The Impact of Tourist Experience Quality and Involvement on Tourist Recommendation Intention: Evidence From Ramelau Mountain as Tourist Destination in Timor-Leste

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to test a model linking tourist experience quality, involvement and recommendation intention. The data was collected from 397 tourists as respondents used a five scale likert questionnaires, and SMART-PLS 3.1 was used for data analysis. The result of this research showed that tourist experience quality and involvement positively and significantly influenced on tourist recommendation intention. This study enriches the empirical debates on tourist experience quality, involvement and recommendation intention in emergent tourist destination. Study also provides insight description to the government and tourism industry to improve Ramelau Mountain as tourism destination by providing memorable experience quality and tourism engagement to enhance tourists to revisit and recommend to the other potential tourists to visit Ramelau Mountain.

Keywords: Experience Quality, Tourist Involvement, Recommendation Intention, Tourism Destination, Ramelau Mountain, Timor-Leste.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a global industry which contributes significantly to the economic growth, sustainable job creation (Chaulagain, Wiitala and Fu, 2019; Ratnasari et al., 2020; Saldanha et al., 2020), cultural and knowledge sharing (Pyke et al., 2019). Tourism destination is considered as a tourism product (Chaulagain, Wiitala and Fu, 2019) which is important to enchech tourists experiences and involvement in tourism activities (Lu, Chi and Liu, 2015; Kusumawati and Rahayu, 2020), leading to tourist recommendation intention to visit a tourism destination (Chaulagain, Wiitala and Fu, 2019). Tourism destination is place offers to visitors enjoy various types of travel experiences such as the uniqueness scenery, blueocean, hiking and enjoy the view of the mountain (Huang et al., 2015; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). Tourism destination must satisfy the expectation of visitors by including infrastructure and facilities tailored to their needs (Huang et al., 2015; Su et al., 2020).

Tourist experience quality represents how tourist emotionally evaluate their experiences as they participate in consumption activities and interact with the service surroundings, service providers, other customers, customer’s companions, and other element (Hasan et al., 2019). Tourist experience quality has become a critical concept in tourist behavior (Jin et al., 2015). Tourists have good experiences in their visit to various tourism destination will lead to positively talk, recommend to other people and revisit the the same destination (Campos et al., 2017; Ratnasari et al., 2020). Therefore, tourists’ experience quality has positive impact on tourist recommendation intention (Altunel and Erkut, 2015; Li, Wen and Ying, 2018).

Tourist involvement is an individual and a recreational activity, at one point in time, characterized by some level of enjoyment and self-expression being achieved through the activity (Hwang, Lee and Chen, 2005; Altunel and Erkut, 2015).

Tourist recommendation intention is tourist actions to tell people, share positive information, experienced on tourism destination due to they feel satisfied with tourism destination or represents an individual efforts to obtain the desire goal (Jin et al., 2015). Tourist recommendation intention helps to lead to sustainable visitation in one tourism destination (Zauberman et al., 2009; Li, Wen and Ying, 2018). Previous studies revealed that quality experience influenced positively and significantly on tourist recommendation intention in (Chen and Chen, 2010; Afonso et al., 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), while tourist involvement had no significant impact (Altunel and Erkut, 2015).

Dividing results of previous empirical studies confirm that tourist recommendation which trigger positive feeling, intention to revisit and willing to promote to the other potential tourists to visit the same tourism destination. This also requires undertaking studies to find proper antecedent variables for tourist recommendation intention especially for emergent tourist destination such as Timor-Leste. The objectives of this research are: (1) To analyse and explain the impact of tourists experience quality on tourist recommendation Intention in Ramelau mountain. (2) To analyse and explain the impact of tourist involvement on tourist recommendation intention in Ramelau mountain.
2. Theoretical Framework, Research Model and Hypothesis

2.1. Tourist Destination

Tourism destination is basically a geographic area, which attracts visitors. This can be an individual country or a city. A tourism destination has different types of accommodation and other facilities such as restaurant (Soininen, 2015). Tourism destination are the foundation units of tourism, the term tourism destination is a typical geographical term and is understood as a part of geographical space (Zemla, 2016). Tourism destination is a beautiful and unique place that must satisfy the expectations of visitor by including infrastructure and facilities that are tailored to their needs (Patanidanan and Shibusawa, 2020).

2.2. Tourist Experience Quality

Experience quality is a tourist judgement based on his or her evaluation of the overall experience at a tourism destination (Zatori, Smith and Puczk, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Tourist experience quality can contribute to the tourist’s perception of value and satisfaction, which in turn influences of tourist loyalty (Moon and Han, 2018). Experience quality is a tourist subjective evaluation on affective responses to their desired social-psychological benefit (Chen and Chen, 2010).

