The relationship between destination brand experience and brand trust: difference by travel information search type

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Abstract

In this study, we try to determine what type of moderating effect travel information search type has on the relationship between destination brand experience (DBEX) and destination brand trust (DBT). Additionally, we will also investigate the influence of travel information search type on the tourist behavioral intention (TBI) in research related to tourism destination brands.

This analysis showed that, among the two DBEX factors, the factor describing the senory and affective elements had a significantly positive causal relationship with DBT. Our results also revealed a significantly positive causal relationship between DBT and TBI. In contrast, the behavioral and intellectual elements were not significant. This shows that trust in a destination is influenced by affective experiences such as atmosphere or tourists' impressions rather than physical experiences such as tourists' physical activities or learning experiences. Furthermore, This paper noted a stronger influence of non-digital media in the moderating effect according to the information search type. This shows that providing non-digital media is still effective at communicating destination trust to tourists in this era of digital media.

Keywords: destination brand experience, destination brand trust, travel information search type

1. Introduction

The term "destination brand" started to be used in the tourism marketing field in 1998. Organizations involved in tourism marketing in regions all over the world have entered the so-called "era of destination brand competition" (Blain et al., 2005). Research on destination brands is important because travelers tend to rely on the overall reputation of a destination. Despite the fact that information technology has made it easier to gather tourism-related information, it remains difficult to evaluate all the benefits and shortcomings of each tourism destination. The research has considered tourism destination branding as a kind of product or service and has proposed ways of leaving a positive impression among travelers.

This paper empirically examines the relationship between two concepts used in research related to tourism destination brands: "destination brand experience(DBEX)" and "destination brand trust (DBT)". DBEX is used to evaluate the experience value a tourist gives to a tourism activity and has gained much attention as a variable influencing a tourist's intention to revisit. As tourists face various risks and doubts when traveling to an unfamiliar destination (Cai, 2002), destinations must be recognized as locations where tourists can engage safely in tourism activities (Hus and Cai, 2009). Structuring destinations in a way that ensures safe tourism

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activities can earn the trust of tourists and increase their intention to revisit. This study therefore aims to verify the role of DBT as an intervening variable between DBEX and a tourist's intention to revisit. The study also seeks to determine the type of moderating effect travel information search type has on the relationship between DBEX and DBT, and on the tourist behavioral intention (TBI) i.e., intention to revisit.

Finding the best strategies for attracting more customers and increasing the number of revisits is a key issue in modern tourism destination marketing. This involves improving the quality of services at destinations and accurately transmitting the complicated information tourists require for their tourism activities.

Amid the wide variety of tourism information, the information search types tourists use vary depending on the tourist's preferred traveling style. Although more groups are now using SNS (social network services) and other forms of digital information media, some groups still prefer to use older types of information media, such as travel agency pamphlets and specialized travel books. Investigating the potential moderating effect of information search types used by tourists on the relationship between DBEX and DBT, or on the TBI, should assist the design of effective strategies for attracting revisiting customers.

2. Related research

2.1 Brand experience and destination brand experience

Several experience-based concepts drawn from a variety of perspectives were proposed before Pine and Gilmore (1998) advocated the economic value of experiences, such as product experience, service experience, and customer experience. Brakus et al. (2009) proposed the concept of "brand experience," arguing that attention must be paid to changes in the experiences provided by brands over time. They defined brand experiences as the "subjective and internal reactions and behavioral reactions of consumers established by stimuli (such as colors, shapes, design elements, fonts, slogans, mascots, titles, logos, product packaging, marketing, and communication) related to brands." This definition has had a significant effect on the current business climate, in which companies strive to create brands for products, services, and consumer activities amid fierce competition. Brakus et al. (2009) explain that brand experience includes the process of evaluating the sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses created by brand-related stimuli and does not include decision-making regarding a given brand.

Tourism research has increasingly focused on tourist and tourism experience since 2000(Schmitt, 1999). Research based on the concept of "strategic marketing" proposed by Oh et al. (2007) and Wu and Liang (2009), and research based on the concept of "comprehensive brand experience" proposed by Brakus et al. (2009), Beckman et al. (2013) and Barnes et al. (2014), has overtaken research based on the economic concept of experience proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998). The research on "MDE" (memorable destination experiences) of Hudson and Ritchie (2009) and studies on "MTE" (memorable tourism experiences) by Kim (2014) have taken the complexity of destination experiences into consideration.

