

**Familiar and Total Strangers: An Exploratory Study of In-Group and Out-Group
Perceptions among International Ski Resort Visitors**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the current study is to address the dearth of extant studies on tourist-tourist interactions and to further explore tourist perception of and interaction with other ‘stranger’ travelers of the same (in-group) and other (out-group) nationalities and how this influences evaluation of the tourist experience.

Method and Data: We conducted a study in a Japanese ski-resort that is also popular among Western and Asian tourists. We collected 266 valid responses from visitors from Australia (151) and Japan (115) to a questionnaire containing open-ended questions about salient aspects of the tourism experience at the resort. We use content analysis to allow us to perform statistical analysis of differences between the two samples. In addition, we present representative transcript quotes on tourist-tourist interactions for qualitative interpretation.

Findings: Tourists are keenly aware of the presence of other ‘stranger’ tourists, both those of the same and of different nationalities. More than 44 percent of the Japanese respondents mentioned the large number of foreign tourists. Among Australian skiers 13 percent mentioned the presence of other Australians as salient or unexpected, while 11 percent viewed it as negative. Japanese mentioned out-group tourists more often, whereas Australians mentioned in-group tourists more often. Differences were statistically significant.

Key Contributions: The study shows how in- and out-group perceptions in tourist-tourist interaction influence satisfaction. It builds upon the research on interactions with and perceptions of in-group and out-group tourists among Japanese and Western tourists, and expands it to a different tourism destination and activity. The study sheds additional light on the subject of tourist-tourist interaction and the dynamics involved in attracting multiple cross-national customer segments. It shows that perceived incompatibility and numerical imbalance among segments affects the satisfaction with the tourism experience in the destination among members of other geographic segments. It also provides managerial implications regarding the importance of balancing the geographic customer mix.

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INTRODUCTION

Marketers of goods and services routinely use market segmentation as a strategic tool to efficiently match corporate resources with demand. The field of tourism is no exception; practitioners routinely use the concept of marketing segmentation as a strategic tool, while academic researchers often use it as an analytical or prescriptive tool (Lazarevski and Dolnicar 2008).

Lazarevski and Dolnicar (2008) argue that, in spite of the wide adoption of market segmentation in tourism, the problem of potential incompatibility of multiple tourist segments has been widely ignored by both the tourism industry and academia. Segment incompatibility in tourism occurs when the presence of one segment leads to a reduction of the quality of the vacation experience of another segment, other things being equal. In contrast, segment compatibility occurs when the presence of another segment does not impede the quality of the vacation experience of other segments. The term ‘vacation experience’ refers to the context in which (in)compatibility is being examined. This context could be a destination, a hotel, a restaurant, a resort, a tourist attraction, or even supporting infrastructure such as the airport or bus station.

Due to its ease of use, geographic segmentation is the most popular segmentation base in the hospitality and travel industry, and international tourism marketers often use country (or region) of origin as a segmentation criterion (Morrison 2002). Ritchie (1977) points out that despite the focus on inbound tourists it is normally a country’s own residents who represent its most important source of travelers, both in terms of numbers and expenditures. The resulting dilemma facing tourism managers involves the extent to which foreign tourists are desirable and should be actively sought in preference to resident travelers.

Morrison (2002) notes that the concept of the *customer mix* –the combination of customers that use or are attracted to a specific hospitality or travel organization– is closely related to market segmentation. He argues that, as the types of customers who use a destination or individual business influence its image among other current and potential customers, and directly influence the perceived quality of experience and satisfaction levels among other customers, tourism managers need to consider whether different customer segments are compatible. Pearce (2005), in his discussion of relationships in the international tourist experience, implicitly refers to the issue of incompatibility among geographic tourist segments when he notes the difficulties and rewards involving the interaction with fellow travelers who often have culturally different backgrounds. These issues are of interest both to managers of destinations and to managers of individual businesses in the destination in as far as customer interactions influence satisfaction with the destination as a whole and with services provided by individual businesses in the destination. Pearce (2005) distinguishes three main categories of social players that travelers interact with in the tourism experience: 1) the ‘self’ in various

roles and moods; 2) other travelers; and 3) hosts. The ‘other travelers’ category is subdivided into strangers, family, and friends. ‘Strangers’ are then subdivided into two types: 1) strangers, familiar like the travelers themselves and 2) unknown strangers. The ‘host’ category is subdivided into 1) service personnel and 2) the local community.

