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# A visitor motivational typology at Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site

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**Orientation:** Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site (MNP) is a unique national park in South Africa in that it includes a World Heritage Site of significant importance for the people of southern Africa. MNP is a relatively new national park with low visitor numbers and occupancy rates, which threaten the sustainable management of the park.

**Research purpose:** This study aimed to develop a general visitor profile and to describe the motivational factors for visiting the park in order to support the development of tourism at MNP.

**Motivation of the study:** A tourism management plan is required for the park; however, any planning associated planning requires an assessment of tourist behaviour and needs.

**Research design, approach and method:** An online questionnaire was distributed to a database of visitors to MNP during March–April 2013. A total of 486 responses were received. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics through frequencies and means. Motivator constructs were analysed through a factor analysis.

**Main findings:** The study both confirmed and contradicted previous findings from other national parks in terms of visitor profiles and motivations. Most crucially, this study identified a new motivational factor for visiting national parks, which advances the need to manage the heritage aspect of world heritage sites distinctly from national parks.

**Managerial implications**: The results indicated that visitors to MNP were older and better educated compared to visitors at other national parks. These visitors included predominantly first-time visitors. In addition these visitors are mainly motivated by the need for a *nature experience*, although the park is not a Big 5 reserve, findings also identified *heritage and education* as a unique motivational factor for this park.

**Contribution added:** The study promotes the requirement of a unique park-specific tourism management strategy for MNP as the market base of this park is demographically distinct. In addition, the park should improve the promotion of its status as a World Heritage asset in relation to its natural attributes in order to attract greater numbers of heritage tourists. Although the park features exceptional natural features, the reserve is not a Big 5 reserve and this may result in dissatisfaction with the major group of visitors seeking a nature experience.

## Introduction

Tourism is often referred to as the world's largest industry (George 2007; Hall 2008), and it is predicted by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) that tourism will contribute 9.6% of the world's gross domestic product and will employ over 120 million people by 2021 (WTTC 2011a). The WTTC further predicts that in South Africa, tourism will contribute 11.5% of gross domestic product and employ over 1.7 million people by 2021 (WTTC 2011b). South Africa's best selling features are its natural beauty and wildlife, and numerous tourists visit the region in order to appreciate the natural environment, including the dynamic ecosystems and landscapes that are on offer (Parker & Khare 2005). South African National Parks (SANParks) is the custodian of a large portion of the country's natural assets by conserving unique and sensitive ecosystems in the country. At present, SANParks manage over 4 million hectares of protected land, consisting of 19 national parks each responsible for protecting different biodiversities (SANParks 2014). One such park is Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site (MNP), located in the Limpopo Province close to Alldays and Musina (Messina).

**Note:** This article is based on 'A visitor profile of Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site' previously published by the authors as part of a doctoral thesis.

## Background

The park was established at first as the Vhembe-Dongola National Park and was proclaimed in 1995 to protect this unique area. The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape was inscribed as a World Heritage site by the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in 2003 (UNESCO 2003). Mapungubwe was the capital of an Iron Age kingdom and is considered to be the first sophisticated southern African civilisation that had a structured hierarchy, practiced agriculture and possessed trading routes as far as China (Huffman 2008). This park may be considered a relatively new national park; it was only officially established in the mid 1990s and the park was opened to visitors only in 2006.

Tourism to World Heritage Sites and protected areas is increasing, which brings with it potential challenges such as overcrowding, overuse and marketing problems (Cochrane & Tapper 2006). Although MNP has relatively low visitor numbers, these numbers are slowly increasing (SANParks 2010, 2012). These increased visitor numbers could bring along numerous challenges, and for this reason, it is imperative that management has sufficient knowledge of their market base. In order to counter these challenges, management at the park need to make informed decisions to reduce the risk and uncertainty in the decision-making process (Robbins & Coulter 2012). Tourism planning requires an analysis of tourist behaviour and needs to include an assessment of visitor motivations which inform the intrinsic impetus of the reasons for visit. These factors may play a central role in the sustainability of the park. These factors, together with changes in the market environment, developed the main goal of the study, namely to define a visitor profile to MNP and to determine the main motivational factors for visiting the park.

Previous research at national parks within South Africa analysing visitor motives predominantly incorporated inquiry within a national park context and they do not necessarily incorporate inquiry into the context of heritage and more specifically World Heritage. For this reason, the study aimed at generating an updated profile of visitors to MNP and to determine the main motivational factors for visiting taking into account MNP as both a World Heritage site and a national park.

