I travel, I think: Applying the self-perception theory to explain residents’ attitudes toward tourism development through their travel histories

Jingxian Jiang
Kyle M. Woosnam
Kayode D. Aleshinloye

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Abstract:
In the travel and tourism field, research on residents' attitudes toward tourism and/or tourism development has been marked by limited theoretical application. Theories (e.g., social exchange theory) adopted to explain residents’ attitudes have been focused on perspectives outside the residents. Predictors of residents’ attitudes have been mainly limited to social exchange variables, social economics and social demographics. This study contributes to the current research by introducing self-perception theory to explain residents' attitudes from an introspection angle and testing the theory by predicting Tourism Impact Attitude Scale (TIAS) with residents travel experience history (TUH). Our findings suggested that TUH is a useful predictor of residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development. Communities should take advantage of the exemplary effects of more experienced travelers and include the voices of all residents in the development and planning of sustain tourism.

Keywords
Self-perception theory, TUH, TIAS, residents
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Introduction

Residents in tourism destinations play a vital role in providing quality experiences for tourists and maintaining sustainable tourism development (Gursoy, Chi, and Dyer 2010). Many theories and frameworks (e.g., social exchange theory, social representations theory, emotional solidarity, etc.) have been adopted to explain residents' attitudes toward tourism and/or tourism development in the travel and tourism field. Guided by those theories, certain explanatory variables have been identified, including social exchange variables (e.g., Deery, Jago, and Fredline 2011; Nunkoo and Gursoy 2012), social demographics (Cavus and Tanrisevdi 2002; McGehee and Andereck 2004), residential proximity (Belisle and Hoy 1980; Harrill and Potts 2003), and economic dependency on the tourism economy (Long, Perdue, and Allen 1990; McGehee and Andereck 2004). Common to those variables is that they are attributes externally observable to residents; they seek to account for residents’ attitudes from an outsider’s perspective. However, existing research on residents' attitudes does not consider factors of residents’ introspection. The purpose of the current study is a) to introduce one introspective theory, the self-perception theory, in an effort to explain residents’ attitudes toward tourism and tourism development; and b) to test the role that residents’ level of travel use history (TUH) plays in explaining their attitudes toward tourism development with a resident sample in Galveston, Texas.

Social exchange theory is one of the most popular frameworks used to explain residents' attitudes toward tourism and/or tourism development in various destinations (e.g., Deery, Jago, and
Fredline 2011; Lee et al. 2010; Nunkoo and Gursoy 2012; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2010). This theory suggests that residents' level of support or opposition for tourism and tourism development depends on their perceptions of whether their benefits from tourism and tourism development are satisfactory and whether the exchange of resources (e.g., their support for tourism development, their hospitality to tourists) between them and tourists are fair (Ap 1992). Other theories attempting at explaining host community residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development include social representations theory (Moscardo 2011; Fredline and Faulkner 2000), social distance (Sinkovics and Penz 2009; Tasci 2009), and the integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation (Brown 2009; Lee and Woosnam 2010), to name a few. Predictors used for residents’ attitude toward tourism and tourism development are mainly socio-economic and socio-demographic variables (Gursoy, Chi, and Dyer 2010; Wang and Pfister 2008).

Residents’ behaviors have been rarely used to explain residents’ attitudes toward tourism and tourism development. Residents' travel use history (TUH) is a potential behavioral variable explaining residents’ attitude toward tourism development. Contrary to other utilized variables, TUH is focused on residents' personal experiences. Such a measure is introspective whereby residents reflect on their own degree of travel (in an effort to determine its impact on perceptions of others’ travel). In the literature surrounding resident attitudes research, we have rarely seen travel behaviors considered as a predictor of such attitudes. Economic dependency on tourism development is perhaps is the closest to a behavioral measure. Additionally, only one study (Draper, Woosam and Norman 2011) has utilized travel behavior to explain attitudes. However, the study did not use any introspection theory to inform their empirical test.
Self-perception theory suggests that people infer their own attitudes partly by observing their own behavior and the possible causes of that behavior (Bem 1972). For example, people’s past recycling behaviors may affect their attitudes about being an environmentalist or conservationist (Chaiken and Baldwin 1981). Consistent with the framework, we hypothesize that residents’ past travel experiences (measured through TUH) influence their attitudes toward tourism and tourism development (measured through the *Tourism Impact Attitude Scale*, Lankford and Howard 1994; Wang and Pfister 2008).
**Data collection and measurement**

We used a sample of permanent resident heads of households or their spouses in Galveston County, Texas for the purpose of this study. The data was collected during five weekends (between 10 am and 5pm) throughout the county in October and November 2009 following a multi-stage cluster sampling scheme based on census information (Babbie, 2011). In total, 456 questionnaires were completed with a response rate of 73.2%. Ten of the questionnaires were less than 50% completed and discarded, resulting in 446 useable instruments.

