

Understanding Tourists' Experience Expectation: A Study of Chinese Tourists' Behavior in Bali

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ABSTRACT

Tourists' experience expectation is regarded as a salient and powerful construct in tourism marketing and argued to influence behavior. The understanding of the formation of tourists' experience and its influences on tourists' behavior remains limited. Using semi-structured interviews, this study identified that attitudes towards destination, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control were found to be related to tourists' experience expectation. In turn, tourists' experience expectation influences to visit intention and willingness to travel. This study also indicated that tourists' experience expectation is defined as a particular event or situation that tourists perceive what they have in the destination. This research sheds light marketers in understanding the conceptualization of experience expectation from tourists' perspective. Academics and managerial implications are discussed.

JEL Classification: M3

Keywords: tourist expectation; tourist behavior; tourists' experience; travel intention

I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of technology, tourism sector becomes competitive. The world becomes borderless, and no barriers to information and sources flow. People who are planning their holiday have easy access towards any destination details and attributes (Cohen, Prayag, and Moital, 2014). One big challenge of tourism marketers is how to be different and stand out among the competitors (Mistilis, Buhalis, and Gretzel, 2014). Marketers are looking for a new foundation to have an effective strategy to increase their destination appeals from tourists' point of view (Ryan, 2010). Following this argument, many studies in the tourism literature have considered experience as an important issue in travel behavior (i.e., Hosany and Gilbert, 2010; Yilmaz and Burcu, 2016).

In the context of travel behavior, the experience is the core promise of tourism offerings (Ye and Tussyadiah, 2011). Experience is important because individuals are traveling to have an extraordinary and unforgettable time in their life. Tourists are likely telling and sharing their travel experience to others when they are back (Li *et al.*, 2011). Some previous literatures have emphasized the importance of experience in travel and tourism activities. For example, tourists' experience in the destination influences the degree of tourists' satisfaction (i.e., Cong *et al.*, 2014; MacInnis and Price, 1990; Hartmann and Hietbrink, 2013).

Few works of literature have focused on tourists' perception of experience in pre-visit behavior. Except one study found that destination visual image influences tourists' experience expectation of the destination (Ye and Tussyadiah, 2011). Experience expectation in pre-visit behavior is important to shed light marketers to understand and design their strategy from the tourists' perspective. Potential tourists tend to seek destination cues and look at how desirable the destination is. They enable a picture of what will they do, they feel and what the holiday will be like, as a result of cognitive impression through information assimilation in individuals' every day (Rodríguez del Bosque *et al.*, 2009). Tourism operators are likely to provoke their target market with emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and sensory stimuli to allow consumers to imagine their experience of destination (Schmitt, 2003).

Tourists' expectation is important because travel purchases are often associated with uncertainties and risks given the fact that industry characteristics are intangible, inseparable, variable, and perishable (Pizam, 1999). Marketing messages are sources of information in the consumers' perspective to understand promises and provide details which in turn, are expected to bring a favorable exchange in the destination (Santos, 1998; Crăciunescu, 2017). Even though there is a growing interest in the role of expectation especially in the tourism sector (Ozturk and Qu, 2008; Kline *et al.*, 2016), the extant literature remains limited to address a clear concept of consumers' experience expectation. Most studies already determine several factors related to expectation in travel behavior (i.e., motivation as the antecedent and satisfaction as the outcome) and investigate the relationships (see Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987; Gnoth, 1997). The exploration related to tourists' experience expectation of destination is limited. Therefore, the important issue in the literature is the exploratory study to establish comprehensively key constructs of actual tourists' experience expectation (Dolnicar and Ring, 2014). By exploring the main issues related to experience expectation in the tourists' behavior, the study addresses the gaps that remained in the literature. Furthermore, factors related to experience expectation helps the tourism suppliers to have

more control in satisfaction, for instance, giving proper advertising cues can direct tourists' imagination, and operators must provide better than what they have presented in their marketing messages. In specific, experience expectation within tourism context provides valuable information for tourism planners, managers, decision makers, and researchers to develop strategic marketing directions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Tourists' Experience

To date, marketers have shifted from traditional marketing into the experiential marketing strategy. Traditional marketing assumes people think rationally and emphasize on products benefits and functional attributes, while experiential marketing sees people as an ordinary individual with both emotional and rational aspects emphasizing to gain a pleasure moment of life (Schmitt, 2010). In 1999, Pine and Gilmore indicated that experience is a new source of value for both companies and consumers. As an example, the study explained that a coffee bean as a product is treated in several ways depending on its business. Coffee bean can be a commodity, product, or service with different consumers values attach in the offerings. Serving the same coffee in the five-star hotel in where the creation, ordering, and consumption of one cup of coffee is attached with nuance and ambiance and consumers' are still willing to pay twice even five times higher. The study argued that consumers' experience consuming the products is more important rather than the functional attributes of the products.

