UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF TOURIST ATTRACTION SEQUNCING TO ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBLE TOURIST BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the preliminary findings of a study undertaken with a view to understand how visiting eco–cultural attractions in a destination area at the beginning of the trip conditions tourists' attitude towards the destination. It was found that tourists who visit attractions of eco–cultural importance in a destination area prior to visiting leisure attractions within the same destination area are more likely to demonstrate responsible behavior when they actually visit leisure attractions. Traditionally, leisure tourists are perceived as high impact and less desirable. From the sustainable development standpoint, the degree of negative impacts at the leisure attraction sites can be mitigated if leisure tourists are transited through the eco–cultural attraction sites. Further implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: Eco–cultural tourism, leisure tourism, responsible tourism, holiday attachment, and destination marketing.

INTRODUCTION

In order to be successfully promoted in the targeted markets, a destination must be favorably differentiated from its competition, or positively positioned, in the minds of the tourists. Tourists

employ destination images to differentiate and store meanings that they hold for tourism destinations (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). Image is a mental construct developed in a negotiated process among stimuli in the environment and a complex set of socio-cultural and biological filters in the mind of the perceiver (Reynolds, 1965). It is also a way of non-discursively storing the complex set of meanings held by an individual about a person, thing, or quality (MacInnis and Price, 1987).

Favorable destination images lead to both first and subsequent visitations (Chon, 1990). As noted by Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1993), a place's tourist image and it's general image often go together: if a place has got a bad reputation as a tourist destination, this reputation would negatively impact in that place's campaign for typically non-touristic initiatives as well. This indicates that the image of superior destination images are much more widespread, often far beyond the direct and immediate tourism stakeholder groups.

Currently, media plays a crucial role in destination image development (Frias, Rodriguez, and Castaneda, 2008). Media influence could be through paid commercials or through user generated content in the social media platforms. It could also be through expert opinions or through personal feedbacks from kith and kin who visited the destination of interest in the past. When a tourist actually visits a destination, firsthand experience modifies preconceived images. To some degree, the subjective evaluation of firsthand experience may be modulated by the images held by the tourist prior to the trip (Gunn, 1988).

Developing and communicating the desired destination brand image is one of the key activities of destination management organizations (DMOs). Long back, Gardner and Levy (1955) stated that marketers should select a 'brand meaning' and operationalize the same in the form of a brand image before entering into the market and that the actual products should be the reverse engineered versions of such meanings and images. Traditionally, this has remained as a dictum in branding theory.

However, this model has deficiencies when it comes to marketing products such as tourism destinations. In the case of most natural and cultural destinations, the product is 'given': in other words, destination marketers cannot replicate the recipe of success stipulated by Gardner and Levy (1955). Practically, only built attractions such as theme parks, casinos, and cruise lines can follow that recipe. Despite this, DMO's spend millions of dollars every year developing and managing destination image, with varied degrees of success.

Since the image of most tourist destinations is a given entity, a substantial effort of DMOs turn into erasing aspects of images that are against the vision of destination held by major stakeholder groups. For instance, a local community, an important stakeholder group, may want to change an image that their destination is prostitution-friendly.

The present paper reports the effect of a natural, in-built, mechanism in the architecture of many destinations that could eliminate negative images without any expensive DMO intervention. The study is carried out in Goa, India, which is a world-renowned leisure tourism destination. Goa is also famous for its century's old Christian churches. It has also got small pockets that hold rich diversity of flora and fauna. Our research reveals that tourists who visit these eco-cultural spots during the first segment of the trip generally demonstrate more responsible behavior for the rest of their stay in Goa. Also, they have a more

favorable attitude towards the sustainable development of the destination and return home with a spirit of ownership for the betterment of this tourist destination.

RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR: ECO-CULTURAL VERSUS LEISURE TOURISTS

Eco-cultural tourism is a form of tourism wherein the ecological and cultural aspects of a landscape are combined to create a site for tourists (Wallace and Russell, 2004). Studies show that eco-cultural tourism is a community friendly business and is socio-culturally, economically, and environmentally sustainable (Butler and Hinch, 2007). Eco-cultural tourism attracts especially those individuals who hold strong humanitarian and environmental values (Berendse and Roessingh, 2007). More remarkably, eco-cultural tourism is a powerful force of 'conversion': The stay in a natural-cultural area itself is sufficient to raise environmental concern and conservation ethic to some extent. Properly implemented, an exposure like this has the potential to convert individuals with low humanitarian and environmental ethic to the apostles of these values (Grossberg, Treves, and Naughton-Treves, 2003).

Leisure tourists, on the other hand, are known to be 'mass tourists' who consider that they have the right to be intrusive, exploitative, and destructive (Watson and Kopachevsky, 1994). In fact, most leisure attractions are designed with a view to trigger and amplify the self-driven, hyper-consumptive behavior of tourists. Most leisure tourism products are accompanied by discounts or extra services designed to stimulate consumption (Wong and Yeh, 2009). Leisure tourism demand is found to be more sensitive to price and they tend to value experiences in terms of the single yardstick of 'value for money': they seem to hold that they have the right to exploit since they have paid for it (Divisekera, 2010).

