

VOLUNTEER TOURISTS' SATISFACTION
AND FUTURE BEHAVIORAL INTENTION

RENI @ CACILLIA POLUS

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*To my beloved mother and father,
Brothers and Sister
And all the important people in my life.*

Thank you for your endless love, support and encouragement. Thank you for giving me strength to reach for the stars and chase my dreams. To my little brother, Roy, thank you for being my brightest star and believing me, this dissertation is especially dedicated to you.

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate the volunteer tourists' satisfaction with their volunteer tourism experiences and the relationship of the overall satisfaction to their future behavioral intention specifically, intention to revisit and intention to recommend. Although previous research has explored volunteer tourism motivation, experiences and satisfaction, but less research is done to explore the volunteer tourists' satisfaction with respect to their expectations and perceptions. Thus, this study seeks to determine volunteer tourists' expectations and perceptions of their volunteer tourism experiences by measuring their satisfaction level using six experiences attributes. A conceptual model with the concept of the Expectancy-Disconfirmation is used to examine the overall satisfaction among volunteer tourists who had participated with the volunteer program at Batu Puteh Village for the past three years. A sample of 38 respondents was surveyed with online survey questionnaire. A series of analyses were performed using PASW 18. The results of the study illustrates overall motivational factors of volunteer tourists reflected previous studies as majority of the respondents went on their volunteer tourism trip with a desire to experience something completely new and interact with the local people. Moreover, there are significant differences between the expectation and performance of the volunteer tourism experience attributes. By using the Expectancy-Disconfirmation model for predicting overall satisfaction, 'Project Tasks' is the main element in terms of Negative Disconfirmation among volunteer tourists then followed by 'Personal Achievement' and 'Authentic Experience' attributes. However, overall satisfaction level tended towards the high end of the satisfaction scale which suggests that the volunteer tourism experience at Batu Puteh Village provides volunteer tourists with a satisfactory experience. Regression analysis was conducted to test the relationship between overall satisfaction and future behavioural intentions. The results of the study showed that even though the volunteer tourists had a high satisfaction level with the overall volunteer tourism experiences, a significantly lower proportion of volunteers intended to revisit Batu Puteh Village but high proportion will provide positive recommendation. The next finding showed no significant difference between volunteer tourists' overall satisfaction and year of visit; the levels of overall satisfaction of the volunteer tourists are the same. Based on the results, this study concludes that understanding volunteer tourists' motivation, expectation and perception can help to maximize their volunteer tourism experiences and promote loyalty.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat kepuasan pelancong sukarelawan terhadap pengalaman pelancongan sukarelawan mereka dan hubungan antara keseluruhan kepuasan dengan niat tingkah laku masa depan khususnya, niat untuk melawat semula dan niat untuk mengesyorkan. Walaupun penyelidikan sebelumnya telah mengkaji motivasi sukarelawan pelancongan, pengalaman dan kepuasan, tetapi kurang kajian dilakukan untuk meneroka kepuasan pelancong sukarelawan berkenaan dengan jangkaan dan persepsi mereka. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji jangkaan dan persepsi pelancong sukarelawan terhadap pengalaman pelancongan sukarelawan dengan mengukur tahap kepuasan menggunakan enam atribut pengalaman. Dengan menggunakan konsep 'Expectancy-Disconfirmation', kepuasan keseluruhan di kalangan pelancong sukarelawan yang telah mengikuti program sukarelawan di Kampung Batu Puteh untuk tiga tahun yang lalu telah dijalankan. Jumlah sampel yang digunakan dalam kaji selidik ini adalah sebanyak 38 responden dengan menggunakan soal selidik dalam talian. Siri analisis telah dilakukan dengan menggunakan PASW 18. Hasil kajian keseluruhan menunjukkan faktor motivasi pelancong sukarelawan mencerminkan kajian sebelumnya dimana majoriti responden mengikuti pelancongan sukarelawan dengan keinginan untuk mengalami sesuatu yang baru dan berinteraksi dengan orang-orang tempatan. Selain itu, terdapat perbezaan yang ketara antara jangkaan dan prestasi pelancong sukarelawan terhadap atribut pengalaman. Dengan menggunakan model 'Expectancy-Disconfirmation' untuk meramalkan keseluruhan kepuasan, 'Tugas Projek' adalah unsur utama dalam segi 'Negative Disconfirmation' kemudian diikuti oleh 'Pencapaian Diri' dan atribut 'Pengalaman Asli'. Walaubagaimanapun, tahap kepuasan keseluruhan cenderung ke arah akhir tinggi skala kepuasan yang menunjukkan bahawa pengalaman sukarelawan pelancongan adalah memuaskan. Analisis regresi telah dijalankan untuk menguji hubungan antara kepuasan keseluruhan dan niat tingkah laku masa depan. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa walaupun pelancong sukarelawan mempunyai tahap kepuasan yang tinggi, terdapat sebahagian yang kecil sahaja berniat untuk datang semula tetapi terdapat bahagian yang amat tinggi yang akan memberikan syor positif. Kajian juga menunjukkan tiada perbezaan ketara antara kepuasan keseluruhan pelancong sukarelawan dan tahun lawatan; tahap kepuasan keseluruhan pelancong sukarelawan adalah sama. Berdasarkan keputusan kajian, dapat disimpulkan bahawa pemahaman terhadap motivasi dan kepuasa pelancong sukarelawan boleh membantu untuk memaksimumkan pengalaman pelancongan sukarelawan dan menggalakkan kesetiaan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GVI	-	Global Vision Technology
KOPEL	-	Batu Puteh Tourism Cooperative Ltd.
MESCOT	-	Model Ecologically Sustainable Community Conservation and Tourism
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organization
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WWF	-	World Wildlife Fund
WTO	-	World Tourism Organization
SERVQUAL	-	Service Quality Model
SERVPERF	-	Service Performance Model
VTO	-	Volunteer Tourism Organization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The changing dynamic of tourism nowadays has created a trend where travellers are looking purpose and meaning in their holidays. Volunteer Tourism is an increasingly popular activity in which individuals combine travel with voluntary work. It is a new trend which is catching on fast. A recent research done by the World Tourism Organization reported the industry has grown right into a multi-billion dollar industry (WTO, 2011). A survey of over 300 international volunteer organizations uncovered that approximately 1.6 million individuals annually embark on volunteer holidays and the business garners between \$1.7 billion and \$2.6 billion each year (WTO, 2011). It was further promoted with celebrities gone humanitarian and volunteering overseas like Angelina Jolie and Bono. The largest volunteer tourism markets are Europe and North America. Places like biological reserves, rainforests and conservation areas attracted volunteers around the world where countries like Africa, Central and South America and Asia become major destination for volunteer tourism.

