

## **Identifying Gender Differences in Destination Decision Making**

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DOI: 10.12735/jotr.v1i1p01

### **Abstract**

Gender differences are critical in consumer behavior theory. As the purchase risks, the intangibility and perishability of travel products exceed those of other products, the overseas travel decision-making behavior differs from general consumer decision-making fundamentally. This study clarifies whether the thesis of gender differences offers an appropriate explanation of tourist hesitation and the justifiability of destination decisions. Based on multiple regression analysis of data from 443 tourists at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, gender differences did not significantly influence on tourist hesitation and the justifiability of destination decisions after controlling other possible influences. Comprehensive management implications for travel agents are discussed.

**Keywords:** gender differences, tourist hesitation, destination decisions making

### **1. Introduction**

Gender difference has been studied in great detail than other personal attributes (Wilborn, Brymer, & Schmidgall, 2007) owing to its strong ability to interpret consumer behaviors. The literature on gender and consumer behavior has led to the establishment of two theses: gender differences exist (e.g. Okazaki, 2007) and no gender differences exist (e.g. Schubert, Brown, Gysler, & Brachinger, 1999). Though there is probably no generally accepted opinion, most consumer research takes the view that “gender differences exist” and “females make purchase decisions more easily than males” (Mitchell & Walsh, 2004; Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, & Tsai, 2004).

Some studies of tourist decision-making have found no gender differences exist but they did not explain this specific finding. Each Type of Trip represents an option that then leads to a particular ‘cascade’ of decision-making (Moore, Smallman, Wilson, & Simmons, 2012). Most tourism products are challenged by the intangible and perishable nature of services versus other products (Kurata & Bonifield, 2007). Overseas tourists take more purchasing risk and spend more time and effort on destination decision-making and itinerary arranging than on other product and service consumption (Tsaur, Tzeng, & Wang, 1997; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992). Thus, certain attributes of tourist

decision-making may differ from general consumer decision-making behavior and may result in gender findings in tourist studies differing from most consumer behavior research.

In practice, managers have long perceived gender stereotypes that females are more hesitated and easily change their purchase decisions than males. Clearly, it violates the assumption of early decision-making research that consumers behave rationally and choose the alternatives with value maximization (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992). Moreover, it also violates the findings of most gender research that females make purchase decisions more easily than males and leaves an unresolved research question. Consequently, this study examines the effects of gender on tourist hesitation and the justifiability of destination decisions.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypothesis**

### **2.1 Gender Differences**

“Men are from Mars, women from Venus” (Gray, 1992). Males and females have different wants and thoughts (Mitchell & Walsh 2004). The thesis that “gender differences exist” has long prevailed in the social science (Royo-Vela, Aldas-Manzano, Küster, & Vila, 2008). Among demographic variables, gender is the main indicator of consumer behavior (Wilborn *et al.*, 2007). It has been and continues to be one of the most common forms of segmentation and the basis of marketing strategy used by marketers in particular (Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007).

Numerous studies have examined gender differences from various facets, including biological factors (Derry, 2006), sexual identity (Thompson & Morgan, 2008), gender role attitudes (Stickney & Konrad, 2007), and consumer values (Mitchell & Walsh, 2004). Researchers have tried to prove that males and females desire different products probably because their thinking is different (Yang & Wu, 2007). However, some empirical evidence has indicated that gender does not impact on decision-making behavior (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; Radtke, 2000). Unfortunately, studies presenting this evidence have generally simply presented this finding, without clarifying why no gender differences exist.

Generally, tourism research yields two different consequences: gender differences exist or gender differences do not exist. Research on the existence of gender differences mainly argues that women are the crucial decision makers concerning family holidays (Wang *et al.*, 2004), and are becoming more involved in the holiday decision-making process (Pan & Ryan, 2007). Kerstetter and Pennington-Gray (1999) also have found that the roles of women in making pleasure decisions varied markedly based on a generation basis. Beldona and Namasivayam (2006) have indicated that females perceived considerably less price fairness than males. However, Carr (1999)’s results have demonstrated that no gender effect on tourist behaviors though in-depth interviews showed the existence of gender differences in tourist perceptions. The study of community tourism dependence level by Harvey, Hunt, and Harris Jr. (1995) has failed to find any gender differences in perceptions of tourism development. Therefore, there is no general accepted opinion regarding the gender differences in the tourist decision-making behavior theory.