What shapes an individual's disposition towards the environment is too complex to be visualized through one single framework. However, it is generally accepted that environment conditions a person's attitude and behavior (Pearce, 2009). Greater restorative effects arise from experiencing nature and culture than from the experience of leisure oriented human-made settings (Hartig, Mang, and Evans, 1991). Many environmental problems can be traced to maladaptive human behavior (Skogen, 1999). Understanding the dynamics of conditioning is important for tourism practice: for instance, tourists conditioned by a soul soothing environment in the beginning of a trip may continue to exhibit more constructive thoughts and actions during the rest of that trip. Attracting such tourists may hold the key to the sustainable development of destinations, too.

However, this line of thinking is not without caveats: previous research has indicated that the impact of short-term environmental conditioning generally has short-term behavioral modification (Michon, Chebat, and Turley, 2005). Typically, tourists qualify for this situation: the minds of tourists undergo liminal transitions under the influence of the touristic landscape – transitions that involve short – term playful inversions of their regular selves (Urry, 2002). If this is the case, a question that needs to be answered is whether the aforesaid argument still holds. In our view, it is unlikely that behavioral shifts and environmental changes happen simultaneously. For example, when a tourist moves from a nightclub servicescape to a fine dining servicescape within the same building complex, it is natural to take some time in order to adjust to the new environment.

HOLIDAY ATTACHMENT AND RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

Attachment is an important relationship orientation variable and has is a multidimensional property representing the types and degrees of linkages between individuals and the object of consumption, existing neither in the individual themselves, not in the object, nor in the context, but rather in the inter-section of all three (Schultz, Kleine, and Kerman, 1989). The construct of holiday attachment refers to the degree to which holidaymakers are attached to the holidays that they purchase and experience. It is technically defined as a tourists' perceived significance of a holiday based on its ability to fulfill their functional, identity and contextual needs (George, 2005). Holiday attachment may be distinguished from the more mainstream term 'holiday satisfaction' (Tribe and Snaith 1998) as satisfaction is generally understood as instantaneous gratification from particular service encounters (eg: satisfied with the performance of the waitress at restaurant R today) whereas attachment refers to the longstanding and deeply held perceptions.

The components of holiday attachment combine the salient beliefs individuals have about a holiday and thus constitute an important basis for understanding their behavior, especially patronage behavior (George, 2005). The nomological validity analysis performed by George (2005) during the scale refinement process also shows that holiday attachment is a strong predictor of responsible conduct at the destination. In other words, holiday attachment scale may be used to operationalize tourists' responsible (or otherwise) behavior at destination areas.

The Hypothesis:

Taking cues from the discussion thus far, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Tourists who visit attractions of eco-cultural importance in a destination area prior to visiting leisure attractions within the same destination area tend to demonstrate a higher degree of holiday attachment.

THE STUDY

The study was conducted in Goa, India, during the summer of 2009. Located in South West India in the region known as the Konkan, Goa is the smallest State of India in terms of area. In terms of per capita income, Goa is the richest State in India, too. Goa still exhibits the cultural influence of the Portuguese, who first landed in the early 16th century as merchants, and conquered it soon thereafter. The Portuguese overseas territory of Portuguese India existed for about 450 years, until it was annexed by India in 1961.

Goa is a major mass tourism destination in India, which Wilson (1997) aptly described as a 'plethora of paradoxes.' Renowned for its beaches, places of worship and world heritage architecture, Goa is visited by large numbers of international and domestic tourists each year. It also has rich flora and fauna, owing to its location on the Western Ghats range, which is classified as a biodiversity hotspot. Despite the incidences of so many ill-effects of tourism (McCabe and Stocks, 1998). Residents of Goa, especially the majority Roman Catholic community, have wholeheartedly welcomed international inbound tourism development, since it gives them a unique opportunity to empathize or identify with their own colonial past (Newman, 1998).

To measure holiday attachment, the 27-item holiday attachment scale developed by George (2005) was used. This scale was originally developed in the context of India and has passed all essential tests of validity and reliability. In addition, respondents were asked how they allocated the total holidaying time and

the sequence in which they would visit attraction areas. The questionnaire also included questions to extract the vital demographic profiles of the respondents. There were questions about their past visit(s) to Goa and their future visit intentions, too. The questionnaire ended with an open-ended question to summarize their overall feelings about Goa as a destination.

Questionnaires were handed to tourists at the arrival departure terminals of the airports, at the city center, near the State tourism information office, near the historical cultural monuments, and at the Salim Ali bird sanctuary. In total, 264 responses were received.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data gathered was analyzed using SPSS. To test the hypothesis, discriminant analysis was used. Respondents were classified into two groups, one group representing tourists who visited eco-cultural attractions first and the other group representing tourists who visited mainstream leisure attractions first.

