

MOUNTAIN BIKERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS
MOUNTAIN BIKING TOURISM DESTINATIONS

BY

JULIE MOULARDE

A thesis
submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington as partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Tourism
Management

Victoria University of Wellington

2015

Abstract

This thesis, grounded in consumer culture theory, delves into the sociocultural dynamics involved in tourist attitude content and formation. It addresses gaps in special interest tourism, sports tourism and tourist attitudes towards destinations literatures and further knowledge of mountain biking tourism, a niche, but growing, market. Qualitative methods grounded in interpretivism were used to understand how mountain bikers purposefully traveling to mountain bike tourism destinations form attitudes towards these destinations. Twenty-five mountain bikers from Wellington who qualified as serious leisure participants and had previously travelled for the primary purpose of mountain biking were interviewed.

Social influence – through social ties, interactions and subcultural involvement – plays a central role in the respondents' travel motivations and information search process, and thus influences attitude formation, strength and content. Therefore, the respondents are grouped based on centrality of mountain biking identity and subsequent desire to align with the subculture, and differences in attitude formation processes are highlighted. The respondents hold positive attitudes towards most destinations, emphasizing the need to investigate attitude strength and degree of positivity. Four main evaluative dimensions of attitudes are detailed (adventurous, natural, social and utilitarian). It is established that attitudes towards tourism destinations are (1) a qualitative evaluation of the experience anticipated or enabled rather than a quantitative appraisal of attributes, (2) continuously adjusted from the point of naïve awareness onwards, and (3) most relevant and revealing when operationalised as holistic summary evaluations rather than interrelated components. Based on an increased understanding of attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations, their formation and mountain biking subculture, recommendations are drawn to better design, maintain and promote sites.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my supervisor Dr. Adam Weaver for his guidance and unwavering support through this year. His encouragements and his constant inquiries about the state of my research kept me moving forward. I do not think I would have been able to finish this thesis on time without our weekly meetings.

I would also like to recognise lecturers at Victoria University of Wellington who discussed my topic with me and provided clarity in the most obscure moments. Particularly AProf. Karen Smith for helping me narrow down my topic and Dr. Kate Daellenback for providing me with resources on the complex concept of attitudes.

Thank you to Megan Key (known as “Masters Mom” in RWW301) for her timely reminders and always providing answers to the most random questions. Without you, and the rest of the staff on level 10, we would surely be lost.

I have learned more than I thought I could during the last two years at Victoria University of Wellington. I will dearly (and strangely) miss having access to a world of knowledge through the library.

I am grateful for all the people who participated in this research by taking the time to share their experiences and making my work possible.

To my family: Thank you for everything you have ever done and continue to do for me, for believing in me when I stop believing in myself, and for loving me always.

To my friends: Thank you for bearing with me through this difficult time, I promise to never talk to you again about my research.

To the members of the 301 club: Good luck! If I did it, so can you.

A last word to thank ACC, a supporter of all mountain bikers in New Zealand. I will always remember typing my conclusion one-handed after breaking two bones in my left hand a month before my submission deadline, but at least I did not have to worry about hospital bills. I cannot wait to be back on my bike to go explore the world.

Table of contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 General introduction	1
1.2 Research background	1
1.3 Research context	2
1.4 Research questions	3
1.5 Structure	4
Chapter 2: Literature review	6
2.1 Introduction	6
2.2 Mountain bike tourism and mountain biking tourists	6
2.2.1 The rise of special interest tourism	6
2.2.2 Sports tourism	7
2.2.3 Mountain bike tourism	8
2.2.3.1 A developing niche	9
2.2.3.2 Motivations and characteristics of mountain bikers	9
2.3 Consumer attitudes	11
2.3.1 Consumer behaviour and the consumption process	11
2.3.2 Definition & conceptualisation	12
2.3.3 Attitudinal models & attitude research	15
2.3.4 Attitude formation	18
2.3.4.1 Functional and constructive views	17
2.3.4.2 Social influence	20
2.3.5 Summary	21
2.4 Attitudes in the context of recreational sports tourism	22
2.4.1 A Model of tourist attitudes	22
2.4.2 Methodologies	24
2.4.3 Parallel concepts	26
2.4.3.1 Destination image	26
2.4.3.2 Sense of place	26
2.4.4 Involvement and its outcomes	27

2.4.4.1	Serious leisure & recreation specialisation	28
2.4.4.2	Applicability to tourism	29
2.4.5	Social influence in special interest tourism	30
2.4.5.1	Sports subcultures and identities.....	30
2.4.5.2	Sports subcultural capital in tourism	31
2.5	Conceptual framework.....	32
Chapter 3: Methodology	35
3.1	Introduction	35
3.2	Research Paradigm.....	35
3.3	Research Design	37
3.3.1	Qualitative research.....	37
3.3.2	Semi-structured interviews and visual stimulus.....	38
3.3.3	The interview guide	38
3.3.4	Sampling.....	40
3.4	Data Collection	40
3.5	Data Analysis	41
3.5.1	Analysis techniques.....	42
3.5.2	Analysis framework.....	43
3.6	The unique position of the researcher as insider	46
3.7	Research merits and limitations	47
3.7.1	Merits.....	47
3.7.2	Challenges and limitations.....	48
Chapter 4: Contextualizing the respondents within a community: serious leisure and subculture	50
4.1	Introduction	50
4.2	Profile of respondents.....	50
4.2.1	Variation within the stratified sample	50
4.2.2	Evidence of serious leisure	55
4.2.2.1	Perseverance of participation	56
4.2.2.2	Progressions throughout long-term career	57
4.2.2.3	Significant personal effort.....	58
4.2.2.4	Durable benefits.....	59

4.2.2.5	Unique ethos shared with other participants.....	60
4.2.2.6	Social identification with the activity.....	61
4.2.3	From activity to identity: respondents' involvement in mountain biking.....	62
4.3	Mountain biking subculture, social identity centrality and gradations of seriousness.....	66
4.3.1	Evidence of subculture	66
4.3.2	Bonding over common experiences	68
4.3.3	A solo social sport	69
4.4	From serious leisure to special interest tourism	71
4.4.1	Influences of the subculture on mountain biking tourism	71
4.4.1.1	Motivation to travel	72
4.4.1.2	Mountain biking tourism: a social experience.....	73
4.4.2	Mountain biking tourism and subcultural capital	75
4.4.2.1	Identity confirmation	75
4.4.2.2	Travel stories	76
4.5	Summary of findings	78
Chapter 5: Attitude content and formation process		80
5.1	Introduction	80
5.2	Attitude content.....	80
5.2.1	Generally positive attitudes.....	80
5.2.2	Some negative attitudes	81
5.3	Attitude formation	83
5.3.1	Mountain biking tourism motivations	83
5.3.1.1	Motivations to mountain bike	83
5.3.1.2	Social motivations	84
5.3.1.3	Achieving mastery & seeking flow	85
5.3.1.4	Authentic adventure & escape	87
5.3.1.5	Increase subcultural capital	88
5.3.2	Information search	88
5.3.2.1	Supremacy of word-of-mouth	88
5.3.2.2	Media	92
5.3.2.3	Social media: between word-of-mouth and media	95
5.3.2.4	Internal search	95

5.3.3	External factors	100
5.4	Evaluation process	101
5.4.1	Continuous evaluations	101
5.4.2	Summary evaluations	103
5.4.3	Dimensions of attitudes: values and meanings in evaluations	103
5.4.3.1	Adventure: the “epic” factor.....	104
5.4.3.2	Hedonic natural environment.....	105
5.4.3.3	Social experience: presence and absence of others.....	107
5.4.3.4	Utilitarian: activity facilitation.....	109
5.4.3.5	Summary statement.....	112
5.4.4	Holistic flow	113
5.5	Summary of findings	115
Chapter 6: Conclusion & Implications		117
6.1	Introduction	117
6.2	The key role of subculture and social influence	118
6.2.1	Serious leisure in special interest tourism.....	118
6.2.2	Social influence from the subculture on attitudes and attitude formation 118	
6.2.3	The role of tourism in the mountain biking subculture	122
6.3	Implications for attitudinal research.....	123
6.3.1	The importance of tourist attitudes	123
6.3.2	Restructured conceptualisation of attitudes.....	124
6.3.3	Research methodology and future research	128
6.4	Practical implications and recommendations.....	130
6.5	Conclusion	132
Appendices		134
7.1	Appendix A: Interview guide	134
7.2	Appendix B: Projective exercise	139
7.3	Appendix C: Information sheet	145
7.4	Appendix D: Consent form	147
References		149

Illustrations

Figure 2.1 A model of consumer decision making.....	13
Figure 2.2 Multidimensionality of attitudinal models.....	18
Figure 2.3 Travel decision-making process.....	23
Figure 2.4 Mountain bikers' attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations.....	34
Figure 3.1 Analytical framework.....	44
Figure 4.1 Segmentation of the respondents along the casual to serious leisure continuum.....	63
Figure 6.1 Restructured framework: mountain bikers' attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations.....	125

1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Tourist consumption behaviour has received a lot of attention in the tourism literature in the last 40 years (Papadimitriou & Gibson, 2008). However, understanding of the travel-decision process, particularly some of the dynamic relationships between its components, is uneven (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010). This thesis examines the attitudes of special interest tourists towards destinations and thus contributes to several areas of research. First, it addresses the need for more comprehensive research on tourist attitudes, a concept central to consumption patterns but rarely studied in the tourism literature. Second, it focuses on a particular group of enthusiasts for a particular activity, contributing to special interest tourism knowledge. In particular, it investigates the attitudes of mountain bikers towards mountain bike destinations; therefore, it also advances understanding of active recreational sport tourists, an under-researched area in sports tourism. Lastly, the qualitative approach selected differs from the traditional quantitative methods in attitudinal research with the purpose of demonstrating that qualitative research is appropriate to investigate attitudes in niche tourism contexts. In addition to these academic advancements, the findings of this research aim to provide destination marketers and planners with a better understanding of mountain bikers' preferences and the factors influencing the formation of their attitudes towards mountain bike destinations.

This chapter starts by introducing the conceptual and theoretical background of the thesis, grounded in consumer culture. The next section explains the selection of the particular topic of mountain bike tourist attitudes. This is followed by the research objectives and research questions. Lastly, the structure of the thesis is presented.

1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Historically, tourism research has focused on quantifying flows of people and currencies related to travel. But as the importance of tourism increased to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors, new multidisciplinary approaches have been implemented to study tourism (Jennings, 2010). This thesis is grounded in consumer

culture theory (CCT). It investigates the phenomenon of mountain bike tourism using a fusion of perspectives from consumer behaviour, leisure studies, sociology and tourism research.

CCT refers to a range of theoretical perspectives with a common orientation, addressing “the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868). Although very few studies in the tourism literature refer to CCT, it can provide a useful background and framework for tourism research (Berger & Greenspan, 2008). Unlike many models of travel decision making, CCT examines the consumption experience itself (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and can “link the meanings of tourist consumption to broader cultural processes embedded in place and time” (Berger & Greenspan, 2008, p. 90). Consumption is linked to symbols and meanings which are embodied and negotiated by consumers according to the social situation they find themselves in, roles and relationships, and as such provides a frame for identity making and sharing (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Both tourism and sports can be understood in the context of CCT. Tourism destinations and experiences embody symbols, convey meanings and help construct identities (Berger & Greenspan, 2008). Participation in sport consumer cultures can also influence personal identities when participants are highly involved (Humphreys, 2011).

1.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT

This thesis addresses research gaps in sports tourism and tourist behaviour and intends to further knowledge of mountain biking tourism, a small, but growing, market targeted by an increasing number of destinations (TNZ, 2014). Cycling and mountain biking tourism has been identified as a special interest sector of interest by Tourism New Zealand among other niches such as golfing, skiing and hiking (TNZ, 2014). Evidence of increased interest for this sector was front and centre in New Zealand in May 2014 when the government made \$2.225 million available under the Tourism Growth Partnership for two mountain biking destination development projects in Christchurch and Rotorua, among a total of six projects receiving funding (Key, 2014). Sports tourism is considered a niche market but sports-related travel will continue to grow and diversify (Higham, 2005) and can be a path to economic development for many destinations (Green &

Chalip, 1998). However, competition is intense in the global market (Filo, Chen, King, & Funk, 2011) and destination managers need to understand destination appeal and tourist involvement in niche tourism in order to succeed.

Tourism is the consumption of travel experiences. Destination selection is often at the centre of tourist behaviour research (Driscoll, Lawson, & Niven, 1994), investigating concepts such as tourists' motivations, destination image perception and decision-making. However, there is a lack of understanding of, and research addressing, tourist attitudes towards destinations (Gnoth, 1997). This appears to leave an important gap in the understanding of tourist behaviour when considering that "attitude is one of the most critical, if not the most critical, topics of discussion in the development of a model for tourist motivation and behaviour" (Hsu et al., 2010, p. 285).

Psychographics such as attitudes and motivations can provide more accurate segmentation than demographics (Novelli, 2005) for destination marketers and planners, allowing them to tailor their offers to meet the demands of the tourists (Humphreys, 2011) in order to improve profitability and competitiveness. Sports and tourism are meaningful to participants and linked to personal benefits, social participation and social capital (Green & Jones, 2005). Based on this consideration, CCT provides a framework with which to examine the facets of sports tourism and the attitudes of sport tourists.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Attitudes and the process of attitude formation are of interest to researchers and managers looking at changing evaluations of, and preferences for, tourism products and services (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011). The main purpose of this thesis is to understand how mountain bikers purposefully traveling to mountain bike tourism destinations form attitudes towards these destinations. For this purpose, these research questions are addressed:

- What attitudes do mountain bikers hold towards mountain bike tourism destinations?
- How are these attitudes formed and what factors influence them?
- Is the mountain biking subculture one of these factors?

The first research question investigates the content of mountain bikers' attitudes towards mountain bike tourism destinations. This includes beliefs, emotions and behavioural predispositions held towards the destinations. It attempts to identify which elements are salient in destination preference. The second question focuses on attitude formation. This is particularly relevant to understand how tourism marketers and managers can influence tourist attitudes in order to increase awareness, interest, preference and loyalty. The last question examines the particular role of the mountain biking subculture in attitude formation. In CCT, consumption is used to create identities and social bonds, to fulfil needs for personal empowerment and self-actualisation. There is evidence that sport subcultures influence attitudes towards sport destinations (Humphreys, 2011); the existence of a strong mountain biking subculture (Hagen, 2013) suggests that social influence could be instrumental in attitude formation and maintenance.

1.5 STRUCTURE

This thesis is divided in six chapters, the first of which is this introduction. The next chapter presents a summary of the literature reviewed. It addresses relevant studies, models and concepts in the special interest and sports tourism literature, consumer behaviour, tourist behaviour, serious leisure and sports subcultures; it finishes with the introduction of a conceptual framework. The methodology followed during the research is described in chapter 3. It discusses the interpretivist approach and qualitative research methods, including the use of semi-structured interviews and a projective exercise. The combined deductive and inductive analytical process used is explained and the analytical framework is presented. This chapter also addresses the unique position of the researcher as an insider and describes the merits and limitations of the research. The following two chapters present the main findings and provide answers to the research questions. Chapter 4 starts out by profiling the respondents and then provides evidence of the relevance of the serious leisure continuum in this research. It delves into the varying involvement of the respondents in the mountain biking subculture and its influence on attitudes and attitude formation. Chapter 5 addresses attitude content and the stages of attitude formation observed in the interviews. Motivations, information search and evaluation processes are investigated. The conclusion chapter

summarises the major findings and remarks on their potential implications and relevance for attitude research and managers in mountain biking tourism destinations.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes four main sections, after this introduction, organised around the concepts interconnected by this research. The second section introduces mountain biking tourism in the context of special interest, or niche, tourism and more particularly sports tourism. It also describes some of the characteristics of mountain bikers based on previous literature. The third section defines and conceptualises consumer attitudes. It presents models of attitude formation processes and related theories. The following section focuses on attitudes and attitudinal concepts in the context of tourism and particularly sports tourism. Existing models, parallel concepts and methodologies used to study tourist attitudes in previous studies are introduced. The applicability of the concepts of serious leisure and social influence in sports tourism is also highlighted. The last section summarises relevant evidence and concepts from the literature reviewed and introduces the conceptual framework on which the remainder of the research is based.

2.2 MOUNTAIN BIKE TOURISM AND MOUNTAIN BIKING TOURISTS

2.2.1 The rise of special interest tourism

Tourists have become a more discerning public since the 1990s with increased income and available leisure time. They are actively shaping their experiences and are seeking meaning centred around personal enrichment, adventure and education (Weiler & Hall, 1992).

The term *special interest tourism* was developed in contrast to mass tourism (Novelli, 2005). Also known as niche tourism, it describes a range of travel forms (e.g., cruise or cycle tourism), destination preferences (e.g., rural or island tourism) and purposes or experiences (e.g., adventure or culinary tourism) that are designed for, and promoted to, small specialised groups (Douglas, Douglas, & Derrett, 2001; Novelli, 2005). In special interest tourism, the interest is at the core of the decision-making process and travel experience (Weiler & Hall, 1992).

To respond to the diversification of demand and changing tourism consumption patterns, destinations try to differentiate themselves and entice high-spending tourists by developing diversified niche tourism products (Novelli, 2005; Weiler & Hall, 1992). The targeted niche markets are segmented based on their specialised interests, needs and desire for particular experiences. Sports tourism is an example of special interest tourism with growing demand (Higham, 2005).

2.2.2 Sports tourism

Sports and leisure provide a motive to escape from the mundane environment and to seek personal rewards (Ryan, 2003). In the 1980s and 1990s in Western societies the outdoors became the ground of active sports rather than solely relaxation (Weiler & Hall, 1992), leading sports to take centre stage in tourism demand and patterns. A leisure trip away from the traveller's local environment qualifies as sports tourism when sports involvement is a primary travel purpose and a determining factor in destination choice (Gibson, 2006; Kim, Kim, & Ritchie, 2008). Under the umbrella of sports tourism are three main niches: event sports tourism (spectating), nostalgia sports tourism (veneration of places or individuals) and active sports tourism (recreational or competitive) (Gibson, 2006; Higham, 2005).

Sports tourism research has mostly focused on events and spectatorship, with limited attention given to active sports tourism, particularly recreational participation (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Novelli, 2005). A few single-activity sports holiday types have been studied, particularly skiing/snowboarding, golfing, surfing and mountaineering/hiking (Weed & Bull, 2012). Existing studies have focused on sports tourism as a purpose rather than a behaviour (Weed & Bull, 2012), demonstrating "a tendency to examine the activity itself rather than the meanings, norms and values of the individual undertaking the activity" (Gibson, 2006, p. 33). Several recent sports tourism studies are now urging researchers to move beyond models of participation versus non-participation and integrate concepts from wider fields of literature and investigating motivations, destination choice and consumption patterns (Gibson, 2006; Green & Jones, 2005; Shipway & Jones, 2007).

This research is targeting some of the gaps found in the literature by investigating recreational mountain bike tourists. The next subsection presents the definition of this niche, its economic interest and some relevant previous research on the topic.

2.2.3 Mountain bike tourism

In the leisure and sports tourism literature, cycling tourism has received growing attention as planners and policy-makers recognise the economic potential of cycling and develop supporting infrastructures (Lamont, 2009). Cycling tourism encompasses any holiday when cycling is perceived as an integral part of the experience by tourists, whether participants are occasional cyclists or cycling enthusiasts (Douglas et al., 2001). However, there is a broader heterogeneity within that group related cycling technology improvements as well as trip length, purpose and cycling activities (Douglas et al., 2001; Lamont, 2009). Indeed, it seems common sense that a road cyclist devotee following the Tour de France, a family cycling the Otago Central Rail Trail in New Zealand and a mountain biker practicing his jumping skills in Whistler, Canada have limited similarities from a consumer behaviour perspective.

Mountain biking is a subcategory under the cycling tourism umbrella. It is a physically and mentally challenging sport which requires technical skills and is practiced in remote and sometimes unfamiliar terrain (Taylor, 2010). Siderelis, Naber, and Leung (2010, p. 574) define mountain biking as “the sport of riding durable bikes with special riding gear off-road, usually over rough terrain along narrow trails that wind through forests, mountains, deserts or fields.” Based on the basic elements of cycling tourism provided by Lamont (2009) and special interest tourism by Gibson (2006), mountain bike tourism is defined in this study as follow:

Trips of at least 24 hours away from a person’s home environment for which active participation in mountain biking for recreation purpose is the primary motivation and determining factor in destination choice.

2.2.3.1 A developing niche

Mountain biking started in the 1970s and is one of the most popular sports worldwide. Over 8.5 million Americans participated in mountain biking in 2013 (Outdoor Foundation, 2014) and the industry contributed \$26 billion to the US economy in 2008 (Taylor, 2010). Mountain biking is more popular and practiced more frequently in the U.S. than skiing, snowboarding, fly fishing, rock climbing, mountaineering, kayaking (Outdoor Foundation, 2014) and many other sports that have received considerably more exposure in the leisure, sports and tourism literatures.

Purpose-built mountain biking sites are increasing participation and purpose-specific travel (Taylor, 2010). Eighty percent of American mountain bikers indicated they take at least one overnight trip each year for the main purpose of mountain biking (People for Bikes, 2014). In Colorado, renowned for its trails, mountain bikers contributed an estimated \$25 million to the local economy (People for Bikes, 2014). In Oregon, also a popular mountain bike destination, over half of the visitors cited mountain biking as their primary motivation and another quarter said it was one of their main motivations (Runyan, 2012). In Whistler, one of the mountain biking meccas of the world, “total visitor spending [. . .] attributable to mountain biking exceeded \$34.3 million over the period June 4 to September 17, 2006” (MBTA, 2006).

2.2.3.2 Motivations and characteristics of mountain bikers

Mountain biking is thus a popular, fast-growing and money-generating tourism niche. However, very few studies on mountain biking as a sport and mountain biking tourism could be found. Relevant findings from these studies and findings from related fields of research are reported in this section.

Taylor (2010) studied mountain bikers in Nelson, New Zealand. Their motivations for participation included: novelty, fun and excitement, fitness, mastery, out-of-the-ordinary experiences, access to wilderness, flow, mental and physical escape. The focus of a day's ride varied between particular trail characteristics (skills & thrills), reaching a destination, or aesthetic values (site attributes). He also found out that many mountain bikers were motivated by the social aspects of the activity and interpersonal rewards through the sense of belonging and personal identity achieved through participation.

In sports tourism in particular, the dimensions of challenge and skills influence destination choice, expectations and satisfaction (Ryan, 2003). Participants strive to reach a condition of *flow*, “characterised by complete absorption in what one does” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 89), implying intense focus, an optimal level of arousal, heightened sense of being, in harmony with the environment. It is a “state of being that is so rewarding one does it for no other reason than to be a part of it” (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 4). Flow occurs when the abilities of the participant meet the challenges of the activity and results in personal satisfaction (Weiler & Hall, 1992). It is a dynamic and delicate equilibrium: too much challenge leads to anxiety and fear, while too little challenge leads to boredom. This state of flow, also known as peak experience, is often a primary motive for participation in physical activities such as mountain biking and can be an intrinsic motivation for sports tourism (Higham, 2005).

In sports tourism, as in adventure tourism, it is the activity that is the main attraction rather than the settings which are often the dominant appeal in other forms of tourism (Weiler & Hall, 1992). Destinations simply provide opportunities for the desired experiences to occur. The desire to pursue the specific activity of mountain biking is at the core of the holiday choice, however not all tourists will seek the same experience. Based on their literature review, Weiler and Hall (1992) suggest that in sports tourism less skilled participants look for escape (extrinsic motivation) while more experienced participants will seek exhilaration, personal challenge and skill improvement (intrinsic motivation).

There is a lack of research on the various categories of cycle tourism – including motivations, involvement, behaviours and destination preferences of particular segments such as mountain bikers – which limits the potential effectiveness of marketing and product development initiatives. This research is attempting to provide increased understanding of mountain bikers travelling for the main purpose of mountain biking by specifically looking at their attitudes towards destinations, i.e. their destination preferences.

2.3 CONSUMER ATTITUDES

The concept of attitudes has been at the core of consumer behaviour research since its inception in the 1930s (Foxall, 2005). Attitude researchers suggest that consumers' preferences, decisions and actions reasonably follow from attitudes (Albarracin, Johnson, & Zanna, 2005; Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012; Schiffman, 2011; Um & Crompton, 1990). They "prefigure, predict and cause consumer behaviors" (Foxall, 2005, p. 2), from the clothes we buy to the political party we favour and from oral hygiene habits to preferred tourism destinations. In some disciplines *attitudes* are known under different names (Bagozzi, Gurhan-Canli, & Priester, 2002). For example, attitudes towards categories of people can be *prejudices* or *favouritism*, attitudes towards the self are *self-esteem*, attitudes towards ideas are *opinions* and attitudes towards tourism destinations are *preferences*.

This section is focusing on consumer attitudes as a concept in the consumer behaviour and social science literature. First, a short overview of the consumption process is provided in order to contextualise attitudes; attitudes are then defined and conceptualised. Third, models of attitudes are introduced and critiqued. The last subsection addresses attitude formation processes and known influences.

2.3.1 Consumer behaviour and the consumption process

The process of consumption starts when the consumer experiences *needs*, i.e., when there is a perceived discrepancy between actual state and desired state (Solomon, Russell-Bennett, & Previte, 2013). The desired end-states targeted by needs and desires are *goals*; they direct if, when, and how, action is taken. The identification of a goal creates a *motive*, "an internal psychological force that impels a person to engage in an action designed to satisfy the need" (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012, p. 25). Motives have a pivotal role in determining behaviour by motivating or limiting the complexity, intensity and direction of cognitive processing (Albarracin et al., 2005).

Once a need is recognised and a goal is established, a consumer enters the *information search* phase (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2006). The information processed is external or internal, often a combination of both. The next step is to evaluate alternatives gathered during information search using evaluative criteria to compare different options and determine attributes most likely to satisfy the need or desire (Blackwell et

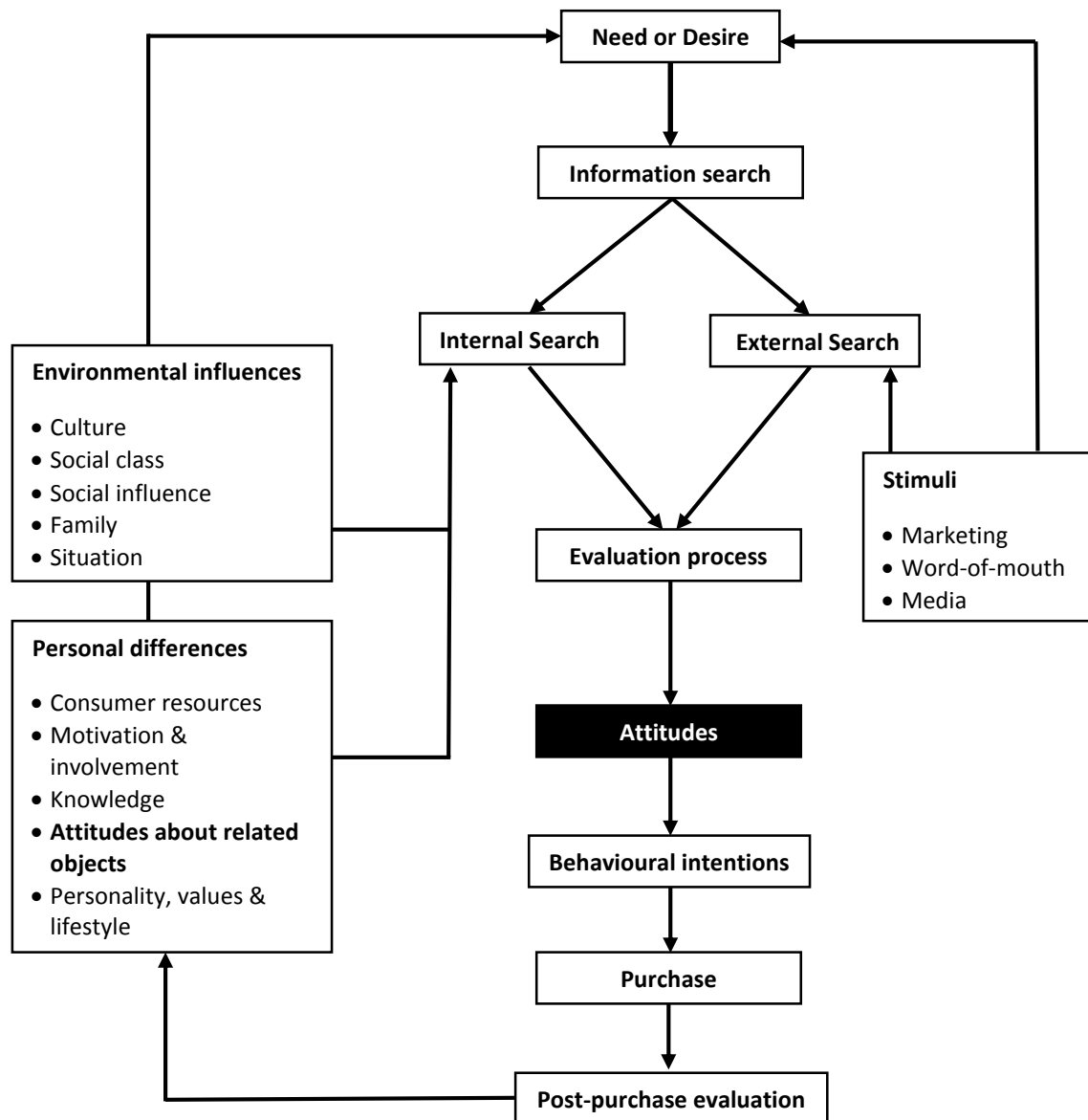
al., 2006; Solomon et al., 2013). It is during the evaluation process that attitude towards the product or service is formed or retrieved (Albarracin et al., 2005). Ultimately, attitudes are believed to precede *behavioural intentions* and actual *behaviour* (e.g., purchase) (Albarracin et al., 2005; Solomon et al., 2013).

Figure 2.1 is a composite of three separate models by Schiffman (2011), Blackwell et al. (2006) and Solomon et al. (2013) depicting various stages of the consumer decision process. It contextualises attitudes within the complex process of consumer decision making, between *evaluation process* and *behavioural intentions*. Attitudes towards an object can only exist once the individual is aware of the object, but the greater the need or desire and the more multifaceted the information search process, the stronger and more complex the attitudes are likely to be. Attitudes are part of a system, not a stand-alone concept. Existing attitudes can influence future decisions about related or similar objects. In Figure 2.1, the *personal differences* box includes the notion of *attitudes towards related objects*, which will be further detailed in section 2.3.3.

2.3.2 Definition & conceptualisation

Despite the centrality of the concept of attitude in consumer behaviour, there has been little consensus on the definition of this concept. Early definitions described attitudes as “a mental and neural state of readiness” (Allport, 1935, p.810, in Foxall, 2005, p. 13) or as “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1995, p.6 in Foxall, 2005, p. 13). More recently, attitudes have been conceptualised as summary evaluations, evaluative judgements or evaluative categorisation (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011; Bagozzi et al., 2002; Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012; Schiffman, 2011). This is the conceptualisation used in this research.

