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The Art of Guiding in Nature-Based Adventure Tourism – How Guides Can Create Client Value and Positive Experiences on Mountain Bike and Backcountry Ski Tours

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ABSTRACT *This paper examines the ways in which guides contribute to creating value to clients. The context is nature-based adventure tourism in the specific mediums of mountain bike and backcountry ski tours in Utah and Idaho, USA. Qualitative interviews of clients and guides combined with participant observations are used to explore how guides interact with clients to increase their perceived value. Important findings are related to how guides use their knowledge about the activity, the area, safety management, as well as their organizational skills, to effectively and conveniently facilitate fun experiences with minimum risk exposure. The paper also documents guides' contributions related to learning, relational aspects, entertainment techniques, and providing information about environmentally friendly behavior. An important theoretical contribution is the identification of how guides carefully balance thrilling and safe experiences and avoid experiences that cause anxiety. The study documents how guides can contribute to prevent negative incidents like conflicts within the client group, or possible accidents. The study indicates that there is a potential for increased contributions from guides especially related to choreographing experiences, interpreting nature, and learning of behaving environmentally.*

KEY WORDS: adventure tourism, guide role, mountain biking, backcountry skiing, value creation

Introduction

Guiding is a very old service occupation, and historically guides were hired for finding ways through mountain ranges, to cities, or to a natural resource. A guide was a

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pathfinder (Cohen, 1985). Gradually the guide role has developed and adapted to new demands and special settings. As adventure tourism has evolved too, so has the role of the guide. However, little research has been done to examine the nature and complexity of guiding roles amidst the modern backdrop of adventure tourism. This paper examined how guides create value for clients in adventure tourism activities based on five identified dimensions derived from the tourism literature. The empirical focus is in particular on backcountry skiing and mountain biking. It specifically focuses on guide behavior and how clients react to guides' actions. Within this context, the creation of value on guided nature-based adventure experiences is a complicated process where the natural environment itself, combined with complex interactions with local societies, also contributes to processes of co-creation between guides and clients. First of all evaluations of a guided nature-based adventure experience require acknowledging the contributions of both guides and clients. In this project, however, the research focus and the data collected are explicitly linked to guides' actions and their implications for value creation.

Adventure tourism is hard to define in few words, but it is quite clear that it has elements of physical and psychological challenge, danger and risk, uncertain outcomes, and exploration (Swarbroke, Beard, Leckie, & Pomfret, 2003). It is derived from adventure recreation experiences such as mountaineering, climbing kayaking, or adventure traveling. Adventure tourism is a commercialized version of this, with a higher degree of safety arrangements, planning, and experience choreographing (Buckley, 2010; Weber, 2001). Learning of skills and safety competence are also well-integrated elements of adventure tourism (Beedie & Hudson, 2003). In this commercialized context, we argue that guides play an important role in adventure tourism, and in order to make a profit they must create value for their clients. Nagle and Holden (2002) argue that value is the satisfaction and utility that customers get from buying a product or a service; however, value has different meanings for different people, and the same person may define the value of a product or experience differently from one situation to another. Macdivitt and Wilkinson (2011) stated that value consists of three elements (the value triad), where value for customers is created through revenue gains, cost reduction, and emotional contributions. For the present study, we define value as the sum of guide contributions in relation to how clients perceive the utility, the gain, cost reduction, or emotional contribution. We are talking about live production where the value creation is made in interaction with the clients (Nielsen, 2006, cited in Mossberg, 2007). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to identify and analyze value components of guides in relation to their importance for clients.

Five Theoretical Dimensions of Adventure Tourism Guiding

Different aspects of guiding in adventure tourism have been studied within various disciplines such as marketing, outdoor education, leisure, recreation, psychology, and sociology. Guides have been described as information providers, sources of knowledge, mentors, surrogate parents, pathfinders, leaders, mediators, culture brokers, and entertainers (Cohen, 1985; Curtin, 2009; citing: McKean, 1976; Schuchat, 1983). In addition they have been called planners (Pomfret, 2011), storytellers (Mathisen, 2012), choreographers (Beedie, 2003), service providers (Arnould & Price, 1993; Wong & Lee,

2012), cultural interpreters (Pereira, 2005), environmental conservators (Curtin, 2009; Ormsby & Mannie, 2006), and activity experts (Pomfret, 2011). The descriptions contribute to the complexity and change of the guide role over time. Several researchers have attempted to categorize guide roles (Cohen, 1985; Lugosi & Bray, 2008; Pereira & Mykletun, 2012). Despite all of the present labels and categories, it remains unclear as to what guiding behaviors create value to a client's experience?

From these earlier descriptions and categorizations, we have framed five different dimensions that we expected to have an influence on the interactions between the guides and the clients and thereby on client perceptions of value. These value dimensions are the instrumental, educational, relational, choreographic, and environmental dimensions. The dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but are linked together and interact with each other. For example, it is reasonable that clients gain valuable learning effects when guides make arrangements for safety reasons. Further, when guides facilitate experiences for fun it may create value in terms of relational aspects. We suggest that these dimensions influence guide actions, which in the next step are part of the value creation process together with the clients. In other words, the dimensions help to understand guide actions and how and why various actions can create client value through the interaction between guides and clients. Figure 1 illustrates this working model.

