

Do Travel Partners Influence the Emotional Experience of Tourists at Destinations ? A Short Communication

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Abstract

This short communication is an extract from a major research work on understanding tourists' experience and post touring behaviour and this portion intended to highlight the role of travel partners in tourists' emotional experience at a destination. Intensive review of literary sources confirmed that this aspect was untapped and lacked research insights. A structured questionnaire containing the statements measuring tourists' emotional experience and travel partners was floated to 400 tourists using convenient sampling technique. The data collection instrument also had questions on tourists' personal factors. Sample size was rounded to 370 after removing the illegible responses. A multivariate analysis approach was employed to test whether travel partners influenced tourists' emotional experience at a destination. The findings revealed that the emotional aspects such as pleasantness, excitement, calmness, happiness, energetic, friendly, and surprising were influenced by the tourists' travel partners.

Keywords : emotions, experience, short communication, destination, multivariate approach

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Tourist experiences have been highly researched by marketers and academic experts as experience paves the cause for positive word of mouth (WOM), perhaps online and offline, and lays foundation for tourists' behavioural intention, attitude, and loyalty too (Serra - Cantallops et al., 2018). Also, marketers investigate tourists' experiences for understanding the dynamics of tourists' characteristics, motives, and expectations. There are distinct studies in the tourism and destination management research arena pertaining to tourists' choice processes, tourists' perception about destination image and destination personality, tourists' post visit behaviour, etc. based on tourists' socio - demographic characteristics, motivations, and travel factors, including the frequency of travel, duration of stay, accommodation preferred, modes of travel, and referents, etc. All these studies had an asynchronous perspective towards tourists' experiences. Statistically, experience gained by tourists would be conceived as a determinant. This short communication portrays one of such perspectives and tries to understand whether travel partners, with whom tourists tour, influence their experiences at the destinations. Though there are assorted destination attributes, tourists' experiences, perhaps emotions mainly, have not been highlighted in the literature in accordance to travel partners. This extract from a major research work intends to understand whether tourists' travel partners influence their emotional experience at a destination.

What Literature Says ?

Being a short communication, the reviews narrowed down to tourists' experiences have alone been analyzed.

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Hosany and Gilbert (2010) found that emotional experience of tourists had a compelling impact on behavioural intention and the emotional dimensions identified were joy, love, and surprise. However, a study by Prayag et al. (2013) on understanding the role of tourists' emotional experience found a dissimilar view of theory. Accordingly, tourists' emotional state of mind or distinct emotions not only act as an antecedent in how they perceive the overall image of the tourism destinations, but significantly impact their satisfaction levels (Prayag et al., 2017). Anticipation and trust were found as the indispensable factors of tourism (Rahmani et al., 2018). Being a predominant variable in understanding tourists' behaviour, emotional experiences of tourists could also be the predictors of destinations' cognitive and affective image and clout of tourists' behavioural intentions. This was narrowed towards yoga tourism. Brunner - Sperdin et al. (2012) inferred that service component settings would leverage the tourists' emotional states and satisfaction. A research work on Chinese diaspora tourists' emotional experiences by Zou et al. (2021) indicated that the emotional experience of diaspora tourists had a distinctiveness based on tourists' socio - demographic characteristics. Interestingly, Kim's (2012) research work on film tourism experiences found that emotional and behavioural components were driving forces that positively affected film tourism experiences.

From the intensive review of literary sources, there are many evidences on tourists' emotional experience and its reflection on tourists' perception, satisfaction, and intention. The independence was highly looked in terms of tourists' socio - demographic characteristics, destination attributes, and other factors. However, studies were not found referring to tour partners and their vital significance in tourists' emotional experience. Hence, this study intends to touch upon this perspective. The following hypotheses are framed based on the objective and review.

➤ **H1 :** There are statistically significant differences in tourists' emotional experiences based on travel partner.

➤ **H2 :** There are no statistically significant differences in tourists' emotional experiences based on travel partner.

