

# **TRAVEL PARTY COMPOSITION ON ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS AMONG CHINESE TOURISTS IN TAIWAN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigated the influence of travel party composition on attitudes and behaviors among Chinese tourists in Taiwan. Based on tourism consumption system, 5 questions were proposed regarding tourists' preferred information sources, planning times, length of stay, satisfaction, and revisits. The three major travel party compositions were "traveling with friends", "couples", and "traveling with coworkers". The results suggested that travel party composition induced a number of substantial differences between travel parties, but that all travel parties exhibited critical similarities. This study provided empirical support for the Tourism Consumption System, and demonstrated the value of travel party composition analysis as a commonsense segmentation method in travel market research. Our findings provide insight into the burgeoning market for Chinese tourism in Taiwan.*

**JEL:** D12, L83

**KEYWORDS:** Travel Party Composition, Tourism Consumption System, Planning Time

## **INTRODUCTION**

**S**ocial groups are networks of people that connect in the course of their daily lives (Verbrugge, 1977; Feld and Carter, 1998; Fischer, 1982; Huckfeldt, 1983; McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1987; Kalmijn and Flap, 2001, Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, 2001). The interactivity of social groups exerts a strong influence on people's behavior (Crompton, 1981; Wu, Zhang, and Fujiwara, 2011). In social groups, each member has distinctive traits, values, beliefs, interests, and expectations. People are motivated to take trips with their social groups because of the possibility for social interaction, rather than because of the destination in question (Carrasco, Miller, and Wellman, 2008). Because of Chinese cultural values, Chinese people prefer to travel with others and take all-inclusive package tours (Yau, 1988; Mok and DeFranco, 1999, Mok and Armstrong, 1995; Qu and Li, 1997; Wong and Lau, 2001).

The tourist decision-making process is influenced by intrapersonal mental processes and their interaction with psychological variables, and is extremely complex and comprehensive. A tourism consumption system (TCS) is the set of travel-related thoughts, decisions, and behaviors of a discretionary traveler prior to, during, and following a trip. Thoughts, decisions, and behaviors regarding one activity influence thoughts, decisions, and behaviors regarding a number of other activities; this implies that tourists exhibit behavioral patterns (Woodside and Dubelaar, 2002). The complexity of social activities during travel depends not only on peoples' schedule, but also on their social context; in other words, the people with whom they are traveling (Carrasco Juan-Antonio, and Miller, 2006; Habib, Carrasco et al., 2008). Travel party characteristics influence most variables in TCSs (Woodside et al., 2002).

Previous studies have focused on the family travel decision (Kang, Hsu, and Wolfe, 2003), rather than travel undertaken by social groups with various party compositions. It has been shown that travel with

companions with the same interests and according to the same schedule enhances the pleasure of a vacation (Crompton, 1981). So and Lehto (2007) indicated that travel party composition was a situational variable that substantially influences tourists' behavior. When family members do not share the same travel interests, people treat friends as their surrogate families (Crompton, 1981). Recent studies have shown that young people prefer to take trips with close friends rather than with their families because they share more traits and behaviors with close friends (Huebner and Mancini, 2003). Traveling with coworkers is another alternative for group travel (Dellaert, Ettema and Lindh, 1998).

Few empirical studies have investigated travel party composition. This study examined differences in attitudes and behaviors among Chinese tourists to Taiwan by using travel party composition analysis. This study is conceptually based on Woodside and Dubelaar's (2002) TCS. We hypothesized that travel party composition affected tourists' travel-related thoughts, decisions, and behaviors. Based on an empirical survey of Chinese tourists visiting Taiwan, this study attempted to examine the influence of travel party composition on leisure trips.

Travel behaviors induced by various travel party compositions were examined using five research questions: (a) How does travel party composition influence information sources? (b) How does travel party composition influence vacation planning time? (c) How does travel party composition influence the length of stay during a vacation? (d) How does travel party composition enhance trip satisfaction? (e) How does travel party composition affect peoples' intention to revisit Taiwan?

