Does service type influence satisfaction?: A case study of Edinburgh Castle

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HIGHLIGHTS

- There is a significant difference in visitor satisfaction with interpretive service types.
- Visitor satisfaction can be influenced by non-site controlled information sources.
- Prior knowledge did not influence satisfaction with interpretation.

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ABSTRACT

Tourism sites often use interpretation to communicate their meaning and influence visitor satisfaction. However, few studies have explored the relationship between satisfaction and different interpretive service types. This study investigated the relationship between prior knowledge and satisfaction with interpretive service types at a highly visited UNESCO World Heritage Site. An onsite self-administered questionnaire collected data from English speaking tourists visiting Edinburgh Castle in Scotland. Respondents self-identified their primary interpretive service type used during their visitor experience. Results reveal visitor satisfaction differed among guided, audio-guided, and self-guided interpretation. Specifically, those primarily using their own personal resources had greater satisfaction than those who took an interpretive guided tour or read exhibits and signs. Additionally, findings identified visitors derive visit satisfaction through interpretive resources not supplied by the site. Implications for tourism management and interpretation services are discussed, along with opportunities for future research.

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1. Introduction

Heritage tourism provides the opportunity to explore and engage with places of value. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention designates World Heritage status to sites with the most outstanding universal cultural and or natural value to humanity. As of 2017 1073 sites hold World Heritage designation (UNESCO, July 2017). Well-known World Heritage examples include Yellowstone National Park in the United States, the Taj Mahal in India, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, and the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador. In addition to global recognition of outstanding value, World Heritage Site status increases brand recognition, creates access to funds for development of infrastructure and conservation efforts, and ultimately increases visitation (Van Blarcom & Kayahan, 2011).

Interpretation communicates World Heritage Site (WHS) history, conservation, and global value to visitors. Within UNESCO, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) charter for interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage sites defined interpretation as:

> … the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of a cultural heritage site. These can include print and electronic publications, public lectures, on-site and directly related off-site installations, educational programmes, community activities, and ongoing research, training, and evaluation of the interpretation process itself. (2008, p. 4)

Despite increased visitation and the recognized importance of interpretation to influence visitor behavior, little research attention has been paid to WHS interpretation (Io & Hallo, 2011). Pressure

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from increased visitor numbers has prompted both concern and greater interest in mitigation strategies from WHS managers. Research has broadly supported interpretation's positive value for the visitor experience as well as for management goals related to entertainment and education (Beck & Cable, 2012; Ham & Weiler, 2002; Porto, Leanza, & Cascone, 2012; Ward & Wilkinson, 2006).

Interpretation is, by its nature and variability, a complex and subjective process (Trinh & Ryan, 2013). While limited research attention has been paid to the use and benefits of WHS interpretation, it is accepted as part of an effective visitor management strategy for issues ranging from environmental degradation to visitor behavior (Hassan & Iankova, 2012; Littlefair & Buckley, 2008; Roggenbuck, 1992) and visitor satisfaction (Ham & Weiler, 2007; Lee, 2009; Pearce & Moscardo, 1998). Further, visitor expectations at heritage sites can guide interpretive planning and implementation (Porto et al., 2012) and tourists' heritage itinerary planning (Leanza, Porto, Sapienza, & Cascone, 2016). Existing interpretation satisfaction literature has largely overlooked UNESCO World Heritage Sites and their international tourists.

Interpretation at historic or natural sites may be delivered through a variety of methods. Carr (2004) suggested when interpretation is provided in multiple forms it meets both diverse visitor preferences and management goals. Dominant interpretive delivery forms include guided interpretation, audio-guided interpretation, performance interpretation, historical interpretation, and interpretive exhibits (Knudson, Cable, & Beck, 2003). Guided interpretation occurs through personal face-to-face contact with an interpreter, while both self-guided and audio-guided interpretation rely on visitor use of non-personal media such as exhibits and signs.

A number of outcomes may arise from visitor interactions with interpretation. One such outcome, visitor satisfaction, is considered an indicator of heritage site success. MacKay and Crompton (1988) suggested that provision of high quality services, including interpretation, are essential to site success. Weiler and Black (2014) noted the need for research to isolate and identify visitor experiences and satisfaction between guided and non-guided interpretation. Further, key characteristics of visitors' prior knowledge about a site, which includes past experience, familiarity, and expertise are known to play a role in visitor outcomes, including satisfaction (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004).

