Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management xxx (xxxx) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jhtm

Utilizing attribution theory to develop new insights into tourism experiences

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Attribution
Tourist experiences
Bias
Mixed method
Individual differences

ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the tourist cognitions and the link between tourist attributions and both positive and negative tourist experiences. A mixed method research design was utilized: a qualitative approach used the critical incident technique to identify and describe tourists best and worst tourist experiences and then used a quantitative format to survey data on attribution theory, tourist characteristics and severity of the negative tourist experience. The results showed a strong self-protective attribution bias that was not related to tourist gender, cultural background or severity of the negative tourist incidents. Implications of these findings were discussed with some applied theoretical recommendations provided in an attempt to decrease the impact of negative word of mouth commentaries and future avoidance behaviours to destinations associated with negative tourist experiences.

1. Introduction

While there are many descriptive studies exploring tourist satisfaction, there is minimal research that attempts to determine the causes of tourist satisfaction levels – and even fewer that are associated with psychological explanations (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007; Hosany & Witham, 2010). This research uses attribution theory to explain how tourists understand their tourist experience. Previous findings in this area has determined that tourists apply a systematic cognitive bias to their explanations of tourist experiences: using self-enhancement explanations for their positive tourist outcomes and self-protective attributions to explain their negative tourist experiences (Jackson, White, & Schmierer, 1994). As a consequence, tourist appear to under-value the role of the tourist industry in providing quality tourist experiences and over-emphasise the part played by the tourist industry in their negative tourist experiences. This invariably leads to the failure of tourists to take responsibility for many of their negative tourist experiences including tourist crime victimization and avoidable threats to their health (Jackson & Schmierer, 1996; Schmierer & Jackson, 2006). This research extends previous studies into attribution theory and tourist behaviour by investigating other variables that may be critical in understanding this phenomena. These include: type of tourist industry; tourist gender; tourist cultural background and severity of negative tourist experiences.

The original research into attribution and tourist satisfaction (Jackson, White, & Schmierer, 1996) studied the relationship in terms of tourism (in general). However, tourism satisfaction has been found to vary between the various sectors that constitute the tourism industry (for example, hospitality, transport, entertainment, etc) (Amissah, 2013). This study investigated whether these different levels of satisfaction within each sector of the tourism industry can be explained by differences in tourist attributions. For instance, historically, travel was the prime goal of tourists (the Grand Tour), whereas currently travel is perceived as a means to get to a destination to commence tourist experiences (Jakle, 1985).

While there is extensive research into gender differences in tourist behaviour (Yang, Khoo-Latimore & Arcodia, 2017) and gender differences in attribution research (Ryckman & Peckham, 1987), no research has explored if gender plays a role in the degree of attribution bias in the tourist industry. Previous attribution research has shown that females are typically less susceptible to attribution bias than males (Larson, 1977). This research will investigate whether gender mediates the role of attribution in tourist satisfaction.

In terms of culture, there is evidence of cross cultural differences in the tendency to exhibit attribution bias; with Western (Individualistic) cultures more likely to display cognitive biases compared to non-Western (Collectivist) cultures (Al-Zahrani & Kaplowitz, 1993). Implications from this finding is that Western individualistic tourists may be more likely (compared to tourists from collectivist nations) to use self-enhancement and self-protective cognitive biases when explaining their positive and negative tourist experiences. This study will be the first to research cultural differences in tourist attribution bias.

Finally, tourist researchers (Breitsohl & Garrod, 2016; Choi & Cai, 2010) have reported more external attributions when explaining severe negative tourist experiences. This association appears to be related to the degree of negative emotions associated with such incidents (Weber, 2004). This implies that severe negative experiences are more likely to

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.04.007

trigger cognitive biases and allow tourists to use self-protective strategies. This research investigates this association.

This research explores the psychological mechanisms associated with tourist satisfaction and investigates key parameters that may explain individual differences. The research utilizes a mixed methodology approach: Flanagan's critical incident technique to qualitatively explore attribution biases associated with positive and negative tourist experiences, and a survey to quantify possible individual differences in cognitive biases associated with tourist satisfaction.

2. Literature review

While the tourism industry has continued to grow over the past 30 years, theory-driven research on tourists' perceptions of their travel experiences continues to lag behind (Abascal, Fluker, & Jiang, 2016; Choi & Cai, 2010; Decrop, 1999; Jackson et al., 1996). Since this early work on attribution theory and tourism, there has been very few studies exploring the way tourists process and interpret their tourism experiences. This is surprising given the important role attribution plays in determining satisfaction and the importance of tourist satisfaction in tourist re-visits and their word of mouth endorsements.

