



Negotiating the Waves and Tides of Life: Challenges, Opportunities, and Coping of Skimboarders in Dahican, Mindanao, Philippines

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Keywords:

Tourism,
Skimboarding,
Phenomenology,
Experiences,
Philippines.

Abstract.

Employing qualitative methods, particularly phenomenological research designs, this study explored the lived experiences and coping strategies of skimboarders in Dahican, Mindanao. Studies have shown varying effects of ecotourism on locals. In this study, the result shows the existence of affirmative and negative effects of tourism. Skimboarders faced physical struggles in learning the sport due to its technical difficulty, high temperatures, and exhaustion. On the emotional and psychological struggles, dealing with unforgiving tourist who treats them as mere commodities or human beings being paid to serve at their disposal. The wanton abuse of the environment, where tourists are inconsiderate of leaving trash anywhere along the coastlines. On the other hand, the result also showed an affirmative effect on skimboarders. Among these were livelihood chances. The tourism industry provides income for skimboarders through tutorials, and these fees are used for their daily expenses. Further, improved interpersonal relations also appeared. By dealing with tourists, skimboarders developed their skills in customer relations. Lastly, they improved their advocacy for the environment through marine life protection. Coastal clean-ups and the development of turtle hatcheries increase their love for the environment, especially the sea. The result of this study greatly contributes to the growing knowledge and literature on the lives of skimboarders by understanding their opportunities and challenges.

Kata Kunci:

Pariwisata,
Skimboarding,
Fenomenologi,
Pengalaman,
Filipina.

Abstrak.

Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, khususnya desain penelitian fenomenologis, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman hidup dan strategi penanggulangan skimboarder di Dahican, Mindanao. Penelitian telah menunjukkan berbagai dampak ekoturis di berbagai tempat. Dalam penelitian ini, hasilnya menunjukkan adanya dampak positif dan negatif dari pariwisata. Skimboarder menghadapi kesulitan fisik dalam mempelajari olahraga ini karena kesulitan teknisnya, suhu tinggi, dan kelelahan. Pada perjuangan emosional dan psikologis, berhadapan dengan wisatawan yang tidak kenal ampun yang memperlakukan mereka sebagai komoditas atau manusia yang dibayar untuk melayani mereka. Penyalahgunaan lingkungan secara sembrono, di mana wisatawan tidak peduli dengan membuang sampah di sepanjang garis pantai. Di sisi lain, hasilnya juga menunjukkan dampak positif pada skimboarder. Di antaranya adalah peluang mata pencarian. Industri pariwisata menyediakan pendapatan bagi skimboarder melalui tutorial, dan biaya ini digunakan untuk pengeluaran sehari-hari mereka. Lebih jauh, hubungan interpersonal yang lebih baik juga muncul. Dengan berurusan dengan wisatawan, skimboarder mengembangkan keterampilan mereka dalam hubungan dengan pelanggan. Terakhir, mereka meningkatkan advokasi mereka terhadap lingkungan melalui perlindungan kehidupan laut. Pembersihan pesisir dan pengembangan tempat penetasan penyu meningkatkan kecintaan mereka terhadap lingkungan, terutama laut. Hasil penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi besar terhadap pengetahuan dan literatur yang berkembang tentang kehidupan para peselancar skimboard dengan memahami peluang dan tantangan mereka.

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Article history: Received 25th January 2023; Accepted 24th April 2025; Available 30th April 2025.

1. Introduction

Skimboarding is a wave sport of riding a board over shallow water on a beach and into the dying waves. The board is usually tossed ahead and jumped on after a running approach. International and national competitions are established to showcase the skills and talents of these skimboarders. Wave sports, including skimboarding, have emerged as a significant dimension of the international ecotourism landscape, which attracts various tourists (Hinch, 2009; Cohen, 1984). While not yet reaching the widespread popularity of surfing (McKibben, 2003), skimboarding is gaining traction, particularly in regions promoting sports ecotourism destinations.