Figure 2.1: A model of consumer decision making



Attitudes always have a target (an individual holds an attitude towards something) called the *attitude object*. Involvement is a motivational construct describing the perceived relevance of an object (product, service or situation) to an individual's values and interests (Solomon et al., 2013). The level of involvement of the individual with the attitude object affects his/her degree of commitment to attitudes towards the object (Solomon et al., 2013). In turn, commitment to attitudes influences attitude strength and durability. The more committed the individual is to his/her attitudes, the less receptive he/she will be to stimuli, therefore the more durable the attitudes are. Table 2.1 summarises the degrees of involvement with attitude objects and their implications towards attitude commitment, strength and durability.

Table 2.1: Attitude commitment, strength and durability

Involvement with attitude object	Commitment	Attitude strength	Attitude durability
Low	Compliance (lowest commitment)	Weak. Held to gain rewards or avoid punishment.	Situational. Individuals are easily influenced and look for acceptance.
Moderate	Identification	Medium. Held to emulate a referent.	Situational. Based on the attitude towards referent.
High	Internalisation (highest commitment)	Strong. Integrated with personal value system	Durable. Held with conviction.

Source: Based on Kimmel and Kimmel (2012) and Solomon et al. (2013)

Attitude valence – positive, negative or neutral (Blackwell et al., 2006) – translates as an inclination or predisposition to behave in a particular way to a given object (Foxall, 2005), while attitude strength and durability influence the consistency between attitudes and that behaviour (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012). In early attitudinal research, attitudes were often defined as enduring and consistent (Solomon et al., 2013), however it is now largely accepted that attitude commitment, strength, durability and even valence can change depending on circumstances (Schiffman, 2011).

2.3.3 Attitudinal models & attitude research

Several models linking attitudes to behaviour have been adopted in the past. This research does not investigate the attitude-behaviour link, but explores attitudes formation and content. However, it is essential to recognise how the various models may have affected attitude research and conceptualisation in the past.

Starting in the 1950s, multiattribute models were used to measure attitudes towards objects as the sum of the beliefs about an object weighted by the evaluation of these beliefs (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012) using multiple differential scales (Bagozzi et al., 2002). These models are the most widely applied measurement of attitudes because they are straightforward and suggest direct implications for changing attitudes (Bagozzi et al., 2002).

Later, multidimensional models were developed to address critiques of multiattribute models as over-simplifying consumer behaviour and assuming rational decision making (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012). Multidimensionality is both (1) inter-attitudinal when the attitude is formed as a set of distinct evaluations and (2) intra-attitudinal when the attitude is composed of distinct elements (Albarracin et al., 2005; Bagozzi et al., 2002).

The consumer decision process shown in Figure 2.1 and explained earlier is an example of inter-attitudinal model. Attitudes are part of a broader system in which attitudes towards related objects (in bold in the *personal differences* box) influence needs and desires (e.g., attitude towards traveling), information search (e.g., attitude towards TripAdvisor) and the evaluation process (e.g., attitude towards camping) (Albarracin et al., 2005). Thus, ultimately attitudes towards new objects are determined by attitudes towards related objects previously evaluated (Solomon et al., 2013). This is known as social judgement theory and implies a confirmation bias when evaluating new objects (Schiffman, 2011).

Intra-attitudinal multidimensionality refers to the components of attitudes. Multiattribute models only considered beliefs about object attributes or outcomes as drivers of attitudes. However, recent research acknowledges the importance of emotions and purpose in consumer behaviour (Solomon et al., 2013). The most common intra-attitudinal frameworks is the tri-component model (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012). It

conceptualises attitudes as the interrelation of three components (Albarracin et al., 2005; Schiffman, 2011):

- The cognitive component contains beliefs about the object (attributes or expected outcomes)
- The affective component includes emotions, drives, feelings and instincts
- The conative component captures the tendency towards a specific action in regard to the object (behaviour or behavioural intentions)

Kimmel and Kimmel (2012, pp. 156-157) explain the reasoning behind the multidimensional conceptualisation of attitudes:

“Attitudes may be based on or expressed by what a person knows or believes about an attitude object [. . .]; the feelings, moods and emotions associated with an attitude object [. . .]; or how a person intends to act (or has acted in the past) towards the attitude object [. . .]. Although attitudes are often based on beliefs, simply knowing what a consumer thinks or believes about a particular product [. . .] typically is not enough to determine his or her attitude, or evaluation of the product in a favourable or unfavourable way.”

The components are interactive but fundamentally different (Baloglu, 1998; Gnoth, 1997) and their relative importance depends on personal involvement with the attitude object (Solomon et al., 2013). According to cognitive dissonance theory, individuals strive for consistency in their evaluative judgements and thus attitude components usually have the same valence (positive, neutral or negative) (Albarracin et al., 2005). For example, the preference for specific attributes in a destination will lead to positive emotions towards destinations with these attributes. Similarly, positive emotions towards a destination (e.g., after several friends expressed their satisfaction) will lead to its attributes being evaluated under a positive bias.

Multidimensionality of attitudinal models suggests breadth (inter-attitudinal models) and depth (intra-attitudinal models). Figure 2.2 is provided as a summary of the multidimensionality of attitude models and is based on a simplified version of Figure 2.1. Elements in blue are steps from the consumer decision process as described in section 2.3.1. The dashed-line green rectangle contains an inter-attitudinal

multidimensional model; the green elements indicate the influence of attitudes towards related objects (social judgement theory). The dashed-line orange rectangle highlights the multidimensional intra-attitudinal model and encompasses the three components of attitudes – the orange arrows representing the influence of cognitive dissonance on the interrelated components. Inter-attitudinal models have been widely applied in tourism research (e.g., the travel decision model), however intra-attitudinal models such as the tri-component model are popular in theory, but have rarely been used in empirical tourism studies (Bagozzi et al., 2002).

2.3.4 Attitude formation

Because attitudes are linked to concepts such as purchase intentions, satisfaction, loyalty and word-of-mouth (Schiffman, 2011), attitude formation and change have been of fundamental interest to scholars and practitioners. Attitudes are formed through conditioning or complex learning processes (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012) when consumers seek to satisfy a need (Schiffman, 2011). There are two main schools of thought regarding attitude formation introduced below: functional or constructive views. Both views account for social influence in attitude formation which is discussed subsequently.

2.3.4.1 *Functional and constructive views*

Under the functional view, attitudes are considered to be "stable object-related association[s] stored then evoked in memory" (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011, p. 431). It is based on the belief that attitudes have *functions* that help consumers cope with their environment (Arnould, Price, & Zinkhan, 2004). Attitude functions represent the purpose of holding the attitude for the individual, not the function of the attitude objects nor the attitude content (Albarracin et al., 2005). Table 2.2 summarises the four main attitude functions. In general, all attitudes serve the primary function of knowledge (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011). However, they often fulfil multiple and varying functions depending on situational parameters.

Figure 2.2: Multidimensionality of attitudinal models

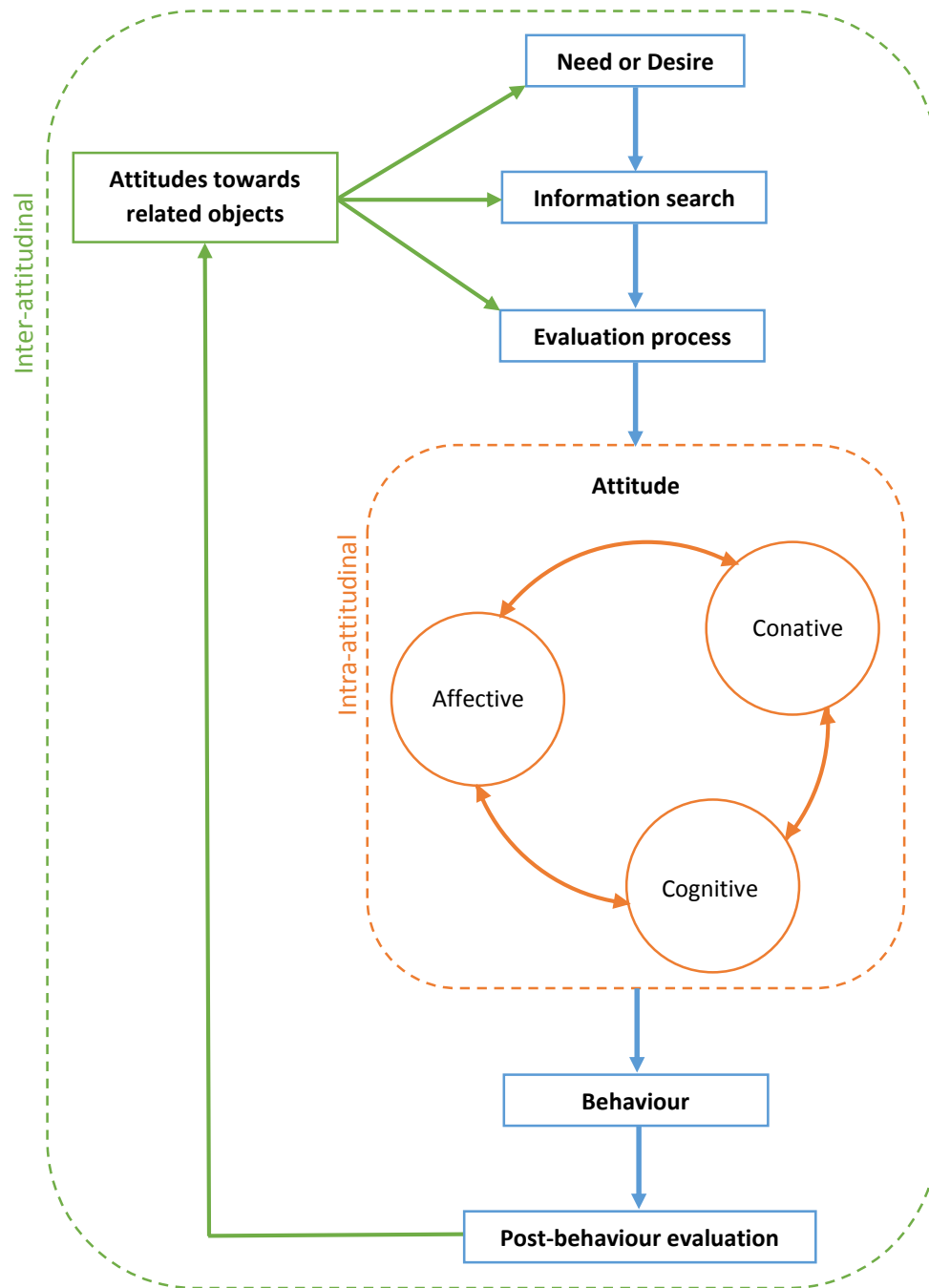


Table 2.2: Functions of consumer attitudes

Attitude function	Description	Example in tourist attitudes
Utilitarian	Attitudes are used as a method to obtain rewards and to minimise punishments	A tourist expresses a positive attitude towards an attraction to gain special attention from an employee
Knowledge	Attitudes are held to provide order, reduce ambiguity and to simplify the decision-making processes	A tourist prefers to travel by train because of news stories about the higher risk of car accidents during long weekends
Value-expressive	Attitudes express the holder's core values, self-concept and beliefs to others	A tourist favours an eco-lodge that supports her environmentally-conscious values
Ego-defensive	Defence mechanism to avoid certain personal truths about themselves and to support self-esteem	A tourist's desire to bungee jump because it projects a "daring" image and draws attention from peers

Source: based on Kimmel and Kimmel (2012, p. 155)

According to the constructive view, attitudes are purely situational. They are temporary evaluations of objects "constructed *in situ* at the time of judgement" (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011, p. 431). The individual's goals at the time the evaluation occurs determine how information is processed (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011). This attitude formation view focuses on perceptions and transient affective states rather than internalised beliefs and suggests a heuristic evaluation process (Albarracin et al., 2005).

Viewing attitudes as stored evaluations or entirely situational influences attitude research. However, both the functional and constructive views recognise that attitudes are context-dependent: situational factors influence the retrieval of associations or *in situ* evaluations (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011). It has been suggested that different situations might trigger different attitude formation processes. For example, Cohen and Reed II (2006) explain that novices are more influenced by the context, while experts are more likely to process internal information. Therefore, they recommend that attitude research should focus on situational parameters and consumers' motives and goals. Among the situational factors influencing attitude formation, social influence is pivotal in both the functional and constructive views.

2.3.4.2 Social influence

Kimmel and Kimmel (2012, p. 154) explain the relevance of attitudes in social interactions: “one of the reasons we hold (or at least express) certain attitudes is to define who we are to others (i.e., the value expressive function), which assist us in defining our relationships to important social groups”. Attitudes express values and preferences and help individuals conform with social norms and guide social interactions (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011).

Social influence is “the processes by which an individual’s attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviours are influenced by group members” (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012, p. 232) and has a greater impact on consumer behaviour than traditional marketing and advertising. It can originate from a culture, subculture or reference group. Cultures include the values, norms, ideas, attitudes, meanings, symbols and artefacts that are shared by societal members and shape their behaviour (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012; Moutinho, 1987). A subculture is a group of people sharing a similar commitment to specific values, norms, beliefs and attitudes that set them apart from the dominant culture (Hagen, 2013). Reference groups are small, informal groups with which members interact frequently (such as family, close friends or clubs) (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012). They can be “any person or group that serves as a point of comparison (or reference) for an individual in forming either general or specific [. . .] attitudes” (Schiffman, 2011, p. 265).

Social influence can create awareness, guide information search and encourage adoption of attitudes towards specific objects or a category of objects when they have been approved by the group (Moutinho, 1987). There are two main categories of social influence: normative and comparative. Normative influence occurs when an individual is trying to fulfil expectations of others (actual, imagined or implied) and affects broadly defined values or behaviour; it is mostly evident in conspicuous consumption situations (Arnould et al., 2004; Schiffman, 2011). Comparative or informational influence is a form of social consensus and conveys validity for object-specific attitudes and behaviours (Moutinho, 1987; Solomon et al., 2013). To simplify, individuals *conform to* normative influence (social norms) to fulfil a need to belong and *agree with* comparative influence (social reality) to fulfil a need for knowledge (Schiffman, 2011).

Socialisation into subcultures is dominated by consumption: members learn the correct patterns of consumption through normative and comparative influences in order to display an accepted social identity within the subculture through accumulation of subcultural capital (Hagen, 2013). The concept of cultural capital was introduced by Bourdieu (1977, in Humphreys, 2011) who explained that symbolic knowledge and resources are drawn upon to achieve status within specific fields. Thus subcultural capital, adapted from the concept of cultural capital, is the “currency measuring the value of individuals’ knowledge, credibility, and identification with a subculture” (Gibson, 2006, p. 41). It can be embodied (knowledge and skills), objectified (in symbolic objects) or institutionalised (recognised qualification) and is operationalised through judgement, knowledge and norms (Humphreys, 2011), denoting its connexions to social influence.

2.3.5 Summary

It can be summarised that attitudes are evaluative judgements combining cognitive, affective and conative components that result from a range of cognitive processes dependent on consumers’ motives, goals and situational factors. Defining attitudes as evaluations is intended to emphasise both attitude content, a static notion, and the process underpinning their formation. Argyriou and Melewar (2011, p. 446) emphasise that there is no single accepted process of attitude formation and that it is characteristic of its richness as a concept. Social interactions are at the core of attitude formation, as individuals strive to learn from their peers and display attitudes to encourage social inclusion and increase their self-esteem. Goals, motives, situational factors, social influence and related attitudes influence the information search and evaluation processes; it can also lead to variations in attitude valence, function and strength (Albarracin et al., 2005; Argyriou & Melewar, 2011; Solomon et al., 2013).

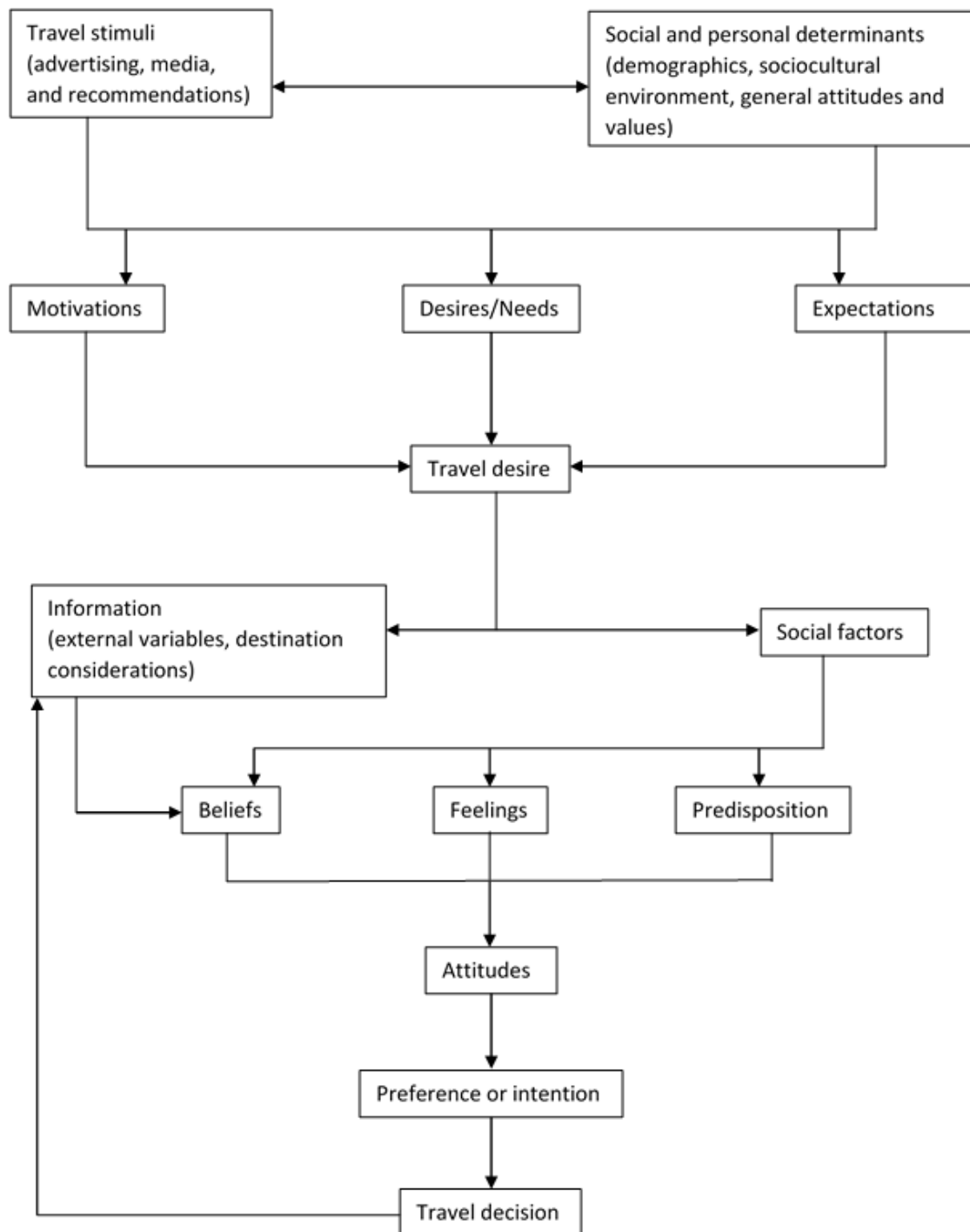
2.4 ATTITUDES IN THE CONTEXT OF RECREATIONAL SPORTS TOURISM

2.4.1 A Model of tourist attitudes

The conceptualisation of tourism as the consumption of travel experiences led to the application of consumer behaviour theories in tourism research (Moutinho, 1987) such as motivation and satisfaction. However, attitudes, a core concept in consumer behaviour, are a relatively rare occurrence in the tourism literature. Some past studies include research on students' attitudes towards the tourism industry (Richardson & Butler, 2012), residents' attitudes towards tourism development (Ribeiro, Valle, & Silva, 2013) and the attitudes of tourism professionals towards tourism policies (Kitterlin & Moll, 2013). Even though spatial settings can be attitude objects (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001) research on tourist attitudes, particularly towards tourism destinations, has been sporadic.

Tourist attitudes are defined as “predispositions or feelings towards a vacation destination or service” (Moutinho, 1987, p. 19) and indicate the preference for, and the intention to travel to, a destination. They have been conceptualised as evaluations based on cognitive (beliefs about the destinations), affective (emotions and values attached to the destinations) and conative (action tendency towards the destination) components (Baloglu, 1998; Lee, 2009; Moutinho, 1987). Tourist attitudes have been contextualised as a key step within the travel decision-making process, as illustrated in Figure 2.3. Attitudes towards tourism destinations are formed in the process of satisfying a need or desire and are the result of evaluation of information and influential factors about destinations. Moutinho (1987) stipulates that in the travel decision-making process attitudes are formed towards a range of alternatives until one is preferred and chosen.

Figure 2.3: Travel decision-making process



Source: Based on Moutinho (1987)

Researchers have addressed the influence on the evaluation process of external, situational and personal factors (Bergin-Seers & Mair, 2009; Sæþórsdóttir, 2010) as well as destination attributes, characteristics and images (Hsu et al., 2010; Lee, 2009). Internal (personal characteristics, motives, values, attitudes towards related objects) and external inputs (direct experience, promotional material and social influence) leading to attitude formation have also been investigated (Um & Crompton, 1990) as well as the role of attitudes in predicting tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Baloglu, 1998; Nyaupane, Paris, & Teye, 2011).

The role of attitudes in the tourist consumption processes is thus understood theoretically but research on tourist attitudes is still sporadic (Hsu et al., 2010), particularly the attitudes of active sports tourists. Only a handful of studies address the attitudes of sports tourists towards destinations, mostly in the context of sports events such as attitude change towards a destination after the Olympic Games (Hede, 2005) or the influence of event participation on attitudes towards a destination (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007).

Considering the recognised importance of attitudes in consumer behaviour research, the lack of consideration for tourist attitudes appears to leave a considerable gap in the understanding of tourist behaviour. Gnoth (1997) suggested that, based on the study of tourism in psychological and sociological terms, attitudes should be a central topic in the development of a model for tourist behaviour. A small number of scholars have tried to address this gap but have encountered methodological issues. They are addressed in the next section.

2.4.2 Methodologies

Consumer attitudes are rich, complex constructs (Gnoth, 1997). However, attitudinal research in the field rarely addresses or conveys this complexity. Previously, in the wider consumer behaviour literature and in tourism research, attitudinal research has primarily focused on the cognitive component of attitudes and applied structured quantitative methods (Bagozzi et al., 2002; Hosany, 2012). The majority of studies on tourist attitudes have used standardised destination attributes selected by researchers based on previous literature (Kang & Moscardo, 2006; Nyaupane et al., 2011; Sæþórsdóttir, 2010) or from a preliminary qualitative phase, including focus groups

(Driscoll et al., 1994; Hsu et al., 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007), consultation travel agents and academics (Hede, 2005; Mohsin, 2005; Um & Crompton, 1990), or content analysis of marketing and user-generated material (Baloglu, 1998). Usually, participants are then asked to rate the preselected attributes on Likert-type or semantic differential scales (Hsu et al., 2010).

As a result, tourist attitude research has generally been focused on destination attributes that are directly observable and measurable (Hsu et al., 2010; Kang & Moscardo, 2006; Mohsin, 2005; Um & Crompton, 1990). This is true as well in active sports tourism research where site characteristics and layout are considered at the core of the destination selection process (Siderelis et al., 2010). However, researchers have recently started to recognise the importance of emotions in decision-making and their influence on holistic attitudes (Bagozzi et al., 2002). As Filo et al. (2011, pp. 17-18) stated, “strictly focusing on the utilitarian attributes of the destination may be too narrow an approach, given that hedonic attributes have been found to have a stronger influence on people’s behaviour.” This seems to be particularly relevant when considering tourist attitudes since tourism is a pleasure-seeking, hedonic activity where experiences controlled by the individual, rather than the object itself (destination), fulfil needs and goals (Gnoth, 1997). Some researchers asked respondents to rate emotions on Likert-type scales, but these studies only provided a limited understanding of the affective component of tourist attitudes (Baloglu, 1998; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). According to Bergin-Seers and Mair (2009), studying tourist attitudes also means understanding tourists’ goals, lifestyles and behaviour as well as external influences and cultural norms. This suggests a considerably larger and more complex area of research than what has been addressed previously in most tourist attitude studies.

In summary, tourist attitudes research has relied on quantitative methods and has focused on destination attributes, overlooking emotional elements and holistic evaluations, assuming objectivity and homogeneity of populations studied. Tourism is highly experiential by nature but special interest tourism consumption in particular is driven by emotions and should be viewed beyond rational decision-making processes from the general consumer behaviour literature (Trauer, 2006). Therefore, it is surprising that very few tourist attitudes studies have relied on qualitative

methodologies (Humphreys, 2011), considering they allow individuals to articulate their views and explain the experiences they seek in their own words rather than rating an *a priori* list of attributes (Jenkins, 1999).

2.4.3 Parallel concepts

Research on tourist attitudes has been sparse but destination image and sense of place have both been studied as attitudinal concepts in the context of travel decision-making and leisure. Relevant implications are explained in this section.

2.4.3.1 *Destination image*

Destination image is a popular topic in tourism research and is defined as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination” (Crompton, 1979, p.18 in Klabi, 2012, p. 311). It is unanimously recognised as one of the most influential factors in destination choice (Lee, 2009), however its role relative to attitudes varies in the literature. Some scholars suggest that destination image has an indirect influence on tourist decisions (Hsu et al., 2010; Um & Crompton, 1990). In this view, destination image is a type of belief that the attitude is built on.

Alternatively, destination image is sometimes perceived as a holistic construct and conceptualised in remarkably similar ways to tourist attitudes towards destinations, to the point of confusion (Sirgy & Su, 2000). This is evident in the description of the cognitive, affective and conative components of destination image by Dann (1996). He further suggests that destination image is shaped by needs and motives and guide destination choice. In essence, Dann bypasses the concept of attitudes altogether. Accordingly, in many destination selection models, the concept of attitude is replaced by that of perceptions and appraisals of destination images (Baloglu, 1998).

2.4.3.2 *Sense of place*

In sports tourism there is a synergy between destination and activity (Filo et al., 2011). Sports relying on natural resources such as surfing, white-water sports and skydiving “exemplify the nature of the sports tourism experience as being derived from the unique interaction of activity, people and place” (Weed & Bull, 2012, p. 94).

Previous sports tourism studies have referred to the concept of *sense of place* when considering destination preference and satisfaction (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000). This

refers to the emotional ties and meanings assigned to outdoor settings by individuals and groups (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). Meanings associated with places reflect individual and cultural identities and are linked to life experiences shared with others in these places (Kyle & Chick, 2007); they express the value of a place for an individual or group. Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) liken sense of place to a multidimensional attitudinal construct when they suggest that “places represent a confluence of cognitions, emotions and actions” (p.233). Beliefs about the symbolic relationship between self and place is the place *identity* (cognitive), the emotional bond between people and place is place *attachment* (affective) and the functional attachment to a place based on it enabling a desired outcome is place *dependence* (conative) (Filo et al., 2011; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001).

There are definite similarities between tourist attitudes and the way destination image and sense of place have been conceptualised and studied at times. This suggests that models and theories applied to study these concepts can be adapted to attitude research. This is particularly relevant regarding methodologies and the operationalization of the concepts and their components. Two influencing factors in particular are considered in the next sections for their speculated role in the attitudes of sports tourists: involvement and social influence.

2.4.4 Involvement and its outcomes

The concept of *involvement* (perceived relevance of an object) has been addressed in consumer behaviour, tourism and leisure research. High involvement with an object is associated with strong and lasting attitudes and thus influences consumer decision making (Schiffman, 2011), as it is explained in section 2.3.2. In tourism research, involvement with travel or the destination has been found to influence destination image perception and its role in the destination selection process (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Highlighting connections with the concept of sense of place, Filo et al. (2011, p. 5) state that “destination involvement can be defined as the meaning tourists’ ascribe to a destination and how it serves as a central aspect of their lives providing both hedonic and symbolic value.” Leisure research has also shown that the more involved people are

in a sport, the stronger place identity and place attachment will be with destinations where they can practice that sport (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000).

The term *involvement* in sports tourism refers to destination preference (sense of place, destination image and attitudes) but also sports participation. Gibson (2006, p. 46) explained that “the nexus of serious leisure, social identity and subculture provides a rich context through which to study sport tourism” as it provides a framework in which to examine the personal involvement and social meaning associated with the sport and related travel.

2.4.4.1 Serious leisure & recreation specialisation

Serious leisure and *recreation specialisation* have been used to study involvement in sports and its outcomes. Researchers have argued that these concepts are helpful in conceptualizing special interest tourism (Trauer, 2006; Weiler & Hall, 1992) and sports tourism (Gibson, 2006; Green & Jones, 2005).

Leisure, the pursuit of freely chosen interests, is often described as the direct opposite of work, associated with seriousness (Green & Jones, 2005). However, for many individuals, leisure activities involve obligations, commitment and responsibilities (Gibson, 2006). The concepts of serious leisure and recreation specialisation were respectively developed by Robert Stebbins and Hobson Bryan in the 1970s to further understanding of “complex forms of leisure that are central to participants’ identities and lifestyles” (Scott, 2012, p. 366). Both concepts are defined along continuums; from casual to serious leisure for the former, and from general to particular behaviour for the latter (Kim et al., 2008; Scott, 2012).

Serious or specialised participants are characterised by the systematic pursuit of an activity where they acquire and demonstrate special skills, knowledge and experience (Gibson, 2006). The concepts share many similarities but recreation specialisation emphasises the characteristics of participants (e.g., ownership of specialised equipment, levels of skills acquisition, club membership and economic investment) while serious leisure focuses on the meaning and purpose of participation (Douglas et al., 2001). Because this research is grounded in CCT and focuses on the meanings conveyed by attitudes, and for the purpose of clarity, the decision was made to use the

concept of serious leisure in the remainder of the thesis. Six distinctive characteristics are used to assess serious leisure participants (Gibson, 2006; Green & Jones, 2005):

1. Perseverance of participation in the face of constraints
2. Progression throughout a long-term career involving contingencies, turning points and achievements
3. Significant personal effort, such as skills and knowledge, is utilised to practice the activity and gained through long-term effort from specialised media, peers and tutors
4. Durable benefits for the participants such as self-esteem, self-actualisation and social interactions
5. A unique ethos exists within the activity; a subculture, a form of social organisation among individuals sharing common interests and identifiable through their norms, values, behaviour and language
6. Social identification with the activity linked to a sense of belonging

Taylor (2010) found that mountain bikers in his studies fitted the serious leisure profile with their “perseverance, personal effort, and a strong identification with mountain biking and its social scene” (p.263). However, the concept of serious leisure has rarely been studied in the tourism literature (Green & Jones, 2005; Shipway & Jones, 2007).

2.4.4.2 Applicability to tourism

Serious leisure and travel to participate in serious leisure have been found to be mutually reinforcing: “serious leisure finds an outlet in sports tourism, whilst sports tourism encourages serious leisure” (Green & Jones, 2005, p. 43). Sports tourism reinforces and extends the characteristics of serious leisure (Green & Jones, 2005) and serious leisure can be exemplified through niche tourism (Weiler & Hall, 1992).

In addition, Green and Jones (2005) note that “tourism may become part of the unique ethos of the serious leisure participant, thus creating a subworld, or perhaps a subculture, of serious leisure tourists” (p.169). They believe that the extension of serious leisure to tourism helps “form stronger, more valued social identities for those individuals” (p.169).

