

## Exploring the attitudes and behaviours of recreational vehicle users



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Overnight camping facilities  
Environmental attitudes  
Environmental behaviour  
Spiritual attitudes

### ABSTRACT

Little is known of the attitudes and behaviours of the growing number of recreational vehicle users (RVers), yet debate over the sector is commonplace. This research utilised a survey at different RV campsites in Victoria, Australia, to determine RVers' attitudes and behaviours towards the environment, including their perception of the outdoors as a place that elicits a sense of spirituality. The respondents could largely be described as 'spiritual environmentalists'. An increased sense of spirituality and environmentalism did not relate to environmental impact or expenditure, but rather to a propensity to camp in undisturbed areas. Those who showed a propensity to free camp were less ecocentric and tended to spend less money than others. Environmental impact was independent of attitudes and behaviours. The diversity amongst RVers illustrates the need for different types of overnight parking facilities to attract and satisfy all.

#### Management implications:

- Caravan and Recreation Vehicle (RV) Parks that offer only one style of overnight camping will not be attractive to all Recreational Vehicle (RV) Users.
- Regions should offer a spectrum of camping opportunities to the diverse RV market.
- This study challenges opponents of free camping by illustrating that free camping RVers do spend money in local communities and consequently may enhance economic development in remote and regional communities.
- Those who own RVs with black water storage tend to seek out overnight camp sites with no fees, yet despite this, they still spend more money than other types of RVs.

### 1. Introduction

In both North America and Australia, self-drive tourism is under-researched (Brooker & Joppe, 2013; Counts & Counts, 2004; Olsen, 2003; Prideaux, 2000), especially for recreational vehicle users (RVers), who are often satirized as fuel guzzling and penny-pinching retirees who negatively impact on the environment, while contributing little to local economies (Counts & Counts, 2004; Fjelstul & Fyall, 2014). However, research has demonstrated that some RVers do express a strong sense of responsibility for the environments and local societies they visit (Gretzel, Simic, Wright, & Hardy, 2008; Holloway, Green, & Holloway, 2011). Indeed, some RVers regard their immersive experiences in nature as a spiritual experience (Onyx & Leonard, 2005; Smith, 1992), akin to the spiritual journeys of tourists documented within the broader tourism literature (Allcock, 2003; MacCannell, 1976; Sharples, 2009). However, the linkage between RVers' spiritual inclinations and travel behaviour is unknown. While the theory of planned behaviour suggests that attitudes, subjective norms and

perceived behavioural control influence intentions and outcomes (Ajzen, 1991), apart from Hsu and Huang (2012), there appears to be a lack of research which explores the relationships between the attitudes and behaviour of travellers during travel.

Given that RVers are primarily escaping the city (Brooker & Joppe, 2013; Onyx & Leonard, 2005), our research was designed to determine whether RVers undertake this form of travel primarily for environmental and spiritual reasons associated with nature, and whether that those who seek out nature for these reasons are less likely to cause environmental damage and to free camp, than those who have other motivations. The implications of the variations in attitudes and behaviours for planning recreational and accommodation facilities are assessed.

### 2. Methods

Questionnaires were distributed at a variety of RV campsites in Gippsland, Victoria, Australia. This method was utilised given our

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desire to test a hypothesis and their ability to be distributed at a time and location that was convenient to participants. Two hundred and seven self-completed questionnaire were returned, at a rate of 86%. The questionnaire included 25 questions that addressed: style of RV; travel behaviours; travel preferences; environmental and spiritual attitudes; amenity, campsite and social preferences; expenditure; and data on country of origin, life stage and travel party.

To avoid responder bias (Millifont, 2009) the questionnaire contained closed and open-ended questions. Five point Likert scales questions from the respected ‘transcendent’ and ‘sacredness of life’ sections of the Spiritual Orientation Inventory of Ekins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988) were used, along with two items per dimension (one negative and one positive) from the highly respected New Environmental Paradigm Scale (NEP) (Dunlap, Van Lierre, Mertig, & Jones, 2000).

Seven point semantic differential scales determined the importance of different aspects of RVing to the participants and opinions on the environmental friendliness of the activity. These were developed following the work of Hardy and Robards (2014). The 10 items were polar opposites in relation to social, campsite, behavioural and amenity preferences. The location of the attributes was varied to avoid response bias (Neuman, 2003).

A variety of indices have been designed for recreation and leisure research, such as a potential for conflict index (Manfredo, Vaske, & Teel, 2003; Vaske, Beaman, Barreto, & Shelby, 2010), a serious leisure continuum (Scott, 2012) and a serious leisure index (Gould, Moore, McGuire, & Stebbins, 2008). Our exploration of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, in an RV setting, necessitated the development of context-specific indices. A freedom camping index was derived by dividing the response for realized preference for overnight camping on free road sides by the response for staying in caravan parks. High values indicated a propensity to free camp.

