A model of perceived image, memorable tourism experiences and revisit intention

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ABSTRACT.

Limited research has investigated the antecedents and consequences of memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) empirically. This study fills this gap by developing a causal relationship model among perceived image (including country image and destination image), MTEs and revisit intention. The study explores its predictive capabilities in international tourism context by using PLS- SEM. The results indicate that country image and destination image influence revisit intention via the mediating effect of MTEs. The 'perceived image-MTEs-revisit intention' model is proved with 43% of MTEs and 28.7% of revisit intention explained. In addition, this study provides a classification framework of destination attributes (i.e. country image and destination image) in international tourism context for future research and destination marketing practice.

KEYWORDS. country image; destination image; memorable tourism experiences; revisit intention; international tourists

1. Introduction

Tourist experiences constitute the essence of the tourism and hospitality industry. With intensifying competition, there is a growing recognition that destinations must create and deliver memorable tourism experiences to their consumers to increase their competitiveness (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2015, 2012). When consumers decide to travel and seek information to select a destination, they often recall past experiences. Internal information search is the first step of tourist information search process (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Kim, 2014). Recently, memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) have attracted the attention of researchers and practitioners. Researchers argue that MTEs are the best predictors of future behavior and represent a new benchmark (Chandralal, Rindfleish, & Valenzuela, 2015; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012, Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2014).

Destination image is a widely recognized important construct, which influences tourists' decision-making, destination choice, post-trip evaluation and future behaviors (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, & Andronikidis, 2016; Zhang, Xu, Leung, & Cai, 2016). There are many different types of destination, ranging from a city/countryside, a region or a country. When the destination is an entire country, country/nation image may be an important factor to influence international tourist perceived destination image and destination choice (Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly, & Luk, 2008; Zhang et al., 2016). Extant studies in general international trade and marketing indicate that consumer perception of country image influences attitude, evaluation and purchase intention of this country's product (Hsieh, Pan, & Setiono, 2004; Lin, Hsu, & Tsai, 2011).

MTEs, destination image and country image are all recognized as important antecedents of future behaviors. However, there is a lack of an integrated model to investigate their relationships, and reveal the mechanism of how these three constructs influencing future behaviors. Extant MTEs literature mainly discusses the essence and structure of MTEs, and develops measurement

scales (Kim, 2013; Kim, 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011a). Researchers call for more studies to test the MTEs scales in new contexts to validate them. Empirical research to investigate the antecedents and consequences of MTEs remains sparse. A few studies explored the relationship between MTEs and guest interactions, sensory impressions, place attachment, recollection, satisfaction, behavior intention, loyalty, eWOM, revisit intention (Agapito, Pinto, & Mendes, 2017; Barnes, Mattsson, & Sørensen, 2016; Manthiou, Kang, & Chiang, 2016; Semrad & Rivera, in press; Torres, 2016; Tsai, 2016). However, no study has yet examined the effects of two crucial constructs, country image and destination image, on MTEs. This study intends to fill this gap by proposing an integrated model to explore the relationship among country image, destination image, MTEs and revisit intention. Based on prior literature about the effects of country image and destination image on satisfactory experience and behavior intention (Carneiro & Faria, 2016; Kim et al., 2012; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005; Lee, Ham, & Kim, 2015; Lu, Chi, & Liu, 2015; Zhang et al., 2016), this study argues that country image and destination image are antecedents of MTEs, and MTEs mediate the relationship between perceived image and future behaviors (i.e. revisit intention). If tourists have more impressed perception of the destination country (e.g. friendly people, beautiful natural landscape), the more likely they feel that they will gain MTEs, which in turn leads to higher revisit intention.

The purposes of this study are: (1) test Kim's seven dimensions MTEs scale in a new context and sample, namely, in the international tourism context and in particular in Korean tourists travelling to China. The reason of choosing Korean tourists to China as research sample is that China is the fourth largest international tourist destination country. Over 133 million tourists visited China in 2015. Korea is the largest source country of Chinese inbound tourists with 4.44 million Korean tourists visiting China mainland in 2015, overweighting the second source country Japan (2.50 million tourists to China mainland in 2015) (China National Tourism Administration, 2016). (2) Develop a causal relationship model to investigate the way country image and destination image affect MTEs and revisit intention, and explore the mediating effect of MTEs. This study adds knowledge to MTEs' antecedents and consequences, and allows a better understanding of MTEs' formation process and its important role in destination competitiveness.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 Memorable tourism experiences

The book Experience Economy by Pine & Gilmore (1999) stresses that the world economy is transforming from service economy to experience economy. This message naturally triggered people's attention to consumer experience and initiated the development of tourist experience research. Researchers explore the essence and classification of tourist experience from different discipline perspectives, such as psychology, anthropology, consumer behavior, phenomenology, and sociology. Promoting tourist experience research is becoming an important cross-discipline research area. In the marketing field, concepts of tourist experience are constantly evolving, from early satisfactory experiences and experience quality to lately extraordinary experiences and memorable tourism experiences. Memorable tourism experiences and tourist experiences are two concepts interrelated with each other, yet different in connotation and extension. Tourist experience is defined as the subjective mental state felt by participants during a service encounter (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). It has been widely recognized that tourists' interpretation of the meanings of products, activities and tourism destinations is subjective (Knobloch, Robertson, & Aitken,

2017; Ryan, 2002; Uriely, 2005). Kim et al. (2012) summarized nineteen experiential components that various researchers had identified to help understand tourism experiences. These include involvement, hedonism, happiness, pleasure, relaxation, stimulation, refreshment, social interaction, spontaneity, meaningfulness, knowledge, challenge, sense of separation, timelessness, adventure, personal relevance, novelty, escaping pressure and intellectual cultivation. Not all tourism experiences can be necessarily translated into an MTE. Instead MTEs are those experiences that are selectively constructed from tourist experiences and can be remembered and recalled after a trip. MTEs are more important because only remembered experiences would influence tourist future decision-making (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Kim, Ritchie, & Tung, 2010). When making a decision, tourists rely on previous experiences and memories to formulate future trips (Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004; Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, & Diener, 2003).