The tourism experience itself also can be enhanced if it provides an opportunity to celebrate and revel in the subculture (Green, 2001; Green & Chalip, 1998). For example, many sports have a tradition of associated socialisation experiences. The importance of participating in the *après* when skiing and the *nineteenth hole* when golfing demonstrate the influence of subculture in promoting a lifestyle rather than an activity and an experience rather than a place (Weed & Bull, 2012).

2.4.5 Social influence in special interest tourism

As explained in 2.3.4.2, recent attitude models and theories acknowledge the power of social influence (Solomon et al., 2013) and the social role of attitudes (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012). In tourism, word-of-mouth is recognised as a dominant source of information in destination image formation and travel decision-making (Papadimitriou & Gibson, 2008). Personal experience and availability of information reduce the need for comparative influence but credibility and attractiveness of the group, as well as conspicuousness of the object, can increase normative influence through a desire to conform and belong (Schiffman, 2011). According to Novelli (2005), niche tourism relates to “the process of social differentiation and status seeking” (p.4), suggesting that social influence from the subculture would be paramount.

2.4.5.1 Sports subcultures and identities

Sports such as golfing and skiing are individual by nature but were found to be highly influenced by subcultures (Humphreys, 2011) which provide knowledge about places, resource quality and associated facilities (comparative influence) and shape preferences (normative influence) (Weed & Bull, 2012). Participants align with the shared ethos by adhering to, and internalizing, group norms and values (Weed & Bull, 2012). Hagen (2013) revealed evidence and characteristics of a mountain biking subculture in her research.

A key element of serious leisure is the interpersonal dimension of the activity through social identities and shared ethos. Gibson (2006) notes that sports tourists are highly concerned with aligning themselves with the *unique ethos* of their sport – a normative system shared by individuals of a specific subculture (Gibson, 2006). Serious leisure participants internalise norms and attitudes defined in the subculture to set themselves apart from casual participants and non-participants (Hagen, 2013). It provides them

with a sense of belonging, social connections and help enhance self-esteem (Green & Jones, 2005). In the context of special interest tourism, the ethos and social identities associated with the activities were found to be intricately linked to participants' behaviours through social influence (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Humphreys, 2011; Ritchie, Tkaczynski, & Faulks, 2010; Shipway & Jones, 2007).

2.4.5.2 Sports subcultural capital in tourism

In sports tourism, travel decisions are made with the sport in mind rather than the destination (Weed & Bull, 2012). Destinations are preferred for the experiences they enable and the promises they hold rather than their apparent attributes (Filo et al., 2011; Weed & Bull, 2012). Higham (2005) explains that when selecting destinations, sports tourists primarily focus on sports opportunities and sports-related facilities through an evaluation informed by specialised knowledge and information search (comparative influence). The subcultural capital (the knowledge and norms shared by members of a subculture) attached to some destinations can also come into consideration by increasing the weight of place identity and place attachment in the destination selection process (Filo et al., 2011). This is particularly true for sports meccas which can have a legacy and/or a socially constructed image (normative influence) (Higham, 2005).

In her research, Humphreys (2011) acknowledges the existence of golf subcultures and their role in influencing golf destination selection. She explains that destinations are evaluated in the subculture and ascribed a certain subcultural capital which can be transferred to individuals visiting these destinations. This acquired subcultural capital allows individuals to further their leisure career and obtain social recognition within the subculture (Green, 2001; Humphreys, 2011). Therefore, destination choice in niche tourism can be selectively focused on building subcultural capital to reinforce social identity and commitment to the subculture (Gibson, 2006).

The influence of subcultures on destination preference is apparent when individuals collect places or plan to visit mythical destinations (Weed & Bull, 2012). This can be to further or showcase their leisure careers (Green & Jones, 2005) or to gain status and respect within the subculture (Humphreys, 2011). Mythical places are often included in all participants' consideration set of potential destinations, even though external

circumstances might dictate if, when, and how the destination will be visited (Weed & Bull, 2012).

2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework (Figure 2.4) was developed based on the concepts, theories and models examined in the literature review. It is read from the top down and its elements and relationships are explained in this section.

This research is investigating tourist attitudes in the particular context of special interest tourism, in this case mountain biking tourism. It is solely concerned with attitude content and the attitude formation process and does not set out to connect or correlate attitudes to behaviour. Therefore, subsequent steps as seen in Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 were removed here. The framework has been colour-coded to simplify its description. Serious leisure elements are in orange, special interest tourism elements are in green and tourist behaviour elements in blue.

The conceptual framework starts with *serious leisure*, characterised by high involvement with the activity. The degree of involvement drives the desire or need to travel for the purpose of taking part in the activity. Special interest tourism is an outlet for the activity and sustains involvement in the activity, resulting in a two-way relationship represented by the green arrow. Serious leisure participants look to align with the shared ethos, or subculture. It provides guidelines for, and strengthens, the social identification with the activity and subsequently involvement. This two-way relationship is represented by the top solid orange arrow. The lower solid orange arrow symbolises the two-way relationship existing between a particular subculture and the special interest tourism destination selection process: (1) subcultural capital is assigned to destinations and the act of travelling, and (2) special interest tourism provides a space to celebrate the subculture, display and increase one's subcultural capital.

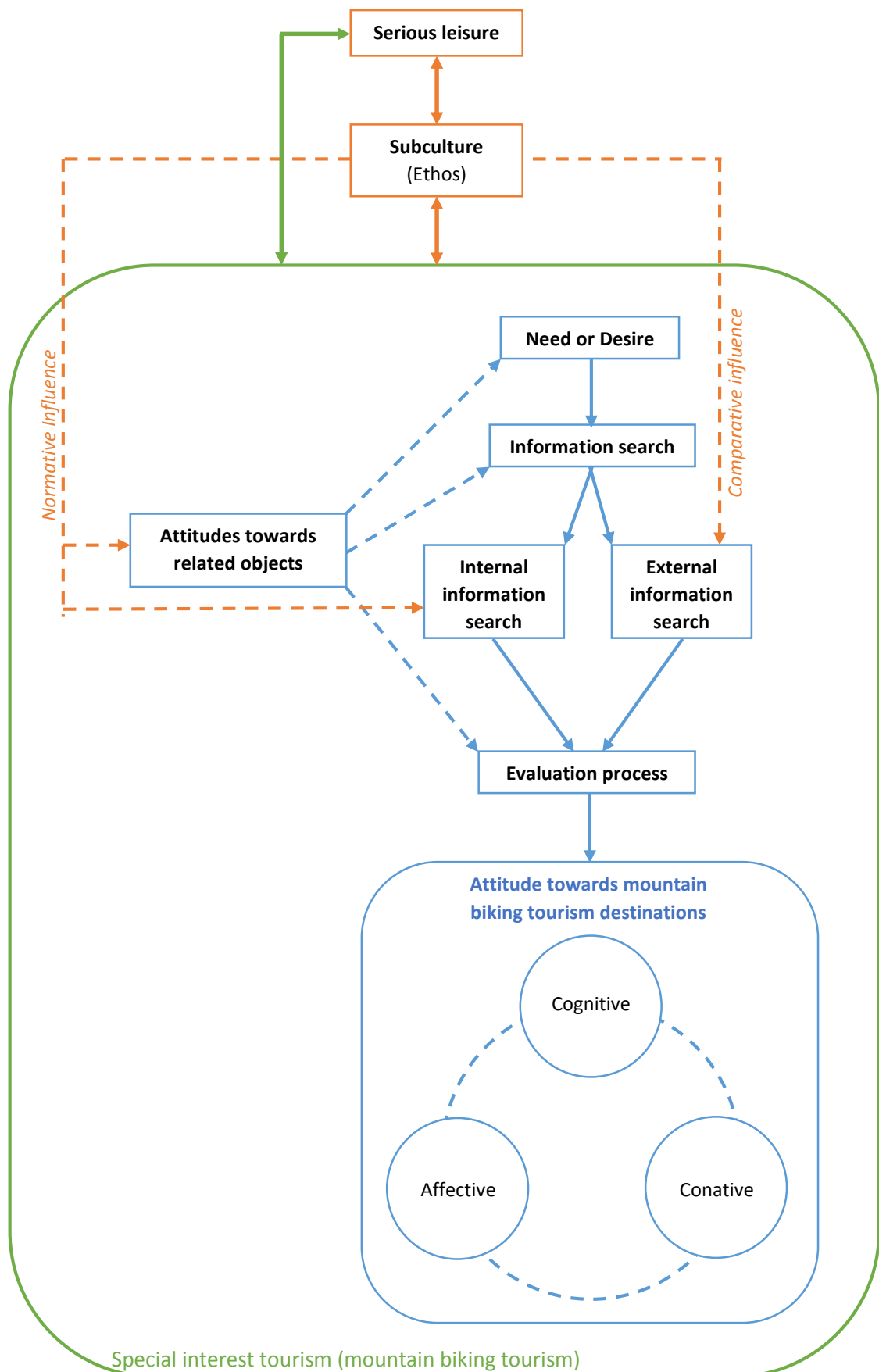
The blue framework combines elements of Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2 depicting the consumption decision process. Blue dashed-line arrows show the influence of attitudes towards related objects on various steps in the consumption process (social judgement bias). The blue dashed-line circle encompassing the three components of the attitude

(cognitive, affective and conative) emphasises their interrelationship and the cognitive dissonance bias.

The last element in the framework, the orange dashed-line arrows, show the potential effect of social influence from the subculture, keeping in mind that it is difficult to distinguish the form of social influence occurring in practice (Albarracin et al., 2005). On one hand, external stimuli, word-of-mouth and specialised media will be used during the external information search process, influencing destination awareness, standards expected and attributes sought (comparative influence). On the other hand, serious leisure participants comply with, and over time internalise, norms and values from the subculture. Normative influence shapes both attitudes towards related objects, such as attitudes towards traveling or the activity in general, and the internal information search process through the social role of attitudes and the desire to align with the shared ethos (value-expressive and ego-defensive attitudes).

This conceptual framework is a graphic representation of the focus of this research and highlights the elements considered for the design of the research instrument and methodology as outlined in the next chapter.

Figure 2.4: Mountain bikers' attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations



3 CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research is grounded in consumer culture theory. Its primary aim is to understand the attitudes of mountain bikers towards destinations specifically catering to them; it delves into the sociocultural dynamics involved in attitude content and formation. It focuses on recreational mountain bikers who had previously travelled, and plan to do so again, for the primary purpose of mountain biking. They provided information-rich cases of sports' motives influencing travel and destination choices.

An appropriate research methodology ensures that research is carried out ethically, useful data are collected and reliably interpreted in order to answer the research questions. The research, including the sampling strategy, interview guide and projective exercise, was approved by the Pipitea Human Ethics Committee at Victoria University of Wellington, demonstrating that ethical issues related to the researcher and the respondents were considered throughout the process. This chapter aims to document the rationale behind the research design (Silverman, 2013) and is divided into six sections, including this introduction. The second section introduces the research paradigm adhered to. Next, the choice of qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews, and the sampling strategy are explained. The following two sections address data collection in the field and subsequent data analysis; an analytical framework is presented. The sixth section reflects on my unique position as an insider with respect to mountain bikers. The last section discusses the merits and limitations of the research.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Researchers are guided by paradigms, sets of beliefs and abstract principles (Patton, 2002) which “shape how the [. . .] researcher sees the world and acts in it” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). A paradigm combines ontology (beliefs about the nature of reality), epistemology (nature and scope of knowledge) and methodology (how is knowledge acquired) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The research paradigm influences the overall research process, including the definition of the research questions, the methods

selected to investigate the phenomena and the interpretation of the data (Silverman, 2013). Since the distinction between, and definitions of, paradigms are often contentious (Patton, 2002), this section only focuses on explaining the approach used in this study as recommended by Silverman (2013).

Historically, tourism research has applied a positivist approach with an emphasis on quantitative methods and scientific inquiry (Jennings, 2010). A positivist paradigm implies a unique, highly structured reality guided by causal relationships (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, qualitative approaches are gaining in popularity in tourism, resulting in research being increasingly grounded in social sciences paradigms (Jennings, 2010).

This thesis is grounded in interpretivism which “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). Interpretivism is sometimes defined as equivalent to, or described as a sub-model of, constructivism, social constructivism and the interpretive social science paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hagen, 2013; Jennings, 2010; Patton, 2002). For the purpose of consistency and clarity, *interpretivism* will be used when addressing the paradigm this study adhered to.

Interpretivist researchers look to understand the emotional context of actions and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Jennings, 2010). They are investigating *what* is happening but also *how* and *why* social realities are produced and sustained through social processes (Silverman, 2013), leading to a strong focus on phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Phenomenology is a philosophy concentrating on the meaning and essence of lived experiences for the individuals; symbolic interactionism is the study of common symbols that give meaning to social interactions in social psychology (Patton, 2002). Hence interpretivism is understood to be appropriate for the study of holistic attitudes, combining cognitive and affective dimensions, as well as the concepts of subculture and involvement.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.3.1 Qualitative research

Interpretivism is associated with qualitative research methods. Attitudinal research in both the tourism literature and the wider consumer behaviour literature has traditionally used quantitative approaches. This thesis does not set out to test out new methodologies instead of using proven techniques, but is taking into account methodological issues raised in previous studies as identified in section 2.4.2. Um and Crompton (1990) drew attention to the limitation of quantitative methods and the inherent subjectivity of selecting attributes on “face validity” when studying attitudes. Other researchers are also concerned about the predominant focus on the functional characteristics of destinations and the cognitive component of attitudes (Beerli, Meneses, & Gil, 2007; Gnoth, 1997) due to methodological limitations (Dann, 1996) and have pointed out the need to include the non-tangible, psychological characteristics of destinations (Jenkins, 1999). Several authors stress the need for new attitudinal models accounting for the importance of heterogeneous meanings and symbols associated with destinations (Dann, 1996), the decision makers’ values and motives (Bagozzi et al., 2002; Um & Crompton, 1990) as well as normative beliefs, subjective norm and social influence in attitudes (Bagozzi et al., 2002; Moutinho, 1987).

Arnould and Thompson (2005) acknowledge that qualitative methods based on relativist ontology are better suited for consumer research focusing on the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption. Quantitative studies, although accurate and objective, are limited to the prediction of macro-tendencies because they limit the ways respondents can express themselves and their choices (Riley, 1996). While tourism research can greatly benefit from quantitative methods for a variety of topics, qualitative methods can provide an understanding of the cultural and social dimensions of tourism (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Qualitative research offers an opportunity for greater insight, to explore meaning rather than facts (Silverman, 2013) and is particularly recommended for exploratory research when little information is known about the phenomenon investigated (Jennings, 2010), as is the case in this study.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews and visual stimulus

A relativist ontology implies that the perspective of others is meaningful because there are multiple realities. Interviews allow the researcher to grasp the respondents' perspective (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews permit the respondents to describe what is meaningful to them through "conversations with a purpose" (Jennings, 2010, p. 171). They are an acceptable data collection method for obtaining detailed information on attitudes, opinions and values (Jennings, 2010) by letting the researcher access complex information without pre-conceived notions of what is salient for the topic researched (Silverman, 2013), including subconscious norms and meanings (Riley, 1996). Questions are not fixed, leaving the interviewer free to ask for clarification, additional details, or pursue new issues as they arise in the conversation (Jennings, 2010). Non-verbal cues such as body language and humour can be recorded. Silverman (2013) also suggest that methodological choices are dependent on practical concerns. In this case, semi-structured interviews and the use of a projective exercise, described in the next section, offered access to in-depth information within a limited time, as this thesis had to be completed within 12 months.

3.3.3 The interview guide

The general aim of the interviews was to encourage respondents to share their experiences of, and preferences for, particular destinations as well as the role mountain biking played in their everyday life, travel motivations and destination choice. An interview guide "provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject" (Silverman, 2004, p. 343). This is a common practice in qualitative research (Jennings, 2010) and allows the interviewer to have a conversation while retaining the focus on a particular topic.

The interview guide (see Appendix A) included open-ended questions based on the literature review and the research questions, and included a projective exercise using photos (see Appendix B). This type of stimulus is recommended to "minimise the danger of forcing respondents to react to a standardised framework that may not be an accurate representation of their image" (Jenkins, 1999, p. 7) and can assist respondents in explaining attitudes and preferences that they are sometimes themselves not aware

of (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012). Projective exercises are structured, indirect ways of uncovering feelings, beliefs, attitudes and motivations that consumers may find difficult to articulate otherwise (Donoghue, 2000). The exercise included 10 images of mountain bikers in various settings, selected based on keywords collected during a discussion involving five mountain bikers in Wellington talking about destinations they preferred or wanted to visit. In the remainder of the thesis the numbered pictures (1 to 10) refer to those used in the projective exercise as indicated in Appendix B; the locations depicted were not disclosed to the respondents during the interview but are included in Appendix B for clarity.

The interviews started with idle chatter and general descriptive questions so that the respondents grew comfortable (Riley, 1996). Then respondents were asked about destinations they had visited or wanted to visit. This allowed them to describe their preferences in their own terms and without being influenced by predetermined images or categories (Jenkins, 1999). Subsequently, the respondents were asked to pick the most appealing images in the projective exercise and to describe the thoughts and feelings of the people in the pictures. Open-ended questions followed, first oriented towards destinations in general and moving to questions about personality and identity once the respondents were comfortable with the topic. The projective exercise was used once more during the interview to investigate negative perceptions of the destinations pictured.

Silverman (2013) suggests that it can be useful to test different types of questioning and questions by doing pilot interviews. Two pilot interviews were scheduled with individuals with whom I had a strong personal relationship. They were encouraged to point out issues and provide feedback about the interview process. Overall, the feedback was positive and only one question was reworded to avoid confusion. It should also be noted that as some topic emerged during early interviews, questions were added or rephrased in subsequent interviews; the interview guide was therefore flexible and evolving throughout data collection (Silverman, 2013).

The interview guide was designed to access the respondents' thoughts and feelings about mountain biking tourism, destinations and the sport in general and to understand their underlying motives, values and attitudes in an unconstrained way. The

combination of projective techniques and open-ended questions encouraged respondents to evaluate and communicate their explicit and implicit perceptions. It was expected that the respondents' responses could be interpreted both at the literal and symbolic levels (Dann, 1996), revealing cognitive and affective elements of their attitudes.

3.3.4 Sampling

Qualitative research is concerned about depth, details, context and nuances about a phenomenon (Patton, 2002) and the researcher needs to think critically about the parameters of the population studied (Silverman, 2013). Purposeful sampling is the process of selecting information-rich cases about a phenomenon and is recommended in exploratory studies (Jennings, 2010; Patton, 2002).

Only active mountain bikers who had previously travelled for the main purpose of mountain biking were recruited for this research. A snowball sampling strategy was used by asking individuals in the mountain biking community of Wellington if they knew someone who could be interested in being interviewed for a Master's level research project. Respondents were also recruited through formal and informal mountain biking groups and clubs. Finally, a stratified strategy was used to try and capture variations as well as shared dimensions. Stratified purposeful sampling is recommended in qualitative research to maximise opportunities to compare and contrast findings within the sample (Patton, 2002). This means that, as the interviews unfolded, the researcher aimed to include respondents from different age groups, who are male and female, and vary in terms of their experience and skill level.

A total of 25 interviews were completed until data saturation (Riley, 1996). Saturation was determined by recording analytical insights during the interviews and on-going transcription which allowed me to see that no new insights occurred during the last few interviews.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Upon first contact, all individuals were told the general research topic (mountain biking tourism), the interview process was explained and the information sheet was provided (see Appendix C). Respondents were included in a prize draw to create interest in the

research; however, all respondents stated that curiosity about the topic, rather than the incentive, motivated them. Collecting data in my place of residence, Wellington, New Zealand, allowed me to be flexible regarding the date, time and location of interviews. Most interviews took place at Victoria University of Wellington in small meeting rooms, two occurred in cafés and three at the respondents' offices; locations were chosen by mutual agreement. At the start of each interview, the respondents were reminded of the interview purpose and process, and that they were free to stop the interview at any point or withdraw from the research later. The interview only started once the respondents signed the consent form (see Appendix D).

A casual conversational tone was maintained and respondents were left to talk at their own pace (Riley, 1996; Silverman, 2013). Questions and themes from the interview guide were rearranged constantly to follow the respondents' narrative. Respondents were engaged and interested in the topic, providing in-depth insights and many stories. Interviews lasted between 26 minutes and 1 hour; the 25 interviews added up to just under 17 hours of recorded data.

Silverman (2013) emphasises that recollection of conversations is not reliable for credible analysis so interviews were tape recorded, allowing me to focus on the conversation and give respondents my full attention. All interviews were transcribed verbatim for accurate discourse analysis (Antaki, 2008). Respondents were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The 242 pages of interview transcripts were analysed in NVivo for organisational purposes and to facilitate coding.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

During the analysis, important dimensions, constructs and attributes are extracted from the data (Jenkins, 1999). Later, through interpretation, patterns and themes are explored, inferences are made and explanations are offered (Patton, 2002). In order to increase the credibility of the analysis and the reliability of the interpretation, a transparent and documented process is essential (Jenkins, 1999). The discourse analysis technique with blended deductive-inductive reasoning used in this research is explained next.

3.5.1 Analysis techniques

A key element of the interpretivist approach is the focus on interaction and discourse as productive of social reality (Silverman, 2013). In discourse analysis, *discourse*, talk or text, is seen as a collection of allusions, images and references that illustrate social actions and phenomenon (Antaki, 2008). Accordingly, transcripts were scrutinised to uncover the underlying dimensions along which the respondents perceive their experiences and realities (Antaki, 2008) rather than exclusively focus on literal meanings.

Within the overall discourse analysis approach, a mixed coding method was used. A deductive approach can be used to analyse qualitative data based on the conceptual framework (Jennings, 2010). Deductive codes based on the literature review included themes such as normative influence, attitude function and state of flow. On the other hand, an inductive approach does not presuppose important dimensions or their connections (Patton, 2002). Inductive codes originated from notes taken during the interviews, the transcription process and data familiarisation; themes included the *vibe* of some destinations, the need for varied experiences and the perception that travelling can improve skills. The data were broken down into segments through open coding including all noticeable themes and patterns (Patton, 2002). Various codes were attached to words, sentences and whole paragraphs in the transcripts; some sections were attached to multiple codes (Jennings, 2010).

A predominantly inductive analysis followed, allowing the patterns, themes and interrelationships in the phenomenon under study to emerge from the analysis (Patton, 2002). A subjectivist epistemology implies that both the researcher and the respondents produce interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Respondents interpret their own perceptions and the researcher interprets the data collected. In addition to identifying and reporting the experiences of the respondents, I set out to elucidate the meaning, structure and essence of these experiences. During the analytical process, coded evidence from all transcripts is compared and contrasted; there is a constant back and forth between the data, the emerging themes, potential interpretations and back to the data (Jennings, 2010; Patton, 2002). As codes and themes are combined and relationships are uncovered through axial coding (Jennings, 2010), the level of

abstraction increases and major categories and concepts emerge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Themes and categories that were found to be significant and relevant are reported in the next chapters.

3.5.2 Analysis framework

According to Pearce (2012, p. 50), “analytical frameworks help us to structure the analysis of our data and to order and communicate our findings.” Analytical frameworks are particularly useful in qualitative research as data from interviews can be extensive and dense (Pearce, 2012). Jennings (2010, p. 210) recommends that one “keep[s] a map” of what the research is trying to achieve to avoid losing focus.

The analytical framework (see Figure 3.1) for this research follows the mixed-method approach outlined earlier. The first tier, *low level of abstraction*, shows the combination of the deductive and inductive approaches to open coding. Deductive themes were determined based on the research questions and literature review; inductive themes were unanticipated and emerged from the data. The second and third tiers were identified through axial coding, paying attention to the relationships between and within low level themes (Jennings, 2010). The second tier is comprised of potential comprehensive themes and emerging patterns that arose throughout the analysis process. Keeping a research diary, as recommended by Silverman (2013), with analytical insights, patterns, similarities and differences during the entire research process was particularly useful. The third tier showcases the selection of the most salient and relevant overarching categories and patterns; it is also the most abstract level of analysis. Table 3.1 presents a simplified extract from the codebook and illustrates how the analytical framework was applied to the data. Shaded cells indicate deductive codes and white cells inductive codes.

Despite the rigorous methodology described in this section, subjectivity is a recurrent matter in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Jennings, 2010; Patton, 2002). In recent years there has been an increased emphasis on reflexivity with researchers attempting to account for their own bias (Kanuha, 2000). The next section is a reflection of my particular position as an insider within the population studied.

Figure 3.1: Analytical framework

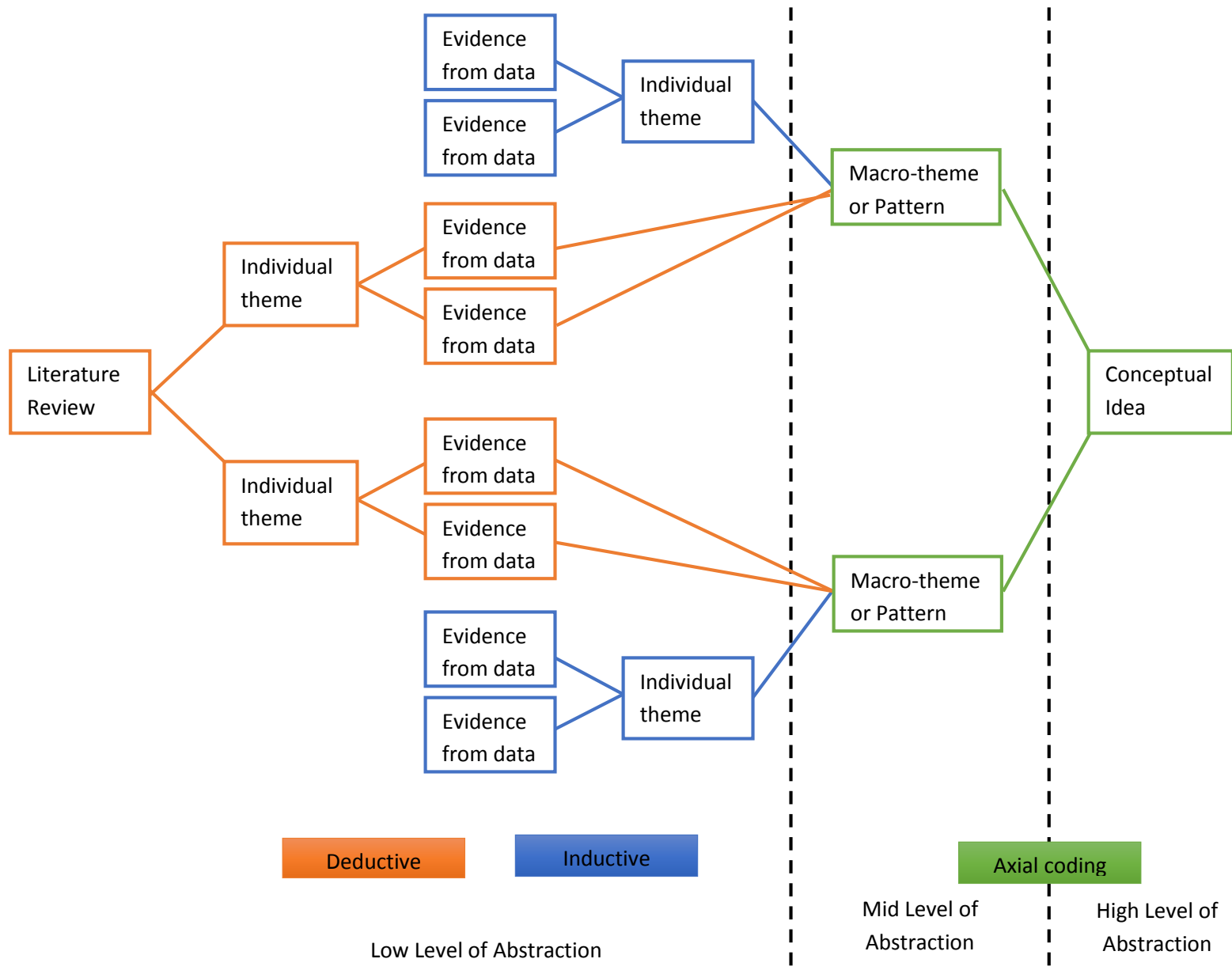


Table 3.1: Codebook extract

Research questions	Individual themes	Pattern	Conceptual idea		
Attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations	No negative	Positive valence	Holistic attitudes		
	Bike-centric	Different trips / destinations, but still positive attitudes			
	Social-centric				
	Destination type				
	Destination appeal				
	Destination aura				
	Mythic destination				
Attitude formation	Word-of-mouth	External information search	What a destination enables		
	Social media				
	Media				
	Race				
	Similarities	Internal information search			
	Norm				
	Strereotypes				
	Look 4 Flow	Interpretation biais			
	Positive bias				
	Previous experiences				
	Congruence				
	Trails	Riding	Worth travelling to	Holistic flow	
	Rideability				
	Free				
	Variety				
	Familiar				
	Nature	Tangible attributes			
	Access				
	Amenities				
	Crowd				
	Other attributes				
	Social vibe	Intangible attributes			
	Desire to be an insider				
	Social Sport	Motivations to ride			
	Adventure				
	Mastery				
	Fitness				
	Fun				
	Flow				<i>Flow and Challenge were used in motivations to ride and motivations to travel to ride</i>
	Challenge				
	Epic		Motivations to travel to ride		
	Other than riding				
	Travel as mastery				
Purpose					
Novelty					
Escape					
Subculture influence	Jealousy	Influence on travel motivation	to ride		Subcultural capital
	Standout				
	Unique				
	Collection				
	Commonalities				
	Share stories				
	Involvement	Serious leisure	Role of travel in the subculture		
	Way of life				
	Social importanc				
	Activity vs identity				
	ID through skills	Evidence of subculture membership			
	Skills				
	Self-esteem				
	Self-expression				
	Frequency				
	Vocabulary				
	Descriptive destinations				
Destination guessing					
Group influence					

3.6 THE UNIQUE POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER AS INSIDER

An emic perspective, focused on the insider's view, is favoured in interpretivism (Jennings, 2010). However, researchers are warned against *going native*, which is being so personally involved with the study and/or the population studied that it is difficult to avoid biased interpretation (Silverman, 2013). However, no tourism literature to my knowledge explores the issue of *being native*, the particular situation of "conducting research with communities or identity groups of which one is a member" (Kanuha, 2000, p. 440).

I have a personal passion for mountain biking and social affiliations within the mountain biking community. I have first-hand experience and intuitive understanding of mountain biking tourism having travelled for that purpose and worked in this industry; I am aware of its potential and was interested in contributing to its recognition. Similarly to Kanuha (2000), I had a keen interest in studying my peers and understanding our similarities and differences. In designing this research, I wanted to avoid limiting the respondents' answers with my pre-conceived ideas, which motivated my choice of a qualitative approach.

The recruitment of respondents was facilitated by my insider position. I had access to many formal and informal clubs and my own social circle in the mountain biking community. Being knowledgeable about destinations, products and media was helpful in understanding the vocabulary and stories shared. However, it is possible that respondents failed to explain some facts and perceptions the way they might have with an outsider. Because I was "one of them" I was supposed to "know what they meant", thus details and justifications seemed superfluous. Impression management from some respondents is also another possibility, providing answers they thought I was expecting rather than their true thoughts (Silverman, 2013).

