

Reliving self-presentational concerns in rural tourism

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ABSTRACT

Tourists are known to behave differently from their home environment, a phenomenon that has been well interpreted by sociologists in early conceptual works. By investigating tourists' self-presentational concerns, this study attempts to provide a psychological explanation of this phenomenon, as well as empirical evidence to test it in the context of rural tourism. Through a mixed-design questionnaire survey, the study shows that destination environment may function as the back stage for tourists to do away with the social constraints at home and relieve their daily self-presentational concerns. Specifically, rural destinations perform better than urban destinations in reducing urban residents' self-presentational concerns but this advantage becomes weaker as tourists stay longer at the destinations.

Introduction

Tourists are known to behave differently from their home environments. This phenomenon has been documented in Jafari's (1987) integrated socio-cultural tourist model, which interprets that tourism is a process of traveling from the ordinary to the non-ordinary world. To explain the behavioral difference, sociologists regard tourism as a permissive domain of social life that enables a temporary suspension of customary rules, social norms, and values that govern their daily lives (Goffman, 1967; Shields, 1992; Turner & Ash, 1975; Wang, 2000). For example, Shields (1992) refers to touristic spaces as liminal zones where social constraints are suspended under the exigencies of relative anonymity and the freedom from social scrutiny. Goffman (1967) labels tourism-related settings as backspaces where people are allowed and even encouraged to experience the adventures denied to them in daily life. Overall, in the destination environment, tourists' behaviors are less constrained by the norms of their social characters and their regular social networks at home, leading to behaviors distinct from their daily routines.

The current study attempts to provide a psychological explanation of this phenomenon by introducing the concept of self-presentational concern, which refers to the degree of which people attend to the impressions that they make on others (Leary, 1995; Leary, Kowalski, & Campbell, 1988). This study claims that the behavioral difference between the destination environment and the home environment may be attributed to the relief of daily self-presentational concerns that prevail in the home environment. Although self-presentational concern has been recognized in social psychology literature as a fundamental and powerful psychological

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process that influences virtually every interpersonal encounter (Leary, Allen, & Terry, 2011), its characteristics in the destination environment are not clear yet.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical sociology of self-presentation provides the theoretical foundation for connecting tourism and self-presentational concern. People's daily self-presentations are performed within the frames of social interactions (e.g., social norms, values) of their home environments (Goffman, 1959). Traveling to destinations for leisure often involves escaping to a non-ordinary world (Jafari, 1987) or a liminal zone (Shields, 1992; Turner & Ash, 1975) where the power of social norms and community scrutiny can be suspended. As such, destination environment may relieve an individual's everyday self-presentational concerns. Notably, daily social constraints can also occur with regular social networks (e.g., families, friends, and colleagues) who can accompany to the non-ordinary world, consequently weakening the effectiveness of the destination environment to relieve these concerns. Hence, whether the overall effect of tourism, including all kinds of travel companionship, on self-presentational concern is significant is worth investigating.

In synthesizing the dramaturgical sociology of Goffman and the literature in environmental psychology, this study further proposes that the effect of tourism on self-presentational concern reflects the psychological reaction to a novel socio-physical environment of a destination. The strength of effect should depend on the destination's socio-physical environment. Motivation for rural tourism is often associated with the escape from urban stress and the pursuit of an experience contrast to urban routines (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010; Rid, Ezeudji, & Pröbstl-Haider, 2014) because the rural socio-physical environment is distinct from that of urban areas (Dong, Wang, Morais, & Brooks, 2013; Pesonen & Komppula, 2010; Urry, 2002). To verify the above proposition, this study examines whether rural destinations exert a stronger effect than urban destinations on urban residents' self-presentational concerns in the context of urban residents traveling to rural destinations. Notably, the rural environment is not equally novel for every urban resident, so the effect may vary individually. But in general it should be more novel than urban destination environment.

The primary goal of this study is to develop a conceptual model that links rural tourism and tourists' self-presentational concerns. As such, this study aims to (1) investigate the general effects of tourism on individuals' self-presentational concerns regardless of travel companionship and (2) compare the effects of rural destinations on urban residents with those of urban destinations. By introducing the psychological concept of self-presentational concern, this study attempts to offer empirical support to the conceptual works on tourists' behaviors that are distinct from their daily routines and to explain the phenomenon from the perspective of environmental psychology. Practically, a comparison between rural and urban destinations would inform the industry practitioners if rural tourism is worth developing to relieve urban residents' daily self-presentational concerns. The study results are expected to reveal a general situation and stimulate future studies to explore the moderators as extension to the conceptual model.

Tourism and self-presentational concerns

People recognize that the impressions they make on others strongly influence how others behave toward them and thus determine a variety of important outcomes in social, financial, occupational and romantic domains. As a result, people are rarely free of self-presentational concerns and few other interpersonal processes exert such a pervasive influence on social behaviors (Leary et al., 2011). According to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework of self-presentation, social interaction is like a theater. People in everyday life are actors on a stage playing a variety of characters. The audience consists of other individuals who watch and react to the performances. Like in a theater performance, there is a front stage where the actors are performing to meet the expectation of the audience. Thus, the behaviors on the front stage are the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during social interactions. There is also a back stage where individuals can get rid of the characters that they play when they are meeting the audience. In the back stage, people can behave freely without the constraints of their social roles because the activities are partitioned from the audience. All their actions are not to please anyone but themselves in the back stage. All in all, individuals care more about what images may be conveyed by their behaviors on the front stage than in the back stage. This theory remains relevant when conceptualizing social interaction in today's society. For instance, the front/back stage framework has been applied to analyze the impersonation of contemporary ethnic tourism (Yang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2016). Moreover, McWha, Frost, and Laing (2018) find that the construction of the online self of travel writers follows a theatrical metaphor. Travel writers self-consciously perform their online identity as they seek to present a particular version of themselves to different audiences.

Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of self-presentation has been widely cited in studies of self-presentational concerns which traditionally focus on how people behave differently between private and public settings (Baumeister & Finkel, 2010). Leary and Kowalski's (1990) self-presentation model illustrates that an individual's self-presentational concern is influenced by dispositions and social contexts. Some people possess the attributes associated with high self-presentational concerns, whereas other people have low concerns in general. The social contexts that affect the level of self-presentational concern include publicity/anonymity of the behavior, dependency on the audience, characteristics of the audience, and expected frequency of contact with the audience. Combining Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework with the social psychological interpretation of self-presentational concern, it is reasoned that the performance on the front stage is a product of self-presentational concern and aims at meeting the requirement of the audience to achieve certain goals. In the back stage, individuals' self-presentational concerns could be relieved and the behavior is less constrained by the regular social roles. Therefore, an individual's self-presentational concern in general should be lower in the back stage than on the front stage.

This argument is supported by impression management theory. People possess a pervasive desire to be viewed positively, so they attempt to control audience's impressions of a person, object, event, or idea. When people are trying to control impressions of themselves, the activity is called self-presentation (Schlenker, 1980). The theory argues that individuals' impression management concerns are motivated by social audiences and become increasingly salient when their behaviors are observed by others. Social

contexts affect the effort of impression management and the image that a person chooses to convey (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). However, the characteristics (e.g., relationships, distance, and goal relevance) rather than the size of the audience have significant influences on impression management concerns (Argo, Dahl, & Manchanda, 2005; Leary, 1995).

Recent studies have regarded tourism as an extension of the everyday self-presentations (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Lyu, 2016). People nowadays engage in online self-presentations in which the absence of face-to-face interaction does not reduce the impact of audience on online performance. Lo and Mc Kercher (2015) identify that sharing travel photos online is closely tied to impression management, which involves defensive or assertive tactics to present an ideal self. By framing the travel experience, tourists reconstruct their everyday selves to idealize and experiment with their identities. Lyu (2016) finds that female tourists with the tendency to commit self-objectification intentionally manipulate their travel selfies for strategic self-presentations. However, these studies fail to recognize that tourists' overall self-presentational concerns may be reduced when they are offline and relax in the destination environment.

Because a change in the social contexts will lead to changes in self-presentational concerns (Gibbins & Walker, 1996; Rutland, Cameron, Milne, & McGeorge, 2005) tourism may affect an individual's self-presentational concerns by relieving the constraints of social norms of the home environment. This notion is also reflected in Wang's (1999) thesis of existential authenticity which proposes that tourism destinations can be liminal zones where social orders and norms are suspended and where they can form an environment favorable to liberation and the acting out of one's authentic self. Tourists feel that they themselves are much more authentic in such liminal experiences than they are in everyday life because they are engaging in non-routine activities and are free from social constraints (Wang, 2000). Therefore, tourism destinations might be perceived by tourists as having the function of back stage due to liminal experiences (Brown, 2013; Jafari, 1987; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999).

This argument also aligns with Jafari's (1987) sociocultural tourist model that points out the behavioral and mental differences of tourists between the ordinary world of home and the non-ordinary world of tourism. Traveling to the destination is labeled as the emancipation component in which tourists are "emancipated from the ordinary bounds into the unbounded realm of the non-ordinary" (p. 152). Changes in the external environment and the perception of anonymousness facilitate the emancipation. The time of staying at the destination is the animation component which captures the lubricant state of detachment or disconnectedness. In the destination environment, immersion into the tourist culture takes place as the tourist further internalizes the idea that he is no longer imprisoned by his former self but is transformed into a new identity playing on a new stage. The tourist culture begins to redefine roles, rules, process and expectation. As a result, various behaviors can be observed as a manifestation of decreased self-presentational concerns.

To summarize the above discussions, the study proposes the dramaturgical framework of self-presentation in tourism (see Fig. 1) which explains tourist behavioral differences between the destination environment and the home environment with the concept of self-presentational concern. The home environment is akin to the front stage for the everyday performance. Here, tourists play their social characters in their regular social networks and act with different levels of self-presentational concerns under the social constraints. Some tourists take the trip for the liminal experience. In this case, the destination environment may function as the back stage, where their self-presentational concerns become lower than at the front stage. However, the function of back stage may not take effect in all the circumstances and can be influenced by social settings (e.g., travel with people from routine life) and tourist personalities (e.g., motivations for self-presentation). Hence, this study aims to test the robustness of the framework in general situations without controlling social settings and tourist personalities.

H1. Tourists' self-presentational concerns are lower in the destination environment than in the home environment.

