Information sources and the decision-making process in tourism:

An Investigation of Tourist Attraction and Activity Selection in a Digital Age

by

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates how tourists choose tourist attractions and activities on holiday. It examines how information sources influence the decision-making process and how other contextual, dynamic, emotional, and situational factors contribute to decision-making in the destination. Adopting a mixed methods approach this thesis aims to deliver a holistic approach to in-situ decision-making. It collects nuanced and descriptive data from in-depth interviews with tourists in-situ and tourism professionals, supplemented by participant field surveys.

This thesis addresses three critical research gaps: first, the scarcity of qualitative studies in the decision-making field; second, the lack of studies that include the divergent range of attractions and activities in the tourist destination; and third, the rarity of in-destination studies that focus on in-situ decision-making. It re-directs much of the focus in tourism from destination choice to in-destination activity choice. The body of work that addresses decision-making theory development and testing is limited mainly to tourist destination choice. It neglects the many complex and dynamic itinerary decisions that emerge while the tourist is on holiday. Information selection has been identified as a critical stage in the decision-making process. Recently, studies from the ICT field have emphasised the importance of new digital information sources, including the Internet, electronic word of mouth, mobile technology, and recommender systems. Suggesting that new digital sources have replaced traditional information sources. This thesis seeks to understand the influence of contemporary and traditional information sources such as leaflets, guidebooks, tourist information sites and recommendations from family and friends. Furthermore, it seeks to understand the dynamic nature of decision-making and the interaction with information search. Moreover, the timing of information sources employed at the different decision-making stages in attraction and activity selection.

A pragmatic approach is utilised, employing mixed methods research with particular emphasis on the qualitative data collected and evaluated with thematic analysis. The thesis comprises nineteen in-depth interviews with tourists in Aberystwyth; three interviews with industry professionals; and 515 surveys conducted at tourist attractions. This study will provide theoretical and managerial insights into in-destination decision-making processes; information sources; dynamic, contextual, and influential factors relating to the selection of activities and

attractions. The study was carried out in rural Wales in the UK and was funded by KESS2, a Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarship funded by the European Social Fund.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

Travel Vignette

'Sitting around a table at a backpacker's hostel in Cairns, Queensland, travel stories were being exchanged over breakfast. I haven't stayed in that many hostels, I don't love the shared facilities, but I do love talking to other travellers. One unhappy traveller was sitting opposite me; a young woman was eating breakfast and staring at her phone. She was angry because it was eight am, and she was supposed to be on a minibus to see the local sights. She had gone to meet the bus at seven, and it had left early without her. Her phone flashes, and she's tapping away furiously. She was mad because it was her last day in Cairns; she was flying out late that night and didn't want to miss the trip and the chance to see the pools and the jungle at Mossman Gorge and Cape Tribulation. She told me the tour company was sending someone from their office to pick her up soon and meet the bus partway through the tour. She was relieved but still annoyed; that much was clear. I was surprised that they responded to emails so early in the morning. She showed me the travel company and the website she had booked through. "It's really good", she said, "all the trips are discounted. I did a flight over the barrier reef yesterday in a tiny plane for less than $100; it was amazing; you should do it", as she showed me the photos. The website was a basic, kind of no-strings comparison site for Queensland tourism activities, advertising many discounted trips and tickets. I thanked her; great tip …I might just do that. I was impressed by her travel savvy and gumption in getting this travel company to send her a car at the last minute. She left soon after to get her lift, and the rest of the table continued chatting. Another person at the table had done the flight across the barrier reef and raved about how great it was, and I was pretty much sold on it, even though my only ambition for the reef at that point had been snorkelling. The other travellers were influencing me, my new transient friends, and I was introduced to a new website to find activities. I had already booked the snorkelling trip with the travel desk in the hostel, which seems to be the norm in Australia. At the time, it seemed easier to book with someone and get advice on the right trip for me. I liked looking at all the leaflets and browsing the options. While my mobile phone was working just fine with a new sim, the amount of information I needed to scroll through just seemed like hard work, though I still did just that, deliberating and debating on how to spend my time in Cairns, Australia.

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND & RESEARCH GAP

The research in this thesis is inspired by these kinds of decision-making moments. Organising visits to attractions and activities on holiday often requires a significant amount of thought, planning and information. Yet sometimes, you strike lucky with a serendipitous conversation or a sign, and you decide on the spot. Furthermore, despite a notional idea of convenience, the internet and mobile technology have further complicated the decision-making space. Adding social media to the mix makes the information sources available truly overwhelming. Yet the final decision to do an attraction or activity can be highly personal and time-bound. Another consequence has been the reification of the link between attractions and activities and their host destinations, which are arguably just the sum of their parts. For rural and regional areas, in particular, the activities and attractions on offer may define the place in the tourist mindset. Thus, the success of tourism and economic opportunity may rest on the potential for positive decision-making in relation to attractions and activities present. Persuasive and effective marketing materials and information sources are essential for tourism stakeholders to attract visitors in a crowded marketplace (Lee and Gretzel, 2012). Marketing plays a pivotal role in the core operations of businesses, especially in the tourism sector where attractions are key (Soteriades, Snyman and Varvaressos, 2012). With destinations offering diverse attractions and activities, the market is often highly competitive. Attractions must continuously strive to appeal to a broad audience of visitors. In this competitive landscape, there is a notable emphasis on attracting new visitors each season. Hence, effectively engaging new tourists through strategic marketing initiatives is crucial for ensuring the financial success of an attraction.

Recent strides in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have transformed the manner in which travellers strategise, partake in, and craft experiences, reshaping our understanding of tourism encounters. Moreover, tourism experiences mediated by ICTs demand novel marketing and management strategies (Yoo and Gretzel, 2016).When it comes to selecting attractions and activities, which frequently take place during the visit, offline sources like information centres and leaflets are still utilised by attractions for marketing purposes alongside online channels. However, prevailing models of information search and decision-making suggest that the bulk of information gathering occurs during the pre-planning phase, with online sources now superseding offline ones. Tourist behaviour is driven by diverse needs such as the desire for relaxation, escapism from routine life, the pursuit of novel

experiences, and the cultivation of social connections (Pearce, 2011). Tourist attractions possess spatial and temporal attributes that set them apart from ordinary locations in individuals' daily lives (Leiper, 1990). Consequently, tourist attractions have the capacity to attract discretionary visitors to a destination (McKercher, 2017).

Individual perceptions regarding an attraction's ability to fulfil visitors' needs and satisfy their travel motivations play a pivotal role in selecting attractions (Leiper, 1990). Yet, tourists typically lack sufficient prior knowledge to finalise all travel arrangements. To facilitate decision-making and shape expectations of future experiences, comprehensive information about tourist attractions is essential, encompassing their attributes, alternative options, and contextual factors (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). Information search in tourism is complex, and the process has multiple steps (Hwang and Fesenmaier, 2011). A study that examined online and offline search behaviours of university students in the tourism context developed a compelling model for information search behaviour: Travel decision-making is a linear progression, encompassing stages such as need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and subsequent purchase and post-purchase activities. The acknowledgement of travel needs and the desire to mitigate potential negative impacts of the travel environment prompt individuals to engage in information search and decision-making processes. In selecting tourism products, tourists typically acquaint themselves with available options, assess them based on their perceived ability to fulfil personal needs, and subsequently reach decisions. However, the mere availability of information does not always culminate in a comprehensive evaluation and final decision. Information found is discussed with other people, and factors such as insufficient information or evolving traveller circumstances may lead to the postponement of purchase decisions. Additionally, the emergence of new information may prompt a re-evaluation of the situation, initiating a renewed phase of the information search process. (Ho, Lin and Chen, 2012). While the study had limitations since it was not with real tourists and was a simulated information search, it validated other studies that have shown similar dynamic search patterns as found in Fodness and Murray, (1997, 1999).

The information search process is widely acknowledged to precede tourists' selection of tourism products such as destination or accommodation, but it can continue while the tourist is in the destination (Hyde, 2008). Advances in technology, such as the internet and personal devices, have reshaped the information search process into a continuous and dynamic one, spanning before, during, and even after tourists visit a destination (Karimi et al., 2015).

The decision-making process for selecting experiences such as activities and attractions is heavily influenced by various contextual factors. These factors encompass individual traits and travel specifics, including the trip purpose, holiday length, as well as the level of familiarity with the destination (Hyde, 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Fodness and Murray, 1999). Moreover, the decision-making process is further influenced by various factors present at the destination, including the tourist's whereabouts, social surroundings, as well as the seasonal variations, weather conditions, and time of visit (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015). Contingent decision-making acknowledges the influence of external factors and adapts decision-making strategies accordingly (Bettman, Johnson and Payne, 1991). In-destination decision-making is dynamic and subject to change due to environmental factors. This contrasts with more rigid decision-making models that do not consider context variability and assume that decisions are made based solely on internal cognitive processes or fixed preferences.

The widespread adoption of information communication technologies (ICTs) has transformed tourist decision-making into a more spontaneous process, heavily influenced by the context (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015). Since advancements in interconnectivity and interoperability now empower tourists to access pertinent digital content at any stage of their customer journeys, even during the in-destination phase (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015) a blurring of the distinct information stages has been suggested (Wang, Xiang and Fesenmaier, 2016). With the decline in the use of printed materials (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). An emerging trend is the tendency to defer travel arrangements until shortly before tourists commence their trip (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). Tourists now commonly seek information during the holiday (Hwang and Fesenmaier, 2011). There has been a surge in interest in digital information sources and their contribution to decision-making in tourism. In a conceptual paper, Buhalis and Leung (2018, p.42) explore smart hospitality and state that hotel guests expect the provision of "effective ICT applications for daily itinerary planning, information search, and for locating nearby activities". It is widely supported in the academic literature that the internet "is now the leading information source for tourists" and that "it has become one of the most efficient means of reaching new tourist markets and foster revisiting of the same destinations" (Pantano, Priporas and Stylos, 2017, p.432). It is suggested that digital information and electronic word of mouth are increasingly influential, and that the internet is utilised by all generations of users for travel searches (Gretzel *et al.*, 2015). The existing literature on information sources typically focuses on one information source rather than a holistic approach to all information sources that the tourist might consider. For example, tourist

information centres are reviewed (Lyu and Hwang, 2015), or the role of social media in information search (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). However, some have compared offline and online sources and found they complemented each other (Ho, Lin and Chen, 2012).

Previous literature that predates the explosion of the digitisation of information identifies that tourists utilise multiple information sources when selecting destinations (Fodness and Murray,1999). While this selection has grown exponentially in recent years with the advent of the Internet, the tourism industry has been focused on developing new technologies to aid decision-making and traditional information sources are sometimes overlooked. For example, in a case study for attraction and activity selection applied to Praiano, a town on the Amalfi coast (Colace et al. (2015), the development of a mobile digital application did not consider the broader tourist decision-making process or wider use of information sources. Selecting and buying travel arrangements entail a series of interconnected decisions over an extended duration (Stewart and Vogt, 1999). Tourists typically research and explore their destinations before their trips, gathering information to craft a vacation itinerary. However, they may adjust their plans upon arriving at the destination based on new information and experiences. Nevertheless, previous studies have noted significant disparities between pre-trip plans and tourists' actual behaviours on-site (March and Woodside, 2005).

While on their trip, tourists often deviate from their pre-established plans (Stewart and Vogt, 1999), with fewer aspects of their itinerary being followed through. Various factors contribute to these changes, including shifting circumstances, exposure to new information, specific outcomes of consumption, and constraints such as weather and time. This often leads to a continuous cycle of plan adjustment throughout the trip (Becken and Wilson, 2007). Leisure travel is characterized by open-ended exploration, novelty-seeking, and a sense of freedom and autonomy over the travel process (Hyde and Lawson, 2003). Even for highly organised independent travellers, many aspects of their itinerary may remain unplanned, allowing for spontaneity and adventure (Hyde, 2008). As a result, tourists frequently postpone certain decisions until they are on-site, preferring to embrace the unpredictability of their journey and experience something different and adventurous (Decrop and Snelders, 2005). Decision biases are common occurrences in the decision-making process, often stemming from the utilization of heuristics or "rules of thumb" that serve as shortcuts to simplify decisions. Many human decisions are not entirely rational as they are influenced by various factors that can either constrain or motivate individuals to act irrationally (Bettman, Luce and Payne, 1998).

It has been identified in the literature that there is a need for a new theory for the decision-making process of tourists as it is deemed highly individualistic and contextual (Smallman and Moore, 2010) and does not lend itself well to usual and more predictable general theories. This research will contribute to developing critical theories that are complex, defamiliarizing and rich in paradox (DiMaggio,1995). It has been proposed that "theorizing tourist behaviour" is a challenging task because tourists "show thousands of facets in their choices and activities" (Decrop, 2014, p.262). This study spotlights decision-making in the attraction and activity sector. While there have been many studies on decision-making, they tend to focus on destination choice or holiday type (Decrop, 2006).

In the field of activity and attraction selection, there are research studies relating to specific attractions or activities such as museums (Volchek et al., 2018), adventure attractions (Sato et al., 2018), and wine tourism (Lee, Bruwer and Song, 2017). Some studies investigate motivations for attraction selection in destination sub-sectors such as rural tourism (Rid, Ezeuduji and Pröbstl-Haider, 2014). However, there is a scarcity of empirical studies that consider the vast array of attractions that tourists can choose from whilst in the destination and the complex, dynamic nature of the decision-making process. It has been stated that attractions have been overlooked in the tourism oeuvre even though they are an important component of the destination: "attractions are vital sub-element in all whole tourism systems" and "knowledge surrounding them is lacking in empirical underpinning and theoretical strength" (Richards, 2002, p.1048). Most decision-making research has been focused on destination choice (Moore et al., 2012) with little attention to the activity and attraction sector. In most of the established work, decision-making of activities and attractions is regarded as a subcategory of destination attributes, or it is a specific activity, such as golf or wine tourism, that is the focus of the research.

There have been calls in the literature for new models and new ways of studying decision-making that move away from dominant frameworks: "Given the centrality of the selection decision process to tourist behaviour, a clear understanding of the complexities and interrelationships of these variables is an important research agenda." (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005, p.816). In a qualitative review, Sirakaya and Woodside, (2005) challenge the grand theories of decision-making that position the decision-maker as a rational and logical utility-maximiser, calling for the study of the role of emotions. In response to the general tourism theories on decision-making, it is posited that simpler and "field-specific" models should be

conceived (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005, p.829). Furthermore, they suggest that rather than focusing on the big holiday decisions, there should be a focus on more minor decisions, where less functional decision-making is involved and the investigation of situational factors. This thesis will investigate the contextual and situational factors such as the environment; travel companions; budget; weather and transport that contribute to in-destination decision-making.

This thesis's findings will benefit the tourism industry's marketing activities. The activity and attraction sector needs to understand the decision-making process to market and deliver services effectively. The UK attraction sector supplies a regional recreational day visitor market and heavily depends on UK-wide and international tourists. Indeed, understanding consumer behaviour is fundamental for the success of leisure and tourism companies in marketing to customers effectively (Decrop, 2010). An investigation of the decision-making cycle of tourists concerning the destination and activity selection that pinpoints those information sources could determine salient market segmentation for the industry. The thesis will provide significant insights into consumer decision-making using online technologies and potentially develop new business models (recognised by the UNWTO in 2016) that will benefit Wales. Furthermore, it will contribute to academic literature and contemporary theory by addressing key research gaps by contributing to qualitative empirical research in decision-making inquiry. It will add invaluable data on decision-making across attractions and activities, rather than focusing on one attraction type, and it will collect rare data in situ instead of pre or post-visit.

Decision-making in tourism has been described as a complex research area (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016) with multiple decisions and many internal and external variables. The decision-making process begins before the holiday, during the planning stages and continues during the holiday. Many of these decisions are high-risk, with changeable outcomes and can be very individualistic (Smallman and Moore, 2010). The dominant research in decision-making stems from statistical and mathematical modelling, which ultimately positions the tourist as a "rational decision-maker engaged in a motivationally driven process of searching for an efficient means of satisfying desires and needs in relation to travel" (Moore et al., 2012, p.635). There have been few efforts to counter this approach with interpretive work (Smallman and Moore, 2010) that considers nuanced, naturalistic, dynamic and contextual decision-making, and the literature lacks empirical qualitative work. Therefore, to address this research gap, qualitative data collection is emphasised in a mixed methods research design.

This thesis addresses three key research gaps: Firstly, the scarcity of qualitative studies in the decision-making field. More qualitative approaches to the study of decision-making have been recommended to better understand the complex and dynamic nature of decision-making. Expressly, that situational and contextual factors need further investigation, underscoring a departure from conventional quantitative and generalist models (Hergesell, Dwyer and Edwards, 2021). Given the intricate nature of tourist behaviour, there is still a relatively restricted amount of empirical research focusing on in-destination tourist behaviour and decision-making (Huang & Wu, 2012; McKercher & Lau, 2008; Smallman & Moore, 2010). Decision-making is "multi-dimensional and complex…more like a piece of the world being studied than just a set of measurements of (a pair of isolated variables) in that world" (Jamal and Hollinshead, 2001). Secondly, there is a lack of studies on the breadth of attractions and activity selection. Tourist attractions have the capacity to attract discretionary visitors to a destination (McKercher, 2017). While large, iconic attractions are better covered in the extant literature, small, diverse attractions and activities in rural geographies deserve attention. Destination selection is a well-traversed area of research, while itinerary and attraction selection are far less researched. Research has primarily focused on choosing a holiday, a destination or an accommodation type. In contrast, consumer selection of attractions and activities has not been investigated to the same degree (Rubright *et al.*, 2016). Thirdly, there is a rarity of in-destination studies focusing on in situ decision-making. Many theories and variance models, conceptualising determinants, variables, and phases, have been developed to further the understanding of decision-making in tourism since the 1950s (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). However, they are typically narrow in focus to either a stage of decision-making, such as pre-trip or a certain decision, such as accommodation selection. It has been reasoned that many decisions are made during the holiday whilst at the destination (Decrop and Snelders, 2005; Moore et al., 2012), and this area of research is not understood and lacks empirical research. These decisions are dynamic and complex and could be more reliant on the heuristic process than pre-trip decisions that are characterised as more sequential or rational. Tourist decision-making is often referred to as complex, and linear, sequential models that have been long established don't accommodate decision-making that is potentially spontaneous, unplanned, or unmotivated (Kenneth F. Hyde, 2008). The decision-making process while on-site is notably more intricate and fluid than decisions made before the trip, resulting in tourists exhibiting unplanned, hedonic, opportunistic behaviours during their time at the destination (Hyde, 2008).

1.2 RESEARCH AIMS

This study investigates the decision-making process and information tourists use when selecting attractions and activities to visit on holiday. The thesis will explore tourist's perceptions in situ while on holiday in the towns of Aberystwyth and Betws Y Coed, Wales, as well as with tourism industry professionals. It implements a pragmatic mixed-method approach that combines field-collected surveys and in-depth interviews. The current study centres on on-site tourist decision-making, encompassing affective, experiential, spontaneous, and intuitive dimensions (Hyde, 2008; Smallman & Moore, 2010). While the study takes a mixed methods approach, the main focus of the thesis is qualitative data collected from participants and tourism stakeholders. Qualitative research offers a more comprehensive understanding of real-life phenomena and human behaviour. By gathering detailed and nuanced information, qualitative methods can capture the intricacies and complexities inherent in the subject matter (Ryan, 2006). Therefore, the qualitative research design is deemed appropriate for the present study, supplemented by collecting surveys at attraction sites. The methodology began with a qualitative study in the form of in-depth interviews to better understand how tourists make decisions about holiday activities in the destination. The second stage of the research was to conduct interviews with attraction site managers and a representative of Visit Wales to gain insight into the industry perspective. The third stage of the research was to design a survey to collect data at attraction sites.

The core aims are as follows:

1. Exploring the Challenges and Trends in Marketing Tourism Attractions: The rapidly evolving landscape of digital marketing presents challenges and opportunities for attractions and activity providers. With the proliferation of marketing channels, understanding the most effective strategies to reach potential customers at the right time becomes crucial. This research aims to identify the most impactful information sources in destination marketing and determine where attractions should focus their marketing efforts to attract visitors. Additionally, the study will investigate the decision-making timeline for attractions and activities.

2. Investigating In-Situ Decision-Making in Holiday Itineraries: Decision-making in destination selection is dynamic and influenced by various factors. While tourists may

have pre-planned their activities, these plans often change upon arrival. This study seeks to understand how in-situ decision-making unfolds within the context of holiday itineraries.

3. Understanding Contextual Elements in In-Situ Decision-Making: This thesis explores the intricacies of real-time decision-making, considering factors such as weather, budget constraints, destination attributes, transportation options, and group dynamics. These contextual elements play a significant role in shaping decision-making moments during travel experiences.

4. Exploring the Emotional Context of In-Destination Decision-making: Emotions play a pivotal role in the decision-making process, particularly in the context of tourism. This research aims to delve into the emotional aspects of decision-making for attractions and activities, seeking to understand the feelings associated with intended or experienced destinations during holiday travel.

5. Analysing Group Decision-Making Dynamics: Tourism is inherently a social activity, often involving group dynamics and collaborative decision-making processes. This thesis explores how group decision-making unfolds in real-time situations, shedding light on the negotiation and discussion processes among travellers.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question:

How do tourists in situ make decisions about activities and attractions to visit or experience? (What is the process of decision-making?)

The following sub-questions are under investigation:

1. *How does the situation and context of the group or individual affect the decision-making process?*

2. *How do feelings and emotions impact the decision-making process?*

3. *How do tourists, attractions and destinations value and use online information sources in relation to traditional information sources?*

1.4 FRAMEWORK

The three key phenomena under investigation are Decision-Making, Attractions & Activities, and Information Sources. The model represents the intersection of these research areas, focusing on the relationship, interaction, and influence between them. Information sources play a crucial role in the decision-making process, while attractions and activities form part of tourist's holiday itineraries. Decision-making, central to the research, connects with information sources, attractions, and activities. Each of these phenomena encompasses various aspects that are open to study. Regarding information sources, questions arise about the types of sources tourists utilize, when and why they use them, and the factors influencing their choice. The increasing prevalence of mobile technology and digital sources raises inquiries into their dominance over traditional sources. Additionally, the extent of influence wielded by information sources over selection, the sequential or patterned nature of information search, and the occurrence of unplanned, spontaneous decisions merit exploration. The exploration of

attractions and activities involves understanding tourists' choices, factors influencing those choices, and any emotional attachments or feelings associated with decisions. Examination of decision-making processes includes the context in which decisions emerge within groups, the timing of decisions, and whether they are pre-planned or made on-site. In-destination decision-making is complex and multifaced, subject to dynamic and contextual aspects as well as cognitive and emotional processes. The thesis aims to understand how decision-making emerges in the in-destination environment.

Figure 1. Framework of the Three Key Phenomenon
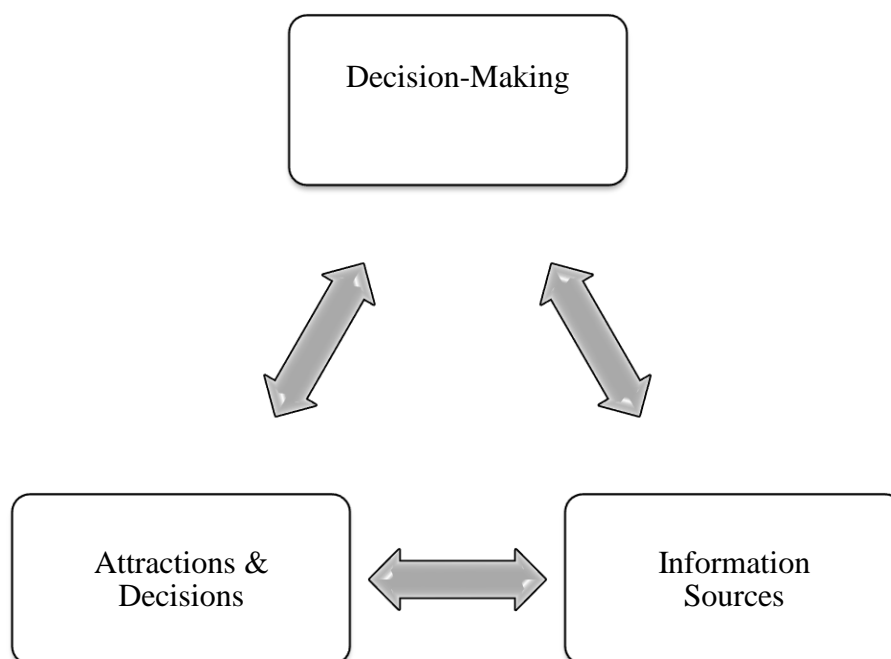
1.5 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH: TOURISM, ATTRACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES IN WALES

Tourism is an important part of the Welsh economy and contributes significantly to its growth and wealth. According to Visit Wales (2020, p.3), approximately 9.5% of the workforce is employed in tourism. In 2018, visitors spent £6.2 billion, generating £3 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA), which accounts for around 6% of the Welsh Economy's GVA. Wales is a country characterised by its rugged geography and rural landscapes. Consequently, there are

typically pockets of intense tourism activities in hubs of natural beauty, such as the Pembrokeshire coast and Snowdonia National Park, with most national-level events and culture in the capital, Cardiff. However, there is a moderate level of tourism reaching all geographic regions. The landscape of the attractions and activities market in Wales is diverse. It is a country that boasts countryside and coastal natural beauty sites. There are many historical places, four UNESCO heritage sites, and over 100 CADW (Welsh National Heritage) sites, including 44 castles. There are 977 attractions, and 444 activities listed on the Visit Wales website.

There is a full range of activities and attractions, from outdoor adventure, water sports, museums, arts, literature, music, and many festivals and events. The national tourism organisation Visit Wales (2022b, p.7) states that experiences are a vital destination driver. The most popular activities for the domestic UK market were cited as "Trying local food and drink" and "visiting outdoor visitor attractions", followed by "visiting heritage sites/cultural attractions' and 'walking, hiking or rambling". It follows that Wales is perceived as a rural destination since it is most likely correlated with 'incredible scenery and landscapes' and as "a destination rich in history and heritage' with "famous landmarks and visitor attractions" and "great places to explore off the beaten track'" (Visit Wales, 2022b, p.8).

In a report on Tourist Attractions commissioned by the Welsh Government, visiting castles and historic sites is cited as the most common reason for domestic and overseas visitors to visit Wales (Kawol, 2013). The staycation trend has supported the attraction sector, while wet weather and growth in overseas travel were perceived as threats. Free-to-visit attractions saw more growth than paid-for attractions. Kawol, 2013 cites 'The Wales Visitor Survey 2013', stating that in 2011, visiting attractions was the second highest-rated reason to visit Wales. In a more recent visitor survey in 2019, most stated that *enjoying the landscape, countryside or beach* (79%) was their main reason for staying. Followed by visiting places, historical and religious sites, or attractions (56%) and taking *part in outdoor or sporting activities* (44%) (McAllister, Blunt and Davies, 2021). This data from Visit Wales confirms that activities and attractions strongly motivate visitors to Wales, are a vital component of destination marketing, and confirm the importance of understanding more about the attraction and activity market. However, the reports do not explain why tourists visit attractions, participate in activities or how they make those decisions.

1.6 RESEARCH FUNDING

This thesis received funding from KESS 2 Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships, which are supported by the European Social Fund. The primary objectives of these scholarships include enhancing the research capabilities of small to medium enterprises by engaging in collaborative PhD/Research Masters projects, promoting research activities within SMEs, training individuals to become proficient research professionals, supporting the advancement of key technologies in the Convergence Area of Wales, and fostering the development of higher-level skills. For companies participating in the program, benefits include fostering a research-oriented culture within the organisation, positioning the company as a leading authority and market influencer in its sector, validating claims, perceptions, and experiences related to products, services, or brands, establishing and maintaining valuable partnerships with local universities, facilitating the recruitment and support of new researchers within the company, and leveraging the low entry cost for potentially significant project outcomes. The researcher was matched with a project partner – Cambria Tours, a small travel agency based in Aberystwyth, that was interested in developing a mobile app for tourists searching for local attractions and activities in Wales.

1.7 RESEARCH LOCATIONS

Aberystwyth, Devils Bridge & Betws Y Coed

Aberystwyth is a small, pleasant seaside town with a sweeping Victorian promenade; beaches; countryside and the Cambrian mountain range. The town reached its peak of popularity in the 1850s when many new hotels, a pier and a railway were built to accommodate Victorian tourism, dubbed *The Biarritz of Wales*. Post-war, there was a decline in tourism, but that has been rejuvenated in recent years because of the increase in staycations, the popularity of caravan parks on the outskirts of the town and visitors to the University. Aberystwyth is located in Mid-Wales, a regional tourist destination that, between 2017 and 2019, attracted 1.9 million overnight domestic; 99,000 international trips; and 12.3 million day visits. The average annual associated spend was £994 million (Velu, 2021). The town has a resident population of around 16,000 people, including the University population of about 7500 students during term time. In the summer, the town is typically packed with tourists and visitors. It is a popular seaside

destination in mid-Wales; it links many other towns and points of interest from the North and South (Visit Wales, 2022).

Devils Bridge (Pontarfynach) is a village twelve miles inland, south of Aberystwyth, in Ceredigion. Its population is around 450, and it is widely known in Wales for its famous stacked bridges, waterfall, and steam railway. It is a "spectacular waterfall attraction and nature trail in the heart of Mid Wales. It is one of the 'Must See' natural features of Wales." (*Visit Wales*, 2024). Betws Y Coed is an attractive rural village in North Wales, which, similarly to Aberystwyth, grew in popularity in the Victorian era when the steam railway and hotels prospered (*Visit Betws Y Coed*, 2022). Nearby historical bridges, rich countryside, and the Snowdonia National Park have appealed to visitors for many years. In recent times, adventure tourism in North Wales has risen in popularity, and many attractions have opened, which has boosted tourism in the region. The village has a population of 564 people and receives visitors all year round, especially in the summer months. Situated in North Wales, a regional tourist destination that in 2017-2019 attracted 3.7 million overnight domestic trips, 299,000 international visits and 22.7 million tourism day visits—the average annual associated spend of £1.47 billion (Velu, 2021). Indeed, North Wales saw higher growth between 2017 and 2019 than the rest of Wales.

Figure 2. A map of Wales adapted from Visit Wales, (2022, p.2), shows the research locations of Aberystwyth, Devils Bridge and Betws Y Coed circled in red.

1.8 RURAL TOURISM

It is essential to consider the backdrop and location of the research and whether it could impact the study's findings compared to urban environments or other countries/continents. Like much of Wales and the rest of the UK, the data collection locations are rural tourist destinations with diverse local product offerings and a limited number of flagship or national-level attractions. Rural tourism has been a subject of academic research that has crossed the disciplines of tourism, agriculture, and geography. While there is not an agreed definition of rural tourism, owing in part to its diversity and subcategories that include eco, adventure, sustainable and agriculture (Frochot, 2005), a systemic literature review (Rosalina, Dupre and Wang, 2021) provides the critical themes of rural tourism: *Location, Sustainable Development, Community-Based Aspects and Experience.* The conceptualisation of these themes in rural tourism is differentiated in developed and developing countries. The key themes of rural tourism can be briefly summarised as follows: the location is non-urban and in the countryside; it varies from isolated or uninhabited positions to small villages and towns with a low population; its definition characterises it as an antithesis to urban tourism; farms or agricultural premises are featured in some definitions of location; descriptors such as nature, calm and unspoiled are prominent; sustainable development is a focus for rural tourism, aiming at sustainable economic growth and "social and cultural preservation" (Rosalina, Dupre and Wang, 2021, p.138). Experience is interpreted either socially, physically, or psychologically. Community-based aspects are summarised as the contribution and membership of the community and stakeholders, emphasising local community involvement in tourism.

In rural tourism, social experiences are interpreted as meeting local people and learning from those interactions. Physical experience was described as perceptible attractions like bonding with the physical landscape. Psychological experiences involve emotional involvement and feature more dominantly in developed countries, where "relaxation…escapism…nostalgia…and a quest for identity" are reported (Rosalina, Dupre and Wang, 2021, p.140). The context of these themes is appropriate since the decision-making process is arguably embedded in these contextual factors. There is also a social construction of rural tourism, created by travel and tourism operators, that promotes natural landscapes, images of the wilderness and hearty locals that also influences the tourists' idealised perception of the countryside (Hall, Roberts and Mitchell, 2016). Owing to the diversity of tourism experiences that can be found in rural destinations, which includes cultural, historical, and physical scope,

Frochot, (2005) affirms that rural tourism has similarities to other forms of tourism and that the definition of rural tourism should extend beyond its physical features and include psychological aspects. In turn, this author argues that this research study, whilst set against the backdrop of rural tourism, should not differ from or be less valuable than a study situated in a densely urban capital. However, rural tourism has unique challenges. Internal challenges include a lesser-skilled workforce, marketing, financial investment, infrastructure, and poor IT or website skills. External challenges included lower market demand and seasonality (Rosalina, Dupre and Wang, 2021). Both Aberystwyth and Betws Y Coed are remote from central urban areas, with travel distances of two to four hours from major airports. Wales lacks physical infrastructure or a motorway to connect North-South or East-West, extending travel times. Public transport is also limited in rural areas.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW, PART 1: TOURIST BEHAVIOUR

2.1 INTRODUCTION

There has been substantial research into consumer behaviour and decision-making in the tourism literature (Hergesell, Dwyer and Edwards, 2021). The chapter begins by considering the broader theoretical frameworks traditionally dominating the field, which include the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Behaviourist. Motivational and Microeconomic approaches. The chapter continues by examining the limited but significant studies that have shifted the focus from pre-trip decision-making to the decisions made on-site, highlighting the work of Blichfeldt, (2008) and the recent insights provided by Liu, Wang, and Gretzel, (2022). These studies underscore the importance of understanding the spontaneous and last-minute decisions that tourists make, often influenced by the immediacy of information and the digital-social environment facilitated by smartphones. It critically assesses the naturalistic decision-making approach, which calls for a qualitative perspective to balance the quantitative dominance in research. This approach is exemplified by the work of Moore et al., (2012), who employed naturalistic inquiry techniques to uncover the decision-making processes of tourists in New Zealand. The chapter further explores the concept of spontaneity in tourist behaviour, as investigated by Hyde (2008), and the implications of such behaviour for local marketing efforts. It also addresses the evolving nature of on-the-go decision-making, particularly in light of mobile technology advancements, and the impact of contextual and situational factors on tourist choices, as discussed by Decrop and Snelders, (2005). In addition to individual decision-making, the chapter acknowledges the significance of group dynamics in the decision-making process, exploring how collective choices are negotiated within familial and social contexts. It also delves into the affective dimension of decision-making, recognizing the role of emotions as a driving force behind tourist behaviour. The chapter aims to present a comprehensive picture of the current state of knowledge on in-situ decision-making in tourism, highlighting the gaps that remain.

2.2 TRADITIONAL DECISION-MAKING THEORIES

Historic theories and models of decision-making in tourism have been adapted from seminal works in consumer behaviour derived from psychology, sociology and economics. However, it is acknowledged that tourism differs from these domains since travel is complex and can be a contradictory experience since vacations can be both stressful and exciting. Tourism has been conceptualized as having a special type of risk because of the intangibility, heterogeneity and additional complications associated with travel (Stewart and Vogt, 1999). There are many stages of decisions to be made, and it can require high involvement and information processing (Correia, Kozak and Tão, 2014). Decrop (2014, p.252) surmises five critical theoretical approaches to tourist decision-making and behaviours: "Microeconomic approach, the motivational perspective, the behaviourist paradigm, the cognitivist approach and the postmodern perspective". The microeconomic approach suggests that budget and price are the driving forces of decision-making. The motivational perspective relates to psychoanalytic theories developed by Freud and Jung. Behaviourist theory assumes that consumers can be conditioned to react in specific ways. The cognitivist approach argues that perception, information processing and risk judgment are central to the process. The Postmodern or interpretive approach explores new dimensions such as emotions, dreams, and the symbolic dimension of consumerism. The following section discusses the literature's grand theories and decision-making models.

The microeconomic approach is driven by rational judgement guided by utility maximisation. Microeconomic models are typically linear in nature and present the tourist as making yes/no choices in a multi-step staged process. They are based on the evaluation of product characteristics and budget. This approach is grounded in demand theory modified to consider the tourism product. Since this type of model can be measured quantitively, it has been praised for its power to predict tourist choices; however, microeconomic models have been criticised since it does not take into consideration the "demand-price curve (i.e., snobbish effect)" (Decrop, 2006, p.28). Microeconomic models do not consider human emotions or experiences contributing to decision-making (Wilson and Moore, 2018). They are regarded as an overly simplistic way of understanding decision-making and are limited as they cannot explain the decision-making process. It also treats the tourist as an individual, making decisions alone (without external influence), not part of a group (Decrop, 2006). It is claimed that most travel is conducted in groups (Moore *et al.*, 2012), so the group's influences should be considered.

According to Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), models that do not recognise that many tourism purchases involve joint decision-making are limited. Furthermore, friends, family, and outside influences have a convincing effect on individuals' choices. While micro-economic models have been influential in tourism, they present an opportunity to explore other ways of viewing the tourist beyond a rational decision-maker.

However, postmodern tourists have been characterised as the antithesis of predictability and rationalism in their decision-making. It is suggested that they cannot be segmented and do not fit with traditional consumer behaviour models (Bigné and Decrop, 2019). A study on the fuzzy segmentation of tourists found that they did not belong to discrete segments and overlapped into multiple groups (Urso *et al.*, 2016). This new age of tourists is due to more considerable societal changes and the rejection of societal values and norms such as religion, community, and family. Examples of these changes are the explosion of social media, gaming, working from home and virtual lives online (Bigné and Decrop, 2019). However, postmodernism is not easy to define and is often cited as the most paradoxical of paradigms (Uriely, 1997). Experiential (Smallman and Moore, 2010), emotional, symbolic and social aspects are emphasised in postmodern theory (Decrop, 2014). There has been a call in the literature to introduce these aspects into the general decision-making theories (McCabe, 2000; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; Decrop, 2014). In this study, the researcher will explore a more holistic approach to the investigation and collect data on the emotional and social aspects of the decision-making process.

The decision to visit attractions is strongly correlated to motivation, where markers of meaning and social consumption include information pre-departure, enroute and at the destination. Markers are closely related to the tourist's needs and depend on the type of visual cues or information and knowledge the tourist is exposed to. Markers also vary depending on the attraction type. There is limited research on rural tourism segments and motivations to visit, as stated by Park and Yoon, (2009) in their segmentation study of motivations of rural tourism in Korea. They found four segments through factor cluster analysis: family togetherness seeker, passive tourist, want-it-all seeker, and learning and excitement seeker" (p.99). *Family togetherness* was the largest segment, whose main interests were relaxing in nature, going to forests and historical sites, and spending time together as a family with children. *Passive tourists* were found to have low motivations for the dimensions tested but were frequent

travellers. The *want it all* cluster were frequent travellers and scored highly in all dimensions; they preferred agricultural and ecological activities. The *learning and excitement* cluster favoured socialisation, learning and social excitement. Motivations to visit rural tourism attractions in the Gambia were investigated by (Rid, Ezeuduji and Pröbstl-Haider, 2014); factor and cluster analysis of motivations were carried out to discover four dimensions of motivation: heritage and nature; authentic rural experience; learning; and sun and beach. Four segments of tourists were found to be: multi-experience and beach seekers, Multi experience seekers, heritage and nature seekers, and Sun and Beach seekers. Some notable results found a clear differentiation between the groups since heritage and nature seekers were predominantly interested in natural and cultural attractions and were not interested in beaches or sun. Multi-experience tourists were interested in authentic local experiences and learning the language and were older and more likely to be female.

The concept of motivation is broadly defined as the effort or intent to participate in or maintain a specific behaviour; furthermore, motivation regulates the strength of that behaviour (Evans, Moutinho and Fred van Raaj, 1996). Motivation theory stems from the work of Sigmund Freud, who developed the psychoanalytic theory (Decrop, 2014) and distinguished the Id, Ego and Superego. The Id represents hedonism, libido and immediate gratification. The Superego signifies conscience, norms, morality and other values, while the ego moves between the id's hedonic stresses and the Superego's ethical wishes (Evans, Moutinho and Fred van Raaj, 1996). The motivational approach attempts to uncover the conscious and subconscious mind, thoughts, concepts, recollections, and memory (Decrop, 2014). Pearce, (1993) defines motivation as a hybrid concept since it originated from psychology and sociology and applied to tourism. Critical motivational factors in tourism include "escape, relaxation, relationship enhancement, and self-development" (Pearce and Lee, 2005, p.226). Goeldner, C. R., & Ritchie (2011) categorised tourist motivations into four fundamental types: physical, such as relaxation; cultural, such as discovering new geographical areas; interpersonal, such as socialising and meeting new people; and prestige, such as self-esteem and self-actualisation. There are several dimensions related to motivation theory: internal and external factors, intrinsic and extrinsic, and push and pull factors. In tourism, motivation can be interpreted as the psychological need or intention to participate in tourist-related activities or indeed provide the satisfaction of those needs (Crompton, 1979). Furthermore, tourism motivation is differentiated by its dynamic nature since individual and family needs change over time (Pearce, 1993). Internal motivations are physiological, emotional, or instincts, whereas external

motivation is based on environmental factors such as products and services (Evans, Moutinho and Fred van Raaj, 1996). Pearce (1993) proposes that extrinsic motivation is related to behaviour that yields outside rewards, while intrinsic behaviour is not associated with an obvious reward. He gives the example of tourists who go to a destination to climb a famous mountain and are only disappointed if they do not reach the top if they are motivated by an extrinsic value; those motivated by intrinsic values are satisfied whether they reach the top or not. In a study by Pestana, Parreira, and Moutinho (2020), satisfaction is linked to motivation. It was found that "satisfaction mediates the relationship between motivations and emotions, and behavioural intentions, simultaneously strengthening the positive association between push and pull motivations" (p.1). Motivations are not necessarily singular and have known to be multiple, and holidays can be viewed as a compromise of numerous motivators, wherby there may be one dominant motivation (Robinson and Gammon 2004 cited in Humphreys and Weed, 2014).

Motivational theory has been criticised since it does not allow for three principles as outlined by Cohen (1983) cited in Pearce (1993): "principle of parsimony (everything is connected), the principle of reflexivity (cause and effect) and the principle of ethnocentrism (seeing from one's own cultural perspective).". Further to this, it is argued that people often have multiple motives, and they cannot be reduced to singular ones, that motivation theory should be viewed as a "tapestry" "this interlocking pattern of shifting and fluctuating motives represented and treated within the theoretical formulation." (p.120). An issue with quantitative research is that it is easier to reduce motives to singular for the purpose of experimentation. (Pearce, 1993) also draws attention to Cohen's emic perspective (Cohen 1983) "that travellers explain their behaviour in place, social context and time with a multiplicity of causes and accounts". There are parallels in this statement with that of more recent scholars such as (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016). It is stated that conditioning and learning are also related to motivations since positive reinforcement strengthens behaviour. Positive experiences encourage repeated behaviour and brand loyalty (Evans, Moutinho and Fred van Raaj, 1996). Repeated patterns of behaviour impact choices related to decision-making in tourism were investigated by Niininen, Szivas and Riley (2004). It is suggested that many tourist behaviours are driven by habit rather than loyalty. Another aspect of motivation theory is positive motivation and negative avoidance, whereby in positive motivation, gratification is sought in the form of sensory, mood, pleasure, and intellect. Negative avoidance manifests as avoidance of stressors or dangerous situations (Evans, Moutinho and Fred van Raaj, 1996). In the work of Iso-Ahola, (1980) (the intrinsic

motivation-optimal arousal perspective), it is highlighted that leisure behaviour is situated within a context of *optimal arousal* and that tourists circumvent monotony while avoiding overstimulation or any activities that are too taxing. Similarly to Pearce (1993), it is suggested that leisure needs change over the course of a person's life and are contextual to place, location and social group. A priori and a posteriori leisure needs, as well as spontaneous or habitual needs, should be considered discretely. While this thesis does not directly address tourist motivations to visit attractions and activities, it is acknowledged that decision-making does not exist without motivations. Motivations are complex and closely linked to decision-making since they can be the driving force behind a decision. When considering the motivations of parents making decisions to entertain their children, they may be motivated by a range of reasons. This study narrows its focus to the decision-making process, the emergence of dynamic decision-making in situ, and the emotional context and information sources.

The behaviourist paradigm is derived from behavioural psychology such as Pavlov and Skinner (Decrop, 2014) and shares similarities with motivational theory. However, its premise assumes that tourist behaviour can be "conditioned" to "create automatic responses" (p.253). According to Tussyadiah (2017), behavioural design in tourism relates to the design of the space and environment of tourism through buildings, cues and the *vacationscape*. This prepares tourists to "perform target behaviour" (p.176) with the caveat that the tourist response will vary due to individual motivations and personality. The conditioning of tourists is to ensure they spend more and stay for longer, a common practice in theme parks or casinos. Advertising, such as email communications and mobile reminders on smartphone apps, are common contemporary behavioural triggers (Tussyadiah, 2017).

The cognitive approach comprises perception, information processing and judgment of risk. It acknowledges that people are active in their choices and "develop rules and strategies" to solve problems (Decrop, 2006, p.28). Cognitive theories are separated into two modes - *process* and *structural* models. Process models are focused on the *how* of decision-making and explore the fundamental cognitive processes. In contrast, structural models are focused on the input-output of information, alternatives, and choice sets (Decrop, 2006). Similarly to behavioural theory, it is a rational utility maximiser approach whereby the tourist makes decisions in a linear and step-by-step style (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). While context is not always considered in the above models, Bettman et al., (1991) propose that "problem, person and social context factors provide an outline of the major aspects affecting contingent consumer decision-

making." Contingent decision-making puts context variables at the centre of this post-modernist theory and critiques structural and cognitive decision-making theories for being too rigid and inflexible. Critics of the cognitive models cite a lack of acknowledgement of the social and emotional nature of tourism decision-making, where interpersonal decisions affect the impact on behaviour (Correia, Kozak and Tão, 2014) (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016). Besides, cognitive models rely on memory load and assume that individuals can deal with and remember large quantities of information; when memory becomes overloaded, people switch to mental shortcuts or emotional systems to make decisions (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016).

Choice sets have been a popular research tool in tourism and are used in practice by tourism professionals (Oppewal, Huybers and Crouch, 2015). A choice set occurs in the early stages of decision-making when the tourist considers potentially an extensive range or set of destinations (total set) before funneling that number to an evoked set before finally choosing one destination. Choice sets have been criticized for being too deterministic (Correia, Kozak and Tão, 2014). Since new information can be searched online anytime, this process may not be as neat and sequential as theorised. When considering experiences and how these contribute to choice sets, it is shown that early exposure to experiences or destinations increases the importance of that attribute (Oppewal, Huybers and Crouch, 2015). The discrete choice theory was developed for regression models to measure choices between holiday alternatives, such as *which destination* or *hotel* a tourist might choose. While this model helps reveal the preferences of tourists and constraints such as budget or time, it does not reflect real-world situations, and it is impossible to confirm which set of goods or choice set was discarded since some destinations or holiday choices will have a similar price or other attributes. Revealed preference experiments work with multinomial logit models and have the advantage that attributes can be manipulated to show an increase in preference if the attribute is increased. However, a weakness of this method is that tourist intentions do not always match tourist behaviour (Correia, Kozak and Tão, 2014). Furthermore, for cognitive models to work, they must assume that the tourist "undertakes comprehensive cognitive processing" (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016, p.6). Not all tourists rely on cognitive function to make decisions, emotions and affect can play an equally important role (Smallman and Moore, 2010). Working memory is a crucial facet of cognitive function and processing capacity, and it has been suggested that consumers have limited working memory to facilitate this function (Correia, Kozak, and Tão, 2014).

Furthermore, decisions are often constructed when cognitive function is overloaded or does not have a well-defined preference by using other decision strategies. These strategies are dependent on the individual and the goal of the decision but could include satisficing, elimination by aspects, confirmations dimension or alternative features (Bettman, Luce and Payne, 1998). Moreover, the literature on behavioural decision-making suggests that decision-making styles are individualistic (Sirakaya et al., 1996). Therefore, developing a model that fits all decision-makers, and every decision situation may not be realistic. Priori segmentation of travel markets according to trip purpose (such as pleasure vacation versus family and friends, leisure travel versus business) is helpful for future models. Treating an individual decision-maker as if they were in a vacuum is common to all decision-making models. Decision-making styles have, however, been segmented in the tourism literature into personality types ranging from the *Perfectionist* to the *Habitual or Loyal consumer* (Correia, Kozak and Tão, 2014). Cultural traits are positively linked to decision-making styles, and Western societies are related to brand and prestige. In contrast, collectivist cultures are more concerned with social well-being and are more price sensitive in decision-making.

Table 1. Table of Decision-making adapted from Correia, Kozak and Ferradeira, (2010, p.435)

	DMS	Statements	Examples in tourist literature
1	Perfectionist or high-quality consciousness	Consumers who shop carefully and look after the very best products.	Rational vacationers – who are the individuals that choose the 'good enough alternative (Decrop & Snelders 2005)
2	Brand Consciousness (BC)	Consumers who are akin to buy the most expensive, well-known brands.	Choosing well-known brands allows avoiding risks (Decrop and Snelders, 2005)
3	Price & Value for money (PC)	Consumers who seek for the best alternative, they are concerned with getting the best value for money.	Constrained vacationers-who are constrained by disposable income of give priority for value for money (Decrop and Snelders, 2005) as such the low-cost tourists (Correia and Pimpão, 2008)
4	Confusion by over-choice (PC)	Consumers who attempt to consider all the alternatives, and due to this feel confused to make a decision.	Hedonic vacationers-who always talk about the holidays, recommend to others but is barely able to decide in accordance with

5	Habitual, brand-loyal orientation (BL)	Consumers who are likely to create habits of consumption.	Psychocentric vacationers-individuals that prefer travelling to familiar and safe destinations (Plog, 1974)
		the advice they collected as presented (Decrop, 2005)	

The theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen, (1991) has been implemented in many consumer behaviour studies to predict purchase intentions. In a study predicting sustainable hotel overnight stays, an extended Theory of Planned Behaviour model confirmed that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control were integral in revisiting intentions (Han and Kim, 2010). The theory says that intentions are predictors of motivations, and therefore the more robust the intention, the more likely a person will engage in that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). This theory has been widespread in business management, tourism, and healthcare research (Huang, Dai and Xu, 2020). However, there is steep criticism of the theory, and substantial evidence suggests that the equilibrium between parsimony and validity has been doubted or even falsified; it has also been criticised for its lack of inclusion of emotional and unconscious aspects of behaviour (Sniehotta, Presseau and Araújo-Soares, 2014).

In summary, theories and models of decision-making in tourism, stemming from seminal works in consumer behaviour, have been adapted from diverse fields such as psychology, sociology, and economics. Initially developed to understand consumer behaviour, these theories are now applied to vacationers. However, tourism introduces unique complexities; holidaying can evoke contradictory emotions of stress and excitement, often associated with risks due to uncertainties in holiday planning. Tourist decision-making involves multiple stages, demanding high involvement and information processing (Correia, Kozak, & Tão, 2014). Decrop, (2014) outlines five primary theoretical approaches to tourist decision-making: the microeconomic approach, motivational perspective, behaviourist paradigm, cognitivist approach, and postmodern perspective. Each of these approaches provides distinct insights into the multifaceted nature of tourist decision-making and behaviours. The microeconomic approach, centred on budget and price considerations, portrays tourists as rational agents seeking to maximize utility. While praised for its quantitative measurability and predictive power, criticisms arise for oversimplifying decision-making and neglecting emotional and social factors, as well as the influence of group dynamics (Decrop, 2006; Moore et al., 2012; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Motivation theory, rooted in psychoanalytic principles, explores

both conscious and subconscious drivers of behaviour. It identifies internal and external motivations, intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and push and pull dynamics as shaping tourist behaviour. Moreover, it acknowledges the dynamic nature of motivations and their influence on satisfaction and subsequent behaviour (Pearce, 1993; Pestana, Parreira, & Moutinho, 2020). The behaviourist paradigm, drawing from behavioural psychology, emphasises conditioning and automatic responses in shaping tourist behaviour. It highlights the role of conditioning in prolonging stays and increasing spending, particularly observed in settings like theme parks or casinos (Tussyadiah, 2017). The cognitive approach delves into perception, information processing, and risk assessment, viewing tourists as active decision-makers employing cognitive strategies. While recognizing the importance of context and social influences, the approach is criticised for overlooking the emotional and social dimensions of decision-making (Bettman et al., 1991; McCabe, Li, & Chen, 2016). The Theory of Planned Behaviour, widely employed in consumer behaviour studies, posits intentions as predictors of behaviour, incorporating attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Although influential, criticisms arise for its oversimplification and neglect of emotional and unconscious aspects of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Sniehotta, Presseau, & Araújo-Soares, 2014). Each theoretical perspective offers valuable insights into tourist decision-making, highlighting the intricate interplay of rational, emotional, and social factors. Integrating these perspectives can provide a comprehensive understanding of tourist behaviour, acknowledging its dynamic and multifaceted nature, which has led to the development of new models in decision-making.

2.3 NEW MODELS IN DECISION-MAKING THEORY

Scholars have incorporated new dynamics into generalizable decision-making models to move away from hierarchical and sequential decision-making stages into cyclic models. One such conceptual example integrates the stages of decision-making, styles, behavioral, and choice-set approaches, including a decision-making and information loop (Fang, 2021). This model places particular importance on the role of information, which is salient in an age of surplus information. The paper includes a graphic illustrating the balance between high and low information needs and the hypothetical decision rules that could apply to the consumer. For example, low information loops pertain to impulsive decision-making and social heuristics, whereas high information loops relate to perfect rational decision-making and cautious budget decision-making. The model includes a range of decision-making styles while allowing for a repetitive process of collecting and discarding information throughout the process. The model

relies on the tourist's cognition of alternative sets, moving through the process of ranking choices in order before making a final decision. It retains classic evaluation rules but allows for a more realistic information loop whereby the tourists receive information in stages. Fang (2021) suggests that practitioners should use the opportunity between information-gathering stages to reinforce advertising messages to tourists to aid their decision-making.

Figure 3. Cyclic Tourist Decision-Making Model adapted from Fang, (2021, p.11)
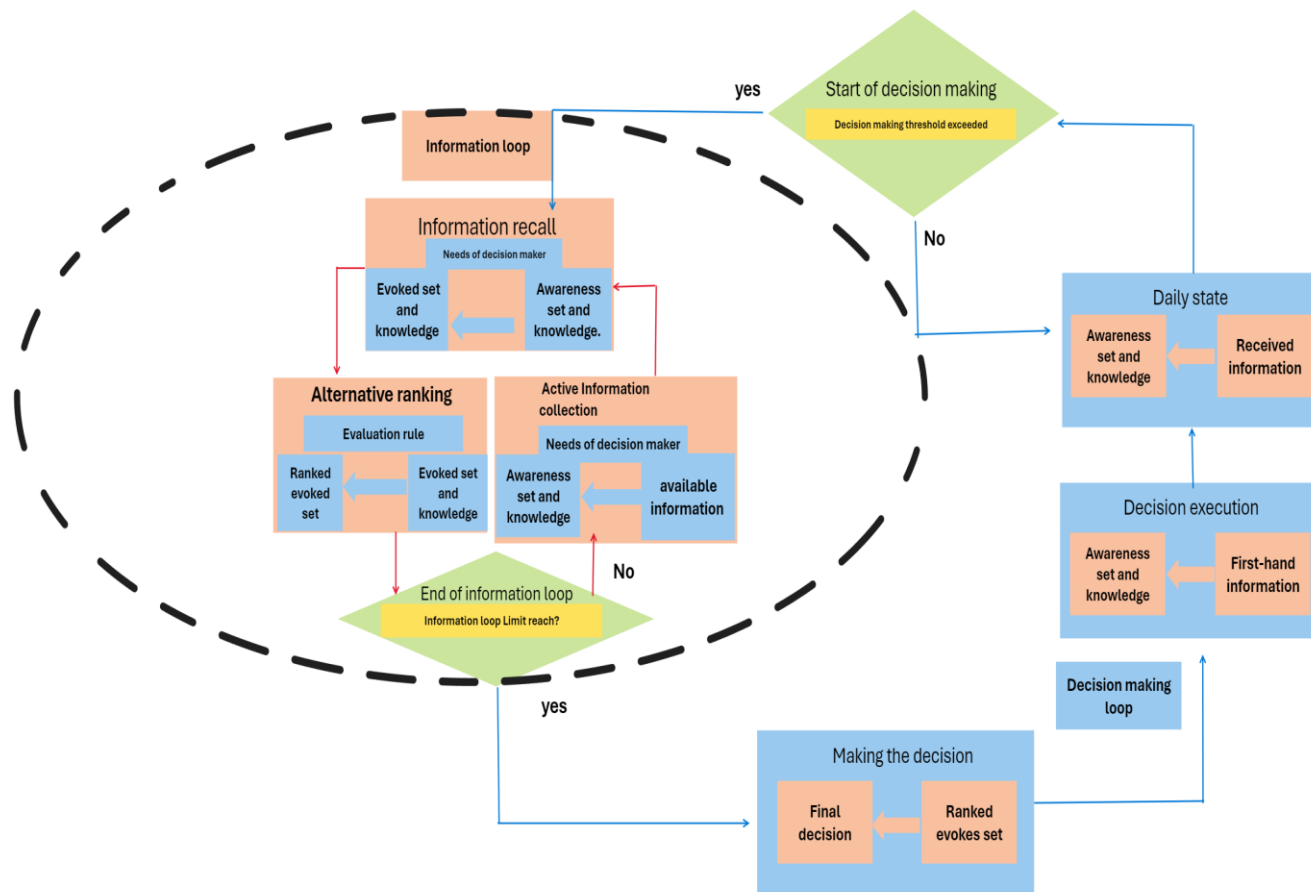
Dual system theory has existed in the scientific literature for some time (Viswanathan and Jain, 2013) and is divided into two systems, commonly known as System 1 and System 2. The experiential system works at the subconscious level and is more instinctive and holistic, whilst the rational system works at the conscious level and is a methodical and well-ordered process (Epstein, 1990). Both contrasting thought systems, experiential and analytical, respectively, work in parallel and can interact with each other. In a conceptual paper, McCabe, Li and Chen (2016) present a new general model for tourist decision-making. They suggest that people use various decision-making styles and processes in different contexts and challenge "tourist choice processes as rational, logical, and involving complex reasoning that is both abstract and affect-free" (McCabe, Li and Chen 2016, p.3). McCabe, Li and Chen (2016) are critical of earlier models in consumer research for several reasons: since they adopt a macro approach, they are too focused on positioning the tourist as a rational, logical decision-maker, do not incorporate individualism, and lack empirical support. These sentiments are echoed by earlier works, including Sirakaya and Woodside, (2005), who highlight the lack of empirically tested work on these models, particularly the lack of assessment with tourism data. Furthermore, while these models have been adapted to tourism theory, they do not differentiate between services and product purchases (Cowell, 1991). Sirakaya and Woodside, (2005, p.826) specifically challenge the conventional "six-stage consumer decision-making model (re-cognition, formulation, alternative generation, information search, judgment or choice, action, and feedback)" since decisions made for manufactured goods and services like tourism contrast greatly. Furthermore, it is argued that with globalisation, tourism has changed irrevocably and that the previous historical models do not apply to modern-day travel patterns and tourist behaviour. Tourists are "ever more experienced and empowered, it is reasonable to assume that tourist decision-making processes have also evolved." (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016, p.3). It is argued that since cognition and social behaviour alter and change over time, a new flexible theory is required to understand tourist consumer behaviour and decision-making (Moore *et al.*, 2012).

The proposed model outlines tourism decision-making as a dynamic process involving two distinct systems. The model focuses on destination choice, depicting how either System 1, characterised by heuristic decision-making "affect-driven, automatic, intuitive, rapid, and requiring less effort" (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016, p.9), or System 2, involving logical and rational reasoning, "slower, deliberate and effortful process" (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016) p.7) may be engaged at different stages. It is suggested that factors influencing this choice

include the level of involvement and cognitive load, which are shaped by individual differences and task characteristics (Jun and Vogt, 2013). In low-involvement scenarios, tourists are more likely to rely on System 1 heuristics, such as recognition or social cues, whereas high-involvement situations prompt the use of System 2 processing, entailing information search and complex evaluation (Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier, 2011). Additionally, tourists adopt simplified heuristics, like lexicographic or trade-off strategies, to expedite decision-making in contexts with massive information availability (Li, 2014). Moreover, system choice is influenced by the choice goal principle and negative emotion avoidance. The choice goal principle posits that consumers balance accuracy and effort, (Johnson and Payne, 1985). As well as minimizing negative emotions and justifying their decisions (Bettman, Luce and Payne, 1998). Emotion-laden choices arise from conflicts between important choice goals, influencing the preference for analytic processing. Justification of choices further affects decision-making, as consumers seek to resolve trade-offs and rationalise their selections (Bettman, Luce and Payne, 1998). However, heuristic and analytic systems distinctions are not always clear-cut, as decision-making involves a continuum rather than separate processes (Evans, 2008). Overall, while the model illustrates destination choice, it is posited that it can be adapted to understand other tourism decisions such as activities or transport mode.

Figure 4. Dual System Processing Model adapted from McCabe, Li and Chen, (2016, p.6)
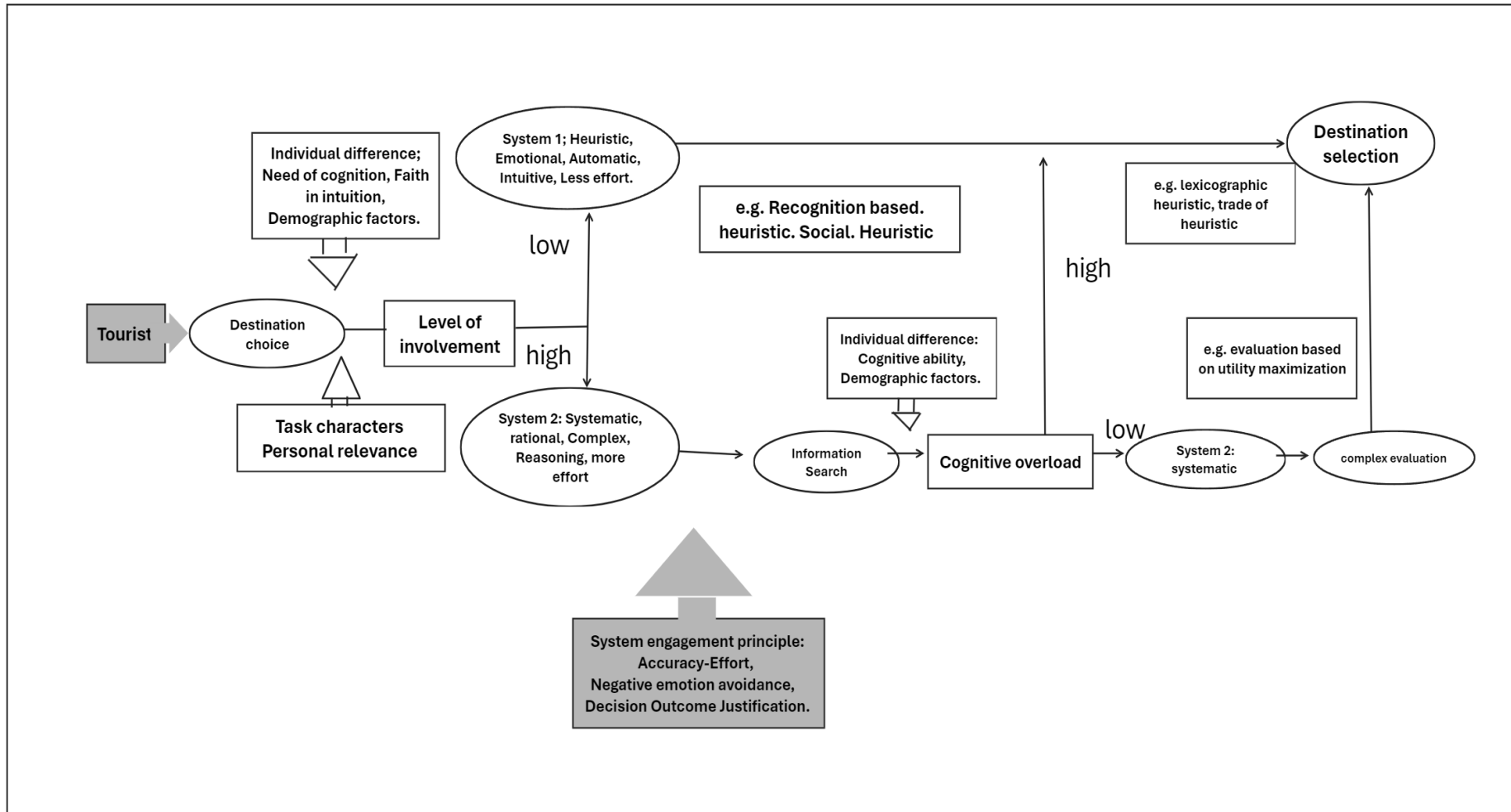
It is said that feelings. emotions and affect are also part of System Two (Evans, 2008), and while the scholar did not include them in their table outlining the principal clusters of System One and Two, emotions are explicitly linked to System One in the work of other scholars (Epstein, 1994; Lieberman, 2003; Hassin et al. 2005 cited in Evans 2008). The table provides a useful classification of features of the two systems into four clusters: Consciousness, Evolution, Functional characteristics, and individual differences. Notably, working memory and cognitive intelligence are associated with conscious decision-making. Therefore, people who are tired or busy may not be able to access System One as easily. Since System Two allows for rapid decision-making, people who lack time may utilise this system out of necessity. In the tourism context, for attraction and activities, people who want to spend time relaxing and unwinding while on holiday may not want to spend mental effort or time seeking information about attractions or activities. Some individuals present with a higher need for cognition, and they are usually more involved in an information search process, while those with a lower need for cognition can be more dependent on System Two (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016).

