Drug tourism motivation of Chinese outbound tourists: Scale development and validation

Jun Wen [a], Fang Meng [b], Tianyu Ying [c, *], Hongxia Qi [d], Tim Lockyer [e]

[a] Department of Marketing (Tourism), Waikato Management School, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand
[b] School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208, United States
[c] Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, School of Management, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 310058, PR China
[d] School of Management, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand
[e] Dept of Marketing, Waikato Management School, The University of Waikato, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand

HIGHLIGHTS

- Chinese tourists visiting Amsterdam for commercial cannabis were investigated.
- A scale was developed to measure Chinese tourists' motivations for drug tourism.
- 10 interviews and 2 surveys were conducted to construct and validate the scale.
- 6 dimensions of drug tourism motivation were identified and discussed.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Drug-taking behaviours have been extensively studied in psychology, behavioural science and health studies, yet, limited effort has been invested in understanding the factors that motivate tourists to engage in drug tourism. Given the increasing numbers of tourists who are exposed to commercially available cannabis in overseas destinations, developing a measurement scale for their motivation offers an effective tool to understand drug tourists more comprehensively. Using samples of Chinese outbound tourists who travelled to Amsterdam for consuming commercial cannabis, this study adopted a mixed methods approach and collected two rounds of quantitative data for scale development and empirical test. The results suggested a six-factor motivation scale: spiritual and emotional healing; social prestige; relaxation and escape; cannabis authenticity; commercial cannabis availability; and, cannabis experimentation. The resulting measurement scale demonstrated accepted reliability and validity. Findings further indicated that commercial cannabis availability is the strongest motivation for predicting drug tourists' future behavioural intention.

1. Introduction

Drug tourism is not a new phenomenon and it has been examined from different social and psychological perspectives. Most researchers to date have portrayed drug tourism as *deviant* or *marginal* tourist behaviour, a western lifestyle highlighted in developed countries (Bandyopadhyay, 2013; Uriely & Belhassen, 2006). Studies on drug issues in the tourism context have addressed a variety of topics including certain destinations attracting foreign travellers (e.g., Korf, 2002) and tourist motivations (e.g., Sellars, 1998). At the same time, prior studies (e.g., Prayag, Mura, Hall, & Fontaine, 2015) suggest that the existing definitions are too general and that different groups of tourists such as drug tourists and spiritual tourists exist in terms of their motivations and self-perceptions. It appears, however, that, due to the sensitiveness of this topic and the difficulty of collecting quantitative data, this body of literature is still mostly descriptive and based on qualitative methodologies.

Motivation is stressed as an important precondition for behavioural intention in the tourism field. Tourists may undertake some risky or adventurous behaviours as they perceive tourism as being

away-from-routine, less restrained, and thrill-seeking. Drug use in the tourism context is perceived as less threatening, although it still involves legal, social, and medical risks (Uriely & Belhassen, 2005). Regarding the motivation of drug use in tourism, prior literature mainly focuses on specific destinations such as the Amazon (De Rios, 1994), or occasions such as students on spring break (Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich, & Smeaton, 1998). The extant drug tourism motivation studies mainly use qualitative methods including observations and in-depth interviews, while a standardised measurement for drug tourism motivations has largely been overlooked. This lack of a specific measurement scale for drug tourism motivation leaves a crucial knowledge gap, and opens up the opportunity for a meaningful and much-needed investigation to examine the intention and behaviour of drug tourists in a more generalizable setting. Furthermore, most, if not all, of the current drug tourism studies focus on western perspectives only, and lack a conceptualised and systematic investigation to advance our understanding of drug tourism in a more global setting. Despite the fact that the outbound tourist flow from the emerging Asian markets has been booming in the past two decades; and particularly China has now become one of the largest tourist-generating countries in the world (UNWTO, 2017), it is unclear if there are Chinese outbound tourists travelling overseas for drug consumption, and, if they do, why they do so.

The primary purpose of this research is, therefore, to develop a measurement scale on drug tourism motivations. Due to the scarce literature in this area with quantitative approach, this study is exploratory in nature, and attempts to contribute to an understanding of the underlying motives that lead tourists to take drugs during travel through an examination of what they seek from this particular behaviour. In the meantime, the study aims to test a drug tourism motivation model using Chinese outbound tourists as the subjects. At the outset, it should be noted that it is not the intent of this study to engage in a debate regarding the tourists' varied levels of focus on drug use during their travel. This study responds to the call for a better understanding of the motivations of individuals who travel for drug consumption (e.g., Belhassen, Santos, & Uriely, 2007; Korf, 2002). In the context of commercial drug tourism destinations such as Amsterdam, the major soft drug tolerated by local government for tourists' consummation in licensed coffee shops is cannabis. We, therefore, chose to examine drug tourists' cannabis-taking motivations and related behaviours because cannabis-taking motives have received little attention in the extant literature.

