A Study on the Effects of Response Time on Travel Package Attributes

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Abstract: The rapid growth of online surveys in the past decade has raised questions about the effects of response time on the results. The focus of our current study is to discuss the impact of response time on various travel package attributes, thereby understanding consumer cognitive process. This study makes use of a recently conducted conjoint analysis experiment on travel package preferences in order to gain insights into the impact of response time on attribute importance and willingness to pay (WTP). Accordingly, the respondents are grouped as fast and slow depending on their response time and their differences in conjoint attribute importance estimates are investigated. The study also examines the changes in consumer willingness to pay for the two groups. Additionally, the distinctions in socioeconomic characteristics between the fast and slow respondents are also analyzed. The results and conclusions obtained from this research will help tour operators to scrutinize the time taken by consumers and thereby deploy appropriate marketing strategy based on the respective importance values and WTP trends.

1 INTRODUCTION

Survey based research has been one of the most prominent mechanisms to elicit social response through both direct and indirect techniques. With the advent of the internet, online surveys have become a popular way to conduct survey research due to better data management, cost-effectiveness, wider target population and higher user interactivity (Benfield and Szlemko, 2006; Couper, 2000; Malhotra, 2008; Van Selm and Jankowski, 2006; Höhne et al, 2018). The use of online surveys also provides respondents the flexibility to take as much time to think as required because of absence of external pressure (Cook et al, 2011). The response time taken to fill up the survey can be easily measured in case of online surveys without obstructing the respondent's thinking process. The time thus gathered, can be used to derive valuable insights into consumer behavioral patterns and decision making process (Baxter and Hinson, 2001; Skowronski and Carlston, 1987; Mayerl et al, 2019; Gibbons and Rammsayer, 1999; Hertel et al, 2000; Sheppard and Teasdale, 2000; Mayerl, 2013).

Although response time is well researched to have impact on customers, not many studies analyze the impact of response time on the importance given by customers to various product attributes. One such study was done by Holmes et al (1998) wherein they observed willingness to pay trends according to survey response time for a conjoint analysis setup. Conjoint analysis is a popular indirect measurement technique used to understand consumer preferences and tradeoff depending upon product attributes (Green and Wind, 1975; Ryan, 1999). Consumers are asked to rate different product profiles with varying attributes in order to understand changes in their underlying importance (Hobbs, 1996; Phillips et al, 2002). These ratings are then modified to part worth utilities and relative importance measures for product attributes so as to evaluate consumer preferences. In addition to determining product attribute utilities, conjoint analysis has also been used to estimate willingness to pay for changes in certain attributes (Gensler et al, 2012; Palumbo, 2011; Breidert et al, 2006). However, the existing literature on conjoint analysis with implications of response time is limited and it fails to provide a detailed analysis of the effects of time on importance values of product attributes.

The focus of our current study is to discuss the impact of response time on conjoint importance values, thereby understanding consumer cognitive process. This study makes use of the survey results carried out to find out the importance and willingness

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to pay for different attributes of tour packages on analyzing tourist preferences (Pai & Ananthakumar, 2017). In order to examine the effects of response time, we categorize the survey respondents into two types, namely slow and fast, as per their survey response times. We then move on to identify differences between the two groups depending upon their preference for certain attributes. We also aim to examine the changes in consumer willingness to pay for the two groups. The differences between the two groups in terms of both attribute importance and willingness to pay can be utilized while developing effective marketing strategies.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 involves related literature review for response time effects on consumer decisions; Section 3 describes our data and methodology; Section 4 provides the results of our analysis and Section 5 presents the conclusions and marketing implications of our study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

For answering a typical survey question, the respondents are required to complete multiple cognitive tasks such as question comprehension, judgment, choice comparison, response formatting (Tourangeau et al, 2000) and hence the entire process of survey completion involves significant cognitive efforts. Prior to the advent of internet-based surveys, researchers explored the effect of respondents' time to think on survey responses (Svedsater 2007; Cook et al. 2007, 2012). It was observed that time to think reduces uncertainty about response as well as the willingness to pay (WTP). Cook et al (2012) also found a correlation between individual reflection time and demand for the product to be valued under the valuation task.

With the increase in the number of online and computer assisted surveys, multiple studies have tried to explore the impact of objectively measured response time on the responses. Holmes et al (1998) observed that response time systematically affects the preference structure for rainforest protection in an adaptive conjoint analysis experiment. They also found that an increase in response time also results in an increase in preference intensity, i.e. how strongly respondents prefer one product over another. Haaijer et al (2000) used a multinomial probit (MNP) model to show that greater response time results in more systematic responses due to decrease in the error variance.