Table 2. Clusters of Features Associated with Dual Systems adapted from Evans, (2008)

	System 1	System 2
Cluster 1 (Consciousness)	Conscious	Unconscious (preconscious)
	Explicit	Implicit
	Controlled	Automatic
	High effort	Low effort
	Slow	Rapid
	Low capacity	High capacity
	Inhibitory	Default process
	Analytic, reflective	Holistic, perceptual
Cluster 2 (Evolution)	Evolutionarily recent	Evolutionarily old
	Individual rationality	Evolutionary rationality
	Uniquely human	Shared with animals
	Linked to language	Nonverbal
	Fluid intelligence	Modular cognition
Cluster 3 (Functional characteristics)	Rule-based	Associative
	Domain-general	Domain-specific
	Abstract	Contextualized

	Logical	Pragmatic
	Sequential	Parallel
	Egalitarian	Stereotypical
Cluster 4 (Individual Differences)	Heritable	Universal
	Linked to general intelligence	Independent of general intelligence
	Limited by working memory capacity	Independent of working memory

Stylos, (2022) presents another conceptual model that builds on the dual system theory in tourism. This model suggests that the two systems do not run separately but simultaneously in parallel and in conjunction. They are renamed Deliberation and Intuition. The reasoning behind this is that the complexity of the mind cannot be reduced to two systems, and it is not a case of one or the other. A table of variables that include stimuli (inputs), customer predispositions and consumer behaviours (outputs) is also included in the model. It is suggested that this model offers a more realistic general model for decision-making in tourism since it covers a broader range of decisions, including activities, attractions, accommodations, and destinations. It also allows for stimuli such as activities and attractions to drive the decision to visit a destination. While these conceptual models in cyclic decision-making and dual system processing are valuable, they have advanced theoretical ground recently. This thesis adopts a holistic and empirical approach to the research questions – "How do tourists decide on attractions and activities in the destination?" and "How do emotions and feelings influence decision-making?". This study will evaluate the findings and explore the influence of the heuristic and rational systems, during in-destination decision-making.

In conclusion, tourist decision-making models have undergone an important evolution, transitioning towards more flexible and adaptable frameworks. Scholars have introduced new dynamics into these models, such as cyclic decision-making processes and dual-system theory, to capture the multifaceted nature of tourist decision-making. Fang's (2021) model, for instance, underscores the pivotal role of information, delineating between high and low information needs and elucidating various decision rules tourists may employ. McCabe, Li, and Chen's (2016) dual system model explores the relationship between instinctive and analytical thought processes, challenging conventional notions of rationality in tourist decision-making. Stylos, (2022) further builds upon dual system theory, proposing a model that integrates deliberation and intuition, acknowledging the inherent complexity of decision-making processes. While these conceptual frameworks offer valuable theoretical insights, this

study endeavours to complement them with empirical investigation. By adopting a holistic approach and delving into the influence of cyclic, heuristic, and rational systems, as well as the impact of emotions and feelings, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how tourists make decisions regarding attractions and activities in a destination. By bridging theoretical constructs with real-world observations, this study seeks to contribute practical insights for stakeholders in the tourism industry, facilitating more informed decision-making processes and enhancing the overall tourist experience.

2.4 IN SITU DECISION-MAKING

Limited studies focus on in-situ decision-making in the attractions and activities sector. Blichfeldt, (2008) addresses a notable gap in research concerning attraction decision-making, which traditionally focuses on pre-vacation decisions such as destination selection and booking. The study conducts in situ qualitative interviews with 126 individuals, exploring the scope and nature of decision-making during their vacations. The sample was divided between hotel and caravan site guests near Legoland. The study found that short-stay hotel guests were there predominantly to visit Legoland. Longer-stay caravan park tourists were on holiday to relax and were either not interested in doing activities or did a limited number of experiences to break up the time doing nothing/relaxing. While the extent and nature of such decision-making varied among participants, a significant finding emerges that for many tourists, decisions, particularly those related to sightseeing and experiences, are deferred until arrival at the destination, often resulting in the choice to do nothing. The paper also links information searches relating to attractions and activities to last-minute and spontaneous decisions. This finding can potentially inform local marketing efforts of attraction and activity providers that having local information ready when the tourist needs it, is important. The nature of the sample limits the study since its key finding is that many caravan site tourists do nothing. This could be explained by the unique position of a holiday park, where many facilities are provided on-site, and there could be a culture of relaxing and doing nothing at the caravan site instead of exploring local attractions. Furthermore, since Legoland is a mega attraction and an expensive one, it is unsurprising that hotel guests visiting for a short stay would want to make the most of their entry tickets for Legoland and would not be actively looking for other attractions and activities to visit. To address the research limitations of this study, a heterogeneous sample of visitors would be advantageous, widening the sample of holiday park or short-stay guests.

Recently, most studies that examine in situ decision-making have focused on in-destination smartphone use. Positioning the smartphone as an essential tool for modern-day travel. Liu, Wang and Gretzel, (2022) link in situ decision-making to mobile technology and the research findings suggest that smartphones create a multifaceted digital-social environment that prompts the formation of new travel plans, reassessment of pre-existing plans, and even cancellation of previously planned arrangements. Interactions within this smartphone-mediated context facilitate streamlined decision-making processes and enhance the overall travel experience.

2.5 NATURALISTIC DECISION-MAKING

Numerous calls have been made in the literature to study decision-making from a qualitative perspective to redress the balance of quantitative dominance (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; Smallman and Moore, 2010). Research that comprehends and describes the complex nature of tourism has been advocated, along with "process-tracing methodologies" (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005, p.829). It is common in the decision-making literature for studies to analyse tourist decisions by collecting quantitative data. Most research in this field has been quantitative (Hergesell, Dwyer and Edwards, 2021). In a grounded study *naturalistic decision-making* is uncovered by interviewing tourist participants (in the field) in New Zealand (Moore *et al.*, 2012). This approach was advantageous since it allows the study of people's minds and thought processes in the natural environment, a changing and adapting environment, "the link between the nature of the task, person, and environment on the one hand and the various psychological processes and strategies involved in naturalistic decision[s] on the other" (Lipshitz et al. (2001, p. 347, cited in Smallman and Moore, 2010). Moore *et al.*, (2012) propose an alternative method to investigate in-situ decision-making. The extant literature has previously focused on overall destination choice and the associative predictive variables, whereas Moore *et al.*, (2012) seek to discover the natural decision-making process that happens while tourists are in situ at the destination. They employed "an overarching research strategy of 'iterative grounded theory' (Orton, 1997)". The research interviewed 142 individuals and groups of tourists at five locations in New Zealand and studied three main areas of interest (p.640): "1. Processes that generate the overall route/itinerary within New Zealand 2. Processes that generate site-specific decisions and behaviours 3. Processes that generate 'between site' decision-making and behaviours".

While the study acknowledges limitations in the "heterogeneous nature of the tourist groups" (p.644), The findings suggest three themes that affect decision-making: Trip type, ease of travel and social interactions. It is found that activity choice is less rigid than trip elements such as trip length, itinerary accommodation, transport, and budget. However, in some cases, a particular activity could provide an "anchor" (p.640) for the itinerary. Repeat visitors did not always follow suit and would book accommodation and other trip elements on-site, and they were usually much more focused on a particular region or site. The type of trip was determined as a dominant context for decision-making and included four types: Visiting friends and family, around the World, family/holiday and working holiday. Characteristics of the trip were vital because they characterised other contextual factors, including transport and itinerary. Getting around and planning was another common contextual theme, with participants commenting that their confidence in decision-making grew with experience on the trip. A third context of social interactions was found, with participants engaging in local encounters or hosts to find information and a preference for recommended online sources of information. The authors present a cascade decision-making model, whereby the "principal driver" is the "Type of Trip" since it influences the subsequent decisions made on the trip, such as accommodation, activities, food and other purchases. It is presented as a framework within which other decisions sit. Tourist typologies are alluded to, with generational factors being moderately important, such as younger people having access to extended working travel visas and thus determining their type of trip differently from other demographic groups. The model also allows for trip progression to affect decision-making, making it more flexible and spontaneous with time.

The work of Moore *et al*., (2012) makes an important contribution to decision-making literature by employing naturalistic inquiry techniques to investigate on-site decision-making among tourists in New Zealand. Their study sheds light on the intricate dynamics of decision-making within the tourism context. It introduces a novel cascade decision-making model, emphasising the pivotal role of trip type in shaping subsequent choices throughout the journey. However, it is limited by location and the self-drive touring segment of participating tourists. The interviews, while large in number, were short in time (approx. 10 minutes) and took place at service stations while tourists were on the go, which would have limited the depth that interviewers could delve into and the time that tourists had to talk. To address this research gap, this study will invite participants to engage in longer interviews of between thirty and sixty minutes and arrange them at a convenient time when the participant has time to respond to the interview questions in detail. Furthermore, this study will go beyond transport, itinerary,

getting around and planning since it will include research questions that broaden the study to include the influence of emotions, information sources, context, planning timeline, and group dynamics.

In conclusion, the exploration of decision-making processes within tourism has historically leaned heavily towards quantitative methodologies, with limited attention paid to the qualitative aspects of this multifaceted phenomenon. Researchers such as Sirakaya and Woodside (2005) and Smallman and Moore (2010) have echoed calls within the literature for a more balanced approach, advocating for deeper comprehension through qualitative inquiries. Moore et al. (2012) responded to this call by employing naturalistic inquiry techniques to investigate on-site decision-making among tourists in New Zealand. Their study not only shed light on the intricate dynamics of decision-making but also introduced a novel cascade decision-making model, emphasising the pivotal role of trip type in shaping subsequent choices throughout the journey. However, while the study by Moore et al., (2012) made significant strides in understanding decision-making processes, it also revealed limitations inherent in its methodology and scope. The reliance on short, on-the-go interviews at service stations constrained the depth of exploration and the time for participants to articulate their decision-making processes fully. This study proposes an expanded research framework to address these limitations and contribute further to the understanding of tourist decision-making. By conducting more extended interviews in convenient settings and broadening the scope to include factors such as emotions, information sources, context, planning timeline, and group dynamics, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of decision-making within the tourism context. While the study by Moore et al., (2012) laid a solid foundation for understanding on-site decision-making, there remains ample opportunity for further exploration and refinement of methodologies to capture the rich complexity inherent in tourist decision-making processes. Woodside and King (2001) as cited in Sirakaya and Woodside, (2005) introduce a comprehensive framework known as the Purchase Consumption System (PCS), designed to delineate traveller's decision-making processes both before and during their trips, as well as to assess the subsequent experiences that may impact future travel choices. The PCS represents a series of cognitive and observable stages that consumers go through when purchasing and utilising various related services, some of which may lead to further purchases. According to Woodside and King, employing qualitative research methods is instrumental in developing and validating intricate models like the PCS, given their interactive and complex nature. Their research underscores the notion that travellers' decision-

making behaviours are shaped by a multitude of interconnected variables rather than following a linear progression.

2.6 SPONTANEITY

In a paper that investigated the decision-making and planning carried out by independent tourists (Hyde, 2008), it was found that two key groups emerged from the study: a low-search backpacker group and a high-search non-backpacker group; they consumed lesser and greater levels of pre-vacation information search and planning respectively. However, during the holiday, both groups made spontaneous decisions related to attractions and activities during the trip. Suggesting that local-level advertising and promotion is more effective than large-scale national marketing for both groups and that spontaneous decision-making is common in attraction and activity selection. Some other key findings from the paper follow (pp.122-124): "Almost all researched before attractions and activities will be actioned"; "Travellers will take advantage of serendipitous opportunities to experience some attractions and activities they had neither planned nor actively researched."; "Travellers make detailed plans about attractions and activities for the immediate 24-hour period only."; "The traveller bases their choice of attractions and activities on a balancing heuristic- a matter of balancing hedonics expected from experiencing the attraction or activity versus the constraints of time and expense." And "Travellers are eager for information about local sub-destinations, attractions and activities.". This suggests that people actively search and plan attractions and activities before arrival at the destination but also make decisions spontaneously. While high information seekers will read guidebooks or search online during the trip planning stages, they will also search while at the destination. It also suggests that choosing experiences are fuelled by emotions and mediated by temporal and budgetary constraints. It correlates independent travel with a desire to experience the unplanned. Furthermore, it states that travellers are willing to take risks in decision-making and experience an evolving itinerary. The study was limited by a small number (20) of longitudinal case-based studies (derived from interviews) and surveys (20) in New Zealand. However, it yields a valuable insight into spontaneity in decision-making in the touring and attraction sector. Compared to the current thesis, a key difference in the study is that it was concerned with itineraries and sub-destinations of travellers since they were touring New Zealand. It does not include decision-making dynamics or group decision-making. Regarding the study's limitations, it is suggested that a larger quantitative study be conducted

to verify the findings. The model represents a cognitive and sequential approach to information search, positioning most independent travellers as searching pre-vacation, and during the vacation, with the addition of spontaneous opportunities alongside a researched set. Since it was found that there were two distinct groups of high and low search, it is surprising that this was not reflected in the model. However, the pre-vacation information search, could be representative of other search behaviours which include accommodation and travel route.

Figure 5. A model of Independent Traveller Decision Processes of Vacation Itinerary adapted from Hyde, (2008)

BEFORE ARRIVAL AT DESTINATION   **AT DESTINATION**
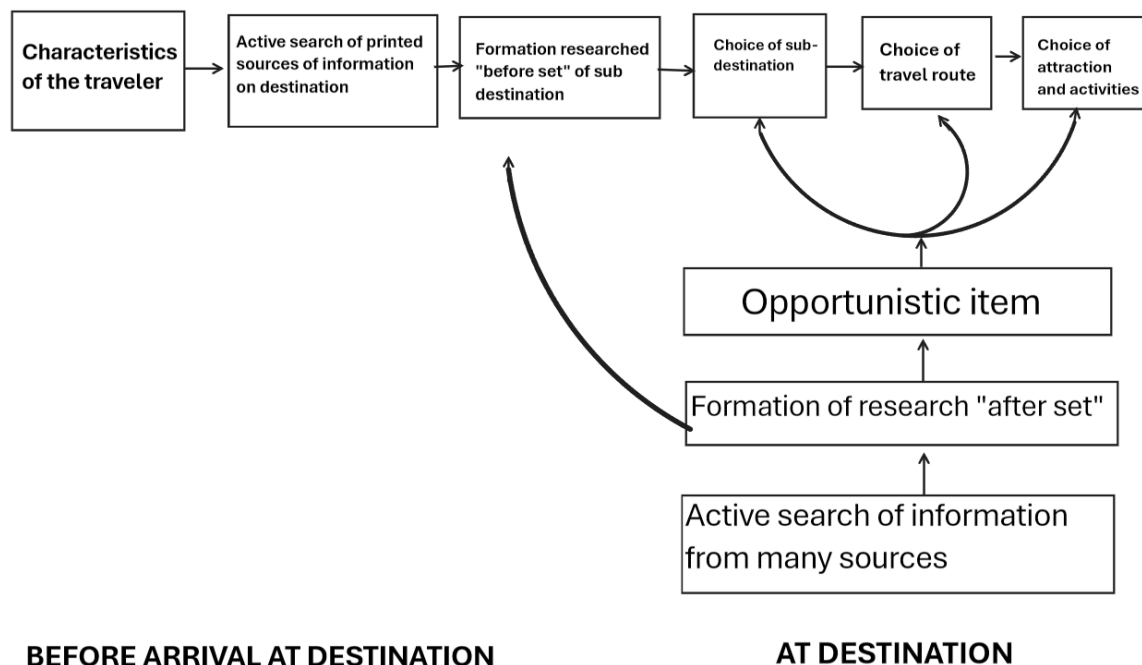
Spontaneity has been linked to *new* tourists or those with limited travel experience. They are typified as wanting to have more adventure, fun, and seeking something different (Poon. A, 1993). Though seeking hedonic experiences is not just limited to new tourists. The experiential dimension inherent in tourism consumption, as discussed by March and Woodside (2005), suggests that leisure travellers inclined towards seeking novel and adventurous experiences often refrain from making meticulous plans to preserve spontaneity and a sense of adventure. Consequently, tourists frequently defer certain decisions until they are physically present at the destination, as noted by Decrop and Snelders, (2005). Hedonic benefits have long been recognised in tourism and leisure. The Ulysses Factor was coined by Anderson in 1970, and it

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underscores humanity's innate desire for exploration and freedom (Anderson, 1970). Neulinger, (1974) highlights the essence of freedom of choice as a defining feature of leisure, emphasizing individuals' autonomy in selecting their recreational pursuits. This idea suggests that people are naturally inclined to seek out new experiences and venture into unfamiliar territories, as elaborated (Lee and Crompton, 1992).

Spontaneity has also been associated with more authentic and memorable touristic experiences. It was found that experiences and interactions characterised by spontaneity possess a heightened sense of memorability and authenticity attributed to their spontaneous nature in a study conducted by Tiberghien, Bremner and Milne, (2020). Furthermore, spontaneous explorers were found to have a higher level of involvement and increased emotional consumption hedonic (Alvarez and Asugman, 2006). Spontaneous decisions have been linked to subconscious decision-making. They are forged through the subconscious application of heuristic processing (Martin and Woodside, 2012) Though little is known about unconscious thinking, a constructive choice theory *Omniscient Rationality* (Ladhari, 2007 cited in Martin & Woodside, 2012) states that constructive choice decision-makers seek to maximize the choice accuracy while minimizing cognitive effort and that choices are based on ease of justifying the resolution to peers.

The complexity of travel means that multiple decisions are made at different times, and this consumption is more risky than other forms. The increased complexity, divergence, imperceptibility and inextricability contribute to an unusual amount of risk for tourists when considering many options for transport, accommodation, itinerary, planning and making reservations (Stewart and Vogt, 1999). It is suggested that searching for information and planning an itinerary overcomes or mitigates perceived risk. In a study that investigated and positioned the travel behaviour of *planfulness* as the antithesis of spontaneity (Li, Xu and Hu, 2022), it was found that participants who engaged in spontaneous decisions had a higher predilection for taking risks. Planfulnes is conceptualised as an action style by Frese et al. (1987) cited in (Li, Xu and Hu, 2022). It defines tourist planfulness as the degree to which individuals formulate intricate travel plans before undertaking action. It is proposed that these styles are distinct from inherent traits, temperament, or innate capabilities, representing instead predispositions to act that are mentally represented as general acquired heuristics for guiding conduct. In this context, planfulness denotes the inclination to engage in detailed planning, devise contingency plans to address potential setbacks, and demonstrate perseverance in

pursuit of objectives (von Papstein and Frese, 1988 cited in Li, Xu and Hu, 2022). Planfulness is anticipated to correlate with more methodical decision-making, as individuals with a high degree of planfulness tend to dedicate more time to elaborating on the specifics of their intended actions (Tucker and Warr, 1996 cited in Li, Xu and Hu, 2022). Moreover, they suggested that action styles are malleable to some extent, as individuals can be instructed to plan meticulously and are likely to adhere to such guidance (Frese et al., 1987 cited in Li, Xu and Hu 2022).

2.7 ON-THE-GO DECISION-MAKING

On-the-go decision-making is a developing area of interest to researchers. Since the advent of mobile technology, on-the-go travel decision-making and new information available to tourists have been important considerations in developing contemporary theories on decision-making. The conceptual paper by Hwang, (2011) focuses on trip planning and explaining unplanned decision-making more realistically. The article presents a conceptual framework to explain the process of unplanned travel decision-making. Building upon insights from attitude, prospect, and dynamic decision theory, the framework suggests that new information, constraints, and the variance between anticipated and actual circumstances can significantly influence traveller's decisions. The paper introduces temporal, dynamic and contingent aspects of a decision-making model. It notes that the dominant literature on decision-making related to destinations and trips positions the tourist as having made many pre-trip decisions, and indeed, experimental and retrospective research methods that invite participants to choose destinations based on alternatives or observations neglect to include enroute and in-situ decision-making. This paper makes a valuable contribution to the timing of decisions, and while it is not empirical, it offers an enhanced model for unplanned decisions. In this research study, understanding the planning stages of the tourist and the timing of decisions will be investigated empirically through interview questions and survey instruments. This empirically collected data could enhance theory building regarding the timing of decision-making for attraction and activity selection.

Unplanned decisions during on-the-go decision-making of touring visitors in New Zealand were found to be more susceptible to the influence of localised information sources in a quasi-experimental study (Becken and Wilson, 2007). While core decisions significantly shape the

itinerary before arrival, tourist maps and other supplementary materials may impact loosely planned or unplanned decisions during the trip. They found that word-of-mouth recommendations play a crucial role in decision-making across all levels, with guidebooks and visitor centres serving as additional information sources. Tourists often rely on familiar brands and personal recommendations, particularly when making rapid decisions under time pressure. Interestingly, the tourist map used in their experiment did not directly influence tourists' itineraries. The findings reveal three distinct levels of planning and decision-making, highlighting the significance of both cognitive and affective processes. Most tourists engage in some pre-trip planning based on previous travel experiences, word-of-mouth recommendations, and guidebooks. Tourists demonstrate three levels of planning and decision-making: *core, loosely*, and *unplanned* decisions. Core decisions, such as the duration of stay and major destinations, are typically made well in advance and involve rational problem-solving. Loosely planned decisions concerning sub-destinations and activities are subject to change during the trip, while unplanned decisions are made spontaneously during the journey. These levels of decision-making align with the theory of case-based planning, which acknowledges the dynamic nature of plans in response to new information and circumstances. However, traditional cognitive theories fail to fully integrate the affective and impulsive aspects of tourist behaviour observed in loosely planned and unplanned decisions. Tourists' planning in New Zealand revolves around experiencing the landscape, influencing their choices regarding transportation and itinerary. One notable limitation of the study is that it pre-dates the explosion of smartphone ownership. Another limitation is that the sample is limited to touring visitors in New Zealand, who have a specific itinerary and self-drive tour planning needs, as opposed to other segments of tourists.

In closing, on-the-go decision-making in tourism has become increasingly intriguing for researchers, especially with the rise of mobile technology. Hwang's (2011) conceptual paper offered a valuable framework, shedding light on how travellers make spontaneous decisions during their trips, considering factors like new information and unexpected circumstances. Meanwhile, Becken and Wilson's (2006) study on touring visitors in New Zealand provided practical insights into the various levels of decision-making tourists engage in, from core decisions to more loosely planned and unplanned choices. While insightful, these studies have limitations, like not fully capturing the impact of smartphones on travel decisions and focusing mainly on one specific tourist group in New Zealand. Nevertheless, they pave the way for further research that can encompass a broader range of tourist behaviours and destinations. By

diving deeper into the complexities of on-the-go decision-making, researchers can contribute to a better understanding of how tourists navigate their journeys and destinations. This knowledge can inform more effective tourism planning and management practices, ensuring a more fulfilling travel experience. This study is interested in participants' in-situ and dynamic decision-making, and on-the-go decision-making is one of the strategies that may be uncovered in the research.

Figure 6. Three-Tiered Planning and Decision-making by Rental Vehicle Tourists adapted from Becken and Wilson, (2006)

	Core	Loosely	Unplanned
Content of Planning	Destination Length of Stay North-South split & direction Transport Mode Rough Travel Route Key Attractions Special Interests	Sub destinations, Activities Attractions Exact Travel Route Location for overnight stop & accommodation	Local activities and attractions Restaurants Shopping Side Trips Accommodation
Time frame	Months	Days and Months	Minutes to hours
Information Sources	Guidebooks WOM Promotional Brochures Internet	Guidebook WOM Visitor Centres Leaflets Maps	Signage WOM Coincidence No real information source
Decision-making Process	More rational-cognitive, problem solving	More situational Experiential cognitive	Affective, Hedonic, Opportunistic, Impulsive

Hwang and Fesenmaier, (2011) developed a conceptual framework outlining unplanned attraction visits and itinerary stops by tourists in destination, arguing that trip plans evolve over the course of a holiday. Their quantitative findings demonstrate that shorter holidays with shorter trip planning times result in more spontaneous activities. It suggests that spontaneous decisions made during travel significantly contribute to the number of attractions visited. These results underscore the significance of on-site stimuli in prompting impromptu stops during travel.

2.8 DECISION-MAKING - ATTRACTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Much of the academic literature on the topic of decision-making in tourism converges on *destination choi*ce and overall *holiday choice* (Gardiner, King and Grace, 2013; Nuraeni, Arru and Novani, 2015; Tussyadiah, Kono and Morisugi, 2006). Choosing a holiday can be broadly broken down into critical decisions, which include the following: trip purpose, length of trip, travel dates, destination/s, transport, accommodation, group composition, activities, and attractions. Typically, the literature suggests that destination choice is made before activities and attractions in a linear mode. The following model for online vacation planning (Pan and Fesenmaier, 2006) splits decisions broadly into A and B groups. In Group A, the primary choices are destination and travel partners. Group B are the secondary decisions relating to destination specifics and activities. In this model, the darker the nodes – the more central and rigid those sub-decisions are. This is a valuable model to demonstrate how activities are related to other decisions in a network of sub-decisions by the tourist and connects activities to the destination. The model is limited by its necessitated generalised assumption that the destination choice comes before the activity choice. It does not allow for situations where the tourist looks for an activity before the destination. For example, tourists visiting a new region that prefer nature-based activities might look for nature reserves before choosing where to stay. Some tourists with disabilities might look for accessible accommodation options in a wider geographic area before deciding on a destination. Furthermore, there is an underlying assumption that tourists are flexible in their activity selection. Activity choices might be much more rigid than the model suggests, particularly when looking at extreme sports such as scuba diving; only a small segment of tourists would likely consider adventure sports (even if it is an option at the destination) during vacation planning. The model assumes that all activity options will be considered, and the tourist will review them all once settled on a destination. Individualistic tourist traits are difficult to map in a generalisable activity and destination decision-making model.

Figure 7. An illustrative semantic model of a vacation planner adapted from Pan & Fesenmaier, (2006)
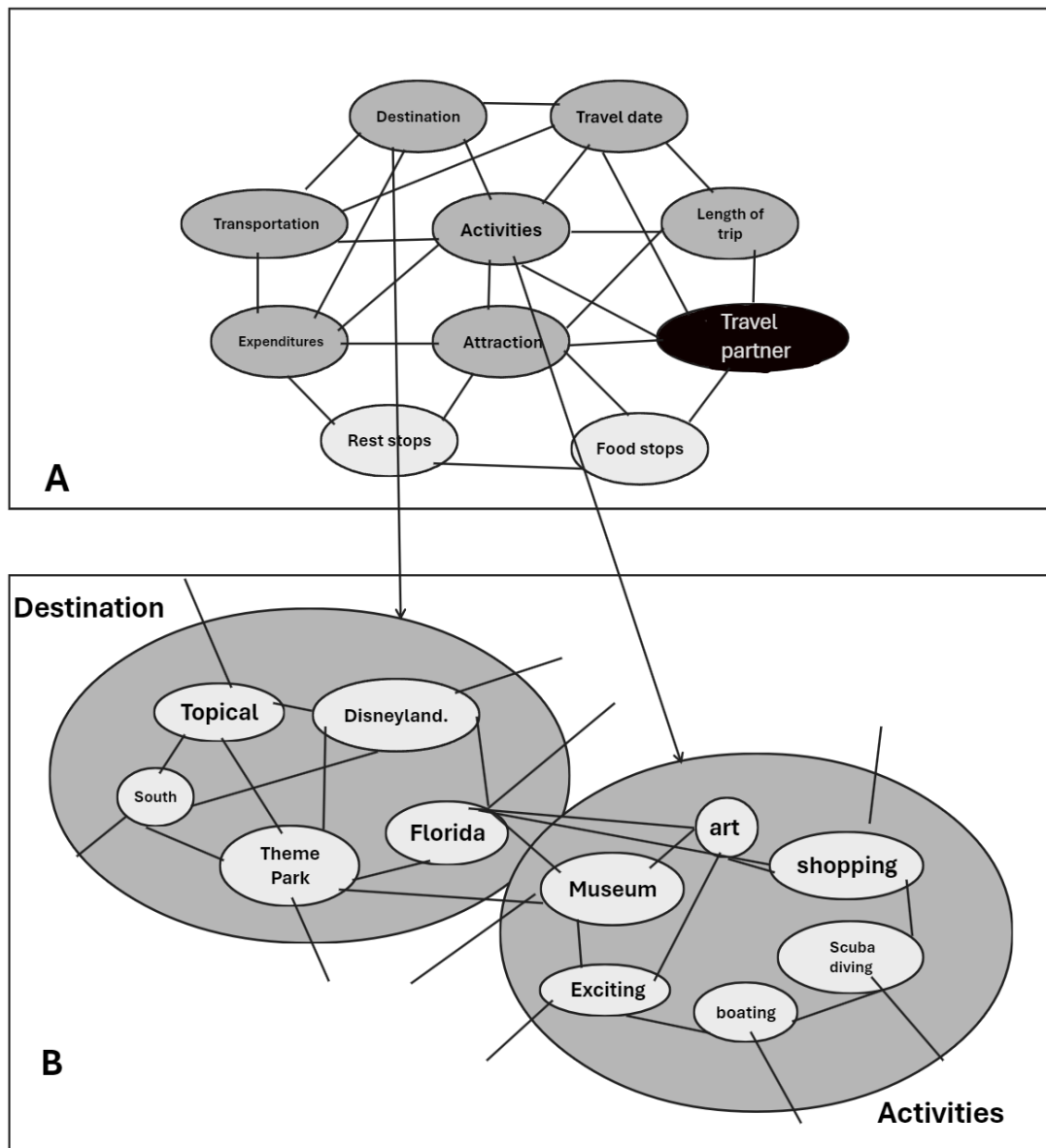
A different study that compared whether tourists first considered available experiences or destinations in the decision-making process concluded that experience attributes do not evoke destinations, but that destinations instinctively evoke expected experiences (Oppewal, Huybers,and Crouch, 2015). Particularly when the tourist first considers the destination attributes, they have a more substantial influence over experience attributes. This suggests that the destination, attractions, and activities are very closely connected in the tourist's mind and

that they may not be easily distinguishable in their mental mapping. However, this could depend on the individual's experience or their unique perception of a destination.

2.9 CONTEXT & SITUATIONAL FACTORS

A segmentation study by Decrop and Snelders (2005) suggests that contextual factors are powerful in influencing holiday choices. Four contextual factors are introduced that impact vacation decision-making: *environment, personal influences, interpersonal influences and situational factors*. Culture, social networks, and geophysical environment are included within environmental factors. Personal influences include age, family situation, occupation, personality, and lifestyle. Interpersonal influences are linked to group decisions, and situational aspects are connected to the timing or place of the decisions. The following model (Decrop and Snelders, 2005, p.125) illustrates the many contextual factors influencing the decision-making process. Several writers have drawn attention to this aspect of tourism decision-making, which includes type, purpose, cost and length of the trip and tourists' familiarity with the destination (Fodness and Murray, 1999), the location, social environment, season, weather, and time of their visit (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015). Bettman, Luce and Payne, (1998) suggest that when consumers are familiar and experienced with a purchase process, they are more likely to follow a rational decision-making process. However, situational factors disrupt this process, particularly if a decision is stressful or complex. A holiday can be quite unpredictable and complex. Sometimes, transport options get cancelled; the weather disrupts plans; someone in the travel party becomes sick or families argue. These are examples of when things go wrong or might be out of the tourist's control. Many other contextual and situational variables, such as family relationships, lifestyle preferences and personal interests, can influence decision-making in the context of attractions and activities. The following model of vacation contextual factors in decision-making adapted from Decrop and Snelders (2005, p.125) considers 19 environmental factors, including social, environmental, cultural and geographical, as well as 16 vacation decisions and 9 decision-making variables. This starts to build a picture of how complex, varied, and unpredictable contextual and situational factors are when investigating their influence on decision-making.

Figure 8. Contextual Factors in Vacation Decision-Making adapted from Decrop and Snelders, (2005,**p.125)**

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

SOCIAL   **CULTURAL**   **GEOGRAPHICAL**

PRIMARY PERSONAL FACTORS

Age

Family situation

Education and Occupation

Personality and Lifestyle

SECONDARY PERSONAL FACTORS

Personal History

Vacations Experience

Personal Resources

Motives

Involvement

INTER-PERSONAL FACTORS

Group Adhesion

Level of Communication

Distribution of Roles

Congruence (Conflict-Consensus)

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

Information

Availability

Emotions and Moods

Side Projects

Task

Hasard

VOCATIONAL DECISIONS

- Accompaniment Activities
- Attractions
- Budget
- Destination
- Duration
- Formula
- Lodging

- Meals
- Organizations
- Period
- Purchases
- Route
- Tour
- Transportation
- Vacation style

DECISION-MAKING VARIABLES

- Generic decision making
- Planning and decision timings
- Number of vacation plans
- Stability of decisions
- Information Search
- Daydreaming, Nostalgia, Prolonged involvement
- Choice mode and decision strategies/rules

Given that context and situational factors are complex and multifaceted, generalist and conventional decision-making models have been critiqued for their limitations (Hergesell, Dwyer and Edwards, 2021; Decrop and Snelders, 2005; Smallman and Moore, 2010). Bettman et al. (1991) posit that contingent decision-making's main aspects are problem, person, and social context. Contingent decision-making puts context variables at the centre of this post-modernist theory and critiques structural and cognitive decision-making theories for being too rigid and inflexible. This limitation is compounded by the lack of empirical studies that collect data using qualitative research methods (Decrop, 2006). The author will address this research gap by collecting rich and detailed qualitative data on the context and situational aspects contributing to decision-making in attractions and activities. Interview questions will address aspects such as travel companions, travel experience; trip purpose; budget; weather and any other influential factors in the tourist's mind contributing to activity and attraction selection.

The complexity of tourism decision-making is underlined by many contextual and situational factors that influence traveller's choices. The model proposed by Decrop and Snelders (2005) highlights the diverse array of environmental elements, ranging from social dynamics to geographical considerations, that shape decision-making in vacation contexts. Critiques of conventional decision-making models, as noted by Hergesell et al. (2021), emphasise the limitations of rigid frameworks in capturing the nuanced interplay between context and decision processes. Adopting a contingent decision-making perspective, as Bettman et al. (1991) proposed, offers a more flexible lens to understand the dynamic nature of tourist decision-making. Furthermore, addressing the research gap highlighted by Decrop (2006), this study will employ qualitative research methods to gather in-depth insights into the contextual and situational aspects guiding attraction and activity selection. By exploring factors such as travel companions, trip purpose, budget constraints, and environmental conditions, this research aims to comprehensively understand the intricate decision-making processes in tourism. Overall, recognising the multidimensional nature of contextual influences on tourist decision-making is crucial for developing more nuanced theoretical frameworks and practical strategies in the field of tourism management and marketing.

2.10 GROUP DECISION-MAKING

Many of the decision-making theories and models have focused on individuals making decisions, which then infers that individuals make travel decisions independently without the influence of others (Stone, 2016). Tourism methodologies such as surveys that measure the motivations and decisions of tourists often place them in a position of independence and ask questions based on an individual's attitude or behaviour. While such studies help understand consumer behaviour, particularly the segment of solo travellers, they could be misleading in the context of people travelling with friends, in a couple or with family since it does not account for the impact of the others. Family travel is popular, engaging approximately 30% of the leisure travel market (Schänzel and Yeoman, 2015). Gitelson and Kerstetter, (1995) reasoned that since tourism is a highly social activity, friends, family, and others in a travel party need to be considered in the decision-making process. Furthermore, their study found that only 25% of decisions were made by a sole decision-maker and that family or friends influenced *all* decisions. However, it has been noted that groups of friends make decisions differently from families, and these decisions are increasingly important in tourism (Decrop, 2005). It is suggested that decision-making in family groups adds another layer of complexity because they are more likely to consider the intricate expectations, needs, and requests of all family members (Kim, Tanford,and Choi, 2020). However, a group leader may emerge as the final decision-maker after discussing and consulting with the other group members (Decrop, 2006).

In the general consumer behaviour literature, collective decision-making and identity as a family unit were uncovered by Gentry and Commuri, (2005). They challenged previous conclusions that suggested individualistic negotiation of outcomes within the family unit. They argued that this perspective overlooks the collective nature of family dynamics (Epp and Price, 2008) and further criticised family researchers for neglecting the intricate interplay between individual, relational, and collective identity practices within families. They advocated for a reconceptualisation of the family as a collective entity composed of interconnected family identities and their communicative practices. They proposed a framework centred on identity interplay to address this gap, comprising family identity bundles, communication forms, and symbolic marketplace resources. This framework emphasises the importance of understanding family consumption through the lens of family identity and communication dynamics. While this work is valuable in the context of communication and family identity, the current thesis will investigate group decision-making that emerges dynamically and contextually in the

destination and is related to decisions relating to tourist attractions and activity selection. Collaborative decision-making and attaining either explicit or implicit agreement within familial contexts emerge (Kang et al., 2003). Strategies for resolving disagreements, such as engaging in family discussions (Kang & Hsu, 2004 cited in Mirehie et al., 2021) or employing a "give-and-take-and-reach-a-compromise" approach (Bronner and de Hoog, 2008, p.969). It was concluded that families operate as a decision-making unit, and while children can influence sub-decisions relating to day trips and adventure parks, joint decision-making is more likely within families (Bronner and de Hoog, 2008). The influence of children is further exemplified both indirectly by their needs or by negotiation of their wants (Thornton et al.,1997, cited in Wang and Li, (2021). The selection of hotel amenities to include children's activities such a s swimming pool, was found to be influential (Curtale, 2018 cited in Wang and Li, 2021).

Historically, tourism research conducted up to the 1950s found that men dominated most decisions, and while socio-economic conditions for women have led to more joint decision-making in family units, there has been a lot of interest in tourism in who has the most influence, which of the spouses, or indeed the children, influence decisions (Hsieh, O'Leary,and Morrison, 1992). Some studies have discovered that there is usually one dominant decision-maker in the group or family unit. A paper that investigated family decision-making in the context of youth sports tourism found that the mother was more likely to be the planner and lead decision-maker (Mirehie *et al.*, 2021). Further to this, women were found to dominate in the information-sourcing stage of decision-making (Kang et al., 2003, cited in Wang and Li, (2021). While these studies are valuable, they focus on the early stages of planning and may not represent in-destination decision-making.

Decision delegation and social surrogacy are noteworthy aspects of decision-making in groups. A study on travel motivations that compared groups of friends, couples, and families revealed that the primary motivation behind group travel may lie in the desire to share experiences and interests rather than merely select a destination. Notably, Decrop, (2005) explicitly identified the presence of decision delegation within multi-individual travel scenarios, where an individual, whether formally designated or informally chosen, assumes the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of the entire group. Moreover, his research indicated that decision delegation rarely led to discordant sentiments among group members, suggesting that their

priority was often achieving agreement and consensus rather than the decision outcome itself (Decrop, 2005). It was also found that within groups of friends travelling together, some friends preferred someone else to organise the travel plans, even if that meant their preferences were overlooked (Decrop, 2005). In another study, some travellers also prefer to delegate decisions to more well-informed people about the holiday destination (Gitelson and Kerstetter, 1995). A quantitative study on decision delegation found that in selecting a destination, 43% of those surveyed let another person, *a social surrogate* choose for them. Furthermore, half of the decisions relating to accommodation, attraction, and daily activity agenda were made by others (Stone, 2016). The findings suggest that decision delegation could be a decision-making heuristic that needs to be included in decision-making models. In this study, group decision-making will be further investigated qualitatively to understand how group decisions emerge dynamically in the destination. This will expand the knowledge and contribute to the *how* and *why* decisions may be delegated.

In conclusion, the discourse surrounding decision-making processes in tourism has traditionally centred on individual actors, neglecting the intricate dynamics inherent in group travel. The collective nature of decision-making within familial and social units constitutes a critical dimension that requires deeper scholarly inquiry. Familial and social ties significantly influence travel choices, challenging the prevailing notion of autonomous decision-making (Stone, 2016; Gitelson and Kerstetter, 1995). Moreover, the manner in which decisions are reached within group contexts unveils a complex interplay of negotiation, compromise, and delegation, as illuminated by Decrop (2005) and Wang and Li (2021). The inclusion of children within these dynamics, as explored by Thornton et al. (1997) and Wang and Li (2021), further complicate the decision-making process, necessitating a more comprehensive understanding of familial dynamics in travel decision-making. While strides have been made in elucidating these phenomena, there remains a pressing need to delve deeper into the subtle intricacies of group decision-making dynamics, particularly within in-situ contexts. A qualitative exploration of these dynamics promises to yield valuable insights into decision delegation, negotiation, and consensus-building mechanisms within group travel settings. Such undertakings hold the potential to enrich extant theoretical frameworks, offering a more nuanced comprehension of the social foundations of tourist decision-making processes.

2.11 EMOTIONS (AFFECT)

Consumer's emotions have been considered a key driver of tourist behaviour, since tourism is considered a hedonic activity (Gnoth, 1997). Holbrook and Hirschman, (1982) found that in leisure and tourism, purchases were more likely to involve emotive needs rather than rational ones. Furthermore, the decisions were based on anticipated feelings rather than problem-solving activities. Since tourism is an experiential and intangible product (Moutinho 1987), it is posited that emotions play a fundamental role in the travel experience and in the pre-and post-holiday decision behaviour (Walters and Li, 2017). Decision-making is a central function of consumer behaviour, and it is conventionally defined as a stepped process, i.e., problem or need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase/experience, and post-purchase/experience outcomes (Hyde, 2008). Emotions interact with the process in each of these phases (Walters and Li, 2017). In tourism, recognizing the necessity for recreation and travel typically manifests as an emotional condition, often indicating either physical or mental fatigue and/or social desires such as acknowledgement or belonging (Neal, Quester and Hawkins, 2002). Following this, tourists seek information to satisfy this need, and in destination decision-making, it is recognised that appealing to the tourists, emotional needs in marketing destinations is essential (Walters, Sparks and Herington, 2012). During the consumption of tourism, emotions are activated, and emotions play an essential role in defining tourism experiences (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2015) and the higher the positive experience, the higher the satisfaction (Bigné and Andreu, 2004). In the post consumption stages, tourists appraise their experience, and these feelings contribute to recommendation (Hosany *et al.*, 2015).

In empirical investigations, Perugini and Bagozzi, (2001) cited in Meng and Han, (2016) demonstrated the crucial role of two anticipated emotions in shaping desire. Individuals anticipate the outcomes or consequences of attaining or failing to achieve the goal and associated positive or negative emotions. Anticipated emotions pertain to the affective state an individual expects to undergo upon successfully achieving a specific goal (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988 cited in Meng and Han, 2016). According to Zeelenberg *et al*., (2008), emotions and rationality work together. Emotions enable people to apply decision-making; otherwise, the rational mind would be forced to consider every single option. It is emotions that assist with ensuring the right decision is made. If other people are involved in the decision or the consequences of that decision, there is heightened emotion, including "empathy, love, anger, shame and guilt"

(p.18). Emotions are also evident before the outcome of the decision and can be between hope and fear; post-decision emotions can include "elation, happiness, surprise, regret and disappointment" (Zeelenberg et al., 1998, p.18). In contrast to cognitive frameworks where choice sets are presented, it is suggested that people have limited cognitive ability to mentally organise a complete list of advantages/ disadvantages and costs/benefits for each alternative "we are only rational within the limits of our cognitive capacities" (Simon, 1955, 1956 cited in Zeelenberg et al., (2008, p.18). While they can be reliable enough to be measured, emotions are subjective to the individual: "The experiential content of an emotion thus reflects how emotions are felt and what emotions mean to the person experiencing them; it is the real emotional experience" (p.20). Essentially, emotions vary between persons; they are based on individual experience, and not all emotions can be named. This statement has quite significant consequences for researchers in tourism since if emotions cannot be named, Likert scale measurements or even interview questions may not elicit the true emotions participants feel.

Emotions present methodological challenges since they are both conscious and subconscious, subjective and objective (Doyle McCarthy, 1994). Recent developments in technology allow psychophysiological methods to be implemented, enabling researchers to measure emotions that participants would otherwise be unable to express and reportedly avoid cognitive bias. Participants are fitted with wearable devices, and electronic dermal activity (EDA) is monitored (Walters and Li, 2017). However, there would be significant practical and resource difficulties in actuating this method since it would require participants to wear the device throughout their holiday and would counter the naturalistic ethos of this thesis. Self-report methods have been commonly used to investigate emotions in tourism and have been criticized for the risk of cognitive biases (Ravaja, 2004), potential memory issues post-experience (Lee and Kyle, 2012) and measurement inaccuracies (Micu and Plummer, 2010). Psychological theories on emotions and measurement scales have been adapted for tourism, ranging from basic or categorical emotions to dimensional emotions (Walters and Li, 2017). While few scales have been tested and adopted for tourism to measure emotion (Hosany *et al.*, 2015), there are some important contributions to the field of tourism. Two examples of this are the Destination Emotion Scale (DES) (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010) and the Pleasure Arousal dimension (Bigné, Andreu and Gnoth, 2005). The DES found three salient dimensions for measuring destination emotions: Joy, Love, and Positive Surprise, which consist of 15 items with robust psychometric properties. Place attachment features in the DES, and it is suggested that "Salient features of a

place (e.g., attractions, historical monuments) can connect to one's self-concept" (Scannell and Gifford, 2010 cited in Hosany et al., 2015, p.484). Place attachment is linked to self-identity and a sense of belonging to a place. Furthermore, the deeper the place attachment, the more it aligns with a person's motivations, and both revisit intention and loyalty are more likely to occur. However, since the scale only measures positive emotions, it neglects potential negative emotions experienced by tourists. While the Pleasure Arousal dimension states that Pleasure refers to the pleasantness of an emotional experience and is normally measured by positive adjectives such as happy, joyful or entertained. Arousal indicates emotional strength, extending from quietness to excitement.

There has been much criticism of using self-reporting scales to measure emotions in tourism since they are context-specific, capture a snapshot in time, and record limited details in the scope of the whole tourist experience Emotions shift and change in the dynamic tourism environment and have been shown to decline towards the end of a holiday (Nawijn *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, some behaviours are driven by unconscious emotions and are unavailable for contemplation by the subject, notwithstanding the fact that the underlying mechanisms are not yet fully understood (Winkielman and Berridge, 2004). The suitability, reliability, and validity of emotional measurement scales for use in tourism have been doubted since these scales are derived from psychology literature for personal and intimate relationships rather than specific consumer contexts (Haynes, Richard, and Kubany 1995). Adapting them for tourism is challenging because the emotional intensity of tourism encounters and personal relationships differ. Tourism is often considered a cross-disciplinary subject and has been repeatedly referred to as an innately social subject area. In pursuit of a broader understanding of emotions in society, this author sought inspiration from cultural criticism and sociology. In the 1980s, sociology and *social constructionism* were the dominant approaches to studying emotions and were later influenced by cultural theory (Doyle McCarthy, 1994). Essentially, this constructionist approach separates emotions from cognitive functions and processes analytically and presents them within cultural practices and meanings. The following list summarises the directions in understanding emotions as constructed by cultural forms and meanings adapted from Doyle McCarthy, (1994, pp.268-275).

Figure 9. Emotions As Constructed by Cultural Forms adapted from Doyle McCarthy (1974, pp.268-275)

Emotions are understood through language, including speech acts and vocabularies of emotion

Emotions combine features of body, gesture & cultural meaning

Emotions are inextricably cultural, though culture is not unified, it is layered, diverse and multi-coded

Emotions are cultural objects and they gain meaning within a system of relations

Emotions are cultural performances

Emotions are socially constituted syndromes

Emotions are a bodily, experiential, and irrational phenomena

Emotions should not be reduced to binary terms of emotion & cognition

Emotions are physiological states

Emotions should not be measured in the same way as natural sciences (positivist) are

Feelings and emotions are the principal experience of self-validation, self-image, and self-conception

Feelings and emotions give meaning to life and one's identity

Emotions make statements to others

Emotions are the presentation of self and society

Emotions are both objects and subjects

In this study, emotional context and the influence of emotions on decision-making are being investigated. If, as stated by Doyle McCarthy (1994), feelings and emotions give meaning to life and one's identity, they could be a powerful insight into the decision-making behaviour of the participants. If emotions are socially constituted and give meaning in a system of relations, understanding emotions that are expressed by participants while on holiday with family and friends will bring new insight into in-destination decision-making. If emotion can be understood by language, as suggested, then allowing participants to express feelings and emotions in interviews, rather than pre-determined scales, would allow them to choose their vocabulary. If emotions are cultural, then it's entirely possible that different cultures will express them differently, which could mean some people have stronger and more explicable emotions than others. If emotions make statements to others, perhaps they are subject to others, or they could change depending on who they are with.

More recently, in tourism, a study reviewed the gaps in literature and directions to better understand the experience of emotion (Volo, 2021). Firstly, it is argued that the language of

emotions has not yet been fully explored in tourism: "The vocabulary of emotions is lengthy and emotion's intensity stretchable" (p.6). Emotions cannot necessarily be contained to discrete words, limited to a few scales of pre-defined categories or even to a specific location in the brain (Lindquist et al., 2012 cited in Volo, 2021, p.6). Diversity should also be considered when accounting for physically and neurodiverse tourists. Secondly, the context and full range of emotions should include those of pain and negativity since tourists experience the full range of emotions and might even seek them out during dark tourism or with risky experiences (Buda, 2015). Thirdly, Volo, (2021) suggests that psychologists have embedded aspects of the constructivist approach and claim that emotions are constructed. Fourthly, Volo, (2021) indicates that there isn't enough diversity in recognising different cultures and languages in tourism research and that measurement tools for one continent will be inappropriate for another. Additionally, they suggest that collective emotions should be considered within the tourism environment (Wood, 2019). Finally, Volo, (2021) emphasises the individual's construction of emotions within the context of the tourism environment. It suggests that the tourism industry should be more aware of its power and role in constructing emotions, and managers should ask the questions – 'what do I want the tourist to feel here?' Because the emotional rod is the tourist (Malone, McKechie & Tynan, 2018), although one key difference here is that it is proposed that tourists have emotional authority. Furthermore, it is recognised that emotions change during a holiday due to inner causes, environments, stimuli, and interactions with others, and mixed feelings are also possible (Nawijn & Biran, 2019). In this study, the research gap will be explored by engaging with participants in-destination, to understand how their emotional expectations and experiences in attraction and activity selection influence their decision-making.

In a conceptual paper, a new framework for decision-making which elevates the importance of emotions in the decision-making process is offered by Walls, Okumus and Wang, (2011). In this Affective-Cognitive Model, the interplay of cognition and affect are given equal weight. The model is underpinned by the work of experimental psychologists (Epstein, 1973; Zajonc, 1980; Berkowitz, 1993; Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999). It highlights that the emotional process is instinctive rather than deliberate and has lower processing than the cognitive route. Furthermore, it proposes that when consumers become overwhelmed and processing is disadvantaged, the affect system is prioritised over the cognitive. Indeed, when individuals feel overwhelmed by the abundance of choices or information, they may shift from deliberate cognitive processing to relying on heuristics or the affective system to make decisions. This

phenomenon, as suggested by Zajonc, (1980), highlights the tendency for people to engage in more spontaneous decision-making when faced with cognitive overload. Heuristics are mental shortcuts or simplified decision rules that allow individuals to make judgments and choices quickly and efficiently without extensive cognitive effort. By relying on heuristics, people can streamline decision-making processes and reduce the cognitive burden associated with analyzing every option. Similarly, the affective system, which encompasses emotions and gut feelings, can play a significant role in decision-making under overwhelming circumstances. Emotions can provide valuable cues and shortcuts that guide decision-making, leading individuals to choose options that evoke positive feelings or align with their emotional preferences.

Conversely, when resources are not restricted, the cognitive process will dominate. It is argued that tourism decisions are often complex, and the required volume of information processing means that consumers will often depend on the affect processes to make decisions. It is argued that there is no evidence that cognitive function is proceeded by the emotional process but that "cognition and affect are in tension with each other" and that "feelings are not free of thought and thought is not free of feelings" (Zajonc, 1980 cited in Walls, Okumus and Wang, 2011) p.572). Furthermore, whether there is any cognitive processing has been questioned: "It is generally believed that *all* decisions require some conscious or unconscious processing of pros and cons. Somehow, we have come to believe tautologically, to be sure, that if a decision has been made, then a cognitive process must have preceded it. Yet there is no evidence that this is indeed so." (Zajonc, 1980 cited in Walls, Okumus and Wang, 2011, p.572). Valence is said to be either positively or negatively associated with the two processing systems (Walls, Okumus and Wang, 2011). The intensity of the affect or cognition (which are said to have opposing valences) will determine the direction. The article recommends that physiological measurements are more reliable than Likert scales to measure affect constructs.

Figure 10. Affective-Cognitive Model of Vacation Decision-making adapted from Walls, Okumus and Wang, (2011, p.571)
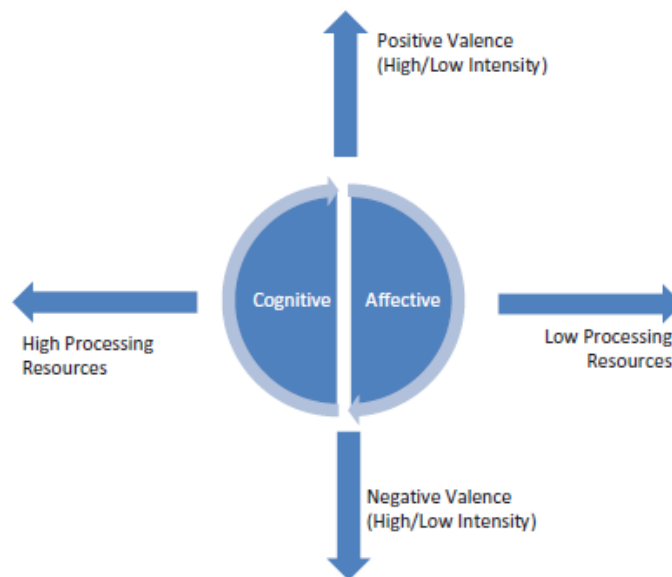
Nostalgia has been acknowledged as an intrinsic motive in tourism and can be experienced emotionally at the destination or following a visit (Wang, 2023). It is conceptualised as an emotion that arises from contemplation of the past, highlighting its effects on behavioural outcomes (Wang, 2023). Nostalgic emotion was found to play a crucial role in shaping a destination's image and attracting tourists. Cognitive and affective destination images significantly affect tourist behavioural intentions (Akgün *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, historical museums and cultural visits to attractions in Istanbul elicit imagination-provoking nostalgia emotions. These influence positive emotions, positive revisits, and intention to recommend. Architecture and public art within the destination were found to enhance the tourist experience. Further to this, it can evoke an emotional response in visitors by connecting them with the past (Frost, Laing and Williams, 2015). Moreover nostalgic emotions promote the feeling of escape from the everyday, and make for more memorable experiences (Leong *et al.*, 2015)

In conclusion, emotions have long been recognized as influential factors driving tourist behaviour, particularly considering tourism's inherently hedonic nature (Gnoth, 1997). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) revealed that leisure and tourism purchases are often driven

by emotive needs rather than rational considerations, with decisions primarily based on anticipated feelings rather than problem-solving activities. Given the experiential and intangible nature of tourism products (Moutinho, 1987), emotions are believed to play a pivotal role in shaping the travel experience and influencing pre- and post-holiday decision-making behaviours (Walters and Li, 2017). Decision-making constitutes a central aspect of consumer behaviour, typically involving a series of steps such as problem or need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase/experience, and post-purchase/experience outcomes (Hyde, 2008). Emotions are intricately intertwined with each phase of this process (Walters and Li, 2017). Throughout tourism consumption, emotions are triggered and play a vital role in defining tourism experiences (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2015). Empirical investigations have underscored the critical role of anticipated emotions in shaping desires, with individuals anticipating the emotional outcomes associated with goal attainment or failure (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001, cited in Meng and Han, 2016). These anticipated emotions influence decision-making processes significantly. Moreover, recent research suggests that emotions and rationality are not mutually exclusive; instead, they work in tandem, with emotions guiding decision-making processes to ensure optimal outcomes (Zeelenberg et al., 2008). This acknowledgment of the interplay between emotions and rationality challenges traditional cognitive frameworks, highlighting the importance of emotions in decision-making. However, measuring emotions in the context of tourism presents methodological challenges due to their subjective and dynamic nature (Doyle McCarthy, 1994). While self-report methods have been commonly utilised, they are criticised for their susceptibility to cognitive biases and limited scope in capturing the dynamic nature of emotions (Ravaja, 2004; Lee and Kyle, 2012). Despite these challenges, efforts have been made to adapt psychology theories and measurement scales to the tourism context (Walters and Li, 2017). In light of these complexities, there is a growing recognition of the need to explore emotions in tourism comprehensively. Recent literature has highlighted gaps in understanding the full range of emotions experienced by tourists and the contextual factors influencing these emotions (Volo, 2021). Moreover, conceptual frameworks, such as the Affective-Cognitive Model of Vacation Decision-making, emphasise the equal importance of cognition and affect in decision-making processes (Walls, Okumus, and Wang, 2011). Furthermore, nostalgia has emerged as a significant emotional motive in tourism, influencing behavioural outcomes and enhancing the tourist experience (Wang, 2023; Frost, Laing, and Williams, 2015). Understanding the role of nostalgia and other emotions in shaping destination images and influencing tourist behaviours is crucial for destination marketers and policymakers. This study aims to investigate the

emotional context and the influence of emotions on decision-making behaviours for attractions and activities among tourists by engaging with participants in-destination qualitatively and naturalistically.

2.12 PART 1 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, exploring in-situ decision-making within the tourism context reveals a complex and nuanced landscape. This chapter has covered the multifarious factors that influence tourist's choices regarding attractions and activities, from the spontaneous decisions prompted by the digital-social environment to the deeply rooted emotional and group dynamics that shape the travel experience. The studies discussed herein, such as those by Blichfeldt (2008), Liu, Wang, and Gretzel (2022), and Moore et al., (2012), provide valuable insights into the nature of on-site decision-making. They highlight the need for attraction and activity providers to be attuned to the tourists' information needs and the significance of local marketing efforts that cater to the spontaneous nature of tourist behaviour. The chapter also underscores the importance of qualitative research methodologies in capturing the essence of naturalistic decision-making and the role of spontaneity and the impact of mobile technology on the fluidity of tourist choices. The influence of contextual and situational factors, as well as the collective nature of group decision-making, are recognised as critical components that warrant further investigation. Emotions emerge as a central theme in understanding tourist behaviour, with studies indicating that affective responses play a pivotal role in shaping decisions and enhancing the overall travel experience. The affective dimension of tourism, therefore, presents a fertile ground for future research, with the potential to deepen our understanding of the emotional underpinnings of tourist decision-making. This chapter calls for a holistic approach that embraces the complexity of tourist decision-making, recognising the interplay between cognitive, emotional, and social factors. By doing so, researchers and practitioners can gain a more profound comprehension of the decision-making processes that define the tourist experience, ultimately leading to more effective tourism planning and management strategies.

CHAPTER 2 PART 2: ACTIVITIES, ATTRACTIONS & THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

2.13 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry encompasses a diverse array of attractions and activities, ranging from natural wonders and cultural heritage sites to purpose-built entertainment venues and events. These attractions are often the primary drivers of a destination's appeal, drawing visitors from near and far. At the same time, tourist activities, such as sightseeing tours, outdoor adventures, and cultural immersion experiences, provide dynamic and engaging ways for travellers to interact with and explore their surroundings. Tourist attractions and activities are integral components of the tourism experience, serving as focal points that motivate travellers to visit destinations. While attractions and activities are distinct concepts, they are intrinsically linked within the tourism ecosystem. Attractions serve as static and enduring features of a destination, while activities offer dynamic and experiential opportunities for engagement. Together, they contribute to the co-creation of the tourist experience, shaping perceptions of authenticity, place attachment, and overall satisfaction. These elements play a crucial role in shaping the overall travel experience, creating lasting memories, and fostering emotional connections with places and cultures. Understanding the interplay between attractions, activities, and the tourist experience is crucial for effective destination management and marketing strategies.

This chapter will discuss tourism behaviour papers and explore the decision-making processes involved in choosing and experiencing attractions and activities, shedding light on tourists' motivations, perceptions, and behaviours. Followed by a consideration of where attractions and activities fit in the broader topic of the tourist experience. Traditional transactional views are contrasted with more holistic, experiential approaches that consider tourism's multisensory and emotional aspects. The chapter then delves into defining and differentiating tourist attractions and activities. Next, it explores the debate about what constitutes attractions versus ancillary tourism products. Various typologies and taxonomies for categorising attractions and activities are examined, acknowledging the lack of consensus in the literature. The role of attractions and activities as pull motivational factors influencing destination choice is discussed, along with the interaction between internal push factors (like anomie and ego enhancement) and external destination attributes. It argues for understanding attractions and activities within the broader context of the tourist experience, which is subjective, personal, and co-created. Moreover, it investigates push and pull motivational factors influencing destination choice, linking internal

drivers with external attributes like attractions. Means-end theory is presented to understand the connection between tourist desires and destination offerings. Finally, the marketing of tourist attractions and activities is discussed. By covering these key areas, the introduction effectively sets the context and outlines the scope of the chapter's examination of tourist attractions, activities, and the overall experience.

2.14 BEHAVIOUR

Major tourist attractions are the primary drivers of a destination's appeal and are recognised as vital assets for destination growth and promotion. They are typically distinguished as prominent and iconic landmarks or features that attract a significant number of visitors to their location or surrounding area (Ram, Björk, and Weidenfeld, 2016). While flagship attractions may be a significant pull factor drawing visitors to a destination, many other push and pull factors are considered part of the destination lure. Seminal works by Dann (1977) and Crompton (1979) investigated the motivational factors in destination choice. The proposed push and pull concepts have since underpinned much tourism research. Dann (1977) argues that tourists are more motivated by their internal motivations and personal needs to visit a place than the attributes of the destination, such as attractions. The development of two concepts, *Anomie* and *ego enhancement,* illustrates the idea that tourists want to escape their everyday lives and ego enhancement, which encapsulates the idea that some tourists travel to seek knowledge. Later work by Pearce and Lee, (2005) differentiates motivations between the lesser and more experienced travellers. Stating that local, cultural, and natural experiences were more important drivers for the experienced tourist, while "stimulation, personal development, relationship (security), self-actualisation, nostalgia, romance, and recognition had a higher priority for the less experienced ones" (p.226). Interestingly, this study states that destination attributes (pull factors) are more significant to the more experienced traveller. Another study that links push and pull factors by means-end chain analysis suggests that there are multiple motivations, and the delineation between push and pull factors is fluid: there is a connection between the tourist's desires and the destination's attributes (Klenosky, 2002). For example, this research connects the pull factor, such as a destination's beach, to the multiple internal push forces and needs of tourists. These include seeking a suntan to appear healthy and feel good; enjoying the social aspect of a beach, meeting new people; escaping; relaxing and re-charging.

A study comparing travel decision-makers (DMs) and non-decision makers (Non-DMs) among

Japanese rafting tourists revealed distinct motivational factors and loyalty development processes between the two groups (Sato *et al.*, 2018). DMs are individuals who actively make travel choices for a trip, while Non-DMs participate in the trip but do not engage in the decision-making process. DMs were motivated by excitement and sought adventure tourism experiences based on natural attractions, while Non-DMs were more motivated by family-related needs and cultural aspects of the destination. The study highlighted the importance of satisfying both groups' expectations to develop destination loyalty, with a particular focus on providing extraordinary experiences for DMs and fulfilling cultural and service expectations for Non-DMs. The study also found that for DMs, destination loyalty is influenced by rafting services and the cultural aspects of the destination, but tourist satisfaction did not mediate the relationship between their motivations and destination loyalty. On the other hand, Non-DMs' destination loyalty is indirectly influenced by tourist satisfaction, which is affected by both rafting services and cultural elements. Aligning with existing research in the field of tourism (Park and Yoon, 2009), the study found that the desire for social interaction and the need to escape everyday life (push motivations) are linked to various destination attributes, which are considered pull motivations, for both individuals who make travel decisions and those who do not. The research suggests that destination marketers should cater to the expectations of both DMs and Non-DMs to foster destination loyalty. For DMs, providing extraordinary experiences that exceed their expectations is crucial, while for Non-DMs, ensuring satisfaction with expected destination attributes is key. Limitations of the study include not accounting for other potential variables like destination image and perceived value. Additionally, the research calls for cross-cultural comparisons to better understand how DMs and Non-DMs in different adventure tourism contexts develop their destination loyalty.

The study offers a valuable contribution by connecting destination attributes, loyalty, and the adventure tourism activity of kayaking and acknowledging the distinctive motivations within a travel party. The study suggests that destination loyalty and perception are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including individual motivations and the overall appeal of the destination's attributes. The research posits that these additional destination attributes play a crucial role in satisfying the varied passions and interests of all travel party members. It is implied that a comprehensive understanding of these attributes is necessary for destination marketers to create a complete package that appeals to the entire travel group. By exploring a holistic research approach, this study aims to uncover the drivers of decision-making and tourist behaviour for attractions and activities in rural Wales. Although motivations are not the

central focus of the thesis, their influence on decision-making is considered significant. By examining these dynamics, the research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of tourist behaviour in the tourism settings, which could inform strategies to enhance destination loyalty and attract diverse tourist segments.

