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in

Hadjipavlou G. (ed.), Ligda C. (ed.).
Addressing the challenges of agro-pastoral farming systems to strengthen their resilience

Zaragoza : CIHEAM

Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 129

2022

pages 85-93

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=00008100>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Iglesias C., Navas F.J., Ciani E., Barba C.J., Delgado J.V. **Sociological profile of touristic camel rides users: a tool to contribute to the sustainable use of native camel genetic resources.** In : Hadjipavlou G. (ed.), Ligda C. (ed.). *Addressing the challenges of agro-pastoral farming systems to strengthen their resilience.* Zaragoza : CIHEAM, 2022. p. 85-93 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 129)



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Sociological profile of touristic camel rides users: a tool to contribute to the sustainable use of native camel genetic resources

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Abstract. Scholars have remarked the opportunities that animal-based tourism provides as the channel to boost local communities' economy and progress while promoting nature conservation efforts. Consumer characteristics and value creation in camel riding tours' target audience are however underdealt topics in literature. Given the survival of certain local camel breeds is contingent on leisure tourism, we examined the sociological and psychographic attributes which may allow differentiating customers. Nonlinear canonical correlation analysis was used to determine profiles of those tourists engaging in these activities to characterize the most profitable segments of camel rides as a business niche. Our results suggest that if not familiarized with camels and their functionalities, travelers may not intentionally engage in camel-based tourism unless offered the opportunity at holiday destinations. On the contrary, amateur users are familiar with camels and valorize the issuing tour operator performance and general comfort during the encounter as pivotal factors conditioning their overall satisfaction. Hence, it is quite recommendable for tour agencies to include this entertaining recreation in packages to individuals, groups and companies, as well as staff to customize the service to make the user feel satisfied and willing to return again. The sustainable use of canary camels as business motors may provide tangible benefits to locals' well-being and natural resources management while these animal genetic resources are protected.

Keywords. Camel-based tourism – Endangered breed – Customer knowledge – Canonical correlation – Nature conservation.

Segmentation de la clientèle touristique de loisir à dos de chameau, comme stratégie marketing pour la conservation à long terme des races menacées

Résumé. Les chercheurs ont remarqué les opportunités représentées par le tourisme animalier pour stimuler l'économie et favoriser les communautés locales tout en encourageant les efforts de conservation de la nature. Les caractéristiques des clients et la création de valeur pour le public cible des excursions à dos de chameau sont cependant des sujets peu traités dans la littérature. La survie de certaines races locales de chameaux est conditionnée au tourisme de loisir. Nous avons examiné les attributs sociologiques et psychographiques qui peuvent permettre de différencier les clients. Une analyse de corrélation canonique non linéaire a été utilisée pour caractériser les profils des touristes engagés dans ces activités. Nos résultats suggèrent que s'ils ne sont pas familiarisés avec les chameaux et leurs fonctionnalités, les voyageurs ne peuvent pas s'engager intentionnellement dans des activités touristiques ayant recours aux chameaux, à moins que l'opportunité ne leur en soit offerte dans leurs destinations de vacances. Les utilisateurs amateurs connaissent les chameaux et accordent de la valeur aux performances des voyageurs émetteurs et au confort général lors de la rencontre comme des facteurs déterminants conditionnant leur satisfaction globale. Il est recommandé aux agences de voyage d'inclure ce divertissement dans des forfaits destinés aux particuliers, aux groupes et aux entreprises, ainsi qu'au personnel de personnaliser le service pour que l'utilisateur se sente satisfait et disposé à revenir. L'utilisation durable des chameaux canaris comme moteurs d'activités économiques peut apporter des avantages tangibles en termes de bien-être des habitants et de gestion des ressources naturelles, tout en protégeant ces ressources zoogénétiques.

Mots-clés. Tourisme à dos de chameau – Race menacée – Connaissance des clients – Corrélation canonique – Conservation de la nature.

