

From Tourist Attractions to Tourist Traps: Laying Theoretical Foundations

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FROM TOURIST ATTRACTION TO TOURIST TRAP AND BACK: SOME THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

ABSTRACT

This study conceptualizes tourist traps and posits a theoretical framework based on a review of the scant literature available on the topic. The aim of the study is to illuminate how some tourist attractions evolve from being attractions to “tourist traps” and to lay the groundwork for identifying relevant factors underlying the process' nomological network. To accomplish this, study adopts an exploratory concept mapping approach based on visitor comments and narratives. Data comes from a subset of a sizable corpus of traveler comments mentioning the term “tourist traps” (n=13,934), mined from Tripadvisor.com. Content analysis using natural language processing of the narratives and comments reveals some potential correspondence between the study's hypothesized framework and initial empirical observations.

Keywords: *tourist trap, attractions, concept mapping, Tripadvisor, content analysis*

INTRODUCTION

The Collins English Dictionary defines tourist traps as places “that attract a lot of tourists where food, drink, entertainment, etc., is more expensive than normal” (Tourist trap, n.d.). Tourist traps are almost universally experienced by travelers in various experiential settings, destinations, and attractions. They are, in common language usage, frequently referred together and inextricably linked with tourist attractions. Furthermore, references to tourist traps often carry a very serious stigma—something that travelers should be wary of and avoid. But how can a tourist attraction be also a tourist trap? What distinguishes one from the other if they are referred to in the same breath? If a tourist trap refers to an attraction, is it essentially still an attraction? At what point does a tourist attraction become a tourist trap? What processes are involved in the transformation from a tourist attraction into a tourist trap? And finally, can an attraction be both an attraction and a trap, and are tourist traps sustainable from a tourism development point of view?

Though the existence of tourist traps is ubiquitous, pervasive, and commonly acknowledged, our understanding of it as a phenomenon is thus far mainly anecdotal and circumstantial. We know of no systematic and sustained line of study addressing the concept of tourist traps and its association with tourism attractions and tourism development in general.

This study seeks to fill this knowledge vacuum by attempting to conceptualize tourist traps and ground its validity as a construct by identifying parts of its nomological structure and conceptual network for the purpose of subsequent theory building (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). For DMOs, references to tourist traps in their jurisdiction may be deleterious to destination image-building and place branding efforts. Also, from a tourism management perspective, DMOs need to understand the effects tourist traps may have on long-term sustainable place and destination development. It is incumbent therefore that a systematic study be undertaken regarding the nature of tourist traps and its relationship with tourist attractions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kruczek (2010) defined tourist traps as “*sites and activities meant to draw money from tourists*” (p. p. 3) and characterized them as “recognized attractions”, often “kitschy sights”, and frequently accompanied by various merchandise from food, hotels, and souvenirs. Kruczek (2010) also distinguished tourist traps from attractions as possessing certain attributes: (a) they draw tourists at all costs, (b) they appeal to primitive tastes, (c) having no cultural value (i.e., they are situated in the sphere of low culture), (d) intended to draw money from tourists, and (e) opposite the notion of cultural tourism (p. p. 4).

A few others, however, see tourist traps not only as something that ensnare tourists on the supply side but something inadvertently created by tourism promoters. In this sense, tourist traps can be seen as the legacy of a ‘joke’ or ‘lie’ (Watson, 2013) perpetuated long enough that it creates an aura surrounding the original destination or attraction. It is this enduring mystique and aura that draws visitors and creates a tourist trap. Watson (2013) gives an example of this commodification process by elaborating how literary tourism was promoted in Mississippi. To promote tourism, state promoters advanced and created less-than-authentic histories founded on pre-conceived images and, sometimes romanticized, stereotypes of the South, which visitors have come to expect in the long run, and that local authorities then strive to meet—thereby creating for themselves a metaphorical, self-inflicting, tourist trap which becomes harder over time to escape from.

In another sense, tourist traps can also be understood as manifestations of tourism dependence or, more accurately, dependence on visitor revenue. For example, in the case of efforts to conserve endangered mammalian species, Buckley (2012) and Buckley, Castley, Pegas, Mossaz, and Steven (2012), report how conservation has become so intrinsically reliant on tourist revenues that curbing tourism growth imperils the continuity of conservation efforts and the preservation of the very species that initially spurred tourism. That is, in order to preserve endangered species, they must, at the same time, be exposed to the vulnerability of tourism. This suggests a paradoxical situation whereby tourist traps emerge as a state of existential dependence, a stage in the development—or overdevelopment—of attractions where optimum thresholds have been exceeded to a point that the purpose of revenues goes beyond the original goal of sustaining the attraction. A tourist trap, in this sense, is not just metaphorical but also literal: The trap lies in sustaining tourism in order the preserve the attraction, rather than sustaining the attraction.

