

Modelling Eco Tourists Experience, Satisfaction And Word of Mouth Recommendation: A Mediation Model of Satisfaction

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the interrelationship of experience, satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation among tourists. Specifically, the study investigates mediation effect of satisfaction between experience and word of mouth recommendation. This study employed quantitative approach in gather data for statistical analysis. Judgmental sampling was used in data collection. Of 260 completed questionnaires collected for data analysis. The proposed conceptual framework was examined with direct and indirect model. All hypothesized relationship was determined. Findings reveal that satisfaction as a mediator on the experience-word of mouth recommendation path. The study was limited to ecotourism context. Comprehensive coverage of ecotourism sites suggested implementing in future research to obtain a robust result. Experience is subjective and personalize, which more comprehensive understanding on the mechanism is largely been ignored. Future study may adopt qualitative method to address this issue. Limited investigation of experience conceptualization is evident. Future studies could provide additional knowledge on experience conceptualization by adding others relevant dimensions. This study sheds knowledge of experience and mediation effect of satisfaction. Practitioners and destination managers would emphasize on manage experiences in order to satisfy and creating positive behavioral among tourists.

Keywords: Experience, satisfaction, word of mouth recommendation, ecotourism, Malaysia

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism as a pillar to a country tourism industry and is recognized among developing countries such as Malaysia. Approximately 10% of total international tourists visited ecotourism Malaysia destination (Yusof, Abd Rahman, Che Jamil, & Iranmanesh, 2014). In the Malaysia development plan, local government has pay attention and efforts in develop ecotourism sector due to its important to the economic well-being of Malaysia. Aware of this ecotourism potential, ecotourism practitioners have put effort in design and categorized different tourism products and services, to target various types of eco-tourists segmentation. However, action in attempts to attract visitors to ecotourism destination remains a challenge for unknown possibilities (Yusof *et al.*, 2014). The possible challenges included construction works during the development process (Jarvis, Stoeckl & Liu, 2016), reduce water level quality and clarity (Jarvis *et al.*, 2016), tourist lack of travel confidence due to safety and security issues (Jarvis *et al.*, 2016; PourAhmad, Shabanifard, Hosseini, & Soltanipour (2010),

seasonality for tourism sector as the nature of demand match with supply regards capacity and resources (Connell, Page, & Meyer, 2015), tourists' dissatisfaction about tourism infrastructures and facilities (Arabatzis & Grigoroudis, 2010). All abovementioned possibilities are mounting to the overall experience gained among tourists, thus will affect tourist satisfaction level. This also might be one of the reasons that likelihood failed to attract domestic and international tourists to place a visit to the ecotourism destinations. Hence, ecotourism destination may suffer from revenue shrinking, thus financial viability and putting ecotourism industry at risk.

Based on the discussion above, this study reflect that the experience evaluation is important to ensuring tourist satisfaction is achieve and likelihood to spread positive word of mouth to others. From literature, "Tourist experience" is complex (Gnoth, Andreu & Kozak, 2009). The concept of "tourist experience" is contrast with routine daily life experience (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009). The understanding of tourist experience is important, nevertheless, measuring "tourist experience" for tourism is remained challenge due to lack of research (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Knutson *et al.*, 2007; Titz 2007; Larsen, 2007). Moreover, knowledge of 'tourist experience' has largely been ignored in the literature (Oh, Fiore & Jeung., 2007; Walls, Okumus, Wang & Kwun, 2011; Chok, Aziz & Awang., 2013).

This limited knowledge and insufficient research with respect to the assessment of tourist experience is evident, especially in ecotourism of the developing countries. Studies of ecotourism mainly depends on developed countries data and information (Khan, 2003) which applicable issue is remaining unsolve, particularly developing countries context (Donohoe & Lu, 2009). Existing study shows a gaps that domestic tourists' attitude and behaviour differ from international tourists (Singh & Krakover, 2015). Thus, domestic tourists often diverge with international tourists in the area perceptions (Tasci & Gartner, 2007) and satisfaction (Yuksel, 2004).

This study call for minimize the literature gap by provide comprehensive understanding of tourist experience in the context of ecotourism. An assessment model of tourist experience in the ecotourism area is enriching existing body of knowledge to tourism sector, and marketing studies domain.

