The Predictors of the Willingness to Recommend a Visit for Diversified Tourism Attractions

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Abstract

The predictors of a positive word-of-mouth experience as an important destination loyalty factor among tourist in the Šumava and South Bohemian Touristic Regions were studied via structural equation modelling. The perception of quality, on-site experience, and the perception of value as the mediators between the motivation to visit and the word-of-mouth experience were studied. The pleasant 'natural' environment, the history, the accessibility, and the closeness were found as the pull motivation factors. Social gathering, education, self-reflection, and relaxation were revealed as the push motivation factors. Speaking of the common-place factors, the complexity, the novelty, and the density were all identified as factors of perception of the visited environment. The on-site experience is given by pleasure, arousal, and dominance feelings. The model 'motivation to visit → quality of environment → on-site experience → perceived value of environment → satisfaction with visit → willingness to recommend the visit' was found as being appropriate for the collected data.

Keywords

motivation, experience, loyalty, quality, Czech Republic

JEL classification: L83, Q26

Introduction

Tourists are the most important pillar of tourism development in destinations. They are the consumers of touristic products that give benefits to entrepreneurs and the economy of the destination (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). As the competition among the tourism destinations is permanently on the increase (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003), destinations are forced to maintain the present visitors and attract the new ones as well (Webster & Ivanov, 2014), together with the increasing pressure on commercialising the remarkable natural and historical attractions. One of the reasons is that the attention of many managers is turned towards the activities related to the support of the image of these destinations (Bonn et al., 2005), in which both the natural and historical attractions play an important part as motivators. One of the most important factors of the destination image is the comparison of this image with the real experience during a visit. This comparison influences the satisfaction with the visit. That satisfaction influences the loyalty to the destination: the willingness to return and the willingness to recommend the visit (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The loyalty to a destination becomes a fundamental strategic component for organizations (Chi & Qu, 2008). The recommendations to other people (via word-of-mouth) are mainly one of the most often sought after types of information for people who are interested in travelling (Hui et al., 2007).

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between the presence of natural and historical attractions and destination loyalty.

Theoretical basis

The willingness to recommend the visit is one of the common measures of the destination loyalty as a further intended action being influenced by the visit to the destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007). The theory suggests that there should be several hierarchized predictors of the willingness to recommend a visit (= positive word-of-mouth). That is why it is better to determine the relationship between the presence of natural and historical attractions and the destination loyalty via several stages than to make a simple comparison of those two variables – for discussion of this issue consult Denstadli and Jacobsen (2010). First of all, word-of-mouth is the outcome of the satisfaction with a visit; the more positive the satisfaction is, the stronger the willingness to recommend the visit to a destination is (e.g. Bigné et al., 2001). There are several other constructs linking presence of natural and historical attractions and satisfaction with the visit.

Several direct predictors of satisfaction have been found: the perceived value (e.g. He & Song, 2009); the perceived quality (e.g. Yuan & Jang, 2008); and the on-site experience (e.g. Bigné et al., 2005; Denstadli & Jacobsen, 2010). Various ties among the above mentioned constructs (the perceived value, the perceived quality and on site experience) were reported. Most researchers agreed that the perceived value is the best predictor of satisfaction (e.g. Chen & Tsai, 2007; He & Song, 2009). The roles of the perceived quality and the on-site experience are still not clear. However, the on-site experience is

considered to be a mediator between the perceived quality and the perceived value in tourism (e.g. Jang & Namkung, 2009).

The perceived quality is influenced by the image of the visited site most of all (e.g. Bigné et al., 2001; Chan & Tsai, 2007). The image is the reason why the visitor comes to the site. He or she visits the sites for certain purposes. These purposes are considered to be motives. The motives can be divided into two distinct groups (Goossens, 2000): those tourists who are pushed to visit a place due to their emotional needs (the so-called "push" motives), and those who are pulled by the benefits the place could offer them (the so-called "pull" motives).

Although there are many ties among the above mentioned constructs, the simplest model is usually needed for a specific practical application. Thus, the following hypothesis has been formed: "It is possible to understand the variability of the willingness to recommend the visit (measured by positive and negative word-of-mouth experience) by the direct non-branched structural model – motivation to visit → quality of environment → on-site experience → perceived value of environment → satisfaction with the visit → willingness to recommend the visit."

