Coping and co-creating strategy to overcome tourist-to-tourist encounter by using Critical Incident Technique

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Introduction

When traveling abroad, tourists are very likely to interact and exchange with others, such as interacting with local residents when buying souvenirs at scenic spots, needing the guidance of local residents in case of getting lost and probably discussing the scenic spots with other tourists when touring the scenic spots. In academic research into the service industry, three major types of service encounters are mentioned: customer and employee, customer involvement in service production and delivery, and the role played by customers in the overall consumption environment. Subsequently, customer-to-customer interaction and encounter were also included as an important research area, since the customer-to-customer interactions were of great importance and even would affect the overall consumption satisfaction and loyalty of the customers (Grove & Fisk, 1997; Martine, 1996). Nonetheless, some scholars still maintained that the customer-to-customer interaction and encounter could not be controlled or mastered by service providers (Martin & Pranter, 1989). However, if learning more about the possible negative effects brought by customer-to-customer interaction and encounter, the service providers/companies could more efficiently and properly arrange and manage resources, and would attract specific customers and avoid reducing services for specific customers (Grove & Fisk, 1997). For instance, if scenic spots can know more about the integration and exclusion between different ethnic groups, they will be able to avoid unnecessary encounter conflicts and hence boost the tourism satisfaction of the tourist attractions.

Aside from tourist-to-tourist interaction, the encounter and interaction between tourists and locals affected attitudes, feelings and actions, and even created or changed social cultures and institutions (Milman & Pizam, 1988). Previously, a host of scholars focused their studies on exploring the possible impact and influence of tourists on social and cultural aspects of locals and local culture (Liu & Var, 1986; Milman & Piam, 1988; Sheldon & Var, 1987). Specifically, the aspect of social impact referred to the effects on and changes in residents' life in an area, and mostly involved the director encounter between local residents and tourists (Peng Yungui, 2007). By integrating studies on service area and tourism area, when traveling in places other than their hometown, tourists would have some encounter, exchange or interaction with three groups including local residents, service providers and other tourists. Such encounter and interaction may enhance mutual understanding, or may give rise to conflicts, so such interaction may exert a positive or negative impact on tourists' tourism experience (Fullerton & Punj, 1993; Claycomb & Martin, 2002; Harris & Reynolds, 2003). Currently, no final conclusion has yet been reached.

When traveling abroad, tourists may stay in a foreign country for only one night or for up to six months. The longer they stay there, the more likely they are to experience different forms of local tourism activities on different occasions. These activities may take place in different locations, and different physical environments may provide different facilities. Also, tourists may have different feelings and emotions due to on-site temperature, lighting and air quality. Whether there were bilingual routing arrangements, commodity display, floor planning, layout and other equipment or guidance sign systems in the physical tourism environment may also lead the tourists to give negative assessment of the quality of tourism services received (Amy & Price, 1993; Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1991).

Tourism was often well prepared in advance, and sometimes it was difficult to temporarily change the itinerary. Tourists may have negative emotions and feelings from encounter or interaction with people or the environment during the tourism, but had to continue their trip. To make the tourism
more pleasant and smoother, the tourists, after conflicts, must alleviate the pressure caused by such conflicts through copying. The research into outdoor recreation found that tourists may also adopt the coping behavior and strategy to address recreational conflicts (Schneider & Hammitt, 1995; Schuster et al., 2006). The past research into copying still employed the scales formulated in the field of outdoor recreation and divided the coping strategies into emotional-focused and problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the service area, copying strategy means that customers decide how to face or respond to different circumstances and that the customers' needs are met through the copying strategy. In the tourism industry, some scholars recommended that "the development process of tourism products" could be added in a more active and creative manner by co-creating strategy in an effort to improve the customers' experience with others and in the physical environment during the tourism (Dabholkar, 1990).

