

# **An Overview of Moderating Effect of Familiarity on Tourism Resources and Future Behavioural Intentions: A Study on Domestic Tourists Visiting Ningxia, China**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Tourism resources is one of the most important destination attributes which helps to create an image for the destination and attract the tourists. This study aims to investigate how the domestic tourists visiting Ningxia evaluates Ningxia's destination attributes (Tourism Resources) and how their evaluation future behavioural intentions, that is, their intention to recommend and to revisit Ningxia. The study will also investigate how destination familiarity moderates the relationship of destination attributes evaluations and future behavioural intentions. In the current study, the researchers reviewed the literatures in order to explore domestic tourists' travelling behaviour, experiences, and some extensive discussions on their satisfaction level. The researchers have conducted a general search for tourists' behaviour, and more specifically on moderating role destination familiarity on future behavioural intentions. This study made the contribution towards body of knowledge by reviewing previous literatures related to the evaluation of destination attributes. The study revealed that, when tourists choose a place to visit, they are attracted by destination attributes, more specifically by tourism related resources in the destination.*

**Keywords:** Destination Attributes, Tourism Resources, Destination Familiarity, Future Behavioural Intentions, Domestic Tourists, Ningxia China

## **Introduction**

Tourism is considered as an economic driver for present and future generations for many countries for its socio-economic contribution (Mahadevan, Amir, & Nugroho, 2017). According to UNWTO (2017), 2016 was an outstanding year for tourism in terms of economic contribution to the world. In Africa and Asia Pacific region, international tourist arrivals had increased for the 7th consecutive year to reach 1.235 billion (a growth of 4% over 2015) with the strongest growth recorded (UNWTO, 2017).

Tourism industry is said to be highly dependent on natural resources, due to that the tourism industry is vulnerable to natural disaster (Jiang & Ritchie, 2017). Besides the natural disaster, the tourism industry in some countries face challenging moments from some man-made disasters which lead to the decline in international tourist arrivals (Ritchie, Crofts, Zehrer, & Volsky, 2014; Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016), such as communication crises (Luo & Zhai, 2017), economic crisis (Eugenio-Martin & Campos-Soria, 2014), and geopolitical tensions (Avraham, 2015). On these circumstances, domestic tourism plays a significant role by sustaining services and jobs, compensating the loss of inbound tourism and reducing the disparity amongst regions' development (Yang, Wang, & Chen, 2011; Hosie & Pforr, 2016). Domestic tourism is also the key to national integration (Nair & Ramachandran, 2016), besides redistributing wealth within the country, stimulate domestic demands and employment, and counter the seasonal nature of international tourism (Rogerson & Visser, 2011; Okello, Kenana, & Kieti, 2012). Because of this, most governments are now promoting domestic tourism (Patwary & Hamimi, 2016; Molokomme, Tsoanamatsie, Karuaihe, Mashile, & Nhemachena, 2016).

In aligning with other countries, tourism is becoming an important part of Chinese residents' life, especially for those living in the well-developed regions such as in the south and in the east of China (Zhang, Guillet, & Gao, 2012). Level of tourism development was the combination of several factors, such as; the level of economic development, resources and location, infrastructures and tourism policies (Qian, Wang, & Wu, 2012). As shown in Figure 1, in 2017, Chinese tourists made 2.8 billion trips within the country compared to 136.5 million outbound trips. The trend reflects in tourist spending, as total outbound tourist expenditure stood at \$220.6 bn, whereas domestic tourist expenditure registered \$679.1bn in 2017.

