CHOICE SET PROPOSITIONS IN DESTINATION DECISIONS

John L. Crompton
Texas A&M University, USA
Paul K. Ankomah
North Carolina A&T State University, USA

Abstract: Choice sets are a central component of destination selection models. The concept suggests that potential tourists develop an early set of possible destinations, reduce this number to form a late consideration set of probable alternatives, and make a final selection from that set. Research propositions related to these three stages are developed. They are intended to frame the state of existing knowledge and to guide the development of future research. Derivation of the propositions is based on interpretation and transition of findings from the consumer behavior field, as well as from exploratory findings reported in the tourism literature. Keywords: choice sets, early consideration set, awareness set, late consideration set, evoked set, destination selection, decision process.

Résumé: Les propositions des ensembles de choix dans des décisions de destinations. Les ensembles de choix sont un élément important des modèles de choix de destination. Le concept suggère que les touristes éventuels créent un ensemble préliminaire de destinations possibles, limitent ces choix en formant un ensemble ultérieur de choix probables, et font leur choix définitif à partir du deuxième ensemble. On présente dans l'article des propositions de recherches qui se rattachent à ces trois étapes. Ces propositions peuvent servir de cadre pour donner une structure aux connaissances actuelles et pour guider le développement des recherches futures. Les propositions sont basées sur l'interprétation des recherches dans le domaine du comportement de consommation aussi bien que les résultats exploratoires des recherches dans le domaine du tourisme. Mots-clés: ensembles de choix, ensemble préliminaire, ensemble de conscience, ensemble ultérieur, ensemble évoqué, choix de destination, processus de décision.

INTRODUCTION

There are finite limits to the capacity of potential tourists to assimilate and process information relating to the large number of alternative vacation destinations from which they can select. One of the models...
proposed to explain how individuals make purchase decisions when confronted with a wide range of alternatives is the now widely accepted notion of choice sets. This concept was introduced by Howard (1963) and later elaborated upon by Howard and Sheth (1969). There is general agreement that selection of a vacation destination emerges from a funneling process consisting of three primary stages: development of an initial set of destinations that has been generally called an early consideration or awareness set; a discarding of most of those destinations to form a smaller late consideration or evoked set; and a final destination selected from those in the late consideration set (Figure 1).

It has been suggested that the notion of choice sets is most likely applicable when two conditions are present (Spiggle and Sewall 1987): When the purchase is a new or modified task in which individuals typically seek information and evaluate alternatives; and when the purchase entails some degree of perceived risk and implies a reasonably high level of involvement. Many vacation destination selection decisions appear likely to meet these two conditions. Hence, the concept has been generally embraced by tourism researchers and is established as a central tenet of tourism choice behavior models (Woodside and Lyonski 1989; Um and Crompton 1990).

The structure of choice sets, described elsewhere (Crompton 1992), suggests how they could be operationalized so marketers could identify

```
Figure 1. Relationships between the Central Choice Sets

ALL POTENTIAL DESTINATIONS

↓

EARLY CONSIDERATION SET

(Awareness Unavailable and Unawareness Sets)

↓

LATE CONSIDERATION SET

(Inept and Inert Sets)

↓

ACTION SET

(Inaction Set)

↓

FINAL SELECTED DESTINATION

(Alternatives for which information was sought but which were not selected)
```
and analyze the status and position of destinations at different stages in the decision process. This paper develops propositions relating to the early consideration set, late consideration set, and the final choice decision (Figure 1). Early consideration set is defined as comprising the destinations that a traveler is considering as possible vacation destinations within some period (e.g., a year). Late consideration set is defined as the destinations that a traveler is considering as probable destinations within some period of time. The action set is composed of all destinations in the late consideration set for which a potential tourist contacts the destination’s marketers or their representatives, for example, travel agents (Spiggle and Sewall 1987).

A number of other sets have been proposed that extend this basic conceptualization (Crompton 1992). They include awareness available, awareness unavailable, and unawareness sets (Woodside and Sherrell 1977); inert and reject or inept sets (Narayana and Markin 1975); foggy and hold sets (Brisoux and Laroche 1980); and inaction, interaction, and quiet sets (Spiggle and Sewall 1987). The decision to omit discussion of these conceptual extensions was made for two reasons. First, early consideration set, late consideration set and final choice decision are the central core sets in conceptualization of the destination selection decision process in the tourism literature. Second, the empirical literature from which the propositions are developed has predominantly focused on these sets.

