

The tourist experience of Iconic Public Art in Macau*

La experiencia turística del arte público icónico en Macao

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ABSTRACT

Art-related tourism is increasingly appealing to the tourist market. Yet how tourists aesthetically judge iconic public art remains unknown. This study attempts to explore their aesthetic judgment and some psychological and behavioral outcome. Or particularly the relationship between place identity, flow experience, and some on-site behaviors. Drawing on a survey, the conceptual framework which consists of five constructs will get validated.

Keywords: public art, place identity, aesthetic judgment, flow experience

RESUMEN

El turismo relacionado con el arte es cada vez más atractivo para el mercado turístico. Sin embargo, cómo los turistas juzgan estéticamente el arte público icónico sigue siendo desconocido. Este estudio intenta explorar su juicio estético y algunos resultados psicológicos y de comportamiento. O particularmente la relación entre la identidad del lugar, la experiencia de flujo y algunos comportamientos en el sitio. Sobre la base de una encuesta, se validará el marco conceptual que consta de cinco construcciones.

Palabras clave: arte público, identidad de lugar, juicio estético, experiencia de flujo

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Introduction

The topic of tourist aesthetics has been explored by many academicians, with topics ranging from natural landscape to man-made attractions. Aesthetic value and judgment is believed to be vital (Kirillova, Fu, Lehto, & Cai, 2014). In the context of urban tourism, iconic public art could be quite captive for sight-seeing and photo shooting. Public art could enliven the street landscape of street of cities and enrich the experience of tourists and residents. It is also believed to be especially attractive for tourists who are no longer satisfied with packaged and routine arrangement (Frost, Laing & Williams, 2015). Yet how the tourists experience the public art remains unclear.

In the recent decades, the concept of place identity has been applied to tourism research to understand of the relationship between tourists and a destination. Tourists' destination experience can be regarded as a process of constructing place identity (Hough, 2011). During or after art appreciation, tourists can have the flow experience (Harmat, et al., 2016), referring to an optimal psychological state characterized by enjoyment, concentration, and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Art appreciation and many other leisure activities are associated with the flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). However, by far there is no tourism research focusing on the appreciation of public art and its antecedents and outcomes.

Based on the previous discussions, this study has the following objectives:

1. To understand tourists' aesthetic experience with an iconic public art;
2. To explore the relationship between aesthetic experience and place identity;
3. To investigate the relationship between aesthetic experience and the sense of flow; and
4. To examine the relationship between the aesthetic and flow experiences and behavioral outcomes.

Literature review

Aesthetic judgment of public art

Aesthetic appreciation is a self-rewarding, hedonic and reinforcing psychological experience, with emotional and cognitive involvement (Leder, Belke, Oeberst, & Augustin, 2004). Academic effort has been made to understand it from a more explicit and pragmatic way. Aesthetic appreciation is a comprehensive sensory experience, which "inevitably tend toward a reasoned choice and therefore must formulate itself as a judgment" (Scruton & Munro, 2009, p. 4). So aesthetic judgment is grounded in aesthetic appreciation, with the evaluative function to discern good qualities from bad, to rank the merit of those qualities, and to identify how pleasure element in the appreciation. Aesthetic judgment in its very nature is the endeavor aiming at figuring out some empirical common universal standards of what is beautiful despite people's subjective experience (Scruton & Munro, 2009). So it is featured to be more cognitive, logic and objective, less of assertive mental processing and perception (Brady, 2003).

Different disciplines offer various understanding of aesthetic appreciation; however, there are some universal law behind the subjective judgment (Scruton & Munro, 2009). It was summarized that aesthetic judgment has three major categories (Knudsen, Metro-Roland, & Rickly, 2015): the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque. Among the three aesthetic concepts, the beautiful is deemed to be suitable for the present research because of the concept's emphasis of rational aesthetic judgment.

Place identity

Place identity is a term derived from environmental psychology, which occurs when people endow a place with certain meaning during interaction of space and psychology (McCathy, 2006). Tourists' destination experience was stated to be a process of identity construction from an anthropological perspective (Hough, 2011). Different places might offer tourists a shared value and belief, thus instill them with a sense of belonging and arouse place identity (Palmer, 2005). Monuments, sculptures or buildings, even tourism event are all helpful in building up local place identity. Some researcher chose to probe into the impact of place identity from the perspective of tourists via reading and reflection of the local heritage

interpretation (Uzzel, 1996). Measurement of place identity is often associated with terms concerning people's cognitions, attitudes, values and tendencies. Proshansky (1983) proposed three dimensions to measure place identity, namely cognitive-descriptive dimension, cluster of affective-evaluative dimension, and role related dimension. Lalli (1992) proposed a five-dimension framework for measuring place identity, and the framework consists of attachment, familiarity, continuity with the past, evaluation, and commitment. This study examines place identity in the context of public space wherein tourists interact with iconic sculpture in an urban setting. The present study adopted Lalli's (1992) five-dimension framework, which has been widely used in studies related to place identity.