Experience is an event that occurs in a person's life that is extraordinary, memorable and easy to recall but difficult to describe (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011). Schmitt (1999) argued that creating consumer experience involves five elements which are sense, feel, act, think, and relate. Pine and Gilmore (1999) indicated that consumer experience emphasizes serving consumers in a personal touch. Hence, it generates individuals' special feeling and emotional response as a consequence of the interaction between consumers and surroundings. Experience is more than products and services produced and consumed. It is also beyond something bought or sold. This generated experience depends on expectation, moods, attitudes, goals, and capabilities of the experiencing person; thus, influences act and perception (Jantzen, 2013). Experience relies on the perception of experiencing person towards the physical and emotional aspects of the situation called expectation.

B. Tourists' Experience Expectation

Larsen (2007) argued that tourists travel to the destination is a result of tourists' experience expectation. Tourist expectation experience is a relation between tourists' states and personal expectation. Hence, tourists' expectation experience is influenced by personal tourist attributes (i.e., motivation, experience) and image-related attributes (i.e., WOM, Destination Image) (Rodríguez del Bosque *et al.*, 2009; Sheng and Chen, 2013). Tourist expectation experience is generated as a consequence of tourists' imagery of their expectation and impression towards the destination. When the location is defined, special, and offering tourism activities, tourists' imagery is more significant. Tourist

imagery becomes the core part of tourists' experience expectation (Ozturk and Qu, 2008; Ye and Tussyadiah, 2011).

Current studies were identifying tourists' experience expectation mostly based on the conceptual proposition (Rodríguez del Bosque *et al.*, 2009). Meanwhile, the empirical study of it usually has focused on tourism imagery and perception yet not included tourists' experience expectation (i.e., Ye and Tussyadiah, 2011). Another study viewed and measured a tourists' experience expectation is similar to the tourist's experience (i.e., Chen and Lamberti, 2013). Only a few studies have investigated the dimension of tourists' experience expectation. Tourists' experience expectation (TEE) includes five components, namely; experience expectation of easiness and fun; cultural entertainment; personal identification; historical reminiscences; and escapism (Sheng and Chen, 2013). In addition, Wang, Qu, and Hsu (2016) have identified five components of tourists experience expectation, namely; learning, experiencing a novelty, entertainment, and shopping.

Tourists' experience expectation provides a picture of the desirability level that tourists wait in their holiday that has been thoroughly planned. By understanding tourists' experience expectation, the tourism operators can understand the actual needs and wants, and minimize the dissatisfaction (Nath, Devlin and Reid, 2016). Tourists' expectation experience guides tourism operators running their operational business from the consumers' perspective (Chen and Lamberti, 2013; Mansfeldt *et al.*, 2008).

C. Conceptual Development

Experience is the core promise of travel operators offerings (Ye and Tussyadiah, 2011). However, little is known related to the influence of experience in tourists' pre-visit behavior. Given some studies have shown that tourists generate an imagery experience or personal perception of what will they have in the destination, and argued this tourists' expected image of experience influences tourists' preference of destination (Chen and Lamberti, 2013; Kline *et al.*, 2016). Tourists' expected experience is an important foundation for destination marketers because it depicts the level of tourists' desire for their holiday in the destination that has been well planned. Nath, Devlin, and Reid (2016) argued that understanding tourists' expectation of destination experience helps tourism operators to identify tourists' needs and wants, solve actual problems to satisfy the tourists, increase repeat visitors and tourists' referrals. Expected experience is also guidance for tourism operators in designing their daily operation from tourists' point of view (Prebensen *et al.*, 2012).

Expectation itself has been considered for decades as a powerful and relevant construct in marketing, been examined influencing behavior. Most extant research of expectation is emerged as perceptual evaluation of product performance (Rust *et al.*, 1999) and determinant of satisfaction (Santos and Boote, 2000), perceived product quality (Olshavsky and Miller, 1972) attitudes, and purchase intention (Schlosser, 2003). The expectation is driven by the interaction between promises delivered by advertisement (Lawton and Page, 1997; Nath, Devlin and Reid, 2016) and tourists' motivational state that interacts with surrounding situations (Gnoth, 1997).

