



EFFECTS OF DESTINATION STRENGTHS AND TRAVEL MOTIVATION ON TOURIST BEHAVIORS

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ABSTRACT

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory is adopted to develop a destination marketing strategy that explains how tourists form destination image and travel willingness by receiving stimulation from a destination. The factors of destination strengths, tourists' feelings and future travel willingness are discussed based on questionnaire surveys with convenient sampling. A total of 217 valid responses were obtained. Structure equation models were analyzed for testing all hypotheses. The results verify the S-O-R relations and confirm the mediating roles of the organism factors (i.e., pleasure and destination image). In addition, travel motivations (i.e., novelty-seeking and escape) are also examined as moderating factors. The results reveal that novelty-seeking moderates the relationship between destination uniqueness and tourists' pleasure. Furthermore, escape moderates the relationship between destination attractiveness and tourists' pleasure.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Individuals' perceptions of a tourism destination can differ greatly, and studies have found that tourists' initial perceptions of a place are a critical factor in determining whether to travel there (Kim et al., 2013; Upadhyaya, 2012). A positive destination image can attract more visitors and thereby create a competitive advantage (Pike, 2002; Yuan & Vui, 2023). Thus, based on the academic and practical importance of destination sustainability, it is critical for tourists to develop positive feelings and a positive destination image.

An individual's impressions of a destination are formed from many facets. Gartner (1994) indicates that destination image consists of three components: cognitive image, affective image and conative image. Cognitive image is the individual's perceptions of the destination attributes. Affective image is regarded as individual's attitudes or feelings that they have about a destination. Conative image refers to the behavioral

tendency for a destination (Wang et al., 2023; Yuan & Vui, 2023). Tasci et al. (2007) reveal a well-known tri-compositional interactive system that emphasizes the interconnections among these image components and destination attributes (Wang et al., 2023). This study adopts the ideas of Gartner (1994) and Tasci et al. (2007) which suggest that these destination image components could influence in the sequence of cognitive-affective-conative image. Based on this issue, this study examines how tourists' perceptions of destination strengths can influence the development of positive affection, and how this in turn influences their subsequent travel intentions.

In the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) relations model presented by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974, all stimuli in a specific environment induce an individual's emotional response and then shape the individual's behavioral tendencies towards that environment. It is thus crucial to determine how people develop positive evaluations of an environment based on given stimuli. This study considers that the various features of a destination are important environmental stimuli for tourists to know more about that place. S-O-R theory is also well-suited for understanding tourists' formation process of destination image. However, limited studies have applied this theory in destination image formation and destination management. Thus, this study utilizes the S-O-R model in the field of destination management to evaluate the influences on tourist behavior. In this process, when tourists receive stimulus regarding a destination, feelings toward these stimulus factors are induced. This study discusses how this process transforms tourists' feelings into impressions about a place, and then influences their future travel willingness.

According to S-O-R relations, as mentioned above, stimuli regarding a place can induce tourists' response toward the place. In order to attract tourists' attention and induce their desires to visit due to positive perceptions toward the place, the stimulus factors of the destination should be distinctive. Snyder and Fromkin (1977) found that individuals have different levels of uniqueness needs, and people use different means to meet their uniqueness needs. Among the constituent elements of a destination, apart from the general elements, the unique elements are important for determining identity (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Thus, when tourists visit a place, if the destination has unique qualities, they will have a special impression. Furthermore, the attractiveness of a destination is determined by the individual's view of the destination features, which can also be a significant factor that draws tourists' attention and shapes their attitude (Nie et al., 2022; Reitsamer et al., 2016), hopefully encouraging tourists to visit the place (Chiang et al., 2017). Accordingly, the factors of the destination strengths (i.e., destination uniqueness and destination attractiveness) are employed here as two stimulus factors of a destination and the influences of these two factors on personal emotional and perceptual responses toward the place are discussed.

When people have a good emotional state, they are more likely to evaluate things positively. This study investigates how tourists' feelings about a place are formed after they are exposed to destination stimuli. Apart from discussing the emotional state (i.e., pleasure) of tourists, destination image, the feelings and opinions that people have of a destination, is also explored (Crompton, 1979a). An individual's image of a place includes both rational and emotional components (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997), which could be formed before, during or even after a trip through learning, feelings or personal experiences. Therefore, when tourists are in a positive emotional state, this can help develop a positive image of a place. Based on the S-O-R model, travel pleasure and destination image are two organism factors in this study. We investigate

how these stimuli help tourists develop the feelings and thoughts that form their image of a place.

In addition to examining the stimulus factors, apart from the destination stimuli explained above, this study also includes two personal stimulus moderators. The first motivation is a significant internal driver of tourist behavior. Regarding the relation between travel motivation and travel destination choice, Crompton (1979b)'s explanation of pull travel motivation addresses the importance of tourists' needs of destination attributes in their destination choices. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) also indicated that travel motivation could influence tourists' image of a place. Based on the definition of uniqueness by Mafael et al. (2021), uniqueness of a destination refers to the degree to which a place contains elements that are distinct from other places. Therefore, this study suggests that when tourists perceive destination uniqueness, if their needs for novelty-seeking are also met in the place, their travel pleasure and impressions about the place would be better. Moreover, other needs of tourists could also be satisfied by tourism activities, such as escape, relaxation or social relationships (Lee, 2009). This study also suggests that when tourists perceive more destination attractiveness, if their needs for escape could be satisfied by this place, their travel pleasure and destination image toward the place would also increase. Accordingly, this study adopts the factors of approach-avoidance motivation (Iso-Ahola, 1982) and proposes that novelty-seeking and escape could be regarded as facilitators to alter the influences of destination stimulus factors on emotional state and destination image formation. However, few studies have discussed the influences of these moderating motivational roles on organism factors in the S-O-R paradigm.

Finally, the factor of behavioral intention is used to determine the tendency to connect with the destination in this S-O-R model. The influences of tourists' emotions and their impressions of a place on future travel tendency are also examined.

