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Celebrity involvement and film tourist loyalty: Destination image and place attachment as mediators

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ABSTRACT

This study reports the results of an examination of the effects of celebrity involvement on tourist loyalty, with destination image and place attachment as mediators. Survey data from 413 tourists in Hengdian World Studio, the most prominent film tourist destination in China, indicated that fandom or celebrity involvement (measured using attraction, centrality, and self-expression) significantly improved destination image and place attachment, both of which also enhanced tourist loyalty. Moreover, although the direct relationship between celebrity involvement and tourist loyalty was not significant, it supported the full mediation of both destination image and place attachment. The findings carry theoretical and managerial implications.

1. Introduction

Film tourism has gained global popularity, bringing benefits to the destination by attracting tourists to visit the places where the filming took place or where the film was set (Kolasińska, 2020). A growth in the numbers attracted to places associated with films and filming serves to stimulate growth in various industries, such as transport, accommodation, and catering (Li et al., 2017). Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) film trilogy, which acted as a highly efficient advertising channel for New Zealand and companies such as Air New Zealand provides a much-cited example (Peaslee, 2011).

Celebrity involvement in film tourism can act as a link between fans and film destinations (Lee et al., 2008), and high levels of celebrity involvement may create a positive destination image that influences tourists' destination choice (Busby et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2008). The term "celebrity involvement" has two dimensions – namely the action of the celebrity being identified with a place, and second, the degree to which a fan identifies with the celebrity as, in part, a leisure activity. Sufficient evidence exists to show that emotional involvement with a film or actor can lead to a greater probability of visiting film tourism destinations (Kim, 2012). Indeed, an attachment to a film star can also transfer similar attachment to a destination by associating a story line or actor with and to positive images of a destination and an intention to visit (Yen & Croy, 2016). Hence this study examines the role of this second sense of celebrity involvement (influencers and actors) in the area of film tourism.

Tourist loyalty originates from customer loyalty and is embedded in the concepts of cognition and emotion (Stumpf et al., 2020). Researchers have recognized and discussed the importance of tourist loyalty for destination success (Loureiro & González, 2008; Stylidis et al., 2020): that loyalty is linked to destination performance, and positive destination evaluation and image can drive destination marketing and financial performance. As in other areas, the willingness to revisit or recommend a site to others are common measures of film tourist loyalty (Teng & Chen, 2020). However, several more variables are also involved including destination image, place attachment, celebrity attachment, and tourist satisfaction (Jeong & Kim, 2019; Li et al., 2020). However, the relationships between those determinants remain vague, and more specifically, celebrities are not taken into account when discussing tourist loyalty in film tourism.

This paper utilizes theories derived from the stimulus-organism-response (S–O-R) theories (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) with those of

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place attachment (Sun et al., 2021). In the context of film tourism, destination image is based on the highly subjective nature of tourists' beliefs, ideas, impressions, and sentiments about the film tourism destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), while place attachment is the emotional bond between tourists and the destination (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015). According to attachment theory, when individuals have a strong emotional attachment to an object, they usually show specific behaviours such as proximity maintenance and separation distress (Boateng et al., 2020). Furthermore, research has found that this emotion can be transferable (Yen & Croy, 2016). In film tourism, when tourists who have a strong emotional attachment to celebrities visit film tourism destinations, this attachment will be transferred to the destination, which in turn increases their emotional perception of the destination and strengthens their emotional ties to the destination, making them inclined to become loyal (Teng & Chen, 2020; Yen & Croy, 2016). Consequently, this study uses S–O-R theory with fandom as a variable impacting place attachment relating to film tourism.

In doing this, we use a Chinese case study to propose the idea that celebrity involvement, destination image, and place attachment are antecedents to tourist loyalty to Chinese film tourism destinations. Furthermore, it is suggested that destination image and place attachment are intermediaries in the relationship between celebrity involvement and subsequent film tourism loyalty. Hence, conceptually the paper contributes to the literature on destination marketing and practically highlights the role of fandom as a potential visitor segment for film tourism sites.

2. Theoretical background and literature review

2.1. Attachment theory

Derived from mother-baby bonding theory, attachment theory is an established theory of human relationships and an influential theory in psychology (Yip et al., 2018), providing a holistic framework for understanding how emotional bonds develop (Krolikowska et al., 2020). Attachment is defined as the human tendency to seek and develop emotional connections to a specific object and that such emotional attachment to a specific object influences modes of interaction with that object (Li et al., 2020; Yip et al., 2018). Although the theory arose from research on parent-child relationships, it has been developed over the years and has been extended to several domains (Boateng et al., 2020; Yip et al., 2018).

In the field of tourism, scholars have also studied attachment theory to focus on the emotional or attachment bonds between tourists and destinations (Krolikowska et al., 2020). However, tourists' emotions are not homogeneous especially in the field of film tourism. For film tourism, tourists may have varying degrees of emotional and attachment ties to celebrities before they visit the destinations (Teng & Chen, 2020; Yen & Croy, 2016). According to associative network theory, when tourists come to film tourism destinations, they connect film stars to destinations, thereby transferring their emotions or attachments from the celebrity to the destination (Ilicic et al., 2016). Thus, there is an important relationship between tourists, celebrities, and destinations. However, the relationship between these three has been overlooked in studies of tourist loyalty in film tourism.

