

EXPLORING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POSITIVISTIC AND POST-POSITIVISTIC PHILOSOPHY: AN INTERPRETIVISTIC CASE STUDY OF TOURIST EXPECTATIONS & SATISFACTION

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Abstract

Moutinho's 1987 Vacation Tourist Behavior model is a comprehensive example of a positivistic theoretical framework for tourist decision-making, based on rational behavioral principles. Debate exists over the role of this form of research, based on positivistic philosophy. Citing an increasing interest in post-positivistic philosophy as a means for addressing the current inability to fully represent people's lived experiences; scientists suggest that post-positivistic approaches are also important for understanding the complex nature of social science phenomena. This study employs post-positivistic philosophy, which is focused on understanding and interpreting the process of satisfaction evaluation rather than on prediction or control. Although results cannot be generalized to a larger population or used in a predictive fashion, they suggest a value for post-positivistic philosophy within leisure and recreation research, which lies in an ability to help managers and researchers better understand and interpret the lived experiences of tourists (Crossan 2003; Clark 1998, Decrop 1999; Floyd 2004; Letourneau & Allen 1999; Stewart & Floyd 2004).

1.0 Introduction

Tourists and vacationers go through a complex decision-making process in determining their level of post-purchase satisfaction. Most tourist satisfaction models follow a positivistic approach, in which tourists are viewed as rational beings who evaluate their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction through a disconfirmation paradigm. That is, tourists purchase a trip with certain expectations (i.e., destination, amenities, and activities), and subsequently evaluate satisfaction based on whether

these expectations were met (confirmed), exceeded, or not met. Moutinho's 1987 Vacation Tourist Behavior model is a comprehensive example of a positivistic theoretical framework for tourist decision-making. This model takes into account three stages of consumer decision processes: pre-purchase influences and decision-making, post-purchase evaluation, and future decision-making. Part two of the model focuses on the post-purchase assessment made by tourists, which is termed as "Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction". Moutinho (1987) proposes that tourists evaluate the adequacy of the tourism product, using a mental cost/benefit comparison. This "Adequacy Evaluation" contributes to the overall disconfirmation paradigm, in which expectations are compared with reality, and determinations are correspondingly made in terms of overall satisfaction / dissatisfaction. Where gaps exist between expectations and reality, Moutinho (1987) suggests that cognitive dissonance mechanisms and reinforcements are employed. The level of acceptance tourists assign to these mechanisms leads to the probability of repeat-buying behavior (Moutinho 1987; Decrop 1999).

Review of the literature suggests that this approach, although widely used by tourism, park, and recreation agencies to measure program success, may not accurately capture the complexity of factors involved in the satisfaction evaluative process of tourists. Social scientists in a range of disciplines continue to debate the role and value of this form of research which is based on a positivistic philosophy (Crossan 2003; Clark 1998, Decrop 1999; Floyd 2004; Letourneau & Allen 1999; Stewart & Floyd 2004). These scholars are among many whom suggest post-positivistic approaches play an important role in understanding the complex nature of social science phenomena such as tourism satisfaction decision-making. This post-positivistic approach assumes "reality is multiple, subjective, and mentally constructed by individuals" (Crossan 2003, p. 54). Crossan (2003) goes on to suggest that the outcomes sought by post-positivistic research are the establishment of warranted assertibility (justification) for the phenomenon rather

than absolute truth, and that such research produces findings “with a focus on meaning and understanding the situation or phenomenon under examination” (p. 54). He recommends building multiple methods approaches that involve the researcher with those being researched and focus on in-depth study of a small sample (Crossan 2003). Stewart and Floyd (2004) capture the rationale for including post-positivistic philosophies within recreation and leisure studies with their observations: “The anxiety amongst leisure researchers is a reflection of a broader crisis within the social sciences about any account that claims to have directly or completely captured someone’s lived experiences and social reality” (p.4). They cite an increasing interest in post-positivistic philosophy as a means for addressing this inability to fully represent people’s lived experiences (Stewart & Floyd 2004).

