

Discovering the Tourism Sensory Experience in Melaka UNESCO WHS

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Abstract. The ‘Tourism Experience’ studies have highlighted the importance of sensory experience since the tourists engage with a destination and understand that particular place based on their senses: sight, taste, hearing, smell, and touch. Previously, most of the studies focused on the visual sense, gustatory sense and auditory sense, especially in agriculture tourism, gastronomy tourism and nature-based tourism. However, the tourism sensory experience of urban heritage destinations has not been addressed adequately. This paper explores the elements of sense-making in Melaka UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS), Malaysia. The paper uses a combination of systematic review of the relevant literature and content analysis of brochures and other publications to identify sensory elements used in describing cultural heritage experiences in Melaka UNESCO WHS, Malaysia. The contributions of this study are i) the sensory experiences are influenced by the destination ‘theme’, ii) both positive and negative sensory impressions are associated with a heritage experience, and iii) a systematic review of past publications and subsequent content analysis method used here provides a useful technique for understanding the tourism sensory experience of an attraction.

Keywords: Melaka UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS); Tourism Experience; Tourism Sense-making; Tourism Sensory Experience; Urban Heritage Tourism

1 Introduction

In general, tourists engage with the tourism experiences of a destination through their senses in a holistic manner [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7]. Their experience involves perceiving and understanding through their corporeal sensations of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. This sensory experience has the capacity to create a ‘tourist space’[8] and can be used to establish a destination profile [2, 9, 10]. Several studies have examined holistic sense-making in tourism [1, 11, 8, 2, 4, 5, 7]. Others have examined particular senses; visual [12, 13], gustatory [14, 15, 16, 17], auditory [18, 19], and olfactory [20, 21]. Previous study has also emphasised that a tourist’s sensory experience is also influenced by the destination theme [1]. In addition, the tourists’ sensory experience will result to the positive or negative impressions towards their experience [22, 23, 24, 25]. Previous tourism experience studies such as [1] have focused on a rural-based tourism context and there is a lack of research on tourist sensory experience of heritage

tourism [24, 26, 27]. The aim of this paper is to discover the cultural heritage elements and items of sense-making in Melaka UNESCO WHS, Malaysia. This study combines a systematic review of the academic literature and content analysis of other materials such as non-academic books that refer to the history of Melaka, the 'grey' literature including reports such as the Conservation and Management Plan of Melaka Historic City (CMP) in 2008 and 2011 as well as the Special Area Plan (SAP) from the local authorities, and travel materials in printed form and electronic medium. The combination of systematic review and content analysis approaches complement each other [28]. The content analysis extends the previous reviews to identify the holistic sensory experience of cultural heritage elements and items [2, 29, 30, 31] in relation to the local context of Melaka UNESCO WHS.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Sense-Making in Tourism Experience

The concept of sense-making in tourism studies can be defined as 'the current restatement of the body, of sense-making and narratives of self and space, combines the senses with the cognitive and affective, thereby creating personal understanding and the storytelling that results from travel' [2] (p.627). In short, sense-making in tourism studies is the process of giving meaning to the experience within the space. Furthermore, the two major areas in tourism studies highlight the concept of sense-making in managing and enhancing the tourist experience: There is little discussion of sensory experiences of cultural heritage beyond sight [26]. Previous studies highlight that the social construct of cultural heritage is not merely limited to the sensation of sight [26, 27]. Essentially, cultural heritage sites are typically well-known for the authenticity of the 'spirit of the place' and the positive visual image formed by the authenticity of the place. Nonetheless, the tourist experience resulting from cultural heritage activities can produce negative impressions and these negative impressions have not been sufficiently analysed by researchers [22]. For example, the touching behaviour such as vandalism, overwhelming noise produced by the residents or tourist activities, and the sight of crowding or littering might trigger disturbance and annoyance towards the attractions [32].

