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Factors influencing archaeological tourists' behavioral intentions: A conceptual framework

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Abstract

Archaeological tourism has tremendous potential to lure inbound and outbound tourists with the announcement of Lenggong Valley as a World Heritage Site in 2012. Promoting archaeological tourism needs extra effort since the public has limited idea of what the site can offer. Therefore, a series of strategies need to be developed to attract more tourists to archaeological sites. This study assesses the literature on the causal effect of destination personality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions among tourists who visit the archaeological sites. A conceptual framework was developed based on the literature propositions. This study contributes to the tourism literature by being one of the primary works in applying destination personality concept on archaeological sites. Furthermore, the findings of the research are anticipated to provide recommendations from the demand side which usually lacking for local authorities and destination marketing organizations' in their branding and positioning strategies for destinations.

Keywords:

Archaeological tourism, destination personality, satisfaction, behavioral intentions, Malaysia

1   Introduction

Cultural and natural heritage tourism including archaeotourism is the most rapidly growing area in the tourism industry (Ashworth & Larkham, 2013). As part of the vibrant

heritage and cultural tourism industry, archaeotourism has shown a commendable growth with about 20 percent of tourist trips worldwide incorporating some form of cultural, heritage or historical activities (Foxell & Trafford, 2010). However, archaeological tourism in Malaysia hardly receives outbound tourists or local tourists as compared to other popular tourist destinations. Little attention has been given to archaeotourism although this niche market promises a viable prospect that could contribute towards the growth of the Malaysian tourism industry. As reported by Ngo (2013) the Lenggong Valley archaeological site did not attract many tourists and the Lenggong Town still look lethargic despite being recognized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as World Heritage Site in June 2012.

Proper planning, aggressive promotion, and marketing activities should be done at an early stage. Although some archaeological sites were being recognized as World Heritage Site, the public has a very limited idea of the attractions offered at these sites. They were usually seen as a place to investigate the past, conduct research, dig, excavate, and document history (Balme & Wilson, 2004; Ramos & Duganne, 2000). These researchers further argue that archaeological sites seem to lack characteristics which are appealing to tourists. Also, Virto, Lopez, and Madariaga (2011) suggest that the feature of archaeological sites is one of the most important aspects that can be used to attract the public.

Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, and Kurtulus (2010) together with Murphy, Moscordo and Benckendorff (2007) suggest that brand personality can be used to develop distinct characters for tourist destinations and eventually contribute towards tourists' perception of the identity of the site (Mishra, 2010) and influence them in the evaluation of the destination's image (Sahin & Bologlu, 2011). Subsequently, the brand personality of a destination would influence tourists' satisfaction (Hultman, Skarmeas, Oghazi & Beheshti, 2015) and tourists' behavioral intention (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Usakli & Bologlu, 2011; Stokburger-Sauer, 2011).

Tourists would show more attachment to those brands which are more congruent with their personalities (Orth, Limon, & Rose, 2010; Usakli & Bologlu, 2010). However, past studies showed that efforts in promoting archaeological sites are often hampered by the sense of disconnection that tourists feel towards the objects from the past. Hence, to anthropomorphize objects or to imbue objects with human personalities could alter tourists' perception of archaeological sites when the personality traits become alive in their mind. By attributing personality to archaeological sites, it can act as a viable metaphor for creating a better association and thereby, leading to the gradual development of a unique identity for the destinations (Chen & Phou, 2013).

The concept of brand personality is basically employed by tourism marketing researcher on the destination (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). Since then many researchers have more applied it in different settings from the branding of a nation (Matzler et. al., 2016); a holiday destination (Bekk, Sporrle, & Kruse, 2016); a city (Fazil, Zulhamri, Ezhar, & Jusang 2013; Kaplan, Yurt, Generi, & Kurtulus, 2010; Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou

& Kaplanidou, 2015; a hot spring destination (Lin, 2013); to archaeological destinations (Chen & Phou, 2013; Pong & Shuhaida, 2015). In consideration of the foregoing, the current research employed personalities with humanlike characteristics to archaeological sites such as Bujang Valley (Bujang) and Lenggong Valley World Heritage Site (Lenggong) in order to develop an emotional connection between tourist and archaeological sites.