Figure 1 provides a map of research topics related to brand experience, based on the characteristics of each experience concept. The concepts of service and customer experience are more affective than the concept of product experiences, and have multi-dimensional characteristics involving direct contact. The concept of brand experience integrates attibutes of all the other experience concepts, from product to destination, but is based more on affective elements than on physical ones. Destination brand experiences have direct, affective, and multi-dimensional characteristics, and include some service and consumption experience areas.

Figure 1. Differences between experience concepts
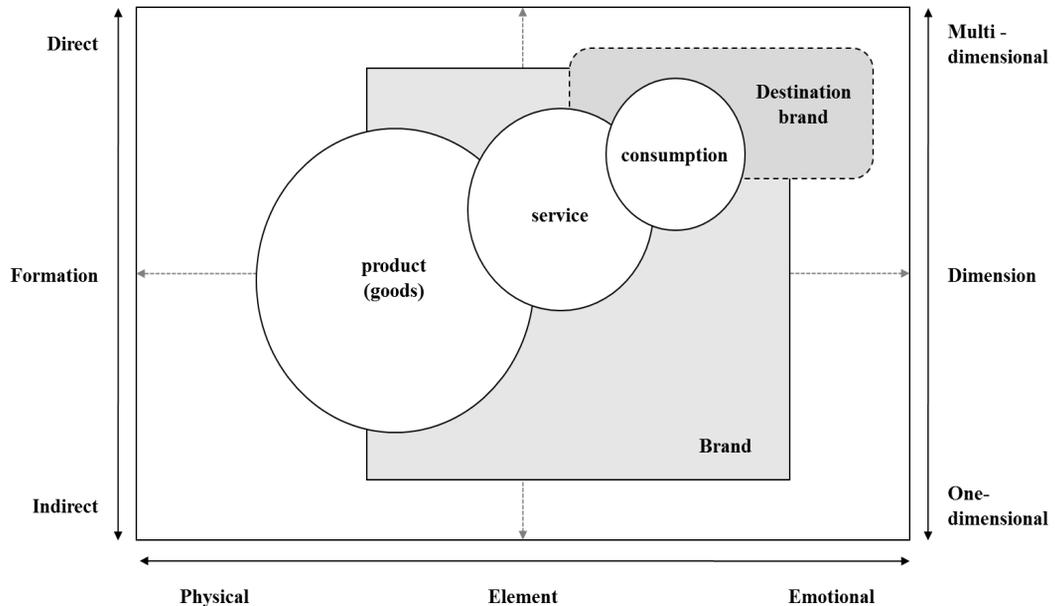
2.2 Exploratory research on destination brand experience

The modern era is the era of SNS due to the development of information and communication technologies. In addition to impacting everyone's consumption behavior, these technologies have also brought about major changes in how information on travel and tourism activities is exchanged. In the era of SNS, tourists' "imagined experiences" begin even before they start their trip. Tourists can now co-create their own experiences by interacting with acquaintances and friends after experiencing a tourism spot (Neuhofer et al., 2012). Destination marketers are therefore deeply interested in how tourists evaluate the wide range of activities they have experienced at their destinations and in how to best circulate information.

The only existing study based on the concept of "destination brand experience" (DBEX) was conducted by Barnes et al. (2014). They use data gathered at three destinations in Europe to verify the causal relationship among destination brand experience (formed from four dimensions), satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to recommend. Their analysis shows a significant causal relationship among all of them when satisfaction is the intervening variable. This analysis suggests the need to apply a different intervening variable for destinations when investigating the relationship between tourism experience and future tourist behavior for the special brand of DBEX (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Destination brand experience model
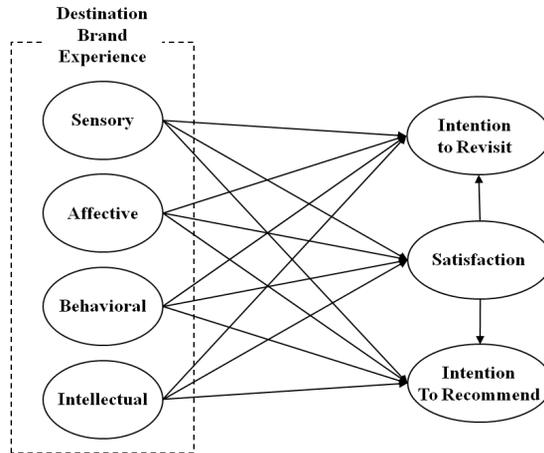
Source: Barnes et al. (2014)

