Risk-Taking Attitude and Behavior of Adventure Recreationists: A Review

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Abstract

Adventure tourism is a fast growing sub-sector of the tourism industry. To better understand the adventure tourism, the risk-taking attitude and the adventure behaviors of recreationists must be considered. This study clarifies these risk-taking attitudes and adventure behaviors by reviewing relevant literature. Recreation experiences, personality, and risk-taking attitude are precedents of adventure behavior. By assessing the factors that affect adventure behavior, adventure tourism managers can provide the best adventure activities for participants.

Keywords: Adventure tourism; Risk-taking attitude; Adventure behavior

Introduction

In recent years, adventure tourism has been a fast-growing sector of the tourism industry [1,2]. According to the Adventure Travel Trade Association [3], adventure tourism has contributed approximately one trillion U.S. dollars of global production value.

Adventure recreationists participate in adventure activities for the adventure experiences [2]. Adventure tourism can be regarded as the process by which recreationists purposefully seek specific activities with dangerous or uncertain outcomes, such as white water rafting, scuba diving, river tracing, snowboarding, surfing, sailboarding, kite boarding, and rock climbing, to satisfy their desire to engage in adventurous behaviors [2,4,11].

Previous studies have attempted to elucidate various aspects of adventure tourism, such as participation motivation, satisfaction and behavior intentions [8,12-14], risk management [1], and environmental attitude [11,15,16].

Adventure recreationists seek recreation experiences that differ from those available through other outdoor activities [17]. Weaver [16] suggested demographic variables may influence risk-taking attitudes. However, few studies have elucidated the relationship between risk-taking attitude and the adventure behaviors of recreationists. To better understand the adventure tourism, the attitudes risk-taking attitude and adventure behavior of recreationists must be considered. Accordingly, this study clarifies the risk-taking attitude and adventure behavior by reviewing relevant literature.

The Adventure Recreationists

Adventure recreation can be defined as activities with inherent elements of physical, emotional, or psychological risk, danger or uncertain outcomes, which typically take place within a natural environment [18]. Accordingly, an adventure recreationist is an individual who participates in activities that involve risk, danger or uncertain outcomes.

Adventure activities could be separated into soft and hard [19]. The hard adventure tourist likes to participate in activities with more risk, challenge and uncertainty [19,20], because soft adventure activities do not provide enough risk or enough of an adrenaline rush to arouse or motivate [21]. According to Sung [22], adventure recreationists can be divided into six groups, which are general enthusiasts, budget-oriented youths, soft moderates, upper high naturalists, family vacationers, and active soloists.

Adventure tourism is one of the most rapidly growing industries in the world. The Outdoor Industry Foundation [23] reports that almost 143 million Americans, or 49.2 percent of the US population, participated in an outdoor activity at least once in 2013. According to a global report on adventure tourism [24], 42% of travelers departed on adventure trips in 2013, and the global value of adventure tourism in that year was US$ 263 billion, representing an increase of 195% over the preceding two years. United Nations World Tourism Organization [24] also reported that 37% of adventure recreationists were male and 63% were female, and adventure recreationists rank natural beauty as the most important factor in selecting their destination, followed by the activities available and the climate.

Risk-Taking Attitude

Attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed as positive or negative evaluations of certain behaviors in which people are engaged [25,26]. Attitudes have been assumed to reflect individuals’ beliefs, feelings, and behavioral intentions [27]. Researchers have defined risk as an everyday experience, and everyone experiences it to varying degrees [28]. Lee and Tseng [9] suggested that risk-taking attitude represents an individual’s positive or negative evaluation of controlled behavior with a perceived uncertain outcome. Thus, in this study, risk-taking attitude is defined as an individual’s belief, feeling, and behavioral intention with respect to participation in risky activities.

Although adventure tourism involves elements of risk and uncertain results, and attitudes toward risk are important in explaining adventure behaviors, this risk and uncertainty of outcome motivate participation in adventure tourism. Cater [29] claimed that rather than demanding actual risk and uncertainty of outcomes, participants in commercial

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adventure activities primarily seek fear and thrills. In commercial adventure activities, participants must be protected from actual risks and hazards that are associated with the adventure activities. However, if the adventure providers manage all of the risk and adventure out of the experience, then the experience will be unappealing and unexciting [29].

Ewert and Cater [29] also suggested the existence of a close relationship between real risk and perceived risk. Weber, Blais, and Betz [30] utilized the Domain-Specific Risk Taking Scale (DPSPERT) to measure perceptions of risk in five risk content domains: financial, health/safety, recreational, ethical, and social. Mishra, Laluimière, and Williams [31] also used the DPSPERT to assess attitudes toward risk associated with gambling. The Brief Sensation-Seeking Scale (BSSS) has been used to measure attitudes to risk that are manifest in four ways: experience-seeking, susceptibility to boredom, thrill and adventure-seeking, and disinhibition [32].

