

International Tourists Revisit Intention: A Case of the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

The connection between past travel experience and tourists revisits behavioral intentions has not been widely explored, but the existing studies suggest a close relationship between them. Tourism-related products of a country can equally be construed to have effects on the attitudes of the tourists at the end of their actual visitation and satisfaction of a tourist with his or her travel experiences contribute to loyalty to a particular destination. It has also been acknowledged that destination image affects visitors' subjective perception, consequent behaviour and destination choice. This paper is reviewing the constructs and dimensions which associated with international tourist revisit intention using the United Arab Emirates as contextual study setting and proposed the study conceptual framework.

Keywords:

Tourist, revisit intention, United Arab Emirates

1 Introduction

Consumer behavioural studies revealed that past experiences influence the satisfaction (Mittal, Kumar, & Tsiros, 1999; Licata, Mills, & Suran 2001). The link between past experiences, customer satisfaction, and company success has historically been a matter of faith, and numerous satisfaction studies have also supported the case (Hill & Alexander, 2000). Customer experiences and satisfaction has always been considered an essential business goal because it was assumed that satisfied customers would buy more. However, many companies have started to notice a high customer defection despite high satisfaction ratings (Taylor, 1998; Oliver, 1999). This

phenomenon has prompted scholars (Jones & Sasser, 1995; Oliver 1999) to criticize the mere satisfaction studies and call for a paradigm shift to the quest of repurchase as a strategic business goal. As a result, customer experiences and satisfaction measurement has recently been displaced by the concept of customer loyalty, primarily because loyalty is seen as a better predictor of repurchase behaviour.

In tourism perspectives, previous experience is found to have given significant impact on future tourists' visitation behaviour (Oppermann, 2000) and an actual visitation which is construed as a past travel experience to be a primary source of influence on revisit behavioural intentions (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998). Tourism-related products of a country can equally be construed to have effects on the attitudes of the tourists at the end of their actual visitation and satisfaction of a tourist with his or her travel experiences contribute to loyalty to a particular destination (Pritchard & Howard, 1997; Bramwell, 1998). Oppermann (2000) noted that tourist loyalty towards a destination is reciprocated by their intention to revisit the destination apart from a willingness to recommend it to others. This paper reviews the constructs and dimensions which associated with international tourist revisit intention using the United Arab Emirates as the contextual study setting and proposed a conceptual framework.

2 Literature review

2.1 Tourist Total Experience and Revisit Intention

The connection between past travel experience and future travel behaviour has not been explored widely, but the existing studies suggest a close relationship between them (Dolnicar & Huybers 2013; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oppermann, 2000; Sonmez & Graefe, 1998). Oppermann (2000) states tourists' loyalty towards a destination is reciprocated by his or her intention to revisit the destination apart from his or her willingness to recommend it to others. Past travel experience appears to be a powerful influence on behavioural intentions and individuals with past travel experiences to various destinations may become more confident as a result of their experience and thus, be more likely to travel back to those places of interests (Dolnicar, Coltman & Sharma, 2013; He & Song, 2009; Sonmez & Graefe, 1998) and repeat tourists are expected to be more likely than first-timers to choose the same destination in the future (Juaneda, 1996). The first-timers cannot be entirely relied upon as they may visit other destinations. In other words, repeat visitation can be developed, and it is contingent upon their total experience with promotion, price, core products, facilities and front employees while they were on vacation for the first time.

2.2 Destination Images

It has also been widely acknowledged that destination image affects tourists' subjective perception, consequent behaviour and destination choice (Assaker, & Hallak, 2013; Chi, 2012; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Researchers modeled image as a function of marketing information or other external stimuli (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991;

Gartner, 1989). For example, in one of the first conceptualizations of the destination image, Gunn (1972) proposed that destination images are formed from the types of information that tourists received. It is argued that destination images are divided into two levels: 1) organic and; 2) induced images. An organic image is formed as a result of exposure to stimuli from non-tourism market-oriented information whereas an induced image derives from conscious efforts of marketers and advertisers to develop promote and advertise a destination. Fakeye and Crompton (1991) states that information as an important determinant which distinguished an organic image from an induced image.

In tourism, tourists develop a more complex and differentiated image from induced image throughout the actual visitation experience. Tasci et al. (2007) contend that the composition of tourism images as advanced by place image has made inroads into the gambit of tourism marketing. Product-country image or simply country image and tourism destination image are both focusing on place image (Gallarza et al., 2002). In this sense, place image relates to the buyer attitudes towards products from various origins. In another word, destination image represents the effects of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has on a destination.

