

THE IMPACT OF TOURIST-TO-TOURIST INTERACTION AND EMOTIONAL IMPLICATIONS ON EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM

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Abstract

This research presents the main considerations regarding the impact of tourist-to-tourist interaction and the emotional implications on experiential tourism, as well as the beneficial effects resulting from tourists' participation in certain tours and programs. The purpose of the study is to show what are the impact of tourist-to-tourist interaction and the emotional implications experienced by tourists during and after visiting certain tourist destinations. Data were collected through a field experiment for three months and analyzed on a sample of 102 tourists who participated in cultural and religious tours and programs. The research methodology of this study was the analysis, the descriptive method and the experimental method using a quantitative research instrument, the questionnaire. The main results show the multitude of beneficial and multiplying effects that each tourist can obtain from participation in certain tours and programs, psychological implications with a major therapeutic role in improving their well-being as well as the emotional and general health of tourists. The importance of the study is far-reaching. The findings can contribute to the development of experiential tourism research from the perspective of tourist-to-tourist interaction and the emotional implications by examining the interaction impact among tourists.

Key words: emotional implications, experiential tourism, general and emotional health, tourist-to-tourist interaction, tours and programs.

JEL Classification: L83, I10, I31, Z32

1. INTRODUCTION

This study broadly examines the different dimensions of human life that, in various combinations, are said to enhance quality of life and capacities to contribute to well-being: social, mental, emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and cultural (Clissold et al., 2022). Social interactions play a vital role in everyday life by fulfilling individuals' need for belonging and connecting with others (Bernstein et al., 2018).

Social interactions are related to positive physical and psychological health such as reducing stress and increasing positive emotions. Social interactions are also a critical component of tourist experience since tourist experience is created through tourists' interactions with other people and places. The level of friendship within tour groups is one of the most important determinants of tourism experience quality. In this sense, the tourism interactions play the roles of strengthening or weakening social relations (Lin et al., 2019).

Mainstream emotion literature and tourism emotion contributions are critically analyzed and discussed. This study explores the nature of tourism experiences, particularly in terms of personal

outcomes, emotions and meanings, by investigating tourists' experiences during cultural and religious tourism programs. It is found that there is a need to understand tourism consumption experiences beyond the hedonic joy of the moment and to consider their broader implications for ensuring human well-being and quality of life (Knobloch et al., 2017).

Tourist-to-tourist interaction and emotional implications are very important factors that affect the entire tourist experience. Social interaction in tourism is a powerful communication tool that is prevalent among tourists, communities, receptionists, tour guides, tourism enterprises and others. The emotions induced by tourists' participation in social interaction play an important role in tourists' behavioral intention. Emotions not only directly predict individual behavior, but also indirectly influence individual behavior through attitudinal variables (Zhou et al., 2023).

Travel offers people opportunities to escape from their routine social networks to some extent, making anonymity a natural part of tourism. In addition, during their vacations, tourists may exhibit attitudes and behaviors that are significantly different from their everyday attitudes and behaviors. Since individuals enjoy their travel experiences not only through seeking novelty, but also through meeting and communicating with other travelers who are also seeking similar experiences, interactions with other

tourists play an important role in the travel experience formation process.

Understanding how tourist-to-tourist interaction influences tourists' experiences can help tour operators develop and design tourism experiences that can improve the attractiveness of their offerings. Thus, examination of tourist-to-tourist interaction, its antecedents and its impacts on tourists' experiences, attitudes and behaviors are critical for both academics and practitioners (Lin et al., 2019).

