



The influence of tourism website on tourists' behavior to determine destination selection: A case study of creative economy in Korea

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ABSTRACT

The winds of Korean pop culture swept across China, Japan, and other South Asian countries, and this leads to a variety of economic and socio-cultural impacts. The Korean wave exemplifies the creative economy; creativity becomes an economic activity. Similarly, many Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) cater intangible products regarding the destination (e.g. information and images) via websites, and become a major information channel for the destination. Assuming that the official website of DMO positively affects the potential tourists' decision-making process, this paper will consider the co-relation between the qualities of the destination website and the intention to continuous use, and the subsequent effects on the intention to visit the destination. To prove the hypotheses, the modified IS success model was developed combining the information system (IS) success model with the expectation–confirmation model, and conducted a survey with the potential tourists who already have used the destination website, but have never visited Korea. The results show that all the hypotheses were supported, and that information quality, in particular, has the greatest effect on confirmation. Based on these findings, we present the theoretical and practical implications from the perspective of creative economy with suggestions for future research.

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1. Introduction

The wave of South Korean popular culture, called Hallyu by the Chinese mass media in 2002, refers to the pace of Korean culture's impact on neighboring countries (Kim et al., 2007). Ten years later, the Korean wave continues to have economic ramifications for the drama, music, and film industries (Jeong, 2014; the Hankyoreh Report). The winds of Korean pop culture swept across China beginning in 1996 and transferred to Japan. Following that, a fever was created by a Korean TV drama series, which led to a variety of economic and socio-cultural

changes. Today, the effects of Korean popular culture have tremendously affected visitors from other Asian countries' interested in visiting Korea. The millions of tourists from Asian countries have grown rapidly since 2008, and spent nearly three times as much money from US\$3.3 billion in 2007 to roughly US\$9.7 billion in 2012 (Jeong, 2014). Not only the tourism multiplier effects, but also important synergies with other industries (e.g. cultural heritage sites, festival, museums, galleries, music, dance, theater, opera performance, media, entertainment, international meetings, exhibitions, sports, and others) have been emerging. As the tourism economy continues to grow to be significant, the government of Korea notifies tourism as a major driving force of creative economy.

The concept of the “creative economy” first proposed by John Howkins (2001), in his study on the relations between creativity and economy, has rapidly grown in the last ten years

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to be a multidisciplinary concept (Duisenberg, 2011) including economy, technology and business, and has become a focus of the potential economic development.

Creative economy in Howkins' sense does not necessarily cater the economic activity but it should convey economic implications with creative ideas. To put it differently, creative economy bases the capital of ideas rather than the physical capital (Snieska and Normantiene, 2012:1424); it offers considerable potential to growth, and development of new, creative, intangible products, service experiences, and markets. However, as Howkins (2007: 17) points out, "creativity on its own has no economic value"; only when an idea is transformed into substance, creativity becomes an economic activity. The link between creativity and activity interplays on the line of the so-called information and communication technologies. The social networks, in the creative economy, have become a new channel to facilitate connectivity and collaboration among the people. Howkins (2010: 11) defines it as a creative ecology, that is, "the study of relationships between organisms and their environment, which probably includes other organisms", and "found in both physical places and intangible communities".

The DMOs, the official websites for tourists have positioned themselves in the middle of the creative ecology and work as a distribution channel for information on the attractions and destinations. Korean wave as an intangible cultural abstraction created the economic benefits with in-bound tourists. This new link shifts the conventional models of tourism (e.g. mass tourism) to new models (e.g. cultural tourism) in creative economy. The tourists attracted by cultural abstraction (e.g. cultural ambience and traditions) are classified as cultural tourists, and they are "individuals who visit cultural institutions or places such as museums, archeological and heritage sites, operas, theaters, festivals or architecture while away from home" (Stylianou-Lambert, 2011, p. 405).

From the creative economy, mass tourism is characterized as high-volume but low-yield, whereas cultural tourism features low-volume but high-yield (UNCTAD, 2010). In the digitally connected global community, the Internet as a medium of the business marketing and channel for creative products has played a role to spread cultural values; cultural tourists as active participants in creative ecology take significant sectors to enhance economic benefits in creative economy.

Thus, cultural tourism can be one of the significant segments for creative economy, especially when economic, cultural, and social elements are combined with intellectual property, science & technology as well as tourism itself (UNCTAD, 2010, p. 10). In this vein, Destination Management Organization (DMO) is regarded as the significant channel of creative economy, providing potential inbound tourists with cultural ambience; thereby it can increase the number of inbound cultural tourists and ultimately contributes to the national economy.

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of the Korean wave, particularly those effects produced by Korea's website on foreign and non-experienced tourists' perceptions and behavior regarding Korea. More specifically, this study identified the website impacts on foreign potential tourists through examination of the systems and the information on the website. Along with this growing interest in South Korea, South Korea's website, which was built by the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), was grappling with how to improve their website design, usage experience, and lead to an intention to travel to the destination

(Pallud and Straub, 2014). The unique trait of the tourism industry is handling intangible products, such as experience or services, which renders intensive information that has greater value compared to other industries. This has made the Internet, as a source of information, a central element of tourism (Wang et al., 2009; Koo et al., 2013a, 2013b). The Internet, mostly online travel agency websites, supplier sites, search engines, and destination websites is the most frequently used in gathering information during the planning stage (Xiang et al., 2014).

This study, employing DeLone and McLean's updated information system (IS) success model (2003), first measures the qualities of the destination website, and hypothesizes that website qualities such as system, information, and service contribute to the formation of expectation, which is preceded by the user acceptance of the destination website. IS success model is widely used to research satisfaction on a website as well as the use of technology at the individual level.

Then, by using the expectation–confirmation model (ECM) (Bhattacharjee, 2001), it assumes that confirmation of the destination website influences website usefulness and satisfaction. Lastly, under the assumption that constant use implies a positive attitude not only toward the website, but also to the destination itself, a hypothesis is postulated that the constant use of the website positively influences the actual visit intention to the destination. The purpose of the study is twofold:

First, by combining DeLone and McLean's IS success model with ECM, a more integrated model of the tourist decision making process is constructed to measure the relationship between the quality of the destination website and the potential tourists' belief, attitude, behavioral intention, and actual visitation intentions.

Second, based on the proposed model and using empirical data, the paper examined the quality of the destination website, how the potential tourists' beliefs and satisfaction affect the continued intent to use the website, and the intention to visit the destination. This study, along with the current trend whereby the newly emerging information source of UGC (User-Generated Content) (Xiang et al., 2014), is relevant to the stakeholders of the destination website in order to understand the potential tourists' expectation, cognition, and behaviors, and to explore the ways that lead to the actual visit intention.

2. Literature review

2.1. Destination Management Organizations websites

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), as a part of web-based marketing services, invest considerable amounts of time and money in the development of websites (Park and Gretzel, 2007). By developing user-friendly websites, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) provide tourists with various travel information such as images of sightseeing and cultural or historical attractions to induce them to travel the destination.

The information provided by DMOs is considerably reliable and trustful than those from User Generated Content (UGC), which is provided by a blend of amateur, semi-professional,

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