Memory and The Visitor Experience: Integrating Psychology and Tourism Research

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Yellowstone in Transition

- **1872-1940’s: “The early days”**
  - Few, wealthy visitors.

- **Post WWII-1990: The emergence of a world-class destination.**
  - The rise of the Middle Class and Yellowstone as a premier vacation destination.

- **1990-present: Adapting to new audiences and challenges**
  - Large scale visitation, adapting to large visitors numbers.
Yellowstone Visitation from 2004-2015

- 2004: 2.87 million visitors
- 2005: 3.00 million visitors
- 2006: 3.00 million visitors
- 2007: 3.00 million visitors
- 2008: 3.50 million visitors
- 2009: 3.10 million visitors
- 2010: 3.00 million visitors
- 2011: 2.90 million visitors
- 2012: 2.80 million visitors
- 2013: 2.80 million visitors
- 2014: 4.00 million visitors
- 2015: 4.00 million visitors

Note: The graph shows a steady increase in visitor numbers from 2004 to 2015, with a peak of 4 million visitors in 2015.
Issues confronting the NPS

• **Congressional Funding**
  – 5% budget cut in 2013, more expected in the future.

• **Younger generations losing interest in parks**
  – Loss of appreciation, loss of political support.

• **Increasing diversity in National Parks**
  – Encouraging diverse populations to visit parks and making them feel comfortable doing so.
Revisiting Leopold

“Provide visitors with transformative experiences”

“Based on interaction with the natural and cultural resources…”

“…educate and inspire.”
The Tourism Experience

• Years of research to explore and define the tourism experience
  – Continues into today with new studies rising up each year.

• Pine and Gilmore’s (1998) Experience Economy
  – Moving from selling a “service” to selling an “experience”

• Traditional measurement tools and frameworks do not define what could be considered a “transformative experience”.
A call to integrate psychological concepts in tourism research (Pearce and Packer, 2013).

Ritchie, Tung, and Ritchie’s (2011) “Memorable Tourism Experience” added a new view on the debate.

A new scale developed to measure the “Memorable Tourism Experience” (Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2012)).

Characteristics $\neq$ the experience.

Source: Adapted from Ritchie and Hudson (2009)

Ritchie, Tung and Ritchie (2011)
High importance on exploring “what and how we remember”.
  - Driven by cognitive conditions and diseases.

Long-term memory and its various sub-dimensions is the primary focus.

Has been found to influence our decisions and affect life choices.

(Fitzgerald and Broadbridge, 2013; Kuwabarra and Pilemer, 2010)
Autobiographical memory

• Personal, emotional recollections of past experiences.

• Pieced together as a way to complete an individual’s life story.

• Three functions
  – Directive
  – Self
  – Social

• Have been shown to have “self-defining qualities”.

(Conway and Plydell-Pearce, 2005; Fivush, 2011)
Purpose of the study

1. Test autobiographical memory in a tourism context (Quantitatively)

2. Determine whether autobiographical memory defines “transformative experiences”
Methods

• Surveyed visitors during 2015 at exit gates

• Measured 5 key concepts:
  – Park Support
  – Auto. Bio. Memory
  – Place attachment
  – Recreation involvement
  – Geotourism tendencies

• 2,300 front-end surveys
• 802 mail-back surveys
Measuring Autobiographical Memory

Two Constructs from (2013) study

• Memory Impact
  – Affect the experience has one a person’s life.

• Memory Rehearsal
  – How often the individual recollects on the experience.

Memory Impact Variables
1. As I remember the event, I can feel now the emotions I felt then.
2. This memory is significant in my life because it imparts an important message for me or represents an anchor, critical juncture, or turning point.
3. This memory has consequences for my life because it influenced by behavior, thoughts, or feelings in noticeable ways.
4. As I recall them now, I would rate the emotions I experienced during the event as...

Memory Rehearsal Variables
1. Since it happened, I have talked about this event...
2. Since it happened, I have thought about this event...
3. Since it happened, I have written about this event to others (e.g. Facebook, email, blog, letter, etc.)...
4. As I remember the event, it comes to me in words or in pictures as a coherent story or episode and not as an isolated fact, observation, or scene.
Conceptual model

- **Autobiographical memory**
  - Personal memories of YNP experiences

- **Place attachment**
  - Emotional connection to the park

- **Park support**
  - Support through donations or introduction of new visitors
Original SEM model

Auto. memory

Impact

Place Attachment

Identity

Dependence

Support

Park Support

Rehearsal
Results - Demographics

- 54.6% Female respondents
- 63% of respondents have at least a college education
- 55 years old average
- Range of 18-86 years old

Prior trips to Yellowstone National Park

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visits</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 visits</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 visits</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10 visits</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 visits</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+ visits</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall mean: 23 visits

N = 2,325
Analysis of Autobiographical Memory

• Replication of Fitzgerald and Broadbridge’s (2013) model was unsuccessful.

• Select variables loaded on opposing constructs.

• Alternative one-factor model.

Goodness of Fit Statistics:
CFI = .811
TLI = .721
SRMR = .107
RMSEA = .196
Alternative Model of AM

Memory Salience

- M1
- M2
- M4
- M5
- M6
- M7
- M8

Goodness of Fit Statistics:
- CFI: .988
- SRMR: .021
- RMSEA: .059
Memory Salience Typologies

- Three groups formed
  - High Salience (mean > 5.0)
  - Moderate Salience (4.2 < Mean < 5.0)
  - Low Salience (Mean < 4.2)

- A diverse spread of the importance of memory salience.

- Explore the high salience memories.
The Importance of YNP Memories

I never tire of driving, walking or biking through the Roosevelt Arch, no matter how many times I’ve done it, because it represents such a symbolic passing from my standard life into this most amazing place.”
What do we know now about Autobiographical Memory?

• A potentially critical element of the visitor experience.

• Adopting new frameworks require rigorous validation. At times adaptations may be needed.

• Autobiographical Memory Salience can now be used to measure decision-making processes as well as its influence on traditional concepts.

• Marketing towards memories.