Tourist Value Lead to Loyalty

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The perceived value of a tourist's trip, representing a trade-off between costs and benefits of travelling to a destination, can exert a significant influence on tourists' loyalty, which is a main concern for managers of tourist destinations.

perceived value   satisfaction   destination trust

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of destinations, tourists have more choices and have become more demanding in the selection of destination, which makes it necessary for destination managers to adopt different marketing strategies to convey attractive messages that will motivate tourists to visit and revisit them [1]. Transactional and relational perspectives have always been used as two different marketing perspectives by destination managers. While the former emphasizes the consumer's perspective of quality and price [2], namely perceived value, the latter focuses on cultivating a strong connection between the customer and the brand [3]. Many researchers have emphasized the importance of perceived value [4] and relationship quality [5] to tourist loyalty respectively, however, the question of whether there exists an internal relationship between perceived value and relationship quality remains largely unexplored.

On the other hand, there is a growing interest in destination loyalty studies as loyal tourists tend to spend more money (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999) and provide positive word of mouth [6], which is a key concern for destination managers. Previous studies mainly focus on concepts, antecedents and indicators [7]; for example, Asli et al. modeled an integrated place-oriented and people-oriented concept to explore destination loyalty [8]. Li, Lv and Scott believed that sensory impressions and destination image are two important antecedents of destination loyalty [9]. Cossio-Silva and his colleagues adapted Best's customer loyalty index to destination loyalty [10]. However, there exists limited research attention on the impact of both tourist–destination relationship [5] and perceived value.

2. Tourist Loyalty and Perceived Value

Tourist loyalty can be divided into a behavioral level and attitudinal level. The former refers to tourists' participation in activities and measures their repeated and consistent behavior. The latter focuses on describing tourists' emotional preferences and favoritism towards a destination [11]. A high degree of visitor loyalty dramatically enhances the stability of a destination's clientele. It provides an effective marketing channel for the destination, that is, publicity through word of mouth, which can significantly increase the destination's economic revenue [12]. Due to

the importance of tourist loyalty, tourist loyalty studies have emerged since the 1980s, and loyalty remains a vital focus for the academic community until today [13].

The academic community has increasingly focused on the importance of perceived value. The concept of perceived value was developed in the 1970s and early 1980s in the retail industry. In the mid-to-late 1990s, the perceived value concept was introduced into tourism research, with Murphy et al. emphasizing that the perceived value of a destination represents the weighting of a tourist's travel time (or investment of money) against the experience gained from the visit [14]. Tourists estimate the value of a destination based on the difference between the perceived benefits and the costs paid for the tourism experience, including the acquisition value and the transaction value [15]. Exploring tourists' perceived value is therefore crucial for the management of tourism destinations [16]. It helps destination managers better grasp tourists' needs and gain a deeper understanding of the value and meaning of the products and services offered by the destination. However, whether and how perceived value leads to tourist loyalty has not been adequately explored.

3. Tourist–Destination Relationship

"Relationship" is a social psychological concept derived from the structural theory of interpersonal relationships [17], and its essence is interdependence over time [18]. According to Blackston, brand relationship is a stable, intimate, and continuous relationship formed during the interaction between a customer and a brand [19]. Muniz et al. further extended the scope of the concept, arguing that brand relationships should include not only customer–brand relationships but also inter-customer relationships and inter-brand relationships, thus proposing a broad brand relationship theory [20]. Since the 1990s, progressively more discerning tourists and increasingly fierce competition have forced marketers and managers to think about how to distinguish their destinations from competitors, deliver positive messages to tourists, and encourage them to repeat their visits.

