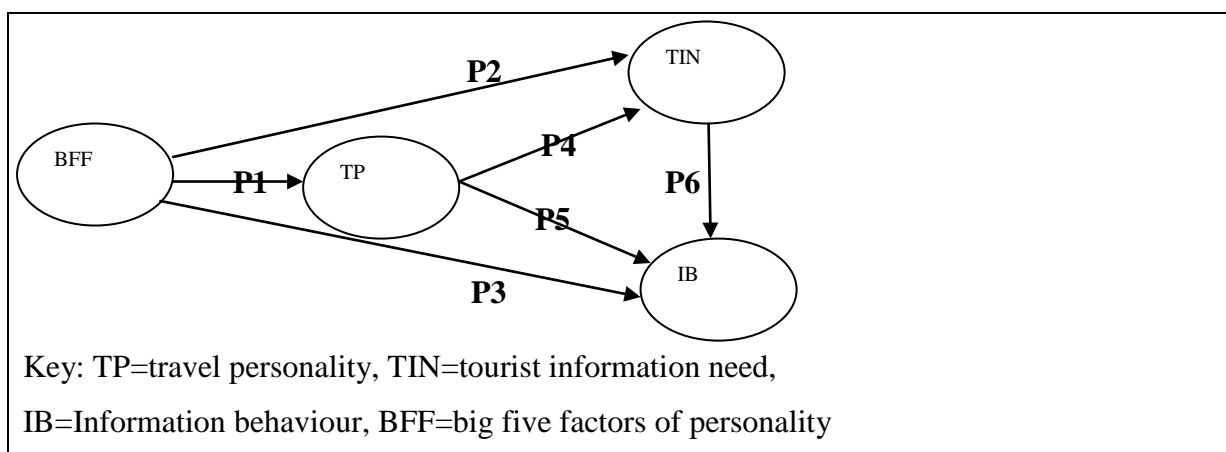
Nishimura et al. (2007) utilizing Vogt and Fesenmaier’s (1998) information needs categorization in studying Japanese travellers’ use of travel guidebooks noted a statistical difference of the functional and non-functional travel information needs between users and non users of travel guidebooks. Despite their study (Nishimura et al., 2007) being informative to tourism marketers, it falls short in terms of comprehensiveness as it focused only on guidebooks among the many possible sources of travel information. In complementing previous studies, the following is proposed:

**P6:** Tourist information needs have a significant influence on tourist information behaviour.

**Conceptual Model**

Based on the propositions stated above that were informed by the literature, a conceptual model was developed that is displayed as Figure 1 below. Information behaviour (IB) includes preferred and used sources of information, depth and breadth of information search (extent of search), temporal aspects of search, effort (active vs. passive), the type of information or content sought, and the use of different Internet channels.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



## **Conclusion**

The model presented in this article offers an integrative perspective of understanding general and travel personality and their relationships with tourist information behaviour. It is anticipated that results from such a study will affirm the status of the BFF and travel personality in predicting tourist information behaviour. Practically, the results will give a clue as to how tourism marketers can appropriately communicate and design communication systems that are effective in terms of appealing to the different personalities. More over, results might shed light on which sources are used for which type of travel information need, thus informing marketers on which sources to use for the different information types. With regards to the Internet, findings might indicate the usage of the Internet with respect to information needs to inform system designers on information contents to include for the different Internet channels. Furthermore, tourism marketers and planners can capitalize on the relationship between BFF and TP in marketing strategies like segmenting and product design to suit different personalities.

In researching the model, a number of challenges can be anticipated. Samples drawn from different cultural contexts will need to be interpreted with care if not treated as sub-samples as there might be cultural influences on travel personalities apart from the general personality traits as measured by the BFF. Quantitative and qualitative research might yield different results as the former usually uses snapshot data rather than 'realistic' data for the actual information behaviours displayed over time. Thus, it is suggested to use a mixed method to capture both the preferences and the evolving information behaviour.

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