Being native also influenced the analysis and interpretation of data. While I tried to be respectful of their perspectives and maintain a neutral position by distancing myself from the respondents, I understand their answers and stories through my own experiences. However, my intimate knowledge of the tourism and mountain biking industries, as well as of mountain bikers, mean that my biased interpretation of the findings can provide richer insights into the deeper meanings behind words, laughter,

expletives and behaviour. Therefore, my position as insider for this research has had both benefits and drawbacks. This thesis has additional overarching merits and limitations which are examined in the next section.

3.7 RESEARCH MERITS AND LIMITATIONS

3.7.1 Merits

The first merit of this research is that it addresses several gaps in the literature. As it was discussed earlier (1) there are few studies on the attitudes of special interest tourists towards destinations, (2) the majority of sports tourism research has investigated sporting events and competitive participation rather than recreational participation, (3) the sport of mountain biking has received very little coverage in both tourism and leisure studies even though it is growing rapidly, and (4) social influence in attitude formation have received little attention from tourism and leisure researchers. This thesis is only a small contribution to these gaps, but can help increase knowledge and understanding of a range of academic and managerial issues.

Secondly, while the majority of tourism and attitudinal studies have been grounded in positivism and based on quantitative methodologies, this thesis is using an interpretivist approach and qualitative methods. This is an approach that has been recommended by several authors, as indicated previously, to overcome shortcomings identified in quantitative methods. The choice of semi-structured interviews has contributed to the depth of information collected and increased the understanding of a specific phenomenon: travelling for the purpose of mountain biking. The third merit of this thesis is the use of stratified sampling to access a range of experiences, preferences and perceptions and provide insights that might not have been achieved with a more homogeneous sample.

Lastly, the exploratory nature of this thesis provides a base for future research. Several categories and concepts addressed would be suitable for further investigation in a range of disciplines. Recommendations are provided in the concluding chapter, however they are a few among many opportunities. This research is inviting academics and managers to delve into additional research, to look for answers and theories in disciplines outside

of tourism, and to consider holistic constructs as well as details when investigating issues.

3.7.2 Challenges and limitations

Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were selected for data collection because of their potential to elicit authentic accounts of subjective experiences and preferences (Silverman, 2013). However, interviewees sometimes hide or reshape their views and opinions in the context of the interview, limiting the authenticity of the data as well as the dependability of the interpretation.

Discourse is only a reproduction of what the subject actually thinks, feels and perceives, and is shaped by his own understanding (Antaki, 2008) on top of which a second layer of interpretation is produced by the researcher (Silverman, 2013). The findings presented in the next chapters represent only a few among a range of possible interpretations. To increase validity and credibility, rich quotations and contextual details are provided. The previous reflexive section also aimed at increasing my credibility as a researcher by being self-critical, recognizing potential bias and explaining the steps taken to reduce them.

Thirdly, qualitative data are meaningless beyond the context in which they occur and are collected because the constructed narrative *truth* is created within the context of the interviews (Silverman, 2013). However, this thesis aims at gaining insight into a specific phenomenon (Patton, 2002) and is not intended for empirical generalisation. While some of the findings can potentially be applied to other contexts and topics, it will require further investigation and quantitative evidence.

In addition, Patton (2002, p. 245) explains that “the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry” depend on the richness of information collected as well as the observational and analytical capabilities of the researcher. The limited time available for this project and my limited research experience may therefore limit the validity of the findings. However, working with qualitative analysis software NVivo increased the rigour of analysis (Silverman, 2013) as it made it easier to compare and contrast discourse from different respondents and to examine the whole dataset, avoiding anecdotal evidence by easily assessing the frequency of occurrence. In order

to maximise the validity of the research, all evidence was compared with the literature review, analytical insights and emerging themes. Contradictory evidence was also considered to achieve comprehensive data treatment. Finally, whenever possible, alternative interpretations have also been considered.

4 CHAPTER 4: CONTEXTUALIZING THE RESPONDENTS WITHIN A COMMUNITY: SERIOUS LEISURE AND SUBCULTURE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the first of two presenting and interpreting the findings of this research. It introduces the respondents and specifically addresses the third research question: “Is the mountain biking subculture one of the factors influencing attitudes of mountain bikers towards mountain biking tourism destinations?” The research questions focused initially on attitude content and general attitude formation. However, the influence of the subculture on the respondents’ behaviour, values and attitudes was so prevailing that a decision was made to focus chapter 4 on the respondents’ categorisation along the serious leisure continuum and how they interact with, and are influenced by, the mountain biking subculture and community. Indeed, in order to understand the attitudes held toward mountain biking destinations, and the formation of these attitudes, one must first understand the mountain bikers themselves. The two other research questions will be addressed in chapter 5.

After this introduction, the second section presents the profile of the respondents and the process used to categorise them along the serious leisure continuum. In the third section, evidence of the mountain biking subculture is introduced. The central role of social relationships within the subculture and their influence on the respondents’ involvement with the sport are also demonstrated. The fourth section extends observed social influence to the context of mountain biking tourism, suggesting their significance in the attitude formation process. Lastly, a summary of the findings in this chapter is provided.

4.2 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

4.2.1 Variation within the stratified sample

A total of 25 mountain bikers were interviewed between 4 June and 22 July 2014. As explained in the methodology chapter, a snowball method was used to get in contact with potential participants. Once individuals got in touch with the researcher, basic information was collected to ensure they fit the criteria. A balance was sought to

maximise variation in order to achieve a stratified sample with a particular focus on age, gender, years of experience, skill level and riding frequency; some volunteers were excluded if they were perceived as being too similar to previous respondents.

The focus of discourse analysis is on the in-depth interpretation of the information shared and generalisation of the findings is not the purpose of qualitative research. Therefore, there is no predetermined adequate sample size. Data saturation was observed during the last four interviews, based on notes taken during and after each interview as well as the on-going transcription process; this led to the decision to stop data collection after twenty-five interviews.

Table 4.1 presents relevant information about the respondents. Pseudonyms are used in order to protect the respondents' identities. The table showcases criteria used to define variations within the sample: gender, age, experience and skill level in mountain biking, frequency of participation in the activity and frequency of travel for this purpose, as well as their degree of involvement with the activity. It should be noted that in this research, the degree of involvement with mountain biking – and subsequent location along the serious leisure continuum – are not directly related to skills or experience. This matter will be addressed further in section 4.2.3 but explains why the criteria used to maximise variation for a stratified sample did not lead to balanced groups.

Table 4.1: Profile of respondent

Name	Gender	Age	Years of experience	Skill Level	Riding frequency (per week)	Mountain biking tourism frequency (per year)	Description of personal involvement in sport	Seriousness / Involvement in subculture
James	M	42	21	Expert	Several times	More than 5	Experienced and passionate; mountain biking deeply influences the way he lives	High
Celia	F	22	9	Advanced	Several times	More than 5	Experienced rider who recently stopped racing seriously to just enjoy the sport	
Laura	F	32	5	Intermediate	Several times	More than 5	Picked up her love of mountain biking through her partner and is now highly involved	
Kim	F	39	14	Expert	At least once	More than 5	Started riding to follow her partner and is now passionate and highly involved	
Kurt	M	34	11	Expert	Several times	3 to 5	Experienced, passionate and involved	
Sam	M	40	21	Expert	Several times	3 to 5	Recently renewed his passion for mountain biking through new experiences	
Becca	F	31	10	Advanced	At least once	3 to 5	Has recently moved to New Zealand; mountain biking is helping her integrate into her new surroundings	
Tom	M	31	3.5	Advanced	Several times	3 to 5	Relatively new to the sport but has become very passionate and highly involved	
Nate	M	40	23	Advanced	At least once	3 to 5	Experienced and highly involved in the mountain bike community	
Olivia	F	38	9	Advanced	Several times	3 to 5	Passionate about mountain biking and raising a young family in this spirit	
Megan	F	40	15	Intermediate	Several times	3 to 5	Rediscovered the joy of mountain biking through a new social group	

Table 4.1: Profile of respondent (continued)

Name	Gender	Age	Years of experience	Skill Level	Riding frequency (per week)	Mountain biking tourism frequency (per year)	Description of personal involvement in sport	Seriousness / Involvement in subculture
Lucy	F	36	5	Intermediate	At least once	3 to 5	A late starter but very involved socially	Moderate
Luca	M	24	13	Expert	Several times	1 or 2	Recently became less involved due other priorities (enrolled to university)	
Eli	M	20	5	Expert	At least once	1 or 2	Passionate about mountain biking but time-poor and limited financially	
Rosa	F	35	5	Advanced	Several times	More than 5	Enjoys trail running and mountain biking, involved in the sport through her partner	
Nelson	M	31	0.5	Advanced	Several times	1 or 2	Recently started mountain biking but it is quickly developing into a real passion	
Phil	M	24	10	Advanced	At least once	3 to 5	Started riding in his teens and is still very involved in the sport but has other interests as well	
Lenny	M	48	13	Expert	At least once	3 to 5	An experienced rider but mountain biking is not always a priority	
Abby	F	29	3	Intermediate	At least once	3 to 5	Relatively new to the sport; tries to fit mountain biking in her busy schedule	
Kevin	M	40	16	Advanced	A few times per month	3 to 5	Very experienced, but mountain biking is not always a priority	
Colin	M	28	2	Advanced	Several times	3 to 5	Recently started mountain biking and is trying to fit it in his busy schedule as often as possible	
Elise	F	45	17	Advanced	At least once	More than 5	Follows her partner in his passion and their lifestyle revolves around mountain biking	
Steve	M	23	3	Advanced	At least once	1 or 2	Relatively new to the sport focused on improving	

Table 4.1: Profile of respondent (continued)

Name	Gender	Age	Years of experience	Skill Level	Riding frequency (per week)	Mountain biking tourism frequency (per year)	Description of personal involvement in sport	Seriousness / Involvement in subculture
Alex	M	31	3	Advanced	A few times per month	1 or 2	Very active, mountain biking is one of many other activities he enjoys	Low
Zoe	F	49	3	Intermediate	At least once	3 to 5	Enjoys the physical activity and fitness from this new-found sport	

Fourteen respondents were male and eleven were female. Considering that mountain biking has historically been, and still is, a male-dominated sport (Huybers-Withers & Livingston, 2010), there is a potential gender bias in the results of this study. It however reflects that over 25% of mountain bikers in Wellington are female, one the largest female participation rate in New Zealand (Moularde, 2014). The respondents' age ranges from 20 to 49 years old, with an average of 34 years old. This is consistent with a survey of 1,534 New Zealand mountain bikers (Moularde, 2014): 79.4% of respondents were between 21 and 49 years old and 34.5% between 30 and 39 years old. The respondents were provided with a selection of choices to collect information about years of experience mountain biking, skill level, frequency of riding and mountain biking travel, as seen in Appendix A. Since the research only targeted mountain bikers who had previously travelled for the primary purpose of mountain biking, it makes sense that there were no beginners.

The next section presents evidence of serious leisure as observed in the transcripts. The particular process used to evaluate the subsequent degree of involvement with mountain biking used in Table 4.1 is explained in section 4.2.3.

4.2.2 Evidence of serious leisure

Stebbins defined six distinctive characteristics of serious leisure explained in 2.4.4.1 (Gibson, 2006; Green & Jones, 2005). This section describes how the respondents in this research meet these characteristics.

1. Perseverance of participation
2. Progression through a long-term career
3. Significant personal effort
4. Durable benefits
5. Unique ethos
6. Social identification

4.2.2.1 *Perseverance of participation*

Evidence of perseverance in the face of constraints can vary from the simple (finding the time for it) to the extreme (overcoming the fear of injury). Non-serious participants often stop partaking when faced with the need to persevere.

When injured, James was impatient to ride again and never reconsidered his participation in mountain biking. He shows the desire to persevere through failure (an accident), pain and the fear of later injury.

So I had 6 months last year where I couldn't ride because I had a broken collarbone that wouldn't heal and it was really frustrating, not just because it kinda hurt and was annoying, but not being able to come out and do stuff, not being able to get out and ride, especially given it was one of the most epic summers ever. (James)

In a different example, Becca explains how her love for mountain biking affected life-changing decisions. When she decided to move overseas she considered various options. Being able to ride is so important for her that she declined a higher salary to make sure she would have easy and regular access to trails.

I have been looking to come and live abroad for a while and I came [to Wellington]. I could have gone to Australia, and if I went to Australia for my job I could have been paid five times the amount that I get paid here. But I was chatting to someone who used to live in Sydney and he was like "oh yes, there are trails in Sydney, they're only about a 4-hour drive." I was like "What?! I'm not going there!" [laugh] So that put me off that [. . .]. I chose Wellington because of the mountain biking. (Becca)

Green and Jones (2005) explain that in the case of sport tourists, perseverance can also be demonstrated in the face of travel constraints. This is exemplified by Kurt who is so passionate about mountain biking that he is willing to persevere through constraints of distance and inaccessibility in order to access certain trails.

I mean if the trails are good enough, [. . .] particularly if I haven't ridden there before, like the distance, or the inaccessibility is less relevant. (Kurt)

On the other hand, Alex appears less likely to persevere through some travel constraints:

In New Zealand I would [travel for the primary reason of mountain biking]. But I'm not going to fly my bike overseas. It's too much trouble. (Alex)

4.2.2.2 Progressions throughout long-term career

Serious leisure participant progress through a long-term career involving turning points and achievements. The stages of a leisure career can take many forms: improving skills, competing in events or, in the case of special interest tourism, travel to specific destinations representative of a career stage.

Nelson, who is new to the sport, explains how he considers racing as a next stage in his mountain biking career. As he becomes more serious he finds the idea more attractive.

I think maybe I'd race. I didn't use to think I would. But the more I'm doing it now, the more it sort of appeals to me a little bit. Not seriously-seriously, but just to see how you stack up against other people. (Nelson)

Megan used to be a more casual participant and only recently started to become more serious about the sport, progressing to more difficult tracks requiring advanced skills which she is learning. Nate was losing interest in mountain biking but he reached a turning point during a trip with friends which gave him new goals to reach for. For both, the acquisition of new equipment and interaction with a different social group reinvigorated their interest in mountain biking by showing them a path for further progression.

I describe myself more as a mountain biker [now]. And I said earlier that I'd been riding on and off about 15 years, but my riding would be more like a tramper. So enjoy the scenery and going out and enjoying easier tracks. But in the last 9 months I got a full suspension bike and started riding like a mountain biker [. . .]. I really enjoy the technical downhill stuff and learning a lot [. . .]. I enjoy riding with people that push me [. . .]. The goal is to get faster and better and learn. (Megan)

I thought that Karapoti was going to be an annual event to keep riding but [. . .] I actually got bored. I got bored of riding [. . .]. Then I bought a different style of bike I guess [. . .]. The reason for buying [this new bike] was because I went to Rotorua with some of my mates, half of them ex-downhillers, and rode some of the Sesame Street tracks and spokes started breaking and I ended up with a spoke through the derailleur and I was just like “this is not the right bike for this stuff!” [laugh] So I came home and I went “I just need a bike that I can ride that stuff, because that was really fun.” I wasn’t quite sure, it was sort of one of the first time that I’d ridden with a couple of those guys and I wasn’t quite sure because they’ve both ridden pro, elite downhill stuff [. . .] but it was good and I could hold my own. Not keep up, but hold my own and so I was like “actually, if I can ride this stuff then I should get a better bike for actually riding it.” So that was kind of the rationale for the change. And it’s invigorated me to ride again. Because I was kinda just a bit bored with the cross-country thing. So it has changed my perception of riding. (Nate)

The example of Nate is particularly relevant in the context of special interest tourism. Travelling to specific destinations, or engaging in particular experiences while travelling, can further a serious leisure participant’s career and become symbols of career achievements (Green & Jones, 2005; Humphreys, 2011).

4.2.2.3 Significant personal effort

Serious leisure involves significant personal effort – specific skills or knowledge, or dedicated effort required to participate in the activity – demonstrating the commitment of individuals to the sport. As illustrated above, the respondents strived to acquire new skills and continually improve their performance. Other efforts include the financial and time costs of the sport. Luca and Phil explain how much they are willing to put into the sport, to a point that Luca thinks outsiders would not understand.

When we lived in Perth, every weekend we had to travel an hour and a half to get to the trail but we did it every weekend because we wanted to. It’s always something that I make an effort to do. (Phil)

Other people I know who are not mountain bikers and who don't really know that side of me would [. . .] probably be a little bit surprised by some of the trips, some of the things I do mountain biking [. . .]. I think they'd be surprised that I put that much time and money [. . .] into it, for the trips. And just into mountain biking in general [. . .]. A lot of the people I know who don't mountain bike would think it's crazy, how much money and time goes into it. (Luca)

On the other hand, Alex dedicates less time and effort to riding, showing a lower involvement. He stated that he only rides occasionally due to his studies and other activities which often take priority in his schedule. He also rarely travels for the purpose of mountain biking.

Sports tourists may need to undertake additional efforts to prepare for travel, access the destination and participate in the activity once they arrive (e.g., have the necessary skills). Laura observes how much money and effort she and her partner put into mountain biking tourism, but explains that it is such a part of their lives that it is worth the effort.

We do spend a *lot* of money travelling with bikes, like a scary amount of money [. . .]. But definitely, anywhere we go, like if we don't have bikes we're like "oh now what?" It's kinda weird. Like we went to New Plymouth two weeks ago with no bikes and it was just strange [. . .]. Definitely, all holidays are planned around bikes [. . .]. We had very few holidays recently where there wouldn't be some form of biking [involved]. (Laura)

The amount of personal effort that they are willing to put towards mountain biking, and the priority they give to it compared to other time-consuming and expensive activities, is an indication of the respondents' involvement with the sport.

4.2.2.4 Durable benefits

Leisure is usually associated with enjoyment and entertainment. However, serious leisure provides more complex benefits to participants, such as self-esteem, self-actualisation, feeling of accomplishment and social interactions. All respondents experienced multiple benefits from mountain biking including, but not limited to,

sense of fun, new and enhanced social relationships and pride in their successes. Increased fitness is a direct outcome of physical activity, but most respondents also acknowledged mental health benefits and the necessity of mountain biking to their overall well-being; as Becca states: “I get cross if I don’t [ride].”

For Nelson, who is moderately involved, mountain biking is currently a form of relaxation, but for more serious participants like Kurt, mountain biking is a more holistic experience with a wider range of benefits.

I really like it in contrast to what I do all day. It’s the coming home, not sitting at the computer, being able to go out and do something entirely different. It just relaxes you I think. (Nelson)

I get a lot of [. . .] benefits, like in terms of my health and wellbeing, out of riding [. . .]. And on occasion if I haven’t ridden my bike for a few days or something, particularly weeks, like when I’ve been injured, I kinda feel like I’m deteriorating [. . .]. Like I get quite dark and moody and really antsy if I haven’t ridden for a while [. . .] It’s a horrible feeling. So yeah it’s a very physical thing and an emotional thing as well. I like that feeling when I get back from a ride and I’m just buzzing. You know, and I just feel like a squirrel. On crack. You know, like “weeee!” [laugh] (Kurt)

Less involved respondents, like Zoe, also experience benefits from mountain biking but appear less dependent on the activity than some of the more serious respondents like Kurt who described a physical and psychological need to ride.

I don’t need to do it every day. I’m relatively happy doing it once a week, twice a week is good. But I probably wouldn’t go out and do it a lot more than that. (Zoe)

4.2.2.5 Unique ethos shared with other participants

As explained in chapter 2, the unique ethos characteristic of serious leisure encompasses shared norms, values, vocabulary and behaviour. Evidence of the mountain biking subculture and its influence on the respondents will be discussed in more depth in section 4.3, however it is relevant here to share some examples of their awareness of that ethos through the characteristics they associate with mountain bikers.

You can recognise [mountain bikers], can't you?! I think by the clothes they wear sometimes [. . .] These [on picture #1], not that I know these people, but they look like recreational mountain bikers. Whereas this chap [picture #10], looks like a hardy chap, looks like a [serious] mountain biker. So a mountain biker is characterised by their love of the outdoors. Their love of speed and challenge. Their sort of grounded attitude. You know what I mean? (Eli)

[Mountain biking] is an attitude, isn't it?! I think it's a way of life as well. You know, looking out of the window and seeing the rain, that not being a problem. Or you know, it's cold but it doesn't matter because the desire to get out of the city [is stronger] [. . .] I know there's a mixture of people, but to me mountain bikers find that it's on their mind, and they can't wait to leave work to just get out there in the rain. (Megan)

4.2.2.6 Social identification with the activity

Green and Jones (2005) explained that social identification with the sport is strongly interrelated with the unique ethos. It is evident in the quotations above that the respondents are aware of belonging to a group and of sharing characteristics and values with members of that group.

The social importance of mountain biking, and the resulting social identity derived from it, can be observed in the transcripts. Variations and consequences of social identification with mountain biking are investigated in more depth in the next section. However, the few examples below illustrate how some of the respondents identify themselves in relation to others.

I describe myself as a mountain biker. (James)

It's just who I am I guess eh? [laugh] [. . .] I think if you're really into mountain biking it becomes who you are. (Celia)

I feel that it describes a lot about me. (Eli)

Thus, all the respondents meet the characteristics of serious leisure participants. Each transcript contains evidence of all six characteristics. However, vocabulary,

specific knowledge about equipment and destinations, and the researcher's intuitive discernment of the respondents' dedication to mountain biking varied across the sample. Since its first documentation by Stebbins, the concept of serious leisure evolved from a dichotomy to a casual to serious continuum (Scott, 2012). Moreover, Scott (2012) highlights that there are gradations of seriousness independent of skills or efforts demonstrated and that additional factors and circumstances can affect a person's involvement in serious leisure. In order to better understand the respondents, a categorisation process was used to evaluate their level of seriousness.

4.2.3 From activity to identity: respondents' involvement in mountain biking

When analysing the transcripts, it was apparent that the respondents were not all involved in the sport to the same level. While it is possible to identify degrees of seriousness based on Stebbins' characteristics, these can be more pertinent to distinguish the social or competitive orientation of participants rather than to assess their personal commitment to the activity (Scott, 2012).

As explained above, serious leisure participants are characterised by a strong social identification with the activity. However, not all participants identify with the sport to the same extent. Social identification is the knowledge of belonging to a group and attaching significance and value to this membership (Green & Jones, 2005). The most serious leisure participants are highly concerned with aligning with the unique ethos of the sport as it helps them construct and confirm their identities through the acquisition and display of subcultural capital (Gibson, 2006; Green & Jones, 2005).

In this research, the centrality of their mountain biking social identity was the most significant manifestation of the respondents' involvement with the sport, desire to align with the ethos and thus degree of seriousness. This is consistent with Bricker and Kerstetter (2000) who measured recreation specialisation based on centrality to lifestyle and enduring involvement. Some respondents appeared less savvy and less intrinsically motivated, while others were more engaged within the mountain biking community and also appeared to receive significant social and personal benefits from participating in the sport. Mountain biking appeared to have a stronger influence on the self-identities and daily lives of those latter, more involved individuals. Less

involved respondents seem to consider mountain biking an activity in which they regularly take part, while more involved respondents identify with the sport beyond the physical act of riding a mountain bike.

Depending on the centrality of their mountain biking social identity, the respondents can be organised along a low to high seriousness continuum as illustrated in Figure 4.1. An iterative process using Stebbins' characteristics of serious leisure, the respondents' self-identity and particularly an assessment of their personal involvement with, and commitment to, mountain biking was used to evaluate the gradations of seriousness. Each case was compared with the others within the context of the research. A short summary of the assessment of the respondents' involvement was included in Table 4.1. It is important to note that all respondents, including those in the low involvement category, are serious leisure participants as opposed to casual participants.

Figure 4.1: Segmentation of the respondents along the casual to serious leisure continuum.



The quotations below are arranged to show the gradations of seriousness starting with less involved respondents and progressing to respondents displaying dominant mountain biking social identities.

When describing the role mountain biking plays in his life, Alex explains that it is one among a range of outdoor activities that he enjoys; although his current circumstances allow him to ride, he would be able to find other suitable activities to replace it with. He also makes it clear that mountain biking is not his “normal life.”

Mountain biking would be one of my first choices [. . .]. I’ve changed sports reasonably regularly. I used to do white-water kayaking. But I found, when I started studying, that was just too much effort [. . .]. Mountain biking is

something I can do for 2 or 3 hours and get a bit of adrenaline going and then get back to my normal life. So I like lots of outdoorsy sports. I've recently gotten into skiing but I've done all sorts of things. (Alex)

For Elise, mountain biking is "one of the things" that she does but is not be "first and foremost" in her self-identity. Nelson recently started mountain biking and while it is quickly taking an important place in his life, he does not currently identify as a mountain biker. He explains that "there are lots of people I talk to that I wouldn't talk about that." Rosa takes it one step further when she says "it does add something to my life, it kinda feels like it's part of you." Eli clearly identifies with mountain biking beyond the activity itself and he associates positive characteristics with this social identity:

It's one of the first things that I'd say about myself. It's one of the first things that come to mind because I identify with it. I feel that it describes a lot about me. (Eli)

An example of how the aforementioned six characteristics of serious leisure do not always offer an accurate way to measure seriousness is noticeable in Phil's account below. Phil has been mountain biking for over 10 years. He is a highly skilled rider, has put much effort in his career progression and does experience durable benefits from the activity. However, he does not display a strong social identity linked to the sport, which remains an activity rather than part of his identity.

[Mountain biking] is more part of my lifestyle instead of a way of life [. . .]. I'm not absolutely obsessed with it. It's something that I fit into my life. And it's one of my passions. But mountain biking doesn't always take the place of other activities for me, because it's one of many things that I enjoy doing [. . .]. I think it will always be there, it will always have a place, I will always enjoy mountain biking [. . .]. It's always something that I make an effort to do [. . .]. But I'm not going to say it's all my life. (Phil)

Once mountain biking starts evolving from an activity to an identity, the respondents start displaying this identity to individuals outside of the subculture. While Zoe says "I do mention it every now and then," other respondents appear to display and rely

on this identity a lot more, considering it an important part of themselves. Both Kim and Kurt said that being a mountain biker was a better way of defining themselves than their jobs or other personal characteristics. Celia's quotation illustrates the centrality of the mountain biking social identity in her life.

I guess it's my identity [. . .]. I started [a new job] at the end of last year. So I didn't want to tell them I'm a mountain biker, because that's what I always used to say, "oh, I do mountain biking" and then people would stick that vision, or identify me as a mountain biker. I was like, see how long I can say... well, not say that I'm a mountain biker. But then, in the end, it's just like "oh, you're the girl who goes mountain biking" or "are you going out riding after work today?" and it's just who I am I guess, eh [. . .]? [laugh] I think if you're really into mountain biking it becomes who you are. (Celia)

Green and Jones (2005) noted that stages in the formation of serious leisure identities correspond to degrees of commitment to aligning with the unique ethos and acclimation to a particular subculture. Therefore, the stronger social identification with the activity, the more serious the individual and the more involved within the subculture. Accordingly, the scale described in Figure 4.1 informed the categorisation of the respondents' involvement in the mountain biking subculture in Table 4.1. The most serious participants could thus internalise more norms and values from the subculture than less serious participants. In this context, the strength of social influence from the subculture in shaping attitudes towards mountain biking tourism and destinations would vary based on the degree of seriousness and acclimation to the subculture. Therefore, the three levels involvement with the subculture (low, moderate and high) categorizing the respondents are used in the remainder of the thesis to analyse variations in attitudes and the attitude formation process to assess the role of the subculture.

4.3 MOUNTAIN BIKING SUBCULTURE, SOCIAL IDENTITY CENTRALITY AND GRADATIONS OF SERIOUSNESS

Aforementioned evidence of a shared ethos and social identification with mountain biking suggested the existence of a mountain biking subculture in which the respondents evolve and interact (Hagen, 2013). This section presents evidence of this subculture and subcultural capital in the respondents' discourse as well as subsequent influences on their behaviour.

4.3.1 Evidence of subculture

All the respondents indicated their awareness of being part of a larger group; as indicated earlier, some of them are conscious of values and norms they share with the wider mountain biking community. They are members of the mountain biking subculture in Wellington, but also nation-wide and internationally. They are aware of being part of a particular social world alongside individuals with a similar passion for mountain biking, common values and associated behaviour which set them apart from the dominant culture and other subcultures (Hagen, 2013). Many respondents define themselves partly through their understanding of, and alignment with, this ethos.

Subcultures are characterised through shared norms, values, behaviours and language, which help members identify each other. Being an insider in the mountain biking subculture and community in Wellington meant that understanding the respondents' stories was easy. However, this might not have been the case if the researcher had been an outsider. The quotations below include italicised jargon specific to the subculture of mountain biking. They highlight a shared knowledge between its members.

Alex considers that using specific vocabulary identifies him as a mountain biker; it increases his sense of belonging.

I associate with guys who mountain bike [. . .]. I use words like *gnarly* and I know what *berm* means. That's part of it. I also wear *Fox* t-shirts. (Alex)

When describing his riding style and given the choice between *cross-country*, *all-mountain* and *downhill*, Nate has an immediate understanding of each option,

intuitively associates *enduro* racing with all-mountain riding, and includes insider banter in his answer based on recent stories in specialised media: “I’m going to put *enduro* in capital letters, because it’s so cool right now [laugh].” On the other hand, Zoe, who is less serious, appeared less aligned with the ethos when she asked “Can you just define the difference between *cross-country* and *all-mountain*?”

Eli names trails in Wainuiomata and Rotorua when describing his riding preferences. He expects the researcher to understand his perspective due to the shared knowledge of these tracks and destinations. Such descriptions can bring clear images in the mind of an insider based on memories of direct (riding) or indirect (watching videos, reading articles) experiences but would likely be ambiguous and imprecise for an outsider.

I love really *tight, rough, raw singletrack*. Trying to get down that as fast as you can. But then I really enjoy *wide, manicured, digger-built trails*, you know, *grade 2* sort of stuff, but where you can really *let loose* and have ultimate freedom of your bike. But I would say, if I had to say what I enjoy the most, it would be the first description. So sort of like *491 in Wainui* as opposed to *Corners up in Rotorua*. (Eli)

Similarly, James presumes that the researcher knows the difference between several types of mountain bikes, even specific models, and would know the outcomes of riding these different bikes in a specific destination (the French Alps). He does not think it necessary to explain that trails in that region are steep and technical, meaning that a full-suspension bike would be more forgiving and provide a better experience for the rider. It is another example of the respondents unconsciously relying on the shared ethos of the subculture and the depth of significance of specialised jargon.

I knew I was going to the *French Alps* and [. . .] I just thought that I would be taking my *cross-country bike*. [But I bought a new bike,] it was my first *full suspension bike*. It was a *Santa Cruz Bullit*, so a *7-inch travel*, do-everything bike. So I went from a titanium *hardtail* to this. So I was planning on taking my hardtail, but I had so much more fun on the Bullit. (James)

Knowledge of equipment, trails, destinations, riding styles and jargon is part of the mountain biking subcultural capital. It provides respondents with the instruments to connect with other members of the subculture.

4.3.2 Bonding over common experiences

Another form, and evidence, of subcultural capital is the appreciation of stories shared by members of the subculture. Commonalities with other mountain bikers, such as similar experiences, helps the respondents (1) identify other mountain bikers, (2) assess their status within the subculture, and (3) bond with members of the subculture. In the two extracts below the respondents and researcher connect through their similar experiences.

Elise: It's too hard to always get it right [*riding on narrow wooden paths*] and then when you don't get it right it hurts! [laugh]

Researcher: Yes. You always looks down thinking it's going to hurt and then you fall.

