

Does it matter to have rapport and social interaction on a group tour?

Johra Kayeser Fatima 

University of Canberra, Australia

Journal of Vacation Marketing
1–13

© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/13567667231219024

journals.sagepub.com/home/jvm



Abstract

With rapport building growing in significance, this investigation of its role in attitude and behavioural intention in the group tour context used a multi-methods approach (a video experiment, a photo experiment and a survey). Group attentiveness was also examined as a moderator in the attitude–behavioural intention relationship. Three studies were conducted on the Australian tourism industry in which group tours are common. The first study (a video experiment) and the second study (a photo experiment) were conducted with participants living in Canberra, Australia, while the third survey-based study was conducted on domestic tourists visiting anywhere in Australia on a group tour for the purpose of generalisation. Results from the partial least squares method confirmed the crucial role of rapport in developing a positive attitude and behavioural intention, with the combined effect of rapport and social interaction higher than their individual impacts. Group attentiveness was also found to be a significant moderator.

Keywords

Rapport, social interaction, group attentiveness, attitude, behavioural intention, Australia

Introduction

As an individual's consumption behaviour in the group context is different to that in the individual context in various scenarios (Albrecht et al., 2017; McFerran et al., 2010), rapport building behaviour can be significantly different on group tours. Rapport refers to pleasant interaction with others and comprises two dimensions: personal connection and enjoyable interaction (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000). Personal connection refers to a strong bond, whereas enjoyable interaction refers to enjoyment in service encounters (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000). Rapport in this study refers to personally connected and enjoyable interaction from customer to customer and from customer to tour guide in a group tour context. Early studies on rapport have mostly tested its impact on relationships in the individual consumption context (Fatima et al., 2020; Lin and Lin, 2017; Lindsey-Hall et al., 2021), with

only limited studies in the existing literature conducted on rapport building behaviour in the group consumption context.

As rapport varies considerably depending on the social context (Grahe and Bernieri, 2002), it is essential to understand how it is influenced by social interaction. Using social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) as a theoretical lens, it can be concluded that social interaction is an exchange of feelings, emotions and information (Lin et al., 2020). Individuals who undertake group tours are found to interact with each other to fulfil their psychological needs and self-interest (Lawler and Thye, 1999); therefore, this

Corresponding author:

Johra Kayeser Fatima, Faculty of Business, Government and Law, Canberra Business School, University of Canberra, 11 Kirinari Street, Bruce, ACT 2617, Australia.

Email: johra.fatima@canberra.edu.au

study explores social interaction between group tour customers and their interaction with their tour guide. Interestingly, the ways in which individuals build rapport on group tours and how this is affected by their social interaction with each other are still not fully explored. Thus, the current study addresses this gap by examining the impact of social interaction on rapport in the group tour context.

Rapport may also be influenced by relationship dependency as individuals may need to compromise their individual preference in favour of the group's preference. In fact, customers' influence on each other when involved in group service interaction is often intense through direct encounters as part of being in the same business environment (Baker, 1987; Wu, 2007). With consumers having diverse types of necessary and unavoidable interaction in group consumption (Kim et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021), accommodating everyone becomes a real challenge. However, little is known in the existing body of literature about the role of relationship dependency in rapport building on group tours, which is the motivation for the current study to investigate the effect of relationship dependency's antecedent role on rapport.

Social interaction and rapport are the key drivers of positive outcomes, such as satisfaction, word of mouth, communication and friendship between group members and service providers, as claimed in the previous literature (Boninsegni et al., 2020; Fatima et al., 2017; Lin and Lin, 2017; Pangarkar et al., 2022). The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) is a useful theoretical framework for examining the impact of these constructs, that is, social interaction and rapport, on both attitude development and behavioural intention in the group tour context. While the TPB has been used in various contexts (Fatima et al., 2017; Juschten et al., 2019; Leung and Jiang, 2018), only a few studies have sought to explain the roles of rapport and social interaction in the attitude-behavioural intention connection using this theory as a platform.

Table 1 summarises the discussions in prior studies on rapport and social interaction, with both having been examined from various aspects, including that of group tours, to identify their impact on service quality, satisfaction, loyalty and commitment (Baker and Kim, 2018; Chang et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Lemy et al., 2019; Tsaour and Ku, 2019). However, past studies have not thoroughly examined the

influence of these two key relational factors on attitude and behavioural intention towards participation in group tours. The significance of social interaction and rapport between customers and between customers and service provider (in the current study, the group tour guide) have also been elaborated in prior studies (Chang, 2009; Hwang and Lee, 2019; Kim et al., 2022) and have been highlighted as crucial factors.

The service relationship literature has a narrow understanding of the moderator role of group attentiveness in the attitude-behavioural intention link. Group attentiveness is often defined as a spatial behaviour expressed in an individual's reaction to other group members' activities (Lee et al., 2021; Spoor and Kelly, 2004). Thus, different levels of group attentiveness may moderate the relationship between an individual's attitude and his/her behavioural intention to participate in group tours. The current study sought to address this gap by using group attentiveness as a moderator in the attitude-behavioural intention link.

