Push or pull? Identifying rock climbing tourists' motivations☆

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HIGHLIGHTS

- The study identifies the motivations of rock climbing tourists.
- Rock climbing motivation is a multidimensional construct.
- Push and pull motivations are the antecedents of overall satisfaction of rock climbing tourists.
- The motivation of rock climbing tourists differs relying on their experience.

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ABSTRACT

The aims of this research are to clarify the motivations of rock climbing tourists by using a push and pull framework and to investigate the relationship between tourist motivation and overall satisfaction. In a survey of 473 rock climbing tourists in the Geyikbayırı region in Antalya, Turkey, the most important push motivations were identified as 'physical setting' and 'challenge', while 'climbing novelty seeking' and 'climbing tourism infrastructure' were the most important pull motivations. Furthermore, the findings of this study indicated that overall satisfaction of rock climbers can be determined by their push and pull motivations. The results also showed that motivations of rock climbers differ according to their experience levels. The paper ends with theoretical contributions of the study and its managerial implications.

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1. Introduction

Since Lundberg (1972) posed the question "why do people travel?", motivation has been widely investigated in the field of tourism as the basis of tourist behaviour. Identification of motivations is the first step towards generating destination plans because this explains why tourists make a trip and the type of experience, destination, or activity they want (Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003). Recently, studies have begun to focus on the identification of specific group motivations rather than examining general tourism and travel motivations. In this sense, many studies were conducted exploring tourist motivations for participating in festivals (e.g. Schofield & Thompson, 2007), visiting rural settings (e.g. Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010), visiting national parks (e.g. Kim et al., 2003), and participating in white-water rafting (e.g. Fluker & Turner, 2000).

However, few studies have attempted to clarify rock climbing tourists' motivations. Notably, no studies investigate rock climbing tourists' motivations by following push and pull motivation theory in the tourism field. Thus, the objective of the present study is to clarify rock climbing tourists' motivations within push and pull motivation framework. More specifically, the objectives of this study are: (1) to identify rock climbing tourists' motivations; (2) to measure the influence of the motivations on overall satisfaction; (3) to test the motivational differences in relation to experience; (4) to test the influential differences of the motivations on overall satisfaction depending on experience. Achieving these objectives is important since in generating successful destination marketing plans, target group motivation should be identified. Moreover, motivation is even vital for understanding all forms of tourism; there are limited studies that examine the motivation of rock climbers, who constitute one of the micro-scale groups (Huang, Luo, Ding, & Scott, 2014).

2. Tourist motivation theories

Conceptualisation of motivation originates from the consumer behaviour literature (Farmaki, 2012). Since motivation is the starting point of the consumer decision process and an important construct for understanding tourist behaviour, it became a widely investigated concept for many years by academics in the field of tourism and travel. One of the early adaptations of consumer motivation to tourist motivation was the study of Pizam, Neumann, and Reichel (1979, 195), who defined tourist motivation as "a set of needs, which predispose a person to participate in a tourist activity". Another definition of motivation in the tourism and travel context was offered by Dann (1981, 205): "a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or group of actors to travel, and which is subsequently interpretable by others as a valid explanation for such a decision".

Previous studies on tourist motivation can be divided into three categories. The majority of the first group have exploratory characteristics and focus on personal motivations that direct people towards specific behaviours. Some studies in this group also attempt to clarify the motivational differences in relation to demographics (e.g. Kim et al., 2003). In the second group, motivation is used for market segmentation purposes. For example, Devesa et al. (2010) identified four market segments by using motivational factors relating to a rural destination. In another study, Baloglu and Uysal (1996) determined 'sport/activity seekers', 'novelty seekers', 'urban-life seekers', and 'beach/resort seekers' market segments for overseas pleasure travel by using the push and pull motivation framework. They showed that the demographic and trip characteristics of these market segments differ considerably. The third group of studies investigates the relationships amongst motivation and other constructs such as customer satisfaction and behavioural intention. The main argument of this group of researchers is that motivation leads individuals towards a specific action that likely brings satisfaction (Moutinho, 1987). In addition, Ajzen (1991) suggested that behavioural intention captures motivational factors. In the tourism literature, many researchers found support for motivation–satisfaction relationships (e.g. Huang et al., 2014; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). But recently, Devesa et al. (2010) concluded that more in-depth research which investigates the relationships between motivation and customer satisfaction is needed because in a highly competitive context understanding the antecedents of customer satisfaction is extremely important for success.

