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RESEARCH NOTE



Pergamon

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Annals of Tourism Research, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 1074–1078, 2008
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Printed in Great Britain

FOLK RELIGION AND TOURIST INTENTION AVOIDING TSUNAMI-AFFECTED DESTINATIONS

Jen-Hung Huang

National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan

Shu-Ting Chuang

The Overseas Chinese Institute of Technology, Taiwan

Yu-Ru Lin

Yu Da College of Business, Taiwan

In the aftermath of the devastating Asian tsunami which occurred on the 26th of December 2004, the number of tourists visiting the affected resorts was significantly reduced, thus severely damaging the regional tourist industry. With reconstruction of tsunami-affected destinations almost complete, Asian tourists have been much slower to return to the affected destinations than Western tourists (Henderson 2005). Why many Asian tourists have been reluctant to visit the tsunami-affected areas after the disaster deserves careful scrutiny.

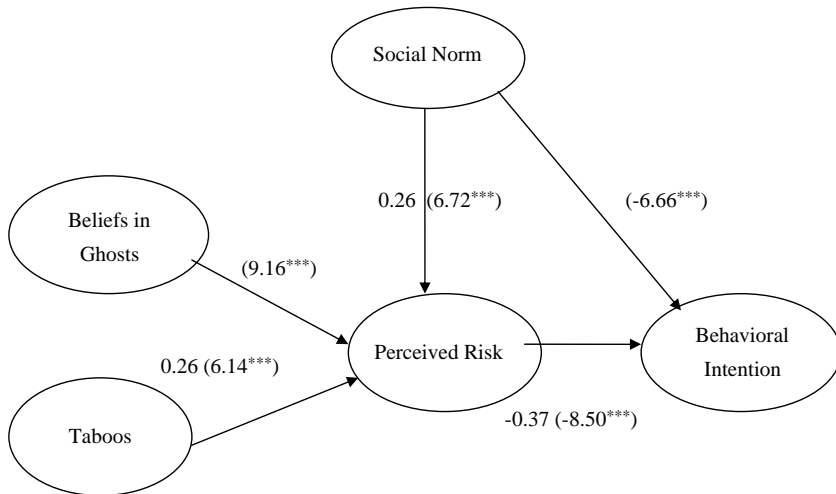
Folk religion may be a key influence on Asian tourists' decisions to visit tsunami-affected destinations, given that more than 280,000 people died as a result of the tsunami in these areas. Based on the semi-static model for cultural analysis proposed by Gullestrup (2006), culture is a complex entity consisting of culture segments (the horizontal dimension) and culture layers (the vertical dimension). Folk religion belongs to the security-creating segment and appears to be in the core culture layers, although further research is needed to confirm this hypothesis. Asian folk religion is based on ancient animistic beliefs and also draws upon certain aspects of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Yin-Yang and other religions. It has neither doctrines nor organization. Folk religions are deeply ingrained in

Asian’s daily life and are transmitted as a matter of custom among people bound together by community (Kaneko 1990).

Folk religion has a strong impact on social behavior and the marketplace. The price endings used in Chinese price advertisements have a distinct tendency to favor the digit 8 and to avoid the digit 4 (Simmons and Schindler 2003). Kramer and Block (2008) show that superstitious beliefs have a non-conscious, robust influence on product satisfaction and decision-making under risk. Belief in soul is one dimension of religious beliefs in Japanese folk religion (Kaneko 1990). Therefore, sites affected by the Asian tsunami may be considered inauspicious destinations and most believers may shy away from them in an effort to avoid the spirits and ghosts believed to roam in these areas.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of the intentions Asian tourists have in traveling to tsunami-affected destinations. Folk religion involves belief in ghosts and religious taboos. According to Asian folk religion, some ghosts, particularly those spirits of people who died from drowning, remain angry and prey on the innocent living as a means of taking revenge, even depriving them of reincarnation (Harrell 1974). Taboo indicates an unapproachable entity which prohibits touching, eating, speaking, or seeing. Many taboos have an aspect of anxiety associated with them, in that misfortune will befall the person who does not obey them. Death is particularly unlucky, is considered taboo, and is seldom joked about; “ghosts” are another taboo subject, and arouse genuine fear in many people (Lin, Xirasagar and Tung, 2006). Folk religion may thus strongly impact perceptions of risk associated with visiting tsunami-affected destinations.

This study defines perceived risk as the experience of anxiety or psychological discomfort resulting from tourist’s spiritual and/or supernatural beliefs associated with the purchase and consumption of travel-related services for the destination. Destinations perceived as posing an excessively high risk may be considered



Number on path: standardized parameter estimation, Number in parentheses: T-value.