The foregoing examples suggest an apparent duality of purpose in the materialization of tourist traps. It also suggests a functional proposition, relative to that posited by Kruczek (2010), that is more solidly grounded on outcomes and processes:

Proposition 1: *“Tourist traps are attractions that are no longer primarily visited for the original essence of the attraction but because of an acquired or constructed self-perpetuating fame and popularity among tourists as a must- or frequently-visited place, usually as the outcome of over-marketing and promotional processes, creating a state upon which an attraction and local supply systems have become co-dependent for revenues.”*

Can tourist traps emerge without an underlying attraction?

Though seemingly implausible, some arguments maintain that tourist traps can emerge even without an attraction underlying its core. Shakespear (2013) makes this case for tourist traps like those found in or that sprout along the peripheries, junctions, or intersections of American interstate highways and its borders. Like desert mirages, these are the sudden agglomeration of shops, restaurants, motels, gas stations, and knick-knack museums one finds serendipitously while navigating the vast expanse of American highways. These tourist traps seemingly arise as a counterpoint to the lifeless and barren feature of interstate highways, in the “confused territoriality” (Shakespear, 2013) of the interstate system. This implies that tourist traps can materialize in the voidness of space and time, requiring only the concentrated assembly of travelers with basic needs for nourishment such as food, rest, and fun. So, like the rare but inviting watering holes in the vast wilderness of the African savannah, where migratory creatures necessarily pause for sustenance and simultaneously submit themselves to the risk of becoming prey, tourist traps are, paradoxically, both nourishing and dangerous places. Extending this metaphor towards another possible definition, tourist traps can thus be considered as places where intense congregations of tourist predators and tourists-as-prey tend to occur, independent of whether an underlying attraction is present or not.

Are tourist traps necessarily repugnant?

Though the term “tourist trap” carry with it a naturally negative connotation, it is unclear whether it is exclusively so. Some narratives project equivocal or dualistic interpretations of tourist traps. Reputable travel guidebooks will instruct travelers to avoid tourist traps (Cochran, n.d.) just as popular media often does (McQueen, 2017; Pile, 2017). But other narratives paint the opposite, that tourist traps are worth your time and money (Olya, 2019) and are “actually good” and “worth braving the crowds” (Mai, 2019). Travel guides also promote tourist traps (“50 State Tribute to the Great American Tourist Trap,” 2015) while some establishments, satirically or otherwise, adopt the term eponymously for their business name and trademark, as exemplified by the “Tourist Trap”, a souvenir, crafts, and apparel shop located in Thayerville, Maryland, unabashedly promoted by the local Garrett County Chamber of Commerce (“The Tourist Trap,” n.d.). The local directory listing describes the establishment in no uncertain terms:

“Consider yourselves fairly warned...our goal is to trap customers at The Tourist Trap. Our pleasant associates have been guiding visitors to fulfill their shopping needs for 21 years.” (“The Tourist Trap,” n.d.)

Like a badge of honor, a similar establishment in Branson Missouri offering dining, desserts, collectibles and gift shops also proudly adopts the term in its business name, “Abby’s Tourist Trap”, and promoted by the local CVB (“Abby’s Tourist Trap,” n.d.). It is thus quite unsurprising to find others like the “Great Alaskan Tourist Trap”, a gift shop in Girdwood, Alaska (“Great Alaskan Tourist Trap (Gift Shop),” n.d.).

The liminal nature of tourist traps, straddling negative and positive associations, is most pronouncedly manifest in the case of Tombstone, Arizona, whose local Chamber of Commerce sought clarification from authors of a blog post counting the historic town among the “Great American Tourist Trap”, to wit:

“There are a few complete towns that made our list for their ability to both promote and attract tourists. The first is Tombstone, which sucks you in

with history and keeps you coming for the fun.” (“50 State Tribute to the Great American Tourist Trap,” 2015)

Though the blog author, in response, clarified the town’s listing as a tribute and compliment, the Tombstone Chamber of Commerce nevertheless felt the need to respond to the social media buzz the post created. Citing Wikipedia, the town stated that if the definition of tourist traps *“is an establishment, or group of establishments, that has been created or re-purposed with the aim of attracting tourists and their money”* and if *“tourist traps will typically provide services, entertainment, souvenirs and other products for tourists to purchase”*, the Chamber acceded that *“it is safe to say that Tombstone Arizona could be considered a Tourist Trap”* (“Is Tombstone Arizona a Tourist Trap?,” n.d.). The foregoing discussion and examples suggest yet another possible facet of tourist traps:

Proposition 2: *“Tourist traps possess a dualistic, ambivalent essence, that is, they are places with two co-existing natures that simultaneously attract and repulse tourists.”*

Hypothesized framework

Places or attractions that cultivate co-dependence between prey (tourists) and predator (traps), driven by a self-perpetuating and almost-inescapable cycle of visitation, point toward a hypothesized framework for understanding the nature of tourist traps. This hypothesized framework reimagines tourist traps as an inherent but often dormant state of any attraction, dining, shop, or similar establishments—including attraction-*less* catchment areas akin to highway or railway junctions—with the potential to repulse travelers. In other words, tourist traps can be conceived of as the antithesis or *alter egos* of tourist attractions, which exists only in potential form until actualized by forces.