The Šumava Mountains and South Bohemian Tourist Regions (Cetkovský et al., 2007) were chosen as the study areas (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Study area and surveyed localities
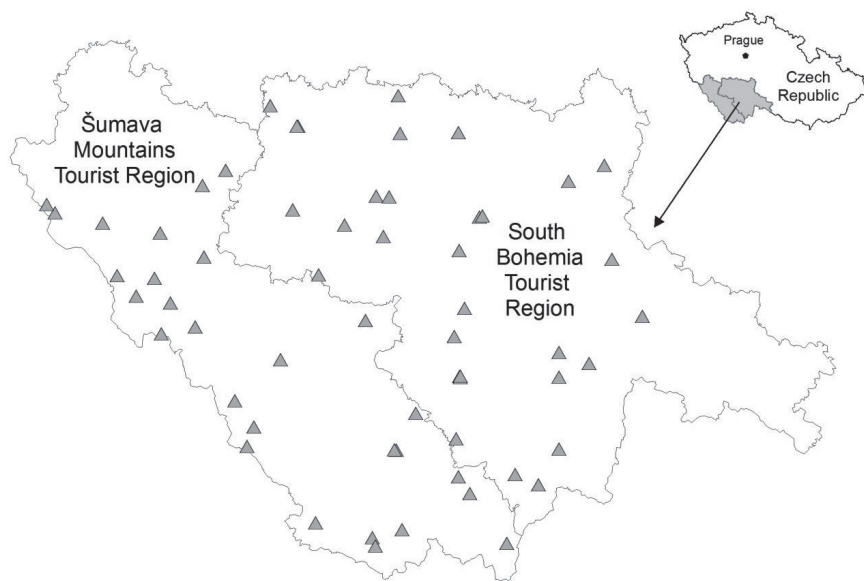
Source: own materials, Czech Statistic Office (2009)

Methodology

The data needed to fulfil the set aim and to test the set hypothesis were collected in the field by means of structured interviews with the tourists.

Data collection

The survey was held during the summer tourist season (from June to September) from 2009 to 2013 throughout the Šumava and South Bohemia Tourist Regions (59 sites, Figure 1) and 3,776 questionnaires were collected. The refusal rate was 15 %.

The research was conducted both during the workdays and the weekends to ensure the near random sample. Every visitor was approached due to the circumstances of the low daily volume of visitors. Every fifth visitor was approached in case of the medium volume of visitors. Every tenth visitor was approached in case of the high volume of visitors. The aim was to obtain 64 completed questionnaires from each site.

Questionnaire

The motivation construct was based on the traditional push and pull motivations. The partial push and pull motives were adapted from previous studies (Petrick et al., 2001; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The respondents were asked to rate the importance of 16 push motives and 14 pull motives. The motivation to visit was measured by a five-point Likert-like Scale with "1 = Not at all important" and "5 = Very important".

The perception of the quality of the environment of the site was identified by means of the Mehrabian-Russell general measure of information rate. The reason why that scale was used instead of the "classic" quality measure tools is the generality of its use. If one understands quality to be "a measure of the provider's performance" (Petrick, 2004, p. 399), then the quality results from the performance of the environment of the visited place. The corrected 14 seven-point scales of semantic differential by Donovan and Rossiter (1982) and Donovan et al. (1994) were employed.

The main components of the on-site experience are emotions or moods. The leading environmental psychology approach (the Mehrabian-Russell Model) was used for the measurement of the emotions that were experienced in these particular locations. The original 18 three dimensional Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance measures were used (Bakker et al., 2014). The original seven-point scale semantic differential was applied.

These constructs were completed with questions on the perceived value, the satisfaction and the willingness to recommend the visit. The following question was used as a measure of the perceived value: "Was this visit worth your time, money, and effort?" (Chen & Tsai, 2007), and measured on a five-point Likert Scale (1 = Definitely not, 5 = Definitely yes). As for the measure of satisfaction, the expectation-disconfirmation model was used. The satisfaction was assessed by asking the question: "Overall, how satisfied were you with your visit?" (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). It was measured on a five-point Likert

Scale (1 = Very Unsatisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied). In case of the measure of the willingness to recommend the visit, the following question was asked: "Will you suggest this place to your friends/relatives as an excellent place to visit" (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). It was measured on a five-point Likert Scale (1 = Definitely not, 5 = Definitely yes).

The main segmentation criteria (such as gender, age, education and the type of visit) were also recorded (Table 1).