This is done with the hope that it may provide suggestion to travel industry in Taiwan. In addition, travel party composition may serve as a situation for the study of different travel decision and travel behavior. The simplicity of this research result should enable the travel industry to offer more various travel package to different group needed.

This paper is divided into four main sections. Section 1 provided some background information about various travel composition's travel process. Section 2 illustrated the survey data analysis by analysis of variance (ANOVA). Section 3 presented a number of application of travel party composition in travel behavior. Finally, section 4 outlined some plans for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociological theorists and researchers have investigated the concept of social group and its influence on individuals' decisions (Olmsted and Hane, 1978). A social group has been defined as a group of people who have similar values, interdependence, and a collective sense of unity (Turner, 1982, Platow, Grace, and Smithson, 2011).

The American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley proposed categorizing social groups into two types, namely primary groups and secondary groups (Cooley, 1909). Primary groups comprise people, such as family or friends, who are connected through shared personal experience and lasting relationships, spend time together, engage in a range of activities, and feel concerned for one another (Cooley, 1909). By contrast, secondary groups comprise people, such as coworkers, who are connected through formal and institutional relationships with weak emotional ties, and they may disband after achieving specific goals (Macionis, Gerber, John, and Linda, 2010). Types of social groups include couples, core family, extended family, relative, friends, and coworkers. Regardless of composition, the members of a group influence each other's behaviors, decisions, plans, and goals; they have strong causal effects on each other. The more time people spend together, the more opportunity they have to influence each other's thoughts and behaviors. Leisure travel produces numerous thoughts, decisions, behaviors, and evaluations prior to, during, and following a particular trip (Dellaert, et al., 1988, Woodside et al., 2002, Woodside, MacDonald, and Burford, 2004). Group travel differs from individual travel in nature, the destination-choice process, and

associated contextual factors (Hsu, Tsaie and Wu, 2009, March and Woodside, 2005, Wu et al., 2011). Associated tourist activities are experienced jointly and reflect the influence of those traveling together (Chadwick, 1987, March et al., 2005). Group-based differences have been identified in the tourist destination-choice process and its associated contextual factors for the group-travel context, including the destination choice, time spent planning, motives, information use and behaviors, tour selection criteria, spending, flexibility, activities, and length of stay (Basala and Klenosky, 2001, Dellaert et al., 1998, Hsu et al., 2009, March et al., 2005).

The influence of social group during leisure time was demonstrated in the field of tourism (Crompton, 1981). Burch (1969) and O'Leary, Field, and Schreuder (1974) have indicated that an intimate social group is decisive in determining the variation in leisure behavior. Some customers could not conceive of satisfactory travel unless they were accompanied by the compatible person. Moreover, traveling with company can save money, avoid loneliness, stimulate additional perspectives, and provide a sympathetic forum for recalling vacation experiences (Crompton, 1981).

This travel behavior can be largely attributed to the collectivist society in China. The group-oriented behavior of Chinese people was revealed by Mok et al. (1999). Chinese tourism can be categorized into company, employee, and family travel. These groups exhibit different travel-related behaviors (Fodness and Murray, 1999). Family tourism often represents connected experiences of leisure travel, and the activities involved reflect the influence of all those traveling together (Chadwick, 1987). The family remains the predominant social group in which people choose to spend their leisure time; this was particularly true of twentieth-century vacations (Crompton, 1981).

In this study, travel groups were categorized into three types, namely couples, friends, and coworkers, because preferences have more weight among the choices of stronger relationships than among those of casual acquaintances. A family is an intimate group of two or more people who live together in a committed relationship and share activities and close emotional ties. Leisure travel creates an opportunity for family members to bond. Moreover, household socio-demographics have considerable effects on the decisions related to tour frequency, tour type, participating parties, mode, and destination choice, and the characteristics of the traveling parties have considerable influences on the decisions related to tour type.

