

## **The Steps and Factors in Decision-Making Process of Chinese Mountain Hikers to choose Destination**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

Mountain hiking has developed quickly in China, but less attention has been paid to their selection of destination. The objective of this study is to research Chinese mountain hikers' decision-making process of choosing a destination. Using Wuyi mountain in China as a study site, do the face-to-face interview. The results demonstrate that the decision-making process contained four steps and eleven factors. The first step was need recognition, which included internal demand and external stimulus factors. The second step was before decision-making, which involved information search, tool, perceived value, perceived cost, and emotional linked factors. The third step was decision-making, which included purchase factor. The fourth step was after decision-making, which means after finishing hiking, it included satisfaction, recommendations, and revisit factors.

**Keywords:** The decision-making process; Chinese mountain hikers; choose destination; four steps decision making model

### **Introduction**

Outdoor activities develop rapidly in the worldwide, which is the population in The United States, China, Australia, Switzerland, New Zealand and many other countries (Rupf, Haider, & Pröbstl, 2014). Mountain hiking is the preferred activity, considering it to be among

the most significant, popular, and engaging outdoor pursuits (Rodrigues, Kastenholz, & Rodrigues, 2010). People think that walking in mountains at various altitudes can assist individuals in a variety of ways (Giacona, Eckert, & Martin, 2017).

Destination is a multi-functional attribute product that tourists choose and buy using the destination impression and selection mechanism, which can be thought of as the purchase outcome of tourists (Mohd Taher, Jamal, Sumarjan, & Aminudin, 2015). Regarding destinations, they are not included in the mountain hiker literature since they are phrases that are employed by many parties, each of whom has a choice. A mountain hiker's investigation aims to clarify the destinations' nature. Tourists are chosen based on both psychological (motive, attitude, belief, and image) and non-psychological factors (time, tourist attractions, service facilities, cost and visitor characteristics). Psychological variables are implicit to tourists, while non-psychological variables are obvious reasons in the process of destination selection. Tourists can use both criteria to compare destinations (Soni, 2021).

More than 100 million Chinese joined in mountain hiking In 2019, and the market for such activities has increased to more than 10 billion RMB. However, there have only been a few research on the process of mountain hiker decision-making, the factors that influence mountain hikers choose to hiking certain mountains is small number of studies and is not clear. Therefore, it's interesting to do study on how mountain hikers decide on their destinations (Sancho-Esper, Ostrovskaya, Rodriguez-Sanchez, & Campayo-Sanchez, 2022; Sharma & Klein, 2020).

## ***2. The decision-making processes***

For nearly 40 years, consumer behavior experts have focused on the study of the decision-making process (Rana, 2021; Soni, 2021). This is the standard method of selecting a vacation spot, presuming the customer is logical, capable of digesting and evaluating vast volumes of information, and capable of making classified judgements. Numerous consumer behavior researchers have conducted pertinent research, examined, and described the decision-making process model of consumers in order to comprehend the decision-making process of consumers. One of the early models highlights the significance of external advertising stimuli on customers' decision-making behavior and examines the input mode of external stimulus at the time of the final decision. This model's purpose is to give conceptual research direction and examine how customers restrict their options before making a choice.

To put it briefly, some researchers view the decision-making process in cognitive models of consumer behavior as a type of funnel process, with the range of options shrinking from broad to tiny. All models of consumer behavior rely on cognitive decision theory, even if each consumer behavior researcher uses somewhat different terminology. According to this view, there are five key stages in the decision-making process for consumers: Problem identification, information search, alternative assessment, choice and purchase, and post-buy evaluation. Some research hold the point that the decision-making process could be separate into four steps.

### 3. Study site

One of China's four UNESCO World Heritage Sites is Wuyi Mountain. In the southeast of China, between Jiangxi Province to the northwest and the southernmost portion of Fujian Province, is where Wuyi Mountain is located. The hiking trail's approximate 1,160 km overall length is broken down into 930 km in Fujian, 138 km in Jiangxi, and 92 km in Zhejiang. The path connects several old trails and passes, and more than 90% of the region is forested.

### 4. Methods

Face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions made up the survey instrument. The following questions were posed to visitors and were organized into groups based on the Alina Stankevich, 2017 decision making model (Stankevich, 2017). The official interview's data was gathered in June 2021. The sample size of this study was 15 people, the sample size for this study was 15, and the number of respondents met the minimal requirement of 3 to 25 in-depth interviews (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The interviews were conducted with a selected list of the coach of mountain hiking, the academics from universities, and the mountain hiking club senior member. At this point, purposive sampling and snowball sampling were employed. In qualitative research, there is no one correct coding method (Saldaña, 2016). The coding method or methods used generally relies on the which method a researcher feels is better equipped to generate the meaning that is being sought (Saldaña, 2016). The key points reflected the phenomena of the variables that mountain hikers considered when making decisions.

### 5. Results

#### *The first step: Need recognition*

Recognizing a need, which encompassed both internal demand and external stimuli variables, was the first stage. When mountain hikers become aware of their desire for something, they become more motivated to go hiking.

#### *Internal demand*

Internal demand describes a desire as an instantaneous, extremely fundamental impulse (Stankevich, 2017). "Enjoy the joy of hiking, and enhance one's physical and mental health," said the professor Ke. This was also validated by academics Zheng and Sun: "Most mountain hikers choose hiking because it is beneficial to their physical and mental wellbeing." The scholar Chen, the coach Hu, and the senior members Lin all share the belief that it is beneficial to relax and reduce tension. "Hiking is incredibly gratifying, and it strengthens my willpower," senior members Lin remarked. "To maintain healthy, it is a fantastic experience, and I like pushing things," the coach Xiang stated. Internal demand should be recognized as a key driver of behavior and decision-making (Saayman, Viljoen, & tourism, 2016). The question of why people travel was one of the first questions addressed in tourism research .

#### *External stimulus*

When a person is affected by external factors, such as external stimulation, advertising

stimuli, a friend's advice, etc., this is known as external stimulus . "When I meet up with my pals, it can help me develop relationship and have conversation with others who share hobbies," the professor Chen remarked. Academic Zheng and coach Su agreed that having friends to walk with was a key factor, pointing out that "my buddy asked me to go hiking" and "my friend invited me to hike." A second factor was some advertising or information. The scholar Sun stated, "I see videos of hiking and lovely natural landscapes on Tik Tok," emphasizing the importance of external stimuli. Travel decisions may be impacted by both internal and external factors . Several authors suggested people's behavior usually influenced by the external stimulus . Therefore, it was necessary to do research about the motivation.

### ***The second step: Before decision-making***

Prior to making a choice, the second stage was before decision-making, which involved information search, tool, perceived value, perceived cost, and emotional linked factors. The mountain hikers use tool to search information before they plan to go out for hiking. They need compare the perceived value, perceived cost and emotions linked factors for choosing a mountain for hiking.

### ***Information Search***

Information search means people look for both internal and external information to help him/her make decision (Stankevich, 2017). "Look for information on the hiking trail, and prepare a hiking strategy," the scholar Ke urged. This was decided upon by senior member Zhang, coach Xie, and coach Su. "If you have a companion, you may refer to aspects like weather and distance with your partner to determine the perfect day," the academic Wang said. More information about the coach Su's advice was provided in the following sentence: "Collect hiking trail information: the difficulty level of the trail, information about the hiking trail, the length of the trail, the risk point, the safety assistance, etc." Consumer spent money, time, and other resources to consume information that might ultimately result in a purchase (Maity, Hsu, & Pelton, 2012). Information search was a significant motivation for consumers' purchase behavior.

### ***Tool***

Tool refers to a primary information source, such as internet and mobile application, which has made the users' lives easier by just searching online about whatever information they need regarding their travels (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012). Academic Wang, Coach Wu, and Senior Member Lv all suggested searching for activities on outdoor websites. Academic Ke stated that most mountain hikers utilized computers to seek for information. For instance, the websites 8264, Mofang, and Lvye are all rather sizable websites. In accordance with academic Ke and academic Chen's suggestion that "you may ask others who has relevant experiences, and my information comes from my friends," external stimuli demonstrated the friend's importance not only as a source of motivation but also as information. "My buddy says this mountain is a fantastic area for hiking," Coach Wu, Coach Xie, and Senior Member Qin all agreed that mobile applications (APPS) were useful tools. To get information and participate in discussion forums like Douban, QQ, and WeChat, I utilize mobile apps. Tools provided information to tourists that may influence or dissuade their decision-making and travel behavior (Tavitiyaman, Qu, Tsang, & Lam, 2021). Individual's travel intention was highly related to the amount of received information or tool where people got information (Chen,

2016). Knowing mountain hikers used what tool to search information was important for the mountain management company.

### ***Perceived value***

A general assessment of visitors to destinations based on the advantages gained is called perceived value. The professor Ke asserts that it's important to understand what active mountain hikers like doing. The precise activities were discussed in other interviews. Su, the academic, stated that "hiking activities, such as picnics, taking photographs, eating local specialties, and admiring the distinctive local landscape, are vital." "Find a secure area at night, build a fire, tie a sleeping bag to relax, take a look at the starry sky at night, and feel the grandeur and magnificence of the wilderness," the coach Su and senior member Qin advised one another. "Rest, eat food, drink tea, and speak on the top of the mountain," said senior member Lin. In the marketing literature, the idea of perceived value has been utilized to look at factors that influenced purchasing choices (Jamal & Sharifuddin, 2015). Perceived value was regarded as a trustworthy theory to predict tourist behaviors (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Pandža Bajsić, 2015), and provided practical implications for marketing ecotravel packages to tourists (Park, Kim, & Kwon, 2017).

### ***Perceived cost***

The price, time, work, effort, and perceived risk that must be invested in obtaining and utilizing the product are all included in the term "perceived cost," along with other financial and non-financial factors. Academic Wang, coach Wu, and senior member Lv all concur that pricing was the most crucial consideration. "The price is extremely essential," "I would like to pick the mountain with inexpensive tickets," and "if the cost of a hiking excursion and the cost of time are low." It also mattered whether the peak was interesting. When asked "Whether it is intriguing and appealing, picking a nice location," Coach Xie and Senior Member Wu said, "I prefer the interesting mountain." What characteristics and advantages were significant to visitors determined what benefits they specifically sought for and how the projected trip expenses were determined (Ghassani, Rahadi, & Jatmika, 2020). However, the money, time, and effort spent on the journey to the target could reduce the overall perceived value.

### ***Emotional link***

Emotional link involvement generally occurs right after consumption and before customer satisfaction judgments (Sthapit, Björk, & Coudounaris, 2017). The academic Sun talked about mountain's popularity "This mountain is famous, and I know this mountain long time ago because my friend recommended this mountain". Senior member Lv said "Feel challenging and get a sense of accomplishment is an attraction". Other interviewees considered mountain's meaningful was important. Senior member Zhang mentioned "There are different scenery and different experiences, so this mountain is more meaningful than other mountains". Previous studies showed emotion affected tourists' behavioral intentions, and it also influenced decisions to purchase tourism and leisure services. Other research pointed that emotion affected tourist destination choice (Goossens, 2000).

### ***The third step: Decision-making***

The third step was decision-making, which contained purchase factor. When mountain hikers select a location, they must reserve a lodging, purchase a ticket, and pay for services or goods from businesses.



### ***Purchase***

Purchase implies that after deciding which brand to buy, a consumer still needs to follow through with the choice and complete the transaction (Gong et al., 2022). The same belief is shared by senior member Lin, academic Sun, and academic Zheng: "I will purchase the ticket fast." Senior member Zhang said, "I'll join up straight once I see the hiking activities I'm interested in." On the other hand, some mountain hikers put off using their paid time. Before going on a hike, you should make preparations for transportation, lodging, tickets, and food, according to Coach Wu. Senior member Lv: "You should surely plan your journey before hiking, and I should get ready in case I decide to hike this mountain." A consumer must still carry out their decision and complete the transaction once they have decided which brand to purchase. Purchase behavior included deciding when, where, and how much to spend (Ladhari, 2007).

### ***The fourth step: After decision-making***

The fourth step was after decision-making, which consisted of satisfaction, recommend, and revisit factors. When mountain hikers reach the end of their journey, how do they feel about it? Do they want to tell others about the mountain, or do they want to return?

### ***Satisfaction***

One of the crucial customer judgments when assessing tourist services is satisfaction. "I am extremely happy since knowing other individuals is also a form of growth and experience," the professor Ke said when asked about her feelings. The professor Chen expressed his sense of satisfaction, saying, "I feel successful." The coach Xie said, "I am glad because this mountain hiking accomplishes the impact of physical exercise and enjoyment of my body and mind," in relation to the prior internal desire. All agreed that the experience was positive and made them feel good, including academic Sun, coach Xiang, senior members Lv and Zhang. They said, "The experience is really excellent, very satisfied, and I feel good, and I'm very happy with friends." For destination marketing to be effective, visitor pleasure was crucial (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). Comparing popular vacation destinations with other potential destinations allowed researchers to gauge how satisfied tourists were with their experiences.

## **Recommend**

Recommend refers to the willingness of tourists to recommend their product and share a positive word of mouth regarding their experience (Bigne-Alcaniz, Ruiz-Mafe, Aldas-Manzano, & Sanz-Blas, 2008). Academics Chen, Wang, and coach Hu all enjoyed sharing their experiences with others, saying, "I'll share it with my friends in my Wechat Moments." Senior members Lv and Zhang agreed, saying, "I'll share my hiking experience and photos online, and summarize the routing and problems and solutions that occurred during this hiking." Many mountain hikers, including academic Chen, academic Zheng, coach Wu, and coach Hu, said they would suggest the mountain to their friends. Because they were seen as the most trustworthy, recommendations were extremely important in the promotion of tourism.

### *Revisit*

The term "revisit" describes people who are prepared to go back to the same place and foresees when they would decide to do it again (Han & Kim, 2010). "Explore the unlimited curiosity, return to the ancient area, and recollect the emotional components of the past," said academic Chen and coach Xie. If I have the chance in the future, I still want to come back a second time. As expert Wang, coach Wu, coach Su, and senior member Lv stated, "Let me go back here for hiking and enjoy the beauty of different seasons, viewing the magnificent landscape," most mountain hikers visited the mountain more than once since the mountain had diverse scenery depending on the season. The significance of visitors returning has been the subject of several research (Chin, Zulfakar, & Hussain, 2021; Sohn, You, & Park, 2019). Particularly, visitors with higher levels of pleasure had a direct impact on whether they intended to return (Meng & Han, 2018).

## **Conclusion and discussion**

The traditional model of the consumer decision-making process "Five-stage model of the consumer buying process" involved five steps that consumers move through when buying a product or service. The results of the interviews displayed that Stankevich's (2017) decision-making process model could be used to research the Chinese Mountain Hikers to choose destination. The results of the interviews also showed that the Stankevich (2017) decision-making process model five steps could be improved into four steps, the first step was need recognition, the second step was before decision-making, the third step was decision-making, and the fourth step was after decision-making. The four steps included eleven factors, the first step was need recognition, which included internal demand and external stimulus factors. The second step was before decision-making, which involved information search, tool, perceived value, perceived cost, and emotional link factors. The third step was decision-making, which included purchase factor. The fourth step was after decision-making, which means finishing hiking, which included satisfaction, recommend, and revisit factors.

The interviewers believed the four parts of the decision-making process model, which were consistent with earlier research, could be broken down into need recognition, before decision-making, decision-making, and after decision-making (Kotler, Keller, Ang, Tan, & Leong, 2018). This was different from Alina Stankevich's (2017) five steps decision-making process model that consist of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post purchase. Due to the simultaneous information search and alternative evaluation that occurred, the mountain hikers evaluated the various mountains as they looked for information. Not every customer goes through each step in the decision-making process; in fact, some of the steps can be bypassed (Nuraeni, Arru, & Novani, 2015).

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