

Active Research Directions for Studying Repeat Tourist Behaviour

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Abstract—Repeat tourism has drawn increased interest among researchers recently. Various aspects of repeat tourism have been studied addressing key issues such as definition, methodology and underlying mechanism. The current article aims to highlight the discrepancies found in the research via a review of existing literature and specifically emphasize the active research directions for studying the repeat tourist behaviour. The main findings of the review are discussed with theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords—repeat tourism; multiple visits; destination loyalty

I. INTRODUCTION

People are drawn to new locations and attractions; however, a substantial group of tourist return once or more to the same attraction, place, city, or country. These travellers are referred to as repeat tourists, repeat visitors, or repeat vacationers. Repeat tourists are a distinctive market segment who often seek relaxation, engage with different activities, local culture, visit variety of places and indulge more in food and shopping [1], [2]. Repeat tourists are economically more beneficial than first time visitors as they bring higher revenue by spending more on meals, hotels, and transportation. Being satisfied during their previous visits, they also help to promote their favorite destinations to future visitors via word of mouth publicity [3].

Tourism literature in general has been growing substantially in the past years, however repeat tourists' behaviour remains an understudied field of research [4]. This article aims to provide a review of the existing research on repeat tourism and highlight the active directions of research. The review presents various forms of operationalization of the repeat tourism construct and discusses several approaches of measurement available in detail. Further, this article also aims to explore the underlying mechanism to explain repeat tourist behaviour, such as geographical, psychological, and demographic factors.

II. IDEA OF REPEAT TOURISM

The study of repeat tourism commenced more than three decades back [3]. Since then, several studies have been examining the repeat tourist behaviour [5]–[7]. The main

focus of such studies is to identify the conditions that provide a favourable environment for repeat tourists. Most countries keep a record of tourism information; however, almost none of the national statistical records identify those tourists who are repeat tourists [4]. Regardless of the exact numbers, all organizations that manage tourist destination and marketing researchers agree that repeat tourists are low-cost and attractive market segment. Unsurprisingly, one of the popular myths in marketing literature is that it costs about five to six times more to attract new visitors compared with those visitors who have already been to that destination [8]. Hence, encouraging repeat visitation can save costs and generate higher revenue in comparison to attracting new tourists [3], [6]. Like all other industries, the tourism industry faces intense competition not only at the local level, but also at the global level. However, the marketing strategies directed at attracting first time visitors can be totally unsuitable for repeat visitors. Therefore, tourist (customer) retention has been a major area of research in tourism and marketing literature. Consequently, destination managers have been examining the distinct needs and requirements of repeat tourists to formulate effective promotion and marketing strategies for this specific market segment [9].

III. DIFFERENT LEVELS OF MEASURING REPEAT TOURISM

This section highlights the origin and development of the concept of repeat tourism behaviour, which has been often combined with the construct of destination loyalty. There has also been a lack of unanimity in operationalizing the definition of repeat tourism. It has often been studied under a higher order construct of destination loyalty. This construct has been measured in distinctive ways as per the definition of destination loyalty adopted by those researchers. Consequently, the actual measurement of repeat visit may vary from intention to revisit a destination, to recommend a destination to others, or to make a repeat visit to a destination that has been visited. This paper addresses the discrepancies in the definition adopted. It also aims to establish the actual return trip to a previously visited destination as the accepted definition of repeat tourist behaviour. There are also

disagreement among researchers where they have examined repeat visitors in the context of visiting the same destination [3]–[5] or different destinations [6], [7] within the same geographical locations.

Given the multidimensionality of the repeated behaviour construct, it has often been masked by the conceptualization of destination loyalty. In marketing, loyalty literature dates back to [10], who presented four categories of the loyalty continuum: undivided loyalty, divided loyalty, unstable loyalty, and absence of loyalty. Later, researchers became inclined to understand the psychological aspect of loyalty and studies of attitudinal loyalty came to the surface. Overall attitude towards products or services includes intentions for repurchase, which are built upon the customers' perception of the value received [11], [12]. However, other researchers emphasized the behavioural aspect of loyalty and defined it as repurchase and recommendation to others [13], [14]. [15] proposed the idea of 'composite loyalty', which included both behavioural loyalty and psychological loyalty, where behavioural loyalty was defined as the repeated purchase of the same product over a period of time and psychological loyalty was defined as a preference or inclination towards a specific brand. [16] defined loyalty as "the highest level of commitment, implying the transition from a favourable predisposition towards a product (affective loyalty) to a repeat purchase commitment (conative loyalty), as a step prior to the action of purchase." Following this, customer loyalty has been regarded as tourism loyalty in the context of tourism and travel.