Self-presentational outcome of rural tourism for urban residents

The function of tourism destination as the back stage of tourists and its effect on self-presentational concern has the psychological foundation. From the perspective of environmental psychology, the relief of self-presentational concern at tourism destinations belongs to the responsive mode of human-environment transaction (Stokols, 1978). The responsive mode concerns about the impact of socio-physical environment on individuals' emotions and behaviors as well as the responses to environmental clues in order to

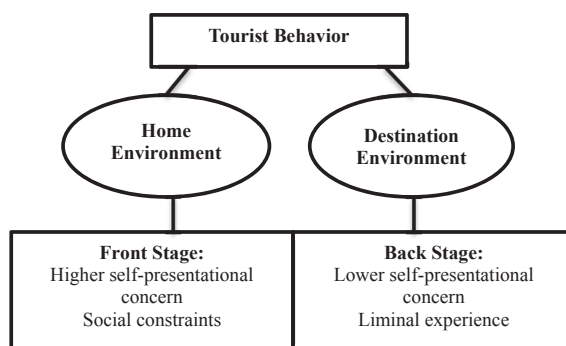


Fig. 1. Dramaturgical framework of self-presentation in tourism.

achieve human-environment optimization. Self-presentational concern in social interaction is a typical psychological reaction to an environment that imposes interpersonal pressures. If this is the case, does the function of back stage vary across destinations with different socio-physical environments? What types of destination perform better as the back stage? Tourism is a place-based activity. The physical dimension of the destination is essential to experiences, which are created in fleeting moments informed by social, cultural and physical cues (Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008; Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Therefore, the characteristics of the destination environment, being cultural, social or physical, as relates to the home environment of the tourists, should significantly affect tourists' psychological states (Fridgen, 1984). This study proposes that rural destinations may perform better as the back stage than urban destinations do in the case of urban residents because the socio-physical environments of urban destinations are more similar to tourists' home environments.

OECD (1994) defines rural tourism as being located in rural destinations and as being functionally rural. It is firmly based on the rural world's special features of open space, contact with nature, rural heritage, and society. The concept of rurality has been widely recognized as the fundamental element in defining rural destination (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015; Zhou, 2014) and in attracting urban residents to rural areas (Dong et al., 2013; Urry, 2002). Rurality should be treated as a continuum concept (Lane, 1994) with sparsely populated remote wilderness as one end of a polar typology. The other end of the scale can be represented by the so-called "world city", the ultimate expression of urbanization. Between these extremes lies a variety of situations, mostly rural or mostly urban (Robinson, 1990). For example, OECD's Rural Development Programme (1992) has developed a typology based on the continuum concept. Following this concept, rural destination should be regarded as a relative concept with the origin of tourists as the reference (Lane, 1994). A destination can be perceived as more rural for one person but more urban for another. Following this conceptualization, the terms "rural" and "urban" used in this article are based on tourists' perceptions.

The tourism literature regarding travel motivation and liminal zones might support the argument that the rural destination environment works better than urban destination environment as urban residents' back stage. Urban residents seek out rural tourism for different motivations. Primary ones include escaping from a stressful life, disconnecting with the urban lifestyle, seeking tranquility and simplicity in rural areas, relaxing away from the ordinary, enjoying peace and quiet, contacting with nature, and experiencing authentic rural lifestyle distinct from urban routine (Cai & Li, 2009; Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010; Dong et al., 2013; Park & Yoon, 2009; Pesonen & Komppula, 2010; Rid et al., 2014; Royo-Vela, 2009; Urry, 2002). It implies that compared with urban destinations, rural destinations may make urban residents feel more disconnected to the ordinary world of their home environments.

Tourism destinations may be perceived as a liminal zone when the socio-physical environment (e.g., architecture, landscape, natural/cultural scenery, appearance of local people) is distinct from that at home (Shields, 1992). Rural and urban communities possess contrasting physical settings and cultures in terms of general lifestyles, customs and values (Lane, 1994). In contrast to the stressful, competitive, standardized, industrialized and complex urban lifestyle, the rural lifestyle reflects peacefulness, simplicity, authenticity, relaxation, tranquility, and greenery (Dong et al., 2013). Therefore, the contrasting socio-physical settings between urban and rural environments might create the liminal experiences, facilitating the relief of self-presentational concerns at the rural destinations.

The influence of socio-physical environments on individuals' psychological states has been documented, including the environments with urban or rural characteristics (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995; Ryan et al., 2010; Weinstein, Przybylski, & Ryan, 2009). For instance, Ulrich (1979) finds that nature scenes in rural areas can relieve the stress of the respondents, but American urban scenes cannot. Ryan et al. (2010) also identify that photographic scenes of nature could enhance participants' subjective vitality while urban buildings could not. Moreover, Weinstein et al. (2009) claim that participants exposed to images of the natural environment (e.g., lakes, canyons) reported higher valuing of intrinsic aspirations (e.g., generosity), whereas those exposed to images of urban buildings reported higher valuing of extrinsic aspirations (e.g., reputation). Pearce (1982) proposes that contrary to the built environment in urban areas which better satisfy the needs for physiological arousal, the natural environment in rural areas works better on self-actualization experiences. Compared with the urban environment, the rural environment is more likely to induce significant psychological change. The latter tends to reflect the intrinsic value and resist the external pressure from social scrutiny.

Tourism involves movement from one environment to another, causing change in psychological states (Fridgen, 1984; Winkelman, 1994), including self-presentational concerns. This study combines the above arguments that the rural socio-physical environment is associated with disconnection to urban routines, liminal experiences, significant psychological change, and intrinsic value. That the rural destination may have a stronger effect than the urban destination in relieving urban residents' daily self-presentational concerns is put forward.

H2. Urban residents' self-presentational concerns decrease more significantly in the rural destination environment than in the urban destination environment.