Tourist experience is an important factor in tourism recommendation intention. Tourist will express their positive feelings, which in turns revisit and recommend to other visitors to visit the same tourism destination (Chang, Backman and Huang, 2014). Many tourist destinations try to offer attractive events and products in addition to natural beauty in order to provide memorable events to attract tourists.

Tourism experience quality consists of seven dimensions namely hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge (Kim, Ritchie and McCormick, 2012). However, this dimension has been criticized as not the experience quality dimensions, but the tourist experience based on their feelings and subjective responses after involving in tourism activities (Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2012). Therefore, Fernandes and Cruz (2016) further developed experience quality dimensions (29 items) namely environment, service providers, learning, entertainment, functional benefits, trust, satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy.

2.2. Tourist Involvement

Involvement is the positive feeling, choice and control on the service offering, and capacity building which lead to a sense of mutual cooperation (Chen and Chen, 2010; Afonso et al., 2018). Involvement is also known as the degree of individual’s participation in an organization’s decision-making which also links to the sense of responsibility and commitment (Amah, 2013), or as an individual and a recreational activity resulting in some level of enjoyment and self-expression being achieved through the activity (Hwang, Lee and Chen, 2005). Tourist involvement is defined as the level of importance a tourist attributes to an object, an action, or an activity and the enthusiasm and interest that is generated (Altunel and Erkut, 2015).

2.3. Tourist Recommendation Intention

Recommendation is one of the follow-up actions to share to other people about something which people felt appreciate and satisfied during involve in some activities. Recommendation intention is a superior predictor of future performance. Recommendation intention must reflect something that is already captured in tourist satisfaction during visiting tourism destination (Chang, Backman and Huang, 2014; Altunel and Erkut, 2015; Ratnasari et al., 2020). Recommendation intention is the delivery of application from the result of observations of tourists desire (McGinty and Smith, 2009:36). Destination attractiveness, experience quality and involvement as antecedent variable for tourist loyalty and recommendation intention (Dedeoğlu, 2019; Yin et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

2.4. Hypothesis

2.6.1. Tourist Experience Quality and Tourist Recommendation Intention

Experience quality is related tourism perception and feelings about a tourism destination after they visit. If tourists have positive feelings, then they will revisit and recommend to other people to visit the same tourism destination (Chang, Backman and Huang, 2014; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2019). Therefore, experience quality has positive impact on tourism recommendation intention. This has been confirmed by study of Kang & Gretzel (2012) that experience quality has a positive effect on recommendation intention (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021) through tourists satisfaction and appreciation of the places that they visited (Chang, Backman and Huang, 2014; Altunel and Erkut, 2015).

H1: Tourist experience quality has positive and significant impact on tourist recommendation intention in Ramelau mountain.

2.6.2. Tourist Involvement and Tourist Recommendation Intention

Tourism involvement is considered important aspect in tourism planning and development. Tourism involvement secures tourism experience, participation and action toward a tourism destination. Tourist’s involvement can contributed to understanding and predicting behaviour intention, decision-making and tourists loyalty to a destination (Campos et al., 2017). Study of Afonso et al. (2018) showed that tourist involvement influence positively and significantly on tourists recommendation intention.
H0: Tourist involvement has positive and significant impact on tourist recommendation intention in Ramelau mountain.

3. Research Method
3.1. Research Population and Sample

This research was carried out in Nunomogue village, Hatubuilico Post-Administrative, Ainaro Municipality for 2 months, starting from 5th of June to 5th of August 2021. The population of this research is the tourists visited Ramelau Mountain from the year of 2018 to 2020. The total population of the research was 48,018 based on the data from National Directorate Tourist Development in Hatubuilico (2021), while, 397 samples were used after the calculation using Slovin formula with the marginal error of 5%.

To select research respondents, accidental sampling technique was used. This means that anyone who had visited the Ramelau Mountain is considered as respondent. Therefore, questionnaires were distributed to respondents in Ramelau Mountain, and Dili. Respondents were assured that their responses will be kept confidential at all the time in order to stimulate respondents’ cooperation to fill the questionnaires.

3.2. Measurement

Experience Quality. Experience quality (EQ) is defined as tourist attraction that can enhance tourists experiences during their visiting in a destination and can play a significant role as contributor to the tourist’s perception of value and satisfaction. (EQ) is measured by enjoyment (EQ1), escape (EQ2), tourist attraction (EQ3), amenities (EQ4), accessibility (EQ5), ancillary (EQ6), and social interact (EQ7) adopted from (Altunel and Erkut, 2015) and Pitana (2012).

Tourist Involvement. Tourist Involvement (TI) is defined as tourist participation in tourism activity during visiting in one destination (Afonso et al., 2018) also as a identification existing between an individual and a recreational activity, at one point in time, characterized by some levels of enjoyment and self-expression being achieved through the activity. (TI) is measured by people identification (TI1), self-discovering (TI2), holiday discussion with friends (TI3), tourism activity involvement (TI4) and relatives (TI5) (Altunel and Erkut, 2015).

