

Research Paper

Wildlife Memorable Tourism Experiences as Antecedents of Visitor Loyalty at Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre (SORC), Sabah, Malaysia

Thanuja Rathakrishnan, Sridar Ramachandran, Siow May Ling, Ahmad Shuib and Syamsul Herman Mohammad Afandi
Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Puvaneswaran Kunasekaran
Taylor's University, Malaysia

Sudesh Prabhakaran
Binary University, Malaysia

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Abstract: This research looks at the wildlife memorable tourism experiences (WMTE) as the antecedents of visitor loyalty to the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre (SORC), Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia. Based on the experience economy reasoning, this study adopts the memorable tourism experience (MTE) framework with the introduction of a new variable – wildlife tourism. Through a self-administered questionnaire, data from 400 domestic and international visitors were analysed using SPSS 23. The study found that five factors are significant (wildlife tourism, novelty, stimulation, activities and adverse feeling) including the socio-demographic variables of education level (primary) and occupation (students) as well as five insignificant factors (relaxation, service, knowledge, unexpected happening and planning) in influencing visitor loyalty. The findings reveal that the introduction of a new dimension — wildlife tourism, contributes as the strongest predictor towards visitor loyalty. Subsequently, this study provides recommendations to the SORC management in enhancing visitor loyalty to the centre. Overall, this study highlights that visitors' memorable experiences in the WMTE model is central in influencing the visitors' revisit intentions to the SORC.

Keywords: Wildlife tourism, conservation, tourist intention, experience economy, endangered species, tourism marketing

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Correspondence: Sridar Ramachandran, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia. Email: hsridar@upm.edu.my

Introduction

Sabah is one of the states in East Malaysia that is blessed with a rich ecosystem. The diversity of wildlife and nature in Sabah could potentially serve as an opportunity towards the development of ecotourism centres in Malaysia. One such famous ecotourism centre is the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre located in Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia. As indicated by the name, the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre (SORC) is a rehabilitation centre for orangutans. Many tourists, domestic and international, flock to Sabah to experience and learn about the orangutans in SORC.

Sabah is one of the main habitat ranges for orangutans in North Borneo. However, the orangutans are in danger of extinction (Ancrenaz et al., 2004). The International Union for Conservation Nature (IUCN) in July 2016 classified the status of the orangutans as “Critically Endangered”, which means the orangutans are close to becoming extinct in the wild. Most of the orangutans are now living in protected areas i.e., nature conservation forests such as SORC in Sabah. SORC is a sanctuary for orangutans that have become orphaned, injured, rescued from merchants or been kept as pets. Initially a rehabilitation centre, it has now been developed into a research and awareness centre to educate people about the conservation of endangered species.

A report from Germany has claimed that in 2018, about 100,000 orangutans have died in the past 16 years and 6,100 orangutans were killed in Sabah between 1999 and 2015 (Voigt et al., 2018). However, the Sabah Wildlife Department argued that, while the statistics of orangutan deaths are devastating, the report failed to mention the ongoing rescue efforts carried out by SORC. This has stimulated the interest of visitors to the orangutan rehabilitation centre in Sabah. While the number of visitors to the SORC continues to rise, it is vitally important for the management to ensure repeat visits. Nonetheless, the main challenge for the management of SORC is in delivering the best experiences that would encourage visitor loyalty.

Scholarly research on tourism promotion has been aplenty. Much of the interest has been on visitor loyalty for various facets of tourism such as cultural tourism (Rani & Ahmad, 2016; Wang, Wu, & Yuan, 2010); food tourism (Kim, Duncan, & Chung, 2015; Latiff, Ng, Aziz, & Basha, 2019); theme parks (Lee, Jeong, & Qu, 2019; Wu, Li, & Li, 2018) and wine tourism (Back, Bufquin, & Park, 2018; Ramos, Cuamea, & Galván-León, 2020). While past efforts have also focused on wildlife tourism (Ing & Kunasekaran, 2016; Ling, Ramachandran, Shuib, & Afandi, 2014; Newsome, Rodger, Pearce, & Chan, 2017; Nordin & Ling, 2016; Siew, Ramachandran, Siow, Shuib, & Kunasekaran, 2018; Yee, Ramachandran, Shuib, Johari, & Afandi, 2018); policies in encouraging tourism (Ling, Ramachandran, Shuib, Syamsul, 2013; Ling et al., 2013; Siow, Ramachandran, Shuib, & Mohammad Afandi, 2015) as well as service quality and visitor satisfaction (Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014; Moore, Rodger & Taplin, 2015;

Tian-cole & Crompton, 2003). However, studies on what makes trips memorable in the context of wildlife tourism, specifically in SORC are lacking.

