

Competitive orientation in cycling tourism: motives and travel behaviour

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Aim of abstract

Cycling tourism has become a pervasive niche segment of the global travel industry and as a result countries have begun to develop and market cycling-based tourism in several forms from road touring to mountain biking. Recently, an EU commissioned study estimated that more than 2 billion cycle tourism trips occur annually in Europe creating €44 billion in economic impact (Weston et al., 2012). Academics have also increasingly sought to understand the travel behavior and motivations of cycle tourists particularly around participatory events to improve event and destination management (e.g., Getz & McConnell, 2011). However, scant attention has focused on the competitive nature of cycling. Thus, the purpose of the study was to investigate competitive orientation in event-based cycling tourism and its impact on motivation, travel, and event behaviors.

Theoretical background

To conceptualize how motivation and travel behavior evolve through progressive individual experiences Buning & Gibson (2015, 2016a) working from Getz's (2008) and Getz and McConnell's (2011) earlier work on event travel developed the Active Sport Event Travel Career (ASETC) concept. The ASETC is a career-like pattern of involvement commitment, and participation in physically active event-related travel leading to a progression of motivations, preferences, and modified behavior (p. 555). The career trajectory is demarcated by six stages: initiation, introduction, expansion, peak threshold, maintenance, and maturity. Later, Buning & Gibson (2016b) determined cycling travel behavior shifts based on the specific conditions related to the travel, such as traveling with children or longer distances. Early conceptualizations of sport tourism identified a distinction between competitive and non-competitive motives (Hinch & Higham, 2001; Standeven & DeKnop, 1999). Thus, conceivably competitive orientation may manifest in different needs and behaviors among sport tourists (Gillet & Kelly, 2006).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Using online survey method, participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire measuring motivation (31-items, 7 factors), event characteristics (22-items), destination characteristics (10-items), travel-style characteristics (12-items), and competitive (i.e., racing) orientation (2-items). Participants were recruited through partnerships with advocacy groups, industry organizations, and local clubs then screened based on Lamont's (2009) definition of cycling tourism. A total sample of N=1452 originating from 49 US states and eight countries participated. The sample was comprised of 74.7% males, mean age of 52.06 years (SD=13.45), and was divided into three groups based upon competitive orientation consisting of racers (n=362), mixed orientation (n=235), and non-racers (n=745). Primary data analysis consisted of one-way between groups MANOVAs

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The results revealed a significant multivariate effect ($p < .001$) between each of the dependent variables (i.e., motives, event, destination, and travel preferences) and the independent variable, competitive orientation groups. First, significant differences were reported for each of the dependent motivation variables (e.g., social, mastery, relaxation, health, charity, giving back) except intellectual based on the three groups. Second, 16 of the 22 racing event preference items (e.g., prize money, a challenging course, a larger event, reputation/prestige) yielded significant between group differences based on racing event orientation. Third, significant between group differences were present for 7 of the 10 destination preference items (e.g., weather, a historical destination, a scenery, safety). Lastly, significant between group differences were found for 5 of the 12 travel preference items (e.g., low cost, my friends are also going, minimal travel time, staying with friends/family).

As a result, event promoters and destinations should organize and market cycling events based upon the competitive orientation of prospective participants as cycling tourists were found to vary on motivation and preferences for travel behavior (Bull, 2006). The findings suggest the core motives of a travel career likely depend on competitive orientation and the type of travel. However, based on post hoc tests motivation related to intellectual, social, and health seem to be universal regardless of competitive orientation and should be incorporated into all events. Further, post hoc tests verified the competitive group preferred challenging courses, larger events, corporate sponsorships, professional cycling categories, party atmosphere at the event, and attending the same event repeatedly among others preferences more than non-competitive cycle tourists. Regarding destinations and travel style, the competitive group preferred favorable weather, things to do in the destination, scenery, safety, traveling with friends, minimal travel time, day trips, and staying with friends/family less than non-competitive tourists. Prior research has either focused on contexts that are either competitive (e.g., Getz & McConnell, 2011) or non-competitive (e.g., Gibson & Chang, 2012). Thus, future research in cycling tourism should consider the role and influence of competitive orientation in event and destination management and perhaps differentiate between cycling disciplines (e.g., mountain biking, touring).

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