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## Senior Tourists' Purchasing Decisions in Group Package Tour

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### ABSTRACT

The senior demographic group is growing rapidly. Family decision-making research has frequently examined relationships between husbands and wives across stages and subdecisions. To supplement previous research, this study examines how different roles' influence over the decision-making stages when the senior tourist participates in a group package tour. A total of 293 senior tourists from Taiwan were surveyed and asked to indicate the amount of influence each family member and 'others' had. Results showed that husbands tend to have the most influence in the final purchase, and one interesting finding is that 'others' exhibit the highest degree of influence in the information search stage. In addition, the husband shows more influence in 9 subdecisions, and as family income level rises there is a rise in the likelihood of husband dominating with respect to the GPT. Finally, implications for tourism marketers and areas for future research are discussed.

**Key words:** Travel decision-making, group package tour, Taiwanese senior tourists.

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## INTRODUCTION

The senior population has been continuously rising because of longer life expectancy. Recognizing the fact that we are rapidly becoming a "gray society", several studies that explore the theoretical linkage between aging and the profession (i.e., McCormick 1991; Kelley 1992; Penalta and Uysal 1993). With respect to the travel industry, one segment that has caught the marketers' attention is the elderly traveler. The travel potential of this group cannot be overlooked (Jang and Wu 2006; Lehto, O'Leary and Lee 2001; Capella and Greco 1987).

Asia is no exception to this trend, where the population of seniors is growing rapidly. As indicated in Sakai, Brown, and Mak's (2000) study, Japan's population is aging rapidly as a result of the shift from high to low birth and death rates. In Japan, the senior has increased from 16.2 percent in 1998 to 20.0 percent in 2005 (Statistics Bureau 2005). In Taiwan, according to the *Monthly Statistics of the R.O.C.* (Executive Yuan 2006), by the year 2005, the over-50 age group constitutes 24.19 percent of the Taiwanese population. Similar demographic shifts are also taking place in many countries throughout the world (March 2000; Fintel 1990).

Seniors have generally made their financial and time investments in home and family, have become free from their children's dependency, and possess a relatively large share of all discretionary dollars (Zimmer, Brayley and Searle 1995). Supernaw (1985) noted that when Americans over fifty retire, the number one thing they say they want to do is travel. Rosenfeld (1986) also indicated that older Americans travel more frequently, stay away longer, and rely more on travel agents than any other segment of the population. Obviously, from a managerial standpoint, it is very important for marketers to understand these consumers' decision-making process. The study of family decision-making could help tourism marketers in the development and facilitation of exchange based upon product decisions, price structures, promotional campaigns and distribution channels (Sharp and Mott 1956; Nichols and Snepenger 1988; Kerstetter and Pennington-Gray 1999).

Essentially, Western researchers have been studying family decision-making almost since the late 1950s (Lalwani 2002). Marketing and advertising researchers have been concerned with determining which family members have the dominant influence in travel decision so that marketing and advertising strategy can be oriented accordingly. To date, very little research dealing with family decision-making has focused on Chinese leisure goods/or services. However, the international tourism industry is now faced with an increasing number of inbound travelers from Asia, such as Australia (Reisinger and Turner 2002) and Guam (Iverson 1997). Group travel is a major force in the tourism industry; it is also a highly competitive market in which both agencies and operators need to understand the buying decisions of tourists.

With regard to travelers in Asia, in countries such as Taiwan, Japan, Korea, China, etc., the group package tour (hereafter abbreviated GPT) is one of the

main modes of outbound travel (Lo and Lam 2004; Wang, Hsieh and Huan 2000; Prideaux 1998; Tourism Bureau 2004; Wang and Sheldon 1995; Nozawa 1992). In Taiwan, nearly 49 percent of the overseas travelers are traveling for pleasure. Among the pleasure travelers, almost 64.3 percent of the senior tourists (50 years old and above) choose the GPT as their outbound travel mode (Tourism Bureau 2004).

In brief, despite the vast quantity of literature addressing senior adults and the GPT's, to the knowledge of the authors no research has fully discussed decision-making of the senior adults for the GPT, and this area is constantly evolving. Thus, the key issue of this research is to focus on the roles of senior tourist's GPT decision-making.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research has discovered that the influence of the husband, wife or child may also vary according to the stage in decision-making. Numerous ways of examining the decision-making process have been identified in the study of consumer behavior. The most common approach has been to break down the purchase decision process into three distinct stages: (1) problem recognition or problem initiation; (2) information search; and (3) final purchase (Davis and Rigaux 1974; Szybillo and Sosanie 1977; Nelson 1979; Howard and Madrigal 1990).