Rose and Black (2006) demonstrate that response time not only influence heterogeneity within the mean of parameter distributions, but also has a significant influence upon variance heterogeneity. Brown et al (2008) noticed that responses become more stable with time and the response time falls with increase in the number of comparison tasks, due to increasing familiarity and experience. Bonsall and Lythgoe (2009) examined the determinants of response time in a choice experiment survey and showed that demographic factors such as age, education level as well as choice order and scenario complexity influence the response time. Hess and Stathopoulos (2013) deployed a response time model using survey engagement as a latent variable and observed positive correlation between response time and engagement. Campbell et al (2018) extended the latent class time model with different scales across classes to reveal that response becomes more and more deterministic with increase in response time. In a recent research, Marquis (2021) utilized the response times to study the problem of cheating in political knowledge tests and clearly indicated response time analysis to be a promising strategy for alleviating the problem of cheating behaviour.

The causes for faster or slower response times can differ for various respondents. Well informed, opinionated individuals may respond quicker than their counterparts (Krosnick 1989; Bassili 1993). Alternatively, individuals with lesser motivation or cognitive skills might rush through the survey and hence report lower response times (Malhotra 2008). The mode and format of survey administration, online or offline, might also affect the response times. Heerwegh (2002) compared the response times for radio buttons and drop-down boxes and found that radio buttons recorded faster response time.

Additionally, respondent involvement has also been known to have a significant impact on willingness-to-pay estimates (Berrens et al 2004). Svedsater (2007) found that giving respondents time to think decreased WTP for donations to an environmental program among students. Macmillan et al (2002) found that respondents who were not given time to think had mean WTP 2–4 times greater than those who were given significant time. Similarly, Subade (2007) observed that WTP estimates reduced without intervention of interviewers, who would otherwise control the flow of the survey and thereby increase the completion time. Cook et al (2012) argue that time to think removes interviewer bias and helps interviewees take well informed choices after properly researching or consulting with their friends and family. However, the literature lacks when it

comes to studying the effects of response time specifically on conjoint analysis estimates of WTP. This motivates our study to answer how exactly response time affects importance attached by consumers to various attributes and WTP values.

3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study uses data from a survey that investigates the importance of various travel package attributes in a conjoint analysis setup (Pai & Ananthakumar, 2017). The main aspects of this work are stated so that it can be taken forward in the present study. Conjoint analysis is a popular marketing analysis technique used to estimate both the individual importance values of product attributes as well as its combined influence with other attributes on customers' product choices (Lewis, Ding and Geschke, 1991). To conduct a conjoint analysis experiment, three main steps must be followed: (1) identify the attributes, (2) determine attribute levels, and (3) compile the attribute profiles (Van der Pol and Ryan,1996). For this study, a conjoint analysis experiment to explore consumer preferences for travel packages was conducted. Six different travel package attributes including price, length of stay, hotel rating, season of travel, destination and mode of transport were chosen. Each of the six attributes was further expanded into five levels as described in Table 1. By applying the principles of orthogonal array design, the entire full factorial design of all levels (5x5x5x5x5x5 i.e 15625 profiles) was reduced to 25 tour packages so that the effects of attributes could be studied without any interference (Green, 1974; Hair et al., 2006).

A comprehensive online questionnaire comprising 33 questions split into two segments was devised. The first segment included questions to assess the socioeconomic background of the survey participant. Details such as gender, age, occupation, income and marital status were gathered in this segment. In the second segment, the participants were asked to rate the 25 tour packages on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing most interested and 1 representing least interested. Instead of just providing plain textual description, the 25 tour packages were accompanied with pictures displaying features of the corresponding package so that the participants would get a better idea of the levels. A total of 168 individuals completed the survey, out of which 153 responses (15 incomplete responses removed) were used for the analysis. Details of the respondents' backgrounds are described in Table 2.

Table 1: Tour package attributes and levels.

Attributes	*Levels*
Price	< 20k, 20 - 35k, 35 - 50k, 50 - 75k, > 75k
Length of stay	<3, 4, 5 - 7, 8 - 10, >11
Hotel rating	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Season	Winter(December - February), Spring(March - April), Summer(May - June), Monsoon(July - September), Autumn(September - November)
Destination	Adventure & Activity, Beach, Hill station, Heritage & Wildlife, Pilgrimage
Mode of transport	Flight, Train, Bus, Car, Minibus

Table 2: Socioeconomic characteristics of the sample.

