VISITOR EXPERIENCE ON VISITOR MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN WILDLIFE TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Wildlife tourism is one of the important components of tourism around the world. Kerala, better known as "God's own Country" which is a federal state of India is one of the sought after tourism destinations for tourists across the world. Wildlife tourism is the upcoming sector of tourism development as far as Kerala tourism is concerned. When the visitors get positive experience, they are likely to revisit or recommend the destination to others. So it is very important to identify the factors underlying the experience of visitor management in wildlife tourism areas. In this paper, the researchers developed a scale to examine the core factors contributing to the experience of visitors on visitor management. The study found that the factors contributing to visitor management experiences are Experience on Directorial Information, Experience on Modification of the Site, Experience on Management related Information, Experience on Interpretive information, Experience on Site Personnel, Experience on Ticket Counter and Experience on Destination Vehicle.

Keywords: visitor management, visitor experience, wildlife tourism, destination

INTRODUCTION

Tourism in the state of Kerala has witnessed a higher growth rate over the past few years. Visitor management is the blend of all those practices made by the destination authorities to control and manage the number and activities of visitors. In order to manage the activities and number of the visitors, there is a need to execute destination management practices which include environmental preservation efforts like visitor management in these wildlife destinations. The objectives of the study were to identify the factors underlying visitor experience on visitor management and to find out the degree of influence of these factors on visitor experience on visitor management. A sample survey was carried out to collect primary data from the visitors to wildlife tourism destinations. The researchers developed a 38-item scale of experience. Factor analysis and Structural Equation Modelling were used to understand the underlying factors associated with the experience of visitors on

visitor management. This study is an attempt to analyse the factors influencing visitor experience on visitor management practices in Kerala as a wildlife tourism destination.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

J.E. Frost and Mc Cool(1988) analysed the effects of management regulations at Glacier recreation sites on visitor experience associated with the viewing of bald eagles during the fall migration season. The study found that the visitors who were aware about these types of regulations are supported it and they were satisfied also. Kuo (2003) evaluated the use of visitor management to care for a fragile environment. He found that the effectiveness of communication with visitors in a tourism destination can improve the level of visitor experience and suggested that the hard visitor management strategies should be balanced through some visitor management practices like interpretation, providing do's & don't s massages, & proper signage. D. Cole & Hall, (2005) suggested that managers may possibly make a decision that it is most suitable to manage wilderness to meet the desires of people who take solitude as very important in wildlife experience who thought use limits are needed to manage the use of wilderness areas. Bryon & Neuts, (2007) establish that the perception of crowding is a sign of reduction in the experience of tourist. Ballantyne, Packer, & Hughes, (2009) advocate that in order to balance the needs of wildlife and tourists, the reasons behind particular management practices should be communicated effectively. They also suggested that the interpretive messages on management practices should be consistent. Elands & Lengkeek,(2012) clearly mentions tourists' experience as the cognitive responsiveness of what happens or happened to human beings which is surrounded in lasting but active cognitive and emotional formation. They made a statement that tourists' imagination and meanings form a sense of distance from the everyday life. Prazeres & Donohoe (2014) found that a composite and exclusive blend of both human and physical sensual dimensions form the visitor experience which includes visitor management, park management, interpretation, and conservation. Weiler & Walker, (2014) recommend that the tourist guides in a destination should be trained well to equip them to deliver the interpretation messages clearly and take care of the visitors firmly which also leads to positive tourism may experience.

METHODS

The data were collected from one wildlife tourism destination each from three regions (South, Central and North) of Kerala state of South India. The sample size was 384 and sampling method adopted was stratified sampling. The respondents were asked 38 questions on five point Likert scale. The responses are scored as 1 for 'Strongly Disagree', 2 for 'Disagree', 3 for 'Neither Agree or Disagree', 4 for 'Agree' 5 for 'Strongly agree'. Collected data were analysed through factor analysis and Structural Equation Modelling. The study developed a 38 item Visitor Management Experience Scale (VMES) which has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.852 which is acceptable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted on 38 items of experiences on visitor management

practices for grouping the variables. Principal component analysis (PCA) method using SPSS was used for this purpose. Prior to performing PCA, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. The correlation matrix revealed that many items have coefficients of 0.3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0.889, which exceeds the suggested value of 0.6. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity also reached statistical significance and hence supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Table 1: EFA Model Fit

