Are You A Tourist?
Tourists' Self-identification and the Definition of Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This study uses 1,619 responses to a visitor survey to empirically investigate the question of who is a tourist. Building on the literature on the definition and measurement of tourism, and the negative characterization of the term tourist, it contrasts the distance-based practical definitions with tourists' self-identification. The propensity to self-identify as tourist is positively related to the distance traveled and first-visit status. It is lower among visitors who visit friends or relatives or stayed longer. It is higher among women, travelers who visited more attractions and travelers with higher income. These findings could assist policy makers who use distance to define and measure tourism. The characterization of those who self-identify as tourists has important implications for CVBs and DMOs who wish to better address the negative connotation of the term "tourist" in their communication.

Keywords: *Tourism definition, tourist self-identification, travel distance*

INTRODUCTION

This study empirically investigates the question of who is a tourist. The conceptualization and measurement of this fundamental issue has been the focus of two established research themes. The first research thread had to do with the five-decade-old debate among practitioners, agencies, and researchers on what tourism is and on how to define tourism and tourists. The second historical stream of research explored the negative connotation of the term "tourist" and the implication of this negative subtext for tourists and tourism providers. This study builds upon these past works and takes a closer look at how tourists self-define their status, and what characterizes those who define themselves as tourists. Beyond providing insight on the tourist perspective about this question, the findings of this study shed light on how this self-definition compares with industry conventions. They also have important implications for DMOs and tourism providers who are concerned with the negative undertone of the term "tourist".

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The first goal of this study is to contrast the common, distance-based and practical approach to tourism definition with the manner in which tourists self-identify in the context of distance. Leiper (1979) lists three approaches to the definition of tourism: economic, technical and holistic. Two classic examples include Smith's (1988: 183), who offered a supply-side view. According to this view, tourism is "the aggregate of all businesses that directly provide goods or services to facilitate business, pleasure, and leisure activities away from the home environment". Another classic example is the World Tourism Organization definition: "Tourism comprises the

activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes (World Tourism Organization, 1994)."

While consumption of industrial service, leave of usual environment, time, and purpose are all used to identify a tourist, the questions remain as to whether and how tourist self-identification is related to such imposed criteria. Among the definition variables, the most challenging is the usual environment, and as such it merits further discussion. Usual environment is best operationalized by a distance threshold. However, what constitutes an appropriate threshold has been a highly contentious issue (Smith, 1999). Instead of relying on empirical evidence and analysis, the distance threshold chosen by agencies often reflects a social, political, or economic compromise. As pointed out by Smith (1999), halving the current Canadian threshold of 80 km to 40 km could introduce a large amount of routine, low-value trips, while Govers et al. (2008) argue that a threshold of 20 km is more appropriate for highly urbanized, and densely populated regions such as Flanders, Belgium. In the United States, distance traveled (used by research managers at convention and visitor bureaus (CVBs)) ranged between 20 and 150 miles (Masberg, 1998). The current study will contributes to this discussion by exploring the relationship between distance traveled and the self-identification of tourists.

