



Do people still have high intention to travel during post-covid period in China? *The role of destination marketing*

Jiaojiao Zhao

Manipal International University

jojzha@126.com (Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to review the destination marketing and the changing behavioral intention to travel during post-COVID period. The recovery and boom of the tourism industry becomes increasingly important due to its pivotal status, and the study of marketing strategies provides academic support and evidence for the policy makers in the tourism industry in the post-pandemic era. However, the operationalization of the smart destination concept and implementation of roles and functions of destination strategies remain poorly understood. This study brings an inter-disciplinary perspective including management. The research on the relationship between smart destination marketing policy and the intention of tourists ensures the destination to emerge as an integrated place physically and technically, and improves the quality of life for residents. The contributions made in this article acts as a provider for tourism agencies with a better comprehension and evaluation. In the meantime, it contributes with the improvement of the experience and expectancy of tourists during and after their travel.

Keywords: *tourism; destination marketing; travel intention; travel behavior; post-COVID*

1.0 BACKGROUND

As the global tourism industry becomes more competitive, investigating future behavioral intentions of international travelers is the subject of interest in tourism which plays a vital role in destination development (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Through obtaining information about various factors such as tourists' personalities, motivations, wishes, destination perceptions, satisfaction levels and behavioral intentions following the purchasing activity, tourist destinations can develop their promotion and marketing strategies based on more concrete goals (Sedat & Bekir, 2019).

Of particular concern to the future of the global tourism industry are the residual effects of the pandemic on future decision-making processes of tourists and their post-pandemic behavior in visiting a destination (Matiza, 2020; Rastegar et al., 2021b). While the nexus between

perceived risk and tourist psychology in the COVID-19 era is a growing tourism research focus, the predictors of post-pandemic travel intentions that ensue from media exposure are yet to be substantially investigated.

Wei et al., (2011) explored the push and pull motivations of parent-child travelers by conducting a questionnaire survey of 290 travelers to parent-child farms and validated the path relationships between push and pull motivations, experiences and behavioral intentions. In their study, the findings indicate that “children & family” and “socialization” are the main push motivation factors for parent-child travelers in decision making, and “theme activities” and “environment” are the main pull motivation factors for parent-child travelers in making decisions, and “facilities & safety” factor is presented the lowest. In addition, parent-child travelers’ push-pull motivation has a positive effect on their experience.

The recovery of the tourism industry is an important issue that has attracted much attention during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sustainable and safe festival tourism is considered an effective way of aiding in the recovery of the industry. Literature indicated that fear of COVID-19 is not just a variable that negatively affects behavioral intentions. Even if individuals are in fear of COVID-19, they can have a positive effect on behavioral intention without the influence of perceived risk. (Yang et al., 2022)

As the epidemic has gradually been brought under control, people’s willingness to travel has become increasingly obvious. Tourism will return to the nature and normal development of health and wellness tourism will gradually become popular. Tourism consumers need to improve their awareness of safety protection, comply with the relevant rules and regulations of epidemic prevention and control in scenic spots, timely do personal disinfection and try to use electronic payment to ensure safe travel.

1.2 Research problem

Intention to travel on post-covid period has changed due to the well-control of the COVID-19, and the tourism industry was gradually recovering. However, the number of imported cases continues to increase and the imported products is also creating potential risks. Several scholars analyzed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry from the perspective of economic losses and provided suggestions for the recovery of the tourism industry from a macro perspective (Ahmad et al., 2020; Gaffney & Eeckels, 2020; Grech et al., 2020; Kitamura et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). However, yet to our knowledge, there are few studies on how COVID-19 changed people’s travel behaviors, especially during the unique recovery period of the tourism industry in China. Moreover, the relationship between destination marketing and tourists’ travel intentions in the post-COVID era is also worthy of further investigation.

2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Definition of travel behavioral intention

Intention refers to a determination to take a specific action in the future and represents the probability of putting one’s beliefs into practice (Kang, Park & Lee, 2017). Behavioral intention refers to the motivational factors that influence a given behavior where the stronger

the intention to perform the behavior, the more likely the behavior will be performed. According to Baker and Crompton (2000), individual behavior can be predicted from the behavioural intention when the appropriate evaluation of behavioural intention was made, then the information obtained from the actual behavior would be very close.

In the study, the connotation of travel behavioural intention refers to the tourists, who are determined to visit the heritage tourist attractions in Henan Province, have searched for the relevant information in order to have a full preparation for the coming travelling. Behavioral intentions are determined by an individual's overall attitude toward an object (Prayag, 2017; Ekinci, 2008).

Travel behavioural intention as a dependent variable in the study of tourism seems to be an important conception in the comprehension of tourist selection of destinations and future motives and behaviour. From this point of view, any attempt to perceive travel behavioural intention will bring further contribution to the tourism knowledge base.

2.2 Past research findings of travel behavioral intention

Since behavioral intentions have become a basic strategic metric to assess the success of a tourism destination, research on this topic remains an important subject in marketing and tourism field (Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013). Numerous studies in the tourism field have established a positive correlation between attitudes and behavior. It is believed that travelers' behavioral intentions, which can be used to predict visitors' actual behavior and predict the future behavior of tourists, indicate the successful development of a destination and maintain it.

