

Plog's and Butler's Models: a critical review of Psychographic Tourist Typology and the Tourist Area Life Cycle

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Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the two popular cited theories in tourism studies, Psychographic Tourist Typology by Stanley Plog and the Tourism Area Life Cycles (TALC) by Richard Butler, which have been widely accepted and applied by scholars worldwide and have retained their relevance more than three decades as the pioneer concepts in Tourism. By capturing and reviewing scholarly articles, this paper identifies some key absent issues that should be concerned when use theories in future tourism research.

Key words: *Tourism, Tourist Typology, Tourist Area Life Cycle*

Introduction

The most cited theories in tourism researches, Psychographic types of travellers and destination life cycle by Stanley Plog and the Tourism Area Life Cycles (TALC) by Richard Butler, have been widely accepted and applied by scholars worldwide and have retained their relevance more than three decades as the pioneer concepts in Tourism. Plog's psychographic typology classifies tourists by their personalities and distributes tourists to destination based on their dominant characteristics (Plog, 1974). Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle model introduces the stage of development of tourism areas and suggests that the increase of tourism is associated with impacts (Diedrich, Garcia-Buades, 2009).

Those two gained the popularity to later researchers have attempted to verify the models. Even Plog's and Butler's models have been extensively taught and most cited works in tourism studies, the validity and applicability of Plog's and Butler's model have been remarkable continuously by many tourism researchers (i.e. George et al., 2013; Ho, McKercher, 2015; Muangasame, 2014; Litvin, 2006; McKercher, 2005a, 2005b; Park, Jang, 2014; Smith, 1990a). Those researchers observe and test some qualifications of the models by various angles.

The proposed models are largely used as fundamental tourism theories presently. Yet, some curious concerns still construct around the original concepts. To address some discussions

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to two theories, this paper attempts to examine the models by capturing the themes from preceding scholar articles related to those two theories to identify the key absent issues which should be concerned when use theories in future empirical studies, a pragmatic level, or theory-based studies.

Plog's model

Stanley Plog (1974) introduced the model of travel characteristics by psychographic scale to differentiate traveller types such as travel patterns, personalities and preferred destinations, samples were targeted in U.S. residents who were called flyers and non-flyers because the study was conducted for air travel business. Those travellers were categorised into five segments started from Psychocentric, Near-Psychocentric, Mid-Centric, Near-Allocentric and Allocentric, and exhibited a normal distribution curve (a bell-shaped curve). Then, in 2001, the model was updated which relabelled Psychocentric as 'Dependable' and Allocentric as 'Venturer'; and further explained the relationship between travel personalities and destination selection. At one extreme was Psychocentric or Dependable represented non-adventurous travellers who preferred familiar destinations; another side was Allocentric or Venturer which represented adventurous travellers who primarily travelled to explore the world; and Mid-Centric was placed between two extreme groups where the vast majority of travellers belonged to (Plog, 2001). Figure 1 shows the clearer clusters.

A destination life cycle by Plog (2001), used a psychographic study to show how destination developed in each stage and types of tourist destination attracted was indicative of destination's position in that cycle and the stage of development appealed to specific psychographic types which predicted the rise and fall of a destination (Liu et al., 2008). Venturers as the searchers were the first group who explored the new destinations and passed their travel experiences to their friends who would like to follow the same destinations, so-called near-ven-

