Reasons For Visiting Destinations Motives Are Not Motives For Visiting — Caveats and Questions For Destination Marketers

Leonardo A.N. (Don) Dioko
Tourism College, Institute for Tourism Studies, Macau

Amy So Siu-Ian
Faculty of Business Administration, University of Macau

Rich Harrill
University of South Carolina, College of Hospitality, Retail, & Sport Management

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ABSTRACT

Many tourism studies consider elicited reasons for undertaking a behavior (e.g., visiting a destination) as the basis from which tourist motives are inferred. Such an approach is problematic principally because it ignores a dual motivational system in which explicit as well as implicit types of motives drive behavior. This paper tackles the conceptual challenge of differentiating explicit from implicit motives in tourism studies or the lack thereof. It reviews the need to discriminate between the two constructs, theorize their interrelationship and assess their relative significance in predicting a wide and varied interconnected array of travel behavior.

Keywords: Implicit, explicit motives, tourist motives, motivation, tourist behavior

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and travel behavior literature is replete with motivational studies. Needs, motives, or motivation have been relevant factors examined in understanding destination choice (Bieger & Laesser, 2002; Jacobsen & Dann, 2009; Park & Yoon, 2009; Rittichainuwat, 2008), decision (or constraints) to travel (Dunn Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991; Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002; Haukeland, 1990; Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007; Lepp & Gibson, 2003; McCabe, 2000) and the conduct of various recreational activities including but not limited to sightseeing (Dunn Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991), sex tourism (Ryan & Kinder, 1996), attendance at festivals (Crompton & McKay, 1997), whitewater rafting (Fluker & Turner, 2000), visitation of gardens (Connell, 2004), attending the World Cup (Kim & Chalip, 2004) or wine festivals (Yuan, Cai, Morrison, & Linton, 2005), hunting (Radder, 2005), eating at night markets (Chang & Hsieh, 2006), and gambling (C.-K. Lee, Lee, Bernhard, & Yoon, 2006). It is clear from the above studies as well as in many others that needs, motives and motivation form the conceptual bedrock for understanding tourism and travel behavior.
A common belief in most of the above studies is that travel behavior is generally a goal-directed, effortful and reasoned behavior—the hallmarks of motivated activity. We identify several issues inherent in or associated with this observation.

First, many studies equate motives as reasons for traveling. This is most evident when motivation is operationalized in studies as “purpose or reasons” for travelling (or other relevant target behavior). When structured questions are used in such studies, identifying and measuring scale items designed to capture subjects’ motives emanate from the very context (e.g. gambling, golfing, wine tasting) that is itself the object of study. This often generates what Gnoth (J. Gnoth, 1998) laments as tautological response.

Second, many studies—especially those from which ‘higher order’ reasons or latent motives are usually inferred—assume that subjects are consciously aware of their needs and motives (Dann, 1981). This is problematic on one hand because subjects may not be self-aware of their own underlying needs and motives. On the other, self-reported measures captured by eliciting responses to “reasons or purpose” for any target behavior can lead to ‘inflation’ of rational (or well reasoned) responses owing to issues of face validity.

Third, when self-reported measures of motivation reveal inferred motives, they normally do not extend its generality beyond the context under study, limiting their conceptual value beyond the situational boundaries defined by researchers, unless corroborated by other findings that lend convergent validity. This is problematic because motivational taxonomies emerging from “context-bound” studies inadequately recognize that travel, leisure and recreation activities represent an integrated, yet diverse, series of experiences or behavior. Thus, a holistic understanding is precluded, resulting in a fragmented patchwork of motivational domains covering an otherwise unified and continuous behavioral episode of travel behavior.

This issue is exemplified in a simple yet common occurrence when a criteria variable of interest, such as the choice of a destination, is assessed by eliciting purpose or reason for visiting. Responses are often interpreted as motives for visiting destinations. The specific mode of assessment can be direct and open as when subjects respond to self-reported measures often phrased as “Why did you visit or what made you visit this destination?” In others, reasons for visiting destinations is measured indirectly, via subjects’ agreement or importance attached to multi item scales composed of attitudinal statements about the destination or its attributes.

Our purpose in this conceptual paper is to highlight the nature of this problem by (a) reviewing early literature on tourism motivation studies, a period of “importation and adaptation” when motivational taxonomies in tourism were developed and on which subsequent research heavily draw from, and (b) critique the methodology employed in assessing and interpreting tourism motives. We then address the deficiency of conceptualizing implicit motives in tourism motivation studies by contemplating how they can account for a variety of travel-related behavior and decision-making variables either separately from or in concert with explicit motives. We then outline several questions for future research to investigate.