D. Determinants of Experience Expectation

Gnoth (1997) defined expectation in the context of tourism as tourists' perceptions of destination performance as a consequence of the interaction between inner-directed motives (i.e., needs and values) with tourists' actual situations. This need and motive become tourists' motivation to travel when dealing with daily conditions. Hence, tourists' travel motivation influences tourists to generate a perception of their expected experience in the destination. In this issue, the expected experience is a destination that promises to satisfy tourists' inner-directed motives (Gnoth, 1999). Also, Rust *et al.* (1999) argued that expectation is a cognitive process of tourists' travel experience (Gnoth and Todd, 1999; Rust *et al.*, 1999). In other words, tourists travel experience (traveling frequency) influences how tourists established their expected experience. This perspective argued that expected experience is formed by tourists' aspects that are uncontrolled by companies (Davidow and Uttal, 1989). However, another perspective argued that expectation comes from companies' *controllable factors* including various types of marketing tools (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1993). Although this study of the expected experience formation remains limited, many studies have indicated that tourism operators' marketing strategy generates tourists' expectation of experience (Lawton and Page, 1997; Santos, 1998; Ye and Tussyadiah, 2011).

E. Outcomes of Experience Expectation

Tourists' intention is one of the main aims of tourism behavior literature. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is one of a widely accepted model of intention by (iSALT Team, 2014). This theory portrays a behavior as a consequence of an individual's intention and this intention is driven by the attitude toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude towards a behavior is individuals' perceived feelings of the behavior whether it is positive or negative. Subjective norms are individuals' belief of what others perception on what they perform the behavior. Perceived behavioral control is individuals' perception of how difficult or easy the behavior to perform and relates to resources and confidence to act (Ajzen, 1985).

In the theory of planned behavior, the expectation is a consequence of the interaction between intention and perception of perceived behavioral control. A normative expectation is an outcome of the association between individuals' beliefs and their interest to perform the behavior. That can be said; the expectation is a resource or individuals' perceived ability to perform the behavior that later, influence intention and behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of tourism, some studies have also noted a significant role of expected experience in tourists' behavior including attitudes towards visiting destination, visit intention (Hsu, Cai, and Li, 2010), and tourists satisfaction (Lather, Singh, and Singh, 2010).

Hsu, Cai, and Li (2010) looked at the influence of expectation on attitude towards visiting destination and visit intention. As individuals' beliefs of a specific event in the future, tourists' expectation results from a desired experience in the destination. The study brings the context of tourists' expected experience of visiting Hong Kong. By visiting Hong Kong, visitors expect experiences on learning the history, exposing new things and engaging with new culture. Their expected experience generated attitude towards visiting Hong Kong and influence tourists' visit intention (Hsu, Cai, and Li, 2010).

Lather, Singh, and Singh (2010) looked at the influence of tourists' expectation on the level of tourists' satisfaction in India. The study compares local and foreign tourist in India. The research result is the higher tourists' expectation towards the destination, the more likely they feel dissatisfaction. The study indicated that the satisfaction level of local is higher than foreign tourists. This issue can be explained because foreign tourists may already experience other international tourism destinations that have a higher standard than what India has and this situation generates a high expected experience on India (Lather, Singh, and Singh, 2010).

III. METHOD

Taking the tourism context, the study addresses the exploration of tourists' expected experience towards the destination in their pre-visit behavior. Using semi-structured interviews, the study had been conducted to examine what aspects generated in tourists' expected experience and how expected experience plays a role in tourists' behavior. The study investigated the expected experience of International students from China in Perth traveling to Bali, Indonesia. As a prominent target market, 9 Chinese students from the University of Western Australia are selected for given the fact that Chinese students from Perth contribute a significant number of tourists' arrivals in Bali and for a convenience reason.

The results of the study will give a new insight for marketers in understanding the notion of expected experience in tourists' behavior. Furthermore, the study guides tourism operators to build this experience aspect in their marketing strategy that leads to behavioral intention. Regarding the rigor in this exploratory study, reliability and validity will be addressed in several stages. First, the question points used in the study is the modification, combination and adapted from relevant previous studies (i.e., MacInnis and Price, 1990). Second, before the actual interviews, the list of the questions is handed to colleagues and experts for suggestions and there was a small pilot interview. Lastly, all interviews are audio recorded from the beginning to the end of the interview process.