Under this posited framework (see Figure 1), tourist attractions start off as having both attraction and repulsion attributes co-existing under a balanced state. This is represented by the diagonal line in Figure 1. This delicate dual-state equilibrium is, however, conceivable as being always in flux and subject to conflict, driven by opposing forces that either repulse or attract visitors further. When repulsive forces succeed to upend this balance, the attraction assumes the status of a tourist trap—diminishing the essence that made it an initial attraction. Hence the upward-pointing arrows in the bottom of the diagonal, representing repulsive forces seeking to transform attractions into traps. These repulsive forces may include, but not be limited to, exploitation of tourists, marketing deception, subtle harassment, and other unfavorable and value-damaging experiences in tourist sites.

However, because a state of complete repulsion would ultimately be detrimental, tourist traps regulate its advance, ensuring it does not develop to the point of extinguishing the attraction as doing so would terminate exploitative opportunities. A converse process may also be conceived by which an attraction that becomes too successful ultimately lays a fertile ground for tourist traps to evolve.

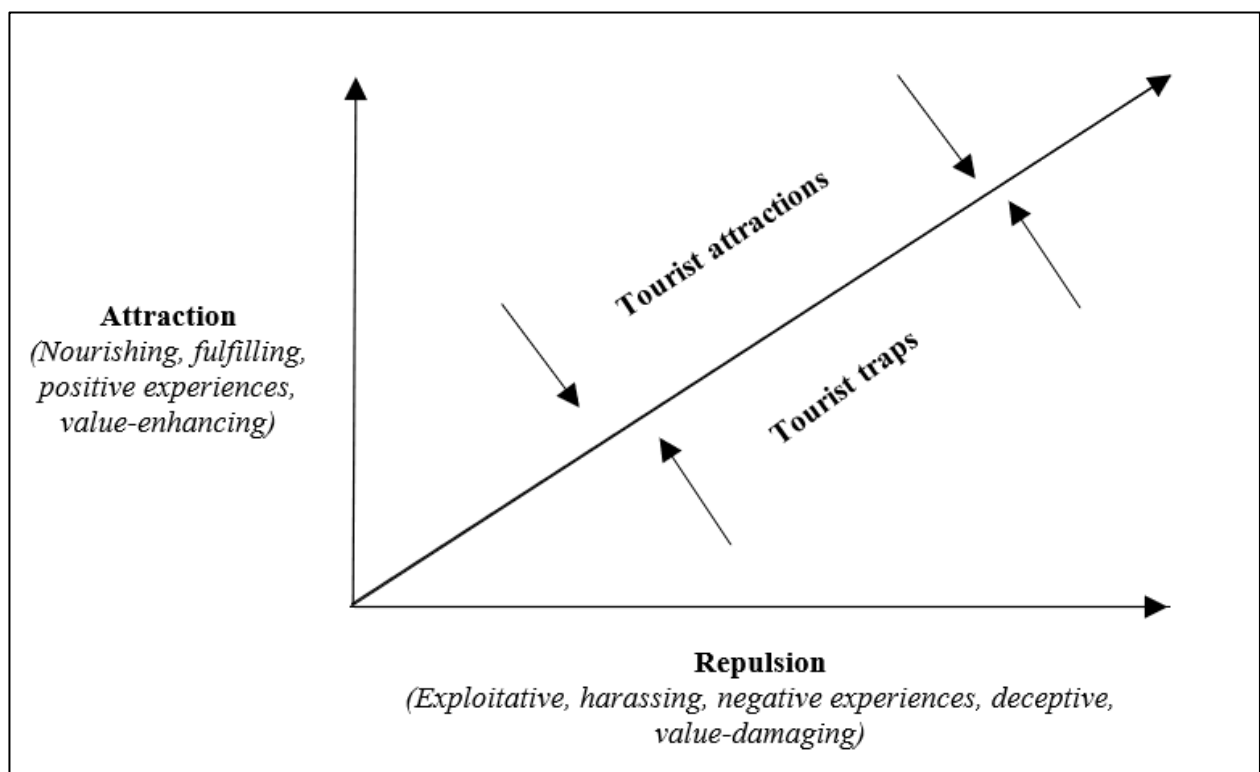
It is important to note that repulsive forces presuppose the existence of attractive forces, which makes any tourist site draw and entice visitation. As site managers offer and deliver positive experiences, fulfill visitor expectations, and provide satisfactory services and value to tourists, the attraction becomes more famous and develops an appealing place or destination brand. The more successful an attraction becomes, however, the more it invites repulsive forces and likelihood of transforming the site into a tourist trap.

Both opposing forces thus serve to increase attraction as well as repulsion. For example, managers of sites may promote and develop fulfilling, positive, and value-enhancing experiences for the attraction. Hence the downward pointing arrows on the upper diagonal of Figure 1. Attraction managers may invest proceeds toward improving services and amenities for visitors, developing facilities that nourish and boost the attraction's brand image and reputation.