Table 1 The profile of the respondents (n = 3,776)

The Sample Characteristics	%
Gender	
Female	52.34
Male	47.66
Age	
18-25	20.72
26-35	23.23
36-45	23.52
46-55	17.01
56-65	11.31
66-75	3.74
75 +	0.48
Education	
Primary	4.48
Secondary	16.77
Secondary with school-leaving exam	45.54
Advanced vocational training	9.93
Tertiary (university)	23.28
Type of visit	
Trip during holiday	46.73
Official journey	1.91
Visiting relatives	12.40
Travel on or from holiday	5.93
Excursion	1.62
Trip from home	28.58
Others	2.83

Source: authors' research 2009-2011

Data analyses

The factors (indicators) of each multi-item construct (the pull motivation, the push motivation, the quality of the environment, the on-site experience) were first identified by an explorative factor analysis (EFA). In all cases, the Principal Components Analysis Method was employed. Only the factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1 were assessed and the results were varimax rotated (Robinson, 1998). Then the composite mean was calculated for each indicator of each construct, i.e. the average value for indicator (EFA factor) from values of items loaded at least with value of 0.5 on this factor. The reliability for each of the indicators was obtained by using the calculation of a Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the indicators with the value of the alpha coefficient of less than 0.6 were removed from further analysis. This procedure was employed on the basis of Peterson's study (Peterson, 1994).

Then the structural equation modelling was performed to test the hypothetical structure of the constructs. The two-stage structural modelling process was performed and the maximum likelihood of the Estimation Method was used (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). First, the measurement model was evaluated by using the Confirmatory Factor Analysis and then the testing of the structural model was performed (Nusair & Hua, 2010). The chi square/d.f. ratio, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), the normed fit index (NFI), the non-normed fit index (NNFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI) were used as the measures of the goodness-of-fit indices. The chi square/d.f. rate is commonly used, as the chi square statistic itself is considered by many to be an unrealistic standard (Long & Perkins, 2003). As the chi square is dependent on a number of observations, the rule of 'close fit' states that chi square/d.f. should be a smaller number than $1 + n/400$ (Steiger, 2009). The values of the RMSEA lower that 0.05 indicates a very good fit and the values between 0.05 and 0.08 indicate an acceptable fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1992). The GFI, NFI, NNFI, and CFI have ranges of 0 to 1 and scores 0.90 and above are desirable. As the AGFI corrects the GFI for the number of parameters in the model, the value 0.80 or higher is acceptable (Long & Perkins, 2003).

Results and Discussion

Four factors of the pull motives that explain the 52.9 % of the total variability, were identified: a pleasant 'natural' environment, history, accessibility, and closeness (Table 2). The items "the location is situated in an interesting landscape; the environment is pleasant here; It is quiet here; It is a site with interesting nature" were loaded on the factor of a pleasant 'natural' environment (Cronbach's alpha = 0.65). The items "the location is culturally/artistically interesting; the location is related to an interesting history; it is a protected heritage site" were loaded on the factor "history" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.68). The items "it is on the way that we have planned; the location is accessible" were loaded on the factor "accessibility" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.47). The closeness is a single item

factor with the only one item "it is quite close to our accommodation or home" loaded with value greater than 0.6 on this factor.

The pull motivations are responsible for the choice of a destination because they represent the specific attractions of the destination (Dann, 1981). Thus, the factors of the pull motivations quite often reflect the specifics of the tourism core resources and the attractions (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The two main factors draw attention to the fact that the attractiveness of a destination given by the core resources is still the most important motivating factor to visit a particular place (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012).

Table 2 Factors of pull motivations

	pleasant 'natural' environment	history	accessibility	closeness
Location is situated in an interesting landscape.	0.693			
It is quiet here.	0.649			
It is a site with interesting nature.	0.626			
Environment is pleasant here.	0.620			
Information is provided in this location.	0.494			
Opportunity to obtain spiritual meaning through contact with this place.	0.485			
Location is culturally/artistically interesting.		0.846		
Location is related to an interesting history.		0.809		
It is a protected heritage site.	0.478	0.505		
It is fun here.			0.705	
Location is accessible.	0.454		0.546	
It is on the way that we have planned.			0.532	
I heard that this place is interesting.			0.431	
It is quite close to our accommodation.				0.914
eigenvalue	3.867	1.320	1.197	1.019
% of total variability (cumulative)	27.621	37.049	45.597	52.874

Source: authors' research 2009-2011

The four factors of the push motivation to visit were revealed: social gathering, education, self-reflection, and relaxation (Table 3). These four factors explain 50.3 % of variability of the dataset. The items "experience an adventure; to be with friends; to enjoy myself; to meet new people; to talk with friends about our experience during the journey" were loaded on the social gathering factor (Cronbach's alpha = 0.74). The items

"to visit interesting places; to gain new knowledge; to get to know new locations" were loaded on the educational factor (Cronbach's alpha = 0.60). The items "reflection on site about the good old times; the possibility to be really myself; to be at place that friends have not visited yet" were loaded on the self-reflection factor (Cronbach's alpha = 0.46). The items "to free ourselves of a stereotypical sort of day-to-day life and job; to change the environment" were loaded on the relaxation factor (Cronbach's alpha = 0.55).

