A Conceptual Framework for Management of Tourism Experience

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Abstract: The quest for pleasure, escape, lifestyle and fulfillment of self has been an ever rising desire of individuals. Tourism, an experience oriented industry, provides numerous avenues for unique, pleasurable and memorable experiences. Tourism experiences are cumulative of all the moments lived by an individual during the entire stages of tourism phenomenon. It is highly personal and subjective, unique to every individual. A large number of factors contribute to formation of tourism experience. The present paper has analyzed important studies and proposed a conceptual framework for management of tourism experience. The proposed framework explains important determinants, process, moderating variables, experiential dimensions and responses of tourism experience. It can serve as a roadmap for management of unique, pleasurable and memorable tourism experience. The study provides important implications for researchers and tour managers.

Key Words: Tourism; Experience; Tourism Experience; Customer Experience; Tourists

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most pleasurable services consumed by human beings. It is essentially an experiential phenomenon resulting into unique and pleasurable memories. In an era characterized by fast pace work life filled with stress and work pressures, tourism provides an escape to relive, refresh and reenergize. Modern tourism provides a variety of avenues to travel. Travel organizations are facing tremendous challenges in creating a unique, pleasurable and memorable tourism experience. It is regarded as a highly personal and subjective experience which is co-created by tourists through an interaction with people, environment, objects, processes and technologies. It is created by a large number of factors, some of which are controllable and many are uncontrollable by the tour operators. An understanding of the nature, determinants, and dimensions of tourism experience will help tour managers in creating strategies for its effective management. The purpose of the present paper is to propose a conceptual framework for management of pleasurable and memorable tourism experience. The focus of this paper is on destination tourism. This paper is based on important studies done in the domain of tourism experience. It is structured as follows: the following section discusses the emergence of experience economy and customer experience. It is followed by description of tourism experience, its dimensions and determinants. In the fourth section, a conceptual framework is proposed framework for management of pleasurable and memorable tourism experience.

2. Customer Experience

Emergence of experience economy is described by Pine and Gilmore (1998) [1] as the fourth wave in the economy, after agriculture, industry, and services. Customer experiences are regarded as equivalent to any other product or service in terms of their value assessment. They are created by a cumulative of tangible and intangible elements through a process of co-creation. In one of the earlier studies, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) [2] described customer experience as involving various playful leisure activities, daydreams, sensory pleasures, esthetic enjoyment, and emotional responses. They further explained that consumption experience involves a steady flow of feelings, fantasies, and fun. Customer experiences are highly personal and subjective in nature which involves a series of interaction throughout the journey of consumption process. Pine and Gilmore (1998) [3] explained that experiences are “inherently personal responses occurring only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level”. One of the most important features of experience is the interactive process. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) [4] described customer experience as “the co-creation of value through personalized interactions that are meaningful and sensitive to a specific consumer”. In another definition, Gentile et al. (2007) [5] defined customer experience as “a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction. This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer’s
involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual)”. A large number of other studies in the domain of customer experience reaffirm its interactive nature, and personalization and subjectivity in its consumption and evaluation. Positive customer experiences result into happy or good memories and have major impact on future behaviour. Research suggest that positive or pleasurable customer experiences are related with benefits to the customers as well as to the organization in terms of satisfaction, loyalty, recommendation, profitability and brand image etc. The concept and characteristics of experiences are equally valid and applicable in tourism experience.

3. Tourism Experience

Tourism is essentially an activity focused on creating pleasurable and memorable experiences. Tourism experience, also described as tourist experience or touristic experience in some studies, is the essence of tourism industry. It is the central concept responsible for tourist satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability of all types of organizations involved in this industry. Tourism experience incorporates all the essential features of customer experience. Tourist behaviour greatly depends upon the nature and quality of tourism experience.

