

Peoples' Attitudes and Beliefs in A Recreational Forest Environment: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract: Forest recreation concentrates on the research of the forestall influence as a recreational destination. The purpose of the present study was to shed light on the perceptions-expectations, social influence and control beliefs related to exercising in the forest. Semi-structured individual interviews were realized according to the instructions and the Theory of Planned Behavior including the collection of demographic evidence and open questions. 29 adults took part in the interviews involved in the physical activity for recreational purposes. Each interview was analyzed according to the topic separately. The participants recognized many advantages and benefits from their participation in recreational exercising like good health, fitness and invigoration in nature. The social environment of the trainees was encouraging as for their participation in the forest. The existence of infrastructure as well as the preservation of the place seems to be the perceived factors which ease participation in forest recreation. On the contrary, lack of cleanliness or preservation as well the imposition of ticket payment is considered to be deterrent factors for entrance in the forest. Lack of time because of work and family responsibilities are perceived hurdles for non-participation in forest recreation. The present survey supports that any kind of participation in forest activities is associated with multiple benefits for an individual and the community as a whole.

Key words: TPB, exercise, physical activity, recreation, leisure time

1. Introduction

By and large, athletic recreation addresses to all ages including physical activity through team or individual sports, space, music or outdoor activities etc. (Kouthouris, 2009) and it is associated with leisure time. Leisure time is the time left after the satisfaction of person's biological needs as well as their work and social needs. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) physical activity is defined as any kind of physical move produced by skeletal muscles requires energetic strength (WHO, 2010, p. 53) and there are some guidelines about exercising at all ages. Athletic recreation entails participation in physical activities which do not aim at athletic performance achievement (Kouthouris, 2009). Athletic recreation includes training programs for everyone, outdoor activities, athletic academies and camps, athletic activities in hotels, as well as exercise for the elderly (Kosta et al., 2015). A sub-category of recreation is therapeutic recreation, which is a holistic approach that uses recreation as a combination with experimental interventions which aim at social, emotional, mental or intellectual

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changes leading the trainees to health improvements, functional ability and generally quality of life (Carter & Van Andel, 2019). This category of recreation addresses to other population teams like the elderly and people with special needs intending to stimulate these people to participate in adjustable recreational activities for socialization and entertainment purposes through them. Attitudes constitute people's predispositions to react positively or negatively to a situation and are modified according to cognitive, emotional and behavioral factors (Theodorakis, Zourbanos & Hatzigeorgiadis, 2015).

For the time being, the most effective theory that explains the attitudes is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) that has been applied in various training and health fields. The TBP theory includes the tendency for the manifestation of specific behavior, hence the exhibition of behavior. The intention entails the attitudes towards the specific behavior, the subjective norm, and the perceived control behavior which are respectively related to behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control ones (Ajzen, 1991).

TPB (Ajzen, 1991, 2012, Ajzen & Driver, 1992) is an extension of the reasoned action of theory (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The main factor of this theory is the intention of the subject to exhibit specific behavior. The intention is respectively categorized into three subcategories (Ajzen & Driver, 1992):

- 1) Attitudes towards behavior which refer to a person itself and its mood to meet a situation positively or negatively (Ajzen, 2005), which rely to behavioral convictions (Ajzen & Smidt, 2020),
- 2) The subjective norm that is related to the perceived social pressure that a person undergoes in order whether to exhibit or not some kind of behavior and it is relied on normative convictions.
- 3) The perceived behavioral control that refers to how much a person perceives the execution of behavior, whether they consider it to be easy or difficult, compare it with past experience, success or failure which can contribute positively or impact them as a deterrent as for the execution of specific behavior. Control behavior relies on control convictions. In general, the more positive the attitude factors and the social norm are, the more likely it is for a person to exhibit the behavior (Ajzen and Driver 1992) Also, the stronger the intention is, the more likely it is for the action to be executed. (Ajzen & Smidt, 2020). All these factors interfere with each other, as they are presented in the following figure (Figure 1).