Early researchers in the area of tourist perceptions and cognitive thought processes utilized qualitative research methodology in an attempt to explore the unknown field of tourist experiences and to develop specific theories in this area (Jackson et al., 1994; Jackson et al., 1996; Moscardo, 1991; Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983; Ross, 1991). Ross (1991) utilized a qualitative methodology to explore how visitors rate tourist destinations (national park) and then developed a set of images/attributes for “ideal” destinations. Moscardo (1991) asked tourists about their behaviour when visiting/moving through museums. Moscardo's data reduction process recorded frequencies of key visitor behaviours and provided recommendations for improved museum design (to maximize visitor flow and satisfaction). Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) applied a qualitative analysis to both positive and negative critical tourist incidents. This data was then integrated into Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1968). Pearce & Caltabiano found that tourists perceived positive experiences primarily from three of needs: physiological (hedonistic activities); love and belongingness (enhance existing relationships); and, self-actualization needs (further understanding themselves and host cultures). For negative tourist experiences, tourists focussed on the failure of the industry to provide basic needs (eg in services such as transportation, hospitality and tourism).

Jackson et al. (1994) used the critical incident technique (see Flanagan, 1954). The Critical Incident Technique was developed by Flanagan (1954) and includes a set of procedures that are used for collecting direct observations of (extreme) positive and negative instances of specific human behaviours. These observations can be gathered in various ways, but typically respondents are asked to tell a story about an experience they have had. These stories are then analysed to determine the broad psychological principles that explain the differences between the positive and negative incidents. The ultimate goal of the Critical Incident Technique is to identify the critical cognitive interpretations, determine possible practical solutions and then evaluate implementation of such solutions. Advantages of using this methodology include: can be applied using questionnaires or interviews; is flexible, inexpensive, provides rich information, easy to understand; the data is collected from the respondent's perspective and in his or her own words; it does not force the respondents into any given theoretical framework; can identify even rare events that might be missed by other methods which only focus on common and everyday events; and, it is useful when problems occur but the cause and severity are not known.

In the original study, Jackson et al. (1994) utilized this critical incident technique to collect and qualitatively analyse 890 positive (best) and negative (worst) tourist experiences. Using qualitative data reduction techniques, they conceptualized these experiences into three major factors: internal person; interpersonal; and, external environmental. Included in the most positive tourist experiences were: internal person factors (understanding culture and heritage, appreciating food, benefits of being with people, being in control of the tourist experience, having freedom and being able to relax); interpersonal factors (positive host and tourist relationships, positive tourist experiences, and friendly interpersonal [family, friends] relationships); and, external environmental factors (presence of natural, built and heritage environments and experiencing tourist industry managed activities [package tours, tour guiding, theme parks and sporting tours]). These three factors also dominated the most negative (worst) tourist experiences. For example, person factors included physical health problems, tourist crime victimization, experiencing fear/emotional discomfort through cultural relativism (not understanding/accepting the host culture [including poverty]). Interpersonal factors included a wide range of negative people relationships (family, friends, other tourists, hosts and members of the tourist-hospitality industry). Finally, negative experiences associated with external environmental factors included inclement weather, sub-standard accommodation (and other facilities), transport errors and tourist venue closures or mechanical break-downs.

Jackson et al. (1996) converted this qualitative data into a quantitative application of Heider's (1958) attribution theory (a mixed method approach). Heider's attribution theory was originally developed to explain how non-scientific or naïve people explain every day events and how these explanations (or attributions) influence their perceptions and ultimate satisfaction of these events/experiences. The theory indicated that a person's own perceptions regarding success or failure about any activity will determine the amount of effort the person will engage in activities in the future. Attributions associated with a positive outcome attributions and high expectancy of future success, will lead to a greater willingness to approach similar tasks in the future compared to activities that led to negative outcomes. Through qualitative research (asking informants to explain the outcomes of their everyday behaviours), three dimensions were identified: locus of control (internal versus external causes); level of stability (stable or permanent cause versus an unstable or changing attribute); and, degree of controllability (specific to that behaviour or instance versus global or a consequence that impacts on the whole of a person's life). While people strive to find reasons for behaviours, they often develop biases or faulty reasoning – that are either self-enhancing (strengthen their egos) or self-protective (protect their egos by blaming others for their own mistakes). These can include: fundamental attribution bias (focus on internal causes of another's behaviour); actor-observer bias (attribute internal attributions to another's mistakes but blame own errors on situational factors); and, a self-serving bias - take personal credit for positive outcomes (self-enhancement) and blame others for any negative outcome (self-protective).

