The Relationship between Leisure Activity Involvement and Place Attachment in Taiwan Indigenous Cultural Park—Experience as a Moderator

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ABSTRACT

Prior empirical research findings regarding the leisure activity involvement and place attachment relationship have been inconsistent. The current study argues that one reason for these inconsistent results may be the existing moderating effect. Place attachment does not always directly result from the leisure activity involvement, but rather from the visitor’s experience after visiting the place. This study investigates the effects of visitor’s experience on the relationship of the leisure activity involvement and place attachment.

Questionnaires were distributed to visitors of Taiwan Indigenous Cultural Park. The hypothesized moderating effect was explored using hierarchical regression analysis based on Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken’s (2003) methodology.

The results indicate that visitor’s experience has a positive impact on place attachment and moderates the relationship of the leisure activity involvement and place attachment. This study suggests that top managers of Taiwan Indigenous Cultural Park may introduce the concept of experience marketing to reinforce the positive visitor’s experience, and the positive visitor’s experience will enhance relationship between leisure activity involvement and place attachment.

Keywords: activity involvement, experience, place attachment, indigenous cultural park

INTRODUCTION

Prior empirical research studies (e.g., Kyle, Graefe, Manning & Bacon, 2003; Gross & Brown, 2006) have shown inconsistent findings regarding the leisure activity involvement and place attachment relationship: results have pointed to a positive or non-significant relationship.

To address the theoretical issues underlying the leisure activity involvement and place attachment relationship, this study sets out to develop and test a theory that can help scholars and managers better understand the relationship between these two factors. One possible explanation for the aforementioned inconsistent findings may be an existing moderator. We argue that place attachment does not always directly result from the leisure activity involvement, but rather from the visitor’s experience after visiting the place.

As already noted, previous reviews found that a substantial amount of the variance in the leisure activity involvement and place attachment correlations remained unexplained. Therefore, identifying the variable (i.e., experience) that moderates their relationship will fill a gap in our current understanding in the related literatures.

Owing to the economic growth and the implementation of two-day-off weekend in Taiwan the tendency for our citizens to travel on weekend has grown. Moreover, due to the abundance of indigenous culture and history which allure people’s curiosity, the tourists who visit and explore the indigenous culture park have constantly increased year by year. The findings of this study may give some suggestions for the top managers of Taiwan Indigenous Cultural Park to ensure tourists’ satisfaction and loyalty (e.g., place attachment) to the park.
MODEL DEVELOPMENT

Effects of Leisure Activity Involvement on Place Attachment

The concept of involvement was mainly applied in the field of consumer research to understanding aspects of consumer choice behavior such as brand loyalty, the purchase of hobby and enthusiast products, and advertising (Gross & Brown, 2006; Broderick & Mueller, 1999; Bloch & Bruce, 1984). Leisure activity involvement has been defined as an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product, and it is evoked by particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). In other words, the leisure activity involvement is deep-rooted, strong and has a hobby-like quality that sometimes is obsessional in nature (Venkatraman, 1990). Involvement with leisure activities leads to greater sensitivity toward the subtleties of activity attributes, greater perceptions of activity importance, and a greater commitment to specific service providers or geographic locales (Kyle, Graefe & Manning, 2004; Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Havitz & Dimanche, 1999).

Place attachment construct has been used by leisure researchers to refine our understanding of certain leisure behaviors for over two decades (Kyle et al., 2003; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). Some have suggested that people who are attached to a place may be more willing than others to donate their time and money on its behalf (Moore & Graefe 1994). Some researchers defined that place attachment represents an affective bond of people to a particular place (Gross & Brown, 2006; Hidalgo & Hernandez 2001). In other words, the place attachment is an individual values or identifies with a particular environmental setting (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). Place attachment has demonstrated integral relations with leisure satisfaction and loyalty (Alexandrins, Kouthouris, & Meligidis, 2006; Williams & Huffman, 1986), recreation specialization (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000) and recreationists' management preferences and use behavior (Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992).