Earlier research in family vacation decision-making; Sharp and Mott (1956) provided an analysis of husband-wife roles in arriving at some economic decisions frequently faced by the metropolitan family. Their results showed that 70 percent of greater Detroit husbands and wives make family vacation decisions together. Jenkins (1978) replicated the work of Davis (1970) in a study that examined which family member was the most influential for specific vacation subdecisions. Results indicated that husbands dominated vacation information collection and decisions on length of trip, timing of vacation, and expenditures. Joint decision making between the husband and wife was common for decision on whether to take the children, mode of transportation, activities, lodging, and destination. Darley and Lim (1986) found that different individuals within a family may play different roles at different stages. Recent studies relevant to travel mainly focused on vacation decision-making between husbands and wives (Litvin, Xu and Kang 2004; Kerstetter and Pennington-Gray 1999; Ritchie and Filiatrault 1980; Filiatrault and Ritchie 1980; Nichols and Snepenger 1988); and the influence of the children in vacation decision-making (Filiatrault and Ritchie 1980; Ritchie and Filiatrault 1980; Cosenza and Davis 1981; Nichols and Snepenger 1988; Howard and Madrigal 1990; Fodness 1992).

With respect to senior tourists, Romsa and Blenman (1989) examined the differences between under-50 and over-60 vacationers. Their results showed that greater personal flexibility allows retirees more latitude in the selection of the length of the vacation and time when it can be taken. Javalgi, Thomas and

Rao (1992) also reported the travel behavior of American senior and nonsenior groups in the pleasure travel marketplace. The study indicated that senior travelers (55 and older) in the pleasure market appear to go for package trips and tend to make both transportation and accommodation arrangements with a travel agent. Besides, Blazey (1992) studied the relationship between pre- and postretirement status, use of various forms of travel information, and key items related to older adult travel activity. Other studies which are highly relevant to the senior tourist include, senior tourist and market segmentation (Shoemaker 2000; Lieux, Weaver and McCleary 1994; Reece 2004; Horneman et al. 2002), uses of travel information (Capella and Greco 1987), constraints to travel (Blazey 1987; Fleischer and Pizam 2002), and motivation (Guinn 1980).

The preceding studies were mainly concentrated on domestic travel or foreign independent tour (hereafter abbreviated FIT), both of which differ in key respects from the GPT. Wang, Hsieh, and Huan (2000: 177-178) indicated that there are two main differences between GPT and FIT, namely, the buying process and the contact employee:

*In the GPT buying process, the customer might buy the GPT product through third parties such as friends, relatives, parents, companies, schools, churches, or through retail travel agencies. On the contrary, FIT customers usually contact the travel agencies personally in order to get travel information and counseling. Second, the GPT customer relationship is mediated almost entirely through a single "contact employee". That is, in the GPT, the travel agency would assign a tour guide to escort the tour. In some countries or cities such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea, Paris, Vienna, and London, etc., local guide are also provided, but this is not necessary for FITs.*

As a rule, in a FIT, after tourists have made up their mind and decided to take a vacation, a host of involved decisions arise, for example, choice of region and resort, timing, length of stay, mode of transportation, travel organization, accommodation, kinds of activities, and financing (Jenkins 1978; Filiatrault and Ritchie 1980; Snepenger et al. 1990). Consequently, after the tourists have chosen to travel in the FIT way, a great deal of decision-making and information gathering are then needed. In GPT, the tourists may consider many of the above-mentioned travel related factors; however, there is no need for them to make detailed, specific decisions or even to gather information with regard to the accommodation, mode of transportation, kinds of activities, etc.

Besides, in view of the decision-making, no research has directly investigated the process of senior tourist decision-making in the GPT, though two recent studies have touched on the issue. Using a sample of 124 escorted tour travelers 50 and older, Milman (1998) found that senior travelers relied mainly on tour operators, destination brochures, and travel agencies as the major sources of information for their trip. Milman focused primarily on the impact of travel and tourism experiences on travelers' psychological well-being or level of happiness, and asked seniors to assess their happiness before and after the tour. Furthermore, Sheldon and Mak's (1987) mode choice model for package tour

clearly indicated that visitors who are elderly, intend to visit several destinations, travel with few people in the party, intend to make short visits, and are on their first trip to Hawaii are more likely to purchase package tours than to travel independently. Their findings have some interesting conceptual and applied implications, but the definition of the package tour used in their study was too broad. Moreover, the samples largely consisted of U.S. west-bound visitor.

Although the above research is interesting, none of these studies examined the specific issues addressed in our research. In summary, despite the importance of the senior market to the travel industry, there is an obvious lack of empirical study regarding the senior's decision-making for GPT. Accordingly, the objectives of this research are: first, to explore the influence of family members for GPT decisions and specific GPT subdecisions, and second, to examine the decision-making roles of seniors relate to their retirement status, education level, and family income levels. Moreover, it was felt that studying this service would give a chance to compare results of family roles in Chinese family with those in the West. Therefore, the operational definition of GPT decisions was defined that the three-stage decision (problem recognition stage, information search stage, and final purchase) of consumers before travel. The sub-decisions is defined as the detail decisions related to travel, for example, where to go, how much money to spend, how much time to spend, where to stay...etc. (Belch, Belch and Ceresino 1985; Jenkins 1978, 1979; Szybillo and Sosanie 1977).