Friendship group relationships are increasingly relevant as people spend more time with similar individuals. Traveling with friends tends to involve activities with strong entertaining and socializing undertones (So et al., 2007). When a family member has a particular interest that is not shared by other family members, friends are sought and serve as family surrogates. Friends with compatible interests travel for an extended period, compared with a family vacation (Crompton, 1981). For example, teenagers have more in common with their friends because of their experience of similar problems. As children mature, the family group naturally begins to deteriorate, and the young seek out the company of peers with similar interests.

Dellaert et al., (1998) revealed the coupling constraints of family members, friends, and coworkers. Although business travel has been investigated, few studies have discussed leisure travel with coworkers. Coworkers may have conflicts of interest, and they only stay together to finish their tasks. Therefore, the interpersonal distances between coworkers are greater than those between friends (Little, 1965). Romantic relationships are generally stronger than friendships, and friendships are stronger than relationships between coworkers.

### Travel Party Composition and Planning Time

Davidson, Yantis, Norwood, and Montano (1985) emphasized planning as the basis for influencing a decision or changing a behavior. Travelers prefer not to ruin their vacation by seeking information and deliberating in advance (Parrinello, 1993). For many tourists, a trip of 1 week or longer is a major decision

that requires planning. Tourists who spend more time planning often travel for longer (Woodside, Trappey, and MacDonald, 1997). In general, the planning and acting behaviors of travelers are heavily influenced by the composition of the traveling party (McIntosh and Goeldner, 1990, Chia and Qu, 2008).

Knox and Walker (2003) demonstrated that travel party composition affects the entire nature of the decision process in travel behavior. Couples spend more planning time and stay longer at their destination than friends and colleagues do. Therefore, in this study, the planning time differed between different travel party compositions because of differences in their travel purposes. Hence, we hypothesized that couples, friends, and coworkers have different planning time in advance of their leisure travel.

*H1: Travel party composition has a significant influence on planning time.*

#### Travel Party Composition and Information Sources

Several studies have confirmed the strong influence of travel party characteristics on the information search and use strategies implemented by travelers (Fodness et al., 1998, Snepenger, Meged, Snelling, and Worrall, 1990). Bieger and Laesser (2004) identified different patterns of tourists' information sourcing throughout the travel decision processes. Consumers adopt different search information patterns because they perceive high risk associated with touristic experiences (Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard, 1995). Commercial guide books, personal experience, travel agencies, and friends or relatives are the main information sources for tourists.

For many travelers, friends or relatives are their primary sources of information during trip planning, and they believe that travel planning is an integral part of vacationing. In addition, those traveling for leisure are the most likely to rely on their personal experience to plan their trips. Moreover, acquiring travel information is time consuming, particularly in the context of different travel party compositions. Couples can commit more time to planning than friends and coworkers can. Because of their distance, friends and coworkers are more likely to seek help from a travel agent. Some tourists personally address the details and concerns of all the dimensions of their trip, whereas others simply leave the decisions to the travel agent. Couples, friends, and coworkers have different types of decision leaders who use different information sources. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

*H2: Travel party composition significantly affects the use of different information sources.*

#### Travel Party Composition and Length of Stay

For tourists, destination and duration choices involve a series of evaluations according to the vacation budget, the time available, and travel companions (Fesenmaier and Jeng, 2000). Nationality, education, income, experience, familiarity, and daily spending are major factors influencing the length of stay (Gokovalia, Bahara, and Kozakb, 2007). Several other factors, including the tour package suitability, price level, and composition and familiarity of the party, may also influence the length of vacation. The length of stay is one of the most crucial vacation decisions (Decrop and Snelders, 2004).