2.2. Film tourism

Film tourism is also referred to as film-induced tourism (Beeton, 2006), film and television tourism (Ma, 2017), media-related tourism (Busby & Klug, 2001), and movie tourism (Jewell & McKinnon, 2008). Essentially, film tourism can be defined as a tourist activity induced by viewing a moving image, whether on film, television, pre-recorded products (e.g., video/DVD/Blu-Ray), and digital media (Connell, 2012). As previously noted, it is regarded as one of the more dynamic global directions for tourism development (Croy, 2011; Kolasińska, 2020). Film tourism owes its success to tourists' enjoyment of "reality" in a completely simulated world that relies on the blurring of fantasy and reality (Buchmann et al., 2010). This experiential authenticity can attract tourists to participate in film-related activities held at destinations and positively influences the interaction between tourists and the destination (Teng & Chen, 2020). Thus, film tourism is regarded as a powerful tool for motivating travel behaviours and has developed rapidly in recent years (Chen, 2018; Zhang & Ryan, 2018).

The literature has covered film tourism from many aspects, including the influence of films on tourists' destination choice (Kendall et al., 2021; Kim, 2012), marketing activities of film tourism destinations (Dubois & Gibbs, 2018; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Wu & Lai, 2021), the impact on film tourism destinations (Croy, 2011; Shani et al., 2009), film tourism as a phenomenon (Beeton, 2006; Gjorgievski & Melles, 2012; Macionis, 2004), and film tourist experience (Beeton, 2010; Buchmann et al., 2010; Chen, 2018).

Macionis and Sparks (2009) argued that films have little effect on tourists' choice of destination, and any choice of a tourist related location is primarily incidental. Nevertheless, for tourists actively seeking out places they have seen in movies, relevant celebrities can play an essential role in choosing a destination—the degree of empathy audiences have for film characters will affect their image of the shooting site (Yen & Croy, 2016). The more a celebrity is involved, then fans of that celebrity may become interested in each location (Chen, 2018). Yen and Teng (2015) found that strong celebrity involvement will increase tourists' interest in the destination, stimulate visit behaviour and affect attitudes and behaviours after the visit. However, despite such observations there remain few structured studies contextualizing celebrity involvement, location visitation and destination image and attachment.

2.3. Tourist loyalty

In marketing studies loyalty is usually defined as consumers' repeated purchases of a single company's products or services over a period (Stylidis et al., 2020). However, in cases of infrequent purchasing (e.g., a car or a holiday), attitudes as well as purchases need to be considered (Uysal et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2020). Thus, one issue is, to what extent is loyalty a sufficient or necessary factor for visitation (Suhartanto et al., 2020). Repeat purchases may be due to reasons other than loyalty to a place, and loyalty may be evident in recommendations rather than repeat visitation (Tajeddini et al., 2022).

The subject of tourist loyalty to a destination has been the focus of research over the past 30 years beacuse of the extreme competitiveness of the global and national tourism industries (Stylidis et al., 2020). Consequently, gaining loyalty is much prized (Stumpf et al., 2020). According to two-dimensional motivation theory, the purpose of tourist travel is either to escape daily life or/and find novel experiences (Iso--Ahola, 1983). If tourists travel to escape daily life, they often repeat consumption of satisfying tourism products, but if looking for novel experiences, they rarely repeat consumption even when satisfied with a specific tourism product (Gursoy et al., 2014). For tourists looking for novel experiences, repeated consumption cannot be used as a criterion to judge whether they are loyal.

Attitude loyalty reflects tourists' preferences for tourism products or services and their willingness to re-consume (Oppermann, 2000), and is typically measured by three indicators: revisit intention, positive evaluation, and recommendation of the experience to family and/or friends (Izogo, 2015), each of which reflects a state of mind rather than observed behaviours (Eid, 2015). Therefore, attitude loyalty cannot predict future tourist behaviour, but it is a proxy from which intent might be inferred and to which measures can be imputed to quantify loyalty, measure its strength, and study relationships with other variables (Suhartanto et al., 2020). For example, scholars have concluded that tour quality and satisfaction (Lee et al., 2011), and image and trust (Loureiro & González, 2008) are antecedents of attitude loyalty. Therefore, our study adopted the concept of attitude loyalty.

2.4. Celebrity involvement

As a concept, celebrity involvement is an extension of leisure involvement. Leisure involvement is an unobservable state of motivation, excitement, or interest in a recreational activity, aroused by a particular attraction (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Fans see celebrities as sources of leisure activities or products (Yen & Croy, 2016). "Celebrity" refers to those who are famous for their achievements and publicly known in specific fields, including entertainment, sports, and politics (Yen & Teng, 2015). In film tourism the emphasis is often on famous actors in movies or TV dramas. Among the well-known actors who have appeared in films shot at the Studios are Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Li Bingbing, and Sean Xiao who all attract fans in China and have several followers on social media. Celebrity involvement can be divided into three parts: attraction, centrality, and self-expression (Lee et al., 2008). Attraction refers to the perceived importance or interest of tourists in celebrity-related activities as well as the happiness or enjoyment value they obtain from such activities; centrality refers to the centrality of celebrity-related activities in tourists' lives; self-expression refers to the extent to which a celebrity-related activity offers an opportunity to express a desired self-image (Yen & Teng, 2015).