### **Hypotheses**

It is natural to inquire whether decision-making patterns are the same for all groups, or vary with sociological and economic factors (Wolgast 1958), marketers must remain abreast of the impact of the family role changes and their concomitant consumer purchasing patterns in order to modify marketing and advertising strategies accordingly (Jenkins 1979).

Belch, Belch and Ceresino (1985) used three stages approach and examined family members' influence as a function of the product category and specific decision areas. For vacation categories they found that the child's greatest influence occurs in the initiation stage and is lower in the search and final decision stages, husbands and wives have about the same amount of influence across the three stages of the decision process. Davis and Rigaux (1974) found that the syncretic pattern characterizes decisions about family vacation. Past research has shown that couples from developed countries are more likely to exhibit joint decision-making, whereas couples from developing countries are more likely to exhibit husband-dominated decision-making (Green et al. 1983; Ford, LaTour and Henthorne 1995). Therefore, it may be suggested that husbands might also play a dominant role in travel decision-making process.

In addition, previous studies mainly focused on the relative influences among family members. Nevertheless, Chinese society is typically collectivist, empha-

sizing connections to others and interpersonal relationships (Hofstede 1991; Triandis 1988). Wang, Hsieh and Huan (2000) also indicated that third parties would play an important role in the GPT buying process. Therefore, it may be implied that instead of husband, wife, and children, 'others' might also play an important role in the senior tourists' GPT decision-making process. For the purposes of this study, 'others' were defined as friends, relatives, neighbors etc. Thus, it is posited that:

$H_{1-a}$ : The influence of family members and 'others' will vary in the GPT problem recognition stage.

$H_{1-b}$ : The influence of family members and 'others' will vary in the GTP information search stage.

$H_{1-c}$ : The influence of family members and 'others' will vary in the GPT final purchase stage.

Jenkins (1978) found that wives perceive husbands to be dominant in decisions regarding information collection, length of vacation, actual date of vacation, and amount of money to spend. Wives and husbands have equal influence on mode of transportation, kinds of activities, selection of lodging, and selection of destination points. Neither husbands nor wives perceive the wives to be dominant in the modal influence pattern for any subdecision in vacation decision-making.

Jenkins (1979) indicated that both spouses perceive children to be highly influential in vacation decisions, and some specific vacation subdecisions could be called "children dominate!" Szybillo and Sosanie (1977) stated that the "when to go" subdecision is characterized as predominantly a complete family decision (58%) or a husband and wife joint decision (33%). For the subdecision "how much to spend," joint decision-making between husband and wife was dominant (73%). Belch, Belch, and Ceresino (1985) found that the financial decision regarding how much to spend is dominated by the husband, but he shows less influence in the where-to-go and where-to-stay vacation decisions.

The results of the above-discussed studies seem inconsistent with regard to the family members' relative influences in vacation-related subdecisions. However, many Asian countries and Taiwan are traditionally viewed as patriarchal societies where female seniors' perception is typically influenced by their husbands. An old and wide-spread Chinese proverb also says "Males are gold, females are water" (Chen, Lai and Tam 1999). Consequently, according to the preceding discussion, it is then hypothesized as:

$H_2$ : In seniors' GPT decision-making, husbands will have more influence on subdecisions.

Economic-demographic variables used as independent variable have tended to be emphasized in decision-making studies (Dunsing and Hafstrom 1975). Kim, Wei and Ruys (2003) indicated that of the travel attributes for seniors,

two demographic factors were found to be significantly important: marital status and income. Nevertheless, researchers ignore several variables that are seen to affect seniors' travel behavior. The most notable among them are retirement status (Blazey 1992), education (Yavas, Babakus and Delener 1994; Javalgi, Thomas and Rao 1992), and family income (Gitelson and Kerstetter 1990; Spiro 1983).

Blazey (1992) examined the relationship between different retirement status. A fear of certain modes of travel and lack of transportation to and from the point of departure further constrain retirees in significantly greater numbers; they may feel that travel requires too many decisions to be made.

Similarly, when the senior tourist decides to participate in a GPT, there are lots of decisions to be made. However, in the GPT, the tour leader and travel agency will take care of many things; thus, retirees are then less bothered by the language, transportation, travel information collection, and arrangement of itineraries. Hence, their fears of lack of transportation, information, and unfamiliarity with the C. I. Q. (custom, immigration, and quarantine) procedures problems are lessened. Thus, it is posited that:

H<sub>3</sub>: The retirement status of the senior tourists has no significant influence on the GPT decision-making process.

As revealed by Javalgi, Thomas and Rao (1992), travelers with more formal education are more likely to engage in a detailed information search before making a purchase decision. Capella and Greco (1987) found that individuals with less education rated consumer publications and direct mail as important sources of information. Zimmer, Brayley and Searle (1995) indicated that as education increased, the tendency to travel increased; they also found those with higher educations, income level, and life satisfaction scores tended to choose more distant destinations. Jenkins (1979) once concluded that higher the level of education of husbands, the less influence they perceived their children to have.

