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Research Paper

Paddler market segments: Expanding experience use history segmentation

Carol S. Kline^{a,*}, Jerusha B. Greenwood^b, Jason Swanson^c, David Cárdenas^d^a *Recreation and Leisure Studies, Center for Sustainable Tourism, East Carolina University, Rivers Building West 203, Greenville, NC 27858, USA*^b *Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration, 1 Grand Avenue, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407, USA*^c *Hospitality Management and Tourism Program, University of Kentucky, 120 Erikson Hall, Lexington, KY 40506, USA*^d *School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management, Center of Economic Excellence (CoEE) and Tourism and Economic Development, University of South Carolina, Coliseum Room 1011, Columbia, SC 29208, USA*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the potential of expanding *experience use history (EUH)* by differentiating paddlers who are apt to travel away from their home to paddle. Using the Recreational and Travel Use History (RTUH) framework, five market segments were developed using data from the 2008 North Carolina Paddle Tourism Study: Enthusiast Travelers, Recreational Travelers, Recreational Hobbyist, Occasionals, and Novices. A new scale was tested to identify what non-paddling experiences paddlers seek on a paddling trip and what issues most concern them on their trip. Four experience factors were identified: *Nature, Local Culture, Local Food, and Corporate Chains*. Three issue factors were identified: *General Safety, Trail Attributes, and Guide/Outfitter* concerns. This study expands on the destination management literature by refining the EUH construct and introducing a new scale to measure paddlers' trip concerns and desired experiences.

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1. Introduction

Recreation trails are powerful promoters of physical activity in communities and are increasingly being heralded for an array of benefits, ranging from stress reduction and lessened risk of chronic diseases to increased quality-of-life and lower obesity (Active Living Research, 2011). Paddle trails, specifically, not only provide health and recreation benefits to the users (Stein, Denny, & Pennisi, 2003), but also economic and social benefits for communities (Siderelis & Moore, 2006). Understanding the characteristics of individual users by employing market segmentation techniques helps managers optimize benefits for users and can also add value to destinations (Andereck & Caldwell, 1994). Visitor management practices heavily rely on understanding tourist/consumer preferences and experiences in making a destination both more competitive and sustainable. It is for this reason that the current study explores the potential of expanding *experience use history (EUH)* through investigating paddlers who travel away from their home to paddle.

Paddling sports, which include canoeing, kayaking, rowing, and rafting, are an increasingly popular form of recreation for many Americans. Between 2005 and 2009, approximately 20 percent of

Americans participated in some form of non-motorized boating' (Cordell, 2012, p. 65). According to Cordell (2012), 22.8 million people canoed in the United States between 2005 and 2008, an increase of 18.2% over the 1999–2001 time period. Projections based on the NSRE suggest the number of adults participating in paddling sports will increase to more than 60 million by 2060 (Bowker & Askew, 2012). According to the NC Outdoor Recreation Plan (2008), 8% of the NC population use personal watercraft as a form of outdoor recreation. Kayaking has growing rapidly (260%+) in the last 10 years. However, there is little information that differentiates paddlers by psychographics, skill level, trip characteristics, party composition, information sources, trip attributes, concerns, or spending on trips.

Experience use history (EUH) has been used to segment users of a specific recreation activity into distinct categories and has been extensively tested (Draper, Woosnam, & Norman, 2011; Hammitt, Backlund, & Bixler, 2004; Petrick, Backman, Bixler, & Norman, 2001; Schreyer, Lima, & Williams, 1984). The data in this study could be analyzed using any of several other techniques. For example, cluster analysis as employed by McIntyre and Pigram (1992, p. 14) was used to differentiate subgroups of campers based on their recreation involvement and could be a useful analytical tool if it was employed to better account for the 'multidimensionality of the concept' of recreation specialization. Kyle, Graefe, Manning, and Bacon (2004) used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in a similar study examining the experience of hikers. Upon finding limited support for their

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 919 306 1705; fax: +1 919 787 9830.

E-mail addresses: klinec@ecu.edu, klinec@me.com (C.S. Kline).

hypotheses using SEM, the authors encouraged further explorations into recreation involvement that would lead to a better understanding of leisure behavior related to involvement (Kyle et al., 2004). While other techniques – such as cluster analysis or SEM – are useful for performing similar analyses, we believe that the approach taken in this paper is appropriate for two reasons.

