The Multi-dimensional Components
of Visitor Loyalty to Protected Areas

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Introduction

Visitor loyalty is important for protected areas not only for the revenue received from entrance fees and other charges but also for political support for their continued existence (Rodger et al., 2015; Weaver & Lawton, 2011). For this reason extensive research reported in the literature examines not only visitor loyalty but also the factors (such as service quality and visitor satisfaction) that may increase visitor loyalty (Moore et al. 2015).

Typically visitor loyalty is presented as a single construct, measured using survey questions about the likelihood that visitors will perform actions such as revisit the area, recommend it to other people, or say positive things about the area. These are widely considered to be measures of the same theoretical construct, typically called loyalty or behavioural intentions. This approach is almost exclusively taken in studies using methods such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to investigate the factors that influence loyalty (Moore et al., 2015; Rivera & Croes, 2010). Exceptions include Weaver & Lawton (2011) who describe loyalty using four factors: positive attitudes, referral and repeat visit intentions, volunteering intentions, and advocacy and financial support intentions.

This paper adds to our understanding of loyalty as a complex construct. Factor analysis is used to demonstrate the multidimensional nature of loyalty and to explore these different dimensions. Implications for loyalty research are discussed.

Karijini Visitor Survey

The multidimensional nature of visitor loyalty is demonstrated with data from a survey of visitors to Karijini National Park in the outback region of Western Australia. The primary attraction of this remote park is its spectacular natural gorges, with plunge pools and waterfalls. Visitors were surveyed as they left Dales Gorge (the major gorge within the Park). Participation was voluntary and over 90% of visitors approached agreed to complete the survey. After removing 8 questionnaires with incomplete answers to the 8 loyalty questions (see Table 1), results are based on 328 visitors. All questions were measured on a 7 point Likert scale from very unlikely to very likely to take the action within the next 12 months.

The loyalty measures in Table 1 are presented in order of likelihood to take the action, from highest mean to lowest mean. Results from factor analysis with one, two and three factors are shown with loadings for each measure to each factor (so in the case of the three factor solution there are 3 columns corresponding to factor loadings with each of the three factors). Note that the one factor solution has a chi-

squared value of 199 (with 20 degrees of freedom). This ratio of chi-squared to degrees of freedom of 10 is highly significant (p < .001) and suggests one factor is insufficient to capture the relationship between the loyalty measures.

The third factor is necessary to capture the first loyalty measure, visit another national park in Australia. This measure is an important aspect of loyalty to protected areas because while individual locations may be important, loyalty to the brand 'national park' is important to managers of national park systems, as is the case in many countries. .This suggests a constellation of loyalty concepts from loyalty to an individual destination, to loyalty to destinations managed by the same organisation and even to protected areas internationally. Note that loyalty to an Australian national park has loadings less than 0.3 for the other factors in the three factor solution and to all the factors in the one and two factor solutions, suggesting this measures a different loyalty construct to the other loyalty questions.

Similarly, the loadings for both the two and three factor solutions suggest measures L2 (say positive things about the park) and L3 (recommend the park) measure a different loyalty construct to the other questions.

Table 1. Factor loadings for 1, 2 and 3 factor solutions (N = 328).
Factor loadings above 0.5 are in bold.

Loyalty measure	1 factor	2 factors		3 factors			mean
L1. Visit another national park in Australia	.246	.141	.208	.095	.115	**.988**	6.69
L2. Say positive things about this park to other people	.415	.034	**.925**	.072	**.930**	.080	6.65
L3. Recommend to friends and relatives that they visit this park	.466	.177	**.696**	.210	**.678**	.059	6.59
L4. Talk to other people about the importance of this park and other protected areas	**.664**	**.540**	.336	**.544**	.293	.190	5.53
L5. Visit this park again	**.505**	**.522**	.113	**.516**	.080	.111	4.96
L6. Donate money to help protect this park or similar protected areas	**.698**	**.725**	.182	**.749**	.151	-.016	4.42
L7. Pay increased park fees to improve park facilities and park management	**.573**	**.564**	.156	**.576**	.134	-.021	4.11
L8. Volunteer my time to help conserve this park or similar protected areas	.493	**.573**	.028	**.566**	.002	.038	3.10
cumulative percent of variance explained	36%	54%	66%				
Chi-squared (df) p value	199 (20) .000	33.1 (13) .002		15.0 (7) .035			

Implications

Researchers investigating factors that influence loyalty should beware of assuming loyalty is a single construct, both implicitly when discussing loyalty and explicitly when performing analyses such as SEM. This includes removing loyalty measures to satisfy model goodness of fit. Measures L2 (saying positive things), L3 (recommending the park) and L5 (revisit the park) are commonly used to measure a single construct of loyalty however in the Karijini survey L5 belongs to a different construct. This may be due to the remoteness of the park, making revisiting a relatively difficult action to undertake. Similar results have been found for other remote, iconic destinations such as the Galapagos Islands (Rivera and Croes, 2010).

The three factor solution groups measures based on the likelihood of the actions being taken, supporting the idea that loyalty measures can be grouped based on how easy they are to perform (Weaver & Lawton, 2011). There are, however, alternative heirarchies such as the extent to which loyalty applies to a specific location or to a wider brand (such as protected areas generally).

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