



Examining the Factors Influencing Motivation of Dark Tourism Under Theory of Planned Behaviour

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Dark tourism or thanatourism is a new area of tourism that has had rapid growth in the modern age. According to Iii and Dugdale (2018), thanatourism is defined as the travel dimension of thanatopsis or travelling to a location that is wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, specifically, but not an exclusively violent death. The marketing of dark sites on media platforms such as television, news outlets, and social media are creating awareness among tourists which have allowed the masses to visit such locations that are known for their ghoulish or violent histories (Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Farmaki, 2013). Thanotourism is known as an inspiration to travel exclusively for the fascination with death, without any bias against the person(s) that may be involved (Stone et al., 2018).

People have been known to travel and explore places associated with death for centuries. The earliest forms of thanotourism can be attributed to the Roman gladiator games taking place in the Republic, tours to watch public hangings in England, and travel to witness medieval executions (Ashworth & Isaac, 2015). Modern times have brought with it a modern take, with tourists fascinated with sites of death and tragedy. According to Stone et al. (2018), today's most visited sites of death are the New York World Trade Centre disaster location, Mother Theresa's death sites, Dracula Experience in the UK, and graveyards in general. It has been argued by academics that there is an increased interest in death due to more tourists' sites being accessible to people to pay their respects or contemplate on the aftermath of such a tragedy (Farmaki, 2013; Magee & Gilmore, 2015; Podoshen et al., 2015; Yan et al., 2016).

A majority of the research currently available attempts to understand why tourists are drawn to these destinations and also understanding how the perception of death and disaster is being handled by those that offer such tourist products (Farmaki, 2013; Hooper & Lennon, 2016; Korstanje & George, 2015; Light, 2017). The link of presentation and consumption of death was first studied under Lennon and Foley (2000) in which it was found that three factors contribute to the thriving industry of thanotourism – global communications, objectives of site perpetuating anxiety and doubt, and sites being commodified. The research in this field has been questioning several topics, specifically if there is a measurable growth in interest of death and atrocity, or if there is an

increasing supply of dark tourist sites. The proposed study looks to dive into these unanswered questions by focusing on how motivations and intentions may impact the individual's need to visit dark tourist sites, specifically, the Tower of London.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

There have been surmountable research on thanatourism from a theoretical perspective, but few academics have been able to provide empirical data in this area. A great majority of the research available explores possible motivations of tourists for visiting such thanatourist sites, however, there is no empirical data available to test the reality of such theories. Preliminary literature review on this topic allowed for the uncovering of a single documented empirical study that examines the motivations of tourists visiting a destination attributed to a disaster (Podoshen et al., 2015).

It is determined from the study that a majority of the tourists were visiting this dark location to satisfy their curiosity with regards to the natural disaster that had taken place there (Schwarz & Benson, 2018; Sharma & Nayak, 2019; Tinson et al., 2015; Yan et al., 2016). Such a severe lack in literature gives rise to further research in the area to discover the motivations consumers of dark tourist locations have which drives them to frequent such destinations. The current research proposes to examine the motivations of tourists towards dark tourism based on theoretical knowledge available on consumer behaviour.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of the proposed study is to use the available theoretical frameworks of consumer behaviour to determine the motivations and intentions of tourists interested in thanatourism location – Tower of London. The study will look to answer the following research questions:

What is the relationship between motivations and intentions of individuals that have previously visited the Tower of London or planned such a trip?

Are there any significant differences between the relationship with theoretical constructs based on an individual's intention of visiting such a location or having visited a dark location?

To answer these research questions and achieve the aim of the proposed study, the following objectives have been constructed:

1. Examine the motivational factors that drive tourists' intentions to dark sites using the Push-Pull Factor Theory.
2. Analyse the behavioural intentions of individuals wanting to visit a thanotourism location using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).
3. Explore consumer motivations and intentions of tourists with regards to dark tourism constructs indicated in the existing literature.
4. Provide practical implications that can be used to aid the tourism industry in benefitting effectively from dark tourism.

1.4 RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION

The knowledge attained from the proposed study will be of grave importance to both academics and practitioners due to its nature of being an empirical exploration of the popular tourism sector. The information that is gathered and then converted to knowledge for tourism and hospitality can be used by the industry to market dark tourist attractions for potential consumers. The proposed study uses four different dark tourism constructs hypothesised in literature to test against their relationship with the theory of planned behaviour variables. This can provide greater insight into consumer behaviour specific to their motivations for visiting tourist destinations. A greater understanding of such knowledge can aid local tourist industries in the United Kingdom by attracting a greater number of visitors than they may be seeing currently.

Additionally, the proposed study provides a possibility to contribute to existing research by establishing a relationship between the theory of planned behaviour and thanotourism. Literature that is currently available has mostly focused on and used the push-pull theory of motivational factors when researching dark tourism (Heidelberg, 2015). The proposed study, however, incorporates the theory of planned behaviour with the push-pull theory in order to prove its applicability in research. This particular approach can then be replicated by others to study specific dark tourist attractions depending on their level of being ominous. This will allow researchers to comprehend if the motivation of visiting a particular site changes depending on the location or the "darkness" of the destination.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The proposed study plans on using the thematic approach to reviewing and assessing literature. For this purpose, it is planned for the literature review to include academic material – journal articles, textbooks, and conference papers, that have been published in the last five years. This ensures that the latest research is used to conduct the study and incorporates information that is relevant to the time. The thematic literature review will organise the literature based on its specific theme. The literature review is to be thoroughly conducted by incorporating relevant theories such as the push-pull theory and the theory of planned behaviour (Busby & Devereux, 2015). The literature will also critically analyse the dark tourism constructs currently accepted as primary motivations for dark tourism.

