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A study of Fright Tourism during Hallowe'en

Fright tourism is a lighter form of dark tourism. While similar elements of death and dying exist in both, fright tourism is a more entertaining version of the dark parent. Fright tourism occurs when a tourist seeks a scary opportunity for pleasure at a destination that may have a sinister history or may be promoted to have one. Since tourist motivation has been shown to be an important determinant of choice behavior, this research note explores the influence of fearful events in our world for a sample of spectators at a haunted attraction. Citing examples of crime, natural disasters, personal finances and others, a scale of fear is created.

Key words: fright tourism, dark tourism, haunted attractions, fear

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Introduction

Recently urban centers have become a likely destination for haunted attractions as developers have re-purposed disused factories and warehouses into entertainment centers (Weir, 2012). The Hallowe'en season is the most popular time for these attractions as the public is seeking sensation-seeking experiences. Horror opportunities provide that sensation (Hoffner and Levine, 2005; Kerr, 2015). The sensation provided by haunted attractions, is a theme of interest in this attempt to define fright tourism as a lighter form of dark tourism.

Fright Tourism exists in the realm of dark tourism, but unlike the more macabre nature of death, it is the simulation of death that is being presented during the Hallowe'en season in haunted houses around the world. Bristow and Newman (2004) were first to define fright tourism in their exploration of two dark sites: Salem, Massachusetts and the Salem Witch Trials, and Transylvania, Romania. Salem now promotes itself as a haunted destination with year-round attractions based on a mixture of fact and fiction (<http://www.hauntedhappenings.org/>). Likewise, across the Atlantic, Romania is home to folk hero Vlad the Impaler, the moniker that influenced the Dracula myth. Transylvania has become a major tourist attraction based on the former (<https://www.visittransilvania.ro/>). Thus both sites have developed as a fright tourism destination, while the dark history of the country is rooted in fact.

The entertaining aspect of horror from novels and movies provides a foundational understanding of Fright Tourism. The sensations sought by the public visiting these sites have created a growing demand in the tourism sector. Globally, fright tourism is big business. While typically timed around the Hallowe'en season, fright attractions may be found year-round at amusement parks and theme parks. According to the trade organization Hauntworld, Inc. (2017) there are an estimated 4,000 Halloween attractions in the US and Canada.

Approximately 100 countries operate haunted houses. Attendances average some 8,000 per season, with some of the more expansive and elaborate attractions hosting over 100,000.

Macabre related tourism is nothing new. Travelers have visited famous tombs for centuries and returning to sites of war has been popular for about as long (Seaton, 1996; Collins-Kreiner, 2016). More recently, dark tourism has emerged as the leading term to define this form of tourist activity. Early attempts to define the attraction to something macabre and death have origins in thanatourism (Seaton, 1996) and more recently dark tourism that includes other atrocities (Lennon and Foley 2000). Seaton (1996) traced the interest in death through the ages and found travel to death sites satisfied the macabre motivation of the traveler. About the same time, the term dark tourism was announced as researchers studied the interest in JFK assassination (Foley and Lennon, 1996). Two decades of research followed as scholars continued to seek an understanding of the attraction to death by tourists and the promotion by dark tourist providers (Light, 2017).

Themes exploring dark tourism include visits to prisons (Strange and Kempa, 2003), assassination sites (Foley and Lennon, 1996), the Holocaust (Lennon and Foley, 1999), celebrity car crashes (Blom, 2006) and War sites (Dunkley et al., 2011). It has become clear from the examples above that not all areas of dark tourism are the same. Stone (2006) proposed a spectrum of dark tourism anchored at one end by 'sites of death and suffering' and the other end being 'sites associated with death and suffering.' This distinction is important since there were so many types of tourism under the umbrella of dark (Stone and Sharpley, 2008; Stone, 2012; Raine, 2013). Further it encourages a broader exploration into everything and anything related to death related tourism including the simulation of death. For this paper, a more whimsical definition is employed for Fright Tourism to reflect the more leisurely aspect of travel. Fright tourism occurs when a tourist seeks a scary opportunity for pleasure at a destination that may have a sinister history or may be promoted to have one

(Bristow and Newman, 2004). The key points of this definition are scary and pleasure, visitors attend haunted attractions to be scared, but want a pleasurable encounter. The artificial experience of haunted attractions provides that opportunity.