There has been extensive research that has been conducted in recent years about how clients are co-creators of value. For example, Vargo and Lusch (2004) claim that there is no value before the offering is used, and clients contribute to their own experience and other clients' experiences by using their experience and personal resources (Prebensen, Chen, & Uysal, 2014). It is also important to note that the interactions between clients and local inhabitants, and between clients and fellow clients, are sources of value creation (Prebensen & Foss, 2011). Further, guides may also play an important role as social mediators between a host society and tourists, and in this process, the guides enrich the overall experience (Jensen, 2010). Finally, it is important to stress that nature itself and man-made installations in nature create client value, and it may be reinforced through interaction between guides and clients (Prebensen et al., 2014).

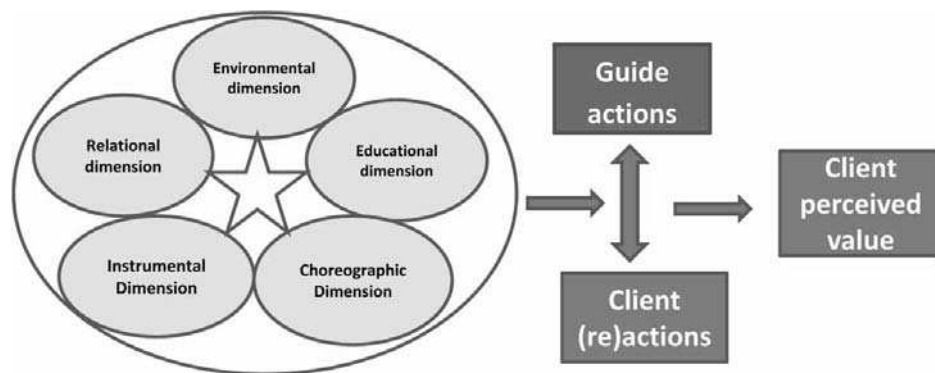


Figure 1. Working model.

Overall, since we have limited our analysis to the guide actions and interactions with clients, and not the complex co-creation process, the main focus of our research is the “value exchange” based in the traditional service quality logic, more than the alternative of the “value in use” described by several researchers (Prebensen et al., 2014, p. 3).

The dimensions are detailed below in relation to current literature, application within the adventure tourism guiding context, and the potentiality for creating value.

Instrumental Dimension

The instrumental dimension sees the adventure guide as a goal-directed leader responsible for organization, planning, and accomplishing the “product” bought by a client. This is the “cold” deliverance of service from guides where personality has less influence. The guide leads the way and an important concern is responding to the physical environment and client safety (Cohen, 1985). Examples from earlier research mention that guides create client value by navigating to the good spots for the adventure activity, beautiful sights, wildlife, solitude, and avoidance of tourist enclaves (Beedie, 2003; Curtin, 2009). Further, value can be created through what guides do to protect their clients from danger both through knowledge and ad hoc decisions during the tour (Beedie & Hudson, 2003), as a result of well-developed safety systems (Rantala & Valkonen, 2010) and in relation to how guides balance safety precautions and thrilling experiences (Edensor, 2000; Morgan, Moore, & Mansell, 2005). Potential client value can also be related to how guides use their skills to make convenient and effective tours where the clients are relieved from worrying, planning activities, responsibility, and time management (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Pomfret, 2011). Instrumentally, creation of value can also be linked to proper functioning of necessary equipment (Beedie & Hudson, 2003). Further, this dimension sheds light on the physical needs of customers (Cohen & Avieli, 2004), as well as any special skills that either could be learned by the clients or are necessary to accomplish the activity.

Educational Dimension

When clients learn during an adventure tour, they tend to perceive it as a value (Arnould & Price, 1993); there are also segments in adventure tourism where the main goal is learning, for example mountaineering, climbing, or rafting (Beedie, 2003; Curtin, 2009; Ewert, 1985; Lowenstein, 1999; Lugosi & Bray, 2008; Pomfret, 2006). Another learning goal can be related to clients’ identity construction where they learn about language, cultural codes, and behavior within subcultures like mountaineering (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993; Ewert, 1985; Pomfret, 2006, 2011). Findings from research in outdoor and adventure-based education indicate that an instructor’s (or guide’s) behaviors directly contribute to student learning (Schumann, Paisly, Sibthorp, & Gookin, 2009). Instructors’ actions that result in learning include direct instruction, providing feedback, delivering formal curriculum, and managing risk (Sibthorp, Furman, Paisley, Gookin, & Schumann, 2011).

Managing risk is a behavior that is particularly relevant in the context of adventure tourism guides creating value. Schumann et al. (2009) point out that some students learned because of their instructors’ creation of a setting in which it was safe for

students to experiment and even (safely) fail at the activity. This practice allows students (or customers) to discover the limits of their ability while avoiding the consequences of failure (e.g. physical harm or injury).

