

THE EFFECTS OF PLACE ATTACHMENT AND EMPATHY ON DESTINATION LOYALTY: USING PLACE-ORIENTED AND PEOPLE-ORIENTED CONCEPTS

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INTRODUCTION

A successful tourism destination is largely determined by tourists' destination loyalty. Tourists are more likely to revisit or recommend a destination based on their memorable and favorable experiences and positive evaluation of the destination performance (Su et al., 2017). Tourists' evaluation of travel experience and destination's performance is influenced by their relationship with destination and its local people. Studies demonstrate that destination loyalty is explained through place-oriented factors and/or people-oriented factors (Tasci, 2017). Place-oriented factors refer to tourists' relationship, emotions and attitudes with the destination, and their evaluations of destination attractions and performance (Tasci et al., 2021), whereas people-oriented factors refer to tourists' relationship with, and attitudes toward residents (Patwardhan et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2018). Place-oriented factors (destination image and place attachment) and people-oriented factors (cultural and social distance, and emotional solidarity) were important antecedents in explaining destination loyalty (Tasci et al., 2021). However, the place-oriented factors elucidated both past and future destination loyalty better than the people-oriented factors as tourists' evaluations of touristic attributes can be core elements, while human interactions are peripheral elements to determine loyalty (Tasci et al., 2021). Furthermore, place-oriented and people-oriented factors can be connected to strengthen their effects on destination loyalty. Patwardhan et al. (2020) found that both place attachment and emotional solidarity significantly increase visitors' destination loyalty. Visitors' emotional attachment to the festival also influences their emotional solidarity with the

residents.

To understand destination loyalty in a dynamic and complex tourism environment, the need of an integrated model with people-oriented and place-oriented factors using different variables is required. However, limited studies have integrated these two factors together to examine how influencing on destination loyalty. This study investigated the effect of place attachment (place-oriented) and tourists' empathy (people-oriented) on destination loyalty and the mediating role of destination trust and trip satisfaction. There are two objectives: (1) to examine the effects of place attachment and tourists' empathy on destination loyalty, (2) to investigate the mediating role of destination trust and trip satisfaction between place attachment and destination loyalty, and tourists' empathy and destination loyalty. Findings can provide suggestions to destination marketers to understand the contributing place-oriented and people-oriented factors of destination loyalty, and to attract loyal tourists.

Place attachment is defined as an emotional link between people and place (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Strong place attachment increases tourists' emotional bonding to a destination, which strengthens tourists' relationships with the destination and increases their trust (Bidmon, 2017; Kang et al., 2017), satisfaction (Prayag & Ryan, 2012), and destination loyalty (Patwardhan et al., 2020; Tasci et al., 2021). Empathy refers to the ability and attitude toward understanding other people's feelings and thoughts (de Waal, 2008). Empathy improves interpersonal relationships between tourists and residents, and influences tourists' attitudes and behaviors (Tamborrel & Cheer, 2019; Pera et al., 2019;

Wieseke et al., 2012). Empathic tourists are more likely to show more trust (Bahadur et al., 2020), increase satisfaction (Wieseke et al., 2012), and promote positive behaviors and loyalty (Pera et al., 2019, Zhang et al., 2018). This study proposed that tourists' empathy is a key determinant of destination loyalty.

Destination loyalty is tourists' willingness to revisit or recommend the destination (Wang et al., 2020). Tourists' positive evaluations of, and attitudes toward the destination (Hosany et al., 2017; Prayag & Ryan, 2012), and their positive relationship with residents (Patwardhan et al., 2020; Ribeiro et al., 2018). Researchers have confirmed that destination trust (Han & Hyun, 2015), and tourists' satisfaction (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019) are critical predictors of destination loyalty. Based on the literature review, ten hypotheses were proposed.

METHOD

A self-administered questionnaire was developed as the survey instrument. Items were derived and modified from previous studies. Five items on place attachment (Lee et al., 2020; Shaykh-Baygloo, 2021), six items on empathy (Batchelder et al., 2017; Segal et al., 2013), six items on destination trust (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017; Liu et al., 2019), three items on trip satisfaction (Su et al., 2017), and three items on destination loyalty (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019). All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire was first developed in English and translated into Chinese using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). Using a convenience sampling method, the data was collected from Mainland Chinese tourists in tourism spots in Macau from June 2021 to January 2022. A total of 720 questionnaires were collected and 548 valid questionnaires was used for

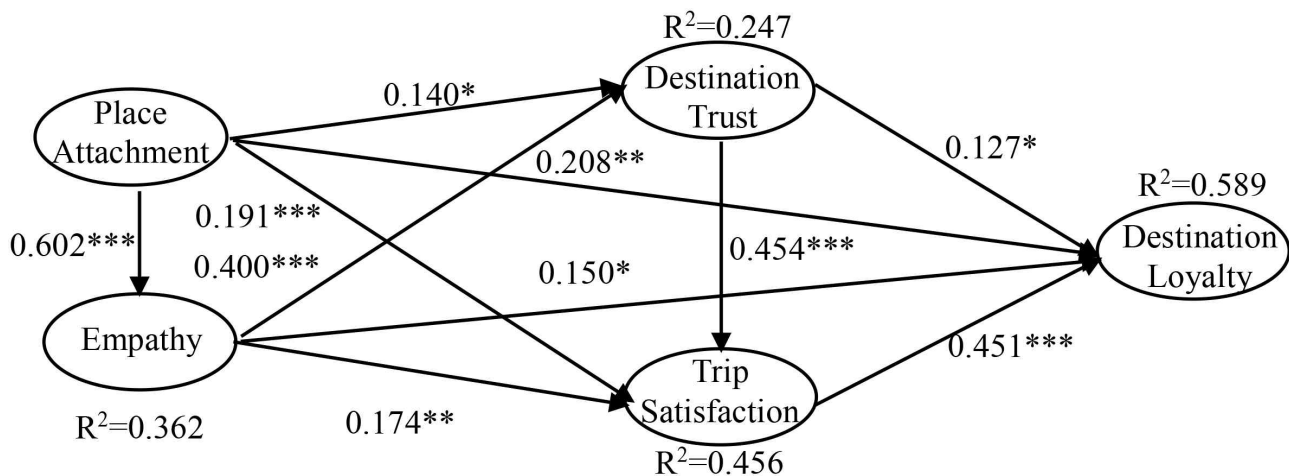
the analysis. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was carried out to examine measurements and structural model using SPSS 25.0 and AMOS 24.0.