This study contributes to theoretical knowledge by improved model of tourist experience and its association with others variables. For the practical contribution, this study enhances the understanding for ecotourism practitioners in identify which attribute is vital for tourist experience assessment. Thus, findings will help ecotourism destination managers to strategize according to expectation and distinctive experiences demanded by tourists. An improvement of proposed tourist experience model attempts to serve as tool in building relationship with tourists, consequently, to increase the likelihood of positive post consumption behavior. Identifying relationships between tourist experience and its consequence variables (e.g.: satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation) are equivalent important design and enriching tourism experiences.

Although experience study in the context of tourism is important, prior researches fail to incorporate tourist experience, satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation in a model, empirically. The main objective of this study is to examine the proposed conceptual model of tourist experience, satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation. Experience in the context of the current study focuses on results of events that culminate in the tourist gaining what is known as 'tourist experience'. An extended service transaction of tourism experience that highlighted such experience consumption can be details by a sequence of occurrences

(Prayag, Hosany, Muskat & Del Chiappa, 2017). Therefore, this study is investigating the interrelationship of tourist experience, satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation in propose conceptual framework. The understanding of present study framework draws on several disciplines such as marketing (e.g., Pine & Gilmore, 1999), and tourism (e.g., Tan, Aziz, Khairil & Zaiton, 2015). This study was operationalize tourist experience influence the overall tourist satisfaction, consequently, lead to tourist's word of mouth recommendation.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourist experience

Firm interact with consumer through its offering of products and services resulting consumer behaviour concept, especially customer experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The consumer behaviour literature has lead the pathway of focusing on consumer characteristic, particularly in the area of consumer experience (Chok, Aziz & Awang., 2013). Customer experience posited to be an essential for business to gained advantages in a competitive business environment (Shaw & Ivens, 2002).

The conceptualisation of experience is not new (Pine & Gilmore's, 1998, 1999). This concept involved in various disciplines and field of studies (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Arnould & Price, 1993; Otto & Ritchie, 1996; O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Poulsson & Kale, 2004; O'Loughlin, Szmigin & Turnbull, 2004; Mascarenhas, Kesevan & Bernacchi, 2006; Wu & Liang, 2010, Zajonc, 1980). However, understanding of tourist experience in tourism literature has largely under researched (Larsen, 2007).

The conceptualisation of consumer experience was differ from several of context. Moreover, this consumer experience was contradict with normal routine activities (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009). In tourism context, experience reflected that tourists who placed a distination visit (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007). Tourist interaction at a given point with a visited destination has culminated as tourist experience. Although 'tourist experience' is general in nature, but this concept was complex (Gnoth *et al.* 2009). Experience in the context of the current study focuses on results of events that culminate in the tourist gaining what is known as 'tourist experience'

2.2 Tourist experience dimensions

The conceptualisation of experience based on Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999). Four components of consumer experience are developed. First, educational experience refers to customers in attempt to learn new things (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). This experience is vital to reflect an interchangeable of new knowledge with experience gained. Interchange of products and services offered by tourism organisation and tourists has occurred an experience. Remarkably, tourists are attempting to learn something new from tourism activities. Second, escapism experience refers to the consumers actively engaged and participate in a leisure context. This experience involved escapist experience which included relaxation and leisure. Tourism and travel often emphasize this experience which differ from normal routine life experiences. Next, entertainment experience occurs when performances delights customers (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Organisation attempts to provide great pleasure for consumers through its offering. Lastly, aesthetic experience refers to the greater meaning derived from the surrounding environment offered. Thus, this experience provide the greater impacts from what is received from the environment that pleasure and influence experience gained by consumers.

2.3 Satisfaction

Managing satisfaction is important for service providers. An evaluation of consumption experience associate with satisfaction. An overall satisfaction become part of experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) that gained from appraisal of experience consumption (Fornell, 1992). A favourable experience consumption leads to satisfaction positively (Oliver, 1997). Moreover, unfavourable experience gained influence level of satisfaction among consumers.

The conceptualisation of satisfaction as post consumption evaluation (Eusebio & Vieira, 2013). Thus, satisfaction also appraise the consumer expectation met or unmet. Based on the literature, satisfaction was conceptualized as cognitive approach (Eusebio & Vieira, 2013) and affective approach (Huang, Weiler, & Assaker 2015). Irrespective of the satisfaction conceptualization, present study measure satisfaction at aggregated level which reflected as the overall evaluation in sum of overall construct. Similar satisfaction operationalization is evident is past research (Prayag *et al.*, 2017; Chen & Chen, 2010). Congruent with the research in tourism, tourist satisfaction is operationalisation as overall assessment of tourism products and services. Present study incorporated satisfaction aims to comprehensively explained tourism phenomena and understand the role of satisfaction and its outcome, particularly tourist behavioural intention.

