



Toward an integrated model of tourist expectation formation and gender difference



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HIGHLIGHTS

- An integrated model of tourist expectation formation was proposed, tested, and established.
- Travel motivation, advertising, and word-of-mouth (WOM) had a positive effect on cognitive image.
- Both cognitive image and affective image had a positive impact on tourist expectations.
- Gender was found to be a significant moderating variable in the integrated tourist expectation formation model.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to build and test a theoretical model of tourist expectation formation and seeks to explore the gender differences regarding how tourists form their expectations toward a travel destination. Survey data were obtained from 774 outbound Chinese tourists to Macao, and structural equation modelling was used to test the model and proposed hypotheses. The results reveal that travel motivation, advertising, and word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations influence travelers' cognitive image and cognitive image interacts with affective image to form individuals' expectations toward travel destinations. Notably, the impacts of travel motivation and advertising on cognitive image, and of cognitive image on tourist expectations were significantly stronger for males than females, while the effects of WOM on cognitive image and of affective image on tourist expectations were stronger for females than males. Both theoretical and practical implications of these important findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Expectation has long been considered important in explaining individuals' behavior, particularly their economic behavior (Olson & Dover, 1979). Expectation is generally referred to as a prediction in the mind of the consumer about the anticipated results or performance of the product/service transaction in the future (Higgs, Polonsky, & Hollick, 2005; Spreng, MacKenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996). Within the marketing literature, expectation has been viewed as a benchmark consumers use to determine satisfaction or

appraise performance of products and services (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985).

Tourist expectations are a preconceived perception of travel outcomes, and “most people participate in leisure travel to satisfy more than one expectation” (Andereck, McGehee, Lee, & Clemmons, 2012, p. 131). Understanding tourists' expectations in relation to their travel decisions is fundamental to effective destination management and marketing because evaluation of an experience is framed within a tourist's preconceived notions (Fallon, 2008). Expectation has been emphasized as an object of attention by researchers investigating travel agencies (del Bosque, Martín, & Collado, 2006), travel products (Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline, & Wang, 2011, travel destinations (Andereck et al., 2012; del Bosque & Martín, 2008) and heritage sites (Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006).

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A review of several recent tourism studies (Fountain, Espiner, & Xie, 2011; Kim, 2012; Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011; de Rojas & Camarero, 2008) reveals that existing studies were directed at understanding the use of expectation as a standard or measure against which the actual product/service performance is judged, and examining the consequences of expectation through satisfaction and quality perceptions. However, little empirical research has focused on how tourist expectations are actually formed, especially toward a travel destination.

In the tourism industry, gender has been considered an important determinant of tourist behavior and may be of great use in segmenting markets (Um & Crompton, 1992). McGehee, Kim, and Jennings (2007) noted that the importance of gender in tourism cannot be overlooked. Individuals are initially differentiated by status characteristics, such as gender, based on the expectation state theory (Humphreys & Berger, 1981). Those characteristics serve as cues from which individuals form expectation (Driskell, 1982). Men and women show different behaviors depending on expectations from society (Moschis, 1985). Given these facts, determining the differences between male and female tourists regarding their expectations toward a travel destination would be of tremendous help in the deep understanding of tourist expectation formation. More importantly, such differences may suggest alternative ways to effectively manage tourists' expectations and maintain their loyalty. Although several researchers have included gender as a key variable in tourism research, few studies have attempted to analyze the moderating effect of gender in the tourism industry, and even fewer have focused on how gender moderates tourist expectations.

The purpose of this study is to establish and test a theoretical model of tourist expectation formation and to address the gender differences regarding how tourists form their expectations toward a travel destination. More specifically, the objective of the study is twofold. First, we try to identify the key determinants of tourist expectations when individuals are engaged in pre-visit decision-making. Second, we explore the moderating effects of gender in the tourist expectation formation process. By examining the relative impact of these determinants and the differential role of gender, destination marketers will have valuable insight into how to better manage tourist expectations. This knowledge is important, as expectations affect tourists' evaluations, their level of satisfaction with the destination, and their future behavior.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

2.1. Destination image

Destination image affects the individual's subjective perception and consequent behavior and destination choice (Chon, 1991). Destination image is the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions individuals have of attributes and/or activities available at a destination (Crompton, 1979a; Gartner, 1986). The work of Gunn (1988) discussed three types of destination images: (1) organic image, which is formed by information assimilated from non-touristic, non-commercial sources, such as word-of-mouth; (2) induced image, which is formed by commercial sources such as travel brochures, travel agents, and travel guidebooks; and (3) complex image, which is based on induced image from both commercial sources as well as organic images from personal travel experiences. More recent research studies view destination image as a multi-dimensional construct that consists of both cognitive and affective components (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Walmsley & Young, 1998). The former refers to the evaluation of the known attributes of the object; whereas, the latter is related to subjective feelings or emotions about the object (Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993).

The interrelationship of cognitive and affective image eventually determines the predisposition for visiting a destination (Kim & Richardson, 2003). There is general agreement that affective evaluation depends on cognitive assessment, and affective responses are formed as a function of the cognitive responses (Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007; Martín & del Bosque, 2008).

Image facilitates the prior knowledge of consumers about product and service performance of a firm (Grönroos, 1990). The image consumers have toward a service firm has a positive effect on their future expectations (Clow, Kurtz, Ozment, & Ong, 1997; Kurtz & Clow, 1991). In tourism, destination image molds the expectation that individuals form before the visit (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001). An empirical study carried out by del Bosque et al. (2006) investigated the formation of expectation, and the relationship between expectation, satisfaction, and consumer loyalty. They found that the image perceived by a travel agency user will be an expectation-generating factor for a future encounter with the service. del Bosque and Martín (2008) proposed a model explaining the interrelationships between psychological variables of the tourist satisfaction process, and confirmed that a favorable image of destination will have a positive effect on the individual's beliefs of a future experience. Ozturk and Qu (2008) investigated the impact of destination image on tourists' perceived value, expectation, and loyalty. They found that all of the destination-image dimensions (e.g., accommodation and food/beverage facilities, cost, hospitality and customer care, overall environment and hygiene/cleanliness, transportation, facilities and activities, and overall accessibility) had a significant impact on tourists' perceived value and tourist expectations.

On the basis of the conceptual and empirical perspectives from the literature, the following hypotheses are postulated:

Hypothesis 1. Cognitive image positively influences affective image of a travel destination.

Hypothesis 2. Cognitive image of a travel destination positively influences tourist expectations.

Hypothesis 3. Affective image of a travel destination positively influences tourist expectations.

2.2. Travel motivation

Motivation has been referred to as psychological/biological needs and wants including integral forces that arouse, direct, and integrate a person's specific behavior or need-fulfilling activity (Oliver, 1997). In psychology and sociology, the definition of motivation is directed toward either cognitive and emotional motives (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977) or internal and external motives (Gnoth, 1997). An internal motive is associated with drives, feelings, and instincts, while an external motive involves mental representations such as knowledge or beliefs (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The concept of motivation in tourism can also be classified into two forces which describe how individuals are pushed into making travel decisions and how they are pulled or attracted by destination attributes (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). The push motivations are related to emotional aspects that increase the desire for people to travel (Uysal & Jurowski, 1993), while the pull motivations are associated with external or situational factors of the destination choice (Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010). Crompton (1979b) identified nine motives/motivations of pleasure vacationers that significantly influenced the selection of a travel destination. Among the nine motives, seven motives were classified as socio-psychological (i.e., escape from a perceived mundane environment, exploration and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of

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