In line with above notion, tourists' behavioural intention is expected to be partly conditioned by the image that they have of destinations. The image will influence tourists in the process of choosing a destination, the subsequent evaluation of the trip and in their future intentions. Destination image exercises a positive influence on perceived quality and satisfaction. A positive image deriving from positive travel experiences would result in a positive evaluation of a destination (Gallarza et al., 2002; Tasci et al., 2007). Tourist satisfaction will improve if the destination has a positive image and destination image also affects tourists' behavioural intentions. Pakaleva (1998) on the other hand contended that more favorable image would lead to higher likelihood to return to the same destination as long it is free from any destruction or environmental turbulences.

2.3 Tourists Responses

It is also evident that satisfaction and commitment with travel experience contribute to destination loyalty (Dolnicar, Coltman, & Sharma, 2013; Hosany, & Gilbert, 2010; Bramwell 1998; Oppermann 2000; Pritchard & Howard 1997). The degree of tourists' satisfaction and commitment to a destination is reflected in their intentions to revisit the destination and in their willingness to recommend it to others (Oppermann, 2000). Tourists' positive experiences of service, products, and other resources provided by tourism destinations could produce repeat visits as well as positive word-of-mouth effects to friends and relatives. Recommendations for previous visits can be taken as the most reliable information sources for potential tourists. Recommendations to other people (word-of-mouth) are also one of the most often sought types of information for people interested in travelling.

On a different note, tourist commitment which is preceded by an act of planning to visit is an important aspect of response as planning in itself is a commitment to the intended behaviour (Warshaw & Davis, 1985). Most scholars view relationship commitment as being represented by the following dimensions: 1) expectation of continuity (Doney & Cannon, 1997); 2) desire of continuity (Geysken, Steenkamp, Scheer & Kumar, 1996) and; 3) willingness to revisit (Siguaw, Simpson & Baker, 1998).

3 Issue relevant to the United Arab Emirates

It is without a doubt that UAE is blessed with a location that is strategic and it provides a bridge to the connecting link between Europe and not only the Indian subcontinent but also to both the the Far East and Africa (Henderson, 2006). It is still somewhat a melting of culture as the population originates from different cultures but somehow the dominant culture remains Arabic despite the fact that even the Arabs themselves are from different corners of the Arab world. Against such a backdrop, UAE appears to be a beneficiary to the convenience to air travel which has contributed towards the significantly increased the number of visitors (DTCM, 2011). In line with the above notion, the tourism industry has contributed towards a steadily increasing percentage of United Arab Emirates Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at 20 percent (UAE Economic Report, 2012). Some views are mind-boggling when they claim that tourism is expected to similarly important as oil exports as a major source of revenue shortly for UAE. Although this only a prediction, trends showing that despite the recession the arrivals of tourists are still increasing with the unrelenting campaign by UAE Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM, 2011). Since January 1997, after the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM, 2009) taking over from the Tourism and Trade Promotion Council, there has been renewed focus on the worldwide promotion of UAE as an ideal tourist destination apart from being a thriving commercial and business centre and very attractive for Dubai property investors. What followed after the takeover was the setting up of the DTCM representative offices in many countries across the globe as well as participation in numerous international tourism fairs to promote the country.

UAE as a country is also with rich culture and history and exciting place to visit with numerous events held throughout the year. Dubai Shopping Festival and Dubai Desert Classic are unique to the city, and UAE with other national festivals are vibrant for the tourists. The Dubai Desert Classic normally takes place at the Emirates Golf Club, and this is one of the main golf tournaments not only attracting golfers but visitors around the world (Sharpley, 2002). Emirates also is renowned as one of the largest horse races in the entire world with US6 million of the winning the price. Besides these, the catchphrase of the event is also “shop, save and celebrate”, and most of the city’s malls and other outlets offer massive discounts on their products while the activities held during this time are divided into categories such as arts, food, nature and adventure. Also, apart from being a thriving commercial and business centre and very attractive for property investors, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Fujairah are three major cities

and district are influx with local and international tourists, ideal tourist destination and creating its images.

