

MINDFULNESS AND INTERPRETIVE OUTCOME: A CASE OF GEORGE TOWN, PENANG, WORLD HERITAGE CITY

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Abstract: *The primary objective of this study is to further understand the concept of mindfulness and its contribution towards interpretation at the heritage sites. Mindfulness refers to psychological awareness based on experiencing the current environment by steering the careful attention through a non-critical state. Past research works have suggested that mindfulness is capable to contribute in creating effective interpretation among visitors. Although mindfulness has been acknowledged as important, there are gaps in understanding mindfulness and its contribution towards interpretation. The current research focuses on examining the contribution of mindfulness towards interpretation. This research is conducted in Penang, a destination listed under the UNESCO World Heritage. A self-administered questionnaire was prepared with 390 usable responses from both local and international tourists were gathered to empirically test the measurement and structural model by using Partial Least Square path modelling approach. The results illustrate the significant positive direct effects and path coefficients. Likewise, significant relationship exists between mindfulness and interpretation. Above all, this research contributes to the mindfulness literature and provides evidence on its contribution towards interpretation.*

Keywords: Mindfulness, Interpretive Outcome, Heritage Sites, Penang and UNESCO

Introduction

Originated from the Buddhist perspective, mindfulness has been applied into various disciplines such as psychology, pedagogy, medical health, tourism, business and communication (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). In general, mindfulness entails a cognitive trait recognised by actively processing knowledge, attached to an individual's environment and exposed to new information. Simply put, according to the tourism literature, mindfulness could be described as actively processing novel information gathered from the surrounding environment (Langer, 1989; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). It involves a set of acquisition procedures with regard to knowledge accumulation from the external environment to be ingrained into behaviour and action.

Essentially, the concept of mindfulness was introduced in the tourism industry to develop a better understanding on tourist interpretation which in turn will help enhance quality satisfaction in this sector. It also provides useful insight in terms of learning from interpretive material (Moscardo, 1996). Effective interpretation will facilitate in offering greater knowledge and better understanding about the destination. According to several academic commentators (Frauman & Norman, 2004; Moscardo, 1999; 2017), visitors who are mindful may cherish and understand the information of the place dissimilarly from those who are mindless despite they have visited similar tourism spots of natural, cultural or historical based setting. An outcome of a mindful tourist with effective interpretation is to learn something novel such as culture, lifestyle and history, which will inject a fresh view into their lives.

Past research works have not clearly established the relationship between mindfulness and interpretive outcome. Understanding this correlation is crucial because making heritage places understandable and meaningful to visitors through heritage interpretation is touted as a central component of modern heritage tourism (Prentice et al., 1998; UNESCO, 2007). In light of this, Moscardo (1996; 1999) claims that mindful tourists would be able to enhance their learning experience as well as share a positive attitude, appreciation and empathy towards the sites by developing a sense of attachment and stewardship towards heritage conservation. Mindful tourists are those who value heritage attractions by dynamically processing the information and questioning what is going on within their surroundings. However, there is no substantial evidence in showing the outcome of the interpretation. Hence, the current research will address this gap by examining the impact of mindfulness towards the interpretive outcome.

Having said that, mindfulness refers to psychological awareness based on experiencing the current environment by steering the careful attention through a non-critical state. It is regarded as an emotional state that dictates information process, adaptability and responsiveness of acquired knowledge from the external surroundings. Ironically, it has been applied in social humanities and tourism studies to comprehend how visitors' experience can be made more appealing. Paradoxically, it has been proposed that in the process of interpretation the information, visitors tend to gain new insights (Larsen et al., 2009; Moscardo et al., 2004) and try to infuse the derived facts impulsively. That is why this research is germane to be executed to examine the relationship between mindfulness and interpretive outcome in the context of heritage tourism.

Effective interpretation plays an important role in learning and understanding the information provided at the heritage sites. On top of that, practical interpretation would help tourists in

gaining more knowledge and at the same time enjoying their visit. In the present study effective interpretation is measured based on several dimensions of interpretive outcomes, namely cognitive, affective, behavioural and value dimensions. Thus, it is imperative to investigate the components of mindfulness which contribute to the desirable interpretive outcome. This paper is organised as follows. Section 2 offers a succinct review of literatures regarding the connection between mindfulness and interpretation. Section 3 presents the theoretical model used in this study. Next, in Section 4, we delineate the adopted research method. In the penultimate section, we discuss the results of the analysed data, while the last section provides the conclusion of this paper.