Qualitative and quantitative studies have been done to investigate the essence of MTEs and what kind of tourist experiences can become MTEs, but the results are incongruent (see table 1). Tung and Ritchie (2011a, b) identified four key dimensions of MTEs (i.e. affect, expectations, consequentiality and recollection) and five characteristics of MTEs (i.e. identity formation, family milestones, relationship development, nostalgia reenactment, and freedom pursuits) respectively in two qualitative studies. Chandralal, Rindfleish and Valenzuela (2015) explored MTEs by travel blog narratives and extracted seven experiential themes: local people, life and culture, personally significant experiences, shared experiences, perceived novelty, perceived serendipity, professional guides and tour operator services and affective emotions. Some quantitative research has examined the effect of tourist experience on memory (Ali, Hussain, & Ragavan, 2014; Ali, Ryu, & Hussain, 2016; Kim et al., 20l0; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013). Their results indicate that the experience dimensions of educational, esthetic, entertainment, escapist, involvement, hedonism and local culture influence tourists' memories significantly and become memorable experiences. So far, there is no general agreement with what constitutes MTEs.

Insert table 1 about here

Recently, Kim et al. (2012) developed a measurement scale specifically for MTEs. They identified seven dimensions of MTEs, and conducted a cross-cultural study to verify it. These seven dimensions are hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. Hedonism is believed as pleasurable feelings that excite oneself (Dunman & Mattila, 2005). Refreshment is the state of being refreshed (Howard, Tinsley, Tinsley, & Holt, 1993). Local culture refers to good impression about local people and closely experienced local culture (Kim et al., 2012). Meaningfulness is a sense of great value or significance, namely doing something important and valuable (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Knowledge refers to information, facts, or experiences known by an individual (Blackshaw, 2003). Involvement is the degree an individual is involved in tourist experience (Kim et al., 2012). Novelty refers to psychological feeling of newness resulted from having a new experience (Farber & Hall, 2007).

These seven experience dimensions are considered to be the MTEs that individual recalls most frequently. Although the cross-cultural comparison study between American and Taiwanese university students shows that the scores on particular dimensions are different, the seven-dimension structure of MTEs is confirmed in both samples (Kim, 2013, Kim et al., 2014). Tsai (2016) also confirmed the seven-dimension structure of MTEs in a context of local food

experiences of Taiwan domestic tourists. Just as Kim et al. (2014) suggest that this seven dimension MTEs scale need to be verified in more contexts and new samples, this study uses their MTEs scale to measure the MTEs of Korean tourists travelling to China, and tests the generalization of MTEs scale in this new sample. Besides validating the MTEs scale, this study further explores the antecedents of MTEs and formation process, namely explores the effect of country image and destination image on MTEs.

2.2 Country image and destination image

Country image is defined in different ways and considered as a multi-dimensional concept in existing studies, ranging from social psychology and political science to communication and business. Recently, Buhmann (2016) and Carneiro and Faria (2016) discussed the conceptualization of country image from international public relations and business respectively. In international trade and marketing area, country image is usually defined as the total impression, belief and perception that consumers hold about a given country (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Compared with other related concepts such as product image, product-country image and image of country of origin, country image represents a more comprehensive and overall image, including consumers' perception and evaluation of the destination's people, history, geography, culture, politics, economy and technical development (Allred, Chakraborty, & Miller, 1999; Carneiro & Faria, 2016; Costa, Carneiro, & Goldszmidt, 2016).

There are many destination image definitions; the following are well-recognized: 'the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination' (Crompton, 1979, p.18), 'The perceptions of individual destination attributes and the holistic impression made by the destination' (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003, p. 43), 'An individual's mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings, and global impressions about an object or destination' (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 870). Therefore, scholars generally agree that destination image is comprised of cognitive, affective and total image. Although the three components model of destination image is well accepted, most destination image research mainly focuses on cognitive image, including attribute image and functional image termed by Echtner and Ritchie (2003).

The measurement items in destination image scales are mainly related to tourist activities and needs, such as tourist attractions, transportation, accommodation, food, service and travel cost. In addition to these items, country destination image measurements include resident hospitality, political stability, economy development, environmental management etc., which are also included in country image measurements in international trade and marketing area. In order to clarify the relationship between country image and destination image, Zhang et al. (2016, p.819) proposed an integrated concept of destination-country image (DCI). Their conceptualization defines country image as 'tourists' perception and impression of politics, economy, technology, environment, people and other tourism environmental factors of a destination country'. Destination image is defined as 'the core tourism product image related to tourist attractions and tourism facilities, which directly meet tourists' core needs'. This study follows these definitions for country image and destination image and focuses on cognitive facets of image.

2.3 The influence of country image on destination image

In country image research field, destinations are viewed as an experience product, whilst destination image is viewed as a product image (Nadeau et al. 2008; Zhang & Cai, 2011). According to the halo effect view, country image is viewed as the clue of product evaluation by consumers. The more positive country image is perceived, the easier for products designed,

manufactured or made in this country to get positive evaluation. Previous studies indicate country image has positive effect on product evaluation and product image (Costa et al., 2016; Hsieh et al., 2004; Lee, Ham, & Kim, 2015; Wang, Li, Barnes, & Ahn, 2012). But the impacts of country image are different across product classes, such as hedonic and utilitarian products (Brijs, Bloemer, & Kasper, 2011; Verlegh, 2001). Costa et al. (2016) investigated the effect of country-of-origin image on consumers' evaluations of three products classes: utilitarian nature-based (fruits), utilitarian industrialized (home appliances) and hedonic industrialized (clothes). Their results suggest that 'for a given product class, the effect of country-of-origin on quality evaluation is not homogeneous, but rather varies across facets of country image' and 'for a given facet of country image, product class moderates the impact of (facet of) country image on quality evaluation' (p. 1072). Wang et al. (2012) also reveal that cognitive country image has a significant effect on product image and then on purchase intention.