Table 3 Factors of push motivations

	social gathering	education	self-reflection	relaxation
Be with friends.	0.787			
Talk with friends after the journey about experience.	0.700			
Enjoy.	0.621			
To meet new people	0.599			
Experience an adventure.	0.563			
Get to know new locations.		0.731		
Gain new knowledge.		0.652		
Visit interesting places.		0.630		
Reflection on site about the "good old times".			0.663	
To be at place that friends did not visited yet.			0.640	
Possibility to be really myself.			0.538	
Free ourselves of a stereotypical sort of day-to-day life and job.				0.679
Change environment.				0.663
Do nothing, just relax.				0.500
Relax through a physical recreational activity.				0.426
To be with my family.				0.393
Eigenvalue	3.933	1.696	1.320	1.114
% of total variability (cumulative)	24.580	35.183	43.434	50.393

Source: authors' research 2009-2011

Social-gathering, which was identified as the first push motivation factor, confirmed the previous findings from the outdoor settings (c.f. Graefe et al., 2000). The following notions of social togetherness and social contact or social gathering are among the main push motives of the participation in travel and tourism (Crompton, 1979). The escape and relaxation factor are among the generally considered push motives towards the participation in travel and tourism (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Razović & Tomljenović, 2015) as well as new knowledge and new experience (Graefe et al., 2000; Yoon & Uysal,

2005; Ballantyne et al., 2008). The last identified factor (self-reflection) is also counted among the primary push motives (Dann, 1981) as "[t]ravel has always offered a unique opportunity for self-discovery" (Pruitt & LaFont, 1995, p. 245). In this case, this factor could be considered as a strongly introverted version of self-fulfilment (Hsu et al., 2007).

The four factors of the environment quality perception in this sample (Table 4) were revealed that are quite consistent with the three dimensions discussed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974): being common place, the complexity dimension, novelty, and the spatial dimension. Those four factors explain that 52.3 %. The first indicator was labelled as being commonplace because the items such as the usually-surprising factor, the common-rare factor or the similar-contrasting factor were strongly loaded on this factor (Cronbach's alpha = 0.74). The second indicator is the complexity dimension because the items given as "continuous-intermittent" and "patterned-random" were strongly loaded on this factor (Cronbach's alpha = 0.61). The third indicator is the novelty with the familiar-novel and the distant-immediate loaded on this factor (Cronbach's alpha = 0.39). The fourth factor is the spatial dimension labelled as the density because the uncrowded-crowded and the sparse-dense items were loaded on this factor (Cronbach's alpha = 0.40).

Table 4 Factors of perceived quality

	being common place	complexity	novelty	density
usual-surprising	0.735			
common-rare	0.751			
redundant-varied	0.669			
homogeneous-heterogeneous	0.639			
similar-contrasting	0.587			
small scale-large scale	0.466			
simple-complex	0.488			
continuous-intermittent		0.796		
patterned-random		0.785		
symmetrical-asymmetrical		0.584		
immediate-distant			0.786	
familiar-novel			0.755	
uncrowded-crowded				0.795
sparse-dense				0.721
eigenvalue	3.364	1.693	1.240	1.018
% of total variability (cumulative)	24.030	36.122	44.983	52.255

Source: authors' research 2009-2011

Only the first two factors are of importance here. The first one is similar to the novelty (cf. Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). However, the items of 'complexity' are also present here. Thus, it could represent the 'rarity' factor, i.e., something that is unusual, new, and contrasting at once.

The factor analysis confirmed the original Pleasure (Cronbach's alpha = 0.87) – Arousal (Cronbach's alpha = 0.66) – Dominance (Cronbach's alpha = 0.68) dimensions explaining 50.1 % of the structure of feelings that had been experienced in particular locations (Table 5). However, the percentage of the explained variability is lower than in the case of analogical studies (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Jang & Namkung, 2009). As usual, the strongest dimension is the dimension of pleasure (Donovan et al., 1994).

