



Do perceptions of time affect outbound-travel motivations and intention? An investigation among Chinese seniors

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HIGHLIGHTS

- This study provides the first empirical examination of seniors' travel behaviour and time perspectives.
- A time perspective profile for Chinese seniors is established.
- The associations between time perspectives and travel intention are fully mediated by travel motivations.

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ABSTRACT

How people conceptualise time can play a critical role in their travel intention. However, relatively little research attention has been directed to the links between time perspective, outbound-travel motivation and outbound-travel intention. In this study, survey data from a sample of Chinese seniors were analysed to test hypotheses regarding these links. The results showed that present-time perspective and future-time perspective were directly related to travel motivation, and that the associations between present and future perspectives and travel intention were fully mediated by travel motivation. These findings not only highlight the relevance of time-perspective styles to travel research, but also have specific implications for tourism-destination marketers with senior audiences.

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1. Introduction

Research on the travel behaviour of seniors has proliferated in recent years due to profound demographic changes and a rapidly ageing population (Sedgley, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2011). The studies concerned are similar in at least two respects. First, most studies address the direct relationship between chronological age and potential travel-behaviour outcomes. Although some researchers have found travel preferences to vary between age groups (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Backman, Backman, & Silverberg, 1999; Javalgi, Thomas, & Rao, 1992; Romsa & Blenman, 1989), others have suggested that the use of chronological age as a variable

is inadequate to differentiate the travel behaviour of an increasingly diversified senior market (Le Serre & Chevalier, 2012; Mathur, Sherman, & Schifferman, 1998). More recently, researchers have addressed psychological variables such as emotions, attitudes and cognitive age to gain richer insights into the behaviour of senior travellers (Faranda & Schmidt, 1999; Jang, Bai, Hu, & Wu, 2009; Morgan & Levy, 1996). These variables offer useful means of differentiating the senior market and tailoring tourism products and services to seniors' needs. Second, most studies of seniors' travel behaviour have focused on the US and developed countries in Europe and Asia. Less developed countries such as China have not yet obtained much attention in ageing research despite its fast growing travel market. China has witnessed a rapid growth in outbound tourism. In 2014, Chinese citizens made over 100 million overseas journeys, representing a tenfold increase in travel within a decade (CTA, 2014). The estimated expenditure on outbound travel

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reached \$140 billion. China is expected to become the world's largest market for international travel by 2020 (WTO, 2003). This increase in outbound travel may be attributed in part to senior citizens residing predominantly in urban and industrialised regions of China, who have more free time, larger incomes and a stronger desire to travel than their counterparts in other regions. Nearly ten million Chinese elderly between the age of 55–65 travelled internationally in 2014 (CTA, 2014). China's rapidly growing retiree population offers tremendous market potential for travel products and services, providing further impetus for an examination of seniors' travel needs. Therefore, a research gap still exists in the study of potential psychological predictors of seniors' travel behaviour in the setting of mainland China.

One such factor that has rarely been investigated is time perspective, which describes the degree of emphasis we place on our past, the present or the future (Gibson, Waller, Carpenter, & Conte, 2007). For instance, some people are seen as “dwelling in the past” (past-oriented), and others viewed as “living only for the moment” (present-oriented), and still others seen as “planning for future” (future-oriented). Time perspective has a significant influence on goal setting and action taking place across a variety of contexts. Gonzalez and Zimbardo (1985) have shown that time perspective can influence one's judgments, motivations, and actions related to health behaviours. In studying the ageing process, Cartensen, Isaacowitz, and Charles (1999) indicated that the perception of time plays a significant role in the pursuit of social goals, emotional regulation, and cognitive processing. Several marketing investigations have suggested that temporal thinking bias can have significant and direct effects on consumers' motivation, the urgency with which they seek to experience activities or purchase products, their responses to advertising appeals and their evaluation of products (Fung & Carstensen, 2003; Keough, Zimbardo, & Boyd, 1999; Wei, Donthu, & Bernhardt, 2013; Williams & Drolet, 2005). Prior research also demonstrated a relationship between time perspective and leisure. For instance, Philipp (1992) suggested that time orientation accounts for variation between individuals in terms of participation versus nonparticipation in specific leisure activities. Cotte and Ratneshwar (2003) stated that leisure-service consumption may be predicated on the allocation of time. Shores and Scott (2007) also confirmed the effects of time perspective on recreation-experience preference.

