



The moderating effects of travel arrangement types on tourists' formation of Taiwan's unique image

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HIGHLIGHTS

- For group inclusive tourists (GITs), cost efficiency is an image inhibitor.
- For GITs, induced and organic information and experiential variety are image drivers.
- For free independent tourists (FITs), repeat visitation and time efficiency are image inhibitors.
- For FITs, organic information, planning time, experiential variety, and friendliness satisfaction are image drivers.
- Chinese free independent tourists perceived Taiwan's unique image as above average.

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ABSTRACT

Image of a destination influences tourists' perceptions and evaluations of that destination. The current study aims to investigate the formation of Taiwan's unique image from the perspective of travel arrangement types. Analyzing survey data from the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, the study finds that unique image formation is moderated by type of travel arrangement. For group inclusive tourists, induced and organic information and experiential variety are image drivers, whereas cost efficiency is an image inhibitor. For free independent tourists, organic information, pre-tour planning horizon, experiential variety, and friendliness satisfaction are image drivers, whereas repeat visitation and time efficiency are inhibitors. Regarding tourist nationality, Chinese free independent tourists perceived Taiwan's unique image as above average, whereas Japanese tourists generally perceived Taiwan's unique image as below average. This study offers several implications for destination management organizations and travel agencies seeking to formulate effective policies and strategies.

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1. Introduction

The contribution of the tourism industry to developing countries' economic development has been widely recognized. Tourists generally choose their destination from among many options, and their choices heavily influence the success of tourism destinations in a globally competitive market. Destination management organizations (DMOs) have recognized the strategic imperative of

destination image (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Destination image is a set of impressions, ideas, expectations, and emotional thoughts an individual hold about a place (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004a,b). Such an image is the overall evaluative representation of intangible and verifiable functional attributes of a destination, as well as emotions and psychological perceptions held by tourists about a destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Josiassen, Assaf, Woo, & Kock, 2016). When considering Greece, Turkey, and Spain, for example, tourists may see similarities among images of their ancient theaters, archeological sites, marinas, sun, sand, and sea, and these similarities may confuse their choice of destination (Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou & Andronikidis, 2016).

Given global competition among destinations, unique image that attracts tourists' attention has become increasingly crucial in destination marketing (Stepchenkova & Li, 2014). Unique image is helpful in differentiating one destination from its competitors,

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based on the meanings and associations perceived, felt, and reported by tourists (Qu et al., 2011). Unique image positively affects tourists' overall image of a destination and is critical in strategic destination branding management (Qu et al., 2011; Stepchenkova & Li, 2014; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008). However, academic studies about destination image have focused instead on topics such as (1) the definition of destination image and its measurement (e.g., Dolnicar & Grün, 2013; Lai & Li, 2016; Stylos et al., 2016); (2) its determinants or antecedents and consequences, namely, how a destination image is formed (e.g., Lee, Lee & Lee, 2014; Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio & Nazzareno, 2017; Prayag, Hosany, Muskat & del Chiappa, 2017; Sun, Chi, & Xu, 2013; Zhang, Fu, Cai & Lu, 2014); and (3) differences in perceived destination image with respect to various tourist characteristics (e.g., Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Liu, Li, & Yang, 2015), with less focus on unique image (Qu et al., 2011).

Unique image helps build destination identities and marketing differentiation strategies that upgrade a destination's competitiveness. Understanding how international tourists perceive destination uniqueness provides substantive policy and practical implications to DMOs. The current study examines the influences of destination familiarity, onsite experience, perceived value, and attribute satisfaction in explaining tourists' unique image of Taiwan. Moreover, the trend of free independent tourists has surged with the advent of user-friendly Internet travel services. Differences in the formation of destination unique image between free independent tourists and group inclusive tourists have been somewhat overlooked in the tourism literature (except for Li, Kim, & Wong, 2016; Liu et al., 2015). The study also aims to discern the effects of travel arrangement types on the formation of destination unique image in the hope of inspiring DMOs to develop feasible destination branding strategies.

