

MOVING BEYOND THE AVERAGE: WOMEN AS SPORT TRAVELLERS

A.J. Weighill, University of Alberta

Tom D. Hinch, University of Alberta

To date, much of the research on sporting events has focused on either the associated impacts of hosting mega events like the Olympics or the motivations and/or behaviours of spectators attending those events (e.g., Neirotti, Bosetti & Teed, 2001; Gratton, Dobson & Shibli, 2000). With the exception of a few studies (e.g., Green & Chalip, 1998) there has been little work done on the participants within non-elite /professional sporting events – particularly females. Further, the majority of literature pertaining to participants in active sport travel has either focused on individual activities like golf or skiing (c.f., Gibson, 1998) or on creating socio-demographic and behavioural profiles of generally active holidays (International Olympic Committee & World Tourism Organization, 2001; Weighill, 2002). Existing research on sport tourism has identified that the average participant is male, college educated, 18-40 years old, and relatively affluent. However, that sport travel continues to be identified as the domain of men (Gibson, 1998) is problematic for a number of reasons. For instance, Gibson has shown, that while the average profile is typical, it does not always apply to sport specific travel markets. Additionally, this profile does not reflect the substantial level of involvement by women within sport travel (c.f., International Olympic Committee & World Tourism Organization, 2001; Weighill, 2003).

From a gender perspective, the continued use of this average is also problematic due to the increased potential for women's contributions to this travel market to be diminished, if not ignored. Further, this emphasis also results in female sport travellers being automatically relegated to the position of subordinate other. Finally, the generalization of sport travellers as men, contributes to the notion that women are not interested in being active, thus are not likely to participate in active leisure travel. A net result of this focus on male sport travel is the potential for under- or poor-development of opportunities for women and, in extreme cases, the complete discounting of women as a prospective and viable market segment.

Methods

The research presented here contains preliminary analysis of data collected during the 2003 Air New Zealand Golden Oldies Hockey Festival. This over 35 (years), non-competitive sporting event took place in Nadi, Fiji and involved players from over 70 teams representing nine different countries.

The purpose of this research discussed is: a) examine the socio-demographic profiles of women from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and b) investigate the women's travel behaviours beyond actual participation in the hockey festival. The data were collected using self-administered questionnaires that were completed during the hockey festival. This method of collection resulted in a total study sample (n=350) that represented 53.9% of the study population. However, as the current project is focused on women, only responses from females living in Australia, Canada, or New Zealand (n=235) are included in data analysis.

Data were analysed with a chi square test for difference and Cramer's V was used to determine effect size as suggested by Aron and Aron (1999).

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this project focused on two different components – socio-demographics and travel behaviours – each of which will be discussed briefly here. Analysis determined that while players from each of the countries were relatively similar in both their socio-demographics and their travel behaviours, some significant differences do exist. These differences are the focal point of this section.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics: Players from New Zealand (n=127), accounted for 54.0% of the total sample while Australians (n=67) represented 28.5%, and Canadians (n=41) only accounted for 17.4%. However, despite the apparent imbalance between the three countries, the study sample is representative of the percentage distribution within the study population.

Examination of other characteristics of the study sample revealed that there was no real difference between the three groups with regard to age; however, there were significant differences, with medium effect sizes, education, and income.

With regard to educational attainment, Canadians differed from the others ($\chi^2(10,229)= 38.881, p<.01, V=.412$). Specifically, it was determined that a greater percentage of women from Canada (84.5%), than either Australia (41.8%) or New Zealand (41.5%), had completed some form of post-secondary degree/diploma or higher.

It was also determined that there was no significant difference in the education levels between women from Australia and New Zealand.

Analysis determined that educational attainment and annual income were positively correlated ($r=.298, p<.01$) with each other. Thus, it was not surprising that a greater percentage of Canadians (71.4%) reported household income of \$60,000+ than did Australians (46.7%) or New Zealanders (22.3%). When comparing the three countries it was determined that the differences were significant and had a medium effect size ($\chi^2(68,207)= 36.103, p<.01, V=.418$). However, unlike education attainment, it was also found that the differences between the Australians and New Zealanders were also significant with an effect size that was at the higher end of low range ($\chi^2(4,172)= 14.665, p<.01, V=.292$).