Up till now, little is currently known about the significance of time perspective for travel behaviour of seniors. Likewise, even less is known about the possible factors that mediate the hypothesized association between time perspective and travel intention. It has been posited that time perspective exerts its influence on travel consumption via enhanced motivation (Bergadaa, 1990). However, to our knowledge, no studies to date have tested the mediating role of motivation in explaining the association between time perspective and travel intention. Therefore, the aims of this study are to examine Chinese seniors' outbound-travel motivation and intention with particular reference to time perspective, and to use the findings to provide recommendations for travel marketers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Time perspective theory

Time does not exist independently of human experience; indeed, it is a psychological construct (Block, 1990). Individuals continually monitor, evaluate and interpret time (Lewin, 1942; Suddendorf & Corballis, 1997). Time perspective or time orientation is “the manner in which individuals, and cultures, partition the flow of human experience into distinct temporal categories of past, present and future” (Zimbardo, Keough, & Boyd, 1997, p.1008). The

study of time perspective (TP) draws from cognitive-motivational theorizing, and describes the degree of emphasis placed by an individual on past, present or future time frames (Karniol & Ross, 1996; Kelly, 1955; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Time frames are used by individuals in forming expectations and goals. If one domain of time perspective (whether past, present or future) is habitually and chronically overused, it may shape goal setting and predict subsequent behaviour (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004; Holman & Silver, 1998; Holman & Zimbardo, 2009). Individuals with a ‘present-oriented’ time perspective tend to emphasize the here-and-now, and are inclined to form goals and adopt behaviour that satisfies immediate needs. They are motivated by present enjoyment and excitement as well as display a strong interest in sensation seeking. An orientation towards the present is also associated with less impulse control (Rothspan & Read, 1996). In contrast, ‘future-oriented’ individuals are better able than others to foresee and articulate the future goals and to direct action in the attainment of future goals. Their decisions are based on cost-benefit analysis of the anticipated consequences of events. ‘Past-oriented’ individuals tend to rely solely on memory when making life choices. These temporal categories need not be considered mutually exclusive.

Past researchers have investigated the relationship between time perspective and a plethora of psychological constructs and behavioural outcomes in various life contexts. Although past time perspective is undoubtedly important from a theoretical point of view, the bulk of studies have shown that individuals tend to be influenced primarily by future or present goals when making decisions (Shores & Scott, 2007; Simons, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Lacante, 2004). In general, future time perspective has shown an ability to positively predict motivation, attitude, behaviour intentions and outcomes related to academic achievement, subjective well-being, and environmental conservation (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). Present time perspective, on the other hand, has been linked with crime, risk behaviours, substance abuse, hedonism and so forth. It has been noted that present time perspective may serve as an adaptive mechanism to increase enjoyment and gain control in life (Öner, 2002). Psychologists such as Csikszentmihalyi held that emphasis on the present can be advantageous for well-being (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992).

Diverse measures have been used to analyse time perspective. Three commonly used psychometric scales of time perspective are Consideration of Future Consequence (CFC), Future Time Perspective Scale (FTP) and the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI). Focusing on a single time perspective, CFC measures the thought about future consequence of current actions (Strathman, Gleicher, Boninger, & Edwards, 1994). The FTP developed by Carstensen (1995) measures whether people perceive time as expansive or limited. ZTPI develops past, present, and future time frames into a six-dimensional scale: past-negative, past-positive, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, future and transcendental future. This instrument has shown reliability and validity over the last decade eliciting individual's time perspective bias. Other methods used to evaluate time perspective include story completion, thematic apperception test, graphic measures, and experiential inventory (Cottle, 1968; Phillip, 1992; Wohlford, 1966).

Researchers have recognized that time perspective is subject to the influence of culture (Graham, 1981; Ko & Gentry, 1991; Lavi & Solomon, 2005). According to Hofstede (1994)'s cultural dimensions, cultures with long-term orientation value the future (i.e., saving and perseverance), whereas short-term orientation value the present (i.e., fulfilling social obligation). Individualistic societies tend to be future-focused, while collectivistic societies invest more in the past. Nationality also has an influence on our time perspective. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) suggested the predominant time perspective in the United States is toward the future while

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