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Explaining intentions to participate in last chance tourism through the theory of planned behavior and the value-beliefs-norm model

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Abstract

Last chance tourism (LCT) remains a controversial yet popular travel trend due to its paradoxical nature of luring travelers to fragile places. However, despite the phenomenon's growing body of academic literature and attention by the popular press, little theory has been applied to understand why travelers gravitate towards this controversial form of tourism. This study addresses this gap in theoretical underpinnings by identifying the psychological determinants of individuals' intention and likeliness to participate in LCT. We employed a sequential model composed of constructs from Stern et al.'s (1999) value-belief-norm (VBN) model in combination with framework from the theory of planned behavior (TPB).

Following Stern et al. (1999) and recent empirical works successfully linking the VBN's six original constructs (Denley et al. 2020; Han et al. 2017; Landon et al. 2018; Lee & Jan 2018; Megeirhi et al. 2020; Sharma & Gupta 2020), the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{1a}: Egoistic values will be negatively related to an environmental worldview (as measured through the New Ecological Paradigm, NEP).

H_{1b-1c}: Altruistic and biospheric values will be positively related to an environmental worldview (through NEP).

H₂: An environmental worldview (through NEP) will positively predict an awareness of the consequences for participating in sustainable tourism.

H₃: Awareness of consequences will therefore be positively related to an ascription of responsibility for participating in sustainable tourism.

H₄: An ascription of responsibility will positively predict the degree of personal norms associated with sustainable tourism.

H₅: Personal norms will be positively related to an individuals' intentions to participate in LCT travel.

To explain a more substantial degree of variance in behavioral intentions as demonstrated by previous research (Han, 2015; López-Mosquera & Sánchez 2012), the current work will follow such a precedent in the context of LCT by adding constructs from the TPB to the proposed conceptual model. Based on significant relationships between the four constructs within research employing the TPB, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H_{6a}: Positive attitudes about LCT will be positively related to an individuals' intentions to participate in LCT travel.

H_{6b}: Negative attitudes about LCT will be negatively related to an individuals' intentions to participate in LCT travel.

H₇: Subjective norms concerning LCT travel will be positively related to an individuals' intentions to participate in LCT travel.

H₈: Perceived behavioral control focused on LCT travel will significantly predict the degree to which individuals intend to participate in LCT travel.

Methods

The questionnaire developed for this study consisted of questions based on measures from prior research. All items (Table 1) were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Egoistic, altruistic, and biospheric values were each measured using three items (van Riper & Kyle, 2014; Landon et al., 2018). Environmental worldview was measured using six items from the New Ecological Paradigm Scale (Dunlap et al. 2000) and following the work of Landon et al. (2018). Awareness of consequences was measured with five items (van Riper & Kyle, 2014; Raymond et al, 2011; Landon et al, 2018). Ascription of responsibility was measured using three items (Steg

& de Groot, 2010; Landon et al., 2018). Personal norms were measured using five items from Landon et al. (2018).

The following items were adapted from the Theory of Planned Behavior following the work of Jordan et al. (2018): perceived behavioral control (five items), subjective norms (six items), and positive and negative attitudes toward visiting an LCT destination (16 items). The last set of questions consisted of items measuring individuals' intention to participate in LCT (four items) and was adapted from the Intention to Visit scale (See & Goh 2019; Han et al. 2010).

Survey data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed by Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Population parameters to target the desired sample criteria were used and consisted of U.S. citizens at least 18 years of age who had traveled within the last 12 months for leisure and whose annual household income was at least US\$50,000. The national panel yielded a sample of 436 useable questionnaires for analysis. A two-step modeling approach (CFA-SEM) was followed to examine psychometrics and hypothesized relationships between VBN constructs, TPB constructs, and intentions to participate in LCT.

Results

Of the five hundred eighty-one individuals who accessed the online survey, 436 were fully completed (i.e., 75.0% completion rate). Following the works of Suess et al. (2020) and Joo and Woosnam (2020), and to ensure the integrity and reliability of the data, thirty cases were removed from analysis for those participants who took less than six minutes to complete the questionnaire or provided straight-line responses. Data analysis was carried out using the remaining 406 useable questionnaires.

The proposed 12-factor model with 48 items fit the data satisfactorily well with a significant χ^2 value of 1854.023. The model demonstrated fit indices within their acceptable threshold (TLI = 0.932, CFI = 0.940, RMSEA = 0.046 and SRMR= 0.054) and all criteria for validity and reliability were met.

A test of the structural relationships revealed the proposed model fit the data reasonably well ($\chi^2 = 2075.965$, $df = 1047$, $\chi^2/df = 1.983$, TLI = 0.922, CFI = 0.928; RMSEA = 0.049, and SRMR = 0.064). Results of the path analysis on VBN constructs showed positive and significant effects of altruistic ($\beta = 0.224$, $p < 0.001$) and biospheric values ($\beta = 0.593$, $p < 0.001$) on environmental worldview through NEP. In turn, NEP was found to positively influence awareness of consequences ($\beta = 0.639$, $p < 0.001$), awareness of consequences on ascription of responsibility ($\beta = 0.639$, $p < 0.001$), and ascription of responsibility significantly predicted personal norms associated with sustainable tourism ($\beta = 0.949$, $p < 0.001$). Personal norms were positively related to individuals' intentions to participate in LCT travel ($\beta = 0.106$, $p < 0.01$). A test of the TPB constructs revealed individuals' intentions to participate in LCT travel was positively predicted by positive attitudes about LCT ($\beta = 0.269$, $p < 0.001$), and negatively predicted by negative attitudes about LCT ($\beta = -0.095$, $p < 0.05$). Intentions to participate in LCT travel was positively predicted by subjective norms concerning LCT travel ($\beta = 0.619$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived behavioral control focused on LCT travel ($\beta = 0.344$, $p < 0.001$). The model accounted for 48%, 45%, 30%, 89% and 61% of the variance in environmental worldview, awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility, personal norms, and intentions to participate in LCT travel, respectively.

