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Implications of host-guest interactions for tourists' travel behaviour and experiences

Abstract

Through their multiple roles in tourism, residents of destination communities interact with tourists at destinations. The consequences of these host-guest interactions are bi-directional. Much research has been done on impacts of host-guest interactions on the local community. On the other hand, few studies have evaluated how tourists' on-site behaviour and experiences are affected by such interactions. Such information could enhance tourism planning and management. Thus, this paper explores tourists' perceptions and opinions on host-guest interactions and the impacts of such interactions on their experiences. Through a survey of domestic travelers residing in Beijing China conducted in 2008, tourists' opinions on the influence of destination community members on their previous domestic travel behaviour and experiences were obtained. Most respondents acknowledged that interactions with local people influence their assessments of the destination, the quality of their experiences, future destination choice and on-site expenditures, particularly those with higher educations and of a younger age. The importance of impacts of host-guest interactions on tourists' travel behaviour and experiences, and their evaluations of a destination are confirmed. Practical implications are suggested for the planning and management of tourism destinations.

Keywords:

host-guest interactions; impacts; travel behaviour; experiences; China

Introduction

Often considered as an essential part of tourism, the destination community plays multiple roles in tourism and is impacted by tourism in a variety of ways. By acting as service providers, sellers, craftspeople, and even as ethnic "attractions" (Scheyvens, 2003), members of the destination community perform a number of roles as they interact with tourists. Impacts of these host-guest interactions are bi-directional. The destination community experiences ongoing impacts from interactions with tourists and tourism development. These have attracted considerable academic and some govern-

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mental attention (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher 2005; Scheyvens, 2003; Timothy, & Tosun, 2003). At the same time, few studies have evaluated how tourists' on-site behaviour and experiences are affected by such interactions, yet such information could be useful as an input to tourism planning and management. Thus, it is worthwhile to explore tourists' perspectives on host-guest interactions. This study addresses this gap through an examination of tourists' perceptions and opinions on host-guest interactions and the impacts of such interactions on their experiences.

With high incidence of travel that has grown substantially in the past twenty years, Beijing residents were selected as an appropriate population for the examination of host-guest interactions based on recollection of their past travel experiences. Based on a survey that was conducted in Beijing in October 2008 and completed by 133 respondents, three topics were addressed: awareness of the local community at a destination, perceptions of the role of the local community in tourism, and implications of host-guest interactions for the informants' on-site behaviours, experiences and evaluations of the destination.

Literature review

Both tourists and local communities are major stakeholders in tourism, which includes anyone who is impacted by tourism, either positively or negatively (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005). The importance of destination communities in tourism has been widely discussed (Aas et al., 2005; Timothy, & Boyd, 2003; Timothy, & Tosun, 2003). Often considered as an essential part of tourism, local communities play multiple roles in tourism development and delivery. They can act as service providers, sellers, craftspeople, and even ethnic "attractions" (Scheyvens, 2003). Living at or near a tourism destination, members of local communities are inevitably impacted by tourism development and their tourists and their daily lives are commonly affected by interactions with visitors. Residents often possess rich knowledge of local environments, and social and cultural traditions, and have the experience and ability to deal with local issues (Bramwell, & Lane, 1999; Yuksel, Bramwell, & Yuksel, 1999), but they often do not have genuine control over the nature and direction of tourism development within their communities and, hence, with their interactions with tourists (Scheyvens, 2003). Tourists represent the demand side of the tourism industry; thus, understanding their travel demands and expectations is crucial to suppliers of tourism products and services and has attracted much attention from tourism scholars (Mathieson, & Wall, 1982; Smith, & Brent, 2001). Many efforts have been made to classify groups of tourists with similar travel preferences or behaviours, striving to better understand each segment of the tourism market (Oppermann, 1999; Smith, & Brent, 2001). Five principal phases in the travel decision-making process have been outlined by Mathieson, and Wall (1982) as identifying travel need or desire, information collection and evaluation, making the travel decision, travel preparation and travel experience, and travel satisfaction evaluation. Relations between tourist motivation, expectation, experience, satisfaction, and future destination choice have been emphasized and well-researched by various scholars (Higgs, Polonsky, & Hollick, 2005; Gnoth, 1997; Nicolau, & Mas, 2005; Oppermann, 1999; Snepenger, King, Marshall, & Uysal, 2006).

Through their multiple roles, members of local communities interact with tourists in different ways and are impacted by tourism development and tourists through their on-site travel activities and interactions with local people to varying degrees. For convenience, these impacts are often discussed from economic, socio-cultural and environmental perspectives (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Smith, & Brent, 2001). Most research has addressed the impacts of tourism on host populations (Prentice, et al., 1994; Timothy, & Tosun, 2003; Wall, 1996). On the other hand, the presence of local residents, both permanent and temporary, at a destination and their interactions with tourists influence tourists from various perspective, such as their on-site behaviours, experiences and satisfactions (Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000) and, ultimately, their evaluations of their visits. However, much less research has examined these topics (Prentice, Witt, & Wydenbach, 1994).

In the context of western tourists visiting developing countries, Bruner (1991) argued that tourists are commonly exposed to a selection of culture heavily influenced by tourists' preferences and expectations. Thus, during the short tourism encounter, tourists themselves may change very little, while the consequences of tourism for the hosts are profound for the latter may experience repeated contacts with tourists (Bruner, 1991). For example, examining impacts of tourism experiences on the attitudes of tourists, Pizam, Jafari, and Milman, (1991) identified little attitude change among US students visiting the Soviet Union. This may be attributed to the limited interactions with local people that occurred on the escorted study tour. Similar findings were presented by Milman, Reichel, and Pizam, (1990) in their study of Israeli tourists visiting Egypt and Anastasopoulos (1992), in a study of Greek tourists visiting Turkey, indicated that positive impacts of host-guest interactions on changing tourists' ethnic attitudes and relations did not usually occur effectively (Pizam et al., 2000). Pizam, Jafari, and Milman (2000) also identified through their research in Israel that higher intensity of social relationships between hosts and tourists results in higher favourable feelings toward the hosts, higher satisfaction with the destination experience, and more positive change in perceptions of the destination and the host community, particularly for long-term tourists. Pizam et al. (2000) also suggested that maintaining an intense social relationship between hosts and guests is critical for sustaining or improving a positive image of the hosts and the destination. Both studies referred to the 'contact model' of social psychology as the basis for their research on attitude change and host-guest interactions in the tourism context, arguing for a change in mutual attitudes and relations of the interacting individuals as a result of inter-group contacts (Pizam et al., 1991; Pizam et al., 2002).

In their study of tourists to the Gower Peninsula in South Wales, Prentice, Witt and Wydenbach (1994) argued that visitors develop an emotional attachment to the people and/or the environment of a destination, which is generally acquired through tourism activities and interactions with local people. Different types of visitors develop their attachment to a destination in different ways and to different extents (Prentice et al., 1994). In addition, chatting with local residents and casual involvement in lo-

cal activities are considered to be the usual process of gaining the attachment, rather than through formal learning or participation in formal events with the host community (Prentice et al., 1994). The attachment occurs when the host and guest are not spatially separated or different linguistically, so that interaction between the two is possible and expected (Prentice et al., 1994). Prentice et al. (1994) identified that first-time visitors and day visitors tend to have superficial travel experience and local interactions, because visiting famous places and brief exposure and superficial images may suffice to meet their expectations. However, through repeat visits, tourists' cultural and social understanding of a destination may be reinforced and stronger emotional attachment to the destination may result (Prentice et al. 1994).

Mainly occurring through informal mechanisms, host-guest interactions are inevitable in most tourism destinations. As indicated above, higher intensity of host-guest interactions is also positively associated with tourists' favourable attitudes toward the hosts and the destination, and their higher satisfaction with the destination experience (Pizam et al., 2000). Furthermore, host-guest interactions form part of the actual destination experience, which has been identified as affecting an individual's on-site behaviour, site evaluation and future destination decisions (Oppermann, 1999). Thus, it is important to understand in what way host-guest interactions occur and how they impact tourists in terms of their on-site behaviours, experiences, and destination evaluations, which are key considerations for tourism planning and management (Smith, & Brent, 2001, p. 54) and should be addressed in the examination of host-guest interactions.

Based on a review of previous studies, it is suggested that many host-guest interactions occur on casual occasions in the destination area. It is hypothesized that tourists are impacted by such host-guest interactions, mainly in their on-site behaviours, experiences, and destination evaluations, but the extent of these impacts is currently unknown. Thus, these impact factors are examined in this research to understand whether and to what such extent impacts occur from the perspectives of tourists.

Research methods

To fulfill the research purpose which is to examine how and to what extent host-guest interactions affect tourists' behaviours and experiences, a survey of domestic travelers residing in Beijing was conducted to evaluate how interactions with residents at tourism spots impact tourists' travel based on their previous domestic travel experiences. The urban population of Beijing was selected as the sampling frame for this study for a number of reasons. First, it was expected that the incidence of travel would be sufficiently high among the populations of the urban centres of China that they would likely have been tourists and had interacted with residents of destinations, for such places include concentrations of residents with high incomes and high propensity to travel. The frequency of travel among residents of Beijing, the capital of China, is among the highest in China. Tourism statistics from Beijing Municipal Bureau of Tourism indicate that the number of Beijing residents engaged

in domestic travel reached 252,000 mostly during May 1st and October 1st seven-day holidays in 2004 (BATS, 2005). Thus, it can be assumed that most Beijing residents had travel experiences in the preceding two years. In addition, when inviting respondents to participate, it was indicated verbally that the questionnaire was about their recent travel experiences. There were a small number of cases when people declined to participate because of their lack of recent travel experiences. Although no screening question was asked, such as when was your last trip, it can be assumed that respondents in this study had comparatively recent domestic travel experiences that informed their answers to the questionnaire survey.

This research did not focus on a particular kind of destination and, although the nature of the destination and associated interactions is likely to influence interactions and associated perceptions, it was impractical to trace the tourism history of respondents. In fact, it would be worth exploring if perceptions vary according to travel experience and destination type, although these questions are beyond the scope of the present study. As the intensity of host-guest interactions positively affects tourists' satisfaction and their favourable attitudes toward the destination and the host community (Pizam et al., 2000), impacts would likely be most marked in a context where non-superficial host-guest interactions occur. Furthermore, language difference is often considered to be one of the most pronounced barriers to effective interactions between hosts and guests at tourism destinations (Prentice et al., 1994). Tourists and hosts might have higher reluctance and less ability to interact with each other when there is a language barrier. The intensity of host-guest interactions would likely be much lower in a foreign destination without a shared language than in a domestic context where hosts and guests can easily communicate and, hence, form a stronger social relationship. Thus, host-guest interactions among domestic tourists permits the more ready development of less brief and superficial interactions between tourists and local people which, as Bruner (1991) argued in the context of developed-developing country tourism encounters, usually does not much alter tourists' perceptions and behaviours. However, it also reduces the likelihood of interacting with local people that are very different from the visitor, for example in race or culture. Although there are many dialects in China, mandarin Chinese is the official language in China, including at tourist destinations. Thus, in a domestic context in China, interactions between hosts and guests, using the same official language, were expected to be more spontaneous, extensive and effective than in an international context. Furthermore, many potential respondents may not have travelled internationally. Therefore, respondents were asked to answer the questions based on their previous domestic travel experiences, ensuring that there were no major linguistic barriers in the host-guest interactions.

In the questionnaire, respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, their observation of local participation based on their past travel experience, their views on their willingness and reasons for such interaction, and their opinions concerning the impacts of host-guest interactions on their on-site behaviours and experiences were examined. Drawing from previous studies, impacts of host-guest interactions on tourists

were examined through behavioural factors such as on-site expenses and length of stay; visitor experiences, assessment of tourism destinations and future destination choice. The questionnaire consisted mainly of close-ended questions including five-point Likert scale questions, yes-no and multiple choice questions, with an open-ended option provided for respondents to add elements not addressed by provided options. A pilot test was conducted by inviting six people of different ages and education levels among friends and relatives of the researcher in Beijing to complete the questionnaire and provide inputs on the wording of questions. The questionnaire was then finalized based on the inputs from the pilot test.

The survey was conducted in October 2008. Questionnaires were distributed near the entrance of the community center of a residential area in Shijingshan District, Beijing, during two weekends. This residential district was developed in the late 1980s and is located near the west fifth ring road. The majority of residents have been living there for more than 20 years. Everyone walking by the community center was asked to fill out the questionnaire. A total of 133 usable questionnaires were collected from people with a wide range of age groups, education levels and career types. The data were analyzed using SPSS, mainly through descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests.

The questionnaire focused on respondents' opinions or perceptions derived from their past travel experience rather than their direct memories, including their willingness and reasons for interacting with the hosts, and their opinions on impacts of such interactions on their behaviours and experiences. Respondents' observations on local communities at tourism destinations were based on memories or recollections of their past travel experiences. As argued by Crang (2001) and Crouch (2005), memory is not an exact reflection of the past but is reinvigorated or reconstructed in the present. Memory might be influenced or even distorted by our prejudices, expectations and social attitudes (Crouch, 2005). Thus, limitations in the accuracy and reliability of answers based on memories should be recognized. On-site tourist surveys conducted at destinations could be used to overcome this problem but have their own challenges.

Results and discussion

The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. The sample of 133 respondents exhibits a reasonable distribution of age, career and income. Long residence in Beijing is noticed with 74% respondents living in Beijing for more than 10 years. More females (61%) than males (39%) participated in the survey, probably due to the fact that females were more approachable by the female researcher. In addition, the respondents generally had high education levels with 80% having university-level education. Beijing has the best higher education resources in China and education is highly valued. It is also possible that people with a higher education level were more willing to participate in the survey. Therefore, while not fully representative of Beijing residents, the sample was considered to be adequate for the specified purposes.

Table 1

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF BEIJING RESPONDENTS (N=133)

| | | Number | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------|------------|
| Gender | | | |
| | Female | 81 | 61% |
| | Male | 52 | 39% |
| Age | | | |
| Young | 18- 24 | 29 | 22% |
| | 25- 34 | 37 | 28% |
| Middle age | 35- 44 | 17 | 13% |
| | 45- 54 | 32 | 24% |
| Elder | 55- 64 | 16 | 12% |
| | 65 or above | 2 | 2% |
| Years of residence | | | |
| | 1-10 | 32 | 24% |
| | >10 | 99 | 75% |
| Education | | | |
| | Primary school | 1 | 1% |
| | High school | 25 | 19% |
| | University or above | 107 | 80% |
| Monthly income (RMB) | | | |
| | < 2,000 | 43 | 32% |
| | 2,000 - 3,999 | 64 | 48% |
| | 4,000 - 5,999 | 18 | 14% |
| | > 6,000 | 8 | 6% |
| Career | | | |
| | Student | 21 | 16% |
| | Teacher | 8 | 6% |
| | Company employee | 54 | 41% |
| | Government employee | 20 | 15% |
| | Retired | 24 | 18% |
| | Others | 6 | 4% |

When asked whether and in what way they observed local residents at destinations, most respondents acknowledged that they were aware of the presence of local residents in their previous domestic travels. Table 2 shows different forms of local participation that they experienced or observed in their past travel. Souvenir-selling was the most widely recognized form of local participation (92%), followed by the provision of food and beverages (78%) and accommodation (74%). Other forms of participation, including tour guide services, transportation services, performances or working as employees of the site were less frequently noticed with just of 40% acknowledging these.

Table 2

RECOGNITION OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM AT THE SITE

| Forms of local participation | No. | % |
|---------------------------------|------------|----|
| Sell souvenirs | 122 | 92 |
| Provide food and beverage | 103 | 78 |
| Provide accommodation | 98 | 74 |
| Provide tour guide services | 63 | 47 |
| Provide transportation services | 63 | 47 |
| Employed by the site | 59 | 44 |
| Participate in performances | 59 | 44 |
| Total N | 133 | |

Almost all (99%) of respondents considered local residents to be part of the tourist site and when asked whether they would like to interact with local residents during their visit, 97% indicated that they are willing to do so. Reasons for interacting with local residents were then explored and the results are shown in Table 3. Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents interact with local residents to understand local culture and customs; 59% intend to acquire more local travel knowledge and 49% want to understand local life. However, only 17% intend to make more friends by interacting with local residents. In general, tourists' interact with local people to broaden their views, acquire more knowledge of the place, and enrich their travel experience, rather than to fulfilling their social needs.

Table 3

| REASONS FOR INTERACTING WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS | | |
|---|-----|----|
| Reasons for interacting with local residents | Yes | % |
| Understand local culture and | 94 | 71 |
| Understand local life | 65 | 49 |
| Acquire more local travel knowledge | 79 | 59 |
| Get to know more friends | 22 | 17 |
| Total N | 133 | |

The implications of host-guest interaction for visitors' travel experiences and behaviours were examined through five variables: length of stay, travel experience, on-site expenditures, assessment of the tourist spot, and future choice of travel destination. This was done using five-point Likert scale. The five impact factors can be grouped into two categories: the first three factors address on-site behaviour and experience, and the last two factors address post-visit reflection and evaluation. As shown in Table 4, mean scores for the five factors range from 3.18 to 3.53, indicating that impacts do exist but that they are not very marked. Standard deviation scores range from 1.142 to 1.335, indicating some variation of opinions among respondents. Assessment of the tourist spot is shown to be the most impacted factor and almost half (48%) of respondents agree that there are some impacts and 18% suggest that there are a lot of impacts. Travel experience and expenses on-site are similarly impacted, with 60% and 57% of respondents suggesting some or a lot of impacts respectively. Only 29% and 31% respectively suggested that there was little impact on these two factors.

Implications for future destination choice were accorded more varied opinions (S.D. = 1.335), with almost one-fifth (19%) indicating a lot of impact compared to 12% who indicated no impact of this type. Length of stay was not much affected (mean = 3.18) by host-guest interactions, probably because most tourists arrange their itinerary in advance.

Table 4

IMPACTS OF ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS ON TOURISTS

| | | Not at all | Not much | Neutral | Some | Quite a lot | Mean | S.D. |
|--|---|---------------|-------------|---------|------|----------------|------|-------|
| • Length of stay at the site ¹ | N | 12 | 37 | 16 | 47 | 19 | 3.18 | 1.251 |
| | % | 9 | 28 | 12 | 36 | 15 | | |
| • Expenses at the site ¹ | N | 9 | 31 | 16 | 52 | 23 | 3.37 | 1.217 |
| | % | 7 | 24 | 12 | 41 | 18 | | |
| • Travel experience ¹ | N | 9 | 29 | 15 | 64 | 14 | 3.34 | 1.142 |
| | % | 7 | 22 | 12 | 49 | 11 | | |
| • Assessment of tourist spot ² | N | 7 | 25 | 13 | 63 | 23 | 3.53 | 1.146 |
| | % | 5 | 19 | 10 | 48 | 18 | | |
| • Future choice of travel destination ² | N | 15 | 32 | 7 | 52 | 25 | 3.31 | 1.335 |
| | % | 12 | 24 | 5 | 40 | 19 | | |

¹ Experience and behaviour on site.

² After-visit reflection and evaluation.

Perceptions and opinions in tourism often differ in association with the demographic differences of tourists. Chi-square tests were used to examine whether demographic factors, such as gender, age and education, affect the perceived importance of the five impact factors (Table 5). To fulfill the required number of cases within each cell for statistical analyses, age was regrouped into three categories: young (18-34), middle aged (35-54) and elderly (>55); education was regrouped into two categories: primary and high school, and university or above. As shown in Table 5, statistically significant differences were found at the .05 level.

Table 5

**CHI-SQUARE ANALYSES OF VARIATIONS IN IMPACTS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH GENDER AND EDUCATION**

| | Gender | | Age | | Education | |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|-------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Value | Sig | Value | Sig | Value | Sig |
| Length of stay at the site | 6.457 | 0.168 | 8.034 | 0.43 | 8.908 | 0.063 |
| Expenses at the site | 5.033 | 0.284 | 3.532 | 0.897 | 10.08 | 0.039 * |
| Travel experience | 3.741 | 0.442 | 6.594 | 0.581 | 4.298 | 0.367 |
| Assessment of tourist spot | 1.675 | 0.795 | 16.92 | 0.031 * | 3.571 | 0.467 |
| Future choice of travel | 13.595 | 0.009 * | 13.45 | 0.097 | 14.53 | 0.006 * |

* Statistically significant difference at 0.05 level

The differences are not marked but males had a slightly higher impact score on future destination choice (mean = 3.50) compared with females (mean = 3.19) (Table 6) and the latter tended to give less extreme answers to this question. In terms of the distribution across the five-point scale, females demonstrate a preference for non-extreme answers to this question (31% of females chose 'not much' and 44% selected 'some', compared with 30% of males who indicated 'quite a lot' and 32% who chose 'some' impacts.

Table 6

| GENDERS DIFFERENCES IN FUTURE CHOICE OF TRAVEL DESTINATION (%) | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|----------|----------|------|-------------|----|------|-------|
| | Not at all | Not much | Neu-tral | Some | Quite a lot | N | Mean | S.D. |
| Female | 10 | 31 | 3 | 44 | 12 | 81 | 3.19 | 1.276 |
| Male | 14 | 14 | 10 | 32 | 30 | 50 | 3.5 | 1.418 |

As shown in Table 7, on-site host-guest interactions have least impacts on people aged 55 or above in influencing their assessments of the tourism spot (mean=2.94), indicating neutral impacts). In contrast, the young (mean=3.53) and middle aged (mean=3.76) are more likely to incorporate their interactions with local people into their site assessments.

Table 7

| INFLUENCE OF AGE ON ASSESSMENT OF TOURIST SPOTS (%) | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|----------|----------|------|-------------|----|------|-------|
| | Not at all | Not much | Neu-tral | Some | Quite a lot | N | Mean | S.D. |
| Young: 18- 34 | 5 | 19 | 15 | 41 | 20 | 65 | 3.53 | 1.154 |
| Middle age: 35- 54 | 6 | 10 | 4 | 62 | 18 | 49 | 3.76 | 1.071 |
| Elder: >= 55 | 6 | 44 | 5 | 39 | 6 | 18 | 2.94 | 1.162 |

Relationships between education level and on-site expenses and future destination choice are shown in Tables 8 and 9. The expenses of respondents with university education are most impacted by host-guest interactions with a mean score of 3.48, indicating a positive impact, compared with those with less education with mean score of 2.92. Similarly, as shown in Table 9, the future destination choices of respondents with university or above education are more likely to be impacted (mean=3.47), indicating positive existence of impacts) by host-guest interactions, as compared with that of respondents without university education (mean=2.60), indicating not much impact. These results are important for it appears that those who have higher incomes are most influenced by the nature of host-guest interactions. Results suggest that people with higher education (university or above) will be more likely to be impacted by host-guest interactions in their on-site expenses and future travel choices, both of which have economic implications.

Table 8

| DIFFERENCES IN ON-SITE EXPENDITURES IN ASSOCIATION WITH EDUCATION (%) | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|----------|----------|------|-------------|-----|------|-------|
| | Not at all | Not much | Neu-tral | Some | Quite a lot | N | Mean | S.D. |
| Primary or high | 20 | 24 | 16 | 24 | 16 | 25 | 2.92 | 1.412 |
| University or above | 4 | 24 | 11 | 43 | 18 | 106 | 3.48 | 1.148 |

Table 9

| INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION ON FUTURE CHOICE OF TRAVEL DESTINATION (%) | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------|----------|----------|------|-------------|-----|------|-------|
| | Not at all | Not much | Neu-tral | Some | Quite a lot | N | Mean | S.D. |
| Primary or high | 32 | 24 | 8 | 24 | 12 | 25 | 2.6 | 1.472 |
| University or above | 7 | 24 | 5 | 43 | 21 | 106 | 3.47 | 1.251 |

Conclusions

This study mainly examined how and to what extent impacts of host-guest interactions occur to tourists, through a questionnaire survey of Beijing residents based on their past domestic travel experiences. High awareness of local participation (82%) in tourism was observed, with souvenir-selling, sale of food and beverages, and providing accommodations as the most widespread forms of local participation. These form the context for most host-guest interactions. In terms of the role of local residents in tourism, almost all (99%) respondents considered residents as part of the tourist site and 97% of respondents indicated that they are willing to interact with local residents during their visit. Tourists interact with local people more to broaden their views, acquire more knowledge of the place and enrich their travel experience, rather than to fulfill their social needs. This supports the argument of Prentice et al. (1994) who suggested that superficial interactions with the host population suffice most visitors who usually do not have high social or cultural expectations for their local interactions at a destination and their influence on their travel experience, even when there are neither spatial nor linguistic limitations on interaction.

Important implications of host-guest interactions on tourists' travel behaviours and experiences was shown through five-point Likert scale examinations of five impact factors drawn from previous studies: travel experience, length of stay, expenses, assessment of tourist spot, and future choice of travel destination. The majority of respondents considered that interactions with local residents have some or a lot of impacts on their destination assessment (66%), travel experience (60%), future destination choice (59%), and on-site expenditures (57%). Length of stay site (mean=3.18) is not much affected by host-guest interactions, probably because most tourists have arranged their itinerary in advance. Therefore, the importance of host-guest interactions for tourists' on-site behaviour and experiences is supported, corresponding to the results of Prentice et al. (1994) and Pizam et al. (2000), particularly with respect to tourists' satisfaction with their destination experiences and favourable evaluations of the destination and the hosts. Furthermore, impacts on tourists are indicated as not only short-term, such as by affecting their on-site expenditures, but long-term by affecting their destination assessment and future destination choices.

In addition, respondents' reactions to on-site host-guest interactions differ according to demographic factors such as age, gender and education. Respondents with higher education (university or above) are more likely to be influenced by host-guest interactions in their on-site expenses and their future travel destination choices. Males demonstrate a slight higher tendency to be impacted on their future destination choice than females. In addition, people from young and middle aged groups, more than seniors, tend to associate their site assessment with their on-site interactions with local people. It is concluded that people with higher education and of a younger age are more likely to be impacted by on-site host-guest interactions.

As the questionnaire survey focuses on Beijing residents and their previous domestic travel experience, the results may not be generalizable to other situations. Nevertheless, this study presents valuable insights into the ways in which host-guest interactions

influence tourists' on-site behaviour and experiences. Enhanced host-guest interactions will improve tourists' experiences, increase tourist satisfaction, and enhance positive economic outcomes for the destination community.

Implications for planning and managing destinations are generated from this study. First, as both short-term and long-term impacts of host-guest interactions on tourists are supported, it is important to enhance host-guest interactions and minimize unpleasant interactions not only to improve visitor experiences but also to increase on-site expenditures, contributing higher economic benefits to the destination community.

Although it is indicated in this study that tourists usually do not look for extensive interactions with the host to fulfill their social needs in travel, they are willing to interact in order to acquire travel knowledge and understand the local culture and lifestyle for learning purposes. In addition, people with higher education and of a younger age are identified as being more likely to be impacted by host-guest interactions. Thus, they are market segments for whom enhanced host-guest interactions would be more likely to generate improved destination experiences, more engaged tourist behaviours, more favourable site evaluations, and enhanced expenditures. It is implied that a pleasant host-guest interactions that illustrate the essence of the local culture and lifestyle should be facilitated by the destination managers and included in the destination marketing efforts, particularly to a highly educated and younger population. This will enhance the attraction of the site, improve destination experiences, strengthen the emotional attachment of the destination to potential tourists (Prentice et al., 1994) and contribute to the creation of an enhanced destination image (Pizam et al., 2000).

Focusing on how and to what extent tourists are impacted by host-guest interactions, this study confirms that tourists are impacted by host-guest interactions. Future research could examine of tourists' preferences for host-guest interactions, which could provide more information for destination planners and managers to understand tourists' expectations for their experiences and allow them to acquire higher benefits from tourism. Moreover, this study was conducted in a Chinese context where there is a strong travel culture that travel is a learning opportunity. Acquiring knowledge on local culture and life are among the top reasons for interacting with local people. Impacts of host-guest interactions on tourists might have different expressions and implications in a different cultural and social context, and this could be examined in future research. In addition, considering the limitation of reliance on past experience, future research could address impacts of host-guest interactions on tourists through tourist surveys at destinations, which might improve the accuracy and reliability of the results and permit a stronger link to be made with differences in destination characteristics.

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