



Applying self-perception theory to explain residents' attitudes about tourism development through travel histories



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Self-perception theory is introduced as guiding framework to explain residents' attitudes involving degree of travel.
- Travel use history (TUH) is a useful predictor of residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development.
- Adoption of self-perception theory expands the pool of limited theories in resident attitudes research.

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ABSTRACT

This study introduces self-perception theory as a guiding framework in explaining residents' attitudes from an introspective approach involving residents' own degree of travel. To date, measures explaining such attitudes have primarily come in the form of sociodemographic, socioeconomic, spatial, personal benefit/dependence, etc. variables. Results reveal that travel use history (TUH) is a useful predictor of residents' attitudes about tourism development. Residents who were infrequent travelers indicated less support for tourism than those who were intermediate or frequent travelers. For intermediate travelers, residents who had traveled internationally over the past two years had stronger support than those who had not for selected items within both attitude factors: support for tourism development and tourism contributions to the community. Findings provide support for the continued use of self-perception theory as a framework to consider in explaining residents' attitudes involving tourism and corresponding development.

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1. Introduction

Residents in tourism destinations play a vital role in providing quality experiences for tourists and maintaining sustainable tourism development (Gursoy, Chi, & Dyer, 2010). Relatively few theories and frameworks (e.g., social exchange theory, social representations theory, emotional solidarity, etc.) have been applied or tested to explain residents' attitudes toward tourism and/or tourism development. Guided by those theories, certain

explanatory variables have been identified, including social exchange (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2011; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012), social demographics (Cavus & Tanrisevdi, 2002; McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Pulina, Meleddu, & Del Chiappa, 2013), residential proximity (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Harrill & Potts, 2003; Pulina et al., 2013), and economic dependence on the tourism economy (Long, Perdue, & Allen, 1990; McGehee & Andereck, 2004). Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) examined resident attitudes from the perspective of extrinsic (e.g., stage of development) and intrinsic (e.g., residents' length of residence, involvement in tourism) elements of tourism development. Such variables are attributes externally observable to residents; they seek to account for residents' attitudes from an outsider's perspective. As such, existing research on residents' attitudes does not consider factors

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unique to residents that reflect self-perceived behavior.

Taking into account residents own travel behavior (much like Draper, Woosnam, & Norman, 2011) have with the tourism use history (TUH) could potentially explain how individuals perceive tourism within their own community. Such measures of TUH can take the shape of number of previous trips, destinations, and types of destinations (e.g., domestic versus international) (Draper, 2016). In essence, consideration of the TUH framework allows for an empathetic, introspective examination of how a person may formulate perspectives of positive or negative attitudes about tourism (Woosnam, 2012); affording the opportunity to consider tourism impacts 'through the eyes' of being a tourist. Arguably, some research within the sub-field of residents' attitudes has focused on considering tourists as separate from residents, perpetuating an 'us versus them' mentality (Tasci & Severt, 2016). This has been noted within the work of Wall and Mathieson (2006) discussing the distinctive characteristics of 'host' and 'guest' and the corresponding relationship (based on interaction forms) that likely stem from the initial works of tourism anthropology and impacts research. As a result, studies have unintentionally disregarded the fact that many individuals living within tourist destinations are actually travelers elsewhere. Such experiences and opportunities to be a tourist should provide individuals with a necessary perspective to be self-reflective and pensive when it comes to assessing tourism in their own community.

Self-perception theory, which has gained some momentum in social science fields and disciplines (see Visser & Cooper, 2007) outside of the tourism literature as of late, offers an introspective framework to consider in explaining residents' perspectives of tourism within their community. Bem (1972) argued that people understand their cognitions and emotional states as a result of examining their own behaviors. Bem (1967) offered self-perception theory as an alternative to cognitive dissonance theory, which examines interpersonal phenomena. Self-perception theory is based on two premises (Bem, 1972). First, it tends to be a more internal reflection of an individual's attitudes and emotions. Second, the attitudes and emotions are influenced by the circumstances of an event or experience.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to introduce the self-perception theory to the tourism literature as a framework that may help explain how residents' formulate their attitudes toward tourism and tourism development; and 2) to test the role that residents' level of travel use history (TUH) plays in explaining their attitudes concerning tourism development.

