Travel Process of the Recreational Sport of Cycling in Silk Road

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Abstract

Recently, cycling adventure travel trips have experienced significant growth and development. Thus, travel motivations and perceived value have been widely investigated. However, few studies have investigated cycling adventure travel. Therefore, in this study we investigated the travel motivations and perceived value of bicycle travelers. For this study, we recruited six bicycle travelers who had cycled the Silk Road in China and conducted in-depth interviews to provide qualitative research. Then, we comprehensively analyzed and discussed the data and related literature. The results indicated that the interviewees' motivations for participating in cycling grand tour travel events can be classified into the following three categories: exploration/curiosity, deep interaction, and to challenge oneself. Additionally, the perceived values can be classified into the following three categories: knowledge value, social value, and emotional value. Based on the research results, we proposed suggestions for future studies.

Key words: Cycling grand tours, Silk Road travel, motivations, perceived value

1.   Introduction

Cycling tours are a type of travel that combines sports tourism and independent travel. Recently, with mass media promotions, numerous people have participated in cycling travel, developing cycling travel into a type of sports tourism. In the past 10 years, the international travel types available have changed continuously. In the mid-1960s, the development of public tourism aroused people's unique travel desires and demands and encouraged them to pursue unique and meaningful travel experiences. This exploration resulted in the emergence of backpacking, independent travel, and various adventure travel types (Hall & Weiler, 1992). Cycling travel differs from traditional tourism; instead, it is more similar to adventure travel and sports tourism, but containing a wide variety of personal and potential of the market segment, reflecting the new values "special interest tourism," stressed the "heterogeneous nature " with   the general mass tourism (Ritchie, Tkaczynski, & Faulks, 2010; Trauer, 2006). Cycling travel is a niche travel market (Faulks, Ritchie, & Fluker, 2007; Ritchie, 1998; Ritchie, et al., 2010) that has grown the most rapidly among the numerous outdoor travel markets (Buckley, 2007; Cater, 2005). In the U.S., nearly half the adults have participated in one adventure travel type (Tsui, 2000). In Europe, nearly a quarter of Europeans have participated in tour packages that include adventure travel components (Keeling, 2003). In Australia, the domestic cycle tourism market was estimated to spend approximately A\$213 million per annum and traveled on average for 16 days (Faulks et al., 2007).Thus, cycling adventure travel market is expected to grow significantly and continuously in the future. However, research has concentrated on profiling and describing cycle tourists, with a particular focus on cycling route users. It is recently that research has been conducted into the motivations and destination preferences of bicycle tourists more generally and more explanatory or analytical techniques have been employed using theory from the leisure, recreation, and tourism field (Ritchie, et al., 2010).

Studies on cycling travel can be investigated from multiple perspectives. The most basic research perspective is social psychology, where travel motivations and perceived value are considered the two basic elements that influence travel behavior.   Scholars researching recreational sports and sports tourism have investigated participation motives (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1994; Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003; McIntyre & Pigram, 1992; McIntyre, 1991; Ritchie, et al., 2010). Motives are an essential factor that drives behavior and stimulates demand, driving tourists to take action to satisfy their demands (Iso-Ahola, 1982; Fodness, 1994; Park, Reisinger, & Park, 2009; Park & Yoon, 2009). The concept of travel motives originated from push-pull factors. Push motives refer to personal internal energy that increases people's travel desires, whereas pull motives refer to external influence that spark the initial desire to engage in travel (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Park & Yoon, 2009; Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele, & Beamount, 2009; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Yuan & McDonald, 1990). Ritzer (1993) maintained that travel is a type of escape. Fodness (1994) contended that motives drive all behavior. Madrigal (1995) adopted the perspective of personal values and stated that independent travelers primarily value travel that is internally

oriented, enables self-realization, and offers a sense of achievement. Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006) reported that, as well as satisfying the basic demand for relaxation and stimulation, the travel motivations of independent travelers emphasize a higher level of self-development, respect, and self-realization demand motivations. Pearce and Lee (2005) employed Maslow's hierarchy of needs to develop a career model for travel, and the results indicated that the fundamental travel motives were novelty, escape, relaxation, and friendship, followed by the internally-oriented motives of self-realization and the externally-oriented motives of experiencing nature and accepted involvement. The most common and less essential travel motives, as identified by Pearce and Lee (2005), were aloneness, nostalgia, and social status.