Recommendation Intention. Recommendation Intention is the follow-up actions to share to other people about someting which people felt appreciate and satisfied during involve in some activities or visiting a destination. It is measured by recommendation to family and friends (RI1), uploading information on social media (RI2) and revisit (RI3) (Altunel and Erkut, 2015).

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection is a process of collecting information/data from all the relevant sources to look for answers to the research problems, test the hypothesis and evaluation (Jhon Dudovskiy, 2018). The technique of collecting data is using questionnaires of Likert Scale. The reason of using questionnaires are because questionnaires as effective and efficient methods. The questionnaires were adapted by previous research that related to the topic.

This research used SMART-PLS 3.1 to analyse data in order to test validity and reliability of the model and the relationship between variables following outer and inner model measurement as recommended by Hair et al. (2014). Hypothesis was tested using path coefficient T and P Values. The threshold value of T is higher that 1.96 and P value is lower than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2017).

4. Results and Discussions
4.1. Demographic Characteristic

This research was carried out in Hatubuilico, Ainaro Municipality with the target population of 48,018 tourists and 379 were selected, based on Slovin formula, as respondents for this research. From this, male (48.61%) and female (51.39%). Based on the age, the majority of respondents with the age 18-25 years old (77.01%), 26-30 years old (18.36%), 31-37 years old (4.9%), and 38-50 years old (1.2%). From the education level, the majority of respondents from university students (50.7%), graduating from high school (46.3%) and graduating from the university (3%). Based on the profession, the majority of respondents from students (72.54%), workers (21.66%), teachers (1.51%) and Members of Soldado Negro Rainha Ramelalu (4.28%).

4.2. Validity and Reliability Tests

The validity test is categorized into two types namely convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is measured by utilising two parameters such as indicator loading or outer loading (OL) and average variance extracted (AVE). According to Hair et al., (2014), the item is valid when the OL value is higher than 0.7, and the AVE value is higher than 0.5. However, for exploratory research, the OL value can be accepted at 0.6 and the AVE values of all items are above the minimum suggested value of 0.5. In this research there are some indicators of experience quality (EQ) namely EQ1, EQ2, EQ15, EQ6, and TI1 in tourism involvement (TI) are invalid due to the OL value of the indicators are below minimal the minimum OL value which influence the content validity (Hair et al., 2014). However, some items such as EQ13, EQ14, EQ17, TI12, TI13, TI14, R1, R12 and R13 are valid to measure inner model (Figure 1).
The discriminant validity is to represent empirical distinct between variable and another variable, all construct measures that is intended to measure (Hopkins, 2015). Discriminant validity was tested by using Fornell-Larcker Criterion, and Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

This method shows that variable or construct which has variance value with highest indicators compares to other variable. Therefore, the root average variance extracted (AVE) value of every items are highest square correlation and another variable or constructs as suggested by Hair et al. (2014).

Table I shows the values of Fornell-Larcker Criterion all items were fulfilled the criteria which recommended by Hair et al. (2014). That is why; all items are valid based on Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Table I).

Table II. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio for Discriminant Validity

| Item | EQ  | RI  | TI  |
|------|-----|-----|-----|
| EQ   | 0.714 |     |     |
| RI   | 0.283 | 0.743 |     |
| TI   | 0.399 | 0.370 | 0.694 |

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) is another parameter to measure discriminant validity of outer model. Normally, the maximum values of HTMT of items are below than 0.9 (Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2015). Table II showed that the HTMT values of all items were below than 0.9. Therefore, all items were valid to use in inner model test.

4.3. Inner Model Test

This study uses R-square to test the relationship between variables in the inner model. R-square (R²) shows the combination the effect of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. Acceptable R² values are 0.75 (strong model), 0.33 (medium model) and 0.25 (weak model) (Hair et al., 2014; Saldanha et al., 2018). The result of this study revealed that coefficient of determination or R-square (R²) value were 0.159 which could categorized as low relationship (2018) (Table IV).
4.4. Hypothesis Testing

The first hypothesis is to test the influence of tourist experience quality on tourist recommendation intention. The results from SMART-PLS 3.0 shows that the T value (2.876) which is far beyond the minimum threshold value of 1.96 and the P value (0.004) is below the maximum threshold value of 0.05. This indicates that tourist experience quality influenced positively and significantly on tourist recommendation intention in Ramelau mountain. Consequently, H1 was supported (Table V).