These data from adventure education settings are encouraging, but the results have not been explicitly examined in the context of guiding. An effective guide may use several strategies in an effort to share information and teach his or her clients in an effort to create value to the experience. Even if a guide does not formally teach lessons, it is likely that the customers will learn due to the management of risk by the guide. Because the guide creates a safe environment for the customer, the customer is able to practice skills they would have been otherwise unable to do so, due to their lack of experience. For example, a backcountry skiing client may learn how to plan an effective skin track in avalanche terrain because their guide was there to point out hazards and assess the terrain alongside the client.

Relational Dimension

The relational dimension addresses the role that guides often must play wherein he or she relies upon interpersonal skills to develop a group, manage conflict, motivate clients, and develop a rapport with clients. This role may have become more important than the original functions of a guide largely comprising the instrumental dimension (Buckley, 2010).

Adventure tourism experiences are often demanding, challenging, and hazards may be unknown; these factors may cause conflicts and dysfunctions within the group (Rantala & Valkonen, 2010). The value-creating actions of guides may include solving these kinds of problems and doing it in a way that makes all parties in the group satisfied. Paradoxically, a guide has to switch between the role as a teacher or leader when the guide has superior skills to the clients and service provider, when she or he clearly must act as a subordinate to the customer (Wong & Lee, 2012).

At times, clients must be coaxed or motivated by their guide to achieve their goals. Beedie (2003) found that mountaineering tourists want peak experiences, but in a safe environment. Jefferies and Lepp (2012) found that extraordinary experiences often are connected to effort and challenges, then a sense of accomplishment, nervousness, happiness and awe. Beedie (2003) points out that guides sometime push clients further and harder than normal so that they can be at the best location for a fantastic sunrise. In sum, the relational dimension opens possibilities to create value through actively motivating and managing client relationships, who otherwise would be less able to accomplish a particular adventure activity or goal.

Choreographic Dimension

Historically, economic offerings have gone through four stages. At first humans exchanged commodities and went further to buy and sell goods. Then services connected to the sale became an important economic value, and finally trading included experiences where the nature of the offering is memorable moments (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The main idea on the choreographic dimension is that it is possible to create value by using service as a stage and the goods as a prop to engage clients'

emotional, physical, intellectual, or spiritual needs on a personal level (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Guides in adventure tourism have a possibility to think and act like entertainers or performers in the planning and interacting processes with clients (Edensor, 2000). Essentially, guides can function as choreographers (Beedie, 2003). Guides have the potential to use basic film theory to create value to what may be an otherwise routine experience. An experience should have a great start, something exciting that gets the clients' full attention, a slower part to provide necessary information and build up to a new experience peak that is even better than the first one and is often the main goal of the tour. Finally conclude with a slower part where the clients get the time to absorb, reflect, and share the experiences with others (Pedersen, 2012).

Environmental Dimension

Clients on adventure tours may have expectations that guided tours are accomplished while also preserving the environment. A study by Stokes, Cook, and Drew (2003) shows that 72% of US travelers believe it is important that their visit not damage the environment, 61% say that their experience is better when destinations preserve nature, and 28% buy from companies that make an effort to preserve/protect the environment. For many clients, not disturbing wildlife is an expectation and a value-creating factor, and, specifically pertaining to this research, a reason for using a guide (Curtin, 2009).

Clients are generally aware of their impact on nature and wish to minimize it (Curtin, 2009). The environmental dimension demands sustainable behavior (Arnould & Price, 1993) or at least striking the balance between comfort and environmental responsibility (Curtin, 2009). It is also expected that guides have knowledge about how different species react, and how to minimize disturbance (Knight & Cole, 1998). Guides may create value through environmental interpretation of local flora, fauna, geology, geography, and other natural systems, and through this help clients understand how to behave sustainably (Pereira, 2005; Pereira & Mykletun, 2012) on their own subsequent activities.

Methods

The purpose of this research was to explore the ways in which guides contribute value to adventure tourism experiences. In order to address the research questions, a variety of qualitative research methods were employed over the duration of this study. Our research questions, consistent with interpretive nature of outdoor experiences, are best addressed in a "natural setting using exploratory approaches" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, pp. 52–53). Using both participant observation and semi-structured interviewing of clients and guides in four separate guided outdoor adventure settings, we were able to effectively address the value added in backcountry skiing and mountain biking.

Data Collection and How They Were Analyzed

Ethnographic techniques, such as participant observation, rigorously examine lived experiences of a particular population, but also include the subjective experiences of

the researcher (Goodall, 2000). Participant observation is a multi-instrument approach that enables researchers to better know a particular culture, place, or social setting (Bernard, 2006; Spradley, 1980; Wolcott, 1999). Ranging from full participant to full observer, we tried to maintain a balanced, albeit varying, approach to our participant observation researcher positions.

As this research project progressed, we clarified, filtered, and funneled our observations and field notes, ultimately identifying various themes and subthemes. Using memos, we focused further observations and experiences so that they more closely focused on the emerging themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), while also attending to more generalized observations of nature-based adventure experiences and the roles that guides played in the process. Specifically, we participated in two backcountry ski tours: a three-day all-inclusive tour that included sleeping in a yurt, and a single full day tour. We also participated in two half-day mountain biking tours. The tours had groups of three to seven participants. We chose these activities because of their site convenience, their breadth of adventure pursuits, and our familiarity and experience with these activities. During these experiences, we meticulously took field notes, jottings, and verbal notes (Emerson et al., 2011) to record not only the “facts” of the experience, but also our immediate personal interpretations and impressions. These field notes were summarized and analyzed.