Characteristic	%
Gender:	
Male	48
Female	52
Age (years):	
Less than 25	27
25 - 40	18
40 – 60	49
60 or above	6
Family Status:	
Single	34
Married	66
Occupation:	
Working	69
Non-working*	31
Income (in INR):	
Less than 0.2 million	29
0.2 - 0.6 million	22
Greater than 0.6 million	49

*Non-working refers to respondents who are students or retired or unemployed

Conjoint analysis gives attribute importance and part-worth utilities at both aggregate as well as individual level (North, De Vos, & Kotze, 2003). Part-worth utility values measure the consumer preference for levels within attributes, with greater values denoting higher consumer liking for the level. The basic conjoint analysis model used in our study is as follows:

$$r = \beta_0 + \beta_1 d_1 + \beta_2 d_2 + \beta_3 d_3 + \beta_4 d_4 + \beta_5 d_5 + \beta_6 d_6 + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where r denotes user rating for corresponding tour package, d1 denotes price, d2 denotes length of stay, d3 denotes hotel rating, d4 denotes season, d5 denotes destination, d6 denotes mode of transport, βs the corresponding coefficients and ε denotes the error term. The six tour package attributes were chosen as independent variables whereas respondent ratings

were chosen as the dependent variable. Using the estimated beta values, relative importance of the attribute is a measure to understand how important a particular attribute is compared to the rest (Orme, 2010) and can be given as:

$$RI_{jk} = \frac{\max_l(\beta_{jkl}) - \min_l(\beta_{jkl})}{\sum_{k=1}^{K}\left(\max_l(\beta_{jkl}) - \min_l(\beta_{jkl})\right)} \quad (2)$$

where βjkl indicates the corresponding conjoint model weights for attribute k. Additionally, we also estimate the marginal willingness to pay (MWTP) for certain attribute level changes. MWTP can be viewed as the marginal rate of substitution (MRS) between price and non-price attributes. It provides a monetary value to identify fluctuations in the utility associated with product adjustments. Utility and price can be used to estimate MWTP from level l to level h of attribute k for an individual j as follows (Jedidi and Jagpal, 2009):

$$MWTP_{jk}(h,l) = \left(\frac{\max(p_j) - \min(p_j)}{\max_l(\beta_{j1l}) - \min_l(\beta_{j1l})}\right)\left(\beta_{jkh} - \beta_{jkl}\right) \quad (3)$$

where pj denotes the levels of the price attribute and the βj1l represents the corresponding part-worth utilities. The minimum and maximum price levels used for computing minimum MWTP values were 20,000 and 75,000 INR respectively. In order to compute MWTP, classes were identified for the attributes. For hotel ratings, the classes were - Budget hotels (1, 2 star) and Luxurious hotels (3, 4, 5 star). Similarly, the length of stay was divided into two categories - Short stay (4 or less), and Long stay (5 or more). Mode of transport was divided into flight and land routes. Minimum attribute MWTP values were found by considering maximum difference in the change of class by using minimum utility value from the higher class and the maximum utility value from the lower class. It was observed that under the given conditions, the best representative based on the frequencies of budget hotel to luxurious hotel was 2 star to 3 star, and for short stay to long stay was less than 3 days to greater than 11 days. Trains were selected for representing land-based mode of transport due to their maximum utility value. Yan and Tourangeau (2008) found multiple item specific features involving response time of survey such as question length, toughness of the question and position of the question within the survey. Total completion time averages out the effects of such various factors pertaining to each question and hence in our study, the total survey completion time (in minutes) was recorded for response time analysis. Descriptive statistics for completion time are presented in Table 3.

To analyze the survey response time, the respondents are divided into two groups. Respondents with response time less than 7 minutes are classified as fast respondents whereas those with response time greater than or equal to 7 minutes are classified as slow respondents. The chosen time boundary value is the greatest integer completion time less than the median completion time. In order to identify differences between the groups, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test is carried out on the attribute importance values derived from the conjoint analysis. This is followed by analysis of variance (ANOVA) on each of the six attribute importance to recognize where the difference stems from within the groups. Similarly, the three MWTP values are also tested for differences by using MANOVA, followed by ANOVA. We also analyze the groups to determine which group dominates for the individual willingness to pay. Following this, we conduct a thorough profiling of the socioeconomic data gathered from the survey and attempt to figure out the slow and fast groups based on their demographic features. Subsequent to this, appropriate statistical tests are carried out to confirm if the groups are different based on various demographic characteristics.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics.

