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The relationship between high risk athletes risk perception of adventurous activities, their
travel destinations and their vacation travel patterns

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PART ONE

Introduction

Adventure tourism is a growing market segment in the US; the decision to participate in adventurous activities and the selection of risky destinations while on vacation involves one's risk perception about the physical risks that can lead to fatal results from these activities. Existing literature suggests that risk perception is a determinant in choosing a leisure activity and destination while on vacation and that level of tolerance to uncertainty can determine travel behavior (Floyd & Gibson, 2004; Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Hofstede, 2001; Iso-Ahola, 1980, 1982; Money & Crotts, 2003; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). People who have high tolerance to risk and uncertainty and are seeking high risk activities and destinations are defined in the literature as sensation seekers. Research shows that high risk athletes are sensation seekers that would take risks for the sake of novelty experience and that their risk perception of risky activities is different than that of non-athletes (Straub, 1982; Woitas-Slubowska, 2006; Zuckerman, 2007). This research will look at high risk athletes' risk perceptions of risky destinations and activities to determine the probability of them participating in adventure tourism.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between high risk athletes' risk perception of adventurous activities, their travel destinations and their vacation travel patterns.

Statement of objective

Much research has been conducted on high risk athletes risk perception and the activities they are engaging in (Rowland, Franken, Harrison, 1986; Schneider, Butryn, Furst, Masucci, 2007; Woitas-Slubowska, 2006; Zuckerman, 2007). Literature shows that athletes risk perception of safety is different that non- athletes, defining the former as adventure / sensation seeking which drive them to participate in dangerous sports activities as their profession (Straub, 1982; Woitas-Slubowska, 2006; Zuckerman, 2007).

It was also showed that perceived risk of safety is a factor in travel planning (Floyd & Gibson, 2004; Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Hofstede, 2001; Iso- Ahola, 1980, 1982; Money & Crotts, 2003; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). Limited attention was paid in literature to the travel patterns and behaviors of high risk athletes and the way they choose to spend their leisure time. This study will seek to understand travel patterns of high risk athletes in relation to participation in extreme sports recreational activities while on vacation.

It is assumed that because high risk athletes are sensation seekers in their nature, they will seek to participate in risky activities not only as their profession and lifestyle, but also in their leisure time. As they do not see the risk in those activities they will engage more in extreme sports while on vacation; hence, will participate more in adventure tourism.

Justification

Today, high risk leisure pursuit is popular with millions of people around the world; participating in risky leisure activities and travel to risky destinations with the understanding that such travel behaviors have potential negative costs (Olivier, 2006).

Given the growing number of high risk athletes and the growth of the adventure tourism industry in the US, it would be beneficial to the industry to understand athletes' travel behavior to better accommodate their needs when traveling to the US.

Although adventure tourism is a relatively new tourist practices, it is rapidly expanding as a segment. In fact, it is suggested that the adventure travel and its related expenditure contribute \$220 billion annually to the US economy alone (Cater, 2006). Those industries, serving the high risk leisure population have grown and are using technological advances and marketing campaigns to become a significant segment that receive increased media coverage (Olivier, 2006).

As not much research has been done on high risk athletes travel patterns and behavior, little is known about the athletes themselves perceive and experience of risk and travel patterns (Schneider et al., 2007). For the tourism industry, finding high risk athletes' travel patterns, as well as their risk perceptions of destinations and activities, will help shed a light on the adventure tourism industry that is now rising.

Constraints

According to Zuckerman (1994), sensation seeking is highly related to participation in high risk sports and not related at all to participation in low risk sports. Previous research has determined what is considered as a high risk sport activity; such as mountaineering, kayaking, canoeing, white water rafting, adventure racers, mountain biking and skateboarding (Schneider et al., 2007). Zuckerman (2007) mentions that high risk sports can also include skydiving scuba diving, rock climbing and downhill skiing. As the range of risk sports is wide and more sports are being added constantly, and the level of the risk in sports is in the eyes of the beholder, this paper will look only at athletes who are

engaging in high risky sports activities as a major part in their lifestyle while they train constantly to be able to compete. Those athletes are defined as sensation seekers; that is that the risk involved in their profession is likely to be fatal if something goes wrong (Zuckerman, 2007).

Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) identified seven types of risk; financial, functional or performance, physical, social, psychological, deprivation of satisfaction and lose of time. This paper is intended to review two aspects of risk: destination risk, which includes risky activities at the destination that may lead to injury or death (hence physical risk). It is assumed that the risk perception of high risk athletes is the main determinate of travel behavior; this assumption is necessary to limit the scope of the paper and being able to reach a substantial conclusion.

The paper will look at limited literatures as not much research was done on the subject; the literature will refer to athletes from all over the world but the assumption is that high risk athletes, no matter where they are from, has the same characteristics and traits and are high sensation seekers. High risk athletes will be generalized into one group without looking at cultural factors and recommendations will be made only for the US market.

Glossary

High Risk Athlete

High risk athletes are defined as those individuals for whom serious extreme grade risky sports is a regular and ongoing part of their lifestyle and might be competing in sport events that are considered to be 'extreme sports'. Those athletes perform at high rate of speed, where they are subjects to significant effect of gravity or exposed to other dangers due to stunt with limited or no safety equipment (Robinson, 1985).

Risk perception

Defined as “*a consumer’s perception of the overall negativity of a course of action based upon an assessment of the possible negative outcome and the likelihood that those outcomes will occur*” (Fuches & Reichel, 2006 p.84).

Sensation Seeking

Zuckerman (1994) is defining as “*a trait describing the tendency to seek novel, varied, complex, and intense sensations and experiences and the willingness to take risks for the sake of such experience* (preface)”.

High risk sport activities

Zuckerman (2007) indicated three levels of risky sports: High, medium and low risk level activities. High risk sports are skydiving, scuba diving, mountain climbing and downhill skiing. In high risks sports, when something goes wrong it is usually fatal. High risk sports also provide novel sensation and experiences one can not find in popular activities.

Adventure tourism

Williams and Soutar (2005), defines adventure travel as “a trip or travel with the purpose of activity participation to explore new experience, often involving perceived

risk or controlled danger associated with personal challenges, in a natural environment or exotic outdoor setting” (p. 66). Cater (2006), also suggested that in adventure tourism the consequence is known as there is a risk of fatality involved.

Risky destinations

A risky destination is one that is perceived as too risky and it may become undesirable for tourists to travel to (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). The destination will be perceived as risky due to tourists’ unfamiliarity with the destination and the uncertainty involved in it. For example, a destination which is all wildernesses holds in it a lot of unknown and may be perceived as risky.

