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The Effects of Online and Face-to-face Experiential Value Co-creation on Tourists' Wellbeing

As the rapid and sustained development of the information communication technology (ICT), tourists can be constantly connected with their original environment. ICT has changed the travel experience which may further influence their satisfactions and wellbeing. The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of online and face-to-face experiential value co-creation on the wellbeing of tourists by using a mixed-methods approach. After introducing scales developed by interviews into a PLS-SEM model, this study reveals that both online and face-to-face experiential value co-creation has positive impact on satisfaction and wellbeing. The trade-off between the two types of co-creations is not significant.

Key words: online experience, face-to-face experience, value co-creation, satisfaction, wellbeing

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Introduction

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is integrated into our daily lives, and tourism is not an exception (Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2016). Debates on the effects of the Internet have long existed since its beginning. Traditionally, tourists keep a distance from their original social network when they get away from home and visit a destination. Such physical and mental detachment contributes to the desire for relaxation and recovery when travelling (Jansson, 2007; Lehto, 2013; Kirillova & Wang, 2016). However, the rapid development of online communication platforms and social media enables people to constantly engage with the environment regardless of distance and time. People in the online world have the need to be connected wherever and whenever. Tourists' experience and own welfare may have changed dramatically (Neuhofer & Ladkin, 2017; Tanti & Buhalis, 2017; Graburn, 2017). Jansson (2007) argued that information technology has changed tourists' perceptions and behaviours. The encapsulation and decapsulation of tourism, as well as the critical degree to which tourists favour most, must be reconsidered given the unavoidable intervention of the online presence. Understanding tourists' travel behaviour, especially their online and face-to-face social behaviours, can help industry operators make suitable decisions regarding how to provide desirable travel experience. However, such hybrid travel experience is not fully investigated from both the academia and the industry. To bridge this research gap, the current study aims to explore tourists' online and face-to-face experiential value co-creation, the trade-off effect of online experiential value co-creation on face-to-face experiential value co-creation, and to examine their effects on tourists' travel satisfaction and wellbeing.

The informants comprised Mainland Chinese tourists who had overseas travel experience in the last two years and used online social platforms to contact others during their trips. Chinese tourists are targeted for the current study because China is the largest outbound

tourist market globally (UNWTO, 2017) the salient usage coverage of the Internet, e-commerce, and social media in this country (China Internet Network Information Center, 2017).

Hypotheses development and modelling building

The literature indicated a positive effect of value co-creation on tourists' travel satisfaction and subjective well-being (SWB). It is stated that the degree and efficacy of co-creation can influence tourists' satisfaction with the travel companies (Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Prebensen & Xie, 2017). Furthermore, various studies have identified a positive effect of tourism experience on tourists' SWB (Pera & Viglia, 2015; Kim, Woo, & Uysal, 2015; Saayman et al., 2018). Thus, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1a: Online experiential value co-creation has a positive effect on travel satisfaction.

H1b: Face-to-face experiential value co-creation has a positive effect on travel satisfaction.

H2a: Online experiential value co-creation has a positive effect on tourists' SWB.

H2b: Face-to-face experiential value co-creation has a positive effect on tourists' SWB.

Research also indicates that travel satisfaction can positively influence tourists' SWB (Saayman et al., 2018). The bottom-up spillover theory implies that overall wellbeing is affected by the satisfaction of all life domains, for example, health, family, leisure and recreation, finance, social life, and work, and are further affected by concrete events through a "bottom-up spillover" of effect (Sirgy & Lee, 2006). Thus, a vocation experience affects the leisure domain of one's wellbeing, which further affects one's overall wellbeing (Neal et al., 1999, 2007; Saayman et al., 2018). The hypothesis is proposed as:

H3: Travel satisfaction has a positive effect on tourists' SWB.

As the development of ICT, debates on the effects of the Internet have long existed since its beginning. In general, studies tend to indicate that, the usage of online devices during travel may have a trade-off effect on their offline time (Jansson, 2007; Fan et al., 2019). The more that people are interacting with online social networks, the less time and effort they may have to interact face to face with the others, such as local people, travel companion and other tourists. Thus, the hypothesis can be proposed as:

H4: Online experiential value co-creation has a negative effect on face-to-face experiential value co-creation.

The overall conceptual model of this study is presented in Figure 1.

