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Exclusive Memorable Experiences in Tourism and Hospitality Industry

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Article info

Abstract

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Keywords: Exclusive memorable experiences, Tourism experiences The current businesses, especially those in the tourism and hospitality industry, have been shifted to strongly focus on memorable experiences obtained from products and services. Such memorable experiences allow tourists to recall their tourism experiences and therefore trigger their need to repeat those memorable experiences by returning to the same tourist destinations to receive the same memorable experiences again and again. The objectives of this article are to demonstrate the importance of experience and marketing theories as well as to show how to create them into practice in the tourism and hospitality industry. This article also showcases a variety of factors leading to exclusive memorable experiences among tourists. The review of literature in this article, therefore, lead to theoretical framework of exclusive memorable experiences which provides important insights in the tourism and hospitality industry. It was found that ten factors influencing exclusive memorable experiences among tourists. They are learning, meaningfulness, involvement, refreshment, interaction, novelty, hedonism, quality, prestige and conspicuousness.

Introduction

Since business competition in this era is approaching the experience economy, the tourism and hospitality industries therefore has been attempting to alter their ways of selling products and services to selling experiences to tourists, especially those travelling to high value destinations. This is to serve the increasing number of high-quality travelers whose spending power is deemed to be greater than most travelers. Also, this aims to promote niche markets where merely certain number of travelers are able to access. From the review of literature, it can be seen that current travelers tend to consider several factors before purchasing products and services in the tourism and hospitality industry. These factors include benefits both in terms of social and emotional benefits, as well as value which can be expected to obtain from those products and services. This means entrepreneurs who are able to adapt to such changes are likely to have an edge over other competitors. They can also retain such high-quality customers in a long term. This is due to the fact that the needs of consumers are longer based on prices and qualities, instead these consumers seek exclusive experiences which can provide them with impressive memories which are hard to forget from the products and services they purchase. As a consequence, these tourists are willing to spend greater amount of money in seek of new tourism destinations so that they can discover and experience new tourism activities, new cuisines, and special experiences which in turn bring happiness to them.

Thus, the recent studies of travelling behaviors should place an emphasis on experiences tourists obtain as per what Pine and Gilmore stated in an article in Harvard Business Review (Include the YEAR) that the current economy is the experience economy. Such a statement has tremendously challenged a number of business sectors to thrive in this new era by finding ways to embed experiences in their existing products and services. Pine and Gilmore divided experiences into four categories including entertainment, education, escapist, and aesthetic. Aside from the framework from Pine and Gilmore which focused on the concept of experiences, several other studies have proposed a similar approach concerning the significance of experiences, notably the one by Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) which mentioned that experiences are the fluidity of imagination as well as the feeling of fun and enjoyment which tourists receive. Consequently, due to the current rapid growth in the economy together with the dynamic of technological advancement and the ever more competitive environment in the business sectors, a myriad of businesses including those in the tourism and hospitality sectors must adapt themselves and establish their own identities so as to make them unique and different from their competitors.

Businesses in the tourism and hospitality industry are currently attempting to make them stand out from the crowd by anchoring their identity through incorporating memorable experiences which cannot be found elsewhere. By doing so, tourists are provided with great connivances and high-quality activities as well as new innovations. Frequently many tourism and hospitality businesses try to design activities which create knowledge, for example, teaching tourists to cook local dishes, teaching tourists how to drink wine properly, providing excursions to extraordinary locations, and arranging welcoming activities to tourists which may include knowledge about health and safety, world-class shopping destinations, hospitals, tourist information and tour centers, accommodation, butler services, swimming pools, hot tubs, sport and recreation centers, spas, high-end beauty salons, sanctuaries for health and spiritual retreat, exciting activities, all day and night wi-fi service and telephone signal, security systems, medical staff members in case of an emergency. On top of that, a number of international cruise ships have also

prepared their top-notch quality staff members to provide exclusive and special services. They have been trained to treat their customers as if they are extraordinary throughout the trip. Their services include 24-hour personal services, top-quality cuisines from Michelin chefs, and so on. These extra services indicate that several tourism destinations and business sectors have prepared their top-quality products and services to meet the needs of customers these days by creating memorable experiences to their customers. Subsequently, the study of memorable experiences among tourists is deemed to be significant in the development of the tourism and hospitality industry in terms of providing services and improving the concept of travelling experiences. Additionally, such a study yields great implications to governmental sectors in planning their strategies in the tourism and hospitality industry in the national scale.

