Clustering **tourist involvement** in a **rural destination**

ANA CLÁUDIA CAMPOS * [ACALVES@UALG.PT]
DORA AGAPITO ** [DLAGAPITO@UALG.PT]
PATRÍCIA VALLE *** [PVALLE@UALG.PT]

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Objectives | The involvement construct has been extensively applied in consumer behavior research and used to profile consumers and explain their consumption behavior. More recently, in the context of tourism, it has been used to explain tourists' purchase behavior (Josiam, Kinley & Kim, 2005; Smith & Pan, 2009), information search (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004), preferences (Cai, Feng, & Breiter, 2004), destination experiences (Letho, O'Leary & Morrison, 2004), and place attachment (Gross & Brown, 2006). Several scales have already been tested based on Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) and/or Zaichkovsky's (1985) seminal works, such the case of Gursoy and Gavcar's (2003) scale, which is applied to tourism. However, previous research has not yet examined tourist involvement in the context of rural destinations, despite a demanding market for rural tourism is growing (Lane, 2009). Against this background, this study focuses on consumer involvement theory and aims at validating Gursoy and Gavcar's (2003) scale to the tourist experience in a rural destination of South-western Portugal.

Methodology | Methodology is based on self-administered questionnaire constituted by three groups of questions. The first group includes situational variables, while the second group adapts the 16-item scale for tourist involvement proposed by Gursoy and Gavcar (2003) to the context of a rural destination and uses a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The last section focuses on socio-demographic information. The data collection was conducted in Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast, Portugal. Self-administered questionnaires were presented to visitors who spent at least one night in rural lodging units in three municipalities in the area, from July 15 to December 15, 2011. A total of 181 valid questionnaires were obtained, corresponding to 92.8% of the selected sample. The data were analysed through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and cluster analysis using SPSS 21.0.

Main results and contributions | The 16 items measuring tourist involvement were subjected to principle component factor analysis with 'Varimax' rotation method. A final four-factor model was estimated, accounting for 60.35% of the total variance. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($P < .000$) and KMO measure of sampling adequacy (0.78)

* **PhD Student in Tourism** at the University of Algarve. **Researcher** at the Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics, and **Lecturer** at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Algarve.
** **PhD in Tourism** from the University of Algarve. **Researcher** at the Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics, and **Assistant Professor** at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Algarve.
*** **PhD in Applied Statistics to Economics and Business** from the University of Algarve. **Researcher** at Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics, and **Assistant Professor** at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Algarve.

exceeded the minimum recommended value (0.60). The four dimensions were named 'Risk importance' (Dimension 1), 'Risk probability' (Dimension 2), 'Sign value' or 'Self expression' (Dimension 3), and 'Interest/pleasure' (Dimension 4). The results of Cronbach's Alpha Reliability measure indicate that the four factors all had acceptable internal consistency with a coefficient of respective 0.799, 0.754, 0.807, and 0.812. Thus, it supports the argument that items on each factor or domain are reliable and have internal consistency on each factor.

Next, a cluster analysis was run in order to segment tourists according to the involvement dimensions. The cluster analysis, carried out using a hierarchical classification method with the factorial scores of four factors, identified three groups of tourists. The first cluster is the biggest one (formed by 61.5% of total tourists) and is made up of tourists very aware and afraid of the risks associated with choosing a rural destination, even though recognizing pleasure in this type of tourism experience. The second cluster is the smallest one (8.9%) and it includes those tourists that most associate pleasure to the rural experience and that it reflects their identity (sign value). In this cluster, a low risk is associated to the tourist experience. The third cluster (29.6%) is formed by tourists with a more diffuse perspective in the four involvement dimensions, reporting low values in the four factors.

Although no significant dependence relationships were found between cluster membership and socio-demographic variables, there is a statistically significant relationship with a previous rural experience. In particular, the highest proportion tourists that had a previous rural experience was found within segment 2 (93.8%). This percentage has its lowest value within segment 1 (73.6%).

Conclusions | This study confirmed the dimensions of involvement found by Gursoy and Gavcar (2003), but, conversely to these authors' findings, it also confirmed the sign value dimension included in the original scale proposed by Laurent and Kapferer (1985). Generally, the Gursoy and Gavcar's (2003) scale continues to prove its usefulness in the context of tourism, and in particular in relation to tourist experiences in rural destinations.

Both involvement results and cluster analysis highlighted the significance and specificity of rural destinations and experiences in terms of tourist sensitivity to risk importance and pleasure derived from the experience of the rural destination under analysis. According to literature (e.g. Gross & Brown, 2006), previous experience seems relevant to tourist judgement on involvement with experiences lived in the rural destination under analysis.

Further research should confirm in the context of this particular region of Portugal the relationship between involvement and other constructs already explored in literature, such as place attachment or centrality to lifestyle.

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