2.2 Previous studies emphasised sensory experience in Malaysia

The cultural spaces can improve the quality of the visitor experience through their sensory experiences via active learning and engagement with the local heritage attractions, such as architecture, local food, arts, music, customs, and history. In fact, satisfaction levels with heritage elements exceeds tourist expectations [33]. Previous research also identifies three main types of elements in a heritage destination: (1) heritage elements, (2) infrastructure elements, and (3) supporting infrastructure [33]. These heritage elements of the urban heritage area provide a diversity of sensory experiences based on the locals' daily, religious, cultural, and economic activities [33]. The vibrant cultural

landscape of street activities such as street markets provide tourists with a unique sensory experience [33, 34, 35, 36]. Despite the lack of studies on the multisensory experience in Malaysia, a number of studies have emphasised the need for sensory experience from the tourist perspective [3, 37, 38].

3 Methodology

This study employed a combination of a systematic review of both academic and grey/promotional literature followed by content analysis to identify the elements and items associated with each type of sensory experience: visual, gustatory, auditory, olfactory and tactile. A tri-method approach of bibliometric analysis, content analysis and a quantitative systematic literature review was conducted to discover the theoretical foundations and key themes of the tourism destination [28]. The content analysis and systematic review were performed to a total of 51 international academic journals and books, 20 academic journals which highlighted sensory experiences in Malaysia, 3 non-academic books that referred to the history of Melaka as the reference, including the ‘grey literature’ of 3 reports of Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) in 2008 and 2011 as well as the Special Area Plan (SAP) from the local authorities, and 18 travel materials in printed form and electronic medium. Tourism papers were retrieved from Science Direct and Google Scholar using the keywords “sensory experience”, “tourism”, “tourist gaze”, “visual” and “gastronomic tourism” [28]. Other grey literature included printed travel materials such as brochures, travel magazines and travel guides. The content analysis of the academic journals, grey literature and the travel materials was analysed line by line to discover the presence of the cultural heritage elements (i.e., the promotional activities of local people activities, local music, climate/weather) and items that will influence the senses. These elements and items will be categorised under visual, gustatory, olfactory, auditory, and tactile experience.

4 Findings

4.1 Identification of elements and items

Visual Experience

The visual elements of the cultural heritage urban sites that influence the tourist sensory experience involves tangible cultural heritage assets, such as the architectural building/built heritage and museum [12,13,26] and intangible heritage such as cultural landscape and local culture crafts [39]. Historically, these heritage buildings in Melaka were painted in white during the Dutch colonisation and then, the exterior of Stadthuys and Christ Church was painted in salmon-red colour during the British occupation [40]. Hence, the red colour of Stadthuys and Christ Church has been dominantly as the image for Melaka in travel materials. 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. This article from the travel magazine has reflected on what had been discussed by [13] about the appreciation of tourism attractions through photography, by means of gazing through the lenses.

Gustatory experience

The gustatory experience involves the local food experience that enhances the quality of tourist gastronomic experience [42, 43]. The local food experience in Melaka has highlighted the spiciness of the local dish in the travel website as follows [44]:

“Melaka has the ultimate bragging right for having the best asam pedas (sour and spicy stew dish) in Malaysia. It is thicker in consistency and uses far more spices than the average asam pedas made in other states.”

Besides, the gustatory experience involves other elements such as the settings, services, prices, and the food quality [45]. For instance, the local gastronomic experience by eating with hands and the food quality were emphasised [46] (p.11):

“When eating with your hands, wash them first and try to use your right hand; use utensils to take food from a communal plate, never your fingers.”

The price also will influence in the gustatory experience, in which “...The bestseller at the moment is the creamy Musang King that goes well with their waffle cones. A single scoop of ice-cream here costs RM8.50.” [47]. It also can be seen the gustatory experience in terms of the ambience or atmosphere, the services, values of money (the price), and the food quality are the main assessment in TripAdvisor for the gustatory experience.

