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FAMILY LIFE CYCLE ANALYSIS: AN APPLIED EXAMPLE IN A TOURISM SETTING

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have utilized the concept of family life cycle to better understand leisure behavior. In fact, it has been proposed as a potentially useful variable for both "recreation product companies and recreation administrators to use in segmenting markets and predicting demand". (9) The purpose of this study was to determine if there were significant differences between couples who traveled either with or without children. In all, 2,700 surveys were mailed to persons who had requested the North Carolina Travel Information Packet. A total of 1,887 (69.9%) were received. A factor analysis was performed on 26 reasons (benefits sought) for taking a trip. Four factors or "benefit scales" resulted. Significant differences were found between couples who had traveled either with or without children as to the types of benefits sought and a number of trip-related behaviors.

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INTRODUCTION

Life has been described as a "developmental" or "evolving" process; in fact, Levinson has argued that the life cycle consists of six stages which represent major life transitions. (10) Crawford, Godbey & Crouter, Orthner, and Rapoport & Rapoport suggest that these stages have implications for leisure involvement. (4, 13, 15) According to Kelly,

leisure has a career that changes with new opportunities, altered social roles, and in ways quite unanticipated. ... the most dramatic change in leisure behavior comes with the birth of children. Parenthood is the role context that produces far and away the greatest shift in both leisure orientations and contexts.(8, p. 187)

Cheek and Burch have found that many leisure activities are undertaken because they permit the strengthening or maintenance of social bonds with family, friends and neighbors.(3) Kelly is in agreement and concludes that families are drawn to activities that complement the family role.(8) He also believes that adults who are married but not yet parents are more likely to pursue experiences that build upon their relationship.

Bergier has concluded that, "the extent to which a person participates in an activity is a function of how the individual perceives the benefits provided by that activity".(1, p. 150) Within the context of travel, a number of theories have been postulated about the benefits people seek; most can be grouped into two dimensions, pull factors and push factors.(11) Pull factors are motives or benefits aroused by the destination rather than emerging exclusively from within the travelers themselves.(5) They include such reasons as: visiting historic attractions, oceans and beaches or sport facilities; a desire for exposure to new cultures and education; and, seeking beautiful scenery or a relaxing atmosphere.(2, 12, 19)

Push factors, on the otherhand, are considered socio-psychological motives or benefits and are considered to be useful in explaining the individual's desire to vacation. Benefits such as the desire to meet new people, to visit friends and relatives, to escape from everyday life, and to seek recognition, attention, or status constitute push factors.(5-6, 14, 16-18) As Hill pointed out over 20 years ago,

the holiday is psychologically a period during which [individuals hope] to take in and store "internal goods" with which [they] will return enriched, regenerated and recharged to [their] own environment.(7, p. 130)

While theories about the benefits of pleasure travel (as leisure) have been postulated, few have been empirically tested. The purpose of this study was to determine whether significant differences in benefits sought and various forms of travel behavior existed between groups that included and did not include children. By attempting an empirical study to understand the differences in travel behavior between the two groups, further support will be given to the work of Kelly, Levinson, and others who have enhanced our understanding of the impact of life stages on leisure behavior.(8, 10)

PROCEDURE

A literature review and 30 unstructured personal interviews were used to generate a list of possible travel benefits. Twenty-eight possible reasons (benefits sought) for taking a trip were derived from this procedure and were included in the data collection instrument. In addition to the benefit dimension of the questionnaire, the sample was also asked to indicate the purpose of their trip and other related travel behaviors (i.e., length of stay, season visited, section of state visited, and activities engaged in during the trip).

Subjects were drawn from consumer inquiries for the 1984 North Carolina Travel Information Packet (n=2,700). For the purposes of this study, only individuals who: 1) had visited North Carolina since receiving the information packet, 2) were on a pleasure vacation, 3) were not on personal or official business, and 4) had completed the section of the questionnaire that required them to indicate which reasons influenced their decision to travel to North Carolina, were included in the analyses. Out of the total response to the questionnaire (1,887), 637 met the established criteria for inclusion in the study. A self-administered questionnaire, a post-card reminder, and two follow-up questionnaires were used to collect the data.

ANALYSES

A preliminary analysis of the frequencies resulted in the elimination of two potential reasons for travel (seeking danger and seeking spiritual benefits), which were not considered important enough to this sample to warrant further study. A factor analysis was performed on the remaining 26 reasons to determine if salient benefit dimensions existed. It supported the existence of six possible benefit dimensions. (see Table 1) Items with factor loadings of greater than .60 formed scales that could be used to measure these dimensions. A reliability test (Cronbach alpha) resulted in the exclusion of two of these scales. In addition, chi-square procedures were used to explore the relationships between the benefits sought and forms of travel behavior of the two groups.

RESULTS

A number of significant differences were found between groups with children and groups without children. Couples traveling with children were more likely to score high on the "aesthetics" factor as well as the "social" factor (see Table 2). This group was also more likely to travel during the summer months, and when traveling, to visit the coastal region of North Carolina. In addition, couples traveling with children were more likely to desire a variety of activities than couples without children. Thus, it is not surprising that of the eight activities where there were significant differences between the two groups, couples traveling with children were more likely to participate (see Table 3).

Groups traveling without children were more likely to spend less during their vacation. However, they were also not as concerned with the amount of money they would have to allocate to their pleasure travel experience. Additionally, couples traveling without children were more likely to spend less than three months planning for their vacation whereas those traveling with children were more likely to begin planning three or more months in advance (see Table 4).

