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ABSTRACT

Attachment is considered a universal human experience that occurs throughout the lifecycle, which provides an opportunity for both self-expression as well as connection to others. However, the greatest challenge for attachment researchers is to integrate diverse perspectives and approaches to define the construct. This study synthesized literature from relevant disciplines (i.e., psychology, marketing and human geography) to provide a comprehensive reflection upon the concept of destination attachment. A four-dimension construct of destination attachment was proposed, and its influence on revisit intention was also examined. This study provides an integrated view of the destination attachment definition, and further empirically examines the validity and reliability of the four-dimensional construct.

Keywords: *destination attachment, destination identity, destination dependence, affective bond, automatic prominence*

INTRODUCTION

Attachment is considered a universal human experience that occurs throughout the lifecycle, which provides an opportunity for both self-expression as well as connection to others. Although psychological attachment is mainly examined within interpersonal contexts, recent research in human geography and marketing suggests that individuals can also develop attachments to environmental objects and marketplace entities, such as place (Brown et al., 2003; Giuliani & Feldman, 1993), community (Hummon, 1992; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974), and brands (Keller, 2003; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Significant parallels have been found between place attachment and human attachment, which illustrates the sense of “being-in-the-world” shaped by place (Heidegger, 1953). The term “Mother Earth” implies the sharing features between these two types of attachment. This linkage has been recognized by environmental psychologists, calling for an integrated theory that

accounts for the complex relationships among persons, places and situational elements throughout the lifespan. However, the greatest challenge for attachment researchers is to integrate diverse perspectives and approaches to define the construct (Kleine & Baker, 2004; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Inclusive definitions of attachment lead to a problem of conceptual distinctions between attachment and other related constructs.

This study synthesized literature from relevant disciplines (i.e., psychology, marketing and human geography) to provide a comprehensive reflection upon the concept of destination attachment. A four-dimension construct of destination attachment was proposed, and its influence on revisit intention was also examined. This study provides an integrated view of the destination attachment definition, and further empirically examines the validity and reliability of the four-dimensional construct.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is destination attachment? Comparing literature relevant to the various attachment types across different disciplines, which are summarized in table 1, contributes to develop a fuller understanding of the origins of attachment concept. This study defines the concept of destination attachment as “the strength of the cognitive, emotional, functional and autobiographical bonds connecting the tourist with a particular destination.”

Destination attachment consists of four components. (1) *Destination dependence* refers to the functional attachment to a destination, “based on its importance as a setting for specific activities” (Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010, p. 275). Destination dependence explicates the importance of a destination in offering amenities necessary for desired activities. (2) *Destination identity* is defined as the extent to which the interaction with a destination can support and contribute to the development of tourist’s self-identity. In essence, destination identity reflects the belief that the destination is an important part of who the tourist is. (3) *Affective bond* addresses the set of positive emotions a tourist has with respect to the destination. This component denotes the emotional tie between tourists and destinations. (4) *Automatic prominence* is represented by the ease with which destination-related thoughts and feelings are retrieved positively and the retrieval frequency of such thoughts and feelings.

Table 1
Attachment Constructs in Psychology, Marketing and Human Geography

Construct	Definition	Dimensions	Supporting Literature
Interpersonal Attachment	“lasting psychological connectedness between human beings” (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194).	Proximity maintenance Emotional security Safe haven Separation distress	Bowlby (1980), Hazan & Zeifman (1999)
Material possession attachment	“a multi-faceted property of the relationship between an individual or group of individuals and a specific material object that has been psychologically appropriated, decommodified, and singularized through person-object interaction” (Kleine & Baker, 2004, p.1). <i>(1) Emotional attachment perspective</i>	Affiliation Autonomy Temporal orientation	Schultz et al. (1989), Kleine et al. (1995)
Brand Attachment	“an emotion-laden target-specific bond between a person and a specific object” (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005, p.77). <i>(2) Attitudinal attachment perspective</i>	Affection Connection Passion	Thomson et al. (2005)
Place Attachment	“the strength of the cognitive and affective bond connecting the brand with the self” (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2008, p.195). <i>(1) Bonding-type-focused perspective</i> “a complex phenomenon that incorporates several aspects of people-place bonding” (Altman & Low, 1992, p.4). <i>(2) psychological perspective</i>	Brand-self connection Automatic prominence	Park et al. (2010)
Destination Attachment	“the cognitive and emotionally linkage of an individual to a particular setting or environment” (Low, 1992, p.165).	Natural attachment Civic attachment Place dependence Place identity	Kaltenborn (1997), Scannell & Gifford (2010) Williams & Vaske (2003)
Destination Attachment	The strength of the cognitive, emotional, functional and autobiographical bonds connecting the tourist with a particular destination.	Destination dependence Destination identity Affective bond Automatic prominence	Yuksel et al. (2010), Park et al. (2010)

