

Impacts of tourist destination image on place attachment and tourist loyalty

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Abstract

Although the importance of tourist destination image as a tool to enhance tourist loyalty is commonly acknowledged, prior research on the relationship between tourist destination image and tourist loyalty is not in-depth. Drawing on place attachment theory, a model depicting the relationship among tourist destination image, place attachment and tourist loyalty is constructed. Using the sample of 337 inbound tourists from Japanese and Korean and the structural equation modeling method, the empirical results reveal that: 1) Landscape image, merchandise image and facility image have positive effects on affective image. Landscape image and merchandise image significantly and directly affect place attachment while partially mediating the effect of affective image. Service image has a direct effect on place attachment. Facility image has an indirect effect on place attachment. Facility image significantly and directly affects tourist loyalty while partially mediating the effect of place attachment. 2) Affective image has a direct effect on place attachment and it is an antecedent of tourist loyalty while completely mediating the effect of place attachment.

Keywords: tourist destination image, cognitive image, affective image, place attachment, tourist loyalty

1 Introduction

Since more than 40 years ago, tourist destination image has grown into one of the most pervasive areas in tourism studies [1,2]. Previous researches have sought to emphasize the crucial part it plays in tourism production and consumption [3,4]. Indeed, tourist destination image is understood to play an important role in destination positioning [5], destination branding [6], and tourist decision [7,8]. Therefore, the construction and maintenance of effective tourist destination images has been a major focus of the marketing [9]. In other words, tourist destination image plays an important role in enhancing tourist loyalty. Regardless of significant progress achieved, few studies examine the role of place attachment in the relationship between tourist destination image and tourist loyalty. Due to the importance of place attachment in revealing tourist loyalty [10,11], there is an imperative need to examine the relationship among tourist destination image, place attachment and tourist loyalty.

With the fast development of tourism industry in China, the number of inbound tourists has increased sharply. It is worth mentioning that Japan and Korea have been the main focus of China's inbound tourism marketing in recent years. Hangzhou is famous for a beautiful international tourist destination. Despite all this, Hangzhou's tourist destinations have long suffered a critical problem. An important manifestation of the problem reveals low revisit to a particular place. Hence, it is urgent that destination marketing organizations find the effective solutions for cultivating positive tourist destination images without compro-

missing the viability of natural and cultural resources. Based on the above consideration, in order to solve this problem, the main purpose of this article is to contribute to this study of tourist destination image, by examining the relationship among tourist destination image, place attachment and tourist loyalty.

2 Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 DEFINITION OF RELATED CONCEPTS

Tourist destination image studies have proliferated as a major focus of tourism research over the past four decades [12]. Tourist destination image is defined as the sum of the beliefs and impressions that an individual has of a tourist destination [13]. Phelps (1986) defines tourist destination image as an individual's overall perception of a tourist destination [14]. Fakeye & Crompton (1991) defines tourist destination image as an individual's mental representation of knowledge and overall perception of a particular tourist destination [15]. It is referred to the sum of perceptual beliefs and impressions based on information processed from a number of sources over time [16]. It is viewed as an individual's mental representation of knowledge and global impressions about a tourist destination [7]. So most related academic scholars commonly agree that it could be conceptualized from a psychological perspective.

Regardless of this dispute, it is commonly accepted that tourist destination image as a multidimensional concept. Prior researchers describe tourist destination image could

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be divided into several sub-constructs from the cognitive image perspective [5,17]. With the deepening of tourist destination image studies, it is widely understood that tourist destination image could be divided into two separate dimensions of cognitive image and affective image [18-25]. Therefore, tourist destination image could be conceptualized as the sum of perceptual beliefs and affective feeling that a tourist has about a tourist destination, which could be divided into cognitive image and affective image. In order to explore what constitutes the multi factors of tourist destination cognitive image, this article uses the focus group discussion to ascertain it. Four experts are chosen to conduct this survey. It is widely accepted that tourist destination cognitive image of landscape image, merchandise image, facility image, service image and entertainment image. On the basis of the previous studies and the focus group discussion, tourist destination cognitive image could be divided into landscape image, merchandise image, facility image, service image and entertainment image. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed.

Tourist destination image can be divided into landscape image, merchandise image, facility image, service image, entertainment image and affective image (H1).

