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Research Paper

Repeat visitation: A study from the perspective of leisure constraint, tourist experience, destination images, and experiential familiarity

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ABSTRACT

Repeat visitation is a cost-effective and desirable market segment for destination marketing organizations. This paper investigates repeat visitation from the perspective of leisure constraints, tourist experience, destination images, and experiential familiarity (number of visits). The differences are examined across two previous visitor groups, segmented according to the number of visits to a destination (Toucheng/Jiaosi, Taiwan), i.e. domestic holidaymakers who have visited the destination just once ('first-timers') and those who have previously visited it two or more times ('repeaters'). Partial least squares regression analysis shows that escapism and scenery play defining roles in the destination offerings. The former also contributes to future revisit intention for the destination. Moreover, a multi-group analysis reveals how experiential familiarity affects visitors in viewing a destination when facing constraints. However, the number of past visits has little effect on the relationship between tourist experience, destination image, and revisiting intention, or on the relationship between constraints and revisit intention. Unlike previous research that typically cites constraints as an obstacle to leisure pursuit, this study shows that besides their negative potential, under certain circumstances constraints could provide possibilities and enabling potential. The positive effect of constraints is more strongly felt for first-timers than for repeaters.

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1. Introduction

Repeat visitation is a cost-effective and desirable market segment for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). Such visitation behavior supports and has a stabilizing influence on most destinations (Lau & McKercher, 2004). Domestic visitors, unlike overseas ones, are more likely to make multiple visits to a destination. These domestic previous visitors may consider a second visit due to attractions or experiences that they missed during their first visit or to relive the experience they had. Three or even more visits could be made if the visitors enjoy the destination.

However, domestic visitors also face leisure constraints for subsequent planned visits. According to the leisure constraint concept, when perceived or experienced by individuals, constraints limit the individuals' leisure preference formation and/or inhibit participation and enjoyment in leisure (Jackson, 2000). Although constraints do not necessarily lead to non-participation (Nyaupane, Morais, & Graefe, 2002), they could affect the frequency of visiting a destination and other touristic behaviors. Therefore, a good understanding of the effect of constraints on

previous visitors who make multiple visits to a domestic destination is necessary. Nevertheless, studies on the effect of constraints on destination image, an often-cited antecedent that influences revisit intention, are scarce, even though the leisure constraint concept is 'well-established as a recognizable and distinct sub-field within leisure studies' (Jackson, 2005, p. 10). A recent study by Chen, Chen, and Okumus (2013) shows that pre-visit destination image of non-visitors is negatively related to constraints. Furthermore, some researchers argue that the relationship of leisure behavior and constraints, in general, is far more complex (Aybar-Damali & McGuire, 2013; Kleiber, McGuire, Aybar-Damali, & Norman, 2008; Kleiber, Wade, & Loucks-Atkinson, 2005; McGuire & Norman, 2005). Instead of being obstacles to leisure pursuit, constraints may offer possibilities and even be beneficial and enabling (Aybar-Damali & McGuire, 2013; Kleiber et al., 2005; McGuire & Norman, 2005). Again, few studies have considered the positive benefits of constraints.

This study therefore aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the leisure constraint concept within the broader body of tourism behavior research. As such, the paper extends the study by Chen et al. (2013) beyond non-visitors and pre-visit image to consider constraints faced by previous visitors of a domestic destination as a predictor variable in the relationship of tourist experience that visitors have during their latest visit, destination

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image held by visitors after their latest visit, and revisit intention. The latter relationship is relatively well documented in the literature. Studies have shown that tourist experience could positively influence destination image (Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012) and revisit intention (Zhang et al., 2014). Destination image also contributes to revisit intention (Kim et al., 2012).

The number of visits to a destination is related to the concept of destination familiarity. Destination familiarity is an important topic for tourism research and DMOs because it 'represents a key marketing variable in segmenting and targeting certain groups and developing a marketing action plan, including product, distribution, pricing and promotion decisions' (Baloglu, 2001, p. 127). Studies have pointed out that regardless of how familiarity is measured, it is a crucial factor in consumer decision-making (Sun, Chi, & Xu, 2013). Familiarity is often linked with 'the number of product-related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer' (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987, p. 411). Consequently, familiarity has been conceptualized as previous visitation, number of previous visits, or the difference between repeaters and newcomers (Chen & Lin, 2012; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Prentice, 2006; Snepenger, Meged, Snelling, & Worrall, 1990; Sun et al., 2013; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007). Baloglu (2001) and Prentice (2004) have labeled these kinds of familiarity as 'experiential familiarity'.

