THE ROLE OF SENSORY EXPERIENCES IN APPRECIATING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE ATTRACTIONS

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Abstract

Tourism forms a unique entanglement between the tourist and the tourism products through the sensory experience. Linking the human senses of seeing (visual), smelling (olfactory), hearing (auditory), tasting (gustatory), and touching (tactile), with the cultural heritage attractions on the heritage street of Melaka and Penang UNESCO World Heritage Site brings about the discussion on how the senses will improve the quality of tourist experiences, and create an attachment between the tourist and the cultural attractions. With the branding as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the tourists will be expecting to experience the local culture, customs, architecture, arts and music, foods and history. However, less studies have been carried out to determine the importance of the sensory aspect and the role of multisensory in tourist corporeal experiences, even though it captures the interest of tourism geographers. Furthermore, the micro-level of tourism activities in determining the quality of tourist experience through the multisensory experience is still in a limelight, especially in Malaysia. A plethora of studies has been focusing on the food tourism (gustatory) and the visuals, even though very few studies have done to look into a holistic approach of sensory experience. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to discuss the role of sensory experiences in appreciating the cultural heritage attractions. Content analysis is used based on reviewing the previous literatures through journals, books and articles, to develop the role of each sensory of seeing (visual), smelling (olfactory), hearing (auditory), tasting (gustatory), and touching (tactile), in relation to the cultural heritage attractions. The aspect of tourist senses is important to be looked into in depth, as it will give implications to the marketing perspectives. An implication of such perspective is in developing a good image towards the usage of multisensory in relation with the products of the cultural heritage attractions, as well as the social phenomenon of the basic tourism consumption by the tourist.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Attractions, Sensory Experience, Tourist Experience, Melaka and Penang UNESCO World Heritage Site, Multisensory
Introduction

“Experience is a cover-all term for various modes through which a person knows his world. Some sensory modes are more passive and direct than others. With taste, smell, and touch, we feel as though we are simply registering sensations provoked by external stimuli. With hearing, and particularly with seeing, we seem to be actively exploring the world beyond us and getting to know it objectively. Seeing is thinking, in the sense that it is a discriminating and constructive activity; it creates patterns of reality adapted to human purposes. Even taste, smell, and touch are affected by thought in the above sense: they discriminate among stimuli and are able to articulate gustatory, olfactory, and tactual world”

Tuan, Yi-Fu (1975)

In recent years, the experience through the aspect of senses has been noticed and highlighted as an important tourist experience in tourism studies. Previous studies emphasized that future researches should focus on the study of social phenomenon such as sensory experience in the tourism consumption, as it may enhance the quality of tourist experiences and their level of satisfactions while ‘doing’ the tourism activities at the location (Franklin & Crang, 2001; Crouch, Aronsson, & Wahlström, 2001).

Discussions on experiences through sensory stimulation have attracted the attention of geographers such as Tuan (1974) with his idea Tapophilia and Relph (1976) with his idea of place and placelessness. Insights of tourism studies, the earlier discussion on the tourist experiences at the attractions was by Boorstin (1964), in which he discussed on the concept of "pseudo-event" in the authenticity of the tourist experience. However, MacCannell (1973: 600) argued that there is a lack of a detailed research conducted to deliberate the Boorstin’s concept of "pseudo-event". Therefore, MacCannell discussed his ideas regarding the authenticity through a six staged tourist settings continuum. Additionally, Cohen in 1972 and 1979 discussed that both ideas presented by Boorstin and MacCannell have contributed to a deeper discussion about the motivation, behavior and experience of the tourists. Cohen (1979) has looked into the geographical perspective which he then emphasized on the phenomenological approach in the modes of tourist experience.

These previous researches led to a new discussion by Urry (1990), at which he saw the importance of sensory experience in studying the tourist experience. He has introduced his idea on the ‘Tourist Gaze’, relating to how the tourism activities are consumed by the tourist. In the ‘Tourist Gaze’, Urry (2002: 1) emphasized that “… they are consumed because they supposedly generate pleasurable experiences… we gaze what we encounter”. It has also been further emphasized by Gibson (2010: 521) when he stated that " we travel to encounter other places, landscapes, people, sights, weather". Gibson stressed on the importance of the sensory encounter as “the senses trigger specific bodily and emotional responses and encourage human interaction... tourism encounters as moments of interaction between humans and non-human landscapes”. Hence, the tourist experience is very much related to the sensory aspect, as it is seen that the tourism attractions are consumed by the tourist.

