

2016 年度 森泰吉郎記念研究振興基金「研究育成費」成果報告書

留学促進マーケティングとしての海外教育旅行の効果

慶應義塾大学政策・メディア研究科後期博士課程 1 年

柏木 翔

shok@sfc.keio.ac.jp

Preface

Below is the outcome of the research conducted with the support of this grant and under the title of 'Revisiting the Concept of VFR Travellers: The Case of Japanese Travellers' (VFR is the acronym of visiting friends and relatives). In December 2016, a conference paper was published by Travel and Tourism Research Association Asia Pacific Chapter. It is a fundamental part of the author's doctoral research discussing reconceptualising VFR travellers from the perspective of Japanese outbound. This doctoral research will also cover aspects of recognising the travel behaviours of Japanese outbound VFR travellers and providing effective marketing strategies for the VFR market to tourism firms, destination marketing organisations, and governmental agencies dealing with tourism policy.

The research actually conducted and the usage of this research funds have been marginally shifted from the original context of the application submitted in May 2016 since the research originally planned was not able to be done with the research funds provided. In addition to this, the topic of the doctoral research has been slightly modified after some consultation with the author's supervisor. This doctoral research is still about tourism marketing and the marketing policy of outbound tourism for the case of the Japanese market to Australia. However, the focus is now on VFR tourism and not the educational tourism market. Therefore, the title of the research below has changed from the original title of the application for this research grant. The topic and focus of the doctoral research below should no longer need further alteration. This report gives a summary of the research which has been done with the support of this grant.

Revisiting the Concept of VFR Travellers: The Case of Japanese Travellers

Abstract

Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) tourism is one of the biggest tourism markets globally. VFR travellers are commonly categorised in terms of type of accommodation and purpose of visit.

However, these two elements alone do not fully reflect the characteristics of current VFR travellers, and in particular of Asian VFR travellers. This study revisits the concept of VFR travellers and explores other elements that might extend the existing VFR definitional model. By consulting secondary data on outbound tourism from Japan, one of the major Asian outbound source countries, the study identifies several unique characteristics of Japanese VFR travellers. In particular, the study proposes that knowledge about decision making processes and behaviours at the destination, especially about length of time shared with friends or relatives, can be useful in extending the existing model. As this study is at a preliminary stage, future research directions are also discussed.

Introduction and Literature review

Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) tourism has attracted increasing research interest among tourism scholars since the early 1990s, and especially in the last five years (Yousuf & Backer, 2015). Among a variety of perspectives, definitions and categorisations of VFR travellers are the most active and developed areas of research (Griffin, 2013; Yousuf & Backer, 2015).

Backer (2012) developed a model based on the use of accommodation and purpose of travel to differentiate VFR from other travellers and categorised VFR travellers into three types: Pure-VFRs (PVFRs); Commercial-VFRs (CVFRs); and Exploiting-VFRs (EVFRs). Figure 1 illustrates Backer's (2012) three types of VFR traveller.

	Accommodation: Friends & family	Accommodation: Commercial
Purpose of Visit: VFR	✓ PVFRs	✓ CVFRs
Purpose of Visit: Non-VFR	✓ EVFRs	✗ non-VFRs

Figure 1. VFR definitional model (Backer, 2012)

Although Backer's (2012) model made a significant contribution to understanding the VFR market, it has been suggested that both the model and VFR research itself are largely Western-oriented. In particular, a review of the literature confirms that the growing Asian VFR market has not been fully explored (Backer & King, 2015; Griffin, 2013; Jackson, 1990), and the applicability of the existing VFR model to the Asian market is questionable. This study, therefore, revisits the concept of VFR travellers discussed in the tourism literature through investigating the Asian VFR market. Because this study is at a preliminary stage, future research directions for extending the current understanding of VFR travellers are also discussed.

