

A Ground up Approach for Consumer Choice Behavior Model of Tourism Destination Loyalty: The case of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

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Abstract

How consumers become loyal towards a tourism destination? Various stakeholders including tourism destination operators would like to know the answers to this question to effectively operate their businesses and contribute towards economic development. Choice modeling offers powerful tool for the analysis of consumer choice behavior toward the destination. The growing application of this approach in tourism holds promise of major advances in knowledge if such studies are well designed and executed. This paper focuses on developing consumer choice behavior model with regards to destination loyalty. The Cox's Bazar, in Bangladesh, has been chosen as the tourism destination in this study. Content analysis is performed based on 15 field interviews to extract the factors and variables. In total 12 factors and 71 corresponding variables have been extracted. A comprehensive model, including moderating variables of age, gender and education, is then developed and proposed for further future studies. This model is generic in nature and can be fine-tuned for various destination loyalty applications.

Keywords: Choice Behavior, Comprehensive Destination Loyalty Model, Field Study

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Introduction

In the past few decades, tourism has clearly become one of the most prominent economic sectors for many countries (Goh and Law, 2002) such as the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Greece and Thailand, and many island nations, such as The Bahamas, Fiji, and Maldives, due to the large intake of money for businesses with their goods and services and the opportunity for employment in the service industries associated with tourism. According to World Tourism Organization, in 2008 there were over 922 million international tourist arrivals, with a growth of 1.9% as compared to 2007. International tourism receipts grew to US\$ 944 billion in 2008, corresponding to an increase in real terms of 1.8%. This is increasingly being seen as an important area of study in its own right with some debates as to whether it can be considered as a scientific discipline with its own theoretical development and methodologies (Chu-Mei, 2000). Therefore, the tourist choice behavior topic is frequently investigated by scholars (Ajzen and Driver, 1991; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Fesenmaier, 1988; Um and Crompton, 1990) from different perspectives. In the literature, among many other things loyalty behavior has generally been regarded as a desirable area of research (Alegre and Juaneda, 2006). It is thought that firstly, the marketing costs need to attract loyal visitors are lower than those required for non loyal visitors; secondly, a return (loyalty) is a positive indicator of one's satisfaction; thirdly, positive attitude of high repeaters increases their likelihood to return (Oppermann 1998). Therefore, a comprehensive destination loyalty model for tourism consumer choice behavior is of utmost interest. Generally, choice models can vary from very general conceptual model such as the Howard-Sheth (1969) model of consumer choice to more specific numerical models addressing particular products and consumption situations (Crouch & Louviere, 2000). Therefore, the objectives of this research are; a) to determine the most responsible factors of destination loyalty, b) to develop a comprehensive destination loyalty model (earlier type of choice model) and, c) to contextualize the model via field study of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Background of the Study

Geographically Cox's Bazar, the tourist capital of Bangladesh is located in an advantageous position from the tourism point of view. It is a 120 km world's longest (Rahman, 2004) unbroken sandy beach and second natural wonder of the world. Cox's Bazar is not only in the Macro Asiatic Air Corridor but also in transcontinental traffic connecting Europe, Asia and Australia. This strategic location of Bangladesh is beneficial for improving international tourism and more particularly tourism within the region. India with Taj Mahal, Nepal with its nine Himalayan peaks, Thailand with its free society and Sri Lanka with its Indian Ocean are surrounding Bangladesh. Besides, it is pertinent that when the climate of western countries in winter season becomes intolerable, Bangladesh offers soothing climate in the winter season. This timing and climate will lead the tourism consumers from western countries to visit Bangladesh along with the local visitors. Having these different tourism potentials, some researches (Hossain, 2007; Hossain & Islam, 2007; Rashed & Roni, 2006) have conducted research regarding tourism development in the country. However, no model based research has been conducted yet to measure the multiple factors and variables that visitors consider for selecting a tourism destination and retention. Besides, it is observed from the literature that studies on visitors' destination loyalty and its determinants have not been thoroughly investigated (Oppermann, 2000) to explore the real mechanisms of tourism consumers' destination loyalty behavior. This research is therefore of utmost importance from both theoretical and practical points of views.

