



“All that's best of dark and bright”: Day and night perceptions of Hong Kong cityscape

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HIGHLIGHTS

- This study compared visitors' perceptions of the same view (i.e., Hong Kong cityscape) at daytime and nighttime.
- Hong Kong respondents perceived “night” to be more feminine, mysterious, imaginative, vulnerable and superficial than “day”.
- “Night owls” perceived “day” to be more masculine, powerful, hardworking, vulnerable, glamorous and independent.
- American respondents perceived “night” to be more successful and glamorous than Hong Kong respondents did.
- Hong Kong respondents perceived “night” to be more superficial and vulnerable than American respondents did.

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ABSTRACT

Tourists can go sightseeing at various hours of the day. This study compared visitors' perceptions of the same “sight” at daytime and nighttime, and examined how perceptions relate to visitor characteristics (i.e., nationality and circadian rhythm). Focus groups were conducted to identify the day and night brand personality of the cityscape of Hong Kong as seen from atop Victoria Peak. Afterwards, a quasi-experimental design was employed, with day-or-night video of the view as the treatment variable. Questionnaires were administered in Hong Kong and the United States for cross-cultural comparison. More significant differences were observed in the Hong Kong sample than in the USA sample. Findings revealed that “night” had more personality, in that the night view generally received higher ratings. “Day” had a more distinctive personality, which was perceived differently by “early birds” and “night owls” in Hong Kong, and more relatable to USA respondents than to Hong Kong respondents.

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1. Introduction

Destination image is one of the most widely studied topics in tourism (Pike, 2002; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). However, most studies examined image at a single point in time, without considering temporal environmental changes. A site can be experienced at different seasons and hours of a day. Environmental factors, such as light, weather, and climate, may induce different emotional responses, which may influence people's perceptions. While climate has been identified as an important attribute of image (e.g., Baloglu

& McCleary, 1999; Bonn, Joseph, & Dai, 2005; Gallarza, Saura, & García, 2002; Hui & Wan, 2003), only a handful of studies have examined or compared tourist perceptions at different seasons. Kim's (1998) study on the attractiveness of Korean destinations found that each destination was associated with a “favorite season” in the minds of tourists, such as Cheju Island in spring and Sulak Mountain in fall. Tasci's (2007) study on the image of Michigan found that survey season (i.e., winter, spring, and summer) had some influence on respondents' “sense of place” and “things to do,” but not so much on their “overall image” of Michigan. Wenger's (2008) analysis of travel blogs on Austria identified summer and autumn to be more popular, while younger travelers were more common in winter. Moreover, seasons were associated with different activities in Austria, such as skiing in winter and hiking in summer.

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Besides seasonal differences, tourists also experience the destination at various hours of the day, most notably at daytime and nighttime. Light, be it sunlight or artificial lighting, is a stimulator. A historic house by day may become “haunted” after dusk, and a normal street alley may seem enchanting at night with proper illumination. As such, there are different versions (sights) of the same site. Arguably two sights, at daytime versus nighttime, of the same site are two different tourism products. While seasonal differences may be more obvious for some geographic regions than others, day and night differences can be observed in all destinations and can be experienced by tourists in a single trip. However, previous studies on time and destination image focused on the effects of length of stay and repeat visitation (Gallarza et al., 2002). Day and nighttime differences have not been explored. Moreover, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Previous studies on destination image have examined image differences as perceived by different socio-cultural and visitor groups (e.g., Bonn et al., 2005; Joppe, Martin, & Waalen, 2001; Lee & Lee, 2009; Ryan & Aicken, 2010). Likewise, people's perception of the day and nighttime view may also be shaped by their culture, nationality, personality traits, and other factors. It is necessary to explore if day and night views are perceived differently by different types of visitors.

The purpose of this study is to examine visitors' perceptions of the same view at daytime and nighttime, and investigate the effects of visitor types on perception. Destination brand personality, rather than destination image, was used to assess tourist perceptions. As this study will also investigate day/night perceptions based on individual characteristics, destination personality can better capture how tourists see a product (i.e., the view) as well as relate the product to themselves (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Victoria Peak (The Peak) was selected as the study site, and the view that visitors experience is the cityscape of Hong Kong as seen from Sky Terrace 428, the highest viewing platform at The Peak. The cityscape of Hong Kong was selected for two reasons. First, Hong Kong has a world-famous urban nightscape. It is the only city in the world to be awarded “Top Three Night Views in the World” consecutively (YAKEI Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2012). Second, The Peak is considered the number one attraction in Hong Kong, and the daytime view from The Peak is also popular with tourists and hikers (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2016). Therefore, the specific objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the brand personality of the cityscape of Hong Kong as seen from The Peak at daytime and nighttime.
2. To test the differences in day/night brand personality perceptions based on individual characteristics (i.e., nationality and circadian rhythm).

