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Opinion of Inexperienced and Experienced Tourists on Curaçao Regarding Locally Produced Handcrafts

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ABSTRACT

The authors based this relatively large-sample, quantitative study upon Love and Sheldon's (1998) small-sample, qualitative study in an attempt to differentiate inexperienced from experienced tourists on souvenir preference, arguing that if inexperienced tourists primarily assign meaning to souvenirs that are representative of place, they should prefer to purchase souvenirs that are representative of place and if experienced tourists are more concerned with hedonics, they should prefer non-representative, artistic souvenirs. Data were collected in November 2008 from cruise-ship and stay-over tourists on the island of Curaçao and analysed primarily using chi-square tests of independence to determine the influence of level of travel experience. The results were mixed and different populations of tourists were not clearly distinguished by any of the hypothesis tests. Future research that includes a larger sample size, improved grouping variables, and wider separation of samples may show more promising results.

INTRODUCTION

Love and Sheldon (1998) describe two classes of tourists, naïve (inexperienced) and experienced, in reference to concepts of representativeness and authenticity of souvenirs and discuss differences in how inexperienced and experienced tourists assign meanings to souvenirs they have purchased at some point in the past. Love and Sheldon (1998, p. 171) state, "For those informants who report less travel experience or visits to unfamiliar destinations, meanings tend to be assigned to souvenirs in specific contexts and are typically associated with a particular place or destination." This is what Love and Sheldon refer to as "representations of place." In contrast, experienced tourists are less concerned with direct associations between the souvenir and the place/event; they "assign more abstract meanings that relate to relationships or experiences," what Love and Sheldon (1998, p. 172) term "representations of hedonics." Love and Sheldon (1998, p. 172) also distinguish two levels of authenticity of souvenirs; conspicuous authenticity refers to souvenirs of which the "meanings are generally transparent, public, or evident to the casual observer." In contrast, idiosyncratic authenticity is private and symbolic—the meaning of the souvenir to its owner is not obvious and would have to be explained to any observer.

Love and Sheldon (1998, pp. 173–4) state that, "naïve travelers are more likely to assign meanings as representations of the place, while experienced travelers are more likely to assign meanings as representations of hedonic elements of the experience". In the excerpts from the informant interviews they provide, inexperienced tourists discuss souvenirs that are representative of place and experienced travelers hedonics. However, the distinction is not as clear when it comes to authenticity. Two inexperienced informants each speak about conspicuously authentic souvenirs but one in reference to seeking and obtaining the work of a local artisan and the other a nature item (a preserved alligator head). The artisan's pewter bowl in the first instance is authentic in keeping with Sharpley's definition of "made,

produced, or enacted by local people according to customs or tradition” (as cited by Hashimoto & Telfer, 2007) but in our opinion, a handcrafted pewter bowl from an unknown locality is not as conspicuously authentic as the stuffed alligator head. In Love and Sheldon’s excerpts, there appears to be an intermingling of authenticity and representativeness. In our opinion, only a minority of casual observers would be able to distinguish the handcrafted pewter bowl from a mass-produced one. On the other hand, the stuffed alligator head is representative of place and the vast majority of casual observers would be able to ascertain (1) it was real (authentic) and (2) it came from a locality where alligators are found, any American casual observer mostly likely would guess from Florida or Louisiana.

In the excerpts of the experienced informants, who according to Love and Sheldon assign inconspicuous authenticity to their souvenirs, the informants do so with souvenirs that are very different. One informant speaks of inconspicuous authenticity in reference to a Mickey Mouse sweatshirt from Walt Disney World—one could say an extreme representation of place—and the other informant in reference to a figurine of a nondescript ancient fertility goddess that could have come from any number of cultures around the world. Therefore, we hypothesized it would be less easy to distinguish the two populations with regard to authenticity and for the purposes of this study, in our questionnaire, we specifically linked authenticity to representation of place; authentic souvenirs were those which were “unique to Curaçao,” that (1) represented some memorable or prominent feature of the island that (2) were produced locally, in keeping with one of the themes of authenticity discussed by Littrell, Anderson, and Brown (1993). Idiosyncratic authenticity was linked to souvenirs that were “artistic,” having no connection to the island but that were produced by local artisans.

