

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE VISITORS' INTENTION TO VISIT CULTURAL HERITAGE SITE

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ABSTRACT

This study tests the visitors' intention to visit the cultural heritage site and their opinions about the impacts of tourism development using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The implications of Theory of Planned Behavior provide the theoretical underpinning for this study. The study is descriptive in nature, and is based on quantitative methodology to investigate the relationships between different constructs. The research study used survey questionnaires for quantitative data collection. The study area is a cultural and heritage tourism place Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu, India. Convenience sampling methods was adapted to collect quantitative data from different types of visitors. The sample size is 420. The data was then analyzed using the statistical package SPSS and model was tested using SEM with AMOS. The research shows some statistical positive relationship between Attitude (visitors' positive or negative feelings and opinions about cultural heritage sites), Subjective Norm (information sources or recommendations from reference groups which might influence visitors' destination choice), Perceived Control (visitors' perceived ease or difficulty of leisure travel) and visitors' intention to visit a cultural heritage site. The result helps the rural tourism planners, governments and support organizations in other areas to better evaluate and understand the visitors' attitude, perception about the heritage place they are visiting.

Keywords: *Heritage Tourism, Culture, Intention, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)*

INTRODUCTION

India is a globally famous tourism destination with several exciting tourist places and lots of attractions. It deserves the attention of tourists and vacationers throughout the entire world. Both Northern and Southern India are known for great heritage tourism potential. Southern India has many tourist places known for great historical monuments, rich culture, diverse flora and fauna, picturesque hill stations, religious places, and much more.

Heritage tourism has gained increasing attention in recent years. It has nurtured tourism literature from different perspectives such as tourists' behavior in world heritage sites, visitor management (Johnson, 1999; Herbert, 2001; Waitt, 2000), pricing issues of heritage attractions (Tian *et al.*, 2007), heritage sites and community development (Grimwade and Carter, 2000; Schulz, 1980), marketing of heritage sites (Nuryanti, 1996), motivation to visit (Yan & Morrison, 2008), perception and expectation of heritage sites (Poria *et al.*, 2006; Rojas and Camarero, 2008), and classification of visitors in heritage cities (Espelt and Benito, 2006). A primary benefit of heritage tourism is its long-term economic value, representing one

of the most profitable tourist market segments, with high sustainable growth rates.

This study aims to investigate the reasons why people visit a site where historic artifacts are located. It is hoped that such an investigation will contribute to the theoretical understanding of heritage tourism by highlighting whether there is a need to emphasize the link between the tourists' behaviour and the space visited. It also investigates whether heritage tourism is motivated by the search for education and knowledge or a search for emotional experience. Such new understanding of tourists' heritage site motivation will also have implications for the management of such places. Identifying that different tourists visit heritage site for different reasons may lead to the provision of different visitor services. It may also contribute to more direct marketing, where groups of consumers are approached based on their own reasons for visiting the site.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Heritage Tourism

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2005), defines natural heritage

sites as those that have natural features consisting of physical and biological formations of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view; geological or physiographical formations; habitats of threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation; and natural sites or areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation or of natural beauty.

