Promoting Interpretation through the Concept of Mindfulness: The Case of Selected Heritage Sites In Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that mindful visitors at heritage sites experience and interpret site information differently than those who are not very mindful. Many studies have applied the concept of mindfulness as proposed by Moscardo (1996) to ensure effective interpretations at heritage sites. Past research has identified setting factors as an important factor in contributing towards mindfulness. To ensure the comprehensiveness of the factors, this research aims to revisit the setting factors for mindfulness that was suggested by Moscardo. This research seeks to explore other setting factors that might have been overlooked in past research. This research is carried out in Penang, a destination listed under the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Item questions for the setting factors were developed based on extensive review of past literature. Data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to 150 local and international tourists. Factor Analysis was conducted to generate the new setting factors. The results derived from the study, suggested six distinct factors that contribute to mindfulness, namely Situational, Uses of Questions, Variety, Physical Orientation, Novelty and Multisensory Media. The key findings derived from the study provide new insights in understanding the concept of mindfulness and further improve the model for future applications.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of mindfulness has been introduced to the tourism industry to assist in developing a better interpretation among tourists which in turn will help enhance the quality in the tourism industry. Effective interpretation will help in enhancing greater knowledge and better understanding about the location. Additionally, it also leads to visitor satisfaction and contributes to the commercial viability to the tourism operations [1,2]. Tourist’s interpretation is closely connected to the physical setting, social interaction, expectation and information provided at the tourist destinations. These features are the key considerations in the mindfulness studies in tourism [3].

Mindfulness has been identified as a helpful tool in helping tourists in their interpretation of tourism offerings. Mindful tourists are beneficial to the tourism management at various levels [4, 5]. At the basic level, tourists who are mindful are more attentive to and understand the management and safety requests while on-site. Mindfulness is important at the basic level to manage the tourist’s behaviours that are potentially harmful to themselves, others and the setting. At the higher level, being mindful helps tourists to learn, increase their awareness and influences their attitudes and behaviours on-site. Hence, at the tourism attractions, creating mindful tourists helps in building ‘insightful’ experiences. Insights refer to the personal meaning, sense of place, and appreciation that tourists can derive from their experience in heritage environments [6].

Moscardo (1996) proposed the model of mindfulness and revised in 2003 by Woods &Moscardo. They put forward two sets of factors that influence visitor’s state of mindfulness of built heritage sites: Setting Factors and Visitor Factors. The setting factors include, (1) variety (2) uses of multi-sensory media (3) novelty/conflict/surprise (4) use of questions (5) visitor control (6) connection to exhibits and (7) good physical orientation. In addition to the Setting Factors, the model includes several visitor factors that can influence the visitors’
cognitive state. Specifically, the visitor factors are (1) high level of interest (2) visitors with educational goals (3) familiarity (4) visiting companions and (5) cultural background.

Setting factors are the direct factors that can be controlled by the site managers. Although setting factors have been tested in various research such as Moscardo in 1996, Woods & Moscardo in 2003, Frauman & Norman in 2004 and Rubin, Lee, Paris and Teye in 2011 [4, 7, 8, 9] this study seeks to explore other setting factors that might have been overlooked in past research.

Methodology:

This study utilise the quantitative research method which is the survey questionnaire. A comprehensive list of items representing various setting factors were generated based on extensive review of past literature. Data were collected from 150 local and international tourists. Factor Analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilised to generate and validate the setting factors. In the study, the respondents were asked to rate their experience at the heritage sites based on a 5-point semantic differential scale which represented by 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Principle Component factor analysis using Varimax Rotation was first conducted to generate the number of setting factors. The criteria for a factor was at least an eigenvalue of 1, primary loadings of at least 0.40, with secondary loading above 0.20 difference. In addition, screen plot was used to determine the number of factors to be considered in the study. The analysis generated 8 factors which were reduced to 6 factors after eliminating questions that did not fulfil the criteria set earlier. Some items were removed because of the poor fit to the other items in the same factor. For example, item “I can make connection between the present situation and the past” and also “I do not have enough time to tour the whole place” were removed because they were conceptually inconsistent with the other items in the same factors. Most items were removed due to high cross loading values between the main factor and the secondary factor. After elimination of items, the final analysis produced only 6 setting factors that would lead to mindfulness.