In contemporary culture, public interest in celebrities is reinforced by social media (Kim et al., 2018). According to attachment theory, a person attached to a celebrity typically shows a positive attitude toward the products endorsed by the celebrity (Wong & Lai, 2015). Fans of celebrities will actively maintain relationships with celebrities, consume products related to celebrities, and even go to film and television sites associated with stars or themes as tourists (Teng & Chen, 2020). This can occur via involvement and identification with a place through film storylines, which increases the personal meaning for tourists (Chen, 2018). This positive meaning affects the destination image perceived by tourists, thus influencing their destination choice and behavioral intention (Lee et al., 2008, 2015). Literature has also found a significant relationship between celebrity involvement and place attachment. Place attachment is the emotional bond between tourists and destinations (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015). When tourists arrive at the destinations associated with their favourite celebrities, their place attachment can be affected by celebrity involvement (Chen, 2018; Wong & Lai, 2015).

Scholars have extensively discussed the relationship between tourist involvement and loyalty. Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) confirmed that leisure involvement is a significant antecedent of loyalty. Lee et al. (2007) also found that activity involvement can significantly influence tourists' attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Similarly, Alexandris (2016) suggested that site attraction, centrality, and self-expression can positively impact revisit intention and word-of-mouth intention. Kontogianni et al. (2011) also confirmed that higher involvement leads to higher loyalty. In film tourism, tourists who regard celebrities as meaningful leisure activities will consider participating in celebrity-related activities as part of their life and to express their support for given celebrities (Lee et al., 2019). Therefore, it is thought that tourists' celebrity involvement will significantly and positively affect tourist loyalty. Accordingly, three hypotheses follow:

H1abc. Celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) has a significant direct positive impact on film destination image.

H2abc. Celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) has a significant direct positive impact on place attachment.

H3abc. Celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) has a significant direct positive impact on film tourist loyalty.

2.5. Destination image

Destination image is commonly described as the sum of one's belief and impression of the destination (Chon, 1990), and comprises cognition and emotional responses of the tourist regarding the destination's attributes (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Cognitive image is interpreted as the sum of tourists' cognition and belief regarding the destination; affective image is the subjective feelings held by the tourist about the destination (Beerli & Martín, 2004). The tourist's image incorporates an affective evaluation dependent on the state of their cognition of the destination (Boo & Busser, 2006). In short, tourists first get to know of a destination, evaluate it and then generate emotion regarding the destination (Lin et al., 2007).

Early studies focused on the cognitive perspective (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Rimmington & Yüksel, 1988), but overtime scholars recognized the role of tourists' emotions in the formation of destination image (Li et al., 2010; Prayag, 2008). New concepts and processes have been explored and applied, such as that of cognitive–affective joint image" interaction. This approach measures tourists' perception of destination image by measuring cognition and emotion using different items (Zhang et al., 2014) and has been used in several studies (e.g., Del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007), and justifies it use in the current study.

Several researchers have perceived destination image as a prerequisite that positively shapes place attachment (Jeong & Kim, 2019; Lee et al., 2015; Prayag & Ryan, 2012), while Fan and Qiu (2014) suggested that the cognitive image was the primary determinant of place attachment. Lee et al. (2015) suggested that cognitive and affective images have differing effects on place attachment, with the cognitive component shaping affective responses that, in turn, affect place attachment.

It follows from the above that the perceived image of place plays a vital role in tourist decision making, destination choice, post-trip evaluation, and future behaviours (Zhang et al., 2014). Several studies have also confirmed that destination image additionally has a direct impact on tourist loyalty (Chung & Chen, 2018; Jeong & Kim, 2019; Zhang et al., 2014), and that tourists who have a positive destination image are more likely to intend to return to that destination and to recommend the destination to others (Lu et al., 2020). Accordingly, the following hypotheses arise:

H4. Film destination image has a significant direct positive impact on place attachment.

H5. Film destination image has a significant direct positive impact on film tourist loyalty.

2.6. Place attachment

The conceptualization of place attachment is based on psychological theories, including interdependence and attraction theories (Loureiro et al., 2012). Thus, place attachment is defined as the emotional bond between an individual and a given location and reflects the strength of that connection through the dimensions of dependence, identity, emotion, and social connection (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015). Scannell and Gifford (2010) explain that connection with reference to three dimensions: person, process, and place, thereby forming a temporary or lasting bond that is both cognitive and emotional (Xu, 2016).

To measure place attachment, most studies in tourism have used "place identity" and "place dependency". The former emerges through an accumulation of experience with a place (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015). The latter refers to tourists' functional attachment to destinations, which represents the extent to which destinations can meet tourists' needs and describes how environmental resources motivate tourists to engage in relevant activities (Loureiro, 2014). Scholars have also proposed other dimensions of place attachment, such as social bonding, affective and social attachment, and place affect (Plunkett et al., 2019; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Shaykh-Baygloo, 2020).

