Homelessness in destinations: Tourists' visit intention

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Although the presence of homelessness can challenge a destination's existing representations and undermine tourists' visit intention, its impacts have not received much scholarly attention in the tourism literature. Recognizing this research gap, this study examines the impact of homelessness on tourists' visit intention in Hawaii. In particular, findings reveal that tourists' preceding prosocial behavior and moral emotion affect their intention to visit a destination experiencing homelessness issues. This study also finds a gender difference regarding the effect of preceding prosocial behavior on moral emotion. It contributes to the literature by expanding the discussion of this important social phenomenon in a tourism context. Findings also suggest that destinations could promote socially responsible and sustainable practices to mitigate the effects of homelessness.

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Introduction

Since as early as the 16th century, rapid social, economic, and political changes have given rise to the global phenomenon of homelessness (Kusmer, 2002). According to a recent report, approximately 2% of the world's population may be considered homeless (Chamie, 2017). Although meanings of homelessness have changed over time, it is generally characterized as "living in a place of habitation that is below a minimum adequacy standard; and lacking access to adequate housing" (Amore et al., 2011, p. 32). In the U.S., the homeless population increased significantly during the 2000s due to deteriorating economic conditions (e.g., recession, unemployment, affordable housing shortage) and soaring housing prices. Accordingly, policymakers began attending to this emerging social phenomenon and its social and economic consequences and have implemented various measures to reduce and/or prevent homelessness in major cities. Despite growing awareness, however, the impacts of homelessness have received only scant scholarly attention in the tourism context. For instance, using a qualitative approach, several researchers described tourists' encounters and interactions with beggars as the moment of disruption to travelers (Andriotis, 2016; Lozanski, 2013). Given the continued growth of the homeless population in tourist destinations, an in-depth analysis is critical to better understanding this important social phenomenon and its impact on tourists.

Tourism sectors depend on destination representations that can appeal to visitors (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005). As global competition in travel and tourism intensifies, many destinations have focused on developing and promoting a positive image to attract potential tourists. In the tourism literature, researchers emphasize the strong influence of destination image on travelers' decisions when they are considering a location to visit (Josiassen et al., 2015; Molinillo et al., 2018; Prayag et al., 2017). However,

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the presence of homelessness within communities can challenge a destination's existing representation. When tourists experience discomfort through interactions and/or encounters with homeless people, their perceptions of desirable environments at a destination may be affected (Andriotis, 2016; Atzori et al., 2019; Lozanski, 2013). For example, news coverage on homelessness reported that visitors to major U.S. cities such as San Francisco complained about homeless people lying in the streets, eating out of dumpsters, and urinating and defecating in public (McDermid, 2018). The San Francisco Travel Association acknowledged negative impacts of homelessness on tourism, stating "we hear from a lot of individual travelers that have come here and have had negative experiences on the streets and say they don't want to come back to San Francisco" (Cowan, 2018). Images of safe and clean destinations with pristine and unspoiled nature are pivotal to the success of the tourism industry. Thus, an important question arises: How do tourists' experiences with homelessness influence their behavioral intentions regarding travel destinations?

Given the potential implications for the tourism industry, we propose that tourists' responses to homelessness within destinations must be considered when examining their behavioral intentions. Particularly, we argue that the presence of homelessness can undermine the portrayal of safe and clean environments in representations of destinations and thereby influence tourists' intention to visit. This study investigates tourists' psychological mechanisms in an attempt to identify factors that mitigate the undesired effect of encountering homeless persons in destinations. For instance, as moral emotions motivate individuals to help others and build an orientation to society (Tangney et al., 2007), we propose that tourists' moral emotions may alleviate the effects of homelessness on their visit intentions. Previous research indicates that individuals' preceding prosocial behaviors, such as making donations, can reinforce their moral emotions (Haidt, 2003; Rueckert & Naybar, 2008; Willer et al., 2015). Drawing on gender differences in prosocial disposition (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Winterich et al., 2009), we suggest that the effect of preceding prosocial behavior on moral emotion – and, in turn, on visit intention – varies between male and female visitors. Hence, we developed an integrated model to test the interrelationships among tourists' moral emotion, preceding prosocial behavior, gender, and visit intention.