2.3 Significance of destination brand trust

Brand trust can be defined as the "general expectations" or "feeling of trust" produced in someone who is provided with a trustworthy product or service (Moorman et al., 1992; Anderson and Narus, 1990). Atilgan et al. (2009) argue that brand trust plays an important role as a mediator between perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty for global brands (such as McDonald's or Coca-Cola). However, if we replace global brands with destination brands such as well-known cities or countries, establishing trust in tourist destinations becomes important for positively influencing tourists' decision to revisit.

According to Huang et al. (2006), trust in a destination has a strong influence on decision-making when a tourist is planning a trip. Furthermore, Hus and Cai (2009) argue that a trustworthy destination will be more competitive than other destinations when a tourist is making a decision. They also argue that tourists will rely on their own knowledge when selecting a destination, and will therefore not consider any destination that has risks (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Destination brand trust model
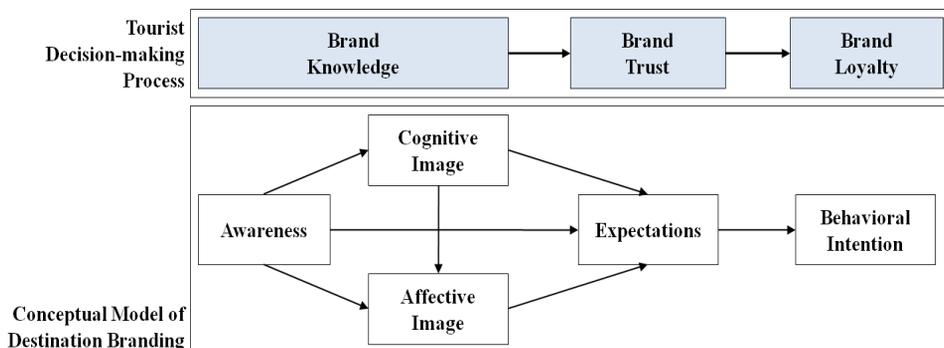
Source: Hus and Cai (2009)

3. Tourist behavioral intention model based on DBE

3.1 Hypothesis and questionnaire design

3.1.1 Hypotheses and model

Keller (1998) argues that "brand associations" are formed from the "attributes, benefits, and then attitudes" related to the brand. Once tourists have completed an evaluation of the attributes provided through the brand experience, they conduct an objective evaluation of the benefits they enjoyed by considering the type of experience the brand provided; Finally, loyalty (i.e., the resultant attitude) may be formed for the brand. This objective evaluation process includes a range of intervening variables, including brand originality and customer satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009), affective engagement (Iglesias et al., 2011), and brand attitude (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013).

Barnes et al. (2014) show that tourist satisfaction intervenes in the relationship between destination brand experience (DBEX) and intention to revisit or word of mouth. However, of the four DBEX attributes they found that only "sensory" showed a clear causal relationship with the dependent variables such as tourist satisfaction, intention to revisit, or word of mouth. Based on these results, this paper anticipates that an intervening variable is needed to establish a relationship between DBEX and the dependent variables, rather than exerting a direct influence on a dependent variable such as intention to revisit. Therefore, this paper proposes the following:

Hypothesis 1. Destination brand trust (DBT) mediates the relationship between DBEX and tourist behavioral intention (TBI).

The core issue for modern tourism marketing in efforts to attract customers and increase revisits is how best to transmit information about tourist destinations to consumers planning their tourism activities (i.e., via a media strategy). The SNS era allows consumers to share various types of information, which is making consumers better informed. Efforts are being made to attract tourists by linking to tourism information with e-commerce and reservation system technologies. However, many tourists still rely on non-digital media such as specialized travel books and travel agents to gather information.

