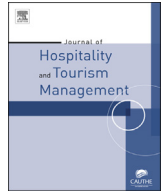




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Does the quality of tourist shuttles influence revisit intention through destination image and satisfaction? The case of Macao



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ABSTRACT

Transportation is a necessity for tourists at a destination. However, empirical evidence of the impact of quality of tourist shuttles on intention to revisit a destination has been lacking. This study contributes to the tourism literature by linking quality of tourist shuttles with intention to revisit a destination and by examining the underlying mechanism. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the analysis of data collected from 282 inbound tourists in Macao reveals that quality of tourist shuttles predicts intention to revisit through two mediators - destination satisfaction and image. The results also show that destination image predicts intention to revisit through destination satisfaction. The findings suggest that destination marketers should strive to maintain high quality tourist shuttle service, specifically in the areas of staff service, efficiency, punctuality, and safety.

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry has grown at an average rate of 4.1% per year since 1995 and is expected to be responsible for 1.56 billion international arrivals per year within the next 25 years; therefore, tourism will remain a main driving force for global economic growth (UNWTO, 2001). Competition among destinations arises since tourism provides lucrative revenue streams which contribute to a city's economic and social success (Albalade & Bel, 2010). Each destination tries to attract as many tourists as possible through its primary tourism products such as accommodation, entertainment packages, city's infrastructure, and transportation (Benur & Bramwell, 2015). Among these products, transportation is relatively neglected, lowering its significance in the field of research and in the industry (Thompson & Schofield, 2007).

Transportation has often been considered a key attribute in

tourism development (Duval, 2007). Tourism is not sustainable without transportation, since it has to take tourists to their desired destinations (Page, 1994). Because transportation and tourism complement each other (Duval, 2007), there has been a growing research in how transportation services enable tourism (Lumsdon & Page, 2004). Although transportation is usually regarded as a means of bringing travellers to and from destinations and enabling them to get around while on site (Sorupia, 2005), it can also determine how tourists experience a destination by affecting their travel patterns and destination choices (Prideaux, 2000). Even by itself, transportation becomes part of tourists' experience (Duval, 2007).

Transportation is often assumed to be a factor that could affect destination image (Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015), destination satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008), and perhaps intention to revisit (Kozak, 2001). In the stream of tourism research, many studies on destination image have regarded transportation as one of the facets constituting the image of a destination while ignoring their direct relationship (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002). Also, previous study argues that the quality of local transportation can influence inbound tourists' destination

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satisfaction and perception (Law, 2002). However, little empirical work on such relationships has been conducted (Thompson & Schofield, 2007).

While tourism literature usually relates quality of transportation to destination image, satisfaction, or intention to revisit, their underlying mechanism is clearly under-examined. This is an unfortunate oversight as transportation plays an essential role in tourism development (Duval, 2007; Page, 1994). Hence, an advanced extension of destination marketing literature would examine the relationship between quality of transportation, tourists' perceptions, and intention to revisit. Since several studies have shown the impact of quality of transportation on satisfaction (Thompson & Schofield, 2007), image (Hunter, 2016), and intention to revisit (Kozak, 2001), their results provide partial supports for our research which investigates how the quality of transportation shapes intention to revisit through tourists' satisfaction with and perceived image of a destination. The primary objective of this study is to broaden our knowledge of whether a particular mode of transport (tourist shuttles), as one of key tourism products at a destination (Page, 2005), could shape tourist experience and influence behavioral intention (Kozak, 2001; Thompson & Schofield, 2007). By revealing this conceptual framework, we can argue and promote tourist shuttles as a crucial tourism product for the competitiveness of destinations.

This study provides some important contributions to the extant literature of transportation and tourism. First, it changes the existing research focus about transportation from as part of destination image to as a robust predictor of image and satisfaction. Tourism literature has considered transportation a factor that constitutes to destination image due to the traditional concept of image (Gallarza et al., 2002), but little is known about how it directly affects tourists' perceptions of a destination. Second, by examining image and satisfaction as the mediators, our study illustrates the process about how quality of tourist shuttles affects tourists' revisit intention, and thus answers the call for examining local transportation as part of tourism products on tourists' experience and behavioral intentions (Page, 2005). Third, from practical perspective, this study clearly points out that tourist shuttles should improve or maintain high service quality (e.g., punctuality and safety) in order to satisfy and help tourists forming a good image of a particular destination, resulting higher intention to revisit the same place again in the future. Finally, by using a sample from inbound tourists in Macao to test our hypotheses, our findings convince not only gaming destinations such as Las Vegas and Singapore but also other tourism cities about the importance of tourist shuttles on tourists' perceptions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Transportation, destination satisfaction, and destination image

The precise meaning of *image* is controversial because it can mean many things depending on how we approach the concept. For instance, from the perspective of psychology we consider image a visual representation, whereas in the field of marketing it denotes an underlying attribute of consumer behaviour that has been widely studied over the decades (Jenkins, 1999). In the context of tourism, Crompton (1979, p. 18) defines image as “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination.” As such, the image of a destination could stimulate tourists' satisfaction, resulting in plans to revisit a location. Studies on destination image are numerous. For example, some scholars look into the relationship between destination image and visit intentions, while others examine tourists' perceptions of a destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) or competitiveness (Enright & Newton,

2004).

Although it has been suggested that having a well-developed transportation system can create a favourable destination image (Mandeno, 2012), empirical studies about transportation performance on destination image have been lacking. As transportation has been theoretically viewed and empirically supported as one of tourism products (Page, 2005) and services (Prideaux, 2000), and its contributions to destination development and attractiveness are recognized (Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2008; Masson & Petiot, 2009), these studies lend support to our claim that quality of transportation could affect how tourists perceive a particular destination.

Cole and Scott (2004, p. 81) define destination satisfaction as “the aggregate feelings that one derives as a result of visiting a tourist attraction.” Literature on destination satisfaction is extensive and has strategic implications for the tourism industry (Kozak, 2001). Destination satisfaction has been widely studied since late 19th century given the importance and size of tourism industry in western countries (Mattsson & Chadee, 2015). Similar to the study of destination image, studies about destination satisfaction are prolific. For example, some have studied tourist satisfaction associated with destination experience (Pizam & Milman, 1993) and with recreation services (Noe & Uysal, 1997), while others have developed a construct to measure satisfaction (Tribe & Snaith, 1998).

Several studies have found that transportation may affect the cognitive component of one's experience including customer satisfaction (Ettema et al., 2011). In particular, Haywood and Muller (1988) argue that ease of accessing places at the destination can affect tourists' experience. Thompson and Schofield (2007) echo this view in their findings regarding the impact of public transportation performance on tourists' destination satisfaction. Their results support the contention that transportation availability and performance are salient factors influencing tourists' destination satisfaction and choice. In Danaher and Arweiler (1996)'s study about New Zealand visitors, transportation (an average score of plane, public bus, train, bus tour and rental car that rated by respondents individually) regressed in overall satisfaction and likelihood of recommending, and the results were insignificant. From their findings, we realize that transport in general may or may not have an impact on tourists' destination satisfaction. However, their studies' context is limited and does not indicate whether an individual mode of transport could play a role in tourists' experience at a destination since any mode of transport is in fact a tourism product (Page, 2005). To fill this gap, this study examines whether a particular mode of transportation, tourist shuttles, affects inbound tourists' perceptions. Taken together, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1. *Quality of tourist shuttles has a positive relationship with destination satisfaction.*

Hypothesis 2. *Quality of tourist shuttles has a positive relationship with destination image.*

2.2. Destination image, destination satisfaction, and intention to revisit

Literature indicates that tourists' perceived image is a significant indicator of satisfaction as well as post-visit behavioral intentions such as revisit intention (Leung, Law, & Lee, 2011). Many empirical studies have revealed the impact of destination image on satisfaction. For instance, Lee, Lee, and Lee (2005) confirmed that the relationship between destination image and satisfaction level was positively significant, and such a direct relationship has also been

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