Generally, most Chinese are influenced by filial piety, older Chinese are much less influenced by Westernization (Labouvie-Vief et al. 2000), and the average level of education for seniors (50 years of age and above) is lower than that of their children (Executive Yuan 2006). Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that the influences of filial piety, lower education levels than children, and lack of Westernization, senior tourists' influence on outbound GPT decision-making will be varied by different education levels. The above discussions then led to the following hypothesis:

H<sub>4</sub>: Differences in the education level of senior tourists will significantly influence the GPT decision-making process.

Sharp and Mott (1956) indicated that increasing influence of the husband accompanied an increase in income; also as income level rises, there is a rise in the likelihood of mutual decision-making between spouses with respect to

family vacations. Jenkins (1979) had found that neither the absolute income of each spouse nor spousal differences in income is significantly related to parents' perceptions of children's influence. Wolgast (1958) indicated higher income greatly increases the husband's importance and diminishes the wife's.

Previous studies mainly focused on the influence of husband and wife with regard to family income and decision-making. However, a GPT is not cheap and considering the filial respect in Chinese society, we may postulate the children might pay the travel fees for their parents. Therefore, the relative influence of the senior tourist on the GPT decision-making process would be more complicated than prior studies have revealed. Thus, the following hypothesis may be derived from the above discussion:

H<sub>5</sub>: Family members and others' influences will vary by different family income levels in the GPT decision-making process.

## METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed consisting of three parts. In the first part, to evaluate the influence of family members and 'others' across three stages of the senior tourists' GPT decision-making process, respondents were asked to indicate the amount of influence exercised by each of the family members and by 'others'. A six-point scale was used, ranging from "no influence at all" to "all of the influence" (Belch, Belch and Ceresino 1985).

In the second part, the subdecisions were assessed. Subdecisions were defined as the specific decisions regarding the participating in GPT. Twelve subdecisions were employed in this study (Belch, Belch and Ceresino 1985; Wang, Hsieh and Huan 2000). First, the respondents were asked if they had taken certain subdecisions into consideration, if they had, then they were further asked the influences of each family member and 'others' specifically on the subdecisions. The subdecisions mainly included the destination (where to go), budget (how much money to spend), days (how much time to spend), accommodation (where to stay), departure day (when to go) (Belch, Belch and Ceresino 1985), airline, restaurant, coach, shopping, optional tour, travel agency, and tour leader (Wang, Hsieh and Huan 2000). A six-point scale was used ranging from "no influence at all" to "all of the influence."

In addition, the respondents were asked to provide information on various sociodemographic variables including age, gender, education, retirement status, and family income (here defined as husband's and wife's joint income). Finally, they were also requested to indicate the destination of their trip and other related travel behavior.

### Sample Selection

The definition of a senior traveler varied among past studies. In general, the senior traveler has been defined as an individuals of (1) 50 years old and above (Hawes 1988; Blazey 1992; Milman 1998), (2) 55 years old and over (Lieux,



Weaver and McCleary 1994; Shoemaker 2000), and (3) 60 years and older (Capella and Greco 1987). This study operationally defines seniors as individuals being 50 years old or above.

Previous research has shown that if the purpose of a study is limited to describing the relative influence of husband versus wife in making various decisions, it is sufficient to question only one spouse (Davis 1976; Howard and Madrigal 1990). Therefore, an on-site intercept interview procedure was utilized at an international airport in Taiwan. Before the tour groups departed from the CKS Taipei International Airport, which is the major international airport in Taiwan, the researchers approached family groups having at least one senior tourist to ask if they would like to participate in the surveys. It should also be pointed out that even when the senior couples were present, only one completed the questionnaire.

Before large-scale data collection took place, this study used a small-scale sample to conduct a pre-test in order to uncover any potential problems. The characteristics of the 30 respondents who participated in the pre-test were as follows: there were sixteen males, fourteen females; 57 percent of the respondents paid the travel costs themselves, 30 percent had travel costs paid by their children; and most of them traveled abroad one or two times per year. Based on the respondents' results and comments, some revisions were made to improve the clarity of the items.

In total, 306 seniors (from 306 different families) were finally obtained, of which 293 were usable. Chi-square analysis was performed on 13 of the incomplete questionnaires. The results showed no significant differences were found between the incomplete returns and the 293 completed questionnaires. While the possibility of nonresponse bias cannot be ruled out with the data, it was thought that with the respectable 95.7 percent response rate nonreturn bias would have minimal effect on interpretation (Guinn, 1980).