Scholars generally agree that place attachment is an essential factor shaping tourist loyalty, and some suggest that place identity and place dependence are respectively indicators of behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty (Lee et al., 2007; Shaykh-Baygloo, 2020). Place attachment is a strong psychological driver of tourist loyalty by enhancing senses of security, trust, pleasure, and identity (Tsai, 2012). Lee et al. (2007) came to this conclusion when studying forest tourism. And similarly, Cardinale et al. (2016) showed that positive experience and place attachment have a positive impact on destination loyalty when examining visits to wineries. Therefore, the next hypothesis is:

H6. Place attachment has a significant direct positive impact on film tourist loyalty.

2.7. Mediating role of destination image and place attachment

How leisure involvement impacts an individual's loyalty to a recreational destination has attracted scholarly interest (Lee & Shen, 2013), and it seems several variables may play a significant mediating role in leisure participation and tourist loyalty. For example, Tsai et al. (2011) found that place attachment plays a mediating role between tourist involvement and tourist loyalty. Lee and Shen (2013) also confirmed that attraction, centrality, and self-expression of leisure involvement can indirectly affect attitude loyalty through place dependence and place identity and ultimately affect tourists' behavioural loyalty, while Prayag and Ryan (2012) suggested that destination image and place attachment not only independently mediate leisure involvement and tourist loyalty but also play a chain mediating role between the latter variables.

These findings suggest that, in film tourism, celebrity involvement can be actively correlated to tourists' destination image (Yen & Croy, 2016) and place attachment (Chen, 2018), and a positive destination image (Li et al., 2021) and place attachment (Ji & Prentice, 2021) can improve tourists' loyalty. The deeper the emotional connection between tourists and celebrities, the higher the tourists' destination loyalty (Lee & Yoo, 2015). It suggests that film tourists' celebrity involvement will transfer this emotional connection to related activities and destinations, thereby significantly positively impacting tourists' place attachment, destination image and, consequently, their destination loyalty (Tsai, 2012; Wong & Lai, 2015). Therefore, destination image, place attachment and fandom may play important interactive roles in determining tourist loyalty in film tourism.

H7abc. Film destination image plays a significant mediating role between celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) and film tourist loyalty.

H8abc. Place attachment plays a significant mediating role between celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) and film tourist loyalty.

H9abc. Film destination image and place attachment play a chain-mediating role between celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) and film tourist loyalty.

Based on the above literature review and hypotheses, a theoretical model is proposed indicating the relationship between celebrity involvement (including attraction, centrality, and self-expression), film destination image, place attachment and film tourist loyalty (see Fig. 1).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research site

Hengdian World Studios in Dongyang City, Zhejiang Province, China, is the largest film tourism destination in Asia (Ma, 2017). In 1999, Hengdian was described as "China's Hollywood" by the *Hollywood Reporter*, a leading magazine in the American film and television industry. One-quarter of China's films and one-third of China's TV series

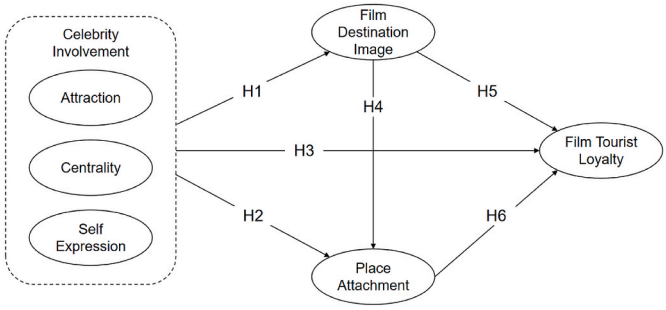

Fig. 1. Indicative relationships
Note – For a full list of relationships and coefficients see Tables 2–4.

(more than 64, 000 films and TV series) have been produced at Hengdian World Studios. Hengdian World Studios was also among the first tourism attractions to gain a AAAAA status in China, with more than 10 famed scenic spots, including Qin, Ming, and Qing Palaces, Guangzhou Street, and the Spring and Autumn Garden. According to its 2020 audit and financial statement, filed by operator Hengdian Entertainment Co., Ltd., the Studio hosted 19.1818 million global visitors in 2019, and the company's operating income reached RMB 2.814 billion. Hengdian World Studios has developed various experiential film tourism products integrating film and television, science and technology, and interactive gaming. In general, Hengdian World Studios is a large-scale comprehensive tourism resort integrating film tourism, leisure vacations, parent–child research, the popularization of science education, and other functions (Ding et al., 2018).

3.2. Sample and collection

Data were collected at the exit of the Qinwang Palace scenic spot of Hengdian World Studios because, during the period of pandemic, this was the only way by which tourists could leave the Studios. The questionnaires were originally designed in English but were translated into Chinese and then reverse translated by four native Chinese-speaking researchers studying in English-speaking countries. The survey was conducted from May 10 to 18, 2020 and used convenience sampling, which is considered appropriate for the reasons provided by Akhtar et al. (2020). Filter questions were used to ensure the respondents were neither company employees or residents of Dongyang City.