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to examine the impact of homelessness in a destination on tourists' visit intention and 2) to identify factors that can mitigate the impact on behavioral intention. We conducted three empirical studies (Fig. 1). In Study 1 we conducted an experiment to test the effect of seeing a homeless person in a destination on visit intention. In Study 2, using an online survey, we explored key factors that may mitigate the undesired effect of the presence of homelessness. Based on the factors identified in Study 2, in Study 3 we conducted a quasi-experiment to examine the interaction of tourists' prosocial behavior and gender on their moral emotions toward a homeless individual and, in turn, its influence on their visit intention. This study marks the first time that homelessness within tourism destinations has been considered an antecedent of tourists' visit intention. The findings of this study can provide a better understanding of the impacts of homelessness to help tourism policymakers develop and implement more balanced and sustainable tourism management strategies to benefit both visitors and communities within destinations.
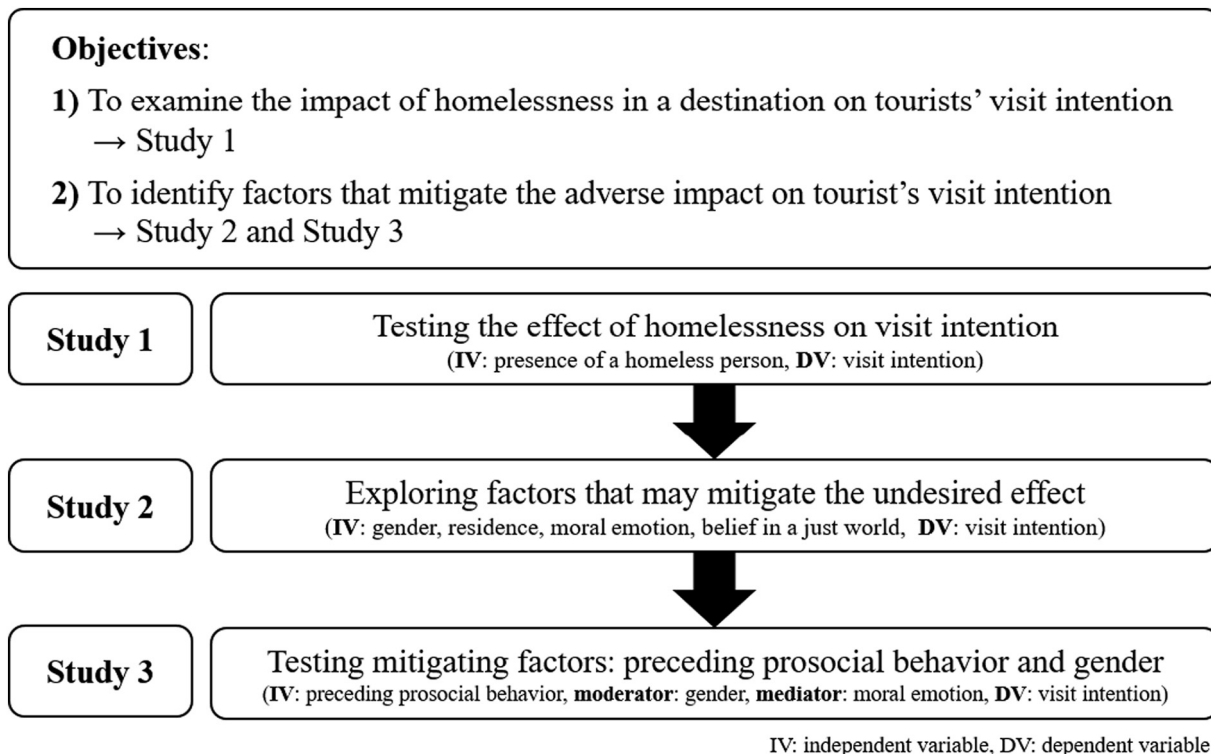
Objectives:

1) To examine the impact of homelessness in a destination on tourists' visit intention
→ Study 1

2) To identify factors that mitigate the adverse impact on tourist's visit intention
→ Study 2 and Study 3

| **Study 1** | Testing the effect of homelessness on visit intention (**IV**: presence of a homeless person, **DV**: visit intention) |

| **Study 2** | Exploring factors that may mitigate the undesired effect (**IV**: gender, residence, moral emotion, belief in a just world, **DV**: visit intention) |

| **Study 3** | Testing mitigating factors: preceding prosocial behavior and gender (**IV**: preceding prosocial behavior, **moderator**: gender, **mediator**: moral emotion, **DV**: visit intention) |

IV: independent variable, DV: dependent variable

Fig. 1. Overview of Study 1, 2, and 3.

Study 1: presence of homelessness and tourist' visit intention

Given that the presence of homeless individuals can be perceived negatively by tourists, Study 1 was designed to test the relationship between the presence of homelessness and tourists' visit intention.

Literature review: homelessness, destination representation, and tourists' perceptions

Homelessness in Hawaii

Many tourists have viewed the Hawaiian Islands, with their beautiful beaches and year-round warm climate, as a desirable vacation destination. Unfortunately, favorable climate and living environment also have made the islands an attractive place for the homeless. According to the 2019 Hawaii Statewide Homeless Point-In-Time count report, Hawaii has the second highest per capita rate of homelessness in the U.S. after New York, with more than 6400 sheltered and unsheltered homeless people across the state (Point in Time Count, 2019). Given the consistently high homeless population, concern has grown in recent years about how homelessness would impact Hawaii's tourism industry (Schaefers, 2019a). According to the Hawaii Tourism Authority, homelessness in Hawaii is one of the top complaints among tourists (Barney, 2017). For example, Waikiki police receive 6 to 15 homeless-related complaints daily from visitors, suggesting possible serious safety and security concerns for tourists related to the increased homeless population in Hawaii (Schaefers, 2019b). Furthermore, the presence of homeless persons is generally considered bad for business as it may disturb social engagement and interaction in commercialized public spaces (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015). Local business communities have expressed concern about the negative impacts of homeless persons on the local economy, contending that their presence may turn off visitors (Nakaso & Pang, 2019).

We chose Hawaii for our study for three reasons. First, it is among the popular tourist destinations that are struggling to address rising levels of homelessness. Second, the impact of homelessness on the tourism industry has already been noticeable there. Third, unlike urban destinations where some negative attributes, such as being dirty, congested, and polluted, are expected, tourists are primarily drawn to Hawaii for its favorable climate and natural resources. Homelessness may create a significant gap between destination representation and reality.

Gap in destination representations

The relationship between destination image and tourists' behavioral intentions has been discussed extensively in the tourism literature. Destination image refers to "a sum of associations and pieces of information connected to a destination, which would include multiple components of the destination and personal perceptions" (Murphy et al., 2000, p. 45). Considering that destination image influences one's perceptions of a place, a tourist's beliefs, feelings, and attitudes associated with a destination play a critical role in the travel decision-making process (Alcañiz et al., 2009). That is, the psychological aspects of destination image can explain variance in tourists' evaluations of a destination and therefore predict their behavioral intentions (Stylos et al., 2017). Essentially, tourists' intentions regarding a destination are both cognitive and affective, influenced by their beliefs and knowledge about the destination's attributes, as well as their emotions toward it (Pike & Ryan, 2004).