Studies in tourism area also illustrate that country image has a significant effect on destination image. Nadeau et al. (2008) investigated the relationship between the country image and destination image of Nepal. The results indicate that the two competence dimensions of country image (i.e. country competence and people competence) affect significantly two destination dimensions (i.e. built environment belief and destination evaluation). The other two characteristic dimensions of country image (i.e. country characteristic and people characteristic) affect destination evaluation. Other studies also confirm country image's effect on destination image. For example, the study conducted by Zhang et al. (2016) finds that country image affects destination image positively. The better country image is perceived, the better destination image is perceived. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: country image has direct positive effect on destination image

2.4 The influence of destination image and country image on MTEs

Destination image is an important factor influencing tourist experience. Tourist experience research has evolved from early fundamentals of the experience, through satisfactory experience, quality experience, extraordinary experience, to memorable experience (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). During the stage of satisfactory and quality experience, satisfaction is considered as one of the tourist experience components (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The degree of satisfaction is determined by tourists' individual response to service quality subjectively and affectively (Otto & Richie, 1996). Previous studies indicate that destination image affects tourist's satisfaction and revisit intention significantly. For example, the study conducted by Lee, Lee & Lee (2005) finds that destination image influences perceived quality, and then influences satisfaction and behavior intention. Chen and Tsai (2007) designed a quantitative study to test the relationship among destination image, experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction and behavior intention. The results reveal that destination image has a direct positive effect on perceived value and experience quality. Experience quality has a direct influence on satisfaction and an indirect effect on satisfaction through perceived value. Lu, Chi and Liu (2015) investigated the influence of destination image on tourists' experience (i.e. satisfaction) and supported the relationship.

Based on these research findings, this paper extends the effect of destination image from experience quality and satisfaction to MTEs. In a recent study, Kim (2014) explored the destination attributes associated with MTEs. These attributes essentially comprise cognitive destination image, including the following ten dimensions: local culture, variety of activities, hospitality, infrastructure, environment management, accessibility, quality of service,

physiography, place attachment, and superstructure. However, Kim didn't test how these attributes influence MTEs empirically. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: destination image has a direct positive effect on MTEs

Although the effect of country image on tourist experience is rarely explored, country image has been proved to be an important factor to influence consumers' product evaluation, perceived value, satisfaction and purchase intention (Buhmann, 2016; Carneiro & Faria, 2016; Costa et al., 2016). For example, Lin et al. (2011) explored the influence of national images on marketing performance (measured by consumer lifetime value, satisfaction and loyalty). They revealed that national image had a indirect positive impact on marketing performance through experience marketing and integrated marketing. Lee, Ham and Kim (2015) investigated the effects of likability of Korean celebrities, dramas, and music on preferences for Korean restaurants. Structural model results for three tourist groups from HongKong, Bangkok and Dubai indicated that country image has significant effects on preference for Korea restaurants cross the groups and mediates the relationship between likability and preference. Based on the results of the effects of country image on product evaluation in literature, Carneiro and Faria (2016) developed a measure for country image (including economic, technological, and human/social aspects) within a specific setting (i.e. ready-to-eat shrimp meals and refrigerators). Their research results support the effects of country image on product evaluation. This study extends the country image effect to tourism field. For international tourists, their perception of a destination country's politics, economy, environment and people probably exert an influence on tourist experiences, and hence the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: country image has a direct positive effect on MTEs

2.5 The influence of MTEs on revisit intention

MTEs are viewed as fundamental for destination competitiveness and sustainability as they can influence future destination choices. If destinations can provide MTEs to tourists, the probability of tourists revisit this destination will increase. For many tourism destinations, repeat visitors constitute a desired market segment, because they tend to stay longer at a destination, tend to be more satisfied as they experience and realistic expectations, spread positive word of mouth, and participate in consumptive activities more intensively, whilst require a much lower marketing costs than first-time visitors (Lau & McKercher, 2004; Lehto, et al., 2004; Oppermann, 2000; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014).

Previous studies have examined the effect of MTEs on behavior intention, loyalty and revisit intention in different contexts. For example, Tsai's (2016) research indicates that MTEs has both direct effect and indirect effect through the moderating role of place identity on behavior intention. Semrad and Rivera (in press) find that memorable festival experience has a significant influence on eWOM. Manthiou, Kang and Chiang (2016) examine the impact of theme park visitors' experiences on loyalty. The results indicate that experience influences loyalty indirectly through satisfaction and recollection. Barnes, Mattsson and Sørensen (2016) suggest that longer-term remembered experiences have the strongest impact on revisit intentions. Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013) explored the antecedents and consequences of MTEs using in-depth interviews. The results showed that 27 out of 35 respondents suggested that they had neither revisited those destinations nor they would revisit them again in the near future. MTEs only had effects on positive word-of-mouth, but no significant effect on revisit intention. The major reason was that travellers wanted to experience new destinations when on leisure travel. This may depend on

destinations, as some places are seen as once-in-a-lifetime destination. While most of the studies agree that MTEs is an important factor to influence behavior intention, the influence patterns may be different. In addition, the measurement of MTEs is also different in these studies which makes it is difficult to compare with each other.