Travel behavior

The time it takes to plan the trip and decide on destination, to the time of actually purchasing the ticket. Whether a traveling route is planned in advance and is the traveler following it. Is the tourist traveling alone or with a group and is there significance to the specific party that was chosen. What are the activities the traveler is engaged in; food, accommodation, site destination, range of activities (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006)

PART TWO

Introduction

Part two offers research findings from an extensive review of the literature, which originates mainly from the hospitality and psychology industry fields. The main purposes of this section are to discuss general travel and leisure motivations and needs, the connection between risk perception of destinations and activities and travel behavior, look into the sensation seeking concept and relate it to travel behavior in general and participation in risky activities specifically. Risk perception, travel behavior, sensation seeking and adventure tourism concept will be applied to the high risk athlete traveler. Finally, it is concluded that high risk athletes are more likely to participate more in high risk activities but not of any range as they will stick to the sport they are experienced in.

Literature Review

Travel & Leisure Motivations

For many years travel has been a matter of survival; whether for finding food, selling goods concurring new land or running away from enemies. Since the modern country concept has developed, and people can find all their basic needs within their immediate environment, travel became leisure and not a need. The base for understanding tourism motivations is to understand that because the needs and desires of the potential tourist can not be satisfied in the tourist's home area, they expect to experience something while traveling, that they can not experience at home (Lee & Crompton, 1992).

Tourism motivation is an integral part of tourist behavior and is directly related to destination and activity selection, it also may be the key for attracting more visitors and understanding what influence traveler's decisions (Wolf & Hsu, 2004). Although

motivation is not the only reason determining tourist behavior, it is a critical variable as it is a compelling force behind all behaviors (Crompton, 1979).

Leisure motives and needs

It was determined (Iso Ahola, 1980) that there is a joint influence of biological dispositions and early socialization experiences that form the foundations for the individual need for optimal arousal and incongruity and that leisure behavior takes place within a framework of optimal arousal and incongruity. The theoretical model suggests that social and cultural forces; such as social system, race, and ethnicity, establish the outer boundaries within the socialization process occur. The early theories about tourist's motivations concentrated on push- pull theories where the push factor for vacation is a socio psychological motive that is explaining the initial desire to go on vacation. The pull factor is motives aroused by the destination and are explaining the choice of destination and activities (Crompton, 1979). The Social Psychological Model of Tourism Motivation (SPMTM), known as the Seeking – Escaping Theory was introduced by Iso Ahola in 1982 and is based on the push- pull theory. The model recognizes four motivational categories: Seeking Personal Rewards (SPR), Seeking Interpersonal Rewards (SIR), Escaping Personal Environment (EPE) and Escaping Interpersonal Environment (EIE). In 1991, along with Dunn Ross, the theory was tested amongst bus tour groups in Washington DC, using a 20- item instrument to survey. The predominant travel motivations were SPR and SIR. Meaning the seeking dimension was important for sightseeing tourists who are mainly motivated by acquiring knowledge and socialize. EIE and EPE categories were not represented in these types of tourists.

It was suggested that people travel for two reasons: the one is the love for affection and meet new people and the other is self recognition where travel gives one an

opportunity for ego- enhancement. It is also suggested to distinguish between specific and non specific motivations; If the motivation is specific, than the satisfaction from travel will only be fulfilled by a specific unique experience, but if the motivation is non specific it can also be satisfied by alternative opportunities (Crompton, 1979).

Perceived controls; reaching equilibrium

The concept of perceived freedom was introduced by Iso- Ahola in 1977, claiming that a person's subjective definition of leisure is largely affected by perceived freedom to participate in various activities. The research shows that the lower the perceived freedom is, the lower the perception of leisure and vice versa. It is shown that perceived freedom is a critical regulator of what is perceived as leisure and also shapes the extant of leisure involvement as humans have a need to understand their world and exercise control over their environment in order to survive. A person, who does not have perceived control, does not have freedom either and therefore will not participate in leisure activities.

It is suggested that people are trying to reach equilibrium between physical, psychological and social aspects; when there is a disruption in the equilibrium, it causes a motivation or a reason to restore the equilibrium, resulting in satisfaction. Hence, individuals participate in leisure activities to reach satisfaction to restore equilibrium (Wolf & Hsu, 2004). Crompton (1979) claims that individuals who experience disequilibrium in their life are more likely to be motivated to take a vacation; visiting a novel destination may be a way to restore equilibrium.

Risk perception and travel behavior

The above literature support the assumption that intentions to travel are determined by varies motivations such as seeking- escaping motivations and the need to restore equilibrium. The decision of the travel destination and the type of activities one will

engage in, are determined, among others, by their travel anxiety levels and levels of perceived safety. Travel risk perception is a function of cultural orientation and anxiety is a function of type of perceived risk; perceived risk and perception of safety are greatly influenced by intentions to travel. Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) identify three basic dimensions of perceived risk: physical- equipment, vacation risk and destination risk. When potential travelers evaluate the risk of the purchase- they are in fact evaluating the perceived risk. However, it is hard to evaluate risk as uncertainty of outcome is a major element of risk (Zuckerman, 2007). It is claimed that tourist will select destination that best matches their needs and offers the most benefits with the less risk and was determined that risk perception is influenced by travel motivations and lifestyle. In other words, personality, motivation and lifestyle are associated with the perception of risk (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005).

Elsrud (2001) proclaims that risk and adventure narratives are used by tourists as manifestations of identity. Participating in risky activities is seen as both challenging and rewarding. This dynamic separates the independent travelers from the tourists who view themselves through this adventure narrative. The adventurous tourist will be attracted to destinations that are considered as risky and engage in risky activities within those destinations to express themselves to others that they are brave and experienced.

Some individuals are motivated by the experience of risk and only experiencing a risky activity will create satisfaction. Those tourists are defined not as independent tourist (Elsrud, 2001) but as risk seekers who choose to travel to destinations that are perceived as less safe by the norm. Those risk seekers must have a low level of anxiety and risk and high confidence to perceive the environment as safe and be able to adapt to the situation. In Zuckerman (2004) it is mentioned that what a high sensation seeker perceive as low

risk, a low sensation seeker may believe it is high risk and dangerous. The more experienced the sensation seeker, the more comfortable they feel with perceived risk.

Destination and risky activities Risk Perception

When choosing a destination, tourists have alternatives between which they need to prioritize. One's risk perception about destination will determine whether a specific destination will be chosen or not. Therefore, it is suggested that tourism can not or will be very slow developed in places that are perceived as risky. Fuchs and Reichel (2006) determined that destination risk perception has several dimensions such as financial, natural disasters, service quality, and weather, socio psychological and human induced risk. Combining all those possible risks, they came up with an "overall destination risk" formula. When booking a vacation, tourists have different risk perceptions that influence their decision making and they are using their overall perceptions of destination risk in the decision process.

Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992), classified tourists by the level of their risk perception: The first classification is *risk neutral*, whereby the tourist does not see any risk in the destination. The second classification is *functional risk* whereby the tourist is considering a mechanical equipment failure, for instance and place risk where the destination is perceived as very risky. The risk neutral group emphasized the need to take risks by experiencing excitement and adventure while on vacation. Furthermore, they suggested that this group may be able to treat risk as a natural part of the tourism experience.

Leep and Gibson's (2003) study hypothesized that there is a relationship between tourists' preference of novelty or familiar destinations to their risk perception. They determined that different groups of tourists (organized mass tourists, Independent mass tourists and drifters) choose different destinations due to different risk perceptions and that

was determined significantly by experience. As Crompton (1979) suggested, novelty is one of two cultural motives for traveling. In this case the tourist is more concerned about the destination and the activities than ones' psychological status. Novel pleasure also provides high arousal and can move an individual back to 'arousal tonus' (Bello & Etzel, 1985), which is a term consistent with Crompton's notion of restoring equilibrium.

Although destination risk perception is important, some may not care for the destination itself but for the other benefits they can gain from the chosen place other than the scenery, such as novelty experiences (Crompton, 1979). According to the New Zealand Adventure Tourism Sector (Bentley & Page, 2008), high risk sports activities (novelty experiences) can be divided into three bases: Land Base, water based and aviation based activities: Land-based activities include mountaineering, tramping mountain biking, rock climbing, snow sports, bungee jumping and abseiling. The water-based activities include sea kayaking, white water kayaking, white water rafting, black water rafting, jet boating, wake boarding, jet skiing and surfing. The aviation-based activities include ballooning, paragliding, parasailing and hang gliding.

Leep and Gibson's study (2003) supports the proposition that a tourist preference for novelty activities is correlated with perceived risk (of the activity). They define those who seek novelty experiences as explorers and suggest that previous experience is significant in relation to the risk perception of the activity chosen as they are congruently motivated. It is agreed that novelty seeking is associated with lifestyle as well as environmental characteristics. Their choice to seek novelty experiences is determined by underlying psychological reasons (Cater, 2006; Leep & Gibson, 2003; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005).

Novelty plays a significant role in destination and activity selection. The tourist's perception of how novel the destination or activity will be is a function of perceived novelty of objects, the environment and other people. The more time spent with objects, the environment and the people, the more familiar the experience is and the less novel it is being perceived by the tourist. Lee and Crompton (1992) suggested a model for the role of novelty in the pleasure travel destination choice process: the tourists' predispositions will determine whether the tourist is arousal seeking or arousal avoiding. Novelty is comprised of five dimensions: first, change from routine; different conditions than current lifestyle. The second is the notion of escape, which is defined as a temporary distraction from reality. The third is thrill adventure, an experience in which excitement is an essential element. The fourth surrounds the notion of surprise or the feeling created by unexpected features (uncertainty). Finally, the fifth is boredom alleviation which is defined as "a search for additional or alternative stimulation of a more varied nature to achieve a high degree of need satisfaction (p.736)".

Determined by predisposition, a tourist can be either arousal seeking or arousal avoiding depending upon the aforementioned five elements. An action will then be taken to seek novelty, avoid it or be indifferent to it. The tourists will then evaluate the decision according to their risk perception of the destination and novelty activities and then a destination will be selected. This selection is a reflection of the risk perception one has on destinations and risky activities.

It is shown that participation in risky activities is determined by whether the tourist perceives the activity as risky or not. It is not a calculated risk of the actual risk of the activity. As suggested by one of the interviewers in the study conducted by Cater (2006): "I think risk is if there a serious chance to become injured doing something, and I don't

think that the river surfing is a risk (p.321)”. One can see that while river surfing is considered to be an activity with actual risk, the tourists’ perception of risk is minimal.

Real risk: Injuries

In contrast to perceived risk, real risk is a statistical, numerical estimation of a likelihood of an event (Cater, 2006). This dynamic clearly influences perceived risk. An activity can have no real risk in it, but if the one see a huge risk in it, he /she will not participate. Real risk has three critical elements (Pizam et al., 2004). One is the potential loss. Second, is the significance of those losses and last the uncertainty of those losses. When one think of engaging in high risk activity, they will evaluate the benefits of the activity according to those three elements; what is the potential loss? Is the activity worth it and can one deal with the uncertainty features of the activity?

Participants in adventure recreation need to be protected from the actual risks and hazards associated with the adventure activity. Risky activities or ‘extreme activities are considered risky because of the environments they take place. Adventure recreation is affected by the physiological and psychological demands that they require from the participants and because of the element of uncertainty and unpredictability inherent in the activities. Unpredictability can result from underwater rocks in surfing, unpredictable weather and loose handholds in climbing, or equipment failure or problems caused by environmental conditions (Olivier, 2006). The scale of the adventure tourism injury and areas of risk of adventure tourism remains unknown. Adventure tourism related accidents in the late 1990s in New Zealand was associated with a number of high profile deaths but no underlying data existed to demonstrate how this interconnected with injuries per se in the sector (Bentley & Page, 2008).

Some researchers tracked adventure tourism related injuries in specific places (Bentley & Page, 2008; Gajdzinska, Kunysz, Marciniak, 2006). According to the study conducted in New Zealand by Bentley & Page, data from the years 1982-2005 indicated that Mountaineering and tramping is associated with the highest number of fatalities (79) and mountain biking had the highest number of compensation claims (4565). In the water sports 9 fatalities were reported for white water rafting and 4 fatalities for kayaking. Gajdzinska et al looked at injury cards from the mountain voluntary rescue service group in Poland in 2004/2005. Data indicated that there were 62 snowboard accidents. A survey was submitted to 100 snowboarders and it showed that 62% of the respondents reported injury while snowboarding. Bruises represented the highest percentage of injuries (37%). This data is in line with Bentley and Page's (2008) conclusion that the number one reason for injuries is falls from heights or slips.

Uncertainty and travel behavior

As presented in the literature, people perceive traveling in different ways and travel for different reasons. Because some parts of the world experience more uncertainty than others, in general, we will assume that different people will have different intolerance for risk and have different tolerance levels for uncertainty. It is suggested that those who seek to travel to risky destinations and engage in risky activities, will have high tolerance for uncertainty and low anxiety levels, as they see the risky activities as a natural part of the tourism experience (Elsrud, 2001; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Zuckerman, 2004). Yates (1982), looked at risk taking behavior and concluded that risk, when related to sensation seeking is defined as uncertainty as risk exist when ever the outcome is unknown.

Risk tolerance and travel behavior; coping with uncertainty

One of Hofstede's (2001) four dimensions in culture is Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI). It deals with uncertainty about the future and reflects the degree of comfort people feel in unfamiliar or unstructured situations. Cultures usually try to cope with the unknown by technology, law, religion, rules and rituals that give them a sense of stability and a feeling they control the future. The higher UAI is – the more stressed people feel but at the same time they are trying to cope with their anxiety by searching for security. The UAI cultural dimension gives the base foundation for understanding why people will behave differentially in relation to the unknown.