Based on these research motivations, this study integrates the factors of destination uniqueness, destination attractiveness, pleasure, destination image and behavioral intention to develop a new S-O-R framework. We further examine the influences of destination strengths (i.e., destination uniqueness and destination attractiveness) together with personal motivation moderators (i.e., novelty-seeking and escape) on tourists' affection and destination image formation (organism factors: pleasure and destination image). To provide more references for academia and industry, this study provides an empirical application, that offers a confirmatory and extended perspective in the field of destination management. The research objectives are as follows:

- a. Examine the influences of destination uniqueness and destination attractiveness on tourists' pleasure and destination image.
- b. Investigate the effects of tourists' pleasure on destination image.
- c. Explore the effects of tourists' pleasure and destination image on their future travel behaviors.
- d. Discuss the mediating roles of pleasure and destination image.
- e. Examine the moderating roles of novelty-seeking and escape on tourists' pleasure and destination image.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory

The S-O-R theory from Mehrabian and Russell (1974) indicates that all stimuli in a specific environment will induce an individual's emotional response, and influence an individual's tendency toward or avoidance of an environment. The organism in this paradigm refers to a customer's emotional state only (Liu et al., 2023). Cognitive and psychological factors were also incorporated in the S-O-R model by later studies (Bitner, 1992; Kim et al., 2020). This study also employs this theory and expands its application to the field of destination management. Destination uniqueness and destination attractiveness are adopted as the two stimulus factors, pleasure and destination image are organism factors, while behavioral intention is the factor of response. The study aims to understand the influences of stimulus factors for a destination on tourists' responses and subsequent consequences.

2.2 Stimulus factors

2.2.1 Destination uniqueness

The need for uniqueness arises when people pursue something distinctive (Auriza et al., 2024). Destination uniqueness is visitors' perceptions of a place, for things that are special or distinct from other destinations (Kim, 2016; Mafael et al., 2021). Previous studies indicated that destination uniqueness could be viewed as the additional information about a place offered to visitors (Pechlaner et al., 2011) and a higher level of uniqueness can attract people's attention (Pieters et al., 2002). This study follows Kim (2016) and defines destination uniqueness as aspects that are distinct or special in comparison to other places, as felt by visitors.

2.2.2 Destination attractiveness

Destination attractiveness is defined as a person's perception of the attractions of a specific place (Ariya et al., 2017). It is also an advantage of a destination that meets tourists' vacation needs and goals (Vengesayi et al., 2009). Each destination has its own special features that draw tourists to visit it (An et al., 2024). Many aspects of a destination can be attractive, such as natural resources, recreational facilities, transportation, services, and cultural activities (Das et al., 2007), which can be regarded as important travel motivations (Wu et al., 2017) that influence tourists' attitude toward a place (Reitsamer et al., 2016). This study follows Ariya et al. (2017) and operationalizes destination attractiveness as tourists' perception of a specific destination.

2.3 Moderating factor: Travel motivation

Previous research has indicated that travel motivation can drive tourist behaviors (San Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008) and the push-pull framework (Crompton, 1979b; Dann, 1977) has been broadly applied by scholars to discuss travel motivations. This framework indicates that travel motivation could be aroused by either a tourist's internal needs or attracted by the destination attributes. This study thus employs the push-pull idea to develop its framework for analysis. Apart from the external pull factors from the destination (i.e., destination uniqueness and destination attractiveness), this study also discusses tourists' internal needs. Two travel needs, i.e., novelty-seeking and escape (Iso-Ahola, 1982) are used as the moderators that are proposed to affect the influences of stimulus factors on organism factors.

2.3.1 Novelty-seeking

According to Iso-Ahola (1982)'s seeking-escape motivation, tourism allows people to seek something or simultaneously avoid something (Marques, 2006). Novelty-seeking is an individual's internal desire or motivation to seek out new information (Acker & McReynolds, 1967), different things (Hirschman, 1980) or the opportunity for unusual experience (Ryan, 2002). Novelty-seeking means the desire to discover new things or go to unfamiliar places during travel, and is one of the push factors for people to make a vacation decision (Chen et al., 2023; He & Connors, 2017). This study also follows He and Connors (2017) and Chen et al. (2023) to define novelty-seeking as tourists' internal desire to seek out new places or new experiences during travel.

2.3.2 Escape

For the aspect of avoidance, travel can help people leave the routine environment or get away from a stressful social environment (Snepenger et al., 2006). Escape is also recognized as an important internal factor that motivates people to travel (Crompton, 1979b). There are many forms of escape or seeking change in tourism, for example, visiting far-off destinations, enjoying slow travel, participating in religious travel or nature activities (Chylińska, 2022, Vespestad et al., 2026). This study also regards escape as tourists' desire to be free of a daily regime or stressful environment.

2.4 Organism factors

2.4.1 Pleasure

Emotional states can affect an individual's judgements. People's evaluations of certain stimuli show the influence of emotional states (Goldsmith et al., 2012), such as positive feeling leading to more positive evaluations. Positive emotions can also influence consumption satisfaction (Bigne et al., 2005). Recent studies (Aurora et al., 2022; Kozłowski et al., 2025; Ong et al., 2020; Siltan et al., 2020) indicate that positive emotions predict healthy behaviors and higher resilience, as well as protecting from depression. Pleasure is a positive emotion that occurs when a person feels positive or cheerful in a situation (Das, 2013), and this study defines pleasure as a tourist feeling good or cheerful while visiting a travel destination.

2.4.2 Destination image

Destination image is an important factor that affects tourists' destination decisions (Ishida et al., 2016). It is defined as the aggregate of all impressions that a person has about a destination (Ninomiya et al., 2019). Wang et al. (2023) also reveal that the components of the image of a destination are multifaceted. For example, the image can be measured with both attribute-based components and holistic components (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Gartner (1994) also indicates that the image of a destination is composed of the cognitive image, affective image and conative image. Beerli and Martin (2004) suggest that individuals can form their impression of a destination by cognitive evaluations or by affective appraisals. Tourists normally choose their favored destination based on positive impressions in order to reduce travel risk (Molina et al., 2010). Therefore, destination image is a crucial factor for building market position (Enright & Newton, 2004). This study considers destination image as the perception that a person has of a place.