With respect to the subcategory of ‘other travelers,’ the construct of in-group versus out-group has been applied to distinguish between people that belong to the tourist’s in-group and those that belong to the out-group (Pearce 2005). One related analytical construct that may be useful in a tourist-tourist interaction context is that of the ‘familiar stranger,’ which refers to fellow unknown travelers whose faces tend to become familiar because of temporary physical proximity during travel at airport waiting lounges or during transportation (Pearce 2005). Yagi (2001) has extended this ‘familiar stranger’ concept in a cross-national tourism context as referring to unknown travelers of the same nationality as that of the traveler, i.e., the in-group, whereas ‘total strangers’ refers to people from different countries, i.e., the out-group.

Several authors (e.g., Dann and Phillips 2001; Guthrie and Anderson 2007; Reichenberger 2014; Yagi 2001; Yagi and Pearce 2007) note that while a substantial body of research exists on tourist-host interactions (cf. Ward and Berno 2011), to date there has been very little research on tourist-tourist interaction and its influence on tourist experience of the destination. Reichenberger (2014) asserts that while the visitor experience is influenced by the physical environment, products and services, and the social aspect, the topic of social interactions between ‘stranger’ visitors is a thus far neglected area of tourism research. Yagi (2001) also points out the lack of academic studies about the way in which tourists perceive other tourists –a construct that can be conceived as a result of tourist-tourist interaction– and its influence on how tourists experience the destination. We will now first review the limited extant literature on tourist-tourist interaction and perception in international tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Yagi (2001) notes that interactions or encounters with other tourists can either consist of direct, personal contact (i.e., socializing) or indirect, impersonal contact where the presence of other tourists merely forms a backdrop to the tourist experience. In the context of international tourism, perception of other ‘stranger’ tourists can be thought of as the result of the more superficial impersonal (indirect) interaction or the more involving personal (direct) interaction with other ‘stranger’ tourists at the destination. Interaction with other tourists either may be limited to indirect interaction or may also be combined with or followed by direct interaction. These interactions may range from negative, neutral, to positive and the experience with a limited number of strangers from a given country may shape the perception of other stranger tourists from the same country as a group. Figure 1 summarizes the relationships among the constructs described above in a conceptual model. The model assumes that the presence of

other ‘stranger’ tourists will be one factor in the overall evaluation (satisfaction or dissatisfaction) of the experience at the destination.

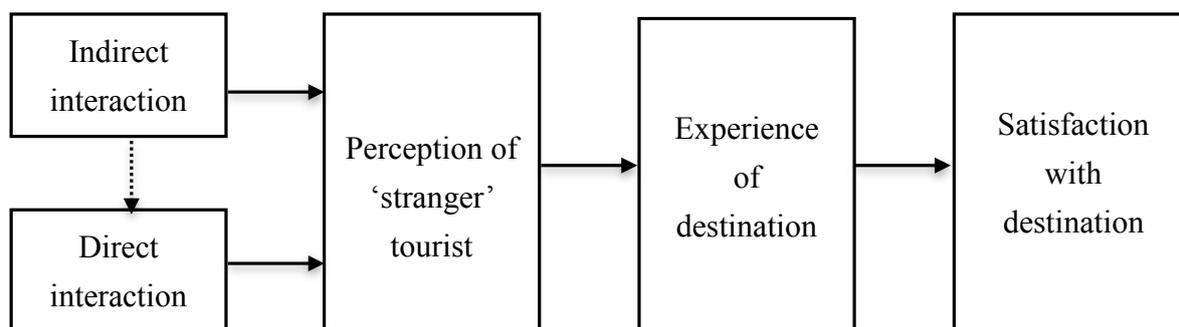


Figure 1. Model of Tourist-Tourist Interaction in International Tourism Destinations

While there is a dearth of studies on tourist-tourist interaction and tourist-tourist perception of ‘stranger’ tourists in international tourism, notable exceptions are the studies by Yagi (2001), Yagi and Pearce (2007), and Reichenberger (2014).

