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## **Tourist post-visit attitude towards products associated with the destination country**

### **Abstract**

Post-visit attitude towards products or brands associated with destination countries is an important outcome variable overlooked in the tourism literature. Drawing upon associative network theory of memory, this study aims to contribute to the extant literature by testing tourist post-visit attitude as an outcome variable of tourism experience, in addition to destination loyalty. A conceptual model was developed and tested through a survey of Chinese tourists who have recently visited Britain. Results suggest that both tourist satisfaction of destination attributes and overall satisfaction influence post-visit product attitude. We suggest that tourism researchers could adopt a wider perspective to explore the influence of international tourist experiences by conceptualizing the destination country as a destination for tourism, investment, education and immigration, as well as a political partner. This paper concludes with a discussion of destination managerial and policy implications.

**Keywords:** Associative network theory; product attitude; tourism experience; destination loyalty; China

## **1. Introduction**

Considerable attention has been dedicated to developing and testing models of destination satisfaction and loyalty. Destination loyalty is often measured using revisit intention (e.g. Leong et al., 2015; Sirakaya-Turk, Ekinici, & Martin, 2015), however research suggests that revisit intention diminishes over time and actual repeat visits are rare (Jang & Feng, 2007; McKercher, Denizci-Guillet, & Ng, 2012). Tourism motivation is primarily about exploration, novelty seeking and wanderlust, and its consumption is relatively infrequent, in comparison to daily consumption activities (Crompton, 1979). As such, McKercher et al. (2012) call for more customer-centric research to examine tourist post visit behavior beyond the tourism destination sphere. The concept of nation brand may help to broaden the area for research in tourism marketing. Nation branding advocates marketing a country like a commercial brand to build national identity and public diplomacy; to attract tourists, international students, and foreign direct investment; and to support exports of products and services (Anholt, 2005; Dinnie, 2015; Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

Two of the major components of Anholt Nation Brands Index are tourism and exports, in addition to other ones such as political, cultural, commercial and human assets, as well as investment potential (Anholt, 2005). Consumer attitude toward imports is an important topic in the international marketing literature. There have been studies investigating consumers' international travel and tourism experiences and their exposure to other cultures and lifestyles as the antecedents of world-mindedness and cosmopolitanism (Rawwas, Rajendran, & Wuehrer, 1996; Sampson & Smith, 1957; Skrbis, Kendall, & Woodward, 2004). These factors have been positively related to consumer attitude to imported foreign brands, products and services (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 2006; Nijssen & Douglas, 2011). Yet historically there has been a lack of cross-fertilization across the disciplinary boundaries of tourism

research and international marketing research (Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011). Attempts to draw the two different research fields together have only started to emerge recently in studies that have linked destination image, product-country image and general country image (Elliot et al., 2011; Nadeau et al., 2008; Ryu, L'Espeir Decosta, & Andéhn, 2016). These studies' findings suggest that a positive product country image or attitude will influence a consumer's intentions to visit a country or destination as a tourist. However, the question of whether tourism experience directly influences product attitude remains unexplored, and it needs to be addressed to advance research across the two subject areas of tourism and consumer studies (Ryu et al., 2016).

The present study aims to address the above gap in the literature by drawing upon associative network theory of memory to examine tourist satisfaction's effect on attitude towards product and brand associated with the destination country. We add this post-visit product and brand attitude as a new outcome variable to an existing destination loyalty model and test it with data collected from a survey of Chinese tourists who have visited Britain. By doing so, we attempt to make three important contributions to the literature. First, we reveal that tourism satisfaction has a cross-over effect on the general consumption sphere, specifically tourist's positive attitude towards destination country's products and brands; Second, by drawing upon the theory of associative network theory of memory, we provide potentially fruitful avenues for future research in destination marketing and management; Third, both our empirical evidence and conceptualization provide practical implications for destination management strategies and government policy.

