



Exploring tour member misbehavior in group package tours

Sheng-Hsiung Tsaur, Tien-Ming Cheng*, Ci-Yao Hong

Department of Marketing and Tourism Management, National Chiayi University, Chiayi City, Taiwan



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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of tour member misbehavior is common in the practical operation of tour groups, but it hasn't been elucidated by previous studies. Hence, this study aims to explore tour member misbehavior. A qualitative approach and content analysis were conducted, resulting in five themes of tour member misbehavior: (1) misbehavior detrimental to group operation; (2) misbehavior toward the tour leader; (3) misbehavior toward tour members; (4) misbehavior toward the tourism environment; and (5) misbehavior toward tourism organizations. In addition to contributing to the current knowledge of both customer misbehavior and tour group dynamics, the prevention mechanisms and post-incident response strategies are provided to tour operators as well as tour leaders in the practice of tour guides. This study also puts forward the research limitations and the suggestions for future research direction.

1. Introduction

The group package tour (GPT) is a major form of outbound travels in Asian countries and areas (Wang, Hsieh, & Chen, 2002; Wong & Wang, 2009). With GPT, tourists pay a one-time fee to a travel agent before a designated tour, the travel agent then provides all of the travel services, including food, lodging, sightseeing, transportation, and all sorts of tickets. During the tour, the group embarks and returns together (Wang, Hsieh, Chou, & Lin, 2007). The main difference between GPT and other forms of tourism is that with GPT the tour leaders accompany the tour group and provide tour services (Wang, Hsieh, & Huan, 2000). A GPT is like an organization temporarily formed by a tour leader and tour members. During the tour, the tour leader and members live together and the behavior, manners, and ways of interaction of tour members could affect the atmosphere of the whole group.

Bowen (2001) found that tour members had a significant impact on the effective functioning of the tour. Consequently, tour members' behavior could affect the quality and performance of the tour leader in guiding the tour. Past research indicates that the behavior of tour members could have a positive or negative effect on the tour group during a tour. For example, it should be conducive to the functioning of the tour when tour members exhibit tourist citizenship behavior (Liu & Tsaur, 2014). However, other types of behavior by tour members, such as lack of punctuality, failure to follow the shared rules of the tour group, or even behavior such as theft, sexual harassment, or physical violence, could undermine the travel interest and mood of other tour members, affecting the atmosphere of the group overall. Thus, the

behavior of tour members, especially with respect to tour member misbehavior, is closely related to the functioning of the tour group.

Consumer misbehavior may be defined as an act by a consumer that violates the generally accepted norms of conduct in exchange settings (Fullerton & Punj, 1997, p. 337). Such misbehavior affects the mood of other customers and service personnel (Yi & Gong, 2006) and even disrupts normal business operations (Zemke & Anderson, 1990). The majority of past studies on customer misbehavior in the tourism industry have focused on restaurants (Knutson, Borchgrevink, & Woods, 1999), hotels (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Harris & Reynolds, 2004), and airlines (Bitner et al., 1994). Fewer studies have looked at misbehavior by GPT members. GPT differs from the products of other industries in that the service time of tour leaders and time tour members associate together, ranging from a few days to a few weeks, is relatively longer. In addition, the relationship among tour members is also closer than that between general customers. The ripple effect produced by tour member misbehavior is consequently more significant.

Past studies have explored misbehavior by general visitors (Tsang, Prideaux, & Lee, 2016; Uriely, Ram, & Malach-Pines, 2011), but few focused on tour members. Scattered media reports account for most of the exposure of misbehavior by tour members, such as reports of tour members sexually harassing hotel housekeeping staff during room cleaning (Tang & Hsu, 2013). Chen (2014) reported that tour members had a physical conflict with service personnel over dissatisfaction with travel arrangements. There have even been reports of destruction or theft of travel providers' assets (Kitching, 2016; Shan, 2014). However, little academic attention has been paid to the misbehavior of tour

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: tienming@mail.ncyu.edu.tw (T.-M. Cheng).

members. Therefore, a survey of misbehavior by GPT members and categorizing misbehavior from the perspective of the tour guide practice can help travel agencies and tour leaders formulate prevention and post-incident response strategies to ensure better GPT experiences. Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand potential misbehavior by tour members when participating in a group tour, to categorize misbehavior through qualitative research, and to provide travel agents and tour leaders with a reference for tour guide management.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical approaches to understand misbehavior

Misbehavior refers to behavior contravening various proper norms (Fullerton & Punj, 1997), i.e., behavior that violates conventions, rules, regulation, laws, or social mores (Moschis & Cox, 1989). Many of the past studies on misbehavior have interpreted the inappropriate behavior and attitudes of customers based on neutralization theory, strain theory, and label theory (Cohn & Vaccaro, 2006; Hinduja, 2007; Merton, 1968).

Lemert (1951) is the earliest to apply label theory to the study of deviant behavior. The study found that the definition and views of social groups towards deviant behavior can affect the attitude and behavior of a deviant. The theory posits that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the identification and reaction of social groups and that, once an individual accepts the label of deviant behavior conferred by a social group, he or she would begin to feel hostility towards the social group and engage in more deviant behavior (Becker, 1964; Lemert, 1951).