Measure	Completion time (mins)
Mean	7.57
Median	7.27
Standard deviation	3.13
Maximum	14.67
Minimum	1.77
33rd percentile	5.8
66th percentile	8.45

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following subsections contain a detailed discussion of the most noteworthy findings of our study.

4.1 Differences based on the Response Time

The relative importance values estimated by the conjoint analysis technique can be used to get an idea of the desirability of each of the travel package attributes. Figure 1 shows the aggregate average relative importance values for all the attributes. The attributes in descending order of importance are hotel

rating (21.57%), price (19.58%), length of stay (16.63%), mode of transport (14.98%), destination (13.99%) and season (13.25%). Tables 4 and 5 respectively describe the MANOVA and ANOVA results for the conjoint importance values for the two groups. MANOVA reveals that there are significant differences between the importance values for slow and fast respondents ($p < 0.05$). ANOVA results show that among the attributes, importance for length of stay, hotel ratings, destination and mode of transport differed between the two groups. Price and season are found to have more or less the same importance for all the respondents. This could be because, price of a tour package is a factor which is somewhat pre-decided by individuals depending upon their budget. Likewise, season is another factor which is given similar importance by all consumers probably due to high preference for a pleasant travel weather which matches their work schedule.

The group means for the four significantly different attributes are compared to each other. It is found that mean importance for duration (Mfast = 15.32, Mslow = 17.74) and hotel rating (Mfast = 19.31, Mslow = 23.46) are greater for slow respondents compared to fast respondents. On the other hand, mean importance for destination (Mfast = 15.39, Mslow = 12.79) and mode of transport (Mfast = 14.09, Mslow = 12.54) are found to be higher for fast respondents. Duration and hotel ratings are found to have higher importance values in the aggregate results whereas destination and mode of transport feature in the bottom two attributes. It is also found that the mean importance values for all the four attributes are somewhat similar for fast respondents whereas slow ones specifically show more importance towards overall importance attributes i.e duration and hotel ratings. This suggests that slow respondents actually gave a more careful thought while deciding the importance attributes and not so much for the relatively unimportant attributes. Figure 2 shows the comparisons between importance values for the fast and slow respondents.

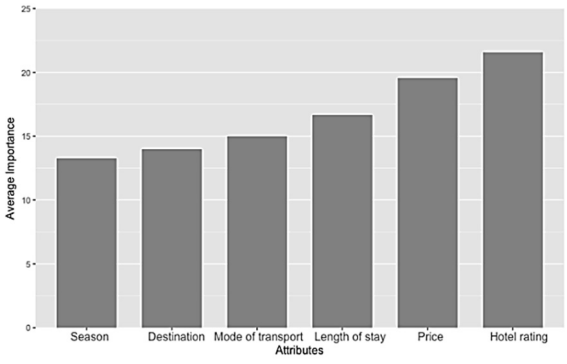

Figure 1: Average importance of the attributes in percentage in increasing order.

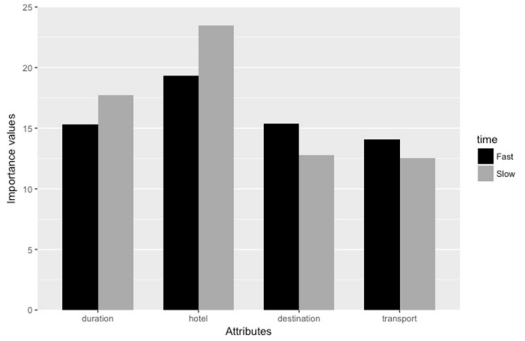

Figure 2: Average importance values in percentage for fast and slow groups.

Table 4: MANOVA results for conjoint importance values.

Statistic	Value	F	Num Df	Den Df	Pr (>F)
Wilk's Lambda	0.853	4.208	3	146	0.00062

Table 5: ANOVA results for conjoint importance values.