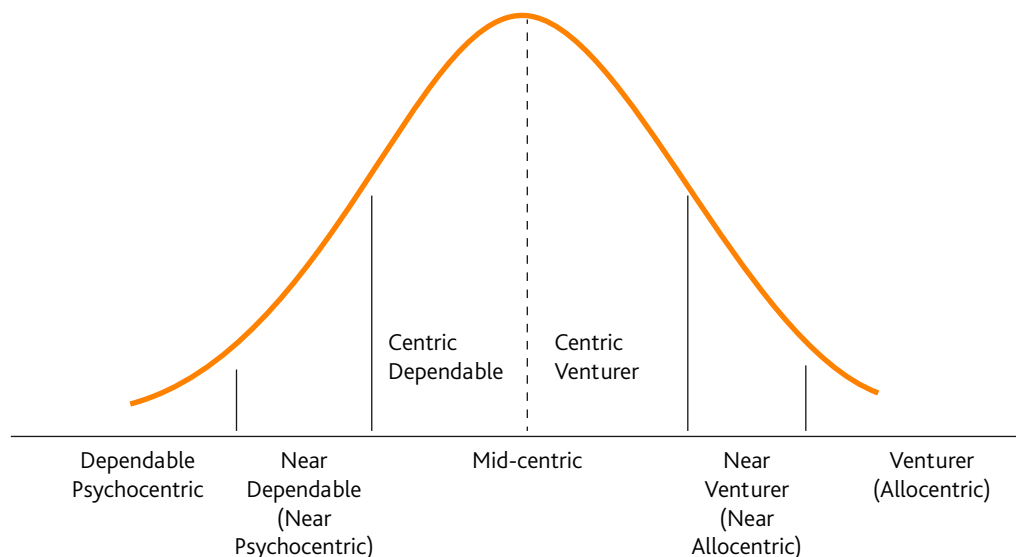


Figure 1. The Psychographic personality types (Original model)

Source: Plog (2001)

turers. Next stages of destinations were begun and kept continuously in greater numbers and improving destination images to target more travellers. Service and local development also improved to carry more tourists. Then, the destinations encountered more pressure from fast-growth populations, tourism firms and development.

Some arguments to Plog's model

Various studies have been explained the validity of Plog's model by criticising the concept or testing by numerous research instruments, selected constructs have been discussed as following.

Firstly, the model cannot generalise in the global context due to different perceptions of each nation to destinations. Plog (2001) classifies the destinations to fit with the travellers' personality types. However, the samples of destinations are manipulated by single markets, U.S., which may not be applicable to other nationalities (Litvin, 2006; McKercher, 2005a; Smith, 1990a). Personality types that travellers belong to may not influence on their destination choices. Each nation may view each destination differently from country to country depending upon many factors, not just their fitted personalities. For example, McKercher (2005a) states that destinations are categorised from a distinctive perception by geographical proximity, socio-cultural environment such as political orientation, language, shared history, cultural similarity and differences. Therefore, each destination can attract tourists from different psychographic types and various countries. Another study of Ho and McKercher (2015) interpret this concept from the marketing viewpoint suggest that each market has a different and unique perception to a particular destination. So, a destination is primarily classified by a market-specific rather than a destination-specific. Other research studies, Smith's study (1990a) and Litvin (2006), can use to support this argument undoubtedly.

Smith (1990a) tests Plog's model in seven nations to examine its applicability. Based on 1,500 respondents who fly a long-haul pleasure trip, he concludes that allocentric-psychocentric categories do not actually prove the association between personality types and destination preferences. A part of results shows some disagreements with Plog such as there is no significant difference in the mean incomes of allocentrics and psychocentrics among seven nations, while Plog (1974, 2002) discovers that allocentrics have the higher income rate than mid-centrics or psychocentrics. Furthermore, each personality group prefers a distinctive set of destinations. Allocentrics tend to visit out of the ordinary destinations whereas psychocentrics desire to visit the familiar destinations regarding the original model. Conversely, Smith's study observed that some destinations can attract tourists from every groups with no distinctive preferences. To illustrate, The United States has ranked the highest preferred destination from every personality types from French, Singaporean and Hongkongnese travellers. Therefore, from Smith's study, the destination may be defined by the unique perception of each nation which leads a similar premise to McKercher (2005a) and Ho and McKercher (2015). Later, Plog (1990) argues that Smith uses the wrong variables and wrong classification systems as his samples are more likely to be allocentrics. Shortly, Smith (1990b) clarifies all comments with accurate evidences that the distribution is normal and is not skewed.

Litvin (2006) does another helpful support to Smith's study and defends Plog's model. His Singapore-based study observes the destinations choices of psychocentric and allocentric travellers whether those selected destinations fit with those provided destinations in the various categories by Plog (2001). With his result, destination choices of Singaporeans have present-

ed differently from those predicted by Plog. This reconfirms that other nations cannot use the identical examples of destination classifications to analyse their citizens' travelling choices. Thus, if each nation would like to classify by using personality types to match with destination choices, individual nation should conduct as the country-based study.