From the perspective of neutralization theory, Sykes and Matza (1957) explored how individuals use neutralization techniques to rationalize minor or rare deviant behavior. These techniques include denial of responsibility, denial of harm, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeals to higher loyalties (McKercher, Weber, & du Cros, 2008, p. 372; Sykes & Matza, 1957, pp. 667–669). When individuals engage in misbehavior, they may use these various techniques to excuse their misbehavior and attempt to lighten an inner sense of guilt arising from the deviant behavior (Cohn & Vaccaro, 2006; Hinduja, 2007).

Other scholars have explored the causes of misbehavior from the perspective of strain theory. They argued that misconduct occurs when the feasible legal means to attain what they desire are limited (Merton, 1968; Messner, 1988). In other words, individuals may have an emotional response of frustration, tension, or anger when they are hindered in their ability to achieve their goals by legal means, causing them to attempt various illegal means to realize these objectives.

2.2. Customer misbehavior

Some scholars have applied all kinds of terms and phrases to explore and describe failure service encounters including “deviant consumer behavior” (Moschis & Cox, 1989), “aberrant consumer behavior” (Fullerton & Punj, 1993), “problem customers” (Bitner et al., 1994), “jaycustomers” (Lovelock, 1994), and “dysfunctional customer behavior” (Harris & Reynolds, 2003). These various terms for consumer misbehavior generally refer to the demonstration of customer behavior that contravenes norms acknowledged by the general public during a consumption process. They differ only in levels of severity. This paper adopts the more broadly defined term of “consumer misbehavior,” as behavioral acts by consumers that violate the generally accepted norms of conduct in consumption situations and disrupt the order expected in such situations (Fullerton & Punj, 1997, p. 337).

The service industry has long exhorted front-line employees to put customers first so that they feel at home. The impact of this and subsequent contentions is that customer orientation is frequently described as a central pillar of the marketing academy (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990).

Yet subsequent scholars have offered the perspective that “the customer is not always right” (Bitner et al., 1994; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). On this subject, Lovelock (2001) presented the view that, in many cases, the customer is not only wrong, but also “thoughtless or rude” (p. 73). To some extent, misbehavior can also lead to service disruption and imbalance (from the perspective of the service supplier, the customer, and even other customers). This behavior includes verbal or physical abuse, theft, causing cost of business losses, vandalism, and defiling the environment (Huefner & Hunt, 2000), as well as talking loudly in public places, cutting in line, and smoking (Grove & Fisk, 1997; Huang, 2008; Martin & Pranter, 1989).

Some studies looked at types of customer misbehavior. For example, Lovelock (1994) identified six types of jaycustomers: thieves, rule breakers, belligerents, vandals, family feuders, and deadbeats. To understand jaycustomer behavior in the hospitality industry, Harris and Reynolds (2004) applied the critical incident technique in identifying eight categories or types of jaycustomer behavior from an analysis of over 417 incidents. These included compensation letter writers, undesirable customers, property abusers, vindictive customers, service workers, oral abusers, physical abusers and sexual predators (Harris & Reynolds, 2004, p. 344).

Other studies explored the causality of customer misbehavior. For instance, the customer misbehavior is caused by the customer's dissatisfaction and feeling of inequity (Harris & Reynolds, 2004) and the service environment also affects the degree of customer misbehavior (Reynolds & Harris, 2006). In terms of the outcome caused by customer misbehavior, it not only directly affects the mood and psychological reactions of front-line service personnel (Harris & Reynolds, 2003; Loo, Boo, & Khoo-Lattimore, 2013) but also results in the reduction in satisfaction of other customers (Grove & Fisk, 1997). In summary, it is of great importance for enterprises to understand customer misbehavior and effectively prevent its occurrence.

2.3. Tour member misbehavior

The phenomenon of misbehavior in the practical operation of tour groups was heard from time to time (Chen, 2014; Tang & Hsu, 2013; Wang, 2014). Generally, the tour members have different socio-economic backgrounds, cultural levels and habits. When a tour member faces an unexpected event, these differences could cause a member to break the rules out of self-interest (Liu & Tsaur, 2014; Reynolds & Harris, 2006). Apart from factors intrinsic to the tour member, a feeling of discontent with the tour service or a sense that the service is unfair, imitating the misbehavior of others, and the crowded environment can be factors which lead a tour member to misbehave (Areni, 2003; Harris & Reynolds, 2004). (Areni, 2003; Harris & Reynolds, 2004). This study found that the past literature has summarized the potential impact of tour member misbehavior into four types: misbehavior toward people (the tour leader and members), toward events (tour operations), toward suppliers (tourism organizations), and toward the environment (tourist sites).

First, tour members have different backgrounds and approach things with certain differences of values. This can lead to disharmony and even verbal or physical conflict. Such negative behavior (e.g. violence, recalcitrance, rudeness, or disregard of others) affects the level of tour satisfaction felt by other members (Wu, 2007). Past studies on tour leaders mention that abusive behavior by tour members negatively influences the mood of the tour leader (Bowie & Chang, 2005; Tsaur & Lin, 2014). Tour members may also misbehave towards other service personnel. For example, on a flight to Nanjing, China, some travelers splashed water on a flight attendant due to dissatisfaction with the seating arrangements. Their uncivilized behavior seriously disrupted the normal order of the flight service, forcing the plane to turn around (Jiang, 2014). Tang and Hsu (2013) also noted cases in which hotel housekeeping staff suffered from forced embraces, chest groping, and other incidents by tour members. Thus, the possibility exists for tour

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