Prior to traveling, people generally recall their past experiences especially when deciding on their next destination (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012). In determining a person's desire as to whether they will make a similar trip in the future, their remembered experiences is taken into account (Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon & Diener, 2003). In this context, Kim et al. (2012) suggested that tourism operators should create conditions to help create and realise positive memorable tourism experiences (MTE), which will subsequently develop future behavioural intentions such as revisitation tendency. The aforementioned studies are empirical evidences that the MTE construct should be included in destination loyalty studies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the constructs in MTE that affect repeat visitations in SORC, Sabah. With these insights, SORC can increase its revenue with increased number of repeat visitors. In response, this would help the management of the SORC to strengthen their marketing strategy to enhance visitor loyalty to the centre.

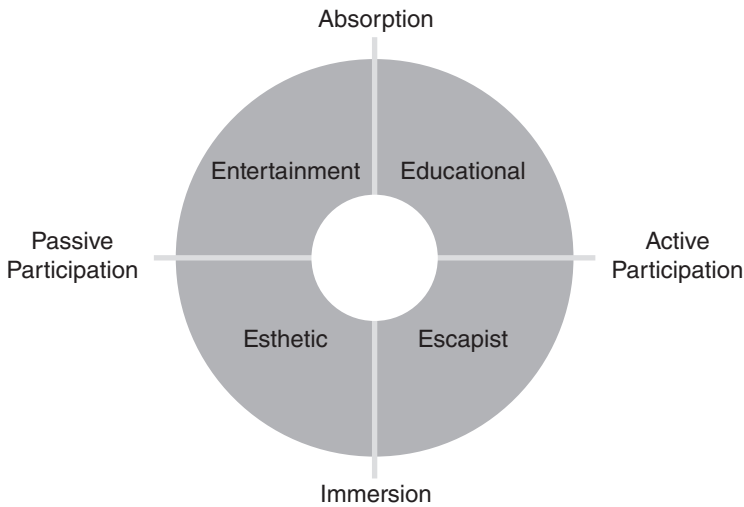
Experience Economy

The experience economy concept was introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1999) in tourism research with a focus on tourist experience. In light of the fierce competition and globalisation in today's marketplace, it is essential for tourism-related industries to differentiate their product offerings to gain a competitive advantages. Therefore, experience needs to be treated as a new economic offering — next to commodities, goods, and services.

Experiences consists of behaviour, perception, cognition and emotions that are neither expressed nor implied (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). Memorable experiences correspond with attributes such as affect, personal value, expectations, recollection which takes place during the consumption of the activities as well as reflection of the quality of interaction between visitors and employees (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Ritchie & Tung, 2011). Since experience is a determinant in tourists' visiting decisions, it is crucial for the tourism industry to strategise their activities that focus on visitor experience (Mathisen, 2012).

In the field of tourism, Pine and Gilmore (1999) conceptualised four realms (or dimensions) of experience differentiated by the level of customer participation (passive or active) and environmental relationship (absorption or immersion between customer and occurrence) (Figure 1). Along the customer participation axis, passive participation of visitors in destination offerings characterises the entertainment and aesthetic dimensions, whereas educational and escapist dimensions reflect active participation. Visitors who passively participate in destination activities would not directly influence the performance of the destination (business). On the other

hand, active participants will affect the performance or event that becomes part of their experience. As for the absorption-immersion quadrant, absorption is defined as “occupying a person’s attention by bringing the experience into the mind” and immersion refers to “becoming physically (or virtually) a part of the experience itself” (Pine & Gilmore 1999, p. 31). Along the absorption-immersion axis, visitors typically “absorb” entertaining and educational offerings of a destination and “immerse” in the destination’s environment resulting in an aesthetic or escapist experience.



Source: Pine and Gilmore (1999)

Figure 1. The four realms of experience

In short, the experience economy influences the visitors’ decision-making (e.g. revisit intention) by tapping on their experiences and memories. Based on the experience economy model, this study then examines the constructs in MTE, Overall, this study strives to contribute to the MTE dimension by 1) introducing wildlife tourism as a new variable and 2) extending the experience economy model by explaining how memorable tourism, focusing on wildlife tourism, could encourage repeat visitors.

Literature Review

The essence of tourism is expanding the travelling experiences of individuals and groups by exploring the uniqueness of what other destinations have to offer (Ritchie & Wong, 2011). According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), experience is defined as “events that engage individuals in a personal way” and use the concept of experience

as the final progression phase of economic development (e.g. commodity, product and service economy). The changes in the tourism sector drive competitors to focus on services to ensure customers recall past events based on the memorable experiences they had (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013).

Tourism has become more common as many more people are willing to pay for experiences and building memories with themselves or loved ones (Sorensen & Jensen, 2015). According to Barnes, Mattsson, and Sørensen (2016), a recollection of past memories plays a critical role in understanding consumer behavior towards tourist destination. Ballantyne, Packer and Sutherland (2011) also explained that tourism has received a great deal of expectations from the government, industry bodies and tourists to improve visitor experiences when traveling. This can be done by educating and spreading awareness to enhance the tourist experience.