As a psychological reaction to a novel socio-physical environment, the function of back stage may change when tourists stay longer and become increasingly familiar with the destination environment. Studies on culture shock indicated that people's psychological reactions to a new cultural environment are the strongest upon their arrival. When people stay longer in a new environment and gradually adapt to it, they are likely to adjust their psychological states to what they usually have in their familiar environments (Winkelman, 1994). Accordingly, when urban residents just arrive at the destination and begin to experience a life distinct from their home environment, the effect of environmental change on the psychological state is expected to be significant. However, the effect may become less significant when the tourists stay longer and begin adapting to the new environment. In examining rural and urban destinations, this study also explores the moderation effect of length of stay at the destinations, specifically whether the difference in the effects between rural and urban destinations decreases when tourists stay longer at the destinations. Fig. 2 illustrates the hypothesized conceptual model.

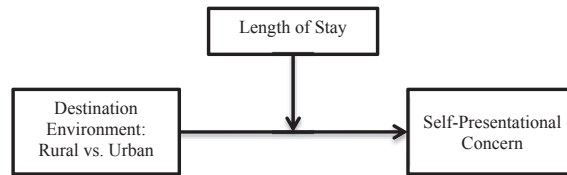


Fig. 2. The hypothesized conceptual model.

H3. The difference in the effects between rural and urban destinations decreases when tourists stay longer at the destinations.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives, a self-administered questionnaire survey was designed to collect the information. The sampling frame of this study included adults (18 and older) who live in urban areas of the United States and took a domestic leisure trip within the last three months. According to the U.S. [Travel Association \(2017\)](#), on average a U.S. resident took a leisure trip every three months. Therefore, this sampling frame allows an expectation to capture an average U.S. tourist according to the frequency of travel but not according to any other tourist typology attributes. An online version of the questionnaire powered by Qualtrics was prepared. Screening questions were used to select qualified respondents. Four hundred completed responses were collected on Amazon-mturk in May 2017. At the same time, three hundred completed responses were obtained by purchasing the data collection service of Qualtrics who was responsible for recruiting the participants according to the researchers' requirements. Two sources were used to recruit participants to increase the diversity of the respondent pool and the robustness of the study result across different samples.

The respondents were asked to recall their last trips and answer the questions on the basis of this experience. To facilitate the recalling process, the first part of the questionnaire includes the name of the destination, destination type (mostly urban vs. mostly rural), date of travel, length of stay, travel party size, and the most memorable activity. Notably, respondents who were unsure about the destination type they visited were not eligible to complete the survey. Considering that the study adopts the notion that rural destination is a relative concept, the destination type is defined by the respondents who also perceived themselves as urban residents. The questionnaire does not provide any instruction on defining rural or urban destinations. This approach is based on the assumption that defining the destination type reflects the respondents' perceptions of the destination environments as different from or similar to their home environments. The subjective perception is the foundation of their psychological reactions to the socio-physical environments of the destinations.

In the second part, self-presentational concern was measured with the Public Self-Consciousness Scale (7 items) ([Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975](#)) and the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (7 items) ([Leary, 1983](#)). The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = does not describe me at all while at the destination, and 7 = describes me very well while at the destination. These two scales have been widely applied to measure the individual level of self-presentational concern ([Kowalski & Brown, 1994](#); [Leary & Jones, 1993](#); [Martin & Leary, 2001](#); [Martin, Leary, & O'Brien, 2001](#)). The Public Self-Consciousness Scale measures an individual's awareness of the self as a social object that has an effect on others (e.g., I was concerned about the way I present myself). The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale measures a person's concerns about being judged negatively by others in a social context (e.g., I was frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings). Noticeably, the two scales were developed separately to measure self-presentational concern from each perspective rather than as its two dimensions. Therefore, previous studies tended to treat them as two independent proxies of self-presentational concern and analyze them independently. Following this way, the current study applied the two scales individually to measure self-presentational concern.

The survey was designed to observe the differences of the respondents' self-presentational concern between the destination environment and the home environment. Therefore, the third part of the questionnaire intended to collect the information in the home environment. The measuring items of the variables were the same as those in the second part, but the respondents were asked to report the situations in their daily lives rather than at tourism destinations. To help the respondents change their mindset from destination experience to daily life, they were asked to answer a series of questions regarding their daily routines. The last part of the questionnaire consisted of demographic information, including age, gender, annual family income and education.

To analyze the data, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was first conducted to the Public Self-Consciousness Scale (PSC) and the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE) to verify if the scales have satisfactory validity and reliability in the current sample. To test the effect of tourism on self-presentational concern, paired sample *t*-tests were applied to the summated means of the two scales of self-presentational concern between the destination environment and the home environment. To test if rural destination has a stronger effect than urban destination on urban residents' self-presentational concerns, a mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Mixed-design ANOVA was also applied to test the moderation effect of length of stay. All of the analyses in the hypothesis testing were performed using SPSS 23.0.

Findings

Six hundred and eighty-six valid responses were left for analysis. [Table 1](#) shows the profile of the respondents and some of the trip characteristics in the form of frequency. The majority of the respondents have Bachelor degrees or above. The respondents have an

Table 1
Profile of respondents and trip characteristics (n = 686).

Variables	Percentage (%)	Variables	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		<i>Annual family income</i>	
Male	48.3	< \$20,000	9.9
Female	51.5	\$20,000 to \$39,999	20.1
Other	0.2	\$40,000 to \$59,999	20.0
<i>Education</i>		\$60,000 to \$79,999	20.7
High school or lower	17.6	\$80,000 to \$99,999	18.8
Associate degree	16.3	≥\$100,000	10.5
Bachelor	44.2	<i>Age</i>	
Master	15.6	18–30	31.0
Doctoral	5.0	31–40	26.0
Other	1.3	41–50	19.8
<i>Companionship</i>		51–60	13.1
Alone	16.3	> 60	10.1
With others	83.7	<i>Destination type</i>	
		Mostly rural	51.2
		Mostly urban	48.8

average age of 39.83. Nearly half of the respondents have an annual family income higher than \$60,000. In terms of trip characteristics, the proportion of respondents who visited rural destinations is similar to that of urban destinations. Over eighty percent of the respondents traveled with other people and 16.3% traveled alone. The average length of stay is 5.32 days and the average number of travel companions is 2.35.