Successful management of attractions and destinations, however, invite exploitative forces that visitors may see as repulsive. These forces could be unchecked development and commercialization of areas adjacent to attractions that are beyond attraction management's control. Overmarketing and unsanctioned promotion may lead to visitor harassment, deception, and value-damaging, negative experiences.

Either of the opposing forces may persist regardless of the outcome for the other but the success of one may lay the seeds for its own ruin. Figure 1 depicts this dual-tugging framework.

Figure 1
Hypothesized conceptualization of tourist traps



The current study

The foregoing propositions are only initial and presently lack empirical support. It is necessary therefore to investigate if such definitional facets are discernible from empirical observations. It is also important to explore the relations between the different features and facets and their role in the evolution of tourist attractions into tourist traps. To illuminate our scant understanding of the tourist trap phenomenon, this study aims to identify and map the

relevant facets associated with the term “tourist trap” from visitors’ perspectives. Once identified and mapped, the interrelationships between the different facets comprising the tourist trap concept can be discerned for deeper and more thorough understanding. Also, emergent features and facets from the study can be compared to those previously suggested in the limited literature earlier reviewed.

METHOD

Approach. The study adopts an exploratory and inductive approach to shed light on the notion of tourist traps, using concept mapping technique. Concept mapping identifies distinct but closely associated concepts surrounding a central concept of study—in this case tourist traps. Once identified, related concepts are grouped and mapped in relation to their connection with the central concept, which produces an *epistemological network* that may illuminate understanding of the concept of interest. (Such a network of associated concepts related to a core concept is distinguishable from *between network* mapping, which are often done for construct validation purposes (Cronbach, 1971)). The method undertaken follows procedures suggested for the “structured conceptualization” (Trochim, 1989; Trochim & Linton, 1986) of phenomena by mapping the necessary contents or ‘domains’ of a concept, in this case that of tourist traps. Concept mapping is essential for grounding propositions for theory construction and later development of a nomological network for tourist traps and its evolution.

Data and data collection. Traditionally, Trochim (1989) suggests undertaking concept mapping along a 6-step procedure, the first three of which involves the selection of participants, the generation of statements, and sorting or rating statements. Afterwards, the statements are represented visually or mapped into a concept space and then interpreted as well as used for planning and evaluation. In this study, however, undertaking the first three steps was facilitated by modern data extraction and mining techniques, which drew unstructured data in the form of online narratives and comments. The narratives and comments comprise the reviews and experiences documented and shared by travelers on the Tripadvisor websites, with each narrated experience mentioning the term “tourist trap”. These narratives were identified by a Boolean search on the Tripadvisor website using the term “tourist trap”, downloaded, and inputted as text data.

Analysis. The study analyzed the large corpus of unstructured narratives using text and content analysis (Stepchenkova, 2012). There were three stages in the analysis. First was to identify the most relevant and frequent terms, keywords, and themes revolving around the concept of tourist traps. Second, once identified, the most frequently occurring terms and keywords were analyzed for how often they co-occur with each other. Third, results of the co-occurrence analysis were used to group the extracted terms and keywords, with terms co-occurring more closely and frequently with another clustered together more closely. The clustered terms and keywords are mapped and represented in a concept space with their location and relative distances from each other determined by the strength of their co-occurrence or association. Finally, the relative distances and groupings between the different keyword clusters were then examined and interpreted to suggest emergent themes of features of tourist traps.

Analysis focused on the 100 most frequent and relevant terms and keywords based on *tf-idf*, or term frequency-inverse document frequency. Following recommended procedures for content analysis (Stepchenkova, 2012), common exclusion terms (e.g., propositions) were

applied to the corpus of narratives, ensuring only significant terms and words are analyzed. In addition, stemming (i.e., obtaining the root of many similar words) and lemmatization (i.e., obtaining the meaningful root of similar words) procedures were also applied.

Co-occurrence analysis was undertaken using first-order word co-occurrence. and using association strength index (or coefficient of co-occurrence) for clustering of keywords and terms. A term or keyword could be said to co-occur with another if both appear frequently in the same case or comment. The relative frequency of one keyword's co-occurrence with another is calculated and referred to as their association strength. The strength of one keyword's association with another thus determine their relative distances as well as clustering in a conceptual space. All content analysis was done using WordStat 8.0 (Provalis Research, 2018).