I – Introduction

Tourism, one of the largest and fastest-growing economic activities all over the world, encompasses a wide variety of sectors that offer diverse products and/or services to visitors focusing on customer's satisfaction, safety and enjoyment (Marinao, 2017; Sofronov, 2018). In particular, nature-based tourism or eco-tourism has become the most popular segment of the tourism industry since the contemporary trendiest destinations are changing from traditional mass tourism emplacements to attractive natural environments. That is, a responsible travel to natural areas that led to the generation of revenues for conservation of the environment in which it is based and the socio-economic development of locals (Fennell, 2020). In the particular case of camels, this animal species is well known to be an iconic attraction for trekking experiences, excursions and picture taking in desert places at Middle East, India, Africa and Spain (Seifu *et al.*, 2018; Wilson and Gutierrez, 2015; Wilson, 2013). Such interactive encounters not only provide enjoyment for tourist users but also revenues for animal genetic resources' sustainable conservation (Coria and Calfucura, 2012). The present research arises in the context of the CARAVAN project – toward a camel transnational value chain, an ARIMNet2 initiative (ERA-NET ARIMNET2/PCI2016-00011) which has placed the focus on domestic camel revalorization. The purpose of the present investigation is set at the segmentation analysis of this adventure tourism subsector, that still remains overlooked within the scientific literature. Given that some local camel breeds are capitally used for touristic activities, their long-term viability relies on this functional segment (i.e. endangered Canarian camels from Canary Islands, Spain) (Iglesias Pastrana *et al.*, 2020). The mentioned breed historically acted as service animals (Schulz, 2008) but was displaced from rural labours by transport means' technification (Iglesias *et al.*, 2020). Its total rural census diminished and the breeders decided to start including their animals in tourist rides by the early 1990s (Wilson and Gutierrez, 2015). However, the census of this European unique camel breed is currently estimated on 1000 animals. As a direct consequence, it becomes indispensable to clearly analyse and monitor the profile of the demands of this tourism sector for further exceptional investment attempting to ensure the sustainable conservation of Canarian camels as their main element (Bhandari and Heshmati, 2010; Di Minin *et al.*, 2013).

Through deepening market segmentation, tourism companies may identify a mix of sociodemographic, motivational and psychographic variables that are exhibited from consumers who make up a target market and are most likely to purchase for and benefit from their products and services (Díaz *et al.*, 2012; Fernández-Hernández *et al.*, 2016). Hence, tourism marketers and managers will be proficient in devising tourist development initiatives that can improve the destination competitiveness and loyalty by delivering a high-quality customized experience for tourists and thus generating and increasing revenues for the sustainable management and conservation of the mentioned camel breed, the only genetic resource of such nature along Europe.

II – Research methodology

1. Study sample and geographics

A total number of 131 respondents (55 males and 76 females) participated in this study. Eight Canarian dromedaries (6 males and 2 females; aged between 4 and 32 years) reared for tourist rides in Southwestern Spain constitute the animal sample. The saddle used for riding is the English type.

During the high season in Southern Spain (1st July to 30th September 2019) and thus the business experiments its high demand, we asked all the consumers that enjoyed a camel ride to voluntarily fulfil an on-site Likert-type questionnaire aimed to collect multiple data (socio-demographics, motivational factors, perceived value service and personal attitudes towards camel functionalities) (Iglesias Pastrana *et al.*, 2020).

2. Data statistical analysis

A nonlinear canonical correlation analysis was performed using the Optimal scaling routine of the Dimension reduction procedure of IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 (IBM Corp. 2017). The nonlinear canonical correlation analysis, is also known as OVERALS to determine scale dimensionality.

To interpret the dimensions obtained, those variables with component loadings of over |0.5| (Bárcenas *et al.*, 2003), were deemed the most effective ones at identifying relationships among sets (Greenacre and Hastie, 1987).

III – Results and discussion

Two dimensions were identified to explain 41.2 % of shared variability in the dataset. Table 1 reports the eigenvalues for the bi-dimensional solution of nonlinear canonical correlation analysis performed.

Table 1. Eigenvalues for the two-dimensional solution of nonlinear canonical correlation analysis

Variable sets	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	FIT
Seasonality and timing	0.505	0.947	1.452
Customer and trip profile	0.400	0.910	1.309
Decision-making motivating factors	0.458	0.564	1.022
Staff performance	0.652	0.401	1.053
Camel behavior	0.676	0.630	1.305
Quality of riding route	0.320	0.458	0.778
Previous experience	0.694	0.738	1.431
Customer impressions	0.471	0.333	0.804
Customer satisfaction and loyalty	0.913	0.521	1.434
Mean	0.565	0.611	1.177
Eigenvalue	0.435	0.389	0.824

Within the frame of market segmentation in tourism research, the maximum number of dimensions selected and their respective eigenvalues when aiming to explain the greatest percentage of variance due to correlation between variable sets at an acceptable loss level (see Table 2; Model partitioning fit and loss analysis), is quite variable among approaches. Multiple study design-related factors such as the sample size, data outliers, normality distribution (Hair Jr Joseph *et al.*, 2009), the type of tourism activity being investigated, the number of different variables tested and the rating scale(s) used (Dolnicar, 2008), markedly influence these statistical outputs. In our case, despite the high conceptual heterogeneity within variables/items used as potential segmentation criteria (tourist socio-demographics, staff and camel behavioral performance, and customer attitudes/knowledge towards/on camel-based tourism), the eigenvalues for both dimensions fit the mean range values reported by other authors investigating the relationships between sets of variables that help to explain travel motivations and customer perceived value of tourist services (Oh *et al.*, 1995; Pyo *et al.*, 1989; Whyte, 2017). Hence, the conclusions derived from the present pioneer research are valid and reliable.