2.5 Response factor

2.5.1 Behavioral intention

Behavioral intention is the likelihood that a person will perform certain behaviors (Muhammed et al., 2016). It also is an important signal of whether customers will remain or leave and is often used to determine customers' responses to a product or services (Wei et al., 2016), such as loyalty, willingness to pay more, switching intention, continued buying or willingness to recommend (Ozdemir & Hewett, 2010). This factor is also broadly discussed in tourism research. Revisit willingness and personal recommendation are the main dimensions to be measured when assessing tourists' behavioral intention (Sivasubramaniam & Jayawickrama, 2021; Yuan & Vui, 2023). This study defines behavioral intention as tourists' willingness to visit the same place in the future and measures tourists' willingness to revisit or recommend it.

2.6 Hypotheses development

2.6.1 Influences of stimulus factors on organism factors

As mentioned above, uniqueness enhances recall and generates more attention (Mafael et al., 2021). It also lets people feel different from others (Schreier, 2006). Zaggl et al. (2019) suggest that people are likely to seek uniqueness with hedonic product attributes, and the hedonic benefits of the product attribute are associated with positive arousal of customer emotion, such as delight, joy or excitement. In the travel context, the hedonic benefits provided by a destination are also important. The uniqueness of a destination creates tourists valuable and positive experiences (Anshori et al., 2020; Auriza et al., 2024). Tourism resource uniqueness positively affects tourists' positive emotion (Liu et al., 2021). Furthermore, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) indicated that apart from the general features of a destination, unique features are also essential to develop tourists' impressions of the place. Destination uniqueness is an important element for a place to attract tourists to visit (Auriza et al., 2024). Accordingly, this study proposes that if a place makes tourists feel unique, and gives them special and distinct experiences and benefits, it will arouse travel pleasures and form a destination image. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Destination uniqueness positively affects tourists' travel pleasure.

H2: Destination uniqueness positively affects destination image.

A previous study suggested that destination attractiveness is determined by the destination elements that satisfy tourists' vacation needs (Hu & Ritchie, 1993). Impressions that visitors have for a destination arouse their interests and expectations about the place (Das et al., 2007). Tourist's preference could also emerge from the evaluation process of destination attractiveness (Moularde & Weaver, 2016). As destination attractiveness is described as tourists' cognition about a place (Yin et al., 2020), it can thus be viewed as a basic element for tourists to form impressions of a place (Reitsamer et al., 2016). Stylidis et al. (2022) and Yacob et al. (2019) also confirm the positive influence of destination attractiveness on destination image. Accordingly, this study suggests that when a visitor perceives greater destination attractiveness, there will be a more favorable emotional state and destination image for the place. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Destination attractiveness positively affects tourists' pleasure.

H4: Destination attractiveness positively affects destination image.

2.6.2 Relationship between organism factors

Regarding the relation between pleasure and destination image, tourists' perception of a place has both cognitive and affective components (Nadeau et al., 2022). Therefore, apart from the beliefs or ideas tourists have about a place, tourists' feelings toward a place affect their evaluations of the place (Chen & Tsai, 2007). A previous study supported the influence of tourists' emotion on their perception of a city (Akgün et al., 2020). Ferreira et al. (2025) also indicates that emotion of happiness is significant in the perception of the destination. Accordingly, this study proposes that when tourists have more favorable emotional state while visiting a destination, they will have better destination image. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Pleasure positively affects destination image.

2.6.3 Influences of organism factors on response factor

Emotions can be categorized as either positive and negative (Machleit & Eroglu, 2000). Babin and Babin (2001) suggested that positive emotions lead to positive results, whereas negative emotions lead to negative consequences. Emotion is an important predictor of customers' loyalty behaviors (White & Yu, 2005), word-of-mouth behavior or complaints (Ortiz et al., 2017). Emotion influences the decision of destination selection (Hosany et al., 2021). Jang et al. (2009) and Haji et al. (2021) also indicate that positive emotion is related to future travel intention. Moreover, the assessment of destination image is closely related to tourists' behavioral intention (Lee, 2009; Moon et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2025), and word-of-mouth intention (Ferreira et al., 2025), and is the key factor influencing tourist decisions. Therefore, this study proposes that more positive emotions, such as travel pleasure from a place, or greater destination image, enhance behavioral intention. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: Pleasure positively affects tourists' behavioral intention.

H7: Destination image positively affects tourists' behavioral intention.

2.6.4 Roles of the mediators

The S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) used in this study considers that all stimuli in a specific environment will induce an individual's emotional response, directing an individual's behavioral tendency toward or away from the environment. Liu et al. (2020) also supported the mediator of positive emotion between resource uniqueness and tourist word-of-mouth recommendations based on the S-O-R theory. Accordingly, this study also discusses the mediating factor of pleasure in the relations of destination uniqueness → pleasure → behavioral intention, as well as in the relations of destination attractiveness → pleasure → behavioral intention.

In addition, tourists' perceptions of destination attractiveness can inform their overall impression of a place (Reitsamer et al., 2016; Stylidis et al., 2022; Yacob et al., 2019), and these impressions of a place can also influence tourists' behavioral intentions (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Chi & Qu, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2025; Ramkissoon et al., 2011). Destination image could be viewed as another organism factor. Thus, this study also discusses this mediating factor in the relations of

destination uniqueness → destination image → behavioral intention, as well as in the relations of destination attractiveness → destination image → behavioral intention. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H8: Pleasure mediates the relationship between destination uniqueness and behavioral intention.

H9: Pleasure mediates the relationship between destination attractiveness and behavioral intention.

H10: Destination image mediates the relationship between destination uniqueness and behavioral intention.

H11: Destination image mediates the relationship between destination attractiveness and behavioral intention.

