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## A Study on Leisure Participation and Environmental Perception of Ecotourism towards Well-Being

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### Abstract

Along with increasing national income and enhancing living standard, the changes of lifestyles also enhance the citizens' emphasis on leisure activity. In face of the increasing demands for leisure and travel, people have to maintain good physical and mental conditions in the busy and diverse life. Leisure allows people escaping from environmental perception or surpassing selfhood in leisure to develop self-creativity and satisfy the sense of achievement and performance at work. Leisure and travel therefore become the primary elements in life. Aiming at visitors to Yongchun Niumulin Ecological Tourism Zone in Fujian Province, 380 copies of questionnaire are distributed with random sampling, and 262 valid copies are retrieved, with the retrieval rate 69%. The retrieved data analysis is preceded with statistics software. The research results conclude significantly positive correlations between 1.environmental perception and leisure participation, 2.environmental perception and well-being, and 3.leisure participation and well-being. According to the results, suggestions are proposed in this study, expecting to grasp the future trend of domestic ecotourism and propose suggestions for the modification of ecotourism policies to create larger economic benefits.

**Keywords:** ecotourism, leisure participation, environmental perception, well-being

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### INTRODUCTION

The growth of economy, the enhancement of national income, the promotion of living standards, and the changes in lifestyles have the citizens gradually stress on leisure activity. The citizens' needs for leisure and travel are also increasing. The boom of tourism presents critical contribution to global economic growth. Nevertheless, natural resources are not inexhaustible. The booming tourism also impacts the environment that people start to emphasize ecotourism. The development of ecotourism satisfies people's needs for basic living, responds to people's expectation for ecological conservation and environmental protection, as well as catches up with the trend of sustainable development in the world. More importantly, ecotourism shows the new solution for the dilemma between economic development and environmental protection as well as provides economic incentives to protect the environment, allowing local people overcoming the difficulty in collective action and implementing community participation. It allows natural ecology, communities, industries, and the government sustainably managing tourism development strategies for the sustainable development.

In such a busy and diverse life, people have to maintain good physical and mental conditions to face the challenges in workplaces and life. Appropriate pressure could be the motive for advance, while pressure might obstacle individual work and life, when not positively facing pressure. Leisure and travel allow people getting rid of dull and weary work, escaping from work, or surpassing selfhood, developing self-creativity in leisure, and satisfying the sense of achievement and performance at work. Leisure and travel therefore become important elements in life. In the changeable society, leisure plays the balancing role in schools, workplaces, family, or communities. The quality of life could be enhanced, personal potential could be developed for expansion, and work efficiency and morale could be promoted by properly utilizing free time, regularly proceeding leisure and travel with plans, and appropriately participating in leisure in order to establish good lifestyles and perceive pleasant and positive emotion for generating driving force, relaxing mood to satisfy high-level psychological needs, and achieving physical, mental, and spiritual balance. Leisure participation in ecotourism to environmental perception and well-being is therefore studied, expecting to grasp the future trend of domestic

ecotourism, propose suggestions for the modification of ecotourism policies, and create larger economic benefits.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Leisure Participation

Huang (2015) regarded leisure as the remaining time after completing work and other obligation. Pandey and Shrivastava (2017) defined leisure participation as the frequency to participate in certain activity or an individual participating in general leisure activity. Joo et al. (2015) considered leisure participation as an individual being able to dominate the free time and participate in activity, except for the time for obligation in 24 hours. Boyce et al. (2016) defined leisure activity as the activity engaged according to individual will in the free time for physical and mental relaxation and pleasure, enriching life, increasing knowledge, as well as enhancing work efficiency. Mayungbo (2016) pointed out leisure participation as an individual, according to personal will and preference, freely selecting proper and legal activity, which would not endanger the society and self-indulgence, in the free time for physical and mental relaxation, saving energy, enhancing health, and acquiring various pleasant perception, happy and satisfactory experiences, and memories.

Referring to Chang and Tam (2015), four dimensions of intellectual component, social component, familiarity component, and avoidant component are selected for leisure participation.