Research Methodology

Since this communication focuses on understanding whether travel partners play a role in tourists' emotional experiences at the destinations, factors constituting to the uncommon objective have been shown. Being an empirical research extract, the emotional experience is measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The sample size, using convenient sampling technique, was 370 tourists who visited tourism destinations in a district of Tamil Nadu, India between May 2019 and January 2020. Travel partners were classified into – sole travellers (24.1%), travel with friends (28.4%), family (33.2%), spouse (13.8%), and colleagues (0.5%). Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used using SPSS for testing the significance.

Analysis and Interpretation

MANOVA has been used to test if there is any statistically significant difference in tourists' emotional experience based on the travel partners. The distribution of travel partners has been provided above. However, as an overview of the socio - demographic profile of the tourists, there is close to equal distribution of the respondents based on gender (55.7% : male and 44.3% : female). The highest percentage of respondents (40.5%) was aged between 25 and 34 years and 31.1% of the respondents were less than 25 years of age. More than 60% of the respondents were graduates, 34.6% of the respondents were employees of private sector, and earned more than 40,000 INR per month, and finally, there was close to equal proportion of married and unmarried respondents (51.1% were married ; whereas, 48.9% were unmarried). Table 1 enumerates the multivariate test results.

From Table 1, it can be inferred that (Wilks' Lambda $F = 4.829$ and $P\text{-value} < 0.05$ (0.000)) there is a statistically significant difference in emotional experience of tourists in the destination based on their travel

Table 1. MANOVA Results (Including the Follow-Up Individual ANOVA Values)

| Travel Partner and Emotional Experience | F- Value | Sig. |
|---|-----------------|-------------|
| The destination is very pleasant. | 2.588 | .037* |
| Feeling relaxed at this destination. | 1.704 | .148 |
| The destination is beautiful. | .941 | .440 |
| I am excited to be here. | 4.010 | .003* |
| I feel calm here. | 3.054 | .017* |
| The destination creates happiness in me. | 10.101 | .000* |
| The destination boosts my energy and makes me active. | 6.344 | .000* |
| The destination is accommodative. | 10.644 | .000* |
| The destination makes me so lively. | 1.246 | .291 |
| I feel a sense of belonging at this destination and people here are friendly. | 2.429 | .047* |
| I am so surprised to visit this destination. | 3.255 | .012* |
| Wilks' Lambda F- Value | 4.829 | |
| Wilks' Lambda Sig Value | .000* | |

Note. *significant at the 0.05 level.

partners. Hence, H1 is accepted. However, it is decisive to analyze the multivariate follow up test, which shows that the emotional experiences such as feeling relaxed, sense of beauty of the destination, and feeling lively do not have statistically significant differences in experience based on the tour partners as the significant values 0.148 ($F = 1.704$), 0.440 ($F = 0.941$), and 0.291 ($F = 1.246$), respectively are greater than 0.05. Thereby, H1 is not accepted in these individual cases. This finding could be based on the destination attributes. Relaxation of tourists would be based on the distinct ambience of the tourism destination. Undoubtedly, the beauty of the destination is not impacted significantly by other factors as this aspect is a key inculcation of the destination's attractions. Similarly, liveliness would also be a consistent ambience that the tourism places would provide. In this case, H2 can be accepted (only for emotions such as relaxation, beautiful, and lively). However, the other aspects such as pleasantness ($F = 2.588$, $P = 0.037$), excitement ($F = 4.010$, $P = 0.003$), calmness ($F = 3.054$, $P = 0.017$), happiness ($F = 10.101$, $P = 0.000$), energetic ($F = 6.344$, $P = 0.000$), accommodative ($F = 10.644$, $P = 0.000$), belongingness ($F = 2.429$, $P = 0.047$), and surprising ($F = 3.255$, $P = 0.012$) have significant differences in experiences based on travel partners. Hence, H1 (with respect to these individual cases) has been accepted and H2 has been rejected. This shows that travel partners do influence the emotional experience of tourists in the destination. The most significant emotional aspects such as being excited, happy, and energetic would be based on whom the tourists travel with or explore the tourism places with. Similarly, pleasantness, calmness, accommodative, belongingness, and surprising aspects of emotions would be mainly based on travel partners, but to some extent, the destination characteristics could contribute. However, as the major findings, travel partners play a significant role in tourists' emotional experience at the tourism destinations.