Variable	No of Statements	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity –Chi	Df	Sig.
Experiences on Visitor Management	38	0.889	3703.652	703	0.001

Table 2: Experience on Visitor Management –Factor loadings

Dependent variable	Code	Statement	Factor loading
Experience on Directorial Information(EDI)	EDI1	The signage used minimal and clear text to enhance readability	0.709
	EDI2	The sign boards create a positive first impression to visitors	0.791
	EDI3	The sign boards are of a size that is appropriate to be viewed while travelling in vehicles	0.839
	EDI4	The design of the signage is attractive and appropriate	0.768
	EDI5	The signage provided is consistent, clear and logical	0.809
	EDI6	The sign is located in appropriate location	0.672
	EDI7	The content of the sign is easy to read	0.839
	EDI8	The information contained in the sign is useful	0.745

Experience on Modification of the Site (EMS)	EMS1	The zoning is properly communicated	0.674
	EMS2	The zones are clearly defined	0.579
	EMS3	There is fencing to buffer zone	0.489
Experience on Management related Information(EMRI)	EMRI1	The interpretation provided is accurate and current	0.600
	EMRI2	There are adequate and appropriate printed guides and maps for the destination	0.548
	EMRI3	Proper visiting guidelines are clearly displayed at the destination	0.580
	EMRI4	The copies of the guidelines are easily available to the visitors	0.560
	EMRI5	I have received information on rules and regulations of the destination	0.586
Experience on Interpretive information (EII)	EII1	The information received from the tourist information centre is useful and relevant	0.469
	EII2	The objects, material, and information exhibited are of high cultural and historical interest	0.626
	EII3	I could learn about nature from the information provided by the centre	0.618
	EII4	It provides the opportunity to learn about historical and cultural tradition of the destination	0.611
	EII5	It provides the opportunity to learn about environmental issues and importance of conservation of natural resources	0.481
	EII6	The tourist information centre is well arranged	0.463
	EII7	Working hours of the tourist information centre is convenient	0.673

Experience on Site Personnel	ESP1	Personal attention is provided to visitors when needed	0.521
	(ESP)	The guides are knowledgeable and well trained	0.752
	ESP3	The guides are cooperative	0.748
	ESP4	They are enthusiastic to give information	0.803
	ESP5	There are appropriate numbers of trained guides to take people through the destination	0.741
	ESP6	I received good treatment from the employees of the Tourist information centre	0.660
Experience on Ticket Counter (ETC)	ETC1	The ticket counter is not crowded	0.801
	ETC2	The ticket counter is well arranged	0.611
	ETC3	The staff in the ticket counter is friendly	0.669
	ETC4	The destination charges are reasonable	0.670
Experience on Destination Vehicle (EDV)	EDV1	The destination operated vehicle is clean and eco friendly	0.600
	EDV2	The vehicle staff are cooperative	0.676
	EDV3	The vehicles operated as per the schedules	0.625

Table 3: Consolidated table - CFA

Dependent variable	Construct (Independent Variable)	Regression Coefficient	T	P	Variance explained (%)
Experience on Directorial Information	EDI1	0.747	18.858	<0.001	55.8
	EDI2	0.840	23.836	<0.001	70.5
	EDI3	0.826	22.943	<0.001	68.2
	EDI4	0.803	21.608	<0.001	64.5
	EDI5	0.900	28.737	<0.001	81.0
	EDI6	0.643	14.898	<0.001	41.3
	EDI7	0.846	24.241	<0.001	71.5
	EDI8	0.657	15.372	<0.001	43.1