## Literature review

According to Saayman (2013), there are a range of factors that play a role in the planning and forecasting of demand for tourism. These factors include amongst others the demographic structure of the population, travel motivations, availability of services and the price, uniqueness and image of the attraction.

In terms of the demographic structure of the population at MNP, Van der Merwe *et al*. (2009) were able to generate a profile of visitors to MNP. However, that study was conducted in the early establishment phase of the park and visitor numbers and occupancy rates were low. Their study also included an undersized sample (151 respondents over 3 years). MNP is a relatively young national park, which has shown a notable growth in visitor numbers over the last few years since the study by Van der Merwe *et al*. (2009) was conducted. Over the past 3 years, occupancy rates for accommodation in the park have improved from 25% to just fewer than 52% (SANParks 2010; 2012), and the park has been the focus of numerous marketing campaigns and has received increased publicity in the media.

With regard to visitor or tourism motivations, these are known to be associated with a set of needs that cause an individual to participate in tourism activity (Park & Yoon 2009). These motives are primarily intrinsic (Devesa, Laguna & Palacios 2009). Thus, tourism motivation is a concept that explains one of the primary driving forces behind all consumer behaviour (Fletcher *et al*. 2013; Snepenger *et al*. 2006).

Research into the field of visitor motivations was primarily informed by the empirical motives identified by Crompton (1979) and Fodness (1994). Crompton proposed the push-and-pull motivator theory. This theory promoted the belief that motivation is regulated by two main types of forces. The first, namely push forces, push a tourist to visit a certain attraction. These are mostly intrinsic forces. Secondly, pull forces are extrinsic and include all the elements of a destination that lure a visitor towards it (Crompton 1979). Although the study of Crompton (1979) does not specifically address tourism issues, intrinsic and extrinsic motives still impact on tourism motivator research. Application of motivational studies on tourism occurred in the 1980s but it was Fodness (1994), who first conducted an empirical study on the field. Fodness (1994) believed that an increased understanding of tourist behaviours and travel motivations could ultimately be beneficial in marketing plans in order to attract more tourists to the area. Later, other researchers identified the importance for a destination to measure the motivational factors that lead to the choice to visit in order to inform an efficient marketing strategy and sustainable management plan (Boo & Jones 2009; Pan & Ryan 2007; Slabbert & Viviers 2012).

Taking this into account, data on visitor profiling at World Heritage Sites within South Africa are minimal. Research into the field of visitor profiling at national parks is growing; however, there is still a gap in research relating to determining visitor motivations to these parks (Van der Merwe & Saayman 2008).

Van der Merwe and Saayman (2008) and Kruger and Saayman (2010) have identified a gap in literature that focuses on travel motivations to national parks, whilst Park and Yoon (2009) note that such research into tourism in rural areas is also lacking. Some authors have strived to breach the research gap in the understanding of visitor motivations to national parks in South Africa. Table 1 provides an overview of some of these studies.

**TABLE 1:** Travel motivations to national parks.

| Park | Travel motivations | Authors |
|---|---|---|
| Kruger | To relax.<br>To move away from routine.<br>To learn about animals. | Saayman & Slabbert (2004) |
| Kruger | Nature (to see animals and plants).<br>Activities (attend events and hiking).<br>Attractions (accommodation, brand and climate).<br>Nostalgia (childhood experience and family time).<br>Novelty (new destination and socialisation).<br>Escape from routine (relaxation). | Van der Merwe & Saayman (2008) |
| Kruger | Knowledge seeking.<br>Activities.<br>Park attributes.<br>Nostalgia.<br>Novelty.<br>Relaxation. | Kruger & Saayman (2010) |
| Tsitsikamma | Knowledge seeking.<br>Nature experience.<br>Photography.<br>Relaxation.<br>Park attributes.<br>Nostalgia. | Kruger & Saayman (2010) |
| Karoo | Relaxation. | Saayman *et al*. (2009) |
| Mapungubwe | To explore a new destination.<br>To move away from routine.<br>To relax.<br>For family recreation.<br>For educational reasons. | Van der Merwe *et al*. (2009) |

In the South African context and in the case of MNP, there has been only one study with reference to visitor profiling. Van der Merwe *et al*. (2009) conducted a study shortly after the establishment of MNP (2007–2009), and they found that visitors to the park were primarily motivated to explore a new destination, to move away from routine, for relaxation, for family recreation and for educational reasons.