Many of the studies reviewed here are not from the tourism literature, but they are included because they offer insights that may be transferrable to the tourism context. The inventory of propositions that is presented is intended to parsimoniously synthesize the discussion and to guide future research efforts. The discussion is arranged under three headings relating to the early consideration set, the late consideration set, and the processes by which the late consideration set and final choice decisions are formulated.

**CHOICE SET PROPOSITIONS**

*Early Consideration Set*

The early consideration set consists of those destinations considered by a potential tourist to be possible for a vacation. If a destination is not in an individual’s early consideration set, then it has no chance of being selected.

A number of studies have provided evidence suggesting that all destinations included in the early set do not have an equal probability of emerging as the final destination selected. An initial hierarchy of preferences is likely to be present at this early stage. Axelrod (1968) used five brands within a product class of manufactured goods to test whether such a hierarchy existed. Results indicated a relationship between first brand awareness and switching behavior. A majority of respondents who named a specific brand first in response to the brand question and who were not users of that brand during the first interview had switched to that brand 5 months later when they were recontacted, while only a small proportion who did not mention that brand
switched to it. First advertisement awareness and preference also were found to be good predictors of brand purchasing behavior. These findings relating to manufactured goods were replicated by Woodside and Wilson (1985) using three services and a similar methodological approach. They reported that a brand receiving first mention was also most preferred and received the highest intention to purchase rating. Further, respondents who mentioned a brand's advertising in the first interview in answering a top-of-the-mind advertising question, indicated substantially greater purchase intent for that brand in a second interview 3 weeks later, compared to those who did not mention it.

In a study of Dutch tourists, Bronner and de Hoog (1985) reported that respondents' preference rankings of vacation destinations correlated positively with the order in which they were mentioned in an earlier unaided recall exercise. Michie (1986) investigated the travel behavior of Mexican respondents from three areas of Mexico from which tourists to New Mexico originated: the interior (Guadalajara), the frontier zone (Ciudad Juarez) and a frontier state (Chihuahua). He examined the relationship between a family's awareness of a destination and actual travel to the destination. Results showed that degree of awareness of sites in New Mexico was significantly associated with actual visitation from each market. Awareness was also found to be a function of distance, since families from the frontier state and frontier zone tended to be aware of more sites in New Mexico than their counterparts from the interior. Michie attributed the observed differences between the markets to differences in destination information exposure. The greater the distance to a destination, the less opportunities are likely to be available for people to be exposed to information about a destination.

**Proposition 1a:** Those destinations in the early consideration set for which there is a higher level of awareness have a greater probability of being selected for a vacation, than do those destinations that are also in the early consideration set for which there is a lower level of awareness.

**Proposition 1b:** Marketers of a destination that an individual mentions first in an unaided response to destination awareness questions are likely to be more successful in persuading that potential tourist to switch to that destination from a preferred competing destination, than marketers of the second mentioned destination, and so forth.

Michie's (1986) findings suggest that high awareness of tourism destinations in the early consideration set is likely to be influenced by the intensity of previous visitation to them and by proximity to them. This leads to two related propositions:

**Proposition 2a:** The size of the early consideration set of tourism destinations within a given geographical area is likely to be larger for those potential tourists who have
visited that geographical area than for those who have never traveled to it; and larger for frequent visitors to the geographical area than for infrequent visitors.

**Proposition 2b:** The size of the early consideration set of destinations within a given geographical area is likely to be larger for residents of adjacent geographical areas than for residents of non-adjacent geographical areas.

**Late Consideration Set**

In the initial conceptualization of the late consideration set, Howard and Sheth (1969) had no empirical evidence to guide estimates of the likely set size. The only rule of thumb was the “magical number seven, plus or minus two,” which had been proposed by Miller (1956:81) as a result of his review of experiments reported in the psychology literature. Subsequent evidence has demonstrated that this number is too high to apply to late consideration sets. This may be because each of the set alternatives has multiple attributes to be evaluated, whereas the evidence reviewed by Miller related primarily to unidimensional decisions.