The sense of connection could help in cultivating a sense of preservation among the tourists and society. Past studies show that archaeological tourism is important not only in generating economic gains but also in providing the means for the conservation of the site (Binoy, 2011; Castellenos-Verdugo, Oviedo-Garcia, & Martin-Ruiz, 2011; Walker, 2005). Developing the sense of stewardship in preserving the site among tourists requires them to value the destination not only for what it has, such as the monuments and artefacts, but also the symbolic benefits derived from intangible offerings (e.g. the emotional connection to the monuments and artifacts) so that they are able to relate to the destination.

This study aims to develop a conceptual model of destination personality, satisfaction, and behavioral intention at archaeological sites namely Bujang and Lenggong. This study also seeks to propose the mediating effect of satisfaction on the relationship between destination personality and behavioral intentions in the context of archaeological tourism. To hypothesize the propositions, a thorough literature review was conducted.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Destination Branding

Although tourism and hospitality branding are still in its infancy (Pereira, Correia, & Schutz, 2012), it is especially crucial because the features of these products and services are easy to copy, especially when tourism operators use the functional attribute to brand destinations (McCabe, 2009). There are seven benefits of destination branding that have been identified by different authors: a)reduce the choice when making decision; b)reduce the impact of intangibility; c)convey consistency across multiple outlets and through time; d)reduce the risk factor attached to decision making about holidays (Clarke, 2000); e)facilitate precise segmentation; f)provide a focus for the integration of producer effort and; g)help people to work towards the same outcome (Upadhyaya, 2012). Previous studies found that destination branding is important for heritage tourism in differentiating one destination from its competitor to attract higher spending tourists; disseminate heritage knowledge to tourists and protect the site against destruction (Binoy, 2011; Park & Petric, 2006). Applying branding to the destination is considered new in the academic field although the concept of branding was used for products a few decades ago (Khanna, 2011).

2.2 Destination Personality

Anthropomorphism refers to the tendency that people have to imbue nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristic, motivations, intentions, or emotions (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). Previously, the effect of anthropomorphization has been investigated on computer and technological devices. It is only recently that anthropomorphization is adopted in the study of consumer behaviors especially with regards to a tourism destination. By adopting Aaker (1997) terminology of brand personality, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) define destination personality as the set of a human characteristic associated with a destination (p.127). They are the first to examine the applicability and validity of Aaker's brand personality framework in the context of a tourism destination. The authors mention that tourist destinations can be perceived as a brand because they are rich in symbolic value. A distinctive brand personality can help create a set of unique and auspicious association in consumer memory, and thus build and enhance the brand. Consumers develop a relationship with a brand based on its symbolic attributes. As a result, the brand comes to life and is no longer a passive object but an active partner in the consumer's mind (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). In their research, they found that tourists attribute personality traits to destinations, and these destinations are perceived on three dimensions: sincerity, excitement, and conviviality (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). Sincerity and excitement were found to be the main aspects in communicating the unique features to the potential tourists. Besides that, they also found that there is interaction effect of destination personality on the relationship between destination image and intention to recommend.

Recently, Kumar and Nayak (2014) developed a destination personality scale from capturing India as a tourism destination. They describe destination personality as the set of human characteristics associated with a person visiting a destination. Also, Kumar and Nayak (2014) outlined a 23-item, six dimension scale for measuring destination personality. They indicate that destination personality enables destination marketers to understand tourists' preference, intention to a destination, product-destination attitudes, travel attitude, and overall destination attitude.

2.3 Satisfaction

Satisfaction is fundamental to marketing, a notion that entails the fulfillment consumers' needs and desires. Satisfaction is defined as "the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the prior feeling about the consumption experience, and it provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment due to the pre-judgment of the product or service feature or solely from product or service" (Oliver, 2015).

Derived from the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) developed by Oliver (1980), the concept will be used to explain the outcome from the discrepancy between expectations and perceived performance before and after visiting archaeological sites in this study. Yuksel, Yuksel, and Bilim (2010) further echoed that satisfaction is an outcome of purchase in relation to the anticipated consequences. A survey carried out

by Hultman, Skarmeas, Oghazi and Beheshti (2015) explore the interrelationship between destination personality and tourist satisfaction with a sample from Taiwan which indicate destination personality encourage tourist satisfaction when visiting a destination. Chen and Phou (2013) support the notion by examining destination personality on tourists' satisfaction on tourists visiting Angkor Wat Archaeological Site at Cambodia. Based on the above conjecture, a hypothesis was developed:

H_1: Destination personality positively affects tourist's satisfaction.