A study from Mitas, Yarnal, Adams, & Ram (2012) investigated the role of emotions from the cognitive point of view. In addition to exploring the resources and attractiveness of a destination, more studies need to examine the tourists' opinions and perspectives. This is because, there is a link between emotional experience and destination of visitor that makes a trip meaningful and feel connected (Huang & Liu, 2017; Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016). Furthermore, emotions naturally change during vacations due to internal and external factors (e.g. environment, motivation, memorable experience and interpersonal character).

Memorable Tourism Experience

Memorable tourism experience (MTE) refers to the memory of visitors which they could reminisce after the experience has occurred. The MTE scale developed by Kim (2009) comprises of 17 constructs — namely, hedonism, refreshment, knowledge, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, involvement, relaxing, stimulation, happiness, assessment of value, assessment of service, planning, wildlife tourism, adverse feeling, challenge, and unexpected happening which are used as a marketing tool for tourism destinations. The visitors' memories of a trip affect their emotions either positively or negatively, which would influence their intention to revisit the place (Shen, 2016). While visitors may not be able to recall the overall experience, they usually can remember both the positive and negative emotional memories about the trip. Having said that, the MTE has seen important phenomenal growth in the field of destination competition among competitors (Kim & Ritchie, 2013). Hence, to ensure that visitors are not only satisfied but also gain memorable experiences, the management needs to provide visitors with memories and experiences that are unique. Hence, this study looks at 17 constructs based on the MTE model. The pool of items is generated from a comprehensive literature review on tourism experience constructs in leisure, marketing, and tourism (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Constructs of MTE based on literature review

Construct Domain	Construct Definition	Description of Construct	Literature
Hedonism	Pleasurable feelings that excite oneself	Thrilling, enjoyment, exciting, indulging, fun, pleasant, interesting	Kim, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012; Dunman & Mattilla, 2005; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997
Refreshment	The state of feeling refreshed	Good impressions of local people, refreshing, inspirational, sense of freedom, revitalising, liberating, therapeutic	Kim, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012; Samdahl, 1991
Local culture	A feeling of connection and group identity with travel partners and/or locals	Local culture, experience, friendliness of local people, interaction with local people	Kim, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997
Meaningfulness	Sense of great value	Great value, meaningful, significant, learning about myself, important things	Kim, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012; Noy, 2004
Knowledge	Information, facts or experiences acquired by an individual	Acquired knowledge, informational, facts	Kim, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012
Involvement	Participants involved with the programmes	Involvement with activities, interested with activities, participation	Kim, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012; Swinyard, 1993
Novelty	Psychological feeling of newness as a result of a new experience	Cultural differences, newness, exotic, unique, different experiences	Kim, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012; Dunman & Mattilla, 2005
Adverse feeling	Negative psychological feelings	Bad luck, stressful, tiring, frustration, anger	Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Kim, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012
Happiness	A feeling of joy that springs from the heart	Happy, heartfelt, joy	Kim, 2012; Bolla, Dawson & Harrington, 1991

Table 1 (con't)

Construct Domain	Construct Definition	Description of Construct	Literature
Challenge	An experience that demands physical and mental abilities	Physical and mental challenges	Kim, 2009; Lee, Dattilo & Howard, 1994
Unexpected happening	An unforeseen event or situation, that occurs while travelling	Unforeseeable situation, unexpected situation	Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Kim, 2009
Stimulation	Arousal of feelings that heightens and/or invigorates one	Arousal, invigorating, and rejoiceful, stimulating	Kim, 2009; Bolla et al., 1991; Samdahl, 1991
Relaxation	Separates participants from daily mundane lives	'No-work, no-care, no-thrift situation'	Kim, 2009; Cohen, 1979
Assessment of value	Quality of offerings at a destination	Value for money	Kim, 2014; Dwyer & Kim, 2003
Assessment of service	Reliable, responsive, and customised service to visitors from tourism businesses	Customisation of service; unique, memorable and personal	Kim, 2009; Kim, 2014; Pine & Gilmore, 1999
Planning	Anticipating, planning, initial travel, on-site and recollections based on tourist behaviour	Tourist self-organised trips, organised trips (agencies, companies), unscheduled trips/gifts, unforeseen events	Choi, Lehto, Morrison, & Jang, 2011; Coelho, Gosling, & Almeida, 2018
Wildlife tourism	Provides unique opportunities or activities to individuals	Human-wildlife interactions, mother nature/wildlife appreciation	Ballantyne et al., 2011; Higginbottom & Scott, 2004

Methodology

This study studied the constructs involved in enhancing visitor loyalty at SORC based on the WMTE model. Hence, data were collected at SORC. The population sample was the centre's visitors, both domestic and international. The researchers adopted the judgmental sampling method and distributed self-administered questionnaires to visitors. Judgmental sampling was selected since this sampling technique allowed the researchers to approach their target audience directly and is based in real time. The researchers were able to explain the objective of the study to the visitors as well as obtain relevant and timely data.

