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PARTICIPATION IN CHILDREN'S ADVENTURE CAMPS IN GREECE: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INCENTIVES AND LOYALTY

Key words: incentives, children's camps, loyalty, camp participation, adventure camps.

ABSTRACT

The present paper investigates consumer behaviour issues on the basis of a children's adventure camp in Greece. The research aimed specifically to: a) identify the most important incentives that drive children to participate in adventure camps, b) investigate whether these incentives are modified after camp participation, and c) evaluate relationships between post-participation incentives and children's camp loyalty. A sample of 108 (N = 108) children (54.6% boys) participated in an adventure summer camp and filled twice (before and after their participation in camp) the Six Incentive Dimensions Instrument designed by Alexandris & Kouthouris (2005). The obtained results show that: a) the most important children's pro-participation incentives were 'Socialization II' (making new friends) (M = 4.10, SD = 0.82) and 'Camp Experience' (M = 4.05, SD = 0.60); b) after their participation in camp children gave higher scores only to the 'Socialization II' incentive (making new friends) (M = 4.21, SD = 0.64). In terms of differences between pre- and post-camp participation incentives, only the 'Be in Nature' incentive scores were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$); c) a regression analysis revealed only the 'Camp Experience' (beta = 0.58, $p < 0.001$) and Socialization I (meeting old friends) (beta = 0.17, $p < 0.05$) incentives as statistically significant in predicting camp participants' loyalty. Information regarding adventure summer campers' profiles and managerial implications to develop camp services and satisfying children incentives are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The institution of children's camps in Greece and the particular market for children's camps has become more consolidated and competitive in the last twenty-five years. Attraction of new campers and maintenance the interest of old ones constitute the fundamental objective for the marketing departments of Greek summer camps. Camp directors try to make their services more customer-oriented in order to build a faithful customer base. It is a significant task as their business success

depends to a great extent on camp participants' responses.

The reasons that drive children to spend their holidays at a summer camp and consider their participation in the future should be researched to enable camp managers to develop their segmentation strategy. Personal incentives are reasons that explain individuals' engagement in specific behaviours. According to Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman [15], motivation research faces two challenges. The first relates to the development of a list of motives that can capture the whole range of

motivating forces that drive individuals to engage in specific behaviours (e.g., participation in a specific sport activity). The other relates to the understanding of relationships between motives and specific behaviours.

Maher and Braskamp [21] suggest individuals might be motivated by a variety of personal incentives that can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic ones. Intrinsic incentives are those that motivate an individual to engage in an activity for its own sake, for the pleasure and satisfaction derived simply from performing the activity [11]. Intrinsically motivated individuals are driven by learning (e.g., learning a new activity), stimulation (e.g., living exciting experiences, having fun), and accomplishment (e.g., experiencing satisfaction by perfecting my abilities) related incentives [26]. Extrinsic motivation pertains to a wide variety of behaviours used as means to an end and not for their-own sake [11]. Extrinsic personal incentives are related to social approval (e.g., affiliation to a group and social concern) and external rewards (e.g., financial recognition for accomplishment).

Research on incentives before and after participation is important for camp managers because it provides them with information regarding participants' personal needs. Once the incentives are fully understood they may be applied to target consumers more effectively, and satisfy their needs and expectations better. Psychographic segmentation involves profiling participants based on their needs and expected benefits. In the context of the current study, the understanding of reasons behind children becoming loyal campers can help camp managers develop appropriate programmes and services.

Although a number of studies in the area of sports and recreation have examined personal incentives of participation, research into differences in incentives before and after participation has been rather limited. The present study investigates the differentiation between incentives before and after participation in a children adventure's camp in Greece as well as possible relationships between post-participation incentives and campers' loyalty.

The role of incentives for participation

Vallerand [30] reports that there is empirical evidence that intrinsic motivation is related to positive affective experiences such as satisfaction and enjoyment, while amotivation is related to

negative affective experiences such as stress and anxiety. There have not been any studies investigating specifically incentives for participation in adventure camps. The majority of leisure and recreation studies have referred to the importance of fun and enjoyment related incentives [8, 16, 32]. In the physical exercise context, Duda and Tappe [13] proposed the following dimensions of incentives driving individuals toward participation in exercise: mastery, competition, social affiliation, recognition, health benefits, and physical fitness. Some years later, two more dimensions, i.e. enjoyment and future creation, were added by Markland and Hardy [22].

The context of loyalty

Customer loyalty is the level of continuity in the customer's relationship with a brand or a service provider [28]. Behavioural and attitudinal loyalty constitutes the two main types of loyalty [20, 27]. According to literature, behavioural loyalty may include customer share [7], frequency of visits [9], and duration of the relationship [27]. Attitudinal loyalty refers to attitudes [12], preferences [27], commitment [5] and intentions [33].