A substantial number of studies have now been reported which investigated size of the late consideration set. Most of these studies used low priced convenience products, such as toothpaste, detergent, and beer (Campbell 1969; Jacoby and Olsen 1970; Jarvis and Wilcox 1973; Narayana and Markin 1975; Williams and Etzel 1976). A smaller number of researchers focused their work on automobiles (Gronhaug and Troye 1980; Horton 1983; Ostlund 1973). The operational definitions of late consideration set vary between studies so the results are not directly comparable. Nevertheless, the studies exhibit an impressive level of consistency and a major conclusion of the empirical work on choice sets undertaken on products is that the late consideration set is relatively small, usually within the range between two and five.

There is some evidence that suggests that it would be reasonable to expect the set size for vacation destinations to be larger, because they are non-durable, relatively high-priced purchases. For example, Horton concluded, “Although the evidence is limited, the pattern is relatively clear. Evoked set size tends to be larger for non-durables than for durables” (1983:75). Similarly, Samli, Riecken and Salmon (1980: 48) found that their respondents had larger evoked sets when they were considering the more expensive shopping and specialty goods:

When considering convenience goods, consumers simplified their lives by ignoring or eliminating many brands. For obvious reasons, there are no significant gains possible from switching brands. In regard to shopping and specialty goods, simplifying life was replaced by economic benefit and psychological satisfaction. The consumers gathered relatively more information so that they had a large evoked set. This provided them the choice which would, in turn, lead to greater benefits than in the case of convenience goods.

In discussing the results of their empirical study, Jarvis and Wilcox conjectured, “One dimension of the relative magnitude of evoked set
size may be perceived importance of the product class” (1973:239). These findings are consistent with Howard and Sheth’s (1969) original discussion in which they suggested that late consideration set size would increase up to some limit according to the importance of the decision.

However, several empirical studies on products have reported finding no statistical relationship between perceived importance or perceived risk associated with the purchase decision and size of the late consideration set (Campbell 1969; Ostlund 1973; Williams and Etzel 1976). The empirical studies reported in the tourism literature appear to support this lack of relationship, because the late consideration set sizes they report are not consistently larger than those reported in the product literature. They suggest that for any given vacation, potential tourists are likely to seriously consider no more than an average of four destinations (Bronner and de Hoog 1985; Thompson and Cooper 1979; Um and Crompton 1990; Woodside, Ronkainen and Reid 1977; Woodside and Sherrell 1977).

Proposition 3a: The average number of tourism destinations individuals will seriously consider in their late consideration set when making vacation decisions will not exceed four.

Proposition 3b: Perceived importance and/or perceived risk of the vacation destination decision will have no effect on the size of the late consideration set.

It is possible to express the size of the late consideration set as a proportion of the size of the early consideration set. This identifies the magnitude of the reduction of alternatives that takes place between the two stages of the decision process. Ratios calculated from set sizes reported in the literature for convenience products tend to fall between .3 and .4. Examples include .26 and .30 for two products by Campbell (1969); .41, .37, and .68 (Jarvis and Wilcox 1973); .41 (Jacoby and Olsen 1970); and .31, .37, .27, and .33 (Narayana and Markin 1975).

Similar work in the tourism literature has been limited to four studies. However, they show consistently higher ratios than those reported for convenience products. Woodside and Sherrell (1977) reported a ratio of .60, while Thompson and Cooper, who replicated their study with a different sample, reported .43. Woodside, Ronkainen and Reid (1977) reported ratios for four different groups of .88, .85, .73 and .64 and Um (1987) reported a ratio of .90.

There appear to be two possible explanations for these higher ratios in the tourism context. First, a major empirical finding is that the late consideration set will be small, which implies it will be only marginally affected by size of the early consideration set. Horton (1983) demonstrated that substantially larger early consideration sets resulted in only marginally larger late sets. The late consideration set size of his respondents remained remarkably consistent, even though they were derived from a wide range of differently sized early sets. Similarly, Jarvis and Wilcox suggested that their findings demonstrated a
functional relationship between evoked and awareness set sizes. They concluded, "It may be predicted that as the number of brands an individual is aware of increases [beyond some level], evoked set size asymptotically approaches an upper bound" (1973:237). Since little difference has been reported in the late set sizes of products and tourism destinations (Proposition 3a), the early sets of tourism destinations must have been relatively small in order for their ratios to be higher than the product ratios. Reasons for the relatively small early consideration sets in the tourism studies are unclear.

