

MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES FOR RETIRED INTELLECTUAL EXPLORERS: CASE STUDY OF WALKING TOURS

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ABSTRACT

As the global population ages, an increasing number of Retired Intellectual Explorers (RIEs) seek meaningful and enriching tourism experiences. This study investigates the key factors contributing to memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) for this demographic, using a combination of questionnaires and interviews to explore seven core dimensions introduced by Kim et al. (2012). Memorable Tourism Experience scale - hedonism, refreshment, meaningfulness, local culture, involvement, knowledge, and novelty.

The research highlights that Retired Intellectual Explorers (RIEs) value depth, personal engagement, and intellectual fulfillment as central to their tourism experiences, with an emphasis on knowledge-sharing and personalization through customized tours. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of how aging populations shape tourism behaviors and offer insights into the development of more targeted, enriching tourism services.

By focusing on the Walking Tours in Taiwan, this study provides practical insights for both academia and the tourism industry, underscoring the importance of designing experiences that cater to the intellectual and emotional needs of Retired Intellectual Explorers (RIEs). As such, this research serves as a foundation for creating more memorable and fulfilling experiences for an increasingly significant demographic in global tourism.

Keywords: Senior Tourism, Creative Aging, Memorable Tourism Experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of senior citizens worldwide continues growing and life expectancy is on the rise. The number of people aged 65 and over has tripled from 130 million to 419 million since 1950. According to estimates, the population of people aged 60 years and over will double from 841 million in 2013 to nearly one billion in 2050 (United Nations, 2013). According to the World Health Organization, a society in which the proportion of people 65 years or older is 7% or higher is known as an "aging society," 14% or higher is regarded as an "aged society," and 20% or higher is called a "super-aged society." Taiwan became an aging society in 1993 and is entering the era of aged society in 2018 (National Development Council, 2014). The world is experiencing the most rapid aging of its population in recorded history. According to the most recent United Nations Report on Global Population Aging, aging is a worldwide phenomenon. It predicts that 1 by 2050, 1 in 6 individuals, or 16% of the global population, will be aged 65 or older. This marks a significant increase from the 9% (1 in 11) recorded in 2019 (United Nations, 2019). This research aims to delve into these aspirations and expectations, exploring what constitutes a truly memorable tourist experience. Additionally, it seeks to determine whether a standardized MTE (Memorable Tourist Experience) scale can effectively assess experiential factors across diverse tourist characteristics, considering the distinct motivations and expectations of each tourist. This study is focused on active retired seniors who have time available and are interested in traveling. These individuals typically have a higher educational background and are financially stable. They are seeking meaningful travel experiences as a form of fulfillment in their later life. The above classification system is used in this study, and the specific target market of these intellectuals is termed "Retired Intellectual Explorers" (RIEs).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Senior Tourism

Tourism is widely recognized as one of the world's most significant forms of economic activity, whose economic potential attracts the interest of national and local governments. Governments routinely encourage the development of tourism in their region as a vehicle for addressing economic decline. Despite concerns as to the effects of financial crises, climate change and the increasing costs of oil, tourism is forecast to continue to grow in the foreseeable future. In 2012, international tourist arrivals reached one billion for the first time, up from 25 million in 1950, 277 million in 1980 and 528 million in 1995 (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2012). According to the UNWTO (2017), International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) in 2016 grew by 3.9% to reach a total of 1,235 million worldwide, an increase of 46 million over the previous year. It was the seventh consecutive year of above average growth in international tourism following the 2009 global economic crisis. A comparable sequence of uninterrupted solid growth has not been recorded since the 1960s. Demand for international tourism followed the positive trend of previous years, with many destinations reporting sound results, while a few faced security incidents. Some redirection of tourism flows was observed, though most destinations shared in the overall growth due to stronger travel demand, increased connectivity and more affordable air transport. By UNWTO region, Asia and the Pacific led growth in 2016 with a 9% increase in international arrivals, followed by Africa (+8%) and the Americas (+3%). The world's most visited region, Europe (+2%) showed mixed results, while available data for the Middle East (-4%) point to a decline in arrivals.

