

CRITICAL REVIEW OF DARK TOURISM: TOURISTS' PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract: *There is a growing interest in dark tourism as evident in the increased number of publications discussing dark tourism, as well as the number of dark destinations and tourists visiting dark destinations all over the world. Past literature has concentrated on the designation and theoretical aspects of dark tourism. Emphasis was given on the scope of dark tourism, site typology, managerial aspects and issues in developing dark destinations. Thus, less is known on the travel behaviour to these places. In addition, the early studies on tourists' behaviour to the dark destination are majorly speculated. Among the most frequently cited factors influencing travel behaviour are tourists' motivation and experience, emotions, and perceptions towards dark tourism. Therefore, this paper will critically review the definitions of dark tourism, tourist motivation to visit dark destinations and other travel behaviours on dark tourism.*

Keyword: *Dark Tourism, Motivation, Perception, Experience, Emotion.*

Introduction

Travel behaviour is a term frequently used to represent consumer behaviour (CB) in the field of tourism (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2007). It has been one of the most researched areas in tourism realm. Consumer behaviour involves certain decisions, activities, ideas or experience that satisfy consumer needs and wants (Solomon, 1996). Although there has been saturated literature on the travel behaviour, there is no end to travel behaviour studies because it is considered as continuous process that includes inter-correlation of concepts and stages that should not be analysed separately (Mill & Marrison, 2002). In addition, authors found a gap within travel behaviour in dark tourism whereas concentration is primarily on the Western perspective. Very little has highlighted the travel behaviour of dark tourism in the non-western setting such as the Southeast Asia countries. Overall, the literature review on consumer behaviour in tourism itself was claimed bias towards the western perspectives,

neglecting the understanding of emerging market of different nationalities and multi-cultural background (Cohen, Prayag, & Moital, 2014). Before examining the travel behaviour of dark tourism, this article first provides a scant review on the designation and conceptualization of dark tourism.

Dark tourism is a term introduced in the late 19th century, describing the act of travel to site – real or not – of death, suffering, disaster and seemingly macabre. The rising number of people traveling to these unusual sites has urged and grabbed researchers' attention on the contemporary phenomenon of dark tourism. Foley and Lennon (1996) first defined dark tourism as the presentation and consumption of real or associated site of death and disaster. Yet, the designation and definition of dark tourism has remained fragile. There is no precise definition and consensus reached on what is dark tourism (Fonseca, Seabra, & Silva, 2016; Light, 2017). The designation and interpretation evolved and reflected from various perspectives and researchers' interest, for example, heritage, tourist behaviour, practises and type of sites (Light, 2017). Although, dark tourism is considered as a new niche tourism product, people travel to death-related sites has a long dotted histories way back in the mid-century. People have been travelling to sacred death sites known for pilgrimage, spectates the Gladiator game during the Roman era and assemble to witness the public execution during the medieval era (Sharpley, 2009). Apart from that, the contemporary act of travel of dark tourism has been frequently associated and linked with other terms; thanatourism (Seaton, 1996), morbid tourism (Blom, 2000), black spot tourism (Rojek, 1993), atrocity and holocaust tourism (Ashworth, 2002), war tourism (Henderson, 2000; Seaton, 1999), and in much recent studies, phoenix tourism (Causevic & Lynch, 2013), prison tourism, and natural disaster tourism (Biran, Liu, Li, & Eichhorn, 2014). Authors perceived these associations and linkage serves to provide a comprehensive understanding on the multifaceted nature of dark tourism destinations that can be divided into many categories (Stone, 2006). Recognising the complex nature of dark tourism, literature recorded bias, which emphasis on the conceptualisation and theoretical aspects of dark tourism. Consequently, researchers were slow to address the travel behaviour to dark destinations (Light, 2017), and little is known of the travel behaviour of dark tourism (Farmaki, 2013; Stone, 2005). Only the last decade researchers started to pay attention on the nature of visitors' behaviour towards dark tourism. Therefore, in order to understand tourists' behaviour towards dark tourism, it is crucial to familiarise with the multiple shades of dark destinations and interest groups on dark tourism. By observing the interrelation between both supply and demand of dark tourism will allow for better understanding of the heterogeneity in visitors' behaviour on dark tourism.