- (1) Intellectual component: Intellectual component aims to evaluate the leisure activity engaged by an individual according to the motivation, including mental activities of learning, exploration, discovery, creation, and imagination.
- (2) Social component: The social reasons for an individual engaging in leisure activity contain needs for friendship and interpersonal relationship and needs for being respected by others.
- (3) Familiarity component: The reason for the competency-familiarity of an individual engaging in leisure activity is to acquire achievement, control, challenge, and competition, and the activity property lies in physical natural instinct.
- (4) Avoidant component: The reason for stimulation-escape of an individual engaging in

leisure activity is that an individual presents driving force to escape from excessive stimulation in the living environment and avoid the contact with the society, to pursue the need for being alone and quiet environment, and to pursue rest and self-relaxation (Steinhoff 2015).

### Environmental Perception

Cho (2015) explained that an individual being affected by external environment was stimulation; people received stimulation through physiology-based perception to appear feeling when the stimulation achieved certain strength; the feeling of objects in the environment, through organization in the brain, allowed people understanding, organizing, and giving meanings; such a process was perception. Hayat et al. (2016) indicated that when a person received stimulation from the environment to a certain degree, the perception would generate in the brain (Brüggen et al. 2017). Ng et al. (2017) pointed out the effect of simulation on consumers' senses that the pleasant experience induced by environmental factors would have people stay for longer time. Huang and Lu (2017) stated Environmental factors were the simulation in the overall environment, aiming at internal and external environment to create the climate for consumers increasing the time for stay and enhancing consumption opportunities. Kuykendall et al. (2015) regarded environmental perception as an individual collecting preliminary information in the environment through senses; events from external environment were stimulation which was received by people through physiology-based senses; feelings would be generated when the stimulation achieved certain strength; such feelings were organized in the brain to perceive the existence of object in the environment and to understand and organize the features; such a process was perception.

Referring to Hu et al. (2016), four dimensions are used for evaluating environmental perception.

- (1) Contextual factor: referring to intangible background environment and non-visual perception which could affect consumers' subconsciousness, e.g. music, temperature, light, air-conditioning, noise, and odor.
- (2) Design factor: indicating tangible and visual environmental components, which are divided into aesthetics and functions. The former contains architecture, style, color, pattern, and texture, and the latter refers to decoration, mark, comfort, and privacy.

- (3) Social factor: including the appearance, behaviors, and number of people, e.g. number of people at site, customer type, buyer/seller behavior.

### Well-being

Well-being is a pure emotional reaction. Defining well-being with personal emotion, it stresses on individual positive and negative emotional reaction, but not reflects the long-term and stable characters of well-being (Helliwell et al. 2017). Sajin et al. (2016) regarded well-being as the perception acquired from the cognitive evaluation of entire living situations, where an individual would set the standard and evaluate the quality of life in a period of time in the past; the ignorance of short-term emotion would also affect well-being. Carolyn et al. (2017) pointed out well-being as the total evaluation of emotion and perception, including life satisfaction, positive emotion and negative emotion, and individual subjective evaluation of overall living experience. Marina et al. (2017) regarded well-being as the state of physical and mental health, which could be measured with mental health. Such a point of view ignored the effects of short-term emotional fluctuation and long-term stable personality traits on well-being. Dinisman et al. (2017) also indicated well-being as individual subjective perception, containing personal subjective positive emotion to overall life satisfaction. Olagunju et al. (2015) pointed out well-being as an individual dealing with living environment and events with positive emotion, reducing negative emotion, and enhancing individual satisfaction with overall life.

Referring to Ju (2017), well-being covers two dimensions in this study.

- (1) Emotional well-being: including the measurement of positive emotion and perceived overall life satisfaction.
- (2) Positive functioning: containing psychological well-being and social well-being. Overall speaking, subjective well-being covers two dimensions of emotional well-being and positive functioning.

### Research Hypothesis

Chang and Tam (2015) referred environmental perception as the physiological and psychological states presented and acquired by a person participating in activity and dealing with distinct information in the environment. Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer (2017) mentioned that the quality of environmental perception

was affected by individual characteristics, preference, expectation, and past experiences. Apparently, environmental perception would be influenced by the experience in leisure participation (Rahtz et al. 2015). Joo et al. (2015) discovered that outdoor experience in leisure participation would affect environmental perception, regardless of an individual participating in outdoor leisure environment alone or participating in leisure with family. Moreover, Zheng et al. (2018) said that the witness of negative environmental effects, e.g. special natural environment being polluted or destroyed by deforestation, would induce the idea of environmental protection (Santiago et al. 2017). The following hypothesis is therefore proposed in this study.