Research on loyalty in the tourism sector started at the end of 1980s; however, the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon carried an uncertainty of the construct being measured [9]. The tourism researchers have operationalized tourists' destination loyalty in mainly three ways; firstly as "actual repeated visit" to a destination, secondly as the "behavioural intentions", i.e. intentions to revisit a destination and thirdly as the "willingness to recommend" that destination [9], [17]–[22]. The behavioural loyalty generally includes the measurement of actual repeat visitor behaviour, however some researchers have incorporated the intention to revisit with actual visit behaviour [22]. Furthermore, it has also been studied as a positive attitude towards a destination along with a behavioural loyalty, in which case it is called composite loyalty [23]. Hence, researchers suggest using both behavioural and attitudinal approaches simultaneously while studying destination loyalty [24]. Given this multidimensionality at the operational level, the construct of behavioural loyalty has generally been uncertain. Therefore, the current study focuses on the behavioural outcome of the destination and behavioural loyalty constructs, and defines repeat tourism as 'repeat behaviour of tourists where the tourists have made at least two visits to the same destination.'

Repeat tourism can be of much higher value for larger countries that have variety of experiences to offer, such as the United States, Canada, China, and India.

A. Intention to Revisit

In many cases, destination loyalty is defined as the intention to return to a specific destination. There are evidences to indicate that previous visits significantly affects the intention for repeat visitation [6], [7]. Several studies have endeavored to establish a link between service quality, satisfaction, and future travel intentions [25]–[27]. [28] notes that there is general agreement among behavioral intention studies that visitors satisfaction level is linked with their return behaviour and making recommendation to others. A review of loyalty, repeat tourism, and revisit intention was presented in [29] and the authors found that out of 50 articles, forty-two measured revisit intentions with one or more other measures. However, the analysis of secondary data showed no correlation between intention to return and actual return behaviour [29]. Such findings advocate to develop a reliable measure of intention to critically assess the repeat behaviour which should account for distance, time, weather, social-political conditions, and many other factors considering the unique nature of tourism purchase.

B. Recommending a Place

The literature on destination loyalty has frequently included recommendations to others as a valid indicator of loyalty [26]. This is understood that the visitors who had positive experience at one destination will recommend it to their family, friends, and network. It serves a valid measure of loyalty. In the review of loyalty, repeat tourism and revisit intention with 50 articles willingness to recommend a destination to others was measured mostly with intention to return [29].

C. Actual Repeat Visit

Tourism researchers have found demographic and psychographic differences between first time and repeat visitors [1], [30] A visitor who has been to a destination will has a different perception of that destination. First time visitors are more novelty-seeking, and they are attracted by the popularity of the novel destinations. However, repeat visitors indulge in the more niche social and cultural activities that the place has to offer [31].

Larger destinations tend to have a variety of opportunities available, so it is more likely that travellers revisit that destination for entirely different reasons and intend to participate in a fundamentally different activity that they could not achieve during their first visit.

In the literature on destination loyalty, very few studies have actually measured the actual repeat behaviour. Actual repeat visit studies are not common in the literature as there are many logistics issues to conduct such studies. The studies

are conducted when tourists have made repeat visits to a destination country or sometime in a retrospective manner after they had come back from their repeat visit. Actual repeat visits can be measured by longitudinal studies which will take higher cost and longer time.

D. Multiple Repeat Visits

Given the growing competition amongst the tourist destinations, repeat tourist is highly valuable segment in tourism industry. Repeat tourism not only provides an economical profitability but also the sustainable destination development [25]. There is evidence to show that repeat tourists constitute more than half of the total tourist arrival at many destinations [2], [7], [32]. Those visitors who choose the same destination many times were referred to as 'continuous repeaters' [3]. However, it has not been explored whether these repeat visitors make just one time repeat visit to the destination they have previously visited or they make multiple trips to that destination.

In tourism research, the multiple visits to the same destination has not been given much attention. Some studies have explored the multiple visits in the context of domestic tourists [33] however, not many for the international tourists [34]. There are some studies conducted which focus on how tourists move from one place to another place within same destination, however, the study on making multiple trips to the same destination has not been explored in much depth. This is another higher behavioural level category where actual repeat behaviour is shown with higher frequency of visits [35].

Multiple visits are very important for any destination as the visitors will engage in various activities and later provide word of mouth publicity [34]. The segment of repeat visitors does not need a lot of marketing and promotion as they already had first-hand experience of the place during their previous visits. The act of repeat behaviour has been questioned and the researchers examined whether repeat visitation could be just a habitual behaviour or a result of inertia [35], [36]. Interestingly, both studies found that tourists return to a destination because of their continued attraction and satisfaction thereby ruling out the existence of inertia. This is not surprising as travelling is an expensive affair not only in terms of money but also in terms of time and effort invested. The tourists will not make a repeat purchase of the same tourism product if they did not have a satisfactory experience initially.