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of respondents failed to reach the required number as calculated using the app G*Power and the site danielsoper.com. Using a desired level of statistical power of 0.8, probability tests at 0.05 and Cohen's D = 0.15, it was estimated a minimum sample of 403 respondents was required. To correct the deficiency caused by the rejection of 77 incomplete questionnaires, additional responses were collected from platforms such as Ctrip, Qunar, Mafengwo, Fliggy, and Tuniu using the same questionnaire. These were sent to identifiable potential respondents who had visited the Studios within the past 12 months. This corrected the deficiency and resulted in a useable sample of 413 responses. A total of 120 online questionnaires were distributed, with 97 valid questionnaires (a response rate of 80.83%.) and a total of 370 offline questionnaires were distributed, with 316 valid questionnaires (an effective response rate of 85.41%). Comparisons were made between the two sub-samples to ensure they were comparable using the aggregated tests reported below to check reliability while additional tests using rank correlations and distribution comparisons indicated no significant differences between the samples.

3.3. Survey design

The constructs in this study were adapted from the literature. The measures of celebrity involvement used a 12-item scale adopted from the questionnaires developed by Yen and Teng (2015) and Yen and Croy

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Basic situation	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	170	41.2
	Female	243	58.8
Age	16–18	53	12.8
	19–29	179	43.3
	30–39	100	24.2
	40–49	50	12.1
	50–59	29	7.0
	Above 59	2	0.5
Monthly Income Level	Significantly below average	41	7.7
	Below average	66	9.9
	Average	179	43.3
	Above average	95	23.0
	Well above average	27	6.5
Education	< High school	28	6.8
	High school	44	10.7
	Associate college	81	19.6
	Bachelor	244	59.1
	Post graduate	16	3.9
Occupational Status	Civil servant	37	9.0
	Staff of enterprises or institutions	79	19.1
	Private enterprise	48	11.6
	Waiter/Salesperson	37	9.0
	Freelancer	38	9.2
	Resign/Retirement	1	0.2
	Professionals	31	7.5
	Self-employed	35	8.5
	Student	107	25.9
Marital Status	Unmarried	164	39.7
	Married	216	52.3
	Divorce/Separation	33	9.0

(2016). Place attachment was measured by eight items appropriately modified from items prepared by Kyle et al. (2004) and Ramkissoon and Mavondo (2015). Destination image used items taken from the work of Beerli and Martín (2004) and Chen (2018) and modified to the specifics of Hengdian World Studios. That scale used 14 items. Finally, the three-item scale established by Howat and Assaker (2016) and Kim et al. (2018) measured tourist loyalty. A five-point scale was used with 1 representing "strongly disagree", 3 "neither agree nor disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree". In addition, the questionnaire also included socio-demographic variables including gender, age, monthly income level, number of children, education, occupational status, and marital status.

4. Results

4.1. Sample profiles

The socio-demographic profiles of the sample are provided in Table 1. There were slightly more female respondents (243, 58.8%) than male respondents (170, 41.2%). In terms of ages, most respondents were under 40 years of age. The 19–29 age group accounted for 43.3% (179). Respondents were highly educated. Approximately 63% (260) of respondents had a bachelor's degree or above, whereas just 6.8% (28) had only finished junior high school. In terms of average monthly income, 43.3% (179) believed they had an average monthly income, and 29.5% (122) believed that their monthly income was above average. About 25.9% (107) of the respondents were students. These data showed that tourists at Hengdian World Studios were primarily young people, highly educated, and had an average monthly income.

4.2. Reliability and validity

Harman's single factor test was used to examine the issue of common method variance (CMV) for data analysis. The results (<50%) indicated the absence of a common trait both overall and when specifically testing tourist loyalty (Cote & Buckley, 1987; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), the value of total variance interpretation varies with different disciplines and survey concept types. The mean total variance interpretation of the attitude measurement method was 40.7%.

The means of structural equation analysis is partially determined by an absence or presence of normal distribution (Ryan, 2020). The degrees of skew ranged from 1.293 to −0.484, and the absolute value was <3. Kurtosis of the items ranged from −0.566 to 1.487, and the absolute value was <8. According to Kim (2013), the data in this study conformed to the normal distribution and could be analyzed using covariance-based methods and hence the software AMOS was used.

Using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0, for reliability analysis, the overall Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.970 and the CR value of all variables were greater than 0.7 (0.791–0.909) implying that the questionnaire had good internal consistency (Chan & Idris, 2017). This confirmed an initial exploratory factor analysis where each of the scales resulted in factors that exceeded 50% of the variance in their respective scales, and the results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis are given in Table 2. Except for the GFI, RFI, and AGFI, which were slightly lower than the standard of 0.9, all other fitness indexes >0.9. Moreover, χ^2/df was less than the standard value of 3. These results indicated good model fit (Hair et al., 2010).

The factor loading of each item was between 0.626 and 0.778, which met the standard requirement of being greater than 0.6. Except for the AVE of destination image (0.477), which was slightly less than 0.5, the AVEs of the other variables were all greater than 0.5. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), if the AVE is less than 0.5 but the CR is higher than 0.6, then the convergent validity of the construct is still adequate. Therefore, the above results confirmed the convergent validity between destination image, celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, self-expression), place attachment, and tourist loyalty (Suhartanto et al., 2020).