Travel use history was measured by six variables reflecting three dimensions of their travel experiences during the past two years. The first two questions asked respondents the number of domestic day trips and overnight trips they had taken during the last two years. The third question was dichotomous, asking whether they traveled outside the country during the same time. The last two travel experience questions were the total number of international trips and destinations they had taken over the last two years. The TUH variables used in this study were adapted from existing measures of the EUH framework (Hammitt, Backlund, and Bixler 2004; Petrick 2002; Petrick et al. 2001; Shinew 1993; Shreyer, Lime, and Williams 1984). However, our scales were more inclusive, collecting travel experience information on whether traveling internationally or not, number of trips (domestic and international), and number of visited destinations (domestic and international). Past EUH measurement used fewer items to measure one or two dimensions of experience history.

We adopted 17 items from the *Tourism Impact Attitude Scale* (TIAS) developed by Lankford and Howard (1994) to examine residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development in
Galveston. These 17 items were used by Wang and Pfister (2008) and yielded a two-factor structure: support for tourism development and contributions tourism makes to the community. The two-factor structure was consistent with that in previous studies employing TIAS (Harill and Potts 2003; Lankford and Howard 1994; Lankford, Chen, and Chen 1994; Rollins 1997; Vesey and Dimanche 2001). To keep the scale parsimonious and reliable, redundant items from Wang and Pfister (2008) were excluded, and items with the lowest loadings from Lankford and Howard (1994) were removed. For each item, respondents were asked their degree of agreement with the statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.
Data analyses

TUH questions were used to categorize residents in Galveston. First, we calculated the total number of domestic and international trips as well as the total number of domestic and international destinations visited. Then we used the median for total number of trips and total number of different destinations to create bivariate categories of low and high for each variable. The median number of trips taken was 10 trips and the median for visited destinations was five places. Next, we formed four groups based on the two categories total trips and total destinations. These groups were infrequent travelers (low trips, low destinations), intermediate travelers (low trips, high destinations and high trips, low destinations) and frequent travelers (high trips, high destinations). Last, we collapsed the two intermediate groups into one single group following a similar protocol used by Petrick (2002) and Petrick et al. (2001). The authors combined two intermediate segments at the end of the segmentation process. The variable “travel outside the United States” was not used in grouping but was examined as a main effect and interaction effect in subsequent ANCOVAs. Finally, ANOVA tests were used to determine whether the three groups were truly distinct in their travel histories.

To confirm the factor structure of TIAS, CFA was used with EQS 6.2. Before beginning analysis, the dataset was cleaned and screened for outliers at the univariate level (e.g., examining z-scores) and for collinearity at the multivariate level (e.g., Mahalanobis distance) (Mertler and Vannatta 2010; Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). Missing data were imputed through expectation maximization (EM) procedures (Kline 2011).
To address whether residents’ previous travel experiences affect their attitudes toward tourism and tourism development, a series of ANCOVAs were performed on each of the items within the two TIAS constructs. The TUH groupings and whether individuals had traveled outside the United States or not were measured as main effects and the third was an interaction effect between the two main effects. We also included length of residence (measured in years) and economic dependence on tourism (measured as percentage of income derived directly/indirectly from tourism) in each model covariates. In case the ANCOVAs suggested significant differences in TIAS items among the three TUH groups, a post-hoc Bonferroni test was used to show the differences between each of the groups.
Findings

The average participant had lived in the county for 25 years, and derived approximately 10% of income through visitor spending in the county. The median annual household income was between $60,000 and $79,999. A large portion (i.e., 43.2%) of individuals attained at least a four-year college degree.

Results of ANOVA tests and the subsequent Tamhane T2 procedures suggested that the three TUH groups were significantly different from each other for total number of trips ($F = 67.899, p < 0.001$) and total number of destinations ($F = 65.744, p < 0.001$). The Tamhane T2 procedure was chosen for post-hoc test to minimize Type I error given the unequal variances and different sizes of the three groups (Tamhane 1979). For the CFA test of TIAS scale, the same two-factor structure that Wang and Pfister (2008) found was confirmed after dropping one item (i.e., “one of the most important benefits of tourism is how it can improve the local standard of living”). The measurement model fit reasonably well to the data: Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2$ (103, $N = 446$) = 248.24, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.06 (Browne and Cudeck 1993; Hu and Bentler 1999). The resultant first factor was support for tourism development, comprised of nine items ($M = 5.91$), and the second factor was contributions to the community, comprised of six items ($M = 4.36$). All but four of the standardized factor loadings were greater than 0.70 and thus considered ideal (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

ANCOVA tests showed that there were significant differences among infrequent travelers, intermediate travelers and frequent travelers on their attitudes toward most items (6 out of 9) within support for tourism development on (Table 1). The post-hoc Bonferroni tests suggested
that the differences existed between infrequent travelers and intermediate travelers and between infrequent and frequent travelers. On the contrary, no significant difference among the three groups was found on any item within contributions to community. The main effect of travel outside the United States was not significant in any of the ANCOVA models, but the interaction term was significant in selective items from both of the TIAS factors. Additionally, one covariate, economic dependence, was significant in predicting all items within contributions to community and one item of support for tourism development (i.e., “the tourism sector will continue to play a major role in the Galveston County economy”), indicating that as dependence on tourism increased, residents’ agreement with tourism contributions to community and the industry’s leading role in the economy increased.