Our intention was to investigate if inexperienced and experienced tourists could be differentiated in their interest in souvenirs as part of an ongoing production and marketing effort of a handcraft industry on the island of Curaçao. Hawkins (2006) describes the history of the development of a handcrafted souvenir industry on Curacao, explaining how such an industry has failed to succeed and recommended ways in which it may have a better chance of succeeding in the future. The current research study on tourist preferences for handcrafted souvenirs is intended to add a more sophisticated understanding of tourists’ desire for handcrafted souvenirs. The results of our research were intended to provide insights into strategies for greater success in developing and maintaining the existing tourism handcraft industry on the island. Love and Sheldon (1998, p. 171) investigated the relationship of the Self and souvenirs and sought to “move away from functional, descriptive, or comparative perspectives, and toward the understanding of meanings and how they evolve over time.” We theorized that not only would inexperienced and experienced tourists differ in the meanings they assigned over time to different categories of souvenirs but that there would be differences between experienced and inexperienced tourists in their interest in the souvenirs they encounter at point of purchase.

Although other research studies (e.g., Littrell *et al.*, 1994; Oh, Cheng, Lehto, & O’Leary, 2004) have investigated more complex tourist typologies related to souvenir purchases—typologies such as those speculated upon by Graburn (1989)—we tested the simpler dichotomous typology of inexperienced and experienced travelers. Based upon the limited excerpts in Love and Sheldon’s qualitative study, we hypothesized that it would be possible to more clearly distinguish inexperienced from experienced tourists in reference to representativeness of souvenirs, according to Gordon’s (1986) typology of pictorial image, piece-of-the-rock, symbolic shorthand, markers, and local product souvenirs, but there would be a less clear distinction between inexperienced from experienced tourists in reference to the authenticity of the souvenirs. Ultimately, we were interested in determining if producers and vendors of authentic handcrafts on Curaçao are required to consider two distinct target

markets—inexperienced and experienced tourists. In the current study, in order to answer our research question, we test several hypotheses:

Hypothesis One: A larger proportion of inexperienced tourists than experienced tourists will prefer a souvenir representative of place.

Hypothesis Two: A larger proportion of inexperienced tourists than experienced tourists will agree it is easy to find a souvenir representative of place.

Hypothesis Three: A larger proportion of inexperienced tourists than experienced tourists will be satisfied with what they find in souvenirs representative of place.

Hypothesis Four: Inexperienced tourists will show a preference for marker and symbolic shorthand souvenirs and experienced tourists will show a preference for artistic souvenirs.

Hypothesis Five: Experienced tourists will more frequently ask for authentic souvenirs.

Hypothesis Six: A larger proportion of experienced tourists will claim they can distinguish between mass-produced and locally produced handcrafts.

Hypothesis Seven: A larger proportion of experienced tourists will suggest piece-of-the-rock and indigenous souvenirs and a larger proportion of inexperienced tourists will suggest pictorial, marker, and symbolic shorthand souvenirs.

METHODS

Participants

A total of 170 tourists were surveyed during the month of November 2008. The student-researchers who collected the data were instructed to gather roughly equal proportions of cruise-ship tourists and stay-over tourists. The respondents in the study were 47.1% ($n = 80$) cruise-ship tourists and 52.9% stay-over tourists ($n = 90$), 46.7% males ($n = 79$) and 53.3% females ($n = 90$). Europeans comprised the largest percentage of the sample (49%, $n = 83$), with North Americans 42% ($n = 71$), and Latin American and Caribbean tourists 8.9% ($n = 15$). The ages of participants ($n = 166$) ranged from 19 to 84 years of age ($M = 48.3$, $SD = 17.2$). The values of three questionnaire items on travel experience were summed to make a grouping variable for level of travel experience. The respondents were divided into two equal groups at the median of the summed total. Those respondents who were at the median or below ($n = 90$, 52.9%) were labelled “inexperienced tourists” and the respondents who were above the median ($n = 80$, 47.1%) were labelled “experienced tourists.” Approximately even proportions of cruise-ship and stay-over tourists were categorized as inexperienced and experienced, with a non-significant, slightly larger percentage of the 90 stay-over tourists being categorized as inexperienced (54.4%) compared to the 80 cruise-ship tourists (51.2%). Creating the samples of experienced and inexperienced tourists by splitting the sample at the median was not the first choice of the authors. An attempt to create two more distinct groups by cutting off the inexperienced sample at the 33rd percentile and starting the experienced sample at the 67th percentile created such small samples that the chi-square tests of independence were invalidated by low expected frequencies.