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The characteristics of the 293 respondents were as follows: 55.6 percent were male and 44.4 percent were female; 26.6 percent were 70 years of age and older, and 23.5 percent were 50-54 years old; while 22.9 percent of the respondents' occupations were business, followed by homemaker 19.5 percent; the majority of employment status' were retired, 56.3 percent. The family income per month was mostly under NT\$ 49,999 (about US\$ 1,471), about 43.3 percent; the primary family status were three generations living together accounted for 39.6 percent of the respondents.

Most of the respondents had received only a primary school diploma 37 percent; followed in second place by senior high school diploma 18 percent, and 16.7 percent of the respondents had a college educational background. This finding is inconsistent with prior studies where the majority of respondents were mainly high school or college graduates in the West (Hawes 1988; Javalgi, Thomas and Rao 1992; Milman 1998; Lieux, Weaver and McCleary

1994). Regarding the travel destinations, 28 percent of the respondents went to China, Hong Kong, and Macao; 24 percent to Northeast Asia. Most of the respondents traveled with their spouses (26.3%), friends (22.2%), or children (19.4%). Nearly 68 percent of the respondents paid the tour expenses by themselves and 21.5 percent were paid by their children. About 31.7 percent of the respondents traveled once a year, and 24.6 percent traveled two times per year. Finally, in terms of purchasing behavior, about 33.4 percent of the senior tourists bought the GPT by themselves, nearly 25 percent were bought via children, and 15.7 percent were bought via friends. The sample was all Taiwanese.

### Extent of Influence across Decision Stages

The first hypothesis suggested that the influence of family members and others' will vary with the different stages of the GPT decision-making process. In order to test this hypothesis, the relative influence scores of family members and others across the three decision stages were analyzed. The mean scores representing the respondents' perceptions of family members and others' influence are reported in Table 1. Examination of this table reveals that the influence of each member is likely to vary by information search and final purchase stages. No significant differences were found among the four decision-makers with regard to the problem recognition stage. Surprisingly, 'others' have the highest mean score ( $M=3.19$ ,  $p<.001$ ) in the information search stage, and wife has the lowest one.

This finding is inconsistent with Fodness' research (1992), which indicated that wives were more likely than husbands to conduct the pre-vacation information search. In this study, the final purchase stage was found to be dominated by husband ( $M=3.71$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Accordingly, the  $H_{1-b}$  and  $H_{1-c}$  are then supported.

The husband tends to have the most influence in the final purchase stage, and less influence in the information search. The wife demonstrates a relatively high degree of influence in the final purchase, and the least in information search stage. The influence of children also varies by decision stage. The child demonstrated a relatively high degree of influence in the problem recognition stage, and a lesser degree in both information search and final purchase.

### Extent of Influence by Subdecisions

The second hypothesis concerns the influence of family members and others with respect to subdecisions. Table 2 shows the mean score and frequency for each of the subdecisions. Since the respondents were asked if they had taken certain subdecisions into consideration, if they had, then they were further asked the influences of each family member and others specifically on the subdecisions. The results reveal that among the 12 subdecisions, the travel agency (65.9%) was primarily received the most consideration by the respondents, followed by how much time to spend (53.9%), when to go (52.2%),

Table 1. Influence by stages of the decision process<sup>1</sup>

	Decision Process					
	I		II		III	
	Problem Recognition		Information Search		Final Purchase	
Husband	3.07	(2.35)	2.37bc	(2.14)	3.71a	(2.44)
Wife	3.09	(2.33)	1.94c	(1.83)	3.17b	(2.39)
Child	2.67	(2.28)	2.48b	(2.22)	2.48c	(2.20)
Others <sup>2</sup>	3.16	(2.48)	3.19a	(2.47)	1.94d	(1.94)
F	2.644		16.893*		34.784*	

1. Each score represents the average of the husband's, wife's, child's, and others' influence, as measured on a scale where 1= no influence at all and 6 = all of the influence. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on Scheffe tests p significant at .05 level. If no superscripts appear, none of the means was significantly different.

2. According to the respondents, "others" refer to as eight categories; they are friends, travel agent, relatives, companies, neighbors, colleagues, churches, and union. Among these categories, friends play the most important role in problem recognition (46.9%), information search (40.6%), and final purchase (44.4%).

\* Represents F ratio significant at .001 level.

and where to go (50.2%).

According to the mean score in Table 2, subdecisions for where to go, how much money to spend, how much time to spend, where to stay, when to go, airline, coach, travel agency, and tour leader, the husband had substantially more influence than the wife, child, and others. On the other hand, the wife only shows more influence for restaurant, shopping, and optional tour. Overall, children and others show less influence in the 12 subdecisions. In consequence,  $H_2$  is then partially supported.