The subsequent sections of this article are organized as follows: The literature section summarizes the extant literature on motivations for drug taking, drug and tourism, and drug and culture. Following Churchill's (1979) recommendations, the method section presents the processes and results of the major steps involved in developing and validating a drug tourism motivation measurement scale. Discussion and conclusions of this study are finally provided, followed by a discussion of the limitations of this study and directions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Motivations for drug taking

Drug use motivation has been a popular topic in social and psychology research in the past few decades. Although researchers have tried to explore the reasons for drug use (e.g., Comeau, Stewart, & Loba, 2001; Bachman, Wadsworth, O'Malley, Johnston, & Schulenberg, 2013; Pomazal & Brown, 1977; Simons, Correia, & Carey, 2000; Simons, Correia, Carey, & Borsari, 1998, 2005), no clear consensus has been reached. The fields of psychology and

sociology have posited drug-taking from multiple perspectives to account for the intentions to consume drugs (Baker, Piper, McCarthy, Majeskie, & Fiore, 2004; Dakwar, Levin, Foltin, Nunes, & Hart, 2014; Pomazal & Brown, 1977). Scholars have reported that drug use tends to be associated with psychological factors such as anxiety, curiosity, and loneliness, but due to the complexity of the phenomenon, few research appears to provide an adequately comprehensive interpretation for why people use drugs. Studies have reported a wide array of factors related to drug use, suggesting that drug use motivations could be grouped into particular categories including: escapism, seeking personal identity, feeling high, rebelling against authority, relaxation, socialising, drug-related expectations, curiosity, individual willingness, and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (e.g., Boys, Marsden, & Strang, 2001; Goode, 1970; Jurich & Polson, 1984; Roshanfekr, Noori, Dejman, Geshnigani, & Rafiey, 2015). However, as yet, there has been neither systematic examination of drug-taking motivation nor measurement scale development in the tourism setting.

Recent studies focusing on young people and women have identified their motives for drug use (e.g., Roshanfekr et al., 2015; Shek, 2007; Wu et al., 2014). These studies suggested that drug-taking behaviour has its own group characteristics and was influenced by gender, age, and the normal social parameters. For example, taking youths in Hong Kong as a case, Shek (2007) emphasised the roles of curiosity and undesirable peer influence among adolescents using drugs. Examining Asian drug users in the U.S., Nemoto et al. (1999) further validated the idea that the patterns of drug use were unique to the users' ethnicity, gender, immigrant status, age groups, and cultural constructs. This body of literature has seen drug use as a predominantly abnormal behaviour, with the notable exception of studies such as Riemer (1981), which looked at drug-taking from the perspectives of recreation or leisure, and suggested viewing cannabis as a recreational drug. Despite the vast amount of attention that scholars have paid to drug use motivations as discussed above, little effort has been expended on investigating drug-taking motivations in the context of travel, where motivations could arguably be distinctively different from the general or habitual drug-use motives identified in the extant literature.

2.2. Drugs and tourism

According to Valdez and Sifaneck (1997, p. 880), drug tourism is "the phenomenon by which persons become attracted to a particular location because of the accessibility of licit or illicit drugs and related services." Drug tourism usually refers to a non-institutionalised form of tourism (Belhassen et al., 2007). Nevertheless, other scholars have claimed that drug tourism definitions should take the multiactivity nature of tourism into consideration, and posited that this type of tourism also includes tourists who refer to "their drug taking merely as a by-product of their travel experience and tourists who become aware of the accessibility of drugs only during their stay in a particular destination" (Uriely & Belhassen, 2005, p. 244). Generally, the existing literature on drugs and tourism does not distinguish between tourists with diverse drug-driving motives. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of drug use in the context of tourism often falls within the area of marginal tourism (Uriely & Belhassen, 2005). In the current study, drug tourists are defined as those who see drug consumption as one of the major motivations for travelling, i.e., they can be seen as drug-oriented tourists.

Many countries like the Netherlands, Australia, and Brazil have gradually established the image of a drug culture and attracted tourists from all over the world (e.g., Kjellgren, Eriksson, & Norlander, 2009). The popularity of drug use in contemporary