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THE CITY UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL

A Study of the Consumer Decision Process for  
Hospitality Services

Richard Edward Teare

A thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November, 1989



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### Declaration

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## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the consumer decision process for hospitality services, with particular reference to the interactions occurring between the consumer and the producer during service delivery. As the hospitality industry is very diverse, the hotel short break product was selected as the locus for the study.

At the outset, a hypothetical model of the consumer decision process was constructed, drawing on the characteristics of hospitality services and the differing perspectives of the consumer and the producer. In order to generate a grounded theory which would help to explain the consumer decision process, data was collected by personal interview prior to, during and after the hotel short break. The interview data was then transcribed and analysed using the constant comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss.

Following this, a secondary method of analysis derived from Kelly's personal construct theory was used to elaborate the theoretical framework. To identify decision-making similarities and differences more clearly, each interview was re-constructed in the form of an interactive computer-based cognitive model using a software program called Cognitive Policy Evaluation (COPE). The output from the models, in the form of cognitive maps depicting themed relationships, was used to illustrate decision process relationships and distinguish between consumers with extensive and limited prior product experience.

The hypothetical model was supported by the study findings which showed that prior experience of the product category and the perceived importance of the purchase occasion influence the level of consumer involvement in the decision process, and thereby the range and type of decision-making activities which are undertaken. The findings also illustrate the value of prior product experience and involvement as segmentation variables by revealing sub-group characteristics relating to the selection, assessment and evaluation of hospitality services. They include notable differences in the operation of personal category systems during pre-purchase and the personal rating systems used by consumers during the consumption and post-consumption evaluation stages of the decision process.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction and background to the study

#### 1.1 Rationale for the study

Although commercial hospitality services make an important contribution to the service sector of the economy, empirically-based understanding of the interactions between the consumer and the producer is limited to a small number of prior studies. In this context, the purpose of the study was to investigate the consumer decision process for hospitality services and to generate a grounded explanatory consumer theory. As the term 'hospitality' embraces a wide range of catering, accommodation and leisure activities, it was necessary to focus the research in one sector of the industry.

A prominent feature of product development in the hospitality industry during the 1980's has been the integration of a wider range and type of consumer services. The hotel short break product was selected as a basis for the study because it exemplifies this trend, with catering, accommodation and leisure activity components packaged at an inclusive price. As there are many choice options available, and the investment cost is higher than for non-residential hospitality services, the consumer decision process might be expected to vary according to factors such as the level of perceived risk and the extent of prior experience with the product category..

The chapter begins by examining the characteristics of hospitality services and the differing perspectives of the consumer and the producer. Following this, the collaborative nature of the research is explained with reference to definitions of the hotel product and trends and developments in the U.K. short break market. At the end of the chapter a hypothetical model of the consumer decision process for hospitality services is presented. This provides a frame of reference for the theory generating approach to the study which is explained in chapters 3 and 4.

#### 1.2 The concept and characteristics of hospitality services

The origin of the word hospitality can be traced to the Latin noun 'hospice' meaning a 'place of entertainment or of shelter'. Usage of the generic term 'hospitality industry' to describe what is traditionally known as the 'hotel and catering industry' is a comparatively recent development in the U.K., following wider acceptance in the U.S.A. and mainland Europe

(Burgess, 1982).

Hospitality services are associated with the commercial provision of catering, accommodation and leisure facilities, and can be classified as profit-centred (e.g. hotels and restaurants) or cost-centred (e.g. employee and institutional catering). The service offering consists of both tangible and intangible components which are designed and managed by the producer with the aim of satisfying the needs of the consumer. The relationships between the consumer and producer of hospitality services are shown in Figure 1.1.

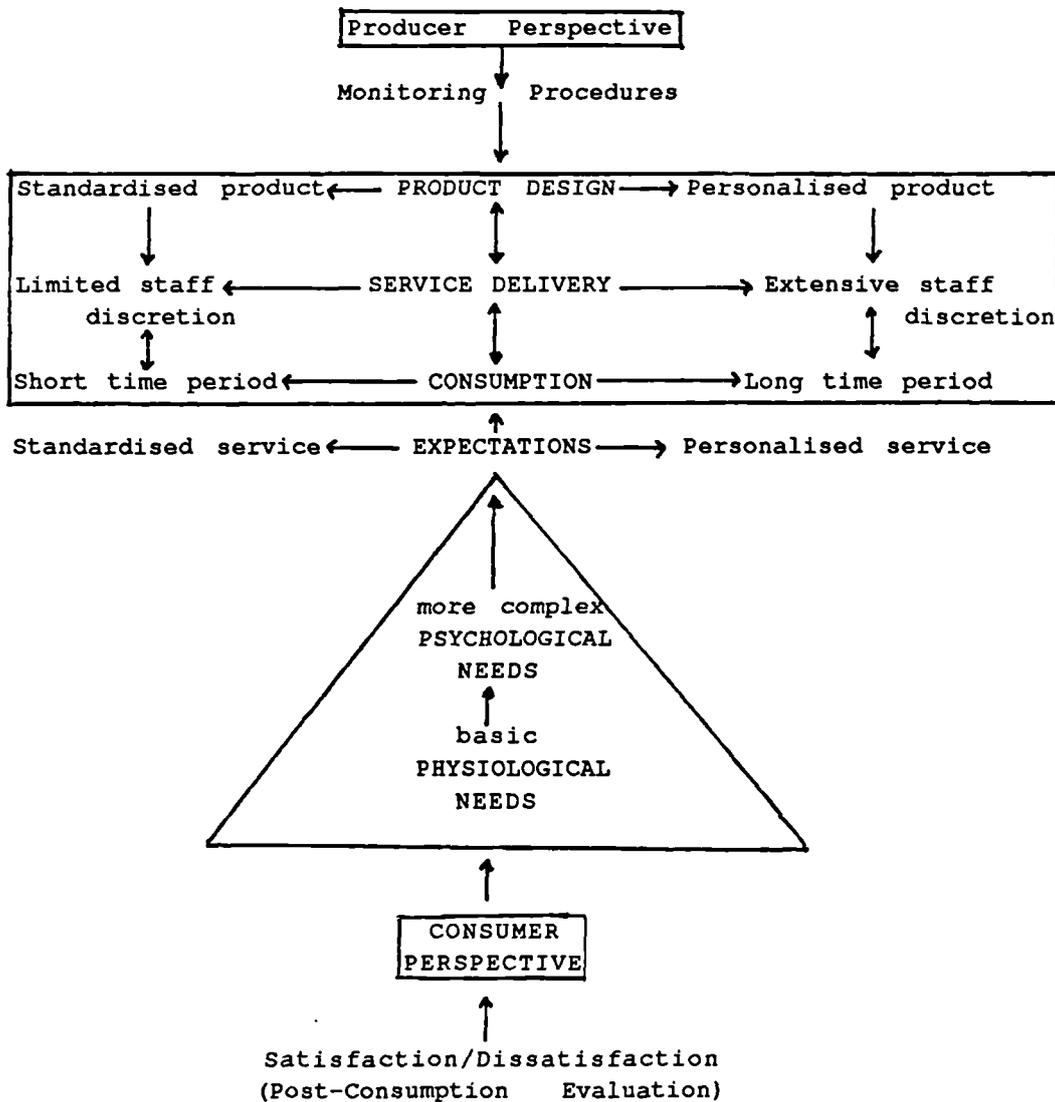


Figure 1.1

The interdependency between the consumer and the producer of hospitality services

Promotional activities such as advertising and brochure distribution may lead to the initial contact between the consumer and the producer, usually by telephone or written enquiry. The main consumer-producer interaction occurs at the point of consumption where the effectiveness of service delivery, especially the behaviour of service staff, is a critical determinant of consumer satisfaction.

Referring to the environment in which hospitality managers work, Nailon (1981, 1982) observed that many operational problems occur because the consequences of service interactions are not fully understood. Cassee (1983) agrees and identifies the need for empirical research focusing on the behaviour of consumers and producers of hospitality services in different contexts. As the period of consumption extends over several days for the hotel short break, consumer-producer interactions are necessarily varied and complex.

#### 1.2.1 Hospitality services and the consumer perspective

Hospitality services have both functional and expressive roles to fulfil. The consumer is primarily concerned with the desire to satisfy basic functional (or physiological) needs such as hunger and thirst. These are accompanied by more complex expressive (or psychological) needs such as identity, status and security.

Psychological needs may be determined by expectations derived from the consumer's lifestyle and prior experience. They may also be motivated by aspirations to experience surroundings beyond current lifestyle expectations.

Consumer needs require an immediate response from the producer. If they are not satisfied, complaint behaviour may be triggered by physiological discomfort or psychological ego-defensive mechanisms. The consistency and quality of service delivery are important because the consumer has little or no control over the environment in which consumption takes place. Service efficiency is often vulnerable because of the long operational service periods and demand fluctuations which occur throughout the day, week, month and year.

Hospitality service interactions are typically short and variable in nature, with the degree of formality influenced by the situation and

personalities of the participants. Every consumer has a unique set of expectations about the role of staff during service delivery. If these expectations are not met, the consumer may feel dissatisfied, although the feeling may be internalised if it is not strong enough to cause complaint behaviour. For example, non-verbal communication by staff, relating to the expected payment of gratuities may cause the consumer to feel irritated or embarrassed. This source of dissatisfaction is unlikely to be reported to management.

Consumer satisfaction is derived from different kinds of service experiences and interactions which are unique to the occasion and situation. For example, the time period for using hospitality services can vary from several minutes (a fast food restaurant) to a week or more (staying in an hotel). Consumption over a longer time period will require a more sophisticated form of consumer evaluation. This is because satisfaction with service delivery is linked to the accumulation of many impressions from successive and usually transient experiences and interactions. The evaluative procedure must be able to cope with this complexity, and provide the consumer with an overall post-consumption measure of satisfaction.

#### **1.2.2 Hospitality services and the producer perspective**

As hospitality services are usually consumed at the point of consumption, the consumer becomes involved in the production process. This is because the consumer arrives with a set of needs and expectations about the product and the environment in which the service will be delivered. The producer's ability to control and regulate service delivery depends on the use of sensitive monitoring procedures, and corrective measures. When service delivery occurs over a long time period as in an hotel, continuous performance monitoring is necessary in order to minimise service variability.

Hospitality managers need to understand the dynamics of service interaction for their type of operation, and the important implications for staff recruitment, selection and training. This is because the highly personalised form of interaction during service delivery exacerbates the problem of service variability. If for example, the consumer arrives feeling tired and tense after travelling a long distance, the receptionist must be able to recognise and respond to this psychological state in an appropriate way. This is important because initial interactions are likely to play a critical role in the formation of first impressions.

Hotels are often characterised by high fixed costs and sensitive profit ratios. This is especially the case if the pattern of business is irregular, which may contribute to short-term sales instability (Kotas, 1975; 1977). To minimise these effects, reduced cost options such as the hotel short break product have been used to penetrate new market segments and improve productivity and profitability.

Hospitality services cannot be stored like manufactured products, and hence the revenue from unsold meals or bedrooms over a given time period cannot be recouped. Similarly, product experiences cannot be precisely replicated. For instance, the atmosphere and service in a restaurant will be affected by the number of customers being served at any given moment. Too few or too many customers may create an undesirable impression. If the restaurant is too busy and complaints occur, the manager can only offer to compensate the dissatisfied customer, he cannot erase the recollection of an unsatisfactory meal experience.

Service and manufacturing industries have different consumer-producer interface characteristics. As many as 90 per cent of the staff in service organisations have direct contact with the consumer, compared with only 10 per cent in manufacturing (Irons, 1983). The different orientation of service delivery means that management theories and methods developed in manufacturing industries have limited application to service management problems. The natural focus for consumer research in hospitality services therefore lies at the point of simultaneous production and consumption, where consumer-producer interactions are concentrated.

### **1.3 Background to the study**

During a period of employment in operations management with Thistle Hotels Limited, the project collaborators, it became apparent to me that consumers using hotels for leisure purposes had a wide range of needs and expectations. This view was confirmed by two internal secondments to assist with the promotion of the company's branded short break product; Highlife Breaks. I subsequently formulated a proposal to investigate consumer decision-making which was accepted by the company, who provided the necessary access and support to undertake the research.

#### **1.3.1 Defining the hotel product**

Baker (1981) suggests that the distinction between products and services is often based on the traditional view that 'goods are produced, services are performed' (Rathmell, 1974). This boundary is rather rigid and

unhelpful compared with Levitt's (1981) view which recognises that products and services both have tangible and intangible characteristics. Levitt recognises a common objective (to satisfy the consumer) and a distinction based solely on how satisfaction is derived from differing combinations of tangible (physical) and intangible (emotional) properties.

Buttle (1986, 1986a) applies Levitt's definition to hospitality services, arguing that consumers seek intangible benefits in the form of satisfaction, regardless of whether the product is tangible or intangible. He illustrates this with the example of a restaurant meal occasion characterised by consumer-producer interactions which are both tangible (such as the experience of food and personal service) and intangible (such as the emotional reaction to the decor and quality of furnishings) Buttle calls the sum of these experiences the 'catering product'.

Nightingale (1983; 1985) describes the 'hotel experience' as a composite of many activities and interactions, each with physical and emotional content. This view implies that the consumer continually assesses the product, combining individual assessments to evaluate overall product satisfaction at the end of the stay.

Doswell and Gamble (1979) define the hotel product as a composite of physical products (such as food, beverages and accommodation) and their associated service elements. Their definition also recognises the importance of product intangibles such as image and atmosphere, which have an emotional impact on the consumer.

Medlik (1980) identifies five factors which may affect the level of consumer satisfaction with the hotel product. These are:

- (1) Location - geographical convenience, accessibility, attractiveness of surroundings, freedom from distractions (such as traffic noise).
- (2) Facilities - including bedrooms, restaurants, bars, function and meeting rooms, leisure and recreational facilities for customer use, differentiated in various ways, including by type and size.
- (3) Service - the availability and extent of hotel services in conjunction with facilities. The style and quality of these facilities in terms of formality / informality, degree of personal attention, speed and efficiency.

- (4) Image - defined in terms of the way in which the hotel is perceived by an individual or group. Partly a function of location, facilities and service are also influenced by the name, reputation, appearance, atmosphere and other associations.
- (5) Price - value for money expressions about the hotel are made by consideration of location, facilities, service, image and the satisfaction derived by its users from these and other components of the hotel product.

Although this list of product-specific factors affecting consumer satisfaction provides a helpful overview, it requires empirical verification. The operation of assessment procedures and alternative explanations of how consumer satisfaction is derived are discussed in chapter 2.

### 1.3.2 Trends and developments in the U.K. short break market

The hotel short break is a comparatively recent hospitality product, which has become increasingly important to the hotel operators during the 1980's (Teare, 1989d; 1990b). Despite its significance, no prior consumer research has been reported in the marketing literature, and the information available is limited to surveys of market trends and dimensions.

Mintel (1987) refer to the term short break as a 'holiday of two or three nights spent away from home'. This definition excludes business trips, visits to friends and relatives and one night stays. Euromonitor (1987) adopt a broader view, including within their definition, holidays of up to four nights duration. This reflects a trend towards increased flexibility in the packaging and marketing of short breaks, which have traditionally been associated with weekend accommodation. The accommodation component may be packaged with meals and other features such as transportation, at a reduced, inclusive price (Travel and Tourism Analyst, 1987).

The economic significance of the short break market is demonstrated by its rapid development and future growth prospects:

'The commercial market is believed to have doubled in size in the last five years. The operators estimate that the short break market has grown by 20 per cent per annum in the last five years and they forecast that it will continue to grow at this level over the next two or three years.' (Travel and Tourism Analyst, 1987)

The hotel accommodation sector of the short break market is fragmented by

many specialist operators including hotel groups, tour operators, transport companies and independent hoteliers. An estimated 4-6 million hotel short breaks were taken in Britain during 1985, valued at £320 million. This represents 18 per cent of the total market, estimated at 33 million short break trips (Euromonitor, 1987).

The statistics indicate the significant business potential of short breaks for hotel groups marketing their own product packages. Well established brands include those operated by Crest, Embassy, Ladbroke, Rank, Thistle and Trusthouse Forte Hotels.

Brand image is closely associated with the design of the brochure, the distribution network and the level of national and regional advertising support for the brand (Parker, 1985). The retail distribution network has become especially important during the last few years as competition between the leading brands has intensified (Teare, Davies and McGeary, 1989a). This is because a distribution agreement with the large multiple travel agencies such as Thomas Cook and Pickford's Travel ensures that the brand maintains high visibility in the marketplace and that consumers have easy and convenient access to brochures. As short breaks are now widely available, these are important considerations because consumers expect to be able to collect brochures and other information from a travel agent as they would when planning a long holiday.

It is difficult to estimate the proportion of sales generated from retail distribution because there are no statistics available. However, retailer perceptions of brand performance indicate that the market is very competitive, with only two brands thought to have more than a 10 per cent share of the market (Euromonitor, 1987a).

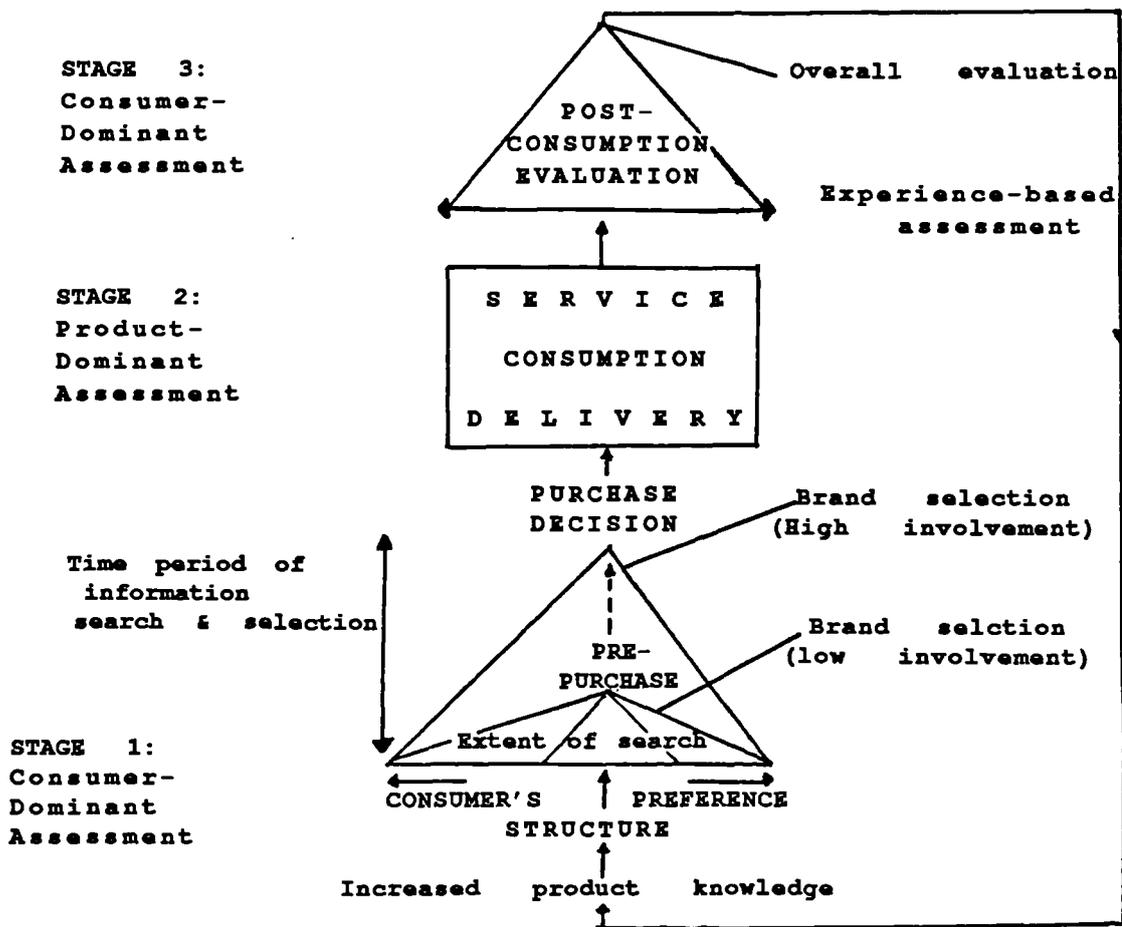
Growth prospects in the hotel accommodation sector of the short break market are optimistic. Euromonitor (1987) forecast a growth rate of 15 per cent per annum during the period 1985-1995. In particular, they foresee an increased proportion of people in the 30-39 age group taking short breaks, and a more even distribution of demand throughout the year. This suggests that hotel groups and other operators will continue to invest in supporting and developing their brands.

#### 1.4 A hypothetical model of the consumer decision process

The purpose of this section is to outline a hypothetical model of the consumer decision process for hospitality services. The model has been

developed from the observations made above, and from personal experience in marketing and operations management. The summary at the end of the section identifies implications for the literature review and for the research methods and design used in the study.

As the hotel short break is primarily a leisure activity, the decision process is likely to be characterised by joint or family decision-making and greater caution than might be expected for non-leisure hotel use or non-residential hospitality services. This is because of the comparatively high financial investment with no tangible return, and the perceived need to assess the associated costs and benefits. Figure 1.2 shows the hypothesised change in emphasis between consumer and producer dominant assessment during the consumer decision process for hospitality services (Teare 1988b; 1990a). The changes correspond to the three main stages of the decision process; pre-purchase, consumption and post-consumption evaluation which are described below.



High Involvement = Longer, more complex search and selection  
 Low Involvement = Shorter, more limited search and selection

Figure 1.2

A hypothetical model of the consumer decision process for hospitality services

- (1) At the pre-purchase stage, consumer-related factors are likely to be more influential than product-related factors in reaching a purchase decision.

When joint or family decision-making occurs during the course of reaching agreement on a purchase decision, role specialisation is commonplace (Davis and Rigaux, 1974). Role adoption will be determined by personal, consumer-related factors such as self-confidence and assertiveness, and the product-related factor of prior experience. Stage 1 assumes that consumer-related factors are the dominant influence on the purchase decision because the subjective interpretation of product information and recommendations feature prominently in pre-purchase activity.

If family members have limited prior experience, the perceived risk is likely to be higher, requiring greater personal involvement in order to resolve sources of anxiety. Conversely, consumers with extensive prior experience will be able to make a purchase decision more easily and with greater confidence. In this situation, consumer-related factors are less dominant because product knowledge provides a stabilising influence. Therefore, the relationship between prior experience and product involvement is important because it is likely to determine the amount of time, the extent of information search and the level of involvement required to assess the purchase options and reach a decision.

- (2) During consumption, product-related factors are likely to be more influential than consumer-related factors in determining product satisfaction.

An hotel leisure product provides the consumer with personalised service over a time period of between two and four days. As the needs of consumers cannot be fully anticipated during consumption, hotel staff must be able to exercise discretion during service delivery in order to respond effectively. Stage 2 therefore assumes that product-related factors such as service interactions and subjective impressions of product experience will have a greater impact on satisfaction than internalised consumer-related factors such as prior expectations. This is because the consumer becomes co-producer during consumption (Teare and Gummesson, 1989b) helping to create atmosphere in restaurants and bars and simultaneously assessing the many tangible and intangible impressions and interactions which occur. The consumer must integrate all of these individual assessments in order to evaluate post-consumption feelings of satisfaction

or dissatisfaction.

- (3) During post-consumption evaluation, consumer-related factors are likely to be more influential than product-related factors in determining overall satisfaction.

The overall feeling of satisfaction formulated during post-consumption is an enduring, cumulative measure derived from the many assessments made during consumption. Although the consumer may need to recall sensory product-related impressions such as visually appealing guest room design features, the final evaluation is more likely to be influenced by consumer-related factors. These are principally end-state feelings of a psychological nature such as feeling relaxed and refreshed. If the outcome of stage 2 is a negative psychological state, such as increased tension, then the consumer is likely to experience an overall feeling of dissatisfaction during post-consumption evaluation, this in turn will influence brand attitudes and future purchase behaviour.

#### 1.4.1 Implications for the study

The characteristics of hospitality services and the structure of the hypothetical model have several implications for the study. Firstly, the model provides guidance and direction for the literature review in chapter 2. Of particular importance is the need to investigate the extent to which prior product experience affects pre-purchase decision-making and consumption stage assessment procedures. Secondly, an emphasis on the consumption stage of the decision process is desirable. This is because the consumption stage is longer and more complex for residential hospitality services, and because of the need for research designed to investigate how consumers react to, and assess the consumption environment. These issues are referred to again in the discussion of research methods and design in chapters 3 and 4.

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## Chapter 2

### The consumer decision process: A paradigm in transition

#### 2.1 Overview of the chapter

The consumer decision process introduced in chapter 1, broadly describes the task of product assessment and evaluation across the three decision stages of pre-purchase, consumption and post-consumption. There are however, differences of opinion concerning the sources of influence operating at each stage, and the relationships between the stages.

The first part of the chapter reviews three of the general decision process models which have had a formative role in the development of consumer theory. These were developed by Nicosia (1966), Howard and Sheth (1969) and Engel Kollat and Blackwell (1968; 1982) They have influenced the construction of a more recent descriptive model of vacation tourist behaviour, which is also reviewed (Moutinho, 1982; 1984; 1986). As the model describes international long holiday behaviour, it does not necessarily provide an appropriate basis for an empirical study of hospitality services. However, as there are some areas of commonality between decision-making for long and short holidays, the general and specific models collectively provide guidance for theory construction.

The second part of the chapter is concerned with a broad-based review of the literature relating to consumer decision process research. The review is primarily intended to identify influences and relationships which may have implications for the research design, and the development of consumer theory for hospitality services. In order to focus the review as precisely as possible, research findings for each decision process stage have been grouped together by using appropriate themes emerging from the literature.

#### 2.2 Consumer theory and the cognitive paradigm

Anderson (1983) and Peter and Olson (1983) identify the need for a theoretical framework or 'paradigm' (Kuhn, 1970) when making empirical observations. This viewpoint is strengthened by the findings of Bagozzi (1984) Foxall (1980, 1980a) and Jacoby (1978) who have reviewed and commented on the limited success of attempts to construct and test theory in isolation from existing theory. Others have argued that any given theory only has meaning and significance within the paradigm from which it is derived (Anderson, 1983; Hunt, 1983).

The dominant tradition in consumer research is the cognitive paradigm. The most well known models of consumer behaviour assume that consumers have considerable capacity for receiving and handling quantities of information and for undertaking pre-purchase search and evaluation. The consumer is also assumed to process information in a rational way, and by so doing becomes progressively convinced of the need to purchase the focal brand. The central component of these models is an extended consumer decision sequence in which information is received and classified by the individual. It is subsequently transformed by cognitive processing into attitudes and intentions, which determine purchase behaviour and brand choice (McGuire, 1976).

In a review of consumer choice models, Hansen (1976) identifies a common characteristic which is understood to be an ego-involving sequence of cognitive, affective and conative change. A typical pattern, in situations where choice is preceded by the evaluation of alternatives, may include experiences of uncertainty and anxiety. This produces a sense of inner conflict as the possible outcomes are considered.

Olshavsky and Granbois (1979) suggest that the purpose of cognitive activity during decision-making is to reduce anxiety and conflict by gradually resolving sources of uncertainty. This assumes that the consumer can formulate and apply evaluative criteria to predict the possible outcomes of each purchase option. The procedure is aided by the use of decision rules, which are developed from information received, processed and stored in memory. The role of decision rules is to provide stability and consistency during decision-making, enabling the consumer to undertake a standardised form of comparative assessment and evaluation.

The cognitive theories and models of decision-making reviewed in the following section presuppose that the consumer is motivated to find the optimum solution for purchase decisions. This requires subjective assessment of product attributes. However, as the number of alternatives increase, it becomes more difficult for the consumer to decide. If for instance product knowledge is limited, the consumer may aim more realistically to make a satisfactory rather than an optimal decision (Fletcher, 1986; 1987).

Although the cognitive paradigm remains influential, Foxall (1986) points out that there have been a number of sustained criticisms. These can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Comprehensive models of consumer decision-making are often too complex and/or too generalised to test empirically, (Bagozzi, 1984; Jacoby, 1978) indicating that an alternative approach, located much closer to observable consumer behaviour, is needed.
- (2) Empirical research has often revealed low correlational consistency between decision process components (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977; Foxall, 1983; 1984).
- (3) Consumers are thought to use less information than the cognitive paradigm generally assumes (Jacoby, Chestnut and Siberman, 1977; Olshavsky and Granbois, 1979) and too much information may actually impede rational decision-making (Jacoby, Speller and Kohn, 1974; 1974a).
- (4) Sequences other than cognition-affect-conation have been shown to describe more accurately the consumer choice process. For example the low involvement hierarchy, and alternative views of the learning of brand preferences in response to advertising have been proposed (Krugman, 1965; Robertson, 1976).

Foxall argues that the success of the cognitive paradigm is actually impeding various forms of theoretical progress which run contrary to the fundamental assumptions of the paradigm. He suggests that this is because there are so many "ready made" explanations which can be inferred for any observed behaviour. In the following section, these criticisms are related to the three selected cognitive decision models.

### 2.3 General models of consumer behaviour

A decision process model is typically represented by a set of propositions, or a series of related statements and ideas which attempt to predict how consumers and markets will react. Created by defining the variables and specifying the relationships between them, it also facilitates the prediction of outcomes under specified conditions, and provides a framework for analysis.

There have been numerous attempts to develop general models of consumer behaviour which focus on the decision process. Models by Nicosia (1966), Howard and Sheth (1969) and Engel Kollat and Blackwell (1968; 1982) have been especially influential. However, attempts to validate these models have met with only limited success. To establish the theoretical implications, it is helpful to consider some of the problems associated

with their operationalisation.

### 2.3.1 Nicosia model

Nicosia's empirical model which is shown in Figure 2.1, was based on the 'funnel' concept, which begins when the consumer recognises the existence of a problem or need. This activates information search, and a gradual narrowing of the possible solutions until the best option is recognised and selected.

Nicosia modelled the consumer decision process on four sequential fields, starting with the receipt and processing of a persuasive message (message exposure) by the consumer. The output from Field One is an attitude, which causes a search and evaluation of attitudes towards the advertised product and brand alternatives in Field Two. The output from Field Two is a motive to buy, which is translated into action and the act of purchasing in Field Three. This behaviour leads to product usage in Field Four. Finally, feedback to Field One influences the way in which future communications are received and decisions are made.

Critics of Nicosia's work point to the imprecise definition of variables and relationships in the model. It was also considered to be premature, simplistic and too generalised, with no serious concern for the operationalisation of the flow chart variables (Tuck, 1976). The model was designed with practical applications in mind, but it received little attention from practitioners following publication.

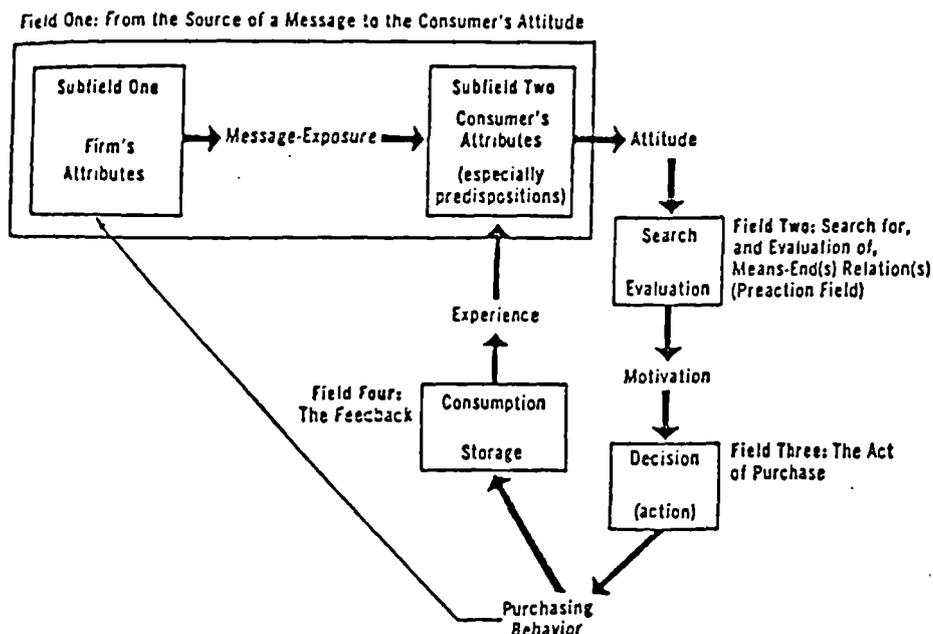


Figure 2.1

### Nicosia's model of consumer behaviour

### 2.3.2 Howard and Sheth model

Howard and Sheth's model which is shown in Figure 2.2, depicts inputs from a stimulus display and outputs of attention, brand comprehension, attitude, intention and finally purchase. At the centre of the model there are perceptual and learning subsystems. Their operational efficiency is influenced by variables such as the importance of the purchase and time pressure.

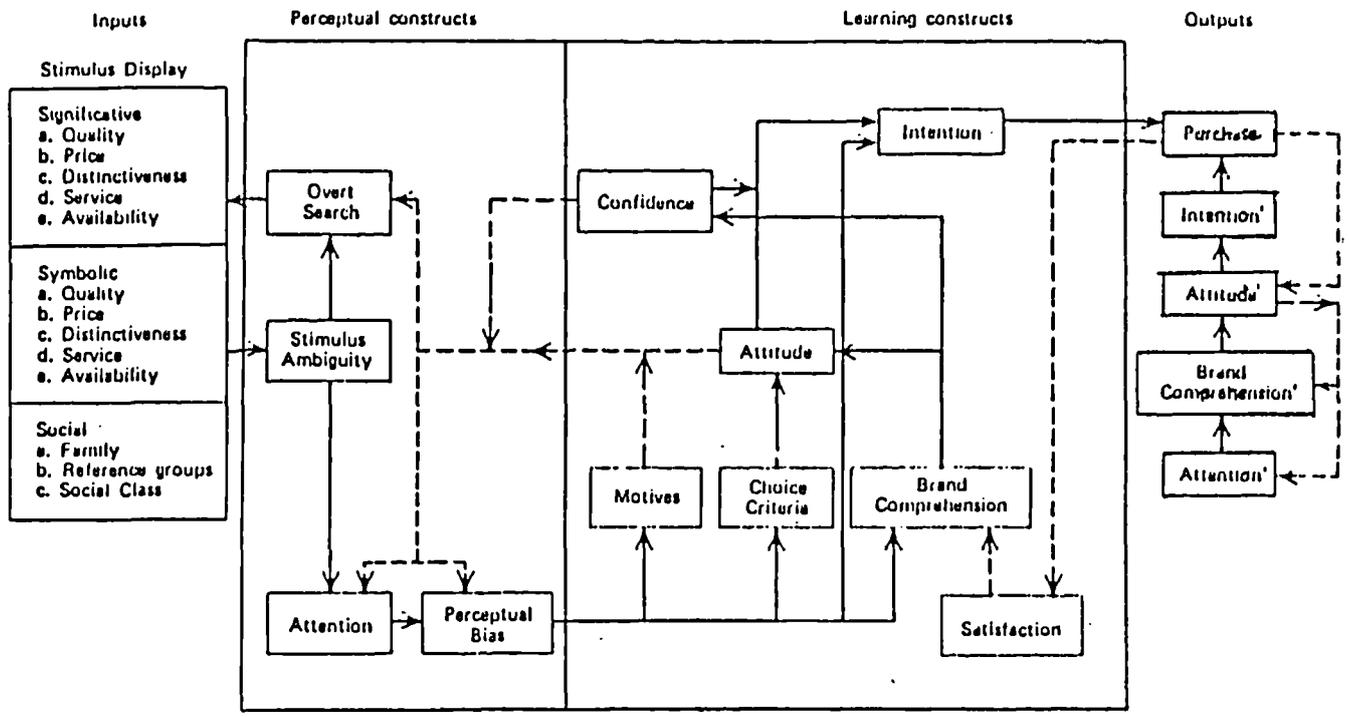
The perceptual subsystem receives inputs from the stimulus display and its function is to gather and process or 'encode' information relevant to the purchase decision. The elements of the subsystem - attention, stimulus ambiguity, perceptual bias and overt search cope with internal and external search activities. Ambiguity may occur if there is lack of clarity in the stimulus display. Perceptual bias occurs if the consumer selects information in such a way that the overall quality or meaning is distorted.

The learning subsystem, which contains motives, choice criteria, attitudes, brand comprehension and confidence receives input from the perceptual subsystem, which is then evaluated. The output either supports or rejects the purchase decision.

There have been many attempts to operationalise the Howard and Sheth model (for example Farley, Howard and Ring 1970; 1974) resulting in a progressive revision of the theory. Even so, only small sections of the model have been tested, and the verification of relationships has been inconsistent. Problems have included relationships which have not been fully developed and articulated in the model, measurement error, difficulty in operationalising some concepts (such as perceptual bias and stimulus ambiguity) and causal relationships which are difficult to prove. Tuck (1976) concludes:

''The theory produced is untestable and non-specific and fails to meet the criterion of a good science''.

Despite this assessment, the model was instrumental in developing the important decision process concepts of search and evaluation.



Solid lines indicate flow of information; dashed lines, feedback effects.

Figure 2.2

Howard and Sheth's model of buyer behaviour

2.3.3 Engel, Kollat and Blackwell model

The first version of the Engel, Kollat and Blackwell model was published in 1968. It also used the funnel concept, depicting the decision process as part of an information processing system. Branches from each stage - problem recognition, search and evaluation of alternatives, choice and choice outcomes facilitate looping back, halting or continuing. The model

was initially designed to accommodate the range from extended to routine problem-solving. However, the later version published in 1982 and shown in Figure 2.3, is described more specifically as a high involvement model.

The model was originally conceived for teaching and learning purposes, and has undergone several modifications to reflect current thinking. However, the authors have made no explicit attempt to specify functional relationships which would permit empirical testing. This has resulted in criticisms that the model is too superficial and generalised (Tuck, 1976). Despite this, it remains influential because of its association with the first major text book on consumer behaviour. The modifications to the model also reflect more recent interest in the information processing approach to modelling consumer behaviour, notably Bettman's information processing model (1979).

To summarise, the utility of general consumer models remains questionable. There are several reasons for this, notably because of the complexity of model relationships, and their unreliability as a means of predicting consumer behaviour or guiding communication strategy. These reasons also account for the limited appeal of decision model research to practitioners, who might usefully employ empirical approaches to solve marketing problems if the model relationships were relevant, and easier to understand.

There is clearly a need to develop theoretical and practical understanding of the consumer decision process in specific product fields and situations. As there are procedural similarities between short and long holiday decision-making activities, a model of tourist decision behaviour is reviewed in the following section.

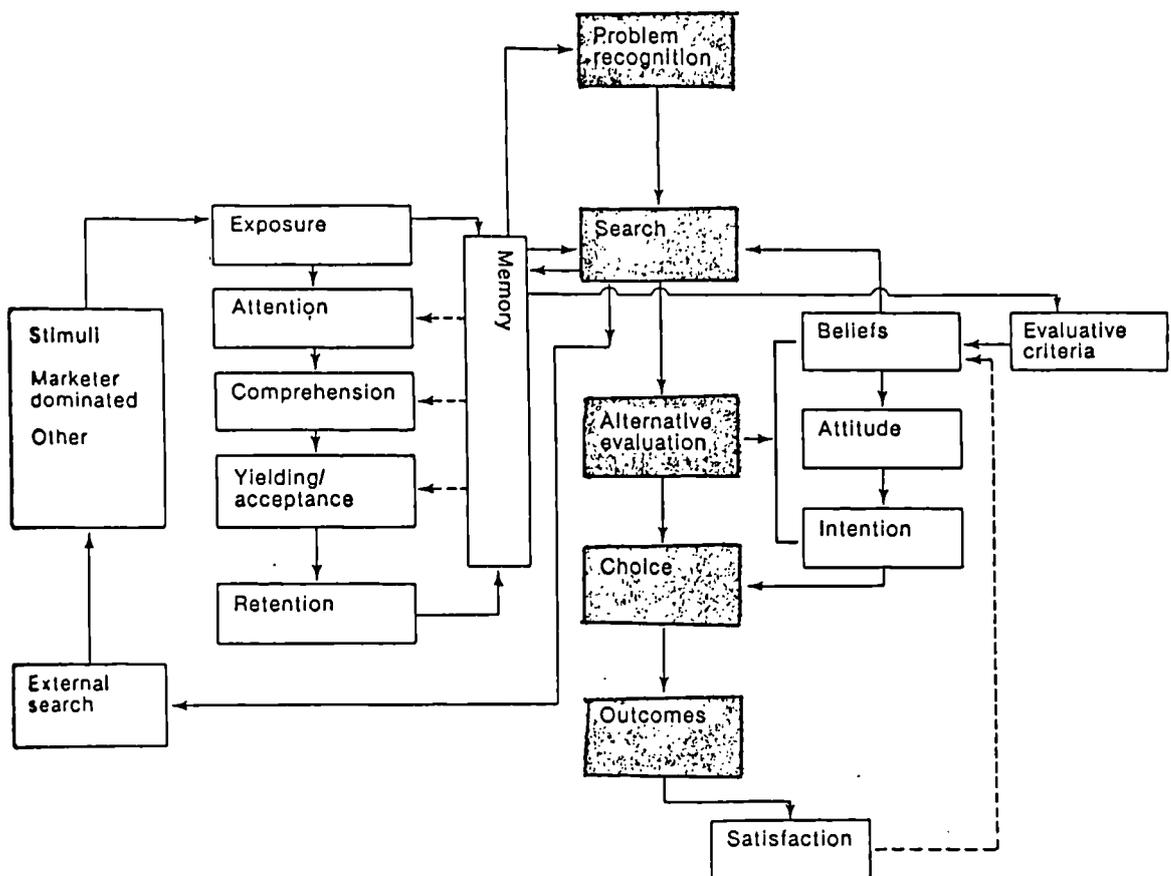


Figure 2.3

The Engel, Kollat and Blackwell model of buyer behaviour

2.4 Moutinho's model of vacation tourist behaviour

In service industries, the consumer decision process is likely to be directly influenced by the nature of the service activity. For example, Moutinho (1982; 1984; 1986) suggests that the tourist product purchase is rarely spontaneous, being preceded by planning and saving over a long time period, with no tangible return on investment. The similarities with hospitality services are evident from the review of consumer and producer perspectives in chapter 1.

The basic framework of Moutinho's model is derived from general decision model assumptions and published research relating to vacation tourist behaviour. The model construction is underpinned by three behavioural concepts; motivation, cognition and learning. The assumption is that

purchase motives initiate the sequence of behavioural events, cognition activates mental processing and learning causes subsequent changes in behaviour. Behaviour is defined as a function of intention to act, which may in turn be influenced by situational factors which intervene between intended and actual behaviour. The model which is shown in Figure 2.4, consists of three parts, pre-decision and decision processes, purchase evaluation and repeat buying probabilities.

The decision process stages in the model are problem recognition, search, alternatives evaluation, choice and outcomes. The assumption is that as the consumer proceeds through these stages, progressive focusing occurs, giving rise to three options at the alternatives evaluation stage:

- (1) Destinations may be rejected by the travel decision-maker, because they have no potential to satisfy travel objectives.
- (2) Destinations which are considered to be neutral alternatives may require further information, and discussion inputs from other family members.
- (3) Destinations considered after preliminary judgement to be viable alternatives, may require more detailed evaluation.

The model implicitly recognises that during the evaluation of alternatives, the evoked set of brands is unlikely to contain more than seven options for most tourist destination decisions (Woodside, Ronkainen and Reid 1977).

The model also recognises that family influences are an important factor in vacation decision-making. For example, it is conceivable that different family members may assume specialist roles to identify holiday needs, search for information and make the purchase decision.

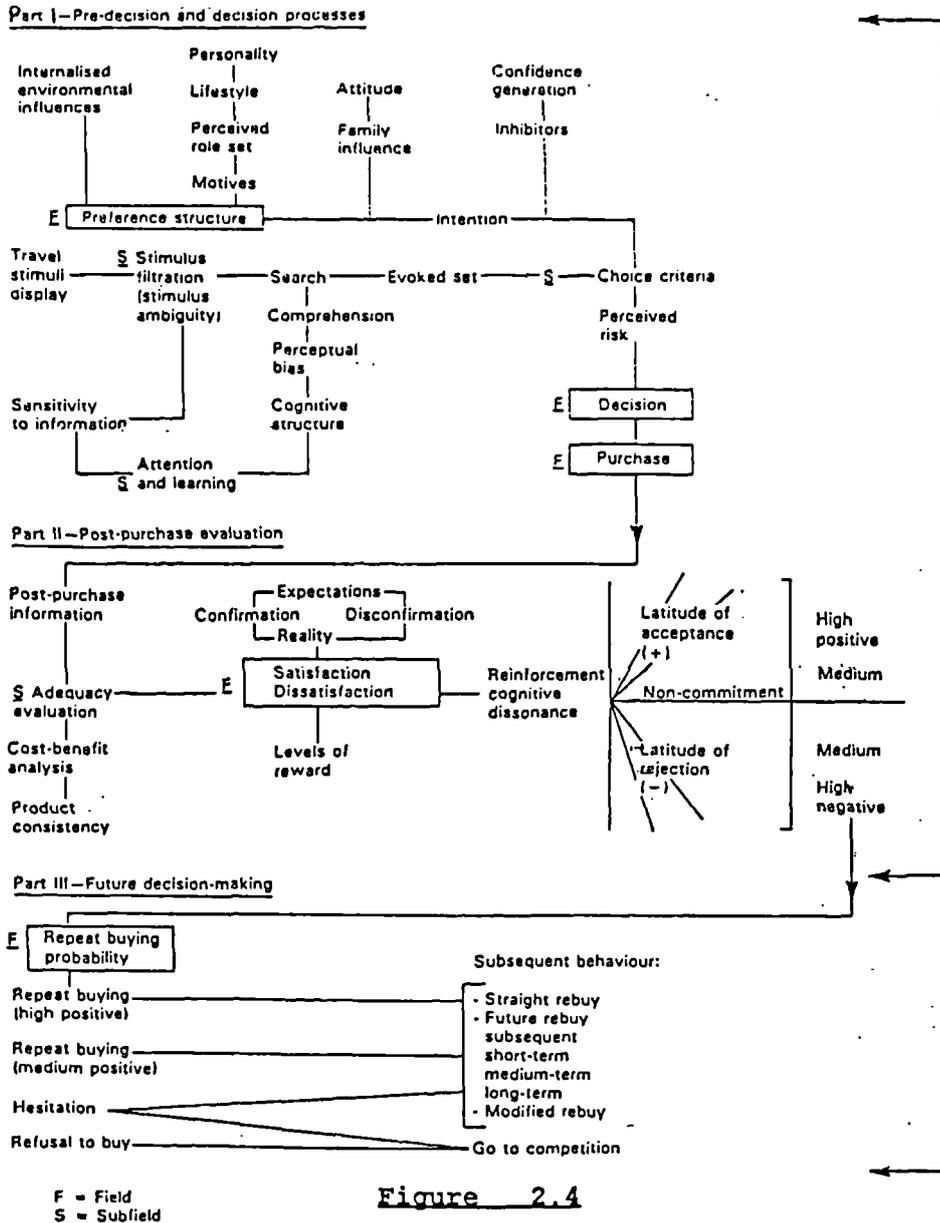


Figure 2.4

Moutinho's vacation tourist behaviour model

2.4.1 Structure of the model

Part One of the model is concerned with pre-decision and decision processes, beginning with need arousal and the receipt of travel stimuli, and culminating in product purchase. The pre-decision field of preference structure has subfields of stimulus filtration, attention and learning processes and choice criteria. The two decision fields are labelled decision and purchase.

The assumption is made that the consumer's preference structure for a tourist destination is influenced by internalised environmental factors derived from many sources. These include cultural norms and values, family

and reference groups, financial status and social class. It is also assumed that affective judgements are influenced by factors such as the consumer's own personality, lifestyle, perceived role set, and purchase motives.

The consumer's preference structure may also be influenced by exposure to travel stimuli, portraying product attributes such as quality, price, distinctiveness, prestige, service and availability. The act of filtering these stimuli enables the consumer to organise information in a meaningful way. If however the stimuli contain ambiguity, the consumer may feel the need to search for additional information.

When a consumer feels uncertain about the merits of alternative brands and or destinations it is assumed that the extent of external information search activity will be proportional to the degree of perceived risk. In contrast, the consumer with extensive product knowledge derived from prior experience may engage in little or no external information search.

It is assumed that attention to media and other information sources will lead to active comparison of new information with that stored in memory. Learning occurs as new information and experiences are integrated into the consumer's organised system of beliefs and knowledge, referred to in the model as the cognitive structure. When potential sources of conflict or ambiguity have been resolved by assimilating new information, the consumer may begin to feel more confident about the purchase decision.

The model assumes that the criteria used to assess the suitability of tourist services are derived from the components of the holiday (such as travel, hotel and resort facilities) and performance expectations for each component. If however, the consumer has relevant prior experience, then individual assessment of each separate component of the holiday package may not be necessary. Instead the consumer may be able to use a decision rule to select the holiday option with the highest perceived overall rating. The consumer does this by recalling overall evaluations of different brands and destinations which are stored in long-term memory.

When the consumer has selected the preferred brand or holiday option, a purchase intention is formed. In addition to prior experience and family influences, the purchase intention may be mediated by situational factors such as tourism promotions and advice received from travel intermediaries. If for example, price reductions are displayed at the point of sale they may influence the purchase intention, and the consumer may buy a lower cost holiday solely because it is perceived to be better value for money.

Part Two of the model is concerned with purchase evaluation, which is the mechanism by which the consumer's frame of reference for future purchase intentions is developed. The post-purchase evaluation field is labelled satisfaction/dissatisfaction and the subfield is referred to as adequacy evaluation.

The model proposes that during adequacy evaluation, the consumer will evaluate brand attributes against a notional ideal for each attribute. This ranking procedure represents a form of mental cost-benefit analysis. Aggregated scores brand performance assessments are then used to determine the overall level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the brand.

Part Three of the model is concerned with future decision-making, and the implications arising from a particular vacation destination or tourist service for repeat buying. The repeat buying probabilities field assumes that the consumer will consider a number of purchase options, which may involve straight re-purchasing or modified re-purchasing behaviour.

#### 2.5 Implications for the study

Although the general decision models have not proved to be very useful in practice, they have nonetheless helped to identify components of the decision process, and develop theory about the relationships which may occur. For instance, the accepted pre-purchase sequence of problem recognition, search, and choice emerged from this early work. To establish the nature and dynamics of decision-making for hospitality services, it is necessary to identify similarities and differences with the literature, which is reviewed below.

The vacation tourist behaviour model shares a number of similarities with hospitality services. In particular, the high investment requirement with no tangible return on investment. It is also assumed that satisfaction is derived from many transient impressions and experiences which occur during consumption, which affect the consumer's psychological state of mind at the end of the consumption period. These factors are likely to affect the way in which the consumer approaches the decision process for hospitality services, and the sources and methods used to overcome feelings of perceived risk associated with the purchase decision.

#### 2.6 The pre-purchase stage of the consumer decision process

The hypothetical model presented in chapter 1 implicitly recognises that

pre-purchase behaviour may be influenced by many different factors. Consequently, the following review of pre-purchase studies aims to identify research findings and their possible implications for the pre-purchase stage of the decision process for hospitality services.

#### **2.6.1 Preference structure**

As noted by Moutinho (1982; 1984; 1986) consumer preferences are influenced by internalised environmental factors such as cultural norms and values, family and reference groups, financial status and social class, and by individual differences. In an investigation of households undergoing life status changes such as retirement or unemployment, Andreasen (1984) found that spontaneous changes in brand preferences were also occurring. Consumers were generally more open to persuasion because of this.

The individual differences which influence the consumer's preference structure include personality, beliefs, attitudes and purchase motives.

Kassarjian and Sheffet (1981) define personality as "consistent responses to the world of stimuli surrounding the individual". In their review of personality studies they conclude that it is a difficult concept to operationalise because the relative consistency of individual behaviour needs to be measured in a variety of different situations over time. This is further complicated by the interactions in any given situation between personality and other determinants of behaviour such as attitudes and perceived risk. They report that only a few studies have successfully established a strong relationship between personality and consumer behaviour. Kakkar and Lutz (1981) confirm this, and suggest that the relationship between personality and purchasing behaviour is difficult to verify because of the reported high incidence of intervening situational variables.

The attitudinal influence on the preference structure has also been inconclusive so far. Fishbein (1979) argues that attitudes towards brands and products are inappropriate predictors of consumer behaviour, as a positive brand attitude does not necessarily lead to the formation of a purchase intention. This is because there are a variety of other ways in which a favourable attitude may be expressed, including increased product interest and word of mouth recommendations. He concludes that research observations are more meaningful if they aim to reveal the set of beliefs that underlie a given attitude.

Motives have an important influence on intention to purchase, as much consumer behaviour is goal orientated. Beard and Ragheb (1980; 1983) suggest that individuals are motivated to participate in activities which offer opportunities for fulfilment and self-actualisation. They report that these higher order motives are revealed by measurements of leisure motivation and satisfaction. Their findings also support the notion of 'a motivational career' in travel (Pearce and Caltabriano, 1983) in which consumers are motivated by a hierarchy of needs and future travel aspirations.

Motives also affect the type and extent of information search. Where for example, consumers feel confident that a particular external information source is reliable and easily accessible, they are more likely to depend on this information source (Capon and Burke, 1980). In situations where the optimal choice is desirable, both internal and external sources of information are used, because purchase alternatives are likely to be evaluated more carefully (Claxton, Fry and Portis, 1974; Jacoby, Chestnut and Fisher, 1978).

#### 2.6.2 Search behaviour

The extent of search behaviour, especially in connection with external information gathering, has been debated extensively in the literature. Some studies have found that pre-purchase external search is either absent, or restricted to specialised or first time purchases (Newman and Staelin, 1972; Olshavsky and Granbois, 1979). In contrast, large individual differences in the extent of search have also been observed. Duncan and Olshavsky (1982) have classified the factors which may explain these differences as:

- (1) Environmental factors - in particular, the availability of information and the number of purchase alternatives present.
- (2) Consumer factors - including perceived benefits, risk and household roles, brand preferences and differences between alternatives, knowledge, experience, time and financial pressures, personality and socioeconomic and demographic factors.

Duncan and Olshavsky cite Newman (1977) to support their view that search activity only increases when the consumer believes that the purchase is important, that there is a need to learn more, or that information is easy to obtain and utilise.

### **2.6.3 Information search strategies**

In a study of search behaviour relating to long holiday purchase decisions, Schul and Crompton (1983) found that consumers may seek information from a variety of sources before making a decision about the destination and the holiday package. They point out that unlike most shopping decisions consumers cannot observe what they are buying, and because they must rely on secondary and tertiary sources of information the search is longer and involves more informational sources.

Furse, Punj and Stewart (1981; 1984) support the view that systematic search strategies are common among consumers. They suggest that search activity is likely to be a function of product knowledge and experience, individual differences such as ability; situational variables such as time pressure, and product importance. Differences in the type of information search have also been reported (Jacoby, Chestnut, Weighl and Fisher 1976) where brand loyal behaviour was closely associated with stored information about the properties of a particular brand.

### **2.6.4 Individual differences and search behaviour**

Some studies have found significant, but not always consistent relationships between information search and age, (Phillips and Sternthal, 1977; Kiel and Layton, 1981; Biehal, 1983) and between information search and educational attainment (Claxton, Fry and Portis, 1974). Newman and Staelin (1972) reported a drop in external search amongst respondents who had undergone higher education. They suggest that this may be explained by greater information processing efficiency. The relationship between income level and external search remains unclear, with both positive (Claxton, Fry and Portis, 1974) and negative (Furse, Punj and Stewart 1981; Kiel and Layton, 1981) relationships reported. It is possible that as income level increases, the cost-benefit relationship changes. For instance, the cost of time required for external search may begin to outweigh the perceived benefits of engaging in extensive information search.

### **2.6.5 The role of prior product experience in search behaviour**

Alba and Hutchinson (1987) suggest that product knowledge has two major components; familiarity and expertise. They define familiarity as the number of product-related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer, and expertise as the ability to perform product-related tasks successfully. They conclude that increased product familiarity generally leads to increased consumer expertise.

The extent of pre-purchase search is likely to depend on the consumer's familiarity with the product category (Howard and Sheth 1969; Bettman, 1979; Punj and Staelin, 1983). Search behaviour generally begins with the recollection of information held in memory, as the consumer tries to determine whether choice can be based on prior experience. Insufficient information or experience is likely to activate external information search.

Consumers who have limited prior experience are inclined to rely more heavily on currently available information than on their own product knowledge (Bettman and Park, 1980). However, as the decision process continues beyond information search, use of internal and external sources of information is more likely to occur (Bettman, 1979).

#### 2.6.6 The role of product involvement in search behaviour

Involvement is considered to be a causal, individual difference variable which affects purchase behaviour. It has been defined as:

''...an unobservable state reflecting the amount of interest, arousal or emotional attachment evoked by the product in a particular individual...'' (Bloch, 1981).

The degree of consumer involvement in a product category is recognised as an important variable in the context of advertising strategy, as it may lead to different patterns of consumer decision-making (Vaughn, 1980). Characteristic differences include the number of attributes used to compare brands, and the duration of the search and selection process. Product involvement is also likely to affect information processing activity, as variables include the extent of information search, receptivity to advertising, and the type of cognitive responses generated during exposure to information sources (Krugman, 1967).

In a study of decision-making involvement, Slama and Tashchian (1985) found that some consumers tend to be more involved in the decision-making process, regardless of the product class. They conclude that involvement is a useful marketing variable because product and situational involvement can be combined to provide a more insightful explanation of decision-making behaviour.

Involvement is difficult to operationalise as it cannot be measured directly. However, a number of studies have overcome this problem by clustering respondents by involvement type. For example Lastovicka and

Gardner (1979) measured the relative strength of product importance, commitment and emotional reaction to a group of fourteen products. Their analysis revealed a typology of low, high and special interest involvement in the product group.

The degree of product involvement in pre-purchase decision-making may also be linked to antecedents such as perceptions of product importance, risk, symbolic or sign value and hedonic or emotional value (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985).

Bloch and Richins (1983) argue that product importance has been inadequately defined and understood. In their view product importance has three dimensions:

- (1) Perceived product importance - the extent to which a consumer links a product to salient, enduring or situation specific goals;
- (2) Instrumental or situational importance - a temporary perception of product importance based on the consumer's desire to obtain particular extrinsic goals that may derive from the purchase and/or usage of the product;
- (3) Enduring importance - a long term perception of product importance based on the strength of the product's relationship to central needs and values.

Moreover, they argue that perceived product importance as well as beliefs about situational and enduring importance may change at different stages in the decision process. It appears to operate through high involvement, and is associated with products which have symbolic meaning which is closely related to self image and expression ideals.

Most empirical work on product symbolism has paid relatively little attention to how products are used by consumers in social situations. Solomon (1983) suggests that the subjective experience of product usage contributes to the consumers' structuring of social reality, self concept and behaviour. He concludes that the symbolism embedded in many products may in fact be the primary reason for purchase and use.

#### **2.6.7 Perceived risk**

Perceived risk has been defined as an outcome of uncertainty about the product (Bauer, 1960). The sense of risk is commonly associated with the

place and mode of purchase, and the financial and psycho-social consequences of product purchase. (Stem, Lamb and MacLachlan 1977). Ahtola (1979) concludes that perceived risk is related to the degree of uncertainty experienced during decision-making.

A study of perceived risk associated with leisure activities (Cheron and Brent Richie, 1982) found that levels of risk varied substantially from one activity to another. They also found that leisure activity-related perceived risk is different from that associated with manufactured goods, and that it's effect diminishes as individuals become more familiar with, or interested in a particular leisure activity.

#### 2.6.8 Role specialisation in information search and brand selection

Role specialisation has been found to be closely related to information search in family decision-making, especially in terms of time allocation and the use of specialist skills (Grashof and Dixon, 1979; Heffring, 1979).

In a review of research on family decision-making, Jenkins (1979) highlighted the need to investigate the various dimensions of power associated with decision-making roles. The most influential factors affecting the family role structure were found to be income, education, time availability, prior experience and role specialisation.

Davis and Rigaux (1974) examined the patterns of influence exerted by husbands and wives at different stages in the decision process. They found that marital roles are likely to be differentiated by stage and consumption category. While no significant differences were apparent in the relative influence of marital partners, information search was characterised by considerably more role specialisation than other pre-purchase activities. The most likely explanation for this is that differences in the degree of role specialisation relate to the nature of the task and the allocation of role responsibilities.

Burns and Granbois (1979) found that family decision-making roles are often related to the perceived influence of husbands and wives as portrayed by their recollection of decision process events. But the reasons why decision-making roles vary from one family to another can only be identified by investigating the situational factors which influence information search and other pre-purchase behaviour (Holman and Epperson, 1984).

