



Research Paper

The role of tourists' emotional experiences and satisfaction in understanding behavioral intentions

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ABSTRACT

Modeling behavioral intentions remain an important area of research in tourism. This study empirically tests a model linking tourists' emotional experiences, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The model proposes that satisfaction mediates the relationship between tourists' emotional experiences and behavioral intentions. Data were collected from international tourists visiting Petra, a UNESCO world heritage site. Contrary to theoretical predictions, results do not support the mediating effect of satisfaction on the relationship between emotions (joy, love, positive surprise, and unpleasantness) and behavioral intentions. Findings offer important strategic marketing implications for Petra in relation to branding and managing destination experiences.

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1. Introduction

The role of emotion in tourism has received unprecedented recognition (Gnoth, 1997; Goossens, 2000). Previous research focuses on emotional experiences associated with festivals (e.g. Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Lee, Lee, Lee, & Babin, 2008), shopping (e.g. Yuksel, 2007; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007), restaurants (e.g. Han & Jeong, 2013; Han, Back, & Barrett, 2009; Ladhari, 2009), theme parks (e.g. Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005), holidays (e.g. del Bosque & San Martin, 2008) and adventure tourism (e.g. Faullant, Matzler, & Mooradian, 2011). All these studies show that tourist emotional reactions are fundamental determinants of post-consumption behaviors. For example, Bigné et al. (2005), Grappi and Montanari (2011), and Yuksel and Yuksel (2007) examine emotions as antecedent of satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Although tourism research acknowledges the importance of studying emotions, satisfaction and behavioral intentions, mixed support exists viz the relationships among these three constructs (Bigné et al., 2005).

Prior studies (e.g. Bigné et al., 2005; Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Han & Jeong, 2013; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007) establish a positive path between positive emotions, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. However, when negative emotions are introduced as antecedents

of satisfaction and/or behavioral intentions, contradictory results emerge. For instance, Lee et al. (2008) found a negative relationship between emotions and satisfaction but a non-significant path between satisfaction and behavioral intentions. In theory, negative emotions should decrease satisfaction levels and loyalty (Dubé & Menon, 2000; Lee et al., 2008). Yet, some evidence in the marketing literature indicates a positive relationship between negative emotions (such as shame, guilt and sadness), satisfaction (Belanger & Dubé, 1996) and behavioral responses (Allen, Machleit, & Schultz-Kleine, 1992).

Similarly, the complex relationships among these three constructs remain poorly understood in the context of tourist destinations. Existing studies (e.g. del Bosque & San Martin, 2008; Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Yuksel, 2007; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007) do not assess the mediating effects of satisfaction on the relationship between emotions and behavioral intentions. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to empirically test a conceptual model linking tourists' emotional responses toward a destination, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The proposed framework (Fig. 1) shows positive (joy, love and pleasant surprise) and negative (unpleasantness) emotions have a direct effect on satisfaction. In addition, emotions and satisfaction influence behavioral intentions (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Bigné et al., 2005; Faullant et al., 2011). The model further depicts satisfaction as a mediator between emotions and behavioral intentions (Walsh, Shiu, Hassan, Michaelidou, & Beatty, 2011). As a result, the contribution of this paper is three-fold.

First, we explicitly examine the relationships between joy, love, positive surprise, unpleasantness, satisfaction, and behavioral

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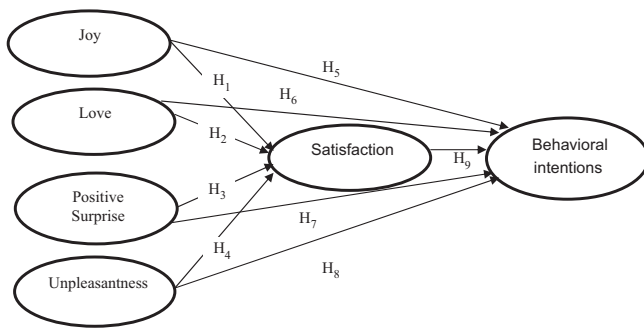


Fig. 1. The conceptual model.

intentions elicited in the broader context of destination experiences. To aid theoretical development, it is important to establish the relative influence of various emotions on satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Soscia, 2007; Walsh et al., 2011). Second, the mediating effects of satisfaction on the relationship between emotions and behavioral intentions are further assessed, given inconclusive evidence in both the marketing and tourism literatures. Third, the research contributes to the limited body of knowledge addressing tourists' emotions while visiting a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage site (WHS) (Palau-Saumell, Forgass-Coll, Sanchez-Garcia, & Prats-Planaguma, 2012). The study focuses on Petra (Jordan) a historical site with unique archaeological attributes and cultural properties.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses development

