

## The Characteristics of Dining-out Customers at Ski Resorts in South Korea

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**ABSTRACT** The purpose of this study was to investigate the characteristics of dining-out customers by their behaviors based on geographical regions and visiting days in relation to restaurant attraction at ski resorts in Korea. The data were collected from six ski resorts. Three of the ski resorts were located in Kyunggi Province close to a metropolitan area, namely Seoul. The other three resorts were located in Kangwon Province, which is considered to be distant from the Seoul metropolitan area. A total of 599 usable questionnaires were utilized in the data analysis. Descriptive statistics and a cross tabulation analysis with chi square were used to examine the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the significant differences between geographical regions as well as between weekdays and weekends. The responding customers consisted of 57.3% (n=343) males and 42.7% (n=256) females. With respect to age, 15.5% were less than 20 yr., 44.6% were 20~30 yr., and 28.0% were 30~40 yr. The most recognizable occupations were student (32.9%) followed by office worker (33.2%). Twenty-seven percent of the respondents had less than one year of skiing experience and the majority (32.9%) had more than 1~3 yr of experience. The major findings obtained from this study include statistically significant differences in the customers' demographical characteristics of age, occupation, skiing experience, and residential area according to the geographical regions of Kyunggi Province and Kangwon Province ( $p<0.05$ ). All six of the customers' behavioral attributes, including transportation, reason to visit, staying days, purpose of visit, spending expenses, and usage of discount programs, showed significant differences between geographical groups ( $p<0.05$ ). Finally, restaurant attraction was associated with the purpose of visiting and spending expenses by customers at the ski resorts ( $p<0.001$ ).

**KEYWORDS:** dining-out customer, ski resort, customer behavior, weekday and weekend, geographical difference

### INTRODUCTION

Skiing is a popular outdoor recreational activity, and in certain regions, winter tourism accounts for 20% of the created economic value providing thousands of jobs (Matzler et al 2007). It is reported that tax reduction programs for ski resorts as well as economic growth have caused dramatic increases in Korean ski businesses. Presently, there are over four million skiers, and skiing is recognized as an increasing sector of winter sports. Such a large group of skiers is unlikely to be uniform in their individual characteristics in terms of choosing a ski resort or skiing experience. Behavioral factors can be classified within ski resort attributes or within the ski experience itself

(Carmichael 1996). An important measure of a sport organization's success is its ability to retain customers. In the average organization, it can be more valuable to attract a new customer than to retain an existing customer, and the objective of retaining satisfied customers is critical (Barber 1989; Rosenberg and Czepiel 1983).

In terms of these segmentation variables, ski marketing will probably be different according to the situation involved. However, little is known about customers' characteristics and marketing strategies for ski businesses. A better understanding of the specific needs and characteristics of skiing customers seems to be a key element that can help sports marketers develop improved marketing programs for ski businesses (Park 2003). Several researchers have examined customers at ski resorts in relation to service quality, customer satisfaction, and choice intention (Kim and Lim 2001; Lee and Lee 2003). Personality variables are well-known to affect the way customers respond to marketers' promotional efforts, and when, where, and how they consume particular products or services (Shiffman and Kanuk 2006). Customer behaviors are proven to be

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associated with specific characteristics. Therefore, the identification of such characteristics is highly useful in the development of a company's market segmentation strategies. Little research, however, has empirically or conceptually examined customers' characteristic attributes at ski resorts, which may influence the marketing activities of ski resorts.

The purpose of this study was: 1) to segment dining-out customers' characteristics based on geographical regions, 2) to identify the differences in customers' characteristics between weekdays and weekends, and 3) to examine these in relation to restaurant attraction at ski resorts.

