



Bike-traveling as a growing phenomenon: Role of attributes, value, satisfaction, desire, and gender in developing loyalty



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H I G H L I G H T S

- This study developed a loyalty model in a bike-traveling context.
- Moderating impact of gender was identified.
- Value, satisfaction, and desire played a mediating role.

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This research was designed to investigate the role of bike-tourism attributes, perceived value, satisfaction, desire, and gender in bicyclers' loyalty generation process. We employed a survey methodology. Using the data collected from members of bicycle clubs in China, we conducted a structural analysis and test for metric invariance. Results showed that our theoretical model explained a sufficient amount of the variance in loyalty; the hypothesized relationships in our research framework were generally supported; and cognitive, evaluative, and motivational processes were significant mediators. Moreover, the proposed moderating impact of gender was partially supported. Overall, our empirical findings make a significant contribution to advancing our knowledge of how product attributes, value, satisfaction, and desire are related and how these relationships are affected by gender in the formation of bicycle travelers' loyalty.

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1. Introduction

Bicycle tourism refers to cycling that is undertaken during leisure time for periods of time under 24 h, or one night from the home destination. Usually, it is often a half-day or a day of touring, primarily from home with family members or social groups (Ritchie, 1998). Lumsdon (1996), Simonsen and Jorgenson (1996), and Ritchie (1998) generalized six features of bicycle tourism: 1) away from home; 2) the duration of a single day to multi days; 3) non-competitive; 4) cycling should be the main purpose; 5) occurs in an active context; and 6) a recreation/leisure form.

Bicycling for the purpose of transportation had dropped

immensely in the past several decades due to the use of motorized vehicles (Ritchie, 1998). However, the bicycle has regained its popularity as a form of tourism providing healthy and natural experiences (Hjalager, 2015; Lamont, 2009). The rapid growth of bicycle tourism has made bicycle-tourism destination marketers, related-industry practitioners, and local government agencies see the importance of bicycle tourism industry, and various strategies have been made to attract more bicycle tourists (Karki & Tao, 2016; Lee, 2014; Lee, Chen, & Huang, 2014). Among these strategies, continuously maintaining loyal customers is considered one of the most effective marketing strategies since customers with higher loyalty are more likely to spend more money and perform positive WOM behaviors (Ladhari, Brun, & Morales, 2008; Yang & Peterson, 2004). More specifically, destination marketers can use loyal customers as useful information sources once high loyalty has been maintained. Due to the inherent characteristics that those loyal customers usually have (e.g., schedule, eating habits, favorite

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bicycle activities, etc.), understanding of these them would enable tailored services to be prepared in advance. As such, regular loyal customers would also make the launching of long-term policies possible (Han & Ryu, 2009).

Researchers in many existing studies regarding tourism, hospitality, consumer behavior, and marketing have widely examined the antecedents of customer loyalty and the direct/indirect roles of such antecedents in the loyalty generation process (Getty & Thompson, 1994; Han & Ryu, 2009; Hwang & Hyun, 2014; Luarn & Lin, 2003; Oliver, 1999; Prebensen, Woo, & Uysal, 2014). Important drivers of customer loyalty documented in the extant literature generally involve product/service attributes (Han, 2013; Turel, Serenko, & Bontis, 2010), perceived value (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994; Lee, Hsu, Han, & Kim, 2010; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996), satisfaction (Antón, Camarero, & Laguna-García, 2014; Chiou & Droge, 2006; Luarn & Lin, 2003), and desire (Carrus, Passafaro, & Bonnes, 2008; Han, Baek, Lee, & Huh, 2014). These variables are believed to provide an excellent explanation of loyalty formation. Nonetheless, researchers in diverse fields have also asserted to consider gender as a moderator influencing customers' loyalty generation process and post-purchase behavior (e.g., Chen, 2000; Han, Hsu, & Lee, 2009; Jackson & Inbakaran, 2006; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). Indeed, gender differences on individuals' loyalty formation have been extensively examined and identified in hospitality and tourism (Han et al., 2009, 2011). Considering the role of gender thus seems to be necessary to explicitly uncover travelers' loyalty generation process.