In addition to participant observation, we engaged in 16 semi-structured interviews with other participants, including clients (11) and guides (5). The interviews were conducted 2–6 weeks after the tours (four face to face and the other by telephone). All except one client participated on tours together with the researcher. The exception was a client who participated in a similar three-day ski tour one week earlier. A primary researcher interviewed all participants. Our interview protocol was a list of 19 questions that were asked to all interviewees, but the semi-structured nature of these interviews enabled deviations and follow-up questions and conversations as well. The interviews lasted between 16 and 120 minutes each and, during the interviews, we conveyed that the participants’ views were valuable and useful (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Notes were taken during the interviews to keep track of tone, expressions from the person being interviewed, and even thoughts or reactions that the researcher was having in that particular moment. Later, all interviews were transcribed to facilitate analysis (Table 1).

Analysis of the data was an iterative process that was collaboratively co-constructed between researchers. The analytic process consisted of organizing the data, immersing ourselves into the data, generating categories and themes, coding the data, interpreting findings, considering alternative understandings, and reporting the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 156). Participant observation field notes and interview transcripts were coded, providing an “analytic scaffolding on which to build” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 217). This coding took place through a three-part process consisting of open or initial coding, selective coding, and axial coding. This qualitative research does not attempt to determine or announce a universal interpretation of all nature-based adventure tours; the findings from the research only hold in the particular context of the study. While the interviews represent the voices of the participants, and the field notes from our participant observation experiences are inspections, qualitative research does not pretend to have complete ownership of the “truth” about guided outdoor adventure experiences. All three authors are experienced backcountry skiers and the researcher

Table 1. Informers' profile.

Clients	Gender and age	Activity	Experience with the adventure activity	Education
	Female 49	BC Skiing	Intermediate/expert	Higher degree
	Male 52	"	Expert	Some College
	Male 46	"	Beginner	Higher degree
	Male 55	"	Expert	Some College
	Male 42	"	Intermediate	Bachelor
	Male 48	"	Beginner	Higher degree
	Male 40	Mountain biking	Intermediate	Some college
	Male 48	"	Beginner	Bachelor
	Female 52	"	Beginner	Bachelor
	Female 36	"	Beginner	Higher degree
	Male 14	"	Beginner	Secondary School
Guides	Gender age	Activity	Adventure guide experience	Activity-based guide certification ^a
	Male 43	BC Skiing	More than 10 years	Yes
	Male 47	"	More than 10 years	Yes
	Female 31	MTB	3 years	No
	Male 45	MTB	8 years	No
	Male 52	MTB	5 years	No

^aIn addition, all guides had first-responder certifications.

who did the data collection has 25 years of experience as a mountain biker. The authors are also involved and engaged in experience production, environmental, and safety issues connected to outdoor activity education. These attributes may lead to an analysis where the personal lenses interrupt objectivity, but hopefully we have succeeded in using our knowledge to see and understand guide actions and client response better.

Findings and Analysis

Instrumental Dimension Findings

Based on our data we are able to understand that clients appreciate risk management and view safety as very important, a finding that resonates with previous research in this area and the instrumental dimension (Morgan, Moore, & Mansell, 2005; Pomfret, 2011; Rantala & Valkonen, 2010). When asked about the reason for using a guide, motivation for participating on a guided tour, and what the biggest contributions from guides were, nearly every participant identified safety as primary reason. One backcountry skier participant explained:

[The guide is] . . . someone to bring you to the right places, the best game, the best experience, the best views, but also more important than everything, I think, is safety. (Skier, male 42)

An interesting observation during the ski tours was that guides always ski first in riskier areas. They tested ski conditions by crossing under the start points (ski cutting). This technique is designed to provoke possible avalanches. In this practice, guides are taking chances on behalf of their clients, and by doing so the guides create value by reducing the clients' worries (costs) of participating in a risky activity (Macdivitt & Wilkinson, 2011). In such cases, the guides did not act irresponsibly, but undoubtedly exposed themselves to increased risk in order to reduce the risk for the clients. Clients agreed that ski cuts included increased risk for the guide and it created value to the experience. One said:

I think that's what you're paying for. (Skier, male 42)

This client also said that this behavior was not just about taking a risk for the client, but something the guide did with general and local knowledge, and it was presumed that the guide did not take unnecessary chances in doing so. Some would probably argue that this can be a staged performance where clients think there is more risk than actually exists. The behavior seemed more motivated by the guide's wish to give clients a positive and less anxious ski experience in risky terrain that borders between safe and dangerous.

The mountain bikers were not equally as concerned about safety yet it appeared this was an important aspect when commenting on what the guide contributed, and when talking about what they gained from the tour. The explanation for this differentiation is probably that mountain biking is not as risky as backcountry skiing in relation to fatal consequences. To some degree the mountain biking clients expressed surprise at the necessity to focus on safety, yet ultimately found value in guides managing risk and attending to their safety.