DISCUSSION

Literature has suggested that as individuals move into the parenting role their leisure behavior is modified; this study supports that notion. (4, 8, 13, 15) Couples traveling with children, more than those traveling without, appear to be more interested in "sharing" their experiences with others. This behavior appears to be reminiscent of that which Kelly suggested--parents are drawn to activities, such as sharing, that complement the family roles. (8) Not surprisingly, parents were also more likely to involve themselves and their families in a variety of activities while on vacation.

Perhaps most important to recreation planners and marketers are the pre-planning variables found to be significantly related to the composition of the traveling party. Individuals who travel with their children appear to be more concerned about the cost of their vacation than those who travel without children. They also begin planning sooner for their experience. Planners and marketers should heed this information. They should focus their appeals on the low-cost alternatives available at their destinations and begin their campaigns at least three to six months ahead of the summer season when most families with children appear to travel.

The findings also indicate that the "excitement" and "relaxation" factors were not significantly related to family group. This was surprising to the researchers because the tourism industry tends to focus their advertising appeals on these two dimensions. Perhaps this finding is due to the preconceptions families have about North Carolina. Further research needs to address this issue.

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TABLE 1
FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS OF BENEFIT DIMENSIONS
1984 NORTH CAROLINA VISITORS SURVEY

	factor 1 (relaxation)	factor 2 (explore)	factor 3 (excitement)	factor 4 (social)	factor 5 (shopping)	factor 6 (social 1)
benefit items	(.889) ^c	(.796)	(.720)	(.609)	(.304)	(.415)
to relax	.6114	.1317	-.0590	.0902	.2789	.0641
to experience solitude	.7006	.1476	-.0884	.0899	.0767	.2103
to get away from it all	.7686	.0883	.0673	-.0154	-.0963	-.0126
to get recharged	.6313	-.0188	.2745	.2896	-.0306	.1194
to be able to do nothing	.6995	.0496	.1016	.0142	.1308	-.0843
to release tension	.7818	.0421	.2324	.0830	-.0567	.0584
to have privacy	.7957	.0865	.1347	.0043	.0454	.0479
to escape from the routine	.6689	.1285	.1983	.0054	-.0373	-.0346
to not have to rush	.6612	.1861	.2059	-.0231	.0019	-.0432
to learn new things	.1015	.6332	.0827	.0304	.1137	.3426
to see interesting sights	.0607	.8228	.1324	.0728	.0173	.0614
to explore new places	.1562	.7845	.1791	-.0202	.1038	.0726
to view scenery	.2424	.7359	.0184	.1219	.0525	-.0552
to do exciting things	.1933	.3773	.5574	.1545	-.1240	.2188
to be entertained	.1151	.2315	.7393	.0208	.1171	-.0001
to do a specific activity	.0972	.0491	.5816	.2304	-.0948	.1403
to experience luxury	.1597	-.0361	.7397	-.0523	.2907	.0219
to be in control	.3107	.0991	.5307	.0636	.1617	.0787
to visit friends	-.1691	-.0118	-.0737	.5631	.0444	.2633
to share a familiar place with others	.0852	.0698	.1438	.7672	.0660	.0867
to return to a favorite vacation site	.2757	.0645	.1167	.6670	.1926	-.0016
to do something with the family	.1733	.3178	.2350	.4995	-.1329	-.3615
to eat good food	.21535	.0726	.1252	-.0108	.7468	.1028
to go shopping	-.1043	.1173	.1244	.2315	.6195	-.0583
to meet new people	-.0877	.2172	.2539	.0923	.1201	.4990
to learn about yourself	.2728	.1267	.1359	.1724	-.0860	.6956

^aKaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = .88867

^bBartlett test of sphericity = 5557.7499, significance = .0000

^cCronbach alpha reliability coefficient

TABLE 2
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COUPLES WITH
CHILDREN AND COUPLES WITHOUT CHILDREN
AS TO BENEFITS SOUGHT ^a

Descriptive Characteristics	Relaxation			Excitement			Social			Aesthetics		
	low	med	high	low	med	high	low	med	high	low	med	high
couples with- out kids	34%	32%	34%	32%	42%	26%	41%	40%	20%	25%	41%	35%
couples with kids	26	39	36	27	41	32	32	36	32	19	32	49
	X ² =4.04			X ² =2.58			X ² =9.27**			X ² =9.56**		

^a The percentages are totaled across and may not equal to 100% due to rounding

* Significant at alpha ≤ .05

** Significant at alpha ≤ .01

TABLE 3
PERCENTAGE OF GROUPS
PARTICIPATING IN PARTICULAR ACTIVITIES

Type of Activity	Couples without kids (N=281)	Couples with kids (N=180)	X ²
Fishing	21%	39%	17.65***
Shopping	73	84	7.21**
Golf	16	12	1.33
Camping	20	29	5.32*
Hiking	34	49	10.45**
Visit Museums	48	59	5.00*
Amusement Parks	11	32	28.72***
Historic Sites	74	83	4.41*

* Significant at alpha ≤ .05

** Significant at alpha ≤ .01

TABLE 4
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS
ON TRAVEL BEHAVIOR VARIABLES

Travel Behavior	Couples without kids	Couples with kids	X ²
Was friend/relative visited			
no	74%	74%	
yes	26	26	0.00
Season visited			
offseason	16	6	
shoulder	43	20	
summer	41	74	45.73**
Section of NC visited			
Coast	42	52	
Piedmont	21	11	
Mountain	37	37	5.60*
Spending Levels			
Low	34	28	
Medium	32	27	
High	34	45	5.24*
Planning timeframe			
less than 1 month	23	15	
1 to 3 months	52	49	
more than 3 months	25	36	11.09*

* Significant at alpha \leq .06

** Significant at alpha \leq .01