It is widely accepted today that it is more expensive to attract new customers than to retain the existing ones [34]. Oliver [25] reported that the net present value increase in profit that results from a 5% increase in customer retention varies between 25% and 95% for over fourteen industries. Kim & Scott [18] defined loyalty both in behavioral and attitudinal terms. This was further supported by Iwasaki and Havitz [17], who also viewed loyalty as one of the main consequences of leisure involvement. Furthermore, retention of customers and measuring customer loyalty are increasingly important issues for managers of recreational facilities. Retention of loyal customers, word-of-mouth advocacy and ultimately organisational profitability are important consequences of customer service quality as well as customer satisfaction [24, 31]. Some earlier studies in the context of recreation measured attitudinal loyalty, in terms of intention to continue doing skiing [4] and intention to continue visiting a specific resort [2]. Motivations and negotiation strategies have been shown to be determinants of loyalty in recreation [4], while place attachment and service quality have been shown to influence the development of resort's loyalty [2]. Barlas,

Koustelios & Mantis [6], also reported a significant effect of skiers' service quality perceptions on word-of-mouth communication. Finally, Alexandris & Kouthouris [3] in their study of children's camps reported that the Camp Experience incentive was the most powerful and consistent predictor of loyalty and word-of-mouth communications.

The sector of children's adventure summer camps in Greece

There are more than 300 children's summer camps in Greece today. They usually operate for three 21-day seasons during the summer. A typical camp is attended by more than 300 children in each season. Camp staff usually consists of physical education teachers and school educators. In recent years different types of camps have been developed. The majority of the summer camps can be characterized as 'sport camps' and they offer a wide range of sport activities. Other kinds of camps are cultural (e.g., painting, performing arts), leisure (e.g., entertainment) and educational (e.g., language classes, environmental behaviour). The majority of the camps in Greece are owned by private companies, while a small number of public sector camps also exists (e.g. run by the Greek National Bank or Inland Revenue Service). In most cases the private sector camps are more expensive than public sector camps. There is a small number of camps owned by non-profit organizations (e.g. Y.M.C.A.). However, the increasing trend to include alternative activities such as hiking, climbing, rope courses, sea-kayaking and archery, into camp programs alongside sport and education activities has led to the development of different adventure or mountain camps usually called adventure camps. Their main objective is to offer an attractive leisure environment for children, in combination with sport and educational experiences [3].

Aims

The aims of this study were a) to identify the most important incentives that drive children to participate in adventure camps, b) investigate if these incentives are modified after participation in camps, and c) investigate the predictive ability of post-participation incentives toward children's camp loyalty.

METHODS

Sample

The study sample consisted of 108 (N = 108) children, who participated in a summer camp in central Greece. The camp focused on outdoor activities (e.g. hiking, climbing, mountain biking, team building and environmental education courses). Permission to collect data was obtained from the camp manager. 54.6% of the campers were boys (N = 59) and 45.4% girls (N = 49). The participants' mean age was 13.3 years (SD = 1.02). In terms of campers' years of participation, the mean retention time in this particular camp was 3.15 years (SD = 1.63), while the total mean time as a camper was 3.83 years (SD = 1.32).

Instruments

The scale to measure incentives for camp participation (pre- and post-participation) was developed by Alexandris & Kouthouris [3] and its validity and reliability has been tested successfully in Greek studies. The scale consisted of 18 items, divided into 6 incentive dimensions for summer camp participation. The six incentives were: a) 'Camp Experience' (e.g. to have fun), b) 'Socialization I/Old friends' (e.g. to meet my old friends), c) 'Socialization II/New friends' (e.g. to make new friends), d) 'Independence' (e.g. to feel free), e) 'Outdoor Activities Participation' (e.g. to do rock climbing), and f) 'Be in Nature' (e.g. to breath fresh air). The questionnaire was filled by the participants before and after their participation in the camp. In the pre-participation survey the children gave their answers to the question: 'Personally, why are your reasons for participation in this adventure camp?' The second time, i.e. after the end of the camp, the children gave their answers to the question: 'Why will you be willing to participate in this adventure camp next year?' The children were asked to rate the importance of 18 incentives on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 = Totally Disagree to 5 = Totally Agree).

In terms of evaluating campers' loyalty, a scale proposed by Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman [33] and adapted to the Greek market by Alexandris, Dimitriadis, & Kasiara [1], was used. The scale consisted of three items (e.g. How determined do you feel to remain a camper at this specific summer adventure camp?). A five-point Likert scale,

ranking from “Very much” (5) to “Not at all” (1) was used.