Brief Literature Review

Empirically, perceived value and perceived satisfaction are closely related constructs (Johnson et al., 2006) although, a few researches used these two constructs separately under some research settings (Lee, Petrick & Crompton, 2007; Chen and Tsai, 2006). In the context of our research we considered both perceived value and perceived satisfaction in related way. Besides, throughout this study "tourism services" is used as a generic umbrella term embracing both the intangible (services) and tangible aspects (goods) of a destination (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). In the literature choice behavior has been dealt with either one (Yoon et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2004; Mossberg and Kleeper, 2005; Lin et al., 2007; Martin and Bosque, 2008) or two (Lee et al., 2007; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Yieh et al., 2007) independent variables to determine their effect on perceived satisfaction and loyalty in different research settings. Only few published studies in marketing literature have thoroughly investigated the relationship between multiple variables and perceived value focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic attributes (Bearden and Shimp, 1982; Doods and Monrore, 1985; Agarwal and Teas, 2001, 2004). In tourism literature some empirical studies have been conducted using multiple variables for perceived tourism value assessment (Patric, 2004a; Chen and Tsai, 2007) using different quality cues of intrinsic and extrinsic types. Moreover, some scholars in tourism literature have constructed reliable and meaningful models in order to investigate the perceived destination loyalty and documented the multiple explanatory variables from different perceptions (Petrick 2004b; Lam and Hsu, 2004, Millan and Esteban, 2004; Lobato et al., 2006; Chi and Qu, 2008; Yuan and Jang, 2008; Campo and Yague, 2008; Zakbar et al., 2010). The variables from these studies and other related empirical studies [not included for page limitation] from marketing and tourism literatures have been assessed to develop the proposed research model (see variables without dotted lines in figure 1).

Research Methods

Since we are interested in developing a comprehensive destination loyalty model in the particular context of Cox's Bazar, the field study technique was used (Quaddus and Xu, 2005) for data collection. At first random sampling procedure was undertaken to select visitors from the destination. Then the judgment sampling (respondent familiar with relevant characteristics) procedure was used. The main selection criterion was that the visitors must be on the spot during interview time and have revisit experience. A semi-structured interview technique was used to collect data. It mainly focused on the areas of information needed to satisfy the objectives of this research. In total we conducted 25 interviews intensively. Each interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes depending on the knowledge of the interviewees. These interviews were recorded in audio recording and written form. As most of the interviews were conducted in Bengali language, firstly, two individual Bengali transcripts were prepared by two research associates who also considered the body language and other forms of fresh memory which occurred during the interviews. Secondly, researchers also listened to the audio recordings one by one which were transcribed in Bengali. It was found that no new variables and factors came up from the interview 16th onward. Finally, the researchers translated all Bengali transcripts into English. Since this research is exploratory in nature (Zikmund, 1997; Jennings, 2001), we have chosen 'content analysis' in analyzing our interview transcripts (Berg, 2001; Sarantakos, 1998). This technique was carried out in two stages. Step one dealt with single interview transcripts, while step two dealt with cross interview transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Combinations of inductive and deductive approaches were used to categorize the factors and variables (Quaddus and Xu, 2005). The relationships (+,-) among the factors and variables were depicted based on the empirical researches and field study.

Findings

Altogether initially 19 factors and 114 variables were identified from different interviews via extensive content analyses. We have tried to label the factors and variables in line with the literature (Bearden and Shimp 1982; Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal, 1991; Backer and Crompton 2000; Agarwal and Teas, 2004; Petrick 2004; Lobato et. al. 2006; Lee et. al. 2007; Chi and Qu, 2008; Campo and Youge, 2008; Yuan and Jang, 2008 etc.). However, some of the variables within each factor and their meanings are different from the literature as they are more specific to tourism destination loyalty model with respect to Cox's Bazar. Out of the 19 factors, nine were fully matched with the literature to develop loyalty model. These are: i) Perceived Intrinsic Attribute, ii) Perceived Destination Brand Image, iii) Perceived Warranty, iv) Perceived Price, v) Perceived Quality, vi) Perceived Risk, vii) Perceived Sacrifice, viii) Perceived Satisfaction, and ix) Perceived Destination Loyalty. Ten (10) more factors were i) Seasonal Variation, ii) Social Class, iii) Income Group, iv) Religious Belief, v) Ethical Belief, vi) Social Acceptance, vii) Wonders of the World, viii) Demand Fluctuation, ix) Cost and Affordability, and x) Income level. These ten factors were combined into three high level factors. The three new factors are: i) Seasonal Variation, and Demand Fluctuation considered as "Seasonal Variation", ii) Social Class, Income Group, Cost and Affordability, and Income level all together considered as "Income level", and iii) Religious Belief, Ethical Belief, and Social Acceptance considered as "Religious belief". However, after three more rounds of revisions a final total of 71 measures were produced for a total 12 factors (Table 1). It is noted that we did not include demographic details for page limitation

