



Research Paper

Travel motivations and travel distance with temporal advance: A case study of Hong Kong pleasure travelers

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ABSTRACT

Although previous studies have examined different factors that affect travel demand and destination choice, tourism research has not investigated changes in such factors over time. This paper presents the findings of a study that examines the robustness of motivations and travel distance over time based on the 10 most popular overseas destinations for pleasure travel and utilizing data collected in an annual survey of Hong Kong residents from 2001 to 2010. The empirical findings indicated that for in most destinations, motivations to travel to the destinations remained unchanged over time. Similarly, results found participants did not necessarily travel further as time progressed. In addition, the study found that independent travel is an increasingly popular mode of travel.

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1. Introduction

Hong Kong is one of the most popular travel destinations in the Asia-Pacific region (Qu, Li, & Chu, 2000). At the same time, the city is also one of the largest tourist-generating markets in this region, after Japan, Taiwan, and Australia (Zhang, Qu, & Tang, 2004). The number of Hong Kong outbound travelers by air and sea increased from 13 million in 2004 to 15 million in 2010 (Hong Kong Tourism Board [HKTB], 2011). Moreover, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Hong Kong increased from US\$26,092 in 2005 to US\$31,758 in 2010, and was the fourth highest in the Asia-Pacific region that year after Australia, Japan, and Singapore (World Bank, 2012). Given this large tourism market, along with a combined annual disposable income of US\$205,725 million across the Hong Kong population (Euromonitor International, 2012), the travel demands of Hong Kong residents should be of great interest to destination marketing organizations (DMOs) worldwide.

A number of studies have examined the factors influencing travel demand and destination choice. In relation to choice, researchers have proposed that traveler choices are influenced by different factors related to travel motivations (Crompton, 1979; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Kim, 2008; Sangpikul, 2008). In

general, people travel to particular destinations because these destinations satisfy their desire for such things as escape, relaxation, and spending time with family members and friends. Additionally, the inherent desire to travel is further stimulated and reinforced by destination attributes such as beaches, cultural attractions, shopping, and other attractions. Different motivational attributes result in different destination choices. Other studies have focused on the relationship between travel demand and distance, and have identified a lognormal pattern of travel demand (Greer & Wall, 1979), where demand declines exponentially once travelers notice a high demand. Furthermore, a number of studies have investigated modes of travel with respect to various socio-demographic and travel characteristics (Quiroga, 1990; Mok & Armstrong, 1995; Hyde & Lawson, 2003).

Travel demand to a destination should be maintained at a certain level as part of sustainable tourism and one way to achieve this is by creating and maintaining destination loyalty. Studies on destination loyalty have examined the factors that influence the “repeat” destination choices of travelers, including monetary (e.g. accommodation, air tickets) and non-monetary costs (e.g. time and effort), past visit history, different cultural experiences, safety, considerations and transport convenience (Oppermann, 2000; Chen & Gursoy, 2001; Niininen, Szivas, & Riley, 2004; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Alegre & Juaneda, 2006; Chi & Qu, 2008). When tourists travel to familiar destination, they spend less time and effort organizing their travel than they would travel if they were traveling to an unfamiliar destination. Similarly, travelers who visit familiar destinations have a better understanding of price and quality than those traveling to unfamiliar ones.

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The objectives of this study are three-fold. First, the study argues that destination loyalty (or repeated destination choice) needs to be examined along with travel motivations. It is because travel motivation is a precedent to the establishment of destination loyalty. In order for a destination to be selected at the first place, the destination should satisfy travelers' motivation. This study makes an attempt to examine how distinguishable travel motivations to a destination will be from other destinations. As such, one of the study's objectives is to examine the robustness of travel motivations over time. While travel motivations may change with travel experience (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983), little is known about the robustness of travel motivations over time. Also, this study argues that repeated destination choice needs to be examined over increasing travel distance. Given that technological advancement and infrastructure development have reduced travel costs (Khadaroo & Seetana, 2008), travelers might travel further or cheaper. Thus, the second objective of this study is to examine the changes in distance over time. Although previous studies have well documented motivations to travel and destination choices, limited research has examined these factors (i.e. motivation and distance) from a temporal perspective. Such a perspective, usually expressed in terms of trends, is essential for identifying the long-term series of movements hidden in the raw data (Gonzalez & Moral, 1996). Hence, the third objective of this study is to explore travel characteristics of Hong Kong pleasure travelers. It includes travel mode and travel trend among the 10 most popular destinations.