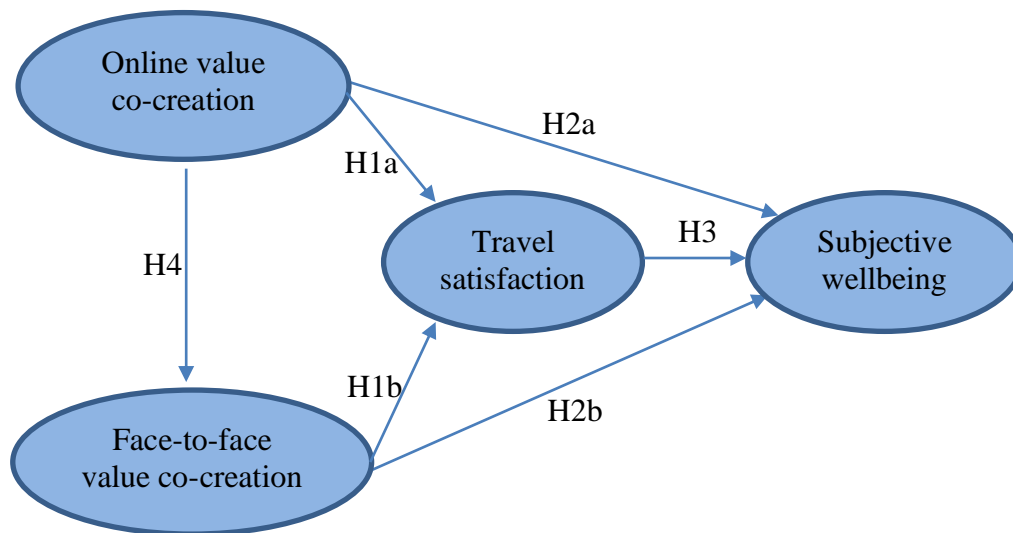


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

Methodology

In the absence of online and face-to-face experiential value co-creation measurements, the mixed-methods approach was adopted to develop the valid and reliable measurement instruments and to test the proposed model. In the stage of scale development, Churchill's (1979) scale development procedure was followed. Item pools were formed from both the literature and 51 semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol included three parts. First, the interviewees were prepared for the topic by being asked about their recent overseas travel experiences. Second, the respondents were requested to evoke their social contact both physically in the destinations and via any online social platform during their travel and how they felt and what they valued about those contact activities. Third, the informants were invited to share their demographic information. The interviewee recruitment stopped when information saturation was reached. NVivo 11 was used to code the transcripts. A total of 26 items emerged for the online experiential value co-creation and 25 items for the face-to-face experiential value co-creation as a result of the literature review, interviews and expert panel review.

A questionnaire was developed to obtain the respondents' perceptions of different constructs using a five-point Likert-type agreement scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Besides the newly developed scales, the measurement of travel satisfaction and SWB were adopted from Saayman et al. (2018).

A professional research company was hired in October and November 2018 to collect survey data via the company's online database. A pilot test (n = 150) was conducted prior to the main survey to ensure the clarity of instructions, evaluate the entire data collection duration, and perform exploratory factor analysis (EFA). A total of 500 valid responses were collected. SPSS was used to perform the EFA and SmartPLS was applied to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM).

Findings

Among the 500 participants in the main survey, 59% were female, while 83.8% were married with children. A total of 35% were between 30 and 39 years old, while 19% were between 40 and 49 years old. Approximately 80% held a bachelor's degree or above. In terms of employment, 51.4% were managers and administrators, while 24.2% identified themselves as professionals. Over 90% of the respondents earned a monthly income 10,000 RMB or above.

The EFA result indicated that three factors emerged for online experiential value co-creation, namely, intrinsic/extrinsic enjoyment (nine items), logistics (five items), and efficiency (four items) values. Two factors emerged for face-to-face experiential value co-creation, namely Egotistic value (10 items) and altruistic value (five items).

Due to the complicity of the model, second-order CFA was performed to further validate the online and face-to-face experimental value co-creation measurement scales. The EFA results were the bases for creating a hypothetical model with three constructs. The measurement model was assessed in terms of validity and reliability. The reliability was examined by the composite reliability and ρ As. The construct validity was examined by convergent, discriminant, nomological, and criterion validity. All the indices passed the cut-off points and the CFA results were acceptable.

As indicated in Figure 2, both types of experiential value co-creation had positive effects on travel satisfaction and SWB. Meanwhile, travel satisfaction had a positive effect on tourists' SWB. Interestingly, the online experiential value co-creation did not have a significant negative effect on face-to-face one, which denied the trade-off effect argued by the previous literature.