RESULTS

The search on Tripadvisor.com yielded a total of 1,020 listing of attractions associated with the term “tourist trap”, with each attraction generating various numbers of comments mentioning the term. In total, data extraction yielded a total of 43,099 comments mentioning “tourist trap.” As this study constitutes an initial exploration and pilot for the proposed theoretical framework, analysis included only a sample (32%) of the entire corpus, or n=13,934 comments, distributed across different types of “tourist trap” attractions such as historic walking areas (9.7% of the sample), points of interest or landmarks (10.2%), and neighborhoods (14.2%). After filtering stop words (or exclusion terms) and applying stemming and lemmatization, the entire text corpus of reviewer comments consisted of a total of 594,733 words. Results of this extraction process yielded the 100 most frequently mentioned and relevant terms or keywords associated with “tourist traps” from the corpus of reviewer comments. These are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Most frequent and relevant (based on *tf-idf*) terms

	FREQUENCY	% TOTAL WORDS	NO. CASES (i.e., COMMENTS)	% CASES
1. PLACE	45161	7.59%	3113	29.66%
2. SHOP	35592	5.98%	2468	23.52%
3. VISIT	26606	4.47%	1985	18.91%
4. RESTAURANT	24985	4.20%	1879	17.90%
5. TIME	22787	3.83%	1729	16.47%
6. WALK	20359	3.42%	1562	14.88%
7. FUN	19465	3.27%	1234	11.76%
8. GOOD	19450	3.27%	1449	13.81%
9. GREAT	19440	3.27%	1397	13.31%
10. AREA	18457	3.10%	1343	12.80%
11. STOP	18277	3.07%	1013	9.65%
12. FOOD	18204	3.06%	1424	13.57%
13. STREET	18110	3.05%	1247	11.88%
14. WORTH	18019	3.03%	1411	13.44%
15. PEOPLE	17886	3.01%	1462	13.93%
16. PRICE	15981	2.69%	1330	12.67%
17. CROWD	15488	2.60%	1158	11.03%
18. NICE	15355	2.58%	1138	10.84%
19. STORE	13280	2.23%	802	7.64%
20. THING	12564	2.11%	1007	9.60%
21. SOUVENIR	12253	2.06%	1014	9.66%
22. MAKE	12148	2.04%	952	9.07%
23. MARKET	11778	1.98%	1008	9.60%
24. EAT	11058	1.86%	823	7.84%

	FREQUENCY	% TOTAL WORDS	NO. CASES (i.e., COMMENTS)	% CASES
25. OVERPRICE	11023	1.85%	908	8.65%
26. EXPENSIVE	10868	1.83%	862	8.21%
27. EXPERIENCE	10437	1.75%	806	7.68%
28. INTEREST	10341	1.74%	865	8.24%
29. BUY	9953	1.67%	830	7.91%
30. TOURISTY	9802	1.65%	825	7.86%
31. ENJOY	9692	1.63%	751	7.16%
32. DAY	9611	1.62%	751	7.16%
33. BIT	9533	1.60%	765	7.29%
34. SEA	9236	1.55%	523	4.98%
35. BAR	8635	1.45%	596	5.68%
36. SELL	8580	1.44%	785	7.48%
37. LOCAL	8481	1.43%	741	7.06%
38. LION	8292	1.39%	454	4.33%
39. WATER	8228	1.38%	500	4.76%
40. DRINK	8208	1.38%	619	5.90%
41. MONEY	7740	1.30%	658	6.27%
42. SPEND	7677	1.29%	617	5.88%
43. AFTER	7669	1.29%	570	5.43%
44. WATCH	7405	1.25%	611	5.82%
45. CITY	7404	1.24%	598	5.70%
46. HOUR	7397	1.24%	571	5.44%
47. VIEW	7339	1.23%	560	5.34%
48. FEEL	6986	1.17%	599	5.71%
49. KID	6905	1.16%	504	4.80%
50. AVOID	6877	1.16%	595	5.67%
51. MILE	6861	1.15%	372	3.54%
52. EXPECT	6828	1.15%	560	5.34%
53. BUSY	6483	1.09%	502	4.78%
54. TOUR	6432	1.08%	614	5.85%
55. TRIP	6377	1.07%	516	4.92%
56. FREE	6282	1.06%	427	4.07%
57. LOVE	6264	1.05%	463	4.41%
58. FULL	6198	1.04%	513	4.89%
59. BIG	6017	1.01%	518	4.94%
60. ATTRACTION	5971	1.00%	523	4.98%
61. BEAUTIFUL	5942	1.00%	492	4.69%
62. SHOW	5902	0.99%	328	3.13%
63. PRETTY	5894	0.99%	472	4.50%
64. CHEAP	5881	0.99%	483	4.60%
65. BOAT	5541	0.93%	497	4.74%
66. END	5541	0.93%	424	4.04%
67. YEAR	5505	0.93%	415	3.95%
68. PART	5499	0.92%	464	4.42%
69. PHOTO	5439	0.91%	461	4.39%
70. SHOPPING	5276	0.89%	393	3.74%
71. PAY	5267	0.89%	513	4.89%
72. TYPICAL	5220	0.88%	432	4.12%
73. LAGOON	5205	0.88%	235	2.24%
74. HISTORY	5153	0.87%	445	4.24%
75. STUFF	5148	0.87%	421	4.01%
76. HIGH	5061	0.85%	437	4.16%
77. SIGN	4990	0.84%	285	2.72%
78. REAL	4910	0.83%	422	4.02%
79. PICTURE	4841	0.81%	418	3.98%
80. STAY	4718	0.79%	398	3.79%
81. SMALL	4711	0.79%	393	3.74%
82. DRIVE	4706	0.79%	355	3.38%
83. KIND	4619	0.78%	364	3.47%
84. LONG	4617	0.78%	379	3.61%
85. BUILDING	4601	0.77%	373	3.55%
86. DISAPPOINT	4591	0.77%	406	3.87%
87. ICE	4526	0.76%	297	2.83%
88. CHECK	4510	0.76%	360	3.43%
89. BAD	4454	0.75%	364	3.47%
90. RECOMMEND	4432	0.75%	370	3.53%