Sometimes researchers have failed to analyze and present gendered data in a meaningful way (Carr, 1999). Laing (1987) has suggested that differences in the nature of the leisure activities of men and women create differences in their holiday behaviors, and do not adequately explain the reasons for the observed gender differences. Since the nature of tourist decision-making differs from decision-making regarding other products and services, the generalization of gender differences in tourist decision-making behavior still requires further examination. The apparent lack of meaningful analysis and presentation of gender differences in tourist behavior inhibits the construction of social

theories and weakens understanding of tourist motivations and behavior, which must be central to tourism industry planning (Carr, 1999).

## **2.2 Tourist Hesitation**

Previous studies have not clearly defined the concept of “hesitation”, with the only exception being the study of Cho, Kang, and Cheon (2006). They have defined hesitation as postponing or deferring product purchases before making final product-purchase decisions. Basically, hesitation belongs to decision-making styles and is based on different hypotheses to early decision-making research mentioning. Early decision-making research has assumed that consumers behave rationally and are primarily interested in value maximization, with specific preferences consistent with their choice among alternatives (Josiam & Hobson, 1995). However, choices inevitably involve the risk that real life decision makers systematically violate the key behavioral assumptions of subjective expected utility theory (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992), that is, they frequently delay or quit making decisions (Dhar, 1997). Delayed decision-making is defined as hesitation in Cho *et al.* (2006)’s study of online consumer hesitation.

Furthermore, the hesitation scale comprises difficulties associated with the initiation of an intended activity, and hypothesizes that people have reduced likelihood of forming clear and polarized views of controversial issues, display ambivalence and thus are less inclined to initiate decision-making related behavior; Thompson and Zanna (1995) have reported some evidence that personal fear of invalidity is conceptually related to hesitation, because such fears are concerned with errors and the negative consequences of poor decisions, which manifest themselves in hesitation to decide (Hänze, 2001). Given the intangibility and perishability of overseas travel, tourists frequently experience the unexpected while traveling overseas. The errors and negative consequences associated with overseas travel decisions are more serious than for other services and products.

Research has gone to enormous lengths to discuss the influence of gender differences on consumer decision-making rather than consumer hesitation. However, two possible arguments have demonstrated. The first statement is that female consumers are easily influenced by the external world, making it difficult for them to make purchase decisions, while male consumers make decisions more quickly because they focus on product brand, form and physical attributes (Yang & Wu, 2007). In contrast, some researchers believe that women have greater purchasing power and experiences so that they know how to make their final decisions than men (Mitchell & Walsh, 2004). Though these two statements are widely separated, most researchers assume that females make purchase decisions more easily than males.

Since the limitation of service features influences overseas travel products more than general consuming services and products (Kurata & Bonifield, 2007), the thesis of gender differences need to be further examined on tourist hesitation in destination decision-making. As the main cause of tourist hesitation is fear of decision errors and negative consequences (Hänze, 2001), possibly no gender differences exist in tourist hesitation. As a result, this current study attempts to clarify whether the degree of hesitation differs between male and female tourists. From the above discussions, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: No gender differences exist in tourist hesitation when making destination and itinerary related decision-making.

## **2.3 Justifiability of Destination Decisions**

Decision-making can be defined as selecting and committing oneself to a course of action through a process that involves a series of steps or events (Milman, 1993). Numerous marketing strategies strongly emphasize on the manner in which consumers make purchase decisions (Bronner & De

Hoog, 1985). Except for rational decision-making, more and more consumers tend to apply emotion-focused coping methods, including positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance, and avoidance (Luce, Bettman, & Payne, 2001).

Reinforcement models of human learning have indicated that people are more likely to repeat actions that previously yielded favorable outcomes (Ratner & Herbst, 2005). Reviewing their past decisions enables people to learn from mistakes and prevents them from repeating similar mistakes (Zeelenberg, 1999). Individuals rate their own decision quality lower when they learn that the selected alternative has failed to meet their expectations. People choosing between two options do not always choose the more likely option, and affective responses can lead individuals to make suboptimal decisions (Ratner & Herbst, 2005). That is, consumers justify their purchase decisions and tend to compromise in selecting among alternatives to reduce decision-making conflicts (Josiam & Hobson, 1995; Sheng, Parker, & Nakamoto, 2005).