Reviewing the literature on household decision-making, Davis (1976)

identified two key implications for research:

- (1) The need to consider in more detail the extent to which prior experience influences family decision-making responsibilities for evaluating the consumption experience, storing information for future use and utilising the stored information when the need arises.
- (2) The need to explore how families make decisions rather than simply who is involved. This is important because the nature of family relationships and the financial and time constraints faced by the family constitute a unique decision-making environment.

#### 2.6.9 The evoked set

The range of purchase alternatives available to the consumer can be described as the 'universal set'. As the consumer becomes familiar with some of these alternatives through search, incidental learning and experience, brand categorisation occurs (Fletcher, 1986). The group of acceptable brands is termed the 'evoked set' and represents the small number of alternatives which the individual is familiar with, remembers, and finds acceptable for further consideration (Howard and Sheth, 1969).

Further to the brand-based definition, Moutinho (1986) found that consumers sometimes use situation-specific criteria to assess tourist destination options. This provides the consumer with an alternative approach to brand selection derived from comparative assessment against specific decision criteria

#### 2.6.10 The role of decision rules in choice behaviour

Reviewing psychological theories of consumer choice, Hansen (1976) concludes that choice processes vary on a continuum ranging from very simple or routinised to more complex behaviour. For example, when an alternative that has performed well in the past is selected, a simple choice process has been used. Such a process repeated many times, may become established as an integral part of a behavioural sequence. This acts as a guiding principle or decision rule which can be applied to subsequent choice decisions.

Product familiarity can lead to increased confidence during subsequent consumer decision-making (Johnson and Russo 1980). This enables the experienced consumer to be more selective in searching information, and to use established decision rules instead of repeating preliminary

explorations of external information on subsequent purchase occasions. The latitude of product acceptance is also likely to narrow as new experiences are assimilated, and preferences become more focused.

The influence of product knowledge on choice behaviour can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Brand-based information processing is more likely to occur among consumers who are familiar with the product category, and attribute-based processing among consumers who are unfamiliar with the product category. (Russo and Johnson, 1979; Bettman and Park, 1980; Beattie, 1981; Biehal and Chakravarti, 1981; 1983).
- (2) Consumers tend to start with attribute-based comparative assessments, turning to brand-based processing in the later stages of information search and selection. This suggests that attribute-based comparisons are more easily undertaken. Experienced consumers also tend to make comparisons against an established reference standard in order to evaluate alternatives and make trade-off decisions (Bettman and Park, 1980; Beattie, 1981).

These findings suggest that experienced consumers are able to construct a prototype for the product class within an internal knowledge structure, and process information schematically. This enables the consumer to make the fullest use of similarity and difference information.

#### 2.6.11 Non-compensatory decision rules

More complex choice processes occur when non-compensatory choice principles are invoked. Typically this happens when a weakness in one product attribute is not compensated for by the strengths of another. Alternative approaches include:

- (1) Lexicographic - which involves the ranking of product attributes from most important to least important, usually in situations where the number of brand alternatives is fixed;
- (2) Conjunctive - which determines the minimum acceptable level for each product attribute;
- (3) Disjunctive - which determines acceptable standards for each criterion.

As non-compensatory choices become more complex, the consumer may try to rank choice criteria using a weighting, or subjective probability procedure. The composition and individual importance of the evaluative criteria has been found to vary at different stages of the decision process (Fletcher, 1986; 1987):

''Consumers will recall with greatest ease how they made the choice from amongst alternatives in the choice set, and if not prompted may ignore how this choice set was created...''  
(Fletcher, 1987)

Bettman (1981) considered the use of evaluative criteria during choice, and concluded that an overall evaluation is more likely to occur in high involvement situations characterised by brand-organised information, and when there are factors present which prevent the use a simple choice process.

#### 2.6.12 The role of price information in product choice

During the evaluation of choice alternatives, consumers often use price information as a criterion against which product attributes can be ranked and evaluated (Park, Lessig and Merrill 1981). Price information also provides an indicator of product quality, especially if product information is limited.

Price information also provides an indicator of product quality, especially if product information is limited. In making price comparisons, the consumer considers alternatives which lie within an acceptable price range. Alternatives outside the range may be rejected because they are perceived to be either too expensive or too cheap. A brand may also be rejected if the price is considered to be incompatible with the purchase occasion. (Monroe and Petroschius, 1981).

#### 2.6.13 Family role influences in choice behaviour

Focusing on the different influence strategies used by marital partners in resolving disagreements about purchase decisions, Spiro (1983) found that people who are more traditional in their life styles and attitudes are more likely to use persuasive influence. However, husband and wife perceptions of each others' influence attempts differ, especially for decisions involving other family members (Belch, Belch and Sciglimpaglia 1979). Choice behaviour is also influenced by the wider circle of family and friends. One explanation for this is that the consumer has more empathy with those who's patterns of consumption are most like his own. (Belk, 1979).

Midgely and Christopher (1975) found that the problem-solving approach adopted by the consumer is related to his perception and classification of the decision-making situation. In this context, they cite differences between the approaches required for joint and individual decision-making. For example, when joint decision-making occurs, it often involves discussion and negotiation relating to different or even opposing viewpoints. As a consequence of this interaction, they found that less information may be used and retained than during individual decision-making.

#### 2.6.14 The purchase decision

Concluding a review of research on pre-purchase behaviour, Olshavsky and Granbois (1979) make several observations about the relationship between pre-purchase activities and the purchase decision:

- (1) Many purchases are likely to occur out of necessity, because of deeply rooted preferences, conformity to group norms or imitation of others based on recommendations from personal or non-personal sources.
- (2) Even when the purchase decision is preceded by a choice process, it is typically limited to the evaluation of a few alternatives, little external search, few evaluative criteria and simple evaluation processes.

They believe that a stronger emphasis on the study of situational factors is necessary in order to develop a broader understanding of consumer decision-making. To achieve this objective, they add that observational research methods will need to be used more widely, thereby reducing the dependence on model-based predictions of consumer choice.

Belk (1975) defines the situational context in which decision-making occurs as 'a point in time and space'. He also describes five situational factors which commonly influence decision-making. These are physical surroundings, social surroundings, antecedent states, task definition and the temporal perspective of the decision process. He defines task definition as:

''...an intent or requirement to select, shop for, or obtain information about a general or specific purchase...''

Situational factors are also known to affect consumer satisfaction. For example, the results of a study carried out by Granzin and Schjelderup

(1981) showed that situational factors affected the level of anticipated satisfaction with car repair decisions. They conclude that situational factors may also affect levels of self-confidence, and perceived risk associated with the decision process.

As noted in chapter 1, hospitality services are delivered in a wide variety of situations and physical environments. Therefore the relationship between self-confidence and consumer satisfaction may be important, especially if the consumption environment is an unfamiliar one. The concept of situational self-image provides a link between personal and situational influences on consumer behaviour. For example, Schenk and Holman (1979) believe that the consumer develops a repertoire of self-images which may vary as the situation requires. Interpreting this view, the consumer who is selecting an hotel might be expected to seek confirmation that he will feel comfortable with the physical environment and the services provided.

#### 2.6.15 Research questions arising from the review of pre-purchase studies

In order to identify different patterns of consumer decision-making, it is necessary to establish a framework for comparative analysis. The review of pre-purchase studies has shown that there are problems associated with isolating preference structure variables, and that prior attitudinal and search behaviour studies have resulted in inconclusive or inconsistent findings. However, the review has also indicated that there are several promising variables, notably prior experience with the product category, and product involvement. These two variables are interrelated, and may also influence the way in which assessment and evaluation are undertaken during the consumption and post-consumption stages of the decision process. Their potential explanatory value is summarised in the following research questions:

- (1) The propensity of consumers with extensive prior experience to engage in high involvement decision-making is related to the perceived importance of the product.
- (2) The propensity of consumers with extensive prior experience to engage in low involvement decision-making is related to product familiarity and personal confidence in product class decision-making ability.
- (3) The propensity of consumers with limited prior experience to engage in high involvement decision-making is related to

perceived risk, and limited personal confidence in product class decision-making ability.

- (4) The propensity of consumers with limited prior experience to engage in low involvement decision-making is related to pre-knowledge of product suitability and low perceptions of risk.
- (5) The use of pre-purchase decision rules, and their relative effectiveness during the assessment of choice criteria is positively related to the consumer's prior product experience.
- (6) Confidence in joint decision-making is positively related to product role specialisation.

## 2.7 The consumption and post-consumption stages of the decision process

Investigating changes in consumer satisfaction associated with consecutive purchase behaviour, LaBarbera and Mazursky (1983) found that satisfaction plays a significant role in mediating intentions and actual behaviour. Although consumers may not always recall evaluations, they conclude that they will always think of past satisfaction prior to a re-purchase decision, thereby linking expectations with experience.

### 2.7.1 The relationship between consumer expectations and experience

Historically, a certain degree of ambiguity has existed in the literature regarding the expectancy construct. Olson and Dover (1976) define expectation as:

''...the perceived likelihood that a product possesses a certain characteristic or attribute, or will lead to a particular event or outcome''

The different expectations and perceptions of quality and service held by consumers, managers and staff in the hospitality industry has been investigated by Nightingale (1983; 1985). His findings suggest that efforts to improve consumer satisfaction may be seriously impeded by perceptual differences. Managers and staff tend to focus on tangible elements of the product in their role as service providers, whereas consumers often have a wider set of expectations which are not always easy to anticipate. To some extent, as Burnkrant and Cousineau have argued (1975), this may be explained by the influence of word of mouth communications on the formation of expectations. They found that recommendations from people who are known

to be familiar with a particular product category have an influential role on the way in which products are perceived by others.

A reference standard may be used by consumers for making attribute-based product comparisons. This is usually described in terms of experiences which fall above or below a reference point experience. For example, LaTour and Peat (1978; 1979) found that prior experience and product satisfaction are linked by product attribute comparisons. Swan and Jones Combs (1976) and Howes and Arndt (1979). found that product attributes are likely to be assessed according to their perceived product importance, suggesting that consumer satisfaction consists of many differently weighted individual satisfactions. Howes and Arndt argue that consumers often seek 'bundles or clusters of satisfactions' especially from service products where the consumer actively participates in the service provision. Further evidence is provided by Westbrook (1981) who concludes that consumers add together their experiences so that high levels of satisfaction from some sources compensate for lower levels from others.

#### 2.7.2 The concept of satisfaction

Reviewing the literature on consumer satisfaction, McNeal (1977) found that it has been defined in numerous ways. He concludes that the term 'consumer satisfaction' is most frequently used to refer to the fulfilment of a motivating state or the meeting of an expectation, through the purchase of a product or service.

In a study concerned with the measurement of tourist satisfaction with a destination area (Pizam, Neumann and Reichel, 1978) satisfaction is defined as:

''...the result of the interaction between a tourist's experience at the destination area and the expectations he had about that destination.''

They found that satisfaction was derived from the evaluation of tourist product components such as accommodation, eating and drinking experiences, destination accessibility, attractions, cost and services. The outcome; satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) was derived from the weighted sum total of comparative assessment ratings, guided by expectations and reference standards.

Lounsbury and Hoopes (1985) found that an important dimension of tourist satisfaction is relaxation and leisure. This is related to the way personal plans work out in practice; emotional and physical wellbeing; the 'pace

of life' experienced; opportunities for familiar and new leisure activity participation and the feeling of enjoyment associated with each experience.

The majority of studies in the review concerned with consumer satisfaction subscribe to one of the two viewpoints. Firstly, that satisfaction results from the confirmation of expectations and dissatisfaction from disconfirmation, or secondly, that satisfaction/dissatisfaction is derived from measurements made against experience-based norms.

### **2.7.3 Confirmation/disconfirmation of expectations**

Confirmation/disconfirmation begins prior to brand purchase and use, when the consumer formulates expectations about brand performance in a given situation. After using the brand, the consumer compares perceived actual performance with expected performance. Confirmation of expectations, leading to a feeling of satisfaction, occurs when the two perspectives coincide or if perceived brand performance exceeds expectations. Disconfirmation occurs if perceived brand performance falls below expectations, leading to a feeling of dissatisfaction.

Oliver (1980) concludes that expectations provide a standard against which product performance can be measured, thereby influencing subsequent product preferences and behavioural intention. Westbrook and Cote (1979) support this view, suggesting that the consumer compares actual experience with prior expectations noting any performance disparity. This information provides the basis for assessing relative satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the overall experience.

### **2.7.4 Experience-based norms**

Woodruff, Cadotte and Jenkins (1983) propose a model for conceptualising consumer satisfaction which replaces expectations with experience-based norms as the standard for comparing brand performance. They suggest that after using a brand, the consumer will note how it performed. When there are many attributes to consider, overall brand performance may be determined by a combination of beliefs about the brand's various performance dimensions (Westbrook, 1981). In this way, beliefs are either strengthened or weakened according to how closely actual brand performance matches expected brand performance (LaTour and Peat, 1979).

Experience-based norms provide a frame of reference for evaluating performance. There is also some evidence to suggest that they are better predictors of satisfaction than evaluations based solely on brand

expectations (Swan and Martin, 1980). As experience will vary for different product categories, two types of experience-based norms are hypothesised:

- (1) A brand-based norm in situations when one brand dominates the consumer's set of brand experiences;
- (2) A product-based norm in situations when the consumer has had experience with several brands within a product class, but does not have a specific reference brand.

Experience-based norms are utilised in different ways during the decision process, ranging from single norms for familiar low involvement products, to multiple norms associated with important events such as the purchase of a car or holiday. When actual brand performance is close to the norm, it is described as being within an acceptable latitude of performance. If however, brand performance is considered to be outside the latitude of acceptance, dissatisfaction occurs. Comparing the two explanations, Woodruff, Cadotte and Jenkins regard the experience-based norms viewpoint as more realistic because norms provide an integrated frame of reference derived from evaluations of prior experience.

#### 2.7.5 Research questions from the review of consumption and evaluation studies

The literature indicates that prior experience is likely to be an important factor during the consumption of hospitality services, influencing the formation of expectations, assessment criteria and the way in which experiences are integrated into the consumer's personal rating system. The system is derived from experience-based norms, and enables the consumer to assess and evaluate the extent of satisfaction with the consumption experience. These points are summarised in the following research questions:

- (7) The correlation between product expectations and experience is positively related to product familiarity.
- (8) The degree of sophistication inherent in the operation of the consumer's personal rating system is positively related to the extent of prior product experience.
- (9) Satisfaction during product consumption is a function of many differently weighted impressions and experiences which are cumulative, and are continually being integrated into the

consumer's personal rating system.

- (10) Satisfaction during post-consumption evaluation represents the sum total of individual assessments made during consumption. This evaluation reinforces or modifies the consumer's preference structure and influences future decision-making.

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## Chapter 3

### Consumer theory and methodology

#### 3.1 Overview of the chapter

The discussion of hospitality concepts and consumer theory in the previous chapters has indicated that consumer decision-making for hospitality services has not been systematically investigated before. It was therefore appropriate to collect the study data using a theory generating approach.

The objective of this chapter is to explain and justify the selection of a qualitative methodology. The chapter begins by assessing the requirements of consumer theory development, including the selection of appropriate research methods. Following this, the Glaser and Strauss grounded theory method of theory generation is introduced and described. The account refers to procedures for sampling, data collection and categorisation, with reference to social science research applications.

In addition to the grounded theory method, I decided to use a cognitive modelling program derived from George Kelly's theory of personal constructs. The program is called Cognitive Policy Evaluation (COPE) and its development was based on an established manual procedure known as cognitive mapping. At the end of the chapter, the use of COPE as a secondary method of data analysis is outlined, with reference to its theoretical basis and range of applications.

#### 3.2 Scientific progress and method in marketing

The potential value of theory development in marketing is frequently underestimated. Foxall (1986) asserts that this is because practitioners and applied researchers try to avoid academic speculation. They tend to make unadorned descriptions of marketing phenomena through direct observation and empirical generalisations built up from multiple observations. He believes that whereas theory and metatheory are widely held to be irrelevant or even obstructive, they are inextricably linked with observation and practice. Baker (1986) agrees and notes four essential functions of theory which share concepts familiar to practitioners and academics. These are:

- (1) The means of classifying, organising, and integrating information relevant to the factual world of business.
- (2) A technique of thinking about marketing problems, and a

perspective for practical action.

- (3) An analytical tool-kit to be drawn on as appropriate in the solution of marketing problems.
- (4) The possibility to derive, in time, a number of principles, or even laws, of marketing behaviour.

These common areas of interests provide a basis for developing theory which has practical value. Kelly (1963) states that theory should possess several qualities:

''A theory may be considered as a way of binding together a multitude of facts so that one may comprehend them all at once. When the theory enables us to make reasonably precise predictions, one may call it scientific.''

In unifying facts into theory, an explicit framework is created within which deductions can be made and future events anticipated. Supported by the work of Kuhn (1970) and Popper (1969), Kelly asserts that theory generation should:

- (1) Facilitate the integration of new ideas, and the production of testable hypotheses;
- (2) Provide a better understanding of the phenomena represented by systemising facts, and facilitate modification in the light of subsequent observations.

The review of the cognitive paradigm and general decision models in chapter 2 identified a number of shortcomings. Principally these were the difficulties of operationalising model concepts and establishing consistent relationships between variables. They have been attributed by some writers to the quantitative research tradition used in the development of marketing theory.

Hunt (1983) reviews the marketing literature in order to establish the expectations of theory. He concludes that a formal theory, operating across product classes or fields, would explain all the phenomena within one of the following categories:

- (1) The behaviours of consumers or producers in the context of the exchange;
- (2) The framework within which the exchange occurs;

- (3) The consequences on society of the behaviours of consumers or producers;

According to Arndt (1976) the methodological tradition in marketing has hindered the development of consumer theory. He asserts that fragmentation in the subject matter can be explained by the fact that the great majority of studies are non-cumulative, and tend to use reduced form models or selected constructs which are isolated from consumer behaviour as a whole. He believes that data sources are often selected because they are easily available, and that convenient research and mathematical techniques have been used to analyse 'appealing' behavioural constructs. He concludes:

''Such opportunism and reductionism have subordinated conceptualisation and theory -building to measurement and manipulation of data by high powered statistical tools. This has resulted in a large number of isolated facts, which lack consistency and which are difficult to integrate into formal comprehensive theories...there is little doubt that the fragmentation of the subject matter is a symptom of the absence of adequate theoretical underpinnings in the area, which could give direction and meaning to empirical research.''

Arndt's analysis of consumer theory development is supported by other critics. Kassarian (1981) agrees that the field of consumer behaviour is more realistically described as 'fragmented' than 'interdisciplinary'. Anderson (1983) adds that it is often difficult to determine what problem the research is attempting to solve, or if the solution has any real significance for the advancement of knowledge. He emphasises three points:

- (1) Too often the focus of theory development is 'relationship studies' where an attempt is made to determine if an independent and dependent variable are related.
- (2) There is little serious effort to link the result to an established body of theory.
- (3) Follow-up studies to explore and develop the area are rare.

Anderson concludes that the quantitative approach appears to follow an empiricist model of science which assumes that if enough scattered facts or relationships are gathered, they will somehow assemble themselves into a coherent body of theory. He advocates a greater commitment to theory-driven research capable of solving both theoretically and commercially significant problems.

Deshpande (1983) believes that a broadening of the theoretical tradition is necessary. This is due to the methodological bias evident in new theoretical contributions which use methods more appropriate to theory testing than to theory generation. He suggests that this could be achieved by making greater use of qualitative methods when attempting to generate new theory. This approach may also be more relevant to practitioners who need to understand the social realities of the marketplace in which they operate.

### 3.2.1 Qualitative approaches to consumer research

Qualitative methods were originally used in market research to uncover subconscious consumer motivations. This work still continues, but of wider interest today is the link between the decision-maker in marketing and advertising and the consumer. The Market Research Society (R & D sub-committee, 1979) have identified a number of applications which have commercial and theoretical significance in this context. They are:

- (1) The gathering of information about the characteristics of a changing, new or unfamiliar consumer market. The nature of this information requires exploration and discovery using personal interview methods.
- (2) The gathering of information which is too subtle and too complex to be tailored to the structured, standardised techniques and criteria of quantitative research. Typically this might be consumer information about needs and emotions with varied conscious and unconscious motives and influences.
- (3) The gathering of information for advertising purposes which provides a more complete picture than could be achieved using quantitative research. For example, consumer language use and non-verbal behaviour can provide insights about the consumer-media and consumer-product relationship, and about behavioural, emotional and lifestyle patterns associated with product usage.

To summarise, the use of a qualitative methodology offers several distinct advantages. It provides the means of exploring the consumer decision process holistically, and thereby enables the construction of a theoretical framework on which subsequent relationship studies can be based. It also makes the integration of data easier, and is therefore more likely to meet the expectations of marketing theory. The use of qualitative methodology

in grounded theory generation is explained in the following section.

### 3.3 Theory generation using qualitative methods

The limited application of qualitative methods in consumer theory generation can be traced to the 1960's. Case studies were not generally considered to be as scientific as statistical methods of investigation because they require subjective interpretation (Festinger and Katz, 1966; McCall and Simmons, 1969). More recently the debate has centred on the quality and applicability of the theory generated. These criteria provide a more objective basis for research design than the intrinsic merits of quantitative and qualitative methods (Roos, 1979).

Theory generated using quantitative methodology requires a deliberate, pre-determined focus on specific variables and their assumed relationships. This formula may preclude important variables from the research design if they cannot be accommodated within the analytical framework. In contrast, qualitative data collection techniques are less rigid and more responsive to changes in research direction, although the non-standardised approach can inhibit definition and clarification of research variables and their relationships (Dean, Eichhorn and Dean, 1969). Hawker (1982) argues that this difficulty can be overcome by carefully documenting the way in which analytical procedures are developed and used during data collection.

The main advantage of qualitative theory generation is that it facilitates closer and more detailed observation within the defined area of research. This is an important consideration in generating consumer theory. Diesing (1972) emphasises this, suggesting that theoretical concepts are more realistic if they are derived from observation rather than abstraction.

There are numerous texts which describe qualitative research techniques and methods, and the recommendations concerning data collection and analysis vary. Most authors describe the use of analytical methods during or after data collection (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Bogdan and Taylor, 1984; Miles and Huberman, 1984; Walker, 1985). The approach introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) involves constant comparison of new data with existing data so that it can be integrated into categories as it is collected. They call this a 'constant comparative method'. It has the advantage of bringing consistency to the field work through the systematic cross-comparison of data, and ensuring that the emerging theory is centred or 'grounded' in the research observations.

### 3.3.1 The grounded theory method

The term 'grounded theory' meaning the discovery of theory from field data, is derived from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) later refined by Glaser (1978). They argue that research potential has been restricted by too much concern for the testing and verification of theories. Their approach to handling qualitative data enables the generation of theoretical explanations as the investigation progresses, although subjective judgement at each stage of theory development is necessary. The purpose of this is to verify the fit between emerging research themes and the situation or events that they represent.

Sims (1978) suggests that the need to make subjective judgement is common to all forms of social enquiry. However, the discipline of the constant comparative method provides effective guidance because of the interrelatedness of the data:

''...an observer always has several different kinds of evidence available to him, and can form some impression of the validity of any one of these in the context of the others.''

The credibility of grounded theory is derived from its objective basis which is, wherever possible free from a priori assumptions and hypotheses which may otherwise 'mask important features of social reality' (Silverman, 1970). The objective of grounded theory according to Silverman is to:

''...seek to mobilise, as an explanatory tool, the categories which the participants themselves use to order their experience.''

To achieve this objective, various methods of data collection may be necessary. These include participant observation, semi-structured or unstructured interviews and the use of case study material. Brown (1973) and Trend (1978) conclude that each of these methods is well suited to grounded theory generation.

The grounded theory method has been used in a variety of contexts. These include problem construction in organisations (Sims, 1978) and the interaction between hospital nurses and patients' relatives (Hawker, 1982). Other applications of grounded theory (Turner, 1983; Martin and Turner, 1986) and methodological developments (Turner, 1981; Jones, 1985) have also been reported in the literature.

### 3.4. Theoretical sampling

Glaser and Strauss use the term 'theoretical sampling' to describe the process of data collection for theory generation. This involves the joint collection, coding and categorising of data. As the theoretical concepts begin to emerge from the categories, they determine the direction and emphasis of subsequent field work. The purpose is to discover and explore the emerging themes or categories until they become 'saturated'. This occurs when no new category properties or characteristics are evident in the data.

Glaser and Strauss state that initial decisions about data collection should be based on nothing more than a general understanding of the subject or problem area, to avoid imposing a preconceived framework on the research. Glaser later modified this view, conceding that some researchers necessarily begin field work with pre-understanding of the concepts involved. He comments that this is less than completely open, but may be unavoidable. He adds that in this situation, the researcher should be aware of the possibility of introducing subjective bias during the interpretation of data.

The inductive process of grounded theorising requires that data is collected and categorised until the theory crystallises. At this point it can be substantiated from the subject literature, although Glaser believes that insights from the literature may be necessary to guide the early stages of theory development:

''It is vital to read, but in a substantive field different from the research. This, maximizes the avoidance of pre-empting, preconceived concepts which may easily detract from the input...It is hard enough to generate ones own ideas without the ''rich'' derailment provided by the literature in the same field.''

Once the field work has commenced, the constant comparative method yields insights which direct theoretical sampling. However, the direction may be complicated by multiple options. If this occurs, Glaser suggests that different approaches should be tried until categories have been identified which reflect the complete data set.

Differences between consumers can be identified by comparing sub-group data. This procedure also enables the progressive focusing of interviews. Glaser and Strauss suggest that data collection should continue until the differences and similarities within and between comparison groups have been established. This process begins with open-ended interviews which

gradually become more structured as the researcher becomes aware of the sub-group differences and similarities which exist. The study comparison groups are discussed in chapter 4.

Summarising the central aspects of theoretical sampling:

- (1) Grounded theory is shaped by emerging categories. These also control the subsequent research direction. This includes the subject matter focus and the selection of respondents.
- (2) Preconceptions about the field of enquiry should be minimised, although theoretical contributions from subject areas other than the one under investigation, provide initial guidance.
- (3) The requirement to saturate the categories by a process of continual data comparison determines the sample size and the duration of field work.
- (4) The emergent theory should possess relevance and 'goodness of fit' in describing the total data set.

### **3.5 Data collection and categorisation**

In order to investigate patterns of behaviour, Jones (1985) asserts that it is necessary to interpret the meaning and significance that consumers attribute to their actions. Drawing from Kelly's work (1955; 1963) she believes that individuals use a complex personal framework of beliefs and values to categorise, explain and predict events. The ability to make predictions about product suitability corresponds with the function of a decision rule as described in chapter 2. If the prediction proves to be inaccurate, the framework of beliefs may, as a consequence need to be modified.

Depth interviewing is an effective way of investigating the consumer's personal construct system. This provides:

''...the opportunity for the researcher to probe deeply, to uncover new clues, to open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate, inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience.'' (Burgess, 1982)

The purpose of depth interviewing is to understand the respondent's constructions of reality by seeking explanations and consequences of their behaviour. It is important to hear their interpretation of events rather than make assumptions based on behavioural observations. The Market Research Society support this approach in situations requiring a 'highly

detailed understanding of complicated behaviour or decision-making patterns'' (R & D sub-committee, 1979). They cite as an example the planning process for a family holiday. As personal interviews provide an effective way of identifying decision-making activities and consumer reactions to the hotel experience, this method of data collection is an appropriate choice for the study. Details of the interviewing procedure are given in chapter 4.

The volume and complexity of data generated by using the grounded theory method necessitates the use of an effective coding and categorisation procedure. As the data is collected, it needs to be compared and coded into as many categories as are applicable. The theory begins to take shape as the categories are gradually defined. Glaser advises of the need for sensitivity during the early stages of categorisation because the established framework provides the factual basis of the theory. Ultimately each component category becomes saturated, and can be explained by its properties or characteristics. The theory finally becomes integrated when the relationships between categories are understood.

Turner (1983; 1986) emphasises the importance of being well organised during the period of data collection. This involves ensuring that field notes are chronologically ordered and easily retrievable. He discusses three aspects of data recording, involving the continual processes of note writing, category discovery and definition. He uses notes to comment on the content and context of interview data, recording events, impressions and interactions with respondents. He refers to category discovery as the process of moving from data to a category. This requires a variety of data giving nominal definition, theoretical meaning and substantive content to the category. He suggests that this information about categories can be held on separate cards for ease of use.

According to Bailyn (1977) the way in which the researcher organises and responds to emerging themes in the data is critical. As data collection, comparison and categorisation are concurrent activities, the researcher can easily be overwhelmed by the data. The objective should be to balance these activities in such a way that they stimulate rather than impede conceptualisation. This has several implications:

- (1) The period of data collection should permit the research to proceed sequentially, and allow sufficient time for preliminary analysis and conceptualisation.

- (2) As the analytical process is slow, it may be necessary to re-examine data gathered at different stages of the field work. The need for backward reflection is most likely to arise when categories are close to saturation, and during the formulation of theoretical propositions.

Bulmer (1984) argues that theory generation requires the discipline of observing and making intelligible, patterns in the data. Turner (1983) suggests that this involves converting "concepts which are built covertly into any descriptive account of the world" into theoretical categories which can be rigorously examined and defined. However, the categories by themselves do not explain the differences in the consumer's cognitive structure which influence decision-making behaviour. In order to elaborate the grounded theory categories, further analysis is desirable. This was undertaken using a cognitive modelling procedure derived from Kelly's personal construct theory.

### 3.6 Personal construct theory

Kelly (1963) asserts that individuals make sense of their world through "transparent patterns or templets" which they create and use to interpret reality. These patterns are called "constructs" because they represent ways of construing the world around us. His personal construct theory (1955; 1963) consists of eleven corollaries which are listed and explained in Appendix 1. They elaborate the central assertion which states that an individual's thinking is psychologically guided by the ways in which he anticipates events.

Kelly argues that personal constructs are organised into a hierarchical system of superordinal and subordinal relationships. The system is continually evolving to incorporate new knowledge and understanding. It also integrates factual information which the individual uses to anticipate and predict events. In this sense the construct system provides a personal theory to guide thinking and behaviour. The relationships between personal constructs can be explored by using a depth interviewing technique and the analytical procedure of cognitive mapping.

#### 3.6.1 Principles of cognitive mapping

The analytical technique of cognitive mapping is derived from Kelly's personal construct theory. The mapping procedure involves listening and exploring beyond the surface of the words used by the individual in an interview to describe their interpretation of events. The purpose of the

map is to represent a person's thinking and theorising about a part of their world, using their own language and by depicting constructs or ideas and their interrelationships in their terms.

Jones (1985) describes a manual procedure for cognitive mapping which begins with interview data either in the form of a tape recording, or notes made immediately after an interview. The aim is to code each interview so that wherever possible it can be depicted on one large sheet of paper. The coding procedure involves assigning causal or non-causal (connative) links between related constructs. Links are shown by using lines and arrow heads to illustrate the causal path. A line without an arrow head is used to show that two constructs are related, but that there is no implied direction to the link.

During the process of constructing the map, Jones uses a variety of coding aids to emphasise meaning. These include words written along the arrows and lines and bold or dotted lines to indicate emphatic or tentative assertions made by the respondent. During the coding process, she also makes notes on apparent inconsistencies in the data, contradictory views expressed during the course of the interview and other reactions together with their significance for category development.

When all the main ideas and relationships contained in the interview have been depicted, the map is complete. From this, and with the aid of explanatory notes made on the map, it is possible to prepare summary diagrams representing clusters of ideas. The network structure of the map also makes it possible to identify loops and chains of ideas which may be helpful in theory development.

The principles of the manual cognitive mapping technique were used in the development of a computer-based cognitive modelling program called Cognitive Policy Evaluation (COPE). The program was extensively tested and refined during its development period (Eden, Smithin and Wiltshire, 1980, 1985; and Eden, Jones and Sims, 1983) and it has been used on a wide variety of research investigations. These include self-reflection and learning (Eden, Jones and Sims, 1979) negotiating problem definition in groups (Eden and Jones, 1980) the analysis of semi-structured interviews and qualitative market research data (Jones, 1981; Jones, 1985a; Jones and Eden, 1981) and in various organisational research studies (Eden, 1979; Sims and Jones, 1980; Eden, Jones, Sims and Smithin, 1981; Smithin and Sims, 1982).

### 3.6.2 Computer-based cognitive modelling

COPE was originally designed to assist decision makers and project teams with qualitative aspects of problem solving. The program authors felt that existing management science techniques were capable of supporting rational, quantitative assessments, but that their mathematical basis was better suited to the generation of solutions than creative thinking and learning around the problem itself. The intention therefore, was to design an interactive modelling program that would bring together ideas, beliefs and attitudes associated with the objects and or people encompassed by a given problem or situation so that the relationships could be fully explored. Data selection and input into the COPE program are explained in chapter 4, and the analytical methods used are detailed in chapter 6.

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## Chapter 4

### Research design and methods

#### 4.1 Overview of the chapter

In chapter 3, the role of qualitative methods in theory development was discussed. The objective of this chapter is to describe how the grounded theorising approach was applied to the study. This involves identifying the factors affecting the research design, the use of data comparison groups, the sampling procedure which was adopted and the procedures and methods used to collect and analyse interview data. The final section outlines how the research findings are presented in the chapters which follow.

#### 4.2 Factors affecting the research design

To identify factors affecting the research design, it is helpful to recap on the reasons for using qualitative methods in the study.

Firstly, chapter 1 revealed the need for consumer theory which will aid hospitality management decision-making, especially at the point of service delivery. The relevance of the study to this objective is assured by the collaborative nature of the research. Secondly, the literature review in chapter 2 established that there have been few contributions to the development of consumer theory in marketing which have direct application to hospitality services. As a consequence of this, the review supports the need for a research design using a theory generating approach. In chapter 3, the traditional role of quantitative methods in theory development was questioned, partly because of the fragmentation which exists in the literature. The need for an holistic study of consumer decision-making for hospitality services therefore meant that a qualitative approach would be a more appropriate choice.

The research was undertaken by interviewing consumers in their home, at their place of work or at their hotel during the course of the short break. The interviews were semi-structured in format, being directed by a topic list which I had developed from background reading, discussions with the collaborating company and several exploratory interviews. A total of thirty-six interviews were undertaken over a four month period with eighteen of the interviews involving both marital partners. The theoretical importance of the consumer-producer interface in hospitality services led to the decision to undertake thirty-two of the thirty-six interviews in

the participating hotels. Of the remainder, two interviews were completed before, and two interviews after the hotel short break.

The main advantage of collecting data by personal interview is that it is possible to draw on the thinking and theorising of consumers to ensure that theory development is realistic. I was able to tape record and fully transcribe every interview, which meant that a large volume of data was used to substantiate the emerging data categories. I also used the individual transcripts to construct a cognitive model for each interview using the COPE program referred to at the end of chapter 3.

The initial intention was to conduct interviews at two of the three stages; before, during or after the hotel short break. It was hoped that a number of respondents would agree to participate in more than one interview, with final interviews taking place within two weeks of completing the break. In practice it was not possible to implement this plan because of the wide geographical distribution of both the respondents and the participating hotels. Consequently, the interviews were all single stage, with interviews before the short break taking place soon after the booking was made, and interviews after the break taking place no more than two weeks afterwards.

The interview plan worked effectively, as consumers interviewed during the consumption stage were able to recall pre-purchase stage activities very clearly. Experienced hotel users were also able to give detailed descriptions of post-consumption reactions by referring to prior experiences and their impact on subsequent decision-making.

#### **4.3 Organisation of the field work**

After discussions with the collaborating company about the organisation of the research, the following arrangements were made. Interviews conducted before or after the short break took place in the homes or workplaces of the respondents. Hotel-based interviews were conducted at four hotels in London, Cheltenham and Newcastle upon Tyne. These hotels were selected because of their strategic importance to the success and profitability of the company's short break brand.

The two central London hotels are situated in close proximity to city centre shopping areas, entertainment and cultural attractions. The hotel in Cheltenham is close to the Cotswolds, and the hotel in Newcastle-upon-Tyne is situated in rural surroundings with convenient access to the largest shopping centre in the North East of England. This hotel also has extensive

indoor and outdoor leisure facilities, which have become an especially important feature of hotel short breaks for the family.

Each respondent (or couple) received a discount voucher which was valid for a subsequent hotel short break at the end of the interview. There were two reasons for this, firstly to provide an incentive and a token of appreciation for participating in the research, and secondly to signify that the interview represented a sincere effort by the company to consult it's customers.

The initial discount voucher gave a 50 per cent discount on two nights' accommodation and breakfast for two adults. However, this was reduced to a 15 per cent discount after completing five hotel-based interviews, following comments made by respondents indicating that the level of discount was too generous. The 15 per cent discount voucher proved to be a satisfactory incentive, and was considered by respondents to be an adequate level of compensation for the intrusion into their leisure time. The methods used to contact respondents are explained in the section dealing with the sampling procedure.

#### **4.4 Data comparison groups**

The approach to theoretical sampling explained in chapter 3, requires the constant comparison of data during the field work in order to develop and substantiate data categories. The purpose of this is to identify similarities and differences between respondents and to facilitate integrated theory development. In order to undertake constant comparison, it is necessary to identify appropriate measures or groups which can be used to differentiate the data.

The need to identify the expectations of consumer sub-groups is a common requirement in most product fields. The conventional response is to segment the marketplace by defining specific target groups of consumers, and positioning products and services accordingly. A key objective is to find the most effective way of differentiating the target groups. Wind (1978) observes that several methods are commonly used in commercial segmentation practice to estimate segment size and consumer demographic, socioeconomic and psychographic characteristics:

- (1) A priori segmentation design - in which managers pre-determine the basis for segmentation. Examples include product purchase, brand loyalty and customer type.

- (2) A clustering-based segmentation design - in which segments are determined in relation to particular variables such as perceived benefits, needs and attitudes.

Wind believes that theoretical and commercial approaches to segmentation can be integrated by:

''...narrowing the gap between the academically oriented research on segmentation and the real-world application of segmentation research.''

This view emphasises the importance of consumer classification based on actual market behaviour and personal characteristics as suggested by Lunn (1978; 1983) whereby:

- (1) Market or direct classification is concerned with ownership, purchase and usage behaviour or product-related behaviour.
- (2) Personal or indirect classification is concerned with consumer demographics, geographical differences and psycho-sociological characteristics which embrace traits such as personality, life cycle stage and product orientated consumer values.

Lunn argues that consumer research data may be misleading if it is presented in aggregate form because the 'universal product' and the 'average consumer' are atypical. The method of classification should therefore facilitate explanation of the market structure, consumer sub-groups, and market gaps that exist. He concludes that a specific, market-related basis for classification may be more useful and relevant than an indirect method because of the growing concern for precise and sensitive measures of consumer behaviour. In this context qualitative research has an important role in generating explanatory theory.

The study used both direct and indirect comparison group measures to categorise the field data. The indirect measures were predetermined in order to assess the representativeness of the sample, but the direct measures were not defined until the early stages of data collection. At this point they were adopted because it was apparent that they had the potential to provide effective comparison group measures.

#### **4.4.1 Indirect measures: Age and estimated socioeconomic group**

The theoretical sampling procedure was guided throughout by the indirect

comparison groups of age and estimated socioeconomic group membership. Published statistics for the hotel short break market indicate the predominance of consumers in the age range 35-54, with a socioeconomic profile of A, B or C1 (Euromonitor, 1987). These statistics are reflected in the sample which shows that 83 per cent of the respondents were aged between 31-59, with membership of A, B or C1 socioeconomic groups estimated at 92 per cent. This information is displayed in more detail in Appendix 2.

It must be noted that there is increasing dissatisfaction with the accuracy of socioeconomic measures in the literature. The main criticism being that classification is often interpreted in a subjective way, and can be misleading because of this. For instance, socioeconomic grade is defined by occupation, but could also be interpreted as measuring income, social values or life style.

#### 4.4.2 Direct measures: Motives, prior product experience and involvement

Evidence that leisure activities are often goal orientated (Beard and Ragheb 1980; 1983; Pearce and Caltabriano 1983) indicates that motives are likely to play an important role in the consumer decision process for hospitality services. If for example, a consumer is unable to take a summer holiday, the hotel short break may assume more importance. However, in other circumstances such as using a short break in conjunction with business travel, the consumer may not attribute the same significance to hotel selection because the purpose of the break is more routine. The predictive capability of a motive classification developed from the research findings is reviewed in chapter 5.

The importance of two related variables, prior product experience and involvement was noted in the literature review. Twenty-one of the respondents were experienced hotel users, and the remaining fifteen had little or no prior experience of the type and standard of hotel accommodation featured in the collaborating company's short break programme. The degree of commitment to, and involvement in the product category is also thought to play an important role during the decision process. High involvement is characterised by extensive pre-purchase activity, and may be linked to antecedents such as perceptions of product importance, risk, symbolic or sign value and hedonic or emotional considerations (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985). The product involvement classification was derived from the research data and is summarised in

#### **4.5 Sampling procedure**

The main determinant of the sampling procedure was the need to ensure that data categories were identified, and fully developed as the programme of interviews progressed. The procedures used for arranging and completing the programme of interviews are explained below.

##### **4.5.1 Interviews before and after the short break**

Consumers interviewed before or after the short break were contacted by standard letter. This was sent out by the collaborating company with all short break booking confirmations for the participating hotels during a two week period in September, 1986. Consumers were invited to participate in the research by indicating on a return form their preferred interview location, either in their home, place of work or at the short break hotel. Although the response rate to the standard letter was good, with approximately twenty replies, interviews were difficult to organise, because of the wide geographical distribution of respondents.

##### **4.5.2 Interviews during the short break**

Hotel-based interviews were arranged by contacting consumers by letter, distributed either from the reception desk during registration, or shortly after arriving at their guest room. The letter contained a brief explanation of the research, and explained that I would contact guests by telephone to arrange an interview with those who were willing to participate in the study. This procedure was designed to be as discreet and unobtrusive as possible. As hotel guests received the letter in advance of my telephone call, it meant that they were aware of what the interview would involve, and had had time to think about whether they would like to participate. In this way it was possible to arrange an average of four interviews on each residential visit to the participating hotels. The refusal rate varied on each visit from one in two to one in four telephone enquires.

The sampling procedure involved making interview appointments by systematically working through the arrivals list for short break guests until an interview schedule had been organised for the duration of the visit. By using this approach consumers could not be purposefully selected, as the list contained only details of the family name, group size and room number.

The indirect comparison group measures of age and socioeconomic group provided a helpful cross-check on sample representativeness as the research progressed. Differences in decision-making related to prior experience and product involvement became apparent early in the interview programme, and so it was also important to ensure that the direct comparison group measures of prior experience and product involvement were adequately represented. This consideration influenced the duration of the field research and the number of interviews undertaken.

Most consumers expressed satisfaction with the way in which the interviews were organised and conducted. It was especially interesting to note the reactions of experienced hotel users who generally preferred to express their opinions in an interview rather than via a guest room questionnaire. This is because they tend to view the questionnaire method as too superficial or inappropriate for the collection of detailed, subjective information.

#### **4.6 Data collection and analysis**

The relationship with participating hotels was productive because each general manager had been briefed about the study by the company's sales and marketing director before the field work began. I also wrote to each hotel explaining how I would like to organise the interviewing, and requested the use of a quiet interview room close to the reception area. The purpose of this was to ensure that the interviews could be conducted without disturbing hotel guests, management or staff. It was agreed that the duty manager at each hotel would ensure that an interview room was made available, and that a list of short break guests was provided each time I visited the hotel.

The depth interviewing method described in chapter 3 was used in conjunction with a topic list to guide the discussion, and a proforma to record comparison group data and subjective impressions after the interview. The proforma was especially useful for recording interview themes and my impressions of the rapport established with the respondent, as well as details about the respondent's personality and non-verbal behaviour. This information was also used to assess the effectiveness of the interview topic list and probing tactics, and to consider possible implications for subsequent interviews. Comparison group data was collected in several different ways. Age group membership was established by showing the respondent a card with six age ranges numbered 1-6, socioeconomic group

membership was estimated by asking respondents to describe the nature of their work and motives and prior experience were topic list items discussed in every interview. Finally, I assessed the level of involvement in the decision process whilst transcribing the interview by noting the range of pre-purchase activities and the associated comments made by the respondent.

On average, two interviews were completed each weekend throughout the four month period of data collection. The hotel-based interviews averaged forty minutes in duration and the three interviews before, and one interview after the short break averaged sixty minutes. I transcribed the cassette tapes made during the previous weekend's interviews into computer files during the weekday period prior to the next interview appointments. By pausing to transcribe immediately after completing several interviews, it was possible to ensure that data categorisation was continuous, and that progressive interview focusing occurred as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The use of a computer also meant that rapid categorisation was possible by copying information between files. This approach to the construction of categories is quicker than using separate index cards for recording category information as described by Turner (1981; 1983).

#### **4.7 Constructing individual cognitive models**

The computer-based modelling procedure introduced at the end of chapter 3, is a complementary form of secondary analysis because it provides a way of re-building the interviews using the same data. As the software program is interactive, the contents of each model can then be explored and output in the form of summary cognitive maps. The maps are used in chapters 6 and 7 to exemplify and develop the theoretical framework presented in chapter 5.

The preparation of COPE model input necessitates re-reading the interview transcripts in order to identify the main themes and their interrelationships in the text. Then by working systematically through each transcript, the contents are entered into the program in the form of single lines of text, each of which represents one idea or viewpoint. The procedures used for entering data, verifying model relationships, model analysis and the interpretation of model output are explained in a case example at the beginning of chapter 6.

#### **4.8 The presentation of research findings**

The study findings are presented in the following three chapters, beginning in chapter 5 with an overview of the consumer decision process, which

illustrates the key themes emerging from the data categorisation using the constant comparative method. This work is summarised in chapter 8 by referring back to the hypothetical decision process model presented in chapter 1, and reporting on the empirical support emerging from the categorisation of interview transcript data.

In chapters 6 and 7, output from the individual cognitive models is used to illustrate the characteristics of each of the three stages in the decision process. Chapter 6 focuses on the role of prior product experience and involvement in the decision process, concluding with a matrix illustrating their potential utility as segmentation variables. Chapter 7 examines the consumption and post-consumption stages, and the methods used by consumers to assess and evaluate product experience. Chapter 8 summarises the main aspects of the work reported in chapters 5, 6 and 7 in the context of the research questions contained in chapter 2, and concludes by considering the study implications and directions for future research.

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## Chapter 5

### An overview of the consumer decision process for hospitality services

#### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the general framework and characteristics of the consumer decision process for hospitality services. The theoretical and methodological background in chapters 3 and 4 explains the role of data categories, derived from the interview transcripts, in generating and substantiating consumer theory. In this chapter, examples are drawn from the categories which were developed to illustrate the reasons why consumers adopt different decision-making strategies.

#### 5.2 The data categories and comparison groups

The categories supported by the data were not pre-determined, but were established during the early stages of the research. To some extent they reflect my agenda of discussion topics, but they are more closely related to the issues repeatedly raised by respondents during the interview programme. The fifteen categories established were as follows: pre-purchase motives; expectations and lifestyle; prior experience; search and selection strategies; decision-making responsibility and role specialisation; word of mouth recommendation and information seeking; brochure assessment; the role of intermediaries during pre-purchase; brand comparison; consumer information and marketing assessment; reservation experiences; consumption stage assessment procedures; quality standards and service assessments; hotel facilities assessment and post-consumption evaluation.

An important aspect of theory generation is the need to compare the responses given by consumers during the process of data categorisation. Five comparison groups were used, divisible into personal or indirect classification measures (age and socioeconomic group membership) and market or direct classification (purchase motives, prior product experience and involvement).

The indirect measures provided a way of cross-checking the representativeness of the sample with published market statistics. However, attempts to differentiate consumer groups using the indirect measures were not successful. This was because socioeconomic group membership is difficult to quantify, and because age group differences were inconsistent. Although

age-related expectations were identified, and as such constitute a potentially useful marketing tool (Teare and Williams, 1989c) decision-making behaviour was more closely related to prior experience and the perceived importance of the purchase occasion. Further research will be necessary to identify more clearly the nature of the interrelationships between age and decision-making for hospitality services.

The direct comparison measures of prior product experience and involvement were successfully used to identify differences between groups, and they are considered in detail in chapter 6. However, the influence of motives on the consumer decision process is more difficult to interpret. The reasons for this are explained below.

### 5.3 The role of purchase motives in the decision process

The range of factors affecting consumer preferences were identified in chapter 2. These include cultural norms and values, family and reference groups, social and financial status, lifestyle and stage in the life cycle. The way in which these factors combine is thought to affect the composition of the purchase motives which activate the decision process. An English Tourist Board survey (1982) found that most short breaks are taken because:

- (1) Consumer interest has been 'triggered' by a media advertised special offer, or the occurrence of a special event around which the holiday is built;
- (2) Consumers respond to the need to 'take a break' from work and/or their domestic routine.

The survey also found that spontaneity is an important factor in the decision process, as 42 per cent of respondents had planned their trip less than one month in advance.

A Wales Tourist Board survey (1986) reported that the most popular holiday pattern was a long holiday in the U.K. or abroad combined with one or more short breaks taken in the U.K. (40 per cent of respondents). A further 30 per cent of respondents had taken all their holidays in the U.K. for at least two years, combining long and short holidays.

The Euromonitor report (1987) relates motives to the pattern of demand for short break holidays, identifying three broad categories:

- (1) Consumers who take a short break to supplement their main holiday;

- (2) Consumers who substitute a short break for a main holiday;
- (3) Consumers who prefer to divide their annual holiday into a number of short breaks.

Although there is evidence to support all of these findings in the data, most respondents had more than one purchase motive. For instance, a total of fifty-three references to purchase motives were made by respondents during the first twenty interviews. In most cases, the transcripts revealed an integrated set of motives, usually dominated by a principal or primary motive and several related secondary motives.

#### 5.3.1 The purchase motives comparison group

A six part classification of primary motives was derived from the interview transcripts. All of the respondents identified one of the following reasons as their primary motivation for taking an hotel short break:

- (1) To coincide with attending a pre-arranged event;
- (2) In response to the need for a break from family / domestic commitments / routine problems / employment related pressures;
- (3) In response to a desire to relax / recover in different / comfortable / surroundings;
- (4) In response to a desire to visit a particular town / region / hotel / somewhere new;
- (5) To compensate for a missed summer (main) holiday opportunity;
- (6) For the specific benefits derived from taking short breaks on a regular / seasonal basis.

Although important to the decision process, the derived motive classification was too complex to use as a basis for comparison in this study. The following example illustrates why the relationships between purchase motives and pre-purchase behaviour requires further investigation.

The findings indicate that motives exert a strong influence on pre-purchase behaviour, but that other factors may intervene and mediate behaviour. For instance, the link between motives and perceived risk may be influenced by the extent of prior experience with the product category. If a family had for some reason had to forgo their summer holiday, they may be expected

to undertake a detailed investigation of the short break alternatives because of the compensatory role which may be attributed to the break. If however, a member of the family is an experienced hotel user, hotel selection may be made quickly and confidently despite the perceived importance of the purchase occasion.

In chapter 1, the characteristics of hospitality services were identified from the different perspectives of the consumer and the producer. The needs and expectations of the consumer were sub-divided according to whether they were of a physical or psychological nature. The findings support this interpretation, which is illustrated below.

### **5.3.2 Motives associated with physical needs**

Physical needs are easily identified and understood because they relate to specific symptoms such as tiredness, fatigue and stress. Several of the many variations of physical need influencing the desire to take a short break holiday are illustrated in the following extracts.

Primary motives are frequently associated with sources of tension and fatigue at work and in the home:

''...I rarely get a chance to spoil myself. I work shifts, I work weekends, I work Christmas days...now and again I just like to relax in something completely different, and have total comfort...''

Women are often more critical of the hotel short break experience than men. This can be explained by the domestic substitution role that the hotel must fulfil:

''...for me it's a break, not so much for my husband because he's used to going out - it's part of his job, but for myself stuck at home, it is rather nice to go out and have a meal cooked for me and to be entertained...''

Hotel short breaks may be used as 'recovery periods' or as an integral part of family life:

''...we arrived today at 3.15pm and I think we were in the pool at 3.45pm. I think that life today is very much for families to be together...''

### **5.3.3 Motives associated with psychological needs**

Although consumers may recognise the physical need for a change of environment, they may also be motivated by particular psychological benefits which they expect to derive from the consumption experience. These

are typically more complex and difficult for the consumer to understand and articulate. For example, the consumer may experience a feeling of wellbeing and security in a luxurious hotel environment:

``...just the nice feeling you get whenever you walk through the place, all the walnut on the walls - it looks real walnut, it..gives me a nice secure feeling. I think really that it's the sort of hotel you would stay at if you had unlimited money...''

Consumers may also expect the hotel to provide a natural extension of their current standard of living. In this context the quality and condition of hotel furnishings and fittings may have symbolic meaning and invoke a particular psychological reaction:

``...the quality of the fabric, it's a nice entrance...it does really make you feel good, and that's what it's all about...we all want for better things, we've all got nice places and nice clothes, but it's when you come into nice surroundings that you feel a lot better...''

Although most consumers are motivated by the need to reduce the level of work-related stress they may be experiencing, or to alleviate boredom with the domestic routine, a short break may be used to focus on a particular decision or business problem:

``...I wanted to get away at this time because I've got another business project that I might be buying into, in fact I might be buying outright. A rather big business, and there's an awful lot of money involved, and I just want some time to toss it around in my mind.''

Although the primary motive may influence the desired type and timing of the short break holiday, it was difficult to assess the effect on the decision process, or the impact of secondary motives which may be present. It was therefore necessary to concentrate on identifying differences attributable to reported behaviour during the decision process stages of pre-purchase, consumption and post-consumption evaluation.

#### 5.4 Consumer perceptions and the interpretation of product information

The provision of product information is an issue of some concern to consumers, who often seek tangible assurance that they are making an appropriate hotel choice. The general expectation is that the brochure should provide all the necessary information. However, this has to be achieved without creating the impression that the brochure is too complicated, as this may discourage retailers and consumers from using the

brochure:

``...you open it up and it's easy to follow, straight away you look and there's a map of England, and you've got all the hotels...it basically tells you all you want to know on that first page...I do read these pages before going any further...''

A frequent observation is that hotels featured on a full page or more of the brochure are more attractive because they help to reduce the sense of uncertainty that the consumer may be feeling:

[On the brochure text] ``To me it's the only criteria you go on, pictures do help, but without a detailed description...all the hotels basically offer the same core facilities, it's that extra detail that will make the difference between choosing one hotel or another.''

Consumers may have some difficulty in positioning the image associations conveyed by brochures and other sources of information. If however, the received impressions are reinforced by experience, the outcome may be an enduring sense of confidence in the brand:

``It's a very positive image. When I first came down here, I thought they were expensive hotels...it's a very up-market logo, and it projects in the rooms and the feeling we have is that it's the standard we're going to keep with...''

Incomplete or ambiguous product information is a frequent source of frustration for consumers, who often feel that they must engage in further information gathering activities in order to satisfy their needs:

``The amount of information you get in advance enables you to make the most of the short break...There's nothing to tell you how to get there, or the best way of getting there, nothing about the hotel or the facilities of the hotel...it's sold as a package, but it doesn't have the trimmings that you would expect in a package.''

The possible consequences of inadequate information are illustrated by the observations of an experienced hotel user:

``...There are three places to take breakfast at this hotel at different prices...I would have thought that somebody unused to this kind of hotel would be slightly daunted by it all...if you don't know the ropes it's an extremely humiliating experience...people tend to hide away, and not like to say anything, and be quite unsure about what they can have, and can't have.''

##### **5.5 Word of mouth recommendations and risk reduction**

The perceived complexity and intangibility of the hotel consumption

experience suggests that consumers often need the added security of product recommendations (or cautions) from experienced hotel users:

''It's very difficult to make your product stand out from somebody else's...I think that you've got to have a high standard of product and maintain it...you can do 99.9 per cent of it right, and you don't get that many mentions, people say ''Yes, that was good'' - but they expect it to be good, and you get 0.1 per cent that's bad and that goes round very quickly.''

Word of mouth communications are widely used in business communities to solve problems. For example, the cost and availability of accommodation in London is considered to be a re-occurring problem, requiring a continuous exchange of information:

''...staying overnight in London, how can you reduce the costs of doing so...it's a topic of conversation constantly...One is aware that you can find deals, the question is finding the right one.''

When consumers feel that they have insufficient information, they may feel that they have to seek specialist advice. This is another commonly occurring source of frustration, especially if the retailer is unfamiliar with the brand:

[On a request made at the travel agency for information about the hotel] ''...she wasn't familiar with it. She had the brochure, but I asked her several questions and she couldn't tell me anything.''

A feeling of uncertainty is often more easily resolved by telephoning central or hotel reservations staff or by talking to an experienced hotel user, when received word of mouth recommendations can have an influential role on hotel selection:

''...the lady I used to work for had been here before and so that stuck in my mind...I don't know if I would have picked it otherwise, just on the description...''

Product recommendations are seldom given unreservedly by experienced hotel users. This is because they recognise that the consumption situation is unpredictable:

''...it's a tricky thing recommending hotels, it's like recommending food or theatre - people have different anticipations, what's acceptable to me may not be acceptable to you.''

The knowledge that subjective assessment of hotels will vary from one individual to another, may cause consumers to identify situations where

recommendations are less helpful, or even of no perceived value:

''...I would never take [a recommendation] for a main holiday...I've done that before and people have said ''Don't go there, it's an awful place'' but their idea of a holiday is not necessarily my idea of a holiday...''

#### **5.6 The influence of prior product experience on choice behaviour**

The term 'evoked set' describes the criteria used by the consumer to evaluate choice options. The evoked set consists of product attributes and brands which are important to the consumer, to the extent that an overall evaluation of the alternatives may be retained in long term memory. In such situations assessment by individual attributes becomes unnecessary as the consumer would be able to select the alternative with the highest perceived overall rating. These guidelines represent a form of decision rule, which may be influenced by prior experience and comparative product analysis.

Consumers often assess hotels or their attributes by using the most similar comparison they are able to recall. Situational factors may however, account for variations in the decision rule criteria:

[On comparisons between hotels] ''...not that this hotel's better than that one, you just observe differences in situations if you comment on them...I think what you mainly remember are negatives...if you have a feeling that it's a reasonable standard and a reasonable price, that's fine...''

Although choice criteria may be numerous, comparative assessment using a pre-determined reference standard may have a strong influence on the development and application of a decision rule. This is because the latitude of acceptance narrows as new experiences are assimilated, and the consumer's ability to differentiate between the suitability of choice options improves. More experienced consumers are able to equate acceptance with a wider experience-based understanding of hotel standards:

''We've basically developed standards of hotels now...it has been a learning experience and the only way you can learn is to...you don't have to stay in the extremes but to stay in either something that's at the same level or below it or above it until you know where you are.''

#### **5.7 The interactive role of prior product experience and involvement**

There are a number of factors which may influence the search and selection strategy used by the consumer prior to making a purchase decision. These include the extent of product-related experience and the degree of perceived risk associated with the decision. Ultimately, the strategy

adopted by the consumer will depend upon how difficult the task is perceived to be, and how much effort and attention will be required to make an acceptable choice between purchase alternatives. A typology of three distinctive strategies, high, moderate and low involvement, was derived from an assessment of the extent and duration of pre-purchase behaviour. The characteristics of each level of involvement are summarised in Appendix 2 and are exemplified below.

#### **5.7.1 High involvement decision-making**

High involvement behaviour is characterised by an extensive or prolonged period of search, with special importance attached to selection criteria and/or performance expectations:

[On brochure assessment procedure] "We looked through them more than once or twice, we looked through them quite a lot, we marked hotels we liked on the basis of what we thought, and the text, "No, no not that one, this one sounds alright, put a star next to it" and then we went back looking through them, to decide."

Associated activities may include telephone calls to verify information, and the consultation of intermediaries such as travel agents as well as friends, relatives and colleagues with relevant hotel experience. The final selection will be based on a careful assessment of the information gathered:

"...I would have phoned anyway to try and find out what the hotel was like...if you've phoned and found out, and it's not right, you can say "I phoned you and you said this..." But if you don't phone and make contact, you've no come back."

"...I like to find out as much as I can. By speaking to a receptionist, you can really work out what the staff are like. If the receptionist is polite and friendly, the staff will be normally polite and friendly...if someone is rude towards you, you back off don't you? if someone is warm and friendly, you come forward."

#### **5.7.2 Moderate involvement decision-making**

Moderate involvement behaviour is characterised by some evidence of systematic search, and reference to important considerations and/or performance expectations. Associated activities may include reference to intermediary information sources, but will focus mainly on gathering and comparing brochures.

Although the following extracts indicate several unresolved concerns, they are moderated by familiarity with the hotel and the area, as well as the knowledge that friends nearby would provide accommodation if necessary:

[On prior experience of the hotel] ``My impressions were that the interior was far better than the exterior. We'd driven past it several times and thought ``Oh it doesn't look very pleasant there, we won't bother going'' and yet when we actually came here...we came out with a very favourable impression of the place...when we saw it [in the brochure] I said ``Oh yes, we remember this place'' and so it had an edge on the other places we were looking at, because we were familiar with it.''