In a study that examined behavioural intentions of Korean tourists to visit Wine Tours (Lee, Bruwer and Song, 2017), it was found that experience and involvement were the key constructs to predict behaviour. Utilising the Model of Goal Directed Behaviour, the study revealed that attitude, subjective norm and positive anticipated emotion induced tourist's desire to visit. Previous experience of a wine tour made it more likely that tourists would choose another wine tour. Further to this, the study posits that the decision was driven by motivation and emotion rather than cognitive factors. The study recommends enhancing experiences with authentic aesthetic and entertaining elements such as storytelling; local food and experiential facets to delight the tourist, thus reinforcing positive feelings. The study was limited by sample size (216) and narrow scope of wine schools. However it yields interesting results that point to an emotional aspect of decision-making in the attractions sector, and the desire of the tourist to be immersed in an experience at an attraction. This thesis adopts a comprehensive approach by examining the tourist experience across diverse attraction types and activities. Rather than constraining the inquiry to specific experiences or attractions, participants are invited to reflect on the full spectrum of engagements they have undertaken during their travels. While this broad research scope presents methodological challenges, it aims to address a significant gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of the decision-making processes underlying tourist behaviours across various contexts.

Tourists choose activities they are familiar with, like hobbies were found by Sthapit, Kozak and Coudounaris, (2019). The study investigates the relationship between leisure activities at home and on vacation, along with their impact on choice overload, regret, and satisfaction among tourists in Rovaniemi, Finland. Findings suggest that tourists may engage in similar activities both at home and while on vacation, influenced by high involvement and habits in leisure activities. Notably, lower choice overload leads to reduced regret but does not directly correlate with satisfaction. The study emphasises the importance of tourism service providers understanding visitors' home activities to mitigate choice overload and enhance satisfaction. However, limitations include destination-specific findings, a narrow range of activities examined, and reliance on post-holiday data collection, which may affect memory accuracy.

2.15 THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

The 'experience economy', a word conceived by Pine and Gilmore (1998), made experiences mainstream in consumerism. The central notion is that people hunger for unforgettable and meaningful experiences instead of material products or services. Moreover, companies that can meet this need successfully will gain a competitive advantage. In tourism, particularly in the entertainment and attractions sector, selling intangible experiences is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, it has been recognised that experience is "the locus of value creation within the tourism sector" (Frochot and Batat, 2014, p.115). Nevertheless, it can be claimed that the experience economy has transcended all aspects of consumerism, with the desire for memorable and transformative experiences taking precedence over purchasing things or objects (Pine and Gilmore, 2013). In this thesis, attractions and activities serve as focal points to study decision-making in the destination. However, the tourist experience is not limited to conventional or assumed attractions and activities. Frochot and Batat (2014) present a list of characteristics that outline the tourist experience, which includes "the people met, the places visited, and activities participated in" (2014, p.115). There has been a debate in the academic literature on how attractions and activities are defined and subjective to the authors' scope and goals. In the next chapter, definitions of attractions and activities will be explored further. It has been posited that people do not view the world in the same way as academics and that the tourist experience is foremost a human experience. In a study evaluating tourist satisfaction at attractions, it is suggested by Vittersø et al., (2000) that people are immersed in the natural environment instead of separate attributes or characteristics. This viewpoint is presented as a more holistic approach than the historical body of work such as Swarbrooke (1995), which explains the tourist experience as separate transactional fragments that can be measured. This traditional viewpoint disregards the tourists' active and emotional role in their environment. Whilst experiencing the environment and the activities they partake in, people are immersed in their surroundings and are using all five senses, their whole body and mind. It is often where meaning, memories and emotions are created. The following table highlights the main differences between the traditional and experiential approaches to tourism marketing:

Table 3. Variables used in traditional marketing theories compared to the experiential approach adapted from Frochot & Batat (2014, p.111)

	Traditional Approaches	**Experiential approaches**
Stimuli	Verbal	Non-verbal
	Tangible	Sensorial
Consumer Objective	Maximise Utility	Experience lived
	Extrinsic objectives	Intrinsic objective
	Utilitarian criteria	Esthetical and symbolic criteria
Goal Decision	Maximise utility & Value	Maximise emotional benefits
	Formulate preferences with multi attribute comparisons	Holistic perception
Mediating variables	Attitudes	Emotions, Feelings
Post purchase evaluation	Satisfaction	Pleasure, Memory
Involvement	Level of Involvement	Involvement Type

The meaning of the tourist experience is a combination of symbolic, social, and environmental aspects, along with the subjective and personal motivations of the tourist or travel group. Furthermore, the tourism experience takes on further intangibility since the experience stays with the consumer-post experience and lives on as a memory (Pine and Gilmore, 2013). Hedonic consumption encompasses "those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products" Holbrook and Hirschman, (1982, p.92). Indeed, not all experiences are hedonic, but the hedonic element should be considered part of the tourist experience. Based on a review of the literature, Frochot and Batat (2014) compiled a list of all the attributes that define experiential tourism that include: People create meaning through direct experience; Experience includes the people met, the places visited, and the activities participated in; Experience creates memories; experience is personal; experience is emotional; experience can be co-created and has the power to transform (pp.115-116). Since visiting activities and attractions are part of the tourism experience, this study will consider the tourist experience as described by the participants.

MacCannell (1976) wrote that the new wave of tourists were searching for authenticity, meaningful interactions and a break from everyday routines. In this book, a distinction is made between ordinary life and time spent on holiday. Life at home is predictable and inauthentic, while travel is exotic and has the power to be transcendent. Cohen (1979, p.181) argued that ''tourism is essentially a temporary reversal of everyday activities - it is a no-work, no-care, no-thrift situation''. Uriely (2005) cites Turner and Ash (1975) to affirm the short-term release that tourists experience from their day-to-day routines, which in turn allows for new viewpoints on their lives and the suspension of normative values. However, since the 1970s, travel has been through a metamorphosis: cheap airlines have opened travel to more people; frequent travel has been normalised; business travel has increased with the advent of globalisation; remote working has coincided with the popularity and glamorisation of digital nomad lifestyles where people travel extensively while working from laptops and mobile phones. The stereotypical (British) once-a-year holiday for a week or two in the summer is no longer as commonplace. People take many different kinds of holidays that include: short breaks; day trips; micro-adventures; long-haul international trips; they combine work with travel and tour countries and continents for long periods.

Visitor attractions have also been approached from a cognitive position (Ram, Björk and Weidenfeld, 2016) focusing on how tourists perceive authenticity and develop a sense of connection to a place. Rather than considering experiences broadly, this research specifically investigates how tourists perceive the authenticity of major visitor attractions in Helsinki and Jerusalem. The paper suggests that the authenticity of attractions is contingent on the heritage value, iconicity, and location of the attraction. Authenticity is also found to be influenced by the subjective and psychological qualities of the tourist. The research suggests that perceived authenticity can be increased by storytelling and innovative interpretation at attractions. While the study had limitations, since it reviewed four attractions in two cities, it made a valuable contribution by uncovering "empirically significant close relations between two theoretical constructs: authenticity and place attachment" (Ram, Björk and Weidenfeld, 2016,p.116).

It is argued that this societal change in travel, becoming more globalised and normative, has yet to be reflected in the general theories (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016). Some writers challenge this assumption that travel is out of the ordinary and suggest that the tourist experience is now every day. Larsen (2019, p.3) states that travel is now a normative behaviour that people take with them as their "baggage", which includes "social habits, small daily rituals, precious

objects, mundane technologies and significant others". There is an overflow from everyday life into the travel experience, which includes activities such as reading the news, using social media and other habits. Mobile technology has further enmeshed travel everyday by the extension of mobile technology, such as taking photos, searching and sharing information and staying in touch on social media (Wang, Park and Fesenmaier, 2012). Further to this, it is suggested that escaping from everyday life is merely an image or a performance. In The Tourist Gaze, Urry and Larsen (2011) further the concept of performative behaviour by suggesting that the presence of others affects the gaze as well as cultural discourse and representations. For example, families no longer at school or work while on holiday perform happiness. Birenboim (2016, p.10) presents work on post-modern tourism and experiences in a research paper. In this paper, "subjective momentary experiences" are offered as highly situational and location-specific, and are an affective state (rather than cognitive) whereby "happiness, satisfaction, and self-actualisation" are the most critical aspects of the experience. The author argues the relevance of the "subjective momentary experience" because of today's fast-paced life, the ubiquity of mobile and WIFI data, and the interconnectivity of mobile technology to measure the above with geolocation technology. Further, he states that these experiences are unpredictable and change over time. This position implies that the decision-making process regarding attractions and activities might not embody a complex, multifaceted, or high-risk nature. Should tourism activities become perceived as mundane or routine, their perceived value as special or extraordinary experiences diminishes. Consequently, this shift in perception may lead to a predominance of heuristics or mental shortcuts in the decision-making approaches of modern tourists. This view of decision-making processes suggests a potential underestimation of the nuanced and dynamic factors that influence tourist choices, underscoring the need for a deeper exploration of the mechanisms involved in contemporary tourism behaviour.

2.16 ATTRACTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Attractions "include landscapes to observe, activities to participate in, and experiences to remember" (Lew, 1987, p.554). It has been said that the anticipated tourist experience is directly related to the destination and its innate attractions (Erik Cohen, 1979), and attraction preference has been said to impact destination choice directly (Rubright *et al.*, 2016). "Without tourist attractions, there would be no tourism (Gunn, 1972, p.24), and without tourism, there would be no tourist attractions." (Lew, 1987, p.554). Tourist attractions are indeed an essential

part of the product offering of a destination; Ram, Björk and Weidenfeld, (2016) state that visitor attractions are viewed as an economic stimulus for destinations. The following section will review visitor attractions and activities from the marketing perspective, management, definitions and decision-making literature.

In the tourism management literature, attractions and activities are often positioned as destination *attributes* within conceptual frameworks of Tourism Management. The conceptual model below situates tourist activity on the left side under tourism behaviours. In contrast, tourism developments (the closest reference to attractions) are positioned on the right under destination characteristics. They are individual elements that combine to form the tourist experience and destination. The first implication is that the tourist attraction, indeed the background is a co-creation between the tourist and the destination development. The second implication is that the attraction is independent and does not exist without the destination. It is part of the destination within the tourism framework. There is an interdependence that connects destination selection, attractions and activity choice. For instance, choosing a coastal destination with highly rated beaches offers travellers sea swimming and beach activities, while cities typically offer purpose-built cultural and touristic attractions. Destinations will have inherent characteristics and limitations, predetermining what is available to tourists. Tourist management models such as the following present the tourism environment as an ecosystem of discrete parts that can be measured and tested (Inkson and Minneart, 2018, p.26). Recently, Navarro-Ruiz and McKercher (2020) highlighted that attractions have been under-researched in the tourism literature.

According to Swarbrooke, (2002) the attractions sector is complicated and less comprehensively understood than other tourism industry sectors. There have been several attempts to define attractions; however, due to their fragmented geographical locations and the sheer variety of attraction types, it is difficult to present a generic definition. Variables include location, size, funding type, heritage status, seasonality, and purpose. A broad scope of organisational goals could include entertainment, education, preservation, or conservation. Business models could be commercial, charitable, not-for-profit or subsidised. Furthermore, certain attractions and events rely on their location, such as heritage sites or specialist events (Sharples, Yeoman and Leask, 1999).

Figure 11. Conceptual Framework of Tourism Inkson and Minneart, (2018, p.26)
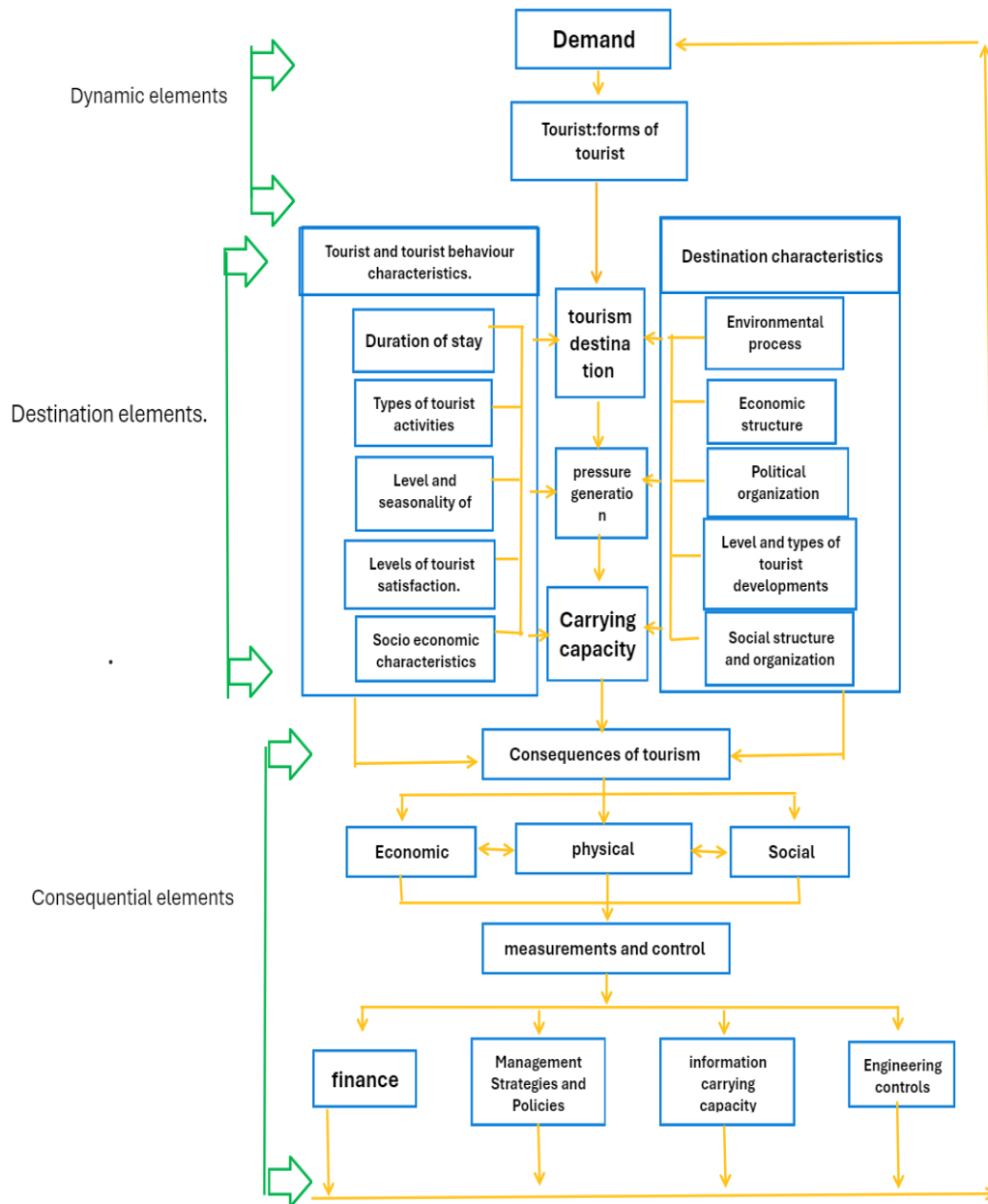
2.17 DEFINITIONS OF ATTRACTIONS

Attractions, as defined in the literature, consist of three main components: a tourist, a site of interest, and a marker or image that gives significance to the site (MacCannell, 1976). Lew,

(2000) expands on this, suggesting that attractions are integral to tourism systems and can vary in typology depending on their marketing or planning purposes. Moreover, it is emphasised that attractions do not exist without tourists; rather, they become so by creating a tourism system that designates and elevates them. Swarbrooke, (1995) describes attractions as single units or small-scale areas that motivate people to travel from their homes to visit for leisure, while Soteriades et al., (2012) define attractions as focal points for recreational and educational activities, attracting both day visitors and tourists. In the first definition by MacCannell, (1976), the criteria of only three elements—tourist, site, and marker—mean that almost anything can be defined as a tourist attraction (Lew, 1987). The second definition by Lew (2000) further conceptualises the marker element, which is the marketing information about an attraction which signifies and motivates the tourist to visit. Location (destination) is part of the definition, furthering the idea that the attraction does not exist without the destination. The third definition presented by Swarbrooke, (2002) includes the prerequisite that distance from home must be travelled. It is also slightly dated in that it omits 'groupings' of attractions in many destinations and (for example Zip World has multiple attractions marketed both as a group and as individual attractions). The fourth definition alludes to another ongoing debate about whether attractions should be called "visitor" or "tourist" attractions (Weidenfeld and Leask, 2013). They differentiate between day trippers (visitors) and overnight stays (tourists). Further to these definitions, attractions can be subcategorised.

Swarbrooke (2002) categorises attractions into four main types: Natural features; Human-made structures originally intended for purposes other than tourism, like religious sites, now attracting visitors for leisure; Human-made structures intentionally designed to attract visitors, such as theme parks; and special events. Kušen, (2010), p.418 classified sixteen types of attractions as follows: "Geological features; climate; water; flora; fauna; protected natural heritage; protected cultural heritage; the culture of life and work; famous persons and historical events; special events/happenings; cultural and religious institutions; natural spas; sport and recreation facilities; tourism paths, trails, roads; attractions for attractions; tourism para-attractions. The considerable variety of tourist attractions makes it difficult to generalise and discriminate between attractions and other tourism resources (Lew, 1987). It is suggested that tourist spaces such as cruise ships, resort hotels and other services have the same attributes as attractions. Furthermore, it is suggested that tourists can sometimes become attractions (MacCannell, 1976). The extant literature has sought to determine which tourism products classify as tourist attractions, grouped, or categorised by typology or taxonomy (Kušen, 2010;

Weidenfeld and Leask, 2013; McKercher, 2016). Lew, (1987) offers a typology of tourist attractions whereby attractions are organised into three smaller groups: Nature, the interface of Nature and Humans, and Human. In this typology, all artificial structures, including shops, restaurants, festivals and events, are included in human attractions. In contrast, Kušen, (2010, p.413) differentiates pure tourist attractions from other ancillary tourist products and attractions. It is argued that attractions are used by tourists (in the majority), are the main reason for visiting a destination, and are where the motivation to stay is travel driven. It is stated that attractions lack proper definitions, and too often, other tourism products are treated as attractions, such as restaurants or shops.

McKercher, (2016) approaches categorising tourism products from a taxonomy system, grouping similar items hierarchically. Tourism products are grouped under a needs-based system where the tourist needs are classified as: Pleasure; Personal Quest; Human Endeavour; Nature; and Business. Tourist attractions feature most prominently under the Pleasure group, while Nature and other activities are classified under Nature and Museums under Human Endeavour. While the research does not attempt to include motivations or the decision-making process, it provides a valuable visual representation of the sheer choice of activities and attractions available to tourists. The study also acknowledges that tourists can have multiple needs, which can cross over various categories during a single trip since, in recent years, it has become more popular to mix business travel and destination weddings. Leisure time can be combined with other trip purposes. McKercher, (2016) suggests that top attractions are not the primary pull factors to destinations that previous studies have suggested. It is a destination's combined attributes that meet the needs of the tourist. For this thesis to investigate the decision-making process in attractions and activities, it has been necessary to understand where attractions and activities sit within tourism management and how they are classified. The literature differs on what is and is not considered a tourist attraction or activity. The viewpoints range from the seminal work by MacCannell, (1976) that suggests all tourist activity, including the former, a site, and an image or marker, are attractions. However, Kušen, (2010) proposes a far narrower view that attractions should be limited to physical and classic tourist-designed attractions. In practice, tourists spend some parts of their holidays doing everyday things like shopping, practising hobbies or sports, and eating at restaurants, as well as new and exciting activities like city tours, visiting nature, notable landmarks, or purpose-built theme parks and attractions sites as is outlined in other taxonomies (McKercher, 2016). Hence, this thesis will

encompass the divergent range of tourist attractions and activities, rather than focusing on one attraction type like museums or a narrow group like adventure tourism.

This thesis adopts a holistic approach to studying tourist attractions and activities, recognising the importance of a comprehensive understanding of the tourism system. Attractions, as central elements of this system, are multifaceted and encompass a wide range of experiences and sites that draw tourists. According to MacCannell, (1976), attractions are constituted by three main components: the tourist, the site of interest, and a marker or image that imbues the site with significance. Lew (2000) expands on this definition, emphasising that attractions are integral to tourism systems and vary depending on their marketing or planning purposes. Swarbrooke, (1995) and Soteriades et al., (2012) further detail that attractions can be anything from single units to small-scale areas that motivate people to travel for leisure, educational, or recreational activities. This broad conceptualisation suggests that almost anything can be considered a tourist attraction if it draws tourists and is part of a designated tourism system.

The literature categorises attractions into natural features, human-made structures (both originally intended for non-tourism purposes and those designed to attract visitors), and special events. This categorisation highlights the diversity of attractions, from geological features and cultural heritage to sports facilities and special events. Lew, (1987) and Kušen, (2010) discuss the challenges in generalising attractions, suggesting that tourist spaces like cruise ships and even tourists themselves can become attractions. This diversity is further explored in McKercher's (2016) taxonomy, which groups tourism products based on tourist needs, such as Pleasure, Personal Quest, and Nature, among others. This approach acknowledges the wide array of activities and attractions available to tourists and the possibility of multiple needs being met during a single trip. In summary, the literature underscores the complexity and diversity of tourist attractions and activities, challenging narrow definitions and emphasizing the need for a general understanding. This thesis reflects this perspective by considering all attractions and activities as important components of the tourism system, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of tourist decision-making processes.

Figure 12. A Tourism Product Taxonomy adapted from McKercher, (2016, p.202)
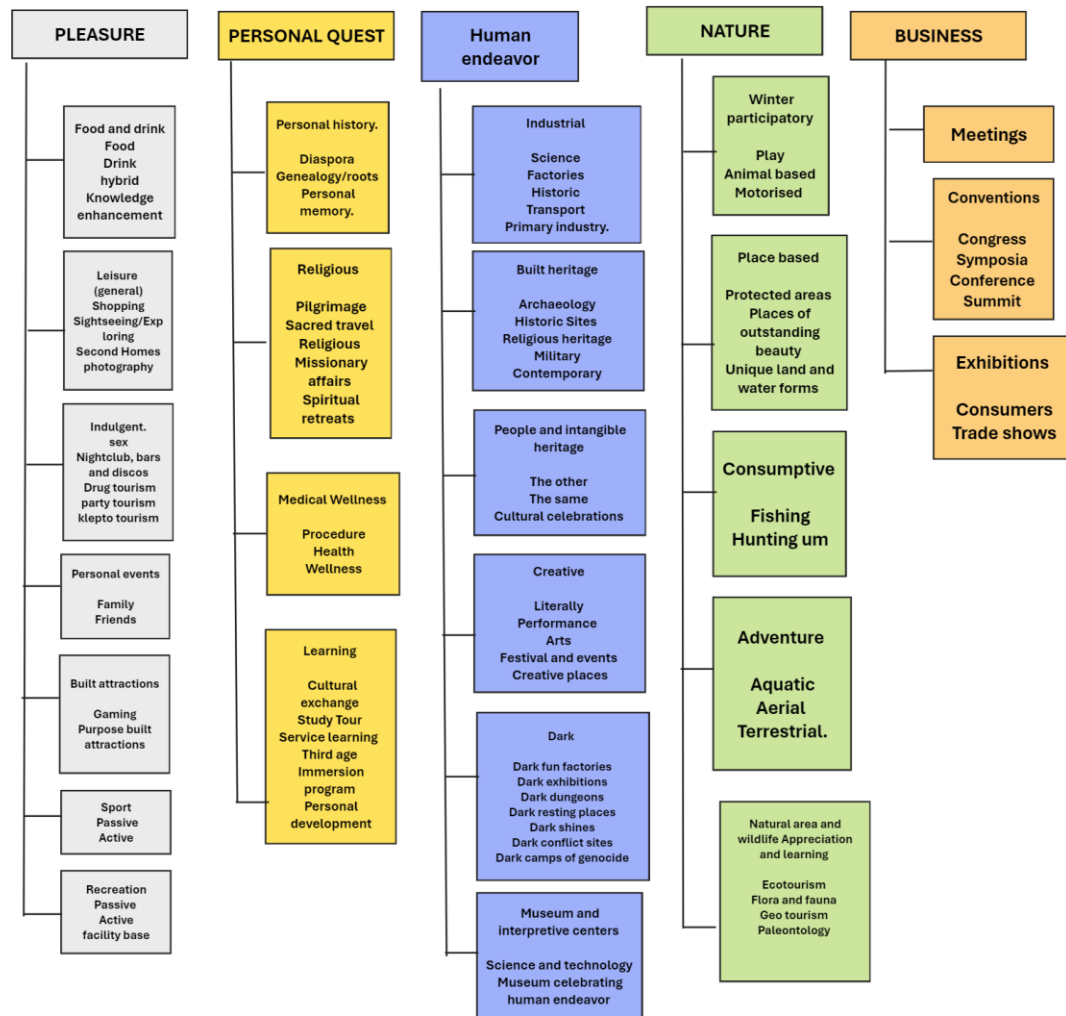
2.18 MARKETING OF ATTRACTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Marketing activity is a core business function and is significant to tourist attractions (Soteriades, Snyman and Varvaressos, 2012). Many tourist destinations offer a wide range of attractions and activities for tourists and visitors. It is often a competitive marketplace, and attractions must appeal to many visitors. There is a particular focus in the industry on drawing *new* visitors every season, with less emphasis on repeat visitors. Therefore, engaging new tourists through the marketing mix is vital for an attraction's bottom line. Effectively, first-time visitors are three times more likely to visit an attraction than repeat visitors and are more inclined to spend money accessing paid-for attractions (Litvin, 2007). According to McKercher and du Cros (2012), there is insufficient marketing expertise among managers of small

attractions. While the marketing strategy of attractions will vary, it is suggested by Soteriades, Snyman and Varvaressos, (2012, p.663) that they have deficiencies which include "lack of suitable marketing information, limited marketing research-based, limited use of branding", which influences management and diminishes their marketing power. Indeed, with the advent of the internet, the marketing of attractions has become multifarious, and there are dozens of offline and online information platforms. It is unclear whether marketing managers know which information sources are utilised by visitor segments and at what stage in the decision-making process they are most influential. Improved knowledge of the decision-making process can help DMOs understand the "underlying drivers of decisions and follow reasoning processes through to purchase decisions" (Moore et al., 2012, p.644). The study commissioned by the New Zealand Government to enhance tourism impact was deemed to add value by exploring the "micro-detail of tourist decision-making" (Moore et al., 2012, p.644).

The growing field of accessible tourism research has increasingly turned its attention to the experiences of persons with disabilities (PWDs) within the tourism industry (Cloquet et al., 2018). An empirical investigation into visitor attractions in Cornwall, England, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative content analyses of promotional materials, exemplifies this research (Cloquet *et al.*, 2018). The findings of the study reveal a significant gap in the visibility and communication of access information, with many suppliers failing to provide adequate details in both print and online formats. This lack of information hinders the first step towards inclusivity. The study also uncovers a disparity in the marketing of accessibility based on the size and legal status of organizations. Furthermore, it found that information about access was more likely to be online, than on paper information sources. Moreover, the representation of PWDs in marketing imagery is notably scarce, perpetuating a sense of invisibility and often conveying ambiguous messages. Such marketing approaches contrast sharply with those targeting able-bodied persons (ABPs), focusing more on access needs than on the experiential aspects of tourism. People with disabilities face obstacles in tourism particularly in the dependability and accessibility of information about tourism products and destination (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011 cited in Colquet *et al*., 2018). Tourist attractions and activity providers need to consider a diverse range of needs from potential visitors in their marketing materials in order to ensure inclusivity.

Forecasting tourist demand is a key marketing function for tourist attractions and activities, and the predictive power of artificial neural networks and linking them to Google Trends were

examined in the context of London Museums by Volchek et al., (2019). The study found that the networks were able to predict visitor demand successfully for 2-, 3- and 6-month time periods. The study was limited by the narrow sample of free entry museums, rather than a diverse range of attractions. It acknowledges that diverse needs will motivate tourists to visit different attractions. The study places considerable emphasis on analysing online search query data as a means of predicting tourism demand. There is growing recognition of the value that big data and user-generated content can provide in understanding and anticipating tourist behaviour patterns. However, it is important to acknowledge that the study's emphasis on internet search patterns presents a potential limitation, as it overlooks the role of in-person, offline, and traditional information search methods employed by tourists. While online search data offers valuable insights into consumer behaviour and decision-making processes, it represents only one facet of the multifaceted information acquisition strategies adopted by travellers. Neglecting the influence of interpersonal interactions, physical information sources (e.g., brochures, guidebooks), and conventional media channels may result in an incomplete understanding of the complex relationship between various information sources and their impact on attraction and activity choices. To address this limitation, this thesis will address this gap by collecting insights into the full range of information sources, both digital and analogue, through in-depth interviews and surveys.

2.19 PART 2 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of tourist attractions and activities within the context of the tourism experience reveals a multifaceted and dynamic field that significantly influences destination appeal and visitor satisfaction. This chapter has delved into the various dimensions of tourist behaviour, the decision-making processes involved in selecting attractions and activities, and the broader implications for the tourist experience. Through examining the motivations behind tourist choices, from the pursuit of authentic experiences to the influence of push and pull factors, it becomes evident that attractions and activities are not merely components of the tourism product but are central to the creation of meaningful and memorable experiences. The discussions on the marketing of attractions and activities, alongside the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital landscape, underscore the importance of strategic engagement with potential visitors and gaps in the knowledge of practitioners. Furthermore, the consideration of accessibility and the need for inclusive marketing practices

highlights the imperative for destinations to cater to a diverse range of needs. As the tourism industry continues to evolve, so too must the understanding of the complex relationship between tourist attractions, activities, and the overall experience.

CHAPTER 2. PART 3: THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN DECISION-MAKING

2.20 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews information sources in tourism in relation to the research questions. This thesis investigates how tourists use offline and online information sources when choosing attractions and activities at their destinations. It seeks to understand the relevance of traditional sources of information in a digital age. This highlights the research gap in this domain. Since the proliferation of technology in tourism, there has been a shift in interest from academia and industry towards online marketing channels. There is also a tendency for information sources to be considered through the lens of the destination rather than activities and attractions. First, the *role* of information sources in the tourist decision-making process is evaluated, followed by the *stages* of information gathering in the decision-making process. Drawing on *Construal Level Theory*, which elucidates how psychological distance influences perceptions and interpretations, this study will explore how tourists perceive and evaluate travel options based on their temporal and psychological proximity to the destination. There is a discussion on *information overload* and how *familiarity with place* influences decision-making. This is followed by an evaluation of offline and online sources, including ICT; mobile technology; recommender systems; guidebooks; leaflets; advertising; word of mouth; online reviews; and tourist information offices.

2.21 THE NEED FOR INFORMATION

The intangible nature of tourism and hospitality products makes it difficult for consumers to evaluate their suitability before consumption, making information sources very important (Chang and Wang, 2019). Many attractions are notable enough to pull tourists to a destination and may not require any information search (Leiper, 1990). However, most rural attractions and activities are unknown beyond their local or regional catchment area. For instance, tourists visiting North Wales would probably be aware of Snowdon. Still, they might like to know what other events or activities are offered in the destination for themselves and their travel party. It is common for tourists to seek information about attraction attributes such as price, location or travel time to aid decision-making (Gretzel *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, the purpose of finding information is to reduce risk and enhance trip enjoyment (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012). Compared to other travel plans, activity and attraction selection is more fluid than other travel

arrangements since other decisions, such as destination and transport, must occur before the trip, and accommodation can be sourced on arrival or very close to the trip date (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2016). Attraction selection can be made during the planning stages (D Wang, Park and Fesenmaier, 2012), but increasingly it is done during the holiday (Hwang and Fesenmaier, 2011).

In a 2019 visitor study (McAllister, Blunt and Davies, 2021) for Wales, it was found that 70% of tourists used information sources to help plan their trip to Wales in the pre-arrival stages. With 52% using exclusively online sources which has remained the same since 2016. 14% used both offline and online resources. A decrease in offline sources has been noted, with leaflets and brochures falling from 21% to 14% since 2015 and other offline resources falling from 6% to 3%. During their stay, it was found that 60% of visitors searched for information while in the destination. They found that 28% used online sources exclusively, with 19% choosing both offline and online resources; 14% choosing offline resources only and 34% not using any information sources. This data reinforces the importance of information sources in both pre arrival and during the holiday. Though it does not extend to specific sources or help us understand the value of the various information sources for attractions and activities. Grønflaten, (2009) found that first-time visitors preferred face-to-face interactions when planning a trip, whereas returning visitors booked online. Face-to-face usage of travel agents and printed materials are also preferred by some tourists to avoid risk (Alvarez and Asugman, 2005). Conversely, more adventurous tourists are more likely to speak to friends and family for information (Alvarez and Asugman, 2005). Though some researchers have compared offline and online sources and found the sources complemented each other (Ho, Lin and Chen, 2012). Murphy and Chen (2016) investigated the planning stages of the tourist and ascertained that in the planning process, the first digital stage is to use search engines to locate information and check suppliers and online travel agents. Litvin and Hoffman, (2012) found that social media and review sites such as Facebook and Trip Advisor are used mainly at the post-purchase stage.

2.22 STAGES OF DECISION-MAKING

Tourism information search is complex and multistage (Hwang and Fesenmaier, 2011). Many models state that decision-making begins with an information search (Decrop and Snelders,

2005) that precedes choice, and information search alone is a powerful predictor of choice (Volchek *et al.*, 2018). It is suggested that there are three stages: first, information search; second, travel planning; and third, trip arrangements. Although some academics acknowledge that the information search process is dynamic and can occur at all planning stages, including post-destination (Volchek et al., 2018), decision-making is commonly theorised as a linear and sequential process: need recognition, information search, assessment of alternatives and purchase and post-purchase activities (Ho, Lin and Chen, 2012). It is claimed that before deciding which attractions to visit, tourists acquaint themselves with the available options and appraise them regarding their suitability before deciding. This always happens before a decision is made (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015); irrespective of the model applied (Hyde, 2008), the information search process is known to precede tourists' choice of destination, accommodations, and other travel-supporting services.

Decision-making is typically delineated in the literature as having three phases: first is choosing the destination; second the accommodation and third attractions and activities. With most studies on decision-making focus on destination choice (Moore *et al.*, 2012) or accommodation selection. Attraction and activity selection has yet to be investigated to the same extent. According to Correia, Kozak and Tão, (2014) tourists often make their travel decisions in stages, rather than all at once. Understanding the timing of these choices is crucial for strategic policy making, management actions, and marketing strategies. For instance, if tourists first decide on their destination before choosing accommodation, marketing efforts for hotel facilities could be timed more effectively following prior communications about countries and regions. Similarly, it's important to recognize the sequential influence of vacation elements on tourists' choices. Once a destination is selected, it narrows down accommodation options, affecting dining choices. By categorizing destinations within tourists' consideration sets, destination marketers can better position themselves competitively.

However, the idea of linear stages of decision-making has been opposed by other scholars, Walls, Okumus and Wang, (2011) found that decision-making is a continuous process and does not necessarily even start with the decision to go on holiday. They propose that situational factors and a lack of involvement counteract a linear decision-making process. Furthermore, their model presents two operating systems: affective and cognitive, that operate independently and together in the holiday decision-making process. The affective process is more flexible and, rather than a stepped process, is more circular. Earlier work by Decrop and Snelders,

(2005) theorised that decision-making was a constant process influenced by context, interpersonal factors, information search and emotional factors. While these studies offer a compelling alternative to the sequential decision-maker, their focus of study is on the core decision – about whether to take a vacation, and where to go on vacation, not how their itinerary will be planned and what attractions and activities to partake in. This thesis aims to close the research gap on in-destination attraction and activity selection.

2.23 CONSTRUAL LEVEL THEORY

Construal Level Theory (CLT) is a psychological theory that explains how individuals mentally represent and interpret events and information based on their psychological distance from those events. CLT suggests that people perceive events and information differently depending on whether they are temporally, spatially, socially, or hypothetically distant or close (Trope and Liberman, 2010). In the context of tourism decision-making, CLT can help understand how individuals perceive and evaluate different travel options and information sources based on their psychological and temporal distance (Sano *et al.*, 2024). Construal Level Theory (CLT) elucidates how individuals express, predict, evaluate, and behave based on different mental representations of psychological distance (Stephan, Liberman and Trope, 2010). Psychological distance is typically conceptualised across dimensions such as spatial distance (proximity or distance); temporal distance (near or distant future); social distance (familiar or unfamiliar individuals); and hypotheticality (real or imaginary scenarios (Trope and Liberman, 2010). CLT suggests that events anticipated in the near future tend to be depicted in a more tangible, specific manner, focusing on the "how" of the situation, consistent with low-level construal's (Wen and Shen, 2016). Conversely, events projected into the distant future are perceived in a broader, abstract manner, emphasizing the "why" of a situation (Cobbs, Schaefers and Groza, 2020) indicative of high-level construals. Tan, (2017) discovered that tourists exhibit a tendency to seek specific information as their trip approaches, indicating the growing significance of concrete details in tourist decision-making as the trip's temporal proximity increases. Whereas more abstract information is more likely to be sought by tourists when they are in the earlier, more temporally distant planning stages (Wang and Lehto, 2020).

In a study that reviewed social media content produced by the DMO and the effects of temporal distance (Sano *et al.*, 2024), it was found that emotionally driven messaging was not effective

in enhancing tourist attitudes when they were temporally close to visiting the destination. Indicating the closer tourists were to the destination temporally and psychologically – fact-based information was more useful. Furthermore, the frequent use of social media reduced the effectiveness of emotional or affective content. Thus, limiting the influence the DMO has on the tourist (through social media channels). Emotive messaging the "why" was only effective when the tourist was temporally distant from visiting the destination. The closer the tourist is to visiting the destination, the more they are interested in "how" they can enjoy the destination - lower-level construal information. However, with respect to heritage sites, natural beauty, food and activities, both cognitive and emotive messaging were still effective and influenced tourists who were temporally close to the vacation. Indicating that tourists are more interested in attractions and activities as they get closer to the holiday and are looking for inspiration for their itineraries. While the study primarily focused on destination promotion and social media messaging, its implications extend to attraction and activity decision-making. In this thesis, the survey will inquire about the types of information tourists sought at various stages, while interviews will delve into the information sources utilised both pre-arrival and during the trip. This approach offers insights into the application of CLT in destination information sources and decision-making processes related to attractions and activity selection.

In a study that explores heritage tourism from the perspective of CLT, Scarpi and Raggiotto, (2023) found that in the mindset of the tourist, heritage tourism was usually experienced by the tourist at a more abstract level, and they were more psychologically distant from the experience, though authenticity and engagement level moderated this construal level, and could lower it – bringing the tourist psychologically closer to the experience. "Particularly, vicarious and autobiographical memories strengthened tourists' engagement and perceived authenticity more than collective memories" (Scarpi and Raggiotto, 2023, p.7), meaning that if the tourist had some kind of connection to the heritage attraction, they felt psychologically closer to it.

2.24 FAMILIARITY WITH PLACE

Consider a scenario where a tourist possesses prior experience of a destination. In such instances, the individual likely harbours a comprehensive understanding of the destination's offerings, potentially diminishing the necessity for extensive information-seeking behaviour compared to encounters with unfamiliar locales. Notably, research exploring destination search behaviour has yielded divergent findings concerning the interplay between destination

familiarity and information search conduct (Baloglu, 2001; Lu & Chen, 2014, cited in Gursoy, del Chiappa and Zhang, 2018). McCabe, Li and Chen, (2016) suggest that in the tourism context, repeat visitors are not highly motivated to seek new information. Though it is recognised that for tourists, when far from home, information is a significant risk reducer, and the consumption of information carries over into post-trip in the guise of photos and information shared with friends and relatives (Correia, Kozak and Tão, 2014). It is pertinent to note that extant literature has yet to comprehensively scrutinise the ramifications of destination familiarity on the pursuit of attractions and activities. A study that utilised conjoint analysis investigated the information needs of both new and repeat visitors to Sardinia and discovered that during the pre-purchase stages, personal information sources such as friends and family, travel consultants, printed magazines and tour guides were most important to domestic returning visitors (Gursoy, Del Chiappa and Zhang, 2018). Conversely, domestic travellers with limited destination familiarity exhibited a pronounced reliance on online review platforms like TripAdvisor, supplemented by endorsements from friends and family. In contrast, international travellers unfamiliar with the destination preferred online personal information (such as social networking sites, online guides, review sites, microblogging sites and picture-sharing sites) as the most critical category. The general findings were surprising since they demonstrated that social media sites such as Facebook were not influential in selecting destinations for both domestic and international tourists.

In a study that focused on destination selection for tourists visiting Portuguese national parks, (Carneiro and Crompton, 2010) it was found that tourists less familiar with the destination were more likely to search for information. Furthermore, that financial constraints stimulated information search in both early and late stages of searching, though time or accessibility did not. It was also found that distance from the destination affected the likelihood of searching for information, so the farther away the more likely to search. Therefore, information targeted towards international visitors should be prioritised by DMOs and understand the different information needs of different travellers. One limitation of the study is the potential cognitive bias of the participants since they had already chosen the destination at the time of the study. Understanding whether familiarity with the destination impacts information search behaviour for attractions and activities is considered one of the multiple facets that contribute to the findings of this thesis. This is aimed at bridging the research gap and enhancing the comprehension of tourist attraction and activity selection, as well as information search patterns, among both familiar and unfamiliar visitors to the destination

2.25 ICT

The travel and tourism industry is well known for being information-intensive (Poon. A, 1993). However, in recent times, it has never been easier to find information online to assist with decision-making, mainly from personal mobile devices. However, there is a tendency in much of the literature to emphasise smartphone use and online information search over traditional offline sources of information. It is widely written that the advent of the internet and ICT has improved tourism, with information readily available whenever the tourist needs it. This is reflected in the significant interest from tourism academics in smartphone use, Google trends, big data, mobile technology, AI and recommender systems in the study of decision-making and information use. It has been intimated that printed information is declining, and digital content is more accessible and convenient for tourists on the move (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). Furthermore, mobile devices enable more spontaneous decisions (Choe, Fesenmaier and Vogt, 2017). Tourists use various online sources for information, from general sites to specific websites, including "travel portals, online travel agencies, online reservation systems, and social media and news websites" (Xiang *et al.*, 2015). In a quantitative study that compared face to face information sources with online sources of information for holiday purchases it was found that independent travellers were more likely than tourists on organised tours to use the internet to do travel research (Grønflaten, 2009).

Personal mobile devices increasingly support today's world, and travel behaviour has become more dynamic and socially connected (Lamsfus et al., 2015). Since the 1990s, there has been a steep rise in the availability of information because of Information Computer Technology and the internet. Tourism is no exception, and tourists are reliant more than ever on online search tools (Xiang et al., 2008; Volchek, 2018). Many people have become dependent on it for daily use, and it has been labelled the "external memory" (p.778) for countless people (Sparrow, Liu and Wegner, 2011). In the earlier times of e-commerce searching online for information was favoured by younger generations. Still, it is pervasive across all generations, though younger people are more active online than older ones (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). Even though some segments of tourists perceive using online tools as lacking trust or having poor usability, most users have adapted to e-tourism (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). Search engines such as Google, Bing and Baidu dominate globally (Kim, Xiang and Fesenmaier, 2015). Though search engines are commonly used for all travel decisions, including attraction and activity selection (Fesenmaier et al., 2011), destination and

accommodation websites are deemed more valuable than search engines for travel information (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015).

The use of the internet, and particularly mobile phones, has been a keen area of interest by tourism academics in exploring how it will shape the information architecture of tourism (Xiang, 2018) and even so far as to claim it will reshape tourism (Tribe and Mkono, 2017). With 7.1 billion mobile phone users globally (statista.com) in 2021 and 4.6 billion social media accounts (statista.com), it is no wonder that this research area has received so much attention. However, much of the research on social media and smartphone use has failed to separate the information search process from the decision-making process. Studies such as Volcheck et al., (2018) use Google trends data to predict visits to attractions to circumvent the holistic and whole decision-making process. Social media has become not just a place to share travel plans post-trip but a tool to check and reference plan details; indeed, many travellers use a vast source of information points to gather specifics and collect electronic word of mouth. Positive online reviews generated from the social setting are essential influencers of behaviour because they promote attitudes and intentions (Pantano, Priporas and Stylos, 2017).

Furthermore, "Interpersonal influence and word-of-mouth (WOM) is ranked as the most important information source when a consumer is making a purchase decision" (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2019, p.458). Smartphones and tablets have been designed to work with tourism-focused geolocation apps. This new technology that tracks live tourism behaviour is said to be disruptive (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). The use of smartphones has blurred the lines between work and pleasure since they also contain an electronic collection of our social networks, hobbies, and work-life through email accounts, chat apps, social media or news channels (Xiang, 2018). It is deemed that spontaneity in decision-making is also a consequence of smartphones since information is available at any moment or place (Anckar and D'Incau 2002).

Some researchers have advocated that recommender systems are now essential to assist tourists in making sense of the volume of information and personalisation of information. However, that would take decision-making out of the hands of the tourist and enable algorithms to control or influence behaviour. A conceptual paper (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015) suggests that information should be made more relevant for the user by recognising user preferences and context and automatically making recommendations and co-creating experiences with the

tourist. The conceptual model highlights how central social media has become for some travellers and the pervasiveness of cocreated user and industry content. In some countries, there is a move towards smart destinations, with the infrastructure of ICT deemed an essential consideration by some destinations (such as Dubai) to improve the quality and reduce the intricacy of the e-tourism experience (Lamsfus et al., 2015). Though some authors note there is a barrier to international visitors using phones abroad because mobile companies charge roaming fees (Mang, Piper and Brown, 2016). A conceptual study by Sigala (2016) proposes that tourism experiences are enhanced by technology with personalised and socially constructed dimensions. Social media facilitates an iterative exchange among tourists and their social networks, thus contributing to the ongoing development of tourism experiences. For example, smartphones can be likened to a travel buddy for searching for new information. It implies that technology and social media influence are viewed as new actors influencing tourism experiences to build social capital and social media profiles. New aspects, such as the selfie gaze, are introduced, meaning that tourists make decisions based on the images and new content they can upload to their social media profiles.

2.26 INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Technology has made it both easier and harder for people to plan and subsequently make decisions (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016). Information overload and confusion over choice have been documented in the extant literature (Lu, Gursoy and Lu, 2016). When there is too much information for the tourist to process, it leads to overwhelm. Being overwhelmed can lead to confusion or paralysis in decision-making. Additionally, products that are too similar can also lead to confusion and indecision (Kent & Allen cited in Lu, Gursoy and Lu, 2016). Much of this confusion is recognised as the proliferation of online sources and websites that are indistinguishable from each other. In dual system processing, system one processes are fast, automatic and unconscious, while system two are slow, analytical and is a conscious process. System One requires minimal effort, is important in enabling perception and recognition and is a largely nonverbal process. While System Two is linked to vocal interactions and working memory (Viswanathan and Jain, 2013). Arguably, when tourists become overwhelmed, they rely on the heuristic process in system one. Besides, cognitive models rely on memory load and assume that individuals can deal with large quantities of information and remember them. When memory overloads, people switch to mental shortcuts or emotional systems to make decisions (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016).

2.27 TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

Tourist information centres and bureaus were once prominent in the information search stage, where visitors could pick up maps, leaflets and brochures or speak to information officers. Located in airports, train stations and town or city centres, they are a signal for all visitors. They have declined recently, with some DMOs cutting costs and diverting funds to online resources. A Google search of tourist information offices closed in the UK revealed that since 2015, many prominent cities, including Cardiff and Birmingham, have closed their operated tourist information centres, with smaller towns following suit. Tourist information centres are also a valuable resource for local attractions and activities, as well as hotels and restaurants for displaying leaflets and brochures. They can act as a hub for regional tourism endeavours. A Korean segmentation study by Lyu and Hwang (2015) investigated whether tourist information offices are relevant in the digital age. In their findings, they discovered that tourists with higher levels of mobile and internet device *ease of use and perception* were less likely to visit a local tourist information centre. However, higher use of social media had a positive relationship with visiting a TIC. It was concluded that social media use was related to more social personality characteristics.

Additionally, tourists who took frequent domestic trips were more likely to visit a TIC. These findings suggest surprisingly that staycation tourists would be more likely to see a tourist information centre when those domestic tourists presumably have more knowledge about a place than another country. However, language barriers could be another factor that would deter Korean tourists from visiting tourist information in other countries. Wilson and Moore, (2018) investigated naturalistic decision-making at tourist information centres in New Zealand with the discursive action model framework. It highlights the positive aspects of professional face-to-face interactions, such as conversations, trust, authenticity, and negative emotion avoidance. It was found that the staff at tourist information centres were more than gatekeepers of information. They offered a beneficial selection of choices but were creative and responsive co-constructors of suitable decisions. Furthermore, it brings to light the socially embedded nature of tourism that studies of mobile apps and Google trends data fail to recognise. Going to a tourist information centre was viewed as tourists seeking an authentic experience of being a tourist.

2.28 TRAVEL GUIDEBOOKS & PRINTED MATERIALS

Travel guidebooks such as the *Rough Guide* and *Lonely Planet* are long established in the publishing industry and have been available since 1982 and 1973, respectively. Recently, such guidebooks are available in print format and as eBooks and audiobooks and have websites promoting travel blogs and tips. Guidebooks usually have a fee to purchase compared to many online sources that are free of charge. It is said that cost is the main barrier to purchasing a guidebook, as well as the hassle of going to buy one, the cognitive work of having to read it, and the job of physically carrying it around on holiday (Pan and Fesenmaier, 2006). The era of printed materials and the publishing industry has declined since the advent of digital information, and with that, the behaviour of tourists has changed. Before digitization, travellers often made all trip decisions using printed materials, which would be made before leaving home (Choe, Fesenmaier and Vogt, 2017). Considering this, it begs the question: what is the place of guidebooks and other printed materials in the digital age? Guidebooks offer tourists a one-stop-shop guide to the destination and its attributes, and professional writers usually write them that fact-check the book's content. Though the guidebook market has shrunk for some time, sales have increased again recently (Dickinson *et al.*, 2014). Guidebooks are closely linked with functional decision-making needs such as planning, acquiring knowledge, lessening uncertainty and refining the itinerary (Vogt & Fesenmaier,1998).

A study that interviewed tourists on their use of guidebooks (Mieli and Zillinger, 2020) found that although participants said that sometimes guidebooks were not necessarily due to the ease of getting information from their smartphones, they were still *nice to have.* Furthermore, guidebooks were viewed as a *curated set* of information and were more efficient than searching for information online. However, it was also said that guidebooks required more cognitive effort compared to the ease of searching for a particular detail online because, in a guidebook, it was necessary to remember which page the information was in the book. A different paper that investigated changes to information needs compared two parallel studies surveying tourists in 1992 and 2016 (Choe, Fesenmaier and Vogt, 2017). It was found that pre-travel information needs were essentially the same in both years, though on-the-go travel needs had changed. This new behaviour was linked to smartphone use to aid decision-making whilst on holiday. Furthermore, people sought more information in 2016 compared to 1992 due to traveller's increased experience and intelligence. The study differentiates between functional and hedonic

information needs and traveller's decisions. It suggests that innovation and hedonic information needs are significantly more important during the trip than before.

2.29 WORD OF MOUTH

In tourism, it is known that people enjoy talking about their travels and sharing their expertise and knowledge: "Word of mouth stems from an overall positive evaluation of a destination and reflects high levels of attitudinal loyalty" (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007, cited in (Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou and Apostolopoulou, 2018, p.506). According to Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, (2008), interpersonal influence and word of mouth are considered the most critical information source when purchasing. From the customer's perspective, receiving a recommendation from a trusted person reduces risk because "reference group evaluation is an important aspect of the decision-making process" (Lewis & Chambers 2000 cited in Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008, p.458). The intention to participate in positive WOM can be significant in generating new tourists, but negative word of mouth can also have a detrimental effect on destinations and local businesses (Crick, 2003). Measuring WOM intention is said to be a better gauge of positive tourism experiences than measuring satisfaction (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006). It is thought that opinion leaders drive WOM and spread information to opinion followers (Piirto, 1992, cited in Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008). Before the digitisation of information sources, personal word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family was considered more influential and trustworthy than other forms of marketing, such as advertising. Online word of mouth, such as consumer-generated content, is deemed to be one of the most valuable and trusted assets compared to advertising and destination websites (Dickinger, 2011). Websites like TripAdvisor that collate customer reviews for hotels, restaurants and attractions garner huge interest from tourists and are an essential part of the marketing mix for businesses. However, the reliability of these websites has been questioned since there has been a proliferation of fake accounts and fake reviews reported by the media (Filieri, 2015). A study that measured trust and satisfaction with online reviews found that trust was directly linked to the previous experience of website users. So, if the user had a positive experience with reviews, they were likelier to use websites such as TripAdvisor. The quality of the website and the information were also factors that contributed to trust.

2.31 PART 3 CONCLUSION

The intangible nature of tourism products poses a unique challenge for consumers in evaluating their suitability before consumption. Consequently, the role of information sources becomes crucial in aiding decision-making processes (Chang and Wang, 2019). While certain prominent attractions may draw tourists to destinations without necessitating extensive information searches (Leiper, 1990), lesser-known rural attractions often require dissemination of information beyond local or regional catchment areas. Therefore, understanding tourists' information needs regarding attraction attributes such as price, location, and travel time becomes imperative to facilitate decision-making (Gretzel et al., 2006). Certain well-known attractions can attract tourists to destinations without the need for them to engage in extensive searches for information, as noted by Leiper (1990). However, attractions in rural areas that are not as well-known often necessitate the spread of information beyond local or regional boundaries. Consequently, it is crucial to comprehend the information needs of tourists concerning attributes of attractions such as cost, geographical position, and the duration of travel to aid in their decision-making processes, as highlighted by Gretzel et al., (2006).

Moreover, the pursuit of information serves dual purposes in tourism: it mitigates risks and enhances trip enjoyment (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012). Unlike other travel arrangements where decisions are more static, activity and attraction selection entail a fluid process, often occurring during the holiday itself (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2016). Despite attractions being considered during the planning stages, there's a growing trend of selection happening during the holiday itself (Hwang and Fesenmaier, 2011). Research indicates a significant reliance on information sources both before and during trips, emphasizing the importance of understanding tourists' information-seeking behaviour (McAllister, Blunt, and Davies, 2021). However, while previous studies have compared offline and online sources, there's limited insight into the value and usage patterns of specific information sources for attractions and activities (Ho, Lin, and Chen, 2012). Factors such as familiarity with the destination further influence information search behaviour. This thesis aims to bridge existing research gaps by focusing on in-destination attraction and activity selection processes. By exploring the stages of decision-making and the role of information sources, it seeks to enhance understanding of tourists' behaviour and preferences. Additionally, drawing on Construal Level Theory (CLT), this study will explore how tourists perceive and evaluate travel options based on their temporal and psychological proximity to the destination (Trope and Liberman, 2010). Furthermore, this

thesis considers the implications of information overload in decision-making processes, especially in the era of ICT proliferation. With smartphones and online platforms becoming ubiquitous tools for accessing travel information, understanding their impact on tourists' decision-making becomes essential (Poon, 1993). Additionally, the decline of traditional information sources like tourist information centers and the rise of digital platforms underscore the evolving landscape of tourist information consumption (Sigala, 2016).

Considering the paradigm shift in information consumption driven by advancements in ICT, the review underscores the need for stakeholders to adapt and innovate their strategies. The decline of traditional information sources and the rise of online platforms signal an evolving landscape that demands agility and responsiveness to meet the preferences of contemporary travellers. Yet, in parallel, scholars found that word-of-mouth marketing is a powerful source of interpersonal influence and tourist information centres yielded positive interactions for tourists. In conclusion, this thesis aims to understand how information sources are applied by tourists in-situ, for the selection of attractions and activities. It takes a holistic perspective and will investigate a wide range of information sources, as well as the timing of those sources. The research represents a significant contribution to the field by delving into the multifaceted nature of tourists' information needs and decision-making processes. Tourism marketers can improve their deployment of marketing efforts, and better understand the tourist and how they approach decisions.

2.32 CONCEPTUAL GAPS & CONCLUSION

The thesis seeks to understand in situ decision-making for activities and attractions in tourism. It evaluates the role of offline and online information sources, emotions and context of on-site decision-making. This thesis posits that traditional theories of decision-making that are grounded in economics and rational theory fail to reflect the dimensions of group dynamics, spontaneity, emotions, context or environment. These dimensions are intrinsic to the process of decision-making while on holiday. Previous studies investigating in-situ or dynamic decision-making are rare and have been limited by depth (short interviews), methodology (quantitative dominant), decision type (itinerary/route) or scope (did not focus on attractions/activities).

Few studies concentrate on in-situ decision-making within the attractions and activities sector. Blichfeldt (2008) highlights a significant research gap related to decision-making at attractions, as prior studies have primarily centered on pre-trip decisions, like destination selection and bookingTourist decision-making models have evolved toward frameworks that are increasingly flexible and adaptable. Scholars have introduced elements such as cyclic decision-making processes and dual-system theory to capture the complexity of tourist choices. Fang's (2021) model emphasises the critical role of information, differentiating between high and low information needs and outlining various decision rules that tourists may follow. McCabe, Li, and Chen's (2016) dual-system model examine the interplay between intuitive and analytical thinking, challenging traditional views of rationality in tourist decisions. Building on this, Stylos (2022) proposes a model that integrates deliberative and intuitive processes, acknowledging the layered nature of decision-making. While these frameworks offer critical theoretical perspectives, this study aims to further advance our understanding of this conceptual gap. By exploring the influence of cyclic, heuristic, and rational systems and the roles of emotions and feelings, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how tourists choose attractions and activities at a destination. Bridging theory with practical insights, this study aims to assist tourism stakeholders in making more informed decisions and enhancing the overall tourist experience.

Decision-making is complex and shaped by various contextual and situational factors influencing traveller choices. Decrop and Snelders (2005) propose a model emphasising the diverse environmental elements—such as social dynamics and geographical factors—impacting vacation-related decisions. However, conventional decision-making models have limitations in fully capturing the interactions between context and decision-making processes, as Hergesell et al. (2021) noted. Bettman et al. (1991) advocate for a contingent decision-making approach, which provides a more adaptable framework to reflect the fluid nature of tourist choices. This study addresses a gap noted by Decrop (2006) to gain deeper insights into the contextual and situational aspects influencing the selection of attractions and activities. By examining factors like travel companions, trip purpose, budget constraints, and environmental conditions, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of tourism decision-making. Recognising the multidimensional influences on these decisions is essential for developing more refined theoretical models and practical strategies within tourism management and marketing.

Furthermore, the discussion around decision-making in tourism has often focused on individual choices, overlooking the complex dynamics of group travel. Decision-making within families and social groups presents a vital area for further scholarly attention, as familial and social connections play a major role in shaping travel choices, challenging the idea of autonomous decision-making (Stone, 2016; Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1995). The group decision-making process involves a nuanced mix of negotiation, compromise, and delegation, as highlighted by Decrop (2005) and Wang & Li (2021). The involvement of children adds another layer of complexity, as explored by Thornton et al. (1997) and Wang & Li (2021), underscoring the need for a fuller understanding of family dynamics in travel decisions. Although research has made progress in this area, further in-depth study of group decision-making dynamics, particularly within real-life travel contexts, is essential. Qualitative research into these dynamics could provide valuable insights into decision delegation, negotiation, and consensus-building within group travel, contributing to more robust theoretical frameworks and a richer understanding of the social foundations of tourist decision-making. Lastly, Emotions have long been viewed as a core driver of tourist behaviour, given that tourism is inherently a hedonic activity (Gnoth, 1997). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) observed that leisure and tourism purchases often cater more to emotional needs than to rational ones, with decisions grounded in anticipated feelings rather than problem-solving considerations. This study explores the emotional context of decision-making and how emotions shape choices. As Doyle McCarthy (1994) suggests, feelings and emotions lend meaning to life and personal identity, offering powerful insights into participants' decision-making behaviour. If emotions are socially constructed and provide meaning within relational systems, examining emotions expressed by individuals while on holiday with family and friends could reveal new aspects of in-destination decision-making. Allowing participants to describe their emotions in interviews instead of through predetermined scales might provide a more authentic view of their experiences.

This thesis responds to the call for a deeper understanding of decision-making through a qualitative study and naturalistic enquiry (Moore et al., 2012). Rational and economic decision-making models organise decision-making as a linear decision progression. However, post-modern models are more random by design and are shaped by interconnected variables. This thesis addresses this research gap for attractions and activities by investigating the decision-making stages of attractions and activities in situ and pre-arrival. Furthermore, traditional choice set models assume that the tourist will consider all available options when, in actuality, they may not have the cognitive ability or time frame to do so (McCabe, Li, and Chen., 2016).

In response to the call for a holistic, naturalistic and post-modern approach to investigating decision-making in tourism (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; Smallman and Moore, 2010), this study evaluates dynamic, in-destination decision-making processes. An exhaustive literature review was carried out to examine contributions to dynamic and in-situ decision-making theory and the broad fundamental theories of decision-making in tourism.

The thesis also addresses the conceptual gap relating to decision making and information sources in the attractions and activities. With the rise of technology in tourism, academia and industry have increasingly focused on online marketing channels. Information sources are often considered from a destination-centric perspective, with less attention given to activities and attractions. This study first examines the role of information sources in the tourist decision-making process and then analyses the stages of information gathering involved. Drawing on Construal Level Theory, which explains how psychological distance affects perception and interpretation, the study explores how tourists perceive and evaluate travel options based on their temporal and psychological proximity to the destination. Additionally, it addresses information overload and the role of familiarity with a place in shaping decisions. The study also assesses both offline and online information sources, including ICT, mobile technology, recommender systems, guidebooks, leaflets, advertising, word of mouth, online reviews, and tourist information centres.

Research highlights that tourists rely heavily on information sources before and during trips, underscoring the need to understand their information-seeking behaviours (McAllister, Blunt, & Davies, 2021). While previous studies have compared offline and online sources, there remains limited insight into how specific information sources are valued and used for selecting attractions and activities (Ho, Lin, & Chen, 2012). The decline of traditional sources like tourist information centres and the rise of digital platforms further reflect the shifting landscape of tourist information consumption (Sigala, 2016). Given the paradigm shift in information consumption due to technological advancements, this review highlights the need for stakeholders to adapt and innovate their strategies. The growing prominence of online platforms and the declining use of traditional sources indicate a rapidly evolving environment that calls for agility and responsiveness to modern travellers' preferences. Yet, studies also show that word-of-mouth remains a powerful interpersonal influence, and tourist information centres can still provide valuable in-person interactions. Therefore, a study is needed that

evaluates all available information sources, rather than prioritizing single channels as the primary determinants

Figure 13. Conceptual Model

The following conceptual model highlights the key dimensions influencing decision making in the attraction and activity sector that this thesis seeks to investigate:
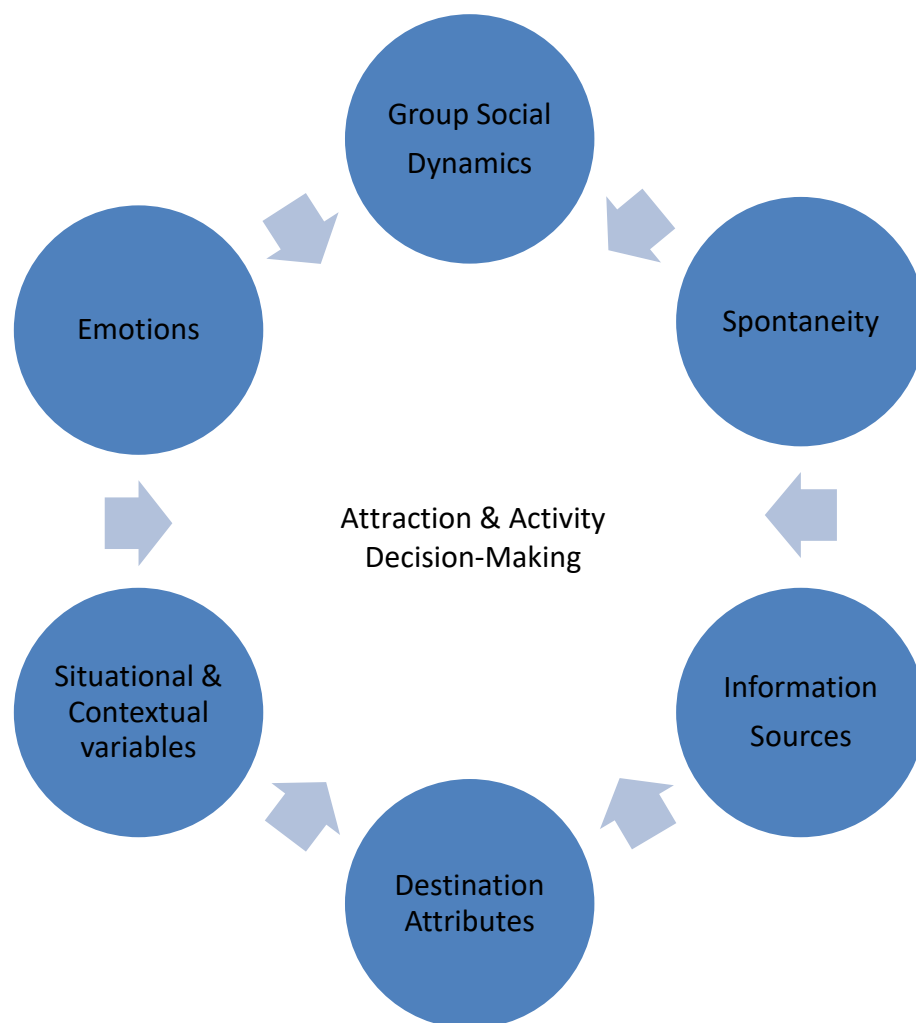
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological portion of the research. Firstly, the following chapter will introduce the context of the research project in Wales and the research locations. Secondly, the theoretical influences on the research and philosophy adopted will be presented. Thirdly, the research design, phases, and journey will be presented, and the epistemological views of the research will be discussed. The author will explain the research strategy and how the data was collected. Finally, the ethical considerations, data analysis and interpretation will be reviewed.