Table 5 Factors of experience

	pleasure	arousal	dominance
depressed-contented	0.825		
unhappy-happy	0.813		
annoyed-pleased	0.800		
unsatisfied-satisfied	0.754		
bored-relaxed	0.747		
restricted-free	0.653		
despairing-hopeful	0.598		
sleepy-widewake	0.494		
insignificant-important	0.396		
calm-excited		0.741	
relaxed-stimulated		0.653	
sluggish-frenzied		0.625	
unaroused-aroused		0.576	
dull-jittery		0.531	
uncrowded-overcrowded		0.342	
controlled-controlling			0.788
submissive-dominant			0.739
influenced-influential			0.785
eigenvalue	5.263	2.183	1.567
% of total variability (cumulative)	29.241	41.366	50.074

Source: authors' research 2009-2011

The pleasant 'natural' environment was used as the motivation measure. Being the commonplace was used as the perception of the environment measure and the pleasure as the on-site experience measure in the final model. The theoretical model has a good fit to the data, except the chi square/d.f. ratio: chi square/d.f. = 14.9 (based on Steiger

rule – see Steiger, 2009 – it should be smaller than 10.4), RMSEA = 0.060, GFI = 0.99, AGFI = 0.97, NFI = 0.98, NNFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.98. All the structural coefficients are significant (Figure 2). Thus, the model was verified on the data from a variety of sites across the Šumava and South Bohemia Tourist Regions.

Figure 2 Model of willingness to recommend the visit
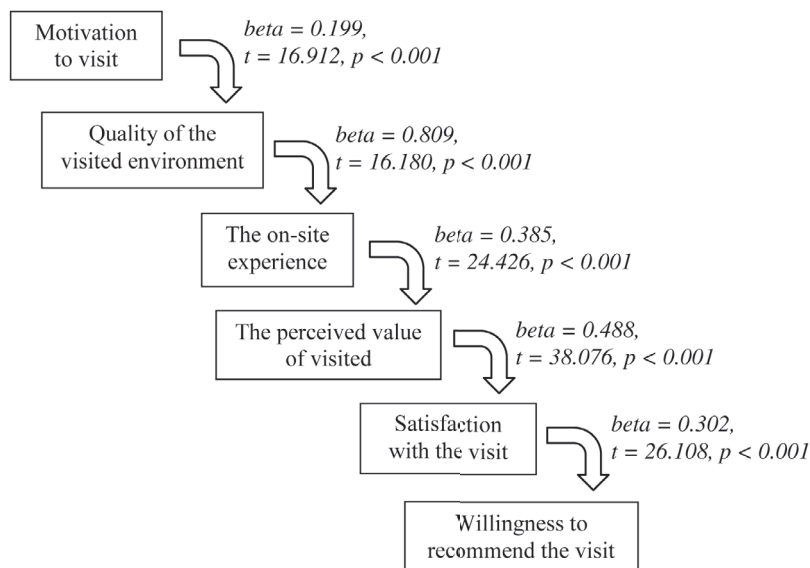
Source: authors' research 2009-2011

Conclusion

The extent of the positive word-of-mouth experience increases with the higher volume of satisfaction with the visit to the site. The satisfaction is higher if the value that is generated from the visit of the site is higher for the tourist. The perceived value rises with the emotions of pleasure that the visit has evoked in the mind of the visitor. The feeling of pleasure is evoked when something unusual and contrasting can be seen on the site. Finally, the perception of the environment is given by the motivation to spend a pleasurable time in a 'natural' environment. It all means that the positive word-of mouth experience is directly connected to the motivation which stands behind the act of the visit. As the pull motives are formed by the image, the image is compared with the 'reality' with all the consequences during the visit.

As it has been already mentioned in the introduction, many models were proposed to test the context of decision making related to the destination loyalty. However, those models are based on the data obtained from one destination/one place. No model based on the data collected at the complex range of tourist attractions within a destination has

been tested yet. The advantage of this approach is a wide variety of respondents who differ one from another in many aspects of their tourist behaviour. This could be achieved only when making a survey at many places that differ in the core of their attractiveness. As the research was conducted on many sites, thus yielding a large and representative sample, with completely different tourism core resources, it is valid for the whole area and not only for one type of destination as it is common in similar studies.

Another contribution is the simplicity of the proposed model, which directly focuses on practice rather than on theory. The main research output has marketing management consequences. The issue is that what the visitor expects and what he or she really finds in that place is important as it has a strong and immediate impact on his/her intended future behaviour. The visitor's expectation is given by the image that is formed by each person's own activities of marketing within the tools of marketing promotion. The authors of this study discovered that it was not good to market a false (usually much better) image of the place than the one that was really justified.

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