[On the brochure information] ``Our big question was would this all actually happen the weekend we are here...like the play room with the nanny, is that going to happen at the weekend?''

``I booked it through a travel agent...she wasn't familiar with it. She had the brochure, but I asked her several questions and she couldn't tell me anything...If I wasn't aware of the sleeping arrangements I would have phoned the hotel direct to make sure they were okay...but otherwise I was fairly happy about it, we have friends nearby so if things had gone wrong, we could have asked them to help out.''

Although experienced hotel users would normally be able to use a low involvement strategy to make an acceptable purchase decision, solving a new or irregular problem situation may require increased personal involvement:

``...it was borne out of last year's experience, there were no complaints, but the hotel wasn't up to the standard I wanted.''

### 5.7.3 Low involvement decision-making

Low involvement behaviour is characterised by limited, or in some cases no formal information search. Associated activities might include reference to intermediary or company information, but more usually concentrate on obtaining brochures:

``My friends had the brochure...an internal sight means nothing to me at all, because I know quite readily just how easy it is to set up a photograph to give an entirely different impression...the friends we came with had already been here before and they said they liked it very much. They said to us that they were sure we would like it when we came down here.''

Any references to selection criteria or performance expectations are likely to be assertions relating to prior knowledge or established facts:

``...we have in the past got together quite a number of different brochures for different hotels...we've never really found anything in them that we could say would distinguish one form of hotel from another...usually we finish up by saying ``That is precisely where we would like to stay and it just so happens that this is the hotel nearest to it, let's try it.'''

The purchase decision is likely to be dominated by personal decision-making confidence acquired from prior experience:

''...it's four star...so you expect somewhere nice...I think that tells you that it's a good hotel, because it has to be to warrant it's star rating, so we tend to look for things like that...''

Role specialisation is often more evident when a low involvement strategy is used. Female dominant activities typically begin with responsibility for initiating discussions about the timing of the break, and extend to information gathering and the screening of options:

[On decision-making roles] ''It has varied tremendously over the years, there is no way in which I could put any pattern to it, but it's usually a higher proportion of my wife's decisions to get away...she says to me ''Where shall we go?'' and I make several suggestions, and then we pick one...''

The main exception to the pattern of female dominance in family decision-making occurs when the male partner has extensive business travel experience of hotels. In discussions concerning familiar hotels or destinations, a higher proportion of male dominant decisions are likely to occur:

[On male dominance in selecting a London hotel] ''I would choose it because I know the hotel scene in London reasonably well...she would leave it to me on the grounds that I knew my way around a bit more...I would say ''Who does deals to London for a weekend? ...let's have a look at the hotels they offer...''''

In summary, consumers using a high involvement strategy typically engage in extensive search to satisfy their selection criteria and/or performance expectations because they have limited prior experience of hotels. More experienced consumers may also engage in high involvement behaviour when they attach special importance to the purchase decision.

More experienced hotel users, or consumers who feel less concerned about the return on investment risk associated with the purchase decision, will adopt a moderate or low involvement profile. These groups of consumers may consult intermediaries during information search, but more usually make a decision based on their own brochure appraisal. The greater the degree of confidence with which the decision is made, the more likely it is that the consumer is using an established decision rule to guide their choice.

In many cases, consumers reach a decision to purchase despite residual feelings of uncertainty. In these circumstances, the administration and the interpersonal contacts which occur during the transaction assume particular importance for the consumer. The transaction represents the initial contact with the product, during which uncertainty may be reduced or increased depending on the nature of the service encounter. If the reservation is made by telephone, most consumers expect to receive a confirmation, together with ancillary details such as directions on how to find the hotel, and further information on the services provided. Inadequacies in this provision may give rise to a renewed sense of anxiety, and may be interpreted as service inefficiency:

[On the booking confirmation] ``...there wasn't any cohesion to it, no package, unlike when you book a holiday abroad, there was nothing to give the hotel, which I felt slightly uneasy about. I had visions of arriving at the hotel and them saying 'I'm sorry, we've got no record of you, who are you, where's your voucher?'' ...we always felt a bit nervous about the arrangement, it didn't seem to be very efficient.''

The critical role of interpersonal contacts, especially by telephone, becomes apparent when an unhelpful or obstructive response occurs. The consumer may react by discounting the hotel or even hotel group at the pre-purchase stage. If however, a reservation has already been made, the level of anxiety is likely to increase:

[On an attempt to make a restaurant reservation in advance by telephone] ``I said 'Can we book for Saturday night?' 'We don't take bookings' and I said 'On the voucher it says it's advisable to book'...'We don't take bookings, we don't take bookings!' and that was all I got back. That did annoy me, and when I put the phone down, I did make some comments about it...It made me hesitant.''

#### 5.9 The role of assessment criteria during consumption

In chapter 1, the complex nature of the consumption environment for hospitality services was identified. Figure 1.1 shows the service delivery continuum ranging from limited staff discretion over a short time period, to extensive staff discretion over a long time period. Whenever consumption occurs over a long time period; several days or more in the case of hotel short breaks, the consumer faces the difficult task of assessing many successive experiences to evaluate overall product satisfaction.

The focal concern of the consumption stage is to determine how consumers use pre-conceived expectations and assessment criteria to measure the various aspects of product performance, both during consumption and at the

post-consumption stage. The findings suggest that the consumer is able to integrate many individual assessments within a personal rating system capable of providing a moving average measure of satisfaction.

By comparing perceived ideal product attribute ratings with experience, the consumer is able to undertake a form of cost-benefit analysis to assess 'value for money' in relation to the services received. If expectations are experience-based, they may facilitate comparison against particular reference standards, enabling the consumer to assess whether the experience falls above or below their reference point standard:

[On comparison with other recent hotel experiences] ``So far there hasn't been anything that's below the standard of other hotels we've stayed at, everything is just fine.''

``...invariably you can find some sort of fault, or something you don't like, it's not up to your usual standards or something like that..but I must say that so far here, everything's been very good...it's the best standard of service, food and comfort that I've come across...you're talking about Intercontinental Hotels and places like that...''

``...I think if anybody came here first, they would come back again...we've compared everything with this.''

#### 5.10 The consumption environment and design effects

Atmospheric associations with physical design features sometimes described as 'warm' or 'cold' can have a powerful subconscious impact on the consumer:

``...the size of a hotel seems to make no difference whatsoever...we've been into some hotels which are vast, and have been very happy. Others have been much smaller and like a mortuary, and I have said that this is so cold that I don't want to stay here very long...I think that if the hotel itself is cold, then the staff are cold...''

[On business hotel use] ``...you're anticipating a cold situation anyway, inherently when you're on business, and you're not looking for an extraneous comforts...if you come into a hotel room and it's cold and it's unattractive, and your bathroom's not very nice, you finish up by saying well the best thing I can do is to jump straight into bed and ignore everything else and hope it goes away by the morning!''

Although guest room assessments are subjective and therefore unpredictable, design features can be planned to convey personality and warmth. For example, the effective use of light and space will create an immediate and favourable effect:

``One of the things we generally notice is whether there are

mirrors down near the entrance to the room to catch the light...it makes it very much more attractive...''

''...we usually find that when we come across a room set up which is not symmetrical...it's far more receptive, more pleasing than if it was literally a rectangular box...''

''...what we actually said to each other was that they'd virtually thought of everything...it makes you feel that the people running the place are caring about it...''

The consumer may use a formalised procedure to assess guest room facilities and standards. In this context role specialisation during assessment is commonplace, and female assessment can be rigorous, including checks for cleanliness and quality on bedding, fabrics, furnishings and fittings:

[On female guest room assessment] ''I look at the towels to see how soft they are, and I sit on the bed to see what that's like...[Husband] I checked the electrics out...you obviously have to make sure that everything works, because if you're going to make any complaints, you do it the minute you get into the room, and not the next day...''

''...I think we got there and we automatically went round the room, and looked at beds, television, bathroom and things like that..you don't actually say it out loud, you sum it up yourselves...''

The most widely used reference point for gauging the acceptability of the hotel, and more particularly the guest room, is the home:

''I feel when you go to an hotel it's got to be at least as good as your own home. In general decor, warmth or coolness, the atmosphere, the fittings in the rooms, the bathroom cleanliness. Things like that have got to be as good otherwise there's no point in going to an hotel.''

A common expectation is that the hotel should be able to provide all of the facilities enjoyed in the home and more besides. If this expectation is not met, the consumer may feel unwelcome because the environment is perceived to be uncaring:

''...if we go into a room that isn't well decorated..it's like the hotel doesn't care about the guests...you don't spend a lot of time in the hotel usually...but you want a room that's going to be nice and give you a warm, welcome feeling. That's what you try to do in your home to make your guests welcome, and that's the philosophy a hotel should have.''

#### 5.11 The assessment of hotel services

The labour intensive provision of hotel services is difficult to monitor

and control, a problem that is widely recognised by experienced hotel users:

''You could come into contact with fifteen or twenty staff on a weekend like this. Nineteen of them could be spot on, and one who was off-hand could tip the balance, especially if it's your initial greeting.''

''...the sort of thing that one tends to notice is whether the staff are happy in their work or not, whether they're smiling and what kind of reception you receive...You can tell straight away in their voices whether they're happy in their work or not.''

Service delivery is often beyond the influence or control of the consumer. If service expectations are not fulfilled, the outcome is likely to be strong consumer dissatisfaction:

''We did have a problem last night. The room was far too hot, we couldn't sleep and we just couldn't seem to control the heating...We phoned up the hall porter and he wasn't very tactful...He said ''The only thing you can do is open the windows''...I said ''It's not very satisfactory'' and he said ''Oh well, good night sir'' and put the phone down. I held onto the phone..I was stupified...I could have come storming down at that point...I thought this is dreadful, there's no way I'm ever coming back here. I think this morning I could have come downstairs and demanded my money back and left, but I don't want to spoil my weekend, everything else is fine.''

#### 5.12 Personal rating systems

In recognising the complexity of the consumption situation, which may involve service interactions over a time period of forty-eight hours or more, the consumer develops a personal rating system which stores assessments as they occur:

[On assessment procedures] ''...I think it starts from the very beginning, and either builds or detracts...you come in and you've accepted the hotel because it looks appealing, and from then on the experiences you have either build on that or they detract from it, so when you finally leave, you say ''I wouldn't want to go back there again'' or ''We'd like to come back here sometime''.''

''...we were greeted by the doorman Arthur, who was very friendly and kind, and the girl at the desk was very courteous. Then we decided to have a cup of coffee, and we met the girl who serves that, she was most pleasant, so all these things kept building it up, I can't remember any particular thing that subtracted.''

''I think one evening in the dining room...I was looking for something a little different and I selected something from the a la carte which was good, but just didn't quite hit the spot, and that might have been a slight depression...''

''...after the first couple of days, you tend to think is it going to tail off a bit? particularly as we'd had two good evening meals, is tomorrow night going to be the same? and it was, there was no let up at all, it just kept to the same standard the whole way through...''

Contrasting experiences can have an important role in the operation of the personal rating system, as positive assessments may be compared with situations which have in the past received a negative score:

''...immediately the car stopped and the door opened, the porter was there, the staff were very courteous, they carried everything, I was directed to a car parking space, which was fairly convenient, the receptionist told me all I had to know, no problems...I was staying a hotel about a fortnight ago...I checked in, I was given my key and told the room was about two hundred yards down the corridor on the left...I asked if someone would carry my bags and I was told that there was no porter, and I had to carry them myself. That to me is not good...''

Design effects may also have a psychological impact, and thereby influence how positively or otherwise the consumer feels about the consumption environment:

''...you feel at home, it's comfortable, it's not austere, it's not endless corridors just as though you were marching down to a prison cell. You've still got the same sort of multiple room system in here but there are noticeable differences in the corridor lay out, it is not repetitive all the way down the corridor which makes a tremendous amount of difference to an individual. I notice it only too often. When I see a long corridor where everything is absolutely identical all the way down, I shudder...''

### 5.13 Post-consumption evaluation

During the post-consumption period, retrospective discussion and reflection is necessary in order to complete the consumption rating procedure, and calculate the overall assessment rating:

''I think at the end of the day, when we go home, we tend to mark everything out of ten...I think subconsciously we use some scale...I think it's an overall balance...it's something we formulate as opposed to first impressions. First impressions sometimes do stay with you, but...I think a couple of days after is the best time, when we say ''What did we really think about it?''''

The term satisfaction is used by consumers to define 'end state' aspirations:

''I expect to leave here with the feeling that I can recommend this to someone else. If I can leave with that feeling, then I'm very satisfied with the hotel...My wife's saying what a nice room we have, and it's nice to go back and enjoy the

room...it's a three hour train ride [home] so we'll discuss the hotel and what we've done this weekend."

Strong feelings of consumer dissatisfaction usually lead to vivid recollections of the causal event or events. This is suggested by both verbal and non-verbal responses made by consumers when describing their experiences. Sources of strong dissatisfaction most often relate to the disconfirmation of expectations, inefficiency or perceptions of abrupt or uncaring service:

"...we were very disappointed in the room...it really wanted refurbishing...the carpets were badly stained, badly worn... immediately you walked through the fire doors to the family wing, you could tell, even down to the corridor carpet...I certainly felt like going down to reception and complaining. We'd had a long journey, we'd got my daughter who was only about four and we left it. We said "Okay, the remedy is in our own hands, we don't come here again." We very rarely do complain..we usually go, and if we don't like it, we just don't go again."

Sources of dissatisfaction are not easy to anticipate or rectify, particularly as the response of consumers is unpredictable. Most consumers do not like to complain, and so service providers must take the initiative and instigate effective procedures for monitoring service delivery:

"...No matter how expert the people are, no matter what they do, you always need to take note of what people outside say and think, to enable them to see more clearly that which they've become accustomed to because it surrounds them. When it comes to doing something about it, inevitably it has to come from outside because they are constrained internally...I always feel slightly inhibited about filling in forms asking if you are satisfied, and how well were you treated - was it excellent, very good, good and so on...I mistrust it because I feel it's a way of taking the heat out of complaints, it doesn't seem to be positive enough, it needs to be turned to advantage..."

#### 5.14 Implications for repeat buying

Confidence in the re-purchase decision is commonly associated with shared experiences among friends and relatives, and generalised assumptions about other hotels in the group, based on experiences at one or two hotels:

"...since several people, including family members have had positive experiences...there's no reason to gamble anymore...We now expect the service..and if it doesn't live up to it, we're going to be extremely disappointed now that the standard is established in our minds..."

"...having sampled this one, one would assume that the others are very much of the same standard. Obviously facilities vary according to the hotel, but we would probably be inclined to look at another in the same group...mainly because it's

familiar, we've sampled one, we'll try another.'

Experienced hotel users learn to accept that chain operated hotels are not always consistent with the corporate image, or with their own personal expectations. Although they may develop customised methods of categorising hotels, anomalies occur:

'We have been to hotels where I've complained, I've said 'This is below standard' ...we have met quite powerful differences between hotels from one area to another, and we just say we won't come back to this hotel, but we would go to another one in the same group...It's difficult to say why because it's not a conscious decision, that's the big problem, you can't say without analysing what you're actually thinking at the time.'

In generating repeat business, the objective for service providers must be to ensure that the expectations of consumers are met at every stage in the decision process. Given that dissatisfaction may only result in a complaint when the consumer experiences anger or frustration, the implications for product design and service delivery are important:

'The snag of the hotel and catering business is that condemnation comes quietly, people just go elsewhere, they never tell you why, you find out when it's too late. The British nature of things is not to complain, they're dissuaded from doing so. To try and encourage complaints is a difficult policy to put into practise, but should be done...It's a recall thing, if for example you were there when I checked into the hotel, whichever one it was...if I indicated to you what it was that I either liked or disliked as I went through all these various phases...then that would be an extremely valuable exercise...it's very difficult to recall everything...'

#### 5.15 Conclusion

In reporting on the reactions of leisure break hotel users, it is clear that hotels with regular tourist business throughout the week are better prepared to meet the needs of the short break consumer. However, the situation becomes more complicated in hotels where there is a demarcation between midweek and weekend business. In contrast to the business traveller, short break consumers are spending their own money and consequently their sensitivity as to what constitutes value for money is likely to be keener. As there is often a saving and investment input, the satisfaction output requirement is more clearly defined in terms of ideal mental and physical states. If hotel staff are unaware of these expectations and cannot recognise potential sources of tension relating to the consumption experience, dissatisfaction is more likely to occur (Teare, 1987; 1988a). This reinforces the need for continuous interpersonal skills

development, especially for staff working in close contact with consumers (Teare, Davies and McGeary 1989a).

The examples used in the chapter illustrate how consumers assess their experiences and indicate the importance of the consumer perspective in performance monitoring. By recognising that consumers consciously assess product tangibles and react subconsciously to intangibles such as design and atmospheric effects, managers can develop a more comprehensive and systematic approach to the operations audit. This issue is discussed in the context of the wider implications of the study in chapter 8.

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## Chapter 6

### Pre-purchase decision-making for hospitality services

#### 6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the relationships between prior product experience and the use of involvement strategies by consumers during the selection of an hotel for a short break. The overview of the decision process in chapter 5 indicated that the extent and duration of the decision process is influenced by these two factors. In contrast, the relationships between decision process variables and other comparison groups used in the study; age, socio-economic group and purchase motives were inconsistent. The intention therefore is to identify the reasons why, and the circumstances in which experienced and inexperienced consumers use high, moderate or low involvement strategies during decision-making.

The six categories which provide the framework for this chapter were suggested by the findings reported in chapter 5. Data categorisation relating to search and selection strategies revealed three levels of involvement in the decision process; high, moderate and low. The characteristics of each involvement type were exemplified in chapter 5, and are summarised below:

- (1) High personal involvement - characterised by extensive information search which may include telephone calls to verify information and the consultation of intermediaries such as travel agency staff or friends with relevant hotel experience. The purchase decision is likely to be based on a detailed assessment of a wide range of information from a variety of different sources.
- (2) Moderate involvement - characterised by some evidence of systematic search, and selection criteria which may be derived from prior product experience. Search activities are focused on the collection and assessment of brochures. The purchase decision is likely to be based on a combination of information from external sources and knowledge gained from prior product experience.
- (3) Low involvement - characterised by little or no external information search, and reliance on product knowledge established from prior experience. Although brochures may be consulted during hotel selection, the dominant factors affecting the purchase decision are prior experience and personal confidence arising from familiarity with the product field.

A more detailed definition of the three involvement types can be found in Appendix 2.

To investigate the relationships between product experience and involvement, it was necessary to simplify the prior product experience classification system which had been developed during the field work. In order to classify respondents as accurately as possible, four categories had been used, ranging from very extensive experience to no prior experience of three or four star rated hotel accommodation. A description of each prior product experience type is listed below:

- (1) Very extensive prior hotel experience over a number of years and in a variety of different usage contexts and places, including overseas travel.
- (2) Substantial prior hotel experience, mainly in connection with regular hotel short breaks and/or business travel.
- (3) Limited hotel experience, mainly in connection with occasional short breaks taken over the last few years and/or infrequent business travel.
- (4) No prior experience of three or four star category rated hotel accommodation.

The classification system worked satisfactorily during the field work, but it proved difficult to substantiate differences between four prior product experience types during data analysis. Respondents were therefore reclassified as 'experienced hotel users' by merging product experience types 1 and 2 or 'inexperienced hotel users' by merging types 3 and 4.

The cognitive maps presented below describe and illustrate the circumstances in which experienced and inexperienced hotel users may use high, moderate or low involvement strategies during the decision process. The chapter concludes by summarising the relationships in the form of a product experience-involvement matrix for hospitality services. The data presented here, and in chapter 7 have been selected from the output of individual cognitive models constructed from the interview transcripts; section 6.2 explains the processes involved.

## 6.2 An overview of the cognitive modelling process

Two analytical procedures are referred to in the discussion of research methods in chapter 4. They are data categorisation, which was undertaken as the data was collected, and cognitive mapping which was used to construct an interactive model of each individual interview after the field research had been completed. The two procedures are complementary because they use the same data, but have different functions.

Categorisation was used to identify the general framework and characteristics of the decision process, and modelling to examine the interrelationships between ideas contained within each interview transcript. Modelling also made it possible to identify cause and effect by re-connecting chains of related ideas expressed by the respondent at different points during the interview. Groups of ideas and their relationships could then be examined in the form of summary cognitive maps.

The modelling procedure involved the use of a software program developed at the University of Bath (Bath Software Research, 1985) called Cognitive Policy Evaluation (COPE). Thirty-five individual cognitive models were created using COPE, each of which is based on the interview transcript bearing the same identification number. Only one transcript was excluded (interview number 11) because it was too short to yield any meaningful data. Comparison group details relating to each of the individual models can be found in Appendix 3. The number of ideas, relationships and key idea groups contained in each model are also listed.

As it was necessary to select model data for presentation from the total output of thirty-five individual cognitive models, it is helpful to show the progression from grounded theory development to cognitive modelling. The flow chart in Figure 6.1 provides a summary of the procedures described in chapters 3 and 4 which were used during data collection to formulate the theoretical framework presented in chapter 5. It also shows the sequence of activities involved in constructing the individual cognitive models. These activities are described in the following sub-sections with reference to example data taken from interview/model number eighteen.

Stage 1

Concurrent data collection and analysis

Grounded theory methodology was described in chapters 3 and 4 and used to develop the theoretical framework presented in chapter 5:

- (1) Data collection was undertaken by interviewing consumers during the pre-purchase, consumption and post-consumption stages of the decision process;  
↓
- (2) Data analysis was concurrent and involved the transcription of interview tapes and the categorisation of data into separate computer files corresponding to the key emerging themes;  
↓
- (3) Constant comparison of the data was undertaken to identify differences by age, motives, socio-economic group, prior product experience and involvement.

Stage 2

Cognitive modelling after completing data collection

Cognitive modelling is used in chapters 6 and 7 to exemplify and develop the theoretical framework:

- 6.2.1 Preparation for individual model construction began by identifying and listing all the ideas contained in a transcript. Each idea was then entered into the computer program in the form of a single line of text;  
↓
- 6.2.2 Model construction was completed by entering the relationships between the ideas contained in an interview transcript and by checking that they accurately represent the interview;  
↓
- 6.2.3 Model analysis was undertaken by using three reporting procedures to identify the key ideas and relationships in the structure of a model. Key ideas are used to formulate key idea groups which can be printed in the form of a cognitive map;  
↓
- 6.2.4 Model output in the form of a cognitive map depicts the relationships between the ideas contained in a key idea group;  
↓
- 6.2.5 Representative cognitive maps were selected for presentation.

Figure 6.1

Flow chart summary of analytical procedures used in data categorisation and individual model construction

### **6.2.1 Constructing a cognitive model**

The procedure for constructing a cognitive model using an interview transcript began by re-reading the text to identify the main discussion topics and the ideas expressed in the various strands of related argumentation. One of the advantages of semi-structured interviewing is that it provides an opportunity to probe important topics in depth. However, as related ideas may have been expressed at different points during the interview, it is helpful to be familiar with the overall structure and content of the transcript before entering data and relationships into the model.

The input data used to construct a COPE model is alphanumeric, and consists of a single line of text up to a maximum of seventy-four characters in length. Each line represents one concept or idea relating to any aspect of a problem or viewpoint on the decision process. Converting a transcript to the required format is a subjective process as each idea must be summarised separately. An average of seventy-five ideas are contained in each model, and to ensure that conversion was as accurate as possible, each model was summarised on paper before re-checking and entering the ideas into the model. The program is designed to accept one line of text at a time, and each line is automatically numbered in sequence as shown in the extract in Figure 6.2. When all the ideas had been entered into the model, a final comparison was made by cross-referencing the transcript with a print-out of the model contents.

### **6.2.2 Entering and verifying model relationships**

The next step was to identify how the ideas contained in the model related to each other. As a preliminary to this task it was necessary to re-read the transcript, noting in the margin or on a separate sheet of paper where related ideas were located in the text. Following this, coding was undertaken by working systematically down the print-out list of idea statements from the model, using coding symbols recognised by the program to record how the ideas were related. If a section of the transcript was ambiguous, it was usually possible to clarify meaning by listening to the audio tape recording of the interview again, in order to hear how a particular point had been expressed during the interview.

COPE recognises several types of relationship, which are denoted by inserting the appropriate symbol between the related ideas. Where one idea leads to, or affects another idea this is referred to as a causal link.

Causal links can be plus (+) or minus (-) and as the program accepts bi-polar statements, a (+) link indicates that the first pole of one idea leads to the first pole of the related idea. The second poles of the two ideas are similarly related. For example:

49+50 = idea 49 leads to idea 50

This means that idea 50 is a consequence of idea 49, and also that idea 50 can be explained by idea 49.

Conversely, a (-) link denotes that the first pole of one idea leads to the second pole of the related idea. The cross-relationship also applies to the second pole of the first idea and the first pole of the second idea. This can be illustrated by referring to three ideas contained in model eighteen, idea number 16 is bi-polar:

16 a +ve .. a -ve: psychological impression of the guest room used on a business trip

17 intelligent design and 'warmth' created by comfort, furnishings and fittings and decor

18 the 'cold' effect of an impersonal/unattractive guest room and bath room

The relationship (18-16) means that idea 18 leads to the (-) pole of idea 16. Hence the 'cold' effect of an impersonal/unattractive guest room and bath room leads to a -ve psychological impression of the guest room used on a business trip.

Conversely, the relationship (17+16) means that idea 17 leads to the (+) pole of idea 16. Hence intelligent design and 'warmth' created by comfort, furnishings and fittings and decor leads to a +ve psychological impression of the guest room used on a business trip.

In order to code a relationship between two ideas with unspecified consequences, a full stop symbol (.) is used. This is called a non-causal or connotative relationship because the influence of one idea on the other is either unknown or has not been clearly defined. Connotative links are bi-directional, so that by entering the link (43.44) meaning that idea 43 is related to idea 44, the reverse link (44.43) will also be automatically inserted. For example:

43 the procedure for assessing/ evaluating hotels

44 experiential learning over the years...

In this example the relationship between the two ideas is the same, regardless of whether the relationship is shown as (43.44) or (44.43) because causal direction is not known.

Hence:

(43.44) means that the procedure for assessing/ evaluating hotels is linked to experiential learning over the years...which means the same as (44.43) whereby experiential learning over the years...is linked to the procedure for assessing/ evaluating hotels.

To collect bi-polar data, it is necessary to obtain the contrasting view or 'psychological opposite' to every point made by the respondent during the interview. As the format of the interviews did not readily facilitate this, most of the ideas contained in the models represent single pole (or monotonic) statements. The relationships are therefore more straightforward, using mainly connotative or causal (+) links to relate one single pole idea with another single pole idea. This is illustrated in Figure 6.3 which lists the relationships between the idea statements shown in Figure 6.2.

The nine idea statements in Figure 6.2 were taken from a section of interview transcript number eighteen. They represent part of the explanation given by an experienced hotel user about how he assesses and evaluates hotels (line 43). The numeric data in Figure 6.3 provides information on how the ideas are related to each other, aiming to accurately reproduce the account given during the interview and recorded in the transcript.

The respondent explains that his approach to assessment and evaluation is related to the 'experiential learning' which has taken place over the years, enabling him to accurately categorise hotels (line 44). This experience also enables him to make 'rapid decisions on hotel suitability' from first impressions (line 45). He goes on to explain that the circumstances and the extent of familiarity with an hotel (line 47) account for differences in the way he rates (or assesses) an hotel (line 46). He illustrates this with several examples; how a large reception area in an unfamiliar hotel (line 48) leads to 'an acute awareness of open space' (line 49) and how this in turn may lead to a 'feeling of detachment' because of the coldness of the hotel environment (line 50) causing 'a much more critical assessment of the hotel (line 51).

Extract example showing the lines of data entered into the individual cognitive model created for respondent number 18:

- 43- the procedure for assessing/evaluating hotels
- 44- experiential learning over the yrs- now able to categorise accurately
- 45- the ability to make rapid decisions on htl suitability from first impressions
- 46- differences in the operation of personal rating procedures
- 47- the circumstances of the htl usage situation- familiar or new hotel
- 48- the experience of standing in a very large reception area- unfamiliar hotel
- 49- an accute awareness of open space
- 50- the feeling of detachment from a 'cold' unfriendly environment
- 51- a much more critical assessment of the hotel

Figure 6.2

Entering data into the model

Extract from the relationships entered for model 18:

43 . 44  
44 . 43 + 45  
46 . 51  
47 + 46  
48 + 49  
49 + 50  
50 + 51  
51 . 46 . 52

Figure 6.3

Entering relationships into the model

Interpreting, listing and cross-checking the relationships for each idea statement with the meaning conveyed in the transcript was an intensive process. An average of eighty relationships per model were identified. In order to complete model construction it was therefore important to ensure that the relationships accurately represented the sense of the interview. The program has three exploratory commands which can be used for this purpose; consequences (C) explanations (E) and explore (X).

By typing the command 'C46' for example, a search for the consequences if any, of idea 46 is activated. If the search finds that there are one or more consequences leading from idea 46, they are listed on the computer screen or print-out when the search has been completed. The listing may range from a single idea to a long chain of related ideas depending on the importance of idea 46 to the model structure. The (E) command operates in

the same way, except that it activates a search for explanations of the given idea. The (X) command displays the specified idea at the centre of the output, surrounded by the ideas which are directly linked to it. Lines show non-causal links, and arrow heads indicate the direction of causal links, with (+) links assumed unless indicated by a (-) sign positioned close to the arrow head.

By using these commands to examine the relationships associated with every idea statement in each model, it was possible to check, and where necessary amend relationships so that potential sources of error or inaccuracy were detected prior to the analysis of model data.

### 6.2.3 Model analysis

The purpose of the modelling exercise was to create a realistic simulation of an interview so that an analysis of the model structure would report on all of the related ideas, regardless of when and in what context they were mentioned in the interview. The main task of model analysis was to identify the most influential ideas in the model structure around which key idea groups could be clustered.

COPE can generate three different analytical reports on the key ideas in the model structure. They are called cognitive centrality analysis, path analysis and trace analysis:

- (1) Cognitive centrality analysis (COG) searches all the direct links into and out of the ideas in the model, and the report lists the ideas with the largest number of related ideas. The purpose of this procedure is to identify ideas which are important to the structure of the model.
- (2) Path analysis (PATH) reports on the most significant links or chains of argument contained in the model. The number of different routes or paths are calculated for each idea in two directions; from the head and from the tail of the argumentation. A head idea is one which has no consequences, and a tail idea is one which has no explanations. Path analysis searches and calculates the number of paths inwards from the tail of the argumentation, and outwards down the paths leading to the head ideas.
- (3) Trace analysis (TRACE) looks at the way in which one idea is linked to all the other ideas. Included in the trace score for each idea are all the directly linked ideas, and ideas linked indirectly

through connected paths.

Extracts from the COG, PATH and TRACE reports for the example model number eighteen are shown in Figure 6.4.

Extracts from the reports produced on model 18 by using the cognitive centrality, path and trace analysis commands:

(1) Extract from the cognitive centrality report (COG)

COG searches all the direct links into and out of the ideas contained in the model. The report lists the ideas with the highest number of associated statements:

No:	Idea	In	Out	Kon	Total
3	high satisfaction with the accom	:2	1	0	3
16	a +ve...a -ve psychological impr	:3	0	0	3
51	a much more critical assessment	:1	0	2	3

(2) Extract from the path analysis report (PATH)

PATH reports on the most significant links or chains of argument contained in the model by counting from the head and the tail relationships for each idea:

No:	Idea description	In	Out	Total
12	anticipation of an inherently cold situ	:4	5	9
15	more limited requirement of the gst rm	:4	5	9

(3) Extract from the trace analysis report (TRACE)

TRACE examines the network of relationships surrounding each idea. Included in the report are all the directly linked ideas, and ideas linked indirectly through connected paths:

No	Idea description	In	Out	Total
12	the anticipation of an inherently cold s	:4	5	9
11	expectations of an htl used for business	:4	5	9

Notes:

In = direct links from other ideas to the specified idea  
Out = direct links to other ideas from the specified idea  
Kon = connotative bi-directional links

Figure 6.4

Analysing the model relationships

By examining the reports for each model, it was possible to identify most of the key ideas; although the (C) (E) and (X) commands referred to earlier were also used to locate key ideas isolated from the model structure. This can happen if a particular topic has no direct bearing on the rest of the discussion topics. An average of eighteen key ideas per model were identified from the reports and by using the commands as a secondary form of analysis.

The final stage of preparation necessary to produce cognitive maps from the models is the creation of key idea groups using COPE's autogrouping command. Included within a key idea group are any ideas which form part of the explanatory structure of the key idea. Prior to issuing the autogroup command, each key idea is given an identification number which can be illustrated as follows:

G12\$46 - means that the key idea group 12 is centred on key idea 46. This is shown in Figure 6.5 as:

G12 differs in the operation of personal rating scale/assessment procedures \$46

The key idea group 12 (G12) shown in Figure 6.5 was identified using the (C) and (E) commands, and as the relationships are largely self-contained within the group, it is not subordinate or superordinate to any other key idea group. In contrast, the smaller key idea group 2 (G2) shown in Figure 6.6 is part of the group hierarchical structure of the model because it has a subordinate group (G3) listed and indented beneath it.

**List of the key idea group 12 contents for model 18:**

G12	differs in the operation of personal rating scale/assessment procedures \$46
46	differs in the operation of personal rating scale assessment procedures
47	the circling of the hotel usage situation- familiar or new hotel
48	the experience of standing in a very large reception area- unfamiliar hotel
49	an acute awareness of open space
50	the feeling of detachment from a 'cold' unfriendly environment
51	a much more critical assessment of the hotel
52	difficulty in overcoming emotional reaction- essential role for staff

**Figure 6.5**

**Examining key idea groups**

Extract from the key idea group hierarchy for model 18:

G2	high satisfaction with the accommodation	\$3
G3	a non-standard guest room (not rectangular box)	\$70
3	high satisfaction with the accommodation	
70	a non-standard guest room (not rectangular box)	
71	a well designed bathroom and entrance corridor	

Figure 6.6

Examining the key idea group hierarchy

As successive key idea groups are created, a group hierarchy is automatically determined according to whether each new key idea group is subordinate or superordinate to existing key idea groups. By listing the complete group hierarchy for a model, it was then possible to identify which groups belonged to the hierarchy, and of those which did, which groups were subsumed by others. This information provides guidance on reducing the number of cognitive maps to print, as the smaller groups which were also contained within larger groups were redundant. Having eliminated key idea group duplication by checking the contents of group hierarchies for each model, a total of one hundred and ninety one cognitive maps were printed from the thirty-five individual models.

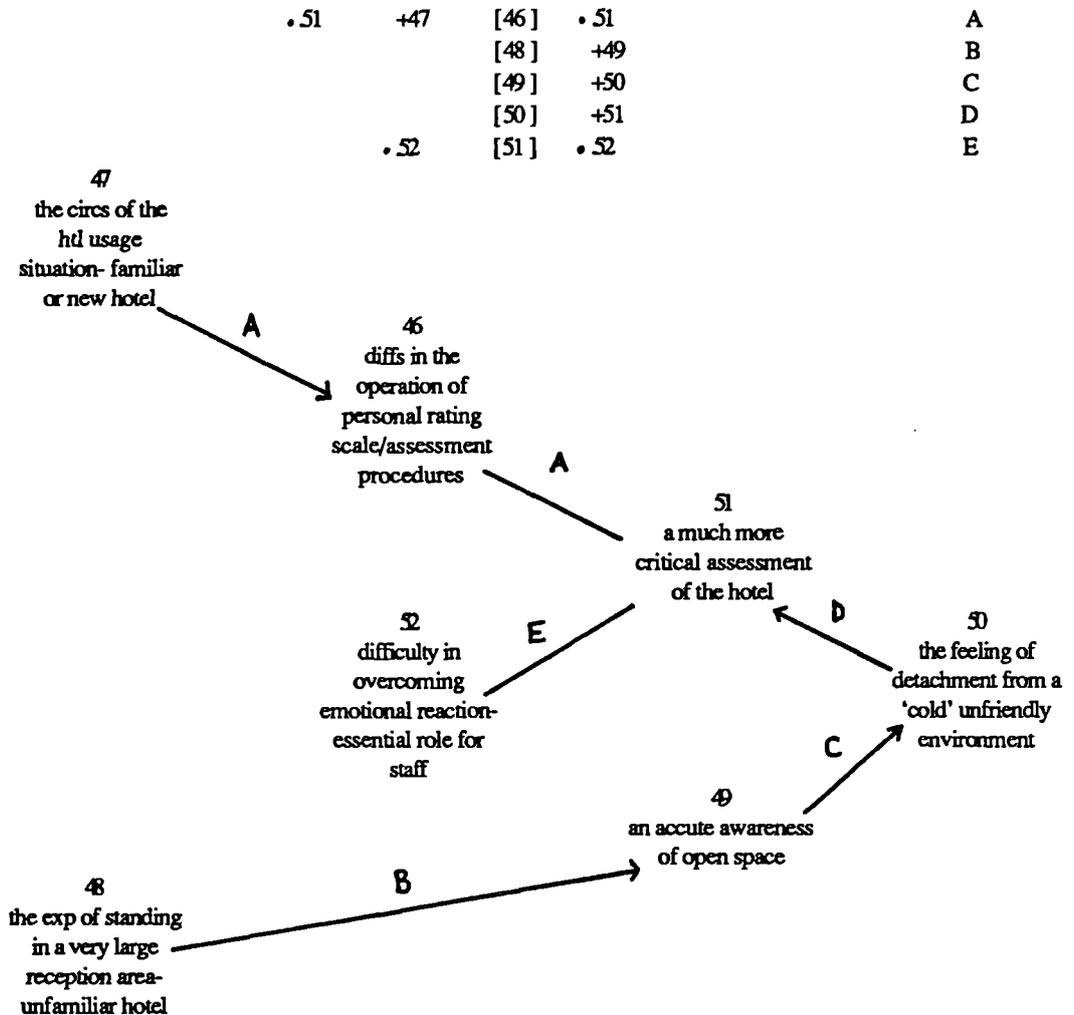
**6.2.4** Model output

A cognitive map illustrates key idea group relationships in diagrammatic form. Each map has a relationship grid which provides explanatory information so that lines and arrows can be drawn to link the ideas automatically positioned to facilitate this. Figure 6.7 shows the relationships for the key idea group listed in Figure 6.2. The maps are code numbered for identification in the text (Map 67). They also list the key group number (G12) the key idea statement and number (\$46) and the respondent identification code [R18]. The numbers to the left of the idea number [46] in the relationship grid are explanations (.51 +47) and those to the right are consequences (.51). In some maps there are consequences which are enclosed by < > brackets, they refer to relationships with ideas which are not included on the map. The letters to the right of each column in the relationship grid are the reference labels for the lines linking the ideas on the map.

Cognitive map output from key idea group 12 in model 18. The numbers and symbols in the relationship grid indicate where, and what kind of connecting lines should be drawn:

Map 67

G12    diffs in the operation of personal rating scale/assessment procedures \$46 [R18]



**Map key:**

- G12    Key idea group reference number.
- \$46    Key idea forming the basis for key idea group 12.
- R18    Respondent reference number.
- A-E    References for each row of the relationship grid. To assist interpretation, they appear as reference labels written above each line on the cognitive map.
- Lines depicting bi-directional links.
- Lines depicting a causal relationship.

A number enclosed by square brackets [46] at the centre of each row in the relationship grid has relationship explanations printed to the left (.51 +47) and consequences on the right (.51). Numbers enclosed by < > brackets refer to relationships with ideas which do not appear on that specific map.

Figure 6.7

Mapping key idea group relationships

#### 6.2.5 The criteria for selecting cognitive maps

A total of one hundred cognitive maps are presented in chapters 6 and 7. The main objective in selecting maps for presentation was to provide where possible, supporting evidence for the theoretical framework reported in chapter 5. Starting with a total of one hundred and ninety one maps, it was necessary to check for overlaps; and wherever two or more maps which illustrated the same point were encountered, the map which gave the clearest or the most detailed description was selected. Every map was also examined to see whether or not it would confirm or deny differences between the decision process activities and perspectives of experienced and inexperienced hotel users. This was an important consideration in selecting maps which reported similarities and differences relating to level of involvement in the decision process.

Chapter 6 is primarily concerned with the relationship between prior product experience and involvement during pre-purchase and chapter 7 with consumption stage assessment procedures and post-consumption stage evaluation.

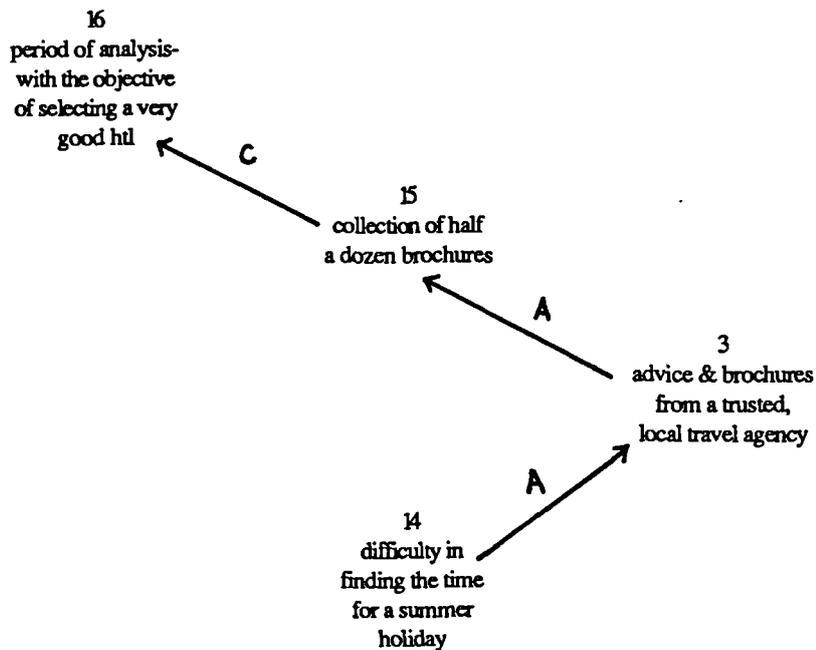
**6.3 Extensive prior product experience and high involvement**

Whenever experienced hotel users interviewed in the study had adopted a more cautious and detailed search and selection process, it was related to an important occasion or to specific personal needs. In Map 1 the respondent identifies "difficulty in finding the time for a summer holiday" (14) as the main reason for undertaking detailed choice consideration. This is supported by the expressed need to select "a very good hotel" (16) involving the receipt of advice from a trusted intermediary, consideration of a wide range of brochures and a period of careful analysis (3).

Map1

G13 period of analysis- with the objective of selecting a very good htl  
 \$16 [R05]

+14	[3]	+15		A
	[14]	<+17 >	<+17 >	B
	[15]	+16		C

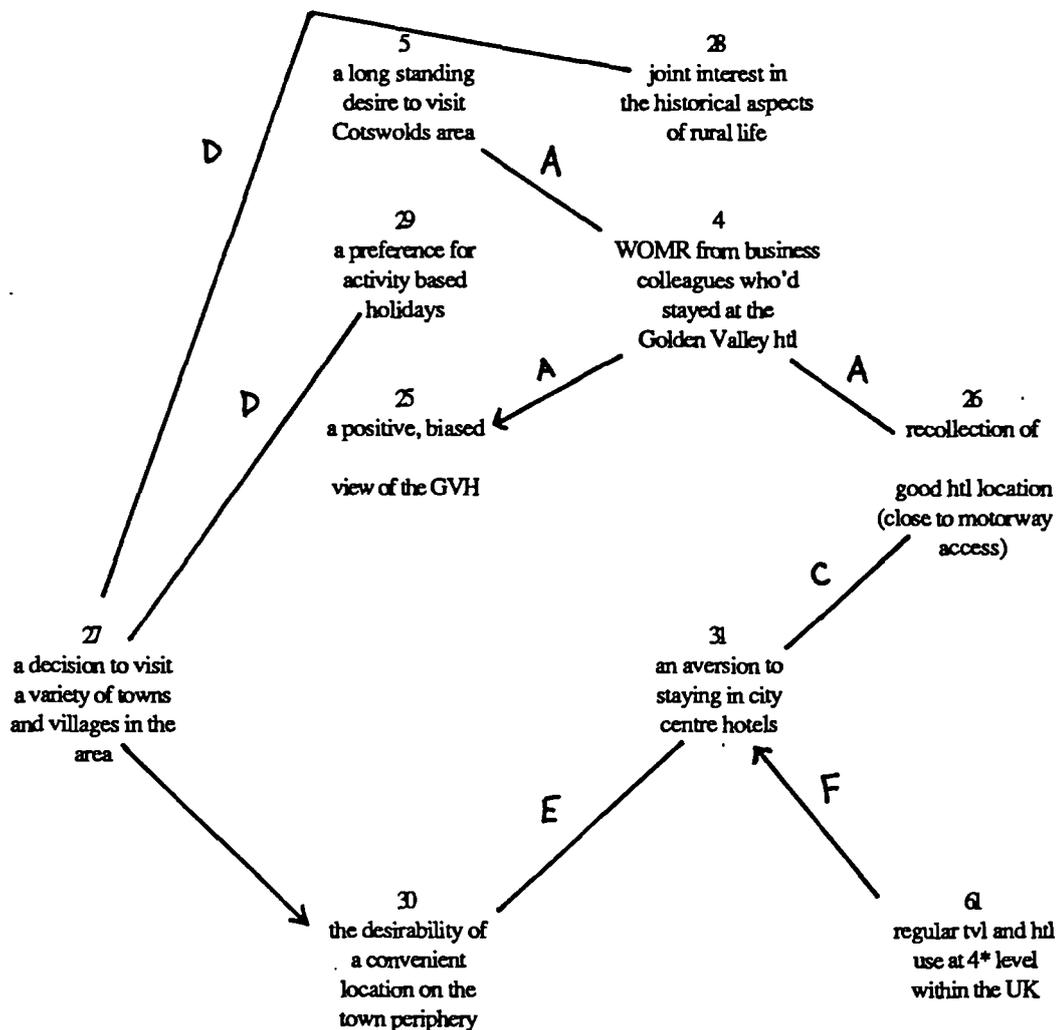


Map 2 shows that extensive prior product experience has an important role in determining pre-conceptions and expectations, which in turn influence selection criteria. The respondent lists an aversion to city (or town) centre hotels (31) and a preference for easily accessible hotel locations (30). These criteria are reinforced by regular business travel and use of four star category hotels (61). Word of mouth recommendations are also sought from business colleagues sharing similar preferences and aversions, to aid decision-making (4).

Map2

G7 WOMR from business colleagues who'd stayed at the Golden Valley htl  
\$4 [R05]

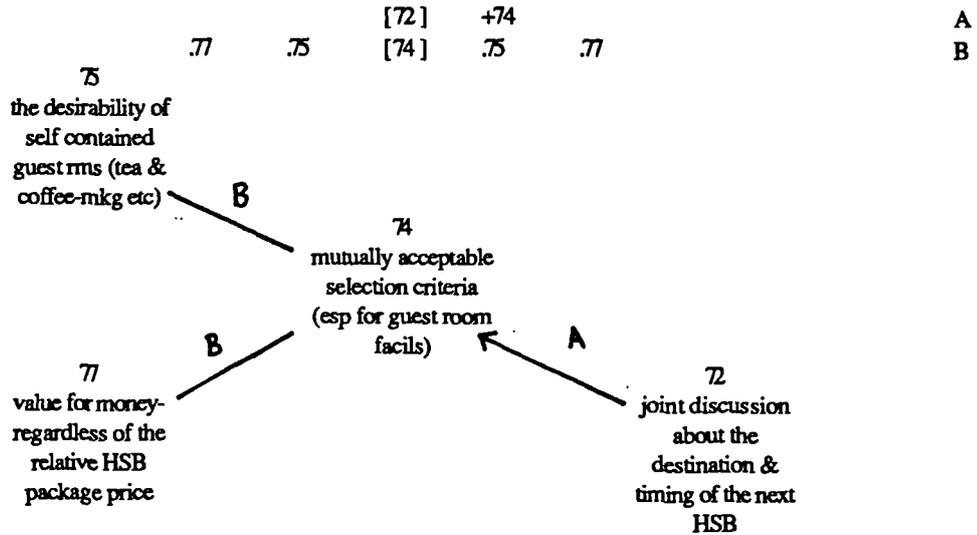
26	5	[4]	5	+25	26		A	
		[25]	<+6 >				B	
	31	[26]	31				C	
29	28	[27]	28	29	+30+	<+32 >	D	
	31	[30]	31				E	
	+61	[31]					F	
<65 >	<1 >	[61]	<1 >	<+36 >	<65 >	<+76 >	<+73 >	G



Extensive prior experience also facilitates agreement between marital partners on mutually acceptable criteria for hotel facilities (Map 3). Referring to guest room facilities (74; 75), the map shows how joint discussion and agreement (72) influences the formation of expectations in the context of leisure travel.

Map 3

G17 mutually acceptable selection criteria (esp for guest room facils)  
 \$74 [R05]

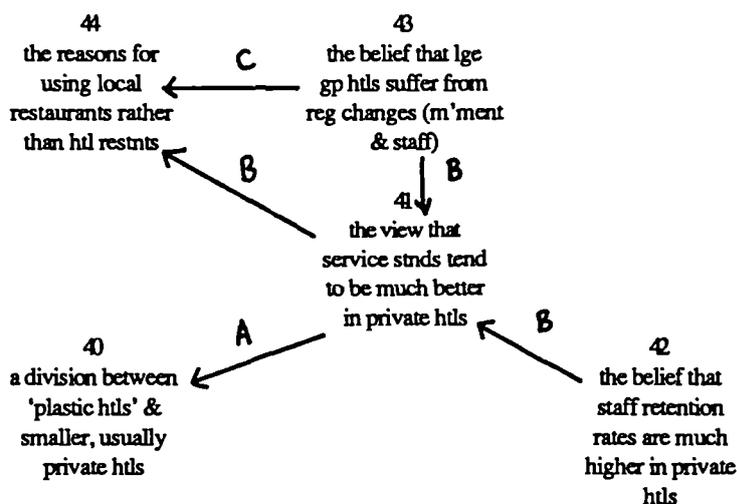


As the consumer gains more product experience from using different types of hotels, the ability to differentiate between types and standards of accommodation, services and facilities improves. This operates through encoding product information within a personal category system. For example, Map 4 includes the category label 'plastic hotel' (40) which is used to describe the standardised features of chain-operated hotels. The way in which categories are organised for the purpose of making comparisons depends on the consumer's range of prior experience. If the size of the hotel is important to the consumer, comparison is frequently linked to service standards (41) and the varying degrees of personal service experienced in small, medium-sized and large hotels (42; 43).

Map 4

G11 the view that service stnds tend to be much better in private htls  
 \$41 [R05]

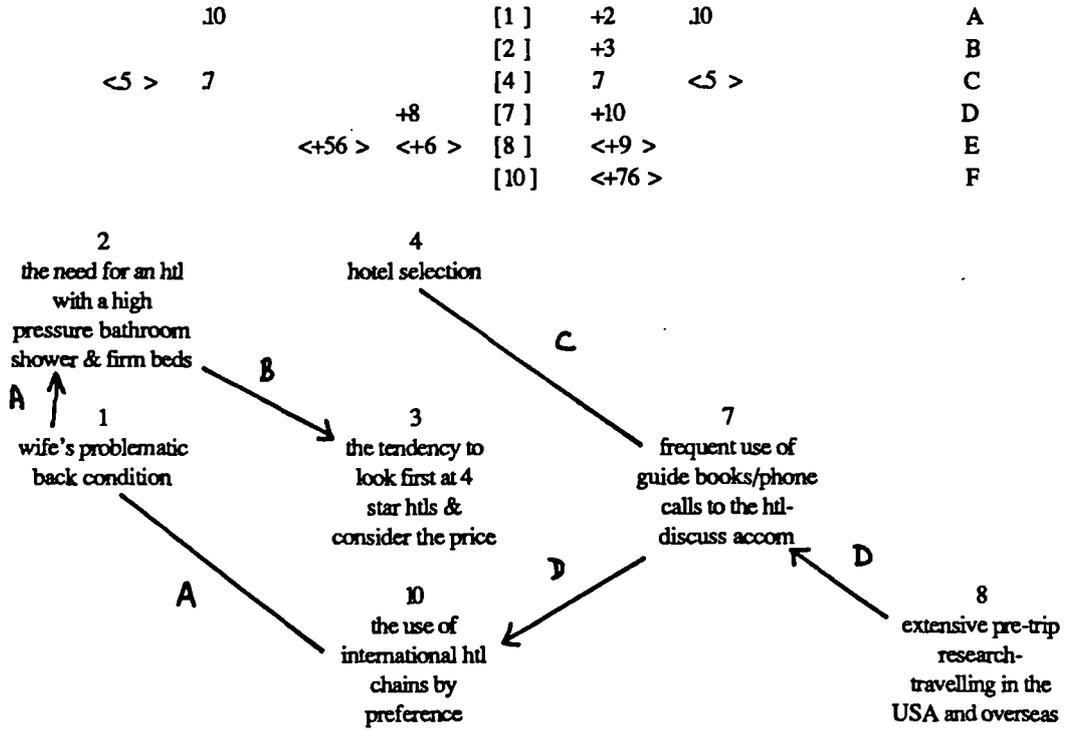
+41	<+39 >	[40]		A
+43	+42	[41]	+44	B
		[43]	+44	C
	<+67 >	[44]	<+38 >	D



Maps 5 and 6 show that specific personal needs are also associated with the use of high involvement strategies during the decision process. For example, in Map 5, a problematic back condition (1) pre-determines the standard and type of facilities required of the hotel guest room (2). Wide experience of hotels (10) indicates that these facilities relate to the standards usually associated with four star rated accommodation (3). As Map 6 shows, physical needs also combine with the desire to stay in the best hotels (56), and extensive research is undertaken to seek out the most desirable hotels using a variety of information sources (7; 9). In this example both partners have extensive prior experience, but the combined personal requirements, interests and aspirations of the female partner account for the high involvement approach.

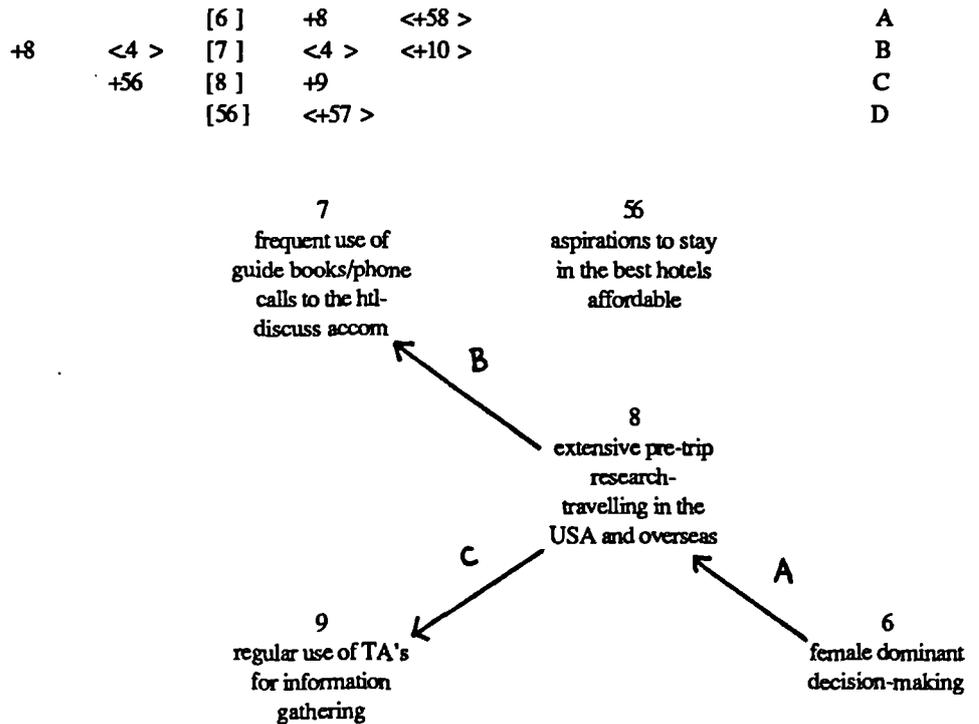
Map 5

G7 the tendency to look first at 4 star htls & consider the price \$3  
[R19]



Map 6

G5 extensive pre-trip research- travelling in the USA and overseas \$8  
[R19]



### 6.3.1 Summary

The findings indicate that extensive prior product experience has an important role in the determination of expectations, which in turn influence selection criteria. These criteria are shaped and reinforced by regular hotel use. As the consumer experiences different types of hotel, his ability to differentiate between different standards of accommodation, services and facilities improves. This also suggests that assessment criteria are influenced by the extent of prior experience during consumption, a theme which is addressed in chapter 7.

The integration of new product information occurs as experiences are encoded within a personal system of categorisation. The categories enable the consumer to compare and assess new information during pre-purchase. If however, the purchase decision is considered to be especially important, a high involvement approach may be adopted. This takes the form of a longer or more cautious search and selection process.

Finally, the findings show that experienced hotel users are likely to have established decision-making roles which utilise the specialist interests and knowledge of marital partners. They are based on mutually acceptable criteria for hotel selection, and enable one or other partner to take responsibility for particular pre-purchase activities. Role specialism is also likely to extend to specific assessment responsibilities during the consumption stage of the decision process.

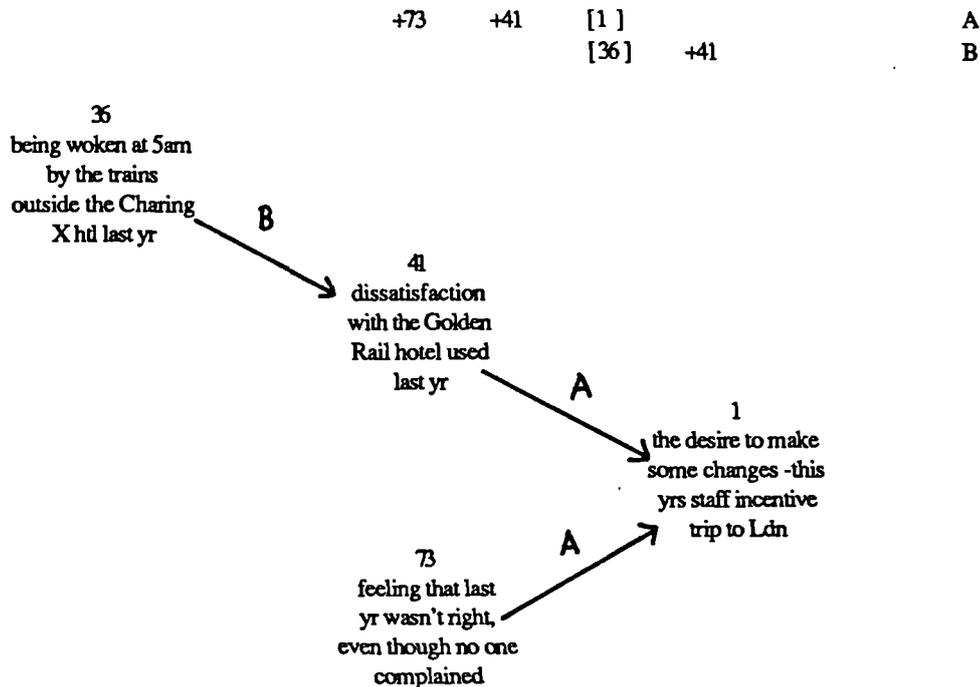
### 6.4 Extensive prior product experience and moderate involvement

Consumers with extensive prior experience may need to use a moderate involvement strategy to resolve problems of a re-occurring or evolutionary nature. The desire to find the best solution tends to relate to responsibility for others rather than uncertainty about the decision itself. For instance, finding suitable low-cost accommodation in London is considered to be a re-occurring problem by regular business travellers. The examples which follow illustrate the sense of vicarious responsibility felt by two experienced hotel users while attempting to resolve other peoples' problems relating to hotel accommodation in London.

In Maps 7, 8 and 9 a company director refers to a re-occurring need to find suitable accommodation for a staff incentive visit to London. His analysis of the previous incentive trip (Map 7) left him feeling that improvements were necessary (36; 41) even though none of his staff actually complained (73). He is confident of his ability to solve the problem using information gathered from contacts in the local business community (Map 8).

