ADDING VALUE TO SOUTH CAROLINA CHARTER FISHING SERVICES: PERSPECTIVES OF CHARTER BOAT CAPTAINS

Jarrett R. Bachman[a], Laura W. Jodice[a], William E. Hammitt[a], Chi-Ok Oh[b]

[a]Clemson University, Clemson, SC
[b]Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

Acknowledgements

- South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium
- South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
- South Carolina Charter Fishing Captains

Introduction

- Charter operators conduct a unique service that is dependent on providing a quality experience
  (Ditton, Gill, & MacGregor, 1999)
- Building capacity for outreach on the marine environment should be part of cooperative resource management that builds understanding for the community and its resources
  (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000)
- The retention of other fisheries-related businesses depends on integration of the fishing industry with other waterfront-based tourism entities
  (Cicin-Sain & Knecht, 1998)

Literature Review

- Some decline exists in charter industry in South Carolina
  (Jodice, Lacher, Norman and Hughes, 2010)
- Some operators are trying to adapt by switching to smaller vessels and/or focusing on providing trips closer to shore
  (Holland, Oh, Larkin & Hodges, 2012)
- Stimulating production of value-added experiences and services has been part of a long term economic sustainability strategy for declining marine resource dependent businesses
  (Cicin-Sain & Knecht, 1998)

Problem Statement

- Economic recession is causing attrition of the customer base of traditional anglers who are willing to pay the high cost of a charter trip
- Charter operators must find viable solutions to compete with other coastal tourism services for the value received
- Strong evidence of consumer demand for value-added services
- Supply analysis is necessary to understand whether there is a gap between current services and demand

Research Question

- What is the potential for charter operators to provide expanded and non-fishing value-added services and experiences for anglers and non-anglers visiting or recreating on the South Carolina coast?
  - Identify real and perceived barriers and opportunities related to inclusion of value-added services

Methods

- 379 unique SC charter licenses for 2012
- Divided into three regions
- 30 license holders randomly selected in each region
- Division into three regions was based on major tourism destinations
- Alternate list used to achieve data saturation

Methods

- On-site in-person interview
- 32 of 43 Interviews Recorded
- Mean Interview Time: 21m48s
- Semi-structured Interview
  - Open-ended questions asking about current services offered, value-added opportunities, and support and needs followed by additional questions to probe deeper as the interview progressed (Merriam, 2001)

- What type of services do you provide for non-anglers?

- What services would you consider adding to enhance the quality of your trips at the current trip rates?

- What do you feel your angling/non-angling customers most want that you don’t currently offer?

- What are the major problems and/or barriers that prevent you from offering experiences or presentations not specific to catching fish?

Methods

- Transcribed & Coded
  - 100% agreement on Themes & Topics
  - 89% Inter-rater Reliability
- Phenomenological Approach (Husserl, 1931)
  - Seeks to describe rather than explain
  - Completed without theories about causal explanations or objective reality
  - Brings experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives to the forefront (Moustakas, 1994)
  - Understand how people construct meaning

Interviewee Profile

South Carolina Charter Licenses and Study Sample Size and Proportion

REGION	# Licenses	Sample Size (n)	Sample Proportion (%)
Myrtle Beach	103	14	13.6%
Charleston	186	15	8.1%
Hilton Head/Beaufort	90	14	15.6%
Total	379	43	11.3%