Tourism experiences are formed through tourism activities done at destinations, and tourists often search for information in advance before engaging in these activities. Thus, the tourist's experience at a destination, the tourist's trust in that destination, and any intention to revisit may all be influenced by the information sources the tourist used to select the destination. This paper therefore proposes the following:

Hypothesis 2. The information search type used by a tourist has a moderating effect on the influence of DBEX on DBT.
Hypothesis 3. The information search type used by a tourist has a moderating effect on the influence of DBT on TBI.

Figure 4. Structural model of destination brand experience and destination brand trust
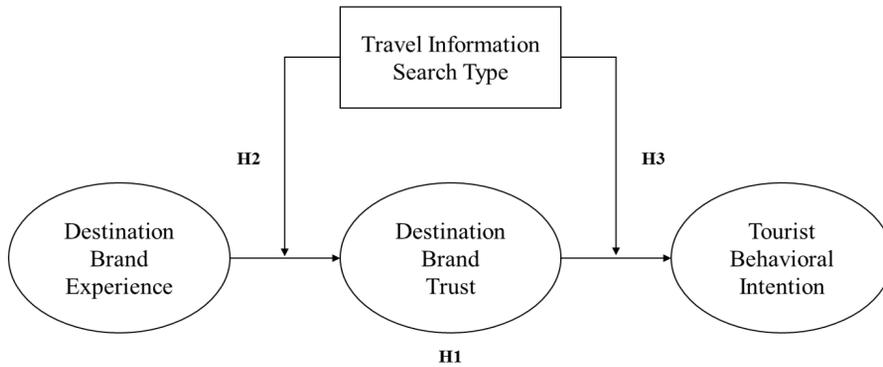
3.1.2 Questionnaire design

Our definition of DBEX is based on the definition provided by Brakus et al. (2009): "a tourist's subjective and internal reactions and behavioral reactions formed through stimuli linked with a destination brand." Our definition of DBT is based on the definition provided by Moorman et al. (1992): "the level of expectations or feelings of trust in a destination formed through experiences in that destination."

Our measurement items for DBEX comprise eight of the 12 items used by Barnes et al. (2014), excluding the four reverse code items. DBT is composed of "affective aspects" of a customer in the product or service field and four items used to measure "affective trust" (Lassar et al., 1995; Lee and Back, 2008; Hsu et al., 2012). Finally, five measurement items related to TBI are used to measure factors such as intention to revisit a destination. Each measurement item is developed using a Likert scale (1= "Do not agree at all"; 7= "Strongly agree").

Table 1. Variable description

Category		Variable	References
Destination brand experience	DBEX1	Seoul is an emotional area	Barnes et al. (2014)
	DBEX2	Seoul induces feelings and sentiments	
	DBEX3	I find Seoul interesting in a sensory way	
	DBEX4	Seoul makes a strong impression on my senses, visually and in other ways	
	DBEX5	Seoul stimulates my curiosity and problem solving	
	DBEX6	I engage in a lot of thinking when I am in Seoul	
	DBEX7	Seoul gives me bodily experiences	
	DBEX8	I engage in physical activities and behaviors when I am in Seoul	
Destination brand trust	DBT1	Seoul has high integrity	Lee and Back (2008), Hsu et al. (2012)
	DBT2	Seoul will not disappoint me next time	
	DBT3	Seoul will meet my expectations next time	
	DBT4	Seoul seems to care about travelers' interests	

Category		Variable	Reference
Tourist behavioral intention	TBI1	Thinking about Seoul makes me feel pleasant	Boo et al. (2009) Konecnik and Gartner (2007), Pike (2010)
	TBI2	I feel good and positive when I think about staying in Seoul	
	TBI3	I would advise other people to visit Seoul	
	TBI4	I intend visiting Seoul in the future	
	TBI5	Seoul would be my preferred choice for a vacation	

3.1.3 Questionnaire methods

South Korea was selected as the survey country for the purpose of verification during this research, with Seoul chosen as the survey area within South Korea. Seoul is the capital of South Korea and attracts 78.7% of all tourists who visit the country (International Visitor Survey, 2015). Convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was used for this survey. Individuals were interviewed from March 10 to July 31, 2016. This survey was conducted via one-on-one interviews of foreign tourists who were taking a break from their tourism activities, checking out from their hotels, or waiting at Incheon International Airport. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed. After excluding 164 deemed unfit for analysis, this analysis used the remaining 436 for the analysis.