Zuckerman, Eysenck, and Eysenck [33] suggested that experience-seeking is individuals’ seeking experience through the mind and senses, travel, and a nonconforming life-style. People enjoy short-term sensory experiences in the form of hallucinations, fantasies, dreams, and self-contemplation [34]. Susceptibility to boredom refers to an individual’s strong dislike of routine, repetitive experiences and dull people [33]. Unlike experience-seeking, susceptibility to boredom is related to aversion to sameness [34]. Thrill and adventure-seeking indicates a desire to engage in sports or activities that involve speed or danger [33]. Disinhibition concerns social and sexual disinhibition, such as variety in sexual partners, social drinking, and partying [33]. Males exhibit greater disinhibition than do females [34]. These four constructs (experience-seeking, susceptibility to boredom, thrill and adventure-seeking, and disinhibition) have been widely used to measure individuals’ risk-taking attitudes [32-35].

The BSSS was created by adapting the Sensation Seeking Scale [33] and has been widely used to measure attitudes to risk [32,36,37].

Demographic variables such as gender, education level and age can affect risk-taking attitudes [16,37,38]. Scholars have suggested that men, younger people, and well-educated people are likely to have more positive risk-taking attitudes [16,37,38].

Attitudes to risk-taking have been discussed in relation to different issues, such as flooding [39], and among various groups, such as offenders [40], undergraduate students [38], entrepreneurs [41], medical travelers [42], and adventure recreationists [9]. Some studies have suggested that attitudes to risk-taking influence governance, such as in flood prevention planning [39], and the management of prisoners [41]. Recently, in the context of tourism, risk-taking attitudes may affect a tourist’s perceived value of medical travel and loyalty [42] and adventure behavior [9]. According to aforementioned literature, risk-taking attitudes may affect the adventure behavior and travel decisions related to travel.

**Adventure Behavior**

Ewert and Vernon [18] claimed that adventure activities incorporate elements of physical, emotional, or psychological risk and potential danger. Participants can satisfy their desire to experience risk and danger by participating in such activities [6,10]. Thus, adventure behaviors may be defined as the behaviors of an individual who is taking part in an adventure activity that involves risk, an uncertain outcome, and potential danger [2,9,29,43,44].

Ewert and Hollenhorst [45] examined the relationship between the degree of engagement in an adventure activity and personal attributes of adventure recreationists. As the level of engagement increases, skill, frequency of participation, internalized locus of control, and preferred level of risk all increase. Ewert, Gilbertson, Luo, and Voight [46] elucidated motivations for participation in recreational adventure activities, and identified three groups of motivating factors, which were social factors, factors related to sensation-seeking, and factors related to self-image. Participation in adventure activities can meet participants’ psychological need for challenge [11,16,47,48]. Tsaur and Lin [47] identified seven classes of challenge for adventure recreationists, which were uncertainty in the environment, insufficiency of resources, relationships with partners, difficulty of the activity, the ability of partners, equipment, and a sense of competition.

Ong and Musa [11] examined the influences of experience, personality and attitude toward the underwater behavior of SCUBA divers, and found that recreation experience, personality, and attitude significantly influence a diver’s underwater behavior (including their non-contact diving behavior, buoyancy control diving behavior, and safety diving behavior).

**Risk-Taking Attitude and Adventure Behavior**

According to the Theory of planned behavior TPB [25], adventure recreationists’ attitudes may affect their adventure behavioral intentions. Numerous studies have utilized TPB theory to assess behavioral models [15,49]. Researchers have also found a significant relationship between attitude and behavioral intention [11,50]. Adventure activities involve elements of risk and uncertain results, so attitudes toward risk may have an important role in explaining adventure recreationists’ behaviors. Recently, Lee and Tseng [9] examined the structural relationship between risk-taking attitude and adventure behavior, but measured both by self-reporting. Risk-taking attitude and actual adventure behaviors have not yet been objectively determined. Accordingly, future research should develop an approach that combines quantitative with qualitative methods, such as the use of implicit measurement techniques, to make unobtrusive behavioral observations and thereby directly elucidate adventure behaviors [51].

**Conclusion**

Adventure activities have elements of risk and uncertain results; therefore, risk-taking attitudes may have an important role in explaining the adventure behaviors of recreationists. Understanding adventure behavior will allow adventure tourism managers to provide suitable recreation programs that meet adventure recreationists’ needs. To construct a complete model of risk-taking behavior, future research should consider a wide range of adventure activities, such as terrestrial, airborne, and aquatic activities. By exactly assessing the factors that affect adventure behaviors, adventure tourism managers can provide the best adventure activities for participants.

**References**