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Categorization of Destinations Based on Tourists' Emotional Responses

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ABSTRACT

It is important for destination marketers to understand tourists' emotional reactions to tourism experiences in order to initiate successful marketing efforts. Therefore, this study aimed to categorize tourist destinations based on tourists' emotional responses, by utilizing a circumplex model of emotion, which describes emotional responses to environments along two main dimensions—pleasure and arousal. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from sixteen Japanese destinations. The emotional evaluation of the pleasure and arousal dimensions for each destination was plotted on a two-dimensional grid. The results suggest that the majority of destinations that received a positive evaluation were perceived as exciting (high pleasure and arousal), rather than relaxing (high pleasure and low arousal), by tourists.

Keywords: *emotion, pleasure, arousal, tourist behavior.*

INTRODUCTION

Currently, understanding tourists' emotional responses towards various travel destinations is essential for the success of destination marketing. This is because emotional reactions to the tourism experience are antecedents of satisfaction, revisit intention, and intention to recommend the destination to others, which are measures of customer retention (Bosque and Martin 2008). That is, improving the emotional evaluation leads to strengthening the competitiveness of a destination. Destination marketers need to know tourists' emotional responses of their vacation experience.

A circumplex model of emotion (Russell 1980) has been widely used to understand consumers' emotional responses to service environments (Lovelock and Wirtz 2007). For example, Bigné, Andrew and Gnoth (2005) established the causal relationships among theme park visitors' emotion, satisfaction, and loyalty by using the model. Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) used the model to measure affective components of destination image. According to this model, the emotional response to environments can be described along two main dimensions: pleasure and arousal. The model defines that emotional responses to environments can be described along two main dimensions, pleasure and arousal. Based on the assumption, the model includes four bipolar adjectives in a circumplex; unpleasant–pleasant, sleepy–arousing, distressing–relaxing, and gloomy–exciting. In this case, “Exciting” is a combination of arousing and pleasant emotion, and “Relaxing” is a combination of sleepy and pleasant emotion.

By using this framework, it is possible to categorize destinations based on tourists' emotional states. Pike and Ryan (2004) used this technique for analyzing the positioning of five destinations in New Zealand. However, they took into account the destination image, and not the actual travel experience. In this study, we used tourists' emotional reactions toward a destination to precisely evaluate their experience. Overall, the purpose of this study is to categorize destinations based on tourists' emotional responses.

METHOD

The data for this study was collected by distributing self-administered questionnaires at forty-eight destinations in Japan. The survey was carried out as part of biannual national tourist survey of Society of Destination Management Research (SDMR), which is established by Japan Travel Bureau Foundation, from July to September 2011. The target population was domestic tourists who are able to read Japanese. A total of 1,500 questionnaires were distributed at each destination. Among these, over 150 usable responses (10% response rate) were obtained at 16 destinations; these responses were included in the subsequent analysis to assure the reliability of the results. The final number of usable responses was 3,944.

According to the circumplex model (Russell 1980), emotional responses were measured through two dimensions: pleasure and arousal. Pleasure was measured using four items on a seven-point semantic differential scale; pleasant-unpleasant, fun-boring, joyful-sad, and happy-unhappy. Similarly, arousal was measured using four items on a seven-point semantic differential scale; stimulated-relaxed, passionate-composed, excited-calm, and active-passive. The scale was adapted from Bigné, Andrew and Gnoth (2005) and Uehara (2008). The questionnaire was originally written in Japanese, and then translated into English.