Secondly, the normal distribution curve might not accurate. Litvin (2006) also notes a destination distribution curve is shaped far away from the original work. Majority of travellers select destinations where are close-by, non-exotic which extremely skew to psychocentric destinations rather than mid-centric destinations in Plog's study. Occasions and purposes of holiday also influence on destinations' selections. Most trips are the family visits for the holidays, a quick trip for a special occasion as family wedding or weekend nearby which are not absolute holidays. Nevertheless, if they gain the occasion to plan their actual holidays, travellers will select more adventurous destinations closer to their ideals. Also, psychocentric destinations can change to be mid-centric choices due to conditions of time and money. It seems that travellers search for at least some varieties in nature. This is similar to Ho and McKercher (2015) who support the view of a trip-specific purpose rather than a person characteristic. One trip could be psychocentric-focused and then travels to a touristic destination, the next holiday in mid-centric or allocentric which prefers less touristic area and more adventurous. In another way, tourists could display both extreme sides from allocentric to psychocentric characteristics on one trip to visit varieties of attractions with different appearances. These samples do not follow the severe model and descriptions.

Another doubt with Plog normal distribution curve, he does not demonstrate the breakdown line of the distribution of various types and no indicator of X, Y axes are given to transform one segment to others which users could not distinguish the scale of difference (George et al., 2013; Smith, 1990a). The model might be appropriate to revise to be more realistic to describe the life cycle of a destination. The approximate revision proposes as shown on Figure 2, by time (X-axis) and the number of tourists (Y-axis) as uses in Butler's model. As mentioned by George et al. (2013), then, the normal distribution maintains the same shape with the orig-

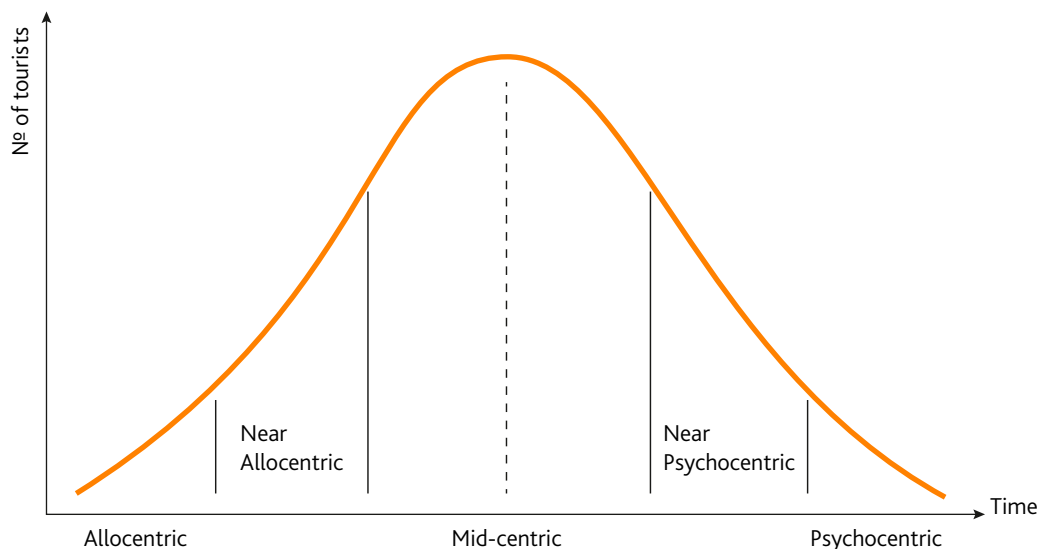


Figure 2. The framework of destination life cycle by modified Plog's Psychographic model

Source: modified by the author

inal model, but on the time scale, it clearly exhibits that allocentrics make the first move to explore the destinations so the revision model should be the other way round in Plog's original drawing.