The first factor, consisted of five items and was labelled as Situational. The factor explained 17.33% of variance. The second factor that emerged from the analysis consisted of four items and explained 12.79% of variance. The factor was labelled as the Uses of Questions factor. The third factor which comprised of three items, was labelled as the Variety factor. This factor explained 12.23% of variance. Another factor that emerged from the analysis consisted of three items and was labelled as the Physical Orientation. This factor explained 11.5% of variance. Novelty was another factor derived from the analysis and the factor explained 10.12% of variance and consisted of three items. Finally the last factor that emerged in the study is Multisensory Media, which explained 9.62% of variance and comprised of four items. All items in each factor had acceptable reliabilities of greater than 0.7.

Overall, the results are parallel to the mindfulness model as suggested by Moscardo [4, 7]. The results of this study reinforce that the theoretical framework of mindfulness by Langer in 1989 and its application to tourism and interpretation by Moscardo in 1996 appears to be relevant and useful in connecting together various components of the heritage tourism experience.

In the study, the Situational factor emerged strongly as a distinct factor. Creating the “ideal” experience lies in creating the right atmosphere or physical environment in which to view the display, exhibit, or attraction. Ultimately, the exterior and interior designs of an attraction’s space become fundamental in shaping the attraction’s identity as well as its patronage. Ambience, design and layout, as well as social factors all play a critical role in determining visitation numbers, overall image perceptions, as well as word of mouth recommendations. More specifically, the findings demonstrate that for the visitor, ambience and design elements play a more significant role than does the social environment[10].

The second factor with high percentage of variance explained, is Uses of Questions. As proposed in the Moscardo’s model, this factor is strongly related to mindfulness because the curiosity of the visitors will encourage them to seek for more information and thus lead them to be more mindful and aware of their encounter at the heritage sites. The next factor derived is Variety. Having various encounters would arouse the curiosity of the visitor to seek for more information about certain display or culture. Tours or activities at the heritage sites can incorporate elements of variety to encourage mindfulness among the visitors.

Additionally, physical orientation is the fourth factor that emerged in the study. Having good physical orientation are important conditions in contributing to mindfulness. Heritage sites need to have a good map or/and information at the entrance or foyer providing the tourists information on the facilities available, the schedules for the day and suggestions for the visitation plan. Tourists need to be able to find their way easily around the sites and understand how to plan and organise their visit around the sites so that they are comfortable to focus on the place that they are visiting for the interpretive experience [3].
Another factor that emerged in the study is Novelty factor. This factor is said to have strong relationship to mindfulness because people are less likely to have routine behavioural scripts to rely on in such situation [1]. It is an ongoing challenge to encourage and also to instil the interest among tourists in appreciating the heritage. Thus, to encourage mindfulness at the heritage sites, the management can focus and also provide the opportunity to see the less widely-known attributes of the heritage or culture in the setting. The use of novelty in the themes, titles and introductions to less well-known items may be a valuable tool to attract the attention of tourists.

Finally, the last factor that emerged in the study the Multisensory Media factor. Incorporating multi-sensory experience at the heritage sites would also draw the attention of the tourists and helps in the interpretation. The traditional interpretation usually involves reading and looking at the display and it is best if it is incorporated with the sense of touch and kinaesthetic as additional sensory experience and this would offer the tourists to have variety in handling and feeling the objects. Besides, to strengthen the interpretive experience the new technologies can be incorporated with sound, smell and climate effects [3].

**Conclusion:**
This study confirms and reinforced the importance of incorporating specific setting factors in contributing to mindfulness as reported in the literature. The new factor, Situational Factor that was derived in the study shows the importance of creating the ideal physical environment for the visitors. This is because creating the right atmosphere for the visitors will further enhance the social environment and further create positive word-of-mouth recommendations. It is recommended that this factor is included in the existing framework of mindfulness to further enhance the visitors experience in promoting interpretation among visitors. The advantages are that the positive word-of-mouth means that the visitors have good visitation at the heritage sites and are satisfied with what they have experienced. In this research, one of the factors, Connection to Visitors did not emerged as a distinct factor probably because not all visitors could relate to the exhibits or display at the heritage setting. Connection to Visitors factors is created by building a link between the interpretation topic and something of personal relevance or significance to the visitors. However, not all the exhibits can be linked to all visitors because there may be visitors from different cultural background and thus making it difficult to connect to something foreign at the site.

**REFERENCES**


