

USE OF INFORMATION SOURCES IN OUTBOUND TRAVEL PLANNING: CASE OF THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM

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Abstract. In the Information Age travellers have a wide range of information that can be accessed by a variety of channels. The kind of information search travellers undertake and acquire will have significant consequences for the purchases they will make. There is a need for repeated studies to track possible changes in tourist behaviour for information search patterns as use of information sources and their combination evolve over the time. Understanding tourists' information search peculiarities can be of use for tourism scholars and practitioners in the marketing planning process. Majority of European citizens are travelling mainly within their home country (Eurobarometer, 2014) still small countries of Central Europe are among the most active international travellers (Eurostat, 2018). The aim of the research is to study the usage of sources of information and their combinations in outbound travel planning for Dutch and Belgian travellers.

The research is based on the data of a survey of travelling population carried out in different cities of the Netherlands and Belgium in the summer 2018. 502 valid questionnaires were obtained. MS Excel, SPSS and R network visualization visNetwork software tools were used for analysing the data applying following methods - descriptive statistics, crosstabulation and network analysis method concept as network diagram.

The conclusions and recommendations of the study are addressed to marketing organizations of tourism destinations and companies, whose target market is tourists from Belgium and the Netherlands.

Keywords: *travel planning, information sources, experience, social media.*

JEL code: M31, L83

Introduction

The kind of information search consumers undertake and information they acquire has significant consequences for the purchases customers will make, therefore understanding of information search patterns is essential for destination marketers (Steen Jacobsen, Munar, 2012). In the Information Age customers in general and especially in the tourism industry are overwhelmed with the amount of information, therefore understanding how tourists acquire information and what kind of sources of information they use is important for marketing management decisions. As indicated by researchers (Zarezadeh, Benckendorff, Gretzel, 2019), tourism information search is a complex and dynamic process that is applied in several phases of travel. Tourists are using different sources of information and the use as well as combination of sources of information evolve over time (Almeida-Santana, Moreno-Gil, 2017) consequently there is a need for repeated studies to track possible changes in tourist behaviour for information search patterns. Understanding tourists' information search peculiarities can be of use for tourism scholars and practitioners in the marketing planning process.

As indicated in a household study of Eurobarometer (2014), almost 40% of European citizens are travelling mainly within their home country, especially in south-eastern countries and some of the larger countries, such as Italy, Spain and Poland, where more than 50 percent of the population have never been abroad in their entire life. The most active international travellers are citizens of small countries of Central Europe. The Netherlands and Belgium are among TOP10 countries of highest share of travelling population of EU (Eurostat, 2018). The aim of the research is to study the usage of sources of information and their combinations in outbound travel planning for Dutch and Belgian travellers.

This study focuses on the pre-travel phase – the planning phase of outbound trips.

The following research questions are explored:

- Which sources of information are used more often when planning a trip abroad,
- What are the differences in the use of information sources between different segments of potential travellers,
- Which sources of information potential travellers combine to obtain information when planning an outbound trip?

The research paper is organised as follows – starting with literature review on tourism information search importance, variety of information source types and determinants affecting use of information sources, then describing statistical research methods used, study organisation process, sampling, data collection, result analysis, finishing with conclusion.

Literature Review

1. Importance and specifics in information search for tourists

Information search behaviour in tourism industry has been a popular research area in the recent decades (Dey, Sarma, 2010; Coromina, Camprubí, 2016) and an impressive amount of literature has been published on tourist information search, 556,000 results according to Google Scholar 2016 was indicated by Zarezadeh, Benckendorff and Gretzel (2019), still the concept of consumer search for information dates back to the research done by Stigler (1961) that was conceptualised in theory of the economics of information, outlining that consumers will continue expending resources for search until the utility gained from the search exceeds the cost. (Stigler, 1961; Money, Crotts, 2003; Zarezadeh, Benckendorff, Gretzel, 2019). Information search is a complex and dynamic process (Dey, Sarma, 2010; Coromina, Camprubí, 2016; Zarezadeh, Benckendorff, Gretzel, 2019) as consumers in the searching process are checking various sources in all stages of their travel decision-making as a multiple set of decisions. What kind of source of information consumers will use has implications (Money, Crotts, 2003) for their travel decision they will eventually make.