Reichenberger (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with 76 international individual backpacker tourists in New Zealand regarding personal tourist-tourist social interactions between previously unacquainted (i.e., ‘stranger’) visitors and found that profound interactions were more likely to positively impact satisfaction with the tourism experience. Reichenberger reports that the interviewees in her study perceived the vast majority of all traveler-traveler interactions as positive.

Yagi’s (2001) content analysis of online travelogues written by Japanese and American travelers shows that Japanese and Americans hold different perceptions of other tourists. When Japanese describe other tourists, they tend to make clear distinctions between Japanese and non-Japanese and to have more direct contacts with Japanese tourists than with tourists from other countries. In contrast, Americans are willing to make personal contact with non-American tourists.

Yagi and Pearce (2007) conducted a survey among 409 tourists visiting Australia, comparing how Western (208) and Japanese (201) tourists perceived manipulated pictures featuring different numbers of tourists (levels of density) and two types of ethnicity (Caucasian and Asian). Japanese preferred seeing Caucasians rather than Asians, while Westerners did not show strong preferences for either Asians or Caucasians.

While these studies provide valuable insights on tourist-tourist interaction and perception of ‘stranger’ tourists in international tourism, they also have important limitations. Reichenberger’s (2014) research did not include domestic travelers from New Zealand, so a comparison between resident tourists and foreign tourists could not be made. In addition, the type of traveler interviewed was mostly the younger, single (66%) and long-term backpacker traveler from Europe (72%), North America (20%), and Australia/Oceania (7%). This leads to

a strong Western cultural bias in the results and limits the type of social interaction covered in the research to personal interaction between travelers, which is typical for the backpacker traveler. Yagi (2001) analyzed travelogues, which means that 1) data were not collected during the actual tourism experience and 2) the sample frame was limited to only the type of tourists who write travelogues about their experience. Yagi and Pearce (2007) used manipulated pictures in their study and thus did not measure actual experiences. Moreover, tourists depicted in the manipulated pictures were not clearly identifiable in terms of nationality. In addition, Yagi (2001) investigated differences between Japanese and American tourists and results cannot be generalized to other nationalities, whereas Yagi and Pearce (2007) studied differences between Japanese and Western tourists, which does not allow inference about tourists of specific nationalities other than Japanese. Yagi (2003) discusses the same study as reported in Yagi and Pearce (2007) and makes an important caveat in noting that Japanese tourists naturally were expecting to see Westerners in Australia, and that the study's location may have influenced the results for the Japanese respondents. She also points out that if the destination had been an Asian country the responses of Japanese tourists might have been completely different. Finally, in contrast to the study by Reichenberger (2014), Yagi and Pearce (2007) only measured the non-personal or indirect type of interaction.

Thus, many questions regarding the nature of cross-cultural tourist-tourist interaction and perception, the influence of other 'stranger' travelers on evaluation of the tourist experience and the influence of destination type or activity type on these types of evaluation, remain yet unanswered.

The purpose of the current study is to partly fill these gaps in the literature while building upon the studies by Yagi (2001) and Yagi and Pearce (2007). The study examines how tourist perception of and interaction with other 'stranger' travelers of the same (in-group) and other (out-group) nationalities influence evaluation of the tourist experience, and whether there are differences between Japanese and Western tourists.

More specifically, we address the following research questions:

RQ 1: Are there differences between Japanese and Western tourists regarding the perceived influence of in-group and out-group 'stranger' tourists on the evaluation of the tourist experience?

