



Influence of interpretation on conservation intentions of whale tourists



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Interpretation increased conservation intentions in whale watch tourists.
- Conservation intentions did not increase in control group without interpretation.
- Effect of evoking emotion is larger than fostering responsibility or knowledge.
- Whale tourism can contribute to whale conservation through interpretation.

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ABSTRACT

The concept of interpretation denotes on-site education while people engage in a guided nature-based activity. The literature suggests that interpretation influences conservation intentions but does not reveal whether the effect is constituted by interpretation or by other aspects of the guided activity. This study examined the effect of interpretation on conservation intentions on top of a wildlife viewing tour without interpretation, and differentiated among interpretation contents. In a field experiment among whale watchers, four interpretation conditions were implemented: (1) no interpretation (control group), (2) knowledge content, (3) responsibility content, and (4) emotion content. Whale conservation intentions were measured before and after the whale watching experience. The results indicate that interpretation has an effect on whale conservation intentions. The effect of emotion interpretation was larger than were the effects of knowledge interpretation and responsibility interpretation. Incorporating emotional messages, then, could contribute to successful interpretation in terms of promoting conservation among tourists.

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1. Introduction

Nature-based tourism, ecotourism and wildlife tourism are frequently promoted as activities that can contribute to conservation of natural resources (Ballantyne, Packer, & Falk, 2011; Ballantyne, Packer, & Hughes, 2009; Hughes, 2013). Shaping thought about conservation is an important method to implement this contribution. As success in nature conservation ultimately hinges on public support and involvement (Jacobson, 2009), nature agencies and tourism organizations that foster conservation habitually try to influence tourists in order to promote conservation intentions and behaviors. For example, education programs are designed and implemented to increase understanding and awareness (Christensen, Rowe, & Needham, 2007; Lück, 2003; Orams, 1995).

Indeed, research suggests that environmental education can encourage pro-environmental behavior (Zelezny, 1999). The concept of interpretation refers to a specific form of environmental education, namely on-site education through communication while people engage in a nature-based activity (Christie & Mason, 2003; Moscardo, Woods, & Saltzer, 2004). Interpretation involves information provided by guides or on-site interpreters to a voluntary audience, for example tourists that participate in a guided wildlife viewing tour (Lück, 2003; Orams, 1995; Weiler & Ham, 2001), next to information provided by visitor centers, displays, and brochures (Zeppel & Muloin, 2008). The effects of interpretation have been examined in terms of entertainment provision (Weiler & Ham, 2001), enjoyment and satisfaction (Ham & Weiler, 2007; Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005; Powell & Ham, 2008), and participants' knowledge (Hughes & Saunders, 2005; Lück, 2003; Madin & Fenton, 2004; Powell & Ham, 2008; Tubb, 2003).

In addition, a select few studies have addressed the effects of interpretation on conservation intentions. Exploratory research at the Galápagos National Park indicated that interpretation

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encouraged pro-environmental attitudes and intentions to support conservation (Powell & Ham, 2008). A study among participants in four different wildlife experiences showed a self-reported impact on conservation intentions (Ballantyne et al., 2011). And research among participants of dolphin shows found an increase in conservation intentions, which were measured before and after attending the show (Miller et al., 2013). Yet, these studies did not intend to isolate the effect of interpretation from the effect of viewing nature and wildlife, as there was no control group (i.e., a group that participated in the activity and that was not exposed to interpretation). In other words, the voyage or experience as a whole, including interpretation, had an effect on conservation intentions, but whether this effect can be attributed to interpretation, cannot be inferred. Furthermore, these studies did not manipulate the interpretation. Therefore, the question whether different interpretation contents have different effects on conservation intentions is yet to be addressed.

The current research examined the effects on conservation intentions of interpretation as additional to viewing nature and wildlife only (without interpretation). Also, the differences of these effects as interpretation content varies were studied. To this end, we carried out a field-experiment. During whale watching tours, the on-board interpretation was manipulated and whale conservation intentions of participating tourists were measured before and after they were exposed to interpretation. A control group of tourists that was not subjected to any form of interpretation was included as well.

1.1. Psychological antecedents of environmental intentions

Research into environmental intentions and behaviors has identified various psychological antecedents that influence intentions. As conservation intentions can be considered a subset of environmental intentions, this literature was useful for contemplating different interpretation contents within our study. Values are often contemplated to explain environmental intentions (e.g., Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Karp, 1996; Nordlund & Garvill, 2002; Schultz & Zelezny, 1999; Stern & Dietz, 1994). Values are desirable trans-situational goals varying in importance, which serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity (Rockeach, 1973; Schwartz, 2006). Values are at the basis of the Value–Belief–Norm model (Stern, 2000). This model was often used as a framework to study conservation behavior (Kaiser, Hübner, & Bogner, 2005). Empirical research found that pro-environmental values predict environmental intentions to some extent (e.g., Cameron, Brown, & Chapman, 1998; Karp, 1996; Nordlund & Garvill, 2002).

