

## Consumer behavior aspects of snowboarding in Greece: an examination of participants' motives, constraints and attachment to the skiing resort

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**Introduction.** The present study aimed to examine snowboarders' motives, constraints and place attachment levels with reference to their chosen skiing resort. Furthermore, the study aimed to check whether place attachment can predict snowboarders' intention to continue participating in the activity. **Material and Methods.** The study sample consisted of two hundred and eighty snowboarders ( $n = 280$ ). The leisure constraints and place attachment questionnaires were used. **Results.** The results of the study indicated that the feeling of excitement, fun and enjoyment were the most important motives, while the financial dimension had the highest mean score on the scale of constraints followed by the facilities/services (4.9) dimension. In terms of the "place attachment" construct, the place dependence factor had the highest mean score. Finally, the place dependence dimension offered the most significant contribution to the prediction of behavioral intentions ( $t = 5.09, p < 0.001$ ), followed by place identity ( $t = 2.32, p < 0.05$ ). **Conclusions.** The theoretical and applied implications of these results are discussed.

**KEY WORDS:** snowboard, motives, constraints, place attachment, behavioral intentions.

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### Introduction

The origins of snowboarding go back to the early 1920s [38]. The decades that followed witnessed an immense development of the sport worldwide. In fact, millions of people practice snowboarding at both championship and recreational levels [18]. Snowboarding has experienced a swift development of the relevant industry, multiplication of snowboarding products and the sport's admission to the program of the Winter Olympic Games of Nagano in Japan in 1998 [39]. In Greece, snowboarding made a relatively late appearance in the early 1980s. Today, it has achieved considerable progress [41].

Even though it has not been formally recorded in statistical figures, it could be argued that snowboarding is considered today one of the most rapidly developing winter tourism activities. It should be noted that snowboarders constitute a distinct group of participants with a specific profile and special characteristics [21]. Research on consumer behaviour aspects of snowboarders in Greece and other countries is still very limited. The socio-economic and demographic profile of snowboarders as well as the motives and constraints they face before and during their participation in the activity still remain unknown [24]. Furthermore, it is not clear if and why snowboarders choose specific skiing resorts for their participation. For example, there is anecdotal evidence that snowboarders do not like practicing in skiing resorts which are popular

destinations for recreational skiers. It has been proposed that attachment to the place is an important construct for development of participants' loyalty to the activity. It is therefore of practical importance to investigate whether snowboarders develop psychological links with specific skiing resorts. Subsequently, the present study was aimed to: a) determine the demographic profile of snowboarders in Greece, b) identify the main motives for their participation, c) explore the main constraints on their participation, d) determine the level of attachment that snowboarders develop with the skiing resort, and e) investigate the degree to which the place attachment construct can predict snowboarders' intention to continue participating in the activity.

## **Theoretical Constructs**

### **Motives for Leisure Participation**

Motivation refers to "the psychological mechanisms that govern the direction, intensity and persistence of behavior" [19]. Individuals can be motivated by a variety of motives [25], which can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic ones. Intrinsic motives push individuals to participate in an activity for its own sake, for the pleasure and satisfaction derived simply from performing it [16]. Intrinsically motivated individuals are driven by learning (e.g., to learn a new activity), stimulation (e.g., to live exciting experiences, fun and enjoyment), and accomplishment related motives (e.g., to experience satisfaction by perfecting my abilities) [29]. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is related to social approval (e.g., affiliation to a group and social concern) and external rewards (e.g., financial rewards and recognition for accomplishment). The majority of studies conducted in leisure and recreation settings have demonstrated the importance of fun and enjoyment related motives [12, 19, 32]. Motivation research can give information to marketers and practitioners in terms of answering "why", and satisfying their needs and expectations. While motivation has been studied in a variety of recreation settings and activities, there has been no research to examine snowboarders' motives for participation in this activity.