Literature has it that ecotourism affects locals and tourists alike. Ecotourism is one of the global trends in developed and developing countries and has been considered a primary factor of globalization. Skimboarding is making its mark in the industry among the many aspects of ecotourism. However, this wave sport has encountered varied direct and indirect challenges as an ecotourism event. In the economic aspect, the development of ecotourism leads to social capital disparities, potentially marginalizing local inhabitants, including skimboarders (Mowforth & Munt, 2003). Additionally, the economic benefit often receives more attention than the socio-cultural impacts on host communities and tourists (Stronza, 2014). Socially, while offering intercultural interaction opportunities, it challenges navigating diverse social behaviors and communication (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Further, prioritizing national tourism development sometimes overshadows local cultures (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Meanwhile, the physical challenges skimboarding presents as a complex and demanding sport are obvious and realistic predicaments (McKellar, 2017). This is furthered by the risks of injuries exacerbated by adverse weather conditions (Williams, 2006; Hansen, 2013). Meanwhile, concerns about self-esteem and coping can arise psychologically.

Dahican Beach has become a notable ecotourism attraction centered around skimboarding in the Philippines. The local skimboarders in this area encounter various tourists and specific challenges. Ecotourism industries can affect host communities in multifaceted ways – physically, socially, psychologically, and economically. However, despite the growing recognition of skimboarding as a driver of globalization in tourism (Cooper & Hall, 2001), and while local variations exist within sports like skimboarding (Maguire, 1999), research specifically focusing on the experiences of skimboarders in emerging ecotourism destinations like Dahican remains limited. Current studies often focus on the general challenges and opportunities of Skimboarding (McKellar, 2017; Stratton, 2014) or even the broader impacts of ecotourism and commodification (Fennel, 1999; Folk, 2019). Consequently, there is a clear need to investigate the specific realities faced by local skimboarders in Dahican, particularly as the area is being actively promoted as a Skimboarding destination by the local government and regional tourism department. Understanding their lived experiences is crucial for informed and sustainable territorial development within the sea economy (Seifman, 2015), making a qualitative exploration of their opportunities and challenges both timely and significant.

This study aims to explore, using a phenomenological approach, the various challenges, opportunities, and coping strategies of local skimboarders in Dahican Beach, Mindanao, Philippines. As skimboarding is one of the major attractions in the area, local skimboarders are affected by this industry. They may be affected positively or negatively when facing various tourists and challenging circumstances. Given the effects on the various aspects of their lives, it is but fitting that this be given paramount consideration to unfold the lives they live. As such, the focus will be on their challenges and opportunities as humans, given their predicament.

2. Literature Review

In examining the impacts of tourism, various writings present different considerations. As mentioned earlier, tourism affects both the tourist and the host. However, the impact on the host or the locale has been given more consideration and less attention to the impact on the tourist (Stronza, 2014). Fennell (1999) says tourism has been appreciated and denounced for its encompassing impact on people, particularly on the economics of the people and the physical aspect of the place. Folk (2019) reiterates this finding by expounding that even indigenous cultures were distorted by becoming consumerist cultures to encourage tourists to visit their places. This phenomenon resulted in the exploitation and destruction of resources and wildlife, especially in the Bahamas and the Philippines. In addition, tourism has provided long-term development of a region, be it a first-world or third-world country. According to the study by Travel and Tourism Group (2017), tourism has contributed US\$2.3 trillion and 109 million jobs worldwide. GDP is equivalent to 10.2% of the entire world's GDP. It comprises one out of ten jobs in the world. In the Philippines, tourism's direct contribution to employment was 5.5 % and 19.7% of the GDP in 2016 (Turner, 2017). Though the economic impact of tourism is vast, Stronza (2001) still points to the immense effects on the culture of the host and tourists. It includes acculturation and commodification or commercialization of culture and environment. Commodification, a Western ideology, is seen as an ecotourism-associated problem, which is natural and cultural, and where financial value is attached to resources (Fennel, 1999). King and Stewart (1996) define commodification as taking something that was not marketed and turning it into something marketed. This commodification of nature and activities gives rise to the commercialization of ecotourism activities, including those of the hosts.

