

The influence of on-board experiences on eWOM for bus-sightseeing services and tourists' intentions to revisit destination

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Abstract

This paper examines how tourists' recent experiences while utilizing bus-sightseeing services may affect their electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication of their on-board experiences, and furthermore their intention to revisit the same urban destination. By adopting sightseeing city tours as a study context and using the Appraisal Theory, this study shows that perceived value of bus sightseeing experience (PVBSE) contributes to enriching the overall experience at the destination and how this may influence their future intentions to revisit destination. The proposed model is tested based on a sample of 470 individuals visiting Valencia and by employing a structural equation modelling technique (AMOS). Data analysis shows that tourist emotions partially mediate the relationship between PVBSE and eWOM, and fully mediates the tourist emotions - revisit intentions relationship. Given the scarcity of research on urban bus-sightseeing tours, this study contributes, both theoretically and managerially, to a better understanding of its influence on tourists' future behavior.

Keywords: *Bus-sightseeing; Urban destination; e-WOM, Revisit intention; Tourist emotions*

Introduction

The sightseeing city tours have grown over the last years because of the increase of short breaks, a worldwide well-expanded model (e.g. City Sightseeing is in more than 130 locations), and tourists aiming to get holistic views of destinations. However the impact of city tours on the overall travel experience in urban destinations has not been examined yet with exceptions in UK (Stylos and Bigne, 2018). Further, the impact of city tours on specific customer behavioral variables, such as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and loyalty. Therefore this paper aims to fill in this gap by analyzing the influence of perceived value of a bus-sightseeing experience on eWOM and revisit intentions, adding the emotions experienced in the city bus, as a mediation variable.

Conceptual Framework

City tours can be understood as a bundle of stimuli (i.e. tourist attractions) or situations, seen by a tourist in a consecutive way from a bus, delivered by a tourist provider and accompanied by background evaluations of each attraction. These stimuli related to corresponding tourist attractions can be approached as small units of a tourism destination. In this vein, Appraisal Theory postulates that appraisals or evaluations render emotions, and a given stimulus or event may produce different emotional reactions. At the same time 'a common pattern of appraisal is found in all the situations that evoke the same emotion' (Scherer et al., 2001; p.7). Accordingly, the bus sightseeing tours experience can be key in formulating tourists' mood. In fact, it tends to be enhancing tourists' positive affect as these tours reach all exciting venues and sites in fast-forward, thus creating a flux of emotions (source?). Feelings and emotions arising from the bus experience can be further influential and serve as key

transmitters of tourists' level of enjoyment while being onboard (Bigné, Mattila and Andreu, 2008; Stylos, Bellou, Andronikidis and Vassiliadis, 2017). The perceived experience on such tours affects tourists' perceptions of TDs, derived from an intrinsic dimension related to the facility and extrinsic components related to attractions seen and the flow. These two dimensions can be captured through the perceived value of a bus-sightseeing experience, PVBSE, which includes quality, price-value, as well as affective elements.

Perceived value is defined as "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product (or service) based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988). It is the individual's trade-off between the perceived benefits and the perceived costs associated to a particular purchase (Chen and Chen, 2010). Some researchers suggest that perceived value may be a better predictor of repurchase intentions than either satisfaction or quality (Cronin et al., 2000; Oh, 2000). The literature on perceived value shows a positive relationship on loyalty and electronic word-of-mouth. As Hultman, Strandberg, Oghazi and Mostaghel (2017) posit, the perceived destination personality has a positive influence, directly or indirectly, on behavioral loyalty through revisit and recommendations to others. Extending this argument into city tours, it is expected that

H₁: PVBSE directly and positively influences eWOM communication of on-board experience.

H₂: PVBSE directly and positively influences tourists' intention to revisit destination

The overall mediating role of emotions can be conceptualized based on the direct and indirect effects of PVBSE on future intentions to recommend bus sightseeing and revisit the specific TDs. Research suggests that emotions influence information processing, mediate outcome responses and influence satisfaction and intent (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Emotions created after performance evaluations have a close relationship to satisfaction and perceived value (Arora and Singer, 2006; Bagozzi et al., 1999, Hume and Sullivan Mort, 2010).

