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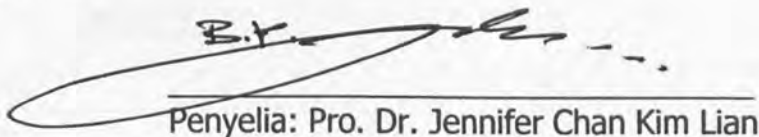
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OF GOLF TOURISM EXPERIENCE
IN SUTERA HARBOUR GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB,
SABAH, MALAYSIA**

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DECLARATION

The materials in this dissertation are original except for quotations, excerpts, summaries and reference which have been duly acknowledged.



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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study of Korean golf tourists' perception of golf experience in Sabah, Malaysia. In order to identify the expressive dimensions that describes the quality of their experience. In-depth interviews were conducted with Korean golf tourists who played golf in Sutera Harbour golf and country club. The analysis of expressive dimensions of their service experience identified positive and negative experiences of respondents. The findings show that the golf experience is multidimensional- affective/ emotional aspects and functional/ utilitarian aspects. Golf tourists emphasize golf course, maintenance of golf course, environment, club house, and interaction with service staffs. The six expressive dimensions describing the positive experience are consistent with previous research. The Korean golf tourists' perception is developed to display both positive and negative aspects that build up the golf experience of the tourists. This research has strong implications to provide operators with guidelines to improve the golf tour operations.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses an overview of this research on Korean golf tourists' perception of golf experience in Sabah, Malaysia. This chapter identifies the problem statement, research objectives, scope and significance of the study, and definition of the term.

1.1.1 Overview

Sports tourism is related to tourism and sports activities such as golfing, skiing, scuba diving, etc. It has become popular among those who want to enjoy their holidays and weekends with their acquaintances and to free themselves from ordinary life. Golf tourism is the term which is the trip for playing golf at highly developed resorts. Golfers tend to enjoy their stay in a golf destination and accompanying family or friends in their re-visiting the golf destination (Kim, Chun, & Petric, 2004). That is why golf tourism is recognized as a facilitator to the development of tourism destinations in economic sector. It means that golf is a potential sports in tourism to give economic benefits to tourist destination.

Golf tourism has become an important market of the tourism industry. Golf tourists spend money in a variety of ways such as accommodations, restaurants, golf clubs, tourist attractions, amusements. Business travelers who play golf have a greater impact in economic sector than business travelers without playing golf (National Golf Foundation, 2007).

Experience is the starting point and key term for understanding humans and their relations with themselves and their environments. Experience is an important factor in influencing satisfaction. In tourism experience, satisfaction results from the experiential consumption (Chan & Baum, 2007). When consuming a service, the

experiential consumption (Chan & Baum, 2007). When consuming a service, the subjective personal reactions and feelings experienced have been found to be an important part of tourists' evaluation and satisfaction with services (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). The experience of tourism can be explained as subjective feeling of respondents. Williams (2006) also stresses the basic component of tourism, tourism suppliers offer the products which are close to the tourist experience. Tourist experiences are important value for providers of tourism experiences because based on these experiences to be the core product. In tourism, understanding of experience is especially important, as experiential emotions and reactions.

In tourism, the production of experiences is critical for influencing customers' emotions positively. The emotional content is emphasized a natural part of what a tourism experience composes (Slatten, Krogh, & Connolley, 2011). Otto and Ritchie (1996, p.168) state, "perhaps more than any other service industry, tourism holds the potential to elicit strong emotional and experiential reactions by consumer".

1.2 Problem Statement

According to Chan and Baum (2007), there are many researches on tourists experiences done by researchers such as museums, river rafting, skydiving, heritage parks, and heritage sites. Previous research has focused on the effect of customers' experiences. However, previous studies have criticized the lack of explaining satisfaction with services (e.g. Bagozzi, 1997; Bigne', Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Erevelles, 1998; Ladhari, 2007; Phillips & Baumgartner, 2002; Smith & Bolton, 2002). Some researchers suggest emotional constructs as an alternative to cognitive satisfaction (e.g. Bigne' et al., 2005; Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997; Slatten, 2008; Wirtz & Bateson, 1999; Wong, 2004). Bigne' et al. (2005, p.833) note that ". . . there is a lack of research on the emotional effects affecting consumer satisfaction and behavioral intentions when consumers are involved in a service setting". Then there is a need for further research on emotions. Chan and Baum (2007) note that understanding tourists' perception of their experience is predominant to any tourism industry that tries to improve its visitors' experiences for their satisfaction levels. Their evidences highlighted need for empirical studies of experience in service sectors. However, there is little

perspective of golf experience and even emotions in golf experience and little studies of Korean golf tourists. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to describe Korean golf tourists' perception of golf experience in Sabah, Malaysia. Subsequently identify the expressive dimensions that describe that experience.