Demand for dark tourism offerings appears to be supply-driven and attraction-based (Farmaki, 2013). Based on the reports of past researchers regarding dark tourism consumer behaviour, there are two major aspects that contribute to the varying reasons to visit dark destinations; the visitors' typology, and the dark destinations' typology. First and foremost, dark destinations criteria and attributes may contribute to varying motives and experience gained by visitors (Stone, 2006). Sites interpretation and orientation share a fair role in shaping the drives to dark destinations. Two similar sites may evoke different emotion, experience and reasons, depending on how the sites were interpret. On the other hand, education oriented sites offers deeper connection and understanding about dark event in comparison to dark destination that purposely built for entertainment (Strange & Kempa, 2003). Dark tourism spectrum by Stone (2006) outlined the characteristic and attributes of dark destinations into multiple shades of darkness that justify the categorisation of diverse range of sites, attractions and exhibitions that are linked with death and the macabre.

Dark Tourists

While literature recognised the complex nature of dark tourism and multilayer destinations classified as dark destinations, determining who the dark tourist is even more difficult. In general, visitors to dark destination can be classified into three groups; those with connection to the past event, the tourist and local community. Understanding the characteristics and behaviour of these tourists may help to develop the dark tourism tourists. Such typology allows researcher to comprehend their vast reasons to engage with dark destination, the depth of emotion involvement and individuals' perception towards dark tourism. There are empirical studies that highlighted came out with visitors segmentation and one on dark tourist spectrum which concentrates on different sites' context, such as war tourism (Le & Pearce, 2011), cemeteries tourism (Raine, 2013). Visitors to battlefield were segmented into three groups, the battlefield tourism enthusiast, the opportunist and the passive tourist. Raine (2013) in her study came out with dark tourist typology from the darkest to the lightest shades which were built in references to the dark destinations' classification by Stone (2006). This typology consist of the mourners, pilgrims, morbidly curious individual, thrill seekers, information seeker, hobbyists, sightseers, retreaters, and passive recreationists. Understand this typology allow researcher to comprehend the vast reasons of people engagement with dark destination, the depth of emotion involvement and individuals' perception towards dark tourism. Even so, relying solely on either typology may not be a wise, because both typology is lack of holistic approach that centred particularly within a fragment of dark destinations which cannot be generalised into a wider context of dark tourism. Yet, acknowledging the existence of these typologies, enable us to see that, dark tourism attracts various group of people, ranging from a mere tourist to pilgrims (Raine, 2013). To some, they would distinguish themselves from tourist, and considered themselves as pilgrims to dark tourism destinations due to perceived heritage of event and personal connection shared with the victims of the rough events (Slade, 2003). Consequently, both typologies help reader to grasp the diverse consumer behaviour in dark tourism, through the glance of push (inner drives) and pull (destination attributes) factors.

Early study on visitors' behaviour towards dark tourism is largely speculated, until the mid-2000 onwards when researchers started taking interest on people reasons to visit the macabre site (Light, 2017). In addition, much data recorded on dark tourism is centred on the battlefield location (Bigley, Lee, Chon, & Yoon, 2010; Cheal & Griffin, 2013; Rami K Isaac, Nawijn, Liempt, & Gridnevskiy, 2017; Rami Khalil Isaac & Çakmak, 2014) which probably due to fact that, war sacrificed many people and is assumed to constitute the largest category of tourism attraction (Iles, 2008; Smith, 1998). There is fair amount of studies examined visitors' motives and experience, but only few have captured visitors' emotion, perception, and intention to visit dark destinations. Some even investigate multiple behavioural dimensions under one research. Most commonly found was the relationship between visitors' motives and experience gained (Kamber, Karafotias, & Tsitoura, 2016; Kang, Scott, Lee, & Ballantyne, 2012; Kidron, 2013; Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006; Tang, 2014), motives and intention (Biran et al., 2014), motives and emotion (Rami K. Isaac & Cakmak, 2016), motives and perception (Gatewood & Cameron, 2004), motives and constraint (Zheng, Zhang, Zhang, & Qian, 2016), experience and constraint (Zhang, Yang, Zheng, & Zhang, 2016), perception and emotion (Brown, 2015) and emotion and intention (Nawijn & Fricke, 2015). Also noticed, data on dark tourism is heavily concentrated on the western setting and societies' perspective (refer Table 1). Consequently, less is known from the non-western society's perspective. Worth noting, few researchers has highlight on the constraint and