Skimboarding is one of the wave sports that is beginning to become a global phenomenon. As opined by McKibben (2003) that skimboarding, technically, may have been behind surfing in terms of popularity, yet it has started to become widespread, especially with places offering sports ecotourism destinations. Though it is a sports tourism attraction that is a Western construct (Cater, 2015), other developing countries' tourism destinations are engaging in such sports activities. Such is a wave sport done closer to the shore with a smaller board, in contrast to surfing. Skimboards are designed to float and glide on the water's surface (Huntington, 2015). A skimboard is silkier and silkier than a surfboard. It is made of marine plywood and fiberglass. It can be bought in a wave sports store or can be personally made. Seifman (2015) describes, that children in Angola used wooden plywood as their boards in learning how to skimboard. The experience was similar to the children in Leyte in how they learned to play the sport. What amazes skimboarders about skimboarding is the wide range of space to execute skimming, unlike surfing (Breeding, 2008). Further, McKibben (2003) describes it as a fun sport to perform anywhere, even if the wave is not huge.

Physically, skimboarding is nonetheless seen by Williams (2006) as a dangerous sport. It is risky, for it presents various possible injuries similar to skating and skateboarding. It is associated with frequent falls and injuries. Further, he expounds that common injuries from these sports are to the wrist (33%); the skimboarding injuries recorded in this study were predominantly to the lower limb, reflecting that these are usually high-energy torsional falls. In most cases, these injuries are due to the slips one will experience once a skimboarder hops onto the board. The foot slips, rendering the body unbalanced, eventually falling into the shallow water (Jones & Macias, 1987). Thus, Williams (2006) suggested that boards on sale must have warnings indicating the risk of injuries they may cause. Injuries are furthered when the weather conditions are unfriendly and the temperature is searing (Hansen, 2013).

Further, though it has been primarily viewed as an economic activity rather than of cultural one, it has affected the different aspects of people's lives (Fennel, 1999). These skimboarders, particularly the local skimboarders, had been affected and influenced by the flock of tourists they deal with as hosts. Tourism has already been interwoven in the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental life

of the people, tourists, and locals alike. In the study of Higham and Hinch (2009), both claim that sports can be manifestations of culture and have real potential for cultural attractions; they may be urban, nature-based, or eco-based sports. Hence, tourism is an ideal situation for studying issues of political economy, social change and development, management of natural resources, and cultural identity and expressions. Furthermore, Fennell (1999) says tourism has been appreciated and denounced for its encompassing impact on people, particularly on the economics of the people and the physical aspect of the place. Folk (2019) reiterates this finding by expounding that even indigenous cultures were distorted by becoming consumerist cultures to encourage tourists to visit their places. This phenomenon resulted in the exploitation and destruction of resources and wildlife, especially in the Bahamas and the Philippines. Commodification, a Western ideology, is seen as an ecotourism-associated problem, which is natural and cultural, and that which attaches financial value is attached to resources (Fennel, 1999). King and Stewart (1996) define commodification as taking something that was not marketed and turning it into something marketed. This commodification of nature and activities gives rise to the commercialization of the ecotourism activity, including the hosts. These circumstances present a reality to tourism planners and should inevitably recognize the link between the environment, economy, and culture of the inhabitants. Jameson (1984) calls this the postmodern-hyper-space, or the interconnectedness of the different aspects of society and life.

Furthermore, these wave sports are an important segment to study because they may generate sustained growth and new opportunities for the sea economy and territorial development (Seifman, 2015). Further, Breeding (2008) views the lesser participation of women as a challenge due to the lower turnout of female participants, as this may be viewed as a man's sport. She states that this may be due to low competition prizes, which discouraged one from exchanging them for a job.

In the Philippines, Skimboarding is a fast-growing water sport. The sport was introduced first in Leyte. The place is considered the skimboarding capital of the country today (Reynoso, 2020). It is so fast-growing that we can now see skimboarders in various places in the country. The famous destinations are Zambales, Sarangani, Bicol, Batangas, Albay, La Union, and Mati City. Villanueva, as cited by Tacio (2010), appreciated the waves in Dahican and even further called it the new skimboarding capital of the Philippines.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method, particularly the phenomenological approach. Burklow (2018) expounds that qualitative research is a scientific method of observation that aims to gather non-numerical data. The qualitative method can be used best in understanding the why and how of human experience since it captures the actor's perspective through detailed interviews. Further, Lincoln (2013) posits that qualitative research delves into the everyday life of the informants.

