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Structural model of hassles experienced at travel destinations

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ABSTRACT

Visitors expect to have pleasant experiences at travel destinations. However, they are often perplexed by hassles. Previous studies have rarely focused on the possible consequences of hassles experienced by visitors. Therefore, the present study constructed a complete hassle experience model for destinations, addressing the relationship between hassles and their consequences. A self-administered questionnaire was designed to collect empirical data from visitors to the Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area in Taiwan. The results revealed that the visitors who experienced more hassles had stronger negative affect, and lower satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, negative affect negatively influenced satisfaction, which subsequently influenced loyalty. The study then proposes several managerial implications based on these findings, discusses the research limitations, and makes suggestions for future studies.

1. Introduction

Travel destinations exist in order to offer visitors satisfactory, valuable, and memorable experiences (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013; Rääkkönen & Honkanen, 2013). The positive experiences of visitors in traveling ease the pressures of daily life, generate positive emotions, and promote physical and mental health (Nimrod, 2007; Payne, Mowen, & Montoro-Rodriguez, 2006). However, every tourist attraction does not necessarily satisfy the needs of visitors, and visitors do not necessarily have the positive experiences they expect each time they visit a destination because of frequent yet minor, annoying hassles that visitors experience, which affect their psychology and behaviors, leading to negative traveling experiences (Hung & Hsieh, 2014; Peden & Schuster, 2008; Schuster, Hammitt, & Moore, 2003, 2006).

Such annoying events at tourist destinations are considered hassles. Hassles can be defined as minor incidents, experiences, contacts, conditions and/or thoughts that occur in daily life (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981). Hassles are a long-term and constantly recurring role-related source of pressure (Visser & Rothmann, 2009). In addition, some hassles might be specific to certain situations and do not occur constantly. However, some hassles might occur repeatedly because individuals have been placed in the situations with a predictable workload (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990). Hassles are often considered obstacles to reaching goals. To overcome obstacles, people are often required to expend additional effort in identifying a solution (Schuster et al., 2006; Visser & Rothmann, 2009).

Travel destinations or recreation areas can pose numerous hassles for visitors (Miller & McCool, 2003; Schuster et al., 2003, 2006).

Schuster et al. (2003) defined hassles in destinations as requirements or situations in recreational environments that annoy visitors. Some studies have concluded that visitors in many national parks or wilderness areas have often encountered hassles such as crowding, noise, rubbish, conflicts with other visitors, weather, numerous visitors, and management regulations (Miller & McCool, 2003; Peden & Schuster, 2008; Schuster et al., 2006). Miller and McCool (2003) highlighted that the main hassle for visitors at national parks is crowding, followed by poor facility accessibility and the behaviors and noise of other visitors. Schuster et al. (2006) proposed some methods for adapting to these hassles, including changes to travel plans to avoid hassles and simply ignoring annoying events. Although hassles are common in tourist destinations and some studies have already identified them and proposed relevant coping strategies, a resultant model of hassles at destinations has not been developed.

Many studies in work and family fields have confirmed that hassles can induce negative emotions, such as anger (Swim, Johnston, & Pearson, 2009), and have a negative influence on life and family satisfaction (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2008). Hung and Hsieh (2014) suggested that an increase in perceived hassles decreases the satisfaction of hikers. Schuster et al. (2006) suggested that when visitors encounter severe hassles, they often leave the location and are unwilling to revisit the destination. Peden and Schuster (2008) concluded that the social and managerial hassles experienced by visitors in wild environments affect their emotions, behaviors, and experience quality. Consequently, hassles may have numerous negative consequences for visitors. However, few empirical studies have verified the potential consequences of common hassles experienced at tourist destinations.

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Accordingly, the present study established a model of hassle experiences at tourist destinations from the perspective of the personal experiences of visitors. The goals of destination management should be ensuring visitor satisfaction, enhancing revisit motivation, and encouraging visitors to recommend tourist destinations to other potential visitors. Clarification of the relation between hassles and their outcomes can assist companies in developing strategies that foster visitor satisfaction. The development of a theory requires exploring and conducting empirical studies on the hassle experience model to fill the research gap. Therefore, this study was first to propose an outcome model of hassles experienced by visitors at travel destinations. The purpose of the research was to verify the relationships among hassles experience, negative affect, satisfaction, and loyalty.

2. Literature review and conceptual framework

2.1. Hassles at destinations

The concept of hassle originates from stress appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Cognitive appraisal models of stress have indicated that individuals assess environmental events related to them and then determine the type and quality of their emotional responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Hassles are related to threats and losses in daily life and they cause psychological stress. Consequently, hassles are referred to as experiences and events that, after a person's assessment, are either considered imperative or harmful and threatening to the person's well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In the context of tourism, many studies have confirmed the presence of hassles at destinations (e.g. Miller & McCool, 2003; Schuster et al., 2003, 2006). Hassles at destinations refer to requirements or situations that annoy or frustrate visitors (Schuster et al., 2003). Hassle events range from minor concerns to major pressures, problems, or difficulties (Schuster et al., 2006). In outdoor recreational areas, hassles are exemplified by matters such as unclean surroundings, noisy campers, and heavy backpacks. They may also include minor events such as bad weather, inconvenient traffic, disappointing events, and conflicts (Kanner et al., 1981).