Pearce and Lee (2005) noted that two of the main complications in tourist motivation research are the wide variety of human needs and methodological difficulties. To overcome these issues, academics tend to examine tourist motivation relying on tourism types such as adventure tourism, cultural tourism, and event tourism. The most popular theoretical frameworks are Plog's (1974) 'allocentrism/psychocentrism model', Dann's (1981) 'push and pull motivation theory', Iso-Ahola's (1982) 'optimal arousal theory', Beard and Ragheb's (1983) 'leisure motivation approach', and Pearce's (1988) 'travel career ladder' model.

Plog's (1974) 'allocentrism/psychocentrism model' was generated by a study of the airline industry conducted in the late 1960s, to explore why a large number of American people did not fly, and whether they could be encouraged to fly (Hsu & Huang, 2008). While allocentric people are venturesome and self-assured, psychocentrics have some common personality tendencies (such as territory boundness, generalised anxieties, and a sense of powerlessness) (Hsu & Huang, 2008). In the model, people are categorised into one of five groups (psychocentrics, near psychocentrics, midcentrics, near allocentrics, and allocentrics) depending on their personalities on an axis.

Iso-Ahola's (1982) 'optimal arousal theory' suggests that tourist motivation contains components of both seeking (to intrinsic rewards) and escaping (from routine environments). Also, both of these elements have personal and interpersonal dimensions. Thus, this theory consists of four motivation categories: personal escape, interpersonal escape, personal seeking, and interpersonal seeking.

Beard and Ragheb's (1983) 'leisure motivation approach' aims to highlight the motivations that influence post-leisure activity satisfaction. According to Ryan and Glendon (1998), the first motivation type, called 'intellectual', explains the need to take part in leisure activities involving mental effort such as learning and discovering. The second is 'social' motivation, when people seek leisure activity for social reasons. This can be divided into two factors: basic and esteem of others. The third motivation type is 'competence-master', namely, the desire to achieve, to be challenged, or to compete. Lastly, 'stimulus avoidance' motivation is escape from annoying environments and avoidance of exhausting social contacts. This motivation type represents Iso-Ahola's (1982) 'escaping' construct.

Pearce's (1988) 'travel career ladder' model, which is based on Maslow's (1970) 'hierarchy of needs', describes tourist motivation as having five levels. These are, from the bottom to the top: relaxation needs, safety/security needs, relationship needs, self-esteem/development needs, and self-actualisation/fulfilment needs. This model's main argument is that human needs tend to ascend higher levels of the career ladder as their travel experiences increase and increasingly sophisticated factors motivate them to travel.

In Dann's (1981) 'push and pull motivation theory', 'push' factors reflect the psychological drivers of behaviour (Wu & Pearce, 2014) such as the desire for escape, relaxation, or adventure, while 'pull' factors are considered to be external, situational, or cognitive motivations such as destination attributes and leisure infrastructure (Devesa et al., 2010). In many previous studies on tourism and travel, push motivations are identified to be 'escape from everyday environment', 'novelty', 'social interaction' and 'prestige' (Kim et al., 2003). Interestingly, the 'escaping' element in Iso-Ahola's (1982) theory, which represents psychological/inner motives, and the whole 'travel career ladder' model both consist of Dann's (1981) 'push' motivations. Pull factors enable researchers to find out when, where, and how people travel (Prayag & Ryan, 2011), although these factors are different in each case since the 'pulling' attributes of a destination differ considerably from one person to another. In brief, "push factors focus on whether to go, and pull factors focus on where to go" (Kim et al., 2003, 171). However, it is not enough to identify push and pull motivation factors. As Wu and Pearce (2014) suggested, a link between push and pull factors should be generated by destination authorities, so that potential tourists are attracted to explore that destination.

3. Adventure tourist motivations

Ewert and Jamieson (2003, 68) defined adventure tourism as "a self-initiated recreational activity, typically involving a travel and overnight stay component that usually involves a close interaction with the natural environment, structurally contains elements of perceived or real risk and danger, and has an uncertain outcome that can be influenced by the participant and/or circumstance". In these and other definitions of adventure tourism, academics mostly include the 'risk elements' of the activities (Kane & Tucker, 2004). Weber (2001) argued that in order to be described as adventure an activity should have, to various degrees, both risk and insight-seeking characteristics. Cater (2006) and Pomfret (2006) stated that not only risk, but also other qualities such as insight, challenge, and play are essential elements of adventure activities. Thus, 'risk'