This study analyzes data from a series of annual surveys of travel demand for international pleasure travel among Hong Kong residents. The purpose is to examine whether travel motivations and distance vary over temporal advance using the 10 most popular international destinations based on aggregated data. Having introduced the background of this research, the following section reviews the published literature on issues relating to outbound travel. After that, there is a section to discuss the data collection and analysis. The final section summarizes the findings and offers suggestions for future research. This study contributes to the literature on travel and tourism by addressing the aforementioned gap in the research on destination choice and travel demand by exploring the destination choices of Hong Kong outbound travelers from a temporal perspective. Furthermore, it aims to investigate variations in motivation among travelers to different destinations. It thus provides new insights into the international travel trends of Hong Kong residents, which in turn could help travel industry managers and DMOs worldwide to target Hong Kong pleasure travelers, to understand changes in travel demand for international destinations, and to establish appropriate operations and marketing strategies for Hong Kong travelers.

2. Literature review

This section reviews existing research on factors associated with travel demand and destination choice.

2.1. Destination loyalty and travel Motivations

Destination loyalty conceptually incorporates customer loyalty in the marketing literature on tourism destinations. Conventionally, loyalty embraces two aspects: behavioral and attitudinal (Dick & Basu, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010; Bianchi & Pike, 2011). Repeat purchase or revisit to a travel destination is the basis of behavioral loyalty. Due to difficulties in measuring actual behavior, the loyalty literature commonly measures intention, to purchase again which the

theory of planned behavior theoretically overarches (Ajzen, 1991). Attitudinal loyalty, however, reflects attitudinal preference or commitment towards to product, service, or destination. While behaviorally loyal customers may be swayed by better alternatives (Minami & Dawson, 2008), attitudinally loyal customers stay with the service provider or destination regardless of situational influences and marketing efforts (Carpenter, 2008). Thus, it is important to focus on true loyalty, a balance between behavioral and attitudinal loyalty.

The destination loyalty literature postulates two factors that determine the extent to which destination loyalty can be established and maintained: satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim, 2008; Mendes, Valle, Guerreiro, & Silva, 2010) and destination brand equity (McDowall & Ma, 2010; Bianchi & Pike, 2011). In the literature, destination loyalty is commonly measured by the intention to revisit and willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth. Revisit and recommendation to others are critical in a competitive tourism destination market (Yoon & Uysal, 2005), as retaining existing customers is less expensive than acquiring new customers (Chaudhry, 2007; Mendes et al., 2010). Given that travel motivation plays an important role played in destination loyalty by tourist satisfaction (Bramwell, 1998; Yoon & Uysal, 2005), a discussion of the role of travel motivation in destination selection follows.

2.2. Travel motivations and destination selection

Among the literature on the significance of motivations (i.e. pull and push motivations) on travel destination selection, Um and Crompton's (1990) travel destination choice model provides one of the original theoretical bases. Their two-stage model is based on the notion that attitude toward a destination is a useful predictor of destination selection. Travelers select a tourism destination by comparing perceived facilitators and perceived inhibitors. Travelers tend to have a more positive attitude toward a tourism destination when the destination satisfies specific motivation for pleasure travel.

Consequently, a plethora of studies has investigated how different types of travel motivations (i.e. pull and push motivations) affect travel destination selection (Crompton, 1979; Cha, McCleary, & Uysal, 1995; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Keating & Kriz, 2008; Kim, 2008). Pull motivation factors are related to the external and cognitive aspects of a destination, such as beaches, cultural attractions, shopping, and natural scenery. Push motivation factors are related to the internal, emotional aspects of travel, such as the desire for rest and relaxation, escape from routine, adventure, excitement, and family unity. Push motivation factors are considered to be directly related to destination loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Other studies have examined the destination selection process in terms of preferences by, arguing that destination preference shares similar traits with travel motivation (Manfredo, Driver, & Tarrant, 1996; Hsu, Tsai, & Wu, 2009).

These motivations have been further examined with regard to culture (You, O'Leary, Morrison, & Hong, 2000; Zhang et al., 2004; Kao, Patterson, Scott, & Li, 2008; Rittichainuwat, 2008). You et al. (2000) compared UK pleasure travelers with Japanese pleasure travelers, and found that UK travelers rated enhancing knowledge, visiting friends and relatives, being together as a family, finding excitement, and experiencing a new and different lifestyle higher than their Japanese counterparts. Japanese pleasure travelers, meanwhile, viewed relaxation as more important than travelers from the UK. You et al. (2000) further found that UK travelers sought after outdoor sport activities, culture and heritage activities, sightseeing and shopping, people-interactive activities, low-priced food and accommodation, and exotic atmospheres more than Japanese travelers, who sought more after

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