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Moderating Effect of C0VID-19 pandemic on the Relationship between Tourists' Happiness and Intention to Revisit and Overall Image

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The Moderating Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Relationship between Tourist Happiness and Tourist Behavioural Intentions

1.1 Introduction

The need for happiness, which began with the existence of humankind, has been prevalent and universally recognised, regardless of people' different lifestyles resulting from culture, age, gender, or socioeconomic status (Nelson-Coffey, Kurtz and Lyubomirsky, 2015). Its prominences and the ways of measurements have drawn considerable attention from psychologists (Huta, 2016; Diener et al., 2017; Karam and Dorothy, 2017), economists (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006; Spruk and Kešeljević, 2016), public policy theorists (Johns and Ormerod, 2007; Easterlin, 2013), sociologists (Fors and Kulin, 2016; Bojanowska and Zalewska, 2017) and political scientists (Michalos, 2014; Loubser and Steenekamp, 2017). This growing interest in happiness has also affected some destination marketing organizations, where researchers have begun to create their marketing and branding strategies that embraced the notion that positive emotions are key to progress. Some seminal tourism campaign examples include: It's more fun in the Philippines; I love New York; Hong Kong 'Live it. Love it' (McCabe, 2014, p. 451). Slovenia has also benefited from using an emotional appeal in its promotional campaign by stressing the word 'love' in their country's name (I feel sLOVEnia) to establish an emotional link with potential tourists. Other such slogans that seek to arouse a positive emotional experience among (potential) tourists include Germany's 'Simply Inspiring'; The Netherlands' 'Surprising Cities'; 'Fascinating' Malaysia; and Edinburgh's 'Inspiring Capital'; these slogans seek to link positive emotional responses with choosing to visit a particular destination. The above examples provide further evidence of the importance of linking positive emotional responses and the tourist experience (Hosany, Hunter-Jones, and McCabe, 2020). However, although positive-emotions has received considerable attention in recent years in the tourism literature (e.g. Bastiaansen et al., 2019; Hosany, Martin and Woodside, 2020; Tu et al., 2020), the existing studies tend to ignore how happiness can be operationalised in tourism research. This highlights a well-defined research gap: the lack of understanding of how tourist happiness is related to tourist experiences (Filep and Laing, 2018).

1.2 Literature Review

Positive psychology has moved beyond the prior one-dimensional construct of happiness that solely focuses on positive emotions; the literature has revitalised the interest in studying happiness from different perspectives (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). For Ryan and Deci (2001), there are two principal orientations towards happiness: (i) pleasure and (ii) meaning. Further, as per the authentic theory of happiness, Seligman (2002) introduced engagement as a third distinct orientation towards happiness besides pleasure and meaning. Accordingly, the present paper attempts to address these gaps in the literature by providing an empirical investigation of how tourist experiences influence tourist happiness; to achieve this, the researcher will focus on *engagement* and *meaning* as well as positive emotions to better understand the factors that influence tourist happiness. Further, this research project explores the consequences of tourist happiness on tourists' behavioural intentions, such as revisit intention and intention to recommend. In the meantime, at the time of writing (2021), the world continues to face the COVID-19 pandemic, which has wreaked considerable psychological, economic, and social harm globally (Gössling, Scott and Hall, 2020). Unfortunately, COVID-19 has also been responsible for generating considerable animosity between people worldwide: hate, fear, and anger due to lost jobs, livelihoods, and incomes (Nawaz et al., 2020). This is likely to encourage the expression of adaptive or protective behaviours, aiming to provide an escape from the source of the danger or motivational conflict (Steimer, 2002). Thus, while investigating the consequences of this situational animosity on human behaviour is crucial, to date, it has failed to attract any significant attention among researchers (although this issue has been addressed in marketing-related tourism studies: e.g. Sanchez, Campo and Alvarez, 2016), this phenomenon deserves more investigation. To this end, the present study adopts a quantitative research approach to investigate the moderating effect of COVID-19-related situational animosity on the relationship between tourist happiness and tourist revisit intention.

1.3 Methodology

The study's primary constructs were measured using multi-item scales, convenience sampling, and a cross-sectional data approach. The quantitative data were collected via a self-administered online questionnaire on a professional online data-collection platform (Qualtrics). In line with the research context, the researcher defined the target population as 'international tourists from the USA and China who have visited London'. The researcher recruited 460 respondents from the USA and 440 from China to meet the model's complexity requirements. The United States is characterised by a highly individualistic culture, while China can be typified as a strongly collectivist society. This division assured that while the sample includes subjects with generally homogeneous destination experience stimuli, these subjects will also belong to comparable cultural groups to improve generalisability (Bell, Bryman, and Herley, 2019).