The paper is structured as follows: the next section provides a comprehensive literature review, summarizing relevant research and studies. The third section explores the research methodology used, analysis, descriptive method and experimental method using the questionnaire as a quantitative research instrument. The fourth section presents the results obtained and their discussion within this research. Finally, the concluding section summarizes the paper's final findings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focus upon the acknowledged benefits of tourist-to-tourist encounters through productive interactions among tourists rather than focusing on interactions between tourists and service providers (Pandey, Kumar & Ali, 2025). Although previous research has widely acknowledged the critical role that tourist interaction and emotional implications play in experiential tourism, there is limited evidence on the impact that these factors have on the formation of tourists' self-image or on their intention to return or recommend a particular tourist destination to others. When a person is stimulated, an internal state (emotion) is aroused. Subsequently, the internal state affects human behavior. Tourists' emotional experiences are related to satisfaction, which in turn have a significant influence on behavioral intentions (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010).

Emiroglu et al. (2017) consider that the customer experience in tourism is affected by various factors in the service landscape, including the physical environment and social interactions. Tourists will respond behaviorally based on their emotions, which are influenced by their moral norms and thus determine further tourist-to-tourist interaction behavior responses. Tourists experiencing happy emotions throughout their vacation are more inclined to engage in socially-positive behaviors, whereas those experiencing negative emotions are more prone to avoidance (Tang et al., 2025). Experiential tourism and the quest to create memorable and extraordinary experiences for customers have become essential for tour operators. The implications between tourism providers and experiential tourism are essential in this regard (Knobloch et al., 2017).

Research on emotions is extensive in history, sociology, philosophy and psychology. Fleeting but powerful, emotions are associated with individuals' biological makeup, shaped by their experiences and related to personal mental associations. Emotions are cognitive linguistic constructs used to give meaning to affective states. Emotional meaning is what differentiates humans from the animal world. We can assess the emotional meanings given to affective states. However, the nature of affect is self-responsive and instinctual (Titz, 2009).

In the context of tourism, research on emotions has recently expanded its scope, although it remains largely rooted in consumer behavior, often embedded in cognitive psychology. Emotional experiences, both positive and negative, are critical in shaping behavioral intentions. Tourism scholars have explored the nature of emotions in holiday settings, highlighting the complexity of the concept. Emotions play a central role in tourists' cognitive evaluations and behavioral responses, and undoubtedly, tourism experiences can provide a wealth of emotions for tourists (Volo, 2021). In this context, research on experiential tourism can benefit from a deeper understanding of tourists' emotions and their interaction with travel-specific experiences.

Meaningful tourism experiences are the result of individuals' participation in the creative process. The emotions that tourists evoke during their vacation play a crucial role in their final cognitive evaluations and behavioral responses: only truly personalized and unique co-creation experiences will thrive in the competitive marketplace (Volo, 2017). Such experiences are based on the creation of various innovative, spectacular and sensory stimuli that involve tourists to identify with them and/or to participate and co-create. To obtain a "real" response in a tourist experience, it is necessary to stimulate emotions with which tourists are able to identify (Jelinčić & Senkić, 2019).

In most cases, tourism activities take place in unfamiliar or in somewhat familiar locations over a short period of time and are often associated with certain levels of hedonism. This makes tourist-to-tourist interaction different from interpersonal interactions in everyday contexts in terms of mode, content and depth. During travel, individuals' everyday roles and statuses play less important roles, and thus they interact with each other with less inhibition.

The study of social relationships between one person and another during the tourism experience has not received enough attention. The study of human social relationships is an important issue and offers a unique perspective in the study of the tourist experience. Social relationships are an integral part of tourism-related services and tourist consumption is indelibly social. To explain the consumption of tourist services, one cannot separate the social relationships

that occur during the consumption of these services. In fact, tourist-to-tourist interaction and the quality of the social relationship between tourists have a great influence on the quality of the tourist experience. Therefore, it is necessary to study the context of the tourist experience related to the presence or absence of others. When another tourist is present, the tourists can collectively view a landscape or a landmark, or they can interact with each other if such a landmark is absent. If others are absent, the tourist sees such landmarks alone (Dan, 2013).