Rithie, et al.(2010) Study confirms a number of significant differences were found on travel motivations, travel behavior, and behavioral intentions, as well as socio demographics and cycling behavior. It is as suggested by Fodness (1994), because additional knowledge of travel motives was necessary to enable people and travel industry operators to select and design appropriate travel products and plans that satisfy the demands of travelers. Bicycle travelers regard travel as an adventure and challenge, and they typically travel to remote and extreme places to satisfy their demand for emotional thrills, risks, challenges, excitement, and novelty (Zuckerman, 1994; Crompton, 1979). Therefore, investigating the participation motives of bicycle travelers will provide a significant contribution to existing literature and recreational sports theories.

Regarding perceived values, Holbrook (1999) indicated that values are the result of evaluations and judgments. People make value judgments based on certain standards and principles. A model of perceived values was first proposed by Monroe and Krishnan (1985), who believed that when the perceived quality for consumers exceeds the perceived sacrifice, consumers have a positive perception of the value of products and services, which positively influences their repurchase willingness. Grewal, Monroe, and Krishnan (1998) divided perceived values into the following two sections: acquisition values and transaction values. Acquisition values are obtained from acquiring products or services, whereas transaction values refer to the mental satisfaction resulting from a transaction.

Regarding the perceived value of travel, previous studies have indicated that the interaction between travelers and the environment during the travel process (i.e., the interaction with various people, events, places, and things) enables travelers to better understand themselves and others (Wearing & Neil, 2000). Brown and Lehto (2005) maintained that the primary benefits of travel are satisfaction with travel experiences, self-fulfillment, interaction with travel destinations, pleasant memories and experiences, self-growth, and enhanced family relationships.

Although numerous scholars have emphasized the importance of perceived value, no recognized definition of perceived values has been established. Because of the complexity of perceived values, perceived values cannot be considered the transaction results of quality and sacrifice and should be

evaluated on multiple dimensions (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Woodruff,1997; Zeithaml, 1988). By investigating the perceived values of bicycle travelers, we can better understand the in-depth learning, gains, and experiences of bicycle travelers during the travel process and whether their perceived values affect their subsequent behavioral intentions (Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee, Yoon, & Lee, 2007; Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000; Petrick & Backman, 2002). Perceived values are a function and presentation of consumers' judgments of products and processes. Numerous travel studies have indicated that the impressions that travelers retains of a destination significantly affect their future behavior intentions. Travelers are likely to select similar travel types or revisit the same places in an attempt to acquire a similar travel experience (Al-Sabbahy, Ekincl, & Riley, 2004; Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim, Holland, & Han, 2013; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005; Petrick, 2002). Therefore, identifying the perceived values of bicycle travelers will enable bicycle travelers to understand and select appropriate cycling travel opportunities, and enable researchers to better understand the effects that cycling travel has on travelers' behavioral intentions.

The majority of research currently available in the area of bicycle tourism primarily relates to the preferred destination attributes of bicycle tourists, or the needs and motivations of independent cycle tourists of bicycle tourism (Chang & Chang, 2003; Downward & Lumsdon, 2001; Lumsdon, 2000; Ritchie, 1998; Ritchie, et al., 2010). However, previous studies on the participation motives and perceived values of cycling travel have not identified the comprehensive implications and meanings of cycling travel. Therefore, for this study, we selected bicycle travelers who had cycled the Silk Road in China as the research targets to conduct quantitative research by describing, analyzing, and discussing the data. We hope to understand the participation motives and perceived values of bicycle travelers and the related behavioral issues of other cycling travel types to examine their travel experiences from the perspective of recreational sports sociology. The results of this study can provide an alternative perspective for contemporary recreational sports and sports tourism.

2. Research Methods

For this study, we employed the in-depth interview method. Qualitative research interviews offer an abundance of opinions that can be used to understand the construction of experiences, memory guidance, and the various methods of expression used by interviewees during this process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In-depth interviews are interactive and explore the objective truths that existed before the interview, continuously providing new meanings and impressions during the interaction process (Mishler, 1991).