Tourism experience is a highly individual or self centric phenomenon. The individual self, through an interaction with people, culture, environment and other tourism related elements experiences an internal change. Wearing and Wearing (2001) [6] observed that “Much of the work on tourism was concerned with the individual tourist and the part that holidays play in establishing identity and a sense of self.” They further explained that tourism experience provides “a mental and physical escape from the immediacy of the multiplicity of impinging pressures in technological society and, as such, holiday experiences provide a scope for the nurturance and cultivation of human identity.” The role of individual tourist is discussed in many other studies. Larsen (2007) [7] described tourism experience as a psychological phenomenon taking place in an individual tourist and defined it as “a past personal travel-related event strong enough to have entered long-term memory.” In this definition the emphasis is laid on the function of individual psychological processes. Another definition provided by Tung and Ritchi (2011) [8] provides a more comprehensive and process view of tourism experience. They defined it as “An individual’s subjective evaluation and undergoing (i.e., affective, cognitive, and behavioural) of events related to his/her tourist activities which begins before (i.e., planning and preparation), during (i.e., at the destination), and after the trip (i.e., recollection).” This definition highlights that tourism experience is a cumulative of all the moments experienced by an individual tourists much before beginning of the tourism event and continues even after the event is over. Considering the earlier definitions, tourism experience can be defined as “a unique, pleasurable and memorable experience, reflected as cumulative of attitude, perceptions, feelings and emotions, which result as a series of interaction with people, process, objects and environment during entire stages of tourism phenomenon”.


Tourism experience management can be understood by analysing the important factors affecting tourism experience, the interactive process, experience dimensions and its consequences. The framework also explains the flow and relationships among different variables and activities.

A. Determinants (Input) : Earlier studies suggest that tourism experience is determined by a wide range of factors. Buhalis (2000) [9] reported that selection of destinations is affected by attractions, accessibility, available packages, activities and ancillary services. Mossberg (2007) [10] suggested an experiencescape to explain the factors affecting tourism experience. This included service personnel, other tourists, physical environment, products/souvenirs and theme/story which play a major role in tourism experience formation. Slåtten et al (2011) [11] observed that ambience factors – light, sound, and smells – and interaction among customers have significant influence on tourism experience, particularly on tourists’ positive emotions. In one of the important studies Kim et al. (2012) [12] reported that memorable tourism experience comprised of seven elements: hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. In another study Kim (2014) [13] extended the previous work and proposed ten factors responsible for formation of memorable tourism experiences. These factors were described as : local culture, variety of activities, hospitality, infrastructure, environment management, accessibility, quality of service, physiography, place attachment, and superstructure. These two studies have provided a valid instrument for measurement of tourism experience.
Conceptual Framework for Management of Tourism Experience

**Determinants**
- Destination Attributes (Attractions, Local Culture, Physiography, Infrastructure, Activity Mix etc)
- Environment (Ambient Factors and Crowding)
- Support Services (Information, transportation, food, accommodation, hospitality, Amenities)
- Cost
- Story / Theme
- Other Tourists
- Tourism Service Providers (employees)
- Shopping (Products & Souvenirs)
- Safety and Security

**Tourism Experience Co-Creation**
- Tourist Interaction, Participation and Involvement

**Tourism Experience Dimensions**
- Distinctiveness (Unique, Novel, Authenticity, Special, Personalization)
- Emotional (Pleasure Mood, Feelings, Happiness, Excitement, Entertainment, Fun)
- Cognitive (Knowledge, Learning, Information, Meaningfulness, Discovery, Exploration)
- Behavioural (Leisure, Relaxing; Refreshing; Escape)
- Social (Bonding, Networking, Relationship)
- Sensorial (Related to sight, sound, smell, taste and touch - Aesthetics, Exotic, Comfortable, Pain, Appealing, Delightful)
- Spiritual (Peace, Serenity, Well being, Healing, Bliss)

**Tourist Characteristics**
- (Past Experience, Expectations, Affective States, Demographic and Psychographic Profile)

**Situational Characteristics**
- (Type of Destination, Occasion and Time, Competitive Offers, Other Environmental Factors)

**Experiential Responses**
- Memories
- Satisfaction
- Value
- Attitude
- Image
- Revisit
- Loyalty
- Recommendation
- WOMC
- Sales
- Profitability
In the light of important studies determinants of tourism experience are identified and presented in the conceptual framework as: Destination Attributes (Attractions, Local Culture, Physiography, Infrastructure, Activity Mix etc.); Environment Management (Ambient Factors and Crowding); Support Services (Information and communications, transportation, food, accommodation, hospitality, Amenities); Cost (price of the package); Stories / Themes; Interactions with other Tourists; Interactions with Tourism Service Providers (employees); Shopping (Products & Souvenirs); and Safety and Security.

