Order effects and multi-city visits; tour guides’ views

Abstract:

Purpose: The study examines the influence of the order in which a set of cities are visited to ascertain the effects of position on group tourists’ recall and evaluations.

Design/methodology/approach: In Iran, a natural variation in the order of visiting cities exists. Using a questionnaire, the views of highly experienced tour guides were analysed to provide preliminary insights about the likely occurrence of position effects.

Findings: Credible and consistent evidence was found for the perceived effects of recency when considering tourists’ recall and evaluations. In particular, the influence was seen as clearly enhancing the recall and positive evaluation for the most high profile cities in the set of visited locations.

Research limitations/implications: Replications of the recency effect in other countries and for other kinds of tourism cities needs to be pursued, desirably by direct assessments of tourist’ views to buttress the present views held by guides.

Practical implications: Designing itineraries by making imaginative use of the effects of order on the tourists’ sequence of city visits should facilitate new positive outcomes for tourists and businesses.

Originality/value: Empirical evidence about order effects in multi-city tour itineraries has never been established. The study provides foundation evidence for such influences through a non-reactive and naturalistic assessment by tour guides who are in contact with varied itineraries and who regularly consider the experiences of diverse and large numbers of tourists.

Keywords: Position Effects, City Evaluation, City Recall, Recency Effect, Tour Guides, Iranian cities

Introduction

This study addresses the following key topic: Does it matter to the tourists’ recall and evaluation if they visit a city first, in the middle of, or at the end of a multi-city tour? In the literature the concept is referred to as position effects. Tour guides are credible observers of position effects, and their key role as close observers of and advisers to tourists has already been emphasized in the
literature (Weiler and Black, 2015; Vogt and Fesenmaier, 1995; Goldsmith et al., 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1985, p. 45). Tour guides can also be seen as independent commentators on the operation of position effects, particularly if they have experience of a setting where the tour itineraries conform to a naturalistic variation of order effects (Tunnell, 1977). The context for this exploration of position effects is Iran, where views about the order effects of visiting the cities of Shiraz, Esfahan and Yazd will be highlighted. This study uses Iranian tour guides’ experience of literally hundreds of trips and tourists’ experiences to provide access to the topic of interest. The tourists whose views were indirectly assessed were from a wide variety of international destinations.

The broad applicability of the psychological concepts of temporal and spatial position effects in recall and judgement inform the work. Two concepts, notably the serial position effect (Ebbinghaus, 1902) and memory based judgments (Hastie and Park, 1986), are of special relevance. In this kind of work, the term primacy effect refers to advantages conferred on the first items in a sequence while recency refers to the last elements experienced (Goldstein, 2014). The fundamental question driving the study is: can we establish any empirical basis for the hypothesis that the first and/or last visited cities in a multi-city itinerary are recalled more readily by tourists? Further, are the cities in these positions likely to be judged more favourably? The study concentrates on cities where visitors have a common experience (through a packaged group tour) and it is their first time in visiting the locations.

The potential implications of finding clear and powerful position effects on tourists’ memory for their destinations in a trip sequence are of considerable commercial and marketing interest. If such effects can be shown to exist, it raises the possibility that tour designers may want to start or conclude their tours with the most outstanding attraction. Such a strategy may confer halo satisfaction effects for the tour, the company and the destination. Alternatively, tour designers might choose to boost the appeal of lower profile destinations by placing them at the end or start of the journey rather than in the middle. In a theoretical sense the study of visiting tourism cities provides an opportunity to explore the power and limitations of position effects at a more molar scale than previously studied in more sterile laboratory tasks (Pearce and Packer, 2013).
It is important to stress, however, that while it is possible to speculate on the existence and usefulness of knowing about order effects on tourists’ recall of a set of cities, empirical evidence of such effects resulting from tour itineraries has never been established. It is the generic aim of this study to collect empirical evidence about the influence of the order in which a set of cities are visited on group tourists’ recall and evaluations.