	FREQUENCY	% TOTAL WORDS	NO. CASES (i.e., COMMENTS)	% CASES
91. TOWN	4408	0.74%	316	3.01%
92. WALL	4379	0.74%	263	2.51%
93. TACKY	4303	0.72%	338	3.22%
94. BLUE	4197	0.71%	218	2.08%
95. LEAVE	4189	0.70%	357	3.40%
96. ROAD	3941	0.66%	287	2.73%
97. ISLAND	3934	0.66%	258	2.46%
98. COFFEE	3873	0.65%	237	2.26%
99. ART	3810	0.64%	228	2.17%
100. RIVER	3692	0.62%	199	1.90%

After subjecting the terms and keywords in Table 1 to co-occurrence analysis, results yielded 10 clusters of co-occurring keywords (single-word clusters excluded). These clusters of keywords and terms are mapped in a concept space shown in Figure 2. The more adjacent a term or cluster is to another reveals the degree of their conceptual closeness or similarity, and vice-versa. The color of each word bubble corresponds to the cluster they belong to and the size of the bubble reflects the frequency of the term's occurrence in the corpus.

The emergence of 10 clusters of keywords suggests certain facets or features most strongly associated with the term “tourist trap.” Brief descriptions of the three most dominant clusters of keywords shown in Figure 2 are as follows:

- *Cluster 1* keywords suggest that tourist traps are principally places for shopping (spending for souvenirs), visiting, and eating, such as restaurants. They are usually crowded and tend to be overpriced and expensive. At the same time, they are places where visitors can spend time having fun, and enjoy.
- *Cluster 2* represent keywords adjacent or closely related to Cluster 1, yet distinct from it. This cluster of terms and keywords characterize tourist traps as local markets where one can buy or sell high priced stuff but also cheap items such as souvenirs.
- *Cluster 3* represents a feature whereby visitors refer to tourist traps as unanticipated stops (or waystations) in their journey where they can get free water, ice, or coffee. Keywords suggest that these unexpected stops tend to attract visitors after driving certain distances (‘miles’) and seeing a sign. It is possible that signs advertising the availability of amenities entice visitors to make these stops.
- *Clusters 4 to 10* represent rather small groupings of keywords or terms but are nevertheless informative in understanding the nature of tourist traps. For example, one small cluster (red colored circles in Figure 2) incorporating the terms “history”, “interest”, and “bit”, suggests that tourist traps are places with some degree of appeal as historical or interesting attractions. (Note also in Figure 2 that lines connecting these 3 keywords with “place” in Cluster 1.)

To examine whether the hypothesized framework, proposed earlier and depicted in Figure 1, corresponds to the empirically observed content and structure of visitor narratives, the emergent concept map depicted in Figure 2 was rotated while maintaining its structural integrity, i.e., the the inter-item distances between keywords and clusters remain fixed, and

then superimposed (or projected) upon the hypothesized dimensions characterizing tourist traps suggested in Figure 1. The aim of projecting the observed mapping of concepts in Figure 2 upon Figure 1 is to see whether a certain degree of correspondence exists between the data (i.e., visitor comments and narratives about tourist traps) and theory.

Figure 3 shows the combined result of projecting Figure 2 (post-rotation) onto Figure 1, where it can be discerned that an appreciable level of correspondence exists between the theorized framework and the empirical findings. For example, below the diagonal, in the tourist trap “zone”, are located negatively worded terms and keywords such as “crowd”, “expensive”, and “overprice” from Cluster 1, as well as “cheap”, “high”, and “price” from Cluster 2. These terms allude to exploitative and negative experiences and evoke unfavorable sentiments.