First, the paper expands on the EUH by demonstrating how paddlers can be segmented not only across experience variables, but also across travel-related variables to better understand the multi-dimensionality of recreation behavior. Second, expansion of EUH opens the door for further testing of a valuable market segmentation model. Finally, the purpose of this research is not to explore factors related to EUH through the lens of recreation specialization (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Hammitt, Knauf, & Noe, 1989) or recreational involvement (Kyle, Kerstetter, & Guadagnolo, 2002), but rather to use EUH to understand behaviors related to travel patterns. While it is useful to know the relationship of recreation specialization and recreation involvement with EUH, there are many subtleties and nuances that exist in people's travel preferences which specialization and involvement may not address. This study explores a new modification of EUH that may prove useful in understanding the underlying dynamics influencing travel choices and behaviors. Additionally, this study examines the differences between five paddler segments within a new construct of recreational and travel use history (RTUH). Natural resource managers, tourism planners and destination marketers, as well as any manager tasked with marketing resources for water based-recreation will find this approach beneficial. Specifically, the research questions examined in this study are the following:

1. Do paddlers with varying Recreation and Tourism Use History (RTUH) differ in socio-demographic characteristics?
2. Do paddlers with varying RTUH differ in their trip characteristics (boat ownership, travel party composition, region of North Carolina, typical distance, lodging preferences, sources, spending)?
3. Do paddlers with varying RTUH differ in their trip experience preferences?
4. Do paddlers with varying RTUH differ in their trip concerns?
5. Do paddlers with varying RTUH differ in their general recreational activity preferences?

2. Literature review

Since its introduction by Schreyer et al. (1984), EUH has been developed into a useful tool to categorize recreational users in consideration of differences in their previous experience. However, EUH is not without limitations when applied to recreational tourism as the framework does not include variables related to travel. Expanding on experience use history requires understanding not only recreation segmentation and EUH, but also the concepts incorporated into the new model. To expand on EUH, thus creating a visitor management tool for destination managers, this research incorporates paddler and paddling trip characteristics, trip experience preferences, and trip concerns. Relevant literature covering recreation segmentation, EUH, and the newly incorporated concepts are reviewed here.

2.1. Recreation segmentation

Segmenting a market, or identifying different wants, needs, and characteristics of consumers, is important because it can result in competitive advantages for a business, organization and/or destination (Sausen, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2005; Smith, 1956).

Yankelovich and Meer (2006) propose a market segmentation strategy that focuses on the benefits of the product or service that matter most to consumers. In terms of paddling, consumer benefits would include learning about a local area, experiencing nature, or finding a safe yet enjoyable adventure. This approach differs from many market segmentation activities based solely on customer demographic or psychographic variables. Without considering the various types of paddlers, and by assuming preferences among all segments of paddlers are homogenous, policy makers and recreation managers misjudge the allocation of recreation resources (Hynes, Hanley, & Garvey, 2007).

Market segmentation is not a new concept in recreation and tourism. Segmentation of nature-based tourists, cultural/heritage tourist, ecotourism markets, and travelers based on their environmental values has been addressed (Blamey & Braithwaite, 1997; Huh, Uysal, & McCleary, 2006; Nyaupane & Graefe, 2008; Zografos & Allcroft, 2007). Other scholars have conducted research on the similarities of individuals involved in various recreation activities and sports. Kyle et al. (2004) found hikers share similar characteristics with fishermen, hunters, and other outdoor recreationists in terms of important attributes of the place where they experience their leisure activities. According to Chang and Gibson (2011), paddlers who participate in the sport while traveling also enjoy bicycling, hiking, camping and diving activities. In general, those who engage in active recreation interests typically enjoy multiple active recreation pursuits and share commonalities with people who prefer the same. This appears to be true for those recreating in their home areas and also when participating in recreation activities while traveling.

Specific to paddlers, Lee, Graefe, and Li (2007) surveyed a sample of more than 600 canoeists from 11 paddling organizations to identify motivations and preferences based on paddlers' gender and skill levels. The authors presented two important findings related to paddler segmentation. First, paddlers with more experience were less concerned about the site attributes (e.g., restrooms, campsites, picnic tables, boat launches) and more concerned about the challenge of the paddling experience. Second, gender played a role in motivations and attitudes toward site attributes. For example, men were more interested in visiting new sites, while women were more interested in relaxation and the social attributes of the site.

Grossman, Klaphake, and Meyerhoff (2004) surveyed users of a trail system in a German National Park to determine paddlers' perception of congestion. One of the limitations listed in the Grossman et al. paper was the sample size of 285 paddlers. While a larger sample size would enable more in-depth analysis of various user groups, the authors were able to make valuable conclusions concerning congestion. Negative perceptions of crowding are more likely to be exhibited by: (1) paddlers who take longer paddling trips, (2) paddlers who travel in larger groups, and (3) paddlers who own canoes.

2.2. Experience use history

The use of tourist/consumer experiences is becoming more prevalent in the destination marketing and management literature (Lugosi & Walls, 2013). Ritchie and Hudson (2009) recently categorised tourist/consumer research in to six main streams. Stream 3, 'research related to the methodologies for understanding the tourism experience' (p. 123), which is the focus of this research, was rated as the most difficult and under researched. Experience use history (EUH) is a method used to segment markets based on past behaviors and experiences to assist destinations in marketing and planning for future visitors (Hammitt, Kyle, & Oh, 2009; Schreyer et al., 1984). The premise of EUH is that prior knowledge and understanding of a place or event is a key

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