Jackson et al. (1996) reduced both positive and negative tourist experiences to the two major attribution dimensions: locus of control and degree of stability. Locus of control has been conceptualized as either internal (tourist outcomes attributed to ability or effort) or external (tourist outcomes attributed to task ease/difficulty or luck). The second dimension is level of stability and focuses on whether these outcomes are stable (inherent in the person or setting) or unstable (vary from one time to another). By quantifying the data, the results showed that tourists were equally likely to attribute positive tourist experiences to internal or external factors but were statistically more likely to attribute the reason/cause to stable factors (ability/skill or task ease). However, tourists attributed negative tourist experiences to external factors (task difficulty/tourist situational challenges and bad luck). For negative tourist experiences, there was no statistical difference in terms of level of stability.

Current researchers, mainly using students in laboratory experiments, have found a link between tourist previous experiences and recall of causal attributions and how these then influence future preferences (Lasuer, 2007). Choi and Cai (2016a) investigated the complex

relationship of attribution theory and negative nature-based incidents such as weather and found the importance of global (rather than specific) attributions in predicting levels of satisfaction under these types of (uncontrollable events). Breitsohl and Garrod (2016) studied attribution processes and the presence of unethical destination incidents (inappropriate searches during airport scanning) and found that such unethical behaviour leads to negative emotions, external attributions (blaming industry) and subsequent negative word of mouth (WoM) recommendations and intention to avoid such incidents and destinations in the future.

This cognitive bias (more internal attributions to explain positive experiences and more external attributions for negative experiences) has been studied and found in most areas of attribution research (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Miller & Ross, 1975; Ross, 1977; Weary, Stanley, & Harvey, 1989). These researchers have concluded that people make internal attribution s for successful/positive outcomes for self-enhancement reasons (Miller & Ross, 1975) and utilize external attributions to explain negative outcomes to protect their egos (Jones & Nisbett. 1972). The findings of Jackson et al. (1996) are consistent. That is, tourists conceptualize their tourism experiences within Heider's attribution framework (including the self-serving bias). That is, tourists perceive themselves to be central and in control of their positive tourist experiences and this leads to the self-enhancement of their egos – they positively recall and see themselves as the primary cause of these experiences. In contrast, tourists attribute negative tourist experiences to external factors (primarily natural events [weather or geography] and the tourism industry). This attribution bias minimizes in their mind their responsibility/role in these events and thus protects their ego (a self-protective strategy). However, this cognitive bias leads to increased negative perceptions of the industry and this, in turn, leads to an increased level of criticism and blame. This is a challenge for an industry that relies on WoM and consumer satisfaction from tourists to maintain market share.

The next logical phase in this research is to utilize a quantitative (survey) approach to explain and achieve a greater understanding of the role of attribution in the tourism industry. The use of the mixed method approach (following qualitative studies with quantitative research) allows researchers to understand the processes (how tourists attribute causation) and to then determine whether the rates of these processes vary in terms of tourist attributes (gender and cultural background) and tourist industry type (for example, transport, hospitality, tourism environment or tourist activities). For example, a number of cross cultural researchers (Chang, 2007; Reisinger & Turner, 2002; Smith & Bond, 1993) have indicated that people from individualistic cultures (for example, from United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand) are more likely to demonstrate attribution biases than people from collectivist cultures (for example, most nation states in Asia).

Finally, there has been some research investigating severity of negative tourist experiences. Researchers have found more severe the negative tourist experience the greater the negative emotions (Lee, 2004; Roseman, 1996; Weber, 2004) and a higher frequency of external attributions/blame (Breitsohl & Garrod, 2016:; Choi & Cai, 2016b). The stronger the blame of the industry (external attribution), the greater the degree of perceived similarity (unstable attributions), the more likely tourists will use negative WoM (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Ward & Ostrum, 2006) and avoidance strategies (avoid this and similar situations – global attributions) (Breitsohl & Garrod, 2016). However, having a positive attitude toward the tourist industry (or a particular part of the industry) will mitigate the negative cognitive emotional reaction (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014) and negative behaviours (WoM and avoidance) (Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011). This can best be understood in terms of self-protective behaviours through short and long term coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). For example, in a qualitative study, Tuzovic (2010) showed that both negative WoM and avoidance behaviour were chosen by airline travellers after a service failure. However, the ultimate outcome of using negative WoM and avoidance behaviours has a negative impact on future destination choices (Coombs & Holladay, 2007).