On or close to the diagonal in Figure 3 can be plotted neutral facets and features of tourist traps such as “place” [to] “shop”, “visit”, and “eat”. In contrast, in the tourist attraction “zone” above the diagonal can be observed more favorable or positive keywords and terms such as “worth” and “good”, “great”, “enjoy”, and “fun” from Cluster 1. There appears therefore some degree of conformity between the observed thematic narratives and comments of visitors regarding their experiences at “tourist traps” and the hypothesized conceptualization earlier posited and depicted in Figure 1.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

There appear to be three distinct facets associated with the concept of “tourist traps”. The most prominent of these is that tourist traps are a crowded place comprising usually of a restaurant, shop, store, or street. This place exhibit both positive (fun, enjoy, eat, watch, nice, etc.) as well as negative experiences (overpriced, expensive, money, etc.), somewhat consistent with the dualistic principle earlier suggested. A second facet of tourist traps is that they are not necessarily destinations in themselves but can be ‘stops along the way’, with visitors expressing in their comments a tendency to make a necessary stop for photos or trying a local product popularly and famously sold in the area. A third facet conform to the stereotypical belief that tourist traps are congregations of shops and stores selling cheap souvenirs and products but at high prices, designed to exploit visitors.

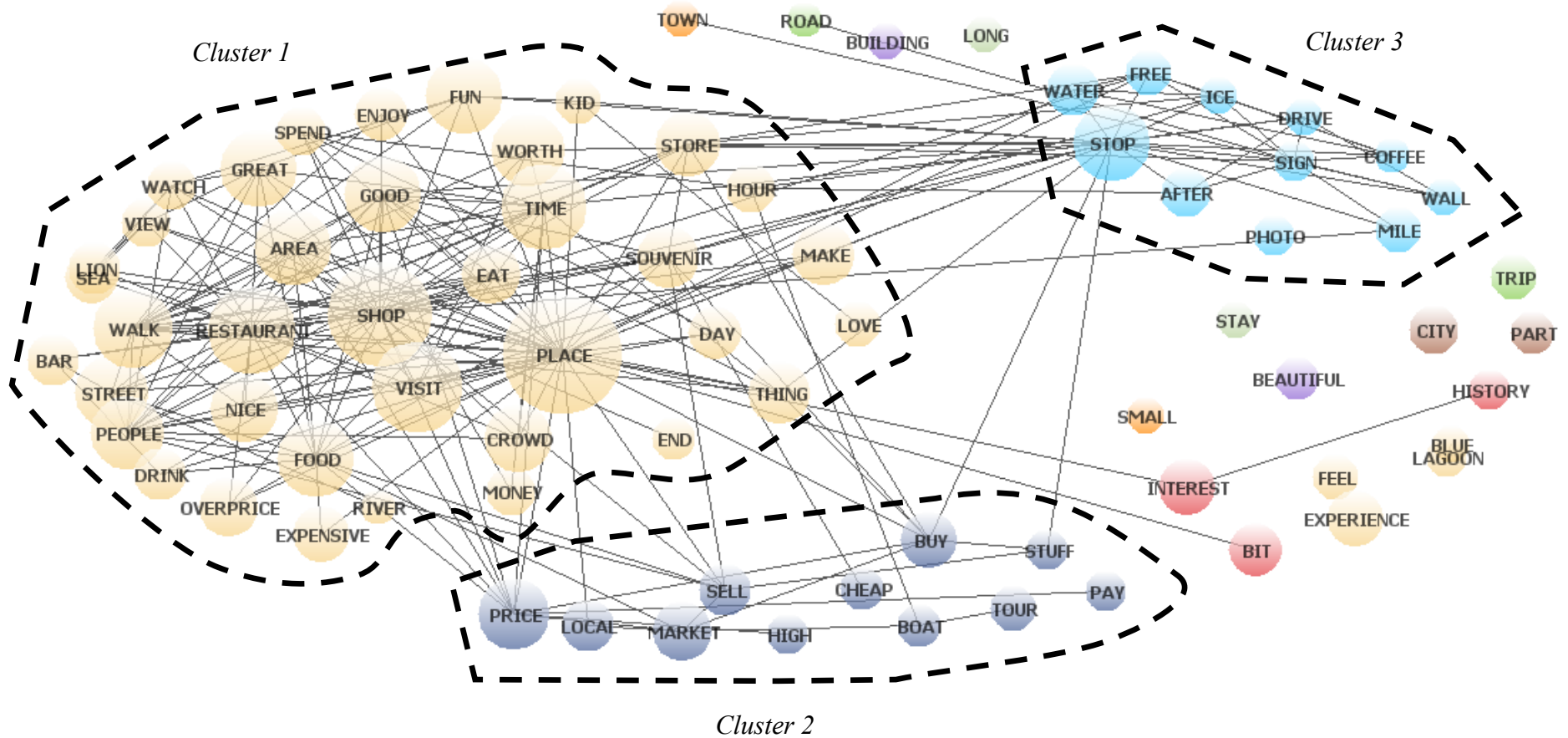
The aforementioned features and characteristics of tourist traps appear to co-exist in a delicate balance as a result of forces that serve to attract and entice tourists to visit or to repel them by exploitative and unfavorable aspects such as crowding and overpricing.

These findings offer a more nuanced understanding of tourist traps, revealing a more sophisticated nature about it than our current knowledge suggests. The study therefore somewhat debunks the simplistic notion that tourist traps are injurious to tourism and destination development.