In related studies on outdoor recreational activities, researchers have already applied stress theory to identify possible situations that interfere with visitors, in which biological and social environments are the greatest concern to visitors (Miller & McCool, 2003; Schuster et al., 2006). Miller and McCool (2003) reported that nearly 56% of the Glacier National Park visitors experienced hassles. Crowding was one of the most common sources of hassles, followed by poor facility accessibility, and the inappropriate behaviors and noise of others. Conversely, visitors are least concerned about tourist conflicts, regulations, and the weather (Miller & McCool, 2003). Schuster and Hammitt (2001) observed that nearly 87% of visitors in the wilderness have encountered hassles; the main sources of such hassles were unclean surroundings and conflicts with other visitors. A person visiting the wilderness might experience numerous hassles that may be considered regular events (Schuster & Hammitt, 2001). For example, traveling off a trail might create a pathfinding hassle, nearby campsite users might generate noise that is irritating, and seeing litter in the wilderness might be frustrating. In addition, situations used to describe conflicts in outdoor recreation settings can be sources of hassles such as user crowding or negative interactions between horse riders and hikers (Schuster & Hammitt, 2001).

Schuster et al. (2006) conducted a literature review, observation, and informal interviews to summarize 21 hassles in a recreational environment, such as litter, dangerous resources, or numerous visitors. Peden and Schuster (2008) interviewed 30 people who visited the wilderness and developed a 20-item hassle scale and extracted the following five factors through an exploratory factor analysis: society, management, wilderness, pathfinding, and camping. Hassles encountered in a social context include the behaviors of other visitors, the

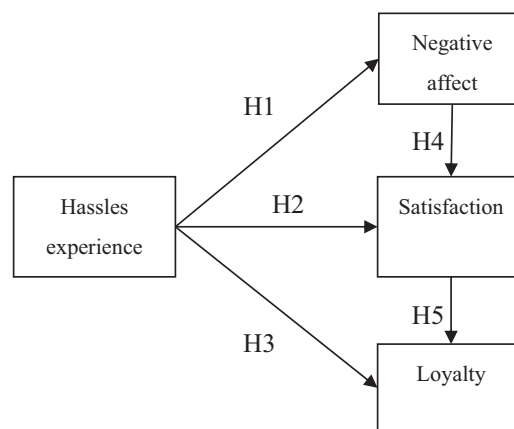


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

number of visitors, and inappropriate mandatory regulations. Management hassle indicators include negative interactions between managers and employees, camping or parking fees, and confusing regulations or norms. Wilderness hassle indicators include bear encounters and difficulty with food reservations. Pathfinding hassle indicators include concerns of being lost and encountering unexpected situations. The camping hassle indicator is a lack of water sources. Hung and Hsieh (2014) reported that hikers experience five hassles, namely litter, noise, resource damage, crowding, and vehicles in national parks.

2.2. Conceptual framework

The present study proposed a comprehensive model to offer new insights into hassles theory and destination literature. The conceptual framework is detailed in Fig. 1 and the hypotheses of the study are described in the succeeding text:

2.2.1. Outcomes of hassle experiences: Negative affect, satisfaction, and loyalty

The notion that individuals respond emotionally to their immediate environment is widely accepted in psychology (Machleit & Eroglu, 2000). Emotions refer to a complex psychophysiological experience of an individual's state of mind and are often considered spontaneously developed feelings or mental states (Meyers, 2004). Negative affect is an unpleasant engagement that includes various aversive mood states, such as anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness, whereas low negative affect indicates a state of calmness and serenity (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

Zohar (1999) used skydiving instructors as research subjects and confirmed that higher occupational hassles generate higher negative affect. Swim et al. (2009) noted that hassles caused by gender discrimination have a significant positive correlation with negative affect responses such as anger and anxiety. Although the relationship between hassles and the negative affect of visitors has not been confirmed in the context of tourist destinations, Kalamas, Laroche, and Makkdessian (2008) confirmed that consumers encounter hassles that induce negative emotions when they are queuing in crowded environments while shopping. In other words, when destinations have hassles, such as inappropriate behaviors by others and an unclean environment, visitors are more likely to feel disgust or impatience. Accordingly, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1. The greater a hassle experience is, the greater the negative affect will be.

Satisfaction can be defined from affective and cognitive perspectives. It refers to the personal real-life experiences of individuals based on the affectivity generated by inner feelings that follow interactions between individuals and destinations (Baker & Crompton, 2000). From

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