Employing a post-positivistic philosophy, this study focuses on understanding and interpreting the process and factors of satisfaction evaluation, rather than on prediction and control. Utilizing mixed qualitative methods, this study examines the complexity involved in tourists’ satisfaction with their travel experiences, moving beyond the rational decision-making principles found in positivistic approaches such as Moutinho’s, towards an interpretivistic approach.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review for this study contained three areas of focus: an analysis of tourist behavior process frameworks in relation to Moutinho’s model, appropriate methodology for an interpretivistic scientific approach, and specific components of tourist satisfaction.

The framework review focused on tourist behavior from pre-trip choice determinants to post-purchase evaluation, satisfaction-dissatisfaction, and the impact of these dynamics on future-decision making (Decrop 1999; Foster 2004; Mazursky 1989). Decrop (1999) evaluates traditional positivistic and post-positivistic models, including those proposed by Crompton, Moutinho, and Woodside that consider a tourist a rational and cognitive information processor. He contrasts these approaches to more recent interpretivistic frameworks, such as those proposed by Woodside and MacDonald and Teare. Decrop (1999) states that “it is important to remember

that there are an array of possible decision-making processes, depending on the individual, the group, and the moment in time” (p. 129). Foster (2004) states that the “measurement of satisfaction involves an assessment of whether the experiences have resulted in the desired benefits sought by the individual and satisfaction is therefore a function of the needs and interests of the individual that the attributes and characteristics of the service provided” (p. 5). Mazursky (1989) studied past experiences and how these experiences contribute to future tourism decisions. He states “that this analysis implies that the traditional expectations-disconfirmation-satisfaction process couldn’t be studied as a closed independent system. The interaction and effects of prior experiences and norms on these factors have to be taken into account to improve the understanding and predictions of choice decisions” (Mazursky 1989, p. 336). This lack of agreement amongst researchers within even this brief analysis seems to confirm the complex nature of predicting tourist behavior. Employing an interpretivistic scientific approach to evaluate the positivistic model presented by Moutinho offers an interesting way to begin to amalgamate current understanding.

To gain a better understanding of the appropriate research methods to apply to this study and scientific approach, literature by Decrop (1999), Patton, (1990), and Bowen (2002) was reviewed. Decrop (1999) suggests that an interpretive approach to science requires a very different approach: “Instead of a rigid separation between the investigator and the object of investigation, interpretivism proposes an interactive and cooperative relationship. The focus is no longer on the quantity of the gathered information but rather on its quality (richness). All points of observation are worthwhile: the interpretive inquirer watches, listens, feels, asks, records, and examines. In-depth interviews, participant observations, or archival research are privileged tools for this” (p. 11). Patton’s (1990) guidance on qualitative research methods provided further input for the framework for this study, resting on methods involving naturalistic inquiry, which means that the researchers intend to study behavior as it exists naturally, without manipulation of the setting; and phenomenological inquiry, which focuses on understanding human experience in a specific context. He challenges researchers to “understand and

document the day-to-day reality of the setting or settings under study..." (Patton 1990, p. 42), and "focus on capturing process, documenting variations, and exploring important individual differences in experiences and outcomes" (p. 43). According to Patton (1990), open-ended responses "permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents...[and] enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (p. 24). Bowen's (2002) research through participant observation in tourism was a third influence on research design. Bowen (2002) states that "the level of detail from the participant observation, which created the narrative and informed the conceptualization, would not be created by either quantitative or qualitative CSQs [customer satisfaction questionnaires]" (p.14). The collective guidance offered by these researchers formed the basis of the methodology used within this interpretivistic study.

The final phase of the literature review sought and identified factors which: a) may contribute to tourist satisfaction; and b) may not have been reflected in Moutinho's model. The objective was to study the role these factors play in the direct tourism experience. Four factors were identified: active involvement (Foster 2004; Geva & Goldman 1991; Arsenault & Gale 2004), group dynamics (Arsenault & Gale 2004; Bettenhausen 1991), the role of the guide (Geva & Goldman 1991; Arsenault & Gale 2004; Leiken 2003), and unexpected events (Mazursky 1989; Arsenault & Gale 2004).