Thirdly, various factors influence on destination selections, not just psychographic types. Earlier studies have mentioned that personality types cannot absolutely use to predict their destination choices. Numerous attempts still outline tourist motivations and tie them to destination choices. Destinations can target different tourist clusters by physical attractiveness, socio-psychological attractions, political and social environment of destinations themselves (Andreu et al., 2014) and then include push factors from the individual traveller (i.e. a desire to travel). Distance, availability of time, travel expenditure and effort to visit also create boundaries to certain destinations and narrow the tourist types (McKercher, 2005a).

Park and Jang (2014) suggests that even though a tourist is placed into one particular category in nature, resources or other factors may cause one to demonstrate another travel patterns. Travellers are normal consumers who waste some resources in exchange of the best goods to fit their needs so that vacation which requires the expenditure both money and time as well as physical energy, need to be cautiously selected (Litvin, 2006). Age increasing and physical health produce travel restrictions that limit destination choices (Oppermann, 1995). Therefore, travelling and destination choices need the sense of balance and compromise between a desire and a traveller's conditions to visit a destination which might end up with less exotic places than the ideal.

McKercher (2005a) describes that distance decay and cultural distance impact the choices of a tourism destination. These encourage tourists to go or become barriers to visit particular destinations because the distances are related to time, travel companions, budget, travel mode and their preferences. Additionally, culturally and linguistically distant destination from tourist's origin may not turn into psychocentric destinations; on the other hand, culturally similar destinations will never be allocentric destinations as Sydney will never turn into a psychocentric destination for American tourists due to physical distances (McKercher, 2005a). Andreu et al. (2014) point out a similar argument about cultural elements and cultural distance. More similarities between the origin cultures and destinations, exhibit the greater likelihood of visiting that country which locates in the category of psychocentric destinations of that market. Moreover, it seems that tourists from individualistic cultures tend to travel to destinations where are different from them; however, some exceptions are spotted from collectivistic cultures. Chinese tourists usually travel to destinations with fewer cultural similarities because Chinese tourists are primarily motivated by the desire to know the unknown countries (Andreu et al., 2014) against the references of Hofstede's dimensions of collectivism. However, they still heavily travel in the organised groups due to cultural distance and linguistic barrier. Those studies have proved a result that cultural distance extremely influences the decision to visit a destination which Plog's work does not concern. Travellers will decide destinations based on their perception of distance ideally and reality. This can imply that only destination attractiveness alone cannot grab travellers' attentions and convince them to visit. There are many conditions to limit the choices of destinations apart from a destination itself and traveller's personality type.

Park and Jang (2014) test whether allocentrics have high intentions to revisit a destination if they are satisfied with the destination and whether psychographic segmentation is static. Results indicate that the revisit intentions of satisfied allocentric travellers cannot be differentiated from satisfied psychocentric travellers which diverge from Plog (1974). Nevertheless, for dissatisfaction, the results show statically consistence with Plog that allocentrics have lower

revisit intentions than dissatisfied psychocentrics. Their study exhibits both valid and invalid assumption of Plog. Nonetheless, some arguments still keep presenting around the original thought. Plog's model is subjected to little empirical confirmation that weakens the theory. Failed justification of the fact that tourists travel based on different motivations and occasions and he excludes various influential factors as this study discusses earlier. Tourism is dynamic which is difficult to classify that destinations appeal to a single group. Similarly, human being is complex and cannot attach them in a single category even their natures are associated with particular elements, each psychographic type can demonstrate other types of travel behaviours and patterns as well.

Butler's Model

In 1980, Richard Butler (Butler, 2006) developed product life cycle theory to tourism destinations called Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC). The model predicted as tourism increased did associate impacts by using the number of tourist arrivals as the variable that drove the life cycle over time and characterised a stage of tourism development. The beginning stage of destination, exploration, was carried a small number of tourists due to lack of facilities and inconvenience. This stage targeted tourists who sought pure nature and valued cultural differences. Next stage, involvement, began to provide primary facilities and involved informal contact between locals and visitors. The destination attracted more tourists from the particular groups. The development stage, destinations became more touristic areas and advertised. Natural and cultural resources were well-developed and positioned to markets. Local involvement seemed to decline and more regional and national involvement to plan and to develop the areas to carry more tourists from various markets. The consolidation stage was seen from the rate of increase in the number of visitors declined, although total number still increased. The stagnation stage was seen from the rate of increase in the number of visitors declined, although total number still increased. The destination covered with marketing, advertising, franchises and chains in tourism industry.