1.1 Background

Volunteer tourism also has been widely discussed as a promising sector of tourism and host communities (Wearing, 2001, 2002; Brown and Morrison, 2003; Clark, 2009; Broad, 2003; Coren and Gray, 2011). Indeed, such optimism would be inspired by the growing number of tourists embarked for volunteer activities and the popularity may signify the creditable development within the tourism industry (Guttentag, 2009). While researchers argue that “tourism often leads to the exploitation of host communities, their cultures, and environments” (Brown and Morrison, 2003), some researchers propose that the volunteering component in volunteer tourism experiences can add value to an industry that represents consumer capitalism at its worst (Wearing, 2001). Volunteer tourism has indeed accomplished a lot by helping the people from different communities in improving social and physical living conditions and of course the most importance, spreading world peace in developing countries. However, one should not forget the looks can be deceiving. The facts and figures do not tell the stories of the people facing the consequences. This was reported in Coren and Gray (2011) where many Vietnam’s and Thailand’s volunteer tourists expressed dissatisfaction that the funds they paid to the volunteer organisation did not reach the host community.

The growing trend of volunteer tourism complemented by its extensive selection of available packages in terms of both duration and type of work makes volunteer tourism more comparable with mainstream conventional mass tourism and requires further attention as to whether it is as good as it is claimed to be. Wearing (2001) expressed the concern mentioned that “the industry would be especially in danger of losing its true identity that differentiates it from other types of tourism if it becomes more commercialized.” Callanan and Thomas (2005) noted that ‘Volunteer Tourism Organizations (VTO) have a tendency to glamorize destinations and projects’ in order to attract more volunteers. In fact, discrepancy between the VTO’s claim on the website and the reality on the ground was stark (Cousins et al., 2009 and i-to-i, 2009 cited in Coren and Gray, 2011).