## **2. Conceptual background and hypotheses**

### *2.1. Tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty*

Satisfaction can be defined at both attribute-specific and overall levels. Attribute specific satisfaction involves a tourist's cognitive evaluation of destination attributes and is similar to post-visit cognitive destination image (Zhang et al., 2014). Overall satisfaction relates to the holistic assessment of a series of experiences at destination (Johnson & Fornell, 1991; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Perceived value can also be defined as an overall construct (Zeithaml, 1988), or as a multi-dimensional construct comprising functional, emotional value and social value (Sanchez et al., 2006; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

Past studies have suggested that the major antecedents of destination loyalty are satisfaction (Ali et al.; del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Meleddu, Paci, & Pulina, 2015; Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013) and perceived value (Chen & Chen, 2010; Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2015). Destination loyalty is frequently defined as positive behavioral intentions that include plans to revisit and willingness to recommend (Chen & Chen, 2010; Chi & Qu, 2008; Forgas-Coll et al., 2012; Leong et al., 2015; Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2015; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

In the tourism marketing literature, there have been extensive empirical studies on the drivers and antecedents of destination loyalty (Dolnicar & Ring, 2014; Leong et al., 2015). The theoretical underpinnings of this stream of research can be traced back to the general 'Attitude-Behavior Paradigm' in social psychology, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), and later the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) as well as the 'Cognitive-Affect-Behavior' model (Oliver, 1993). The model illustrates how satisfaction results from tourists' interaction with a destination and its service providers. Overall satisfaction deriving from the evaluations then leads to future behavioral intentions and

behavior (del Bosque & Martín, 2008). Cognitive destination evaluation can have both direct or indirect effects on destination loyalty through the mediation of overall satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2010; Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000).

In general, the empirical results of tourism research have supported the linkage between destination image/attribute level satisfaction, perceived value, overall satisfaction, and future destination related behavioral intentions, with perceived value and satisfaction acting as mediators (Ali et al.; Prayag et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). Destination attribute satisfaction is generally recognized as having a positive impact on perceived value (e.g. (Chen & Chen, 2010; Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009) as well as overall satisfaction (De Rojas & Camarero, 2008; Denstadli & Jacobsen, 2011; Žabkar, Brenčič, & Dmitrović, 2010). Therefore, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H1. Destination attribute satisfaction has a positive effect on overall satisfaction.

H2. Overall satisfaction has a positive effect on destination loyalty.

H3. Destination attribute satisfaction has a positive effect on destination loyalty through the mediation of overall satisfaction.

## *2.2. Post-visit attitude, associative network theory and tourism experience*

Social cognition theory (McGuire, 1969) suggests that an attitude refers to the ‘psychological tendency, expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor’ (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). It is believed that attitudes are formed through a hierarchy of effects which are commonly expressed as: 1) exposure/attention; 2) reception/encoding; 3) cognitive response; 4) attitude; 5) intention 6) behavior (Simonson et al., 2001). Sakarya, Eckman, and Hyllegard (2007) used the term ‘consumer receptivity’ to refer the sum of consumer’s attitudes toward foreign goods and services. Elliot et al. (2011) operationalize

consumer receptivity using three indicators: ‘welcome more imports of (*products/brands associated with destination country*)’, ‘willing to buy (*products/brands associated with destination country*)’, and ‘proud to own (*products/brands associated with destination country*)’. In this study we adopted Elliot et al.’s (2011) operational definition but used a more commonly known term ‘product attitude’ to refer to tourists’ post-visit attitude towards the products or brands associated with destination country (Sakarya et al., 2007).

Associative network theory suggests that our memory is an associative network that consists of nodes that are interlinked (Anderson, 2013). The links between any two nodes suggest an association in our mind (Henderson, Iacobucci, & Calder, 1998; Krishnan, 1996). This theory has been widely applied in branding and consumer research (e.g. Kelting & Rice, 2013; Puligadda, Ross Jr, & Grewal, 2012; Swoboda, Berg, & Schramm-Klein, 2013) however, it has not been sufficiently utilised by tourism researchers.

Tourists interact with many touch points at any destination they visit and as such their perceptions and feelings are developed with regards to a destination country in a holistic manner (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Tourists as consumers have direct exposure and heightened attention to the products, services and brands of a destination country.

