

EXPLORING MILLENNIALS' MEMORIES: SETTING THE COURSE FOR DESTINATIONS' ATTRACTIVENESS

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine the factors shaping memorable tourist experience. Three objectives have been set: (1) to explain the concept of the memorable tourist experience, (2) to explore which destinations Millennials consider as the most memorable or enjoyable and (3) to investigate the factors that influence memorable tourist experiences from the Millennials' perspective.

Design/Methodology – To achieve the purpose of the research, empirical research was carried out. The research is based on the study of Morgan and Xu (2009). A survey was conducted on a sample of 420 young European travellers. Content analysis was applied to categorise and analyse results.

Findings – Young European tourists are experience-seekers who look for an active and attractive way to spend their vacation. The results indicate that young tourists predominantly reported Mediterranean destinations as the most memorable holiday destinations they have visited, followed by destinations in Western Europe, Northern Europe, Central/Eastern Europe and North America. Furthermore, the research shows that destination-oriented memories dominate among the young travellers' reasons for considering a specific destination as memorable, followed by socially-oriented and personally-oriented memories.

Originality of the research – The paper contributes to understanding the concept of the memorable tourist experience as well as the sources of memorability from the Millennials' perspective. The research results are valuable to marketing managers in tourist destinations, empowering them to create a tourism offering that will generate unforgettable experiences.

Keywords memorability, tourist experience, young tourists, Millennials, tourist destination

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary academic literature indicates that Millennials, young travellers born between the early 1980s and 2000s (UNWTO 2017, 10), have different travel patterns than previous generations; they have particular travel characteristics such as the desire for authentic cultural experiences (ITB 2016). They search for new and unique experiences and often travel to places where other market segments don't, like "up-and-coming travel destinations, places off the beaten track, rural areas and the local niches within city neighbours" (UNWTO 2017, 10). As their buying power increases, young travellers or Millennials are inspired and motivated to travel more often. Millennials are a large market segment, which in Europe represented about a third of all European outbound trips in 2015 (ITB 2016).

Traditional mass tourism is not an option for Millennials or young tourists. They strive to have memorable tourist experiences that will enrich them and engage them in planning and in experiencing destinations, and they want to experience adventure. Hence, travel types are drifting away from the traditional mass tourism offering (Karayilan and Cetin 2016). Contemporary tourists travel wishing to experience something different and new that is, in most cases, in contrast with their daily routine (Cetin and Bilgihan 2016). This different and new experience in the tourism literature is known as a tourist experience. According to Morgan (2006, 305), memorable experiences and the possibility that a destination can provide them to tourists can create a sustainable competitive advantage for a particular destination. Tourist experience involves a complex psychological process with an emphasis on memories (Larsen 2007; Tung and Ritchie 2011; Kim 2014; Agapito et al. 2017) and only remembered experiences will influence future tourist behaviour (Zhang et al. 2017). Hence, providing a memorable tourist experience that represents a contrast with everyday life is related to creating long-term memories, and that is what is needed to encourage tourists to return to a destination.

Researchers share an awareness that providing tourists with unique and memorable experiences contributes to the competitive advantage of destinations (Morgan and Xu 2009; Chandralal and Valenzuela 2013; Kim 2014; Kim and Ritchie 2014; Cetin and Bilgihan 2016; Manthiou et al. 2016). In the context of the tourist experience, previous studies have pointed out the relationship between a destination's attributes and customer satisfaction, loyalty as well as destination image (Maunier and Camelis 2013; Huang et al. 2016; Kim et al. 2012; Zhang et al. 2017; Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001). Therefore, experiential offerings of destinations enhance future tourist behaviour and return to a certain destination and contribute to its uniqueness. Kim (2014) stresses that the experiential component of a destination's attributes is of the utmost importance and helps deliver memorable tourism experiences. However, Servidio and Ruffolo (2016) highlight that, although the recognition of the significance of memorable tourist experiences is growing, the academic literature and research remain sparse. Similarly, Park and Santos (2017) emphasise the need to explore the essence of memorable experiences.