Taking into account that this study considers individuals who have already visited a particular destination, this paper considers experiential familiarity of previous visitors and adopts the practice of Fakeye and Crompton (1991) and Baloglu (2001) by segmenting previous visitors into first-time visitors ('first-timers') and repeat visitors ('repeaters'). First-timers are individuals who have only visited the destination once, while repeaters are those who have already visited the destination two or more times (Morais & Lin, 2010). Regarding the destination image, Fakeye and Crompton (1991) suggest that, 'many of the perceptual changes occur during first direct experience rather than multiple experiences or visits' (Baloglu, 2001, p. 129). This study aims to contribute to the literature on behavioral differences arising from the number of visitations to a destination by considering experiential familiarity of previous visitors as a potential moderating variable in the relationship between constraints and the other variables within the wider context of tourist experience, destination image, and revisit intention. Thus, a two-model comparison is used to consider the structural relationships between the study constructs across two groups of previous Taiwanese visitors (first-timers and repeaters) to Toucheng/Jiaosi, a popular destination in Taiwan.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Experience, destination image and revisit intention

Tourism is inherently experience-based and there is a consensus in the literature on the need to create experience for tourists (Laing, Wheeler, Reeves, & Frost, 2014). Holidays are often constructed as enjoyable experiences (Foster, 2014), and tourists demand to experience something, which matches the central assumption of the 'experience economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Many tourism purchase decisions are based 'on a mere promise, a notion, and a socially constructed image of what constitutes an interesting or appealing experience' (Curtin, 2005, p. 2). According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), experience is a complex, subjective psychological process that engages the individual in a personal way. It 'encompasses anything ranging from emotional, intellectual, and esthetic to experiences of nature, amusement and travel' (Mei, 2014, p. 73).

The experience economy concept is useful in destination positioning and helps destinations gain competitive advantage

(Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2014). Dmitrovic et al. (2009) describe destination as 'a blend of consumers' space and tourism products providing a holistic experience' (p. 116). Moreover, by providing the 'props or cues' that underpin tourist experience (Laing et al., 2014), destinations are consumed within the context of a 'servicescape' (Goldsmith & Tsiotsou, 2012) and are, thus, important sites for tourists to consume experiences. Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003) suggest that tourists' on-site experience involves an interaction between tourists and destinations, with destinations being the site and tourists being the actors. There is even a proposition that the entire tourist destination can be positioned as 'experience' (Richards, 2001). Because tourists are often willing to pay more for these experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), travel experience can be bundled and sold with tourist destinations (Fesenmaier & Xiang, 2014).

Applying Pine and Gilmore's (1999) four dimensions of experience, destinations offer firstly an escapist experience by providing tourists the feeling of escaping from their daily life. Oh, Fiore, and Jeung (2007) identify three types of escapes: getting-away, immersing-into-destination, and partaking-a-different-character. Getting-away escapes involve tourists distancing 'themselves from the daily routines, no matter what the daily routines are, where they head, and what they do' (p. 122). Immersion-into-destination escapes involve people wanting to escape to a particular destination, while partaking-a-different-character refers to tourists' active involvement in specific activities at the destination. Secondly, an entertainment experience occurs when tourists passively observe activities taking place in a destination. Thirdly, an esthetic experience is obtained when they enjoy and passively appreciate being in the destination environment (Oh et al., 2007). Lastly, an educational experience is acquired when tourists increase their knowledge or skills. Each experience dimension is unique, and the dimensions collectively provide an optimal tourist experience, i.e. there is a 'sweet spot' at which all four dimensions work optimally together (Oh et al., 2007). Studies such as those of Loureiro (2014), Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011), and Oh et al. (2007), provide support for experience to be operationalized along these four dimensions.

The literature has often shown that tourist experience directly promotes revisit intention (Kim et al., 2012). Tourist experience also influences destination image (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Kim et al., 2012), which is a complex amalgam of products, services, and attributes, woven into a total impression. Image attributes are often classified as cognitive (i.e. an individual's beliefs and attitudes about the destination) and affective (i.e. the feelings or emotions that a tourist destination is able to evoke) attributes (Beerli & Martin, 2004), with the cognitive image contributing to the affective image (Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002). Thus, experience indirectly influences revisit intention through destination image, as studies have shown that destination image contributes to revisit intention (Kim et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2014). Hence, this paper proposes the structural model shown in Fig. 1 and postulates the following hypotheses:

- H1.** Tourist experience positively influences revisit intention.
- H2.** Tourist experience positively influences destination image.
- H3.** Destination image positively influences revisit intention.
- H4.** Cognitive destination image positively influences affective destination image.

2.2. The possible effects of leisure constraints

Constraint-related studies have suggested three types of constraints: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural (Godbey,

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