Self-presentational concern was measured two times in this study, obtaining values in the destination environment and the home environment. Values in the destination environment were used for CFA in which PSC and FNE were validated independently as one-factor scales. As shown in Table 2, all the factor loadings were above 0.5 and had a significant *t*-statistic at *p* < 0.001. The AVE values of PSC and FNE scales were 0.596 and 0.780, respectively, while their CR values were higher than 0.8. The convergent validity of the scales was therefore satisfactory. They fit the sample data well based on the goodness-of-fit indices (e.g., normed chi-square < 3, GFI > 0.95, CFI > 0.95, RMSEA < 0.06).

To test the effects of tourism on self-presentational concern, paired sample *t*-tests were conducted on its two scales. A summated mean procedure was applied. Consistent with H1, the respondents' self-presentational concerns decreased in the destination environment (see Table 3). The mean scores of PSC and FNE in the destination environment were significantly lower than those in the home environment (*p* < 0.01). The study result indicated that the destination environment is perceived by tourists as the social context in which the impressions and interpersonal goals become less important compared to the home environment. Notably, over 80% of the respondents traveled with others in any kind of relationship. Although travel companionship may moderate the effect of tourism, the finding shows that, in general, tourists' daily self-presentational concerns are relieved in the destination environment.

A mixed-design ANOVA was conducted to test if the degree of change in self-presentational concern differs between rural and

Table 2
Results of CFA.

Variables	Factor loadings ^a	Variables	Factor loadings ^a
<i>Public Self-Consciousness Scale</i>		<i>Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale</i>	
I was concerned about my style of doing things.	0.736	I was frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings.	0.881
I was concerned about the way I present myself.	0.836	I was concerned about other people's opinions of me.	0.911
I was self-conscious about the way I look.	0.831	When I was talking to someone, I worried about what they might be thinking about me.	0.931
I usually worried about making a good impression.	0.838	I was usually worried about what kind of impression I made.	0.917
One of the last things I did before I left my house was look in the mirror.	0.677	If I knew someone was judging me, it tends to bother me.	0.775
I was concerned about what other people think of me.	0.852	I often worried that I would say or do wrong things.	0.867
I was usually aware of my appearance.	0.597	I worried about what other people would think of me even when I knew it doesn't make any difference.	0.893
<i>Goodness-of-fit indices:</i>		<i>Goodness-of-fit indices:</i>	
AVE	0.596	AVE	0.780
CR	0.911	CR	0.961
Normed chi-square	2.42	Normed chi-square	2.56
GFI	0.987	GFI	0.989
CFI	0.994	CFI	0.997
RMSEA	0.046	RMSEA	0.048

^a*p* < 0.001 for all the factor loadings.

Table 3
Results of paired-sample *t*-tests.

Variables	Destination mean	Home mean	<i>t</i> -value
Public Self-Consciousness Scale	3.68	3.89	-5.53**
Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale	3.10	3.41	-7.26**

p* < 0.05, *p* < 0.01.

urban destinations as well as the moderation effect of length of stay. Since it was hypothesized that the effect of destination type depends on the length of stay at the destinations, the variable of length of stay was included in the analysis. The sample was divided into two groups with the median value as the cut-off point, representing longer duration (> 4 days) and shorter duration (≤4 days). The longer duration group contained 302 respondents while the shorter duration group had 384 respondents. The analysis tested the three-way interaction effects among tourism, destination type, and length of stay as well as the two-way interaction effects between tourism and destination type. Wilk’s Lambda and its *F*-value were used to judge the existence of interaction effect.

Table 4 presents the results of the three-way interaction test. There was an interaction effect among tourism, destination type and length of stay on PSC (*F* = 4.4, *p* < 0.05) and FNE (*F* = 6.18, *p* < 0.05). Box’s Tests for PSC and FNE had insignificant *F*-values, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of inter-correlations of the two variables was not violated. Levene’s Tests also showed insignificant *F*-statistics, confirming the homogeneity of variances among groups. Moreover, the two-way interaction effect between tourism and destination type without including the length of stay was not observed. Although the moderation effect of destination type was not supported by the two-way interaction test, it was identified after considering the length of stay. Therefore, the three-way rather than two-way interaction test supports H2 and H3.

The interaction effects on PSC and FNE are illustrated in Figs. 3 & 4. As displayed in Fig. 3, the effect of destination type on PSC was moderated by length of stay. When the duration did not exceed four days, the respondents experienced a more significant reduction of self-presentational concern at the rural destinations than at the urban destinations. However, for respondents who stayed beyond four days at the destinations, the levels of reduction at rural and urban destinations became increasingly similar. The two plots in Fig. 4 demonstrate a different situation. In the shorter duration group, the score of FNE reduced more significantly at the rural destinations than at the urban destinations (i.e., the slope of the rural destination group is steeper than that of the urban destination group). However, the opposite phenomenon was observed in the longer duration group. The respondents at the urban destinations had a significant drop of self-presentational concern on average.