The survey questionnaire was developed from established scales. The MTE construct consisted of 61 items adopted from Kim (2009), 5 items on visitor loyalty taken from Aisyah (2017) and Baker and Crompton (2000) as well as socio-demographic questions. Extant literature also adopted these components in their study: MTE (Coelho et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2012; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018) and visitor loyalty (Lee, Lee, Lee & Babin, 2008; Yoon, Lee, & Lee, 2010).

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) suggested that the largest sample size for a population of 1,000,000 and above should be 384. Since the actual number of the population is unknown, this study chose the highest sample size as suggested by Krejcie and Morgan, which is 384. However, with the assumption of a 95% interval confidence and a 5% error, the researchers distributed an additional 15% — amounting to 440 as the sample. From the 440 questionnaires distributed, 40 yielded unusable data. Thus, the response rate was 91%. Overall, only 400 returned survey questionnaires were usable and subsequently analysed.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were then examined using SPSS 23. The study analysed the items in WMTE using the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). EFA extracts the principal components with varimax rotation to ensure that the variables are not correlated. As a result, EFA reduced the data (17 constructs and 61 items) to a smaller set of variables and constructs. By doing so, the relationships and patterns can be easily interpreted and understood. Subsequently, the multiple regression analysis was also conducted to explain the relationships between multiple independent variables and one dependent variable.

Findings

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Visitors

A descriptive analysis generally describes the population and the socio-demographic profile of the respondents based on data from the questionnaire. Table 2 shows the frequency distribution for various demographic features such as age, gender, marital status, nationality, education level and occupation which affect the variables in this research.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nationality		
Malaysian	207	51.7
Non-Malaysian	193	48.3

Table 2 (cont)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	143	35.7
Female	257	64.3
Age		
18 – 29	211	52.8
30 – 49	137	34.3
50 – 69	49	12.3
> 70	3	0.8
Marital Status		
Single	243	60.75
Married	157	39.25
Education Level		
Primary School	10	2.50
High School	131	33.80
Diploma	66	16.50
Bachelor's Degree	144	36.00
Master's Degree	44	11.00
Doctor of Philosophy	5	1.30
Occupation		
Student	90	22.5
Housewife	19	4.8
Government Sector	70	17.5
Private Sector	97	24.3
Self-employment	44	11.0
Retired	17	4.3
Others	63	15.8
Income Range		
RM0	4	1.0
RM1 – RM3000	190	47.5
RM3001 – RM5000	55	13.8
RM5001 – RM7000	25	6.3
> RM7000	126	31.5

Based on Table 2, the majority of the respondents who visited the SORC were Malaysians (51.7%) whereas the remaining were foreigners (48.3%), mostly from Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, United Kingdom and USA. In terms of gender, there were more female visitors (64.3%) compared to male (35.7%).

The results also showed that most visitors were aged between 18 and 29 years (52.8%). This age group suggests that most of them are tertiary students who intended to learn more about wildlife as well as become actively involved in wildlife recreation activities. The two lowest percentages were recorded for the age groups 50 – 69 (12.3%) and above 70 (0.8%). According to Ramli and Ramachandran (2016), senior citizens prefer to spend their leisure time at home with the families; hence the low percentage.

In terms of marital status, the majority of visitors were single (60.75%) while the remaining were married. The high percentage of the former group could be attributed to single people having more time to visit the SORC compared to those who were married. However, it also could be that the willingness of respondents in filling out the surveys were lower among married respondents compared to singles. A possible reason could be that married respondents, especially those who came with families, needed to keep an eye on their young children and filling out surveys could have been a distraction. In terms of education, the results found that 68% of the respondents were those with tertiary education. This finding suggests that visitors to SORC are mostly educated and it has been shown that education has a positive significant impact on attitudes towards conservation (Masud & Kari, 2005).

The survey also collected data on respondent's occupation. Private workers formed the highest group (24.3%), followed by students (22.5%) and government sector (17.5%). This indicates that employees choose to visit SORC as a form of escape from a busy and hectic lifestyle. The student group recorded the second highest percentage (22.5%) because they have more leisure time for activities with friends. In addition, they are more prone to posting updates on their social media accounts as a platform to promote their social status. Hence, this probably encourages more students to visit SORC.

For income, the group which received the highest percentage were those who earned less than RM3000. This group could very likely be students. Interestingly, the results also reported that the second highest percentage was the group earning more than RM7000. This group could be foreign visitors whose income in foreign currency would definitely be higher.

Exploratory Factor (EFA) and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The study examined 17 constructs (61 items) and ran the EFA analysis to group the variables into smaller and manageable constructs. The EFA produced 10 constructs

(35 items) from the 17 constructs. These included relaxing, novelty, stimulation, wildlife tourism, adverse feeling, knowledge, service, activity, unexpected happening, and planning.