acceptance of dark tourism within the non-western societies (Zhang et al., 2016; Zheng et al., 2016). They emphasise how one cultural background determine the society conception of death, simultaneously affecting their decision to visits dark tourism destinations. The following discussions will enlighten the reasons or motives behind tourists' visits to dark destinations and highlights the psychological aspects of visiting dark tourism destination. The discussion was based on demand and supply perspectives regarding factors influencing visits to dark destinations. The demand perspectives focused on motivation, perception, experience, emotion and intention of the dark tourists. On the other hand, the supply perspectives looked at various destinations factors such as the dark destinations criteria and attributes.

Motivation

Motivation can be described as the 'psychological or biological needs and wants, including integral forces that arouse, direct and integrate a person's behaviour and activities (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Although motivation is considered a saturated area of studies in tourism field, dark tourism is late to address the visitors' drives to engage with dark tourism (Light, 2017). Since dark tourism is a new contemporary phenomenon, it often reflecting from the older concept, such as the *thanatopsis* (Seaton, 1996) and pilgrimage where people travel to sacred places such as shrine and cemeteries (Digance, 2003). However, nowadays, traditional pilgrimage has experienced shifting to secular pilgrimage due to the alternate medium replacing religion role within medical institutional and now, dark tourism destinations, where people seek comfort from death (Stone, 2012; Phelan, 2008; Sharpley & Stone, 2008). In *thanatopsis* or thanatourism, people were assumed to visit dark destinations due to their fascination of death, to contemplate death and seek pleasure from seeing others' misfortune (Seaton, 1996; Seaton & Lennon; 2004). Death becomes the central subject to why people engaging with dark destination. Although there is no denying to people fascination towards death, much empirical evidence disagree that contemplation of death (*thanatopsis*) driven people to visit such morbid sites, nor pilgrimage cited as one of the reason behind their visitation. Timeframe gap between earlier literatures assumptions with contemporary empirical studies probably contribute to such contradictory to some reasons stipulated. Timeline between event occurred and contemporary society was denoted as crucial element to determine sites' perceived intensity (Stone, 2006). Consequently, the discourse on contemplation of death and pilgrimage is comprehensible. Empirical data recorded people visiting dark tourism destination for various reasons which similar to those of cultural-heritage tourism, leisure and nature tourism since dark tourism itself contained multi-layer mixture of history and heritage (Neimela, 2010). Starting from early 2000, academics have coined various reasons to visit dark tourism destinations. A fair share of heritage tourism, nature tourism and hedonic tourism is observed within visitors' motives to visit dark destinations. Light (2017) in his studies on dark tourism progress denoted opportunity for education, curiosity, personal connection / heritage, leisure motives, pilgrimage / secular pilgrimage, interest in history, remembrance, sense of moral duty / obligation, morbid curiosity, participate in organised / planned itinerary, national identity, 'must see' site, honouring own ancestors, desire for engagement with death / dark event / violent, personal recommendation, it is a famous sites to visit, outing with friends, to help with disaster recovery and many more.

Most quoted reasons are education (Biran, Poria, & Oren, 2011; Rami K. Isaac & Cakmak, 2016; Ryan & Hsu, 2011; Stone, 2012), curiosity (Kamber et al., 2016; Le & Pearce, 2011; Mudzanani, 2014), and remembrance (Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2011; Rami K. Isaac & Cakmak, 2016; Kamber et al., 2016; Walby & Piché, 2011; Winter, 2011a). Data recorded

