Too dark to revisit? The role of past experiences and intrapersonal constraints

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Paper investigated the sub-dimensions of intrapersonal constraints to dark tourism.
- Effects of past experiences on intrapersonal constraints were examined.
- Different effects on revisit intention of past experiences were revealed.
- Paper reduced the gap that no empirical studies examine constraints in dark tourism.
- The current understandings of experience in a dark tourism context were challenged.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Laden with assorted emotional factors, dark tourism behaviors are heavily influenced by emotion-related factors, such as intrapersonal constraints. By deploying a survey of tourists visiting the Memorial of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre, which lies on the darkest edges of the dark tourism spectrum, this study probes how well one's intrapersonal constraints and past experiences relate to one's revisit intention. Results indicate that there are four sub-dimensions in intrapersonal constraints, namely culture, emotion, escape, and incuriousness. The cognitive experiences have significantly positive effects on the revisit intention either through direct effects or via the mediating variables of intrapersonal constraints, while intrapersonal constraints play an indirect-only mediating role in the relationship between affective experiences and revisit intentions. Theoretical and practical contributions of the study findings are discussed within the realm of dark tourism.

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1. Introduction

Dark tourism, the act of traveling to sites of death, disaster, and atrocities, has emerged as an academic field and in global media imaginations over the past decade or so (Stone, 2013). Dark tourism is now becoming a research brand in which scholars can locate a diverse range of death-related topics and tourist experience studies, although there remains a deficiency of empirical research efforts. As a rigorous academic field, dark tourism research remains in its infancy. Despite the recently increasing number of research papers, much of the literature remains supply-side focused, especially on the terminology and definitions of dark tourism, which provide little clarity or consensus on the essence of such a form of tourism (Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2011).

Only a handful of studies have examined the demand side of dark tourism from a tourist perspective, such as research on why people visit or do not visit dark tourism sites and how they experience/consume such sites. Moreover, there have been very few empirical studies examining tourists' constraints, experiences, and revisit intentions to dark tourism sites. To our knowledge, most research on the motivations and experiences of dark tourism does not leverage any empirical data but is rather based on conceptual frameworks and arguments. Seaton and Lennon (2004) claim that consumer-oriented research on visits to sites of death, disaster and atrocities 'has hardly even begun', and this claim is still valid now. Wight (2006) also argues that while a conceptual approach is dominant, empirical research of dark tourism is still lacking.

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Additionally, Sharpley and Stone (2009, p. 250) suggest that "there is a pressing need for empirical research into the ways in which dark sites are consumed, both in terms of tourists' motivations and experience and more generally in terms of the function of dark sites as one of many social institutions that mediate between life and death." Therefore, it is necessary to further explore and decipher travel behavior and experiences in the context of dark tourism.

Echoing the previous research calls for empirical analysis, this study plans to bridge the gap in the literature by conducting a rigorous empirical analysis on tourists' experiences of and their revisit intentions to a dark tourism site. In this study, the Memorial Hall for Compatriots killed in the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Forces of Aggression (hereafter the Memorial of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre) is selected for a case study, as this site can be considered to be at the darkest edges of the dark tourism spectrum and has a high political influence and ideology (Stone, 2006). The study begins by reviewing key topics and research findings through a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature. The concept of tourism constraints, a neglected side in consumer-oriented tourism and dark tourism research, is at the core of this study. Additionally, both cognitive and affective experiences in dark tourism are reviewed. Afterward, descriptions of the research objectives and methodology are presented, and the constructs of intrapersonal constraints and past experiences of the memorial are discussed. Last, the relationships among intrapersonal constraints, cognitive experiences, affective experiences, and revisit intentions to dark tourism sites are investigated and the results are presented.

2. Constraints and past experience in dark tourism

2.1. Constraints to tourism

Compared to the plethora of research on motivation, the study of constraints in tourism has long been overlooked (Hudson & Gilbert, 2000). In leisure studies, researchers have developed various theories of leisure constraints and have consistently and continually investigated factors hindering people's participation in and enjoyment of leisure activities. Among the theories of leisure constraints, the hierarchical model of leisure constraints is among the most influential and widely used one (Hudson & Gilbert, 2000; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008; Nyaupane, Morais, & Graefe, 2004; Zhang, Zhang, Cheng, Lu, & Shi, 2012). In this theory, Crawford and Godbey (1987) first categorize leisure constraints into three types. This three-factor framework is further extended by Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991). The first level is the intrapersonal constraints proposed by the model (e.g., lack of interests, shyness, personality needs), which are considered to be the most powerful constraints (Carroll & Alexandris, 1997; Crawford et al., 1991) leading to non-participation. The next level of the model is interpersonal constraints, which are expected to relate to a lack of companions, etc. The last type of constraints that one has to overcome is structural constraints (e.g., limited information, time shortage, limited budget, and inconvenient facilities). Crawford and his colleagues also propose that participation in leisure activities requires sequentially negotiating and overcoming the hierarchical series of these three dimension/level constraints in succession (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Crawford et al., 1991; Jackson, 1991).