Hence, we posit that:

H₃: Tourists emotions from bus sightseeing positively mediate the relationships between PVBSE and their future intentions to recommend bus sightseeing and revisit the destination.

H_{3a}: PVBSE significantly and positively influences tourist emotions.

Prior literature on tourism has shown a positive relationship between positive emotions and loyalty for specific attractions. According to Oliver (1999), loyalty can be defined as a deeply held commitment to repurchase or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future. Carreira et al. (2014) found a high impact of positive emotions on loyalty to mid-distance bus trips. Similarly, in the context of restaurants, research found that customers with high positive emotions were more likely to become repeat customers and more likely to recommend a product or business to friends and family (Chen, Peng and Hung, 2015).

Accordingly, we propose that:

H_{3b}: Tourist emotions exert a significant and positive effect on tourists' intention for eWOM communication related to their on-board experience.

H_{3c}: Tourist emotions exert a significant and positive effect on tourists' intentions to revisit the destination

Method

The field research study took place in Valencia where a bus company offers city-circle sightseeing services. This Mediterranean tourism destination was selected as a good case of an emerging tourism destination of a medium-sized city; top destinations were not eligible because we wanted to escape of the previous knowledge on the destination that might exert some influence on the variables of interest for this study. Respondents were approached to

participate in the field research study while being on-board to capture their experience. A self-administered pen and pencil survey run on board to be filled out after the first half of the tour or at the end of it (as tourists were allowed to remain in the bus after the tour and before the next one starts). Structural equation modelling (SEM) was implemented to analyze data and specify the factors that significantly influence tourists' behavioral intentions. A total of 470 tourists participated in this study.

Measures

PVBSE was measured via a fifteen-items scale, which was adopted from Lee et al. (2007) and the 7-point Likert scale with anchors "1 = strongly disagree" and "7 = strongly agree" was used to record responses. Three items adopted by Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) were utilized to gain information about tourists' emotions stemming from bus sightseeing; a 7-point-Likert scale was applied, ranging from "1=strongly disagree" to "7=strongly agree". Then, eWOM recommendations with respect to city-circle bus sightseeing was measured via four items (Brüggen et al., 2011) on a 7-point Likert scale. Last, intention to revisit the destination as a more general upshot of bus sightseeing was measured via the four-item scale proposed by Stylos et al. (2017), and on a 7-point semantic differential scale anchored with "1 = extremely unlikely" and "7 = extremely likely".

Results

Before execution of structural equation modeling analysis, reliability and validity of all constructs were examined. Then, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) followed to investigate the factorial structure of the measurement model. As a last step, the statistical significance of the relationships in the proposed model and its predictive power were assessed. The Cronbach's alpha values were estimated at 0.74 to 0.85 for the four constructs of the model, which are higher than the minimum value of 0.70 suggested (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The structural model fits the data well, and there is no need for any indicators' pruning. Also, all relevant criteria are satisfied as far as fit indices concern, for both measurement and structural models (e.g. $\chi^2/df = 2.280 < 3.0$). Moreover, composite reliability (CR), convergent and discriminant validity checks and average variance extracted (AVE) ratify the proposed factorial structure.

Concerning the regression weights of the paths depicted in Figure 1, it was found that all but one of the proposed relationships are highly significant. The direct influence of PVBSE on eWOM recommendations is positive and strongly significant and positive ($\beta = .596$, $p < .001$), providing support to H₁. However, the direct effect exerted from PVBSE onto tourists' intentions to revisit the destination is non-significant ($\beta = -.027$, $p = .756$), suggesting rejection of H₂. The effect of PVBSE on tourist emotions is positive and strongly significant ($\beta = .691$, $p < .001$). Similarly, the effects of tourist emotions on a) eWOM and b) on revisit intentions are positive and significant ($\beta = .256$, $p < .001$ and $\beta = .226$, $p = .009$). Thus, the data provide support to hypotheses H_{3a}, H_{3b} and H_{3c}, with tourist emotions partially mediating the relationship between tourist emotions and eWOM, and fully mediating the tourist emotions - revisit intention relationship. Overall, the proposed model has good predictive power explaining 47.7% of the variance of tourist emotions and 63.1% of the eWOM variance. Moreover, 5% of revisit intention variance was explained, as a result of tourists' involvement with the bus sightseeing activity alone; this is not negligible at all.