Managerial Implications

Destination marketers design advertising campaigns using the destination attributes and cater to the prospective tourists based on their varied motives and personal characteristics. Management of destination attributes is critical for the marketers because of its direct connection to tourists' satisfaction and revisiting intentions (Bandaru & Venkateshwarlu, 2020). Countries such as United Arab Emirates, France, Spain, United States,

Netherlands, India, and many more have their own bestowed tourism attractions, and the marketers, perhaps also the policy makers, incur huge investments on those to elevate the tourists' arrivals and boost their local economies and tourism based businesses (Shankar, 2020). One of the most essential and compelling strategies is to ensure that a correct image of the destination is formed in the tourists' minds even before visiting through destination branding paradigms. Effective utilization of visual representations, brand taglines, sonic branding, and other elements of marketing through online and offline sources facilitate the thereof in conceiving the image and forging lucrative competition, and thereby deriving revenue. All these executions are enhanced by the research community's findings and recommendations. This could be done by revealing insights on tourists' changing personal characteristics, motives, perception, experience, satisfaction, and post visit behaviour, etc.

Many research findings have enumerated the new avenues of smaller or micro segments of the tourism market and led to creative marketing campaigns that produce profitability for the industry. Accordingly, neither literature nor empirical studies portrayed this aspect of travel partners who could also be the influencers of tourists' emotional experience. Though studies have been conducted with respect to varied perspectives of tourists' emotional experience, the aspect of with whom the tourists' tour and whether this accompaniment has significance on the experience in destinations have not been highlighted.

This research indicates that travel partners play a huge role in tourists' emotional experiences at the destinations. Technically, tourists' experiences conceive affective phenomenon in tourists' perception, then reflects on tourists' post visit behaviour, and perhaps could affect the word of mouth message and recommendation or intention to re-visit too. Hence, it is decisive for the marketers to understand that tourists' experience is a predominant factor that has to be pondered upon while constructing marketing strategies & campaigns and for branding their destinations. For example, the destination marketers should understand how their destinations are to be proposed – a destination for family or friends or an explore alone destination, etc. This inculcation would intrude the prospects' perception and decide their destination choice accordingly. Also, this facilitates the marketers to size up the new niche segments of tourism markers.

Conclusion

This short communication has highlighted the untapped arena of tourists' studies. Though various studies in tourism marketing focus mainly on tourists' emotions, perception, satisfaction, and pre & post visit behaviour, certain variables such as travel partners have not being explored. Being one of the most lucrative industries, the tourism sector requires in-depth analysis of tourists' changing dynamic motives, satisfying touch points, and scope of tourists' behaviour in creating potentiality for businesses. Hence, it is crucial to explore the market characteristics and tourists' behaviour in detail from time to time. This would not only facilitate the destination marketers in formulating marketing and branding strategies, but also help the policy makers to design growing avenues that would attract more tourist inflow. This key aspect of accompaniment and its significance in experiencing emotions at the destinations can lead to creative branding strategies, marketing campaigns, and positioning process of the destinations.

Limitations of the Study and Scope of Further Research

This short communication is an extract from a major research work on understanding the tourists' experiences and post visit behaviour. The findings and recommendations provided in this work are based on the data derived from the tourists, and replication of this model of work on another sample framework or timeline may produce distinct results. Also, the interesting gap in the tourism and destination marketing studies highlighted in this communication is based on an intensive review of literature. All these limitations could pave way for further

studies in this arena. Exploring the untapped perspectives of tourists and their relevance on marketing the destinations would add value to the existing literature.

Author's Contribution

Dr. Sabari Shankar R. is the sole author of this short communication. All the aspects – from identifying the untapped aspects of tourists' emotional experience, intensive review of literary works, data collection, analysis, and writing the manuscript were done by him.

Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that he has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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