

# **Emotional Connection, Cognitive Engagement and Post-Experience Behaviours in Religious Site Visits: A Search on Mawlana Museum in Konya, Turkey**

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## **Biographies**

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## **Abstract**

This study looks at different motives that tourists experience for their vacations and visit different holiday destinations. Tourist experiences are more than physical travels to places. Therefore, major tourist destinations associate themselves with sacred people e.g. St. Philipus or Virgin Mary, sometimes a Sufi such as Mawlana or Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. These associations with the sacred people create emotional connections and cognitive engagements with these destinations. These emotional connections and cognitive engagements in turn lead to destination loyalty. Within this context, this study specifically aims at (1) exploring the effects of religious sites on emotional connections and cognitive engagements, (2) investigating how emotional connections affect tourists' post experience behaviours, and (3) finding how cognitive engagements affect tourists' post experience behaviours. The survey was conducted on the visitors to the Mawlana museum in Konya, Turkey between the months of December 2016 and April 2017. The findings show that the emotional connection factors affect the recommended intentions in high rates and the cognitive engagement factors create the re-visit intentions in high rates.

## **Introduction**

Tourist experiences incorporate more than just a physical travel to a place, as they can also involve spiritual elements, psychological and physical benefits, self-development, and life-change (Wilson and Harris, 2006). Therefore, Wall and Mathieson (2006) state that religion has

been a powerful force causing people to travel to the religious centres in different places of the World. With this powerful force mentioned above, this study especially looks at the emotional connections and cognitive engagements with the religious site called Mawlana Museum in Konya, Turkey and further looks at tourists' post experience behaviours. The following sections present the related literature, methodology, findings and some conclusions for this study.

## **Literature Review**

Religious sites are seen as important tourism attractions highlighting the uniqueness and competitiveness for destinations in tourism marketing (Francis *et al* 2008; Hughes *et al* 2013). Regarding these tourism attractions, Woodward (2004) clarifies the religious sites such as cathedrals, temples and mosques. Moreover, Nolan and Nolan (1992) add religious sites offering visitors experiences such as music recitals, civic, ceremonies etc. Therefore, tourists have different motives to experience their vacations and to visit destinations. To support this, Güzel (2013) states that many opportunities are available for escapism in tourism sector. This is because tourists like to feel spiritually satisfied. In turn, they make their trips to spiritual places rather than historical or popular sites. By taking this into consideration, many destinations are promoting themselves in connection with spiritual motivations and creating spiritual experiences (Güzel and Özer, 2013). For example, Pakistan presents a spiritual hub of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) based on a web of Sufi shrines offering massive annual gatherings and international events (Haq, 2011). The mentioned statement example also suggests emotional/spiritual connection is paralled with the escapism dimension. However, the cognitive engagement is paralled with the education dimension. On these two dimensions, tourists need to participate actively to the spiritual experiences. In order to support this, Pine ve Gilmore (1999) say that the escapism dimension is the strongest dimension for the emotional connection. Laselle and Britton (2003) also locate that escapism and looking for spirituality is the last step of touristic product in the experience value circles. Therefore, this study's literature focuses upon two dimensions; emotional connection and cognitive engagement. Emotional connections directing the escapism dimension of experience model refers the tourists' connection to the creator/God, feelings somethings special through the faith and spiritual sacred people. However, cognitive engagement regarding the education dimension of experience model refers the changes on tourists' ideas, learning something about the religion (Islam/Sufism). This study specifically looks at both

emotional and cognitive dimensions affecting the level of how tourists feel themselves belong to a destination and explain the post-experience behaviours (re-visit/advise).

## **Methodology**

This study used a survey questionnaire that was administered between the months of December 2016 and April in 2017. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part included socio-demographic items including gender, age, educational level, nationality, number of visits to Turkey. The second part included the items for emotional connection/cognitive engagement and the post-experience behaviours (intention to recommend/re-visit behaviour) by using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The implementation of the measurement scale was done with the visitors to the Mawlana Museum in Konya. The visitors to the Mawlana Museum were the focus population of the study. A total of 340 questionnaires were collected between the months of December 2016 and April 2017. Data were statistically analysed by using the SPSS statistic software.

## **Results**

For the purpose of examining the effects of emotional and cognitive factors on post-experience behaviours, single regression models were formed. Based on the suggested models hypotheses were tested at significance level 1%. This was done by detecting the means of emotional and cognitive factors and turning it into single factorial pattern. Also, all the hypotheses in the study attempt to examine the effects of cognitive/emotional factors on post-experience behaviours. This was accomplished by first obtaining the means of cognitive and emotional factors and checking the relationship between emotional/cognitive factors and individual items in post-experience behaviours.

Emotional factors positively affect the post experience attitude items about revisiting the site ( $\beta = 0,320$ ). Thus, it can be said that an increase of 1 degree in emotional factors correspond to an increase of 0,320 post experience attitude item about revising the site.

Cognitive factors positively affects post-experience item on revisiting the site at a significance level of 1 % ( $\beta = 0,375$ ). Therefore, an increase of 1 degree in cognitive factors would correspond to an increase of 0, 375 in post-experience behaviour of revisiting the site.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Visitors feel emotionally connected to the places important for their faith and they also feel connected to the important religion leaders. This emotional bond raises the revisits and attitudes towards recommending these places to other people. For these reasons, people feel themselves belong to the destination after their visitation and they feel the importance of their religion during their visitation.

Recommending through this study that the touristic products should enhance emotional/intellectual changes, and thus, destinations should promote themselves with spiritual motivations. The spiritually important people related with religion could be used for marketing destinations. This type of a touristic product should be marketed to the international religion travel agencies/tour operators and make sure that all the necessary marketing materials should be placed in their catalogues as one of tourism products.

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