It is commonly acknowledged that the notion of place attachment is traceable to attachment theory [26]. Precisely, the concept of place attachment originates from interpersonal attachment theory, which is first reported by Bowlby (1979) [27]. It's further developed by several scholars [28,29]. Hence, attachment originally is defined as the emotional and psychological bonds of interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal attachment theory is found extendable beyond interpersonal relationship context to person-to-object context [30,31]. For tourism marketing, place attachment is capable of bonding the tourist emotionally and psychologically with the tourist destination [32].

Williams et al. (1992) defines place attachment as the emotional bond between an individual and a place [33]. Guiliani & Feldman (1993) defines place attachment as the bonding between individuals and places [34]. Mazumdar (2005) describes place attachment as the emotional bond between individuals and places [35]. Regardless of this dispute, it is widely acknowledged that place attachment is described as a multidimensional notion. It is commonly understood that place attachment could be divided into two separate dimensions of place dependence and place identity [33, 36-38]. Therefore, place attachment is viewed as a bond with a particular tourist destination, which could

be divided into place dependence and place identity. Place dependence is viewed as tourists' functional attachment to a specific destination [33]. Place identity refers to a far-reaching connection between a place and an individual's personal identity [39].

2.2 RELATIONSHIP AMONG TOURIST DESTINATION IMAGE, PLACE ATTACHMENT AND TOURIST LOYALTY

Prior academic researchers have examined the relationship among tourist destination image, place attachment, tourist loyalty [40]. However, few studies examine the role of tourist destination image factors in the relationship. At the same time, the relationship between cognitive image and affective image is tested by most scholars. That is, cognitive image is an antecedent variable of affective image. So there is an imperative need to examine the effect of each factor of tourist destination image of place attachment and tourist loyalty. Taking account into the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses are developed.

Landscape image, merchandise image, facility image, service image and entertainment image relate positively to affective image respectively (H2a-H2e).

Landscape image, merchandise image, facility image, service image and entertainment image relate positively to place attachment respectively (H3a-H3e).

Landscape image, merchandise image, facility image, service image and entertainment image relate positively to tourist loyalty respectively (H4a-H4e).

Affective image relate positively to place attachment (H5).

Affective image relate positively to tourist loyalty (H6).

Place attachment relate positively to tourist loyalty (H7).

2.3 THE HYPOTHETICAL MODEL

Taking account into the preceding discussion, the six-factor of tourist destination image measurement model (M1) is proposed, which consists of landscape image, merchandise image, facility image, service image and entertainment image and affective image. Moreover, the model depicting the relationship among tourist destination image, place attachment and tourist loyalty (M2) is constructed, which is presented in Figure 1.

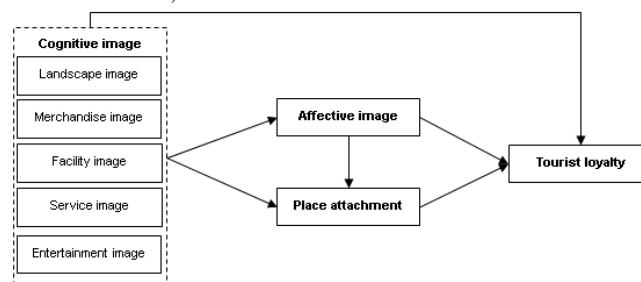


FIGURE 1 Research theory model

3 Methods

3.1 MEASURES

Measurements of the variables in this article are drawn from the prior literature and the focus group discussion. These constructs in this article are measured with multiple items. Each factor of tourist destination image is measured with 19 items by a combination of previous studies and focus group discussions. Landscape image is measured with four items (e.g., "I think Hangzhou is a beautiful international tourist destination"). Merchandise image is measured with three items (e.g., "I think Hangzhou has unique local specialties and souvenirs"). Facility image is measured with three items (e.g., "As an international tourist destination, I think internal traffic of Hangzhou is convenient"). Service image is measured with three items (e.g., "I think Hangzhou has a high service quality of catering"). Entertainment image is measured with two items (e.g., "I think leisure activities of Hangzhou are rich and colourful"). Affective image is measured with four items (e.g., "As an international tourist destination, I think visiting Hangzhou is excited"). Place attachment with four items is adapted from Williams et al. (1992) [33]. Tourist loyalty with 2 items is modified from Bao & Hu (2008) [41].