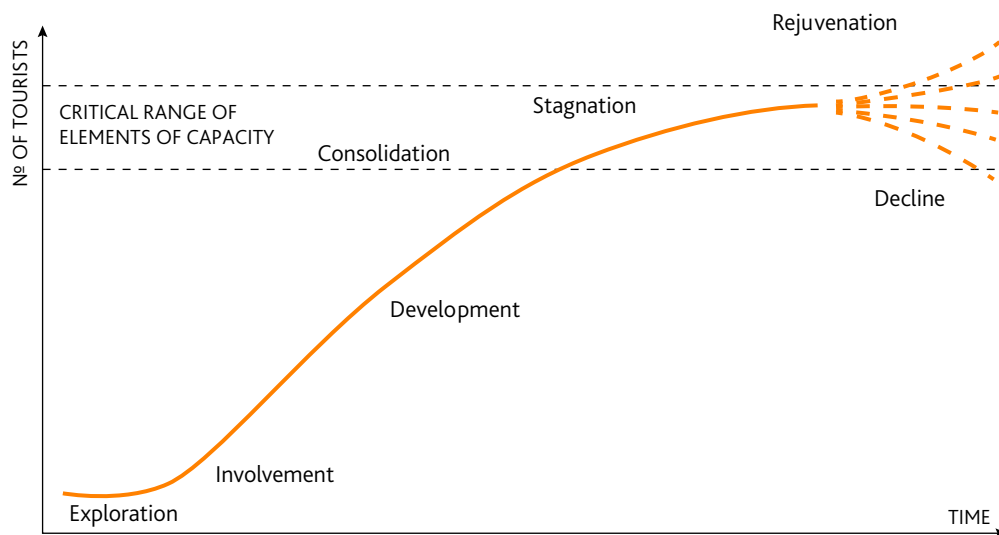


Figure 3. The tourist area life cycle by Butler (Original model)

Source: Gale, Botterill (2005)

Next stage moved to the stagnation stage with the peak number of tourists was reached including exceeded capacity levels. Destinations relied on repeat visitors and conventional tourists. After this stage, Butler identified the range of five possible scenarios that fitted between a complete rejuvenation and a total decline. In the decline stage, the area was unable to compete with other newer attractions. A trend to visit started to decline and it was no longer appeal to visitors but still had some visits for weekend while the rejuvenation stage was likely to start over the tourist area and re-imaged of destinations.

Some arguments to Butler's model

The Tourism Area Life Cycle model (TALC) provides a direction for undertaking fieldworks. People can gather data to locate its position of tourism development by studying each stage and consider the types of data that are relevant to Butler model (Numpty Nerd, 2014). Each stage possesses a different time scale. The length of stages is determined by those described characteristics and further confirmed by comparing the number of tourists from one stage to the next stage (Numpty Nerd, 2014). Therefore, availability of data and tourist statistics in each period are the essential tools to make the analysis.

To discuss the model, *firstly*, Butler makes references to advertising and marketing as a factor in tourism development as frequent explanations in each stage (Butler, 2006). Media and advertising can become the external drives to exhibit destinations in life cycle; however, no indicators are given which stage destinations are in. Furthermore, Butler argues that locals will exhibit the signs of dissatisfaction, particularly if they are not getting any benefits from tourism (Numpty Nerd, 2014). Omar, Othman and Mohamed (2014) declare that the locals definitely accept tourism because tourism has brought more benefits to them. Development of tourism helps to improve the quality of life, infrastructures and facilities and income from those tourist activities; however, the rapid evolution has damaged the environment and social and cultural values of inhabitants. Consequently, it might be more reasonable to evaluate both cost and benefit contributed to the areas by bottom-up with locals' involvement in the decision-making process rather than top-down from regional public sectors or government.