1.4 Results

1.4.1 Measurement Model

In the data distribution, the levels of skewness and kurtosis for the scale items on both datasets was below the acceptable scores for (skewness < |3|, and kurtosis < |10|) recommended by Kline (2010), suggesting no violation of the normality assumption (Kline, 2011). The psychometric properties of the scales were assessed using a five-factor measurement model that was estimated via AMOS. The measurement model results indicate a considerable satisfactory level of fit on both samples (Chinese data: $\chi2 = 681.52$, $\chi2/df = 2.07$, CFI= 0.96, NFI= 0.92; RMSEA= 0.049; USA data: $\chi2 = 512.63$, $\chi2/df = 1.56$, CFI = 0.98, NFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.035). All the standardised factor loadings exceeded the critical value of 0.60 (Awang, 2014). All the constructs investigated in

this study indicate a high level of internal consistency: the reported composite reliability values all exceed the acceptable cut-off value of 0.70 (Hair et al.,2014). All constructs achieved adequate AVE values: all were greater than 0.50, as per Hair et al.'s (2010) recommendations, establishing the scale's convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). To suggest adequate evidence of discriminant validity, the square root of the average variance for each construct should exceed its correlation with any other constructs to provide robust evidence of discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Therefore, in the present study, the researcher first extricated the square root AVE for each construct in the proposed model; then, the results were compared with the results for the corresponding inter-construct correlations. The results showed that convergent validity and discriminant validity were supported for both samples. Then, multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFA) was considered, as well as the most essential three tests of measurement invariance: configural, metric, and scalar equivalence analysis. The results support factor structure equivalence (configural invariance), partial loadings equivalence (partial metric invariance), and measurement (scalar) equivalence; this indicates that the proposed model may be generalised across the sample cohorts (China and the USA).

1.4.2   Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesised relationships. Overall, an acceptable fit was achieved by the structural model: (Chinese data: $\chi2 = 575.95$, $\chi2/df = 2.36$, CFI = 0.96, NFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.056; USA data: $\chi2 = 660.47$, $\chi2/df = 2.71$, CFI = 0.95, NFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.061).

As for the results relating to each hypothesis, they are presented in turn.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that positive emotions towards a destination positively influence tourist happiness among both the USA and Chinese participants. The data revealed that positive emotions positively affect tourist happiness in the samples (Chinese data: (β = .204, $P < .001$, t = 4.85; USA data: (β = .328, $P < .001$, t = 5.96). Therefore, H1 is supported on both samples.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that meaning/purpose in tourist experience positively influences tourist happiness among both the USA and Chinese participants. The results show that meaning/purpose in tourist experience directly and positively affected tourist happiness among the Chinese participants (β = .409, $P < .001$, t = 6.14) and the USA participants (β = .247, $P < .001$, t = 3.92). Therefore, H2 is supported on both samples.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that tourist engagement positively influences tourist happiness among both the Chinese and US participants. The results show that tourist engagement significantly predicted tourist happiness among the Chinese participants (β = .357, $P < .001$, t = 5.72) and the USA participants (β = .268, $P < .001$, t = 4.50). Therefore, H3 is supported on both samples.

Hypothesis 4 expects that tourist happiness positively influences intention to revisit in both USA and China. The data show that the higher tourist happiness is likely to have a more propensity to revisit a destination in the sample of China (β = .619, $P < .001$, t = 11.15) and in the USA (β = .629, $P < .001$, t = 12.47). Therefore, H4 is supported on both samples.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that tourist happiness positively influences intention to recommend among both the Chinese and USA participants. The findings revealed that tourists with higher levels of tourist happiness reported stronger intentions to recommend in both samples: Chinese participants (β = .692, $P < .001$, t = 13.31) USA participants (β = .574, $P < .001$, t = 11.74). Therefore, H5 is supported on both samples.

Hypothesis 6 expects that situational animosity-(COVID19) moderates the relationship between tourist happiness and revisit intention such that the higher situational animosity-(COVID19), the weaker is the relationship between tourist happiness and Revisit intention in both USA and China.
Andrew Hayes' PROCESS for regression analysis (an add-on process in SPSS (v.26), was used to examine the possible moderation effect (Hayes, 2013). The findings substantiate the assumption that situational animosity-(COVID-19) negatively influenced the relationship between tourist happiness and revisit intention (Chinese data: β= -.072, p<0.5, [CI: -0.130, -0.015], USA data: β=-0.069, p<0.5, [CI: -0.124, -0.014]. Therefore, H6 is supported on both samples.

1.5 Discussion

The results provide evidence of a positive correlation between *tourist happiness* and *post-travel behavioural intentions*. This finding is consistent with previous theoretical conceptualisations of this relationship in the literature (e.g. Bigné, Andreu and Gnoth, 2005; Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Vittersø et al., 2017; Vada, Prentice and Hsiao, 2019). Also, the findings suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has harmed the relationship between *tourist happiness* and *revisit intention*; this may be due to the ongoing quarantine, isolation, and unemployment caused by the pandemic facilitating significant situational animosity that has harmed the relationship between *tourist happiness* and *revisit intention*. Overall, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the current body of knowledge and practices in four ways. First, it provides a universal cross-cultural framework that addresses three main orientations towards happiness: (i) pleasure, (ii) meaning, and (iii) engagement. Besides, it also provides an analysis of the relationships between these orientations and tourist happiness among respondents from individualistic (i.e. the USA) and collectivist countries (i.e. China). Second, the proposed conceptual model examined *tourist happiness* as an antecedent of *tourist behavioural intentions*, moderated by situational animosity due to COVID-19 among respondents from the USA and China. Third, the invariance analyses examined whether it is possible to generalise the proposed model across diverse population samples (China and the USA). Finally, this paper has profound implications for tourist destinations: specifically, by raising awareness of the importance of measuring and managing tourist happiness to enhance overall destination competitiveness and performance.

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