

# The Transfer of Travel Habits from Childhood to Adulthood

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This study examines whether tourists' travel habits and patterns transfer from their childhood to adulthood and which elements of their vacation are most commonly repeated in their adulthood. We have examined this phenomenon through a survey questionnaire which has been completed by 111 respondents who take vacations regularly. The survey presented two sets of eleven pairing statements relating to the following travel elements: destination, spatial repetition, frequency, duration, timing, organization, travel party composition, type of vacation, vacation activities, accommodation and travel mode. First set of eleven pairing statements referred to the present while the second set referred to the past. We have examined repetition by calculating correlations between pairing statements. The results have shown existence of weak correlations between the majority of pairing statements which suggests repetition of repetition of childhood patterns and habits. The highest repetition rate has been noted with transport, activities and time elements, while no correlation has been noted with frequency element.

*Keywords:* tourism, tourist, pattern, habit, travel

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## Introduction

The concept of habits in daily life is well recognised; they act as a link between a certain goal and the necessary action to accomplish this goal (Aarts & Dijksterhis, 2000) with the purpose of saving the time and effort that our brain needs to complete some of the tasks we frequently perform (Duhigg, 2012). Research has also shown that our past behaviour is the strongest predictor of our future behaviour, especially when talking about repetitive tasks that are performed day after day; in contrast, other, less frequent tasks are believed to be a result of conscious intent (Ouellette & Wood, 1998). Whilst we agree with the opinion that a tourist purchase cannot be equated to one made

in a supermarket (Papatheodorou, 2001), we think that some level of routine and patterns of habit could be noted in tourists' decision-making process when they are making vacation purchases (Chang & Gibson, 2015).

The purpose of this research was to obtain insight into whether some kinds of habits and pattern of repetition are also noted at times when decisions about tourist trips have to be made. The aim is to examine whether tourists' travel habits and patterns transfer from their childhood to adulthood and which elements of their trips are most commonly being repeated in their adulthood. A tourist trip considered in this study was every departure from home that

included at least one and not more than 365 consequent overnights. Only leisure trips, i.e. vacations have been taken into account (business trips have been excluded). Touristic patterns, which were the main objective of this research, were perceived as a tourist's behaviour in a certain period (Bargeman, Joh, & Timmermans, 2002). To date, thorough research on the repetition of vacation patterns has been relatively rare. A general opinion that habits and patterns are not relevant to vacation decision making prevails, with the exception of Chang and Gibson (2015) who thought that habits were an important concept in understanding tourists' behaviour.

Eleven travel elements have been identified for the purpose of this research, which we believe represent a factor in decision making and are considered when tourists make their purchases for a vacation trip. These elements are: (tourist) *destination*; *spatial repetition* (repeated visits to the same destination; Gitelson and Crompton, 1984); (vacation) *frequency*, defined yearly; (vacation) *duration*; *timing* (period of the year when vacations take place); *organisation* (level of vacations organised by tour operators); *travel party composition* (party of people traveling together); *type of vacations* (planned/unplanned, different landscape types); *activities* (which tourists pursue while on vacation); *accommodation type* (chosen for the time of vacations); and *type of transport* (chosen for the time of vacation).

## Methods

A three-part questionnaire was designed for the purpose of this research. The first part consisted of eleven sentences relating to the participant's present traveling choices. The second part consisted of eleven similar sentences, except related to the participant's travel choices from childhood. Each of the eleven sentences from the first and second parts related to one of the eleven travel elements. This type of questionnaire allowed us to examine correlations between the past and present travel choices using a simple statistical method of correlations. The third part consisted of basic demographic questions; the entire questionnaire had a total of 27 questions and statements.

