Influence of place-based senses of distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and self-efficacy on residents' attitudes toward tourism

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Place identity proved to be an effective tool in measuring resident attitudes.
- Place-based self-esteem influences resident attitudes toward tourism development.
- Place-based self-efficacy influences resident attitudes toward tourism development.
- Place identity theory and social exchange theory can be applied complementarily.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of the four place identity principles (i.e., senses of distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and self-efficacy) (Breakwell, 1986) on residents' attitudes toward tourism. A self-administered survey was conducted on urban residents in a southern province of China, and the place-based senses of distinctiveness, self-esteem and self-efficacy were found to affect residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and attitudes toward support for tourism. While tourism literature has suggested social exchange theory to be a useful tool in predicting residents' perceptions and attitudes toward tourism, this study suggests a new perspective in evaluating resident perceptions and attitudes by applying place identity theory as a theoretical foundation instead. Both the theoretical and marketing implications are discussed.

1. Introduction

Municipalities view tourism as an important tool in the restoration and revitalization of economic development, which results in improved quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Many cities in the world have used tourism for the purpose of generating civic pride, raising city profile, and attracting investment. Tourism may increase safety concerns for residents while also possibly decreasing the integrity of the natural environment. To promote urban tourism, a city needs to win support from its residents. To maintain residents' positive attitudes toward tourism development is important because friendly interactions between visitors and residents create a significant effect on visitor satisfaction with the destination (Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000).

Tourism is essentially a place-based phenomenon involving the production of destination identity at different scales (Hall, 1998). A destination can be seen as a product, since it consists of a bundle of tangible and intangible attributes (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006). It is assumed that an individual will be inclined to engage in relationships with a product that is considered to be close to his or her personality (Stokburger-Sauer, 2011). In the context of incoming tourism, it is considered that a destination's place identity will appeal to a resident if its identity attributes fit into his or her personal values. Therefore, for a city's tourism planners and managers, one key to enhance a city's tourism should be to allow residents to incorporate the place identity attributes into their own self-concepts, so that residents' self-concept-related motives can provide a simple engine for their support for tourism development.

Much research has assessed the effects of brand identity and attitude formation of visitors toward a destination brand and on their subsequent travel behaviors (e.g., Chon, 1991; Crompton, 1990; Jenkins, 1999). Less attention, however, has been paid to a destination's place identity and its impact on residents' attitudes

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toward tourism and their behavioral intentions with regard to supporting tourism (Schroeder, 1996). As the topics of sustainability and tourism continue to merge, residents' place satisfaction in tourist destinations lies at the heart of the movement toward more socially sustainable development (Williams & Lawson, 2001). Therefore, addressing place-based views and concerns of residents is critical in maintaining public support for tourism (Andereck & Vogt, 2000), and the active support of host communities can be crucial for successful tourism development (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). This study aims to fill this gap by extending place identity theory to the context of tourism in order to analyze associations between place identity, residents' attitudes toward tourism, and their support for tourism.

2. Literature review

Residents' perceptions of tourism impacts have been widely discussed in the tourism literature (e.g., Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2007; Ap, 1992; Schroeder, 1996). Most studies have applied social exchange theory to explain the relationship between residents' attitudes and tourism impacts. Ap (1992, p. 668) explained social exchange theory as "a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation." This definition suggests that individuals are positively disposed toward actions from which they benefit and can be negatively disposed toward actions from which they incur costs of some kind (McGehee & Andereck, 2009).

For instance, recognizing the crucial role of empowerment in sustainable tourism development, Boley and McGehee (2014) developed the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) to measure whether residents perceive themselves as being psychologically, socially, or politically empowered by tourism. Cole (2006) indicated that resident empowerment represents "the top end of the participation ladder where members of a community are active agents of change and they have the ability to find solutions to their problems, make decisions, implement actions and evaluate their solutions" (p.631). The role of resident empowerment in tourism is considered to be part of and consistent with the application of the social exchange theory in explaining residents' attitude toward tourism such that the perceived empowerment derived from tourism development is actually the resident's self-concept of his or her augmented benefits, either psychologically, sociologically, and/or politically.