In comparison with other industries, complex and fragmentary nature of the tourism product determines that tourists must make a number of decisions before a trip that require obtaining a substantial amount of information. (Xiang, Wang, O’Leary, Fesenmaier, 2015). Travel products as a set of services are intangible, involving personal interactions between customers and service providers as well as customer to customer influence, especially international tourism products have functional, financial, physical, psychological, and social risks (Bieger, Laesser, 2004; Xiang, Wang, O’Leary, Fesenmaier, 2015), a tourist is highly involved in the information search because of high-perceived risk factor (Bieger, Laesser, 2004; Sirakaya, Woodside, 2005).

With increasing frequency, in tourism marketing research consumers have been segmented based on their information search behaviour (Bieger, Laesser, 2004).

2. Variety of information sources in tourist decision making process

Information search process can be divided into internal and external search, in the internal information search tourists use their long-term memory to make decisions in travelling (Tjostheim, Tussyadiah, Hoem, 2007; Shekarchizadeh, Ranjbarian, Ghasemi, 2018), still, when additional information is not sufficient, they use external sources from the environment that can be both marketing or non-marketing sources. (Sirakaya, Woodside, 2005; Pan, Fesenmaier, 2006; Tjostheim, Tussyadiah, Hoem, 2007; Coromina, Camprubí, 2016).

Generally, there are three main reasons for external information searches in tourism (Coromina, Camprubí, 2016):

- trips are considered a high-risk purchase,
- intangibility of the tourism product
- unfamiliarity with the new destination.

Four basic categories of external sources of information can be grouped as follows (Beatty, Smith, 1987; Assael, 1987; Hawkins et al., 1998):

- personal e.g., word-of-mouth advice from friends and relatives;

- marketer-dominated e.g., advertisements in print and electronic media;
- neutral e.g., third-party sources such as travel agents and travel guides;
- experiential sources – direct contacts with retailer.

In addition to the previously mentioned groups, Internet can be added as a fifth uniquely interactive source of external information (Money, Crofts, 2003), due to the wide range of information available, searching on the Internet has become an increasingly dominant tool for travellers (Tjostheim, Tussyadiah, Hoem, 2007; Xiang, Gretzel, 2010; No, Kim, 2015). Some researchers add DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations) information as neutral, some as marketing source (Money, Crofts, 2003).

The number of information sources differ in various research papers, Bieger and Laesser (2004) included 18 different types of information sources, Coromina and Camprubí (2016) used 11 types and Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco and Izquierdo-Yusta (2015) used 19 types. There is no common agreement among researchers on the number of variables that should be included in information search analysis (Coromina, Camprubí, 2016).

Previous research indicates that travellers to a high degree (Money, Crofts, 2003; Gursoy, Umbreit, 2004) use a combination of different information sources, therefore marketing researchers should pay their attention not only to the frequencies of information sources, but also to the particular combination of sources used by potential travellers. (Tjostheim, Tussyadiah, Hoem, 2007). Tourists use different channels of information that are continuously evolving over time, therefore there is a need for repeated studies to track possible changes in tourist behaviour for information search patterns (Almeida-Santana, Moreno-Gil, 2017).

3. Factors affecting the use of information sources

There is a general common agreement in academic literature on tourism consumer behaviour that socio-demographic characteristics and travel behavioural variables influence search of information (Coromina, Camprubí, 2016; Shekarchizadeh, Ranjbarian, Ghasemi, 2018), but the opinion on particular influences differs between scholars and their studies. Fodness and Murray (1999) developed an in-depth study and models of tourist information search (Zarezadeh, Benckendorff, Gretzel, 2019) analysing information search process, strategies and outcomes. Such socio-demographic characteristics as age, gender, income, education, nationality and occupation are the conditioning variables in information search strategy (Coromina, Camprubí, 2016), taking as an example the research of Luo, Feng and Cai (2004), they confirmed that gender and household income are related to information search preferences, still no differences were indicated among different ages, education levels or occupations (Luo, Feng, Cai, 2004). Fodness and Murray (1999) also concluded in their research that the level of income affected information sources used.

Studying scale for sociodemographic and travel behaviour characteristics is important for tourism marketers to be able to determine the dimensions of information source use for better understanding of the communication strategy needed (Coromina, Camprubí, 2016).

Additionally to the previously mentioned variables, cross-cultural studies also concluded that nationality has certain influence on tourist information search behaviour (Money, Crofts, 2003; Coromina, Camprubí, 2016).