International tourism receipts grew by 2.6% in real terms (taking into account exchange rate fluctuations and inflation) with total earnings in the destinations estimated at US\$ 1,220 billion worldwide in 2016 (Euro 1,102 billion). The contemporary global landscape is witnessing an unprecedented acceleration in demographic ageing. The United Nations' Report on World Population Aging (2019) underscores the pervasive nature of this phenomenon, projecting that by 2050, a significant proportion of the world's population, amounting to 16%, will be aged 65 or above, a notable increase from the 2019 figure of 9%. The anticipated global surge in elderly individuals is staggering, with projections indicating a doubling from 617 million to 1.6 billion by 2050 (He et al., 2016). Additionally, Kazeminia et al. (2015) posit that, by 2030, 55 countries across diverse regions will experience a demographic shift wherein seniors aged 65 and above will constitute at least 20% of each nation's total populace. Concomitant with these transformative demographic patterns is the discernible impact on the travel industry, particularly in relation to senior travelers. Research conducted by Patterson (2018) has elucidated that senior individuals are increasingly wielding considerable influence over vacation and holiday expenditures. Notably, investigations focusing on seniors in Western societies reveal a demographic characterized by affluence, substantial discretionary time, and a lifestyle oriented towards entertainment and travel enjoyment, as contrasted with preceding generations (Kazeminia et al., 2015). Consequently, the tourism sector is witnessing a paradigm shift, recognizing senior travel as an expanding and prominent market segment (Chu & Chu, 2013). World Tourism Organization (WTO) have anticipated market trends for the year 2020 encompass several noteworthy developments. Foremost among these are the projected escalation in the elderly tourist demographic, a shift from active vacation preferences towards experiential holiday pursuits, and an escalating complexity in demand segmentation. This complexity arises from the necessity to align with diverse objectives or purposes inherent in traditional travel, such as cultural-related products and destination-oriented travel. Consequently, it can be asserted that prevailing trends in tourism demand are principally shaped by the following contextual factors, notably there is a discernible elevation in the significance of the demographic segment comprising tourists aged 55 years and above within the overarching demand landscape, this demographic shift is accompanied by a heightened demand characterized by a pronounced emphasis on quality and sophistication. Additionally, the tourism market exhibits a path towards increased segmentation, reflecting a subtlety responsiveness to diverse traveler preferences, the interaction between time limitations and financial abundance results in a situation where individuals experience a shortage of time despite having sufficient financial resources, this contiguity plays a crucial role in shaping the changing dynamics of tourism demand. Furthermore, an emergent trend pertains to the augmented awareness of environmental and sustainability issues among travelers, influencing their choices and preferences.

2.2 Creative Aging

The concept of creative capital, as delineated by Florida (2010: 276-292), extends from the notion of human capital, specifically emphasizing weak ties among individuals (thin social capital). These weak ties are deemed crucial for fostering the creative endeavors of individuals, promoting openness to immigrants, and accommodating individuals with diverse characteristics and beliefs. Creative capital, therefore, serves as a mitigating force against the negative repercussions associated with human and social capital, such as the exacerbation of differences, exclusionary practices, and constraints imposed by tradition. According to Florida (2010: 256-275), a comprehensive regional development model hinges on four factors crucial for urban and, by extension, creative regional and national development: technology, talent, tolerance, and territorial assets.

The intertwining of creative capital with territorial considerations is particularly pronounced as regions and cities strive to attract highly skilled or creative human capital, a prerequisite for achieving elevated levels of economic growth (Florida, 2005; Chantelot et al., 2010). This perspective diverges markedly from the human capital theory, which traditionally asserts that education plays a pivotal role in propelling regional economic growth (Florida, 2002; 2002a). Furthermore, Florida argues that the creative capital theory surpasses human capital theory in its capacity to predict urban economic development (Florida, 2005).

While the conventional measure of human capital often revolves around an individual's educational attainment, the creative capital approach necessitates a broader evaluation encompassing an individual's intrinsic creative potential. This potential is essential for generating novel ideas, pioneering technologies, innovative business models, cultural forms, and entire new industries, ultimately giving rise to the concept of the

'creative class' as articulated in the works of Richard Florida (Dinescu & Grigorovici, 2008).