The 10 constructs were then tested to determine their relationships towards visitor loyalty. The relaxing construct was reported to be the strongest factor, followed by novelty, stimulation, wildlife tourism, adverse feeling, service, knowledge, activity, unexpected happening, and the lowest, planning (refer to Table 3). The relaxation factor with the highest score can be attributed to most visitors coming from city centres where lifestyle is hectic. Thus, visitors are likely to revisit the SORC as a gateway to a peaceful and serene surrounding. The novelty factor indicated that many visitors love exploring and gaining new experiences. Refreshing and novel experiences would motivate them to revisit the centre. The same can be said for stimulation as visitors who had memorable experiences would plan their trip to the centre again.

Wildlife tourism suggests that visitors who feel a sense of connection to wildlife experiences have a higher potential of developing visitor loyalty. According to Cong, Wu, Morrison, Shu, & Wang (2014), any interaction between wildlife and human leaves an unforgettable impact, especially if the particular wildlife is facing extinction. At SORC, visitors leave with a strong sense of meaningful connection with the orangutan and the dangers they face. Other substantial factors include adverse feeling and services especially when visitors feel frustration or encounter bad incidences at the centre (Kim et al., 2012). Thus, the level of happiness and comfort of the visitors would influence their loyalty to visit the centre in the future. In this regard, satisfactory services and experiences would indeed enhance visitor loyalty to SORC.

A study by Mazlina and Ahmad (2016) found that visitors who gained new knowledge with regard to a destination perceive it as the most memorable experience. As such, the center should develop and present new knowledge towards creating a memorable experience which will influence the loyalty of their visitors. This is especially true for interactive and unique information. The same goes for the second last factor, range of activities. Activities that involve a high degree of wildlife encounters or interaction would make trips to the centre memorable and worthwhile. Planning is the least influential factor that encourages visitor loyalty. Local visitors do not apply the norms of planning when they travel domestically (Mohamed & Yusof, 2012). Reason being, the confidence of being in their own country is perceived as less risky as they are aware of the norms, culture, and language. Since the majority of respondents are Malaysians, the factor analysis shows that planning carries a low influence on visitor loyalty.

Table 3. Factor loading of condructs

WMTE Constructs	Statements	Loading	Communalities
Relaxing ($\alpha = 0.885$)	Visiting the wildlife here can relax my mind.	0.811	0.777
	I feel revitalised when visiting the wildlife centre.	0.764	0.747
	The experience of visiting wildlife at Sepilok makes me feel calm.	0.693	0.726
	Visiting wildlife in Sepilok can release my stress.	0.669	0.686
Novelty ($\alpha = 0.813$)	The new experience of visiting wildlife are memories that I cannot forget.	0.660	0.699
	These experiences are different from previous experiences of visiting wildlife.	0.659	0.697
	First-time experiences of visiting wildlife is the most memorable in my life.	0.620	0.597
Stimulation ($\alpha = 0.881$)	I really enjoyed the experience of visiting wildlife at Sepilok.	0.748	0.767
	I had an exciting experience of viewing during my visit to Sepilok.	0.745	0.761
	I was happy with the wildlife nature environment in Sepilok.	0.679	0.689
Wildlife Tourism ($\alpha = 0.838$)	I realized the importance of wildlife after visiting Sepilok.	0.710	0.713
	Seeing the wildlife at Sepilok was exciting to me.	0.693	0.760
	I can see human interactions that get closer with the wildlife.	0.691	0.650
	I have a unique experience that cannot be forgotten after seeing wildlife.	0.671	0.679
Adverse Feeling ($\alpha = 0.902$)	Visiting the wildlife here makes me feel angry.	0.894	0.872
	I feel frustrated during my visit to this place.	0.824	0.747
	I have had bad memories during my visit to the wildlife centre in Sepilok.	0.822	0.810
	The trip was long and tiring.	0.805	0.756

Table 3 (con't)

WMTE Constructs	Statements	Loading	Communalities
Service ($\alpha = 0.810$)	The staff in SORC were very friendly and makes me want to come here again to see the wildlife.	0.718	0.746
	The staff here were helpful and provided guidance about wildlife here.	0.702	0.726
	Service staff at Sepilok are always willing to help others.	0.625	0.747
Knowledge ($\alpha = 0.842$)	The history of wildlife in Sepilok gives me new knowledge.	0.749	0.795
	After this visit, I am able to understand the life cycle of wildlife.	0.691	0.706
	I learned something new about wildlife especially in Sepilok.	0.619	0.709
Activity ($\alpha = 0.831$)	I really want to visit again to be involved in volunteering activities for wildlife.	0.840	0.777
	I am willing to be involved in volunteering activity in Sepilok during my visit.	0.833	0.777
	The activities provided give some memorable experiences that cannot be forgotten.	0.680	0.659
	I enjoyed participating in the activities provided.	0.633	0.645
Unexpected Happening ($\alpha = 0.824$)	I lost my valuables during my visit to Sepilok.	0.838	0.769
	I had experienced attacks by wildlife at Sepilok.	0.829	0.779
	I experienced some problems with transportation during the journey to the wildlife centre.	0.681	0.668
	The place was physically challenging for me.	0.654	0.618
Planning ($\alpha = 0.727$)	In planning my visit to the Sepilok wildlife centre, I made little comparison to other wildlife centres.	0.769	0.676
	I planned my visit to Sepilok wildlife centre by myself.	0.720	0.547
	I spent a lot time in planning the visit to the wildlife centre.	0.692	0.670