Sampling

Systematic sampling was used to collect data at the piers from cruise ship tourists returning to the ships and cluster sampling was used to collect data from the stay-over tourists at downtown outdoor cafes on days when there were no cruise ships in port. To determine how closely the sample of 170 tourists represents the tourists who visit Curaçao as stay-over tourists, comparisons were made with data reported by the Curaçao Tourism Board (Curaçao Tourism Board, 2008). The comparison of the two sets of percentages indicated that the

sample in the current study may only be representative of European stay-over tourists; North Americans appear to be over-represented and Latin Americans/Caribbean tourists appear to be under-represented in the current sample. However, the data in our study were collected during November 2008 and the CTB data is for the entire year. No comparison data were available for cruise-ship tourists.

Instrument

The measurement instrument in the study was a 25-item self-authored questionnaire (Hawkins, 2006), which included four demographic variables (type of tourist, nationality, age, and gender) and 21 research questions. The research items were intended to gather the tourists' opinion about the demand for, availability of, and satisfaction with locally produced handcrafts that were observed and/or purchased, the experience level of the tourist, the tourist's self-assessment of the ability to recognise a locally produced handcraft, the tourist's handcraft shopping experience on the island. Hawkins' (2006) questionnaire was extended to include items on the concepts of representativeness and authenticity, and to measure the extent to which vendors are promoting locally produced handcrafted souvenirs. The measurement scales were a mix of Likert-type response scales on agreement (e.g., "disagree a lot" to "agree a lot") and frequency determination scales (e.g., "never" to "very often"). The data were analysed using SPSS's PASW V.18 for Mac. Among the ten variables using interval data from the Likert-type scales, seven were negatively skewed. Therefore, the authors opted to analyse the data using non-parametric statistics. In the chi-square tests, the five response categories of agreement were collapsed to three due to low expected values.

RESULTS

This paper reports only that portion of the questionnaire that concerns research related to Love and Sheldon's (1998) description of naïve and experienced tourists and tests seven hypotheses related to the concepts of representation and authenticity.

Hypothesis One: A larger proportion of inexperienced tourists than experienced tourists will prefer a souvenir representative of place.

Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement to the statement, "I prefer to find something unique to Curaçao in handcrafts." It was hypothesized that a statistically discernibly larger proportion of inexperienced tourists would want a souvenir representative of place ("something unique to Curaçao") compared to the experienced tourists. A larger percentage of inexperienced tourists did respond with "agree" (53.1% compared to 46.9%) but the chi-square test of independence was invalidated by low expected values on the "disagree" side. Using only the percentages in the response category "agree," a one-tailed, one-sample t-test for proportions was conducted to see if there was a statistically discernible majority of inexperienced tourists who agreed compared to experienced tourists. The results were non-significant ($z = 0.81, p = .29$, one-tailed).

Hypothesis Two: A larger proportion of inexperienced tourists than experienced tourists will agree it is easy to find a souvenir representative of place.

Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement to the statement, "Unique [to Curaçao] locally produced handcrafts are easy to find here." It was hypothesized that inexperienced tourists would agree more that they were able to find what they considered unique locally produced handcrafts than experienced tourists, given that naïve tourists would likely be more concerned with finding souvenirs representative of place. Among those who agreed with the statement, there was a larger percentage of inexperienced tourists (55%, compared to 45%) but among those who disagreed, the larger percentage was also with the

inexperienced tourists (54.3%, compared to 45.7%). A larger percentage of experienced tourists responded with “neither agree nor disagree” (57.7%, compared to 42.3%). That the inexperienced tourists had larger percentages in both the “agree” and “disagree” columns and experienced tourists had a larger percentage in the “neither” column perhaps indicates the inexperienced tourists placed greater emphasis on finding place souvenirs. However, a chi-square test of independence showed a non-significant influence of level of travel experience on this variable.

