APPLICATION OF CONTEXTUAL APPROACH FOR MEASURING TOURISM DESTINATION ATTRACTIVENESS

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Abstract. Understanding the importance of touristic attributes in contributing to attractiveness of a tourism destination is always a search not only by tourism managers and practitioners, but also by research scholars. Using a structured questionnaire survey with 418 respondents in 3 provinces of Central region, Vietnam, this study examines the use of the contextual approach for measuring tourism destinaton attractiveness by incorporating three different types of vacation experience in the specific context of immature tourism destinations. The study found that different attributes of tourism destination can be perceived and evaluated differently depending on the context in which the judgment is made. The relevant methodological and managerial implications are discussed for further research and development in tourism destination management.

1. Introduction

Literature review on tourists' behaviors releases that the 'push and pull' theory provides a simple and intuitive approach for explaining the motives behind tourists' behavior. The push factors indicate that people are initially driven by internal desires or emotional factors such as the need for escape, knowledge, relaxation, prestige, adventure and so forth (Balogul and Uysal, 1996; Klenosky, 2002; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Once tourists are pushed into deciding to travel, they are then pulled by external factors such as historical sites, natural and beautiful scenery, cultural or sporting events, etc. The push is the decision to travel and the pull explains reasons for travel. When these two groups of factors convened, the destination selection would occur and tourism would happen. The driving force of tourism is represented by the destination attractiveness.

With the purpose to understand how tourists evaluate attractiveness of a tourism destination in different usage contexts, the study was carried out in 3 Central provinces of Vietnam, namely Quang tri, Thua thien Hue and Da nang, from February to June 2011. This paper is an extract of the study to present a methodological discussion on using the contextual approach to measure touristic attributes and its contribution to attractiveness of a destination.

2. Destination attractiveness – concepts and measurement

Recent researches suggest that the popularity of tourism destinations can be enhanced by a combination of attributes of competitiveness and attractiveness. The competitiveness is derived from the supply side and the attractiveness from demand side of tourism (Vengesayi, 2003; Tasci, 2007). The attractiveness of a tourism destination reflects "the feelings, beliefs, and opinions that an individual has about a destination's perceived ability to provide satisfaction in relation to his or her special vacation needs" (Hu and Ritchie, 1993: 25).

Attractions are the primary elements of destination appeals. They are the key motivators for visitation to a destination. This is generally what pulls tourists from one destination to another. The literature review helps to group destination attributes into the following five major categories: (1) natural factors, (2) social factors, (3) historical factors, (4) recreational and shopping facilities and (5) infrastructure, food, and shelter. Figuring out what the most important attributes tourists are looking for at a destination is a vital part of measuring destination attractiveness because it identifies respondents' salient image attributes and these are most likely to serve as behavior determinants (Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Tasci et al., 2007).

The dominating force that influences destination attractiveness is the pulling effect. The pulling effect refers to the push-pull motivation of tourists. Without destination attractiveness, tourism would be almost nonexistent. People have the inner desire to travel based on their push motivation but need the pulling effect to bring them to any specific destination (Kim and Lee, 2002). Studies of destination attractiveness have centered on the needs of the tourists and what attracts them to various destinations (Hu and Ritchie, 1993). Goeldner et al (2000) categorized attractions into five main groups: cultural, natural, events, recreation, and entertainment. In line with these discussions, Vengesayi (2003) argues that the ability of destination to deliver individual benefits is enhanced by its touristic attributes and the importance of these attributes helps people to evaluate the attractiveness of a destination to make relevant choices. Measuring destination attractiveness can therefore be done by evaluating what a destination can offer tourists.

3. Proxies of context and its impact on tourist's choice behavior

Along with studies on decision making theory in consumer behavior which emphasizes on analysis the relationship between demographic variables and tourist behavior, substantial research effort has been made to examine the impacts of situational or usage context on both consumer behavior and customer choice processes. This research domain affirms that consumer choice decision can be influenced by other factors rather than cognitive information processing, such as affective information processing or behavioral influence.