4. Analysis results

4.1 Sample characteristics and description

The general characteristics of the survey participants are as follows. A total of 182 people (41.7%) indicated "SNS, Internet" as their information search type, while 254 people (58.3%) indicated "travel book, travel agency." The participants comprised 137 men (31.4%) and 299 women (68.6%). Of the total, 219 (50.2%) were in their 20s, 109 (25.0%) were in their 30s, and 75 (17.2%) were in their 40s or older. In terms of visit type, 269 people (61.7%) indicated it was their "first" time to visit Seoul, while 167 people (38.3%) indicated it was a "revisit." In terms of nationality, 223 people (51.1%) indicated they were "non-Chinese," while 213 (48.9%) indicated they were "Chinese (including Taiwanese)."

Table 2. Demographic characteristics

Category		N	%	Category		N	%
Information type	SNS, Internet	182	41.7	Gender	Man	137	31.4
	Travel book, travel agency	254	58.3		Woman	299	68.6
Age	Under 20	33	7.6	Visit type	First	269	61.7
	20 − 29	219	50.2		Revisit	167	z38.3
	30 − 39	109	25.0	Nationality	Non-Chinese	223	51.1
	40 over	75	17.2		Chinese	213	48.9

4.2 Validity and reliability analysis

To confirm the validity and reliability of the structural model, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted first to split the eight DBEX measurement items into two categories: DBEX1 (sensory and affective) and DBEX2 (behavioral and intellectual). Subsequently a confirmatory factor analysis was performed.

This paper set the normal coefficient at which construct validity could be confirmed to 0.5 or higher and the AVE (average variance extracted) value at which convergent validity could be confirmed to 0.5 or higher. The CR (construct reliability) value at which reliability could be confirmed via internal consistency and Cronbach's α value were set to 0.7 or higher. This paper ensured the statistical fitness of our model structures using modification indices.

Although our results showed a somewhat low level of convergent validity (AVE) in the DBEX2 (behavioral and intellectual) measurement items, the results also showed that our validity and reliability criteria were met for all other measurement items. Our results also showed acceptable levels for our fit indices used to confirm the fitness of our models, with covariance assumed among all dimensions (χ^2/df = 2.851 (316.475/111), RMR = 0.064, GFI = 0.919, IFI = 0.955, TLI = 0.945, CFI = 0.955, and RMSEA = 0.065).

Table 3. Validity and reliability analysis result

Category	Variable	Factor loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's
Destination brand experience1 (sensory and affective)	DBEX1-1	0.781	0.525	0.813	0.837
	DBEX1-2	0.577			
	DBEX1-3	0.664			
	DBEX1-4	0.847			
Destination brand experience2 (behavioral and intellectual)	DBEX2-1	0.755	0.446	0.759	0.752
	DBEX2-2	0.699			
	DBEX2-3	0.701			
	DBEX2-4	0.484			
Destination brand trust	DBT1	0.823	0.599	0.856	0.857
	DBT2	0.744			
	DBT3	0.797			
	DBT4	0.728			
Tourist behavioral intention	TBI1	0.791	0.638	0.898	0.898
	TBI2	0.855			
	TBI3	0.829			
	TBI4	0.757			
	TBI5	0.756			

▶χ^2/df = 2.851(316.475/111) RMR = 0.064 GFI = 0.919 IFI = 0.955 TLI = 0.945 CFI =0.955 RMSEA = 0.065

4.3 Hypothesis testing

This paper used bootstrap t-verification values to verify the mediating effect of DBT in the structural model.

First, our results showed values of 0.945 (p < 0.01) and 0.768 (p < 0.01) for the relationship between DBEX1 and DBT and between DBT and TBI, respectively, indicating a statistically significant positive causal relationship. However, for the relationship between DBEX2 and DBT indicated a value of -0.009 (n.s.), which was not statistically significant. Our results for hypothesis 1 indicated that DBT had an indirect effect on the relationship between DBEX1 and TBI of 0.726 (p < 0.01), indicating that DBT has a significant mediating effect. However, the indirect effect on the relationship between DBEX2 and TBI was not significant (-0.007, n.s.). Therefore, the results for the significance of the mediating effect of DBT partially support hypothesis 1. (See Table 4.)