METHODOLOGY

A self-administrated questionnaire was designed for measuring the dimensions of destination attachment. Respondents were asked to indicate their sense of destination attachment, using a five-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Thirteen items were adapted from relevant literature (Yuksel et al., 2010; Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). Email-database of U.S. travelers at the Center for Hospitality and Tourism Research at Oklahoma State University were used as sampling frame. Seven hundred thousand email surveys were sent out to travelers in the U.S. between June and July, 2012. Six hundred and thirty-three responses were used in the analysis. Table 2 shows the demographic profile of respondents.

Table 2
Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	314	49.6%
Female	319	50.4%
Age:		
18-24	47	7.4%
25-34	109	17.2%
35-44	92	14.5%
45-54	143	22.6%
55-64	146	23.1%
65 and above	96	15.2%
Education:		
High School Diploma	101	16.0%
Associate's Degree	69	10.9%
Bachelor's Degree	202	31.9%
Master's Degree	214	33.8%
Doctorate Degree	47	7.4%
Ethnicity:		
White	385	60.8%
African American	48	7.6%
Hispanic/Latino	79	10.9%
Asian American	74	11.7%
American Indian	44	7.0%
Others	13	2.0%

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to provide a confirmatory test of the 13-item measurement scale. AMOS 17.0 was applied to examine the measurement model. The structural equation modeling further confirmed the influences of destination attachment on revisit intention, which showed additional evidence of the nomological validity of the measurement scale.

RESULT

The confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated acceptable levels of scale internal consistency and validity. The result provided an adequate fit to the data, χ^2/df (N=633) = 2.971, CFI= .90, RMSEA= .056. All factor loadings of the indicators related to each construct were statistically significant and sufficiently large, demonstrating that the indicators and their underlying constructs were acceptable (see Table 3).

Table 3
Confirmatory Factor Analysis on Destination Attachment

Dimensions of Destination Attachment	Factor Loading	T-value	CR	AVE
<i>Destination Dependence</i>			0.786	0.551
For the activities that I enjoy most, the settings and facilities provided by the destination are the best.	0.694	18.464		
For what I like to do, I could not imagine anything better than the settings and facilities provided by the destination.	0.784	21.669		
I enjoy visiting the destination and its environment more than any other destinations.	0.744	20.215		
<i>Destination Identity</i>			0.873	0.697
I feel the destination is a part of me.	0.887	27.697		
I identify strongly with the destination.	0.859	26.308		
Visiting the destination says a lot about who I am.	0.750	21.509		
<i>Affective Bond</i>			0.875	0.638
I feel strong, positive feelings for the destination.	0.773	22.412		
I am very attached to the destination.	0.845	25.613		
I am delighted when I am in the destination.	0.739	21.027		
<i>Automatic Prominence</i>			0.860	0.673
Thoughts and feelings about the destination come to mind naturally and instantly.	0.729	20.448		
Thoughts and feelings about the destination are often automatic, coming to my mind seemingly on their own.	0.852	25.547		
Destination name automatically evokes many good thoughts about my past, present and future.	0.871	26.427		

The result of SEM analysis showed that all destination attachment dimensions positively influence revisit intention. Table 4 further suggested that destination dependence and affective bond have relatively stronger effects on revisit intention than the other dimensions. The result implied that the functional and affective connections between the tourists and destination play vital roles. The functional evaluation and alternative comparison of destinations are imperative,

as these processes help tourists recognize whether the environment and facilities would enable them fulfill the vacation goals. Further research should continue to verify the reliability and validity of this four-dimension measurement.

Table 4
The influence of Destination Attachment on Revisit Intention

Direct Effects	Standardized coefficient (β)	P value
Destination Dependence → Revisit Intention	0.602	P < .001
Destination Identity → Revisit Intention	0.226	P < .001
Affective Bond → Revisit Intention	0.505	P < .001
Automatic Prominence → Revisit Intention	0.081	P < .1

Note: χ^2/df (N=633) = 2.787, CFI= .902, RMSEA= .053.

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