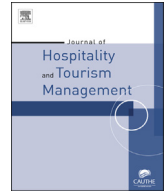




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Family-based travel narratives: Confirmatory personal introspection of children's interpretations of their journey to three destinations



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ABSTRACT

An extensive review of the literature indicates a very limited amount of empirical investigation on consumer psychology in tourism benefitting from travel narratives or storytelling. This paper therefore tries to uncover how visitors are likely to interpret the places, people and situations that they personally experience while travelling to three destinations: Dubai, Hong Kong, and Macau. Departing from theories on confirmatory personal introspection that suggest the use of multiple methods, this methodology employed in this study consists of the personal observation of the researcher (etic) and verbal and written expressions and memories of two members of a single family (emic) during the summer of 2014. The study contributes to the literature by offering a wider perspective of subjects in terms of visitor behaviour, tourism marketing and travel narratives.

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1. Introduction

The method of using quantitative methods to reach conclusions based on specifically identified research aims dominates current research into consumer psychology in tourism. Among the limited number of studies in tourism research that focus on consumer behaviour and make use of qualitative methods, approaches such as travel narratives or participant observation have been greatly underused and underestimated (e.g., [Komppula & Gartner, 2013](#)). Behavioural research is a dynamic process, requiring observations that will detect the ongoing multiple processes involved in consumer behaviour. In such empirical investigations, the term “travel narratives” is used to describe the written form of the stories that visitors recount, and their interpretation of these experiences using their own explanations using words that relate to various aspects of their holistic travel behaviour (e.g. [Hsu, Dehuang, & Woodside, 2009](#); [Santos, 2006](#)).

The use of travel narratives is a neglected methodological approach in the tourism literature. While there are a few existing studies relating to the consideration of travel stories or writings, such studies tend to be limited to the use of secondary sources, such as scanned travel books or guidebooks (e.g. [Meneghello &](#)

[Montaguti, 2014](#)), travel blogs (e.g., [Hsu et al., 2009](#); [Martin, Woodside, & Dehuang, 2007](#)), or the personal recollections of visitors (e.g. [Foster, 2005](#)). [Foster's \(2005\)](#) study examines a combination of personal memories and travel books written by visitors and local people on a railway journey across South Africa in the 1890s, a journey which Foster regards as a potential ancestor of the travel narrative. [Santos \(2006\)](#) takes a best-selling book series of travel narratives in the US as research material, and carries out a textual analysis from an intercultural communication perspective.

On the other hand, some work in the literature has attempted an empirical exploration of the relationship between travel narratives and visitor behaviour, including experiences and image development. [Hsu et al. \(2009\)](#) collected data from overseas visitors who had written blog reports about their first visit to four Chinese cities, and they offer suggestions regarding how such writings could influence the behaviour of potential visitors. [Meneghello and Montaguti \(2014\)](#) investigate how travel writing is likely to create a destination's image, and how this image may subsequently influence visitors' perceptions. Such studies suggest that travel writing has an influence (either direct or indirect) in contributing to the creation of a specific image of the places visited by writers and authors. This image may then stimulate others to visit similar places.

From a practical point of view, the consideration of travel narratives can also open new possibilities in terms of the marketing

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strategies developed by practitioners. The subject of travel narratives is a potentially significant one in experiential marketing, in terms of its focus on visitors' own memories and personal experiences. The literature supports the significance of travel narratives or travel stories, as is evident in the creation of a word-of-mouth recommendation effect. For instance, as Cowley (2014)'s study based on retrospective evaluations indicates, visitors' stories may have a word-of-mouth effect. Furthermore, travel stories influence the positioning of a given a destination in the minds of future visitors who may search for information via online sources, specifically travel blogs (see e.g. Hsu et al., 2009; Woodside, Cruickshank, & Dehuang, 2007).

Based upon the significance of travel narratives in both literature and practice, the present study outlines the personal experiences of three people on a single family trip that encompassed three destinations in the Middle-East and Asia-Pacific. The study makes use of participant observations and travel narratives. Specifically, this study reports upon how visitors are likely to interpret the places, people and situations they experience when travelling to Dubai, Hong Kong, and Macau. The study uses multiple methods of confirmatory personal introspection, including the personal observation of the researcher (*etic*), and the verbal and written expressions, and memories of other two people in the same family (*emic*).