### **Leisure Constraints**

Constraints have been defined as "the factors that are assumed by researchers and perceived by individuals to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure" [22]. Crawford and Godbey [17] categorized constraints into intrapersonal, interpersonal and struc-

tural constraints. Intrapersonal constraints are internal to an individual and are related to individual psychological states and attributes such as lack of skills, perceived health problems, low self-esteem, and limited motivation. Interpersonal constraints are related to an individual's inability to find partners to participate with; while structural constraints are external to an individual, and include factors related to lack of resources, facilities, time and financial problems. The hierarchical model of leisure constraints further proposed that intrapersonal constraints are the most powerful predictors of participation, which has been empirically supported by the majority of recent studies [7, 5]. While constraints have been studied for participants in a variety of leisure and recreation activities, so far they have not been studied for snowboarders.

### **Place attachment**

Place attachment as a theoretical construct is defined both in the "place identity" and "place dependence" dimensions [35]. The place attachment construct reflects the importance of a place (e.g., skiing resort or skiing destination) to a participant due to its tangible offerings, such as facilities and the physical environment or the personal meaning that this place holds for the individual [31, 33, 34]. Strong place attachment means that an individual has no desire of practising his/her activity in a place other than in the one that he/she shows a special preference and emotional attachment towards. Strong place attachment pertains also to the dynamics of a particular place in satisfying participants' needs and expectations. At the same time it can justify a comparison between this place and others that also provide the same services that satisfy the same demands.

It has been proposed that place attachment has two dimensions: place identity and place dependence [35]. The place identity refers to "the symbolic importance of a place as a repository for emotions and relationships that give meanings and purpose to life" [35]. Williams and Vaske [35] reported that place identity can enhance an individual's self-esteem and increase feelings of belonging to one's community. On the other hand, place dependence has a more functional meaning; it refers to the specific functions and conditions of a place that are necessary to satisfy an individual's needs and goals, in comparison to other similar or competitive places [35]. These functions or conditions might be related to the physical aspects of the place such as hiking paths, river rafting trips, lakes, camping facilities, downhill skiing slopes and lifts, mountain bikes crossings, etc.

**Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were set to examine:

- a) the socio-demographic profile of snowboarders in Greece;
- b) their motives for participating in snowboarding;
- c) their constraints to participation;
- d) their level of attachment to the chosen skiing resort;
- e) the degree to which the place attachment construct can predict snowboarders' intention to continue participating in the activity.

**Methods**

**Data Collection and Participants**

The data were collected in a skiing resort in Northern Greece with using an on-site survey during the winter of 2010-2011. A team of two researchers who were familiar with the activity and the resort was utilized to collect the data. The questionnaires were distributed and collected in the resort café. The final sample consisted of two hundred and eighty snowboarders (n = 280).

**Questionnaires**

The following questionnaires were used:

- a) Leisure Constraints: a modified version of Alexandris and Carroll's (1997) questionnaire.
- b) Place attachment: Williams and Vaske's (2003) scale consisting of two dimensions: place identity and place dependence. The answers were given on a five-point Likert scale.

The motives were measured using open ended question.

**Results**

**Socio-demographic profile of participants**

76% of the participants were men and 24% were women. 39% were between 18 and 22 years old, and 59% were between 23 and 30 years old. Only 2% were above the age of thirty. In terms of their education: 58% were high school graduates, 15% were vocational training institute graduates, and 24% were university graduates. As for marital status, most of the participants (95%) were unmarried, while only 5% were married. 49% were current university students. Lastly, 30% were full time employees and 14% had their own business. The participants' socio-demographic profile is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for constraint dimensions

	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
Lack of time	3.9	0.5	0.68
Individual/psychological	2.7	0.7	0.83
Lack of interest	3.6	0.4	0.76
Facilities/services	4.9	0.6	0.53
Economic	5.1	0.6	0.76
Lack of partners	2.5	0.4	0.74

**Reliability Analysis of the Scales**

The internal consistency of the scales was examined using Cronbach's alpha. In terms of the constraint dimensions the values ranged from 0.64 to 0.84. In terms of the place attachment dimensions the values were 0.74 for place identity and 0.89 for place dependence (Table 2).

**Descriptive Statistics**

**Motivation**

The most important motives for participating in snowboarding were the feeling of excitement (63%), fun and enjoyment (34.9%), physical fitness (31.9%), escape (29.8%), the love of the mountain and nature (29.2%), willingness to learn snowboarding (27.6%) and to be with friends (12.2%).

