Tourists' Ethical Concern for Dumbo: Elephant Tourism in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing interest in the treatment of animals used in the tourism industry, yet the academic literature on the animal welfare consideration exhibited by tourists is limited. This exploratory study seeks to identify if demographic differences amongst tourists engaging in animal-based tourism influence the importance they attribute to the ethical treatment of those animals. The case study is based on elephant tourism in Thailand. A statistical analysis of 136 completed questionnaires demonstrates a statistically significant difference in animal welfare concerns between Asian and Western tourists, but no significant differences for gender, age, educational background, or research prior to travel. The findings suggest a need for further research on animal-based tourism to examine the link between tourist responsibility and animal welfare. Managerial implications emanate conclude the paper.

Keywords: *ethical consideration; tourist's behavior; animal welfare; demographics; elephant tourism*

INTRODUCTION

"The question is not, "Can they reason?" nor, "Can they talk?" but rather, "Can they suffer?" - Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), English philosopher, social reformer and the founder of modern utilitarianism

Throughout the decades, the tourism industry has sought innovative solutions for attracting more tourists to specific regions. Many of the most attractive offers derive directly from nature, from waterfalls and mountains to flora and fauna. One area which has increased in popularity over the past decades is that of the animal world as animal-based attractions and wild-life related tourism has continued to grow (Alie, 2009; Cohen, 2009; Moorhouse, Dhlsjo, Baker, D'Cruz, Macdonald, & Davidk, 2015; Shani, 2012; Tremblay, 2001). While hunting, bird-watching, fishing, and swimming with the dolphins was traditional tourist activities, in the past decade, other nature-based, eco-tourism, and responsible animal attractions have emerged such as whale watching or safaris (Shani &Pizam, 2007) where the tourist is educated about the animal and takes a proactive approach in protecting their environment.

Though research suggests a growing awareness and concern of tourists for animal treatment in tourism (Hughes, 2001), a vital part of the experience for many tourists appears to be typically educational insights on specific species (Ballantyne, Packer & Hughes, 2009). Considering the case study of elephant tourism in Thailand, it was identified that the poor conditions the majority of domesticated elephants in Thailand face, prohibit elephants from participating in their species' specific behaviour and from meeting their particular needs (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009a). There are differing viewpoints on and attitudes toward the animal's welfare in the midst of a prosperous business venture. Further, the guidelines, regulations, and laws which should protect animals without a voice are inconsistent and vary from country to country, from one species to the next. When looking into the tourists' level of concern about animal welfare, research has also identified differences between different populations and traits groups (Phillips & McCulloch, 2005; Phillips et al., 2012) which suggests that none of the stakeholders - owners, managers, employees, locals, or tourists- have a consistent view of what constitutes an eco-friendly and equitable animal attraction for humans and animals.

The question arises whether or not the suffering of individual animals justifies those, mostly human, benefits. Although the demand for animal-based tourism has grown, and animals

have become a vital part of the tourism industry, only a limited amount of academic research has been conducted concerning the animals' welfare and treatment in tourism-based facilities (Shani &Pizam, 2008). This paper strives to explore the topic of animal welfare in tourist attractions with the goal of examining if demographic factors, nationality, and the number of research tourists conduct prior to their trip influence their concern for animal welfare. The following two research questions are thus posited:

- RQ1: To what extent is animal welfare considered in the tourism industry?

- RQ2: Do demographic differences influence the importance tourists attribute to animal welfare?

To analyze those questions, the present study focuses on elephant tourism in Thailand as a case study. Despite the extensive literature which debated a variety of opinions on animal welfare in tourism, with researchers, countries, and individual tourists taking different ethical standpoints, a gap remains on animal welfare for the specific species, the Thai elephant. Our work contributes to the literature by examining the activities and perceptions of the tourists who participate in elephant attractions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Animal-based attractions and wildlife-related tourism belong to the most popular leisure tourism activities, and demand is consistently growing (Cohen, 2009; Moorhouse et al., 2015; Shani, 2012). Despite the growing increase of interest, knowledge, and demand for ethical animal treatment and higher animal welfare standards by consumers (Hughes, 2001), little research has been conducted thus far on the role of animals in the industry and the species and activity-related welfare standards (Bertella, 2014; Fennell, 2014; Hughes, 2001; Shani &Pizam, 2008).