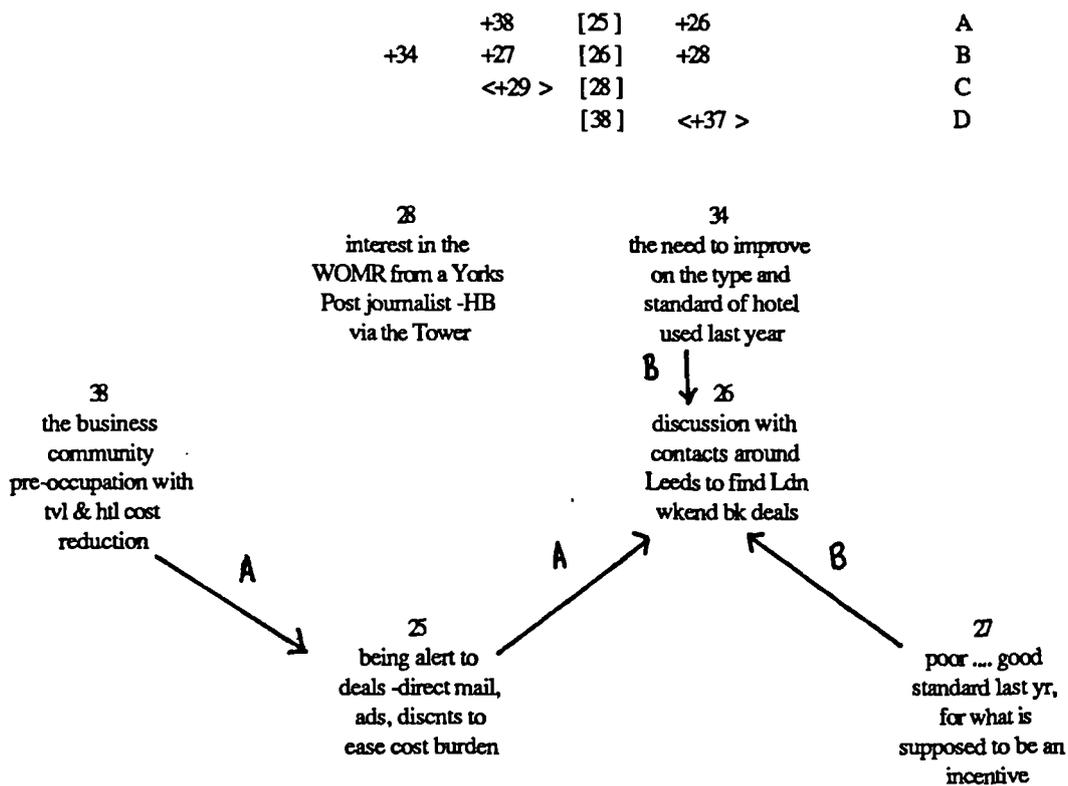
Map 7

G11 the desire to make some changes -this yrs staff incentive trip to Ldn  
\$1 [R01]



Map 8

G5 discussion with contacts around Leeds to find Ldn wkend bk deals \$26  
[R01]

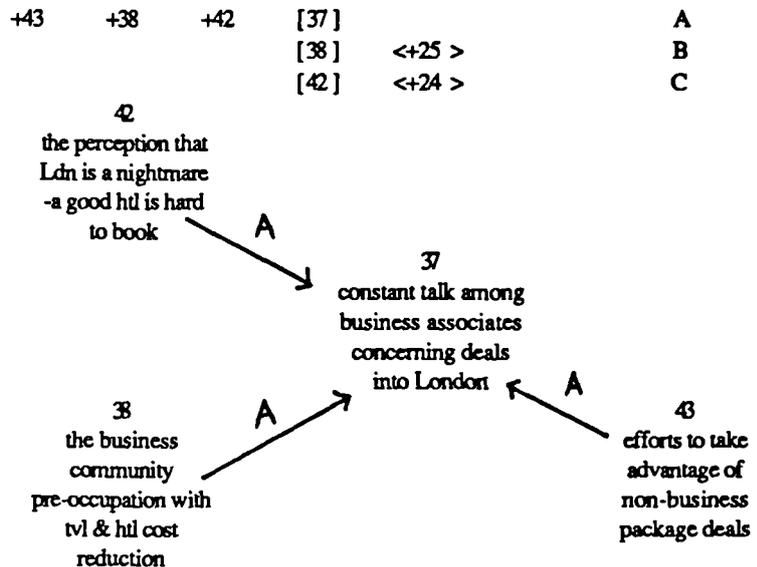


Motivated by his recollection of the poor standard of hotel accommodation used on the previous year's visit to London (27; 34), he uses business contacts to find out more about "London weekend break deals" (26). He knows this to be a valuable information source, as the business community is very receptive to new information concerning reductions on travel and hotel costs associated with staying in London (25; 38).

Map 9 elaborates on the "pre-occupation with travel and hotel cost reduction" (38) which is a constant topic of conversation in the business community (37) because of the difficulty of booking good accommodation in London at a reasonable price (42). One of the possible solutions to this problem is to "take advantage of non-business package deals" (43) where they are available for use in connection with combined business and leisure trips. The discovery that a familiar hotel offers a package deal which would meet the requirements of the incentive group booking (Map 10) facilitates a rapid and confident purchase decision (32).

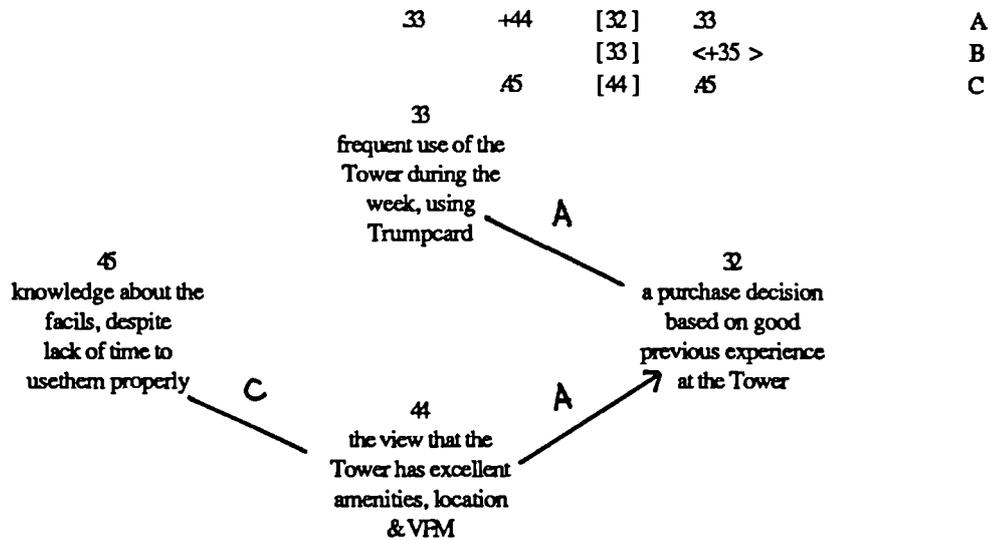
Map 9

G7 constant talk among business associates concerning deals into London  
 \$37 [R01]



Map 10

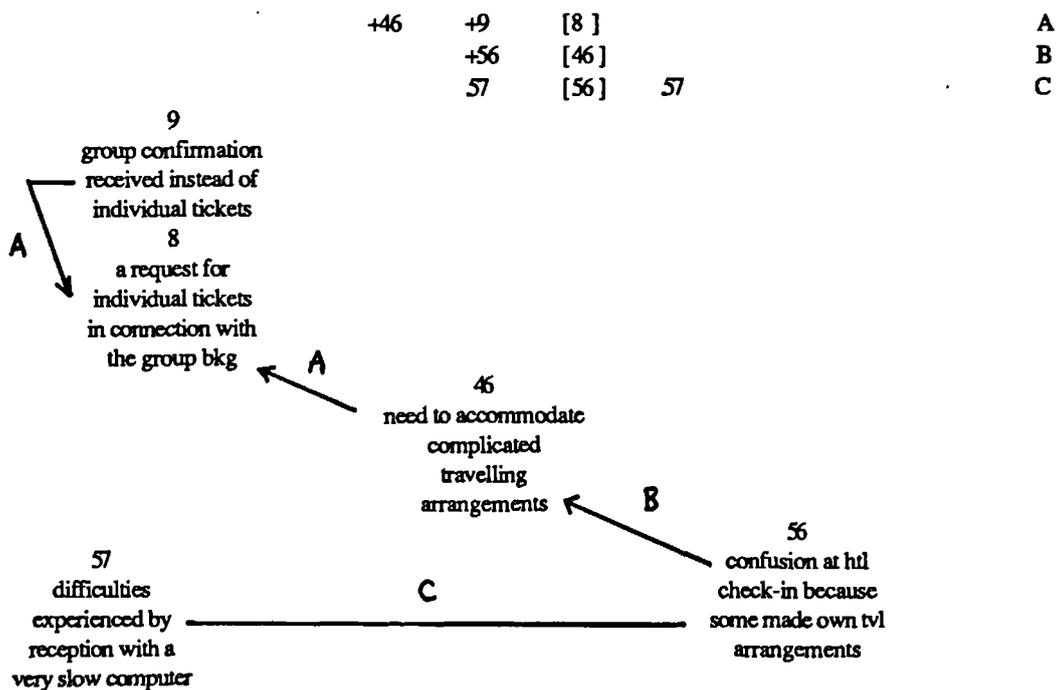
G16 a purchase decision based on good previous experience at the Tower \$32 [R01]



The respondent is familiar with the hotel, but Map 11 shows how confidence in the hotel is undermined by two incidents. Firstly, a request for individual tickets for members of the group travelling separately was not met (8; 9; 46). This resulted in confusion over the booking during reception at the hotel (56). The problem was also exacerbated by technical problems with the computerised reservations system (57).

Map 11

G12 a request for individual tickets in connection with the group bkg \$8 [R01]

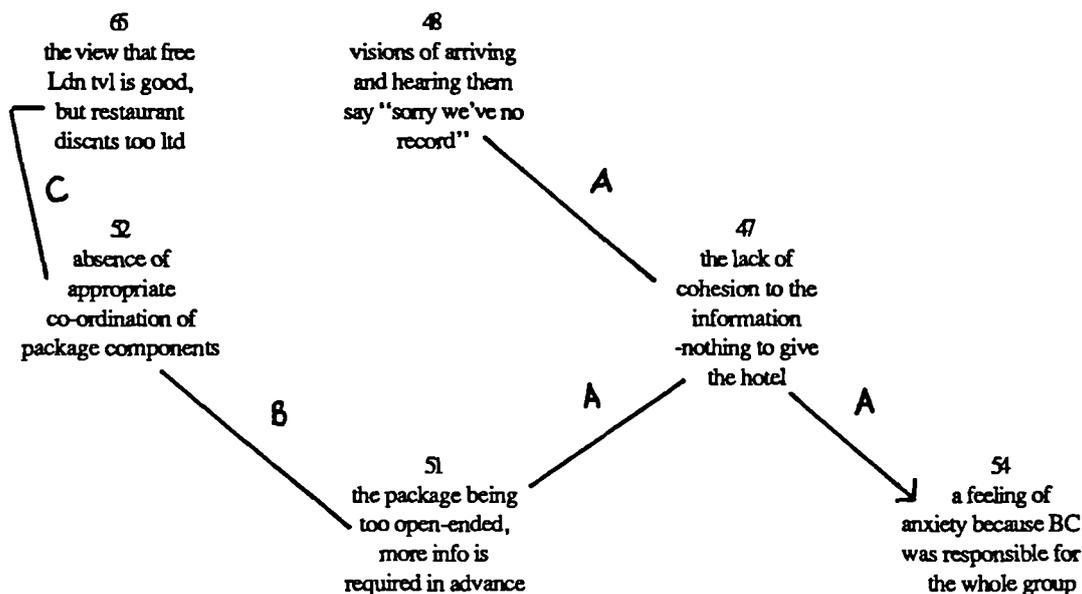


Although the respondent is an experienced hotel user, the confusion leads to a feeling of anxiety (Map 12) because he feels responsible for the group (54). This is linked to a "lack of cohesion" in the information provided with the booking confirmation (47). Reflecting on the experience, he concludes that improvements could be made by providing more information in advance of the break (51) and by better co-ordination of the brand's "package components" (52).

Map 12

G3 the lack of cohesion to the information -nothing to give the hotel \$47 [R01]

51	[47]	48	51	+54	A
52	[51]	52			B
55	[52]	56			C



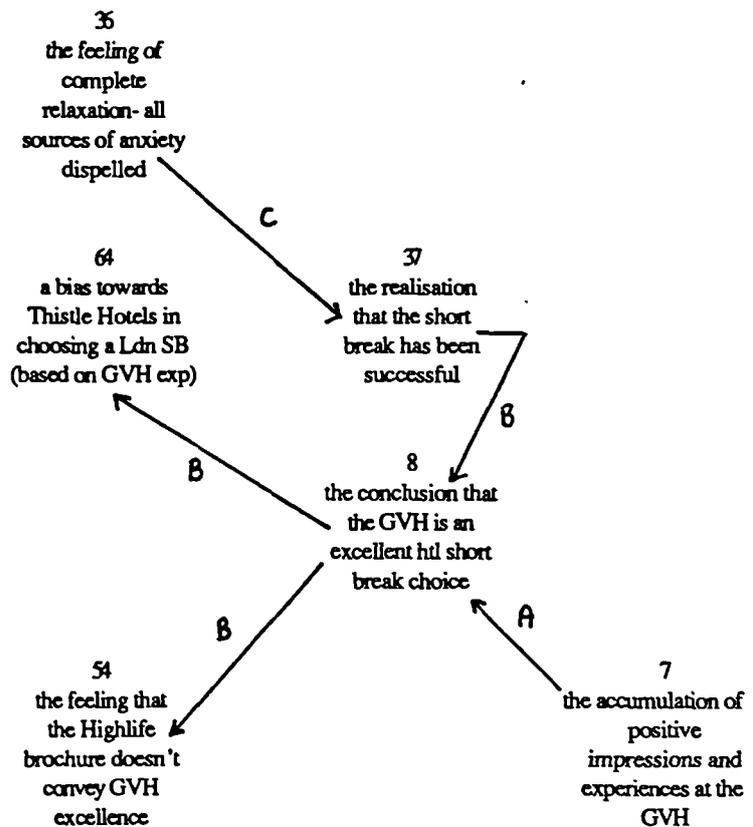
In Map 13 the director general of an international organisation explains the sense of irritation he feels when attempting to find inexpensive accommodation for overseas visitors to London. He believes that London hotels are overpriced (2) that standards of accommodation are "quite ordinary" (3) and that they offer inconsistent standards of service (4).

Map 90 provides a further indication of the desirable 'end state' feelings equated with a successful short break. A positive assessment (7) leads to satisfaction with the choice of hotel (8) and company (64). This facilitates mental and physical relaxation (36) and subsequently, recognition that the break is successful (37).

Map 90

G5 the conclusion that the GVH is an excellent htl short break choice  
 \$8 [R17]

<+38 >	<+17 >	<+11 >	<+10 >	<+9 >	[ 7 ]	+8		A
				+37	[ 8 ]	+64	+54	B
					[ 36 ]	+37		C
					[ 54 ]	<+55 >		D

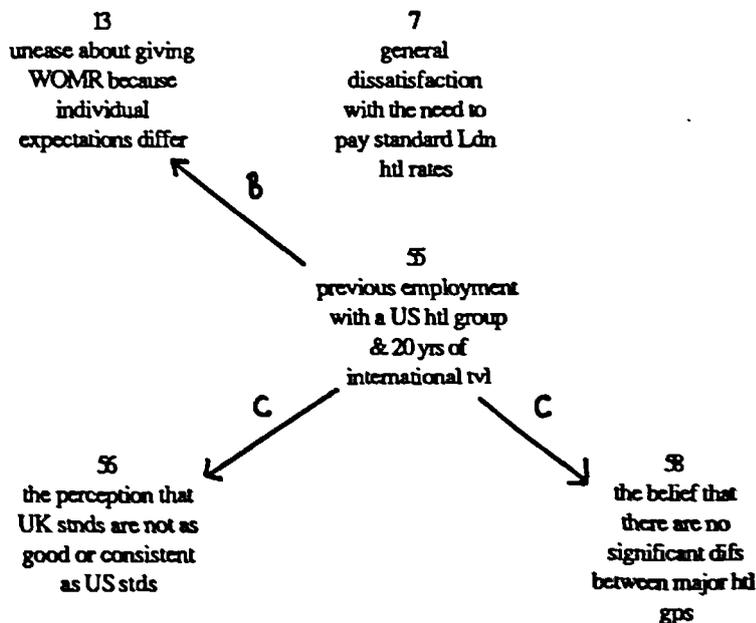


Maps 13 and 14 show that the respondent has an inventory of product knowledge which can be used to make comparisons and to select an appropriate type of accommodation. However, when selecting an unfamiliar hotel from a brochure, he has to rely on the information which is provided. Map 15 shows that clearly displayed information is important, (24; 26) and that irritation with the brochure (23) is likely to occur if the layout is confusing (25) or the information is perceived to be inaccurate or misleading (28).

Map 14

G3 previous employment with a US htl group & 20 yrs of international tvl \$55 [R04]

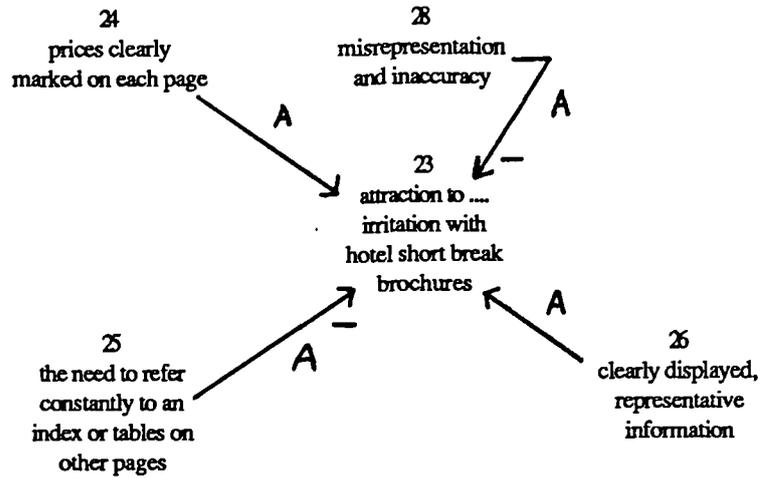
+55	<+4 >	<+3 >	<+2 >	[7 ]	<+1 >		A
			+55	[13]		<+10 >	B
				[55]	+56	+58	C
				[56]	<+39 >		D
				[58]	<+54 >		E



Map 15

G7 attraction to hotel short break brochures \$23 [R04]

-28	+26	-25	+24	[23]		A
				[26]	<+27 >	B
				[28]	<+29 >	C

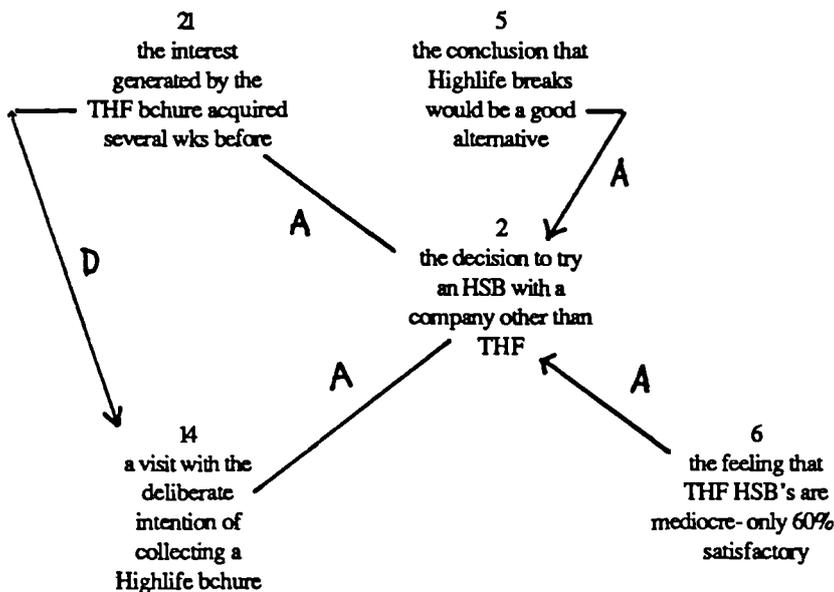


Finally, Maps 16 and 17 illustrate how brand switching can influence the involvement strategy of experienced hotel users. In Map 16, a feeling that recent short break experiences had only been '60 per cent satisfactory' (6) leads to a decision to try another brand (2). This results in a shift from low to moderate involvement in an attempt to improve on the post-consumption satisfaction rating.

Map 16

G7 the decision to try an HSB with a company other than THF \$2 [R09]

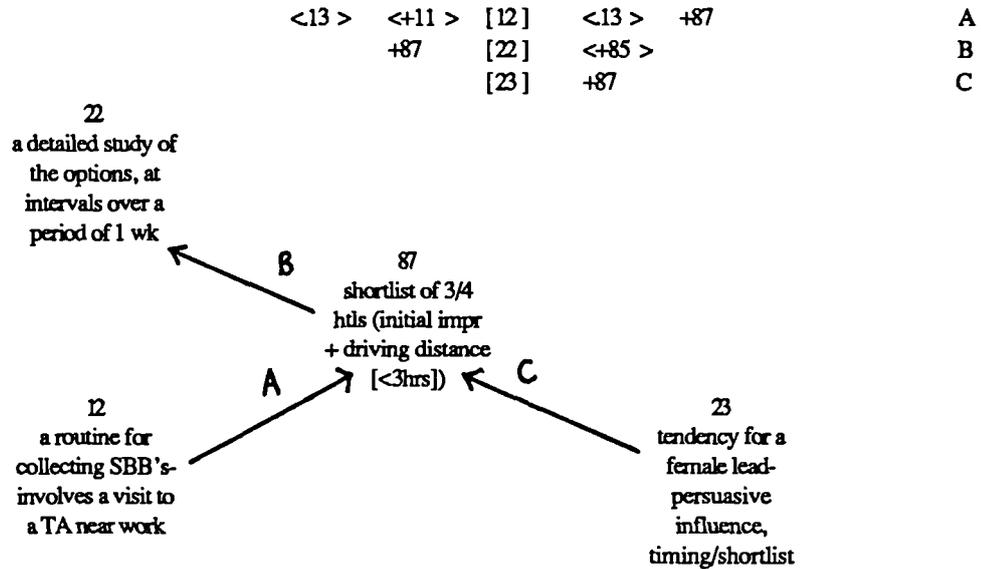
.14	21	+5	+6	[2]	21	.14	A
		<+15 >	<+3 >	[5]			B
		<7 >	<+1 >	[6]	<7 >		C
			+21	[14]			D



As Map 17 shows, there is an established procedure for hotel selection. This involves collecting brochures (12) compiling a short list of hotels which are within an acceptable driving distance from home (87) followed by a more in depth study of the selected options (22). The female partner assumes responsibility for co-ordinating these activities (23) devoting in this instance more time and attention to the decision process because she is interested in learning more about the new brand that she had chosen to use.

Map 17

G17 shortlist of 3/4 htls (initial impr + driving distance [<3hrs]) \$87 [R09]



**6.4.1 Summary**

In contrast to the high involvement sub-group, a moderate involvement strategy may be used by experienced hotel users to resolve unanticipated or re-occurring purchase problems. These include purchase decisions containing an element of responsibility for others and requiring more detailed attention because of the circumstances surrounding the purchase. If the consumer knows where to find additional information which will support the decision, a moderate rather than a high involvement approach will be sufficient for this purpose.

Valued information sources typically include business associates with similar prior experience of hotel accommodation, although interpersonal sources are more likely to be used to exchange information rather than to endorse a decision. This is because experienced hotel users recognise that satisfaction with an hotel represents a subjective assessment of derived benefits which will vary according to the individual's lifestyle and cultural background. However, information from other experienced hotel users is considered to be more useful than product information in brochures and other printed media. This is because the extent to which a brochure accurately portrays a given standard of accommodation is difficult to validate without some prior knowledge of the hotel or hotel company.

The findings also show that brand switching can cause a shift from low to moderate involvement among experienced hotel users. This is because the

established procedure for hotel selection is affected by the desire or the need to undertake additional research in order to support the new brand decision. In most cases, respondents reported that the female partner took responsibility for undertaking additional research in preparation for discussion and joint decision-making on the choice of hotel. Further investigation will be necessary in order to confirm the emerging pattern of female role specialisation in pre-purchase research relating to new brand adoption.

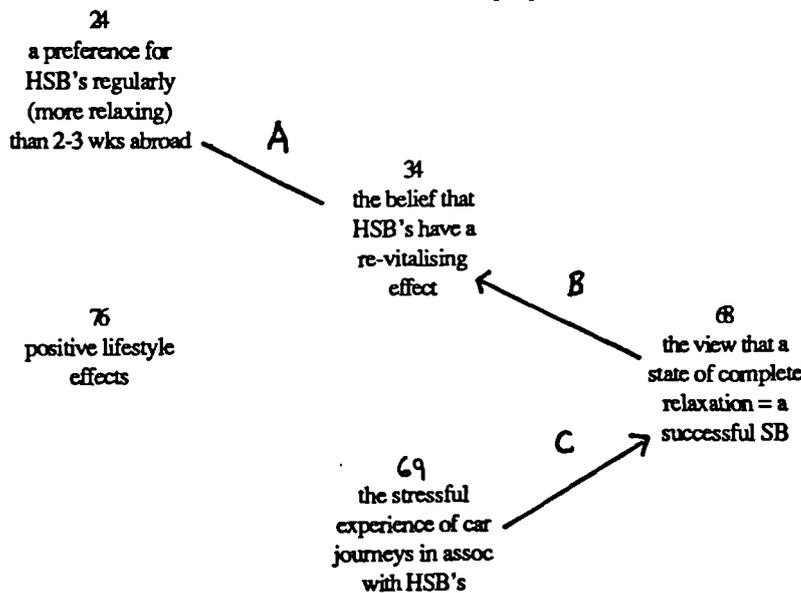
**6.5 Extensive prior product experience and low involvement**  
 Experienced hotel users are better prepared to make a low involvement purchase decision because as product knowledge increases, they can compare, categorise and assess hotels with greater accuracy and confidence.

For some of the respondents in the study, regular hotel short breaks are seen as an integral feature of their lifestyle pattern. This is illustrated in Map 18 where the feeling of relaxation engendered by a successful hotel short break (68) leads to the belief that they have 'a re-vitalising effect' (34). This in turn is linked to a preference for regular short breaks instead of one long holiday abroad (24). This pattern contrasts with the trend reported in published statistics of one or more short breaks supplementing the main, long holiday.

Map 18

G7 the belief that HSB's have a re-vitalising effect \$34 [R08]

34	[24]	<+28>	34	A
+68	[34]	+76		B
+69	[68]			C
<+77>	[76]	<+79>		D

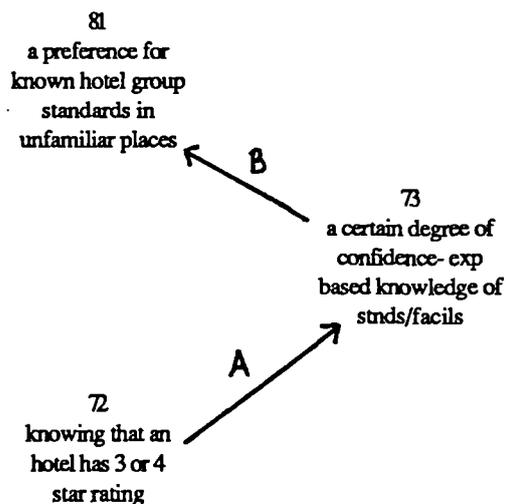


As Map 19 indicates, regular hotel users derive confidence from an experience-based knowledge of standards and facilities, enabling them to categorise hotels quite easily. The star rating of an hotel provides a widely used reference point (72) which leads to increased confidence, based on 'knowledge of standards and facilities' in differently rated accommodation (73). This may also lead to a preference for chain operated hotels, particularly in unfamiliar places (81) because they generally aim to achieve consistently uniform operating standards.

Map 19

G15 a preference for known hotel group standards in unfamiliar places  
 \$81 [R15]

[72]	+73	A
[73]	+81	B



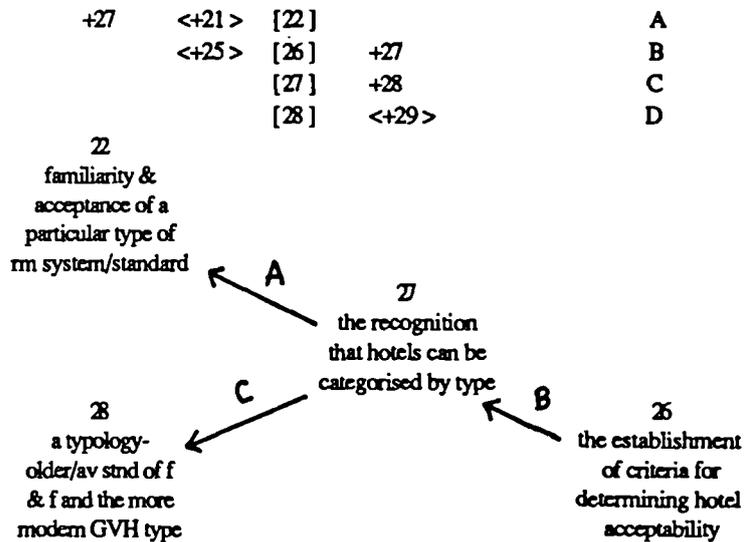
Experienced hotel users also develop their own category systems, an example of which can be seen in Map 20. The way in which they operate is largely determined by the breadth of product experience, and familiarity with different types of guest room standards and design (22).

Categories may be organised in a variety of ways. For example age-related comparison of older hotel design with more modern styles of furnishing and fitting (28) may require the use of different kinds of assessment criteria.

The perceived need to develop personalised assessment methods stems from recognising that brochures and other media information have limited value (Map 21). At most, brochures convey impressions which enable the consumer to make an approximate assessment of hotel suitability (63; 64) but they cannot realistically convey information about intangibles such as atmosphere and service (66).

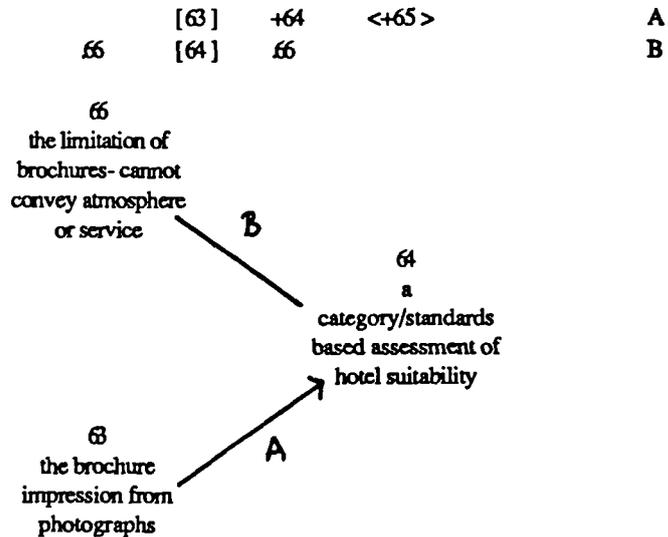
**Map 20**

G6 the recognition that hotels can be categorised by type \$27 [R18]



**Map 21**

G13 a category/standards based assessment of hotel suitability \$64 [R18]

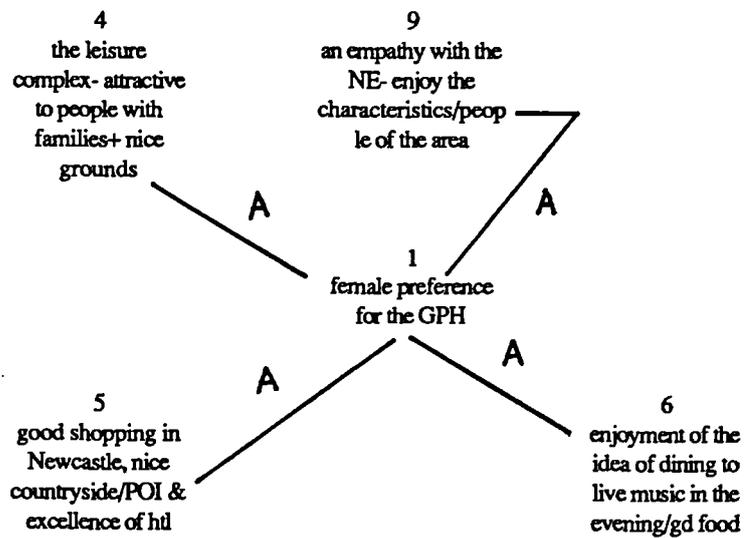


Low involvement strategies feature prominently in repeat-purchase situations, especially when there several reasons for returning to the same hotel. This is illustrated in Map 22 which shows how the female partner's preference for a particular hotel is linked to empathy with the area (9), the attraction of good shopping and leisure facilities (4; 5) and enjoyment derived from using the hotel restaurant (6).

Map 22

G1 female preference for the GPH \$1 [R25]

9 6 5 4 [1] 4 5 6 9 A

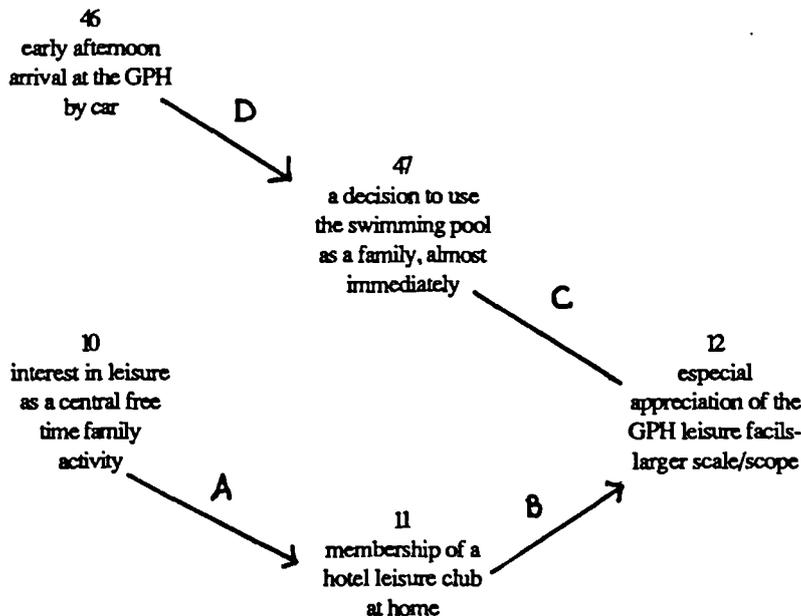


The attractiveness of the hotel, which centres on the incorporation of leisure club facilities, is elaborated in Map 23. The facilities provides a natural extension of the hotel's appeal because they enable the family to enjoy leisure activities together (10). In general, indoor leisure facilities are increasingly seen as an important risk-reducing asset, as they provide a form of insurance against bad weather, and a range of health and fitness related benefits which can be used and enjoyed by all the family.

**Map 23**

G6 especial appreciation of the GPH leisure facils- larger scale/scope  
 \$12 [R25]

	[10]	+11	<+13>	A
	[11]	+12		B
47	[12]	47		C
	[46]	+47		D

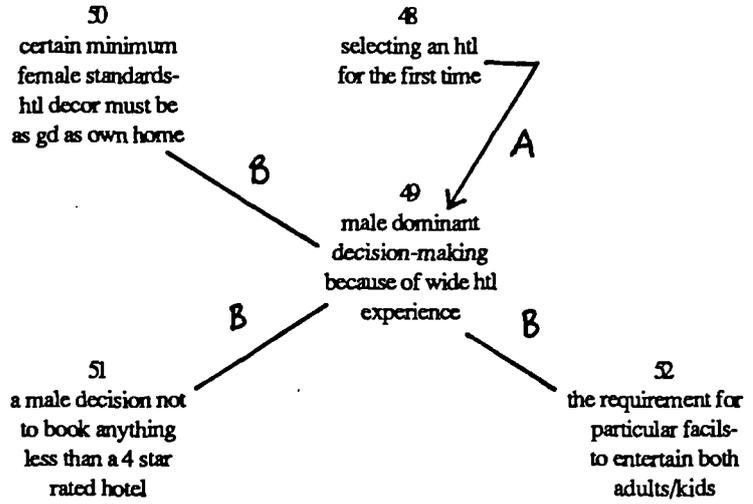


Experienced hotel users are better able to devise strategies for coping with uncertainty in hotel selection, without necessarily increasing their level of involvement in the decision process. Map 24 illustrates this by showing how male and female domains of expertise and influence may interact to ensure consistency in decision-making. In this example, the male contribution is a decision 'not to book anything less than a four star rated hotel' (51), a stance which is linked to a dominant role in the decision process because of his 'wide hotel experience' (49). The female partner takes a specialist interest in hotel interiors because of her concern to ensure that certain minimum standards are attained. She uses the home as a basis for determining the acceptable quality of decor and furnishings (50).

Map 24

G2 male dominant decision-making because of wide htl experience \$49 [R25]

			[48]	+49				A
52	51	50	[49]	50	51	52		B
			[52]	<+53>				C

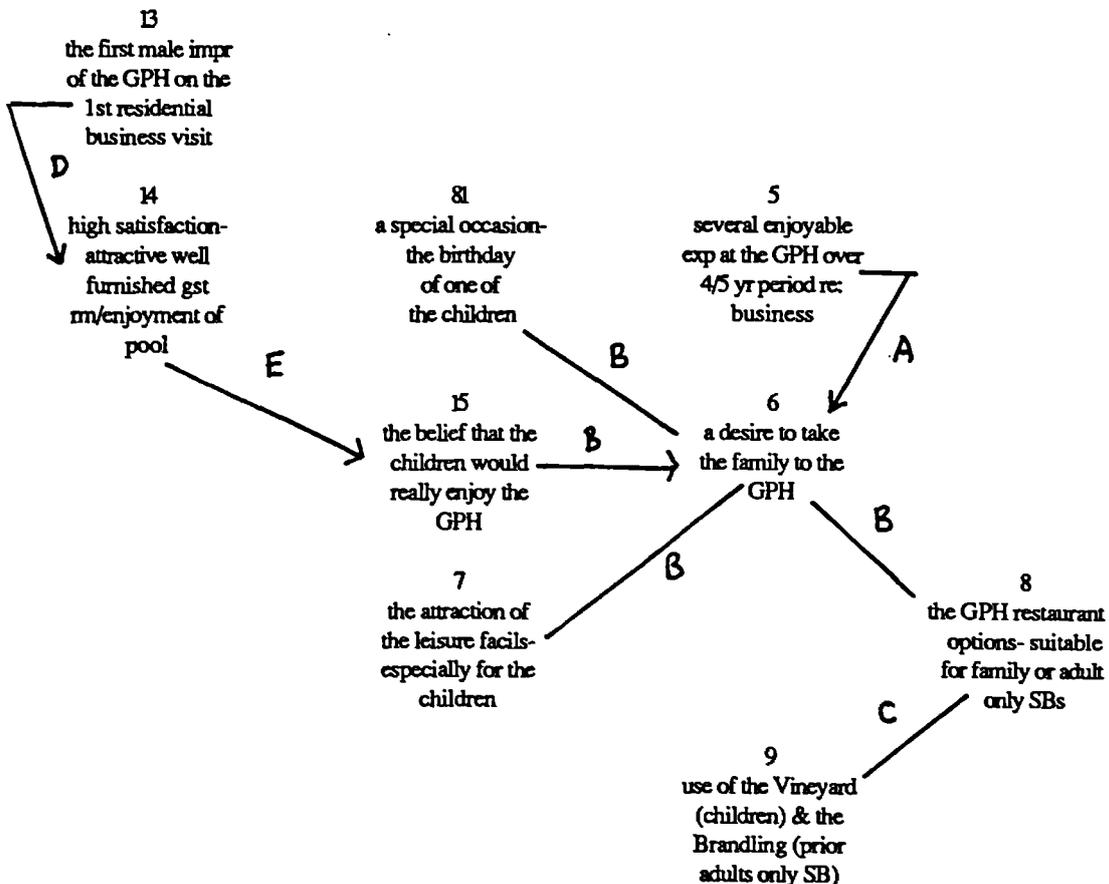


Consumers in this category are also able to recognise how contrasting types and styles of hotels may meet different situational needs. This is related to a personal assessment of how effectively hotel services are geared to the market segments they serve. For example, Map 25 illustrates how prior knowledge of an hotel used for business purposes (5; 13) leads the respondent to the conclusion that the hotel would also be a suitable place to take a leisure break with the family (6). This is related to the belief that the hotel is flexible enough to cater for family needs (7; 8; 9; 15) to the extent that he thinks about using the hotel to celebrate 'the birthday of one of the children' (81).

**Map 25**

G1 a desire to take the family to the GPH \$6 [R28]

				[5 ]	+6	<+69>			A
+15	8	7	81	[6 ]	81	7	8		B
			9	[8 ]	9				C
				[13]	+14				D
				[14]	+15	<+16>			E



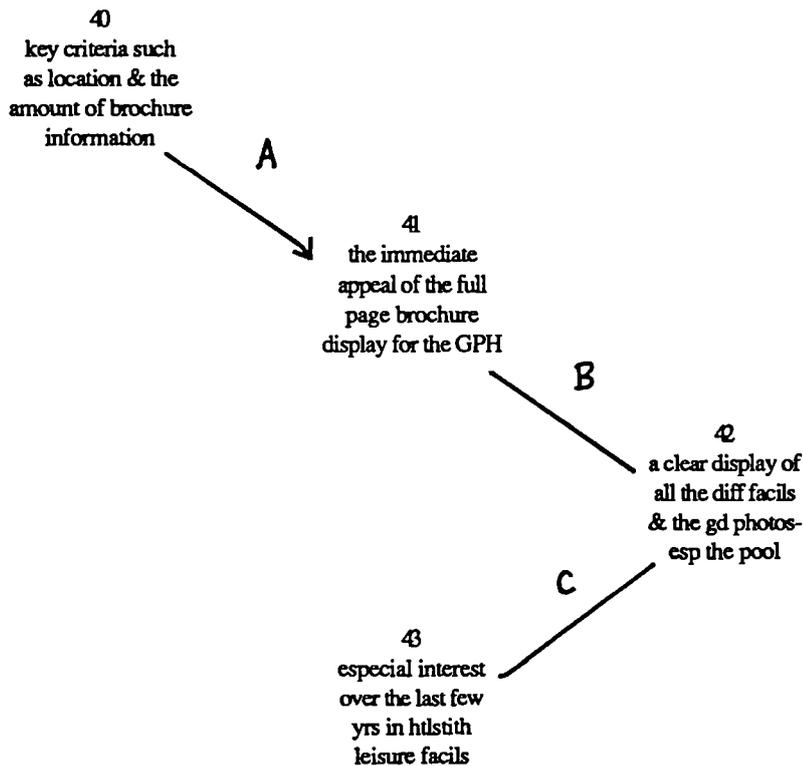
With the considerations shown in Map 25 in mind, the respondent obtains the leisure break brochure (Map 26), and is impressed by the full page display (41) detailing the leisure facilities available (42). In this example, the brochure confirms that his initial assessment is correct, and no further investigation is considered necessary before making the booking.

The majority of experienced hotel users in the study were men who were regularly using hotels in conjunction with business travel. However, if the male partner is unfamiliar with the geographical area of interest or a particular hotel featured in a short break brochure, the female partner may assume responsibility for the pre-purchase investigation. This is more likely to happen when the initiative for the short break has come from the female partner, or if the female derives satisfaction from the process of selecting the hotel.

Map 26

G22 the immediate appeal of the full page brochure display for the GPH  
 \$41 [R28]

	[40]	+41	A
42	[41]	42	B
43	[42]	43	C
	[43]	<+44>	D

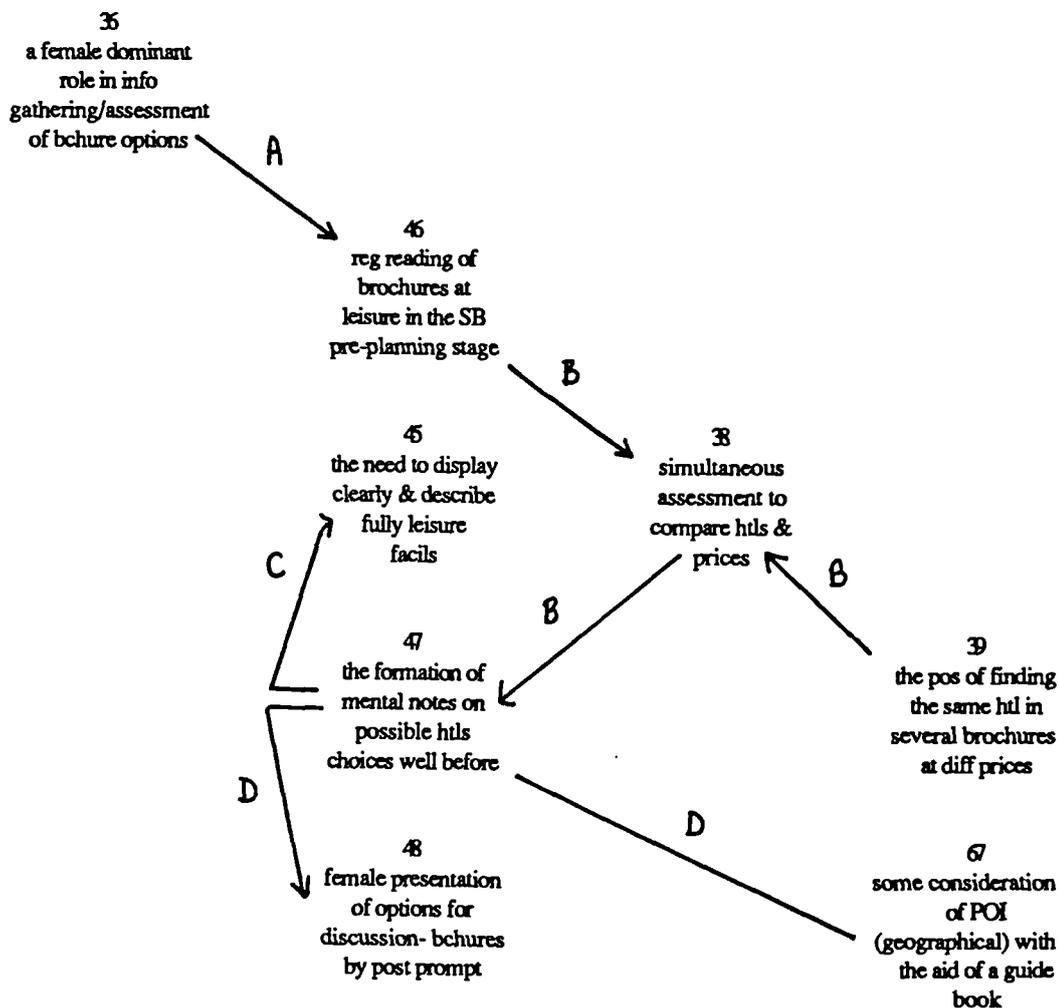


Map 27 provides an example of a very thorough investigation undertaken by the female partner for a combination of both of these reasons. In this case, she takes the lead whenever her husband is unfamiliar with suitable hotels at the planned short break location. This is assisted by 'regularly reading brochures' (46) which triggers 'simultaneous assessment to compare hotels and prices' (38). This in turn leads to the accumulation of knowledge about hotel options worth considering (47) which she discusses with her husband, especially when she is prompted by the arrival of new brochures in the post (48).

Map 27

G5 the formation of mental notes on possible htls choices well before  
 \$47 [R28]

<35>	<30>	[36]	<30>	<35>	+46	A
+39	+46	[38]	+47			B
+47	<+44>	[45]				C
	57	[47]	+48	57		D
		[67]	<+68>			E



### 6.5.1 Summary

In routine, re-purchase situations, there are a number of key indicators which are used by experienced hotel users in order to make an uncomplicated, low involvement purchase decision. These indicators are also used in high and moderate involvement purchase decisions, although in low involvement decision-making where sources of perceived risk are minimal, the consumer may be able to rely solely on key indicators to make an appropriate hotel choice.

Familiarity with the various national schemes of hotel grading and classification is the most widely reported indicator, as desired amenities and facilities are guaranteed by the number of stars or crowns which an hotel has been awarded by a validating body. As noted earlier, product knowledge also enables the experienced hotel user to develop a personal system of categorisation. This may incorporate perceptions about the type of service provided in different styles of hotel, with categories structured in a number of different ways. For example, hotels may be compared and assessed by characteristics associated with size, age and architectural design and by whether the hotel is independent or chain operated.

Personal systems of categorisation seem to provide a more valuable source of reference when male and female partner domains of expertise are integrated by role specialisation and joint decision-making responsibility. For example, male partners who regularly use hotels on business are able to interpret hotel standards through their knowledge of national grading schemes, and female partners reported a specialist interest in the expressive aspects of hotel interior design. These different perspectives provide an effective way of assessing the 'personality' of an hotel and thereby its acceptability in the context of purchase motives and expectations.

6.6 Limited prior product experience and high involvement

With few exceptions, the interviews with inexperienced hotel users revealed that comprehensive search and selection procedures were considered necessary to reduce the risks associated with an uninformed choice. The exceptions, which are reported in sections 6.7 and 6.8, were due mainly to the acceptance of recommendations from others relating to specific hotels, or from people with specialist knowledge of hotels. Alternatively, if the consumer's prior experience is limited to one, or several hotels which have been used on more than one occasion, familiarity with the hotel means that an extended decision process is unnecessary when re-booking.

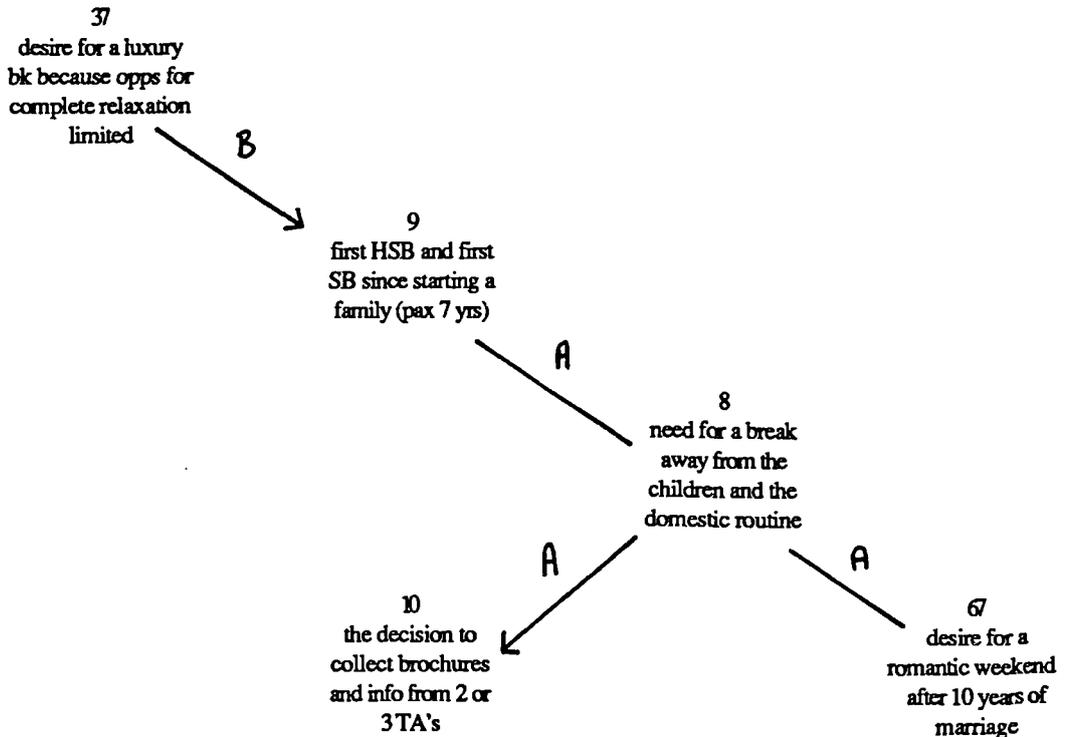
High involvement during pre-purchase is characterised by risk-reducing activities such as the evaluation of word of mouth recommendations and telephone calls made to the hotel(s) under consideration. The reason given for this activity is usually to gather additional information, but the desire to assess the friendliness of the hotel, and its ability to meet personal needs often underlies this activity. In this respect telephonists and reception staff have an important role, as their response is often considered to be indicative of staff attitudes in general.

A short break can represent a sizeable financial investment, and the consumer may feel the need to resolve any associated perceived risk before making the purchase. This may involve accounting for the expenditure by identifying how the benefits derived from the break relate to current personal needs, such as the desire for a change of routine. Map 28 provides an illustration of the reasoning used to justify making what is considered to be an expensive purchase. The reasons relate to both personal (67) and physical needs (8; 9; 37).

Map 28

G8 need for a break away from the children and the domestic routine \$8  
[R02]

67	9	[8]	9	+10	67	A
	+37	[9]				B
<+36 >	<45 >	[37]	<+26 >	<45 >		C

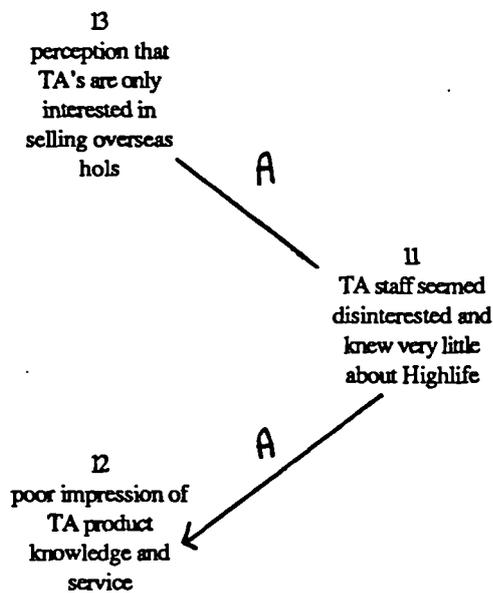


For consumers seeking guidance and information, the travel agent may provide the only point of contact prior to purchase (Map 29). If the consumer senses indecision or indifference (11), the outcome is likely to be a telephone enquiry to the central reservations office and/or the hotel(s) featured in the brochure(s) under consideration.

Map 29

G13    poor impression of TA product knowledge and service \$12    [R02]

13    [11]    13    +12    A

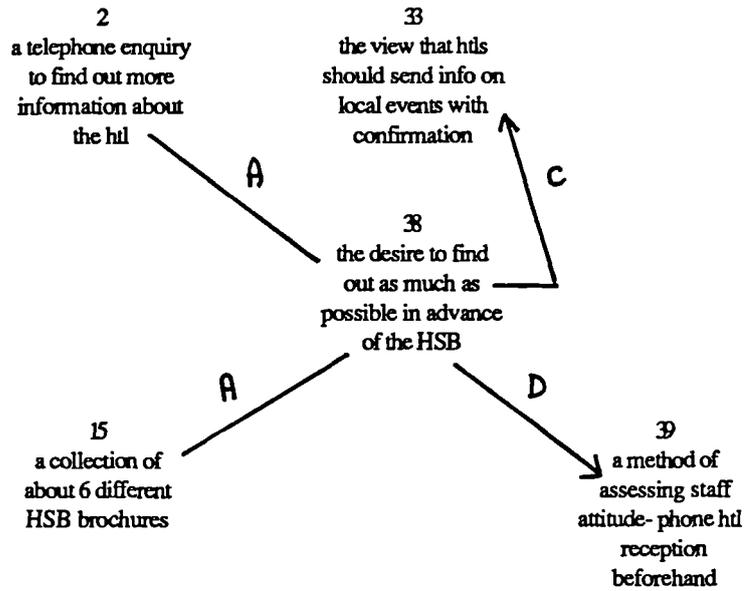


Maps 30 and 31 illustrate the role of a telephone enquiry during information gathering (2), corroborated by the expressed intention to "find out as much as possible in advance" (38) and the view that hotels should send further information once the booking has been confirmed (33). The consumer is likely to make a judgement of hotel acceptability based on the way in which the enquiry is handled. If the consumer experiences poor interpersonal telephone skills (3), and senses a failure to appreciate the importance of information received in this way, a negative attitude is conveyed (4).

Map 30

G3 the desire to find out as much as possible in advance of the HSB \$38 [R02]

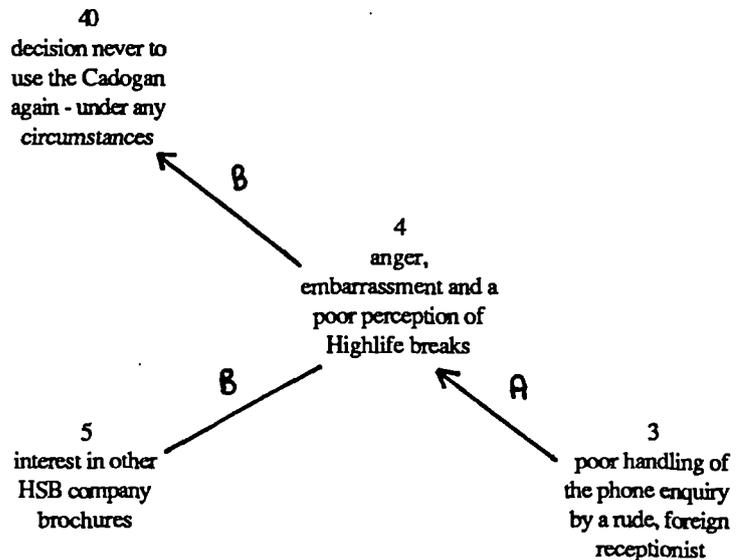
38	<+1 >	[ 2 ]	38	A
38	[ 15 ]	38		B
+38	[ 33 ]			C
[ 38 ]	+39			D



Map 31

G7 anger, embarrassment and a poor perception of Highlife breaks \$4 [R02]

	[ 3 ]	+4	<+63 >	A
5	[ 4 ]	+40	5	B

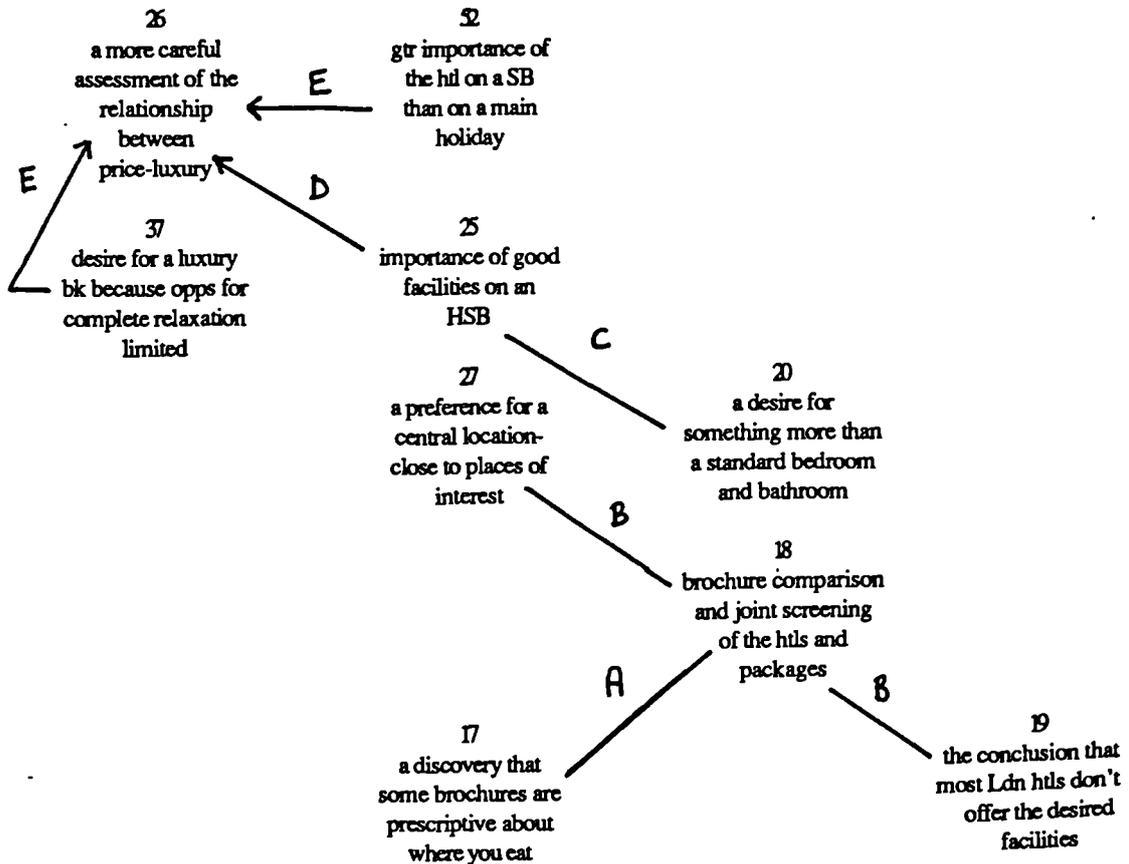


When a consumer has limited prior experience, it is more difficult for him to equate price and quality, in terms of knowing what to expect in differently graded hotels. Map 32 shows that this source of uncertainty can contribute to the difficulties of brochure assessment, because the consumer is simultaneously learning and assimilating product information. For example the 'desire for something more than a standard bedroom and bathroom' (20) is responsible for a more careful assessment of the perceived relationship between price and the accommodation type (26). In this example, the consumer can only discern this from looking at a range of different brochures. As new information is assimilated, learning occurs such as the 'discovery that some brochures are prescriptive about where you eat' (17) and the conclusion that 'most London hotels don't offer the desired facilities' (19).