**Literature review**

1.1 Destinations and memory

The importance of destinations and the role of memory to support the enduring value of tourists’ experiences provide the tourism relevant literature for this study. These central concerns of tourism scholars are supplemented by the specific studies on position effects which derive from diverse social science traditions and which have been used sparingly in tourism research. By reviewing the link between recall and (memory-based) evaluations the full rationale for examining position effects on the recall of tourism destinations will be established.

*Destinations.* Tourists seek to fulfil their needs through complex patterns of using services and interacting with destinations (Prebensen et al., 2014; Pearce and Zare, 2017). The actual concept of a destination can vary in its scale. At times, tourism researchers use it to encompass whole regions, even countries, and on other occasions the term can refer to a specific city, site or attraction (Crouch and Ritchie, 2005; Dolnicar and Grun, 2016; Jovicic, 2016). The interest in this study is with how well defined destinations, specifically cities, are recalled and by implication the forces which act on this recall. In a multi-destination trip such as a tour within one country, cities with all their attributes including sights, events, and services encountered, represent one specific level for studying destination recall. There are many tours which operate on the basis of visiting multiple cities within one country. This is the level of investigation within the present work. More broadly, however, the same conceptual ideas about the role of position can also be applied to a suite of more molar destinations (countries in Europe, islands in the Caribbean or Pacific), or at a more micro scale (churches or temples in a city).
Narrowing the recall of tourism experiences down to the memorability of cities provides a focus on the critical role of places and their attributes in delivering memorable tourist experiences (Dwyer and Kim, 2003; Crouch and Ritchie, 2005; Kim, 2014). In a recent review Kim (2014) identified 10 key destination attributes - local culture, the variety of activities, hospitality, infrastructure, environment management, accessibility, quality of service, physiography, place attachment, and superstructure - that destination managers can manipulate to deliver more memorable tourism experiences. Nevertheless, links between recall and experiencing a destination extend beyond destination attributes. The role of critical incidents and the behaviour of other tourists are two such factors (Pearce, 2011). Another potentially important connection between a destination and tourists’ memory to be considered in this study is the temporal position of a destination in a visit; the researchers have not been able to identify previous empirical studies on this topic.

In a somewhat allied topic area, benchmarking and comparison processes have been shown to be important in a range of tourist studies (Wober, 2002; Pearce and Benckendorff, 2006). Marschall (2012) has suggested that memories from previous trips create an involuntary comparative context against which any specific journey is (mostly subconsciously) measured. When recalling a recently completed journey at least two scenarios exist. Firstly, tourists can compare the overall memory of the trip with previous trips. Secondly, they can remember key facets of the recent trip (cities, attractions, restaurants, and hotels) and rank or compare those elements. The present study is interested principally in the effects of the position in which cities are visited in these comparison and benchmarking processes.

**Memory.** A travel memory is a mental souvenir. Travel experiences are stored in autobiographical memory which is a person’s memory about his or her own life experiences (Goldstein, 2014; Robinson, 1986). Autobiographical memories are constructed, reconstructed and distorted due to suggestions, context and later experiences (Pearce and Packer, 2013). Such memories function as reliable sources of information that shape future travel behaviours such as revisit intentions or word of mouth referrals (Marschall, 2012). This makes the study of memorable tourism experiences increasingly valuable for destination marketing and management. Memory itself is best
conceived as an active process of encoding information, storing, and then retrieving it for use in decision making (Braun, 1999). If encoded thoroughly, there are some generic internal psychological and physiological forces such as personality (Cuttler and Graf, 2007), mood (Anderson et al., 2006) and autobiographical relevance that facilitate the retrieval process (Goldstein, 2014). Additionally, external forces such as olfactory and auditory cues as well as physical mementos can enhance retrieval. The growing understanding of the factors shaping memorable tourist experiences advances our knowledge of the type of stimuli that should be provided for visitors (Kim and Jang, 2014). Nevertheless, the position of a destination in a travel itinerary (or the order of presentation of the tourism services in a tour package) is one external factor potentially related to both the encoding and retrieval stage that has rarely been studied in the tourism domain if at all. Since external forces are easier to control compared to internal forces (such as mood and personality), it can be suggested that an understanding of the effects of position on the memory of a tourism experience will be of practical use in designing many tourism services and products.

