



Boat Captain Perspectives on adding non-consumptive value to charter experiences on the South Carolina coast



Jarrett R. Bachman^{a,*}, Laura W. Jodice^b, William E. Hammitt^b, Chi-Ok Oh^c

^a Fairleigh Dickinson University, 842 Cambie St., Vancouver, BC, Canada V6B 2P6

^b Clemson University, 263 Lehotsky Hall, Clemson, SC 29634, USA

^c Chonnam National University, Yongbong-Ro 77, Buk-Gu, Gwangju 61186 South Korea

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Charter boat operators
Fishing
Value-added services
Coastal tourism
Marine tourism growth

ABSTRACT

Profitability and competitiveness of the saltwater charter fishing industry is becoming more challenging in coastal communities. Adding value with non-consumptive experiences and targeting a broader range of marine tourists may enhance industry sustainability as well as broaden opportunities for public access to marine waters. This study explored industry beliefs about capabilities for implementing new or enhanced services as a means to understand capacity for adding non-consumptive value. Semi-structured interviews and a written self-assessment survey were administered to 43 charter operators licensed in coastal South Carolina, USA during the summer of 2012. Operators gave high ratings to their knowledge relevant to providing outreach on expanded topics, but were less confident about their marketing, networking (within the industry and with the tourism industry), and customer service skills. Consumer demand information was also desired.

Management implications: For marine resource managers, this research identifies the information most needed for captains to add non-consumptive value. This research also highlights the importance of marine resource managers about understanding the perception of issues for charter boat captains, specifically from a regulatory standpoint. For charter boat captains, this research suggests that most captains would support collaboration between other charter boat captains, local communities, and tourism promotion organizations. However, captains are not well equipped to establish these relationships. Finally, the identification of potential value-added services may be helpful in developing and diversifying the charter boat industry.

1. Introduction

Recreational charter operators in coastal regions in different countries including the U.S. (Dumas, Whitehead, Landry, & Herstine, 2009), France (Alban & Boncoeur, 2004) and Australia (Gartside, 2001) face numerous challenges to business survival. These challenges include fluctuating fuel costs, increasingly restrictive regulations on catch size and quota, decline in consumer willingness to pay, and competition with other coastal venues, services and amenities catering to tourists (Murray et al., 2010). Exploring perspectives of operators of for-hire fishing businesses (i.e., recreational charter, head or party, and inshore guide boats; hereafter ‘charter’ for simplicity) regarding potential for enhancing the long-term prosperity and sustainability of their industry is needed. In addition, since charter boats provide the public with access to coastal and ocean waters, the capacity of the industry to expand provision of marine recreation, tourism and education experiences, including non-consumptive activities, is of interest.

A 2009 federal economic study of the recreational charter sector on

the U.S. South Atlantic coast found that the South Carolina charter (i.e., six passengers or less) population declined 30% from 1998 to 2009, and the head boat (i.e., more than six passengers) population declined 50% (Holland, Oh, Larkin, & Hodges, 2012). That study also found that two-thirds of South Carolina (SC) charter operators were operating a charter boat for 5 years or less. Operators interviewed for that study were considering nearshore trips and adding marine ecotourism and natural history interpretation to enhance trip value without raising rates and broaden their customer base (Holland et al., 2012).

The current study focused on identifying the range of perceptions and experiences among marine charter boat captains about value-added services that (1) they were currently providing or could provide, (2) were in demand by anglers and non-anglers seeking access to offshore marine environments, and (3) were considered possible within regulatory restrictions. The study also examined their self-assessed capacity for knowledge and skill related to provision of these services and key challenges facing charter operators in the current economic climate.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jbachman@fdu.edu (J.R. Bachman), jodicel@clemson.edu (L.W. Jodice), chiokoh@gmail.com (C.-O. Oh).

2. Literature review

Stimulating production of value-added experiences and services has been part of a long term economic sustainability strategy for declining marine resource dependent industries in coastal communities. For example, special events and culinary experiences highlighting local seafood as a quality product have been used to help improve profitability of the fishing industry. In coastal tourism destinations with access to fisheries, the charter industry has demonstrated the ability to attract new hotels and restaurants as support businesses for the local economy (Amsden, Stedman, & Kruger, 2010). However, the presence of a marine charter fishing fleet in a community is often dependent on the extent of coastal gentrification and whether fishing is prioritized in waterfront development plans (Colburn & Jepson, 2012). The charter industry provides considerable economic impacts to coastal communities. Research by Holland et al. (2012) reported that in South Carolina alone in 2009, charter boats attracted about 67,000 passengers, 80% of which were non-locals. These charter boats generated \$137.9 million of total economic output and supported about 540 jobs.

The continued presence of recreational charter operators in coastal communities is also desirable because these businesses provide access to offshore waters for those who do not own a boat. However, charter operators need innovative and entrepreneurial strategies to adapt to changing economic and environmental challenges. These challenges include fluctuating fuel costs, regulatory limitations due to sustainable management policy impacting popular recreational fisheries, an increasingly competitive and complex business environment, and consumer demand for lower trip costs during economic recession (Oh, Lyu, & Holland, 2012). For example, charter operators must find viable solutions to compete with other coastal tourism services for the value received.

One possible strategy for adapting to the competitive environment is adding value, either by enhancing services for current trips or offering different types of trips, to attract a broader variety of customers, including anglers and non-anglers. Since charter operators conduct a unique service that is dependent on providing a quality experience (Ditton, Gill, & MacGregor, 1991), adding value to increase demand for these services has potential. Some charter operators on the southeast Atlantic coast have begun exploring strategies for adding value. Interviews conducted for a U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) socio-economic assessment of saltwater charter operators (Holland et al., 2012) suggested that some operators were already adapting by switching to smaller vessels and/or focusing on providing trips closer to shore as a means to lower costs and appeal to different types of customers. These efforts include adding trips that are focused on non-angling, ecotourism experiences. However, there has been limited research examining demand for value-added recreational charter boat services.

A study conducted in Florida indicated charter fishing customers were interested in opportunities to see marine wildlife and receive conservation education as part of the trip and thus were willing to pay more (between \$9 and \$43) for a higher level of wildlife seen during the trip (Oh et al., 2012). Also, a study of charter fishing customers (N = 307) on the Alabama Gulf Coast indicated that 87% of respondents felt knowledge and courtesy of captain and crew was very important to their charter trip satisfaction (New South Research, 2010).

Another study conducted in the southern United States demonstrated an increase of non-consumptive wildlife recreation. This included marine and non-marine based recreation. The economic impact of these experiences from equipment and trip-related expenses totaled \$54.9 billion in 2011 (Poudel et al., 2016). Poudel et al. (2016) also stated that this type of wildlife recreation can provide motivations for conservation of wildlife.

Given the intersection of the charter industry with the tourism industry and with marine resource management, it is also important to consider the vital role that the community and its resources can play in

connecting agencies, organizations, and government entities as part of broader resource management strategies involving the charter industry (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Interviews conducted with marine resource dependent business operators for Jodice, Lacher, Norman, and Hughes (2010), documented some decline in the SC charter industry, but also found some interest among charter operators in developing stronger linkages with tourism promotion programs as a means to attract customers. In addition, charter trips offer potential for expanded opportunities to engage the public with outreach and education about sustainable marine resource use and management.

Ultimately, the capacity of the industry to provide value-added services depends on the ability of operators to invest in an appropriate vessel, deliver quality services, and capitalize on or build consumer demand. However, little is known about operators' capacity to add or expand services. A needs assessment is a critical tool for defining capacity, informing decision-making for investment, and determining whether additional training or support could stimulate development consistent with integrated coastal management strategies (Cicin-Sain & Knecht, 1998; Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Adding interpretive services (e.g. wildlife identification, natural history interpretation, maritime history and culture interpretation) that are not part of a typical saltwater fishing trip requires extensive topical knowledge to assure quality, and skilled interpretive techniques to assure delivery of commentary that is well-timed, interesting and engaging to customers (Ham & Weiler, 2007). Consequently, it is important to assess capacity for these skills. In addition, capacity may be limited by the attitudes and perceptions among charter operators, especially their beliefs in their abilities to perform certain actions given specific inhibiting or facilitating factors (Ajzen, 2002).

To better understand what is possible for coastal charter operators, a supply analysis is needed to understand the current services available and to characterize capacity for provision of value-added services, including those not specific to catching fish. For example, expanding services to include education and interpretation about marine ecology and other coastal topics would require competencies beyond expertise on where and how to catch fish.

2.1. Research question

This study focused on determining baseline conditions and issues faced by charter operators as they adapt their business to regulatory and economic changes. Specifically, the research question was: What are the elements faced by charter operators in their efforts to provide expanded and non-fishing value-added services and experiences to anglers and non-anglers visiting or recreating on the SC coast? The goal was to learn from charter operators what real and perceived barriers and opportunities existed related to inclusion of value-added services. Inclusion of charter operators in all major regions of the coast was important because charter businesses, tourism marketing, destination attributes (e.g., level of development, types of coastal ecosystems and access, types of fishing activities) and recreation opportunities were different across these regions. In person, on-site interviews were used to achieve a rich understanding of current concerns, services being provided and issues related to adaptation through design or expansion of alternative coastal recreation and tourism services and strategies for offshore charters.

3. Methods

This study focused on illuminating the attitudes and perceptions of SC charter operators as a means to understanding capacity. This focus is consistent with perceived behavioral control theory (Ajzen, 2002), which suggests that identifying the range of attitudes and beliefs about taking an action is necessary to determine what control beliefs influence a behavior of interest (e.g., even if an individual believes they have the knowledge or skills to successfully complete a task, they

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4759893>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4759893>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)