Methods and Results

Since there are no comprehensive data on Japanese VFR travellers, the present study drew on existing large scale data published by government agencies, destination management organisations and consulting firms. Existing data on Australian and British travellers, major VFR travellers' source countries, are also used in this study. These data are consulted to explore characteristics of the Japanese VFR market and the applicability of the existing VFR model to the Japanese market. In particular, the study focuses on spending patterns on accommodation and travel purpose among Japanese VFR travellers as a way into their broader characteristics.

As indicated in Table 1, the available data reveal that Japanese outbound VFR travellers spend less than holiday travellers (Japan Tourism Agency, 2016). This finding is consistent with past studies on VFR travellers from Western countries (Lehto, Morrison, & O'Leary, 2001; Seaton, 1994). The data also suggest that the spending behaviour of Japanese outbound VFR travellers and holiday travellers are more similar than that of their Australian and British counterparts.

In addition, the data show that Japanese outbound VFR travellers contribute as much as Japanese holiday travellers to the accommodation industry. Of VFR travellers' total expenditure including transport, insurance, activities, food, souvenirs and other travel-related costs, the average spend on accommodation is 6.1% while the figure for holiday travellers is 6.9% (Japan Tourism Agency, 2016). This suggests that Japanese outbound VFR travellers often use commercial accommodation at international destinations, which may affect their overall expenditure.

Table 1. Average spending of outbound travellers by purpose of visit*

	Holiday	VFR	VFR / Holiday
Japanese 2014	\$2,717	\$2,278	83.8%
Australian 2015	\$5,470	\$3,246	59.3%
British 2015	\$818	\$506	61.9%

* Calculated in US dollars

In terms of purpose of visit, Japanese travellers cannot easily be categorised into VFR and non-VFR on the basis of existing secondary data because the presence of friends or relatives tends to profoundly influence their choice of holiday destination. According to the available data, 8.8% of Japanese outbound travellers specified visiting friends and/or relatives as the primary purpose of their trip (Japan Tourism Agency, 2016). However, for 30.6% of Japanese travellers, the most significant influence on their decision making about outbound travel was information and invitation from family and friends living at that destination or in Japan (JTB Tourism Research & Consulting, 2016). From this perspective, assigning Japanese outbound travellers whose primary purpose is not VFR and who use commercial accommodation to Backer's (2012) non-VFR category shown in Figure 1 may overlook some travellers who should be considered part of VFR tourism.

In order to fully capture the VFR and related markets, a more comprehensive VFR model should be developed. One possible item that can be used to develop such model and to improve the current understanding of Japanese VFR travellers is the length of time they spend with their friends or relatives at their destination. For example, a Japanese couple in their 50s, having friends in Australia may visit Australia on holiday to play golf with them but stay at a hotel. In this case, as the main purpose of their visit is holidaying while staying in commercial accommodation, Backer's (2012) model would categorise them as non-VFRs even though they spend most of their time with their friends. This suggests the existence of an overlap group, whose purpose of visit puts them between VFR and non-VFR. Although their primary purpose is overseas holiday, their actual behaviour at the destination may closely resemble that of VFR travellers. It follows that length of time spent with friends or relatives at a destination should also be considered when categorising such travellers.

Conclusion

This study revisited the VFR definitional model developed by Backer (2012). To extend the model, this study also sought to identify the unique characteristics of Japanese outbound VFR travellers on the basis of the available secondary data. The findings indicate that while Japanese VFR travellers tend to stay in commercial accommodation, friends and relatives including those living at a potential destination influence their choice of destination. It is therefore proposed that the influence of friends and relatives on decision making and the length of time spent with them at the destination should also be considered in order to fully understand today's VFR travellers and to develop a more comprehensive VFR definitional model.

In a future study, semi-structured in-depth interviews will be first conducted with VFR hosts (i.e. people who host VFR travellers) to extend the current understanding of Japanese VFR market. In particular, this research direction seeks to illuminate decision making processes and behaviours at a destination to extend Backer's (2012) model and more fully articulate the nature of the Japanese VFR market. At a practical level, this will help to develop effective marketing approaches and competitive tourism resources for Japanese outbound VFR travellers.

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