Since the "Tourist Gaze" study was conducted by Urry, broader and different perspectives are seen in the studies relating to the field of sensory experience in tourism. Examples of such studies are the tourism mobilities and travel glance (Larsen, 2001), tourism smellscape (Dann & Jacobsen, 2003), culinary tourism...
(Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Everett, 2008), music in tourism (Gibson & Connell, 2007), and multi-sensory experiences (Van Hoven, 2011, Agapito, Mendes & Valle, 2013; Agapito Valle & Mendes, 2012, 2014; Diţoiu, & Căruntu, 2014). Furthermore, Urry & Larsen (2011: 195) urged that experiences are not merely and solely reliant on the gaze, but also involves various other senses:

“We have brought out the crucially visual nature of tourist experiences. Yet it has never been the intention to argue that vision is the only sense through which tourists encounter places and that the tourist gaze can explain all aspects of tourism encounters... Tourists encounter places through a variety of senses... Tourists eat exotic food, smell new odors, touch each other, are touched by the sun, dance to pulsating ‘soundscapes’, talk with friends and occasionally get drunk”

Hence, most of the previous studies emphasized on the needs for the future studies to be conducted on how the sensory mode impacts the level of tourist satisfaction, and how it makes the experience a memorable one for the tourist (Franklin & Crang, 2001; MacCannell, 2001; Everett, 2008; Urry & Larsen, 2011; Agapito, et al., 2013; Agapito et al., 2012, 2014; Cohen, Prayag & Moital, 2013; Zainol, 2014; Diţoiu & Căruntu, 2014).

Malaysia has a vibrant society of multi-ethnicity from various religions, cultural background, history and different customs. The cultural elements and historical background that are strengthened by the branding of heritage tourism will attract more tourists as the cultural heritage tourism products shows the uniqueness of Malaysia (Rojek & Urry, 1997; Poria, Reichel & Cohen, 2011; Samadi & M. Yunus, 2012b, 2012c; Hassan, 2014). In fact, previous studies of cultural heritage tourism has found that the tourists, either international or domestic, are expected to experience the attributes of local heritage, landscapes, culture, customs and food, respectively because of the branding of the UNESCO WHS (A. Aziz, Ariffin, Omar et al., 2011 ;. Moy & Phongpanichanan 2014; Omar, A. Karim & Omar, 2014). However, the current challenge is to meet the expectations of contemporary tourists. The tourist will be expecting to have a feel of the destination through learning and experiencing the tourism activities, especially the destinations that promotes history and culture (Mohamed, A. Ghafar & Badarulzaman, 2002; Roozbeh, Ng & Boo., 2013; Teo, M.Khan, & A.Rahim, 2014).

In Malaysia, earlier studies related to the sensory experience are more focused on the gustatory, the food tourism in particular (Jalis, Zulkifly & Othman, 2009; Roozbeh et al., 2013; Jaiswal, Sapra & Patil et al., 2013; Omar, A. Karim & Omar, 2014; Jalis, Che & Markwell 2014), visual (Mohamed et al., 2012; Samadi, Omar, & M. Yunus, 2012a) and the stimulation of multisensory (Zainol, Ahmad & Nordin et al., 2013; Zainol, 2014). These studies emphasized that lack of attention that have been given at the micro-level, especially in the tourism activities at providing a quality tourist experience through the multisensory (Rahman, Ismail & Wai, 2011; Zainol et al., 2013; Ujang & Muslim, 2014). Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical studies done to show the relationship between the quality of the tourist experience with the phenomenon of tourists’ sensory aspects (Roozbeh et al., 2013). This has led to the research question, how are the cultural heritage attractions perceived by the tourists through their sensory experience? What is the role of multisensory experiences in appreciating the cultural heritage attractions? Therefore, this paper aims to discuss about the role of the sensory aspect of seeing (visual), smelling (olfactory), hearing (auditory), tasting (gustatory), and touching (tactile), in relation to the cultural heritage attractions.
The role of multisensory