A second explanation relates to the arguments concerning perceived importance and perceived risk which were presented in the discussion of Proposition 3b. Although the number of alternatives in the destinations' late sets has not been shown to be any larger than those in the products' late sets, the larger proportion of destination alternatives retained between the early and late sets may be attributable to greater perceived importance and risk associated with vacation destination decisions.

**Proposition 4:** The ratio of size of late consideration set to size of early consideration set is likely to be between .6 and .9.

Ostlund, in one of the early studies of choice sets, stated that more research work was needed to establish a set of late consideration set size correlates "prior to plunging into longitudinal analysis in quest of the underlying formulation process" (1973:230). Surprisingly, little work has been reported in the product literature relating choice set size to traditional correlates (such as sociodemographics) and no such studies were found in the tourism literature. This may be because there is no a priori rationale for the existence of such relationships, except perhaps with education level.

Campbell (1969) reported that most of the demographic characteristics measured in his study did not influence or determine size of the late set to any appreciable degree. However, he did find that late set size was positively correlated with education level. This finding was reinforced by Gronhaug (1979), Homans, Maddox and May (1977), and Maddox, Gronhaug, Homans and May (1978). This relationship may be explained by higher education level being an indicator of ability to process more information and, thus, handle a larger number of alternatives in the late consideration set.

**Proposition 5:** Late consideration set size is likely to vary positively in accordance with the education level of potential tourists.

*Decision Formulation*

Most of the research on choice sets has focused on sizes of the early and late consideration sets. According to Jarvis and Wilcox, "Although such research provides insight into the phenomenon, it does not illuminate the dynamics of brand inclusion, i.e., how a specific brand enters or
leaves the evoked set" (1973:240). It is clear from the earlier discussion relating to Propositions 3 and 4 that late consideration sets exist, but understanding of their formulation is not well developed. An understanding of the process would appear to be a prerequisite to successfully positioning a destination so it has a high probability of selection.

A key issue is whether the process used to formulate the late set from the early set, is similar to that used to make a final choice from the late set. The funneling process is dynamic, so changes in perceptions and images of destination, and in attitudes towards them, are likely to occur, causing the potential tourist's choice map to undergo transitions. It seems reasonable to anticipate changes in process associated with these transitions.

LeBlanc (1989) noted that conventional decision-making models assume a five-stage process: problem recognition, search (external and internal information search), evaluation (information evaluation), purchase, and post-purchase evaluation. He pointed out that research on choice sets indicates that this conceptualization is incomplete. Rather than five stages, LeBlanc suggests there are six stages in the decision-making process: problem recognition, search (external and internal information search), formation of an early consideration set of alternatives, evaluation of these alternatives and formation of a late consideration set, evaluation and choice from the late consideration set, and post purchase evaluation. This conceptualization suggested that "generally assumed models and conventional approaches to studying consumer behavior which do not consider the decision process at both stages cannot expect accurate prediction" (Le Blanc 1989: 10). Le Blanc suggests that late consideration set decision rules may differ from those used in the final selection decision. Decision process models based on the assumption that only one decision is made in relation to the final destination selection, are likely to offer relatively low predictive accuracy of the final vacation choice.

**Proposition 6:** The decision strategy used by tourists to select their late consideration set of vacation destinations is independent of their decision strategy for making the final destination choice from the late consideration set.

Insights into how processing differs by stage will assist in determining what types of information are likely to be most effective in influencing potential tourists at each stage. There appear to be three questions related to this issue. First, are the criteria used to evaluate destination alternatives different at each stage? Second, are the sources and types of information sought and used to assist in making these evaluations different? Third, are the decision rules used to discard and select alternatives at each stage different? (These questions are discussed in Propositions 7, 8, and 9.)

Um and Crompton (1991), in the only study that has used a longitudinal design in the destination choice sets literature, reported that there were changes in evaluation criteria at the two stages. In formulating the late consideration set from the early set, the ability of a destination's
attributes to satisfy a potential tourist's specific motives, which the researchers termed facilitators, was likely to be the dominant criterion for selection. However, in selecting a final destination from the late set, situational constraints (such as cost, travel time to the destination, potential health problems, safety and physical accessibility) which the researchers termed inhibitors, were likely to be more dominant criteria for selection than facilitators.