The terms 'context' and 'situation' or 'use occasion' have been used by different authors to describe the settings in which consumer choice is made. Snepenger and Milner (1990) suggests that dimension of the 'situation' is commonly used in travel research and very frequently referred to 'trip purposes'. Studies using contextual approach to measure air travelers' preferences for and perception of airlines services during the last decades provide the same conclusion that attribute importance and perception of an airline were different according to the context in which choice decisions were being made (Klenosky, 2002; Awaritefe, 2004). Several other approaches have also been employed to study tourist's behavior including purchase settings, previous travel activity and seasonal factor. However, the most consistent correlation is found with 'trip purpose' dimensions (Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Formica and Uysal, 2006). These previous research findings provide strong support for the use of "trip purpose' as proxy variable of context applied in this study.

4. Research methods

The above discussion supports the use of 'trip purpose' as contextual variable in this study, which divides the sample into three groups of vacation experiences: leisure, education and business travelers. The hypothesis was that *the relative importance of touristic attributes in contributing to the attractiveness of a destination will differ in contextual settings described by different types of travel experiences*. Using the conceptual framework for measuring destination attractiveness suggested by Hu and Ritchie (1993) with additional modification of destination security as emerging issue of international travel nowadays, a structured questionnaire of 17 attributes was designed to measure the attractiveness of tourism destinations. A field questionnaire survey was carried out with 420 tourists who were randomly selected at different tourism attraction in Hue, Quang tri and Da nang during Feb. to Jun., 2011 (The sample structure is summarized in Table 1), of which 412 questionnaires were usable. Three these destinations were selected on purpose by their different stage of tourism development but in the link as an important tourism circuit in the Central region. This will help to validate the use of the attribute model in evaluating the attractiveness of different destinations. However, for the purpose mentioned above, this paper aims to present the findings and discussions on tourist perception of common attributes that they think to be important to destination attractiveness in general, rather than evaluating the attractiveness of the specific local destinations.

To test the hypothesis, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was made to compare means differences among testing groups. Before carrying out the ANOVA, the Levene statistics were calculated to test the equality of group variances. In addition, statistic descriptive analysis was used to summarize the respondents' rating and perception of tourism destination attractiveness.

5. Findings and discussions

Respondent profile

In order to make sure that any difference in responses from each groups taken in the statistic tests is not effected by difference in characteristics of sampled groups, the Chi-square tests (Phi and Cramér's V) were applied to test whether significant difference existed in the profiles of sampled groups of respondents. The results of the tests concluded that there were no significant difference in terms of age, gender, education and nationality, which support the conclusion that three groups of vacation experience are homogenous in their profiles defined by the above variables.

Relative importance of touristic attributes for different vacation experiences

The results show that for leisure group, safety and security destination, cultural attractions, scenery, price level and attitude towards tourist were rated as five most important attributes to the attractiveness of a tourism destination. Uniqueness of local people's life, festival and special events, shopping, accessibility and sport/recreational opportunities were evaluated as five least important attributes influencing tourist's perception of destination attractiveness (Table 1).

Table 1. *The relative importance of each touristic attribute in contributing to the attractiveness of a tourism destination by different usage contexts*

Touristic attributes	Leisure group (G1)		Education group (G2)		Business group (G3)		Sig. between groups
	Rating	Ranking	Rating	Ranking	Rating	Ranking	
Safety and security at touristic destination	3.85	1	3.53	3	3.54	1	0.00
Scenery	3.63	3	3.61	1	3.52	2	0.49
Price levels	3.63	4	3.54	2	3.50	3	0.34
Cultural attractions	3.65	2	3.52	5	3.45	4	0.05
Attitude towards tourists	3.62	5	3.40	6	3.40	9	0.01
Uniqueness of local people's life	3.25	13	3.53	4	3.42	6	0.01
Food	3.57	6	3.36	9	3.30	14	0.02
Availability/quality of local	3.54	7	3.38	7	3.36	10	0.08

transportation							
Historical attractions	3.50	8	3.39	8	3.21	16	0.01
Entertainment activities	3.39	9	3.29	10	3.35	11	0.62
Festivals and special events	3.24	14	3.26	11	3.44	5	0.11
Communication difficulties	3.32	11	3.24	12	3.42	7	0.29
Availability/quality of accommodations	3.30	12	3.15	15	3.23	15	0.30
Weather and climate	3.33	10	3.11	17	3.16	17	0.09
Shopping	3.23	15	3.13	16	3.41	8	0.08
Accessibility	3.05	16	3.19	14	3.33	12	0.01
Sports/recreational opportunities	2.79	17	3.20	13	3.31	13	0.00

(Source: Author's survey, Feb. - Jun. 2011).