The study, therefore, sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Do rapport with the service provider and social interaction positively affect behavioural intention? (Study 1)

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Do rapport with the service provider and social interaction positively affect attitude? (Study 2)

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Does group attentiveness moderate the relationship between rapport with the service provider and behavioural intention? (Study 3)

Overview of the studies

To answer the research questions, three studies were conducted on the Australian tourism and hospitality industry using the multi-methods approach. This approach has been popular in previous tourism studies (Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2015) for its inherent significance and higher validity as well as its practicability, including the avoidance of self-reporting bias. Study 1 used a video experiment to explore the impact on behavioural intention of various combinations of rapport with the service provider and social interaction. In considering the crucial role of rapport with a service provider, Study 2 used photo experiments (rapport with the

Table 1. Key literature on rapport and social interaction in tourism and hospitality journals.

No.	Study	Journal	Context	Method	Findings
1	Lee et al. (2021)	<i>Tourism Management</i>	Tourist–tourist rapport, group activities	Study 1: Interviews, 30 participants. Study 2: Video experiment, 594 participants. Study 3: Field experiment, 9 food tours	A. Tourist–tourist rapport in a guided group comprises of the dyadic dimensions of personal connection and enjoyable interaction, and service congruity and group attentiveness. B. People have better tourist–tourist rapport when positivity and mutual attention occur in the early stages, followed by coordination. C. Getting along with other tourists in guided group activities is a ‘critical factor’ in the levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, regardless of the quality of other elements such as food, the tour guide, physical spaces and organization. Employees’ servicescape-affected organisational citizenship behaviours towards customers significantly affect customers’ perceptions of rapport and quality of interactions with employees.
2	Kaminakis et al. (2019)		Restaurants	Questionnaire, 147 service workers and 716 customer participants	The perceptions of intelligence, social presence and social interactivity inspired trust, particularly perceived social interactivity, due to its impact on social judgement and interpersonal warmth.
3	Kim et al. (2022)		United States, human–robot interaction, rapport	Questionnaire, 592 participants	It is essential for the tour guide to develop and maintain rapport with the group members during the guided tour. Rapport between customers and service employees impact on the service quality perception.
4	Chang (2009)	<i>Journal of Vacation Marketing</i>	Guided group tour	Qualitative study	A. Professional skills have a significant impact on rapport with a tour guide. B. Professional attitude is a significant factor in affecting tourist satisfaction.
5	Lemy et al. (2019)		Customer loyalty in Indonesia	Questionnaire, 596 participants	
6	Hwang and Lee (2019)	<i>Journal of Travel Research</i>	Korea, tour guides	Questionnaire, 382 participants	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

No.	Study	Journal	Context	Method	Findings
7	Tsaur and Ku (2019)		Taiwan, emotional intelligence, tourism	Survey, 526 tour leader/member pairs	<p>A. Leaders' emotional intelligence has a strong positive affect on tour members' positive mental states.</p> <p>B. Tour leaders' emotional intelligence has a direct and positive influence on tour member rapport.</p> <p>C. The emotional intelligence of tour leaders created higher levels of satisfaction among tour members towards the tour leader.</p>
8	Baker and Kim (2018)	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	United States, language, rapport	Study 1: 312. Study 2: 308 participants	Both the server and customer smiling impacts perceptions of authenticity, and a genuine smile can affect many customer perceptions leading to higher customer satisfaction.
9	Chang et al. (2020)	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	Person-environment, group package tours, rapport	Questionnaire, 482 participants	<p>A. People with similar traits tend to interact more effectively and when interaction is higher, tourists are more pleased with their consumption experience.</p> <p>B. Tour leaders play an important role in fostering the perceptions of tour member-leader fit, and if the tour members and leader share similarities, such as speaking style, interests or values, there is a higher chance they will resonate and have increased comfort during the interaction.</p> <p>C. If both parties perceive positive emotions, their relationship may be more harmonious, increasing the chances of tourists experiencing positive emotions for the rest of their travel, as well as higher tourism satisfaction.</p>
10	Wang et al. (2017)		Taiwan, hotel industry, employee perspective	Survey, 539 participants	<p>A. Service practitioners in the high-end hotel industry in Taiwan understand customers' standards and expectations, and it is favourable for service practitioners to be committed to service innovation.</p> <p>B. Both managers and service employees gave themselves substantially lower scores in regard to their performance, suggesting that all levels of service providers in high-end hotels would benefit from enhanced training and preparation.</p>

service provider vs. no rapport and social interaction vs. no social interaction) to understand attitudes to participating in group tours. Study 3 used the survey method conducted among domestic tourists to test a conceptual model comprising rapport with the service provider, social interaction and group dependency to determine the attitude-behavioural intention relationship in the group tour context, with group attentiveness as a moderator of this relationship. These studies (Studies 1, 2 and 3), using different data collection methods, were conducted in the order determined by the research aim and the specific methodological requirements for addressing the research questions. While no pre-testing with a small sample was carried out, several initiatives were undertaken as an alternative, for example, peer review, literature search and refinement of the questionnaires and procedures in accordance with previous related studies. Standard ethics procedures were also undertaken as recommended by the university's ethics committee.