The results are consistent with the notion that choice is a satisficing behavior (Simon 1957) which is constraints driven, rather than an optimizing behavior which is attribute driven. Selection of a vacation is likely to be a decision made under conditions of uncertainty, since knowledge of a destination's ability to meet needs is likely to be based on indirect symbolic or social information. An optimal decision maximizes the pay-off, but it may involve disregarding inhibitors which involves a considerable investment of risk. The greater importance of facilitators at the early stage in the decision process reflects optimization, but people tend to be risk reducers and at the final decision stage it is inhibitors which prevail. To reduce risk, the potential tourist requires only that the destination appears to offer a satisfactory pay-off which can be attained within perceived constraints (Um and Crompton 1992:24).

**Proposition 7a:** The criteria used to evaluate alternatives in the early consideration set will primarily focus on the relative merits of the destinations' attributes, while the criteria used to evaluate alternatives in the late consideration set will primarily focus on the constraints associated with each of the alternative destinations.

A related issue is the number of evaluative criteria that will be used in a decision. If there are a relatively large number of destinations in either set, then in order to maximize the number of reasons which will facilitate eliminating destinations from the set, the number of evaluative criteria used will be relatively large. Belonax and Mittelstaedt (1977) reported that those individuals employing "few" choice criteria constructed larger late consideration sets than those employing "many" choice criteria. This finding was confirmed by Horton (1983).

**Proposition 7b:** The number of choice criteria used to evaluate destinations in the early and late consideration sets is likely to be inversely related to the number of destinations in those sets.

The general models of the pleasure traveler's destination choice process, postulated by Woodside and Lysontski (1989) and Um and Crompton (1990), specify that at the early consideration set stage information primarily is acquired passively. This passive information is used to discard some alternatives and select others into the late consideration set. However, at the late set stage, it is active information search that is believed to dominate.
Proposition 8a: Reliance on information acquired passively will be highest at the early consideration set stage, lower at the late consideration set stage, and lowest at the final decision stage; while reliance on information acquired actively will be lowest at the early set stage, higher at the late set stage, and highest at the final decision stage.

An additional stage between the late consideration set and final choice decision based on nature of the information search was proposed by Spiggle and Sewall (1987). It comprised an action set and an inaction set (Figure 1). The action set is composed of all destinations for which a potential tourist contacts the destination’s marketers or their representatives (for example, travel agents). It is argued that this additional contact, which in the context of tourism is most likely to involve a request for information (Woodside and Lysonski 1989), gives the contacted destinations an increased opportunity to “sell” their benefits. Support for this proposition can be drawn from several psychological theories. They suggest that potential tourists are likely to develop more commitment to destinations in the action set than to those they seriously considered but took no further action (Spiggle and Sewall 1987). The theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) and contrast and assimilation theories (Anderson and Bower 1973) suggest that potential tourists who incur the costs of directing actions toward destinations have a cognitive motive to justify their investment of effort and resources. Attribution theory (Calder 1979) also supports the notion that potential tourists are more likely to evaluate positively those destinations towards which they have directed some action. These theories suggest that the bigger their investment, the more likely it is that individuals will make a commitment to the destination.

Proposition 8b: A destination in the late consideration set for which a potential tourist has requested some information (action set) has a greater probability of being the final destination choice than a similar destination for which no information was sought.

Proposition 8c: The greater the perceived investment in effort and resources directed to contacting a destination’s representatives to acquire additional information, the more likely it is that a destination will be the final vacation choice.

Five main decision-making rules are generally recognized. Two of them are compensatory (i.e., a destination’s weakness on one attribute can be compensated for by its strength on another). Thus, potential tourists evaluate destinations across a number of different attributes and then determine the most preferred by summing across those attributes. Using the unweighted linear compensatory rule, an individual sums the attribute ratings for each destination in the set, and then selects the destination(s) whose final rating(s) exceeds a certain cut-off total.
The weighted linear compensatory rule is similar, but the attribute ratings are weighted by their importance before they are summed.