**H1:** Leisure participation shows significantly positive correlations with environmental perception.

Garrison and Lee (2017) discovered that environmental perception might affect emotional reaction. Pöllänen (2015) regarded emotion as the first impression of the stimulation of environmental information; however, emotion was not necessarily induced by perception, but an immediate and instinct emotional reaction. From the viewpoint of environment, Sharma (2016) argued that emotion was resulted from a series of complexity; emotion was induced by individual internal or external stimulation, and the perception was subjective and played an important role in individual life; emotion presented the functions of communication and information delivery and reflected people's feeling about situations to understand selfhood as well as realize others' situations (Shoshani and Russo-Netzer 2017). Hu et al. (2016) indicated that emotion was composed of environmental perception, the first reaction to environment was emotion, and the direct impact of emotion would lead the successive relationship between an individual and the environment. Accordingly, environmental perception would affect visitors' well-being. For this reason, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study.

**H2:** Environmental perception reveals remarkably positive correlations with well-being.

Ju (2017) pointed out the characteristics of a person with well-being, covering positive emotion, favor of activity participation, good at social, good interpersonal relationship, favor of the engaged activity, good at controlling self-activity, and presenting avoidance of personal situations, viewing affairs from positive side, and high self-esteem. Lovallo (2015) also proposed higher leisure participation to relatively more positive

overall life satisfaction (one of well-being contents). Dinisman et al. (2017) studied the relations between leisure and well-being and discovered that proper rest and relaxation would reduce anxiety and pressure of life to further enhance well-being and mental health. Pinto et al. (2016) found out the effect of leisure participation on subjective well-being of college students, i.e. ones with more frequent leisure participation or acquiring higher leisure satisfaction would enhance the overall well-being. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study.

**H3:** Leisure participation appears notably positive correlations with well-being.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Method and Model

Goodness-of-fit test in LISREL model could generally be measured with overall model fit (external quality of model) and internal quality of model. In terms of overall model fit test, the common evaluation indices contain (1) “ $\chi^2$  ratio” (Chi-Square ratio), standing for the gap between the actual theoretical model and the expected value, which is better smaller than 3, (2) goodness of fit index (GFI) and adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), which are better close to 1, (3) root mean square residual (RMR) of the square root of “fit residual variance/mean of covariance”, which is better smaller than 0.05, and (4) incremental fit index (IFI), revealing good model fit when larger than 0.9.

Evaluation indices for quality of internal model often applied to LISREL cover (1) square multiple correlation (SMC) of individual manifest variable, i.e. R2 of manifest variables and latent variables, which should be higher than 0.5, (2) component reliability ( $\rho$ ) of latent variable, i.e. Cronbach’s of observation indices of the latent variable, which is better higher than 0.6, and (3) average variance extracted of latent variable, which is calculated by dividing the R2 sum of manifest variables of a latent variable by the number of manifest variables to reveal the percentage of latent variable being measured with manifest variables, which is better higher than 0.5.

### Research Sample and Object

Aiming at visitors to Yongchun Niumulin Ecological Tourism Zone in Fujian Province, 380 copies of questionnaire are distributed with random sampling, and 262 valid copies are retrieved, with the retrieval rate 69%. The retrieved data are analyzed with statistics software.

**Table 1.** Model analysis result

overall model fit	evaluation index	judgment standard	result
	$p$ -value	$p$ -value > 0.05	0.000
	$\chi^2$ /d.f.	< 3	1.733
	GFI	> 0.9	0.984
	AGFI	> 0.9	0.911
	CFI	> 0.9	0.975
	RMR	< 0.05, lower than 0.025 excellent	0.017
	RMSEA	0.05~0.08 good below 0.05 excellent	0.042
	NFI	> 0.9	0.946
	IFI	> 0.9	0.931

### Reliability and Validity Test

Validity refers to a measuring scale being able to actually measure what a researcher would like to measure. Validity generally contains “content validity”, tending to qualitative concept test, “criterion validity”, using preset external criterion and the correlation coefficient in the test for the evaluation, and “construct validity”, using for evaluating the theoretical consistency of a measurement to other observable variable. The questionnaire content in this study is based on past theories and refers to the actual conditions of the research object to design the measuring tool, which could truly express the essence of the object and the complete representativeness, in order to ensure the questionnaire conforming to the content validity. Besides, the final commonality estimate of the factor analysis result is applied to measure the construct validity of the measured items. The validity appears in 0.8~0.9, showing good validity test of the questionnaire.