While steps have been made to shift from circus-like attractions to facilities allowing animals to behave in a more natural manner or their natural surroundings (Shani &Pizam, 2008), human welfare still has higher importance. It is acceptable to compromise an animal's welfare should it be beneficial for human welfare or the species at large (Hughes, 2001; Shani &Pizam, 2008) as long as the actions do not impact or threaten the species or ecosystem as a whole. The approach is based on Aldo Leopold's land ethic (Hughes, 2001), which credits the ecosystem, yet, not the individual

animal within it (Hughes, 2001; Shani &Pizam, 2008). However, some researchers hold the viewpoint that any activity that negatively impacts the welfare of any individual animal is not considered as ethically acceptable. Animals are considered equal to humans, due to the attribution of sentience, the ability to feel psychological and physiological pain (Hughes, 2001; Shani & Pizam, 2008).

Previous research has stressed the importance of ethics in tourism, as nature and wildlife are often one of the main motivators for tourists to visit a destination, and, therefore, require special attention (Jamal & Camargo, 2014; Payne &Dimanche, 1996). In fact, the duty of ethical behaviour also lies with the tourists, who have to take responsibility for their actions and need to be trained to adapt their behaviour accordingly. This begins with clear rules and regulations to guide their behaviour, which is often inconsistent or non-existent.

While clear policies on ethical behaviour seem plausible, a generalized practice guideline for animal treatment in tourism can prove to be ineffective (Duffy & Moore, 2011). Different species appear in different environments; however, they are often not embedded in the same way in the local culture. One example is elephant tourism in Thailand and Botswana. Elephant back riding is offered as a touristic activity in both countries.

Nevertheless, the elephant plays a different role in the Thai culture, where it has been familiar as a working animal for many decades. In Botswana, on the other hand, elephant back riding became popular only recently due to high touristic demand. Thus, the treatment of the same animal in a different environment and perceived differently cannot be regulated by global standards (Duffy & Moore, 2011). Additional research showed that tourism demand could impact animal-based attraction and strongly influences the supply offered by travel companies (Hughes, 2001).

One example is the case of Dolphin tourism in the UK, where growing awareness amongst consumers and the public led to a complete ban on dolphin shows in the country. Further research showed significant consumer interest in the educational aspects of animal-based activities (Ballantyne et al., 2009 Bertella, 2011). Milman, Okumus, and Dickson (2010) found that educational and conservational aspects are growing in non-ecotourism settings as well, as animals displayed in theme parks are increasingly

used for educational purposes instead of solely for entertainment.

Furthermore, Ballantyne et al. (2009) discovered that the information distributed at environmental parks raised awareness of wildlife, the natural setting, and the human impact on it overall. Tourists responded immediately to educational measures and were willing to act with more care, even if it impacted their personal experience or comfort. However, it was also noted that the wildlife and eco-tourism customer base might be limited, and the conservational interest of this specific group may be considerably higher than the general public's interest in conservation (Ballantyne et al., 2009; Bertella, 2011). Thus, travel companies must strike a balance between awareness, education, and the overall well-being of the animals with the expectations of the consumers for responsible holidays where the animals are treated in a respectable and humane manner.

Elephant Tourism in Thailand

Thai elephants historically hold an important part in the local culture and have played a special role in the country's history and employed as working animals for hundreds of years (Duffy & Moore, 2011; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009a; Tayloe & Mizner, 2010). After the logging industry's ban on elephant use in Thailand in 1989, elephants could no longer earn their living, making them a financial burden to their owners. Due to the increase in tourist demand for animal-related tourism, elephants started to be used in the tourism industry. Today, nearly every domesticated elephant works in the tourism industry, and the numbers are growing (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009b).With an increasing interest in exploiting elephants for the tourists' pleasure, appropriate measures must be taken to ensure their well-being. At present, policies and guidelines to protect elephants are lagging behind the economic benefits of putting them on show for entertainment.

Tourism-related activities for elephants range from begging on the streets in the capital with their caretakers (also called mahouts), to elephant back riding or circus-like shows, to sanctuaries /rescue stations where tourists can only observe elephants in their natural habitat. Nonetheless, the majority of elephant attraction facilities in Thailand are unable to maintain an environment that sufficiently replicates the natural environment of an elephant (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009a; Schmidt-Burbach, Ronfot, & Srisangiam, 2015).