Visual

Discussion on the excitement and enjoyment in the travel and tourism that are affected by sensory experience was dominated by the visual experience. As mentioned before, the idea of ‘Tourists Gaze’ by Urry since the 1990s has created a new paradigm for the social phenomenon of tourist consumption towards the destination attributes. Tourists want to experience a new place by travelling to a tourism destination. Satisfaction is obtainable by having a pleasurable and memorable experience through the stimulation of sensory experience. The visual sense plays an important role to motivate people before the vacation, during the vacation and even after the vacation. Therefore, Urry & Larsen (2011: 4) stated that:

“The tourist gaze is directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience. Such aspects are viewed because they are taken to be in some sense out of the ordinary. The viewing of such tourist sights often involved different forms of social patterning, with a much greater sensitivity to visual elements of the landscape or townscape than normally found in everyday life. People linger over such a gaze which is then normally visually objectified or captured through photographs, postcards, films, models and so on. These enable the gaze to be endlessly reproduced, recaptured and distributed over time and across the space”

Urry (2002:3) and Urry & Larsen (2011:4) have repeatedly emphasized that the tourist gaze is directly involved with the landscape and townscape which relates to the physical environment of the destination attributes. In the previous studies of the visual encounter, the physical environment is the most highlighted. There are many factors that relate to the visual pleasure through the physical environment, such as the building or the architectural style itself, the changing of aesthetic design, objects, pattern, forms, theme, material and the symbolic design of self-enclosed tourism space (Page, 1995; Shackley , 2001; Urry, 2002; Urry & Larsen, 2011; Zainol et al, 2013 ; Diţoiu & Căruntu, 2014; Agapito et al., 2014). These factors can affect the emotional attachment which is reflected in the tourists’ identification of visual attractiveness, portraying the image and identity of the place, particularly in the area with significant historical and cultural attributes (Rojek & Urry, 1997; Shackley, 1998; McIntosh, 1999; Urry, 2002; Urry & Larsen, 2011; Ujang & Muslim, 2014). The articles written by David Bowen, the travel journalist, reflects on what has been discussed by Urry & Larsen (2011) about the appreciation of tourism attraction through photography:

“While modern-day commercialism dominates the retailing scene, there are some stores selling local items that are remotely authentic. Sadly, most of the sarongs, fridge magnets, tea towels and other assorted items made in China, Indonesia, or Thailand and have little to do with the local culture.

Conversely, antiques stores like Abdul’s Ying Yang Collectibles, Jacob Antiques, and Malaqa House along Jalan Hang Jebat or Jalan Tun Cheng Lock are packed with pieces of antiquity from around Malaysia, China and the region. Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock was once Melaka’s Millionaires’ Row” and there are some fine examples of Baba Nyonya-style houses along the street.
Temple Street has been dubbed the ‘Street of Harmony’ as it houses three different religious temples on the same side of the street and all close by. These religious communities have coexisted peacefully here for over three centuries.”

(David Bowden, Sense of Malaysia Vol 43, May-June 2015: 25)

“The inner city precinct of George Town offers maze of lanes, streets and old buildings that are perfect for admiring or for immortalizing via a ‘selfie’”

(David Bowden, Penang International, Vol 15, Apr-Sept 2015: 23)

On the other hand, visual studies are not only focused on the factor of physical environment. Tourists tend to look at the heritage which led to the nostalgia of a place by visiting the local museum or heritage site (McIntosh, 1999; Urry, 2002; Zainol et al., 2013). Historical or cultural presentation and performance gives the interpretation on the background of the city. It is also as such to how it is designed and developed, which made it a place for the local people. For example, Malacca and Penang has its own history which are being told through the building design and architecture. This uniqueness has attracted the tourists to feel and experience the cultural heritage attractions, and the reason as to why both Melaka and Penang are recognized as UNESCO WHS.

The construction of the physical environment that reflects the identity of the place is not merely based upon the physical attributes, it also consists of the developed social attributes (Harun, 2011; Samadi, Z., Omar, D., & M. Yunus, R., 2012a; Lai, Ismail, & Kubota, 2013). Zainol et al., (2013) emphasized that in appreciating the urban sensory elements, it is not limited to the architectural design but also the local people. The ways of the local people dress reflects the culture and its design which reflects the cultural background of that particular area. Therefore, the visual pleasure is not limitedly to the physical environment, it is important for the tourists to see the cultural scenes, such as the local people working and interacting during buying goods as well as the local belongings, in relation to the identity of the cultural place.