Attribute used for the test	Source	Mean square	F value	Pr (>F)
Price	Model Residual	121.64 56.76	2.143	0.1453
Duration	Model Residual	350.86 52.90	6.632	0.0109
Hotel rating	Model Residual	620.99 74.04	8.839	0.0434
Destination	Model Residual	310.67 60.726	5.116	0.0251
Season	Model Residual	62.3 33.258	1.873	0.1731
Mode of transport	Model Residual	850.20 47.79	17.79	4.2e-05

When it comes to marginal willingness to pay (MWTP), MANOVA results suggest that there are differences between the groups ($p < 0.05$). ANOVA reveals that the source of these differences is the MWTP for transport (train to flight) and duration (short to long stay) to some extent ($p < 0.10$). The remaining MWTP value i.e budget to luxurious hotel is found to be consistent across the groups. Thus, hotel rating, which was relatively an important attribute, show similar willingness to pay in spite of differences in importance. It is also found that MWTP for train to flight is considerably larger for fast respondents (Mfast = 18983 INR) as opposed to slow ones (Mslow = 5448 INR). Similarly, MWTP for

short to long stay is higher for fast respondents (Mfast = 8073 INR) as compared to their slow counterparts who have negative MWTP values (Mslow = -4355 INR). This means that for a travel agent willing to make economic benefits from tweaking the travel package attributes, the best option is to change mode of transport and duration rather than any other feature. The huge difference in the MWTP values reveals that fast respondents have a strong opinion both in terms of importance as well as spending budget for transport and duration. Tables 6 and 7 respectively describe the MANOVA and ANOVA results and Figure 3 depicts the MWTP values.

Table 6: MANOVA results for willingness to pay.

Statistic	Value	F	Num Df	Den Df	Pr (>F)
Wilk's Lambda	0.929	3.74	3	149	0.0125

Table 7: ANOVA results for willingness to pay.

Attribute used for the test	Source	Mean square	F value	Pr (>F)
Budget to luxurious hotel	Model Residual	1.66e+09 1.03e+09	1.603	0.207
Short to long stay	Model Residual	5.86e+09 2.07e+09	2.83	0.0946
Train to flight	Model Residual	6.96e+09 1.60e+09	4.343	0.0388

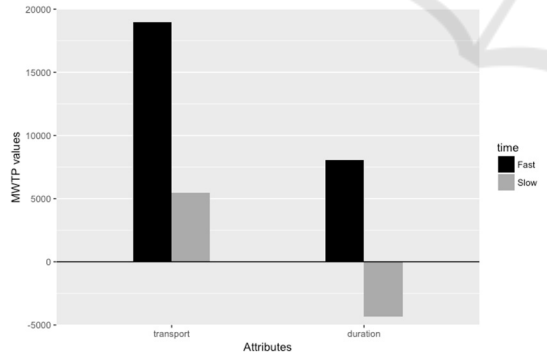

Figure 3: Average MWTP values in INR for fast and slow groups.

4.2 Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

As suggested by past studies, it is found that slow and fast respondents indeed show different preference structures. Importance for length of stay and hotel rating are observed to be high amongst slow respondents. These two attributes have considerable share of importance in the overall travel package combination. Fast respondents show higher affinity for destination and mode of transport, both of which had relatively low contribution to the travel package. This demonstrates that slow respondents give more careful thought in relatively important variables. However, fast respondents are found to be more strongly opinionated about their choices, which can be seen in the high value of their MWTP for both transport and duration. These findings align well with previously conducted studies (Bassili 1993, Malhotra 2008).

Since we have established that response time does have effects on consumer preferences, it is of interest to study the characteristics of a customer and thereby find whether a particular customer would take less or more time. Accordingly, we decide to analyse the demographic characteristics of the respondents in fast and slow groups. The demographic details of the fast and slow groups are described in Table 8.

In terms of demographics, respondents in the slow group (n = 83) are more than that of fast group (n = 70). The slow group has more middle-aged adults over the age of 40 and senior citizens. This group also consists mainly married, working individuals within the higher income group (greater than 0.6 million INR). The fast group has more of younger population of the age group below 25 years. This group consists

Table 8: Demographic profiles of the respondents.

Demographic attribute		Group 1 (slow)	Group 2 (fast)	Total
Gender	Male	47	32	79
	Female	36	38	74
Age	Less than 25	11	30	41
	25 - 40	11	16	27
	40 – 60	56	20	76
	60 or above	5	4	9
Family Status	Married	67	34	101
	Single	16	36	52
Occupation	Working	62	44	106
	Non-working	21	26	47
Income	< 0.2 m	21	24	45
	0.2 - 0.6 m	18	15	33
	> 0.6 m	44	31	75
Average time taken (mins)		9.87	4.85	

Table 9: Chi-square test results.