Creative aging pertains to the engagement of seniors in creative pursuits, shifting the focus from the challenges associated with aging to the exploration of an individual's inherent potential (Misey, 2007). Creative aging policies are designed to formulate programs amalgamating cultural and artistic development with lifelong learning, community integration, and rehabilitation. The categorization of the creative class encompasses professionals from the service sector individuals in the workforce constrained by fixed schedules and exposed to the potential loss of employment and social

status. This stratification extends to the changing roles of the elderly, defined as individuals over 60 years of age according to the World Health Organization criteria (UNDP, 1999: 7).

Participation in creative activities by seniors yields numerous benefits, including personal fulfillment, the creation of meaning, opportunities for lifelong learning, social connections, celebratory experiences, enhanced communication, the preservation of dignity and self-esteem, empowerment, and the maintenance and improvement of health (Moloney, 2006: 19-24).

Creative work is an opportunity for the continuation of a senior's work, learning and economic activity, such as in the use of new technologies that lead to a reduction in the number of jobs, but also create new, more flexible jobs that require originality and creativity. Creative aging addresses the lack of creative opportunities for adults to grow and maintain physical and mental function during later years of life (Cohen, 2005). Cohen (2009) identified four phases of human potential during later years which set the stage for creative expression: 1) midlife re-evaluation phase (40's-50's), characterized by re-evaluation of life and sense of crisis or quest; 2) liberation phase (60's-70's), characterized by added energy and a new degree of personal freedom; 3) summing up phase (70+), characterized by accounting for unfulfilled dreams and unfinished business and a pursuit of what is missing; and 4) an encore phase (80+), characterized by the desire to make a final impact to himself or herself or the community. Creative activities allow older adults to engage their imagination, make new connections, discover a sense of purpose and a feeling of personal growth, and to express their creativity in ways that contribute to society (Dahlberg et al., 2011). Ivey and Tepper (2008) noted that the major challenge for lifelong learning is to find ways for people to access community programming. While opportunities exist, there is little infrastructure that cater to adult learning, with substantially fewer creative programs for older adults in the visual arts, music, dance, writing, and drama. Creative engagement is particularly important in later life, a time of reflection and rebalancing as one moves toward the end of the arc of life. Despite the potential market for programs promoting health and wellness, lifelong learning, and community engagement, gaps in providing access to older adults remain (Hanna, 2013). Since 2015 the British Council has developed an "Arts and Aging" program, which sits within a broader Arts and Inclusion strand across North East Asia (Korea, Japan, Taiwan, HK and Singapore). This agenda aims to build bridges for exchange of knowledge, network building and collaboration on the role of arts and culture in an aging society. According to a National Development Council report, the old age dependency ratio will decrease from 1 to 6.7 care-giver in 2012 to 1 to 1.3 in 2060. Responding to this changing landscape, increasing numbers of social welfare organizations, museums and design collectives have started to advocate for active aging, aging-in-place and creative aging. Hence, the important impact of arts and design innovation on health promotion and dementia prevention in an aging society is gradually being recognized by both the cultural and science sectors in Taiwan.

2.3 Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) A memorable tourism experience (MTE) is characterized as a tourism encounter that leaves a positive and enduring impression, one that is remembered and recollected even after the event has concluded, as articulated by Kim et al. (2012). MTEs hold heightened importance due to their potential to influence the decisions of future travelers (Kim et al., 2010). When planning upcoming trips, travelers heavily rely on their past experiences and memories (Lehto et al., 2004).

The importance of providing memorable experiences has been extensively acknowledged in previous literature (Kozak, 2001; Wirtz et al., 2003; Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004). For instance, use of purchase experiences in decision-making: as an illustration, personal memories of purchase experiences serve as a valuable source of information for shaping future decision-making (Hoch & Deighton, 1989). As well as the influence of past experiences on tourist choices: in a similar vein, tourists often make decisions that are influenced by their past experiences. When determining their travel plans and researching specific destinations, tourists frequently draw from their recollections of past encounters (Raju & Reilly, 1979; Kerstetter & Cho, 2004).