Destination branding is undoubtedly a quality solution. Some scholars argue that a successful destination brand needs to meet tourists' emotional and functional needs, thus creating a positive and active relationship between tourists and the destination [21]. DeBenedetti et al. also suggested that the relationship between tourists and destinations can be inspired by the relationship between customers and brands [22], and Li conducted a study on the tourist–destination relationship from the perspective of destination marketing [23]. Chen and Phou conducted an empirical study focusing on the tourist–destination relationship, which consists of three dimensions (satisfaction, trust, and attachment), and their conclusions confirmed the hypothesis that the better the relationship between tourists and destinations, the higher their loyalty [5]. Kumar et al. measured the strength of destination relationships using these three variables (satisfaction, trust, and attachment) in their study on destination personality, self-consistency, and tourist loyalty [24].

4. Hypothesis Development

A large body of research in tourism confirms the link between tourists' perceived values, attitudes, and behaviors [25]. For example, Han and Hyun demonstrated a positive relationship between perceived quality, tourist satisfaction, tourist trust, and loyalty [26]. Wu et al. showed that environmental quality, relationship quality, and interaction quality positively contribute to medical tourists' trust, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions [27]. That is, the higher the perceived benefits and the lower the perceived costs, the more likely a tourist is to develop satisfaction, trust, and attachment to the destination and form a close relationship with it. Therefore, the study concluded that perceived value positively influences destination relationships. Among the three dimensions of the tourist–destination relationship, tourists' satisfaction can be strongly impacted by the value they perceive [28], and this relationship has been confirmed in studies of destination marketing. For example, Chen and Chen focused on tourist behavior in heritage tourism destinations and demonstrated that tourists' perceived value of the destination plays a significant role in their satisfaction levels [29]. Pandža et al. similarly found a significant positive effect of perceived value on satisfaction [30].

When customers perceive a brand as having a high value, they are more willing to establish a long-term connection with the brand and have confidence in its future development [31]. When the perceived value increases, this emotional attachment also increases, which is another dimension variable of the tourist–destination relationship. While perceived value has been studied intensively in tourism studies, these have focused on how tourism companies can make customers perceive higher tourism benefits, thus increasing tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. The present study argues that just as perceived value is one of the value bases of destination trust, it also plays a vital role in place attachment. If tourists perceive the costs of tourism to be higher than its benefits, emotional place identity, place dependence, and attachment will cease to exist.

Finally, the link between perceived value, attitude, and behavior has been emphasized by many scholars in recent years, Doney et al., for example, explored the nature of trust in buyer–seller relationships and argued that customer perceived value plays a value-based role in the trust formation process [32]. Additionally, empirical studies have verified the hypothesis that perceived value has a significant positive effect on trust in destinations [33][34]. Al-Ansi, for example, pointed out that tourists' perceived value of halal-friendly destinations is essential for their trust. If tourists feel that the benefits of tourism are more significant than the costs, they will trust the products and services more and thus enjoy a good interaction with the destination [25]. Based on the arguments above, Hypotheses 1a–c for this study are presented:

Hypothesis 1 (H1a).
Perceived value has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1 (H1b).
Perceived value has a positive effect on place attachment.

Hypothesis 1 (H1c).
Perceived value has a positive effect on destination trust.

Among the internal dimensions of the tourist–destination relationship, satisfaction is always associated with positive word of mouth and a higher level of trust [35]. While some scholars argue that customer trust leads to satisfaction, others contend that the level of satisfaction positively contributes to the level of trust [36][37]. Scholars who hold this view believe that the more satisfied customers are with a brand, the more they will trust it [38]. Conversely, a customer who is dissatisfied with products and services may question the competence of the provider of the products and services [39]. A study by Lee et al. found that customer satisfaction is likely to trigger positive feelings towards the manufacturer, increasing trustworthiness [40]. Lai similarly argued that the higher the level of satisfaction of tourists, the higher the level of trust in the destination [35].