Further, this study utilized a phenomenological research design to describe and understand the lived experiences of skimboarders. In particular, using the In-Depth Interview and the Focus Group Discussion method. Creswell (2013) explains that this phenomenological approach understands the essence of the human experience concerning a phenomenon as being expounded by the informants in a study. This understanding of the lived experiences of the informants, though small in number, is through prolonged and extensive engagement to see the meaning in their patterns and their relationships (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing or categorizing the researcher's experience is necessary for understanding the participants' lives in the study (Nieswiadomy, 1993). Accordingly, this phenomenological approach allows a better understanding and broader possibilities in the inquiry. It gives this study a better grasp of the lived experiences of the skimboarders. In addition, qualitative research is person-centred; hence, the skimboarders are viewed as human beings holistically (Charmaz, 2006).

Meanwhile, participants were selected using a purposive sampling method. There were five participants in the In-depth Interview (IDI) and seven in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). All of them were residents of the locality and were members of the skimboarders group in various resorts. These Skimboarders have more than 5 years of experience and have participated in local, national, and international Skimboarding competitions. Further, these skimboarders are all adults and include two women.

4. Results

The result of this study indicates that local skimboarders had been greatly affected by the ecotourism industry in Dahican. These are shown in the opportunities, challenges, and their coping strategies.

4.1 Opportunities

Skimboarding, as a sport and as an ecotourism activity, provides opportunities for local skimboarders. The result shows two major positive impacts of ecotourism on local skimboarders. The first is the economic opportunity. Skimboarding provides a chance to turn their lives around. They consider skimboarding as a better livelihood compared to their previous endeavors since it provides the means for their daily needs, and they can help build their house and provide allowances for their siblings. They earned this through Skimboarding tutorials to tourists willing to learn the sport since they are paid on an hourly basis. One skimboarder posits that "life before skimboarding was difficult since I was a grass weeder, but now, I earn better money here." The second is a better life and a broader horizon. Skimboarding enabled them to become better individuals by learning interpersonal relations through dealing with tourists and adhering to various advocacy initiatives like environmental protection and preservation, especially regarding maintaining cleanliness and preserving sea turtles and other marine species. Their life experiences broaden through travels and participation in national and international competitions. As they travelled, they could see and experience places and circumstances they had not been able to see before. Some have experienced riding a plane and staying at a hotel for the first time. Others were able to fund themselves in their schooling. Further, some have improved their social status since they were considered famous in the locality, which enriches their self-esteem.

4.2 Challenges

The skimboarders' lives also demonstrate many challenges in their encounter with tourists. It is a blend of sufferings, struggles, and pain. This study shows three challenges: physical, interpersonal, and environmental. The physical challenge has been displayed by their struggles in learning skimboarding the hard, painful, and risky way. Skimboarders retorted that in the beginning, they experienced falling into the waves and the sand, resulting in multiple injuries. In learning the sport, it takes many months or years of practice under the searing heat of the sun and exhaustion. Skimboarders have even been brought to the hospital due to injuries during practice. Additionally, in the desire to continue to master their craft and become better Skimboarders, they endured the pains, falls, and injuries. Another challenge is the reality that they have to deal with various challenging personalities. Most of their experiences include the need to adjust to various behaviors of local, national, and international tourists. Some tourists treat them as mere commodities and must submit to the tourists' desires. Being belittled for poor communication skills, driven by being out of school, decreases their self-esteem and confidence. Positively and negatively, the behaviors they deal with affect them psychologically, emotionally, and socially. The final challenge they encountered was that their frustrations at the wanton abuse of the environment by tourists were very disturbing. It is disappointing on their part when tourists come and leave trash on the beach. This is one of their

dilemmas, mainly when significant events are conducted in the place. Tourists commonly leave behind bottled water, beer, food wrappers, and other forms of plastic along the shorelines. Further, the lack of organized restoration after events is a hassle for them. It has become their responsibility to maintain the cleanliness of the beach and the seas.