2. Literature review

2.1. Nighttime tourism

Tourism takes place at all hours of the day. While there are not many studies on nighttime in relation to tourism, some relevant research is found in other fields. In sociology and urban studies, scholars have examined nighttime leisure activities. Traditionally, people work during the day, and nighttime is often associated with leisure and certain “late-night pleasures,” including drinking, partying, and other pursuits (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009). The increasing popularity of nighttime activities has led to the development of “the night-time economy,” where jobs and wealth are created through alcohol-related industries and night entertainment, such as bars and clubs (Hobbs, Lister, Hadfield, Winlow, & Hall, 2000; Lovatt & O'Connor, 1995; Shaw, 2010). These

nighttime activities tend to attract younger consumers and lead to problems such as binge drinking and inappropriate behaviors (Jones, Charlesworth, Simms, Hillier, & Comfort, 2003; Roberts, 2015). As the night falls, darkness and lack of visibility may also expose people to crime and violence (Bromley & Nelson, 2002). Therefore, many studies examined nighttime activities from a negative perspective and discussed how late night economy has turned town and city centers into dangerous and unpleasant environments at night (Eldridge & Roberts, 2008; Hobbs, Winlow, Hadfield, & Lister, 2005; Roberts, 2009).

Nighttime leisure can be available to both locals and tourists. Facing intense competition, destinations try to offer creative tourism products, including nighttime activities (Richards, 2014). The darkness and illumination at nighttime can amplify tourists' impression of the destination (Baker, 2015; Jiwa, Coca-Stefaniak, Blackwell, & Rahman, 2009). Gu (2013) identified five types of night tourism products in urban areas, including leisure pedestrian zones, night tours of scenic areas, performance arts, folk festivals, and light art installations. He also compared selected cases in China and Europe, and found that cities in China tend to develop night tourism around a single theme, such as food street and shopping street. On the other hand, urban night tourism in Europe often involves multifunctional entertainment complexes, which offer more activities and encourage visitors to stay longer. Another study by Lu and Luo (2010) compared the nighttime activities of tourists and local residents in Xiamen, and found that while locals preferred shopping, dining, and going to the beach at night, tourists were more interested in folk art performances, night cruises, and visiting the largest urban park in Xiamen.

Besides being a local or a tourist, other factors may influence one's preference for nighttime activities, such as circadian rhythm. Human's circadian rhythm is shaped by sleep-wake patterns and lifestyle habits (Cooper, 1994; Nag & Pradhan, 2012). Gaina et al. (2006) found that circadian rhythm influences morning-evening preferences. While most research approached circadian rhythm from a chronobiology perspective, a few studies have explored its implications marketing and purchasing behavior (Delacroix & Guillard, 2010; Roorda, 2013). It is possible that circadian orientation also influences tourist perceptions and preferences towards the nighttime.

2.2. Lighting and the urban landscape

In addition to nighttime activities, another line of research focused on lighting and urban destinations. Evans (2012) discussed the *Nuit Blanche* phenomenon in European capital cities, where cities organize late night cultural festivals and events, including fireworks, light installations, and late night opening of museums and galleries. Such events are not only for tourists but also help to solve some of the “late-night pleasure” issues in cities. Based on the *Nuit Blanche* concept, the Light Night initiative was developed in the UK, with events such as outdoor concerts, circuses, and synchronized firework and lighting displays (Jiwa et al., 2009). These programs also served to revitalize city centers, create a welcoming atmosphere, and change visitors' perception of the place (Jiwa et al., 2009).

While *Nuit Blanche* type festivals are becoming more popular in European and North American cities, cities in China have a different approach to night tourism. Arguing that lighting projects lead to the development of night tourism in Guangzhou, Guo, Lin, Meng, and Zhao (2011) analyzed the nighttime attractions based on lighting projects in different tourist zones in the city. Zheng, Shi, and Rao (2010) explored how lighting was used to improve the nighttime view of the Hangzhou Grand Canal to attract tourists. Liu et al. (2011) also examined the nightscape of Shanghai and identified

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