Active involvement involves the role tourists play in deciding and shaping their own tourism experiences. Are all the decisions made by the trip organizer? Do participants get a say in the itinerary, meals, activities, etc.? Does the individual experience his/her vacation as simply a member of the audience, watching a performance or do they get involved in the script of the trip, i.e. become part of the play? Geva & Goldman (1999) capture the essence of this dimension in this description: "Consumers play an active role in the tour and take part in shaping its performance. Thus, the quality of the tour performance depends to a large extent on their motivation, initiative, ability, and

effort" (p. 179). Foster (2004) expresses his theory of the role of active involvement in satisfaction by saying, "Therefore tourist experiences can be regarded as the result of an active endeavor by the individual to create a situation in which to achieve satisfaction. It is this active involvement of the individual in the creation of his or her personal experiences that needs to be acknowledged" (p. 5-6). Arsenault and Gale (2004) identified a demand by travelers to engage in participatory, interactive, and hands-on activities: "Travelers want more than merely observing things and listening to lecture, they want to get actively involved" (p. 6). Tourists may have expectations about the level of active involvement they will experience during a trip that would lead to a disconfirmation paradigm, however active involvement seems to be a more complex variable in the evaluation of satisfaction than what can be captured and measured using Moutinho's model. For this reason, it has been chosen as a variable to be further explored.

Geva & Goldman (1999) define group dynamics as "...the relations and interactions among group members, the cohesion and morale of the tour group, manner in which free time was spent..." (p. 179-180). Bettenhausen (1991) suggests that belonging to a group had a great impact on an individual's sense of self, in shaping behavior and attitudes, in creating a shared culture, and in creating the "rites, rituals, and social roles that provide continuity and order" (p. 348). Arsenault and Gale (2004) report findings from their study of Travel Suppliers and Tour Operators, which indicate a relationship between small group interaction, bonding, friendship formation, and satisfaction via the dimension of positive memory creation (p. 10).

Leiken (2003) suggests that guides act intentionally to create special moments for their groups and that by so doing make ordinary moments of an itinerary extraordinary (p. 2). Geva & Goldman (1991) feel that "the responsibility for achieving customer satisfaction is mostly delegated to the tour guide, who, throughout the tour's entire duration, is in a continuous and intense contact with the tour participants" (p. 178). Arsenault and Gale (2004) state: "The importance of the tour director and tour guides cannot be overstated. These people are a critical element of any tour and their

knowledge, skill, and ability to balance group situations along with individual needs is essential to group travel” (p.11).

Arsenault and Gale (2004) referred to “unexpected events” as “surprises”. In their study, “the element of surprise was consistently mentioned in discussions on creating memorable experiences” (p. 12). Based on the findings of their study, they surmise that “surprises can be pre-planned or opportunistic, for despite all the planning in the world, something is bound to go wrong. The beauty of surprise situations is that they create unique opportunities for human interaction, generate a special connection with the place, and build a common bond between travelers. They also can be the foundation of some of the best stories people tell when they return home” (p. 12).

3.0 Research Objectives

The purpose of this research was to explore post-positivistic philosophy in relation to the study of tourist expectations & satisfaction. Research outcomes include an interpretation of the components of tourists’ satisfaction grounded in the experience being studied. The experience chosen for this in-depth, interpretive case study was the 2004 West Virginia University (WVU) Student Recreation Center spring break trip to the Florida Everglades.

4.0 Methodology

This study utilized a purposeful sample of 18 college students enrolled in West Virginia University in a variety of academic programs. This sample was chosen because all members had purchased a space in a nature-based, group travel package, sponsored by the WVU Student Recreation Center. This one-week trip took place in March, 2004, during the university spring break. The destination was the Florida Everglades. Activities included canoeing, camping, snorkeling, boating, sight-seeing, and sunbathing on the beach. A mixed method, qualitative approach was employed, including participant observation, focus groups and open-ended surveys. The study began with an examination of choice determinants and pre-trip expectations, and culminated with an exploration of the components that add into the concept of individual satisfaction.

4.1 Design, Instrumentation, and Procedures

This study employed an interpretive scientific approach, based on post-positivistic philosophy, and qualitative methods in examining the spring break travel experience within and beyond the context of Moutinho’s Vacation Tourist Behavior model. This was a naturalistic inquiry into the students’ decision-making, satisfaction, and future decision-making processes, meaning that the researchers studied behavior as it exists naturally, without manipulation of the setting (Patton 1990) . The research took place in three stages. The first stage consisted of a focus group interview with all participants on the 2004 Student Recreation Center Spring Break Trip prior to the trip commencement. The second stage of the research consisted of participant observation during the trip in order to provide additional context for analysis of satisfaction. The third stage employed a post-trip questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions based on themes identified in the focus groups and in the literature review.