Apart from the above mentioned, all stakeholders should be involved. Ho and McKercher (2015) share an insight from a marketing perspective that a destination as a tourism product comprises an amalgam of tangible and intangible elements which is the sum of all experiences at the destination. These include those supplies by a wide range of different tourism components such as tourism business firms, communities, places and social interaction. Without those components, the destination might not attract tourists to visit. Therefore, individual firm should take the initiative to prolong its growth and to keep rejuvenating a destination.

Secondly, carrying capacity shows an important part of Butler's model but may be more perceptual issues and difficult to define (Haywood, 1986). It is subjective, a complex concept and includes many social constructs (McKercher, 2005b). Additionally, perceptual carrying capacity is about tourism experience and relates to the feeling that the areas may be overcrowded regarding the number of visitors or not. Butler proposes that if capacity levels are exceeded, decline in the quality of visitors and residents experience would result along with the decline in visitation (Butler, 2009). Nevertheless, the difficulty to measure carrying capacity is the major barrier to explain which level of carrying capacity has been reached in each stage or even the peak as there is more than physical carrying capacity to consider. It measures and relates with local attitudes and visitor attitudes; also relates to psychological and per-

ceptual carrying capacity (Singh, 2011). Furthermore, the rate which an area progresses might vary depending on characteristics of destinations and type of tourism it attracts (Diedrich, Garcis-Buades, 2009). For these reasons, to make it more applicable, it requires to employ universal indicators and considers applications on a case-by-case basis.

Thirdly, the series of cycles and the life cycle always transfer as the ideal curves are questioned. The series of destination life cycles may happen. McKercher (2005b) illustrates an interesting point that the destination development might be ended in some stages before moving to another life cycle 'stagnation stage may represent the end of one cycle and simultaneously the exploration stage or beginning of another cycle (p.99)'. Furthermore, the shape of the curve is open to argument. A destination might not follow the original model passes through every stages, it may skip one or more stages during its development. Similarly, a part of Muangasame's study (2014) doubts about the move from "development into consolidation" stage as it is still blurred and difficult to measure the achievement. This author also indicates an absence of Butler's model is the model does not involve the understanding of the specific characteristics of tourism products (i.e. intangibility, perish ability, inseparability and variability) as the essential parts of tourism development. Therefore, the recent tourism situation is more complicated, it is not sufficient to apply only time and numbers to analyze tourism development.

To illustrate the skip of the TALC, heavily online marketing through social media or films and movies might induce some markets to visit the area such as occurred in Chiang Mai (Thailand). Chinese tourist numbers are increased 250 % from 2012 to 2013 (Chiang Mai Provincial Office of Tourism and Sports, 2014), the rapid tourist numbers affect the carrying capacity and locals are shocked with changes as many areas have been popular shortly because of being a filming location for the movie. Some areas have never been tourist attractions appeal to tourists and skip the exploration stage (i.e. the university campus which already has all facilities and infrastructures, so that this attraction does not begin from the poor access as noted by Butler, but previously it has never become a tourist attraction before)¹. Thus, destination life cycle may not be the single way curve as proposed by Butler.

An insight from Haywood (1986) suggests a variety of possible tourist area life cycle curve which exhibits non-S-shaped pattern differed from the dominant pattern. Moreover, he states that the original theory ignores the possibility of various market segments in the same destinations. This concern is also supported by many latest scholars (i.e. Ho, McKercher, 2015; McKercher, 2005b). To illustrate, each segment might present different evaluation and entry to that destination as Figure 4 shows.

Haywood (1986) demonstrates that in destination life cycles, segment 1 may present a jet-set tourist, segment 2 a MICE market and segment 3 an inclusive tour market or other market types as domestic and international tourists. Various groups can be plotted in the graph by different pictures. Furthermore, entering a destination of various markets may not start from the same point of time which affects the curve as well. Besides, it should concern about seasonality as a unique characteristic of tourism product. Seasonality of destination would affect the general pattern of life cycle which may not follow the evolution pattern (Education Bureau Hong Kong, 2013). Tourist might prefer to visit destinations in specific times (or months) of a year which reflects the stable number of tourists to that destination. If there are three months a year as a tourism season, the stage of destination life cycle would remain with extension period without shifting to another. For this reason, tourism industry has underlined 'seasonality'

¹ i.e. "Lost in Thailand" was the Chinese blockbuster and highest grossing film (over 1 billion yuan) which inspired the unrelenting waves of Mainland Chinese tourists over the last few years in Chiang Mai.