Following associative network theory, a tourism experience that is stored in consumer memory can be activated when consumers access the products, service and brand originating from the destination country they visited previously. This is because the links and associations between specific nodes are based on past experiences (Mandler, 1978; Swoboda et al., 2013), including the tourism experience. Information about the destination, along with the country and its products, services or brands is stored in memory as a network of interdependent associations. Activation of nodes of tourism experience helps consumers to

form attitudes toward the product, service, or brand associated with the country visited (Boush & Loken, 1991). Specifically, the activation of product, service and brand nodes triggers the activation of the country node and tourism experience node, through associative network linkages, and vice versa (Anderson, 1983; Puligadda et al., 2012). In other words, the linkages are bi-directional. The implication is that a positive tourism experience helps to form a positive attitude towards the products, services and brands originating from the destination country.

Applying the associative network theory of memory in the case of this study, we can conceive the node of Great Britain as a tourist destination that is associated with the nodes of architecture/buildings, natural attractions and historic sites/museums. For Chinese tourists, they may associate Great Britain with other European countries such as France or Germany. Britain as a tourism destination could also be associated with a destination for international investment, education or immigration. Britain as a country may be associated to a political partner of China. Positive tourism experience of Britain may activate its associative link with British products, services and brands such as Burberry, Cadbury or Rolls-Royce. Past studies have revealed a crossover effect from consumption-related attitudes towards tourism-related attitudes (Elliot et al., 2011; Nadeau et al., 2008; Ryu et al., 2016). Given that the activation of one node in the associative network will activate other nodes in the network, the linkages between any two nodes can be triggered in either direction; as such, there should be a reverse crossover effect from tourism-related attitudes to consumption-related attitudes, which has not been empirically examined in the previous tourism studies. Thus, we posit that:

H4. Overall tourism satisfaction has a positive effect on product attitude.

H5. Destination attribute satisfaction has a positive effect on product attitude through the mediation of overall tourism satisfaction.



Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model with hypotheses.

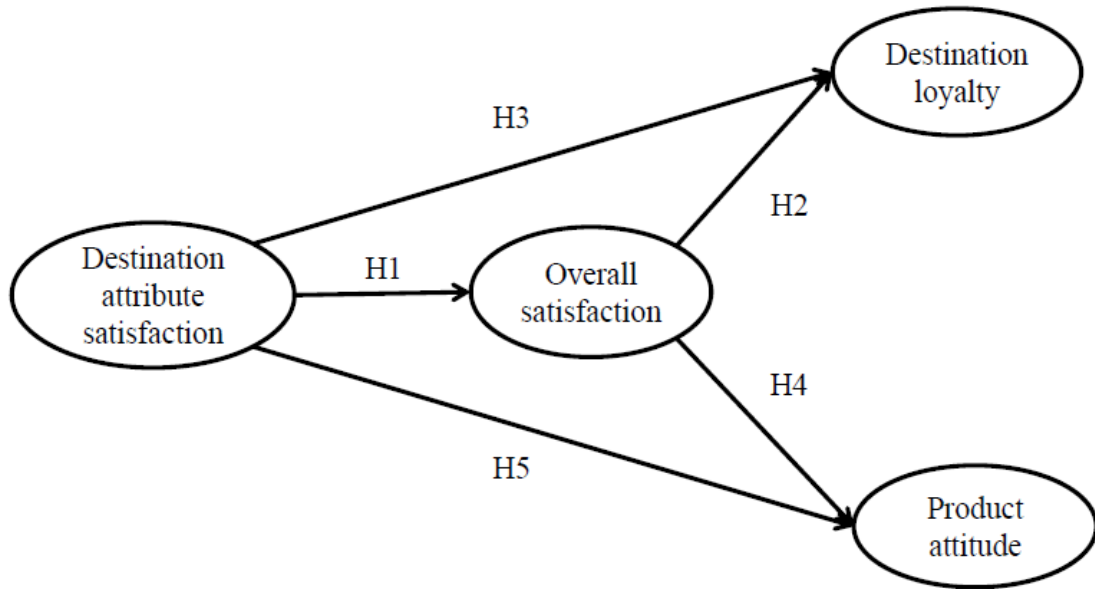


Figure 1 Conceptual model

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1. Construct measures*

Construct measures were developed based on scales that have been used in the literature, in consultation with relevant experts from both academia and the industry to set the wording for each items used in the questionnaire (Campón-Cerro, Hernández-Mogollón, & Alves, 2016). Specifically, tourist satisfaction of destination attributes include eleven essential items: accommodation, architecture (built-environment), entertainment activities, food and drink, hygiene, nature (natural environment and landscape), residents (friendliness), services, shopping facilities, natural or historical sites of interest, and the overall society (Lin, He, & Vlachos, 2015). Participants were asked to rate each attribute from zero to 10 according to their level of satisfaction, where 0 indicates “extremely poor”, while 10 suggests “extremely good”.

