A Study on Cognitive Characteristics and Constraints of College Students’ Volunteer Tourism: A Case Study of Harbin College Students

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Abstract. Volunteer tourism is a kind of tourism pattern that combines voluntary service and tourism activities which can provide tourists with higher level psychological experience and spiritual enjoyment. Taking college students of Harbin as research object, this paper analyzes the cognitive characteristics and restrictive factors of volunteer tourism through a questionnaire survey. The study found that the awareness level of college students in Harbin on volunteer tourism is low, and the tourism motivation is characterized by Self-interest and Altruism with a high potential to participate, but restricted by funds, time and safety and other factors. Therefore, this paper proposes the development strategies of improving the awareness of college students’ volunteer tourism, which has a certain practical significance to promote the wide spread and the attraction of volunteer tourism.

Introduction

Volunteer tourism appeared in the middle and late 20th century. Nowadays, volunteer tourism has become an alternative and sustainable tourism that meets the requirement of low-carbon life.

Volunteer tourism is broadly defined as seeking to affect positively the social, cultural, natural or economic situation of destinations visited, while gaining breadth and depth to one’s personal perspective, in addition to travelling and enjoying the “traditional elements of travel” during personal leisure time[1]. At present, research on foreign volunteer tourism has expanded from concept, motivation and influence to promotion mechanism, perception and satisfaction. The development of volunteer tourism lacks consideration of community environment and social costs of the community, and how to develop and market it responsibly becomes a key point [2]. Keri shows that the form of volunteer tourism obscures local relationships to nature and alters multispecies assemblages from past configurations[3]; Polus and Bidder examine volunteer tourists’ satisfaction with their volunteer tourism experiences and study the relationship between volunteer tourists’ satisfaction level and their behavioral intention[4].

Chinese researchers have limited research achievements on volunteer tourism. They mainly focus on the concept, subject motivation and product development of volunteer tourism. Dai and Zong et al. have discussed the concept and internal law of volunteer tourism [5, 6]. Yang and Wu have proposed the development strategies of volunteer tourism aiming at the problems such as the lack of public awareness, the lack of product market segmentation and the unreasonable proportion of volunteer welfare[7]. Liu has proposed a new concept of family volunteer tourism, and believed that family volunteer tourism can both promote the function of individual growth and family education [8].

Compared with the research progress of volunteer tourism in western countries, the research of volunteer tourism in China also focuses on the concept, motivation and behavioral mode. The research on college students’ volunteer tourism mainly involves the research on characteristics, cognition, motivation and behavioral pattern. The research field is mainly in the economically developed areas in southeast China, so there are problems of coverage bias and timeliness, and it is difficult to comprehensively judge and explain the cognitive characteristics and participation intention of Chinese college students’ volunteer tourism.

Harbin is a provincial capital located in Heilongjiang Province in northeastern China. There are many colleges and universities in Harbin, so the study on the cognitive characteristics, cognitive
channels and constraints of Harbin’s college students’ volunteer tourism is representative to some extent, and this paper can complement the existing historical research and provide a reference for the better development of volunteer tourism.

Methods

The target population of this study is the college students in Harbin. The study uses an online and face-to-face self-administered questionnaire. The sample survey is conducted on the awareness of college students’ volunteer tourism in Harbin, and the scope is relatively concentrated. The survey time was taken from July to August 2018.

The study uses a convenience and snowball sample. Of the 510 questionnaires returned, 27 were excluded due to incomplete responses that left a total of 483 usable questionnaires, with an effective rate of 94.7%.

Analysis and Results

Cognitive Characteristics of College Students in Harbin to Volunteer Tourism

Low Awareness of Volunteer Tourism. The degree of understanding of volunteer tourism by college students is an important indicator of cognitive level. According to the survey results, 59.42% of college students in Harbin do not know or very little about public service tourism, 7.45% are quite familiar with it, and only 0.83 are very familiar with it. At the same time, the results show that only 14.7% of the respondents have participated in volunteer tourism, which shows that the awareness of volunteer tourism among college students in Harbin is low, which is a hindering factor for college students to participate in volunteer tourism.

Egoism and Altruism Coexist in Tourism Motivation. Volunteer tourism has its own characteristics, which are mainly characterized by leisure and entertainment, combination of self-interest and altruism, and ecology, among which self-interest and altruism are the biggest characteristics that distinguish volunteer tourism from other forms of tourism. See fig.1 for the motivation cognition of Harbin university students’ volunteer tourism. Figure 1 shows the main motives of volunteer tourism for college students in Harbin.

![Figure 1 Motivation of Volunteer Tourism.](image)

Figure 1 shows that 57.56% of the people choose leisure relaxation needs, mainly because of tourism motivation; 45.96% choose to enjoy the fun of interpersonal communication in the process of volunteer tourism; 53.21% hope to realize their own value and enhance their sense of identity. They are can be classified as egocentric motivation. And 20.25% want to fulfill their social responsibility, 26.29% choose to contribute to the local community, which can be attributed to the altruistic motives for social responsibility.

