

ASSESSING THE VISITOR PATTERN AND IMPACTS IN HONG KONG GEOTOURISM UNDER THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A COMPARISON STUDY BETWEEN HONG KONG UNESCO GEOPARKS AND UNMANAGED GEOSITES

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RESEARCH BACKGROUND

- Widespread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), with stringent social-distancing policies imposed
- Significant growth in visitor volume in countryside since COVID-19, with parallel increase in geoparks
- Unmanaged geosites receive unexpected attention along with promotion via various social media platforms

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- To investigate **visitor motivations and patterns** in Geoparks and unmanaged geosites after the pandemic outbreak
- To investigate the **visitor activities and impacts** on the two sites after pandemic outbreak
- To examine the **linkage and result** between varying visitors' motivation, behavior, and impacts in the two sites

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

- Geological resources and processes underpin the biodiversity and biological processes and should be treated with equivalent significance to biodiversity
- Draw attention to the urgency of geoconservation in Hong Kong during the epidemic outbreak
- Fill in research gaps

MAJOR FINDINGS ON VISITORS' MOTIVATION AND PATTERNS

- **Two-way ANOVA analysis:** the public's perception on these two site categories are **roughly identical** to one another, without significant deviations in terms of their motivations and usage of the sites
- **Positive correlation** of motivations and visitation frequency: stronger positive correlation is perceived in geoparks instead of geosites
- Comparison of motivational categories: **Attitude > Context (Destination) > Context (Origin)**, for both HK geoparks and unmanaged geosites
- Low ranking of the **knowledge-seeking motivational** items, especially for unmanaged geosites
- **Larger visitor inflow** in unmanaged geosites than managed ones
- **Major visitor groups:** HKGPs- middle-aged visitors (40-69); Unmanaged geosites- younger adults (18-39)

METHODOLOGY

Primary Data:

- Online Questionnaire
- In-depth Interview (Local Residents)
- Field Observation (Tung Ping Chau & Tung Lung Chau)

Secondary Data:

- Books and Academic Journals
- Governmental and Organizational Publications
- News Articles

Data Analysis:

- Two-way ANOVA
- Correlation

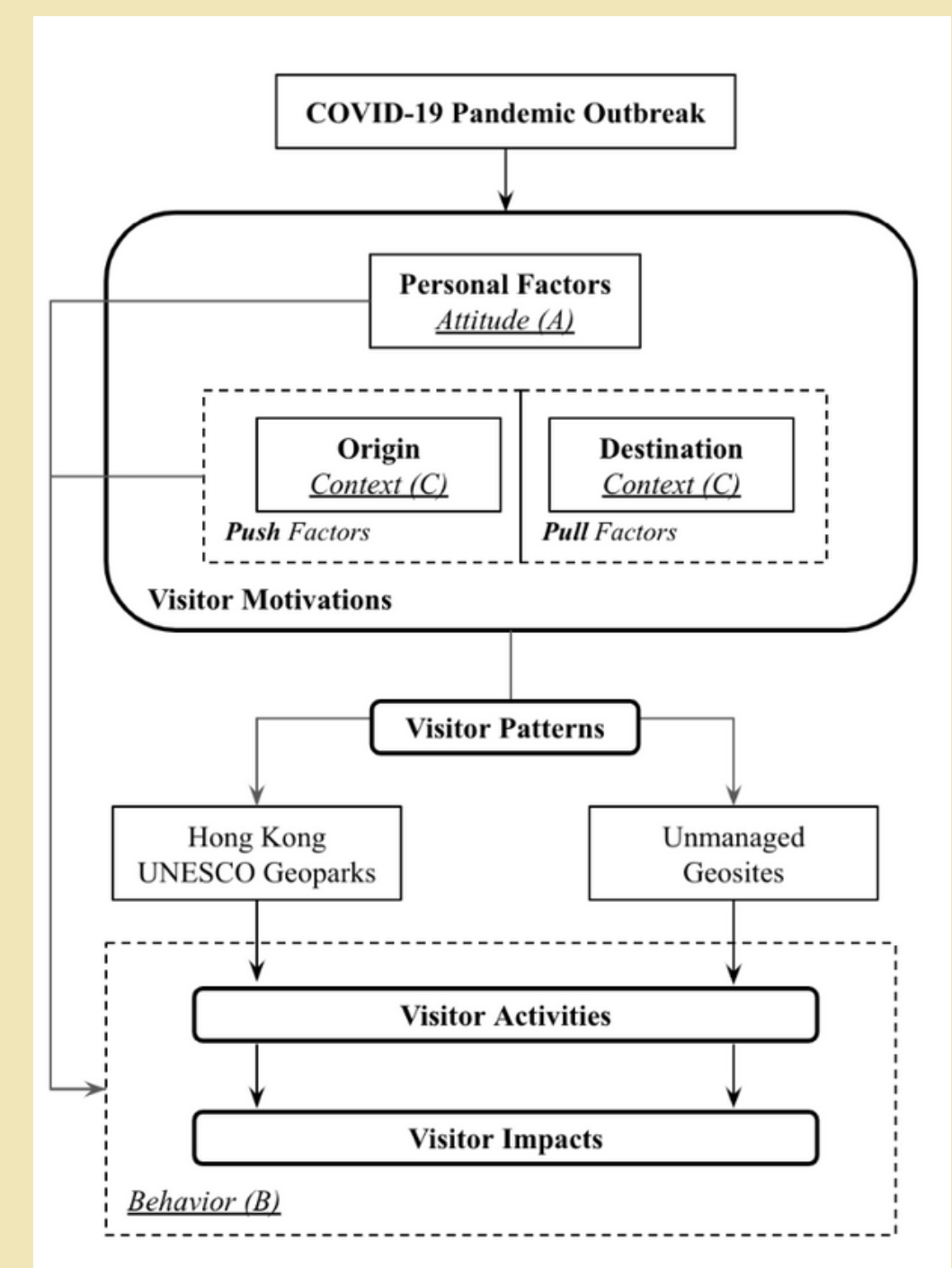
MAJOR FINDINGS ON VISITOR ACTIVITIES

Visitor Activities

- Tung Ping Chau: middle-aged visitors tend to participate more in leisure walking, taking photographs, joining tours and having meals
- Tung Lung Chau: young adults participating in hiking, camping, cooking, fishing, kayaking and rock climbing (photos below)
- Larger variety of activities seen in unmanaged geosites



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



IMPLICATIONS

- Public members may maintain same/ similar desires during recreation → oblivious on their respective carrying capacities
- Lower learning motives in unmanaged sites in turn hinders environmental awareness
- Young respondents seeking for novelty and targeted secluded spots in countryside recommended by social medias
- Less restriction: performing a wider range of activities
- Lack of infrastructural and amenities support in unmanaged sites
- Higher accessibility without control on visitor flow allows upsurge in travellers
- Ultimate outcome: higher severity of visitor impacts in unmanaged geosites
- Serious littering, trail degradation, soil erosion and nuisance to locals there

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS

- Follow-up actions in salvaging these sites would be needed
- Some suggested management strategies:
- Further control visitor inflow by setting up an upper limit each day
- Increasing the cost it takes to travel
- Reducing the availability of the sites via accessibility
- Onsite rehabilitation: regularly removing litter, repaving the trails
- Essential to acknowledge the significance in conserving abiotic resources
- Promoting education and conservation as the ultimate aim of geotourism