2.4 Word-of-mouth recommendation (WOM)

WOM is deliberated in consumer literature as marketing tools as experience sharing (Westbrook, 1987). In common, measurement of tourist loyalty often included (1) intention to revisit again and (2) intention to recommend (Eusebio & Vieira 2013). The WOM was operationalized in this study as post-trip behavioural intention among tourists. The intention of WOM is emphasized in term of tourists' propensity to say positive things about the travel destination and trip to others such as friends and family. Satisfied consumer are positively react with their post behavioral (Schmitt, 1999). Existing WOM literature finds that satisfied tourists who with positive and good experience are likelihood to recommend the holiday destination to others (Beeho & Prentice, 1997; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Prayag *et al.*, 2017). On the other hand, dissatisfied tourists are unlikely to react their post behavioural positively. Indeed, dissatisfied tourists have the tendency to share their negative experience with others (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2001).

2.5 Hypotheses development

Service delivery emphasized on experience that leads to overall satisfaction (Cohen, 1979; Pomfret, 2006). Experience gained by tourists through their involvement and participation of tourism activities is evident (Vitterso, 1997; Vitterso *et al.*, 2001). In festival study, experience is a significant antecedent of satisfaction (Lee, Lee & Choi, 2010). In adventure tourism, hedonism, escapism and socialisation were associated positively with tourist satisfaction. (Triantafillidou & Petala, 2016). Likewise, Willian and Soutar (2009) has found that experience served as important driver for satisfaction. Similarly, emotional experience finds to have predictive power on tourist satisfaction (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). The aforementioned has deliberated the following hypothesis:

Research proposition H1: There is a relationship between experience and satisfaction

In marketing literature, customer satisfaction is associated with post behavioural positively (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991), which included WOM intention (Jones & Sasser, 1995). In tourism literature, numbers of scholarly works indicated that satisfaction does influence WOM recommendation (Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001; Alegre & Juaneda., 2006; Wu & Liang., 2011). Relationship between tourist satisfaction and their post trip behavioural is established (Alegre & Juaneda., 2006). Thus, significant of tourists satisfaction leads to tourists' behaviour intention. The more likelihood of tourist satisfaction, the more intention of tourists to revisit and spread WOM to friends and family (Wu & Liang, 2011). Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis is posited:

Research proposition H2: There is a relationship between satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation

Past research finds that experimental quality and post behavioural is established (Chen & Chen, 2010; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). Study on experiential marketing has validate the overall experience associated positively with behavioural intention (Schmitt, 1999). Study on shopping context has evident that a satisfied experience is positively affect revisit intention (Ibrahim & Ng, 2002). In cruise study, experience is positively associate with intention to behave in near future (Oh *et al.*, 2007). In tourism studies, tourist satisfied with their recreational experience attempts to recommend the holiday destination to others (Beeho & Prentice., 1997). On the other study setting such as theme park, Wang *et al* finds aesthetic and action experiences are positively related with future behavioural intention. The abovementioned has posited the following hypothesis:

Research proposition H3: The experience has a positive influence on WOM recommendation.

Mediator role of satisfaction is not new. Based on previous research, satisfaction served as mediator is upheld (Walsh, Shiu, Hassan, Michaelidou & Beatty, 2011; Prayag *et al.*, 2013). However, the role of mediation differ from study context. Satisfaction mediate the relationship between emotion and behavioural intention (Han *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, satisfaction does mediate the path of experiential quality and behavioural intention (Chen & Chen, 2010). Similarly in tourism studies, contradict of mediation effect is evident. Full mediation of satisfaction was upheld (Chi & Qu, 2008; Su, Swanson, and Chen., 2016). Meanwhile, partial mediation of satisfaction does occurred (Walsh *et al.*, 2011). Thus, an understanding of satisfaction and its mediation role is worth to be explored, particularly in experience-word of mouth recommendation path. Hence, following hypothesis is posited:

Research proposition H4: Satisfaction will mediate the relationship between experience and WOM recommendation.

The Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual framework with four hypotheses. Experience act as antecedent of satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation. Satisfaction posited mediating the relationship between experience and word of mouth recommendation.