Rho Spearman Rank Order Correlation between: G1&G2 = 0.735 (P 2-tailed= 0.001); between G1&G3= 0.453 (P 2-tailed= 0.068); and between G3&G2 = 0.666 (P 2-tailed= 0.004)

Note: Likert's scale: from 1 – totally unimportant to 5 – totally important.

For the education group of tourists, the highest rating is given to safety and security at touristic destination, followed by scenery and price level, uniqueness of local people's life and cultural attractions. The five least important attributes were sport/recreational opportunities, food, availability of accommodation, historical attractions and weather and climate. These several least important attributes were also mentioned by business group of travellers. It is somewhat similar that five most important attributes were rated by business group including scenery, price level, uniqueness of local people's life, safety at destination and cultural attraction, festival and special events (Table 1). The findings confirm the need for market segmentation in developing product strategy in each destination as well as in the region, e.g. if targeting market is mass leisure tourists, the product development should focus on the attributes ranked as the most important by this group.

Comparison of relative importance of touristic attributes across vacation types

The ANOVA results found that, for 6 attributes (including scenery, price level at local destination, entertainment activities, communication difficulties due to language barrier, availability/quality of accommodations and festival and special events) there is no statistically significant difference in importance among three different types of vacation experiences (P≤0.1). However, for the rest of 11 other attributes, the differences do exist. For examples, safety and security at destination and cultural attractions were rated 3.85 and 3.65 in the case of leisure vacation experiences, their relative importance in contributing to attractiveness of a tourism destination in terms of business and education vacations were rated 3.54 and 3.45 for business travelers, 3.53 and 3.52 for education travelers, respectively. The results are also consistent with discussions from previous studies by Ho and Ritchie (1993), Formica and Uysal (2006).

The results also suggest that three main groups of touristic attributes were classified according to their relative importance influencing tourists' evaluation of the attractiveness of a tourism destination (Table 1). The first group includes 6 attributes: Safety and security at destination, scenery, price levels, cultural attractions, attitudes towards tourists. These have the same high relative importance in influencing people's evaluation of destination attractiveness for three groups of respondents (except for lower ranking of 'uniqueness of local people's life' by leisure group), although their important levels are different. This is understandable because the sampled tourists in the region were mainly characterized as mass tourists, not high-end tourists.

The second group includes 5 attributes: food, availability/quality of transportation, historical attractions, entertainment activities and festivals and special events. For this group of attributes, the leisure group gave higher rank for these attributes, followed by education group, while the business group considering these attributes has lower relative importance to the destination attractiveness. However, this remark is reversed for the 'festivals and special events'. Especially, the lower relative importance was given to entertainment activities, accommodations, festival and special events.

The third group includes 6 attributes: communication difficulties due to language barrier, availability/quality of accommodation, weather and climate, shopping, accessibility, sports/recreational opportunities. These attributes have the same low level of relative importance across the three types of vacation groups, except for 'shopping' and 'communication difficulties' ranked higher by business travelers. These observations may also be influenced by the fact that pre-trip expectation of tourists who visited destinations in surveyed provinces paid for the authenticity and uniqueness of the destinations rather than these attributes.