Experiences

Experiences can be regarded as feelings occurred from interaction with or participation in an event at a particular point of time (Caru & Cova, 2003). These experiences take place from what people see, smell, taste, hear, or even sense (Berry & Carbone, 2007). Customers' experiences may emerge from the interaction between customers and products, manufacturers, or organizations. As these trigger responses from customers, individual customer's experiences differ from person to person depending on the level of participation and involvement in terms of reason, emotion, feeling, physic, and mentality (Gentile, Spiller, & Nocci, 2007). The interaction between customers and manufacturers can occur both directly and indirectly. While the direct interaction takes place when customers purchase a product or service, the indirect interaction happens from senses, awareness, and acknowledgement about products and services via advertisement, publicization, news, and word of mouth (Urry, 1990; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Moreover, experiences are the results of customers' interpretation and evaluation of products and services they purchase (Russametummachot, 2006). These customers must receive enjoyment from participating in the purchasing and selling of products and services, which ought to create memory (Oh, Fiore, & Jeong, 2007). Experiences consists of a number of important elements, for instance, good surprises, gratefulness beyond expectation, and great impression (Mossberg, 2007). As a result, customers' experiences are the general composition of acknowledge, emotion, feeling,

participation, and explicit responses of customers toward manufacturers (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007).

Tourism experiences

An essence of the tourism and hospitality industry is provision of unforgettable experiences to travelers (Prentice, Witt, & Hamer, 1998). Based on the review of literature concerning tourism experiences, it can be seen that there have been a variety of studies focusing on the clear establishment of tourism experiences (Wang & Pizam, 2011). A number of instances include the study of emotional components and co-existence in society, components leading to experiences, participation, as well as points of view in the domain of social sciences, marketing, and experiences embedded in long-term memory (Murray, Foley, & Lynch, 2010). Furthermore, there are several other studies devoting to experiences stemmed from feeling and social co-existence (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). These studies mention that tourists usually purchase products and services to create their own emotion and feeling. Since tourists tend to consume products and services all the time, experiences can take place throughout their entire trip (Mossberg, 2007). This is due to the fact that tourists are obliged to consume components of tourism to some degree. They may include restaurants, accommodation, transportation, excursions, tour programs, souvenirs, and so on. These components of tourism purchased by tourists lead to interaction between service providers and the tourists themselves. Such activities can also be called touch point.

Regarding the participation domain (Aho, 2001), tourism experiences consist of four main factors, namely, experiences concerning emotion and feeling, experiences concerning learning, experiences concerning implementing, and interpretation of the results of such experiences. Nonetheless, Oh, Fiore, & Jeong (2007) added that tourists are triggered by their past experiences and images from their personal expectation from the trip, rather than the trip itself. In other words, many tourists view their trip based on their own perception and expectation instead of reality. Subsequently, tourism experiences in terms of participation need to be comprised of two important components, notably, landscape and senses capes (Urry, 2002). When it comes to components and occurrence of experience, Mossberg (2007) claimed that service providers are unable to directly create experiences to tourists. However, they can prepare different components to create such experiences. Since each tourist has different feeling, perception, and memory from prior experiences obtained from previous trips, tourism experiences are deemed to be a holistic combination of feeling, perception, interpretation, and order of events (Volo, 2009). Additionally, Otto & Ritchie (1996) supported that tourism experiences can occur from six aspects, namely, enjoyment, participation, new discovery or escape from old routines, convenience, safety, challenge and discovery. These have also been supported by Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel (2002) who studied environment concerning the establishment of experiences. He found that in order for tourists to achieve high-quality experiences, entrepreneurs and business sectors must also provide suitable environment and service location needed to create high-quality experiences.

Considering the social sciences domain, tourism experiences are the journey to escape from people's daily routines (Mossberg, 2007). Not only can tourism experiences occur from the journey itself, travel can also be influenced by the received information about tourist destinations from various sources such as media, the internet, and advertisements (Urry, 1990; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). As a result, tourism experiences do not occur merely at tourist destinations, instead, they can occur anywhere from the start until the end of the trip (O'Dell & Billing, 2005). Such a statement has been supported by Killion (1992) who added that travelling experience is a form of free time spending for enjoyment and recreation. It can be divided into several circular steps: 1) the process of travel preparation, 2) the process of traveling to a destination, 3) the process of activities participation whilst traveling, 4) the process of leaving a destination to return home, and 5) the process of recalling of memories. These steps can occur at any time throughout a trip (Jennings & Nickerson, 2006). However, Craig-Smith & French (1994) argued that prior experience would determine future tourism experiences, which include the process of receiving suggestions and recommendations, the process of experiencing, and the process of self-reflection.