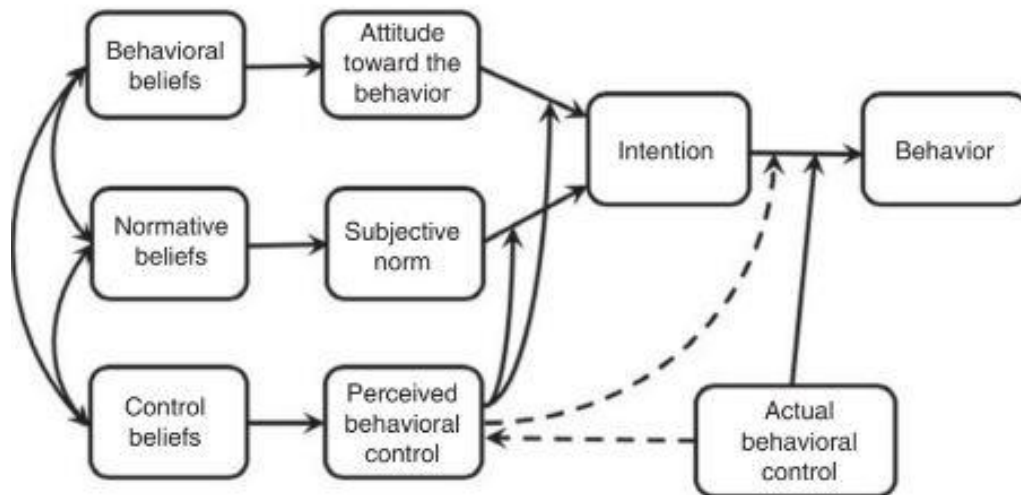


Figure 1 Theory of Planned Behavior

Source: Ajzen & Schmidt, 2020

As for the contemporary book reference, there are enough researches which apply the TPB model in training. According to a meta-analysis, it was verified that intervention researches which used the TPB model had a statistically higher impact on participation training and exhibition of other kinds of behavior in comparison with other theoretical models. (Webb et al., 2010). At the same time, it was confirmed that interventions held in public places or groups of people were more effective in comparison with interventions focusing on individuals only, in private places. (Steinmetz et al., 2016). Hence, the importance of social influence on behavioral changes is emphasized. The researchers themselves claim that sex and education constitute pivotal coordinators for the outcomes of the intervention. (Steinmetz et al., 2016).

As for the attitudes towards the local parks and recreation, there are quite a few surveys which ventured to study the correlation with physical activity according to TPB theory. Some of them concentrate mainly on the psychological variants of TPB on outdoor recreational activities like running, cycling and climbing (Ajzen & Driver, 1991, 1992, Kouthouris & Spontis, 2005), while others in correlation with stances and mild activities like walking in combination with the gratification of the community (Payne & Schaumleffel, 2008). The above surveys used only quantitative methods. There is no survey throughout the literature which uses quantitative methods of research. The former can lead to interesting results as for exercising and health (McKinlay, 1995). The purpose of this study was to illustrate the perceptions-expectations, the social influence and control beliefs related to recreational exercise in forests. TPB is used as a theoretical background.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

The sample was 29 adults that took part in the interviews (20 men, 9 women) engaged in the physical activity for recreational purposes. They took part in a big spectrum of activities ranging from walking or parent and children cycling to athletic activities like basketball, tennis, walking and running.

2.2 Experimental Planning — Qualitative Analysis

The researchers were using the specific forest for their own training while they were in contact with other people at the same time in that place. Semi- structural interviews were used as an evaluation tool created according to Ajzen's (2006) most recent guidelines for the planning of the qualitative survey. The interviews involved the collection of demographic data and open questions related to the psycho-social variants of TPB. Thereafter, each interview was analyzed separately but in relation to the rest of the interviews and the original ideas were emphasized.