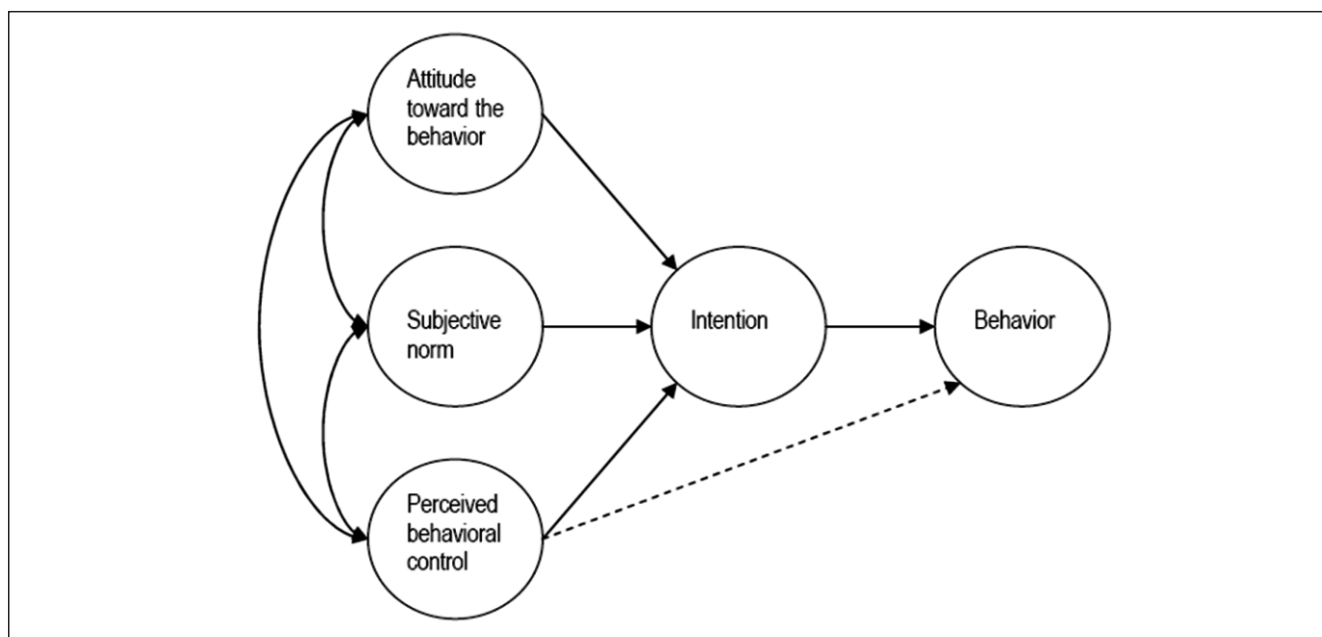
Heritage tourism can be subdivided into cultural tourism and natural heritage tourism. Cultural tourism is a holiday trip essentially motivated by interest in cultural aspects, such as historical sites and monuments, museums and galleries, artistic performances and festivals, as well as communities with distinctive lifestyles.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) addresses the impacts of cognitive components on behavior, such as attitudes, social norms, and intentions. TRA has been extended by taking the issues of other related control elements into account in predicting behavioral intention and actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The extended model is called Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which indicates that

intention is postulated to be based on attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude (A) refers to “the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). Here, it refers to visitors’ attitude toward cultural heritage sites. Subjective Norm (SN) refers to “the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). This means that intention to the target behavior is assumed to be influenced by others, termed as reference groups. Thus, from the perspective of tourism, subjective norms can be understood as information sources or recommendations, which might influence tourists’ destination choice. Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) refers to “the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). In this study, PBC is edited as Perceived Control (PC), which means the perceived ease or difficulty of traveling for visitors. Intention (INT) is an indication of a person’s willingness to perform a given behavior. From the diagrammatic representation of the theory (TPB) (Figure 1), it is evident that intention is an indication of a person’s readiness to perform a given behavior. Behavior is the clear, observable response at a given situation with respect to a given target. Moreover, performance of the behavior depends on not only an intention to perform but also an adequate level of behavioral control.

Figure 1: Theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991)



Conceptual Framework

For this study, two attributes are added to the TPB model. One is Past Behaviour; the other is Tour Involvement.

a. Past Behavior (PB)

In behavioral research, Sonmez and Graefe (1998) emphasize that the best predictor of behavioral intention and future behavior is past relevant behavior. One of the possible reasons for this is that people tend to maintain behavioral persistency and value consistency. Hence, past behavior is added into the TPB model for predicting behavioral intention.

b. Tour Involvement (TI)

The concept of involvement can be traced back to earlier studies in consumer behavior (Flynn and Goldsmith, 1993; McIntyre, 1989). It has also been applied in the fields of recreation, leisure, and tourism (Havitz and Dimanche, 1990; Park *et al.*, 2002). Involvement here refers to the level of importance, interest, or enjoyment attached to a cultural tour by visitors. A cultural heritage site tour can be regarded as a kind of cultural tour. It is then understood that individuals highly involved in cultural tour pay greater attention to cultural heritage sites during their travel choices.