The uncertainty avoidance dimension influences the type of external search, trip planning, party dynamics and trip characteristics. Extreme uncertainty can create tremendous anxiety. As a result, different persons have adapted to uncertainty in different ways. The assumption is that high UAI persons will avoid traveling alone which will involve more packaged deals and therefore shorter trips (Money & Crofts, 2003). Following Hofstede's (2001) study, it is claimed that high UAI cultures are not comfortable with unstructured situations, prize structure and will search for destinations more with travel agents than medium UAI cultures. While medium UAI cultures are willing to take more risk than high UAI cultures, they will search more in mass media and take personal advice and hence will be more involved in individual traveling. On the other hand, low UAI scores correspond to cultures that have less anxiety, more individual traveling, and more experience in traveling.

One can see that the above findings suggest that high UAI cultures experience more anxiety and they feel more stressed but at the same time they are trying to cope with their anxiety by searching for security by traveling in groups, for shorter periods and they rely

on mass media advertising for their trip planning (Hofstede, 2001). Another way to cope with the anxiety stemming from uncertainty is to return to a proven destination, to be more familiar with it or by starting with the known as your base to experience the unknown (Crompton, 1979). In addition one can practice on skills and prepare, if possible, for the activities one will do while on the vacation. It is suggested in this paper that high risk athletes, although they have low levels of anxiety, will have low UAI because they deal better with uncertain futures and take measurements to cope with it, by training, practicing and relaying on proven equipment.

Sensation seeking theories

Theories of sensation seeking stem from the differences in the optimal level of arousal of preferences, interests and activities between people. As it is a personality trait, individuals vary in their ability to tolerate sensation of all types (Pizam, Reichel & Uriely, 2002). There are two main predictors relative to how an individual will develop into a sensation seeking adult: biological predictor and a psychological- environmental one. First, while intense experience increases euphoria happens due to dopamine stimulation (Schneider et al., 2007) and dopamine helps generate a sense of satisfaction, it is suggested (Pizam et al., 2002; Zuckerman, 1994) that sensation seeking has a biological basis as an enzyme (MAO) with a strong genetic determination is related to sensation seeking. It has been determined that high sensation seekers have low MAO levels and produce low levels of dopamine and therefore tend to pursue activities that will stimulate MAO and dopamine. Those chemical predispositions allow high sensation seekers to take physical challenges that push their comfort zone to elevate their experience level. The second predictor is grounded in psychological- environmental research. Zuckerman (2007) suggested that risk taking choices come from the

individual's motivational and emotional state of mind. This notion supports the idea of novelty travel motivation suggested by Lee and Crompton (1992). Furthermore, Elsrud (2001) suggest that those sensation seekers (risk takers) are members of a society which is preoccupied with an uncertain future; which requires the members to have reflexivity. As suggested before (Hofstede, 2001; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992), some people have low UAI and are more uncertainty tolerance, as they cope with risk and uncertainty better than high UAI people and have low anxiety level.

Sensation seeking and travel behavior

Sensation seeking is used to explain a variety of behaviors and is positively related with risky behavior, adventure travel and liking of intense experience (Pizam et al., 2002). This research will look at sensation seeking (the search for high risk experiences) in relation to travel behavior. Sensation seeking is defined as level of stimulation; hence, different people prefer different and particular level of stimulation. It is suggested that if the environment fails to provide the right level of stimulation one needs, the individual will seek satisfaction out side the immediate environment in forms of complexity, novelty and other conditions. On the other hand if stimulation exceeds the desired level, the individual will seek ways to reduce it (Bello & Etzel, 1985).

Relying on different psychological top-down adult personality theories, Zuckerman (2007) began researching the sensation seeking concept. This idea began from sensory deprivation and in the early 1960's in which first sensation seeking scale (SSS) was created. The SSS has four factors: Thrill and adventure seeking (TAS), which measures the desire to engage in impulsive and adventurous activities; Experience Seeking (ES), which measures the desire to seek for new sensations; disinhibition (DIS) which measures the need to seek social stimulation through disinhibited behavior; and Boredom

susceptibility (BS) which measures aversion to routine, repetitive and monotonous situations. The idea of boredom alleviation was also suggested by Lee and Crompton (1992), operationally defined as the search for additional and alternative activities to elevate the level of stimulation to reach satisfaction. Zuckerman's (2007) assumption in all his writings surrounded the notion that high sensation seekers are persons with high optimal level of stimulation (OLS) and arousal (OLA). As a result, they will look for novel and intense activities to reach them. Zuckerman (2007) differed between high and low sensation seekers determining that while high sensation seekers need more stimulation to reach their OLA, low sensation seekers are naturally closer to their OLA.

Iso Ahola (1980) claims that leisure behavior takes place within a framework of optimal arousal and incongruity. She determined that there is a joint influence of biological dispositions and early socialization experiences that form the foundations for the individual need for optimal arousal and incongruity. As seen, the tendency for sensation seeking is both biological and environmental. It is now suggested that sensation seekers will participate more in risky activities than low sensation seekers.

It is suggested (Pizam et al., 2002; Pizam et al., 2004; Yates, 1992; Zuckerman, 1994) that high sensations seekers are inclined to make impulse decisions with no thought about the consequences, tend to keep their options open to maximize opportunity. These individuals are very independent and prefer to travel by themselves. It is also suggested that high sensation seekers are more likely to use drugs and abuse alcohol more often and are selfish. As that may be true for sensation seekers in general, this study looks at high risk athletes and suggest that this group of sensation seekers might not have the above characteristics of travel behavior It is agreed, though, that sensation seekers like to travel and are more willing to accept the uncertainty and risk in travel and activities. In

addition, they have low anxiety levels, receive more pleasure than low sensation seekers and that people who score high on the SS scale, may be strongly motivated to travel because they are looking for new and different experiences. They might also like to make their traveling arrangements independently and engage in active, adventurous and risky tourist activities (Pizam et al., 2002).

Sensation seeking and risky sports activities participation

Zuckerman (1994) noted that the relationship between risk taking and sensation seeking is that high sensation seekers, as opposed to low sensation seekers, are generally risk takers and they believe the experience is worth the potential risk and see value in it. He indicates that sports provide satisfaction for sensation seekers as they stimulate arousal, require skills and provide a place for aggressive competition. Studies show a positive relationship between sensation seeking and participation in risky sports activities. For instance, it was proven that sky divers, auto racers and hand gliders have higher sensation seeking scores (Zuckerman's SSS) than the control group to which they were being compared (Robinson, 1985; Rowland, Franken, Harrison, 1986; Straub, 1982; Zuckerman, 2007). Pizam et al. (2004) concluded that respondents, who scored high on Zuckerman's SSS, were statistically more likely to participate in more active, spontaneous, fast paced and less comfortable vacations. These respondents were engaging in the following activities while going on a leisure trip: hiking, camping, open water swimming, mountain biking, and river rafting and mountaineering. That is in contrast to those who scored low on Zuckerman's SSS who were more likely to engage in shopping while on a leisure vacation. From these findings it was concluded that, although high sensation seekers are not participating in adventurous novel activities all the time they are always staying active unlike the low sensation seekers. Research suggests that

high sensation seekers are strongly motivated to engage in new novel and adventurous activities to reach these high levels of sensation (Elsrud, 2001; Pizam et al., 2004; Schneider et al., 2007; Zuckerman, 1994, 2007). It is suggested that once they exhaust popular activities they have no choice but to turn to more risky activities such as parachuting, hand gliding, auto racing, scuba diving, mountain climbing and downhill skiing (Pizam et al., 2004).

Rowland, Franken and Harrison (1986) ranked the 10 most popular activities for high and low sensation seekers and found that the most desired activities for high sensation seekers were: white water rafting, scuba diving, kayaking, wind surfing and hand gliding. It was concluded that high sensation seekers are not only looking for new experiences but also the types of activities chosen would be considered as high risk activities as some sports had a disproportional number of participants from the high sensation seeking level. Consequently, sensation seeking is observed to influence participation in high risk sports activities. As Zuckerman (2007) determined, sensation seeking was primarily related to participation in high risk sports, somewhat related to participation in medium risk sports and not at all related to low risk sports. Based on the above literature it is logical to assume that high risk takers, when traveling, will engage in adventurous activities and extreme sports while paying less attention to safety and security than the norm. The new market segment involves adventurous activities, destinations and extreme sports are referred to as adventure tourism.

Adventure Tourism: Risk creation in traveling

Tourism is a system involving the unrestricted travel and temporary stay of people away from their homes for one or more nights. The elements of the system are tourists, generating regions, transit routes, destination regions and a tourist industry. The system is

open where those five elements operate within the physical, cultural, social economic political and technological environment (Lolper, 1979). Seeking - Escaping theories (Iso-Ahola, 1980), show that the motivations for tourists to participate in the tourism industry and become a tourist are seeking–escaping motivations such as seeking adventure or escaping boredom, and reaching equilibrium. As shown, novelty seeking is also a motive for tourism and tourists will range along the continuum from novelty seekers to novelty avoiders (Lee & Crompton, 1992). Novelty seekers will prefer destinations and activities that are different and unusual; these activities will provide them with excitement. On the other hand, novelty avoiders will prefer familiarity and a planned experience. Leisure tourism was also classified into two main personality types: allocentrics and psychocentrics where the former are tourists looking for new places that will provide them opportunities to escape the boredom in their life. Those tourists are adventurous, who feel in control and are relatively anxiety free, risk takers. The psychocentrics, like novelty avoiders, will prefer familiar destinations and attractions. They seek comfort and have a non active lifestyle (Pizam et al., 2004).

Adventure travelers (those who seek novel experiences), expect various levels of risk, excitement and tranquility, and to be personally tested. They are often explorers of unspoiled, exotic parts of the planet and they also seek personal challenges. This definition illustrates that there are several potential areas of risk to the adventure tourism participant, including remote and wilderness locations, risk-taking, and being personally tested or challenged. Moreover, the importance of unfamiliar environments, including marine and road environments and activities in which the visitor lacks experience, has been implicated in tourist morbidity and mortality by previous research (Bentley & Page, 2008). Consequently, there are a group of tourists that are seeking to travel and

participate in risky activities for the purposes of reaching equilibrium. Cater (2006) claims that participants in risky activities are merely looking for the fear and thrills. These participants are referred to as high sensation seekers. Cater (2006) classified adventure tourism as a part of a new spectrum of tourist activities such as ecotourism and suggests that this segment contributes \$220 billion annually to the US economy. It is proven that tourists engaging in adventure tourism activities in a destination are seeking the experience of fear and thrills. Their participation is a result of their perceived risk of the activities rather than considering the actual risk and an uncertain outcome.

It is clear from Bentley and Page (2008) that the *“acceptance of risk is a relative concept, and is associated with many factors including a participant’s skill level, concept of what constitutes a risky situation, and trust in guides, while the perception of risk and possible loss is weighed against benefits such as self-fulfillment and social approval (p. 858).”* Although most of the literature assumes that risk and uncertainty of outcome is part of the motivation for individuals who participate in adventure tourism as they are looking for thrill and excitement, the researchers are looking at ‘actual risk’ and determining that for many, it is not an important element influencing participation in risky activities.

High Risk athletes as sensation seekers

The literature suggests that athletes engage more in risky sports such as mountain climbing, skiing and parachuting than non athletes and those athletes, in general score higher on Zuckerman’s SSS and thrill and adventure seeking (TAS) scale than non athletes (Rowland, Franken, Harrison, 1986; Schroth, 1995 & Zaleski, 1984; Schneider, 2007; Zuckerman, 2007). Straub (1982) also found that high risk athletes will score higher on Zuckerman’s SSS than athletes participating in low risk activities. For example,

high risk professional athletes who have a lot of experience in risky sports, and make their living by engaging in competitions of that sport, scored higher on the TAS scale than those with less experience.

Zuckerman (1994) shows that rock climbers groups that are engaging in risky sports are scoring higher on the SSS and TAS scale. This dynamic was also found in skiing where ski instructors score higher than ordinary skiers. The conclusion was that, in general, people who make their living from participation in high risk sports will score higher on the SSS, than the less experienced. It is also shown that, generally, ex- athletes are participating in physical recreation more frequently than non athletes as there is a big influence of former professional sports career and participation in physical recreation activities (Woitak-Slubowska, 2006). Straub (1982) looked at 80 high risk athletes who participated in hand gliding, auto racing and bowling. His findings support the assumption that athletes who participated in high risk sports (hand gliding and auto racing) scored significantly higher in total sensation seeking than the bowlers.

Several studies have been conducted in an attempt to show the connection between high risk athletes and sensation seeking traits (Robinson, 1985). The literature looked at four behavioral characteristics among Elite rock climbers, sport parachutists, aerobatic pilots and race drivers: Sensation seeking, trait anxiety, need for achievement and affiliation. Robinson (1985) defined Elite Rock climbers as those individuals whom serious rock climbing (five 8th grade and above in the US grading system), is a regular ongoing part of their lifestyle. Results indicated that, in comparison to the norm group, elite rock climbers scored significantly higher in sensation seeking scale (Zuckerman's SSS) and in the subcomponent "thrill and adventure" they scored significantly lower than the norm group on travel anxiety. Scores on need for achievement and affiliation were

not significantly different than the norm group. An important finding for this research is that 70% of respondents expressed their need to experience higher risk of climbing and to stretch their limits and abilities. The elite rock climbers identified other risky sports such as hand gliding, white water kayaking and downhill skiing as substitutes for rock climbing. The findings above confirm that high risk athletes are high sensation seekers.

High Risk Athletes motivations and risk perception

As presented, disequilibrium or disturbance in equilibrium drives a person to take an action to restore it. When one is in the state of disequilibrium, one will seek for a break from the routine; although it may suggest that a person will look for the opposite activities than of those done on the day to day life, it is suggested by Crompton (1979) that a break from routine often involves activities that emphasize elements on the regular lifestyle rather than changing the lifestyle to incorporate different activities.

It is suggested that as risk experience is acquired, worries about potential negative consequences decrease; so when the risk perception decreases, positive affective outcome expectancies go with greater risk taking (Olivier, 2006), so for a high risk athlete to experience the same level of thrill, they need a more exciting, risky activity.

It was found that high risk athletes accept risk as an integral component of sports and as a part of their daily training (Schneider et al., 2007). As claimed by Le Breton (Schneider et al., 2007), the more intense the suffering is for the extreme athlete, the more they feel a personal achievement and reach personal satisfaction. Therefore, high risk athletes are aware of the real risk they are taking when participating in high risk sport activities. In Straub's (1982) study 67% of hand gliders and 50% of auto racers answered 'yes' when asked whether their sport is a high risk activity. Knowing the athletes' level of sensation seeking may help them become more aware of the risk involved in their risk

taking behavior. Those findings are backed by the assumption (Schneider et al., 2007; Zuckerman, 1994) that athletes' perception of a challenge is related to their capabilities; an optimal experience of an adventure occur when combining high challenge with high skills; if the risk is too low and competence is high, there will be no thrill in the activity as it will be perceived as common (Cater, 2006; Schneider et al., 2007). Consequently, high risk athletes, the more experienced the more likely they will take bigger risks as they no longer consider their actions risky.

Risk reduction- High Risk Athletes dealing with uncertainty.

High risk athletes learned how to deal with fear and tend to minimize risk by taking actions to manage risk, like skill development and planning & preparation, training, equipment checking and maintaining, and not operating if the environment does not allow it; taking those measurements ensure the athlete with control on the highest level possible on the situation (Olivier, 2006; Schneider et al., 2007; Zuckerman, 1994). Schneider found that high risk athletes relate to uncertainty as a drive to complete. These athletes feel more comfortable in uncertain situations or treat the unknown with indifference. Those types of responses are classified within the context of denial by athletes as they need them in order to feel comfortable in participating in high risk sports. All the preparations, experiences and past successes make them feel confident and comfortable with high risk activities. Lastly, high risk athletes are relaying on their equipment to help them achieve their goals and complete the tasks.

Discussion

The statistical and descriptive results presented above were aimed at finding a relationship between high risk athletes' perception of adventurous activities and destinations and their potential vacation travel patterns. Travel and leisure motivations, risk perceptions of activities, and tolerance for uncertainty were related to travel behavior, particularly as it relates to the sensation seeking tourist. It was proved that high risk athletes are high sensation seekers and therefore, have a unique risk perception, tolerance for uncertainty and travel patterns.

Travel and leisure motivations appear to be related to destination and activity selection. Motivations can be biological, early socialization experiences or trying to restore equilibrium in an attempt to reach satisfaction. When looking at high sensation seekers motivations, it was concluded that high sensation seekers have low MAO enzyme levels and produce low levels of dopamine which allow them to take physical challenges that push their comfort zone to elevate their experience level. It was determined (Schneider et al., 2007) that high risk athletes were socialized with high risk activities either at home or within the context of their life experiences and will therefore look for higher levels of risk in their activities in an attempt to reach satisfaction and restore equilibrium.

Travel motivations will lead high risk athletes to participate in risky activities but risk perception is one of the strongest determinants for picking an activity and destination while on vacation. Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) classified tourist to two categories: risk neutral and functional risk. It was found that the former will take more risks and will not see any risk in activities or destinations that the norm considers to be risky. The latter will consider the mechanical risk and possible pitfalls in their activities. High risk athletes

seem to be both risk neutral and risk functional as they are high sensations seekers. They are looking for risky activities and see risk as a natural part of the tourism experience. They also rely on equipment and calculate the possibility of equipment failure. As high risk athletes' risk perception is of high sensation seekers, they have high confidence in themselves, in their peers and in their equipment and as a result will have low risk perception. They will not see activities as being risky whereas the norm will see those activities as being risky. They have a high tolerance for the unknown and can be defined as low UAI in Hofstede's dimensions. High risk athletes will find ways to cope with their low anxiety level and uncertainty and will try to minimize risk by taking actions to manage risk, like skill development and planning & preparation, training, equipment checking and maintaining, and not operating if the environment does not allow it; taking those measurements ensure that they are in control on the highest level possible on the situation (Olivier, 2006; Schneider et al., 2007; Zuckerman, 1994).

High risk athletes are high sensation seekers. The literature suggests that high sensation seekers have few unique characteristics while traveling. Although it was found they might use more drugs and abuse alcohol, they are also open to new options to maximize opportunity. They will usually travel alone, accept uncertainty and risk in travel more frequently and they have low levels of anxiety. High sensation seekers have high levels of OLS and OLA and need more stimulation by engaging in more risky activities. High sensation seekers will choose high level risk activities once they exhaust the former level of risky activities.

Because high risk athletes are proved to be high sensation seekers on Zuckerman's SSS and are dealing with risk and anxiety better than those who do not engage in high risk sports activity, one would assume, according to presented literature, that high risk

athletes will engage more in high risk sport activities than the average person. It can also be assumed that the correlation between having experience in high risk sports activities will predict a positive correlation in predicting future participation in other high risk sports activities in leisure time. Shoham, Rose and Kahle (2000), hypothesized the opposite than the above and proved that experience is actually related negatively to the future probability of joining new sports; they claim that “*non- transferability skills developed in one sport result in a reluctance to consider additional sports (p.247)*”.

The purpose of the study was to stand on the relationship between high risk athletes’ perception of adventurous activities and destinations and their potential vacation travel patterns. It was found that although high risk athletes will participate more in risky leisure activities and will search for risky destinations often on their leisure time, they will not participate in risky activities they are not proficient in. Those results have managerial implications for businesses that provide risky sports leisure activities and for their future marketing plans. The next part of this paper will give a basic outline for businesses that wish to market high risk activities and suggest that high risk athletes should be treated as a segment with specific needs within the industry.

PART THREE

Purpose

A strategic market plan was selected to help businesses in the US who wish to market their extreme activity. The purpose of strategic market plan is to provide a strategic direction from which to set performance objectives and guide the development of a tactical marketing strategy. It was selected for several reasons, to include the growing market share of extreme sports activity requires better understanding, segmentation within the market is necessary and the fact that limited research was done in that area. After thoughtful review of available data and figures, it was possible to provide a good insight, though not complete, that will allow businesses to evaluate their customers and concentrate on the customer's specific needs.