Elise: Exactly! "I don't want to go there!... oh look I am..." yes! [laugh]

Kurt: Like the trail I always think about is Te Tihi O Tawa in Rotorua, because it's relatively...

Researcher: Oh it's such a good trail!

Kurt: It's sick, eh?!

The respondents experience a sense of belonging with the in-group of mountain bikers. The subcultural capital they hold and perceive in other members of the subculture helps strengthen social relationships and reinforces their involvement with the sport. Association with the in-group is obvious among the respondents. When discussing conflicts on trails, Kim explains that "What is important is that we, as mountain bikers, only do good stuff," showing her association with a wider community who stands apart from other trail users. Other respondents also provide examples of the sense of belongingness and commonalities they experience:

There's a general consensus that we all love the outdoors, we all love to get away from responsibilities and regular lives for a regular time and swing a pick or get on the bike. (Eli)

I like to go to mountain biking events and stuff, like screening of movies because we've all got something in common you know? It's kinda like running into that dude, a couple weeks ago, on that long ride, you know, never met him before, didn't know his name, but we had something in common. (Kurt)

The respondents are aware of their membership to the mountain biking subculture and there is evidence of the importance of subcultural capital among the respondents. But beyond the reality of shared knowledge which can facilitate interaction between members, how does the subculture influence the respondents?

4.3.3 A solo social sport

The evolution of mountain biking from an activity to an identity, increased personal involvement in the subculture and display of subcultural capital appear to be linked to the social importance of mountain biking in the respondents' lives. The stronger their social ties around the activity, the more they identify with the sport, leading them to be active members of the subculture. Involvement in the subculture thus partly relies on shared experiences and social ties between members. Mountain biking is an individual sport, however previous studies confirmed that individual sports such as golfing and skiing can be the stage of rich social interactions which can motivate participation and involvement (Fluker, 2003; Hagen, 2013; Humphreys, 2011; Weed & Bull, 2012). In this research mountain biking emerges as a context for important social interactions to which the respondents ascribe emotional value.

All the respondents admitted to having regular group rides throughout the week. A range of formal clubs, informal groups and regular gathering of friends and co-workers were mentioned. The social role of mountain biking was particularly evident when the respondents moved cities. Becca and Tony, who moved to Wellington from overseas, explained relying on mountain biking to create social ties in their new home. When Lenny arrived in Wellington he says:

I was actively looking for groups that were riding and a friend of mine said "get in touch with [this] person" and they told me about the Wednesday night ride and I have been going ever since. (Lenny)

Social relations with other mountain bikers also motivated the respondents to ride more often, improve their skills and dedicate more time and efforts to the sport. Therefore, it appears that social ties within the subculture push participants towards the serious end of the spectrum. Zoe explains that “knowing somebody who took me out” was the key to changing her riding routine from sporadic to regular. Megan only became a more regular rider, and started developing a strong mountain biker social identity, in the last nine months as she got to know people who were able to help her improve. Lucy emphasises the importance of social connections in her pursuing mountain biking:

I guess the stuff that makes me mountain biking more recently and in the last couple of year it's meeting people and friendships and bonding over mountain biking. (Lucy)

When asked about the importance of mountain biking in their lives, the respondents mentioned the benefits of fitness and health and being in nature. However, the main value ascribed to participation in mountain biking were the social ties and social interactions through the subculture. The relative importance of those social connections varied between the respondents, but connecting with other mountain bikers and bonding over shared experiences was at the core of all the respondents' motivations for mountain biking.

Pretty much all my social activities revolve around bikes [laugh]. Most of my friends in Wellington I met through mountain biking. (Laura)

For me [mountain biking] is kinda of very holistic. So it's physical exercise, it's fresh air, it's the challenge and the achievement of getting up the hill [. . .]. And it's social [. . .]. I broke my hand and wasn't riding for 2 months and nobody called! [laugh] I was of no use to anybody because I couldn't ride. I was like “oh...” And that was a realization of “Damn! Maybe I should think about other parts of my life” because [. . .] I can't go track building because you need your hands, and there's no connection to my community or my set of friends. It was like “oh damn, this is quite serious.” [. . .]. So miserable! But it's healthy though, eh?! Because you share a passion with people, you learn

from each other, and you share exciting memories and you can laugh together when you fall off. (Megan)

Even Luca, who admits that he has currently less time to dedicate to the sport, emphasises the social role of mountain biking in his life:

I've got university, and I've kind of committed myself to that [. . .]. But [mountain biking] is something that will always be part of my life, I'll never stop mountain biking [. . .]. I still spend time with my friends, my mountain biking friends. I still look at the websites [. . .]. It's still a part of my life definitely. Hmm as much as anything because a lot of my friends are mountain bikers [. . .]. So it is a big part of my life. (Luca)

Participation in mountain biking can originate from a variety of motivations. However, the richer and more complex the benefits perceived, and particularly social ties to the subculture, the more serious the respondents tend to be.

4.4 FROM SERIOUS LEISURE TO SPECIAL INTEREST TOURISM

As explained in chapter 2, special interest tourism and serious leisure have been found to be mutually reinforcing (Green & Jones, 2005). In this research, serious leisure shapes tourism preferences and decisions – through membership in the subculture, social identification and social ties with mountain biking. This section addresses how the respondents' position on the serious leisure continuum and their involvement with the mountain biking subculture influence motivations to travel, information search and evaluation of destinations. It also discusses how mountain biking tourism can be perceived as subcultural capital.

4.4.1 Influences of the subculture on mountain biking tourism

The influence of social relationships, social identities and the shared ethos was obvious when the respondents discussed their motivations to travel and the type of travel they had done.

4.4.1.1 Motivation to travel

Mountain biking tourism is rarely a solitary venture. When talking about past and future trips the respondents all favoured the pronoun “we” as opposed to “I” (with the notable exception of Luca), evidence of the preference for group travel. Mountain biking tourism was often triggered by the respondents’ social circles. In these cases a person or group would suggest an itinerary or destination and the respondents would join them. As Tom explains, “a lot of the time if there’s a ride organised to go [somewhere], a group going, I tag along.” While these trips would most often be short domestic trips, the example of Kevin suggests that mountain bikers have an inherent trust in their social circle and are willing to travel to overseas destinations when motivated by their peers.

I met [Friend 1] and [Friend2] [. . .]. We drove to Crested Butte and I think we had 3 days there of riding and then a couple of rides on the way back to Denver and then flew back home. Just a short stop. That was all I could afford time wise but it was magic [. . .]. So they sort of wanted me to come over. I said “here is the mid-semester break where are you going to be?” and they’re like “Colorado,” so I said “sweet, I’ll come.” (Kevin)

Travelling for mountain biking can be the occasion to catch up with friends, strengthen relationships and confirm social ties. Therefore, attitudes towards destinations can be influenced by the individuals at the core of the travel motive. In those circumstances, many tangible destination attributes would likely be of lesser importance compared to the emotional bonds that it enables.

The riding itself has to be challenging. I mean, in a couple of weeks, we’re doing the Rimutaka Rail Trail which doesn’t look to be a particularly challenging trail but it’s with people who I quite like and they invited me and I’m not doing anything else, so I’m going. (Becca)

I travel [. . .] to catch up with other people from around the country in a central location. So other people that I ride with live in different places. But I also think that it’s a good reason to get out of town and go and do something different. (Nate)

The reason we're going back [to BC], two years later, it's because some of the people we met at the Revelstoke Bike Fest want to do it again [. . .]. So yes, it's a bit of a reunion as well. And I hope that maybe it will continue. (Kim)

Social interactions are central to the respondents' involvement in the sport and special interest tourism appears to provide a context for extended social interaction with other members of the subculture. Thus, attitudes towards the group, and towards group travel, appear to strongly influence attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations as per social judgement theory.

4.4.1.2 Mountain biking tourism: a social experience

Social motives could also mean that destinations are not only evaluated based on attributes directly linked to the activity (trails) or essential travel needs (accommodation); an individual could hold a positive attitude towards a destination based on it fulfilling social motivations. Thus, it is expected that destination attributes would be scrutinised for their potential to facilitate social interactions. Attributes taken into considerations when evaluating mountain biking tourism destinations and forming attitudes will be addressed further in the next chapter but the quotations below illustrate the extent of social influence on this process and the resulting attitudes.

Ease of access can be an important factor in the attractiveness of a tourism destination however travel to the destination can be perceived as part of the experience in mountain biking tourism; it encourages interactions between the members of the group.

Getting 4 people in a van and driving somewhere with the bikes and [random chatting] on the way, all that sort of stuff can be a good thing in itself. We did a road trip down to Queenstown to do a race and sort of drove back and that was about a 10-hour drive back from Queenstown to Picton and that was quite fun in itself. (James)

Spaces to mingle, share stories and relive the day's adventures, such as cafés and pubs, are attributes perceived as supporting social interactions and often considered essential in mountain biking tourism destinations.

[Picture #4] I bet down there, there's probably some sort of a city where you can go for a nice drink afterwards. So that one looks really cool. (Becca)

I just liked [picture #9] because it looks like you can just like go for a really nice relaxed ride and end up in a pub somewhere [. . .]. That's a very appealing sort of mountain bike ride [. . .] It's kind part of the whole experience [. . .]. Especially if you're going with other people, having somewhere to chill out and [. . .] look back at the day and chat about it. (Zoe)

The sense of belonging to the mountain biking community can be heightened through travelling when individuals have the chance to immerse themselves in the subculture. This was expressed by all respondents; they tended to favour destinations where they could experience a sense of community with other mountain bikers. Rotorua was often cited as an example of a destination facilitating social interaction and bonding. Eli calls it a "great community" and Colin thinks "it just makes it a very social occasion."

On one hand, those social experiences are sought because they reinforce the respondents' sense of belonging and validate their membership in the mountain biking subculture. On the other hand, they allow participants to revel in the subculture and their social identity. Mountain biking trips are occasions to enjoy extended contact with friends within the subculture, ultimately strengthening relationships. This corroborates the opinion of Green and Jones (2005) that special interest tourism facilitates and reinforces serious leisure participation.

Sharing travel experiences provides companionship but can also help the respondents validate their identification with the sport. Positive attitudes towards a particular destination could then be held to conform to the attitudes of the other members of the subculture or a close social group.

4.4.2 Mountain biking tourism and subcultural capital

Beyond opportunities to share travel experiences directly, mountain biking tourism also seems to hold a subcultural capital quality for the respondents. Traveling for the main purpose of mountain biking allows them to reinforce their mountain biking identity by acquiring experiences and knowledge. Evidence of this subcultural capital gained is provided when they share travel stories.

Humphreys (2011) had observed that the golfing subculture bestows reputation levels on specific golfing destinations which golfers draw upon to enhance their status within the subculture. In this research, travelling to mountain biking destinations also appeared to provide the respondents with evidence of serious leisure career development, maintaining and reinforcing of their mountain biker identities. However, they did not associate visiting particular destinations as a status symbol per say.

4.4.2.1 *Identity confirmation*

One of the respondents' underlying motivations for mountain biking tourism is to define themselves against the out-group. This is the first step in creating their mountain biking social identities.

Some of my friends would say “you’re not a mountain biker if you just ride a mountain bike on the Otago Rail Trail.” I probably would agree with that actually. (Lenny)

Special interest tourism can provide them with a sense of pride and self-esteem when comparing themselves to individuals who are not mountain bikers or who would not be able, or willing, to partake in similar adventures.

You’re standing on some pass or some saddle and you’re like “oh my goodness, here I am, and I’m riding with my bike and not like everyone else taking the gondola,” you know, it’s great. And just looking on the map later and you see those 300 or 400 kilometres that you’ve done and you’re like “wow, I did that on my own, with my own two legs.” (Rosa)

This helps the respondents validate their identity and their member status within the subculture. Travelling allows them to collect stories and experiences which they rely

on as forms of subcultural capital. Some previous studies have indicated that travel within the context of serious leisure can further the career of participants (Green & Jones, 2005). As Nelson indicates, mountain biking tourism is “another point of similarity that people can relate to and talk about.”

Sharing stories and comparing stories is good [. . .]. Like lots of people have been to Rotorua, and when you come back from Rotorua people are like “oh, how was that?” or if you’ve been somewhere new, people are always interested. (Lucy)

It’s an interesting thing to talk about with people [. . .]. It’s having another thing in common with people. That’s good to talk about [. . .]. I enjoy sharing the experience of those places with people. (Tom)

Those situations are occasions to celebrate the shared ethos of the subculture and deepen social relationships. Discussions between mountain bikers about particular trips or destinations include inside banter, comparison of experiences and questions about trail status. In turn, this will strengthen the serious leisure participant’s involvement in the sport and subculture. It is thus possible to suggest that attitudes held towards some mountain biking tourism destinations fulfil a value-expressive function. Individuals would be interested in bonding over their commonalities, encouraging them to internalise attitudes from the wider community as their own.

4.4.2.2 Travel stories

Sharing travel stories appears to be at the core of the respondents’ interactions within the subculture. However, as noted previously, the respondents emphasised that they were inspired by their peers’ stories and experiences but did not recognise those as status symbols.

So sometimes people are quite envious. Yeah. But it’s not necessarily that they think “oh wow you’re really amazing because you went there,” they’re more like “oh I’d love to go myself” [. . .]. Most people are keen to [travel] because they really enjoy it, not because they are doing it to make themselves look good. (Elise)

It might give me ideas of what I might want to do [. . .]. Like, people like [Friend 1] and [Friend 2], who have just been overseas recently racing the BC Bike Race [in Canada], I thought “oh, that’s pretty cool, I’d like to do that” but yeah I’ve never thought “oh I want to be like this person traveling the world” [. . .]. Just inspiring ideas, giving me ideas of where I might want to go later on, what I might want to do when I travel. (Celia)

Similarly, when sharing their own stories, they were aware their friends would be envious rather than impressed.

People are interested in telling stories and that’s how you get inspired [. . .]. So you’re always looking for that shot that is going to make everyone else jealous because you’re in some place that looks amazing. (James)

Good stories, particularly from unique or unusual destinations, are regarded as important parts of the mountain bikers’ social identity. It allows the respondents to express their individuality within the subculture.

[Picture #10] looks like it would be the one that I would be talking about the most afterwards. It looks like a nice day [. . .]. In terms of feeling like you got the most reward from it. It was the most challenging [. . .]. Actually that’s something that really wasn’t like riding up to Tinakori or going to Makara Peak or something like that [. . .]. Yes, it’s unique. (James)

Travel stories allow individuals to portray themselves in a positive manner to maintain their position within the subculture and strengthen their sense of belonging to the mountain biking community, but it also serves a more obvious information sharing role. Sources of information used in the attitude formation process will be further discussed in the following chapter, however it is relevant to note the prominent influence of the subculture.

You always talk about it [. . .]. But I think to a certain point people are interested as well. Because they want to know what are the opportunities to ride, and what was it like, and was it better than here, and is it worth going all that way. (Megan)

A lot of riders are kind of [interested in travel stories] because there is a possibility that they might one day go there as well. So they're interested to see what it might be like and [. . .] what you thought of it, and they're keen to see pictures or look at maps [. . .]. And then the perspective is that they might go themselves someday so they kinda gathering their own store of knowledge about what might be possible in the future. Or they might have been themselves and it's kind of an opportunity to relive their own trips. And sometimes it's people that you share it with that are the ones who told you about it in the first place. (Elise)

Travel experiences being one of the primary topics of discussion among mountain bikers indicates the central role of word-of-mouth in attitude formation in mountain biking tourism.

4.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter introduced the 25 respondents interviewed for this research. It explained the selection criteria and the process used to categorise them along the serious leisure continuum. Mountain biking, even though it is an individual sport, is very social. The more socially connected individuals appear to be, the more serious they are about their participation in the sport and the more involved in the subculture. Evidence of the subculture and the importance of social interactions for mountain bikers were provided, first in the context of the activity in general, then in the specific context of mountain biking tourism.

It was explained that social influence plays a central role in the respondents' travel decision process and thus in the formation and content of their attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations. This chapter underlined some of those influences. The desire to travel in groups means that an individual's personal attitude towards a destination might be less relevant in the decision process than situational factors. It also suggests that attitudes towards the group and mountain biking travel in general would have a strong influence on attitudes towards destinations. The importance of sharing travel stories indicates the important role of word-of-mouth in attitude formation. Lastly, attitudes towards mountain biking destinations appear

to have a social role for the respondents, allowing them to bond over similarities with other members of the subculture and strengthening social relationships. Therefore, it is likely that certain attitudes are held because of their value-expressive or ego-defensive functions. It is thus possible that the respondents are complying with expectations and norms from the subculture.

5 CHAPTER 5: ATTITUDE CONTENT AND FORMATION PROCESS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a deeper understanding of the respondents in this research, their involvement in the mountain biking subculture, and the resulting social influence on their travel decisions and attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations. This chapter addresses the remaining two research questions: “What attitudes do mountain bikers hold towards mountain biking destinations?” and “How are these attitudes formed and what factors influenced them?”

Attitudes can result from different processing strategies, be context-dependent and be influenced by situational factors (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011; Cohen & Reed II, 2006), all elements investigated in this chapter. The second section focuses on attitude content and their generally positive valence. The following section addresses precursors to attitude formation as identified in the conceptual framework (namely motivations, information search and influencing factors). Lastly, the evaluation process resulting from these elements and leading to attitudes is investigated.

5.2 ATTITUDE CONTENT

The respondents’ attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations were assessed by investigating commentaries on destinations they had visited or were aware of, as well as their evaluations of destinations depicted in the projective exercise.

5.2.1 Generally positive attitudes

Tourist attitudes towards destinations are summary evaluations expressing an intrinsic attraction or aversion to that destination (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011; Moutinho, 1987). In this research, the respondents appear to hold overly positive attitudes towards most mountain biking tourism destinations. They used words such as “magic” (Kevin), “fantastic” (Alex) and “amazing” (Eli) when relaying their evaluations.

Their tendency to positive evaluations was particularly obvious when asked about places they might avoid or negative aspects of some destinations. While not all

destinations were acknowledged as ideal – the respondents made comments regarding issues and downsides in some of the destinations discussed – overall they felt noticeably attracted to most of the alternatives discussed (actual destinations and photographs from the projective exercise).

When Steve reminisced about a trip on the Queen Charlotte Track and Becca talked about Scotland, they both conveyed adverse aspects or undesirable attributes, but clearly maintained overall positive attitudes towards those destinations.

[The Queen Charlotte Track] was good, but we had some pretty terrible weather [. . .]. And I don't really have good wet weather gear so half an hour into the second day I was like a drowned rat [. . .]. But it was really good fun, it was a cool trip. (Steve)

[Scotland] is wet sometimes, but when it's not wet it's beautiful, and even when it's wet it doesn't really matter anyway because, it's still fun. I think they have showers [in trail centres] and everything, so it doesn't matter how muddy you are. It's really good! (Becca)

5.2.2 Some negative attitudes

Most of the respondents were unable to name specific destinations they would avoid: "I have no destination right now that I would say I would never go there to ride" (Rosa). Negative assessments of some attributes or adverse conditions did not inevitably result in negative evaluations. Zoe prefers challenging trails but stated: "the Timber Trail isn't exactly hard but it was fabulous and fun." And Elise explained: "I don't mind carrying my bike and I don't mind dressing for winter."

Interestingly, bad experiences and negative word-of-mouth, while potentially leading to a generally less positive attitude towards some destinations, did not always deter the respondents. They largely remained positive about most mountain biking destinations.

I mean I don't hate [Woodhill], I still enjoy going out riding there, it's just that... there are definitely places that I much prefer, yeah [. . .]. No I can't think

of anywhere that's that bad [that I wouldn't want to go]... [. . .] I think everywhere has its merits. (Celia)

However, a few negative attitudes were noticed. Among 129 distinct destinations mentioned by the respondents, in only 10 cases the attitude expressed was noticeably negative. Most of these negative attitudes were the result of unsatisfactory direct experiences in the destinations.

Napier. Terrible bike park. Terrible. At least it was when we were there. It was just awful. Tracks were just really not fun [laugh]. Poorly sign-posted and no map and not really very exciting [. . .]. Yes, bad experience. (Elise)

Australia. I probably wouldn't travel there for the purpose of mountain biking. I've been there, I've done the mountain biking there because I was there. It wasn't anything special. I know there is a lot there, but [. . .] I just wouldn't go. (Phil)

However, in a few cases respondents held negative attitudes towards destinations they had not visited:

I haven't heard anything that sounds like [Woodhill] is worth the effort [. . .]. It wouldn't be worth a specific trip [. . .]. It's kinda mostly flat or not terribly interesting and probably quite crowded. (Elise)

Australia doesn't really appeal to me very much [. . .]. [I heard] it's quite hard and rocky [. . .]. I just don't imagine it as a very interesting place to ride. (Eli)

Similarly, the respondents appeared to consistently like the photographs from the projective exercise. As Lenny stated: "I mean there's not much here that I [. . .] wouldn't enjoy in some way." However, when probed further most respondents did admit that some destinations depicted were less desirable than others:

They're all appealing to me for different reasons. But I would say... least appealing would be this picture here, number 1, exclusively because the trail is [. . .] just a road. All you're doing is just turning your legs. (Eli)

They all look pretty cool. This maybe [picture #1] is probably my least favourite. I mean... I'd still do it and I'd still enjoy it, but it looks slow [. . .] I mean it would still be nice as part of a [trip]. But I wouldn't go there like "wow this is going to be amazing riding." (Lucy)

The respondents' evaluations of mountain biking tourism destinations are predominantly positive. However, it is apparent that not all positive attitudes are held with equal conviction and strength. While most destinations would be perceived as *good* by the respondents, some are preferred above others – the *great* destinations. Better understanding of the attitude formation process could provide insights into the critical characteristics of *great* destinations.

5.3 ATTITUDE FORMATION

Based on the conceptualisation of attitudes as a step in the travel decision-making process (Figure 2.4), this section investigates the antecedents of attitude formation: motivations, information search and potential influencing factors.

5.3.1 Mountain biking tourism motivations

The consumption process starts with needs or desires which trigger motivations to achieve specific goals (Albarracin et al., 2005). In order to understand the respondents' attitudes, it is essential to first identify their motivations to travel for the purpose of mountain biking.

5.3.1.1 *Motivations to mountain bike*

The respondents all unquestionably enjoy the mountain biking outside of the tourism context. They perceive mountain biking as a holistic experience and associate it with a range of durable benefits such as a sense of fun, increased self-esteem, physical health and general well-being, as well as social relationships providing a sense of belonging.

In addition to social identity and social ties, described in detail in the previous chapter, the respondents are often attracted to the physical challenges offered by the sport, both fitness and technical. As a result they are motivated to get stronger and improve their skills. Alex enjoys "the exercise" and tries "to get better," while Nelson strives to be "faster," and always "do better." More serious respondents

focus on mastery and finesse, like Eli who wants to “achieve perfection” which he finds satisfying because “the fun comes from executing the style well.”

Some of the more experienced and serious respondents evoked the psychological gratification of successfully pushing their limits to meet the challenges of a ride. This appears to be linked to the state of flow where the participant experiences intense focus and personal satisfaction when they have the abilities to meet challenges encountered. Once achieved, the state of flow can become a motivation to practice the activity (Higham, 2005). Rosa strives to get “the mojo right” and Luca experiences “a sense of joy” and “a bit of a high” when he pushes his abilities. James is in “constant pursuit of [the] perfect corner” and Nate wants to achieve “that level of concentration that you are forced into, and the adrenaline that ultimately comes with that.” Other respondents, often less involved in the sport, sought a relaxed state, rather than an aroused flow state. For example Olivia considers mountain biking a peaceful “timeout.” In these cases mountain biking was often perceived as a relaxing activity with a focus on enjoying the outdoors.

The more involved the respondents, the more holistic their experience of mountain biking, and the more complex their motivations to practice the activity, seemed to be. They looked for tangible benefits such as improving their skills, but also the simple enjoyment of nature, social relationships and an opportunity to escape from the routine. As Kurt explains: “I’m just in the middle of nowhere so it’s like an excuse to shake your responsibilities.”

The respondents’ drive to travel for the primary purpose of mountain biking was based on their general motivations to ride but also revealed richer, multifaceted motivations. These are described in the following subsections.

5.3.1.2 Social motivations

Social motivations to travel were addressed in chapter 4 when describing the influence of social relationships on the respondents’ participation in mountain biking tourism. Social ties to the mountain biking subculture act as pull motivation when the respondents join a trip already planned, and push motivation when the respondents sought to strengthen social relations through travelling. This echoes

findings from Taylor (2010) that mountain bikers are motivated by the social aspect of the sport, but challenges findings from Ritchie et al. (2010) who state that bicycling tourists seek solitude.

5.3.1.3 Achieving mastery & seeking flow

The respondents often mentioned searching for novelty and variety. Their underlying motivation appears to be the pursuit of mastery. Travelling gives the respondents access to new terrain, styles of trails and features. Luca, for example, looks for “different trails with [. . .] different building styles, different features, different soils.” Thus, the respondents perceive mountain biking tourism as offering opportunities to test their skills in different conditions and learn new skills which, as explained by Kurt, “motivate[s] you as a rider.”

I think just kind of getting exposed to all sorts of different trail styles, is good for your confidence, and learning how to tackle different terrain. (Steve)

It’s variety. And it’s challenge. Constant challenging, because there’s just no point being able to ride all the hardest trails here and [. . .] then what? You can wait for a new one to be built? (Kim)

Mountain biking tourism also (1) allows the respondent to focus on riding for a few days, which boosts their confidence and increases their perceived abilities, and (2) encourages them to tackle challenges that they might otherwise have perceived as beyond their abilities.

It’s usually an intense weekend, and often a long weekend. So you have 3 big days of riding so you get fitter and I think when you’re riding that hard you just start feeling it rather than thinking about what you’re doing as well. (Megan)

I also think that it improves my riding [. . .]. It’s the challenge of riding new stuff [. . .]. Because it pushes you and puts you outside your comfort zone [. . .] but because everything is new you’d try it all, you’d just give it a go because [you’re] doing things without analysing so much. (Abby)

Mountain biking tourism is thus perceived as increasing mastery by offering opportunities for extensive and intensive riding time, and to face new challenges.

Since many respondents mentioned flow state as a motivation to ride it is reasonable to assume that it would apply to mountain biking tourism as well. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) explained that, in the context of flow, challenges and skills are dynamic subjective interpretations rather than measurable assessments. Extensive and intensive riding time leads the respondents to be increasingly confident in their abilities to successfully tackle new and riskier challenges. Thus, mountain biking trips could change the respondents' perceptions of their skills and of the challenges encountered in the destination or upon their return home. It could therefore be an opportunity to experience flow.

Although only a few highly involved respondents included flow as part of their motivations to travel, most respondents revealed they deliberately look for challenges: "I look to get into situations where I'm feeling challenged" (James). This self-imposed goal to challenge themselves can be understood as an intrinsic motivation to experience situations of flow, since the respondents expect to successfully meet these challenges. Below, Kurt and Eli explain how traveling allows them to experience challenges they feel enthusiastic about.

Wellington has a lot to offer but you can't beat that feeling of riding a new trail for the first time, just like not knowing what's around the corner [. . .]. It's *super* exciting, and scary, yeah [. . .]. That feeling you get, right?! "Oh my god what's this?!" (Kurt)

The first time I went up to Rotorua, it's the first time I experienced proper national downhill style track [. . .]. The size of the jumps and the features, it's just freaking huge. And doing all those is fantastic you know. It's such a learning experience. And I wouldn't have done it if it was just at home because I would have thought "oh I can always do it when I'm a bit better." But when you're there, you have to do it. Because you won't be there forever. (Eli)

5.3.1.4 Authentic adventure & escape

When the respondents sought challenges it involved the idea of pushing their abilities to their limit (for mastery and flow) but also putting themselves in extraordinary situations and settings. This is apparent in the search for new experiences and places mentioned by the respondents regardless of their level of involvement.

[Traveling] is just very different, I think that we are looking for new experiences and new stimulations [. . .]. You can get that in the place where you live all the time [. . .], [but] if you've ridden everything then there's nothing that is surprising. And I think that's what is really nice about going somewhere else, it's experiencing something that you haven't felt before. (James)

I get tired of riding the same trails all the time [. . .]. I think the biggest thing is that I travel to have new adventures and new experiences. (Luca)

Novelty is a recognised travel motivation in several studies (Gnoth, 1997; Hsu et al., 2010). For the respondents, mountain biking provides the means to fulfil general goals of escapism and novelty. Becca explains: "I travel to ride, but I also ride to travel." They deliberately choose mountain biking tourism because it allows them to access locations they would not otherwise visit because of lack of time or other constraints. This was particularly true for respondents who had previously done multi-day cross-country trips.

I think that mountain biking gives me opportunities to go places that I wouldn't otherwise get to. (James)

There are some beautiful tracks out there [. . .], that take you to part of the country where you wouldn't normally go to and on the bike you can cover a track that would take you 3 or 4 days on foot, and you can do it in a day, so a lot of it is just much within reach, and you get to see a lot of the country [. . .]. Just to discover and to travel and to explore. (Rosa)

A recurring theme for all respondents regardless of their level of involvement or previous experience was the importance of being *in the middle of nowhere*

(mentioned by 19 respondents) which denotes their desire to escape into nature. As Zoe states: “scenery is sort of an integral part of mountain biking.” Exploring new places, overcoming new challenges and – temporarily – living a more adventurous life through mountain biking tourism also symbolises their motivation to escape from their routine via authentic adventures.

The sort of carrying all your gear, backpacking style of riding [. . .] out in the middle of nowhere, with overnight gear, and that’s something that I love doing [. . .]. It’s sort of once or twice a year having only one responsibility and that’s just to keep yourself safe. And it’s kind of absolute freedom. (Kevin)

5.3.1.5 Increase subcultural capital

Chapter 4 addressed the significance of sharing stories between members of the subculture. Mountain biking tourism provides the respondents with experiences that will be worth sharing with their friends. Adventures in new and exciting destinations, along with the challenges conquered and new skills acquired, confirm their social identities as mountain bikers and reinforce their sense of belonging within the community.

It adds to my list of experiences, my chest of knowledge you know, things that I’ve done, places that I’ve been [to] and seen, and experiences I had [. . .] It’s another story to tell. Good or bad right. If you had a great experience or if it was really challenging, both of those are stories to tell. (Alex)

5.3.2 Information search

The next step towards attitudes in the consumption process is *information search*, when an individual looks for potential solutions to fulfil his/her needs and gathers details about available options. It is often conceptualised as the combination of external and internal information search.

5.3.2.1 Supremacy of word-of-mouth

External search refers to information collected from sources such as peers, media and the marketplace (Blackwell et al., 2006) and is usually greater when the individual is highly involved with the product or service (Solomon et al., 2013), as would be the case with a tourism experience (as opposed to a toothbrush).

In this research, word-of-mouth and social media – non-marketer-dominated sources (Blackwell et al., 2006) – prevailed in the external information search process. Social interactions and the subculture thus influence the respondents through their motivations to ride and travel but also as the main source of information. This is consistent with previous studies reporting that “the most influential source of information for destination choice was interpersonal relationships” (Um & Crompton, 1990, p. 434).

The greater the respondents’ involvement with the subculture, the more they relied on word-of-mouth as their primary source of information. As Megan indicates, it’s “90% word-of-mouth, from people who have been before.”