Only a few institutions have veterinarians contracted or employed, leaving most places to rely on their staff for medical treatment in case of an emergency (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009b; Schmidt-Burbach, Ronfot & Srisangiam, 2015). Further, touristic activities involving elephants have been shown to have negative physical and psychological consequences for the animals, such as work overload, insufficient social interaction, and harsh training methods (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009a; 2009b).Nevertheless, welfare impacts do not concern only domesticated elephants. Thailand has witnessed a drastic decline in its elephant population with a decrease of 95,000 animals since 1900 Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009b; Tayloe & Mizner 2010). Due to the growing demand in tourism, many elephants are now being captured in the wild to be used in the tourism industry.

Tourists' Attitude towards Animal Welfare

As research has shown, not all tourists act and think alike. There are significant differences in tourists' preferences and attitudes towards certain activities and animal welfare which often relate to the tourist's culture/nationality (Crotts & Erdmann, 2000; Pizam & Sussmann, 1995), as a human's concern for animals is often directly linked to the animals they are familiar with in their own culture (Phillips & McCulloch, 2005; Phillips et al., 2012). Phillips et al. (2012) found that animals with higher attributed sentience receive higher welfare concern from humans. However, the attribution of sentience to a specific species varies from one culture to another. For instance, studies have shown that humans demonstrate greater concern for mammal welfare opposed to non-mammals (with the highest concern for animals that are most similar to humans) and that younger, educated, and culturally experienced people do not state a difference between human and animal sentience (Phillips & McCulloch, 2005). Further influences on attitudes and awareness included age, occupation, education level and travel spending (Kang & Moscardo 2006). However, Ohl and Van der Staay (2012) argued that a cultural difference in how animal welfare is defined and practiced is directly linked to a country's morals and ethics. While Asian countries having a lower animal welfare concern compared to European countries a strong similarity between views and attitudes from countries and cultures located geographically close to each other (i.e., Sweden and Norway, Ireland and Britain, Serbia and Macedonia) exists (Phillips & McCulloch, 2005; Phillips et

al., 2012). Thus, it may be necessary to target countries individually by addressing their citizens' specific perceptions or misperceptions of animal welfare. A trend has emerged in emerging economies with higher income to keep animals as pets, leading to higher welfare consideration for animals in those countries (Franzen, 2003; Phillips et al., 2012). Greater wealth leads to higher demand for a clean environment and human's desire to protect the environment also grows. High-income countries can consider environmental problems and pay attention to them in contrast to poorer countries (Franzen, 2003).Consequently; wealthier countries prioritize environmental protection over economic growth, unlike poorer countries. While wealth tends to indicate higher levels of concern for the environment and, subsequently, the well-being of the animals which inhabit it, it is beyond the scope of this study to analyze wealth as a determining factor. Rather, this study focuses on several variables which derived from the previous literature such as gender, age, education level, research conducted prior to partaking in elephant tourism, and country of origin to determine if these factors influence tourists' level of concern regarding the welfare of Thai elephants.

HYPOTHESES

A total of five hypotheses were developed for testing the above-mentioned factors. Based on Crotts and Erdmann's (2000) study, this paper too argues that gender does not influence a person's attitude towards animal welfare; thus, animal welfare attitudes will not differ in regards to gender. Therefore,

Hypothesis 1o

There is no difference in animal welfare concern between genders.

Hypothesis 1a

There is a difference in animal welfare concern between genders. Kang and Moscardo (2006) examined the variables of age and education level as important factors that can influence a person's attitude and knowledge base; therefore, age and education level has been tested in hypotheses 2 and 3 in regards to animal welfare concern.

Hypothesis 2o

Animal welfare sensitivity is dependent on age,

Hypothesis 2a

Animal welfare sensitivity is not dependent on age.

Hypothesis 3o

Tourists with a higher level of education are more sensitive towards animal welfare than those with a lower level.

Hypothesis 3a

Tourists with a higher level of education are not more sensitive towards animal welfare than those with a lower level.

The paper further tests if tourists who have invested time in investigating and researching animal facilities prior to their trip will have a higher level of animal welfare concern than those who didn't.

Hypothesis 4o

The more research or knowledge a person has before visiting an elephant park, the higher the animal welfare consideration. Accordingly,

Hypothesis 4a

The more research or knowledge a person has before visiting an elephant park, the animal welfare consideration is not higher. As seen in the literature review, there tend to be differences between animal welfare attitudes among Asian and Western cultures (Phillips & McCulloch, 2005; Philips et al., 2012. Thus, this study aims to examine the differences in Asian and Western responses to verify if this also applies to elephant-related tourism activities in Thailand.