Conclusions

This was one of the first studies seeking to investigate the effects of bus sightseeing experience offered in urban areas and the relevant impact on the overall experience during tourists' stay. Specifically we have examined the effect of PVBSE on tourists' emotions, and

their intentions to share their evaluation of travel experience through electronic word-of-mouth communications, as well as on the intention to revisit the destination.

This study suffers some limitations. First, the type of visitor was not analyzed. By analyzing this, we might test whether the type of visit to the town (e.g. tourist motivation and previous visiting experience in the given town) is affecting to the intention to revisit and eWOM. Second, the study was focused on only one location that might bias the results. Third, the study did not look at the valence and type of eWOM content.

Future research may be focused on three directions. First, to analyze the whether the motives of visiting the destination might exert any variation in our proposed model. Second, to conduct a cross-cultural comparative study. Third, a further research may integrate data from smart cities (Liberato, Allen and Liberato, 2018) and look at the differences in content posted by visitors from the city tour and non-users of a city tour.

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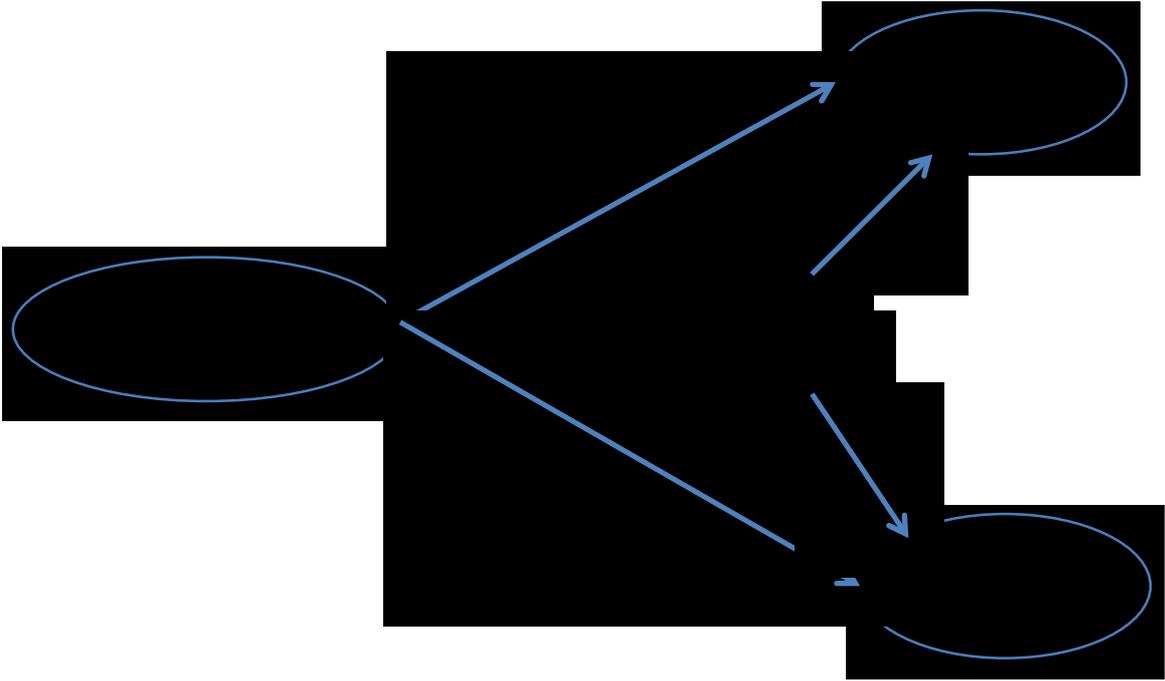


Figure 1. The proposed model with the relevant hypotheses.