Travel Behaviours: The main travel behaviours examined as part of this study related to whether players vacationed before or after the hockey festival and to their participation in a variety of activities during the various travel period. While there were no significant differences between the players, it was found that shopping (83.0%) and visiting a bar or nightclub (41.3%) were by far the most popular non-festival activities. The only activity within which there was a significant difference and medium effect size was participation in additional outdoor or sporting activities ($\chi^2(2,235)= 22.153, p<.01, V=.307$). Specifically, it was found that 39.0% Canadians participated while only 11.8% of New Zealanders and 7.5% of Australians took part in additional outdoor or sporting activities.

For the purposes of analysis, three possible travel periods were identified – before the festival, festival only, and after the festival. Examination of these travel periods showed that there were significant differences with regard to who was more likely to add-on to the festival vacation. When comparing the three countries it was determined that New Zealanders (12.6%) were significantly (large effect size) less likely ($\chi^2(2,235)=$

31.400, $p < .01$, $V = .366$) than Australians (40.3%) and Canadians (51.2%) to add onto their vacations prior to the festival.

When the travel period after the festival was examined, it was found that once again, New Zealanders (44.9%) were less likely to add onto their festival vacation. However, while the difference between New Zealanders (44.9%), Australians (62.7%), and Canadians (65.9%), with regard to add on vacation after the festival, was significant, the relationship only had a small effect size

Finally, when players were divided into four travel groups – those who vacationed before the festival, those who only attended the festival, those who vacationed after the festival, and those who vacationed before and after the festival – a significant difference with a large effect size ($\chi^2(2,235) = 8.581$, $p < .05$, $V = .191$) was found. The main difference between groups was that in comparison to Australians (16.4%) and New Zealanders (4.0%), a considerably greater percentage of Canadians (35.0%) holidayed both before and after the festival. Conversely, New Zealanders (46.0%) were by far the most likely to only attend the festival and Australians were most likely to select to vacation either before (23.9%) or after (46.3%) the festival.

Discussion

The results of this study clearly illustrate that while women are definitely active sport travellers, they cannot be treated as a single market group. Specifically, it was determined that within a specific sporting niche market, the socio-demographic characteristics and travel behaviours of female players differed significantly based on the country from which they came and quite possibly the proximity of that country to the host destination.

The most significant socio-demographic differences were related to the education and income of the players. A probable explanation for the higher education and income rates of Canadian players is the relative cost of travelling to the Festival. In September 2004, the cost of a flight to Nadi, Fiji from Vancouver, Canada was approximately \$2181.23. In contrast, a flight to Nadi from Sydney, Australia was approximately \$974.61 and a flight from Auckland, New Zealand would cost even less at \$644.87 (all dollar amounts are in Canadian funds and price quotes are from Air New Zealand's website).

The most significant behavioural difference found was related to whether or not players took additional time for their festival vacation. Coincidentally, the explanation for why so many more teams from New Zealand attended the festival may also help to explain why Canadians were more likely to take longer vacations. Distance decay models would suggest that the farther away from the destination people, the less likely they are to travel to it. Further, other factors such as associated travel expense and cultural significance of the sport event (i.e., field hockey) will also influence individuals' willingness to travel longer distances (Hinch & Higham, 2004). However, what is left unexplained by these models is whether individuals who travel a greater distance are more likely to take longer trips.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that organizers of events such as the Golden Oldies Hockey Festival, which rely on existing niche sporting markets, may want to focus on those locations (countries) located close to the host destination. In contrast, host destinations may want to put extra emphasis on markets that exist in more distant locations in the attempt to attract tourists that will stay longer and thus spend more money.

Finally, planners and marketers have to be aware that women are active participants in sporting events and as such there is a need to learn more about these women's travel behaviours and motivations. Learning more about women within the active travel market is important because greater information can only lead to the (re)development of satisfactory active travel opportunities.

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