The focus group interview took place during the first meeting for the Spring Break trip. The researchers took notes and tape recorded the interview for maximum data collection. Overall topics to be explored were broken into three categories: icebreakers and travel behavior background, pre-decision and decision structure, and trip expectations (Fluker & Turner 2000; Hobson & Josiam 1992; Hyde & Lawson 2003; Mansfield 1992; Sirgy & Su 2000; Weiermair 2000). A short icebreaker activity was conducted to enable participants to meet each other and enhance comfort levels. After that, the interview followed an open-answer format, allowing individuals to speak in a free-form manner.

To gather data on participant satisfaction and dissatisfaction measures during the trip, and more fully explore the direct experience, participant observation was utilized. One of the researchers assumed the role of leader/participant throughout the trip and gathered data at various times during the travel experience. A variety of techniques were employed in the collection of participant observation data during the trip:

1. Interactive introspection, in which there is two-way sharing of experiences between the

researcher and the participants. This was achieved through random (covert) personal interviews of participants at various times throughout the trip.

2. Daily observations of group behavior and interactions.
3. Guided introspection, in which the participants are asked to think aloud about their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This was achieved through a group debriefing session at the half-way point of the trip and a final debriefing session on the last night.

The main method of recording data was through compiling field notes at the end of each day, or at significant other breaks during the day when the opportunity presented itself. Notes were primarily recorded into a field notebook or other unobtrusive materials such as letter paper or postcards. Still photography also formed part of the documentary evidence, as it did not interfere with the observation and prompted later memories.

A post-evaluation open-ended questionnaire was developed based on themes identified in the literature and in the focus groups. In order to explore a wide variety of factors, a list of 15 questions was developed. It was felt that the length of the questionnaire would prohibit in-depth responses. Therefore, in an effort to increase the detail of each of the responses, not all questions were included on each questionnaire. Instead, a core group of questions was chosen to include in all of the questionnaires (six total), and the remaining eight questions were divided, resulting in two different questionnaires. These were distributed at random, with half of the participants receiving Version A, and half receiving Version B. To increase the response rate, this questionnaire was distributed during the bus ride on the return back to Morgantown and collected prior to arrival.

4.2 Treatment of Data

Data from the focus groups, participant observation field notes, and post-trip questionnaire were analyzed for themes, trends, insights, theories, and additional research opportunities. An inductive analysis was used by looking

for natural variations in the data. Content analysis was used to identify, code, and categorize primary patterns in the data (Patton 1990). Analysis of the focus group transcripts and subsequent field notes collected during the trip was conducted by breaking down responses using spreadsheets. Phrases and expressions within the responses were captured and evaluated to find patterns of response similarities and differences. Key themes were identified and captured. The post-trip questionnaire data was initially analyzed using open-coding, in which content is examined to capture the essence of the data in its pure form. Themes were then identified on the basis of the open-coding, and subsequently, the data was re-examined and recoded using focused coding based on the themes. QSR N6 (2002) qualitative analysis software was utilized to organize the data according to themes identified through content analysis. This process was validated using peer review of all stages of analysis. To obtain additional context, data and themes from the post-trip questionnaire were compared and contrasted with the field notes, as well as the preceding focus group analysis. Results were then explored in relation to Moutinho's model, with the goal of comparing positivistic and post-positivistic philosophies and approaches.

5.0 Results

Participants in the 2004 WVU Spring Break trip to the Florida Everglades expressed high levels of satisfaction. Findings identified 13 satisfaction-related themes: active involvement, amenities, environment, escape, flow and pace, fun, group dynamics, guides, new attitudes and values, novelty, physical activities, unexpected events, and value proposition. Each of these factors seemed to play a significant part in participants' satisfaction. Most of them were expressed in all phases of the research. During the pre-trip focus groups, these themes arose either as elements of past travel experiences or as expectations for the spring break trip experience. During the trip, these themes were present in the participant observations and they re-emerged in the post-trip surveys in discussions of satisfaction. Table 1, which follows, provides a brief explanation of each theme as well as some examples of the direct quotes from participants.