Table 4. Result of analysis model

Path			Estimate	S.E.	t-value	DBT's indirect effect
DBEX1	→	DBT	0.945	0.084	11.283***	(1) DBEX1 → DBT → TBI
DBEX2	→	DBT	-0.009	0.080	-0.112	: 0.726***(0.945*0.768) (2) DBEX2 → DBT → TBI
DBT	→	TBI	0.768	0.084	9.194***	: -0.007(-0.009*0.768)

***p<0.01

Next, this research conducted a multiple group analysis to verify how a tourist's information search type has a moderating effect in the structural model. The method of "test statistics on variation between parameters" was used as statistical test of choice and we decided to pick ±1.64 (p < 0.1), ±1.96 (p < 0.05), and ±2.58 (p < 0.01) as the criteria for our parameter test statistics (Byrne, 2001; Kline, 2005; Yu et al., 2008). The results for hypotheses 2 and 3 are as follows.

Regarding the influence of DBEX1 on DBT, a parameter value of 1.998 (p < 0.05) was found with respect to the two groups related to information search type, indicating a significant moderating effect. The groups had values of 0.909 (p < 0.01) and 1.331 (p <0.01) respectively, indicating a significant causal relationship. This result shows that a tourist's information search type serves as a significant moderating variable in the relationship between DBEX1 and DBT, and that the "travel book, travel agency user" information search type has a slightly greater influence than "SNS, Internet user information search type." However, a parameter value of -1.433 (n.s.) with respect to the two groups was found with respect to the relationship between DBEX2 and DBT, showing no significant moderating effect. Furthermore, the values of the two groups for the causal relationship with DBEX2 and DBT were -0.045 (n.s.) and -0.288 (n.s.), respectively, indicating a non-significant causal relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was only partially confirmed. A parameter value with respect to the two groups of -0.488 (n.s.) was also found for the relationship between DBT and TBI, indicating no significant moderating effect. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was rejected. (See Table 5.)

The results for hypotheses 2 and 3 indicate that the sensory and affective experience factors form a positive causal relationship, while the behavioral and intellectual experience factors form a slightly negative relationship regarding the influence of DBEX on DBT.

Table 5. Hypothesis results

Path	Total		Information search type				Critical ratio
			SNS, Internet user		Travel book, travel agency user		
	Estimate	t-value	Estimate	t-value	Estimate	t-value	
DBEX1 → DBT	0.945	11.283***	0.909	10.326***	1.331	6.929***	1.998**
DBEX2 → DBT	-0.009	-0.112	-0.045	-0.547	-0.288	-1.932	-1.433
DBT → TBI	0.768	9.194***	1.031	13.764***	0.979	13.374***	-0.488