RQ 2: Are there differences between Japanese and Western tourists in the manner and frequency in which they refer to 'stranger' tourists of the in-group and out-group?

METHOD AND DATA

Selection of the Destination

Yagi (2001) and Yagi and Pearce (2007) studied Japanese and Western tourists in non-Japanese destinations. In order to expand upon these studies we decided to compare Japanese

and Western tourist perceptions of ‘stranger’ tourists in a Japanese domestic destination that is also popular among Western and Asian tourists. In addition, we selected a type of tourism destination and activity that is different from the rainforest setting studied by Yagi and Pearce (2007).

We chose the Niseko ski resort located in the prefecture of Hokkaido in Northern Japan as our research location. The resort originally catered mainly to Japanese skiers, but went into decline after domestic skiing peaked in the early 1990s (Foster 2011). Niseko was subsequently discovered by a small number of Australian skiers whose word-of-mouth promotion, in combination with a 1995 article in the Australian ski magazine *Snow Action* that extolled Niseko’s extraordinary powder snow conditions, led to a steady increase in the number of Australian skiers in the early 2000s (Hirota 2015). This caught the attention of Australian real estate investors (many of whom were wealthy skiers) and travel agencies, which started to actively promote Niseko as a ski resort (Hirota 2015). Since 2007 there also has been a notable increase of tourists from Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and other Asian countries (Foster 2011). In addition, an increase in interest in powder snow skiing among skiers in Europe and North America and recent snow shortages in these parts of the world have led to a dramatic increase in the number of skiers from these areas in Niseko.

These developments have caused the main target segment of the resort to shift away from Japanese patrons towards Australian patrons, combined with strong growth in visitors from Asia, North America, and Europe. Thus, we believe that the Niseko ski resort constitutes an appropriate environment for conducting a study regarding tourist-tourist interaction and perception of in-group and out-group tourists across geographic segments, including Japanese and Westerners.

Survey Method and Sample

The current study was conducted as part of a larger study that explored domestic and international ski patron perception and evaluation of the overall tourism experience. Research assistants individually approached Japanese and Western ski patrons on-site at four different ski fields that together form the Niseko ski resort between January 6-9, 2015, and asked them to fill out questionnaires.

The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it allowed us to gauge respondent feedback on a wide range of sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the ski resort. Thus, in addition to a number of basic demographic questions, including country of residence, the questionnaire contained a number of generally phrased open-ended questions. These open-ended questions inquired: 1) about the things that had left an impression during the patron’s current visit; 2) about the things that were different from what the respondent had expected; 3) whether there was anything the respondent was or had been experiencing problems with during the visit or whether there was anything he/she would like to have changed or improved. Since

the survey was exploratory we did not ask questions specifically inquiring about perception of other tourists so as not to lead respondents towards a specific direction or topic. We were interested to know which topics respondents considered important or salient enough for them to voluntarily report. While respondents pointed out a range of sources of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, for the current paper we focus only on those responses that are related to tourist-tourist perceptions and direct and indirect interactions. While our initial sample included a number of Western respondents from North America, Europe, and New Zealand, the number of Australian respondents was much higher. In order to conduct meaningful quantitative analyses based on nationality, we excluded all non-Australian Westerners from our sample. The final sample retained for analysis contained valid responses from 151 Australian and 115 Japanese visitors.

Method of Analysis

Given the open-ended nature of the questions, we use the analytical technique of content analysis, which makes it possible to code respondent comments into categories that can be counted and used in quantitative analysis. More specifically, we coded comments referring to a respondent's in-group (tourists from the same country as the respondent) and out-group (tourists from other countries).

