



Developing and testing a model explaining cultural consumption: the case of Mauritius

Haywantee Ramkissoon¹

Received: 21/04/2012

¹ Department of Management, Faculty of Business & Economics, Monash University, Australia
Australia & International Tourism Research Unit, Faculty of Arts, Monash University, Australia
Monash Sustainability Institute, Monash University, Australia
School of Sustainable Development & Tourism, University of Technology, Mauritius.
phone: +61 449534097; e-mail: Haywantee.Ramkissoon@monash.edu

Supervisors: Prof Muzaffer (Muzzo) Uysal, Virginia Tech University, USA
Associate Professor Keith Brown, Canada

Institution awarding the Ph. D. Degree: University of Technology, Mauritius

Date of defence: 10th March 2011

Degree awarded: 10th May 2011

© 2012 International University College. All rights reserved

Citation: Ramkissoon, H. (2012) Developing and testing a model explaining cultural consumption: the case of Mauritius. Doctoral Dissertation Summary. *European Journal of Tourism Research* 5(2), pp. 182-185

Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

To develop and test a model explaining cultural consumption in an island economy.

Objectives

Using an integrative approach, the first objective of the study is to develop a structural model to understand the factors determining the behavioural intentions of tourists to visit cultural tourism attractions by integrating the following constructs: 1) felt authenticity, 2) motivation, 3) information search behaviour, 4) destination imagery and 5) behavioural intentions to consume cultural attractions. The second objective of the study is to empirically test the interplay of relationships among these constructs in a small island economy.

Methodology

Data were collected (N=620) at selected cultural and natural heritage sites in Mauritius, an island with a land area of around 1860 square kilometres situated in the Western Indian Ocean, off the South East Coast of Africa. The modelling objective impelled a preliminary first stage qualitative survey to elicit important dimensionalities of cultural behavioural intentions of tourists. A qualitative survey was conducted with 40 tourists consuming selected natural and cultural heritage sites of the island. The preliminary findings were used to develop the main survey instrument. Measurement scale items, adopted from well-established studies in literature were slightly modified in the light of the qualitative findings to fit the context of the

study. A pre-test of the measurement instrument was hence deemed necessary to validate the items in the scales. The survey instrument was pre-tested on 115 cultural tourists visiting Le Gorges National Park, a renowned natural and cultural heritage site of the island. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to ensure unidimensionality and internal consistency of the constructs. The final version of the questionnaire survey design was developed and administered in English, French and German.

The main phase of data collection was undertaken in the months of January, February and March 2009 involving all weathers. The structured questionnaire, designed for self-completion was administered to tourists visiting 10 selected natural and cultural heritage sites of the island. They were approached on a next person basis and the purpose of the study explained to them. Exit surveys at all sites were considered impractical. To avoid statistical bias, 20 questionnaires with missing data were eliminated (Hair, Anderson, Tathan & Black, 1998). This resulted in 600 surveys retained for the analysis with almost equal proportions of male (49.5%) and female (50.5%) respondents. More than half of the respondents were between 30 and 35; the age distribution was 26.2% (20-29), 22.8% (40-49), 10% (50-59), 9% (60+) and 2.7% (19 or younger). The vast majority were from Europe (87.2%) with France (45%) being the dominating market.

Results

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Hierarchical Multiple Regression (HMR) were used to test the proposed structural model. The sample was randomly split into two halves with the first sample (N=291) used for the model estimation, and the second half (N=309) to validate the model. First, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed on the first half of the sample (N=291) to determine the underlying factors of each of the measurement scales. Confirmatory factor analysis was further employed to produce empirical evidence of construct validity. Findings revealed a

significant positive relationship between felt authenticity and cultural behavioural intentions of tourists. This confirmed the centrality of the concept of authenticity and its significant role in its function in destinations as a determinant of tourists' cultural behavioural intentions. Another key finding was the moderating effect of felt authenticity on the respective relationships between motivation, information search behaviour, destination imagery and cultural behavioural intentions of tourists.

Destination imagery had a positive influence on tourists' cultural intentions. In line with Bigné, Sanchez, & Sanchez (2001), this finding has important marketing implications. Information search behaviour was found to exert a negative influence on tourists' cultural intentions. It is likely that for consumers expending more external effort to look for information, the cultural attractions should become more attractive to the users leading to their behavioural intentions to consume the cultural product.

Another interesting finding which emerged was that tourists' motivation did not influence their intentions to consume cultural attractions. This was attributed to the context-specific nature of the study. Essentially marketed as a sand, sun, sea and resort destination, findings suggest that the primary motives of the tourists visiting the island might have been to consume the 3S. This further implied that since they were already at the destination, they were also consuming the cultural attractions. Therefore, they were essentially incidental cultural tourists as McKercher (2004) conceptualized them.

Theoretical conclusions

The study contributes to the theoretical enhancement of knowledge by developing and proposing a unique structural behavioural model for cultural tourism consumption. In fact, to-date cultural tourists' behaviour and intentions have remained unexploited in tourism research. One of the most important theoretical contributions of this research study is that it attempts to identify the salient factors influencing the cultural behavioural process in

a small island developing state. The integrative model seeks to operationalize discourses on tourist behaviour and cultural tourism consumption. It seeks to determine the factors that influence cultural tourists' behaviour and consumption of the unique natural and cultural offerings in small island destinations. Challenging traditional discourses on behavioural modelling, this study offers to literature a new and unique model of cultural behavioural intentions with integrative concepts in the context of small island economies. The bundle of determinants proposed to influence tourists' intentions in cultural tourism consumption which include felt authenticity, motivation and information search behaviour and destination imagery was thoroughly investigated.