A. Data Analysis

Leximancer 4.5 was used to analyze participants' expected experience, attitude towards Bali, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control and their willingness and intention to travel to Bali. Leximancer is a relatively new method used in qualitative studies. It uses word occurrence and co-occurrence frequency to produce a word co-occurrence matrix from which concepts are identified (Wu, Wall, and Pearce, 2014). Co-occurred concepts are then clustered into themes. Therefore, both semantic and relational information is elicited. In the result presenting, both concept map and numerical indication (e.g., connectivity and prominence) will be used to show meaning and offer insights.

IV. FINDINGS

In terms of the expected experience of traveling to Bali, seven themes and eleven concepts were identified. The seven themes were *Low Price*, *Drink*, *Food*, *Beach*, *Hotel*, *Nice*, and *Friends* in the significance order. Their significance was indicated by both

colors of spheres in the concept map (Figure 1) and connectivity scores (Table 1). Spheres (themes) of hot color (e.g., red and then orange) were more significant than ones of cold color (e.g., green and then blue) (Leximancer, 2018). Connectivity score indicates the relative importance of the themes (the most important is the top theme at 100%) (Leximancer, 2018). Therefore, participants expected a leisure trip with a cheap and nice drink, food, and hotel and natural offering of beach with friends in Bali.

Figure 1
Concept map of expected experience

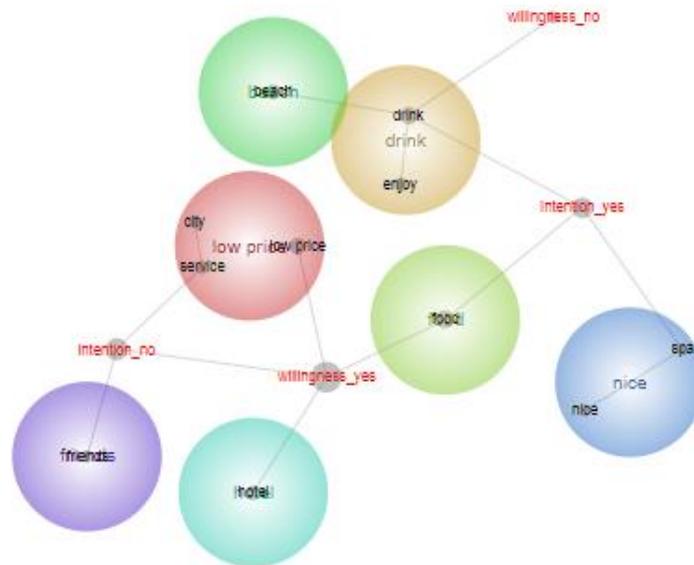


Table 1
Thematic summary of expected experience

Themes	Connectivity		
Low Price	9	100%	Most significant
Drink	9	100%	
Food	8	89%	
Beach	5	56%	
Hotel	5	56%	
Nice	4	44%	
Friends	3	33%	Least significant

Fred: I would like to relax in Bali. Moreover, I would expect that the beer and wine in Bali are very cheap, and also for the food.

Jeremy: I can think many things happening on the beach. Like enjoying the sun on the beach and drink some juice and eat something special.

To explore the influence of expected experience on the willingness and intention to travel in Bali, concept importance within categories was examined. *Willingness_yes* and *Intention_yes* were used as categorical tags in the analysis, and then which concepts were more important within each category indicated what expected experience lead to the willingness or intention. Importance within categories was indicated by *prominence* score which is the measure of relative frequency and strength of the most prominent concept within a specific category (Leximancer, 2018). Therefore, participants who expected more *service* (1.9) experience, *hotel* (1.9) and *city* (1.9) had more willingness to travel in Bali; participants with more expected experience on *spa* (3.8), *nice* (3.8), and *drink* (2.6) had higher intention.