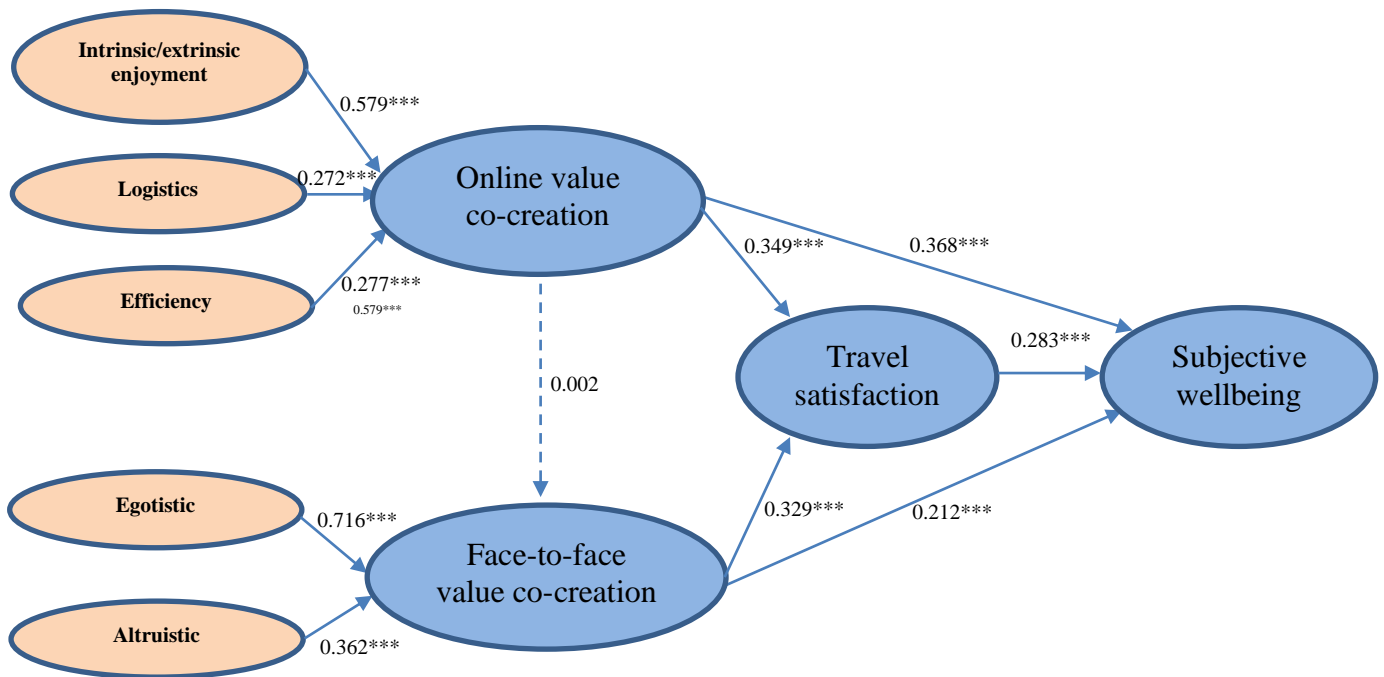


Figure 2. Final Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients

Discussion and conclusion

By applying a mixed-methods approach, the current study explores the relationship among online and face-to-face experiential value co-creation, travel satisfaction and tourists' SWB. First, valid and reliable measurement scales of online and face-to-face experiential value co-creation were developed. It is evident that tourists co-create different experiential values through online and face-to-face contacts. Tourists tend to establish enjoyment, logistics and efficiency values through online platform, whereas besides the egotistic values that have been identified in online experiential value, face-to-face social contact also enabled the altruistic values, such as recommending destinations to the others, destination promotions and sharing experience. Such kind of experience co-created through personal and physical contact is part of their existential travel experience as stated by Wang (1999) in the tourism authenticity.

Second, results also support that both online and face-to-face experiential value co-creation could positively influence tourists' travel satisfaction and SWB, which supplements the literature by specifying the kinds of value co-creation and their roles. In addition, this study also argues that tourists' online and face-to-face experiential value-co-creation is not related to each other, which indicates that, tourists' are parallelly co-creating different kinds of experience via different contact ways and such kind of hybrid travel experience tends to enrich their overall travel experience, rather than gradually switching their face-to-face social contact to online social contact.

The current study also provides rich practical implications to the industry. By identifying different dimensions of online and face-to-face experiential value co-creation, the study claims a clear scope of the experience that can be co-create by tourists during travel. Tourism product designers and operators could aim to facilitate both kinds of co-creation activities by, for example, enhancing their connectivity level, promoting experience sharing campaign and designing social space in attractions to encourage personal interactions and contact. Tourists can also benefit from the findings that, both kinds of experience co-creation can lead to a favourable travel satisfaction, and most importantly, a better SWB. Experiential value co-creation, regardless of virtually or physically, can positively influence tourists SWB, especially the social wellbeing. Thus, travel can be considered as an effect way to enhance individuals' quality of life and can even be a supplementary non-intrusive social intervention for people with particular wellbeing issues.

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