## EMPIRICAL RESULT ANALYSIS

### Model Fit Test

With the estimation of “maximum likelihood method”, the analysis results reach the convergence. Overall speaking, the overall model fit indices in this study pass the test, **Table 1**, thoroughly reflecting good external quality of the model.

### Path Relationship Test

In regard to the quality of internal model test, the square multiple correlation (SMC) of manifest variables is higher than 0.5 (**Table 2** & **Table 3**), revealing favorable measuring indices of latent variables. Moreover, the component reliability of leisure participation, environmental perception, and well-being is higher than 0.6, and the average variance extracted of dimensions is higher than 0.5 (**Table 4**), apparently conforming to the test requirement for the quality of internal model.

**Table 2.** SMC of variable to dimension

leisure participation			
intellectual component	social component	familiarity component	avoidant component
0.72	0.73	0.76	0.78

**Table 3.** SMC of variable to dimension

environmental perception			well-being	
contextual factor	design factor	social factor	emotional well-being	positive functioning
0.75	0.77	0.83	0.79	0.84

**Table 4.** Component reliability and average variance extracted of variable

Item	leisure participation	environmental perception	well-being
component reliability	0.842	0.827	0.879
average variance extracted	0.82	0.80	0.83

**Table 5.** Linear structural model analysis result

evaluation item	parameter/evaluation standard	result	t
internal fit	leisure participation→environmental perception	0.843	24.51**
	environmental perception→well-being	0.866	31.23**
	leisure participation→well-being	0.875	35.44**

**Table 6.** Hypothesis test

research hypothesis	correlation	empirical result	P	result
H1	+	0.843	0.00	supported
H2	+	0.866	0.00	supported
H3	+	0.875	0.00	supported

**Table 5** shows positive and remarkable correlations between leisure participation and environmental perception (0.846), environmental perception and well-being (0.871), as well as leisure participation and well-being (0.863) that H1, H2, and H3 are supported. The hypothesis test results are shown in **Table 6**.

### CONCLUSION

By understanding the public leisure participation and environmental perception of ecotourism, the research results reveal that people are suffering from huge pressure in daily life in the industrial environment with the pursuit of new, change, fast, and quality, while leisure participation in ecotourism appears positive effects on well-being. For this reason, leisure participation and environmental perception of ecotourism could be regarded as the primary factors in the balance between work and life. The adjustment of workload at work and leisure participation in individual life are the reference for the public pursuing better and more suitable balance between work and life. The public are therefore encouraged to engage in leisure participation in ecotourism and plan different programs for leisure participation in ecotourism. Acquiring the most suitable experience and sports consciousness, along with the number of times for leisure participation

in ecotourism, the increase of time, and the leisure participation process, could benefit in releasing life pressure and contribute to the adjustment and balance between work and life as well as effectively enhance the public well-being.

### SUGGESTION

Based on the research results and findings, practical suggestions are proposed in this study.

1. People, when hardly making adjustment due to work restriction, could improve the balance between work and life from leisure participation, e.g. proceeding leisure activity with trivial or segmented time. Short-term leisure participation might not be as effective as long and complete time of leisure participation, but it could easily accumulate the number of leisure participation times to enhance the positive contribution in well-being. The public could also enhance the strength of leisure participation in ecotourism for better psychological experience so that leisure participation in ecotourism becomes the buffer of role transfer in various fields, reduces invasion and conflict between work and personal life, and even promote the mutual benefit between work and personal life.
2. Preferred leisure environment is better established around urban parks or rural areas with convenient transportation and beautiful scene. Besides, activities for both genders or unions for the attendance with partners could be designed and encouraged for more people's participation.
3. Supporting measures related to ecotourism should be arranged for reducing the threshold of economic conditions and allows more people's participation in ecotourism. Furthermore, the governmental units and environmental protection groups should devote to the promotion of environmental education so that the citizens could contribute to the sustainable development of environment with the simplest way. Consumers therefore could present higher environmental awareness and motivation to participate in ecotourism. On the other hand, the reduction of external economic threshold could remove economic factors from the restriction on the selection of ecotourism so that the entire tourism could provide incentives for consumers participating in ecotourism.

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