Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management 29 (2016) 88–98

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management

journal homepage: http://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-hospitality-and-tourism-management

The impact of perceived crowding on customer satisfaction

Anita Zehrer*, Frieda Raich

MCI Management Center Innsbruck, Austria

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 5 August 2015
Accepted 21 June 2016

Keywords:
Customer satisfaction
Coping behavior
Perceived crowding
Outdoor recreation

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to develop and test an explanatory model of how perceived crowding and coping behavior impacts upon customer satisfaction. The paper contributes to the service management literature by; 1) identifying key factors impacting crowding perception in a winter sport outdoor setting; 2) highlighting its influence on customer satisfaction; and 3) advocating the need for winter destination managers to overcome perceived crowding.
Design/methodology/approach: The paper applied a quantitative methodology to explore the relationship between customer demographics, coping mechanisms and customer satisfaction. This data is utilized to highlight management issues to overcome perceived crowding.
Findings: The theoretically developed and empirically tested model proves that perceived crowding in winter sport settings is influenced by a number of different factors, such as a customer's demography. Perceived crowding leads to coping behavior that in turn increases the crowding perception of affected people. Perceived crowding and coping behavior both negatively influence customer satisfaction in a winter outdoor setting.
Research limitations/implications: The most significant limitation of the paper are the non-random sampling approach, the rather small sample size, the selected factors in the presented model, as well as the nature of the services (outdoor experiences) explored in this paper.
Originality/value: The paper is the first to explore the constructs of crowding, coping behavior and visitor satisfaction for a winter sports outdoor setting. Results show that crowding is an important construct for service sector managers to recognize and manage in order to overcome an increase in dissatisfied visitors.

© 2016 The Authors.

1. Introduction

Perceived crowding is the subjective evaluation of density levels in a specific surrounding (Shelby & Heberlein, 1984) and is ususally defined as a negative assessment of visitor density within a given area (Graefe, Vaske, & Kuss, 1984). Loo's (1974) and Shelby's (1980) early studies show that an increase in the amount of encounters influences peoples' perceptions, and in turns their behavior. Research suggests that crowding issues arise when a large number of people are gathered together, and the usage of environmental and/or social resources exceeds the limit by physical environment (Lee & Graefe, 2003). In this case, visitors perceive the density of people in the place as too high and feel the negative effects of crowding, which might result in a lower level of customer satisfaction (Buckley, 2009; Ryan & Cessford, 2003; Saveriades, 2000).

Satisfaction can be approached by expectancy theory which suggests previous experiences influence future behavioral outcomes, and this has largely been supported by empirical studies (Lawler, 1973; Oliver, 2010; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985; Pizam & Milman, 1993; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001). In essence, at the core of the theory is the cognitive process of how an individual processes to select a specific behavior option over another on the basis of his/her expectations (Vroom, 1964). According to Oliver's (1980) expectancy–disconfirmation paradigm (EDP) one of three outcomes will occur: a) confirmation, which emerges when the actual experience matches expectations; b) negative disconfirmation, which develops when the actual experience falls short of expectations; and c) positive disconfirmation, which occurs when the actual experience exceeds expectations (Oliver, 1980). The EDP is

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: anita.zehrer@mci.edu (A. Zehrer).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2016.06.007
1447-6770/© 2016 The Authors.

one of the most frequently cited frameworks to understand behavioral intentions of consumers (Reimann, Lunemann, & Chase, 2008; Schoefer, 2010; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001). Service providers rely on positive disconfirmation which usually produces satisfied consumers, as high satisfaction levels greatly correlate with the firm's financial results (Olsen, Witell, & Gustafsson, 2014).

So far research on crowding mainly focused on retail and shopping (Li, Kim, & Lee, 2009), festivals (Kim, Lee, & Sirgy, 2016), urban areas (Popp, 2012; Sun & Budruk, 2015), and tourism sites (Jin & Pearce, 2011). The research reveals mixed results on the effects of crowding on behavioral outcomes (Kim, Cha, Knutson, & Beck, 2011; Li et al., 2009). There is also a body of literature on recreation conflicts that result from crowding in outdoor settings, particularly national parks (Kainzinger, Burns, & Arnberger, 2015; Manning, Lawson, & Valliere, 2009; Moyle & Croy, 2007; Mudiyanselage & Rathnayake, 2015), since crowding is considered as the most direct social impact on outdoor recreation (Arnberger & Mann, 2008; Van Riper, Manning, & Reigner, 2010). Conflict occurs when the interaction leads to negative outcomes for at least some of the participants (Owens, 1985).