More recently, Josiassen et al. (2015) defined destination image as an individual's overall evaluative representation of a destination, to which they impute some degree of goodness and badness. That is, while tourists can link cognitive and affective attributes to a destination, perceived destination images based on these associations can be positive or negative (Kock et al., 2016). Since an individual's perceived image of the destination contributes to the development of expectations, negative consequences result when the perceived image does not conform to reality. Fairweather and Swaffield (2001) pointed out that a gap in destination representations will negatively affect a tourist's evaluation of the destination, resulting in an unfavorable behavioral intention toward the destination. When tourists to a certain destination experience unfavorable situations that are significantly different from their expectations based on a preconceived image, the representations of the destination become more negative for them, translating to a negative intention toward the destination. Therefore, researchers argue that it is important to project an image that corresponds to the reality of a destination, whether positive or negative (Martín-Santana et al., 2017).

However, tourism governing entities and destination marketing organizations place particular focus on producing touristic representations that emphasize a destination's positive aspects (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). For example, to make destinations attractive for potential tourists, they are portrayed as idyllic, pristine, and unspoiled natural environments devoid of problems. Touristic representations largely rely on essentialized descriptions and tend to ignore a destination's negative characteristics (Britton, 1979). Lowenthal (1985) defined this phenomenon as representational dissonance, in which a discrepancy exists between touristic representations of a destination and reality.

Recently, tourism literature has argued that incongruences in the representation of a destination may mystify travelers' expectations and perceptions about the destination and influence their behavioral intentions (Buzinde et al., 2006; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). Several scholars examine the effects of environmental changes (e.g., climate change) on representations of destinations and tourists' perceptions of and reactions to them (Atzori et al., 2019; Buzinde, Manuel-Navarrete, Kerstetter, & Redclift, 2010; Buzinde, Manuel-Navarrete, Yoo, & Morais, 2010; Gössling et al., 2012). Many costal tourism destinations depend on representations of their exotic and lucrative environmental attributes (e.g., clean beaches, palm trees), but deteriorated natural landscapes, such as beach erosion, can change the ways in which visitors perceive the natural landscapes. Other scholars also suggest that external changes, such as noise, traffic, and pollution, which are contradictory to the desired qualities of the landscapes, can influence individuals' representation of the destination and further motivate them to react to the changes (Lai et al., 2017; Law & Cheung, 2007).

Atzori et al. (2019) maintain that understanding how tourists perceive and respond to the impacts of various changes that challenge the extant representations of destinations is important to predict tourism demand and patterns. Despite the growing body of literature on touristic representations, most of these studies discuss the consequences of climate change and overlook other important social and environmental processes of change in destinations. With increased homeless populations in major tourism destinations, we propose that social representations about homelessness will play an important role in predicting tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions.

Tourists' perceptions about homelessness

Given that recent global financial and economic crises have led to an increase in homelessness in the U.S., homeless populations have particularly soared in locations that are perceived to be desirable tourist destinations. Research shows that the homeless gravitate to these destinations for the same reasons tourists do – warm climates and comfortable environments (Corinth & Lucas, 2018). According to a report on homelessness by the U.S. Council of Economic Advisers (2019a), the increasing cost of living and rising housing prices also contribute significantly to the growing number of homeless populations in popular tourist destinations, such as California and Hawaii. With rapid social change, the continued growth of homelessness has negative implications for the tourism industry because it is generally perceived to disturb social engagement and activities in commercialized public spaces (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015). In addition, the presence of homelessness tends to provoke negative associations, such as disgust, dysfunction, and filth, contrasting with the clean and unspoiled images in destination representations (Ahmed, 2014).

Literature in sociology and psychology suggests that stigma plays an important role in understanding how the public perceives homeless people (Goffman, 1963; Phelan et al., 1997). Stigma is defined as a discredited attribute that conveys labeling associated with the abuse of alcohol and drugs as well as psychiatric mental illness (Harris & Fiske, 2006).

Stigmatizing attitudes toward the homeless may lead to discriminatory behaviors such as avoidance, rejection, and segregation (Hinshaw & Stier, 2008). In a tourism context, therefore, stigmatization of the homeless can influence how tourists make sense of and cope with conflicting representations of destinations, ultimately affecting their behavioral intentions.

Consequently, local governments and tourism organizations have attempted to keep the homeless out of sight of tourists by implementing rules and regulations against activities associated with homelessness (Nakaso & Pang, 2019). According to a survey of 187 U.S. cities conducted by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2016), approximately 76% of cities prohibit begging, and 53% have banned sitting and/or lying down in public places. For example, in San Francisco, homeless individuals were given citations by local law enforcement for sleeping on the streets, trespassing, and blocking sidewalks (Johnston, 2012). Recently, the Honolulu City Council adopted a "sit-lie" ordinance to keep homeless people from sitting or lying on sidewalks in tourist areas like Waikiki (Hawaii News Now, 2018). Due to an increased homeless population, the ban has been expanded to downtown and other commercial areas in Honolulu. The Hawaii Tourism Authority emphasized the need for the sit-lie ban to eliminate homelessness in high-traffic areas (Barney, 2017). Although such attempts suggest the presence of homelessness has a significant impact on tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions, studies that examine this important relationship remain limited. Based on stigmatization theory, we argue that the way tourists perceive and respond to the phenomenon of homelessness may play an important role in predicting their intentions to visit a destination. While tourists are primarily attracted by the positive qualities (e.g., warm and comfortable environments) projected by destinations, deterioration of these elements caused by homelessness create representational clashes, which in turn negatively affect their visit intentions (Gössling et al., 2012). Although it may seem intuitive, the negative effect of homelessness on visit intention is yet to be empirically tested. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. There is a negative relationship between the presence of homelessness and tourists' visit intention.

Method

Design and procedure

To test the effect of seeing a homeless person on visit intention, a one-factor between-subject experiment with two levels (absence or presence of a homeless person) was conducted. U.S. residents aged 18 years or older were recruited from MTurk to participate. They were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions. Among 150 participants, 37 who provided incorrect answers for two attention-check questions ("According to the survey scenario, which destination did you see in the photos?"; "Please choose 'strongly disagree' here") were excluded from the analysis. There were more male ($N = 71$, 62.8%) than female participants ($N = 42$, 37.2%). Most were aged 20–39 ($N = 100$, 88.5%).