I think mountain biking is a very social sport. And you meet a lot of very like-minded people and you’re just constantly sharing stories about, you know, “you should go do this, and you should ride this, you should travel here” [. . .]. I guess a lot of it is word-of-mouth [. . .]. I think it’s cool when people tell you where they’ve been, I’m like “that’s sweet, I’d like to do that.” (Steve)

The respondents actively and passively collected information from conversations with, and stories shared by, mountain bikers in their social circles. At times, the respondents simply paid attention to, and retained information shared by, their peers.

[Nelson] is somewhere I’ve been wanting to go riding for quite some time now [. . .]. Heaps of different persons are talking about it at the moment. (Lucy)

Other times, likely closer to the final decision, they actively sought recommendations and details about potential destinations and trips.

I would definitely talk to people who have travelled there [. . .]. People know secret places and word-of-mouth is sometimes a lot more informative than reading a guide book. (Phil)

As a result, new trails and up-and-coming mountain biking destinations are rarely a well-kept secret among the mountain biking community.

You kinda know most of what's going on, or you can easily find out through someone. (Lenny)

Word-of-mouth is sometimes sufficient for the respondents to form positive attitudes towards particular destinations, as in Megan's example below.

Morzine, it's a place I've heard is a really good mecca and really well set up for mountain bike tours and that stuff [. . .]. Some guys who have been said it was incredible. (Megan)

5.3.2.1.1 Inherent trust in members of the mountain biking subculture

The respondents appeared to have an inherent unconditional trust for information and recommendations gathered from fellow mountain bikers.

I don't actually know anything [laugh]. So I haven't done any particular research on any of [those destinations], it's just all people telling me and I'm like "Ok, I'll believe that." (Becca)

The respondents' involvement within the subculture exposes them to, and increases confidence in, word-of-mouth. Their positive attitudes towards the subculture and its members lead to positive attitude towards the information received. This is evidence of social judgement in the attitude formation process, as suggested in the literature review.

The respondents are eager to learn about new destinations – adding them to their awareness set – and trust most fellow mountain bikers to provide reliable information. However, when investigating destination attributes in more details – to add to their consideration set – they admitted that word-of-mouth from mountain bikers they knew and regularly rode with was more trustworthy. As Nate specified: "it depends who it is who gives me that advice." The respondents looked for congruence with the source based on riding style, skill level, fitness and other personal preferences. They explained wanting to make sure they would be able to meet the challenges ahead.

You need to be careful sometimes how you take advice [. . .]. We were thinking of doing the Nydia trail this weekend [. . .]. So I posted on Welly

Tracks Facebook to see who had done it before. And you get a wide range of responses. So, for instance, my friend who's super fit, she was like "oh yes, we knocked that out in two and a half hours" but then my other friend who I know would be more like me, she was like "there're huge climbs, five to six hours" [laugh] so I think you've got to take a bit of a happy medium [. . .]. [Friend], who I know would be around the same level as me, and she said "oh yes, it's doable in this time but yes, there are some big climbs, you wouldn't want to be doing it in the wet." I trust her because I know she's around the same skill level [. . .]. Yes, judge [advice]. (Laura)

More skilled and experienced respondents with advanced skills were less cautious about the source of information, likely due to their confidence in handling potential challenges.

5.3.2.1.2 Confirmation bias

The respondents demonstrated confirmation bias – tendency to accept and value information confirming original beliefs (Trawöger, 2014) – when evaluating information received through word-of-mouth. Their widespread positive attitudes towards mountain biking as a sport and travel purpose seemed to influence their acceptance of information.

In general, the respondents remembered few instances of receiving very negative feedback about potential destinations.

I haven't had places that I was thinking of going and have people said "nah, it was shit" and thought I wouldn't go (James)

However, when negative word-of-mouth was received, the respondents appeared to moderate its importance and relevance. They had reservations and questioned the circumstances leading to the source's assessment or the source itself. In general, they appeared willing to take their chance despite negative feedback.

I've got a terrible quality of thinking if someone doesn't like somewhere it's because they weren't good enough to ride it. (Eli)

I'd always rather experience it for myself anyway [. . .]. I think we're all after different things [. . .]. It's nice to know different peoples' opinions but your experiences might be different. (Kim)

I wouldn't listen to them [. . .]. You could just be feeling a little bit under the weather and your whole trip is going to suck so I [. . .] take it with a grain of salt I guess [. . .]. At the end of the day, if I see some photos of a place and it looks amazing [. . .] I'd go, try it for myself. (Luca)

Negative word-of-mouth information is thus often dismissed. However, it is not always the case, as seen in section 2.2 with Eli's attitude towards Australia and Elise's attitude towards Woodhill. It is possible that receiving negative word-of-mouth from multiple sources and/or not being able to find evidence to contradict negative word-of-mouth through other information channels can take precedence over the confirmation bias.

While further information would be required to draw definite conclusions, it is possible to suggest that word-of-mouth influences attitude formation differently at separate stages of the decision-making process. Any member of the subculture can provide information leading to a destination being added to an individual's awareness set. However, when actively searching for information about destinations in one's consideration set, members most congruent with the individual's self-perception are trusted more. Lastly, the respondents display a confirmation bias when processing that information.

5.3.2.2 Media

The respondents also rely on media in external information search; channels cited included magazines, websites, guide books and social media.

Only six respondents mentioned collecting information from magazines. Although this was not discussed in depth, it is likely that articles create awareness about potential destinations but that further information is required to form more specific and durable attitudes.

Magazines articles [. . .] basically act as tourism brochures [. . .]. I think the things that kinda inspire is you might see either a movie or a magazine article or something like that that will make you go “man I really want to go and ride that.” (James)

Magazines were often mentioned but as online rather than printed information sources. When asked to cite some of the online channels used to research information about mountain biking tourism destinations over half of the respondents listed Spoke, Bike Magazine, Dirt and/or New Zealand Mountain Biker. A variety of other online sources were popular among the respondents. Respondents more involved in the subculture often collected information on mountain biking specific websites (e.g., Pinkbike, NSMB or singletrackworld).

I frequently check all the websites like Vital MTB, Pinkbike, North Shore Mountain Bike, Spoke, Bike Magazine... and so through the websites there’s stuff there, you see coverage of [. . .] competitive events [such as] Enduro World Series and World Cup Downhill. (Kurt)

Trails and outdoor recreation websites (tracks.org.nz and the Department of Conservation) and general tourism websites were more likely to be used by less involved respondents.

The western Australian websites had real good information about it. (Colin)

Videos and photography in particular can shape the respondents’ motivations and evaluations of destinations. Kurt discusses picture #10, a still capture from a video, and its appeal. Alternatively, Tom formed a somewhat negative attitude towards Canadian destinations based on the image promoted through videos and photos.

I’ve watched it half a dozen or 10 times [. . .]. The video is Steve Peat [. . .] and the whole premise of the video is just a man and his bike just in the wilderness, and staying in a hut overnight and lighting a fire and toasting marshmallows then riding down glaciers and stuff [. . .] and that really appeals to me, like the adventure riding. (Kurt)

The image that I have of Canadian trails is probably ones that I've seen on videos and it's a lot of bike parks and a lot of people around. I know it's probably not the reality of all the riding, I know there's a lot of backcountry trails and things like that you know. But I don't want to stand in line for a gondola, that doesn't really do it for me. (Tom)

Media appears to have a mixed role. Magazines and websites can generate a desire to travel and help create awareness about a destination and but rarely led to its inclusion in the respondents' consideration set. The respondents actively seeking further information about specific destinations relied more often on word-of-mouth based on direct experiences.

I know [Friend] has spent quite a bit of time riding in Oregon and I've got friends who have spent quite a bit of time riding in Canada. [So] my next port of call, would be somebody who has travelled there and perhaps had more sort of intimate knowledge about what to do, what not to do, best practice, where to eat, where not to eat, you know, where to stay, that sort of thing. So yes, I guess... initially, to sort of arouse my interest, it would be like websites and stuff, and then I would go and talk to somebody, that had been there. (Kurt)

However, availability of detailed information on a destination – through websites or specialised guidebooks – was particularly important in attitude formation as the respondents neared a travel decision or once at the destination. This will be further investigated in the next section.

Probably avoid somewhere [where] we'd be uncertain about the quality of the riding. So you'd want to go somewhere where you at least got some knowledge about it [. . .] At least being able to find something on a website that shows that there are some decent tracks there. (Elise)

5.3.2.3 *Social media: between word-of-mouth and media*

Social media were mentioned by the majority of the respondents as a source of information. While many tourism destinations have a social media presence, the respondents mainly described looking at photos or links shared by their friends. Social media have a central role in the respondents' motivations and attitude formation process because they (1) enable on-going social interaction with members of the subculture, (2) facilitate the diffusion of word-of-mouth about destinations (passive and active information collection), and (3) allow individuals to access and share third party content about or from tourism destinations (from marketers, journalists and professional riders).

I think the Internet and specifically social media has changed the whole idea about mountain bikers groups themselves. It used to be that you had to be a club member to find stuff, and now there's Facebook and all that [. . .]. People are interested in telling stories and that's how you get inspired. (James)

[Word-of-mouth] these days is mostly social media [. . .]. I keep an eye out for people sharing their good experiences, saying that they've just been somewhere or are going somewhere, seeing peoples' photos and hearing what they say. (Kevin)

5.3.2.4 *Internal search*

Solomon et al. (2013, p. 259) explain that "as a result of prior experience and simply living in a consumer culture, each of us has some degree of knowledge already in memory about many products." When individuals want to purchase a product or service, they scan their memory about relevant categories and similar consumption experiences. Information assimilated through external sources can be internalised and become part of the respondents' internal search process.

In this research, it is sometime difficult to distinguish internal and external information because the interviews focused on attitudes rather than the information search process. However, the respondents' attitudes were noticeably shaped by normative influence from the mountain biking subculture. Many respondents identified some destinations as "obvious," mainly Rotorua and Queenstown in New Zealand, British Columbia (particularly Whistler), the European Alps and Moab

internationally. These are perceived as the norm for any respectable mountain biker and were part of the respondents' internalised awareness set. Attitudes towards these destinations were positive regardless of the respondent's actual knowledge of their attributes.

You know Moab, some of the famous American venues. I'd like to go there but without really knowing why. (Kevin)

The other one would be Whistler. The one that everyone, every mountain biker wants to go to at some point. (Celia)

Places like Moab and Whistler mostly have really good mountain biking for whatever level you are [. . .]. Well, they're pretty well-known for mountain biking I guess. (Zoe)

Destination image and geographic knowledge were also internalised by many respondents. Many successfully identified the locations of the photos used in the projective exercise; Luca stated: "I reckon I could probably tell you where every photo is from." Some more involved respondents also associated particular geographic locations with specific trails, riding styles and tourism experiences. Picture #6 depicts the North Shore area in British Columbia, Canada and the trail in picture #8 was inspired by the North Shore style of riding. Elise and Sam identified the location and style but while Sam liked it because he associated it with a fun adventure, Elise held a more negative attitude based on her internalised knowledge of that area and her previous experiences.

[Picture #6] because it looks like a bit of an adventure. It's the North Shore-y, kinda BC-like with the structure. (Sam)

Maybe number 8 [. . .] it doesn't look too bad with [the] big berm... so it doesn't look *too* bad, but it kinda makes me think of North Shore style riding. And that's not really [. . .] my thing. (Elise)

The respondents perform an internal *rideability* assessment when forming attitudes towards destinations. They compare expectations regarding the trails in the

destination with perceptions of their own abilities and preferred type and level of challenge.

[Picture #1]. Awesome location. Obviously looks like a [female] riding one of the bike, so it seems more appealing to me because [. . .] it's definitely something I could do in terms of the section of track they're showing. (Abby)

[Picture #4] It looks like potentially it could be less fun [. . .]. I'm a reasonable rider but I don't necessarily enjoy pushing myself technically that hard [. . .], I don't have any need to feel scared the whole time. (Olivia)

Evaluations of destinations were also shaped by stereotypes regarding the riders/visitors observed or expected in a destination. This is obvious in the respondents' evaluations of picture #5. Becca and Kim both evaluated the picture based on their associating downhill mountain bikes and full face helmets with serious, fast riders and technical trails. Becca thinks it would be too challenging while Kim displays a positive attitude. They both based their evaluations on the riders rather than the trail – flat and wide.

They look like quite serious downhillers. They're just quite intimidating [. . .]. I wouldn't mind doing some of the stuff, but I think if I was with people like that I'd feel [. . .] like I was holding them back and I wouldn't like to do that. (Becca)

[Picture #5] looks like [. . .] somebody would choose to use this pictures as an advert to say "come on our tour, it's great." The track itself we can see looks ridiculously easy for the level of gear, like the full face helmet and the goggles, but [. . .] probably this is just an easy part of the track where they can take a photo [. . .]. Looks good, looks appealing, looks like I'd like to do it. (Kim)

The respondents also evaluated destinations by comparing previous travel and riding experiences with destinations they learned about through external information sources or those depicted in the projective exercise. The respondents considered general travel preferences and personal values, for instance when Tom says he prefers remote, less popular destinations because "I like doing things that you know,

are not necessarily down the beaten path [. . .] that everybody has gone on.” Holistic evaluations were also based on the respondent’s riding preferences, linked to their motivations to ride and travel for that purpose.

I love the freedom of being on a bike and riding to somewhere and somehow getting carried to the top of the hill and riding to the bottom doesn’t really fit in for me [. . .]. [Pictures #1 and #2] encapsulate what it is that I love about doing riding. The sort of carrying all your gear, backpacking style of riding [. . .]. I guess I’ve done enough of most of these things to know that where I truly feel at home on a bike. (Kevin)

[Picture #4] is me [laugh] [. . .] I just like this style of riding, that sort of trail, reasonably technical. Although it doesn’t look very technical there but I don’t know why, that just seems that the sort of trails that I would ride. (Nate)

The respondents’ satisfaction with destinations previously visited caused them to have preconceived ideas about destinations that they perceived as similar. Elise and James both have positive attitudes towards the destination in picture #7 based on recollections of previous experiences.

That just reminds me of the Alps and just that massive big open scenery. I like places with really great scenic values [. . .]. Sometimes when you get to those ones right up on the top and you know, it just opens up, you see the Alps stretching on forever and you’ve got a thousand meter down to get back down to the valley. Get the cows out of the way, the marmots popping up, it’s kinda of like Heidi is going to come over and sing *The Sound of Music* any minute [laugh]. It’s kind of got everything. (Elise)

I quite like the look of [picture #7], that reminds me of [. . .] the week that I’ve spent in the French and Swiss Alps, just in terms of the epic scenery, sort of middle of nowhere feeling like you’re really going on an adventure. (James)

Alternatively, Celia negatively evaluates picture #5 based on her lack of satisfaction with her experience in Queenstown.

Number 5 doesn't appeal to me; that looks like a big highway mountain bike trail, real fast, high speed, downhill [. . .]. I've done that in Queenstown on the gondola [. . .] I didn't really enjoy it [. . .]. [I prefer] something like number 7, where it looks quite raw, a bit more technical, some rocks and awesome scenery, like it looks like it's in the middle of nowhere. (Celia)

This is consistent with previous research on attitudes towards tourism destinations stating that previous visitation and satisfaction level are important factors in attitude formation (Um & Crompton, 1990) as post-purchase evaluations are stored in memory for future consumption decisions (Blackwell et al., 2006).

In summary, the respondents' internal search process appears to predominantly involve gauging external stimuli and information through lenses of perceived abilities and challenges, internalised stereotypes, and previous experiences. Although it is not addressed in this research, it is expected that promotional material from mountain biking tourism destinations would be similarly scrutinised. All respondents looked for what they deemed *rideable* considering their abilities. However, more serious respondents had a better understanding of their own preferences which led them to more specific when evaluating destinations: looking for specific terrain, types of trails and challenges. Respondents less involved in the subculture were less successful in identifying the locations depicted in the projective exercise and were more susceptible rely on negative stereotypes. Respondents who had previously travelled extensively undeniably evaluating potential destinations according to previous experiences.

It should be noted that direct experience in a destination unquestionably resulted in the strongest attitudes (and less likely to change) observed during this research, both positive and negative.

Australia, I probably wouldn't travel there for the purpose of mountain biking. I've been there, I've done the mountain biking there because I was there. It wasn't anything special. I know there is a lot there, but [. . .] I still wouldn't go. (Phil)

[I want to go back to] British Columbia. I went once, for a couple of weeks back in 2007 and it was fantastic. And we only did a week in Whistler and a week on the North Shore, and there's just so much more stuff there. (James)

5.3.3 External factors

As indicated in Figure 2.1 in the literature review, several environmental and personal factors influence the information search and evaluation processes; Luca explains: "given the time and money, I would always travel to ride." Many external constraints primarily affect purchase decisions rather than attitudes towards an object. However, some factors are relevant in understanding the respondents' attitudes.

Outside of their social circle within the subculture influencing travel motivations and destination choice (as reviewed in chapter 4), immediate family also shaped the respondents' attitudes. Eight respondents ride and travel for that purpose with their partners and children. It could increase the desire to travel but brought additional constraints, such as a range of abilities, affecting attitudes towards destinations.

I have already said I don't like Rotorua. But in small doses it is nice to have, and particularly if I am going with [the kids] who struggle in Wellington, whether it's for fitness or just skill, I find that the trails in Rotorua are a lot more accommodating. (Kevin)

Six respondents sometimes planned vacations where their primary purpose was mountain biking but their non-riding partner and children had other purposes and needs, resulting in a wider range of attributes sought.

My wife doesn't ride, so if we're going somewhere and she's coming along as well, then we have to care about other things, because she understandably gets a bit grumpy if we go on holidays and I go out riding all the time and she's stuck. (James)

Family and friends also influences attitudes of the respondents when mountain biking is one of the reasons, rather than the sole reason, to travel.

So I'd like to go to Australia. Because I lived in Australia for a big chunk of time and I've got plenty of friends out there. So I often thought "how could I made this into a visit and a ride." (Lucy)

Availability of disposable income is at the core of travel decision. Mountain biking tourism covers a wide range of experiences, from affordable bikepacking multiday rides to expensive long trips visiting bike parks overseas. For many respondents, financial cost did not appear to influence attitudes:

The price is almost secondary. I guess your willingness to go somewhere is always balanced against what's the cost of getting there and there isn't really any place in New Zealand where I would say "I don't want to pay to go there because I don't think it's good enough." Queenstown is probably one of the more expensive places to get to, but it pays off in terms of the experience. (James)

However, among younger respondents – particularly students Eli and Luca and recent graduate Celia – the lack of financial resources impeded their ability to travel but also their attitudes towards destinations by making them less receptive to information.

Because I only just graduated [. . .] I've never thought about it. I was like "oh it's ages away until I can go overseas," but now [. . .] I'm starting to think a bit more about it, maybe Canada, as a destination, yeah. (Celia)

5.4 EVALUATION PROCESS

5.4.1 Continuous evaluations

According to consumer behaviour frameworks (see Figure 2.4), information search is followed by the evaluation process which results in attitudes towards objects. However, in this research, precisely distinguishing information search and evaluation appeared impractical and irrelevant since attitudes were observed as dynamic continuous summary evaluations. As illustrated below, respondents held attitudes towards destinations they just learned about and had little information about. Tom's attitude towards Nepal as a mountain biking destination is based on heuristic evaluation of limited information received the night prior to the interview from a

friend evoking a past experience. His attitude could easily change once he learns more about the destination.

I'd love to do Nepal. Nepal sounds good [. . .] I think that would be something that I'd like to try. A bit more adventure riding. (Tom)

These evaluations conformed to the constructive view of attitude formation where attitudes are a "temporary evaluation of an object constructed in situ at the time of judgement" (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011, p. 431).

From simple awareness, the respondents' attitudes towards a destination evolved continuously based on external stimuli, new information, new experiences, changing abilities and preferences, changing destination characteristics and evolving personal circumstances. Laura's attitude towards Queenstown is concurrent with the functional view that attitudes are stable and internalised (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011), even though her attitude is likely to slowly evolve over time. Her attitude serves a knowledge function, helping her simplify decision-making by preferring Queenstown or destinations with similar characteristics, as well as a value-expressive function, conveying her love of the outdoor and fast tracks.

I think Queenstown is my favourite [. . .]. The backdrop is just stunning. And I think there's a real buzz around the town. And there's a good, wide range of riding. So you've got the gondola, you've got the more backcountry stuff [. . .]. So you can have like a real comprehensive bike holiday. (Laura)

This is consistent with Argyriou and Melewar (2011) who suggested that attitudes can be formed through qualitatively different processes. Depending on formation process and situational factors, attitudes varied in strength, complexity and salience. Laura's attitude towards Queenstown is strong, complex and internalised, thus likely to influence subsequent evaluations of mountain biking destinations. However, Tom's attitude towards Nepal, per his own words, "might be one of those ideas that just stay in my brain for 12 hours and then goes away."

The remainder of this chapter investigates the evaluative criteria considered by the respondents.

5.4.2 Summary evaluations

The most common and accepted model in the consumer behaviour and tourism literatures conceptualises attitudes as the interrelation of cognitive, affective and conative components (Moutinho, 1987). Yet, making such distinction in the data collected seemed inadequate. Respondents often struggled to describe the causes of their attitudes, as when Rosa simply states “I don’t know, apparently it’s really good” when trying to explain her positive attitude towards British Columbia. When they were more specific, as seen below, beliefs (access to alpine trails) and their abilities to enable a positive outcome (the right challenge) were so intricately interrelated, along with emotions (being awestruck), that interpreting them separately would lessen their meaning in the respondent’s evaluation.

[Picture #7] I think it’d be difficult not to be pretty awestruck riding something like that [. . .]. It seems to be a good mix of beautiful terrain and it looks like a fun trail as well, little bit of rocks, fast [. . .], an alpine setting, with a lot of longer remote trails. Not like a bike park [. . .]. If it’s really groomed [. . .] I get bored of those quite quickly [. . .]. I guess it doesn’t really satisfy what I want out of mountain biking. (Tom)

It is the summary evaluations of destinations as a whole, rather than separate attitudinal components, which truly conveys preferences. This supports recommendations from Bergin-Seers and Mair (2009), Trauer (2006) and Gnoth (1997) to focus tourist attitude research on holistic attitudes.

5.4.3 Dimensions of attitudes: values and meanings in evaluations

The respondents assign various values and meanings to mountain biking tourism destinations to determine their *worth*, resulting in attitudes that range in focus. Four main dimensions of attitudes based on a destination’s perceived main trait(s) were observed among the respondents: adventurous (extraordinary experiences), natural (celebration of nature), social (sense of belonging) and utilitarian (activity facilitation). Attitudes could be grounded in other dimensions when mountain biking was not the sole purpose of traveling, however these are not addressed in this research.

5.4.3.1 Adventure: the “epic” factor

The *adventurous* dimension is based on mountain biking tourism fulfilling the participant’s sense of adventure. The respondents enjoy visiting unique and unfamiliar destinations where they can enjoy extraordinary experiences. The concept of *adventure* is subjective (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004) but some common themes emerged such as the respondents’ desire to step outside of their comfort zone and routine.

But the things that really excite me are the ones where it’s more challenging [. . .]. [When] I went to Queenstown we pushed up to the top. We got up at 4 in the morning so we could get up to the top for dawn. And it took us about two hours to get up and it was 20 minutes back down and it was totally worthwhile, just because you’re up in the mountains and it was cold and there were keas and amazing views and we had a really nice ride back down. So it’s those challenges and those opportunities to do stuff that you don’t get to do every day. (James)

The respondents also attentively considered natural surroundings for the riding they enabled. Remoteness, novelty and uniqueness were valued when they sought adventures and life experiences. Respondents usually looked for self-sufficient longer rides (full-day or overnight) on raw natural trails, off the beaten path.

I love mountain regions. I just like that kind of landscape, I just find it very aesthetically pleasing I guess. But [also] they kind of convey a sense of adventure. You know on a larger scale, like, you’re kinda removed from civilisation I guess in a way [. . .]. You’re out in the wild and, yeah, it’s a *real* [emphasis] adventure. (Luca)

[Pictures #7 and #10] it’s very remote and it looks very untouched [. . .] it just feels very secluded and cut-off. (Eli)

The respondents looked for “less chartered territories” (Megan) and avoided “manufactured experiences” (Elise), such as bike parks.

With a trail centre sometimes I feel that I’m a little bit on a treadmill [. . .] it does feel less like an adventure. (Becca)

The surroundings provide the stage but an element of challenge is also required, focused on the journey rather than a single ride, providing an exhilarating sense of achievement afterwards.

[Carrying your bike] I think it's part of the adventure [. . .]. You get to the top of a mountain and you're *really* [emphasis] tired and you have a sore shoulder [. . .]. I just find it very rewarding. Sit down, see where you come from. (Steve)

[Picture #7] seems like a very raw mountain bike experience you know. The isolation, the sort of implied self-sufficiency of you know, you're the only person up there [. . .]. I think it's exciting because it's a little bit scary. Because you're on your own, you're relying on yourself, and it's a challenge, and overcoming that challenge, and making it out, back to your house in one piece, with that experience on your belt, it's quite rewarding I find. (Eli)

While the promise of adventure to some degree was appealing for many respondents, only eight held positive attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations based on the adventurous dimension – and only four had actually visited destinations to which they ascribed that meanings. As Nelson's comments showcases below, the adventurous dimension can be fascinating but not wholly attractive.

I saw a video [. . .] I was like "man, that looks pretty sweet! I want to do a camping biking adventure!" [. . .] But I kinda can't be bothered carrying a bag worth of stuff. It's not as fun. I don't want to carry a tent and food. But I kinda want to. I'm torn.

In this dimension, destinations were evaluated positively when they were perceived to facilitate a purpose – going on an adventure – and fulfil a desire for escape and personal challenge.

5.4.3.2 *Hedonic natural environment*

The *natural* dimension of attitudes is grounded in the respondents' enjoyment of the environment for itself – rather than for what it enables, as for the adventurous dimension. They appreciated the serenity and beauty of natural surroundings and experienced a sense of peace and escape. This is consistent with previous studies on mountain biking (Taylor, 2010) and sports tourism (Flucker, 2003; Humphreys, 2011).

Fourteen respondents mentioned the environment influencing their attitudes and were drawn to scenery when discussing the projective exercise. For example, Alex was attracted to picture #4 for the “fantastic scenery and fantastic views.” However, only four respondents held positive attitudes primarily based on this natural dimension. In those cases, mountain biking provides access to natural environment that is revered for its beauty.

We get on a gravel road, I go “oooooh my favourite sort of mountain biking!” and I’m partly joking in making fun of myself, but I’m partly not because [. . .] I can actually look around. And this sort of stuff [picture #7], these guys are going to be seeing a meter-wide section of track and the mountain is over their shoulders. Your ability to look up and admire is different. You have to stop, which I suppose is fine. But yes, that’s what I love doing on my bike.
(Kevin)

Beautiful and peaceful natural settings and natural-looking trails, far from crowds and obvious human-made features are associated with a sense of escape.

I guess I get my thrills from being in the middle of nowhere in the backcountry, in beautiful bush, or in the mountains [. . .]. Something like [picture #7], where it looks quite raw, a bit more technical, some rocks and awesome scenery, like it looks like it’s in the middle of nowhere. I quite like that. (Celia)

Many respondents partially grounded their attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations on the natural dimension. However, it was often associated with, and curtailed by, other dimensions. Steve started out stating: “even if the riding was better, I’d take the less cool riding with the cool views.” But later on, when discussing his positive attitude towards Rotorua, he added: “I’ve heard that the trails are really cool [. . .] I think it’s a bit of a balance, so you get cool riding but not so much views, that’s ok.”

5.4.3.3 *Social experience: presence and absence of others*

Actual or expected human interactions in a destination are at the centre of the *social* dimension. There are three separate but related social sub-dimensions: social scene, sense of belonging and crowd avoidance.

The social scene includes the group the respondents travel with and members of the subculture they interact with in the destination. Positive attitudes depend on attributes facilitating social interactions, such as variety of trails to satisfy all group members and facilities enabling socializing (cafés and pubs).

There was five of us and [. . .] we did a big road trip around the South Island and that was great fun [. . .]. We were all kinda riding different stuff in the bike park but we'd all meet at the end of the gondola. (Laura)

[Cafés are] kind part of the whole experience [. . .]. I think especially if you're going with other people, having somewhere to chill out and [. . .] look back at the day and chat about it. (Zoe)

Hospitality services catering specifically to mountain bikers were perceived more positively (bikes shops, bike-friendly accommodation and transport).

We look for accommodation with a proper bike shed and stuff like that [. . .]. It's different travelling with a bike. (Rosa)

Beyond making their stay easier, cycling-specific infrastructure and amenities denoted a destination where the respondents could revel in the subculture. This was linked to the second social sub-dimension of the respondents' attitudes: sense of belonging. Attitudes based on this dimension were similar to the concept of place attachment (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). The respondents had more positive attitudes towards destinations that they perceived specifically "catered for mountain bikers" (Laura) beyond the trails, where "it feels that you're being immersed in mountain biking" (Nate).

[Whistler] is a mountain bike village. In summer at least. Everything is devoted to mountain biking and you can hit the five-meter drop, the GLC drop, in front

of a café you know [. . .]. It's ideally suited to a mountain biker. It almost seems singly purposed towards it. (Eli)

Having access to the local subcultural capital is central to this sub-dimension. Specialised websites, maps and chatting with bike shop employees or local riders provided the respondents with a sense of belonging to the overall mountain biking community. Not having access to this insider knowledge was linked to negative attitudes and ultimately negative word-of-mouth; as Rosa explains "that can really ruin everything."

I think [. . .] to be able to research in advance, get good up-to-date maps and be able to find your way around. Because there's nothing worse than coming back and hear[ing] "oh did you ride that trail?" and "well we couldn't find it" [. . .]. We've been in situations where you're driving around a place, trying to find this carpark to this mythical trail. So yeah, that's important. (Laura)

Lastly, the respondents preferred to avoid crowds. While they travelled in groups and sought social interactions with members of the subculture, they tended to negatively evaluate overcrowded destinations.

I wouldn't like lots of people. Yeah, I went to Woodhill, and it's the biggest car park full of cars I have ever seen, and it immediately put me off [. . .]. It's not very nice constantly having to overtake or be overtaken. (Abby)

Therefore, in the social dimension of attitudes towards mountain biking destinations, the respondents preferred destinations which were exclusive to mountain bikers but where they could feel included. Thirteen respondents reported attitudes based on the social dimension, primarily sense of belonging, including five for whom it was central to their attitudes towards most destinations.

As with the natural dimension, in some cases the respondents' preference for exclusive destinations was curtailed by other dimensions. For example, James has negative perceptions about some characteristics of Whistler, Canada: "waiting 40 minutes for a ride when it takes 10 minutes to get back down can be a little bit frustrating." But he holds a positive attitude towards the destination and intends to

return there soon. The opportunities offered in Whistler in terms of quality of riding, social atmosphere and the chance to visit a mountain biking mecca counterbalanced the negative aspects of a popular destination.

5.4.3.4 Utilitarian: activity facilitation

The last dimension of the respondents' attitudes refers to the functional nature of destinations and is the most significant. Since active participation is at the core of mountain biking tourism, it is not surprising that the respondents based their attitudes, at least partially, on a destination's capacity to facilitate their participation in the sport. This dimension was closely related to the concept of place dependence, which refers to attachment to a place based on it enabling a desired outcome (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). When a destination's attributes were not perceived as facilitating the type of ride the respondents enjoyed, it was deemed a "wasted opportunity" (Elise) and resulted in negative attitudes.