The aim of this research is to utilize a qualitative - quantitative survey to determine if there are differences in attributions for positive and negative tourist experiences and whether the outcome is dependent on tourist gender, tourist cultural background, level of seriousness for negative tourist experiences and type of tourist industry.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

One thousand and twenty three adult participants were surveyed regarding their most positive and their most negative tourist experience. The sample was made up of 370 males (36%) with an average age of the whole sample being 25.6 years (age range 18 years–71 years). This sample is gender-biased and is significantly younger than the current Australian average of 37 years (ABS, 2016). Hence, this study focusses on attribution processes and cautions against using this data for normative comparisons.

3.2. Materials

A new attribution survey was developed for this research and included:

1. Demographics – participant gender, participant age and cultural background (self-nominated national identity. Hofstede (1991) surveyed the cultural values of 117,000 + citizens of 50 nation states and determined that cultures vary on four dimensions – including Individualism – Collectivism. Utilizing Hofstede's (1991) table, each national identity in this research was classified as individualistic [eg Australia, United States of America], in-between cultures [India, Japan] or collectivist [Indonesia, Pakistan].
2. Participants provided an open response to their most positive (best) tourist experience and most negative (worst) tourist experience utilizing Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Technique). This data was primarily used to determine the context of the experiences (that is, the specific sector within the broad tourism) and their naïve reasons for the cause of those experiences (Heider, 1958).
3. At set of attribution questions (answered on a dichotomous scale [yes/no]) to determine the following attribution dimensions
   a. Locus of control – internal versus external attribution of cause [Example: Do you believe you were ultimately responsible for this outcome?]
   b. Level of stability – stable versus unstable [Example: Given similar circumstances, do you believe the same outcome would occur?]
   c. Level of control – specific or global [Example: Do you believe the outcome of this experience is limited to this situation?]

The complete combination of attributions is represented in the following figure (See Fig. 1).

3.3. Procedure

Participants were recruited using a snowball convenience sample utilizing University students completing a semester long research project. Each student was required to survey 20 members of the general community. While encouraged to recruit across all age groups, the sample is skewed toward a younger sample – a disadvantage of using the snowball sampling methodology (Andrews, 2015). The survey was completed online during 2016 and was purely voluntary. Results were uploaded to IBM SPSS Statistics 22 (2015) and the nominal data was analysed utilizing the Chi-square statistic.

	Internal		External	
	Stable	**Unstable**	**Stable**	**Unstable**
Specific	Particular tourist skill	Special effort by tourist	Expected support from a known other	Special help from others
Global	General ability of tourist	Emotions/mood experienced by tourist	Task difficulty	Luck/chance

Fig. 1. Attribution dimensions and simple descriptions for each combination.

4. Results

4.1. Qualitative report -descriptives

Within the sample there were examples of all eight combinations of the Attribution model. An illustrative positive and negative tourist example of each combination and the percentage of cases in each profile follow:

1. Internal, stable, specific
   Positive tourist experience – tourism activity

   To make all my holidays enjoyable, I take special care to pre-plan trips (in contrast to other aspects of my life)

   Negative tourist experience - health

   I got food poisoning in Bali, the food tasted fine but there is always a chance of such health risks when you go on holiday

2. Internal, stable, global
   Positive tourist experience – tourism entertainment

   On holidays, I chose a concert with a particular musical genre; these types of bands consistently provide excellent entertainment

   Negative tourist experience - finance

   In general, I am bad at managing money, as consequence I ran out of money while travelling overseas

3. Internal, unstable, specific
   Positive tourist experience – transport

   On asking for help to use public transport, the commuters in Vancouver were lovely, something unexpected (especially when compared to Australia)

   Negative tourist experience - health

   While travelling, I over-reacted and had an enormous fight with my mother. It was specific to that trip and will never re-occur

4. Internal, unstable, global
   Positive tourist experience – tourism venue

   This time it was my choice; we went to Disneyland with the kids and thoroughly enjoyed it. This type of theme part is always enjoyable