As the number of alternative destinations and evaluative attributes increases, compensatory models assume extremely complex cognitive processes on the part of the decision maker (Nakanishi and Bettman 1974; Park 1978). Noncompensatory decision rules suggest that potential tourists evaluate alternative destinations on two or three key attributes and eliminate destinations that are perceived to be inadequate on these key attributes.

There are three types of non-compensatory decision rules. The conjunctive rule reflects extreme emphasis on the negative end of attribute scales. A destination is selected only if minimum cut-off levels on all attributes are exceeded. The disjunctive rule focuses attention on the positive pole and a destination is only selected if it is perceived to be superior on one or more key attributes. The lexicographic rule uses all attributes in stepwise fashion. Destinations are evaluated on the most important attribute first. If there is a tie, then they are evaluated on the second most important attribute, and so on.

No work was found on use of decision rules and no consistent decision rule use pattern has emerged. The array of information associated with the destinations in the early set (in order to make decisions on which of them should enter the late set) could be simplified either by considering destinations as a total entity or by considering some manageable number of their attributes. The former strategy seems most probable for two reasons (Belonax and Mittelstaedt 1977). First, it would reduce the number of comparisons that would ultimately have to be made. Second, simplifying by eliminating from consideration some important attributes would mean the potential tourist may forego some of the benefits that he/she is hoping to accrue from the vacation.

The empirical evidence appears to be contradictory. For example, Johnson and Russo (1978), Russo and Johnson (1980), and van Raaij (1976) provide support suggesting that most attribute processing takes place early in the choice process. However, Bettman (1979) summarizes work that suggests destinations as a whole are likely to be considered in early phases, with more attribute processing used in later phases. Parkinson and Reilly (1978) used two convenience products, to identify which decision rules were most frequently implemented when formulating late consideration sets. The lexicographic and unweighted linear compensatory rules consistently emerged as being most frequently adopted. They noted this result was "rather surprising" given the considerable differences between the two rules. LeBlanc (1989) reported that rule strategies used in late consideration set selection were independent of those used in making the final purchase choice. He noted that both compensatory and non-compensatory rules were used at both stages. Other work by Pras and Summers (1975), Payne (1976), Lussier and Olshavsky (1979), Brisoux and Laroche (1980) and Bettman and Park (1980) has investigated the use of rules at different stages in the decision process, but their results do not offer a discernible pattern.

Three explanations have been offered which may explain the lack of consistency emerging from empirical findings in the area of decision
rule use. First, it has been noted that an individual's use of decision rules is likely to vary from one situation to the next, and that the variation may be independent of stage in the choice process (Bettman and Park 1980). This may occur because the information upon which decisions are based is likely to vary in accessibility and quality in different situations. In addition, decision rules may not be well established in an individual's mind. Therefore, there would be no single established procedure for each occasion a destination alternative decision had to be made. These conditions make it likely that decision rules are contingent on the context prevailing at the particular time when a decision is made.

A second explanation of these decision rules, especially the compensatory types, assume a decision-maker has an extensive information processing capacity. Um and Crompton suggest it is unrealistic to assume that potential tourists will be able to assign weights, derive values, and compute overall utility indices in situations that involve many alternatives and attributes. They propose as an alternative approach that "potential travelers may interpret a complex array of perceptions of destination attributes by simplifying them into facilitators and inhibitors in formulating their destination choice decision" (1990: 446).

Finally, it is possible that alternative destinations may be evaluated by different choice criteria and decision rules (Gronhaug and Troye 1980). If information on some criteria is less well-developed for some destinations than for others, then the potential tourist may have to use different rules (and reconcile the results in some arbitrary way) in making selection decisions.

**Proposition 9**: Potential tourists are likely to use a combination of compensatory and noncompensatory decision rules to select both their late consideration set of destinations and their final destination choice, and the rules used at each stage may be different.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The most challenging work in choice sets lies in better understanding the destination selection process. Myers stated that not much is known about "the temporal aspects of evoked set formation: not only what kinds of information processing takes place, but in what sequence this takes place and over what periods of time" (1978:236).

If all destinations in an early consideration set are evaluated at the same point in time, then the weighted/unweighted linear compensatory or lexicographic rules appear likely to be most appropriate for deriving the late set. The results reported by Parkinson and Reilly (1978) are congruent with this postulate. However, if late sets are formed over time by evaluating each new entry into the early set whenever it comes along, then the conjunctive or disjunctive rules appear likely to be more appropriate.