Personal and family characteristics that may determine the length of stay include the tourist's age, family status, number of children, level of education, and profession. For example, a couple's desire to make their vacations coincide might limit the length of the trip (Alegre and Pou, 2006). Couples, friends, and coworkers have various travel behaviors and may decide to join different types of trips over different durations. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H3: Travel party composition significantly affects length of stay*

### Travel Party Composition and Satisfaction

Oliver (1997) demonstrated that conceptualization is the antecedent of overall satisfaction. Satisfaction research in tourism and recreation has indicated that tourists' satisfaction with individual components of the destination influences their satisfaction with the overall destination (Danaher and Arweiler, 1996, Kang et al., 2003, Ross and Iso-Ahola, 1991). Overall satisfaction must be distinguished from satisfaction with individual attributes, because the particular characteristics of tourism have a prominent effect on tourist satisfaction (Seaton and Benett, 1996).

Qu et al., (1997) showed that Chinese visitors were satisfied with the tourism infrastructure and facilities; the service provided in hotels, restaurants, and shops; the transportation system; and the environment. Tourists' satisfaction therefore refers to the favorability of the individual's subjective evaluation of the outcomes associated with using or consuming a product (Hunt, 1977).

However, satisfaction as a type of attitude is particularly likely to be influenced by the social context, and it is communicated to others in the tourist's social environment (Coghlan and Pearce, 2010, Pearce, 2005, Ryan, 1997). Social groups increase the satisfaction derived from a vacation by providing an interested and sympathetic forum within which an individual's vacation experiences can be discussed. Recalling vacation experiences provides a crucial contribution to the total satisfaction derived from the vacation and the interactions of the travel party. Pavot and Diener (2008) revealed that satisfied tourists were entirely engaged with and dependent on the positive experience of their group. According to TCS, different travel party compositions exhibit different travel behavior and satisfaction levels with their trip. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed.

*H4: Travel party composition significantly affects satisfaction.*

### Travel Party Composition and Revisit Intention

Ouellette and Wood (1998) noted that past behavior has significantly positive effects on future behavior. If tourists are satisfied with their travel experiences, they are assumed to be more willing to revisit a destination as well as spread positive word of mouth. Several studies have focused on the relationships between quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions (Backman and Veldkamp, 1995, Baker and Crompton, 2000, Cronin, Brady, and Hult, 2000). Destination image and travel satisfaction had a direct effect on revisit intention. However, trip quality was perceived through customer value and had an indirect effect on customer revisit intention (Chen and Tsai, 2007).

Kozak and Duman (2012) investigated the effect of other members in a travel group on a partner's vacation satisfaction and ultimately revisit intention. Travel companions might also influence the tourism experience derived, and previous travel experience might influence tourist revisit intention. Therefore, other customers can affect the nature of the service outcome and process. In this study, the revisit intentions of couples, friends, and coworkers were discussed. Travel companions who share leisure activities and have good experiences are likely to revisit. Travel with couples, friends, and coworkers has different perceived satisfaction. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H5: Travel party composition significantly affects revisit intention.*

## **DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

This study analyzed secondary data provided by the Annual Visitors Expenditure and Trends Survey for Taiwan in 2010 and 2011, a volunteer survey of 12,025 tourists departing Taiwan from Taipei's Taoyuan International Airport, Taipei International Airport, and Kaohsiung's Siaogang International Airport.

Chinese visitors accounted for 42.46% of all inbound leisure travelers to Taiwan in 2010 and 2011 (Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 2010–2011).

The study determined the influence of travel-related thoughts, decisions, and behaviors on whether Chinese tourists traveled to Taiwan as couples or with friends or coworkers, and queried participants regarding the information sources they used, planning time, length of stay, trip satisfaction, and intention to revisit. Participants were asked to score their answers to most questions using a 5-point Likert scale, and the remaining questions required yes or no answers.

