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Propositions for Examining the Seasonality Construct in Tourism Settings

The phenomena of changing seasons has plagued tourism managers and industry professionals as patterns have become harder to predict; consequently, these situations have become harder to regulate, market, and prepare for tourism flows. Practitioners understand that there is a large issue in the vulnerability of the tourism market that is dependent on seasonal weather fluctuations (see Clifford, 2002). Research suggests that although we often view seasonal changes as negatively associated with travel, there are benefits to the fluctuations as well (Chung, 2009). However, despite the urging of practitioners to improve the knowledge of seasonality and impact on tourism, academic research has yet to fully grasp, understand, measure, or theoretically describe the seasonality constructs that so clearly impact market success and failures in tourism destinations.

Previous research has focused on explaining and defining terms for seasonality and related concepts (Higham, & Hinch, 2002; Moore, 1989). However, albeit these efforts, the amplification of seasonality differentiates across disciplines and regions resulting in a lack of the full understanding of its impact on tourism and travel flows. Consequently, there is also limited knowledge as to seasonal effects on marketing, specifically in tourist-based environments. Therefore, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to further develop our understanding of the seasonality constructs as predictors of tourism behavior. This study answers the following inquiries:

- 1) What literature regarding seasonality is known in the tourism field? How can this literature be organized for more thorough interpretation?
- 2) How does seasonality impact consumer decision making? How has seasonality impacted the use of inbound and outbound marketing?
- 3) What established measurement tools can be defined to help us link seasonal destination consumer needs with actual behavior and internet search behavior and improve our understanding of the constructs of seasonality?

Literature

Baum and Lundtorp (2001) edited a collection of articles that focused on seasonality ranging from specific locations affected by seasonality (Kennedy & Deegan, 2001, p. 51-74) to the marketing effects of seasonality (Jeffrey & Barden, 2001, p. 119-140). Along with this scholarly work, which has provided a detailed analysis of seasonality topics, Butler (1998), BarOn (1975) and Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff (2005) have made significant contributions to the progression of the examination of seasonality constructs. Butler's (1998) article is one of the major academic research contributions that focuses on the development of the seasonality concept explaining the progress in the literature and also the impact of spatial dimensions and spatial variations impacted by seasonal fluctuations. Building on BarOn's (1975) contribution of defining specific terms related to seasonality, as well as Butler's (1998) contribution as previously noted, Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff's (2005) research outlined the then present

literature and suggested additional gaps associated with this phenomena specifically concentrating on the impacts of seasonality, such as economic, ecological, and socio-cultural.

Despite large amounts of research, which is mostly demand driven and practitioner focused (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005), there still remain considerable gaps in the seasonality literature. One gap that Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff (2005) specifically acknowledge is that of lack of theory surrounding the seasonality concept stating “tourism seasonality research has been dominated by a focus on practice, rather than being based on theoretical models” (p. 216). This lack of theory has also suffered from the limited creation of measured seasonality constructs and the methods to measure them in more detail. The goal of this study is to close this gap by (1) acknowledging previous research, (2) defining the seasonality theoretical term(s) and related concepts, and (3) proposing guidelines or propositions for empirical testing.

Type of Study

This conceptual study is focused on contributing to the strengthening of theoretical models and empirical research by thoroughly examining the seasonality concept. Using Xin, Tribe, and Chambers (2013) as a conceptual guide, this study attempts to “answer big, holistic questions that are not amenable to empirical analysis” (p. 84). Xin, Tribe, and Chambers (2013) also state that the main outcomes of conceptual research “include the clarification of a concept” (p. 84), which this study has done. Similar to Pike and Page’s (2013) analysis of the destination marketing literature, this study organizes the seasonality literature and accepts the challenge of Xin, Tribe, and Chambers (2013) to continue the development of tourism concepts (i.e. seasonality and related terms or constructs) and to contribute to the limited number of conceptual research papers in existence. Following the process and organizational procedures used by Havitz and Dimanche (1990), this paper concentrates on suggesting several propositions to be used as a guide in further seasonality literature. The seven propositions have been developed from the previous literature and focus on the measurement of seasonality, specifically the tools to be utilized in seasonality empirical research; the types of seasonality as connected to traveler decision-making; the relationship between traveler search behavior, actual behavior, and seasonal changes; and the organization of seasonal terms in relation to seasonal activity.

Contribution

This analysis of the seasonality literature has revealed that there is a great need for further research on the subject, specifically to address the concepts that are yet to be defined within and across the tourism literature. First, it is suggested that there is a need to quantify the measurement areas in the seasonality literature. Specifically, to quantify and measure the propositions developed in this study. Supporting this, possible quantifiable areas to be further measured are the impact of seasons and weather on sporting destinations, beach destinations, and national park destinations. The most profound impact would come from measurements over time in which the researcher can identify patterns in seasons in relation to patterns in behavior as a comparison to determine how much seasons influence tourism choice and decision-making. Secondly, research is needed that will determine if these terms and trends will lead to correlations that can be used to perhaps better predict tourist behavior and market effectiveness.

Thus, this research would be beneficial for practitioners in the quest for streamlined marketing strategies, as well as for academics in the quest for understanding and explaining the relationship between personal behaviors and marketing to develop sound constructs that lead to more theoretical development of the seasonality.

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