Mindfulness and Interpretation

Several researchers (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Moscardo, 2008) hypothesise that mindfulness theory has espoused a cognitive dual information-processing model based on opposite mental states of mindfulness or mindlessness. This model assumes that a mindful tourist is more thoughtful to what they are listening and observing, while a mindless tourist responds spontaneously with lack of novelty and stimuli to be readily distinguished. In order to achieve visitors' satisfaction, Moscardo (1999) postulates that interpretation should integrate differences into interpretative experiences, offer personal connections to visitors, implement mutual participation, create vivid contents and allow for alternative audiences. Providing diversity in the interpretative experiences would promote mindfulness as it is the best tool for visitors to learn from the destination.

Undeniably, the role of interpretation is to ultimately generate mindful visitors that are capable in reassessing their perspectives. Hence, Markwell and Weiler (1998) propose that interpretive experience must be intellectually inspiring and emotionally encouraging, with the incitement of arousing reaction. To that extent, mindful tourists will be imbued with superior appreciation and understanding towards the site value, which subsequently provide full support for its conservation. By participating throughout the tour, Moscardo (1996) believes that visitors will be able to recognise the consequences of their actions and therefore behave in ways that diminish the impacts on a site. That aside, active questioning by the visitors is demanded as an essential instrument for them to better interpret the locational attributes. Hence, it can be advocated that improving the mindfulness quality of an interpretative material would undoubtedly amplify its effectiveness.

In this research, the effective interpretation is evaluated through the interpretive outcome of visitors. From a theoretical perspective, the desired outcome of an individual at any particular destination is a form of measurement of effective interpretation (Ham & Weiler, 2006). Collectively, the desired effective interpretation focuses mainly on the cognitive, affective and behavioural outcome of an individual (Ham & Weiler, 2006; Munro et al., 2008; Zeppel & Muloin, 2008). Measuring the outcome of interpretation based on cognitive, affective and behavioural outcome have been adopted in many other studies (Weiler & Smith, 2009; Weiler & Ham, 2010). Interestingly, this is in line with the mindfulness framework proposed by Langer (1989), which explains mindfulness in a range of social situations within an individual's cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. Concurrently, the concept of mindfulness and effective interpretation seems to have similarities - interrelated in terms of cognitive, affective and behavioural outcome. Therefore, it can be advocated that the effective interpretation of an individual is measured by the interpretive outcome of the individual at the heritage site.

Conceptual Research Framework

For the purpose of this study, we examine the effects of mindfulness in influencing interpretive outcome. Past studies (Frauman & Norman, 2004; Moscardo, 1996; 1999; 2008; Woods & Moscardo, 2003) have not clearly established the relationship between mindfulness and interpretive outcome. Therefore, the key objective of this study is to examine the relationship between mindfulness and interpretive outcome accordingly.

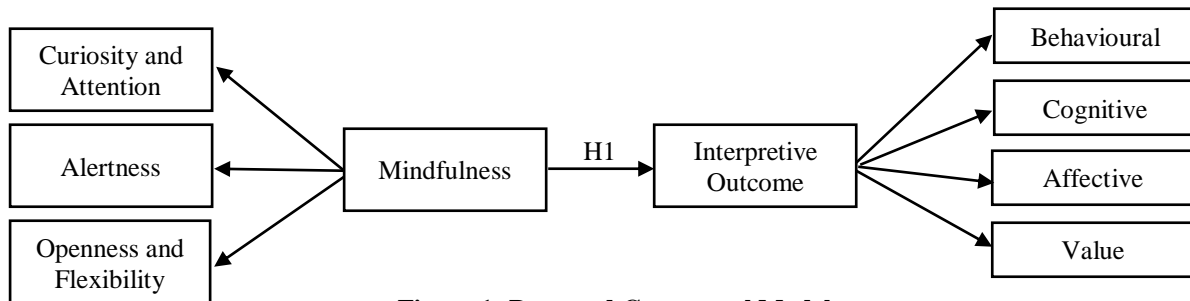


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model

Based on the extant voluminous literature, it is posited that mindfulness contributes to better understanding of tourism destinations and renders strong attitude to support conservation (Moscardo, 1996; 1999; Moscardo & Ballantyne, 2008; Moscardo et al., 2004). However, a myriad of studies (cf. Frauman & Norman, 2004; Van Winkle & Backman, 2009; Woods & Moscardo, 2003) that dwell on mindfulness have focused on either visitors' satisfaction and/or changes in behaviour as the outcome measures while the actual change based on the interpretive outcome was rarely examined. Hence, in the current research, mindfulness is tested to ensure that it influences the interpretive outcome. Consequently, the hypothesis observed in this study is:

H1: Mindfulness influences the interpretive outcome.