Auditory experience

The findings revealed the elements of local people activities, whereby cultural performance and local music have influenced the embodiment of auditory experience in urban heritage destinations [2, 8, 38, 39]. Besides, the auditory experience has been influenced by the locals' daily activities, such as vehicle noise, loud interaction among local people during retailing, and religious activities [37, 39].

Olfactory experience

On another note, the olfactory experience involves the smell from the local food, the local people activities, and the environmental hygiene [2, 20]. The olfactory aspect resulted from local people's daily activities that reflect the identity and attachment of a place [2, 38]. For instance, vehicles or smoke smell from retail landscapes and religious activities will influence the olfactory experience [48, 49].

Tactile experience

Interestingly, the feeling of comfort towards the climate or weather, touching the built heritage, and local culture crafts produce a significant response to the elements of tactile experience [9, 13]. The finding of tactile sense is related to the feeling of comfort from

the surrounding [38]. The travel website has informed the climate of Melaka will stimulate the tactile experience by mentioning that “A gentle reminder for visitors; be prepared to embrace Melaka’s tropical weather by wearing proper attire. Don’t forget to bring along your shades, umbrella and apply some sunscreen on to protect yourself from the blazing sunlight.” [46]. Besides, other cultural heritage elements such as touching souvenirs or local craft items and monuments or built heritage could influence tactile perception [13].

4.2 Positive and negative impressions

The findings show that the sensory experience will result into either positive or negative impressions of cultural heritage elements and items. The CMP [49] (p. 69) notes:

“The Conservation Area has many heritage buildings and intricate architectural elements. Various types, positions, constructions, and designs of buildings have produced an attractive visual and town appearance in the Conservation area. As such, any changes or additions conducted in the name of development or necessity must take these aspects into account to avoid any eyesore.”

Therefore, the CMP [49] emphasised the mismanagement of heritage buildings and its architectural elements will affect the negative impressions towards the visual experience. Additionally, an article has emphasised on the negative impression by seeing the souvenirs, in which [41] (p. 25):

“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.”

This has raised the concern on the current situation on the authenticity of the local crafts. In respect to the auditory experience, the travel website described the local economic activity of trishaw as follows [50]:

“First you hear a distant blare of honking, hip-hop or techno. Then, suddenly, a convoy of three-wheeled vehicles is careening your way in a blur of fairy lights and soft toys...Music is selected according to nationality. Local opinion is divided whether these blinged-up trishaws help save the historic mode of transport or hideously distort it.”

The description from this travel website provides the opinion on the influence of auditory from the trishaw, however, it brings the positive or negative impressions of the music selection and the authenticity of trishaw. Meanwhile, the vehicles contribute to environmental pollution in Melaka at an average of 69.2% [51]. This data implies that pleasant and unpleasant elements of the cultural heritage attractions could influence the olfactory aspect of the tourist sensory experience. Hence, the sensory experience is indeed the result of an individual’s experience of their surroundings and the events that occur when they perform certain activities, which leads to emotional evaluations and positive or negative impressions towards the attractions.

4.3 Inference of cultural heritage elements and items for Melaka UNESCO WHS

In summary, Table 1 presents the elements of cultural heritage attractions that have been examined in through the content analysis and integrate with the systematic review, regarding urban heritage destinations of Melaka UNESCO WHS, Malaysia.

Table 1: Elements and Items for cultural heritage elements in appreciating the urban heritage destinations in Melaka