Participants were instructed to read a travel scenario as if they were planning a vacation trip and searching travel information. An Instagram post with four scenic photos of Hawaii (e.g., beach and mountain) was presented as a search result. Participants were asked to view each photo carefully. Three photos were identical for all participants. As shown in Fig. 2, the scenic view in the fourth photo either included or did not include a homeless person lying on the beach in the presence ($N = 57$) or absence conditions ($N = 56$). After viewing the photos, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that posed questions to capture visit intention and included a manipulation check.

Measures

Three items were adopted and modified from Zeithaml et al. (1996)) to measure visit intention (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): "I would visit the destination I viewed"; "I would seek more information about the destination I viewed"; "I am

Fig. 2. Stimuli in Study 1 (Left: absence condition; Right: presence condition).

interested in visiting the destination I viewed" ($\alpha = 0.75$). One manipulation check item was included: "Please indicate how much you are confident that there is a homeless in one of the photos ($1 =$ Not at all confident, $7 =$ Very confident)".

Results

An independent samples t-test was used to check the effectiveness of manipulation and compare visit intention between the two groups. In terms of manipulation ($t(111) = -4.78$, $p < .01$), the participants in the presence condition ($M_{presence} = 6.20$, SD $= 1.17$) felt more confident they had seen a homeless person than those in the absence condition ($M_{absence} = 4.58$; SD $= 2.25$). Manipulation was successful. Visit intention was lower in the presence (vs. absence) condition ($M_{absence} = 5.65$, $M_{presence} = 6.01$, $t(111) = 2.72$, $p < .01$), suggesting that homelessness can indeed reduce visit intention.

Study 2: key factors affecting visit intention

Given that Study 1 confirmed that seeing a homeless person in a destination photo produced a negative effect on visit intention, Study 2 was designed to explore key factors that affect visit intention.

Literature review: stigmatization of the homeless

Stigmatization theory (Goffman, 1963) provides underlying reasons why homeless people are not desired or accepted in a tourism destination. Stigma refers to an attribute that applies a social label to a particular person or group of individuals. The recognition of social difference generates stigma, resulting in devaluation of identity and social disapproval (Dovidio et al., 2000). Researchers argue that homeless people have long been stigmatized and socially rejected (Phelan et al., 1997; Takahashi et al., 2002). Being labeled 'homeless' discredits and spoils the identity of homeless persons (Takahashi et al., 2002). Phelan et al. (1997) found that, compared with domiciled poor populations, homeless people are perceived as more visible, disruptive, and aesthetically unappealing. They also contend that media contribute considerably to the stigma associating the homeless with mental illness or substance abuse by pinpointing a small number of highly visible homeless individuals. Thus, the stigma of homelessness would induce feelings of discomfort and unease in tourists who encounter a homeless person in a travel destination.

Stigmatization is formed through the process of cognitive representations by which 'perceivers' (tourists) recognize social differences of 'targets' (homeless) (Bos et al., 2013). Previous studies have mainly focused on targets by investigating the profile of homeless populations (Beijer & Andréasson, 2009; Takahashi et al., 2002) and the coping strategies homeless people develop for their stigmatized conditions (Rayburn & Guittar, 2013). Perceivers have received less attention, although a few empirical studies support the view that perceivers' attitudes toward homeless individuals can be changed (e.g., Buchanan et al., 2004; Buchanan et al., 2007). In addition, no study has investigated tourists' attributes that influence or mitigate the negative effects of seeing a homeless individual.

Sociodemographic and psychological variables may influence a tourist's perception of a homeless person in a travel destination. Previous studies have pointed out that, among many potential variables, perceivers' gender and residence are key to understanding their attitudes and social conduct toward stigmatized targets (Mulder et al., 2014. For instance, Mulder et al. (2014) found gender differences in bystanders' helping behavior toward a workplace mobbing victim and in their association with stigmatization of the victim in terms of sympathy and emotional state. In a similar sense, Winterich et al. (2015) found that men and

women respond differently toward donation promotions. They also found that individuals have varying degrees of interdependence and willingness to help others based on where they live; people in rural (vs. urban) areas tend to have a stronger sense of belonging to their communities. Perceivers' perceptions of stigmatized targets or the world in general are important variables as well. For instance, moral emotion – referring to emotions that generate beneficial consequences for society or persons other than oneself, such as sympathy and compassion (Haidt, 2003) – has been studied as a central factor to understand individuals' social conduct (Willer et al., 2015). Researchers postulated that belief in a just world (BJW), the degree to which the world is viewed as a just place, determines individuals' attitudes and discrimination toward the socially weak and alienated (Bizer et al., 2012). Thus, Study 2 was designed to examine the effects of tourists' gender, residence, moral emotion, and BJW on their visit intention when seeing a homeless person in a destination.

Method

Data collection and respondents

An online survey was conducted based on a travel scenario to a fictitious coastal destination. Respondents were asked to view four destination photos. One photo showed a homeless person lying on beach. U.S. residents 18 years or older were recruited from MTurk as participants. Among 400 respondents, 33 who provided incorrect answers for two attention-check questions ("Did you carefully read the information in the scenario and photos?"; "Please choose 'strongly disagree' here") were excluded. There were more males ($N = 240$, 66.5%) than females ($N = 121$, 33.5%). Most of them were age 20–49 ($N = 319$, 88.4%).

Measures

Visit intention was measured with the same items used in Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.855$). Moral emotion was captured with responses to the self-descriptors "sympathetic," "compassionate," "softhearted," "warm," and "moved" (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; Fisher & Ma, 2014; $\alpha = 0.862$). Six items of BJW (e.g., "I think basically the world is a just place"; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $\alpha = 0.917$) were derived from Dalbert (1999). Adopted from Winterich et al. (2015), we asked "To what extent would you describe yourself as rural?" (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). Using median split (4.0), we divided respondents into urban (137, 37.5%) or rural (227, 62.4%) groups.