Map 32

G1 a more careful assessment of the relationship between price-luxury  
\$26 [R02]

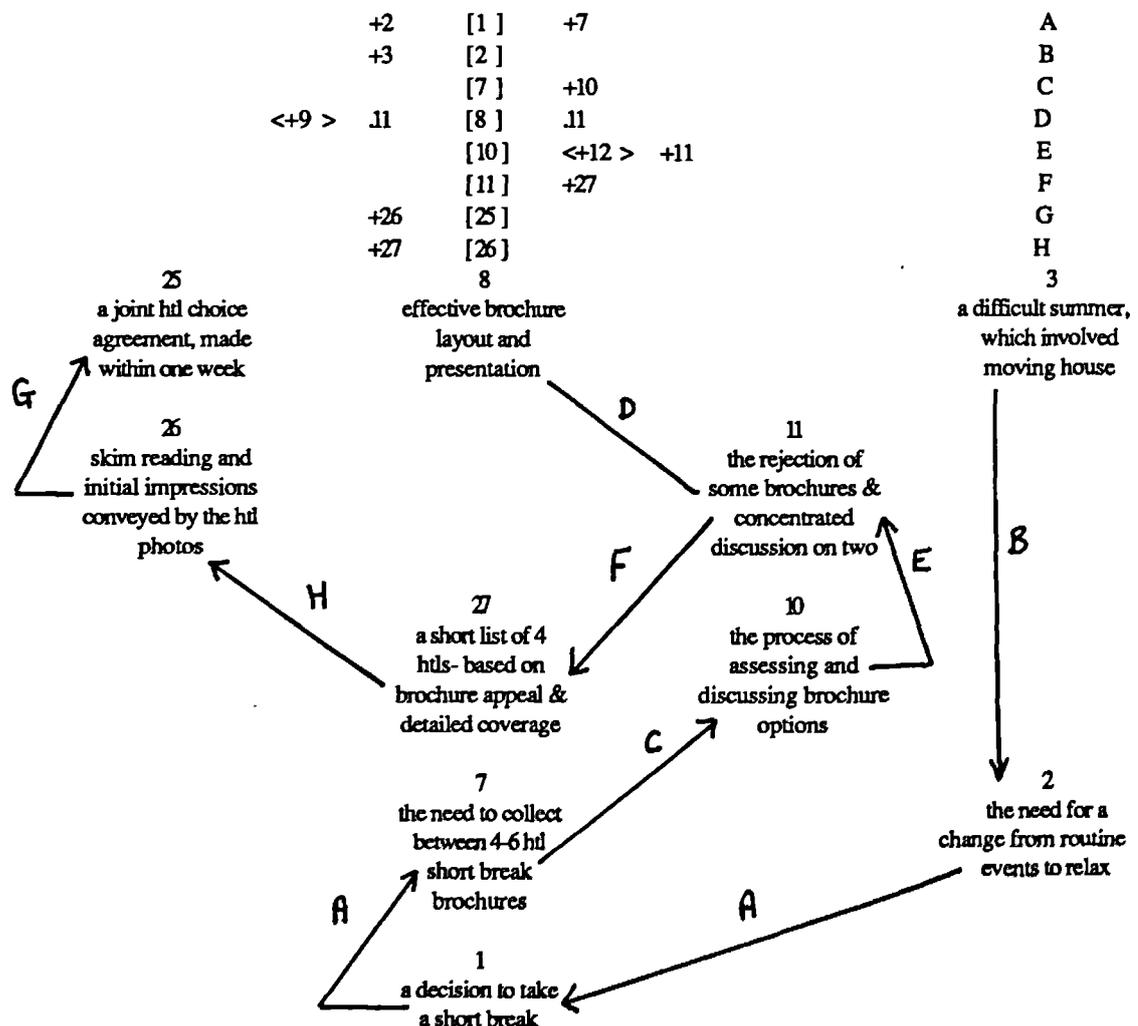
		18	[17]	18				A
27	20	19	[18]	+27	19	20	27	B
		25	[20]	25				C
			[25]	+26				D
	+52	+37	[26]					E
	<+36 >	<45 >	[37]	<+9 >	<45 >			F
			[52]	<+51 >				G



Maps 33, 34 and 35 illustrate why pre-determined requirements such as the need to find an hotel with suitable facilities for a disabled person, can influence the level of involvement in the decision process. The primary motive for the break is shown in Map 33 where 'a difficult summer which involved moving house' (3) leads to the 'need for a change from routine events to relax' (2). The decision to take a short break (1) activates an established routine which involved collecting brochures (7) discussion and assessment (10) the compilation of a short list of hotels (27) and re-assessment (26) prior to a final decision (25). However as Maps 34 and 35 show, the decision was complicated by the need to obtain further information, and assurances about the provision for a disabled member of the party. In these circumstances product information has a critical role in the choice of hotel, because brochures which did not feature facilities for disabled people were disregarded.

Map 33

G10 a joint htl choice agreement, made within one week \$25 [R07]

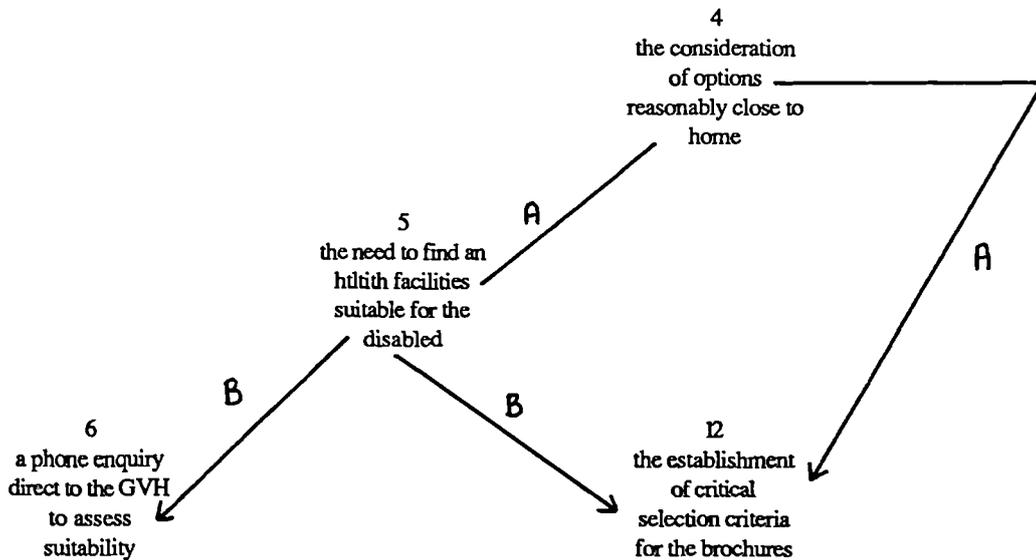


In Map 34, the key selection criteria for the short break destination and hotel are listed. These are a preference for a location close to home (4) and a desire to ensure that the hotel is suitable for the disabled (5). This leads to a more critical assessment of the brochures (12) and a telephone enquiry to assess the suitability of the selected hotel in more detail before making a reservation (6).

Map 34

G3 the need to find an htl with facilities suitable for the disabled  
 \$5 [R07]

		5	[4]	5	+12	<+20 >	A
			[5]	+6	+12		B
<+31 >	<+32 >	<+10 >	[12]	<+13 >	<+19 >		C

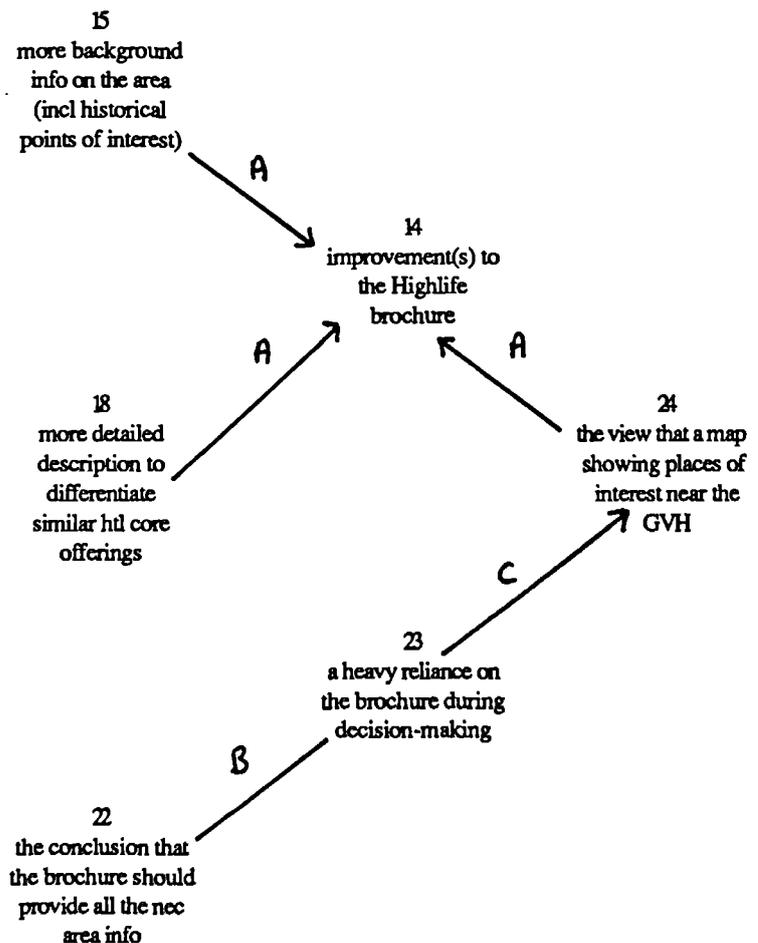


Although in this example additional research via the telephone was necessary, Map 35 emphasises the important role of the brochure, and that more detailed information was expected. Reflecting on the search and selection process, the respondent concludes that more background information (15; 22; 24) and details about hotel facilities (18) would constitute an improvement (14). This observation is especially relevant to inexperienced hotel users who may have to depend on the short break brochure for their main source of information (23).

Map 35

G6 improvement(s) to the Highlife brochure \$14 [R07]

+24	+18	+15	[14]		A
	23		[22]	23	B
			[23]	+24	C



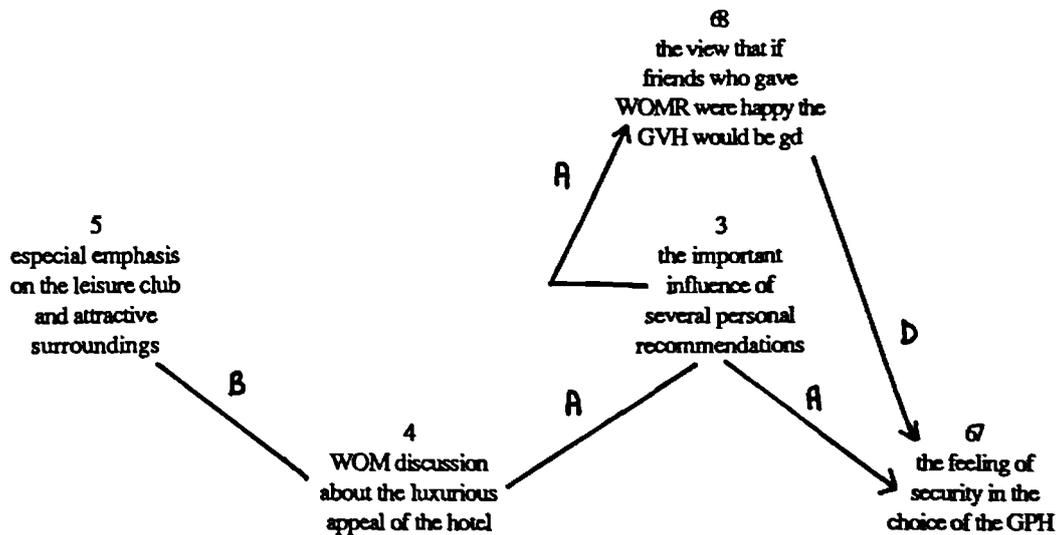
If a feeling of uncertainty is caused by unfamiliarity with the area or the suitability of an hotel, word of mouth recommendations can have an important influence on the selection process. This can be seen in Map 36, where the "influence of several personal recommendations" (3) leads to a "feeling of security" about the choice of hotel (67). It is also derived from knowing that the friends who had given the recommendation had been happy with the hotel (68).

Finally, the study revealed that the level of confidence derived from personal recommendations depends on the nature of the relationship between the persons giving and receiving recommendations. If they do not share similar expectations concerning standards of accommodation and service, the value of the recommendation may be limited.

Map 36

G2 the important influence of several personal recommendations \$3 [R22]

4	[3]	+68	4	+67	A
5	[4]	5			B
	[5]	<+6 >			C
+68	[67]				D
	[68]	<+2 >			E



#### 6.6.1 Summary

The natural inclination of inexperienced hotel users to test as far as practicable, the suitability of an hotel before making a purchase decision may lead to a variety of risk-reducing activities. These include seeking advice from experienced hotel users and travel agency staff when collecting or after an initial assessment of hotel short break brochures. Inexperienced hotel users also reported feeling concerned about coping with an unfamiliar hotel environment. When this was combined with uncertainty about hotel choice, they were inclined to telephone the hotel in order to test the attitudes and responsiveness of hotel staff by requesting further information. Significantly, whenever an inadequate response was given to a telephone request, consumers reported feeling more anxious and less inclined to consider using the hotel.

The desire for supplementary information stems from unfamiliarity with the product and in particular, uncertainty about the relationship between price and quality standards. Consumers reported a desire to obtain 'value for money' but were unable to equate this with realistic ideals for product performance. This helps to illustrate why the level of prior experience affects the type and pattern of pre-purchase consumer behaviour.

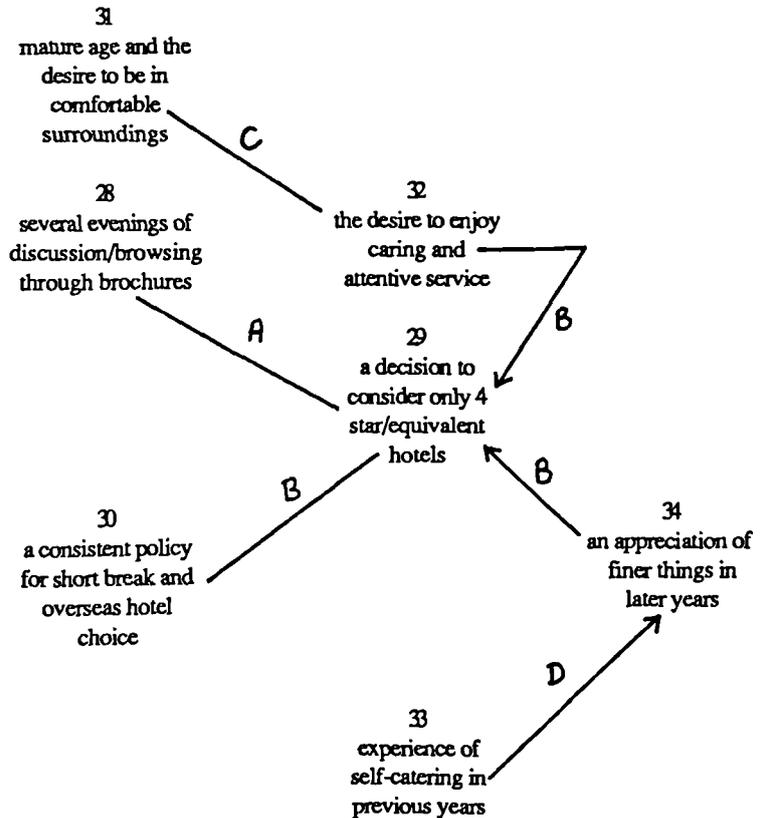
6.7 Limited prior product experience and moderate involvement

One of the re-occurring choice criteria used by older consumers in the study was a desire to relax in a comfortable environment. This is illustrated in Map 37, where it is also associated with the recollection of self-catering experiences in previous years (33) when family holidays included the children. The desire to stay in a comfortable hotel (31) combined with limited opportunity to use hotels in the past, leads to an appreciation of "finer things" (34) such as "attentive service" (32) and a decision to use four star or equivalent hotels (29) on both short and long holidays (30). As the level of comfort and standards of service are of particular interest to older consumers, Map 38 shows how uncertainty about these factors (20) can lead to the belief that more attention should be given to describing and portraying hotel standards in the brochure (23).

Map 37

G7 a decision to consider only 4 star/equivalent hotels \$29 [R16]

		29	[28]	<+27 >	29	A
+32	+34	30	[29]	30		B
		32	[31]	32		C
			[33]	+34		D

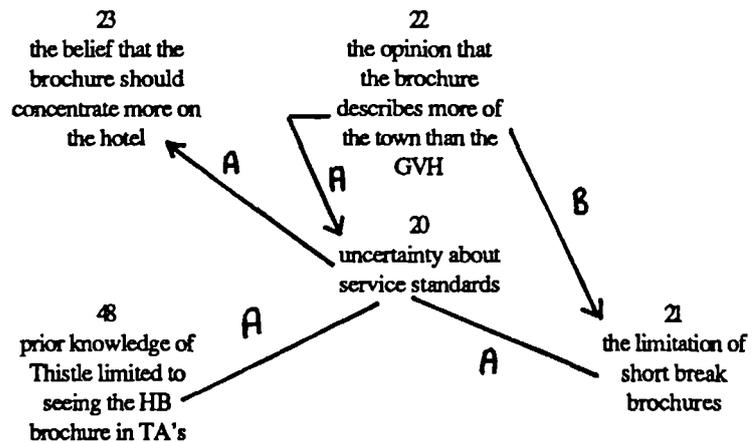


Maps 38 and 39 illustrate the moderating effect that prior knowledge of hotel suitability can have on the decision process. The purpose of the break was to find a house prior to job re-location, and the location and suitability of the hotel as a weekend base for viewing the surrounding area was therefore an important consideration. The example in Map 39 shows how a prior experience at the selected hotel (8) had led to a positive evaluation (9) associated with 'enjoyment of the meal and surroundings' (46) and a favourable impression of the standards of comfort and decor (33). Although this experience had taken place five years earlier, clear recollection of these impressions, linked to the post-consumption decision to re-visit the hotel in the future (9) had been an important influence on the decision to use the hotel again (47).

**Map 38**

G6      uncertainty about service standards \$20      [R16]

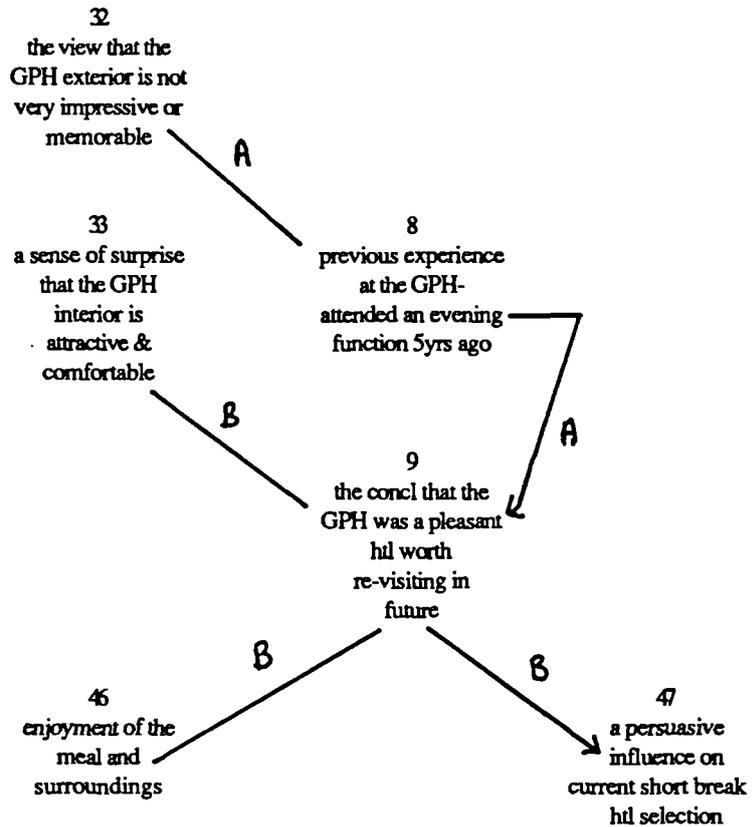
.489	21	+22	[20]	+23	21	.48	A
		22	[21]	22			B
			[22]	<+69 >	<+67 >		C



Map 39

G3 the concl that the GPH was a pleasant htl worth re-visiting in future  
 \$9 [R26]

	32	[ 8 ]	+9	32		A
46	33	[ 9 ]	33	46	+47	B

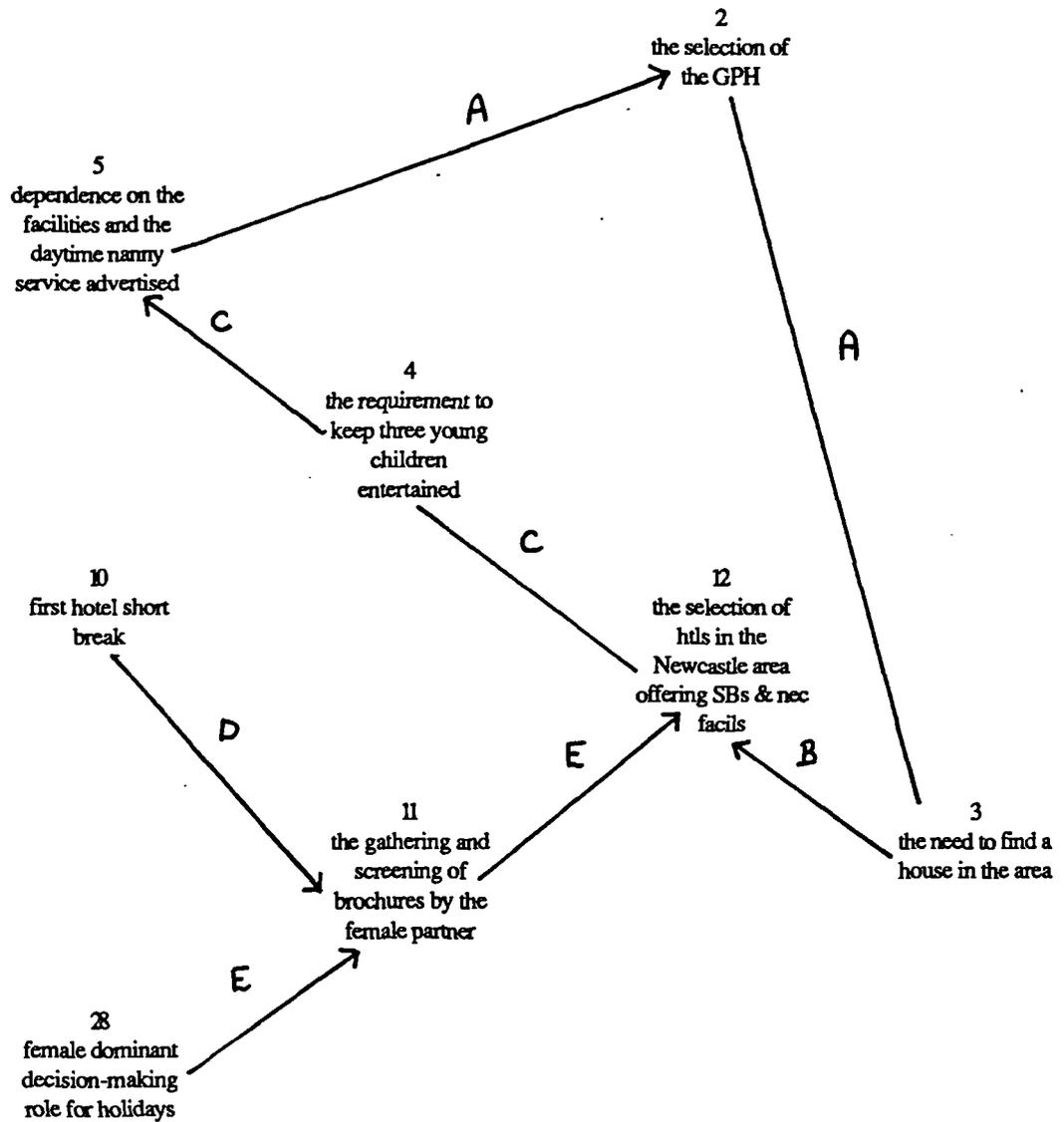


Map 40 shows how "the need to find a house in the area" (3) determines the location of the short break (12). The female partner assumes responsibility for planning activities (28), and has to make an unfamiliar decision (10) and also ensure that the hotel is able to cater for the needs of young children during the day (4; 5). These circumstances might normally require a more cautious and comprehensive selection process, but recollection of the prior experience referred to in Map 39, leads to a confident decision to use the same hotel again (2). Although not shown on either of the Maps, the decision-making task is simplified by a familiar locality, combined with the security of knowing that friends in the area would help out if the hotel didn't meet their expectations. Despite some residual anxiety about the facilities for children, these factors give the female partner sufficient confidence to make a reservation, without telephoning the hotel to make further enquiries relating to her concerns.

Map 40

G2 dependence on the facilities and the daytime nanny service advertised  
 \$5 [R26]

+5	<7 >	<6 >	3	<+1 >	[2 ]	3	<6 >	A
					[3 ]	+12		B
				.12	[4 ]	+5	.12	C
					[10 ]	+11	<+38 >	D
				+28	[11 ]	+12		E
					[12 ]	<+13 >		F
	<+49 >	<50 >			[28 ]	<50 >		G

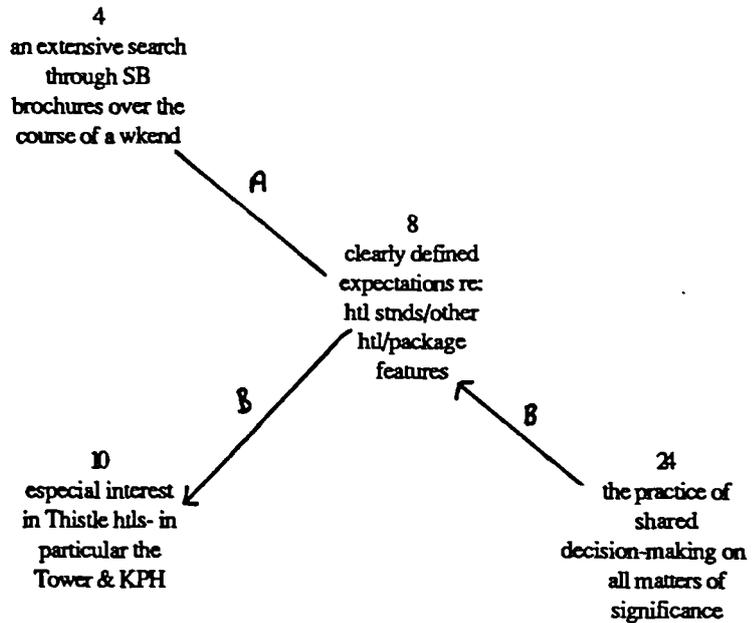


The background to Map 41 is a desire to find an hotel which would improve on the one used during a prior trip to London, and accommodate children free of charge. These objectives lead to joint decision-making (24) and clearly defined expectations (8). Although a comprehensive review of short break brochures follows (4), selection is guided by recommendations from a friend.

**Map 41**

G4 clearly defined expectations re: htl stnds/other htl/package features  
 \$8 [R31]

<+20 > 8	<5 > [4]	<5 >	<+7 > 8	A
	+24 [8]	+10		B
	<9 > [10]	<9 >		C
	[24]	<+23 >		D

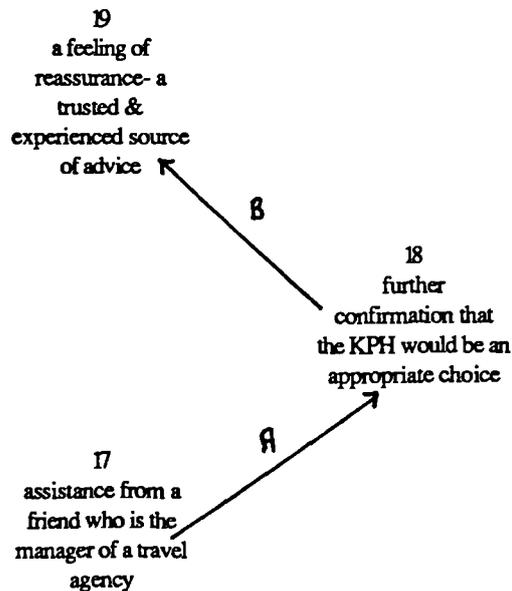


As Map 42 shows, the friend, who manages a travel agency (17) acts as a surrogate decision-maker for the family. His advice is sought in connection with all holiday decisions, and in this instance provides "further confirmation" (18) and "a feeling of reassurance" (19) that one of the hotels tentatively selected would be well suited to the family's needs. This practice of relying on an external adviser to approve holiday plans compensates for the limited extent of prior experience and has the effect of moderating the level of involvement necessary to make a purchase decision.

Map 42

G7      a feeling of reassurance- a trusted & experienced source of advice  
 \$19      [R31]

[17]	+18	A
[18]	<+21 > +19	B

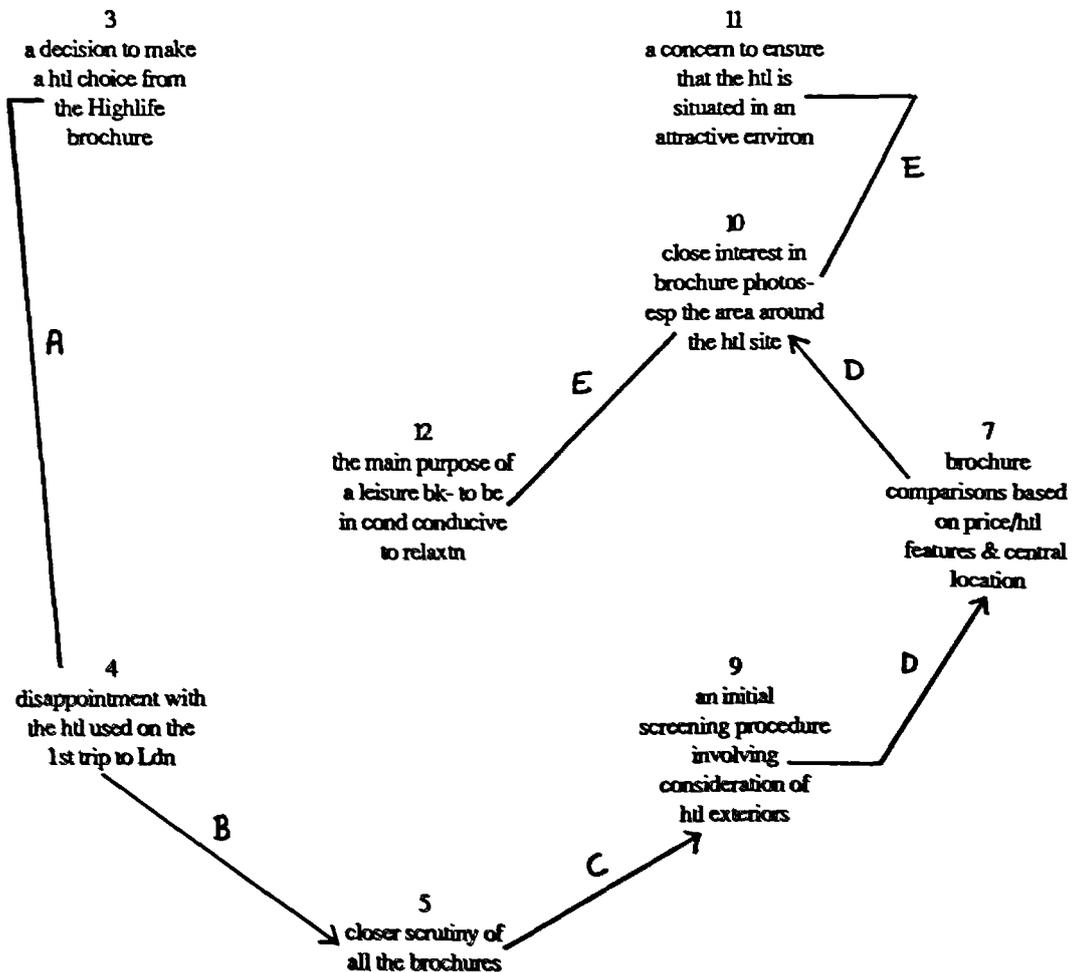


Maps 43 and 44 also focus on a desire to improve on the standard of hotel accommodation used on the first visit to London. In Map 43, this objective (4) leads to "closer scrutiny of all the brochures available" (5) with especial interest in the brochure photographs showing hotel exteriors and localities (9). The concern to find an hotel which is situated in "an attractive environment" (11) arises partly because of the recollection of disappointment with the prior experience, but also because it is thought to be more relaxing (12). The interest in interior and exterior brochure photographs and hotel locations exemplifies the greater dependence reported by inexperienced hotel users on brochure information.

Map 43

G1 close interest in brochure photos- esp the area around the htl site  
 \$10 [R34]

<+6 >	4	<+2 >	[3]	<+1 >	4	A
			[4]	+5		B
			[5]	<+6 >	+9	C
		+9	[7]	+10		D
	.12	.11	[10]	.11	.12	E
			[11]	<+13 >		F

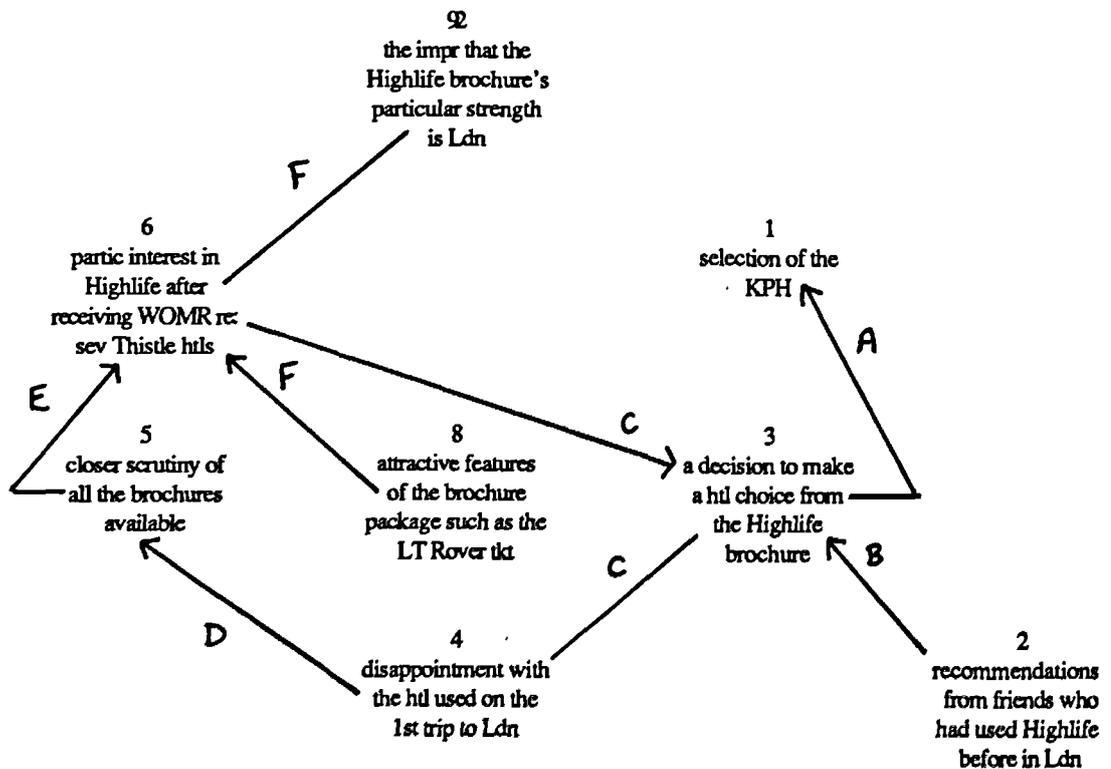


Map 44 shows how brand interest was aroused by a recommendation (6) received from a member of the family, which led to a decision to concentrate on one brochure (3). This was also supported by other recommendations from friends who had used the brand in conjunction with visits to London (2). Although the respondent assessed the options carefully, commenting on attractive brand features (8; 92) his concern about making the right choice was moderated by a willingness to act on the brand recommendations received from friends and family. If this source of influence had not been so strong, he may have felt compelled to make more detailed enquiries before making the reservation.

Map 44

G13 a decision to make a htl choice from the Highlife brochure \$3 [R34]

<+17 >	+3	[1 ]			A
		[2 ]	+3		B
+6	4	[3 ]	4		C
		[4 ]	+5		D
		[5 ]	+6	<+9 >	E
92	+8	[6 ]	92		F



### 6.7.1 Summary

Several factors were reported in the study to account for a moderate level of involvement among inexperienced hotel users.

Firstly, older consumers had in common the desire to relax in a comfortable environment. Descriptions of prior family holiday experiences revealed a dependence on self-catering, with the associated risks of bad weather and inadequate indoor facilities. Recollection of these experiences seemed to reinforce the decision to take an hotel short break, because the hotel represented a desired improvement on familiar standards of accommodation.

Secondly, when consumers reported prior knowledge of hotel suitability they did not feel compelled to engage in extensive information gathering. Prior knowledge accounted for moderate involvement in a number of different circumstances. The most common of which was acceptance of word of mouth recommendations from other people with similar needs and expectations.

Thirdly, moderate involvement occurred when time constraints were imposed on the duration of pre-purchase decision-making. For example, several respondents reported the need to find a house prior to job re-location. As this was the main reason for taking the short break, the timing of the break and the location of the hotel were more important than its individual appeal.

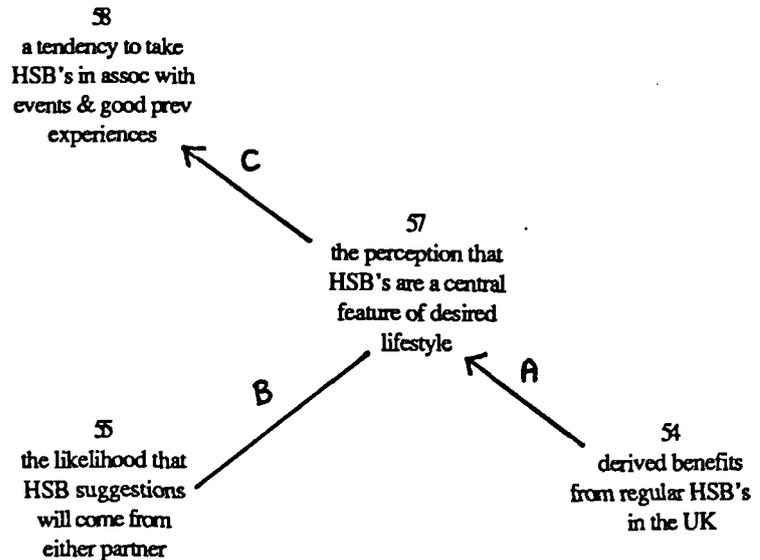
6.8 Limited prior product experience and low involvement

In the case of consumers who's prior experience is limited because they return to the same, or one of several hotels, the decision process is more straightforward. Map 45 provides an illustration of this, where short breaks in the UK are preferred to holidays overseas (54). However, they have usually been return visits to hotels associated with good previous experiences (58).

Map 45

G14 a tendency to take HSB's in assoc with events & good prev experiences  
 \$58 [R03]

<1 >	[54]	+53 >	<1 >+	+57	A
57	[55]	57			B
	[57]	+58			C

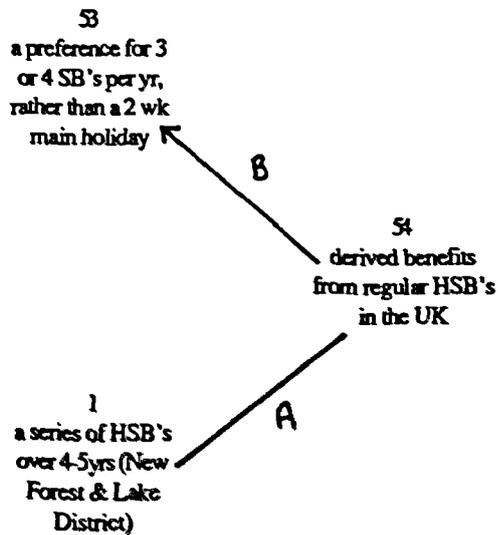


In Map 46, part of the explanation for the established routine is shown, whereby the couple were satisfied with the two or three hotels they had used in the New Forest and the Lake District over a period of four or five years (1), and consequently felt disinclined to experiment with others. Although in this case prior experience is restricted to a small number of different hotels, as Map 47 shows, repeat-purchasing nonetheless supports the development of decision rules which help to establish a routine pattern of behaviour.

Map 46

G12 a preference for 3 or 4 SB's per yr, rather than a 2 wk main holiday  
 \$53 [R03]

\$4	<2 >	[1]	<+12 >	<2 >	\$4	A
	+54	[53]				B
		[54]	<+57 >			C

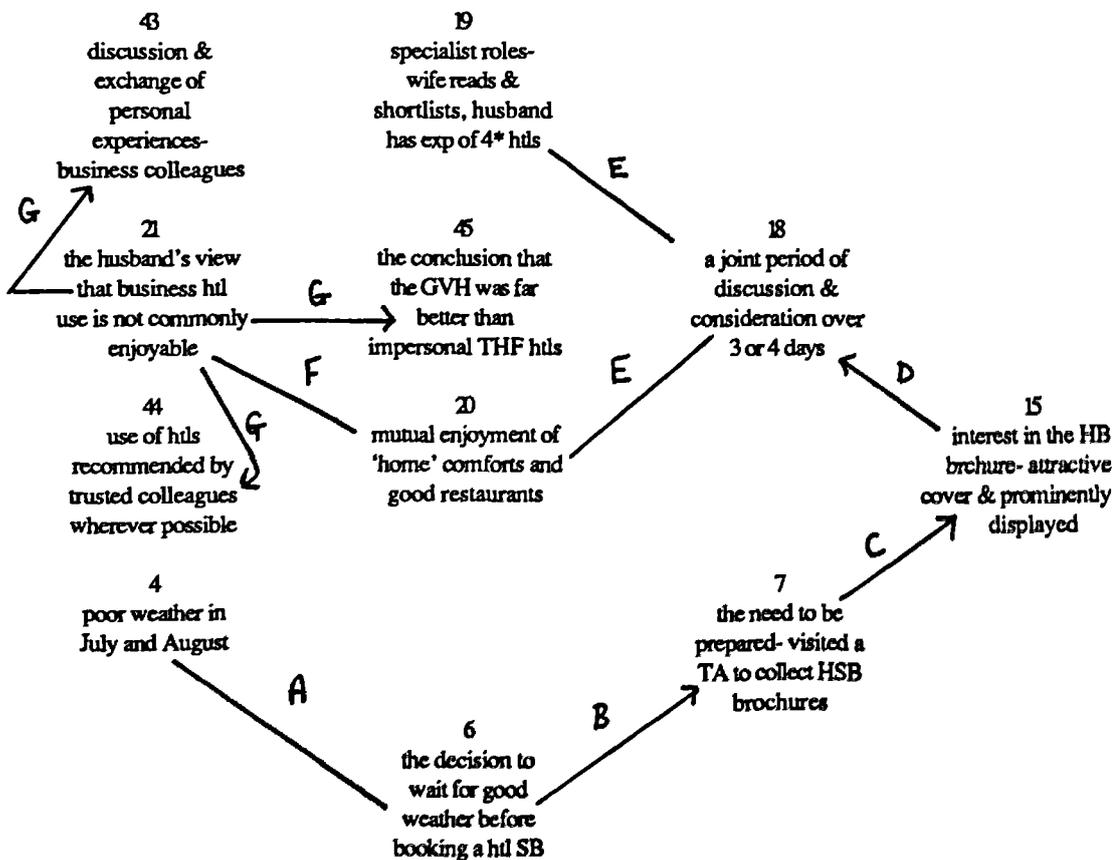


Map 47 illustrates the established routine, beginning with a 'decision to wait for good weather before booking' (6) which prompts a desire to be prepared by collecting brochures from a travel agency (7). The selection procedure starts with interest in brochures which have been well designed and are 'prominently displayed' (15) leading to a period of joint discussion (18). The analysis of brochures is a female dominant activity (19) based on mutually agreed selection criteria (20). Although the male partner has only limited business travel experience, in this instance he is able to use the experiences of colleagues (43; 44) to provide a cross-reference on hotels which may be considered suitable in an unfamiliar area.

**Map 47**

G5 the husband's view that business htl use is not commonly enjoyable  
 \$21 [R03]

	6	[4]	<+5>	6	A	
		[6]	+7		B	
		[7]	+15		C	
		[15]	<+12>	+18	D	
20	19	[18]	19	20	E	
	21	[20]	21		F	
		[21]	+43	+44	+45	G
<+46>	<30>	[45]	<30>		H	

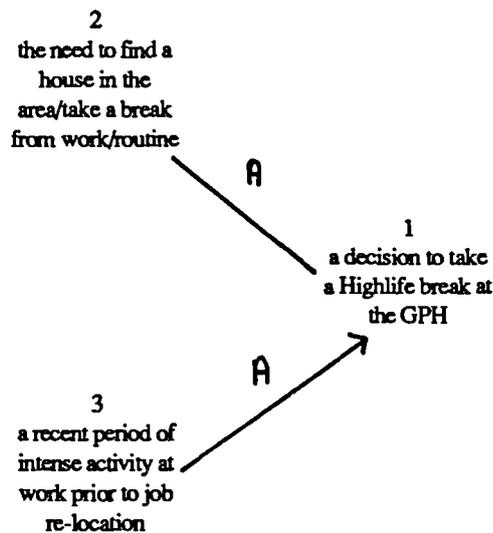


Finally, exceptional circumstances may explain the use of a low involvement strategy when limited prior experience would normally suggest moderate or high involvement in the decision process. Time constraints were mentioned by several of the respondents in the study. This is illustrated in Map 48 where "the need to find a house" (2) during a period of "intense activity at work" (3) leads to a search focused on a specific area. This in turn facilitates a quicker decision than if the destination had not pre-determined.

Map 48

G8 the need to find a house in the area/take a break from work/routine  
 \$2 [R24]

2 +3 [1] 2 A

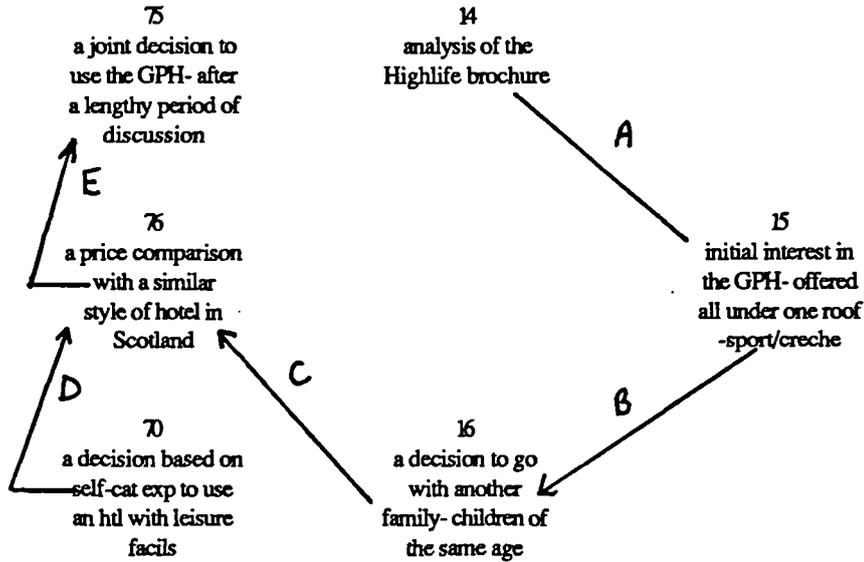


Map 49 shows that the availability of sport and creche facilities "under one roof" (15) was an important factor. It was also considered to be a safer investment given the need to occupy two groups of children (16) recalling the problem of uncertain weather conditions on previous self-catering holidays (70). To assess value for money, a price comparison "with a similar style of hotel" is obtained before the decision to make a booking is taken (75; 76).

Map 49

G6 a price comparison with a similar style of hotel in Scotland \$76 [R24]

		.15	[14]	.15		A
			[15]	+16		B
			[16]	+76	<+17 >	C
<71 >	<+69 >	[70]	<71 >	+76		D
<+18 >	+76	[75]	<+77 >			E



**6.8.1 Summary**

Inexperienced hotel users adopting a low involvement approach to decision-making were either acting in response to personal recommendations from an authoritative source or making a repeat purchase decision. The most frequently reported usage was in conjunction with a return visit to an hotel which had proved to be satisfactory on a prior occasion. In these circumstances the need for additional information is limited by the extent to which the consumer may feel the need to review information about the hotel or attractions in the surrounding area.

**6.9 A product experience-involvement matrix for hospitality services**

In the previous sections, the influence of prior product experience on the level of consumer involvement in the decision process was noted. The purpose of this section is to summarise, and to consider some of the implications of the findings.

### 6.9.1 Consumer segmentation

Effective brand marketing has become more important during the 1980's as the level and variety of competition in the hospitality industry has increased. The hotel short break market is a notable example because sustained growth in the demand for packaged breaks has attracted the attention of hotel companies, tour operators and transport specialists who are investing in national brand promotion. In this context, the need to be able to relate and respond to the expectations of the marketplace, and react to the experiences of different consumer groups has become a critical determinant of success (Teare, Davies and McGeary, 1989a).

A new approach to market segmentation for hospitality services is presented in Figure 6.8. This is summarised in the form of a matrix (Teare, 1988b; 1990a) showing the interrelationships between prior product experience and involvement which have emerged from the study. To explain the theoretical and practical implications of the matrix, the following commentary recaps on the interrelationships supported by the data categories and the cognitive model data and outlines the practical steps that can be taken to support brand marketing and development.

### 6.9.2 (1A) Extensive experience and high involvement

The experienced hotel users in the study were better able to categorise and differentiate between hotels and short break brands because they had clearly defined expectations and selection criteria. Consequently, they might be expected to make a purchase decision using a low involvement approach. However, the length of time which they allocated to pre-purchase activities was related to the degree of confidence in their own judgement and their ability to minimise perceived risk, if any, associated with brand and/or hotel choice.

If the primary purchase motive was considered to be especially important, this affected the level of interest in pre-purchase information search, and consequently the level of involvement in the decision process. For example, high involvement decision-making occurred when the main reason for taking an hotel short break was to compensate for a long holiday opportunity which had been lost because of work-related pressures (Map 1).

Extent of:	<u>Prior Product Experience</u>	
<u>Product Involvement</u>	<u>Extensive (A)</u>	<u>Limited (B)</u>
High (1)	High product importance. Clearly defined expectations and selection criteria. Well focused research.	High perceived risk. Uncertain expectations Diffuse research, using many information sources.
Product Design	Provide clear promotional information on performance parameters, both core and peripheral services.	Ensure that decision support is given with sensitivity, both written and verbal enquiries.
Moderate (2)	Increased involvement associated with new or problematic situations. Systematic search using established information channels.	Perceived risk moderated by pre-knowledge or recommendations of product suitability. Limited information search to confirm brand selection.
Product Design	Anticipate the spectrum of usage situations and design for maximum flexibility of use.	Concentrate decision support on promoting key product attributes to increase brand-based confidence.
Low (3)	Rapid purchase decision based on high personal confidence. Little or no information search and pre-purchase discussion.	Typically a re-purchase situation, from which confidence and purchase assurance is derived.
Product Design	Convey quality standards directly and concisely. Concentrate on brand-based benefits	Aim to broaden the product appeal by generating additional brand purchase options and opportunities.

**Figure 6.8**

**A product experience-involvement matrix for hospitality services**

This sub-group contains experienced decision-makers who make their hotel selection without the need for very much, if any decision support. Consequently the impact of brand promotions and literature will largely depend on how effectively brand benefits have been portrayed. This is because they have limited interest in published information in comparison with inexperienced hotel users, and are reticent to search for information that cannot be readily obtain from familiar sources.

### 6.9.3 (2A) Extensive experience and moderate involvement

As product knowledge increases and the associated decision process becomes more familiar, the level of involvement required to make a purchase decision generally decreases. However, when new situations or factors affecting hotel choice are encountered, the experienced hotel user may have to modify an established decision-making procedure. For instance, a shift from low to moderate involvement occurred during brand switching (Maps 16 and 17) and when experienced hotel users had taken responsibility for a reservation made on behalf of, or in conjunction with other people (Maps 7-12; 13-15). Moderate involvement was therefore primarily associated with purchase decisions requiring the collection and assessment of new product information relating to unfamiliar purchase situations and circumstances.

The experienced hotel users in this sub-group were mostly facing the need to find solutions to new or evolving problems. In some cases, this meant identifying hotels offering services and facilities which were geared towards the needs and expectations of particular usage situations. By anticipating these, the producer can emphasise brand flexibility more effectively in brochures and other printed media. This can be achieved by focusing attention on important brand attributes such as different package options, ease of booking and the availability of specialist services and facilities.

### 6.9.4 (3A) Extensive experience and low involvement

Low involvement decision-making, characterised by rapid and confident hotel selection, is best exemplified by experienced hotel users in repeat purchase situations. Here they are able to use their experience-based knowledge and ability to categorise hotels without the constraints imposed by the need to assess new product information. Personal categorisation operates through familiarity with national grading and classification schemes for hotels (Map 19) and through role specialisation and joint decision-making responsibility (Map 24). The findings showed that male and female partners tend to develop different decision-making interests and expertise. When they are integrated by joint decision-making, the specialist input of each partner reduces the overall level of commitment necessary to make a purchase decision.

The opportunity to influence experienced hotel users adopting a low involvement approach to the decision process is limited by the extent and duration of the information search that they undertake. Instances of rapid, confident decision-making in the study were not preceded by a detailed

appraisal of promotional literature. This is because product information in brochures and other printed media is not always considered to be reliable (Map 21). To achieve maximum impact, brochure design should portray brand attributes and competitive quality standards clearly and succinctly. Ideally, visual examples of brand quality should be used, as the experienced hotel user is unlikely to undertake a detailed examination of descriptive information.

#### **6.9.5 (1B) Limited experience and high involvement**

The findings indicated that inexperienced hotel users adopt a high involvement approach to the decision process when they feel a sense of inner conflict, anxiety or uncertainty about aspects of hotel choice. For example, a detailed investigative approach occurred when respondents were uncertain about the hotel environment and price-quality relationships relating to standards, services and facilities at different types of hotel accommodation (Map 32). In this context, the level of perceived risk was closely related to the investment cost of the purchase decision.

In order to reduce perceived risk and obtain reassurance on hotel choice, inexperienced hotel users have to rely on external sources of information. The period of information search and assessment is an active learning process which may include discussions with travel agency staff during the collection, and following an initial assessment of hotel short break brochures (Map 29). Consumers are also likely to seek opinions, recommendations and advice from experienced hotel users about aspects of hotel choice and service delivery (Map 36).

The cautious, task orientated nature of hotel selection associated with this sub-group may lead to written and verbal requests for brand information (Maps 30 and 31). If the consumer seeks further information by telephone, it is particularly important that reservations and hotel staff respond patiently and sympathetically to the enquiry in order to provide the most effective decision support. In this sense, interpersonal contact is as important, if not more so than the product information contained in brochures and other printed media.

#### **6.9.6 (2B) Limited experience and moderate involvement**

Pre-knowledge of hotel suitability was shown to be an important moderating influence on the level of pre-purchase involvement. The adoption of a moderate rather than a high involvement approach was primarily associated with two aspects of pre-knowledge. Firstly, recommendations that had been

received from an authoritative source (Map 41 and 42), and secondly the recollection of satisfactory prior experience at the selected hotel (Map 38 and 39). Pre-knowledge of hotel suitability reduces perceived risk and other sources of uncertainty associated with limited prior experience. This means that the consumer does not have to expend as much time and effort in gathering and assessing product information.

If the brand-based confidence derived from personal recommendation is confirmed by the consumption experience, the probability of a repeat purchase is strengthened. In these circumstances the internal marketing potential can be fully exploited by featuring photographic displays of other hotels, services and facilities associated with the brand name in the public areas of the hotel. Additional brochures, leaflets and other forms of brand information should also be provided in order to maximise the opportunities arising from positive brand reinforcement at the point of consumption.

#### **6.9.7 (3B) Limited experience and low involvement**

The findings showed that there are several circumstances in which inexperienced hotel users are likely to make a low involvement purchase decision. If for example, a consumer decides to re-visit an hotel which had proved to be satisfactory on a prior occasion, the purchase decision can be made without collecting and assessing new information (Maps 45 and 46).

Secondly, as with moderate involvement, there are circumstances which may require a rapid response. For example, the need to find a house prior to job re-location limits the duration of pre-purchase because the immediacy of the task and the fixed location for the short break impose a restriction on hotel choice (Map 48).

Finally, there are occasions when an unfamiliar hotel environment may be seen as the lowest risk alternative. If for example, the main purpose of a family short break is to participate in leisure activities, an hotel with indoor leisure facilities, though more expensive than self-catering accommodation, may be considered as a safer investment against the possibility of bad weather (Map 49).

When brand-based confidence is derived from a narrow base of experience, the producer can attempt to broaden brand appeal by stimulating the consumer's interest in the company's hotels at other locations. The

promotional strategy could include short breaks packaged around special events as well as incentives in the form of reduced tariff packages for group bookings and combined business and leisure breaks.

#### 6.10 Conclusion

In showing that prior product experience and product involvement are related, it is apparent that the characteristics of high, moderate and low involvement are different for experienced and inexperienced hotel users.

Experienced hotel users may engage in information seeking to ensure that an appropriate hotel choice is made or to resolve concerns arising from responsibility for others, but they remain confident of their ability to assess and use product information. This is because they are familiar with key product quality indicators and are able to interpret and evaluate new information by making comparisons against encoded product information held within a personal system for categorising hotels. They may also have adopted specialist roles and or joint decision-making responsibilities in recognition of differing male and female partner domains of expertise.

In contrast, inexperienced hotel users do not have these benefits, and consequently they are much less confident of their ability to choose an hotel which will meet their particular needs and expectations. As pre-purchase activities are motivated by the desire to overcome uncertainty and the need to reduce sources of perceived risk, information search is likely to be diffuse and less effective than the more systematic, focused approach of experienced hotel users.

The circumstances influencing moderate and low involvement purchase decisions also differ for experienced and inexperienced hotel users. Pre-knowledge of hotel suitability has an important role in determining the duration of the pre-purchase stage. However, inexperienced hotel users tend to feel less certain because pre-knowledge information is more likely to have been received than experienced.

In contrast, experienced hotel users have an elaborate inventory of product knowledge which may include brand-based information. Combined with recommendations from others, this provides a more meaningful indicator of whether an hotel is likely to be a suitable choice. It also enables the experienced hotel user to make a better informed judgement about the kind of information needed to support the purchase decision.

Finally, there were two issues relating to pre-purchase decision-making

which are also likely to be important during the consumption stage. The use of a personal system for categorising hotels by experienced hotel users suggests that assessment criteria used during hotel selection may also have a role in the assessment of the consumption experience. This also applies to the specialist roles adopted by experienced hotel users during pre-purchase. These issues are addressed in chapter 7.

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## Chapter 7

### The assessment and evaluation of hospitality services

#### 7.1 Overview of the chapter

The nature of service firms, and in particular hospitality organisations where operations personnel both produce and deliver consumer services, indicates that the role of marketing is much broader than in manufacturing. Services marketing theory has recognised that production, marketing and even service development are often handled by the same people. As a result, the marketing function is spread throughout the firm, with operations personnel also acting as 'part-time marketers' (Gummeson, 1987; 1990).

This has important implications for the marketing approach, as consumers are continually influenced by the behaviour of operations personnel, who in turn will differ in their understanding and interpretation of consumer needs. If for example, internal channels of communication are ineffective, hospitality managers who design and manage service delivery systems may not fully appreciate the tensions caused by introducing too many consumers into the system, or by changing the business mix of the operation (Teare and Gummeson, 1989b).

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate and explain the procedures used by consumers to assess and evaluate the consumption and post-consumption stages of the decision process for hospitality services. As with chapter 6, the supporting evidence is provided by cognitive model data, and the six sections which form the basis of the chapter were derived from the theoretical framework presented in chapter 5. Four of the sections deal with assessment procedures relating to the consumption stage of the decision process. These are:

- (1) Assessment criteria;
- (2) The consumption environment and design effects;
- (3) Hotel services;
- (4) Personal rating systems.

The remaining two sections are concerned with the post-consumption stage of the decision process and consider:

- (5) Sources of satisfaction during post-consumption evaluation;
- (6) Sources of dissatisfaction during post-consumption evaluation.

A theme of the chapter is the interrelationship between consumption and

post-consumption evaluation. As noted at the end of chapter 6, there are also assessment procedures which help to integrate all three stages. In particular, prior product experience which is encoded within a personal category system and used to formulate pre-purchase selection criteria. As prior experience is used to compare and select an hotel, it can be assumed that this information is also used to assess the consumption experience, influencing future purchase intentions via post-consumption evaluation.

Secondly, as role specialisation was found to be important among experienced hotel users during pre-purchase, it seems likely that the different expectations of male and female partners will also influence the operation of assessment procedures during consumption. These assumptions are tested in the following sections.

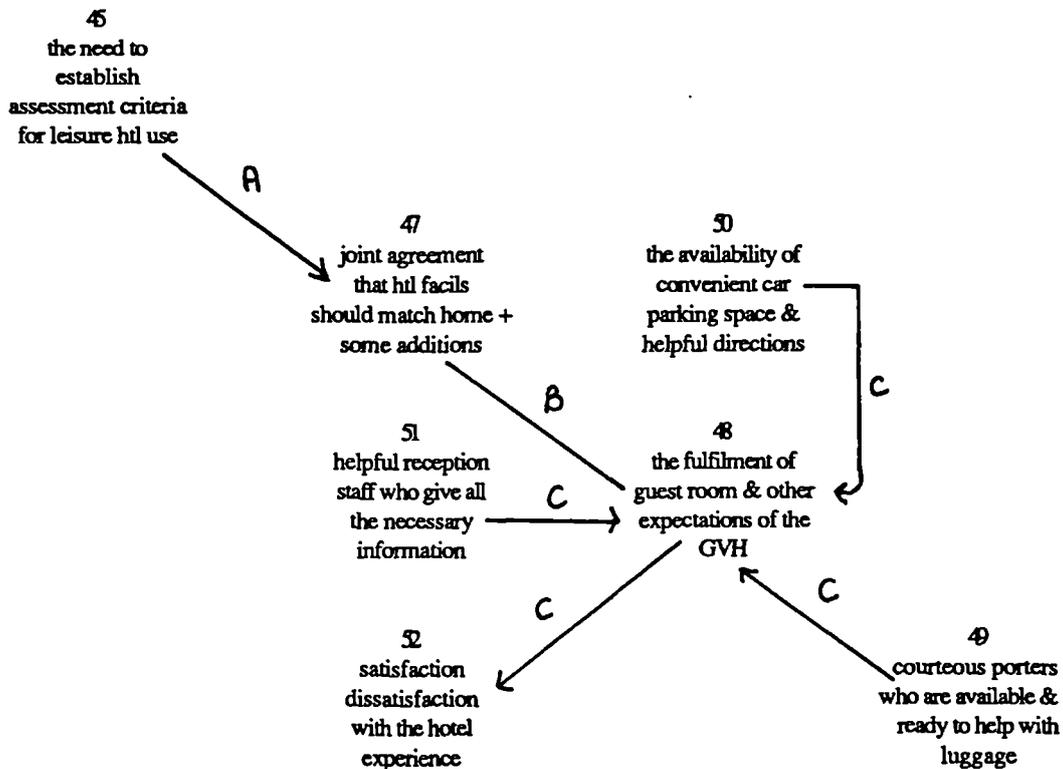
7.2 Assessment criteria

The experienced hotel users in the study reported that initial impressions of an hotel provide a reliable indication of whether expectations are likely to be fulfilled. This is because many of the events which occur on arrival and during the reception and registration period are similar on each occasion. Map 50 illustrates this by showing the connection between fulfilment of expectations (48) leading to a satisfactory experience (52), and re-occurring events such as the need for car parking space (50) and helpful front hall staff (49; 51). The motive for establishing assessment criteria (45) is provided by the desire to assess from the very beginning of the consumption period how well the hotel compares with the standard of facilities at home (47).

Map 50

G9 the fulfilment of guest room & other expectations of the GVH \$48 [R05]

	<+69 >	<+46 >	[45]	+47	<+63 >		A	
		48	[47]	<+37 >	48		B	
+51	+50	+49	[48]	+52			C	
<-53 >	<-54 >	<-70 >	[52]	<+78 >	<+57 >	<-70 >	<-54 >	D

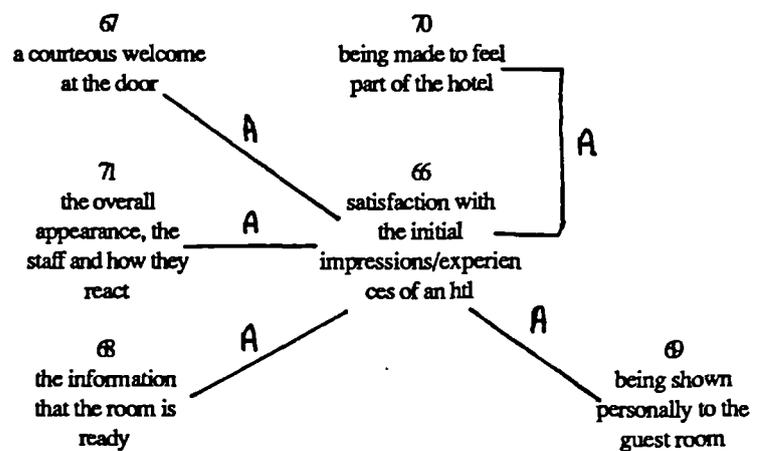


The initial interactions between hotel staff and the consumer are particularly important, because they may affect how the consumer feels about the hotel throughout the stay. If the consumer is experiencing travel-related stress or fatigue, he will be especially vulnerable, and may find it difficult to compensate for negative impressions arising from operational or interpersonal problems. Map 51 provides an example of the range of expectations associated with the formation of a favourable impression of an hotel (66). Important to all consumers is the need to feel welcome on arrival (67; 70). Experienced consumers also reported using other measures to make an early assessment of the hotel. These included how staff react (71) how well prepared the hotel is (68) and how attentive the staff are (69).

**Map 51**

G3 satisfaction with the initial impressions/experiences of an htl \$66 [R13]

71 70 69 68 67 [66] 67 68 69 70 71 A

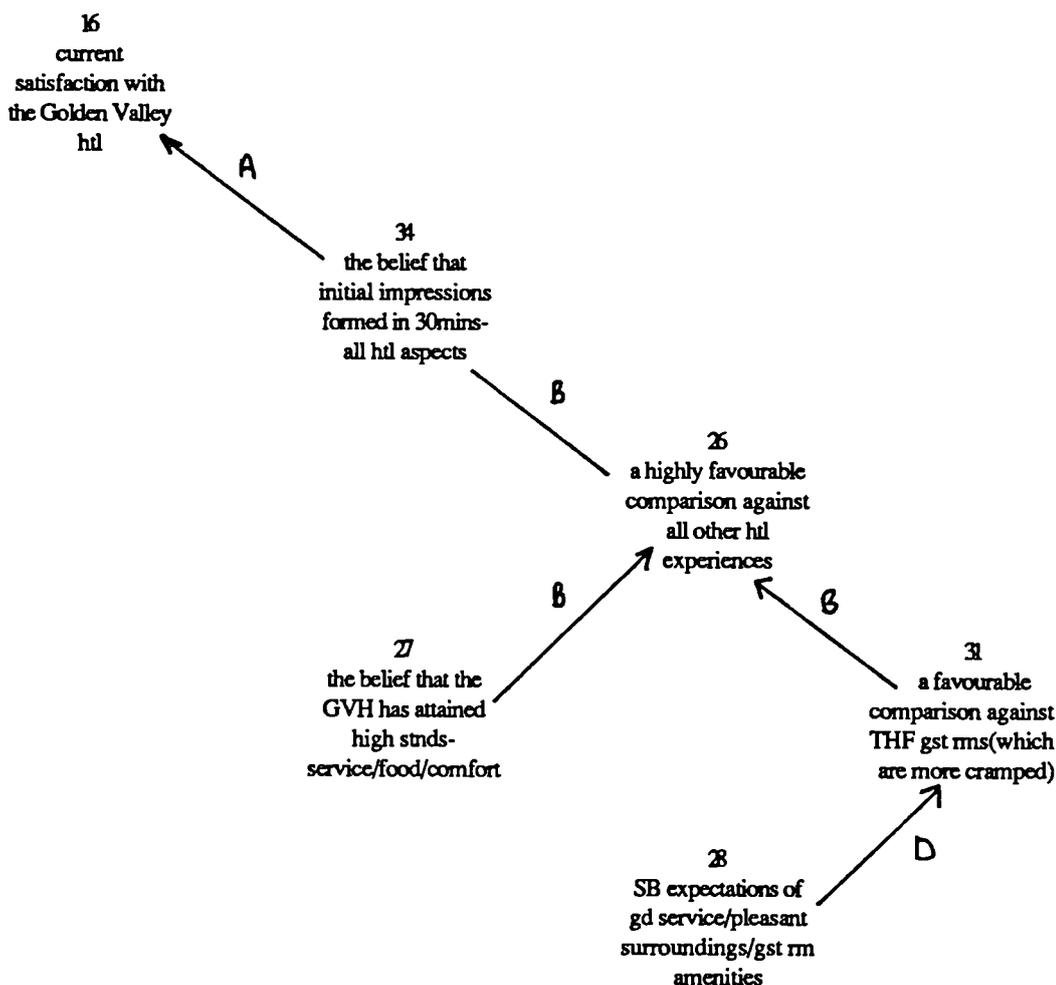


Map 52 shows that the experienced hotel user is capable of formulating an overall impression of the hotel very quickly (34). The necessary information is supplied by psychological reactions to the features of the building, the guest room, internal environment of the hotel and impressions of service standards (28). Prior experience seems to increase the consumer's sensitivity to sensory information, enabling instant comparison with other hotel experiences (26). Comparative assessment may relate to a particular reference hotel, company or hotel category type (31).

**Map 52**

G5 the belief that initial impressions formed in 30mins- all htl aspects  
 \$34 [R09]

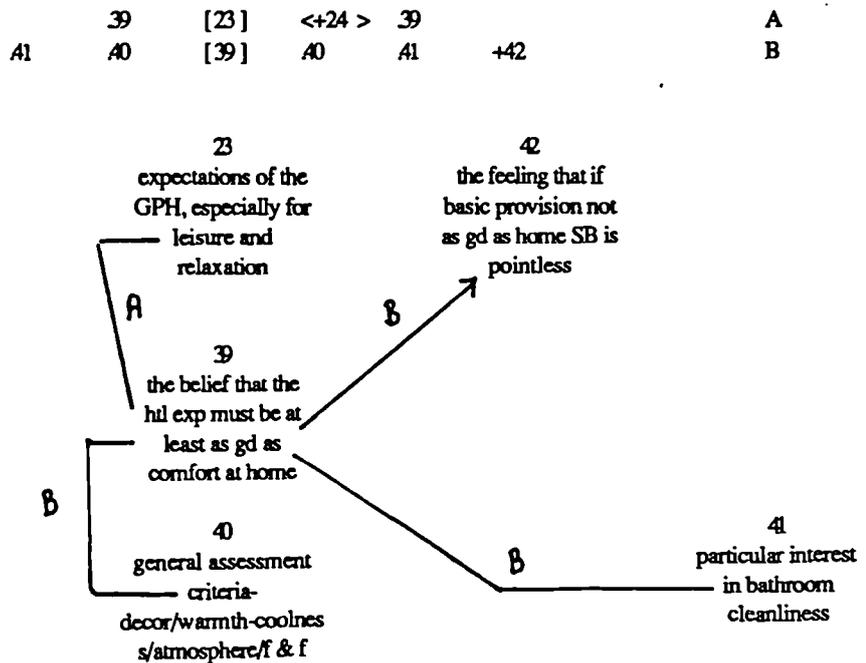
<45 >	<+42 >	+34	[16]	<+17 >	<45 >	A
34	+31	+27	[26]	34		B
<+59 >	<+55 >	<+24 >	[27]	<+35 >		C
	<30 >	<29 >	[28]	<29 >	<30 >	+31
						D



The familiar home environment provides an intuitive basis for comparison with the hotel (Map 53). A cross-section of respondents in the study held the belief that the hotel, and in particular standards of comfort and decor should be at least as good as those enjoyed in the home (39). Logically this is equated with the view that the hotel cannot enable the consumer to relax if the basic facilities are not as good as those at home (42). However, this is very subjective, and opinions differ as to the relative importance of functional and expressive aspects of design, especially when the female partner is the role specialist in guest room assessment. The two aspects are fundamental to assessment, and are reflected in general, expressive criteria like the overall effect of decor and furnishings and fittings (40) and functional concerns such as bathroom cleanliness (41).

Map 53

G4 the belief that the htl exp must be at least as gd as comfort at home  
 \$39 [R21]



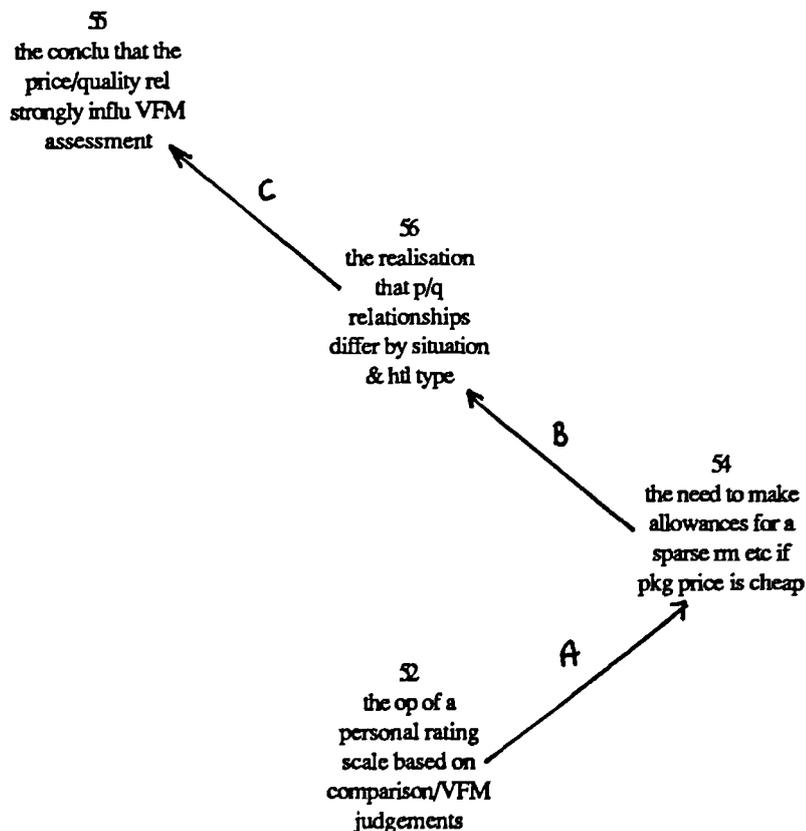


Although the perspectives of male and female partners may differ, all the respondents in the study acknowledged the need to establish criteria and undertake some form of assessment during consumption. Though the underlying reasoning varies, Map 55 illustrates how important elements of the consumption experience are recognised. In the example a respondent identifies the influence of comparisons with prior experience, and value for money judgements on personal assessment or rating (52). This leads to recognition that price should equate with standards and facilities, and the 'need to make allowances' if a cheaper guest room is more sparsely furnished (54). Accepting that price-quality relationships are likely to differ by situation and hotel type (56) leads to the conclusion that this relationship exerts a strong influence on value for money assessments (55).

Map 55

G6      the conclu that the price/quality rel strongly influ VFM assessment  
 \$55      [R35]

	[52]	<+50 >	+54	A
	[54]	+56		B
+56	[55]			C

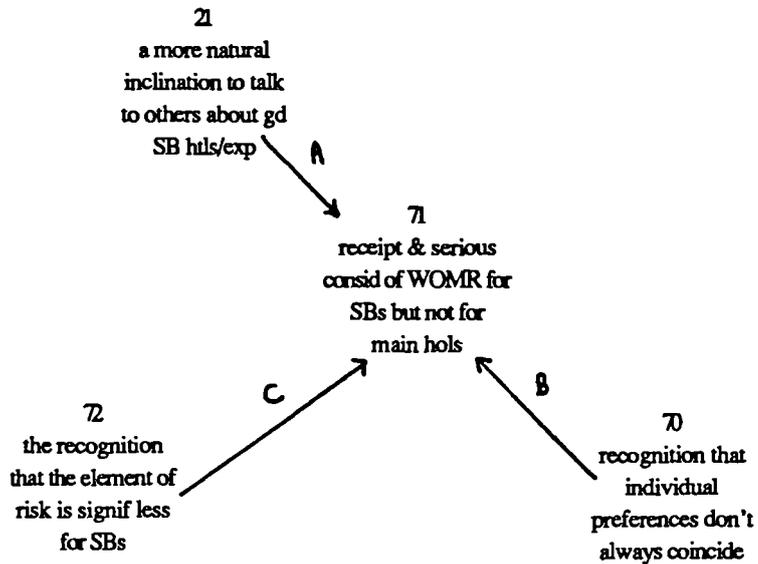


By recognising the differences between short and long holiday expectations, the consumer can formulate a more realistic basis for undertaking assessment. In Map 56, a respondent explains why he would receive and give serious consideration to word of mouth recommendations for short breaks, but not for long or main holidays (71). He cites two reasons, firstly that "individual preferences don't always coincide" (70) and secondly because he believes that the element of risk is significantly less for a short break than for a main holiday (72). These reasons account for why he has "a more natural inclination to talk to others about good short break hotels and experiences" (21).

Map 56

G8 receipt & serious consid of WOMR for SBs but not for main hols \$71 [R35]

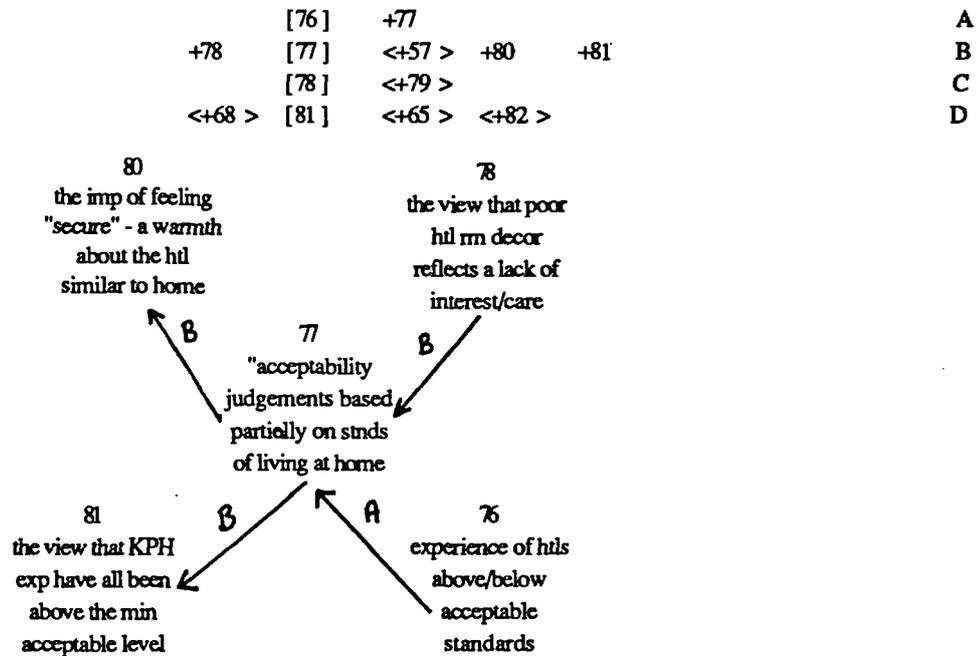
<22>	<20>	[21]	<20>	<22>	<+17>	+71	<26>	A
		[70]	+71					B
	+72	[71]						C



The importance of the home as a basis for comparison is developed further in Map 57 where the respondent states that acceptability judgements are based "partially on standards of living at home" (77). This is also evident in Map 58 where the fulfilment of expectations (26) is related to the pleasing decor of the guest room (25) and joint assessment using the home for comparative purposes (27).

### Map 57

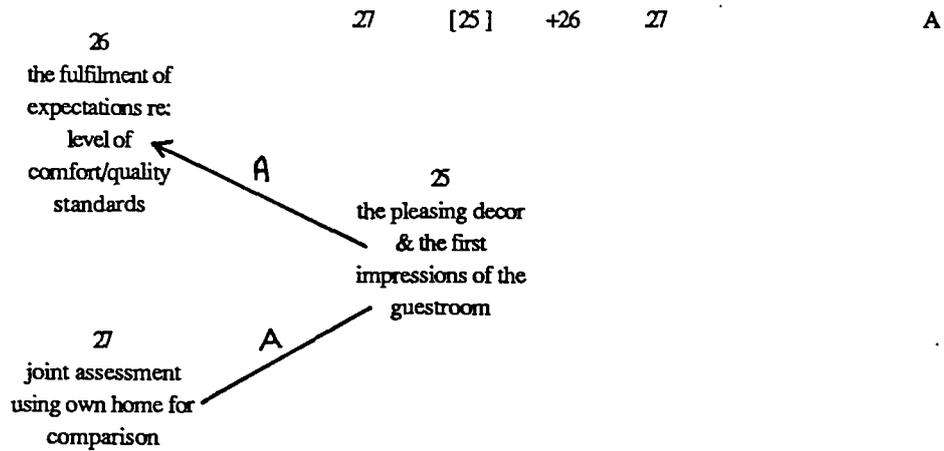
G19 "acceptability" judgements based partially on stnds of living at home \$77 [R34]



Map 57 also refers to two other important influences on acceptability. If the respondent encountered a poor standard of decor in the guest room, this would be equated with a "lack of interest or care" (78). Secondly, the respondent is able to draw on prior hotel experience to determine whether the current experience falls above or below the reference point for acceptability (76). If the assessment of the hotel is "above the minimum acceptable level" (81) the respondent is more likely to feel secure about the hotel and will be able to relax as if at home (80).

**Map 58**

G9 the fulfilment of expectations re: level of comfort/quality standards \$26 [R31]



### 7.2.1 Summary

The findings indicate that assessment criteria are derived from a number of sources. These include pre-purchase motives and expectations, prior product experience, personal recommendations, living standards and lifestyle aspirations.

In order to assess an hotel, it is necessary for the consumer to compare consumption experiences with familiar reference standards such as the home or another hotel, throughout the consumption period. Using assessment criteria derived from prior experience, experienced hotel users were able to determine quickly and efficiently whether an hotel was likely to be acceptable. This is because assessments based on initial interactions with hotel staff, and impressions of hotel systems and procedures formed during reception and registration are seen to provide a realistic and reliable indicator of service quality.

The home environment is an important reference point for all consumers, because it provides a familiar and intuitive basis for comparative assessment. The extent to which an hotel is considered to be acceptable depends on whether the standards of comfort and interior design quality it offers are considered to be as good as, or better than those at home. Inferior hotel standards may be seen as indicative of a lack of interest or care, which may in turn prevent the consumer from feeling secure and relaxed.

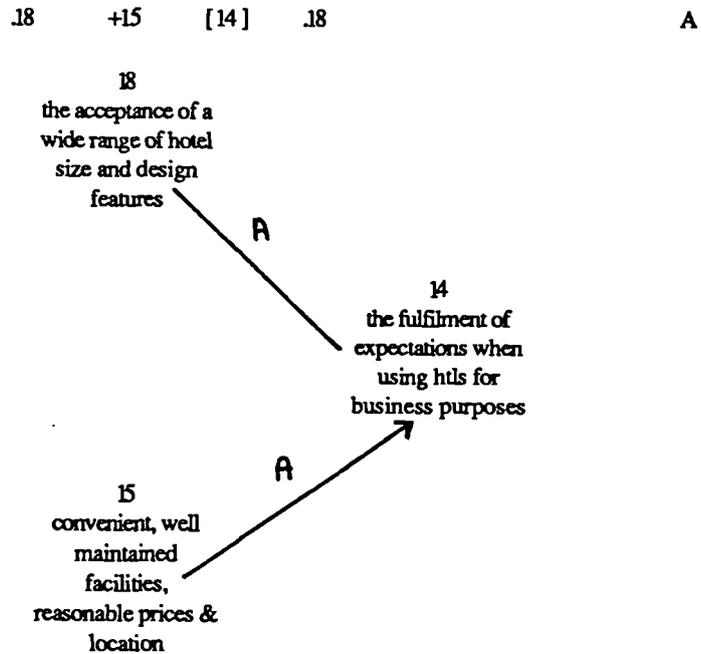
Finally, the findings show that the assessment criteria used by male and female partners are likely to differ, especially among experienced hotel users who have developed specialist role responsibilities for assessment. Female partners were particularly interested in the expressive aspects of interior design, such as the use and quality of different fabrics, colours and textures, and because of this tended to take the lead in assessing quality standards. Male partners were more interested in functional concerns such as the control of guest room air conditioning. This pattern of role responsibility tends to reflect traditional gender stereotypes, and suggests that the female partner is likely to have a dominant role during consumption stage assessment.

7.3 The consumption environment and design effects

In chapter 1, the hotel product was defined in terms of tangible and intangible elements. The physical features of the hotel environment convey design effects which are likely to be interpreted differently according to the prior expectations and experience of the consumer. Map 59 shows that the business traveller expects to find a combination of "convenient, well maintained facilities" which are reasonably priced and well located (15). if these expectations are met, then the type and size of hotel may be unimportant (18).

Map 59

G9 the fulfilment of expectations when using htls for business purposes  
 \$14 [R04]

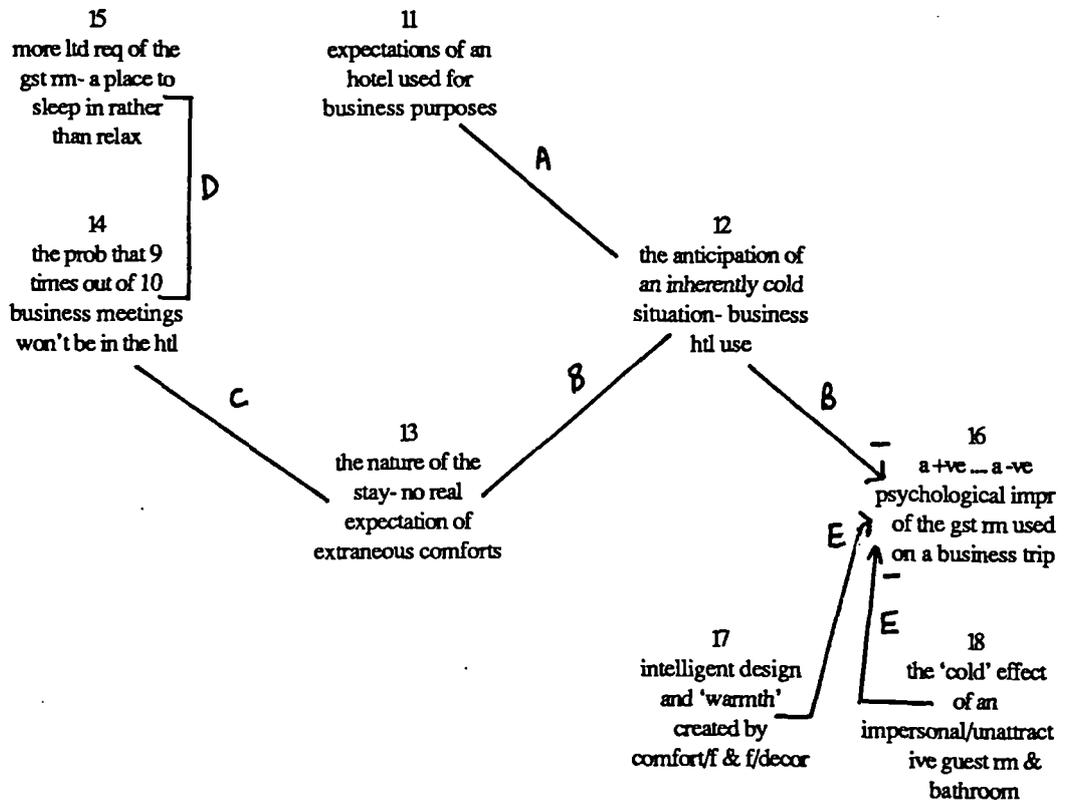


Map 60 confirms this viewpoint by indicating that the business traveller has 'no real expectation of extraneous comforts' (13) because the hotel is viewed as 'a place to sleep in rather than relax' (15). However this example also shows that the functional emphasis of business hotel accommodation may mean that the consumer expects to find an 'inherently cold' atmosphere in the hotel (12), which may lead to a negative impression of the guest room (16). The respondent suggests that a more positive impression is created if a feeling of warmth can be conveyed by the decor, furnishings and design of the guest room (17).

Map 60

G5 a +ve psychological impr of the gst rm used on a business trip \$16 [R18]

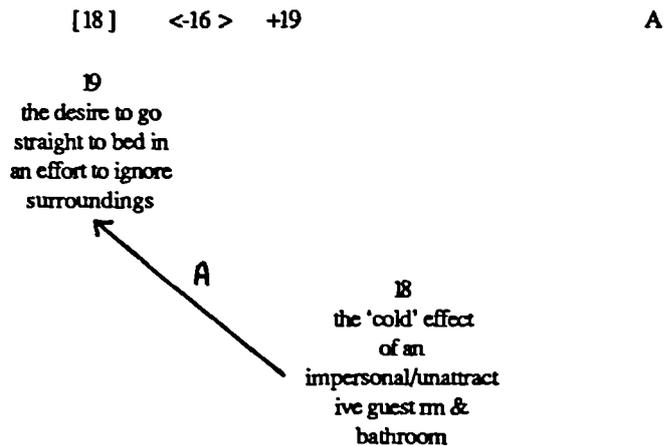
	.12	[11]	.12		A
	.13	[12]	.13	-16	B
	.14	[13]	.14		C
	.15	[14]	.15		D
-18	+17	[16]			E
		[17]	<+20 >		F
		[18]	<+19 >		G



These findings suggest that male business travellers are aware of impersonal design features in hotels, but try to ignore the negative psychological impact that they have. This is illustrated in Map 61 where a negative feeling about the guest room (18) leads to an attempt to ignore the surroundings by going straight to bed (19).

Map 61

G8 the desire to go straight to bed in an effort to ignore surroundings  
 \$19 [R18]



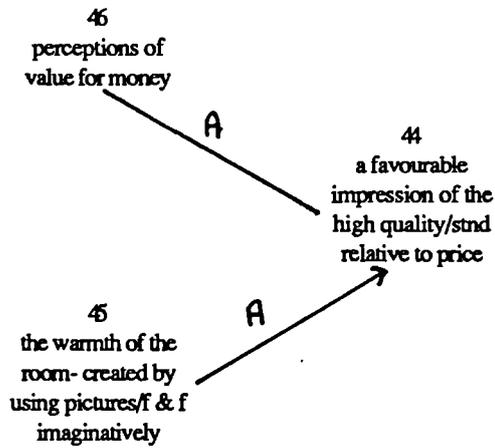
In contrast, the leisure traveller aims to spend more time in the guest room and around the hotel for the purpose of relaxation. Tolerance of obstacles to relaxation such as poor decor and design is consequently lower, especially among female partners who as already noted, are inherently more interested in design features.

Map 62 illustrates how a 'warm' design effect is created by the imaginative use of furnishings, fittings and wall pictures (45). This has two outcomes; quality and price are favourably compared, creating a feeling of value for money (46) and secondly the high quality and standards achieved in design and implementation create a positive impression (44). This is also shown in Map 63, where the favourable impression resulting from coordinated furnishings and curtains (42) is linked to 'a particular interest in interior design' (43).

Map 62

G6 a favourable impression of the high quality/std relative to price  
 \$44 [R20]

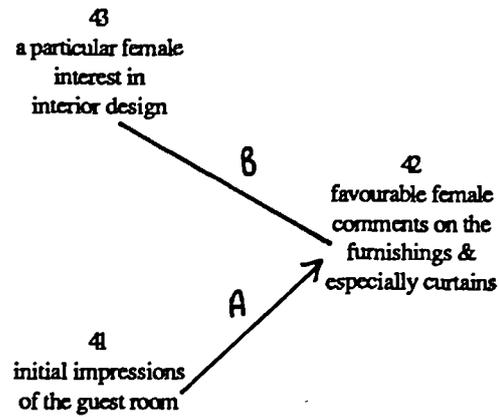
46 +45 [44] 46 A



Map 63

G12 favourable female comments on the furnishings & especially curtains  
 \$42 [R20]

[41] +42 A  
 43 [42] 43 B

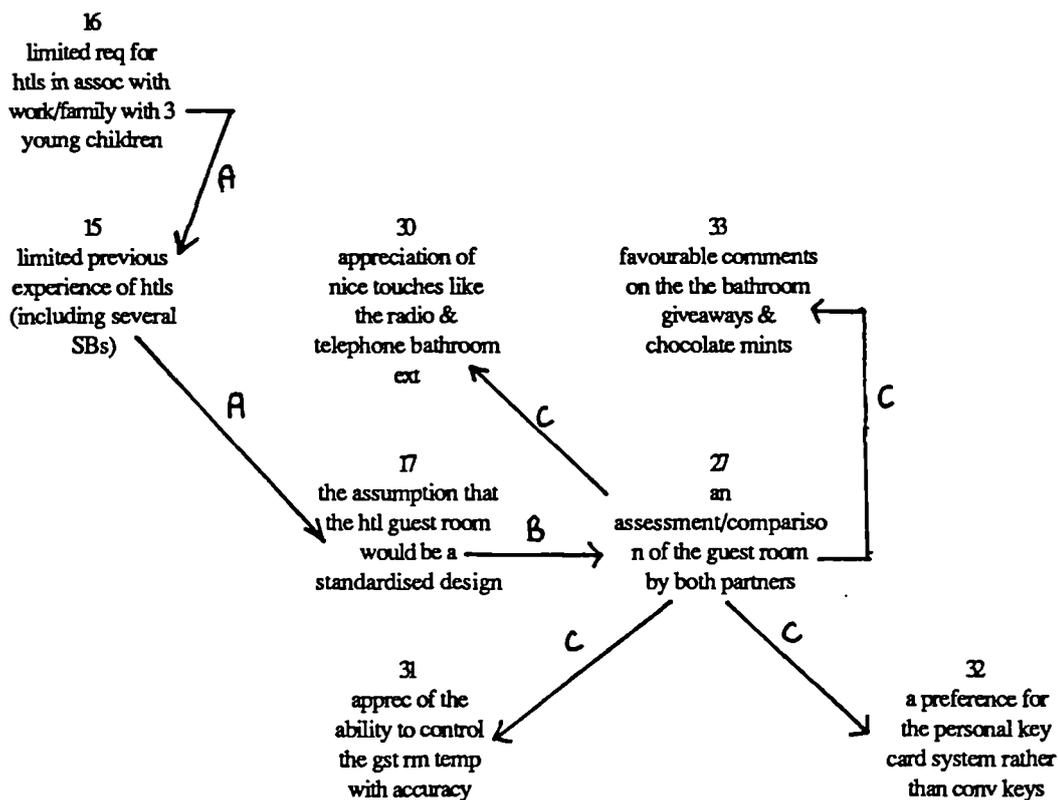


Overall, the inexperienced hotel users were favourably impressed by the guest room design standards and facilities that they encountered. This is illustrated in Map 64 where assumptions about the nature of standardised design (17) are challenged by unexpected features such as the level of guest room control (31; 32) radio and telephone extensions (30) and the standard of guest room preparation (33). A positive experience of this kind may become a reference point for future assessments, with the incorporation of new product information leading to the revision of expectations.

Map 64

G2 an assessment/comparison of the guest room by both partners \$27 [R27]

+16	[15]	+17					A
	[17]	+27					B
	[27]	+30	+31	+32	+33		C

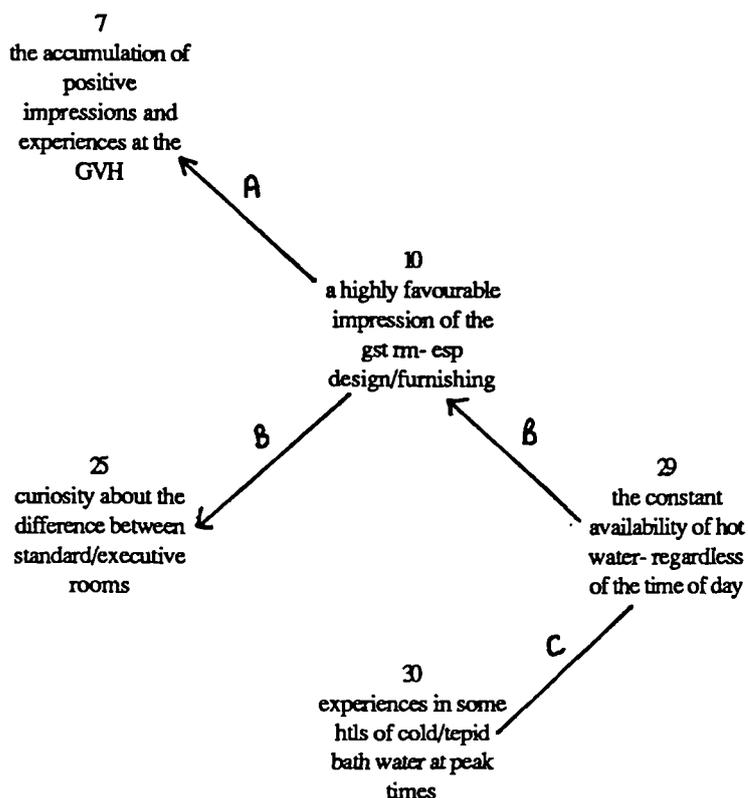


A similar learning experience is illustrated in Map 65 where the respondent is impressed by "the constant availability of hot water" (29). This contrasts with prior experiences which were considered to be less than satisfactory (30). The experience contributes to a favourable impression of the guest room (10) and stimulates curiosity and interest in the hotel's guest room classification system (25).

Map 65

G8 a highly favourable impression of the gst rm- esp design/furnishing \$10 [R17]

<+38 >	<+17 >	<+11 >	+10	<+9 >	[ 7 ]	<+8 >	A
				+29	[10]	+25	B
				30	[29]	30	C



The example also illustrates how a new experience can act as learning stimulus, prompting the consumer to gather further information to facilitate more accurate differentiation between hotel types and styles. As the new information becomes integrated with existing product knowledge, the consumer's confidence in the reliability of selection and assessment criteria will thereby improve.

7.3.1 Summary

The findings show that design effects can have a powerful impact on the consumer, especially if the consumption environment is perceived to be cold and impersonal. This is often the experience of business travellers who equate 'coldness' with standardised design and impersonal service. In these circumstances, the consumer is likely to react by spending as little time in the hotel as possible.

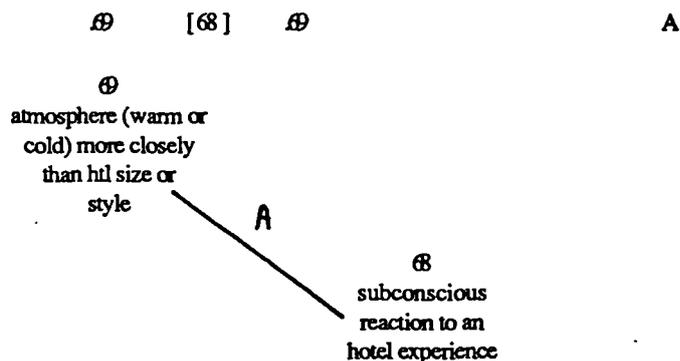
In contrast, the leisure traveller is likely to want to spend more time in the hotel in order to relax. In these circumstances, the consumer determines the 'warmth' of the consumption environment by undertaking a detailed assessment of interior design features. As noted earlier, if the standard of design implementation is considered to be inferior to the home, the consumer is unlikely to be able to relax. Conversely, the effective use of space, colour schemes and well maintained furnishings and equipment are conducive to relaxation. This is especially important to the female partner who is more sensitive to, and appreciative of attention to detail and 'individuality' in the design, implementation, servicing and maintenance of the guest room and public areas of the hotel.

7.4 Hotel services

Service interactions have a critical role to play in making the consumer feel welcome, and in preventing him from feeling isolated or alienated in an unfamiliar environment. This is illustrated in Map 66, where a 'subconscious reaction to an hotel environment' (68) is linked more closely to the atmosphere of the hotel than the physical size of the building or the style of operation (69).

Map 66

G14 atmosphere (warm or cold) more closely than htl size or style \$69 [R18]

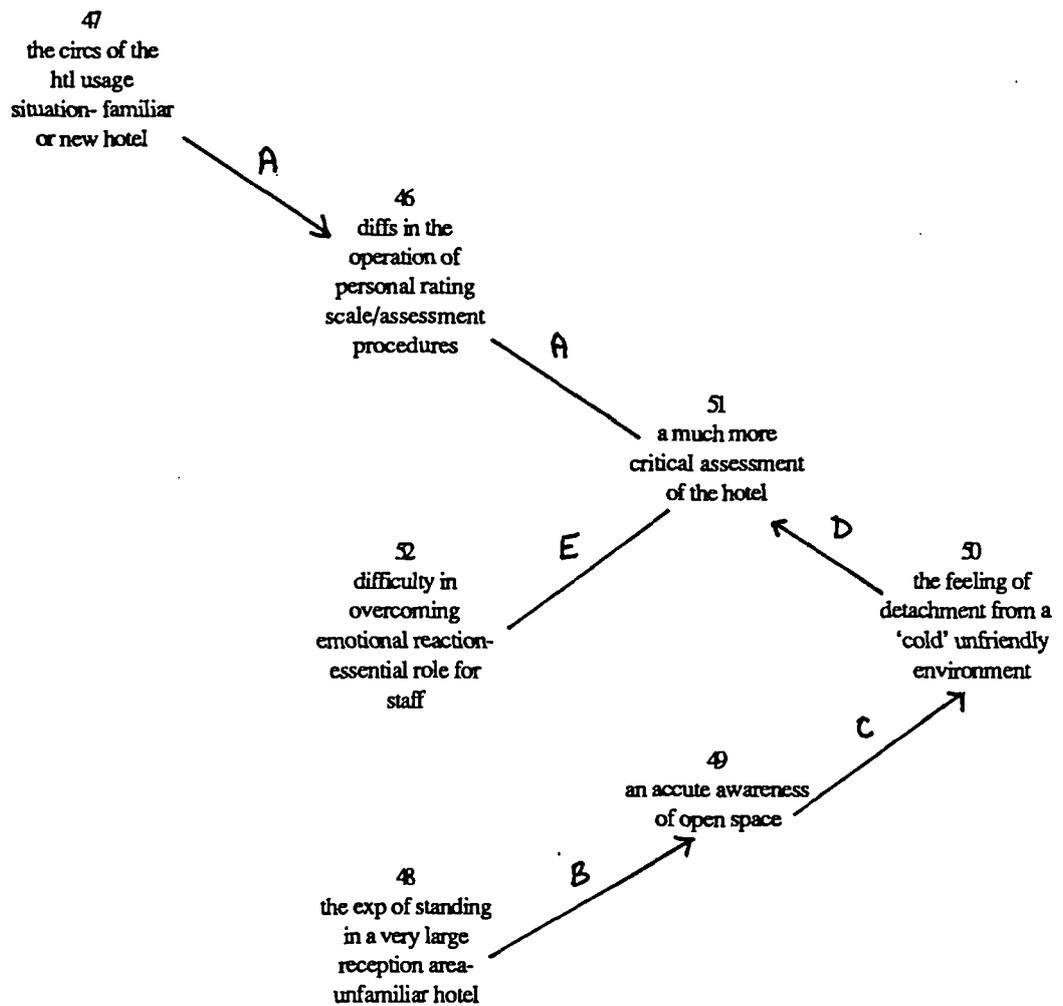


The theme is developed in Map 67 which shows how "an accute awareness of open space" (49) can lead to a "feeling of detachment" (50) resulting in a more critical assessment of the hotel (51). In these circumstances, hotel staff have an essential role in compensating for the emotional reaction evoked by the atmosphere of the building (52).

Map 67

G12    diffs in the operation of personal rating scale/assessment procedures  
 \$46    [R18]

51	+47	[46]	51	A
		[48]	+49	B
		[49]	+50	C
		[50]	+51	D
52		[51]	52	E



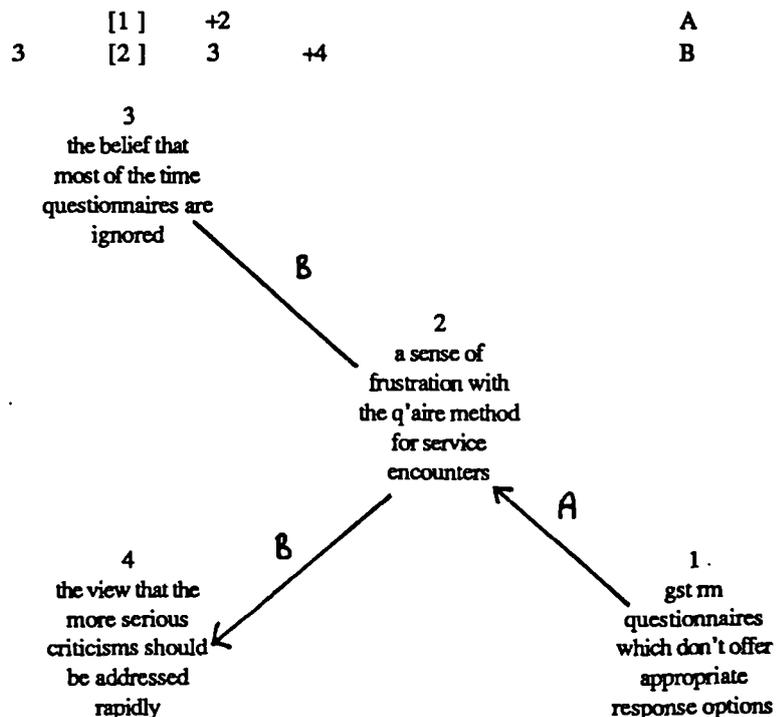
Attaining consistency in service delivery is complicated by the frequency and variety of service interactions which occur during the consumption period. Although difficult to quantify, many hotel operators attempt to measure the effectiveness of service components using self-completion guest questionnaires. The experienced hotel users interviewed in the study did not consider this to be a meaningful way of collecting data.

Map 68 lists several of the major objections. For example, the design of questionnaires which have inappropriate response options (1) can lead to 'a sense of frustration with the questionnaire method' (2). The experienced hotel user is also inclined to feel cynical about the response time to a complaint made in this way, believing that serious criticisms should be dealt with immediately (4).

Suggested improvements to monitoring procedures are shown in Map 69, which helps to explain why effective service delivery is so important, and how monitoring could be improved. The respondent has a background in senior management (27) and consciously assesses hotels whenever he uses them (28). This prompts the suggestion that consumer research should be continuous,

Map 68

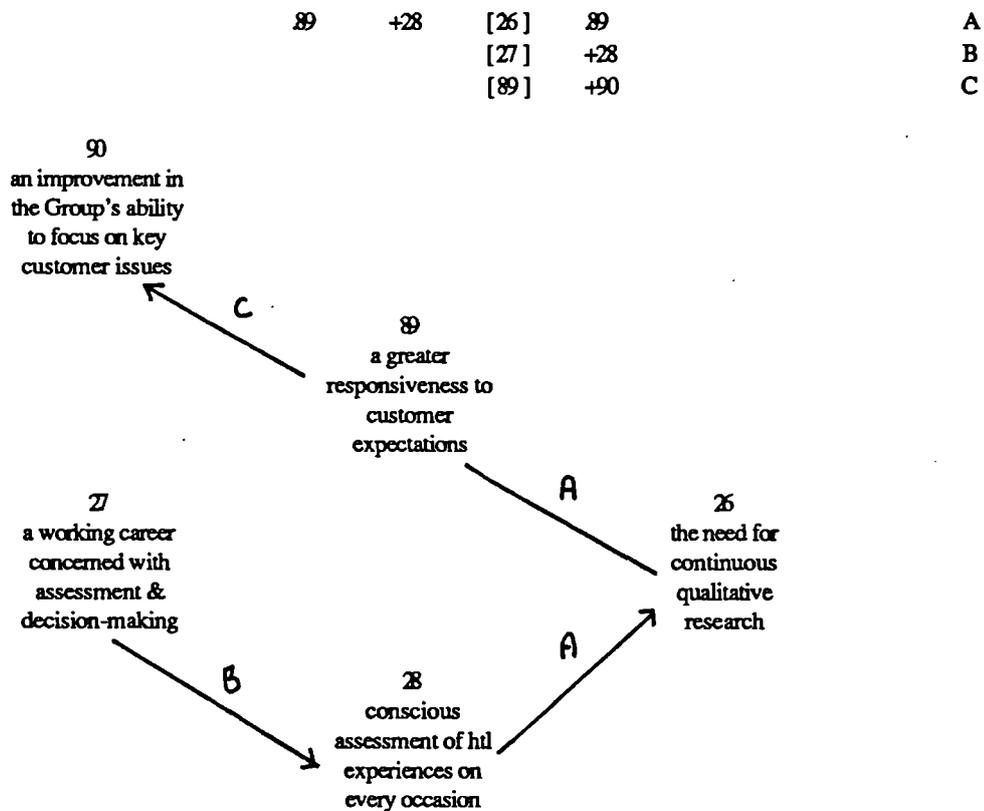
G4 a sense of frustration with the q'aire method for service encounters  
 \$2 [R23]



and preferably undertaken using qualitative methods (26). He gives two reasons for using this approach. Firstly, it would improve the organisation's responsiveness to customer expectations (89) and secondly, it would help to identify and facilitate a focus on 'key customer issues' (90).

Map 69

G16 an improvement in the Group's ability to focus on key customer issues  
 \$90 [R23]



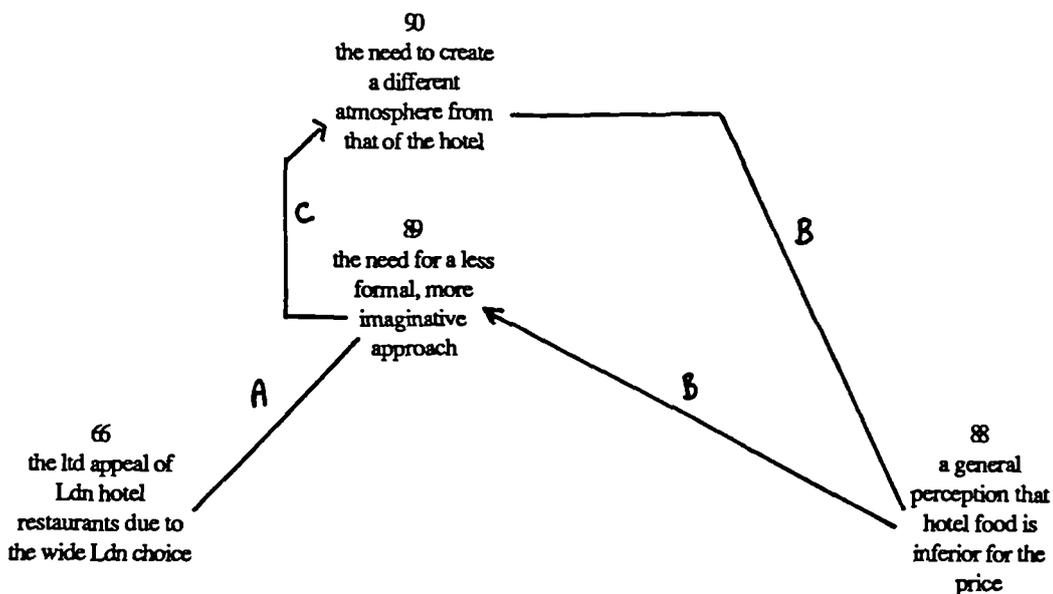
This viewpoint reflects the perceived complexity of the consumption environment, and the belief that objective, factual data and subjective, personal response data should be collected and analysed using appropriate methods. For example, the experienced hotel users in the study were often critical of hotel restaurants. As the nature of the criticisms vary, it is difficult to fully appreciate the range of views on this subject by relying solely on self-completion guest questionnaires.

The main criticisms are summarised in Map 70 which explains why hotel restaurants should adopt 'a less formal, more imaginative approach' (89). This is because they are perceived to be overpriced (88) and unexciting compared with the available alternatives, especially in London (66). The need to create a separate identify from that of the hotel (90) is considered to be a critical factor in improving their image.

Map 70

G23 the need to create a different atmosphere from that of the hotel \$90 [R01]

89	[66]	89		A
90	[88]	+89	90	B
	[89]	+90		C

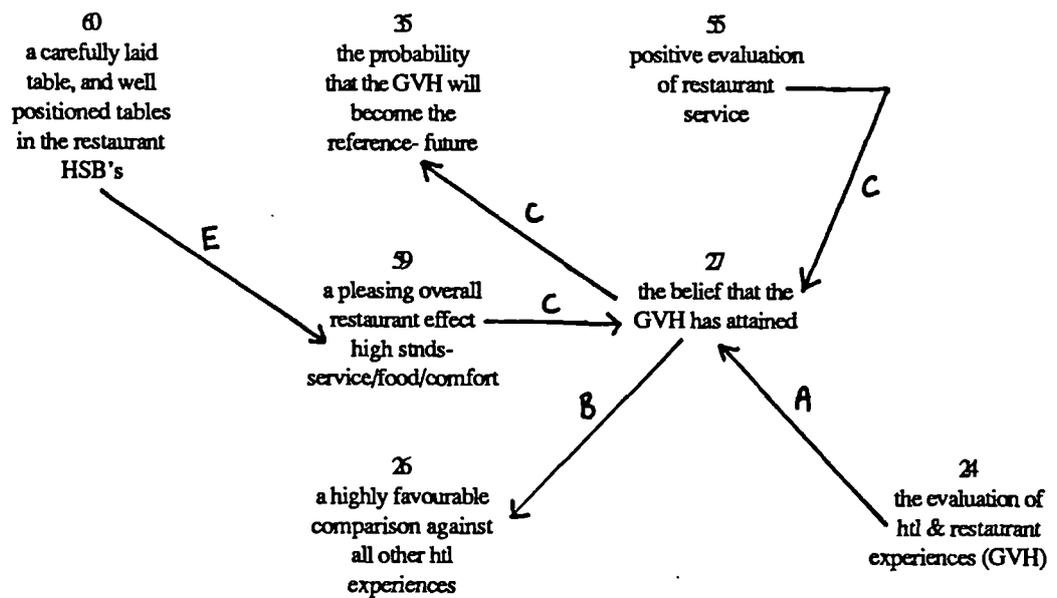


In contrast, Map 71 illustrates the impact that a positive hotel restaurant experience can have. The respondent recalls how thoroughly the restaurant had been prepared (59; 60) how good the service had been (55) and how well the restaurant compared with prior hotel experiences (26). The combination of good food, and service in comfortable surroundings (27) gives the restaurant reference status for assessing future hotel restaurants (35).

Map 71

G2 the belief that the GVH has attained high stnds- service/food/comfort  
 \$27 [R09]

		<25 >	[24]	<25 >	+27		A
<34 >	<+31 >	+27	[26]	<34 >			B
	+59	+55	[27]	+35			C
	<+61 >	<+56 >	[55]				D
		+60	[59]				E



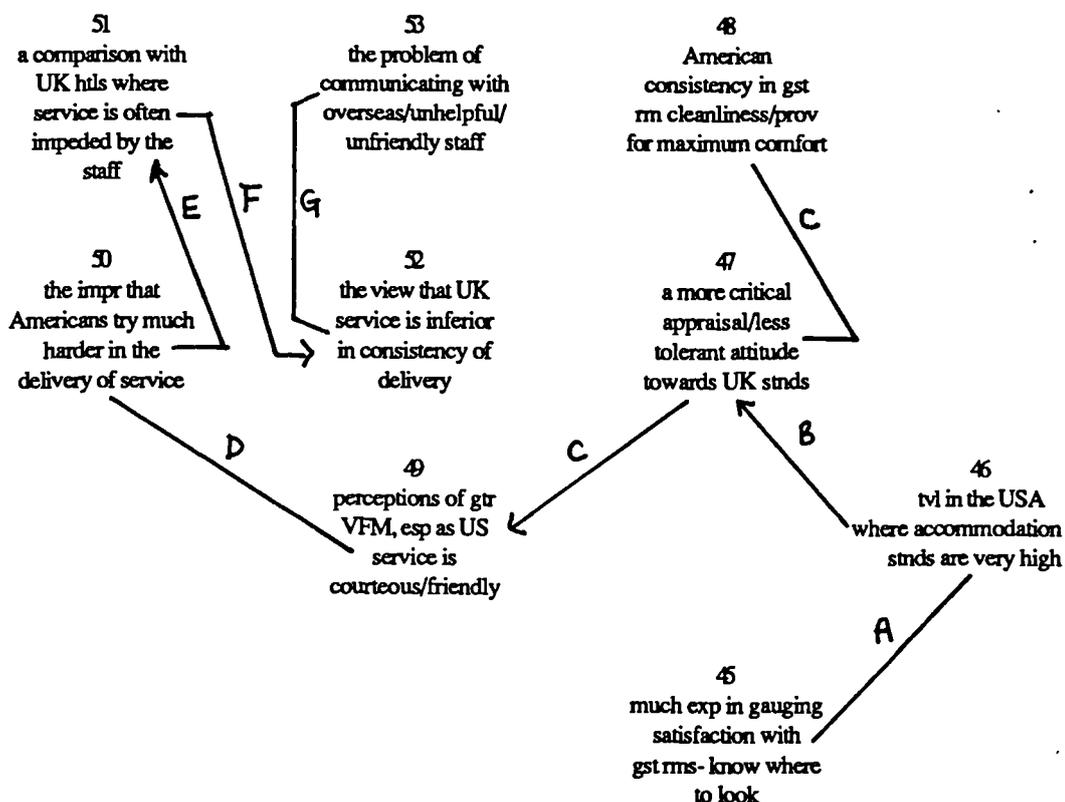
In assessing service delivery, hotel users with international travel experience were able to identify perceived strengths and weaknesses by referring to cultural differences.

This is illustrated in Map 72, where uniformly high standards of accommodation in the USA (46; 48) accounted for a less tolerant attitude towards inconsistent standards in the UK (47; 52). The key cultural difference in service delivery relates to staff attitudes, which are seen to be positive and courteous in the USA (49; 50) and rather negative and unhelpful in the UK (52; 53).

Map 72

G12 the problem of communicating with overseas/unhelpful/unfriendly staff  
 \$53 [R33]

46	[45]	<+42 >	46	A
	[46]	+47		B
48	[47]	48	+49	C
	[49]	50		D
	[50]	+51		E
	[51]	+52		F
53	[52]	53		G



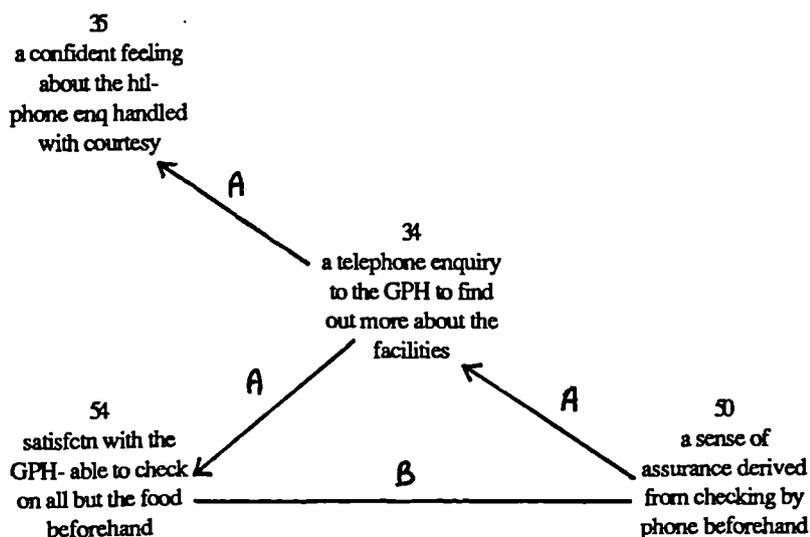
A number of the inexperienced hotel users in the study had sought to address residual concerns about the suitability of the hotel by making one or more telephone enquiries prior to the reservation. This can be seen in Map 73, where the respondent decides that a telephone enquiry would provide reassurance about the hotel's facilities (50). Although not shown on the Map, the telephone enquiry also had another purpose, which was to determine whether the hotel staff were helpful. A courteous response to the telephone enquiry engendered a 'confident feeling about the hotel' (35) derived from having been able to 'check on all but the food beforehand' (54).

In several cases, insensitive handling of general telephone enquiries of this kind was interpreted as a sign of an unfriendly hotel. This was because the attitude of the person dealing with the enquiry was attributed to all the staff, without making allowances for the possibility that the recipient of the telephone call may have been working under pressure at the time.

Map 73

G9 a telephone enquiry to the GPH to find out more about the facilities  
 \$34 [R02]

+50	[34]	+35	+54	A
54	[50]	<+32 >	54	B
	[54]	<+55 >		C

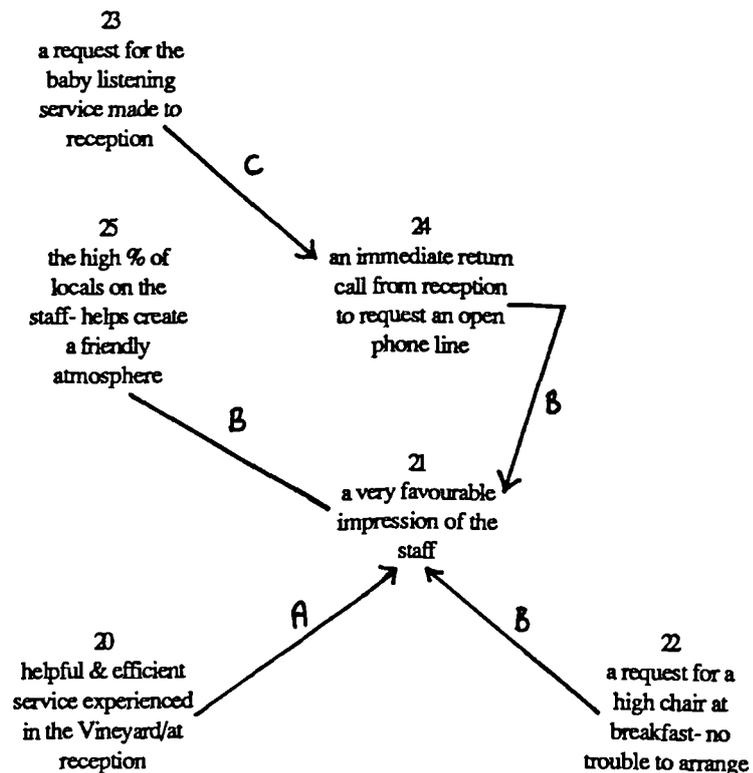


During the consumption period, successive service interactions can have a confidence-building effect on inexperienced hotel users. This is shown in Map 74 where a "very favourable impression of the staff" (21) results from helpful and efficient service (20; 22; 23; 24) and the belief that the hotel's "friendly atmosphere" is related to the high proportion of local people working at the hotel (25).

Map 74

G3 a very favourable impression of the staff \$21 [R27]

			[20]	+21	A
25	+24	+22	[21]	25	B
			[23]	+24	C



#### 7.4.1 Summary

The duration and complexity of the hotel consumption experience means that service interactions are difficult to standardise and control. Experienced hotel users even perceive differences in the friendliness of hotel staff which they attribute to the design and atmosphere of the building. If for example, the building conveys an impersonal feeling, then hotel staff may also appear to be formal and distant. The combined effect is sufficient to make the consumer feel isolated or even alienated as soon as an impression of 'coldness' has formed.

To prevent this from happening, appropriate ways of monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of service delivery are necessary, so that the views of consumers can be incorporated into the design of systems and procedures. The main objective should be to fulfil consumer expectations relating to the desired efficiency and formality of service delivery. As business and leisure hotel users have different requirements, hotel staff therefore need to know how to respond accordingly.

It is also important to note the distinction between the service expectations of experienced and inexperienced hotel users. Whenever experienced users have international travel experience, their definition of 'good service' may include reference to service characteristics experienced in different countries. For example, hotel accommodation and service in the USA is frequently perceived to be of a higher standard than in the UK. This is because the 'service culture' is different, and because American attitudes towards service are perceived to be more positive than in the UK.

As noted in chapter 6, the unpredictability of service may lead inexperienced hotel users to test staff attitudes by telephoning an hotel before making a reservation. If the enquiry is not handled with sensitivity, the consumer may decide that the hotel is unsuitable because the response, which may be considered indicative of staff attitudes as a whole, was inadequate. Conversely, a positive, encouraging response, and a 'warm' welcome at the hotel are likely to have a confidence-building effect on the inexperienced hotel user.

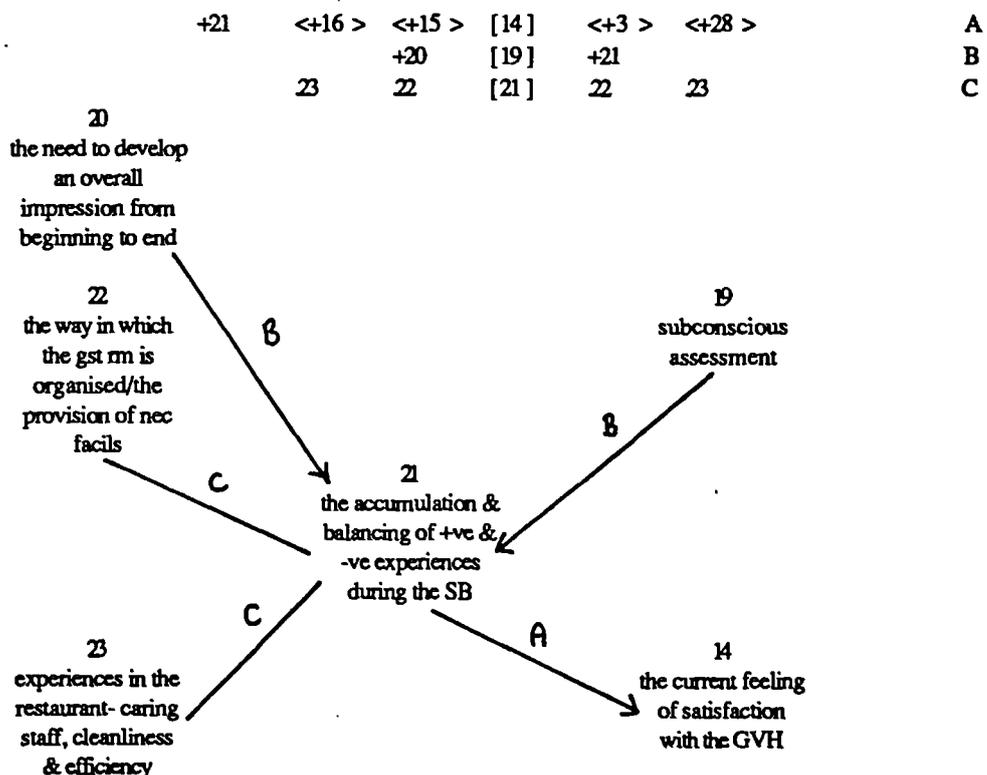
7.5 Personal rating systems

During consumption, the consumer receives and stores information from many sources. This facilitates the formation of impressions which are assessed in relation to established criteria and expectations. To facilitate an overall evaluation of the consumption experience, the consumer has to integrate the impressions and their assessments within a personal rating system.

The efficiency of the personal rating system may depend on how sensitive the consumer is to impressions formed at conscious and subconscious levels. Map 75 offers a partial explanation of how the system operates, with 'subconscious assessment' (19) leading to the 'accumulation and balancing of positive and negative experiences' during the consumption period (21). This suggests that the 'current feeling of satisfaction' (14) (or dissatisfaction) is calculated by continually updating assessment information. This would be necessary in order to develop an overall impression from the beginning until the end of the stay (20). Conscious assessments made during discussion with others, or by comparison with prior expectations, are more likely to be connected with product tangibles relating to the restaurant (23) or guest room (22).

Map 75

G4 the accumulation & balancing of +ve & -ve experiences during the SB  
\$21 [R20]

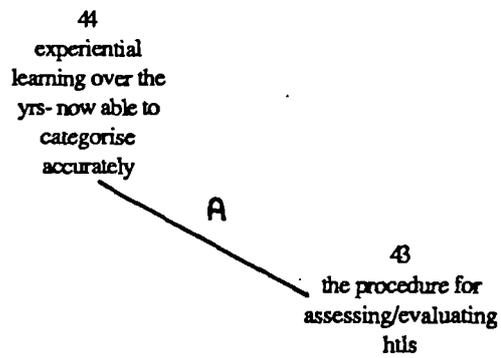


Map 76 shows that experienced-based learning has an important role in the refinement of the personal rating system, enabling the consumer to assess and categorise hotels more accurately (43; 44). This is illustrated in Maps 77 and 78 where the female partner in particular, has developed a routine for assessing the guest room.

Map 76

G11 the procedure for assessing/evaluating htls \$43 [R18]

44	[43]	44	A
	[44]	<+45 >	B



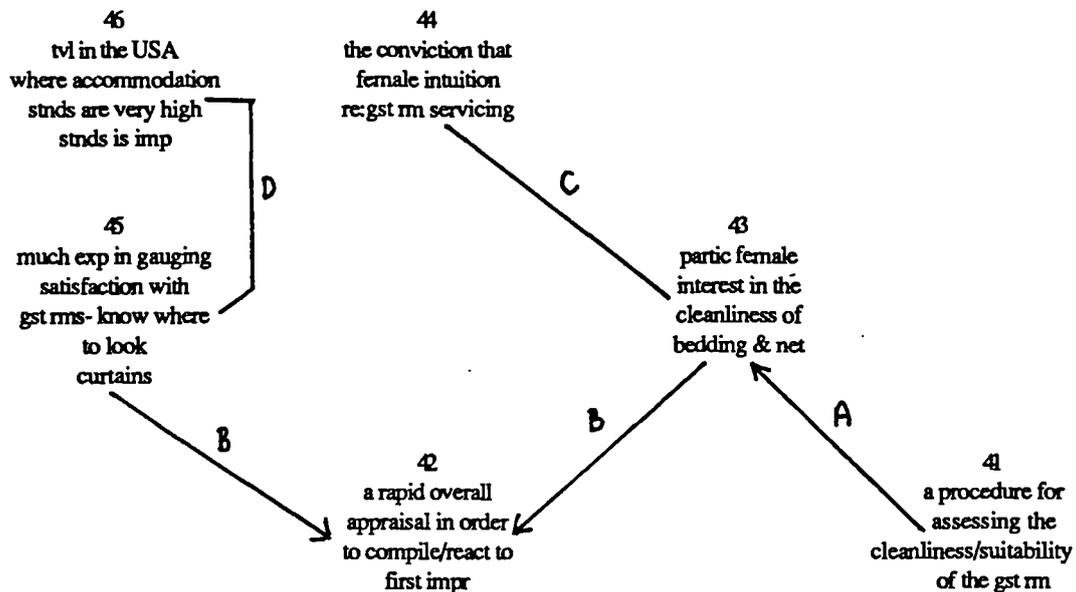
In Map 77, rapid appraisal of the guest room (42) is facilitated by extensive prior experience (45) and a role specialist interest in guest room furnishings (41; 43; 44).

Map 78 also shows a division of responsibilities which is gender-related. The female partner is concerned with the assessment of quality and cleanliness in the guest room, and the male partner with checking that all the electrical appliances are functioning correctly (80). The shared responsibility for assessment is related to the perceived need to check the room immediately, in case it has not been prepared properly or equipment is faulty (81).

Map 77

G19 a rapid overall appraisal in order to compile/react to first impr  
\$42 [R33]

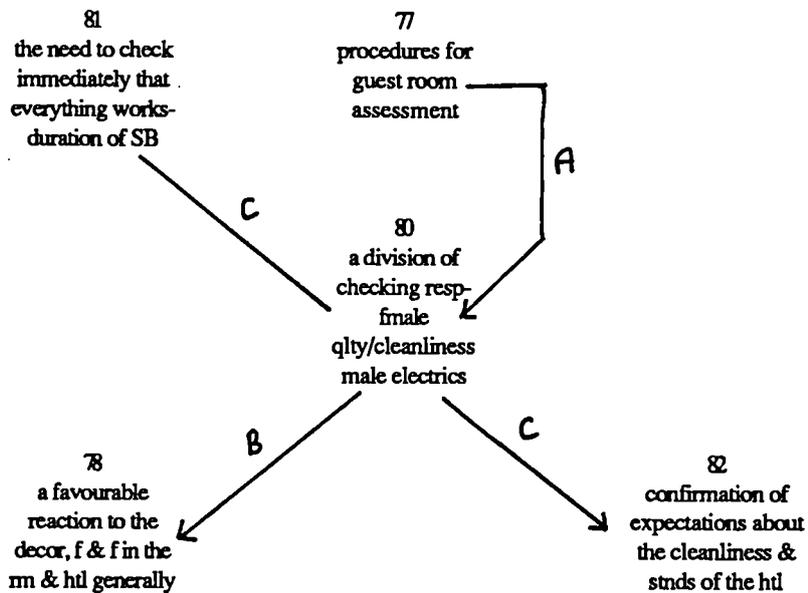
			[41]	+43	A
+43	+43	+45	[42]		B
		44	[43]	44	C
		46	[45]	46	D
			[46]	<+47 >	E



Map 78

G10 a division of checking resp- female qlty/cleanliness male electricians  
 \$80 [R21]

		[77]	+80		A
<79 >	+80	[78]	<79 >		B
	.81	[80]	.81	+82	C

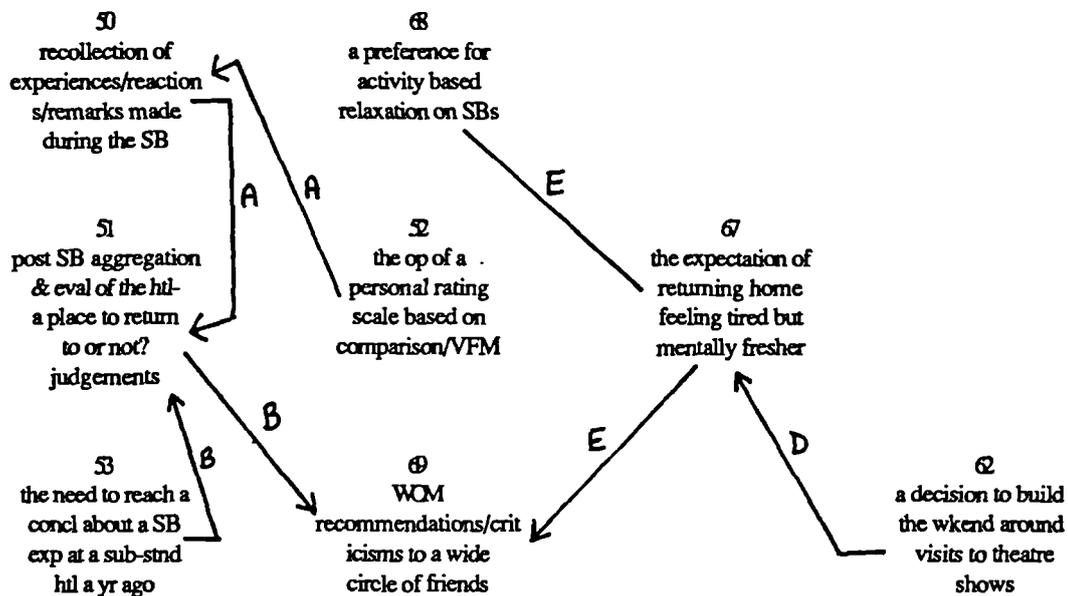


The personal rating system has two interrelated functions. It provides the mechanism for organising, storing and assessing experiences as they accumulate, and it facilitates post-consumption evaluation. The interrelationship is shown in Map 79 with personal rating based on comparisons and notions about value for money (52) facilitating recall of experiences during post-consumption evaluation (50; 51). The motive is provided by the desire to make a final evaluation which will be better than the last hotel experience (53) and to be able to recommend the hotel to others (69).

Map 79

G7 WOM recommendations/criticisms to a wide circle of friends \$69 [R35]

	+52	[50]	+51				A
	+53	[51]	+69				B
		[52]	<+54 >				C
<66 >	<+24 >	[62]	<+63 >	<+64 >	+67	<66 >	D
	.68	[67]	.68	+69			E

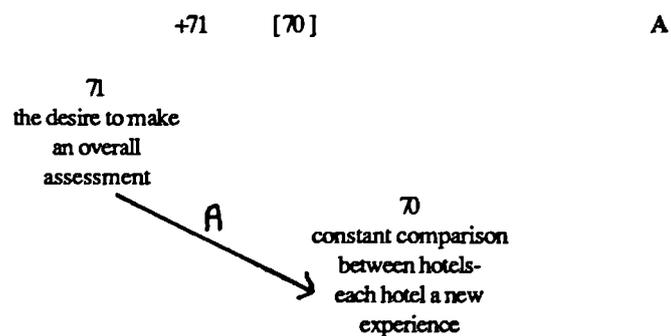


Although post-consumption evaluation depends on consumption-based assessments, this example shows that 'end state' expectations can help to determine the success of the holiday (67). These are linked to the kind of preferred activities for a short break (68).

The approach to assessment adopted by less experienced hotel users supports the concept of a personal rating system, but with some operational differences. Map 80 shows that "the desire to make an overall assessment" (71) leads to constant comparison with prior experiences (70), but the integration of assessments into the personal rating system was found to be more tentative.

Map 80

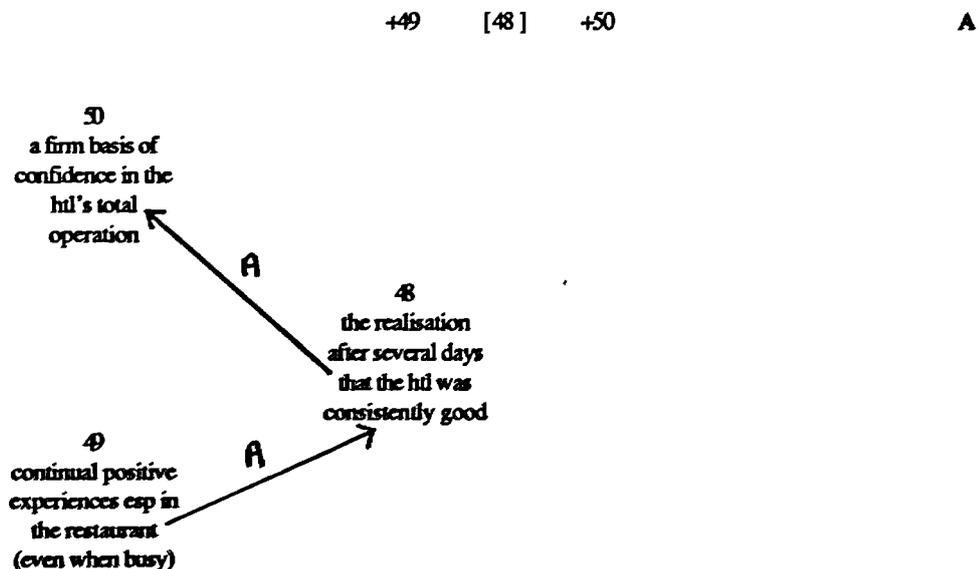
G15 constant comparison between hotels- each hotel a new experience 70 [R16]



Map 81

This is illustrated in Map 81, where a time period of several days (48) is required before positive reinforcement (49) establishes "a firm basis of confidence" in all operational aspects of the hotel (50). The implication here is that the efficiency of the personal rating system is related to the extent of prior product experience.

G10 a firm basis of confidence in the htl's total operation 50 [R03]

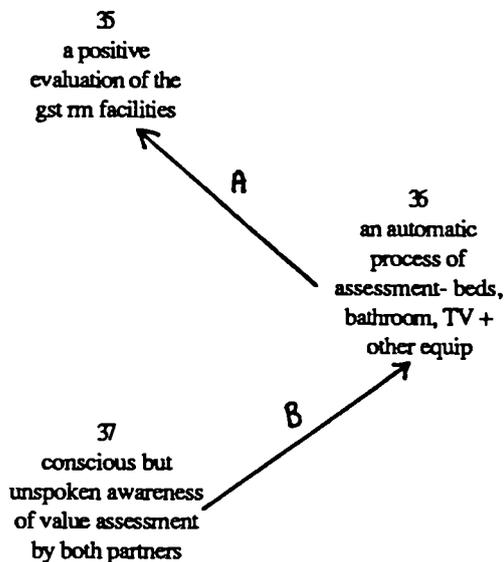


Inexperienced hotel users also undertook role specialisation during assessment, although as Map 82 shows, role tasks were often unclear or imprecisely defined. In this example both partners recall making conscious, but unspoken assessments (37). They do this automatically (36) but in an unplanned way, suggesting that limited prior experience may account for the absence of role specialisation.

Map 82

G10 a positive evaluation of the gst rm facilities \$35 [R26]

+36	[35]	A
+37	[36]	B

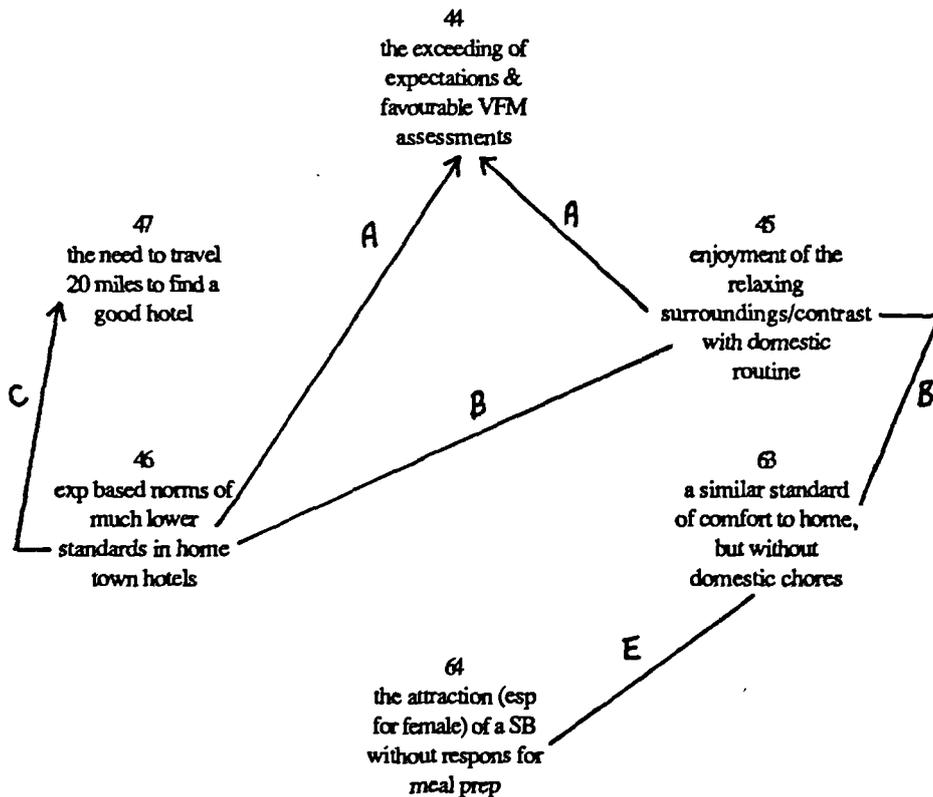


As product familiarity increases, experience-based comparisons become a valuable aid to assessment. This is illustrated in Map 83, where expectations are exceeded (44) because the performance norm of familiar hotels is of a lower standard than the current experience (46; 47). Satisfaction arises from appreciation of the surroundings, the contrast with the domestic routine (45) and because the hotel provides a similar standard of comfort to the home environment (63).

Map 83

G5 exp based norms of much lower standards in home town hotels \$46 [R27]

	+46	+45	[44]	<+79 >		A
	63	46	[45]	46	63	B
			[46]	+47		C
			[47]	<+48 >		D
		64	[63]	64		E

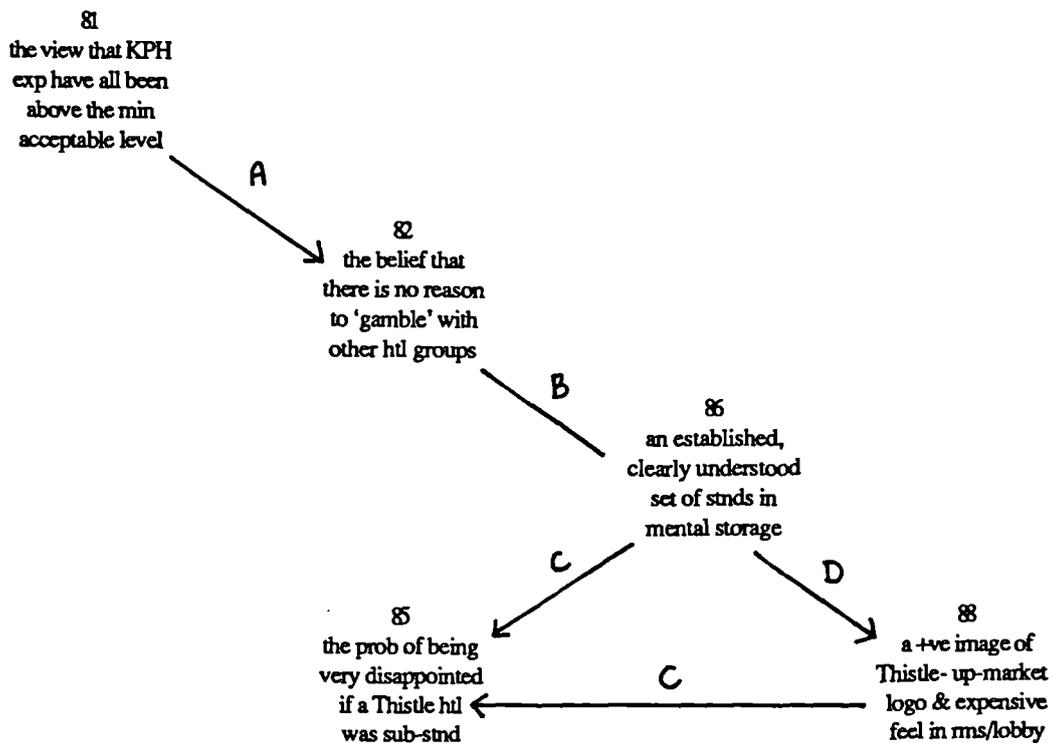


When a reference standard has become established, inconsistent performance may cause disappointment and lead to a re-appraisal of beliefs about the brand. (Map 84). This is because consumption assessments must exceed the 'minimum acceptable level' in order to form a new reference standard (81) and generate brand-based confidence (82). If for example, a newly established reference standard is disconfirmed by a sub-standard experience (85; 86), the consumer's perception of the brand may be affected as a result (86).

Map 84

G17 an established, clearly understood set of stnds in mental storage  
 \$86 [R34]

<+77 >	<+68 >	[81]	<+65 >	+82	A
	86	[82]	86		B
+88	+86	[85]			C
		[86]	+88		D
	<87 >	[88]	<87 >	<+89 >	E



#### 7.5.1 Summary

The personal rating system provides the integrating mechanism for individual assessments made during the consumption period. It also provides a link with post-consumption evaluation, which draws on stored assessment ratings to determine the overall level of product satisfaction. As this information improves product familiarity and knowledge, it is also likely to affect subsequent pre-purchase expectations and selection criteria.

The personal rating system unifies subconscious reactions to the consumption environment and conscious assessments of product tangibles, such as the equipment provided in the guest room. The overall measure of satisfaction is thereby updated as new assessments are made. Experienced hotel users, who have an established frame of reference, are more likely to assume specialist role responsibilities during assessment. Whenever role specialisation was used, the objective was to undertake a rapid and systematic appraisal of the hotel.

The findings indicate that inexperienced hotel users undertook assessment more tentatively, and consequently the overall measure of satisfaction with the hotel at different points in time was less certain. Role specialisation was also reported, although assessment tasks and responsibilities were not clearly defined. These findings indicate that the extent of product familiarity and knowledge affects the operation of the personal rating system and the effective use of role specialisation during assessment. This is supported by the references made by inexperienced hotel users to the learning which occurred during consumption stage assessment.

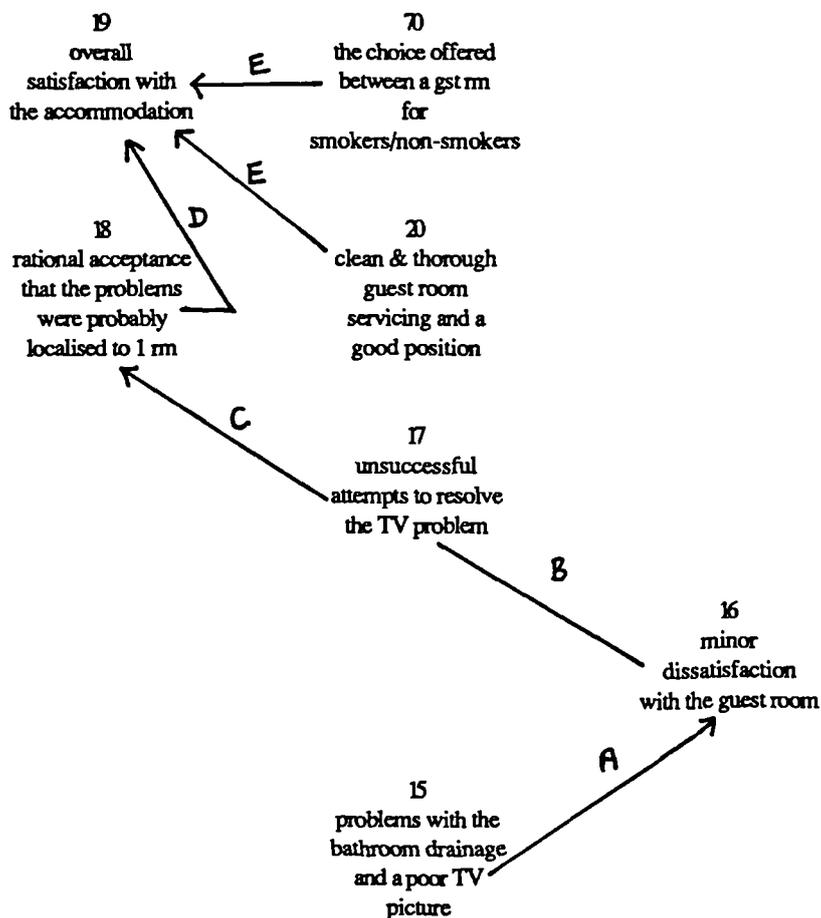
**7.6 Sources of satisfaction during post-consumption evaluation**

During post-consumption evaluation, the consumer faces the task of reconciling the individual assessments which have accumulated during consumption. Even if the overall evaluation is favourable, it may involve assimilating, accepting or compensating for minor sources of dissatisfaction. This is illustrated in Map 85 where a drainage problem in the bathroom and the malfunction of a television set (15; 17) are associated with a feeling of minor dissatisfaction with the guest room (16). However, this is compensated for by other factors (20; 70) which reduce the impact of the problems encountered (18), leading to 'overall satisfaction with the accommodation' (19).

**Map 85**

G9 overall satisfaction with the accommodation \$19 [R19]

		[15]	+16		A
	.17	[16]	.17	<+55 >	B
		[17]	+18		C
		[18]	+19		D
	+70	+20	[19]		E

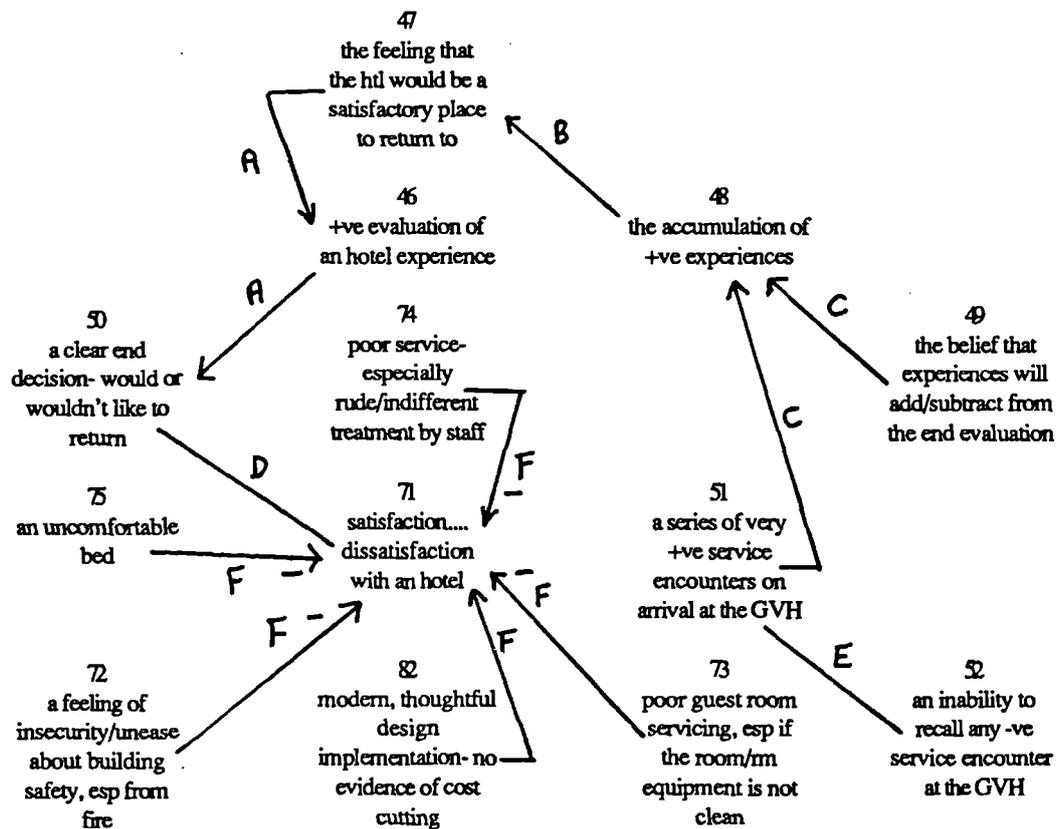


The relationships in Map 86 illustrate how satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with an hotel experience (71) is determined by reconciling assessment ratings. Clustered around the dichotomous variable "satisfaction... dissatisfaction with an hotel" are the contributory factors leading to a feeling of satisfaction (82) or dissatisfaction (72; 73; 74; 75).

Map 86

G3 satisfaction with an hotel \$71 [R19]

				+47	[46]	+50	A
				+48	[47]		B
		+51		+49	[48]		C
				.71	[50]	.71	D
				.52	[51]	.52	E
+82	-75	-74	-73	-72	[71]		F



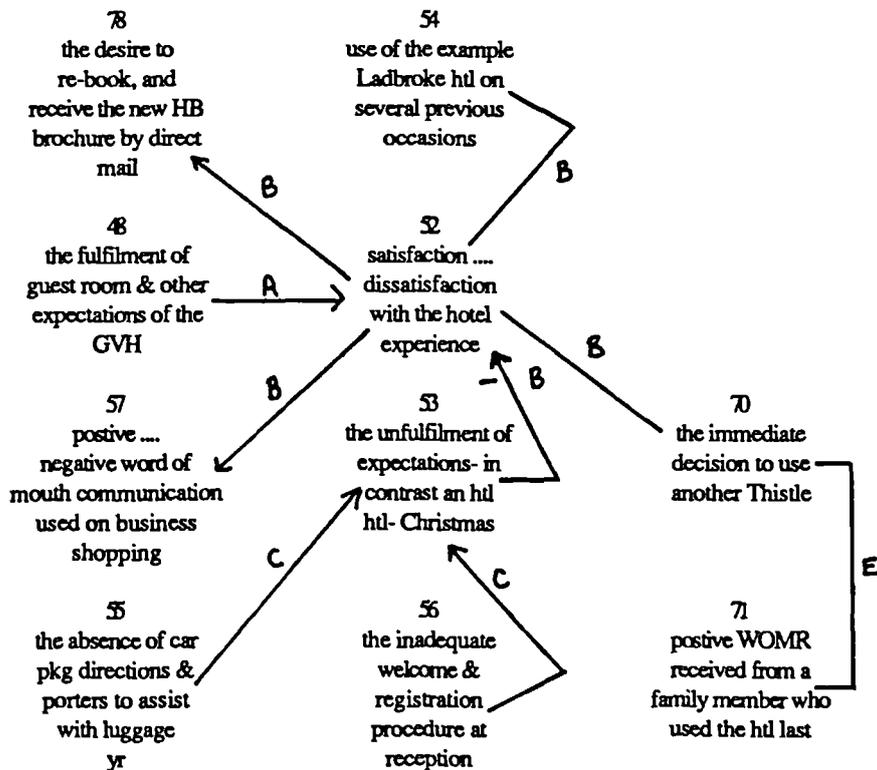
In this example, the respondent found it easier to list factors which would cause dissatisfaction, believing that positive experiences add to, and negative experiences subtract from the final evaluation (49). A series of favourable service interactions (51; 52) lead to "the accumulation of positive experiences" (48) and as no potential sources of dissatisfaction are encountered, a favourable evaluation occurs (46; 47; 50).

Map 87 uses the same dichotomous variable 'satisfaction...dissatisfaction' (52), to show the consequences of two contrasting experiences with the same hotel company. On the first occasion expectations had not been met (53) because of the unsatisfactory events surrounding reception and registration at the hotel (55; 56). However, on the second occasion, the respondent had received (71) and acted on (70) recommendations from a family member. The short break at a different hotel in the same group had been so successful (48) that it led to 'the desire to re-book' (78) and to give recommendations to others (57).

Map 87

G8 satisfaction with the hotel experience \$52 [R05]

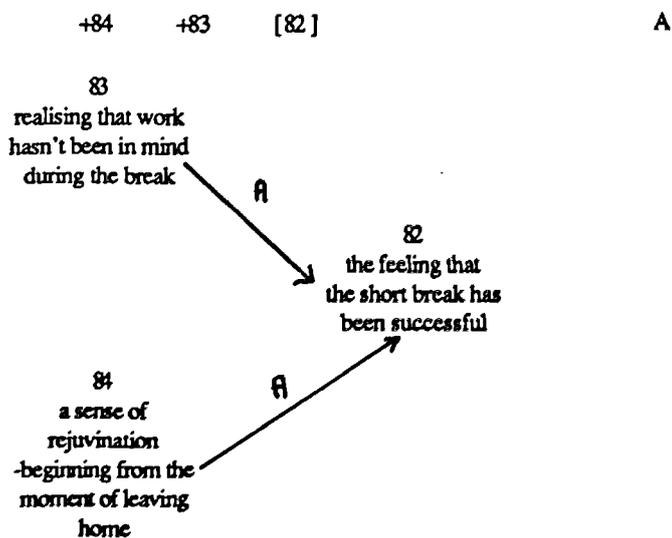
<+51 >	<+50 >	<+49 >	<+47 >	[48]	<+47 >	+52				A
	.53	.54	.70	[52]	+78	+57	.70	.54		B
		+56	+55	[53]						C
		<-59 >	<-62 >	[57]						D
			.71	[70]	.71					E



Although the relative success of an hotel short break is judged according to the subjective processes of assessment and evaluation, all of the respondents in the study equated 'satisfaction' with 'feeling relaxed at the end of a break'. This is depicted in Map 88, where the success of a break (82) is attributed to being able to forget about work-related problems (83) and the 'sense of rejuvenation' (84) derived from the change of environment and routine.

Map 88

G16 the feeling that the short break has been successful \$82 [R13]



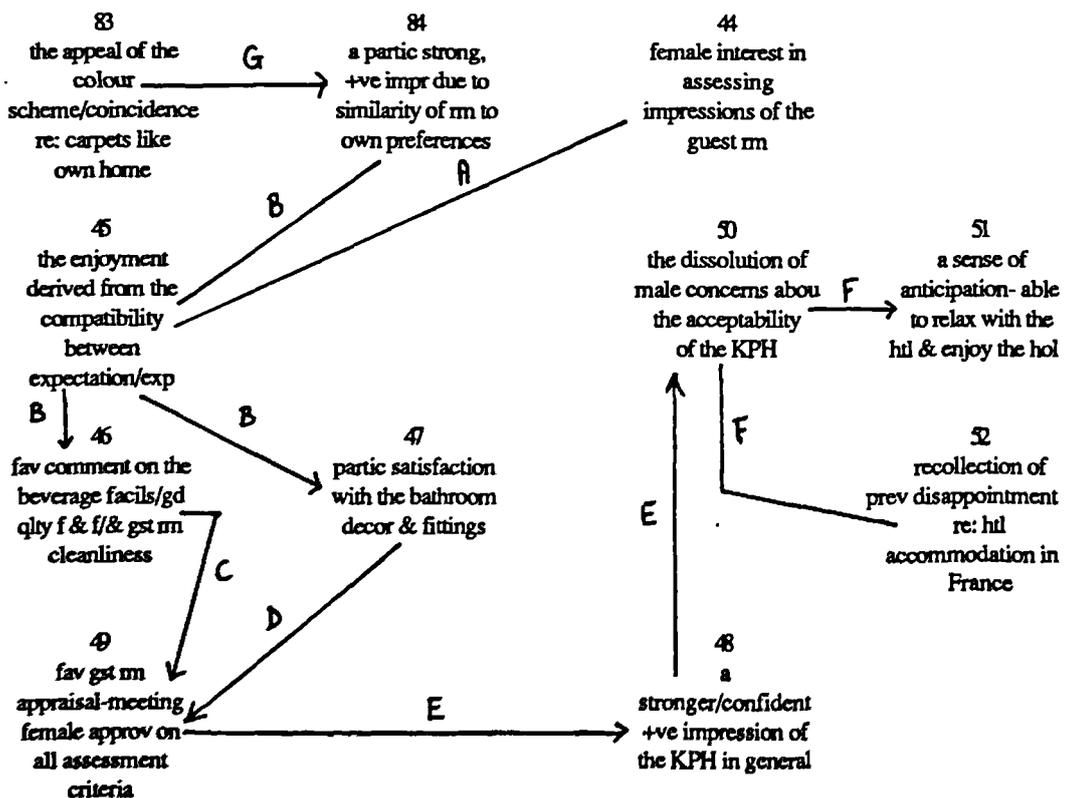
A characteristic shared by some of the study respondents with limited prior experience was a sense of relief that the short break had been successful. Map 89 illustrates this, and provides part of the explanatory background. A recent prior holiday experience (52) had been disappointing because of the poor standard of accommodation provided. Recollection of this experience is closely associated with the male partner's concern about the acceptability of the short break hotel (50).

His concerns are dispelled by favourable impressions (48; 83; 84) and assessments (44; 46; 49) and the enjoyment derived from discovering 'compatibility between expectations and experience' (45). Consequently, pre-purchase anxiety is replaced by a 'sense of anticipation' (51) during the early stages of consumption. This is derived from finding that the break is relaxing and enjoyable.

Map 89

G10 a sense of anticipation- able to relax with the htl & enjoy the hol  
\$51 [R34]

45	[44]	45			A
84	[45]	+46	+47	84	B
	[46]	+49			C
	[47]	+49			D
+49	[48]	+50			E
52	[50]	+51	52		F
	[83]	+84			G

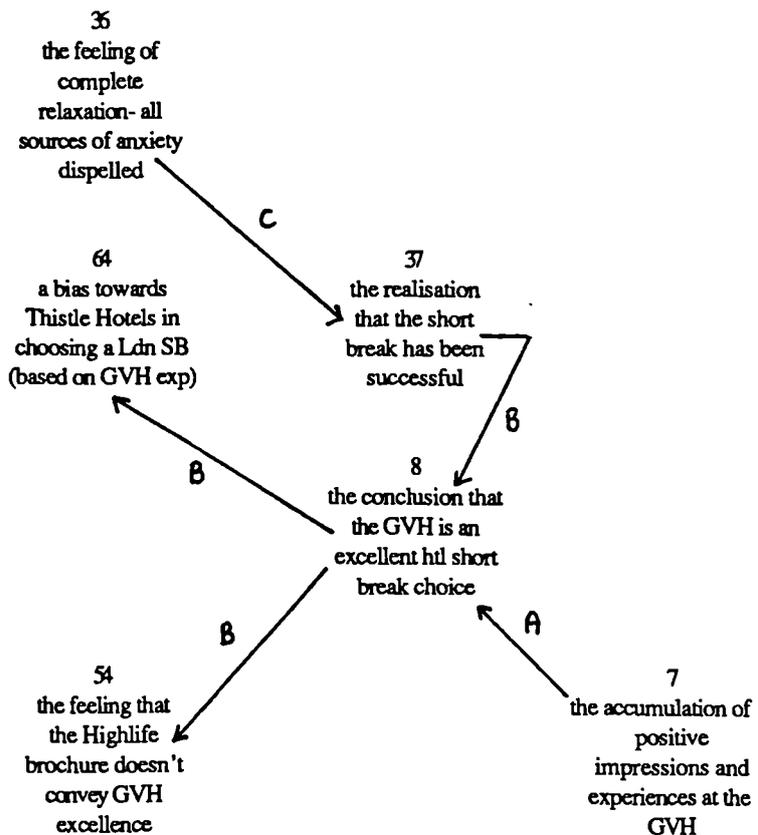


Map 90 provides a further indication of the desirable 'end state' feelings equated with a successful short break. A positive assessment (7) leads to satisfaction with the choice of hotel (8) and company (64). This facilitates mental and physical relaxation (36) and subsequently, recognition that the break is successful (37).

Map 90

G5 the conclusion that the GVH is an excellent htl short break choice  
 \$8 [R17]

<+38 >	<+17 >	<+11 >	<+10 >	<+9 >	[ 7 ]	+8		A
				+37	[ 8 ]	+64	+54	B
					[ 36 ]	+37		C
					[ 54 ]	<+55 >		D

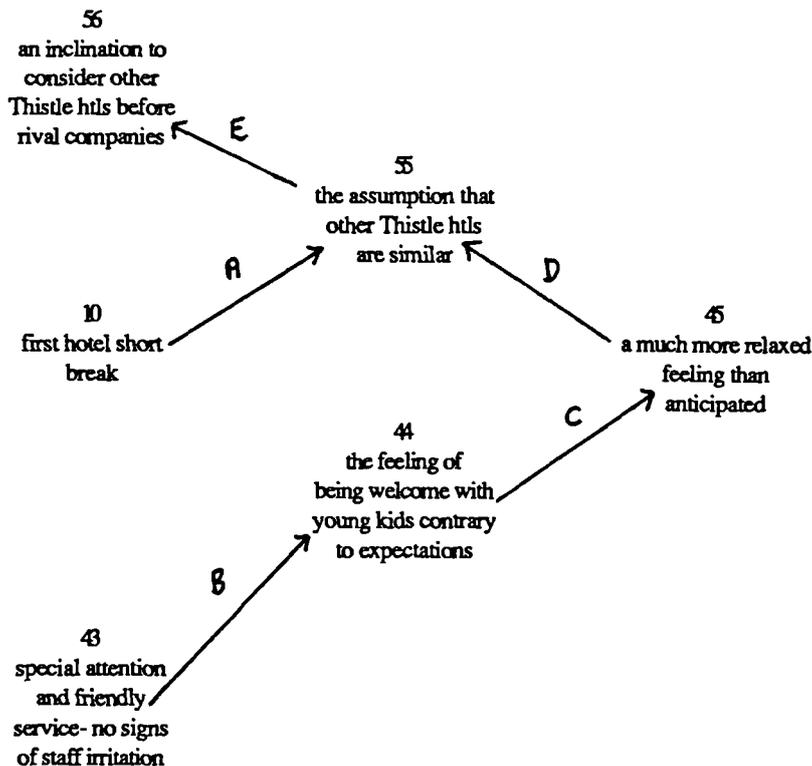


The relationship between a successful short break and feeling relaxed is also shown in Map 91. As there is no comparable prior experience (10), the respondent is surprised to feel 'much more relaxed than anticipated' (45). This leads to the formation of a brand preference (56) based on the assumption that standards are consistent throughout the company (55).

Map 91

G15 an inclination to consider other Thistle htls before rival companies  
 \$56 [R26]

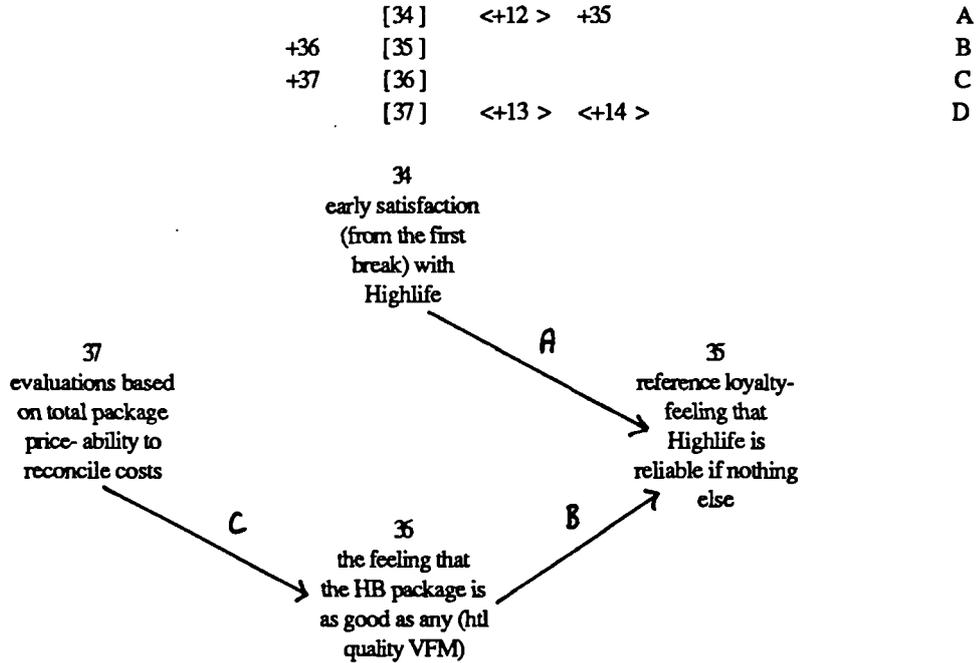
[10]	<+11 >	<+38 >	+55	A
[43]	<+39 >	<+41 >	+44	B
[44]	+45			C
[45]	<+48 >	+55		D
[55]	+56			E



Brand loyalty among consumers with limited hotel experience is illustrated in Maps 92 and 93. In both examples, satisfaction with brand performance on prior short breaks is related to re-purchase choice. In Map 92, satisfaction with the first short break (34) is associated with a favourable evaluation of price (37) quality and value for money (36). A belief that the brand is reliable in these areas of performance accounts for the 'reference loyalty' (35) which develops. This is also implicit in Map 93 where the satisfaction derived from the break (26) stimulates a repeat purchase decision on completion of the break (27; 28).

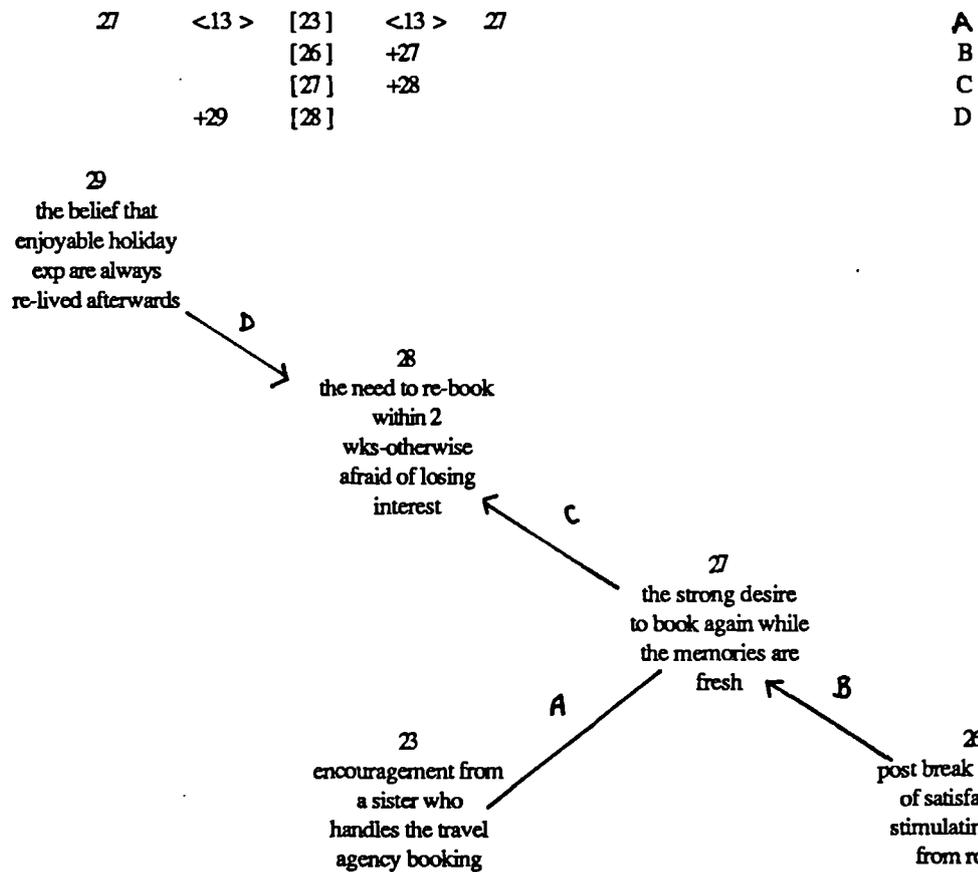
Map 92

G10 reference loyalty- feeling that Highlife is reliable if nothing else  
 \$35 [R12]



Map 93

G7 the need to re-book within 2 wks-otherwise afraid of losing interest  
 \$28 [R30]



### 7.6.1 Summary

The findings indicate that consumer satisfaction is derived from two main sources. Firstly, the accumulation of positive assessments within the personal rating system, and secondly from the psychological impact of consumption. If for example, a consumer feels relaxed and refreshed at the end of the consumption period, this 'end state' will have a positive effect on the consumer.

The purpose of post-consumption evaluation is to determine an overall, enduring measure of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the consumption experience. In this respect, the personal rating system has an important role, as the individual assessments integrated within the system provide a moving average measure of satisfaction.

The post-consumption evaluation period begins at the end of the consumption stage, and may take several days to complete. During this period, the consumer reflects on, and evaluates the temporary measures of satisfaction made during the consumption period. This may also involve re-considering sources of dissatisfaction to determine whether they were compensated for by subsequent experiences, or whether they remain influential, and thereby reduce the overall level of satisfaction.

As might be expected, when brand loyalty was reported, it was closely associated with positive prior experience. However, the effect of a positive evaluation on inexperienced hotel users was more pronounced than for experienced hotel users. This was because consumers with limited prior experience often felt surprised by their own favourable reactions to an hotel. When this happened, pre-purchase preferences were re-inforced and a reference standard for making future comparisons was established.

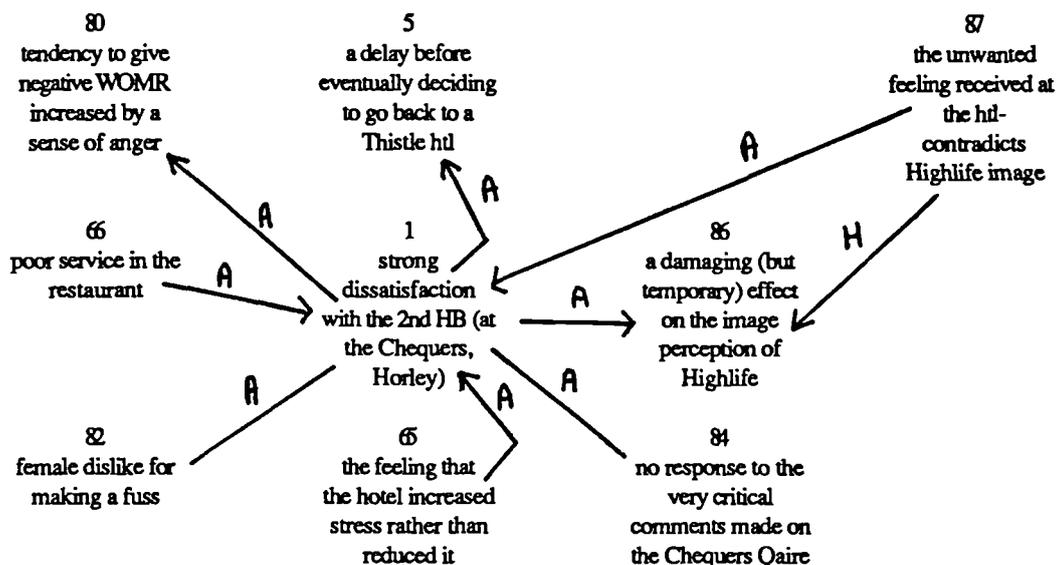


The most emotive source of dissatisfaction reported by respondents was unsympathetic treatment by hotel staff. Map 95 shows how this can create tension which is later released in the form of negative word of mouth communications to family, friends and work colleagues. In this example, the dissatisfaction (1) was caused by poor service in the restaurant (66) and a feeling that short break customers were unwelcome (87).

Map 95

G3 strong dissatisfaction with the 2nd HB (at the Chequers, Horley) \$1 [R08]

+87	84	82	+66	+65	[1]	+80	82	84	+5	+86	A
			<+17 >	[5]							B
	<67 >	<+64 >	<+16 >	[65]	<+63 >	<67 >					C
			<+67 >	[66]							D
			<+81 >	[80]							E
				[82]	<+81 >						F
				[84]	<+85 >						G
	<+17 >	+87		[86]	<+17 >	<+17 >					H



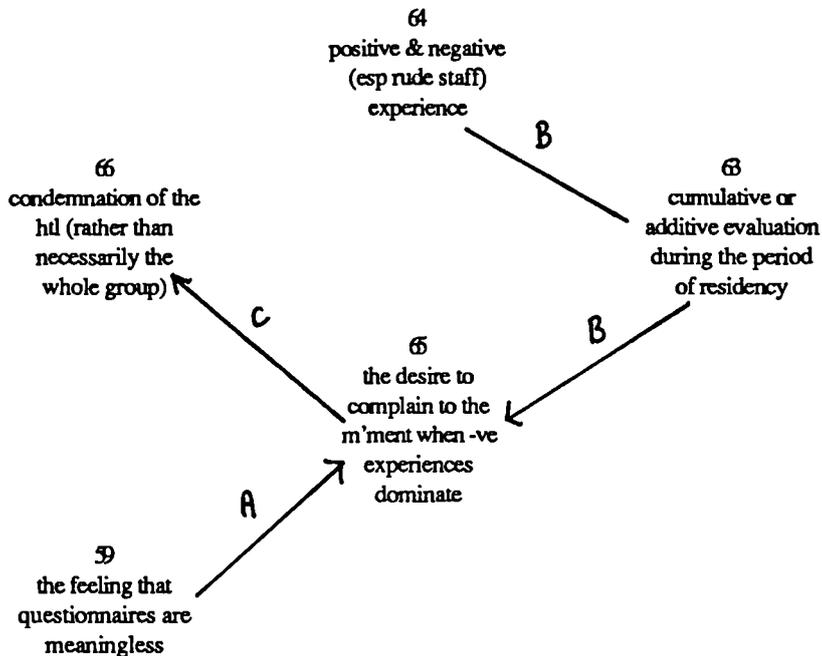
Although not referred to on the Map, the feeling of dissatisfaction was also exacerbated by too many other restaurant customers, with short break guests receiving lower priority attention. This created the feeling that the 'hotel increased stress rather than reduced it' (65). Efforts to resolve the problem, short of complaining (82), were unsuccessful (84). The outcome of this experience was a desire to warn others about the hotel (80) and a loss of confidence in the brand (5; 86).

Regular business travellers also reported that they considered rude or indifferent service to be the most serious and irritating source of dissatisfaction. However, as Map 96 shows, they are more likely to seek immediate redress by making a verbal complaint (65). This is because they recognise that responsibility lies with the hotel, and not the parent company. The belief that guest questionnaires are an ineffective way of registering a complaint (59) also helps to increase the likelihood that experienced consumers will complain in person. If the complaint is not dealt with in a satisfactory way, the experienced hotel user is likely to avoid using the same hotel again, but may continue to use other hotels in the same company or group (66).