Procedure

The questionnaires and all appropriate information were given to the participants by two researchers. Data collection regarding pre-participation camp incentives took place on the first day of the camp season, while data on incentives after participation were collected right after the end of the camp, just before entering the buses. The questionnaires contained scales regarding participation incentives, camp loyalty and demographics.

RESULTS

Pre-participation incentives

The most important incentive for participation in a children’s camp was the ‘Socialization II’ incentive (making new friends) with a mean score of $M = 4.11$ ($SD = 0.82$), followed by the ‘Be in Nature’, ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.78$), ‘Camp Experience’ ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.60$) and ‘Socialization I’ (meeting old friends) ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.80$) incentives. The other camp incentives ‘Outdoor Activities’ and ‘Independence’ also revealed high scores: $M = 3.60$ ($SD = 0.71$) and $M = 3.33$ ($SD = 1.04$), respectively.

Cronbach’s alpha values were calculated to assess the internal consistency of particular sub-scales. In terms of incentives before participation,

‘Camp Experience’, ‘Independence’, ‘Outdoor Activities Participation’, and ‘Be in Nature’, alpha scores were acceptable ($\alpha > 0.70$). The alpha values of ‘Socialization I’ (meeting old friends) ($\alpha = 0.69$) and ‘Socialization II’ (making new friends) ($\alpha = 0.67$), appeared low, but were considered acceptable [29].

Post-camp participation incentives and differences between pre- and post-participation incentives

After participation the only incentive that was scored higher was ‘Socialization II’ (making new friends) ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.64$). The second highest post-participation incentive was ‘Camp Experience’ which was as much rated by campers after as before participation. ‘Socialization I’ (meeting old friends) and ‘Be in Nature’ incentives made an interchange in their importance as revealed by their pre- and post-participation scores. The ‘Outdoor Activities Participation’ and ‘Independence’ incentives received lower rates after participation than before participation, although remained at a high level (Table 1). Acceptable alpha scores were calculated for children’s incentives scores after camp participation.

A paired-samples t-test was calculated to investigate potential differences between children’s incentives before and after their participation in the adventure camp. It is remarkable that in terms of statistical significance, the only significant differences between pre- and post-participation incentives scores, were noted in the ‘Be in Nature’ incentive ($t = 2.84$, $p < 0.01$), which was rated

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, alpha values and significance of differences between incentives for participation before and after camp experience

Incentives		M	SD	Cronbach’s alpha	t	p
Independence	Before	3.33	1.04	0.87	2.50	0.140
	After	3.13	1.08	0.80		
Participation in Outdoor Activities	Before	3.60	0.71	0.75	0.74	0.460
	After	3.55	0.79	0.81		
Camp Experience	Before	4.05	0.60	0.70	0.00	1.00
	After	4.05	0.71	0.77		
Be in Nature	Before	4.06	0.78	0.77	2.84	0.006
	After	3.79	1.01	0.88		
Socialization I (meeting old friends)	Before	3.99	0.80	0.69	1.65	0.103
	After	3.83	1.01	0.66		
Socialization II (making new friends)	Before	4.11	0.82	0.67	-1.34	0.183
	After	4.21	0.64	0.70		

higher pre-participation ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.78$) than post-participation ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 1.01$) (Table 1).

Relationships between post-participation incentives and children's camp loyalty

Children gave a high mean score to their post-participation camp loyalty ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 0.32$). The scale's alpha value was considered acceptable ($\alpha = 0.86$). A regression analysis was performed to assess which of the post-participation incentives were the most significant predictors of children's camp loyalty. Camp loyalty was entered as a dependent variable and the six incentive dimensions as independent variables. The results indicated that the incentive dimensions explained 54% of variance of camp loyalty ($R = 0.76$, $p < 0.001$). Only the 'Camp Experience', and the 'Socialization I (meeting old friends)' incentives offered significant contributions ($b = 0.58$ and $b = 0.17$, respectively) (Table 2).

Table 2. Regression analysis coefficients for incentives after participation

Incentives after participation	B	β	t	p
Independence	-0.10	-0.12	-1.68	NS
Participation in Outdoor Activities	0.10	0.09	1.21	NS
Camp Experience	0.71	0.58	7.33	0.001
Be in Nature	0.10	0.11	1.53	n.s
Socialization I (meeting old friends)	0.14	0.17	-1.68	0.05
Socialization II (making new friends)	0.05	0.04	1.21	n.s
$F = 20.8$, $p < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.54$, $R^2 = 0.57$				

DISCUSSION

The study examined children's incentives to participate in an adventure summer camp in Greece. It is important for any summer camp manager to know the participants' current preferences. The children's incentives were rated twice, before and after their participation in the camp. The knowledge of details of changes between the two ratings is useful for camp managers for their evaluation of the quality of services they provide, and for in-depth understanding of customer's level of satisfaction.