The responses of 2,566 Chinese leisure travelers in Taiwan were analyzed, which filter to who i) Nationality is Chinese; ii) the purpose of trip is sightseeing; there were 1,561 women and 1,005 men, and most were 20–29 years old; iii) travel party compositions were “traveling with friends” (1,143 people, 44.54%), couples (767, 29.90%), and “traveling with coworkers” (656, 25.57%). The five research questions were investigated using a one-way ANOVA to test the continuous variables of information sources, planning time, length of stay, and trip satisfaction.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, the information sources used by couples, those traveling with friends, and those traveling with coworkers, differed; however, all groups were exposed to subway/bus and TV/radio advertising. These findings were consistent with those of Fodness et al., (1999), who reported that use of information sources differed substantially depending on friends, couples, and co-workers.

Table 1 : Type of Information Source Preferences by Travel Party Composition (ANOVA Tests)

Information Source	Friends	Couples	Coworkers	F	P
Newspapers Magazines	1.68(4)	1.30(4)	1.22(5)	10.717	0.000***
Ad on Subways/ Buses	0.82(6)	0.46(6)	0.32(6)	26.564	0.000***
TV/Radio	2.83(1)	2.70(1)	2.42(1)	5.986	0.003**
Internet	1.97(2)	1.28(5)	2.08(2)	24.696	0.000***
International Travel Exhibitions	0.39(8)	0.22(8)	0.30(7)	4.916	0.007***
Outdoor Ad or Billboards	0.47(7)	0.23(7)	0.28(8)	10.775	0.000***
Tourism Leaflets of Travel Agency	1.43(5)	1.83(2)	1.95(3)	11.192	0.000***
WOM from Friends or Relatives	1.71(3)	1.42(3)	1.24(4)	8.626	0.000***

*This table shows mean difference analysis in friends, couples, and coworkers. The fourth column reports the results of ANOVA test of F value. The last column reports the P value. Note: \* significant at 10%-level, \*\* significant at 5%-level, \*\*\*significant at 1%-level. Numbers in parenthesis are the rank of each item based on means.*

As shown in Table 2, couples spent the most time planning their trips, and those traveling with coworkers averaged the longest lengths of stay. Those traveling with friends were most likely to revisit Taiwan. Although Chinese travel to Taiwan had varying travel party compositions, they were all satisfied with their itineraries, accommodations, transportation, meals, tour guide services, the professionalism of their tour guides, and their overall trip. Couples were most satisfied regarding all survey items.

To determine how travel party composition affected peoples' intention to revisit Taiwan, a chi-square analysis was used to test the associations between the row (travel with friends, couples, and coworkers) and column variables (intention to revisit), because the variables were measured on a discrete scale (see Table 3). The Pearson chi-square statistic was non-significant ( $\chi^2 = 0.316$ ,  $p > .1$ ). As for tourists' intention to revisit Taiwan, there were no statistic differences between those who traveled with couples, friends, and coworkers. Travel party composition was determined not to influence tourists' intention to revisit Taiwan.

Table 2 : Time of Plan Length of Stay and Satisfaction of Travel Package by Travel Party Composition (ANOVA Tests)

Element	Friends	Couples	Coworkers	F	P
Time of Plan	45.91	55.89	53.72	4.632	0.010**
Length of Stay	5.36	6.12	6.16	33.642	0.000***
Itinerary	4.3(6)	4.46(5)	4.13(6)	26.184	0.000***
Accommodations	4.36(5)	4.42(6)	4.30(5)	4.304	0.014**
Transportation	4.62(3)	4.74(3)	4.61(3)	11.842	0.000***
Meals	4.2(7)	4.23(7)	4.05(7)	8.877	0.000***
Tour Guide Service	4.69(1)	4.80(1)	4.64(1)	16.305	0.000***
Professional of the Tour Guide	4.67(2)	4.78(2)	4.62(2)	13.427	0.000***
Overall Impression	4.53(4)	4.65(4)	4.48(4)	15.998	0.000***
Revisit	1.08	1.08	1.08	0.158	0.854

This table shows mean difference analysis in friends, couples, and coworkers. The fourth column reports the results of ANOVA test of F value. The last column reports the P value. Note: \* significant at 10%-level, \*\* significant at 5%-level, \*\*\*significant at 1%-level. Numbers in parenthesis are the rank of each item based on Means.