Simulated haunted houses have a much shorter history than most dark tourism sites. The oldest haunted house in the world is believed to be the 100 year old Orton and Spooner Ye Haunted Cottage currently displayed at the Hollycombe Steam in the Country in the United Kingdom (Hollycombe, 2017). The most famous might be the Haunted Mansion at Disneyland, California since the doors creaked open in 1969. In fact, many contemporary haunted attraction businesses credit the Haunted Mansion as their inspiration (Morton, 2012). The main purpose of these attractions is to provide an experience to be “scared to death.” People seek these opportunities to be frightened and socialize with other like-minded travelers. At the same time, businesses know that the market demands a safe and secure experience (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005). Safety is a priority for the tourists, since injuries will certainly deter future visitation. Given the popularity of fright attractions and since participants are expecting a safe, yet scary experience, what elements of fear come to motivate the individual? Fear of heights is something a mountain climber has to overcome. So for these fright tourists, how might they assess common fears facing not only tourists and the general population?

This research note assesses the elements of fear of participants before they enter a haunted attraction. During this waiting period to enter the haunted house, a study of fear can take place. This phase of the experience is known as the anticipation stage (Clawson and Knetsch, 1966) and is known to heighten the experience for the fright tourists (Light, 2009). The anticipation of the unknown may contribute to the overall experience in the haunted attraction and an understanding of their fears may bring insight to the motivations of the

participants seeking a fright tourism experience. Further the fright tourists are expecting a safe encounter with that unknown.

The next section of the paper highlights selected literature on fear found in tourism, a case study is introduced and the conclusion includes recommendations for future studies of fright tourism.

Literature Review

To understand the influence of fear for spectators at fright tourism attractions, a brief introduction to the types of fears commonly experienced by tourist consumers follows. There are many fears that tourists have to overcome on a daily basis. Since the tourist experience here is a short event lasting maybe an hour, even the most common fears should be evaluated in order to understand the individual motivation for a fright attraction. So we employ a general review of common fears experienced by people that includes crime, government, natural and human disasters, phobias, personal health, financial future and technology.

Crime is a frequent fear, crime can be measured by the personal experience of participants, or it can be the characteristics of the destination. For tourism, the morbid curiosity of visiting sites of serial murders often has a push/pull influence on people (Gibson, 2006). Pushing is evidenced by reducing local shopping, and pulling those people who are attracted to the thanatourism location. But even petty crime can hurt a destination since most people just want a safe experience free of vagrants and other distractions (Burns et al., 2010). Finally gender differences tend to be highlighted in tourism studies. Hughes et al. (2003) studied women's rating of fear and found immediacy and intimacy to be the most fearful.

A fear of Government is another concern of tourists. Political stability has been shown to influence international travel. For our fright tourist, concerns of a "Big Brother" and surveillance appears to be most important. Even so, Dinev et al. (2006) found Americans

accepted the need for government surveillance. The acts of governments extend beyond just surveillance when the actions of a government are so atrocious (e.g., the Holocaust) fears are felt by many tourists (Heidelberg, 2015; Reynolds, 2016). Thus government actions may often expand into other fears in this literature review.

Terrorism as one of many human-caused disasters is unfortunately becoming an all too frequent event and the impact on tourists has recently gained the attention of scholars (Floyd et al., 2004; Dube and Black, 2010; Korstanje, 2011). Other human-caused disasters include war-zones like the DMZ in Korea that continue to attract visitors (Bigley, et al., 2010). And even some travelers put themselves at risk by travelling to very active war-zone countries encouraged by the writings of Robert Pelton (Pelton, 2003). Chernobyl is another popular tourist attraction (Yankovska and Hannam, 2014).

Natural disasters are common on the planet. Some are more or less predictable (i.e., hurricanes in the Caribbean) while others shock us by the lack of predictability (earthquakes). Park and Reisinger (2010) explored the influence of natural disasters on tourists in south Florida. It appears that natural disasters do have an influence on travel. Frequent warnings from CDC and health professional may alert the tourist to Health hazards in today's world. Concerns about health has been shown to be a barrier to travel (Dolnicar, 2005; Kozak et al., 2007; Burattini, 2016).

There are many Personal Phobias that impact us. Fear of spiders, height, and darkness are common. For our tourists, fear of immunizations (shots) seems to be the most pronounced phobia for the travelling tourist (Noble et al., 2013). Awareness of one's Financial Future might influence consumer's decisions. For some a simple benefit cost analysis takes place prior to a purchase (Dowling and Staelin, 1994). For our tourist the uncertainty of the future economy may be a concern for some and not just the immediate price of a \$20 admission ticket.

Technology appears to be an attraction in fright tourism. As technology becomes more common in today's world, additional research into the risk associated with technology has emerged (Slovic, 1987). Virtual tourism and augmented reality at attractions have been used to enhance the experience at many destinations (Bristow, 1999; Kaelber, 2007; Mine et al., 2017). Countering the attraction are the fears that tourists may have regarding technology. Since technology is slowly being accepted by consumers, the dehumanizing aspect of a self-driving taxi (Tussyadiah et al., 2017), or the loss of control (Tussyadiah and Wang, 2016) appear to be the only contemporary fears of tourists.