2.4 Behavioral Intentions

Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) defined behavioral intention as indications of a person's readiness to perform a behavior. As proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) in their Theory of Reasoned Action, the human intention will affect the actual human behavior. In general, for tourism literature, the behavioral intention has been identified in forms such as intention to revisit, intention to recommend, and willingness to spend money. In this research, the behavioral intention will be measured based on intention to revisit, intention to recommend, and intention to preserve the destination. Intention to preserve the destination is added as it is a key concern in archaeological tourism promotion. Stokburger-Sauer's (2011) study concluded that tourists are more likely to re(visit) and promote a destination that is highly congruent with their personality and eventually strongly embedded in their mind. Recent studies echo the findings from Stockburger-Sauer's that tourists have a favorable reaction towards a destination with personification elements like emotionality, aggressiveness, sincerity, ruggedness, and so on (Matzler et al., 2016). Tourists tend to choose similarity rather than complementarity (Bekk, Sporrle & Kruse, 2015). Lin (2013), when conducting a study on the sustainable development of a hot spring destination found that of destination personality has a significant impact on revisit intention. Based on the above conjecture, a hypothesis was developed:

H_2: Destination personality positively affects tourist's behavioral intention.

2.5 The relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions and the mediating effect of satisfaction.

In tourism literature, high levels of satisfaction result in increased behavioral intentions and future visitation (Kim, Han, & Byon, 2009). It is believed that satisfaction leads to repeat purchase and positive word-of-mouth recommendation. Tourist satisfaction is considered as one of the crucial variables to sustain competitive business in the tourism industry because it affects the selection of destinations, consumption of products and services (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Rajesh (2013) together with Chi and Qu (2008) support the argument by stating that the concept of tourism satisfaction has been one of the key areas of tourism research for more than four decades. Satisfaction is also commonly used as the framework to investigate as a mediator in tourism study when testing the relationship between satisfaction and destination image (Chi & Qu, 2008); place attachment (Prayag & Ryan, 2012); destination personality (Hultman,

Skarmeas, Oghazi, & Beheshti (2015); tourist experience (Altunel & Erkut, 2015). Based on the above conjecture, two hypotheses were developed:

H_3: Tourist's satisfaction positively affects tourist's behavioral intentions.

H_4: Tourist's satisfaction mediates the relationship between destination personality and behavioral intentions.

Based on the above hypotheses, a conceptual framework was developed. The conceptual framework represents the propositions identified from the literature reviews. Figure 1 below displays the conceptual framework.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

3 Methodology

A self-administered questionnaire survey was planned to be employed to test the framework. The instruments will be pre-tested and revised to ensure content validity. A 42-item brand personality scale from Aaker (1997) and a 23-item destination personality scale from Kumar and Nayak (2014) will be employed to measure the destination personality. All items will be measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale from "Highly Undescriptive" to "Highly Descriptive." Once the data is collected, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmation Factor Analysis (CFA) will be conducted to delineate the underlying factors.

4 Conclusion

To ensure the competitiveness in attracting tourists, efforts in promoting archaeological sites require a perspective from demand sides is desirable. The current research is expected to provide insightful information to understand better tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intention to meet the ever-changing demand from tourism market. Also, the findings from this research will help target different segments of tourists. Fan (2006) affirmed that defining a target market is crucial because some aspects of a destination may seem positive to one segment but negative to another. Due to the site's history and background, it is always perceived that archaeological site is only suitable for educational purposes. Therefore, its tourists are limited to only students who are on study trips. As such, the researchers hope to help archaeological sites in targeting a different segment of tourists in the current study by changing the public's perception towards the former. Moreover, positioning tourism destination by using functional values has become less helpful in branding strategies because functional values are easily substituted or imitated thus making it hard for destinations to differentiate its identity (McCabe, 2009; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Therefore, the present research is looking at archaeological sites from the perspectives of its symbolic values by studying the brand personality of archaeological destination.

Also, supply and demand are equally indispensable in the marketing of archaeological tourism destinations. Boukas (2012) stated that most of the studies in archaeological tourism deal with the supply side of heritage sites and its management and little effort are put on the demand side even though the archaeological tourism is tightly connected to the relationship between supply and demand. Consequently, the present research is looking from the demand's side i.e. tourists' perspective so as to help the destination marketing organizations know more about tourists' demands and plan their trip accordingly. Destination marketing organizations should take into consideration what are the factors that lead to tourists' satisfaction and could influence their behavioral intention toward archaeological sites. In addition, the researchers hope that this study will help in attracting a different segment of visitors to archaeological sites and help in preserving the sites, thus contributing towards sustainable archaeological tourism.

5 About the author

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