Memory-based judgments. The current study seeks to explore if remembering the most “available” destination in recall as the most memorable one (the effect of position on destination memorability) may also cause the individual to choose the first recalled destination as the most preferred (the effect of position on evaluation). Based on Hastie and Park (1986), strong relationships between recall and judgment are expected when judgments are computed on the basis of information retrieved from memory. When memory causes judgment, the Availability-Biased Judgment model (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973) predicts a direct relationship between memory and judgment due to memory availability (Sherman et al., 1983; Lichtenstein and Srull, 1985; Hastie and Park, 1986). The associated idea with the memory availability model is that the input into the judgment operator comes from the information that is retrieved from long-term memory. Under such circumstances, the relationship between judgment and memory depends on the patterns of order effects observed in judgment and memory (Lichtenstein and Srull, 1987; Unnava et al., 1994; Kardes and Herr, 1990). Unnava, Burnkrant and Erevelles (1994) confirmed that the order of presentation of information
affects recall and memory-based attitudes. In their study, subjects’ attitudes depended on the order in which products were recalled.

In summary, one base for this study is the idea that attributes that are retrieved first have a disproportionately greater impact on judgment (Sherman et al., 1983). Tourists’ evaluations of the destinations they have just visited are in many cases based on memory, so it is quite likely that the destination position in the itinerary first influences the recall and then shapes the favourability judgment. Such perspectives help build the case for the hypotheses to be explored in this study. Additional work on position effects in tourism marketing research clarifies the likely directions of these influences.

1.2 Position effects in tourism marketing studies

The phenomenon of a serial position effect was first introduced by Ebbinghaus (1902, 624-626). He studied the recall of nonsense words or sets of syllables in memory tasks. Many researchers have replicated the original findings in different contexts (see Crowder 1976, Chapter 12 for an early review; Goldstein 2014). In essence the foundation work suggested that the first few and last few elements in a series are recalled best (the primacy and recency effects). The midpoint has the lowest performance which means that there is a bow-shaped (or U shaped) relationship between recall and the serial position of listed items.

Associated studies of Ebbinghaus’s position effect theory on the choice of products have been the base for many marketing studies (Valenzuela and Raghubir, 2009; Campo and Gijsbrechts, 2005; Chandon et al., 2009; Underhill, 1999). These studies have consistently confirmed the persistent effects of position on the recall of physical and non-physical as well as identical and non-identical products. Nevertheless, destinations have not yet been a subject area for the investigation of position effects despite many tourism experiences occurring over time and in structured and carefully planned sequences.

There are a limited number of allied studies in hospitality and tourism service design. One allied study on the topic of order effects has been examined when booking a hotel online (Ert and
Fleischer, 2014). Their results have revealed both recency and primacy effects. Using an experimental design they developed a website simulating a hotel reservation service such as Booking.com. Respondents were presented with 10 hotels with highly similar attributes and prices. Ten different conditions were presented to the respondents on the screen. In each of these conditions the order of presenting the hotels changed. The analysis of the results showed that the hotels listed at the top and at the bottom of the list were more likely to be chosen than those in the middle (that is both primacy and recency effects occurred).

In another study about the effect of position of the food in the restaurant menu by Dayan and Bar-Hillel (2011), the items placed at the beginning or the end of the list were found to be up to twice as popular as when such items were placed in the center of the list. Position effects have been also investigated in the tourism advertising context. In a study by Chiou, Wan and Lee (2008) about the advertising effects of destinations traditional brochures versus virtual images, the recency effect of traditional brochures was more apparent for verbalizers (those who tend to use fewer images, but rely mostly on verbal material), whereas the recency effect of virtual experience was more pronounced for visualizers (those who tend to remember better from visual material and not from verbal material). In this study, the results also indicated that the recency effect was more prominent than the primacy effect when hybrid advertising (mix of the two advertising modes) was employed. Finally, some studies have considered first impression effects towards tourism destinations. In studying web pages, links at the top (primacy effects) were found to be more important in attracting attention and assisting memory (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2008; Buda and Zhang, 2000; Haugtvedt and Wegener, 1994; Jones and Goethals, 1972).