The study results supported the hypothesis that there is an interaction effect among tourism, destination type, and length of stay on self-presentational concerns. Specifically, the decrease of their self-presentational concerns is greater when urban residents travel to rural destinations than when they travel to urban destinations. Moreover, this study identifies the moderation effect of length of stay, and finds that the difference in the effects between rural and urban destinations decreases when tourists stay longer at the destinations. Interestingly, by using FNE, the study found that when the respondents stayed beyond four days at the urban destinations, they even experienced a more significant drop in their self-presentational concerns than those who stayed at rural destinations. This finding is partially against the hypothesis that rural destinations are better than urban destinations as the back stage of urban residents. Nevertheless, the finding supports the assumption that the function of back stage reflects the psychological reaction to a novel socio-physical environment, which is subject to the time of being in the environment. This unexpected finding indicates that the function of back stage can vary with tourists’ familiarity with the socio-physical environments.

Discussions and conclusions

To achieve the goal, this study utilized a self-administered questionnaire survey to understand the general effects of tourism on urban residents’ self-presentational concerns, as well as the differences between rural and urban destinations in this process. The key findings are illustrated in the Conceptual Model of Rural Tourism and Self-Presentational Concern. As shown in Fig. 5, self-presentational concern varies in different environments. The *Urban Home Environment* in the figure is closer to the left polar while the

Table 4
Interaction effects among tourism, destination type, and length of stay.

Variables	Mean (S.D.)				Levene’s Test <i>F</i> -value	Box’s Test <i>F</i> -value	Wilks’ Lambda	<i>F</i> -value
	Rural (n = 351)		Urban (n = 335)					
	L (n = 156)	S (n = 195)	L (n = 146)	S (n = 189)				
PSC (Destination)	3.84(1.56)	3.35(1.55)	4.03(1.59)	3.62(1.56)	0.07	1.05	0.994	4.40*
PSC (Home)	3.93(1.58)	3.77(1.53)	4.17(1.54)	3.78(1.63)	0.50			
FNE (Destination)	3.39(1.73)	2.88(1.66)	3.27(1.77)	2.95(1.74)	0.54	1.42	0.991	6.18*
FNE (Home)	3.43(1.71)	3.37(1.76)	3.57(1.77)	3.28(1.81)	0.45			

p* < 0.05, *p* < 0.01. (Destination) = values in the destination environment, (Home) = values in the home environment, L = longer duration group, S = shorter duration group.

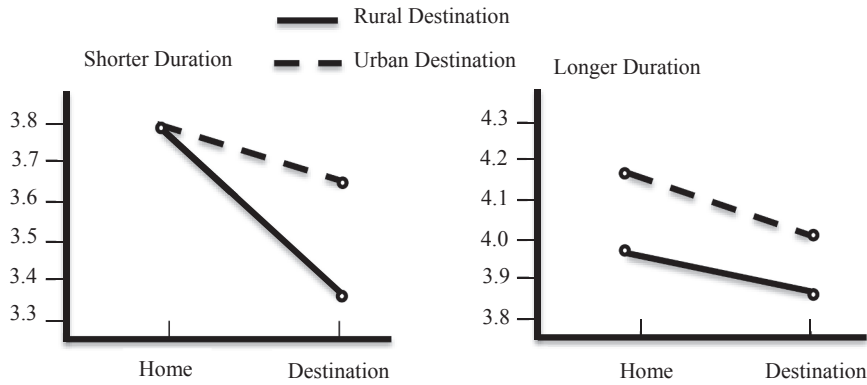


Fig. 3. The interaction effect between tourism and destination type on PSC.

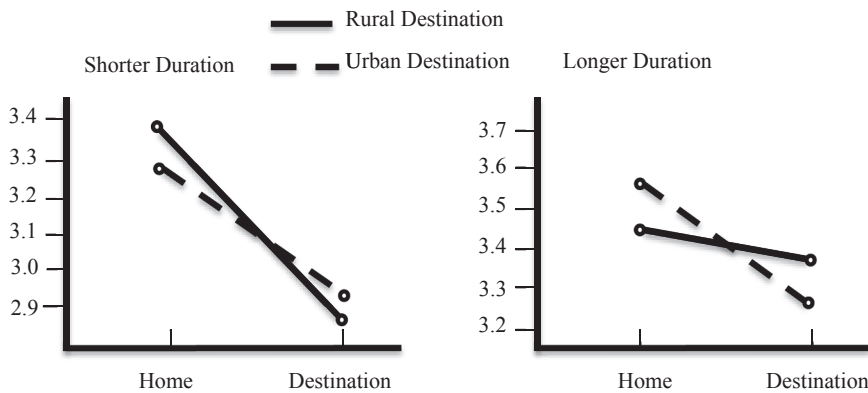


Fig. 4. The interaction effect between tourism and destination type on FNE.

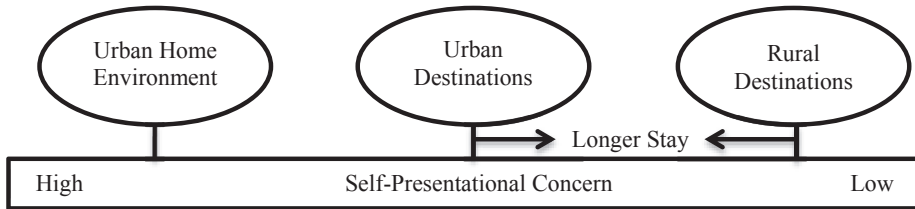


Fig. 5. The Conceptual Model of Rural Tourism and Self-Presentational Concern.