Table 2
Top five concepts by prominence for categories of expected experience

<i>Willingness_yes</i> concept (prominence)	<i>Intention_yes</i> concept (prominence)
service (1.9)	spa (3.8)
hotel (1.9)	nice (3.8)
city (1.9)	drink (2.6)
spa (1.9)	enjoy (2.6)
low price (1.9)	food (1.9)

In terms of attitude towards Bali, it consisted of two themes and six concepts: *Low Price* (concepts: *low price*, *nice* and *beach*) and *Short-term Travel* (concepts: *short-term travel*, *quiet* and *escape*). This revealed that participants had a positive attitude towards Bali as a nice and quiet destination to escape from their daily routine, and they perceived trip to Bali as a low-price and short-term one while able to enjoy the beach. An attitude of *escape* (2.2), *short-term travel* (2.2), *beach* (2.2), *nice* (2.2), and *quiet* (2.2) had higher connection with a willingness to travel there. Similarly, concepts of *escape* (3.3), *short-term travel* (3.3), *quiet* (3.3), *low price* (1.3), and *nice* (1.1) gave participants higher intention to travel there.

Only one theme emerged for the variable of subjective norm, *Enjoy*. It included concepts of *enjoying*, *low cost*, *good*, *holiday*, and *worry*. Except for the concept of *worry*, all the others were positive. Participants believed that others would see traveling to Bali as positive. The only negative concept *worry* comes from possible concerns about the terrorist attack. The most significant five concepts for *Willingness yes* category were *worry* (3.2), *holiday* (3.2), *enjoy* (2.0), *low cost* (1.6), and *good* (1.1); the five ones for *Intention yes* were *good* (2.0), *worry* (2.0), *holiday* (2.0), *enjoy* (1.8), and *low cost* (1.5). The result of concept importance within categories shows that although *worry* was a negative subjective norm, it did not stop participants from willing to (2.0) and intend to (3.2) travel in Bali.

Perceived behavior control contained two themes: *Time* and *Low Expenses*. Each of the themes had one concept only. Participants expressed that they did not have enough time to travel, and this served as one factor that weakened their travel motivation to Bali. On the contrary, they mentioned that they were happy about the low expenses of traveling in Bali, which was one pull factor for willingness (1.8) and intention (1.6) to travel in Bali.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Extant researchers have indicated that understanding tourists' expected experience towards destination is favorable for destination operators because having this consumers' perspective information can lead to tourists' attitudes towards visiting destination and intention (Hsu, Cai, and Li, 2010), also tourists' satisfaction (Lather, Singh, and Singh, 2010). One of the successes of tourism operators is measured by how they able to create unordinary and memorable tourists' experience and to understand their expected experience help tourism operators achieve this success (Kim, 2010). This present study addresses the gap in the literature since previous studies investigated the tourists' expected experience based on its conceptualization from the literature while consumers may perceive expected experience differently from the theoretical conceptualization.

To get a deeper understanding of tourists' expected experience, the current study has contributed to the knowledge of tourists' behavior literature. This study indicated that in the tourists' perspectives, tourists' expected experience is generated in the specific image of experience. In the context of Indonesia tourism, this expected experience is for instance associated with low price, good meals, relaxing in the beach, indulging with hotel services, nice story, and time with friends. This study noted that Chinese tourists who have an expected experience related to the city environment, hotel, service, spa, and low price have a visit intention to Bali and Chinese tourists who have an expected experience related to having a spa, nice culinary, full of enjoyment have a willingness to travel to Bali. This finding is supporting previous studies that tourists' expectation has an influence on tourists' willingness to travel and visit intention (Lawton and Page, 1997; Hsu, Cai, and Li, 2010b; Nath, Devlin, and Reid, 2016). However, the study is noted that tourists' expected experience is a complex behavioral construct that is related to psychological aspects which are tourists' attitudes towards the destination, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norm. While, in the context of environmental aspects, others' referral is defined as an influential factor in the formation of tourists' expected experience.

Suggestion for tourism operators is clear from the current study. Tourism operators should insert a clear message associated with tourists' expected experience and satisfy this expectation when delivering their services. This study guides tourism operators to have appeal content for their marketing strategy that attracts tourists' and thus, will recall their message easily. As an example, in the context of perceived behavioral control, time is one factor that weakens tourists' willingness to travel. Hence, tourism operators might emphasize to have a short trip to Bali to accommodate this need. This insight is important to tourism operators to stand out in the competitive tourism market. Although the study has defined tourists' expected experience, it is not without limitation. The exploratory study and the sample size is one limitation in terms of generalizing the findings. Chinese tourists' expected experience towards Bali, Indonesia cannot be generalized for other countries' case. Other non-Chinese tourists (i.e., Australian, American) might have different expected experience towards Bali, and Chinese tourists' expected experience also might be different in the case of other destination (i.e., Singapore, Malaysia). The obvious next step is to investigate other sample and other destination and quantitatively measured these relations among constructs.

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