According to DTCM (2009), 3.95 million visitors visited UEA in the first six months of 2009 compared to 1 million visitors annually in the last ten years and only 600 thousand during the 80's. Similarly, the demand for hotel room tremendously increased with 255 international hotels in the city of Dubai alone with a total of 17,253 rooms compared to less than 100 in the last decade. Not to exaggerate with strong marketing efforts, UAE not only considered successfully attract the foreign investors but becoming the most popular tourism destination in the Arab region and the developed its tourism image. Despite the above developments, to what extent tourist experience on promotion, price, core products, facilities and frontline employees provide by the UEA tourism organizations, hotels, destinations and others and the impact of their level of satisfaction, commitment toward revisit intention are not known. In other words, can the visit of the international tourists' to UEA, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Fujairah in particular and their experience with promotion, price, core products, facilities and frontline employees) together with country, destination and hotel image along with their satisfaction, commitment be translated into revisit intention ?. In short, four questions are posted which also related to the problem statement of this proposed study:

- i. Does total tourist experience whose underlying dimensions are promotion, price, core products, facilities and frontline employees have a positive relationship with the tourism images which comprises of the country image, destination image, and hotel image?
- ii. How do tourism images affect tourist satisfaction and commitment most importantly their revisit intention in the face of the unfavorable occupancy rate and declining revenue per available hotel?
- iii. To what extent does the total tourist experience can create tourist satisfaction and commitment?
- iv. How can the hotel operators, the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTMC) of UAE and travel agencies ensure that the country image, destination image, and hotel image are sustained to generate tourist responses which will develop into positive revisit intention?

All those questions warrant an empirical investigation as the influence of the individual underlying dimensions of total tourist experience (promotion, price, core products, facilities and frontline employees) on tourism images (country, destination and hotel) and tourists responses (satisfaction and commitment) and the impact of these attributes on tourist revisit intention need holistically be investigated.

4 Conceptual framework

Based on the literature and the issue of the United Arab Emirates tourism perspectives, the conceptual framework is proposed in Figure 1.

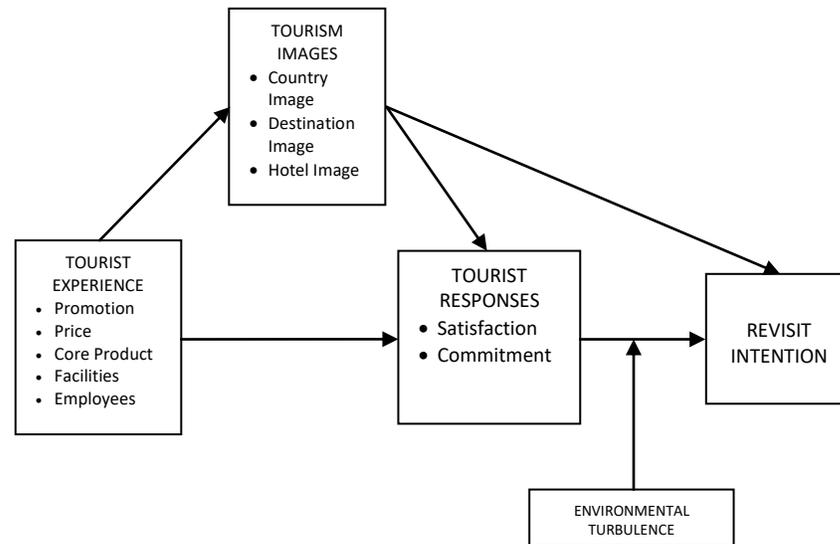


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

This conceptual study framework which is also referred to hypotheses diagrammed depicts the role of total tourist experience in creating a country image, destination image, hotel image and the consequences it has on tourist responses and his or her intention to revisit. The total tourist experience is operationalised by 1) promotion; 2) price; 3) core products; 4) facilities and; 5) frontline employees whereas the underlying dimensions of tourist responses are: 1) tourist satisfaction; 2) tourist commitment and; 4) revisit intention.

5 Conclusion

As this study is still under investigation, significant academic contributions to the existing body of knowledge will be accomplished by way of testing the hypotheses and confirming whether they are supported or rejected and relating the findings to empirical evidence drawn from the literature. From the practical perspective, the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTMC) of UAE and its representative offices and travel agencies may take heed to the findings for instance, by adopting human resource strategies so that frontline employees are productive and motivated enough to help the tourism industry to create its tourism images. Its aggressive promotion should be able to induce positive image among potential visitors by providing adequate information on UAE as a tourist destination which is a prerequisite to destination selection and visitation.

As tourist satisfaction is found to be insufficient to bring about loyalty and revisit intention, then it is incumbent upon the policy-makers to develop a loyalty programme so that both tourist commitment and satisfaction are enhanced to ensure that their revisit intention is more significant. The primary interest of the stakeholders is to improve the tourism images as a marketing tool to bring more and more visitors to UAE and to inculcate or implant their revisit intention.

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