Looking through the lens of marketing, tourists are customers (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Oh, Fiore, & Jeong, 2007). Since tourists make purchase of products and services in the tourism and hospitality industry, they are a part of business trading cycle. Their involvement in the business trading cycle can be influenced by business owners and stakeholders (Bruner-Spendin & Peters, 2009). The tourism and hospitality industry provide tourists with complicated experiences which lead to a myriad of memories and feelings toward tourist destinations. Different tourists receive their own unique tourism experiences (Graburn, 2004; Noy, 2007). As a result, an objective of business owners and stakeholders is to manage certain components to allow tourists to use their multiple thoughts and senses which include visuals, tastes, smells, sounds, and touches. These feelings and senses allow tourists to bond with different elements at tourist destinations. This can be done through story telling or presenting the backgrounds and narratives of tourist destinations. This would also enhance the value tourists can receive from tourist destinations via meaningful experiences obtained from products and services (Oh, Fiore, & Jeong, 2007).

When visiting the psychological camp, Svein (2007) stated that tourism experiences include expectation, situation and memory. Whenever tourists deem such an experience as valuable for them, they tend to keep that memory in their long-term memory. Therefore, business owners and stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry need to build enjoyable experiences which would be instilled within their memory for the long term (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikzentmihaly, 1990). Additionally, Brunner-Sperdin & Peter (2009) placed a strong emphasis on positive memories provided to tourists. These positive memories involve quality of locations, service providers, technologies, and management processes.

From the aforementioned literature review, it is noted that a myriad of viewpoints and explanations regarding components of tourism experiences exist. Nonetheless, these various viewpoints and explanation seem to have one thing in common-memory.

Memory

Memory is an important component of tourism experience (Svein, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). As travel provides tourists with experiences, memory serves as a medium between experiences and feelings, which would eventually lead to traveling behaviors in various forms, depending on experiences and feelings tourists are exposed to (Oh, Fiore, & Jeong, 2007). Memory emerges from the tourists' evaluation and interpretation of their tourism experiences. Generally, they tend to be able to recall impressive memories more accurately than bad memories (Fridgen, 1984; Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, & Diener, 2003). These impressive memories can attract tourists to be involved in tourism activities. Nevertheless, Kensinger & Schacter (2006) argued that tourists can

face negative experiences during their trip. If these bad experiences are deemed impactful to tourists, such as severe sickness and accidents (Aziz, 1995; Ryan, 1991, 1993), they can be turned to personal narratives (Selstad, 2007). As a result, tourists are not merely those who are welcomed to tourist destinations, but they are also co-creators of stories and meaningfulness of tourism experiences (Selstad, 2007). However, Cary (2004) argued that true experiences would have similarities and differences from the narrated experiences, depending on memories. Consequently, the study of tourism experiences using the concept of acknowledge need to consider memory. This memory would remain even after an experience has ended (Svein, 2007). In short, it can be claimed that memory is one of the most powerful components in shaping tourism experiences.

Since one of the most important features of tourism experiences is memory, many psychologists view memory as a tool which can affect emotion and feeling. Active memory is similar to how computer works. This includes the ways to receive, keep, and use information. Psychologically, memory can be divided into three systems, notably sensory memory, short-term memory or working memory, and long-term memory. To elaborate, short-term memory tends to keep information in a form of voice which is sensitive to any disturbance. Oftentimes, short-term memory is not repeated and therefore it is easily replaced by new information. In contrast, long-term memory serves like a chamber where permanent information is placed. This information is limitless in terms of memory since it is deemed meaningful and impactful to a person. As a result, long-term memory tends to remain in a person's thought system for good.

Long-term memory can be divided into two categories. The first one is semantic memory. This kind of memory concerns acknowledgement of information. The second one is episodic memory. This memory revolves around experiences or important events occurred within one's lifetime. As a result, it can also be called personal learning or autobiographical memory. A few examples of this kind of memory are traveling atmosphere and traveling to any destination for the first time (Tulving, 1979).