The novelty of the present investigation lies in the examination of the relationship between the position of large scale entities, specifically cities and their recall, and the further effect on favourability assessments. The main emphasis in the present work is on the sequence of cities visited over time rather than the spatial position of tourism products (such as the hotels in an online booking list or food items in a menu). Furthermore, the present research efforts, are directed at recall, rather than choice, and operate at a larger scale. In addition, cities as tourism products can be categorized as
non-physical and non-identical items. Such categorization matters because it introduces the issue of non-equivalence as a potential mediator on the effect of position and this feature distinguishes the current study with the position effect studies from the product marketing studies. At the methodological level, most previous studies have used factorial design in their experiments with a random/student sample, while this study intends to explore the reports about order effects from highly experienced key informants.

Building on the research on position effects and memory based evaluations the present work is guided by the following hypotheses:

H1: In a multi-destination trip, the destination at the end is likely to be seen as better remembered than the destinations at the beginning and in the middle.

H2: The first recalled destination will be the most likely to be favoured.

In proposing these hypotheses the researchers are aware that the qualities of real destinations may interact with or modify the value of position as a heuristic. The study therefore addresses a third hypothesis:

H3: The power of the position effects will be more apparent when the destinations in the itinerary are rated by external criteria as more similar.

2 Method

The study had to have a unique design to meet the four requirements necessary for the control and assessment of major non-position effects on memory. These requirements were: 1) a standardized style of tourism experience with the existing itineraries offering a natural manipulation of the order in which destinations are experienced (group tours), 2) relatively uniform cities for comparison, 3) A destination with many first-time visitors to control familiarity, 4) A way to access judgments of position effects; in this work the views of experienced inbound tour guides was a pre-requisite for the study. The following sections document these issues in details.
3.1. Group tours.

Vacation package tours are the most comprehensive form of tourism offerings. They include all the components of a tourism experience such as sights, activities, events, accommodation, food and guides. The experiences of those who buy such packages are somewhat similar in terms of the time they spend in destinations and in the order of the places visited. Those who design travel itineraries usually arrange the destinations to suit points of entry and exit, means of transportation, and the length of trip. Potentially important factors affecting recall such as destination attributes, level of interaction with the local people, and differences in the service experience can be seen as somewhat standardised by choosing guided packaged tours as the research setting. In a guided packaged tour every tourist follows the same path, stays in the same level of accommodation, undertakes the same activities and has almost the same level of interaction with the destination or its local residents because the daily plan is directed by a tour guide. Among many countries that the group package tours are still operated traditionally, this study chose Iran as most suitable one considering certain issues that make the group package tours of this country to be all from one level of services and cultural design. For example such setting prevents interference with tourists’ memories due to staying in very different classes of hotels as such difference doesn’t exist in the hotels offered by all the Iranian travel agencies in their package tours (there is no internationally recognized or chain hotel in Iran). The natural manipulation of the order that occurs in the way most of the travel itineraries in Iran are designed for the package tours was another important feature of the setting that the authors were looking for. This is called by Tunnell (1977) as ecological validity or naturalness of the manipulation.

2.2 Uniform types of cities:

Destinations are the main focus of the current study. A rare quality of Iranian cities is their relative uniformity as cultural destinations with parallel richness in history, architecture and art. These commonalities provide a homogenous study context. In other words, the effect of order cannot be easily examined if the nature of destinations, the places to visit in each city and the activities that interests tourists are strikingly diverse (for example, if a tourists travels to a beach resort, a historical
city and a capital, the strongest memory may belong to the one destination that is closer to the tourists’ interests rather than the one that is visited first or last).