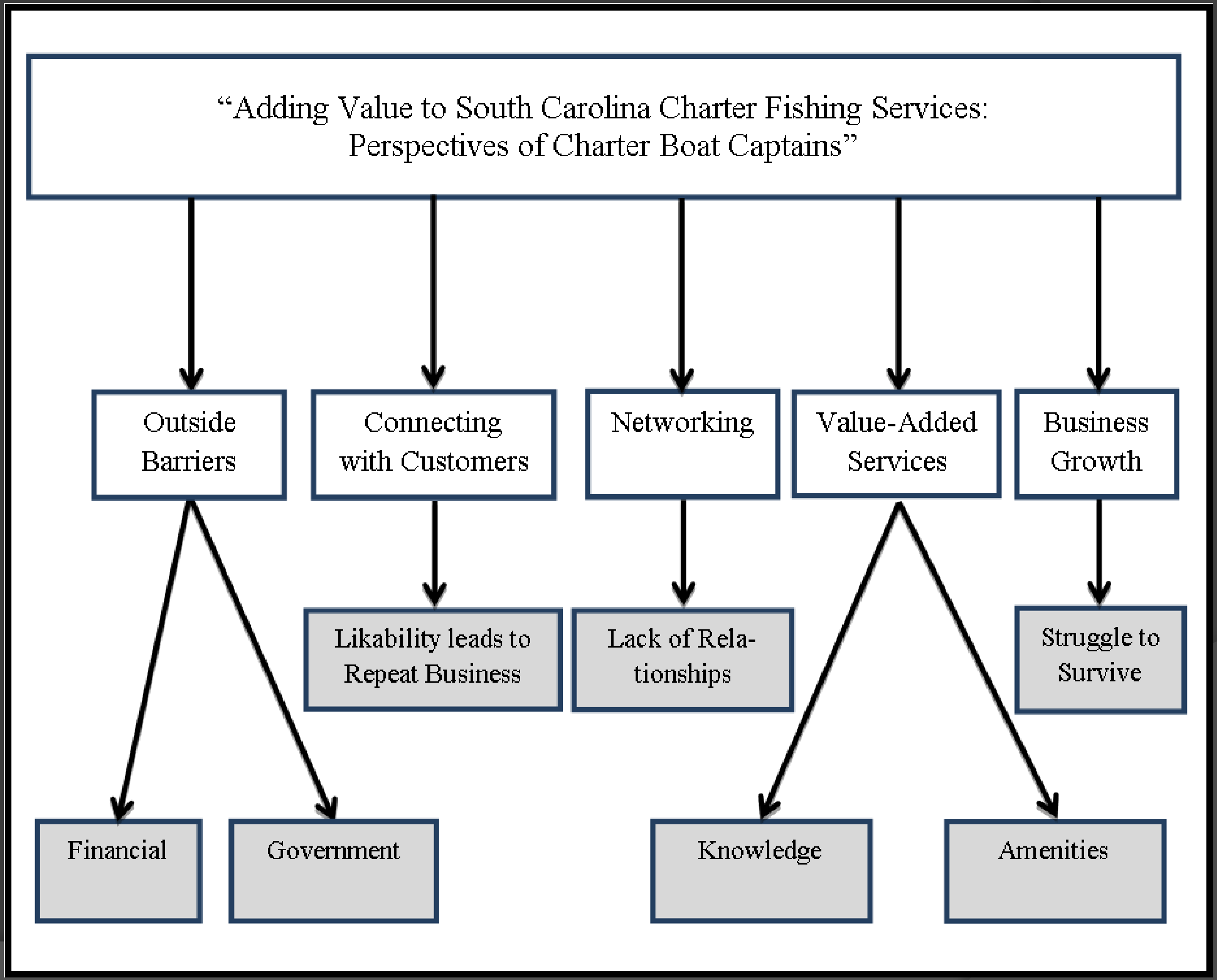
Demographics

Gender				Work Status				Charter Location		
	Male	97.7%			Full-Time	60.5%			Inshore	62.8%
	Female	2.3%			Part-Time	39.5%			Offshore	37.2%
Age				Education Level				Experience Level		
	21-30	9.3%			High School	20.9%			1-4 Years	32.6%
	31-40	23.3%			Some College	30.2%			5-8 Years	25.6%
	41-50	27.9%			College Degree	44.2%			9-12 Years	14.0%
	51-60	9.3%			Post-Grad Degree	4.7%			13-16 Years	11.6%
	60+	30.2%							17+ Years	16.3%

Results: Thematic Figure

Themes

Topics



Theme 1 – Outside Barriers

(86%)

- Financial

"Between regulations, taxes, fuel, and other costs, there will not be an offshore charter business in [the town] in 5 years."

"The way the economy is, I don't want to kill [customers] with additional fees and things like that."

- Governmental

"I think where they've got it at right now is fine because I know I want [kids] to have fish, but I think that if they stress [charter fishermen] more than they have right now they'll be putting more and more people out of business because people will eventually quit fishing."

"You're putting charter captains out of business with these rules from the government."

Theme 2: Connecting with Customers

(93%)

- Likability leads to repeat business

"It's one thing to go out and catch a fish. It's another to make it an experience that relates to people. It's not about the fish that you catch. It's 100% about connecting with people emotionally and to the place they're in. And they'll come back next year and do the same things – that's the connection we're looking for."

"Some sort of training about customer service would be very helpful."

Theme 3 - Networking

(79%)

- Lack of Relationships

“If somebody comes to this state and are thinking about going fishing or on the boat or water, how do they go about finding out about doing that?”

“I haven’t had much success marketing…but would like to know if it’s me doing something wrong.”

“Captains need training on business sense and advertising.”

Theme 4 – Value-Added Services

(100%)

- Knowledge

"It's important to give a well-rounded experience to people, and you can't always expect to catch fish... I feel like it's my duty as a native of the area to educate people on the ecology and what the issues might be with over-development, pollution issues – that kind of thing."

- Amenities

"I've thought about a higher fee for supplying food and drink, but the issue with that is knowing what each individual customer likes."

"I could do better with services for them. I don't think there is anything I can think of off the top of my head."

Theme 5 – Business Growth

(86%)

- Struggle to Survive

"I'm actually looking into mixing it up and doing more eco-tours and whatnot."

"I don't offer cruises to go watch things. I stick to [fishing]."

"There's definitively room to grow in non-angling trips. You don't go fast or burn fuel and people just like to have a good time – that's pretty much what it's all about."

"I'm not doing it now, but I do plan on offering non-fishing trips."

Conclusions

- There is room to further develop the industry with value-added products and services
  - Not all captains have the flexibility or capacity to make these improvements
  - Understanding of the supply-side can be used for more comprehensive assessment of training needs
- Captains would like to obtain more knowledge about a range of topics associated with their profession (i.e. ecology, biology, local area history) as well as information important to business planning
- Lack of networking with the tourism community
- How to keep up with changing tourism market & marketing strategies

Limitations & Future Research

- Area of Study
- Time of Year for Interviews

- Further Research into Captain needs and best delivery mechanism
- Research of Demand-side of industry

Questions?

"This report was prepared in part as a result of work sponsored by the S.C. Sea Grant Consortium with NOAA financial assistance award NA10OAR4170073. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of South Carolina Sea Grant or NOAA."