We designed the interview outlines based on the research purposes. The interview outlines comprised four main aspects, that is, the interviewees' basic information, travel motives, travel process and experience, and their reflections of cycling travel. We used a semi-structured interview style to communicate and interview the participants. Based on the research framework and the interview outlines adopted for this study,

we adjusted the order of the interview outlines to encourage the interviewees to share their motives of cycling travel, their experiences of interacting with local people and the environments during the travel process, and their physical and mental effects or changes after participating in cycling travel.

Regarding the selection of research participants, Patton (1990) stated that for qualitative research sampling, "either a few or only one sample can be employed (n = 1); however, the sample must be obtained using in-depth purposive sampling." Samples for qualitative studies must provide in-depth and extensive data. Therefore, for this study, we selected the samples using purposive sampling methods. We referenced the recommendations of the Merida Company, searched on the Internet, and used the snowball sampling method to recruit appropriate research participants. The interviews were conducted in March 2012, and the duration of the interview for each interviewee was approximately 2 h. The interview locations were determined based on the convenience of the interviewees. The collected interviewee data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Interviewee data

Code	Gender	Age	Occupation	Time of Silk Road travel	Other cycling travel experiences
A	M	51	Coffee-shop owner	1998, 2009	Mount Everest, Tibet, and other places throughout the world
B	M	49	Piano teacher	2011	Taiwan
C	M	45	Expedition guide	2001	Tibet and Siberia
D	M	42	Sales manager at an insurance company	2008	Taiwan
E	M	32	Computer engineer	2007	Taiwan and France
F	M	29	Discipline director at a junior high school	2011	Taiwan

The most commonly assessed aspects of qualitative research are reliability and validity. The concepts of reliability and validity originated from quantitative research. Therefore, the objectiveness and credibility of measurement tools provide significant assessment indicators. For this study, we employed in-depth interview methods to investigate the interviewees' experiences and feelings and then organized the interview context. Regarding the reliability of the data, when various interviewees had expressed similar concepts, these concepts were used as examples for other interviewees, enabling the interviewees to interact with each other through the researcher's guidance. The interviewees could better understand the questions using this method.

Regarding the research validity, we used the interviewee responses, the researcher's actual participations, and observation of the interview process in combination with the researcher's reflective observation to achieve the purpose of triangulation exam.

3.   Results and Discussion

Before travelers depart for their journey, the question they are most commonly asked is "why cycling travel?" People tend to question the motives and meanings of cycling travel. Furthermore, during the travel process, numerous travelers have asked themselves "why do I want to participate in cycling travel?" Several possible motivations for cycling travel exist because cycling travel activities involve complicated decision-making behavior that can be influenced by environmental and personal factors. Individuals also have different considerations. Some bicycle travelers participate in cycling travel activities to relax and release stress, whereas others hope to gain knowledge and skills. By participating in cycling travel activities, a number of bicycle travelers acquire self-esteem, satisfaction, and a sense of achievement. Based on the analytical results of the in-depth interviews, we classified the motives of cycling travel into the following three categories, exploration/curiosity, deep interaction, and as a personal challenge.

3.1 Exploration/curiosity

People who choose to travel may wish to visit a certain location or have a specific experience that they have heard about previously. People not only travel for specific items or to certain places, but the experiences of different cultures, locations, and environments also attract people to travel to unfamiliar environments.

> *Unlike tour packages, cycling travel enables me to deeply explore local customs and traditions. I enjoy traveling to unusual places to see new things. (A1)*

> *Cycling travel on the Silk Road was the first time I had experienced the different lifestyle of China. (D1)*

Data from the interviews indicated that the motives for cycling travel were to explore and experience various environments and societies. Poon (1993) maintained that people showed their preferences when traveling, and these preferences reflect their values, including their preferences for experiencing new things, seeing unexpected things, learning about new cultures, and expanding their perceptions when traveling.

3.2   Extensive interaction

Most travelers expect to experience and interact with the local environment, people, scenes, history, geography, and cultures.

To travel is to interact with local people. We chat with them to understand their lives. Otherwise, it is meaningless! (B1)

When we cycled the Silk Road, we truly experienced the history, geography, and culture of the Silk Road. (F1)

Urry (2001) contended that tourists focus on the uniqueness of tourist attractions. The meaning constructed by unique experiences can enhance travelers' sensory travel experiences. The conclusion by Urry (2001) agrees with that reported by Maoz (2007), that is, the primary motivations of travel are to experience local lifestyles, see local cultures, and meet local people.