on dark tourism is mostly situated at war tourism sites including battlefield (Winter, 2011; Bigley et al., 2010; Ashworth, 2002; Preece & Price, 2005; Gatewood & Cameron, 2004; Winter, 2012; Dunkley et al., 2011; Hyde & Harman, 2011), memorials (Zheng et al., 2016; , war museum (Isaac & Cakmak, 2016; Kang et al., 2012), war cemeteries and concentration camp (Cheal & Griffin, 2013; Kidron, 2013; Biran et al., 2011; Le & Pearce, 2011) where education and remembrance is the orientation to such sites. To combat sensitivity issues revolves around death and sufferings sites, developer often incorporate educational in dark tourism to minimise the perceived moral issues for exploiting death and the dead. At the same time, to ease tension between tourist and local communities for unfolding the past hurt (Ashworth, 2004), and shield from direct gazes towards death (Stone, 2012). People seeking for novelty are mostly due to their pure curiosity about what happened at the sites and some having morbid curiosity about the past event. Per se, how the POWs were tortured, killed and died. With much studies take place at the memorials, visitors came for remembrance, to commemorate and pay respect to those perished (Stone, 2012). Similarly but different, recently, some even come for memory collection (Isaac et al., 2017). Memory is refers to the direct memory on events occurrence, for example, the 9/11 (Stone, 2012). It is remembrance, if someone did not experience or witness the events first hand. Therefore, those visiting for the sake of memory collection have deeper connection with the dark event in comparison to the younger generation whom could hardly relate with the event. Visitors also travel to dark destination for personal connection with the dead or event, in short, finding their identity root. They are those classified as the pilgrims and mourners (Raine, 2013). They are normally the sites or country's people, or division group of past war family members, for example, the Australian visiting to Gallipoli battlefield (Chael & Griffin, 2013). To believe that such cruelty could happened, people also keen to visit dark destination to validate the event, particularly within battlefield context. This is parallel with the evolving of contemporary tourist characterised as individual that seek the truth and authenticity (Blom, 2000). Like other typical tourist, dark tourism has its own shared of leisure pursuit motives which includes to escape from the abundant hectic life, relaxation, sightseeing and having recreational activities (Biran et al., 2014). Leisure pursuits for dark tourism often take place at sites of natural setting such as the cemeteries (Raine, 2013) and natural disaster sites (Biran et al., 2014). Some dark tourism destinations is very much popular that people were driven because it is a 'must visit' tourism attraction and an infamous destinations for dark tourism. For example, the Ground Zero of United State, the Alcatraz Prison, and Auschwitz concentration camp.

Experience and Emotion

The discourse on visitors' experience during their visitation to dark tourism is also researched adequately. Most empirical researches in dark tourism integrate the study on visitors' motives and experience under one research. Consequently, drives to visit dark destination pre-determined the experience they gained. Visitors' experience at dark tourism destination is mainly classified into two; affective and cognitive. As knowledge seeking become one of the major motives to engage with dark tourism, it contributes to cognitive experience whereby visitors learned more about the death-related sites and dark event took place at the area visited. With much dark destination developed with educational and history orientation, especially war sites, even those without prior desire to learn are able to increase their knowledge and understanding about the rough past. Visit to dark tourism also evokes multi-shades of emotion among visitors, ranging from positive to negative. Primarily, emotions evoke by dark tourism leaning more towards the negative feelings, contradict to the traditional tourism that aims to deliver positive emotion among tourist during their travel as

satisfaction become the key for successful service delivery. This exception however is anticipated within CB realm where negative emotion is sought after and that it may influence tourist satisfaction and visitors' attachment to destinations (Cohen et al., 2014). Literature on dark tourism recorded visitors tend to feel sadness, shock, despair, shame, afraid, disgust, horror, anger, and depression upon visitation to dark destinations. Simultaneously, dark tourism also evokes a rush of reliefs and grateful for the peace life we obtain today. This emotion cluster at dark destination can be divided into three themes; misery, sympathy and positivity (Nawijn, Isaac, Liempt, & Gridnevskiy, 2016).