While Tsai (2016) examined the influence of second-order measurement of MTEs on behavior intention, Kim et al. (2010) investigated the effects of seven first order dimensions of MTEs on future behavioral intentions. It reveals that the memorable experiential components of involvement, hedonism, and local culture positively affect behavioral intention to revisit the same destination, re-practice the same tourist activities, and generate positive word-of-mouth publicity. These two studies use the same MTE scales and get similar results, indicating that MTEs have significant influence on behavior intention. This study measures MTEs using Kim's (2012) seven dimension scales. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: MTEs has a direct positive effect on revisit intention

2.6 Conceptual model

Based on the above discussion and hypotheses, Figure 1 proposes a conceptual model. In the model, country image and destination image are tourists' perception of macro environmental attributes and micro tourism attractions and facilities of a destination country. These attribute perceptions can impact tourist's cognitive and affective benefits in the destination (i.e. MTEs such as hedonism, knowledge), and then impact the tourist future revisit intention. This model represents the two levels of attribute-consequence in Gutman's means-end chain theory, which derives aggregate value chains; namely prototypical sequences of attributes, consequences, and values for a sample of consumers and constructs consumer decision maps (Pieters, Baumgartner, & Allen, 1995). In our model, country image and destination image represent attributes and MTEs represent consequences. Both are important components in the value chain. The model is also consistent with the fundamental psychological process of human being, namely cognition-affection-intention. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) raised the 'Hierarchy of effects' or 'Cognitive, Affective & Behavior (CAB) model. Thereafter, many consumer behavior and tourist behavior researchers took the CAB model as their theoretical foundation (e.g. Baloglu et al., 1999; Hamidizadeh, Yazdani, Tabriz, & Latifi, 2012). In our model, country image, destination image and parts of MTEs dimensions represent cognition, parts of MTEs dimensions represent affection, and revisit intention represents behavior. The relationship among these constructs follows the CAB hierarchy. Although some of previous research suggest that cognitive country image and destination image have direct effects on revisit intention (Tan, in press; Tan & Wu; 2016), some others suggested the effects are indirect (Castro, Armario, & Ruiz, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Stylos, Bellou, Andronikidis, & Vassiliadis, 2017; Stylos et al., 2016; Zeugner-Roth & Žabkar, 2015). Rucker, Preacher, Tormala and Petty (2011) argue that mediation analysis should assess the magnitude and significance of indirect effects. Hence this study tests the indirect effects of perceived image on revisit intention through MTEs as a mediator by PLS-SEM and Bootstrapping analysis.

Insert figure 1 about here

3. Methodology

3.1 Construct measurement and questionnaire translation

This study needs to measure the following four constructs: country image, destination image,

MTEs, and revisit intention. The measurement of country image refers to the dimensions and scales of country image in international trade and marketing. It includes six domains and 22 items: namely country characteristics, country competence, people characteristic, people competence, environmental management and the relationship between countries. These dimensions are consistent with the conceptualization of country image and has also been used and confirmed by previous studies (Heslop et al., 2004; Nadeau et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2012). Destination image is measured based on its conceptualization by Zhang et al. 2016 (i.e. core elements of a destination product, including attraction and infrastructure). The items were sourced from the literature including natural landscape, cultural landscape, accommodation, catering, shopping, and tourist activity (Beerli & Martín, 2004, Zhang et al., 2016). The measurement of MTEs uses Kim's seven dimension and 24-item scale, namely: hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty (Kim, et al., 2012). Country image and destination image are conceptualized as second order formative constructs with reflective dimensions in the first level. MTEs are conceptualized as a second order reflective construct with reflective dimensions in the first level. Revisit intention is measured by three items, including revisit propensity, revisit willingness and revisit probability in near future (Horng, Liu, Chou, & Tsai, 2012; Hung, Lee & Huang, 2014; Jang & Feng, 2007; Wang & Wu, 2011, Zhang et al., 2016). All the items were measured using a five-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to rate constructs from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Table 2 lists all the items.

The questionnaire was written in Chinese firstly; then double-translated to Korean. A bilingual expert translated it into Korean, another bilingual expert translated the Korean version back into Chinese Version. After comparing the initial and translated Chinese versions and revising those in disagreement, an expert, whose native language is Korean, further checked and polished the questionnaire.

3.2 Data gathering

The survey was carried out in Huangshan city, a very popular tourist city in China. The target population was tourists from Korea visiting the city during the survey. The Huangshan Mountain in Huangshan city is one of the Korean tourists' favorite attractions in China. The Huangshan international airport gives a chance for Korean tourists to fly directly. The survey sites were chosen at those places where there were many Korean tourists, such as the airport, scenic spots, and Korean restaurants. The questionnaire was administered personally by convenient sampling. While target population and survey sites were chosen consciously, the sampling process was spontaneous which would reduce the confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998). A total of 320 tourists were interviewed, and 300 completed questionnaires were returned. In fact 261 valid questionnaires were used after removing those invalid ones; the valid percentage is 87%. Questionnaires were removed: (1) When they had many unanswered items; (2) When ten or over consecutive same scores occurred, which may mean that the respondents didn't answer the questions seriously.

Male respondents were a little more than female: 55.8% was male and 44.2% was female. Most of the respondents (67%) were between 45-64 years old, the second age group (21.8%) was 25-44 years old. Most of the respondents (42.1%) had a four-year university degree, 19.5% of respondents had two-year college degree. 87% of respondents were married. Package travel was the main way of travel, as 82.4% of the Korean tourists in the sample joined a tour group. Over 70% of tourists had visited China twice or more.

3.3 Data analysis

SPSS 17 was used for descriptive statistical analysis, missing value treatment and common method bias test. The skewness of most indicators was between -1 and +1 except just four items. The kurtosis of 55 out of 60 indicators was between -1 and +1 (Table 2). This means that the assumption of normality is not violated, just with the exception of five indicators. All the missing value were replaced by EM (expectation-maximization algorithm). Due to the limit number of missing values (less than 5% for per indicator), mean replacement, EM, and nearest neighbor generally result in only slightly different in PLS-SEM estimations (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014). The common method bias was tested by Harmon's one factor test approach (Chiu, Lee, & Chen, 2014; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Lee, 2003). All constructs were entered into an exploratory factor analysis. The results showed fourteen factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 68.357% of the total variance. The first factor accounted for only 28 percent of the total variance (less than 50%), which meant that one single factor did not account for the majority of variance. Therefore, the common method variance was not biasing the results.

PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structure Equation Modeling) was used to analyze the latent constructs and test the hypotheses by using SmartPLS 3.0. Compared with CB-SEM, PLS-SEM can better deal with complex model, small sample size, non-normally data distribution, formative measures, predictive and exploratory research. In this study, the model is complicated with 60 indicators, the sample size (261) is relative small, and the data distributions of 5 indicators are non-normal. The main purpose of this study is to explore the relationships among country image, destination image, MTEs and revisit intention. The first three latent variables are multidimensional second order constructs. Country image and destination image are conceptualized as second order formative constructs, MTEs is conceptualized as a second order reflective construct. All the first order constructs are measured by reflective indicators. Hence, PLS-SEM is suitable for this study.

A higher-order model or hierarchical component model (HCM) including second order formative and reflective constructs was established for this study. A mixture of the repeated indicator approach and the use of latent variable scores in a two-stage approach in PLS-SEM was used to assess the model. The two-stage approach can address the issue that any additional latent variable as a predecessor is always approximately zero and non-significant because almost all of the high-order formative construct variance is explained by its first order constructs. The non-parametric bootstrapping technique was used to test the significance with 261 cases, 1000 subsamples and no sign changes (Hair et al., 2014; Hayes, 2009; Wells, Taheri, Gregory-Smith, & Manika, 2016).

4. Results

4.1 Measurement model

The reliability, convergent and discriminate validity of 17 first order reflective constructs were assessed following the procedure suggested by Hair et al.'s (2014) and Fornell and Larcker's (1981) (Table 2). After deleting 11 indicators with low loading (less than the threshold values 0.7, see the indicators with * in Table 2), all other indicator loadings were above the recommended threshold, the composite reliability ranged from .803 to .921 (more than 0.7 threshold values), and AVE ranged from .613 to .795 (more than 0.5 threshold values). The reliability and convergent validity were established. Discriminate validity of the first order reflective constructs was assessed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. This approach compares the square root of the AVE

values with the latent variable correlations. If the square root of the AVE is larger than the biggest correlation with any construct, discriminant validity is recognized. In this study, all constructs met this criterion.

The measurement quality of the second order formative constructs (i.e. country image, destination image) was assessed by content validity, collinearity and the significance and relevance of the first order constructs. Based on prior literature and conceptualization of country image and destination image, this study includes important facets of the two high-order constructs, which are composed of 6 and 3 facets respectively (Table 2). Three professionals in this field checked for the facets and ambiguity, and verified the content validity. Collinearity was assessed by variance inflation factor (VIF). All the VIFs ranged between 1.183 and 2.159 (lower than 5), indicating no potential collinearity problem. The contribution or importance of first order constructs to second order constructs was assessed by path coefficients. All the path coefficients were significant at 95% confident level (Table 3), proving the relative contribution of the first order constructs to the second order constructs. The measurement quality of the second order reflective construct (i.e. MTEs) was assessed by path coefficients between first order MTEs dimensions and second order MTEs and CR and AVE based on these path coefficients. All the path coefficients ranged between 0.768 and 0.879 (larger than 0.7). AVE was 0.66, and CR was 0.95. All appear to support the reliability and validity of the scales.

Insert table 2 about here
Insert table 3 about here

4.2 Structural model

According to the two-stage approach in PLS-SEM, second order latent variable scores (i.e. country image, destination image, MTEs) were obtained by using the repeated indicator approach in the first stage. In the second stage, these latent variable scores were served as manifest variables in the high-order measurement. Then the causal relationships among country image, destination image, MTEs and revisit intention were tested. The structural model was assessed by the two key results (i.e., the path coefficients and R^2 values) (see Table 4). The standardized path coefficient value between country image and destination image was 0.447 (P=0.000), indicating that country image has a significant direct impact on destination image at 0.001 confidence level. The higher tourists evaluate politics, economy, technology, people and environmental management of a destination country, the higher they evaluate the tourism attractions and facilities in this country. Therefore, the hypothesis 1 is supported. The standardized path coefficient value between destination image and MTEs was 0.287 (P=0.000), showing that destination image affects significantly MTEs at 0.001 confidence level. The higher tourists evaluate the tourism attractions and facilities of a destination country, the more probability they experience high level MTEs including hedonism, knowledge, involvement, and refreshment etc., the hypothesis 2 is supported. Similarly, country image has a significant direct influence on MTEs with a standardized path coefficient value 0.475 (P=0.000), showing that the higher tourists evaluate the macro attributes of a destination country, the more probability they remain MTEs, the hypothesis 3 is supported. The

standardized path coefficient value between MTEs and revisit intention was 0.535 (P=0.000), showing MTEs exert a significant direct effect on revisit intention, the hypothesis 4 is also supported.

Insert table 4 about here

In order to further understand the relationships among the constructs and the mediating effect of MTEs, the direct, indirect and total effect among the explanatory and explained variable were calculated (see Table 5). The direct effect of country image on MTEs was 0.47 (P=0.000), the indirect effect on MTEs through the mediating effect of destination image was 0.13 (P=0.000). Therefore, the total effect of country image on MTEs reaches up to 0.60 (P=0.000), indicating country image is a very important factor to explain MTEs of international tourists. Both the direct and total effect of destination image on MTEs in the model were 0.29 (P=0.000), showing that destination image is also an important factor to influence MTEs. The direct and total effect of MTEs on revisit intention were 0.54 (P=0.000), providing a strong evidence to support that MTEs is a very important factor influencing revisit intention of international tourists. The influence of country image and destination image on revisit intention are indirect in the model. The indirect effect of country image on revisit intention was 0.32 (P=0.000), and the indirect effect of destination image on revisit intention was 0.15 (P=0.000). Bootstrapping test shows that all the effects are significant at 0.001 level. These results appear that MTEs mediates the relationship between country image, destination image and revisit intention in this study's model.