**Constraints**

The financial dimension (5.1) had the highest mean score followed by the facilities/services (4.9), while the lowest mean scores had the dimensions of lack of partners (2.5) and individual/psychological (2.7).

**Place Attachment**

In terms of the "place attachment" construct the place dependence factor had the highest mean score (2.77), followed by the "place identity" factor (mean = 2.71) (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for place attachment

Place attachment dimensions	Mean	SD	min.	max	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Subjects
Place identity	2.71	2.9	1	5	0.74	4
Place dependence	2.77	3.6	1	5	0.89	4

**The Relationship between Place Attachment and Intention**

The regression analysis, with Intention as the dependent variable and the two Place Attachment dimensions as

independent variables, showed a statistically significant contribution of the two dimensions, both predicting a total of 20% of variance in the Intention variable. The place dependent dimension offered the most significant contribution ( $t = 5.09$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by place identity ( $t = 2.32$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Regression analysis for predicting behavioral intentions

Dimensions	$\beta$	t	p
Place identity	0.15	2.32	0.021
Place attachment	0.34	5.09	0.000

$F = 36.5$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $R^2 = 0.20$

### What this paper adds?

This is one of the few published papers which investigate consumer behavior aspects of the rapidly developing activity of snowboarding. Specifically, the study makes a valuable contribution to the subject literature by providing primary research results on the demographic and psychographic profile of snowboarders in Greece, based on their constraints, motivations and psychological attachment levels. The paper will be also useful for skiing practitioners and managers of skiing resorts.

### Discussion

As discussed earlier, the popularity of snowboarding has risen rapidly over the last years in Greece and other countries (Hudson & Cross, 2004). However, academic research in this area is still limited. The present study aimed to examine specific aspects of consumer behaviour of snowboarders (demographic profile, motives, constraints and place attachment). All these aspects were proposed in the literature as important for understanding snowboarders' behaviour, and subsequently, for designing and promoting services to satisfy their needs.

In terms of the demographic profile of participants the results indicated that the majority of snowboarders were young, male, single, and well educated individuals. This is a clear target group, which is very dynamic and promising. If these individuals continue snowboarding, the customer base of the skiing resort will clearly increase. The good education level of these individuals is also a promising finding, since young generations are better educated,

which again provides a good perspective for further developments. On the other hand, this target group is quite limited in terms of its size and characteristics. Efforts should be made to further widen this target group. For example, more women should participate in snowboarding, since there is no reason for this activity to be considered an exclusive men's sport. Furthermore, the development of appropriate family programs can encourage more married individuals to participate in snowboarding.

In terms of motives for participation, the results confirmed anecdotal evidence, according to which snowboarding is an exciting and "fast" activity associated with the feelings of fun, enjoyment and escape. It is also worth noticing that a significant proportion of snowboarders mentioned the role of nature and the environment as motivating factors. Subsequently, it is important for participants to experience these feelings during their participation. Furthermore, a large proportion of respondents talked about their effort to learn the skills required for the activity, as an important motivating factor. Novice snowboarders should be helped to improve their skills in order to enjoy the benefits of snowboarding.

In terms of constraints for participation, the financial aspects were reported as the most important problems. This could be expected, since snowboarding requires investment in time and money (equipment, skiing resorts, transportation), and this is further becoming more intense due to the financial crisis in Greece. Resort managers should reconsider their pricing strategies by offering more flexible/economic packages for those who wish to use their facilities frequently. It should be noted that the facilities/services dimension was reported as an important one as well. This shows that facilities and their services should be improved in order to meet participants' demands.

Finally, in terms of participants' attachment to the resort the results showed average mean scores for both place attachment dimensions, i.e. place dependence and place identity. This means that skiing resort managers should make more efforts to develop snowboarders' psychological attachment to their resorts. This is crucial since results also show that the place attachment dimensions can significantly predict snowboarders' loyalty to the resort. Increasing snowboarders' involvement with activities organized by the resort management is a proposed strategy.

The current study offers information on consumer behaviour aspects of snowboarders in Greece. The study

results show that snowboarders form a group with specific characteristics and expectations. The results of the present study can help practitioners develop their marketing strategies more effectively. More research is required using larger samples from more skiing resorts in order to offer more concrete solutions based on the profile of snowboarders and their expectations.

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