By and large, the preceding conceptual framework is built based on the intensive review of previous literature. The factors contributing towards mindfulness and interpretive outcome were measured based on the factor analysis run earlier and it was found that for interpretive outcome, there is a new dimension emerged. Hence, the dimension was included in this study. The dimensions of both mindfulness and interpretive outcome are established based on the item questions that was tested using the Exploratory Factor Analysis and later the Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Methodology

This study embraced a quantitative research method through the adoption of survey questionnaire. Questions were generated and validated based on the factor analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) on the measure of mindfulness and interpretive outcome. A raft of data were collected from 400 local and international tourists. The targeted sample population for this research is 400 visitors who visited Penang Heritage Site after considering the sampling error and also the sample size population suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Cohen et al. (2007). The target sample population is slightly higher than the suggested number of 380 to reduce the possibility of insufficient data due to missing value and incomplete questionnaire. In this research, convenience sampling technique was used. According to Babbie (2010) and Neuman (2011), convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the researchers select anyone within the target population that they happen to come across. The respondents must be aged 18 and above in order to ensure

their understanding of the questionnaire. Data were collected for two weeks - from 15 November 2016 to 30 November 2016. The stipulated duration was selected in conjunction with the school holiday season since the possibility to get more respondents is relatively higher. Respondents were asked to rate each indicator according to their experience at the heritage sites based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neutral, 5 = strongly agree). SmartPLS was used to perform the Partial Least-Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) data analysis. PLS-SEM was selected for data analysis due to its comprehensive statistical approach that allows simultaneous evaluation and modification of a conceptual model, including the relationships among the latent variables (LV) (Anderson & Gerbing, 1991).

Results

Respondents' Profile

The analysis of the sample profile shows that the respondents encompass almost equal gender of both Male (N=196) and Female (N=194), representing a ratio of 50.3% and 49.7% respectively. The highest percentage for educational level is at College or University level with 56.9%. This followed by Postgraduate which consisted of 21.5% of the total. Next is the Secondary School level with 20%. On the other hand, there are the Non-formal educational level which encompassed 1% of the respondents. While the lowest percentage was Primary School (0.5%). Majority of the respondents are International tourists (57.4%) and there are only 42.6% of local respondents. Most of the respondents have arranged their own trip (87.4%) while there are only 49% of them engaged with tour package. Within all the respondents, only 27.7% of them came to Penang repeatedly compared to 72.3% of first timer to Penang. As for Respondent's Job, the respondents were mainly Professionals (35.6%), followed by Students with 19.7%. A total of 13.1% are Businessman and next is Clerical level with 7.9%. The subsequent group is the Retiree with 4.6% and 3.3% of Housewife. There are a total of 1.8% of Expatriate. The lowest percentage is the Unemployed with 5% of the total. Additionally, there are a total of 5.4% with Other's job description such as Store Owner, Freelancer and Self-Employed. Majority of the respondents visit the heritage site with their Friends (31%) as their companion. This is followed by Family with Children (25.1%) and Spouse (16.4%). Besides that, there are also tourists who visit the sites with Relatives at 12.2% while another 8.2% of the respondents are considerably Alone. 4.6% of the respondents come in a Group and 2.1% of them visit the place with their Business Associate. The lowest percentage is the Others with 0.5% for those who were suddenly came across this place or visited the site without earlier plan.

Assessment of the Measurement Model

The VB-SEM Smart-PLS was used for 390 samples to test the hypothesis. The measurement model assessed the reliability and validity of the constructs. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) must be determined in the course of such evaluation (Chin, 2010; Hair et al., 2014). In this particular study, composite reliability of all construct variables were above 0.70 which is indicative of good scale reliability as per the rule of thumb suggested by Hair et al. (2014). All constructs have AVE above 0.5, which illustrates an acceptable degree of convergent validity (CV) as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). As from Table 1, all the values were above the recommended value points, thus ensuring the achievement of CV. Furthermore, B6, VL1, OF1 and CA1 were deleted due to main loading < 0.5. Table 1 reveals the final results of the measurement model.

Table 1: Measurement model of PLS (n=390)

First-order constructs	Second order construct	Items	Loadings	AVE	Composite Reliability
Alertness		AL1	0.574	0.610	0.902
		AL2	0.823		
		AL3	0.844		
		AL4	0.870		
		AL5	0.800		
		AL6	0.736		
Curiosity and Attention		CA2	0.796	0.658	0.931
		CA3	0.827		
		CA4	0.825		
		CA5	0.836		
		CA6	0.761		
		CA7	0.856		
		CA8	0.775		
		Openness and Flexibility			
OF3	0.865				
OF4	0.777				
Mindfulness		Alertness	0.606	0.548	0.780
		Curiosity and Attention	0.886		
		Openness and Flexibility	0.702		
Behavioural		B1	0.778	0.556	0.862
		B2	0.738		
		B3	0.800		
		B4	0.742		
		B5	0.662		
Cognitive		C1	0.753	0.699	0.920
		C2	0.863		
		C3	0.835		
		C4	0.890		
		C5	0.833		
Affective		AF1	0.831	0.681	0.895
		AF2	0.782		
		AF3	0.834		
		AF4	0.851		
Value		VL2	0.783	0.667	0.857
		VL3	0.868		
		VL4	0.796		
Interpretive outcome		Behavioural	0.872	0.706	0.905
		Cognitive	0.811		
		Affective	0.895		
		Value	0.777		

