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Which Campground Features and Amenities Will Campers pay for?

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Abstract

The Course of Action (SOW) scope includes a collection of previous research related to interest payments (DAP) and college tuition for sports. To address this topic at the SOW, researchers completed a data analysis on a wide range of topics directly and indirectly related to the main objectives of this project. The following information is part of the revised research for project integration, but is designed to be more of a social capital for the forest service. Although much of this information is mentioned in this article, some are not, but it has been included for their practical use. Many other studies aren't included in the data if researchers find their results are lower.

Introduction

Across the studies, camper preferences for certain attributes seem to come through, including:

- Developed restroom facilities, specifically flush toilets and showers *(Choi & Dawson, 2003; Lillywhite et al., 2013; McEwen, 1986; Oh, et al., 2007; Schroeder et al., 1999)*

- Privacy of campsites, which is sometimes reported as “more vegetation,” “trees and bushes,” or “forested,” but these seem to be an indicator of privacy than affinity for flora *(Brunson & Shelby, 1990; McEwen, 1986; Oh et al, 2007; Stankey, 1973; Shelby & Heberlein, 1986; Verma et al, 2006)*

- Proximity of campsite to water *(Choi et al., 2003, Bamford et al., 1988)*

- Ability to have campfires *(Brunson & Shelby, 1990, Lillywhite et al., 2013; Lucas, 1985)*

- Ability to make an advanced reservation *(Verma et al., 2006)*

One interesting take on campsite attributes is to put them into categories, as campers may do subconsciously. Brunson & Shelby (1990) propose categorizing campsite attributes into *necessity attributes*, which provide minimum camping comforts, *experience attributes*, which facilitate preferred trip outcomes, and *amenity attributes*, which provide small embellishments on the overall experience. An important component of this way of viewing campsite attributes is that different camper will assign different values to different category types.

Decision Making about Campgrounds

Much of the research on campground and campsite decision making works on the assumption that campground consumers are rational and that their choices are made after careful consideration of alternatives. This does not seem to be the case in the real world and several researchers (e.g., Foster & Jackson, 1979; Lee, 1977; Zuckert, 1980) found examples of campers either not knowing why they had selected their campsite, or had not selected their campsite based

on their criteria a good campsite. Schreyer et al. (1985) contends that campground choice is often a compromise between group members who value different experiences and therefore different campground attributes. Therefore, setting pricing policy also requires an understanding about decision making processes.

Building off of Brunson and Shelby, Lillywhite et al., (2013) propose that when considering campsites, campers first narrow choices into “Maybe buckets” (similar research has been done with hotel selection). When selecting a campsite, visitors first assess the site for the presence of necessity, or "must have," attributes. If a campsite does not provide a necessity attribute, the camper removes the site from his or her prospective list. Obviously, what is a necessity for one camper might not be necessary for another.

Williams, (1985) adds that choices may also be limited by incomplete information. Online review sites are closing the information gap for increasing numbers of campers, but in certain situations campgrounds and campsites are encountered serially, without knowledge if a better place to camp may be available beyond, so there may be pressure to choose quickly because of competition, fatigue or threatening weather.

The notion of consumers making decisions without having all available information is not new. Simon (1959) pointed out that people tend to select acceptable choices over optimal ones, a process he described as “satisficing.” In other words, campers might make a decision about a camping location based on the first one that meets most of their criterial, rather than an optional

one. Context matters here as well. It is easy to understand how a set of choices and a decision may be different when a camper is researching campgrounds and sites weeks or months before a trip as compared to when they are on the road in the afternoon and thinking about where they will likely be when they are ready to stop for the night.

Some additional takeaways from the literature include:

Categorization of Campgrounds

When it comes to available research, camping seems to only be broken into two categories: dispersed (primitive) and developed (e.g., Lilliwhite, et al, 2013; Mitchell et al.,1996; National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, 2000). However, another component of this project looked at the features and amenities of campgrounds based on the type of provider (e.g., USFS, NPS, State Parks, Commercial, etc.). According to this two-category distinction, almost all of the campgrounds examined would be in the same category: "developed campgrounds." However, as that section of this project shows, there are significant differences between, for example, USFS campgrounds and commercial campgrounds, with regard to amenity provision and price. Other public sector camping providers seem to be offering more developed amenities to campers such as hookups, internet, and laundry. This distinction is important to understanding campers WTP for certain amenities because several researchers, (e.g., Choi, 2003; Oh et al., 2007) have shown that people have different preferences based on the development level of campground they are considering and the type of camping they will be doing, and the needs of the camping party, such as size, activities and cooking methods.

Overall Trip Expense

A number of studies showed results indicating things such as out of state campers or campers taking longer trips having a higher WTP for certain amenities (e.g., Bamford, et al., 1988) or are willing to pay more for campgrounds vs. day use areas (e.g., Schroder, 1999), or decreases in visitation among locals (but not those from further away) when fees are raised. Considering all of these together it seems plausible that people are not a resistant to higher campground prices, when the cost of the campground is a smaller percentage of the overall trip. For instance, the difference between a $15 or $20 campsite is not as meaningful for a family taking a two week out of state vacation than it would be for a nearby family camping for the weekend. As an example, Schroeder (1999) found a higher willingness to pay when people had travelled further, and at places they'll be staying longer (e.g., campsites over day sites). Similarly, in an experiment in raising prices for prime campsites (e.g., on a lake or pond) in Vermont state parks, Bamford et al. (1988) found that out of state residents were more likely to pay the premium price for the more desirable campsite than Vermont residents. This could also be the reason people seem more resistant to fees for day use areas than for campgrounds.

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