Situational Analysis

Market Demand

The risky leisure activities involved in adventure tourism are increasing in popularity and participants today cover a broad range of age, income and education levels. Consequently, growing segments of consumers are involved with high risk activities such as rock climbing, white water rafting and downhill skiing (Creyer, Ross, Evers, 2003). The estimated annual growth of adventure tourism in the US is 15% and that about one half of the adults in the US (about 98 million people), have taken an adventurous vacation in the last five years (Williams & Soutar, 2005). According to the 2008 Adventure Industry research roundup, North America is the top continent/region visited for the adventure travelers. After North America, the next most visited destinations were Mexico, Western Europe, and the Caribbean.

In any market there are untapped market opportunities as most markets are operating below their full market potential. To capture the market opportunities, a business must communicate to its clients a complete and comprehensive picture of product benefits and create product awareness. Because adventure travelers have specific needs and desires, and high risk athletes have even more specific needs, it may be hard for one business to accommodate all customers and reach its maximum market potential.

Industry Analysis

Industry forces determine a business's competitive position and profitability. The major industry forces impacting the market include: Barriers to entry, Barriers to exit, product substitutes and competitive rivalry. Adventure tourism is a relatively new tourist practices but is rapidly expanding as a segment; it is suggested that the adventure travel and its related expenditure contribute \$220 billion annually to the US economy alone (Cater, 2006). Other than the industries providing opportunity and services for participating in the actual risky activities, the popularity of risky sports has created market opportunities for emergent industries such as clubs, equipment stores and magazines (Shoham et al., 2000).

As a new business offering extreme sports activities, it will not have a favorable measure for barrier to entry as they do not have a first mover advantage. However, the concept of extreme activities is constantly stretched and new activities are being added; it is possible, though, that if a company will come out with a new innovative sport, it will enjoy first mover advantage in product. A new business will probably have significant barrier to exit as there is a large capital investment and specialized assets creation in that type of business from receiving permits to operate to capital investment in buildings and equipment. In the market there are many substitutes for extreme activities; in the US

market there are many ski resorts, many places to do rock climbing, white water rafting and other activities. Out side of the US there are also an endless number of places to do the same activities. The current market has similar products thus more substitutes are available, the competitive environment is harder.

Market Share

Studies indicate that participation in high risk sport activities has to do with gender, age and socio- economic level (Lopez –Bonilla & Lopez- Bonilla, 2008; Schrader & Wann, 1999). To analyze the potential market one should look at all those factors. It is estimated that the demographics of the high risk activity participant is a young male, educated, middle class and active. Research show that male, in comparison to women, will participate more in air activities such as hand gliding but for land, snow & water activities like rock climbing, kayaking, and downhill skiing, participation is equal (Schrader & Wann, 1999; Williams & Soutar, 2005). It was found that *“level of sensation seeking and gender were the two variables that accounted for the greatest proportion of variability in high risk recreation involvement for all individuals, and when high risk participants were analyzed separately from nonparticipants (Schrader & Wann, 1999. p. 436)”*.

To create market share customer satisfaction must be achieved. As some places treat tourists as one –off participants, they do not get repeat clientele. The short term mentality when looking for market share is not profitable (Williams & Soutar, 2005); high risk athletes are proved to return to the same activity and not look for an activity they are not proficient in. therefore, an ongoing customer relationship will be profitable in the long term. Also, high risk athletes are a community communicating through telling experiences to each other, word of mouth in this community is probably the strongest tool

a business can have to market itself and gain higher market share. Creating the awareness is the first step in gaining market share, but the price must also be adjusted to the market. High risk athletes are shown to come from a higher socio-economic level, as paying for the activities is costly; from travel expenses to equipment (Schrader & Wann, 1999).

Market Threats

The largest threat now is the economy environment the world is experiencing. The US is experiencing the biggest recession since 1929. The recession is affecting all industries including the tourism industry; in 2007, a number record of 900 million tourist in the US was registered, a 6% growth from 2006 (WTO, Jan. 2008). It is expected to slow down in 2008. Despite the recession, the 2008 Adventure Industry research roundup suggests that some niches in the adventure tourism are more recession-proof than other segments as the high risk athletes view high risk activities as a fundamental part of their lifestyle and their identity and will cut back on other expenditures before cutting on high risk activities.

As the market matures, there is more competition and increased commercialization. Marketers and suppliers have to invest heavily into the market; websites, books, magazines, clothing, outdoor stores travel agents ext. each business must find their competitive position and create a competitive advantage. It is suggested that in a competitive market a long term investment in a niche market while developing a targeted marketing program, will yield long term profits (Williams & Soutar, 2005; Adventure industry research roundup, 2008).

Other threats in the market are the environmental issue, regulations and the actual risk in operating a high risk activity facility. As the industry gets more commercialized, more damage to the natural environment is done. Keeping the environment as natural as

possible is not only a high value in general but also damage to the environment makes the destination less attractive to high risk athletes to come and practice their activities. Also, the independent business has no control over regulations by the government and the tourism industry association. Those bodies are not in consideration of the business itself; as the operators today have no national standardizing operating procedures, no regulations, the operators have no incentives or any penalties or professional guidance on how to operate or how to protect the environment. Hence, more injuries and fatalities are happening and the risk is being waived from the operator when the participants are signing the waiver and takes the risk upon them (Williams & Soutar, 2005).

Market Opportunities

The most notable opportunity for any business in the high risk activity industry is the growing market. More and more people are joining the high risk activities community and are in search for risky activities to participate in, on their leisure time (Creyer et al., 2003; Williams & Soutar, 2005). Focusing on the younger market and hold on marketing to baby boomers is recommended by the Adventure Industry research as due to the economic situation, baby boomers experienced more significant financial losses than the younger market.

Another opportunity in the market is the various destinations that can be picked to hold the high risk activities. Around the world Queenstown in New Zealand positioned itself as the 'adventure capital of the world' and is accommodating half million tourists per year. Guangxi province in China is offering activities for die- hart high risk athletes such as rock climbing, and Kayaking and rafting on the Li River. Those areas are marketing to all tourism markets and are reaching a broader range of consumers. In the

US, there are many places where high risk activities can be held. Today, places like Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, Zion Park and Lake Tahoe are offering commercialized adventure tourism. To be relevant to the high risk athletes' niche, an uncommercialized, natural environment should be picked.

As the importance of the natural environment for the high risk athletes is high, and is also important to nature itself, in a competitive environment, businesses have the opportunity to gain a competitive advantage by practicing 'green' standards. For example, building ski resorts or a check point on a river while working with nature and not building against nature, like minimizing tree cutting and using more natural materials. Keeping the natural environment intact will give the high risk athletes a sense of originality, connection to nature and less commercialization.