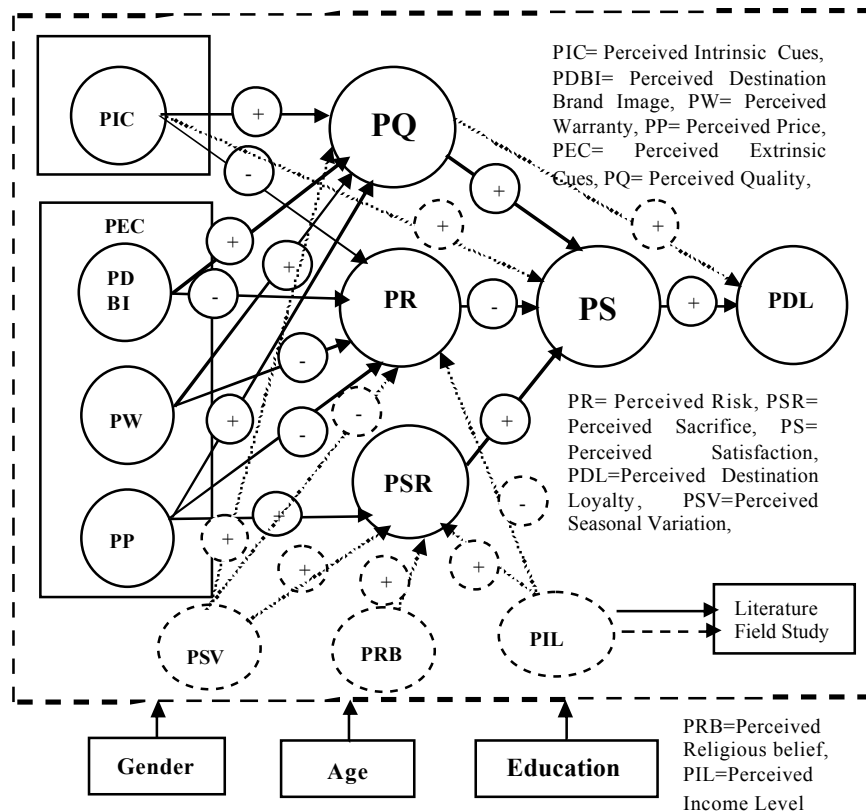
Theoretical Ground for Developing the Model

In this section we considered three prominent theories; Information Processing Theory (IPT), Theory of Reason Action (TRA), and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as basis to develop an integrated but parsimonious loyalty model (Fig 1). In IPT (Miller, 1956), the first concept is 'chunking' which suggests that processing capacity of short-term memory is approximately seven chunks (seven plus or minus two) of information. Secondly, if the environmental likes to input more than seven chunks of information, the information processing level begins to decrease. Thus it means that consumer cannot always articulate the attributes as per their requirements for limited working memory and computational capabilities (Olson and Jaccoby, 1972; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). Thus, we selected nine constructs including dependent one for this study. The core of the TRA is an individual's behavioral intention to perform a specific act with respect to a given object, in a given situation. This intention is a function of an individual's "attitude toward the behavior" and his or her "subjective norm" (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Therefore, perceived quality (PQ) and perceived sacrifice (PSR) of the current study (Fig 1) have been developed from the concept of attitudinal behavior and subjective norm of TRA. TRA was developed explicitly to deal with purely volitional behavior (Ajzen, 1985) which is not enough to explain behavioral intention (satisfaction) and actual behavior (loyalty). Therefore, TPB was proposed (an extension of the TRA) which postulates three conceptually independent constructs to determine BI. The first two are same as TRA, but third one is the degree of perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991) which refers to the perceived difficulty/risks of performing the behavior (Ajzen and Driver, 1992). Thus the perceived risk (PR) construct has been considered as behavioural control for this study. In current research the visitors' perceived satisfaction (PS) refers to behavioral intention, as it is the result of attitudinal behavior (PQ), subjective norm (PSR), and behavioral control (PR) of TRA and TPB. PIA, PDB, PW and PP (see figure 1 for definition) are considered as environmental (salient) belief of TRA and TPB. Perceived Destination Loyalty (PDL), the ultimate dependent variable (actual behavior) is theorized from TPB.

Moderating Variables

The TRA and TPB are all well-established theories belonging to the school of cognition and have been confirmed widely by many behavioral studies (Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006; Lam & Hsu, 2008). The original models of the two theories contain only internal factors, but not external factors such as age, gender, and education. A few tourism literatures have reported positive relationships between gender, age, personality and behavior (Frew and Shaw, 1999; Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006), but not explored the influence of age, education, and gender in the context of tourism consumer loyalty. Therefore, researchers expect these personal characteristics to be general moderators in the different links of proposed conceptual destination (Fig 1) loyalty model. The ideas from previous discussion are summarized in the proposed model which predicts that intrinsic cues (PIA) and extrinsic cues (PDBI, PP and PW) directly influence the perception of PQ, PR and PSR, and these factors influence PS. Thus PS is the main antecedent of actual behaviour (PDL). Consequently, it is expected that the PQ, PR and PSR will mediate the relationship between both cues and PS. On the other hand, age, gender and education will moderate different causal relationships of the proposed model as a whole.