**Reasons for visiting = tourism motives?**

The phrase “reasons for visiting” is ubiquitous in pre-fixing a considerable number of tourism research in which motivation is invoked as the primary dependent variable or as a
variable of interest. Tourism studies often include this question as an indispensable part of the data collection process and girds the framework of studies across diverse contexts ranging from very specific (wine touring, visitation of festivals, attendance at World Cup events) to broader or general tourism behavior (destination choice or decision to travel). In essence, however, “reasons for visiting” is assumed by many authors as a priori capturing tourism-related motives or motivational factors so much that it is the most commonly used basis for inferring tourism-related motives.

A common methodological approach to inferring tourist motives is to use grounded or exploratory methods to generate items to formulate a scale from which higher order concepts such as motives can be measured. Generation of items, however can be attitudinal, preference, or behavioral in nature (e.g., in measuring activities sought to be experienced at destinations). Other studies base scale item generation from attractions sought in a destination. Still others utilize evaluative frameworks such as satisfaction with services, attractions or experience in deducing motives. The relevant context of the study (e.g., senior tourist motives (Hsu et al., 2007)) largely determines the scope of items generated and, subsequently, the identification of relevant motives. Analytical approaches for inferring tourism motives mainly utilize factor or variations of principal components analysis though other studies also utilize an aggregative approach whereby clusters of items based on similar evaluations of scale items are used as indicators of latent motives. Interpretation and labeling of inferred motives from factor analysis are often guided by early studies in the genre of tourism motives.

Consideration of the context, however specific or general, from which motives are ultimately inferred is important not only because the relevant definition of a context informs and bounds the items generated for scale development but also establish the generalizability of motivational types that emerge from any study. Pearce (1993) argued that taking into account the situation or focus of the study is instrumental in determining the validity of motivational taxonomies resulting from analysis. This admonition is especially true for research that targets the identification of varying levels of motivation from specific-concrete to general-abstract.

Nevertheless, in his review early on of the multiplicity of motivational taxonomies in tourism literature, Dann (1981) critiqued the “definitional fuzziness surrounding tourist motivation” and that “sometimes it is difficult to discover whether or not researchers are studying the same phenomenon” (p. 198). It is clear that the variety of context and definitional approaches to tourism motivation exert great influence in the outcome of tourism motivation studies and limitations to its proper conceptualization have precluded an integrated understanding of stable and universal tourism motives. It also seems that recent advances in tourism motivation studies have peppered the literature with a diverse array of motivational taxonomies for different context as well as subtext of travel behavior. As a whole, the field largely remains stuck and unable to transcend an ad hoc yet very established approach to surveying tourist motives.

Dann (1981) and (Fodness, 1994) also cautioned researchers on the limitations of traditional approaches to measuring tourist motivation. Fodness (1994) lamented the “lack of a universally agreed upon conceptualization of the tourist motivation construct” (p. 556) and the inadequacy of their operationalization and empirical support, indicating that a list of reasons for traveling does not constitute motives in the sense understood by psychologists.
and marketers. Fodness (1994) also emphasized that “motivation must be related to needs and personal goals” (p. 557).

Rich but fragmented taxonomies in tourism motivation research

The lack of an integrated theory and universal measurement for tourism motivation has constrained many studies to develop measures ad hoc, with the unintended effect of limiting generality and validity within the contextual boundaries defined by different researchers. The deficiency of an integrated theory and assessment procedure is a problem compounded by methodological issues, foremost of which is the tautological problem propounded by Gnoth (1997). When used to assess tourist motives, “reasons for visiting” generate responses in relation to the objectively observed behavior (visiting a destination, for example). When responses are analyzed usually by clustering, the emergent typologies are often regarded as the reasons for the observed behavior (Juergen Gnoth, 1997, p. 293), and therefore merely reflect what was originally observed—a tautological conundrum. This problem is not mitigated by the use of factor analytic techniques because considerable leeway exists in the phrasing of item statements in scale formulation. For example, the use of phrases such as “to learn” prefixing various reasons (e.g., to learn destination x’s culture, language, food, etc.) invariably produces common loading patterns among such items. Ultimately, therefore, results of many studies that use common established approaches to capturing tourist motives almost invariably confirm investigators’ preconceived categories of responses. The scope of the research context or the framework adopted by investigators also largely determines the interpretation of the types of motives that emerge. Gnoth (1997), for example cites the work of Cohen’s (1988) sociological perspective in interpreting tourist motives as well as Hartman’s (1982) interpretation of empirically derived motives from respondents’ emotive thoughts and reaction towards different landscape patterns.