IV. UNDERSTANDING DESTINATION SELECTION PROCESS FOR REPEAT TOURIST BEHAVIOUR

The reason why tourists would make multiple trips to one place may be explained with various factors, which could be broadly categorised into two categories i.e., intra-personal factors and external factors. Intra-personal factors could be motivation, experience, satisfaction, familiarity, positive image, and other psychological variables. These factors have

been studied in detail in the context of destination loyalty. However, they have not been discussed much in the actual context of repeat behaviours. On the other hand, there could be some external factors that may affect the multiple visits, such as time, distance, visa policies, and environmental, political, and social condition.

A. Psychological Dimensions

There is a large amount of contribution in the literature to investigate the factor affecting destination loyalty and actual repeat visits. Understanding the motivation to travel has been a well-researched area in tourism literature. Researchers have presented various theories to explain the driving patterns of travel behaviour. Motivation is a dynamic and multi-dimensional concept that can change from one person to another, from one travel destination to another, and from one market segment to another, as well as for one tourist at different time periods. The study of motivation has significantly progressed using various theories and frameworks such as means-end analysis, push and pull motivation and travel career pattern [37].

Satisfaction is regarded as another most important antecedents of destination loyalty. Satisfaction has been one of the most researched topic and researchers have found a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and repeat visits [25], [35]. Satisfaction is generally identified as a post-purchase concept. When the experience of the tourists meets or exceeds their previous expectations, they feel satisfied. Thus, satisfaction is a cognitive and affective evaluation between the results and the expectations, which produces a pleasing contentment. Subsequently, maximization of the tourist satisfaction has received growing interest from destination managers.

Research has established that a pleasant and positive tourist 'experience' is the key to successful tourism [38]. Furthermore, experience might be the major determinant when it comes to planning a visit to a destination where the tourist has been before. When repurchasing a product, customers have confidence about its predictability and stability; however, tourist destinations are dynamic in nature [39]. The experience of a tourism destination can vary due to factors such as seasonality, local weather conditions, landscape transformations, altered host culture, and technological advancement. Therefore, future researchers should focus on these determinants.

B. Destination image and destination attachment

Destination image has been another important determinant to attract repeat tourists. The positive image of the destination significantly affects the tourist' loyalty and repeat behaviour [22]. The destination image not only helps with the selection of the destination but also establish the right expectations for the tourists. A positive image and then positive experience influences the future repeat behaviour. [25]. Destination image is derived from three components: cognitive, affective, and conative. Most of the studies have focused on the role of

cognitive and affective image. However, some others have explored joint cognitive-affective approach. There is evidence to demonstrate that destination loyalty is most significantly influenced by overall image of the destination, which is followed by cognitive and affective image. Such images are formed on the basis of not only physical attributes, but also the tourists' personal experience. However, both destination image and repeat behaviour are multi-dimensional constructs. In order to develop precise promotion and marketing strategies, the future research should focus on specific aspects of both phenomenon.

Another determinant that influence repeat visits could be a sense of attachment with a place. There are theories presented to indicate how people develop a sense of attachment after visiting a place [40]. Such destination attachment is formed due to satisfaction during the previous trip, fulfilling specific goals or activities, special emotional associations, and cognitive bonds. Place attachment could be a significant factor in predicting destination loyalty that could result in multiple visits to that destination. Possibly, the tourists' positive experience and satisfaction are the key factor that makes them make a repeat trip to a place they have visited before despite having the option of alternatives. The place attachment could be defined as an affective bond with environmental or geographical setting [37]. In geographical terms, place could vary from one particular site to a city or a geographical region. Hence, the differences could be investigated between tourists who return to the same site in comparison to those who return to the same destination yet in a different location. This proves that all the tourists who make multiple trips have had positive experience. However, those returning to another location might look for novelty but similar experience. Larger destinations have more advantages as they have several experiences to offer in comparison to small destinations. The future research should identify the factors, specifically the one that can predict multiple visits. The research should distinguish between tourist who return to one particular site versus those return to one destination and explore other site of interest.

V. CONCLUSION

In sum, the current article is mainly focus on reviewing literature about repeat tourism. The review shows that most of the studies are being conducted in the context of identifying the precedent factors and subsequent responses of repeat tourist behaviour. The future research should aim to analyze how destinations that have the intentions and capabilities to be promoted as multiple visit destinations could plan their tourism strategies addressing both intra-personal and external factors. This approach will help the destination promoters to put forward differentiated marketing schemes that particularly cater to this special segment of repeat tourist. The future research should also attempt to understand the changes in the perception of the destination image. The study should be conducted to address the impact of incorporating new attractions, updating their existing tourism products, while

maintaining the unique components of the destination's competitiveness and long term success.

In the current era of globalization and changing customer requirements, tourism destinations have been adopting differentiated marketing strategies. Some destinations have developed an advantage by attracting loyal visitors more than once. Given that repeat tourists are a highly valuable and profitable market, both researchers and destination marketers should direct their focus on this tourist segment and such destinations.

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