Research results and discussion

The study is based on survey data from interviewing Dutch and Belgian residents in August 2018 in different cities of the Netherlands and Belgium. During the survey 502 valid questionnaires were obtained. Table 1 shows the structure of respondents.

Table 1

Respondent's Profile					
	Number of respondents	%		Number of respondents	%
All respondents	502	100	Gender		

Age			Male	212	42.2
18 – 24	245	48.8	Female	290	57.8
25 – 44	202	40.2	Country		
45+	55	11	The Netherlands	267	53.2
			Belgium	235	46.8

Data source: Dutch and Belgian population survey data 2018

One of the survey questions was about the use of different information sources in the travel planning process ('Where did you get information for planning the outbound trips?'). Respondents were given the option to select multiple answers out of the 13 offered, as well as to record a different one.

Study results show that, despite the increasing role of information and communication technologies in the last decade, more than half of the potential travellers use the experience and suggestions of their friends and relatives (word of mouth communication) and their personal experience (internal source) when planning outbound trips. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Use of information sources for planning the outbound trips in the Netherlands and Belgium

Information sources	All respondents (n=502)	
	Frequency	%
My previous experience/ previous visit	230	45.6
Experience/ suggestions of friends/ relatives	317	62.9
Guidebooks (Lonely Planet, Dorling Kindersley, etc.)	111	22.0
Newspapers and magazines	76	15.1
TV and radio	88	17.4
Travel fairs	66	13.1
Destination official webpage	162	32.1
Homepage of travel agency/ tour operator/ Suggestions of travel agent	115	22.8
Tourism related platforms (TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, etc.)	107	21.2
Facebook	135	26.8
Instagram	117	23.2
Travel blogs	120	23.8
On-line reviews from other travellers	109	21.6
Other	12	2.4
	Google (4), YouTube (4), Wikipedia (1), Qudra (1), TV series (1), Zoover (1)	

Data source: Dutch and Belgian population survey data 2018

The results of the study show that Internet sources (websites, social networks) are used more often than traditional tourism information sources. The most frequently used information sources on the Internet prior to travelling are official websites of tourist destinations, used by 32.1% of the respondents, together with the most frequently used social networking site - Facebook, which is used by 26.8% of respondents. Only traditional travel guidebooks have the same frequency of use as most Internet sources (used by 22% of all respondents).

From analysing the data showing gender differences, it can be concluded that men are more confident in their personal travel experience than women. (See Table 3) Women, on the other hand, are more likely than men to use information available at travel agencies when planning trips abroad. From the listed Internet sources, women more often than men use Instagram and travel blogs in the travel planning process, as well as draw information more often from TV, radio, newspapers and magazines.

Table 3

Use of information sources for planning the outbound trips by gender

Information sources	Female (n=290)		Male (n=212)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
My previous experience/ previous visit	122	42.1	108	50.9

Experience/ suggestions of friends/ relatives	180	62.1	136	64.2
Guidebooks (Lonely Planet, Dorling Kindersley, etc.)	63	21.7	48	22.6
Newspapers and magazines	51	17.6	25	11.8
TV and radio	56	19.3	31	14.6
Travel fairs	40	13.8	26	12.3
Destination official webpage	94	32.4	68	32.1
Homepage of travel agency/ tour operator/ Suggestions of travel agent	75	25.9	40	18.9
Tourism related platforms (TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, etc.)	64	22.1	43	20.3
Facebook	78	26.9	57	26.9
Instagram	78	26.9	39	18.4
Travel blogs	76	26.2	44	20.8
On-line reviews from other travellers	59	20.3	50	23.6
Other	8 Google YouTube TV series Zoover	2.8	4 Google Wikipedia Qudra	1.9

Data source: Dutch and Belgian population survey data 2018

The analysis of the survey data by age group reveals several differences, which are shown in Table 4. Experience and suggestions from friends and relatives as a frequently used source of information, when planning trips abroad, is more common in the age group 18 – 24 (67.8% of all respondents in this age group). Respondents in the age group 25 – 44 use their past travel experience more often (49.5% of all respondents in this age group) than other age groups in the travel planning process, which can be explained by the higher travel intensity and thus more experience. Younger travellers are less likely to use traditional guidebooks (only 16.7% of all respondents in the age group 18 – 24), but are much more likely to use information from social networks (from Instagram – 34.3%, from Facebook – 30.2%). Respondents over the age of 45 are equally likely to use their travel experiences (40% of respondents in the age group 45+), as well as those of their friends and relatives (41.8%). A little less often they use information from tourism destination websites (36.4%) and travel agencies (32.7%). Much less often travellers of this age group use social networks as sources of information in the travel planning process, both in comparison to other sources of information and to other age groups.

