



# Outdoor recreation in a Taiwanese national park: A Hakka ethnic group study

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore factors of values, perceptions of crowding and service quality affecting Hakka people's behavioral intentions in the Taroko National Park in Taiwan. The Hakka ethnic group is a cultural group in Taiwan, composed of 14% of Taiwan population. In 2007–2008, the visitors to Taroko National Park, one of the most visited national parks on the eastern coast of Taiwan, were surveyed on-site. Overall, 315 usable questionnaires were obtained from the Taiwanese Hakka informants. The results showed that combined effects of values, crowding and service quality predicted behavioral intentions, and the model R-squares reached 0.73. In particular, the results revealed values were more important than crowding and service quality in predicting Taiwanese Hakka visitors' behavioral intentions. The results indicated that values are an appropriate approach for modeling outdoor recreation and tourism behavior. The finding implications for outdoor recreation and tourism management were also provided.

**Management implications:** The study provides findings for management of outdoor recreation and tourism in national parks:

- Employing more Hakka language spoken staff in the national park for Hakka visitors to make comments and feedbacks, would improve Hakkas' management service quality.
- Providing a sense of "solitude" recreation opportunity such as using total visitation capacity control is critical to Hakka people's national park outdoor recreation experience.
- Park managers not only need to understand visitors' perception of service quality and crowding, but also need to know visitors' values such as Taiwanese Hakka group's values.
- The achievement values such as self-fulfillment, sense of accomplishment positively affect Hakka visitors' behavioral intentions to national park.
- Building cheerful, joyful or challenging atmosphere is important on Hakka visitors' positive behavioral intentions to national park.

## 1. Introduction

One of the purposes of national park was to host and educate visitors from a variety of cultural backgrounds, especially from those underserved cultural groups. It was essential to give equal opportunities to diverse cultural groups. The success of the national park recreation management will depend increasingly on attracting, hosting, and educating visitors from a variety of cultural backgrounds, especially those underserved cultural groups (Manning, 2011). Moreover, responsiveness to the needs of diverse populations is a legal requirement. A failure of agencies to respond to these requirements may ultimately result in

serious legal challenges (Allison, 1988; O'Dell, 2016). Therefore, it is important to assess and address the perceptions such as crowding and service quality, and values of the cultural minority populations with respect to national park management and to the provision of outdoor recreation and tourism services. In this changing social climate, understanding the factors influencing behavioral intentions among various cultural groups such as Taiwanese Hakka ethnic group will help national park management be more successful and further promote social and environmental justice in ethnic minority's outdoor recreation and tourism participation (Anaza & McDowell, 2013; Burk & Shinew, 2013; Hsu & Hsu, 2012; Lee & Scott, 2013).

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Taiwan has about 23 million people in the populations. The Hakka ethnic group is a cultural minority in Taiwan, composed of 14% of Taiwan population<sup>1</sup> (National Statistics R.O.C, 2017). According to the 2012 Taiwanese Hakka population survey, 2.859 million self-identified themselves as Hakka people. Furthermore, there were 6.084 million Taiwanese identified themselves as Hakka or were descendants of Taiwanese Hakka if counted from those who accepting two or more identities. Therefore, there is one Hakka for every 3.7 individuals in Taiwan (Hakka Affairs Council, 2017). The Council for Hakka Affairs was established in 2001 in Taiwan with the purpose to promote Hakka culture which is the only central-level competent authority worldwide specifically responsible for Hakka affairs. Previous research found that Taiwanese Hakka people had different recreation patterns; e.g., perceived lower service quality and had higher crowding perceptions in their park and recreation visits (Liu, 2013; Wang, Li, & Liu, 2013). Therefore, understanding Hakka people's recreation behavioral patterns helps to find niche management solutions so as to enhance ethnic equity and further promote Hakka culture. The purpose of this study was to explore factors of values as well as perceptions of crowding and service quality affecting Hakka people's behavioral intentions in the context of a Taiwan national park.

A key to understand visitors' outdoor recreation behavior intentions in national parks may include knowledge of visitors' values, crowding and service quality (Li, Lai, Chick, Zinn, & Graefe, 2007; Manning, 2011; Petrick, 2004; Reisinger & Turner, 1999). In the absence of such insights, managers of national parks will not have sufficient knowledge needed to develop a comprehensive perspective on visitors' behavior. Since values are presumably central to cultural differences that may exist among cultural and national groups and allegedly influence perceptions and behaviors (Chick, 2000; Clark, 1990; Hofstede, 2001; Inglehart, 1997; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1975; Torelli & Kaikati, 2009), this study argues that this is also true with respect to visitation behavior and engaging in outdoor recreation (Brubaker, 2006; Gobster, 2007; Li et al., 2007; Tanner, Freimund, Borrie, & Moisey, 2008). Research on factors contributing to a better understanding of visitor behavior for specific cultural groups will help improve the outdoor recreation management on the one hand, and promote a positive cultural understanding on the other (Reisinger & Turner, 1999). Therefore, it is important to explore the relationships among values, crowding, service quality and behavioral intentions in diverse populations such as ethnic/cultural minorities in societies. In an effort to promoting social justice and environmental fairness in national park outdoor recreation and tourism participation, more intra-cultural research regarding customer services in ethnic/cultural minorities is necessary and thus encouraged (Paisley & Dustin, 2011).