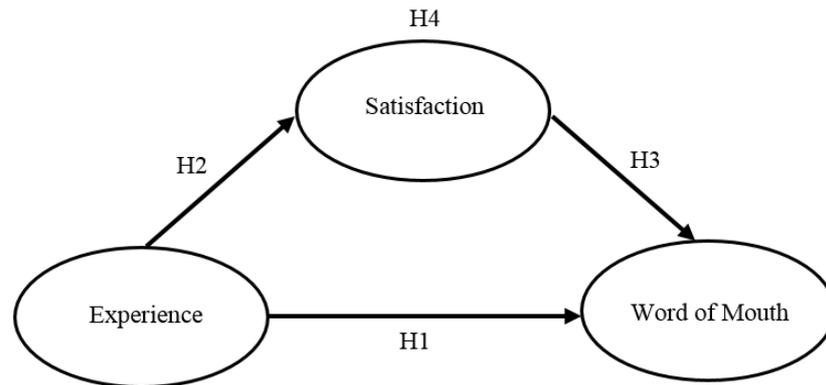


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Present study adopted literature review and administrative questionnaire survey to conduct the model evaluation to reflect the tourists experience in ecotourism sector. This evaluation aims to identify the tourist experience in associate their post service consumption in ecotourism, specifically Marine Parks.

Present study administrated pilot study on 30 respondents. Pilot study suggests several questions need to be remove and rephrasing some questions. Three items were removed due to ambiguity and low in reliability. These items namely “The setting of the park was attractive”, “The setting of the park pays attention to design details” and “I completely escaped from my daily routine”. After elimination and rephrase process, a total of 18 questions remain as the final questionnaire for full survey distribution.

Tourist experience was initiated as reflective construct. All dimensions reflected to the overall tourist experience that adopted from Pine and Gilmore (1999) conceptualization. Measurement for tourist experience was adapted from Oh *et al.*, (2007). All items were used 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). Satisfaction constructs using four statements adapted from Oliver (1977). This adoption of 4 questions: (1) I really enjoyed myself at this park, (2) I have made the correct decision to attend this island, (3) My choice to visit this park was a wise one, (4) I am satisfied with the diving experience, was its investigation relevancy in tourism and hospitality studies. Four items were used 7-point Likert scale (1 = very dissatisfied and 7 = very satisfied). Word of mouth recommendation was initiated using three items namely (1) “I would positively recommend to other people”, (2) “I would be glad to refer other travelers”, (3) “I would recommend to those who are planning a vacation”. This constructs measurement was adapted from Hutchinson, Lai and Wang (2009). Measurement scale was operationalised using 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

3.1 Study Settings, Sampling, and Data Collection

This survey was conducted in Malaysia ecotourism destination. In order to select the ecotourism site for full administrated questionnaire survey distribution, several criteria need to be considered. Firstly, this study targeted Sipadan Island as questionnaire survey distribution due to number of visitation from domestic and international tourists. Secondly,

Sipadan Island Park was recognised as marine dive spot that been listed as one of the top ten dive destination around the world (Ostheimer, 2017). Thirdly, Sipadan Island Park also rich with natural attractions and been claimed as the richest marine habitats with priceless and valuable irreplaceable assets (UNESCO, 2013).

Target population for this study is tourists who visited Sipadan Island, both domestic and international tourists. Diver tourists who travel and engaged with diving activities will be invited for this survey due to their relevancy in provides the most honest opinions regards diving experience. However, tourists who visited Sipadan Island for non-diving activities will be excluded due to under exploration of underwater service setting. Moreover, snorkelers were not listed as valid respondents because their exposure of underwater servicescape, remains limited. Data were collected from valid respondents after completion of diving activities or end of their diving trip. Survey only conducted at the area of dive centres with permission of dive centre managers / owners.

3.2 Sampling

Population for this study is eco-tourists who involved on natural environment and participate ecotourism activities such as snorkelling, diving and islands activities. In considerate to the nature of present study context, domestic and international diver tourists were identified. A non-probability sampling applied due to sampling frame failed to identify. A judgmental sampling technique apply to identify valid respondents. Targeted respondents only for diver tourists due to experience with underwater diving activities and exposure of underwater surroundings. Similar sampling methods adopted by research such as Prayag, Hosany, Muskat and Del Chiappa., (2017) as the study focusing on tourists' emotion experience and their behavioral and data were collected from local tourists. In present study, questionnaire survey distributed to local and international tourists after end of their diving trips around dive center in Semporna, Sabah.