3.2 PARTICIPANT AND PROCEDURE

The sample is collected in Hangzhou tourist destination which locates at Zhejiang province. Facing the visiting

inbound tourists from Japan and Korea, the 400 questionnaires are distributed. This study obtained 337 completed valid questionnaires, for an effective response rate of 84.25%. The socio-demographic and tourist profiles of the respondents are summarized as follows. Briefly, 55.2% are female and 44.8% are male; 34.5% are 25-34 years old and 25.9% are 35-44 years old; 80.7% have a university education and 15.3% have a high school education; 66.3% are repeated visit and 33.7% are first visit.

4 Tables

4.1 DIMENSIONALITY OF TOURIST DESTINATION IMAGE

Exploratory factor analysis is carried out using the principle component method with VARIMAX rotation to examine the dimensionality of tourist destination image [42]. As recommended by Hair et al. (2010), factor loadings greater than 0.50 and eigenvalues greater than 1.0 indicate significance [43]. For the tourist destination image scale, none items do not meet the criteria, and thus none items are eliminated from further analyses, yielding a six-factor model with 19 items (See Table 1). The factor solution accounts for approximately 68.704% of the total variance extracted. Therefore, all initial indicators of tourist destination image are preserved for reliability and validity testing, which is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Exploratory factor analysis, reliability and validity

Variable	Eigenvalues	Item coding	Factor loadings(EFA)	Cronbach α	Factor loadings (CFA)	C.R.	AVE
Landscape image	1.931	A1	0.778	0.777	0.714	9.262	0.556
		A2	0.752		0.696	9.135	
		A3	0.795		0.748	9.478	
		A4	0.649		0.586	-	
Merchandise image	1.282	B1	0.732	0.699	0.554	8.064	0.562
		B2	0.787		0.744	9.317	
		B3	0.729		0.697	-	
Facility image	1.240	C1	0.646	0.702	0.512	7.594	0.526
		C2	0.811		0.787	9.582	
		C3	0.710		0.657	-	
Service image	1.783	D1	0.695	0.746	0.573	-	0.595
		D2	0.788		0.780	9.201	
		D3	0.826		0.774	9.193	
Entertainment image	1.117	E1	0.751	0.619	0.829	5.146	0.612
		E2	0.812		0.544	-	
Affective image	5.702	F1	0.840	0.888	0.887	15.882	0.657
		F2	0.800		0.805	14.487	
		F3	0.769		0.735	-	
		F4	0.831		0.837	15.067	

KMO sample measurement and Bartlett test: KMO=0.846 $\chi^2=2447.791$ df=171 Sig.= 0.000
Overall fit : $\chi^2/df=2.183$ RMR=0.029 RMSEA=0.059 GFI=0.913 TLI=0.912 NFI=0.878

Reliability and validity testing

Table 1 indicates that the Cronbach's α of all factors of tourist destination image reach 0.7, satisfying the specified standard of internal consistency [44]. So tourist

destination image scale is considered acceptable as a good indication of reliability. In addition, as recommended by Song et al. (2014), each construct's Average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.5 is treated as indications

of convergent validity [45]. The AVE for the scale ranges from 0.526 to 0.657, indicating an acceptable level of convergent validity. According to the criteria by Lee et al. (2012), if the average variance value extracted for each construct is greater than the squared correlation coefficient for corresponding inter-constructs, the scale is considered acceptable as a good indication of discriminant validity [46]. Based on the above criteria, the scale

of tourist destination image has acceptable levels of discriminant validity (see Table 2). Moreover, according to the criteria by Hung & Petrick (2012), the overall fit measures indicate that tourist destination image scale is a good representation of the structures underlying the observed data [47]. Therefore, H1 generally receive support from the empirical findings.

TABLE 2 Discriminant validity analysis

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Landscape image	(0.746)					
2.Merchandise image	0.337	(0.750)				
3.Facility image	0.553	0.380	(0.725)			
4.Service image	0.553	0.369	0.471	(0.771)		
5.Entertainment image	0.268	0.275	0.341	0.482	(0.782)	
6.Affective image	0.467	0.562	0.532	0.364	0.289	(0.811)

4.3 STRUCTURAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES TESTING

According to the criteria by Hung & Petrick (2012), the overall fit measures indicate that M2 has acceptable levels of overall fit (see Table 3). On this basis, this study builds CM2 through eliminating no significant relation-

ship on M2. In Table 3, CM2 is more reasonable for examining the relationship among each factor of tourist destination image, place attachment and tourist loyalty. In the light of the output results of CM2, this study sorts out the relevant information, this is shown in Table 4. According to the output results of CM2, this study draws the final relationship figure (see Figure 2).

