Scale development for tourist trust toward a tourism destination

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ABSTRACT

The increasing occurrence of tourist trust crises in various destinations in recent years has made tourism researchers and practitioners aware of the important role of trust. However, the previous literature has not provided a generally recognized scale for measuring tourist trust toward tourism destinations. In the current study, a qualitative analysis of social media posts and a quantitative examination of destination visitors were used to measure and validate tourist trust in a destination. The results revealed that tourist trust in a destination consists of five dimensions involving multiple stakeholders, including authorities, tourists, residents, employees, and the agency, which demonstrated that each party in the overall ecosystem of tourism destination plays a critical role in building positive tourist trust. Evidence from about 1100 tourists' responses at multiple destinations indicated that tourist trust has a significant positive impact on destination image. The study findings have many theoretical and practical implications.

1. Introduction

In the tourism literature, trust is defined as the reliability and credibility of the critical elements related to destinations perceived by tourists (Artigas, Yrigoyen, Moraga, & Villalón, 2017; Marinao, Torre, & Chasco, 2012). Trust drives many key constructs in travel decisions, such as tourist satisfaction, revisits, commitment, and loyalty (Eastlick, Lotz, & Warrington, 2006; Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Su, Hsu, & Marshall, 2014). Previous studies have confirmed that tourist trust will influence tourists' risk perception (Kim, Kim, & Shin, 2009) and their emotional attachment to a destination (Chen & Phou, 2013). Tourists are likely to visit destinations they perceive as trustworthy and reliable (Han & Hyun, 2015; Roodurmun & Juwaheer, 2010), and tourists may even develop personal connections with trustworthy destinations in the long term (Thomson, McInnis, & Park, 2005).

To date, the tourism literature related to trust studies has been divided into two major categories: 1) organizational trust, for example, trust in government and tourism enterprise (Han, Nguyen, & Lee, 2015; Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursoy, 2012) and trust in online travel agencies (Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011; Razak, Marimuthu, Omar, & Mamat, 2014); and 2) interpersonal trust, for example, trust between tourists, residents, and travel guides (Chang, 2014; Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2009; Ouyang, Gursoy, & Sharma, 2017). However, to the best knowledge of the researchers, little research has been conducted on

tourist trust toward a destination as a critical construct (Marinao et al., 2012; Yao, Chen, & Jia, 2013), though the issue is prominent and plays a crucial role in destination development and sustainability.

A universal scale for the construct of tourist trust toward a tourism destination has not been established in the extant literature. The majority of tourism studies have adopted a trust instrument from other disciplines, such as social science (Johnson-George & Swap, 1982), branding (Delgado-Ballester, 2004), and e-commerce (Gefen, 2000). Some researchers (i.e., Artigas et al., 2017; Marinao et al., 2012) have developed a scale from a qualitative approach without rigid validations. Therefore, to fill in the literature gap, a scale for tourist trust toward a tourism destination is developed and validated through multiple qualitative and quantitative examinations in the current study.

Tourism destination image has close associations with tourist trust. Trust toward a destination enables tourists to establish a positive destination image during their visits (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Han & Hyun, 2013). In addition, if a tourist trust is sabotaged, the overall tourism destination image is can be severely destroyed. This issue has tremendous practical implications to today's tourism destination management, given the increasing number of incidents on tourist harassment incidents and cheating practices at some destinations. Unreasonable pricing of tourism products from the local vendors and unfair or dishonest treatments by tour guides are examples of activities that can lead to trust crises (Chang, 2014), to name a few. Therefore, it

Table 1
Previous studies on tourist trust in tourism.

