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## **From Tourist Involvement to Destination Attachment -The Chain Mediation Effecting of Self-Expansion and Psychological Ownership**

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# **From Tourist Involvement to Destination Attachment: The Chain Mediation Effecting of Self-Expansion and Psychological Ownership**

## **Introduction**

Tourists interact with a destination in various ways. These interactions create some positive emotional connection between tourists and the destination, which leads to destination attachment. With the rapid development of mobile internet technology and transportation modes, "psychological distance" has gradually surpassed time and space distance as the main factor influencing tourists' destination choice. Building an emotional connection with tourists and creating an attachment to the destination has become essential in tourism marketing. The formation mechanism of destination attachment, as a particular emotion of tourists towards destinations, needs to be further studied. Previous research on destination attachments mainly inherited in place attachment explored destination attachment from the "person-place" relationship (Yuksel et al., 2010). Researchers mostly ignored specific psychological changes in its formation as an emotional connection between tourists and destinations. The focus on the specific psychological changes in its formation as an emotional connection between tourists and destinations is insufficient. In recent years, more and more researchers have focused on the role of the self in the formation of destination attachment and have presented it through qualitative methods (Cao & Qu, 2019; Qu et al., 2020). This study analyzes the role of variables such as self-expansion and psychological ownership in destination attachment formation from the perspective of tourist psychology to reveal its formation mechanism more objectively and clearly.

## **Literature Review**

This study argues that the essence of destination attachment is the emotional connection between the tourist and the destination. This process of relationship between these two needs to be analyzed from tourists and psychology point of view. In the first place, self-expansion implies that people incorporate external environmental features into themselves, thus establishing relationships. Secondly, self-expansion allows tourists to gain a deeper understanding of the destination and even develop a certain degree of ownership and belongingness, generating psychological ownership. Involvement represents an individual's perceived motivation or state of interest in a particular thing, (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Extant literature suggests that tourist involvement influences destination attachment directly and indirectly (Gross et al., 2008). According to the self-expansion model, people are universally motivated by self-expansion and enhance their self-efficacy by incorporating external environmental features. The novel, arousing activities can lead to self-expansion (Aron et al., 1996). In this process, tourists develop a subjective sense of ownership of the destination, develop psychological ownership of the destination, and develop positive feelings toward the destination due to the "endowment effect" (Walasek & Lukasz, 2013), which promotes the formation of destination attachment (Zhang & Xu, 2019). At the same time, the need for cognitive closure, as a stable cognitive trait of individuals, influences tourists' processing of novelty and evocative contextual cognition in tourism (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Accordingly, this paper proposes the following hypotheses.

H1: Tourist involvement positively influences destination attachment.

H2: Tourist involvement positively influences tourists' self-expansion.

H3: The need for cognitive closure positively moderates the relationship between tourist involvement and self-expansion.

H4: Self-expansion positively influences destination attachment.

H5: Self-expansion mediates the relationship between Tourist involvement and destination attachment.

H6: Tourist involvement positively influences psychological ownership.

H7: Psychological ownership positively influences destination attachment.

H8: Psychological ownership mediates the relationship between tourist involvement and destination attachment.

H9: Self-expansion positively influences psychological ownership.

H10: Self-expansion and psychological ownership act as a chain mediator between tourism involvement and destination attachment. The theoretical model is shown in Figure 1.

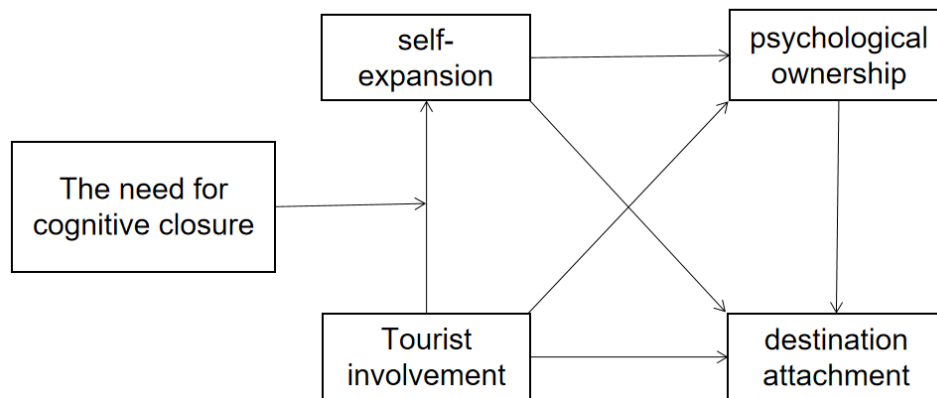


Fig 1. The theoretical model

## Methodology

In terms of methodology, a questionnaire was designed for this study and measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale that asked subjects how much they agreed with each measure (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). All measures were designed with reference to classical scales and important studies in the field, and were adapted to the linguistic conventions of Chinese and the

applicability to travel contexts. Three questions were used to measure tourist involvement (Chiu et al., 2014), six questions were used to measure the need for cognitive closure (Kossowska 2002), six questions were used to measure self-expansion (Lee et al., 2019), three questions on self-expansion (Kumar et al., 2019) and six questions on destination attachment (Yuksel, 2010).

The questionnaire was distributed in China through Wenjuanxing ([www.wjx.cn](http://www.wjx.cn)). Since this study targets general tourists, convenience sampling is used to snowball the questionnaire link by distributing it on social media platforms such as WeChat and Microblog to friends we know and then inviting them to forward it. The planned survey is to collect more than 500 valid questionnaires. SPSS, AMOS, and PROCESS macro software will be used to analyze the data and validate the research model.

## **Results**

We found that the data analysis has support the hypotheses H1-H10, confirming that there is a chain mediation role of self-expansion and psychological ownership between tourist involvement and destination attachment, and the need for cognitive closure play a moderating role in the effect of tourist involvement on tourists self-expansion. As a result, the research model of this paper validated by demonstrating that tourist's self-expansion and the resulting psychological ownership is one of the pathways through which destination attachment arises and that the need for cognitive closure as a personality trait has an impact on self-expansion in tourism context.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

The theoretical significance of this study is that, first, this study breaks through the existing perspective of human-place relations and explains the formation process of destination attachment from the perspective of tourists' selves and psychology, contributing a new perspective and a new research area to the theory. Second, the chain mediation model was constructed by introducing theories of self-expansion and psychological ownership to explain the formation mechanism of destination attachment. The moderating effect of the need for cognitive closure on self-expansion is analyzed, and the psychological process between tourists and destinations from involvement to self-expansion, followed by psychological ownership. Finally, the formation of destination attachment is further explained.

The practical significance of this study is that the findings give instructions for destinations to enhance tourist relationships: on the one hand, the formation of destination attachment increasingly requires more tourist involvement, and destinations need to create more online and offline multiple interactive events, scenarios, and opportunities to build tourist relationship entrances through festivals, online activities, and building communities. On the other hand, destinations need to segment the market further and gain a deeper understanding of the self-concept and psychological preferences of the target population in order to promote self-expansion and strengthen psychological ownership in tourism products, services, and marketing.

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