This study examines how tourists as individuals and groups decide to spend their time on holiday. The research questions of this thesis are concerned with understanding the decision-making process in attractions and activities. Under evaluation are the situation and context, the relationship of emotions and logic, and the influence of online and offline information sources. The research and basis of the theoretical framework for the study were carried out by reviewing the literature on these topics, presented in the preceding chapters. This study has three research phases following an exploratory mixed methods design. Research phase one focused on understanding the thoughts and actions made by tourists during their decision-making process on holiday. The open-ended and semi-structured interview questions allow the interviewer to probe and explore the interviewee's responses. The interview questions were based on the literature.

The second phase consulted industry professionals on their marketing strategy in online and offline communications and whether they considered the decision-making process in promoting tourist attractions in Wales. The survey design was based on the findings of the qualitative phase. The third phase was a field-based survey of tourists visiting two significant attractions in Wales, Zip World (Betws Y Coed) and the Vale of Rheidol Railway (Aberystwyth). This study was funded by KESS2, a program designed to bring academia and industry together on projects to promote economic rejuvenation in Wales. The researcher and supervisor designed a research project with a local company, Cambria Tours, with parallel academic and business goals. The project's sponsorship and subsequent challenges are discussed later in this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question:
How do holiday tourists decide about activities and attractions to visit or experience? (What is the process of decision-making?)

The following sub-questions are under investigation:

1. *How does the situation and context of the group or individual affect the decision-making process?*

2. *How do feelings and emotions impact the decision-making process?*

4. *How do tourists, attractions and destinations value and use online information sources in relation to traditional information sources?*

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

INDUSTRY SPONSORSHIP- KESS 2 FUNDING

The thesis received financial support from the Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS 2) program facilitated by the European Social Fund. KESS 2 aims to empower small to medium enterprises (SMEs) by fostering collaborative research projects with academic institutions. Its objectives include enhancing research capabilities, promoting engagement in research, nurturing professional skills, fostering technological advancements, particularly within Wales's Convergence Area, and developing higher-level skills.

Moreover, the thesis outlines the various benefits for companies sponsoring such research endeavours. These benefits include fostering a culture of research within the organisation, establishing the company as a thought leader in its industry, validating claims and perceptions regarding its offerings, building lasting partnerships with local universities, attracting and nurturing new talent, and leveraging low entry costs for potentially high returns.

The research project's genesis lies in addressing a gap in the tourism sector. Despite existing modes of engagement like pre-packaged tours and traditional brochures, independent travellers exploring Wales lack access to real-time information. The proposed digital application, a location-based service, aims to bridge this gap by providing timely information on accommodations, activities, attractions, and tour operators within the Convergence area, thus enriching the visitor experience.

Project Background

The company partner Cambria Tours, had identified a need for the research as visitors increasingly use digital technologies to plan, select, and purchase tourism products. The company partner already engages with visitors booked onto pre-packaged tours, as well as online and offline brochures and guides to attractions in Wales. However, they have recognised that they cannot engage with independent visitors already touring Wales. Currently, no suitable mobile digital platform provides real-time, location-based digital services to inform and enhance the visitor experience.

Project Design

Regarding the project's design, a detailed systematic approach is used. It begins with a thorough review of global literature on consumer behaviour in tourism. Subsequently, close collaboration with the industrial partner leads to the formulation of an experimental framework examining consumer decision-making and the market potential of location-based services in mid-Wales. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the research seeks to uncover nuanced insights into market demands and preferences. The culmination of the project involves presenting a comprehensive report to the company partner, outlining actionable marketing and management strategies derived from the data analysis.

3.4 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

It is essential to connect the stages in the research process. The following framework by Crotty, (1998, p.4) helps sort the sections of the research development. The flow of steps directs the research from top to bottom, the first consideration being epistemology and methods being the last.

Figure 14. The Four Elements of Research adapted from Crotty, (1998, p.4)
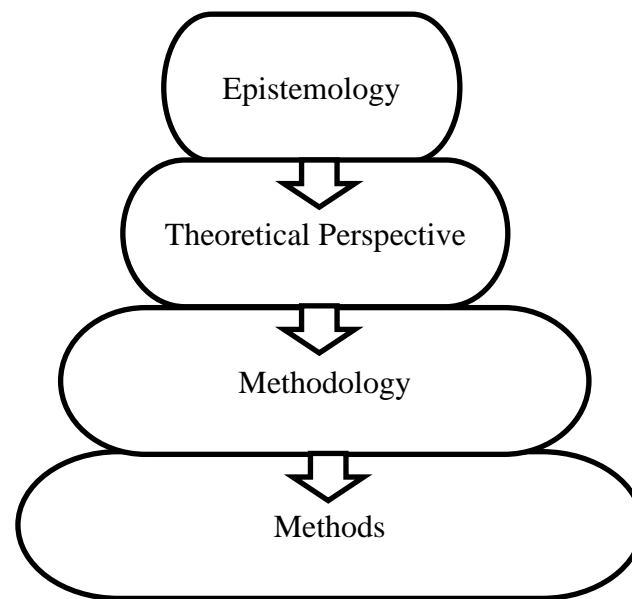
Thesis Framework

Epistemology: Pragmatism

Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism & Postpositivism

Methodology: Phenomenological Research & Survey Research

Method: Interviews & Questionnaire (Thematic Analysis & Statistical Analysis)

3.5 EPISTEMOLOGY & ONTOLOGY

As a Marketing MSc student at Aberystwyth University, the researcher was enlightened by the curriculum and teaching community in Postpositivist, Constructivist and Pragmatic world views. As is common in many Universities, there were divides in the business school with preferred epistemology and methodologies. The researcher, sensitive to others' opinions and attitudes towards research, noticed these biases towards preferred research methods and found it very interesting to observe as it challenged her prior knowledge towards research. Before the MSc, the researcher was an entrepreneur, managing property, including tourist accommodation. She had been active within tourist organisations such as Mid Wales Tourism, Menter Aberystwyth and Aberystwyth Business Club, so she had been involved in various activities and working groups on tourism in Mid Wales. Running a business and her

involvement with many business organisations meant that the author was very action-orientated and had conducted many practical research tasks, such as surveys and informal workshops, to gather customer feedback and develop marketing strategies. The approach to this research was to combine those skill sets and design a study that met academic and business goals.

The definition of a worldview is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p.17). Creswell and Creswell (2018, p.5) conceptualise worldviews as "a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study". They add that the researcher's personal and professional experience of life and research contribute to this worldview, influencing their choice of research methods. The four dominant research paradigms are: Postpositivism, Constructivism, Transformative and Pragmatism, and the researcher's choice of paradigm affects the subsequent methodology. The following table by Creswell and Creswell, (2018, p.6) illustrates the key elements of the four worldviews:

Table 4. Four World Views as adapted from Creswell and Creswell, (2018, p.6)

Postpositivism	Constructivism
Determination	Understanding
Reductionism	Multiple participant meanings
Empirical observation and measurement	Social and historical construction
Theory verification	Theory generation
Transformative	**Pragmatism**
Political	Consequences of actions
Power and justice orientated	Problem-centered
Collaborative	Pluralistic
Change -oriented	Real-world practice oriented

Decision-making in tourism has been described as a complex research area (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005; McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016) with multiple decisions and many internal and external variables involved. The process begins before the holiday, during the planning stages and continues during the holiday. Many of these decisions are high-risk, with changeable

outcomes and can be very individualistic (Smallman and Moore, 2010). The dominant research paradigm in decision-making stems from statistical and mathematical modelling, which ultimately positions the tourist as a "rational decision-maker engaged in a motivationally driven process of searching for an efficient means of satisfying desires and needs in relation to travel" (Moore et al., 2012, p.635). There have been few efforts to counter this approach with interpretive work (Smallman and Moore, 2010).

3.5.1 POSITIVIST/POSTPOSITIVIST PARADIGM

A survey instrument is deemed an appropriate method to address the third research question—whether online or offline information sources are more valued. Positivism is typically associated with the natural sciences and traditional and scientific forms of enquiry (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Postpositivism is a recent development in that truth about humans cannot exist without a certain amount of doubt. Experiments to determine causality and prove a hypothesis are commonly implemented. Statistical measurements are typically implemented.

3.5.2 CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

Decision-making in tourism has been described as contextual and individualistic. To answer the thesis research questions and further understand the decision-making processes, it is necessary to delve deeper and understand the context and how people think, feel, plan, negotiate, decide, and construct their decisions. It is, therefore, necessary to design a methodology that allows for discussion and for the researcher to listen to the tourist's views and interpret those patterns of meaning. In essence, constructivism posits that meaning and human experience are subjective and are influenced by contextual, cultural, and historical factors. It is further defined as social constructivism by interactions and the impact of other humans (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Meanings could be numerous and multifaceted; the participant's view forms the narrative. Questions are open and expansive so that the participant makes sense of the world and constructs their understanding. The researcher's role is to "interpret the meaning that others have of the world" (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.8). They do not start with a theory but develop a "pattern of meaning" (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.8) or approach through inductive research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

3.5.3 PRAGMATIC PARADIGM

This author argues that pragmatism is the most appropriate epistemology to capture the contemporary behaviour of tourists and is the best approach for the research questions since it allows a combination of both postpositivist and constructivist worldviews. The pragmatic approach allows for "choosing explanations that best produce desired outcomes." (Pansiri, 2005b cited in Pansiri 2006). The pragmatic paradigm is summarised by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p.10) as the following: It is not fixed to "any one system of philosophy or reality". The focus is on the research problem, and researchers can select the most appropriate research method to address the problem. Multiple data analysis and collection methods may be used since the world is not viewed unanimously. There is a concern for "*what* and *how* to research based on intended consequences" (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.11) that there is a rationale and clear research direction. Furthermore, the research is contextual, of a particular time and place, which aligns with the pragmatic approach. This standpoint has led to the recognition of pragmatism as the cornerstone of mixed-method research (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Mixed methods studies are characterized by the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data within a single study, either concurrently or sequentially, with priority given to the data, and involving the integration of data at one or more stages in the research process (Creswell *et al.*, 2003). In tourism, mixed methods and pragmatism have been used in a number of studies (Hanna and Rowley, 2015; Pansiri, 2006).

A mixed method methods approach was employed by Pansiri, (2006) to investigate alliance partners with Australian travel executives, this study and align closely with the philosophy and methodology of pragmatism, aiming to take a practical and grounded approach to the study of human group dynamics and behaviour. This approach involves direct examination of the empirical social world to fulfil the fundamental requirements of empirical science, as outlined by Blumer, (1969) including observing and analysing an available empirical world, raising abstract problems, gathering data through disciplined examination, and uncovering relationships between data categories (Pansiri, 2006). Building upon this insight, (Pansiri, 2006) utilised mixed methods to explore executives' own meanings and perceptions, delving into how these are shaped and sustained through direct examination of real human experiences. This methodological choice was driven by the aim to mitigate the limitations inherent in each individual method by leveraging the strengths of the other. As discussed by Denzin, (1970) mixing methods enables verification and corroboration, enriches analysis, provides richer

details, and stimulates new lines of inquiry by addressing surprises or paradoxes. The integration of mixed methods in the study facilitated a deeper understanding of strategic alliance practices in the travel sector, with interviews complementing and confirming many of the quantitative findings. By incorporating selected interview quotations to elucidate the quantitative analysis, this approach enhanced comprehension of alliance formation and performance evaluation, while also clarifying ambiguous factors. For instance, while survey data emphasised the importance of control in partner selection, interviews revealed nuances in executives' perceptions of formal and informal control, highlighting the value of qualitative data in supplementing quantitative analysis. In this study, the mixed method paradigm will enable the researcher to verify and compare qualitative and quantitative responses to attraction and activity selection, it will result in a deeper understanding of the research questions. Furthermore, pragmatism allowed for the balance of competing needs of the thesis, as a funded research project and academic endeavour.

3.6 MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

Following a pragmatic approach, this thesis incorporates the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Mixed methods were chosen because the research would benefit from both components by revealing more insight into the research problems. Mixed methods research has been the subject of much academic debate regarding best practices, definitions, and their value in contrast to monomethods (Creswell, 2015). Quantitative research primarily assesses causal relationships, collects, and measures facts, observable data, and phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). However, it does not reveal human behaviour, feelings, or experiences. Qualitative data is descriptive and can validate, interpret, clarify, and illustrate findings and build and review theory (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2020). A particular issue is when these opposing, and arguably incompatible methodologies are used in the same study. Historically, these two paradigms have been set in opposition by research purists; the two worldviews have adopted "rigid boundaries" that cannot be integrated (Creswell, 2011, p.277). At the core of this contest is the positioning of philosophical paradigms at opposing ends of the research spectrum. For some time, research traditions have framed quantitative versus qualitative or positivist versus interpretivism and debated the relative merits of both (Ritchie, Palmer and Burns, 2005), resulting in problematic issues for mixed methods work. Furthermore, university culture often influences the direction of an academic's research since

some researchers prefer a particular methodology, specialism, or quantitative/qualitative practice. This makes mixed methods more challenging when the field is particularly dominant in one method or another.

According to Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, (2020), for it to be possible to understand the world, both *numbers* and *words* are indispensable. In recent years, mixed methods have been accepted as a valid research method as a third central research approach (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) and have been adopted by tourism scholars as well as the broader social sciences. The complexity of many research problems in social sciences, not least tourism, can be understood better by integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches and can deliver more sapience than monomethods alone (Truong, Xiaoming Liu and Yu, 2020). Social issues, particularly those complex and dynamic with interacting factors, can be more comprehensively understood through a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2015). Mixed methods are not "intrinsically superior" (Molina-Azorín and Font, 2016, p.3) to single-method research, but the design must add value to the study. Multiple methods are more expensive, skilled and time-consuming than single methods, so they should only be implemented if necessary (Molina-Azorín and Font, 2016). Mixed methods commonly combine the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. Qualitative research can inform quantitative and vice versa. Findings can be more holistic and illustrative and offer a richer, more complete picture and overcome the limitations of single methods (Truong, Xiaoming Liu and Yu, 2020; Molina-Azorín and Font, 2016). Furthermore, mixed methods can unearth subtleties and conclusions that single methods would have otherwise missed and offer the opportunity to proffer different or opposing views (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). This is particularly effective when triangulation of methods is implemented.

In the academic literature, tourist behaviour is widely regarded as a complex process (McCabe, Li and Chen, 2016). Decrop, (2014,p.262) states, "Theorizing tourist behaviour is not an easy task as tourists may show thousands of facets in their choices and activities". This study seeks to build on pragmatic and naturalistic studies on decision-making, such as the paper by Moore et al., (2012, p.643), that are situated in "socially and discursive" approaches. A mixed method approach was deemed suitable to approach the complexity of decision-making to collect both rich, detailed and potentially paradoxical content from interviews and develop a survey from that interview data further to investigate the decision-making process from a much bigger sample.

Mixed methods research is appropriate for the design of this study primarily because it fits within the pragmatic paradigm. To understand the complex decision-making processes, including cognitive and emotional thoughts, coupled with contextual factors such as location, family, friends, weather, budget, transport, interests, the self, and information sources, it was essential to combine probing interviews with survey data. Survey data alone would have been too limited since decisions on holiday are not made in a vacuum and not usually by one person. Surveys, by the nature of their design, often assume that there is one lead decision-maker (Decrop, 2014) and do not consider the group dynamics, cooperation, or potential dissatisfaction or disagreements within the group. The researcher wanted to meet people in situ, in real-time, in person and find out how they make decisions so that they could explain the process and talk about the influences, feelings, or reasons why they made those decisions and how they did them. The researcher also wanted to speak to business owners and Visit Wales to learn more about their decision-making understanding and how they promoted attractions. The researcher was interested in emerging online marketing trends and whether they measured this or noticed any behavioural patterns that could help answer the research question. The diverse, rich findings of the interviews could then provide a basis for the survey design to measure more generalisable conclusions. It was decided that the qualitative work's context, detail and richness would benefit from dimension and "analytic texture" (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2020, p.36) of the quantitative. The scope of the study is much enhanced by interconnected qualitative and quantitative work, with the option to develop methods during the research process (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989).

3.7 RESEARCH MODEL – EXPLORATORY SEQUENTIAL DESIGN

An exploratory sequential design was implemented, this method is suited to studies whereby the quantitative work should fit the context of the qualitative (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The research began with exploratory qualitative interview work; then, themes were identified for testing, followed by survey design. The interviews were designed to understand the phenomenon, conceptualise the "process of decision-making" thematically, and provide the basis for further quantitative examination (Hartmann and Hedblom, 1979).

Figure 15. Exploratory Sequential Design (Three-Phase Design) adapted from Creswell & Creswell, (2018, p.218)
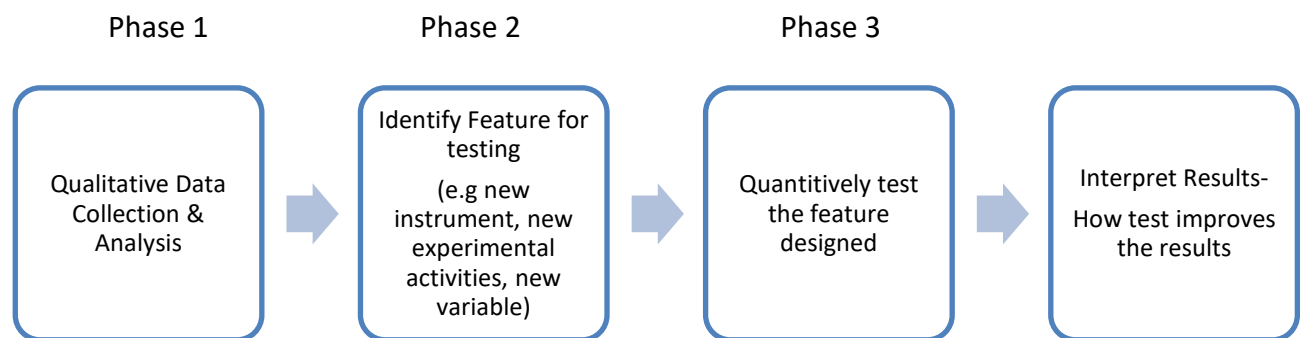
Research Phases

Phase 1 – Interviews with Tourists (Aberystwyth)

Phase 2 – Interviews with Industry (Aberystwyth, Cardiff & Betws Y Coed)

Phase 3 – Surveys with Attraction Visitors (Aberystwyth & Betws Y Coed)

2.8 PHASE 1 RESEARCH – INTERVIEWS WITH TOURISTS

The first research phase aimed to explore and understand decision-making in attractions and activities by speaking to guests while they are on holiday. The researcher wanted to capture in situ decisions as they unfolded and were fresh in the participant's memory. A qualitative method was chosen since this method allows for participant meanings to unfold (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) as opposed to meanings from the literature or those the writer brings to the research. The thoughts and views of participants cannot be discovered by observation alone; therefore, interviews are the best way to find out expressive and unambiguous thoughts (Patton, 1990). Interviews make it possible to collect detailed and plentiful data from fewer participants (Veal, 2011). In-depth interviews aim to interrogate more deeply (than a questionnaire-based interview), to probe the respondent, and encourage a free-flowing discussion with the opportunity for additional questions. They allow the interviewer to ask more probing questions (Veal, 2011). The research style was grounded and holistic. The researcher observed and questioned the participants and relied on their own words and descriptions of the decision-making process.

3.8.1 PHASE 1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. *How do tourists on holiday make decisions about activities and attractions to visit or experience? (What is the process of decision-making?)*
2. *How does the situation and context of the group or individual affect the decision-making process?*
3. *How do feelings and emotions impact the decision-making process?*
4. *Do tourists value online information sources and the internet more than offline information sources?*

3.8.2 INTERVIEW PROCESS

It was important for the researcher to have quality time with the participants; previous research experience, such as street surveys and interviews, had taught the researcher that people have a limited attention span out in the field because they are busy and often on their way to other activities. As noted by (Moore *et al.*, 2012), ad hoc interviews are often cut short by tourists needing to leave. To accomplish in-depth interviews, it was deemed essential to be able to speak to tourists for at least 30-45mins. From previous experience, recording interviews and collecting good quality data is not usually possible unless pre-arranged and in an environment that is comfortable for both interviewee and interviewer.

The researcher contacted hotels and self-catering establishments to request permission to conduct interviews during guest stays. A report by the Welsh Government estimates that in 2022, there will be 70,585 serviced bedspaces, such as hotels and B&Bs, and 78,520 self-catering bed spaces in Wales (Welsh Government, 2022). The contribution to the Welsh economy from visitor stays at self-catering establishments in 2019 is estimated to be 134.2 million (Frontline, 2021). Unfortunately, most of these establishments contacted did not reply to emails or offered to consider it and then did not respond. The researcher enlisted the support of the company partner, Cambria Tours, who also contacted several hotels, but they were reluctant to allow interviews to take place or were unresponsive. The researcher had access to holiday apartment guests through her own business Rees Property Management, so it was decided to recruit participants through this route.

The researcher conducted the pilot interviews with guests staying at Awel Môr Holiday Apartments and holiday homes Anchorage and No3 Laura Place, all based in Aberystwyth, to ascertain if this could be a successful avenue for data collection. This process was relatively straightforward as the researcher had access to guest names and telephone numbers. The researcher called all guests by phone during their stay (during the data collection period) to invite them to interview. A sampling procedure to obtain a random population was difficult because not all guests answered the telephone, so to increase the probability, all guests were contacted (over a specific time period). Guests who answered and agreed to an interview were sent an email outlining the process. It was noticed that guests booked in for more extended stays (more than three nights) were usually more inclined to accept an initiation to interview, since they had more time available in which to meet the interviewer. This affected the sample, and participants were subsequently tended to be on longer holidays (as opposed to short 2–3-night stays). People on shorter breaks did not usually want to commit an interview. Sometimes guest plans would change during their holiday, and interviews were cancelled or changed. The researcher occasionally had to be ready at little notice to do the interview. Consent forms explaining the purpose of the interviews and research institution. Confidentiality and data handling were issued and signed in person during the interview. Demographic data, including age, gender, ethnicity, education, and employment status, were also collected. It was explained that participation was voluntary, and they could leave the interview at any time.

Five initial pilot interviews were carried out during September and October 2017. The interviews were carried out at the self-catering homes, except for one interview held at a café at the guest's request. The interviewer recorded each of the interviews and took notes in situ. A memo was written after each interview, noting ideas, interesting points made by participants, and very early-stage themes prior to coding. These memos were valuable documents for the writing up of codes later. One surprising finding during the transcription process was that the background noise of the café made the transcription very difficult; therefore, the aim was to hold all interviews in a quiet environment. It was also noted during the pilot that fewer guests were visiting Aberystwyth from September onwards. Therefore, interviews were planned for the following summer months. A further fourteen interviews were conducted between June and September 2018, and June-September 2019 at the self-catering homes.

During the interviews, the interviewer also observed the participants. The interviewer did not ask to interview the whole group or family, but surprisingly there were often more than two

people, or the entire family, present. They had discussions, and each contributed to answers. This sometimes made the interview process complex and chaotic, but overall gave a very rich and nuanced insight into the family and group dynamics. It also highlighted how there was often more than one decision-maker, or they took turns making decisions. Upon arrival at the holiday home, the interviewer would ask the main participant (the point of contact) where they would like to do the interview and usually the living room or kitchen was selected. Often there were other family members in those rooms, and the interviewer would tell everyone present about the PhD research and they would usually either invite themselves to join the interviewer, or the main contact would ask if it was ok for them to stay. Sometimes half-way through an interview, a family member would arrive home or enter the room and join in the conversation. The process of interviewing more than one participant was sometimes difficult to manage, as they did not always consistently answer every question, sometimes taking it in turns, or jumping in when they had a point to make. However, by recording the interviews, and letting the participants speak naturally, the interviewer collected interesting, dynamic, contextual accounts of the decision-making process. The interviewer could not always plan to expect more than one participant, as they did not share who would be present.

The location of the interviews, at the self-catering homes, was very effective because people were relaxed and in no rush to leave. The researcher was also responsible for the management of the homes, so sometimes guests would bring things to the researcher's attention inside the home or ask for recommendations of places to visit, restaurants to visit or things to see in the town. The researcher would offer to respond after the interview was conducted so that her responses would have a limited effect on the interview. The researcher acknowledges her participation in the research and the co-creation of research under the constructivist paradigm, as the interviewer may have some influence on the process. The constructivist paradigm asserts that social phenomena and meaning are created through social interactions and human experience (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Bryman, 2012). During the interview, there is a "social negotiation of meanings between the interviewer and the interviewee" (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.88), which reflects the relationship between the two. Furthermore, through the analysis of the interview data, theory development is built on the experience and knowledge of the researcher and the participants (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006).

The interview protocol was adjusted and tweaked as the interviews progressed. The first five interviews in the pilot were more grounded and less structured. The interviewer spent longer getting to know the participants with open questions about their holiday before starting to probe

about decision-making. This meant it was more difficult to keep participants on track on the discussion around activities and attractions, as they enjoyed talking about their holiday in general. Often in the interviews, participants would jump around topics and cover many of the questions in one since they talked about the steps they took to make decisions. The participants told stories and went off on tangents. During the second phase of interviews, the interviewer had a more structured list of questions and spent less time with open questions at the start of the interview. However, the interviewer remained agile and would ask more probing questions and change the order of the questions when the direction of the discussion changed.

The interview questions are listed below. Opening questions to warm up the participants included: *How are you enjoying your holiday? Have you visited Wales before? What brought you to Aberystwyth?* During the pilot phase of interviewing, it sometimes proved difficult to keep participants focused on specific decisions or events rather than detailing a general narrative about their whole trip. During the second phase, after having experienced some participants and groups getting very animated at the start of the interview talking about their whole trip, the interviewer, directed the conversation to attractions and activities to ensure the interview did not go over time. All interviews were included in the study since there were all valuable to the analysis.

Table 5. Visitor Interview Questions

1	Can you tell me about your holiday?
2	Have you visited Aberystwyth/Wales before? What brought you here?
3	What activities and/or attractions have you visited during your holiday? If they have not yet visited, I could ask what they plan to visit?
4	Why did you choose these activities and/or attractions?
5	How did you decide on these activities/attractions
6	Why are you interested in "insert response to above"
7	How do you feel about these activities?
8	How and when did you plan these activities? *(e.g., before booking/at the time of booking/ during the journey /while on holiday)*

9	When did you make your decision that these were the activities you were going to do?
10	What were the deciding/influential factors?
11	Were the attractions/activities paid for or free?
12	How important was the destination in relation to the activities?
13	How long have you been on holiday in Wales? What is the length of the holiday? Who are you here with?
14	What is the purpose of your holiday?
15	How did you plan your holiday in general? Is it different to the specific activities? For example: Is planning destination/transport/place/accommodation any different?
16	What information sources did you use to plan?
17	Do you use any apps on a mobile or tablet device to help plan/decide on things to do whilst on holiday?
18	How easy were those information sources to access?
19	What were the advantages and disadvantages of those information sources?
20	Would you consider those sources trustworthy /reliable?
21	Did you perceive any risk using these sources?
22	Are there any information sources you would never use and why?
23	In your opinion how could the information sources be improved?
24	When accessing online resources (if online used) Did you access via a laptop/desktop/tablet/mobile? And why?

3.8.3 DEVELOPMENT OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

After nineteen interviews were conducted, memos written by the interviewer indicated that the saturation point had been reached. It was noticed that broad topics were repeated, and the interview phase was completed. The next phase of transcribing and coding the interviews was necessary. The interviews were subsequently transcribed and went through several coding iterations in line with thematic analysis procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis "is a method for systematically identifying, organising and offering insight into

patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" Braun and Clarke, (2012, p.57). The coding process was challenging since the interviews were long, rich and had multiple speakers. The first phase of coding was largely a familiarisation exercise for the researcher to become immersed with the content of the interviews. The researcher used Microsoft Word, to make comments, line by line on the interview transcripts, with codes and notes. Examples of codes would be "activity", or "emotion", or "shopping", or "decision", or "information source". An inductive approach was taken to the thematic analysis meaning that codes and themes originated from the data. Each line of the text was coded with its relevant content code.

Once the interviews were coded, the researcher spent time reflecting the codes and developed a table for each interview to map out the codes. Each of the tables were compared, and the researcher looked for patterns. The coding process was challenging because there were hundreds of entries and codes. The participants had done lots of activities, there were lots of motivations, reasons, stories, dynamics. The interviews were re-coded several times, narrowing down to meaningful themes to move beyond superficial observations. The researcher made lists of potential themes, from the codes, and reviewed the themes against each interview to check that there were patterns that were applicable from the complete data set. The patterns from the codes, were developed into themes that spoke to the research aims and research questions. An example of the code development to themes is included in the appendix. An inductive process of gathering the codes and themes from the data was implemented. Then the researcher took a deductive approach and went back to review the decision-making literature and then back to the transcripts to complete the thematic analysis. Data from all interviews, including the pilot interviews, were included in the analysis, this decision was made because on reviewing all interviews against the key themes, it was found they all fit into the overall data set. The same themes appeared in the pilot interviews as the main set of interviews. While the pilot interviews contained more content on the holiday in general, they still contained the important aspects on attraction and activity choice.

3.8.4 REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

There are several reflections from the interview process. All the interviewees were genuine tourists and were on holiday. This brought with it a surprising interaction from conducting real time research. I was surprised at several requests, during interviews for advice on what to see, and what to visit during their time in Aberystwyth. Which was a conflict with the work I was

doing, in researching their activity choices, and information sources. I was being asked to be a social surrogate. Since during the interviews I was asking them about where they had been and what kinds of activities they liked doing on holiday, they would naturally and almost instinctively as for my opinion. This was likely due to them knowing I lived in Aberystwyth and would be familiar with the area. To avoid creating any bias in the interviews, if they asked me at any point in the interviews, for my advice, I simply responded by saying, I could not give them advice until after the interview.

The interviews were not planned to be held with groups and multiple speakers. However, participants often presented as a group, at the time of the interview. The interviewer did not challenge this, since the participants were on holiday, and were giving up their time to contribute. This presented a challenge in collecting the responses, while the interviews were recorded, it was a slow and laborious process to separate the speakers in the transcription phase. Sometimes people talked over each other, and didn't complete their sentences, which meant that recordings were sometimes a little incomplete or unclear. Some participants were more vocal than others, and expressed their opinions more confidently, while quieter or more reserved participants did not speak so freely. The interviewer did not feel it was appropriate to single participants out for probing and addressed the questions to multiple participants and allowed people to speak in their turn, as they were comfortable. In some groups, there was consensus or differences on opinions, and there may have been dynamics or biases at work, which contributed to these opinions. The interview transcripts have been presented in the truest and most representative form, to present the findings of the interview questions. In some cases, multiple speakers are presented to show consensus or differing views within groups. The groups presence, and the multiple stories and insights enriched the data collection process and findings.

The topic of emotions and feelings was a challenging section of the interviews. Sometimes participants could not articulate their responses to the question on emotions and feelings. I asked them if they had thought about how they would feel when selecting an attraction. Instead, sometimes they would talk about the feelings they had experienced, if they had already visited an attraction or activity. In some cases, they responded by expressing their feelings for the destination or their family instead. This was an unexpected finding in the research. Some groups expressed very strong feelings of attachment to Aberystwyth and to Wales, their emotional connection to the place, were stronger than their feelings towards experiencing the

attractions or activities. Groups often talked about emotions in the sense of their relationship to their family or friends. They would link their activity and attraction selection to an improved emotional connection with their family, or that of the destination.

Sometimes people were not aware of their decision-making process, they hadn't ever reflected on how they made decisions and weren't able to explain it. Which alludes to the notion that for some people decision-making is made in the subconscious or unconscious parts of the mind. Conversely though, some people had very clear ideas about how they made decisions and were fully aware of the influences, choices and attributes that were most important to them. I noticed that in the transcripts, my own passion for the destination, for Aberystwyth comes through in the interviews. And my own personal bias and objectivity of the place should be considered. The interviews elicited storytelling; people often told me stories in the interviews, about their trip to Aberystwyth and other holidays. Looking through my transcripts, I ask people "Can you tell me why you chose those activities", "Can you tell me how you decided", "Can you tell me more". I inadvertently added to the interview questions "Can you tell me" – which I think prompted story telling from participants. As a researcher, I am curious, and I enjoyed carrying out the interviews. I nodded and smiled a lot, and I listened. I would make comments like – "Oh that's really interesting". Though, I didn't talk too much in the interviews, I let them talk and talk. Participants seemed comfortable sharing their stories with me.

Some of the interview questions were sometimes a little uncomfortable to ask, particularly on budget and how much money people were comfortable spending on activities and attractions. Personally, I loathed asking people if they had any budgetary considerations when choosing attractions or activities. It was an important question to ask, since it's a situational and contextual consideration, for anyone on holiday. However, I did not enjoy asking it, as I sometimes felt it was too intrusive. Lastly, disturbing people with an in-person interview on their holiday, was quite a big imposition. People's holidays are precious, and I have much gratitude to guests for their welcome and consent in giving their time to the research. It should be acknowledged that it is a real privilege to have been able to conduct this research in real time with tourists, during their holidays.

4.8.5 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

The interview participants are listed in the table below. The interviewer made notes on the group type, the number of participants, travel party size and nationality. Participants also completed permission forms which included demographic information. There were four groups of friends, eleven families, three couples and one couple with brother totalling 19 sets of participants. Of the family groups, nine were two generation and two were three generation. There were eleven groups from the UK, four from the US, one from Denmark, one from Australia, one from Norway and one from Germany. Ten of the groups had visited Aberystwyth before, and nine of the groups were first time visitors.

Table 6. Visitor Interview Participants Information Table

	Date	Length	Travel Party	Travel Party Size	Participants	Location	Psydonyms	Familiarity with Aberystwyth	Nationality	Context/ Situation	Ages
1	15.09.17	53.56	Friends	4	4	In person	Jane Sally Daniel Bert	First visit	America	Two couples on holiday for 3 weeks	All 60-70
2	10.10.17	7.38	Family (2 gen)	6	2	In person	Anders Ingrid	First visit	Norway	Family with older children – 1 starting university in Aber. 4 nights	Parents 45-50 Teens 16-19
3	26.10.17	35.23	Family (3 gen)	7	3	In person	Faye Melissa Charles Tom (child)	Repeat visit	UK	Family on holiday. History of holidaying in the area. 1 week	Parents 35-45 Child 5 Grandparent 60-70
4	26.11.17	27.17	Friends	6	3	In person	Natalie Sophie Matt	Repeat visit and some had lived in Aberystwyth as students	UK	Three couples on a long weekend, young children. 4 nights	Couples ages 30-40 Children under 2
5	26.11.17	29.35	Family (2 gen)	4	4	In person	Maria Helen (niece) Amelia Lina	First visit to Aberystwyth for most of group, Niece was recent Erasmus student at Uni	Germany	Three sisters and niece on holiday. Two sisters 1 week. 1 sister 2 weeks (husband joining for second week)	Sisters 40-50 Daughter 18-25
6	01.08.18	25.09	Family (2 gen)	4	3	In person	Jennifer Katie Ben	Had previously lived in Aberystwyth as student	America	Parents and young children week holiday	Parents 50-60 Children 20-30
7	01.06.18	18.51	Family (2 gen)	2	1	In person	Elizabeth	Had previously lived in Aberystwyth	UK	Mother and son week holiday	Mother 35-45 Son 10
8	01.06.18	36.45	Family (2 gen)	3	1	In person	David Camila	First visit	UK	Couple with mother. Week holiday	Mother – 75-85 Couple 50-60
9	04.07.18	37.54	Family (3 gen)	8	3	In person	Hannah George Jackson	First visit	UK	Extended family on holiday for 2 weeks.	Grandparents 60-70 Daughter 40-50 Grandchildren 20-25

10	05.07.18	49.3	Couple	2	2	In person	James Viola	First visit	America	Couple had been on touring holiday, 4 nights Aberystwyth	50-60
11	26.07.18	24.04	Friends	2	1	In person	Alex Leon	First visit	Denmark	Two friends on holiday 1 week	20-30
12	03.08.18	31.21	Couple	2	1	In person	Mary Tom	Visited once before in 1983	America	Couple - husband working in Arts Centre, wife on holiday 2 weeks	50-60
13	09.08.18	16.23	Family (2 gen)	4	1	In person	Lauren	Repeat visitor	UK	Family on holiday for 2 weeks (daughter a student at uni)	Parents 50-60 Children 18-25
14	09.08.18	17.5	Family (2 gen)	4	1	Telephone (after visit)	Peter	Repeat visitor and had lived in Aberystwyth as students	UK	Family with young children on holiday for 1 week	Parents 30-40 Children under 5
15	14.08.18	20.09	Family (2 gen)	4	2	In person	Dionne Michael	First visit	UK	Family with teenagers and dog Holiday 1 week	Parents 40-50 Children late teens
16	22.08.18	38.5	Family (2 gen)	4	1	In person	Emily	First Visit	UK	Family with teenagers Holiday 1 week	Parents 40-50 Children late teens
17	03.09.18	17.25	Friends	6	1	Telephone (after visit)	Steven	Repeat visit	UK	Group of Friends, on holiday long weekend 20-30	All 20-30
18	24.05.19	41.24	Couple	2	2	In Person	Amanda Greg	First Visit	Australia	Couple	60-70
19	26.06.19	26.08	Couple with brother	3	3	In Person	Peter Carl Zoe	Repeat Visit	UK	Visiting family and friends	60-70

3.9 PHASE 2 RESEARCH – INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The aim of the second research phase was to investigate the industry's understanding and approach to tourist decision-making in attractions and activities. Qualitative interviews were chosen since this method allows for collecting rich and detailed data from a relatively small number of subjects (Veal, 2011). Interviews are conducted to uncover a perspective that cannot be observed and to gather meaningful and explicit thoughts (Patton, 1990). Marketing managers plan and orchestrate commercial spending to promote their visitor attractions, and they typically collect data and measure the effectiveness of their marketing strategy. Zip World and Rheidol Valley Steam Railway were approached for interviews with their respective marketing managers as an opportunity to discuss the research questions and to gain permission to carry out surveys at the attraction sites. Both granted in-person interviews with their marketing managers. An in-depth interview guide approach was deemed appropriate. The interview guide approach specifies questions and topics to be covered but allows for some freedom for the interviewer to change the sequence or wording of questions over the course of

the discussion (Patton, 1990). This was deemed an appropriate style since the managers are busy people, and there was limited time in the interviews to cover an extensive list of questions. Visit Wales was contacted as the leading RTO for Wales, they carry out flagship tourism marketing campaigns across Wales and collect data nationally. The interviewer carried out a semi-structured in-depth interview in person with the head of marketing of Visit Wales.

3.9.1 PHASE 2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. *How do attractions and destinations value and use online information sources in relation to traditional information sources?*
2. *What is the marketing strategy of the organisations?*
3. *What is the balance of print versus online marketing? Where do they emphasise their communications, and why?*
4. *Have the organisations considered how tourists make decisions about visiting attractions in Wales?*

The researcher prepared a list of questions for Visit Wales. The interview was semi structured to allow for the participant to bring her knowledge to the interview process.

Table 7. Visit Wales Interview Questions 2019

Q1. What is the role of Visit Wales?
Q2: Can you tell me about the marketing strategy of Visit Wales?
Q3. How effective is it? How is it measured?
Q4: What is your understanding of the decision-making process of visitors when selecting activities or attractions?
Q5: How does Visit Wales engage with attractions? Does it get involved with the marketing of individual attractions? (I noticed that in the growth plan, there is an emphasis on increasing the number of flagship attractions. How important is it for Wales to have "big draw"

attractions?)
Q6. What kinds of digital information sources does Visit Wales use to communicate with new and existing visitors? How do visitors use these?
Q7. What type of offline sources does Visit Wales use to communicate with new and existing customers? How do visitors use these?
Q8. Are the needs of repeat visitors and new visitors considered differently? and is any differentiation made?
Q9. Are there any ways that information sources or channels could be improved to solve problems such as information overload?
Q10. Is there a difference in the type of customer that prefers online or offline sources? Is there a difference in volume?
Q11. How does Visit Wales, segment visitors? What are these segments?
Q12. How can attractions or activity providers better market themselves?
Q13. What are the future plans in terms of how you market attractions and activities? Do you foresee any new trends or changes?

The interviewer prepared the following questions and talking points for the attractions:

Table 8. Zip World and Vale of Rheidol Questions 2019

Q1. Introduce the research project and explain the objectives.
Q2. Gauge interest and see if the company is interested in research in decision-making, ask whether they would be able to help me collect surveys either online or in person.
Q3. What marketing activities do they conduct?
Q4. What marketing activities are most valuable? Do they measure them?
Q5. Discuss decision-making and determine to what extent this is considered in marketing activities.

The interviews were held at the respective offices of the organisations. The marketing managers are busy people, and gave their time with full consent, though they did request anonymity in the thesis. Their industry knowledge was illuminating and added another perspective to the data collection, since as key stakeholders, their communication and marketing activities, offer the other side of the coin for 'information sources' sought out by visitors. Once collected, the interviews were transcribed and coded similarly to the first phases. Thematic analysis was implemented to analyse the interviews, and the analysis was sorted into key themes.

3.10 PHASE 3 RESEARCH - SURVEYS

The aim of this survey was to empirically evaluate the decision-making process of visitors, with a particular focus on the information sources they utilize. Comprising fifteen questions, the survey was divided into two main sections: attraction decisions and information source decisions, in addition to collecting demographic data. The initial questions aimed to measure the factors influencing individuals' decision-making processes, including the influence of group members and the spontaneity of visits. Emotions were also explored as part of the decision-making process, with respondents invited to express their emotional expectations. Subsequent questions delved into changes in plans during the holiday, types of accommodation, familiarity with the destination, travel unit type, duration of the holiday, and the number of people in the party. Furthermore, respondents were asked to identify the online and offline information sources they utilised at different stages of the planning process. The importance of specific pieces of information about attractions was also investigated, considering insights from interviews with both tourists and businesses. By gathering comprehensive data on decision-making processes and information sources, the survey aimed to provide valuable insights to Cambria Tours for the development of their mobile application or website. Additionally, the findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of visitor behaviour and inform strategies for destination management and marketing in Wales.

3.10.1 PHASE 3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. *Why did the tourists visit the attraction?*
2. *Were there any influencing factors, such as other people in the group/weather etc.?*
3. *Did any feelings or emotions influence the decision?*
4. *How long did they spend planning the attraction visit?*
5. *What kind of attractions are they visiting in the destination?*
6. *What information sources did they use to plan?*
7. *When did the planning stages occur?*
8. *What type of information was most important?*
9. *Did they use both online and offline sources of information?*

3.10.2 SURVEY DESIGN

The purpose of the survey was to empirically evaluate the decision-making process with particular attention to the information sources used by visitors. The literature and the coded interviews with tourists and the business sector influenced the survey design. This stage of the research was designed to meet the needs of Cambria Tours, whose primary aim was to develop a mobile app or website for visitors to Wales, as well as the thesis research questions. The survey has fifteen questions, split into two main sections between attraction decisions and information source decisions, and finally collects demographic data. The survey instrument was developed from the interview codes and influenced by the literature on decision-making. Since they are new constructs, validity and reliability are unknown.

The first question was developed to measure the influencing factors on people's decision-making process. The variables included were extracted from visitor interview respondent quotes. A seven-point Likert scale was used to measure from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Question two attempted to measure the influence of group members on the decision-making process. In the interviews, people commonly spoke of different people, such as children or spouses, influencing the decision, this question was designed to measure whether certain group members were more influential than others. This data would be useful to compare with the interviews. A seven-point Likert scale was used to measure from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Question three was designed to find out whether the visit had been planned or was spontaneous, it asked respondents to state when they started planning the visit. This can

also be compared to the interview data. Respondents were asked to tick the box for the relevant planning period from 3 months in advance to no planning at all. Question four was designed to measure emotional expectations as part of the decision-making process. The emotions listed were extracted from the interview quotes, and respondents were invited to write their own emotional expectations. Question five asked respondents if plans had changed during the holiday and to tick those that applied and write their own responses. Question six was an extended list of generic attractions in the area, the purpose of this was to be able to cluster respondents into activity segments to assist Cambria Tours with their app development. Question seven asked people where they were staying and was designed to be able to map out distance of travel from the visitor's accommodation to the attraction, this was included to assist Cambria Tours with their app development. Question eight asked people if they had visited or lived in the area or had before – to gauge familiarity with the destination, since in the interviews, people who had stayed in the area before were less likely to spend time planning activities, and it would be useful to be able to correlate this data. Question nine asked the respondents to state travel unit type, whether solo/couple/family/friends etc. Question ten asked the respondents to state the number of days on holiday and number of people in the party, as this would be useful to correlate with other questions such as the when the planning started. Question eleven was designed to ask people which online and offline information sources they used, as well as at what point in the planning process, they used them. In the interviews a very diverse range of planning styles was uncovered, and this question sought to be able to map out which information sources were most important at specific time stages. Question twelve was designed to investigate the importance of specific pieces of information about an attraction. These variables were developed from the interviews with businesses and tourists. Some visitors in the interviews put a lot of emphasis on the importance of reviews, or good quality photographs, while others did not mention them. This was included in the survey to ascertain how they would be valued across a much larger data set. Also, the business owners placed emphasis on gathering online reviews and paying for professional photography and video footage and they were interested in knowing what was most important to potential visitors. A seven-point Likert scale was used to measure from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Question thirteen asked people to state the kind of device they used for online searching – this question was included to assist Cambria Tours with their app development and the attraction businesses. Questions fourteen and fifteen asked respondents if they had adequate WIFI or mobile network coverage during their holiday, since having poor connection may have affected

their ability to search online, this was included to assist Cambria Tours with their app development and the attraction businesses.

Visitor Attraction Survey, 2019

This survey is being carried out by Rhiannon Rees, Doctoral Candidate of Swansea University Email 932805@swansea.ac.uk

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Visitor Attraction Survey

- Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey for the PhD thesis on decision making for activities and attractions visited on holiday by Rhiannon Rees.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to omit any question. Your completion of this questionnaire is taken as your informed consent to participate.
- We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study. To the best of our ability your answers in this study will remain confidential.
- We will not collect any personal details and your answers will only be used for the purposes of this research project.
- Only complete this survey if you are on holiday for a minimum of 2 nights away from your normal home
- Only complete this survey if you are independent travellers and not part of an organised tour
- If you have any questions about this survey please contact Rhiannon Rees 932805@@swansea.ac.uk

Part 1 – Attractions and Activities

Q1. In relation to your choice of _The Vale of Rheidol Steam Train_ please tell us to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Please rate the following statements on scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 7 represents strongly agree.

	To what extent do you agree? Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
It is a top attraction in the area	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It wasn't our first choice, but it was the best available attraction	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is a treat	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It's just something you have to see	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is a personal interest or hobby	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I/we have done it before and wanted to go again	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is relaxing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is educational	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is expensive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There is beautiful scenery and views	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It was a suitable activity for the weather	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It was close by another attraction or activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	To what extent do you agree? Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
The history is interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is special, different to what we normally do	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I/we wanted to go somewhere peaceful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is something I/we used to do in my/our youth	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is affordable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is cultural	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is accessible for the disabled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I/we love this type of attraction	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is dog friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I/ we wanted to be outside	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I/ we wanted to be in nature	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q2. If you are travelling as a group or family please tell us to what extent do you agree or disagree which the following statements?

	To what extent do you agree? Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree	Does Not Apply
It got the children outside of the house	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
It is a way of us catching up and reconnecting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My friends wanted to go	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
It is a way to spend time together as a group or family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
The children wanted to go	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
My partner wanted to go	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
The parents wanted to go	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I wanted to go	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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Q3. When did you plan your visit to Vale of Rheidol?

3 Months or more in advance	☐
1 Month or more in advance	☐
1 Week or more in advance	☐
Less than 1 week in advance	☐
On the day	☐
There was no planning	☐

Q4. In terms of choosing the activity, how did you expect to feel at the Vale of Rheidol Steam Train?

Please rate the following statements on scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represents strongly disagree and 7 represents strongly agree.

	Not Applicable	To what extent do you agree? Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Happy		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Connected to family or friends		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Nostalgic		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Negative		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Euphoric		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Excited		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tired		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Enjoyment		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Positive		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Nice		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Warm		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No feelings		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other Please state		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Q4. Have plans changed unexpectedly whilst on holiday?   Yes / No

If yes, what changed those plans? Please tick all that apply

Change in weather	
Change of mind	
Illness	
Accident	
Transport issue	
Attraction or activity closed	

Other – please specify……………………………………………………………………

Q5. Where have you been and where do you intend to go whilst on this holiday?

Attractions

	YES we have visited	Not yet - We will visit
Art gallery	☐	☐
Adventure attraction	☐	☐
Amusement park	☐	☐
Castle	☐	☐
Cinema	☐	☐
Cultural attraction	☐	☐
Family/ Children's attraction	☐	☐
Festival	☐	☐
Forest	☐	☐
Gardens	☐	☐
Heritage attraction	☐	☐
Marina	☐	☐
Museum	☐	☐

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	YES we have visited	Not yet - We will visit
Nature reserve	☐	☐
Theatre	☐	☐
Railway	☐	☐
Waterfalls	☐	☐
Wildlife or animal attraction	☐	☐

Activities

	YES	Not yet - We will
Beach	☐	☐
Boat trip	☐	☐
Coffee shops	☐	☐
Countryside	☐	☐
Cycling	☐	☐
Fish & Chips	☐	☐
Fishing	☐	☐
Golf	☐	☐
Hiking	☐	☐
Kayaking	☐	☐
Market	☐	☐
Nature	☐	☐
Paddle boarding	☐	☐
Photography	☐	☐
Picnic	☐	☐
Leisure Centre	☐	☐
	☐	☐

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	YES we have visited	Not yet - We will visit
Nearby town/village		
Pub	☐	☐
Reading	☐	☐
Restaurants	☐	☐
Rock Pooling	☐	☐
Sea	☐	☐
Shopping	☐	☐
Walking around	☐	☐

Q7. Where are you staying? (Town/Village) …………………………

Q8a. Have you visited this area before? Yes / No

Q8b. Have you ever lived in this area? Yes / No

Q9. Who are you travelling with? *Please tick one*

Solo	
In a couple	
Group of friends	
Group of family and friends	
Family group with two generations	
Family group with three generations	

Q10a. How many days are you on holiday for in total? Please state ……………………..

Q10b. How many people are you travelling with? Please state ……………………..

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Part 2
INFORMATION SOURCES

**Q11. Please tell us how you got your information about attractions and activities.
Did you use any of the following information sources to either before your holiday, or during it?** *Please tick all that apply*

Offline

	Does Not Apply	1 Month in advance	1 week in advance	On the day
Asked friend or family for recommendation				
Asked a local person for recommendation				
Banner or Poster				
Brochure or Leaflet				
Guide Book				
Map (hard copy)				
Telephoned the attraction/activity				
Tourist Information office				
Visited the attraction to ask for information				

Online

	Does Not Apply	1 Month or more in advance	1 week or more in advance	On the day
Attraction of Activity website				
Local website				
Day out with the kids website				
Facebook				
Google Earth				
Google Maps				
Instagram				
Online Word of Mouth				
Searched online – Google or other search engine				
Trip advisor website				
Visit Wales website				
Weather website				

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Q12. On a scale of 1 to 7, What type of information was of most importance to you?

	Not Important						Very Important
Admission or ticket price	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Address and location	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Accessibility	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Availability of tickets	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Travel time	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Time needed at the attraction or activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Customer Reviews	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Photographs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Written information about the place	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Video footage or clips	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Q13. If searching online what devices do you use? Please tick all relevant boxes

	Does not apply	Pre-Planning stages at home	While on holiday
Laptop			
Mobile (smart phone?)			
Tablet			
Desktop			
None of the above			
Other			

Q14. Has access to WI-FI in the destination been adequate for your information search needs? *Please tick*

	Agree	Disagree
Yes – all the time		
No – none of the time		
Some of the time		
I have not used WIFI		

Q15. Has access to your mobile phone contract phone data in the destination been adequate for your information search needs? *Please tick*

	Agree	Disagree
Yes – all the time		
No – none of the time		
Some of the time		
I have not used phone data		

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<u>About you</u>   *Please circle -*

What is your gender?

Male   Female   Other   Prefer not to say

Please indicate your age group

16-24   25-34   35-44   45-54   55-64   65+

Prefer not to say

What is your current employment status?

Employed   Self Employed   Retired   Student   Home

Maker   Unemployed   Prefer not to say

Other please state...

What is your highest educational attainment?

Primary School   Secondary School   College

University Degree   Prefer not to say

Other please state...

What town are you from?....................................

What country are you from?.................................

If there is anything you would like to add or if you have any comments, please add here:

....
....
....

Thank you for your time completing this survey!

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3.10.3 DATA COLLECTION

Online survey data collection was originally sought as this would have been the most efficient method. However, the attractions could not send a survey on my behalf or release customers' email addresses due to GDPR regulations. Therefore, data collection was done face-to-face with surveys self-administered by participants. Face-to-face surveys are high-cost and labour-intensive, which is a disadvantage to this data collection method. Another limitation is interviewer bias and affect (Bryman, 2012). While it should be noted that the researcher did not read out the survey questions to the respondents, she was nearby and spoke to them before and after completing the surveys. Social desirability bias in responses and satisficing in lengthy surveys is another factor that can affect survey results (Holbrook, Green and Krosnick, 2003). Face-to-face surveys are also limited by geographic location, and there is time pressure on respondents (Szolnoki and Hoffmann, 2013) when compared to an online survey method. However, the advantages of self-completion surveys are lower cost and a reduced interviewer effect when compared to traditional interviews (Bryman, 2012). A clear advantage of conducting the surveys at the visitor attractions was the high response rate and access people in the moment in time while holiday decisions were fresh in their minds. If the surveys had been emailed at the end of the season or before arrival at the attraction, the perception of the decision-making process could have been diminished.

The researcher located herself in areas (at both attractions) where there was a high volume of visitors congregating. The advantage of both attraction sites was that people needed to wait around for the attraction rides and were happy to complete a survey during this time. The researcher handed out paper-based surveys on clipboards. She had ten clipboards that were handed out simultaneously. Respondents were chosen randomly (every third person), moving in a clockwise direction from the data collection position. The researcher was on hand to answer any questions or help people if they had difficulty with the survey. During the piloting process, which was done at The Vale of Rheidol Steam Railway, this interaction with participants was very helpful, and the pilot survey went through three iterations before being finalised. The steam railway has two main stations, and it was at the Devils Bridge station that the researcher positioned herself where many visitors congregated, waiting for the return train to Aberystwyth. At Zip World, surveys were collected from two locations: outside of the café of the main Zip Line attraction and near the café at Fforest (the woodland adventure park). Data collection was cross-sectional and took place between the 29th of July and 31st of August

2019. The researcher collected a total of 601 surveys, 51 in the pilot study, 175 at the Vale of Rheidol Railway and 376 at Zip World. The pilot surveys are not included in the analysis. Survey data (551 surveys) was entered manually into the statistical package SPSS over the course of three months.

3.10.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data was checked and cleaned, with 37 incomplete surveys removed. A total of 515 surveys are included for analysis, 354 collected at Zip World and 161 at the Vale of Rheidol. Data was recorded in the statistical package SPSS, and graphs and charts presented are produced using Microsoft Excel. The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in the appendix of the thesis, including gender, country of residence, employment, and age. Descriptive statistics are implemented to present the findings of the survey alongside the qualitative data. The survey data is intended to add texture to the interview findings and compare the perspectives of detailed narratives from the interview participants with larger sample sizes.

3.11 ETHICS

The ethical principles outlined by Bryman, (2012) have been followed to ensure research ethics were complied with in this study. Four key principles are cited in Bryman, (2012) p.135 from Diener and Crandall (1978). The first is "whether there is harm to participants", the second is "whether there is a lack of informed consent", the third is "whether there is an invasion of privacy", and the fourth is "whether there is any deception involved". Steps were taken to ensure that there was no physical or psychological harm to participants. Confidentiality was particularly important to the representative of Visit Wales, and they have not been named in this study. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to all the tourist interview participants and survey respondents. All names used for the purpose of discussing the findings have been changed. There was no deception involved in the study, participants for the interview were contacted by telephone and email, and the study was explained to them in detail. If they agreed to participate, informed consent was sought in all cases prior to data collection, and all participants were offered the right to withdraw from the research process. According to Patton (1990,p.472), "the researcher is an instrument in qualitative enquiry"; in this case, the researcher was also the property host. It was found that the researcher's credibility was

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enhanced since people trusted the property host. However, an ethical consideration should be made since as a host, there may have been a perceived power relationship, this was minimised by ensuring participation was voluntary. Swansea University Ethics Committee and Aberystwyth University gave ethics approval for each stage of this study.

3.12 RESEARCH CONSTRAINTS

There were a few disruptions to the research journey. Tourism being seasonal in rural Wales meant that the optimal times for data collection were June, July, and August. This research window meant that there was limited time to organise and reach visiting tourists. The researcher transferred University from Aberystwyth to Swansea in September 2018 (due to supervisors' relocation) and essentially became a distance student from Swansea while living in Aberystwyth. This impacted having local university resources such as an office and postgraduate study network and disrupted research activities. Cambria Tours, while an enthusiastic and supportive partner, was primarily concerned with developing an app for tourists, and it was a difficult bridge to manage between industry and academic output. Cambria Tours, unfortunately, withdrew from the KESS2 programme due to financial issues, and the researcher had to deal with this issue since the company was not in communication with KESS2. In 2020 and 2021, Covid and the subsequent lockdowns impacted on the research. Finally, while data collection was complete, the researcher had difficulty writing the thesis due to isolation and stress.

CHAPTER 4: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents insights from three semi-structured interviews conducted in 2019 with key marketing managers in the Welsh tourism sector, providing qualitative findings from these discussions. They comprised of two attractions: The Vale of Rheidol Railway in Aberystwyth; Zip World in Betws Y Coed and Visit Wales the National DMO for Wales. The aim of the interviews was to understand their marketing approach; the effectiveness of their communication channels; their understanding of consumer behaviour with respect to decision-making and a general view of industry challenges or trends. The participants, comprising marketing managers from each organisation, generously shared their insights, providing their specialist understanding of marketing practices, audience engagement methodologies, and sectoral dynamics. These interviews contribute to the thesis by sharing the management perspective on activity and attraction selection, customer insights and future plans for growth. It offers a more balanced approach to answering the research questions, particularly on information channels and enables the thesis to make more applicable management recommendations.

These interviews share the perspectives of tourism stakeholders, and some of the challenges of marketing tourist attractions. They were an important factor in gaining permission to visit both sites to collect tourist surveys and offered the researcher an insight into their marketing activities and relationship with tourists. This contributes to the overall thesis by understanding the organisational perspective on in-destination decision-making (not limited to the consumer perspective). Another aim of the thesis is to offer management recommendations, and understanding the position of attraction and activity organisations is optimal for this. All the stakeholders interviewed were responsible for marketing activities and managing marketing budgets and expressed a strong interest in the findings of the thesis, since it could contribute directly to their marketing plans. The interviewer aimed to get a broad understanding of how they viewed tourists and where they directed their marketing activity. Whether they considered spending more resources on newer digital marketing channels like social media to be more important or effective than traditional routes. The interviewer wanted to understand the strategic approach, and whether the marketing managers understood the decision-making process of the tourist. The interviews revealed four key themes: 1. Marketing strategies and

outreach; 2. Marketing challenges and measuring marketing effectiveness; 3. Decision-making & 4. Future growth. While all three organisations recognised the advantages of digital communication channels, there were differences in their strategic approaches. Zip World and Visit Wales prioritised digital platforms and limited printed materials – embracing new technologies and favouring video and digital media wherever possible, citing its reach and measurability as essential factors. Whereas The Vale of Rheidol Railway adopted a more diverse approach encompassing many digital, in-person and print channels. Zip World's adoption of data-driven customer personas and segmentation strategy contrasted with The Vale of Rheidol Railway's reliance on direct customer engagement, reflecting varied approaches to understanding and catering to consumer preferences. The organisations acknowledge challenges in measuring marketing effectiveness; information channels; seasonality and changes in consumer behaviour since digitisation; Brexit and Millennial patterns.

Research Questions

1. *How do attractions and destinations value and use online information sources in relation to traditional information sources?*
2. *What is the marketing strategy of the organisations?*
3. *What is the balance of print versus online marketing? Where do they emphasise their communications, and why?*
4. *Have the organisations considered how tourists make decisions about visiting attractions in Wales?*

4.2 ORGANISATION DETAILS

The Vale of Rheidol is a narrow-gauge heritage steam railway and visitor centre, and trades as a charitable trust and tourist attraction. Once owned by Great Western, it has historical significance to the local area. It began in 1897 as a passenger train connecting the twelve-mile journey between Aberystwyth and Devils Bridge. The journey traverses the Welsh countryside and is both scenic and exhilarating. The attraction offers vintage steam locomotive rides, access to a small museum and a short "drive the train" experience. At the time of the interview, the attraction had expansion plans to develop a visitor experience and host events. Since the

completion of this thesis, the expansion plans to include an engine shed museum have been completed. The attraction is open from March to October annually and usually closes after the last half term holiday in the autumn. Its timetable is most frequent during the summer months. It attracts approximately 60,000 visitors a year and has seen growth in recent times. Visitors are from a wide catchment which includes international visitors, train enthusiasts, coach parties and holidaymakers. It also markets to locals and local groups. Vale of Rheidol employs around 40 members of staff and additional volunteers, which makes it distinct from other steam railways that are run solely by volunteers.

Zip World is an adventure attraction that was established in 2013 by a local entrepreneur Sean Taylor. It has grown exponentially from a single zip line across a disused quarry, into multiple adventure attraction sites, and a multi-million-pound development. It has been viewed as a key adventure centre and contributor to economic regeneration of North Wales. Zip World operates three sites in North Wales, one in South Wales, and has expanded its reach to include a site in Ireland. The company's offerings have diversified over the years to include more than twelve attractions, which include: underground trampolines, cavern adventures, and forest coasters, among others. Despite this diversification, zip lines remain a significant part of its portfolio, with the Velocity zip line at Penrhyn Quarry being recognized as the fastest in the world and the longest in Europe. At the time of the interview, the company received 500,000 visitors annually excluding spectators and 85% of bookings were made online. The company has since grown since this time, with a reported turnover of £10 million and a profit of £5.5 million in 2021. By September 2022, Zip World was valued at almost £100 million and had ambitions for further expansion while maintaining its roots in Wales. The company employs around 850 staff and delivers approximately 800,000 rides annually across all its sites. Zip World continues to innovate and expand its offerings.

Visit Wales is the tourism organization of the Welsh Government, dedicated to promoting tourism within Wales and assisting the tourism industry. It plays a crucial role in showcasing Wales as a premier destination for visitors by highlighting the country's rich history, heritage, culture, and natural landscapes. The origins of Visit Wales trace back to the establishment of the Wales Tourist Board in 1969. The goals of Visit Wales are to deliver economic growth that benefits people and places, environmental sustainability, social and cultural enrichment, and health benefits (Government, 2020). It aims to achieve this by growing a stronger and more defined brand for Welsh tourism, focusing investment and innovation in the sector, and driving

an increase in both the volume and value of visitors to Wales each year. (Government, 2020). Visit Wales has embraced digital platforms to reach a broader audience. The organization maintains a comprehensive website VisitWales.com, which serves as the official international consumer website for tourism in Wales. It provides inspiration and information for those looking to explore Wales, whether for short breaks, family holidays, or business events. The website is available in multiple languages, including English, Welsh, German, French, and Spanish, catering to a global audience. Through its various initiatives and campaigns, it plays a pivotal role in supporting and enabling partners to grow the tourism sector for the future, thereby contributing to the overall well-being of Wales.

4.3 MARKETING STRATEGIES AND OUTREACH

There were similarities in the approach of marketing to visitors by the three organisations. All of which recognised the importance of digital communications. Though there was some difference in the level of advanced digital strategies and weighting on various channels. Visit Wales and Zip world have shifted most of their marketing efforts to digital and social media channels, while the Vale of Rheidol was marketing across many online, in person and print channels. Both Zip World and Vale of Rheidol engaged with external agencies to enhance their marketing efforts. The Vale of Rheidol recently overhauled its website to make it more user-friendly and mobile-responsive, addressing previous limitations that made online booking difficult. This was a significant step in improving its digital marketing. The company also engages in social media marketing and has started to see an increase in online bookings, although most tickets are still purchased at the booking office on the day of travel.