2.3 Tourists

The selection of respondents was particularly important in this study. The central purpose of the present work is to build the case that position effects in tourism experiences matter and that destinations which are experienced in a different order may gain certain memory and evaluation advantages from the position in which they are visited. Typically tourists do not visit the same set of destinations in varied orders. If they were to do so, then there would be substantial reactivity effects resulting from the carryover experiences of previous visits. Therefore, the researchers fulfilled this requirement with choosing Iran where tourists are mostly first-timers.

2.4 Tour guides

A total of 40 respondents/tour guides participated in the online survey. Typically key informant studies use modest numbers of respondents (Gomm, 2000). It’s the characteristics of those who provide knowledge that matters most (cf. Cooper, 2006). All the respondents were inbound tour guides handling international tourists (mostly first-time visitors) not locals. They had an average age of 37.6 years (Mode = 32) as well as a mean of 11.1 years of work experience (Mode = 10). Sixty percent of the respondents were male. Such information is important because every professional tour guide is handling at least 6 groups (average of 15 people in each group) every year, which means they have been observing almost 1000 tourists in their professional life. The sampling of the key informants was based on the research team’s extensive professional contacts.

2.3 Study Design

The suggested relationship between position and destination recall, as well as the effects of the order visited on evaluation, were explored using a survey questionnaire with a combination of binary and Likert response scales. Based on the selection procedures for choosing the Iranian setting, a quasi-experiment was conducted (Campbell and Stanley, 2015). That is, it is possible to assess the
target factor (position in the itinerary) from a realistic setting (combinations of three common destinations in Iran) and therefore, investigate the position effects on recall. The online questionnaire contained five main questions as well as five demographic and content evaluation questions. The respondents were asked to express their professional opinions on the existence of position effects (Yes/No question), the strength of position effect (5 point Likert scale), the existence of such effects on judgment (Yes/No question), and the strength of position effect on judgment (5 point Likert scale).

In the quasi experiment (Campbell and Stanley, 2015), respondents were asked to identify the destination which was most likely to be seen as preferred from six orders of combinations of the cities. In this last question, three major tourist cities- Shiraz, Esfahan and Yazd- were introduced in six different sequences as a representing multi–destination itinerary of Iran. The fact that these three commonly visited cities are already arranged in these six ways in the actual travel itineraries of Iran by the tour companies thus mirrors real cases for the tour guides. The only difference with the real-world cases lies in the fact that more cities are often incorporated into the actual travel itineraries by the tour operators in response to market demands. The justification to focus on only three cities is that the examination of serial position effects is directly assessed by considering the three positions of first, middle, and last visited. A three-city set up can elegantly represent each of these positions and possible combinations. Qualtrics software was used to design the online questionnaire.

As outlined in Table 1, each destination appeared once in each of the six possible positions. Each participant was asked to make a prediction by identifying the name of one city as the most likely to be remembered for every one of the six conditions.

Table 1. The order of the cities for each of the 6 travel itineraries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Itinerary 1</th>
<th>Itinerary 2</th>
<th>Itinerary 3</th>
<th>Itinerary 4</th>
<th>Itinerary 5</th>
<th>Itinerary 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shiraz=S</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esfahan=E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yazd = Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Discrete choice methods and analysis

The application of discrete choice models has been applied to tourism and leisure studies since the 1970s (Stynes and Peterson, 1984; Luzar, et al., 1998; Riddington et al., 2000; Viña and Ford, 2001). Not only traditional demographic variables but also attitudinal and psychological variables, such as recall, can be incorporated into the discrete choice models. This feature makes the logit model the right fit for this study because the positive or negative answers of the respondents to the existence of this phenomena can be interpreted as the binary codes. In other words, a binomial logistic regression (also called the logit model) enables the assessment of the quantification of perceptions/feelings of tourists in the form of a set of conditional probabilities (Seddighi and Theocharous, 2002). Therefore, in this study, a logistic model estimated the probability that a particular city would be seen as the one likely to be recalled most readily. Explanatory variables were position of the city in the itinerary, city identity, and their interaction. The various combinations of the independent variables (i.e. three cities in all the possible positions of first, middle and last in a single itinerary) generated six conditions for examination of the recall (dependent variable). Every city featured twice as the first, middle and last city in the design.