Attribute	Chi-square	df	p value
Gender	2.7773	1	0.2494
Age	22.081	1	2.613e-06
Family Status	16.093	1	6.032e-05
Occupation	1.9765	1	0.1598
Income	0.8342	1	0.361

of mostly unmarried individuals. This profiling indicates that the response time of an older customer who is married is higher than a younger, single person. It is interesting to note that the two groups did not show any significant difference with respect to gender, occupation and income. On inspection of the average time to respond for the two groups, the slow respondents clocked 9.87 minutes while fast respondents took approximately half the time.

In order to confirm the differences between the groups in terms of different demographic characteristics, hypothesis testing was carried out for each of the attributes. For comparing gender, we chose the null hypothesis (H0) that the percentage of male members is same for both the groups. For comparing age, the null hypothesis was the percentage of people above 40 years is the same for both the groups. For comparing family status, the null hypothesis was the percentage of married people is the same for both the groups. For comparing occupation, the null hypothesis was the ratio of working people in both the groups was the same. Finally, for income, the null hypothesis was the fraction of people with income higher than 0.6 million was the same in both the groups. Results of the chi-square test for these hypotheses are shown in Table 9. Based on the p value, we can reject the null hypotheses for age and family status. This confirms our claims that the two groups have differences mainly in case of age and family status.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this study was to comprehend the effects of response time on preferences of Indian travellers for different tour package attributes. The results of the conducted study have direct implications on key purchase decisions as it aids travel agents in understanding the consumer preferences. The results from this research can be applied in tourism management to create effective marketing strategies that attract potential clients.

Based on the preliminary analysis, price, hotel rating and duration were found to be relatively crucial attributes whereas destination, season and mode of transport were less important. This is consistent with previously conducted studies on tour package attributes (Jacoby and Olson, 1977; Chan and Wong, 2006). The classification of respondents into fast and slow groups also provided key insights into the consumer decision making process. Price is more or less determined by the spending power of the individual and not so much by the time taken. Similarly, season of travel is something for which consumers have a clear preference. Apart from these two attributes, other four had significant differences depending on the response time of respondents. Slow respondents demonstrated a more careful attitude by showing more importance for overall important attributes such as duration and hotel ratings and less for others. On the other hand, fast respondents showed similar importance for all the attributes and hence, had relatively more importance for mode of transport and destination as compared to slower individuals. This suggests that slow respondents are more careful in their choices and spend more effort in determining the overall important attributes as compared to fast ones.

When it comes to willingness to pay, both the groups showed similarities for MWTP for budget to luxurious hotels. Though hotel ratings attributes were more important for slow respondents, no significant differences within MWTP were observed. This means that although slow respondents identify these as important attributes, they are not willing to shell out more money. Alternatively, fast respondents were found to have significantly larger MWTP for transport (train to flight) and duration (short to long stay). Transport was initially found to have more importance for fast individuals and they also showed larger economic preference towards the same. This can be interpreted as faster individuals having strong opinions about their preferences. On the other hand, in case of duration, even though slow respondents showed higher importance, they were not willing to pay as much as the fast ones. Travel agents can use this information to change transport factors in their travel packages so as to maximize their economic profits. Future studies can use these results and attempt to identify random outliers such as older, married people with faster responses, so as to effectively analyze survey findings.

The demographic profiling of our slow and fast respondents revealed that older, married, working individuals tend to take higher time. This can be attributed to their eagerness to understand more about the products which they plan to purchase. On the other hand, the younger, single, non-working population showed a significantly lower time to respond. This brings into light the effects of advances in technology and social media that has created a more informed youth population having lower attention span. The way of handling response time in our study can also be used in case of online marketing wherein travel websites can track user behavior to classify the respondent as fast or slow and thereby provide suitable tour packages.

Few recent developments with regard to attributes are worth considering for future studies. Gonzalez (2019) focuses on the aspect of variation in attribute importance measures and highlights the need for reporting how these measures are obtained for better comparison and interpretation. Though previous literature is used to select the attributes in our present study, Webb etal. (2021) has used best-worst scaling survey to come up with certain criteria to guide attribute selection for discrete choice experiments.

There are some shortcomings to this research. Convenience sampling method was deployed to collect the data because of limited availability of manpower and resources. Therefore, the results obtained in the study may not represent the entire tourism sector. Orthogonal array design method was applied in converting the full factorial design into a smaller one that was finally used for the survey. There could be some initial biases in the respondents due to the order of survey questions, which could have been reduced by randomizing the order of questions. Lastly, this study was conducted for the Indian tourism market and hence, all results might not be directly extended to other regions. However, there is good scope for future research broadening the findings from this study, which can improve the quality of tour packages provided and thereby the global tourism industry.

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