*"Thankfully we've just **built a new website** because ours was awful…. So, now it's just simpler, it's cleaner, it's mobile-friendly…I think already we're **noticing more activity** on our website because it is much easier to navigate. We've just done a bit of work with (external agency) just to help us because my knowledge of social media isn't brilliant." Vale of Rheidol*

Vale of Rheidol also managed a few social media and video content sites, including Instagram, Twitter and YouTube:

*"We do **Instagram,** we do **Twitter**…We've got **YouTube videos** and stuff as well that we use. So, yeah, we try and use **a lot** of stuff really." Vale of Rheidol*

At Zip World a significant portion of their marketing budget is allocated to digital channels, with a strong emphasis on social media platforms:

*"Overwhelmingly **seventy percent of the marketing budget is on digital**. Of which another **seventy percent is social media and Instagram**. So, we focus heavily on social media advertising, display advertising. " Zip World*

Zip World employ geo-targeting for adverts on mobile apps and digital boards at train stations:

*"We also do **geo-targeting** as well. So, if you're in the train station, if you don't see the digital 6 sheets, we've got **adverts** on about a **hundred thousand mobile apps** that will pop up… but it could be an app that's a game, it could be a key weather, it could be daily mail."*
Zip World

Zip World increasingly rely on social media-based influencer marketing to reach potential customers when launching new attractions:

*"We're launching a new product in, next month, called Quarry Cart, that's a downhill kind of mountain buggy that you're going to be able to race your friends. And we have, we've moved the **majority of the budget to an influencing campaign**." Zip World*

While Zip World did not emphasise leaflets in their marketing strategies, they also printed a similar number of leaflets as Vale of Rheidol.

*"We probably **print around about 350,000 leaflets** a year, that is increasing," Zip World*

Visit Wales also prioritised digital marketing in their strategy, focusing on leveraging digital platforms to promote Wales both domestically and internationally. It highlights the shift away from traditional print media towards digital channels:

*"We **are digital first**, so we produce **virtually no print** at all now and haven't done for some time." Visit Wales*

Visit Wales has seen substantial growth on Instagram, emphasising the importance of real, user-generated content to connect with potential visitors. The 'This is Wales. Share yours' campaign encourages locals and visitors to share their experiences, which Visit Wales then uses in paid social media advertising. This approach authenticates the promotional content and leverages the power of community and personal recommendations.

*"We've been **pushing people in Wales**, local communities and residents to **share their pictures** of their favourite places in Wales and what we do in them... (for our) paid social media advertising so you know that when you're seeing paid social from us, the people in it are **genuinely real people**. " Visit Wales*

Despite the focus on digital, Visit Wales still values traditional media, including print and radio, for certain target audiences and campaigns. This balanced approach recognizes that while digital is dominant, traditional channels still play a role in reaching and influencing potential visitors. Visit Wales.

*"So whereas occasionally you may have **minimal print** for certain markets, for example, last year some of the Wales Way product there was **some print produced for that show** and distribution around that, and also things like the caravan and camping show where sometimes **slightly older market**, but pretty much **digital first**." Visit Wales*

They also engaged with some print media, radio, television and advertising if they thought it was appropriate:

*"We take placements. **Advertisement placements in magazines**. Things like national trust and as well targeted to specific audiences. And we also do a little bit **of radio work**."*
Visit Wales

*"In the last few weeks, we've been doing a lot of work with the **Times**. So, you see a lot of times articles coming up on **Facebook** in particular, and their article **'Seven Things To Discover Around Wales'**." Visit Wales*

For the attraction sector, they recognised the leaflets were a defining strategy for attractions to reach visitors in places such as local supermarkets.

*"And yet when you get down to an **attraction level**, you only have to walk into **Morrisons to see that there are attraction leaflets on display** ... it's quite **nice to browse** them and look through them, and that hasn't shown any sign of diminishing in the last few years."*
Visit Wales

The Vale of Rheidol's audience is not limited to rail enthusiasts but includes families, holidaymakers, and international tourists from various regions. This diversity presents a challenge in creating marketing materials and strategies that appeal to a broad audience. The railway has responded by distributing leaflets and brochures widely, and attending shows with high footfall unrelated to railways, as well as online platforms to reach a wider audience.

*"Basically, we **do leaflets, brochures**, that we send out **to five different distributions**. So, we do **three hundred thousand leaflets** a year." Vale of Rheidol*

*"I've got a book of all the **shows** everywhere, and we basically look at what's the **biggest footfall,** it hasn't got to be anything to do with railways because ... people that visit us aren't just rail enthusiasts, they're just holiday makers.... We're doing the **Country File Live show, the Great Yorkshire Show and I think we're doing Dorset** again this year." Vale of Rheidol*

Additionally Visit Wales and The Vale of Rheidol saw the value in engaging with local businesses such as hotels or caravan sites, to promote attractions:

*"I think the role that the rest of the rest of **visitor economy network** plays in **supporting and signposting to attractions is invaluable,** whether that's a petrol station or a local supermarket, but particularly accommodation." Visit Wales*

*"We send out letters to all the **camp sites, caravan sites, B&Bs, hotels,** you know, and send them leaflets and we've done a couple of **familiarisation tours**." Vale of Rheidol*

While Zip world did engage in leafleting in North Wales, they were more focused on bringing in new visitors from further afield, which explains their emphasis on digital marketing to spark interest and raise awareness before the visitor reached the destination:

*"Over seventy five percent of our customers are **outside of Wales**. So, when our kind of local DMO organisations look at leafleting, they don't tend to think outside of North Wales, they tend to focus on leaflets in hotels but that's because the people are already here, so what I'm interested in is to the **top of funnel, the new customers**." Zip World*

4.4 MARKETING CHALLENGES & MEASURING MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS

The organisations acknowledged the difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of their marketing efforts. The Vale of Rheidol, operating with limited resources, utilised numerous marketing channels and sought clarity on prioritising them effectively. Although they had begun implementing website analytics, they lacked a clear strategy to optimise the website's impact.

*"The problem is you've got to **cover everything** and if you don't do one thing you could be missing out. So, knowing what's working the best, I mean we do get **analytics back from (the website)** to say, you know, it's had more hits and stuff, so we see that, so that's great."*
Vale of Rheidol

The railway endeavoured to improve the measurement of print media by incorporating coupons and special offers in their leaflets and at events, which visitors can redeem. This enables them to track the origin of their visitors and evaluate the effectiveness of print marketing initiatives.

*"We've got a **generic ad** that we run, we've done quite a **big discount promotion** this year, just so I can **get feedback** of where these magazines are coming from, just to **see if it works** basically." Vale of Rheidol*

Additionally, they conducted annual visitor surveys to gather data on how people had heard about them, and where they were from.

*" I think we do four **surveys** a year and basically ask where they've seen us from, you know, what they're doing here, age group and stuff like that." Vale of Rheidol*

Furthermore, the Vale of Rheidol were concerned about the environmental footprint of producing 300,000 leaflets:

*"The other thing that we are…is **green aware** and three hundred thousand brochures is a **resource**." Vale of Rheidol*

In contrast, Zip World presented a sophisticated approach to digital marketing. They gauged the effectiveness of their mobile advertisements through click-through rates. While they acknowledged the challenge of measuring digital boards, they monitored increases in website orders alongside the presence of advertisements on digital boards in city centres.

*"On **geo-targeting**, that's quite simple because you're able to **record click-through** rates."*
Zip World

*"In terms **of out of home**, that's a little bit **more difficult** but we have started to see spikes in certain areas. So, if we're advertising in Manchester and Liverpool city centre packs, we're also in the, the static display board in city centres and we see an **increase in orders from the areas where we're advertising**." Zip World*

*"We're seeing an **increase in click through** rates, to that's the kind of major measure for us." Zip World*

Visit Wales identified a significant challenge posed by the abundance of information accessible to tourists and the difficulty of distinguishing oneself. They advised attractions to devise strategies to differentiate themselves and stand out amidst the competition:

*"The two things that strike me always is the **plethora of choice** and so there's a lot of white noise out there, so you have to get cut through whether you're selling Wales or whether you're selling your attraction. You've still got a very **crowded marketplace** to cut through."*
Visit Wales

Visit Wales also acknowledged that their relative size compared to their closest competitors was small.

*"We **are small compared to Ireland or Scotland**, literally like almost about 1/10 of what they spend." Visit Wales*

For Visit Wales, they measured their effectiveness though their brand pillars and marketing focus:

*"The brand itself, has three pillars. So whichever theme year we're in the **three core pillars** of the **brand are landscape, culture and adventure**. And those are the three pillars where Wales it's felt Wales can really compete nationally and internationally." Visit Wales*

The marketing manager from Visit Wales also spoke about new changes to their website to track hits on the attraction pages, but unfortunately, the analytics site was not working on the day of the interview, so they couldn't offer any more information on their data.

Seasonality was also considered a challenge by both attractions since they experienced their busiest times at the height of summer season. Rather than opt for discounting strategies, Zip world utilised third-party resellers with package deals to boost sales out of season. They highlight the importance of maintaining visitor numbers during the off-season time, otherwise it would be detrimental to the financial wellbeing of the business:

*"We tend to utilise **third party ticket re-sellers out of season** and out of holidays. We view seats as perishable items…so it's important that we, we're able to flex occupancy out of season. We're able to capitalise on the summer, but it's the out-of-season business which you can really impact if you are price-led. It's trying to **change people's buying habits**, whether it's working with travel, on a **package deal** or Picnic on a special rate with those guys, so we kind of work across a **number of channels**." Zip World*

For the Vale of Rheidol, it was a similar picture: Summer was very busy, and the shoulder months were much quieter. They had tried discounting all tickets for limited weeks in the past and found that the revenue was too low. Instead, they are promoting reduced-price tickets for locals year-round.

*"I'd say June, July, August our trains are heaving, and we have to turn people away because it's just too busy…. then **Spring and Autumn**… is when I have to sort of **find ideas to bring people to the station.**" Vale of Rheidol*

*"Last February we did a **local's discount week** where we had a fifty percent discount. It was okay but then this year I decided let's not do that but let's **offer locals a forty percent discount they can use any time of the year**, so rather than it just being that one week in February. We had less people in February but because they weren't paying the fifty percent*

*discount we had more revenue, but we've also sold now tickets where they all come **with their families** with the forty percent and hopefully fill the trains when, you know, we haven't been able to fill them before."*

The seasonality of tourism is a clear challenge for the attractions and communication efforts during these times need to be very effective at bringing in new visitors. During the shoulder and winter months the attractions see a reduced demand and apply discounts or novel activities to attract visitors. The impact of their communications is critical to influence the decision-making of potential visitors.

4.5 DECISION-MAKING

Both visitor attractions demonstrated extensive knowledge of their customers regarding decision-making. However, Zip World adopted a more analytical approach, collaborating with a marketing agency to craft six customer personas centred on demographics. These personas served as the foundation for their marketing strategy.

*"We've narrowed it down to **6 personas**... different **segmentations** for young adults, without children, families with children of a certain age and whether they're suburban or rural and young professionals." Zip World*

It was clear that The Vale of Rheidol engaged directly with their customers onsite, gathering anecdotal information to better understand their needs. They acknowledged the significance of crafting a memorable tourist experience.

*"I was **talking to one of the customers** and they said the same thing, **they love the fact that we've kept it vintage** with the steam trains, whereas some steam railways have gone completely modern." Vale of Rhiedol*

*"One of our **biggest assets is how friendly the staff are**….we really are big on that, and we like everybody to be in uniform and look like part of the railway." Vale of Rheidol*

The Vale of Rheidol noted the different types of booking behaviour – some people wait until they arrive to book, some book in advance, and some are day trippers:

*"We know there's a lot of people that come to **Aber on day trips**, I've known people that come from London, Leeds or Yorkshire for a day. We've also got the people who might look at caravanning and come and spend a week and **they decide what they're going to do when they get here**. We also get people who are **booking seats for October**, they're that well organised." Vale of Rheidol*

Zip World observed a recent shift in consumer behaviour. Previously, they could depend on most customers booking months in advance, but lately, bookings have been made much closer to the date of the visit.

*" We have seen a **shift since probably March** this year where people are not **booking as in advance**... because people are waiting that much long, **closer to the time before they book**."*
Zip World

*"And I think that is down to a couple of reasons, I think **Brexit** perhaps has an affect… I think **it's budget** and I think it's the **millennial mindset**." Zip World*

The decrease in consumer confidence regarding spending was attributed to environmental and fiscal factors. This raised concerns because, despite witnessing a steady increase in visitor numbers in real terms, it hindered their operational planning for the future. The planning preferences of visitors is echoed in the guest interview findings on decision-making approaches, with some participants planning and making bookings early, though most preferred to be flexible and spontaneous.

4.6 FUTURE GROWTH

The Vale of Rheidol and Zip World both had strategic growth plans, Vale of Rheidol was opening a new event centre and museum at the Aberystwyth Site, while Zip World were planning on opening or acquiring new attractions.

*"It's a £2.2M project that we're going through…for a **new museum…visitor centre**…Once the building across the track here is up and running, we're hoping we can do weddings."*
Vale of Rheidol

*"We have some really **ambitious growth plans** for the next 2 to 3 years, so we're looking to maybe acquire **additional sites**. Add to existing sites and then also to find brand new sites."*
Zip World

4.7 CONCLUSION

The interviews conducted with industry professionals provided valuable insights into the marketing strategies, audience engagement tactics, and challenges faced by these organisations within the Welsh tourism sector. Through an examination of their approaches and practices, four key themes emerged, shedding light on the dynamic landscape of tourism marketing and management. All three organisations recognised the importance of digital communications in reaching and engaging with their target audiences. While Zip World and Visit Wales heavily emphasised digital and social media channels, The Vale of Rheidol Railway adopted a more diversified approach, leveraging both online, in-person and offline platforms to connect with potential visitors. Despite their varying strategies, each organisation strived to enhance its marketing efforts, with Zip World and The Vale of Rheidol Railway engaging external agencies to bolster their initiatives. Both visitor attractions demonstrated a deep understanding of their customers, albeit with different approaches. Zip World employed a data-driven, analytical approach by collaborating with a marketing agency to develop detailed customer personas. In contrast, The Vale of Rheidol Railway engaged directly with customers on-site,

gathering in-person information to tailor their offerings and experiences accordingly. This personalised approach underscored the importance of creating memorable experiences for visitors. The organisations grappled with various challenges, including the measurement of marketing effectiveness, shifts in consumer behaviour, seasonality, and the need to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace. In conclusion, the insights garnered from these interviews contribute to this thesis, which aims to address the overarching research question: 'How do tourists make decisions about activities and attractions to visit or experience while on holiday?' The attractions are deeply committed to providing memorable experiences and are invested in optimising their marketing efforts, measuring performance, increasing bookings, and ensuring sustained growth. The exploration of the research sub-question, 'Do tourists prioritise online information sources and the internet over offline sources?' holds the potential for offering valuable marketing insights to the attractions, particularly when considering the timeline of decision making, and contextual factors while in the destination. Understanding this aspect can aid in better allocation of budgets and focus, thereby enhancing their marketing strategies and optimising their outreach efforts.

5. CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS – INTERVIEWS & SURVEY DATA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The first phase of data collection involved conducting nineteen interviews, collected over three summers in Aberystwyth, providing insight into the decision-making behaviour of its thirty-six participants. The interview participants were all travelling with family or friends, which yielded an interesting and unexpected understanding of group dynamics and the decision-making process of multiple participants. Data from the third research phase, the 515 surveys, has been included to supplement the qualitative findings and demonstrate correlation and contrast where the data adds value to the interview findings. The research's overarching aim was to understand how tourists make decisions regarding attractions and activities in situ. There were three research sub-questions: First, to understand and explore the situational and contextual factors influencing decision-making. Secondly, to understand emotions and feelings in decision-making. Thirdly, the aim was to understand the influence of information sources in those decisions. At the time of undertaking the research, the model of dual system processing (McCabe et al., 2016) was a key framework with the view that this study could expand on that framework, specifically for the decision-making behaviour of attraction and activity selection. However, the interviews yielded limited insight into dual-system processing. Nevertheless, a new understanding of the dynamic and contextual nature of tourists in situ decision-making while on holiday was observed. There was ample interview data collected on group dynamics; timing of decisions; the emotions involved in decision-making; motivations influencing decisions; and the nuanced function of information search and how it is used in decision-making. Furthermore, the researcher has been able to undertake a classification of decision-making styles – the organised planner; flexible planning; no planning and spontaneity.

The first and second themes address the overarching research question of how tourists decide on attractions and activities and the situational and contextual aspects. The first theme discusses how decision-making happens in situ, exploring the subthemes of transport, weather, budget, destination attributes, seeking something different and motivations. Participants considered many situational factors while at the destination, and these contributed to the decision-making process. The second theme explores the dynamic and social context of decision-making: the group's influence, negotiation, power and collective decision-making. The third theme addresses the second research sub-question investigating emotions in decision-making. The

study explores the emotional context, including psychological and physical feelings expressed by participants, as well as the emotional connection and familial bonding experienced. The fourth and fifth themes address the overarching research question of how people make decisions and the third sub-question of how information sources influence decision-making. The fourth theme determines and segments four groups of decision makers – the organised planner, flexible planning, no planning, and spontaneity. The fifth theme discusses how information sources influence decision-making, revealing the participants' nuanced and multifaceted behaviour.

Research Questions

How do tourists in situ decide about activities and attractions to visit or experience? (What is the process of decision-making?)

The following sub-questions are under investigation:

1. *How does the situation and context of the group or individual affect the decision-making process?*

2. *How do feelings and emotions impact the decision-making process?*

3. *How do tourists, attractions and destinations value and use online information sources in relation to traditional information sources?*

5.2 THEME 1: UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT & HOW DECISION-MAKING HAPPENS IN SITU

This section will review the findings on situational and contextual factors in decision-making. Participants repeatedly mentioned the weather and transport when discussing their activity selection and holiday plans; these were often the first things they discussed in the interviews. While the researcher worked to get beyond the superficial and understand more about how people make decisions from a deeper perspective, participants often described these practical and seemingly obvious factors as important considerations in their decision-making process. The interviewer asked participants to share their thoughts on budget and how that influenced their selection of attractions and activities. Other situational factors that emerged were the influence of the destination and how the destination attributes were sometimes linked to the activity choices. Motivations for activity choice, the desire to do something different, and authentic experiences were revealed.

5.2.1 TRANSPORT AND GETTING AROUND

Aberystwyth is a small town easily accessible by foot and has limited public transport by train and bus connecting it to other towns and villages. Many attractions and activities are situated on the outskirts of the town in the countryside. They are most easily accessible by car, though some, like the famed Devils Bridge Steam Railway and waterfalls, are reachable by train during the tourist season. The type of transportation that participants had access to naturally impacted which activities they could reach. Participants usually found it much more convenient to reach various attractions and activities within the destination with their own car. In some examples, a car also offered tourists a sense of freedom and independence. The participants of Interview Thirteen were with a multi-generation family, so taking their mum to see the spectacular views on the road from Devil's Bridge was as much of an experience as the attraction itself:

*"No, we drove. **Beautiful views when you drive**. And it's just the scenery there. I wanted to take my mum before her knee totally gives out you know, and I just think it's so pretty there, it's **something you have to see** if you know what I mean, to appreciate the beauty of it."*

Lauren (Interview 13)

The group in Interview One had a rental car for the entire trip, and they mentioned many enjoyable road trips and their spontaneous encounters. However, they also carefully evaluated the pros and cons of public transport to reach other destinations and locations from Aberystwyth. Noting that sometimes it was easier and more convenient to travel by train:

*"That was fun yeah. That's what we're **trying to figure out here**, how much do we do this by car and how much by train, and part of it is because when we look at it, you can look at it and say OK 60 miles, that should take us forty-five minutes. (laughing) But here (in Wales) it's two to three hours. **So maybe we would, are we smarter to do some things by train**."*
Daniel, (Interview 1)

One group from Germany expressed frustration at having done all the activities in the town centre and the need to rent a car to explore further afield. They visited in October, an out-of-season time for the UK. They found that they wanted to explore, but the weather prevented them from venturing too far on foot, as they had been caught in the rain a few times.

*"The only thing is the city is small, now we are **struggling little bit with the activities we can do** because we did everything after. So now we have to **extend the area**. That is probably easier when you are here in **summertime,** now its November, raining sometimes every now and then during the day. We cannot go hiking for more than one kilometre because you never know what happens. So, we would need **to rent a car which is no option anymore for the group**. Next week I can rent with my husband…will come." Maria, (Interview 5)*

They had encountered issues with the bus to Devil's Bridge, and the train was not running, so they missed the convenience of having a car. There was an air of disappointment that they couldn't make the most of their time and explore the surrounding area with the mobility a car would have given them. They regretted their decision not to hire a car earlier in the trip. One of the guests who was staying on had decided to rent a car (with her husband, who was arriving later) so they could drive around and see more of the area. They were an active group and enjoyed hiking, so renting a car had not been on their minds at the start of the trip as they preferred to explore on foot. Had they been visiting earlier in the year, in the summer, they acknowledged there would have been more for them to do in the town, on the local beaches and walking trails, as they would not have to dodge the rain. This contextual background

demonstrates how decisions about transport, the impact of the weather, the season and the interests of the group all contribute to in-destination decision-making.

In another example, an American couple staying during the summer had decided not to rent a car as they thought it would cause unnecessary stress, driving on the left side of the road. They were deliberating between the bus or the train to take them to an attraction and acknowledged that the train along the coastline to North Wales from Aberystwyth was considered a strong draw since they would be able to enjoy the views on the journey:

*"James doesn't really want to drive here and I'm not particularly excited about that either, just because of the other, you know, **the other side of the road** thing….any place else, we'd just **rent a car** and then we can do things a little bit quicker." Viola, (Interview 10)*

*"The **Welsh coastline is supposed to be just beautiful**, so…I think we're kind of leaning towards the **train**….it sounds like it will be a really pretty, pretty trip." James (Interview 10)*

Transport and getting around impacted decision-making; groups with access to a car had far more freedom to select attractions to visit or make scenic drives around rural Wales. Groups without a car were actively investigating and using public transport options. They had made decisions based on the scenery of the routes taken, convenience of not having to drive and availability of public transport. Groups that holidayed during the summer months and tourist season had greater access to public transport, as during off-season, some services were reduced in Aberystwyth and the surrounding area, impacting their mobility. It points to a temporal dimension since time of year can impact on decision-making. This contextual evidence of transport in the decision-making process, demonstrates that transport can sometimes be a barrier to tourists' full autonomy on their choices.

5.2.2 WEATHER

The weather was quite a frequent topic in the interviews, particularly since the weather can be quite wet and unpredictable in Wales, even in summer. Weather is quite an important factor in planning outdoor activities however, there was a split in attitudes towards the weather. Some

groups were fully prepared to go out and enjoy local activities or attractions in the rain, while others would not commit to plans unless they knew the weather would be favourable.

One family group interviewed chose a large house in the centre of town to stay in and brought lots of games and crafts to keep the family entertained in case of bad weather. There was no intention of going out in the rain if it was not necessary.

*"That's it for attractions really, because we know the **weather was going to be bad** and obviously, there's such a big group of us with different abilities this time. Erm, so that's why we wanted a house like this. So, we could **bring bits and not have to go out all the time***." Faye, (Interview 3)*

Other factors also played into this decision, such as a temporary disability and a desire to spend quality time together as a family. These themes are explored further later in this chapter. Conversely, in another interview, a family with teenage children was readily prepared for the inclement weather and were unfazed by it; they walked the town's promenade in the rain and storms and enjoyed it. They even made an activity out of the stormy weather, snapping photos and playing around the waves crashing onto the promenade.

*"We went out and we went round the castle and again the **weather was terrible** south of the prom and because it was windy the **sea was nice and choppy***, so we were just dodging the waves on the pier and **taking photographs** like that. Laura's got a camera, and she was doing action shots with the other two." Emily (Interview 16)*

There was an attitude of being prepared for adverse weather and wearing the right clothing so that the group could still enjoy themselves.

*"But you see as a child **we holidayed in Scotland** on the western isles, so you just go, you have to **have your waterproofs***." Emily (Interview 16)*

It was noted that the weather changed frequently, so planning activities around the weather fostered spontaneity in decision-making since decisions were made at the last minute.

*"...so **haven't particularly planned** anything and also the **weather's changed**, even from the forecast it changes sort of like half-daily." Emily (Interview 16)*

The group picked a sunny day for their visit to Devils Bridge, a scenic bridge and waterfall park in nature; they were very pleased that they were there on a good day.

"Yesterday we went on the railway up to the Devil's Bridge which was probably the **best day for weather**. So, that was really nice, so the **scenery was brilliant**, and we saw lots of Kites and Buzzards, which was really nice, and some Herons as well." Emily (Interview 16)

Though they did acknowledge that had the weather been better – their activity choices would have been more orientated towards the beach and sea swimming:

*"But not really, I suppose **if the weather had been really good, we would have been down at the beach more**, and they would have been in the sea but it's just trying not to, well just to be a bit chilled and not have the hassle of work and all of that stuff" Emily (Interview 16)*

Others planned their whole itinerary around the weather and would not consider going outside in the rain. These participants took a more fluid approach to making decisions and planning activities; they delayed making plans since they were waiting to see what the weather was like.

*"Yeah, we **planned** Devil's Bridge and then the walk round the Castle and up Constitution Hill, but we didn't set exact days because obviously, you've got to **go with the weather** as well. So, we've really been **taking each day as it comes**." Lauren (Interview 13)*

In Interview Eight, the couple were holidaying with David's elderly mother, and going out in the rain was not an option. They had planned to take the train to Devils Bridge, but the rain prevented them from booking tickets in advance. However, when the sun came out, they decided to head out.

*"Thursday it was **blowing a storm**, absolutely ponding here, it was lovely to watch, and we decided we were going to go on the train up the valley, but it was that bad we wondered if it would even be going but then around ten o'clock the sun came out, **it was still wild out there***

but the sun came out, so I drove down, I knew I'd miss the train, but we booked tickets in the afternoon, so we went up the valley yesterday." David (Interview 8)

The weather had a considerable impact on the context of decision-making; good weather – sunshine and clear skies gave people more choices for activity selection, though participants with a positive and pragmatic attitude found ways to work around the weather, finding indoor activities, being prepared for rain, or being flexible in their schedule and going to their desired attractions as soon as there was a break in the weather.

The influence of weather on decision-making was also identified in the quantitative data. In the survey, respondents were asked if their plans changed and if so, what were the reasons for those plans changing. Only 26% of the total respondents (n=128/515) changed their plans to visit Zip world or the Vale of Rheidol railway (figure 17). However, change in weather was the most frequent response with 100 respondents overall reporting this as influencing decision-making (figure 16).

Figure 16. Causes of Changes in Plans

Causes of Change in Plans

- Change in weather — 81%
- Change of mind — 5%
- Illness — 5%
- Accident — 2%
- Transport issue — 1%
- Attraction or activity closed — 6%

Legend:
- Change in weather
- Change of mind
- Illness
- Accident
- Transport issue
- Attraction or activity closed
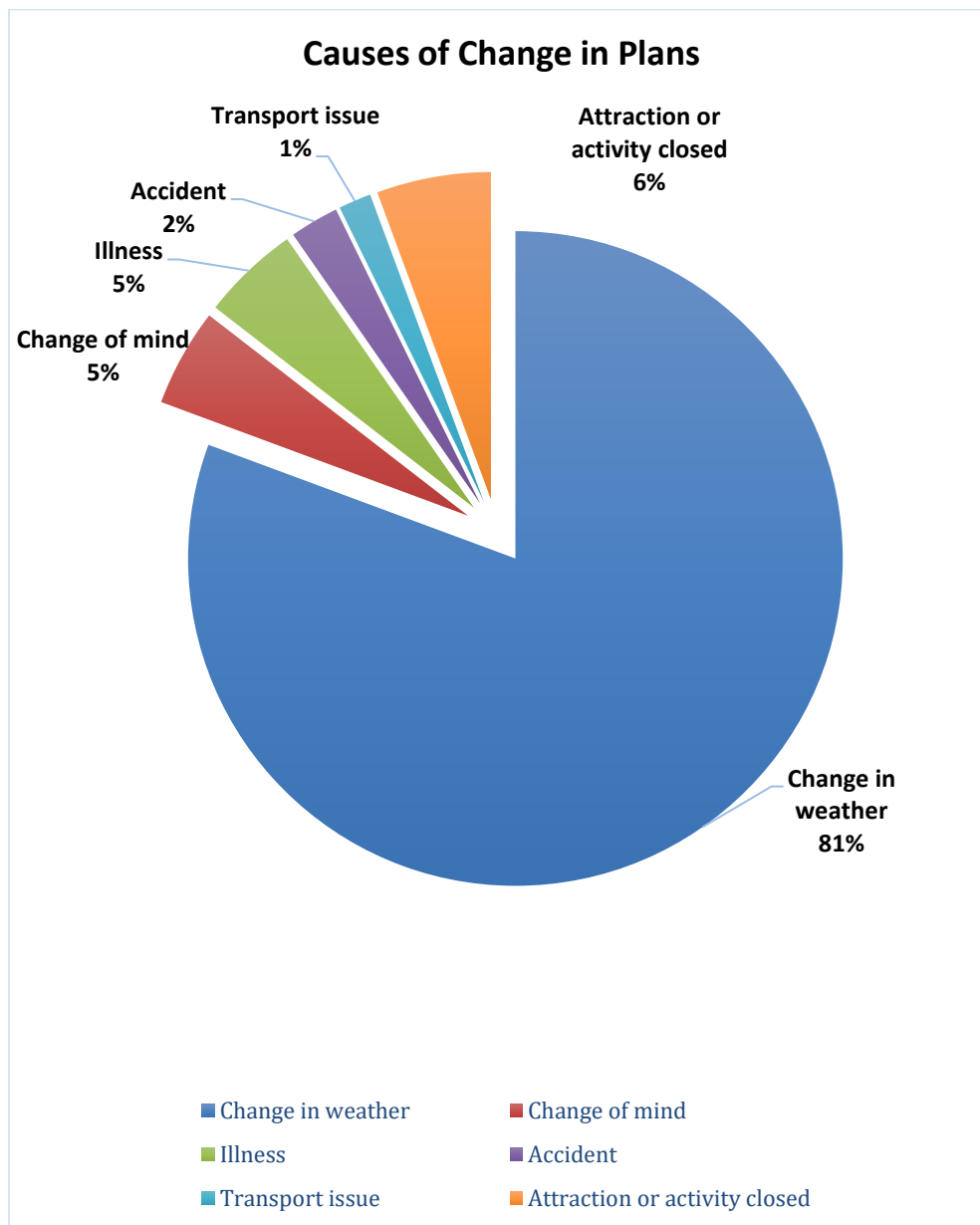
Figure 17. Change to Plans by Percentage
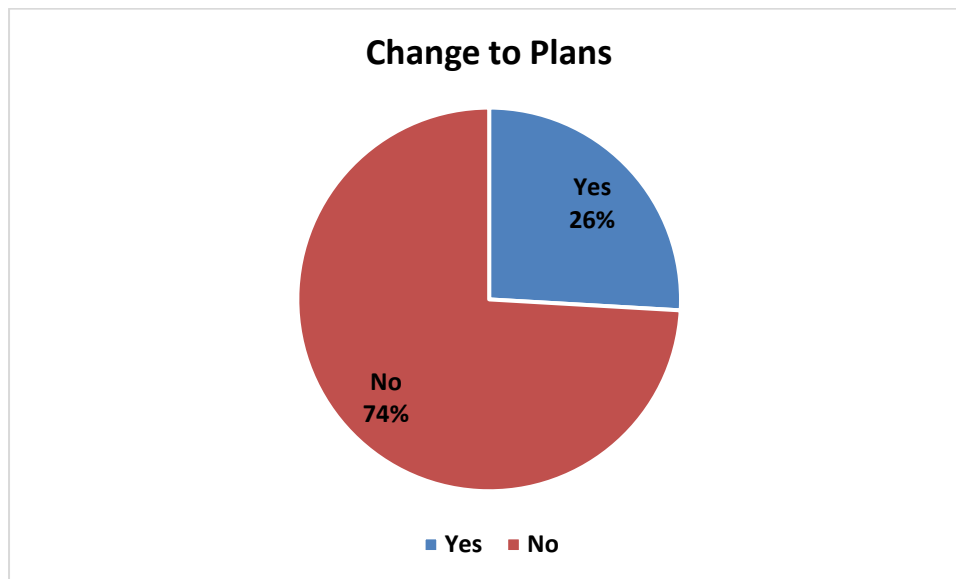
5.2.3 BUDGET

The interviewer asked participants to share their opinions on the budget and whether it influenced the activity and attraction choices. There were conflicting views regarding the budget and affordability of activities and attractions on holiday. For some groups, there was an attitude of caution toward spending on the days when attractions had been expensive and less constraint on spending when they had been doing free activities:

*"You make the most of your coffee shops and fish and chip shops and ice cream places…because you think, well actually we spent a day or spent a few hours on the beach. So, I **don't mind going and spending and having a cake at the little bakery**…because you think well actually, **I've not been spending money**. Whereas the **day we went on the train** that was that like that was us **done for the day**." Faye (Interview 3)*

They managed their daily spending based on whether there had been any major purchases on the day. Tickets for the family at The Vale of Rheidol Railway would have been a considerable expense, so there were no other treats that day. On days spent doing free activities, they could spend money on eating out without guilt. This was an evaluation by the decision-maker, and it

could be inferred from this quote that she had a rational decision-making style. Sometimes the response, was less clear, in this example, "too expensive" and "if I wanted to" give the impression that there is a limit though so that they wouldn't spend excessively but they would stretch the budget perhaps, if they really desired the activity:

*"I think if it was something I really wanted to do and if it **wasn't too expensive**, then **we'd do it, wouldn't we**?" Zoe (Interview 19)*

Conversely, other groups had a less restrained attitude towards spending, more of an attitude that while on holiday, they could spend without consideration of a budget. Hannah and her husband were older, visiting with their children and grandchildren.

*"Yeah. I mean if we want to see it then **we'll pay for it**. Money is not a constraint if that's what you mean" Hannah (Interview 9)*

*"I don't think it really makes a difference whether we have to pay for it or not. **If you have to pay for it, it's fine, if you don't, it's better but it's not really a determining factor**".*

Steven (Interview 17)

Budgeting wasn't a problem for some groups because they focused mostly on free activities. In Aberystwyth, it is possible to spend time without spending much money being outside, on the beach or visiting free museum attractions. In this example from interview 7, the mother was very happy that she had not spent much money on activities.

*"Well, apart from swimming, **everything I did was free; it was brilliant**….Not the arcade I suppose, but even so, we spent more time looking around than we did actually playing games so… accommodation was our main cost." Elizabeth (Interview 7)*

There was a pattern of younger families being a little more budget-conscious and aware of their spending. In contrast, older couples around or nearing retirement age and child-free friend

groups had less concern for spending management. Decision-making styles could also explain this difference, with some participants having a more rational approach to their expenses, and others could be more driven by emotions and desires (Wilson & Moore, 2018).

5.2.4 CONNECTION BETWEEN THE DESTINATION AND ACTIVITY SELECTION

The destination of Aberystwyth was the backdrop to the interviews and the interviewer began each interview by asking the participants, if they had visited before and how their holiday was going. This prequel to the main interview revealed some interesting observations about the place and the participants often spoke about the destination while discussing activity and attraction choice. Most participants had positive feelings towards the destination, and some had a strong affinity to Wales and Welshness, while others had never been to Aberystwyth before and simply wanted to be by the sea, countryside or try somewhere new. There is an inherent interdependence that connects destination selection and activity choice. Some participants chose Aberystwyth since it is located in Mid Wales and meant that travelling to places of interest in North or South would be easily accessible by Car or Train:

*"We picked out because it was **central in Wales** so we could do day trips out from here and also **the University** was here and Daniel had interest in that, and the **train station**, we knew it was close to the train station."* Bert, (Interview 1)

The University in the town is known, and while not a tourist attraction, it provides a point of interest, and means the town has more amenities than other smaller coastal parts of Wales. The participants in interview one wanted to be able to go to local pubs, walk around the town and enjoy some local facilities. Therefor the destination selection is in harmony with some of the desired activities:

*"We were looking at a place, Devils Bridge and then we thought, it's **too far from the coast**."* Bert, (Interview 1)

*"And we wanted to be able to **walk out at night**."* Daniel, (Interview, 1)

*"And see **local pubs**, local colour."* Bert, (Interview 1)

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In another interview the participant talks about the flat promenade and how it would make it easier to wheel his mother around. He was looking for local shopping experiences and somewhere that wasn't too quiet – or as quiet as a seaside village:

*"The reason why I chose Aberystwyth was it was in **two to three hours drive away from Preston**, so I was limited on time for travelling, it also appeared to have **a prom** which was nice because she can't walk far, and we used the wheelchair. I also thought it would have some **retail experience and things like that around because of the university in Aberystwyth**, so there would be students and things like that, so it should be a reasonably **busy place** in comparison to somewhere like Borth (village)."*

Aberystwyth's status as a university town with plenty of local shops, cafes, restaurants and proximity to beach and countryside, as well as a large selection of local attractions and activities make it a destination appealing to a wide range of interests. The environment is an important contextual aspect, and the findings on the decision-making of attractions and activities must be considered in the context of the environment. Furthermore, since the environment is fixed, and though the selection of attractions and activities are broad they are not infinite. Like all destinations, they are limited to an extent by their geography, weather conditions, structures and systems. While each destination has unique aspects, and tourism products vary across destinations, it can be said the Aberystwyth is similar to many other rural, seaside rural towns across the UK.

5.2.5 SEEKING SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Doing an activity that was different and out of the ordinary was a common theme in the interviews, which illustrated that tourists were looking for a way of experiencing something new, that was out of the ordinary. For some groups- it was about delighting their family and children, such as this example from Interview 14, where the participant refers to the delight at an attraction that catered for his children:

*"The main consideration was what was a **bit different**, a **bit more special** to what we normally do. That you can't do anywhere else, do you know what I mean?"*

Peter, (Interview 14)

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*"Yeah, mainly for the kids. The silver mine really was for the kids, just myself, my wife, two kids and then my wife's parents came as well, so the grandparents came. So we were after **something for the family to do that was a little bit different** and then a lot of stuff about… they dressed up as elves and stuff, you know, and all that malarkey. It was quite nice for the kids really." Peter, (Interview 14)*

In other examples, it was about the scenery and being in nature that was perceived as the point of difference:

*"But you know, it was nice, and I really **enjoyed being in the countryside**, **seeing something different**. Especially when halfway along you started going up into the, up onto the ridge and then followed it all the way to…" Greg, (Interview 18)*

For another group, visiting a renowned attraction such as the Devils Bridge railway was deemed as special:

*"It's probably because there is not so much going on in Aberystwyth. So...**Devils Bridge is like famous site**. It's not too far." Helen, (Interview 5)*

Interview one talked about "local colour" and "local experiences" interchangeably, and were quite taken with local, pubs and cuisine in the UK:

*"The **pubs and the fish and chips are wonderful**. We really like this. I think on all of our England trips all we did was eat in pubs. I don't know that we ate anywhere else."
Sally (Interview 1)*

"Yeah, that's true." Daniel (Interview 1)

*"Just the colour of them, they are **so different**." Sally (Interview 1)*

The idea of doing something different echoes much of theory in the literature (as discussed in Chapter two), in the book The Tourist: A New Theory of The Leisure Class, MacCannell (1976) wrote that the new wave of tourists were searching for authenticity, for meaningful interactions and a break from everyday routines. In this book, a distinction is made between normal life and time spent on holiday. Life at home is predictable and inauthentic, while travel is exotic and has the power to be transcendent. Cohen (1979, p.181) argued that ''tourism is essentially a temporary reversal of everyday activities - it is a no-work, no-care, no-thrift situation". Uriely (2005) cites Turner and Ash (1975) to affirm the short-term release that tourists experience from their day-to-day routines, which in turn allows for new viewpoints on their lives, as well as the suspension of normative values. While these findings echo previous work on authenticity in travel there is a lack of empirical work that links authenticity and attraction or activity selection. Tourists select a new or different destination to spend their holiday, but they are also looking for novel experiences, new landscapes or activities that foster that feeling of escapism. They are looking for new attractions to be surprised by, to feel special, to feel enlivened.

5.2.6 MOTIVATIONS

Motivations and personal hobbies or interests were talked about by some participants when they explained why they had chosen an activity or attraction. In interview one the first female talked about her craft shop and visiting shops in the UK for potential purchases and the second talked about her love for photography and taking pictures while on holiday:

*"I have an ulterior **motive** in a way because **I own a store**. A pretty large store and so I'm always **looking for, items arts, crafts.** Items for sale to include in my own store, and to get ideas. So we're looking at a couple pottery places. Stoke on Trent you know, Portmeirion. I want to talk to dealers of pottery" Jane, (Interview 1)*

*"And the people I **love taking pictures** of people too. Or anybody who looks different....you know because you don't see that as much." Sally, (Interview 1)*

In another example the husband talks about his passion for architecture and photography While his wife was content to shop or visit coffee shops:

*"But I also like, and it sounds ridiculous, but I **like a little bit of architecture** very much. I'm very interested in going to cities…and towns and just **looking and photographing** a lot of modern and old buildings. And if I can get into them, I do go into them. **Amanda just goes and sits in a coffee shop** while I look. Or just sometimes just basically **shops**"*

Greg, (Interview 18)

They both had a keen passion for visiting open gardens, wherever available:

*"And the other part is going to the country. I quite like **looking at gardens**. We do garden tours." Greg, (Interview 18)*

Not all participants had such strong ideas about what they liked doing, these examples demonstrate people with quite strong hobbies or personal passions that they can participate in while on holiday. It could not be determined from these conversations if these passions dictated their destination choice, but hobbies like shopping, photography and looking at landmark buildings are quite common pastimes while on holiday.

In the survey, respondents were asked to rate to what extent they agreed with twenty-six statements representing influential factors that can contribute to decision-making at attractions. They were asked to respond specifically to their visit at Zip World or Vale of Rheidol. Three statements – *Fun, Thrill and Scary* were only measured at Zip World since they better represented the nature of the attraction. The measurement instrument for the variables was a 7-point Likert scale ranging from one - strongly disagree to seven - strongly agree. The statements were taken from quotes from both the business and tourist interviews. Descriptive statistics are shown here to illustrate the mean score for each statement.

The highest scoring statements are: *It is fun (Zip World only)* with 6.64, *It is a treat* with 6.29, *There is beautiful scenery and views* with 6.12, *It is a top attraction in the area* with 5.95, and *It was a suitable activity for the weather* with 5.97.

The *fun* variable as a top-scoring statement is not very surprising since going on a theme park would be considered a fun activity, yet *fun* is not a construct that has been well theorised our common motivator found in the tourism literature (Bakir and Baxter, 2011), though in a

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grounded study on visitors to Lego Land it was found that perceived sense of fun and family togetherness was a key pull factor and motivator.

The *"it is a treat"* variable is an indication here that tourists viewed the attractions as a special visit and not an everyday experience. Both the Vale of Rheidol Railway and Zip World are considered flagship tourist attractions in their regions, so they fit with the Swarbrooke, (1995, p.4) and (Ram, Björk and Weidenfeld, 2016, p.110) definition of attractions being landmarks and big draws for tourists. Some of the interview participants also spoke of attractions, particularly the expensive ones, being a treat. It was a careful consideration, especially with large families.

It was unsurprising that the *nature* variable scored highly since both attractions are located within scenic landscapes. Some segmentation studies have linked *family togetherness* with spending time in nature (Park and Yoon, (2009). This correlates with the interview data, since many of the participants spoke about spending quality time with loved ones, outside – taking walks, going to the beach, and they said it was a time of bonding as well as enjoying the nature.

Weather appeared as a top statement, which correlates with the interview data, as weather was a common topic in contextual details influencing decisions about day-to-day activities. Weather was often checked frequently, and plans were changed or arranged to suit the weather, with rainy day activities often done indoors, and outdoor activities done outdoors.

The lowest scoring variables were: *It is something I/we used to do in my/our youth* with 2.77, *I/we have done it before and wanted to go again* 2.47, *It wasn't our first choice, but it was the best available attraction* 2.62, It is something *I/we used to do in my/our youth* 2.77. This is an interesting insight as it confirms the visitors to be mostly first-time visitors to the attractions, that it was also their first choice of attraction – recognising the attraction's notability in the area, and there was a little element of nostalgia or re-living youth. This contrasts the interview findings, where participants discuss Nostalgia later in the theme on emotions and feelings.

Two other statements are of interest as they indicate that specialist attractions are not every day, not a hobby and are infrequent in the lives of tourists – with variables *It is special, different to what we normally do scoring* 5.79, and *It is a personal interest or hobby* scoring 3.56. This

contrasts with the postmodern idea that tourism is every day (Larsen, 2019), and while it may be true that tourists bring their mobile phones with them on holiday, they are participating in activities that lift them from their everyday routines.

Figure 18. Influential Factors

Influential Factors

Factor	Value
IT IS FUN (ZIP WORLD ONLY)	6.64
IT IS A TREAT	6.29
THERE IS BEAUTIFUL SCENERY AND VIEWS	6.12
IT WAS A SUITABLE ACTIVITY FOR THE WEATHER	5.97
IT IS A TOP ATTRACTION IN THE AREA	5.95
IT IS SPECIAL, DIFFERENT TO WHAT WE NORMALLY DO	5.79
I/WE LOVE THIS TYPE OF ATTRACTION	5.70
IT IS A THRILL (ZIP WORLD ONLY)	5.66
I/ WE WANTED TO BE IN NATURE	5.55
I/ WE WANTED TO BE OUTSIDE	5.49
IT IS EXPENSIVE	4.95
IT IS DOG FRIENDLY	4.89
IT WAS CLOSE BY ANOTHER ATTRACTION OR ACTIVITY	4.88
THE HISTORY IS INTERESTING	4.49
IT IS SCARY (ZIP WORLD ONLY)	4.49
IT'S JUST SOMETHING YOU HAVE TO SEE	4.26
IT IS AFFORDABLE	4.16
IT IS RELAXING	3.90
IT IS EDUCATIONAL	3.84
IT IS CULTURAL	3.74
IT IS A PERSONAL INTEREST OR HOBBY	3.56
I/WE WANTED TO GO SOMEWHERE PEACEFUL	3.49
IT IS ACCESSIBLE FOR THE DISABLED	3.25
IT IS SOMETHING I/WE USED TO DO IN MY/OUR YOUTH	2.77
IT WASN'T OUR FIRST CHOICE, BUT IT WAS THE BEST AVAILABLE ATTRACTION	2.62
I/WE HAVE DONE IT BEFORE AND WANTED TO GO AGAIN	2.47

In summary, this theme has revealed several situational and contextual factors influencing decision-making processes among tourists visiting Aberystwyth, Wales. Transportation emerged as a consideration with participants access to vehicles impacting their mobility and activity selection. The convenience and flexibility offered by cars were evident, providing tourists with the opportunity to explore more remote attractions. Conversely, reliance on public transport could constrain options, particularly during off-peak seasons when services were limited. Though, since Aberystwyth is a relatively small town, this restriction would only affect people wishing to travel further afield. Weather conditions played a major role, with attitudes towards inclement weather shaping their decision-making. While some embraced adverse conditions, others preferred to avoid wet outdoor activities altogether. The dynamic nature of weather necessitated flexibility and spontaneity in decision-making processes, highlighting its significant influence on experiences and activity choices. Budget considerations further underscored the complexity of decision-making, with varying attitudes towards spending observed among participants. While some exhibited caution and budget-consciousness, others were more inclined to spend freely, prioritizing experiences over financial constraints. The interaction between budget considerations and activity selection reflects tourists' diverse decision-making styles and preferences. Participants connection to the destination emerged as an influencing factor on activity choices. Aberystwyth's unique attributes, including its coastal setting, cultural offerings, and accessibility to surrounding attractions, influenced decisions and contributed to their overall experience satisfaction. The destination's appeal, coupled with desire for novelty and authenticity, shaped activity preferences and contributed to the richness of their holiday experiences. Additionally, individual motivations and interests played a decisive role in activity selection, for some participant's hobbies and passions guiding their choices. Whether driven by a desire for cultural exploration or personal interests, tourist's motivations underscored the diversity of experiences sought during their visit to Aberystwyth. Overall, this theme provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of the contextual and situational aspects that contribute towards the decision-making processes among tourists. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of tourist's behaviour and preferences in the context of attraction and activity planning in the destination.

5.3 THEME 2: HOW DECISION-MAKING EMERGES AND IS NEGOTIATED DYNAMICALLY, CONTEXTUALLY AND SOCIALLY IN GROUPS

The interviews offer vignettes of the group dynamics. Illustrating contextual situations unique to each travel party; their social dynamics, and participant roles in decision-making. The interview sample comprised couples; two-generation families; three-generation families, and groups of friends. None of the participants in this study were travelling solo. While the groups were from different places and had different configurations, there were patterns in the ways in which decisions emerged. As discussed in the methods section, interviews were often conducted with multiple contributing participants. This collaborative aspect of the interviews triggered further discussion around people's preferences, shared experiences and the social nature of decision-making when travelling as a group.

When the interviewer asked participants, 'How did you decide to visit a particular place?' probing for more details, sometimes it elicited the response of 'Who decided?'. The negotiations between the participants and the nature of decision-making as a social activity. There were examples of collective decision-making; inter-generational negotiations; considerations; compromise; group discussions; mutual agreements; decision avoidance and decision delegation. All making up the nuanced ways the groups interacted around decision-making. There were examples of people assuming different roles within the group. Some groups had a clear leader in decision-making, who did the research and led the group on their adventures and activities. Some people were much more comfortable following and going along with the leader or the group majority. Others were comfortable making suggestions but happy to let someone else organise and make the final arrangements. There was subsequent active and passive decision-making. There were explicit and hidden power dynamics. The needs or desires of individuals in the group often influence decisions, for example, the need to entertain children or give teenagers space. Arrangements were made to make the individuals or sub-groups happy and fulfil their needs. The following section has been organised into four subthemes: Power Dynamics; Negotiation; Collective decision-making and Decision avoidance.

5.3.1 POWER IN THE DYNAMICS OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

It was observed that in some groups, there were leaders or planners that made decisions on behalf of the group. These individuals often displayed organisational skills, and confidence in directing the group's activities. One couple visiting from Australia were frequent long-haul travellers on multi-week trips to the UK and Europe. While the conversation between the couple demonstrated much joint contribution in decision-making, it was the wife – that led on most of the decisions in planning the tour destinations and the activities available for the couple:

*"I start off and say, okay, we're going here. This is our endpoint. What are we going to do to get there? How are we going, what route are we going? **I'm usually the planner**. And then I look at what's available. And I look up places. And I think oh this place, like I think with, we wanted to come on the West coast and so when I was looking, I could see that we could easily get to Aberystwyth and to Port Madog…and then **I find out how to get there** and what the **options are** and how long, and **what things are around** that we can do."*

Amanda (Interview 18)

Another participant, spoke about the dynamic between herself and her husband, He was working at a music festival in, and she was accompanying him on holiday. She refers to herself as the organiser since she is retired:

*"Yeah, and **I'm the manager of us**, um since I've retired before Tom"*

Mary (Interview 12)

She spent much time, staying in the apartment, quite content by herself – reading, watching TV series (Hinterland), writing letters – and talked about how nice it was not to be constrained by time. While she had researched and found activities, she couldn't decide or plan those activities since she was working around his schedule.

*"Because Tom's schedule, that's the one, not great thing…..**schedule is not conducive** to getting out, so because **I like to coordinate him for the day** and it takes, it's an hour to get to Devil's Bridge and an hour to get back…." Mary (Interview 12)*

She had looked around for things to do, booked restaurants but didn't go out exploring alone So, her decision-making was all based on his timetable and whether he would accompany her. She did a lot of pre-planning, but his schedule seemed unknown as rehearsals went on late or things cropped up. She is more comfortable listening or watching her shows than going out by herself.

*"So, I kind of, that's why **I don't venture out too much on my own** and I sort of*

structure our day" Mary (Interview 12)

She did reveal that she would have preferred to join group activities and expressed disappointment at the lack of group walking tours or similar in the town.

*"**I didn't really find** any, any listing there of some kind of **group activities,***

like a little walking tour" Mary (Interview 12)

In this example, Mary's choices of activities were restricted by the lack of group activities she could join in Aberystwyth, but also her reluctance to visit any attractions without her husband. While she identified as the organiser, throughout the trip her choices were limited by her husband's busy work schedule.

Sometimes, power and influence in the decision-making were due to deference to a particular family member. David was on holiday with his partner and ninety-year-old mother. Later in this chapter, examples of his planning and organisation style are shared. However, in this excerpt of the interview, he is talking about how the priority of this trip is his mother (they chose activities and attractions that she would enjoy, and her mobility would allow for). His partner Camila, had to go along with the plans and make some allowances for his mother.

*"Well, when **we're away with my mum, it's all for her**. And I say that to Camila, I say 'Sometimes mum can be difficult. Put up with her please, **if you need your own space tell me**, and I'll sort you out. Go into your room and **read a book**, go and have a shower, do whatever, have a walk if you want', but no, priorities there (Mum)". David (Interview 8)*

Decision delegation is closely linked to social dynamics in decision-making. As discussed previously, a more dominant person sometimes guides the group's decision-making and planning. For some participants, this relationship dynamic seemed to be the norm, where one person does the organising, and the other follows the plan. As expressed by Peter when talking about their visit to the Silver Lead Mine, he realises as he is speaking that it was his wife who had done the planning and led the decision-making to visit a particular attraction.

*"I'm **looking at my wife now**. When did we plan to go to the silver mine? When we were there, wasn't it? To be honest with you, I tend to **leave it all to Louisa**, my wife, really. **I just go where I'm told.** But I think she'd done a bit of background research. To be fair, the Kite Feeding Station, we've driven past it for years and never been, so it was a case of just actually going." Peter (Interview 14)*

5.3.2 NEGOTIATION & COMPROMISE WITH CHILDREN & TEENAGERS

Since many participants were families, an emerging subtheme was negotiation and compromise with children and teenagers. Parents with teenagers discussed negotiation in activity selection and allowing teens to contribute to plans. Furthermore, moments of togetherness and family bonding were illuminated. Some activities were chosen to bring them together, connect, and have a shared experience. Recognising they are young adults who can also make some decisions themselves, they were also given the freedom to spend time doing their own activities. In this example the mother Emily describes a moment of closeness during a shopping trip, doing things together and letting them make their own choices:

*"**The kids had done their own thing and that's fine**. We did our own thing and then even just going to Tesco this morning with Emily, it's like we went to, is Home Bargains or whatever, and came out with a load of stuff that we didn't need (laughter). It's just that time, just to go and do that and have an **hour together** and the other two were asked but obviously that would involve leaving the house (laughter). So, there's that **compromise of what I would like to do ….and what they would like to do and what I expect them to do and what they have a choice in.**" Emily, (Interview 16)*

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In another interview, Elizabeth negotiated an activity exchange rather than only doing activities they would both like. So, decisions were alternated, between doing activities she and her son would enjoy so that they could both enjoy their preferred activities.

*"That was the deal, **I get to see an exhibition, you get to play your video games**."*
Elizabeth (Interview 7)

In another example from Interview 15, Dionne, another mother of teenagers, talks about collaboration and negotiation in making decisions – how they use discussion to reach a satisfactory outcome.

*"Bit of both. We try and, you know, we don't, we very rarely say this is what we're doing and that's the end of it. You know, normally it's **up for discussion**." Dionne (Interview 15)*

In this example, her teenage daughter was driving the decision for a family visit to the National Library. Her parents were unaware of what to expect from the exhibits on show. They trusted her to organise the visit, having done research online.

*"No. **My daughter knows more about it**. She's done the research. She's dead keen to go.*
***She's taking us**". Dionne (Interview 15)*

Rather than taking a totally authoritative approach, the parents viewed their activity choice as an opportunity to listen to their children and accommodate their needs. She reflected on the difficulty of decision-making, that they don't always agree with each other, and how they try to keep everyone together on holiday. Her goal was to find activities they would all enjoy doing, as she didn't want them to spend too much time apart. On holiday, they want to take the opportunity to bring them together and do key activities as a family.

*"Obviously **not everyone will always agree**…we're on **holiday together**, we all **do it together**
or we don't do it, is how we tend to do things. Because we don't, certainly in the holidays,
both Ian and I are working, so they're at home a lot on their own now. It's obviously **not
spending every minute of every day with each other**, but if we're going out somewhere then
we'll do that all together. And try and agree on it." Dionne (Interview 15)*

There was a balanced approach from parents of teenage children, whereby they allowed teenagers to have some freedom in their decisions while on the family trip. One parent compares herself to other parents who take a more authoritative approach while choosing holiday activities; she doesn't want her children to feel forced into doing activities they don't want to do. Her teenage children want to sleep in and spend time on their devices, making them non-participants in the usual holiday activities such as going to the beach or exploring. As a parent, she allows them to dip in and out of the family activities as and when the teenagers feel like it.

*"When you talk with them it's like, and they talk about what **their friends do**, they're quite often are **forced**. It's like a three-line whip and everybody will do this". Emily (Interview16)*

This tool strengthens their relationship; instead of enforcing participation, she gives them space. Above all, she wants the holiday to be enjoyable; as she states in the next quote, she does not want everyone to be unhappy. She also acknowledges that the family has their own individual interests, and she brought hobbies from home so she could also pursue her own hobbies.

*"**Why would I want to make me miserable because I'm making you miserable**? It's just that, so I think I'm **probably fairly chilled about it**, which is, I've brought, well we've all got books, we've got games and I've brought sewing and when I saw the wool shop I thought, 'Actually, I'm happy to do that', and when I got the pins out the girls are going, 'Oh, I can't remember how to do that, can I have a go?', it's like, 'Not with this wool (laugh), you can do it with some of the rubbish from home'. So, not really, don't really have a plan in that sense."*
Emily, (Interview 16)

Negotiation and compromise emerge as central themes in decision-making within family units, particularly when children and teenagers are involved. The interviews illustrate how parents navigate the delicate balance between familial bonding and individual autonomy, allowing space for shared experiences while respecting the preferences of each family member. The participants exhibit the importance of flexibility and open communication in reaching decisions that cater to diverse needs and interests within a family context.

5.3.3 COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

Some groups demonstrated a closeness that contributed to collaborative and collective decision-making. The group's needs, interests, passions, and expertise emerged prominently in the discussions on the decision-making process. The participants expressed keen appreciation and consideration of their travel parties' interests when selecting activities and attractions to visit. The two couples travelling together from interview one had travelled together before, so they knew what each other was interested in; they recognised and included these preferences in their decision-making:

*"You know Bert has things that he likes to do. And we kind of **blend them all together**"*
Daniel (Interview 1)

Further to this, they expressed gratitude and pleasure from sharing their experiences together since they valued each other's interests and passions, making visiting attractions more enjoyable:

*"What I loved about it - going to museums with Jane is she knows about all of it. **It's like having a personal tour guide**. And it's wonderful; it gives me a whole new appreciation for art, though. I wasn't much of an art museum person **till we travelled with them**."*
Sally (Interview 1)

The family in Interview 5 had made the decision to visit Hay On Wye Book Festival while in Aberystwyth, and when probed on why they had made the decision – they simply responded by their shared love of reading:

*"Because **we're all madly into books**." Jennifer (Interview 6)*

In an interview with siblings (Interview 19) they went further and commented that they probably would have done the same activities even they were on separate holidays, their interests were so aligned:

*Peter: "**Something in common**. So I'd imagine if each of us was travelling individually we might have done slightly, not much though, slightly different things"*

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> Carl: "Well yeah. A lot of the things **we would have done the same** I think as well you know. Yeah so we're, yeah. **Similar interests**." (Interview 19)

Overall, these decisions on selecting activities and interests were made in harmony with the group. The individual's interests became the group's interests—knowledge was shared, and there was a suggestion of appreciation for each other. Collective decision-making fosters a sense of togetherness and mutual appreciation within travel groups. As demonstrated by the couples and siblings interviewed, shared interests and collaborative discussions shape the itinerary, creating opportunities for meaningful experiences that resonate with all members. This section emphasises the significance of empathy and consideration for others' preferences in cultivating a harmonious decision-making process that reflects the collective ethos of the group.

Some groups identified as a particular type of people or demographic, which could be interpreted as a group identity. The group in Interview 4 did a lot of eating and shopping while together, which they had reflected earlier was quite different to their student days in Aberystwyth, they identified as middle class:

Natalie "So the activities that **we choose to do I guess are just shopping... and eating**."

Sophie: "Embarrassingly yeah."

Matt "It's all very **middle class**." (laughing)

The couples in interview one, identified as baby boomers, they had just been talking about authentic and local experiences, and Sally connected this outlook of experienced travellers with their generation:

> "We wanted a taste of it. You might remember you know lot of the people in the United States are **baby boomers** which were born during the war. Right after they war, so we are older. And I think a lot of us, **this is what we like**, you know. So I meant a lot of your tourists are older." Sally (Interview 1)

Both groups in interviews one and four had known each other a long time and were comfortable sharing this idea of an identity with the interviewer. While these statements were rarely

vocalised in the interviews, it does point to a harmonious and close connection that builds on the idea of collective decision-making and group identity.

5.3.4 DECISION AVOIDANCE & SLOWING DOWN

In some interviews, participants talked about a holiday as an opportunity to slow down, make less decisions and not have a busy schedule. While they might have visited a couple of key attractions, the purpose of the break, was to do less, and not have a lot of decisions to make.