## METHODS

### Sample and Data Collection

The data were collected from six ski resorts in South Korea. Three of the ski resorts were located in Kyunggi Province close to Seoul (the capital city) and three were located in Kangwon Province, which is considered distant from Seoul. Randomly selected participants at restaurants and ski houses were requested to complete and return a

**Table 1.** Respondents' demographic characteristics at ski resorts (n=599)

Characteristics		Freq.	%
Gender	Male	343	57.3
	Female	256	42.7
Age	<20 yr.	93	15.5
	20~30 yr.	267	44.6
	30~40 yr.	168	28.0
	40~50 yr.	58	9.7
	>50 yr.	13	2.2
Occupation	Student	197	32.9
	Office worker	199	33.2
	Personal business	67	11.2
	Profession	46	7.7
	Housewives	71	11.9
	Etc	20	3.3
Ski experience	<1 yr.	166	27.0
	1~3 yr.	197	32.9
	3~5 yr.	130	21.7
	5~10 yr.	76	12.7
	>10 yr.	31	5.2
Ski type	Ski	167	55.3
	Snow board	123	40.7
	etc	11	3.6
Residential area	Seoul	310	51.8
	Kyunggi province	176	29.4
	Kangwon province	28	4.7
	Chungcheong province	16	2.7
	Others	69	11.5

questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to measure the demographic characteristics of the dining-out customers (e.g., gender, age, residential area, and occupation) as well as their behavioral patterns, including skiing type, companions, transportation, staying days, reason to visit, purpose of visit, and spending expenses.

The attributes used to measure the importance were

**Table 2.** Customers' behavioral attributes at ski resorts

Characteristics		Freq.	%
Companion	Family	214	35.7
	Friends	227	37.9
	Co-workers	50	8.3
	Lovers	77	12.9
	Others	31	5.2
Transportation	Car	346	57.8
	Public bus	67	11.2
	Ski shuttle bus	151	25.2
	Other	35	5.5
Reason to visit	Condor membership	128	21.4
	Accessibility	190	31.7
	Quality of slop	79	13.2
	Price	38	6.3
	Tour Package	64	10.7
	Facility	37	6.2
	Others	52	8.7
	Staying days	<6 hr	124
One day (no sleep)	158	26.4	
2 days	205	34.2	
3 days	77	12.9	
4 days	23	3.8	
>4days	11	1.8	
Purpose to visit	Sports recreation	331	55.3
	Dating	19	3.2
	Recreational camp	40	6.7
	Resting	56	9.3
	Family trip	100	16.7
	Others	57	8.8
Spending expense	<100,000won	338	56.4
	100,000~200,000won	148	24.7
	200,000~300,000won	23	3.8
	>300,000 won	8	1.3
	Others	33	5.5
Usage of discount program	Mobile company	46	7.7
	Credit cards	68	11.4
	Condor membership	111	18.5
	Group discount	25	4.2
	Discount coupon	85	14.2
	No discount	127	21.2
	Others	132	22.8

derived from relevant literature reviews and previous research (Ryu 2002; Park 2003; Park 2006). A pilot test was performed on ski customers to assess how well the survey instrument captured the constructs. Based on the results of the pilot test and feedback, the final version of the survey instrument was completed. A total of 600 customers at six different ski resorts responded to the questionnaire. Among these answer sheets, 599 useful answers were analyzed for the study.

### Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to identify the demographic characteristics of the respondents. A cross tabulation analysis with chi square was performed to examine the significant differences between geographical regions and between weekdays and weekends. All reported differences between frequencies were significant at least at the 5% level. SPSS (version 14.0) was used for statistical analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive characteristic data of the respondents indicate that 57.3% (n=343) were males and 42.7% (n=256) were females. With respect to age, 15.5% were less than 20 yr., 44.6% were 20~30 yr., 28.0% were 30~40 yr., 9.7% were 40~50 yr., and 2.2% were older than 50 yr. The occupation data indicate that 32.9% were students, 33.2% were office workers, 11.2% had personal businesses, 7.7% were professionals, 11.9% were housewives, and 6.4% were classified as other. For skiing experience, 27.0% of the respondents had less than one year, 32.9% had 1~3 yr., 21.7% had 3~5 yr., and only 18% had more than 5 yr. of skiing experience. Fifty-five percent of the respondents were skiers while 40.7% were snow boarders. Their residential areas varied by Seoul (51.8%), Kyunggi Province (29.4%), Kangwon Province (4.7%), Chungcheong Province (2.7%), and others (11.5%).