The structure of the article is as follows: Study 1 (video experiment) is discussed first, followed by Study 2 (photo experiment) and then Study 3 addresses the survey and its results. Finally, the Discussion section highlights the key summary of the findings from all three studies, with the Conclusion section comprising the study's theoretical and managerial contributions along with its limitations.

Study 1

Data

Study 1 used an experimental design (2 × 2 design, rapport with the service provider vs. social interaction) involving 36 participants in Canberra, Australia, to answer RQ1. Participants of various ages, different genders and different ethnic backgrounds were chosen. While participants had previously experienced tourism-based group tours, no time restriction was placed on when they had their group tour experience, as behavioural intention was measured based on their overall experience, not on a specific service encounter.

Procedure

Four different types of videos (Types 1–4) were shown to four distinct groups of participants. To reduce bias, one participant at a time undertook the experiment and each could only access

his/her allocated video, not the other videos. All videos were in the tourism and hospitality industry context, with each undergoing a specific manipulation. Each video's content characteristics are summarised in Table 2. A follow-up short survey questionnaire on behavioural intention was then filled in by participants. Three items on behavioural intention were taken from existing tourism studies (Byun and Jang, 2015; Erul et al., 2020) and highlighted 'make an effort', 'willing to use' and 'I will plan again', with the range being from 1 = 'highly disagree' to 5 = 'highly agree'.

Results

The results showed that the combined effect of social interaction and rapport with the service provider in Type 4 (social interaction and rapport with service provider, mean [M] = 4.25, standard deviation [SD] = 0.46) had a higher level of positive impact on behavioural intention compared to the individual impact of rapport with the service provider in Type 2 (no social interaction and rapport with the service provider [M = 3.38, SD = 0.65]) and social interaction in Type 3 (social interaction and no rapport with the service provider [M = 3.33, SD = 0.59]). Type 1 (no social interaction and no rapport with service provider [M = 3.95, SD = 0.45]) had a medium level of impact on behavioural intention. Furthermore, post-hoc analysis revealed that participants watching Type 2 and Type 4 videos (significance [$sig.$] = 0.023 at the 0.05 level) and those watching Type 3 and Type 4 videos ($sig.$ = 0.007 at 0.05 level) had significantly different opinions. With Type 1 having the highest mean value, it can be concluded that both social interaction and rapport with the service provider are crucial antecedents for developing a positive behavioural intention in the group tour context. However, perceptions between the no rapport/social interaction group (Type 1) with either rapport or social interaction

Table 2. Study 1: video content characteristics.*

Type 1: No social interaction and no rapport	Type 3: Customer to customer social interaction but no rapport with service provider
Type 2: Service provider–customer rapport but no social interaction	Type 4: Service provider–customer rapport and social interaction

*Dependent variable: behavioural intention.

present (Type 2 and Type 3) showed little impact due to the small difference in the mean values of these three types.

Study 2

Data

Study 2 used the same participants as Study 1 but with different stimuli. With the growing significance of rapport with the service provider, this study used a photo experiment (2×2 design, social interaction vs. rapport with the service provider) to examine attitudes towards the service provider.

Procedure

Firstly, participants were divided into four randomly chosen groups to see four different combinations of photos (Types 1–4), highlighting rapport with the service provider and social interaction. They then filled in a short 5-point Likert-type questionnaire on attitude towards the group tour with the established scale items: ‘I like the tour’, ‘opinion of the tour is favourable’ and ‘overall, I consider [the tour] as a good thing’ (Ramaprasad, 2001).

Results

Analysis of variance revealed that Type 3 (no social interaction, rapport with the service provider) produced the highest level of positive attitude ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.46$), followed by Type 1 (social interaction and rapport with the service provider [$M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.82$]). Type 4 (social interaction and no rapport [$M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.77$]) received a higher rating from participants than Type 2 (no social interaction and no rapport [$M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.70$]). The post-hoc analysis results further illustrated the significant differences between Type 1 and Type 2 groups (sig. 0.005 at the 0.05 level), between Type 2 and Type 3 groups (sig. 0.000 at the 0.05 level) and between Type 2 and Type 4 groups (sig. 0.040 at the 0.05 level). Based on these findings, it can be concluded that rapport with the service provider and social interaction are both essential for developing a positive attitude.

Study 3

Hypotheses’ development

In group tour consumption, customers are in a better position to understand other customers’ emotions in terms of physical proximity (Lee

et al., 2021) and can influence each other in service encounters (Baker, 1987; Wu, 2007). One of the outcomes of social interaction between customers is to fulfil customers’ hedonic expectations by exchanging enjoyment and pleasure (Lin et al., 2020; Voss et al., 2003), with this being a primary steppingstone for building rapport. Previous studies have claimed that social interaction is a positive antecedent for building rapport (Kim et al., 2022; Nomura and Kanda, 2016). In the group tour context, it is assumed that social interaction would help to build rapport from customer to customer as well as from frontline employee to customer. Therefore, the current study hypothesised that:

H1: Social interaction has a positive impact on rapport.