Woosnam (2012) suggested a different approach to predicting residents' attitudes toward tourism from the perspective of emotional solidarity. Woosnam developed and used the Emotional Solidarity Scale (ESS) and its factors to predict levels of the Tourism Impact Attitude Scale (TIAS) and its factors. Collectively, each of the three ESS factors (welcoming nature, emotional closeness, and sympathetic understanding) significantly predicted the two TIAS factors (support for tourism development and the contributions tourism makes to the community). What should be noted is that relationships between residents and tourists may, in most cases, be reciprocal. In other words, the levels of residents' emotional solidarity with tourists may also be influenced by tourists' attitudes toward residents. In addition, a resident's emotional feelings toward tourists may not be impulsive but depend on his or her self-concept of tourists' attitudes and travel behaviors in the community, as well as how they perceive the economic and social benefits brought by tourism.

However, attitudes toward tourism are not solely explained in terms of social exchange theory but also in terms of personal value systems, as suggested by Ryan, Scotland, and Montgomery (1998). The above-mentioned approaches assume that residents' attitudes

toward tourism are generally passive, reactive or interactive. In contrast, place identity theories tend to suggest that the primary dynamism in influencing a resident's attitudes toward tourism may originate from his or her self-concept of the place. Such place-based self-concept is relatively more active and less affective with regard to tourism development. Relatively few studies have ever associated residents' perceptions and attitudes toward tourism impacts or associated their support for tourism with place-based personal identity (Gu & Ryan, 2008; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Palme, Koenig-Lewis, & Jones, 2013).

2.1. Place identity

A place is defined as a setting that has been given meaning based on human experiences, relationships, emotions and thoughts. Places consist of the physical environment, the activities conducted in that environment, and social/psychological processes (Stedman, Beckley, Wallace, & Ambard, 2004). More specifically, sense of place can be described as a compilation of meanings, knowledge, attachment, commitment and satisfaction that an individual or group associates with a particular place. Physical space is called a "place" when personal, group, or cultural processes have been given meaning through it (Low & Altman, 1992). Place satisfaction is an aspect of sense of place and deals with how a place meets or fails to meet the preconceived expectations, needs or standards of quality of life that a person holds (Shamai, 1991; Stedman, 2002). If the social and physical resources within residential environments are sufficient to satisfy the needs and preferences of residents, attachment (which might be understood as loyalty in marketing terminology) to the place occurs (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983). Attachment to a place might also be an effect of people's and places' characteristics, thus influencing attitudes and behaviors towards a place (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983).

According to Stets and Biga (2003), an identity is "a set of meanings attached to the self that serves as a standard or reference that guides behavior in situations (p. 401)." A place identity is determined not only by the physical components but also the meaning and association developed between people and place (Bott, Cantril, & Myers, 2003). In place-behavior studies, Breakwell (1986) furnished an identity process theory in which identity is seen as a dynamic, social product of the interaction of capacities for memory, consciousness and organized construals, which are guided by four principles, i.e., distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Breakwell (1986) suggested that the first principle of place identity is the establishment of a sense of personal distinctiveness or uniqueness. McGuire (1984) articulated that people in a social context tend to identify with others with whom they share characteristics that are relatively rare in that context. According to McGuire's distinctiveness theory, the attention-grabbing salience of distinctive characteristics is the basis for social identification (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998). Drawing on the principle of distinctiveness, we predict that residents living in a (physically or culturally) distinctive/unique place, relative to other places comparable to the current one, would exhibit more place identification.

The second principle of place identity is the desire to preserve continuity of the self-concept which focuses on the maintenance and development of the continuity. A place's physical and functional qualities influence the degree of dependency on and attachment to a place as a platform for activities and social interaction (Twigger-Ross, Bonaiuto, & Breakwell, 2003). This means that to secure identity is to ensure continuity in the physical, social together with meanings and attachment held by the people (Ujang,