Remark: * Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ level; ** Significant at $\alpha = 0.01$ level; *** Significant at $\alpha = 0.001$

Model Fit: $\chi^2 = 177.62$; $df = 82$; P -value = 0.000; RMSEA = 0.042; GFI = 0.96; AGFI = 0.95;

CFI = 0.99; NNFI = 0.99

Figure 1. Standardized Solution of the Structural Model

Table 1. Summary of Measurement Scales

Constructs	Mean	SD	Loading	CR	AVE
<i>Beliefs in Ghosts:</i>				0.89	0.66
Spirits and ghosts of those who have no one to appease them will wander.	3.57	0.91	0.76		
Thousands of spirits and ghosts of tsunami victims are likely to be wandering near their places of death, for example on beaches or near resorts.	3.58	0.89	0.86		
If the body of the deceased is mutilated, or if there is no proper burial, his/her soul will wander restlessly.	3.42	0.92	0.83		
Wandering spirits who died from an accident cause troubles by bringing bad luck, misfortune, illness, or spirit possession to the living.	3.53	0.93	0.80		
<i>Taboos:</i>				0.87	0.69
I will avoid water sports on beaches or in rivers during the Ghost Month.	3.86	1.00	0.76		
I will avoid getting married or engaged during the Ghost Month.	3.84	0.99	0.89		
I will avoid moving, buying houses or buying cars in the Ghost Month.	3.85	1.00	0.83		
<i>Perceived Risk:</i>				0.90	0.76
The thought of vacationing in tsunami-affected destinations makes me feel psychologically uncomfortable, including spooky and cold feelings.	3.60	0.97	0.87		
The thought of vacationing in tsunami-affected destinations makes me feel unwanted anxiety, for example worrying about experiencing something paranormal.	3.58	0.95	0.89		
There is a risk that vacationing in a post-tsunami location will make me mentally ill owing to haunting by ghosts or an attack by demons.	3.58	1.00	0.85		
<i>Social Norm:</i>				0.86	0.75
People who are important to me would disapprove of me visiting tsunami-affected destinations.	3.64	0.93	0.89		
Friends and relatives will disapprove of be choosing tsunami-affected destinations as a vacation spot.	3.67	0.94	0.84		
<i>Intention of Traveling:</i>				0.94	0.85
If I were to take a vacation, I would consider tsunami-affected destinations.	2.47	0.95	0.88		
The probability that I would consider traveling to tsunami-affected destinations is: (very low to very high)	2.34	0.91	0.94		
My willingness of traveling to tsunami-affected destinations is: (very low to very high).	2.38	0.93	0.94		

undesirable and thus may be eliminated from the selection process (Sönmez and Graefe 1998).

Social norm is the perception of general social pressure regarding whether to perform a particular action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Significant others influence an individual’s formation of perceived risk. Moreover, potential tourist per-

ceptions of social norms are a function of perceptions regarding whether “relevant referents think he should or should not perform the behavior and his motivation to comply with the referents” (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975:332).

The data-gathering instrument used was a self-administered questionnaire. The scale for the two constructs of folk religion was developed by multi-stage procedures with an initial pool of items from three sources (literature, expert interviews, and focus groups). Perceived risk measures were newly developed for this study. Social norm measures were adopted from Ajzen and Driver (1992). The behavioral intention measurement scale developed by Dodds, Monroe and Grewal (1991) was used. A five-point Likert-type scale (disagree-agree) was used throughout. Table 1 shows all of the measurement items.

The study data were collected from a sample of 652 potential tourists in Taiwan. A confirmatory factor analysis with LISREL was conducted to further validate the measures of the constructs. The high factor loadings (above 0.60), composite reliability, and average variances extracted (AVE) for each construct all confirmed the reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the instrument (see Table 1).

Figure 1 presents the results of the analysis using the structural equation modeling, which show a good fit between the data and the model ($\chi^2/df = 2.17$, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.99, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.042). Folk religion, specifically, beliefs in ghosts and taboos, significantly affects tourist perceptions of risk associated with travel to tsunami-affected destinations. Moreover, tourist risk perceptions and social norm significantly affect their intention to visit tsunami-affected destinations.

Although some studies doubted the predictive ability of the Ajzen and Fishbein model, Sheppard, Hartwick and Warshaw (1988) concluded that “the model performed extremely well in the prediction of goals and in forecasting activities involving an explicit choice among alternatives.” One limitation of this work is that the results may be predictable based on the type of questions that were posed. Further research is needed to verify whether these results may be related to other as yet unknown conceptual variables. **A**

Acknowledgement—The authors would like to thank the National Science Council of Taiwan, for financially supporting this research.

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Shu-Ting Chuang: Department of Management Science, National Chiao Tung University, 1001 Ta Hsueh Road, Hsinchu 300, Taiwan. Email: <kathy@ocit.edu.tw>

Submitted 7 April 2007. Resubmitted 25 August 2007. Resubmitted 25 January 2008. Accepted 25 February 2008. Revised 24 June 2008.

doi:10.1016/j.annals.2008.06.007

Annals of Tourism Research, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 1078–1082, 2008
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Printed in Great Britain

GOOGLE SCHOLAR VISIBILITY AND TOURISM JOURNALS

Jamie Murphy

The University of Western Australia, Australia

Rob Law

Hong Kong Polytechnic University, China

Tourism is a cross-disciplinary subject working in myriad fields such as anthropology, geography, and sociology. Yet for universities, departments and governmental organisations judging research output (King 2004), interdisciplinary journals necessitate comparisons within and across disciplines (Barrett, Olia, and Von Bailey 2000). Although hospitality and tourism heads reported publications in reputable refereed journals as the top measure of research performance (Law and Chon 2007), tourism journals are troublesome to rank.

Despite controversy over what they represent, universities often rely on Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) journal indices to reward research performance