### Sociodemographic Variables and the Influence across Decision Stages

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test whether there were significant differences in perceptions regarding the influence of family members and others according to retirement status and education level in separate and overall decision-making stages. Retirement status and education level were used as independent variables, and influence scores given by respondents with regard to the four decision-makers represent the dependent measure. The results in Table 3 show that there is no significant difference in the four retirement statuses with regard to overall influence ( $F=2.508, p>.05$ ). Accordingly,  $H_3$  is supported. However, the influence of children was found to vary by the senior tourists' individual retirement status. For senior tourists who were retired or unemployed, the influence of children tended to be stronger. Blazey (1992) indicated that preretirees appear to be more intensive users of travel information. However, Table 3 reveals that no matter what the senior tourists' retirement status, they show less influence in GPT information search and no statistically significant difference was found between the four different retirement statuses ( $F=1.479, p>.05$ ).

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Table 2. Family members and others' influence for subdecisions<sup>1</sup>

Subdecisions	Decision	N <sup>3</sup>	%	Mean Influence Score							F
				Husband	Wife	Child	Others				
Where to go How much	Joint <sup>2</sup>	147	50.2	3.73 <sup>a</sup> (2.39)	3.30 <sup>a</sup> (2.40)	2.46 <sup>b</sup> (2.20)	2.35 <sup>b</sup> (2.20)				12.363*
money to spend How much	Husband dominate	122	41.6	4.46 <sup>a</sup> (2.22)	3.61 <sup>b</sup> (2.35)	2.11 <sup>c</sup> (2.02)	1.08 <sup>d</sup> (0.64)				74.644*
time to spend	Husband dominate	158	53.9	4.12 <sup>a</sup> (2.37)	3.36 <sup>b</sup> (2.42)	2.23 <sup>c</sup> (2.11)	1.69 <sup>cd</sup> (1.72)				40.325*
Where to stay	Joint	98	33.4	3.92 <sup>a</sup> (2.44)	3.38 <sup>a</sup> (2.45)	2.09 <sup>b</sup> (2.03)	2.31 <sup>b</sup> (2.19)				14.184*
When to go	Joint	153	52.2	3.65 <sup>a</sup> (2.44)	3.42 <sup>ab</sup> (2.42)	2.80 <sup>bc</sup> (2.38)	1.80 (1.83)				20.084*
Airline	Joint	83	28.3	3.86 <sup>a</sup> (2.43)	3.02 <sup>ab</sup> (2.38)	2.1 <sup>9b</sup> (2.09)	2.41 <sup>b</sup> (2.25)				8.780*
Restaurant	Joint	59	20.1	3.83 <sup>a</sup> (2.45)	4.17 <sup>a</sup> (2.30)	2.22 <sup>b</sup> (2.07)	1.59 <sup>b</sup> (1.63)				20.001*
Coach	Joint	32	10.9	4.13 <sup>a</sup> (2.46)	3.03 <sup>ab</sup> (2.49)	1.78 <sup>b</sup> (1.84)	2.09 <sup>b</sup> (2.10)				7.092*
Shopping	Joint	57	19.5	3.79 <sup>a</sup> (2.31)	4.39 <sup>a</sup> (2.19)	2.19 <sup>b</sup> (2.00)	1.58 <sup>b</sup> (1.63)				23.564*
Optional tour	Joint	72	24.6	3.62 <sup>a</sup> (2.38)	3.67 <sup>a</sup> (2.37)	2.28 <sup>b</sup> (2.12)	1.82 <sup>b</sup> (1.85)				13.278*
Travel agency	Husband and others dominate	193	65.9	3.24 <sup>a</sup> (2.40)	2.57 <sup>bc</sup> (2.24)	2.18 <sup>c</sup> (2.07)	3.02 <sup>ab</sup> (2.47)				8.159*
Tour leader	Husband, wife, and others dominate	59	20.5	3.32 <sup>a</sup> (2.45)	3.08 <sup>a</sup> (2.46)	1.80 <sup>b</sup> (1.81)	3.20 <sup>a</sup> (2.50)				5.483*

1. Each score represents the average of the husband's, wife's, child's, and others' influence, as measured on a scale where 1= no input at all and 6 = all of the input. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations. Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on Scheffe tests p significant at .05 level. If no superscripts appear, none of the means was significantly different.

2. Joint decision means Husband and Wife share the decision together.

3. The number of respondent take subdecisions into consideration.

\* Represents F ratio significant at .001 level.

As shown in Table 4, significant differences were found in the six different education levels ( $F=4.924, p<.001$ ). According to Table 4, one clear trend can be found in overall influence, that senior tourists with higher education levels have more influence on GPT decision-making. Thus, the  $H_4$  is supported. Another interesting trend can be found in Table 4, the influence of children decreases as parents' education levels get higher. Besides, as Javalgi, Thomas and Rao (1992) noted, tourists who have more formal education are more likely to engage in a detailed information search process before making a purchase decision, and the result of this present study is fairly consistent with this view.