3.3   To challenge oneself

Unlike tour packages, cycling travel is difficult. During cycling travel, travelers experience diverse challenges and self-dialogue.

This Silk Road travel must be not easy, particularly for my physical abilities. However, I believe I can do it, and I want to visit the Silk Road to see the desert. (C1)

Different road sections and conditions challenge my physical abilities, but I urge myself to learn something. Each time when I set out, I told myself to improve my competitiveness. (E1)

The results of the interviews agreed with that reported by Madrigal (1995), that is, independent travelers emphasize internally oriented self-realization and a sense of achievement the most. Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006) contended that in addition to relaxing and pursuing stimulation, independent travelers highlight greater self-development, respect, and self-realization demand motives.

Regarding the perceived values of cycling travel, we classified the perceived values of grand cycling tour travel into the following three types, knowledge value, social value, and emotional value.

3.4   Knowledge value

Williams and Soutar (2000) contended that knowledge value refers to the consumption attitude of consumers to purse new things, experiences, and knowledge. Knowledge value was the first perceived value of cycling travel to be identified.

I have participated in numerous cycling tours. Since last year, I have organized experience activities and invited office workers and students to experience the Silk Road. I can still learn new things from each tour. (A2)

There is an old saying in China that is "Reading 10,000 books cannot equal travelling 10,000 miles." When I visited the Silk Road, I learned numerous things. (D2)

The results of the interviews agreed with that reported by Richards and Wilson (2004), that is, independent travel offers bicycle travelers freedom and opportunities to interact with different societies. Additionally, during the cycling travel process, travelers can achieve self-growth, self-learning, and improved confidence.

3.5   Social value

Regarding social interaction, the interviewees in this study believed that grand cycling tours facilitated interaction with their relatives and friends, providing social value.

After returning to Taiwan, numerous friends visited me to share experiences. Everyone was interested and asked me numerous questions. I am really happy. (D2)

I can give a speech in your school! I like to give speeches anywhere to share my experiences and make friends! (C2)

Based on the interviewees' responses, the knowledge and experiences obtained during the travel process enables travelers to better understand themselves and others (Wearing & Neil, 2000). Additionally, the knowledge and experience obtained can provide pleasant memories, experiences, and self-growth and enhance relationships with family and friends (Brown & Lehto, 2005).

3.6   Emotional value

The characteristics of the pursuit that bicycle travelers are after represent their emotional values.

> *Once I was settled, I could consider numerous things. Through increasingly intense experiences, I understood things that I did not realize before. (E2)*

> *After seeing the magnificence of nature, I realized how small I am. I opened my mind to see how large and beautiful the world is. (B2)*

The responses of the interviewees were consistent with the results reported by Babin, Darden, and Griffin (1994), that is, internal value is constructed by the joy and pleasure obtained during the travel process, rather than the completion of the mission. Maoz (2007) found that travelers redefine themselves based on their personal experiences, not social constraints, to achieve personal recognition.

4.   Conclusions and Suggestions

Bicycle tourism is a growing niche tourism market which has potential economic, social, and environmental outcomes for individual participants and host communities (Ritchie, et al., 2010).However, there has been a lack of research conducted on the motivations of cycle tourists, their perceived value. Therefore, in this study, we explored the participation motives and perceived value that bicycle travelers have regarding cycling travel, and referenced the interpretation and analysis of related academic studies to identify alternative research directions for contemporary multiple recreational sports. Through research analysis and interpretation, we identified the primary participation motives for cycling the Silk Road, namely, exploration/curiosity, deep interaction, and as a personal challenge. Perceived values can be classified into the following three categories: knowledge value, social value, and emotional value. We found that cycling travel enables travelers to experience various cultures and overcome the social limitations of their everyday life. Additionally, cycling travel is a reflective endeavor that enables bicycle travelers to pursue self-growth and self-challenge. De Certeau and Massumi (1986) described the process of cycling travel as being circular, where travelers cycle and return to the starting point continually. Each terminal can become the starting point of the next journey. Therefore, in future cycling travel studies, scholars should conduct various qualitative and quantitative investigations of diverse topics to understand the implications and significance cycling travel.

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