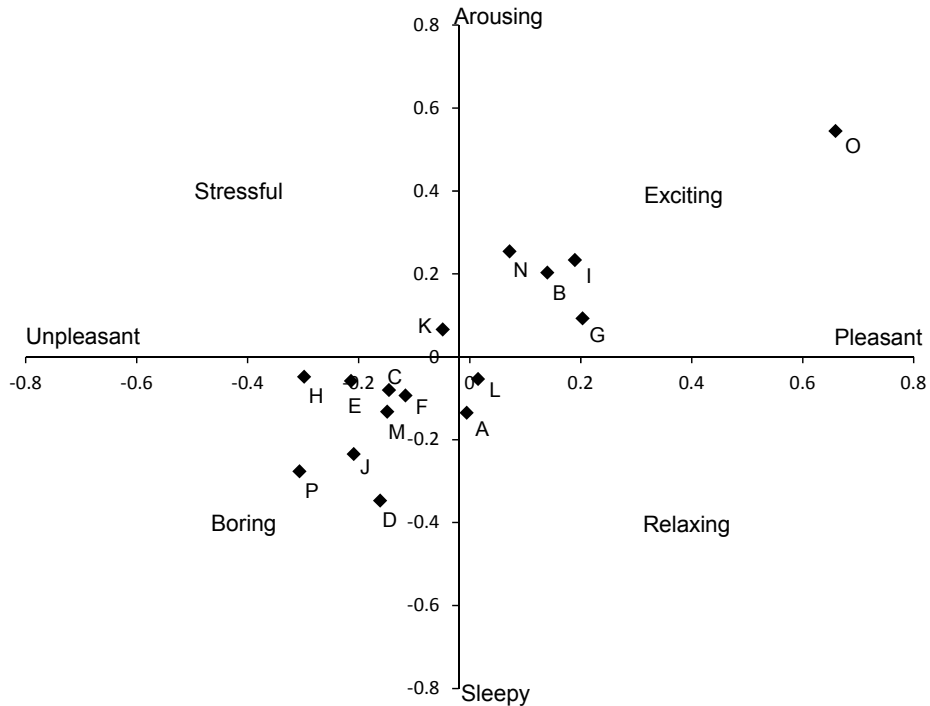
RESULTS

All analyses were conducted using R version 2.15.0 and the packages “psych”. First, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to identify the dimensions of pleasure and arousal. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.90, indicating that the data was appropriate for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). The principle axis factor method was used to determine the underlying factors among eight attributes. As a result, the scree plot indicated a two-factor solution. The two factors were labeled as pleasure and arousal, and promax rotation revealed that all items had factor loadings of 0.40 or greater, which was the general cut-off criterion (Stevens, 1992). Then, the Cronbach’s alphas for the two factors were calculated to assess the internal reliability. The alpha values ranged from 0.91 to 0.93. Second, mean factor scores for each destination of the two factors were calculated based on the regression method (see Table 1). In addition, these scores were plotted on a grid (see Figure 1). The x axis represents the mean factor scores of pleasure for each destination, and the y axis represents those of arousal. The grand means of the two dimensions were used to locate the crosshairs.

Table 1
Mean Factor Scores for Each Destination

Destination	Pleasure	Arousal	Label
Iiyama	-0.01	-0.14	A
Tanabe	0.14	0.20	B
Karatsu	-0.15	-0.08	C
Shima-Onsen	-0.16	-0.35	D
Katsuyama	-0.21	-0.06	E
Mashiko	-0.12	-0.09	F
Niseko	0.20	0.09	G
Omihachiman	-0.30	-0.05	H
Miyajima	0.19	0.23	I
Takayama	-0.21	-0.23	J
Nikko	-0.05	0.07	K
Yufu City	0.02	-0.05	L
Yonago	-0.15	-0.13	M
Sapporo	0.07	0.25	N
Miyako Islands	0.66	0.54	O
Yanagawa	-0.31	-0.28	P

Figure 1
Emotional Response Grid



Finally, the emotion words were plotted on the grid. Based on Pike and Ryan's (2004) framework, four destination types were grouped together in the following manner: exciting (high pleasure and arousal), relaxing (high pleasure and low arousal), stressful (low pleasure and high arousal), and boring (low pleasure and arousal). The results showed that the majority of destinations were positioned as exciting (five destinations) or boring (eight destinations). On the other hand, only two destinations were positioned as relaxing, despite the fact that relaxation is known to be a central component of travel motivation (Crompton 1979). Furthermore, there was just one destination that was positioned as stressful.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, we attempted to categorize destinations based on tourists' emotional responses. The results suggest that the majority of destinations that were positively evaluated were rated as exciting, and not relaxing. One possible explanation for this outcome could be that pleasure and arousal seem to be highly correlated with each other. In fact, inter-factor correlation coefficient between the two factors was high ($r = 0.67$). In order to evoke favorable emotional reactions, it is recommended that destination marketers strive to develop a strategy that stimulates tourists' perceptions, even if a destination is believed to be relaxing.

Finally, this study has several limitations. First, it was based on a comparative assessment. The evaluation of each destination is likely to change depending on data sets. Second, it was designed to examine tourists' overall emotional reaction toward the tourism experience. Future research must distinguish clearly between tourists' judgment about specific aspects of the experience and their overall judgment about the experience for further understanding tourists' complex behaviors.

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