The consumers got involved in the development stage of experience by means of personally taking part in the consumption and development processes, as if the consumers served themselves (Muter et. al., 2000). Moreover, customers should work with service providers in some respects (Dong, Evans & Zou, 2007). Under different scenarios, consumers must play different roles in order to interact and exchange with other consumers (Gummeson, 2008; cf. Vargo & Lushm 2008). In other words, the consumers did not passively receive services, but rather they worked with others to create more wonderful encounter and interaction experience in developing tourism products and services (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, 2004b). There were few studies on the copying strategy after tourists had conflicts with other interested parties (Prebensen & Foss, 2011). The study by Prebensen& Foss (2011) understood how the tourists coped with the encounter conflicts during the tourism through critical incident technique (CIT) in qualitative research. This technique could help explore more real contents (Walle, 1997; Riley and Love, 2000). This study investigated the tourists' response strategies through a two-month traveling experience involving a single mother and her three children and based on the critical incidents during the travel. The findings showed that there were two coping strategies -- cognitive method and behavioral method. Each strategy had different behaviors and emotional responses. For example, the tourist adopting the behavioral method to respond to the encounter conflicts may take more pictures, and may spend more time with their travel companions. On the other hand, the tourists using cognitive method to respond to the conflicts may avoid any encounter and interaction with other people (locals, other tourists and service providers) prior to conflicts. The study by Prebensen & Foss (2011) also found that tourists did not have one coping strategy only, but would employ different methods due to different travel situations, which were proactive or passive.

Not every tourist had tons of opportunities to be exposed to a different culture or have a wealth of experience in overseas travel, but most people always had a stereotype or a subjective sense of social distance for other ethnic groups. These might contribute to cultural shock, though encounters and exchanges can lead to conflicts with other tourists (Nash, 1996). By contrast, tourists might also increase their knowledge and understanding about other cultures by means of encounters in scenic spots (Goeldner, Ritchie, & McIntosh, 2000). These incidents could not be planned in advance, and only through the copying strategy could unpleasant mood in the subsequent itinerary be avoided or the tourists' copying abilities and methods in different travel situations could be enhanced by learning. However, there were inadequate studies in such research topics in the domain of tourism (Prebensen& Foss, 2011). (Prebensen& Foss, 2011) also recommended that different and diversified exploration dimensions should be constructed in the future probe into encounter and copying strategy of the tourists, including different products, different services and different tourism types encountered during the travel, in order to investigate the application of copying and co-creating strategies after encounters in different tourism situations.
Previous studies indicated that individual satisfaction with consumption hinged on how closely the individuals got involved in the production and development of tourism products (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003). Exchanges and interactions with service providers and other customers would influence consumer satisfaction (Gronroos, 1990). In addition to exchanges and interactions between consumers, the exchanges, encounters and interactions between individuals and physical consumption environment and between atmospheres of consumption environments would directly affect the individuals' consumer satisfaction (Bitner, 1992; Ryan, 1997; Arnould et a., 2002). In other words, the interested parties which could affect the tourists' satisfaction with tourism were various in the tourism product, including locals, tourism industry practitioners and tour guides, and all of them were the co-creators of travel atmosphere and travel experience. (Mossberg, 1995; Wong, 2001; Arnould, et al., 2002). But the relationships and interactions between tourists exerted a greater impact on the travel experience of each tourist (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1991; Grove & Fisk, 1997; Ryan, 1997; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). This is because during the travel, the tourists would, actively or passively, encounter locals, other tourists, tourism industry practitioners and physical environment, and had interactions and exchanges with them. Sometimes, the tourists would adopt copying strategy to respond to conflicts so that negative emotions would not affect the itinerary.

Research Purposes

This study is designed to explore what the encounter experience of tourists with others (locals, other tourists, tourism industry practitioners) and physical tourism environment is when they travel abroad. Next, the study also investigate what copying strategies tourists will adopt when faced with different encounter experience and situations and how they will co-create better travel experience with other related parties (service providers/other tourists)?