Clearly, there is a need for research designs that are longitudinal, rather than cross-sectional, to better understand the decision process.
at its different stages. Myers (1978) suggests this could be done expeditiously with samples of college students. The obvious weakness of this approach is that the decision processes used by members of this group may be atypical of those used by the general population. However, it is likely that generalization will be a problem whatever group of subjects are used in this type of longitudinal panel design. The agreement to participate as a panel member and to respond to repeated surveys involves a level of commitment that makes it inevitable that many selected to participate refuse to do so. Similarly, the required level of commitment makes it inevitable that some of those who initially pledge cooperation will drop from the panel. According to Churchill, "depending on the type of cooperation needed, the refusal rate and mortality rate might run as high as 50 percent" (1976:74). Even though findings from a particular panel may not be generalized, they will improve understanding of how decisions are made at different stages. Generalizability will evolve over time as results from different panels accumulate.

This type of longitudinal research-design would involve taking an inventory of the early and late sets at, for example, one or two month intervals over a one year time period. At each inventory, information could be gathered about a variety of aspects of the set formulations. Thus, the movement over time of destinations into and out of various sets could be tracked. These data would reveal the dynamics of establishing each of the types of sets, the stability of these sets over time, and the types of factors that appear to have the greatest influence on formation, size, and composition of the sets.

The discussion of choice sets in this paper has focused on the issue of destination selection. The concept might be expanded to embrace other facets of tourism. For example, investigations of the characteristics of potential tourists' sets of travel agencies, airlines, or hotels might offer insights useful to the operators of those enterprises. It is important for destination marketers and operators in these complementary industries to know in which of their target market's choice sets they are positioned, before they proceed with strategies designed to enhance their position.

REFERENCES

Anderson, R. E.

Axelrod, J. N.

Belonax, J. A., and R. A. Mittelstaedt

Bettman, J. R.

Bettman, J. R., and W. C. Park
1980 Effects of Prior Knowledge and Experience and Phase of the Choice Process
Brisoux, J. E., and M. Laroche
Bronner, F., and R. de Hoog
Calder, B.
Campbell, B. M.
Churchill, G. A.
Crompton, J. L.
Festinger, L.
Gronhaug, K.
Gronhaug, K., and S. V. Troye
Homans, R. E., R. N. Maddox, and F. E. May
Horton, R. L.
Howard, J. A.
Howard, J. A., and J. N. Sheth
Jacoby, J., and J. C. Olson
Jarvis, L. P., and J. B. Wilcox
Johnson, E. J., and J. E. Russo
1978 What is Remembered After a Purchase Decision? Graduate School of Business, University of Chicago, USA.
LeBlanc, R. P.
Lussier, D. A., and Olshavsky, R. W.
Maddox, R. N., K. Gronhaug, R. E. Homans, F. E. May
Miller, G. A.  
1956 The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information. The Psychological Review 63:81-97.

Mitchie, D. A.  

Myers, J. H.  

Nakanishi, M., and J. R. Bettman  

Naryana, C. L., and R. J. Markin  

Ostlund, L. E.  

Park, C. W.  

Parkinson, T. L., and M. Reilly  

Payne, J. W.  

Pras, B., and J. O. Summers  

van Raaij, W. F.  

Russo, J. E., and E. J. Johnson  

Samli, C. A., G. Riecken, and C. A. Salmon  

Simon, H. A.  

Spiggle, S., and M. A. Sewall  

Thompson, J. R., and R. D. Cooper  

Um, S.  

Um, S., and J. L. Crompton  


Williams, T. G., and M. J. Etzel  
1976 An Investigation and Extension of the Evoked Set Concept Applied to Consumer Durables. In Proceedings of the Southern Marketing Association Confer-
ence, H. Nash and D. Robin, eds., Department of Marketing, Mississippi State University, USA.
Woodside, A. G., and D. Sherrell
Woodside, A. G., and J. E. Wilson
Woodside, A. G., and S. Lysons
Woodside, A. G., I. Ronkainen, and D. M. Reid

Submitted 1 August 1991
Resubmitted 21 March 1992
Accepted 5 May 1992
Refereed anonymously
Coordinating Editor: Philip L. Pearce