Table 4

Use of information sources for planning the outbound trips in different age groups

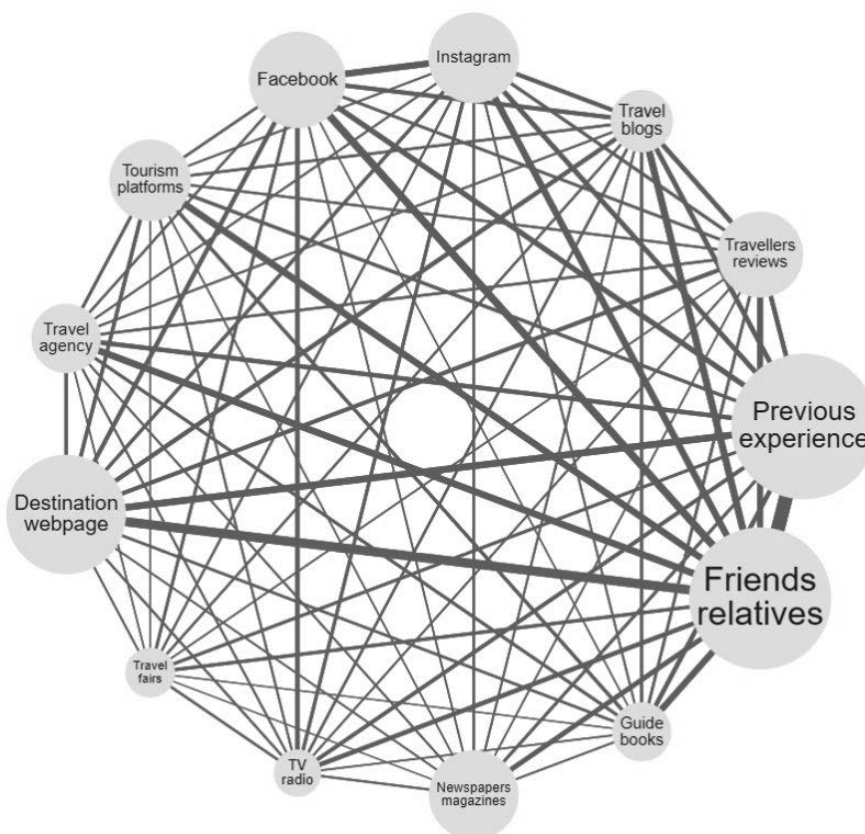
Information sources	Age groups					
	18 – 24 n=245		25 – 44 n=202		45+ n=55	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
My previous experience/ previous visit	108	44.1	100	49.5	22	40.0
Experience/ suggestions of friends/ relatives	166	67.8	127	62.9	23	41.8
Guidebooks (Lonely Planet, Dorling Kindersley, etc.)	41	16.7	55	27.2	15	27.3
Newspapers and magazines	42	17.1	23	11.4	11	20.0
TV and radio	48	19.6	33	16.3	6	10.9
Travel fairs	41	16.7	22	10.9	3	5.5
Destination official webpage	74	30.2	68	33.7	20	36.4
Homepage of travel agency/ tour operator/Suggestions of travel agent	51	20.8	46	22.8	18	32.7
Tourism related platforms (TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, etc.)	47	19.2	52	25.7	8	14.5
Facebook	74	30.2	56	27.7	5	9.1
Instagram	84	34.3	31	15.3	2	3.6
Travel blogs	62	25.3	50	24.8	8	14.5

On-line reviews from other travellers	55	22.4	46	22.8	8	14,5
Other	9	3.7	2	1.0	1	1.8

Data source: Dutch and Belgian population survey data 2018

Travellers usually use more than one source of information when planning their outbound trip, as evidenced by the results of the survey. Therefore, find out which sources of information are most often combined with one another. The following figures (Figure 1 – Figure 4) show the combinations of information sources used for travel planning by all respondents and by age group. The combinations of information sources were determined by selecting each information source and, accordingly, the frequency of use of other information sources combined with it, expressed as a percentage of the frequency of use of the selected information source. Combinations of information sources were visualized using the R package for network visualization visNetwork. The size of the background circles and the size of the letters of the information sources indicate the frequency of use of those sources in combination with other information sources, the thickness of the connecting lines indicates the intensity of combining the connected information sources.