B. Tourism Experience Creation (Process): Studies suggest that tourism experience creation is an interactive process. Individual tourist engage in co-creation process by participating in a series of activities which start much before the actual event, during the event and after the event is completed. Aho (2001) [14] suggested that traditional three stages of a tourism experiences (before, during, after) can be expanded to seven stages: 1. Orientation, 2. Attachment, 3. Visiting, 4. Evaluation, 5. Storing, 6. Reflection, and 7. Enrichment. Tourists interact with people, objects, environment, processes and other elements during all these stages to form their own unique and personalized experience. The nature and extent of tourist’s interaction, involvement and participation in the whole process across all the stages determine the formation of his/her unique tourism experience.

C. Influences on Tourism Experiences (Moderating Variables): Studies suggest that tourism experience is highly individual and context oriented phenomenon. Sheng and Chen (2013) [15] found that the tourism experience expectations include: experience expectations of easiness and fun; cultural entertainment; personal identification; historical reminiscences; and escapism. Jensen et al. (2015) [16] suggested that consumer culture theory (CCT) serves as the foundation for explaining the meaningfulness of tourist experience. They explained that the tourist engage in experience formation as a personal process and the meaning creation is constituted by a combination of individual, social, and cultural meaning. In the light of earlier studies, it is proposed that the characteristics of individual tourists in terms of Past Tourism Experiences, Expectations from the present event, Affective States (emotions, moods, feelings), Demographic (Age, Gender, Education, Financial Position, Nationality etc.) and Psychographic Profile (personality and lifestyle), are likely to influence the formation of individual’s experience.

Situational Characteristics such as - Type of Destination, Occasion and Time, Competitive Offers, Other Environmental Factors are also likely to influence the process of tourism experience formation.

D. Dimensions of Tourism Experience (Output): In earlier studies, experience is described as a personal and subjective phenomenon characterized by rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual dimensions (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Gentile et al., 2007) [17, 18]. Tung and Ritchi (2011) [19] reported four dimensions of memorable tourism experiences as affect, expectations, consequentiality, and recollection. In an important study Gnoth and Matteucci (2014) [20], on the basis of earlier studies, suggested four modes of tourism experience as - pure pleasure, re-discovery, existentially authentic exploration, and knowledge seeking. Authenticity and novelty have been widely cited as critical dimensions of tourism experience. Studies on spiritual tourism have highlighted the importance of peace, well being, healing and bliss as major benefits. In view of past researches, tourism experience can be described as multidimensional construct consisting of: Distinctiveness (Unique, Novel, Authenticity, Special, Personalization); Emotional (Pleasure Mood, Feelings, Happiness, Excitement, Entertainment, Fun); Cognitive (Knowledge, Learning, Information, Meaningfulness, Discovery, Exploration); Behavioural (Leisure, Relaxing; Refreshing; Escape); Social – (Bonding, Networking, Relationship); Sensorial (Related to sight, sound, smell, taste and touch - Aesthetics, Exotic, Comfortable, Pain, Appealing, Delightful); and Spiritual (Peace, Serenity, Well being, Healing, Bliss). A positive tourism experience will consist of a combination of above mentioned dimensions.

E. Experiential Responses (Consequences): Past studies suggest that a pleasurable memorable tourism experience has a major impact on favourable future behaviour of tourists and bring favourable benefits to the tour organizers. The responses of an experience depends upon its nature and quality. A pleasurable and good quality tourism experience results into positive outcomes, whereas, an un-pleasurable and poor quality tourism experience results in negative consequences. Whether positive or negative, experiential responses can be measured and described in terms of Memories, Satisfaction, Value, Attitude, Image, Revisit, Loyalty, Recommendation, WOMC, and increased Sales and Profitability of the tour organizers.
5. Conclusion

Tourism experience is a pleasurable and measurable phenomenon. It is gaining wider importance in an era of experience economy. It also acts as a stress buster in high pressure lifestyle of individuals. The present study has analyzed the relevant literature on tourism experience and proposed a conceptual framework for effective management of tourism experience. The activities, variables and their relationships have been explained in the light of previous researches. It is suggested that empirical testing and validation of this conceptual framework should be taken up in future researches. All the components of the conceptual framework can be further explored and validated. The study presents important implications for the tour operators / managers for designing their strategies and benefit from positive experiences. Suitable elements can be incorporated for better interactivity with tourists to create a unique, pleasurable and memorable tourism experience.

References:


