Exploring the motivation and personality traits of adventure travelers: A hierarchical model approach

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Received: 31/08/2011

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Date of defence: August 2010

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Citation: Schneider, P. (2012), Exploring the motivation and personality traits of adventure travelers: A hierarchical model approach. Doctoral dissertation summary. *European Journal of Tourism Research* 5(1), pp. 72-75

Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

The limited research explaining the relationship between personality and tourism behavior was the catalyst for the current study. The goal of the study was to examine the underlying psychological traits that contribute to adventure travel propensity (ATP) by identifying the motivation and personality schemas of adventure travelers. In addition, this research aimed to determine the usefulness of employing a Meta-Theoretic Model of Motivation and Personality (3M Model) as an organizing structure for understanding how personality traits impact behavior.

Objectives

The study was designed to determine the motivation-personality systems of adventure travelers. Building on existing tourist personality research and utilizing an integrated approach to motivation and personality, the 3M

Model, the objective was to address the following research questions:

1. Does a motivation-personality system of traits exist which is predictive of adventure travel propensity?
2. Does a motivation-personality system of traits exist which is predictive of soft and hard adventure travelers?
3. What are the trait antecedents of soft and hard adventure travelers?
4. Does the 3M Model of motivation and personality provide a useful framework for examining tourist behavior?

Methodology

Data were collected using a mail questionnaire across four geographical regions following the U.S. Census model. A random sample of subscribers from *National Geographic Adventure* magazine was drawn using sampling frames representing the US in four regions. Questionnaires were mailed in

October 2007 and used data collection strategies recommended by Dillman (2000). From 1,000 surveys, 339 were returned and completed for an overall response rate of 34%.

A multi-method approach was used to develop the survey instrument. The survey was developed based on a literature review of existing research related to adventure recreation and tourism, consumer behavior, and personality, then modified based upon input obtained from a panel interview with adventure industry leaders. The result was a questionnaire combining previous studies and theories in the consumer behavior and recreation and tourism literature along with key industry perspectives.

The overall statistical analysis included: descriptive statistics to analyze the demographic profile of the sample of adventure travelers; travel experience, intention, and pre- and post-travel behavior profile; descriptive statistics of the four personality trait levels; factor analysis to determine underlying factors of ATP; and hierarchical regressions to test the hypotheses. Guttman scaling procedure was also employed to categorize respondents into soft/hard categories as a context for understanding the demographic and travel behavior characteristics of the study sample.

Results

Results indicated significant differences exist between the hard adventure traveler (HAT) and soft adventure traveler (SAT) subgroups.

In all measures of ATP, the best regression models were often the "full model." For the ultimate destination experience measure of ATP, a combination of elemental, compound, and situational traits in the final hierarchical model accounted for a range of 28% to 40% of the variance. The trait indicators for all travelers were two elemental traits, need for arousal and physical/body needs (negative relationship); and two situational traits, interest in cultural experiences and fashion leadership. These accounted for 32% of the variance in ultimate destination experiences. In the case of HATs the same traits were predictive of ultimate destination experiences (need for arousal,

physical/body needs-negative relationship, and interest in cultural experiences), with the exception of fashion leadership. These accounted for 28% of the variance for HATs. For SATs, the elemental trait need for physical/body needs (negative relationship), and two situational traits, interest in cultural experiences and fashion leadership (negative relationship) accounted for 40% of the variance in the ATP measure ultimate destination experiences.

The final hierarchical model for the measure of ATP, tropical adventure experiences, accounted for a range of 25% to 37% of the variance explained. For all travelers 31% of the variance was explained, for HATs 25%, and for SATs 37% of the variance was explained for tropical adventure experiences. The elemental trait need for arousal, the compound trait altruism (negative relationship), and the situational trait interest in cultural experiences accounted for 31% of the variance in tropical adventure experiences for all travelers. For HATs, the same traits were significant along with agreeability and accounted for 25% of the variance in the measure of ATP, tropical adventure experience. In the case of SATs, tropical adventure experiences accounted for 37% of the variance explained with the elemental trait need for arousal and the situational trait interest in cultural being the trait indicators.

Finally, for the traditional outdoor adventure experience measure of ATP, a combination of elemental, compound, and situational traits in the final hierarchical model accounted for a range of 25% to 26% of the variance. In the case of all travelers the elemental trait, need for arousal, and the situational trait, interest in cultural experience, accounted for 26% of the variance. For the HAT group, need for arousal and cultural experience were significant as well as fashion leadership (negative relationship), which accounted for 25% of the variance. Results for the SAT group were not significant for the ATP measure, traditional outdoor adventure experiences.

Results for the ATP measure extreme activity experiences were least predictive. Results

indicated no variance explained for HAT and SAT subgroups; however 31% of the variance was explained for all travelers. Consistent with other measures of ATP, the elemental trait need for arousal and situational trait interest in cultural experiences were the trait indicators of extreme adventure experiences.