An effective safeguard to avoid the tautological conundrum or the inherent bias in phrasing items in tourism motivation scales is to adopt the use of focus groups, in-depth interviews or other grounded (or exploratory) methods. Rather than measuring tourist motivation based on indirect assessments such as the use of structured scales, researchers may opt to use more open-ended questioning that seeks more direct responses to questions eliciting “reasons for visiting”. Though appealing, the researcher will then be faced with the problems posed by Dann (1981), whereby tourists may be unwilling or unable to reflect their true travel motives and unwilling or unable to express their true travel motives. Issues of face validity and the social desirability of responses can be expected to inform subjects’ responses, however effective the operationalization of variables.

To overcome the inherent difficulty of whether reasons for traveling or visiting equate to real tourism motives, a few landmark studies have instead generated new or substantially adapted motivational constructs outside the tourism and leisure genre. Lee and Crompton (1992) succeeded, for example, in developing a novelty-seeking measure specific to travel experience consistent with conceptualizations of similar constructs in other fields. Seeking and escaping (Dunn Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991) also represents a dimensional facet with universal appeal, now often referred to as pull and push factors, yet consistent with the approach-avoidance dimension of motivational conflict theorized in the psychology and personality fields. Similarly, (Ryan & Glendon, 1998) adapted the Leisure Motivation scale (Beard & Ragheb, 1983) for use amongst travelers from which emerged motivational factors such as social, intellectual, relaxation and competency mastery emerged. The conceptualization of a Travel Career ladder by Pearce et al. (Philip L. Pearce & Caltabiano,
1983; Philip L. Pearce & Lee, 2005; Ryan, 1998), rooted in Maslow’s need hierarchy, is another study that identifies motivational factors for the tourism context drawing from broader based ground. These studies have largely formed a “native” foundation by importing, adapting, or grounding established frameworks or scales (such as the Leisure Motivation scale) for the tourism field. Indeed, many subsequent studies, including recent ones, have come to interpret or label their empirically derived motivational taxonomies based on similarities with the early “tourism-native” motivational frameworks.

Needs, motives and motivation

A number of early studies presaged the problem of equating reasons for behavior with related concepts of needs, motives and motivation and highlighted early on in tourism by (Dann, 1981) and later by Gnoth (1997). Different authors of course adopt different motivation terminologies; thus, a review of past literature needs to focus more on the conceptual underpinning of the various terms in order to properly place them in meaningful conceptual categories and relate them to each other.

Such early works necessarily drew upon psychology literature, something now often overlooked despite the ongoing ambiguity or lack of integrated theory. Among these, Dann (1981) stressed that motivation should be distinguished from verbal justification in which “in order to” motivation is often mistaken by “a ‘because of’ explanation” (p. 203). Dann also saw the need to regard stated objectives as different from motivation and asserted that motives are distinct from reasons (p. 204), which he considers a sub-type of motivation now more commonly taken as goals—instrumental means towards an end, but not the end itself. Dann also sought to differentiate motives from intentions, which he lamented as often being confused with one another, especially when the ubiquitous survey question of “Why did you go to destination A?” is asked and interpreted by subjects as “What was your intention for going to destination A?” when the researcher actually means “What was your motive for going to destination A?”

Gnoth (1997) distinguished motives from motivations, referring to the former as the “generic energizer for behavior” (p. 291) and asserted that motives are fundamental reasons for behavior, more global and less situation-specific whereas motivations are cognitive in nature and infer cognitions of subjects’ evaluations of specific objects in a given situation (i.e., situation-specific cognitions). In other words, motives to Gnoth, represent the target or direction (ends) whereas motivations represent an interaction of both motives and particular situations. He parallels such conceptualization with the popular dichotomy of cognitivists versus behaviorist psychologies in which the former seeks the fundamental driver and energizer of human activity towards particular manifestations whereas the latter focus more on the observable and objectively measurable. Gnoth (1997) also parallels the motive-motivation dichotomy with the celebrated push-pull factors invoked by many tourism researchers. To Gnoth (1997), motivations are equivalent to pull factors whereby situation-specific inducements drive tourist behavior while motives are equated to push factors, based on more lasting dispositions of individuals.

In sum, a dichotomous stream of motivational taxonomies has emerged over the last three decades of motivational research in the area of travel, tourism, recreation and leisure.

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1 In Dann’s (1981) work, motivations (motives in terminology to Gnoth) are also closer to dispositions than they are to intention and reasons.
On one branch lies a plethora of context-specific studies from which has emerged a rich but fragmented catalogue of motivational taxonomy. On the other branch lie general, context-transcending needs or motives, grounded from socio-psychological studies, and widely believed to strongly underlie the basis for universal behavioral dispositions.

