



Destination fascination: Conceptualization and scale development



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Based on attention restoration theory, this study develops the Destination Fascination Scale (DFS).
- A six-dimensional 24-item DFS is developed through the multi-study method.
- The DFS includes six dimensions: mystique, richness, attractiveness, uniqueness, fitness, and friendliness.
- The DFS could be applied in both natural and artificial destinations.

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ABSTRACT

This study developed a Destination Fascination Scale (DFS) based on the attention restoration theory. Through the multi-study method, this study performed a literature review to sort five DFS dimensions. Then, 13 in-depth interviews are conducted, resulting in 209 statements, which later be narrowed down into 30 items under six dimensions. In study two, 470 survey responses from national parks are collected. Twenty-five items in six dimensions emerged in exploratory factor analysis. In study three, 473 survey responses from national forest recreation areas are collected for testing confirmatory factor analysis, resulting the final 24-item DFS. Tests of criterion-related validity showed that the six dimensions were significantly related to destination loyalty. In study four, cross-validation analysis was performed using 240 survey responses from theme parks to test model stability and model extension of the developed six-dimensional 24-item DFS.

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1. Introduction

The concept of fascination is widely applied in the tourism industry. Examples include the webpage called “Fascinating places in Spain” on the official Spain tourism website, the term of “Fascinating Turku” to introduce the medieval European town in the official travel guide of Finland, a popular travel guidebook titled “Kerala Tradition & Fascinating Destinations” to introduce a southern state in India, the activity to vote for “Fascinating Historical Towns” held by China Central Television (CCTV), and several homepages named “fascinating destinations” on Facebook and Pinterest. The above examples show the importance of destination

fascination in tourism marketing.

Fascination, which is an important concept in attention restoration theory, refers to involuntary attention and emerges from exploration of restoration through natural environment in environmental psychology (Kaplan, 1995). Kaplan (1995) defined environment fascination as an environment where people are free to pursue their interests, explore details in the environment, and personally define meanings of the environment. Fascination is the central and necessary component in a restorative experience, which also consists of being away, extent and compatibility (Kaplan, 1995). Therefore, recent studies in environmental psychology suggest that a fascinating environment is needed for efficient restoration (Berto, 2005, 2007; Herzog, Maguire, & Nebel, 2003). That is, people need a fascinating environment to think about other things, detach physically and mentally from daily tasks, and reach an effective mental recovery. After Kaplan (1995) proposed the definition of environment fascination, related measures

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from items of the one-dimensional environment fascination were developed by Korpela and Hartig (1996) and Laumann, Gärling, and Stormark (2001).

Based on the attention restoration theory and other tourism literature, a study by Lehto (2013) performed surveys of U.S. participants and proposed a six-dimension scale for perceived destination restorative quality (PDRQ), including dimensions of fascination, compatibility, extent, mentally away, physically away, and discord. After comparing tourist perceptions between natural and urban destinations, Lehto (2013) concluded that, unlike most dimensions in the scale, perceived fascination had no significant differences. A follow-up study by Lehto, Kirillova, Li, and Wu (2016) used the PDRQ scale in an empirical study of Chinese tourists and consistently found that fascination does not significantly differ between natural and urban destinations. Additionally, in terms of judging destination aesthetics, Kirillova and Lehto (2016) proved that in both natural and urban destinations, fascination is the strongest antecedent among all dimensions of the PDRQ scale. Kirillova and Lehto (2016) further suggested that the design and management of restorative experiences must emphasize and prioritize fascination. The findings of Lehto (2013), Lehto et al. (2016) and Kirillova and Lehto (2016) reveal the importance and value to fully focus on studying destination fascination, and the applicability and feasibility for implement a scale for destination fascination in both natural and urban/artificial destinations.

