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Tourism and Attitude Change: the Case of Study Abroad Students

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is believed to be a peace industry based on the contact theory. However, not all interactions between tourists and hosts have a positive outcome. The purpose of this study is to test whether or not prior expectation and trip experience would impact the post-trip attitudes in multiple destinations. This study is based on the surveys conducted with two groups of students: 1) prior and post trip of a group of 66 students who went on study abroad program to the South Pacific (Australia and Fiji) or Europe (Austria and the Netherlands), and 2) a control group of 80 students who did not participate in the study abroad programs. The results show that attitude changes were positive towards the Dutch and Australians,, negative towards Austrians, and mixed towards Fijians. Further investigation of experience during the trip shows that non-tourism related services experienced played an important role in changing the attitude towards Australians. This study supports the expectation theory, but contradicts the cultural distance theory of attitude change.

INTRODUCTION

While the world faces serious conflicts and tensions based on social and cultural differences, it has been argued that tourism can be a vital force for world peace by bridging the psychological and cultural gaps that exist between people (Kaul, 1980). Tourism provides the opportunity for millions of daily interactions between tourists and hosts to create diverse socio-cultural understanding, thereby reducing the level of prejudice, conflict and tension that is necessary to improve global relations between people and nations (D'Amore, 1988; Thyne, 2006). The noble idea of tourism and peace is based on the assumption that the attitude and behavior of groups or individuals can be changed as a result of intercultural contact and interactions, which are explained by the contact theory (Allport, 1954). However, the existing empirical research has mixed findings. Carlson and Widaman's (1989) study indicated that the level of international understanding of participants increased, with a more positive attitude after the trip, whereas Pizam, Jafari, and Milman's (1991) study could not confirm the assumption that tourist's attitude would improve after visiting a host country. Attitude changes depend of a number of factors including tourism setting, social distance, the level of intimacy and

intensity, and prior experience of tourists. However, there is lack of research on understanding whether or not visitors' attitudes toward residents of a destination change after the trip in multiple destination settings. Moreover, as of now, no research has been conducted to examine the impact of prior expectations and trip experience on post-trip attitudes. The purpose of this study therefore is to test whether or not prior expectation and trip experience would impact the post-trip attitudes in multiple destinations.

RESEARCH METHODS

The objective of this study was to examine the extent to which attitudes of students toward other countries change after the trip. The study focused on two groups of undergraduate college students: those participating in summer study abroad programs (SA) and control groups. The SA group consisted of a total of 66 students who went on study abroad programs to the South Pacific (Australia and Fiji), or Europe (Austria and the Netherlands). The control group included 80 undergraduate students enrolled in randomly selected classes who did not participate in the study abroad programs. The SA group was surveyed twice: 1) prior to the trip (pre-trip) in April and May of 2006, and 2) after the trip (post-trip) in June and July of 2006. The control group was surveyed in April and May of 2006. Questionnaires for the control group included four sets of attitude questions toward Australians, Fijians, Austrians, and the Dutch. The pre-trip and post-trip questionnaires included exactly the same attitude questions.

To measure attitude, a set of 23 attitude questions were selected based on the previous studies (Allport, 1954; Pizam, Jafari, and Millman, 1991). Semantic Differential form has been proved to be the best measurement to measure attitude (Dawes, 1972). This study uses the rating scales developed by Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957), and used by Pizam, Jafari and Millman (1991) in tourism attitude context, with some modifications. In this semantic differential form, a set of bipolar semantic scales are anchored at each pole by an adjective describing the continuum. Respondents were asked to place a check mark at the point on a seven point scale (Dawes, 1972). Each of the points has a numeric label to help the respondents.

FINDINGS

To compare the pre-trip, post-trip, and control group attitudes, a series of ANOVA tests was carried out. Scheffe test and a post-hoc test were further conducted to examine the differences among the three groups. Overall, cumulative mean scores of 23 attitude variables showed that the study abroad group going to Australia had positive attitude (overall mean=5.54 on a seven point scale) prior to the trip, which was declined significantly after the trip (overall mean =5.03), even lower than the control group (5.17) ($F=4.368$, $p=.014$) (Table 1). The results showed that eight out of 23 items related to the attitude towards Australians were significantly different among three groups (table 2). Interestingly, for all of the significant attitude items, the changes were in a negative

direction after the trip. This means that the students' positive attitude declined after their trip.

The attitude towards Fijians, however, was mixed. Out of 14 significantly different items, for four items, the changes were in a positive direction (table 3). These attitude items include "Fijian are warm/cold hearted", "Fijians are nice/awful", "Fijians are Friendly/unfriendly", and "Fijians love/hate Americans". For one item, "Fijians are active/passive" the change was in a negative direction. The attitude towards the Dutch, overall, was in a positive direction (Table 1). Out of 10 attitude items, for the six items, the post-trip means were significantly higher than the pre-trip means suggesting increasing positive attitude after the trip (table 4). Finally, when evaluating the change of attitudes towards Austrians, for 17 items, the changes were in a positive direction (table 5). Further, respondents were asked to evaluate 22 items on a five-point Likert type scale ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). The experiences were compared among the four destinations to find out the role of experience in post-attitude. The results reveal that the Australian group was least satisfied with custom officials, police, how local perceive the United States, and how locals see Americans among four groups. Possibly, these four experiences caused their attitudes to change in a negative direction.