1.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions

The objectives of this research are:

- (1) To describe Korean golf tourists' perceptions of their experience in Sabah, Malaysia.
- (2) To identify key expressions of golf experience.

In conducting this research paper, the following question was answered;

- (1) How do Korean golf tourists perceive the golf experience in Sutera Harbour Golf and Country Club?

The research sub-questions are:

- (1) How do Korean golf tourists define golf tourism experience?
- (2) What do they perceive as quality in their experience?

1.4 Scope of the Study

The research aims to describe Korean golf tourists' perceptions of their experience in Sabah, Malaysia and to identify key expressions of golf experience. This research focuses on Korean tourists whose purpose to visit Malaysia for playing golf and five-star-rate resort in Sabah, namely Sutera Harbour golf and country club.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Golf tourism is sports-related travel apart from individual ordinary life. Golf has been played and enjoyed worldwide. Satisfiers are associated with personal experiential facet

that derived from the environment and attractions, physical sites and leisure activities which enhanced the tourist's positive experiences (Chan, 2007) and negative experiences. Identifying experience is critical because it is related to satisfaction and influence to its levels.

Since the landmark work by Pine and Gilmore in 1998, it ignites interest into a new management prototype which emphasizes the change from service delivery to experience concept. In golf tourism, most research undertaken has focused on golf course facilities or services such as swing, golf tourism destination, etc, little emphasis on concerning the golf tourists' emotion. Therefore, this research can bring about significance to the golf product providers and the golf club management, to know what the feeling of golf tourists' experience is, for better managing golf tourists and improving their service.

1.6 Definition of Term

1.6.1 Golf Tourism

Golf tourism is to travel to participate in active sport holiday which is the main traveling reason for travel (Tassiopoulos & Haydam, 2008). Golf as a leisure activity is a hugely popular sport and it has been played and enjoyed worldwide. Holidays for playing golf are an established parts of the sport tourism market, with countries such as South-East countries – Thailand, Malaysia, etc are well-designed destinations on golf tourism.

1.6.2 Tourists Experience

Tourists' experiences are combination of factors which is the feelings of their visitation (Page & Dowling, 2002). The experience of sports tourism can be explained as the subjective feeling by tourists.

1.7 Summary

Chapter 1 discusses an overview introduction of the background of the research. This chapter identifies the problem statement, construct problem statement, objectives, scope and significance of the study, and definition of term.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a review of the relevant literature. It includes sports tourism, golf tourism. It describes golf tourism in Malaysia and Korean golf tourists. It concentrates on tourist experience and presents quality of experience. This is the foundation part of the research.

2.2 Sports Tourism

Tourists are more demanding and seeking a wide range of experiences as they wish to feel new sport activities. Therefore, modern sports tourism is important contents of stay and the main purpose for travelling to the destinations (Peric, 2010). Sports tourism can be broadly described as including travel away from one's primary residence to take part in sports activity, for recreation or competition purposes, travel to watch sports, and travel to visit a sports attraction (Neirotti, 2003).

Considering the mutual relationship between sport and tourism, modern sports tourism has not only a perceptual role, but becomes more important contents of stay with tourists who want to actively participate in various sports activities (Bartoluci, 2003). According to Peric (2010), sport is frequently the main purpose for travelling to a certain destinations which makes a good base for development of sports tourism. Tourism is recognized by motives why people travel at certain tourist destinations, the main purpose for travel is sport activities and facilities. Sports tourism is that tourist choose destinations by sports activities and services. Thus, sports activities and experience are influenced by the choice of tourists.