Therefore, this study explores whether a modified TPB model predicts visitors' intention of visiting cultural heritage sites.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study

To find the impact of the constructs on tourist intention to revisit the site.

Research Hypotheses

1. H1a: Visitors with more positive attitude toward heritage sites are more likely to intend to visit again.
2. H1b: Visitors, who think information sources or recommendations from reference groups are more important, are more likely to intend to visit again.
3. H1c: Visitors, who perceive less travel control, are more likely to intend to visit again.
4. H1d: Visitors with more favorable past behaviour of visiting heritage sites are more likely to intend to visit again.

5. H1e: Visitors, who are more interested in cultural tours, are more likely to intend to visit again.

Research Design

The study is explanatory and descriptive in nature. Quantitative analysis was used to investigate the relationships between Tourists' Attitude (A), Subjective Norm (SN), Perceived Control (PC), Past Behavior (PB) and Tour Involvement (TI), and in turn the Tourists' Intention (INT) to visit the heritage places.

a. Study Population

Population of the study can be defined as the entire group of visitors' (tourists') visiting Rameshwaram, South India to know the perception and expectation of visitors about the facilities available and their level of satisfaction.

b. Sample Size

The research proposed to supply the instrument to 464 respondents from which only 420 respondents were willing to return with fully filled questionnaire. Therefore, the response rate was 90%.

c. Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling methods were adapted from identified and independent sample frames to collect quantitative data from the respondents.

d. Data Collection

This study utilized a self-administered survey method with the tourists' in Rameshwaram. However, prior to collecting the main data for the study, a pilot study was conducted to test the measurement.

e. Measurement Scales and Research Instrument

1. Exogenous Construct: (The independent variables)

Attitude (A): Attitude towards cultural heritage site is measured by three statements with 5-point Likert scales ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). A sample of an attitude statement is: "More preference to heritage sites than other sites".

Subjective Norms (SN): Statements with 5-point Likert scales ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) are asked to evaluate subjective norms, which consist of three statements. A sample statement of subjective norms is: "Media influenced you to come here (TV, internet)". Professional advice

(tour operators, travel agents, and airlines), word-of-mouth (friends, relatives), advertisement (print, broadcast, and electronic media) and non-tourism (books, movies, and news) are the four major information sources recommended by Baloglu (2000).

Perceived Control (PC): Perceived Control in this study is measured by three statements with 5-point Likert scales ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). In tourism literature, lack of money, health problems, and time restriction have been observed as travel constraints (Schmoll, 1977). Thus, factors of perceived control include money, health, and time restrictions.

Past Behaviour (PB): Three statements about their visit to Rameshwaram are used to measure past behaviour with 5-point Likert scales ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). A sample statement is: “your previous visit attracts you?”

Tour Involvement (TI): Three statements are used to evaluate cultural tour involvement with 5-point scales ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The sample items include: “Visiting heritage sites are interesting” and “Eager to know about various cultures”.

Table 1: Model fit indices – Structural model

Model Fit indices	Structural Model	Standardized Values
Absolute Fit Measures		
CMIN (X^2 /df)	1.869	≤ 3.00 (Hair <i>et al.</i> , 1998) good fit
Probability	0.069	$P < 0.05$
Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	0.931	≥ 0.90 (Byrne, 2001) good fit
Root mean square residual (RMR)	0.057	< 1 (Hu and Bentler, 1999) good fit
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.047	≤ 0.06 (Hu and Bentler, 1999) good fit
Incremental Fit Measures	0.90	≥ 0.80 (Hair <i>et al.</i> , 1998) good fit
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI)		
Parsimonious Fit Measures	0.960	≥ 0.90 (Bentler, 1992) good fit
Comparative fit index (CFI)		

Note: All t-value were significant at the level of 0.05.