Table 1. Composite Attitudes

<i>Country</i>	<i>Pre Mean</i>	<i>Post Mean</i>	<i>Control Mean</i>	<i>F Value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Australia	5.54 ^a	5.03 ^b	5.17 ^{ab}	4.368	.014
Fiji	5.02	5.09	4.81	2.072	.129
Netherlands	4.58 ^a	5.18 ^b	4.78 ^{ab}	3.896	.023
Austria	4.50 ^a	5.48 ^b	4.71 ^{ab}	9.700	.000

Table 33. Attitude towards Australians

<i>Attitude Item</i>	<i>Pre Mean</i>	<i>Post Mean</i>	<i>Control Mean</i>	<i>F Value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Warm/Cold Hearted	5.98 ^a	5.06 ^b	5.41 ^b	6.095	.003
Nice/Awful	6.05 ^a	5.24 ^b	5.46 ^b	5.390	.005
Friendly/Unfriendly	6.30 ^a	4.88 ^b	5.59 ^c	15.547	.000
Flexible/Rigid	5.49 ^a	4.79 ^b	5.09 ^{ab}	3.215	.043
Love Americans/ Hate Americans	4.95 ^a	3.79 ^b	5.03 ^a	9.676	.000
Kind/Cruel	5.88 ^a	5.09 ^b	5.43 ^{ab}	5.425	.005
Relaxed/Tense	6.07 ^a	5.18 ^b	5.38 ^b	6.706	.002
Active/Passive	6.07 ^a	5.27 ^b	5.61 ^{ab}	5.417	.005

Table 3. Attitude towards Fijians

<i>Attitude Item</i>	<i>Pre Mean</i>	<i>Post Mean</i>	<i>Control Mean</i>	<i>F Value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Warm/Cold Hearted	5.67 ^a	6.48 ^b	5.59 ^a	7.833	.001
Nice/Awful	5.86 ^a	6.64 ^b	5.59 ^a	12.139	.000

Good/Bad	5.67 ^{ab}	6.30 ^a	5.55 ^b	5.171	.007
Friendly/Unfriendly	5.86 ^a	6.67 ^b	5.60 ^a	10.317	.000
Submissive/Aggressive	5.12 ^{ab}	5.64 ^a	4.72 ^b	6.121	.003
Hardworking/Lazy	5.79 ^a	5.55 ^{ab}	5.01 ^b	4.642	.011
Fast/Slow	4.05 ^a	2.55 ^b	4.21 ^a	19.342	.000
Discriminate Against Women/ Not At All	5.02	5.06	4.47	3.515	.032
Discriminate Against Minorities/ Not At All	5.26 ^{ab}	5.39 ^a	4.69 ^b	4.609	.011
Love Americans/ Hate Americans	4.42 ^a	5.52 ^b	4.58 ^a	10.304	.000
Kind/ Cruel	5.53 ^{ab}	6.18 ^a	5.25 ^b	7.586	.001
Relaxed/Tense	6.19 ^a	6.58 ^a	5.29 ^b	16.219	.000
Rich/Poor	3.24 ^{ab}	2.67 ^a	3.81 ^b	9.661	.000
Active/Passive	5.14 ^a	4.12 ^b	4.39 ^b	5.113	.007
Modest/Boastful	5.42	5.45	4.89	4.122	.018

Table 4. Attitude towards the Dutch

<i>Attitude Item</i>	<i>Pre Mean</i>	<i>Post Mean</i>	<i>Control Mean</i>	<i>F Value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Nice/Awful	4.88 ^a	5.75 ^b	5.06 ^a	4.013	.020
Good/Bad	4.88 ^a	5.75 ^b	5.15 ^{ab}	3.659	.028
Friendly/Unfriendly	4.88 ^a	5.81 ^b	5.15 ^{ab}	4.102	.019
Educated Illiterate	4.79 ^a	5.69 ^b	5.33 ^{ab}	3.586	.030
Fast/Slow	4.26 ^{ab}	3.39 ^b	4.60 ^a	6.239	.003
Discriminate Against Women/ Not At All	4.57 ^a	5.63 ^b	4.79 ^a	5.424	.005
Kind/Cruel	4.65 ^a	5.53 ^b	4.96 ^{ab}	4.049	.020
Relaxed/Tense	4.74 ^a	5.81 ^b	4.79 ^a	7.775	.001
Modern/Old Fashioned	4.57 ^{ab}	5.19 ^b	4.28 ^a	4.683	.011
Modest/Boastful	4.43	5.19	4.61	3.640	.029