All respondents (Figure 1): Respondents who have used their personal experience from previous trips as a source of information for travel planning abroad most often combined this internal source of information with recommendations from friends and relatives (69% of the respondents selected by this indication), travel destination websites (34%) and information on Facebook (26%).



Data source: Dutch and Belgian population survey data 2018

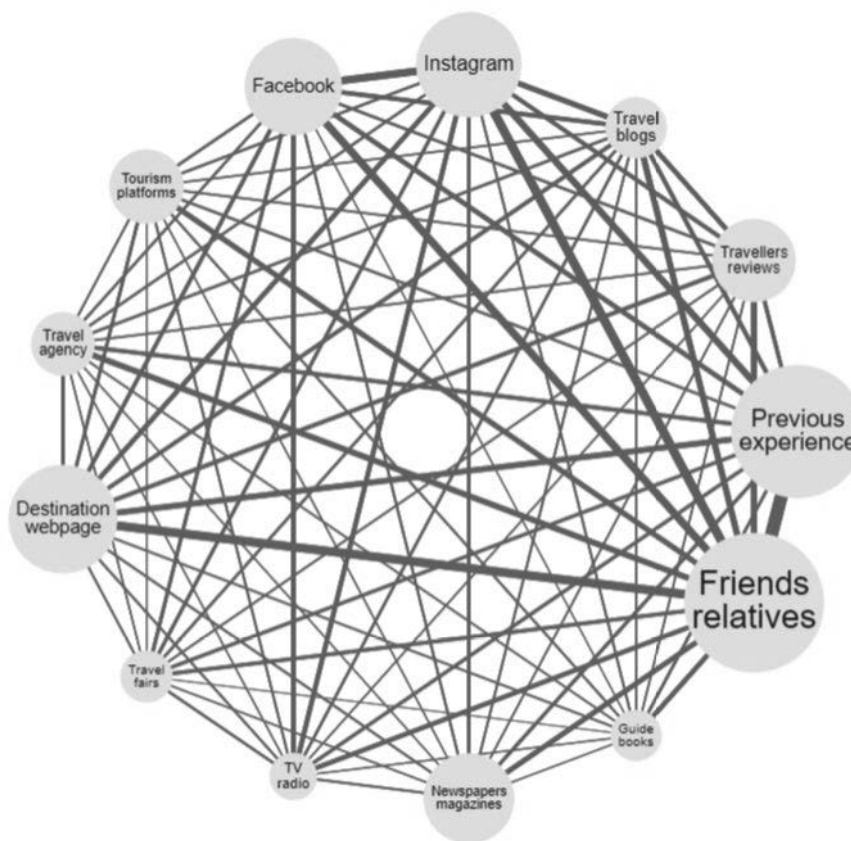
Fig. 1. Combinations of information sources used for outbound travel planning (all respondents)

Those respondents, who use experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives, most often combined it with their own travel experience (50%), travel destination websites (33%) and information on Facebook (27%). Respondents using guidebooks as a source of information for travel planning most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (64%), their personal experience from previous trips (45%) and tourism related platforms (TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, etc.) (34%). Respondents who have used

information from newspapers and magazines most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (71%), their personal experience from previous trips (45%) and information from the social network Instagram (36%). Those respondents, who use information from TV and radio, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (58%), social network Facebook (55%) and their personal experience from previous trips (49%). Respondents using information from travel fairs most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (58%), their personal experience from previous trips (53%) and social network Facebook (55%). Respondents who have used information from destinations official websites most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (64%), their personal experience from previous trips (48%), travel blogs and social network Facebook (both 30%). Those respondents, who use information from travel agencies, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (66%), their personal experience from previous trips (44%) and information from destination official websites (34%). Respondents using information from tourism related platforms most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (69%), information from destination official websites (38%), guidebooks (36%) and their personal experience from previous trips (36%). Respondents who have used information from Facebook most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (62%), social network Instagram (54%) and their personal experience from previous trips (44%). Respondents using information from social network Instagram most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (62%), information from another social network Facebook (62%) and their personal experience from previous trips (46%). Those respondents, who use information from travel blogs, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (65%), their personal experience from previous trips (44%) and on-line reviews from other travellers (43%). Respondents who have used information from on-line reviews from other travellers most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (60%), information from travel blogs (48%) and their personal experience from previous trips (47%).