Research Method

This study employed the qualitative research method by collecting data from travel logs published on travel blogs and from traveler’s traveling diary/logs by using the Critical Incident Technique (C.I.T). Then, the data was analyzed through content analysis method and its reliability and validity was improved through triangulation. This study garnered a total of 57 travel logs, 27 of which were completed by foreign students with Western cultural backgrounds from Hungary, Belize and France. The travel destinations of these students included Taipei, Taoyuan, Yilan, Kaohsiung and Taichung. The other 30 travel logs were finished by 20 foreign students with oriental cultural backgrounds from Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Macau, Hong Kong and China. Their destinations encompassed Green Island, Hualien, Taitung, Yunlin and Hsiao Liouciou. Compared with the western students, the destinations of these oriental students were far from Taipei and Taoyuan and the oriental students traveled for a longer time. These trips were completed by 31 participants (22 female participants and 19 male participants) between October 2015 and May 2015. The second source of data was 101 travel articles in Taiwan written by 41 different foreigners, most of whom traveled for a long time in Taiwan, lasting for about one week to two months. 13 of the 41 participants were male tourists and the other 28 were female tourists. The 41 participants had completed 101 travel logs, 38 of which were written by male tourists and 63 of which were written by female tourists. According to the information about the travel logs provided by the travel bloggers, the time recorded in the 101 travel blogs was from February 2011 to February 2016, approximately the traveling experience in the past five years. In total, there are 158 travel logs but seven are invalid due to insufficient information. In the end, only 151 travel logs were used to data analysis.
Regarding the travel logs, the participants must keep diary at the end of each trip which should include two kinds of information. The first part of the questions included which destinations, travel company, length of traveling, travel purpose, weather condition, activities during the trip and the expectation to the trip. The second part of questions were concerned with the record and description of critical incidents and encompassed 1) Do other local residents, tourists, or industry personnel / physical destination environment (setting) affect your traveling experiences? 2) Specially, how do other local residents, tourists, or industry personnel / physical destination environment (setting) influence your traveling experiences (i.e., what is that other people do or appear to enhance or detract from your traveling experience?) 3) Does the effect or influence of other people / physical destination environment (setting) upon your traveling experiences vary across individual? 4) How do you see other tourists with different cultural backgrounds? Seeing other tourists with same cultural background in the museums located in tourist attraction sites.” and “Seeing other tourists with different cultural background in the museums located in tourist attraction sites.” 5) If possible, you could describe your encounter and interaction experience with other people and physical environment in details.

All logs were collected every two weeks. After all the logs were collected, 1) each log was typed by researchers to set up files; 2) Then three copies of the logs were printed for 3 researchers' independent analysis in the way of content analysis; 3) A coding meeting was first held to study the original communication and coding methods and principles; 4) On a monthly basis, the three researchers respectively conducted open coding of all travel logs; 5) Next, on a monthly basis, the logs were subject to group coding which was repeated every month, and after the coding was completed three months later, analysis was carried out in light of the same procedures.

Research Findings

The data consisted of a total of 151 travel logs, and the summary of the analysis results is detailed as follows:

The first part is concerned with the encounter/interaction with other people. According to all data, the development situations of and reasons for encounter experience of the tourists with local Taiwanese, other foreign tourists, tourism practitioners and physical tourism environment were analyzed and the following table is sorted out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1 Classification</th>
<th>Level 2 Classification</th>
<th>Level 3 Classification</th>
<th>Level 4 Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With local Taiwanese</td>
<td>Direct encounter</td>
<td>Find ways</td>
<td>Urban areas and suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Purchase items</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pay tips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect encounter</td>
<td>Select vehicles</td>
<td>Train and bus</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural encounter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Living habits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With other tourists</td>
<td>Direct encounter</td>
<td>Visit friends</td>
<td>Queue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Travel together</td>
<td>Ride in a car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With other tourists in scenic spots</td>
<td>Direct encounter</td>
<td>Participate in leisure activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect encounter</td>
<td>Take pictures</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>During the visit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traffic practitioners</td>
<td>Chartered drivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>With tourism practitioners</td>
<td>Taxi drivers</td>
<td>Bus drivers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation Practitioners</td>
<td>Restaurant service staff</td>
<td>B&amp;B operators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors of recreational activities</td>
<td>Tourist guides</td>
<td>Instructors of water activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Souvenir shops</td>
<td>7-11 employees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policeman</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>With physical environment</th>
<th>Road conditions</th>
<th>Mountains</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English environment</td>
<td>Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural environment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traffic and tourism environment</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Public toilets</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Night markets</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

