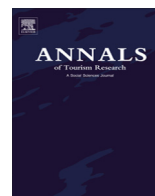




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Research Notes and Reports

Demystifying visitor harassment



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Introduction

Visitor harassment is a decades old phenomenon negatively impacting tourism activities in developing countries across the globe (Kozak, 2007; McElroy, Tarlow, & Carlisle, 2007) and is one of the least researched areas in tourism. A factor that has contributed to the latter, and which some of the few scholars in the field have also noted, is a lack of a clear and agreed upon definition of the term (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 2001; McElroy et al., 2007). Visitor harassment has largely been defined as a negative behavior that annoys visitors (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 2001; Dunn & Dunn, 2002; Skipper, 2009). Hence, the goal of the study was to determine the visitors' interpretation of the term "harassment" and to use this information to craft a more comprehensive definition of the phenomenon for further discourse amongst practitioners and researchers. This is important. A clear definition of visitor harassment would allow for more effective communication amongst researchers, traders, vendors and other industry partners. Incidentally, one island that has been battling with the problem of visitor harassment for decades is Jamaica. Exit surveys conducted by the Jamaica Tourist Board in 2006 and 2007 revealed that approximately 30% and 35% of visitors to the island, respectively, reported being harassed (Jamaica Tourist Board, 2006, 2007).

Review of literature

Four types of harassment behaviors have been described in the literature thus far, traders': physical and verbal abuse of visitors, restriction of visitors' movement and persistence (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 2001; Reid, 2008; Skipper, 2009). Visitor harassment has also been described as a group behavior (Dunn & Dunn, 2002), that is multiple traders beckoning to the visitor at once or one after the other. Scholars have also noted that visitor harassment occurs mainly during the solicitation and sale refusal phases of the trading process (McElroy et al., 2007). As shown earlier visitor harassment has been described according to its effect on visitor emotions, in particular on visitor annoyance (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 2001; Dunn & Dunn, 2002). Consequently, there are four basic negative consumer emotions under which most negative consumer emotions fall: sadness, fear, anger and shame (Desmet & Schifferstein, 2007; Laros & Steenkamp, 2003; Plutchik, 1980). Emotions have been defined as subjectively experienced feelings of attraction or repulsion (Zikmund & d'Amico, 1996).

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Methodology

A phenomenological study was embarked upon. Fifty-three (53) consumer reviews on visitor harassment in craft markets in Jamaica were collected and analyzed. The reviews were from the world's largest travel website, TripAdvisor (Trip Advisor, 2013). The key words "harassment", "Jamaica" and "craft market" were used to locate the reviews. No date restrictions were used during the search. However, the reviews were from the period 2006 to 2013. TripAdvisor was founded in 2000 (Trip Advisor, 2013). Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the total reviews analyzed for the study were posted less than a month after the reviewers visited the island and 21% did not indicate when they visited the island. The postings were coded separately by the two researchers and an 80% convergence achieved. The reviews were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

Findings

Twenty-six (26) individual, group, contact and non-contact harassment behaviors were identified in the TripAdvisor reviews and they occurred during all four phases of the trading process, that is during the solicitation, solicitation refusal, sale, and after sale phases. The top three aggressive selling behaviors described by the visitors were the traders: surrounding them at once (group non-contact behavior) (32%); calling to them at the same time (group non-contact behavior) (21%); and hurling at them abusive, rude or intimidating language when purchase was refused (individual non-contact behavior) (21%). No group contact harassment behaviors were reported. In fact, most of the harassment behaviors described were individual non-contact behaviors (65 mentions from the 53 reviews) and occurred mainly during the solicitation phase of the trading process (39 of the 65 mentions) (Table 1).

Twelve (12) types of visitor emotional responses to the locals' aggressive selling behaviors were identified from the 53 reviews. The top three, in the order of frequency of mention, were they felt: unsafe (13), overwhelmed (10), and pressured (6). Five of the reviewers also noted feelings of sympathy. The findings also revealed that the traders' individual harassment behaviors resulted in visitors feeling more fear (56% of the emotions reported from the vendors individual harassing behaviors) than anger (29%) or sadness (23%). Subsequently, the traders' group non-contact harassment behaviors resulted in the visitors feeling more fear (75% of the emotions reported from the traders' group harassment behaviors) than sadness (25%) and not anger (0%). None of the 12 emotions the visitors reported fit into the basic negative emotion category of shame.

Discussion

The study confirmed previous findings but also made three significant contributions to the literature. First, it identified 26 specific visitor harassment behaviors. Second, it captured and summarized the full spectrum of harassment behaviors (individual and group behaviors, contact and non-contact, and behaviors that occurred at each phase of the trading process). Third, it identified 12 visitor emotional responses to the local traders' aggressive seller behaviors. Previous studies identified fewer behaviors and emotions (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 2001; Dunn & Dunn, 2002; Kozak, 2007). When the 12 emotions were organized according to Laros and Steenkamp (2003) four basic negative consumer emotions, one basic negative emotion was absent from the list of negative visitor emotions as a result of the traders aggressive selling behaviors and that was shame. Therefore, based on the study local traders' aggressive selling behaviors left visitors feeling largely angry, fearful and sad but not ashamed, the top three most intense negative customer service emotions. In fact, visitor harassment behaviors left visitors feeling fearful, then angry, then sad. However, the traders' group non-contact selling behaviors resulted in less intense negative emotions (fear and sadness), not anger. While individual trader selling behaviors left visitors feeling all three negative emotions, including anger.

Visitor harassment is a combination of two constructs: a local selling behavior at a tourist destination and the visitor's emotional response to that behavior, making the visitor's emotional response an important qualifier for harassment. Visitor harassment could aptly be defined as *an individual or group*

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