**Table 3.** Classified customers' demographical differences based on geographical regions

Characteristics	Kyunggi province		Kangwon province		$\chi^2$	p-value	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%			
Gender	Male	162	54.2	180	60.0	3.211	0.201
	Female	137	45.8	120	40.0		
Age	<20 yr.	56	18.8	24	8.0	52.180	0.000***
	20~30 yr.	153	51.2	102	34.0		
	30~40 yr.	66	22.1	118	39.3		
	40~50 yr.	21	7.0	43	14.3		
	>50 yr.	3	1.0	13	4.3		
Occupation	Student	126	42.1	70	23.3	34.497	0.000***
	Office worker	99	33.1	100	33.3		
	Personal business	23	7.7	44	14.7		
	Profession	16	5.4	30	10.0		
	Housewives	24	8.0	47	15.7		
	Etc	11	3.7	9	3.0		
Ski experience	<1 yr.	97	32.4	68	22.7	11.973	0.018*
	1~3 yr.	101	33.8	96	32.0		
	3~5 yr.	60	20.1	70	23.3		
	5~10 yr.	30	10.0	46	15.3		
	>10 yr.	11	3.7	20	6.7		
Ski type	Ski	140	46.8	164	55.0	5.777	0.123
	Snow board	150	50.2	128	43.0		
	Both	9	3.0	5	1.7		
Residential area	Seoul	152	50.8	158	52.7	15.134	0.004**
	Kyunggi province	104	34.8	72	24.0		
	Kangwon province	13	4.3	15	5.0		
	Chungcheong province	8	2.7	8	2.7		
	Others	22	7.4	47	15.7		

\*:  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

**Table 4.** Classified customers' behavioral differences based on geographical regions

Characteristics		Kyunggi province		Kangwon province		$\chi^2$	p-value
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
Companion	Family	88	29.4	126	42.0	54.860	0.000***
	Friends	150	50.2	77	25.7		
	Co-workers	30	10.0	20	6.7		
	Lovers	18	6.0	59	19.7		
	Others	13	4.3	18	6.0		
Transportation	Car	166	55.5	180	60.4	24.661	0.000***
	Public bus	40	13.4	27	9.1		
	Ski shuttle bus	82	27.4	69	23.2		
	Other	11	3.7	22	7.4		
Reason to visit	Condor membership	73	24.7	55	18.8	116.583	0.000***
	Accessibility	144	48.6	46	15.8		
	Quality of slop	24	8.1	55	18.8		
	Price	13	4.4	25	8.6		
	Tour Package	15	5.1	49	16.8		
	Facility	2	0.7	35	12.0		
	Others	25	8.4	27	9.2		
Staying days	<6 hr	50	16.8	74	24.7	42.167	0.000***
	One day (no sleep)	105	35.2	53	17.7		
	2 days	96	32.2	109	36.3		
	3 days	41	13.8	36	12.0		
	4 days	1	0.3	22	7.3		
	>4days	5	1.7	6	2.0		
Purpose to visit	Sports recreation	194	64.9	137	55.0	30.392	0.000***
	Dating	11	3.7	8	3.2		
	Recreational camp	19	6.4	21	8.4		
	Resting	41	13.7	15	6.0		
	Family trip	34	11.4	66	26.5		
	Others	-	-	2	0.8		
Spending expense	<100,000won	203	68.1	135	53.6	52.756	0.000***
	100,000~200,000won	84	28.2	64	25.4		
	200,000~300,000won	2	0.7	21	8.3		
	>300,000 won	6	2.0	2	0.8		
	Others	3	1.0	30	11.9		
Usage of discount program	Mobile company	22	7.4	24	12.2	47.673	0.000***
	Credit cards	20	6.7	48	24.5		
	Condor membership	75	25.2	36	18.4		
	Group discount	12	4.0	13	6.6		
	Discount coupon	65	21.8	20	10.2		
	No discount	87	29.2	40	20.4		
	Others	17	5.7	15	7.7		