While the important role of the attributes of a product/service is quite apparent in explaining in individuals' post-purchase behaviors, key questions still remain unaddressed. In particular, its relationships with value, satisfaction, and desire and the impact of such relationships on traveler loyalty have rarely been researched. Few studies have clearly identified the independent role of each dimension of bike-traveling attributes in the formation of bicyclers' loyalty. Moreover, no empirical research has yet developed a robust model of loyalty comprising such vital concepts as product/service attributes, value, satisfaction, and desire. Further, despite the criticality of gender, little is known about the impact of gender on bicyclers' loyalty generation process. To minimize these gaps, the present research was designed to achieve the following research objectives:

- 1) The first objective was to develop a model explaining travelers' loyalty for bike-traveling by involving the attributes of bicycle tourism, perceived value, satisfaction, and desire.
- 2) The second objective was to identify if gender differences on the intricate associations among study constructs exists.
- 3) The third objective was to test the mediating impact of perceived value, satisfaction, and desire in the proposed theoretical framework.
- 4) The fourth objective was to identify the comparative importance of bicycle tourism attributes in determining perceived value.
- 5) The last objective was to assess the relative criticality of research constructs in generating travelers' loyalty for bicycle tourism.

The following section contains a discussion of the theoretical/conceptual background about the present study and hypotheses development. Next, the research design is described. Findings from the data analysis and hypotheses testing results are then presented. The last section provides a discussion of theoretical and practical implications, study limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

2. Literature review

2.1. Bicycle tourism in China

Bicycle ownership in China dropped sharply in the mid-1990's with the rise of automobiles and growth of road networks (Zhang, Shaheen, & Chen, 2014). However, there is a rapid growth of bicycles as a tool for tourism purposes. The number of bicycle clubs in China has now reached over 10 thousand, and bicycle tour participants have grown to 6 million. Regarding to bicycle events, there are 3000 events held in China in 2015, which is a 30% growth compared to 2014. Therefore, China's bicycle market is expected to be grown from 16.2 billion RMB in 2014 to 420 billion RMB in 2025 (Xia, 2016). China's bicycle market is predicted to have a huge potential due to the Chinese traditional culture in bicycles, the rich source for bicycle traveling, the needs for green tourism products, as well as governments' policies for supporting bicycle use. Specifically, China has a long history of bicycle riding (Zhang et al., 2014). Once upon a time, China was named "kingdom of the bicycle" because of its large population of bicycle riders (Zhao, 2014). Because most Chinese are familiar with bicycles and are used to using bicycles as a way of commuting, it is easy for people to accept bicycles as a tourism form. Meanwhile, China has appropriate resources (e.g., large territory, topological diversity, colorful culture and numerous heritage sites) for developing bicycle tourism activities (Lee et al., 2014). Compared to countries/regions, China has unique bicycle routes such as the Great Wall in Beijing, city bicycle tours in Shanghai and Suzhou, and adventure tours in Lhasa, Tibet and Sichuan province (Bikechina, 2016; Chinacycletours, 2016). The market potential of bicycle tourism in China also lies in people's growing needs for green products. Recently, many Chinese people have suffered from the negative consequences of their environment (e.g., lung cancer), and therefore, they desire to stay healthy and go more environmentally friendly ((Li, Liu, Lü, Liang, & Harmer, 2015). As such, growing concerns in the environment and awareness of physically active lifestyles raise the bicycle tourism as a green way of traveling (Lu, 2010). At the same time, Chinese governments have been attempting to stimulate the development of a bicycle-related infrastructure in order to build a well-designed bicycle network (Karki & Tao, 2016). At present, many cities in China have bicycle sharing programs implemented to promote a low-carbon transportation policy (Zhang, Zhang, Duan, & Bryde, 2015).

2.2. Attributes of bicycle tourism

Most of the studies consider bicycle tourism a specific situation of general tourism and thus, its attributes could be generalized under the framework of tourist destination research (Chang & Chang, 2005; Lamont, 2009; Laws, 1995; Lee, 2015; Lumsdon & Peeters, 2009). The researchers considered that the four attributes could be distinguished in general tourism destination (i.e., attraction, access, amenities and ancillary services) (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 1993). However, when applied to bicycle tourism, the attributes should be considered during the entire period of bike-traveling, rather than the final destination bicycle travelers attempt to reach to (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). Under this consideration, researchers believe that bicycle attractions should include tourism attractions, accessibility, amenities, and complementary services (Cooper et al., 1993; Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993; Lew, 1987; Van Raaij, 1986). These attributes together facilitate the activities and experiences in bicycle tourism (Lee, 2014). Empirically, researchers have applied the framework into a context of bicycle tourism by testing the validity of these attributes (Lee, 2015; Lee et al., 2014; Lee & Huang, 2014). Thus, the evidence from these empirical studies supported the appropriateness of

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