The second aspect is the pejorative tinge associated with being a "tourist". This negative perception dates back to the mid-nineteenth century when the privileged travelers/tourists of previous generations were upset by what they perceived to be an intrusion of middle class tourists (Leiper, 1983). Boorstin (1964) provided an incisive and widely cited lament and critic on the tourist phenomenon in his chapter *From Traveler to Tourist: The Lost Art of Travel*. In his view, modern tourists, in number of millions, were insulated from locals by carefully planned, designed, and implemented guided package-tours or sea cruises, separated from landscape by airplane or by automobiles traversing through the land on a strip of monotonous super highway. Cultural artifacts were gathered in museums, and attractions and events were fabricated and reproduced for their convenience, both out of the original context. Tourists were there to confirm their expectations developed through mass media and guidebooks rather than to discover and understand. The whole experience was diluted, contrived, striped of authenticity and passive, failing to make the tourists more cosmopolitan or more understanding of other people. Boorstin's negative image of tourists has been widely cited, but also challenged (e.g., Cohen, 1972, 1973,1979; Galani-Moutafi, 2000; Jacobsen, 2000; MacCannell, 1999; Nash, 2001; Pearce, 1982, 1985; Urry, 2002). The most significant challenge was that of MacCannell (1999: 107) who regarded Boorstin's account to be a reflection of a characteristically upper-class view that "they are the tourist, I am not". For MacCannell, all tourists embody a quest for authenticity in other "times" and other "places" away from their everyday life. Such authentic experience could not be obtained by direct gaze on real life without intrusion into the gazed's privacy, thus staged authenticity and constructed tourist attraction is created in response to their need. The tourist experience, authentic or not, is, according to MacCannell, the result of the modern social structure, and thus the tourist is not the one to be blamed. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that some negative perceptions persist (e.g., Jacobsen, 2000) and as such, the issue is of concern to CVBs and tourism providers. Given the positive/negative duality, careful and thoughtful use of the term tourist and tourism within the marketing communication is called for in order to avoid undesirable outcomes.

With regard to this duality the current study aims to answer two questions. The first is: how many people self-identify as tourists? The level of acceptance of the tourist identity might

indicate the level of normalization and acceptance of such a role in contemporary society. The second question relates to one's ability to predict how people define their tourist status. In other words, the traditional negative image has been assigned by upper class to middle and lower class tourists, and was associated with passivity and dependence. Accordingly we ask: Does social class, as indicated by income, and gender indeed impact one's self-identification, or are there other factors which better predict it.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection and samples

Data for this study was taken from a 2010 visitor survey. Data was collected using face-to-face intercept interviews and online survey. Four interviewers, rotating among five popular tourist attractions within the vicinity of a midwestern city, conducted the surveys 7 days a week during the period of June 15 through August 15. They approached visitors to the sites in random manner and asked them to participate in a visitor survey by the local CVB. They switched between field survey and obtaining permission to contact the person via email. That is, every second person was asked if s/he was willing to participate in an online survey and to provide an email address so that s/he could be contacted on a later date. A total of 1,662 surveys (975 field interviews) were collected, with a response rate of 61.5% for the field survey and 34.6% for the online survey. The usable number of surveys was smaller (1,619) after eliminating incomplete and unusable questionnaires. 50.6% of the respondents were women, 57% were return visitors, 31% of the households had an annual income of over $100,000, and 28% between $75,000 and $100,000.

Analysis methods

The focus of this study was to explore the issue of tourists' self-identity as it relates to distance traveled and other factors. Accordingly, the variables used in the analysis included the respondents' self-identification (i.e., their answer to the question of "Do you view yourself as a 'tourist'?"), demographic variables (gender and income), and tripographic variables (previous visits, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), and travel distance). Distance was estimated using the respondents' zip codes and was calculated using a computer program written by this research team. The algorithm extracted the longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates from the respondents' zip codes. The distance was approximated as the product of the angle (computed using the *Great Circle Distances* formula) and the radius of earth (3,963.1 statute miles). The angle is given by

$$\Delta \hat{\sigma} = 2 \arcsin \left(\sqrt{ \sin^2 \left(\frac{\Delta \phi}{2} \right) + \cos \phi_s \cos \phi_f \sin^2 \left(\frac{\Delta \lambda}{2} \right) } \right).$$

where $\Delta \phi$ and $\Delta \lambda$ denote the difference between the latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates respectively. This approximation of the shortest path between two points on the surface of Earth assumes that the Earth is a perfect sphere. This approximation was deemed accurate enough for the purpose of this study. The frequencies of the distances traveled are shown in Figure 1.