In the relationship literature, customers’ dependency refers to a psychological situation in which customers are assured that replacing the current service provider is difficult (Gao et al., 2005). Customers’ psychological aspects and needs (Pangarkar et al., 2022) also need to be considered when explaining rapport building in the group tour context. For instance, dependency helps to reduce uncertainty in decision making (Gao et al., 2005) and acts as a mental switching barrier. This may encourage rapport building in the group tour context, considering that customers (i.e., travellers) need to accommodate the needs and expectations of their fellow customers, with the help of social bonding. Thus, the study proposed the following hypothesis:

H2: Relationship dependency has a positive impact on rapport.

When individuals spend time together in a group tour context, rapport with others helps them to better understand service quality and thus increases their satisfaction (Hwang and Lee, 2019; Hyun and Kim, 2014). With its two core dimensions (i.e., personal connection and enjoyable interaction), rapport plays a crucial role when participating in group tours (Chang, 2009; Hwang and Lee, 2019). Pleasant conversations and close relationships with others, in fact, develop a positive attitude towards the group tour as a whole. Previous studies (Hwang and Lee, 2019) also demonstrated that the experience of positive rapport makes individuals feel better about others, with this helping to build positive attitudes towards the group tour overall. In

addition, a social context (e.g., a group tour) provides an opportunity to easily and promptly assess non-verbal behaviour of others which helps to develop future decisions about affiliation and to provide a basis for rapport building (Ambady and Rosenthal, 1993; Jiang et al., 2010; Lim et al., 2017). This study therefore hypothesised that:

H3: Rapport has a positive impact on attitude towards participating in group tours.

While attitude leading to behavioural intention (Tsang et al., 2023) has been tested in different contexts using the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), the scarcity of studies in the literature exploring group tour consumption has made it difficult to be conclusive about the attitude-behavioural intention link. For instance, Lee and Moscardo (2005) examined the attitude-behavioural intention link among ferry travellers heading towards an island. Considering the TPB assumptions and support from related early studies (Fatima et al., 2017, 2019), the current study hypothesised that:

H4: Attitude towards group tour consumption has a positive impact on behavioural intention towards future group tour consumption.

Group attentiveness as a moderator

Group attentiveness involves individuals' overall spatial behaviours as demonstrated to others, such as responses by eye contact, leaning towards others and smiling (Bernieri et al., 1996; Lee et al., 2021; Spoor and Kelly, 2004). Thus, the individual's attitude-behavioural intention relationship may be moderated by group attentiveness. Group attentiveness characteristics are very influential on individual group members and increase their focused involvement (Lee et al., 2021; Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal, 1990) in the group tour context. Therefore, it is assumed that a lower level of group attentiveness may increase the influence of attitude on strengthening behavioural intention. Thus, the study hypothesised that:

H5: Group attentiveness moderates the attitude-behavioural intention relationship in such a way that attitude's influence is stronger for the group with lower attentiveness compared to the group with higher attentiveness.

Method

Research context and participants

Study 3 considered group tours in the tourism context, as developing rapport, social interaction and relationship dependency often play significant roles in group tours. The online survey was conducted among 177 Australian participants with group tour experience; however, the final sample size was 169 (with eight participants not fully completing their questionnaires).

Measures

Rapport: it refers to bonding with the tour guide and other tour group members. Six items ('close relationship', 'bond', 'personal interest', 'enjoyed interacting', 'comfortable interacting' and 'related well to me') were used to measure rapport (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000). Cronbach's alpha value = 0.862.

Social interaction: it refers to being pleasant in conversation and interaction and the participant being understood by other tour group members in a group tour context. Three scale items ('pleasant conversation', 'pleasant when interacting' and 'other members understand me') were taken from Kim et al.'s (2022) study. Cronbach's alpha value = 0.725.

Relationship dependency: it refers to an individual participant's dependency on the group tour. Three items ('dependent on tour guide and other members', 'difficult to switch' and 'hard to find a replacement') were borrowed from Styles et al. (2008). Cronbach's alpha value = 0.708.

Group attentiveness: it refers to the perceived importance by the participant of talking to the tour guide or to others as a tour member. Three scale items ('tour guide and other members like to talk to me', 'they like to talk to each other' and 'they are helpful') were borrowed from Lee et al. (2021). Cronbach's alpha value = 0.727.

Attitude: it refers towards the group tour was measured using three items ('like the tour', 'opinion is favourable' and 'group tour is a good thing') borrowed from the study by Ramaprasad (2001). Cronbach's alpha value = 0.846.

Behavioural intention: it refers to the participant's intention to undertake group tours again in future. Borrowing from the studies by Byun and Jang (2015) and Erul et al. (2020), this study used three items to measure behavioural intention. Cronbach's alpha value = 0.864.

Data analysis and results

The largest age group (around 66%) was the cohort from 18 to 30 years, with 44% of participants being male. When travelling, most participants (53%) reported that they travelled with family members: the rest either travelled alone (17%) or travelled with friends and colleagues (around 30%). In terms of group tour experience, most participants had recent experience (approximately 34% had been on a group tour in the previous 2 years), while the remainder had experienced participation in group tours at least 5 years previously.