Table 3 : Revisit Intention by Travel Party Composition (Chi-Square Tests)

Travel Party Composition	Revisit Intention	
	Yes	No
Friends	1,055 (41.1%)	88 (3.4%)
Couples	704 (27.4%)	63 (2.5%)
Coworkers	601 (23.4%)	55 (2.1%)
Total	2,360 (92.0%)	206 (8.0%)

This table shows “yes” or “not” revisit to Taiwan in friends, couples, and coworkers. The second column reports the tourists will revisit. The last column reports the tourists will not revisit.

This study extended So et al.,’s (2007) research on travel party composition. We discovered that types of information sources used, planning time, length of stay, and trip satisfaction differed significantly between couples and those traveling with friends or coworkers. The results of this study revealed that travel party composition induced a number of significant differences between travel parties, but all travel parties exhibited critical similarities. The difference in travel behaviors among couples and those traveling with friends or coworkers has theoretical implications for tourism researchers.

This paper provides empirical support for the relevance of the TCS to the analysis of travel party composition. First, although all three travel party compositions were exposed to subway/bus and TV/radio advertising, they reported different uses of travel agency tourism brochures. A significance test showed that couples considered information available at travel agencies more decisive than those traveling with friends or coworkers. This is because tourism brochures available at travel agencies have emerged as one of the main sources of information for couples.

Second, regarding planning time, those traveling with people with whom they were intimate, such as couples, were likely to spend more time planning their trips and had higher levels of satisfaction than people traveling with friends. Because friends typically do not see each other often in their daily lives, they might travel together to catch up with each other. Conversely, couples typically spend more time together and therefore might have higher perceived travel quality than friends.

Third, lengths of stay differed significantly among the three travel party compositions. Tourists lengthen their stays when they become aware of additional activities (Fodness et al., 1999). People who traveled with coworkers stayed longest, followed by couples. Trip durations might depend on people’s work schedules (Dellaert et al., 1998). Couples and coworkers typically have similar work schedules, enabling similar trip scheduling; thus, there were significant differences in lengths of stay between couples and those traveling with coworkers, and those traveling with friends.

Fourth, couples were most satisfied with tours in Taiwan, because they prefer to acquire travel information from travel agencies before their trips. According to the expectation theory (Oliver, 1974), people decide to act due to what they expect the result of that selected. Couples were satisfied regarding their itineraries, accommodations, transportation, meals, tour guide services, the professionalism of their tour guide, and overall impressions because they prefer got the information source from travel agency.

Finally, the three travel party compositions exhibited no statistic difference in their intentions to revisit. These results suggested that travel agencies should identify travel party compositions and target them with tailored travel package promotions. Couples can be identified by travel marketers by their use of tourism brochures available at travel agencies; travel marketers can also provide couples with information in 56 days prior to the decision to travel at all. Travel marketers can target those traveling with friends or coworkers by using the Internet or TV/radio advertising.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

By analyzing TCSs, this study investigated how travel-related attitudes and behaviors were influenced by three travel party compositions: couples, those traveling with friends, and those traveling with coworkers. Travel party compositions influenced the use of various information sources, planning times, lengths of stay, satisfaction levels, and revisit intentions. The results indicated that traveling with friends is a prevalent contemporary phenomenon. Couples and those traveling with coworkers had longer lengths of stay, and couples required more planning time. These findings provide insight to travel agencies and the government and enable further evaluation of the effects of tourism marketing activities on subsequent tourist behavior. Moreover, marketing segmentation should consider not only tourists' individual attributes but also their travel party compositions.

Future research monitor another factor such as generation on TCS. Travel party composition is a critical influence on tourist behavior which must be considered by Taiwanese marketers. Market segmentation on the basis of travel behavior and adopting effective media could be a useful method for Taiwan marketers to reach their target audiences and provide suitable travel package.

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