Authors (Year)	Contexts	Key constructs	Measurement of trust construct	Methods
Abubakar (2016)	Medical tourism	eWOM, Gender, Destination trust, Travel intention	Proposed eight-item scale of trust adopted from Abubakar and Ilkan (2016): 1. Turkey as a medical destination meets my expectations. 2. I feel confidence with Turkish hospitals. 3. I will not be disappointed with Turkey's healthcare services. 4. Turkish hospitals guarantee satisfaction. 5. Turkish hospitals would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns. 6. I could rely on Turkish hospitals to solve my medical problems. 7. Turkish hospitals would make any effort to satisfy me. 8. Turkish hospitals would compensate me in some way in case of injuries after service.	Survey
Abubakar and Ilkan (2016)	Medical tourism	eWOM, Income, Destination trust, Travel intention	Proposed eight-item scale of trust adopted from Delgado-Ballester (2004): 1. Turkey as a medical destination meets my expectations. 2. I feel confidence with Turkish hospitals. 3. I will not be disappointed with Turkey's healthcare services. 4. Turkish hospitals guarantee satisfaction. 5. Turkish hospitals would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns. 6. I could rely on Turkish hospitals to solve my medical problems. 7. Turkish hospitals would make any effort to satisfy me. 8. Turkish hospitals would compensate me in some way in case of injuries after service.	Survey
Abubakar et al. (2017)	Medical tourism	eWOM, Gender, Destination trust, Revisit intention	Proposed eight-item scale of trust adopted from Abubakar and Ilkan (2016): 1. Turkey as a medical destination meets my expectations. 2. I feel confidence with Turkish hospitals. 3. I will not be disappointed with Turkey's healthcare services. 4. Turkish hospitals guarantee satisfaction. 5. Turkish hospitals would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns. 6. I could rely on Turkish hospitals to solve my medical problems. 7. Turkish hospitals would make any effort to satisfy me. 8. Turkish hospitals would compensate me in some way in case of injuries after service.	Survey
Artigas et al. (2017)	Tourism destination	Reputation, Cognitive perception, Affective evaluation.	Proposed three dimensions of trust: 1. Trust in the inhabitants of the place. 2. Trust in public institutions (offices of Chile's National Tourism Service (SERNATUR), police, and public health services). 3. Trust in private institutions (hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets). Adopted from Doney and Cannon (1997); Kumar, Scheer and Steenkamp (1995); Roy, Dewit and Aubert (2001); Siguaw, Penny and Baker (1998).	Survey and in-depth interviews
Chang (2014)	Shopping tourism	Tour guide performance, trust, tourist satisfaction, shopping behavior, Flow experience	Proposed two dimensions of trust: 1. perceived credibility. 2.perceived benevolence. Eleven-item scale was adapted from Chen et al. (2011).	Survey
Chen and Phou (2013)	Tourism destination	Destination image, destination personality, destination satisfaction, destination trust, destination attachment, destination loyalty	Proposed two dimensions of trust: 1. Reliability. 2. Intentions. Adopted from Delgado-Ballester's (2004) brand trust scale.	Survey
Chiang and Jang (2007)	Tourism e-commerce	Perceived price, perceived quality, perceived value, Brand image, Trust, Purchase intention	Proposed four measurement items of trust: 1. What the hotel says about its product/service is true. 2. If the hotel makes a claim about its product/service, it is true. 3. I feel I know what to expect from the hotel. 4. I believe this hotel would be reliable. Adopted from previous studies (e.g., Dodds et al., 1991; Grewal, Krishnan, Baker & Borin, 1998; Law & Lamb, 2000; Oh, 2000).	Survey
Choi et al. (2016)	Shopping tourism destination	Shopping destination trust	Developed seven-dimensional scale of trust: benevolence, integrity, competence, predictability, ability, transaction security, information content	Scale development
Han (2013)	Medical tourism	Attributes of a healthcare hotel, perceptions/cognitions, affect, trust, visit intention	Three-item scale adopted from Johnson-George and Swap (1982)' Specific Interpersonal Trust Scale (SITS).	Survey
Han and Hyun (2015)	Medical tourism	Quality, Satisfaction, Trust, Revisit intention, price reasonableness	Proposed two dimensions of trust and six-item scale adopted from Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Santos and Basso (2012). Three items measured trust in the staff. Three items measured trust in the medical clinic.	Survey
Han et al. (2015)	Chain restaurant	Consumer-based chain restaurant brand equity, brand reputation, brand trust	Proposed three measurement items of trust: 1. I can rely on this brand to solve the service dissatisfaction. 2. This brand guarantees satisfaction. 3. I have confidence in this brand. Adopted from Delgado-Ballester (2004).	Survey
Kim et al. (2011)	Tourism e-commerce	Navigation functionality, perceived security, transaction cost, trust, satisfaction, loyalty	Proposed three items of trust: 1. Tourism online sites have integrity. 2.Tourism online sites are reliable. 3.Tourism online sites are trustworthy. Adopted from Chen (2006), Chung and Kwon (2009), Fam et al. (2004), Kim, Kim, and Kim (2009), McCole (2002), and Wu and Chang (2005, 2006).	Survey
Kim, Kim, and Kim (2009)	Tourism e-commerce	Distributive justice, Procedural justice, Interactional justice, Recovery satisfaction, Trust, Word-of-mouth, Revisit intention	Proposed four-item scale of trust: 1. This hotel's employees can be trusted at all times. 2. This hotel's employees have a high level of integrity. 3. This hotel's employees made every effort to fulfill the promises made to its customers. 4. Overall, this hotel is reliable. Adopted from Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Wong and Sohal (2002).	Survey

Table 1 (*continued*)

Authors (Year)	Contexts	Key constructs	Measurement of trust construct	Methods
Lien et al. (2015)	Tourism e-commerce	Brand image, perceived price, trust, value, purchase intentions	Proposed four measurement items of turst: 1. What the hotel says about its product/service is true. 2. If the hotel makes a claim about its product/service, it is true. 3. I feel I know what to expect from the hotel. 4. I believe this hotel would be reliable. Adopted from Chiang and Jang (2007).	Survey
Loureiro and González (2008)	Rural tourism	Perceived quality, image, satisfaction, trust, loyalty	Proposed three-item scale of turst: 1. Here the promise is fulfilled. 2. I trust on service delivered by rural lodging. 3. Here exists a real concern to my well-being. Adopted from previous research (e.g. Berry, 1995; Grönroos, 1995; 2000; Moorman et al., 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Setó, 2003).	Survey
Marinao et al. (2012)	Tourist destination	Familiarity, reputation, image, trust	Proposed three dimensions of trust: 1. Trust in local inhabitants. 2. Trust in public institutions. 3. Trust in private institutions. Adopted from Vogt and Fesenmaier, 1995; Pizam, 1999; Saxena, 2003; Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2009; Vásquez, Suárez and Biaz, 2005.	Survey and in-depth interviews
Ponte et al. (2015)	Tourism e-commerce	Perceived privacy, Information quality, perceived security, trust, perceived value, purchase intention.	Proposed three measurement items of trust: 1. This tourism product website has integrity. 2. This tourism product website is reliable. 3. This tourism product website is trustworthy. Adopted from Kim et al. (2011).	Survey
Su et al. (2014)	Tourism destination	Service fairness; emotions; trust; revisit intentions; word-of-mouth referrals	Proposed three-item scale of trust: 1. In general, service providers in Xiamen can be trusted at all times. 2. In general, service providers in Xiamen have a high level of integrity. 3. In general, service providers in Xiamen made every effort to fulfill the promises made to their customers. Adapted from Morgan and Hunt (1994), Wong and Sohal (2002), and Kim, Kim, and Kim (2009).	Survey
Zainal, Harun, and Lily (2017)	Tourism e-commerce	Trust in eWOM source, attitude of eWOM, intention to follow eWOM	Proposed three dimensions of trust: 1. Honesty, 2.Competence and 3.Benevolence, and measurement items were adopted from Urban, Amyx and Lorenzon (2009).	Survey

is critical to assess the role of tourist trust in shaping a destination's image.

The purpose of the study is twofold: 1) to develop and validate a scale of tourist trust toward a tourism destination and 2) to assess the role of tourist trust in destination image using a self-developed instrument. To achieve the aims of this research, two studies are conducted: Study 1 explores the components of tourist trust based on grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Zhang, Tucker, Morrison, & Wu, 2017) and develops a measurement scale for tourist trust through a content analysis of tourists' posts on social media. In Study 2, empirical surveys of 1140 on-site tourists at multiple tourism destinations were conducted to examine the impact of tourist trust on destination image.