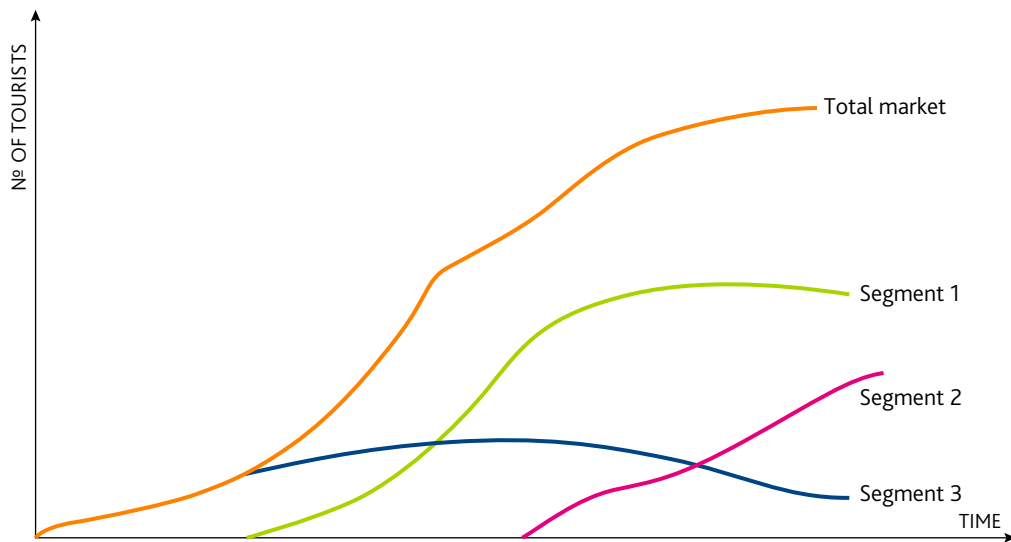


Figure 4. Tourist area life cycle with different time entry to a destination

Source: Haywood (1986)

as one of the essential factors and most businesses cope with this limitation by offering lower price during a low season to attract more business opportunities.

As a result, by earlier studies, Butler illustrates only single direction ended with five directions after a stagnation stage, which there are opportunities for destinations to shift in other life cycles. Additionally, in reality, if one market declines, there might be other segments enter or increase. Thus, the total number of tourists visit the areas could not predict the stage in destinations life cycle by one side without considering others factors.

Plog's and Bulter's model in Destination life cycle

Plog's model originally defines the profiles of markets and is useful in understanding the characteristic of tourists from each category which affects their destination choices. However, it does not work well to explain destination life cycle. When using Plog to describe the stage of destination, the model looks life-to-death analogy as destinations have to be in a decline stage. The dominant percentage of allocentric tourists is assumed to indicate a particular destination is in the preliminary stage of life cycle and then climbs up to the next stage based on the growing number of tourist arrivals in destinations, when it reaches the large number of mid-centric group, the destination receives the signal of mature phase of the life cycle (Liu et al., 2008). However, Litvin's study exhibits more pragmatic level and witnesses the invalidity of Plog's model. The majority curve skews into psychocentric destinations rather than mid-centric which supports that if this model utilises to explain in the stage of destination life cycle, the graph should be visually a high rise in psychocentric destinations. The graph curve in Litvin's study can be refined and is probably consistent with Butler rather than Plog in destination life cycle as shown on Figure 5. A caution issue would remain focused as psychocentric destination by Plog might not be in a decline stage. Destinations appeal psychocentric tourists; however, no evidences are provided that destinations will be going to decline.

