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Unveiling the Impact of Nature-Based Tourism Marketing: A Phenomenological Analysis of Experiences and Emotional Engagement on Tourist Behaviour in the United Arab Emirates

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Journal: FIIB Business Review, December 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/23197145241297426>

Research Background

The study explores the impact of nature-based tourism marketing on tourist behavior in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a region primarily known for its man-made attractions. Despite the growing global interest in sustainable tourism, there is a significant gap in understanding how nature-based marketing strategies influence tourist preferences and behaviors, particularly in the UAE. The research addresses this gap by focusing on the role of authenticity, emotional appeal, and sustainability in nature-based tourism marketing.

Industry Context : The UAE has traditionally been recognized for its luxury and urban attractions, such as the Burj Khalifa and Palm Islands. However, the country is increasingly shifting its focus toward promoting its natural resources, such as the Hajar Mountains, deserts, and beaches, to diversify its tourism offerings and attract environmentally conscious travelers. The study highlights the UAE's efforts to integrate sustainable tourism practices, such as the Dubai Sustainable Tourism Initiative, to address challenges like over-tourism and environmental degradation.



Research Objectives

- Assess the impact of nature-based marketing strategies on tourist decisions and behaviors in the UAE.
- Investigate the relationship between authenticity and emotional appeal in marketing campaigns and their influence on tourism spending on local activities.
- Analyze tourists' perceptions of sustainability and responsible tourism practices promoted through marketing.



Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in the Travel Career Pattern (TCP) model, which explains how tourists' motivations and behaviors evolve over time based on their cumulative travel experiences. The TCP model categorizes motivations into three layers: core motives (e.g., relaxation, escapism), middle motives (e.g., nature, self-growth), and outer motives (e.g., self-actualization). The framework helps analyze how nature-based marketing resonates differently with tourists at various stages of their travel careers.



Research Methodology

- The study employs a qualitative phenomenological methodology to capture tourists' lived experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 27 international tourists aged 25–60, recruited through purposive sampling. Interviews were conducted in natural settings such as deserts, mountains, and water bodies in the UAE during the tourist season (October–December 2023).
- Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase process, was used to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data.

Key Findings

- **Nature-Based Destination Marketing Awareness:** Social media influencers and visual campaigns were highly effective in promoting natural attractions, especially among novice travelers.
- **Influence on Tourist Preferences and Choices:** Nature-based marketing significantly impacts travel decisions, with novice travelers drawn to visual appeal and experienced travelers prioritizing authenticity and cultural richness.
- **Authenticity of Marketing Content:** Authentic portrayals of natural beauty and cultural heritage were critical for experienced travelers, fostering emotional connections and trust.
- **Emotional Connection:** Marketing materials emphasizing natural beauty evoked strong emotional responses, influencing travel decisions and creating lasting impressions.
- **Implications for Destinations:** Nature-based marketing drives increased spending on local accommodations, guided tours, and products, benefiting local economies.
- **Responsible Tourism:** Participants supported marketing campaigns promoting eco-friendly practices and sustainable tourism to preserve natural attractions.
- **Challenges and Concerns:** Over-tourism and environmental degradation were identified as potential risks of excessive marketing of natural attractions.

Academic Contribution

- **Extension of the TCP Model:** The study applies the TCP framework to nature-based tourism, highlighting how tourist motivations evolve from novelty-seeking to self-actualization as travel experience increases.
- **Authenticity in Marketing:** The research emphasizes the importance of authentic and culturally integrated marketing campaigns in fostering emotional connections and enhancing tourist satisfaction.
- **Sustainability in Tourism Marketing:** The study underscores the need for responsible tourism practices in marketing to ensure long-term destination sustainability.
- **Tourist Segmentation:** The findings highlight the need for tailored marketing strategies to cater to different tourist segments, from novice to experienced travelers.
- This research provides valuable insights for destination marketers and policymakers in the UAE, offering strategies to promote nature-based tourism while ensuring environmental and economic sustainability. Future research could explore the role of advanced technologies, government policies, and comparative studies with other successful nature-based destinations.