Factors that influence the justifiability of consumers' decisions include consumer preferences (Simonson & Tversky, 1992), uncertainty and product familiarity (Sheng *et al.*, 2005). However, given the importance of gender differences in consumer decision-making (Wilborn *et al.*, 2007), this study attempts to clarify the impacts of gender differences on the justifiability of destination decisions.

Although few academic works discuss this above issue, the general stereotype is that women are more risk averse than men (Fehr-Duda, De Gennaro, & Schubert, 2006) and females appear to lack brand loyalty (Bendall-Lyon & Powers, 2002). Additionally, women are more settled than men and change their minds more easily when making purchase decisions. Miller (1995) noted that women are more responsive to their purchase decisions and they still show a degree of brand loyalty in the real world. On the contrary, Bendall-Lyon and Powers (2002) have mentioned that both women and men experiences decrease in intentions to return and recommend purchasing over time. Since tourist decision-making differs from decision-making regarding general consumption of products and services, the generalization of gender differences in tourist decision-making behavior still needs to be examined. Thus the second hypothesis is developed, as follows:

H2: No gender differences exist in justifiability of destination decisions in destination and itinerary related decision-making.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Sampling and Procedures**

Considering the purpose of this study, a structured questionnaire was distributed using an on-site intercept procedure at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport. Moreover, judgment sampling was employed. The intended respondents for this study should be tourists who had taken a pleasure overseas group package trip at least once prior to the survey and may spend another vacation abroad within the next five years (Jang, Morrison, & O'Leary, 2002; Milman, 1993). Prior to the survey, a pre-test was conducted to check the questionnaire reliability and the content validity. To reduce the non-response error, appropriate steps mentioned by Hsieh and Chang (2006) were implemented. First, six graduate students worked in pairs when conducting the survey. Second, prior to the survey, the students were trained in street survey skills, including politeness. Finally, sequentially numbered questionnaires and gifts (accommodation coupons from a well-known hotel in Yi-lan, Taiwan), were distributed by the research team as gestures to thank respondents for completing the questionnaires. A total of 650 questionnaires were distributed, of which 565 were returned. Moreover, of the returned questionnaires, 443 were valid and usable. The effective response rate thus was 68.2%. Most of the respondents were female (54.9%), aged 21-30 years old (50.8%), single (61.4%), and had a university

education (60.7%). The average monthly income was NT\$20,001-40,000 (about US\$630-\$1,260) (37.5%) and the average frequency of overseas traveling was once (50.3%).

### 3.2 Measures

The structured survey questionnaire used to collect data comprised three sections: tourist hesitation, the justifiability of destination decisions, and tourist demographics. Aside from questions dealing with basic tourist attributes, the questions were all rated using a Likert five-point scale and were pre-tested. In terms of leisure travel product features, this research adopted the six-item scale of Friedman and Mann (1993) to measure tourist hesitation in making destination related decisions. Furthermore, a two-item scale was adopted from Sheng *et al.* (2005) to examine the justifiability of destination decisions. Higher scores indicated that tourists generally changed their destination related decisions when deciding where to visit.

As this research measures the influence of gender differences on tourist hesitation and the justifiability of destination decisions, five control variables are used in this study, including age, occupation, education, marriage, and average monthly income (e.g. Douglas, 1976; Kerstetter & Pennington-Gray, 1999; Carr, 1999; Lin & Lehto, 2006).

## 4. Results

Table 1 lists the means, standard deviations, and factor loadings for all variables used in this study. The degree of tourist hesitation is moderate, while the degree of justifiability of destination decisions ranges between moderate agreement and agreement, indicating that tourists generally changed their travel decisions when deciding where to vacation.