\*:  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

Table 2 shows the ski resort customers' behavioral attributes. Friends (37.9%) and family (35.7%) were the highest ranked companions, and the car (57.8%) was the most favorable transportation method. Thirty-two percent of

the respondents reported that accessibility was the primary reason to visit a ski resort, followed by condominium membership (21.4%) and tour package (10.7%). In terms of staying days, 34.2% of the respondents indicated two days

**Table 5.** Classified customers' behavioral differences by weekdays and weekends at ski resorts

Characteristics	Weekday		Weekend		$\chi^2$	p-value	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%			
Gender	Male	174	57.6	168	56.6	1.079	0.583
	Female	128	42.4	129	43.4		
Age	<20 yr.	47	15.6	33	11.1	7.891	0.162
	20~30 yr.	124	41.1	131	44.1		
	30~40 yr.	86	28.5	98	33.0		
	40~50 yr.	33	10.9	31	10.4		
	>50 yr.	12	4.0	4	1.3		
Occupation	Student	126	41.7	70	23.6	57.626	0.000***
	Office worker	58	19.2	141	47.5		
	Personal business	42	13.9	25	8.4		
	Profession	27	8.9	19	6.4		
	Housewives	40	13.2	31	10.4		
	Etc	9	3.0	11	3.7		
Ski experience	<1 yr.	83	27.5	82	27.6	3.423	0.490
	1~3 yr.	95	31.5	102	34.3		
	3~5 yr.	63	20.9	67	22.6		
	5~10 yr.	41	13.6	35	11.8		
	>10 yr.	20	6.6	11	3.7		
Ski type	Ski	167	55.3	137	46.4	12.135	0.007**
	Snow board	123	40.7	155	52.5		
	Both	11	3.6	3	1.0		
Residential area	Seoul	158	52.3	152	51.2	7.612	0.107
	Kyunggi province	96	31.8	80	26.9		
	Kangwon province	16	5.3	12	4.0		
	Chungcheong province	5	1.7	11	3.7		
	Others	27	8.9	42	14.1		

\*,  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*,  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*,  $p < 0.001$

whereas 26.4% reported one day, and 20.7% of them were staying for less than 6 hr. without lodging. The main purpose of visiting a ski resort was sports recreation (55.3%) followed by family trip (16.7%). Of the respondents, 56.4% spent less than 100,000 won on expenses, whereas 24.7% fell in the range of 100,000~200,000 won and only 1.3% spent more than 300,000 won.

As shown in Table 3, there were significant differences between Kyunggi Province and Kangwon Province in terms of the respondents' demographical characteristics of age, occupation, ski experience, and residential area, but not skiing type. The ski resorts in Kyunggi Province tended to have younger customers than those in Kangwon Province due to a greater number of students in Kyunggi Province.

According to Table 4, there were significant differences in the behavioral patterns of the respondents by geographical region. In terms of companions, skiers in Kangwon Province seemed to prefer family in contrast to friends as favored by those in Kyunggi province. There were significant differences

in reasons to visit where more skiers in Kyunggi Province utilized condo memberships and examined accessibility, with purposes of sports recreation and resting. The ratio of respondents in Kyunggi Province who had less than one day of staying time was greater compared to respondents in Kangwon Province.

As shown in Table 5, there were no significant differences in the respondents' behaviors by weekdays and weekends for gender, age, ski experience, and residential area. However, significant discrepancies were observed for occupational status and skiing type between weekdays and weekends. Students were more likely to visit ski resorts on weekdays whereas office workers preferred weekends.