Approximately 288 diver tourists were willingly to participate in this survey. Of the 260 diver tourists who completed the questionnaires, 28 respondents and their opinions were discarded due to questionnaires were not completed. Thus, 90.28% of response rate reflected the usable questionnaires for data analysis. In total, 260 valid with completed questionnaires are usable for further analysis. In descriptive analysis, age groups reported as: below 20 years old (5.8%); 20-29 years old (34.2%); 30-39 years old (38.1%); 40-49 years old (13.5%) and 50 years old and above (8.5%). Respondent's gender was as follows: male (62.7%) and female (37.3%). In term of nationality, respondents were groups into: Malay (20.0%), Chinese (20.0%), Indian (4.6%) and non-Malaysian (55.0%). Marital status was reported with three groups as single (65.0%); married (31.5%) and others (3.5%). The types of travel deliberated into: single (18.1%); fiends/family (76.2%); company trip (1.5%) and others (4.2%). Level of education is significant among respondents with 27.7% high school level, 20.4% college/trade school level, 35.0% with bachelor degree level, 16.9% postgraduate degrees.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Normality test was employed in Following Kline (2011) guideline, this study adopted normality test with suggested Skewness and kurtosis values of 3 and 8 as rules of thumb. Thus, result indicated data is not violated the normality assumption. Common method variance (CMV) employed in present study due to several reasons such as (1) self-report of questionnaire which respondents have to provide their opinions, (2) same respondent who

answer for both independent and dependent variables. Thus, present study adopted several remedies recommended by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff (2003) as guideline in attempts to reduce the potential CMV. Firstly, multiple cover stories for each variables in order to separate respondents' psychological. Secondly, well trained surveyor as researcher himself assured anonymity and confidentiality of information provided. Third, layout and formatting of the administrated questionnaire survey was arrange based on measurement items for independent variables stated before dependent variable. Lastly, Harman's single-factor test was adopted by entering all study variables into statistical procedure of Exploratory factor Analysis (EFA) to assess common method bias (Podsakoff & Organ 1986). Common method bias exist when single factor explains majority of the variance (Podsakoff *et al.* 2003). EFA was adopted by incorporated six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. Result reveals that first factor explained 42.6% of the total variance, thus indicated common variance bias does not exist.

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Present study employed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), using Amos XX to examine the hypothesized model. Amos method is a covariance-based structural equation modelling (CBSEM) which remedies are strictly adheres. CBSEM employed to examined XX items which represented by 6 factors structure of endogenous and exogenous variables. Goodness-of-fit indexes included absolute fit indices, incremental fir indices and parsimonious value applied to evaluate the poor or fitness of the data. In addition to strength data fitness, monitoring of modification indices, is required. There were two items removed after re-specification model applied. Items namely: "The underwater activities were amusing", and "I felt like I was in a different time or place" were removed in attempts to achieved goodness of fit.

Congruent with Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) guidelines, reliability, convergent and discriminant validity were examined to ensure appropriate instrument before examine of structural model. Internal consistency for research instrument was examined using Cronbach alpha and composite reliability (Fornell & larcker, 1981). Convergent validity was assess through significance ($p < 0.05$), item loadings (above 0.50). Discriminant validity was examined using average variance extracted (AVE) by monitoring the square root of AVE of constructs, which should be higher than variance between constructs with another constructs within model (Fornell & larcker, 1981). Table 1 summarized the reliability coefficients, items loadings, composite reliability and AVE. Following table 2 summarized the square root of AVE of constructs and a comparison between one constructs with another, is illustrated.

Table 1: Item loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted.

Items	Item loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE
Education		0.940	
I learnt a lot during this dive	0.877		0.798
The experience gain more knowledgeable	0.934		
It was a learning experience	0.918		
It stimulated my curiosity to learn new things	0.842		
Entertainment		0.909	
The entertainment was captivating	0.738		0.772
Underwater activities were entertaining	0.948		
Underwater activities were fun	0.934		