2.6.5 Roles of moderators

Crompton (1979b) found that travel motivations can influence tourists' destination choice, and the motivation factors in a specified destination can be used to identify market segments (Jang et al., 2009). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) indicated that travel motivation can influence tourists' perception of a destination, while an individual's sensory pleasure can provide motivation for certain actions (Cabanac, 1971). According to Schreier (2006), uniqueness allows people to differentiate themselves from others and to enjoy feeling special. Consumers with high uniqueness needs prefer to experience novel things and be different from others (Auriza et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Therefore, for persons seeking greater novelty, who would like to discover new places or new experiences during travel, if a destination can offer them the feeling of uniqueness, and their needs for novelty are also satisfied, they will have more travel pleasure with this destination and form a better destination image. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H12: Novelty-seeking moderates the relationship between destination uniqueness and tourists' pleasure.

H13: Novelty-seeking moderates the relationship between destination uniqueness and destination image.

Moreover, Crompton (1979b) highlighted the significance of tourists' needs of destination attributes in their travel decision making. Thus, destination attractiveness is also an important pull factor for destination selection (An et al., 2024; Pompurová et al., 2024). Various needs of tourists could also be satisfied by tourism activities, such as for escape from their daily routine or from a stressful environment (Lee, 2009). This study also suggests that when tourists are aware of the attractiveness of the destination, and their needs for escape can also be satisfied, their travel pleasure and destination image toward the place will also increase. Therefore, this study also proposes that escape can be regarded as another moderator influencing the effect of destination attractiveness on tourists' emotional state and destination image formation. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H14: Escape moderates the relationship between destination attractiveness and tourists' pleasure.

H15: Escape moderates the relationship between destination attractiveness and destination image.

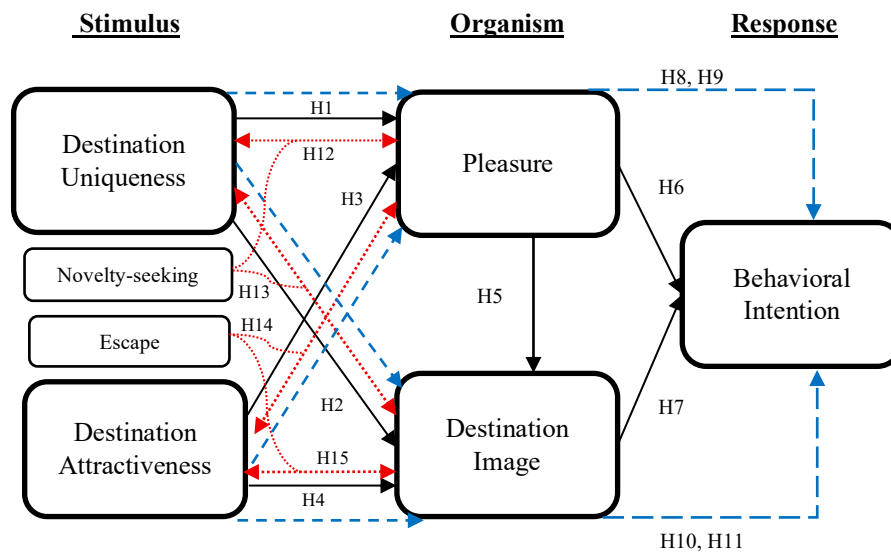


Figure 1: Proposed research framework

3. RESEARCH METHODS

For this study, questionnaire surveys were conducted from February to May in 2022, distributed to travelers with travel experience in Tainan, Taiwan R.O.C. as the sample. The respondents were required to recall their travel experiences and to be over 18 years old. In order to obtain sufficient samples, snowball sampling was used. Online questionnaires were prepared using Google forms. The questionnaires (including pretest and formal survey) were first distributed to acquaintances who had travel experiences in Tainan, then asking them to help forward the questionnaire to other eligible people they knew after they had answered the questionnaire. Before people answered any questionnaire items, their identities (whether over 18 years old and a tourist) and travel experiences (whether they traveled in Tainan between February 2020 and May 2022) were checked. If these two conditions were not met, the data were not obtained. This study determined the appropriate survey items based on a literature review (Chen, 2012; Chen & Hsu, 2000; Das, 2013; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Hsu et al., 2010; Lee, 2009; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Pearce & Lee, 2005). Seven-point scales were used for measurement items.

A pre-test with a total of 45 respondents was conducted. The result of the pilot test showed that all factor loadings (0.654~0.926) were higher than 0.6, and the results of the reliability values for all factors (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.810\sim0.901$) were higher than 0.7. Therefore, all question items were retained for the formal survey. The formal sample collection took three months, from March to May in 2022. Finally, a total of 217 valid responses were obtained.

4.1 RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Respondents description

In the total of 217 valid responses males (63.1%) exceeded females, and around 75.6% of the respondents were single. Approximately 46.5% were between 21 and 30 years

old. Most (83.4%) had a bachelor's degree. Around 56.2% of the respondents were students. Many of them (38.2%) earned less than US\$ 313 (US\$: NT\$ exchange rate is around 1: 32, around NT\$ 10000) per month, followed by more than US\$ 1563 (around NT\$ 50001) per month (17.5%). Most (91.7%) were repeaters to visit Tainan.

4.2 Confirmatory factor analysis

Second order confirmatory factor analysis with AMOS 18.0 was conducted. The model indicators showed that Chi-square (χ^2)/Degrees of freedom (df) = 1.625; Goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.818; Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) = 0.779; Normed fit index (NFI) = 0.887; Comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.953; and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.054. Following Hair et al. (2006), factor loading values are required to be not less than 0.6, the composite reliability (CR) value should be at least 0.7, and the average variance extracted (AVE) should be over 0.5. Two items from the construct of destination attractiveness were deleted due to low loadings. Table 1 shows that the factor loadings (0.678~0.963), AVE values (0.656~0.866) and CR values (0.894~0.962) meet the recommended criteria, so this model has acceptable fit and good reliability.