Insert table 5 about here

R^2 reflects explained variance of every constructs by independent variable. R^2 value of destination image was 0.20, showing that country image explains 20% variance of destination image in this study's model. While R^2 value of MTEs was 0.43, indicating that the direct and indirect effect of the two antecedents (i.e. country image and destination image) totally explain 43% variance of MTEs, further proving that country image and destination image are the most important antecedents of MTEs. R^2 value of revisit intention was 0.287, indicating country image, destination image and MTEs totally explain 28.7% variance of revisit intention. All R^2 values are greater than the recommended 0.10 value and significant at 0.001 level. (Hair et al., 2010). The f^2 effect sizes for country image-MTEs and destination image-MTEs were 0.316 and 0.116 respectively, showing that country image has a larger effect on MTEs than destination image. The f^2 effect sizes for MTEs-revisit intention is 0.402, indicating that MTEs has a large effect on revisit intention in this model. The proposed model explaining the relationship among perceived image, MTEs, and revisit intention is well supported.

Insert table 5 about here
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5. Conclusion and discussion

MTEs receive more attention as the cutting edge of tourism experience. The research mainly focuses on the topics including the essence and structure of MTEs, the subjective nature of MTEs, and what kinds of tourist experience is remembered and become MTEs. Limited research has explored the antecedents and consequences of MTEs. Based on previous research findings, this study tests the MTEs scale developed by Kim et al. in 2012 in a new international tourism context, and the causal model among perceived image, MTEs and revisit intention empirically. The construction and testing of the model contribute to further understanding of the antecedents of MTEs and the relationship between tourist experiences and revisit intention. The results prove that the proposed model is a robust and explains 43% variance of MTEs and 28.7% variance of revisit intention. This is the first attempt to integrate country image, destination image, MTEs and revisit intention into one model and test it empirically.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The first theoretical contribution of this paper is to confirm the MTEs scale developed by Kim et al. Except for deleting several items, the seven dimension MTEs scale is supported in the context of Korean tourists travelling to China mainland. These seven dimensions are hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. Among them, hedonism, refreshment, involvement, and novelty bear emotional nature; local culture, meaningfulness and knowledge tend to be cognitive. These cognitive and affective experiences reflect the connection or bond between tourists and destination, becoming the link to connect tourists and destination. Comparing with the original 24 items, this study deletes four items (i.e. indulged in the activities, enjoyed sense of freedom, unique and once-in-a-lifetime experience); this may be related to the research context. The sample of this study is Korean tourists to China mainland. Most of them are repeat visitors, adding the similar culture and short distance between two countries. They may be familiar with the destination already and therefore, unique and once-in-a-lifetime experience in novelty domain is not very prominent. In addition, there are large proportion of middle-aged and senior visitors in the sample, who tend to join in travel group, which may hinder their sense of immersion and sense of freedom. Even though deleting four items, the structure of seven dimensions of MTEs is still confirmed, indicating seven dimension MTEs scale has good universality.

The second theoretical contribution is to build and confirm the relationship model among country image, destination image, MTEs and revisit intention. In the satisfactory experience and experience quality research, some studies indicate destination image has significant influence on satisfaction and experience quality, and satisfaction has significant effect on revisit intention. However, some other research suggest that the relationship between satisfaction and tourist loyalty is weak. They argue that MTEs is the best predictor of future destination choices, while destination attributes are important antecedents of MTEs, influencing the formation of MTEs (Kim, 2014). This study tests the above proposition in an international tourism context, and builds a causal model of perceived image-MTEs-revisit intention.

For international destinations, perceived image includes perceived country image and perceived destination image. These measure impressions and beliefs of international tourists on macro attributes such as politics, economy, technology and people of destination country, and micro tourism attractions and facilities. These impressions and perceptions are tourists' evaluation and cognition on a variety of attributes of a country destination. The attractiveness of a destination

is determined by tourists' perception about the ability of that destination to meet their expectations. MTEs represent a strong connection between destination attributes and tourist needs, as they reflect what kind of memorable cognitive and affective benefits tourists receive from tourism destinations, which relate to the goals and values that tourists seek. The model in this study is in agreement with the attribute-consequence chain in Gutman's means-end theory. The higher tourists evaluate the destination attributes, the stronger the perceived ability of destinations to meet tourists' needs is, then the higher possibility of tourists to receive MTEs. The result that country image and destination image totally explain 43% variance of MTEs also confirms that perceived images are important explanation variables of MTEs. Comparing with destination image, country image has greater influence on MTEs. The findings of this study support Kim's proposition that destination attributes, such as local culture, physiography, the variety of activities, hospitality, infrastructure, environmental management (being measured in perceived image) are antecedents of MTEs. In addition, this study extends and classifies destination attributes into country image and destination image in international tourism context. This provides a classification framework for future research and destination marketing practice.

In tourism research, the antecedents of tourist loyalty may be different from general marketing because tourists always hope to explore new tourist destinations. Even though they are very satisfied with specific destination, they may not go back to the same destination and choose to explore a different region. Only those destinations, which provide memorable tourism experiences to tourists, can attract more repeat visits. Equally, destinations that fail to create MTEs do not attract tourists to revisit. The findings of this study support this argument. The standardized path coefficient from MTEs to revisit intention reaches up to 0.54, which is significant at 0.001 confidence level, showing the strong relationship between the two. The finding of this study is in accordance with the study conducted by Kim et al. in 2014, which shows MTEs is good predictors of behavior intention. However, their study measures behavior intention differently, including both revisit and recommend intention, while this study only measures revisit intention. The result has a special contribution to understanding the antecedents of revisit intention.

In summary, the causal model of 'perceived image-MTEs-revisit intention' is well supported by this empirical study, which also confirms the cognition-affection-behavior (CAB) model in international tourism area. MTEs are a mediator between perceived image and revisit intention. Perceived image influences revisit intention via the mediating effect of MTEs. It is very beneficial to understand the antecedents and consequences of MTEs and the importance of MTEs in destination competition.