Table 5. Attitude towards Austrians

<i>Attitude Item</i>	<i>Pre Mean</i>	<i>Post Mean</i>	<i>Control Mean</i>	<i>F Value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Warm/Cold	4.70 ^a	5.66 ^b	4.84 ^a	4.894	.009
Nice/Awful	4.52 ^a	5.94 ^b	5.04 ^a	9.119	.000
Good/Bad	4.48 ^a	6.00 ^b	5.11 ^a	9.836	.000
Honest/Dishonest	4.74 ^a	6.00 ^b	4.93 ^a	9.854	.000
Friendly/Unfriendly	4.74 ^a	5.88 ^b	4.91 ^a	6.341	.002
Reliable/Unreliable	4.52 ^a	5.56 ^b	4.68 ^b	7.796	.001
Flexible/Rigid	4.39	5.13	4.447	3.299	.040
Intelligent/Stupid	4.87 ^a	5.94 ^b	5.25 ^a	5.263	.006
Hardworking/Lazy	4.78 ^a	6.00 ^b	5.10 ^a	7.275	.001
Educated/Illiterate	4.83 ^a	6.06 ^b	5.39 ^a	6.680	.002
Clean/Dirty	4.70 ^a	5.84 ^b	5.10 ^a	4.971	.008

Discriminate Against Women/ Not At All	4.39 ^a	5.88 ^b	4.76 ^a	8.524	.000
Discriminate Against Minorities/ Not At All	4.22 ^a	5.91 ^b	4.36 ^a	14.535	.000
Love Americans/Hate Americans	4.26 ^a	5.16 ^b	4.13 ^a	7.965	.001
Kind/Cruel	4.52 ^a	6.00 ^b	4.76 ^a	13.728	.000
Relaxed/Tense	4.30 ^a	5.72 ^b	4.36 ^a	11.824	.000
Rich/Poor	4.35 ^a	5.25 ^b	4.69 ^a	4.207	.017
Modest/Boastful	4.26 ^a	5.59 ^b	4.24 ^a	13.706	.000

a, b, c indicate significantly different groups at .05 level.

Table 6. Comparison of Experience among Four Countries

<i>Experience</i>	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Fiji</i>	<i>Austria</i>	<i>Holland</i>
Interaction with hotel/ accommodation employees/owners	4.09	3.82	4.78	3.44
Experience with restaurant and food services	4.32	3.30	4.22	4.06
Experience with tour guides	4.18	3.62	4.16	4.03
Experience with transportation services	4.12	3.48	4.59	4.09
Experience with tourist attractions	4.59	4.12	4.53	4.30
Experience with the general public	3.76	4.35	4.52	4.04
Experience with general service delivery	3.79	3.84	4.28	3.63
Experience with other tourists	4.09	3.91	4.20	3.97
Experience with my classmates	4.74	4.65	4.59	4.71
Experience with my roommates	4.76	4.74	4.50	4.67
Experience with custom officials	3.97	4.12	4.11	3.98
Experience with police	3.53	3.61	4.14	3.78
Experience with shopping	4.47	3.91	4.31	4.34
Experience with security and safety	4.24	3.88	4.52	4.18
Experience with bars/ night clubs	4.50	3.84	4.56	4.48
Experience with adventure activities	4.59	3.92	4.24	4.30
Experience with museums and other cultural activities	4.12	3.85	4.41	4.16
Experience banks and currency exchange services	3.91	3.94	3.84	3.84
Experience with natural attractions	4.35	4.41	4.32	4.17
Experience with how local perceive the United States	2.91	4.15	4.06	3.31
Experience with how locals see Americans	2.88	4.15	4.13	3.29
Overall experience	4.65	4.47	4.78	4.62

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DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study showed that the changes of attitude towards the destinations are mixed, both positive and negative, which does not support the assumption that tourism always promotes understanding and peace through changing visitors' attitude. A comparison of attitude towards the four countries showed that the changes were positive towards Europeans (the Dutch and Austrian), negative towards Australians, and mixed towards Fijians. Three important findings emerge from this study. First, this study does not support the social distance theory because Australians should be culturally closer to Americans than the other three countries, but the attitude change was negative after the trip. Second, the results support the expectation theory (Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983). One of the reasons for the negative attitude towards Australians after the trip is that the pre-trip attitude was very positive (highest among the four countries). Although the post-trip attitude was still positive, the higher pre-trip attitude resulted in significant decline in attitude based on actual travel experiences. Third, tourism industries focus on attracting more tourists through providing better services to their clients. However, there might be some more important factors that play important roles in tourists' overall evaluation of their visits. These include tourists' experience with general public, custom officials, police, and how locals perceive them. This study has implications for destination management organizations that are charged with quality service delivery to international visitors. This is very critical because of the size of today's youth and highly mobile student market, as well as their future potential to travel when they complete their education and enter the job market with greater disposable and discretionary incomes.

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