   Negative tourist experience - crime

   I got scammed (purchased expensive entrance tickets) but have learned from this and now avoid such "deals"

5. External, stable, specific
   Positive tourist experience – tourism venue

   The family decided to holiday in Bangkok. We had previously been to Thailand and have consistently had wonderful holidays

   Negative tourist experience - culture

   I constantly go charged extra at the markets in the Philippines. It is likely to happen to tourists in foreign countries when you cannot speak the local language

6. External, stable, global
   Positive tourist experience – tourism venue

   The spectacular scenery (riverboat cruise in Europe) created a beautiful trip and while you never know when such scenery will occur, it always leads to good feelings

   Negative tourist experience – tourist activity

   My fellow traveller often acts in a rude and arrogant manner. I continually react negatively and it colours the way I judge Australian tourists abroad

7. External, unstable, specific
   Positive tourist experience – hospitality

   I tripped over a raised tile in the hotel bathroom. According to hotel policy, they upgraded my accommodation. Thankfully such an accident has not re-occurred

   Negative tourist experience - transport

   The airline lost my suitcase during overseas travel. I know it rarely happens but it is very disruptive when it does

8. External, unstable, global
   Positive tourist experience – weather

   Traditionally, the family goes to the Gold Coast for Xmas. While you cannot predict the weather, it was sunny and fine and such perfect weather always improves my mood

   Negative tourist experience - crime

   On a trip to Cairns, my friend and I were walking in the street and were approached by a local for bus fare. We gave him our change but he demanded more and made such a scene that the police were called

4.2. Role of attribution bias for positive and negative tourist experiences

Table 1 provides descriptive data for the attributions of participants for their most positive and most negative tourist experiences. The results illustrate that for positive experiences, tourists are more likely to use internal, stable attributions (57.8%) compared to either external, stable (11.7%) and/or external, unstable attributions (19.5%). In contrast, the modal profile for negative tourist experiences was external, unstable attributions (49.7%) compared to internal, stable attributions (11.0%). These results support previous research and demonstrate a clear attribution bias. Interestingly, level of control (global versus specific) did not discriminate between the best and the worst tourist

Table 1
Frequency of each possible Attribution Profiles for Positive and Negative Tourist Experiences.

Profile	% of positive cases (N = 1022)	% of negative cases (N = 1023)
Internal, stable, specific	25.3%	7.1%
Internal, stable, global	32.5%[a]	3.9%
Internal, unstable, specific	5.8%	12.3%
Internal, unstable, global	4.5%	7.7%
External, stable, specific	6.5%	18.7%
External, stable, global	5.2%	7.1%
External, unstable, specific	15.6%	31.0%[b]
External, unstable, global	3.9%	11.6%

[a] Modal profile for positive tourist experiences – praise/credit self with a dispositional focus that will have a wide impact on their future life.
[b] Modal profile for negative tourist experience – blame tourist industry for variable service that is quarantined to this tourism experience.

experience.

4.3. Type of tourist industry by positive and negative tourist experiences

Table 2 reports on the tourist industry's associated with positive and negative tourist experiences. Positive tourist experiences are associated with participants engaging in tourist activities, visiting friends and relatives and exploring host cultures. A significant number of tourists also associated their best tourist experience with accommodation and hospitality services. In contrast, the worst tourist experiences were associated with the tourist transport industry, loss of personal health and the lack of personal safety. A significant number of tourists reported their most negative tourist experience was associated with the hospitality industry. There was a significant difference between the different types of tourist industries, with hospitality being strongly involved in both the best and the worst of tourist experiences.

4.4. Quantitative

4.4.1. Positive tourist experiences

The attribution profile for positive tourist experiences was analysed using a Chi-square analysis. Both locus of control and level of stability differ in line with attribution bias and summarized in Table 3. These results highlight individual differences associated with positive tourist experiences. Confirming the results from the qualitative analysis, tourists utilized an internal, stable attribution for positive tourist experiences. There was no significant attribution bias for level of control or culture (individualistic versus collectivist). There was a gender difference but only for internal locus of control.

4.4.2. Negative tourist experiences

In contrast, the statistical significant attribution bias for negative tourist experiences (see Table 4.) was for (external) locus of control.

Table 3
Positive Tourist Experiences (N = 1022).