Another significant theoretical contribution to the existing reservoir of knowledge in tourism is the testing of the moderating effect of felt authenticity in cultural tourism consumption. Authenticity plays a fundamental role in cultural tourism consumption and literature has noted the importance of further research on this concept. Yet, researchers have not systematically investigated the role of felt authenticity as a moderating construct. This study makes an important contribution to literature by shedding light on the effect of felt authenticity as a moderator of the respective relationships between motivation, information search behaviour, destination imagery and behavioural intentions in cultural tourism consumption.

Practical application of the dissertation

From a practical perspective, findings of the study could aid in the planning, development and marketing of the cultural tourism sector of small island economies. Understanding the salient factors influencing cultural behavioural intentions is of particular interest to the marketing of the cultural tourism product and moreover is critical to sustain destination competitiveness in island destinations. Testing the proposed integrative structural model using the case of Mauritius can offer useful insights to tourism planners and policy-makers of small island economies to innovate, plan, develop and promote more

appropriate cultural tourism offerings at their destination. This is clearly in line with the Mauritian government's tourism policy seeking at diversifying the tourism product of the island by promoting the island's cultural attributes. Thus, creating and integrating the latter as value-added components will additionally help to sustain tourism resources and promote successful tourism development thereby maintaining and enhancing destination competitiveness in the market.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of chapter one

Chapter one provides an introduction to the study. It investigates the research problem, identifies the gaps in literature and emphasises the need to better understand the consumption behaviour of cultural tourists. The clearly defined objectives of the study are stated followed by a succinct discussion on the theoretical background of the study. The proposed structural model is presented describing a logical flow among the constructs by indicating the directions of the causes and effects of the interplay of factors relating to the behavioural intentions of tourists in cultural tourism consumption. The relationships depicted by arrows in the structural model are presented as research propositions. Contributions of the study are discussed in the context of applied and research-based relevance.

Abstract of chapter two

This chapter provides a scoping review of tourism in the island of Mauritius which serves as the background to the study. It explores the distinctive characteristics of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and goes further in explaining tourism as an engine of growth for such economies. It further provides a detailed analysis of tourism development in Mauritius starting with the evolution of tourism in the island. It describes the tourism product and further investigates into the policy directions in the Mauritian economy with specific emphasis on measures to support expansion in volume, product diversification, land-use planning and the differentiation of tourism products.

Abstract of chapter three

This chapter provides a scoping review of the literature relevant to the present study reflecting cultural tourism theories and behavioural models in destination choice. Evidence of relevant concepts pertaining to the constructs of the proposed model of the study is presented. The bundle of travel determinants proposed in cultural tourism consumption namely felt authenticity, motivation, information search behaviour and destination imagery are further investigated. The discussion of these concepts serves as a research background for the propositions and research objectives of the study.

Abstract of chapter four

This chapter reports the methodological framework of the study and investigates at great length the research design and instruments used to collect, measure and analyse the data. It details the qualitative approach adopted in the preliminary survey discussing its potential in elucidating new dimensions and constructs to further develop the main survey design. The latter adopts a quantitative approach which is further discussed at length. This mixed method approach was chosen since a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods seems to be the best approach in the present study given its context-specific nature as detailed in chapter two. The first section of chapter four discusses the qualitative survey with tourists at selected cultural sites to elicit preliminary dimensionalities of cultural tourists' behaviour. The second section presents a discussion of the research design and survey instrument specifying the survey sample and data collection methods. The measurement variables and scaling used to measure the constructs are further elaborated. The third section describes the statistical method (Structural Equation Modelling) employed in the study and addresses the issues of reliability and validity of the measurement scales.

Abstract of chapter five

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis. As discussed in Chapter four, a preliminary stage of qualitative research was

initially adopted to elicit the constructs most relevant to the study. The initial task consisted of developing the survey instrument which resulted in the design of semi-structured interview questions to address different aspects of the cultural tourist's behaviour. It was expected that this approach would help to serve as an inference to build up a more appropriate survey instrument since the study was context-specific. The elicited dimensionalities were used to build the main survey design for the study. This however required a further pre-test for the refinement of the scales. The profile of dimensions extracted from the preliminary qualitative survey is presented, followed by an analysis of the pre-test of the scale items including a description of the sample used. The next section details the survey method employed in the final study including the demographic profile of respondents. The last section provides the detailed statistical analysis results using the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses followed by an examination of the structural equation model and the analysis of hypotheses testing.

Abstract of chapter six

Chapter six concludes the study. The major focus of this final chapter is to present the summary, discussion, and managerial and theoretical implications of the research findings. The first section starts with a summary and discussion of the hypotheses testing. The managerial and theoretical implications of the findings are discussed next followed by the limitations of the study. In conclusion, the chapter suggests additional directions for future research.

References:

- Bigné, J. E., Sanchez, M. I. & Sanchez, J. (2001). Tourism image, evaluations variables and after purchase behaviour. *Tourism Management*, 22, 607-616.
- Hair, J. F., Anderson, R. E., Tatham, R. L. & Black, W. C. (1998). *Multivariate data analysis with readings*. New York: Macmillan Publishing.
- McKercher, B. (2004). A comparative study of international cultural tourists. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 11(2), 95-107.