According to Table 6, there were no significant differences in the respondents' behaviors by weekdays and weekends, except for staying time. In addition, restaurant attraction was significantly associated with purpose of visit and spending expenses among the customers indicating that decreasing spending expenses was related to more restaurant attraction

**Table 6.** Classified customers' behavioral differences by weekdays and weekends at ski resorts

Characteristics		Weekday		Weekend		$\chi^2$	p-value
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
Companion	Family	111	36.8	103	34.7	2.130	0.712
	Friends	111	36.8	116	39.1		
	Co-workers	27	8.9	23	7.7		
	Lovers	35	11.6	42	14.1		
	Others	18	6.0	13	4.4		
Transportation	Car	167	55.5	179	60.5	3.208	0.782
	Public bus	39	13.0	28	9.5		
	Ski shuttle bus	80	26.6	71	24.0		
	Others	15	5.0	18	6.1		
Reason to visit	Condor membership	64	21.8	64	21.8	3.205	0.783
	Accessibility	98	33.3	92	31.3		
	Quality of slop	39	13.3	40	13.6		
	Price	19	6.5	19	6.5		
	Tour Package	26	8.8	38	12.9		
	Facility	21	7.1	16	5.4		
	Others	27	9.2	25	8.5		
Staying days	<6 hr	59	19.5	65	22.0	12.699	0.026*
	One day (no sleep)	81	26.8	77	26.0		
	2 days	95	31.5	110	37.2		
	3 days	49	16.2	28	9.5		
	4 days	9	3.0	14	4.7		
	>4days	9	3.0	2	0.7		
Purpose to visit	Sports recreation	168	56.0	163	65.7	7.407	0.192
	Dating	11	3.7	8	3.2		
	Recreational camp	26	8.7	14	5.6		
	Resting	30	10.0	26	10.5		
	Family trip	64	21.3	36	14.5		
	Others	1	0.3	1	0.4		
Spending expense	<100,000won	158	56.8	180	66.2	9.754	0.083
	100,000~200,000won	83	29.9	65	23.9		
	200,000~300,000won	15	5.4	8	2.9		
	>300,000 won	2	0.7	6	2.2		
	Others	20	7.2	13	4.8		
Usage of discount program	Mobile company	15	5.0	84	28.5	75.588	0.000***
	Credit cards	65	21.8	36	12.2		
	Condor membership	5	1.7	19	6.4		
	Group discount	54	18.1	33	11.2		
	Discount coupon	143	48.0	105	35.6		
	No discount	15	5.0	17	5.8		
	Others	1	0.3	1	0.3		

\*:  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$ 

(Table 7).

The major findings obtained from this study were as follows: First, by frequency scores, statistically significant differences were found between Kyunggi Province and

Kangwon Province ( $p < 0.05$ ) according to the dining-out customers' demographical attributes of occupation, skiing experience, residential area, and companions. Second, based on chi-square analysis, all six of the customers' behavioral

**Table 7.** Pearson's correlations between restaurant attraction and customer behaviors at ski resorts

		Purpose to visit	Spending expenses	Visiting days
Restaurant attraction	Pearson's coefficient	-.125***	-.219***	.065
	P value	.003	.000	.115

\*\*\*:  $p < 0.001$

attributes such as transportation, reason to visit, staying days, purpose of visit, spending expenses, and usage of discount programs showed significant difference between the two geographical groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). Third, restaurant attraction was significantly associated with the purpose of visiting and spending expenses ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Given the increasing competition in the winter sports sector, ski operations need to know what differences exist in their customers that may influence dining-out behaviors. This study classified the behaviors of dining-out customers at ski resorts in Korea based on the geographical location of the resorts and visiting days. Ski resorts are being recognized as important leisure facilities for family units as well as for skiing itself among ski tourists. Therefore, from a long term perspective, it is very important to properly develop plans and strategies targeting the various customer markets. And from a practical point of view, customers' behaviors are a crucial variable, where personal characteristics related to destination choices appear to be linked to skill level and skiing-related factors (Richards 1996). Therefore, the important personal attributes of skiers vary according to skiing skills, and skiers have different choice criteria for making resort selections (Matzler et al 2007). Diners can be classified by their diverse behavioral patterns; therefore, restaurant managers in ski resorts should recognize the needs of their diners. In conclusion, this study offers useful data to restaurant businesses to aid in segmenting customers by different behaviors.

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