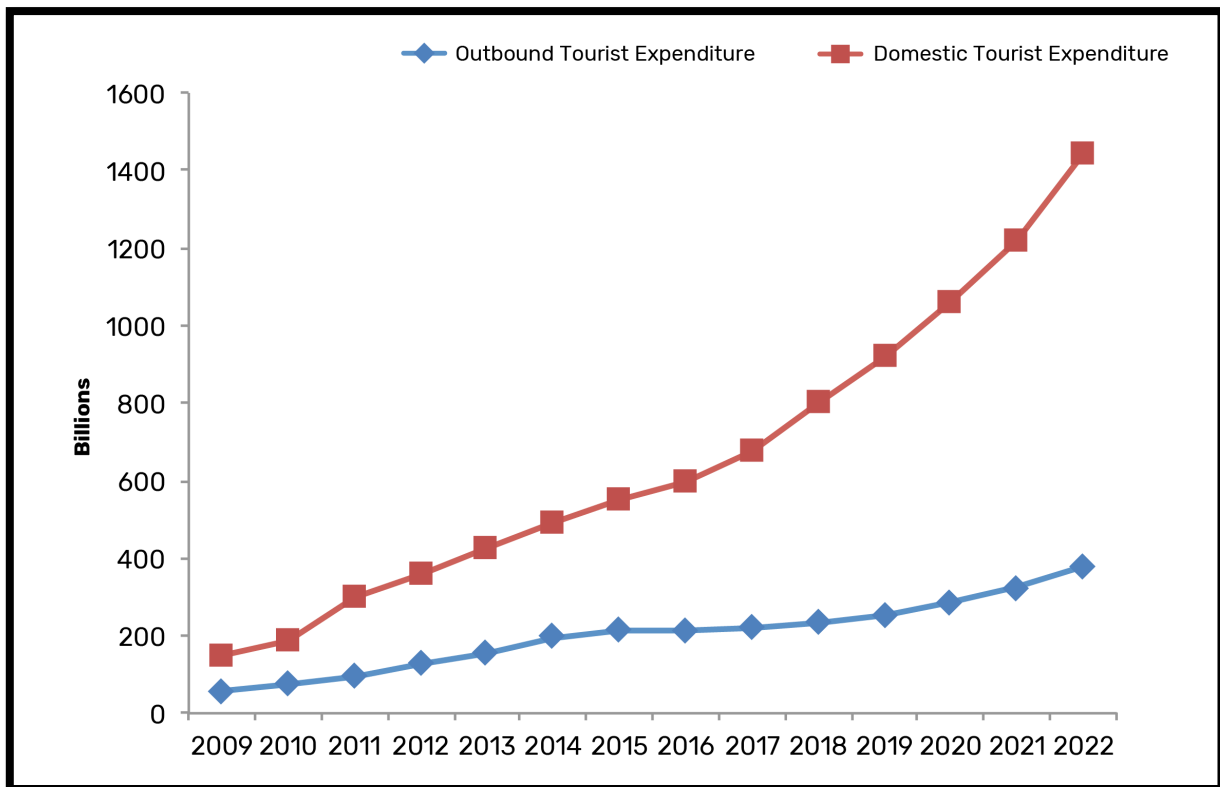


Figure 1: Domestic and Outbound Tourists Expenditures in China (USD); (Source: Global Data, 2018)

The regional unbalance appeared on the development of China which seems sophisticated, although there was a significant gap among the provinces (Goh, Li, & Zhang, 2015). Overall, the level of tourism development in the north-west inland part of China is much lower than the south-east coastal part of China (Luo, Qiu, & Lam, 2016). China's tourism policies have accelerated an unbalanced interregional development through providing less supports for inland regions instead of arranging support for the coastal international tourism industry (Bao & Ma, 2011; Luo, Qiu, & Lam, 2016). This is true for Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, one of the inland provinces lying in the north-west part of China. Ningxia is known for its beautiful natural landscape and numerous historical sites, and home to the largest concentration of Hui people - a predominantly Muslim minority ethnic group (Gladney, 1998).

This study aims to investigate how the domestic tourists visiting Ningxia evaluates Ningxia's destination attributes (tourism resources) and how their evaluation effect their future behavioural intentions, that is, their intention to recommend and to revisit Ningxia. The study will also investigate how destination familiarity moderates the relationship of destination attributes evaluations and future behavioural intentions.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Tourism Resources***

According to Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly, & Luk, (2008), destinations refer to the locations such as countries, regions, and cities visited by tourists which have multiple attributes (such as climate conditions, natural and historical values, accessibility) that distinguish them from the other destinations (Sirakaya, McLellan, & Uysal, 1996). Destinations consists of several attributes that significantly affect visitors at different stages. For example, a favourable image of a destination formed by a combination of the destination's attributes which are beautiful landscape, shopping opportunities for tourists, cultural exchange, infrastructure, safety, and activities. These attributes significantly affect tourists' destination choices (Kim, Hallab, et al., 2012).