2.1 DARK TOURISM

Dark tourism is a fascinating and controversial research area that allows academics to address complex issues of social, political, cultural, and moral dimensions. According to academics, there are five travel activities that can be categorised as thanotourism – (1) travelling to witness public enactments of death, (2) visiting locations of mass or individual deaths, (3) travel to visit memorials, (4) viewing of material evidence or symbolic representation of death in locations that are not connected with the occurrence, and lastly, (5) re-enactment or simulation of death. (Korstanje & George, 2015; Seraphin, 2017; Skinner, 2016)

A concurrent theme in dark tourism literature attempts to explain the causes attribute to the rise of individuals interested in visiting such destinations associated with death and disaster (Kerr & Price, 2018). The literature currently available points to increased curiosity about death-related locations causing the medicalisation of death. This is because the process and acceptance of death have changed significantly with modernisation (Martini & Buda, 2020).

Illich (1990) had developed a theory that explores and describes the perceptions of health, healing, and death over the last five hundred years as being in specific stages. The research included a sixth stage, of the 20th century, that is described as being “Death and Intensive Care”, in which the author argues that the modern perception of death in patients being placed in intensive care units where they are no longer the masters of their deaths and are at the hands of medical professionals. The

increased use of medicine becoming a controller of our death has sparked cultural fears which have shifted from dying to post-mortem judgement to fear the act of death.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

There are two dominant ontological and epistemological traditions employed in research – positivism and interpretivism. It is argued that researchers that are using the positivist ontology hold the view that work is external and that there is only a singular objective to reality to research situations that cannot include personal perspectives or beliefs (Sharma & Nayak, 2019). This premise ensures that researchers take a controlled structural approach when conducting a study by first clearly identifying a research topic that can then allow for the development of appropriate hypotheses.

The opposite approach interpretivism believes that reality has the ability to be both multiple and relative (Busby & Devereux, 2015). It has been argued that those multiple realities can be described depending on the surrounding systems that hold meanings to them (Gmelch & Kaul, 2018). Knowledge acquired through this means is more difficult to interpret and is commonly socially constructed instead of being objectively determined and perceived. The proposed research will use the positivist approach for the development of the study by ensuring its methodological techniques are in line with this philosophy. For this particular reason, quantitative research methods will be used to construct a data collection instrument, strategy, and analysis.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Keeping in view the requirements of the current study, surveys will be the most suitable strategy in conducting research. Surveys allow researchers to obtain data about viewpoints, situations and practice at a certain point in time using questionnaires and even interviews (Lennon, 2018). Implementing quantitative analytical techniques then allow researchers to make inferences from the data based on existing relationships. Lam et al. (2001) point out that the use of surveys allows a researcher to study a plethora of variables at one time which is often not possible in laboratory or field experiments.

3.3 SAMPLING

The proposed sampling strategy for the study will be a random sampling of participants who have visited the Tower of London or are planning to visit the dark tourist destination. Sample participants will be asked to participate using an online survey through Survey Monkey keeping in mind the current situation of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom. It is proposed that a large sample be taken with the sample target being 200 participants (N= 200). The recommended sample size is based on the requirements needed to conduct an SEM. According to Hair et al. (2017), for a study using structural equation modelling (SEM) the sample size should be at a minimum of 200, but preferably more than 400 observations.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

The proposed study will use a survey instrument to measure the dark tourism constructs and theory of planned behaviour variables. The measurement items will be adapted from previously developed and validated tools from studies of Ajzen (1991), Biran et al. (2014), Bissell (2009), and Molle and Bader (2014). The constructs used in the proposed study are developed according to relationships of consumer behaviour and motivations established in the literature as those attributed most commonly to dark tourism locations.

The instrument constructed for data collection will study constructs of causal interest, engaging entertainment, unique learning experience, and dark experience. These constructs are proposed to be tested against the theory of planned behaviour constructs that include behavioural intentions, subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived behavioural controls. It is also proposed for the survey instrument to include demographic questions including gender, age, education, income, country of residence, and marital status. The proposed questionnaire will be developed using a Likert scale allowing participants to select a response from five choices indicating their level of agreement.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The proposed study will analyse the data in two stages. The first phase of analysis will include descriptive statistics of all variables using IBM Statistical Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 24. The second stage of analysis will be conducted using structural equation modelling (SEM) to determine the positive and negative relationships between the constructs currently identified. This stage of analysis will employ the software tool of Smart PLS 3.0 as it will allow for the

evaluation of the model through reliability and validity tests of each of the variables to ensure that the model is fit for testing hypotheses.

SEM is used in the current study as the reliability and validity of the measurement items can be conducted concurrently for each of the seven latent variables. Also, the method can estimate the relationship that may be present for the seven latent variables and the dependent variable. Hair et al. (2011) argue that “SEM approaches provide the capability to advance understanding by combining theoretical with empirical knowledge in a way that was not possible with MRA, FA, and PA”.

When constructing the PLS path model there are three components that are used – the structural model, measurement model, and weighting schemes. Tenenhaus et al. (2005) note that structural and measurement models are components that are found across a vast array of SEMs, by weighting schemes are specific to the PLS approach. Monecke and Leisch (2012) argue that PLS path models only allow for a recursive relationship and are able to be expressed as a simply connected digraph.

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