Hypothesis 5o

Tourists from Asian countries have less animal welfare concern than the ones from Western countries.

Hypothesis 5a

Tourists from Asian countries do not have less animal welfare concern than the ones from Western countries.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was distributed through the travel website Trip Advisor, based on users who left a review for elephant park profiles on the Trip Advisor website. A total of eight Trip Advisor web pages were selected for contacting reviewers. Additionally, Facebook Messenger was used to contact people who left a comment/review on the Facebook pages of 17 elephant parks, shows, or sanctuaries from different regions in Thailand. Through this procedure, the survey targeted a relevant sample base, namely people who participated in an elephant-related activity in Thailand. The companies, on which the reviews

were based, offered a mix of different activities including elephant shows, zoos, elephant trekking, bare back riding, bathing, feeding, mahout training, and sanctuaries in which elephants could be observed. In total, 421 people were contacted individually through Trip Advisor.

Additionally, travellers were contacted individually through Facebook, representing a total of 456. Additionally, the survey was shared in six Facebook groups, one with 1,400 members for exchange students in Thailand, and five groups linked to an international hospitality management school in Switzerland, ranging between 510 and 920 members. As a result, a total of 141 responses were collected, and 136 were used for this study. The survey consisted of a total of 43 questions, which were a mix of demographic and open questions. The number of questions a participant was required to answer depended on the amount of different elephant related activities they participated in. Based on the activities chosen, the answer path was constructed accordingly.

Measures and Analyses

For the purpose of analyzing the data, the following findings were coded in a numerical form: Gender, Age, Education, Countries (into Asian and Western), and the research conducted prior to the visit. An overall welfare score for every participant was determined, through the results from the rating on the different animal welfare and tourist welfare statements. The statements were divided into animal welfare-focused statements and tourist welfare-focused statements. The importance attributed to those statements through the 10-point Likert scale were tallied and summed (for animal welfare focused statements) or subtracted (tourist welfare statements). Therefore, a cross-sectional score was achieved through all the statement ratings and an overall welfare attitude of the

participant could be determined. Those scores were used as the dependent variable in the One-Way ANOVA analysis and are the determinant of the participants' animal welfare attitude.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

To test the hypotheses, the variables of gender, age, education level, research (prior to travel), and country of origin were tabulated and are summarized here. Of the 136 valid responses analyzed for this study, 97 respondents were female (69%). The vast majority (n=96, 68%) ranged in age from 18-24, followed by 25-34 years (n= 29, 21%). The other age responses ranged from 7 (45-54 years old) to 1 (under 18). The highest response for education level was reported as Bachelor/University (n=92, 65%), followed by high school (n=36, 26%), Masters/University (n=10, 7%). Only two respondents reported an education of higher than a Master's Degree; one reported elementary school education. The amount of research conducted prior to travel was recorded as "minimal" (n=66, 47%), "none" (n=47, 33%), and "substantial" (n=28, 20%). Finally, for the country of origin, Asian countries were reported by 37 respondents (29%), while Western countries had 99 responses (71%).

General Findings

The results for participation in five elephant activities (elephant back riding, bathing with elephants, elephant show, mahout/owner training, and feeding elephants) was summarized in Table 1. The most popular of the presented activities for both genders, under the age of 24, with a Bachelor's degree, and from Asian or Western cultures was elephant back riding, which is in line with the findings of Kontogeorgopoulos (2009a). Feeding elephants proved the most popular with both genders, over the age of 25, and with a Master's degree.

Table1. *Activity Participation by Group*

Activity participation					
	Elephant Back	**Bathing with Elephants**	**Elephant Show**	**Mahout/ Owner Training**	**Feeding Elephants**
Gender					
Male	62.79%	46.51%	25.58%	16.28%	69.77%
Female	61.29%	44.09%	38.71%	18.28%	63.44%
Age					
Under 18-24	85.26%	38.95%	34.74%	20.00%	58.95%
25-44	48.39%	61.29%	25.81%	6.45%	80.65%
45+	60.00%	50.00%	60.00%	30.00%	80.00%
Education					
Elementary/High School	72.97%	43.24%	40.54%	21.62%	75.68%
Bachelors	77.53%	43.82%	32.58%	17.98%	60.67%
Master+	60.00%	60.00%	30.00%	0.00%	70.00%

