

THE IMPACT OF HOST-TOURIST INTERACTION ON RESPONSIBLE TOURIST BEHAVIOR: A CASE ON MACAU

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INTRODUCTION

A balanced or harmonious relationship between tourists, the people and places they encounter, and the organizations and enterprises providing tourism services is the foundation for the tourism industry's successful development (Zhang et al., 2006). However, the media frequently cites instances of tourists' irresponsible behaviors that have a detrimental impact on other people, create issues for hospitality businesses, as well as challenges for government, ranging from stealing hotel supplies to causing damage to historical buildings (Wan et al., 2021).

Considering the sustainable development of travel destinations, it is important to focus on responsible tourism practices to promote the harmonious development of tourists and travel destinations (Farmaki et al., 2014). Responsible tourist behavior can be defined as a behavior that tourist with the need to avoid having a negative impact on the destination and emphasize the responsibility of tourists to the destination (Balıkcıoğlu Dedeoğlu et al., 2022). Environmental friendliness (Dolnicar & Long, 2009), respect for local culture (Leslie, 2012), and pro-tourism behavior (Liu et al., 2022) are all practical actions taken by tourists to support responsible tourism behavior. Like impolite behavior, not all tourists are aware of this (Lee et al., 2017). In the context of sustainable tourism development, encouraging tourists to adopt more ethical and sustainable travel behaviors plays a more positive and critical role (Chen et al., 2018).

Studies pointed out that the relationship between host and guest had a significant impact on the level of satisfaction and spiritual awareness experienced by tourists (e.g., Reisinger & Turner, 2002). In addition, destination residents could perceive positive or negative impacts brought about by the tourism industry and tourists (Tang & Wang, 2021). In other words, tourists gain utility and value from their interactions with the service environment or the people they meet (Prebensen et al., 2013). These interactions' experiential value may influence their intentions or behaviors toward the destination, such as responsible tourist behavior (e.g., Wei et al., 2020).

Host-tourist interaction (HTI for short) research has never ceased (e.g., Xiong et al., 2021; Fan et al., 2020) and showed positive behavior among residents could foster tourists' attachment and satisfaction with the destination, whereas negative behavior could result in discrimination and harm tourists' perceived moral behavior toward the destination (Stylidis et al., 2021). Examining HTI is therefore critical for promoting responsible tourist behavior and improving the sustainability of tourism destination development (Tse & Tung, 2022). However, although interaction has received academic attention, empirical research is still insufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of HTI and this behavioral mechanism because it is primarily based on the perspectives of residents (Xiong et al., 2021), and detection of tourist perspectives is deficient (Tabaeian et al., 2022).

Tourists frequently seek new social

interactions in tourism destinations unconsciously in order to promote understanding and emotional connections to the destination, thereby forming place attachment (Stedman, 2002). Tourists who have a strong attachment to their destination are more likely to support initiatives related to the development of tourism destinations and to engage in sustainable tourism practices such as responsible tourist behavior and environmental protection behavior (Schütte & van der Heijden, 2020).

Moreover, tourism information sharing among tourists promoted destination attachment, which was positively correlated with responsible tourist behavior (Lin et al., 2022). However, limited research has been conducted that directly examines the relationship between responsible tourist behavior and HTI. As a result, it is necessary to determine whether HTI based on tourist perspectives can also have a positive impact on tourists' place attachment and responsible tourist behavior. The mechanism of responsible tourist behavior formation may be more subtle than the mechanism of interactive and responsible behavior formation between tourists. The tourism industry can benefit from a better understanding of how responsible behavior affects tourists.

Considering the above research gaps, this study aims to investigate the impact of interaction between tourists and destination hosts on responsible tourist behavior. The specific objectives are:

(1) Exploring the impact of interaction between hosts and tourists on place attachment from the perspective of tourists.

(2) Explore whether the interaction between hosts and tourists can directly affect responsible

tourist behavior.

(3) Explore whether place attachment plays a mediating role in the interaction and responsible behavior between hosts and tourists.

Combined with the above factors mentioned and the research purpose, the following hypotheses are put forth:

H1: HTI is positively related to place attachment.

H2: HTI is positively related to responsible tourist behavior.

H3: The relationship between HTI and responsible tourist behavior will be mediated by place attachment.

METHOD

The primary research methodology in this study was a questionnaire survey, with testing conducted using a 7-point Likert scale. The survey is broken down into four sections: HTI (Tabaeian et al., 2022), place attachment (Eusébio et al., 2018), responsible tourist behavior (Lin et al., 2022), and socio-demographic questions about the respondents' gender, age, education level, marital status, and economic situation.