Results

Table 1 presents the results of a hierarchical regression analysis on visit intention. Respondents' gender and residence were entered in the first step ($R^2 = 0.062$, $F = 11.779$, $p < .001$). Two psychological variables were entered in the second step ($\Delta R^2 = 0.299$, $F = 83.152$, $p < .001$). The effect of gender on visit intention (standardized beta = 0.089, $p < .05$) was significant, but the effect of residence was not significant. As expected, both psychological variables, moral emotion (standardized beta = 0.405, p < .001) and BJW (standardized beta coefficient = 0.355, p < .001), had significant effects.

Among the key variables identified in Study 2, moral emotion not only has the strongest effect on visit intention but also reflects tourists' perceptions of homeless persons in travel destinations. Given that many studies support gender differences in the prosocial domain (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Winterich et al., 2009), investigating how male and female tourists respond to issues of homelessness would provide meaningful insight to destination management orgranizations and policy makers. Thus, a follow-up experiment further examined the interaction relationship between gender and moral emotion.

Study 3: preceding prosocial behavior in mitigating effects of homelessness on visit intention

Our third study was designed to further investigate the roles of moral emotion and gender and to test the role of preceding prosocial behavior in mitigating the negative effect of homelessness on visit intention.

Table 1
Results of hierarchical regression analysis on visit intention.

Predictors	β	t
Step 1		
Gender	0.096	1.879*
Residence	0.224	4.370***
$R^2 = 0.062$, $F = 11.779$		
Step 2		
Gender	0.089	2.075**
Residence	0.022	0.474
Moral emotion	0.405	9.367***
Belief in a just world	0.355	7.435***
R^2 change = 0.299, $F = 83.152$		

  * $p < .10$.
 ** $p < .05$.
*** $p < .01$.

Literature review: prosocial reinforcement and moral emotion

Males and females set different goals through socialization, and constant exposure to gender-specific expectations and feedback creates gender identities with different goals. Communal and agentic goals correspond to feminine and masculine gender identity, respectively (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987). Communal goals emphasize social relationships and harmony, whereas agentic goals center on self-efficacy and self-assertion (Bem, 1974). Thus, feminine identity is typified by interdependence, emotional expressiveness, and unselfishness, while independence, competitiveness, and dominance characterize masculine identity (Markus & Oyserman, 1989). Such gender differences have implications in the prosocial domain. Communal and agentic orientation may shape moral regard for out-groups. Given that communal goals place greater focus on others, females tend to have more expansive circles of moral regard, or "showing concern for the needs and welfare of others" (Winterich et al., 2009, p. 200). Echoing this notion, converging evidence suggests that communally oriented prosocial behavior is more prevalent among females (Eagly, 2009). Thus, aversive responses to homeless people, a stigmatized group, are likely to be more pronounced among males than females. Indeed, findings from Study 2 showed that males exhibited lower intention to visit destinations with issues of homelessness.

This research proposes that preceding prosocial behavior, or acts undertaken to better the welfare of others (Kafashan et al., 2014), can alleviate such negative responses. Previous research suggests that initial prosocial behavior can influence subsequent prosocial tendencies. One line of research attests to a licensing effect – preceding good deeds may undermine subsequent prosocial tendencies (Mullen & Monin, 2016). For example, individuals who previously demonstrated a lack of prejudice tend to subsequently act in a more prejudiced manner (Monin & Miller, 2001). Another line of research, however, documents a reinforcement effect – initial good deeds may prompt subsequent prosocial responses (Mullen & Monin, 2016). For instance, people who initially helped one person are more likely to help another (Freedman & Fraser, 1966). In the context of this research, the licensing effect would predict that preceding prosocial behavior would stimulate tourists' aversion to the homeless population. In contrast, the reinforcement effect would predict that preceding prosocial behavior would prompt individuals to accept homeless people. Thus, it is important for tourism organizations to understand triggers of reinforcement.

The cost of a prosocial decision presumably leads to reinforcement. Gneezy et al. (2012)) suggest that engaging in a costly prosocial act increases self-perceptions of pro-sociality, thereby prompting decisions that are consistent with perceptions ("I incurred a cost for other people. I must be a good person. So I should continue to be caring."). This finding reflects a preference to act in accordance with one's self-image (Chen & Li, 2009). Conversely, costless prosocial acts are less likely to spur prosocial behavior because they barely shift self-perceptions of pro-sociality.

Donating, an example of prosocial behavior (Caprara & Steca, 2005), is costly in terms of valuable resources like money or time. Thus, we propose that making a donation (operated as a preceding prosocial behavior in this study) increases male tourists' moral emotion toward homeless people. Moral emotions, like sympathy and compassion, generate beneficial consequences for society or persons other than the agent him/herself (Haidt, 2003). Males (vs. females) tend to experience weaker moral emotion for others (Rueckert & Naybar, 2008; Willer et al., 2015). Preceding prosocial behavior (e.g., past donation behavior) may elevate males' moral emotion, given that individuals tend to regulate emotions based on self-concept (Coleman & Williams, 2013), amplifying emotions consistent with self-concept and reducing those that are inconsistent. Thus, self-perceptions of pro-sociality forged by donating are likely to evoke moral emotion toward vulnerable others, such as homeless people. However, this effect is unlikely to be pronounced in females, whose gender identity already disposes them to be communally prosocial (Eagly, 2009). It is well-established that moral emotion toward stigmatized targets, such as homeless people, decreases negative behavior toward them (Batson et al., 2002). Hence, we posit that moral emotion toward homeless people relates to a tourist's intention to visit a destination that has issues with homelessness. Thus, moral emotion is expected to underlie a joint effect of a tourist's gender and preceding prosocial behavior on visit intention (see Fig. 3 for conceptual model).