A research assistant first transcribed the handwritten answers collected through the Japanese and English questionnaires into a database. We then verified the database against the original questionnaires and corrected any mistakes that had occurred due to difficulties with handwriting recognition. For this study, the lead author translated all comments related to perceptions of other 'stranger' tourists from Japanese into English and these translations were verified by the co-authors. We then coded the answers to the open-ended questions whenever the respondents were mentioning other 'stranger' tourists, including those of the same nationality and those of different nationalities. Below we first present the results of the quantitative analysis, i.e., percentages of Japanese and Australian respondents who mentioned 'stranger' tourists of the same or other nationalities in a positive, negative or neutral way. We then conduct Chi-square analysis to compare Japanese and Australian respondents.

Finally, to enable a deeper understanding of our data, we also present a qualitative analysis of the more representative comments of respondents from both nations.

RESULTS

Quantitative Analysis

First, from the comments under each of the open-ended questions, we counted and aggregated references to foreign tourists or tourists from the same country as the respondent across the Japanese and Australian respondents. It should be noted that we counted references

in a binary way ('0' or '1'). This means that even if a respondent mentioned in-group 'stranger' tourists multiple times, or across multiple questions, this was counted as 1 reference. We counted references to out-group tourists in the same way. The analysis therefore does not represent the within-respondent frequency (or intensity) of references to each type of 'stranger' tourists. We compared the frequencies of references to members of in-groups and out-groups between the Australian and Japanese respondent groups, and conducted Chi-square tests. Results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary Statistics for Reference to In-Group and Out-Group Members

	in-group		out-group	
	count	percentage	count	percentage
Australia (n=151)	20	13	12	8
Japan (n=115)	4	3	51	44
Chi-Square Tests	$\chi^2 = 7.5863, p=0.006, df=1$		$\chi^2 = 47.8566, p=0.000, df=1$	

Eight percent of Australians referred to foreigners (i.e., members of the out-group), while forty-four percent of Japanese did so. The difference was statistically significant at the 1% level ($\chi^2 = 47.8566, p=0.000, df=1$). In contrast, thirteen percent of Australians mentioned fellow Australians (i.e., members of their in-group), while three percent of Japanese mentioned fellow Japanese guests. The difference was statistically significant at the 1% level ($\chi^2 = 7.5863, p=0.006, df=1$). Although not shown in Table 1, eleven percent of Australians mentioned the large number of fellow Australians as negative.

In the next section we conduct a qualitative analysis by introducing and interpreting some of the more representative comments made by Japanese and Australian respondents.

Qualitative Analysis

Japanese respondents. Many of the Japanese respondents expressed a feeling of alienation and discomfort, of being in a place that does not feel Japanese, and of being overwhelmed by the presence of foreign tourists and foreign languages:

“There are too many foreigners. Public announcements and signs are also mostly in foreign languages.”

“When I visited 13 years ago there were almost only Japanese, but this time I am surprised that the place has become such a foreigners’ town.”

“This is not Japan.”

In contrast, a very small minority of Japanese patrons also explicitly expressed positive

views regarding foreigners and the foreign atmosphere in Niseko:

“There is a foreign atmosphere, which is good.”

One respondent commented on the cosmopolitan feel of the destination as a positive and stimulating aspect of the visitor experience:

“The fact that there are not just Japanese, but a lot of people from a variety of countries gives [the place] a lively impression.”

One patron expressed disappointment with the perceived neglect of Japanese as target customers by the destination’s management:

“There are so many foreign tourists (skiers). Many of the restaurants, bars [and shops] don’t seem to be considering Japanese as potential customers, and that was a bit perplexing.”

Another patron echoes this feeling of being neglected as a customer and also points out a perceived lack of willingness among foreign tourists to adjust to the local customs and mores when on holiday:

“The number of foreigners. [The resort] is putting a lot of effort in attracting inbound [tourists], but I would like them to also pay attention to locals and domestic tourists. Especially in the Hirafu area everything is in English, it would be nice if they would put a bit more effort in being hospitable to Japanese tourists. I would like the foreigners to be aware of the fact that they are visiting a foreign country. Their manners are not good (of some of them...).”