Aesthetic		0.822	
It was pleasant just being here	0.838		0.697
I felt a real sense of harmony	0.832		
Escapism		0.868	
I felt I played a different character here	0.953		0.769
The experience let me imagine being someone else	0.793		
Satisfaction		0.957	
The experience let me imagine being someone else	0.89		0.848
I have made the correct decision to attend this park	0.966		
My choice to visit this park was a wise one	0.945		
I am satisfied with the diving experience	0.88		
Word of mouth recommendation		0.960	
I would positively recommend to other people	0.953		0.889
I would be glad to refer other travelers	0.967		
I would recommend to those who are planning a vacation	0.907		

*** Significant at 0.01level; AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 2: Discriminant validity

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6
WOM	0.943					
Education	0.495	0.892				
Entertainment	0.546	0.647	0.879			
Aesthetic	0.621	0.71	0.778	0.835		
Escapism	0.219	0.398	0.255	0.396	0.877	
satisfaction	0.711	0.629	0.642	0.753	0.249	0.921

*Diagonal elements are the square root of AVE; off-diagonal are correlations.

According table 1, result indicating composite reliability should above minimum threshold of 0.70. Empirical result range from 0.868 to 0.960, thus indicated reliability of constructs, is achieved (Fornell & Larcker 1981). From table 1, factor loadings for items above 0.55 and significant at p value less than 0.005 (Tabachnick & Fidell 2007). Value for each construct (range from 0.697- 0.889) signposted convergent validity is upheld (Fornell & Larcker 1981). Form table 2, a comparison of square roots of AVEs for all constructs with diagonal and off diagonal values. Square roots of AVEs value greater than correlation value, thus indicating discriminant validity, is evident (Fornell & Larcker 1981).

4.2 Structural Model and Hypotheses testing

The hypothesized three relationship (H1, H2 and H3) were examined using SEM. Overall model fit achieved at $\chi^2 = 316.699$, $df = 129$, $p < 0.001$. Incremental fit measures (Tucker–Lewis index = 0.954, comparative fit index = 0.962 and incremental fit index = 0.962) were indicating acceptable fit is achieved (Byrne 1998). $\chi^2/df = 2.455$, < 5 , thus indicating parsimonious fit, is achieved (Kline, 2011). A satisfactory absolute fit is achieved with RMSEA = 0.075 (Brown & Cudeck, 1993). Table 3 summarized the standardized path coefficient and significant value as the analysis result. Thus, result indicating that H1 (experience and satisfaction; $\beta = 0.794$, $p < 0.001$), H2 (satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation; $\beta = 0.521$, $p < 0.001$) and H3 (experience and recommendation; $\beta = 0.239$, $p < 0.01$) are supported statistically.

Table 3: Hypotheses tests

Research hypothesis	Path		
	Coefficient	t-value	Result
Experience-Satisfaction	0.794	11.263***	Supported
Satisfaction-word of mouth recommendation	0.521	5.832***	Supported
Experience- word of mouth recommendation	0.239	2.58**	Supported

*Note: 5000 Samples bootstrapping procedures applied

*p<0.005, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

4.3 Mediating Role of Satisfaction

Hypothesis 4 examined the mediation effect of satisfaction on experience and word of mouth recommendation path. To examine the mediating role of satisfaction, direct, indirect and total effects were measured.

Table 4: Direct and Indirect Effect of Satisfaction

Model/Hypothesed paths	Beta	P-value	95% CI Bootstrap BC	
			LB	UB
Direct model				
Experience- Word of mouth recommendation	0.653	0.00		
Mediation model				
Experience- Word of mouth recommendation	0.239	0.01		
Standardised indirect effect (SIE)	0.413	0.00	0.238	0.596

CI=confidence intervals, BC=bias corrected, LB=lower bound, UB upper bound,

***p<0.001, **p<0.005; *p<0.05

From table 4, direct model shows indicating a significant relationship between satisfaction and WOM recommendation ($\beta = 0.653$, $p = 0.000$). A comparison of value path between direct model and indirect model were observed, after satisfaction incorporate into the direct model. The comparison resulting decrease of coefficient value (from 0.653 to 0.239), thus fulfilled the mediation effect criterion (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Further understanding mediation effect, bootstrapping approach with 5000 resampling was employed. The indirect effect of satisfaction on WOM recommendation is 0.413 (95% CI: 0.238-0.596) was upheld. Value 0 does not straddle between lower bound (0.238) and upper bound (0.596), sufficient empirical evident to claim the mediation effect of satisfaction (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Following Cohen (1988) effect size guideline, satisfaction with effect size of 0.413 was recognized as medium effect. Thus, hypothesis 4 was supported.