Based on the semantic meaning of the variables with component loadings of over |0.5| within each dimension (Table 3; variables with component loadings of over |0.5| are in bold italics), these last can be labelled as: Dimension 1 or customer knowledge on camel functionalities and involvement in a pleasing camelback riding tour during holidays, and Dimension 2 or staff manners and comfortability during camelback riding for experienced customers satisfaction.

Table 2. Model partitioning fit and loss analysis results

Set	Variables	Multiple Fit			Single Fit			Single Loss		
		Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Sum	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Sum	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Sum
Seasonality and timing	Month of Visit	0.349	0.161	0.510	0.349	0.161	0.510	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Year of Visit	1.407	0.263	1.671	1.407	0.263	1.671	0.000	0.000	0.000
Customer and trip profile	Sex	0.024	0.001	0.025	0.024	0.001	0.025	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Age	0.058	0.034	0.092	0.050	0.003	0.053	0.008	0.032	0.039
	Country origin	0.091	0.069	0.160	0.090	0.068	0.158	0.001	0.001	0.002
	Study level	0.229	0.042	0.271	0.227	0.018	0.245	0.002	0.024	0.026
	Travel Companion	0.168	0.009	0.177	0.168	0.000	0.168	0.000	0.009	0.009
Decision-making motivating factors	Camel knowledge	0.047	0.118	0.165	0.001	0.110	0.111	0.046	0.008	0.054
	Environmental knowledge	0.294	0.020	0.314	0.270	0.002	0.272	0.023	0.018	0.042
	Andalusian culture	0.046	0.098	0.144	0.010	0.040	0.049	0.036	0.058	0.094
	Andalusian friends/relatives	0.131	0.019	0.150	0.102	0.002	0.104	0.028	0.017	0.046
	Special event in Andalusia	0.045	0.126	0.171	0.004	0.100	0.104	0.041	0.026	0.067
	Conference/meeting	0.062	0.031	0.093	0.049	0.012	0.060	0.013	0.019	0.033
	Education/research	0.088	0.372	0.459	0.058	0.356	0.415	0.029	0.015	0.045
	Business	0.090	0.069	0.159	0.083	0.051	0.134	0.008	0.018	0.025
	Holidays	0.455	0.026	0.481	0.438	0.009	0.447	0.017	0.017	0.034
Staff performance	Language abilities	0.149	1.144	1.293	0.141	1.142	1.284	0.008	0.001	0.009
	Camel knowledge	0.161	0.025	0.186	0.161	0.024	0.184	0.000	0.001	0.001
	Nature knowledge	0.031	0.015	0.046	0.029	0.012	0.040	0.002	0.004	0.006
	Manners	0.153	0.330	0.484	0.153	0.330	0.483	0.000	0.000	0.001
	Social skills	0.452	0.121	0.573	0.452	0.119	0.570	0.001	0.002	0.003
	Willingness to serve	0.377	0.101	0.479	0.377	0.101	0.479	0.000	0.000	0.000
Camel behaviour	Unfocused/Distracted	0.044	0.094	0.138	0.043	0.093	0.137	0.001	0.000	0.001
	Calm/Awaiting	0.045	0.053	0.098	0.020	0.032	0.052	0.025	0.020	0.045
	Mistrustful	0.093	0.007	0.100	0.092	0.006	0.097	0.001	0.002	0.003
	Fearful	0.000	0.124	0.125	0.000	0.124	0.124	0.000	0.001	0.001
	Depressed	0.009	0.103	0.112	0.006	0.103	0.109	0.002	0.001	0.003
	Curious	0.018	0.082	0.100	0.016	0.062	0.078	0.001	0.020	0.022
	Surprised	0.072	0.016	0.087	0.059	0.008	0.067	0.013	0.007	0.021
	Rejection	0.023	0.094	0.117	0.020	0.093	0.113	0.003	0.001	0.004
	Indifferent/Irresponsive	0.205	0.102	0.307	0.194	0.099	0.293	0.011	0.003	0.014
	Cautious	0.050	0.107	0.157	0.017	0.101	0.118	0.033	0.006	0.039
Nervous	0.037	0.011	0.049	0.036	0.007	0.043	0.002	0.005	0.006	
Quality of riding route	Secure	0.001	0.004	0.005	0.000	0.004	0.004	0.001	0.000	0.001
	Interesting	0.013	0.009	0.022	0.004	0.001	0.005	0.008	0.008	0.016
	Varied	0.010	0.079	0.089	0.002	0.042	0.044	0.008	0.037	0.045
	Appropriately long	0.106	0.015	0.121	0.090	0.000	0.090	0.016	0.015	0.031
	Walk overall quality	0.501	0.022	0.523	0.500	0.005	0.506	0.000	0.017	0.017
Previous experience	Previous experience	0.087	0.128	0.215	0.084	0.126	0.211	0.003	0.002	0.005
	When did previous experience take place?	0.000	0.031	0.032	0.000	0.031	0.032	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Comparison between experiences	0.012	0.156	0.168	0.012	0.155	0.167	0.001	0.000	0.001
	Did you receive previous training before the walk?	0.002	0.086	0.087	0.001	0.086	0.087	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Personal impression	0.008	0.003	0.011	0.008	0.003	0.011	0.000	0.000	0.000