Tourism resources have been considered as one of the important destination attributes which helps to create an image and attract more tourists on the destination. Herington, Merrilees, and Wilkins (2013), identified six main components of destination attractiveness features through literature: (1) actual attractions are comprised of the natural scenery and climate, and human-made attractions i.e. architectural attractions, historical attractions, cultural event, sporting event, and theme parks; (2) service includes food and accommodation; (3) facilities are accessibility, infrastructure, shopping, transport; (4) reputation includes the overall picture of the destination, attitudes to tourists and tourism; (5) social component is considered how locals look after the destination; and (6) economic is whether the attractiveness of the destination is worth for money spent for the holiday. Based on the above discussion, the hypothesis formulated as below:

***Hypothesis 1: Evaluation of tourism resources in the destination influences the future intentions of domestic tourists visiting Ningxia.***

### ***Destination Familiarity***

Destination familiarity refers to the visual or mental impression of a destination or tourist experience and can stimulate travel intention to visit those places (Milman & Pizam, 1995). According to Tan & Chang, (2016), the familiarity has been defined as knowledge about the places, including travel knowledge and information sources, are now extensively accepted influences on destinations attributes. Consumers familiarity with a product or services have been extensively used in product categories (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987) and consumer decision making (Bettman & Park, 1980). Maestro, Munoz-Gallego, and Requejo (2007) pointed that travel destination familiarity plays a vital role in the process of evaluating the information related to the destination. Perceptions of service quality, personality, or satisfaction can affect the evaluated process of destination familiarity, thus, determine the customer's attitude and intention to travel to that destination (Horng, Liu, Chou, & Tsai, 2012).

In this context, destination familiarity has a significant moderating role between destination attributes (tourism resources) and future behavioural intentions. Studies have shown that familiarity has important effects on the destination searching behaviour of tourists (Baloglu, 2001). When tourists are about to select either familiar or unfamiliar destinations, at very first stage, they search memories and previous experiences for familiar information to guide their decision. Tourist familiarity with a travel destination leads them to direct acquisition of available information from their memory. Therefore, tourist experiences and memories could thrive the destination selection process. As stated by Sharifpour et al. (2014), destination familiarity can be conceptualized based on the combination of these aspects, which are awareness, knowledge, experience and expertise. Moreover, the operationalization of familiarity has been inconsistent and blurred by the different definitions of familiarity. Nonetheless, the existing literature regarding familiarity and its related concepts attempted to develop a model for investigating the interdependency between different types of familiarity (Tan & Wu, 2015). Based on the above discussion, the hypothesis formulated as below:

***Hypothesis 2: Familiarity in a destination moderates the relationship between tourism resources evaluations and future behavioural intentions of domestic tourists visiting Ningxia.***

### ***Future Behavioural Intentions***

The evaluation of post consumption is a complex process as it involves the measurements of a number of constructs (Weaver, 2012). The consequences of an evaluation are often described in term of tourists' perception of quality, value and satisfaction. However, the result of visit evaluation is more beneficial if it is examined beyond these consequences such as recommendation and revisit (Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur, & Leistriz, 2013). Thus, repurchase intention and willingness to recommend to others are well-established measurements for consumers' future behaviours. Tourism literature has proven that tourists with higher levels of satisfaction are more inclined to visit the destination again, willing to give more positive word-of-mouth (WOM) and to recommend the destination to others (Kuo, Chang, Cheng & Lin, 2016). For instance, satisfied tourists may visit a place and recommend it to others, or they might have a favourable belief about that place (Ranjbarian & Pool, 2015).