Table 1.—Summary of themes & related dimensions

Theme	Dimensions	Examples from pre-trip focus groups & post-trip surveys
Active Involvement	Degree to which the group helped construct the trip as it evolved, both in terms of decision-making and day-to-day operations.	–“I liked the canoeing and being able to pick from activities at times with some downtime.” –“Keeping everyone involved in cooking and cleaning seemed to help everyone get along.
Amenities	Presence or absence of facilities such as bathrooms, showers, equipment, etc.	–“...there were too many mosquitoes and too few bathrooms.” –“I learned I can go well over a week without a real shower.” –“I have camped before, but not without showering for that long.”
Environment	Environmental factors such as weather, bugs, landscape, ecosystem, etc.	–“The reef, beach, springs and all activities were awesome. The bugs were annoying, but they came with the territory and added bonding and fun jokes.” –“I didn’t have any dislikes that didn’t involve bugs. But they were OK because nature rules.”
Escape	Degree to which experience provided a break from the routine and rejuvenation.	–“I feel like I’m going back to Morgantown rejuvenated and fresh...” –“I needed to get out of Morgantown, away from the rains and clouds every freaking day, go where it is sunny, sunshine, I need sunshine, I need to get a tan. I need light therapy here.”
Flow & Pace	Scheduling of Activities – including flexibility, down-time, and flow of activities.	–“I really enjoyed this trip. I liked the diversity of people on the trip, and the variety of activities we went on and the relaxed nature of it.” –“The activities were great, although the crazy amounts of driving hours bogged things down occasionally.”
Fun	Expectations and experiences that contain elements of fun.	–“Long van rides sucked but it was still fun.” –“All week long I kept saying, “I’m having so much fun! This is really great!”
Group Dynamics	The degree to which the group “got along” – included concepts such as “teamwork” “friendship”, “conflict”, etc.	–“I wanted to meet new people. You’re around your roommate forever, if you get in a fight, you don’t have anyone else to be your friend or get new friends.” –“I experienced no negative comments or actions from anyone. A wonderful group of people, half of the fun is watching the change from the beginning of the trip to the end.”
Guides	Competence and style of the guides.	–“The trip leaders were great. I think they made the trip much more enjoyable.” –“I liked the openness and approachability of the trip leaders, and their knowledge of what was going on.”
New Attitudes & Values	Aspects of personal growth resulting new attitudes and increased motivation, confidence, and/or tolerance for oneself and for others.	–“It changed me for the better as I feel that camping, travel, and not only meeting new people but also living and working together with them always does!” –“I’m (at the moment) eager to keep this level of activity and I am motivated to not just pack away my camping junk.” –“...My tolerance of people’s environment grew sky high. And my sleeping pattern became better. Sobriety is fun too ... it breeds good times among people on vacations.”

Continued

Table 1.—Continued

Theme	Dimensions	Examples from pre-trip focus groups & post-trip surveys
Novelty	New Activities, Destinations, Culture, Experiences	– “I want to learn new things, I’ve done canoeing a little bit, but I’ve never done anything else like this, it will be a learning experience.” – “I think I was able to learn and experience new things with new people and it had a sense of adventure with the different activities.”
Physical Activities	Expectations and experiences relating to programmed itinerary events and activities during the trip.	– What about this trip appeals to you the most? “...definitely stuff I wouldn’t be doing on my own – like kayaking, canoeing, and snorkeling.” – “I liked snorkeling in the ocean. I’d never snorkeled before and it was an experience that I never thought I’d enjoy.”
Unexpected Events	Elements of the trip experience that might be considered uncontrolled: “surprises”, “adventures”	– “Canoeing was a lot of fun especially at Juniper because the chance of being flipped or hitting a tree made it more intense. The more hurdles the better!” – “The springs were cool. I didn’t plan on swimming in Florida and I’m glad I got to. It was an experience I will never forget.”
Value Proposition	Expected and Perceived Value for Cost Comparisons	– “Yes, I couldn’t have found a better deal with the amount of cool things we did with this group of people.” – “... I’ve had more meals in the last week than in the preceding month. We also had activities for every waking hour of the trip. Certainly a better deal than a tattoo and alcohol poisoning in Motown.”