4.3 *Coping*

Challenges are part and parcel of one's life, and skimboarders are not excluded from experiencing them. However, skimboarders still find ways to cope with and be resilient in their challenging lives. Given the hardships, skimboarders stay resilient by staying positive, humble, and simple. Skimboarders believe that every problem is always paired with a solution. In the unfortunate attitudes of some tourists, skimboarders cope with this by understanding that their customers are right. Even with the insults, they never fight back. Instead, they learned not to mind it by staying quiet and calm and swallowing their pride. This coping is, as described by skimboarders, mind management.

Further, they exemplify resiliency by being faithful to their craft. These skimboarders never stopped perfecting their craft. They trained every day to become better skimboarders regardless of the season. They show their determination by continuing to learn various tricks, even with great difficulty. The chances of getting injured increase with their desire to learn new tricks on their own. They, too, exercise self-discipline by staying away from drugs, alcohol, smoking, and other vices. By doing this, they stay physically fit. These are also the bits of advice given to younger skimboarders by their elders and coaches. To become a good skimboarder, one has to respect and value oneself.

Another manifestation of their resiliency with environmental concerns is doing one's share for the environment. It shows that one of the most significant challenges faced by skimboarders is waste disposal. Skimboarders never lose hope in maintaining the beauty of the place. They clean the shoreline and the beach daily. It is exemplified when they jog along the beach; they see to it to pick up pieces of garbage seen in the area. These skimboarders have made this a covenant to themselves and nature to protect and preserve their environment. They, too, politely reprimand tourists for the trash being scattered.

Finally, they keep their faith and persevere. It was clear that skimboarders experienced various challenging situations in life, including personal, emotional, psychological, and economic challenges. Yet, they never lose faith and hope. They have shown faith in the adversities in life. They never forget to pray and ask for divine intervention in everything they do. Skimboarders, too, have persevering attitudes. They desire to become better individuals. Aside from skimboarding, most still valued education to help them become better individuals. Thus, some went to school even at an advanced age. They never wavered in achieving their dream despite the difficulties.

5. Discussion

This phenomenological study aims to describe and understand the various opportunities, challenges, and coping strategies of Dahican Skimboarders. The current study found that skimboarding is, indeed, a challenging sport. It is draining and exhausting. It requires experiencing shattered bones, bruises, cuts, painful eyes, and many other types of ailments; thus, learning it is first challenging. This result corroborates with previous research (Williams, 2006; Jones & Macias, 1987) that identifies skimboarding as a challenging and potentially dangerous sport. The high incidence of injuries reported by the participants, including bruises, cuts, fractures, and even more severe incidents like falls and loss of consciousness, aligns with Williams' (2006) assertions that skimboarding carries physical risks comparable to other board sports like skating and skateboarding. As such, tourists desiring to learn the sport must be cautious of the danger and difficulty it presents. Local governments and the community must provide safety measures on the beaches to easily address such concerns.

Aside from the physical risks, this study reveals significant social and emotional challenges faced by skimboarders due to tourism in their area, which aligns with Mathieson and Wall's (1982) observation of tourism's impact on local hosts and communities. The result indicates that some tourists perceive local skimboarders as mere commodities, thus leading to unpleasant interactions, particularly with those viewed as having a higher status in society. This maltreatment is similar to that of racism and bullying. This needs a constant reminder on the part of the resort owners to their guests to respect local inhabitants, individually and as a community. Further, this objectification resonates with Cooper and Hall's (2013) view on the weakening of community values and loss of authenticity as locals feel devalued. The experience of being commodified echoes Rossel's (1998) concern about tourism contributing to the wreckage of locals' social lives. Given that ecotourism inherently brings social and cultural change, our findings underscore the critical need to address these human dimensions to ensure more equitable and respectful tourism practices prioritizing the well-being and dignity of the local skimboarding community.

Despite this circumstance, skimboarders learned how to adjust to different kinds of people with varying attitudes. They had acquired and developed good interpersonal relations, values, and coping strategies. It is a manifestation of what Sharma (2014) calls the demonstration effect, which means the changes in attitudes, values, or behavior as a result of observing and imitating tourists. Consequently, with the arrival of tourists, skimboarders' horizon was broadened. They learned how to entertain visitors. They, too, learned marketing strategies through offering goods and services they have. They developed skills that, in turn, give them confidence as individuals. Conversing in the vernacular, Tagalog, and even English with the tourists boosts their morale as they learn to relate even with the foreign tourists. This circumstance is what Lakey (2003) described as the communication process that facilitates the acculturation flow between the tourist and the host. Even without finishing schooling, they have, at the very least, learned to converse with some tourists. Additionally, the values of individuals are inculcated in them. The values of understanding, patience, determination, and love for peace are among the values they acquired.