Participant responses support existing research that actions related to the instrumental dimension still are important value-creating factors, and expected from both backcountry skiing and mountain bike guides. This means that clients expect the guides to have an extensive level of place-based knowledge about the area and are able to navigate the terrain knowledgeably.

There is a sort of necessary condition; basically, we couldn't have gone without the guide at all. We didn't know the area. (Skier, male 48)

Other instrumental value creation factors in our material that are consistent with earlier research are related to convenience and efficiency (Pomfret, 2011). Participants often viewed the use of a guide as an "efficiency" who would reduce the effort it takes to accomplish a task. Some clients mentioned decreased number of decisions that had to be made. Clients also mentioned the benefit of having fewer things to worry about, saving time, and having effective and comfortable transportation (Pomfret, 2011). One participant noted how their hiring of a guide helped them avoid performing basic tasks in the backcountry by pointing out:

We didn't want to deal with food and melting water. (Skier, male 52)

Another participant explained:

It was very convenient. They picked us up at the hotel. They had the bikes right here and stuff like that, all the equipment. (Biker, female 36)

A surprising finding in this study was the importance of equipment. Based on our observations and the interviews this factor is a source of value creation in two ways. Several mountain biking and backcountry skiing clients emphasized that equipment rental was an important reason for choosing a guided trip. The clients see gear rental as a value in the form of a cost reduction, or a convenience factor where the clients are relieved from the troubles and expenses of bringing their own equipment. The other way this creates value is through the guides' choice of well-functioning and sometimes high-end equipment. In this way, hiring a guide provides a positive emotional contribution (Macdivitt & Wilkinson, 2011) where the clients were able to try equipment to which they might otherwise not have access. This dimension of guides as equipment brokers is especially important in outdoor adventure activities that are particularly gear intensive.

The rental equipment in terms of skis, poles, packs, safety equipment like um, [avalanche beacons], probes, etc. Shovels, all of which was great quality . . . It felt good, I was glad to demo that equipment. (Skier, 42 male)

One participant responded to a question about the biggest contributions the guide made to his experience:

The equipment. The provider, the equipment was excellent. (Biker, male 48)

Another participant, responding to a question concerning using a guide as opposed to doing it on one's own:

Well, I would use a guide for different reasons for different things. For mountain biking, I wanted the support and good equipment. (Biker, male 40)

Both the mountain biking and backcountry skiing tours in this research were physically demanding, especially the skiing. We observed that guides created value through actions that attended to participants' caloric needs (Cohen & Avieli, 2004), set a suitable pace for the whole group (Beedie, 2003), and monitored clients' temperature regulation. These aspects are part of guides' training, and they appropriately followed through in practice. The guides had routines for checking how much water each participant brought along, they reminded the participants to drink several times, and handed out energy bars, nuts, and other high-calorie food during the day. On the tours we participated in we did not experience any cases of dehydration or lack of food that caused notable problems. One of the ski guides also asked specifically if the participants had trimmed their toe nails before starting, and he arranged a "health brake" in the beginning of the tour where emerging blisters were taped and clothing layers adjusted. Also the other guides were conscious about giving reminders to eat and drink. This level of

care may seem inevitable for experienced participants, and even beginners may not define this action as value creation; however, if it is not done, then clients may experience dehydration, overheating, cold injuries, or problematic blisters, negatively affecting the total experience for everyone.

Educational Dimension Findings

Learning was an important part of creating value on both the backcountry skiing and mountain biking tours, but there were some interesting differences between them. These differences might result from varying skills, where most skiers were of expert or intermediate level. The mountain bikers defined themselves as beginners or intermediate. In contrast to skiers, the mountain bikers were open for instructions and many of them had signed up for the tour to learn for themselves or to introduce the sport to a partner or children.

I think [the most important guide contributions were] for me knowledge of the trails. And for my wife, teaching her some skills that she didn't have. (Biker, male 40)

Some clients were even disappointed that there were not more instructions. For example:

I think there could have been a little more emphasis on the techniques on the bikes, especially for the beginners. (Biker, female 48)

There were a lot of individual and general instructions on the bike tours, and some clients made it clear that this feedback was a valuable contribution from the guide, a finding consistent with earlier research (Beedie, 2003; Curtin, 2009; Ewert, 1985; Lowenstein, 1999; Lugosi & Bray, 2008). In relation to backcountry skiers the picture was less clear. We did not observe clear individual skill instructions. One of the researchers received valuable instructions after the guide had asked discreetly if that was wanted. In the interviews we asked about this aspect and this may be a sensitive area. The guides were, in general, cautious to instruct individually because they have experienced that clients in some cases see this as critique and not fun. One ski guide noted:

I think the goal is to provide for the clients, a safe and fun experience, and teach as much as they are interesting in learning Many clients don't want to spend much time learning in a tour like you went with me on. So, I tried to teach them the minimum we need to make it safe. (Ski guide, male 47)

Another example of how one of our guides solves this learning paradox;

Whenever you see a teaching moment such as when you get to a kick turn. Okay, this is how you can do a kick turn. (Ski guide male 47)