5.2 Management implications

This study has important practical contributions. Firstly, some destinations still focus on providing product-oriented marketing and management practices, often neglecting to take care tourists' needs and experiences through the eyes of tourists. They fail to design and deliver tourist experiences from the tourist's perspective, but sell the tourist products supplied. It is difficult for those destinations to obtain sustainable competitiveness and development capability in the fierce tourism marketplace. The research about tourism experience and MTEs is helpful to guide the destination managers to attach importance to the role of MTEs.

Secondly, although the relationship between satisfactory experience and tourist loyalty is

weak, there is a strong causal relationship between MTEs and revisit intention. Destination marketing and management should not only remain on satisfaction management, but rather emphasize MTEs, especially for those destinations depending on repeat markets. It is critical to create MTEs everytime that tourists visits and therefore need to manage the experience differently to satisfy the second, third, fourth visit and still generate MTEs. This study is helpful for destination managers to understand how tourist experiences can be remembered and become MTEs, and what antecedents affect the formation of MTEs. This can guide destination management and marketing practices and support the development of appropriate promotional material but also influence innovation in developing tourism products and services.

Thirdly, country image and destination image are proved to be important factors to affect the formation of MTEs of international tourists. In order to facilitate MTEs, destinations should constantly improve the macro environments of country, including politics, economy, technology, environment, and people, as well as their micro attributes including tourism attractions and facilities. The marketing and management efforts of country branding are also beneficial to build a good country brand image in international tourist's minds. In this study, the respondents gave a relatively high evaluation on Chinese destination image (mean=3.73), so that having greater contributions on the formation of MTEs. The evaluation on the China country image is average (mean=3.15), which inhibits the ability of Korean tourists developing MTEs in China. China could design special marketing plans for the Korean market based on this study's finding. At the same time, China should make efforts to improve politics, economy, technology, environment, attractions and facilities to improve its image.

5.3 Future research directions

While this study develops the theoretical model to investigate the relationship among country image, destination image, MTEs and revisit intention, which is helpful to understand the causal relationship among these constructs, more research is needed to further validate and extend these concepts. Firstly, future research with samples from different populations would be useful to justify the results and to address the possible problems of case-building and confirmation bias. Secondly, based on the findings, future research could further develop the relationship model to explore the relationship among the dimensions of country image, destination image and the dimensions of MTEs. This would be useful to get fine-grained understanding about the way of perceived image influencing MTEs, and develop more specific guidelines for destination managers. Thirdly, future study is also needed to test the influence of MTEs on recommendation intention, and explore the similarities and differences of MTEs-revisit and MTEs-recommendation relationship. Fourthly, this study doesn't test the direct effects of perceived image on revisit intention and affective images are also not considered in the model. Future research can add these constructs and paths in the model. Fifthly, post-visit country and destination image measurements are used in this study to investigate the influence of post-visit image on MTEs and revisit intention. An inverse relationship is also confirmed by some research, which indicate emotional experience is the antecedent of overall image (Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou, & Kaplanidou, 2015; Prayag, Hosany, Muskat, & Del Chiappa, 2017). But these research papers do not include cognitive image, and emotional experience that are different from MTEs in conceptualization and measurement. Future research can further test the relationship between pre-visit image, post-visit image and MTEs. Additionally, recent advances in the field of ICT technology such as social media, mobile

technology provide great opportunities for destinations to create memorable experience for tourists (Neuhofer, Buhalis, Ladkin, 2015, 2014, 2012). Future research can further explore how emerging technologies can facilitate tourist experiences cocreation and enable smart destinations to dynamically contextualize and individualize experiences towards delighting tourists in real time every time they visit a destination (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015). This is an emerging area that will enable destinations to improve their competitiveness and effectively create partnerships with their tourists towards maximizing benefits for everybody involved in the cocreation of value.

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Tables

Table 1 The dimensions of MTEs in literatures

Author	Dimensions of MTEs being examined	Dimensions of MTEs affecting memory
Tung & Ritchie (2011a)	Affect, expectations, consequentiality, recollection	Qualitative research/no quantitative test
Tung & Ritchie (2011b)	Identity formation, family milestones, relationship development, nostalgia reenactment, freedom pursuits	Qualitative research/no quantitative test
Quadri-Felitti & Fiore (2013)	Educational, esthetic, entertainment, escapist	Educational, esthetic
Ali, Hussain, & Ragavan (2014)	Educational, esthetic, entertainment, escapist	Educational, esthetic, entertainment, escapist
Chandralal, Rindfleish, & Valenzuela (2015)	Local people/life and culture, personally significant experiences, shared experiences, perceived novelty, perceived serendipity, professional guides and tour operator services, affective emotions	Qualitative research/no quantitative test
Ali, Ryu, & Hussain (2016)	Escape and recognition, peace of mind, unique involvement, interactivity, learning	No dimension level test, the second-order tourist experience influences memories
Kim, Ritchie, & Tung (20l0) Tsai (2016)	Hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, novelty	Involvement, hedonism, local culture

Table 2 Assessment of the first order measurement model and descriptive statistics