Whether distance impacts the respondents' propensity to define themselves as tourists was investigated using two different approaches. First, the differences in the percentage of people who self-identified across distance categories were tested for statistical significance using a chi-square test (i.e, the contingency table method) followed by the Marascuilo procedure (Levine, 2007), which simultaneously tests the differences of all of the pairs of proportions. Second, a logistic regression model was fitted, where the dichotomous dependent variable was the respondents' self-identification as a tourist, and where the independent variables included the demographic and tripographic information listed above.
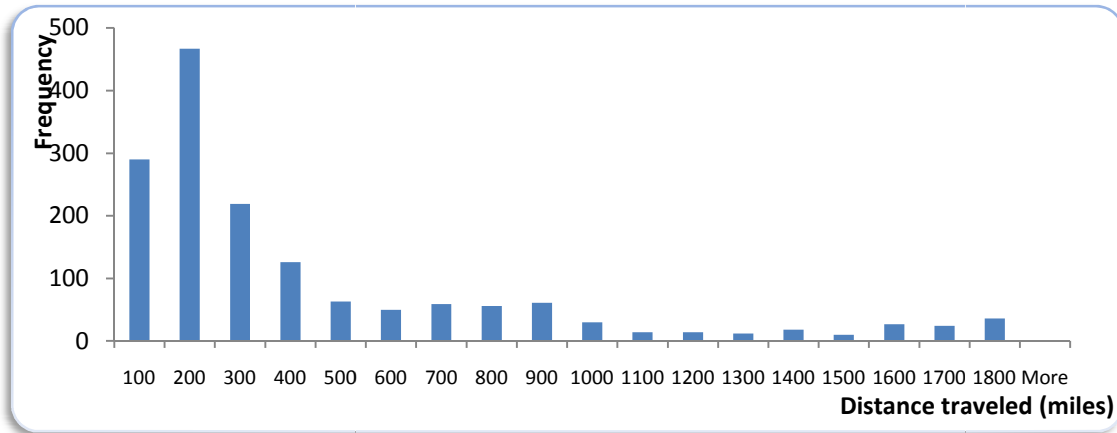
Figure 1 The Frequency of the Distance Traveled

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A large proportion of the respondents (90.1%) considered themselves to be tourists. Previous research considered various distances including 25, 50, 100 and 150 miles (Masberg, 1998). To ensure an appropriate number of observations in each distance category, this study set the following levels: less than 75 miles, 75-99.9, 100-199.9, 200-499.9, 500-1,499.9, 1,500 – 2,940 miles. As shown in Figure 2, among people who traveled less than 75 miles, 76.5% identified themselves as tourists and this proportion increases with the distance, following a concave form.
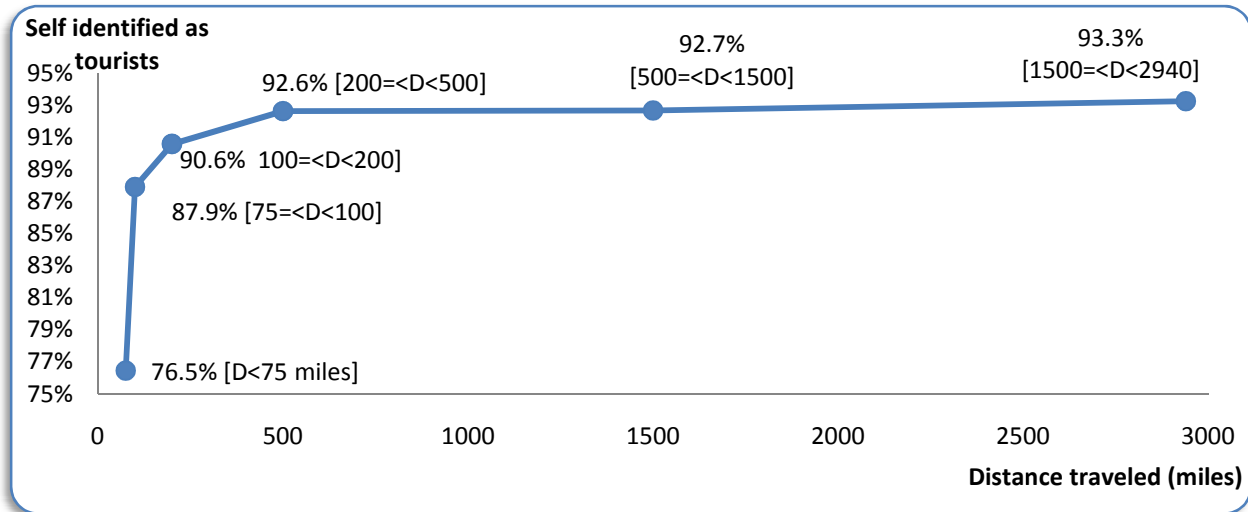
Figure 2. Percentage of People Who Identified Themselves as Tourists per Distance Category