**Gustatory**

The gastronomic pleasure is important to the tourist satisfaction while visiting the tourism destination because a part of the tourist experiences is to taste the local food and drink. Moreover, the gustatory sense is very influential in constructing a relationship between the tourist and the place because as the tourist creates an image through the branding of culinary tourism (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Berg, Sevón, 2014). It has also been emphasized by Everett (2008, 2012) that tourist experience involves a sensory such as taste because it can be a medium for tourists to interact closer with the culture of a certain place. In fact, Kivela & Crotts (2006) stated that through the consumption of food, tourists will have a pleasurable sensory experience as the gastronomic pleasures may give an appreciation and some emotional attachment towards the place. Therefore, the discussions on gastronomic pleasure involving the culinary tourism or food tourism should also be viewed from various factors that contributes to the enjoyment of the tourist experience because it reflects the cultural background of the heritage tourism destination.

In the culinary tourism discussions, the local food and beverages are the most important element in the gastronomic pleasure (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Everett, 2008, 2012; Lin, Pearson & Chai, 2011; Omar, A. Karim & Omar, 2014; Diţoiu & Căruntu, 2014). These factors are supported by the authenticity of the food
and unique flavors or taste to portray the identity of the local cuisine. The local food and beverage plays an important key role in determining the positive quality tourists experience towards the image of the destination. Likewise, earlier studies also emphasized that the expectations on the gastronomic pleasure are high because tourists will be expecting to taste local food that reflects the cultural heritage of the destination such as Roozbeh et al., 2013, in which had emphasized that:

“From the cultural perspective, Frochot (2003) suggested that food experience portrays the images of cultural experience, status, and cultural identity. Such cultural aspects of gastronomy that can only be found in that particular destination.”

Furthermore, an important factor that contributes to the enjoyment of the culinary tourism is the food experience (Kivela & Croots, 2006; Roozbeh et al., 2013; Jalis et al., 2014) because it can improve the quality of the tourist experience. Food experience is related to the local culinary resources and ingredients, the preservation, and the teachings of traditional cooking methods. In addition, the food customs could be an interesting experience to the tourist, such as how it is served, and the local culture on how the food is eaten. Other factors have also been discussed by previous studies, some of which, the factor of the physical atmosphere (decor or the style of the atmosphere, be it of traders or local restaurants), prices of food and the services for the food as it enhances the tourist’s food (Lin et al., 2011, Jaiswal et al., 2013).

**Auditory**

The pleasure of auditory may let the tourists experience an enjoyable destination. Music or auditory sense can attract tourists to visit attractions, such as music or noise from the local cultural heritage festival and the sound of celebrations by the local community (Gibson & Connell, 2007; Gibson, 2010). It creates a sense of excitement and arouses the tourists curiosity to find out what is actually happening in the area. For instance, in the cultural heritage tourism industry, music can bring back the old memories of the region and reflections to the cultural identity of the region. It has been emphasized by Gibson & Connell (2007: 165):

“More profoundly, humans experience emotional reactions to music (Wood and Smith, 2004). It evokes feelings of nostalgia, elation, energy and melancholy, and that this is so is both a lure for tourists and an opportunity for tourism promoters. Music is vital to creating a sense of occasion and celebration (Duffy et al., forthcoming), without which street parades might fail, or tourist districts appear mundane. Similarly, the loud broadcast of iconic song from cafes or museum entrances in music tourism destinations is capable not just of marking those spaces as tourist-friendly, but of enticing tourists inside and inviting them to feel part of the musical community (whether as fans of a performer or style, or participants in a musical event)”

On the other hand, the auditory experience is influenced by the daily activities of the locals, such as the sound from the noise made by the vehicles as well as the interaction and communication of local people who speak loudly during retailing and religious activities (Zainol et al., 2013).
Olfactory
The stimulation of the olfactory by the human senses helps to recognize and experience the place. Furthermore, some authors stressed that the smell creates a relationship between man and the destination through the tourism consumption (Pan & Ryan, 2009; Van Hoven, 2011; Agapito et al., 2014; Diţoiu & Căruntu, 2014; Zainol et al., 2013; Zainol, 2014). For instance, Dann & Jacobsen (2003:5) stated that the tourists can give an image to the destination through the olfactory senses:

“Since only the travelogue and word-of-mouth differ from other media of the ‘language of tourism’ (Dann, 1996), in that they can either promote or demote, they tend to follow the equation ‘nice places smell good, nasty places smell bad’.”