Overall satisfaction was measured by two items on a seven-point scale (Lin et al., 2015): “Overall, how satisfied are you with your trip to Britain?” (1= totally unsatisfied; and 7 totally satisfied) and “Overall, comparing what I get and what I have paid, my tour in Britain was...” (1=very low value; and 7 = very high value). Destination loyalty was measured by three items (del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Nadeau et al., 2008; Yoon & Uysal, 2005): “I would like to visit Britain again in the future” (Revisit intention); “I would recommend Britain to friends and family” (Recommendation); and “I would extend my stay in Britain if time and budget allow me to” (Extend stay). Product attitude was also measured by three items adapted from Elliot et al. (2011): “I am proud of owning British products/brands” (Ownership); “I will purchase British products/brands” (Purchase); and “I welcome British exports to China” (Export). These items were anchored on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”). The questionnaire consists of different scales and

question formats, which according to Podsakoff et al. (2003), helps to avoid common variance bias. The questionnaire was first developed in English, and translated into Chinese, and back-translated to English.

### *3.2. Sample and data collection*

The data were collected through a questionnaire survey with Chinese tourists who had recently visited Britain. With the support from staff members of a tour operator, tourists were invited to take the survey on board their returning flights to China after visiting the country. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, 275 of them were considered as valid responses, a response rate of 91.7%. The sample consists of 62% males, thus males are slightly over-presented; and in terms of age, there is a fairly equal spread over different age groups from 18 to over 50 years of age. In terms of education, majority of the participants are well educated, only 13% of them had not had a degree. In terms of income, majority of the participants belong to the middle or higher income brackets (55%). Most of the participants visited Britain for the first time (76%). In terms of duration of visit, nearly half of the participants spent about 2 weeks in Britain (46%).

### *3.3. Data analysis*

The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), and the software used is SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005). According to Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011), PLS-SEM is suitable for theory development or extension. Given our research is an extension of destination loyalty model to product attitude, thus using PLS-SEM is an appropriate method. Moreover, unlike covariance-based SEM, PLS-SEM does not have stringent minimum sample size requirement or distributional assumptions (Hair et al., 2011). As such, PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for small sample size, and ours is 275,

which can be considered as adequate; and there is no requirement in the procedure of PLS-SEM to report each indicator's mean and standard deviation values (Hair et al., 2011).

All our constructs in the model were treated as reflective ones. We followed the procedure suggested by Hair et al. (2011) to examine and report the indicator items' loadings and cross-loadings. For missing data, we adopted mean replacement approach in SmartPLS. Following Hair et al. (2011), we used the two-step approach to model estimation, starting with the measurement model evaluation and then the structural model. This is to ensure that the measures are valid and reliable before testing the proposed hypotheses (Campón-Cerro et al., 2016). We computed t-statistics through 5000 bootstrap samples to assess the significance of model estimates.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Measurement model

Assessment of measurement model includes the examination of construct item reliability, composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2011). According to Hair et al. (2011), the major reliability criteria are that: the values of item loadings should be above 0.7; and the values of composite reliability (CR) should also be above 0.7. For convergent validity, the values of average variance extracted (AVE) values should be above 0.5. Table 1 shows the data results. The lowest two item loadings are two items measuring attribute satisfaction: nature or natural environment (0.676) and entertainment activities (0.698). Both loadings are near the threshold level of 0.7, which is deemed acceptable (Campón-Cerro et al., 2016; Chin, 1998). All the CR values were above 0.9, well above the 0.7 threshold. Among the AVE values, the lowest one is destination loyalty (0.564), which is above the 0.5 threshold. Thus, reliability and convergent validity can be established.