2. Literature review

The practical, contextual nature of residents' attitudes concerning tourism makes it somewhat difficult to employ one theoretical framework that will explain locals' perspectives. In light of this consideration, some theories have been employed to explain host community residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development including social representations theory (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Moscardo, 2011), social distance (Sinkovics & Penz, 2009; Tasci, 2009), integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation (Brown, 2009; Lee & Woosnam, 2010) and emotional solidarity (Woosnam, 2012) to name a few. Beyond these, the social exchange theory has been utilized most in an effort to explain residents' attitudes (Nunkoo & So, 2016; Nunkoo, Smith, & Ramkissoon, 2013; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Kock, & Ramayah, 2015; Sharpley, 2014; Styliadis, 2015; Wang & Pfister, 2008; Ward & Berno, 2011; Zuo, Gusoy, & Wall, 2017).

Nunkoo and So (2016) claimed that the social exchange theory is likely one of the most popular theories used to explain residents' attitudes toward tourism and/or tourism development in various

destinations (e.g., Deery et al., 2011; Lee, Kang, Long, & Reisinger, 2010; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Nunkoo & So, 2016; Ward & Berno, 2011). This theory suggests that residents' level of support or opposition for tourism and tourism development depends on perceptions of whether positive externalities are greater than negative externalities and whether the exchange of resources (e.g., support for tourism development, hospitality toward tourists, etc.) between residents and tourists are fair (Ap, 1992). In short, individuals will remain in a given relationship so long as they feel exchanges are balanced for parties involved.

Studies employing the social exchange theory framework within tourism have revealed somewhat mixed results (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Chen & Raab, 2012; McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Woosnam, Norman, & Ying, 2009). In an early study, Perdue, Long, and Allen (1987) predicted outdoor recreation participants and non-participants would have different attitudes toward tourism, however the two groups did not differ. McGehee and Andereck (2004) examined combinations of demographic variables and the perception of residents' personal benefits from tourism, as well as whether the study communities were dependent on tourism to predict attitudes toward tourism. Models including personal benefit and economic dependence as predictors of positive and negative impacts indicated, according to McGehee and Andereck (2004), that as a destination becomes increasingly dependent on tourism, the negative impacts are more recognizable which may detract from positive impacts. Latkova and Vogt (2012) found the perception of personally benefiting from tourism was positively related to positive impacts and negatively related to negative impacts. Subsequently, positive impacts and benefiting from tourism were positively related, but negative impacts negatively related, to support for tourism development.

Research has also used social exchange theory to examine residential proximity and attitudes toward tourism development (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004). The results indicated residents living in closer proximity to the tourism attraction, who use it more frequently, had more negative attitudes than those residing further away. Findings relating geographical proximity to a tourism center and residents' attitudes are somewhat contradictory as Harrill (2004) claims. For instance, Harrill and Potts (2003) found that residents living in neighborhoods further from the tourism core (which received fewer impacts) perceived more positive attitudes toward tourism. Similarly, Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) residents living within a tourism zone felt tourism resulted in more litter and disruption in the area compared to those not living in the tourism zone. Belisle and Hoy (1980) found the opposite to be true, "that as the distance from the tourism zone increases, positive impacts are perceived less favorably" (p.254). The latter finding is arguably a function of economic dependency (as the study took place in Bogota, Columbia) as Harrill (2004) suggests.

Measures used to predict residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development have largely taken the form of socio-economic and socio-demographic variables (Gursoy et al., 2010; Wang & Pfister, 2008) as well as geographic proximity (Harrill & Potts, 2003). As Williams and Lawson (2001) found however, demographic factors did not explain why residents had formulated their perspectives of tourism within their community; arguing additional measures must be considered. This sentiment was echoed by McGehee and Andereck (2004) as they reported personal factors (i.e., socio-economic and socio-demographic variables) did not significantly predict support for tourism, rather, economic dependence did. Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) also found that residents involved (i.e., employed directly or indirectly) had more positive attitudes toward tourism development and its potential for their communities compared to those not economically dependent on the industry.

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