The output of the analysis is presented below in table 1.a and 1.b:

Table 1.a Summary statistics for the groups

Type of Attraction		Mean	Std. Deviation	Valid N (listwise)	
				Unweighted	Weighted
Eco- Cultural Attractions	Holiday Attachment	3.5446	1.12716	101	101.000
Leisure Attractions	Holiday Attachment	2.4091	1.18053	154	154.000
Total	Holiday Attachment	2.8588	1.28424	255	255.000

The summary statistics indicate that, out of 255 valid respondents, 154 visited leisure attractions prior to visiting eco-cultural attractions. As informed by theory, the holiday attachment score for those who visited eco-cultural attractions first are higher than that for those who visited leisure attractions first (3.54 versus 2.41, in a 5 point scale).

The Wilks' Lambda score for the test of equality of means is significant ($F=58.47$, $p<0.05$) and this enables us to generalize the above finding. The output of the analysis is presented in Table 1.b.

Table 1.b Test of equality of means

	Wilks' Lamda	F	dfl	df2	Sig.
Holiday Attachment	812	58.470	1	253	.000

Thus, the analysis reveals that holiday attachment is a predictor of the group membership (visiting leisure attractions first versus visiting eco-cultural attractions first). Using the reverse argument, the order of a tourist visiting leisure and eco-cultural attractions provides us vital cues about his or her holiday attachment. Since holiday attachment is known to be a significant predictor of responsible tourist behavior, we can restate the argument to mean that individuals who visit eco-cultural attractions during the first leg of their trip are more responsible in their touristic pursuits than their counterparts who visit leisure attractions first.

Some Miscellaneous observations:

1. The responses indicate that tourists who visited attractions of eco-cultural importance in a destination area during the final segment of their previous visit would behave more responsibly

when they revisit leisure attractions in the same destination area in the future. Some of the qualitative comments that we received in response to an open-ended question on their overall feelings indicated guilt and repentance: many of the respondents wondered why they did not know the 'real' Goa until they reached the last segment of the trip. A couple of respondents wondered if there is a hidden agenda behind the industry not keen on showing tourists the unique eco-cultural heritage of Goa beyond beaches, bars, and nightlife.

2. When the data set was divided into two groups of domestic and international tourists, we could see that the proposed relationship was much weaker for the domestic tourist group. While we do not have causal evidence, one potential reason could be that most domestic respondents (Hindus by far in religious orientation) consider Goan cultural heritage as the remnant of European colonialism. It must be noted that Goa was a Portuguese colony since 1510 until 1961 when India annexed it back.

CONCLUSION

Environmentally significant behavior (ESB) is an important outcome that evolves out of this scheme of things. The term ESB refers to the extent to which human behavior changes the existing relationships in an ecosystem (Stern, 1997). This study reveals that there is a positive association between one's order of visiting eco-cultural and leisure attractions gives us cures about his or her attachment to the holiday destination and consequently responsible behavior. It must be admitted, this does not necessarily mean that prior exposure to places of eco-cultural importance

will lead to more desirable ESBs for the remaining part of a holiday trip.

Yet, this is a real possibility, as corroborated by the evidences we gathered during the qualitative interactions we had with the tourists.

Environmentally and socio-culturally sensitive tourists are much less likely to leave negative footprints upon the destinations. Since destination carrying capacity is a function not only of the tourist numbers but also of the intensity of tourist actions, a destination can afford to receive more number of low impact tourists (Saveriades, 2000). This way, destinations gain the benefit of more tourist numbers, too. Another benefit, especially for locally owned SMEs, is that such tourists are less price conscious and prefer to buy local products and experience local services (Tosun et al., 2007).

The question is how DMOs can entice tourists to visit eco-cultural attractions first and mend them selves before venturing for more impact-oriented mass leisure activities. This must be fairly easy for group tourists who come to the destination guided by a tour operating company, provided the DMO or any other agency concerned can influence the company. Through guide training programs, tour guides may be sensitized about the importance of taking tourists to eco-cultural attractions at the beginning of the trip. Another suggestion is that local tourist information counters should be stacked with readymade itineraries that list eco-cultural spots at the beginning.

These actions share certain characteristics of 'demarketing', a form of marketing that is applied in order to reduce undesirable demand or redistribute demand across a time period. In fact, demarketing techniques are often employed by tourism destinations to achieve sustainable development goals. It cannot be

neglected that the term demarketing has acquired a negative implication: for example, a demarketing tactic often used is to discourage or restrict certain segments of tourists from visiting certain destinations (Clements, 1989). Thus, beyond demarketing, the present paper is on how environmental behavior is shaped as a result of the interaction between personality, situational, cultural, and environmental variables.

Finally, the association we propose is inadequate for leisure destinations that do not have eco–cultural attractions. For the benefit of such destinations, we need to search for alternative solutions.

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