The two-study empirical research project contributes to the body of knowledge in at least four ways: 1) a comprehensive conceptualization of tourist trust toward a destination is constructed, which provides a number of further and exploratory insights into the nature and dimensionality of the "trust" concept for a destination; 2) a scale of the trust construct is developed and validated through several empirical investigations, which contribute to the aforementioned scarce research body of tourist trust scale development in the tourism literature; 3) social media data are analyzed to decompose the construct of tourist trust through a novel research method in the arena of tourist trust; 4) the role of tourist trust for a tourism destination image is empirically examined, which contributes to the tourism destination image literature. Besides the theoretical implications, this study provides valuable practical insights for tourism destination management organizations (DMOs) and policymakers in building a trustworthy and positive destination image.

The structure of the rest of the paper is as follows: first, a literature review on tourist trust and destination image is presented; second, Study 1 involves an analysis of social media posts of tourists after their destination visits to develop an initial scale of tourist trust in a tourism destination; and then Study 2 is implemented to validate the developed scale and examine the role of tourist trust in destination image with on-site tourist data; finally, conclusions and implications are discussed based on the research findings.

2. Literature review and theoretical foundation

2.1. Tourist trust toward a tourism destination

The concept of trust was first proposed by psychologists in the 1950s (e.g., Deutsch, 1958) and has been extensively studied in sociology (Johnson-George & Swap, 1982), management (Hosmer, 1995), and marketing (Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993). In the late 1990s, tourism and hospitality researchers began studying trust (e.g., Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998; Crotts, Aziz, & Raschid, 1998), though most of the studies are interdisciplinary and adopt trust theories from the psychology and sociology fields (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). With recent occurrences of trust-crisis incidents in the tourism and hospitality sector, such as unfair or dishonest treatments by tour guides/agencies (Chang, 2014) and the failure to provide quality services as promised by hotels (Lien, Wen, Huang, & Wu, 2015), to name a few, the concept of tourist trust has become a critical topic among academia and practitioners, and more research efforts have been dedicated to the field of study. For example, Han Li (2013) and Han and Hyun (2015) focused on inter-organizational trust to investigate the connections between healthcare services and hotel operations. They examined trust in terms of trust in the staff and trust in a medical clinic and tested the relations among patient trust, affect, quality, and satisfaction in medical tourism. Other projects (Abubakar, 2016; Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Abubakar, Ilkan, Al-Tal, & Eluwole, 2017) in medical tourism have adopted the scale of destination trust from brand trust measurements and tested its impact on tourists' eWOM and revisit intentions. In addition, with the rise of e-tourism, trust has been studied in the context of online hotel/tour package booking and transactions (e.g., Kim et al., 2011; Ponte,

Carvajal-Trujillo, & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2015).

In tourism destination management, Loureiro and González (2008) adapted a three-item scale for tourist trust from the related literature (e.g., Moorman et al., 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and tested the relations among tourist trust, satisfaction, and loyalty in rural tourism. Choi, Law, and Heo (2016) introduced the concept of shopping tourism and developed a shopping tourism destination trust scale through a multi-staged approach. They proposed a trust scale consisting of benevolence, integrity, competence, predictability, ability, transaction security, and information content. In addition, Su et al. (2014) developed a three-item scale for trust in urban destination based on the works of Morgan and Hunt (1994), and Kim, Kim, and Kim (2009). Applying a qualitative method, Marinao et al. (2012) and Artigas et al. (2017) proposed a three-dimensional scale for trust in three areas: trust in local inhabitants, in public institutions, and in private institutions. Sannassee and Seetanah (2015) highlighted the importance of trust in achieving repeat tourism by using a probit model and provided empirical evidence that trust leads to repeat and recommended tourism. Table 1 below presents the past studies that have developed or adapted a scale of trust in various tourism-related contexts.

As discussed above, no universally adopted scale of tourist trust toward a destination has been used in the previous literature, and most researchers have either adopted the scale from other disciplines or developed the scale in a specific tourism sector (e.g., medical tourism and shopping tourism). Wang, Law, Hung, and Guillet (2014) proposed that the scale of tourist trust toward a destination should be multi-dimensional and consider various stakeholders in the tourism destination, including institutions, interpersonal connections, and public policies. In practice, tourists usually adopt multiple references to establish their trust toward a destination during their visits (Chen & Phou, 2013). Therefore, it is critical to develop a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional scale for tourist trust toward a destination, which would significantly contribute to the relevant tourism literature and trust theories on tourism. To fill in the literature gap, a novel method of analyzing social media data from tourists to develop a tourist trust scale is adopted, and the scale is further validated through several empirical examinations in the current study.

2.2. Tourist trust and destination image

It is unanimously agreed that a destination image is closely connected to tourist trust. If a destination is considered distrustful, making it feel risky and unsafe to visit, the image for the tourism destination is severely diminished. It is reasonable to understand that tourists who are usually unfamiliar with the places they visit (Chang, 2009; Williams & Baláž, 2013) may evaluate what they confront and explore at the destination as references to establish their trust system. Consequently, trust crisis incidents may result in worries about safety and potential risks, and a negative destination image is formed in tourists' minds (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998).

In the tourism industry, many studies have reported that tourist trust has a significant influence on a destination image. For example, Lawson and Thyne (2001) and Lepp, Gibson, and Lane (2011) noted that some of the travel risks reported in Africa, such as a high crime rate, unhealthy food, and unfriendly hosts, have severely damaged the entire African destination image. Moreover, Chew and Jahari (2014) asserted that Japan's Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 projected the concern of radiation exposure and contaminated food, water, and air, which greatly affected the image of Japan as a tourism destination. Therefore, it is proposed that tourist trust toward a destination will significantly influence the destination image.