**Table 1.** Descriptions of measurement items

| Variables  | Mean | S.D. | Factor loading* | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|--|------|------|-----------------|---------------------|
| <b>Tourist Hesitation</b><br>(KMO= 0.845; Bartlett's $\chi^2= 880.441, p= 0.00$ )  |      |      |                 | 0.81                |
| I avoid making decision when I choosing a destination.   | 2.83 | 0.90 | 0.671           |                     |
| I put off making decision when I choosing a destination.   | 3.00 | 0.87 | 0.724           |                     |
| I'd rather someone else make a decision for me so that it won't be my problem.   | 2.78 | 0.90 | 0.765           |                     |
| I prefer to leave decisions to others.   | 2.83 | 0.92 | 0.784           |                     |
| When I have to make a decision, I wait a long time before starting to think about it.  | 3.00 | 0.89 | 0.673           |                     |
| I don't like to take responsibility for making decisions about choosing a destination.                                       | 3.00 | 0.96 | 0.710           |                     |
| <b>Justifiability of Destination Decisions</b><br>(KMO= 0.500; Bartlett's $\chi^2= 86.541, p= 0.00$ )                        |      |      |                 | 0.60                |
| Some of these alternatives are easier to justify than others when I decide the holiday destinations and related itineraries. | 3.45 | 0.81 | 0.836           |                     |
| My choice is easy to justify when deciding holiday destinations and related itineraries.                                     | 2.94 | 0.89 | 0.836           |                     |

\* All Factor loadings are statically significant,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Additionally, exploratory factor analysis is performed to examine the construct validity of the research variables (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005; Lee, Yoon, & Lee, 2007). Table 1 revealed that the KMO values are 0.50 or higher and all factor loadings exceed 0.40 by a statistically significant margin ( $p=0.00$ ). Therefore, the instruments have good validity (Hwang *et al.*, 2005; Lee *et al.*, 2007). As suggested by Hair, Tatham, Anderson, and Black (1998), Cronbach's alpha, the most commonly used reliability measure, was applied to test the factor reliability. The factors with alphas exceeding 0.6 were retained for further analysis. As shown in Table 1, alpha of 0.6 or higher indicates reasonable internal consistency among the items making up the factor (Hair *et al.*, 1998).

Hypotheses are tested using multiple regression analysis. In the regression analysis for the effect of gender differences on tourist hesitation, controls of age, education, marriage, occupation, and average monthly income were included in an initial hierarchical step to assess their contribution to explained variance.

Table 2 reveals that the overall explanatory power of Model 1 achieved significance, since the control variables explained 5.7% of the variance ( $F=2.185$ ,  $p=0.012$ ). However, almost no significant differences existed, in the influences of those five control variables on tourist hesitation. In Model 2, the overall explanatory power reached significance since control variables and the gender variable explained 6.0% of the variance ( $F=2.121$ ,  $p=0.012$ ). After controlling the five control variables, the gender differences did not influence tourist hesitation ( $Beta=-0.058$ ,  $p=0.249$ ). That is, male and female tourists exhibit identical hesitation when determining destinations and travel itineraries. Consequently, H1 is supported.