In sum, when ski guides instructed clients, it was mostly general advice aimed at the whole group. Examples of this phenomenon were instructions for how to climb

effectively with skins, or instructions on skiing safely in the backcountry compared to skiing in a resort. More precisely, the guides instructed the clients to ski more slowly with smaller turns, cautiously stating that this was to prevent injuries and avalanches, both of which could cause serious problems both for the skier and the group as a whole. Important value-creating factors were “tricks of the trade” that are not in the “books”. For example, guides taught clients how to remove ice on the skins by using the steel edge on the ski, and how to pack the skins effectively after a climb. Clients often asked follow-up questions and made comments, and together with our observations and interpretation of body language and face expressions, these “tricks of the trade” tips seemed highly valued. This finding could be linked to a motive for using guides that have been described by Pomfret (2011). She argues that purchasing guided services can be a way to learn skills, dress-codes, and language within a sub-culture that the client wants to be a part of, or in other words to establish status and self-identity (Celsi et al., 1993; Ewert, 1985; Pomfret, 2011).

Relational Dimension Findings

An interesting observation that was mentioned by clients participating in mountain biking tours was the role a guide can play when people with strong social relationships take part in the same tour. We observed that some parents and spouses put a mild pressure on family members to go faster and/or on more difficult routes. We also observed that some parents and spouses tried to instruct their child or spouse. The instructions or encouragements were not received positively, and it created frustration for the target person and an unpleasant atmosphere for the other clients in the group. Interviews indicated that both guides and clients were familiar with this kind of problems. Two interviews illustrate the parent–child relations problem and that this is somehow based in children’s need for autonomy or teenage rebellion

And you know how kids are, especially when kids start to enter their teens, they don’t want to listen to anything their parents say. (Bike guide, male 52)

I find the guide is not the authority figure that the parent is. I find the kids will respond more and better to a guide. (Biker, female 52)

When we asked if instructions between spouses were a problem, some guides said that this was based in different motives for participating, or in other words that some partners are pushed into the activity. One guide said:

Yes. Sometimes I get a family member on a tour that really didn’t want to go mountain biking, you know. And they were pushed into it by husband, boyfriend, or dad. And so we get melt down out there sometimes. (Bike guide, male 43)

Our findings indicate that these problems are general and usual on mountain bike tours and probably also on other activity tours that are technical or physically challenging. If guides offer a solution to this social conflict, it can be defined as value creation

or a valuable difference between a guided tour and private tour. On our tours the guides did that by interrupting the situation and simply splitting the participants:

I was having trouble getting over some rocks, and my husband was trying to instruct me. I was getting kind of frustrated and the guide told him to go; why don't you try going over here and trying this trail. He could see I was getting frustrated with my husband's instructions. It was easier to not get frustrated with the guide than it was with my husband. (Biker, female)

All guiding companies in this study had a two-guide system despite an established ratio of one guide per 5–8 clients (Buckley, 2010). In addition to the strong relationship problem mentioned above, the reasons for this ratio were linked to safety and the possibility of splitting the groups to prevent problems related to different skill and physical levels.

The person that having the most trouble has to be your first priority. (Ski guide, male 37)

As we observed, all guides set a pace that was comfortable for clients with less ability or stamina. The guides also found places where it was natural to give people a choice, for example to ski two rounds for the fittest or most motivated clients and one round for less fit/motivated clients. Furthermore, they searched for places where it was possible to choose between different difficulty levels. By acting this way, the clients did not have to be perceived as less fit, less skilled, or less courageous than the other members of the group as earlier described by Mackenzie and Kerr (2012). The client values were related to a positive emotional feeling or relief of negative emotional feelings like embarrassment.

Lastly, in the context of backcountry skiing, the desire to ski on exciting, untracked slopes often presents a safety problem that may increase when people are skiing in groups, because the participants put various pressures on each other (Furmann, Shooter, & Schumann, 2010). One participant identified the value creation noting:

I have considerable experience (in backcountry skiing), but if I was going out with friends. It takes sometimes a strong personality in a group. It wasn't just me . . . I think a good leader is capable of dealing with all persons in a group. (Skier, female 49)

In this case, the participant wanted to have a strong leader and guide contribution is related to having the guide as a legitimate leader to prevent group conflicts, making unsafe decisions, or falling into common decision-making traps (McCammon, 2004).

Choreographic Dimension Findings

The guides in our study used entertainer techniques and storytelling to create value for the clients. There were no examples of a designed plan where the whole tour is choreographed with intensions of creating memorable moments (Pedersen, 2012). Often

guides play the roles of entertainers and good storytellers, but this was a result of spare time, coincidences, and personal characteristics more than an overall explicit plan to increase the value of the experience. Based on our observations, the guides undoubtedly have a goal to create positive experiences for clients. In this process, they are aware of how they can create both positive and negative feelings. These negative feelings – including fear – can be temporary, as they are often later transformed into positive feelings of mastery after the experience (Lee, Dattilo, & Howard, 1994).