3 Results

In assessing the three hypotheses for this study it is important to initially record some background results from the questionnaire. All of the respondents agreed that the position of the destination in tours affected overall memorability. For the power of the effect, 89% of the tour guides ranked the effect to be either strong or very strong while only 11% estimated a modest effect for the importance of the destination position in the itinerary in shaping recall. The responses for these two questions fulfilled the initial purpose of the study to establish that there are position effects in the recall of destinations as revealed by the opinion of the key informant.

For the first hypothesis it was proposed that the destinations at the end of a tour were likely to be better remembered than the destinations at the beginning and in the middle. The analysis with the binary logistic regression model partially supported this first hypothesis. The expected U shape serial
position curve was achieved for one of the three cities; Yazd. The analysis of deviance for the two independent variables of city and the order of visit, were significant with no interaction effect: City: $\chi^2 [df=6, N = 40] = 91.57, p < 0.0001$ and Visit order: $\chi^2 [df=4, N = 40] = 4.76, p < 0.0001$. The result for the order in which the cities were visited revealed that the tour guides perceived the last city to be visited as significantly more likely to be remembered when compared to cities visited first or in the middle of the tour ($t=7.71, p<.001$). Figure 1 summarises the results and identifies the effects for the specific cities. The Y axis in Figure 1 indicates the proportion of responses for recalling a city first when it appeared in the relevant position indicated on the X axis. For example when Esfahan was first in one of the itineraries it was recalled first 0.38 (38%) of the time by all respondents, whereas when it was third (last) in the city order it was seen as likely to be recalled first .90 (90%) of the time.

Figure 1: The relationship between perceived memorability of cities and the order in which they are visited.
From Figure 1 it is apparent that the overall proportion of the frequencies for Esfahan as the choice of first remembered destination in all the given positions is higher than for Shiraz and Yazd. Comparison of individual cities established that Esfahan achieved significantly better recall ratings than either Yazd (\( t = -8.5 \ p < .001 \)) and Shiraz (\( t = -4.84 \ p < .001 \)).

The second hypothesis investigated whether or not the first recalled destination was also perceived to be the most likely to be favoured, that is evaluated the most positively. A direct question to the respondents assessing this issue supported this hypothesis. For this question about the possible effect of recall (therefore position) on the choice of favourite destination, 80% of respondents believed that this effect exists. Using a simple binomial test this effect was significant, \( p = 0.0005 \).

The third hypothesis of the study suggested that the power of the position effects will be more apparent when the cities in the itinerary are rated by external criteria as more similar. In the Iranian context the cities of Shiraz and Esfahan are arguably more famous tourist locations than Yazd (Cultural heritage news agency of Iran 2014). They are larger with more tourist attractions and accommodation options and overall have higher visitor numbers than the central Iranian city of Yazd. It can be noted in Figure 1 that the position effects for these two somewhat equivalent cities follow a similar trend. As specified in the logistic regression model the influence of the city is significant overall (\( \chi^2 [df=6, \ N = 40] = 91.57, \ p < 0.0001 \)) and there is not a significant interaction with the order effect. There is therefore some support for the third hypothesis in that the two of the cities which are externally rated as similar conform to a recency effect but the somewhat dissimilar city (Yazd) in the trio of destinations assessed does not conform to a full serial position effect.

4 Discussion

The central purpose of this study as expressed in the three hypotheses guiding the work was to build the case that the position in which a destination is visited affects recall and judgements. An indirect but nevertheless powerful way to assess this likely influence on recall was to seek the opinions of tour guides who have experienced these kinds of positional influences as manifested in the varying orders of destinations employed in the tours they have conducted. The explicit rationale for using these respondents was built on the view that few individual tourists repeatedly tour the same
cities in different orders. Furthermore, in investigating a phenomena for the first time, the tacit knowledge of key observers represents a valuable starting point. The Iranian tour guides studied in this research had substantial work experience of guiding about a thousand tourists each during their career.