6.0 Implications

According to Moutinho (1987), “Tourist satisfaction is a function of tourist product performance, specific expectations, and expectancy confirmation or disconfirmation” (p. 34). This study indicated a greater complexity to tourist satisfaction that seemed unlikely to be captured in measures of expectancy confirmation or disconfirmation. Of the 13 themes identified within this research, seven seemed likely to fit within a disconfirmation paradigm. These themes include: amenities, environment, fun, novelty, escape, physical activities, and value proposition. Each of these themes were identified both prior to the trip in the participants’ needs and expectations as well as post-trip in their evaluations of satisfaction. Other themes such as flow & pace, active involvement, guides, group dynamics, new attitudes & values, and unexpected events seemed less clear. Expressed needs and expectations with relation to these variables were vague or non-existent. While expectancy confirmation or disconfirmation with relation to these aspects of tourist product performance may have occurred, there also seemed to be situations when these themes interacted with or influenced other themes

in unexpected ways and a traditional disconfirmation paradigm seemed unlikely to capture the complexities taking place.

For example, photographs taken during the participant observation phase of research showed less than desirable environmental conditions with regard to the amount of bugs present and the relative discomfort they posed on the experience. While many of the group members had expressed expectations that the bugs would be a problem, their comments on the post-trip survey indicated a gap between these expectations and reality in which the bug problem was much greater than anticipated. Comments included: “*Bugs sucked*,” “*I like seeing the different animals – the bugs less so*,” “*Least favorite – bug bites*,” and “*Least favorite: tiny bugs*.” A positivistic approach to measuring the disconfirmation paradigm for this variable would likely indicate a gap between expectations of the environment and reality, due to the greater than anticipated impact of bugs, resulting in a negative impact on satisfaction. Yet, the post-positivistic approach taken in this study revealed a greater complexity to the environment theme. The photos

taken during the participant observation phase depicted participants in mosquito netting and hoods, at dusk when bugs were at their worst. From the disconfirmation evaluation of this variable, you would expect to see a lot of unhappiness on the faces of participants; outward expressions of their dissatisfaction with the environment. Yet, these photos overwhelmingly showed smiles on the faces of the participants, laughter, and a general mood of fun. Review of the researcher's notes reveal observations that the positive group dynamics and trip management techniques of the guides helped to mitigate the unpleasant environmental conditions caused by the plethora of mosquitoes. Consider some of the participant quotes from the post-trip survey:

"I was very satisfied with the whole experience. The people were friendly; the leaders were fun, helpful, and laid-back. The teamwork affected my satisfaction as well. The reef, beach, springs and all activities were awesome. The bugs were annoying, but they came with the territory and added bonding and fun jokes."

"I didn't have any dislikes that didn't involve bugs. But they were OK because nature rules."

These comments support the researcher's observations and indicate a greater complexity to the evaluation of satisfaction than that suggested in Moutinho's model.

A second example of the complexities revealed using an interpretivistic approach to the study of tourist satisfaction relates to the relationships and interactions between the themes of active involvement, guides, group dynamics and new attitudes & values. The pre-trip focus groups revealed minimal expectations for these themes. Participants expressed expectations for "easy planning" and "nothing to think about", to "meet new people" and find "new stories" and for "interaction". Notes from the participant observation phase indicated that group dynamics were a pivotal part of the trip from early on. The guides actively managed the trip to create and encourage good group dynamics, utilizing a variety of tactics including pre-trip interaction, getting participants actively involved in trip decisions and daily activities such as cooking and cleaning, and encouraging an overall

atmosphere of tolerance and low stress. Participant survey responses to the post-trip questionnaire suggest the outcomes of these management actions:

"I lost intolerance for things I cannot change. I got a vacation I really needed. My breath was taken away many times. It changed me for the better as I feel that camping, travel, and not only meeting new people but also living and working together with them always does!"

"Keeping everyone involved in cooking and cleaning seemed to help everyone get along."

"I love to camp and meet people. My tolerance of people's environment grew sky high. Any my sleeping pattern became better. Sobriety is fun too ... it breeds good times among people on vacations."

While the complexity and exact nature of the interactions between these themes remains unclear, the use of the interpretivistic approach seems to add value by enabling researchers to more "directly or completely captured someone's lived experiences and social reality" (Stewart & Floyd 2004, p. 4). Evaluations of the gaps between expectations and reality with regard to themes such as the guides, group dynamics, or active involvement would miss the complexity revealed through interpretivistic approaches such as participant observation.