Rural Destinations and Urban Destinations are closer to the right polar. It shows that compared to the home environment, the destination environment is associated with low self-presentational concern. Moreover, urban residents’ self-presentational concerns decrease more significantly at the rural destinations than at the urban destinations, so the position of Rural Destinations is closest to the right polar. However, the positions of Rural Destinations and Urban Destinations move toward each other in a longer stay and may even switch in certain circumstances. The findings are discussed from the perspective of psychological reactions to socio-physical environments.

The psychological reactions to socio-physical environments

The study results demonstrated that tourism destinations function as the back stage where the individuals can do away with the burden of the characters at the front stage and have lower self-presentational concerns than in the home environment. Consistent with early sociological works, this study finds that destinations can create liminal experiences that are likely to be perceived by tourists as the back stage of social life (Shields, 1992). As a result, tourists imagine that they are in the non-ordinary world where the norms and social constraints in the everydayness no longer apply (Jafari, 1987). Using the evidence from rural tourism, the study affirms that the function of back stage reflects tourists’ psychological reactions to a novel socio-physical environment. At the start of vacation, the socio-physical environments in the rural destinations are novel to urban residents (Dong et al., 2013; Zhou, 2014),

evoking the feeling of being in the back stage. However, the environments in the urban destinations may induce urban residents to feel connected to the home environment, resulting in a less degree of change in the self-presentational concern. This situation may change as tourists become increasingly familiar with the destinations.

The moderation effects of destination type and length of stay manifest the fundamental assumption in environmental psychology that humans react differently to different socio-physical environments to achieve human–environment optimization (Stokols, 1978). Research in the field has identified the behavioral consequences of built and natural environments embedded with social implications. For instance, scholars interpreted that nature scenes are associated with physical activities and outdoor recreations while the urban buildings remind people about their daily routines and mundane jobs (Ryan et al., 2010). Studies in tourist psychology also showed that the built and natural environments in the touristic spaces have been endorsed with the social meanings that affect tourists' judgments about appropriate behaviors at various places. This phenomenon has been referred to as entering into touristhood (Jafari, 1987; McKercher & Lui, 2014). When urban residents see wildlife, stocks, and farmlands in rural areas, they may perceive this image as a society different from their usual social environments. Moreover, they may form a belief that they can set aside their daily concerns for self-presentations.

The time of being in the socio-physical environment is an important factor of the psychological reaction. The study identifies that the influence of rural environment becomes weaker as tourists stay longer at the destinations. This finding is consistent with the theories on human adaptation to a new environment. For example, studies in culture shock demonstrate that people's psychological reactions to a new cultural environment are the strongest upon their arrival. When people gradually adapt to the new culture, the intensity of these reactions will weaken and eventually return to normal reaction levels (Winkelman, 1994). The present study shows that tourists' psychological reactions to the destination environment also change at different stages of their vacation and that the function of the liminal zones (Wang, 2000) of the destinations may have a time limit. The mindset of being in the non-ordinary world (Jafari, 1987) may fade when people stay long enough at their destinations.

Two changes may occur in a tourist's psychological state. On the one hand, the liminal experiences created by the contrasting environment between urban and rural areas are influential in the first few days. However, when the urban residents stay longer and become increasingly familiar with the rural environment, their self-presentational concerns may rebound. On the other hand, a first glance at the similar urban physical attributes may not evoke intensive psychological changes. However, as the tourists stay longer and fully immerse in the non-ordinary world of the urban destinations, they will discover other social and cultural differences between the two urban areas, and the impact of a new environment begins to grow. In this case, the influence of urban destinations on urban residents' self-presentational concerns may become stronger than that of rural destinations in certain circumstances. Therefore, destination type does not independently work on tourists' self-presentational concerns. Its influence is subject to tourists' adaptation to the destination environment.

Conclusions

The primary goal and the two objectives of this study have been achieved through the development of the Conceptual Model of Rural Tourism and Self-Presentational Concerns based on the testing of three hypotheses. The three key findings are summarized as follows. First, the destination environment is perceived by tourists as the back stage of social life where their self-presentational concerns are lower than in the home environment. Second, compared with urban destinations, rural destinations have a stronger effect on urban residents' self-presentational concerns. Third, the effect of rural destination environment weakens, and the effect of urban destination environment intensifies when urban residents stay longer at their destinations.

The discussions of the key findings in environmental psychology lead to the following conclusions. Individuals' self-presentational concerns can be different when they travel to an unusual environment that they perceive as the back stage of social life. However, the function of back stage varies in different destinations according to the environmental differences between the destinations and tourist origins as well as the time of being in the environments. This process can be interpreted as tourists' psychological reactions to the socio-physical environments of the destinations. In this study, the rural destination environment performs better than urban destination environments as the back stage for urban residents. Conversely, this advantage is unstable across time as tourists adapt to the destination environment and change their psychological states at different stages of the vacation. This argument is based on the assumption that the tourist defines a destination as rural or urban. In applying the findings, initially understanding how the tourism markets perceive the destination is critical.

Theoretical and managerial implications

This study contributes to the literature of tourist behavior in numerous ways. First, by virtue of discovering the characteristics of self-presentations in an unusual environment, this study makes unique contributions to the development of social psychology theories as applied to tourism. As a prominent social psychological concept, self-presentation has not been extensively studied in the context of tourism. By extending the knowledge of self-presentational concern to the destination environment, this study echoes Leary et al.'s (2011) argument that self-presentation research should be placed in various spontaneous settings rather than only conducted in controlled laboratories. Moreover, by introducing the psychological concept of self-presentational concern, this study offers solid empirical support to the conceptual works on tourists' behaviors distinct from their daily routines. For instance, the current study demonstrates that the decreased self-presentational concern at the destination environment is a manifestation of the emancipation component of Jafari's (1987) tourism model as well as a reflection of the liminal experiences (Shields, 1992; Turner & Ash, 1975; Wang, 1999).