The eleven pairing statements were designed as 5-point Likert-type scales, and we set an additional ques-

tion examining the participants' opinion on the occurrence of the repetition of their travel patterns. The questionnaire was set up through an online platform which remained active for three consecutive days, during which we collected 111 completed questionnaires. Convenience sampling was used; the participants were recruited from online social networks, and a web link to the questionnaire site was sent via e-mail and posted on online forums. The personal characteristics required were that the age of the participants was greater than 18 years, as this is the age when in most countries people are considered to be adults and are allowed to travel without the supervision of their parents, and frequent traveling, which was defined as taking at least one trip every two consecutive years. We performed statistical analysis with SPSS Statistics software while using the method of descriptive statistics and the calculation of correlations using the Pearson correlation coefficient. The correlations have been calculated only between the 11 pairing statements from the first and the second parts of the questionnaire, and not between all possible combinations of presented statements.

## Results

Out of 111 participants, 74.8% were female, and 25.2% were male. The majority was aged between 18 and 30 years (57.7%), had completed their undergraduate studies (45.9%) and were currently employed (57.7%).

Results have shown positive correlations between 10 out of 11 pairing statements. This outcome suggests the repetition of childhood patterns and habits. The highest repetition rate has been noted with the elements of transport ( $r = 0.378$ ), activities ( $r = 0.360$ ) and timing ( $r = 0.316$ ). Spatial Repetition (0.309), Accommodation (0.290), Organisation (0.248), Travel Party Composition (0.240), Destination (0.225) and Type of Vacations (0.209) also showed correlations, while no correlation has been noted with the element of Frequency (0.171, sig. at 0.076 level). The correlations have been identified as low/weak, which shows that they were not distinctive. The findings are represented in Table 1.

The findings also showed that the majority of respondents (74%) believe they do not repeat their childhood travel patterns.

Table 1 Pearson Correlation and Significance in Each Dimension

Elements	Pearson Correlation	Significance (2-tailed)
Destination	0.225	0.018
Spatial Repetition	0.309	0.001
Frequency	0.171	0.076
Duration	0.203	0.035
Timing	0.316	0.001
Organisation	0.248	0.010
Travel Party Composition	0.240	0.013
Type of Vacations	0.209	0.031
Activities	0.360	0.000
Accommodation Type	0.290	0.002
Type of Transport	0.387	0.000

## Discussion & Conclusion

The findings of this research show the existence of childhood travel patterns and their influence on travel decision making in adulthood. With 10 out of 11 comparing statements from both periods (i.e. childhood and adulthood) correlating, there is a strong inclination of childhood travel patterns being of great importance for tourists when they are making decisions about their future vacation plans. Transport, activities, and timing showed the highest rate of correlation, meaning that tourists make similar decisions in these regards as the ones which were made on their behalf in their childhood. These are important findings, linking similar behaviour from two different time periods in people's lives. The only element not showing correlation was frequency, meaning that the rate of vacation occurrence is not currently the same as it was in the tourists' childhood. The statement in the questionnaire was formed specifically and stated that the tourist takes vacations once per year. With no existing correlation, we are able to conclude that tourists take vacations with different frequencies than they did in their childhood, which coincides with the current trend of more frequent but shorter vacation trips (Graham, 2001; Vanhoe, 2005; OECD, 2016; Alegre, Mateo, & Pou, 2009).

Interestingly, respondents' opinion on the repeti-

tion of their childhood travel patterns showed different results from the statistical correlations. A possible explanation for this outcome could lie in a lack of awareness of the childhood habits that were being unconsciously repeated in adulthood.

There were some limitations to this study. The characteristics of the participants could have been better spread through different age clusters as the typical participant's characteristics were female at the age of 18 to 30. More evenly distributed characteristics could potentially result in a different image of possible repetition although there is no reason to believe that young women are more or less inclined to repeat the tourist behaviour from their childhood than people with different demographics. We would, however, advise future researchers to distribute the demographic characteristics of their participants more evenly.

These findings offer the opportunity to investigate the subject further into the complexity of its study theme. Discovering why the correlations were expressed as low/weak and which type of tourists generate stronger correlations between their travel decisions in childhood and adulthood would bring a practical use to tourism management. The findings could be of great significance to the marketing field of the tourism industry and could show which marketing segment of tourists would be the most inclined to repeat their childhood travel patterns, and how to approach this segment with the highest possible efficiency.

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