2. Travel narratives—confirmatory personal introspection

Ethnographic approaches offer relatively simple and objective ways of collecting social scientific data. Ethnography used to be a research instrument mainly used in anthropology, but has now become an essential tool in fields including sociology, history, and communication. As ethnography often works with primarily unconstructed data, it also contributes to suggesting various methods of data collection. With an in-depth focus on a certain subject or culture, data collection methods in ethnography involve various methods, such as interviews, personal observations, and surveys. The social science literature includes a broad spectrum of ethnography-based studies, including the observation of immigrant street vendors or beggars (e.g. Voiculescu, 2014), and hunting as a travel experience (e.g. Komppula & Gartner, 2013).

The issue of travel narratives also appears to be a combination of participant observation and interviews. Travel narratives allow the researcher to reach a conclusion on the basis of their own elaborations of actions or behaviours that are then harmonized through the use of participant observation. Because the researcher who plans to write a narrative on travel experiences may have no initial ideas on how these may contribute to the literature, that researcher will need enough flexibility to first observe what happens and how it happens, and then to report the process of actions or behaviours in the context of cause-effect relationships. As the researcher is a witness to how such relationships are formed and how they exist (*etic*), identifying and suggesting additional research tools that may be more effective or more promising than participant observation may be difficult. Even apparently insignificant personal experiences can be of great help to the researcher in filling in a small piece of the puzzle that contributes to the whole picture. With the assistance of travel narratives, the whole picture, once formed, may suggest multiple implications for various strands of the literature. These will be discussed in detail in the concluding part of this study.

Following a series of earlier studies (e.g. Martin & Woodside, 2011; Martin et al., 2007), this study acknowledges the significance of using *emic* and *etic* approaches when contributing to the literature. The former approach refers to the way in which people perceive the world and explain things from their own perspective. In contrast, the later approach indicates what is considered

important by the researcher. As such, *emic* is more people-oriented, while *etic* is more researcher-oriented. A growing body of research has been documented using *emic* or *etic* approaches. For instance, implementing both approaches, Martin and Woodside (2011) have investigated international visitors' thought processes and behaviours while on vacation to Hawaii. Komppula and Gartner (2013) partially include the *etic* approach in an auto-ethnographic study designed to test the typology of consumer value. This study, with contents and materials designed to complete the text, can also be regarded as fruitful research on travel narratives. Woodside and his colleagues' contribution to the literature on travel storytelling and marketing focuses on first-time visitors' feelings and experiences, as posted on travel blogs, and applies a netnography approach – a cyber-version of ethnography (Martin et al., 2007).

Although a substantial amount of research investigates various aspects of the consumer behaviour model and its component steps (such as motivations, information sources and decision-making) from a broad perspective, the consideration of experience as a major step receives scant attention. The difficulty of exploring an experience from a natural base and from beginning the end is perhaps the primary factor that has hindered research into this step. Also, the employment of both qualitative and quantitative research methods remains of limited value in fully resolving the complex nature of consumer experience, for such experiences are flexible and are susceptible to change right up to the final stage. As a consequence, the literature tends to consider storytelling (e.g. Woodside, 2010; Woodside & Megehee, 2010; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008) and confirmatory personal introspection (e.g. Woodside, 2006) to be more useful ways of pursuing research into consumer behaviour, on the grounds that human memory is based on the storage and retrieval of information. Having said this, travel narratives appear to be little more objective than other forms of data collection.

The current body of literature on travel narratives has a restricted focus on researchers' examination of secondary sources, such as travel books or blogs. Some other studies have used interviews as a form of data collection. Woodside et al. (2007) suggest that, viewed from the perspective of ethnography or netnography, such limitations may well be generated due to visitors' lack of ability to see, to interpret or to self-edit their lived experiences of the destination. To overcome the effects of such weaknesses related to the presence of the researcher, this study seeks to broaden the existing literature using participant observations involving the exchange of observations between the researcher and the other two people in the travel party, in light of the *emic* and *etic* approaches to specific and confirmatory personal introspection (Gould, 1995; Woodside, 2004).

In response to the weaknesses of other forms of qualitative or quantitative research methods, studies involving the researcher's personal introspection were first introduced into the consumer behaviour literature in the 1990s. The idea included the notion that the researcher's own observations are helpful when interpreting one's inner states, because the experience of consumer behaviour has become increasingly dynamic due to the immediate relationship between the experience itself, and the consumption and production of the service. However, one critical issue emerged due to the use of a single method (e.g. the researcher's own observations about his or her own experiences), which was likely to succumb to problems such as excessive subjectivity and self-fabrication (Woodside, 2004; 2006). Since those early days, there has been much debate concerning how to improve the quality of personal introspection studies (see Gould, 1995; Holbrook, 2005a, 2005b; Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993).

In the 2000s, confirmatory personal introspection has gained momentum as a method of substantiating the value of personal

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