2. Endogenous Construct: (The dependent variable)

Intention (INT): The intention to visit a cultural heritage site is measured by two statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from extremely likely (5) to

extremely unlikely (1).

f. Data Analysis

The statistical analyses were done using SPSS 16 and the conceptual model was tested using (Analysis of Moment Structures) AMOS.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Structural Model for Intention to Visit

The Structural model consists of five exogenous variables: Attitude (A), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Control (PC), Past Behaviour (PB) and Tour Involvement (TI) and one endogenous variable, namely, Intention to revisit (INT) (Figure 2). The goodness-of-fit statistics for the structural model produced reasonable results, as shown in Table 1 below. The results of the structural equation modeling indicate an adequate model fit to the data.

The structural model was examined by using measurement indices representing three types of fit indices: absolute fit indices, incremental fit indices, and parsimonious fit indices. The results are shown in Table 1 above.

The structural equation model for intention to visit showed a strong goodness-of-fit and its estimation yielded a CMIN (X^2 /df) value of 1.869 with ($p < 0.05$), which was not statistically significant. The model fit indices that are shown in Table 1 supported the

structural model as a well-fitting model to the data, and suggested that this model could be the final structural model to be tested for the proposed hypotheses in this study. The statistical indices shown in Table 1 were all within the acceptable threshold for a well-fitted acceptable model.

This assessment of estimates of fit was supplemented by an examination of the significance of completely standardized factor loadings. These standardized loadings were used to determine the relative importance of the observed variables as indicators of the constructs. Table 2 shows the relationships between

Table 2: Structural model - Standardized regression weight factor loadings

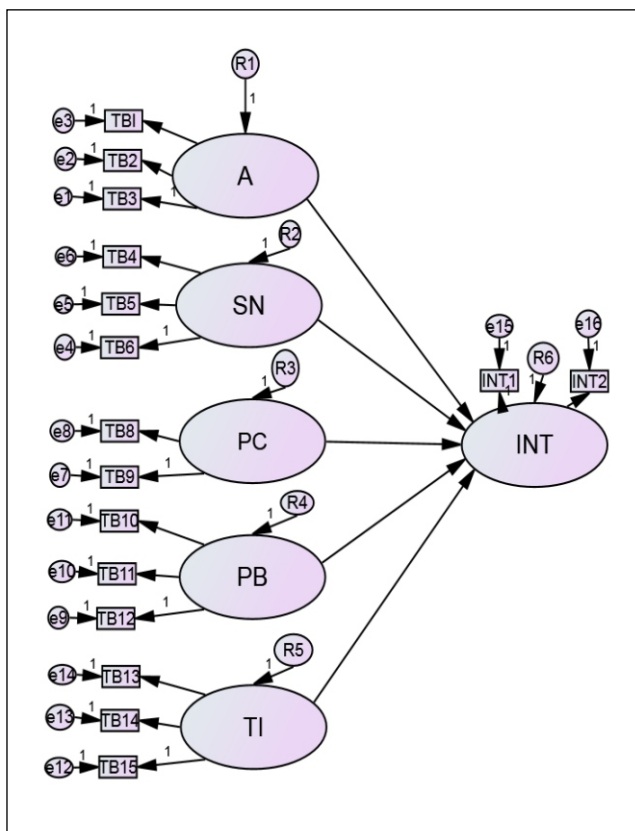
Item A	Direction	Item B	β Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
INT	<---	TI	0.099	0.040	2.475	NS
INT	<---	SN	0.396	0.083	<u>4.765</u>	***
INT	<---	A	0.213	0.051	<u>4.188</u>	***
INT	<---	PC	0.500	0.117	<u>4.279</u>	***
INT	<---	PB	0.015	0.054	0.274	NS

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, NS: Not significant

C.R. is the critical ratio obtained by dividing the covariance estimate by its standard error.

Underlined values are critical ratios exceeding 1.96 at the 0.05 level, 2.58 at the 0.01 level, and 3.29 at the 0.001 level of significant respectively.

Figure 2: Structural model



all the endogenous and exogenous constructs.