3. Methodology

The purpose of the research is twofold: 1) to develop and validate a scale for tourist trust and 2) to evaluate the role of tourist trust in

developing a destination image. To achieve the goals of the study, two studies have been carried out. Study 1 adopts grounded theory to explore the concept of tourist trust with the aid of tourists' posts on social networking sites and develops the measures for tourist trust. Study 2 validates the scale for tourist trust developed in Study 1 and includes a field examination to assess a model of tourist trust and destination image with the analysis of a structural equation modeling (SEM) technique.

3.1. Study 1: scale development for tourist trust

3.1.1. Grounded theory

Grounded theory, proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is a common qualitative approach to discover and understand a phenomenon or theory behind the contextual data, and it is widely adopted in social sciences research (Harrison & Rouse, 2014; Pinnington, Meehan, & Scanlon, 2016), including hospitality and tourism studies (e.g., Martin, 2007; Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017; Muraraneza & Mtshali, 2018; Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Wang, Harris, & Patterson, 2012). The grounded theory approach is deemed appropriate for the current study for the following reasons: 1) Grounded theory produces meaningful interpretations about critical incidents and effectively maps sensible relations among individuals, communities, and other social groups, which may provide a deep understanding of complex travel experiences and tourist attitudes and behaviors in tourism research (Jennings & Junek, 2007). 2) As the literature review above reveals, few previous studies have concentrated on the conceptualization of tourist trust, and the majority of researchers have either adapted the measurements of the construct from other disciplines or developed a scale of tourist trust in a specific tourism sector or activity (e.g., medical tourism and shopping tourism). Therefore, a comprehensive scale for measuring the construct of tourist trust from various perspectives of destination stakeholders is needed on both institutional and interpersonal levels. Hence, grounded theory is adopted to explore the components and dimensions of tourist trust toward a destination for scale development. It is worth noting that, to supplement the limitations of the grounded theory approach, the existing literature on tourist trust for the initial generation of measurement items for scale development is also considered in the current study.

3.1.2. Data collection and selection

To establish the initial pool of measurement items for tourist trust toward a destination, social media data from tourists who visited (during January 2016–December 2017) China's three major tourism destinations (i.e., the Greet Wall in Beijing, the Terra Cotta Warriors in Xi'an, and the Yellow Mountain in Huangshan) were collected from Ctrip, a leading social networking tourism site in China. The three destinations were chosen for data collection for two main reasons: first, the three destinations have huge popularity nationally and accommodate large numbers of visitors each year. For instance, The Badaling Great Wall hosted > 8 million visitors in 2016 (Li & Net, 2016). The Terra Cotta Warriors has attracted about 70 million domestic and foreign visitors so far (Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum Website Li, 2013). And the number of visitors to Yellow Mountain exceeded 3 million in 2015 (Statistical Yearbook of Huangshan Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Therefore, rich data related to the three destinations are available from social media for content analysis. Second, given that the three destinations accommodate a large number of visitors, many trust-related incidents and experiences may occur in terms of interactions among agencies, local stakeholders, and visitors from all around the world. Hence, a more comprehensive viewpoint about tourist trust from different perspectives should be reflected in the data.

The sampling of social media data was through keyword searching and tourists' posts that only included the destination name (Great Wall, Terra Cotta Warriors, or Yellow Mountain). Experiential comments/

blogs were also collected for content analysis. According to the principles of grounded theory, the sample size for analysis depends on the occurrence of theoretical saturation of the analysis results (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Jovanovic, Mas, Mesquida, & Lalic, 2017). Therefore, the data collection was interactive with the data analysis, and the data collection terminated when no new themes or information emerged. The final sample size of social media data for the content analysis was 8175 posts.

To meet the requirement of methodological triangulation of the qualitative study, 50 individual interviews with tourists who had visited a destination in the last three months were conducted to add to the sample of content analysis for generating the initial pool of measurement items for scale development. The convenience sampling method was used for interview participants due to the constraints of the research budget. Each interview took about 30 min to complete, and a semi-structured interview questionnaire was used for researchers to start the conversation. Open-ended questions were developed from the previous literature. Two researchers in the study team conducted the interviews to reduce interview bias. The interview protocol was attached in Appendix B. The interviews were recorded, and transcripts were added to the content analysis dataset for qualitative analysis.

3.1.3. Coding process

Grounded theory is an interpretive process that emphasizes two major principles—constant comparison and theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Suddaby, 2006). Per grounded theory (Suddaby, 2006), two researchers in the study team constantly compared and connected data and theory formation during the data analysis and critically evaluated emerging constructs and themes through the theoretical saturation process. The overall coding process was conducted in three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Glaser & Holton, 2004). To reduce analysis bias, two researchers did the coding separately, and the coding results were compared. A high agreement on the coding results was reported (85% similarity), which is suggested as acceptable by Miles and Huberman (1994).

The detailed coding procedure is illustrated in Fig. 1, and the steps are explained as follows: Step I, open coding. Based on observations of the data and continuous comparisons, open codes were created. Through interpreting the data, continuous induction, and summaries of open codes, a total of 22 preliminary categories of codes were identified. Step II, axial coding. Based on comparisons and abstractions among categories, connections and distinctions were determined, and six core categories were built upon the 22 preliminary categories. Step III, selective coding. Propositions about the relations among categories at the dimensional level were formed, and the scale for tourist trust toward a destination was composed of six dimensions, namely, *trust in a scenic spot*, *trust in administration*, *trust in agency*, *trust in employees*, *trust in residents*, and *trust in other tourists at the destination.* Given that no new themes or categories emerged in the dataset, the process of theoretical saturation was deemed complete (Briks & Mills, 2011).

3.1.4. Initial pool of measurement items

Six core categories were developed after the three levels of coding analysis: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These six categories—*trust in a scenic spot*, *trust in administration*, *trust in agency*, *trust in employees*, *trust in residents*, and *trust in other tourists at the destination*—represented the six dimensions for measuring the scale for the construct of tourist trust. Detailed discussions of each dimension of tourist trust in a destination are provided in the next section.