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The multiple linear regression analysis using the stepwise method was employed to identify how WMTE factors and socio-demographic factors influence visitor loyalty to SORC. According to the model summary in Table 4, only 10 independent variables were predicted to have a significant influence on the dependent variable. Visitor loyalty was tested against WMTE constructs (relaxation, novelty, stimulating, wildlife tourism, adverse feeling, service, knowledge, activity, unexpected happening, and planning) and socio-demographic factors (age, gender, education level, occupation, nationality, and marital status). The R² value of 0.623 implies that 62.30% of the relationships between visitor loyalty to SORC in the future can be explained by ten independent variables while 37.70% can explained by factors which are not covered in the study (refer to Table 4).

Table 4. Regression model summary of visitors to the SORC

R	R ²	Adjusted R	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.789	0.623	0.613	0.385

Table 5 outlines the order of significant predictors on the dependent variable. From the table, wildlife tourism ($\beta = 0.257$, t-value = 6.564) was found to be the most significant independent variable that can influence visitor loyalty. This means that wildlife tourism is the strongest contributor to visitor loyalty when all other independent variables in the model are controlled.

Novelty was found to be the second strongest predictor with a β value of 0.256 and t-value of 5.947. Activity and stimulating shared the same importance where both β are 0.239 (t-value = 5.896; 6.886) respectively. This is followed by adverse feelings where ($\beta = -0.080$, t-value = -2.346). The two lowest predictors were identified as education level ($\beta = -0.087$, t-value = -2.808) and occupation ($\beta = -0.109$, t-value = -3.468). This suggests that socio-demographic factors are the least strongest contributor to visitor loyalty.

Table 5. Results of the multiple regression analysis between independent variables and visitors’ time spent at the SORC

Coefficients^a

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig.
	β	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	.791	.183		4.323	.000
Novelty	.218	.037	.256	5.947	.000
Wildlife Tourism	.252	.038	.257	6.564	.000

Table 5 (con't)

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig.
	β	Std. Error	Beta		
Stimulating	.227	.038	.239	5.896	.000
Activity	.177	.026	.239	6.886	.000
Student	-.161	.046	-.109	-3.486	.001
Primary	-.346	.123	-.087	-2.808	.005
Adverse Feelings	-.060	.026	-.080	-2.346	.019

a. Dependent Variable: Visitor Loyalty

Referring to Table 5, the estimated model coefficients for β -constant are:

$$Y = \beta^1 + \beta^2 + \beta^3 + \beta^4 + \beta^5 + \beta^6 + \beta^7$$

$$Y = 0.791 + 0.256 + 0.257 + 0.239 + 0.239 - 0.109 - 0.087 - 0.080$$

Where,

Y = Visitor Loyalty

β^1 = Novelty

β^2 = Wildlife Tourism

β^3 = Stimulating

β^4 = Activity

β^5 = Occupation (student)

β^6 = Education Level (primary)

β^7 = Adverse Feeling

Discussion

As mentioned at the beginning of the study, wildlife tourism has long been one of the understudied areas in the MTE model. Based on the foundations of the experience economy, this study aimed to identify the constructs in the MTE model for visitor loyalty in the context of wildlife tourism.

The multiple regression analysis showed that there is a positive significant relationship between novelty, wildlife tourism, stimulating, activity, occupation, education level and adverse feelings towards visitor loyalty to SORC with wildlife tourism being the strongest. This finding is interesting as literature based on the MTE model did not include wildlife tourism at all (Mahdzar & Shuib, 2016; Thoo, Johari, Ismail, Lee, & Hasan, 2019; Thoo & Johari, 2016; Wei, Zhao, Zhang, & Huang, 2019). Visitor loyalty increases when emotional attachment is created between the orangutans and humans, which leaves a longlasting impact on visitors

such as increased awareness of the potential dangers faced by these primates. This also provides the opportunity to educate visitors on biodiversity conservation and responsible tourism that can minimise harm to wildlife and nature. Using emotional attachment as a marketing strategy is not a foreign concept in the advertising world to increase sales and purchase intentions (Akbari, 2015). In fact, this would increase loyalty among the SORC visitors.

Novelty is the second strongest contributor towards increasing visitor loyalty. Since it is not possible for visitors to obtain this unique experience at the centre, in their own country or hometown, they will be encouraged to visit SORC again. Further, novelty also prompts positive emotions and helps fulfilling one's goal for memorable tourism experience (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018). This is particularly true, since SORC provides one-of-a-kind experience for exotic wildlife such as the orangutan, which can only be found in the islands of Borneo and Sumatra. This reaffirms the relationship between novelty and positive emotions in enhancing visitor loyalty (Kim, 2010; Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018; Wei et al., 2019).