While the latent variables Attitude (A), Subjective Norms (SN) and Perceived Control (PC) were significantly associated with Intention to visit (INT), the latent variables Past Behaviour (PB) and Tour Involvement (TI) were not significantly associated with Intention to visit (INT).

RESULTS

The results of structural equation analysis by AMOS were used to test the proposed hypotheses in this study. The relationships between constructs were examined based on *t*-value or critical ratio (c.r.) values associated with path coefficients between constructs. If an estimated c.r. is greater than a certain critical value ($p < 0.05$, c.r. = 1.96) (Mueller, 1996), the null hypothesis that the associated estimated parameter is equal to 0 was rejected; otherwise, the hypothesis was supported. The summary of the hypotheses testing is presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3 Attitude (A) (visitors' positive or negative feelings and opinions about cultural heritage sites) ($\beta = 0.213$, $p < 0.001$), Subjective Norms (SN) (information sources or recommendations from reference groups which might influence visitors' destination choice) ($\beta = 0.396$, $p < 0.001$) and Perceived Control (PC) (visitors' perceived ease or difficulty of leisure travel) ($\beta = 0.500$, $p < 0.001$) are all significant predictors of Intention to visit (INT) (visitors' desire to visit a cultural heritage site), thereby supporting H1a, H1b and H1c.

The other latent constructs, Past Behavior (PB) (visitors' latest experience of visiting cultural heritage sites) and Tour Involvement (TI) (the level of importance, interest or enjoyment attached to culture

measures. The tourists also felt that availability of transportation to reach the site, and the facilities for food and accommodation are the important factors to be considered for the preference of the heritage sites.

Table 3: Summary of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis Relationship estimate			Beta Estimate	c.r value	Results
INT	<---	TI	0.099	2.475	Not Supported
INT	<---	SN	0.396	<u>4.765</u>	Supported
INT	<---	A	0.213	<u>4.188</u>	Supported
INT	<---	PC	0.500	<u>4.279</u>	Supported
INT	<---	PB	0.015	0.274	Not Supported

tour, which mainly refers to all kinds of cultural activities) have no significant impact on visitors' intention to visit cultural heritage sites, and thus H1d and H1e can be rejected.

DISCUSSION

From the empirical results, it is evident that Attitude (visitors' positive or negative feelings and opinions about cultural heritage sites), Subjective Norm (information sources or recommendations from reference groups which might influence visitors' destination choice), Perceived Control (visitors' perceived ease or difficulty of leisure travel) are the significant factors to predict visitors' intention to visit a cultural heritage site. Many studies confirmed that attitude consistently outweighs subjective norm in predicting behavioral intention (Farley *et al.*, 1981; Fishbein *et al.*, 2001). The visitors relatively have more positive attitude toward Rameshwaram. Oliver and Bearden (1985) found that a strong relationship exists between attitude subjective norm and subjective norm, suggesting that subjective norm may reliably influence attitude. This study also exhibited a significant relationship between attitude and subjective norm.

The additional constructs Past Behaviour (visitors' latest experience of visiting cultural heritage sites) and Tour Involvement (the level of importance, interest or enjoyment attached to culture tour, which mainly refers to all kinds of cultural activities) do not play a significant role in predicting visitors' intention to visit cultural heritage sites. The results show that the tourists felt the heritage beauty and the cleanliness of the heritage site are important factors of their lifestyle

CONCLUSION

For the tourists, if they perceive the experience to be beyond their expectations, they will be satisfied and trust in the cultural heritage tourism population, entities, and facilities. They will be more inclined to return to the place or will try to find a similar cultural heritage tourism experience. Thus, the overall image will be positively encoded in their minds.

These results are likely to help tourism stakeholders and marketers to collect information and plan appropriate competitive strategies, based on the tourism attractions they prefer to develop before the implementation stage. For the local communities, rural local official entities, public and private service providers, the anticipated outcomes should offer an insight into the potential for sustainable cultural heritage tourism, by helping to not only provide a good experience but also offer a good level of service quality.

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