**Table 2.** Gender (IV) vs. tourist hesitation (DV)

| Model Variables  | Model 1 |          |          | Model 2       |               |              |
|--|---------|----------|----------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
|  | Beta    | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | Beta          | <i>t</i>      | <i>p</i>     |
| Age  | -0.087  | -1.366   | 0.173    | -0.082        | -1.294        | 0.197        |
| Education  | -0.160  | -3.059   | 0.002*   | -0.162        | -3.100        | 0.002*       |
| Average monthly avenue   | 0.029   | 0.485    | 0.628    | 0.015         | 0.252         | 0.802        |
| Marriage: Widowed vs. Married  | 0.037   | 0.753    | 0.452    | 0.041         | 0.837         | 0.403        |
| Marriage: Divorce vs. Married  | -0.030  | -0.633   | 0.527    | -0.028        | -0.594        | 0.553        |
| Marriage: Single vs. Married   | 0.093   | 1.481    | 0.139    | 0.102         | 1.613         | 0.108        |
| <b>CV</b> Occupation: Work vs. Student   | -0.023  | -0.384   | 0.701    | -0.027        | -0.445        | 0.657        |
| Occupation: Business vs. Student   | -0.096  | -1.288   | 0.198    | -0.088        | -1.180        | 0.239        |
| Occupation: Government/Education vs. Student   | -0.039  | -0.642   | 0.522    | -0.028        | -0.465        | 0.642        |
| Occupation: Retired vs. Student  | 0.043   | 0.762    | 0.447    | 0.053         | 0.922         | 0.357        |
| Occupation: Free vs. Student   | -0.166  | -2.501   | 0.013*   | -0.156        | -2.329        | 0.020*       |
| Occupation: Others vs. Student   | -0.066  | -1.189   | 0.235    | -0.057        | -1.018        | 0.309        |
| <b>IV Gender</b>   |         |          |          | <b>-0.058</b> | <b>-1.155</b> | <b>0.249</b> |
| <b>Model 1:</b> $R^2=0.057$ ; $F=2.185$ ; $p=0.012^*$ ; $\Delta R^2=0.057$ ; $\Delta F=2.185$ ; $\Delta p=0.012$ |         |          |          |               |               |              |
| <b>Model 2:</b> $R^2=0.060$ ; $F=2.121$ ; $p=0.012^*$ ; $\Delta R^2=0.003$ ; $\Delta F=1.335$ ; $\Delta p=0.249$ |         |          |          |               |               |              |

\*  $p \leq 0.05$

Table 3 indicates that the overall explanatory power of Model 1 achieved significance as the control variables effectively explained 5.3% of the variance ( $F=2.185$ ,  $p=0.021$ ). However, almost no significant differences existed in the influences of the five control variables on the justifiability of

destination decisions. In Model 2, the overall explanatory power reached significance as all factors explained 5.4% of the variance ( $F= 1.891$ ,  $p= 0.029$ ). When controlling the five control variables, gender differences did not impact the justifiability of destination decisions ( $Beta = 0.030$ ,  $p= 0.551$ ). This result demonstrates that male and female tourists identically justify their decisions when determining tourist destinations and itineraries. As a result, H2 is supported.

That is, the thesis of gender differences cannot be adequately explained the tourist decision-making behavior.

**Table 3.** Gender (IV) vs. the justifiability of destination decisions (DV)

| Model Variables  | Model 1 |          |          | Model 2      |              |              |
|--|---------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|  | Beta    | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> | Beta         | <i>t</i>     | <i>p</i>     |
| Age  | 0.050   | 0.785    | 0.433    | 0.048        | 0.747        | 0.456        |
| Education  | -0.050  | -0.957   | 0.339    | -0.049       | -0.934       | 0.351        |
| Average monthly avenue   | -0.133  | -2.236   | 0.026*   | -0.126       | -2.076       | 0.039*       |
| Marriage: Widowed vs. Married  | 0.025   | 0.519    | 0.604    | 0.023        | 0.473        | 0.636        |
| Marriage: Divorce vs. Married  | -0.083  | -1.739   | 0.083    | -0.084       | -1.757       | 0.080        |
| Marriage: Single vs. Married   | 0.043   | 0.680    | 0.497    | 0.038        | 0.602        | 0.548        |
| <b>CV</b> Occupation: Work vs. Student   | -0.069  | -1.124   | 0.262    | -0.067       | -1.090       | 0.276        |
| Occupation: Business vs. Student   | -0.054  | -0.722   | 0.471    | -0.058       | -0.772       | 0.441        |
| Occupation: Government/Education vs. Student   | -0.132  | -2.169   | 0.031*   | -0.137       | -2.231       | 0.026*       |
| Occupation: Retired vs. Student  | 0.003   | 0.046    | 0.963    | -0.002       | -0.042       | 0.967        |
| Occupation: Free vs. Student   | -0.087  | -1.300   | 0.194    | -0.092       | -1.367       | 0.172        |
| Occupation: Others vs. Student   | -0.013  | -0.238   | 0.812    | -0.018       | -0.308       | 0.750        |
| <b>IV Gender</b>   |         |          |          | <b>0.030</b> | <b>0.596</b> | <b>0.551</b> |
| <b>Model 1:</b> $R^2= 0.053$ ; $F= 2.022$ ; $P= 0.021^*$ ; $\Delta R^2= 0.053$ ; $\Delta F= 2.022$ ; $\Delta p= 0.021$ |         |          |          |              |              |              |
| <b>Model 2:</b> $R^2= 0.054$ ; $F= 1.891$ ; $P= 0.029^*$ ; $\Delta R^2= 0.001$ ; $\Delta F= 0.356$ ; $\Delta p= 0.551$ |         |          |          |              |              |              |