Flow experience

The flow theory was developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1979) to address a state of psychological experience featured with high concentration and lose sense of time and space. Flow experience was intensively employed to explain flow-like activities such as poetry, painting, musical composition, singing in a choir, listening to music, regardless of an amateur artists or collectors (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). The pursuit of leisure is closely related to flow experience, and flow is a desirable experience of leisure (Man-nell & Bradly, 1986). However, this concept seems to be undervalued in tourism research.

Flow is characterized by immersion in an activity. When one's skill matches with the challenge of the activity, the mental state of flow could be attained. and visitors are prone to sense the feeling of enjoyment and immersion in beautiful scenes. Standing in front of an artwork, the captive appreciator would observe thoroughly, react cognitively, and relate oneself to the destination. Concentration and imagination might be employed in this gaze at an artwork. However, it remains unknown how tourists' flow experience could be triggered during the appreciation of artworks.

Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The formulation of hypotheses is briefly stated subsequently.

- H1. Aesthetic judgment has a positive effect on flow experience.
- H2. Aesthetic judgment has a positive effect on place identity.
- H3. Flow experience has a positive effect on tourists' behavioral outcome.
- H4. Aesthetic judgment has a positive effect on tourists' behavioral outcome.
- H5. Place identity has a positive effect on tourists' behavior outcome.

Method

Study object: Kun Iam Ecumenical Centre

Kun Iam ecumenical Centre is a landscape site of Macau. It is located on the Outer Harbour dedicated to Goddess of Kun Iam (Goddess of Mercy). The statue is 20 meters tall and made of golden bronze, seating above a hemispherical lotus shaped base. A Portuguese artist designed this statue and made it present an unusual and remarkable outlook. The clothing style and the charm make the statue looks like Mother of Maria. The expression of Kun Iam's face was especially designed to be "raceless-but-with-one-heart" (Leiria, 1999, p. 158). The Kun Iam statue is recognized as one of the iconic public artwork (Shang et al., 2010). The statue is popular among tourists and often referred to as signature or symbol of Macau. It is the last public artwork that Portuguese government left behind in Macao before their official excavation. The Kun Iam statue is quite intriguingly rich in art design, culture as well as politics.

Sampling procedures and measurement

A structured survey will be employed in this study. A self-administrated questionnaire will be distributed in front of the sculpture. The questionnaire consists of three sections. The first section deals with aesthetic judgment based on the previous researches (Kirillova et al., 2014;) and adapted to the real context. 7 Semantic differential scales are employed which made up of two opposites. Themes are extracted as balance, uniqueness, scale, time, condition, legibility and shape. The place identity is constructed with 5 dimensions: familiarity, evaluation, commitment, attachment, and continuity (Lalli, 1992). flow experience was measured by 4 dimensions (Kaur, Lee, & Tsang et al., 2018; Pelet, & Cowart, 2017): enjoyment, concentration, social interaction, curiosity. As photo-taking and social-media sharing are getting more and more popular among Chinese visitors, this current study employed 4 items to measure In-situ behavior: take pictures, share photos and share writing via social media, and read interpretation.

Data analysis

This study investigated the relationship among 5 latent constructs: aesthetic judgment, place identity, flow experience and some travelling behavioral outcomes. Structural Equation Modeling will be employed to test the proposed hypotheses. The software of Amos and spss will both be utilized.

Conclusions

Aesthetic experience has its long and natural history rooted in the domain of art, regardless of a variety of artistic forms, architecture or music, poems or painting (Parsons, 1987). Public art which used to be a marginal area within art practice is now gradually gaining attention by city planners and politicians to assume the role of city-image re-maker, as well as forerunner of local culture renaissance (Hall, T., & Robertson, I., 2010), but regretfully remain scarcely touched by tourism academicians. This study try to bridge the aforementioned gaps by exploring how iconic public art is aesthetically judged by tourists, what place identity was provoked during their interaction with iconic public art, is it possible that the desirable mental state of flow experience could be triggered during this art appreciation.

Apart from these academic implication, the findings of this research could also shed light for destination marketing organization and policy makers with some practical implication. A stronger place identity will bond up the relationship between tourists and the destination, which will in turn bring about favorable outcomes such as WOM and returning intention. By assessing how their place identity is constructed and even reasserting one in a better level is beneficial to identify and obtain marketing edges would be found and obtained by asserting or reasserting a place identity in a better level. Besides the angle of tourism economics, tourists' experience can also be updated by a better understanding of the flow experience during their art appreciation.

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