3.1.4.1. Trust in a scenic spot. Trust in a scenic spot is a relevant premise when it comes to predicting tourists' attitudes and behavioral intentions (Abubakar, 2016). Tourists may be willing to choose a trustworthy destination to reduce potential travel risks (Choi et al., 2016). Consequently, establishing trust in a scenic spot may have a positive impact on tourist trust. Trust in a scenic spot involves tourists' subjective perception of the scenic spot (e.g., reliability, warranty, and guarantee). Mutual trust can be established between the scenic spot and tourists by satisfying the emotional and basic needs of visitors (Roodurmun & Juwaheer, 2010). According to the results from the qualitative data analysis (see Appendix A), one scenic spot gained tourists' trust through offering a transparent and flexible pricing policy and displaying high-quality landscaping scenery besides attractions. In addition, the social media reviews also indicated that sound traffic management and convenient facilities for tourists played an important role in shaping the trust of visitors toward the scenic spot. Therefore, the items measuring trust in a scenic spot were developed, for example, *"The destination scenic spot had a customized and transparent pricing policy."* For the detailed measurement items, please refer to Table 2.
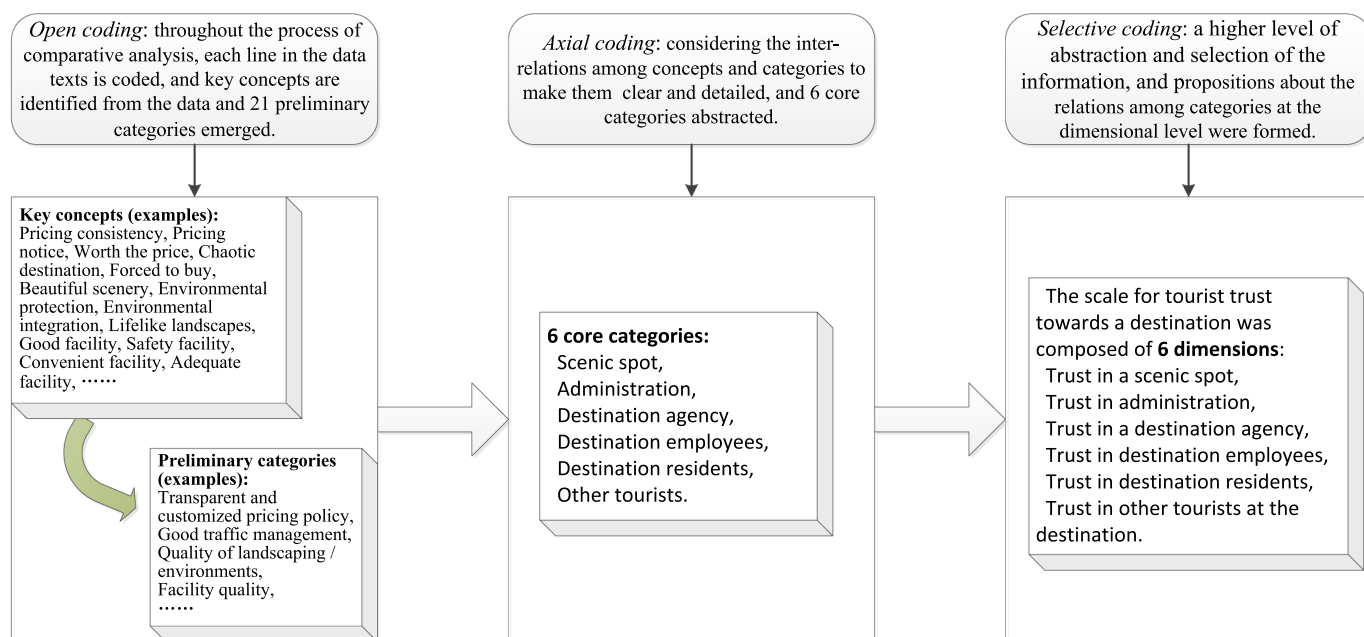

Fig. 1. Illustrations of three-stage coding process.

Table 2
Initial pool of items for the scale for tourist trust in destination.

Construct	Dimensions	Key component	Item statement
Tourist trust in destination	Trust in scenic spot	Transparent and customized pricing policy	T1.The tourism destination had a customized and transparent pricing policy.
		Good traffic management	T2. The tourism destination managed the traffic well.
		Quality of landscaping/environments	T3. The tourism destination had good quality of the landscapes and general environments.
	Trust in administration	Facility quality	T4.The tourism destination provided good and convenient facilities for me.
		Tourism-friendly policy	T5. The destination administration implemented tourism-friendly policy.
		Public security	T6. The destination administration provided sound security management for me.
		Sound organization	T7. The destination administration provided sound organization over its employees.
	Trust in agency	Service offerings	T8. The destination agency provided comprehensive and customized service for me.
		Service reliability	T9. The service offered by the destination agency was reliable.
		Tourism package value for price/ reasonable pricing	T10. The tourism package/product offered by the destination agency was worth the value.
		Service quality	T11. The destination agency provided quality of service for me.
	Trust in employees	Integrity	T12. The destination employees were reliable and honest to me.
		Friendliness	T13.The destination employees were hospitable and friendly to me.
		Professionalism	T14.The destination employees provided professional services for me.
	Trust in residents	Honesty	T15. The destination residents were honest to me.
		Reliability	T16. The destination residents were reliable to me
		Hospitality	T17. The destination residents were hospitable to me.
		Rapport	T18. I have a relationship of mutual understanding or trust and agreement with local residents in the destination.
	Trust in other tourists	Friendliness of other tourists	T19. The other tourists in the destination were friendly to me.
		Civilized travel behaviors of other tourists	T20. The travel behavior of other tourists in the destination was civilized.
		Helpfulness of other tourists	T21. The other tourists in the destination were willing to help me.
		Interpersonal interactions of other tourists	T22. I had great interpersonal interactions with other tourists in the destination.