Research in marketing has demonstrated that if consumers are satisfied with a brand, they may develop an emotional attachment to it [41]. This view is supported by Halpenny, who argued that tourists' satisfaction with the social, natural, and other park environments promotes their sense of place attachment [42]. Zenker and Rütter stated that place satisfaction is the most significant predictor of place attachment [43]. In their review of the place attachment literature, Chen et al. concluded that place attachment is an outcome of an individual's evaluation of a destination or attitude toward the destination, and again demonstrated a link between satisfaction and place attachment [44]. Ramkissoon et al. argued that tourists' satisfaction has a significant indirect effect on their sense of place attachment by encouraging environmentally friendly behavioral intentions [45]. Jia et al. pointed out that tourist satisfaction has a positive relationship with tourists' identification with a place and their sense of attachment [46].

In marketing research, brand trust has been shown to be a vital prerequisite for evoking customers' emotional attachment to a brand [18], and in tourism research, the empirical findings of Chen and Phou showed that the level of tourists' trust in a destination has a positive correlation with their level of attachment to that destination [5]. Furthermore, in 2016 Kumar et al. similarly confirmed the role of destination trust on place attachment [24]. Therefore, this study argues that for tourist destinations (especially highly reputable destinations), the more tourists trust the quality of the products and services they provide, the more likely they are to form place attachment. Based on the arguments above, Hypotheses 2a–c for this study are presented:

Hypothesis 2 (H2a).
Tourist satisfaction has a positive effect on destination trust.

Hypothesis 2 (H2b).
Tourist satisfaction has a positive effect on place attachment.

Hypothesis 2 (H2c).
Destination trust has a positive effect on place attachment.

A good relationship with the destination is an essential prerequisite for tourists to remain loyal. When tourists are no longer satisfied, trusting, and attached to the destination, their loyalty level will wane significantly. Moreover, they may evaluate the destination negatively, stop visiting the destination, and discourage others from doing so. As

confirmed by Chen and Phou [5], there is a significant positive effect of the tourist–destination relationship on loyalty. Therefore, this study suggests that the destination relationship positively affects tourist loyalty. Many studies have confirmed that tourist satisfaction is an important variable leading to future behavior and intention of tourists. Wang et al. explored the behavior of tourists revisiting harbor attractions in Taiwan. They showed that tourists satisfied with their travel experience were more willing to revisit the same destination in the future [47]. The findings of Chen and Phou also confirm the hypothesis of a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and loyalty [5], and suggest that a tourist who is satisfied with a destination is more likely to revisit it and recommend it to others, leading to attitudinal loyalty as well as behavioral loyalty [48].

A sense of attachment is an important prerequisite for individuals to generate behavioral intentions and an important and valid predictor of tourist loyalty [49]. Tourists who are emotionally willing to connect with a destination are more willing to devote more time, effort, and money to maintaining that relationship and are more likely to develop attitudinal and behavioral loyalty [50]. Many researchers have noted this logical relationship and attempted to develop a research framework of place attachment and to measure its relationship with behavioral intentions. In 2013, Ramkissoon et al. explored the pro-environmental behavior of park visitors, and their results demonstrated that visitors' sense of place attachment (and social connection to the destination) is an important driver of pro-environmental behavior [49]. Yüksel et al. similarly demonstrated this relationship in their study [51]. Therefore, the relationship between place attachment and tourist loyalty has been clearly established.

Trust is an essential relationship marketing tool to increase loyalty [52], so the study of customer loyalty has become more common. The results of empirical studies by Chaudhuri et al. reaffirmed the importance of brand trust for loyalty and suggested that brand trust makes customers believe that establishing an exchange relationship with a brand leads to high value [53]. In the tourism literature, Loureiro and González also provided evidence that tourist trust positively affects loyalty in rural accommodation [37]. Han and Hyun's study on medical tourism showed that tourists' trust in clinics and their staff significantly affects their willingness to revisit [26]. Moreover, the willingness to revisit is included in loyalty, which suggests that a higher level of tourist trust promotes a higher level of attitudinal loyalty. In addition, numerous scholars approaching the issue from different perspectives have argued that tourist trust in a destination has a positive effect on tourist loyalty [25], and that tourists are more likely to form attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Based on the arguments above, Hypotheses 3a–c for this study are presented:

Hypothesis 3 (H3a).