Research					
Noresearch	84.78%	21.74%	39.13%	15.22%	56.52%
Minimal	79.69%	43.75%	39.06%	15.63%	62.50%
Substantial	46.15%	88.46%	15.38%	26.92%	88.46%
Country					
Asian	77.50%	20.00%	57.50%	17.50%	60.00%
Western	72.92%	54.17%	23.96%	16.67%	66.67%

Source: *Authors*

The least popular activity was mahout/owner training regardless of gender, age, educational level, prior research, or country origin. The only group which rated elephant shows as the least popular was respondents who had done substantial research prior to their travels. For all respondents, bathing with elephants was neither the most nor least sought after activity to pursue while on vacation. The most active participants in all activities combined, including the mahout /owner training (30% participation) were the group aged over 45 which could suggest higher income and more disposable income as each of these activities costs money.

It could be inferred that this age group may also travel with families which could explain the second highest number for the mahout/owner training were under aged 18-24. If they were travelling with their parents, they might have participated in the same activities. The lowest participation group was hard to identify as it was based predominantly on the activity itself and not the overall participation in all five activities.

Statistical Analysis

The findings of the tourists' enjoyment of the activity and perceived elephant welfare were graphed for each activity accordingly. Participants were asked to rate on a 10 point Likert scale how much they enjoyed the activity and, on the other hand, how comfortable they perceived the elephant to be during the activity. The results are summarized in Table 2.For the activities, elephant back riding, elephant shows, and elephant mahout/owner training the findings show a discrepancy between the participants' rating of their enjoyment of the activity and the comfort level they perceived for the elephant. In each instance, the perceived enjoyment of the tourist outweighed the perceived comfort of the elephant. This finding suggests that tourists reflect on their experience and consider the animal and its welfare during their experience.

Table2. *Average Rating Score of Tourist Enjoyment and Elephant Comfort for Five Activities*

	Tourist Enjoyment Elephant Back riding	Elephant Comfort Elephant Back riding	Tourist Enjoyment Bathing with Elephants	Elephant Comfort Bathing with Elephants	Tourist Enjoyment Elephant Shows	Elephant Comfort Elephant Shows	Tourist Enjoyment Mahout/ Owner Training	Elephant Comfort Mahout/ Owner Training	Tourist Enjoyment Feeding Elephants	Elephant Comfort Feeding Elephants
Gender										
Male	6.07	4.93	7.30	7.65	5.64	4.91	6.71	5.14	7.77	8.00
Female	6.32	3.91	7.59	7.27	5.69	3.17	6.59	5.41	6.97	7.19
Age										
Under 18-24	6.33	4.10	7.41	7.16	5.85	3.36	6.74	5.11	7.02	7.18
25-44	5.40	4.00	8.05	8.21	5.13	3.63	3.00	3.00	7.88	7.96
45+	7.33	5.67	6.00	6.00	5.50	4.67	8.33	8.33	6.75	7.88
Education										
Elementary/ high school	6.41	4.41	7.75	8.13	6.47	4.80	6.50	6.00	8.25	7.90
Bachelor	6.28	4.16	7.77	7.33	5.28	3.03	6.69	5.00	6.87	7.15
Master+	5.33	3.33	5.00	5.83	5.67	2.67	-	-	6.0	7.80
Research										
No research	5.79	3.77	7.70	7.40	4.72	2.89	4.86	4.14	6.88	6.54
Minimal	6.33	4.14	7.00	6.68	6.08	3.84	6.40	5.00	7.35	7.53
Substantial	7.42	5.67	8.00	8.26	7.50	5.00	8.71	7.00	7.43	8.39
Country										
Asian	5.97	2.87	7.38	7.63	5.91	2.70	6.71	5.29	6.33	6.08
Western	6.33	4.74	7.46	7.31	5.35	4.39	6.63	5.44	7.53	7.94

Source: *Authors*

This is further supported by the comment section of the survey, in which it was noted by certain participants that they would not participate in the activity again due to the high discomfort they perceived for the elephant. These results confirm the findings of Ballantyne et al. (2009), which state that tourists are willing to compromise their own experience for the

animal's comfort and welfare. A higher perceived comfort level is stated for bathing with elephants and feeding elephants. It is also noted that the tourists' enjoyment scores were found to be higher for those activities than for the prior three.