3.1.4.2. Trust in administration. Trust in administration is the faith of tourists in the administrations or the local authorities in terms of capability, ethics, or other policy-related factors (Wong, Wan, & Hsiao, 2011). Trust in administration bridges the connection between individuals and the local authority/administration (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2007). It indicates the government's ability to provide effective policies that benefit the general population (Wong et al., 2011). If the administration does a good job in meeting the public needs, such as widening the roads to reduce traffic jams and/or hiring more staff to improve the cleanness of the public areas, the administration gains great trust from the public (Nunkoo et al., 2012). According to the qualitative analysis results, trust in administration closely relates to the evaluation of the performance and competence of the administration (see Appendix A). For example, the elements that indicate a capable and sound government performance from the viewpoints of tourists include implementing tourism-friendly policies and providing great security management for the tourists and sound organization for its employees. Therefore, three statements for measuring trust in destination administration were developed (see Table 2).

3.1.4.3. Trust in agency. The products and services that tourists enjoy during a trip were provided by a destination's travel agency. Trust in a destination's agency is the main factor in establishing and maintaining a strong relationship with tourists (Brownell & Reynolds, 2002; Roy, Hall, & Ballantine, 2017). The outstanding aspects regarding a trust crisis with a destination's travel agency may include false advertisements, unfair pricing for products and services, and consumer fraud and/or transactional fraud (Oh, 2003; Ziegler, Dearden, & Rollins, 2012). According to the analysis results, trust in a destination's agency means it can provide comprehensive and customized services for tourists and ensure the quality of those services. Moreover, the services offered by the destination's agency are reliable, and the tourism package/product are worth the value (see Appendix A). Therefore, four statements for measuring trust in a destination's agency were developed (see Table 2).

3.1.4.4. Trust in employees. In the tourism literature, tourists tend to

have frequent and close interactions with a destination's employees (Li & Hsu, 2016), and thus the employees significantly shape the perceptions of tourists toward the destination. In addition, since individual tourists usually do not have tour guides with them, the employees of the destination are the only sources that those tourists can depend upon when faced with questions or problems. Therefore, trust in destination employees significantly reduce tourists' insecure or uncertain perceptions (Gefen, 2000), and further, their overall travel concerns can be significantly alleviated (Mansour, Kooli, & Utama, 2014). According to the analysis findings, tourists tend to trust the destination employees who exhibit good characteristics or virtues, such as integrity, friendliness, and professionalism (see Appendix A). During the interactions with the employees at the destination, tourist trust increased when employees were honest, smiled, and behaved professionally. In contrast, if the employees lied to the tourists, were rude regarding the tourists' request, or could not answer tourists' questions about the destination, the tourists lost trust in the employees. This is in accordance with social psychology theories that state people tend to trust people of good virtues, including honesty, friendliness, and knowledgeability (Moorman et al., 1993). Kim, Kim, and Kim (2009) found that tourists have confidence in the staff members who show reliability and integrity to tourists. Therefore, items measuring the trust in destination employees were developed (see Table 2).

3.1.4.5. Trust in residents. Besides interacting with destination employees, tourists are highly likely to communicate with local residents during their travel. The perception toward the residents projects an important impact on the overall image of the destination (Artigas et al., 2017). Therefore, trust in destination residents should be an integral component of the construct of tourist trust. According to the social media posts analyzed during Study 1, three characters of destination residents, including honesty, reliability, and hospitality, were identified as the influential elements for tourist trust in destination residents (see Appendix A). In addition, the rapport between tourists and residents was also found to be a key component

Fig. 2. The word cloud diagram description.

for trust in destination residents. Therefore, four statements for measuring trust in destination residents were developed (see Table 2).

3.1.4.6. Trust in other tourists at the destination. In addition to local residents, other tourists from all over the world are relevant. When tourists link themselves with other tourists, they build trust (Rosen, Lafontaine, & Hendrickson, 2011). Tourists inevitably have contact with other tourists during a tour; personal interaction is a significant factor because it reduces risk assessment (Roth, Trautmann, & Voskort, 2016). When tourists have good interpersonal interactions with other tourists, they are more likely to gain trust. Undoubtedly, from the above qualitative analysis results, the attitudes and behaviors of other tourists at the destination become important factors influencing tourist trust (see Appendix A). Therefore, items measuring trust in other tourists at a destination were developed (see Table 2).

Based on the analysis in Study 1, the initial items for the scale for tourist trust were developed. Fig. 1 displays the three-stage coding process of development following the grounded theory. Fig. 2 presents the word cloud generated from the qualitative data set, and Table 2 summarizes the item statements for each dimension of tourist trust. Accordingly, a total of 22 measurement items were developed and constituted the initial pool of items for the construct of tourist trust (see Table 2). Appendix A depicts the illustrative examples for each item and the dimensions developed throughout the quantitative analysis.

This scale for tourist trust is relatively comprehensive because it covers various perspectives of destination stakeholders. The dimension of trust in a scenic spot emphasizes tourists' subjective perception of the destination scenic area. The dimension of trust in administration reflects the benefits tourists perceive from effective policies and services provided by the government. The dimension of trust in agency highlights the ability of destination service providers to meet the needs of tourists. The dimension of trust in employees represents tourists' affirmation of what employees say and do when they interact with them. The dimension of trust in residents depicts tourists' perception of the host's quality in their interaction with the host of the destination. The dimension of trust in other tourists portrays tourists' perceptions of the attitudes and behaviors of other tourists they meet in the course of travels.