According to Fu et al., (2016), international stereotype had a direct effect on cognitive and affective images and indirect effects on travel intention, while the effects of stereotyping were equally strong among visitors and non-visitors. Their findings suggest that even when inter-governmental relations have been gradually normalized people might still perceive their former rival nation as hostile, which can negatively influence their destination images of the nation.

The quality of tourist shuttles predicts intention to revisit through two mediators—destination satisfaction and image, while the destination image predicts intention to revisit through destination satisfaction. It can be seen that the most favourable indicators of pre-visit and post-visit behavioural intentions for tourism researchers and managers are intention to revisit (Loi et al., 2017).

Jia et al.,(2018) carried out an empirical research on the influence of attitudes and low-carbon factors on the behavior intention while making commuting mode choices. They first proposed a conceptual model in which the MPT factors were combined with the low-carbon factors. By designing a questionnaire according to the model and conducted a survey in three major Chinese cities—Beijing, Jinan and Hangzhou, the authors believe that the instrumental factor of public transportation is the strongest predictor of the intention of choosing a particular commuting mode, and low-carbon factors have direct impact on the intention of commuting

mode choice. However, there is a gap existing between the intention to use a particular transportation mode and the actual choice.

Sedat & Bekir (2019) revealed the relationship between personality traits, travel motivations, perceived destination quality, overall destination satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Their study showed that personal traits “agreeableness” and “conscientiousness” positively affect relaxation motivation. Cultural and relaxation motivations had a positive impact on satisfaction, whereas pleasure-seeking motivation has a negative impact on satisfaction. In addition, overall destination satisfaction is positively affected by destination quality perceptions and affects loyalty in a positive way.

In the context of epidemic, the risk messages disseminated by destinations are a critical factor in determining travel-related decisions, as well as being a widely investigated topic for crisis and risk research in tourism. In addition, people’s travel-related decisions vary in different crisis context. Accordingly, the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on post-pandemic travel intentions has received much attention (Xie, et al., 2021).

2.3 Overview of destination marketing

Destination marketing is now acknowledged as a pillar of the future growth and sustainability of tourism destinations in an increasingly globalised and competitive market for tourists (UNWTO, 2011). Its organizations invest heavily in marketing their destination in the severe competition in tourism industry. Despite the rapid growth of Internet-based marketing, the use of big data is expected to remain the most widely used channel to market products and services for years to come.

Published research related to destination marketing represents an important growth area in tourism that has become a distinct paradigm (Pike & Page, 2014), and its significance is reinforced by four key propositions that are associated with global tourism: first, most aspects of tourism take place at destinations (Leiper, 1979); second, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) proposed that destinations were “the fundamental unit of analysis in tourism” (WTO, 2002); third, destinations have emerged as the biggest brands in the travel industry (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2002), and lastly, a large number of nations, states and cities are now funding a Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) as the main vehicle to compete and attract visitors to their distinctive place or visitor space. Therefore, not only has the destination and destination marketing emerged as a central element of tourism research (Fyall, Garrod, & Wang, 2012; Wang & Pizam, 2011), it is associated with the operational activities undertaken in the highly competitive business of attracting visitors to localities (UNWTO 2007, 2011).

2.4 Definition of destination marketing

According to *Global Hub*, destination marketing is a marketing approach in the travel industry that involves promoting a specific location and its benefits instead of the product or service that a company offers. This could be a country, a town or city, or even a specific holiday resort or attraction.

In the heritage tourism in Henan, with the in-depth development of tourism and fierce competition in the tourism industry, the establishment of favorable branding has come to be a powerful and effective marketing tool for a tourist destination (Bianchi et al., 2014; Wassler et al., 2018).

The purpose of destination marketing is to increase customer awareness of a certain destination so that they start to think about visiting, or to help them remember the location when they are ready to book a holiday. By slipping in subtle calls to action and mentions of a brand's offering, the idea is that potential customers will decide to book a holiday to that destination through the company that is promoting it. It is also often used by the tourist boards of certain countries or regions as a way to try and bring more visitors to the area to boost the local economy and establish themselves as a desirable holiday destination.

The main aim of destination marketing is to make the customer aware of and interested in the target location before they arrive. You want to spark an emotional desire to see and experience the place you are offering, as this makes the likelihood of paying for a holiday much higher.

2.5 Past Research of destination marketing

Choi and Cai (2017) illustrates in their article the role of the relationship quality perceived by the international public, which is increasingly discussed in public diplomacy research. It leads to the implications for integrated destination marketing of a host country in targeting the international public, where the host country is considered both as a tourism destination and as a place for business and investment. Their study proposes a model illustrating the intervention of relationship quality in the way tourism destination image and country image are associated with tourism and business behavioral intentions.

Okumus et al., (2018) analyzed how the three cities of Jinan, Qingdao, and Qufu in Shandong Province of China use their cuisines in promoting their destinations. The study findings suggest that all the three cities have not yet fully utilized their cuisines in their destination marketing efforts. Although some of their culinary resources appear in their marketing materials, the local cuisines of these three cities are not yet skillfully integrated into their marketing efforts.