As stated by Hair et al. (2010), the discriminant validity of each variable was tested by comparing nested models. Table 3 shows the fitting indices of the six-factor model outperforming the other seven

Table 2
Results of confirmatory factor analysis.

Latent Variable	Observation variable	Factor Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's α
Destination image	D1 Hengdian World Studios is clean and hygienic	0.696	0.477	0.909	0.931
	D2 Hengdian World Studios has a pleasant climate and is suitable for sightseeing	0.689			
	D3 Hengdian World Studios has good public security	0.684			
	D4 Hengdian World Studios has friendly residents	0.685			
	D5 Hengdian World Studios has beautiful natural scenery	0.687			
	D6 Hengdian World Studios has unique architecture	0.669			
	D7 Hengdian World Studios has a variety of entertainment facilities	0.709			
	D8 Hengdian World Studios has complete accommodation facilities	0.731			
	D9 Hengdian World Studios has convenient transportation	0.677			
	D10 Hengdian World Studios has a good service attitude and modernized tourism information system	0.654			
	D11 Hengdian World Studios is a pleasant place	0.709			
	D12 Hengdian World Studios is an exciting place	0.656			
	D13 Hengdian World Studios is a relaxing place	0.701			
	D14 Hengdian World Studios is an amazing place	0.626			
Celebrity involvement					
Factor 1: Attraction	C15 Being involved in celebrity-related activities is very important to me	0.715	0.528	0.817	0.866
	C16 Being involved in celebrity-related activities makes me feel relaxed	0.778			
	C17 Being involved in celebrity-related activities makes me feel satisfied	0.733			
	C18 Being involved in celebrity-related activities makes me feel enjoyable	0.678			
Factor 2: Centrality	C19 My daily life is closely related to the celebrities	0.750	0.512	0.807	0.877
	C20 My daily life is closely related to celebrity-related activities	0.744			
	C21 Celebrity-related activities play an important role for me	0.737			
	C22 I enjoy talking about celebrities with friends	0.624			
Factor 3: Self-expression	C23 Being involved in celebrity-related activities makes me know more about myself	0.694	0.503	0.802	0.858
	C24 Being involved in celebrity-related activities makes me know more about others	0.745			
	C25 Being involved in celebrity-related activities makes me feel real	0.708			
	C26 Being involved in celebrity-related activities helps me make friends	0.688			
Place attachment	P27 Hengdian World Studios is a special place for me	0.680	0.508	0.892	0.899
	P28 The experience in Hengdian World Studios is unique	0.689			
	P29 Compared with other destinations, Hengdian World Studios brings me more satisfaction	0.707			
	P30 Compared with other destinations, I prefer Hengdian World Studios	0.696			
	P31 Hengdian studios is of great significance to me	0.740			
	P32 I am sentimentally attached to Hengdian World Studios	0.748			
	P33 I strongly identify with Hengdian World Studios	0.729			
	P34 I found out who I am in Hengdian World Studios	0.709			
Tourist loyalty	L38 If I have the chance, I will visit Hengdian World Studios again	0.734	0.558	0.791	0.798
	L39 I will speak positively of Hengdian World Studios	0.747			
	L40 I would recommend the trip to Hengdian World Studios to my relatives and friends	0.759			

RMR = 0.036, SRMR = 0.033, GFI = 0.888, AGFI = 0.872, NFI = 0.904, RFI = 0.896, TLI = 0.965, CFI = 0.968, IFI = 0.968, PGFI = 0.776, PCFI = 0.893, $\chi 2/df$ = 1.448.

models. The six-factor model also passed the chi-squared test with a significance level of 0.001, indicating that the original model had discriminant validity.

4.3. Hypothesis test

When testing the structural model ($\chi^2/df = 2.820$, RMSEA = 0.066, GFI = 0.824), the data fit the model well (Marsh et al., 1988). Attraction, centrality, and self-expression had a significant positive effect on destination image and place attachment ($p_{1a} < 0.001$, $p_{1b} = 0.016$, $p_{1c} < 0.001$, $p_{2a} = 0.039$, $p_{2b} = 0.013$, $p_{2c} < 0.001$), supporting H1a, H1b, H1c, H2a, H2b, and H2c. However, attraction, centrality, and self-expression had no significant effect on tourist loyalty ($p_{3a} = 0.913$, $p_{3b} = 0.744$, $p_{3c} = 0.121$). Consequently, H3a, H3b, and H3c were not supported. Destination image had a significant effect on place attachment ($p_4 < 0.001$), indicating that H4 was supported. Destination image and place attachment had a significant effect on tourist loyalty ($p_5 = 0.028$, $p_6 = 0.001$); H5 and H6 were thus supported. Table 4 shows the model path coefficients for all hypotheses.