Theoretical conclusions

Results of this study indicated that the 3M Model provided a useful framework for examining tourist behavior (Mowen, 2003). Most studies examining personality as a predictor of leisure behavior have employed general personality inventories to measure individual differences, failing to provide a theoretical approach to identify leisure-specific personality differences to aid in understanding leisure behavior. The theoretical basis of the 3M Model addresses this shortcoming.

Additionally, the findings of the current study are robust, addressing criticism made of studies examining the relationship between leisure behavior and personality. The 3M Model presented a consistent measure of personality, provided definitional clarity in the variable operationalizations, and was based on theory for the inclusion of specific behaviors addressing concerns regarding the study of personality and leisure behavior.

Finally, the findings were consistent with the proposal that traits can be arranged into a four-level hierarchy. These results supported the use of a hierarchical approach for understanding the relationships among personality traits.

Practical application of the dissertation

Results of this study enhance knowledge and understanding of the relationship between personality and tourism behavior, providing a more effective means for segmenting the market. Additionally, the results will assist the adventure tourism industry in classifying tourists according to their personality traits giving marketing managers the ability to develop promotional themes linking the personality of their brand to that of the consumer, essentially linking the product

characteristics to consumer personality. In a more technical sense, the results allow for communications to be created which tap into the self-schema of the desired target market. The results will clearly contribute to business decisions related to product development, price, and distribution. Finally, the results will address many problems that result from research which lacks a theoretically based organizing structure.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of chapter one

Over a decade has passed since the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) investigated the topic of adventure travel experiences. Results in the *Adventure Travel Report* (1998) indicated one-half of all U.S. adults took an adventure vacation trip that included either soft adventure outdoor activities and/or hard adventure outdoor activities. Among the nearly 100 million adults who had not taken an adventure trip in the past five years, one-fourth indicated that they would be very or somewhat likely to do so in the next five years, suggesting additional growth of the adventure market. Although adventure travel has continued to be a growth market, research on the topic has remained stagnant.

Consumer trends such as increased interest in healthy lifestyles and concern for the environment and sustainability are reflected in tourism behavior and in particular, adventure tourism. These changes will have a positive impact on the adventure travel industry, suggesting further expansion. An understanding of how adventure travelers make their decisions to purchase or use tourism products allows adventure tourism businesses to optimise the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing activities.

Abstract of chapter two

The problem selected for this study was to investigate the relationship between personality and tourism behavior, specifically adventure travel behavior. To accomplish this, the literature related to personality and consumer behavior in a leisure and tourism context is reviewed. This review of literature is organized

around the following sections: 1. adventure tourism, 2. personality, 3. the theoretical framework employed to identify the motivation and personality systems of individuals, the 3M Model of motivation and personality, and 4. hypotheses development.

In addition, the background and theoretical information needed to understand personality and consumer behavior in a tourism context is described. The most important research and methods that have been conducted in this area and establishes this study as one link in a chain of research that advances knowledge in the field of consumer behavior and leisure and tourism. Justification for the constructs was explained in relation to personality and adventure tourist behavior and the study's proposed model and hypotheses were discussed.

Abstract of chapter three

The philosophical stance of the researcher is outlined in this section, providing a briefing on the methodological choices underpinning the current study. In developing a research proposal, considerable effort should be exerted in determining which methodologies and methods will be employed (Crotty, 2003).

This study drew on the methods of previous tourism and consumer behavior research and chose to engage in survey research, employing a quantitative method of statistical analysis. The following sections discuss the research method used to obtain and analyze information for this study. First, the population and sample are described. Next, the data collection techniques and study instrument, non-respondent survey, and reliability tests are described. Finally, the statistical tests used for data analysis are explained including the scale development.

Abstract of chapter four

The discussion of survey results, data analyses, and hypothesis testing are presented in Chapter IV. The overall statistical analysis included: (1) demographic profile of the sample; (2) travel experience profile; (3) travel intentions profile; (4) pre- and post-travel behavior profile; (5) descriptive statistics of the four personality trait levels; (6) factor analysis to determine underlying factors of the surface trait ATP; and (7) hierarchical regressions to test the hypotheses.

The study sought to extend past research on consumer behavior and personality in the context of adventure tourism. The 3M Model was a theoretical framework used to examine the personality traits of adventure travelers, and the key results of the study are discussed.

Abstract of chapter five

Chapter V presents a summary of results, conclusions, a discussion of key findings, and implications and limitations of study findings, as well as recommendations for future traveler personality research.

The focus of this study was to explore the psychological forces that motivate and influence travel-related behavior (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). The 3M Model was the organizational structure employed in an effort to understanding how personality traits impact behavior. Integrating control theory, evolutionary psychology principles, and elements of hierarchical trait theories the 3M Model provides a holistic view of how personality interacts with situations to influence feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. The study extended the model which has been utilized to examine healthy diet lifestyles, compulsive buying, bargaining proneness, sports participation, modest living, and now adventure travel.