This finding may be related to the fact that both bathing and feeding are activities that belong to the elephant's natural behaviour. Therefore, tourists might perceive it as less disturbing to the animal. The findings further suggest a correlation between the comfort level of the animal the tourist perceives and the tourist's enjoyment. Overall, the findings show a higher rating for tourist enjoyment for those activities that were rated high in perceived elephant comfort as well.

With the exception of two groups (those with an educational level of high school or below and aged under 18), all groups rated elephant comfort in elephant shows as the least perceived comfort level. For the majority of the groups, tourist enjoyment of elephant shows ranked the lowest. Participants with high school or lower education level and those who had conducted a substantial amount of prior research reported elephant back riding as the least enjoyable elephant activity, and those aged 25-44 reported mahout/owner training as their least preferred activity.

Table3. *ANOVA and Descriptive Results for Gender, Age, Education, Research, and Asian/Western Countries and Animal Welfare Concern*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minim um	Maxi mum
Gender	Between Groups	7.085	1	7.085	.036	.851	0	43	12.91	13.823	2.108	8.65	17.16	-15	39
	Within Groups	26735.907	134	199.52			1	93	13.40	14.261	1.479	10.46	16.33	-24	40
	Total	26742.993	135				Total	136	13.24	14.075	1.207	10.86	15.63	-24	40
Age	Between Groups	661.216	2	330.608	1.69	.189	1	95	11.99	14.794	1.518	8.98	15.00	-24	40
	Within Groups	26081.777	133	196.104			2	31	17.29	12.765	2.293	12.61	21.97	-16	39
	Total	26742.993	135				3	10	12.60	8.303	2.626	6.66	18.54	1	24
							Total	136	13.24	14.075	1.207	10.86	15.63	-24	40
Education	Between Groups	48.340	2	24.170	.120	.887	1	37	14.22	14.303	2.351	9.45	18.98	-15	40
	Within Groups	26694.652	133	200.712			2	89	12.87	14.075	1.492	9.90	15.83	-24	40
	Total	26742.993	135				3	10	13.00	14.514	4.590	2.62	23.38	-16	35
							Total	136	13.24	14.075	1.207	10.86	15.63	-24	40
Research	Between Groups	915.956	2	457.978	2.36	.099	1	46	12.11	14.894	2.196	7.69	16.53	-23	39
	Within Groups	25827.037	133	194.188			2	64	11.89	13.564	1.695	8.50	15.28	-22	40
	Total	26742.993	135				3	26	18.58	13.045	2.558	13.31	23.85	-24	40
							Total	136	13.24	14.075	1.207	10.86	15.63	-24	40
Asian/ Western Countries	Between Groups	1537.618	1	1537.618	8.18	.005	0	38	8.03	13.206	2.142	3.69	12.37	-24	40
	Within Groups	24820.807	132	188.036			1	96	15.54	13.905	1.419	12.72	18.36	-22	40
	Total	26358.425	133				Total	134	13.41	14.078	1.216	11.00	15.82	-24	40

Source: *Authors*

For each of the variables examined in this study, a one-way ANOVA was employed. Relating to Hypothesis 1, the gender of the participants was analyzed based on their welfare score achieved. The analysis was conducted through a One-Way ANOVA, testing if the groups' (female/male) average welfare score differs from each other and thereby would prove that men and women have different attitudes towards elephant welfare. As can be seen from the Table 3, a p-level of 0.851 (as p>0.05) was determined by the analysis, meaning an insignificant difference in the mean of animal welfare scores between males and females. The descriptive statistics score for males (0) lies at 12.91 compared to females (1) who have an average score of 13.40.

The difference between those scores is small and therefore statistically not significant. Hence, H1o: There is no difference in animal welfare concern between genders, is accepted. Age was the second demographic data that was analyzed with the tourist animal-welfare-concern-score. The different age groups were classified into three groups (1= 18 - 24 years; 2= 25 – 44 years; 3= 45 or older). The ANOVA test shows a p-level of 0.189, finding an insignificant difference in animal welfare concern between the presented age groups. Therefore, Hypothesis 2o: Animal welfare sensitivity is dependent on age, is rejected (Table 3).