To examine common method variance, single-factor analysis (Harman, 1976) was conducted, and the result was satisfactory (at approximately 38.72%). The results from partial least squares (PLS) analysis (Ringle and Sarstedt, 2016) indicated satisfactory validity and reliability measures for the items used (Nunnally, 1978) as shown in Table 3. Discriminant validity was also established with correlation values found to be lower than the relevant average variance extracted (AVE) values (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

The hypotheses' testing results (Table 4) showed that both relationship dependency and

social interaction significantly impacted on rapport (H1: t -value = 7.96, p -value = 0.000; H2: t -value = 2.83, p -value = 0.005), resulting in the acceptance of H1 and H2. Rapport was found to be a significant antecedent of attitude (H3: t -value = 6.75, p -value = 0.000) and also had a significant influence on behavioural intention (H4: t -value = 9.06, p -value = 0.000), leading to the acceptance of both H3 and H4.

Moderation analysis

Moderation results showed that group differences between a low level of group attentiveness and a high level of group attentiveness were significant (t -value difference = 2.426, p -value difference = 0.016). A low level of group attentiveness had a higher t -value (t -value = 8.173) than a high level of group attentiveness (t -value = 3.126).

Mediation analysis

Considering that several underlying mediation relationships existed in the conceptual model, the current study used the bootstrapping method (Preacher and Hayes, 2004) to check these

Table 3. Reliability and validity measures.

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted	Attitude	Beh_int	Dep.	Rapport	S_Int
Attitude	0.846	0.907	0.765	0.874				
Behavioural intention	0.864	0.916	0.785	0.578	0.886			
Dependency	0.707	0.828	0.618	0.184	0.391	0.786		
Rapport	0.863	0.897	0.593	0.468	0.526	0.338	0.770	
Social interactions	0.73	0.848	0.65	0.496	0.53	0.287	0.586	0.806

Table 4. PLS output.

Hypotheses	t -Statistics	p -Values
H1: Social interactions to rapport	7.96	0.000
H2: Relationship dependency to rapport	2.83	0.005
H3: Rapport to attitude towards group consumption	6.75	0.000
H4: Attitude towards group consumption to behavioural intention	9.06	0.000

Table 5. Mediation output.

Mediation relationships	Confidence interval (lower and upper values)	Percentage and type of mediation
Social interactions > rapport > attitude	0.0740, 0.2704	27.83
Dependency > rapport > attitude	0.0596, 0.2369	20.35
Rapport > attitude > behavioural intention	0.1175, 0.3204	39.91

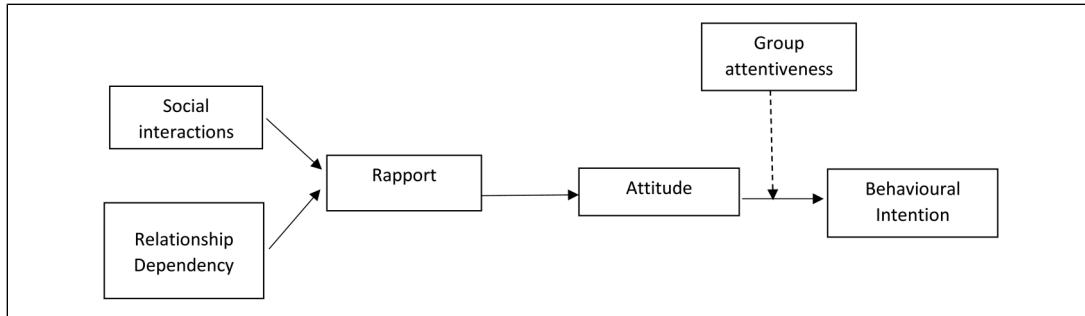


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

relationships. The results in Table 5 showed that rapport had a significant mediation impact on the relationship between social interaction and attitude (approximately 27.83%) as well as in the relationship between relationship dependency and attitude (20.35%). Additionally, the rapport–behavioural intention relationship was found to be significantly mediated by the attitude towards group tours (approximately 39.91%).

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the role of social interaction and rapport in the group tour context in developing travellers' positive attitude and behavioural intention. To achieve this aim, three separate studies were conducted with different data collection methods. Study 1 confirmed that a combination of rapport and social interaction would create a more positive behavioural intention among individuals to participate in group tours than the other types (i.e., no rapport/social interaction and only rapport or social interaction). This finding supported previous claims of the significance of social interaction (Fatima et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2019) in the group service scenario. Considering that interaction in group consumption has received very limited attention in past studies (Lee et al., 2021), the current study highlighted the significance of social interaction and rapport in the group context.

Interestingly, Study 2 reported that group participants who watched photos in which social interaction and rapport were present had the second highest score, whereas the highest score was among group participants who watched photos in which rapport was present but that showed no social interaction. This reinforced the significance of rapport (Baker and Kim, 2018; Bernieri et al., 1996; Eroglu et al., 2022) in group tour consumption as the presence of

rapport on its own often acts as a crucial factor in developing a positive attitude.

In addition to investigating the impact of social interaction and rapport by conducting a self-reported survey, Study 3 also examined the antecedent role of relationship dependency and the moderation influence of group attentiveness on the attitude–behavioural intention link. Interaction between consumers in the group context, given their diverse backgrounds, often creates discord (Lee et al., 2021; Wu, 2007). However, Study 3's findings provided evidence of an alternative viewpoint, with a lower level of group attentiveness having a higher impact on the attitude–behavioural intention relationship.