We used Model 6 of the SPSS micro-PROCESS provided by Hayes (2012) that seeks to assess the accuracy of the model with mediation variables. Attraction, centrality, and self-expression were taken as the

Table 3
Fit statistics for nested models.

model	factors	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	△X2	△df
6 factors	a, b, c, d, e, f	888.81	614	1.448		
5 factors (1)	a+b, c, d, e, f	912.48	619	1.474	23.67***	5
5 factors (2)	a+c, b, d, e, f	906.24	619	1.464	17.43***	5
5 factors (3)	a, b + c, d, e, f,	903.01	619	1.459	14.2***	5
4 factors	a+b + c, d, e, f	924.15	623	1.483	35.34***	9
3 factors	a+b + c, d + e, f	1198.46	626	1.559	309.65***	12
2 factors	a+b + c + d + e, f	1134.65	628	1.807	245.84***	14
1 factor	a+b + c + d + e + f	1147.73	629	1.825	258.92***	15

a = Attraction, b = Centrality, c = Self-expression, d = Film Destination Image, e = Place Attachment, f = Film Tourist Loyalty.
***$p < 0.001$.

Table 4
Model path coefficient of SEM and hypothesis test results.

Hypothesis β	Influence path	Standard Estimate	Estimate	P	Result
H1a	Destination image ← Attraction	0.061	0.460	***	Supported
H1b	Destination image ← Centrality	0.048	0.115	0.016**	Supported
H1c	Destination image ← Self-expression	0.054	0.302	***	Supported
H2a	Place attachment ← Attraction	0.067	0.138	0.039*	Supported
H2b	Place attachment ← Centrality	0.044	0.108	0.013*	Supported
H2c	Place attachment ← Self-expression	0.057	0.258	***	Supported
H3a	Tourist loyalty ← Attraction	0.104	−0.011	0.913	Unsupported
H3b	Tourist loyalty ← Centrality	0.068	−0.022	0.744	Unsupported
H3c	Tourist loyalty ← Self-expression	0.115	−0.177	0.121	Unsupported
H4	Place attachment ← Destination image	0.104	0.588	***	Supported
H5	Tourist loyalty ← Destination image	0.216	0.702	0.028*	Supported
H6	Tourist loyalty ← Place attachment	0.288	0.631	0.001**	Supported

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table 5
Results of mediating effects.

Dependent variable	Attraction		Centrality		Self-expression	
	Effect	95%CI	Effect	95%CI	Effect	95%CI
Total effects	0.754	[0.682, 0.826]	0.695	[0.619, 0.770]	0.695	[0.623, 0.768]
Direct effects	0.098	[0.001, 0.194]	0.059	[-0.029, 0.146]	0.011	[-0.084, 0.105]
Total Indirect effects	0.657	[0.554, 0.754]	0.636	[0.532, 0.733]	0.685	[0.580, 0.791]
Ind1: X- > M1- > Y	0.398	[0.284, 0.509]	0.382	[0.275, 0.490]	0.404	[0.303, 0.510]
Ind2: X- > M2- > Y	0.090	[0.041, 0.148]	0.092	[0.044, 0.144]	0.121	[0.061, 0.188]
Ind3: X- > M1- > M2- > Y	0.169	[0.084, 0.265]	0.162	[0.081, 0.248]	0.160	[0.084, 0.248]

X = Attraction/Centrality/Self-expression; M1 = Film Destination Image; M2 = Place Attachment; Y = Film Tourist Loyalty.

independent variables, tourist loyalty as the dependent variable, and destination image and place attachment as the intermediary variables. The results, given in Table 5, showed that the three elements of celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) had no significant effect on tourist loyalty. Destination image played an independent mediating role in the relation between the three elements of celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) and tourist loyalty; thus, H7a, H7b, and H7c were supported. Place attachment mediated the relation between the three elements of celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) and tourist loyalty; thus, H8a, H8b, and H8c were supported. Place attachment and destination image also played a full chain-mediating role between the three elements of celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) and tourist loyalty; thus, H9a, H9b, and H9c were supported. Centrality and self-expression had no direct effect on loyalty, whereas attraction had a direct effect on loyalty. Therefore, centrality and self-expression were fully dependent on the mediating role of place attachment and destination image to affect film tourism tourist loyalty, and attraction was partly mediated by place attachment and destination image.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the notion that fans of celebrities may form more favorable perceptions of a film tourism destination if they perceive involvement with a given actor or influencer as a key part of their leisure activities. If this is the case then it was argued such involvement would lead to higher levels of site loyalty. Hence the relationship between (a) the three elements of celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression), with (b) destination image, place attachment, and tourist loyalty were considered while (c) considering the intermediary role of destination image and place attachment. This notion has been largely neglected in previous studies. The study used Hengdian World Studio, the largest film tourist attraction in China, as the case destination. The positive relationship between celebrity involvement and tourist loyalty and the mediating roles of destination image and place attachment represent novel findings in the studies of film tourism and possess theoretical and practical implications, described in the next subsection.