Contemporary youth tourism research increasingly addresses young people as a significant component of the international tourism market. According to UNWTO (2017), youth travel has become the fastest growing segment of international tourism, representing more than 23% of the over one billion tourists travelling internationally every year. Young consumers, especially Generation Y or Millennials, are considered to be the travellers of the future (Monaco 2018) and experience-seekers (Morgan and Xu 2009). They were born in the period between 1977 and 1999 (Lancaster and Stillman, 2003 in Dlačić and Kadić-Maglajlić 2013, UNWTO 2017). Similarly, UNWTO (2011, 8) points out that the traditional age of the young tourist market has shifted to 15-30+. They search for culture, adventure and relaxation (Morgan and Xu 2009), take long periods of time to travel and are interested in visiting places not explored by traditional tourists. As to this, they are of a particular significance for destinations (UNWTO, 2017) willing to build competitive advantage. To develop extraordinary and memorable experiences for young travellers, destination marketers must create and deliver experiential offerings that will help them ensure long-term success for the destination (Karayilan and Cetin 2016).

Based on the above, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the elements that can be used to create a memorable tourist experience from the young traveller perspective. Therefore, the objectives of this study are: (1) to explain the concept of a memorable tourist experience, (2) to explore which destinations Millennials consider as the most memorable or enjoyable and (3) to investigate the factors that influence memorable tourist experiences from the Millennials' perspective.

The paper is divided into four parts. Following the introduction, the second part explains the tourist experience with emphasis on memorability. The third part focuses on the methodology of research, followed by the analysis and discussion of research results. The conclusion presents the synthesis of the research findings and provides managerial implications.

1. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

In order to understand the memorability of tourism experiences, the following sections provide a literature overview with focus on the concept of memorable tourist experience. Furthermore, the facets of memorable tourism experiences are discussed.

1.1. Memorability and tourist experience

The tourist experience has been conceptualized from different discipline perspectives and, consequently, various approaches – psychological, phenomenological, sociological and consumer behaviour-based – have emerged. Researchers argue that the subjective perceptions and behaviours of tourists are the essential elements that form their tourist experience (Kim 2010). These subjective experiences of tourists do not always convert directly into a memorable tourism experience (Kim et al. 2012). Instead, memorable tourist experiences are those experiences that are selectively constructed following from an individual's assessment of their subjective experience and can be remembered, as well as recalled, after travel (Zhang et al. 2017).

Larsen (2007) has acknowledged the importance of memorability in tourist experiences. He has noted that tourists when referring to and remembering holidays often bring up their experiences from holidays. Furthermore, these experiences are basically their memories from holidays (Larsen 2007, 13). Positive memorable tourist experience that is remembered and retrieved in the holiday recall process is a significant predictor of a tourist's future decisions (Agapito et al. 2017). In the present research, tourist experience is considered as "a past personal travel-related event strong enough to have entered long-term memory" (Larsen 2007, 15).

Various studies have acknowledged (Pine II and Gilmore 1998; Larsen 2007; Morgan and Xu 2009; Kim 2010; Tung and Ritchie 2011; Kim et al., 2012) that one of the distinguishing factors of an experience is its memorability. By definition, memory represents systems that jointly work, so that we can learn from the past and predict our future behaviour and reactions (Baddeley 1999, 1 in Agapito et al. 2017). Memory is observed as a multidimensional psychological concept consisting of different components that need to be considered within a specific context (Manthiou et al. 2016,

363). Hence, memory components are contextual and perceptual beliefs, multimodal spatial imagery, narrative reasoning, emotions, vividity and recollection.

Memory can be divided into two interdependent categories (Kim 2014): (1) semantic memory, which is related to general facts and knowledge (e.g. images and attributes of the destination) and (2) episodic memory, which is related to autobiographical memory and refers to an individual's memory of his/her tourist experience. Scholars have noted that episodic memory that is related to personal experiences (Larsen 2007, 13) is the category of long-term memory most interesting to study in relation to tourist experience (Larsen 2007; Tung and Ritchie 2011; Agapito et al. 2017).

1.2. Facets of memorable tourist experience

To fulfil experience-related needs, tourists travel to a destination and consume various components of tourism offerings and products. In the tourism literature, destinations are considered as the pull factors for tourists (Karayilan and Cetin 2016). These pull factors consist of (Mill and Morrison 1985 in Cetin and Bilgihan 2016): attractions, facilities, infrastructure, transportation and hospitality. Tourist destinations offer an integrated experience to consumers (Buhalis 2000, 97). Furthermore, from an experience viewpoint, destinations facilitate and create conditions for creating and providing tourist experience (Sorensen 2004 in Sotiriadis and Gursoy 2016, 67). This tourist experience is created in two steps (Kim 2014). First, tourists are initially attracted by a destination's attributes and consequently visit the destination. Second, destination attributes become experiential components that form a tourist's experience. Recently, Kim (2014) identified a destination's attributes associated with memorable tourism experience; they include local culture, the variety of activities, hospitality, infrastructure, environment management, accessibility, service quality, physiography, place attachment and superstructure.