| Construct          | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics (O/STDEV) | P Values | Note         |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|----------|--------------|
| TEQ -> TRI         | 0.161               | 0.168           | 0.056                       | 2.876                  | 0.004    | Significant  |
| TI -> TRI          | 0.306               | 0.312           | 0.044                       | 7.029                  | 0.000    | Significant  |

4.5. Discussion

The first objective of this research is to test the impact of tourist experience quality on tourist recommendation intention in Ramelau Mountain. The result of the research showed that tourist experience quality has positive and significant impact on tourist recommendation intention. Tourists satisfy to visit Ramelau Mountain to pray, enjoy the originality of the mountain, beautiful natures, and history behind the mountain. Tourist also enjoy with accessibility, basic infrastructures and accommodation and parking places of the site. This has offered tourists to get memorable experience through enjoyment, scape and attractions, which in turn lead them to recommend to their relatives and friends via passing positive information on social media and revisit Rameau Mountain. This confirms that tourists emotionally evaluates their experiences as they participate in consumption activities and interact with the service surroundings, service providers, and customer’s companions (Chen and Chen, 2010; Chang, Backman and Huang, 2014). Tourists value destination attractiveness, which lead to trigger revisit intention and promote to the other potential tourists (Afonso et al., 2018; Li, Wen and Ying, 2018; Dedeoglu, 2019). If tourists have high experience quality in a tourism destination, then they can be motivated to share their positive experience with their friends and families (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2019). The result of the study is in line with the previous studies revealed that tourist experience has positive and significant effect on tourist recommendation intention (Altunel and Erkut, 2015; Li, Wen and Ying, 2018) and tourist loyalty (Fernandes and Cruz, 2016; Wu, Cheng and Ai, 2018; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020).

The second objective of this research is to test the impact of tourist involvement on tourist recommendation intention in Ramelau Mountain. The result of the research showed that tourist involvement has impact on tourist recommendation intention. Tourists can involve through hiking the mountain, pray, took photos and look at the awesome scenery. This will encourage tourists to pass positive information on social media, recommend to the other people and revisit Rameau Mountain because tourist’s involvement can contributed to understanding and predicting behaviour intention, decision-making and tourists loyalty to a destination (Campos et al., 2017). This research showed that tourist involvement has positively impact on tourists recommendation intention to visit Ramelau Mountain, of which it confirms the study of Afonso et al. (2018). However, the result of this study is asymmetric finding to the study of (Altunel and Erkut, 2015) that tourist involvement has insignificant influence on tourism recommendation intention.

5. Conclusions and Implication

In this study, the relationships among tourist experience quality, involvement and recommendation intention were examined. The statistic results show that tourist experience quality and involvement influence positively and significantly on tourist recommendation intention. The more tourist involvement in activities in a tourism destination, then that will provide good experience quality, ultimately enhancing tourist intention to recommend to the other people to visit the same tourism destination.

In Ramelau Mountain, tourist experience several activities such as experience the beautiful natural view, hiking, and praying which lead them to enjoy, have positive feelings, and intention to recommend to the other tourists. Tourist involvement can also enhance their knowledge and self-discovering on Ramelau Mountain, which lead them to revisit and share their experiences to the other people via social media, and word of mouth (WOM).
Private sector and organization have to work with local community in order to prepare the most principal facilities such as guest house, local restaurant and parking in Ramelau Mountain. It is also important to organize weekly attractions and activities that involve tourists, which aims to offer memorable experience to tourists. This will attract more tourists which then ultimately also provide benefits to government, private sector, tour operator, and local community. Therefore, local community should always be reminded that they are the owner of Ramelau Mountain, and tourism is activities that can contribute to the local economy, job creation, income generation, and knowledge sharing. Therefore, local community participation and collaboration is important to secure the sustainable development of Ramelau Mountain as tourist destination in the future.

6. Limitation and Future Research

The results of this study stated that tourist experience quality and involvement has positively and significantly impact on tourist recommendation intention in Ramelau Mountain, tourism destination. Nevertheless, needed to recognize that the research might have various limitations as below: Firstly, this study was only using a single data collection instrument is questionnaire. That is why, the responses were absolutely depending on respondents which might only provide socially acceptable responses and not reflected the factual answer. Secondly, this research only focused of tourist experience quality and involvement on tourist recommendation intention through natural and religious attraction and activities involvement of tourists. However, experience quality and involvement on tourist recommendation intention in Ramelau mountain can be influenced by cultural factor, lifestyle of community who lives near the destination and agrotourism. Thirdly, this study is adapted by the previous study of Altunel and Erkut (2015) in Stainbul. The indicators which researcher adapted through added the theory of 4A in order to develop the questionnaires and the target result. Unfortunately, some indicators were not valid due to not related to the real situation and tourists perception of the destination. Finally, this study only focused on the perception of the tourists about tourism destination impact to their experience quality and involvement on recommendation intention in Ramelau Mountain.

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