There were few negative interaction experiences in the 151 travel logs, among which Chinese tourists most frequently had negative experiences. However, there is little difference in appearance between Chinese students and general Taiwan students, which is the principal reason for negative encounter experiences. The tourism practitioners are very enthusiastic and nice before knowing the identity of the Chinese students, but once knowing the service targets are Chinese tourists, they show great changes in their service attitude. The tourists come in for an immense emotional trauma due to the great differences in service attitude. The following two cases can prove the above discussions:

One participant mentioned that when traveling with her friend in Green Island, she needed to rent a motorcycle. At first, the owner was ready to help. Renting a motorcycle required a use certificate. When seeing her Entry Permit (Taiwan, Republic of China), the owner had considerable changes in his reaction and directly said that he could not rent the motorcycle to mainlanders. Although the participant rented a motorcycle afterwards and finished her trip in Green Island, this incident affected her mood and she was greatly hurt. Additionally, such feeling was her clearest memory of this trip.

A Chinese tourist described his traveling experience in Kenting. Since failing to book in advance and causally finding a hotel to check in. Yet, the hotel charged a high price, but the room quality did not match its price. It was after repeated requests of the tourist that he could replace the room, and the whole process was extremely unpleasant.

Nonetheless, there are still Chinese tourists with rather pleasant traveling experience in Taichung. One travel log mentioned a trip in Taichung lasting for two days and one night. Since he did not reserve a room, he could not find a hotel, but finally, he relied on local people to find the tourist attraction he wanted to visit and a hotel. The log also particularly emphasized that the local residents did not show any unfriendliness because he was a mainlander. Besides, among the 151 travel logs, the third most important negative encounter experience resulted from tour guides. However, since most of the logs were written by independent foreign travelers, the travelers had few opportunities to interact with and encounter the tour guides. Yet, still large numbers of tourists chose to purchase one-day trip or two-day trip, so such tourists had the opportunity to encounter the tour guides. For instance, one tourist in this
study mentioned the differences in the attitude of travel agencies and tour guides before and after purchasing products. Nevertheless, the tourists felt uncomfortable with the interactions with tour guides, but not with those with the travel agencies. Yet, the tourists find it difficult to tell the differences between the tour guides and the travel agencies, and think that tour guides represent the travel agencies. To put it in another way, when the tour guides are unprofessional, they will affect the reputation of the travel agencies.

When tourists interact with other tourists, local residents, tourism practitioners or tourist attractions, they will have some evaluation. However, not all encounters and interactions will produce a positive feeling, and tons of interactions end up making tourists feel negative emotions. The feelings after encounter are produced immediately and cannot be stored. In other words, the negative emotions may affect the coming itinerary if not properly handled. Therefore, copying strategy or adaption strategy is precisely used to assist tourists to face negative encounter experience. The previous research into copying was conducted in a quantitative manner, but this study got an idea of what are the copying strategies adopted by self-help tourists by analyzing the contents of their travel logs.