Table 1. Construct reliability, loadings and cross-loadings

	Attribute satisfaction	Overall satisfaction	Destination loyalty	Product attitude
Attribute satisfaction (CR= 0.958, AVE= 0.564)				
Accommodation	<b>0.763</b>	0.367	0.381	0.373
Architecture (built environment)	<b>0.785</b>	0.391	0.374	0.443
Entertainment activities	<b>0.698</b>	0.379	0.309	0.382
Food and drink	<b>0.705</b>	0.375	0.325	0.350
Hygiene	<b>0.809</b>	0.435	0.433	0.416
Nature (natural environment)	<b>0.676</b>	0.377	0.388	0.400
Residents (friendliness)	<b>0.796</b>	0.373	0.407	0.363
Services	<b>0.781</b>	0.404	0.421	0.409
Shopping facilities	<b>0.743</b>	0.382	0.400	0.405
Sites of interest	<b>0.745</b>	0.440	0.429	0.448
Society	<b>0.749</b>	0.431	0.396	0.401
Overall satisfaction (CR= 0.933, AVE= 0.874)				
Overall satisfaction	0.521	<b>0.936</b>	0.781	0.773
Overall value	0.468	<b>0.934</b>	0.795	0.774
Destination loyalty (CR=0.934, AVE=0.883)				
Recommendation	0.473	0.765	<b>0.945</b>	0.778
Revisit intention	0.507	0.806	<b>0.935</b>	0.797
Extend stay	0.482	0.803	<b>0.939</b>	0.838
Product attitude (CR=0.923, AVE=0.800)				
Ownership	0.501	0.718	0.675	<b>0.822</b>
Purchase	0.506	0.775	0.812	<b>0.933</b>
Export	0.428	0.728	0.805	<b>0.925</b>

Notes: All loadings are significant; CR = composite reliability, AVE = Average variance extracted.

For discriminant validity, we first examine cross loadings and then compare the square roots of the AVE and a construct's correlations with the other constructs in the model. The cross-loadings shown in Table 1 confirm that each item loads higher on the construct it intends to measure than on other constructs (Chin, 1998). Boldface numbers on the diagonal of Table 2 are higher than their respective construct's correlations with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), thus discriminant validity can be established.

Table 2. Discriminant validity test

	Destination loyalty	Attribute satisfaction	Overall satisfaction	Product attitude
Destination loyalty	<b>0.940</b>			
Attribute satisfaction	0.519	<b>0.751</b>		
Overall satisfaction	0.843	0.529	<b>0.935</b>	
Product attitude	0.857	0.533	0.827	<b>0.894</b>

*Notes:* All pairs of correlations are significant; Boldface numbers on the diagonal are square root of the AVE (average variance extracted).

#### 4.2. Structural model

Table 3 shows the results of the structural model, which explains 28% of overall satisfaction, 72% of destination loyalty, and 71% of product attitude. The results indicate that destination attribute satisfaction has a positive effect on overall satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.529$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), thus H1 was supported. Overall satisfaction has a positive effect on destination loyalty ( $\beta = 0.785$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) supporting H2. Attribute satisfaction does not have a significant direct effect on destination loyalty ( $\beta = 0.105$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), but its total effect on destination loyalty is significant ( $\beta = 0.520$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that its effect on destination loyalty was mediated through the overall satisfaction, thus H3 was supported.

Regarding the new hypotheses developed in this study, the results indicate that overall satisfaction has a significant effect on product attitude ( $\beta= 0.751, p<0.01$ ). Attribute satisfaction has a significant direct effect on product attitude ( $\beta= 0.149, p>0.01$ ), it also has a much significant total effect on product attitude ( $\beta= 0.546, p<0.01$ ), indicating that its effect on product attitude was partially mediated through the overall satisfaction, thus H5 was supported.

Table 3. Structural model results

	Overall satisfaction ( $R^2=0.280$ )	Destination loyalty ( $R^2=0.721$ )		Product attitude ( $R^2=0.708$ )	
		Direct	Total	Direct	Total
Attribute satisfaction	0.529**	0.105	0.520**	0.149**	0.546**
Overall satisfaction		0.785**		0.751**	
<i>Control variables</i>					
Age		0.027		0.027	
Education		0.049		0.003	
Gender		0.004		-0.084	
Income		-0.005		-0.007	

Notes: \*\* $p<0.01$ ; Control variables are age, gender, education and income, none of them is significant.



## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

In this study, we attempt to broaden tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty research by adding a product attitude construct to the existing model. Associative network theory of memory was used to explain how the activation of a node of tourism experience (in a tourist's memory after visitation) triggers a tourist's feelings toward the destination they have visited, and its associated products, brands and services. Empirical data collected from Chinese tourists visiting Britain supported the extended model and its hypotheses. The results reveal that tourist satisfaction has impact on both destination loyalty and product attitude.

From a theoretical perspective, by applying associative network theory in our study we show that the consequences of the tourist satisfaction go beyond traditional tourism related constructs such as destination loyalty or revisit intention, to a broader consumption sphere, tourists' post visit attitudes towards the products, services, and brands associated with the country they have visited. The existing destination model is still useful, but with the addition of product attitude, it becomes even stronger. We can conclude that tourism experiences have a spillover effect on international consumption sphere. This effect has not been tested in previous consumer or tourism research. Consistent with consumer product attitude research conducted by Nadeau et al. (2008) and Ryu et al. (2016), our findings support the arguments for a need to situate tourists' intentions in the greater context of consumer behavior research. Our findings suggest that theoretical constructs developed in the general consumer literature are relevant to the tourism context. We advocate tourism researchers to adopt a wider perspective to explore how international tourism experiences influence tourist attitude and subsequent behavior beyond the sphere of 'tourism destination' to consider the destination country as a political partner, a destination for tourism, investment, education and immigration (Ryu et al., 2016). The second but more important theoretical implication of this

study is that we drew upon a psychological theory rarely utilized in tourism research: associative network theory of memory. As demonstrated in this study, this theory has the potential to further support and extend the conceptualization and operationalization of nation branding as a multi-dimensional construct that consists of tourism, exports, people, governance, culture and heritage, investment and immigration (Anholt, 2005; Ryu et al., 2016).

This study has several practical implications. First, the results highlight that tourist satisfaction is important because not only is it beneficial to future tourism development, but also for the development of tourist's post-visit positive attitude towards the products, services, and brands associated with the destination country. Therefore, destination marketing managers should work more closely with leading business companies in other industries to jointly promote their products, services or brands to international tourists. Second, at government policy level, policy makers should consider the cross-over and multiplier effects of tourism on a country's products/brands beyond tourism sphere, because as shown in this study, tourism development has the potential to enhance the export of the country's product/brands to the tourists' home country. The indirect effect of product attitude on export sales should also be incorporated into studies that measure the economic impact of tourism in a destination country. Third, destination country stakeholders should engage in a systematic approach to nation branding by marketing their country as an ideal destination of tourism, foreign direct investment and higher education services, in addition to creating a favorable product-country image (Dinnie, 2015; Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

This study is limited to a study of single cultural group visiting a single destination with a convenience sampling approach, thus caution is warranted in interpreting the results. Future studies could explore how tourism motivation (Crompton, 1979), tourism type (Kladou,

Giannopoulos, & Assiouras, 2014) could influence different tourists' post-visit attitudes. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that product attitude is influenced by a range of factors such as brand awareness, image, quality, country of origin effects and others, which could be included as control variables. This study is also limited to the study of product attitude, without examining the actual product purchase behavior when tourists return to their home country. As product attitude is one of the stages in consumer decision making process, a logical progression is to examine the effect of the tourism experience on consumer choices, purchase intent and actual purchases over time. Future tourism destination studies will generate fruitful findings if they integrate constructs from international consumer behavior, such as consumer world-mindedness and cosmopolitanism (Rawwas et al., 1996; Sampson & Smith, 1957; Skrbis et al., 2004), to further uncover the intricacy between destination image and country of origin image (Andéhn & L'Espoir Decosta, 2016; Elliot et al., 2011; Nadeau et al., 2008; Stepchenkova & Shichkova, 2016). Research that explores how destination marketing organizations and export-oriented organizations could work together more holistically to achieve synergy would further academic knowledge as well as provide useful insights to practitioners. Finally, our conceptualization derived from the theory of associative network theory of memory (Henderson et al., 1998; Krishnan, 1996) opens up numerous potentially fruitful avenues into future destination marketing and management research. For example, future research could examine the impact of tourism satisfaction on national brand equity, country image, country affinity, as well as post-visit investment, education and immigration decisions.

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