The results of a questionnaire to these experienced guides in Iran provided strong evidence for all three hypotheses in the study. First, there was the overall perception that the position of cities as destinations in tours affected the recall of those destinations. The logit regression analysis as well as the direct responses by the guides to questions about order effects confirmed the hypothesis. More specifically, the pattern of the findings revealed that the power of being the first city visited was less than being the last city visited. This result meant that the full serial position effect - the first and last are recalled best - did not occur in the case of the two stronger destinations, Shiraz and Esfahan. For these two cities the last position alone was considered as more memorable. Importantly, the city recalled first was also the city evaluated the most positively, thus providing evidence for the link between the ease of recall and evaluation. For the city of Yazd the full serial position effect - that is the superior recall for first and last visited cities compared to the city in the middle of itinerary - was reported.

The reported recency effect in recall and judgments established in this study extend the work on position effects in consumer attitude formation (Kardes and Herr, 1990; Unnava, Burnkrant & Erevelles, 1994) and draw attention to the role of tourists’ memory in decision making and revisit intentions (e.g. Ert and Fleischer 2014; Barnes et al., 2016). In the literature it was proposed that the order effects would be more clearly discerned when destinations of equivalent stature and external recognition were involved in the benchmarking contrasts. It was also recognised that in the tourism city context externally rated attractiveness, along with other influence factors, might moderate the order effects. The material reported in Figure 1 did indeed find that both order effects and the influence of the city affected the perceived recall but no interaction between these variables was found. (Dolnicar and Grun, 2016; Jovicic, 2016). In the present study Esfahan was seen as the first
choice irrespective of its position but the effect of being the last visited also enhanced its memorability and appeal.

6 Conclusion and further studies

By direct questions to tour guides, and by analysing the responses to varied patterns of the order of presentation of city destinations, this study found credible evidence for the recency effect when considering tourists’ recall and judgments. The core aim of the study, which was to build the case that position effects might matter more than has been appreciated in tourism studies, can now be seen as a contribution requiring further confirmation.

The limitations of any study offer pathways for improvement as well as providing important caveats about the generalisability and value of the work. The work has been conducted in one setting and the diversity inherent in the phenomenon of tourism demands that replications in other countries and for other kinds of tourism cities needs to be pursued. In this study, the naturalness of the tasks required of the tour guides was seen as high since tours in Iran do vary in the kinds of city order presented in the study. The topic does, however, also need to be directly investigated with tourists themselves as direct access to their reported experience may assist in determining the psychological mechanisms at work in generating the order effects. This suggestion to work directly with tourists does not invalidate or undermine the approach adopted in the present study. Tourists can report on a specific trip sequence whereas the guides studied in the present work were able to use their experience to reflect on multiple sequences and travel possibilities; such judgements were need to establish the case for subsequent investigations.

The import of this kind of work on order effects stretches beyond demonstrating the novelty of an established research finding in social science studies to tourism. There are genuine practical consequences if researchers can confirm the present findings and extend their applicability by assessing the tourists’ views of and responses to these issues. The design of multi-city tour itineraries is an important task for destination tour operators. Armed with the power of serial position effects, a tour itinerary designer may want to place an already popular city at the end of the tour, thus enhancing
the evaluation of that destination and generating a powerful positive feedback for the business. On other tour itineraries, some planners may choose to boost the recall and evaluation given to a moderately attractive city by finishing the tour with that destination. This strategy might ensure a more even evaluation of remembered good times across the span of the tourists’ holiday. Such decisions and strategies might work as remedial and competitive tools for the perceived success of the tour.

The further investigation of serial position effect for sites within cities also offers prospects for new city research. Museums, commercial attractions, parks, churches, mosques or temples often exist in profusion in large cities. Tourism researchers have perhaps underestimated or ignored the importance of order effects in such site and destination itineraries. City tourism researchers can be challenged to pursue the fundamental question inspiring this study: How much does changing the order of visiting within or across tours of cities affect the evaluation of the trip?

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