Table 1: Summary of CFA and reliability test

Construct/Factors/Items	Numbers	Loadings	AVE	CR
Destination uniqueness	4		0.680	0.895
a. I perceive this destination as highly unique.		0.767		
b. Visiting this place makes me feel distinctive.		0.854		
c. This destination is very different from other places.		0.806		
d. This destination is very special for me.		0.868		
Destination attractiveness	2		0.866	0.928
i. Nostalgic	5	0.897		
a. Historical sites in this destination are attractive.		0.678		
b. The antique styles of stores in this destination are attractive.		0.825		
c. The cultural and artistic tourism activities in this destination are attractive.		0.844		
d. This destination has a good public transport network.		0.779		
e. The old streets in this destination are attractive.		0.894		
ii. Culture and art	4	0.963		
a. The fairs and festivals in this destination are attractive.		0.807		
b. This destination has good tour guidance, travel activities, and an explanatory board system.		0.829		
c. Art performances in this destination are attractive.		0.796		
d. The many kinds of tourist shops in this destination (antique toys, handicrafts, antiques) are attractive.		0.733		
Pleasure	5		0.834	0.962
a. I felt very happy when I visited this destination.		0.913		
b. I felt very contented when I visited this destination.		0.880		

c. I felt very pleasant when I visited this destination.	0.907		
d. I felt very hopeful when I visited this destination.	0.928		
e. I felt very relaxed when I visited this destination.	0.938		
Destination image	7	0.656	0.930
a. The natural attractions in this destination are diverse.	0.829		
b. The cultural attractions in this destination are diverse.	0.814		
c. This destination is unusual and exotic.	0.874		
d. This is a good destination to meet local people.	0.743		
e. This destination is suitable for shopping.	0.690		
f. This destination is suitable for doing sporting activities.	0.813		
g. This destination is a suitable place to enjoy a vacation.	0.890		
Behavioral intention	3	0.754	0.901
a. I will visit this destination continuously in the future.	0.881		
b. I will participate in trips to this destination often in the future.	0.792		
c. I would like to recommend this destination to my family or friends.	0.926		
Novelty-seeking	4	0.679	0.894
a. I traveled to this destination for fun.	0.810		
b. I traveled to this destination to experience something different.	0.833		
c. I traveled to this destination to feel its special atmosphere.	0.898		
d. I traveled to this destination to visit places related to my personal interests.	0.747		
Escape	4	0.749	0.923
a. I traveled to this destination for rest and relaxation.	0.855		
b. I traveled to this destination to get away from everyday psychological stress / pressure.	0.904		
c. I traveled to this destination to be away from daily routine.	0.840		
d. I traveled to this destination to not worry about time.	0.862		
Chi-square (χ^2)/Degrees of freedom (df)		1.625	
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)		0.818	
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)		0.779	
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)		0.953	
Normed Fit Index (NFI)		0.887	
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)		0.054	

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted

This study also examined discriminant validity. Table 2 shows that all correlation coefficients with the factors are smaller than the AVE square root values of all factors, so the constructs of this study are not related to each other.

Table 2: Discriminant validity test

	M	S. D.	DU	DA	PL	DI	BI	NO	ES
DU	5.6555	1.0388	0.825						
DA	5.4639	1.0418	<i>0.666*</i>	0.931					
PL	5.8488	1.1270	<i>0.428*</i>	<i>0.429*</i>	0.913				
DI	5.6313	1.0839	<i>0.745*</i>	<i>0.775*</i>	<i>0.455*</i>	0.810			
BI	6.0829	1.0736	<i>0.708*</i>	<i>0.630*</i>	<i>0.531*</i>	<i>0.748*</i>	0.868		
NO	5.6832	1.1187	<i>0.589*</i>	<i>0.720*</i>	<i>0.413*</i>	<i>0.749*</i>	<i>0.638*</i>	0.824	
ES	5.7247	1.1486	<i>0.548*</i>	<i>0.584*</i>	<i>0.434*</i>	<i>0.651*</i>	<i>0.589*</i>	<i>0.724*</i>	0.865

Note: * indicates p value < 0.001; M = Mean value; S. D. = Standard deviation; DU = Destination uniqueness; DA = Destination attractiveness; PL = Pleasure; DI = Destination image; BI = Behavioral intention; NO = Novelty-seeking; ES = Escape; Bold values are the AVE square root values of factors, and values in italics are correlation coefficients.

4.3 Hypotheses testing

4.3.1 Results for the first seven hypotheses

According to the results of the respondent description described above, about 91% of the respondents had several travel experiences before participating in this study. Some scholars have found that past travel experiences of tourists could influence their judgements and travel decisions (Kim & Chen, 2019; Solomon et al., 2024). Therefore, this study set the factor of travel experience as the control variable.

To verify the first seven hypotheses, analysis by a structural equation model using AMOS 18.0 was conducted to examine the relationships among the factors of destination uniqueness, destination attractiveness, pleasure, destination image and behavioral intention. Indicators of the model reveal that $\chi^2/df = 1.729$; GFI = 0.881; AGFI = 0.838; NFI = 0.930; CFI = 0.969; and RMSEA = 0.058.

Table 3: Results of the structural equation model

Path	Standardized β value	C.R.	p value
DU $\rightarrow$ PL	0.226*	1.996	0.046
DU $\rightarrow$ DI	0.463***	6.228	0.000
DA $\rightarrow$ PL	0.293*	2.556	0.011
DA $\rightarrow$ DI	0.443***	5.929	0.000
PL $\rightarrow$ DI	0.095*	2.150	0.032
PL $\rightarrow$ BI	0.170***	3.363	0.000
DI $\rightarrow$ BI	0.754***	12.030	0.000
TE $\rightarrow$ PL	0.004	0.068	0.946
TE $\rightarrow$ DI	0.058	1.566	0.117
TE $\rightarrow$ BI	-0.004	-0.097	0.923
Chi-square (χ^2)/Degrees of freedom (df)			1.729
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)			0.881
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)			0.838
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)			0.930
Normed Fit Index (NFI)			0.969
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)			0.058

Note: DU = Destination uniqueness; DA = Destination attractiveness; PL = Pleasure; DI = Destination image; BI = Behavioral intention; TE = Travel experience (Control variable); * = $p \leq 0.05$; ** = $p \leq 0.01$; *** = $p \leq 0.001$

Results for testing the hypotheses in Table 3 show that both destination uniqueness ($\beta = 0.226$, $p = 0.046$) and destination attractiveness ($\beta = 0.293$, $p = 0.011$) positively affect tourists' pleasure. Thus, H1 and H3 are supported. Furthermore, destination uniqueness ($\beta = 0.463$, $p < 0.001$) and destination attractiveness ($\beta = 0.443$, $p < 0.001$) have positive effects on destination image. Thus, H2 and H4 are supported.