According to Huang et al. (2016), tourist experience involves both objective destination attributes and the tourists' subjective state of mind, like perception, creation and interpretations. Destination attributes are interpreted subjectively depending on the tourists' cultural background, the purpose of visit, moods, level of education and past experiences (Buhalis 2000). Moreover, Chang et al. (2014) pointed out that tourist experience mainly lies in a set of complex interactions between subjective tourist responses and objective features of a destination. In that way, the experience is co-created. This co-creation process is approached as the interaction between a destination's pull factors and its internal push factors arising from the individual's needs and desires (Morgan and Xu 2009).

As a theoretical framework for this research, the facets of tourist experiences are based on Kapferer's brand identity prism (Kapferer 2012). In previous studies, the theory of brand identity prism was applied to tourist destinations (Ngoubene Dany et al. 2015; Berrozpe et al. 2017) to explain factors that influence the tourist experience (Morgan 2006; Morgan 2008; Morgan and Xu 2009). Kapferer's prism of brand identity takes into account the interaction between the sender, the sender's tangible characteristics and brand personality and the recipient, the recipient's reflection and self-image (Kapferer 2012). The interaction between brand personality and self-image occurs through a

cultural dimension of brand identity, while interaction between tangible characteristics and reflection occurs through a relationship that represents the social context of brand identity. Building on Kapferer's brand identity prism, Morgan and Xu (2009) have emphasized that the memorability of tourist experiences should be analysed through six dimensions: (1) physical attributes of a destination, (2) destination image (personality), (3) benefits, (4) meanings, (5) social interactions and (6) cultural interactions.

A destination's external (pull) factors comprise the physical attributes of the destination and destination image (personality). Physical attributes are tangible aspects of the destination as well as intangible elements of service provided (Morgan and Xu 2009). They include (Berrozpe et al. 2017, 3): tourist infrastructure, transportation, natural resources, cities and villages, heritage, activities, recreational and other services. Destination image (personality) is defined "as the perceptions of individual destination attributes and the holistic impression made by the destination" and consists of (Echtner and Ritchie 2003; 43) functional (tangible) and psychological (intangible) characteristics. In the tourism literature, no consensus has been reached about the definition of destination image, although researchers point out three of its components: cognitive, affective and total image (Zhang et al. 2017). For the purpose of this study, the destination image is perceived as the "total impression the destination makes on the mind of tourists" (Morgan and Xu 2009). In a recent study, Zhang et al. (2017) provided evidence that destination image has a direct positive effect on memorable tourist experience.

A destination's internal (push) factors comprise benefits and meanings. Benefits that tourists seek from engaging in tourism activities are the core of motivational studies in the tourism and leisure literature (Otto and Ritchie 1996). Perceived benefits are related to satisfying psychological needs that motivate tourists to travel (Morgan and Xu 2009). In early motivational studies Crompton (1979) identified seven socio-psychological and two cultural motives related to tourists' choice of a destination: escape from a perceived mundane environment, exploration and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of relationships, facilitation of social interaction, novelty, and education. Recent motivational studies suggest variations of this approach (Moscardo et al. 1996; Sellick 2004, Prayag and Ryan 2011). Researchers have found that destinations may differ according to symbolic significance and meanings (Hosany and Gilbert 2010). Eusébio and João Carneiro (2015) found the travel motivations of young people to be knowledge, challenge, escape and novelty. Modern tourists seek unique, extraordinary and meaningful travel experiences to fulfil their needs and desires (Kim and Ritchie 2014). Meanings are created by tourists' "memories, interest and concerns as much as by their encounter with the attraction" (Morgan 2008, 83), that is, with the destination they visited. Furthermore, meanings are shaped within the context of an individual's sense of identity (Morgan and Xu 2009). For example, Berrozpe et al. (2017) found that some respondents identify themselves with the destination they visited.

Social interactions can be described as a "degree of the individual's closeness to others" and are constituent elements of human social behaviour (Campos et al. 2016). Experiences emerge through social and cultural interactions. Therefore, these interactions are an essential part of tourist experiences. In visiting a tourist destination, social interaction, as a cross-cultural encounter, emerges between tourists and between

tourists and the host community (Morgan and Xu 2009). Previous studies revealed that the experiences might produce strong relationships among participants (Schouten et al. 2007; Morgan 2008), primarily through the creation of special groups and communities (Pomfret 2006). Morgan and Xu's studies (2009) indicated that socially-orientated memories, like having fun with friends and family, are the most important factor in creating memorable holiday experience.

2. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

This study aimed to explore the elements of a destination that create memorable tourist experience from the Millennials' perspectives as well as to examine the different potential of destination-oriented, personally-oriented and socially-oriented memories from the Millennials' perspective. Also, the study aimed to research what is the most memorable destination for Millennials.

In this study, we used the approach from Morgan and Xu's (2009) research which explores the influence of past memorable tourist experience on future travel aspirations on a sample of British students. The study was conducted on a purposive sample of young European travellers in May and June 2017. A questionnaire was created with Google Forms, and the Internet was used to distribute the questionnaire. In addition to demographics, the respondents were asked two open-ended questions. The first question was "What is the most memorable or enjoyable place you have visited in your life?" and the second question was "Please explain why.". The responses to the open-ended questions were classified through content analysis performed by three researchers. Unclear cases were discussed, and the final categories were formed.

A total of 420 respondents accessed the online questionnaire. Each questionnaire was completed correctly. Table 1 shows the respondents' socio-demographic profile.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

ITEMS	RESPONDENTS	
	FREQUENCY	%
Gender		
<i>Female</i>	280	66.7
<i>Male</i>	140	33.3
Age		
<i>Up to 19 years old</i>	23	5.5
<i>20 – 25</i>	284	67.6
<i>26 – 30</i>	63	15.0
<i>31 and more</i>	50	11.9
Level of education		
<i>Primary school</i>	2	0.5
<i>Secondary school</i>	77	18.3
<i>Higher education</i>	337	80.2
<i>Other</i>	4	1.0
Employment		
<i>Student</i>	292	69.5

ITEMS	RESPONDENTS	
	FREQUENCY	%
<i>Employed</i>	105	25.0
<i>Unemployed</i>	17	4.0
<i>Other</i>	6	1.4
Country		
<i>Austria</i>	98	23.3
<i>Croatia</i>	180	42.9
<i>France</i>	4	1.0
<i>Germany</i>	7	1.7
<i>Italy</i>	9	2.1
<i>Latvia</i>	5	1.2
<i>Poland</i>	38	9.0
<i>Spain</i>	14	3.3
<i>Russia</i>	5	1.2
<i>Turkey</i>	5	1.2
<i>Other</i>	55	13.1
Accompanying person during travel		
<i>Alone</i>	38	9.0
<i>Friends</i>	193	46.0
<i>Family</i>	65	15.5
<i>Group of tourists</i>	7	1.7
<i>Other</i>	15	3.6

Source: Research results

Out of a total of 420 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 66.7% were female, and 33.3% were male. The majority of them belong to the 20 – 25 age group (67.6%), followed by those aged 26 – 30 (15%). The majority of respondents (80.2%) had a higher education degree, 69.5% of respondents were students, and 25% were employed. They mostly travel with friends (46%) or with family (15.5%).

The first objective of the research was to establish what is the most memorable or enjoyable place Millennials have visited in their life. There were 302 different responses. Respondents reported different destinations: large European cities, countries, and continents. After all responses were reviewed by three researchers, the principle was established by which coding was performed. All destinations were classified by country and then by region, taking into account the criteria used by UNWTO (2017). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Most memorable tourist destination by region

DESTINATION	RESPONDENTS	
	FREQUENCY	%
Northern Europe	48	11.4
Western Europe	57	13.6
Central/Eastern Europe	41	9.8
Southern/Medit. Europe	176	41.9
North America	22	5.2
Caribbean	10	2.4
South America	2	0.5

DESTINATION	RESPONDENTS	
	FREQUENCY	%
Middle East	6	1.4
North Africa	3	0.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	4	1.0
North-East Asia	10	2.4
South-East Asia	14	3.3
Oceania	8	1.9
South Asia	4	1.0
More than one country	7	1.7
No answer	8	1.9

Source: Research results

It is evident that a considerable number of respondents (41.9%) selected one of the Mediterranean destinations as the most memorable destination for a holiday. The following countries appear most frequently in this category: Croatia (29.5%), Italy (25.6%), Spain (20.5%), Turkey (6.3%), Greece (4.5%), Portugal (3.4%) and others (10.2%). As the most memorable holiday destinations in these countries, the respondents reported the cities of Barcelona (8.7%), Rome (5.8%), Venice (5.8%), Istanbul (4%) and Dubrovnik (2.3%). Other tourist destinations in Mediterranean countries are mentioned in a small number of cases.