Conclusion

This study validates the proposed constructs encapsulated in these two theories as useful psychological determinants of why individuals want to participate in LCT travel to endangered places. Of the 11 hypotheses examined, 10 were supported, with both theories combining to explain 61% of the variance in travelers' intentions to participate in LCT. All but one (egoistic values) of the relationships within the VBN causal chain were significant and predicted individuals' intentions to participate in LCT. Additionally, the TPB constructs were shown to significantly influence individuals' intention to participate in travel to endangered places. Of these constructs, subjective 'social' norms were the best predictor for LCT intentions, corroborating previous investigations utilizing the TPB (Coon et al., 2020; Jansson et al., 2010). However, the salient role of subjective norms in combination with the other model constructs highlights the conspicuous nature of LCT's influence on demand.

The ability to continue to attract visitors is vital to destination survival and economic stability for many countries that depend on tourism as their primary source of revenue (Wilson et al., 2014). However, managing visitor expectations is becoming increasingly complex with rapidly changing and deteriorating environmental conditions. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic adds another layer of intricacy as public health restrictions are constantly evolving. As such, LCT sites managers face unique and significant challenges associated with maintaining appropriate access, visitor safety, and operational costs.

This study aimed to understand individuals' behavioral intentions to participate in LCT through the lens of two well-established theoretical frameworks, the VBN model and the TPB. In doing so, findings from this research inform marketing approaches for destination management organizations (DMOs) concerning the ideal travelers for this niche form of tourism. We suggest

DMOs use the psychological determinants from this study to tailor what experiences they add to their itineraries and offer to LCT tourists. For example, the positive associations identified between higher altruistic and biospheric values and awareness of consequences for participating in sustainable tourism suggests that tourists may opt for more environmentally friendly/less carbon-intensive activities while on their trip.

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Table 1. *Scale items*

Model constructs and corresponding items

Values*Egoistic values*

- Authority: the right to lead or command
- Social power: control over others dominance
- Influence: having an impact on people and events

Altruistic values

- A world at peace: a world free of war and conflict
- Equality: equal opportunity for all
- Social justice: correcting injustice, care for others

Biospheric values

- Unity with nature: fitting into nature
- Protecting the environment: preserving nature
- A world of beauty: the beauty of nature and the arts

Environmental worldview (New Ecological Paradigm)

- We are approaching the limit of the number of people the Earth can support
- When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences
- Plants and animals have as much right to exist as humans
- The Earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources
- The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset
- Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature

Awareness of consequence

- Carbon emissions from transportation (airplanes, cars, etc.)
- Pollution of local environments
- Destruction of native species' habitats
- Waste (trash, sewage, etc.) coming from tourists
- Water scarcity and overuse

Ascription of responsibility

- It is my responsibility to minimize my impacts on the environment as a tourist
- I feel jointly responsible for tourism impacts on the environment
- Minimizing my impacts on the environment is in part my responsibility

Personal norms

- As a tourist, I feel morally obligated to do whatever I can to minimize my environmental impact
- I would feel guilty if I were responsible for damage to the environment as a tourist
- Minimizing my impact on the environment is the right thing to do
- I am obligated to do my part to reduce my impact on the environment as a tourist
- People like me should do what they can to minimize their impact on the environment when traveling

Eco-friendly travel behavior*Willingness to sacrifice*

- I am willing to pay more for travel if it helps the environment
- I am willing to purchase environmentally-friendly tourism products even if they may be more expensive

I am willing to use environmentally-friendly means of transportation although this might take more time

I am willing to pay more to stay at environmentally-friendly accommodations

I am willing to use environmentally-friendly means of transportation although this may be more expensive

Localism

Stay at locally owned accommodations

Eat locally sourced food

Hire local guide services/tour operators

Purchase locally produced crafts and goods

Purchase locally made alcohol

Eco-behavior

Separate recycling from waste

Reuse bath linens during consecutive days stayed at accommodations

Use eco-friendly tour operators

Use reusable shopping bags

Positive attitudes about LCT

Travelling to an LCT destination would be satisfying

Travelling to an LCT destination would be rewarding

Travelling to an LCT destination would be worthwhile

Travelling to an LCT destination would be enjoyable

Travelling to an LCT destination would be pleasant

Travelling to an LCT destination would be fascinating

Travelling to an LCT destination would be relaxing

Negative attitudes about LCT

Travelling to an LCT destination would be uncomfortable

Travelling to an LCT destination would be scary

Subjective norms

Most people who are important to me expect me to travel to LCT destinations

Most people who are important to me encourage me to travel to LCT destinations

Most people who are important to me think I should visit LCT destinations

Most people who are important to me would visit LCT destinations themselves

Perceived behavioral control

It is mostly up to me whether or not I travel to an LCT destination in the near future

Whether or not to visit an LCT destination in the near future is completely up to me

If I wanted to travel to an LCT destination in the near future, I could

I have the complete control over visiting an LCT destination in the near future

If I wanted to, I could visit an LCT destination in the near future

Intentions to participate in LCT travel

I intend to travel for last chance tourism in the foreseeable future.

I plan to visit to a last chance tourism destination in the near future.

There is a high likelihood that I will visit a LCT destination within the foreseeable future.

I will visit a LCT destination within the next 12 months