Hypothesis Three: A larger proportion of inexperienced tourists than experienced tourists will be satisfied with what they find in souvenirs representative of place.

Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement to the statement, “I am satisfied with the unique [to Curaçao] locally produced handcrafts that I saw here.” It was hypothesized that the inexperienced tourists would be more satisfied with what they saw in unique locally produced handcrafted souvenirs than the experienced tourists because such souvenirs are what they are looking for. A larger percentage of inexperienced tourists did respond with “agree” (54.5% compared to 45.5%) but also with “disagree” (61.5% compared to 38.5%), and a larger percentage of experienced tourists responded in the “neither” column (51.4% compared to 48.6%). There was a statistically discernible influence of travel experience on the responses ($\chi^2 = 6.9$, $df = 2$, $p = .032$), which may indicate that inexperienced tourists placed a greater emphasis on place souvenirs than the experienced tourists. At least they appear to have stronger opinions about them.

Hypothesis Four: Inexperienced tourists will show a preference for marker and symbolic shorthand souvenirs and experienced tourists will show a preference for artistic souvenirs.

This hypothesis is tested with three separate items in the questionnaire, asking about preference for souvenirs representative of place. Respondents were asked, “Generally, when you are looking for a handcraft, how often do you look for something that has the name of the place on it?” We hypothesized that inexperienced tourists would more frequently seek out souvenirs that were “markers” (Gordon, 1986, p. 142). A larger percentage selected “very often” (24.4%, compared to 12.5% for experienced tourists) but a smaller percentage of inexperienced tourists selected “often” (34.4%, compared to 43.8% for experienced tourists). A larger percentage of experienced tourists selected “seldom” (33.8%, compared to 23.3% for inexperienced tourists) but a smaller percentage selected “never” (10%, compared to 17.8% for inexperienced tourists), giving mixed results. The chi-square test of independence showed a marginally significant influence of level of travel experience on the responses ($\chi^2 = 7.597$, $df = 3$, $p = .055$).

We asked a question about the respondents’ habit of seeking out “symbolic shorthand” souvenirs (Gordon, 1986, p. 142). Respondents were asked, “Generally, when you are looking for a handcraft, how often do you look for something that has a prominent or memorable feature of the place?” We hypothesized that inexperienced tourists would report that they seek out souvenirs representative of place more frequently than experienced tourists. Among inexperienced travellers, 23.3% replied with “very often” compared to 17.5% for experienced tourists, 55.6% with “often” compared to 60% for experienced, 15.6% with “seldom” compared to 21.3%, and 5.6% responded with “never” compared to 1.3% among experienced. The results were mixed and there was no statistically discernible influence of level of experience on the responses of this variable.

We also asked the respondents a complementary question, “Generally, when you are looking for a handcraft, how often do you look for something that is artistic, regardless if it identifies where it came from?” This question was intended to measure if a larger proportion

of the experienced tourists more frequently sought out such souvenirs compared to the inexperienced tourists. The percentages were basically similar: 11.3% of experienced travellers responded with “very often” compared to 14.4% of inexperienced tourists, 55% with “often” compared to 46.7% for inexperienced, 28.7% with “seldom” compared to 30%, and 5% with “never” compared to 8.9% inexperienced tourists. A chi-square test of independence showed no statistically discernible influence of level of experience on the responses.

Hypothesis Five: Experienced tourists will more frequently ask for authentic souvenirs.

Respondents were asked, “Specifically, here on Curaçao, when you have been at a place that sells souvenirs, how often did you ask the salesperson about locally produced handcrafts?” We hypothesized that experienced tourists would respond that they had asked for locally produced souvenirs more frequently than inexperienced tourists due to a greater concern with the authenticity of the souvenirs. Among the experienced tourists, 22.8% responded with “never” compared to 37.8% of the inexperienced tourists, 45.6% with “seldom” compared to 25.6% for inexperienced, and 31.6% with “often/very often” compared to 36.7% for inexperienced tourists. The response categories of “often” and “very often” were combined to facilitate a valid chi-square test of independence. The results of the test were significant ($\chi^2 = 8.21$, $df = 2$, $p = .016$). The hypothesis that experienced tourists would ask for locally produced handcrafts more frequently than inexperienced tourists was not supported, however, due to mixed results. The most likely source of the statistically discernible influence of level of travel experience is in the response category “seldom,” which more experienced tourists selected by 20 percentage points.