	on involved camels' welfare									
	Do you think this tourism activity has wide impacts on camel health and welfare?	0.425	0.121	0.546	0.235	0.056	0.290	0.190	0.065	0.255
	Personal impression on camel riding as a sustainable tourism activity	0.312	0.149	0.461	0.303	0.131	0.434	0.008	0.019	0.027
	Easiness of camel-back riding	0.070	0.079	0.150	0.070	0.079	0.150	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Comfortability of camel-back riding	0.035	0.388	0.423	0.022	0.387	0.409	0.013	0.001	0.014
	Familiarity towards worldwide camel uses	0.046	0.005	0.051	0.046	0.004	0.050	0.000	0.001	0.001
	What do you think camels are raised for?	0.364	0.074	0.438	0.361	0.019	0.380	0.003	0.055	0.058
	Consciousness about the usefulness for endangered camels breeding and conservation	0.055	0.036	0.091	0.042	0.035	0.078	0.013	0.001	0.013
	Walk length	0.020	0.075	0.094	0.001	0.073	0.073	0.019	0.002	0.021
Customer satisfaction and loyalty	General satisfaction	0.055	0.423	0.478	0.048	0.417	0.465	0.007	0.006	0.012
	Return intention probability	0.052	0.058	0.111	0.036	0.054	0.090	0.016	0.005	0.021

Table 3. Components loadings for nonlinear canonical correlation analysis

Set	Variables	Dimension 1	Dimension 2
Seasonality and timing	Month of Visit	0.477	0.060
	Year of Visit	-0.655	-0.152
Customer and trip profile	Sex	0.165	0.005
	Age	-0.322	-0.068
	Country origin	-0.335	-0.260
	Study level	-0.497	-0.145
	Travel Companion	-0.403	-0.004
Decision-making motivating factors	Camel knowledge	-0.062	0.400
	Environmental knowledge	-0.199	0.334
	Andalusian culture	0.024	0.337
	Andalusian friends/relatives	0.174	0.187
	Special event in Andalusia	0.054	0.324
	Conference/meeting	0.105	0.211
	Education/research	0.152	-0.033
	Business	0.090	0.228
	Holidays	0.533	0.164
Performance	Language abilities	0.008	0.576
	Camel knowledge	-0.131	0.124
	Nature knowledge	-0.177	0.100
	Manners	-0.193	0.028
	Social skills	-0.314	0.103
	Willingness to serve	-0.378	0.135

Camel behaviour	Unfocused/Distracted	-0.239	0.120
	Calm/Awaiting	0.158	-0.147
	Mistrustful	0.099	0.093
	Fearful	-0.041	0.083
	Depressed	-0.059	-0.050
	Curious	0.074	0.198
	Surprised	-0.012	-0.050
	Rejection	-0.123	-0.117
	Indifferent/Irresponsive	-0.392	-0.230
	Cautious	0.093	-0.261
	Nervous	-0.042	0.127
Quality of riding route	Secure	-0.012	-0.031
	Interesting	-0.003	-0.065
	Varied	-0.117	0.349
	Appropriately long	-0.365	0.124
	Walk overall quality	0.692	0.090
Previous experience	Previous experience	-0.218	0.348
	When did previous experience take place?	-0.058	-0.124
	Comparison between experiences	-0.216	0.511
	Did you receive previous training before the walk?	0.016	0.379
Customer impressions	Personal impression on involved camels' welfare	-0.067	-0.034
	Do you think this tourism activity has wide impacts on camel health and welfare?	-0.235	-0.392
	Personal impression on camel riding as a sustainable tourism activity	-0.338	0.465
	Easiness of camel-back riding	-0.258	0.426
	Comfortability of camel-back riding	-0.206	0.674
	Familiarity towards worldwide camel uses	0.214	-0.098
	What do you think camels are raised for?	-0.586	-0.176
	Consciousness about the usefulness for endangered camels breeding and conservation	0.162	0.152
	Walk length	-0.050	0.300
Customer satisfaction and loyalty	General satisfaction	-0.225	0.653
	Return intention probability	0.196	-0.251