In addition, tourists' pleasure is shown to affect positively their destination image ($\beta = 0.095$, $p = 0.032$) and behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.170$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, H5 and H6 are supported. Destination image also positively affects tourists' behavioral intention ($\beta = 0.754$, $p < 0.001$), so H7 is also supported.

Moreover, as for the influences of the control variable (i.e., travel experience), the results indicate that travel experience has no effect on travel pleasure ($\beta = 0.004$, $p = 0.946$), destination image ($\beta = 0.058$, $p = 0.117$), and tourist's behavioral intention ($\beta = -0.004$, $p = 0.923$).

4.3.2 Results for the mediating roles of pleasure and destination image

To examine the mediating roles of organism factors (ex. pleasure and destination image) between stimulus factors (ex. destination uniqueness and destination attractiveness) and response factors (behavioral intention), the Bootstrap method in AMOS was used and the number of Bootstrap samples was set as 2000 in this study. Model 1 in Table 4 indicates that the mediating role of travel pleasure between destination uniqueness and behavioral intention is significant (Estimate = 0.056; $p = 0.029 \sim 0.050$; Bias-corrected Bootstrap = 0.014~0.124; Percentile Bootstrap = 0.008~0.115). In addition, the direct effect (Estimate = 0.491; $p = 0.001$) and total effect (Estimate = 0.547; $p = 0.001$) of destination uniqueness on behavioral intention are also significant. Thus, travel pleasure is shown to have a partial mediating effect in the relationship between destination uniqueness and behavioral intention. Thus, H8 is supported.

Table 4: Mediating effects of travel pleasure

Model 1	Estimate	p value BC/PC	Bias-corrected (BC)	Percentile (PC)
Indirect effect				
DU → PL → BI	0.056	0.029 / 0.050	0.014~0.124	0.008~0.115
Direct effect				
DU → PL	0.249	0.049 / 0.049	0.046~0.429	0.046~0.429
PL → BI	0.226	0.001 / 0.002	0.123~0.336	0.117~0.327
DU → BI	0.491	0.001 / 0.001	0.328~0.632	0.337~0.640
Total effect				
DU → BI	0.547	0.001 / 0.001	0.371~0.690	0.382~0.700
Indirect effect				
DA → PL → BI	0.060	0.016 / 0.041	0.019~0.131	0.010~0.114
Direct effect				
DA → PL	0.265	0.031 / 0.040	0.060~0.484	0.050~0.469
PL → BI	0.226	0.001 / 0.002	0.123~0.336	0.117~0.327
DA → BI	0.238	0.011 / 0.017	0.091~0.406	0.077~0.392
Total effect				
DA → BI	0.297	0.004 / 0.006	0.126~0.472	0.111~0.464
Chi-square (χ^2)/Degrees of freedom (df)				1.547
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)				0.932
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)				0.900
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)				0.986
Normed Fit Index (NFI)				0.962
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)				0.050

The results also show that the mediating role of travel pleasure between destination attractiveness and behavioral intention is significant (Estimate = 0.060; $p = 0.016 \sim 0.041$; Bias-corrected Bootstrap = 0.019~0.131; Percentile Bootstrap =

0.010~0.114). Moreover, the direct effect (Estimate = 0.238; $p = 0.011\sim0.017$) and total effect (Estimate = 0.297; $p = 0.004\sim0.006$) of destination attractiveness on behavioral intention are also significant. Thus, travel pleasure is shown to have a partial mediating effect in the relationship between destination attractiveness and behavioral intention. Thus, H9 is supported.

Model 2 in Table 5 confirms the mediating role of destination image between destination uniqueness and behavioral intention (Estimate = 0.326; $p = 0.001$; Bias-corrected Bootstrap = 0.211~0.484; Percentile Bootstrap = 0.201~0.468). In addition, the direct effect (Estimate = 0.187; $p > 0.05$) of destination uniqueness on behavioral intention is not significant, and total effect (Estimate = 0.514; $p = 0.001$) is significant. Thus, destination image has a full mediating effect in the relationship between destination uniqueness and behavioral intention. Thus, H10 is supported.

Table 5: Mediating effects of destination image

Model 2	Estimate	p value BC/PC	Bias-corrected (BC)	Percentile (PC)
Indirect effect				
DU → DI → BI	0.326	0.001 / 0.001	0.211~0.484	0.201~0.468
Direct effect				
DU → DI	0.564	0.001 / 0.001	0.425~0.695	0.427~0.697
DI → BI	0.578	0.001 / 0.001	0.420~0.762	0.407~0.751
DU → BI	0.187	0.156 / 0.120	-0.027~0.365	-0.011~0.381
Total effect				
DU → BI	0.514	0.001 / 0.001	0.337~0.660	0.351~0.671
Indirect effect				
DA → DI → BI	0.208	0.000 / 0.001	0.125~0.328	0.112~0.309
Direct effect				
DA → DI	0.359	0.001 / 0.001	0.220~0.503	0.218~0.498
DI → BI	0.578	0.001 / 0.001	0.420~0.762	0.407~0.751
DA → BI	0.122	0.125 / 0.159	-0.010~0.273	-0.023~0.258
Total effect				
DA → BI	0.329	0.003 / 0.004	0.158~0.505	0.149~0.494
Chi-square (χ^2)/Degrees of freedom (df)				2.036
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)				0.903
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)				0.850
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)				0.970
Normed Fit Index (NFI)				0.943
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)				0.069

The results also confirm the mediating role of destination image between destination attractiveness and behavioral intention (Estimate = 0.208; $p \leq 0.001$; Bias-corrected Bootstrap = 0.125~0.328; Percentile Bootstrap = 0.112~0.309). In addition, the direct effect (Estimate = 0.122; $p > 0.05$) of destination attractiveness on behavioral intention is not significant, and total effect (Estimate = 0.329; $p = 0.003\sim0.004$) is significant. Thus, destination image can fully mediate the relationship between destination attractiveness and behavioral intention. Thus, H11 is supported.