<Insert Table 1>
Discussion

This study applied self-perception theory to examine residents’ attitudes toward tourism and tourism development. Our results demonstrated that the travel experiences of Galveston residents had significant effects on their support for tourism development. Frequently travelers exhibited a significantly higher degree of support for Galveston remaining as a tourist destination, the promotion of tourism, the general positive benefits of tourism and so on than did infrequently travelers. The same was true between intermediate travelers and infrequent travelers. Our findings indicated that TUH should be a valuable variable added to the predictor family of residents’ attitudes; self-perception theory is helpful in understanding residents’ perceptions of tourism development. We contend that the adoption of self-perception theory expands the pool of limited theories in resident attitude research and hence increases our knowledge on this topic.

From a practical standpoint, the TUH framework for understanding residents’ attitudes has potential implications for communities seeking development and planning of sustainable tourism. To minimize the negative impacts of tourism development and the negative attitudes residents may have toward tourists, developers should include inputs from all residents in the community, regardless of their travel experiences (Edgell et al. 2008; Murphy 1985). Traveling frequencies and visiting various places exposes residents to diverse and novel tourism development models, allowing them understand that a collaborative effort with government, nonprofit, and private sectors is key to successful and sustainable tourism development (Gunn and Var 2002). In addition, the experienced travelers need to be encouraged to share their experiences and thoughts and explain how tourism in other sustainable destinations has benefited the overall community. Given the usefulness of self-perception theory and the fact that the power for a number of the
ANCOVA tests was below an ideal 0.80 level (Pallant 2005), further development and testing of the TUH framework may help to better determine if residents’ attitudes toward tourism are indeed influenced by their own travel experiences. For example, it will be interesting to include Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale (Woosnam, 2013) along with TUH in the examination of residents’ attitudes toward tourism. In this way, both the frequency and depth of residents’ past travel behaviors are considered in analyzing their effects on attitudes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors and corresponding items</th>
<th>Power</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Group/TUH Main effect</th>
<th>Outside-U.S. Main effect</th>
<th>Group x outside-U.S. interaction</th>
<th>Year’s residence covariate</th>
<th>Economic dependence covariate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for tourism development</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>I support tourism and want to see it remain important to Galveston Co.</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>2.29*</td>
<td>5.55**</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.87</td>
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<td>I believe tourism should be actively encouraged in Galveston Co.</td>
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<td>Galveston Co. should support the promotion of tourism.</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>2.84**</td>
<td>6.43**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>3.67*</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I support new tourism facilities that will attract new visitors to Galveston Co.</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>4.71**</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galveston C. should remain a tourist destination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In general, the positive benefits of tourism outweigh negative impacts.</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>4.79**</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tourism sector will continue to play a major role in the Galveston Co. economy.</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>2.93**</td>
<td>7.27**</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.41*</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term planning by Galveston Co. can control negative environmental impacts.</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>2.17*</td>
<td>4.83**</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>4.19*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to develop plans to manage growth of tourism.</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>2.42*</td>
<td>3.43*</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>4.74*</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contributions to community</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of life in Galveston Co. has improved because of tourism facilities.</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>4.91***</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>5.13**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>16.75***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>3.10**</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>3.55*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>9.13**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficients</td>
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<td>I have more recreational opportunities (places to go and things to do)</td>
<td>.19  2.61**  .80  1.03  1.79  .53  6.74*</td>
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<td>because of tourism in Galveston Co.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The tourism sector provides many desirable employment opportunities for</td>
<td>.31  3.56**  1.44  1.24  4.40**  .01  11.01**</td>
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<td>residents.</td>
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<td>The quality of public services has improved due to more tourism in</td>
<td>.35  3.51**  1.67  1.62  1.47  .03  15.27***</td>
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<td>Galveston Co.</td>
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<td>Shopping opportunities are better in Galveston Co. as a result of</td>
<td>.27  2.60*  1.25  2.08  5.48**  .55  3.40</td>
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<td>tourism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galveston Co. has better roads due to tourism.</td>
<td>.16  1.67  .64  .32  2.33  .47  4.50*</td>
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<tr>
<td>My household standard of living is higher because of money tourists</td>
<td>.44  7.51***  2.12  1.62  5.04**  .55  34.35***</td>
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<td>spending here.</td>
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*p < .05. **p < .01. *** p < .001
References