Note: B6, VL1, OF1 and CA1 were deleted due to main loading; AVE=average variance extracted

Discriminant Validity of Measurement Model

Recent research claims that the Fornell-Larcker criterion is not effective under certain circumstances (Henseler et al., 2014; Rönkkö & Evermann, 2013), pointing to a potential weakness in the most commonly used discriminant validity criterion. Hence, the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio has been set up recently as an exceptional criterion in comparison to the more traditional assessment proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Previous research efforts have indicated construct thresholds of 0.85 and 0.90 for HTMT to establish

discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The present study utilises the HTMT of 0.85 to evaluate discriminant validity. Thus, the HTMT ratio criterion is fulfilled in the present study. This thumb rule is also supported by Kline's (2011) thresholds of 0.85 in order for HTMT 0.85 to confirm the discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). In view of that, Table 2 displays the results of the discriminant validity assessment of the measurement model Heterotrait-Monotrait.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity of Measurement Model-Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Constructs	Interpretive Outcome	Mindfulness
Interpretive Outcome		
Mindfulness	0.519	

Assessment of Structural Model

Utilising the SmartPLS algorithm output, the relationship between both the dependent and independent variables was examined. The path coefficients of the structural model were measured and bootstrap analysis with 5000 resamples was utilized to evaluate the structural model of significance of direct effects-path coefficients. Subsequently, the path coefficient, t-statistics output and the significant level of each relationship were tested. By utilising the findings from the path assessment, the acceptance or rejection of the proposed hypothesis is decided. The path from mindfulness towards interpretive outcome were tested. H₁ is supported. The results show that the mindfulness has significant relationship on interpretive outcome. Mindfulness with the path coefficient of $\beta = 0.485$ at $p < 0.01$ level and t-value = 9.597, shows that this hypothesis is supported.

Table 3: Significance of direct effects- Path coefficients (n=390)

Path	Beta value	SE	t-value	P Values	Result
H1: Mindfulness→Interpretive Outcome	0.485	0.051	9.597*	0.000	Supported

Note: * $p < 0.001$, $t > 3.33$ (one tailed); SE: Standard Error

Discussion

The findings indicate a significant relationship between mindfulness and interpretive outcome with path coefficient of $\beta = 0.485$ at $p < 0.01$ significant level and t-value = 9.597. Also, the results specify that mindfulness is capable to facilitate the effective interpretation as it evokes the interpretive outcome among the visitors. A mindful individual is more attentive towards his/her surroundings, resulting better interpretation compared to those who are mindless. The products of this research provide strong empirical evidence towards the proposed link between mindfulness and interpretation in the past (Moscardo, 1996; 1999; Moscardo & Pearce, 1986; Moscardo et al., 2004) which were measured as interpretative outcome in this research. Moreover, the findings also suggest mindfulness as an essential instrument in affecting interpretive experience (Van Winkle & Backman, 2009) and management of the experience among visitors (Frauman & Norman, 2004) at the setting. Again, this study reinforces the arguments of mindfulness in supporting the interpretive outcome. In general, it would be able to generate new insights on the mindfulness as it provides a better understanding on mindfulness with fine-grained contribution towards desirable interpretive outcome among the tourists at the heritage sites. It will also help to further establish the conceptual framework of mindfulness within new research landscape.

Conclusions

Past research findings are incapable to conclusively show how mindfulness had contributed towards effective interpretation. Interestingly, the results of this study suggest mindfulness as a vital device in influencing interpretive experience (Van Winkle & Backman, 2009) and a key element that moulds the management of experience among visitors (Frauman & Norman, 2004) at the tourism destination. This study strengthens the arguments of mindfulness in supporting interpretive outcome. Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature in terms of providing evidence on the ability of mindfulness in supporting interpretive outcome. In conclusion, mindfulness is in a position to assist in creating desirable interpretive outcome among visitors at the heritage sites. Having effective interpretation will lead to attitude change which in turn will warrant the behavioural change. Additionally, interpretation also would be able to facilitate the rewarding visitation experience besides further encouraging participation and positive behaviour at attractions. On a larger scale, the successful application of interpretation is deemed plausible in directing the visitors to conservation and sustainable tourism. Finding of this research further encourages mindfulness, which in turn is likely to result in more effective outcomes for both visitors and destination managers. The application of the concept of mindfulness provides an insight as the guidelines for the design and management of the exhibits and information at the tourism destination so that they include the types of features likely to encourage mindful visitors in enhancing effective interpretation that would lead to better understanding of the destination.

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