As indicated in Table 1, only a limited number of studies have been published relating to travel motivations to national parks in South Africa. These studies have identified a number of key and similar travel motivations. In all these studies getting closer with nature, nostalgia and particularly the need for relaxation have been found to be the main motivators to visit national parks. Although these studies have identified a number of main motivators, these cannot be generalised for all national parks as each national park has its own unique characteristics and background. MNP and Richtersveld National Park are the only national parks in South Africa encompassing a World Heritage site. Understanding the motivators of visitors may have a significant impetus on the planning and forecasting of visitor services at the park.

## Methodology

The study is quantitative in nature, using a survey technique as research design. Research methodology will be discussed under two headings: (1) sampling method, survey and questionnaire and (2) statistical analysis.

## Sampling method, survey and questionnaire

The paper draws on data collected from visitors to MNP over the period March-April 2013. A database of 2400 email addresses was obtained from SANParks of visitors who had reservations with MNP over the period 01 March 2012 to 31 March 2013. This represented the population of the study. Because of the small nature of the population, a census sample was used. The research design made use of a survey, more specifically a structured online questionnaire. Emails with a request to participate in the study were distributed to all these email addresses. The online questionnaire was designed to gather data on (1) demographic data, (2) an assessment of management performance, (3) issues relating to sustainable tourism management, (4) challenges facing MNP and (5) visitor motivations. For the purpose of the paper, the data from sections 1 and 5 were used as the other sections did not pertain to demographic and motivator constructs.

Literature obtained from Saayman and Slabbert (2004), Nicholas and Thapa (2009), Van der Merwe *et al.* (2009) and George (2007) served as an added framework for refinement of the questionnaire. At the end of the survey period, a total of 486 responses were received, on a confidence level of 3.18 (representing a 20% response rate). This sample size is representative of the population according to Jennings (2010), who states that a minimum sample size of 331 would be adequate for such a population size.

## Statistical analysis

Microsoft Excel was used for basic data capturing, and data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 20. The demographic profile of the respondents was analysed using descriptive statistics through frequencies and means. Motivator factors were analysed using a factor analysis. A pattern matrix using the principal axis factoring extraction method and the Oblimin rotation method was used on 18 motivator constructs, which were sourced from previous research in protected areas, namely by Saayman and Slabbert (2004), Van der Merwe and Saayman (2008), Kruger and Saayman (2010) and Van der Merwe *et al*. (2009). The aim of such a factor analysis is to reduce data and to assist with the interpretation of the data in order to identify the constructs that contribute to a set of motivational factors.

# Results

The results of the study will be discussed in two sections. The first section will provide an analysis of the basic demographic profile of respondents, whilst the second section will provide a description of the motivating factors for visit.

## Demographic profile of respondents

Based on the results presented in Table 2, visitors to MNP are predominantly in the age bracket of 51–60 years (average age, 51.7 years). They originate primarily from Gauteng, followed by Limpopo and the Western Cape. Visitors to the park are primarily first-time visitors who are well educated as they possess primarily postgraduate qualifications. The visitors to the park stay mainly for four nights, consisting of couples or groups of two, and they are loyal SANParks

**TABLE 2:** Demographic profile of visitors.

| Variable | | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | |
| 18–30 years | | 5.0 |
| 31–40 years | | 17.3 |
| 41–50 years | | 20.5 |
| 51–60 years | | 31.2 |
| 61–70 years | | 18.7 |
| 71–80 years | | 7.3 |
| **Place of residence** | | |
| Limpopo | | 12.5 |
| Gauteng | | 52.8 |
| North-West, Free State and Northern Cape | | 3.9 |
| Mpumalanga | | 5.0 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | | 3.8 |
| Eastern Cape | | 1.5 |
| Western Cape | | 7.9 |
| Botswana and Zimbabwe | | 0.8 |
| Germany | | 3.1 |
| United Kingdom | | 1.7 |
| United States | | 1.5 |
| Other Europe | | 3.3 |
| Rest of world | | 2.1 |
| **Number of times visited MNP in past year** | | |
| Once | | 83.9 |
| Twice | | 10.4 |
| 3 times | | 3.4 |
| 4 times | | 1.5 |
| 5 and more times | | 0.8 |
| **Education** | | |
| Below grade 11 | | 1.2 |
| Matric (grade 12) | | 14.8 |
| 3-year diploma/degree | | 27.0 |
| 4-year degree | | 15.6 |
| Postgraduate degree | | 41.4 |
| Length of stay | 4 nights | 32.4 |
| Number of people in group | 2 people | 47.8 |
| Possession of Wild Card? | Yes | 70.0 |
| | No | 30.0 |

MNP, Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site.

visitors as 70% of visitors possess Wild Cards, the loyalty programme of SANParks.

These findings show a change from the previous study by Van der Merwe *et al.* (2009) in terms of origin, length of stay and education. Since the Van der Merwe *et al*. (2009) study, more visitors from Gauteng are visiting MNP, length of stay has increased by an average of 1 night and average age has increased by 11 years. This represents an increase in average age from 39 years in 2009 to 51.7 years in 2013. The profile additionally indicates that visitors to MNP are older and have higher educational qualifications compared to visitors to other SANParks (Saayman & Slabbert 2004; Van der Merwe & Saayman 2008).

The study found that visitors to MNP spent an average of R6997, per group of two people, during their trip. This spending included average spending on the following: entrance fees (R397), accommodation (R3435), restaurants at the park (R397), food (R1091), beverages (R699), clothes (R500), transport to and at the park (R2732), souvenirs (R415) and other spending (R1054). This visitor spending at MNP is therefore higher than that at KNP and TSK (Kruger & Saayman 2010).

## Results of the factor analysis

A pattern matrix using the principal axis factoring extraction method and the Oblimin rotation method was used. Bartlett's test of specificity indicated that the factors yielded *p*-values < 0.001 supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix (Field 2009; Pallant 2013). Four factors were identified, which accounted for 64% of the total variance. All these factors had high reliability coefficients extending from 0.703 to 0.879. The KMO statistic for this factor analysis was 0.845, which signifies superb results (Field 2009; Pallant 2013). The factors analysis, described in the pattern matrix in Table 3, indicates these four main motivator factors for visitors to MNP. These constructs contributing towards each factor were measured on a Likert scale of 1–5, where 1 represented extremely unimportant, whilst 5 represented extremely important.

### Factor 1: Heritage and educational attributes

The factor of heritage attributes, with a mean of 3.47, relates to the heritage features of MNP. These included learning about culture, to learn about history and to experience a World Heritage Site. Although learning appears as a main motivator in previous studies (Kruger & Saayman 2010; Saayman & Slabbert 2004; Van der Merwe *et al.* 2009), this is the first study in a national park context in South Africa to indicate learning primarily derived from the heritage attributes of the attraction.

### Factor 2: Escape and relaxation

The motivator factor: This factor may be considered a newly identified motivator factor for visiting national parks in South Africa, as the previous studies listed in Table 1 had not identified these motivators as significant. Factor of escape was identified, which included the motivator themes of spending time with family and friends, for purposes of recreation, to relax and to escape from ones daily routine. This factor scored a mean of 3.64, which is the second highest mean. This factor was also identified by Saayman and Slabbert (2004), Van der Merwe and Saayman (2008), Saayman *et al.* (2009), Kruger and Saayman (2010) and Van der Merwe *et al*. (2009) as a major motivator for visitor motivation to national parks in South Africa.

### Factor 3: Experience nature

This factor received the highest mean (3.87) and is thus the main motivator for visitors to MNP. This factor included the themes of visitors wanting to do bird spotting, do photography, experience endangered species, experience Wildlife and to experience plants. This motivator was also identified in a number of previous studies to be a critical motivator for national parks in South Africa including Saayman and Slabbert (2004), Van der Merwe and Saayman (2008) and Kruger and Saayman (2010).

**TABLE 3:** Pattern matrix of visitor motivations.

| Travel motivation | Component | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Heritage and educational attributes | Escape and relaxation | Experience nature | Park attributes |
| Mean values | 3.47 | 3.64 | 3.87 | 3.15 |
| Reliability coefficient (α) | 0.826 | 0.879 | 0.810 | 0.703 |
| Average inter-item correlation | 0.546 | 0.745 | 0.515 | 0.290 |
| To learn about culture | 0.887 | - | - | - |
| To learn about history | 0.874 | - | - | - |
| To experience a World Heritage Site | 0.793 | - | - | - |
| To spend time with family and friends | - | 0.885 | - | - |
| For recreation | - | 0.839 | - | - |
| To relax | - | 0.739 | - | - |
| To escape my daily routine | - | 0.718 | - | - |
| To do bird spotting | - | - | -0.849 | - |
| To do photography | - | - | -0.762 | - |
| To experience endangered species | - | - | -0.676 | - |
| To experience wildlife | - | - | -0.609 | - |
| To experience plants | - | - | -0.548 | - |
| For conferences and events | - | - | - | 0.686 |
| To do 4x4 routes | - | - | - | 0.669 |
| To experience three countries in one place | - | - | - | 0.664 |
| Great climate | - | - | - | 0.583 |
| To enjoy good accommodation facilities | - | - | - | 0.498 |
| To explore a new destination | - | - | - | 0.337 |

**TABLE 4:** Component correlation matrix.

| Component | Heritage attributes | Escape | Experience nature | Park attributes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Heritage attributes | 1.000 | 0.129 | -0.225 | 0.204 |
| Escape | 0.129 | 1.000 | -0.298 | 0.374 |
| Experience nature | -0.225 | -0.298 | 1.000 | -0.305 |
| Park attributes | 0.204 | 0.374 | -0.305 | 1.000 |

### Factor 4: Park attributes

The final factor that was identified as a main motivator included themes relating to the general park attributes of MNP. However, it scored the lowest mean of 3.15. The main themes identified within this factor included for conferencing and events, to do 4x4 routes, to experience three countries at one place, the area's great climate, good accommodation facilities, and to explore a new destination. This factor has also been identified by Van der Merwe and Saayman (2008), Kruger and Saayman (2010) and partly by Van der Merwe *et al*. (2009) in the previous study at MNP.

Founded on the results of the component correlation matrix (Table 4), a very low correlation between the four factors is noted. This describes relatively specific and well-defined motivators. Based on the results of the study presented above, concluding remarks and recommendations will be made in the next section.

## Discussion

The purpose of the paper was to generate an updated profile of visitors to MNP incorporating demographic and motivational characteristics of visitors. This was performed as visitors' numbers have increased remarkably over the last few years and that previous studies in this context have not analysed the aspects of heritage and world heritage. The results of the study confirm a number of results encountered in previous studies at national parks in South Africa. The study found that visitors to MNP are predominantly in the age range of 51–60, originate from Gauteng and are first-time visitors to the park. These visitors have postgraduate degrees and prefer to travel in pairs. They stay an average of four nights and are loyal visitors to SANParks. The findings of the study has furthermore built on the previous study by Van der Merwe *et al.* (2009) as this study shows that the profile of visitors has become older in terms of age and that the average spending per group has almost doubled in value. These visitors spend more money compared to visitors to other national parks; however, there are limited facilities available for these visitors to spend money on at MNP such as curios, food and beverages and amenities.

Visitors to MNP are motivated by four main factors, namely, the *heritage and education attributes* of the park, the *need for escape and relaxation*, to *experience nature* at the park and the *general attributes* of the park. The study has identified *heritage and education attributes* as a new factor for visiting national parks as it has not been identified distinctly in previous studies at other national parks in South Africa. This may be as a result of the World Heritage Site status and cultural importance of the park for southern Africa.

The latter finding is important for the continued marketing of the park. MNP is experiencing high numbers of first-time

visitors, which generates market growth for the park. This may also explain why nostalgia is not considered a major motivator as experienced at other national parks. Although the park is experiencing low occupancy rates, these are slowly increasing.

## Conclusion

For MNP to retain these first-time visitors and to entice repeated visits, a better understanding of market characteristics is needed. In order to improve the marketing of MNP, the following recommendations are provided.

Visitors to the park are loyal to SANParks and are well educated and possibly well travelled. In order to grow the market base, it is recommended that management strive to attract increased numbers of younger travellers and youth as this park is a strategic heritage asset for the whole country. Although the factor of *experiencing nature* is seen as the most influential factor for visiting, MNP is not a Big 5 park and visitors may potentially be disappointed with their visit should their natural experience not match their expectations. It is recommended that park management ensures that visitors are aware of this fact. This can be achieved through the improved provision of information on the park on the SANParks website and in public relations campaigns. Visitors note the need for *escape* as important; therefore, management should ensure the provision of sufficient leisure and recreation facilities at the park without disturbing the integrity of the park.

The *heritage and educational attributes* of the park should be enhanced in order to attract a different customer base compared to other national parks, namely heritage tourists. It is recommended that marketing campaigns heighten their portrayal of the park as a cultural landscape and World Heritage Site. SANParks may need to adopt a management approach where the national park is seen as part of a World Heritage Site rather than a World Heritage Site within a national park. This motivational factor has only been determined in South Africa at MNP and as such it may be necessary to test the prevalence and significance of this factor further at other World Heritage Sites, situated in predominantly rural and natural areas such as Richtersveld National Park.

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### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contributions

U.P.H. was the lead researcher and author of the article and conceptualised the idea, conducted the fieldwork and data analysis (in consultation with a statistician) and performed technical editing. P.v.d.M., W.J.L.C. and M.S. provided supervisory support over the research and technical input for the article.

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