FINDINGS

Demographic characteristics. The sample had slightly more female respondents (51.5%). About 80.6% of respondents aged from 18-39. Most of the respondents hold a bachelor's degree or higher (66.8%). 36.3% have an income of RMB 20,001-30,000.

Results of CFA. The factor loading of all items were higher than 0.6 which was acceptable (Hair et al., 2014). Composite reliabilities (CR) ranged from 0.844 to 0.881, which demonstrated the internal consistency for all constructs (Hair et al., 2014). The average variance extracted (AVE) for all latent variables were greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The discriminant validity was confirmed as the value of square roots of AVE were greater than the standardized correlations between the associated constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Results of hypotheses. Figure 1 and Table 1 showed that all hypotheses were supported. Place attachment had a positive effect on tourists' empathy ($\beta=0.602$, $p<0.001$), destination trust ($\beta=0.140$, $p<0.05$), trip satisfaction ($\beta=0.190$, $p<0.001$) and destination loyalty ($\beta=0.208$, $p<0.001$). Tourists' empathy positively influenced destination trust ($\beta=0.400$, $p<0.001$), trip satisfaction ($\beta=0.150$, $p<0.001$), and destination loyalty ($\beta=0.174$, $p<0.01$). Destination trust had a positive effect on trip satisfaction ($\beta=0.454$, $p<0.001$) and destination loyalty ($\beta=0.127$, $p<0.05$). Trip satisfaction positively influenced destination loyalty ($\beta=0.451$, $p<0.001$). The variance explained for endogenous constructs are 36.2%, 24.7%, 45.6% and 58.9% for tourists' empathy, destination trust, trip satisfaction, and destination loyalty respectively.



Note: ***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$

Figure 1. Results of Hypotheses

Table 1. Results of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Result
H1	Place attachment → Empathy	0.602***	-	0.602	Supported
H2	Place attachment → Destination trust	0.140*	0.240	0.380	Supported
H3	Place attachment → Destination loyalty	0.208***	0.350	0.558	Supported
H4	Place attachment → Trip satisfaction	0.191***	0.278	0.468	Supported
H5	Empathy → Destination trust	0.400***	-	0.400	Supported
H6	Empathy → Destination loyalty	0.150**	0.211	0.361	Supported
H7	Empathy → Trip satisfaction	0.174**	0.182	0.356	Supported
H8	Destination trust → Trip satisfaction	0.454***	-	0.454	Supported
H9	Destination trust → Destination loyalty	0.127*	0.205	0.332	Supported
H10	Trip satisfaction → Destination loyalty	0.451***	-	0.451	Supported

Note: ***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$, *: $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSIONS and CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of place-oriented and people-oriented constructs on examining destination loyalty by investigating place attachment, and tourists' empathy, and testing the mediating role of destination trust and trip satisfaction. Findings found that place attachment and tourists' empathy are important determinants of destination loyalty. Place attachment had a stronger influence on trip satisfaction and destination loyalty, while tourists' empathy had a stronger effect on destination trust. The results are consistent with Tasci et al. (2021) that tourists' emotional feelings and evaluations on the destination are more a contributor of destination loyalty than their attitudes, evaluations and understanding of local residents. Moreover, this study confirmed that place attachment had a positive influence on destination

trust, which contributed to the current research results (Bidmon, 2017; Kang et al., 2017). Empathy helps to promote positive attitudes and understanding of local residents, which increases tourists' positive traveling experiences and destination loyalty, which was consistent with previous studies (Bahadur et al., 2020; Wieseke et al., 2012). Specifically, the impact of tourists' empathy on destination trust was particularly strong. Empathic tourists had more understanding and positive attitudes toward local communities, which influences their better evaluation of destination performance (Tsai, 2012). Moreover, the impact of trip satisfaction on destination loyalty is stronger than that of destination trust, which further reflects that tourists' affective evaluations of their experience had stronger effects than their cognitive evaluations of destinations (Su et al., 2017) in this research.

This study investigated tourists' empathy and examined its effects on destination loyalty. The indirect effect of place attachment and tourists' empathy were positive through destination trust and trip satisfaction, which indicated the mediating roles on these constructs in this model. A new model for understanding tourists' trust, satisfaction and destination loyalty was developed. For practical implications, regarding to place-oriented factors, destination managers and marketers can strengthen tourists' emotional connections with the destinations through promoting more local activities and events, and reinforcing destination's position and uniqueness. Second, for promoting the effect of people-oriented factor, destination can encourage tourists to have more interactions with local communities to increase their social bonds and understanding. Finally, destination managers have to provide high quality products, services and performances to increase tourists' trust and satisfaction toward the destination.

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