5.2. Theoretical implications

First, given the recognition of the importance of tourists' loyalty (Antón et al., 2017; Stumpf et al., 2020; Suhartanto et al., 2020), there is substantial interest in researching tourists' loyalty in terms of film tourism in China, especially in the immediate post-COVID-19 period, when domestic tourism is an important economic driver of regional economies. Premised on attachment theory, the study examined how tourists' level of celebrity involvement affects their loyalty to film tourism destinations. Although scholars have studied attachment theory extensively (Boateng et al., 2020; Cardinale et al., 2016; Fan & Qiu, 2014), and a few have even applied it to film tourism (Chen, 2018; Teng & Chen, 2020), the role whereby film star fans transmit their emotions and attachment to revisit and other metrics of destination loyalty has been over-looked. This study found that tourists' emotions and attachment towards celebrities do not directly influence destination loyalty, but (as shown in Table 4) rather need to go through a process where tourists' emotions towards celebrities to the destination are primarily transferred to the film destination strengthening their destination image and place attachment, and thus increasing their loyalty. These results add to the research on attachment theory and provide some new theoretical foundations for the study of film tourism loyalty. In addition, despite being tied to the context of film tourism, the findings provide a theoretical base for future research on other forms of tourism.

Second, our study confirmed that place attachment and destination image should be considered when examining the influence of the three

elements of celebrity involvement (attraction, centrality, and self-expression) on tourist loyalty in film tourism. Place attachment generated by the functional and emotional connection to a destination (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015; Xu, 2016) and destination image representing tourists' beliefs, ideas, and impressions after evaluating various attributes of the destination (Moon & Han, 2019; Stylidis et al., 2020) play a significant intermediary role between celebrity involvement and tourist loyalty. Although extant research has proven that place attachment and destination image are important determinants of tourist loyalty (Jeong & Kim, 2019; Lee & Shen, 2013; Shaykh-Baygloo, 2020), some scholars have also studied them as intermediary variables (Akroush et al., 2016; Nasir et al., 2020). Our findings may help prove the intermediary role of place attachment and destination image in the film tourism industry. Celebrity involvement has been considered by others (e.g., Chen, 2018; Lee et al., 2008; Wu & Lai, 2021), but the need remained for better understanding of the three factors of centrality, self-expression, and attraction. Regarding film tourism, this study does progress research of those three dimensions of celebrity involvement on tourist loyalty, and in doing so expands research on the antecedents of tourist loyalty and improves the predictive power of the tourist loyalty model.

Third, the study examines how celebrity involvement links to the revisit and recommendation intention of film tourists and highlights the role of intermediary variables. Previous studies have only examined the direct effects of celebrity involvement on tourists' willingness to recommend and revisit (Yen & Teng, 2015), ignoring the indirect effects produced by mediating variables. This study introduces place attachment and destination image as mediating variables between celebrity involvement and tourist loyalty. It concludes that centrality, self-expression, and attraction of celebrity involvement had no significant direct impact on tourist loyalty but have an indirect effect through the two mentioned mediating variables.

Finally, the results indicate that destination image and place attachment play a separate and chain mediating role using celebrity involvement as an antecedent variable. It is possible to discern action paths of - attraction, centrality, and self-expression → destination image → tourist loyalty; attraction, centrality, and self-expression → place attachment → tourist loyalty; attraction, centrality, and self-expression → destination image → place attachment → tourist loyalty. These paths reinforce prior studies for the mediating role of destination image and place attachment between tourists and subsequent tourists' behaviors of recommendation and revisit intention.

5.3. Practical implications

In practical terms, our findings can help film tourism destination marketing organizations identify the "star effect" to enhance the destination image by considering how actors and/or influencers develop attraction, centrality, and self-expression on the part of their fans. The "reward" is that high levels of celebrity involvement may help create a positive destination image and influence tourists' destination choice (Busby et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2008). Consequently, managers can provide tourists with a better experience that is more in line with the tourists' identification with the star they follow. For example, for the parent–child market, managers can develop parent–child projects in which parents and children participate according to the activities in which stars participate and by improving parent–child facilities and parent–child services. Managers could also consider developing the film and television shooting base into a unique place to experience familial affection by possibly filming them replicating the stars' roles.

Destination marketing organizations should also carefully consider tourism experiences for the target market that will increase place attachment to film tourism destinations. For followers of "Romcoms" managers can provide more festival activities related to star couples, shrink the distance between tourists and stars, and enable tourists to experience star-related activities to increase tourists' attraction to the destination. According to the characteristics of the romance market, managers should strengthen fans' centrality dimension of celebrity involvement by offering invitations to events with the stars, participation in re-enactments of key scenes while being filmed, and being provided with souvenirs that incorporate both the star and the tourist. This can be done using digital technologies or film star "doubles". In this way, tourists can both share romantic travel experiences with people around them but also enhance their own lives.

5.4. Limitations and future research

Despite the theoretical and managerial implications listed above, there are caveats to consider. First, this study was limited to a specific destination, Hengdian World Studio. Future research can consider different types of destinations for film tourism or conduct a comparative study. Second, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the respondents were Chinese; and it is not known if tourists from different cultural backgrounds would record similar attitudes. Third, the study focused on the effect of celebrity involvement, destination image, and place attachment on tourist loyalty; however, other variables, such as tourist activities (Padrón-Ávila et al., 2021), self-congruity, emotional solidarity (Joo et al., 2020), perceived ambiance (Wang et al., 2021), and demographic factors (e.g., age, sex, monthly income) may affect the relationships among the variables of this study.

Declaration of competing interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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