The Effects of International Travel on the Tourist: Seeing and Clearing Methodological Roadblocks

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"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrowmindedness" – Mark Twain

"Too often travel, instead of broadening the mind, merely lengthens the conversation" – Elizabeth Drew

ABSTRACT: Measuring change such as the effects of the travel experience on the tourist requires the collection of before and after data and the analysis of the difference between the two. To do so for an overseas tourist segment is a relatively difficult, time-consuming and expensive undertaking, and as a result has been done in very few studies. This paper presents methodological procedures used to obtain pre- and post-trip measures of and therefore change in the destination perceptions and attitudes of a Japanese tourist segment. The study’s methodological considerations included scope (e.g. number and choice of methods; longitudinality), experimental design (e.g. control of extraneous variables), instrument design and pre-test (e.g. generation of destination attributes; construct validity), data collection procedures (e.g. the setting and timing of survey administration), data analysis procedures (e.g. requirements of statistical tests), and the cross-cultural context (e.g. language barriers; cultural attributes). Suggestions for replication and modification of the methodology for future research on tourist perception and attitude change are given. Other methods and approaches of value in measuring the quantitative and qualitative effects of travel are outlined.

Introduction

Although most writers and researchers are more inclined to suggest the former point-of-view, that travel enhances one’s knowledge, enlightenment or broadmindedness, to date there has been almost no research demonstrating the effects of travel on the tourist. Arguments for increased development and promotion of global tourism are often based on a combination of its economic contribution as the second largest item in world trade (Gyte 1988) and its humanistic contribution as a major force for socio-economic development, international understanding, and indeed “world peace”. There is ample evidence of the former, that is tourism’s economic effects in the form of foreign exchange earnings and job creation, but precious little evidence of the latter, tourism’s humanistic contribution in the form of social, cultural or intellectual enhancement for either the host population or the tourist. Indeed, in terms of tourism’s effects on host communities, research has found the social and environmental impacts of tourism to be largely negative (Mathieson and Wall 1982). With respect to travel’s effects on the tourist, there have been a handful of studies reporting negative psychological and physiological effects, although causation was not strictly tested (Strelitzer 1979; Pearce 1981; Morris 1982). In terms of tourism’s effects on tourists’ perceptions and attitudes with respect to the environment, there has been very little research carried out. Two notable exceptions include a study by Pearce (1982a) in which a repertory grid technique was used to measure before-and-after perceptions of small groups of travellers to Greece and Morocco, and a recent study by Gyte (1988), essentially a replication of Pearce’s work on travellers to Holland and Menorca. Both found changes on a limited number of constructs regarding tourists’ perceptions of their destination environment and their home environment.

The measurement of the effects of travel on the tourist is an area in urgent need of further research. However, the conceptual and methodological roadblocks
to such research are considerable, not the least of which is the need for before-and-after measures in order to demonstrate change. The purpose of this paper is to outline some of these methodological difficulties, and to illustrate procedures that were used in a recent study of tourist perception and attitude change to overcome these obstacles.

For the purposes of this paper, learning is considered to be a tripartite concept that can include the acquisition of knowledge or beliefs (cognitive change), the modification of pre-existing values or attitudes (affective change), and/or a change in behavioural intentions (conative change) (Brislin 1981; Lovelock and Weinberg 1984; Gray 1985). The study on which this paper is based focused on changes in belief and attitude with respect to the tourist destination: the province of British Columbia (BC), Canada, including its host population. However, the methodological problems and solutions discussed here are equally applicable to the study of beliefs, attitudes and behavioural intentions toward one’s home environment or with respect to spatial learning and behaviour.

Briefly, the Ph.D. research on which this paper is based sought to measure a Japanese tourist segment’s perceptions (beliefs) of and attitudes toward BC as a tourist destination (Andressen 1987). The methodology is presented in three sections beginning with the broad concerns of conceptualization and research design, followed by the increasingly narrow foci of the operationalization of variables and instrument design, and finally the procedures for data collection, including cross-cultural considerations. Suggestions for methodological improvements in future research are given throughout the paper.

**Conceptualization and Research Design**

An important consideration found lacking in previous research was the design of a study that could demonstrate causation. In order to achieve this goal, it was necessary to, first, identify variables that might be factors in enhancing or inhibiting perception and attitude change and, second, utilize an experimental design in order to test the effects of these variables. Given the lack of tourism research on travel’s effects, studies in the areas of cross-cultural education and ethnic conflict were analyzed, and these suggested three key variables as factors affecting an individual’s attitude change with respect to the host country and its people: (1) the individual’s pre-trip motives and attitudes, (2) the opportunities for contact with the host population, and (3) the type of interaction with the host population (Kelman 1975; Pearce 1982b; Sell 1983). It was hypothesized that these variables might also be factors affecting tourists’ perceptions and attitudes toward their destination. The study attempted to measure the effects of a slightly modified form of the two latter variables: the opportunity for tourist-environment interaction, and the type of tourist-environment interaction (Tab 1).

The construction of an experimental design to test the effects of these two variables was the major methodological difficulty of the study. It required (1) the selection of a tourist population whose perceptions and attitudes could be measured both before and after travel, (2) the existence of pre-existing subgroups within the population that differed with respect to the two variables opportunity for and type of tourist-environment interaction, and (3) the control of the effects of extraneous variables. Not surprisingly, then, a number of compromises had to be made in the final selection of a target population and the operationalization of the independent variables.

The selected study population consisted of pre-existing groups of Japanese summer English language students who travelled to Canada in July and August of 1986. They came in organized groups of 6 to 180 students per group, for periods ranging from 5 to 42 days, for the combined purposes of English language learning, cross-cultural experience, and pleasure travel. They studied at post-secondary institutions, primarily in BC, and they stayed in dormitories, at the homes of host Canadians, or some combination of the two. The programmes were highly structured, and all involved some travel within BC; some included very extensive travel such as pre- and post-programme excursions.

The nature of the nine groups for which permission for research was granted was such that the independent variables length of stay and type of accommodation could

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**Tab 1**

Research design matrix showing distribution of respondents

* Numbers in brackets refer to respondent numbers for which measures of both “attitude before” and “attitude after”, and therefore “attitude change”, were obtained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity for Tourist-Environment Interaction (Length of Stay)</th>
<th>Type of Tourist-Environment Interaction (Type of Accommodation)</th>
<th>Structured (dormitory)</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>Unstructured (homestay)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW (short stay)</td>
<td>42 (30)</td>
<td>85 (77)</td>
<td>49 (43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH (long stay)</td>
<td>96 (86)</td>
<td>14 (13)</td>
<td>16 (14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 302 (263)</td>
<td></td>
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