To test the hypothesis, Spearman Rank Order Correlation – Rho was calculated

based on the overall rankings assigned to each of the 17 destination attributes by leisure group (G1), education group (G2) and business group (G3), respectively (Table 1). The results show that, the values of Spearman Rho were 0.735 for correlation between G1 and G2, 0.666 for G2 and G3 and 0.453 for G1 and G3. For an Rho of n=17, the required value of Rho for a significant correlation is 0.558 (at the 0.01 level of significance, $P \leq 0.01$), or 0.482 ($P \leq 0.05$) and 0.412 ($P \leq 0.10$). Comparing the values of calculated Rho for correlation of each pair of tourism groups with the required Rho allows us to reject the hypothesis. The findings support the hypothesis that *the relative importance of touristic attributes in contributing to the attractiveness of a destination was evaluated differently by different types of travel experiences.*

6. Conclusion

Understanding the importance of touristic attributes in contributing to the attractiveness of a tourism destination is always a search not only by tourism managers and practitioners, but also by research scholars. The findings of this study support the fact that the relative importance of a majority of touristic attributes are assessed differently in different types of vacation experience being sought. In other words, different attributes of tourism destination can be perceived and evaluated differently depending on the context in which the judgment is made.

In term of methodology, it is not reasonable to expect that the model used for measuring destination attractiveness is universally complete. The results of this study provide a case how the contextual approach for measuring destination attractiveness works in the developing countries where tourism development is at the development stage of its destination life cycle. Any modification and expansion of the model should be encouraged.

From managerial perspective, the findings from this study show that for some touristic attributes of destination, their negative images may be less tolerant to tourists' perception of the destination attractiveness than others. Therefore, once market segmentations for a destination are made, the efforts should be made in accordance with tourist expectation so as to enhance their perceived experience of a tourism destination.

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Appendix 1. *The Sample Structure*

Items	Percent	Items	Percent
Age		**Occupation**	
Below 18	5.9	Business	19.0
18-30	38.6	Public servants	32.5
31-45	26.8	Workers	19.7
46-60	23.5	Students	9.1
Above 60	5.2	Retired	14.2
Total	100	Others	5.5
		Total	100
Income		**Nationality**	
Low	30.4	Vietnamese	46.1
Medium	37.8	Thai	15.1
High	18.0	European	17.0
No answer	13.8	Australia& Newzealand	4.3
Total	100.0	United State & Canada	5.3
Gender		Vietnamese Oversea	5.7
Male	56.8	Other	6.5
Female	43.2	Total	100
Education		**Purpose**	
Primary school	4.9	Sightseeing	45.1
Secondary school	23.3	Business	22.8
College and University	48.1	VFR	8.1
Post graduates	19.0	Study & research	23.0
Others	4.7	Other	1.0
Total	**100**	**Total**	**100**

(Source: Author's survey, Feb. - Jun. 2011).

Note: 1 – Totally unimportant to 5 – totally important.

Appendix 2. *The relative importance of attributes to destination attractiveness*

Attributes	Mean	% respondents by level of importance				
		1	2	3	4	5
1. Scenery	3.59	0	3.6	47.7	34.5	14.2
2. Weather and climate	3.24	0.9	18.0	46.8	25.2	9.1
3. Historical attractions	3.41	0.5	10.3	44.8	36.0	8.4
4. Cultural attractions	3.57	0.2	5.3	39.7	46.4	8.4
5. Availability/quality of accommodations	3.25	1.4	14.4	47.1	31.8	5.3
6. Food	3.46	0.5	13.6	39.7	31.6	14.6
7. Uniqueness of local people's life	3.36	1.2	11.5	45.5	34.0	7.9
8. Accessibility	3.15	2.4	15.6	51.9	25.4	4.8
9. Festivals and special events	3.29	0.2	15.6	46.2	31.1	6.9
10. Sports/recreational opportunities	3.00	5.0	17.9	51.7	22.5	2.9
11. Shopping	3.26	3.1	12.0	48.1	29.7	7.2
12. Entertainment activities	3.36	0.2	11.0	51.2	27.8	9.8
13. Attitude towards tourists	3.51	0	4.8	49.8	34.9	10.5
14. Availability/quality of local transportation	3.46	0.5	8.6	43.1	39.7	8.1
15. Safety and security at touristic destination	3.70	0	4.5	37.6	41.1	16.7
16. Communication difficulties due to language barriers	3.33	0.2	13.2	48.3	29.9	8.4
17. Price levels	3.58	1.2	2.2	48.3	34.4	13.9

(Source: Author's survey, Feb. - Jun. 2011).

Note: 1 – Totally unimportant to 5 – totally important.