Although the influence of level of travel experience was statistically discernible, the percentages within each sample do not fit consistently with the hypothesis. It would be expected that a larger percentage of inexperienced tourists would reply with “never” and “seldom” and a larger percentage of experienced tourists would reply with “often/very often” but this was not the case in this sample. Although a larger percentage of inexperienced tourists did reply that they “never” asked for locally produced handcrafts, a larger percentage also replied that they “often/very often” asked for them and a smaller percentage of inexperienced tourists replied that they “seldom” asked for locally produced handcrafts.

Hypothesis Six: A larger proportion of experienced tourists will claim they can distinguish between mass-produced imported and locally produced handcrafts.

The respondents were asked about the level of ease or difficulty in distinguishing locally produced handcrafts from imported handcrafts, “Based upon your experience, how easy or difficult is it for you to tell the difference between a locally produced handcraft and an imported handcraft?” It was hypothesised that experienced travellers would show a higher level of confidence in distinguishing between the two, given that they should be generally more interested in the authenticity of the souvenirs they seek out. The variable had four response categories of “very easy,” “easy,” “difficult,” and “very difficult.” Among the 170 respondents, 4.4% of inexperienced travellers selected “very difficult” compared to 0% of experienced travellers, 27.8% inexperienced selected “difficult” compared to 23.8% experienced, 53.3% inexperienced selected “easy” compared to 63.7% experienced, and 14.4% inexperienced selected “very easy” compared to 12.5% experienced. The variable’s four categories were reduced to two response categories of “easy” and “difficult” in order to conduct a valid chi-square test of independence but it did not statistically discern an influence of level of travel experience on the ability to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic handcrafts.

Hypothesis Seven: A larger proportion of experienced tourists will suggest piece-of-the-rock and indigenous souvenirs and a larger proportion of inexperienced tourists will suggest pictorial, marker, and symbolic shorthand souvenirs.

The respondents were asked an open-ended question about what else they would have liked to see in locally produced handcrafted souvenirs, “What would you have liked to see in a locally produced handcraft here on Curaçao that you didn’t see?” The suggestions were coded using to Gordon’s (1986) typology. The influence of the level of experience of the tourist on the suggestions offered was tested with a chi-square test of independence but several cells did not have a sufficient number of expected values. The response categories could not be combined, thereby nullifying the use of a chi-square test of independence. However, it is interesting to note that the cross-tabulation table showed that among the inexperienced tourists who made suggestions, a smaller percentage of them suggested pictorial souvenirs (9.7%, compared to 13% for experienced tourists) and markers (22.6%, compared to 34.8% for experienced tourists) and a larger percentage of them suggested nature items (25.8% versus 13% for experienced tourists) and symbolic shorthand souvenirs (16.1% versus 13% for experienced tourists). Suggestions for indigenous item souvenirs were almost the same between the two samples (25.8% for inexperienced tourists and 26.1% for experienced).

DISCUSSION

The primary motivation for this research was to more clearly determine if there were in fact two target markets for souvenirs on the island of Curaçao—inexperienced and experienced tourists—with different demand levels for locally produced handcrafts and type of handcraft. Past attempts to develop a handcraft industry on the island have been discussed by Hawkins (2006) and the current research is worthwhile because a more developed, larger scale handcraft industry provides employment and generates income for the island, as well as acting as an effective “word of mouth” marketing tool. The purpose of the study was two-fold: (1) to more precisely determine what tourists demand, find available, and are satisfied with regarding foreign mass-produced and locally produced handcrafted souvenirs and (2) to distinguish inexperienced from experienced tourists on these characteristics. We investigated this distinction in reference to Gordon’s (1986) typology of souvenirs. Our expectation was that inexperienced tourists would demonstrate a preference for souvenirs that were representative of place compared to experienced tourists whose souvenir preferences would be more artistic.