When talking about family discussions on choosing activities in Interview 15, the father (James) said "I hate decision-making". The parents both expressed how busy their lives were at home and how they wanted to relax while on holiday:

*"We're **not huge ones for lots of people** and when we're away, we like to just get out, have a lovely walk, maybe find a nice pub, you know…I see a lot of people in, at work, so I quite like a bit of **de-stress**" Viola, (Interview 15)*

In other groups, decision avoidance manifested as people doing less, slowing down and giving themselves time:
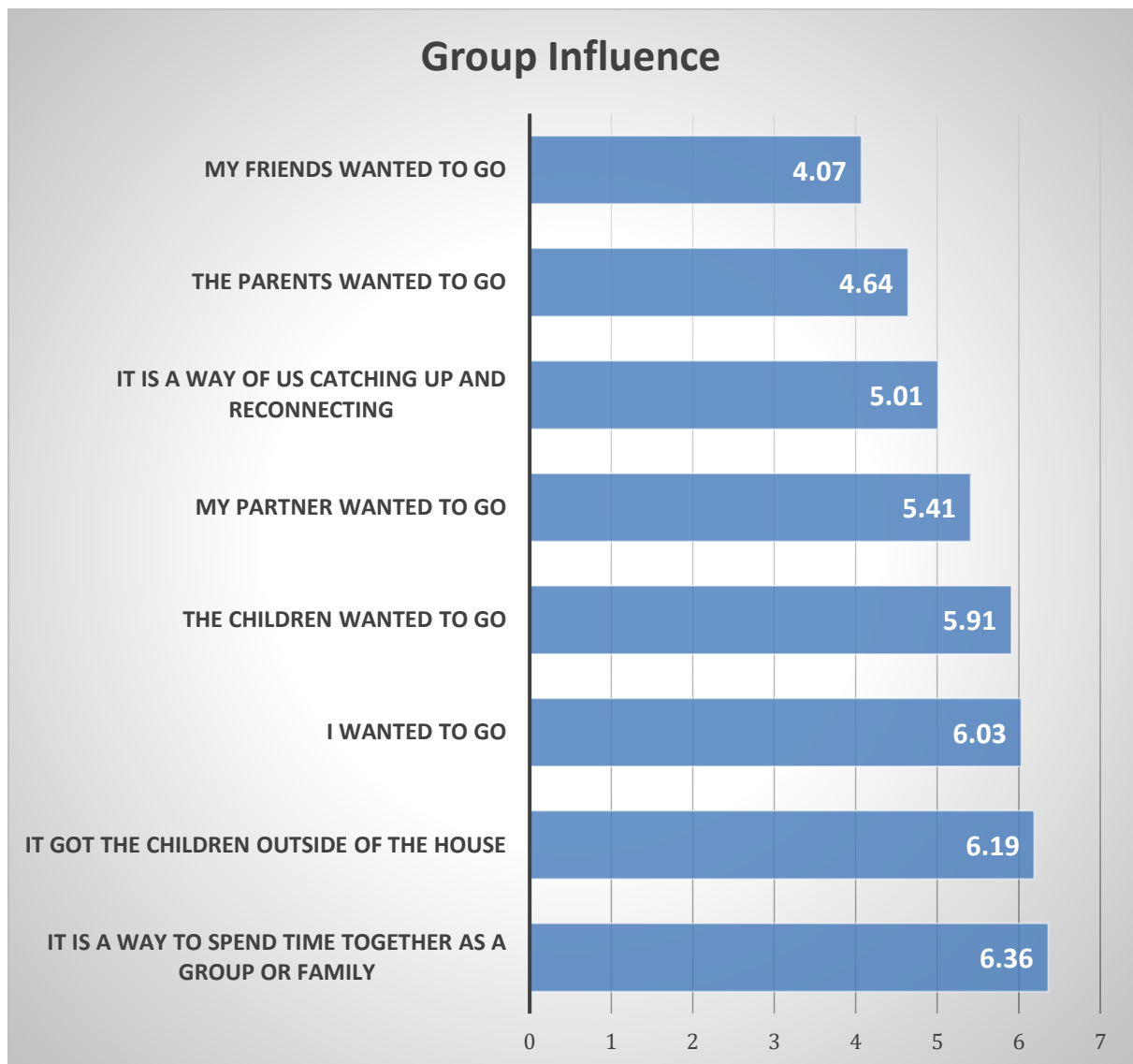

*"I guess the point for us has very much been to go to a place where you can sort of **slow down** and this is also reflected in how we do things when we're here, because we really like to get up late in the morning and watch an episode of a tv series together, just **relaxing** and then going out for one thing and coming back and relaxing. Doing really **our own stuff in our own time not rushing about**." Alex (Interview 11)*

Decision avoidance and the desire to slow down highlight the contrasting motivations behind travel experiences. While some groups actively engage in planning and exploration, others prioritise relaxation and spontaneity, seeking respite from the demands of everyday life.
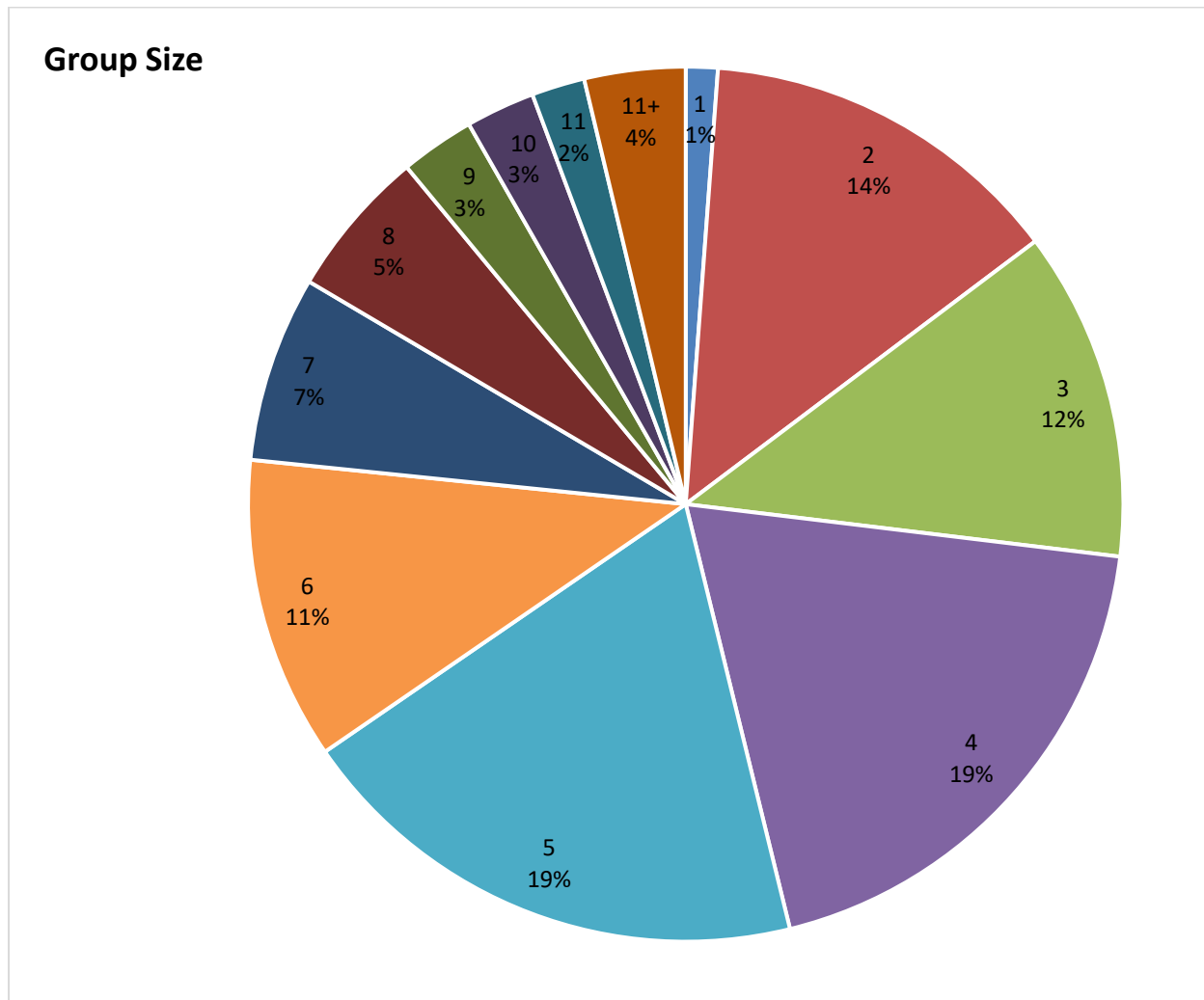
The second theme of this study has explored the dynamics of group decision-making. The interviews provide valuable insights into the multi-faceted nature of in situ group decision-making. Power dynamics play a crucial role in shaping how choices are made within travel parties. Whether a designated leader takes charge of planning or deference is given to a particular family member's preference, the distribution of power influences the decision-making process. The excerpts demonstrate how individuals may assume roles based on their circumstances and relationships within the group. Groups negotiated decision-making in nuanced and complex ways, revealing relationship power dynamics. Some participants identified as leaders and actively took on the role of organiser. While others were more passive and allowed decisions to be made for them, going along with the plans. Negotiation and collaboration were evident in families with children and adolescents as efforts were made to blend collective and individualised experiences. The influence of children and negotiation with children has been acknowledged in the literature (Thornton, Shaw and Williams, 1997). Collective decision-making stimulated a shared decision-making ethos, fostering a sense of togetherness and collective enjoyment of planned activities and attraction visits.

The survey data correlates with the interview findings that attraction choice fostered connectivity and family led choices. Respondents were asked their opinion on who had influenced their decision to visit the Vale of Rheidol and Zip World. The measurement instrument for the variables was a 7-point Likert scale ranging from one - strongly disagree to seven - strongly agree. As shown in figure 19, The highest scoring variable was *It is a way to spend time together as a group or family*, 6.36, closely followed by *It got the children outside of the house, 6.19* and *I wanted to go*, 6.03. Which indicates that while bringing family and friends together was important there wasn't perhaps too much compromise in the decision since the respondent also wanted to visit the attraction. However, it could also indicate collective decision-making since it was viewed as an activity for all the family. The responses to group influence should be considered in accordance with the group types, since 53% of the groups were families and 26% were combined groups of family and friends (figure 21). Couples and solo travellers were the smallest group with 15% combined. The most common group size was four or five people with 19% each, the smallest being 1 person at 1% (figure 20).

Figure 19. Group Influence

Group Influence

MY FRIENDS WANTED TO GO	4.07
THE PARENTS WANTED TO GO	4.64
IT IS A WAY OF US CATCHING UP AND RECONNECTING	5.01
MY PARTNER WANTED TO GO	5.41
THE CHILDREN WANTED TO GO	5.91
I WANTED TO GO	6.03
IT GOT THE CHILDREN OUTSIDE OF THE HOUSE	6.19
IT IS A WAY TO SPEND TIME TOGETHER AS A GROUP OR FAMILY	6.36

Figure 20. Group Size

Figure 20. Travel Group Type

Travel Group

Solo 2%
Couple 13%
Group of Friends 6%
Group of Friends and Family 26%
Family Group 53%
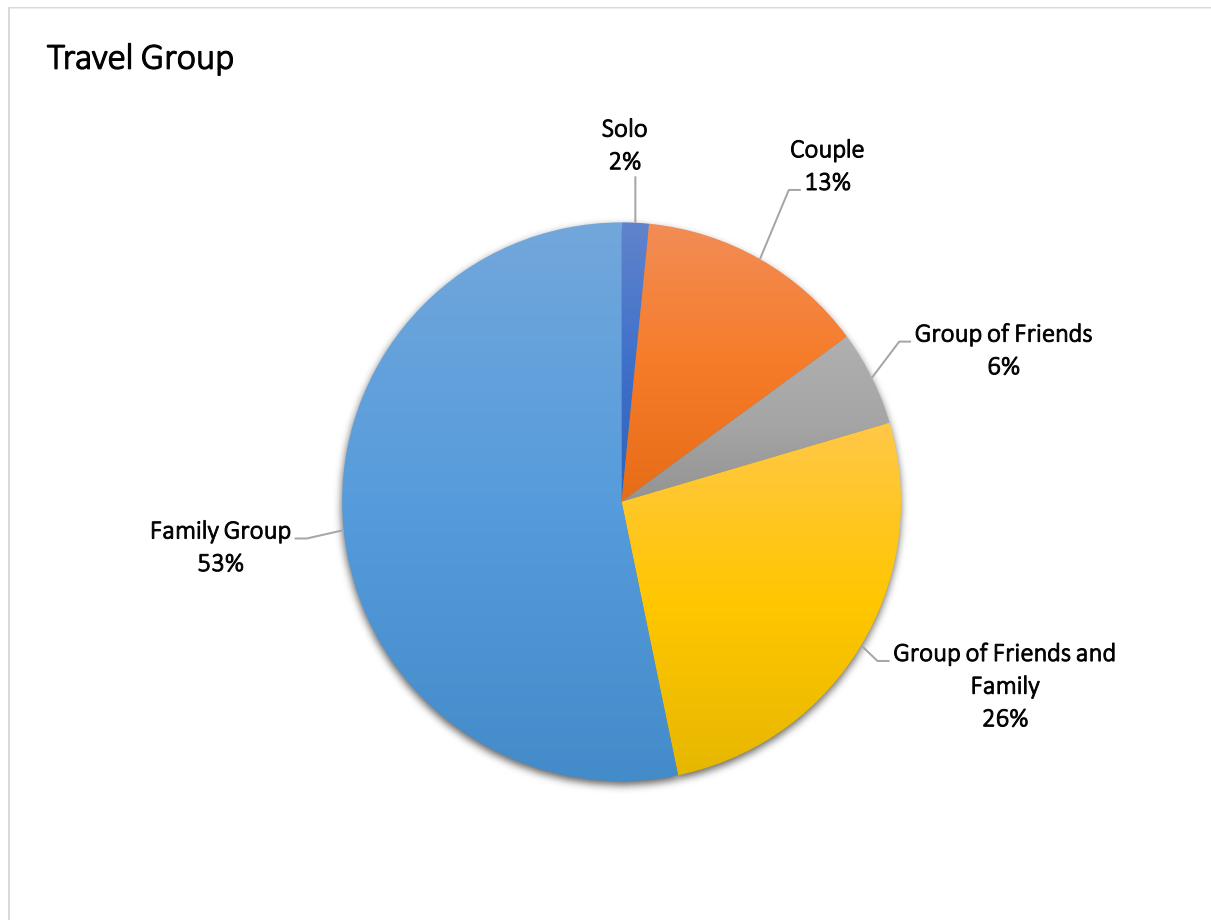
5.4 THEME 3: THE EMOTIONAL CONTEXT AND GROUP CONNECTIVITY IN DECISION-MAKING

The following theme explores the participant's emotions and feelings that were associated with decision-making behaviours and attraction and activity choices. It focuses on the research question: 'How do feelings and emotions impact the decision-making process?'. The interviewer prompted participants' emotional responses by asking them, 'How do you feel about these activities?' after asking them how they had decided to visit them. These questions elicited a range of emotions and feelings, including physical and psychological states. Positive emotions were the most expressed, and participants often discussed the place and the destination as an extension of these emotions. "Happiness" is one of the strongest emotions revealed in the interviews in relation to the activities they engaged in:

*"**Happy. I love being here**…It's definitely one of my **favourite places**." Faye, (Interview 3)*

An attachment bias was evident in some interviews, where people had strong connections to the destination. When asked how they felt about the activities and attractions, many participants responded by talking about the destination, almost as though the activity and destination are interconnected in the tourist's mindset. Another participant expressed very strong feelings for the destination, with the scenic landscape,

*"I looked at pictures on Internet and **I loved it**. This was the reason; I loved the landscape."*
Amelia, (Interview 5)

*"Good. I mean for me anyway. Just being **outdoors with the view** made me want to come back and gave me ideas for future trips. I've not been here for a while, more than 15 years…so yeah, made me **think to come back** relatively soon."*
Carl, (Interview 19)

Another example of attachment to Aberystwyth, as well as enjoyment of the attractions and activities, was Interview Seven, where the participant expressed the strong emotion of falling in love with the place:

*"It has been **really nice**. Even though I lived in Aberystwyth for years I'd never been to the National Library and I'd never been to the Art School, even though I worked for the*

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university. So I have seen a lot more variety and plus the weather's been lovely. So I feel **really in love with Aberystwyth again**. *" Elizabeth, (Interview 7)*

Participants could not always distinguish between the attractions, activities, or destination. It was clear that they had an affinity or attachment to the Welsh scenery and country. In another example, another participant had a similar response – attaching the feeling to the destination, when talking about a previous visit to London:

*"**I love it**…The first time I went to London I just couldn't stop smiling, I **had so much fun**."* *Sally, (Interview 1)*

The emotions expressed in the interviews were not always as intense as love; feelings of warmth, niceness, and pleasantness were associated with some attraction visits.

*"It's **very nice,** it's a **warm feeling** because it's just being able to appreciate nature and look at them close, you know you can see them on television and they look great but to be in a butterfly house and experience the butterflies landing on you…" David, (Interview 8)*

*"Well nice I guess…Like today I feel it was a **nice trip**. It was very **pleasant**, and I really **enjoyed** heading out." David, (Interview 8)*

In another interview, previous experiences of the tourists mediated their emotional range. In this example, while they expressed surprise admiring the local architecture, once inside the building, they did not experience any emotions compared to other attractions they had visited in other places. Though Hannah did not complete the sentence, the subtext was that some places they had visited had elicit a strong emotional response:

*"Well, firstly round there, it was just Oooh, it's **beautiful**…It's just an academic building, isn't it …an academic building with history…..no, **nothing emotional**. But we have had emotions, haven't we? In places we've been. **Especially on Holy Island, remember that? That was really…**" Hannah, (Interview 9)*

Feelings of happiness were also related to the people in the group and the time spent with family and friends:

"*Makes me feel happy. I love coming here and seeing these guys because we're all kind of scattered around the country now…. It makes me feel great." Natalie, (Interview 4)*

In some interviews, participants mentioned their physical as well as their emotional state:

*"Happy I suppose, yeah, **happy. Relaxed I suppose**. I don't know how I felt. I **felt tired** all the time chasing after them but yeah, just **happy** and just **enjoying it**, enjoying time with the family." Peter, (Interview 14)*

Participants didn't always answer the question directly, preferring to describe the environment, what they did or who they were with. Though Jennifer does allude to a nostalgic attachment to the Welsh language, which reminded her of her time spent in Wales as a postgrad student while visiting Hay on Wye book festival:

*"It was **really cool**, it was a **bit wet and damp um**, and a very **long drive, little windy roads"** Jennifer." (Interview 6)*

*"And it was **nice to…hear people speaking Welsh** because I've missed that in the almost year I've been away and just wander round looking at books and eating snacks and it's just **relaxing." Jennifer (Interview 6)*

In Interview 1, the American couples felt a sense of belonging when visiting Wales:

"Also, since we have **heritage here**, I am Welsh Irish from my grandmother. So it kinda gives you this **Nostalgic**. Yeah. It's a **feeling of your heritage**." Jane (Interview 1)

Very strong feelings of nostalgia were conjured in Interview 11, where two friends had spent time visiting heritage attractions; it allowed them to imagine and feel as though they were part of times gone by. The interviewer had asked why they had chosen these places to visit and the response was evocative, describing a desire to experience the past, as well as the influence of historical television shows:

*"Because they had this element of **nostalgia** in them. You know, the Cliff Railway very old and the steam engine thing, very old…we just took the train ride and **imagined how it was to go by train in those days.** It's also to experience what we have seen in numerous British television series, both modern-day series what you call Midsummer Murders, I know they're old-fashioned, but they are mundane in the time they take place, and also **in period pieces** of series like, we really watch together **Agatha Christie** tv series, particularly **Miss Marple**. The English countryside and its ways." Alex (Interview 11)*

In another interview in response to the "how did you feel question" the participants describe the scenic activity of going to the Vale of Rheidol Railway as well as the euphoria it inspired:

*"Well nice I guess…Like today I feel it was a **nice trip**. It was very **pleasant**….I really enjoyed being in the countryside, **seeing something different**. Especially when halfway along you started going up into the, up onto the ridge and then followed it all the way….Yeah it's an **amazing view**. The **landscape and the views** are quite **spectacular** yeah."*

Greg (Interview 18)

"I mean it makes you happy I guess, happy to be alive actually."

Greg (Interview 18)

*"Or **thankful for being alive**." Amanda (Interview 18)*

In many interviews, group connectivity was discussed in response to the same question. Selecting activities that drew the group together for a shared experience and to connect emotionally was a common motivation. The activity choice was particular to the group, but the main purpose was to spend quality time together, connecting, bonding, and reaffirming their relationships.

*"And chatting. We like to **do things** where **we can talk to each other**. We'd rather do stuff where we are **socialising**" Sophie, (Interview 4)*

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Families that would not normally see much of each other because of work and school made an effort to be together. Friends focused on doing activities that meant they could talk and socialise together.

> *"Good I think…Yeah, we've enjoyed everything that we've done. Yeah. And we, we as parents enjoy that. Because when we're at home it's very hard to get the kids out of the house…So there is that holiday premise of, we're **all doing this together**, and that, that's nice. So we've **spent more time with the kids** than we would do normally, which in itself is a, is a **nice thing to do**." Dionne (Interview 15)*

The groups often made decisions to do activities that facilitated bonding and togetherness. The focus was on talking and having the time and space for each other. This sometimes meant that organised activities or attractions were eschewed in favour of what was considered a simpler or less structured activity. Eating together as a means of bonding is a well-known phenomenon, and many groups dined together. However, some participants put much more emphasis on group dining to connect and deepen their familial or friendship bonds. Further to this, the act of socialising together was seen as a way of mending relationships; holiday activities were building a new relationship to foster closeness:

> *"To **come together and to grow together**" Maria, (Interview 5)*

Furthermore, eating together was symbolic of mending family tensions, with the group from Interview 5 participants telling stories of the many local foods they tried together and the café they visited. On recounting their choice of activities, one of the sisters stated:

> *"The purpose was also to **see how we travel together as sisters** because in childhood it was not always..." Maria (Interview 5)*

There was an unspoken sense from the group that were building anew their relationship to foster a closeness that they had not always enjoyed in their childhood.

In Interview 3, the mother talked about being primarily interested in spending quality time with her son and partner. They avoided busy children's attractions like soft plays in favour of walks

on the beach collecting stones, preferring to be in their own quiet company, reaffirming familial bonds.

*"We come here to get **fresh air** because of how busy we are and the hours we work. Particularly me and my partner, **we don't get that much time with our son right now**. So the last thing we want do is take him to a soft play. **I'd rather be walking along the beach and watching him throw stones in. Yesterday I was looking for red stones***."*
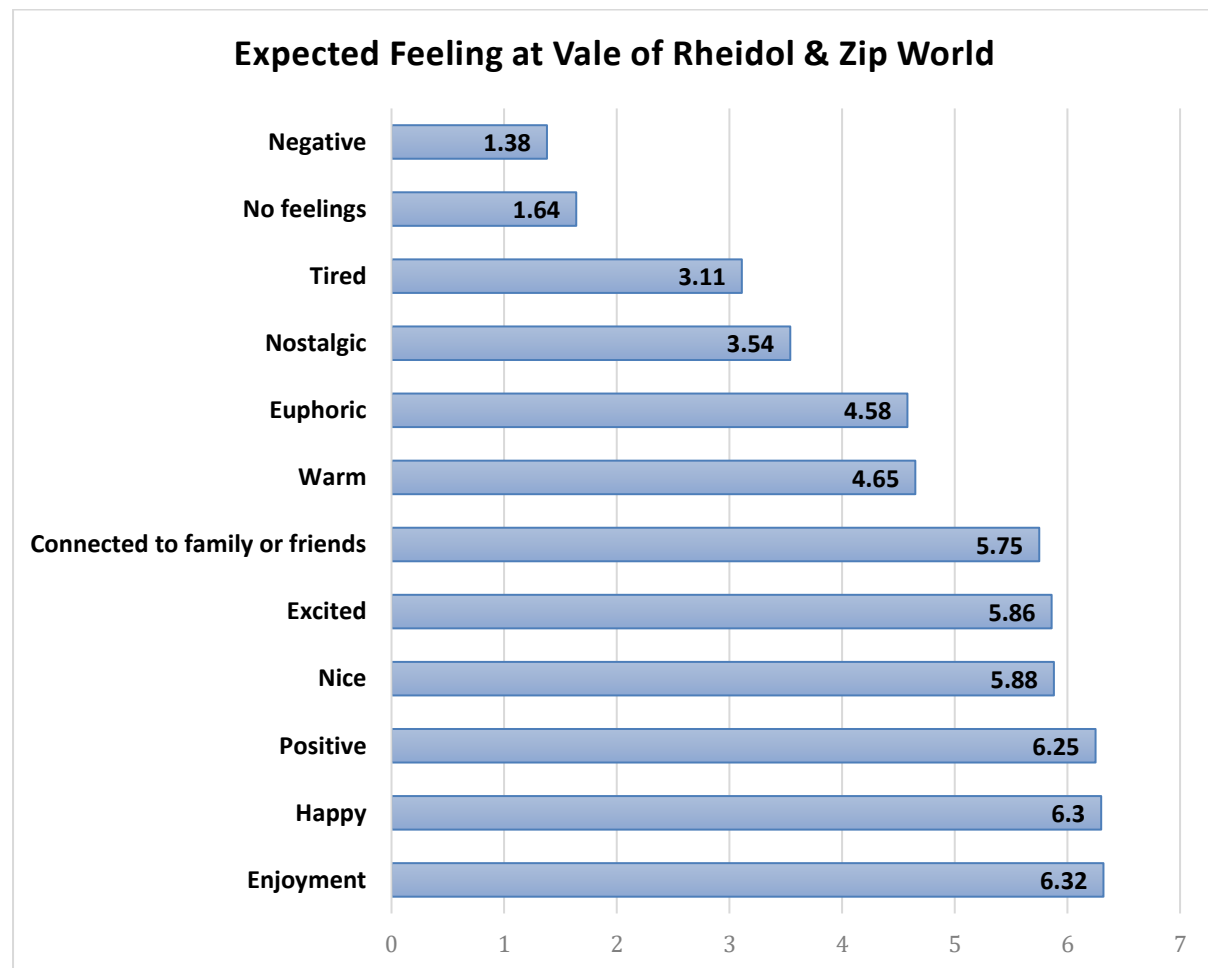
Faye (Interview 3)

Participants consistently expressed happiness associated with the activities and attractions they engaged with; destinations were framed as extensions of these positive emotions. The destination or its attributes, such as landscape, were intertwined when discussing emotions. The emotional spectrum ranged from intense joy like euphoria, to subtler feelings of warmth and pleasantness. While participants sometimes eluded direct responses to emotional queries, the excerpts reveal experiences that prompted nostalgic sentiments and a desire for connection with their family and friends. While most participants talked about the emotions experienced post-attraction or activity visits, there is a link between the selection process and emotion. Since participants often engaged with attractions and activities to foster positive emotions and experiences, to enhance the group's connection.

In the survey respondents was asked to rate their expected feelings before visiting the attractions. As before, the measurement instrument for the variables was a 7-point Likert scale ranging from one - strongly disagree to seven - strongly agree. As shown in figure 22, the highest scoring variables were *Enjoyment* (6.32), followed by *Happy* (6.3), and *Nice* (5.88), indicating positive feelings. The lowest scoring variables were *No Feelings* (1.64) and *Negative (1.38). Connected to family and friends* also scored highly with 5.75. These emotional states resonate with the interview data, that visiting attractions is related to feeling positive, connected and tourists expect to enjoy the experience.

In conclusion, the exploration of emotional contexts and group connectivity in decision-making processes within the attraction and activity context has enlightened the connection between affective and cognitive dimensions. Through an examination of participants emotional responses and group dynamics, this theme revealed emotions and feelings influencing their decision-making for attractions and activities. The findings highlight the prominence of

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positive emotions, particularly happiness, as a driving force behind tourist's activity and attraction choices. Participants frequently expressed emotional attachments to the destination, often intertwining their feelings with the place itself.

Figure 22. Expected Feeling at Vale of Rheidol & Zip World

Expected Feeling at Vale of Rheidol & Zip World

Feeling	Value
Negative	1.38
No feelings	1.64
Tired	3.11
Nostalgic	3.54
Euphoric	4.58
Warm	4.65
Connected to family or friends	5.75
Excited	5.86
Nice	5.88
Positive	6.25
Happy	6.3
Enjoyment	6.32

This attachment bias was manifested in sentiments of love, nostalgia, and appreciation for the scenic landscape, underscoring emotional resonance's integral role in shaping tourists' perceptions and experiences. Moreover, the theme unveiled the significance of group connectivity in influencing decision-making behaviours. Participants prioritised activities that fostered social interaction and bonding, emphasizing the importance of shared experiences in strengthening familial and friendship ties. Some group's preference for unstructured, intimate settings highlighted the intrinsic value placed on quality time spent together, indicative of a collective endeavour to nurture and reaffirm relationships. Furthermore, the survey data

corroborated the qualitative findings, revealing a convergence of expected emotional states with actual experiences. Positive emotions such as enjoyment, happiness, and a sense of connectedness with family and friends emerged as predominant themes, reflecting tourist's anticipatory excitement and fulfilment during their visit to attractions.

In synthesising these insights, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the emotional underpinnings and social dynamics inherent in tourist decision-making processes. By revealing the connection between emotions, group dynamics, and destination attributes, this research offers valuable implications for destination management and marketing strategies. Recognising the essential role of emotional resonance in shaping tourist's experiential narratives, activity and attraction managers can tailor experiences to evoke positive emotions and foster meaningful connections, thereby enhancing destination appeal and visitor satisfaction. Overall, this theme underscores the importance of integrating emotional considerations into decision-making frameworks within the tourism context.

5.5 THEME 4: HOW ACTIVITY AND ATTRACTION DECISION-MAKING CAN BE CLASSIFIED BY THE EXTENT OF PLANNING, NO PLANNING AND SPONTANEITY.

During the interviews, participants shared details on the extent of their planning in preparation for attraction visits and activities. It focuses on the research question, 'How do tourists in situ decide about activities and attractions to visit or experience? (What is the process of decision-making?)'. It was important to ascertain from participants how long they spent planning their trip activities and when they started the process. This revealed the level of involvement, time available and mental processing invested into the decision-making process. In this study, participant responses were segmented into four groups: people who did a considerable amount of planning ahead of the holiday; those who did a little planning for potential activities; those who did not plan; and spontaneity seekers. The analysis will begin first by exploring the subtheme of the organised planner followed by: some planning; no planning and spontaneity.

5.5.1 THE ORGANISED PLANNER

Prior planning with extensive information search requires cognitive effort and involvement (Jun and Holland, 2012). It requires seeking out information, researching, considering alternatives, and making decisions based on multiple attributes and factors. It was observed that this approach was not widely adopted over the course of the nineteen interviews. However, particularly strong examples of this approach warrant including these excerpts in the findings. In the following example, David (Interview 8) spent considerable time and effort on the planning process, and the example is enriched by the context of bringing his mother, who was wheelchair-bound, on the trip. David motioned towards the organised printouts from his web searches as he talked.

*David: "Well, I'd already **done my research** before I came here. So, before I ever go away, I'm always prepared because you don't have time (on holiday)."*

*Interviewer: "So you **printed that out by yourselves**, I wondered where that had come from."*

*David: "Yes, so then I went down and **had a chat with the chaps** in the **information centre**."*

This is a demonstration of sequential cognitive decision-making. According to Decrop, (2006), cognitive decision-making is a mental thought process (as opposed to microeconomic or interpretive decision-making). The unique aspect of sequential thought models is a fixed order of processing: "problem identification, information search, evaluation of alternatives, choice and post-choice processes" (Decrop, 2006, p.23). Throughout the interview, David spoke consistently about his mother's needs on holiday. Keeping her happy and entertained was the main objective. "While we are away with Mum, it's all about her". Whether walking around an open-air market for "retail therapy" or taking her to the butterfly house and seeing his mum experience feeding the butterflies with sugar water, he felt a sense of satisfaction and reward from their enjoyment. His role was to arrange memorable and happy experiences, and the work of researching and making decisions was one that he took on with keenness and impressive organisational skills. This example alludes to his mother's needs; however, he used the word "always", implying that he is this prepared every time for holiday activities (and didn't holiday exclusively with his mother). This could mean that he has a particular style of decision-making behaviour and likes to know in advance what activities are available. There is an overlapping theme in the above example of an emotional sense woven into the decision-making: he wanted his mother to have the best experience possible, and his responsibility was to ensure it. Other researchers have explored intergenerational holidays and filial duties to ageing parents on holiday. It is reported that while taking an ageing parent on holiday can be challenging, it is an emotional and rewarding experience (Heimtun, 2019). The organisation of the holiday activities on behalf of his mother reflects well on the interviewee, and he fulfils the role of being a *good son*.

In another example of organised and prior planning, a group of young parents cited socialising with each other and eating out as their main holiday activities. They had spent time planning and booking restaurants before arriving at the destination.

"Yeah yeah. So, we've had this planned since the summer, I think, thereabouts, since August time maybe. Then Rick books Pysgoty shortly afterwards after we'd booked to stay here. And then and I booked Gwesty Cymru for the following day. So, we've had it booked for a good few months. Didn't want to be disappointed. And I guess as well planning goes into that because trying to organise six people's...(and) babies... social diaries" Natalie (Interview 4)

*"So, if you don't get into the **good places**, **you will really miss out**. There are probably about four places we like to eat here. We need to make sure **we can get in**."*

Sophie, (Interview 4)

This example goes further than the sequential decision-making model since they attach value and beliefs in their desire to go to the "good" places. They alluded to a dichotomy of "good" and "bad" places to eat out. Their prior experience of visiting Aberystwyth meant that they had formed beliefs about places to go, which was significant enough to warrant planning in advance.

In another example of prior planning of activities, disabilities were an essential consideration in the decision-making process. Time and effort were spent finding activities and places that are wheelchair friendly or not too difficult to access. In this example (Interview 9), the daughter was a wheelchair user. She planned and researched the holiday to ensure places she visited, including restaurants, would have accessible facilities. When asked in the interview about planning, the grandparents said that their daughter had done much research and made decisions for the whole group to ensure it would meet her needs:

Hannah:	*Well again, I can't say that because I don't know what my daughter, because she does research a lot doesn't she? Because **she's in a wheelchair, she has to research and so whether she did all that before deciding to go to Aberystwyth** –*
George:	*She did because she looked at all the restaurants*
Hannah:	*because she wanted to see which one had a –*
George:	*Disabled toilets. Disabled access and that, and she **looked at all the reviews** and then obviously if they had access for her and stuff, so she has done her research and that.*

Websites and other information sources are important in the decision-making of disabled people. The attributes of locations and restaurants are checked, and places need to have advertised disabled facilities and access for them to be chosen by a disabled person.

This knowledge that their daughter would have needed to spend time planning is almost taken for granted by her parents. Their own attitude to planning and decision-making was much more relaxed, even carefree, hinting at spontaneity. While they had an idea of what they would like to do, they were flexible in their approach, and plans were subject to change:

*"Normally when me and George go away, **we do have a plan, don't we**? We very **rarely stick to it…**We've all the **time in the world** because we're retired but you know, you've still got to **make the most** of your time." Hannah, (Interview 9)*

This feeling of being carefree but also making the most of their time seemed to be a signature travel style; they seemed quite content with their way of planning. Optimal weather conditions were their only concern around decision-making to make the most out of every day:

*"Yeah, so we do it according to the weather really. But we **always make plans for each day,** but we very **rarely do what we planned**, we do other things." George (Interview 9)*

While most groups did not plan their activities and attractions methodically, there were some examples of detailed planning and research that exemplified sequential cognitive decision-making. This approach to planning could be attributed to the participants' personality traits and roles within the group. Earlier in this discussion (Theme 1), organisers and leaders were considered within the social dynamic of the group. In these examples, the individuals performed the role of an organiser, doing preparatory work ahead of the trip. They also demonstrate the ability to manage the cognitive load of information search and sorting the various options. It was evident from the interviews that special circumstances, such as a disability, brought with it the need to research the accessibility of venues and activities before visiting. This contrasted with other able bodied group members who could be more spontaneous in their decision-making.

5.5.2 FLEXIBLE PLANNING

Some groups had a flexible approach to planning, where they had booked or planned key activities in advance. However, they left other days open to options depending on other factors such as the weather or their mood:

*"We **planned the train** before coming because obviously we were meeting up with other people and it was for a birthday but the rest, we just had an **idea of things** that we knew we wanted to do. We were hoping we could be able to go to the castle a little bit more but that's been a **bit too wet**. But we go to New Quay every time we come, don't we? And then Borth again."* Faye (Interview 3)

The groups that did some planning were often familiar with the destination, which allowed them to approach their plans more relaxedly. Elizabeth had planned beach activities for her son, but also decided on activities that they found while they were on holiday:

*"We've been to Aberystwyth **several times** before and Todd really likes the beach and rock pooling, so that was definitely **on our agenda**. Todd saw the arcade because it's nearby, so he wanted to do that. The National Library we saw the poster, the one at Terrace Road where it crosses North Parade, and I've always liked Kyffin Williams so I thought I would like to go to that exhibition"* Elizabeth (Interview 7)

In another example from Interview 13 the participants had an idea of the attractions they wanted to visit, but were taking keeping their plans open and also considering the weather:

*"Yeah, we **planned Devil's Bridge** and then the walk round the Castle and up Constitution Hill, but we **didn't set exact days** because obviously you've got to **go with the weather** as well. So we've really been **taking each day as it comes"**. Lauren (Interview 13)

A flexible approach to planning could be considered as a combination of both planned decisions and spontaneous decisions that were usually weather-dependent. Familiarity with the destination was another factor since in all these examples, they had visited Aberystwyth before, which forgoes the need to spend any significant time planning or researching activities. It was also evident that they were not concerned about missing out on anything (by not booking) or having any need to be prepared, unlike some of the organised planner extracts.

5.5.3 NO PLANNING

In this subtheme, the interview participants actively avoided planning and preferred to be more spontaneous with their day-to-day activities. This was the most common approach that the groups identified with. In contrast to other decision-making and planning styles, participants consciously chose not to plan their daily activities and attraction visits. The discussions revealed an array of motivations and external influences, which included unfamiliarity with the destination; choice overload; mood; wanting freedom from the restraints of fixed plans and a desire for freedom.

In the following example where guests had not planned their activities in advance, this was sometimes a deliberate choice:

*"Actually, we decided we would **wait until we got here** before we filled our calendar....we did that on purpose." Daniel (Interview 1)*

On further probing, this was because these overseas visitors found it quite difficult to plan the logistics of getting around, and there was too much choice since their interest was visiting castles of Wales (of which there are many):

*"Well, what we found is that you know we **did look and research**. There were so many castles up north and then down in the south set we realised there was a **lot of options**. And it would probably **take getting here before we could find how easy** would it be to travel to those places. And what's doable." Daniel (Interview 1)*

Comparable to the participants who had done some planning, for some participants, familiarity with the destination contributed to families not planning ahead.

*"So, we **know the town really well** and that's the reason why we chose it really as a holiday destination. So, we were **fairly flexible and quite relaxed** about what we did when we got there." Peter, (Interview 14)*

Not planning activities ahead of time, in the manner of 'taking each day as it comes', was a conscious decision by some participants. It was suggested that planning ahead would have put them on a schedule and would, therefore, constrain their enjoyment. (Holidays, for some, are a temporary release from the routine of work and home life). Not having an agenda (without the commitments of home and work) was an expression of freedom, and it gave the impression of a different perception of time, time being the constraining factor. The family from interview thirteen has spent much time walking during their holiday.

*"Yeah, we've done a lot of walking…But because you're **not on a time scale**, you **don't have to worry about the time** and how long you're taking to walk, do you know what I mean? It's lovely." Lauren (Interview 13)*

As a group dynamic, the family came to Aberystwyth for a holiday to visit their daughter, who works there. There were elements of organised spontaneity. Whereby they would come together at different points on holiday, giving the impression of loose organisation:

*"Like when we take the dog out first think **I ring her up**, she **meets us** half-way and then that's it, she's with us the rest of the day. And we **just do different things** and it's all the family together, you know, so nice." Lauren (Interview 13)*

There was further evidence of the 'No plan' attitude from other participants who had deliberately not planned too much ahead and were taking things on a day-by-day basis.

*"So yeah, **we'd kind of looked** but we **didn't specifically want to plan a real rigid schedule** because we knew it was at the end of the trip and we thought, 'Well, we'll just not plan anything'." James (Interview 10)*

The couple in Interview Eleven, expressed this by saying they wanted to do what they felt, letting their mood guide them each day:

*"I didn't spend much time looking at it, because as I said, we really wanted to do things when we were here, **not plan ahead** like, we have to do three activities every day. It was like **just take one day at a time** and **do what we feel** for, that might be nice. Alex (Interview 11)*

Planning was not always possible in groups with adolescents. In Emily's discussion (Interview 16), the teenagers preferring to sleep in or stay at home with WIFI access prevented the parents from making group decisions in advance. Talking about her teenage children and getting them out of the house, the mother was very understanding of their needs and was taking each day at a time:

*"They **fall asleep in the house**, you know, **detaching yourself from technology** so why would you, but Paul and I will probably go for a walk and we will need to go and get the fish and chips, so that involves leaving the house as well. So, **haven't really decided what we'll do for the next few days.**" Emily, (Interview 16)*

Participants commonly employed the strategy of allowing the holiday activities to unfold on the day with little pre-planning. Mood and a desire to slow down were cited as reasons for this, as were contextual reasons like unfamiliarity with the destination and travel logistics. Familiarity with the destination gave some tourists the advantage of prior knowledge, so they did not need to research or plan activities in advance. Rejecting the idea of a rigid schedule was viewed as a valid choice, and these participants embraced a more free-spirited attitude towards daily activities. A prevalent pattern emerges in this subtheme as interview participants opt for a more impulsive approach to their day-to-day holiday activities. This approach stands out as the most embraced among the groups studied. The conscious choice not to pre-plan daily activities and attraction visits is evident by many motivations and external influences: both unfamiliarity and overfamiliarity with the destination; too much choice; traveller disposition and a desire for freedom from the constraints of fixed plans.

5.5.4 SPONTANEITY AND THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

Many participants talked about spontaneity during the interview discussions on planning and finding activities. Of course, unexpected things happen on holiday – this is to be expected. Still, in activity selection, some participants embraced a deliberate choice to welcome surprise into their itinerary, and some of them considered it more fun and exciting than planning activities – particularly when it relates to place. There was an attitude of adventure and being more of an intrepid traveller, to take a risk on things just working out. Conversely, in previous examples, where participants took the time to plan their activities to avoid risk, avoid

disappointment, or save time on holiday looking for things to do, the spontaneity seekers were rewarded with surprises and fun, even if it meant sometimes getting lost – they didn't view that time as wasted but as part of the adventure. Those willing to take risks in spontaneous activities were animated and used more emotive language to describe those moments. The participants in interview one used the words fun nine times throughout the interview, including a time when they got lost on their drive to a craft centre:

*"I think part of the fun is **discovering things** though, just **run across** things that you never thought." Sally, (Interview 1)*

The group shared details about their current Aberystwyth trip and the many day trips they had made by car on other shared holidays. In their opinion, discovering places by car was a good way to see a new place, and they had gotten lost before. While they were wary of longer car journeys, shorter trips were made. While the drivers in the group (the husbands) bemoaned the GPS systems in the UK and the lack of signage in the countryside, one of the wives – Sally, countered that it was part of the fun, and it led them to new places that they otherwise would not have seen. Taking in the scenery and countryside on these drives was a pleasurable experience, and wrong turns or directions didn't deter them.

*"Like, we got lost going into to find Rhiannon (Craft shop Tregaron). And we **stopped this person**, and they say go down **get down to the bridge**, take a right to the second right, take a left you go get all the way up in the country, and it was like **what in the world**, and then we find out **we were (already) right there**." Daniel, (Interview 1).*

Daniel, the driver, was amused by the local sending them in the wrong direction and found it funny that they were already in the right place when they asked for directions. Getting lost meant they interacted with locals, which echoed their desire for authentic experiences and getting to know local people. So, getting lost and needing help was seen as a positive part of the holiday. Sally reiterated again that even when lost, it was enjoyable because the scenery was picturesque, though she concedes that while on holiday, they have plenty of time, they weren't on a schedule and didn't need to be on time for any activities:

*"The benefit is **everything is beautiful**….You know **we have a lot of time**."*
Sally, (Interview 1)

Similarly, in Interview 5, the group of sisters and niece enjoyed telling the tale of getting lost on the first day of the holiday. This resulted in them unintentionally trekking the whole town in rough weather to reach their accommodation and interacting with some helpful locals. They laughed while telling the story, and it was clear this was an important memory from the trip:

*"So, we saw the **whole city** already on the **first day by accident (laughter)**."*
Maria, (Interview 5)

*"We **found out yesterday** that **we only have 15 minutes to the house**. Not one and a half hours. We came from the train station and we just **choose the wrong direction**. We walked along the promenade; it was stormy, and we had our suitcases." Maria, (Interview 5)*

*"It was the **best part of our journey** I think." Lina, (Interview 5)*

*"That's **true because we went along the pier** with our trolleys and there were **two ladies, and they showed us the whole way (laughter)**." Maria, (Interview 5)*

For some tourists, walking the whole of Aberystwyth promenade in a storm with your luggage would have been a disaster and a bad start to a holiday. But they enjoyed the scenery and met some helpful locals who assisted them to their accommodation. Like interview one, they also expressed an interest in the interview to interact with locals and find local experiences. So, this unintentional activity of traipsing around the town resulted in a great experience. They laughed a lot during the interview, and even though many things did not go according to plan, they were happy with their time together. Micro-interactions with locals were some of the highlights of their trip together.

*"Very **friendly** yes. It's really **interesting**, we have **so many fun** with the **people** here."*
Amelia (Interview 5)

The experience of having fun and interacting with friendly locals gives them more meaningful memories. It could be suggested that spontaneous experiences and interactions are perceived as more memorable and authentic because of the spontaneous dimension. Perceived authentic tourist experiences have been linked to spontaneity in a study by Tiberghien et al. (2020). However, the interviewees were in Kazakhstan and talked about the authentic (but planned)

homestays and meals with locals. The examples from Aberystwyth contrast with this because they were unplanned interactions with locals that led to an enhanced experience. They were sometimes in between unexpected moments, often between planned activities, the stories participants seemed to enjoy telling, and laughter elicited fun in the conversations.

For some participants, spontaneity was linked to residual memories of Aberystwyth that was prompted by a cue in the environment. In interview seven, Elizabeth decided to visit a local art exhibition after noticing a poster in the town. She made this decision because it sparked a memory of an artist of note:

*"We **saw the poster**…and I've always liked Kyffin Williams so I thought I would like to go to that exhibition." Elizabeth (Interview 7)*

*"Yeah, so there's **lots of things that are to do with having lived here before**. So there was Kyffin Williams painting on the wall in one of the meeting rooms **when I worked** at the university, I'd never heard of him before, but somebody said, 'Oh yeah, he's one of **the best artists** that we've got in this building". Elizabeth (Interview 7)*

Exploring participants' perspectives on planning and spontaneous activities during holiday experiences revealed a subtheme of embracing serendipity and surprise, sometimes linked to authentic local interactions. Spontaneity was also triggered by noticing an event advertised locally. The absence of rigid planning allowed for more impulsive experiences.

In conclusion of the fourth theme, the exploration of activity and attraction decision-making through the lens of planning, no planning, and spontaneity, provides valuable insights into the dynamic nature of tourist behaviour. The organised planner emerged as a distinct decision-making archetype characterised by meticulous preparation, extensive research, and a proactive approach to ensure a smooth and fulfilling holiday experience. These individuals exhibited a high level of cognitive engagement and invested effort in anticipating and addressing various contingencies, particularly when accommodating special needs or preferences of travel companions. Their planning was often driven by a desire to curate memorable experiences and optimise the enjoyment of all involved.

Conversely, the flexible planners adopted a more relaxed approach, striking a balance between prearranged activities and open-ended exploration. A willingness to adapt plans based on prevailing conditions allowed them to maximize spontaneity while still achieving their desired holiday objectives. Their planning style reflected a pragmatic outlook, leveraging prior knowledge and preferences to guide decision-making without being overly constrained by fixed itineraries. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the no-planners embraced spontaneity wholeheartedly, rejecting formal planning in favour of embracing freedom, and a sense of expanding their time. For these individuals, the essence of the holiday experience lay in the freedom to pursue activities and follow impulses without the burden of preconceived agendas. Finally, the spontaneity seekers displayed a willingness to embrace the unexpected. Their decision-making was guided by a desire for novelty, fun, and authentic interactions with locals, often leading to memorable experiences and serendipitous discoveries. They cultivated a sense of openness, enriching their travel experiences with spontaneity and surprise. In essence, the diverse approaches to activity and attraction decision-making reflect the many-sided nature of tourist behaviour. By acknowledging and understanding these distinct decision-making archetypes, tourism practitioners and destination managers can tailor their offerings to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of travellers, fostering more enriching and fulfilling holiday experiences for all.

5.6 THEME 5: HOW INFORMATION IS USED IN DECISION-MAKING

5.6.1 NUANCED SELECTION OF INFORMATION SOURCES

The following theme explores the multi-dimensional relationship between information-seeking behaviour and the decision-making process, focusing on the research question: "Do tourists value online information sources and the internet more than offline information sources?" Participants were questioned about the types, timing, and motivations behind their use of information sources in relation to activities and attractions. The excerpts offer a multi-faceted understanding of the contextual nature of information search, emphasising the influence of weather, familiarity with the destination, and personal preferences on their decision-making processes. The participants revealed varied inclinations for information sources, with some expressing a preference for in-person recommendations over online platforms like TripAdvisor. The discerning taste exhibited by participants suggests a nuanced evaluation of the reliability of online reviews and a positive perception of local or personal suggestions.

*"In **person**. We like to **talk to people**." Sally, (Interview 1)*

*"Yes, **they can tell you what to eat and what to do** if there's anything local which we love to do. They can tell you about **local events** that a lot of people never look for."*
Sally, (Interview 1)

It was perceived that getting local recommendations was a better way to find less touristy activities. Some participants associated authentic experiences with local recommendations:

*"You don't get the places that are tourist related. You **go to places like you're at home**."*
Bert, (Interview 1)

*"Will make you feel like you are **part of the culture**". Sally, (Interview 1)*

Many participants believed review sites like TripAdvisor weren't reliable or aligned with their preferences. This attitude expresses a discerning taste. The perception of local knowledge was that it was better than online sources.

*"Well, part of it is you're making decisions based on not having any information. So why not go for **people who've lived there** who know the country, and they are **going to be informed**."*
Daniel (Interview 1)

Further to this, unreliability was also cited as a reason that review sites could not always be relied on:

*"On **Trip Advisor,** somebody might give something ten stars or five stars, but **they might not have the same taste as you**." Sophie, (Interview 4)*

*"I don't like **Trip Advisor** no. I feel that **it's all made up**". Amanda (Interview 18)*

Conversely, some participants found TripAdvisor a useful tool for restaurant selection:

*"Yeah, I did use TripAdvisor quite a bit. I think **TripAdvisor is quite useful** in that respect, obviously giving other people's opinions so you can kind of see the range of restaurants"*
Steven, (Interview 17)

Another group (Interview 6) that had just been to France before arriving in Aberystwyth had just experienced a personalised day trip, and this positive memory left the group with strong feelings towards this way of sourcing recommended activities:

*"The friend that we were visiting had already mapped out this little day trip it…he just **texted me the Google map's destinations** and the sort of, okay, drive here and I've booked you in for lunch at this restaurant, and…then go up here.. which obviously **is not a thing that the internet can do for you** in the same way as a **friend** can" Jennifer, (Interview 6)*

They acknowledged that because of their familiarity with Aberystwyth, selecting activities had not required as much research or information search; however, in France, they had relied much more on their friend's information and a website called France Voyager, which had helped them with routes and finding various activities.

*"I did use (**France Voyager**) in France to find places. You could enter your itinerary and it would say, you know, **forty-five minute's drive** between the places. So that did help."*

Another example of a participant asking friends for recommendations, this time a day trip to Devils Bridge; the recommendation was enough for her to take her family there:

*"Some activities from **friends**. They had **already been to** Devils Bridge, and **she really loved it**" Helen, (Interview 5)*

Internet use was chosen by many of the participants, particularly for checking crucial details like transport timetables or opening times of restaurants. Still, it was acknowledged that it could not always be relied upon to be up to date:

*"I **usually look at the internet to start with**. We usually look at things like Lonely Planet and see if it recommends bus routes and things like that. But I don't go on that altogether because they also **go out of date**. But I use the internet a lot. And I use the internet, and I look at **specific places**." Amanda (Interview 18)*

*"So, you know, I **regularly check to see what the menus** are, what time they actually open, you know, if we need a reservation, that, that kind of thing or for a **little thing to get directions** on how to walk there." Mary, (Interview 12)*

All participants mentioned using the internet at some point in the interviews, but what is interesting is how people use it. There were examples of spontaneous decision-making and checking for new things to do. The searching was very contextual; it depended on the day, their familiarity with the destination, and their personal preferences. One of the participants used the search engine Google to find local information without searching for specific websites.

*"Just **Googled**. See what's coming up…basically anywhere...I don't know. I didn't choose special websites" Helen, (Interview 5)*

Jennifer found information about the Hay on Wye literary festival by chance while searching for events that were on during her stay:

*"I think **I followed a link**, you know, best literary festivals or something and oh I wonder what that is and oh wait, what those dates, but I'm there that week…**Completely accidental**."*

Jennifer, (Interview 6)

While some guests had specific websites they liked to check, exemplified in Interview 3, the family had young children, and so checking a known website "days out with the kids" for children's activities as part of their search process:

*"So, **I went there before we came** to see what was available. I mean, in case it was a complete washout….. And so, I've been on **"days out with the kids"** to see what there is, and there's a pottery place and painting place and there's a couple of soft plays and things."*

Faye, (Interview 3)

However, when pressed on which kinds of information they preferred, she used the internet to check for any new activities because they were familiar with the destination – looking for local recommendations wasn't necessary.

*"**Word of mouth isn't so much for us now**. It is more internet-based because the word of mouth stuff we generally know, so it's **looking to see anything new**." Faye, (Interview 3)*

Individuals often had different approaches within the group. In Interview Five, when asked about the information sources they used, one participant didn't look at all due to lack of time; another checked pictures only; and another watched the TV series Hinterland as preparation before her family arrived. These different approaches within the same group demonstrate how people look for and consume information differently. Some people prefer images and film to written information; it could also have been due to them visiting a relative that they didn't need to do so much information search.

***Lina:** No, **I hadn't the time**. A week before I went to Lanzarote so I hadn't any time to look.*
***Amelia:** **I looked at pictures on Internet**, at Aberystwyth and I loved it. This was the reason I loved the landscape.*
***Helen (niece):** 'Hinterland' Did you know that? I just started to **watch it with some friends** from Uni. It's fun if you recognise someplace. Ah I've been there and Ah I know where they are right now…"*

There were examples of participants searching for activities before arriving at the destination online and by the rarer format of guidebooks:

*"I did **look (online**) and **see what was on** at the Arts Centre before we came. We didn't go to anything, but I did have a look." Zoe, (Interview 19)*

"We did buy one or two books outlining some of the local walking trails, and some of them were recommended by the tourist centre." Peter, (Interview 19)

There were some examples of participants finding it difficult to navigate mobile phones for information search with a preference for tablets or laptops over mobile phones. This was due to being unfamiliar with the phone model or screen size being too small:

*"I use both. I use the laptop, and if we're away, I obviously use the iPad. Mostly because **my phone's little**, and **I can't read it**. Yeah, too small." Amanda (Interview 18)*

*"A little bit to **check the opening hours** of something we want to do or something, but I **don't really like doing things on my phone**…I'm much more likely to do things on my laptop, which I didn't bring this time." Jennifer, (Interview 6)*

Many groups used printed leaflets to aid with attraction and activity selection. Since the participants were staying in self-catering accommodation, they often found leaflets in the properties or picked them up from information points at the destination.

*"I think Leon got **some pamphlets** he found, and I don't know where, he just said, 'Look what I've procured. Look what I've got for us.'." Alex, (Interview 11)*

There is a prominent tourist information office in Aberystwyth, which was visited by many of the participants. An interesting observation was made by an older participant in interview nine, when he talked about his own behaviour while searching for information, he gestured to his much younger grandchildren and inferred that they would use digital sources as opposed to in

person or printed ones. In his opinion, going to a local tourist information and gathering leaflets was more than adequate for finding information about the destination:

*"I mean, in the past, I've done quite a bit of travelling in various parts, and the first thing you do when you arrive in a town in a foreign country is get a **street map**, go to the **Tourist Information**, and get the **leaflets**. Go back to your room later and have a **read of them** before you start off the following day and that supplies everything I want to know. But that's before the IT age. Well, every time in the past I got enough information that way. I mean, you two (grandchildren) would probably just **go on your phone** and find things."*

George, (Interview 9)

His grandson gives a slightly unexpected response, that while he has already done some research online for a forthcoming trip to Melbourne, Australia, he has found a tourist information near his accommodation to visit on arrival:

*"Where, yeah where we're staying in Melbourne, I've actually **looked (online)** and our hotel is down the road from the **Tourist Information** place so I thought, 'Yeah, I'll definitely be going there', straight away just to get some stuff, like **information and that**."*

Jackson, (Interview 9)

This example demonstrates the multiple information sources that tourists need. He had done some pre-trip planning online but is also going to do some in-person research on arrival.

The tourist information centre was acknowledged as a place that participants felt comfortable visiting and provided inspiration on places to visit:

*"So, there was some **interaction there**. And just the good layout's helpful as well. You can **browse around and get ideas**." Peter, (Interview 19).*

It was acknowledged by one participant that tourist information centres are not as commonplace anymore and are quite rare in the destination.

*"When we're in a place we go to the information (centre), if they've got an **information place,** often they're **closing nowadays**." Amanda, (Interview 18)*

While mobile technology and internet search engines have grown exponentially in the last twenty years; the internet has become central to our daily lives. There is an abundance of information available on activity selection online. Notwithstanding this phenomenon, the internet is a component in the layered process of how people make choices.

The information search process is presented in some literature as the start of a linear decision-making journey: tourists allocate adequate time to researching and planning activities before making informed decisions. However, various processes surround and precipitate in situ decision-making and planning and do not usually follow the expected linear path particularly for flexible and spontaneous decision-makers. Information search in tourism is complex and multistage (Hwang and Fesenmaier, 2011). Many models state that decision-making begins with an information search (Decrop & Snelders, 2005) that precedes choice, and information search alone is a powerful predictor of choice (K. Volchek et al., 2018). It is suggested that there are three sequential stages: first, information search; second, travel planning; and third, trip arrangements. Although some academics acknowledge that the information search process is dynamic and can occur at all planning stages, including post-destination (K. Volchek et al., 2018), decision-making is commonly theorised as a linear and sequential process: need recognition, information search, assessment of alternatives and purchase and post-purchase activities (Ho, Lin and Chen, 2012). It is claimed that before deciding which attractions to visit, tourists acquaint themselves with the available options and then appraise them with regard to their suitability before deciding (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). Irrespective of the model applied (Hyde, 2008), the information search process is known to precede tourists' choice of destination, accommodations, and other travel-supporting services.

Participants were stimulated by personal preferences for information sources, and there were some underlying motivations for looking for more authentic local experiences and recommendations. The Internet was deemed adequate for looking for ideas and lists of places

to go. Tourist information centres, while not unique to Aberystwyth, were acknowledged as less ubiquitous than they once were. Since the digitisation of information in tourism and the popularity of the internet and smartphones, it is often proposed in the extant literature that tourists are in an internet or mobile-dominant information world, and other information sources such as in-person information centres, word of mouth and printed information are deemed secondary.

In contrast to the interviews, the survey data presented smartphone use for getting information about attractions as high. With 33% using phones for pre-planning stages and 64% while on holiday (figures 23 and 24). This inconsistency with the interviews could be explained by survey questions over-simplifying the use of smartphones and digital information in decision-making. It is not possible to delve deeper and understand the context of the information search or ask detailed questions to reveal the how or why smartphones are used in a survey.

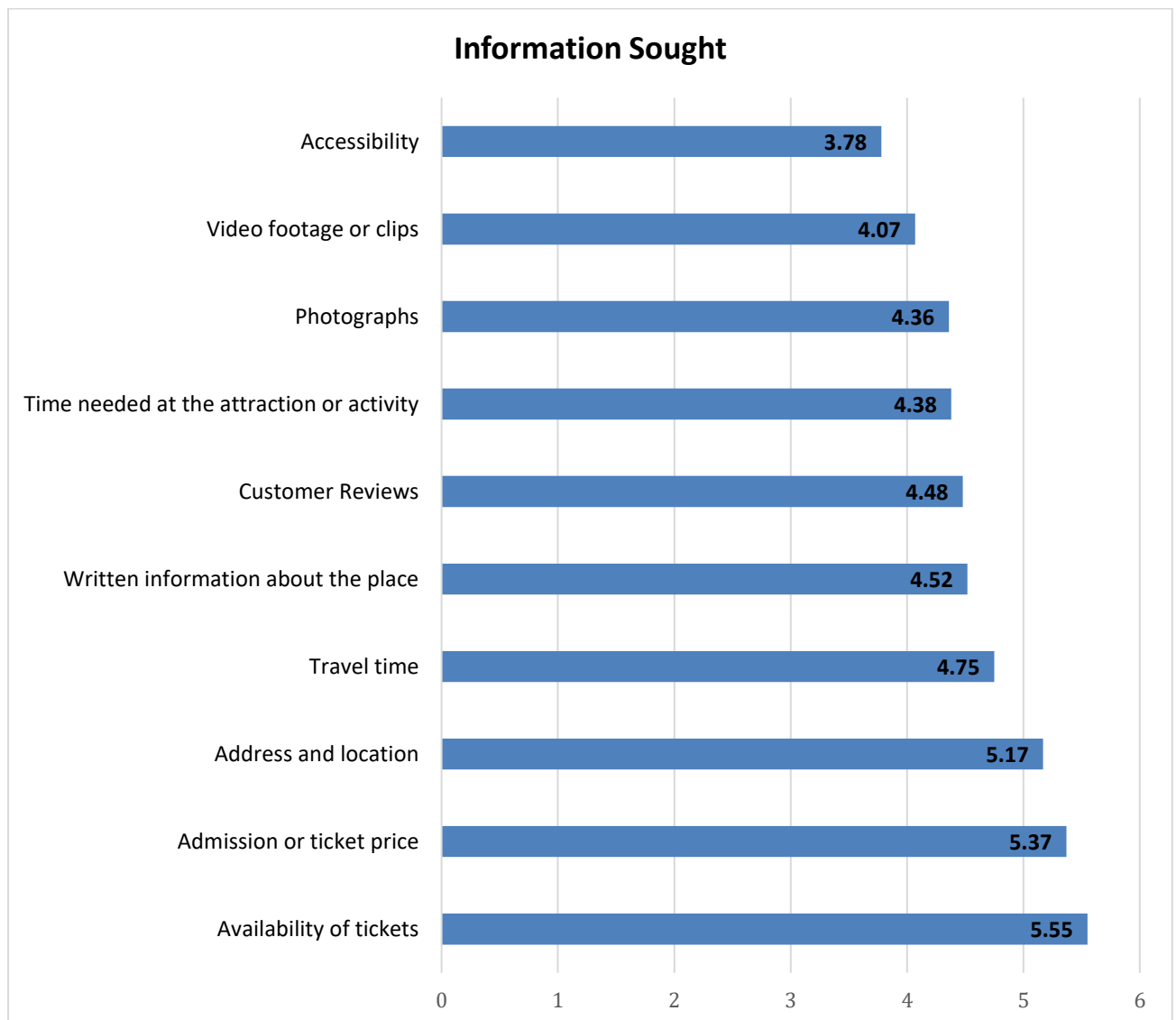**Figure 23. Technology used when Pre-Planning at Home**
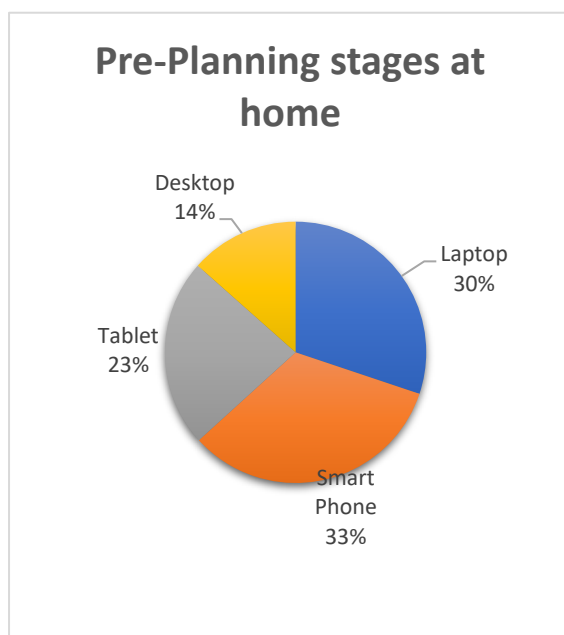
Figure 24. Technology used when Planning while on Holiday

While on holiday

Desktop 2%
Laptop 13%
Tablet 21%
Smart Phone 64%
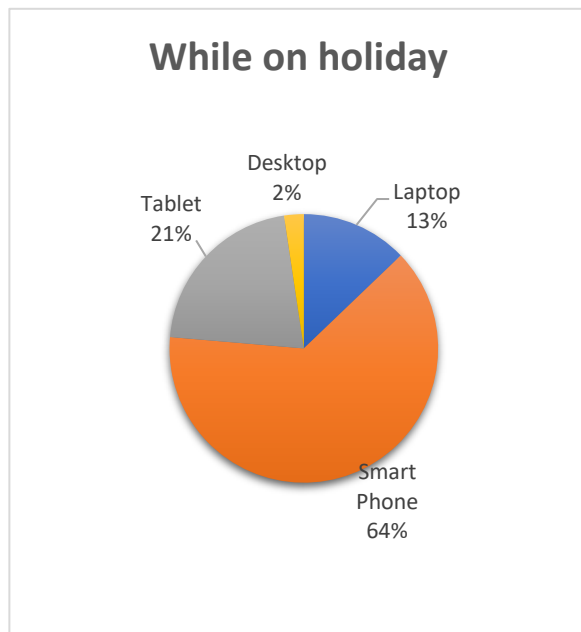
In an attempt to understand more about the information type required by tourists, the survey also asked respondents to indicate what information was most important to them while searching online. The measurement instrument for the variables was a 7-point Likert scale ranging from one - strongly disagree to seven - strongly agree. Figure 25 illustrates the means for each variable. *Admission, or ticket price,* was the highest scoring response with 5.37; followed by *Availability of Tickets* with 5.55 and *Address/Location* with 5.1. This indicates that the information sought related more to practical issues rather than more persuasive information such as videos or reviews. This correlates with the interview data, since participants spoke about using their phones to check opening times and other details before visiting an attraction.

Figure 25. Types of Information Sought Online

Information Sought

Category	Value
Accessibility	3.78
Video footage or clips	4.07
Photographs	4.36
Time needed at the attraction or activity	4.38
Customer Reviews	4.48
Written information about the place	4.52
Travel time	4.75
Address and location	5.17
Admission or ticket price	5.37
Availability of tickets	5.55

In conclusion, the fifth theme explores information-seeking behaviour and decision-making in attraction and activity selection. Specifically addressing the research question, "Do tourists value online information sources and the Internet more than offline information sources?", participants were probed regarding the types, timing, and motivations underlying their utilisation of various information sources. Tourists engage with various information sources in nuanced ways to inform their choices. This study sheds light on the multi-faceted nature of information selection, highlighting the contextual factors influencing tourists' preferences for online and offline sources. Participants demonstrated a discerning approach to information sources, with some expressing a preference for in-person recommendations and local suggestions over online platforms like TripAdvisor. The perceived authenticity and reliability

of local knowledge emerged as key factors driving this preference, suggesting a desire by some participants for more authentic and culturally enriching experiences. Conversely, while online platforms like TripAdvisor were acknowledged as useful for certain purposes, such as restaurant selection, concerns about trustworthiness and alignment with personal preferences led some participants to question their reliability. However, the survey findings do not confirm the nuanced and selective information search behaviour discovered in the interviews. The survey results point to a high level of smartphone use. However, this blunt comparison does not give justice to the rich and detailed data unveiled in the qualitative findings. The findings also revealed the diverse ways tourists utilise online sources, ranging from spontaneous searches for new activities to checking crucial details like transport timetables and restaurant opening times. Participants' reliance on internet-based information varied depending on destination familiarity, weather conditions, and personal preferences. Despite the prevalence of digital information sources, offline sources such as tourist information centres and printed leaflets were still valued by many participants for their role in providing inspiration and local insights. Recognising the nuanced relationship between online and offline sources, attraction managers can learn from tourists' diverse needs and information preferences in rural destinations. This study contributes to the evolving discourse on information consumption and decision-making in tourism.