4.4 Discussion of Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the experience that affects satisfaction of eco-tourists in Malaysia. Moreover, the aim of this research was investigate the interrelationship between experience, satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation. Corresponding with marketing research, this study demonstrated the predictive power of experience in tourist's behavioral model. Proposed conceptual framework has confirmed the significant relationship between (1) experience and satisfaction, (2) satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation intention. Thus, sufficient evidence to claims that predictive power of experience to attitudinal and behavioral intention, is upheld.

Tourism investigation of experience is remains scant. Advancing knowledge, empirical result from this study highlighted tourist's experience inclusive of action, escapism, education and entertainment, influence tourist satisfaction. As a result suggested, different level of experience influence tourist satisfaction. Thus, empirical findings reflected that the more attention require in understanding determinants of overall experience evaluation. Furthermore, effort in create and deliver a better values can be designed in the context of ecotourism which suitable for domestic and international tourist preferences. This also indicated that tourist selection in ecotourism destination is worth to be explored.

This study confirms that direct relationship between satisfaction and word of mouth recommendation. The result is consistent with previous research (Alegre & Juaneda., 2006; Chen & Chen, 2010; Wu & Liang., 2011). Similar result obtained also indicated satisfaction positively associate with eco-tourist word of mouth recommendations (Prayang *et al*, 2013).

5.0 CONCLUSION

Empirical evidence support the mediation effect of satisfaction on the experience-word of mouth recommendation path. This findings claims to be the pioneer in enriching the knowledge of satisfaction in mediate the relationship between experience and word of mouth recommendations. Result ample to have significant medium effect size which moderately influence the experience gained by eco-tourist with the post behavioral intention. Thus, this study confirm the mediating role of satisfaction with its implication to the managerial advantages besides enriching tourism and marketing body of knowledge.

This study contributes to the literature beyond the established single relationship between experience and behavioral intention. The study reveals the contribution of mediating role of satisfaction on experience and word of mouth recommendation relationship. Incorporated of satisfaction as mediator could explain the mechanism of the experience-word of mouth recommendation path. Experience influence word of mouth recommendation through satisfaction. The finding shed the important of satisfaction on the experience-word of mouth recommendation path, highlighting the new contribution as a mediator with medium effect size influences the path relationship.

The empirical result uncovers the important of experience with four components: education, entertainment, aesthetic and escapism. Among the experience dimensions, aesthetic seems to have most predictive power effect on overall eco-tourist experience. Based on the statistical findings, destination managers and practitioners should focus more on aesthetic experience through its tourism packages and activities. Practitioners such as dive instructors and dive master play a vital role in create a more meaningful through the exploration of underwater activities. Managing tourist experience effectively could provide comprehensive understanding of underwater natural resources such as flora and fauna. Tourist also educated in preserve the natural resources by ethical and responsible to these valuable resources. Dive instructor and dive master could emphasize more practices in maintaining underwater surrounding from being ruin.

Moreover, marketers should emphasized on creating experiences that enhance overall tourist experience. Complementary services such as travel responsible could trigger the interesting of activities, thus build overall favorable experience. Destination organization could design the activities that help diver tourists in participate to be responsible for the natural environment especially underwater ecosystem. Activity such as clean wastage and plastics material from dive spot could enhance impact on tourists aesthetic and education experiences.

Destination marketers also aim to create different tourist dive package according to tourist preferences aims to unleash unique escapism and entertainment experiences.

Limitations

The first limitation is nature of investigation for this study. Self-administrative questionnaire was adopted to examine experience in associate with satisfaction and behavioral intention. Due to the experience is subjective and personalize in nature, an in-depth investigation such as focus group in understanding different groups' insight is lacking in this study. Hence, future research may need to address this issue by adopting qualitative method.

Second limitation is limited scope of study and findings lack of representativeness. This study only focuses on east Malaysia, particular Sipadan Island, which not include other dive destination in Malaysia. Therefore, a comprehensive coverage of ecotourism sites include others states in Malaysia could provide fruitful insights. Thus, wider coverage of study destinations also could overcome the potential limitation of representative sample issue. Hence, study findings could be by present study framework will address empirically, especially contributed on others related experiential marketing studies.

Third limitation refers to the scare in experience concept examination. Due to various interpretations and conceptualization marketing literature, this study only limited to four realms of experience components. Thus, this limitation can be addressed by include additional dimension of experience to provides a comprehensive and holistic of experience concept.

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