H2. There is an interaction between tourists' gender and donating on their moral emotion toward a homeless person in a travel destination.
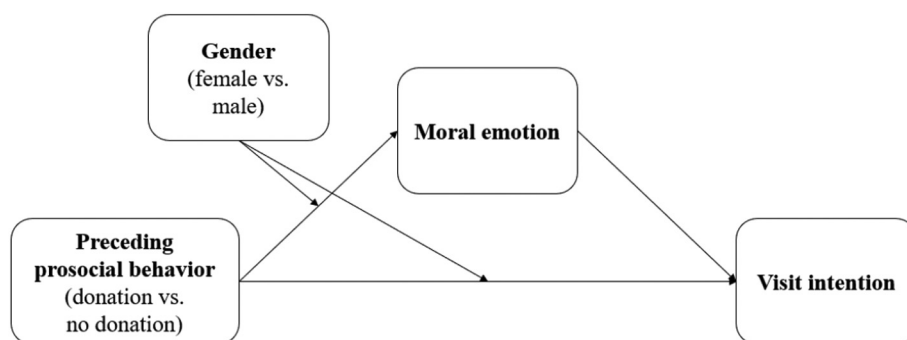

Fig. 3. Conceptual model for Study 3.

H2a. Male tourists experience higher moral emotion when they previously made (vs. did not make) a charitable donation.

H2b. The effect of donating on moral emotion is attenuated among female tourists.

H3. Moral emotion toward a homeless person mediates the interactive effect of tourists' gender and donating behavior on their visit intention.

Methods

Data collection and respondents

This study used a 2 (gender: male vs. female) x 2 (preceding prosocial behavior: donation vs. no donation) quasi-experimental design. Preceding prosocial behavior was manipulated with a hypothetical scenario and gender was measured. U.S. residents aged 18 years or older were recruited from MTurk as participants. After excluding 21 participants who provided incorrect answers for two attention-check questions ("According to the survey scenario, which destination did you see in the photos?"; "Please choose 'strongly disagree' here"), a total of 379 participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. 49.9% of participants were female; 21.4% were aged between 18 and 29, and 39.6% between 30 and 39.

Participants were instructed to imagine taking a vacation in Hawaii as in Study 1 and to read the following scenario designed to manipulate preceding prosocial behavior: "When you wake up in the morning, you feel hungry and decide to go out to grab a small bite and drink. (As you leave your hotel, you notice a charity fund box for childhood cancer. You choose to donate and drop US $1 in the box). On the way to a restaurant, you walk along the beach. When you arrive at the restaurant, you find a homeless person sleeping in front of the restaurant. You enter the restaurant and get ready to order." The sentences in parentheses were displayed in the donation condition only. After reading the scenario, participants completed a questionnaire.

Measures

Visit intention was measured as in Study 1 (Zeithaml et al., 1996; $\alpha = 0.88$). Moral emotion was captured as in Study 2 (Fisher & Ma, 2014; $\alpha = 0.96$). For a manipulation check, we asked participants to indicate their agreement with the following statement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree): "According to the scenario, I made a donation to childhood cancer."

Results

An independent samples *t*-test revealed that participants in the donation (vs. no donation) condition had a stronger perception that they had made a charitable donation ($M_{donate} = 6.00$, $M_{no\ donation} = 1.65$, $t\ (377) = -24.53$, $p < .01$). Thus, our manipulation was successful.

To test if gender moderates the effect of preceding prosocial behavior on moral emotion, we conducted a two-way ANOVA on moral emotion, with gender and preceding prosocial behavior as independent variables. The overall model was significant ($F\ (3, 375) = 4.54$, $p < .01$), and the ANOVA revealed a significant interaction ($F\ (1, 375) = 4.87$, $p < .05$; see Fig. 4). Males' moral emotion was higher in the donation condition than the no donation condition ($M_{donation} = 5.63$, $M_{no\ donation} = 4.99$, $F\ (1, 375) = 9.83$, $p < .01$). However, this difference was not observed among females. Females' moral emotion was similar across the two conditions ($M_{donation} = 5.59$, $M_{no\ donation} = 5.59$, $F\ (1, 375) < 0.01$, $p > .10$). H2a and H2b were supported.

To test H3, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017; Model 8). In the model, preceding prosocial behavior was an independent variable, gender was a moderator, moral emotion was a mediator, and visit intention was a dependent variable. Moral emotion positively affected visit intention when controlled for gender, preceding prosocial

Fig. 4. Interaction plot: moral emotion.

Table 2

Results from moderated mediation analysis.

		Results						
		M (moral emotion)				Y (visit intention)		
		Coeff.	SE	p		Coef.	SE	p
X (proceeding prosocial behavior)	a	0.004	0.202	0.98	c'	−0.375	0.174	< 0.05
M (moral emotion)		–	–	–	b	0.240	0.044	< 0.01
W (gender)		−0.594	0.202	<0.01		−0.344	0.174	< 0.05
X × W		0.632	0.287	< 0.05		0.498	0.245	< 0.05
Constant	i	5.588	0.143	< 0.01	i	4.430	0.274	< 0.01
		$F(3, 375) = 4.54, p < .01$				$F(4, 374) = 9.75, p < .01$		

Note. X = independent variable; W = moderator; M = mediator; Y = dependent variable.

behavior, and their interaction (effect = 0.24, SE = 0.04, p < .01; see Table 2). An index of moderated mediation was significant (effect = 0.16, SE = 0.08, 95% bootstrap CI: 0.01 to 0.32), indicating that the size of the indirect effect via moral emotion differed across the two gender groups. Thus, H3 was supported. Specifically, the conditional indirect effect of gender on visit intention was significant in the male condition (effect = 0.15, SE = 0.06, 95% bootstrap CI: 0.05 to 0.29), whereas it was insignificant in the female condition (effect ≤0.01, SE = 0.05, 95% bootstrap CI: −0.10 to 0.10).

