

# A grounded typology of vacation decision-making

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## Abstract

This paper presents a typology of vacationers based on decision-making variables and processes. Employing a naturalistic perspective, the (summer) vacation decision-making process of 25 Belgian households was followed for a year. In-depth interview and observation data were analyzed and interpreted through the grounded theory methodology. Findings show that vacation decision-making is an ongoing process with a lot of contextual influences. A distinction is made between six types of vacationers: habitual, rational, hedonic, opportunistic, constrained and adaptable. This new typology may be useful for both theoretical and segmentation purposes.

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## 1. Introduction

The tourism literature has proposed a large number of typologies of vacationers, tourists and travelers. Many of these typologies are based on segmentation criteria (see Table 1), which have been proposed to sub-divide vacationers into homogeneous groups, in order to help targeting and positioning strategies. These criteria can be used separately or in combination (Lang & O'Leary, 1997). Widely used are demographic criteria, such as age (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982), the family life cycle (Fodness, 1992) and vacationers' predispositions such as benefits sought (Shoemaker, 1994; Woodside & Jacobs, 1985). A lot of attention has also been given to behavioral variables, such as vacation activities (Hsieh, O'Leary, & Morrison, 1992; Moscardo, Morrison, Pearce, Lang, & O'Leary, 1996), amount of expenditure (Spotts & Mahoney, 1991), chosen destination (Lang et al., 1997), distance traveled (Etzet & Woodside, 1982) and frequency of travel (Woodside, Cook, & Mindak, 1987). More traditional geographical and economical criteria have been suggested as well (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999).

Typologies based on segmentation criteria can be used for day-to-day marketing operations such as segmentation, targeting, destination selection, pricing, etc. However, segmentation criteria are less useful for describing more fundamental and structural aspects of the vacationer's life, which are important for theoretical purposes and for strategic marketing planning (e.g. product development and (re)positioning may be based on an analysis of social and cultural trends in the market). Although segmentation criteria can highlight various aspects of the vacationer's life, without an integrated theory of how to combine them they are like separate pieces of a puzzle. Therefore, more theoretical typologies have been proposed and these have focused either on socio-psychological variables of the vacationer, or on his/her decision-making style. In this paper, we propose a new typology where socio-psychological processes and decision styles are combined. The need for such a typology becomes apparent when one looks at the strengths and weaknesses of existing typologies.

### 1.1. Socio-psychological processes

In general, socio-psychological typologies offer a more integrated view of the vacationer because they connect descriptive aspects of the vacationer with

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Table 1  
Tourist typologies based on segmentation criteria

Author(s)	Major variable(s)	Tourist types
Anderson and Langmeyer (1982)	Age	The under-50 and over-50 travelers
Etzel and Woodside (1982)	Distance traveled	Distant and near-home travelers
Fodness (1992)	Family life cycle	Young couple, young parents, mature parents, mature couple, senior couple
Hsieh et al. (1992)	Activities	Visiting friends and relatives, outdoor sports, sightseeing, full-house activity, entertainment
Lang, O'Leary, and Morrison (1997)	Destination	Within-Asia and out-of-Asia (Taiwanese outbound tourists)
Moscardo et al. (1996)	Travel benefits and activities	Escape/excitement, self-esteem/self-development, family relationships, physical activity, safety-security, self-esteem/social status, escape, relaxation
Shoemaker (1994)	Benefits sought	Get away/family travelers, adventurous/educational travelers, gamblers/fun oriented travelers
Spotts and Mahoney (1991)	Expenditure	Light, medium and heavy spenders
Woodside and Jacobs (1985)	Benefits sought	Rest and relaxation, cultural experiences, family togetherness
Woodside, Cook, and Mindak (1987)	Frequency of travel	Light and heavy travelers

Table 2  
Tourist typologies based on socio-psychological variables

Author(s)	Major variable(s)	Tourist types
Cha et al. (1995)	Push factors (motives)	Sport seekers, novelty seekers and family/relaxation seekers
Cohen (1972)	Roles, motives and level of risk aversion/novelty seeking	Drifter, explorer, individual mass and organized mass
Cohen (1979)	Roles, motives and sought experiences	The recreational, the diversionary, the experiential, the experimental and the existential tourist
Davis et al. (1988)	Attitudes, interests and opinions	Five clusters of differing degrees of attitudes towards the state's tourism efforts
Madrigal and Kahle (1994)	Values and lifestyles	External locus of control (sense of belonging and security), enjoyment/excitement, achievement, egocentrism
Mayo and Jarvis (1981)	Psychographics	The 'peace-and-quiet' traveler, the overseas traveler, the historian traveler, the recreational vehicle traveler and the 'travel now/ pay later' traveler
Mazanec (1994)	Socio-styles	Dandy, rocky, business, squadra, protest, scout, pioneer, olvidados, vigilante, romantic, defence, prudent, moralist, citizen, gentry, strict
Plog (1974, 1994)	Personality traits	Psychocentrics and allocentrics (plus intermediate categories: near-psychocentrics, midcentrics, near-allocentrics)
Smith (1989)	Motives and lifestyles	Explorer, elite, offbeat, unusual, incipient mass, mass, charter
Thrane (1997)	Personal values	The modern materialist, the modern idealist, the traditional materialist and the traditional idealist

sociological or psychological variables (see Table 2). Socio-psychological typologies can be based on values and lifestyles (Madrigal & Kahle, 1994; Thrane, 1997), attitudes, interests and opinions (Davis, Allen, & Crozenza, 1988), motives (Cha, McCleary, & Uysal, 1995), or personality types (Plog, 1974). In a 'meta-typology', Plog (1994) identifies eight psychographic/personality dimensions of the tourist: venturesomeness, pleasure-seeking, impulsivity, self-confidence, planfulness, masculinity, intellectualism and people orientation. Of particular importance to the tourism literature has been Cohen's (1972, 1979) work. Based on tourist roles, motives and sought experiences, he developed a four-fold classification of tourist behaviors (i.e. drifter, explorer, individual mass and organized mass). There have been a few attempts to develop and refine this

popular typology (Pearce, 1982; Redfoot, 1984; Wickens, 2002). Mayo and Jarvis (1981) describe five types of travelers: the 'peace-and-quiet', the overseas, the historian, the recreational vehicle and the 'travel now/ pay later' traveler. Finally, general socio-style typologies of US and European consumers have been adapted to tourism (Mazanec, 1994). Other typologies are reviewed by Lowyck, Van Langenhove, and Bollaert (1992) and Swarbrooke and Horner (1999).

While interesting for conceptualization purposes and a more thorough understanding of tourist behavior, socio-psychological typologies lack practical relevance for decision-making in tourism, 'as the implied types are often difficult to identify' (Bargeman, Joh, & Timmermans, 2002, p. 321). A first reason for this may be that many typologies have been built more than 10 years ago,

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