Overall, there are many fears that tourists face in their decisions. The fears described are real fears and do not include paranormal or supernatural ones. While Hallowe'en is wrought with the supernatural, the lack of general and widespread acceptance has influenced our decision to not discuss it here. Further since these common tourist fears may deter travel, it is necessary to identify the importance for these fright tourists who despite these fears, expect a safe experience. The haunted attraction is specifically designed to do that: provide a safe yet entertaining and scary occurrence. The next section of this research note describes the methods employed to measure fear of participants.

Methods

To measure the fears found in Fright Tourism, participants visiting a haunted attraction were sought. DementedFX, a haunted house in Holyoke, Massachusetts was selected as the site for the survey since it has fairly large attendance record (10,000 guests per Hallowe'en season). The venue is an old factory building in an industrial/commercial zoned district that adds to the mysterious ambiance of the experience. To assess the measures of fear of participants visiting the haunted attraction, a survey instrument was created. Besides some

standard socioeconomic data of the respondents, each was asked to rate how frightful the fears were to them, on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not frightful and 10 being most frightful.

After survey pretesting, the instrument was administered by a team of trained students to the guests waiting in the queue to enter the haunted house. The attraction was open evenings on weekends during the month of October 2016. Surveys were collected on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturday and Sundays throughout the month. The dates were randomly selected to visit the site during the evenings on ten of the fourteen nights that the attraction was open to the public. The survey was administered to the groups before entering the attraction in order to reflect their feelings prior to the frightening experience, a point of anticipation that heightens the experience (Light, 2009).

Each group was approached and asked if they would freely participate in the study and a spokesperson was self-nominated. One hundred and seventy one surveys were administered to groups of visitors representing 570 visitors. Average group size was four and equally made up of women and men. The data represents an approximate sample of 5.7% of the 10,000 paying guests.

Results

To test the fears, participants were asked to rate how frightful the terms were to them on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not frightful and 10 being most frightful. Recall the survey was administered to the guests prior to entering the attraction. Most of the sample had attended some fright tourist attraction in the past (79.4%) and some had visited DementedFX during one of the two prior seasons. This reinforces the fact that these individuals have some basic expectations of what they may encounter, are expecting to be surprised and most importantly, they will exit the attraction safely, although perhaps a bit shaken.

Starting with crime, the participant was asked to rate the fear. How the individual might define crime, as well as the other fears were up to the respondent Table 1 summarizes the average response and standard deviation of our sample.

It appears that people were most concerned about their human-caused disasters, such as terrorism, with a mean response of 7.01 out of 10. Technology was least concerning with a mean response of 4.49. Fear of Government had the most variability of responses because it has the highest standard deviation at 3.22, followed by personal phobia with a standard deviation of 3.17. Human-caused disasters had the least standard deviation of 2.53 showing that the participant rate is similar.

Table 1. Fear Measures

	N	Mean	SD
Crime (Murder, rape, theft, fraud)	171	5.80	2.86
Government (Corruption, privacy, immigration, trust, control)	170	6.07	3.22
Human-caused Disasters (Climate change, terrorism, war)	171	7.01	2.53
Natural Disasters (Earthquakes, droughts, floods, hurricanes)	169	5.87	2.70
Personal Phobias (Tight spaces, darkness, insects)	166	5.42	3.17
Personal Health (Death, illness, injury)	166	5.33	3.04
Financial Future (Running out of money, loss of jobs, housing)	167	6.72	2.90
Technology (Artificial intelligence, privacy, cyber terrorism, drones)	167	4.49	2.98

Note: Responses recorded on a 1-10 scale with 10 being most frightful.

Next, a principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the measures of fear (Table 2). Cronbach’s Alpha for the all the fear measures is 0.709. The eight fears were reduced to two factors exceeding an eigenvalue of 1.0. After the varimax rotation, the two factors accounted for 48.01% of the variance.

The data suggests two major groupings of fear for participants entering a haunted attraction. The first factor includes crime, human-caused disasters, natural disasters, personal phobia, and personal health. This factor appears to define certain fears and has a reliability

coefficient of 0.678 with 33.787 percent of the variance explained. These are randomly occurring fears, but are certain to occur at some point. The only thing unknown to people is when they might occur. For example hurricanes are a likely natural disaster for those in America’s southeast during the late summer and early fall. It is a certainty. The likelihood to get hit by high winds, storm surges and flooded is a certain possibility.