Stimulation and activities share the same degree of influence on visitor loyalty to SORC. The demand for tourism activities involving interactions with wildlife has increased rapidly in recent years, attracting millions of people worldwide (Egresi & Prakash, 2019). When visitors participate in activities and interact with the wildlife at SORC, this strengthens further their intention to revisit SORC. The range of activities include feeding the orangutan, petting them, and taking pictures with them.

The findings reveal that three variables — adverse feelings, occupation and education level — are negative coefficients. These independent variables towards visitor loyalty demonstrate an inversely related relationship. Results for adverse feelings ($\beta = -0.080$; t -value = -2.346) imply that the higher the negative feelings experienced by visitors in SORC, the lower their loyalty to visit the SORC in the future. This is plausible as visitors who have experienced bad memories or unpleasant incidents while visiting the SORC might not be inclined to visit the centre again. The second and third factor are socio-demographic related. The findings imply that students are less likely to display strong visitor loyalty towards the SORC mainly because their purchasing power is limited as most of them are not employed. Thus, they would not spend their money visiting the same place, although they might have experienced a great trip to the SORC in the past. Perhaps, the management could provide the students a membership card or a discount card for subsequent visits to motivate them to revisit. As for education level, results show that visitors with primary-level education demonstrate low visitor loyalty. This could be attributed to their low income. Thus, it is highly unlikely for them to spend money to go to places they have visited before and instead prefer other destinations for different sightseeing experiences.

Insignificant Factors of the WMTE Dimension

The findings also reveal five insignificant factors on visitor loyalty in SORC. These are relaxation, service, knowledge, unexpected happening and planning. Relaxation is insignificant in influencing visitor loyalty because there are many other sightseeing destinations that also offer a relaxed and natural setting such as Perdana Park, Kinabalu National Park, Tunku Abdul Rahman Park Conservation and Pulau Tiga Park. Surprisingly, service is not a substantial predictor towards visitor loyalty. This contradicts with previous studies (Alegre & Juaneda, 2006; Keshavarz & Ali, 2015). Although the relationship was found to be statistically insignificant, good services are important to increase visitor satisfaction and visitor loyalty. Based on the outcome, the discrepancy in the result could probably be attributed to the questions asked in the questionnaire. The questions were related to staff treatment of visitors (e.g. friendly, helpful), which reflect a significant role in visitor loyalty, specifically in SORC. As visitors typically only spend half a day in SORC, staff friendliness and helpfulness does not really carry a significant influence on their decision to revisit the centre. Additionally, visitors are more concerned about other aspects of services such as facilities, transportation, convenience and comfort. This can be deducted from the comments of some visitors who reported a challenging journey to SORC where transportation was an issue (mean = 2.12). Therefore, looking into the suggested areas in addition to quality services by staff members would enhance visitor loyalty to the centre.

Accurate and relevant knowledge is particularly important especially for conservation centres. However, this study found that knowledge is insignificant for visitor loyalty. This is true especially in today's era where information is widely accessible through the internet. Further, visitors may have the perception that knowledge gained from SORC would be the same and repetitive; which explains the finding that knowledge is insignificant for visitor loyalty.

Unexpected happening are insignificant in determining visitor loyalty as most of the unexpected events may not be too severe or traumatic. Also, unexpected incidences could be a rare occurrence or due to carelessness (e.g. lost of things, misplaced items) which be prevented in the future. Thus, any unforeseen incidences that had happened during the trip to SORC is not perceived as affecting visitor loyalty.

Planning is also an insignificant factor on visitor loyalty. According to Mohamed and Yusof (2012), most Malaysians do not book travel packages or make reservations at hotels since they have friends or families whom they can stay with. In addition, Malaysians predominantly do not require much planning, especially when the destination is within Malaysia where the culture, language, money currency are the same.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study puts forth some practical suggestions for the management and marketing team of SORC. As discussed earlier, wildlife tourism is the strongest contributor towards visitor loyalty. SORC could evoke past memories in their past visitors by using the social media to highlight some pictures or play short video clips about orangutans. SORC could also create a deep longlasting impact in visitors by sharing knowledge and awareness about wildlife extinction in particular the dangers faced by orangutans. Moreover, the management could also highlight or prepare a few 'Insta-worthy' spots to set the centre apart from other centres. This strategy could prove particularly attractive to students and young adults who love updating posts and pictures in their social media accounts. This could attract first-time visitors as well as repeat visitors to SORC.

The SORC could also offer more unique and one-of-a-kind activities to increase visitor loyalty. This includes interactive and hands-on ways of sharing information (e.g. fun activities with orangutans) which not only delivers very rare or unique knowledge (that cannot be found elsewhere including the internet), but also creates an unforgettable experience for them.