Though far from definitive, the study’s findings show substantial cause for further identifying the underlying forces that drive the evolution and emergence of tourist traps and the delicate balance between forces of attraction and repulsion. Further studies may assist attractions managers to understand the processes and nomological network of factors and forces driving the transformation of tourist attractions to tourist traps and back.

Figure 2

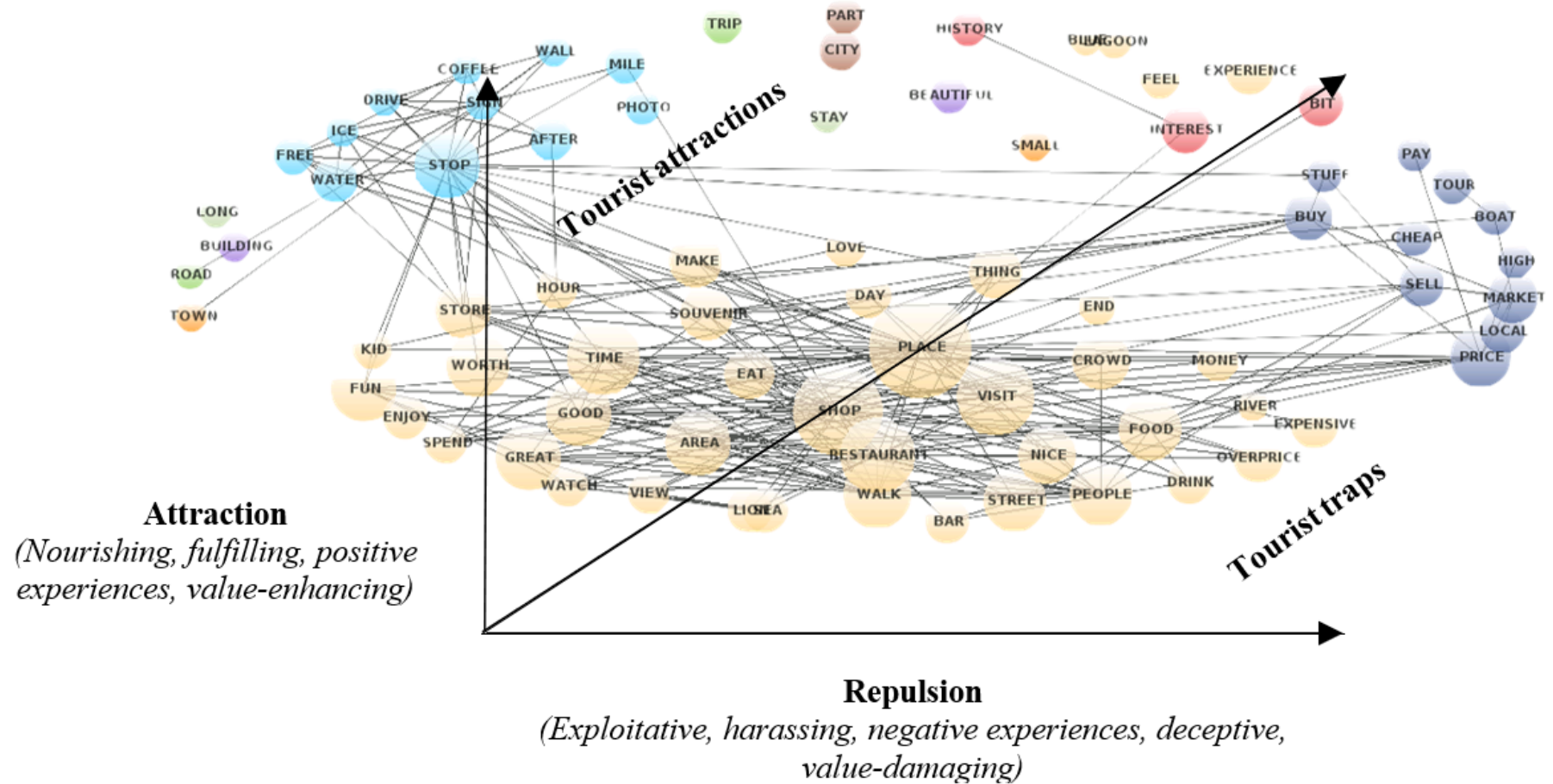
Concept map of “tourist traps” based on the hierarchical agglomeration (or clustering) of associated keywords and terms



Note: There are 10 clusters of keywords and terms, with the clusters determined by the strength of co-occurrence between one keyword and another. The 3 biggest clusters are shown above. Different clusters are distinguishable by different colors (visible in the the PDF online version). Lines represent a link or association within as well as between clusters of different keywords.

Figure 3

Projection of empirical observation (i.e., the concept map in Figure 2) onto the theorized framework (i.e., Figure 1)



Note: The concept map above showing the different clusters of keywords and terms is the same as Figure 2, but after axial rotation. The relative position and distance between the clusters remain the same as Figure 2. Rotation of the concept map was done several times until a close match between the data and theory became evident.

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