2.1. Tourists' emotional responses

A coherent body of research establishes the relevance of emotions in understanding consumer behavior. Emotions are characterized as episodes of intense feelings associated with a specific referent and instigate specific response behaviors (Cohen & Areni, 1991). Emotions play an important function in defining experiences and influencing consumer reactions. Prior research establishes the impact of consumption emotions on global evaluative measures such as satisfaction (e.g. Ladhari, 2007) and behavioral intentions (e.g. Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). Other studies demonstrate the appropriateness of emotions as a segmentation variable (e.g. Oliver & Westbrook, 1993; Schoefer & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Similarly, emotions have a pervasive influence on tourist experiences. At the pre-travel stage, emotions play a fundamental role in tourist motivation (Goossens, 2000; Gnoth, 1997). Emotions also affect decisions to purchase tourism and leisure services (Chuang, 2007; Gnoth, 1997). At the post-consumption stage, emotions influence satisfaction (del Bosque & San Martin, 2008; Faullant et al., 2011), place attachment (Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010), trust and commitment (Han & Jeong, 2013), and loyalty (Bigné et al., 2005; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007).

The psychology literature offers two major theoretical approaches to study emotions: dimensional (valence based) and categorical (emotion specificity). The first school of thought conceptualizes emotions using few dimensions such as positive and negative (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), or pleasure and arousal (Russell, 1980; Walsh et al., 2011). The dimensional approach gives a more parsimonious account of emotional experiences (Lazarus, 1991), as there is no need to distinguish between specific positive (e.g. joy, happiness and excitement) and negative (e.g. fear, regret and disappointment) emotions. The second

approach theorizes emotions as a set of idiosyncratic affective states (e.g. joy, anger, sadness, surprise) (see Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1980). Emotions of the same valence have different effects on judgment (Lerner & Keltner, 2000), decision-making (Raghunathan & Pham, 1999), satisfaction (Machleit & Eroglu, 2000) and behavioral intentions (Soscia, 2007; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). Over the years, consensus has emerged that the two conceptualizations (summary dimensions versus specific basic emotions) do not conflict (Faullant et al., 2011). Measurement of emotions in tourism has favored the valence-based approach. Summary dimensions such as positive and negative emotions (del Bosque & San Martin, 2008; Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Lee et al., 2008) or pleasure and arousal (Bigné et al., 2005; Yuksel, 2007; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007) are common.

Research in tourism and marketing often adapt psychology-based self-report measures to fit the consumption process. Four common psychological scales include Plutchik's (1980) eight primary emotion scale, Izard's (1977) Differential Emotion Scale, Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Pleasures, Arousal and Dominance (PAD) scale, and Watson et al. (1988) Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS). In recent years, concerns have emerged about the applicability, reliability and validity of psychological emotion scales in consumer studies (e.g. Laros & Steenkamp, 2005; Richins, 1997; Schoefer & Diamantopoulos, 2008). Adapting existing scales fail to achieve content validity, leading to erroneous conclusions (see Haynes et al., 1995).

Although it is well established that people elicit emotions toward their immediate physical and social environment (Farber & Hall, 2007), relatively few studies investigate tourists' emotional responses toward destinations. Hosany and Gilbert (2010) note existing emotion taxonomies from psychology and marketing do not take into account tourism and destination-specific characteristics. To measure the diversity and intensity of tourists' emotional responses toward destinations, Hosany and Gilbert (2010) develop the Destination Emotion Scale (DES). The DES is a parsimonious three-dimensional (joy, love, and positive surprise), 15-items scale with solid psychometric properties. Five items measure Joy: cheerful, pleasure, joy, enthusiasm, and delight. Prior studies (e.g. Currie, 1997; Goossens, 2000) show the pursuit of pleasurable experiences is a key motivational factor in tourism. The love dimension includes five items: tenderness, love, caring warm-hearted, and affection. Research in marketing establishes that consumers can develop a sense of love toward products and brands (e.g. Ahuvia, 2005; Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi, 2012). Finally, the last dimension, positive surprise, includes five items: amazement, astonishment, fascinated, inspired, and surprise. Previous research examines the relationship between surprise and consumption related outcome variables such as satisfaction, loyalty, and word of mouth (e.g. Westbrook & Oliver, 1991).

The destination emotion scale captures positive valence emotions. Vacations are characterised as a set of positive experiential processes (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Nawijn, 2011), primarily consumed for hedonic purposes (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Tourists seek pleasurable and memorable experiences through the consumption of their vacation (Currie, 1997). However, studies show some places evoke negative emotions including sadness, depression and empathy (e.g. Miles, 2002; Kang, Scott, Lee, & Ballantyne, 2012). Other negative emotions such as annoyance (Han & Jeong, 2013) and fear (Faullant et al., 2011) are also common but rarely accounted in evaluating tourists' experiences. Realising the need for a balanced sampling of tourists' emotional responses, Hosany and Prayag (2013) adapted the DES by including the negative dimension *unpleasantness*. Hosany and Prayag (2013) uncover a small tourist segment exhibiting high levels of negative emotions toward destination brands. Accordingly, this study adopts Hosany and Gilbert's (2010) and Hosany and Prayag's (2013) conceptualization of tourists' emotional responses.

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