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The Role of Attitudinal Ambivalence in Residents' Support for a Mega-Event

Introduction

Most attitude studies define attitude as a tendency to evaluate a particular entity with a certain degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). An important assumption underlying this definition is that attitude objects are evaluated either favorably or unfavorably (Ziegler, Hagen, and Diehl 2012). However, in reality, individuals can have positive and negative evaluations of an object at the same time. The degree to which an attitude is simultaneously evaluated as both positively and negatively, is aptly termed "attitudinal ambivalence" (Jonas, Broemer, and Diehl 2000). The importance of ambivalence has not been well understood in the tourism literature, particularly resident attitude studies, although the mixed feelings of residents toward tourism events have been widely recognized (Li, Hsu, and Lawton 2015). This paper aims to introduce ambivalence to the current resident attitude research, and examine the impacts of ambivalence on residents' attitudes about mega-events and their behavior intentions.

Theory background and hypothesis development

Ambivalence is the psychological state in which people hold a mix of positive and negative feelings toward an attitude object (Gardner 1987). Attitudes high in ambivalence involve both highly positive and highly negative evaluations, whereas attitudes low in ambivalence consist of either positive or negative evaluations. Ambivalence is a property of attitude strength (Krosnick and Petty 1995). High ambivalence indicates low attitude strength, and has less impacts on behavior than low ambivalence, which is associated with strong attitudes. Empirical studies have supported the impacts of ambivalence on attitude and behavior. Put formally,

H1: Attitudinal ambivalence is negatively related to behavior intention

Ambivalence can moderate the relationship between attitude and behavior. The attitude accessibility model argues that accessibility of attitude can influence the impact of attitude on behavior (Fazio and Williams 1986). Consistency of attitude can influence the automatic activation of attitudes from memory (Bargh et al. 1992). Attitudes can be activated more easily when ambivalence is low, thus the relationship between attitude and behavior will be stronger, compared with the attitude-behavior relationship under high ambivalence. This leads to our second hypothesis:

H2: Ambivalence will attenuate the relationship between residents' satisfaction with an event and their behavior intention of offering support for the event. Satisfaction will have greater (weaker) effects on behavior intention when ambivalence is low (high).

Methodology

We examined the (ambivalent) attitudes of local residents towards the World Expo 2010 Shanghai China (hereafter as "Shanghai Expo" or "the Expo"). A professional marketing research company was employed to collect the three waves of data through phone surveys in Shanghai at the beginning of the Expo, right before the end of the Expo, and after the Expo.

We obtained 350 local respondents (aged ≥ 18) in each wave randomly by dialing to phone number in Shanghai's 12 urban districts (Meng and Li 2011; Zhou and John 2009). The sample demographics (e.g., gender, age, household income and district distribution) was balanced. The

respondents were asked to evaluate their attitudes towards the social impact of the Expo, including 12 positive social impact items and 8 negative social impact items, which were mainly developed upon previous research

Results

Before the main analyses, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted to reduce the length of social impact scale. To explore the overall pattern of the ambivalent attitudes of three waves, we followed the similarity intensity model (SIM, Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995) to compute the value of ambivalence. The computation equation of SIM is: $A = [P+N]/2 - |P-N|$. In the model, "A" represents ambivalence, "P" represents the positivity, and "N" represents the negativity. The range of the value of objective ambivalence is from -1 to 5.

The ANOVA analysis showed that the pattern for the ambivalent attitudes of three waves exhibited an inverted-U shape, with respondents at wave 2 having most ambivalent attitudes ($M_{\text{wave } 2} = 3.34$ vs. $M_{\text{wave } 1} = 1.77$, $p < .001$; $M_{\text{wave } 2} = 3.34$ vs. $M_{\text{wave } 3} = 2.15$, $p < .001$). Thus, we adopted the sample at the wave 2 as the target to analyze the effect of ambivalent attitude on the behavior intention, and whether and how it moderates the relationship between satisfaction and behavior intention. An ordinary least squares hierarchical analysis was conducted with behavior intention as the dependent variable, against positivity and negativity in the first step and the ambivalence in the second step. To isolate the effect of ambivalence on behavior intention, the satisfaction, age and gender were included in the regressions too. As expected, ambivalence was negatively related to behavior intention ($\beta = -0.25$, $t = -2.09$, $p < .01$) and significant statistical improvements with the inclusion of the ambivalence variable. These results showed that the negative effect of ambivalence on behavior intention was independent from the impacts of positivity and negativity.

To test the moderating role of ambivalence in the relationship between satisfaction and behavior intention, a hierarchical moderated multiple regression analysis was run with behavior intention as the dependent variable and mean-centered satisfaction scores, ambivalence scores and their interaction as independent variables (Aiken and West 1991). The results confirmed the moderating effect of ambivalence. Specially, the further spotlight analysis showed that the positive relationship between satisfaction and behavior intention was strongly significant given low ambivalence (1 *SD* below the sample mean); but this relationship was not significant given high ambivalence (1 *SD* above the sample mean). Thus, satisfaction only has greater effects on behavior intention when ambivalence is low.

Conclusion and Discussion

One key assumption of extant tourism research on resident attitudes is residents hold a strong and unequivocal attitude toward tourism development, and a researchers' attention was mainly to make sense of the formation of such attitude. This paper questions the validity of this assumption and argues that residents could very well hold ambiguous, uncertain, even contradictory views toward tourism development. An empirical study on Shanghai residents' attitudes toward the 2010 Expo shows not only that residents could hold ambivalent attitudes, but also that their level of ambivalence changed over time during the event. Plus, the attitudinal ambivalence was found to negatively affect residents' behavioral intentions, and could moderate the satisfaction-behavioral intention link.

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