The null hypothesis that all of the above proportions are equal was rejected at p<.01 (chi-square, contingency table) and the results of the follow up Marascuilo procedure indicate that the 76.5% (the less-than-75-miles distance category) is statistically different, at p<.05, from the 90.6%, the 92.6%, the 92.7% and the 93.3% observed values. This is a strong indication that distance impacts the propensity of visitors to self-identify themselves as tourists, and that the impact is detected when comparing short distances of less than 75 miles to longer distances of more than 100 miles.

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The outcome of the fitted logistic regression model as shown in Table 1 suggests that additional factors are associated with the propensity of visitors to self-identify as tourists. A test of the full model versus a model with intercept only was statistically significant with $\chi^2 = 80.351$ (df = 12, N = 1,619, p<.001), and the model correctly classified 90.1% of the cases, at a cut-off value of p=0.5.

Previous visit, VFR, and traveling less than 75 miles were all statistically significant at p<.05. The inverted odds ratio indicates that when holding all other variables constant, the odds of a first-time visitor claiming himself/herself as a tourist is 2.3 times that of a return visitor. Similarly, the odds of a non-VFR respondent identifying himself/herself as a tourist is 2.4 times that of a VFR respondent. Finally, the significance impact of the distance factor is underscored by the results of the logistic regression model as well. The findings indicate that holding all other variables constant, the odds of a respondent who traveled more than 75 miles reporting himself/herself as a tourist is 2.9 times that of a respondent who traveled less than 75 miles. Income and gender did not have a statistically significant impact on the propensity of visitors to self-identify themselves as tourists.

Table 1. Result of the Logistic regression*

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	P	Exp(B)
Intercept	3.290	.467	49.562	1	.000	26.846
Gender	-.299	.173	2.990	1	.084	.741
Annual household Income (in $000):						
less than 30	-.245	.337	.528	1	.467	.783
30 - 49.9	-.450	.264	2.902	1	.088	.638
50 - 69.9	.221	.258	.734	1	.392	1.247
70 - 99.9	.139	.230	.368	1	.544	1.150
Visited before	-.834	.210	15.705	1	.000	.435
Visited Friends and Relatives	-.878	.215	16.707	1	.000	.416
Distance traveled (in miles)						
Less than 75	-1.064	.482	4.868	1	.027	.345
75 - 99.9	-.358	.508	.495	1	.482	.699
100 - 199.9	-.137	.467	.086	1	.770	.872
200 – 499.9	.044	.476	.009	1	.926	1.045
500 – 1499.9	-.030	.479	.004	1	.950	.971
-2 Log likelihood			963.894			
x^2			80.351		.000	

* Dichotomous dependent variable: the respondents' self-identification as a tourist

CONCLUSION

While the findings of this study indicate that from the perspective of the tourists, distance is related to the definition of tourism (through self-identification as tourists), it is also clear that a large percentage of short distance travelers who are not defined as tourists by most official definitions of tourism do see themselves as tourists. Interestingly, social class, as indicated by income and gender, was not found to be a determining factor while trip purpose and previous visits were found to be determining factors. These findings (as explained in details in the full paper) have important implications for CVBs and DMOs who wish to better address the negative connotation of the term "tourist" in their communication.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations of this study include generalizability (single midwest destination), the omission of services and consumption from the fitted logistic regression model, and the level of variable categorization, such as the grouping of all visitation purposes (beyond VFR) into a single category.

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