Table 2. Factor Analysis for Fear Measures in Fright Tourism

Fear	Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained	Cumulative Variance Explained	Alpha
Factor 1 (Certain Fears)		2.703	33.787	33.787	0.678
Crime	0.652				
Human-caused disasters	0.646				
Natural disasters	0.706				
Personal Phobias	0.557				
Personal Health	0.659				
Factor 2 (Uncertain Fears)		1.138	14.224	48.011	0.539
Government	0.808				
Financial Future	0.618				
Technology	0.662				

The second factor includes government, financial future and technology. This group includes what one may call uncertain fears. This second factor had a reliability of 0.539 with 14.224 percent of the variance explained. These fears have a higher variability of chance. Recall the survey was undertaken just prior to the Presidential election in the US in fall of 2016. Even at this late moment, there was a great bit of uncertainty about the outcome of the election. Likewise the economic recession of 2008 was a surprise for many. Lastly

technological changes are occurring so quickly, mean 4.49/10, that many may have given up any fear and just accept it as a norm of modern day life.

In sum, the two factors provide one possible explanation of the fear groupings. The certain are recognized fears and the randomness of the fear is accepted, or at least recognized as a possibility by the participant. Fear of heights as a phobia is a known fear. One can minimize this threat by avoiding high spots. Fear of crime is a known event. Tourists know crime occurs and can take precautions to minimize the threat. We can avoid travel to the Caribbean in the fall hurricane season.

Uncertain fears combine elements of randomness plus an unknown chance of occurrence. Government's collapsing, financial instability and technological changes at astronomical rate might be accepted fears since most people feel they have no control of the outcomes.

Discussion

The survey was administered while the parties were waiting in the queue. This anticipation stage is purposeful since we wanted to measure the respondent's opinion prior to entering the haunted house. Since 20.6 percent (n=34) of the respondents had never been to a haunted attraction before, the uncertainty of what to expect may have heightened the experience. For the reader as well, we have postponed describing the attraction for the same reason.

DementedFX follows the general theme of a scientific experiment gone bad ... really bad. Once the participants enter the attraction, after the staff provide a short verbal safety check and warning, the guests enter an elevator. And then the fun begins. Elements of human-caused disasters, like cloning and mad-scientists taking control since government failed to protect us, personal phobias including darkness and tight spaces, and the exposure to

unquestionable healthy environments are the primary elements of the experience. Loud sounds, bright lights and darkness are enhanced by startling actors and animatronics, some shrouded in darkness, others in hospital operating theater like brightness offend the visitor's senses. Other haunted elements are present, but we do not want to spoil the experience for the reader.

The larger grouping from the factor analysis makes some sense in that several of the fears have been found to be linked. Some researchers (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005) have found that health, physical, financial risks are linked in some manner. Likewise social and natural disasters are often similar when the action of one causes an impact on the other. Consider the environmental consequences of climate change, certainly one caused by humans.

The uncertain fears make sense as well. The survey was executed just prior to the 2016 Presidential election. Not knowing the outcome of the election is certainly tied to concerns of the economy. Technology is perhaps an outlier since the dependence of technology in our modern world is readily accepted, yet some people do not fully understand it. Uncertainty plays an important role in travel. Baral et al. (2004) found a decrease in visitation following political unrest, a hijacking, and September 11th's terror attack. This might be obvious for international tourist, but for the local urban fright tourist, the risk may be accepted.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the haunted attraction, visitors are saved by a group of apparent renegade military-like combatants. Since the theme of the attraction is one of a scientific lab gone-bad, the guests are "rescued" and allowed to escape the fright tourism attraction to safety. This brings some degree of closure to the evening. This ending is what King and

Hourani (2007) have determined to be more favorable than the teaser endings where the evil is revived.

Future research should explore the relationships among participants in fright tourism attractions. Cultural differences have been found by college students who participate in risk taking and sensation seeking experiences (Pizam et al. 2004). Participants have previously identified the importance of preferred companions (e.g., friends, family, solo etc.). The haunted attraction industry needs this information as well. Milman (2001) found that consumers want highly interactive adventures built on fantasy, mystery and futuristic and/or science fiction themes. This dovetails nicely in the fright tourism arena. Theme parks in general must reinvent themselves to meet a changing clientele (McClung, 1991). In so doing more thrilling opportunities must be created to satiate the demand of the guests.

Understanding fright tourist consumer behavior is important. The two groups may help fright tourist managers create two scenarios. The more plausible fears are at least recognized by the public and despite the general awareness of the fear, may create a modest fright tourist attraction suitable for children. Earthquakes have been simulated in attractions with a shaky floor and flying debris. Tight spaces are perfect for those feeling claustrophobic.

The second smaller group includes element of fear that are not so easily defined or understood. It is difficult to simulate a collapse of a government, or financial decline. Technology gone awry may be simulated with computers taking control. See the movie *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970) for example of such a threat (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0064177/>). Given the uncertainty of these fears, haunted attractions are challenged to simulate these fears to a more mature audience. For the uncertain fears, we may need to leave it to the Disney Imagineers to come up with a way to simulate these fears.

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