Recently, the tourism industry has increasingly prioritized the provision of memorable experiences for tourists, elevating it above tangible resources (Wang et al., 2020). These memorable experiences serve as a cornerstone of successful tourism products (Chen et al., 2020), serving not only as a core determinant of loyalty behaviors (Zhang et al., 2018) but also as a pivotal factor in a destination's competitiveness and sustainability. Talarico and Rubin (2003) assert that extraordinary, surprising, unforeseen, and emotionally resonant experiences have the potential to create vivid and long-lasting imprints in individuals' minds. Travelers often return to destinations that they recall in a positive light (Marschall, 2012). This underscores the significance of MTEs and their influence on traveler retention. However, it's important to note that not all tourism experiences can automatically translate into MTEs. MTEs are those experiences that are carefully curated from a traveler's overall experiences and are capable of being remembered and recalled after a trip.

Significance of memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) take on added importance because only those experiences that leave a lasting imprint on memory influence tourists' future decision-making (Kim, Ritchie, & Tung, 2010). In making decisions about future trips, tourists often draw upon their past experiences and the memories associated with them (Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004). The Quantifiable MTE scale was first developed by Kim et al. (2012) in crafting a scale that could quantitatively measure memorable tourism experiences. This scale encompasses seven distinct dimensions, and they conducted a cross-cultural study to validate its effectiveness. These seven dimensions are

hedonism, refreshment, meaningfulness, local culture, involvement, knowledge and novelty.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to explore the memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) of Retired Intellectual Explorers (RIEs). Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and participant observation, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how RIEs engage with and perceive their travel experiences.

Sampling

The sample consisted of 30 Retired Intellectual Explorers (RIEs) aged 65 and above, all actively engaged in Walking Tours. The research aimed to assess the key dimensions of memorable tourism experiences, including hedonism, refreshment, meaningfulness, local culture, involvement, knowledge, and novelty (Kim et al., 2012). By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this study offers a holistic view of the cognitive, emotional, and sensory elements that define MTEs for this demographic.

Data Collection Methods

1. Questionnaires

The quantitative phase involved structured questionnaires based on the MTE scale (Kim et al., 2012), designed to measure the participants' evaluation of their recent travel experiences. The questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items, assessing participants' agreement with statements across seven MTE dimensions.

2. Participant Observation

The qualitative phase was supplemented with participant observation during guided tours, focusing on how RIEs engage with their surroundings and interact with tour guides.

3. Semi-Structured Interviews

To gain deeper insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' reflections on what makes a tourism experience memorable.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the interview transcripts and observation notes were subjected to thematic analysis. The integration of these findings revealed that RIEs' memorable tourism experiences are strongly shaped by depth, personal engagement, and intellectual fulfillment, with the quality of the tour guide playing a pivotal role in creating meaningful and memorable experiences.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data revealed that the knowledge dimension emerged as the most important factor in shaping memorable experiences for Retired Intellectual Explorers (RIEs), followed by local culture and hedonism. This indicates that RIEs prioritize intellectual engagement, cultural immersion, and personal pleasure during travel. Observation data supported the questionnaire results, particularly in relation to sensory engagement and tour guide interaction. Interview data revealed several recurring themes, such as the significance of the guide's knowledge, sensory immersion, and customized experiences. RIEs consistently emphasized the value of emotional connections to the places they visited, especially when experiencing nostalgia or engaged with historical narratives that resonated with their personal lives. The interviews also highlighted key differences between senior tourists and younger tourists, with seniors placing greater emphasis on learning, depth, and historical context, whereas younger travelers often favored excitement and novelty.

4. CONCLUSION

As the global population ages, an increasing number of Retired Intellectual Explorers (RIEs) seek meaningful and enriching tourism experiences. This study investigates the key factors contributing to memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) for this demographic, using a combination of questionnaires, interviews, and participant observation to explore seven core dimensions - hedonism, refreshment, meaningfulness, local culture, involvement, knowledge, and novelty.

The research highlights that Retired Intellectual Explorers (RIEs) value depth, personal engagement, and intellectual fulfillment, with sensory immersion and personalized experiences being critical to their enjoyment and memory of travel. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of how aging populations shape tourism behaviors and offer insights into the development of more targeted, enriching tourism services.

By focusing on the Walking Tours in Taiwan, this study provides practical insights for both academia and the tourism industry, underscoring the importance of designing experiences that cater to the intellectual and emotional needs of retired intellectual explorers. As such, this research serves as a foundation for creating more memorable and fulfilling experiences for an increasingly significant demographic in global tourism.

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