4.3.3 Results for the moderating roles of novelty-seeking and escape

To explore the moderating effect of novelty-seeking in this study, analyses with AMOS were employed. The results in Model 1 (please see Table 6) indicate that the travel motivation of novelty-seeking has a direct and positive effect on tourists' pleasure ($\beta = 0.178$, $p = 0.019$). In addition, novelty-seeking can moderate the

influence of destination uniqueness on tourists' pleasure ($\beta_{DU \times NO} = -0.144$, $p = 0.002$). Moreover, Model 2 shows that novelty-seeking has a positive effect on destination image ($\beta = 0.467$, $p = 0.000$), whereas there is no moderating effect of novelty-seeking on the influence of destination uniqueness on destination image ($\beta_{DU \times NO} = -0.018$, $p = 0.540$). Thus, H12 is supported, and H13 is not supported.

In addition to the interaction effect between destination uniqueness and novelty-seeking on tourists' pleasure, this study also used the mean values of destination uniqueness and novelty-seeking to identify four groups (e.g., low low, high low, low high, and high high), and then conducted the ANOVA analysis with SPSS. Figure 2 reveals the interaction plot of destination uniqueness and novelty-seeking on tourists' pleasure ($F = 6.814$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 6: Summary of the moderating effects of novelty seeking and escape

	M1	M2	M3	M4
DU $\rightarrow$ PL	0.276***			
NO $\rightarrow$ PL	0.178*			
DU $\times$ NO $\rightarrow$ PL	-0.144**			
DU $\rightarrow$ DI		0.464***		
NO $\rightarrow$ DI		0.467***		
DU $\times$ NO $\rightarrow$ DI		-0.018		
DA $\rightarrow$ PL			0.216**	
ES $\rightarrow$ PL			0.236***	
DA $\times$ ES $\rightarrow$ PL			-0.125***	
DA $\rightarrow$ DI				0.592***
ES $\rightarrow$ DI				0.295***
DA $\times$ ES $\rightarrow$ DI				-0.017
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Note: * = $p \leq 0.05$; ** = $p \leq 0.01$; *** = $p \leq 0.001$

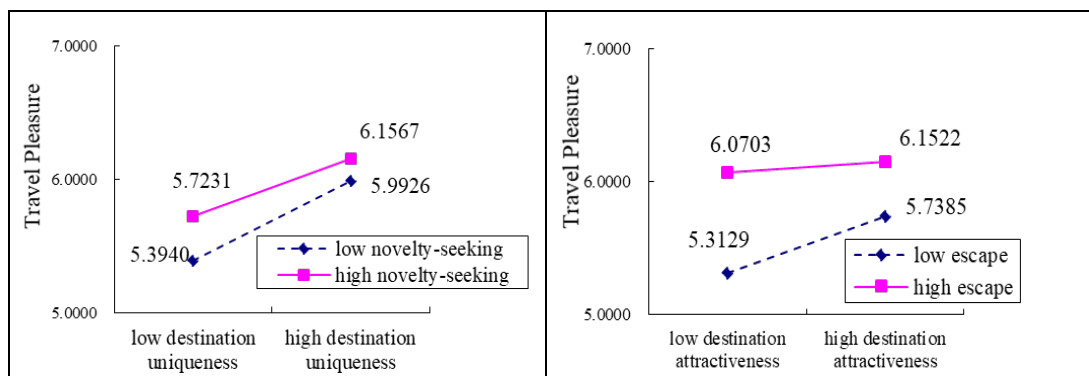


Figure 2: Interaction plots in this study

Furthermore, this study uses the same approach to examine the moderating role of escape. The results in Model 3 and Model 4 in Table 6 show that the motivation of escape has a direct and positive effect on tourists' pleasure ($\beta = 0.236$, $p = 0.001$). Escape can also moderate the influence of destination attractiveness on tourists' pleasure ($\beta_{DA \times ES} = -0.125$, $p = 0.001$). However, while escape did positively affect destination image ($\beta = 0.295$, $p = 0.000$), escape did not moderate the influence of

destination attractiveness on destination image ($\beta_{DAXES} = -0.017$, $p = 0.519$). Thus, H14 is supported, whereas H15 is not supported. Figure 2 also shows the interaction plot of destination attractiveness and escape on tourists' pleasure ($F=8.201$, $p<0.001$).

5.1 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Research conclusions

This study develops an applicable destination marketing model that explains how tourists form destination image and travel willingness by receiving stimulation from the destination strengths. This empirical study applying the extended S-O-R framework in the context of destination management presents several results, as follows.

Firstly, two stimulus factors (e.g., destination uniqueness and destination attractiveness) positively affect tourists' pleasure. These findings agree with the previous research results of Anshori et al. (2020), Auriza et al. (2024), Liu et al. (2020), Moularde and Weaver (2016), and Zaggl et al. (2019). Tourism resource uniqueness can positively affect tourists' positive emotions, and tourist pleasure can result from the evaluation of destination attractiveness. Moreover, destination uniqueness and destination attractiveness positively affect tourists' destination image. These findings are consistent with Echtner and Ritchie (1993), Reitsamer et al. (2016), Styliadis et al. (2022), and Yacob et al. (2019). A destination strength, such as destination's unique and attractive features are also essential to develop tourists' impressions of a destination.