A number of frameworks have been developed in outdoor recreation literature to guide management of crowding by means of measurable indicators (Manning, 2007). According to Manning (2000), crowding can be mediated by characteristics of respondents or the context of the situation and thus have to be specific to the situation under study by focusing on the respective cause of perceived crowding. Knowledge on outdoor user interaction enhances the positive and ameliorates the negative effects (Carothers, Vaske, & Donnelly, 2001; Wang & Dawson, 2005). Frameworks in outdoor seetings include Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) (Stankey et al, 1985), Visitor Impact Management (VIM) (Graefe, Kuss, & Vaske, 1990), and Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) (Manning, 2001). All of these frameworks rely on indicators of resource conditions and the quality of the visitor experience (Manning, 2004; 2007). However, we find that the body of literature on outdoor seetings is conceptually underdeveloped and there has been no study focusing on a winter sport outdoor setting, such as a ski area.

Although there is no international statistics on mountain tourism, estimates show that mountain tourism is one the major forms of the leisure tourism (Keller, 2014; Minciu, Lefter, Sztruten, & Busuioc, 2009). Major ski resorts are located mostly in the various European countries and offer symbolic physical and non-physical features that may influence the visitor experience (Keller, 2014; Silva, Kastenholz, & Abrantes, 2013). In a winter holiday setting, people may have multiple expectations of outdoor recreational activities, such as solitude, excitement, or adventure (Lee & Graefe, 2003); the fulfillment of these expectations is impacted positively or negatively by crowding effects. However, there has been very little research conducted that explores the relationship between perceived crowding and visitor satisfaction, and how this is mediated through coping behavior in the context of outdoor winter sports settings, which is one of the contributions of the study.

The study aims to reveal the interrelationships among perceived crowding, customer satisfaction and coping mechanisms in an outdoor winter sport setting and poses the following research questions:

RQ1. *How do age, gender and frequency of travel impact on perceived crowding?*

RQ2. *How does perceived crowding affect customer satisfaction?*

RQ3. *How does coping behavior mediate between perceived crowding and customer satisfaction?*

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Disciplines and foundations of crowding

As a theoretical approach to understanding the topic under study, we discuss the *reactance theory* as the main foundation of crowding. The reactance theory describes a motivational reaction of people that threaten specific behavioral freedoms (Brehm, 1966). There are three underlying models of reactance theory that are ususally used to understand crowding: Brehm's (1966) *behavioral constraint model* states that there is a basic desire among human beings to maintain their behavioral freedom. According to this model, a certain amount of people will be evaluated as excessive and hence result in the perception of crowding for a setting when one's desired actions are restricted or made impossible because of the presence of other people. The main argument of the *overload model* by Altman (1975) is that crowding results when one's mental ability is unable to deal with all the impinging environmental stimuli. This model argues that crowding is an outcome of one's failure to maintain a desired level of social interactions through means like personal space and territoriality. Manning's (1970) *ecological model* has been used to explain human crowding.

According to literature, the three conceptual models can be subsumed under the concept of control (Averill, 1973). Physical, social, and personal factors can modify an individual's perceived control without any variation in density. A logical conclusion from this argument is that for a fixed density level, perceived crowding can vary between situations and persons (Hui & Bateson, 1990).

2.2. Definition and concept of perceived crowding

It has been reported that the concept of perceived crowding is a multiple dimensional construct created from either human or spatial density (Machleit, Kellaris, & Eroglu, 2000). The number of nonhuman elements in an environment and their relationships to each define the extent of spatial crowding perceived by individuals, while the human dimension of crowding concerns the number of individuals as well as the rate and extent of social interaction among individuals in a given environmental setting (Machleit, Eroglu, & Mantel, 2000). This paper focuses on perceived crowding created from human density. *Perceived human crowding* is thus defined as "the maximum number of people who can use a site without an unacceptable alteration in the physical environment and the social, cultural and economic fabric of the destination and without an unacceptable decline in the quality of the experience gained by visitors" (Wall & Mathieson, 2006, p. 33). Further, drawing on expectancy theory, Shelby and Heberlein (1984) define crowding as the individual's perceived evaluation of density levels in a specific physical environment. Crowding issues arise when the usage of social resources in a destination exceeds its norms (Jurado, Damian, & Fernández-Morales, 2013; Lee & Graefe, 2003) and negatively impacts on visitors' experiences (Patterson & Hammitt, 1990; Shelby, Vaske, & Heberlein, 1989). "Perceived crowding combines descriptive information (the density or encounter level experienced by the individual) with evaluative information (the individual's negative evaluation of that density or encounter level)" (Vaske & Donnelly, 2002, p. 256).

The underpinning concept related to perceived crowding is *carrying capacity*, which consists of *natural, economic* and *social* carrying capacity (Batta, 2000). *Natural carrying capacity* is described as physical carrying capacity, expressed in number of people per square hectare of land and is reached when all available facilities and infrastructure are overcrowded (Roe, Leader-Williams, & Dalal-Clayton, 1997). However *natural carrying capacity* can also be expressed through the ecological carrying capacity approach, as

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1011355

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/1011355

Daneshyari.com