I want everybody to taste some fear during the tour. (BC guide 43)

However, in our experiences, the order often seemed random, indicating a lack of knowledge about how to appropriately and intentionally choreograph actions aiming to create positive client experiences or increased overall value. For example, one of the bike tours went past a beautiful canyon where the guides told stories both about the environment and a film that was shot there. This experience was followed by about half an hour of boring biking towards the parking lot and the end of the tour. The guides had the possibility to finish the tour 5 minutes away from the canyon and let that be the climax. Thus, the guides missed an opportunity to create value by better choreographing, as described by for example Beedie (2003). He observed guides putting pressure on clients even when they wanted a break, because the guides in his study knew that later on they would have a tremendous view where clients could experience an unforgettable moment.

It appears that modern guiding is not about finding the way to a specific place or a resource like traditional guides (Cohen, 1985), but rather in finding routes that offer fun, excitement, challenges, and/or scenic locales. Nearly all clients mentioned fun as an important goal for the trip. This finding illustrates clearly that the guide contributions in adventure tourism can be understood in the light of experience economy, where the nature of the offering is creation of memorable moments (Curtin, 2009; Mathisen, 2012; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Some statements from the clients illustrate this point further:

(What where the biggest contribution the guide made to the experience?); Knowledge about the area, finding places that where challenging, but not to challenging. (Skier, male, 49)

(Thanks to the guide) . . . We were able to ski and experience the best conditions available. (Skier, male 42)

(If you were supposed to make an advertisement for this company what would you have emphasized?): I would have emphasized that they are experienced trail riders and that they cater all types of riders. Essentially they were going to make a fun day out no matter what your competence level was. (Biker, male 40)

In addition, some guides' statements confirm the importance and intentionality of fun:

(How is your product designed?) Always try to listen and speak to the clients to get to know what they want, that they shall have fun and feeling good is important. (BC Guide 43)

The goals are for people to finish the tour having an experience they enjoy. A sense of accomplishment. To simply have fun. (MTB guide 52)

From our own observations, on the mountain biking tours an import aspect of the guide contribution was to show the fun trails among many, and effectively navigate between the fun parts. Backcountry skiing had similar aspects, but in addition the guide had advanced knowledge about particular ski lines that were unused by other skiers and at the same time were safe, indicating that guides can create value or more fun in a given time compared to undertaking the same trip without guides. We did not observe more than sporadic attempts to involve the clients in decisions that seemed to contribute to the co-creation of experience. Generally, the guides had strict plans and effectively carried out the tours; it seems like this practice on the part of the guides was appreciated and valued by the clients who wanted effective access to safe and fun experiences.

Environmental Dimension Findings

Our research found good examples of guides giving information about issues and rules to prevent the depredation or destruction of nature. All of the guides were advocates for environmentally friendly behavior and learning (Weiler & Davis, 1993; Yamada, 2011), an unsurprising fact since US travelers generally consider it important not to damage the environment (Stokes et al., 2003). On the other hand, we also found that the guide behaviors on our tours were motivated by fear of losing the permits for commercial land use.

You don't want to be the one that blows it for everyone else. (Bike guide, male 52)

In addition, there were indications of guides having fear of being too instructive or offensive in environmental issues. This is likely based upon an (old) ground rule for guides, to avoid discussing controversial topics with clients (Pond, 1993). More precisely, some guides were hesitant of taking the environmental interpreter role, the goal of which is to contribute to long-term knowledge and attitude change of clients (Pereira & Mykletun, 2012; Weiler & Davis, 1993). This finding is surprising, since 61% of US travelers actually think the experience is better if the destination makes an effort to preserve and protect the environment, and one out of three states this as an important criterion for buying an experience from a company (Stokes et al., 2003). Further, both Ham and Weiler (2007) and Pereira and Mykletun (2012) argue that interpretation adds more to overall satisfaction than any other tangible item in eco-tourism. The clients in this research are not defined as eco-tourists, but it is relevant to ask if these guides and/or guide companies are missing an opportunity for creation of client value by largely avoiding actions related to environmental interpretation

Discussion and Implications

Our multidimensional search for value creation has resulted in some important findings that could have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, we have found support for the relevance of the five dimensions for the understanding of how guides create value. We have also identified some research gaps that need to be filled and we certainly recognize that there are other dimensions not included in our study that are important for the value creation for guides' clients. Importantly, clients in our study were strongly motivated to seek experiences that were fun (choreographing) and safe (instrumental). The concept of fun has many facets and needs to be studied more. The present data indicate that fun is related to challenging and thrilling experiences, learning, camaraderie, and entertainment. The relationship between safe and thrilling experiences is particularly of theoretical interest. In psychological models, Cater (2006) claims that adventure tourists seek fear and thrills with minimal exposure to risk. Mackenzie and Kerr (2012) claim that adventure tourists "sought challenging yet safe experiences in which they felt protected from risk". Our findings are consistent with this claim, but our study goes one step further by identifying that clients want to be protected from the risk (i.e. avalanches), which represents a negative fear and/or anxiety. On the other hand, clients accept and value that guides organize for a positive fear, the feeling of thrill (Mackenzie & Kerr, 2012), which is related to difficult downhill skiing.