There is evidence that the sport tourism literature previously attempted to define the term 'sport tourism' comprehensively. Hall (1992b) assumes that there are

two primary behaviors involved in sport tourism: travel away from home to watch sport or travel to participate in sport. He chooses to define tourism as non-commercialized or leisure behavior. Standeven (1998) discusses that sport is defined as a cultural experience of physical activity and tourism as a cultural experience of place. Combination of the notion of place and the physical activity into sport tourism would help express the problems associated with distance of travel and the problems associated with using narrow definitions of sport.

Nogawa, Yamguchi, and Hagi (1996, p.47) suggest that a "sport tourist is a temporary visitor staying at least 24 hours in the event area and whose primary purpose is to participate in a sports event, with the area visited being a secondary attraction". They also addresses that sport tourists can be divided into three types: (1) event participants whose primary purpose for travelling is to participate in an sport event; (2) event spectators whose primary purpose is to watch a sport event; and (3) sport lovers who travel to take part in "self organized" sports. Nonetheless, Nogawa et al. (1996, p.47) concede that "a more thorough discussion of these categories and the definition of sport tourist are needed".

Sport tourism includes travel to participate in a passive (e.g. sports events and sport museums) sport holiday or and active sport holiday (e.g. golfing, scuba diving, and cycling), and it may involve instances where either sport or tourism are the dominant activity or reason for travel.

2.2.1 Golf Tourism

The game of golf remains one of the few major sports that are not prejudiced against the fat person or thin, the tall or small, young or old. That is why it appeals to people form across all walks of life. According to the American sportswriter Grantland (1954), he points out that playing golf consists of key elements which include 80% are related to philosophy, humor, tragedy, romance, melodrama, companionship, camaraderie, cussedness and conversation while 20% is related to mechanics and technique.

Tourism is directly associated with golf which is an expanding global phenomenon. The golf industry is strongly growth worldwide, with around 25 million practitioners in the USA, 15 million in Japan and 2.5 million in Europe (Shmanske, 1999, 2000). An increasing number of golf tourists are choosing to play golf abroad usually non-summer seasons for different environment. The golf tourism is becoming an important part of the tourism industry in tour destinations. Golf travelers spend money in a variety of ways (e.g., accommodations, restaurants, golf courses, attractions, entertainment, etc.), and business travelers who play golf have a greater economic impact on local communities than non-golfing business travelers (National Golf Foundation, 2007). Therefore, there has been competition among golf destinations, golf courses and resorts have been developing and upgrading of surroundings for attracting golf travelers.

Globally, golf tourism is considered a major tourism activity both as a direct form of special interest travel and as an adjunct to other forms of travel (Hall, 1992a). It is estimated in 2012 that there are over 35,000 golf courses of which more than 16,000 are found in the USA. In the past few years, the popularity of golf and international golfing destinations has grown fast. The value of golf tourism is estimated more than US\$10 billion annually. Since 1989 there has been increased at 50% of the number of global golf tourists. Golf, therefore, represents major sport-related market served by its own trade association, the International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO) (Readman, 2003).

Readman (2003, p.166) defines the term golf tourism as: "travel for non-commercial reasons to participate in golf activities away from the traveler's local environment". Golf 20/20 (2002) describes golf tourism either as a main purpose for travel or as a pleasurable activity travelling. Alternatively, golf tourism is defined as an activity, or overnight trip, where the golf tourists are travelling more than an hour outside their place of residence and regular golf course. Golf can be characterized as follows; golf is a primary motivator and a major determining factor in choosing the destinations. It means golf will become the primary leisure activity on the trip (Tourism Victoria, 2003).

Golf tourism is relatively easy to conceptualize, it is, however, less clear the concept of a golf tourist. Figure 2.1 provides typology of golf tourists. According to Golf 20/20 (2004),