Fig 1: Choice Behavior Model Regarding Tour Destination Loyalty



Contribution of the Study

The theoretical significance of the present study is that it has been drawn from field study and matched with the widely used theories of TRA, and TPB in developing a comprehensive destination loyalty model (Fig 1) to explore mechanisms of destination loyalty (PDL) behavior.

Hence, it is highly expected that at the theoretical level, this research will deliver greater understanding in the antecedent factors of destination loyalty. The roles of both intrinsic and extrinsic cues have been determined in the same research setting. The warranty which still does not include as quality in the tourism literature with other cues has been found important in the specific context that might be applicable in general. In fact, this research presents the constructs that appears to be most responsible in structuring tourism destination loyalty. The practical contribution of this study lies in the support of tourism stakeholders that is essential for the development, successful operation, and long-term sustainability of a tourism destination in the country like Bangladesh.

Conclusion and Future Research Direction

The literature on choice modeling regarding destination loyalty is sometimes inconsistent and confusing due to not including responsible explanatory factors and variables. Besides, the issue of moderating variables has been largely neglected. This research study tries to fill up the gap by developing a conceptual comprehensive tourism destination loyalty model based on TRA, TPB and IPT including a number of empirical researches (Bearden and Shimp 1982; Dodds et. al. 1991; Agarwal and Teas 2004; Petrick, 2004b; Chi and Qu, 2008; not included all for page limitation). Finding of the research appears to be more effective for qualitative and quantitative research regarding destination loyalty. Our immediate future research plan is to test developed model via Partial Least Square (PLS) based structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. This part of the research will use quantitative approaches, which will test a number of hypotheses and the model itself.

Table: 1, Different Measures and Their Sources

Items	NV	L/FS	Items	NV	L/FS
PIA1	Natural scenery	L & FS	PR2	Services take time	L & FS
PIA2	Accommodation	L & FS	PR3	High price for product	L & FS
PIA3	Sea bathing	FS	PR4	Dishonest behavior	L & FS
PIA4	Adjacent sights	L & FS	PR5	Less privacy	FS
PIA5	Locally made product	FS	PR6	Unknown uncertainty	FS
PIA6	Longest sandy beach	FS	PSR1	Price for pleasure	L & FS
PIA7	Sound of water	FS	PSR2	Price for notice	L & FS
PDBI1	Good reputation	L & FS	PSR3	Price for time gain	L & FS
PDBI2	Famous for beach	FS	PSR4	Price for encouraging	L & FS
PDBI3	Distinct natural sights	L & FS	PSR5	Less time for readily product	L & FS
PDBI4	Natural wonder of world	FS	PSR6	Less time for shopping	L & FS
PDBI5	Proud for Bangladesh	FS	PSR7	Carefulness in destination	FS
PDBI6	Favorable weather	L & FS	SR8	Price for more learning	L & FS
PW1	Service warranty	L & FS	PS1	Thoroughly enjoy visiting	L & FS
PW2	Length of coverage	L & FS	PS2	Favorable tour	L & FS
PW3	Transportation	L & FS	PS3	Pleased with decision	L & FS
PW4	Tourist guide	FS	PS4	Wise choice	L & FS
PW5	Quality foods	FS	PS5	Exact experience	L & FS
PW6	Special offer	FS	PDL1	Recommend to visit	L & FS
PP1	Cost of accommodation	L & FS	PDL2	Advise everyone to visit	L & FS
PP2	Cost of transportation	L & FS	PDL3	Visit Again	L & FS
PP3	Cost of foods and beverage	L & FS	PDL4	Extended visit	L & FS
PP4	Cost for travelling nearby places	FS	PDL5	Tell many experiences	L & FS
PP5	Cost of locally made products	FS	PRB1	Not open wine drinking	FS
PP6	Much time	L & FS	PRB2	Increase faith on nature	FS
PP7	Mental effort	L & FS	PRB3	Not allow free mixing	FS
PP8	Much energy	L & FS	PRB4	Support clean beach	FS
PP9	Physical fitness	L & FS	PIL1	Income allow to visit	FS
PP10	Opportunity cost	L & FS	PIL2	Parents income suit to visit	FS
PQ1	Reliable service	L & FS	PIL3	Income allow to stay more	FS
PQ2	Timely Service	L & FS	PIL4	Sufficient income for shopping	FS
PQ3	Good value for money	L & FS	PSV1	Demand increase	FS
PQ4	Good warranty	FS	PSV2	Price fluctuation	FS
PQ5	Good placement of hotels	FS	PSV3	Risk increase	FS
PQ6	Adequate security	FS	PSV4	Favorable weather	FS
PR1	Few things function well	L & FS	-----	-----	-----

Notes: NV=Name of Variables, L=Literature, (sources do not present for page limitation), FS=Field Study

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