Age group 18 – 24 (Figure 2): Younger respondents (age group 18 – 24) have most often combined their personal experiences from previous trips with recommendations from friends and relatives (74%), information on Instagram (37%) and travel destination websites (32%). They have most often combined the recommendations from friends and relatives with their personal experiences from previous trips (48%), information on Instagram (33%) and travel destination websites (32%). Respondents using the guidebooks as a source of information for travel planning most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (71%), their personal experience from previous trips (44%), tourism related platforms (34%) and social network Instagram (34%). Respondents who have used information from newspapers and magazines most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (74%), their personal experience from previous trips (50%) and information from social network Instagram (50%). Those respondents, who use information from TV and radio, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (58%), social network Facebook (63%) and Instagram (60%). Respondents using information from travel fairs most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (56%), social network Facebook (54%), Instagram (51%) and their personal experience from previous trips (51%). Respondents who have used information from destinations official websites most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (72%), their personal experience from previous trips (47%), and social network Instagram (30%). Those respondents, who use information from travel agencies, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (69%), their personal experience from previous trips (49%) and

information from destination official websites (41%). Respondents using information from tourism related platforms most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (68%), information from destination official websites (43%) and social network Facebook (36%). Respondents, who have used information from Facebook, most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (62%), another social network Instagram (62%), information from TV and radio (41%). Respondents using information from social network Instagram most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (64%), information from another social network Facebook (55%) and their personal experience from previous trips (48%). Those respondents, who use information from travel blogs, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (60%), information from social network Instagram (53%) and on-line reviews from other travellers (47%). Respondents who have used information from on-line reviews from other travellers most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (67%), information from travel blogs (53%), social network Instagram and destination official webpages (both 46%).

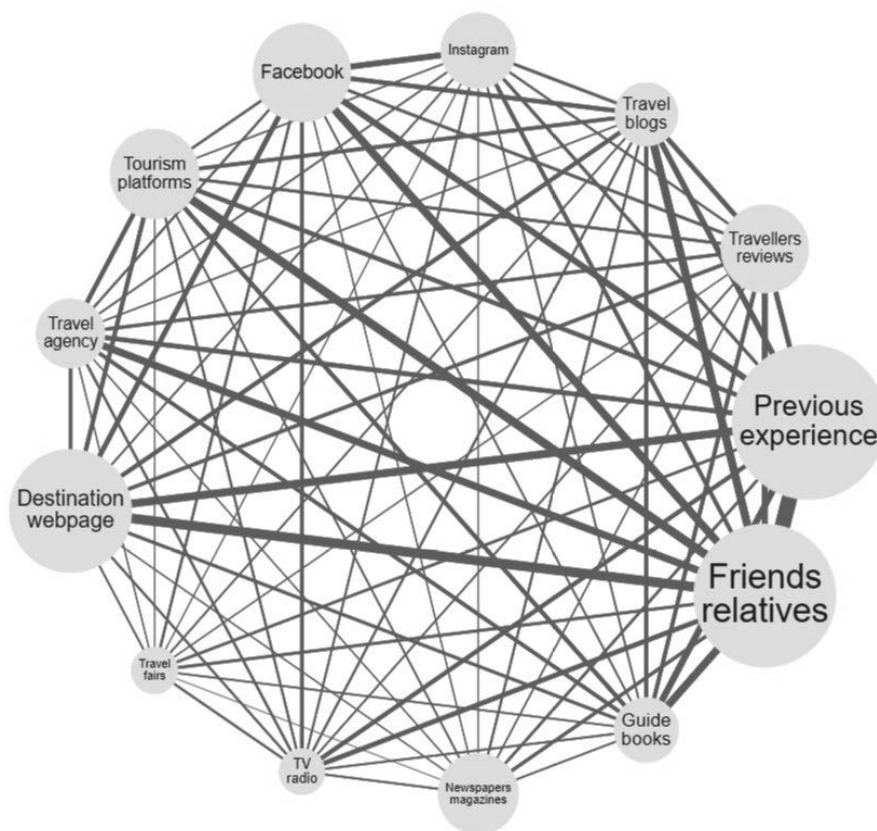


Data source: Dutch and Belgian population survey data 2018

Fig. 2. Combinations of information sources used for outbound travel planning (age group 18 – 24)