Tourist satisfaction has a positive effect on tourist loyalty.

Hypothesis 3 (H3b).

Place attachment has a positive effect on tourist loyalty.

Hypothesis 3 (H3c).

Destination trust has a positive effect on tourist loyalty.

Finally, tourism research has widely demonstrated the effect of perceived value on tourist loyalty. Chen et al. noted that perceived value has a significant effect on satisfaction and directly influences tourists' behavioral intentions [29]. Peña et al. also noted that perceived value positively correlates with loyalty [54]. Therefore, it can be argued that the higher the perceived value and the lower the cost of tourism, the more likely tourists are to view the destination as high in quality and worthy of being visited again. Moreover, they are more likely to think of the products and services of the destination when making decisions about their next holiday, resulting in attitudes and behaviors that reflect tourist loyalty, such as recommendations and repeat visits.

Hypothesis 4 (H4).
Perceived value has a positive effect on tourist loyalty.

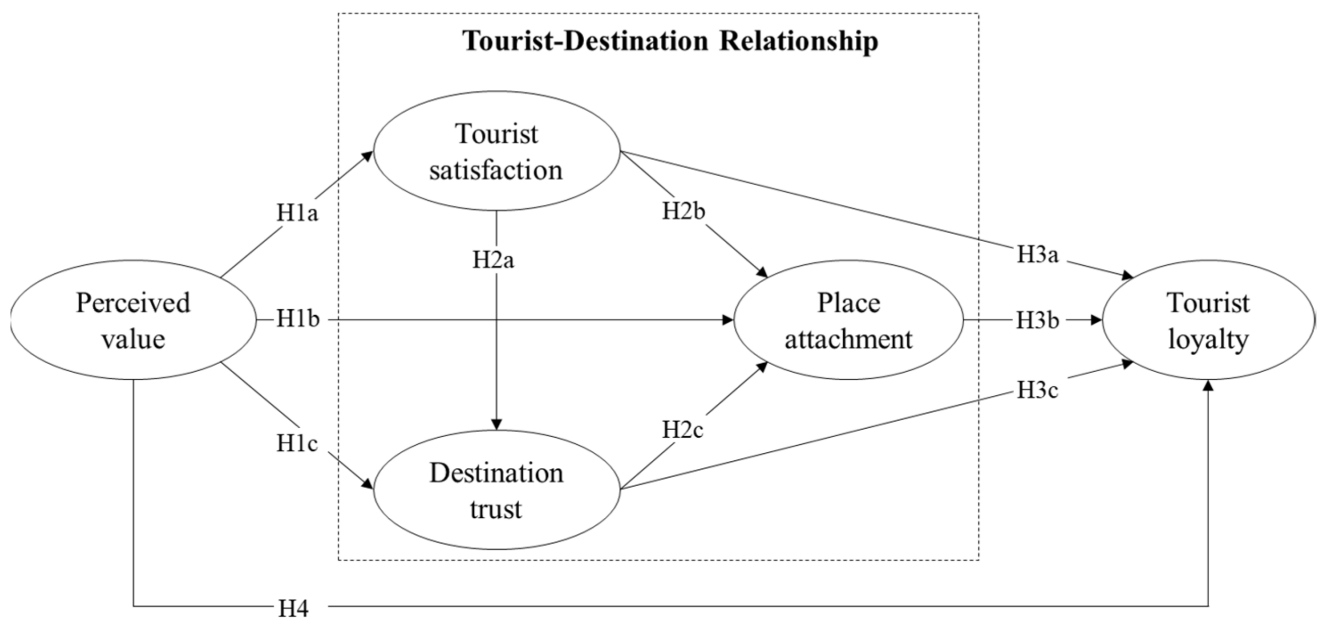All the hypotheses are presented in the conceptual model (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Conceptual model and hypotheses.

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