1.2 Problem Statement

Volunteer tourism is an increasingly popular form of travel that is attracting growing research attention. An increasing number of organizations around the world are offering volunteer trips which can easily be accessed by a potential volunteer. A simple Internet search can result in an extensive list of various international volunteer programs in the range of natural conservation, social development, reconstruction, education etc. Huge international volunteer links, which bond numerous volunteer organizations around the world, are being formed. With the growing number of profit oriented organizations offering volunteer packages, it is proved that volunteer tourism has entered the stage of commercialization, which also has created competition between and among not-for-profit and profit oriented organizations. Furthermore, Many organizations attract volunteers with mottos like ‘Join us to build a fairer world’ (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2009), ‘Want to really make a difference?’ (Earthwatch), or ‘It’s the Experience of a Lifetime’ (Cross-Cultural Solutions, 2009). These slogans, combined with unclear explanations of the trips, could generate enormously different expectations among volunteer tourists. This creates high chances of discrepancies between volunteers’ perceptions and the organizations’ perceptions regarding volunteer tourism and the roles of volunteer tourists. Coren and Gray (2011) reported that both the Vietnam’ and the Thailand’ volunteer tourists conveyed hard criticisms of their respective VTOs specifying the significance of matching the expectations of the volunteer tourists with the realities of their projects. Volunteer tourists in Thailand said the tasks that they were given did not match their expectations, so they lost interest and several volunteer tourists also voiced their suspicions that the money they paid did not reach the community (Coren and Gray, 2011). Furthermore, volunteer tourists in Vietnam expressed that they did not gain any experience linked to environmental issues and they did not have direct contact with the local communities which created great dissatisfaction concerning their personal achievement (Sirasoonthorn and Coren, 2010). Coghlan (2007) claims that “a mismatch between the volunteer’s expectations and their actual experiences may lead to decreased satisfaction levels and lowered volunteer motivation and commitment. This in turn will decrease the effectiveness of the VTO

which is trying to achieve its conservation and humanitarian goals through the use of volunteer tourists’.

Attraction of new volunteers for both not-for-profit and profit oriented organizations depends greatly on the ability to develop programs which match the assumptions and expectations of potential clients. Retention of volunteers depends on the level of volunteers’ satisfaction with the programs, which is also dependent on the extent to which the offered program matches volunteers’ expectations. Therefore, better understanding of volunteer tourists’ satisfaction should result in better volunteer programs, increased number of enrolled volunteers, higher possibility of repeat volunteers and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Nevertheless, existing research has focused primarily on the benefits of volunteer tourism, and many studies have simply involved profiling volunteers or investigating their motivations (Brown, 2005; Campbell and Smith, 2006; Wearing 2001; Chen and Chen, 2011). Thus, the present study will examine the volunteer tourists’ expectations and perceptions and will investigate the relationship between the volunteer satisfaction and their future behavioural intention specifically, the intention to re-visit and word-of-mouth recommend.

1.3 Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions;

- i. What are the factors that motivate the volunteer tourist to participate in the volunteer trip?
- ii. What are their expectations and perceptions towards the volunteer activity?
- iii. What is their level of volunteer overall satisfaction with the volunteer tourism experience at Batu Puteh Village?
- iv. What are volunteer tourists’ behavioural intentions following their visits?

- v. Is there any difference of volunteer tourist overall satisfaction with year of visit?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study is formed on the basis that small numbers of volunteer tourism research explores the various volunteer tourism motivations and the relationships between volunteer tourists' expectations, experiences, satisfactions and their future behavioural intentions.

The specific aims and objectives of this study are:

- i. To explore the factors that motivate the volunteer tourists to participate in the volunteer trip;
- ii. To determine volunteer tourists' satisfaction with their volunteer tourism experiences;
- iii. To examine the relationship between volunteer tourists' overall satisfaction and future behavioural intentions specifically, the intention to re-visit a site and intention to recommendations;
- iv. To identify if any difference of volunteer tourist overall satisfaction with year of visit.

1.5 Scope of the Research

Based on the objective above, the scope of this study will be focused on the following:

1.5.1 Theoretical Framework

So as to have a solid base and well-defined understanding on volunteer tourism and the volunteer tourist, theories and concepts need to be clearly assessed. The theories and concepts are very vital in guiding the whole process of this study. Theories and concepts reviewed in this study involved history and ideas of volunteer tourism, volunteer tourists' typology and the various motivational factors, volunteer tourists' expectation, experiences and satisfaction and future behavioral intentions. All these theories and concepts are described in details in Chapter 2. Beside theories and concepts, previous studies in the study field also reviewed.

1.5.2 Study Area

This study is emphasis on volunteer tourism program at Batu Puteh Village which is fully managed by Batu Puteh Community Tourism Cooperative Ltd (KOPEL). Batu Puteh is a sub-district of Kinabatangan District in the East of Sabah State, which is also known as Borneo. Located 600 meter from the bank of lower Kinabatangan Sanctuary, Batu Puteh Village offered a wide range of volunteer tourism program ranging from habitat and nature conservation to community work. Nature conservation project is the major activity done by the volunteer tourists which act as main activities of attractions. Batu Puteh "Mukim" consists of four main villages namely Batu Puteh Village, Mengaris Village, Perpaduan Village and Sentosa Village. The *Orang Sungai* ethnic group dominates the population. This area

was chosen due to the reason of the successful of the local community in establishing an organization as a local business entity that is fully owned by the local community with less dependency on government funding. Moreover, successful partnership has been built between the community organization and cooperation with international volunteer tourism organization such as Global Vision International (GVI), Raleigh International, Intrepid and some international universities.

1.5.3 Data Collection Method

Mixed-method research approach in the form of survey questionnaire is used as a data collection method. This is because the study tries to quantify the problems and understand how prevalent it is by looking for projectable results to a larger population. Quantitative method means that “data is collected with the aim to try theories” (Bryman and Bell, 2005). While qualitative method goes to the heart of the problem, quantitative method design reaches a broader part of the problem and it focuses on measurement, causality, generalization and replication. The main reason why survey questionnaire is used in this study is because questionnaires are helpful in gathering information that is unique to individuals such as motivation, expectation and satisfaction. Besides, the study also involves describing characteristics of volunteer tourists. Furthermore, this study also required a high response rate from respondents.

The use of structured survey questionnaire with open-ended questions were decided as the most appropriate data collection method where respondents can express their thoughts about the volunteer tourism experiences in a freewheeling manner. The data is collected using online survey questionnaire created by Google Doc and email invitation with survey link was sent to the volunteer tourists who had participated in volunteer program in Batu Puteh Village managed by KOPEL. Details are discussed in Chapter Three.

1.6 Significance of the Research

This study will be a significant endeavor in understanding the various motivational factors of volunteer tourists in planning their volunteer trip. This study will also be beneficial for the VTO in planning their volunteer program that is to meet the volunteer tourist expectations for higher satisfaction volunteer tourism experiences. By understanding the volunteer tourists' satisfaction also, it is hoped it can serve as a guideline in designing future volunteer program to ensure higher retentions. Moreover, this study will provide recommendations on improving the volunteer tourism program at Batu Puteh Village.

1.7 Research Design

In order to achieve the study objectives, it is vital to have a systematic process of conducting the study. This study is conducted in four major stages which consist of preliminary stage, data collection, data analysis and finally, discussion, conclusion and recommendations. Each stage is explained as following:

1.7.1 Preliminary Stage

The first stage comprises identifying the research problems which leads to the formulation of the study goals and objectives. Besides that, details literature reviews are conducted to give a strong understanding of the concepts of the whole research. Theories and concepts related to volunteer tourism, volunteer tourists' motivation, expectation, experiences, satisfaction and future behavioral intentions are clearly reviewed.

1.7.2 Data Collection

The second stage of this study involves collection of both primary and secondary data. The primary data is obtained through online semi-structured questionnaires which was created using Google Doc to the volunteers that did their volunteer activities at Batu Puteh Village for the past 3 years. Secondary data is gathered from KOPEL and sources such as books, journals, previous research papers as well as electronic resources

1.7.3 Data Analysis

At this stage, all collected data is analysed using PASW 18. It involves the analysis of the volunteer tourists' characteristics, the analysis of the expectation and performance of the volunteer tourism experiences, the analysis of volunteer tourists' satisfaction and their future behavioral intentions.

1.7.4 Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The final stage of the study involves the formulation of conclusion and recommendations based on the details discussion of findings. Conclusion is drawn in-line with the study objectives and some appropriate recommendations related to the problems are proposed as solution to the stated problems, or for future research purposes.

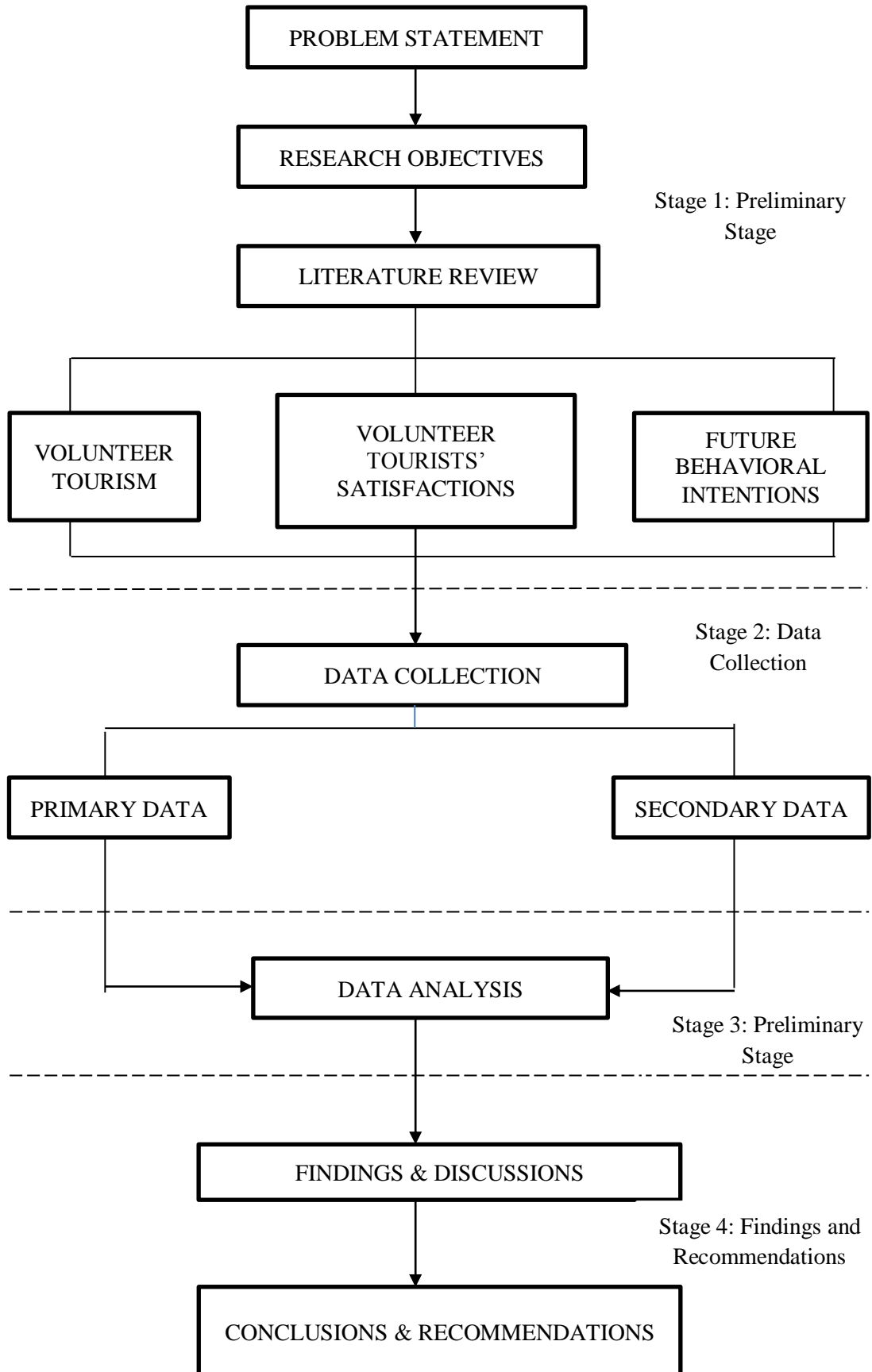


Figure 1.1: Research Design

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the basic information on the overall aim of the study. This chapter is significant in providing general understanding of the research problems and the specific objectives of the study. Besides that, research questions, the scope and the significance of the study and the overall research design is clearly defined. In order to provide a clear direction throughout the whole process of this study, a solid theoretical background of the study is highly required. Thus, the next chapter will explain on the theoretical framework of this study.

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