Market segmentation- Need Based Segmentation

Mass Market strategy is used by places like Queenstown and Guangxi province and although offering packages of different levels of difficulty, the places are still highly commercialized (Bello & Etzel, 1985; Crompton, 1979; Zuckerman, 1994). This proposal, offers to shift to a Multi – Segment Strategy to look at each segment separately to build a plan for each segment based on Price, Product, Place and Promotion. Williams and Soutar (2005) offered two groups to market to: first the soft adventure which refers to activities such as hiking, cycling and scuba diving. The second is hard adventure that includes sports like kayaking, sky diving, white water rafting and downhill skiing. It is suggested the former are low sensation seekers while the latter are high sensation seekers and are the high risk athletes segment this plan will concentrate on.

1. Low Sensation Seekers - Soft Adventure Segment

Lifestyle: This segment is a generalization of all tourists that is not die-hard, hard core high risk athletes. The general motivation to go travel for this segment is what defined as EPE (Iso-Ahola, 1980), escaping the personal environment. Research supports the notion that this segment is experiencing some kind of disequilibrium in their life and need a novel experience to break their routine and as they have no former experience, they will look for 'soft' adventurous activities. This group is most likely to have high anxiety level and is low sensation seekers; they are not dealing well with uncertainty and have high perceived risk. Therefore, they are more likely to use pre-booked packages booked by travel agents, will rather travel in groups and will rely more on mass media advertising. Most of the adventure travelers in the US are married, and a large majority (more than 80%) does not have children living at home. Approximately 50% of adventure travelers have household incomes between \$75,000 and \$149,000 (Adventure industry research roundup, 2008).

2. High Risk Athletes -Hard Adventure Segment

Lifestyle: this segment refers to a niche group that is considered to be high risk athletes as high risk activities are a fundamental ongoing part of their lifestyle. Their travel motivation is seeking personal and interpersonal rewards (SIR and APR); they search for risky activities as manifestation of identity as participation in high risk activities enforce their lifestyle and identity. They are attracted to risky activities and destinations to reach satisfaction. As they see the risky activities as both challenging and rewarding, they see high value in those activities as the experience is worth the potential risk. High risk athletes have low anxiety level; they mostly travel alone and will see a risky activity as a personal, individual challenge. They deal better with uncertain future

as they prepare for it by training, educate themselves, and rely on high technology equipment. They are experienced and proficient in their selected sport (skateboarding, downhill skiing, and rock climbing ext.) and although they see other sports as substitutes to their specialty, they prefer to reach higher challenges in their own sport as they like to be fully prepared to the challenge. This segment will appreciate businesses working with the natural environment as part of the challenge is dealing with the raw nature; the more commercialized the place is, the less attractive it is to this group as they look for fears and thrills that are controlled by the individual and not by the operator.

Demographics: High risk athletes are of all ages, as long as they are physically able to participate. High risk athletes will spend on an activity, equipment and training before they will on other commodities and are sometimes sponsored by a large corporation to advertise them while competing. It is indicated by the 2008 Adventure industry research roundup that destination developers should look for a growth in a segment called “GenY”; those travelers are very young and like high risk athletes, are driven by destination priority over a budget concern; they are the future die- hart high risk athletes that developers should invest in now.

Segment attractiveness- high risk athletes

The forces that shape segment attractiveness are Market growth and Market access. One need to remember that at any given point, the market is composed of existing customers and potential customers who provide the opportunity for growth. With the growth of adventure tourism in general and the rise of “Gen Y”, and the constant increasing attention high risk sports are receiving from the media and the growth in number of extreme sports competitions, it is safe to assume that there will be a steady growth in the number of participants too. Market Access is more difficult as those tourists

see themselves separate from the general mass tourism and are not being influenced as easy by media or regular advertisement. As they have a strong, tight, community like characteristics, they are looking for hard core natural destinations to perform their activities and are more demanding and less loyal. Therefore, it is assumed to be harder to penetrate with a new product and gain their loyalty, available access channels will be discussed under product promotion.

Promotion

Promotion strategies intend to create awareness of the product and its benefits. Building awareness in the high risk athletes' community is mainly a word of mouth process. To spread the word out it is recommended to use personal base advertising strategies rather than mass media strategies. It is suggested to approach potential clients personally in competitions, exhibit and trade shows and meeting the athletes and their sponsors and offering them discount deals for training and spending their leisure time in you facility.

Annual events:

1. The travel and adventure expo in Spokane, WA, in January 31st, 2009.
2. The adventure travel world summit in Quebec in October 09.
3. X Games (an annual event with a focus on extreme action sports) The Winter X Games are held in January or February in Aspen, Colorado through 2010, and the Summer X Games are usually held in August in Los Angeles through 2009. The X Games also has international competitions and demos around the world that are held at varying times throughout the year (Wikipedia).

Product

Product positioning strategies are built to create product attractiveness and preferences. To achieve a desired level of market share and profitability, several management efforts are required: first is to develop a positioning strategy designed around targeted customers' needs. The second effort involves branding and brand management strategies to communicate a consistent image and create a desired target market identity. Positioning the product gives the opportunity to differentiate the products from the competitors' and create a competitive advantage.

Customer's needs

High risk athletes: research shows that high risk athletes needs are unique than common adventure travelers. They need to feel they are in a natural environment that not hurt by commercialization as they are competing against nature as well as against their peers and need to feel exclusive, separated from the mass tourists; they need a place that can offer constant challenges with several degrees of difficulties and high quality equipment.

Brand name

Brand building and brand management will have to surround high risk athletes need to be separated from the norm. The brand name has power to differentiate the product from the competitor's product and give and create market share as well as competitive advantage. If the product is well positioned with attractive benefits for the high risk athletes like exclusivity, high risk athletes are more likely to choose this name brand. A business might want to create an exclusive club where only few are receiving special offers.

Price

Price strategies are designed to enhance intentions to buy based on a price that will create customer value. High risk athletes are not price sensitive when it comes to spending on a high risk adventure that will push them to the next level. Although they are sometimes sponsored, a business must consider the economic environment and the current slow down due to the recession. It is suggested that offering a price promotion to build customer awareness would be beneficial at the beginning as long as it is offered to selected athletes. Part of the brand building is keeping the prices high enough to prevent from the Low Sensation Seekers (Soft Adventure Segment) from participating in the offers for the high risk athletes segment.

Place

Place strategies ensure availability and service to facilitate purchase. It is suggested that high risk athletes will want to customize their travel and the activities they will participate in while on vacation. It is unlikely that they will turn to travel agents or tour operators, but might buy online or call directly to the business. Building an online mass customization website might be the best for a business as the athletes can completely customize their vacation and activities according to difficulty level and needs.

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