Discussion and conclusions

Although the homeless population has been continuously growing in many tourist destinations, particularly those with warm and comfortable living environments (Chamie, 2017; Point in Time Count, 2019), tourism scholars have paid little attention to understanding the consequences of homelessness in destination representations. Given that homelessness can cause representational dissonances that negatively affect tourists' visit intentions (Cowan, 2018), we investigated whether the presence of homelessness within destinations actually decreases visit intention (Study 1). We also explored factors that affect tourists' visit intention when they actually see a homeless person in a destination (Study 2). Based on the findings of Study 1 and Study 2, we proposed a conceptual model highlighting the roles of a tourist's moral emotion, gender, and preceding prosocial behavior in alleviating the negative effect of the presence of homelessness. A quasi-experiment was conducted to examine the roles of preceding prosocial behavior, gender, and moral emotion in predicting tourists' intent to visit a destination experiencing homelessness issues (Study 3). Our findings have implications for theory and practice.

Theoretical contributions

In this first attempt to assess the impact of homelessness on destination representations, we provide several unique contributions to tourism literature. Building upon the discourse of representational dissonance in tourist destinations (Lowenthal, 1985), we proposed that homelessness could create a discrepancy between the touristic representation of a destination and the reality that tourists actually see online or experience at the destination. While environmental changes, such as beach erosion and pollution, negatively contribute to tourist representations (Atzori et al., 2019), social changes, particularly homeless issues, are overlooked in the discussion of tourist representations. We adopted stigmatization theory as a theoretical lens to argue that social changes such as homeless issues could also disrupt and challenge the formation of desirable representations. In particular, we discussed the impact of homelessness by exploring tourists' intention to visit Hawaii, a popular holiday destination that has struggled with homelessness. While the extant research has addressed ways the homeless are perceived by the domiciled population and the social and economic impacts of homelessness in local communities (Ahmed, 2014; Beijer & Andréasson, 2009), this research marks a new research direction addressing ways homelessness can also influence visitors to such communities and destinations, as in the case of Hawaii. In particular, our findings in Study 1 provide empirical evidence supporting the relationship between a tourist seeing a homeless person in a destination and visit intention. Tourists' encounters with homeless persons would broaden the scope of social interactions in tourism studies by moving beyond the dominant discussion of host–guest relations and embracing the social issues of under-represented and minority groups in a destination by expanding the scope of residents (Chien & Ritchie, 2018). As Kock et al. (2018)) called for future research directions, this study suggests an evolutionary tourism research branch to advance our inclusive and comprehensive understanding of complex tourism phenomena by bringing players perceived as undesired and distasteful into the discourse of destination marketing.

In Study 2, we confirmed that tourists' psychographic characteristics, such as moral emotion and BJW, are important components of the tourist experience and key determinants of visit intention. If encountering a homeless person is inevitable, it would become part of the social interaction tourists may directly or indirectly experience in a travel destination. Given that homelessness is a social issue related to human rights and welfare, it is important to consider a tourist's moral compass, perception about the world, or emotional connections with people who are socially weak and alienated. In particular, we focused on BJW (Bizer et al., 2012) and moral emotion – feelings of compassion and sympathy – toward the homeless (Haidt, 2003). Our findings show that both BJW and moral emotion play important roles in understanding the impact of homelessness on visit intention. In particular, the effect of moral emotion was further investigated in Study 3. Although the negative impact of homelessness on destination

marketing is generally expected, we found that moral emotion mediates the effect of preceding prosocial behavior on visit intention in a way that alleviates the negative impact. In previous studies on dark tourism, the relationship between negative feelings (such as guilt, sadness, and anger) and motivation to travel to historical sites and heritages for remembrance and education were well established (e.g., Kang et al., 2012; Petrevska et al., 2018). However, these negative emotions mainly emerged from tourist attractions. The unique contribution of this study is its focus on the role of moral emotion emerging from a tourist's perception of a homeless, who is seen as a destination's ancillary background. That is, the ancillary background not only extends the scope of residents who do not necessarily represent the ideal, nostalgic, exotic, or romantic savage images of residents, but also shows the reality of social issues of an unprivileged group in a destination (Chien & Ritchie, 2018). Our findings provide empirical evidence that tourists' feelings toward others who are not an intended staged component of the tourist attraction substantially affect visit intention.

In Study 3, we found gender differences in the way preceding prosocial behavior (operated as US$1 donation in this study) influences the moral emotions of male and female tourists. In line with previous studies (Mulder et al., 2014; Winterich et al., 2015), this study supported gender as a key variable in understanding the perceiver's (tourist's) emotional and psychological responses toward the target (homeless person). For males, the effect of preceding prosocial behavior (i.e., donation) was positively associated with moral emotion, which in turn led to visit intention. Our findings not only support the 'reinforcement effect' (Mullen & Monin, 2016) but also further illustrate when and how the preceding prosocial behavior can produce a follow-up prosocial behavior. The involvement of cost is important in understanding the psychological mechanism for males who tend to pursue agentic goals (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987). If an action requires any cost, males have a higher tendency to associate their action with self-identity. Likewise, we found that male tourists seem to use the preceding prosocial behavior as a reference to adjust or amplify moral emotion based on their self-identity as a way of reducing the inconsistency of subsequent behaviors (Coleman & Williams, 2013). Hence, even a small cost would be effective in evoking the reinforcement effect for males. For females, however, the effect of preceding prosocial behavior was not significant. In line with previous studies (Rueckert & Naybar, 2008; Willer et al., 2015), we found that females tend to have a higher moral emotion toward others. This finding could be explained by the 'ceiling effect' because the baseline of moral emotion is already high for females. As Eagly (2009) posited, female social identity is strongly associated with communally prosocial behavior and caring for others. Thus, there would be no residual room for the preceding prosocial behavior to further increase the pre-established level of moral emotion for females. By focusing on gender, the proposed model could provide a robust perspective that encompasses demographic measures and contributes to the extant literature on gender effects on tourism behaviors (Gao et al., 2020; March & Woodside, 2005).