Connected to Hypothesis 3, the educational levels were grouped into three categories. Group

1 refers to an educational level from elementary school to high school/secondary school, Group 2 is comprised of Bachelor/Undergraduates, and Group 3 refers to a master degree or higher (Table 3). The ANOVA test identified a p-level of 0.887, concluding a statistically insignificant difference in animal welfare concern between the three levels of education. Thus, Hypothesis 3o: tourists with a higher level of education are more sensitive towards animal welfare than those with a lower level, has to be rejected. The three levels of research prior to the tourists' visit were coded into three groups (1= No research at all; 2= minimal; 3= substantial). The ANOVA analysis shows a p level of 0.099 (Table 3). When comparing the average scores between the research groups, the findings indicate that the highest average animal-welfare-concern score was achieved by the participants that conducted a lot of research prior to the trip (3) (18.58). Nevertheless, Hypothesis 4o: The more research or knowledge a person has before visiting an elephant park, the higher the animal welfare consideration, has to be rejected based on the statistical significance level of p<0.05, set by this paper.

To test Hypothesis 5o, the countries were coded into Asian (0) and Western (1) regions (Table 5). The ANOVA analysis showed a significance level of 0.05, detecting a statistically significant difference between animal welfare concern between Asian and Western participants. Hence, Hypothesis 5o: Tourists from Asian countries have less animal welfare concern than the ones from Western countries, is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore tourists' concern for animal welfare when participating in animal-based attractions. The study examined if tourists' concerns about animal welfare differ based on their gender, age, education, the time they invest in research prior to the visit, and their country of origin. Five hypotheses were developed to find answers to those questions, and their results are summarized below. Hypothesis 1o is based on prior research by Crotts and Erdmann (2000) and Phillips and McCulloch (2005), which states that gender does not influence concern for animal welfare. The findings in the analysis confirm the findings of prior research and accept that gender does not influence animal welfare concern. The most

popular activity for both genders was feeding elephants while the least popular for both genders was mahout/owner training. Both genders agreed that elephant shows provided the least enjoyment for them and the least comfort for the elephants. The only discrepancy which derived was that of the most popular activity which was recorded as feeding elephants for male participants (7.77) and bathing with elephants for female participants (7.59); nonetheless, their high enjoyment was balanced with their perception of these activities providing the most elephant comfort.

Hypothesis 2o explored a potentially significant difference in animal welfare concern between the different age groups. In prior research, this demographic variable was noted to have an impact on animal welfare consideration (Kang & Moscardo, 2006). However, the statistical analysis conducted in this study suggests no significant difference between the three age groups that were tested. The lowest participation from all age groups was mahout/owner training, while the most popular activity ranged from elephant back for those ages under 18 and feeding elephants for all respondents over the age of 24. Similar to the gender variable, a relationship was noted between the activities each age group found the least enjoyable, with the elephant comfort in the same activity. For those aged under 18 or over 45, elephant shows ranked lowest for both tourists and elephant, while those aged 25-44 ranked mahout/owner training as the lowest in enjoyment and comfort. Hypothesis 3o analyzed whether education level influenced tourists' concern for animal welfare. In the literature, education was cited as an important factor regarding tourists' perception (Kang &Moscardo, 2006). The present statistical analysis, however, showed no significant difference in the mean animal welfare consideration score between the three education groups.

Like the age variable, the educational level from which participants derived notes elephant back riding and feeding elephants as most popular. Whilst high school or below education participants stated elephant back riding as providing the least enjoyment for them and the least comfort for the elephant and Bachelor degree participants cited elephant shows as least enjoyable or comfortable for both, the Master's degree level participants reported bathing with elephants as the least enjoyable for them, but elephant shows as the lowest comfort level for the elephant.

Hypothesis 4o explored if the amount of research prior to the elephant site visit influences animal welfare considerations. According to the findings, there is no significant difference between the three groups at a $p<0.05$ level. However, this could have been indicative of the survey question which was posed. Participants had been asked how much they knew or researched about the elephant park camp, or sanctuary before visiting. They had not been asked to elaborate upon their knowledge or research. Therefore, while the hypothesis was rejected, further research must be conducted on this topic to truly gauge its relevance as a variable for testing animal welfare considerations.

Finally, Hypothesis 5o was tested, comparing the country variable (Asian vs. Western countries) to the animal welfare score. Prior research findings have pointed to different conclusions on this topic. Phillips and McCulloch (2005) and Phillips et al. (2012) found in their large-scale culture study on animal welfare a difference in attitude between Asian and Western (European) countries, while Kang and Moscardo (2006) found that Korean tourists showed higher environmental concern compared to the UK and Australian participants in their study.