Because of the great potential of this hierarchical model of leisure constraints in shedding light on travel behavior, many tourism researchers have applied this theory in a tourism context, such as nature-based tourism (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008; Nyaupane et al., 2004; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2002), sport tourism (Funk, Alexandris, & Ping, 2009), cruise tourism (Hung & Petrick, 2010), international travel (He, Li, Harrill, & Cardon, 2013; Lai, Li, & Harrill, 2013), and senior's travel (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002;

Kazeminia, Del Chiappa, & Jafari, 2013).

Throughout previous studies, among the abovementioned three dimensions of tourism constraints, the structural constraints were the most well-investigated, whereas the intrapersonal constraints attracted little research attention. For instance, Nyaupane and Andereck (2008) pinpoint three sub-constructs of structural constraints: place attributes, cost, and shortness of time. However, to our knowledge, there have been no empirical studies on whether sub-constructs exist within the intrapersonal constraints, and a "lack of interest" has always been viewed as the most widely experienced psychological reason for non-participation. Further investigation is needed to explore the underlying structure of intrapersonal constraints (Iso-Ahola, Jackson, & Dunn, 1994; Jackson, 1993).

2.2. Intrapersonal constraint to dark tourism

In dark tourism, individuals confront a number of intense intrapersonal constraints, especially emotional factors, instead of structural constraints (time shortage and limited budget) and interpersonal constraints. Furthermore, compared with intrapersonal constraints, the structural and interpersonal constraints in dark tourism are almost similar to those in "regular" tourism. Therefore, research on intrapersonal constraints to dark tourism would be of great consequence, for the experience of visiting sites associated with death, disaster, and atrocities brings about a relative sadness and discomfort (Kidron, 2013; Stone, 2012; Yankovska & Hannam, 2013). Furthermore, due to the diversity of the push factors in dark tourism, it is necessary to further investigate the sub-dimensions of intrapersonal constraints to dark tourism.

Considering the lack of research of on travel constraints to dark tourism sites, the reasons for "not" choosing a specific dark tourism site, we focus on studies on motivations to provide some enlightenment from past literature (Hudson & Gilbert, 2000). Our study mainly focuses on the intrapersonal constraints akin to the negative push factor in motivation studies, which refers to the internal, socio-psychological drivers that create the initial and preliminary desires to travel, such as rest, relaxation, excitement, novelty seeking, prestige and social interaction, in classic push–pull motivation theory. Biran, Liu, Li, and Eichhorn (2014) cite three major reasons for visiting death-related sites, with the first one being to reap the benefits of contemplating life and one's mortality (Biran et al., 2014; Stone, 2012; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). With the degree of infrastructure and normality that surrounds the supply of dark tourism, the increasingly socially acceptable gaze upon death and its re-conceptualization for entertainment, education or memorial purposes offers both individuals and the collective self a pragmatic, confrontational mechanism to begin the process of neutralizing the impact of mortality (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). In other words, compared to morbid fascination (Seaton, 1996; Seaton & Lennon, 2004) or the benefits of contemplating death, thanatophobia (fear of dark tourism sites) can be an intrapersonal constraint that demotivates people visiting dark tourism sites. Mortality-related reasons, such as learning, curiosity, obligation, national identity, social reason, remembrance and commemoration, can be identified as a second motivation for dark tourism (Biran, Poria, & Oren, 2011; Kang, Scott, Lee, & Ballantyne, 2012; Rittichainuwat, 2008). However, dark tourism, also known as 'heritage that hurts', introduces some historic facts that may not be readily accepted or may cause menticide. Past studies have also identified leisure-pursuit reasons for dark tourism (Biran et al., 2014; Dunkley et al., 2011). Leisure-pursuit motivation also exists in mass tourism; when compared to visiting sites associated with death, visiting "regular" sites may become much more ordinary and attractive. Interest in other, "regular" tourism sites can considered