**Implicit and explicit motives and how they relate to travel behavior**

What is deficient in our understanding of motivational factors in travel behavior is the incorporation of implicit motives. Most of the studies reviewed above attempt to infer or connect explicit, context-bound observations to known latent or implicit motivational frameworks. But interpretation and correspondence of emergent factors to established taxonomies of needs and motives doesn’t necessarily constitute conceptual equivalence. Indeed, implicit motives are known to be distinct from explicit motives, even though they together comprise an integrated dual system of human motivational process.

Implicit or latent motives are more associated with affective reactions and tendencies and unconscious needs (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). Implicit motives are postulated to result in spontaneous, pleasurable behavior and yet are neither consciously accessible nor aroused. On the other hand, explicit motives constitute self-attributed reasons for action and are more consciously accessible. In addition, explicit motives can be expressed as cognitive preferences and choice, as well as susceptible to normative and social pressures.

Because researchers consider each to be conceptually distinct, the corresponding method for assessing each concept also differs. Self-report measures have been the foremost approach in capturing explicit motives (reasons for behavior) while projective or semi-projective tests are the most common approach to measuring implicit motives (Schultheiss, Yankova, Dirlikov, & Schad, 2009; Woike, 1995).

Gnoth (1997) considered both implicit (motives) and explicit motives (motivations) to co-occur in “a dynamic flow of action” (p. 291). This statement however doesn’t imply either to be significant but merely operable at the same time. How each motivational domain significantly influences travel behavior is unclear. Both may act independently to influence behavior, even if they are theorized to occur simultaneously. Equally possible is that both motivational domains exhibit some relationship, either in a hierarchical way, as researchers in psychology and tourism envision them (Maslow, 1943; P. L. Pearce, 1993), or in a non-hierarchical way. McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger (1989) hypothesized that implicit motives assessed via projective techniques explain spontaneous behavioral trends over time, consistent with activity incentives to influence behavior, whereas explicit motives assessed via self-report measures predict responses to structured situations and consistent with social incentives present in structuring situations.

**DISCUSSION**

In light of the rich but fragmented taxonomies of motivational factors emerging from travel behavior research in the past three decades, this paper reviewed and deliberated on two major premises on which these factors have been identified: First, that factors are inferred from conscious, self-attributed, context-bound measures even when obtained via unstructured methods (such as in-depth interviews). Second, that latent motives inferred from and interpreted from such studies are conceptually equivalent to canonical implicit motives, when it is more likely that they are representative of explicit motives.
The first premise undermines emergent factors in explaining the full range and depth of travel behavior because they were conceived ignoring psychological processes that occur below the level of consciousness and beyond the realm of cognitive awareness. The second premise is arguably untenable considering that implicit motives are acknowledged to tap a different construct from explicit motives (Bilsky & Schwartz, 2008), though this may be an artifact of method rather than content. Finally, both premises imply a third: That explicit motives lead to identification of implicit ones, in a hierarchical, ‘laddering’ logic.

To bridge the gap of knowledge between implicit and explicit motives and to reconcile the problems posed by the three premises underpinning motivational research in tourism, this paper draws attention to three research questions that may lead towards a more integrated motivation theory for tourism:

(1) Since explicitly obtained reasons for visiting a destination cannot be strictly construed as motives in the way that psychologists consider motives to be implicit reservoirs of needs requiring expression in manifest behavior (i.e., driven action): Which of the two motivational domains—implicit or explicit—is of more consequence to understanding travel behavior?

If expressed reasons for undertaking tourism behavior (e.g., visiting destinations) are not conceptually equivalent to motives and both constructs independently exert influence on tourism behavior, then research must proceed to discover under what circumstances is each relevant to our understanding of travel behavior. The urgency for tourism researchers to reconcile the many studies that have contributed many explicit forms of motivational factors into the literature but did not take into account implicit motives is great and most pressing.

(2) But travel behavior is itself a complex multi-dimensional interplay and subsuming of various sub-behavior and decision-making processes. This presents a second uncertainty: Which particular aspects, stages, or behavioral sub-domains are most affected by implicit or explicit motives or both? Though overused as a cliché, we underscore this question illustratively using the iceberg diagram in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

Implicit and explicit motives and their possible relations with travel behavior
(3) Last but not least, how are implicit and explicit motives connected, if at all? Do they represent the same construct or is the distinction between the two an artifact of variations in method used to capture motives? Though this question is more aptly grounded in general socio-psychological studies, the behavioral domain characterized by unique aspects and nature of travel and tourism activities can provide an ideal context with which to address and perhaps reveal heretofore-unspecified relations between the two constructs.

REFERENCES


