

Experiential Determinants of Destinations Popularity With Respect to Nightlife Culture Identity Profiling

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Abstract

Party destinations correlate often with intense experiences of nightlife as, nowadays, young people from all over the world choose specific vacation destinations to enjoy activities such as beach parties and mega clubs. The present paper is built upon two pillars: We develop a quantitative form of analysis through a comprehensive network research in randomly chosen sites and blogs, whose basic topic refers to the top Mediterranean party island destinations. The results of this research are collected and weighted according to the visitors' frequency as published by credible web analytics. Our main objective is to identify the top nightlife holiday destination in the Mediterranean. We conclude that Ibiza is the top party island followed by Mykonos. The second strand analyses the subjective nature of the party experience in Ibiza by applying qualitative primary research methodology based upon a behavioural socioeconomic framework and observation. Therefore, we profile the experience of the focal group of party tourists in Ibiza through qualitative research which includes in-depth participant interviewing with the use of observational techniques, descriptive questions and theme identification.

Introduction

Little research attention has been given to party nightlife as a tourism motive, the nightlife touristic market, the destinations most commonly visited by young people and their holiday experiences. This paper aims at highlighting a few comparative issues relevant to the experiential nightlife motivations and identity, in order to contribute to an emerging bibliography. The qualitative research conducted in this paper is still on-going as we intend to gradually increase the size of our sample. However, some preliminary findings are quite suggestive and we report them in the present essay.

The Relevance of Behavioural Economics for Tourism Research:

Experiential aspects of tourism do exhibit behavioural mechanisms. Behavioural economics growingly analyses aspects of leisure (1). For example, in behavioural

evaluations of the distributional impacts of social status, leisure plays an important role (2). This naturally extends to the activity of tourism and its experiential aspects. There is a profound connection between experience, social psychology and modern culture.

Qualitative research and behavioural Economics approach:

We are interested in experiential aspects of tourism, because they exhibit unexplored behavioural dynamics, which are not revealed in standard survey research. There is a number of alternative approaches in empirical travel research, which utilize different multi-factor lists of motivations, without situating them on specific behavioural theoretic approaches. For this reason, we are interested to employ qualitative research in order to explore motivations from a behavioural economics viewpoint that are not typically included in standard travel surveys. By doing qualitative research (i.e., on the basis of Guba (3), Gerson-Horowitz (4) and others) we move from the interpretative demand of user generated content of tourism blogs (UGC), to the actual experiential holiday world. One of the authors has been already familiar with tourism and nightlife in Ibiza and we were confident that we could conduct online interviewing for the purpose of qualitative research. Despite the difficulties of online interviewing, there are clear benefits, such as the opportunity to conduct qualitative research from distance, a possible avoidance of home bias and research output, which can be compared to UGC approaches, and the possibility of original results. Actually, the results of our approach relate to interesting and somehow unexpected findings.

Pillar 1: Top Party Island selection

We conduct a comprehensive network research in randomly selected informative sites, blogs and news coverages, whose basic topic was the top nightlife European island destinations, excluding official promotional sites, uploaded from local authorities and tour operators, simulating the procedure with what a common internet user would do to select a party destination.

We collected the outcomes of randomly, uncorrelated and independent sites from a popular search engine. The querying process took place in April 21st 2015 and included reports and comments uploaded from the beginning of 2013 till the 20th of April 2015.

We compared the data with the outcomes as published by the most credible web analytics (5). The function we used is the following:

$$P(isl) = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (\text{weight}) * \text{frequency}$$

Results of Pillar 1:

Following the site/blog evaluation process, we conclude that Ibiza is the most popular “party” island destination in the Mediterranean.