The mediation analysis in Study 3 revealed that rapport has a higher mediation impact on the social interaction–attitude relationship than on the relationship dependency–attitude link. This finding was consistent with claims in previous studies that customers' interaction with others can holistically change their perceptions about an entire business (Martin, 1996; Wu, 2007). With their characteristics of empowering individuals and cultivating affectionate feelings (Akman et al., 2019; Fyrberg and Jürjado, 2009), social interaction and rapport, when combined, have a stronger impact on attitude development.

Conclusion and implications

Theoretical contributions

This study contributes to the body of knowledge in several ways. Firstly, the study applies social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), a widely accepted theoretical platform (Boninsegni et al., 2020) used to explain the reciprocal exchange of activities (Kim et al., 2022). This theoretical framework has been applied in the sparse number of studies in the literature on rapport development and social interaction in the group

tour context. Supporting the previous claim that rapport offers peace of mind, relaxation and security during social interaction (Tóth et al., 2022), the current study's findings confirmed social interaction and rapport as key players in developing positive attitudes and behavioural intention, testing this viewpoint in its three studies (Studies 1, 2 and 3).

In addition, a few previous studies have sought to explore the dynamics of relationship dependency from geographical, political and environmental aspects and from the perspective of local community support (Chaperon and Bramwell, 2013; Lacher and Nepal, 2010). However, what remains vague is how relationship dependency influences rapport development in the group tour context. The current study's contribution, in this case, to the existing body of knowledge is by confirming relationship dependency's role in rapport building between customers and between customers and the service provider (in this study, the tour guide), as relationship dependency often plays a major role in customers' experience and their future decision making.

The study also extended the TPB by employing it to explain how rapport and social interaction can influence individuals' attitude and behavioural intention on group tours. While past studies extensively used the TPB for pro-environmental behaviour, destination marketing or social media contexts (Fatima et al., 2017; Juschten et al., 2019; Leung and Jiang, 2018), the use of this theory to explain attitude and behavioural intention in the group tour context is limited.

The study's methodological contribution is that it sought to overcome the self-reported bias in relationship studies by employing the multi-methods approach (video experiment, photo experiment and survey) to test the relationships. Even though a limited number of early studies used various data collection sources (Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2015), this approach is comparatively inadequate in the group tour context.

Finally, the current study's interesting addition to the literature is that group attentiveness was found to significantly moderate the attitude-behavioural intention link. While group attentiveness had previously been tested in different scenarios (Lee et al., 2021), the current study is among the primary attempts to explore its moderation role in the impact of attitude on developing positive behavioural intention in the group tour context.

Managerial contributions

The current study has implications for practitioners involved in the provision of group tour services. Given the significance of rapport building, it is essential that practitioners ensure smooth rapport between service providers and customers as well as between customers. Rapport acts as a relationship building block for future attitude and behavioural intention. Therefore, marketers should plan strategies when designing their service blueprint that encourage frontline employees and customers to freely communicate so they can build rapport. In this competitive era (Khan, 2008), frontline employees are widely highlighted in previous service-based studies (Di Mascio and Fatima, 2018; Fatima and Razzaque, 2012) as they play a key role in building rapport with customers (Fatima et al., 2020).

Offering industry-specific training and informing frontline employees about their customers' profile (in brief) would help these employees to build rapport in a more effective and time-saving way. A short talk initiated by a frontline employee based on common interests, familiar topics or recent local events may spark pleasant conversations with a customer and begin their interaction with each other. Almost every organisation today has an online presence: in the group tour context, this presents an opportunity to communicate online to enhance social interaction and rapport building (Akman et al., 2019) between service providers, customers and other potential customers. This could involve posting photos on social media, sharing personal stories, etc. In today's era of e-commerce (Su et al., 2022), this would be an efficient strategic move. Even though social interaction has been identified as crucial, unfortunately, management usually pays less attention to understanding social interaction (Martin, 1996) and its role when designing a successful servicescape (Moura e Sá and Amorim, 2017) for group tour consumption. Finally, introducing visual aids as well as fun facts, and sharing the historical significance of the destination, its services or the local community would help to capture a higher level of group attentiveness among all customers to enhance their behavioural intention.

Limitations

In terms of limitations, the three studies did not differentiate regarding industry, organisation size or other relevant organisational factors, with this possibly having an influence on the

relationships investigated. The study's findings were not tailored to address any specific demographic customer group, such as senior citizens, or any purchase motive, such as a work or personal purchase, etc. While a previous study (Du et al., 2014) emphasised group size and familiarity, the current study did not limit group size and did not consider prior familiarity of group members (e.g., a formal group, such as cruise travel, vs. an informal group, such as travelling with friends and family members). Thus, future research initiatives could address these gaps while investigating rapport and social interaction in the group tour context.