1. Locus of control	Internal [68.8%]	External [31.2%]	$\chi^2 = 7.98$ [df = 1] $p < 0.05$
2. Stability	Stable [69.5%]	Unstable [30.5%]	$\chi^2 = 8.01$ [df = 1] $p < 0.05$
3. Level of control	Specific [54.5%]	Global [45.5%]	$\chi^2 = 0.17$ [df = 1] ns

4. There was a gender difference in positive attributions for locus of control [$\chi^2 = 5.47$ [df = 1] $p < 0.05$] but no gender differences for stability or level of control.
5. No cultural differences in positive attributions in terms of locus of control, stability and level of control

Note: In terms of profile, tourist positive attributions are internal, stable and specific.

Table 4
Negative Tourist Experiences (N = 1023).

1. Locus of control	Internal [32.9%]	External [67.1%]	$\chi^2 = 7.11$ [df = 1] $p < 0.05$
2. Stability	Stable [38.1%]	Unstable [61.9%]	$\chi^2 = 0.93$ [df = 1] ns
3. Level of control	Specific [32.3%]	Global [67.7%]	$\chi^2 = 1.31$ [df = 1] ns

4. No gender differences in negative attributions in terms of locus of control, stability and level of control
5. No cultural differences in negative attributions in terms of locus of control, stability and level of control
6. No severity differences in negative attributions in terms of locus of control, stability and level of control

* In terms of profile, tourist negative attributions are external, unstable and global.

Table 5
Tourist positive (N = 1022) versus Tourist Negative Attributions (N = 1023).[a]

Attribution	Positive	Negative	Significance
1. Locus of control	Internal [68.8%]	Internal [32.9%]	$\chi^2 = 7.70$ [df = 1] $p < 0.05$
2. Stability	Stable [69.5%]	Stable [38.1%]	$\chi^2 = 5.23$ [df = 1] $p < 0.05$
3. Level of control	Specific [54.5%]	Specific [32.3%]	$\chi^2 = 2.09$ [df = 1] ns

[a] In terms of consistency, only 37.7% used the same locus of control attribution for both positive and negative attributions.

4.4.3. Attribution bias: positive and negative tourist experiences

Table 5 illustrates the overall attribution bias in the tourist industry. Comparing positive and negative tourist experiences, there was a statistically significant attribution bias for both locus of control and degree of stability. Positive tourist experiences were dominated by internal, stable attributions (self-enhancing) and negative tourist experiences were dominated by external, unstable attributions (self-protective). A second (but indirect) measure of this bias is the low level of consistency of attributions (37.7%) within each participant for positive and negative tourist experiences.

4.4.4. Tourist industry by attribution bias for positive tourist experiences

Table 6 provides a summary data evaluating attribution bias for

Table 2
Type of Tourist Industry by Positive and Negative Tourist Experiences.[a]

Type[b]	Tourist activity	Crime	Host Culture	Health	Hospit-ality	Transport	Venue	VFR
Positive	33.5%	0.6%	11%	1.8%	12.3%	4.5%	13.5%	11%
Negative	2.6%	18.7%	8.4%	12.5%	12.3%	26.5%	4.5%	3.2%

[a] $\chi^2 = 33.68$ [df = 7] $p < 0.05$.
[b] < 10% on both positive and negative includes weather, retail, and entertainment.

Table 6
Positive attributions by tourist experience.

Activity (N)	Ability	Effort	Task ease	Luck	Significance (χ^2 [df = 1])
Tourist activity (N = 342)	59%	22.1%	16.4%	2.5%	$\chi^2 = 1.09$ not significant
Host culture (N = 122)	80.6%	1.6%	12.9%	4.8%	$\chi^2 = 9.62$ $p < 0.05$
Hospitality (N = 126)	28.6%	2.0%	14.3%	55.1%	$\chi^2 = 22.50$ $p < 0.05$
Tourist venue (N = 138)	47.1%	3.9%	25.5%	23.5%	$\chi^2 = 10.40$ $p < 0.05$
VFR (N = 122)	84.4%	6.0%	1.0%	6.5%	$\chi^2 = 8.88$ $p < 0.05$

each of the tourist industries nominated by participants as being associated with their most positive tourist experience. The findings indicate that tourists used a self-enhancing attribution strategy when explaining their best tourist experience (that is, taking credit for this positive experience). There was a statistically significant attribution bias associated with visiting friends and relatives, when exploring the host culture, when attending tourist venues, and for their positive experiences involving the hospitality industry. The only tourist industry that did not show this self-enhancing attribution bias was the positive experiences while engaging in their own tourist activities. This positive experience was dominated by internal attributions but focused both on their abilities/skill and their effort/motivation.