The results of the present study point to positive relationships between incentives and consumers' behavioural outcomes such as camp loyalty [2]. An adventure camp program differs from a regular summer camp in the type of recreation activities, facilities as well as camp comforts. All these aspects affect participants' profiles and expectations in different ways. Adventure camp participants need to be more life skilled, nature experienced and independent. The results of the present study revealed interesting data for adventure summer camp managers.

Descriptive statistics showed that the 'Socialization II (making new friends)' dimension remained the highest scored incentive, before and after participation. This finding is in line with a previous work of Alexandris & Kouthouris, [3]. Campers expected to meet new young people, interact with them, play with them, and become friends. Nowadays, the majority of children spend most of their free time alone, at home, eating, watching TV, or playing video games [19]. The outcome of this lifestyle is a decrease in children's social interaction. The programs of adventure camps give participants a great opportunity for social interaction. According to Durall [14], young people who attend summer camps are more likely to enjoy a healthy social development.

'Be in Nature' was the second most important incentive for children in their pre-participation evaluation of the adventure camp; however, it was scored lower after participation. It should be mentioned that summer adventure camps can be characterized by a variety of outdoor activities (e.g. rock climbing, forest hiking, lake kayaking, and environmental education) and that the physical environment constitutes an essential element of an adventure program. Children who choose adventure camps over regular summer camps are more sensitive to environmental aspects and perceive experience as an opportunity to learn more about nature preservation and protection. The observed significant reduction in the post-participation 'Be in Nature' incentive dimension was probably due to the sidelining of environmental education issues in the camp program, or due to poor camp facilities. Another explanation is that camp life experience in general and development of new friendships can modify children's future incentives to participate in adventure camps.

The 'Camp Experience' incentive dimension was of high priority to campers and received

equally high scores before and after participation. Alexandris & Kouthouris [3], on the basis of several leisure and sport studies [8, 10, 16, 32], associated the factor of 'Camp Experience' with the enjoyment component. However, because of the generality of the construct, camp experience is quite difficult to explain. Making holidays in a summer camp is a special experience that includes responsibilities, regulations, shared accommodation and all aspects that characterize real life in a small community. Most of children are used to a different ways of life, where parents always prepare everything they need and are responsible for most of their decisions. For most children camp experience is related to a different way of life, while adventure camps constitute a different and intense experience that is difficult for children to share in their daily life.

The low scores in the 'Independence' incentive dimension should also be pointed out. An explanation of this finding could be the fact that children are committed to follow certain safety rules and regulations. Safety is a crucial element in adventure summer camps. It is common for the adventure summer camps management to prefer having campers under continuous leaders' and supervisors' control, than to let them go unprotected in potentially risky situations.

Previous studies on summer camps showed that incentives of participation are an important factor for predicting campers' behavioural outcomes, as much as 'word-of-mouth communications' [3]. In the present study, from among the six post-participation incentives, the 'Camp Experience' incentive turned out to be the strongest predictor of campers' loyalty. This means that campers' repurchasing intentions are to a large degree determined by camp experience and total camp outcomes. As mentioned earlier, the camp setting experience is a unique and special fact for children. Particular rules, interactions, atmosphere and fun during participating in activities usually influence the total camp experience [23] and participants' future intentions. Although Socialization II was indicated as the most significant factor before and after participation, it did not appear to contribute to the variability of loyalty. On the other hand, camp experience that substantially constitutes the camp core product is new every year because it is altered due to the changes in the camp personnel and activities.

The present study identified successfully the most important incentives for participation before and after experiencing a Greek adventure summer camp and confirmed strong relations between participation incentives and children's camp loyalty. The study results revealed the significance of 'socialization' as a pursued adventure camp factor through children's first choice to participate to make new friends. Camp managers should introduce new methods and facilitate socialization between campers. Team building courses, bonfire parties, post-camp season social events and adventurous outdoor team activities, promote team working and develop social interaction in children.

The most important result in the present study was the high score awarded to the 'Camp Experience' incentive before and after participation in a summer camp. The children approved the adventure camp's program in total, and highly praised the camp management. Children declared their satisfaction with camp life and reported their likely further participation.

Moreover, highly significant is the percentage of camp loyalty variance explained by a specific factor, i.e. 'meeting old friends' incentive. Camp administrators should promote to children the regulations and particularities of adventure summer camp life. Creating loyal campers is a key point for adventure camps to overcome difficulties trying to find new camp participants (e.g. marketing and promotion costs). The camp management should endeavor to accomplish participants' incentives and expectations in order to develop better camp adventure programs and quality outdoor services. Finally, loyal and satisfied campers help the establishment of a reliable adventure summer camp's 'brand name' in the very competitive Greek children's leisure market.

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