The copying strategies concluded from the 151 travel logs include quietly accepting, an experience in tourism and concentrating on more wonderful things. For example, tourists mentioned that "I wish try not to think about the unpleasant incidents and try my best to enjoy the beautiful scenery. Fortunately, such incidents do not affect my trip and I have tons of lovely memories in Hualien." Tourists will adjust itinerary and take part in other activities to make up for the unpleasant incidents. Some tourists are terribly interesting and mentioned in their travel logs that in case of unhappy incidents, they would go on an eating spree in restaurants or night markets in order to more quickly recover their good mood by eating more delicious food. Additionally, some tourists indicated that they would directly complain with friends, like explaining their unpleasant experience via their Blogger or sharing such experience via Facebook and other social media. Some tourists would directly loudly denounce or actively punish others. For example, a tourist wrote that "In the end, I was so pissed off that I decided to let them have a taste of their own medicine. Whenever I saw someone taking pictures, I would purposely have walked in front of the camera so that Chinese tourists could not take pictures."

In addition, co-creating requires tourists, local residents, other tourists or practitioners to face the negative encounter experience and address the conflicts. The co-creating strategies learned from the 151 travel logs encompass mutual communication. A tourist suggested that both parties should have further communication after the negative encounter incidents. This tourist mentioned that "both parties should respect and patiently communicate with each other instead of blindly blaming each other". Trust should still be maintained. Many tourists mentioned in their travel logs that the encounter experience throughout the journey can be both positive and negative, but in unfamiliar places, tourists should maintain trust in the travel places or the people they meet. Some tourists thought the most important factor between the tourists and the tourism industry practitioners is "trust", for only trust can allow the relationship to continue for a long time. More tolerance and patience are needed. Many tourists are troubled by the lack of popularization of English in Taiwan. Yet, some tourists suggested that as long as both the practitioners and the tourists had enough patience and a friendly personality, tourists can have a good impression. The facilitators of conflicts -- tour guides are also mentioned. According to data about the 151 travel logs, if the behaviors of tourist members are not controlled, it is very likely to produce serious effects such as making noise, queuing and taking photographs. These effects can be controlled by the tour guides or the team leaders. Be prepared. Some tourists recommended that tourists must be well prepared and can reduce conflicts by means of understanding local culture. The travel logs read that "Need to know about the local traditional and culture to avoid conflict". Besides, both tourists and tourism practitioners should take the initiative to show goodwill and stay open-minded. When traveling abroad, the tourists must change their established habits and make greater efforts when
facing unaccustomed things. Both parties of the conflicts should be considerate and should not be too self-centered. In Hualien, the well-known tourist activity is to watch whales, which most tourists will take part in. However, they do not always have the opportunity to see the dolphins and whales. Additionally, the waves in Hualien are particularly great, so whale-watching boats easily pitch and thus many tourists often feel dizzy or want to vomit. If some tourists are in extremely bad conditions, steering the boats to shore will be considered. But this practice will make certain tourists feel unhappy. Or some tourists will vomit on the boats, hence rendering everyone on the boat uncomfortable.

According to a tourist, "But one of the passengers suffered from motion sickness. So we had to turn back for shore. Seriously, I was not feeling too well at the same time. So I did not complain about going back."

There are some interesting findings from this study. Majority of previous studies found the conflict between local residents and tourists are due to the differences of language, culture, socio-economic. However more and more inbound tourists to Taiwan are from China who might share the similar language and culture background but they also experience kinds of encounter conflicts in Taiwan because they are from CHINA. Possibly some Taiwanese are not friendly and truly open heart to people from China due to political reason. Secondly, Taiwan is always proud of its main attractiveness – people are very friendly of foreigners. Through, being friendly does not always end up with positive experience. Some female tourists were bothered by very friendly local people, taxi drivers and so on. Taiwanese may be very friendly but still need to learn how, when and where they express their friendship. Thirdly, encounter conflict happed due to the comparison. Tourists always have certain standard or expectation to things or matters by using their own values or norms which are used in their own country. But tourists forget other tourists are from different countries which have different norm, values or accepted behavior. Many tourists suggest that it is better to see thing in objective way rather than in subject angle. Besides the best co-creating strategy to overcome the encounter conflict is through communication by two parties.

Reference


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