In previous studies, measurements of Destination Fascination (DF) have considered fascination a single dimension under the scales such as the restorative components of environments (Laumann et al., 2001) and PDRQ (Lehto, 2013). However, since many types and sources of fascination have emerged (Kaplan, 1995), and since tourism experiences are multisensory (Kirillova, Fu, Lehto, & Cai, 2014), the establishment of a multidimensional Destination Fascination Scale (DFS) becomes essential. Kaplan (1995) discussed two aspects of environment fascination. First, environment fascination could be experienced by people through the experience process, such as losing track of time while gambling, as a participative fascination. Second, environment fascination could be experienced through the diverse content of an environment, such as people, things, items, and views. In terms of content, Kaplan (1995) further distinguished between hard and soft fascination. Hard fascination can occur when watching auto racing while soft fascination can occur while walking by a lake, which provides a chance for reflection. The types and sources of fascination in Kaplan (1995) demonstrate the potential for exploring and developing multiple dimensions for DF. Moreover, the study for developing dimensions for tourist aesthetic judgment by Kirillova et al. (2014) noted the need to develop multi-faceted dimensionality for concepts in tourism experiences that involve multisensory “lived experience.” Kirillova et al. (2014) argued that the multisensory “lived experience” provides chances for phenomenological exploration through not only the relationships between tourists and destinations but also tourists’ interactive experiences with the destinations.

Therefore, for efficient promotion and accumulation of DF knowledge, this study conceptualized DF and developed a multidimensional DFS. The analytical results of this study could have important theoretical and practical implications. Regarding theoretical contributions, the DFS developed in this study not only enriches the literature on DF, but also provide a measurement scale for future studies to apply. Regarding practical contributions, the DFS can be used by destination management organizations (DMOs) to understand the core contents of DF, and set the content of DFS as directions for destination marketing and management.

2. Literature review

2.1. Attention restoration theory and DF

The concept of DF is derived from discussions of relationships between human and environment. Based on the attention restoration theory, James (1892) argued that attention in an environment can be classified as voluntary attention and involuntary attention. Voluntary attention requires effort to achieve voluntary control, which causes inhibitory influences (James, 1892; Kaplan, 1995). High intensity and long length of time in voluntary attention result in directed attention fatigue (Kaplan, 1995). To cope with and recovery from negative outcomes of voluntary attention, restoration becomes necessary (Kaplan, 1995). In contrast, involuntary attention, as effortless attention, enables the rest of directed attention and provides opportunities for restoration (James, 1892). Kaplan (1995) further argued that perceived fascination is a form of involuntary attention.

According to Kaplan (1995), fascination is a central component of restorative environments. A restorative environment requires an additional three components: being away, extent and compatibility (Kaplan, 1995). First, being away is later identified by Lehto (2013) as mentally away and physically away, representing the importance for people to leave environments that require voluntary attention. Being away can change the mindset, even in a familiar physical environment; meanwhile, moving to a new place may not ensure being away if people still mentally struggle with old thoughts (Kaplan, 1995). Second, extent refers to whether an environment is sufficiently rich and coherent to constitute a whole new world for restoration (Kaplan, 1995). The extent of a restorative environment should engage the mind, allowing them to think, to experience, and to see (Kaplan, 1995). Third, perceived compatibility could improve psychological and physical health and release stresses (Kaplan, 1983). The person-environment compatibility model developed by Kaplan (1983) indicated that, based on message and resources perceived in an environment, people are subjectively aware of the compatibility between self and the environment.

This study argues that the concept of DF is broader than the definition of fascination in Kaplan (1995). Previous scholars consider fascination a one-dimensional concept experienced in a restorative environment and argue that components of being away, extent and compatibility work together with fascination to make an environment restorative (Korpela & Hartig, 1996; Laumann et al., 2001; Lehto, 2013). However, unlike other terms used to describe fascination (Korpela & Hartig, 1996; Laumann et al., 2001; Lehto, 2013), this study used the term destination fascination, which consists of the words “destination” and “fascination.” Tourism scholars have argued about meanings and contents of being away, extent and compatibility in defining the concept and function of a destination (Hsu, Wolfe, & Kang, 2004; Jeng & Fesenmaier, 1998; Leask, 2010). Therefore, DF should be conceptualized as the core concept of fascination combined with features of a restorative destination, such as being away, extent and compatibility (Kirillova & Lehto, 2016; Lehto, 2013; Lehto et al., 2016). That is, DF is a broader and more complex concept than fascination. Destination itself refers to an environment that is sufficiently far away to be called a destination and provides compatibility for tourists’ travel purposes and inclination to be satisfied.

Empirical findings of environmental psychologists prove that fascinating natural environments has diverse effects on restoration, such as mental recovery through experiencing natural environments (Hartig, Mang, & Evans, 1991; Kaplan, 1995), improve quality of recovery through visiting favorite natural environments (Korpela & Hartig, 1996; Korpela, Hartig, Kaiser, & Fuhrer, 2001), and high-quality self-reflection and attention restoration through the

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