In addition to destinations in Mediterranean countries, respondents also pointed out destinations in Western Europe (13.6%), Northern Europe (11.4%), Central/Eastern Europe (9.8%) and North America (5.2%) as being the most memorable destinations. Other destinations are considerably less represented in the respondents' answers. In the category of Western European countries, young travellers prefer Paris (22.8%) and Amsterdam (10.5%), while in Central and Eastern Europe most respondents like Prague (48.8% answers in this category).

To address the second objective of this study, respondents explained why they find the mentioned destination as being the most memorable or enjoyable for them. This question resulted in a large number of responses. We obtained 405 different answers. The following words were most often mentioned: beautiful (49 times), people (48), amazing (27), nature (27), culture (27), landscape (19), food (18), beach (16), sea (11) etc.

The reasons for choosing a particular destination were listed and examined for similarities. Further, all responses were coded and grouped into seven groups. Except for one group (4% of respondents did not give a reason), the answers were divided into six groups which refer to destination-oriented memories (physical attributes of destination and destination image), personally-oriented memories (benefits and achievements) and socially-oriented memories (social and cultural interactions). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: **Reasons for memories**

	RESPONDENTS	
	FREQUENCY	%
Physical attributes	167	39.8
Destination image	68	16.2
Benefits	31	7.4
Achievements	39	9.3
Social interactions	65	15.5
Cultural interactions	33	7.9
No reason was given	17	4.0

Source: Research results

It is evident that destination-oriented memories dominate. As the reason for memories, the most substantial number of respondents (39.8%) specified the physical attributes of a destination such as beautiful nature, landscape, beaches, architecture, monuments, etc. Specific concepts referring to the overall destination image were indicated by 16.2% of respondents. Respondents used sentences such as “It is something else”, “It is completely different”, “Is an amazing city, you can't describe it with words”, “Because it's really awesome”.

The second group of reasons encompasses socially-oriented memories. Of the respondents, 15.5% mentioned social contacts as the reason why the holiday was memorable. Some of reasons in this category are: “Because I met great people there”, “Because people are really nice and open”, “It was a perfect island to enjoy with close family”, “I met a lot of new friends there”, etc.

The smallest group of respondents pointed out personally-oriented memories relating to benefits (“very relaxing”, “energy”, “development and entertainment”, “I've had a lot of experience there”, etc.) or achievements (“It was the first place I had visited in a foreign country”, “It was my first single trip”, “Because I was a kid and we went to Disneyland”, etc.)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study contributes to understanding the facets of memorable tourist experiences of young European travellers, more precisely European Millennials. The research conducted demonstrates that the most significant segment of respondents mentioned Mediterranean destinations as the most memorable holiday destination they have visited. They predominantly state destinations in Croatia, Italy, Spain, Turkey, Greece and Portugal. This is in line with previous results of the study conducted by Morgan and Xu (2009) that identified Mediterranean destinations as the ones that most respondents recognized as being the most memorable.

Furthermore, research reveals that a significant proportion of young travellers point to physical attributes of the destination as being the most memorable. Hence, destination-oriented memory is dominant among Millennials. This is particularly evident when memories refer to traditional Mediterranean cities (e.g. Barcelona, Rome, Venice,

Istanbul and Dubrovnik) that are full of historical and natural landmarks. Therefore, this study can be useful for marketing theorists and practitioners to find out where (close to historical monuments and natural landmarks) and how (by providing a memorable experience) they could create, and contribute to the development of, a memorable tourist experience among young travellers, especially Millennials.

Further, the findings indicate that memories associated with social interactions are the second critical dimension of memorability. This finding is consistent with Morgan and Xu's (2009) research, which also determined that social interactions are an essential aspect for young people to facilitate co-created tourist experience and its memorability. Also, because young travellers create their memorable tourist experience through interaction with their environment and people in the destination, it is suggested to educate local inhabitants, travel guides and others in the destination to provide experience for tourists.

This research has some limitations. First, although the sample consists of young tourists, Millennials, from several countries it does not include all countries in Europe, and the distribution of respondents does not reflect the number of inhabitants in a particular county. With regard to the nationality of the respondents, most of them are from Croatia; this is perceived as another limitation. The third limitation is seen in the methodology used. It could be that by using different methods we would get different results. So, it is advisable to apply different methodologies for analysing data. As to further research, it would be interesting to explore tourist motivations for visiting a specific destination and to research if tourists plan to return to the particular destination they pointed out as being the most memorable for them.

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