

The role of motivation in visitor satisfaction: Empirical evidence in rural tourism

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ABSTRACT

Motivation and satisfaction are two concepts widely studied in tourism literature; the relevance of these constructs being derived from their impact on tourist behaviour. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between motivation and visitor satisfaction. A survey questionnaire was distributed to visitors at a rural destination in Spain and the data analysed by ANOVA, factor and cluster analyses. The results verified our hypothesis that motivation is a determinant of the visit assessment criteria and, as a direct consequence, of the level of satisfaction (specific factors) of the visitor. However, this investigation also detected the existence of certain elements, which are independent of the reasons that motivated the journey (general factors), but which affect general satisfaction. Based on our findings, implications for management and marketing are presented.

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1. Introduction

Tourism can be considered, in one of its many aspects, as a socio-psychological experience (Castaño, 2005; Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991; Rubio, 2003; Wacker, 1996). Although factors such as socio-demographic characteristics affect tourist behaviour, other factors related to the customer's subjective experience are strongly emerging to explain this complex process. In this context, motivation and satisfaction are two essential elements that determine individual behaviour in the field of tourism.

A review of previous literature on tourism motivation reveals that people travel because they are “pushed” into travelling by internal reasons or factors, or because they are “pulled” by destination attributes (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977, 1981; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). Push factors are more related to internal or emotional aspects, such as the desire for escape, rest and relaxation, adventure, or social interaction. Pull factors are linked to external, situational, or cognitive aspects, of which, attributes of the chosen destination, leisure infrastructure and cultural or natural features are examples. Nevertheless, these destination attributes may reinforce push motivations (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Thus, motivation has become a meta-concept that functions as a trigger for travel behaviour and determines different aspects of tourist activity, in respect of (i) the reasons for travelling or *why*, (ii) the specific destination or *where*, (iii) and the results obtained or overall *satisfaction* with the trip (Castaño, Moreno, García, & Crego, 2003).

The last element of the cycle is key in the field of tourism. Its relevance lies in the role it plays in repetitive purchase or service patterns, i.e. in the loyalty towards a product, brand or destination (Barsky & Nash, 2002; García & Gil, 2005; Yoon & Uysal, 2005); in the favourable criticism it generates and therefore, the positive marketing communicated by word of mouth (Oh, 1999; Oppermann, 2000; Rodríguez del Bosque, San Martín, & Collado, 2006); or in the increase of company benefits (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehman, 1994).

The relationship between motivation and satisfaction has already been studied in tourism research from different perspectives and working methodologies (see, for example, Ibrahim & Gill, 2005; Laguna & Palacios, 2009; Oliver, 1980; Severt, Wang, Chen, & Breiter, 2007), and applied studies have been carried out for different sectors of the market (Devesa & Palacios, 2005, 2006; García & Gil, 2005; Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004; Lopes, 2006; Qu & Ping, 1999; Rodríguez del Bosque et al., 2006, among others). Román, Recio, and Martín (2000) point out that the current demand trend towards greater segmentation can be mostly explained because of the diversification of visitor motivation. Therefore, diversification is a very valuable element when directing the expansion of emerging

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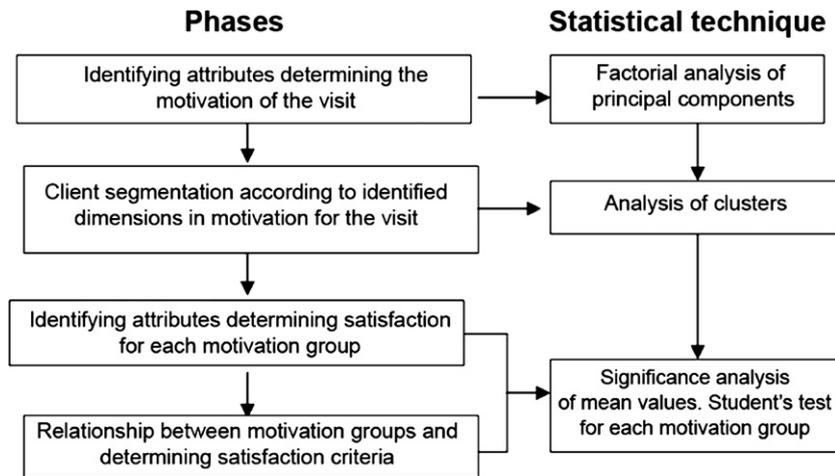


Fig. 1. Research structure and methodology.

tourism products such as rural tourism. Moreover, these authors affirm that an offer exclusively based on countryside and fresh air is insufficient to be considered as a determining factor for a satisfactory experience of a visit.

The object of this research is to analyse the relation existing between motivation and satisfaction obtained by visitors in the rural tourism sector. More specifically, the study examines the influence of motivation — as trigger factor and antecedent for tourism behaviour — on the satisfaction obtained by the visitor to the destination. We maintain that individuals visiting a particular tourist destination, irrespective of the reason, will obtain a higher or lower satisfaction level depending on their evaluation of those aspects of their visit or destination which are more closely related to their motivation for travel.

2. Methodology

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, data collected in a survey designed for visitors to a rural tourism destination in Spain has been used. Rural tourism in this area, the Province of Segovia (situated in the central region of the country), can be considered a reliable, representative sample of rural tourism in Spain, which

currently is a growing segment of the market and a very valuable resource for the inner provinces.

Interviews were carried out in a range of places, at various times of day and at different periods (between April and October, 2004) and 316 valid responses were obtained. The sample was balanced in terms of sex, with a slight predominance of men (52%); a mean age around 45–49 years; a high proportion with university degrees and in employment. There were no statistically significant differences arising from the different periods when the survey was collected. All significant variables in the research allow us to consider the different sub-sets as a unique tourist sample with a sample error of $\pm 5.49\%$ for a significance level of 95%.

The research structure and the analysis methodology used are summarized in Fig. 1.

Two different scales were used: a motivation scale and a satisfaction scale. The motivation scale (a 10-point Likert-scale) included 17 items regarding push and pull factors. Their identification was determined in accordance with our literature review, including and adapting some items in order to complete a full adaptation of the population and destination attributes studied. As regards the satisfaction scale, we assumed the concept of multidimensionality and, therefore, the idea that the evaluation made by

Table 1
Cluster definition by motivation variables.

Cluster (cluster size)	Cluster name	Motivating variables with significant differences
A (129 individuals)	Visitor looking for tranquillity, rest and contact with nature.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Looking for tranquillity ✓ Non-expensive routine escape ✓ Rest ✓ Knowing new places ✓ Contact with nature ✓ Proximity
B (69 individuals)	Cultural visitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Monuments sightseeing ✓ Cultural motivation ✓ Knowing new places
C (40 individuals)	Proximity, gastronomic and nature visitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Working reasons ✓ Gastronomic reasons ✓ Proximity ✓ Visiting natural parks ✓ Practising sports ✓ Contact with nature
D (50 individuals)	Return tourist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Visiting friends ✓ Owning a second residence ✓ Local festivities ✓ Rest

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