Secondly, tourists' pleasure positively affects tourists' destination image. This result agrees with previous studies (Akgün et al. 2020; Chen & Tsai, 2007, Ferreira et al., 2025), which suggest that the feelings or emotions that tourists have toward a place also affect their evaluations of the place. Thirdly, two organism factors (e.g., pleasure and destination image) positively influence tourists' behavioral intentions. These findings are congruent with the studies of Haji et al. (2021), Jang et al. (2009), Lee (2009), Moon et al. (2013), Nguyen et al. (2025) and White and Yu (2005). Positive emotion and positive assessments of destination image are related to future travel intention

Fourthly, regarding the relations among stimulus factors, organism factors and response (S-O-R), the mediating roles of pleasure and destination image are also examined. The results are in line with the S-O-R theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and confirm the mediator of pleasure in the relations of destination uniqueness $\rightarrow$ pleasure $\rightarrow$ behavioral intention, as well as in the relations of destination attractiveness $\rightarrow$ pleasure $\rightarrow$ behavioral intention. Furthermore, the findings also support the mediator of destination image in the relations of destination uniqueness $\rightarrow$ destination image $\rightarrow$ behavioral intention, as well as in the relations of destination attractiveness $\rightarrow$ destination image $\rightarrow$ behavioral intention.

Fifthly, since few studies have discussed the moderating effect of travel motivation on organism factors in the S-O-R paradigm, novelty-seeking and escape are included in the discussion here. The results indicate that novelty-seeking can directly influence tourists' pleasure and destination image. Escape has similar results in that they positively affect tourists' pleasure and destination image. These findings echo previous studies (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Cabanac, 1971). However, in the outcomes regarding moderating roles, the results in this study suggest that novelty-seeking negatively moderates the influence of destination uniqueness on tourists'

pleasure. In other words, excessive novelty-seeking could weaken the strength of the relationship from destination uniqueness to tourists' pleasure. When tourists have a high level of novelty-seeking motivation, the positive effect of destination uniqueness on their pleasure is not as strong as with low level of novelty-seeking motivation. Nevertheless, tourists' pleasure still has the highest value (Mean = 6.1567) when they perceive high destination uniqueness and have high novelty-seeking.

Sixthly, escape motivation can also negatively moderate the influence of destination attractiveness on tourists' pleasure. Excessive escape motivation can also decrease the strength of the relationship from destination attractiveness to tourists' pleasure. The slopes in Figure 2 indicate that the positive effect of destination attractiveness on tourists' pleasure is weaker when they have high level of escape motivation. Nevertheless, tourists' pleasure still has the highest value (Mean = 6.1522) when they perceive high destination attractiveness and have high escape motivation.

5.2 Research and managerial suggestions

This study proposes a marketing strategy that indicates how to encourage tourists to visit from the destination viewpoint and verifies that the S-O-R model can also be applied in the field of destination image formation and destination management. Results indicate that destination stimulus factors can influence tourist's affection and perception of a destination. Greater destination uniqueness and destination attractiveness of tourism sites give tourists greater travel pleasure and greater impressions of the place. Moreover, organism factors also influence the response factor. In this study both travel pleasure and destination image increase behavioral intention to travel. From the destination image formation perspectives of Gartner (1994) and Tasci et al. (2007), this study also confirms the sequential relation of cognitive image-affective image-conative image. For destination management and practical applications, travel practitioners should highlight the unique features of places and present attractive tourism resources during destination marketing and promotions. These unique and attractive destination advantages represent the destination positioning in the minds of tourists, and are very important stimuli that would help tourists pay attention and form their initial impression of a place. After they learn more about the place, this impression and knowledge can be transformed into travel enjoyment and a better image of the place, thus encouraging their future travel willingness.

In addition, the organism factors (e.g. pleasure and destination image) are shown to be important mediators. Tourists' images of a place and travel behavioral intentions are evaluated based on the positive emotions they gain during visits. Thus, for practical applications to increase tourists' revisit willingness, it is important for destination managers and tourism operators to enhance tourists' enjoyments and positive destination image during the travel. When tourists feel happy, they will have more positive thoughts about the place and be more willing to visit again. Every destination has its advantages and unique features. If the destination managers or tourism operators can leverage these advantages to ensure the quality of service sectors, and meet tourists' needs during the travel, the travel pleasure and destination image will be enhanced.

Thirdly, this study also finds that novelty-seeking can moderate the influence of destination uniqueness on the travel pleasure of tourists. Escape can moderate the influence of destination attractiveness on travel pleasure of tourists. However,

regarding the interaction with destination uniqueness and novelty-seeking, the increased rate of travel pleasure for high novelty-seeking tourists was not greater than that of those with low novelty-seeking. In addition, for the interaction with destination attractiveness and escape, the increased rate of travel pleasure for people with high escape was not higher than that of those with low escape. However, tourists have the greatest travel pleasures when they have high novelty-seeking and high destination uniqueness, as well as when they have high escape motivation and high destination attractiveness. Based on these results, it is important in destination marketing to use the destination advantages in conjunction with tourists' motivations to increase tourists' pleasure. For tourists seeking novelty, the unique features of a destination can enhance their travel pleasure. In response to this point, destination managers, national tourist offices or travel agencies could provide more new travel tips to stimulate novelty-seeking tourists' curiosity and increase their sense of freshness and uniqueness about the destination. Furthermore, for tourists pursuing feelings of escape, a marketing strategy using distinctive features of a destination can be useful to enhance their travel pleasure. Accordingly, destination managers, national tourist offices or travel agencies could design and introduce relaxing routes with longer stays, so tourists have more time to discover the attractions of the destination.

5.3 Future research direction

This study has some research limitations that could be explored in future studies. Firstly, the respondents are natives and had previous travel experiences in this destination. Although this study sets travel experience as the control variable, the findings also reveal that travel experience has no effect on travel pleasure, destination image and behavioral intention respectively. Respondent sampling with international tourists could be used in future research to better understand the influences of the destination variables. Secondly, though tourist personality and other motivation factors could also affect travel behaviors, they were not considered in this study and could be discussed in the future.

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