One respondent appears to suggest that Japanese don’t feel comfortable approaching non-Japanese. This may be either because of the feeling of reserve to talk to members of one’s out-group or because of a lack of confidence in one’s foreign language skills:

“On the ski fields I couldn’t find any Japanese people to ask for directions when I did not know which slope to take.”

One patron refers to feeling a need to have more members of the in-group around:

“It is a pity that there are so many foreigners and so few Japanese.”

Some respondents also refer to perceived crowding as a result of the influx of foreign tourists:

“There are too many foreigners, waiting times for the ski lifts have increased, [and] restaurants are also full of people.”

One Japanese respondent mentioned the fact that Australian-owned sports shops do not consider Japanese as potential customers. In addition, the perceived lack of manners of foreign patrons is a source of frustration:

“In the sports shop [the personnel] doesn’t understand Japanese. Payment is in dollars. The [English] native skiers and [snow] boarders have bad manners.”

Several Japanese respondents also refer to the perceived large presence of Chinese tourists and the perceived lack of manners and different customs of this segment:

“I feel that apart from Caucasians there are also many Chinese.”

“The manners of the Chinese people are bad. They talk in a loud voice. The way they take a bath in the onsen (the hotel does not warn them), it was disgusting to look at them.”

“The fact that Chinese people left their bath towels in the [public] bathtub and went outside. Also the fact that Chinese walk around inside the hotel wearing pajamas bothered me.”

“The toilets at the Hanazono ski field are dirtier compared to before. I think the fact that the number of foreigners has increased (recently also Asian people) is causing this.”

One person commented on not being able to relax because of the many foreign tourists in Niseko, and also points out the strong feeling of anxiety due to perceived differences in customs and manners of out-group tourists when using the street and walkways:

“There are many foreigners. We can’t relax at leisure. The foreigners have bad manners when walking. It was scary when I was driving.”

In contrast, one Japanese respondent perceived tourists as having good manners:

“There are many foreign tourists. The people whom we have met and seen all had good manners. The local people and the tourists are laid back and have [good] morals.”

Australian respondents. Many Australian patrons are very pleased with the politeness and friendliness of Japanese staff, the famous *omotenashi* hospitality that is typical for Japanese service providers. However, many Australians feel that there are too many Australians and too few Japanese in Niseko, which inhibits the ability to experience the destination as an authentic Japanese cultural experience:

“Very clean, pleasant, friendly and helpful Japanese staff. Too many Australians; not many Japanese locals or tourists.”

“I have not been in Niseko for four years, and now I notice less Japanese culture and more Australians, which is very sad!”

“Too many Australians. On first visit we didn’t realize how many Australians frequented the area.”

One patron referred to the bad manners of many of the fellow Australian patrons:

“Lots of Aussies (rude ones!)”

Many Australians referred alternatively to foreigners, tourists, or people from English-speaking countries and it is not entirely clear whether they include fellow Australians in these terms:

“Many foreigners around the Niseko area.”

“[The] amount of tourists from English-speaking countries.”

One person also mentioned a perceived large number of European patrons:

“How many European people are here.”

Another Australian respondent pointed out a perceived increase in the number of Chinese visitors:

“More Chinese people.”

One Australian exhibited a clear understanding of Japanese rules of behavior in hot spring

spas and referred to other breaches of rules of conduct by foreign patrons, even suggesting the need for punishment of such violations:

“For tourists who do not obey the rules, they should be fined heavily. I came across 2 sets of people taking photos in onsen (hot spring spa) and jumping queues -no respect of rules!”

Finally, some people expressed the need to discourage the number of Australian tourists by the destination’s management and to attract more resident Japanese visitors. This suggests the perceived need for a more balanced customer mix among tourists:

“Less Aussies.”

“Please encourage more Japanese skiers.”

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

This study shows that, under certain conditions, tourists seem to be keenly aware of the presence of other ‘stranger’ tourists, both those of the same (‘familiar’ strangers) nationality and those of different (‘total’ strangers) nationalities.