In the tourism context, tourists tend to keep their memory and information about tourist information, such as images of tourist destination and its components, at the semantic memory which deals with meaning and facts. In contrast, memory regarding tourism experience of each individual tends to be kept at the autobiographical memory which deals with memory concerning events or situations. Nonetheless, both kinds of memory are interdependent from each other because semantic memory occurs from facts while autobiographical takes place from situational memory. To explain, people use semantic memory to obtain information from new experiences. They also use episodic memory to foster and accelerate semantic memory. Besides, events or situations which are kept within the episodic memory will be transformed and compared with a background of semantic knowledge. Simply put, when people fail to recall their prior knowledge, they tend to forget (Barlet, 1932).

To conclude, memory occurring from tourism experiences is autobiographical memory. Both semantic and autobiographical memories are essential to the memory of important tourism events and experiences which are deemed salient to tourists. This kind of memory tends to retain within the tourists' memory in a long term (Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012). People are likely to convey their memories through several forms, such as blogging and diary writing. Therefore, being aware of the importance of factors leading to memory is crucial. A few of these factors include emotional factor which deal with feelings and familiarity (Zimmerman & Kelly, 2010). This can lead to memorable experiences.

Memorable experiences

From the review of literature, there are several factors influencing memory of tourists when they travel. These factors cover the way tourists feel, think, and perceive different events. Since thoughts concerning affection are a critical element of memory, any events involving feelings and emotions tend to be instilled in memory (Brewer, 1988). In addition, words relating item and activity tend to obstruct the collection of memories which deal with emotion. Such a statement was confirmed in a study investigating how effective various factors are when it comes to memory collection (Robinson, 1976). By contrast, autobiographical memories are likely to be heavily influenced by affect words. Furthermore, when tourists recall their memories, they seem to use their cognitive evaluation or how they think. Also, when considering the formation of memory, tourists appear to implement their cognitive ability to determine their individual memory (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). In other words, when the tourists' mind is enhanced, they tend to have their thoughts digging deeper into their memory.

By doing so, the memory tends to maintain in a longer term when comparing to the time when tourists are enhanced by less significant events. This stimulates tourists to recall their memories better when they perceive their experiences as something meaningful and important to them (Reder, Donavos, & Erickson, 2002).

Based on Gardner (1983), people tend to remember something better when they purchase products and services which are deemed salient to them. Alba, Hutchinson, & Lynch (1991) later confirmed such a statement by mentioning that people tend to try harder and strive to obtain what they strongly want. Thus, when that wish is achieved, people seem to have that memory embedded into their cognition better. On top of that, the study of what constitute familiarity on memories by Brandt, Gardiner, & Macrae (2006) supported that people's desire to be challenged in a unique way can boost how they recall what they buy so as to achieve such a feeling. When people are exposed to something they are accustomed to and something new to them, they tend to have a better memory of that they are familiar with (Schmidt, 1991).

Realizing the great significance of memory proposed by several scholars in psychology, researchers in the field of tourism therefore discovered that affective feelings which include how tourists socialize as well as the way they feel good or bad about themselves are part of memorable tourism experience (Larsen & Jenssen, 2004). People tend not to clearly remember what, where, and when they did an activity, however, they appear to recall how they felt when they did such an activity. No matter these feelings are deemed positive or negative to them, people seem to remember them well. As a result, memorable tourism experience was described as positive tourism experience which tourists recall and remember when they think about their previous trip (Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012). The experience was created by tourists' personal engagement with wonderful service, and this can create memorable experience (Uriely, 2005). There are various kinds of attributes which can constitute memorable tourism experience. Additionally, Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) added that memorable tourism experiences included how people feel, fantasize, have fun. Trauer & Ryan (2007) called hedonism from the Greek god named "Hedone," representing happiness, enjoyment, or pleasure. Croce & Peri (2010) focus on refreshment; Kang and others (Kang, Gretzel, & Jamal, 2008) on meaningfulness; Aho (2001) on knowledge; Bello & Etzel (1985); Dunman & Mattia (2005) on novelty; Swinyard (1993); Kim (2009); Kim, Ritchie, & Vincent (2010) on interaction with local culture; Petrick (2004) on quality; Mason (1981) on conspicuousness; and finally, Sirgy (1982) on prestige. Due to the fluidity of the concept, different researchers defined the experiences in different ways. However, this article attempted to investigate attributes as the main factors contributing to Exclusive Memorable experience in Tourism and Hospitality Industry. The study found ten attributes creating exclusive memorable experiences as follows in Exclusive memorable experience components.