| Sen- sory | Cultural Heritage El- ements | Items for Melaka | Positive/ Negative Impres- sions |
|--------------|---|---|--|
| Visual | Architectural Building/ Built Heritage | The architectural trace of Melaka history for local museum The red colour of colonial building at this historical area The historical sites and monuments The heritage style of <i>shophouses</i> The built heritage of religious buildings | (+) visuality of the historical buildings, religious buildings, the colour of the historical buildings. |
| | Cultural Landscape/ Local People | The local culture that reflects the characteristics of this place The local people daily activities and lifestyles The local people religious activities | (+) visuality of the local cultural landscape and their daily activities |
| | Local Culture Craft/Item | The local people with traditional costume The unique shape/texture of local souvenirs and handicraft product | (+/-) visuality of the shape and texture of the local souvenirs and handicraft |
| | Museum | The history and local culture by visiting local museum The unique shape/texture of the exhibit item in local museum | (+) visuality of the history and the exhibit items in local museum |
| | Local food experience/ custom | Eating experience by using chopstick/fingers The traditional food preparations | (+) gastronomic experience from the local food experience |
| | Local food/ Setting | The local food from night market The local food in local restaurant | (+) gastronomic experience of the local food from the night market and local restaurant |
| Gustatory | Service/Price | The reasonable price of local food The service quality of local food | (+) gastronomic experience due to the service or price (-) gastronomic experience due to unreasonable price |
| | Food quality | The quality of local food | (-) gastronomic experience due to the hygiene and food quality |

| Sensory | Cultural Heritage Elements | Items for Melaka | Positive/ Negative Impressions |
|----------------|----------------------------|---|---|
| Auditory | Local people activities | The trishaw as one of the local economic activities | (+) auditory experience from the local activities |
| | | The local daily activities and lifestyles | (-) auditory experience from trishaw |
| | | The local people religious activities | |
| | | The local economic activities of retailing | |
| | Cultural performance | The cultural events/festivals | (+) auditory experience from the cultural performance |
| | Local Music | The local music | (+/-) auditory experience from the local music/non-local music |
| Olfactory | Local Food | The local food (herbs, spices, fruits) | (+) olfactory experience of local food |
| | | | |
| | Local People activities | The local people religious activities | (+) olfactory experience from the local activities |
| | | The local economic activities | |
| Tactile | Environment Hygiene | The fresh air of surrounding area | (-) olfactory experience from the surrounding area |
| | | The fresh air of surrounding at Melaka River | |
| | Climate/ Weather | The heat and temperature | (-) tactile experience from the climate or weather |
| | | The shades from surrounding | |
| Built Heritage | Local Craft items | The unique shape/texture of the exhibit item and built heritage | (+) tactile experience from touching the built heritage |
| | | The unique shape/texture of local/ non-local souvenirs and handicraft product | (+/-) tactile experience from touching the local/ non-local craft souvenirs |

5 Conclusion

5.1 Theoretical contributions

This paper has made three contributions, i) the sensory experiences are influenced by the destination ‘theme’, ii) both positive and negative sensory impressions of an experience are associated with a heritage experience, and iii) the systematic review of past publications and subsequent content analysis methods used here provide a useful technique for understanding the tourism sensory experience of a local attraction.

Urban Heritage Tourism destination theme

This study extends prior work by examining the sensory experiences in a heritage themed tourism context. The results show some similarity to Agapito’s [1] studies such as the items for sensory impressions for sight will be influenced by the ‘Landscape’ (the landscape of the destination) and ‘Green’ (the colour of the environment), touch will be influenced by the ‘Heat’ and ‘Coolness’ (the climate/weather) and even smell

will be influenced by ‘Fresh air’ (environmental hygiene). However, in comparison to the rural-based tourism context, this study highlighted the importance of the interaction between the tourist and the local people. For example, local people activities’ through ‘The cultural events/festivals’ provide an auditory experience and ‘The local food (herbs, spices, fruits)’ stimulate the olfactory sense.

Positive and negative sensory impressions

In tourism, the sensory experience may lead to positive or negative impressions of an experience [22, 23, 25]. Agapito et al., [1] found that the level of positive experience in respect to each sensory was higher during the visit in comparison with the post-visit. The elements noted in Table 1 are both negative and positive sensory experiences.

A combination of systematic review and content analysis

This study employed a novel systematic review and content analysis method. Previous authors have used content analysis of brochures [29,30], travel writing in New Zealand [2] and promotional materials [31] in order to identify sensory experiences of a destination. This study develops this method by adopting a systemic review of all available content (the academic journals, non-academic books and promotional materials as well as travel materials).

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