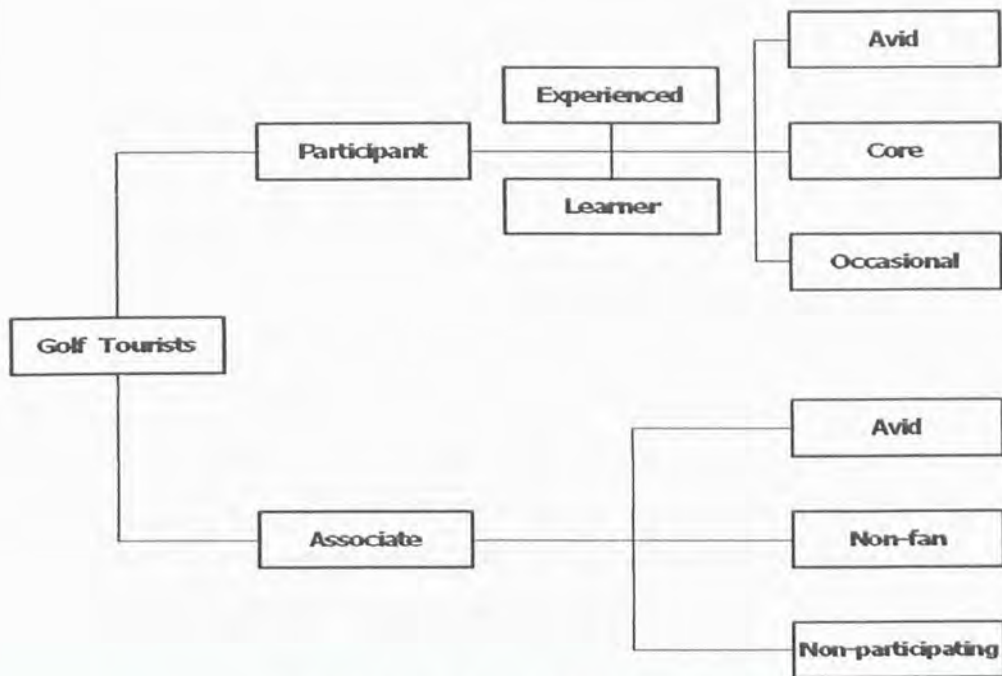


Figure 2.1 Typology of Golf Tourists

(Source: adapted from Weed & Bull, 2004; Golf 20/20, 2005)

Golf tourists can be generally classified into three categories:

- (1) The avid golfer—arranges to travel with golf which is the primary object of the trip normally non-peak season and is a person who plays 25 or more rounds of golf annually. This golfer prefers renowned, high-quality golf courses, mid to high-end accommodation as well as the availability of restaurants and night life.
- (2) The core golfer—travels for business purposes and enjoys playing 8–24 rounds of golf annually. This type of golfer prefers the place attached with conference centres and hotels are considered attractive.
- (3) The occasional golfer—is a person who makes the destination decision that golf does not affected, it is a type of activity during travelling and plays one to seven rounds of golf annually. This golfer prefers good quality golf courses that are reasonable price and are playable by golfers. The family golfer is attracted to a golfing destination that offers family activities, outdoor attractions, with mid to high-end accommodation.

Weed and Bull (2004) note that participant golf tourists are characterized by their behaviors and motivations. Participant golf tourists are identified into two types: those who are experienced respondents and those who are learning play golf. For both types of golf tourists, an important reason for the trip is the need for the golf resources, for example, physical resources such as golf course facilities and associated services such as golf instruction.

The associate experience sports tourists are difficult to define, however its subsector can be described as being interested in the post-activity experience at a golf course. Golf 20/20 (2005) indicates that the associated experience golf tourists can be classified into; (1) an avid fan is a person who shows the interest in golf enthusiastically, whereas a golf fan is a person who expresses some degrees of interest in golf, whether he or she is a participant or not, (2) a non-fan is a person who does not have any interest in golf, (3) a non-participating fan is a person who expresses at least some degree of interest in golf but he or she is not a participant.

The review of literature is that golf tourism is the fastest growing sector in the global travel industry. Golf tourism refers to travel which involves either viewing or participating for playing golf staying apart from usual environment.

2.2.2 Golf Tourism in Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the world's most beautiful, dynamic and energetic countries. It provides a wide variety of golf experiences – easily accessible and affordable leisure activity. Golf tourists can play championship quality golf course in sky-high mountains, along with the beach, in the tropical rainforest, in the center of the city. In 2007, Malaysia celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Independence and a statement was announced to support tourism especially golf tourism which has brought high revenue.