The Participation Willingness of Volunteer Tourism. The cognitive level of college students in Harbin is an essential prerequisite for their participation in volunteer tourism. Table1 shows that the correlation coefficient of Pearson between volunteer tourism awareness and participation willingness is 0.239, and the Sig value is 0.00. This shows that the recognition of college students on volunteer
tourism has a significantly impact on the willingness to participate. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the awareness of college students to improve their willingness to participate in volunteer tourism. However, the development of volunteer tourism in China is still immature, and college students know little about volunteer tourism, which is a challenge for college students to participate in volunteer tourism effectively.

Table 1. Correlation between the Awareness and Participation Willingness of Volunteer Tourism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognition Degree</th>
<th>Participation Willingness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognition Degree</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sig.(2-tailed)</td>
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<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>483</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>.239</strong></td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td><strong>.239</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>.000</strong></td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Limited Cognitive Channels

The paper analyses the popularity and the problems in the publicity channels of volunteer tourism by investigating the way college students perceive volunteer tourism. Figure 2 shows the survey results of cognitive channels of volunteer tourism for college students in Harbin.

Figure 2. Cognitive Channels.

Figure 2 shows that the channels for college students in Harbin to learn about volunteer tourism are mainly the questionnaire survey and the Internet or TV publicity, accounting for 45.76% and 42.86% respectively. This shows that questionnaire can be used as a way to promote volunteer tourism among college students in Harbin and give them a brief introduction to the concept. Secondly, in the information age, Internet media can play a good role in publicity.
Constraints on the Development of Volunteer Tourism

Figure 3 shows the constraints of developing volunteer tourism. Through the statistical analysis of the questionnaire, it is found that insufficient funds have become the biggest factor restricting their travel, followed by the lack of time, and the third is the safety factor. The college students are characterized by economic independence, lack of social experience, weak security awareness, weak ability to cope with emergencies, and immature ideology. Compared with other forms of tourism, volunteer tourism is mainly targeted at economically backward areas with unstable social order and unsafe factors. These factors have seriously affected and restricted students’ understanding and participation in volunteer tourism activities.

Volunteer Tourism Development Strategy

Establish a Risk Assessment System

Most of the volunteer tourism destinations are in remote areas, and there are many uncertain factors involving multi-stakeholder interests such as volunteer tourists, local residents, and local government enterprises. Therefore, in order to ensure the smooth development of volunteer tourism, the government and the volunteer tourism organizers should establish a risk assessment system based on the types of volunteer tourism projects and formulate risk prevention and emergency plans to improve the safety and reliability of volunteer tourism.

Make Full Use of Multiple Channels

The campus community is mainly faced with college students, has a good audience. Volunteer tourism organizers should increase cooperation with campus associations and conduct infiltration promotion through various ways such as campus posters and community activities to effectively expand the publicity and popularity of volunteer tourism among college students. At present, contemporary college students receive information mainly through the Internet, but the network publicity effect of volunteer tourism is poor. Therefore, it is necessary to give full play to the role of network information publicity and topical public opinion on the Internet, and promote the publicity and marketing of volunteer tourism through tourism websites, WeChat and other Internet platforms.

Considering Group Differences

At present, the volunteer tourism projects mainly focus on the protection of animal and plant and cultural heritage, voluntary teaching and community construction, etc. There are relatively few volunteer tourism projects, and the few projects affect the enthusiasm of college students to participate in volunteer tourism. Therefore, the development of volunteer tourism products should fully consider the characteristics, interest preferences and professional differences of the target market, , and carry out multi-level and multi-width product development, so as to change the current status of single and rough product development of volunteer products. Secondly, the development of volunteer tourism products should maintain the original natural features and cultural customs of the destination, avoid excessive commercial exploitation, and integrate specific natural resources,
customs and characteristic cultures to create volunteer tourism products with obvious differences and characteristics.

**Flexible Pricing**

According to the survey, the lack of funds has become the primary factor restricting college students from participating in volunteer tourism. Therefore, the pricing of volunteer tourism products should be flexible and targeted. First of all, according to the distance of the volunteer tourism destinations, the degree of viewing, the length of the travel time, the peak season, etc. to develop different price systems. Next, the organizer should make tiered pricing according to the difficulty and interest of public welfare activities.

**Conclusion**

This paper takes the group of college students in Harbin as the research object, and summarizes the cognitive characteristics, cognitive channels and the constraints of college students’ volunteer tourism. The study finds that college students' awareness and participation in volunteer tourism are at a low level; the motivation for college students to participate in volunteer tourism activities is diversified with egoism and altruism; and funds, time, security and information are the main constraints for college students to carry out volunteer tourism. Finally, based on the restrictive factors that affect college students' volunteer tourism activities, this paper proposes the corresponding development strategies to promote the sustainable development of college students’ volunteer tourism.

**References**