On the other hand, an unsatisfied tourist may not revisit the place and will not recommend it to others. The dissatisfied tourist may have negative ideas about the destination and thus impair its market reputation (Patwary & Rashid, 2016; Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Additionally, it always benefits the destination if visitors went home feeling satisfied and spread good word-of-mouth, recommend and encourage others to visit the destination (Patwary & Rashid, 2016). Such positive actions would generate a continuous flow of visitors to the destination and consequently help towards sustainability (Martin, O'Neill, Hubbard, & Palmer, 2008). Therefore, anticipating tourist future intentions would be a good way to instrument a destination's future direction.

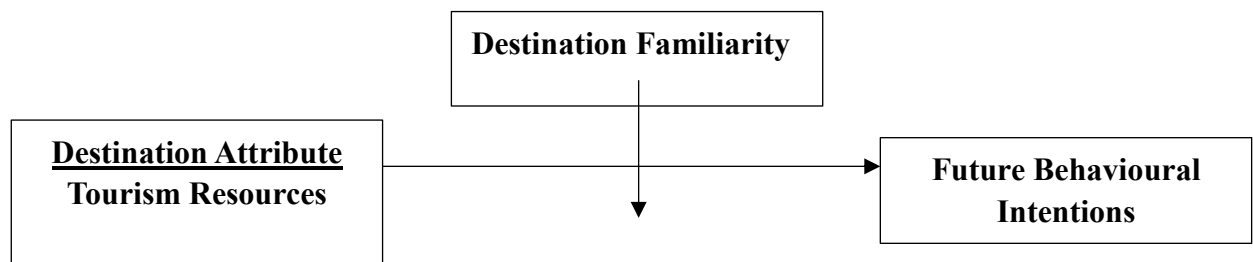


Figure 2: Proposed Research Framework

### **Methodology**

In current study, the researchers relied on existing literature to explore domestic tourists' behaviour, experiences, and some extensive discussions on their satisfaction level. This review study examined the perspective of tourists experience in terms of destination attributes, destination familiarity and future behavioural intentions based on existing literature. Throughout the study, the researchers have conducted a general search for tourists' behavior, and stepwise more specifically on how destination familiarity moderate the relationship on future behavioural intentions. Researchers gathered the information by searching in different online database sources such as Google Scholars, Springer Link, Research Gate, Wiley, Science Direct, Taylor and Francis, JSTOR, Emerald, Scopus, Repository of Universiti Utara Malaysia Library, WorldCAT, and EBSCO HOST etc. During the searching of articles, the researchers have tried to figure out the most relevant articles, conference proceedings, books, published dissertations in order to provide an extensive review of the topic and as well as to provide legitimate suggestions for future study. The review has been examined on the basis of research objectives, methods and findings of the study in accordance with previous empirical and conceptual studies on that particular subject area.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Study**

China is the largest domestic and outbound travel market in the world and even though international visitors from China are a force too big to ignore, domestic traffic is far outstripping outbound traffic in the country. As a result, a growing number of players are seeking to effectively tap into this market. It is the right time for authorities to look after the development of domestic tourism in China when outbound tourism causes rapid outsource of the money from China. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by review previous literatures related to the evaluation of destination attributes. The study revealed that, while tourists choosing a place to visit, they are attracted on destination attributes, more specifically on tourism related

resources in the destination. In order to increase the repeat domestic visitors, the authorities must consider increasing natural and artificial tourism resources in the destination. When tourists are about to select the destination for next visit, tourists consider their familiarity, memories and experiences related to any particular destination. As a result, tourists familiarity and previous experiences with a travel destination lead them to obtain available information from their memory. Furthermore, by understanding the domestic tourists' travel experience and satisfactions, tourism stakeholders and Ningxia Tourism Bureau will be able to better comprehend what different people want from their visit in Ningxia. The future studies in this area should explore more on empirical investigation rather merely focusing on the basis of literature review. While measuring destination attributes, besides tourism resources, there are other aspects of destination attributes (e.g. tourism amenities, tourism supporting factors, service experience, travel environment).

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