However, as values transcend specific contexts (Schwartz, 2006), their predictive potential for specific intentions tends to be low (Ajzen, 2005; Manfreda, 2008). Rather, values influence intentions indirectly, mediated by other mental dispositions such as attitudes or norms (De Groot & Steg, 2007). Attitudes are a central concept within the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which is frequently and successfully used as a framework to guide environmental intention studies (Kaiser et al., 2005). Attitudes are mental dispositions to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object or event with some degree (Ajzen, 2005). An attitude toward an object is determined by salient beliefs about that object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). As knowledge might influence these beliefs, new knowledge might influence attitudes (Cottrell & Graefe, 1997; Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992), and, in turn, intentions. A review study suggests that knowledge is often associated with pro-environmental behavior (Zelezny, 1999). However, of the nine studies in this review that were not conducted in classroom settings, five did not identify a relationship (Zelezny, 1999). In the

context of wildlife, knowledge of wildlife and habitats was demonstrated to be associated with attitudes to act toward broad conservation issues (De White & Jacobson, 1994), and knowledge about manatees was found to be related to support for manatee conservation efforts (Aipanjiguly, Jacobson, & Flamm, 2003). Yet, in general, the relationship between knowledge and behavior change tends to be weak (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), if present at all.

Other scholars have emphasized the domain of moral considerations as an important influence on environmentally significant intentions and behaviors (Kaiser et al., 2005). For example, the Norm Activation Model posits that personal norms (feelings of moral obligation to perform or refrain from specific actions) result in pro-social actions (Schwartz & Howard, 1981). Personal norms are activated when someone is aware that one's actions have consequences for others or the environment (awareness of consequences) and when someone feels responsible for these consequences (feelings of responsibility). The Norm Activation Model was effectively applied to explain various environmental intentions or behaviors, such as willingness to pay for environmental protection (Guagnano, 2001; Guagnano, Dietz, & Stern, 1994), or pro-environmental political behavior (Joireman, Lasane, Bennett, Richards, & Solaimani, 2001; Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999).

Affect and emotions are also assumed to be important antecedents of environmental intentions (Iozzi, 1989; Kals & Maes, 2002; Kals, Schumacher, & Montada, 1999). The term affect refers to the general class of feeling states experienced by humans, and covers the concepts of mood and emotions (Manfredo, 2008). Relative to mood, emotions are about a specific event, have short duration, and usually involve conscious thought (Manfredo, 2008). Affect was found to predict environmental attitudes (Pooley & O'Connor, 2000), and emotional affinity with nature predicted protective behavior (Kals et al., 1999). Affective dispositions, however, have not been addressed extensively in environmental research (Carrus, Passafaro, & Bonnes, 2008). Researchers have pointed to the need to address emotion in the context of human–wildlife relationships (Jacobs, 2009; Jacobs, Vaske, & Roemer, 2012; Manfreda, 2008). Emotions are hypothesized to drive our attraction to wildlife (Manfredo, 2008) and our motivation to view wildlife (Jacobs, 2009). They were found to inform decisions about wildlife-related behaviors (Slagle, Bruskotter, & Wilson, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

1.2. Hypotheses

To conclude, research has identified various psychological antecedents of environmental intentions, and by extension, wildlife conservation intentions. These factors include values, attitudes, knowledge, norms, awareness of consequences, feelings of responsibility, and affect and emotion. For our study, it was important to select factors that are open to manipulation. As values are formed early in life, and tend to be resistant to change (Jacobs, Vaske, Teel, & Manfreda, 2012), this factor was not feasible for the experiment. For the same reason, norms would be problematic: changing someone's norms is hard to achieve. Yet, manipulating awareness of consequences and feelings of responsibility in order to activate someone's preexisting norms is more likely to be successful (Schwartz & Howard, 1981). In addition, we wanted to represent the major categories of psychological antecedents of conservation intentions, that is, antecedents in the cognitive, the normative, and the affective domains of mental functioning. As attitudes are composed of cognitive and affective aspects (Ajzen, 2005), we did not select this factor. Consequently, knowledge was selected as the factor to represent the cognitive domain. Moreover, traditionally, influencing knowledge has been an important goal of

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