A nature-seeking behaviour index out of 100 was calculated using 7 point Likert scale responses to the statements ‘my camping experience is improved by access to recreation in nature’ and ‘my camping experience is improved by access to facilities like tennis courts and swimming pools,’ and, preferences for staying in national parks sites with fees, and selection of a natural setting as a preferred destination (both 5 point Likert scales). The responses were all adjusted to a range of 0–100 after inversion of the values for the second variable, added and divided by four. High values indicated strong nature-seeking behaviour.

Total weekly expenditure while RVing, excluding maintenance, rental or amortisation of the vehicle itself, was calculated by summing all expenditure components except for ‘other’.

A resource use index was calculated by multiplying the number of days per trip (middle of ranges for classes) by number of trips, doubled for those who moved every few nights and multiplied by 1.5 for those who moved occasionally, to reflect the relativities of fuel expenditure as derived from our data.

A spirituality index was derived by adding the responses to five attitude statements after they were adjusted to the same direction: ‘there is a spiritual aspect to life’; ‘in our scientific world there is no such thing as sacredness’; ‘being in nature can shift my personal identity from ‘I’ to something greater than myself’; ‘nature inspires in me a sense of awe and reverence’; and ‘persons who speak of life being sacred appear a little strange to me’. This sum was multiplied by four to give a value out of one hundred, in which high spirituality produced a low score. The first two factor scores on a varimax principal components analysis on the NEP variables in Table 1 were used as environmental attitude indices. After examination of the loadings on NEP variables (Table 1), the first axis score was labelled the ecocentric environmental attitude index. The second axis score was labelled the anthropocentric environmental attitude index.

A one way analysis of variance (statistic=F) was used where a multistate variable with up to six classes was the predictor and where a

**Table 1**  
Rotated factor loadings and communalities for the first two factors on a varimax rotation of environmental attitude statements.

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
Plants and animals have as much right to exist as us	0.75	−0.08
The so called ‘ecological crisis’ ... has been greatly exaggerated	−0.68	−0.38
The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset	0.63	0.17
Humans are severely abusing the environment	0.63	0.28
The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with humans...	−0.59	−0.25
The earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources	0.42	0.42
The earth has plenty of natural resources if we can learn how to use them	0.00	−0.71
Humans have the right to modify their natural environment	−0.14	−0.54
Humans will eventually learn enough about nature to control it	−0.29	−0.54
Humans are still subject to the laws of nature	0.24	0.67
% total variance	25.1	20.3

continuous or ordinal variable with more than six classes was the dependent variable. Classes were aggregated as necessary to satisfy the assumption of equality of variances. These analyses tested whether those with black water storage spent more in total and for fuel than those without this facility, the effect of frequent movement on expenditure, whether those who used more fuel tended to undesirably release black wastes more than others, and whether those who thought they were environmentally friendly perceived themselves as environmentalists. This contributed to our desire to test the hypotheses that those RVers that seek out nature are less likely to cause environmental damage and free camp, than those who have other motivations.

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to test the strength of linear relationships between the continuous or ordinal variables: the indices and other continuous or ordinal variables relevant to our inquiry. This approach allowed the researchers to assess whether RVers travelled for environmental and spiritual reasons associated with nature. The null hypothesis was rejected if  $P < 0.05$ .

### 3. Results

The nature seeking behaviour index was positively skewed among the respondents (Fig. 1). Nature-seeking behaviour was evinced by those more spiritual ( $r = -0.33$ ,  $df = 166$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), those more ecocentrically environmental ( $r = -0.20$ ,  $df = 167$ ,  $P = 0.008$ ) and those more anthropocentrically environmental ( $r = -0.22$ ,  $df = 167$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ).

The ecocentric environmental index was strongly related to spirituality ( $r = 0.26$ ,  $df = 173$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ), as was the anthropocentric

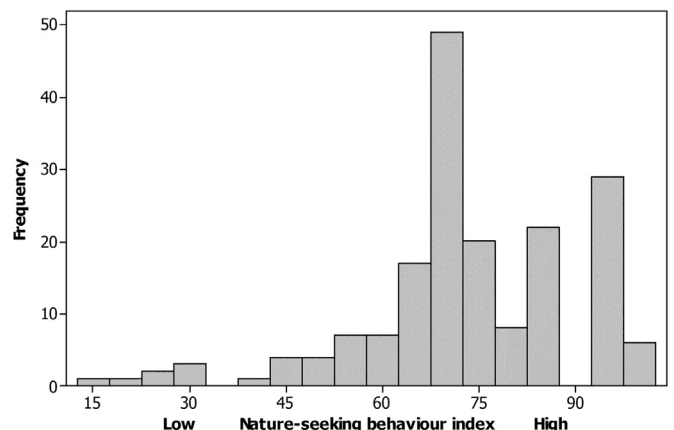


Fig. 1. Distribution of respondents on the nature-seeking behaviour index.

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