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study examines whether the thesis of gender differences can generalize the travel decision-making behavior. Previous studies have discussed tourist decision-making behavior in detail, but have not considered tourist hesitation and the justifiability of destination decisions. Based on decision-making theory, this study adopts the variables of gender to explain the two concepts of tourist hesitation and the justifiability of destination decisions, since gender difference is the most basic and critical determinant of decision-making behavior. As the results, no gender differences exist in tourist hesitation and the justifiability of destination decisions. Regardless of the destinations they wish to visit, most tourists are hesitant and frequently change their minds regarding where they desire to spend their holidays. That is, this study demonstrates the inadequacy of gender differences in clarifying tourist decision-making behavior and breaks down the associated gender stereotypes.

The results of this research resemble the quantitative result of Carr (1999), that no significant gender difference exist in tourist behaviors, although Carr finally concluded that qualitative interviews indicate gender difference in tourist behaviors. A clear contradiction exists between the qualitative and quantitative results of Carr (1999), leaving an unresolved research problem. This study examines this problem, and the results demonstrate that both female and male tourists are likely

to hesitate in making vacation destination decisions, and both groups are equally likely to change their destination and itinerary related decisions. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that today male and female tourists currently undertake the same travel risks and receive equal quantities of tourism relevant information, resulting in them possessing similar degree of tourist hesitation and the justifiability of destination decisions during destination and itinerary relevant decision-making.

Traditional decision-making research has long believed that women differ from men in purchasing behaviors (Yang & Wu, 2007). The results of this study challenge the generally accepted opinions regarding gender differences. Furthermore, the stereotype that “women are settled” is also clarified in this study since the results of multiple regression analysis have revealed no gender difference in the justifiability of destination decisions. This result is similar with the previous statement of Bendall-Lyon and Powers (2002). Regardless of gender, most tourists have similar motivations for going on vacation (e.g., relaxing) and face identical travel risks when purchasing travel products and services. Owing to the intangibility and perishability of tourism products, tourists carefully consider and evaluate the alternatives available for them to ensure a high-quality travel experience when making destination relevant decisions.

Notably, hesitation is generally misunderstood with it widely being assumed that no losses occur when tourists hesitate in destination decision-making. However, for tourism practitioners, tourist hesitation increases the difficulty of convincing consumers to make immediate purchase decisions and increasing the possibility of clients shifting to other travel agents, thus negatively affecting sales performance. Furthermore, from the perspective of tourists themselves, hesitation is likely to result in missing the desired trip owing to the perishability of tourism products though they can select similar trips offered by other travel agents with different prices and itineraries. However, seeking other trips would require them to spend more time searching for information and making new decisions. Consequently, tourism practitioners should focus on reducing tourist hesitation.

Research on tourist decision-making has mostly stressed the magnitude of the female market and presented various marketing strategies for female tourists (Kerstetter & Pennington-Gray, 1999; Pan & Ryan, 2007). However, the results suggest that travel agents should regard males and females as equally important rather than only valuing the demands of female tourists when advertising or promoting tourist products and services. Besides, tourism managers should focus on shaping the specific destination images and should try to make all relevant information clear to eliminate the possibility of tourist hesitation and justifying destination decisions.

Finally, this study also proposes avenues for further research. Hesitation is one of decision-making styles originally, and is not only a habitual behavior pattern but also a stable characteristic of decision makers (Thunholm, 2004). Hesitating tourists represent fish that have not yet been caught in the nets of tourism managers. Further research thus is urgently required on market segmentation, applying hesitation to further extract features of this specific market and effective promotion approaches.

Considering this study merely applies the concepts of tourist hesitation and the justifiability of travel decisions to clarify the effects of gender differences on tourist decision-making behavior, this study could also be extended by further exploring the thesis regarding the influence of gender differences on tourist decision-making behavior using the other behavioral variables, such as revisit behavior.

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