4.4.5. Tourist industry by attribution bias for negative tourist experiences

Table 7 illustrates self-protective attribution bias for crime victimization; for problems with the hospitality industry and with the transport industry (most delays, missed connections and lost luggage). There was no reported bias when these tourists attributed causation to health-related problems. For tourist health-related problems, participants demonstrated a strong tendency to blame others or just bad luck when they were explaining the cause of their illness – even though most health professionals would indicate that these illness are overwhelmingly preventive.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Participants had no difficulty describing their most positive and most negative tourist experiences (qualitative methodology) and were able to provide clear answers in terms of locus of control, degree of stability and level of control (quantitative methodology).

5.1. Qualitative analysis

The eight possible profiles were represented for both the most positive and the most negative tourist experiences. The modal profile for positive attributions was internal, stable and specific compared to an external, unstable and global modal profile for attributions for the most negative tourist experiences.

Table 7
Negative attributions by tourist experience.

Activity (N)	Ability	Effort	Task diff.	Luck	Significance (χ^2 [df = 1])
Crime (N = 191)	14.3%	26.5%	24.5%	38.7%	$\chi^2 = 3.99$ $p < 0.05$
Health (N = 126)	4.5%	34.1%	20.5%	40.9%	$\chi^2 = 2.59$ not significant
Hospitality (N = 125)	14.3%	16.3%	12.2%	57.1%	$\chi^2 = 5.62$ $p < 0.05$
Transport (N = 271)	7.8%	2.4%	31.0%	37.1%	$\chi^2 = 4.79$ [df = 1] $p < 0.05$

5.2. Quantitative analysis

In terms of attributions associated with positive tourist experiences, tourists made significantly more internal and stable attributions (self-enhancement strategies). Statistically, the attribution profile for positive tourist experiences was Internal, Stable, Specific, which was consistent with the above qualitative analysis. In contrast, tourists made significantly more external attributions for their worst tourist experiences (blamed others and/or the tourist industry). Statistically, the attribution profile for the negative tourist experiences was the opposite of the positive experiences: that is, External, Unstable, Global. This was substantially consistent with the qualitative analysis of the profiles [level of control varied]. There was a significant shift when comparing attributions of positive tourist experiences with negative tourist experiences: a shift from internal and stable for best tourist experiences to external and unstable for the worst tourist experiences. That is, tourists take credit for their own positive tourist experiences and blame others for their worst (most negative) tourist experiences. The result demonstrates an inconsistency of attributions within each tourist – with only 37.7% of tourists making the same locus of control attributions for both positive and negative tourist experiences. This demonstrates a strong (self-protective) attribution bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Ross, 1977).

In terms of gender differences, the only significant difference was that males made more internal attributions for negative tourist attributions. When comparing tourists from either Individualistic with Collectivist cultures, there was no significant difference. There were statistically no differences in terms severity of negative tourist experience. Finally, there were substantial statistically significant differences in terms of type of industry (both within the positive and negative tourist experiences, but also between these experiences). For positive tourist experiences the main tourist industry types were: tourist activity, tourist venue/attraction, hospitality industry and then the host culture. For negative tourist experiences, the industries in order were: transportation, criminal justice system, health and hospitality. Of interest is the wide definition of tourist industry that was required to cover both positive tourist experiences [host culture] and negative tourist experiences [crime and health]. Finally, comparing attributions within tourism with work, participants only made more internal attributions for positive work experiences.

There continues to be a need for more (attribution) theory-based research; with a continued focus on applying theory to the resolution of practical issues with the tourist industry. Heider's (1958) attribution theory explores how the (general) tourist tries to comprehend their tourist experience and how this understanding influences future travel decisions – their own (avoidance) behaviour or influencing others' behaviours via WoM.