Map 96

G16 condemnation of the htl (rather than necessarily the whole group)  
 \$66 [R05]

<+58 >	<+60 >	[59]	<-57 >	+65	A
.64	<+45 >	[63]	.64	+65	B
	<61 >	[65]	+66	<61 >	C



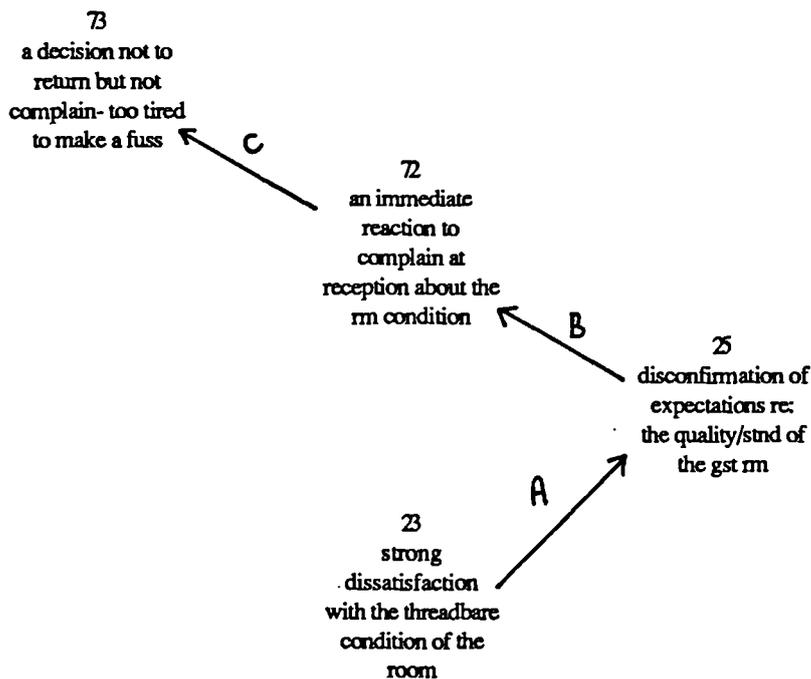
There are some circumstances in which dissatisfaction with one or more aspects of the hotel experience can lead to a feeling of disappointment which the consumer feels unable or unwilling to express. If for example, the source of dissatisfaction is of a confrontational nature, such as an argument with an hotel staff member, the emotional energy generated is likely to be discharged in the form of a verbal complaint. In contrast, dissatisfaction arising from less emotional sources may lead to feeling of dissatisfaction which is not expressed.

This is illustrated in Map 97 where dissatisfaction is caused by a poor standard of guest room furnishing and decor (23). This disconfirms expectations (25) and leads to a decision to complain (72). However, the desire to complain immediately is not strong enough, and the situation is resolved by a decision not to return to the hotel again (73). The consequences of passive dissatisfaction are potentially more serious for the producer. This is because the complaint is not registered, the consumer decides not to return, and the reasons may be communicated to others without the producer ever knowing what had happened.

Map 97

G21 a decision not to return but not complain- too tired to make a fuss  
 \$73 [R33]

<24 >	<+22 >	[23]	<24 >	<+71 >	+25	A
		[25]	+72			B
		[72]	+73			C



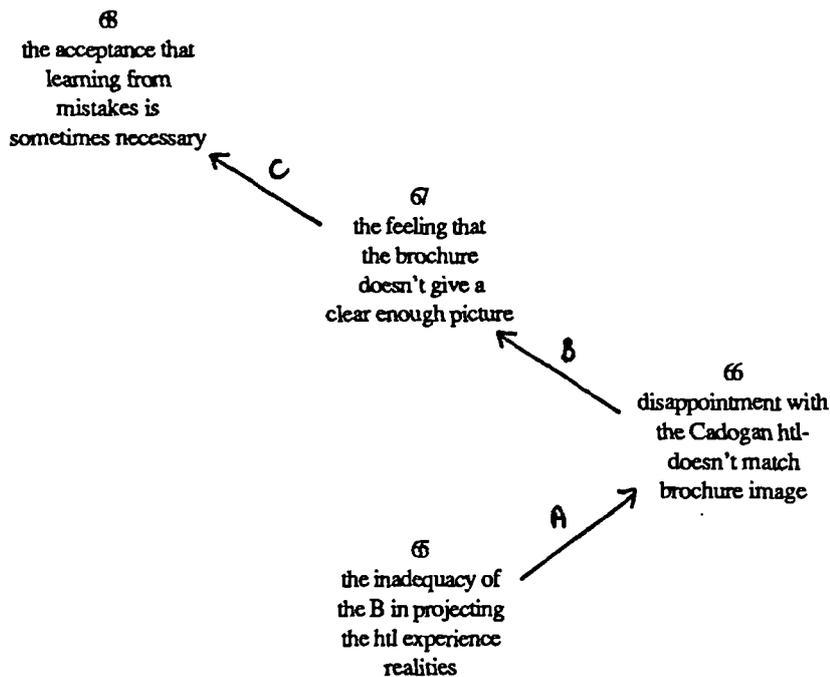
When expectations of the hotel experience have not been fulfilled, post-consumption evaluation may reveal ways of modifying the decision process to avoid future disappointment. Maps 98, 99 and 100 depict learning outcomes which are likely to influence future decision-making.

In Map 98, the respondent identifies a brochure as the source of the mismatch between expectations and experience (65; 66; 67). He realises this only after he recognises that he had not considered the risk of disappointment from this source before.

Map 98

G13 the acceptance that learning from mistakes is sometimes necessary  
 \$68 [R12]

[65]	+66	A
[66]	+67	B
[67]	+68	C



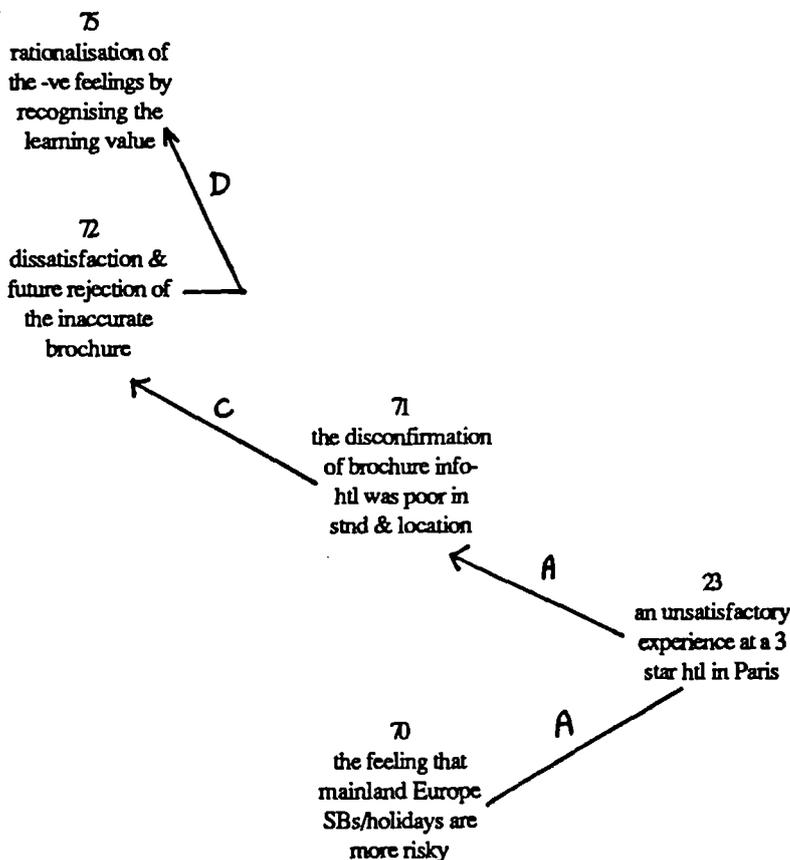
A brochure is also the attributed source of dissatisfaction with an hotel in Map 99, but the inaccuracy of the brochure information (71) leads to a decision to reject it completely (72) as a source of information on possible future holidays. Negative feelings are rationalised by recognising the learning value of the experience (75).

The hotel experience depicted in Map 99 contrasts stongly with that of Map 100, where the positive impression formed (37; 38) leads to a clear recollection of the negative feelings (39) associated with the ealier experience. As they represent opposite extremes, they re-inforce the established reference standards at each end of the spectrum (40).

Map 99

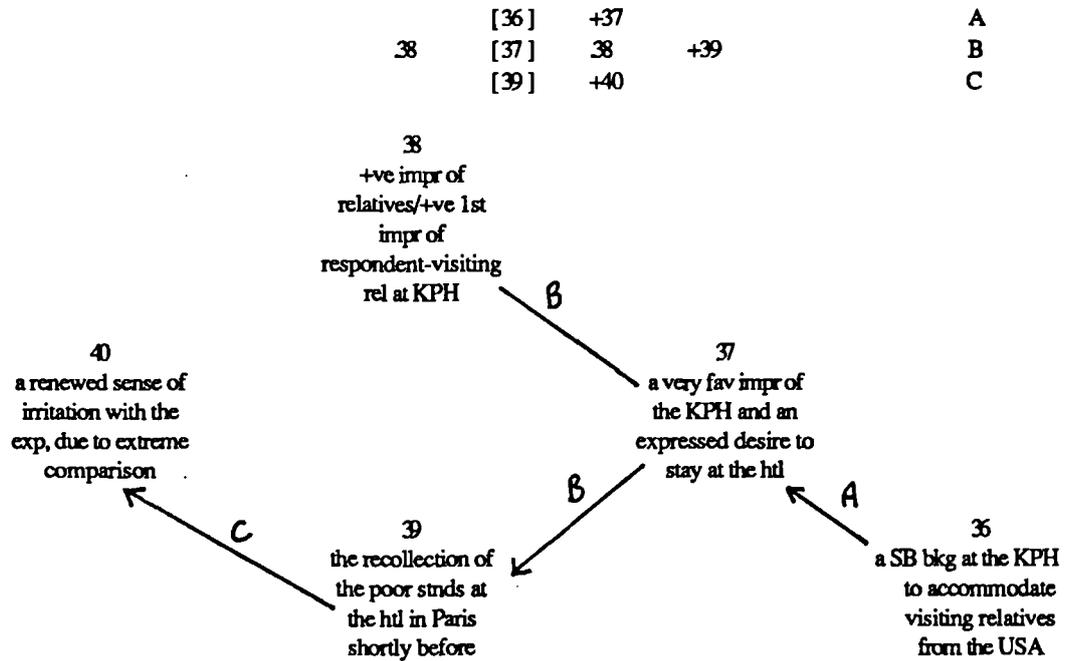
G12      rationalisation of the -ve feelings by recognising the learning value  
 \$75      [R34]

.70	[23]	<+24 >	+71	.70	A
<+69 >	[70]				B
	[71]		+72		C
	[72]	<+73 >	+75		D



Map 100

G9 a renewed sense of irritation with the exp, due to extreme comparison  
 \$40 [R34]



**7.7.1 Summary**

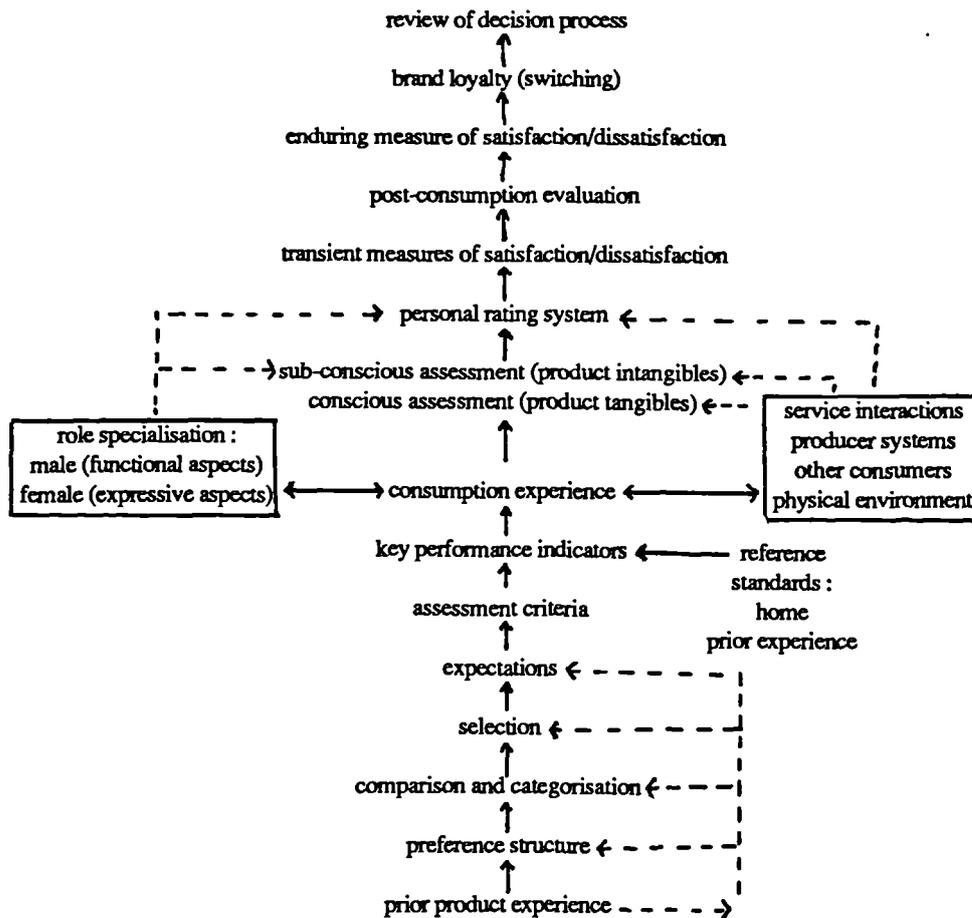
The findings indicate that dissatisfaction is commonly associated with indifferent service and poor design and quality standards. As noted earlier, these factors are considered to be symptomatic of an uncaring approach to the management of the consumption environment. Dissatisfaction may be manifest in a feeling of disappointment that standards and facilities are not as good as expected, or as good as those available at home. The consumer may also feel insecure if the fabric of the building appears neglected, or alienated if hotel staff are perceived to be uncaring.

When dissatisfaction arises from poor service, interactions with hotel staff can invoke strong emotional reactions. In these circumstances, the consumer is more likely to make a verbal complaint at the time when dissatisfaction occurred. In contrast, dissatisfaction relating to less confrontational issues such as poor guest room servicing, may be internalised if the consumer does not feel sufficiently motivated to complain. This is potentially more damaging for the producer, as the source of dissatisfaction is not reported, and yet the consumer may communicate this to others.

Experienced hotel users were generally more confident about their ability to resolve sources of dissatisfaction. This is because they have a notional idea of what constitutes 'ideal service' enabling them to recognise unacceptable practices. Inexperienced hotel users do not have this advantage, and are inclined to be more hesitant about complaining. This is because they are less certain about the distinction between good and bad service, or because they are less confident about their ability to resolve the issues responsible for the dissatisfaction they are experiencing.

**7.8 Interrelationships between the procedures for assessment and evaluation**

As noted in section 7.1, and illustrated in the cognitive data presented in this chapter, prior product experience has an important role in the selection, assessment and evaluation of hospitality services. The interrelationships between the three decision process stages are depicted in Figure 7.1.



**Figure 7.1**

**Interrelationships between the procedures for selecting, assessing and evaluating hospitality services**

During pre-purchase, the two key variables influencing the formation of selection criteria are the consumer's preference structure and prior product experience.

Preference structure was defined in chapter 2 as a combination of internalised environmental factors (such as cultural norms and values, family and reference groups, financial status and social class) and affective judgements, influenced by factors such as personality, lifestyle and purchase motives. As the interrelationships between the contributory factors are complex and difficult to isolate, prior product experience offers an alternative way of identifying decision-making differences.

For example, an experienced hotel user stores encoded information about prior hotel experiences within a personal category system. This enables him to undertake experience-based comparisons during pre-purchase, using selection criteria derived from prior purchase decisions. In this way, the consumer can select an hotel using an established procedure, and formulate realistic product performance expectations. The relationship also extends to the use of assessment criteria during consumption, which are based on key performance indicators and reference standards derived from prior experience. The inexperienced hotel user does not have this advantage, and may have to rely on comparative assessments made against other familiar reference points such as the home.

Consumption experience assessments occur in relation to interactions between the consumer and the producer, producer systems, other consumers and the physical environment. They are either made consciously and deliberately while checking product tangibles such as furnishings and fittings, or subconsciously in reaction to product intangibles such as atmosphere and design effects. Subconscious impressions are mainly responsible for the psychological impact of the consumption experience on the consumer.

As many individual assessments take place during consumption, consumers may identify and develop role responsibilities. For example, experienced hotel users tend to adopt specialist roles, whereby female partners take responsibility for assessing expressive aspects and male partners for functional aspects of the consumption experience.

As individual assessments occur, they are integrated within the consumer's

personal rating system and used to determine transient measures of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the consumption experience. The combined set of measures representing the various phases of consumption, are evaluated during the post-consumption period. The purpose of this is to determine the final, enduring measure of satisfaction. In the event of a positive evaluation, brand loyalty is reinforced. If the final evaluation is negative, the consequence is likely to be a desire to change brands. In both cases, a review of the decision process is likely to ensue, so that new information can be integrated with existing product knowledge.

**7.9 The impact of prior product experience on the personal rating system**

The findings indicate that prior product experience influences the operation of the personal rating system during the assessment and evaluation of the consumption experience. The matrix in Figure 7.2 summarises reported differences between extensive and limited prior experience associated with:

- (1) Pre-purchase influences on the operation of the personal rating system;
- (2) Consumption stage assessment procedures;
- (3) Post-consumption stage evaluation.

<u>Personal rating system</u>	<u>Prior product experience</u>	
	<u>Extensive (A)</u>	<u>Limited (B)</u>
<u>Pre-purchase influences (1)</u>	Established procedures for product classification and categorisation facilitate close links between selection and	Expectations derived from product information and personal recommendations shape assessment criteria
<u>Consumption assessments (2)</u>	Clearly defined role responsibilities and experience-based assessment criteria facilitate rapid and confident assessment	Imprecise role responsibilities and uncertainty about appropriate assessment criteria lead to greater dependence on the home as a basis for assessment
	Comparisons against key performance indicators provide the basis for measuring transient satisfaction	Transient measures of satisfaction/dissatisfaction lead to the discovery of key performance indicators
<u>Post-consumption evaluation (3)</u>	Pre-determined task definition : Enduring satisfaction/dissatisfaction evaluated against experience-based performance norms and in relation to the overall psychological impact of consumption	Reactive task definition : Enduring satisfaction/dissatisfaction evaluated against learned performance indicators and psychological reactions to the consumption experience

Figure 7.2

Relationships between prior product experience and the personal rating system

**7.9.1 (1A) Extensive experience and pre-purchase influences**

Product familiarity enables the consumer with extensive prior experience to use established selection criteria during pre-purchase. The product information encoded within a personal category system also facilitates experience-based comparison. For example, experienced hotel users may categorise hotels by size, age, ownership and other relevant variables. This category-based information guides consumer choice and influences the formation of realistic expectations and relevant assessment criteria.

**7.9.2 (2A) Extensive experience and consumption stage assessments**

Extensive prior experience enables the consumer to assess the consumption experience against pre-determined key performance indicators. For example, experienced hotel users reported that interactions with hotel staff, systems and procedures during reception and reservation provide an early indicator of service quality.

The use of key performance indicators and role specialisation enables the consumer to focus on important elements of the consumption experience and to determine transient measures of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) quickly and confidently.

As the assessment criteria for key performance indicators are derived from prior experience, it is easier and more efficient for consumers to develop role responsibilities for assessment. The findings indicate that role specialisation among experienced hotel users is commonplace and tends to reflect traditional male/female decision-making roles. As noted earlier, gender-related domains of expertise tend to reflect the female partner's interest in expressive aspects of the consumption experience and the male partner's interest in functional aspects.

**7.9.3 (3A) Extensive experience and post-consumption evaluation**

For consumers with extensive prior experience, the final, enduring measure of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the consumption experience is determined with reference to established performance norms. For example, experienced hotel users reported making evaluations against a measurement scale representing a spectrum of prior experience ranging from the most to the least satisfactory experience. In this way, prior product experience

provides a frame of reference within which product evaluations can be made.

The psychological impact of the consumption experience is also indirectly related to prior experience. If for example, an experienced hotel user feels alienated by a 'cold' consumption environment, he may feel tense at the end of the consumption period. If the ideal psychological 'end state' is a desire to feel relaxed and refreshed, the conflict between actual and ideal states may cause the consumer to feel dissatisfied.

#### **7.9.4 (1B) Limited experience and pre-purchase influences**

The consumer with limited prior product experience cannot anticipate the consumption experience in the same way as the consumer with extensive experience. This is because expectations relating to product performance are largely derived from non-personal information sources. Consequently, assessment criteria are less formalised, and the consumer is not as well prepared to interpret product performance or determine transient measures of satisfaction. This is because key performance indicators are less familiar, and may not become apparent until the consumption stage.

#### **7.9.5 (2B) Limited experience and consumption stage assessments**

When the consumer has limited prior experience, it becomes necessary to make comparative assessments using familiar reference standards such as the home. As assessment criteria are likely to have been derived from product literature or personnel recommendations, they may need to be adapted. This occurs as the consumer begins to discover for himself key performance indicators during the measurement of transient satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the consumption experience.

#### **7.9.6 (3B) Limited experience and post-consumption evaluation**

Post-consumption evaluation occurs in the context of learned performance indicators and salient positive and negative recollections from the consumption stage. As the consumer may be unable to evaluate the transient measures of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) in the context of prior experience, it is a more reactive process than for consumers with extensive product experience.

#### **7.10 Implications for managing the consumption experience**

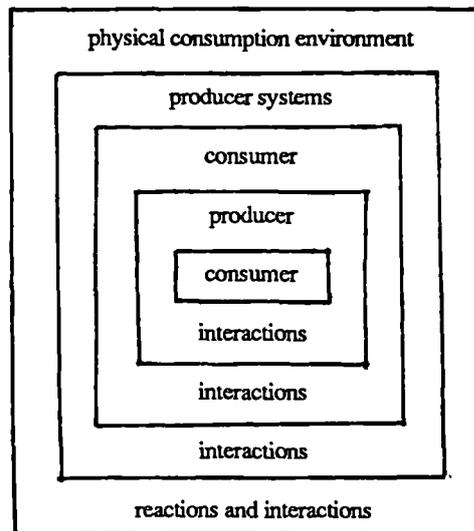
In contrast to manufacturing, where the production process is easier to control, hotels and other hospitality organisations face the problem of dispersed and variable production, often involving the consumer as co-

producer.

For example, the hotel general manager cannot hope to monitor the many events which occur simultaneously around the building, but by focusing attention on the key elements of the consumption experience, he can ensure that service delivery is both consumer orientated and producer-led (Teare and Gummesson, 1989b). This means that the producer aims to maximise internal marketing potential by heightening staff awareness and sensitivity to consumer needs and expectations.

In implementing this approach to service delivery, it is necessary to examine the impact of each key element on the consumption experience. The key elements for hospitality services are shown in Figure 7.3 are listed below:

- (1) Interactions between the consumer and the producer;
- (2) Interpersonal interactions between consumers;
- (3) Interactions between producer systems and the consumer;
- (4) The impact of the physical environment on the consumer.



**Figure 7.3**

**Key elements of the consumption experience for hospitality services**

#### **7.10.1 Interactions between the consumer and the producer**

The interactions which occur between the consumer and the producer represent an important indicator of service quality. If for example, a consumer feels tired and stressful after a long journey, the initial interactions with hotel reception staff will either reinforce or reduce uncertainty about hotel choice. Managers should therefore ensure that the consumer receives efficient and attentive service, especially at the initial point of contact.

#### **7.10.2 Interpersonal interactions between consumers**

In some situations, consumers are able to create the service themselves if the producer provides the appropriate systems, environment and staff. This happens to some extent in hotel bars and restaurants where consumers interact, and by so doing create atmosphere.

Although consumer interactions occur naturally, they can be stimulated by using devices such as background music and lighting. However, if they are set at inappropriate levels, or if bar and restaurant staff are too formal, consumer interaction may be impeded. Managers should therefore give careful consideration to naturally occurring interactions, as consumers that fit together reinforce their own positive experience, and the image of the service producer.

#### **7.10.3 Interactions between producer systems and the consumer**

The interactions between the consumer and producer systems are important because they influence the perceived efficiency of the producer. For example, the value of a computerised reservation system from the viewpoint of the consumer may depend on how easy and convenient it is to access and the accuracy of the information it provides. If check-in and check-out times are reduced by the system, and it is perceived to be more efficient and accurate than the equivalent manual procedures, the consumer may be prepared to accept less personal service in return for the technological benefits of the system.

#### **7.10.4 The impact of the physical environment on the consumer**

The physical environment in which service delivery takes place is important because it can affect the consumer in several ways. Design features in public areas convey impressions of warmth or coldness, which may have a psychological impact on the consumer. The physical environment also

provides the consumer with a wide range of information about the product. For example, the implementation of restaurant design conveys impressions about the style of service the professionalism of the service producer. In restaurant design, retailing techniques can also be used to attract the consumer by designing and positioning signs, displays and architectural features so that they convey a consonant theme.

The increasing emphasis on quality in the management and marketing of services (Armistead, 1990; Piercy and Morgan, 1990; Voss, Johnston, Fitzgerald and Sylvestro 1990) indicates the need for a systematic approach to the analysis of the consumption experience. By analysing the key elements of consumption from the consumer perspective, the internal marketing opportunities which occur naturally during service production and delivery can be identified. They can also be used to provide an operational focus for the development of a quality assurance programme. The wider implications of this approach are discussed in chapter 8.

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## Chapter 8

### Towards a consumer theory for hospitality services

#### 8.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter aims to compare the findings presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7 with prior work reported in the literature, and with the research questions raised in chapters 1 and 2. The purpose is to establish the contribution to knowledge of a grounded consumer theory for hospitality services by commenting on the main findings, emerging issues for hospitality marketing and directions for further research.

To facilitate this, and to identify where the findings support or vary from the hypothetical model presented in chapter 1, it is helpful to recap. The starting point of the investigation related the characteristics of hospitality services to the pre-purchase, consumption and post-consumption stages of the decision process. The purpose was to assess the likely impact on consumer decision-making. This was developed in chapter 2 with reference to the prior work of Moutinho on long holiday decision-making and the research questions arising from the literature review.

The findings provide a set of explanations which are summarised below with particular reference to the role of prior product experience in the decision process for hospitality services.

#### 8.2 The hypothetical decision model for hospitality services

The underlying assumption of the hypothetical model presented in chapter 1 is that the complexity of the decision process varies according to the kind of hospitality services required. If they are leisure-related, such as the decision to take a short break holiday, the decision process is likely to be more elaborate than for non-residential hospitality services. This is because the degree of perceived risk is greater than for more standardised hospitality services such as a fast food meal, which is cheaper, and consumed in a much shorter period of time.

In order to reconcile the wider interests and expectations of family members, joint consultation is also likely to occur during the selection of a short break holiday. Consequently, choice and assessment criteria are likely to be more rigorous than for business-related hotel use.

During the pre-purchase stage of the decision process the model assumes

that consumer-related factors such as self-confidence and assertiveness will be more dominant than product-related factors. This is because subjective impressions of product information vary, particularly if joint or family decision-making occurs, and specialised roles are negotiated. If a family member has prior product category experience, gained for example by using hotels during business travel, this may influence role adoption.

During the consumption of hospitality services, the consumer is surrounded by, and continually interacting with the product. Impressions of service delivery, decor, furnishings and fabrics are examples of product-related factors which the model assumes will be the dominant influence on assessment. As noted in chapter 1, the hotel short break is more complex than non-residential hospitality services because consumption occurs over a period of two or three days.

To assess and evaluate the overall consumption experience, the consumer has to integrate the many individual assessments which are made during the consumption period. This requires an emphasis on product-related assessment during consumption, but during the post-consumption stage, the model assumes a change of emphasis, becoming more consumer-related to facilitate the subjective evaluation of 'end state' feelings. If for example, the consumer feels relaxed and refreshed at the end of an hotel short break, he is likely to feel satisfied. In contrast, a negative outcome such as increased tension, may lead to a feeling of dissatisfaction.

#### 8.2.1 The contribution of Moutinho's tourist decision model

Support for the hypothetical model comes from Moutinho's empirical tourist decision model, which was described in chapter 2 and is summarised below.

Moutinho found that the consumer preference structure for a long holiday destination is shaped by many internal factors. These include cultural norms and values, family and reference groups, financial status and social class. The consumer is also influenced by external product travel stimuli portraying attributes such as quality, price, distinctiveness, prestige, service and availability. The product stimuli have to be selected and interpreted by the consumer before they become meaningful. The way in which this activity is carried out largely depends on consumer-related factors such as personality, lifestyle and purchase motives. If the selected product stimuli contain ambiguity, it may lead to a feeling of uncertainty and a search for additional information.

The criteria used to assess the suitability of tourist services are derived from prior product experience and performance expectations relating to travel, resort facilities, catering and accommodation. If the consumer is guided by relevant prior experience, the need to assess each purchase option against established criteria may not be necessary. This is because the consumer is able to draw on an established frame of reference to guide decision-making. Prior product experience may also enable the consumer to formulate decision rules for different situations. A decision rule provides the consumer with specific guidance on how to select the alternative with the highest perceived overall rating in the context of a particular usage situation.

The model proposes that during consumption the consumer will attempt to assess product attributes against a notional ideal. This is to enable product performance to be assessed as objectively as possible. During the post-consumption stage, the collective evaluation of these assessments determines how satisfied or dissatisfied the consumer feels with the holiday. The evaluative process is more subjective, because the reconciliation of expectations with experience brings together both cognitive and affective elements.

There are, potentially a number of similarities between decision-making for long and short break holidays. In particular, a similar pattern of consumer-related assessment during pre-purchase and post-consumption, and product-related assessment during consumption. As long and short holiday products both involve the portrayal of destination images via brochures and other forms of media, they have similar marketing and distribution needs. There are also similarities between the product components, which both include travel, catering, accommodation and leisure facilities. Finally, the need to reconcile expectations with experience at cognitive and affective levels suggests that consumer satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) may be determined in the same way.

#### 8.2.2 Empirical support for the consumer decision model

To identify the theoretical contribution of the study to the development of a consumer theory for hospitality services, the findings are summarised below. They relate to the general framework of consumer decision-making, and the different approaches adopted by consumers during the decision process.

#### 8.3 The theoretical framework

The statistics reported in chapter 5 suggest that most consumers take an hotel short break for one of several reasons. However, the study findings revealed a wider variety of motives, and a high incidence of motive clusters, containing one important reason (the primary motive) and several subsidiary reasons (secondary motives) for the purchase decision. In order to differentiate between them, a total of fifty-three primary and secondary motive statements were used to develop a classification of primary motives.

### 8.3.1 The importance of motives

The six part classification of primary motives, which was derived from the interview data, revealed that physical and psychological factors are interrelated. For example, when referring to the desire to recover from physical tiredness, consumers also stated the psychological benefits which they expected to obtain from the break. Recovery was closely related to the desire to relax in comfortable surroundings, assessed by using the home or reference standards relating to prior product experience as the basis for comparison.

The findings also indicated that primary purchase motives influence the type and duration of the decision process, especially if the reason for the purchase is considered to be important. For instance, a consumer who decides to take an hotel short break because he had been unable to take a summer holiday, will select the hotel very carefully if a compensatory role is attributed to the break.

### 8.3.2 The role of product information

The precise role of product information in the decision process is more difficult to assess. This is because consumer definitions of the ideal brochure ranged from a desire for simple, and predominantly visual information to a preference for detailed descriptive text. Inexperienced hotel users prefer brochures giving detailed information about the hotel and the surrounding area, and hotels which had been allocated a full page in the brochure are preferred to hotels with a smaller space allocation. This is because they are perceived to be more important and therefore better hotels, and also because more information means less risk of making an inappropriate choice.

Experienced hotel users are less reliant on brochures, and often question their reliability and accuracy as a source of product information. They prefer when necessary, to obtain further information from friends or business colleagues who share similar experience-based expectations of

hotels. However, a favourable recommendation will not be accepted unless the recipient is confident that the person giving the recommendation has similar preferences and expectations of hotel quality standards.

When inexperienced hotel users seek advice, they prefer to approach people whom they consider to be product specialists. These include travel agency and short break reservations staff. They may also try to find out more about a particular hotel by making a telephone enquiry. If this is not handled sympathetically, it may lead to the belief that the hotel is impersonal or unfriendly, resulting in the selection of a rival brand or a different hotel.

### 8.3.3 The role of the personal category system during pre-purchase

The extent of prior product experience influences pre-purchase decision-making in several ways. The findings revealed that consumers with extensive prior experience had developed procedures for comparing and categorising hotels by type, size, age, ownership and other relevant variables. This information constitutes a personal category system which provides a set of reference standards against which new information can be compared.

As the consumer becomes more familiar with a product category, his latitude of acceptance relating to quality standards narrows. The ability to differentiate between competing brands also improves, making it easier to categorise product information.

### 8.3.4 The role of the personal rating system during consumption

The findings show that the assessment procedures used by consumers vary according to their prior experience of the product category.

In general, experienced hotel users were more critical and more aware of operational deficiencies than inexperienced hotel users. However, they were less sensitive to service delivery inconsistencies because they are more confident of their ability to deal with problems which may arise.

Inexperienced hotel users feel that they are less in control, and because of this they are more reluctant to complain, even if they feel dissatisfied. If for example, minor sources of dissatisfaction create a feeling of tension during consumption, this may overshadow more positive aspects of the consumption experience. Dissatisfaction caused by ineffective service is especially potent. This is because inexperienced hotel users may lose self-

esteem if service delivery is perceived to be unfriendly or threatening.

Prior product experience also influences the operation of the consumer's personal rating system. A consumer with extensive prior experience is able to develop a notional ideal for product performance. This facilitates a comparative assessment of cost-benefit relationships with reference standards derived from product usage. In this way, the consumer can determine whether current experiences fall within his latitude of acceptance for product performance.

The integration of individual assessments within the personal rating system enables the consumer to determine transient measures of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the consumption experience. Consumers with limited experience assess product performance in a similar way, although assessments are generally made more tentatively. This is because reference standards for comparative assessment are not as well developed. In the case of inexperienced hotel users, the reference point used for comparative assessment is normally provided by the home.

Transient measures of satisfaction provide a mechanism for monitoring product performance during the consumption period. Continuous updating occurs as new assessments are made, and the moving average measure of satisfaction is re-calculated. If for example, a consumer had arrived at an hotel to find that his reservation details had been mislaid, he may have felt irritated by the inefficiency and the consequent delay. However, this negative first impression may be compensated by a favourable assessment of the hotel if the consumer is satisfied with the design and quality of guest room decor, furnishings and fittings.

#### 8.3.5 The role of the personal rating system during post-consumption evaluation

During post-consumption evaluation, the final, enduring measure of satisfaction with the consumption experience is calculated by reconciling transient measures of satisfaction with performance norms for the product category. These are well established among experienced hotel users, who are able to evaluate the consumption experience in a systematic, task orientated way with the aid of a framework of prior experience. In contrast, inexperienced hotel users may have to react to new product information if their prototype for evaluating product performance is incomplete.

There were two interrelated considerations during post-consumption evaluation; cognitive assessments aggregated within the personal rating

system and 'end state' feelings or affective assessments such as the desire to feel relaxed and refreshed. If the overall balance of assessments was positive, the consumer felt satisfied and brand confidence was re-inforced. When the consumer felt dissatisfied it was caused by the disconfirmation of expectations and clear recollection of the contributory factors.

In order to elaborate the theoretical framework, it will be necessary to investigate how closely it relates to the consumer decision process for hospitality services other than hotel short breaks. For example, operational differences relating to factors such as price, product design and the duration of consumption may account for different approaches to decision-making. The implications for further research are discussed at the end of the chapter.

#### **8.4 Identifying different decision-making strategies**

In order to identify the different approaches to the decision process used by experienced and inexperienced hotel users, it was necessary to compare and contrast reported behaviour. The research questions in chapter 2 were derived from the literature review which showed that prior experience with the product category and personal involvement in the decision process were promising explanatory variables. This was confirmed by the study findings reported in chapters 6 and 7 which are summarised below in relation to the research questions.

- (1) The relationship between consumers with extensive prior product experience and high involvement decision-making.

The experienced hotel user is able to categorise and differentiate between hotels and leisure break brands. This is because expectations, selection criteria and procedures are well established. However, the level of involvement in the decision process depends on how confidently the consumer is able to use established procedures to reduce perceived risk and assess choice options. If the primary purchase is especially important to the consumer, it may lead to the adoption of a high involvement approach.

- (2) The relationship between consumers with extensive prior product experience and low involvement decision-making.

The ease with which an experienced hotel user is able to make a purchase decision is closely related to the extent of product familiarity and knowledge, personal confidence and the adoption of family decision-making roles. Product familiarity, derived from experience-based knowledge, enables the consumer to make consistent and confident decisions. In repeat-

purchase situations or whenever the consumer can confidently predict hotel suitability, a low involvement approach is likely to be adopted. There are however, some circumstances in which a moderate involvement approach will be used. For example, a shift from low to moderate involvement may occur during brand switching or if the consumer is responsible for a booking made on behalf of, or in conjunction with other people.

- (3) The relationship between consumers with limited prior product experience and high involvement decision-making.

The inexperienced hotel user may feel the need to become closely involved in the decision process in order to learn more about the product category and reduce perceived risk associated with the purchase decision. As the consumer may be unfamiliar with price-quality relationships concerning standards, services and facilities available in the various grades of hotel accommodation, a more cautious approach is necessary. The ensuing activities may include consulting with travel intermediaries and experienced hotel users and telephone enquiries made to central reservations and hotel staff.

- (4) The relationship between consumers with limited prior product experience and low involvement decision-making.

The inexperienced hotel user may adopt a low involvement approach when deciding to make a return visit to a familiar hotel. This is because the decision process for a repeat purchase is not constrained by the sense of uncertainty associated with unfamiliar hotels and brands.

There were however, study examples in which a low involvement approach had been adopted in conjunction with the selection of an unfamiliar hotel. They included hotel short breaks motivated by the need to find a house prior to job re-location and hotel selection motivated by the availability of indoor leisure facilities suitable for a family activity break. In the latter example the family had decided that the availability of indoor leisure facilities at the hotel compensated for the risks associated with using an unfamiliar hotel. This was because it was felt that an hotel with indoor facilities was a safer investment against the risk of poor weather than cheaper, more familiar types of short break package offering only outdoor leisure facilities.

- (5) The relationship between the use of assessment criteria and prior product experience with the product category.

The findings showed that experienced hotel users are able to detect from

impressions and interactions at the beginning of the consumption period whether or not their expectations are likely to be fulfilled. This is because prior product experience provides an elaborate frame of reference against which comparisons can be made. It also provides a personal definition of acceptable standards, of which there are a number of key indicators during the initial stages of the consumption period. They include procedures for reception and registration at the hotel, interactions with hotel staff and the assessment of guest room design and facilities.

The consumer knows from prior experience that the key indicators of service quality require careful monitoring and appraisal. In so doing, relevant assessment criteria become established and are routinely used to alert the consumer to potential sources of dissatisfaction. In this respect inexperienced hotel users were more hesitant in their approach, and in the absence of experience-based criteria, comparative assessments were made against other familiar reference points such as the home.

- (6) The relationship between role specialisation and confidence in the joint decision-making process.

During pre-purchase, role specialisation was associated with convenience and interest in the various information gathering activities. More female than male partners were responsible for initiating discussion relating to the timing of the short break. This was accompanied by preparatory work such as collecting brochures and identifying possible holiday options for discussion. Where male partners had business travel experience they tended to comment on the type and standard of hotels by referring to the brochure descriptions and photographs.

During the consumption stage, joint assessment focused on comparisons between hotel standards and the standards of comfort at home. References to the home were frequently made by female partners who were more dominant during guest room assessment, particularly in relation to design features and the artistic aspects of decor, furnishings and fabrics. The assessment criteria used by male partners were more often associated with functional requirements, especially if the male partner regularly used hotels in conjunction with business travel.

- (7) The relationship between expectations and prior product experience.

As noted in the context of the relationship between assessment criteria

and prior experience, experienced hotel users are sensitive to perceived key indicators of service quality, and to environmental design effects. The hotel environment may be categorised as 'warm' and friendly or 'cold' and impersonal, depending on how the combined elements of atmosphere and physical design features are perceived by the consumer. If the service is efficient but impersonal, and the physical design of the building lacks personality, this may contribute to a subconscious psychological impression of coldness, evoking a feeling of detachment or even alienation.

The desirability of contrasting design features and atmospheric effects was also referred to in the context of food and beverage outlets. A common criticism of their design, especially of hotel restaurants, is that they do not have a separate identity, or manage to convey a different atmosphere from the rest of the hotel. If an hotel is considered to be impersonal, this is one of the factors which may contribute to a decision not to use it's food and beverage outlets.

Inexperienced hotel users were often concerned about the kind of service they might experience at an hotel. In this respect, they were inclined to seek reassurance before making a purchase decision by telephoning the hotel beforehand. The response to the enquiry was regarded as indicative of staff attitudes at the hotel, making it an important choice determinant. If the enquiry was handled insensitively, the consumer was inclined to reject the hotel and in some cases even the short break brand. Interactions with hotel staff were also considered to be very important during the initial stages of consumption. When service interactions were perceived as positive and helpful, they had a confidence building effect on the consumer.

- (8) The relationship between prior product experience and the personal rating system.

The study findings showed that the operation of the personal rating system is related to the extent of the consumer's prior experience with the product category. In order to evaluate the overall experience, the consumer has to integrate a wide variety of individual assessments. As the assessment ratings accumulate, the personal rating system facilitates integration and aggregation to produce a transient measure of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) which is continually updated during consumption.

As the consumer gains experience, so the personal rating system becomes more sensitive to information, and the consumer feels more confident about the processes of assessment and evaluation. The experienced hotel user has

the advantage of being able to use experienced-based criteria in order to make a rapid assessment of hotel suitability. This helps the consumer to detect, avoid and resolve potential sources of dissatisfaction.

- (9) The relationship between post-consumption evaluation and assessments made during the consumption stage.

The personal rating system has two main functions. It provides a mechanism for integrating and storing assessments and impressions as they occur, and it facilitates overall evaluation at the post-consumption stage.

During post-consumption evaluation, the consumer recalls the positive and negative measures arising from assessments made during consumption. The purpose of this activity is to determine the extent to which expectations have been met, and to assess the implications for re-purchasing or modified decision-making in the future.

Prior product experience has a clearly identifiable role in the evaluative process, as experienced hotel users were able to evaluate a consumption experience with the aid of an established prototype for product performance. Pre-knowledge of key indicators of service quality provides a set of performance norms against which different aspects of the consumption experience can be compared. Hence, evaluation was task orientated, guided by clearly established objectives and procedures. Inexperienced hotel users were less well prepared to evaluate the consumption experience, because their frame of reference was not as detailed, or the evaluation process as well established. Consequently, evaluation was not as well focused, and took longer than for experienced hotel users because of the need to react to new information.

- (10) The relationship between post-consumption evaluation and brand evaluation.

In distinguishing between transient and enduring measures of product performance, it is important to note the influence of the final measure of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) on brand attitudes and consequent purchase behaviour. Satisfaction will re-inforce positive brand attitudes, contributing to the development of brand loyalty. Conversely, dissatisfaction may lead to modifications in the approach to the decision process, with the pre-purchase stage becoming longer and more involved, especially if the consumer decides to try a different brand on the next purchase occasion.

## **8.5 Emerging issues for hospitality marketing**

A number of practical implications for hospitality marketing have emerged from the study. They are identified below in relation to three important themes, together with recommendations for:

- (1) Planning promotional strategies;
- (2) Improving internal marketing potential;
- (3) Monitoring the consumption environment.

### **8.5.1 Planning promotional strategies**

As return on investment is intangible, it is important that marketing promotions for hospitality services portray brand attributes accurately and effectively. One of the problems associated with packaging hotel short breaks is that product information may contain sources of dissonance. If for example, the consumer considers the brochure layout to be ineffective, or the information conveyed by text and photographs to be unclear, then he may feel the need to seek further clarification. This can be quite a complex task, involving telephone enquiries direct to the short break operator or hotel, if the retailer is unable to provide the requested information. To make information search and selection as easy as possible for the consumer, the producer should ensure that the services and facilities available at each hotel featured in the brochure are clearly described and portrayed.

The problem of finding an appropriate balance between the need to be concise, and the provision of detailed information can be resolved with an appropriate research focus. This should aim to identify how the approaches adopted by experienced and inexperienced hotel users affect information needs. In particular, how different purchase motives lead to the requirement for different kinds of information. For example, the information sought by a consumer will vary depending on whether the short break is to be taken with or without the family, in conjunction with business travel or in association with other pre-arranged activities.

### **8.5.2 Improving internal marketing potential**

Although marketing activities are more usually associated with the external business environment, the potential for improving internal marketing effectiveness should not be overlooked. A consumer audit can be used to appraise the existing potential. The purpose of this is to monitor the consistency of service delivery. It should consider the key elements of the consumption experience which are: interactions between the consumer and the producer, producer systems, other consumers and the physical

environment.

The study findings indicate that a high proportion of consumers are unfamiliar with the hotel environment, and therefore producers should:

- (1) Design the service production/delivery system so that operational procedures are clearly explained to consumers;
- (2) Ensure that the internal market is effectively served by promotional material such as brochures, leaflets, in-house magazines, merchandising and signage which is designed to meet the information needs of target consumer groups.

### 8.5.3 Monitoring the consumption environment

The interactions between consumers and service staff at reception and in other 'front line' areas such as bars and restaurants provide natural opportunities for internal marketing. However, if they are not seen as marketing opportunities or managed in a positive way, they are unlikely to have the desired impact on the consumer. In order to maximise internal marketing opportunities, managers should:

- (3) Employ staff with the capacity to cope effectively with the work-related pressures of their operational role, and who are sensitive to the varying needs of different consumer groups;
- (4) Ensure by way of a continuous programme of personal development that front line staff are aware of the influential role they have in dealing with consumers, and thereby the need to respond positively to every foreseeable kind of service interaction.

To maintain the effectiveness of front line staff, managers should:

- (5) Ensure that staff have the freedom to initiate effective solutions to consumer requests, and wherever possible, delegate responsibility to enable them to make rapid decisions;
- (6) Listen to the suggestions coming from both front line and support staff, encourage new ideas and reward staff when their suggestions have been accepted and effectively implemented.

The consequences of consumer dissatisfaction were identified in chapter 7. They are principally negative word of mouth communications and brand switching. To reduce the incidence of negative post-consumption evalu-

ation, managers should:

- (7) Ensure that lines of communication are always open between managers, supervisors and staff so that ineffective policy and practice can be rapidly identified and rectified;
- (8) Monitor the overall effectiveness of the internal marketing strategy to ensure that it is acceptable to consumers and compatible with external marketing activities.

#### **8.6 Directions for further research**

The theoretical framework emerging from the study supports the hypothetical model of the consumer decision process for hospitality services. In addition, the study findings have shown the interrelationship between prior product experience and involvement during the consumer decision process. In order to elaborate the framework and to explore its relationships in more detail, follow-up studies will be necessary. In particular, they should address the need for comparative research in other sectors of the hospitality industry, and the need to quantify relationships so that the theory can be developed in more detail and with greater precision.

By conducting further research, it will be possible to develop a new typology for hospitality services so that consumers can be grouped and segmented by decision process characteristics. The main benefits of this approach are that it will provide a more accurate predictor of purchase behaviour and reveal in more detail the kind of decision support that the producer should provide.

Although prior product experience is important, there are other factors which may help to explain the decision process. These include the relationships between purchase motives and decision process involvement; the influence of age, lifestyle and situational determinants on the decision process and the role of the personal rating system during consumption and post-consumption evaluation.

#### **8.7 Study achievements and limitations**

The decision to undertake a theory generating study was made because of the absence of consumer decision-making theory for the hospitality industry. By using an exploratory approach, the study has succeeded in revealing the nature and characteristics of the consumer decision process for hospitality services. This area had not been systematically

investigated before, and the consequent theoretical framework provides a foundation for further research.

The findings are also relevant to the advancement of marketing practice in the hospitality industry as they have illustrated the potential value of market segmentation based on product experience and involvement. This approach is relevant to both external and internal marketing activity.

The main advantage of the theory generating approach used in the study was that it was grounded in the research data. There were however, several limitations. The need to concentrate the research effort in the hotel sector of the industry, and on the individual leisure segment to the exclusion of corporate business, group travel or other segments, indicates the need for further work.

The theoretical framework represents an initial step towards explaining the consumer decision process for hospitality services. In order to extend and elaborate the theory, there are several issues which will require further attention. Firstly, it will be necessary to investigate the relationships between decision process variables in more detail. Secondly it will be necessary to investigate the differences between consumer decision-making across the range from standardised to personalised hospitality services. This will also involve investigating a variety of different consumption environments. The outcome of this work will be a comprehensive theory, which will have a valuable role in designing, managing and marketing consumer orientated hospitality services.

## Appendix 1

### Kelly's theory of personal constructs

Kelly's theory of personal constructs (1955; 1963) consists of a central statement termed the 'fundamental postulate' which is elaborated by a series of eleven corollaries which are summarised below.

#### Fundamental postulate:

"A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events."

Mental or cognitive activity is assumed to operate through a network of flexible and frequently modified pathways or channels. This structure is created by the individual to provide guidance on current and future actions.

The statement reflects an interest in the actions of the individual, rather than concern for the way in which the actions might ideally be carried out. Of central importance to the theory are the predictive and motivational features of the individual's cognitive structure. In particular, the way in which the structure helps the individual to interpret and anticipate events.

#### (1) Construction corollary:

"A person anticipates events by construing their replications"

The individual interprets what they have construed within a framework of meaning. The framework is composed of constructs which have both similarity and contrast elements. When the individual acquires knowledge and/or experience of particular events by recognising their beginnings and endings and by construing their similarities and contrasts, it becomes possible to predict their outcomes. The ability to foresee outcomes thereby enables the individual to anticipate events.

#### (2) Individuality corollary:

"Persons differ from each other in their construction events."

The emphasis placed on the anticipation of events in the fundamental postulate recognises that people differ from each other, and use different approaches to anticipate the same events. The assumption is that no two people will share exactly the same experience of an event in which they are the central figure, or events where others are central figures. However, individuals can find common ground by accommodating the experiences of others along with their own.

#### (3) Organization corollary:

"Each person characteristically evolves, for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs."

Kelly views the systematic arrangement of personal constructs as a powerful determinant of personality. The system is continually evolving in order to minimise sources of incompatibility which may cause the individual to make contradictory predictions.

Organisation within the construct system is assisted by many levels of ordinal relationships. These are created when one construct subsumes a second construct as one of its elements. These are termed superordinal and subordinal relationships respectively. In this way constructs are built into hierarchies which provide the mechanism for anticipating events.

#### (4) Dichotomy corollary:

"A person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs."

Cross-referencing of the hierarchy of ordinal relationships embraces different forms of construct, which are differentiated by their dichotomous elements of similarity and contrast. Constructs are composed of at least two elements which are similar, in contrast from a third element. They combine to form a finite number of channels which structure cognitive processes. The assumption is that to think about something, the individual must use the network of channels he has created. New channels of thought are created by a new combination of existing channels.

#### (5) Choice corollary:

"A person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his system."

If the individual's thinking is psychologically guided by the ways in which he anticipates events, options which are presented in a dichotomous way make choice more obvious. Whenever the individual is faced with a choice in this way, he will tend to choose in favour of the alternative which seems to provide the most effective basis for anticipating the ensuing events. This assumes that selection is influenced by the relative values invested in the ends of his dichotomies. Some of the values are quite transient and have short term relevance, others are more stable and represent guiding principles.

The act of making a choice means that the individual becomes involved in the process of selecting an alternative. This may be

influenced by the possibilities for enhancing or elaborating the construct system. Kelly uses the term 'elaborative choice' to explain the individual's tendency to want to make his system "more explicit and clear cut". By becoming more certain about fewer things, or more aware of more things events are thought to be more easily anticipated.

(6) **Range corollary:**

"A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only."

The influence of personal constructs is limited by their focus and range of convenience. For example a construct of tall versus short has a well defined range of convenience because it refers to the logical concept of measurement. However, individuals will differ in the way they apply a construct like for example, respect versus contempt. Some might apply it broadly in many situations, others in a narrower range of contexts.

(7) **Experience corollary:**

"A person's construction system varies as he successively construes the replications of events."

The objective of psychological processes is to anticipate events. As events occur, the individual is encouraged to place new constructions upon them, particularly whenever something unexpected happens. The succession of events also represents a validation process since it continually tests an individual's construct system. Experience is likely to influence the progressive evolution of the construction system as the individual's "working hypotheses" or expectations are challenged.

(8) **Modulation corollary:**

"The variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of convenience the variants lie."

A construct is 'permeable' if it will admit to its range of convenience new elements which are not yet construed within its framework. There are likely to be different degrees of permeability. For example, one individual's construct of good versus bad might be sufficiently permeable to permit him to see many new ideas as good or bad. Another individual may already have an extensive set of labels, and so it is less certain that new ideas on this construct will be accommodated.

The way in which constructs are used by individuals may vary, if their meaning changes over time. For example, the construct of fear versus domination may assume the new meaning of respect versus contempt. Whereas once an individual may have divided his acquaintances between those he was afraid of and those whom he could dominate, he may, as he grows more mature, divide his acquaintances between those whom he respects and those whom he holds in contempt. In order to make this transition, another construct is needed within whose range of convenience the fear versus domination construct lies, and which is sufficiently permeable to admit the new idea of respect versus contempt. The two constructs, the old and the new, are termed the variants.

(9) **Fragmentation corollary:**

"A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other."

An individual may sometimes use construct subsystems which are incompatible with each other. This means that evaluations may not agree with established knowledge or experience. This accounts for illogical actions, as patterns of behaviour are not strictly rational in nature.

As the personal construct system evolves in response to change, the individual must accommodate new information. If the relevant constructs are impermeable, one or more of them may need to be abandoned. This may lead to the formation of subsystems which contain temporary inconsistencies.

(10) **Commonality corollary:**

"To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person."

It is possible for two people to be involved in the same events, but because they construe them differently, they will anticipate and behave differently as a consequence. However, if two people share a similar view of their successive interpretations, their behaviour may exhibit similar characteristics. Therefore it is similarity of current constructions of the experience, rather than the experience itself, which provides the basis for similarity of action.

(11) **Sociality corollary:**

"To the extent that one person construes the construction process of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person."

Participation in interpersonal social processes involves a certain degree of shared understanding, agreement and acceptance. If an individual can predict what others will do, he can if so desired, adjust to their behaviour. The ability to see the perspective of others' is an important aspect of social leadership.

## Appendix 2

### Comparison groups: statistics and definition

#### 1.1 Indirect comparison groups

##### 1.1.1 Age group membership:

Age group:	Respondents:	Percentage:
Under 30	08	06%
31-39	20	36%
40-49	16	29%
50-59	10	18%
60 or over	06	11%
Total:	55	100%

##### 1.1.2 Estimated socio-economic (SE) group membership:

SE group:	Respondents:	Percentage:
A	13	36%
B	14	39%
C1	06	17%
C2	02	06%
D	01	02%
Total:	36	100%

#### 2.1 Direct comparison groups

##### 2.1.1 Primary motives for taking an hotel short break:

- 1 To coincide with attending a pre-arranged event (12) (33%);
- 2 In response to the need for a break from family / domestic commitments / routine problems / employment related pressures (4) (11%);
- 3 In response to a desire to relax / recover in different / comfortable / surroundings (9) (25%);
- 4 In response to a desire to visit a particular town / region / hotel / somewhere new (6) (17%);
- 5 To compensate for a missed summer (main) holiday opportunity (2) (6%);
- 6 For the specific benefits derived from taking short breaks on a regular / seasonal basis (3) (8%).

##### 2.1.2 Classification of prior product experience:

[F] First Highlife Breaks experience (20) (56%)

[\*] Experienced one or more prior Highlife Breaks (16) (44%)

[1+2] Experienced hotel users

[3+4] Inexperienced hotel users

- 1 Very extensive prior hotel experience over a number of years and in a variety of different usage contexts and places, including overseas travel (6) (17%);
- 2 Substantial prior hotel experience, mainly in connection with regular hotel short breaks and/or business travel (15) (42%);

3 Limited hotel experience, mainly in connection with occasional short breaks taken over the last few years and/or infrequent business travel (13) (36%);

4 No prior experience of three or four star category rated hotel accommodation (2) (5%).

2.1.3 Classification of product involvement:

[H] High personal involvement (6) (17%) Characterised by extensive information search with special importance attached to selection criteria and expectations. Associated activities may include telephone calls to verify information and the consultation of intermediaries such as travel agency staff or friends with relevant hotel experience. The purchase decision is likely to be based on a detailed assessment of a wide range of information from a variety of different sources.

[M] Moderate personal involvement (13) (36%) Characterised by some evidence of systematic search, and selection criteria which may be derived from prior product experience. Search activities are focused on the collection and assessment of brochures. The purchase decision is likely to be based on a combination of information from external sources and knowledge gained from prior product experience.

[L] Low personal involvement (17) (47%) Characterised by little or no external information search, and reliance on product knowledge established from prior experience. Although brochures may be consulted during selection, the dominant factors affecting the purchase decision are prior experience and personal confidence arising from familiarity with the product field.

Appendix 3

Comparison groups: respondent classification data

RN:	AG:	SE:	PM:	PE:	PI:	I:	R:	KG:	M:	Ch6:	Ch7:
R01	3	A	1	1[F]	[M]	95	098	24	08	Y	Y
R02	2/3	C1	3	4[F]	[H]	72	081	19	08	Y	Y
R03	3	B	6	3[F]	[L]	60	088	14	05	Y	Y
R04	3	A	1	1[F]	[M]	58	058	18	06	Y	Y
R05	3	B	5	2[F]	[H]	78	093	18	04	Y	Y
R06	5(2)	C1	3	2[F]	[M]	31	030	08	08	N	N
R07	2(2)	B	5	3[F]	[H]	44	047	13	08	Y	N
R08	2(2)	A	2	2[*]	[L]	93	096	19	08	Y	Y
R09	3/4	A	6	2[F]	[M]	92	090	26	07	Y	Y
R10	3	A	4	3[*]	[M]	62	060	16	09	N	N
R11	2	A	1	2[F]	[L]	-	-	-	-	-	-
R12	2	C2	3	3[*]	[L]	70	090	14	04	N	Y
R13	4	A	2	2[*]	[M]	84	094	18	05	N	Y
R14	4	B	4	2[*]	[L]	84	079	20	10	N	N
R15	3	A	1	2[*]	[L]	84	079	17	07	Y	N
R16	4(2)	C1	3	3[F]	[M]	85	093	16	04	Y	Y
R17	2/3	B	3	2[F]	[H]	71	076	16	02	N	Y
R18	4	A	4	1[*]	[L]	93	098	21	02	Y	N
R19	4	A	4	1[F]	[H]	95	102	18	04	Y	Y
R20	4	C2	6	2[*]	[M]	71	075	15	05	N	Y
R21	2/3	B	2	2[F]	[L]	90	112	17	05	N	Y
R22	1(2)	C1	3	3[F]	[H]	68	071	14	04	Y	N
R23	5(3)	A	4	1[*]	[L]	90	098	19	07	N	Y
R24	2(2)	B	1	3[*]	[L]	83	081	20	08	Y	N
R25	3(2)	B	4	1[*]	[L]	72	072	20	06	Y	N
R26	2	B	1	3[F]	[M]	56	059	15	08	Y	Y
R27	2	B	2	3[F]	[L]	79	076	22	09	N	Y
R28	2(2)	B	1	2[*]	[L]	85	077	24	04	Y	N
R29	2(2)	C1	3	4[F]	[M]	68	064	17	08	N	N
R30	5	D	3	3[*]	[L]	36	043	08	08	N	Y
R31	2(2)	C1	3	3[F]	[M]	85	098	21	04	Y	N
R32	3(2)	B	1	3[F]	[M]	78	083	20	08	N	N
R33	2/3	A	1	2[*]	[L]	88	100	24	05	N	Y
R34	1	B	1	3[*]	[M]	92	105	20	04	Y	Y
R35	3	B	1	2[F]	[L]	75	091	21	09	N	Y
R36	4(2)	A	1	2[*]	[L]	51	053	20	10	N	N
Total:						2618	2810	632	191	-	-
Average:						75	080	18	100	49	51

Key to the respondent classification summary:

- RN:** Respondent number (01-36)
- AG:** Age group membership:  
1 (under 30)  
2 (31-39)  
3 (40-49)  
4 (50-59)  
5 (60 or over)
- SE:** Estimated socio-economic group membership (A-D)
- PM:** Primary purchase motive:  
1 (In conjunction with a pre-arranged event)  
2 (Need for a break from the domestic routine)  
3 (Desire to relax in comfortable surroundings)  
4 (Desire to visit a particular town/region/hotel)  
5 (To compensate for a missed summer holiday)  
6 (For specific benefits derived from a short break)
- PE:** Prior product experience:  
1 (Very extensive prior hotel experience)  
2 (Substantial prior hotel experience)  
3 (Limited prior hotel experience)  
4 (No prior experience of 3/4 star rated hotels)
- [F] First Highlife Breaks hotel short break  
[\*] Experienced one or more prior Highlife Breaks
- PI:** Profile of product involvement:  
[H] High involvement - extensive information search  
[M] Moderate involvement - focused information search  
[L] Low involvement - limited information search
- I:** Number of ideas entered into the cognitive model
- R:** Number of relationships entered into the cognitive model
- KG:** Number of key idea groups created in the cognitive model
- M:** Number of maps printed from the cognitive model
- Ch6/7:** Representation in chapters 6 and 7:  
Y (Maps from the model included in chapters 6 and/or 7)  
N (Maps from the model not included in chapters 6 and/or 7)

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