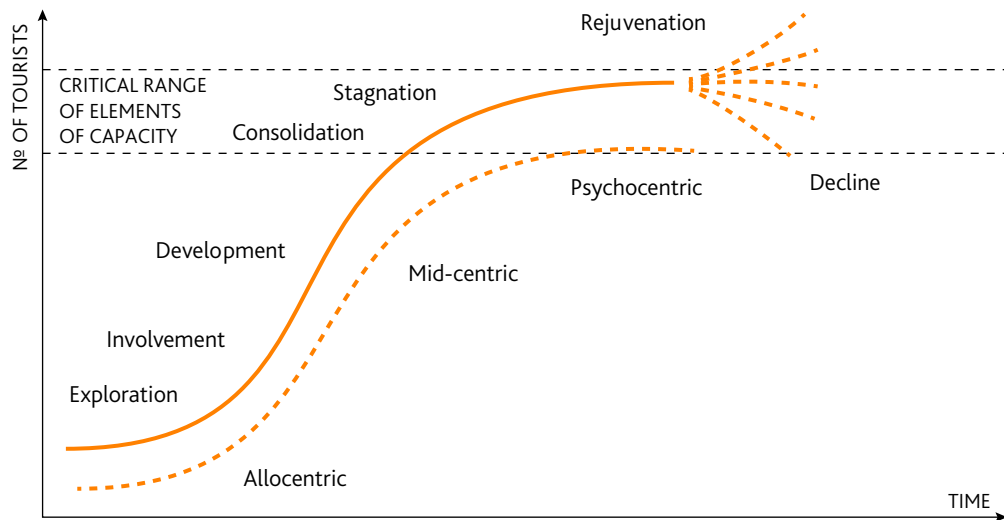


Figure 5. The refined curve of Plog's destination life cycle to Butler's model

Source: modified by the author

Another thought by using psychographic in destination life cycle, McKercher (2005b) mentions that each stage of a destination appeals to a different psychographic group. Even though most destinations are discovered by allocentrics and developed through other closer groups from near-allocentrics and so on. Each market drives its own life cycle at different rate, some just enter into the area, some already in an expanding stage, or stable or tried. Thus, different markets enter to each destination in different periods of time without any doubt.

TALC model does good works with destinations established in earlier days when the life span of a destination might be long period (Butler, 2009), but seems difficult to predict the future movement of destinations in details. The model relies on the supply-side indicators, the measurement by tourist numbers would not be accurate to determine a development of destination (Gale, Botterill, 2005). Utilizing this model would consider other alternative indicators such as expenditure and length of stay to make the model more qualified and reliable. Moreover, there are other factors that need to pay more attention because those affected destination life cycle such as the special characteristics of tourism products, seasonality of destination, travel behavioral changes due to generation shift.

Lastly, both theories exclude the generation differences which might be another consideration of converting of travel frequency, destination choices and destination life cycle. The younger generation has begun to travel earlier than their parents did due to increasing of transportation choices to shorten their time, cheaper expenditure on vacations than preceding generation, availability of destinations that are easily accessible and trends and technology (Oppermann, 1995). At the younger life, younger people gain more travel experiences and their desires to explore the world would shape the travel pattern in a different way. Thus, generation may create the new travel behavior, tourist types or even affects the destination life cycle in the future. And all in all, both models need to consider each source market in micro level rather than capture only the big picture.

Conclusion

Tourism areas are dynamic over time; the changes in tourist area are brought by a variety of factors, mainly changes in preferences of visitors. Plog's model is much more about understanding the tourists, accessibility of destination from each type rather than predicting life cycle stage. The model can provide some insights into the type of person who would be willing to visit their destination in macro level.

Plog's model noticeably ignores the national and cultural differences among tourists which weakens the validity of the concepts. Cultural distance should be included to narrow the markets as each destination attracts tourists from multiple types based on their profiles and markets. Dominant characteristic can be changed and it is not only a single element that inspires people to travel as numerous factors keep influential to tourists' decision making which this study has discussed. Butler's model obviously skews on supply-side rather than including both supply and demand to predict the stage of development. To better improve this theory, Chaos theory might provide an alternative view and complement to Butler's model (Hovinen, 2002) which includes the role of entrepreneurs and considers the potential conflicts with good planners to balance tourism with other harmful factors that might occur in the areas. Both theories can transit from one to another and cater to multiple segments in both destination and tourist types.

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