TABLE 3 M2 /CM2 fit index

Category	X ² /DF	RMR	RMSEA	GFI	IFI	CFI	TLI	NFI
M2	2.159	0.029	0.059	0.887	0.913	0.911	0.892	0.849
CM2	2.035	0.027	0.056	0.898	0.927	0.926	0.913	0.866

TABLE 4 Test results of CM2

Hypothesis	Estimate	C.R.	P-value	Result
Landscape image→ affective image	0.154	2.087	0.037	Supported
Merchandise image→ affective image	0.398	5.522	***	Supported
Facility image→ affective image	0.309	3.790	***	Supported
Landscape image→ place attachment	0.434	5.963	***	Supported
Merchandise image→ place attachment	0.176	2.497	0.013	Supported
Service image→ place attachment	0.173	2.984	0.003	Supported
Affective image→ place attachment	0.350	4.954	***	Supported
Facility image→ tourist loyalty	0.245	2.731	0.006	Supported
Place attachment→ tourist loyalty	0.846	7.511	***	Supported

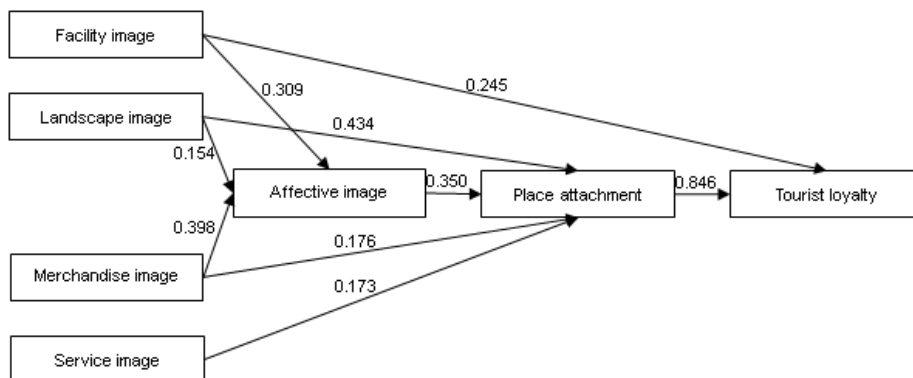


FIGURE 2 The final model

In the light of the relationship described by Figure 2, this study figures up direct effects and indirect effects (see Table 5). Table 5 indicates that:

1) Among the factors of tourist destination cognitive image, merchandise image is the important antecedent variable of affective image.

2) Merchandise image is the important antecedent variable of place attachment.

3) Facility image is the important antecedent variable of tourist loyalty.

TABLE 5 Influential effects

Path	Standardized estimate		
	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Indirect effects
landscape image → affective image	0.154	0	0.154
Merchandise image → affective image	0.398	0	0.398
facility image → affective image	0.309	0	0.309
landscape image → place attachment	0	0.054	0.054
Merchandise image → place attachment	0.176	0.139	0.315
facility image → place attachment	0	0.108	0.108
service image → place attachment	0.173	0	0.173
landscape image → tourist loyalty	0	0.046	0.046
Merchandise image → tourist loyalty	0	0.266	0.266
facility image → tourist loyalty	0.245	0.091	0.336
service image → tourist loyalty	0	0.146	0.146

5 Discussion and conclusion

This article examines the relationship among each factor of tourist destination image, place attachment and tourist loyalty. The results of the structural relationship analysis reveal that:

- 1) Landscape image, merchandise image and facility image have positive effects on affective image.
- 2) Landscape image and merchandise image significantly and directly affect place attachment while partially mediating the effect of affective image.
- 3) Service image has a direct effect on place attachment.
- 4) Facility image has an indirect effect on place attachment.
- 5) Facility image significantly and directly affects tourist loyalty while partially mediating the effect of place attachment. Therefore, each factor of cognitive image has different effects on the relationship among affective image, place attachment and tourist loyalty, indicating that each factor of cognitive image should be treated differently.

Another finding of this article is that Affective image has a direct effect on place attachment. Not only that, but affective image is an antecedent variable of tourist loyalty while completely mediating the effect of place attachment. In other words, affective image and place attachment are two important antecedent variables of tourist loyalty. These results reveal that:

1) It is imperative to foster affective image in order to improve place attachment.

2) It is urgent that international tourist destination management should cultivate place attachment in order to enhance tourist loyalty.

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Scientific interest: tourist destination image, place attachment, tourist behavior, and pro-environmental behavior, on the relationship among tourist destination image, place attachment and tourist loyalty.