Figure 2.2 Map of Malaysia Indicating the “Sutera Harbour Resort”
 (Source: www.mgta.com, April 15th, 2012)

Malaysia offers various experience and exceptional value for tourists. Visitors can enjoy travel alongside their golf, high-end shopping, and authentic Asian-style spas. Additionally, the popular Malaysia, My Second Home program has brought over 10,000 expatriates to the country many of whom are focus on golfers. MM2H and golf packages are high on the list of ways to promote the country and attract more guests to these shores. There are various tournament packages around the ‘Big Four’ annual tournaments: the Maybank Malaysian Open, CIMB Asia Pacific Classic, Sime Darby LPGA Malaysia and Iskandar Johor Open (Source: www.mgta.com, April 15th, 2012).

Golf is an important component in Malaysian tourism. It is also a key industry in Sabah. According to Sabah Tourism Board (2011), the number of total rounds was 264,137. Total golf industry revenue is RM30,629,030. The number of international golf rounds is 55,871, the revenue is RM13,967,750. Golf rounds statistics are compiled from the following golf clubs; 1) Sutera Harbour Golf and Country Club, 2) Nexus Golf Resort Karambunai, 3) Dalit Bay Golf and Country Club, 4) Keningau Golf and Country Club, 5) Sandakan Golf and Country Club, 6) Mount Kinabalu Golf Club, 7) Sabah Golf and Country Club, 8) Kudat Golf Club, 9) Hot

Spring Golf Club, Tawau, 10) Borneo Golf and Country Club, 11) Shan Shui Golf and Country Club, 12) The Kinabalu Golf Club, 13) Mimpian Jadi Resort.

For the research, 'SUTERA HARBOUR Golf and Country Club' was selected because of occupancy of the rate in golf tourism. According to Sutera Harbour Golf management (2012), the number of total golf rounds is 43,755, the international golf rounds was 8,939. This figure is 16% out of total golf rounds in Sabah in 2011. Korean golf tourists were occupied 27% out of 100% golf tourists in Sutera Harbour Golf and Country Club.

The Sutera Harbour Golf and Country Club is a premier golfing ground for business and leisure travelers. It is located in the center of Kota Kinabalu City and just 10 minutes from the International Airport. Sutera Harbour Resort is laid along the shores of the South China Sea. The Sutera Harbour golf course comprises the 27 holes - the Lake Course, Heritage Course and Garden Course. The Lake Course was named for the richness in water hazards and the artificial lakes drew close the greens and vistas. The Heritage Course is a peaceful and sequestered course in which to relax and play. The Garden Course presents a spectacular area richly landscaped with shady trees and sand bunkers with ocean and island views in the horizon. The course grass is Bermuda grass and well-maintained. The Sutera Harbour signature hole is the 24th; a 300 meter par-4, 330m on the Garden Course with the challenge provided by the sandy waste areas and the ocean which comes close to the undulating green. Specially, night golfing is available for those who enjoy playing golf in the cooler part of the day. Other facilities include a driving range, putting green, chipping and bunker practice area, pro-shop, locker rooms with sauna facilities and a golfer's terrace. The Sutera Harbour Golf Club has collected numerous awards of distinction and hosted several major tournaments including the 2nd Best Golf Resort in 2008 and the Asian Tour 2011 Sabah Masters, respectively. In 2012 Sutera Harbour hosted the One Asia Qualifying School as well as a qualifier for the World Amateur Inter-Team Golf Championship, sponsored by Tourism Malaysia (www.golfasian.com, May 5th, 2012).



2.3 Korean Golf Tourist

In Korea, golf is first introduced by English Customs officials in 1900 in Wonsan, a city within North Korea (KGA, 2002). The number of golf population and golf courses in Korea has shown a huge growth since 1990. The number of Korean golfers to domestic regular golf courses is 4.38 million in 1991 and increases to 25.74 million in 2010. The number of golf courses in Korea has increased from 51 in 1991 to 436 in 2012. According to Korean Customs Service, the number of Korean overseas golf tourists carrying golf equipment is 5,189 in 2003, however this number may be twice or three times more than the actual report. Therefore, the Korean golf tourism has become one of the major tourism industries in Korea (Kim et, al., 2004).