The findings of this analysis found a statistically significant difference in animal welfare concern between the Western and Asian countries, showing a higher animal welfare concern from Western countries than from Asian countries. These results must be analyzed with caution as the number of Western participants greatly outweighed those from Asian countries. Further, as seen in the literature review, each country can have different perceptions about animals and animal welfare concerns which could have been skewed by grouping the countries into these two categories.

LIMITATIONS

There were various limitations in this initial attempt to examine animal welfare considerations by tourists when participating in elephant activities while on vacation. The first limitation was the amount of data obtained from the survey which could be linked to the high specificity of the target sample group and limited time to collect the data. Hence, data groups differed in sample size and, thereby, may have compromised the reliability of the findings. Further, the variety in nationality of the participants was noteworthy, yet not enough answers could be collected to make statements between specific countries. Hence, a more

profound analysis between participants or their countries of origin was not possible. A second limitation was the available literature on the topic. As scant research has been conducted on the topic of animal welfare in tourism, finding literature which added value to this paper proved challenging. There is a clear need for further research to be conducted on elephant tourism and the general animal tourism industry. Additionally, there are many opposing views in the industry with different theories and mind-sets in regards to how to handle the topic of animal treatment. This made it difficult to reach a consensus for "good" or "bad" practices as even experts hold different opinions. The lack of a specific theoretical framework to evaluate animal welfare was additionally challenging. It should further be noted that the topic of animal treatment, in general, is a sensitive topic, with varying opinions. A certain bias, therefore, could have influenced survey participants, the interviewee, or the authors themselves. Future research projects could be conducted either with anonymous surveys to allow for unbiased responses or through observation where animal welfare and tourist perceptions could be recorded.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Over the decades, human development has radically changed the world in which we live. From deforestation, hunting, poaching, over-fishing, and global warming, the animal kingdom has been forced to adapt from their natural habitats to human-made replacements. Animals which were once used to plow fields and move rocks are now being used for human pleasure as tourist attractions in exotic locations. In this exploratory paper, we have attempted to address one animal in the tourism industry, the Thai elephant, and tourists' perceptions of the animal welfare conditions put in place to protect these animals with dignity and respect. We raised two research questions at the beginning of the paper: RQ1 To what extent is animal welfare considered in the tourism industry?

As seen in the literature, animal-based tourism has witnessed a steady increase in demand with a growing diversity of activities offered to tourists. Overall, tourists appear to care about the treatment of the animals they encounter when choosing animal-based tourism sites and there seems to be a correlation between elephant comfort and welfare with the tourist's enjoyment of the activity. Further, the trend toward CSR actions and ethical, sustainable practices have

spread into the tourism industry beyond recycling or reusing a towel. Tourists could and should seek out sustainable alternatives which offer opportunities for education and action toward positive social change. In this paper, we tried to give a voice to those who have no voice. We need to continue on this path to ensure a sustainable future for us all.

RQ2 Do demographic differences influence the importance tourists attribute to animal welfare? This paper found a statistically significant difference between Asian and Western tourists in animal welfare concern, but no statistical differences between gender, age, educational level, or research prior to travel. While previous studies in the literature review showed mixed results in regards to these variables, this study showed few discrepancies between the demographic variables. It is not to say that differences don't exist; rather, it suggests the need to replicate this study on a much grander scale.

FUTURE STUDIES

It is suggested that these findings should be confirmed in future research with a larger sample base as well as other touristic activities including other animals. The findings of this paper further suggest a substantial interest from tourists in gaining more extensive knowledge of animals, their welfare, and protection. Research is suggested regarding the relationship between tourists' knowledge and their choice of animal-based touristic activity.

One of the goals of future research should be to create and distribute among tourists, ethical codes of conducts, such as the Animal Welfare in Tourism Code of Conduct by World Expeditions, or the Association of British Travel Agencies' (ABTA) guideline on elephants in captive environments. Lastly, it would be valuable to have more research on the relationship between tourists' enjoyment of an activity and the animal welfare standards of the facilities.

The paper suggests that tourist enjoyment of a particular activity could vary depending on that facility's animal welfare standards. To conclude, the study has important implications for the industry, as the ethical treatment of animals may become an important determinant of tourist demand for those activities.

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