5.6.2 THE TIMELINE OF INFORMATION SEARCH IN ACTIVITY DECISION-MAKING

The following subtheme explores the timeline of information search in attraction and activity decision-making. It was revealed that information search behaviour for attractions and activities is not static and changes according to the holiday's timeline. In the discussions about information search, it was evident that different types of information and search behaviour is carried out at different stages of the holiday. There is a desire for multiple online and offline sources of information for tourists to build a complete picture of the destination and make decisions about attractions and activities. Some participants, particularly the ones who were categorised as organised planners, tended to use multiple information sources, and were organised and adept at managing multiple sources at different stages of the planning process:

*"I do like to get **more than one source** of information." Amanda, (Interview 18)*

Preplanning began online:

*"I look at the internet usually to **start with**." Amanda (Interview 18)*

Checking a variety of sites:

*"Looking **at further sites**. Looking up things to see what I can find" Amanda (Interview 18)*

Followed by guidebooks:

*"**Lonely Planet**....I usually use the **paperback**, get it out the **library**" Amanda (Interview 18)*

Once at the destination in-person information was sought:

*"When we're in a **place** we go to the **information (centre**). And we go to bus stations and train stations and look at where buses go. Sometimes **talk to people** in the information desk about where things are, where buses are going." Amanda (Interview 18)*

As well as checking online in the destination with an iPad:

*"I've got an **iPad and I've got a phone**. And I struggle sometimes with it (phone). But the iPad is for me very useful **for looking up things**." Amanda (Interview 18)*

This systematic, sequential, and thorough information search was quite different from other travellers approaches. Information was important during the holiday as well as before arrival. It was implied that the information-gathering process for attractions and activities began early in the stages of holiday preparation. Most participants did some searching for information about attractions and activities before arrival, though for some their approach was less thorough and targeted to essential information, just before arriving:

Preplanning online:

*"Nothing needed to be booked or anything so the week before I came, I **looked online** and looked up the times of the swimming pool and that was all I did." Elizabeth, (Interview 7)*

*"Later in the year we're going to Pembrokeshire, I might **do a little bit more**, but it probably still **wouldn't be more than a week** before." Elizabeth, (Interview 7)*

The participant in Interview 7, locates herself as a returnee to Aberystwyth, having spent her youth in the town. In response to questions about planning, she suggested that she had done little planning of activities but would have done more if she had been visiting somewhere new. Because she was familiar with the area, she was able to plan quite strategically without referring to external sources:

*"I just had a list of **two or three things** in my head that I wanted to do but we didn't decide **until the day** what we were going to do that day. Like we just **walked over** to Trefechan beach and that was one thing that was on my list, because it's our last day and I just wanted to squeeze that in. A mental list." Elizabeth, (Interview 7)*

For the flexible and spontaneous tourists, there was no clear timeline for planning since they waited until arrival in the destination to consider their options and make decisions related to attractions and activities. This couple in interview ten preferred to discover the town by foot, and discovered the attractions they were interested in on the way around, and also found the tourist information centre:

*"And then we had breakfast, and then **we went down south** and made a great big **loop through the town**." Viola (Interview 10)*

*"We've mainly just been **wandering, walking,** shopping a little bit." James (Interview 10)*

*"Right, and **we spotted** what we thought we wanted to do because we were thinking we were going to take the steam railway. Unfortunately, it was closed, so then. We **stopped at the information centre,** the little museum information centre." Viola (Interview* 10)

Though some did carry out research and then either forgot it or found it difficult to manage the information sources. Information search, particularly pre-destination arrival, caused overwhelm because of too much information available or too much choice. This problem was

sometimes exacerbated because some participants could not retain the information they had searched for, and information overload was evident.

*"And you'll probably ask me what specific sources I've looked at, and **I can't even remember.**" Peter, (Interview 19)*

*"The problem with these kind of **books**...**it's so much thrown** at you at once. Then you start thinking, oh you should (go) here and go there." Sally, (Interview 1)*

*"But you **don't know where** it's at, and you **don't know how** close it is." Jane, (Interview 1)*

Recalling specific information sources or websites was often quite difficult for participants. They couldn't always remember where they had read about or checked the information for an attraction or activity. Some also found that researching places to visit before arriving in the destination was too difficult, as they couldn't process all the information necessary to make decisions, and it was too overwhelming to consider all the options available, particularly in guidebooks. Some participants could not recall the attractions and activities they had found in preparation for the holiday:

*"We **did a fair bit of research**, didn't we? **Forgotten** most of it."*
(Dionne, Interview 15)

*"It's like a **blur**. Totally. We **need reminding** of something that I've already researched."*
(Michael, Interview 15)

Working memory is a key facet of cognitive function and processing capacity, and it has been suggested that consumers have limited working memory to facilitate this function (Correia, Kozak, and Tão, 2014). While they intended to learn about the destination and the activities on offer, they couldn't always recall this information.

The process of selecting attractions and activities during a holiday can occur at different stages, either independently or in conjunction with the decision-making process surrounding the destination itself. While some participants demonstrated a clear vision of their holiday

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activities from the outset, others approached this aspect of planning with less certainty. For some, activity planning occurs well in advance, leveraging a variety of online and offline resources to inform their choices. However, most of interviewees expressed challenges in planning day-to-day activities, either due to a lack of foresight or difficulty in navigating the myriad options available. Tourists must navigate a multitude of decisions, ranging from selecting travel companions and accommodation to determining journey distances, transportation modes, trip durations, and budget allocations. These decisions, distinct from those concerning destination or lodging, are integral components of the overall holiday experience and may warrant consideration within a specialized decision-making framework. Indeed, the complexity and unique characteristics of activity and attraction selection suggest the potential utility of a dedicated decision model tailored to this aspect of travel planning.

Survey respondents were asked about holiday attractions and activities more generally and to indicate their preferred information sources from a list of twenty-one, including a cross-section of online and offline resources. They were also asked to indicate at which time point they used this resource. Information sources were derived from interviews with both the industry sector and tourists. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one-time point for each information source. Three time points were included: One month in advance; 1 week in advance; and on the day. The following chart indicates how the preference for information sources changes over time. Notably, the highest search activity takes place one month before the holiday, with a total of 1283 responses; followed by one week with 923; and on the day with 600. This indicates that most people do look for activities and attractions a month prior to arrival, and they check more types of information. Though the types of information being checked do change in rank:

**Table 9. Preference for Information Sources Over Time**

For the time point	%
One month or more in advance **the preferred information sources:**	
Attraction or activity website	17%
Google search	12%
Local website	8%
Ask a friend or family member for recommendation	8%
Trip Advisor website.	6%
For the time point	
A week or more in advance **the preferred information sources:**	
Attraction or activity website	14%
Brochure or leaflet	12%
Google Search	9%
Weather website	8%
Local website	7%
For the time point	
On the day, **the preferred information sources are:**	
Weather website	14%
Brochure or leaflet	10%
Google Maps	10%
Attraction or activity Website	9%
Ask a local person for a recommendation	8%

From these results, the attraction/activity website is the most crucial resource since it is the only variable to appear in the top results for all three-time stages. Notably, offline resources such as asking a local and brochures become more critical the closer to the visit. Four out of five of the top information sources were online sources at each of the time-points, with one offline or in person source at each time point. While the popularity of some online sources such as Google search and checking the activity website go down over time. In-destination cues such as banners or posters increase as well as asking a local person or visiting the site. These

patterns in the survey data largely correspond to the interview data. It is surprising how scattered the data is, and there are 12 variables with less than 3% each, indicating the vast range of information sources and how spread out the numbers are in figure 25. A surprising finding was the low influence in popularity of social media and Instagram as an information source. This would indicate that attraction and activity sites need to spread their marketing efforts across many information platforms to reach all of the different information preferences, but if limited by budget, they should concentrate their efforts on key channels as listed above.

The exploration of the timeline of information search in attraction and activity decision-making sheds light on the dynamic nature of holiday planning. It becomes evident that the process is far from static; rather, it evolves according to the holiday's timeline and the individual preferences of tourists. Participants demonstrated varied approaches to information search, ranging from meticulously planned pre-departure research to spontaneous exploration upon arrival. Organised planners exemplified a systematic and thorough search process, utilising multiple online and offline sources at different planning stages. In contrast, others opted for a more last-minute approach, focusing on essential information just before arrival. Flexibility and spontaneity were also observed in some tourists, who preferred to discover attractions on the go. However, information gathering emerged as a crucial aspect of holiday planning, influencing decisions both before and during the trip. The significance of working memory in processing and retaining this information became apparent, with some participants experiencing difficulty recalling details amidst information overload. The survey data further underlined the importance of the timing in information search, revealing distinct preferences for different sources at various stages of planning. While online resources, particularly attraction/activity websites, remained prominent throughout, offline sources gained traction closer to the visit.

Figure 26. All Information sources at the Time Point Intervals: On the Day, 1 Week in Advance and 1 Month in Advance
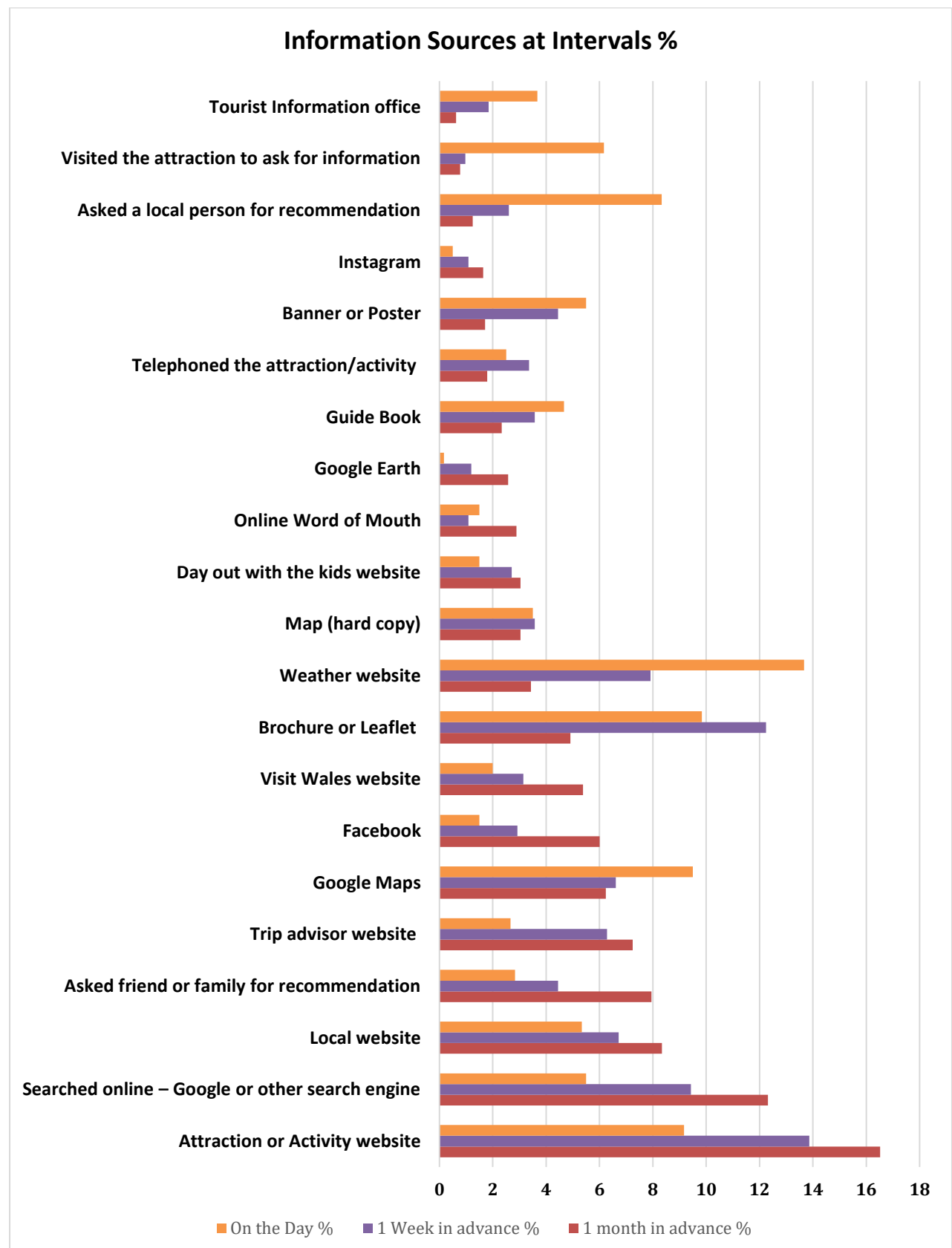
While online resources are still prominent in the survey data at all stages of the search process, the interviews suggest a shift from extensive online research to some reliance on in-person cues and local recommendations in the destination. Yet, amidst the diverse array of information sources, a notable finding was the relatively low influence of social media and Instagram, indicating a need for attraction and activity sites to diversify their marketing efforts across multiple platforms. In summary, the timeline of information search in attraction and activity decision-making reflects the divergent range of information sources and the changing priorities of tourists as the holiday approaches.

5.6.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion of this chapter, examining the five main themes provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of decision-making processes among tourists visiting attractions and activities. Each theme sheds light on different aspects of the decision-making process, situational factors, emotional contexts, group dynamics, planning preferences, and information-seeking behaviours. In the first theme the investigation of situational and contextual factors underscores the multidimensional nature of onsite decision-making, with transportation, weather conditions, budget considerations, and destination attributes all playing fundamental roles influencing itineraries and tourists' activity and attraction choices. These findings emphasise the importance of considering practical constraints and destination features in understanding tourist's decision-making processes. Secondly, group dynamics and social negotiations emerged as integral aspects of decision-making within travel parties. The interviews revealed diverse roles and power dynamics within groups, with some individuals assuming leadership roles while others preferred to follow or delegate decision-making responsibilities. Negotiation and compromise were evident, particularly in families with children, where efforts were made to accommodate diverse preferences. Collective decision-making fostered a sense of togetherness and shared enjoyment, highlighting the significance of group connectivity in shaping activity choices. Thirdly, participants' emotional responses and group dynamics influenced attraction and activity choices. Positive emotions, particularly happiness, emerged as primary drivers behind tourists' decision-making, reflecting their emotional attachments to the destination. Group connectivity played a crucial role, with participants prioritizing activities that fostered social interaction and bonding. The survey data corroborated qualitative findings, indicating a convergence of expected emotional states with

actual experiences, further stressing the importance of emotional resonance in forming tourists' decision-making behaviour. Fourthly, participants exhibited diverse approaches to activity and attraction decision-making, ranging from meticulous planning to embracing spontaneity. Organised planners demonstrated proactive preparation and extensive research, aiming to curate memorable experiences. In contrast, spontaneity seekers prioritized novelty and serendipitous discoveries, rejecting formal planning in favour of freedom and flexibility.

In the final theme, tourists engaged with various information sources to inform their attraction and activity choices, demonstrating a discerning approach to information selection. While online platforms were prevalent, some participants favoured in-person recommendations for their perceived authenticity and reliability. The survey data revealed distinct preferences for different information sources at various stages of planning, emphasizing the dynamic nature of activity and attraction planning and the importance of timing in information search behaviour. Overall, these findings deepen the understanding of tourist behaviour and preferences in the context of attraction and activity planning in rural Wales. By considering situational factors, emotional contexts, group dynamics, decision-making styles, and information-seeking behaviours, tourism professionals can better tailor experiences and information channels to meet the diverse needs and preferences of tourists, ultimately enhancing destination appeal and visitor satisfaction.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The chapter begins by examining the overall research question and the group's influence on in-destination decision-making. This is followed by discussing the sub-question regarding situational and contextual factors that affect decision-making. Highlighting the dynamic nature of this process and external variables such as transportation options, weather conditions, and budget constraints. Thirdly, the sub-question on emotions is considered. Emotions play a dynamic role in the decision-making process, and this section will review how feelings and emotions impact tourists' choices, particularly the emotional connection to destinations, nostalgia's influence, and group connectivity. Finally, the research question on information sources is discussed, recognising that online and offline sources are critical in shaping tourist decisions. Furthermore, the implications of decision delegation and decision avoidance are addressed as well as how these strategies reflect tourists' desires for spontaneity, relaxation, and connection.

The core aims of the thesis are reiterated here:

1. Exploring the Challenges and Trends in Marketing Tourism Attractions: The rapidly evolving landscape of digital marketing presents challenges and opportunities for attractions and activity providers. With the proliferation of marketing channels, understanding the most effective strategies to reach potential customers at the right time becomes crucial. This research aims to identify the most impactful information sources in destination marketing and determine where attractions should focus their marketing efforts to attract visitors. Additionally, the study will investigate the timeline of decision-making for attractions and activities.

2. Investigating In-Situ Decision-making in Holiday Itineraries: Decision-making in destination selection is dynamic, influenced by various factors. While tourists may have pre-planned their activities, these plans often change upon arrival. This study seeks to understand how in-situ decision-making unfolds within the context of holiday itineraries.

3. Understanding Contextual Elements in In-Situ Decision-making: This thesis endeavors to explore the intricacies of decision-making in real-time, considering factors such as weather, budget constraints, destination attributes, transportation options, and group dynamics. These contextual elements play a significant role in shaping decision-making moments during travel experiences.

4. Exploring the Emotional Context of In-Destination Decision-making: Emotions play a pivotal role in the decision-making process, particularly in the context of tourism. This research aims to delve into the emotional aspects of decision-making for attractions and activities, seeking to understand the feelings associated with intended or experienced destinations during holiday travel.

5. Analyzing Group Decision-Making Dynamics: Tourism is inherently a social activity, often involving group dynamics and collaborative decision-making processes. This thesis explores how group decision-making unfolds in real-time situations, shedding light on the negotiation and discussion processes among travellers.

Research Questions

Core Research Question

How do tourists in situ decide about activities and attractions to visit or experience? (What is the process of decision-making?)

The following sub-questions are under investigation:

1. *How does the situation and context of the group or individual affect the decision-making process?*

2. *How do feelings and emotions impact the decision-making process?*

3. *How do tourists, attractions and destinations value and use online information sources in relation to traditional information sources?*

6.1 HOW DO TOURISTS IN SITU DECIDE ABOUT ACTIVITIES AND ATTRACTIONS TO VISIT OR EXPERIENCE? (WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF DECISION-MAKING?)

In-destination decision-making was investigated with groups, which emerged as a dynamic and negotiated activity. In this first section of the discussion, the dynamic and social construction of decisions will be compared to those of the extant literature. Understanding the intricacies of decision-making processes in tourism is essential for comprehending how individuals navigate their travel experiences. It is recognised that many decisions are delayed by tourists until arrival in the destination (Hyde, 2008; Liu, Wang and Gretzel, 2022 ; Li, Xu and Hu, 2022). In the findings of this thesis, it was found that while in destination, the group interacted and negotiated decisions. Group dynamics emerged in orchestrating decisions. As well as inter-generational negotiation, compromise and collective decision-making. The role of the group leader changed since personal motivations and interests could rise at different points in the trip and take priority within the group dynamic. Decision delegation was also evident, with some group members preferring to follow along with the decisions of others. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of the social and dynamic dimensions inherent in in-destination attraction and activity decision-making.

Group leaders, often identified as the organisers within the group, discussed the research they had conducted in planning activities and elaborated on their decision-making process. They frequently considered the needs of others, ensuring that interests and requirements, such as disabilities, were accommodated. It was found by Decrop, (2006) that group leaders often consider other people's needs before making a major final decision such as destination, accommodation, or transport. In families, considering other people's needs is a pattern found in other studies (Kim, Tanford and Choi, 2020). However, in this study, this role was not static, and it was observed that sometimes the role moved to another person in the group when they "decided" on an activity. This could shift at any point during the holiday, and the dynamic nature of in situ decisions contributes to this. This power of the decision maker was not always due to the position of authority in the group; environmental cues, such as spotting a leaflet for

an attraction; checking things to do online or seeing something they wanted to visit could trigger these shifts. Notwithstanding this, power dynamics exert a significant influence on decision-making within travel parties. It was observed by the interviewer that some participants had strong personal interests which motivated them to choose activities; if they were also in the role of group leader – their needs were met. Furthermore, sometimes the needs of another person in the group were elevated above others. Whether a designated leader assumes control of planning or deference is granted to a specific family member's preference, the distribution of power shapes the decision-making process.

The subject of negotiation with and involving teenagers and children in decision-making arose in the interviews with 'give and take' patterns and ensuring the needs of children or teenagers were met. This echoes the findings of previous studies (Thornton et al.,1997 cited in Wang and Li, 2021). For teenagers, the pattern was a little different. Parents often found themselves navigating the needs of their young adolescents, striving to strike a delicate balance between granting independence and fostering family togetherness. Their approach often involved a rhythmic pattern of allowing space followed by periods of reconnection, akin to affording the family room to breathe before reuniting during their holiday. The interviews revealed that teenager's need for digital connection, and proximity to Wi-Fi and mobile devices often led to their disconnection from family activities during vacations. Surprisingly, these needs did not necessarily result in conflict between parents and teenagers. Instead, it was viewed as a deliberate choice to allow teenagers to have digital time alone, fostering a sense of independence and autonomy. In certain respects, it did not curtail the parent's options concerning activities; rather, it granted them a degree of autonomy to pursue their preferences. This finding highlights the evolving role of technology in shaping family dynamics during leisure travel and underscores the importance of understanding teenager's digital behaviours in the context of family vacations. While previous research has explored the influence of teenagers on holiday choice and activities, there has been limited investigation into the negotiation dynamics and decision-making processes related to activity selection during the actual destination visit. This research aims to fill this gap by shedding light on the dynamics involved in negotiation and their impact on activity selection within family holiday contexts (in-destination). By delving into this previously overlooked aspect this study makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature on family tourism and enhances our understanding of the complex interactions among family members during leisure travel.

In the interviews, the concept of decision delegation emerged, with some participants opting to allow others to make decisions for them, simply going along with the group's or organiser's plans. This phenomenon resonates with the findings of Decrop (2005), who proposed that groups often prioritise consensus and may defer to the decisions of others to maintain harmony. Similarly, Stone (2016) suggests that more than half of decisions are made through delegation. Within this study, decision delegation was observed as a relational dynamic. Couples, families, or friends seemed to have established rituals for decision-making, often adhering to certain patterns simply because they had always been done that way. This aspect of decision-making was not always immediately apparent to participants. Upon being asked by the interviewer why they had chosen to visit a particular attraction, many participants realised that they had not actually made that decision; rather, it had often been made by another. This study contributes to the understanding of these entrenched rituals in activity selection within destinations. Collective decision-making emerged in groups that had similar interests or a particularly strong bond or group identity. There was harmony and agreement in decision-making for attractions and activities, where they wanted to share experiences. These groups were usually typified by having known each other a long time or had holidayed together before. This echoes the work on collaborative decision-making that has been found in families previously (Kang et al., 2003). Since groups of friends in this study were also making decisions collaboratively this could be an extension of this knowledge.

Decision avoidance materialised in the interviews, both overtly and subtly, as some participants articulated sentiments such as 'we prefer not to make decisions or plans', while others expressed a desire to unwind and engage in fewer activities while on vacation. This could be explained by a desire to avoid mental effort and cognitive resources to fully enjoy their leisure time without the stress of decision-making. They may have been experiencing decision fatigue, which occurs when making multiple decisions depletes mental resources. These participants seemed to view holidays as a time to relax and move slowly, limiting the number of activities they engage in. This relaxed attitude contributes to avoiding decision-making. Information overload during the planning stages of holidays has been found to cause overwhelm in decision-making and too much choice also causes decision paralysis (Lu, Gursoy and Lu, 2016). However, this notion of in-destination decision-avoidance is slightly different since it points to not to overwhelm but a sense of lethargy and taking their time in the environment. This subgroup of participants seemed to lack the motivation to pursue tourist experiences actively and instead preferred to engage in activities that were flexible, conducive to relaxation,

and they could do at their own pace. Avoiding structured plans or commitments and describing it they used words like avoiding a "rush" or "busy" places. In the literature – not making a decision or plans, is equated with freedom, exploration or spontaneity (Hyde and Lawson, 2003;Hyde, 2008). However, there was a sense that in these cases, the decision avoidance was habitual, as some individuals expressed a preference for avoiding crowds or enjoying a slower, quieter pace during their holidays. This points to a sense of liberation from work with freedom as the motivator for decision avoidance. This finding could also be partially explained by their accommodation selection since participants were staying at holiday apartments located in quite picturesque surroundings and they could prioritize relaxing there in comfortable surroundings rather than active engagement in tourist activities.

In conclusion, this section of the discussion explores the dynamic decision-making processes within groups. Through qualitative interviews, the research has revealed the important role of group dynamics in shaping activity selection and attraction preferences. The findings underscore the complex nature of in-destination decision-making in tourism, highlighting the social, psychological, and situational factors that groups navigate when planning and experiencing holidays. One of the key findings of this study is the significant influence of group leaders in orchestrating activity and attraction selection. Group leaders, often identified as organisers within travel parties, play a central role in planning and decision-making processes, leveraging their authority and negotiating skills to navigate preferences and ensure consensus within the group. However, one important finding was that this role could shift; it was not fixed since environmental cues could trigger others to take over decision-making. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the phenomenon of decision delegation, wherein individuals relinquish decision-making authority to others within the group. The findings echo insights from Decrop (2005) and Stone (2016). However, they are novel findings in the context of in-destination decision-making. Additionally, the study explores the phenomenon of decision avoidance, wherein individuals opt to refrain from making decisions altogether, often to mitigate feelings of overwhelm or to facilitate relaxation or a sense of slowing down. This could be considered different to the overwhelm tourists experience at earlier decision-making stages such as the planning stages. Moreover, the research uncovers the nuanced dynamics of familial relationships and generational differences in influencing activity selection and attraction preferences. Parents of teenagers, for instance, exhibit a pattern of balancing freedom with family time, accommodating the needs and preferences of young adolescents while fostering emotional closeness and togetherness within the family unit. Similarly, negotiation and

involvement of teenagers and children in decision-making processes emerge as significant factors shaping travel experiences and activity choices. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions inherent in in destination decision-making processes. By revealing the complex relationship of group dynamics, and situational factors, the research offers valuable insights for tourism management and marketing strategies.

6.2 HOW DOES THE SITUATION AND CONTEXT OF THE GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL AFFECT THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS?

As discussed in the findings chapter, numerous in-destination situational and contextual factors influence decision-making processes. These included transportation options; destination attributes; weather; budget; motivations; and personal interests. While motivations and personal interests have been well traversed areas of research, especially for destination and holiday choice, other in-destination contextual and situational aspects like transport and weather are much less considered. Furthermore, examining motivations in the context of attractions and activity choice is a research gap. Exploring how they all fit together holistically in-destination is rare.

Transportation emerged as a consideration with participants access to vehicles or the availability of public transport impacting their mobility and consequently activity and attraction selection. It was observed that participants with cars experienced greater freedom in their selection of activities. While some consciously chose not to drive, they sometimes chose public transport to reach attractions. As discussed in the literature review transportation is one of the many sub decisions that tourists make while deciding on a holiday and can also be a decision they make after arrival (Martin and Woodside, 2012). While Hyde, (2008) recognizes that for independent travellers reaching the next destination or visiting attractions, securing transport, and navigating timetables can be challenging. In a conceptual paper Lew and McKercher, (2006) evaluate intra-destination movement of travellers and identify four main types: No Movement; Convenience-based Movement; Concentric Exploration and Unrestricted Destination Wide Movement. While these types are not an exact match for the participants in this thesis, there are some similarities. The No-Movement typify all-inclusive resort holiday makers, which the participants were not. Convenience-based tended to stay close by, visiting places that were close to the accommodation and some participants, particularly

the ones who liked to travel on foot could be likened to these, though they were also open to public transport options. Concentric exploration reflects tourists who gain confidence as they get to know the destination, travelling or exploring further as they become more familiar with the destination. Unrestricted Destination Wide movement was attached to high information levels, repeat visitors who were not uninhibited. In this thesis, information awareness was not necessarily linked to the likelihood of intra-destination travel. Since Aberystwyth is a rural destination, access to transport was more significant. As discussed in the findings, public transport was limited, especially during off-peak times. Motivation, weather, and personal interest could also affect the perception of mobility. Some groups didn't want to "do much" and tended to be happy exploring the town on foot, going for local walks, or visiting the beach. However, if bad weather prevented these activities, they would consider visiting attractions as something to "do" and consequently needed to find transport options, which could be challenging or require further information. The convenience and flexibility offered by cars were evident, allowing tourists to explore more remote attractions.

As referred to in the literature review, seasonality and weather have been recognised as in-destination situational factors (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015). Furthermore, they can prompt changes in decisions relating to the itineraries (Becken & Wilson, 2007). A surprising finding was that attitude to the weather was divided: those who avoided the rain and those who came prepared for it. In an instance of weather readiness, one participant described their familiarity with vacationing in rain-prone regions, indicating that past experiences can influence one's perspective on adverse weather conditions. Watching the weather was a common thread throughout the interviews and scored highly in the information sources that the survey respondents checked closer to the time of visiting an attraction. Choosing an opportune time to make the most of being outdoors (for a particular attraction or activity), was very common. The dynamic nature of weather necessitated adaptability and impromptu in destination decision-making, highlighting its significant influence on experiences and activity choices.

Budget considerations are another contextual factor in decision-making, with participants showing different attitudes towards spending. While some were budget-conscious toward attractions and activities, others preferred to spend more freely, prioritizing enjoyment over any budgetary considerations. As discussed in the literature review Hyde (2008) suggests that experience choice is driven by emotions and mediated by temporal and budgetary constraints, which can be compared to the free-spending attitudes of some participants. While the

microeconomic approach which conflates with rational decision-making styles centred on budget and price considerations, positions tourists as rational agents seeking to maximize utility (Wilson and Moore, 2018), which compares to the budget-conscious decision-makers seeking value. Though, it should be noted that in attraction and activity selection, tourists could choose to be emotionally driven spenders on some days when they visited a top attraction, then switch to budget tourists on other days when they did a free activity like spending the day at the beach. This allowed some tourists to switch between the two types of spenders.

The relationship between the participants and the destination played a significant role in shaping their choices of activities. The distinctive features of Aberystwyth, such as its seaside location, cultural attractions, and easy access to nearby points of interest, were key factors in their decision-making process and enhanced their overall contentment with the experience. Participants spoke positively about the destination and the authentic "Welshness" indicating place attachment on different levels. Destination attributes have been shown to contribute to visitor satisfaction (Sato et al., 2018). While specific points of interest may appeal to the needs of different group members, the overall experience of the destination is an important element of overall enjoyment. Tourists experience both the tangible and intangible aspects of a destination. Some are physical tourist products like attractions or natural features, and others are more intangible, like hearing a different language, experiencing different customs and culture. When participants were aske w how they chose attractions or activities, sometimes about the destination rather than specifics, which suggests that the destination features are psychologically connected to the tourism products. In tourism management models the destination (Inkson and Minneart, 2018, p.26) is presented as an ecosystem of discrete parts that can be measured and tested, but there was some fusion of this in the minds of the participants, particularly when they had a real or imagined connection to the destination. Further research in this area, particularly on the value of "Welshness" in the perception of attractions, activities and destinations, would be an interesting research direction.

The personal motivations and interests of individuals sometimes influence their choice of activities, with hobbies or passions sometimes directing their decisions. Whether motivated by a desire for cultural discovery or guided by personal interests, the motivations of tourists highlighted the broad range of experiences pursued while on vacation. As discussed in the literature review Dann, (1977) posits that tourists are motivated by their intrinsic motivations and personal needs to visit a place rather than the attributes of the destination. Key motivational

factors (or push factors) in tourism include "escape, relaxation, relationship enhancement, and self-development" (Pearce and Lee, 2005, p.226). Goeldner, C. R., & Ritchie (2011) categorize motivations into four fundamental types: physical, cultural, interpersonal, and prestige. Whereas pull factors are usually attributed to destination features. Internal motivations have been shown to drive the selection of activities such as wine tours (Lee, Bruwer and Song, 2017). Tourists are often segmented by motivation Park and Yoon, (2009). However, it was evident from the interviews, that motivations were not always singular, they were multiple and embedded in many other dimensions such as the group dynamic, destination, and situational factors. Which resonates with the work of Cohen, (1983) as cited in Pearce, (1993) that motivation theory should be viewed as an interlinked pattern, like a tapestry. It appeared that while singular motivations could prompt a visit to a museum for one participant on one day; conversely at other times during the same trip, activities could be orientated toward the interests of the whole group or were connected to other aspects of the destination.

Engaging in unconventional activities emerged as a recurring theme in the interviews, highlighting the quest for novel experiences beyond the ordinary. While the desire for authenticity in tourism has been found in previous studies (MacCannell 1976; Cohen 1979), however there are limited studies that explore authenticity for attractions and activities. Though in heritage attractions, authenticity has been linked as a key dimension of the experience (Scarpi and Raggiotto, 2023). Authentic experiences, particularly interactions with locals were sought out by some participants. It has been found that travellers opt for unfamiliar destinations, seeking not only fresh landscapes but also novel experiences that evoke a sense of escape. In this thesis they were found to search for new attractions or experiences that promise surprise and a sense of adventure. Experiences are emotive as well as social (Pine and Gilmore, 2013), and can be hedonic (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). It was implied by participants that by doing something different they were creating special memories, and when an experience was new or different to the ordinary it was more enjoyable. This resonates with previous work that the pursuit of novelty plays a pivotal role in travel motivation, as emphasised by the concept of novelty-seeking (Bello & Etzel, 1985). It serves as a crucial factor in decision-making processes (Petrick, 2002). Importantly, novelty has been recognized as a precursor to enjoyable (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018), emotional (Ma, Gao, & Scott, 2017), and memorable tourism experiences (Andrades & Dimanche, 2014).

The survey findings reveal several key insights into the factors influencing tourists' decision-making at attractions. High-scoring statements such as "It is fun," "It is a treat," and "There is beautiful scenery and views" underscore the significance of experiential enjoyment, the perception of a special occasion, and the appeal of scenic landscapes. These findings align with the notion that attractions act as landmarks and are major tourist draws. Weather emerged as a prominent consideration, reflecting its influence on day-to-day activity planning. Conversely, low-scoring variables like "It is something I/we used to do in my/our youth" and "I/we have done it before and wanted to go again" indicate that visitors to the attractions were predominantly first-time visitors, suggesting the attractions' novelty and notable status in the area. Additionally, the high-scoring statements like "It is special, different to what we normally do" and "It is a personal interest or hobby" highlight the perception of attractions as infrequent and specialised experiences, contrary to the idea of tourism as an everyday occurrence. The research in this thesis sought to understand the multiple contextual and situational factors that contribute towards decision-making in the destination. Earlier models have illustrated the many contextual and situational factors contributing to holiday and destination decision-making (Decrop and Snelders, 2005, p.125). Some scholars such as Smallman and Moore (2010) have highlighted research gaps and recommended that qualitative research is necessary to understand the multifaceted and complex layers of in-destination decision-making. Furthermore, Navarro-Ruiz and McKercher (2020) underlined that attractions are under-researched in the tourism literature. While this thesis has its limitations due to the inherent uniqueness of each destination, characterised by distinct features and variations that underlie multiple layers of contextual and situational factors, it sheds light on the heterogeneous nature of tourist behaviours. Addressing this research gap, the thesis contributes to a better understanding of decision-making processes regarding attractions and activities at destinations. Recognising the multi-dimensional contextual factors influencing tourist decision-making is crucial for refining theoretical frameworks and formulating effective marketing strategies in tourism.

6.3 HOW DO FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS IMPACT THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS?

This portion of the discussion will focus on the emotions and their contextual significance in the decision-making process concerning attractions and activities within the destination. One of the aims of this thesis was to explore the emotional dimensions inherent in decision-making, focusing on understanding the depth and different kinds of emotions entailed in activity selection. This posed a challenging research inquiry, as participants in the interviews occasionally circumvented direct responses to queries on emotional aspects, opting instead to discuss broader environmental aspects; physical states; their feelings towards the group or destination-related themes. Nonetheless, the findings yielded insights into a spectrum of emotional experiences and addressed some of the research gaps that tourism scholars have highlighted. It underscored the limitations of conventional measurement scales in encapsulating the entirety of emotions. Furthermore, the findings acknowledge the inherent complexity in articulating inner emotions or affective responses. The findings underscored the social dynamics underpinning emotional expression, as participants frequently referenced the selection of activities conducive to interpersonal connection and bonding. Moreover, participants communicated emotional attachment to the destination using emotive language.

The findings highlight the prominence of positive emotions, particularly happiness, as a driving force behind tourists' activity and attraction choices. Connecting positive emotions and behaviour in tourism is not a novel finding. As referred to in the literature review, a study investigating emotions, motivations and satisfaction with senior tourists visiting Lisbon (Pestana, Parreira and Moutinho, 2020) found that positive emotions influence tourism purchase intentions. They measured the emotions using two of the three available DES Scale measurements for Joy and Positive Surprise (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010). While the scale is highly valid and tested, the two positive emotions measured in this case include eight scales: joy, enthusiasm, delight, cheerful, pleasure, surprise, fascinated, inspiration, amazement, and astonishment. These scales, along with four other key scales developed (PAD, DES, Plutchik, PANAS) (Hosany, Martin and Woodside, 2021) are commonly applied to studies measuring emotions in tourism. While these are valuable measures, they don't explore the full range of potential feelings or emotions experienced at the destination. Furthermore, they don't allow for the full vocabulary of emotions or the different intensity with which those emotions can be experienced as reasoned by Volo, (2021) and Doyle McCarthy, (1994).

It was evident that the participants were choosing activities that would either make themselves or other people in the groups feel positive. However, the feelings were not always as strong as joyous or amazement. The interview findings collected a range of descriptive words and phrases in response to emotions, many of which were positive. These included: good; happy; love; nice; pleasant; tired; happy to be alive; nostalgic; relaxed; warm and no emotions or feelings. Sometimes participants were ambivalent in their response, stating they didn't really have any feelings toward attractions or activities. The words and expressions ranging from intense emotions like *love*, to more subdued emotions like *nice* offer new insights into the linguistic landscape of tourists in relation to attractions and activity selection. Some respondents connected on a strong level with the attractions visited and activities performed, and some were much less so and their language reflected this. Sometimes people responded by talking about their physical states, such as being tired, or getting wet in the rain. While this was an unexpected response, arguably, it is valid since emotions are also physiological states (Doyle McCarthy, 1994).

While the interviews did not investigate specific attractions. It was observed that when participants had a strong attachment to the destination, they used much more emotive words like love or nostalgia. The strength of the emotion also increased if the experience had been particularly memorable or special. However, this was inconsistent, and the sample size was insufficient to make meaningful comparisons according to familiarity with the destination, travel experience or other potential biases. The goal of this thesis was not to develop a new scale and test its psychometric properties but to allow the participants to naturally express their vocabulary of emotions and begin exploring how participants relate to attraction and activity choice emotionally. The survey in this thesis experimented with new measurement scales, taken from words used in the interviews that included: happy; connected to family or friends; nostalgic; euphoric; excited; tired; enjoyment; nice; warm and no feelings. The survey data correlated with the qualitative findings, revealing a convergence of expected emotional states with actual experiences.

Some participants could not fully express their emotions. In one example, while talking about a particularly emotive experience at a religious site, one participant trailed off before being able to express in words what they had felt. Discussing emotions is a very personal topic; perhaps some participants did not feel comfortable discussing their innermost thoughts with the interviewer. Cognitive bias is reported to be an issue with researching emotions, and some

responses could have been influenced by this (Ravaja, 2004). However, participants commonly conveyed emotional connections to the destination, often blending their sentiments with the essence of the place itself. This was evidenced by feelings of affection, nostalgia, and admiration for the picturesque surroundings. Highlighting the significant influence of emotional resonance on tourists' viewpoints and encounters. This can be explained by the close connection of attractions and destination attributes in the mind of the tourist. Nostalgia was another emotion that was often discussed in relation to the destination, and some attractions. A feeling of being immersed in a historical place, a place that reminded them of the past, which seemed to allow them a feeling of escape – of being in a place that's different to their usual settings. Nostalgia is considered a significant social emotion in tourism, and it was found that nostalgia evokes positive emotions, higher satisfaction and positive revisit intentions in other studies (Wang, 2023; Akgün et al., 2020).

Tourism is a highly social activity (Gitelson and Kerstetter, 1995) and it was evident from the interviews that family and friends chose activities that fostered togetherness, bonding and emotional experiences. They viewed the holiday as a time to spend quality time together, doing things that brought them closer and enhanced their trip. They spoke about being 'away' from work and other stresses, and the activities they chose brought them 'together' in ways that were different from home. These activities might have been simple ones like going to the beach, walking, eating together, or they might have been a special attraction or visit that was a 'treat'. In an early paper by Decrop, (2005) it was suggested that sharing experiences is a leading motivation for going on holiday. This idea of togetherness and emotional family bonding on holiday was found in a study by Kelly, (2022) where families strengthened their emotional connections while on holiday. It was noted that this aspect of family and friends increasing emotional closeness on holidays is an overlooked area of research. While the study only focused on families, the finding of this thesis includes groups of friends and families, thereby extending the notion of family emotions and togetherness to groups of friends.

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the influence of emotions on decision-making processes within tourism. The findings underscore the significance of positive emotions, particularly happiness, as a driving force behind tourist activity and attraction choices. While existing literature has highlighted the link between positive emotions and tourism purchase intentions, this study enriches our understanding by delving into the nuanced emotional setting experienced by tourists. Moreover, the research sheds light on the embedded

interplay emotions, attractions, and destination attributes, emphasizing the role of emotional resonance in shaping tourists' viewpoints and encounters. Furthermore, the study highlights the social nature of tourism, with participants often choosing activities that fostered togetherness, bonding, and emotional experiences among family and friends. Moving forward, these insights can inform destination management strategies and contribute to the development of experiences that resonate with tourists' emotional needs and preferences.

6.4 HOW DO TOURISTS, ATTRACTIONS & DESTINATIONS VALUE & USE ONLINE INFORMATION SOURCES IN RELATION TO TRADITIONAL INFORMATION SOURCES?

Expectedly, the qualitative data collection findings did not offer a binary conclusion on the value of offline or online sources. It offered a greater understanding of how they were used and their relative advantages and disadvantages. Participants demonstrated a surprisingly discerning approach to information sources, indicating strong preferences for information types. As discussed in the literature review, swathes of academic work support ICT and mobile phones as the most important and popular source of information for tourists at all stages of information selection. The use of online sources, both mobile and internet, was found to be commonplace in both interviews and survey findings. They offer convenience if the participants are adept at using digital devices. However, online information was not always helpful to tourists since online reviews were sometimes viewed with scepticism, and information was not always reliable. Lack of trust in online sources is noted by Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, (2015), as well as the problem of fake online reviews (Filieri, 2015). An interesting aspect of online search at the in-destination stage was that the purpose of it was usually to check options, final details, opening times or directions. In parallel to the findings of Fodness and Murray, (1999), tourists were found to use multiple sources of information. Ho, Lin and Chen, (2012) found that different types of information sources complemented each other. This finding was corroborated by interview data, which revealed that participants appreciated accessing diverse information sources while at the destination. The opportuneness of information channels which spanned smart phones, recommendations, leaflets or Tourist Information Centre's, helped tourists build a picture of the available activities and helped with their selection process. Printed information is reportedly in decline (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). However, for the attractions sector, leaflets are still part of their core marketing efforts, especially at visitor centres, accommodation, and information points. The

qualitative interviews echoed the social aspect of getting information from the local TIC. People enjoyed speaking to advisors there and getting local information. Surprisingly, some referred to it as a good place to collect ideas and it inspired their activities or attraction selection. Wilson and Moore, (2018) found tourist information centre's co-created tourist experiences and emphasises the socially embedded nature of tourism. While this is a similar finding, the idea that the tourist information centre can also inspire choice is novel. Asking a local or in person information sources were linked to more local authentic activities. WOM has been found to be most highly valued and highly trusted (Chang and Wang, 2019; Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008). This was echoed in the visitor interviews, as some people sought out recommendations from people they trusted or people with greater knowledge on the destination. Aberystwyth TIC was an accessible place to find local information and was viewed as high quality.

Interestingly, the stakeholder interviews offered differing approaches to marketing. While the Vale of Rheidol had a diverse, approach to marketing with leaflets, engaging with locals and online marketing, Zip World prioritized social media and geo-advertising and other sophisticated digital channels. While online marketing it essential, particularly in the pre-arrival stages, once tourists arrive in the destination, they appreciate a range of information sources. The comment from Visit Wales, that local networks should be taken advantage of, and print was valid in-destination since browsing through leaflets is an enjoyable experience is quite significant. It almost points to information gathering in destination almost being part of the experience of being on holiday. Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, (2015) claim that tourists always acquaint themselves with the available options and collect information before deciding. However, this linear process was not always followed by tourists in destination. Those who preferred local recommendations, did not see the need to collect all the available information, as they preferred a shortcut to the recommendations of a social surrogate. Visitors that explored the destination on foot, found places to visit before conducting or in parallel with an information search. Some participants in the groups followed the decision-making of other family and friends (decision delegation) and were not well acquainted with all the options. The behaviour demonstrated by most of the participants in the interviews echoed the work of Decrop and Snelders, (2005) that posits that decision-making is a continuous process, influenced by context, information search and interpersonal/emotional factors.

The in-destination decision-making process was almost overlooked by the marketing representative from Zip World. Their focus (top of funnel) was primarily on attracting customers who would book online before arriving at the destination. While this approach is certainly valid for Zip World, it overlooks the growing demand from tourists for the flexibility to make spontaneous choices once they are on-site. Recognizing and adapting to this trend for in-the-moment decision-making could prove beneficial for the company. It is advisable for attractions to consider integrating strategies that cater to this aspect of tourist behaviour.

Social media was not a common information source in the interviews and only 2% of the quantitative data. This was a surprising finding, given the vast attention in marketing strategies and academic interest (Pantano, Priporas and Stylos, 2017). Hinterland, the TV series filmed in and around the area, came up several times across the interviews as a source of inspiration. This was a surprising finding, and the power of television or streaming channels shouldn't be underestimated. Guidebooks have declined in popularity due to the cost and inconvenience of purchase compared to free online information (Pan and Fesenmaier, 2006). Guidebooks were mentioned by both the organised planners and flexible planners, though reading them could be overwhelming. The stakeholder interviews revealed a notable enthusiasm for social media due to its measurable impact and potential to generate excitement among companies. The allure of a viral video on platforms like YouTube or Instagram is undeniable, as it can significantly amplify marketing efforts. Despite this interest, the apparent disinterest in social media by participants in the interviews and surveys as a primary source of information, suggests that attractions and activity providers should exercise caution in allocating the majority of their marketing budgets to these channels. This indicates a need for a more balanced marketing strategy that considers various channels to effectively reach and engage potential visitors.

The qualitative data revealed four key types of planners and decision makers: The Organised planner; Flexible Planner; No Plan and Spontaneity Seeker. The organised planner spent considerable time researching attractions and activities and/or making bookings pre-arrival at the destination both online, with guidebooks and other sources. They were not overwhelmed by the information available and took some pleasure in this kind of research. This type of traveller, often continued to do in-person research at the destination such as visiting the tourist information or checking websites for further details. People with disabilities, also join this category since it was essential for them to check accessibility at attractions or restaurants before visiting. This participant also tended to be the group leader, leading on information search, and

then disseminating that with the group. In the literature, information search is linked to mitigating risk (Stewart and Vogt, 1999), and for disabled tourists, the risk of not being able to access a place is high. This behaviour pattern for disabled visitors presents a novel finding in the study. The organised planner could be compared to the Perfectionist decision maker (Correia, Kozak and Ferradeira, 2010), typified by rational, sequential behaviour, that takes care to evaluate all the alternatives. This type of decision-making is controlled, slow, analytic, and could be likened to the System One type of decision-maker in Dual System Processing (Evans, 2008). It would also match the type of decision-maker Volchek et al., (2018) and Ho, Lin and Chen, (2012) write about, the person who typically seeks information online before deciding. Therefore, organised planners behaviour could be predicted with algorithms and tools like Google Trends. However, the organised planner's pattern was not strictly linear since they continued looking for new information sources in the destination and were subject to contextual and situational factors.

The flexible planner typically had done some research beforehand and had an idea of some of the activities and attractions they wished to visit. They would continue with some information searching in the destination but kept much of their itinerary open and unplanned. Balancing some key "must do" activities with loose plans. This might be influenced by personal preference, or the needs of others in the group. Contextual and situational aspects also played their part, and they would optimise their activities according to the weather or needs to others in the group. The flexible planner sometimes got overwhelmed by information choice or had difficulty recalling information they had found in the pre-destination planning stages. They also tended to feel like it would be easier to get any further information required and be able to plan journeys or specific activities while in the destination. The few activities that were planned by the Flexible planner echo "the anchor" factor found by (Moore *et al.*, 2012) as referred to in the literature review in their exploration of self-drive tourists. It was common for tourists to have one or two key activities to "anchor" their holiday, keeping the rest of the itinerary open. The Dynamic Adjustment Cascade model by (Moore *et al.*, 2012) allows for spontaneity and flexibility in a holiday which is also similar to this type of decision-maker. Though it is more aligned with the self-drive touring visitor since the cascade model also represents the increase in confidence in making decisions as the trip progressed.

The flexible planners use of information sources was lighter touch than the organised planner, yet they did seek them out as and when required to prepare for the holiday, finalise plans, check

details during the trip. Situational and contextual factors were cited by flexible planners – such as weather, mood, personal interest, or family dynamics. These kinds of situational factors were outlined by Decrop and Snelders, (2005) and it was suggested in their study that decisions are complex and not linear. Though, these were not directly linked to attraction and activity selection in this study. The flexible decision maker shows signs of rational decision-making, for the "must do" activities, and signs of spontaneity and openness for the rest of the itinerary. For this type of decision maker, sequential and rational models of are not a good fit, and a more flexible framework is required.

The No Plan type rejected the idea of making plans for their time on holiday. They didn't want to commit to any attractions or activities in advance and waited until the day to decide how they felt. Other contextual and situational factors such as group dynamics, weather and availability of attractions contributed. They did some information search and were aware of some options, but they did not feel compelled to carry out thorough research or make any commitment to them. Sometimes this was due to tourists needing time to *decompress from work* before they were ready to *do* anything. There is a similarity here to the findings of (Blichfeldt, 2008) where some caravan tourists *did nothing* and that was a valid choice for them. Though for the participants in this thesis, it wasn't that they *did nothing* it was more than they identified as people *who did not make plans*. Postponing decisions until the on-site phase was found by Decrop and Snelders, (2005), and this type of person extends this to the point of deciding *on the day* or *in the moment*.

Spontaneity seekers favoured inviting surprises into their itinerary. They were looking for *fun* and often mentioned local experiences such as interactions with local people. They liked to explore and see what they found, usually by walking or driving around the destination. They might have an endpoint in mind, but the point of the journey was to discover new places and new experiences. Typically, they would have also searched for information before and during the holiday. However, they didn't always put as much value on the information available, enjoying finding things as they went, as well as having access to traditional and contemporary sources of information. As referred to in the literature review March and Woodside, (2005) found that delaying decisions facilitates exploration and a sense of novelty seeking and spontaneity, the enjoyment of an unpredictable journey. The spontaneity seekers did appear to have more memorable experiences, and this shadows the findings of Kim et al., (2012). Hyde, (2008) found that spontaneity was common in attraction and activity selection for independent

travellers. However, the notion that smart phones enable more spontaneous decisions (Choe, Fesenmaier and Vogt, 2017) was not found. However, that could have been due to the demographic of participants and the need for a larger sample size. Spontaneity has been linked to a higher proclivity for risk in tourists (Li, Xu and Hu, 2022), which is counterintuitive to information search since if someone uses their phone on holiday to check for information frequently, it points to risk reduction behaviour.

It was also evident that the decision-making type overlapped according to the type of attraction or activity the group discussed or negotiated. These information search and decision-making types were only sometimes fixed since the influences of different group members moved the boundaries of these types. There were often different roles within the group, and the organised person who did much of the research allowed others in the groups to feel like they had flexibility or no plans. In other examples, when another group member, such as an adolescent, took over decision-making from the parent (with an idea to visit an attraction), the style could shift from flexible to planned or vice versa. Construal level theory (Sano *et al.*, 2024) can help to explain why some people could only plan attractions and activities when they were very close to arrival or had arrived at the destination since their temporal distance was much closer. While tourists can feel psychologically close to a holiday in the early stages of planning, in the dreaming stages or for exotic plans, they are usually looking for inspiration in information sources rather than fine details on 'how' to make plans for their itinerary (Sano *et al.*, 2024). The holiday is more tangible when visitors are at the destination and the complex variables that include weather; transport; attractions and activities; are physically closer and there is local information available which can make it easier to manage and understand. The survey findings on the shifting information needs and priorities changing the closer the tourist gets to visiting the destination are novel. They demonstrate that offline resources such as brochures or leaflets are helpful in destination, and that the attraction website is very influential at all three time points. While using search engines such as Google is important one week before and one month before, an unexpected discovery was the minimal impact of social media, including Instagram, as information sources. Perhaps this could be explained by social media being more influential at the earlier decision-making stages during the ideation phase. Much social media marketing content is built around inspirational videos and photos and could be part of decision-making's "dreaming" phase. Furthermore, a diverse range of information sources is utilised, with twelve variables, each contributing less than 3%. This suggests that attraction and activity marketers must diversify their marketing strategies across multiple platforms to cater to various

information preferences. However, prioritising efforts on key channels would be prudent for smaller attractions with budget or time constraints.

Studies exploring destination search needs have yielded conflicting findings regarding the relationship between familiarity with a destination and information search behaviour (Baloglu, 2001). Notably, the literature has not addressed familiarity with a destination in the context of attraction and activity search. While it may seem intuitive that prior visits to a place would inform tourist preferences for activities and attractions, repeat visitors did search for new attractions, activities, restaurants, or shops to visit. They were curious about what had changed in Aberystwyth and if there was anything new to discover. Furthermore, environmental cues trigger memories of the destination or its offerings, leading to new experiences. As discussed in the literature review decision-making fatigue and overwhelm are well-documented issues in the information search process (Lu, Gursoy and Lu, 2016). This was confirmed by the interview participants who found internet searching and guidebooks overwhelming with too many options and too much information to process. While organised planners, a small proportion of the interview participants were immune to information overload, and they enjoyed comparing information sources and were organised and methodical in their approach.

In conclusion of this section on information sources, the study's qualitative analysis delineated four distinct types of planners and decision-makers: the Organised Planner, Flexible Planner, No Plan, and Spontaneity Seeker. Each exhibited unique behaviours and preferences in their approach to researching and selecting attractions and activities. The Organised Planner invested significant time in pre-arrival research, utilising various sources to plan their itinerary meticulously. This approach, akin to the Perfectionist decision maker, aligned with rational decision-making models, albeit with room for contextual and situational factors. Notably, individuals with disabilities often fell into this category, necessitating thorough accessibility checks and meticulous planning. Conversely, the Flexible Planner struck a balance between pre-planned activities and spontaneous exploration. They were adaptable, adjusting their itinerary based on personal preferences, group dynamics, and situational factors like weather. Their decision-making process mirrored the dynamic adjustment model, allowing for flexibility and exploration. The No Plan type eschewed pre-planning altogether, preferring to decide on activities spontaneously, often influenced by mood or group dynamics. This approach echoed previous findings on postponing decisions until the on-site phase and highlighted the role of contextual factors in decision-making. Lastly, the Spontaneity Seeker

prioritised novelty and surprise, seeking out local experiences and embracing serendipitous discoveries. Their preference for spontaneity correlated with heightened enjoyment and memorable experiences, challenging traditional notions of decision-making and risk mitigation. Moreover, the research explains the discerning selection of information sources among participants, emphasising the complementary nature of offline and online resources. While online sources offered convenience, offline sources like tourist information centres fostered social interaction and provided trusted recommendations. The findings also underscored the influence of familiarity with the destination on information search behaviour. Repeat visitors sought new experiences, suggesting that environmental cues triggered memories and motivated exploration. Decision-making fatigue emerged as a prevalent issue, particularly evident in the overwhelm experienced by some participants when navigating online resources. However, for the Organised Planner, this overload was mitigated by their methodical approach and enjoyment of comparing information sources.

6.5. THEORETICAL MODEL OF THE RESEARCH

Figure 27. In-destination Decision-Making
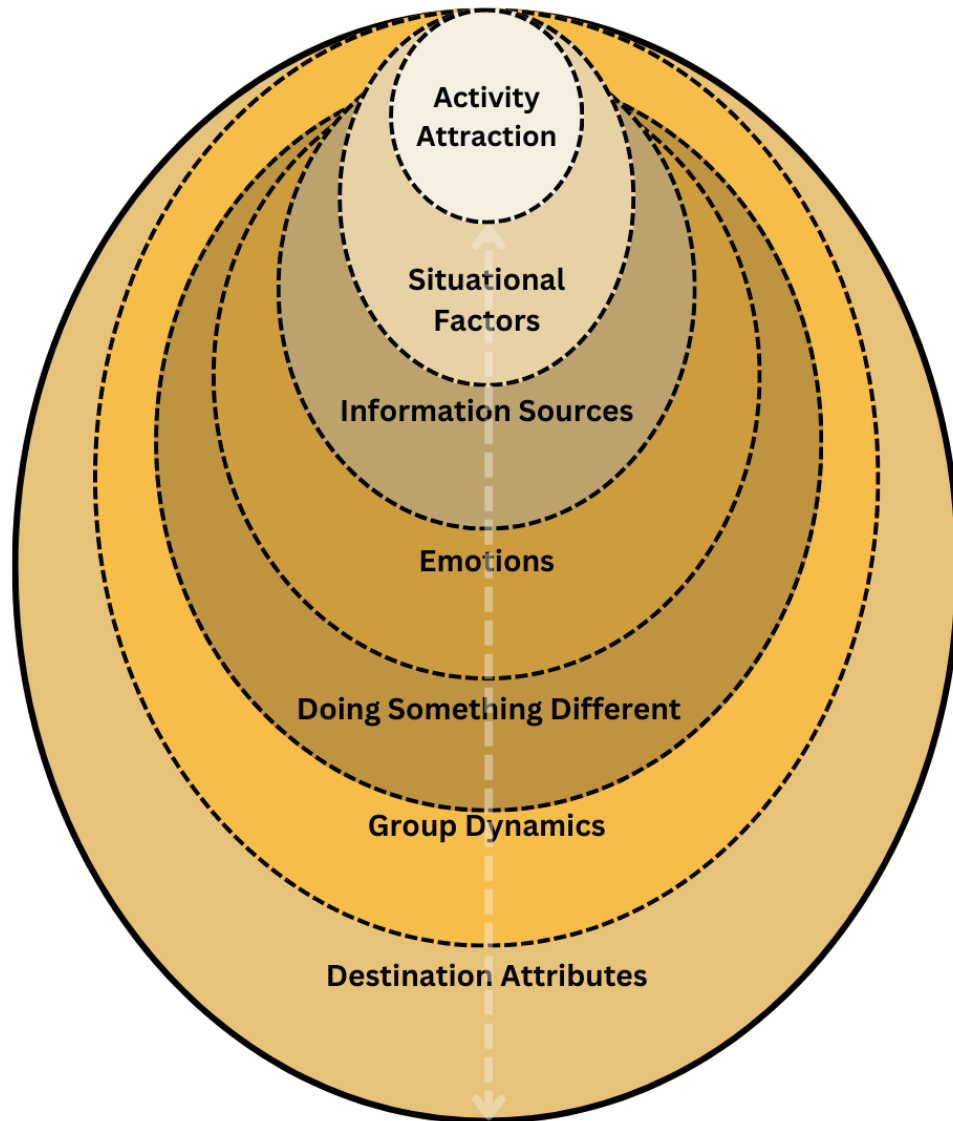
Figure 26 illustrates a model of research findings highlighting the key layers that influence in-destination decision-making. A layered design was selected to illustrate how these aspects overlap and intertwine. They can dynamically shift in response to changing priorities or context. The outer oval shape signifies **destination attributes**, enclosed by a solid line to denote their fixed nature within the geographical boundaries of the destination. The perceived

size of the destination may vary among tourists, each having their own concept of how much they wish to explore.

The other layers encapsulate essential aspects of in-destination decision-making:

Group Dynamics: This layer represents the varying decision-making styles within groups, including aspects of decision delegation, negotiation, and compromise. It also covers planning styles and the roles within the group.

Doing Something Different: This layer reflects the strong motivation expressed by participants to do something unusual, that they would not usually do at home.

Emotions: This layer encompasses both anticipated emotions and feelings, as well as the emotional connection to the group and the destination.

Information Sources: This layer includes the online and offline information collected at the destination.

Situational Factors: This layer considers aspects such as weather, transport, and budget that can influence decisions.

6.6 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Firstly, the thesis adopts a holistic approach to understanding how tourists choose attractions and activities to participate in on holiday. The research adopts a comprehensive perspective, considering all factors influencing in-destination decision-making. Unlike previous studies that may have focused on a singular attraction or activity or have solely focused on digital or mobile information sources, this thesis integrates a wide range of variables. The interviews include all attractions and activities and all potential information sources and cues, providing a more inclusive understanding of how tourists make itinerary decisions while on holiday. Furthermore, in considering active environmental, social, and personal factors, the research offers a nuanced view of the decision-making process in destination. The thesis illustrates that decision-making is a complex and dynamic process. It is influenced by various contextual

factors and information sources that are in motion. By documenting how decisions evolve in response to changes in context, which include weather, transport, budget, destination attributes, group interactions, disabilities, and information cues, the study portrays decision-making as a dynamic tapestry of variables. This approach challenges static conventional decision-making models and builds on theories and process models that accommodate the fluid nature of human behaviour. Secondly, a significant contribution of this study is its examination of emotions in decision-making. Through the expressions of participants, the research uncovers the role of destination attachment and emotional connection to the group. This study reveals that emotions are not just peripheral influences but central elements that drive decisions, highlighting the importance of understanding emotional dynamics in in-destination decision-making. Furthermore, the words used to describe emotions related to visiting attractions and activities differ from those in scales measuring emotions in tourism and demonstrate valency from subdued to euphoric feelings. Thirdly, the thesis contributes to management knowledge by demonstrating the shifting importance of different information sources at three key time points for information selection on the day, one month and one week before arrival. The interview findings highlight the increased importance of in-destination cues during the vacation and the dynamic relationship between information and decision-making.

6.7 MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Several management recommendations are proposed based on the research results: recognising in-situ decision-making, enhancing information accessibility, catering to group dynamics, and highlighting motivational and emotional appeal. The findings revealed that tourists utilise a diverse array of information sources, both online and offline, to make decisions about attractions and activities. Information sources such as posters, leaflets, and tourist information centres gain prominence once tourists arrive at their destination. The study also found that many decisions regarding attraction and activity selection are deferred until arrival, influenced by factors such as mood, transportation, weather, group dynamics, and other situational and contextual variables. Tourists often remain open to spontaneous and last-minute decisions. Based on these findings, it is recommended that marketing managers assess in-situ decision-making processes and ensure the availability of appropriate local prompts and information to guide tourists toward their attractions and activities. While it was found that tourists conduct web searches and collect information pre-arrival, confirming that digital channels such as the organisation's website are important, marketing managers should recognise that understanding

and influencing unplanned decision-making at the destination is also significant. Ensuring the availability of local cues and information services could increase visitor numbers.

Tourists often find information search activities such as reading guidebooks or surfing multiple websites overwhelming. Therefore, activity and attraction providers should consider presenting information in a more accessible format that can be easily saved for later reference. To alleviate information overload, websites could offer downloadable PDFs for convenient access or consolidated local guides. Additionally, ensuring that reliable accessibility information is available online before arrival would significantly enhance the experience for disabled visitors, facilitating better planning and a more inclusive visit. This will enhance their planning process and improve their overall experience at the destination. Decision delegation was a significant factor in decision-making for attractions and activities. This often occurred externally through local recommendations or internally within the group by a group leader. Encouraging local recommendations can be an effective strategy. Collaborating with local businesses to promote attractions and activities can drive spontaneous and last-minute decisions by tourists. Group organisers typically conducted research and planning, gathering information on behalf of the group. Therefore, attractions should recognise this segment and seek to understand and appeal to it. Targeting this segment through tailored marketing strategies and providing comprehensive information can attract group visits.

The desire to 'do something different' or 'connect with family and friends' emerged as common motivations influencing decision-making. Attractions that effectively demonstrate and communicate how they can fulfil these motivations will likely resound with groups holidaying together and enhance their appeal to group travellers. Emotions significantly influence decision-making, particularly in selecting activities that foster group bonding and enhance attachment to the destination, such as those involving landscape and scenery. Emotions reside within the participant's heart and mind, and their experiences can shape their intensity. Attractions and activities can leverage emotional appeal through strategic communication and marketing, as well as through the experiences they offer. By focusing on emotional engagement, attractions can create memorable experiences that relate to visitors, enhancing their overall satisfaction and connection to the destination. Communicating these anticipated emotions via information sources can attract group visits.

6.8 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The thesis has several limitations and future research directions that warrant attention. Firstly, the qualitative section of the empirical study was conducted in Aberystwyth, Wales, a rural and coastal region. Aberystwyth is a small town that can be easily navigated on foot, contrasting sharply with large urban areas or more remote rural regions, where complex travel information and route planning may be essential for decision-making. Unlike some destinations, such as large cities, the local community in Aberystwyth is friendly and accessible, potentially reducing travel friction and visitor's dependence on navigation or information services for on-site decision-making or itinerary planning. In situ decision-making is sometimes influenced by a desire for authenticity and local experiences, which are inextricably linked to the authentic aspects of Welsh Culture, such as heritage, language, food, and scenery, located at the unique destination. Future research could consider the impact of 'Welshness' and its influence on attraction and activity selection in decision-making. Aberystwyth is a specific and singular destination, meaning that tourists' decision-making processes may not be representative of those in other locations. Context and situation are subject to numerous variables and will differ for each destination and type of visitor. Therefore, the findings of this research are not generalisable, and the reliability of the thesis is confined to the context of this destination and its scope. However, the research methodology could be replicated in other destinations to enhance comparative analysis. Future studies could explore decision-making processes across various destinations to compare findings, providing a broader understanding of tourist behaviour in diverse contexts. Secondly, the study of activity choice represents a significant gap in the literature and poses considerable research challenges. The extensive range of activities and information sources adds to the complexity of conducting comprehensive research. Capturing all the variables and influences related to activity choice and information sources in the decision-making process is difficult within the scope of a single study. Additionally, attractions and activities vary widely in their emotional appeal, visitor motivations, and other influential factors. While the surveys were collected at attraction sites and were bounded by a singular variable—the attraction itself—the interviews encompassed numerous activities, attractions, everyday habits, hobbies, and interests of the participants. This diversity makes comparing or contrasting experiences like-for-like across the interviews impractical.