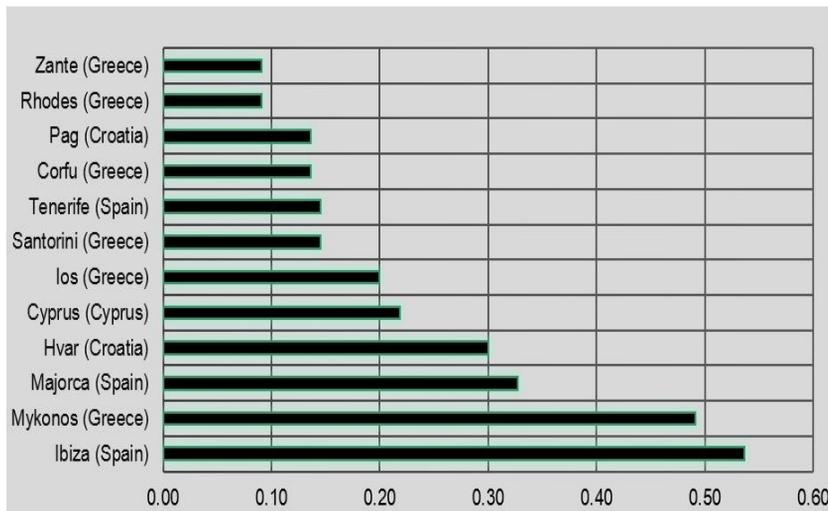


Figure 1: Top ten nightlife islands in Europe 2013-2015 according to internet sites

Why Ibiza: Nightlife and Party Culture

Ibiza is an island in the Mediterranean Sea, the third largest of the Balearic Islands and famous for the party nightlife and the dance electronic music culture that originated in the island. Large summer clubs attract thousands of tourists. The legendary nightlife scenery has established Ibiza as a popular tourist destination for partygoers from Europe and elsewhere. During the summer, in famous nightclubs such as Privilege, Amnesia, Space, Pacha, El Divino and others, the top producers and DJs in dance music industry visit the island and play music.

Pillar 2: Qualitative Research Methodology

At this stage we analyze the phenomenon by adopting a specific experiential qualitative technique: the in-depth participant interviewing, concentrating at profiling more precisely the experience of our focal group, the party tourist in Ibiza with the use of descriptive and explorative questions during “long” interviews (6), floating and planned prompts (7)(8)(9) and theme identification. The use of credible and popular social media blogs gave us a great opportunity to contact directly tourists, who have visited Ibiza recently and whose blog comments exhibited a profound interest for partying. The interviews took place through video

communication with the assistance of web camera. We followed a random approach to select our sample out of the population of bloggers and the response rate in our sample has been 12.8%, so far. Our sample so includes interviews from 36 respondents. Although for qualitative research purposes, this might have been sufficient, we would like to have a much larger sample for comparative and filter analysis purposes. Thus, we intend to increase our sample considerably in order to come with conclusive answers, which we will report in another fully elaborate research paper.

Challenges and Difficulties

We noticed several drawbacks in the procedure:

- Tourists may not wish to reflect on real travel motives or may be unable to reflect on their real travel motives (9).
- The holiday social media presented technical obstacles to our research, which prolonged our procedures and delayed the completion of our interviewing. We faced the first problem by giving “room” to interviewees to describe their opinions and explain their experiences in detail (10). Our purpose was to talk in an open, informal, spontaneous and non-judgmental manner to empower the interpersonal communication and focus on emotions and on the actual experience, rather than eliciting beliefs from the respondent through survey-type lists of factors.

Content of Interviews

The interviews lasted from 20 to 45 minutes depending on the eagerness and correspondence of the interviewees. We applied several filters to concentrate on participants of our focal group. The questions in our notebook were drawn from the examination of alternative groups of numerous studies (11)(12)(13)(14)(15) to ensure that the analysis reflects the tourists’ emotional and experiential needs, pleasurable moods, emotions, and feelings. For example, Fondness (1994) proposed a model based on five motivation types, as a result of extensive multivariate analysis of people’s statements about tourism motivations, which he refers to: *knowledge, punishment minimization, self-esteem, ego enhancement and reward maximization* while others pointed out to other motivations and processes.

Methodology – Results

The following figure presents the experiential variables used during our behavioural process and the preliminary results of the interviews:

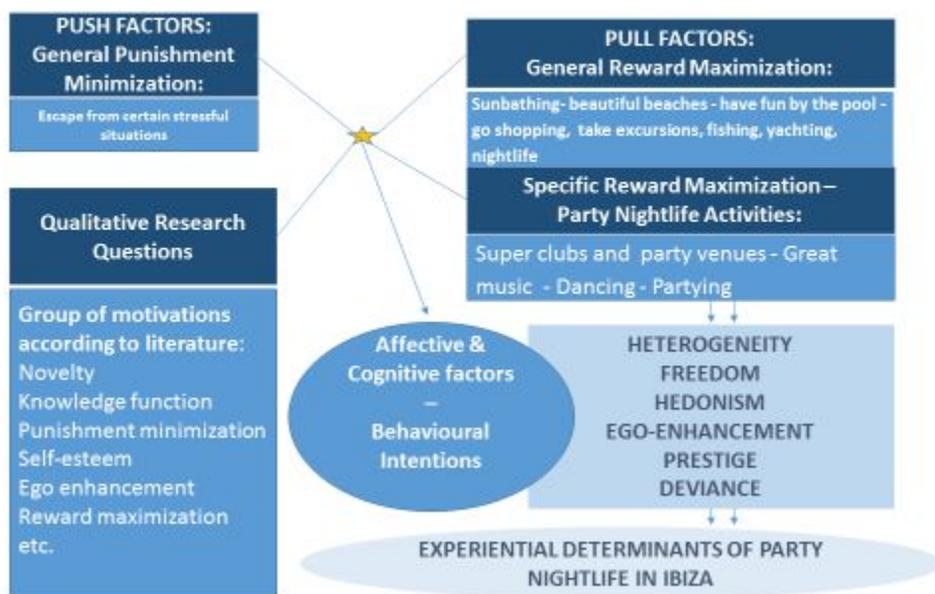


Figure 2: Interview Variables and Results

Results – Discussion

Most of the answers seemed to be in line with previous research about tourism motivation and activities, but our qualitative methodology revealed some interesting and somehow surprising findings.

Heterogeneity:

Our findings reveal that motivations and activities of party tourists in Ibiza are very different. There is no norm that the focal group has a specific way of life or thinking. They arrive to Ibiza from all over the world with a lot of different intentions. A participant stated: *“this island offers something to everyone!”* In fact, there are many party “tribes”.

Freedom:

We have found that this heterogeneity relates to an overwhelming sense of freedom of experiences that emerged from all over the island. This sense of freedom as a pull factor (16) stimulated guests to indulge in various experiential activities and often taking risks

Hedonism:

Ibiza confirms its reputation as a birthplace of modern nightlife hedonism. Large Super Clubs offer the chance to dance for hours, to sing and to feel “crazy” for the music. Some interviewees stressed that dancing in clubs with the *“the size of a football field”* and with the pleasurable music of famous DJs, is an intense

experiential activity, feeling free to behave beyond routine norms, status and rules of appropriateness (17) (18).

Ego-enhancement and Social Status:

During the acts of dancing, drinking etc. guests revealed that it was a very special moment for them and that they were privileged to live it (14). During the interviews, they urged us to see the photos they have uploaded on social media. They were proud for their numerous “likes” they have received from friends and peers and enjoyed compliments, stating that they “*can’t wait to go back to Ibiza next summer*”.

Less prevalent, but nevertheless important appear the motivations, which relate to:

Prestige:

Some interviewees enjoyed the fact that Ibiza is considered to be a fashionable cosmopolitan place, they were aware of celebrities(10) who visit the island and answered that they preferred Ibiza because it was more prestigious than Mallorca, Crete, or even Brighton.

Addictions - Deviance:

We encountered interviewees that enjoyed the opportunity to drink excessively - “*to booze*” - to try frequently and excessively substances (19) or to concentrate excessively in sexual activity (20).

Conclusions

Our paper is one of the first attempts to develop an alternative analysis of experiential tourism, on the basis of qualitative research, which is grounded on robust foundations of behavioural economics. The preliminary findings of our qualitative research reveal interesting insights for party nightlife profiling. We intend to develop further comparative research such as that between direct and online qualitative research, survey-type of research and qualitative research in this particular theme and to try enhanced forms of this approach in other areas of modern leisure culture. Finally, we intend to utilize similar research to enrich leisure theories, which involve social status and political economy considerations. For the time being and on the policy-making side, we conclude that authorities and practitioners of islands investing in a “party” destination cultural identity must improve the destination profile with respect to factors such as the heterogeneity of activities offered to party tourists, to cultivate an enhanced culture to respond to partygoers’ quest for freedom of experiences, to differentiate their services relatively to alternative sources of hedonism, to utilize ego-enhancement and prestige considerations and to concentrate in offering a safe environment for alternative lifestyles. On the other hand, practitioners and authorities of islands with a different cultural mix (i.e., with minimal or growing experiences in nightlife tourism), may wish to look on those motivations to understand better the profiling of party nightlife tourism. The present paper indicates that the dynamics of those motivations are

complex and further qualitative research based on a robust behavioural economics approach is fully warranted.

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