This paper builds on previous research on cross-cultural recreation management as part

of a larger study of customer service in a national park setting. Previous research found there were cross-cultural differences among visitors such as their perceptions of service quality and crowding. The study aims at exploring different recreation participation patterns among diversely cultural groups in the national park in Taiwan, using Taiwanese Hakka ethnic group as an example.

The broad values were chosen rather than "recreation values" or other constructs that might be regarded as more directly relevant to recreation. There were several reasons to do so. For one, there was not

any measure of recreation values that has been validated cross-culturally. Hence, a measure of broad values was selected that has been validated numerous times in comparative cross-cultural studies. The other is that a measure of general values would permit me to compare our results with data collected in other contexts because such values are remarkably stable over time and serve as important standards of conduct (Kahle, 1983; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz & Brisky, 1987). Below relevant literature was reviewed to understand what is known about the aforementioned concepts and relationships.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Values

Values are the form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them (Goodenough, 1957). Values are important components of culture (Kahle, 1983; Li, Chick, Wu, & Yen, 2010). Values can provide potentially powerful explanations of visitor behavior because they are inner and central-oriented within a person's cognitive system, remarkably stable over time and serve as standards of conduct (Buijs, 2009; Kahle, Beatty, & Homer, 1986; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1975). That is, values may be crucial determinants of variation in recreation participation.

In this study, ethnic and cultural groups, i.e., Taiwanese Hakka people, were used as a proxy for culture and studies of cross-cultural patterns suggested that values result in different perceptions and behaviors (Chick, 1997, 2009; Schwartz, 1975). Research also demonstrated that values were significantly related to perceptions of crowding, service quality as well as behavioral intentions in the context of park, recreation and tourism (Li, Absher, Graefe, & Hsu, 2008; Reisinger & Turner, 1999). Among the various instruments for measuring values from different disciplines, Kahle (1983) List of Values (LOV) was one of the most widely-accepted (Madrigal, 1995, 2000). The LOV consisted of nine items underlying four dimensions of harmony, respect, achievement and hedonism, providing valid and reliable measurement of values.

### 2.2. Service quality

Service quality is an important issue in public and private service sectors worldwide because of its apparent relationship to the success of an organization. Service quality can be defined as the consumer's comparison between service expectation and service performance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988b). Although a number of approaches were developed to measure service quality, there was no general agreement as to the nature or content of the measures (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Parasuraman et al. (1988b) identified five dimensions of service quality included tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, collectively referred to as the SERVQUAL. However, Carman (1990) found the items of SERVQUAL required further testing to ascertain their broad applicability. An alternative approach to using SERVQUAL was a simplified performance measures-only model, namely, the SERVPERF approach (Teas, 1994). This approach was especially useful when service expectations are unknown or ambiguous.

Dimensions of service quality is varied depending on the specific research needs in different service settings. Multiple service quality dimensions exist and must be customized to fit different contexts. Although researchers have identified combinations of dimensions, no agreement exists on service quality in outdoor recreation. SERVQUAL model proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988b) had somewhat limited utility in the outdoor recreation context although studies using the modified models were more successful. For instance, Graefe, Absher, and Burns (2000) investigated service quality dimensions for outdoor recreation visitors with respect to lakes built by the Army Corps of Engineers and they found four dimensions of service quality namely information, services, facilities, and recreational experience. These four service quality

<sup>1</sup> Ninety-eight percent of Taiwan's population is made up of Han Chinese people, and 2% are Taiwanese aborigines. Among the Han Chinese people in Taiwan, 70% are Hoklo people, 14% Hakka people, and 14% Mainlanders. The majority of the Taiwanese Hakkas are from the southern China such as Guangdong, Fujian province. It is difficult to physically distinguish Taiwanese Hakka people from other ethnic groups, e.g., Hoklo people and Mainlanders, in Taiwan. The Hakkas have their own traditional Hakka language though Hakka people are normally able to speak mandarin and Taiwanese languages which are two most spoken languages in Taiwan. Hakka food is also popular in Taiwan. (National Statistics R.O.C, 2017).

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