Experience on Modification of the Site	EMS1	0.820	22.580	<0.001	67.3
	EMS2	0.828	23.067	<0.001	68.6
	EMS3	0.538	11.738	<0.001	29.0
Experience on Management related Information	EMRI1	0.732	18.212	<0.001	53.6
	EMRI2	0.764	19.632	<0.001	58.4
	EMRI3	0.773	20.061	<0.001	59.8
	EMRI4	0.724	17.880	<0.001	52.4
	EMRI5	0.536	11.683	<0.001	28.7
Experience on Interpretive information	EEL1	0.729	18.086	<0.001	53.2
	EEL2	0.806	21.774	<0.001	65.0
	EEL3	0.701	16.967	<0.001	49.1
	EEL4	0.759	19.399	<0.001	57.7
	EEL5	0.757	19.307	<0.001	57.3
	EEL6	0.686	16.403	<0.001	47.0
	EEL7	0.706	17.161	<0.001	49.9
Experience on Site Personnel	ESP1	0.802	21.553	<0.001	64.3
	ESP2	0.839	23.770	<0.001	70.4
	ESP3	0.851	24.590	<0.001	72.5
	ESP4	0.723	17.839	<0.001	52.3
	ESP5	0.782	20.505	<0.001	61.1
	ESP6	0.592	13.288	<0.001	35.0
Experience on Ticket Counter	ETC1	0.752	19.081	<0.001	56.6
	ETC2	0.757	19.307	<0.001	57.3
	ETC3	0.721	17.757	<0.001	52.0
	ETC4	0.800	21.444	<0.001	64.0
Experience on Destination Vehicle	EDV1	0.661	15.510	<0.001	43.7
	EDV2	0.865	25.626	<0.001	74.9
	EDV3	0.700	16.929	<0.001	49.0

We use Structural Equation Model to evaluate the influence of the constructs viz, Experience on Directorial Information, Experience on Modification of the Site, Experience on Management related Information, Experience on Interpretive information, Experience on Site Personnel, Experience on Ticket Counter and Experience on Destination Vehicle on Experience on visitor management practices in Kerala.

Table 4: Model fit Indices for CFA – Experience on Visitor Management

	$\chi 2$	DF	P	Normed $\chi 2$	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMR	RMSEA
Experience on visitor management practices	11.648	8	.168	1.456	.991	.970	.993	.994	.998	.302	.035

All the attributes loaded significantly on the latent constructs. The value of the fit indices indicates a reasonable fit of the measurement model with data. In table below, the regression coefficients are presented.

Table 5: The regression Coefficients – Experience on Visitor Management

Path	Estimate	Critical Ratio (CR)	P	Variance explained
Experience on Directorial Information → Experience on visitor management practices	0.505	10.853	<0.001	25.5
Experience on Modification of the Site→ Experience on visitor management practices	0.542	11.848	<0.001	29.4
Experience on Management related Information → Experience on visitor management practices	0.735	18.339	<0.001	54.1
Experience on Interpretive information → Experience on visitor management practices	0.974	42.256	<0.001	94.9
Experience on Site Personnel → Experience on visitor management practices	0.806	21.774	<0.001	65.0
Experience on Ticket Counter → Experience on visitor management practices	0.577	12.843	<0.001	33.3
Experience on Destination Vehicle → Experience on visitor management practices	0.673	15.932	<0.001	45.3