Age group 25 – 44 (Figure 3): Respondents in the age group 25 – 44 most often combined their personal experience with recommendations from friends and relatives (71%), information on travel destination websites (35%) and from guidebooks (29%). They have most often combined recommendations from friends and relatives with their personal experience (55.9%), information on travel destination websites (33.9%) and from tourism related Internet platforms (29.9%). Respondents using the guidebooks as a source of information for travel planning most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (62%), their personal experience from previous trips (53%) and tourism related platforms (TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, etc.) (35%). Respondents, who have used information from newspapers and magazines, most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions

from their friends and relatives (65%), their personal experience from previous trips (52%) and information from travel blogs (44%). Those respondents, who use information from TV and radio, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (64%), their personal experience from previous trips (58%) and social network Facebook (49%).



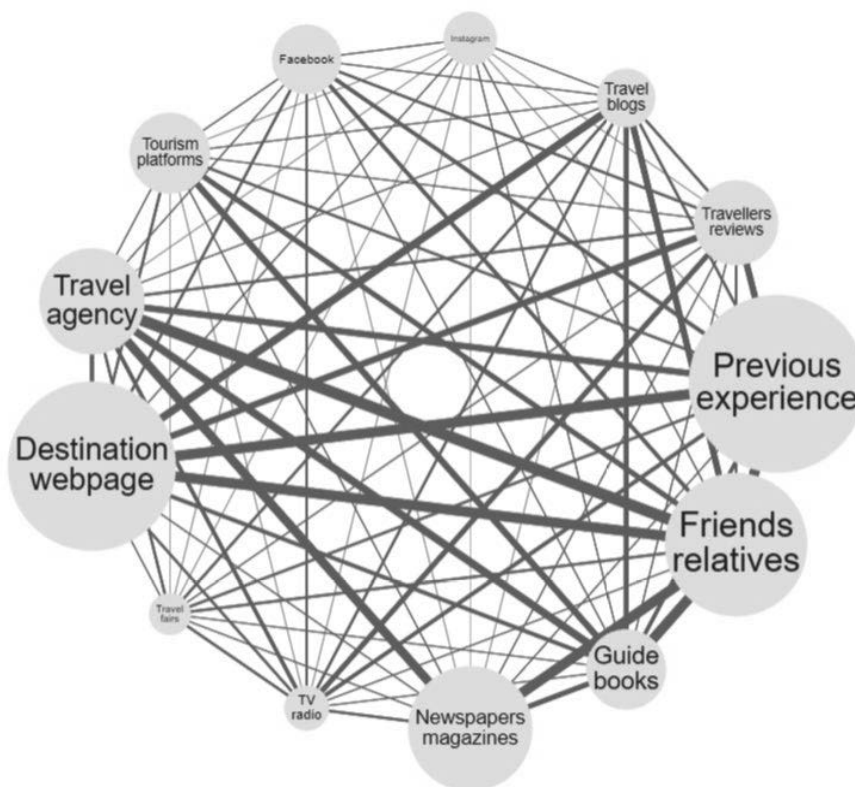
Data source: Dutch and Belgian population survey data 2018

Fig. 3. Combinations of information sources used for outbound travel planning (age group 25 – 44)

Respondents using information from travel fairs most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (59%), their personal experience from previous trips (55%) and social network Facebook (50%). Respondents, who have used information on travel destination official websites, most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (63%), their personal experience from previous trips (52%) and social network Facebook (32%). Those respondents, who use information from travel agencies, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (70%), their personal experience from previous trips (46%) and information from tourism related platforms (44%). Respondents using information from tourism related platforms most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (73%), their personal experience from previous trips (39%) and information from travel agencies (39%). Respondents, who have used information from Facebook, most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (63%), their personal experience from previous trips (48%) and another social network Instagram (46%). Respondents using information from social network Instagram most frequently combined this source with information from another social network Facebook (84%), experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (58%) and their personal experience from previous trips (45%). Those respondents, who use information from travel blogs, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (72%), their personal experience from previous trips (50%) and on-line reviews from other travellers (42%). Respondents who have used information from on-line reviews from

other travellers most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (57%), their personal experience from previous trips (48%) and information from travel blogs (46%).