Practical implications

Findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and tourism governing entities in destinations experiencing growing homeless populations, as is the case in Hawaii. The findings of Study 1, 2, and 3 are consistent in supporting the premise that the presence of homelessness does affect tourists' intentions to visit Hawaii. Despite an idyllic representation depicting the destination's natural environment, tourists can still be influenced by the presence of homelessness. A key area of emphasis for destinations, therefore, is to mitigate the effects of homelessness.

Tourism organizations and policymakers should address the issues of homelessness openly and adaptively. Despite a general consensus that homelessness is problematic, many destinations choose to ignore the coarse reality out of concern that it may deter visitors. However, recent innovations in information and communication technology allow tourists to access non-controlled and unregulated information about a destination available online (Buhalis, 2000). In particular, the emerging use of social media has revolutionized the way travelers obtain and share information about destinations they wish to visit. Although much effort is exerted on suppressing or even concealing homelessness within destinations, potential tourists may still be exposed to unfavorable representations when they actually encounter homelessness in their travels. Social networking sites, such as Trip Advisor and Instagram, allow tourists to share their views, whether positive or negative, of a destination's crude reality, affecting the travel decisions of other tourists (Buzinde, Manuel-Navarrete, Kerstetter, & Redclift, 2010). Failing to acknowledge homelessness issues may have even more significant consequences (e.g., negative word-of-mouth) if tourists feel deceived by the promotional portrayal of the destination. Research shows that tourists positively perceive an adaptive approach to address environmental changes because they find some environmental degradation inevitable in some destinations (Law et al., 2007). Therefore, collaborative efforts between public and private tourism entities are required not only to better understand tourists' perceptions of homelessness within destinations but also to educate them about adaptive efforts to improve the situation. Social media and other networking sites would be a good place to proactively interact with visitors and increase their awareness and understanding of the efforts made to address homelessness issues within destinations.

In addition, our findings revealed that BJW has a significant effect on visit intention when tourists encounter a homeless person in a destination. Also, moral emotion was found to mediate the interactive effect of gender and preceding prosocial behavior on visit intention. These results provide valuable insight into how destinations like Hawaii can foster moral emotion in tourists to ultimately mitigate the negative effects of homelessness on their visit intention. To combat homelessness, major tourism destinations have implemented various laws and regulations that criminalize homeless activities (e.g., sleeping, loitering, panhandling). For example, as part of its effort to eradicate the homeless from public spaces, the city of Honolulu passed two bills in 2018 banning the homeless from lodging on public sidewalks (Hawaii News Now, 2018). However, such measures utilizing the criminal justice system (e.g., arresting and ticketing) have been found to be significantly expensive, costing governments and taxpayers more in the long term. Alternatively, destinations can concentrate on encouraging visitors to foster moral emotions toward the

homeless. A good start would be to proactively promote socially responsible and sustainable practices and initiatives in their marketing strategies. For example, destinations can use social media to campaign locally and internationally to raise public awareness of homelessness issues, encourage charitable donations, and communicate the benefits of participation. The importance of social responsibility and sustainability cannot be overlooked in balancing tourism development with activities that can ultimately benefit destination communities. Recent research supports the view that tourists are likely to be satisfied with and visit socially responsible destinations (Su, Gong, & Huang, 2020; Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020).

Given that we found that males' preceding prosocial behavior can reduce their aversive responses to homelessness, we also suggest that various tourism businesses and organizations (e.g., national parks, attractions, hotels, and restaurants) adopt donation campaigns. One might question the value of engaging all tourists in charitable programs since the desired effect holds only among males. However, because female tourists' gender identity already is predisposed to extend moral regard, a male-oriented strategy makes sense. Our findings further suggest that tourism organizations that choose to tackle homelessness can be flexible in selecting a cause to promote. While intuition might suggest the logical donation program to benefit the homeless would be one that addresses the issue of homelessness, we found that a donation intended to benefit a non-homeless beneficiary (i.e., pediatric cancer patients) could decrease males' aversive responses to homelessness. Thus, tourism organizations aiming to address the issue may not necessarily focus only on homeless-related causes. For example, those with an urgent need for environmental restoration (vs. homeless assistance) can promote environmental causes in public spaces where tourists are likely to encounter homeless people. These philanthropy programs can provide socially conscious tourists with the opportunity to give back and contribute to society through tourism that helps improve their moral emotions.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although our study provides meaningful insights, it is not without limitations. First, the generalizability of the findings is limited by the research design. Although Hawaii was chosen as a study site due to its consistently high rate of homelessness, our results are based specifically on its representation as a coastal tourism destination as tested in Study 2. Future studies exploring the impact of homelessness should strive to examine locations with different destination representations (e.g., history, art, culture, gastronomy). Research shows the attributes of the destination play a role in forming tourists' perceptions that influence their behavioral intentions (Atzori et al., 2019; Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005).

Despite its exploratory nature, this study is the first attempt to examine the impacts of homelessness within destinations in the tourism context. Thus, future directions for research are to extend the baseline framework by including other cognitive and emotional constructs, such as guilt, stress, coping, appraisal, motivation, and perceived risk. Analyzing the degree to which particular cognitive and/or emotional factors influence tourists' perceptions of and responses to homelessness can provide more in-depth insights into predicting their behavioral intentions to visit destinations that are experiencing this emerging social phenomenon. Researchers also can examine the interactive effects of various personality and/or demographic factors in moderating the relationship between homelessness and tourists' behavioral intentions. In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, destinations are expected to address growing health and safety concerns raised by tourists. Given that the homeless are considered vulnerable to transmissible diseases like COVID-19, travelers may become more aware of and sensitive to homeless problems in destinations. Future work examining the impact of homelessness within destinations on tourists' behavioral intentions can provide valuable information for tourism and health organizations as they cope with travel concerns during and post COVID-19.

Declaration of competing interest

none.

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