The target group for this study is visitors to Macao, and a purposeful sample approach is used to guarantee the accuracy of the research findings. Based on the survey's research methodology, 633 visitors visiting Macau provided valid data using a questionnaire survey, which was then examined from February 1 to February 15, 2023. Ruins of St. Paul and Rua do Cunha make up the survey locations.

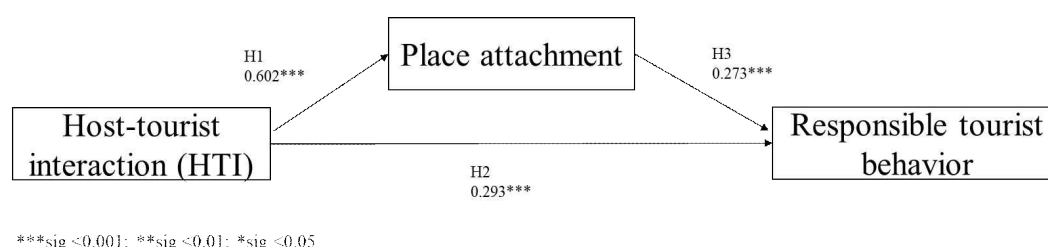


Figure 1. Research model and result of PLS-SEM analysis.

FINDINGS

Convergent reliability was obvious, and

construct validity was also proven by the fact that constructs consistently scored higher than qualified index on the value of average variance extracted

(AVE) in this research. Moreover, the justification for discriminant validity was also demonstrated by comparing AVE values with squared correlations between relevant constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Using software PLS 4.0, we also carried out the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to confirm the model fit of the measurement.

The results of the PLS-SEM analysis support the hypotheses 1 to 3, which are shown in Figure 1 ($\text{HTI} \rightarrow \text{PA}: \beta = 0.602, p < 0.001$; $\text{HTI} \rightarrow \text{RTB}: \beta = 0.293, p < 0.001$; $\text{HTI} \rightarrow \text{PA} \rightarrow \text{RTB}: \beta = 0.273, p < 0.001$). In other word, the study shows that the HTI can directly influence place attachment and responsible tourist behavior. In addition, the study highlights the mediating role of place attachment in the relationship between HTI and responsible tourist behavior.

IMPLICATIONS

There are several meanings to this study. Theoretically, this study developed a conceptual model and specifically looked at the connection between HTI and ethical travel practices. This is an attempt to understand responsible tourist behavior using interaction as an antecedent. Second, the uniqueness of this study resides in its viewpoint, which fills a gap in HTI by including tourists' perspectives on interactions with locals. Thirdly, this study extends the investigation of place attachment generation using HTI's hedonic interaction and functional interaction analysis, assisting researchers in explaining how tourists form attachment to a place, encouraging the intention of tourists with special interactions to engage in responsible behavior, and contributing to the interaction field from the viewpoint of understudied tourists. Additionally, this study highlights the mediating function of place attachment in the relationship between HTI and responsible tourist behavior, extending the range of research contexts in which place attachment can be used as a mediating variable. Last but not least, this study took Macao as the research site, as the world tourism and leisure center, this study would help scholars to further understand the relationship between responsible tourist behavior and HTI in Greater China, and also provided reference for similar foreign tourist destinations.

The following management implications stem from this study. First, sustainable tourism places a high priority on responsible visitor conduct. As a result, from the standpoint of HTI, tourism practitioners or managers are motivated to start with hosts, enhance the interaction between hosts and tourists, and provide tourists a positive picture of tourism destinations, encouraging their propensity to return. Second, there are hedonic and functional aspects to the interactions between the host and tourist. Starting with these two factors, other techniques of engagement can be put up in various living spaces to encourage more pleasant interaction, such as games and festival activities. This encourages interaction between tourists and hosts, enabling tourists to comprehend the local social mores and customs while also helping to encourage tourists to develop into responsible, civilized tourists who defend their destinations. Thirdly, considering that the place attachment significantly encourages responsible travel, the government can put out relevant measures to cultivate tourists' sense of community. For instance, using social media to suggest travel products and routes that allow for interaction with hosts (like Macau's distinctive Portuguese-style market). Additionally, the free shuttle buses provided by Macao hotels is one of the main means of transportation for tourists. Putting local cultural propaganda films and tourism-related public service advertisements on shuttle buses should be regarded as a feasible means to enhance tourists' feelings for Macao.

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