The descriptive analysis also showed that there is poor participation from SORC visitors who are above 70 and retirees. This group of people are more interested in relaxation, however, the required accessibility, services and facilities are lacking or not suitable for their needs. This causes them to travel less as they fear of being mocked by others. To encourage visitor loyalty among retirees and senior citizens, appropriate facilities, services and programs (e.g. less strenuous activities) should be considered by the management.

The management should also strive to minimise the possibility of unfortunate incidences. Adverse feelings arise from bad memories such as lost belongings or injuries. Therefore, such unfortunate incidences should be handled with care. The management could consider setting up a lost-and-found counter and improving the transportation arrangement to the SORC (e.g. discounted rates using e-hailing taxis from airport to SORC). To add, some of the visitors' adverse feelings could stem from their frustrations due to their observations on the wildlife (e.g. poor mental state of the orangutan, poor handling of volunteers or visitors). As such, the management needs to ensure that the staff/volunteers are well-trained in handling the orangutans as well as ensure that the welfare of the orangutan (e.g. sufficient rest, diet, mental state) is taken care of.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

This study has several limitations that the authors would like to address. First, the participants surveyed were visitors of the wildlife conservation centre. Thus, the

results may not be applicable to other types of tourist destinations. Future studies could assess the model using other diverse facets of tourism (e.g. festival tourism, food tourism, nature tourism and heritage tourism). Next, the authors noticed that most of the respondents of this survey were single as married couples (especially with children) were less willing to participate in the survey. This survey typically takes 15 – 20 minutes and the children became restless quickly. This contributed to the low participation from married couples in filling up and completing the surveys (40 unusable data). Future studies could consider giving out gifts to kids as a token of appreciation (such as keychains, badges and stickers). By doing so, might encourage more parents to take time to answer the survey. The third limitation was the data collection method. While quantitative techniques allow faster responses in a short period of time, this technique does not allow for follow-up questions or in-depth answers. Research in the future could opt for a qualitative method of data collection such as interviews. By interviewing respondents, new insights could be discovered from another point of view. To name a few, service, knowledge, unexpected happening and planning were shown to have insignificant influence on visitors' loyalty. Hence, interviews could unravel the underlying reasons for these results, leading to better comprehension of the issue.

This study also urges potential future studies to explore the responsible tourism aspect. In understanding wildlife tourism, it is equally central to consider the management's sustainability practices. Whilst understanding visitor loyalty would bring benefits to the visitors and management, it is the management's duty to ". . . pick up the pieces once the tourists are gone" (Sharpley, 1994, pp. 186). Additionally, loyalty increases when visitors obtain positive wildlife tourism experiences and adverse feelings decrease when they feel that the wildlife is well taken care. On that note, understanding the link between sustainability practices currently implemented by centre towards visitor loyalty could unravel new findings and insights. As the purpose of this paper was to identify WMTE factors in cultivating visitor loyalty, the management's sustainability practices (responsible tourism) was not included in this study. Therefore, future studies could consider looking at the role of responsible tourism in encouraging visitor loyalty.

Conclusion

Promoting repeat visits to wildlife centres poses a bigger challenge compared to other types of tourism destinations. Most often than not, most tourists visit the SORC as a one-off trip (to see the orangutan). Repeat visits can be attributed to memorable events that took place during the first visit. However, studies that focus on memorable tourism events are lacking, specifically in the context of wildlife tourism. As such, this study examined and identified WMTE constructs based on the experience economy model that encourages visitor loyalty.

The findings reveal four variables that are positively significant (wildlife tourism, novelty, stimulation, activities) and three that are negatively significant (adverse feeling, occupation (student) and education level (student) for visitor loyalty. Five factors appeared insignificant : relaxation, service, knowledge, unexpected happening and planning. Both significant and insignificant factors as well as practical implications were discussed.

On a more serious note, a report in the past has stated that thousands of orangutans were killed in Sabah between 1999 and 2015. This was refuted by the Sabah Wildlife Department who claimed that those reports failed to provide solid evidence and neglected to mention the efforts made by Sabah to protect its biodiversity. Regardless, the spotlight on the orangutan's plight has elicited curiosity, debates and awareness of Sabah's wildlife. In light of this, SORC should capitalise on this opportunity to highlight to the public the efforts done by Sabah authorities in protecting the orangutan's welfare and conservation.

In summary, this study has contributed to the body of knowledge in two ways: 1) introduced wildlife tourism as a new variable in the MTE dimension and 2) extended the experience economy model by explaining how memorable tourism, with a focus on wildlife tourism, could encourage repeat visitors. However, this study, did not include the responsible tourism aspect of the centre. Therefore, potential studies should examine the sustainability practices of the SORC in encouraging visitor loyalty. By doing so, more emphasis can be placed on the wildlife's welfare as well as optimising visitors' memorable experiences and loyalty.

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