Perception

Perception towards dark tourism was recorded in the heritage and death context. Does visitors considered dark tourism as their own heritage or identity root? How did they perceive the consumption of death element in dark tourism? Study of people perception in dark tourism covers two group; the international tourist or visitors, and local community or domestic visitors. Before developing tourism product at certain area, the authorities and developer in need to consider the local community perception of dark tourism. Investigating local perspective on dark tourism enable stakeholders to assess the level of acceptance (Masanti, 2016) and local participation in the development of dark tourism at particular area (Wang & Luo, 2017). When comparing the western and non-western societies' perception, authors found that, the non-western society tend to reject the idea of dark tourism. For example, in Sabah, Malaysia, dark tourism was seen as an exploitation of death and disrespecting the dead. Make known of atrocity and the rough past is found less acceptable to the local community. The issue is also evidenced, at other Southeast Asia country like China. Juxtaposed to hype of growing people travel for dark tourism, few studies in China, addressed the constraint to visit dark destination among the Chinese (Zhang et al., 2016; Zheng et al., 2016). The perceived taboo of death, influence their conception of death, thus deterred them from visiting dark tourism destinations. The Chinese believed that talking about death should be avoided for it may bring bad luck to the individual. Other studies on perception also looked into visitors' perceived heritage (Poria Reichel, Biran, 2006), morbidity and benefits gained from engaging with dark tourism.

Intention

Intention is an indication of individual readiness to perform particular behaviour and is considered as the immediate antecedent of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). It emphasis that, visitors will not carry out the actual behaviour if they were not intend to do so, despite having opportunity to carry out the behaviour (Line, Chatterjee, & Lyons, 2010). In dark tourism context, academics have yet to focus on the visitors' intention to visit the dark destinations. Paper recorded only few research conducted on visitors' intention to visit dark destination (Biran et al., 2014; Nawijn & Fricke, 2015). Visitors' intention to visit dark tourism destination was investigated and correlates with other key dimension; motivation, emotions and constraints. Intention in dark tourism observed visitors level of intention to revisit, visit similar destinations and recommendation of destination to others. While positive emotion encourages positive word of mouth towards dark destination, negative emotions have the most variance in long-term behavioural intention. Assessing the outcome from negative emotion is quite tricky. While feeling shocked and sad is positively influence visitors' intention along with other positive emotions felt during visitation at dark tourism destination (Nawijn & Fricke, 2015), horror felt at dark destinations may deterred any revisit intention and intention to visit other sites of death. Motivation wise, data denoted that people visiting

Sichuan with high intention for non-dark leisure attraction, rather than the newly dark tourism (Biran et al., 2014). Apart from that,

Conclusion

In this article, we review the literature on visitors behaviour related to dark tourism. We provide a scant overview on dark tourism and the relationship between demand and supply perspectives to better comprehend visitors behaviour on dark tourism. We highlight few key concepts of visitors behaviour researched under dark tourism including, motivation, experience and emotion, perception, and intention to visit dark tourism destinations. Through this review, we realised that, there is still much to explore on visitors' behaviour towards dark tourism. Empirical evidence is heavily concentrated on exploring the reasons for people engaged with dark tourism thus ignore the importance of other CB antecedents that possibly contributes to the varying behaviour in dark tourism. Particularly, academicians should start paying attention on the emerging market (non-western) behaviour towards dark tourism. Less is being discussed about other possible dark destinations in other parts of the world. Studies were also concentrated on few groups of tourists coming from especially the western countries. Perhaps there is an opportunity for dark tourism to be explored by other groups of tourists in other parts of the world, for example in Asia or the Middle East. With much researches conducted within the western setting and sampling, generalising fascination towards death towards non-western societies can be interesting. People conception towards death may vary across nationalities, religion, cultural beliefs and practises. The perceived cultural sensitive with regards to death is evidenced within non-western societies, for example the Chinese. Few studies have addressed the local constraints to visit dark destinations, or how dark tourism is less acceptable to some culture in general, particularly those from Southeast Asia countries. That however is not discussed in this article. In addition, despite the diversity of dark tourism destination, literature is primarily centred within war tourism memorabilia sites such as, the battlefield, war museum, concentration camp, and memorials. For future suggestion, more research can be conducted on the emerging market, at non-western setting to enable comparison between the western and non-western societies behaviour on dark tourism. Furthermore, empirical research should propose more study on visitors' behaviour at the 'lightest' shades of dark site category to grasp the diverse and possibly distinctive behaviour at dark tourism destinations.

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