In group travel, tourist-to-tourist interaction is an important social relationship. Not only could this relationship influence the tourist experience, but also this relationship could influence the subjective well-being of tourists. The positive tourist-to-tourist interaction could enhance the social bonding between tourists and could also improve tourists' subjective well-being. Conversely, passive tourist-to-tourist interaction has a negative impact either on social bonding or tourists' subjective well-being. Social bonding acts as a partial mediator on the relationship between tourist-to-tourist interaction and subjective well-being (Chen Ye et al., 2017).

It is widely recognized that interactions between tourists significantly influence behavioral reactions, such as willingness to stay, satisfaction, and loyalty, which are important for the development and the management of tourism destinations. However, it is generally agreed that meeting people and creating new relationships are essential parts of the experience, resulting from tourists' interactions with various physical and social elements. As such, shared time and space make tourist-to-tourist interaction essential to the overall tourist experience, which has been recognized in traditional service management frameworks (Sun et al., 2019).

Tourist interactions have maintained a growing significance in the tourism literature. However, existing research that emphasizes dyadic-based questions has become less relevant to the dynamism of the tourism service encounter in which tourist-to-tourist interactions take place; and therefore, more dynamic perspectives that fully explore this phenomenon will prevail (Lin & Wong, 2024).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to show the importance of tourist-to-tourist interaction and the emotional implications on experiential tourism as well as the various benefits obtained for their physical and emotional health when they participate in special trips. These trips are beneficial for relationships and socializing. Social interactions are related to positive physical and psychological health such as relieving stress and enhancing positive emotions. Practicing experiential tourism helps people unlock and use their

own resources creatively in a process of conscious evolution based on freedom of choice and responsibility. This research will be developed by following the specific research objectives.

These specific objectives of the research were:

- identifying the relationship between tourist-to-tourist interaction and the emotional implications on experiential tourism resulting from tourist participation in certain tours and programs;

- identifying and evaluating the emotional benefits resulting from trips and identifying the cultural, social, emotional and medical advantages that the participants can obtain during any trip;

- analysis of the scientific literature regarding the multiple advantages and implications of tourist-to-tourist interaction and emotional implications on experiential tourism and tourist emotional health;

- analysis of data collected through the quantitative research tool, the questionnaire; presentation of socio-medical and emotional benefits resulting from tourists' participation in certain trips;

- dissemination of research results and the final conclusions.

As part of the research, I used the questionnaire to collect information about the social and emotional benefits resulting from participation of tourists in specific tours and programs. The questionnaire was created in Google Forms from the Google Docs ePlatform. Compliance with the legal provisions on the protection of personal data was insured. The research was carried out between November the 1st 2024 and February the 1st 2025.

The questions of the questionnaire were formulated in accordance with the mentioned objectives. In developing the questionnaire, I paid special attention to both the general rules recommended by theory for the realization of questionnaires, as well as those aimed at the form of presentation: formulation of questions, their sequence, balance between closed and open questions. The questions included in the questionnaire were of two types: closed questions with precoded answers options, dichotomous (yes/no type) or multiple (with ordinal scale in 5 steps with the following meanings: 1 = totally disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = rather disagree, 4 = rather agree, 5 = totally agree) and an open question with the role of identifying research attributes.

The questionnaire was structured in such a way as to lead to obtaining relevant, correct and complete information to identify the beneficial and multiplying effects that can be achieved by each tourist following participation in cultural and religious tours and programs.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data collected on the tourists' responses to the questionnaire, it appears that 102 tourists participated in the study, including 79 women (77,5%) and 23 men (22,5%). The larger number of women shows the greater inclination of the female gender towards trips, emotions and religion. The respondents included in the study are aged between 18 and 75 years. 58,8% of the respondents who participated in this study are aged between 18 and 45 years old.