We also emphasize that clients highly appreciate convenience. To offer equipment, especially high-end equipment, is important both for convenience and as an experience in itself. More importantly, the wish for convenience calls for actions and attitudes that, in many cases, are considered boring among adventure guides. Specifically, this research highlights the need for quality assurance systems and training for guides as efficiencies, a role that is subordinate to clients. Acting the subordinate role can be a difficult task given that guide roles also include being the expert (teacher) and the person responsible for safety, where the guide clearly must be a leader. Knowledge and understanding of these roles and role conflicts are essential to succeed in value creation for clients.

Other studies show that overall choreographing of tours creates value to clients (Beedie, 2003), but our study indicates there is a lack of competence and use of this possibility. This lost opportunity can easily be utilized through use of knowledge about experience production, as well as better interaction with clients in co-creating planning processes. An important aspect here is that such modification of the tours does not include high costs. Sometimes it is only a question about the order of activities and how guides behave in certain situations. A guide's simple framing of an activity, or even a brief explanation of various aspects of the experience, can significantly contribute to a client's overall value of an adventure tour. Thus, it appears both the instrumental and choreographic dimensions have found support in the current study.

In relation to the educational dimension, an interesting theoretically relevant finding is related to how learning could both be a value creation and, in other situations, value lost. Both clients and guides on mountain biking tours mentioned that learning is an important factor. Backcountry ski guides, on the other hand, were reluctant to give instructions on skills because they were afraid that this would decrease the fun. A lot of research has been done on teaching outdoor activities and we know a lot both

about pedagogical methods and successful instructor behavior (Schumann et al., 2009), but this line of research was conducted in a context where people sign up for courses where the goal is learning (Beedie, 2003). Our study reveals that teaching is more complex, and therefore may demand other learning methods when the clients' evaluation of the experiences is based on the amount of fun they had. This aspect is a finding that should be investigated further.

Implications in the context of the relational dimension are the potentially problematic issue encountered when people in strong relationships are participating on the same tours with different motivations. Findings indicate that this is a general problem in demanding activities and therefore a possible opportunity of value creation, if solved by guides. The guides' solution has been separating the actors, providing specific goals and feedback to each individual. We argue that separating guests is far from optimal because an important motive for doing adventure activities is sharing memorable moments (Arnould & Price, 1993; Curtin, 2009; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Haig & McIntyre, 2002). So, how do we solve such conflicts in a commercial context where people have paid to have a good time with one another, yet interpersonal conflicts are brought into the experience? It seems the answer remains elusive. However, in the meantime, as long as guides continue to act as interpersonal intermediaries, as they did in the present study, the issue may be addressed and value may be created, yet specific strategies are beyond the scope of this study.

Safety and fun are key factors in value-creating processes, but in adventure tourism these goals sometimes are in conflict. Our study indicates that safety has to be prioritized, which implies that companies should consider an increased focus on safety systems and safety culture, in relation to both marketing and tour accomplishment. The challenge is to communicate safety arrangements professionally and convincingly in such a way that clients still believe they can experience challenge, thrill, and fun.

A potential weakness in our analysis is lack of focus on co-creation of experiences, which in other studies have shown to be very important (Prebensen et al., 2014; Prebensen & Foss, 2011). On the other hand, we did not observe or receive feedback from clients that increased involvement and a more democratic leadership were wanted. The interviewed clients were overall very satisfied with guide contributions. That means that the clients' perceived value of the guided tour is high and calls for more research; the explanation may be grounded in the special character of these tours. Data indicate that the clients are very dependent on the guide, especially in relation to avalanche safety (backcountry skiing), but also in relation to finding the best trails and ski routes. In other words, the clients (including the researcher) felt that they have little to contribute by interacting with the guide. At the same time, it should be noted that these client-participants represent a fairly small (but thorough) sample, one that includes relatively few informants. The depth of insight, in the case of our research, enables a richer understanding of phenomena taking place on the tours than a wide breadth of experience that captures more participants but at a shallower level of understanding.

Conclusions

Adventure tour guiding is a complex, multidimensional process wherein guides have opportunities to create client value in interplay with clients. All five dimensions

contribute to explain how and why this value creation is taking form. The instrumental dimension is of special importance in our study. Clients highlight the importance of fun and safe experiences, and guides use their knowledge about the activity, the area, safety management, and their organizational skills to make it possible for the clients to effectively and conveniently have fun experiences with minimum exposure of risk. We also found good examples of learning, use of entertainment techniques, and information about environmentally friendly behavior that were perceived as valuable by the clients.

It is important to note that value creation is not only about facilitating positive client experiences, but preventing or stopping the development of negative incidents which otherwise would decrease the total value of the guided tour. An interesting aspect of this is that clients do not always understand such value-adding actions of guides. For example, will a route that avoided avalanche danger area not be understood as value creation if the client does not have the competence to evaluate the danger?

Perception of value is a personal attribute and may vary between clients. This study documents this aspect by showing how learning is perceived differently between the clients in relation to value. This finding elucidates that guides cannot work with an assumption of being able to create client value without interacting with the clients. More precisely, it means that guides may have a plan of how to facilitate good experiences, but always be open for changes to fit client preferences.

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