5.4.3.4.1 Number of trails and grades

Number and variety of trail and grades were often the basis of attitudes grounded in the utilitarian dimension as they maximise enjoyment, facilitate group trips and increase the chances of experiencing flow.

I want to know there's enough to do for that whole weekend. That's primary, the type of tracks, and that there's enough in that one place. (Megan)

Something that [partner] will have fun on, because he races downhill and is quite an advanced rider [. . .]. So that's, when we're riding together, that's quite important. So that he won't be bored but I will be able to survive. (Laura)

Having that mixed abilities. I like to be able to ride stuff that I feel comfortable on, but then if I feel confident I like to be able to push myself so having something a step above my comfort level. (Abby)

Destinations offering different types of trails (including, but not limited to, natural trails, flow trails, pump tracks and downhill tracks) were also perceived more positively. Rotorua, Queenstown and the Sea-to-Sky Corridor in Canada (Squamish,

Whistler and Pemberton) were regularly described as offering the perfect variety of tracks for an ideal mountain biking holiday.

[Rotorua] has lots of variety. That's the appeal about Rotorua. It has your standard cross-country tracks that are not really maintained very much and then there are built up berms and jumps and other things. And there are short pump tracks and lots of other things. (Alex)

5.4.3.4.2 Access to a range of opportunities

Most respondents did not have a single style preference and enjoyed a variety of riding opportunities, from backcountry rides for "getting away from it all" to bike parks for "the satisfaction of achieving some technical stuff" (Zoe).

I find that there are two sorts of riding. There is the one where you go out and [. . .] do really groomed trails and they are just amazing for riding. And then you've got the more adventurous kind of riding, where you are out in the middle of nowhere, you've got these amazing views. (Phil)

Therefore the majority of the respondents held positive attitudes towards destinations which offered access to a variety terrain. Some examples included Nelson (access to local trails from the town and longer backcountry rides close-by such as the Heaphy Track) and Central Otago (access to Queenstown, Wanaka and Alexandra).

More serious respondents often had distinct riding preferences influencing their attitudes towards destinations. As Eli indicated, he looks for "trails which suit my riding style." Therefore, destinations offering access to only one specific type of riding were loved by some and avoided by others. For example lift-assisted riding, usually associated with bikes parks, was attractive for some and undesirable for others. Sam states "I want a gondola or a train or something" because riding uphill "seems like a waste of time." In contrast Kevin explains: "I love the freedom of being on a bike [. . .] and somehow getting carried to the top of the hill and riding to the bottom doesn't really fit in for me." Less serious respondents were often more open-minded about destinations and less specific.

5.4.3.4.3 The right challenge

Ultimately the respondents hoped to experience a situation of flow (or alternatively to be in control) when traveling to a mountain biking tourism destination. However, challenges are subjective, thus trail characteristics are perceived differently. Positive attitudes are held by the respondents towards destinations they think present the right challenge.

Rosa, who prefers long exploratory rides, was planning a multi-day ride in Bali at the time of the interview. Lucy knew of her trip but held a slightly negative attitude towards the destination because she does not enjoy similar challenges and is not able to experience flow in these situations.

For me, the most appealing would be technical enough to have some adrenaline and really enjoy where you are, but you know, also covering some distance and really feeling like you're away, and it's a big achievement you know. (Rosa)

I know [Rosa and her partner] have planned to go to Bali [. . .]. I kinda looked at that and [. . .] I mean it was the adventure side of it I guess but [. . .] it looked like there weren't enough downhill action [laugh]. Too much pedalling. (Lucy)

As James explains, a situation of flow is about finding a happy medium, "something that challenges you, something that you don't always feel comfortable riding but you kinda feel like you achieve something." Flow is the ultimate experience, but few respondents are able to pinpoint the exact elements necessary to achieve it. It is a delicate equilibrium of abilities and challenges and is mostly expressed by the respondents wanting to avoid fear and boredom. Tom's quotation illustrates well this balancing act.

Picture #1, it seems like a four-wheel drive track [. . .] that makes it kind of a bit dull to me. [Picture #8] doesn't really appeal to me because it looks terrifying. I am afraid of wooden structures. It just looks terrifying. (Tom)

5.4.3.5 *Summary statement*

Summary judgements were made about the attitudes expressed by the respondents towards destinations evoked during each interview and depicted in the projective exercise, noting recurring and dominant dimensions. Table 5.1 summarises the dimensions of attitudes held by the respondents. When a respondent repeatedly and consistently evaluated destinations according to one dimension over the others, this dimension was considered salient for this individual. For example, James often integrated the adventurous and utilitarian dimensions when evaluating destinations. However, he consistently held strong positive attitudes towards destinations he evaluated as very adventurous, that dimension taking precedent over the utilitarian dimension. Therefore, a destination providing him with an adventure would always have his preference over a destination with a range of well-built trails. Most of the respondents displayed attitudes based on a mix of two or three different dimensions but one dimension was often more salient; it is written in bold in Table 5.1.

The respondents less involved in the subculture were susceptible to ground attitudes on non-cycling dimensions; however, with only two respondents in this category it is difficult to establish commonalities. Moderately involved respondents relied on several dimensions however their attitudes towards destinations were often circumstantial. They were more likely to hold attitudes based on social influence and appeared to contradict themselves at times between attitudes held and general inclinations stated, showing uncertainty about their own preferences and maybe about subcultural norms and attitudes. It is also possible that they are uncertain about their personal preferences and open to most experiences. The most serious respondents, highly involved in the subculture, tended to ground attitudes towards destinations on one salient dimension (with the notable exception of Kurt).

This is similar to findings on attitude formation from Cohen and Reed II (2006) who state that novices are more influenced by the context (constructive view) while experts tend to process internal information (functional view). Despite the different dimensions of the respondents' attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations, a central notion appears to drive their evaluations: holistic flow.

Table 5.1: Attitude dimensions summary

Name	Attitude dimensions	Seriousness / Involvement in subculture
James	Adventurous , Utilitarian	High
Celia	Natural , Utilitarian, Adventurous	
Laura	Social , Utilitarian, Natural	
Kim	Utilitarian , Social	
Kurt	Natural, Utilitarian, Adventurous, Social	
Sam	Utilitarian	
Becca	Social , Adventurous, Natural	
Tom	Adventurous , Utilitarian, Social	
Nate	Utilitarian , Social	
Olivia	Utilitarian , Social	
Megan	Social , Utilitarian	
Lucy	Utilitarian, Social	Moderate
Luca	Adventurous , Utilitarian, Social	
Eli	Utilitarian , Social, Adventurous	
Rosa	Utilitarian, Social	
Nelson	Utilitarian, Social	
Phil	Natural, Adventurous, Utilitarian	
Lenny	Natural, Utilitarian	
Abby	Utilitarian, Natural	
Kevin	Utilitarian , Natural	
Colin	Social , Utilitarian, Natural	
Elise	Natural , Utilitarian	Low
Steve	Natural, Utilitarian, Adventurous	
Alex	Utilitarian , Natural	
Zoe	Natural , Utilitarian, Social	

5.4.4 Holistic flow

In tourism, the individual controls the experience which fulfils the needs and goals motivating the travel decision (Gnoth, 1997). Thus, it is this experience, actual or expected, rather than the destination in which it takes place, which is the true object of the individual's attitude. Rosa's quotation illustrates that it is the experience that Bali enables which is evaluated, from the weather, trails and companions to the subcultural capital gain anticipated and the opportunities for adventure and escape.

I think [Bali] will be pretty amazing [. . .]. There is this all combination of stuff [. . .]. The weather is going to be nice, you're going to be doing something on

Bali that not many people do, and also you're going to be riding in a place that not many people would go to ride, so it's got a sense of uniqueness. It's just going to be like an ideal active holiday. Sunny, hopefully, nice food, good riding, in an area where I have never been before. Yes, it's just the whole thing [. . .]. And it is specifically catered [. . .] I think there are three or four of us riding and the one guide. So yes, it's going to be pretty good [. . .]. It's great, I like it. (Rosa)

The concept of flow has been applied to investigate participation in adventure tourism or activities (e.g., white-water rafting or mountaineering) (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Wu & Liang, 2011). However, rather than fleeting moments of fulfilment resulting from the ability to meet a specific challenge at a specific point in time, flow is increasingly conceptualised as a journey or system (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). This is particularly true in the context of adventure tourism where it is a series of events, depending on the environment and the individual's behaviour within it, which results in an optimal experience (Wu & Liang, 2011). The respondents in this research refer to this *holistic flow* when evaluating destinations and recalling positive previous experiences. The whole tourism experience is perceived as a system allowing their stay in a destination to go from ordinary to optimal which influences their attitudes.

[Picture #4] because [. . .] it's beautiful scenery, like up very high, it doesn't look like it's raining or it's too hot, that's a big thing for me, I don't like biking where it's too hot [. . .]. It looks like a fun trail, it looks like I could do it. It looks like it's a steep corner, so it's kinda quite challenging, the scenery is beautiful. And I bet down there, there's probably some sort of a city where you can go for a nice drink afterwards. So that one looks really cool. That's probably my favourite of all of them. (Becca)

Holistic flow and attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations are about equilibrium. The respondents are balancing sometimes conflicting motivations (e.g., visit a mythical mountain biking mecca or discover unique places), circumstances (e.g., attraction to backcountry destinations but lack of transport or equipment) and perceived destination attributes (e.g., desire for subculture immersion and aversion

for crowded destinations) when forming attitudes. The balance sought in the overarching experience suggests that these attitudes are actually attitudes towards *choosing, planning, traveling to, riding and meeting riders in, and reminiscing about one's experience in a tourism destination*.

5.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter first started out by answering the first research question: What attitudes do mountain bikers hold towards mountain biking destination? It was explained that the respondents held positive attitudes towards most destinations. While a few negative attitudes were noted, the respondents appear to have an optimist bias – tendency to be idealistically positive about an object or situation (Trawöger, 2014) – towards destinations where they could travel to ride. With most destinations evaluated positively, managers and marketers should take into account attitude strength and degree of positivity, to differentiate the merely *good* from the *great* destinations.

The remainder of the chapter answered the second research question: How are attitudes formed and what factors influence them? Unlike in other studies on outdoor recreation and active sports tourism (Weed & Bull, 2012), mountain bikers in Wellington do not need to travel away from home in order to participate in the activity. The respondents' motivations to travel for the purpose of mountain biking were varied and often complex but appeared consistent with mountain bikers' motivations to participate in the activity (Taylor, 2010) and common tourist motivations (Gnoth, 1997): social identity confirmation, affiliation and relatedness, mastery and search for situations of flow, novelty, escape and adventure. The respondents' motivations to ride in general and to travel for this purpose were similar but tourism is perceived as offering increased opportunities to fulfil these goals by providing intensive and extensive immersion in the activity and subculture.

The respondents relied mostly on word-of-mouth and social media to collect (passive) and seek (active) information about destinations; this information was assessed based on congruence with the source (abilities, preferences and personal values) and was often interpreted through a confirmation bias. Media channels,

including bike specific and tourism specific websites, were also essential when the respondents investigated destinations, the lack of available information potentially leading to negative attitudes. All information is assessed by the respondents through various filters: rideability (perceived abilities and challenges), personal values, internalised stereotypes, related attitudes and satisfaction with previous destinations. Additional factors influencing attitudes include family and friends and disposable income.

It was then established that attitudes (1) are continuously adjusted from the point of naïve awareness onwards, through complex information search and relevant direct experiences, and (2) are most relevant and revealing when considered as comprehensive summary evaluations rather than interrelated components. In this research, attitudes of less serious respondents and attitudes towards destinations just entering one's awareness set were formed in situ, relying on external information and social influence (constructive view). Alternatively, attitudes of more serious respondents and attitudes resulting from complex cognitive processes were strong and internalised (functional view).

Respondents were found to ascribe value and meanings to destinations when evaluating them. Four main dimensions were observed: adventurous (enabling extraordinary experiences), natural (appreciation of natural beauty and serenity), social (opportunity to display social identity and revel in the subculture) and utilitarian (facilitating satisfactory participation in the activity). Respondents often grounded attitudes on one central and one or two secondary dimensions. While the central dimension used by moderately involved respondents varied from destination to destination, highly involved respondents evaluated destinations in a more consistent manner. The concept of holistic flow was introduced, suggesting that (1) an attitude towards mountain biking tourism destination is an evaluation of the overall tourism experience it enables and (2) the concept of flow is appropriate to investigate evaluations of destinations based on actual or expected optimal overall tourism experiences.

6 CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis was to understand how individuals traveling to tourism destinations for the primary purpose of mountain biking formed attitudes towards these destinations. A conceptual framework was developed after a review of existing literature on consumer and tourist attitudes, special interest and sports tourism, and serious leisure. Qualitative methods grounded in consumer culture theory and interpretivism were used to collect and analyse data, with a particular focus on the sociocultural dynamics involved in attitude content and formation. The previous two chapters have provided answers to the research questions proposed in the introduction:

- What attitudes do mountain bikers hold towards mountain biking destination?
- How are these attitudes formed and what factors influence them?
- Is the mountain biking subculture one of these factors?

The next section will summarise the relevant findings made when answering the research questions, focusing on the significant influence of the mountain biking subculture. The questions were listed in the aforementioned order, but it was deemed necessary for the purpose of analysis to address the mountain biking subculture and its influences first, before examining attitudes and their formations more generally. A third section reviews methodological lessons learned from this thesis; it highlights the relevance of attitudes in understanding tourist behaviour and advocates for qualitative methods in attitudinal research. Directions for future research are also suggested. The fourth section suggests potential implications and provides recommendations for managers and marketers targeting mountain biking tourists.

6.2 THE KEY ROLE OF SUBCULTURE AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE

6.2.1 Serious leisure in special interest tourism

Early during the research process, it was suggested that mountain biking subculture and associated social influence might play an important role in mountain bikers' attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations. Chapter 4, emphasised the substantial social role played by mountain biking in the respondents' lives despite being an individual sport. It was found that the more social significance the respondents attributed to mountain biking, the stronger their social identification with the sport and commitment to align with its ethos – two characteristics of serious leisure associated with involvement in the subculture.

Effectively, a number of researchers have previously suggested that serious leisure could provide a framework to study special interest tourism (Trauer, 2006; Weiler & Hall, 1992) and sports tourism (Gibson, 2006; Green & Jones, 2005). This thesis has demonstrated that serious leisure, when defined along a continuum, is helpful in conceptualizing mountain biking tourism and examining degrees of personal involvement and social meanings associated with the sport and related travel.

6.2.2 Social influence from the subculture on attitudes and attitude formation

The respondents were grouped based on the assessment of their degree of seriousness in regards to mountain biking and subsequent involvement with the subculture: low, moderate or high. In answer to the third research question (Is the mountain biking subculture one of the factors influencing attitude formation?) the groups were compared throughout the analysis.

Addressing the first research question (What attitudes do mountain bikers hold towards mountain biking destination?), all the respondents hold generally positive attitudes and demonstrate optimist and confirmation biases. However, less involved individuals knew fewer destinations and were less likely to hold strong attitudes towards any destination. This corroborates the suggestion from Bricker and Kerstetter (2000) that the more involved people are in a sport, the stronger their attitudes towards destinations where they can practice that sport. As seen in Table

2.1, the more involved individuals are with attitude objects (in this case both the sport and the destination where one is able to practice the sport), the stronger their attitudes.

Chapter 5 highlighted similarities and differences observed in the attitude formation process between the respondents. Evidence of the degrees of serious leisure and involvement with the subculture and the subsequent variances in attitude formation (motivation, information search, evaluations and social influence) and attitude strength are summarised in Table 6.1. It answers the second research question (How are these attitudes formed and what factors influence them?). Relating to the third research question, involvement in the subculture strongly influenced motivations to travel (social identity confirmation, strengthening relationships and kinship) and attitude formation (group travel, travel stories as information source, social role of attitudes and destination characteristics facilitating valued social interactions) for all respondents. However, Table 6.1 highlights subtle yet pertinent differences observed between respondents based on their levels of involvement with the subculture, indicating its fundamental yet inconstant role in shaping attitudes throughout the attitude formation process.

Those findings are consistent with Novelli (2005) suggesting that social influence is paramount in special interest tourism. It also confirms that subcultures – through ethos and identities – generate strong social influence among serious sports participants, even individual sports such as mountain biking (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Humphreys, 2011; Weed & Bull, 2012).

Table 6.1: Serious leisure, subculture involvement and variations in attitude formation

Seriousness / Involvement in subculture	High	Moderate	Low
Evidence of involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify as mountain bikers at all times • Numerous strong and valued social bonds in mountain biking community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify as mountain bikers in specific circumstances • At least one social circle related to mountain biking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rarely identify as mountain bikers; mountain biking is a favourite activity • Some friends and acquaintances in the mountain biking community
Distinctive motivations	Acquisition of subcultural capital by experiencing new destinations; mastery through travel	Mastery through travel; social bonding	Escape and novelty
Internal information search	Extensive passive collection through social interactions and exposure to specialised media	Passive collection through social interactions; identify with meccas and stereotypes portrayed in specialised media	Passive collection of most discussed and popular destinations
External information search	Actively seeking travel stories and recommendations within subculture; knowledge of specialised media and information sources	Actively seeking recommendations within subculture; knowledge of specialised media and information sources	Refer to tourism information media; rarely actively seek recommendations
Evaluation of information	Specific personal preferences; strong optimist bias; looking for unique destinations, not necessarily known for their mountain biking infrastructures	Rideability assessment; congruence of word-of-mouth sources; starting to define personal preferences; taking into account personal values beyond mountain biking	Consideration of secondary travel purposes; rideability assessment; congruence of word-of-mouth sources; ensure access to mountain bike trails and supporting infrastructure

Table 6.1 (continued): Serious leisure, subculture involvement and variations in attitude formation

Seriousness / Involvement in subculture	High	Moderate	Low
Social influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subtle values and norms from the subculture are internalised • Some broad norms are deliberately rejected in favour of personal preferences • Strong normative and comparative influences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad values and norms from the subculture are internalised • Individual preferences start to emerge • Strong normative influence because individuals want to bond with members of the community over commonalities (identification) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with some norms and values from the subculture • Comparative influence and some normative influence but individuals rarely look to comply because of lower interest in aligning with the ethos
Strongest attitude commitment	Destination allegiance: symbolic, emotional and functional values ascribed to destinations	Destination attachment: some symbolic values (identity construction) but mostly emotional and functional values ascribed to destinations	Destination attraction: generally functional values ascribed to destinations

6.2.3 The role of tourism in the mountain biking subculture

This thesis alludes to mountain biking tourism as a source of subcultural capital and identity confirmation, and a space where participants can revel in the subculture, as suggested in the sports tourism literature (Gibson, 2006; Green & Chalip, 1998). This was evident when considering the importance of sharing travel stories, group travel and the social dimension of attitudes towards tourism destinations.

Subcultural capital ascribed to tourism experiences was noticed when the respondents held positive attitudes towards mountain biking meccas and destinations they perceived as mandatory for authentic mountain bikers. It is consistent with Higham (2005) who suggests that sports tourists comply with socially constructed images when evaluating destinations. Collecting places, seeking variety and novelty with the goal of furthering their career also confirms the subcultural capital ascribed to tourism experiences, as seen in Weed and Bull (2012) and Humphreys (2011). Subcultural capital is socially ascribed to destinations and acquired by individuals visiting these destinations. On one hand, the perceived subcultural capital of a destination can influence attitudes; through participation in the subculture, the respondents are aware of the particular subcultural capital socially ascribed to legendary and celebrated destinations (e.g., Queenstown and Whistler). It implies that emotional and symbolic values ascribed to destinations weigh in on destination evaluations. On the other hand, subcultural capital, gained by individuals through mountain biking tourism experiences, influences information search and evaluations of new destinations. Effectively, based on previous experiences, individuals are more knowledgeable about information sources, internalise more information, are more confident in their abilities to meet challenges, and have a better understanding of their own preferences.

In his review of surf tourism, Fluker (2003) explained that the surf subculture encouraged surfers to push their limits and travel for the pursuit of the next perfect wave; he adds that “the link between the cultural values of this group of sporting participants and the desire to travel in order to practice the sport of surfing is recognized” (p.6). This research suggests a similar link for serious mountain bikers. Humphreys (2011) reflected on the status that golfers were able to achieve in the subculture by visiting specific destinations, however the respondents here never

appeared to consider mountain biking tourism and destinations as a symbol of status, but rather an experience to be had and to share, suggesting a less competitive aspect to the mountain biking subculture.

Mountain biking tourism provides the respondents with a sense of belonging and social connections, confirming and strengthening their social identity and membership in the subculture. Thus, tourism plays a dual role in the mountain biking subculture, as an outlet for the sport and a progression of the leisure career. Within the subculture, attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations guide social interactions and help individuals conform to social norms. This confirms Green and Jones' (2005) suggestion that serious leisure and travel to participate in serious leisure are mutually reinforcing.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR ATTITUDINAL RESEARCH

6.3.1 The importance of tourist attitudes

As explained in the literature review, attitudes are a core concept in consumer behaviour research as an antecedent to consumers' preferences, decisions and actions. Tourist attitudes towards destinations are recognised as a key step in the travel decision-making process (Moutinho, 1987), a central topic in the development of a model for tourist motivation and behaviour (Gnoth, 1997). However, tourist attitudes have rarely been a focus of tourism research (Hsu et al., 2010).

This thesis contributes to tourist attitude research by investigating its relevance and applicability to special interest tourism and particularly sports tourism. The comprehensive information obtained in this research demonstrates studying tourist attitudes and their formation process (1) is relevant to understand the destination choice process, (2) is more thorough than investigating tourist motivation, (3) provides richer insights than studies concerned with the attraction for, or selection of, a single destination, and (4) provides an extensive understanding of the consumption experience itself. This supports the recommendation for a greater focus on tourist attitudes from academics and practitioners. Some suggestions are made regarding the conceptualisation of attitudes in the next section.

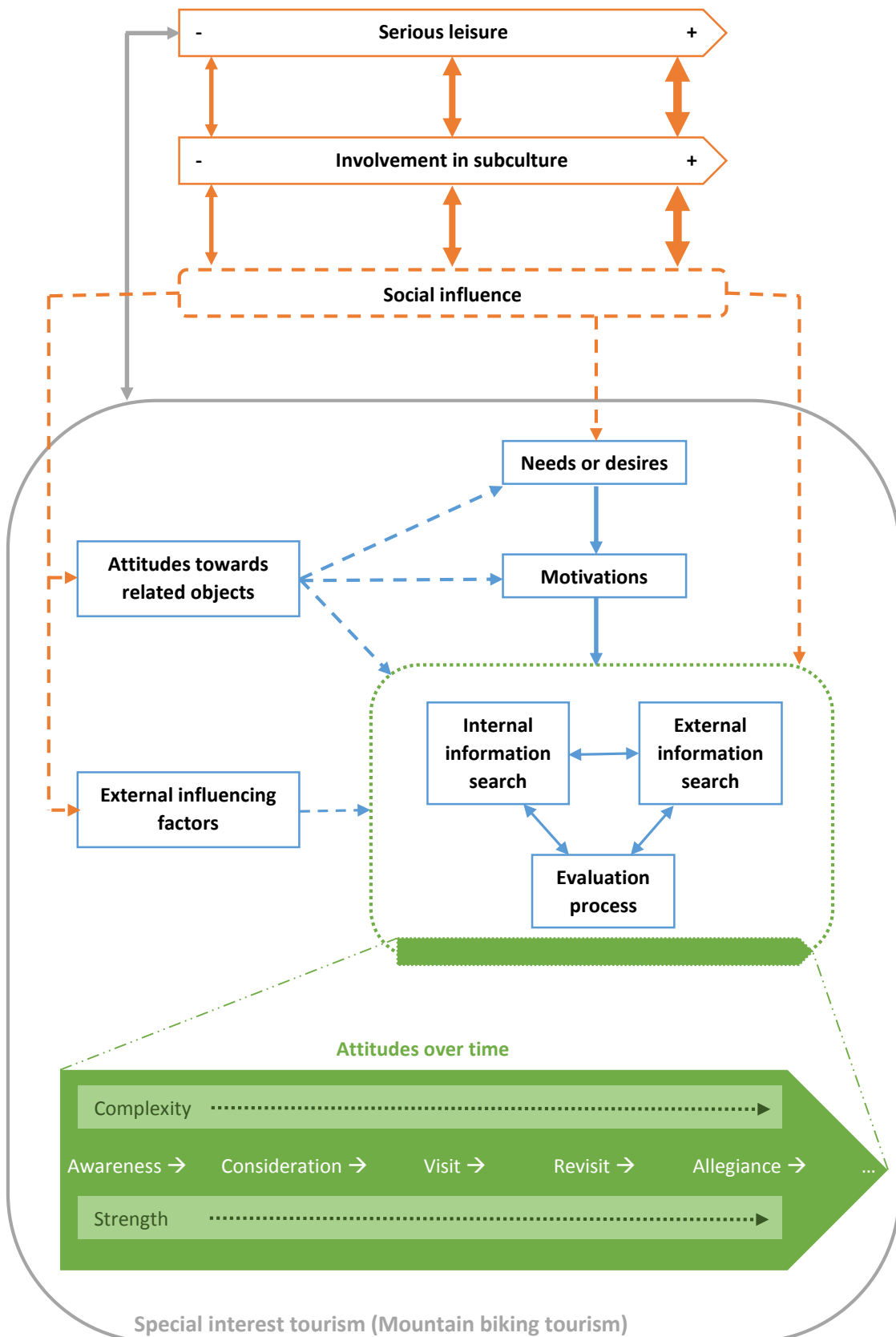
6.3.2 Restructured conceptualisation of attitudes

The conceptual framework (Figure 2.4) was developed based on the concepts, theories and models examined in the literature review. Following Bergin-Seers and Mair (2009) who advocate that tourist attitudes need to be studied as part of a system, it was used in designing the interview guide and provided directions during the analysis. However, some assumptions integrated into the framework proved to be inaccurate or unclear. This section proposes an updated conceptual model (Figure 6.1). Elements in blue are stages and factors in the formation of attitudes, elements in orange relate to serious leisure and subculture, attitudes are indicated in green. Lastly, the context of special interest tourism and its mutually reinforcing relationship with serious leisure are in grey.

The original framework linked needs and desires directly to information search. Evaluations of mountain biking tourism destinations were related to the respondents' motivations to ride and travel for that purpose. While motivations follow needs and wants (Solomon et al., 2013), the concept of motivation includes a qualitative dimension – intensity and direction of cognitive processing engaged in an action to satisfy the need or want (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012). Goals targeted by needs and desires can also be complex and multidimensional (Albarracin et al., 2005), and linked to a range of motivations. Therefore, in blue, the updated framework includes *motivations* following *needs and desires*, both in plural form to indicate that mountain biking tourism is multifaceted.

In blue, the framework retains the notion of attitudes towards related objects influencing the formation of attitudes (social judgement theory) but also integrate *external influencing factors* which were found to shape not only the desire to travel for the purpose of mountain biking but also the preference for particular characteristics of destinations. The variability of their influence is noted by the dashed-line arrows, as opposed to full arrows indicating logical connections.

Figure 6.1: Restructured framework: mountain bikers' attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations



In this research, information was evaluated by the respondents in a constant cycle. In Figure 2.4 attitudes were depicted as a stand-alone stage after the evaluation process, as observed in published consumer decision making models (see Figure 2.1). However, attitudes are defined as summary evaluations or evaluative judgements (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011). Thus, attitudes are described as static notions and as processes of evaluating information and circumstances. In addition, internal and external information search processes appeared to integrate within an overall back-and-forth evaluation process: external information is considered through the filters of internal information and can be assimilated as internal knowledge over time (in turn used to assess new external information). Thus, internal and external information search, the evaluation process and attitudes are interrelated rather than a series of sequential steps.

New personal circumstances and new information about a destination would obviously affect attitudes towards it, but so could apparently relatively unrelated events such as the introduction of a new destination to one's awareness set or the organisation of a group trip. This is likely particularly true in the context of tourism as individuals passively collect information and maintain a range of destinations in their consideration set until conditions allow them to travel (Moutinho, 1987). In addition, from the point of awareness, attitudes become more complex and stronger over time as objects become more familiar and are subject to intricate, dynamic, continuous re-evaluations.

Therefore, the decision was made to (1) depict internal and external information search and evaluation as a cycle (in blue) and (2) represent attitudes as integrated with the evaluation stage and as a dynamic concept (green dotted line and arrow). The expanded arrow-shaped *attitude* box at the bottom includes degrees of involvement with destinations, as high involvement with an object is associated with strong and lasting attitudes (Schiffman, 2011).

Conceptualizing attitudes as continuous dynamic summary evaluations provides support for the suggestion that attitude formation can result from qualitatively different processes (Argyriou & Melewar, 2011). Attitudes are not consistent over time but rather are context-dependent; their valence, strength and durability can change depending on the situation and influences as suggested by Schiffman (2011). Therefore, attitude

research should focus on situational parameters, motivations and goals, information processing strategies and evaluation criteria to better reflect the complexity of attitudes as recommended by Cohen and Reed II (2006) and Gnoth (1997), among others.

The commonly accepted conceptualisation of attitudes follows the tri-component model, proposing that attitudes are composed of separate but interactive cognitive, affective and conative components (Bagozzi et al., 2002). This model reflects the importance of emotions and purpose in consumer behaviour, in addition to beliefs about the object. The tri-component model has been critical in advocating for tourist attitude research to include hedonic attributes of destinations (Filo et al., 2011) and holistic attitudes (Bagozzi et al., 2002) in addition to tangible, observable and measurable attributes of destinations. However, as noted in chapter 5, trying to separate cognitive, affective and conative aspects of attitudes in this research was inadequate. It was the holistic summary evaluations of destinations that were meaningful, rather than their constituting components. Therefore, the new framework does not incorporate the tri-component model. Focusing on holistic attitudes supports recommendations from Bergin-Seers and Mair (2009), Trauer (2006) and Gnoth (1997).

This approach is consistent with the notion introduced previously that attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations are actually *attitudes towards choosing, planning, traveling to, riding and meeting riders in, and reminiscing about one's experience in a mountain biking tourism destination*. The experience anticipated or offered in a destination is the outcome of its functional and emotional components, ensuing opportunities, and the manner in which the tourist intends to make use of them. It also confirms that sports tourism exemplifies “the unique interaction of activity, people and place” (Weed & Bull, 2012, p. 94).

In the top section, in orange, the updated framework also integrates the notion of serious leisure as a continuum and the resulting levels of involvement in the subculture for the participants. As it was suggested throughout chapters 4 and 5, the degree and characteristics of social influence from the subculture varied between the respondents based on their subcultural involvement. This is depicted in the updated framework by the *serious leisure* and *involvement in subculture* boxes being arrow-shape and linked

together and to the rest of the framework by progressively wider arrows. The orange dashed-line arrows indicate the variability of social influence.

6.3.3 Research methodology and future research

Attitudinal research in consumer behaviour and tourism studies has traditionally relied on quantitative methods (Bagozzi et al., 2002; Hosany, 2012). However, chapters 2 and 3 revealed support for the use of qualitative methods to (1) avoid the focus on tangible attributes of destinations characteristic of quantitative methods, (2) take into consideration emotions and holistic evaluations, (3) embrace the heterogeneity of the population studied, and (4) allow individuals to articulate their views and explain the experiences they seek in their own words (Beerli et al., 2007; Gnoth, 1997; Jenkins, 1999; Um & Crompton, 1990).