Among the respondents, 32,3% increased high school education, 23,5% increased graduate education and 44,1% increased master and doctoral education. The largest number of respondents included in the study is represented by tourists with higher education (67,6%). 75,4% represent tourists from the urban environment and 24,6% represent tourists from the rural environment. Some of the respondents, namely 17,6% are still students while 40,2% are employed, 3,9% are self-employed, 5,9% are unemployed, 31,4% are retirees and only 1 % are entrepreneurs.

Regarding the monthly income, 26,5% of the respondents obtain incomes below 2500 ron, 12,7% obtain incomes between 2501-3500 ron, 22,5% obtain incomes over 5500 ron, 18,6% obtain incomes between 4501-5500 ron and only 19,6% obtain incomes between 3501-4500 ron.

Related to the question: How much do you like to travel, where 1 represents very little and 5 very much? 79,4% of respondents gave the maximum value 5, 13,7% gave the value 4, 5,9% gave the value 3 while only 0% of respondents gave the value 2 and only 1% gave the minimum value 1 (Figure 1).

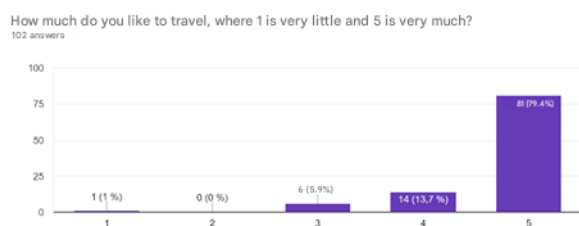


Figure 1. The respondent's percentage answers to the question: How much do you like to travel?

Source: created by the author

Therefore, we can consider that the most participants of this study love to travel and interact with each other whatever the destination visited, or the tourist attractions are included in the travel program.

Another representative question of this study asked to the respondents was: How often do you travel on tours and tourist programs of any kind? where 45,1% of tourists answered *several times a year*, 19,6% of respondents travel on tours and tourist programs *once a week or more often*, 12,7% of respondents

answered *two or three times a month*, 11,8% of respondents answered *once a month*, 8,8% of respondents answered *once a year or less* and finally and only 2% of respondents answered *never* (Figure 2).

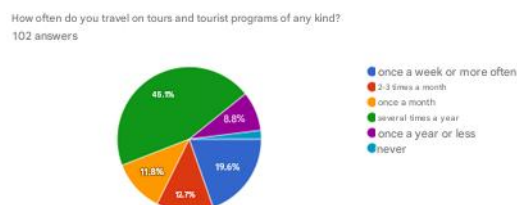


Figure 2. The respondent's percentage answers to the question: How often do you travel on tours and tourist programs of any kind?

Source: created by the author

The obtained results demonstrate that almost half of the people travel several times a year on tours and tourist programs of any kind (45,1%), a significant percentage of respondents (24,5%) travel one, two or three times on a month and another significant percentage of respondents, namely 19,6%, travel on excursions and programs once a week or more often. If we consider the fact that most of respondents of this study are women and they are younger or adults who put a particular emphasis on interacting with new people for more life experiences and pleasant memories, we can conclude that the tendency to travel in any type of tourist programs is oriented more than a half towards younger or adult people aged between 18 and 45 years (58,8%) and almost half towards elder people or retirees (41,2%).

At the question: When you go on vacation, do you choose certain tourist destinations to which you are emotionally attached, which have a sentimental meaning for you? 33,3% of respondents answered *sometimes yes*, *sometimes no*, 30,4% of respondents answered *yes, every time I travel*, 20,6% of respondents answered *yes, many times*, 12,7% of respondents answered *rare* and only 2,9% of respondents answered *no, I never choose a tourist destination that have emotional meaning for me* (Figure 3).

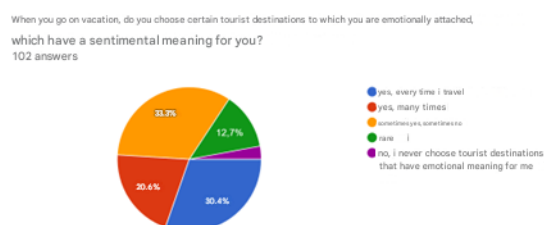


Figure 3. When you go on vacation, do you choose certain tourist destinations to which you are emotionally attached, which have a sentimental meaning for you?