This article consists of four parts. First, we consolidate the research framework from several theoretical perspectives and then derive research hypotheses. Second, we describe the secondary data applied to test the hypotheses. The third part involves data analyses and results presentation. Finally, the paper concludes with theoretical and practical implications and suggestions for future research.

2. Theory and hypotheses

The formation of destination image involves a process of receiving external stimuli (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), in which tourists continuously develop and modify destination image based on accumulated information, actual experience, and personal factors (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). The totality of the tourism experience involves before-, during- and after-tour experiences (Aho, 2001). The process begins when informative promotion awakens an interest in tourism; the desire for a particular destination occurs when persuasive promotion prompts a motivation for tourism. Tourists are exposed to informative promotion, or what is termed a secondary image, before visiting the destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). By comparison, primary image assessment occurs while one is visiting and experiencing the destination. Post-tour evaluation involves reflection on the tourism experience, including comparing it with expectations and previous experiences. Some memorabilia enrich tourism experiences and remind tourists to consider repeat visits or recommend the destination through word-of-mouth. In the section below, this study elaborates the formation of destination unique image, taking into account destination familiarity, onsite experience, and attribute satisfaction, and proposes that type of travel arrangement moderates the formation of unique image.

2.1. Destination familiarity

Destination familiarity affects the perception and attractiveness of a destination, behavioral intention (Milman & Pizam, 1995; Tan & Wu, 2016), and formation of destination image (Baloglu, 2001; Beerli & Martín, 2004a,b). People often first engage in internal search for available information to familiarize themselves with the nature of the decision to be made (Bettman, 1979), so tourists may retrieve from their memory of previous visitation to a destination and from their knowledge about general tourism experiences (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004a). Destination familiarity can also be gained from external search through informational channels such as mass media and interpersonal sources (Baloglu, 2001). Therefore, internal-oriented experiential familiarity and external-oriented informational familiarity are two key dimensions used to describe such familiarity (Baloglu, 2001; Seo, Kim, Oh & Yun, 2013; Sun et al., 2013).

Internal-oriented experiential familiarity includes pre-tour planning and repeat visitation (Beerli & Martín, 2004a,b). Pre-tour planning increases tourists' knowledge and reasonable expectations, decreases uncertainty and perceptions of risk, and provides opportunities to identify deals that are a good value (Zalatan, 1996). Repeat visitation provides various multisensory image clues and factual knowledge of the destination (Huang & Gross, 2010), decreases tourists' social distance from the destination (Tasci, 2006; 2007), enhances the level of activity specialization (Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004), and facilitates subjective interpretation of the experience (Beerli & Martín, 2004a). Collectively, we posit that:

- H1.** Planning horizon is positively associated with destination unique image.
- H2.** Repeat visitation is positively associated with destination unique image.

External-oriented informational familiarity refers to the familiarity people get through organic or induced sources (Gunn, 1972). Organic information, such as mass media and interpersonal sources, facilitate the formation of an individual's original image toward a place. Tourism agencies and DMOs intentionally design induced information, such as advertising, to attract tourists' attention to a target destination (Mak, 2017). In a recent study of mainland Chinese visiting Macao, advertising and word-of-mouth had positive effects on cognitive image (Wang, Qu, & Hsu, 2016). The Internet and news media are also important formation agents of destination image (Khodadadi & O'Donnell, 2015; Pan & Li, 2011; Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015). Therefore, we propose:

- H3.** Organic information is positively associated with destination unique image.
- H4.** Induced information is positively associated with destination unique image.

2.2. Onsite experience

After the internal and external information search stages, tourists may adjust destination image through their onsite firsthand experience. Tourism experience is triggered in specific settings (Jennings, 2006), including objective and interactive encounters (Lin & Kuo, 2016), which intertwine with tourists' varying needs to make the ultimate experiential outcomes subjective (Andersson, 2007). From a value chain perspective, the upstream inputs of tourism experience, such as accommodation, attractions, transportation, and weather (Jeuring, 2017) do not directly deliver

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