In fact, the smell can recall old memories that are associated to the particular place. When viewing from the point of cultural heritage experience, smell is affected by the atmosphere, such as the smell of a bazaar or even the local restaurant. They give identity to the place and leads to a unique, as well as a quality experience (Dann & Jacobsen, 2003; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Hultén, 2012). For example, the smell of food from the atmosphere attracts the tourists to go to the area and experience the local food that are being sold from the hawker or local restaurant. Additionally, the olfactory sense is often associated with local food such as local cuisine, local fruits or even the local spices or herbs as stated by Dann & Jacobsen (2003:10):

“ Over in Central America, Limon (Costa Rica) is depicted as a steaming, stinking town of mud puddles’ (Theroux, 1980: 203), While in Asia, Singapore is epitomized by the foul-smelling durian, with an odor ‘like a cross between dirty socks and lemon pudding that’s been left at the back of the fridge too long’ (Yogerst 1994:200). Theroux (who also lived in Singapore) uses the pre-war phase of that city to describe Panama’s Colon”‘[It] seemed like the hectic and faintly reeking commercial districts... the sour tangs of the bazaar, the cloth and curio emporiums, the provisioners, the ships’ chandlers who, in Colon, as in Singapore, were India and Chinese (Theroux 1980: 244)”

Moreover, similar discussion on the auditory sense, the olfactory sense is produced from the daily activities of local people which reflects the identity and the attachment of the place (Pan & Ryan, 2009; Zainol et al., 2013), such as the smell of vehicles, or the smell of smoke from the retailing as well as the religious activities. The olfactory stimulation can also give a new experience to the tourist, either a pleasant, or even an unpleasant experience.

Tactile
In relation to tourist sensory experience of the previous studies, the aspect of tactile sense is the least being discussed. The few studies which do, have stressed the factors that contribute to the tactile sense through the feel of comfort by heat, temperature and shades. (Diţoiu & Căruntu, 2014; Zainol et al., 2013, Agapito et al., 2014). However, the tactile sense, from a marketing point of view brings a lot of impact to the buyer in purchasing items. This is as such because the sense of touch gives as sort of intimacy and certain information from the buyer through the physical contact with the items (Krishna, 2012; Hultén, 2012). In respect to the context of cultural heritage attractions, the sensory cues from the visual and olfactory will lead the tourists to touch the souvenirs or even to taste the food before consuming or buying them. Therefore, a lot of
study can be done to look into the tactile sense for tourist consumption in the context of cultural heritage attractions.

**Conclusion**

Tourist experiences through the senses can affect the level of tourist satisfaction. It can either lead to a positive experience, or a negative one. The role of tourist sensory experience in tourism activities are in adding value to the cultural heritage as per discussed earlier. Although, it is still moderately developed and there are various additional aspects that can be included. However, it provides the foundation for the knowledge of the elements or categories within each sensory aspect.

When every aspect of the sensory experience develops in a more detailed and in depth way, it is possible to improve the quality of the tourist experience. In particular, for the cultural heritage tourism, tourists will be able to enjoy and feel the attachment towards the attractions. Hence, the tourists will develop a good image to the destination.

In conclusion, the study of sensory experience can contribute to the body of knowledge on the importance for each sensory aspect in appreciating the cultural heritage attractions, and also in increasing the quality of tourist experience. It reveals the importance of the research on sensory experience to the tourism marketer by promotional activities. This is done by providing more information on the sensory experiences. Moreover, from the conservation and preservation of cultural heritage point of view, the authenticity of cultural elements in the micro-level of tourism products that are involved in the sensory experience can be maintained to ensure it sustains the identity for the future generation.

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