Source: created by the author

The results show that the most of respondents, 51%, choose certain tourist destinations to which they are emotionally attached and which have a sentimental meaning for them. However, a percentage of 33,3% of respondents answered that they sometimes choose tourist destinations they are emotionally attached to and sometimes not. This means that when they choose the tourist destinations where they go on vacation, tourists are influenced by other decision-making factors besides emotional factors. And finally, only 12,7% of respondents consider that there is no emotional factor in choosing their tourist destination. Therefore, a very large number of tourists choose to visit certain tourist destinations for emotional and attachment reasons.

And finally, at the question: How loyal are you in visiting certain tourist destinations, where 1 represents a little loyal and five a lot loyal? 52,9% of respondents gave the maximum value 5, 9,8% gave the value 4, 13,7% gave the value 3 while only 16,7% of respondents gave the value 2 and another 6,9% gave the minimum value 1 (Figure 4).

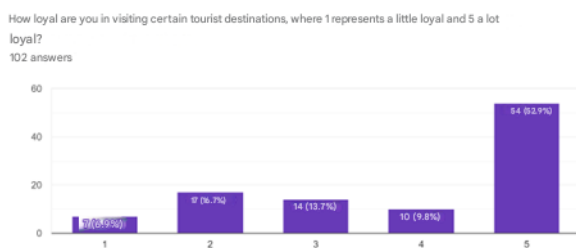


Figure 4. How loyal are you in visiting certain tourist destinations, where 1 represents a little loyal and five a lot loyal?

Source: created by the author

Therefore, we can conclude that most participants from this study are loyal in visiting certain tourist destinations, they love to interact and visit various tourist attractions on which they are emotionally attached.

The results show that the impact of tourist-to-tourist interaction and the emotional implications on experiential tourism are very important factors that affect the whole tourist experience. The study findings also highlight the salience of emotions in understanding tourist responses to hedonic services. Specifically, pleasure is positively linked to both satisfaction and loyalty behaviors.

I believe that future extensive analysis of the practical implications for pleasure-based services, including most experiential services such as leisure, and travel services, should be considered.

V.CONCLUSIONS

This research has shown that social interactions are related to positive physical and psychological health such as relieving stress and enhancing positive emotions. The visitors exhibited a variation in emotions depending on the places visited, their activities, and the people they encountered. It is concluded that the ability to measure travelers' emotions in real time and in natural settings leads to new knowledge about the relationship between travelers' emotions and the physical and social environments, which, in turn, provides a useful basis for designing and managing tourism experiences.

These findings contribute to the development of tourism experience research from the perspective of tourist-to-tourist interaction and the social interaction literature by examining the unique interaction mechanism between tourists. Also, the findings of this study are beneficial for understanding the social benefits of tourist-to-tourist interaction from the perspective of social psychology.

Finally, based on the results, this paper provides some suggestions for tourism companies to improve their services. Tourism companies and tour guides should manage compatibility with tourists and try to ensure that tourists of a given tour group are from the same organization, community, or place, which allows for more in-depth communications; increase social support, such as creating a favorable atmosphere, introducing members to each other, organizing group activities, encouraging members to communicate and help each other. Because these measures activate tourist-to-tourist interaction, which can improve social bonding and subjective well-being; adopt measures to resolve contradictions when there are misunderstandings or even conflicts between tourists, avoiding passive tourist-to-tourist interaction.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to provide further insight on how to improve benefits for both tourists and tourism service providers by managing tourist-to-tourist interactions. Consequently, future research is suggested to adopt interdependent, coevolutionary, and/or integrated perspectives to expand the current tourism literature.

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