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OWNING A PIECE OF PARADISE: HOW FAMILIARITY WITH LOCATION AND INTENDED RECIPIENT INFLUENCE SOUVENIR PURCHASE DECISIONS

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PURPOSE:

Tourists travel to escape the ordinary routine of daily life, to explore the extraordinary life while on vacation. Overall, the tourism experience largely remains intangible to the tourist. Many people hold on to a souvenir as a escape mechanism to their vacation memories after returning to their everyday routines. Whether a treasure personally purchased as a reminder of a special vacation, or a gift from an acquaintance as a token of their holiday, nearly 70 percent of tourists now purchase some form of a souvenir as a tangible way to justify a memory (Littrell,1990). Gordon (1986) suggested that a souvenir's physical presence helps locate and define a transitory experience, while Littrell (1990) added, "a souvenir is a tangible reminder of an experience that otherwise would remain intangible."

Today, the US novelty and souvenir industry has grown to include over 40,000 stores with combined annual revenues over \$18 billion (Hoovers, 2010). From key chains to jewelry and t-shirts, souvenirs are in great abundance in tourist destinations, and are an increasingly important revenue source to the tourism industry. However, in such a saturated selling market, a need arises to consider what makes a souvenir more marketable over the competition. One factor, growing interest in tourism research, is that of authenticity applied to souvenirs. Previous research (Hashimoto and Telfer, 2007; Kim and Littrell, 2001) indicates it is important to consider the need for authenticity in souvenirs, and to determine if this notion can be the driving factor in marketing a location and providing an edge over the competition. While some destinations can be marketed for their indigenous, authentic souvenirs, such as Tahiti and its black pearls, Timothy (2005) showed that most souvenirs are mass manufactured items often made in countries different from where they are sold. As the tourism industry flourishes and becomes more competitive, even souvenir makers and sellers need to consider research into buyer behavior to find a niche that will bring out the uniqueness and selling power of their items.

This paper will build on previous research that suggests a need for authenticity in souvenir purchases, by further investigating if the desire for an authentic souvenir changes based on the recipient; for example, a difference between a purchase for one's self versus a purchase for a family member not present during travel. Second, a focus will be made to determine if the

experience of a traveler and familiarity with the destination increases the need for more authentic souvenirs, for self or for others. Last, the tourist's desired degree of authenticity in a purchase will be investigated as it applies to souvenir purchases, using Gordon's (1986) classification system of souvenirs.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Kolar and Zabkar (2010) expanded on previous research to conclude that authenticity is a universal value and an essential driving force that motivates tourists to travel to distant places and times. MacCannell (1973) believes that the "tourist consciousness" is motivated by the desire for authentic experiences, and the traveler believes he or she is moving in that direction when he travels. He further proposed the concept of 'staged' tourism claiming what is presented to tourists is staged and not a true representation of a culture. Contrarily, Cohen (1988) claimed the search for authenticity was dependent on the individual, that tourists will conceive authenticity in different degrees of strictness. He further argued that individuals who are less concerned with the authenticity of their experience, will be more prepared to accept as "authentic" a cultural product, which more concerned tourists, applying stricter criteria, will reject as "contrived" (Cohen, 1988). The quest for authentic experiences is now considered one of the key trends in tourism today (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010).

In terms of the authenticity of souvenirs, several researchers (Hashimoto and Telfer, 2007; Kim and Littrell, 2001; Keller, 1995) have begun to investigate how important authenticity is in souvenir choice. Wicks (2004) concluded that one of the most important characteristics tourists want in a souvenir is authenticity. Tourists want to identify the local character to the souvenir. Wicks (2004) further explained that tourists prefer souvenirs with cultural meaning, not the items people see duplicated in the storefront of major cities throughout the world. Swanson (2004) supported this claim by finding that a product's relationship to the local area and authenticity were the most important product attributes when a tourist is making a souvenir purchase decision. Spooner (1986) suggested that consumer demand for authenticity is driven by a search for products that provide an element of distinction or difference in consumers' lives.

Within the research of tourism and the quest for authentic souvenirs, an underling issue is prevalent. Cohen (1988), Jules-Rosette (1984), Hitchcock and Teague (2000) all explored the notion of who authenticity is really important to, the buyer, seller, or recipient of said souvenir. This paper will further expand on this research to find evidence to support or reject these findings. Pearce and Moscardo (1985) suggested that tourists increase their preference and concern for authenticity as they become more experienced travelers. To support this claim, Smith and Olsen (2001) devised a three part model to show which tourist types purchase which types of souvenirs. The first part of the model considers tourists new to a destination and concluded they are most likely to purchase cheap souvenirs symbolic of a destination. These tourists would be least concerned with authenticity. The second part of their model focused on tourists more familiar with a destination, and more well-traveled than the once a year summer vacationer. They claim this group favors authentic souvenirs and avoids the stereotypical tchotchke. Finally, the third phase of their model is concerned with the experienced traveler to a particular destination. They claim this group is most likely to purchase souvenirs indistinguishable from locals. Cohen (1988) also investigated the importance of authenticity to different types of travelers. He concluded that a demand for "total authenticity" will be most prominent among "existential" or "experimental" tourists. The vast majority of tourists do not demand this and are often willing to accept commercialized objects at "authentic," insofar as

they are convinced that it is made with traditional designs and by a member of the ethnic group. Research in this study will find evidence to support or reject the claim that the more experienced a traveler, the more authentic a souvenir one purchases. Finally, Gordon's (1986) classification of souvenirs into five categories will be examined to determine which souvenir type each traveler type prefers.

METHODS:

To determine intention to purchase souvenirs and desired authenticity level, surveys will be constructed and administered to tourists traveling to the Caribbean on random days of randomly chosen months. Questions will be designed to determine a tourist's travel frequency to categorize each in Smith and Olsen's three part model, as described previously. Previous research has used the intention-to-purchase scale as an attitudinal measure of likely purchase behavior. Gruber (1971) revealed high correlations ($r = .95$) between purchase intent and purchase probability. Therefore a survey asking respondents their likelihood of purchase for self and for others not present during travel, will be based on a 5 point Likert-type scale (1=very unlikely, 5=very likely) and used to find evidence to support or reject the claims stated below. Photo stimuli of 10 Caribbean souvenirs, currently sold and available to tourists, will be presented to each respondent, along with information on the product and price. Of the 10 souvenirs, 2 will fall in each of Gordon's five classification categories. To prevent experimenter bias, the 10 chosen souvenirs will be decided upon by the Caribbean Tourism Board. Respondents will be asked to rate each souvenir option on the intention to buy scale for themselves and for others. Finally, to prevent respondent bias to the 10 chosen souvenirs, questions will be asked regarding the respondent's attitude toward souvenir purchases to determine which qualities are most important when choosing a souvenir for self and for others, ranging from uniqueness, to quality, price, and ease of purchase.

Analyses will be conducted to determine (1) where significant differences between souvenir purchase intentions for self and for others exists, and (2) if familiarity with location (as determined through frequency of travel) is a significant predictor in souvenir purchase intentions and types. Finally the 10 souvenir choices will be evaluated to see which category showed the most purchase intention when compared to traveler type (determined through frequency of travel).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

H₁: Authenticity will be more important when the souvenir is purchased for self versus purchased for others not present during travel.

H₂: The importance of authenticity in a souvenir for self and others will increase as familiarity with location (determined by frequency of travel to location) increases.

H₃: Traveler type will prove a positive significant predictor in determining classification category of intended souvenir purchase decision.

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