Exclusive memorable experience components

There are many kinds of exclusive memorable experiences. The first factor is learning. The new information and knowledge gained from experiences give tourists idea of a gigantic world. For example, tourists may prefer getting involved in physical activities rather than merely listening to explanation. By doing so, learning process through understanding new culture is easily understood with the use of active learning (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2004). Such an idea is also aligned with intellectual impression (Aho, 2001) in the way that learning through practice contributes to deeper understanding. The second factor is meaningfulness. Meaningfulness can be acquired in several ways in which individuals can find meaning through tourism experiences (Kang, Gretzel, & Jamal, 2008). It is enhanced to develop and change tourists' personality after the journey, which can influence on how they would later act upon their daily lives (Tarssanen, 2007). Engaging in tourism activities and in people of different cultures can also help improve oneself (Uysal, Perdue, & Sirgy, 2012). Hence, in this study, meaningfulness is focused on improvement of selfconfidence, development of personal identity, and meaningful personal quality gained during the trip. The third factor is involvement. Involvement with travel experiences is viewed as a stimulus of memories of the past experiences. Swinyard (1993) proposes that the tourists' involvement with their travel experiences is the most influential factor for one's memory. Such an idea has then been confirmed by Woodside (2008) who suggests that the more involvement travelers have, the better they can recollect and retrieve past travel experiences. Thus, they long to visit those destinations or even other destinations with similar traits. As they are provided with opportunities to be involved in activities, in this study, the travelers' involvement is focused on

main activities of travel experience. The fourth factor is refreshment. The state of feeling refreshed or rejuvenated is also a vital part of tourism experiences. Refreshment refers directly to the state of mind and the level or depth of engagement or participation in the context at the point where one could lose sense of time (Ooi, 2003). Hence, travel experiences have been touched and influenced by psychological benefits from the sense of freedom, refreshing, and revitalizing experiences (Croce & Peri, 2010). The fifth factor is interaction. Travelers interacting with local culture are found to be a component of memorable tourism experiences (Kim, 2009). Kim, Ritchie, & Vincent (2010) confirms such a notion that interaction with local cultures and people brings in high levels of recollection of travelers' past experiences, adding up to their existing knowledge. Furthermore, the interaction with local culture brings understanding of other cultures through cultural activities especially those different from their own. This makes the experience a memorable one (Morgan & Xu, 2009). The sixth factor is novelty. Exotic and unique experiences that satisfy tourists are viewed as novelty (Bello & Etzel, 1985) with the effect on tourists' decision-making process (Petrick & Backman, 2002). Modern tourists are interested in things, sights, customs and cultures different from their own, simply because of the differences (George & George, 2004). In this study, novelty refers to unique and exotic architecture; something that cannot be experienced in other places. Thus, it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The seventh factor is hedonism. Hedonism is viewed as the seeking of sensual pleasure, which can be purchased (Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012). In other words, hedonism is an essential part to draw in leisure experiences of the tourism experience. In this study, therefore, hedonism signifies thrill, excitement, and enjoyment of international cruisers while participating in local tourism activities. The eighth factor is conspicuousness. The purpose of conspicuousness is when consumers, or in this case cruisers, try to impress others by displaying their wealth (Mason, 1981) to satisfy their self-esteem or to lift their social status through a purchase particularly high price for prestige products (Veblen, 1899). Conspicuous consumption could be applied to choices of vacation destination showing off his or her economic success as well (Phillips & Back, 2011). The ninth factor is quality. High quality is seen to be fundamental characteristic of luxury goods. Consumers or cruisers would rather choose to have luxuriously branded products as a guarantor for high quality. Quality from the product

and service, in this study, refers to the worth of money, of time, and of effort (Williams & Soutar, 2009), and particularly functionality (Jennings & Weiler, 2006). The tenth factor is prestige. Prestige in tourism has been defined as the process by which individuals strive to improve their regard or honor through the consumption of tourist experiences conferring and symbolizing prestige both for tourists themselves and for their peers (Sirgy, 1982).

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