***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$
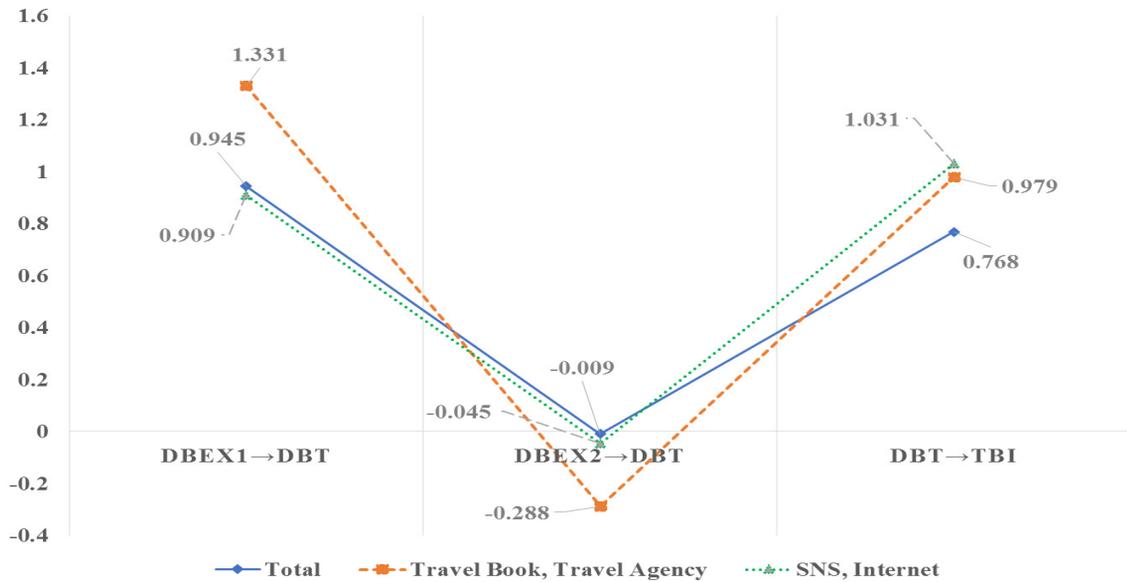
5. Conclusion

This paper used the DBEX concept to examine tourists' evaluation of their tourism activities, and hypothesized that the mediating role of trust in destination is a necessary link between tourists' positive evaluations of DBEX and revisit intentions. The relationship between these three concepts was investigated. We then verified that tourists' information search type has a significant moderating effect on the causal relationship between these three concepts, a result that is very important for destination marketing.

Among the two DBEX factors, the DBEX1 (sensory and affective) elements were found to have a significantly positive causal relationship with DBT. Our results also showed a significantly positive causal relationship between DBT and TBI. By contrast, the DBEX2 (behavioral and intellectual) elements had a statistically non-significant negative relationship with DBT. Thus, DBT was shown to have a significant moderating effect only on the relationship between DBEX1 and TBI. This result shows that a tourist's trust in a destination is influenced by the sensory and affective experiences obtained at that destination. It also confirms

that behavioral and intellectual experiences at the destination do not have a significant influence on a tourist's trust in the destination. In other words, trust in a destination is more likely influenced by affective experiences such as the atmosphere or the tourist's impressions of the location, rather than by physical experiences such as physical activities or learning experiences.

One other interesting result is that the relationship between DBEX1 and DBT is moderated by the information search type used by the tourist. The fact that the "travel book, travel agency user" search type has a stronger influence than "SNS, Internet user" appears to reinforce the finding that affective experiences have a positive influence on destination trust. In other words, although information technologies such as SNS and the Internet have made obtaining information easier and quicker, tourists tend not to value this information highly, regardless of how accurate it may be. Rather, tourists derive meaning from the process of taking their time and making effort to obtain information. Tourists who visit a travel agency while gathering information on potential destinations may be able to obtain useful information that could not be obtained from media such as SNS or the Internet. Therefore, the tourists who prefer to use a search type such as "travel book, travel agency" are the type of consumers who work hard to obtain their information and may form a higher level of trust in a destination if their tourism experience matches the information they have obtained.

Our analysis confirmed that those involved in destination marketing could increase tourist revisits by increasing destination trust. However, providing experience value that is both non-physical and non-rational (such as positive emotions or appreciation felt during a tourism experience) is an important part of strategies for building trust in a given destination. Furthermore, cooperating with and investing in non-digital media (such as working with travel magazines and travel agencies), together with using digital media, is an important part of a communication strategy for providing experience value that is both non-physical and non-rational.

Looking at the "Consumption Trend Survey for Foreigners Visiting Japan" surveyed by the Japan Tourism Agency(2015, 2017), the percentage of first visitors changed from 41.3% in 2015 to 38.6% in 2017,and the percentage of re-visitors changed from 58.7% in 2015 to 61.4% in 2017. And in the case of the travel arrangement method, the group tour changed from 25.6% in 2015 to 19.5% in 2017, and the percentage of individual tourists(round trip ticket + hotel or all individually arranged) changed from 74.4% in 2015 to 80.6% in 2017. Thanks to this data, we can identify some interesting trends of individual tourists and re-visitors in Japan. The ultimate goal of destination marketing is to increase the number of tourists. Therefore, raising the number of individual tourists in the long-term leads to an increase in re-visitors and an increase in the number of visits. This study has shown that it is still important to provide positive emotional experiences with non-physical and non-rational information about the destination for the construction of DBT. For example, it is important to improve the design quality of brochures and guide materials for tourists and to provide impressive tourist information centers. In conclusion, it is considered that the goal of current destination marketing activities is to build up the destination brand trust.

Future research could consider destinations and other physical spaces from the perspective of a single brand. Further empirical research that considers the diverse characteristics of and differences between destinations is also required to develop the DBEX concept and its measurement items. Future research will also need to clarify which factors have a meaningful moderating effect on the formation of experience values and destination trust.

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