There are three major reasons why Korean golf tourists prefer overseas golf tour destinations to domestic golf destinations. First, as the growth of economy the demand of playing golf has increased in Korea. That is why the capacity of golf tourists has been inadequate to meet the demand of golf tourists. Moreover it is difficult to make a booking because of tight schedule of golf courses in Korea. Second, green fees of private golf courses with no membership cost on average more than 200,000 won (about USD 180). This is comparatively high costs of playing golf in overseas golf destination. Third, Korean has four seasons; spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Golf tourists cannot play golf during non-summer times. That is why golf tourists go abroad to play golf.

As increasing Korean golf tourists, overseas golf courses and facilities have been renovated and developed to attract Korean golf tourists. There are examples of efforts to attract Korean golf tourists. Golf courses locate in the locality of Manila is well known to Korean golf tourists because their green fees are relatively inexpensive compare to Korean golf courses. The Philippines Tourist Office in Seoul sponsors a Korean golf championship with a four-night package tour program at Sherwood Hills golf course and Eagle Ridge golf course, which has hosted international golf matches (Korea Travel Times, 2003). Malaysian golf courses are famous for their good reputation, excellent beach views, mild weather, kind residents, and exotic surroundings. Malaysian

golf clubs have given promotions to Korean golfers. They designate Korean tour agencies; give special price and services for their customers to bring in.

2.4 Tourist Experience

The demanding of traveling is more targeted to the personal feelings and experiences that include senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. Naturally, the perspective of supply has to find out the ways to satisfy such a demand. It is important to understand the concept of experiences. Experiences are memorable that influence the tourists. Experiences are classified depending on whether the tourist is active or passive, and whether the tourist is mentally absorbed or physically engaged by the experience. The main differentiation is more focused on experiences than on accommodation (Peric, 2010). The tourists wish to see and experience the nature of different destinations and the way people live and enjoy life in those places. The ongoing evolution of the tourism experience owes its origins to the pioneering works of Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990), Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984), Abrahams (1986), and others who have formed part of a continuously evolving process that has been documented by Ritchie and Hudson (2009) (see Figure 2.3). Those works provide some useful vision into the major research challenges presently facing tourism experience researchers.

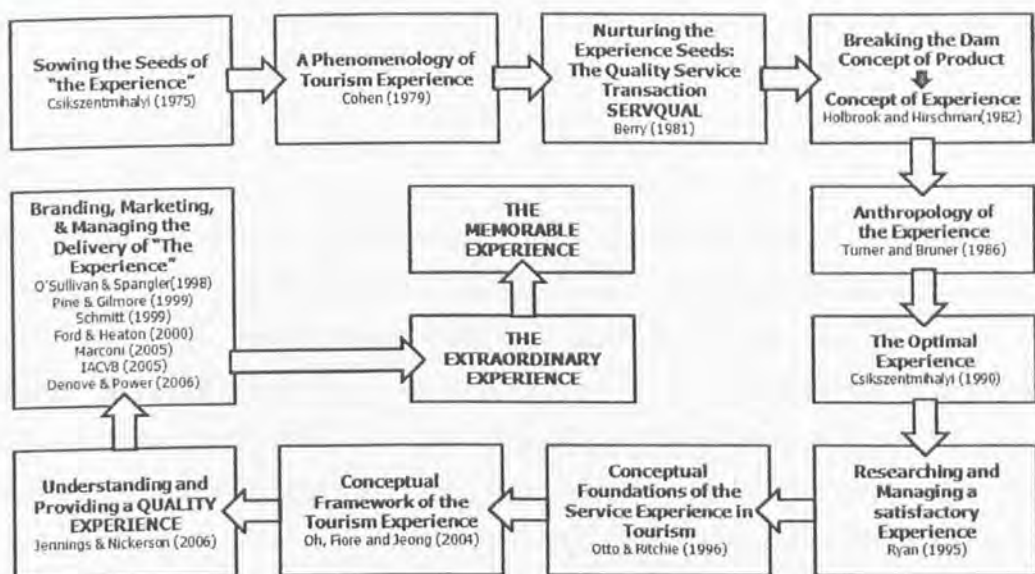


Figure 2.3 The Evolution of the Extraordinary/ Memorable Tourism Experience

(Source: adapted from Ritchie and Hudson (2009))

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