Acknowledgement

www.pexels.com. Visual materials were taken from this copyright free website.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Johra Kayeser Fatima  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6231-3270>

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

References

- Ajzen I (1991) The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 50(2): 179–211.
- Akman H, Plewa C and Conduit J (2019) Co-creating value in online innovation communities. *European Journal of Marketing* 53(6): 1205–1233.
- Albrecht AK, Walsh G and Beatty SE (2017) Perceptions of group versus individual service failures and their effects on customer outcomes: the role of attributions and customer entitlement. *Journal of Service Research* 20(2): 188–203.
- Ambady N and Rosenthal R (1993) Half a minute: predicting teacher evaluations from thin slices of non-verbal behavior and physical attractiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 64: 431–441.
- Baker J (1987) The role of the environment in the marketing service: the consumer perspective. In: Czepiel JA, Congram CA and Shanahan J (eds) *The Services Challenge: Integrating for Competitive Advantage*. Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association, 79–84.
- Baker MA and Kim K (2018) The role of language, appearance, and smile on perceptions of authenticity versus rapport. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 74: 171–179.
- Bernieri FJ, Gillis JS, Davis JM, et al. (1996) Dyad rapport and the accuracy of its judgment across situations: a lens model analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71(1): 110–129.
- Blau P (1964) *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Boninsegni MF, Furrer O and Mattila AS (2020) Dimensionality of frontline employee friendliness in service encounters. *Journal of Service Management* 32(3): 346–382.
- Byun J and Jang SS (2015) Effective destination advertising: matching effect between advertising language and destination type. *Tourism Management* 50: 31–40.
- Chang JC (2009) Taiwanese tourists' perceptions of service quality on outbound guided package tours: a qualitative examination of the SERVQUAL dimensions. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 15(2): 165–178.
- Chang SY, Tsaur SH, Yen CH, et al. (2020) Tour member fit and tour member–leader fit on group package tours: influences on tourists' positive emotions, rapport, and satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 42: 235–243.
- Chaperon S and Bramwell B (2013) Dependency and agency in peripheral tourism development. *Annals of Tourism Research* 40: 132–154.
- Di Mascio R and Fatima J (2018) The role of identification in frontline employee decision-making. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 43: 131–138.
- Du J, Fan X and Feng T (2014) Group emotional contagion and complaint intentions in group service failure: the role of group size and group familiarity. *Journal of Service Research* 17(3): 326–338.
- Eroglu SA, Machleit KA and Neybert EG (2022) Crowding in the time of COVID: effects on rapport and shopping satisfaction. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 64: 102760.
- Erul E, Woosnam KM and McIntosh WA (2020) Considering emotional solidarity and the theory of planned behavior in explaining behavioral intentions to support tourism development. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 28(8): 1158–1173.

- Fatima JK, di Mascio R, Johns R, et al. (2019) Mediation effects of service features on rapport–dependency link in emerging market. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice* 29(5/6): 639–660.
- Fatima JK, di Mascio R, Quazi A, et al. (2020) The dynamic role of rapport on satisfaction–commitment relationship: testing alternative models. *International Journal of Bank Marketing* 38(4): 917–932.
- Fatima JK, Khan HZ and Halabi AK (2017) Ecotourism participation intention in Australia: mediating influence of social interactions. *Tourism Analysis* 22(1): 85–91.
- Fatima JK and Razzaque M (2012) Service quality, customer involvement and customer satisfaction: a case study of retail banking in Bangladesh. *Journal of Business and Policy Research* 7(2): 135–146.
- Fornell C and Larcker DF (1981) Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research* 18(1): 39–50.
- Fyrberg A and Jürjado R (2009) What about interaction? Networks and brands as integrators within service-dominant logic. *Journal of Service Management* 20(4): 420–432.
- Gao T, Sirgy MJ and Bird MM (2005) Reducing buyer decision-making uncertainty in organizational purchasing: can supplier trust, commitment, and dependence help? *Journal of Business Research* 58(4): 397–405.
- Grahe JE and Bernieri FJ (2002) Self-awareness of judgment policies of rapport. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 28(10): 1407–1418.
- Gremler DD and Gwinner KP (2000) Customer–employee rapport in service relationships. *Journal of Service Research* 3(1): 82–104.
- Harman HH (1976) *Modern Factor Analysis*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Homans GC (1958) Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology* 63(6): 597–606.
- Hwang J and Lee J (2019) Relationships among senior tourists' perceptions of tour guides' professional competencies, rapport, satisfaction with the guide service, tour satisfaction, and word of mouth. *Journal of Travel Research* 58(8): 1331–1346.
- Hyun SS and Kim I (2014) Identifying optimal rapport-building behaviors in inducing patrons' emotional attachment in luxury restaurants. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* 38(2): 162–198.
- Jiang L, Hoegg J, Dahl DW, et al. (2010) The persuasive role of incidental similarity on attitudes and purchase intentions in a sales context. *Journal of Consumer Research* 36: 778–791.
- Juschten M, Jiricka-Pürner A, Unbehaun W, et al. (2019) The mountains are calling! An extended TPB model for understanding metropolitan residents' intentions to visit nearby alpine destinations in summer. *Tourism Management* 75: 293–306.
- Kaminakis K, Karantinou K, Koritos C, et al. (2019) Hospitality servicescape effects on customer–employee interactions: a multilevel study. *Tourism Management* 72: 130–144.
- Khan HUZ (2008) Intellectual capital reporting practices: evidence from Bangladesh. *Dhaka University Journal of Business Studies* 29(1): 23–45.
- Kim H, So KKF and Wirtz J (2022) Service robots: applying social exchange theory to better understand human–robot interactions. *Tourism Management* 92: 104537.
- Kim KA, Byon KK, Baek W, et al. (2019) Examining structural relationships among sport service environments, excitement, consumer-to-consumer interaction, and consumer citizenship behaviors. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 82: 318–325.
- Lacher RG and Nepal SK (2010) Dependency and development in northern Thailand. *Annals of Tourism Research* 37(4): 947–968.
- Lawler EJ and Thye SR (1999) Bringing emotions into social exchange theory. *Annual Review of Sociology* 25(1): 217–244.
- Lee LW, Boon E and McCarthy IP (2021) Does getting along matter? Tourist–tourist rapport in guided group activities. *Tourism Management* 87: 104381.
- Lee WH and Moscardo G (2005) Understanding the impact of ecotourism resort experiences on tourists' environmental attitudes and behavioural intentions. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 13(6): 546–565.
- Lemy D, Goh E and Ferry J (2019) Moving out of the silo: how service quality innovations can develop customer loyalty in Indonesia's hotels. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 25(4): 462–479.
- Leung XY and Jiang L (2018) How do destination Facebook pages work? An extended TPB model of fans' visit intention. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology* 9(3): 397–416.
- Lim EAC, Lee YH and Foo MD (2017) Frontline employees' nonverbal cues in service encounters: a double-edged sword. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45(5): 657–676.
- Lin CY and Lin JSC (2017) The influence of service employees' nonverbal communication on customer–employee rapport in the service encounter. *Journal of Service Management* 28(1): 107–132.
- Lin H, Gursoy D and Zhang M (2020) Impact of customer-to-customer interactions on overall service experience: a social servicescape

- perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 87: 102376.
- Lindsey-Hall KK, Jaramillo S, Baker TL, et al. (2021) Authenticity, rapport and interactional justice in front-line service: the moderating role of need for uniqueness. *Journal of Services Marketing* 35(3): 367–380.
- Llodrà-Riera I, Martínez-Ruiz MP, Jiménez-Zarco AI, et al. (2015) A multidimensional analysis of the information sources construct and its relevance for destination image formation. *Tourism Management* 48(C): 319–328.
- Martin CL (1996) Customer-to-customer relationships: satisfaction with other consumers' public behavior. *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 30(1): 146–169.
- McFerran B, Dahl DW, Fitzsimons GJ, et al. (2010) I'll have what she's having: effects of social influence and body context on the food choices of others. *Journal of Consumer Research* 36(6): 915–929.
- Moura e Sá P and Amorim M (2017) A typology of customer-to-customer interaction and its implications for excellence in service provision. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence* 28(9–10): 1183–1193.
- Nomura T and Kanda T (2016) Rapport–expectation with a robot scale. *International Journal of Social Robotics* 8(1): 21–30.
- Nunnally J (1978) *Psychometric Theory*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Pangarkar A, Arora V and Shukla Y (2022) Exploring phygital omnichannel luxury retailing for immersive customer experience: the role of rapport and social engagement. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 68: 103001.
- Preacher KJ and Hayes AF (2004) SPSS And SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers* 36(4): 717–731.
- Ramaprasad J (2001) South Asian students' beliefs about and attitude toward advertising. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising* 23(1): 55–70.
- Ringle CM and Sarstedt M (2016) Gain more insight from your PLS-SEM results: the importance–performance map analysis. *Industrial Management & Data Systems* 116(9): 1865–1886.
- Smith WW, Li XR, Pan B, et al. (2015) Tracking destination image across the trip experience with smartphone technology. *Tourism Management* 48(C): 113–122.
- Spoor JR and Kelly JR (2004) The evolutionary significance of affect in groups: communication and group bonding. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 7(4): 398–412.
- Styles C, Patterson PG and Ahmed F (2008) A relational model of export performance. *Journal of International Business Studies* 39: 880–900.
- Su L, Yang Q, Swanson SR, et al. (2022) The impact of online reviews on destination trust and travel intention: the moderating role of online review trustworthiness. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 28(4): 406–423.
- Tickle-Degnen L and Rosenthal R (1990) The nature of rapport and its nonverbal correlates. *Psychological Inquiry* 1(4): 285–293.
- Tóth Z, Mrad M, Itani OS, et al. (2022) B2b eWOM on Alibaba: signaling through online reviews in platform-based social exchange. *Industrial Marketing Management* 104: 226–240.
- Tsang SS, Kuo C, Hu TK, et al. (2023) Exploring impacts of AR on group package tours: destination image, perceived certainty, and experiential value. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 29(1): 84–102.
- Tsaur SH and Ku PS (2019) The effect of tour leaders' emotional intelligence on tourists' consequences. *Journal of Travel Research* 58(1): 63–76.
- Voss KE, Spangenberg ER and Grohmann B (2003) Measuring the hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of consumer attitude. *Journal of Marketing Research* 40(3): 310–320.
- Wang YC, Luo CC and Tai YF (2017) Implementation of delightful services: from the perspective of front-line service employees. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 31: 90–104.
- Wu CHJ (2007) The impact of customer-to-customer interaction and customer homogeneity on customer satisfaction in tourism service: the service encounter prospective. *Tourism Management* 28(6): 1518–1528.