The study builds upon the research on interactions with and perceptions of in-group and out-group tourists among Japanese and Western tourists (Yagi 2001, Yagi and Pearce 2007), and expands it to a different type of tourism destination and activity. It sheds additional light on the subject of tourist-tourist interaction and the dynamics involved in attracting multiple cross-national customer segments. It shows that perceived incompatibility and numerical imbalance among segments may affect the satisfaction with the tourism experience in the destination among members of other geographic segments.

Findings of this study suggest that when a foreign tourist segment becomes overly dominant this may lead to dissatisfaction with the destination among members of the resident segment. The dominance of the foreign segment also may create a perception among members of the resident (domestic) segment of one’s own country having been ‘invaded’ and ‘taken over’ by foreign tourists, leading to feelings of cognitive and emotional discomfort and even resentment. In this study, many of the Japanese respondents expressed feelings of surprise or shock at the large number of foreign tourists in Niseko. Many of the comments by Japanese patrons about foreigners either carried a somewhat negative undertone or were explicitly negative. This phenomenon resembles Furnham and Bochner’s (1986) description of situations where tourists form a majority and cause hosts to be a minority, or of cases where tourists give the natives *culture shock* by causing the native culture to change.

At the same time, we found that even some of the Australian patrons perceived the overwhelming presence of fellow Australians as a negative aspect of the tourism experience. Thus, a dominant presence of a foreign visitor segment also may cause dissatisfaction among members of the dominant foreign segment itself. In addition, the combination of a large number of foreign patrons, few resident patrons, and a strong emphasis on foreign languages, foreign stores, and non-domestic service personnel may result in a perceived lack of cultural authenticity of the destination. In fact, many Australian patrons perceived the Niseko resort to be lacking in 'Japaneseness'.

The current study confirms Yagi's (2001) and Yagi and Pearce's (2007) observation that Japanese tend to make clear distinctions between fellow Japanese (members of the in-group) and non-Japanese tourists (members of the out-group). Indeed, Japanese respondents mentioned foreign tourists more often than the Australian respondents did, and this difference was statistically significant. In contrast, Australian respondents mentioned members of their in-group (i.e., fellow Australian tourists) more often than the Japanese respondents did, and this difference was statistically significant. While cultural differences between Japanese and Australians can be assumed to partly explain our findings, it seems plausible that findings were also influenced by two situational factors: 1) the survey was conducted in a Japanese destination; 2) there was a large presence of foreign (from the Japanese perspective) and Australian (from the Australian perspective) tourists in the destination.

Yagi's (2003) observation that in a tourism setting, preference for members of the in-group based on ethnic appearance may not apply when tourists are making impersonal or indirect encounters is not supported by our findings. Comments by Japanese respondents referred mostly to indirect encounters and suggest a preference for having more people of their in-group present as opposed to people of their out-group. This is the opposite tendency from the findings that Japanese prefer seeing their out-group (Caucasians) rather than their in-group (Asians), as reported by Yagi and Pearce (2007). This Japanese preference for seeing Caucasians in a touristic setting does not appear to apply to situations when Japanese travel inside Japan and when they perceive to be outnumbered by foreign tourists.

Yagi and Pearce's (2007) finding that Westerners did not show strongly marked preferences for members of either their in-group or out-group seems to be only partly confirmed by our findings as some Australians perceived the large presence of their in-group as negative, while other Australians expressed a preference for interactions with members of their out-group, i.e., Japanese, rather than with fellow Australians.

While Triandis (1995) suggests that members of collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan) make clearer distinctions among in- and out-groups than do members of individualist cultures (e.g., Australia), a detailed review by Brewer and Yuki (2007) on the complexity of cross-cultural differences in social identity and in-group versus out-group distinctions suggests that reality may not be that simple. The issue of cross-cultural differences in the making of distinctions

between in-groups and out-groups has not been sufficiently studied in the context of international tourism. We do not know whether Japanese and Australian respondents in our study defined and perceived in-groups and out-groups in the same way.