Items	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis	Loading	t-value	CR	AVE
Country characteristic						0.829	0.708
China is politically stable	3.43	.061	-.387	0.825	24.379		
China is a democratic country	2.94	.084	-.440	0.857	35.751		
China plays an important role in world politics*	3.85	-.554	-.262				
China has the ability to affect the international affairs*	4.08	-.958	.549				
Country competence						0.803	0.671
China is a wealthy country*	3.27	.204	-.363				
China has advanced economy development*	4.14	-1.296	1.074				
There is a high level of modernization in China	3.31	.120	.158	0.835	27.121		
China has advanced Technology	3.25	.007	-.099	0.803	25.000		
People characteristic						0.901	0.646
Chinese people are friendly	3.00	.037	-.205	0.752	22.413		
Chinese people are polite	2.80	.197	-.201	0.817	35.165		
Chinese people are trustworthy	2.93	-.102	-.255	0.848	47.062		
Chinese people are honest	3.04	-.066	-.082	0.810	38.566		
Chinese people have work ethics	2.93	-.150	.109	0.790	25.449		
People competence						0.826	0.613
Chinese people are diligent	3.07	.132	-.184	0.761	21.461		
Chinese people are smart	3.32	.167	.275	0.824	31.655		
Chinese people have a high level of education level	3.05	.169	.031	0.764	23.307		
Environmental management						0.898	0.745
Environment concern in China is priority	2.82	.143	-.690	0.856	47.851		
China has effective environmental protection scheme	2.95	.006	-.416	0.873	45.191		
China has a strict control on environmental pollution	2.87	.099	-.446	0.860	36.849		
The relationship between countries						0.919	0.790
Korea has a good relationship with China	3.58	-.106	-.397	0.905	74.816		
Korea has a close tie with China	3.74	-.484	-.173	0.904	64.194		
There is similar cultural tradition between China and Korea	3.66	-.517	-.127	0.858	42.490		
Natural attractions						0.866	0.764
China has a good natural environment	3.83	-.761	.070	0.861	36.365		
China is clean*	2.84	.096	-.358				
The environment is not polluted in China*	3.00	-.097	-.726				
China has beautiful natural landscape	4.17	-1.296	1.555	0.887	54.534		
China has a variety of outdoor activities*	3.16	.046	.304				
Cultural attractions						0.889	0.728
China has many historical and cultural heritages	4.14	-1.220	1.405	0.823	20.193		
China has unique life style and custom	3.88	-.659	-.265	0.874	45.225		
China's historical culture is unique	4.05	-1.119	1.241	0.861	35.823		
Tourism facilities						0.838	0.632
China has suitable accommodation	3.39	-.147	-.378	0.814	34.192		
China has a good shopping environment	3.19	.069	-.167	0.801	17.110		

China has a rich cuisine	3.16	-.145	-.617	0.770	21.620		
Hedonism						0.896	0.743
Thrilled about having a new experience	3.56	-.450	-.091	0.831	32.641		
Indulged in the activities*	3.17	-.053	-.128				
Really enjoyed this tourism experience	3.64	-.236	-.048	0.872	49.229		
Exciting	3.49	-.156	-.435	0.882	57.771		
Novelty						0.847	0.735
Once-in-a lifetime experience*	2.67	.155	-.889				
Unique experience*	2.74	.053	-1.090				
Different from previous experiences	3.26	-.257	-.239	0.848	43.473		
Experienced something new	3.39	-.247	-.351	0.867	44.290		
Local culture						0.878	0.707
Good impressions about the local people	3.20	-.056	.191	0.825	29.091		
Closely experienced the local culture	3.31	-.131	-.287	0.821	35.743		
Local people in a destination were friendly	3.16	.151	-.164	0.875	57.477		
Refreshment						0.865	0.682
Liberating	3.25	-.032	-.350	0.843	40.140		
Enjoyed sense of freedom*	3.52	-.154	-.434				
Refreshing	3.29	.081	-.064	0.778	23.389		
Revitalized	3.55	-.061	-.509	0.855	47.539		
Meaningfulness						0.885	0.720
I did something meaningful	3.21	-.170	-.005	0.879	46.546		
I did something important	3.02	-.150	-.226	0.879	39.756		
Learned about myself	3.24	-.199	-.045	0.784	17.675		
Involvement						0.871	0.693
I visited a place where I really wanted to go	3.77	-.551	-.260	0.760	15.887		
I enjoyed activities which I really wanted to do	3.43	-.343	-.080	0.868	46.169		
I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience	3.41	-.396	.485	0.864	49.311		
Knowledge						0.880	0.711
Exploratory	3.27	-.065	.137	0.868	52.746		
Knowledge	3.44	-.393	-.087	0.883	52.332		
New culture	3.64	-.290	-.469	0.774	15.841		
Revisit intention						0.921	0.795
I tend to visit China again	3.92	-.684	.257	0.901	63.933		
I'd love to come to China again	3.75	-.590	-.004	0.888	44.982		
I think I will come back to China in near future	3.70	-.533	-.092	0.887	45.540		

Note: * represents the items deleted in measurement model test.

Table 3 Assessment of the second order measurement model

Second-order constructs	First- order constructs	Path coefficient	t- value
Country image	Country characteristic	0.157	27.338
(formative)	Country competence	0.155	29.384
	People characteristic	0.377	40.188
	People competence	0.220	28.398
	Environmental management	0.241	32.640
	The relationship between countries	0.250	31.238
Destination image	Natural attractions	0.328	14.803
(formative)	Cultural attractions	0.511	14.899
	Tourism facilities	0.410	10.521
MTEs	Hedonism	0.834	30.322
(reflective)	Novelty	0.770	30.160
	Local culture	0.768	16.972
	Refreshment	0.879	53.741
	Meaningfulness	0.782	25.854
	Involvement	0.860	46.698
	Knowledge	0.797	26.194

Table 4 Hypotheses test

	Hypotheses	Path coefficient β	t-value	P value	Result
H1	Country image→destination image	0.447	8.765	0.000	supported
H2	Destination image→MTEs	0.287	5.718	0.000	supported
H3	Country image→MTEs	0.475	9.367	0.000	supported
H4	MTEs→revisit intention	0.535	11.559	0.000	supported

Table 5 Effect deconstruction of structural model (Standardized value)

Explanatory variable	Explained variable								
	Destination image			MTEs			Revisit intention		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
Country image	0.45	-	0.45	0.47	0.13	0.60	-	0.32	0.32
Destination image				0.29	-	0.29	-	0.15	0.15
MTEs							0.54	-	0.54

Note: DE: direct effect, IE: indirect effect, TE: total effect.

Figure 1 Conceptual model

Country image → H3 → Memorable tourism experiences → H4 → Revisit intention

Country image → H1 → Destination image → H2 → Memorable tourism experiences

Attribute perception → Cognitive and affection benefits → Behavior response