“Specialization” and “participation” are synonymous with “involvement” in the past leisure literature. Researchers asserted that there are strong linkages between specialization and commitment (Buchanan, 1985; Schreyer & Beaulieu, 1986). On the other hand, the place attachment construct shares conceptual similarity with psychological commitment or attitudinal loyalty (Kyle et al., 2003). Bricker and Kerstetter (2000) surveyed boaters along the South Fork of the American River in California, and found that whitewater recreationists with high levels of experience, skill, and involvement were more attached to the recreation setting than other lower levels of activity involvement. Hwang, Lee, and Chen (2005) also found that tourists’ involvement had a positive significant effect on place attachment. Thus, this study expects that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between leisure activity involvement and place attachment.

Effects of Tourist’s Experience on Place Attachment

Pine and Gilmore (1998) have identified four stages in the progression of economic values which refer to commodities, goods, services and experiences. Although Pine and Gilmore are convinced that these principles can be effectively applied to any service provider, it is apparent that this approach to the designing of experiences is one that is particularly relevant to the tourism industry. Such as going to Disney World, it immerses guests in rides that not only entertain but involve them in an unfolding story, for every guest, cast member stage a complete production of sights, sounds, tastes, aromas, and textures to create a unique experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The competitive advantage which derived from memorable experiences is more difficult to be copied and substituted. In tourism and travel industry, Barsky and Nash (2002) also demonstrated that experience has an effect on the hotel guest’s loyalty. Prior studies (e.g., Court & Lupton, 1997; Bigne, Sahchez, & Sanchez, 2001) found that the experience and image of the destination positively affected an intention to revisit in the future.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) defined that “experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level. Thus, no two people can have the same experience (p.99)”. Experience is something that happens to you that affects the way you feel, but it not self-generated but induced (Schmitt, 1999). Schmitt (1999) was the first scholar who suggests the concept of experiential marketing. One of the core ideas of different types of experience include sensory experiences (Sense); affective experiences (Feel); creative cognitive experiences (Think); physical experiences and entire lifestyles (Act);
Experience created a closer link between the provider and the customer, leading to stronger engagement and loyalty (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). As already noted, place attachment is conceptually similar with loyalty (Kyle et al., 2003). Thus, this study expects that:

H2: There is a positive relationship between tourist’s experience and place attachment.

**Tourist’s Experience as Moderator**

Prior researches show that tourists have high degree place attachment of a particular place because of their high involvement with the particular place. However, empirical research (i.e., Kyle, et al., 2003) testing the relationship stated above has shown inconsistent findings. Kyle, et al. (2003) found only partial support for the hypothesized relationship between involvement and place attachment. One of the possible reasons for the failure to find consistent relationship between the tourists’ involvement and place attachment may be the existing moderating factor. We argue that place attachment does not always directly result from the leisure activity involvement, but rather from the visitor’s experience after visiting the place. Tourism marketing is no longer concerned simply with presenting or conveying an image of a place, but with attempting to sell and experience of a place by explicitly relating to the lifestyles of consumers. When tourists visited or revisited a place, their last experience will have effects on the relationship tourists’ involvement and place attachment. High (or positive) tourist’s experience may enhance the relationship between involvement and place attachment. On the other hand, low (or negative) tourist’s experience may weaken the relationship between involvement and place attachment. Based on the above, we posit the following:

H3: Tourist’s experience moderates the relationship between leisure activity involvement and place attachment.

**METHOD**

**Sampling Plan**

The participants in this study were selected from visitors who just visited Taiwan Indigenous Cultural Park. Potential respondents were asked whether they had an interest in filling out a survey at the park exit. Participants with a certain degree of ability to fill out questionnaire (18 years old and above) were selected.

The survey period included weekday and weekend from December 2008 through January 2009. In total, 550 questionnaires were filled out by visitors who just visited Taiwan Indigenous Cultural Park. Thirty two of the returned questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete answers or because it was clear that the respondents had not treated the questionnaire seriously (e.g., choosing the same option for each question). Therefore, usable data were obtained from 518 respondents (N = 518).

**Measures**

*Activity Involvement:* In the current study, the questionnaire used to measure activity involvement was originally developed by McIntyre and Pigram (1992), and later modified by Kyle et al. (2003). This instrument contains eleven items. Respondents were asked to rate each item using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

*Tourists’ Experience:* In this study, tourist’s experience was measured by the questionnaire developed by Schmitt (1999). This instrument contains fifteen items. Experiences were separated into five concepts: sense, feel, think, act, and relate. Respondents were asked to rate each item using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

*Place Attachment:* Place attachment was measured by the questionnaire developed by Kyle et al. (2003). This instrument contains eight items. Respondents were asked to rate each item using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

**RESULTS**

The means, standard deviations, and bivariated correlations between the variables involved in this research are reported in Table 1. Activity involvement had a significant positive bivariated correlation ($\gamma = 0.677$, $p < 0.001$) with
place attachment, and tourist’s experience had a significant positive bivariated correlation ($\gamma = 0.766$, $p < 0.001$) with place attachment. Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. Namely, there is a positive relationship between leisure activity involvement and place attachment, and there is a positive relationship between tourist’s experience and place attachment.