ANOVA was also used to test whether there were significant differences in perceptions regarding the influence of family members and others with family income in the entire decision-making process. ANOVAs were run for each of the family income intervals. As can be seen in Table 5, significant differences were found in four family income intervals. Family income per month between NT\$ 150,000-199,999 (about US\$ 4,412-5,882) was the only interval not found to be significant. For senior tourists with family income under NT\$

Table 4. Education level and extent of influence across decision stages<sup>1</sup>

Education	Primary School	Junior High School	Senior High School	Junior College	College	Graduate School	F
N=293	108	43	54	31	49	8	
Problem recognition	2.93	3.51	3.87	4.00	4.16	4.75	3.061
Information search	2.00b	2.60ab	2.98ab	2.87ab	3.66a	3.00ab	3.244*
Final purchase	3.64	4.23	4.90	4.22	4.69	4.87	2.894
Overall influence	2.86b	3.44ab	3.91a	3.69ab	4.07a	4.20ab	4.924**
Influence of child	3.35a	2.66ab	1.80b	2.39ab	1.56b	2.41ab	7.869**
Influence of others	2.74	2.92	3.09	2.72	2.61	1.00	1.855

1. Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on Scheffe tests p significant at .05 level. If no superscripts appear, none of the means was significantly different.

2. Overall influence is the average of Problem recognition, Information search, and Final purchase stage.

\* Represents F ratio significant at .01 level.

\*\* Represents F ratio significant at .001 level.

49,999, the influence of children is significantly higher than wife. And according to the mean score, the influence of the child in this income interval is also higher than husband and others, though not significantly different. One unexpected finding is that for family income between NT\$ 50,000-99,999, the influence of others is significantly higher than child, and others has the highest mean score in this income interval. For seniors with family income per month between NT\$ 100,000-149,999, the influence of husband is significantly higher than wife, child, and others. Likewise, for family incomes above NT\$ 200,000, the influence of husband is significantly higher than the other three decision-makers. This above result indicates that family members and others' influence varies by different family income levels; therefore,  $H_5$  is then supported.

It appears that evidence of two apparent trends can be found in Table 5. As family income increases the influence of husband and wife is also increasing, and the influence of children is decreasing. Moreover, a noticeable increase in the influence of husband accompanying an increase in family income is found, which agrees with the findings of Sharp and Mott (1956) and Wolgast (1958). As family income level rises, there is also a rise in the likelihood of a husband dominating with respect to the GPT. This is consistent with Wolgast's point, but inconsistent with Sharp and Mott's point, since they indicated that as income level rises, there is also a rise in the likelihood of mutual decision-making.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Few empirical studies have explored how senior tourists have evolved in relation to the GPT, and more specifically, in relation to the decision-making pattern for the GPT. This study has provided some interesting and revealing insights into understanding the nature of Chinese group package tour decision-making process.

Table 5. Family income and extent of influence<sup>1</sup>

Family Income (NT\$) Pattern	N	Husband	Wife	Child	Others	F	Decision
0-49,999	127	2.68ab	2.29b	3.12a	2.80ab	4.060**	Child dominates
50,000-99,999	83	3.04ab	2.83ab	2.28b	3.12a	3.522*	Others dominate
100,000-149,999	57	3.59a	3.33b	2.08c	2.28c	9.379***	Husband dominates
150,000-199,999	15	2.57	3.35	1.66	2.77	2.186	---

1. Means with similar superscripts are not significantly different based on Scheffe tests p significant at .05 level. If no superscripts appear, none of the means was significantly different.

\* Represents F ratio significant at .05 level.

\*\* Represents F ratio significant at .01 level.

\*\*\*Represents F ratio significant at .001 level.

In conclusion, the results of the present study indicated that the influence of family members and 'others' varied by stages of the decision-making process and by various subdecisions. We also found that this present study supports the contention that the relative influence of the family members is likely to vary according to the type of purchase decision. Lalwani (2002) found that 'others' had negligible influence in all decisions of the choice of a fine dining restaurant. However, 'others' have the highest influence in problem recognition and information search stages compared to husband, wife, and child in trip decisions of GPT. This result is consistent with several scholars point that Chinese, who are collectivists, connect to others based on who one is; that is, the family, the work organization, or social class membership (Hui and Au 2001; Triandis 1988; Hwang 1987). Thus it could be predicted that 'others' play an important role in the GPT.

In the 12 subdecisions the major concern of respondents in this study is the travel agency (65.9%), and choice of travel agency is mostly made by husband and 'others'. However, this result also revealed that when senior tourists take part in group travel, as many as 35 percent of senior tourists do not take the travel agency into consideration, which is probably due to the fact that most of the senior tourists join tours because of solicitations from friends or relatives. And they are less likely to have an integral consideration for subdecisions, which accommodates the perspective of the Chinese community regarding social relationship highly. This also agrees with the research results of Labouvie-Vief et al. (2000) that the Chinese are more socially inclined than Americans. Thus, this finding is certainly an important issue for the travel agency to take hold of this 35 percent of potential travelers.

Besides, there should be specialized marketing projects focused on senior citizens who have high income, are highly educated, and still working. This study has also found that senior tourists who are of lower income, housewives, or less educated have tour expenses substantially provided by their children. The tour expenses nearly 35 percent for those with the lower income (0-49,999) are provided by their children, housewives are nearly 32 percent, and senior tourists with only primary education are about 45 percent. For participation in a GPT, the influences of children tend to be stronger; nevertheless, past studies showed senior tourists to be a market segment of needs

(Shoemaker 1989) and preferences (Lieux, Weaver and McCleary 1994). Only in this study, where the senior tourists seem to share lower influence in decision-making, would marketing campaigns focused on them possibly not work effectively.

Furthermore, those accompanying senior tourists on the GPT are spouse (26.3%), friends (22.2%), and children and grand-children (43.5%). Milman (1998) also found that those accompanying senior tourists are mostly spouses (43.5%), friends and relatives (43.5%), and other family members (only 6.5%). Thus, the role played by children in GPT's is rather significant. Therefore, a marketing campaign focused on children, could attract more travelers since Chinese are so much influenced by filial piety. And with filial piety taken as the focus of marketing strategy a promotion or marketing slogan like "*Exploring the World with Your Parents!*" could be effective.

In this present study, most of the senior tourists over 60 years of age who were visiting their destination for the first time, amounted to 75.1 percent, while those who had visited the destination more than six times was 3 percent. However, Romsa and Blenman (1989) pointed out that half of the German respondents (51%) favor visiting new spots of sightseeing, but as age matures to over 60 years the proportion drops to 37 percent. In addition, for one quarter of the senior tourists who favor the same sightseeing spots more than six times, the older they become the more likely they will be to visit the same place. They also indicated that with the increase of age the pressure of visiting a new place increases.

This contradiction in traveling could be attributed to the different modes of travel, and the investigation done by Romsa and Blenman is rather extensive, including domestic travel and FIT. On the other hand, the study by Shoemaker (2000) also reveals that senior tourists over 55 years of age must confront the travel constraints of health, age, financial considerations, and lack of accompaniment. While the tour investigated in this present study is of GPT with tour guides, where most of the matters are taken care of by the travel agency, so that the tour participants are less bothered by issues such as being exposed to unfamiliar places, safety, and inconveniences. Senior tourists can, therefore, experience the customs and traditions of different countries conveniently, and senior tourists taking part in a GPT can be considered as seeking new destinations and experiences. Thus, senior tourists who have been to many countries have more pride or *face*, and the importance of *face* also to some extent affects the consumption behavior of the Chinese (Yau 1988).

It is found in this study that the focus of marketing should be placed on husbands when the target market is the family with a high income. With regard to the three decision-making stages and the subdecisions, wives are likely to hold lower position within the household, and they have little influence in terms of the information search stage. This is contrast to finding by Mäser and Weiermair (1998) that the wife is the typical information collector, which could be attributed to the notion that Taiwan remains less oriented to women's views than western culture, and elders are much affected by Chi-

nese traditional roles (Chen, Lai and Tarn 1999) that they are not given much authority with regard to decision-making. In recent years, with the increase of feminism females have gradually been given more political freedoms, have received higher education, and enjoyed higher consumption ability. In addition, the role young wives play has gradually become increasingly important and these changes are important for tour operators to consider.

Our study is important for theoretical as well as practical reasons: First, from a managerial standpoint, this study provides useful marketing information for those interested in the GPT, especially in the senior tourist segmentation. As researchers such as Wang and Sheldon (1995) and Zhang and Chow (2004) also pointed out, China represents the largest population in the world and is currently experiencing stunning growth in outbound travel as Chinese travelers are now discovering the rest of the world. Since Taiwan and China are similar in race, culture, and language; it is reasonable to believe China will become the largest outbound GPT export country in the world (Wang, Hsieh and Huan 2000). Certainly, it is worthwhile for the destination countries to pay closer attention to it and to its outbound senior tourist market. Second, from a theoretical perspective, the results of this present study provide insights and answers to the original research questions. The results also fill the gap between the FIT, domestic travel, and the GPT with regard to seniors' decision-making in traveling. The authors believe that with such rigorous elaboration and research design, this study can increase the knowledge of travel theory.

Finally, some ideas for future study are suggested by the limitations of the current research. Because the sampling was conducted during winter vacation, there were more GPT's going to Australia and New Zealand than to North America, and sampling in a different season might yield different results. Future research might take this point into consideration. Another limitation is the data were collected from one of the senior spouse. Respondents may not be representative of the family travel decision in Taiwan. Thus, in any future study, family members could be separately examined for both GPT decisions and sub-decisions to obtain more useful information. In addition, to further understand tourists' decision making, future research efforts should attempt to explore other variables that can understand variances of tourists' purchasing decision. Finally, families with three generations can be taken as a direction for future study because this study found that the family status of three-generations living together accounted for 39.6 percent of the respondents. Furthermore, a study by March (2000) clearly indicated that family tours with three generations traveling together is an emerging trend, so this seems to be a fruitful area for future GPT research.

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