Thirdly, decision-making is a dynamic process. While this study focused on in-destination decisions, understanding activity and attraction selection could be enhanced by collecting insights from participants at earlier time points. For instance, interviewing participants at a specific time before arrival and while at the destination could provide a better understanding of pre-planning behaviour and its influence on in-destination decision-making. It was observed that during on-site interviews, some participants could not recall their pre-arrival preparations or subsequent decision-making behaviour due to the passage of time. Similarly, distributing surveys at the attractions with questions targeting periods earlier than one month in advance could shed light on the influence of information sources on decision-making. Additionally, longitudinal studies would significantly contribute to filling the research gap by tracking changes in decision-making over time, considering factors such as increased travel experience or lifestyle changes. Longitudinal studies also enhance the validity and reliability of the data collected. Fourthly, the researcher identified budget and monetary considerations in decision-making as a sensitive discussion topic. Social value (Gardiner, King, and Grace, 2013) is recognised as a challenge in decision-making, especially regarding budget, as social desirability biases can inhibit participants from being fully honest in surveys or interviews. Future research should consider developing anonymous methods for participants to share their opinions on budgetary considerations to mitigate these biases and encourage more candid responses. Finally, investigating emotions in decision-making was a key focus of the study. A limiting factor in collecting research on emotions is that participants are not always able to articulate their emotions well, and furthermore, not all emotions can be expressed. The interviews revealed that when participants use their own words to describe emotions, they often attach them to places or people. Furthermore, feelings and emotions are often more subdued, such as nice, relaxed or pleasant and do not align with existing scales developed to measure emotions. Future research should focus on scale development to measure emotions in attractions and activity selection. Emotions could also be measured with electronic wearable devices to track emotional responses.

6.9 REFLECTIONS ON THE PhD JOURNEY

During the doctoral programme, there were many changes and disruptions. These included changing universities, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, and the closure of the industry partner business linked to the KESS2 scholarship. While these issues caused delays in progress, the researcher learned to adapt and was resilient in the face of these challenges. The researcher enjoyed the data collection work and thrived in the field, collecting surveys and interviews. As a naturally curious person, she was able to engage with participants in an authentic style. Reflecting on the interviews, she felt that her role in this process contributed to the richness of the data and the stories that unfolded during these discussions. However, coding and analysing the interviews in a complex holistic study encompassing multiple variables, coupled with the density of group interviews, was challenging. The researcher was inexperienced in the thematic analysis technique, and it took many attempts to uncover the essence of the research findings and to bring the dynamic elements of the participant's contributions to the fore of the work. Her confidence in the analysis of the study has grown, and her skills have improved. She is grateful for the support received from her supervisors and examiners.

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CONSENT FORM

This interview is carried out by Rhiannon Rees for the purposes of collecting data for a PhD enrolled at Swansea University. The project is about decision-making and visitor behaviour of tourists in Wales, with a focus on activities and attractions at a destination.

Supervised by Dr Carl Cater, email: ████████████████████

The interview conducted will be recorded, it will remain secure and confidential, it will not require any details that provide your identity.

If you would prefer not to answer any of the questions or wish to end the interview at any time, please make it known to the interviewer.

If you would like to withdraw from this research project at any time, please email Rhiannon Rees: ████████████████

Please tick this box to confirm your consent ☐

Please circle appropriate answer

1. Age
18-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65-74
75 years or older

2. Gender Male
Female
Other ……………………….
Prefer not to say

3. Ethnicity

White
Hispanic or Latino
Black or African American
Native American or American Indian
Asian/Pacific Islander
Other
Prefer not say

4. Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received.*

No schooling completed
Nursery school to 8th grade
Some high school, no diploma
High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
Some college credit, no degree
Trade/technical/vocational training
Associate degree
Bachelor's degree
Master's degree
Professional degree
Doctorate degree

5. Marital Status: What is your marital status?

Single, never married
Married or domestic partnership
Widowed
Divorced
Separated

6. Employment Status: Are you currently…?

Employed for wages
Self-employed
Out of work and looking for work
Out of work but not currently looking for work
A homemaker
A student
Military
Retired
Unable to work

Other

7. Where is your home country? _____

PILOT INTERVIEW 1 – NOTES AND REFLECTIONS taken after interview

<u>**Date: 15.09.17**</u>

- Country of Origin: U.S
- Length of Stay: 3 weeks
- Age: 60+
- Education: All University higher education
- No. of guests: 4 – all participated in interview.
- Type: Two couples
- Purpose of stay: Holiday

1. Summary of Interview Content

Ideas of Heritage – come to Wales to feel a sense of belonging and home, also chose activities that reflected these values. Guests have Celtic ancestry – Scottish, Irish and Welsh so Welsh language, art, architecture, visiting towns, local characters all make that up. As individuals they each had strong interests and ideas about what they wanted to see: one was very interested in Art; one was very interested in the University; one was more interested in markets/town and one in the castles and history. They did some activities as a group or separately as couples. The type of activities they took part in were shopping, walking around Aberystwyth town as well as other market towns such as Aberaeron and Machynlleth; art gallery's; castle; restaurants; visiting museum; travel by train to see North of Wales.

They booked the trip in March 2017. Booking accommodation and deciding on place was relatively easy. It was difficult for them to plan visiting attractions and activities before coming on holiday because hard to understand distance/travel time between places and the accommodation. They preferred to wait until they arrived and speak to local people to get recommendations. Want to discover local places. (Very Airbnb ethos –local guides/cultures). Desire for local knowledge. For an app – setting out bus/train routes, recommending day trips i.e. stop here, visit this, do that would be good. (They had a personalized guide made for a trip to Scotland which they found very beneficial) Americans used to billboards, well signed routes

– not like Wales. Geographically different and culturally different. They visited tourist information.

They liked talking about destination and Wales, as they have been before (day trips from England) and are very interested in cultural aspects. They really wanted to find the best things to do and see. But travel time was an issue – since they had experienced difficulties driving on unfamiliar roads, wrong side of the road and takes them longer to reach places than a familiar driver.

Guide-books good but too much information in them and not always possible to understand without being in the place. Online sources and trip advisor information was deemed useful. But face-to-face, local information preferred source since it was perceived to be more accurate and authentic.

2. Reflections/Ideas:

Might be an idea to talk about destination and travel choice first in the interview and then drill down into activity choice. As destination seems to be at forefront of their minds. Why they like the place, why they have come to the place is easy for them to define and describe.

Do people know what they want to do until they've done it? Expectation versus reality.

Local authorities in Wales are closing down TI centres. This is unhelpful for guests that prefer to receive information in a face-to-face environment with local/authentic/timely information. Could have an impact on the visitor experience and local economy?

3. Actions/things to improve on:

Order of interview questions should be re-arranged.
Interview skill – keeping people on topic.
Interview skill – multi person interviews – feels more like focus group – hard to keep track of the discussion, and people tend to contribute as and when they feel like it. Also, group dynamics.

Interview 1.mp3

Interviewer: [00:02:49] I thought I'll start with some questions and then I'm very happy to talk to you about what I know about Wales and the places I've been and places I can recommend and you know we can have a dialogue.

Guest 1 Male: [00:02:59] You grew up in Wales.

Interviewer: [00:02:59] Yes. In South Wales, in Carmarthenshire. I came here to University and stayed. I did English Literature and Welsh Literature for my undergraduate. And then I went to work and. I went back to my masters three or four years ago and just loved it in marketing and I was persuaded to come back and do the PhD.

Interviewer: [00:04:35] The first question is: What attractions and activities have you visited so far during your holiday?

Guest 2 Female: [00:04:46] Well we have walked the town, we did some stores we did some kind of touristy stuff, that first day we got in a little later and so it was a good thing and we could walk and kinda get used to things.

> Commented [RR1]: Shopping / investigating town

Guest 1 Male: [00:05:04] We went up to the university. We tried to buy Welsh T shirts you know university of wales T shirts and sweatshirts. It's not that they don't have them. Because they are no longer the University of Wales and also the sizes are much different from the US and here so they never need large enough for me or me, or even the xxl the guys could get on you know.

> Commented [RR2]: Shopping

Guest 2 Female: [00:05:31] And they didn't have any ball caps. No on ball caps with the school.

Guest 3 Female: [00:05:37] Oh yes.

Guest 1 Male: [00:05:40] Oh we thought they would be shirts that would have something like the signage you see going in its very plain (to the university)

Interviewer: [00:05:50] They seem to change the designs quite often.

[00:05:53] Yeah yeah yeah.

Interviewer: [00:05:54] They are not very traditional

[00:05:55] Yeah yeah.

Guest 1 Male: [00:05:57] Which is a marketing idea because as an old university guy. You never vary your colours that much from your school colours. I don't see it green and pink and all kinds of colours. Our marketing firm that we've hired would just be all over us if we did that. They did a lot of grey and black because we're their kinda neutral, other than that they'd stick. Otherwise you create clutter you know marketing clutter. .

Guest 1 Male: [00:06:25] But we've been to a castle and some of the restaurants. Then went to. What was the name of the town we went to yesterday.

> Commented [RR3]: Attraction
> Commented [RR4]: Eating

Guest 2 Female: [00:06:31] The antique town with the big huge clock tower.

Interviewer: [00:06:41] Oh Machynlleth

> Commented [RR5]: Visiting a place/small town

1

Interviewer: [00:06:49] People call it "Mach" for short.

Interviewer: [00:06:52] They'll know where you mean if you say Mach.

Guest 2 Female: [00:06:56] It was fun everybody was so nice. Beautiful

> Commented [RR6]: Enjoyment

> Commented [RR7]: Local People

Guest 3 Female: [00:06:59] And we discovered that the town closes at 2 o clock.

Guest 2 Female: [00:07:05] Well some of the places, the stores there was more Wednesday is their market day and most of them were open that day. That would be a good fact for tourists to know. But it was fun, everybody was nice and it was just roamed. We went in stores that were open and bought things and horse brasses .

> Commented [RR8]: Shopping

Guest 1 Male: [00:07:30] But we had been to Aberaeron before on another trip and we had actually been through here before what made us want to come back.

Guest 3 Female: [00:07:41] And we wanted to visit MOMA. We went to the MOMA in Machynlleth.

> Commented [RR9]:

Guest 2 Female: [00:07:52] That first day we went to the information center too.

> Commented [RR10]: Information Source – Tourist Information

Guest 1 Male: [00:07:55] And that was helpful

Guest 1 Male: [00:08:02] They were very helpful gave us a lot of brochures. You know we've been trying to read em all.

> Commented [RR11]: Leaflet

Interviewer: [00:08:15] And you mentioned Tregaron that yesterday

> Commented [RR12]: Visiting a place- small town

Guest 1 Male: [00:08:19] That was today.

Guest 4 Male: [00:08:23] That was just John and Betty.

Guest 2 Female: [00:08:25] Did you guys like it?

Guest 3 Female: [00:08:27] I did.

Guest 3 Female: [00:08:27] We would have liked to have spent more time there

Guest 2 Female: [00:08:30] John wanted to spend a day at the library

> Commented [RR13]: Attraction – National Library of Wales

Guest 3 Female: [00:08:37] It was scary you know those roads are so narrow. It takes some getting used to. We were in Scotland Last year and it took me a full day to get used to the roads. John screamed a lot. Like a little girl.

Interviewer: [00:09:36] So would there be any particular reasons you chose these places to visit?

Guest 3 Female: [00:09:36] Because of the culture I want to see the culture. To me the arts are the information to me to the culture

> Commented [RR14]: Influence – Personal interest in Art and – Culture. In her view The way of experiencing a culture is through it's art

Guest 1 Male: [00:09:44] Well all four of us have Welsh, Irish, English DNA. So that was part of it.

> Commented [RR15]: Family ancestry and heritage

2

Guest 2 Female: [00:09:53] I love going to town (Aberystwyth) because I love looking at the buildings and the you know the roofs. I take a lot of pictures of buildings and yeah doors. And animals I love the animals. Doors. Because they are so different than home.

> **Commented [RR16]:** Tourist gaze? Architecture, history

> **Commented [RR17]:** Place is different to home. Want to experience another place, that is different to home. But at the same time is like coming home, because their ancestry is here.

Guest 1 Male: [00:10:14] Last year we guys went to Scotland because she though she was pretty much all Scottish to find out she was more Welsh-Irish.

Guest 2 Female: [00:10:24] Yeah I was so disappointed. But thats ok Irish is fine.

Guest 2 Female: [00:10:44] We love the cultural stuff and we're planning on doing more stuff like that but Ron got sick like you know the second day we were here for twenty four hours and I got sick last night. So it's kind of hampered us a little bit.

> **Commented [RR18]:** Culture

Guest 3 Female: [00:10:59] And it's kinda nice to rest.

> **Commented [RR19]:** Rest - relaxation

Guest 2 Female: [00:11:00] Yeah and we're all 69 years old. Well he's a little older so you know we don't move as fast as we used to. John pretty much does because he just retired so he's used to it.

Guest 1 Male: [00:11:13] I don't know any better yet.

Guest 2 Female: [00:11:15] But we've been retired for a long time and Betty too she works but you know so we move a little slower so you know things that are appealing to older people are good.

> **Commented [RR20]:** Identify with older generation, slower, doing things that are suited to older people. Age means they are more car orientated, less active, need more time to get around when they are at a place.

Guest 2 Female: [00:11:30] Yesterday afternoon we took a car trip around the whole town to see it and went down to other side of the pier and up to the other side of the castle we look it and took pictures. It was really raining out. And to the memorial, is that a World War memorial?

Interviewer: [00:11:55] Yes on Pendinas. It's a nice walk up there and there's a nature reserve, that area and there's nice plants.

Guest 2 Female: [00:12:05] We might have tried it but it was pouring.

> **Commented [RR21]:** Rain – adverse weather restricts/prevents from doing much more than taking a few pics, touring in car

Interviewer: [00:12:07] Yeah. If you have a nice day its not too taxing, you can take your time or for any easier view point you can take the train up to constitution hill. A bit better.

Guest 2 Female: [00:12:21] I think we're going to do some trains stuff too

Guest 2 Female: [00:12:27] What else has happened

Guest 3 Female: [00:12:28] I have an ulterior motive in a way because I own a store. A pretty large store and so I'm always looking for, items arts, crafts. Items for sale to include in my own store, and to get ideas. So we're looking at a couple pottery places. Stoke on Trent you know Portmerion. She wants to talk to dealers of pottery.

> **Commented [RR22]:** Personal interest, owns a shop so is interested in looking at local arts and cratfs

Guest 4 Male: [00:12:53] You got some ideas for pillows in that Aberaeron store couple years ago.

Guest 2 Female: [00:13:15] And the people I love taking pictures of people too. Or anybody who looks different. It's hard sometimes though because you don't want to embarrass anybody or to take a picture but maybe I can't that are dressed strange different you know because you don't see that as much.

> **Commented [RR23]:** Personal interest in photography, enjoys being somewhere, new, or other than home.

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Guest 2 Female: [00:13:39] Well you do see that in the states but we're so big and so wide open that you don't have a lot of people, or have opportunity to see a lot of people like that. You know that dress different and different. And as I said if you take pictures of people walking on the promenade because they all have their dogs out. It's just so interesting.

Interviewer: [00:14:04] It is a good place to people watch.

Guest 2 Female: [00:14:08] There were a bunch of kids the other day with wetsuits on out the water. We were by the pier. A life guard class.

Interviewer: [00:14:18] The surf lifesaving club meets three times a week. Surf lifesaving they'll go out on that on the surf board like a cross between a surf board and a kayak and they are paddling out and doing their training exercises

Guest 2 Female: [00:14:32] They looked so little to be in there that

Interviewer: [00:14:33] yeah yeah they start from about six or seven years old.

Guest 4 Male: [00:14:38] Yeah. thats great training. And there were people jumping off the pier (jetty)

Interviewer: [00:14:48] Yeah yeah but it's quite rough at the moment to be doing that this morning and it's freezing cold.

Interviewer: [00:15:05] I've got a couple more questions.

Guest 2 Female: [00:15:17] Well this is not as I think as commercial as you see more scenery. Yeah. We've heard that you had the most Castle's of anywhere and the most sheep.

Guest 4 Male: [00:15:30] John noticed something yesterday which was not seeing a lot of obvious foreigners - Tourists on the streets here.

Guest 1 Male: [00:15:51] If you're in London, your people are German, French as well as English. Here we haven't seen anybody else. Except Welsh. We're the only foreigners right now. Oh yeah.

Guest 2 Female: [00:16:03] Oh yeah. To me that's really appealing. Its nice to be in a place and and hear the language.

Guest 1 Male: [00:16:09] And talk to the people. And they don't say "oh no here's the tourist"

Interviewer: [00:16:18] If you like that, this is a good time again in September in the summer holidays July August it's much busier. There's much more tourists. In September it's just that little bit out of season. That's probably why are you getting more of a local feel.

Guest 4 Male: [00:16:31] We did that intentionally. We looked at when kids would be back in school.

Interviewer: [00:16:46] So you mention these sort of reasons and the sort of places that you've been doing for the Arts and the culture.You also mentioned the heritage you know you have family heritage and visiting the town and Machynlleth in those places, you've been to the information center in Tregaron and you get to university and shopping walking. I was just wondering why do those things interest you? Why have you done those things? How do they make you feel?

Commented [RR24]: Taking pictures of "different people" seems to be a desire to bring home something out of the ordinary in the form of pictures. Different to USA

Commented [RR25]: People watching. Interest? Hobbie? Activity? I think this is probably quite common on hols (Something my mum and dad like doing|) Check literature.

Commented [RR26]: Watching activities in the sea

Commented [RR27]: The guests wanted to be based in a small town, not anywhere too built up or busy.

Commented [RR28]: Enjoy hearing the Welsh. Not something planned, something they've noticed.

Commented [RR29]: Found a particularly warm welcome in Aberystwyth from locals

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Guest 2 Female: [00:17:17] I love it

Guest 3 Female: [00:17:17] You just want to catch a flavour of the area.

Guest 2 Female: [00:17:27] The first time I went to London I just couldn't stop smiling, I had so much fun. In England our whole England trip with the guys we went in 2014. Long time ago.

Guest 3 Female: [00:17:45] Also since we have heritage here I am Welsh Irish from my Grandmother . So it kinda gives you this Nostalgic. Yeah. It's a feeling of your heritage. [13.1]

Guest 2 Female: [00:18:00] .

Guest 1 Male: [00:18:02] Well actually you know we [3.1] have gone on [00:18:07] different things together. For some of us you know those who are really great significance you know. Betty was an art professor, so for her to see the arts to see the paintings to see local artist is really something you know [16.0] .

Guest 3 Female: [00:18:23] You see the direction they take (Artists)

Guest 1 Male: [00:18:24] And Ron You know he has things that he likes to do. And we kind of blend them all together.

Interviewer: [00:18:34] Yeah because you mentioned something before about the art it's how you discover a place, almost through the art of that place.

Guest 3 Female: [00:18:42] It's a it's a universal language.

Guest 2 Female: [00:18:49] What I loved about it - going to museums with Betty is she knows about all of it. It's like having a personal tour guide. And it's wonderful, It's give me a whole new appreciation for art though. I wasn't much of an art museum person person till we travelled with them.

Guest 1 Male: [00:19:08] Yvonne, she takes 100,000 photos so we kinda have a history of the trip too.(laughter) And afterwards we get these books and all the pictures

Guest 4 Male: [00:19:18] And with me driving, her pictures, I relive the trip. Can actually see everything.

Guest 4 Male: [00:19:27] I don't see anything but than the road.

Guest 2 Female: [00:19:36] You know I think we all feel pretty blessed that we can come here and see what our ancestors you know. So. I feel at home. It's a wonderful feeling. But you're on vacation so that makes it even better. So yeah it is really unbelievable.

Guest 4 Male: [00:20:00] I'm blown away by the history, by the age. The age of everything. At home, if something is 100 years old, if it's not torn down it's on the way to being torn down and something new built up there. You know here ya'll refurbish things, and rennovate and keep the same.

Guest 3 Female: [00:20:18] Keep the beauty.

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Guest 4 Male: [00:20:22] yeah same structure, same architecture.

Guest 2 Female: [00:20:22] It's really awesome.

Guest 3 Female: [00:20:24] That's what inspires people to paint. It's so beautiful.

Guest 1 Male: [00:20:25] One of the things I find interesting about England and Wales is that when you come to visit, it's a very complex culture because you have the early period and then you have the Roman period. They have a Viking period, and the Norman period and you go through all this and you say, even though it's very simple and small area you have all these complexities of culture. And my interest is really the religious philosophical and how they blend into the values and ethics of the culture of the area.

Commented [RR41]: Special interest in history

Guest 3 Female: [00:21:02] So he likes the library. (laughter)

Guest 1 Male: [00:21:07] I'm the boring one. (laughter)

Guest 2 Female: [00:21:11] He does so in that little town - where you spent a lot of time in the libraarray, because you found the history of some of your family.

Commented [RR42]: Family history

Guest 1 Male: [00:21:19] Yeah in Hay on Wye.

Guest 2 Female: [00:21:22] And that's it, you can find, you know like John did in that little town more history, it's easier to find a history of your family over here.

Commented [RR43]: Family History

Guest 1 Male: [00:21:28] Dorchester we went to Dorchester and checked out the family through church records which was interesting.

Commented [RR44]: Family history

Interviewer: [00:21:36] So ancestry and getting all that history and information.

Guest 2 Female: [00:21:42] And we had a bit of Wales, we had a taste of Wales twice when we all together drove into it once on our England trip.

Guest 1 Male: [00:21:50] Into Cardiff.

Guest 2 Female: [00:21:52] Our friend from England brought us in for a whole day and it was wonderful. So we wanted to come back.

Guest 1 Male: [00:22:00] In fact we ended up setting up a relationship with Dunfield house which is on the Wales and England border and they can accept 100 students. And so we sent over students in May. And they haven't made term, and there they come into Wales. So we have kids going to London for three or four days then spend the next two or three weeks running all over Wales and England. And it's really great that the faculty love it too because they come over and offer classes and I didn't see them in May but they were here. It came to this area and they were around and so we continue to work on strengthening that relationship.

Guest 2 Female: [00:22:45] And just did a lot of good things like that for the school. Trying to expand their horizons which is great. They love it. They all loved it.

Guest 1 Male: [00:23:00] They did, our grand daughter was here in May. She said she came into Wales for some reason I felt like I was home. You know it was just great, there's this feeling for her that....(could not understand).

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Interviewer: [00:23:17] Wonderful...so I just need to find out a little bit of information now about how you planned these activities. If you can remember when you started planning this trip and it will just be interesting for me to know what stage. I mean you've already hinted you know. You have arrived, you've picked up a lot of information here, but did you start looking for information before you booked? Before you planned?

Guest 2 Female: [00:23:41] How many months ago did we start?

Guest 1 Male: [00:23:44] Well Ron started on the first of March.

Guest 4 Male: [00:23:47] I started making reservations in March yeah. Or at least looking at options. We picked Aberystwyth because first of all, I had to google to learn how to pronounce it. I should have worked out how to pronounce a number of other towns but anyway.

> **Commented [RR45]:** Book accommodation 6 months in advance

Guest 4 Male: [00:24:13] We picked out because it was central in Wales so we could do day trips out from here and also the University was here and John had interest in that, and the train station, we knew it was close to the train station.

Guest 2 Female: [00:24:32] So those were some of the reasons we picked it. We really didn't look around much for any place else.

Guest 1 Male: [00:24:37] We said no to that person that runs the manor house because they are retiring in Wales once they. They said if you're going to do that - come here to stay.

Guest 2 Female: [00:24:49] We were lucky.

Guest 4 Male: [00:24:53] Looking at places to stay, I actually looked through trip advisor and they give you a lot of options and things. I don't remember how we settled on this place, except for the view, the location just seemed to be perfect. It was affordable for us.

Guest 2 Female: [00:25:14] It can be really confusing because we see all these towns that look so neat.

Guest 4 Male: [00:25:19] We were looking at a place, Devils Bridge and then we thought, it's too far from the coast.

Guest 1 Male: [00:25:30] And we wanted to be able to walk out at night.

Guest 4 Male: [00:25:37] And see local pubs, local colour.

Guest 2 Female: [00:25:38] The pubs and the fish and chips are wonderful. We really like this. I think on all of our England trips all we did was eat in pubs. I don't know that we ate anywhere else.

Guest 1 Male: [00:25:48] Yeah thats true.

Guest 2 Female: [00:25:53] Just the colour of them, they are so different.

Guest 4 Male: [00:25:56] I was worried when I got sick it was food poisoning to start off with. Because it came on so fast and left just about as fast. But then we she got sick I realised we picked up a bug. You know from the plane or who knows.

Guest 1 Male: [00:26:20] This is also for me, my retirement trip.

Guest 2 Female: [00:26:22] Oh yeah.

Guest 1 Male: [00:26:24] You know and also Betty and I are coming up on our 50th wedding anniversary. And so we wanted to be able to have a trip and have time away.

Guest 2 Female: [00:26:33] Betty and I have known each other since fourth grade, so we have been friends for a long time and it's fun. They travel so much in their job we don't see them.

Guest 2 Female: [00:26:53] Business Professors.

Guest 1 Male: [00:26:55] Yeah.

Guest 4 Male: [00:26:56] They introduced us and there it is.

Guest 4 Male: [00:27:01] 32 almost 32 years ago

Guest 2 Female: [00:27:02] So, you know it's fun when you have friends you can travel with and it doesn't always happen.

Interviewer: [00:27:12] No that's amazing.

And Ron and I had never really been anywhere out of states except for Hawaii so coming with them was a real treat. They knew where to go because they travel there lots of places. It was really fun.

Guest 4 Male: [00:27:32] We've been to New York with you guys. We've been to Quebec, Maine, Vermont.

Interviewer: [00:27:42] So it seems to me that the destination of Wales and the activities that you've been doing and you plan to do are very much linked in terms of the things that you've described are quite unique to Wales. Like the pretty little towns, the links to the heritage. And I was just wondering you know did did you think about destination first or was it activities first?

Guest 2 Female: [00:28:09] I think we thought of destination (all talking at once)

Guest 1 Male: [00:28:14] Actually we decided we would wait until we got here before we filled our calendar. We didn't have anything written down on the calendar. We did that on purpose. Yeah.

Guest 4 Male: [00:28:25] Yes we did a lot of it yesterday.

Interviewer: [00:28:26] So it wasn't really planned or researched. You decided you'll get here and decide.

Guest 1 Male: [00:28:33] Well what we found is that you know we did look and research. There were so many castles up north and then down in the south set we realised there was a lot of options. And it would probably take getting here before we could find how easy would it be to travel to those places. And what's doable.

Guest 2 Female: [00:28:49] With a car.

Guest 2 Female: [00:28:53] I think so we thought about that but I think you know also one of our

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favorite shows is Hinterland. We love it.

Interviewer: [00:28:59] Really, oh thats interesting.

Guest 2 Female: [00:29:00] (All speaking). We found the building that they use.

Guest 4 Male: [00:29:06] We found the police station.

Guest 4 Male: [00:29:08] Escape the country and watched all the Wales trips. Did we watch hidden estates of Wales, is that what it was?

Guest 2 Female: [00:29:15] (All speaking) Yeah yeah yeah.

Guest 4 Male: [00:29:21] Secret Estates.

Guest 2 Female: [00:30:28] Our country is so big here. That's what I love about this area, All this is an island. And it's not impossible to see anything you want to

Guest 4 Male: [00:30:41] To get anywhere. It's relatively quick.

Guest 2 Female: [00:30:45] I love the town and villages. Everytime we come into a village I think Wow. This is too cool, I'd love to live here.

Interviewer: [00:31:12] So just picking up on that tourist information, how would you describe the experience?

Guest 3 Female: [00:31:18] Well I thought it was pretty good, what we had.. trying to find the addresses...it was a....right?

Guest 1 Male: [00:31:24] Well, are you talking solely about shoulder our response to the information center?

Interviewer: [00:31:30] Yeah. Yes I'm trying to time to trying to find out what was the advantages of that. Why. Why. Why do that... instead of... Some people would of googled everything and made a whole plan before coming. You guys said no it's alright. It's too complicated.

Guest 1 Male: [00:31:47] Well part of it, is you're making decisions based on not having any information. So why not go for people who've lived there who know the country and they are going to be informed.

Interviewer: [00:31:59] Yeah, yeah.

Guest 2 Female: [00:32:01] Yes they can tell you what to eat, they can tell you what to do if there's anything local which we love to do. They can tell you about local events that a lot of people never look for?

Interviewer: [00:32:11] And why is that better for you?

Guest 2 Female: [00:32:12] Because you get a taste of the culture and the food and everything.

Guest 4 Male: [00:32:16] You don't get the places that are tourist related . You go to places like you're at home.

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Guest 2 Female: [00:32:27] Will make you feel like you are part of the culture.

Interviewer: [00:32:30] Yeah you wanted that local recommendation

Guest 2 Female: [00:32:31] We wanted a taste of it. You might remember you know lot of the people in the United States are baby boomers which were born during the war. Right after they war, so we are older. And I think a lot of us, this is what we like, you know. So I meant a lot of your tourists are older.

Guest 1 Male: [00:32:48] In some ways Wales is kinda like our area when I was growing up and everybody had little acreages and had gardens and it was more agricultural. I mean my folks had chickens and (Yeah) and a couple had cattle, an acre garden and it felt like five acre garden. So to come back to this feels more like home. So what home is now, which is all the subdivisions, all the houses.

> **Commented [RR54]:** Nostalgia for childhood?

Interviewer: [00:33:16] You mentioned something about a difficulty getting addresses, what di you mean by that?

Guest 1 Male: [00:33:20] Well some of the brochures they don't have addresses.(Or tepehone numbers)

Guest 3 Female: [00:33:27] So this one gives a lot of information about restaurants but it doesn't give the addresses.

Guest 1 Male: [00:33:34] So if you have a garmin and need to plug it in to get there you have no way to do it.

Interviewer: [00:33:39] Okay.

Guest 2 Female: [00:33:39] Theres no telephone number to call. Okay.

> **Commented [RR55]:** Refering to the information booklet in the apartment

Interviewer: [00:33:43] Okay fine.

Guest 2 Female: [00:33:45] So there looks like a good place to go but I don't know how to get there.

Guest 1 Male: [00:33:48] Whats also interesting, is in the states if they have a really neat place they want you to go visit, they actually have signs to show you when you're there. There's no signs !... (laughing) You'll get there and you'll find there are no signs and you have to get there on your own.

> **Commented [RR56]:** Signage, they need more of it!

Guest 2 Female: [00:33:59] Well you don't have billboards.

Guest 1 Male: [00:34:03] Well you don't have billboards (all talking) going to go towards which is nice. You see what I'm saying . You'll drive all around to find it was right there. But you didn't know.

Guest 4 Male: [00:34:11] Drive around 5 miles. (all talking)

Guest 1 Male: [00:34:16] So there's no signage to direct people that don't know the area.

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Guest 2 Female: [00:34:22] Or at least give a hint that you are going the right way or something.

Interviewer: [00:34:22] Yep, Okay.

Guest 1 Male: [00:34:26] Even yesterday for the trip people would say, just go up there and down that road you know 18-20 miles and OK. If you don't know anything. Yeah. You get to kind of find it on your own.

Guest 4 Male: [00:34:39] That's really the country way though right remember when I was travelling through central Missouri that's your kind of directions you get from people. You know just the first fork, take a left fork and well if there's two forks you get to before the fork their talking about you're in trouble.

Guest 1 Male: [00:35:01] Like, we got lost going into to find Rhiannon (Jewellery shop Tregaron). And we stopped this person and they say go down get down to the bridge, take a right to the second right, take a left you go get all the way up in the country, and it was like what in the world, and then we find out we were right there. (all talking)

Guest 2 Female: [00:35:21] The benefit is everything is beautiful. But if you have limited time now. You know we have a lot of time.

Guest 4 Male: [00:35:27] John said they ended up on a road like we were on yesterday, trying to find a road up to the top of the hill.

Guest 3 Female: [00:35:30] Yeah there was no advertising.

Guest 3 Female: [00:35:35] The first day we drove back home from the airport, back here from the airport. That little town we stopped at to eat, that was run by volunteers.

Guest 4 Male: [00:35:45] It was a community.

Guest 3 Female: [00:35:46] And they weren't gonna give us something to eat because we hadn't didn't convert any of our money yet, but they said well if you spend this much, I we knew we would they will take our credit card and they did and they were just super nice and it was so much fun.

Guest 4 Male: [00:36:03] I don't even remember the name of the town.

Guest 1 Male: [00:36:04] But you know what's interesting, like we pick up the car at the airport and you know we didn't bring our garmins because you know it said the car would have navigation. We put in 9 Marine Terrace, Aberystwyth, Wales. And it comes up - we do not recognize that address. We put in Aberystwyth, and it found an address and we said thats close enough.

Guest 1 Male: [00:36:29] It's not as sophisticated as we are used to, or its a different system than we are used to. (all talking) So we're spoiled.

Guest 4 Male: [00:36:41] Even my gps on my palm will give you options. If you put in a word, a keyword.

Guest 1 Male: [00:36:50] Yeah Ron's phone is better than our Navigation.

Interviewer: [00:36:53] Yeah and I guess because you come from America you know you probably don't have data on your phones. You need to have WI-FI in order to get anything online.

Commented [RR57]: Tregaron is a destination because of Jewellery and craft shop 'Rhiannon'

Commented [RR58]: They are on holiday for 3 weeks, so they have time to get lost. But they are pointing out that if you have limited time it could be frustrated to spend time being lost – on way to an activity.

Commented [RR59]: Issues with Sat Nav in Car

Commented [RR60]: They had a handheld gps system to use (in the same way others use google maps)

Guest 2 Female: [00:37:22] One thing, that would be nice when we went to Scotland, our son gave us this program, a driving program. A map of Scotland

Guest 4 Male: [00:37:30] Called 'Here we Go" .

Guest 2 Female: [00:37:33] It was a wonderful, that would be good for here, some one could in detail do something like that. And you could bring it with you when you came over and you'd have it.

Guest 1 Male: [00:37:45] Is this helpful to you?

Interviewer: [00:37:46] Yes, Yes.

Guest 4 Male: [00:37:48] Lot's of superflous information

Interviewer: [00:37:50] No it's good, really good.

Guest 3 Female: [00:37:51] You would see so many billboards on the way to Colorado city for example. But I can why you don't do it, because it would spoil the landscape.

Guest 2 Female: [00:38:05] Exactly.

Guest 3 Female: [00:38:05] But when you get there you wonder where that place is (laughing)

Guest 1 Male: [00:38:14] Like when we went to Rhiannon in that little town, well we couldn't find it. And there's nothing there to show you where it is. The local the way he was describing it just confused us.

Guest 3 Female: [00:38:23] Anyway we found it but it was accidental in a way.

Guest 1 Male: [00:38:27] It was.

Guest 3 Female: [00:38:28] But anyway that's probably the time here.

Guest 2 Female: [00:38:33] Do you want a cup a tea?

Interviewer: [00:38:36] No I'm fine, thank you.

Guest 2 Female: [00:38:52] I hate to see you put too many signs up though because that would ruin it.

> **Commented [RR61]:** Signage – they want it but don't want it!

Guest 1 Male: [00:38:56] But it could be your GPS.

Guest 2 Female: [00:38:58] But our GPS, I mean he was talking all the time, of how he said no. What would he say we when we went the wrong direction. He'd say make a U-turn. Because we were going the wrong way. We'd turn around and go back and start again but we never got the stray very far maybe.

Guest 4 Male: [00:39:21] Except through the Everdeen, we went through the Everdeen twice (laughing)

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Interviewer: [00:39:27] It's interesting you mention and navigation system for tourists that identifies places to visit, and things to do and directions. Do you use smartphones? Do you use apps on your phone?

Guest 1 Male: [00:39:53] Yeah. It was surprising, we couldn't use the one for the car. It was just a few features, it's not as developed as the ones we are used to at home. It's probably better than we think it is.

Guest 4 Male: [00:40:09] We are just not used to it.

Guest 2 Female: [00:40:15] I think part of the fun is discovering things though, just run across things that you never thought.

Guest 3 Female: [00:40:20] We discovered a very, very narrow very narrow little road. (laughing)

Guest 2 Female: [00:40:20] Betty was our driver the whole time when we did our last England trip. I give her and lots of kudos for that.

Guest 4 Male: [00:40:37] Well one England trip we did all by train.

Guest 1 Male: [00:40:41] That was fun yeah. That's what we're trying to figure out here how much do we do this by car and how much by train, and part of it is because when we look at it, you can look at it and say OK 60 miles, that should take us forty five minutes. (laughing) But here it's two to three hours. So maybe we would, are we smarter to do some things by train.

Interviewer: [00:41:11] Yeah absolutely.

Guest 1 Male: [00:41:13] That's what we don't know yet.

Interviewer: [00:41:14] OK. Yeah great. I can help you with that.

Guest 2 Female: [00:41:18] That would be great thing to have. Let tourists know how long it would take to get to certain places. By car and then by train.

Guest 4 Male: [00:41:26] The GPS tells you a time, but. Mine was fairly accurate from Manchester to here was 3 hours.

Guest 1 Male: [00:41:37] Yeah.

Guest 4 Male: [00:41:36] I think it took us just about 3 hours probably a little longer. I always had a train of traffic behind me.

Guest 3 Female: [00:41:48] I know, that makes you nervous.

Guest 4 Male: [00:41:48] Makes you nervous yeah,

Guest 2 Female: [00:41:52] Better to be safe that sorry.

Guest 4 Male: [00:41:56] And you always know the locals, because they drive like crazy. They know the roads.

Interviewer: [00:42:56] Did you use guidebooks at all? Rough guide to Wales, that kind of thing?

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Guest 1 Male: [00:43:00] Rick Steege

Interviewer: [00:43:04] OK.

Guest 1 Male: [00:43:05] And then one of Britain.

Guest 2 Female: [00:43:05] John found a couple of books.

> **Commented [RR65]:** Guide Books

Guest 3 Female: [00:43:06] A little book on Wales

Guest 1 Male: [00:43:14] Britain in general. Had Wales in there.

Guest 2 Female: [00:43:19] They had neat pictures.

Interviewer: [00:43:35] Great. Talking about trustworthiness and reliability which sort of information sources would you say are more trustworthy than others. Do you have an opinion on that?

Guest 4 Male: [00:43:47] You mean websites and...

Interviewer: [00:43:51] You've mentioned lots of information sources, you've mentioned talking to people, you've mentioned going into tourist information, guidebooks the books in the apartment. TripAdvisor and Web sites.

Guest 2 Female: [00:44:02] Pamphlets too.

Interviewer: [00:44:04] Would you say the more trustworthy, than others?

Guest 4 Male: [00:44:09] Your advise is pretty trusts worthy.(laughing)

Guest 2 Female: [00:44:13] In person. We like to talk to people.

> **Commented [RR66]:** People considered more trustworthy than paper/other sources

Guest 1 Male: [00:44:16] I don't know if I have an opinion. Because I don't really think of them as being trustworthy or not, in my understanding. Because sometimes I think I've missed, or not picked up on it, or I didn't read it well enough.(laughing)

Guest 2 Female: [00:44:30] The problem with these kinda books they get, it's so much thrown at you at once. Then you start thinking, oh you should here and go there

> **Commented [RR67]:** Too much information. Information overload.

Guest 3 Female: [00:44:43] But you don't know where it's at, and you don't know how close it is.

Guest 4 Male: [00:44:45] When we went to Scotland we called, there was a thing online. It's called Secret Scotland.

Guest 2 Female: [00:44:54] These people in Scotland made this book for us you paid for it, they make up a book. You tell them where you want to go and they would plan your trip for you. Which with the maps and other stuff that might be interesting to stop off and see. They get good recommendations what they think is worth and what isn't worth seeing.

> **Commented [RR68]:** Itinerary Tour guide – found very helpful when visiting Scotland. Sounds like they would happily have one again.

Guest 4 Male: [00:45:16] They list arh, bed and breakfasts and...

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Guest 2 Female: [00:45:24] Places to eat.

Guest 4 Male: [00:45:25] We were interested in bed and breakfasts on that trip. So they listed the top bed and breakfast. It cost £120 for the book, to be made up. Actually Dan bound it, they sent it to us online.

Interviewer: [00:45:45] So I guess they sent you series of questions and what you are interested in and then have a conversation, and they put it together. So it was quite personlised.

Guest 4 Male: [00:45:54] We told them what we were interested in seeing and if they had any recommendations. And they filled the general trip for us.

Guest 2 Female: [00:46:04] The interesting thing was, we did use the book a lot but we used it more because we had such a good GPS. We didn't need their instructions on the roads. So we used it more for, when we would get somewhere, reading about it. Because they have a detailed history of the place and so we could read about it right there. We didn't have to look it up, it was right in the book and we could read it before too and decide if we want to see it or not. Yeah it was really nice. We probably use the book every day.

Guest 3 Female: [00:46:37] And you said you looked at all the suggestions and then you picked the ones you wanted.

Guest 3 Female: [00:46:43] Yeah we knew where we wanted to go, kinda about North and around, to Glasgow and....

Interviewer: [00:47:01] OK. Yeah. Because it was what you were interested in, not just everything that's available.

Guest 4 Male: [00:47:08] Even as detailed as where gas stations were on our route.

Guest 2 Female: [00:47:08] They had gone to all these places. Now we did find some places that weren't the same, or weren't there. So we did go to some of those places but they were right along the way. So it wasn't a big deal. So there were a couple things. Like where they were supposed to have, we were on Skye. I said well here's a place that's right here, we were going to be passing it lets stop. It was supposed to be a movie or something or talk about history or something. And it had actually turned into more like Cafe and a tourist - selling stuff.

Guest 3 Female: [00:48:01] But you were interested in the distilleries right?

Guest 4 Male: [00:48:10] Yeah. It told us how to find the distilleries, thats how we found the tallister.

Guest 1 Male: [00:48:15] Well another thing that might be helpful and maybe it's just in summer. When we've traveled we've noticed stuff when we were in frankfurt. They would, the hotels all went together and they trips where you could get on the bus and you could go someplace for the day. Day trips and charge seventy five bucks each or something and they would come pick you up at the hotels meeting area. And you fill up two or three buses and they had all this stuff going on all the time or else even guide tours around the area and people that are tourists could sign up, for a tourist thats really helpful. And for us when you are not always comfortable driving on the wrong side of the road. And so to have somebody who actually you can go and they take you there and there. And all the time you are going they are telling you about it. You know the person on the bus is giving you this history.

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End of Interview

Table 10 Interview 1 Code and Theme Development Phase 2

Quote	Comment	Code Phase 1	Code Phase 2	Themes
walked the town, we did some stores we did some kind of touristy stuff, that first day we got in a little later and so it was a good thing and we could walk and kinda get used to things.	Shopping / investigating town	Activity Shopping		
university. We tried to buy Welsh T shirts you know university of wales T shirts and sweatshirts.	Shopping	Activity Shopping		
But we've been to a castle and some of the restaurants. Then went to. What was the name of the town we went to yesterday. The antique town with the big huge clock tower	Attraction Eating Market Town	Attraction (castle) (Eating Restaurant) (Market Town)		
It was fun everybody was so nice. Beautiful	Enjoyment Local People	Enjoyment Local People		
But it was fun, everybody was nice and it was just roamed. We went in stores that were open and bought things and horse brasses	Shopping	Local People Shopping		
We went to the MOMA in Machynlleth.	Attraction (art gallery)	Attraction (art gallery)		
That first day we went to the information centre too.	Information Source – Tourist Information	Information Source – Tourist Information		Nuanced Information
They were very helpful gave us a lot of brochures. You know we've been trying to read em all.	Helpful Brochures/leaflet	Information Source – Tourist Information Leaflet		Nuanced Information - information overload
And you mentioned Tregaron that yesterday	Visiting a place- small town	Attraction (Market Town)		
John wanted to spend a day at the library	Attraction – National Library of Wales	Attraction – (National Library of Wales)		Dynamic DM

Quote	Comment	Code Phase 1	Code Phase 2	Themes
I want to see the culture. To me the arts are the information to me to the culture	Influence – Personal interest in Art and – Culture. In her view The way of experiencing a culture is through it's art	Art Culture		
And it's kinda nice to rest.	Rest - relaxation	Rest – relaxation		
Quote	**Comment**	**Code Phase 1**	**Code Phase 2**	**Themes**
so we move a little slower so you know things that are appealing to older people are good	Identify with older generation, slower	Older people – slower pace		
Well all four of us have Welsh, Irish, English DNA. So that was part of it.	Family ancestry and heritage	Family ancestry and heritage	Nostalgia	Destination context
I love going to town (Aberystwyth) because I love looking at the buildings and the you know the roofs. I take a lot of pictures of buildings and yeah doors	Tourist gaze? Architecture, history Photography Place is different to home. Want to experience another place, that is different to home. But at the same time is like coming home, because their ancestry is here	Architecture Different to home		
We might have tried it but it was pouring.	Rain – adverse weather restricts/prevents from doing much more than taking a few pics, touring in car	Rain – adverse weather stops play		DM In situ Weather
I think we're going to do some trains stuff too	Planning to do trains - attraction	Attraction (Trains)		
I have an ulterior motive in a way because I own a store. A pretty large store and so I'm always looking for, items arts, crafts. Items for sale to include in my own store, and to get ideas. So we're looking at a couple pottery	Personal interest, owns a shop so is interested in looking at local arts and crafts	Personal interest Arts and Crafts		Motivation – (Context/In situ)

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Quote	Comment	Code Phase 1	Code Phase 2	Themes
places. Stoke on Trent you know Portmerion. She wants to talk to dealers of pottery.				
And the people I love taking pictures of people too. Or anybody who looks different. It's hard sometimes though because you don't want to embarrass anybody or to take a picture but maybe I can't that are dressed strange different you know because you don't see that as much.	Personal interest in photography, enjoys being somewhere, new, or other than home.	Personal interest photography		Motivation (Context/in situ)
Quote	**Comment**	**Code Phase 1**	**Code Phase 2**	**Themes**
Well you do see that in the states but we're so big and so wide open that you don't have a lot of people, or have opportunity to see a lot of people like that. You know that dress different and different. And as I said if you take pictures of people walking on the promenade because they all have their dogs out. It's just so interesting.	Taking pictures of "different people" seems to be a desire to bring home something out of the ordinary in the form of pictures. Different to USA	different exotic		
We love the cultural stuff and we're planning on doing more stuff like that but Ron got sick like you know the second day we were here for twenty four hours and I got sick last night. So it's kind of hampered us a little bit	Culture

Sickness | Culture

Sickness (stopping Play) | | |
| Well this is not as I think as commercial as you see more scenery. Yeah. We've heard that you had the most Castle's of anywhere and the most sheep.

Oh yeah. To me that's really appealing. Its nice to be in a place and and hear the language. | The guests wanted to be based in a small town, not anywhere too built up or busy.

Enjoy hearing the Welsh. Not something planned, something they've noticed. | Exotic Welsh Language | | Destination – Context |

Quote	Comment	Code Phase 1	Code Phase 2	Themes
And talk to the people. And they don't say "oh no here's the tourist"	Found a particularly warm welcome in Aberystwyth from locals	Local people Welcome tourist		
You know he has things that he likes to do. And we kind of blend them all together.	"Blend them all together" Nice way of expressing they are able to take their personal interests and do things together as a group.	Group needs Considerate of group needs		Group Dynamic DM
I love it	Expresses strong connection "loves"	Emotion Love		Emotional Context
Quote	**Comment**	**Code Phase 1**	**Code Phase 2**	**Themes**
Also since we have heritage here. I am Welsh Irish from my Grandmother. So it kinda gives you this Nostalgic. Yeah. It's a feeling of your heritage.	Place can connect you to your own past and family. Nostalgia	Family Ancestry Nostalgia		Emotional Context
I think we feel at home				Destination-Context
Well actually you know we have gone on different things together. For some of us you know those who are really great significance you know. She was an art proefessor, so for her to see the arts to see the paintings to see local artist is really something special	Seeing a place through Art. Personal interest that the group appreciate. And more than that – a way of seeing understanding a place.	Art Place-through Art		Group Dynamic DM
What I loved about it - going to museums with her is she knows about all of it. It's like having a personal tour guide. And it's wonderful, It's give me a whole new appreciation for art though. I wasn't much of an art museum person person till we travelled with them.	The passion of the individual rubs off onto the group members. Plus the group members benefit from the special skills of other members	Group Learning from each other		Group Dynamic – Collective Decision making

Quote	Comment	Code Phase 1	Code Phase 2	Themes
Yvonne, she takes 100,000 photos so we kinda have a history of the trip too.(laughter) And afterwards we get these books and all the pictures	Group appreciates all the pictures that the photographer takes	Group Shares photos		Group Dynamic
You know I think we all feel pretty blessed that we can come here and see what our ancestors you know. So. I feel at home. It's a wonderful feeling. But you're on vacation so that makes it even better. So yeah it is really unbelievable	Ancestory - heritage	Ancestory Heritage		Nostalgia – Destination-Context
I'm blown away by the history, by the age. The age of everything. At home, if something is 100 years old, if it's not torn down it's on the way to being torn down and something new built up there. You know here ya'll refurbish things, and rennovate and keep the same.	Interest in history Different from home country, more historical buildings in Wales/UK.	History Different to home		
Quote	**Comment**	**Code Phase 1**	**Code Phase 2**	**Themes**
One of the things I find interesting about England and Wales is that when you come to visit, it's a very complex culture because you have the early period and then you have the Roman period. They have a Viking period, and the Norman period and you go through all this and you say, even though it's very simple and small area you have all these complexities of culture. And my interest is really the religious philosophical and how they blend into the values and ethics of the culture of the area.	Special interest in history	Personal Interest History		Destination-linked to activities
Well what we found is that you know we did look and research. There were so many castles up north and then down in the south set we realised there was a lot of options. And it would probably take getting here before we could find how easy would it be to travel to those places. And what's doable.	Difficulty planning where to go/what to see in advance	Planning Decision-making Activities		Planning-timeline Classification

Quote	Comment	Code Phase 1	Code Phase 2	Themes
Well part of it, is you're making decisions based on not having any information. So why not go for people who've lived there who know the country and they are going to be informed.	Local information better than the internet	Information Sources		Nuanced information
Yes they can tell you what to eat, they can tell you what to do if there's anything local which we love to do. They can tell you about local events that a lot of people never look for?	Local things to do, places to eat Local events	Local Information		Nuanced Information
You don't get the places that are tourist related . You go to places like you're at home. Will make you feel like you are part of the culture	Looking for non-tourist experiences, or less touristy, like home/local	Local Authentic		Nuanced Information Authentic Experiences
Quote	**Comment**	**Code Phase 1**	**Code Phase 2**	**Themes**
The benefit is everything is beautiful. But if you have limited time now. You know we have a lot of time.	They are on holiday for 3 weeks, so they have time to get lost. But they are pointing out that if you have limited time it could be frustrated to spend time being lost – on way to an activity.	Time Making the most of time		Spontaneity
In some ways Wales is kinda like our area when I was growing up and everybody had little acreages and had gardens and it was more agricultural. I mean my folks had chickens and (Yeah) and a couple had cattle, an acre garden and it felt like five acre garden. So to come back to this feels more like home. So what home is now, which is all the subdivisions, all the houses.	Nostalgia for childhood?	Nostalgia		Emotional context
Whats also interesting, is in the states if they have a really neat	Signage, they	Information Sources		

Quote	Comment	Code Phase 1	Code Phase 2	Themes
place they want you to go visit, they actually have signs to show you when you're there. There's no signs !... (laughing) You'll get there and you'll find there are no signs and you have to get there on your own.	need more of it!			
Like, we got lost going into to find Rhiannon (Jewellery shop Tregaron). And we stopped this person and they say go down get down to the bridge, take a right to the second right, take a left you go get all the way up in the country, and it was like what in the world, and then we find out we were right there. (all talking	Tregaron is a destination because of Jewellery and craft shop 'Rhiannon'	Activity		Spontaneity Interaction with locals
I think part of the fun is discovering things though, just run across things that you never thought. We discovered a very, very narrow very narrow little road.		Discovering a place	Spontaneity	Spontaneity
Quote	**Comment**	**Code Phase 1**	**Code Phase 2**	**Themes**
That was fun yeah. That's what we're trying to figure out here how much do we do this by car and how much by train, and part of it is because when we look at it, you can look at it and say OK 60 miles, that should take us forty five minutes. (laughing) But here it's two to three hours. So maybe we would, are we smarter to do some things by train.	They realize that you can't rely on guessing travel time with distances, since the roads vary so much	Distance Decision-making Planning	Planning/ Transport	Context Transport
John found a couple of books. A little book on Wales Britain in general. Had Wales in there. They had neat pictures.	Guide Books	Information Sources Guide books		Nuanced Information Search
In person. We like to talk to people.	People considered more trustworthy than paper/other sources	Information Sources People		Nuanced Information Search

Quote	Comment	Code Phase 1	Code Phase 2	Themes
The problem with these kinda books they get, it's so much thrown at you at once. Then you start thinking, oh you should here and go there But you don't know where it's at, and you don't know how close it is	Too much information. Information overload.	Too much information. Information overload.		Nuanced Information Information overload
These people in Scotland made this book for us they paid for it, they make up a book. You tell them where you want to go and they would plan your trip for you. Which with the maps and other stuff that might be interesting to stop off and see. They get good recommendations what they think is worth and what isn't worth seeing.	Itinerary Tour guide – found very helpful when visiting Scotland. Sounds like they would happily have one again	Planning Decision-making Itinerary		

Table 11. Code and Theme Development Phase 3

Additional quotes and codes were added from the interview to support the Theme Development.

Quote	Comment	Code Phase 1	Code Phase 2	Themes
We picked out because it was central in Wales so we could do day trips out from here and also the University was here and Daniel had interest in that, and the train station, we knew it was close to the train station."	Choosing the destination – connects activities		Location	Context - Destination
We were looking at a place, Devils Bridge and then we thought, it's too far from the coast. And we wanted to be able to walk out at night. And see local pubs, local colour	Choosing the destination – connects activities		Location	Context- Destination

|				
The pubs and the fish and chips are wonderful. We really like this. I think on all of our England trips all we did was eat in pubs. I don't know that we ate anywhere else.				
We wanted a taste of it. You might remember you know lot of the people in the United States are baby boomers which were born during the war. Right after they war, so we are older. And I think a lot of us, this is what we like, you know. So I meant a lot of your tourists are older			Identity	Group Dynamic Collective DM/Identity
Actually, we decided we would wait until we got here before we filled our calendar….we did that on purpose			No planning/ overwhelm	Timeline of planning

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The researcher collected a total of 601 surveys: 51 in the pilot study, 175 at the Vale of Rheidol Railway and 376 at Zip World. The data was checked and cleaned, with 37 incomplete surveys removed (the pilot surveys are not included in the analysis). A total of 515 surveys are included for analysis, 354 collected at Zip World and 161 at the Vale of Rheidol. Data analysis was conducted using the statistical package SPSS, and the graphs and charts presented were

produced using Microsoft Excel. Firstly, the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are presented, including gender, country of residence, employment, and age. Descriptive statistics are implemented to present the survey findings beginning with influential factors relating to decision-making, followed by group influence and type and emotions. The second part of this report presents the findings on the planning stages for the attractions of the Vale of Rheidol and Zip World. The third part of the report presents the data on the intention to visit other attractions and activities during the holiday. The final part of the report presents the preferred information sources at three discrete time points, the type of information sought and compares device type for pre-trip and during trip planning.

The chart below indicates that the sample contains more female respondents, with 65%, than males, with 34%.
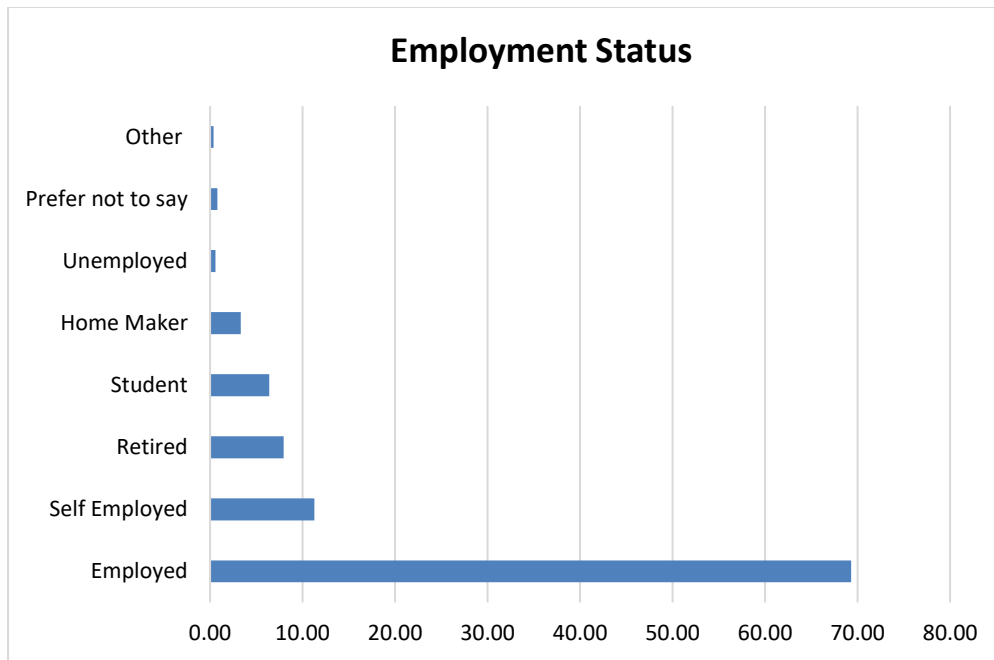
Figure 28. Gender of Survey Respondents
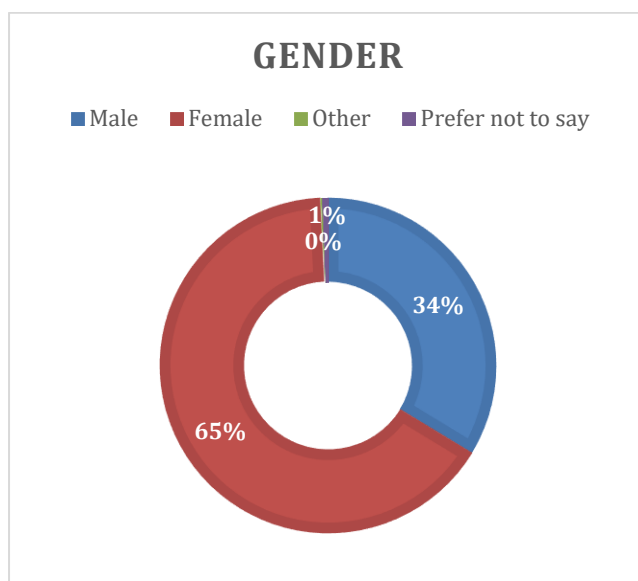
It is noteworthy that the largest category of respondents is between the ages of 45 to 54 with 32% of the sample, followed by ages 35 to 44 at 28%, these two categories represent half of the sample. Age groups 16 to 24 represent 10%; 55 to 64 is 9% and over 65 is the smallest with 5%. It should be noted that the sample represents an older population.

**Figure 29. Survey Respondents Age Groups**

AGE
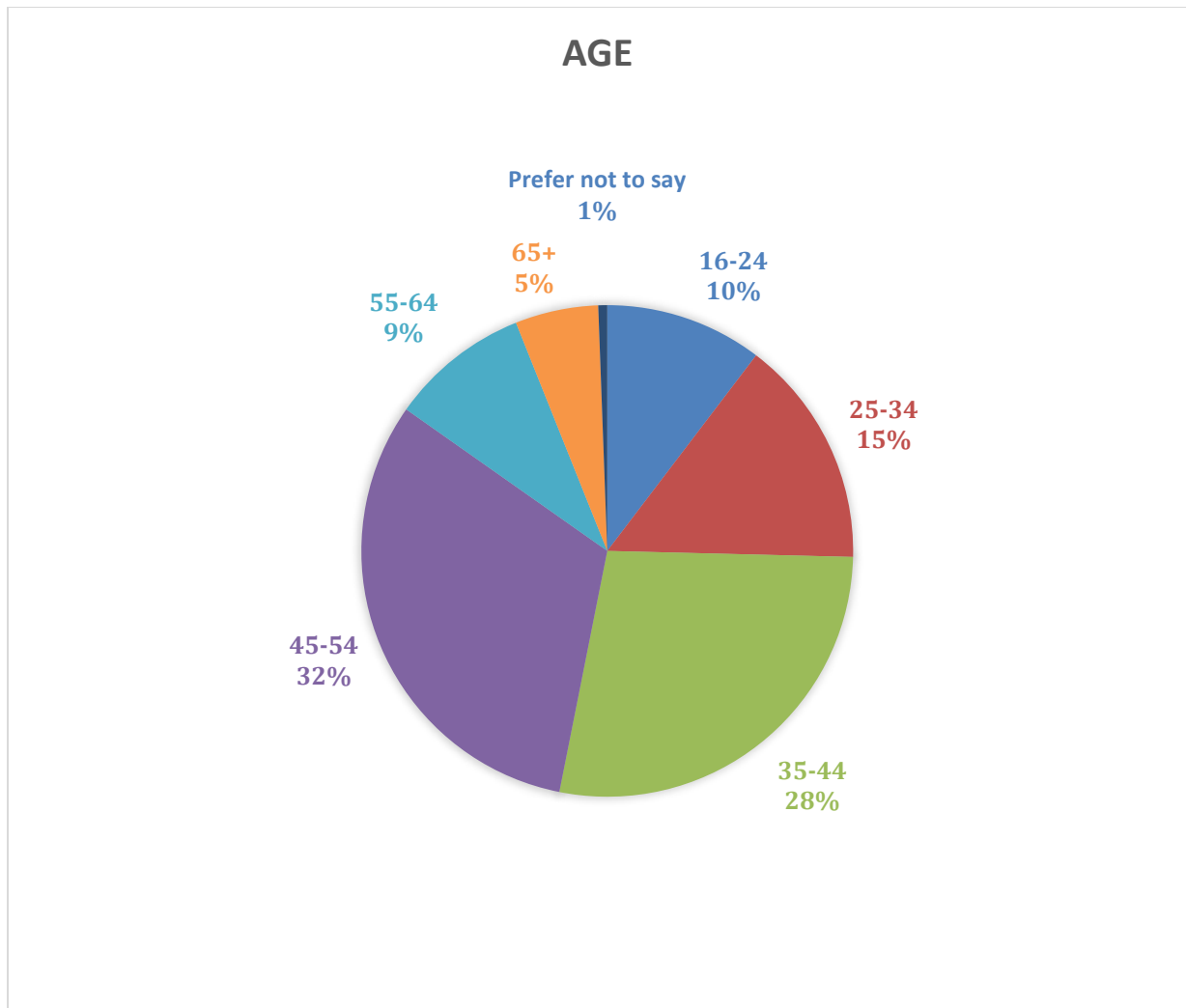
The largest category of respondents are employed, with 69% of the sample, followed by the self-employed 11%, Retired 8%, Students 6% and the smallest categories being homemakers 3%, and the unemployed with 0.5%.

Figure 30. Employment Status of Survey Respondents

Employment Status

Over half of the respondents have a university degree with 53%, followed by college education at 28% and Secondary School at 16%. This sample has a higher level of education than the national average for the UK.

Figure 31. Education of Survey Respondents

Education
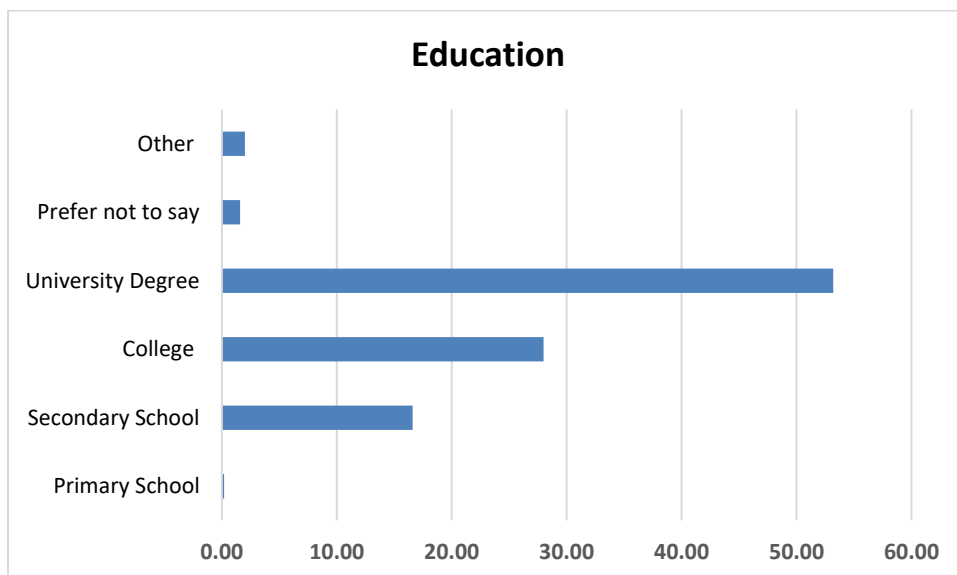
Country of residence, and town of residence was collected. A full list of Towns and countries of residence are reproduced in the appendixes. Most respondents were from the UK with 95% of the sample, a small amount the sample were from international countries 3% and 2% were from Europe.

Figure 32. Country of Residence

Resident Country

International 3%

Europe 2%

UK 95%

UK   Europe   International