Figure 1. Structural Model of Experience on Visitor Management

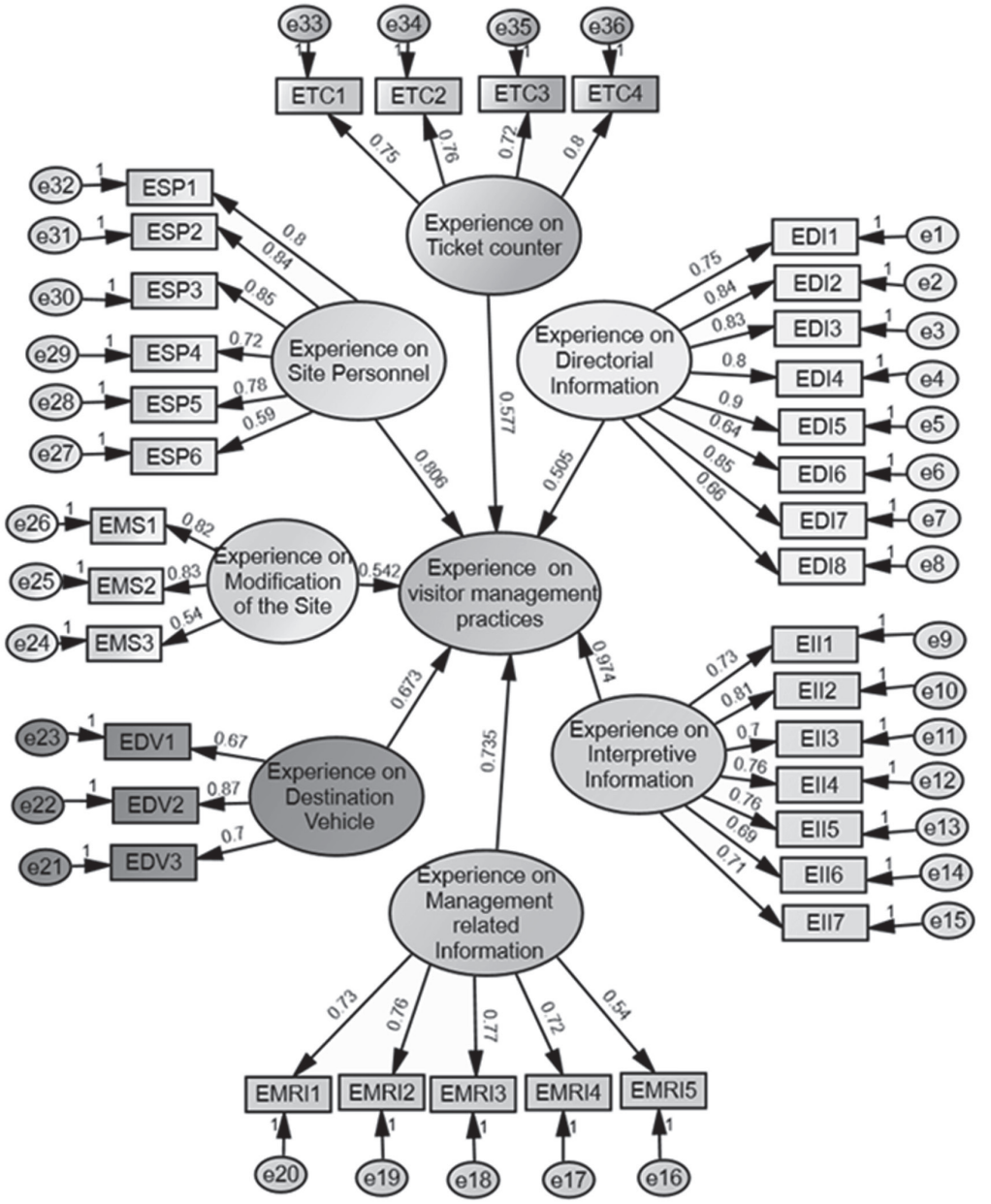

Figure 1. Structural Model of Experience on Visitor Management

Experience on interpretive information has higher regression value of.914. So, it can be inferred that the interpretive signals, messages and interpretation centres are to be improved further for enhancing the experience of people on visitor management. The next important factor contributing to the experience of visitors on visitor management based on the findings from the study is experience on site personnel (.806). The other factors such as Experience on Directorial Information (.505), Experience on Modification of the Site (.542), Experience on Management related Information (.735), Experience on Ticket Counter (.577) and Experience on Destination Vehicle (.673) as well contributes significantly towards the experience on visitor management.

CONCLUSION

Earlier research works on visitor experiences focused on the overall experience of visitors on destinations. Only a very few studies analysed the role of visitor management aspects in deciding the visitor experiences in wildlife tourism destinations. When the visitors get positive experience, they will revisit or recommend the destination to others. So it is very important to identify the factors underlying the experience of visitor management in wildlife tourism areas. The objectives of the study were to identify the factors underlying visitor experience on visitor management and to find out the degree of influence of these factors on visitor experience on visitor management. The study found that the factors contributing to visitor management experiences are Experience on Directorial Information(EDI), Experience on Modification of the Site(EMS), Experience on Management related Information(EMRI), Experience on Interpretive information(EIL), Experience on Site Personnel(ESP), Experience on Ticket Counter(ETC) and Experience on Destination Vehicle(EDV). The findings of the study can be used by tourism authorities like Department of Tourism, Department of Forest and Wildlife and District Tourism Promotion Councils while formulating the visitor management strategies for wildlife tourism destinations.

IMPLICATIONS

There are researches published on experiences of the visitors to popular destinations. But there are no or very few research publications available concerning experience on visitor management in wildlife tourism destinations. This paper contributed the theory of tourism research a comprehensive scale for measuring the visitor management experiences with six dimensions such as directorial information, modification of the site, interpretive information, site personnel, ticket counter and destination vehicle. Another important contribution of this paper is the application of structural equation modeling in experience research in tourism. Based on the results from the study the management of the tourism destinations may decide which type of visitor management practices are to be modified so that the visitors may get more positive experience.

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