3. Results

According to the results, most of the participants (18 out of 29 participants) stated there was a big chance of involvement in recreational activities in the forest. As for the perceptions-expectations of the participants, 14 categories of the benefits of the advantages were presented: 1) Psychological benefits, 2) physical benefits 3) Participation benefits, 4) Benefits related to parents' and children's familiarization with the forest, 5) chances for training, 6) Socialization, 7) Motive for training, 8) Constructive time with the pet, 9) Forest photo-shooting, 10) Easy access by car, 11) Tennis without delays, 12) Free access to the forest, 13) Many activities for training, 14. Change of scenery. There were also three categories of the drawbacks: 1) unfavourable weather conditions, 2)

danger of injury possibility, 3) Individual training without guidance), categories of the positive emotions: 1) Happiness — gratification, 2) Well being — invigoration, 3) Emotional relaxation, 4) Entertainment, 5) Efficacy, 6) Self confidence, 7) Sense of health improvement, 8) Encouragement, 9) Relief, 10) Libido, 11) Excitement. And for categories of the negative emotions: 1) Loniness because of the individual training without company, 2) Competitiveness, 3) Emotions caused due to lack of respect for the forest by some citizens, 4) Lack of education and care for forestal recreation). Generally speaking, it is obvious that the participants realized the benefits of the forest and this leads to draw the conclusion there is forest literacy. As for the social influence, there were eight categories of the social background of each person willing to engage in activities in the forest: 1) Family, 2) Cousins, 3) Doctor, 4) Physical education teacher, 5) friends, 6) Co-athletes, 7) partner, 8) psychologist, three categories for people who were negative: 1) Father, 2) Politicians, 3) Mother in law, while each candidate separately stated the people who were more likely to engage including 14 Categories: 1) Professional and amateur athletes, 2) Parents with their children, 3) People with a lot of free time, 4) People who love healthy life-style, 5) Active people with experiences from the forest, 6) People with health problems, 7) Young people, 8) People who desire to try new things, 9) Those who want to escape from city pollution ,10) People with pets, 11) Middle aged people, 12) non workaholics, 13) All ages, 14) Friends — company, and which people were more likely to engage in recreational activities in the forest including 21 categories: 1) People with no leisure time owing to family or work responsibilities, 2) The elderly, 3) People with health problems, 4) Stressful, 5) Underage-teenagers, 6) antisociable people, 7) People not passionate about life, 8) The disabled, 9) People who do not deem nature to be important, 10) people with no respective literacy, 11) people leading a sedentary lifestyle, 12) people not coming due to covid, 13) The elderly, 14) People with pets, 15) Smokers, 16) Middle aged, 17) People that have no means of transport to get around, 18) Non athletic people — the lazy ones, 19) Toxic, 20) People with health problems, 21) obese people. Therefore forest recreation is influenced by the impact other people exert for participation in various forest and spare time activities. As for the control convictions, there were seventeen categories for the facilitating factors: 1) Infrastructure water-sinks, 2) Programmed sanitation, 3) preservation and care of the forest, 4) Distance — close to the city by means of transport, 5) security, 6) Weather conditions, 7) Canteen, 8) organized athletic activities, 9) Playground, 10) More athletic activities for everyone, 11) Cycling lane, 12) Easy access for people with special needs, 13) Easier access with more frequent itineraries, 14) toilets, 15) Outdoor sports equipment, 16) Better light, 17) Parking lots. There were also stated sixteen deterrent factors for participation in forest recreation activities: 1) No preservation or cleanliness of forest and courts, 2) Imposition of ticket payment for stadium entrance, 3) quarantine, 4) Stray animals, 5) Cars in the forest zone, 6) Inaccessible places, 7) Lack of frequent means of transport, 8) Insufficient security, 9) Crowds, 10) Health problems, 11) Work responsibilities, 12) poor light, 13) Weather conditions, 14) Crowded courts — seldom available, 15) Lack of exits, 16) Scarcity of infrastructure). By and large, infrastructure and forest preservation needs and infrastructure constitute the most important perceived factors for a person's participation in forest recreation.

4. Discussion-Conclusion

There is no research that applies the use of qualitative method and the survey above illustrates that any kind of participation in forest recreation is associated with multiple benefits for an individual and the community as a whole. Although the present survey concentrates on the psycho-social variants with a qualitative approach, TPB is a future theoretical model which relies on behavior prediction. It is advisable future surveys focus on the insight

of the predictions, intentions and behavior of those engaging in forest recreation. That can be attained by following the latest Ajzen's (2006) instructions for the creation of quantitative research planning which is the next step after a qualitative research. The latest will contribute to the creation of safer and more effective recreational exercise programs related to forest recreation activities.

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