We failed to clearly differentiate inexperienced from experienced tourists in all our hypotheses and there are several possible reasons for the lack of clear results in this study. To begin, it is possible the conceptualization of the study itself is faulty. We based our research on a qualitative study with a limited number of informants, of whom only a few were quoted. Given that Love and Sheldon (1998) presented what we took to be a clear distinction between inexperienced and experienced tourists in the excerpts they presented, with both inexperienced informants referring to souvenirs representative of place, we theorized that at point of purchase, inexperienced tourists would show a preference for such souvenirs over experienced tourists. In our results, similar percentages of inexperienced (79%) and experienced tourists (77.5%) often or very often sought souvenirs with a memorable or prominent feature of the place on it; we had hypothesized a statistically discernible smaller percentage of experienced tourists doing so. Similarly, we expected a larger percentage of experienced tourists to seek out souvenirs that were not representative of place, that were artistic, and although a larger percentage of experienced tourists (66.3%) responded with often or very often compared to 61.1% of the inexperienced tourists, it was not a statistically discernible difference.

Another possible reason for the lack of clear results is the method of dividing the sample into inexperienced and experienced samples. Had we obtained a larger sample, we would have been able to create two, more distinct samples by creating cut-points that eliminated the more similar participants on either side of the median. In the current study, neither method of dividing the sample, using the median or cut-points, showed itself to be more advantageous than the other.

Another possible reason for a lack of clear results could be the measurement instrument. Although we asked about travel to foreign countries, prior visits to the Caribbean, and prior visits to Curaçao, these questions may have been insufficient to differentiate the level of travel experience and a more detailed set of questions is required.

We hypothesized that a larger percentage of experienced tourists would claim the ability to distinguish locally produced handcrafted souvenirs from imported, mass-produced ones but this was not the case. A larger percentage of inexperienced tourists (32.2%) claimed it was easy or very easy to distinguish the two types of souvenirs, compared to 23.8% of the experienced tourists, and a larger percentage of experienced tourists claimed it was difficult or very difficult (76.2%), compared to the inexperienced tourists (67.7%), although these differences were not statistically discernible.

A possible confound in the study is the time at which the data were taken. November is very close to Christmas and it is possible that both experienced and inexperienced tourists were seeking and purchasing holiday gifts for others, rather than themselves, and a gift-giving mentality influenced their responses.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We were unable to successfully answer the sub-questions with our hypothesis tests and thereby unable to determine if there are indeed two distinct populations of tourists coming to Curaçao shopping for souvenirs. In many cases, the tests were invalidated by low expected values and in other cases where valid results were obtained, even statistically discernible results, the proportions of inexperienced and experienced tourists selecting the categories were not consistent with our hypotheses. We were unable to clearly determine any influence of the level of travel experience on what tourists want in souvenirs on the island of Curaçao. Given the lack of clear results, there are few recommendations to the handcraft industry of the island that we can make. Our inability to distinguish two populations of tourists, each with their own preference for certain types of locally produced handcrafts, does not mean those populations don't exist. Further, better-conceptualized and designed research may determine that in the future.

The current study was a follow-up study of Hawkins (2006) and extends and improves that preliminary study by increasing the sample size, using probability sampling methods, and delving more deeply into the concepts of representativeness and authenticity. However, future research could benefit from data from a larger number of tourists that would allow for the division of sufficiently sized, more widely separated samples of the two hypothesized populations. This, and improved questionnaire items for the grouping variable, may increase the ability to differentiate any preferences that exist. If the data were collected over several months of a year, it would certainly give a broader view on tourist preferences in handcrafted souvenirs and avoid the possible confound in the current study of data being collected close to the holiday season. On the issue of authenticity, it is also possible to test the tourists' ability to distinguish mass-produced imported souvenirs from locally produced souvenirs. The cruise ship piers on Curaçao are in the downtown area. As the cruise-ship tourists return to the ship after visiting the downtown area, they could be asked to perform some simple sorting tasks at a table set up with examples of souvenirs, as well as completing the questionnaire. A similar set up in one or more of the downtown plazas could test the stay-

over tourists. In conclusion, given the importance that we place upon having a vibrant handcrafted souvenir industry on Curaçao, we are committed to an ongoing research program on tourists' preferences.

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