Second, this study raises discussions in the fields of dramaturgy sociology and environmental psychology on individuals' self-presentations in different socio-physical environments. The dramaturgy sociology interprets the effect of rural tourism by linking the rural environment to the back stage of urban residents on the basis of the assumption that tourists can perceive the environmental differences and define the destination as more rural/urban than their home places. The environmental psychology explains the decrease in self-presentational concern as the psychological reaction to a novel environment. However, evidence that directly support these arguments is lacking in the literature. Other questions must be answered to validate the interpretations of the study results. For example, are there any criteria that we can use to judge if a destination performs better as the back stage than another place? Can we classify tourism destinations according to tourists' psychological reactions to the environments? How can we ensure that the marketers' interpretation of the destination type is aligned with that of the tourists? Answers to these questions are helpful for suggesting positive marketing as well as psychological effects on tourists.

Third, the study findings provide new insights to the traditional tourist models, which tend to ignore on-site psychological changes. For example, [Jafari's \(1987\)](#) tourist model claimed that tourists begin to leave the touristhood and return from the tourist culture to their daily routines when they are prepared to depart from their destinations. This phenomenon is called repatriation in the tourist model. The time at the destination is referred to as the component of animation, which denotes an intensification of the influence of the tourist culture. However, the current study shows that a longer vacation can blur the boundary between animation and repatriation, or it can enrich the characteristics of animation. When the tourists become familiar with the destination environment, the influence of the tourist culture may weaken before they return home. Hence, urban residents' self-presentational concerns begin to rise when they stay longer at rural destinations. This finding supports [McKercher and Lui's \(2014\)](#) argument that the processes of engagement with and disentanglement from touristhood are more complex, prolonged, and subtle than previously envisioned.

This study also has implications on rural tourism marketing and management. People have different levels of daily self-presentational concerns and travel for various purposes. Rural tourism may be developed in a way that targets urban residents seeking a relief from their daily self-presentational concerns. For example, the "Honest-to-Goodness" marketing campaign of the Indiana State that positions the state as a place of "authentic experience" and "genuine people" corroborates this idea. The campaign appeals to the needs for a simple social environment and a genuine interaction with others. If this campaign succeeds, it may evolve into a paradigm for other destination marketers who want to incorporate the element of self-presentational concerns into their brand identities. Specifically, to attract urban residents struggling with peer pressure at home, rural destinations can highlight its simple social environment and the opportunity to disconnect with urban routines.

In addition, one of the potential outcomes of self-presentational change in the destination environment might be the change in tourists' health-related behaviors. Self-presentational concern is positively correlated with the frequencies of engaging in various health-related behaviors ([Martin Ginis & Leary, 2004](#)). A review by [Leary, Tchividjian, and Kraxberger \(1994\)](#) confirm that people act to make a good impression although they know these things may be harmful. Therefore, the policy makers and industry practitioners should pay attention to the health-related outcome of rural tourism. For example, practitioners may emphasize the health benefit of rural tourism, together with the function of self-presentational concern relief to attract people with an unhealthy self-presentation habit at home. Policy makers should support the construction of facilities for healthy destination activities, such as outdoor recreation and organic dining.

Finally, the study finding challenges the traditional method of rural destination development by pointing out that a rural destination should be defined as a relative concept according to the origin of the target market. In the current study, the rural destination is identified by the respondents rather than described in the questionnaire. Therefore, the perceived environmental difference between the destination and the tourist origin actually affects urban residents' self-presentational concerns. This finding informs destination marketers as well as travel agents that they should define their destinations or promote their packages on the basis of markets' perceptions instead of following the traditional academic definitions of rural/urban tourism. They should no longer limit the destination offerings and potential markets by strictly positioning the places as either rural or urban.

Limitations and future studies

This study bears some limitations that may affect the conclusions and can be addressed in future studies. Critical factors that may affect the applicability of the study results include cultural differences, demographics of the target market, and connectivity of the society. First, the applicability of the conceptual model to other cultures needs to be examined. Specifically, future studies can examine whether urban residents from other cultures also perceive the rural environment as their back stage. Second, scholars can also consider the influence of demographic variables or specific demographic groups. For instance, it is interesting to know whether older people are more resistant to environmental changes compared to the younger population and whether female tourists are more inclined to bring the daily self-presentational concerns to the destinations compared with male tourists.

Moreover, the increasing connectivity of the society due to technological advancements may impose significant challenges to the theory of front/back stage in social interaction which was proposed decades ago. Because of the prevalence of social media, individuals are highly connected with each other now ([Bødker & Browning, 2012](#)) so traveling to an unusual environment is not necessarily equivalent to disconnection from one's normal social network ([Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013](#)). Therefore, individuals' self-presentations have gone beyond the physical boundary and the front stage and back stage may gradually converge under this trend. Incorporating connectivity into the conceptual model may contribute to the evolution of the dramaturgical framework of self-presentation and identify if there is a convergence of the front stage and the back stage in the context of tourism. In addition to culture, demographics and connectivity, there are many moderators which can be incorporated into the model such as travel

companionship and familiarity with the rural environment. For example, self-presentations in the home environment are performed in front of different people. Individuals' self-presentational concerns are particularly high in front of unfamiliar audiences. Future studies can investigate if tourists' self-presentational concerns are different when they travel with different types of people.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2018.10.005>.

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