Using qualitative methods for this research provided an opportunity to comprehend attitudes as they relate to the tourist behaviour system. The interpretivist approach was useful in understanding the context of experiences and the social construction of the respondents' realities. As the restructured framework indicated, it is the process of attitude formation that is relevant in understanding attitudes. It is believed that a positivist approach and quantitative methodologies would have constrained the research by presenting attitudes as static preferences, rather than the dynamic process that emerged from the data.

The semi-structured interviews were combined with the use of a visual projective exercise. Projective techniques are suggested to circumvent psychological defences (Kimmel & Kimmel, 2012). The pictures generated discussions revealing both tangible and intangible elements considered when forming attitudes towards destinations by allowing the respondents to reminisce about previous experiences, project themselves into future potential experiences, and articulate some of the stereotypes and biased knowledge they hold.

In this thesis, qualitative methods allowed the necessary flexibility to explore a little studied special interest tourism market, providing an understanding of serious leisure in the context of mountain biking, the subculture and its related social influence without constraining respondents with preconceived ideas and misconceptions. Thus, it is

recommended that future studies on tourist attitudes, particularly in special interest tourism, should use qualitative research methods and projective exercises to better understand the processes tying together activities, places and people.

The unique position of the researcher as *native* to the subculture studied was addressed in chapter 3. Personal knowledge of destinations, their depiction and promotion in the media, involvement with formal and informal groups and online communities, as well as fluency in the mountain bikers' jargon were undeniably relevant and helpful during interviews and when analysing the data. While it required an effort to avoid quick judgement, the resulting interpretation of the subculture and its influence on its members could not have been achieved without this insider knowledge. In the case of special interest tourism, *being native* appears to provide a clearer and more extensive understanding of serious leisure participants and is thus advocated for future research in this context. Furthermore, studies involving two researchers, one insider and one outsider, could provide a better estimation of the benefits and drawbacks of each approach.

Similarities between sense of place and attitudes towards tourism destinations were highlighted in the literature review. Sense of place "resides in human interpretations of the setting" (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, p. 233) and can be expressed through the meanings associated with places. Meanings reflect individual and cultural identities and are linked to life experiences shared with others in these places (Kyle & Chick, 2007). In their research documenting the meanings white-water recreationists attach to specific places, Bricker and Kerstetter (2002) found five types of meanings ascribed individually or collectively. This conceptualisation of sense of place is similar to the conceptualisation of attitudes towards mountain biking tourism destinations in this research. In addition, the concepts of *place meanings* and *attitude dimensions*, identified in chapter 5, are similar. However, place meanings are considered to form as a result of visitation – use of the space over time (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2002) – while people can hold attitudes towards destinations they have not visited. Therefore, further research into similarities and differences between sense of place and attitudes towards tourism destinations is warranted.

Assumptions made when conceptualising attitudes, pre-conceived notions about their formation process and the use of contrived quantitative methods can prevent one from understanding attitudes as rich and complex structures. While this thesis primarily focused on increasing knowledge of mountain biking and mountain biking tourism, the aforementioned recommendations are believed to be applicable to sports tourism as well as special interest tourism research. The last section of this chapter will address practical implications for planners, managers and marketers involved in the development and promotion and mountain biking tourism destinations.

6.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

More clearly understanding how attitudes towards tourism destinations are formed can help design, maintain and promote sites. Every destination is different, but understanding the dimensions of attitudes and involvement of tourists with mountain biking is an opportunity to create better spaces and successful mountain biking tourism destinations. This thesis alludes to a number of implications for practitioners, some of which are detailed in this section.

It is suggested that personal involvement in an activity, rather than demographics or lifestyles, influence mountain bikers' motivations and preferences. The serious leisure continuum should be considered as a basis for market segmentation. While skill level can be partially related to degree of seriousness, Table 4.1 clearly advocates that individuals can be highly serious – thus more likely to travel frequently, for long periods of times and willing to visit distant destinations – while not labelling themselves as experts or even advanced riders. This should be taken into consideration when creating advertising campaigns and targeted promotions. It confirms the suggestion from Ritchie et al. (2010) that tourists should be segmented according to their enduring involvement and/or their travel motivations.

Relatedly, assessment of destinations (and of the challenges they hold) is often based on visuals – whether photographs shared by friends, images in magazines or videos online. Since willingness and motivation to travel is not necessarily linked to perceived skills, marketers should be careful to balance inspiration and aspiration with riders' search for the right level, and right type, of challenge. This is related to the subjectivity

of flow and highlights the importance of providing detailed and accurate descriptions of trails and to follow a predictable grading system.

Motivations to travel are complex and can vary from one trip to another. They affect the sources of information used, their order, as well as how the information is filtered and evaluated. However, word-of-mouth, either face-to-face or through social media, either from friends or from members of formal or informal communities and groups, remains the primary source of knowledge for serious mountain bikers. Attracting riders through festivals, trail opening ceremonies, races, shuttle days or other special events has the potential of getting the *buzz* started for new and emerging destinations. Additionally, interesting content easily shared online, particularly photos and videos, needs to be a priority for marketers. It should also be noted that the strong predilection for beautiful scenery, untouched landscapes and raw trails would most likely lead mountain bikers to prefer, and therefore share more stories about, destinations in pristine natural settings.

Ensuring and measuring satisfactions of visitors in the destination is essential. While negative word-of-mouth does not appear to often lead to negative evaluations from the recipients of that information (optimist bias), positive word-of-mouth offers a higher probability of visitation.

Trails and riding opportunities are obviously at the core of mountain bikers' evaluations of destinations. With riders looking for diversity and the right challenge, managers and planners should develop a variety of trails and access points. Destinations that can offer a wide range of riding type and level are the most renowned and successful – e.g., Queenstown and Rotorua in New Zealand. Not all riding areas can develop such a range of trails but clusters and collaborative marketing can help smaller destinations by promoting a range of opportunities, therefore enhancing the competitiveness of the region against other areas (Freeman & Thomlinson, 2014). Mountain bikers also look for novelty and are interested in discovering new places and enjoying new experiences. In order to satisfy their desire to collect places while encouraging repeat visits, multiple access points should be developed where possible, as well as continuous upgrades and expansions.

As it was indicated in chapters 4 and 5, trails were not always the sole motivation of, or attributes sought by, the respondents. Mountain bikers often live in areas where they are able to practice the sport close to home, therefore the simple act of riding a bike is not the sole purpose of traveling. They are looking for intensive and extensive time riding, immersion in the subculture and seek identity-constructing experiences. Managers and planners should provide spaces to facilitate social interactions among mountain bikers. Trails and terrain are the foundation of destinations but there are opportunities to develop mountain biking tourism destinations through complementary experiences (Freeman & Thomlinson, 2014).

Marketers need to focus on the interpretation of the settings: What do the attributes enable? What opportunities are offered? The dimensions of attitudes introduced in chapter 5 can provide guidelines to develop better communication and promotion material. Many destinations tend to communicate attributes fulfilling the utilitarian dimension, but other dimensions, particularly the social dimension, should be integrated into marketing strategies.

Respondents displayed overwhelmingly positive attitudes. Therefore, optimism bias should be taken into consideration when measuring visitor satisfaction. Future applied research could help further understand (1) what elements or factors lead to stronger positive attitudes and (2) how does a destination go from *good* to *great*.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This thesis provides an insight into the motivations and values of mountain bikers which can help managers better understand the growing market of mountain biking tourism. It also tried to offer a new perspective on tourist attitudes. The concept of attitudes is complex and has seen little consensus over the years in its definition and conceptualisation. This is possibly one of the reasons why it is rarely used in academic and applied research and the development of marketing strategies. Having worked in the tourism industry for several years and discussed the topic of this thesis with lecturers and practitioners, it is clear that while needs, motivations, information search and external constraints are concepts understood in the tourism industry, the concept of attitudes is often unknown and considered obscure the rest of the time. However,

this research demonstrates that the study of attitudes can provide a better understanding of the richness and complexity of the consumption experience. Tourism is highly experiential by nature, particularly sports and special interest tourism, and the consumption of tourism experiences should not be viewed as a rational decision-making process (Trauer, 2006). Tourist attitudes is a concept requiring further investigation.

7 APPENDICES

7.1 APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

The purpose of this study is to understand how mountain bikers purposefully travelling to mountain biking tourism destinations form attitudes towards these destinations (physical and abstract attributes of these destinations). This study will address three research questions:

- What attitudes do mountain bikers hold towards mountain biking tourism destinations?
- How are these attitudes formed and what factors influence them?
- Is the mountain biking subculture one of these factors?

Demographics – Psychographics

These questions are designed to gather some background information and assess riding and travelling habits of the participants as well as some basic demographics for the purpose of analysis.

Date of Interview: ____ / ____ / ____

Number of years of experience mountain biking:

What is your preferred type of riding?

☐ cross-country

☐ all-mountain (enduro)

☐ downhill

How often do you ride?

☐ several times a week

☐ at least once a week

☐ a few times per month

How would you describe your skill level?

☐ Beginner, I am not very confident at the moment and prefer easy trails but I am improving

☐ Intermediate, I enjoy challenging myself but I am cautious and avoid trails too steep or technical

☐ Advanced, I can handle most trails and I am confident about my abilities but I may walk a few sections on difficult trails

☐ Expert, I ride pretty much everything and I am always looking for new challenges

Are you member of a riding group or club (formal or informal)? Please explain briefly:

How many times do you travel away from home for at least 24 hours for the primary purpose of mountain biking?

- ☐ very rarely ☐ once or twice per year
☐ up to five times per year ☐ more often

Last time you travelled away from home for at least 24 hours for the primary purpose of mountain biking (mm/yy)? ____ / ____

Next mountain biking trip anticipated (mm/yy)? ____ / ____ ☐ I don't know

Stimulus / Projective Exercise #1

The purpose of this exercise is both to make the participant feel comfortable conversing about the topic with the interviewer and to assess key components of consumer attitudes and mountain biking destinations.

Step a) will provide the researcher with a general assessment of the most popular and well-known mountain biking destinations in the sample. Step b) is linked to the previous step. It is expected that comparisons between the attitudes of various respondents towards the same destinations will be able to be assessed.

For Step c), ten images purposefully selected to showcase various mountain biking experiences (such as solo, group or family, mellow or challenging, natural or including man-made features, etc.) will be presented to the participant. In previous studies third person and projective techniques were recommended to circumvent psychological defences of respondents. Through this exercise it is expected that participants will reveal their attitudes towards different types of mountain biking destinations which will help provide answers to the first research question:

- *What attitudes do mountain bikers hold towards mountain biking tourism destinations?*

Step d) is intended to assess self-image congruity between the self-concept of the participant and the destination image. Self-image congruity has been investigated in the literature as a component of attitude formation and discussion around this topic will provide information to answer the second research question:

- *How are these attitudes formed and what factors influence them?*
 - a) Can you please provide a list of up to 5 domestic destinations and up to 5 international destinations that come to your mind when you think about going somewhere to go mountain biking?
 - b) Have you been or would you consider going to these places? Which one(s) do you like best? Why?
 - c) Can you please pick 3 or 4 images shown to you and tell me what you think is going through the mind of the person/people in the photo?
 - d) Would you consider going to these places? Which one(s) do you think you would like best? Why?

Open-ended Questions – Set #1

The following three open-ended questions are used to assess the participants' motives and goals (Question 1), and the perceived cognitive, affective and holistic images of mountain biking destinations (Questions 2 and 3). These questions are intended to provide a background that will help answer the subsequent research questions and to understand the phenomenon of attitudes towards a place.

1) Why do you travel to ride?

Prompts:

- What do you think are the benefits for you?
- How is it different than what you do at home?
- What are you looking for when you think of travelling to ride?

2) What are you looking for in a destination?

Prompt:

- In some of the destinations that you mentioned, could you tell me what makes them good places to ride?

3) What would be an ideal destination to ride? Why?

Prompt:

- What is the place where you would most want to go to at the moment?

The next three questions are expected to answer the first two research questions:

- *What attitudes do mountain bikers hold towards mountain biking tourism destinations?*
- *How are these attitudes formed and what factors influence them?*

The goal is to assess the cognitive (Question 4) and affective (Question 5) components of attitude, their relative importance and influence, as well as influencing factors in the formation of attitudes (Question 6) such as sources of knowledge.

4) What makes a mountain biking destination attractive to you?

Prompts:

- Why do you like some places and not others (use actual example from stimulus)?
- Are you looking for particular challenges? A particular environment? A particular ambiance?

5) When you think about riding in these places, how does it make you feel?

Prompts:

- Do you think that you would have a good time?
- Can you tell me what you imagine it would be like? Describe your potential holidays to me.

6) Where do you find information about potential destinations?

Prompts:

- How do you hear about new places?
- Do you talk about potential destinations with your friends or family?
- Do you think you know a lot of details about the destinations that you mentioned to me? Would you like to know more?
- Can you recall a time when you changed your opinion about a destination? Do you remember why you changed your mind?

Projective Exercise #2

Participants in qualitative studies may not feel comfortable discussing negative opinions at first, but it is expected that at this stage of the discussion the participant would feel more open and comfortable sharing their impressions and perceptions, even negative ones.

- e) Can you please pick one image that is not appealing to you at all and tell me why?
Don't you think you would have a good time if you were there?
- f) Can you tell me if you know of some destinations where you don't really want to go and explain me why?

Open-ended Questions – Set #2

The last four questions are intended to assess the participants' degree of involvement in mountain biking (Questions 7 and 8) which would be reflected in the participant's 'mountain biking identity' as well as his or her level of membership in the mountain biking subculture. These concepts could be related to attitudes towards destination through self-image congruity (Questions 9 and 10).

These questions are intended to answer the last research question:

- *Is the mountain biking subculture one of the factors influencing attitudes towards destinations?*

7) How would you describe yourself as a rider?

Prompts:

- Can you tell me why you like riding?
- What do you strive for?

8) How important is mountain biking for you in your everyday life?

Prompts:

- Do you think you are 'part of the family' when it comes to mountain biking? Do you feel that you belong? What must one do to belong?
- Do you participate in formal and informal events around mountain biking? Do you ride with a particular group of friends?
- What do you think characterises mountain bikers generally? Do you fit this profile?

9) Do you think the places you would like to go riding reflect you as a person?

Prompts:

- Do you think that you fit the profile of the type of people who go there? Or would you stand out from the crowd?
- Do you think you would feel comfortable going there to ride?
- Do you feel confident that you would have a good time?

10) Do you think a trip to one of these destinations would reflect positively on you?

Prompt:

- What does such a trip say about you?
- Would you tell people about it?

Final Demographic Questions

Age: _____ years old

Highest education level:

Profession:

7.2 APPENDIX B: PROJECTIVE EXERCISE

1



Moab, Utah, USA

2



Heaphy Track, New Zealand

3



Rotorua, New Zealand

4



Queenstown, New Zealand

5



Whistler, BC, Canada

6



North Shore, BC, Canada

7



Mt Blanc, Chamonix, Alps, France

8



Whistler, BC, Canada

9



Scotland

10



Torridon, Scotland (from a movie starring pro rider Steve Peat)

Sources:

Photo 1: <http://voyagevixens.com/2013/04/16/women-only-adventures-in-moab-utah/>

Photo 2: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/travel/destinations/nz/7212666/Heaphy-Track-gets-even-better>

Photo 3: <http://www.rotoruanz.com/visit/to-do/1260/adventure/301374/rotorua-adventure-day/>

Photo 4: <http://conor-macfarlane.blogspot.co.nz/>

Photo 5: <http://ww1.whistlerblackcomb.com/media/photo/>

Photo 6: <http://www.pinkbike.com/news/North-Shore-trails-Locals-Guide-to-North-Shore-Rides-2011.html>

Photo 7: <http://www.activeazur.com/mountain-biking-france/mountain-biking-french-alps/chamonix>

Photo 8: <http://bike.whistlerblackcomb.com/>

Photo 9: <http://www.mtbholidayscotland.com/2012/04>

Photo 10: http://www.visitscotland.com/blog/mountain-biking/steve-peat-meets-torridon/attachment/8-solo_hike/

7.3 APPENDIX C: INFORMATION SHEET



Mountain Bikers' Attitudes Towards Mountain Biking Tourism Destinations

Interview

INFORMATION SHEET

School of Management

My name is Julie Moularde and I am currently preparing my Master of Tourism Management thesis at the School of Management at Victoria University of Wellington. I would like to invite you to take part in my research project but you are under no obligation to participate. Before deciding whether you would like to be part of this project, you should understand what is involved. This form provides you with information about the project, which will also be discussed with you. You will also have the opportunity to ask questions, and have them answered. If you agree to participate in my project, please sign the attached consent form.

It must be noted that before any research can be carried out, Victoria University of Wellington must grant ethical approval. This research project has been scrutinised and accepted by my supervisor and the Pipitea Human Ethics Committee at Victoria University of Wellington.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research is to understand mountain bikers' perceptions of, and feelings towards, mountain biking tourism destinations where they have travelled, plan to travel or dream of travelling.

What will your role be if you take part in this study?

Participation from you would involve participating in a one-on-one interview with the researcher (myself), at a time and place that would be convenient to you. The recorded interview would take approximately 60 to 90 minutes but will only begin with your consent, and it may be terminated by you at any time, no questions asked.

You may also choose to withdraw from the research after the interview. You will need to contact me, Julie Moularde, no later than August 15, 2014.

What will happen to the information you give?

This research is completely confidential. Your name will not be used in the thesis and any information traceable to you will be excluded from the analysis. My supervisor may review some of the transcripts I prepare for the sole purpose of providing guidance to me. Interview recordings and transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer. The research findings will appear in a thesis, a copy of which will be placed in the library at Victoria University of Wellington. I will also try to prepare a journal article from this research. Any information or opinions that could be traceable to you will not be reported in the written thesis, presentation or journal article. Information will only be reported in a non-attributable form.

The raw data will be destroyed two year after the end of the project, on or before March 31, 2017.

If you have any questions or problems, who should you contact?**Student:**

Julie Moularde

moularjuli@myvuw.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Dr. Adam Weaver, Senior Lecturer in Tourism

Management,
School of Management

PO Box 600, Wellington 6140

adam.weaver@vuw.ac.nz

04 463 5375

7.4 APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Mountain Bikers' Attitudes Towards Mountain Biking Tourism Destinations

Interview

CONSENT FORM

I agree to be interviewed by Julie Moularde for the purposes of her Master of Tourism Management thesis and consent to the use of my opinions and information. I understand that none of the opinions or statements that I make during the interview will be attributed to me personally, and that I may withdraw from the research before August 15, 2014, no questions asked.

I am aware that the findings derived from this study will appear in a thesis, a copy will be deposited in the library at Victoria University of Wellington, and excerpts may be included in academic publications and/or academic conferences.

I have been informed of the purpose of the research and the confidentiality conditions.

I understand that the interview will be recorded and that a written transcript will be prepared based on the audio recording. This raw data collected during the interview will only be available to the researcher, Julie Moularde, and her supervisor, Dr. Adam Weaver.

Name:

Date:

Signed:

If you would like to be entered for a draw to win one of two prizes (\$100 voucher and a t-shirt of your choice from NZO), please provide your email address or phone number. The draw will occur on August 16, 2014 among the respondents who completed the interview. Participants who withdraw from the research after the interview will not be included in the draw.

.....

.....

If you would like a copy of the research summary, please add your email/address below:

.....

.....

.....

8 REFERENCES

- Albarracin, D., Johnson, B. T., & Zanna, M. P. (2005). *The handbook of attitudes*. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Antaki, C. (2008). Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis. In P. Alasuutari, L. Bickman & J. Brannen (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social research methods* (pp. 431-447). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Argyriou, E., & Melewar, T. (2011). Consumer attitudes revisited: a review of attitude theory in marketing research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(4), 431-451.
- Arnould, E. J., Price, L., & Zinkhan, G. M. (2004). *Consumers*. Boston: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.
- Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 868-882.
- Bagozzi, R., Gurhan-Canli, Z., & Priester, J. (2002). *The social psychology of consumer behaviour*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Open University.
- Baloglu, S. (1998). An empirical investigation of attitude theory for tourist destinations: A comparison of visitors and nonvisitors. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 22(3), 211-224.
- Beerli, A., Meneses, G. D., & Gil, S. M. (2007). Self-congruity and destination choice. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(3), 571-587.
- Berger, I. E., & Greenspan, I. (2008). High (on) technology: Producing tourist identities through technologized adventure. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 13(2), 89-114.
- Bergin-Seers, S., & Mair, J. (2009). Emerging green tourists in Australia: Their behaviours and attitudes. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 9(2), 109-119.
- Blackwell, R. D., Miniard, P. W., & Engel, J. F. (2006). *Consumer behavior 10th*. Mason, OH: South-Western Thomas Learning.

- Bricker, K. S., & Kerstetter, D. L. (2000). Level of specialization and place attachment: An exploratory study of whitewater recreationists. *Leisure Sciences*, 22(4), 233-257.
- Bricker, K. S., & Kerstetter, D. L. (2002). An interpretation of special place meanings whitewater recreationists attach to the South Fork of the American River. *Tourism Geographies*, 4(4), 396-425.
- Cohen, J. B., & Reed II, A. (2006). A multiple pathway anchoring and adjustment (MPAA) model of attitude generation and recruitment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33(1), 1-15.
- Dann, G. M. (1996). Tourists' images of a destination-an alternative analysis. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 5(1-2), 41-55.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Donoghue, S. (2000). Projective techniques in consumer research. *Journal of Family Ecology and Consumer Sciences/Tydskrif vir Gesinsekologie en Verbruikerswetenskappe*, 28(1).
- Douglas, N., Douglas, N., & Derrett, R. (2001). *Special interest tourism: context and cases*. New York: John Wiley & Sons Australia.
- Driscoll, A., Lawson, R., & Niven, B. (1994). Measuring tourists' destination perceptions. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 21(3), 499-511.
- Filo, K., Chen, N., King, C., & Funk, D. C. (2011). Sport tourists' involvement with a destination: a stage-based examination. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*.
- Fluker, M. (2003, 5-8 February). *Riding the wave: defining surf tourism*. Paper presented at the 13th International Research Conference of the Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE), Coffs Harbour, Australia.
- Foxall, G. R. (2005). *Understanding consumer choice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Freeman, R., & Thomlinson, E. (2014). Mountain Bike Tourism and Community Development In British Columbia: Critical Success Factors for the Future. *Tourism Review International*, 18(1), 9-22.

- Gibson, H. J. (2006). *Sport tourism: Concepts and theories*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Gnoth, J. (1997). Tourism motivation and expectation formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24(2), 283-304.
- Green, B. C. (2001). Leveraging subculture and identity to promote sport events. *Sport Management Review*, 4(1), 1-19.
- Green, B. C., & Chalip, L. (1998). Sport tourism as the celebration of subculture. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 25(2), 275-291.
- Green, B. C., & Jones, I. (2005). Serious leisure, social identity and sport tourism. *Sport in Society*, 8(2), 164-181.
- Gyimóthy, S., & Mykletun, R. J. (2004). Play in adventure tourism: The case of Arctic trekking. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(4), 855-878.
- Hagen, S. (2013). *The Downhill Mountain Bike Subculture in New Zealand*. University of Otago, Unpublished master's thesis.
- Hede, A.-M. (2005). Sports-events, tourism and destination marketing strategies: an Australian case study of Athens 2004 and its media telecast. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 10(3), 187-200.
- Higham, J. (2005). *Sport tourism destinations: issues, opportunities and analysis*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann.
- Hosany, S. (2012). Appraisal determinants of tourist emotional responses. *Journal of Travel Research*, 51(3), 303-314.
- Hsu, C. H., Cai, L. A., & Li, M. (2010). Expectation, motivation, and attitude: A tourist behavioral model. *Journal of Travel Research*, 49(3), 282-296.
- Humphreys, C. (2011). Who cares where I play? Linking reputation with the golfing capital and the implication for golf destinations. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 16(2), 105-128.
- Huybers-Withers, S. M., & Livingston, L. A. (2010). Mountain biking is for men: Consumption practices and identity portrayed by a niche magazine. *Sport in Society*, 13(7-8), 1204-1222.
- Jackson, S. A., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). *Flow in sports*. Leeds: Human Kinetics.
- Jenkins, O. H. (1999). Understanding and measuring tourist destination images. *International journal of tourism research*, 1(1), 1-15.

- Jennings, G. (2010). *Tourism research*. Milton, Qld: John Wiley & Sons.
- Jorgensen, B. S., & Stedman, R. C. (2001). Sense of place as an attitude: Lakeshore owners attitudes toward their properties. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 21(3), 233-248.
- Kang, M., & Moscardo, G. (2006). Exploring cross-cultural differences in attitudes towards responsible tourist behaviour: A comparison of Korean, British and Australian tourists. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 11(4), 303-320.
- Kanuha, V. K. (2000). "Being" native versus "going native": Conducting social work research as an insider. *Social Work*, 45(5), 439-447.
- Kaplanidou, K., & Vogt, C. (2007). The Interrelationship between Sport Event and Destination Image and Sport Tourists' Behaviours. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 12(3/4), 183-206.
- Key, J. (2014). Six innovative tourism projects get funding. Retrieved 21/05/2014, from <http://johnkey.co.nz/archives/1844-Six-innovative-tourism-projects-get-funding.html>
- Kim, S. S., Kim, J. H., & Ritchie, B. W. (2008). Segmenting overseas golf tourists by the concept of specialization. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 25(2), 199-217.
- Kimmel, A. J., & Kimmel, A. R. (2012). *Psychological Foundations of Marketing*. New York: Routledge Academic.
- Kitterlin, M., & Moll, L. (2013). Employee Attitudes toward Pre-employment Drug Testing in the Full-service Restaurant Industry. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 16(3), 313-326.
- Klabi, F. (2012). The predictive power of destination-personality-congruity on tourist preference: a global approach to destination image branding. *Leisure/Loisir*, 36(3-4), 309-331.
- Kyle, G., & Chick, G. (2007). The Social Construction of a Sense of Place. *Leisure Sciences*, 29(3), 209-225.
- Lamont, M. (2009). Reinventing the wheel: A definitional discussion of bicycle tourism. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 14(1), 5-23.

- Lee, T. H. (2009). A Structural Model to Examine How Destination Image, Attitude, and Motivation Affect the Future Behavior of Tourists. *Leisure Sciences*, 31(3), 215-236.
- MBTA, W. C. M. B. T. A. (2006). Sea-to-Sky Mountain Biking Economic Impact Study - Whistler Report.
- Mohsin, A. (2005). Tourist attitudes and destination marketing—the case of Australia's Northern Territory and Malaysia. *Tourism Management*, 26(5), 723-732.
- Moularde, J. (2014). Trail Fund 2014 Rider Survey: Trail Fund NZ.
- Moutinho, L. (1987). Consumer behaviour in tourism. *European Journal of Marketing*, 21(10), 5-44.
- Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2002). The concept of flow. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 89-105). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Novelli, M. (2005). *Niche tourism: contemporary issues, trends and cases*. Amsterdam; Boston: Routledge.
- Nyaupane, G. P., Paris, C. M., & Teye, V. (2011). Study abroad motivations, destination selection and pre-trip attitude formation. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 13(3), 205-217.
- Outdoor Foundation. (2014). Outdoor Recreation Participation, Topline Report 2014.
- Papadimitriou, D., & Gibson, H. (2008). Benefits sought and realized by active mountain sport tourists in Epirus, Greece: pre-and post-trip analysis. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 13(1), 37-60.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications.
- Pearce, D. G. (2012). *Frameworks for tourism research*. Wallingford, Oxfordshire; Cambridge, MA: CAB International.
- People for Bikes. (2014). Economic benefits of the bicycling industry and tourism. Retrieved 15/07/2014, from <http://www.peopleforbikes.org/statistics/category/economic-statistics#economic-benefits-of-the-bicycling-industry-and-tourism>
- Phillimore, J., & Goodson, L. (2004). *Qualitative research in tourism: Ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies*. New York: Routledge.

- Ribeiro, M. A., Valle, P. O. d., & Silva, J. A. (2013). Residents' Attitudes towards Tourism Development in Cape Verde Islands. *Tourism Geographies*, 15(4), 654-679.
- Richardson, S., & Butler, G. (2012). Attitudes of Malaysian Tourism and Hospitality Students' towards a Career in the Industry. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 17(3), 262-276.
- Riley, R. W. (1996). Revealing socially constructed knowledge through quasi-structured interviews and grounded theory analysis. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 5(1-2), 21-40.
- Ritchie, B. W., Tkaczynski, A., & Faulks, P. (2010). Understanding the motivation and travel behavior of cycle tourists using involvement profiles. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 27(4), 409-425.
- Runyan, D. (2012). The Economic Significance of Bicycle-Related Travel in Oregon; prepared for Travel Oregon.
- Ryan, C. (2003). *Recreational tourism: Demand and impacts*. Clevedon, England; Buffalo [N.Y.]: Channel View Publications.
- Sæþórsdóttir, A. D. (2010). Planning nature tourism in Iceland based on tourist attitudes. *Tourism Geographies*, 12(1), 25-52.
- Schiffman, L. G. (2011). *Consumer behaviour*. Frenchs Forest, N.S.W: Pearson Australia.
- Scott, D. (2012). Serious leisure and recreation specialization: An uneasy marriage. *Leisure Sciences*, 34(4), 366-371.
- Shipway, R., & Jones, I. (2007). Running away from home: understanding visitor experiences and behaviour at sport tourism events. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 9(5), 373-383.
- Siderelis, C., Naber, M., & Leung, Y.-F. (2010). The influence of site design and resource conditions on outdoor recreation demand: a mountain biking case study. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 42(4), 573-590.
- Silverman, D. (2004). *Qualitative research: theory, method and practice*. London: SAGE.
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Thousand Oaks, California; New Delhi; London; Singapore: SAGE Publications Limited.
- Sirgy, M. J., & Su, C. (2000). Destination image, self-congruity, and travel behavior: Toward an integrative model. *Journal of Travel Research*, 38(4), 340-352.

- Solomon, M. R., Russell-Bennett, R., & Previte, J. (2013). *Consumer Behaviour: Buying, Having, Being*. Australia: Pearson Australia Group.
- Taylor, S. (2010). 'Extending the Dream Machine': Understanding people's participation in mountain biking. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 13(1-2), 259-281.
- TNZ, T. N. Z. (2014, 1 July 2014). Cycling and Mountain Biking - 'Naturally breathtaking'. Retrieved 24/09/2014, from <http://www.tourismnewzealand.com/sector-marketing/special-interest/cycling-and-mountain-biking/>
- Trauer, B. (2006). Conceptualizing special interest tourism—frameworks for analysis. *Tourism Management*, 27(2), 183-200.
- Trawöger, L. (2014). Convinced, ambivalent or annoyed: Tyrolean ski tourism stakeholders and their perceptions of climate change. *Tourism Management*, 40, 338-351.
- Um, S., & Crompton, J. L. (1990). Attitude determinants in tourism destination choice. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17(3), 432-448.
- Weed, M., & Bull, C. (2012). *Sports Tourism: Participants, Policy and Providers (2nd ed.)*. Oxford: Elsevier/Butterworth Heinemann.
- Weiler, B., & Hall, C. M. (1992). *Special interest tourism*. New York; London: Belhaven Press.
- Wu, C. H.-J., & Liang, R.-D. (2011). The relationship between white-water rafting experience formation and customer reaction: a flow theory perspective. *Tourism Management*, 32(2), 317-325.