Hudson et al., (2019) discussed how destination marketers can attract the growing segment of migrating retirees. Their study has confirmed the symbiotic relationship between tourism and retiree migration. It has also shown the potential for converting more visitors into retirees. The study has also verified key motivational factors for retirees when they consider retirement destinations, such as climate, accessibility, medical facilities, as well identifying more contemporary motivational drivers such as recreational activities, leisure opportunities, amenities, connectivity, culinary attractions and educational opportunities.

Chung et al., (2020) developed a Bleisure tourism experience chain and examined how Bleisure marketing practices are created to encourage business travelers to have better experiences and spend more money, beyond business events. The results showed that local convention bureaus

and exhibition centers develop a variety of marketing programs in the hope of stimulating extra spending by business travelers, which have been yet arbitrarily delivered.

Bastiaansen et al., (2022) studied the emotion measure in tourism destination marketing by a comparative electroencephalographic and behavioral study. Their results show that ERP (event-related potential) measures of emotional salience are more sensitive in capturing the subtle process of coupling a positive emotion to a destination (and hence influencing affective destination image), than self-report measures. Moreover, destination marketing that is aimed at influencing affective destination image, for example, by coupling positive emotions to a destination, is more effective in influencing destination choice than marketing efforts that are more cognitively oriented.

Sorokina et al., (2022) used interviews with experts in destination marketing, place management and technology, alongside analysis of Destination Marketing Systems (DMSs) to identify the ways of how DMOs lead and facilitate the development and effective governance of smart innovations. They mentioned that the growing application of technologies in tourism signified the transition from smart cities to smart destinations and argued that despite similarities, smart destinations were unique entities with distinct objectives, which required the development of a specialized conceptualization of these entities.

In this paper, it main discusses the variables and invariables from their overviews, definitions and past researches respectively, clarifying the relationship and interaction among destination marketing, destination image, emotion as the mediator, travel policy as the moderator and people's behaviour al travel intention.

The theoretical and practical knowledge of smart destinations is growing but remains limited in the tourism field (Johnson & Samakovlis, 2019; Jovicic, 2019; Mehraliyev et al., 2020; Shafiee et al., 2019). There remains the need to develop transferable frameworks conceptualizing dimensions of smart destination, based on empirical work. Moreover, dating from the 1970s and also the 1980s present some theoretical and conceptual limitations (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Gartner, 1993; Gallarza et. al., 2002). The study of emotion in travel behaviour provides valuable feedback for tourism managers for the design of advertising stimuli. This authors in this research believe that physiological techniques provide an objective measurement of emotions and self-report approaches to explain the reason for destination choosing. Travel restriction and the reopening of the tourism give possibility and prosperity in the future of the global tourism.

3.0 THE FRAMEWORK OF POST-COVID TOURISM

Based on the written literature above, the author has come out with the framework below indicating the relationship between the variable destination marketing and the invariable behavioral intention.



During the pandemic era, destinations are urged to maintain the attractiveness and value of their products and services in readiness for post-crisis tourism recovery programmes. Destination marketing policies should be implemented to revise their promotion and marketing activities in order to encourage future visitation. For example, in response to pandemic-related impulsive purchasing behaviour, online sales promotion has become an essential marketing tool for tourism and hospitality businesses (Hall et al., 2021).

Destinations continued their marketing efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is suggested that marketing strategies be divided into during-lockdown and post-lockdown strategies. The former contained messages of hope and inspiration, people are in this together, and messages that trigger the emotions of yearning and nostalgia. The post-lockdown strategies included messages of welcome back, COVID-19-safe, and a healing experience (Ketter & Avraham, 2021). Recent studies observe that a positive impact of marketing messages on post-disaster visit intentions (Liu-Lastres et al., 2018; Wang & Lopez, 2020). However, there is a lack of theoretical recommendations for designing post-pandemic destination marketing messages for recovery. The focus of the study between destination marketing and behavioral intention is to examine the theoretical factors that might influence tourists' travel behaviors and willingness to travel during the pandemic and the recovery period.

4.0 CONCLUSION

For the clarification of the relationships between destination marketing strategies and tourists' travel intentions, this study analyzes the background, the literature review and provides the theoretical framework in the post-COVID period tourism. First, governments and travel agencies must ensure the "low-risk" and "safe places to visit" at the destination. Marketing messages should depict "how destinations and businesses within the destinations are ensuring that they are COVID-compliant in terms of consumer safety." Ketter and Avraham (2021) also noticed that COVID-19 safety was a common theme in their analysis of COVID-19 marketing campaigns. This influences tourists' travel intention to a great extent. Second, destinations should provide accurate and complete "health and safety information". Visitors should be given up-to-date information to evaluate their risk individually, understand the safety precautions fully, and agree to comply with the necessary protocols (CLIA, 2020). In the post-pandemic era, it is agreed that marketing messages should send a reminder of what the destination is good for, or best known for, and that all the highlights of the destinations are still in people's mind, to boost tourist's confidence and reinvigorate the slumping tourist economy.

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