3.2. Study 2: scale validation and model testing

3.2.1. Scale refinement and validation

To refine the initial item pool of the tourist trust scale reported in Study 1, a total of 420 Chinese tourists in the Huangshan tourism destination were approached in June 2018, resulting in 361 valid returned surveys with a response rate of 86%. With the sample, the gender distribution was well rounded, with 53.7% male and 46.3% female respondents. Respondents were between 18 and 34 years of age (67.6%), with a similar proportion of single (48.5%) and married (50.4%) persons. The majority of the respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher (61.5%) and a stable source of income (59.3%), and most of their annual income was between $4000 and $15,000 (58.7%). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on the 361 cases to explore the underlying structure of the tourist trust construct with the aid of an SPSS 22.0 statistical package. According to the EFA output (see Table 3), no cross-loading in excess of 0.5 was observed, but the items Trust 1 and Trust 3 were deleted due to the low factor loadings. Subsequently, another factor analysis was performed on the rest of the construct items using the maximum likelihood estimation method with oblique rotation, as the resultant factors were expected to be correlated. Using eigenvalues of > 1.0 as guidelines for factor extraction, a multidimensional factor emerged, with 20 items explaining 63.39% of the total variances. Specifically, five dimensions emerged based on non-fixed factor extraction standards—trust in authorities, trust in other tourists, trust in residents, trust in employees, and trust in agency. Compared with the original dimensions of the scale (trust in a scenic spot, trust in administration, trust in an agency, trust in destination employees, trust in destination residents, trust in other tourists at the destination), the dimension "trust in a scenic spot" and "trust in administration" were merged into one dimension "trust in authorities." The possible reasons for this merger could lie in the scenic spot usually having a so-called scenic spot management committee, which belongs to state-owned enterprises and is managed by the administration. The Cronbach's alpha scores for the dimensions of the construct were 0.842, 0.888, 0.888, 0.840, and 0.863, which all exceeded the recommended criterion of 0.70, indicating the construct reliability.

With the refined scale, data from 1140 Chinese tourists were

Table 3

Exploratory factor analysis results for initial measurement items (n = 361).

Dimension and item description	TA	TO	TR	TE	TG
Trust in authorities (TA)					
T2.The tourism destination managed the traffic well.	0.416				
T4.The tourism destination provided good and convenient facilities for tourists.	0.523				
T5.The destination administration implemented tourism-friendly policy.	0.671				
T6.The destination administration provided sound security management for the tourists.	0.725				
T7.The destination administration provided sound organization over its employees.	0.732				
Trust in other tourists (TO)					
T19.The other tourists in the destination were friendly to me.		0.798			
T20.The travel behavior of other tourists in the destination was civilized.		0.740			
T21.The other tourists in the destination were willing to help me.		0.866			
T22.I had great interpersonal interactions with other tourists in the destination.		0.790			
Trust in residents (TR)					
T15.The destination residents were honest to me.			0.793		
T16.The destination residents were reliable to me			0.862		
T17.The destination residents were hospitable to me.			0.676		
T18.I have a relationship of mutual understanding or trust and agreement with local residents in the destination.			0.575		
Trust in employees (TE)					
TE12.The destination employees were reliable and honest to me.				0.568	
TE13.The destination employees were hospitable and friendly to me.				0.951	
TE14.The destination employees provided professional services for me.				0.693	
Trust in agency (TG)					
T8.The destination agency provided comprehensive and customized service for tourists.					0.521
T9.The service offered by the destination agency was reliable.					0.549
T10.The tourism package/product offered by the destination agency was worth the value.					0.819
T11.The destination agency provided quality of service for me.					0.652
Cronbach's a	0.842	0.888	0.888	0.840	0.863
% of variance	40.608	8.969	6.998	3.913	2.900
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	0.920				
Bartlett's test of sphericity	4386.80 (p < 0.001)				

collected in the top-three tourist destinations in China—Beijing, Shanghai, and Huangshan—in July 2018. Tourist visits to each of the three places reached 50 million in the 2017, and Beijing and Shanghai in particular had > 100 million visits (Statistical Bulletin of National Economic and Social Development in Beijing, Shanghai, and Huangshan city, 2017). Therefore, the tourists surveyed in the study were deemed a representative sample for generalizing the research findings. After data screening, 810 valid responses were included for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a response rate of 71%. Among the respondents, 52.1% were male and 47.9% were female. The majority of participants were between 18 and 34 years of age (82.9%). Most of the respondents had full-time jobs (57.8%), and their annual income was between $4000 and $15,000 (55.0%).

The validation of the scale was performed using SPSS Amos 25.0 version, and the results indicated an excellent model fit of the refined scale: χ^2/df = 2.10, GFI = 0.963, CFI = 0.980, NFI = 0.962, standardized RMR = 0.0295, and RMSEA = 0.037. Convergent validity was evaluated using average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 4, AVE ranged from 0.52 to 0.65, exceeding the cutoff score of 0.5 recommended by Hair Jr., Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010). Discriminant validity was evaluated by the calculation standard—the square root of the AVE is greater than the correlations with other dimensions (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.81 to 0.88, and the composite reliability estimates

ranged from 0.81 to 0.88. As the aforementioned statistics indicated, the refined scale of tourist trust was valid and reliable.

Moreover, two approaches to test common method bias in the data were conducted. First, the five-dimensional model was compared to a one-factor model that treated the 20 measurement items as a common factor. The model fit indices for the one-factor model indicated a poor model fit: χ^2/df = 44.399, GFI = 0.87, CFI = 0.75, and RMSEA = 0.232. The fit indexes indices clearly demonstrated that the five-dimensional model fit the data better than the one-factor model. The inferior one-factor model indicated no common method bias in the results. In addition, a Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012) was conducted to test common variance bias in the research. The variance explained that the first factor in the Harman's one-factor test results was 41%, which is below the cutoff threshold of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2012; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), indicating no common method bias in the data.

To determine the non-response bias in the surveys, we first checked the response rate for the two-step surveys with 86% (first-time data collection) and 71% (second-time data collection). According to Fincham (2008), a response rate that is above 80% is deemed an acceptable response rate for surveys, thus confirming a satisfactory response rate for the first-time data collection. For the second-time data collection, we further examined the data to detect any non-response bias issues. Given that late responses are deemed similar to non-

Table 4

Confirmatory factor analysis results for refined measurement items (*n* = 810).

	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	TG	TA	TO	TR	TE
Trust in agency (TG)	0.849	0.834	0.556	0.746				
Trust in authorities (TA)	0.805	0.854	0.542	0.643	0.736			
Trust in other tourists (TO)	0.875	0.811	0.519	0.589	0.587	0.720		
Trust in residents (TR)	0.837	0.879	0.646	0.524	0.422	0.565	0.804	
Trust in employees (TE)	0.833	0.838	0.633	0.705	0.567	0.610	0.670	0.795

Note: χ^2/df = 2.100 (p < 0.001); GFI = 0.963; CFI = 0.980; NFI = 0.960; standardized RMR = 0.0295; RMSEA = 0.037. CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted.

responses according to the arguments of Armstrong and Overton (1977), we performed ANOVA to compare the 20% earliest responses with the 20% latest responses, and no significant differences were found, indicating no response biases were spotted detected in the current study.