This research replicates and extends previous research on the role of attributions in ascertaining tourist satisfaction (Jackson et al., 1994, 1996). Using Flanagan's critical incident technique, it was confirmed that tourists use an attribution bias to interpret and understand their most positive and most negative tourist experiences (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Miller & Ross, 1975). Tourists typically use an internal, stable, global attribution profile for their most positive tourist experiences. This profile leads to self-enhancement cognitions where tourists attribute success to their ability (internal); their skills (stable) and believe the consequences of these outcomes will influence many aspects of their future lives (global) (Miller & Ross, 1975). However, these very same tourists bias these attributions when interpreting their worst tourist experiences and use an external, unstable and specific attribution style. This shift (attribution bias) is conceptualized by the theory as a self-protective strategy where the tourist use an external attribution (blame others including the tourist industry), an unstable attribution (something that varies over time) and a specific attribution (has no implications or future impact on the tourist) (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). The two major implications associated with this self-protective strategy are that tourists will blame the tourist industry for their misfortunes and will

take little/no responsibility to change their own behaviour. While such attributions for some negative travel experiences are realistic (eg, lost luggage) there are other negative experiences that tourists can play an active role in minimizing negative impacts (eg tourist crime victimization or threats to physical health) (Jackson & Schmierer, 1996; Schmierer et al., 2011; Wilks, Pendergast, & Leggat, 2011). For negative tourist experiences that industry has principal control over such as lost luggage during international travel, then airlines can be more proactive. While statistics show that the percentage of lost luggage has decreased by eight percent over the last five years to an all-time low (0.3% of all luggage, Travel and Leisure, 2016), there are two proactive strategies the airline industry s should employ. The first is to continue to put in place strategies to prevent the initial loss of luggage especially when the transport industry accounts to 26.5% of tourists worst tourist experience (although these worst experiences also include cancellations, delays and missed connections). The second strategy is the way the industry re-dresses these issues – given the high rates of external attributions (blame) placed on the industry. Interestingly, 4.5% of tourists indicated their most positive tourist experience was transportation and most were in response to re-dressing these negative experiences – these included apologies, acceptance of responsibility and then short-term compensation (immediate monetary reparation to cover costs associated with temporary loss or a promise of a ticket upgrade on their next subsequent trip).

This research also explored the cultural background of tourists. In past research, people from collectivist cultures were found to be less likely to demonstrate attribution bias (that is, they tended to blame themselves rather than others) for their most negative tourist experience. This research did not find any such cultural difference. This supports other cultural research that have found that people from collectivist cultures will use immediate internal attributions (blame themselves) – a self-effacing strategy with a primary motivation of "saving face" for people working in the tourist industry. However, the findings of this research pertain to the long-term reflection of these negative experiences and demonstrate that all tourists (regardless of their cultural background) are more likely to use self-protective (external) attributions when explaining their worst tourist experiences (Breitsohl & Garrod, 2016; Chang, 2007; Smith & Bond, 1993).

Exploring the severity of negative tourist incidences found that severity was not significantly related to (or did not affect) tourist attributions. This finding indicates that attribution of blame is immune from the degree of severity. The next study in this sequence should determine whether severity of the most negative tourist experience has a greater impact on negative WoM recommendations and future avoidance of these tourist activities or destinations (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Tuzovic, 2010).

5.3. Practical applications

This study allows the application of attribution theory to managing tourist and hospitality industries. This can occur through an informed understanding of tourism attribution biases and the development of strategies to improve the overall tourist experience. First, tourism and hospitality managers need to understand the way in which tourists attribute causality to their experiences. Knowing that tourists will take credit for their positive experiences and attribute negative experiences to the industry allow managers and staff to prepare themselves for biased cognitions and feedback. Second, managers can become aware of what features of their businesses attract the most negative attributions. Typically these aspects can be analysed by managers in terms of locus of control: that is, determining whether management or the tourist has control over the outcome of these events. For experiences that are under the control of the tourist and hospitality industry, managers can focus on changing business practices to minimise the occurrence of these negative events. For example, reducing access to an accommodation venue at night will minimise on-site crime (both assaults/muggings and burglaries/theft). For tourist behaviours that are beyond the control of management, education and prevention strategies can be instigated. For example, without increasing fear or anxiety, management can provide simple guidelines to guests that can reduce tourism crime victimization and the possibility of injury and illness. Thus, becoming aware of tourists' cognitive biases will allow managers and staff to improve the overall tourist experience and thus increase the rates of return visitations and positive WoM recommendations.

5.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, exploring and applying attribution theory in understanding tourist experiences continues to be relevant and should now include research with real tourists in authentic settings and involve the application of strategies to lessen the occurrence of negative tourist experiences and to redress these "injustices" to minimise the negative impacts associated with negative WoM and future avoidance behaviours.

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