Diving and Sustainability: Does the Consumer Perceive Sacrifice in This Experience?

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This article aims to analyze the sacrifice in diving experience. This study adopts an interpretative approach, conducted through semi-structured interviews with informants from Italy, Netherlands and Brazil. Results suggest that the sacrifices and sustainability relationship in diving is associated with the abdication of resources, as: recreation, time, comfort and money.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The complexity that involves consumer behavior studies, including the individual’s perception of what is received and what is given in an exchange (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007), what they need to give up and what they get in the establishment of their consumer relations is a highlighted issue that has been investigated in different contexts. Here we are interested in the diving experience in sites where a sustainable behavior is required from the consumer side.

As stated by Cayolla and Loureiro (2014), the strong connection process and the willingness to sacrifice that happens in the relationship between a consumer and a brand are not yet understood. In this perspective, the sacrifice that the individual can perform to consume a product is associated with aspects of choice, and relates to the attachment, the strength of the emotional and cognitive connection between the brand and the consumer’s self (Park, MacInnis & Priester, 2006).

In tourism, the hedonic experience is a relevant aspect and includes a complex mix of functional, objective and tangible components, as well as subjective, hedonic, emotional and symbolic components (Williams & Soutar, 2009). It is thought that the individuals who choose a tourist adventure trip are buying a hedonic experience unlinked to their daily lives, in which they will experience different aspects of a local culture, such as local scenarios, new excitements, etc., and will probably need to have obligations with schedules or policed behavior.

Thus, if the individual chooses a scuba diving trip, where he/she needs to behave in a sustainable way and preserve the local environment and culture, is this perceived as a sacrifice? Considering that those are more rational behaviors than the expected hedonic context of a service like this (scuba diving business). This way, we are interested in knowing: How do consumers perceive the sacrifice in the diving experiences where the practice of sustainability is required?

This study adopted a qualitative approach considering that qualitative research seeks the capture of subjective meanings of the issues studied from the perspectives of the participants (Flick, 2013). Seeking a better understanding of the research problem, we used data collected through the semi-structured interviews with divers: nine Brazilians, fifteen Italians and fourteen Dutch divers. The data was analyzed according to content analysis.

The individuals of three countries have different behavior related to the diving consumption, especially regarding the diving frequency, Brazilian and Italian respondents, in general, dive more often than the Dutch participants. These last, practice the activity only on holidays, the Brazilians and Italians respondents, often, go diving in the region they live.

The diving experience is evaluated according different perspectives by the informants; all of them reported a positive experience with the activity. It was possible to understand, all the speeches were always imbued with feelings (as passion, love, freedom, well-being, emotion and addiction) and sensations (as good, very good, different). Moreover, it was possible to identify behavior of strong attachment with diving and devotion to the aquatic environment. The experience is for them a sacred one, even for those that are experienced on the activity.

During the interviews the informants were asked about what they understand by sustainability. According to UNWTO (2005), there are three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Data analysis showed that the environmental dimension of sustainability was the main concept that respondents identified, the further aspects such as preservation; awareness and environmental education, were highlighted by the respondents.

Although the divers’ perspective of sustainability is limited, they demonstrated a large concern with the environment, all the informants highlighted the importance to take care of and preserve the environment.

Sacrifice is perceived from different perspectives by the respondents of the three countries: the act of giving up something aiming to conquer another; aspects related to currency or time. However, for the sustainability practice in diving, three dimensions of sacrifice emerged: giving up leisure time, comfort and spending (more) monetary resources, to contribute financially to keep a safe diving environment.

Although sacrifice is present in diving, especially when it involves issues related to adoption of sustainable behavior it was found that the informants believe that any sacrifice is valid to continue practicing the activity. The preservation of the environment and the search for balance of the aquatic ecosystem is revealed as an indispensable factor for the informants to continue diving.

The adoption of a sustainable behavior despite being rated by most informants, sacrifice is seen as something positive and essential in the diving practice, considering that the high affective and emotional involvement with the activity makes them wanting to continue practicing the activity for the rest of their lives, as well as finding a healthy aquatic environment, full of color, rich in fauna and flora.

This study has limitations in terms of methodological nature and some difficulties experienced during the research. We stress the following: the variation in the number of respondents per country, this may hinder the process of comparison between the country’s behavior, even using the saturation criterion; because it is a qualitative research, subjectivity in interpreting the responses of respondents at the time of the analysis can be placed as a research bias.

This study contributed to the understanding of sacrifice in the diving experience when the practice of sustainability is required. In this section, based on the findings of this research some questions for future studies to corroborate with the expansion of knowledge about sacrifice in consumption and sustainability practices are suggested:

Sacrifice is still a relatively unexplored subject in consumer behavior, it is suggested that further studies will be conducted to explore this concept more deeply, related to the willingness to sacrifice, the impact it may cause in consumer attitude and the emergence of new ways to consume.

New studies that relate the sacrifice and sustainability to other consumer activities or different diving services and are more associated with the individual’s daily life. These studies can confirm the construction of new perspectives for Marketing associated with sustainable consumption.

REFERENCES