Age group 45+ (Figure 4): Respondents in the age group 45+ have also most often combined their personal experiences with recommendations from friends and relatives and information on travel destination websites (both sources used by 36.4% of respondents), information from travel agencies and on-line reviews from other travellers (both sources used by 22.7% of respondents).



Data source: Dutch and Belgian population survey data 2018

Fig. 4. Combinations of information sources used for outbound travel planning (age group 45+)

Respondents in the age group 45+ have combined experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives with information from travel agencies (39.1%), their own travel experience, information from guidebooks and destination webpages equally often (34.8%). Respondents using the guidebooks as a source of information for travel planning most frequently combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (53%), information from travel agencies (40%) and tourism related Internet platforms (33%). Respondents, who have used information from newspapers and magazines, most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (73%), information from travel agencies (64%) and information from guidebooks (36%). Those respondents, who use information from TV and radio, most often combined it with on-line reviews from other travellers (67%), their own travel experience (50%) and information from travel agencies (50%). Respondents, who used travel fairs as a source of information for travel planning abroad, also used their previous travel experiences, experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives, information from travel agencies, travel blogs and TV and radio equally frequently (67%). Respondents who have used information from destinations official websites most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (40%), their personal experience from previous trips (40%) and travel blogs (30%). Those respondents, who use information from travel agencies, most often combined it with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (50%), information from newspapers and magazines (39%) and guidebooks (33%).

Respondents using information from tourism related platforms most frequently combined this source with information from guidebooks (63%) and experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (50%). Respondents who have used information from social network Facebook most often combined this source with experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives and their personal experience from previous trips (both 60%). Those respondents, who use information from travel blogs, most often combined it with information from destination official websites (75%), experiences and suggestions from their friends and relatives (63%) and guidebooks (50%). Respondents who have used information from on-line reviews from other travellers most often combined this source with their personal experience from previous trips (63%), information from destination official websites (63%) and TV and radio (50%). Too few respondents have used information from Instagram to objectively evaluate the combination of this source with other sources.

Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

Practitioners usually make marketing decisions on combinations of information channels instead of individual channels of information. Scientific novelty of this research paper is analysis of the most often combined sources of information as well as use of network visualization visNetwork for information channels for different groups of segments

A key finding from the study is that despite the growing role of the Internet in today's world, the personal 'word of mouth' information from friends and relatives as well as search for internal information based on previous travel experience of potential traveller himself is more important in the outbound travel planning process. This result is common to the whole group of respondents and to different gender and age groups. These results, which highlight the importance of personal experience in the travel planning process, lead to the conclusion that tourism destinations and individual tourism product providers must focus on creating an attractive, memorable, and high-quality visitor and customer experience.

The most frequently used combinations of information sources are the experiences and suggestions of friends and relatives, the experiences of potential travellers themselves, as well as tourism destination websites and the social network Facebook. Such combinations of information sources are also prevalent in the age group 25 – 44. For younger travellers (age group 18 – 24) the most frequently combined sources of information are the experiences and suggestions of friends and relatives, the experiences of potential travellers themselves, tourism destination websites as well as social networks Facebook and Instagram. In contrast, in the age group over 45 years, information from travel agencies and traditional travel guidebooks appear alongside experiences of potential travellers themselves, experiences and suggestions from friends and relatives, information on travel destination official websites.

The above conclusions should be taken into account for tourist destinations and tourism product providers whose target markets are the Netherlands and Belgium.

As the most important source of non-marketing information for tourists from Belgium and the Netherlands is the advice of relatives and friends, therefore a suggestion for marketing organizations and business marketers looking to reach this target market is to work on quality.

The most frequently used combinations of marketing tourism sources for Belgian and Dutch tourists are the destination websites in combination with Facebook. Therefore, it is important for tourism organizations and business marketers to use and coordinate these sources of information. For those travel agencies and businesses whose target market is young people in Belgium and the Netherlands, it is important to use and match the information on Instagram profiles and ads to combine marketing information sources in addition to websites and Facebook. It is likely that the Internet sources will be even more important in the future. Internet will also become very important as an information source in the travel phase for travellers on the move

There are certain limitations to the study and to the result analysis presented in this paper that are related to narrow research in two European markets analysing data of one-time study. A suggestion for future research is as follows – repeated studies should be carried out to track possible changes in tourist behaviour for information search patterns as use of information sources and their combination evolve over time and in different tourism markets.

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