Given the popularization in recent times of nature-based leisure tourism and the increased public awareness on natural resources sustainable conservation, involved stakeholders and marketing agencies have started to promote interactive encounters in which tourists can get in close contact with domestic animals or observing wild species on their natural habitat under tightly controlled conditions (Bertella, 2014; Moorhouse *et al.*, 2015). Domestic equids, camels, elephants or marine mammals and wild endangered animals are the leading ambassadors and attractions in this recreation industry (Markwell, 2015). Such innovative products provide tourists with unique experiences and enrich their cultural understanding of the world natural resources (Stone, 2015).

In the particular case of camels, attention provided to customers, specially linked to the communication skills of staff may play an important role. However, our results suggest selection for those animals whose gaits, morphology or behaviour may translate in easier and smoother rides are equally valuable and worth being considered as their repercussion on overall satisfaction may equal that reported for the attention to customers (Dimension 2; Table 3), but also may denote better animal welfare-promoting practices being implemented. By understanding the target customers' de-

mands and expectations, breeding programmes aimed at accurate selection of riding camels for functional traits of interest will enhance the long-term sustainable use of these animal resources and its cultural, historical value. Notwithstanding, in a domestic scenario, the familiarity of customers towards the functionalities of a species (Dimension 1; Table 3) or breed widely affects the likelihood for them to get involved in activities that motivate active interaction with animals and that can be sometimes the main niche for their survival in local regions. That is the case of the camels, a species well known for inhabiting desert areas mainly in Africa and participate in caravan tours. However, an endangered camel breed is distributed along the Canarian archipelago and southern areas of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain) but the level of consciousness of the general public about the existence and thus the functionality (tourism sector) of this local breed still remains low. In turn, camel-back riding appears not to be a preference for local consumers when planning their holidays but include this recreation once they are in the destination and may get informed about the chance to join this experience (Iglesias Pastrana *et al.*, 2020). Strongly related to this condition and if finally book for this type of interactive encounter, unfamiliarized users could feel mistrustful when approaching camels and therefore affect animal behavior and tour overall quality.

On the other hand, travelers that are familiarized with camel functionalities and actively seek for being engaged in these camel-human leisure interactions, are supposed to be more critic when evaluating all the surrounding elements that affect the satisfactory development of the ride tour. At the time they demand to satisfy a combination of social, recreational and emotional needs, they may be willing to give feedback to the destination through cultural and/or monetary exchange only within a framework of a corporative defined social responsibility and ethics in the tour operator supply chain. In this context, staff performance and general comfortability perceived by the riders during the tour, are intrinsic factors affecting the experiential consumption in this tourism brand.

IV – Conclusions

Within this holistic market, business groups have to be aware that more than one target market can appear on the scene: a primary or main target market and a secondary one less large but growthness potent. Experienced users in this tourism brand find the activity memorable when the emotional binding with the surrounding elements during the encounter and the staff enrolling into service performance create an experience-like quality. Contrastingly, novel customers, mainly unfamiliarized with camels and their participation in tourist activities, put in evidence the need for scholars and tourism stakeholders to promote community-wide awareness programs and adapted touristic packs, respectively. Basing on this customer knowledge, high-quality leads can be effectively converted into paying customers by homing in on product's promotion specific efforts. Camel functional selection may promote the enhancement of the touristic activities in which camels may participate, promoting customer comfortability at the same time that animal welfare is preserved. In turn, such customized services will allow to generate resources for the sustainable management and conservation of camel genetics resources at long term.

Acknowledgments

The present research has been developed in the context of the CARAVAN project (ERA-NET ARIM-NET2/PCI2016-00011) and during the covering period of a predoctoral contract (FPU fellowship) funded by Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. The authors thanks "Aires Africanos" Eco-tourism Company for its technical help and assistance.

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