Measuring the Information Sources Used for Sport Tourist’s Purchase Decisions

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Background
Sport Tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry with an estimate of its value at $600 billion and accounted for 10% of the international tourism market in 2008 (Hungenberg, 2014). According to Simon (2003), sport tourism contributed between one and two percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), and the contribution of tourism as a whole was between four and six percent. During the past decades, scholarly research in sport tourism have drawn considerable attentions as it provides implications to the sport tourism marketers (Shipway & Jones, 2007). These scholarly research include: economic impact of sport tourism (Lee & Talyor, 2005; Kurtzman, 2005; Daniels & Norman, 2003), social impact of sport tourism (Ap, 1990; Ritchie & Adair, 2002), sport tourist travel motivation (Gibson, Attle & Yiannakis, 1997; Priestely, 1995; Richards, 1996; Trail & James, 2001), and sport tourism market segmentation (Hungenberg, Gray, Gould, & Stotlar, 2016). However, a few research studies have been conducted on investigating the sport tourists’ information search behavior. This gap has significant implications for both marketers and public policy makers to understand better how to communicate with consumers. By understanding the types of information and depth at which tourists use it, channels of influence can be designed in a cost-effective manner (Crotts, 1999). From sport tourism marketing managers’ perspective, this mean disseminates right message, in the right place, and at the right time to the consumers. For sport tourists, the intangibility of tourism services, and the simultaneous nature of production and consumption require high personal involvement and often lead to large investment of time, effort and financial resources in purchasing decisions. Considering the limited published research studies in information acquisition in the context of sport tourism and the practical and theoretical importance of research in this field. Therefore, this study was designed to explore the sport tourist information search behavior and examine the group (experience and travel distance) differences on information search pattern.

Method
Adopting a convenient sampling procedure, 563 surveys were distributed on site and through email and 380 were completed and returned. This was a response rate of 67.5%. Information source utilization was measured by 18 items which adapted from Murray (1991) and Davies’ (2014) Information Source Scales (ISS). The 18 items had a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely) and high mean scores indicated a high level of information search behavior. Data from the completed questionnaires were entered into a database and analyzed using SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0 (IBM Corp., 2014). The 380 responses were randomly split into two separate halves. The first part contained 197 respondents, as a calibration sample, was used for the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify the underlying structures of the information source scale. The second part contained 183 respondents, as a validation sample, was used for the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to confirm and validate the factor structures extracted from the EFA. A factorial multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was next conducted to determine whether or not two categorical grouping variables (experience, travel distance) significantly account for differences in information source preferences.

Results
The EFA revealed four-component solution explained 62.1% of the total variance. The four factors were given the following names: internet sources, interpersonal sources, print/media sources, and memory sources. The initial CFA indicated that two items loading poorly onto their latent construct and one item we were not able to support theoretically its loading to another factor. The second run of CFA with the remaining 25 items revealed the overall fit of the measurement model was adequate ($\chi^2 = 246.08$, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .064, SRMR = .059, NNFI=.97). All factor loadings for the indicators were significant to their respective construct Cronbach’s α values of all dimensions were greater than .7 (from 0.74 to 0.86) and average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent construct.
was above the recommended cutoff criteria .5 and ranged from .50 to .61 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The two-way MANOVA procedure for the information source preferences indicated that the interaction effect (experience × travel distances) was not significant, $F(12, 1103) = 0.75$, $p = .70$. The main effects for experience ($F(12, 977) = 8.00$, $p < .001$) and travel distance ($F(4, 369) = 8.10$, $p < .001$) were statistically significant on the combined dependent variables, the amount of variance explained by the two main effects was moderate ($\eta^2 = 16\%$). The individuals with travel distance less 50 miles ($M = 3.71$) reported higher levels of print/media source utilization than individuals with travel distance over 50 miles ($M = 3.19$). People with one year of experiences ($M = 5.20$) reported higher level of inter-personal sources preferences than people with four years of experiences ($M = 4.60$), while people with at least one year of experience showed a higher level of using memory sources than people with zero experience.

Conclusion
The ability to understand, predict, and influence the information travelers select in planning their trips is critical to succeeding in today’s highly competitive marketplace (Zhu, Weiller, Young, & Lee, 2015). By understanding the types of information and depth at which tourists use it, channels of influence can be designed in a cost-effective manner (Crotts, 1999). The present study highlights the need to explore more fully the decision-making process in the sport associated with information search behaviors. Also, this study was the first to explore the sport tourism consumers’ information search behavior and tested the group differences on sport tourism consumers’ information search behavior.