**TABLE 1: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, ALPHA COEFFICIENTS, AND CORRELATIONS AMONG STUDY VARIABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Activity involvement</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tourist’s experience</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>.608**</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Place attachment</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>.677**</td>
<td>.766**</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Values on the diagonal represent Alpha Coefficients. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001 (Two-tailed tests); N=518.

The hypothesized interactions were explored using hierarchical regression analysis (as shown in Table 2) based on Cohen, et al.’s (2003) methodology: the main effects were added in step 1, and the interaction term created by multiplying the two main effects was added in step 2.

**TABLE 2: HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Main effect variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity involvement</td>
<td>.324***</td>
<td>.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist’s experience</td>
<td>.549***</td>
<td>.439***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Interaction variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity involvement * Tourist’s experience</td>
<td>0.228</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.657</td>
<td>0.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>0.657***</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes : *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

In order to demonstrate moderation, the change in $R^2$ was analyzed in Model 2, which added the interaction variable while controlling for the main effect variables. If a significant change in $R^2$ was found, then the significance of each interaction variable was assessed (Cohen et al., 2003). The results of Model 2 in Table 2 show a non-significant change in $R^2$ ($\Delta R^2 = 0.001$, $\Delta F = .723$, $p > 0.5$). Thus, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

As expected, leisure activity involvement is positive related to place attachment, and this result confirms the majority of previous research findings (e.g., Gross & Brown, 2008; Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Hwang et al., 2005). This finding is still valuable in that it helps to test the generalizability of this Western theory in Taiwan. As the results in this study are similar to prior results obtained in the West, we suggest that there are no cross-cultural limits to the generalizability of the theory.

Tourist’s experience is the core product in the travel and tourism industry. However, the existing tourist’s experience literature lacks for discussions of the relationship between tourist’s experience and place attachment. The result of this study shows that the visitor’s place attachment was influenced by tourist’s experience. This finding of tourist’s experience as an antecedent to place attachment is meaningful. Increasing importance of leisure travel in peoples’ lifestyles, on the other hand, place attachment itself may also be an important source of satisfaction for some people. So to understanding of how and why visitors develop attachments to recreation settings not only may engage a wide range of destination attributes that can be connected with a variety of preferences of individual but may also enable the operators to better design programs and maintain settings that are consistent with visitors’ attachment. The
implication of this result is that administering authority should strengthen aforementioned experiential marketing stimulations to establish a complete experiential environment to reach place attachment, because better experiential marketing strategies can achieve a competitive advantage that is difficult to be imitated and substituted for administrating authority. Based on Schmitt’s (1999) concept of experiential marketing, top managers of Taiwan Indigenous Cultural Park may make develop a favorable experiential environment related with sensory experiences (Sense); affective experiences (Feel); creative cognitive experiences (Think); physical experiences and entire lifestyles (Act); and culture (Relate) to enhance the visitors’ place attachment.

Unfortunately, the results of the present study do not support that tourist’s experience moderates the relationship between leisure activity involvement and place attachment. One of the possible reasons for the failure to find statistically significant moderating effect of tourist’s experience may be methodological problems. For instance, it is possible that selected moderator variable had too little variation, which would make it difficult to detect interaction effects (McClelland & Judd, 1993). Such restricted variation may occur when samples include only one type of organizational structure or work function. One of the limitations of this study relates to the special travel place common, Taiwan Indigenous Cultural Park, within the sample. As such, one should exercise extreme caution while generalizing the results. In addition, to adequately test for interactions, future research should systematically sample across a broad range of leisure activities.

Another limitation is that all data were obtained from sources through the use of self-reports. This may raise the issue of common method variance. Future research should employ multiple sources of data collection to avoid the potential issue of common method variance.

REFERENCES