Given both the importance of WHS interpretation and visitor satisfaction, this study investigated the relationship of interpretation service types and prior knowledge on visitor satisfaction. Specifically, the relationship between visitor satisfaction and interpretation among three primary interpretive service types — guided, self-guided, and audio-guided— were examined, as well as the relationship between prior knowledge and satisfaction. This research integrated both interpretive theory (Weiler & Ham, 2010) and consumer research theory (Oliver, 1993, 2014) to examine: 1) if there is a significant difference in visitor satisfaction among three interpretive service types, 2) the relationship between prior knowledge with site experience satisfaction, as well as interpretive satisfaction, and 3) the relationship between site experience satisfaction and interpretive service satisfaction.

2. Literature review

Research has explored visitor satisfaction in tourism, heritage management, recreation and leisure studies, and interpretation. Studies have demonstrated that while not solely responsible for visitor satisfaction, interpretation positively influences it (Ham & Weiler, 2007>; Hassan & Iankova, 2012; Pearce & Moscardo, 1998; Trinh & Ryan, 2013) and prior knowledge plays a positive role in the relationship (Huang, Afsharifar, & van der Veen, 2015).

2.1. Interpretation types

Freeman Tilden, widely recognized as the modern philosophical founder of the study and practice of interpretation, defined it as "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than to communicate factual information" (1977, p. 8). Conceptualized as an experiential activity, interpretation seeks to move a visitor beyond the reception of factual information towards awareness, understanding, empathy, and appreciation (Beck & Cable, 2012; Ham, 1992, 2013; Moscardo, 1996; Poria, Biran, & Reichel, 2009).

Interpretation can and does occur at a variety of natural, cultural, and historic sites managed as protected areas and commercial attractions (Beck & Cable, 2012; Ham, 2013). The nature of interpretation makes it a valuable and recognized communication tool between a site and its visitors. Given the broad nature of sites that provide interpretation for visitors, this research focused on UNESCO WHS's and the unique charter under which cultural and historic sites are mandated to provide interpretive services (ICOMOS, 2008).

While there are many different types of interpretation, a globally standardized terminology to describe them does not exist. Interpretive services consist of finished programs or products presented through a range of media that includes signs, exhibits, theatrical plays, information and communication technologies (ICT's), brochures, information kiosks, or site tours (Ham, 2013). Given the dominance of three interpretive service types, this research focused on them: 1) guided, 2) self-guided, and 3) audio-guided.

Guided interpretation is performed by a guide or interpreter who may or may not have formal specialized interpretive training. Self-guided interpretation consists of static signage and exhibits available to a visitor throughout a site. Signs and exhibits may be printed or manufactured to provide a singular non-interactive message or could provide interactive technology such as touch screens, audio, or other multi-media and multi-faceted information. Visitors select the content and quantity of interpretive information they want to read or interact with. Signage and exhibits may be presented as part of a mandatory singular path of travel or placed throughout a site for the visitors to discover and read as they desire.

Personal-use audio guides are a part of information and communication technologies (ICT's). As communications and internet technology have advanced, audio guides have become a more frequent feature of cultural and natural heritage sites (Reino, Mitsche, & Frew, 2007). Designed to be mobile and facilitate an individualized experience, interpretive content can guide the visitor through a site in a specific sequence, triggered by a visitors' location at a site, or provide interpretation as the visitor desires by entry of a location specific number into the audio guide.

2.2. Interpretation and visitor satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction research in tourism and outdoor recreation dates back to the 1960's with the majority of early studies conducted in national parks and protected areas (Manning, 2010). Satisfaction is a highly-valued outcome measure in the tourism industry (Song, Van der Veen, Li, & Chen, 2012). Satisfaction with interpretation has been considered as an element of overall visitor experience (Del Chiappa, Ladu, Meleddu, & Pulina, 2012; Ham & Weiler, 2007; Hassan & Iankova, 2012; Pearce & Moscardo, 1998; de Rojas & Camarero, 2008). In one of the earliest studies to explore the relationship between interpretation and visitor satisfaction, Pearce and Moscardo (1998) found the presence of and