Moreover, it is not clear whether differences between Japanese and Australian tourists in referring to same-nation and foreign visitors in our study are due to cultural differences or due to differences between domestic (resident) versus foreign tourists. Most likely our findings are the result of an interaction effect between cultural and situational factors.

Finally, in contrast to Yagi's (2003) finding that Japanese consider (other) Asians as part of their in-group, findings of our study show that Japanese clearly perceive non-Japanese Asians as part of their out-group, and this specifically seems to apply to Chinese tourists.

Managerial Implications

Our findings have implications for international tourism destination management in general and the management of the Niseko ski resort in particular. This study demonstrates that tourist-tourist indirect encounters appear to be an important factor in tourists' overall evaluation of the tourism experience. This means that managers of tourist destinations need to consider how to manage the international customer mix to ensure tourist satisfaction. Many of the comments by Japanese patrons suggest that Niseko's relatively recent shift in target customers from Japanese to Australians, as described above, is causing a considerable amount of resentment among the domestic skiers who feel that Niseko is no longer Japanese and that the resort's management is neglecting their needs. Japanese patrons, therefore, are starting to stay away from Niseko and are increasingly switching to other ski resorts. This, however, also appears to be starting to become a negative factor for some of the Australian visitors who are not only looking for powder snow, but also want to experience Japanese culture and want to interact with Japanese locals and Japanese resident tourists.

It thus appears advisable to avoid an overwhelming dominance of one specific geographic customer segment, as this dominance may alienate other segments. It is also clear that in the case of Niseko it is important to maintain a proper balance between Australian, Japanese, and other Western and Eastern tourist segments, since Australians prefer to have Japanese tourists present in a Japanese destination and Japanese tourists do not want to be outnumbered by foreign tourists and overwhelmed by foreign languages in a domestic destination. In addition, the increase in Chinese visitors appears to be off-putting to some Japanese and Australian tourists. If the balance in the customer mix is disturbed this may cause Japanese patrons to avoid the destination, which in turn will lead to dissatisfaction among foreign patrons who feel that the destination is no longer sufficiently authentic as a Japanese travel experience. It is important to avoid this vicious circle. For the destination to be considered authentically Japanese by foreign patrons, the presence of resident tourists and local cultural artifacts and experiences is crucial. Finally, a well-balanced customer mix of tourists

from Japan and the rest of the world will make the resort less reliant on inbound customers, as overreliance on inbound customers is a risky strategy in times of global economic and financial crises, strong currency fluctuations, and other uncontrollable external factors such as pandemics and natural disasters.

Limitations and Further Research

The current study looked at the perception of tourist-tourist interaction in a ski resort. Findings can therefore not be generalized to other touristic activities. Moreover, the situation in the Niseko resort may be somewhat extreme or unique because of the relatively overwhelming presence of a specific foreign (in this case, Australian) tourist segment. This means that results of this study may be destination-specific. Nevertheless, other international tourist destinations may also feature similar unbalanced customer mixes, leading to similar problems. One additional and important caveat is that the current study represents a snapshot of the customer mix in the Niseko resort during a very brief time frame. The resort's customer mix at different times of the ski season is likely to fluctuate, which may affect visitor perceptions of the relative density of visitors from different countries or regions. Moreover, the study only compared Japanese and Australian visitors and does not reflect perceptions among other geographic segments. In addition, as the study was exploratory and used open-ended questions, we did not specifically cue respondents about their perception of other tourists and did not include specific questions using quantitative scales. We also did not include scaled questions, which would have allowed us to quantitatively measure satisfaction levels. Follow-up studies that quantitatively measure the constructs, studies in other types of destinations, and research that samples a more varied cross-cultural customer mix, are called for. Finally, on-site in-depth qualitative interviews with tourists are needed to enable thicker descriptions and better understanding of the links among the many aspects of the tourism experience.

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