According to Crossan (2003), "the basic reasoning of positivism assumes that an objective reality exists which is independent of human behavior and is therefore not a creation of the human mind... The senses are used to accumulate data that are objective, discernable and measurable; anything other should be rejected as transcendental" (p. 50). A positivistic approach to post-purchase evaluation and the determination of tourist satisfaction, such as the model proposed by Moutinho, attempts to map and measure the "ideal" point of each attribute based on an aggregate cost-benefit analysis where an equilibrium level is identified based on the point where expectations and reality meet. Methodology focuses on the significance and predictive ability of each of theme or variable in terms of the overall

disconfirmation paradigm, in which expectations are compared with reality and determinations are made in terms of overall satisfaction / dissatisfaction. Where gaps exist between expectations and reality, Moutinho suggests that cognitive dissonance mechanisms and reinforcements are employed. The level of acceptance tourists assign to these mechanisms leads to the probability of repeat-buying behavior (Moutinho 1987; Decrop 1999).

A post-positivistic approach focuses on the concept that reality is subjective; it is influenced by context and can be influenced by many factors and is the creation of those involved in the experience. Post-positivism acknowledges the complex relationship between viewpoints, individual actions, environments and socio-cultural issues (Crossan 2003). Rather than seeking an absolute predictive truth, this approach looks for evidence of the existence of occurrences or trends and seeks to interpret them and construct a representation of the lived experience and social context (Stewart & Floyd 2004). The complexities revealed within this study seem unlikely to have been revealed using a positivistic approach, such as the disconfirmation paradigm. Although results of this case study cannot be generalized to a larger population or used in a predictive fashion; they suggest a value for post-positivistic philosophy within leisure and recreation research, which lies in their ability to help managers and researchers better understand and interpret the lived experiences of tourists.

7.0 Limitations

The limitations of post-positivist approaches generally relate to the interactive and participatory nature of qualitative methods. In these types of studies, the researchers are, by design, close to the investigation. While attempts have been made to remove researcher bias from this investigation through peer review, a standing criticism of qualitative methods is that they are the interpretation of the research team and lack the ability to be reproduced or generalized (Crossan 2004). These same limitations apply to this case study of the 2004 spring break trip to the Florida Everglades. Due to the effect of the guides, unexpected events, and small sample size, the results cannot be reproduced or projected to a larger population. They are specific to this type of trip and program and for the purposes of this study were

treated as such. Time and resource constraints were also identified as a limitation to this study; funding was scarce and the study design, implementation, and analysis were on a strict time schedule. Finally, the timing and administration of the follow-up survey may have had an impact on the quality of the responses. In order to ensure a high response rate the questionnaires were distributed and filled out on the van ride home. While all but two of the questionnaires were returned, the trip was still somewhat in progress and the participants may not have had ample time to reflect on the experience.

8.0 Future Research

Crossan (2003) states that “positivism adopts a clear quantitative approach to investigating phenomena, as opposed to post-positivist approaches, which aim to describe and explore in-depth phenomena from a qualitative perspective” (p. 46). Stewart & Floyd (2004) define a context for post-positivism within leisure and recreation studies by acknowledging the use of the philosophy and associated methods such as interpretivism and constructivism and critical theory. They attribute this trend accordingly: “Over the past decade, the leisure literature has enhanced its array of philosophical approaches to research and expanded its capacity for knowledge ... This growing appreciation for alternative paradigms is indicative of our anxiety for approaches that adequately describe (or explain or capture) the experiences and realities of people’s leisure” (p. 5). Positivistic philosophy and associated methodologies will continue to play a pivotal role in developing summarized appraisals of leisure experience, and models such as the Tourism Behavior model posed by Moutinho serve to provide a valuable filter for experience, but direct experience may be better understood through post-positivistic philosophies and methods (Stewart & Floyd 2004). The research presented in this report supports the idea that as researchers in leisure and recreation continue to try to understand and interpret the complexities of lived experiences, post-positivistic approaches can play a valuable role. Specifically, continued exploration of the complex relationships between satisfaction themes and direct experience is encouraged. There seems to be a distinctive role played by the guides of tourism experiences in weaving together elements of satisfaction to influence the direct experience. Future research

should continue to explore the role of the guides, group dynamics, concepts of cognitive dissonance and loyalty, as well as other themes identified in this study.

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