Furthermore, the lives of the locals, including the skimboarders, have improved through the ecotourism industry and the building of infrastructure and facilities. Through these facilities and activities, skimboarders find ways to earn for themselves and their families. This provided them to turn their lives around, which affirms what Yeoman (2006) posits that ecotourism has been interwoven in the different aspects of human life, particularly the economic aspect, to which Zaei (2013) reiterate that better opportunities and income, aside from the cultural and social events which can be available for the locals and tourists, become available.

Finally, this study shows that resiliency despite challenges is also imbibed into these skimboarders. Skimboarders, similar to other wave sports and other athletes, encounter challenges in the field they choose. However severe the challenges are, they still manage to become resilient. Various authors (Taylor, 1998; Levin, 2003; Lopez-Vazquez & Mavan, 2004) described coping as a specific effort that people make to reduce, minimize, and even tolerate stressful events that can be behavioral and psychological, which skimboarders also exercise. In addition, Van Breda (2001) posits that the term resilience aptly describes the abilities, skills, knowledge, and insights one accumulates in a given period in addressing these challenges and adversities. However, O'Neil (2002) emphasized that there are differences in every individual's ability to handle and cope with challenges and stressors. This is exemplified by the skimboarders in their various coping strategies. Weinberg and Gould (2003) believe that athletes vary in their coping strategies when faced with different situations. But both emphasized that they do have specific strategies when needed. However, studies are very rare relative to the resiliency of skimboarders. This study shows how these Dahican Skimboarders become resilient in their own ways. In various adversities, they stay positive, humble, and simple by being

considerate to the tourists they face and still treat them as visitors. Others focused their coping on doing their share for the environment by doing a clean-up drive to eradicate the beaches of waste. Others have kept their faith and persevered. This shows one of the Filipino traits, which is love, faith in God, and determination amidst difficulty. Their show of determination is not merely on the psychological aspect but more so on the physical aspect, as they are faithful to their craft, which indicates their desire to improve as skimboarders. This is crucial in every endeavor. The desire to be the best in what one does. And lastly, by not losing hope. This study shows the skimboarders' determination to continue living despite the challenges and difficulties in life.

6. Conclusion

This study underscores the experiences, particularly on the opportunities, challenges, and coping strategies, of skimboarders. The key findings revealed physical, psychological, environmental, and social challenges of skimboarders, while the opportunities include economic and social. The study illustrates the direct and indirect impact of ecotourism on the local communities, particularly the skimboarders.

The results and findings gathered in this study pave the way for future research, study, and further investigation. The challenges of the local skimboarders in the psycho-emotional, language and environmental aspects were potential for future studies. In their psycho-emotional challenges, a study on the level of their tolerance and perseverance is very significant. Regarding language problems, further study on their level of communication skills and language and communication development training can be crucial in the lives of skimboarders. This would enhance their communication skills and help them become better and more fluent speakers, which in turn makes them better hosts to tourists. Regarding environmental challenges, research on the level of efficiency of policies and implementation of waste disposal is primordial. It will pave the way for revisiting the environmental policies implemented in the locality and the tourism guidelines in general. Additionally, further investigation into the dynamics of tourist-skimboarder interaction could identify strategies for promoting more respectful and mutually beneficial relationships, potentially through community-based tourism initiatives or educational programs for visiting tourists.

Finally, the experiences of Dahican Skimboarders present the effects of the ecotourism industry. Positively, as seen in their opportunities, and negatively, as seen in their challenges. Yet, this also showed that there is more to them than just mere skimboarders. They have shown us their identity, precarity, and resiliency as they negotiate the waves and tides of their lives as skimboarders. As such, their experiences prove contributory to the entire tourism industry in terms of how locals are affected and how the industry may improve in its approach and the formulation of policies.

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