3.2.2. Examining the impact of tourist trust on destination image

To identify the relation between tourist trust and destination image, an SEM technique was applied in the established model, depicting the impact of tourist trust on destination image. The development of the scale of destination image was based on the measures validated by Beerli, and Martín, J. D. (2004), Chi and Qu (2008), Marinao et al. (2012), Prayag and Ryan (2012), and Souiden, Ladhari, and Chiadmi (2017). The items included in the study were *"The destination is nice,"* *"The destination is socially and culturally diverse," "The destination offers enjoyable entertainment activities," "The destination helps me escape from my daily routine," and "In the destination I got just the vacation I needed."* A 7-point Likert scale was adopted, with responses ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree." The fit indices indicated an acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df = 4.24$, GFI = 0.919, CFI = 0.921, NFI = 0.899, and RMSEA = 0.063. Before performing SEM on the data, several normality tests were conducted to ensure the data met the prerequisite criteria of normal distribution for SEM. Skewness ranged between -0.95 and -0.74, and the Kurtosis values were less than three times the standard errors, thus indicating the dataset had no normality issues (Campos, Mendes, do Valle, & Scott, 2017). According to the SEM results, a significant relationship was observed between tourist trust and destination image ($\beta = 0.80$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the results provided empirical support for the critical role of tourist trust in customers' perceptions of destination image.

To compare a first-order model with a second-order model of the tourist trust construct, an alternative model with pathways from each of the five dimensions of tourist trust to destination image as a first-order model was estimated. The results demonstrated that in the first-order model, one of the five dimensions (trust in the administration) ($\beta = 0.08$, $p > 0.05$) was not significant, hence supporting the valid prediction of the second-order model. Furthermore, to test whether the tourist trust level has an influence on the dimensional structure of the proposed tourist trust model, the overall tourist trust score was computed, and two split groups (high tourist trust vs. low tourist trust) were compared by their median scores. The results of a factor invariance test indicated that the factor structure of the measurement model of tourist trust was invariant across the two samples.

4. Conclusions and implications

The present study was composed of two phases: Study 1 offered a textual analysis of tourists' posts from social networking sites to explore the dimensions of tourist trust and to generate an initial pool of the scale measurements. Study 2 provided a validation of the scale of tourist trust and empirical tests of the impact of tourist trust on destination image by collecting data from tourists at multiple destinations. According to the results of Study 1 and Study 2, a five-dimensional tourist trust construct was developed, namely, *trust in authorities*, *trust in other tourists*, *trust in residents*, *trust in employees*, and *trust in agency*. Specifically, *trust in authorities* emphasizes how the tourism administration manages traffic, facilities, security, and the organization of employees and implements tourism-friendly policies for travelers. *Trust in other tourists* highlights the interactional aspects between travelers, for example, if other travelers are friendly, willing to help, and civilized during the trip. *Trust in residents* and *trust in employees*, respectively, measures the perceptions of locals and service employees (friendliness, honesty, reliability, and hospitality). *Trust in agency* assesses the professional services provided by the destination/travel agencies. Additionally, a direct link between tourist trust and destination image

was established and supported by the empirical examination of 1140 tourists at multiple destinations. The current research demonstrated that tourist trust has multiple influential facets (authorities, agencies, employees, residents, and other customers) and how each party in the overall ecosystem of a tourism destination plays a critical role in building positive tourist trust. Moreover, tourist trust in a destination significantly leads to the establishment of a positive image of the destination. Based on the rich findings of the current research, many theoretical and practical implications are discussed in the following sections.

4.1. Theoretical implications

4.1.1. Conceptualization of tourist trust in the destination

This study developed a tourist trust conceptualization in the tourism destination context using grounded theory, which provided a number of further and exploratory insights into the nature and dimensionality of the concept of trust in a destination. As an important concept of relationship marketing, trust has been regarded as the key quality in successfully managing a destination market (Abubakar, 2016; Choi et al., 2016). It is a context-related concept, and tourism scholars are increasingly concerned and interested in consumer trust, requiring a new look at its conceptual and statistical dimensions. This study has made a breakthrough in this aspect. This study was a bottom-up exploratory study to discover the theory from the qualitative data and constructed a grounded theory conceptual model of tourist trust in a destination with destination stakeholders.

4.1.2. Development and validation of tourist trust in the destination

In this study, the construct of tourist trust in a destination was developed and validated. The construct comprises five dimensions—trust in authorities, trust in other tourists, trust in residents, trust in employees, and trust in agency. Throughout the tourism literature, the scale of trust has come under tremendous discussion, given its importance to the success of businesses. For example, Kim et al. (2011) developed a trust scale in the context of online travel agencies, and Han et al. (2015) determined the measurements of trust in travel brands. However, to the best knowledge of the authors, the construct of trust has never been developed in the context of a tourist destination. For the current study, tourist trust in a destination was established and validated by the aid of both a qualitative analysis of social media posts and a quantitative examination of destination visitors. The results confirmed that tourist trust in a destination consists of five dimensions involving multiple stakeholders, including authorities, tourists, residents, employees, and the agency. The five-dimensional scale of tourist trust was consistent with the some of the previous studies. For example, Artigas et al. (2017) mentioned three components of trust, including trust in local residents, trust in public institutions, and trust in private institutions. Kim, Kim, and Kim (2009) measured customers' trust in a hotel by their trust in employees. Our research then further developed the trust scale from a more comprehensive perspective, encompassing organizational, residential, staff, institutional, and customer levels.

4.1.3. Content analysis of tourists' posts on tourism-related social networking sites

The current study adopted a content analysis method to generate the measurement items of tourist trust from mass social media posts. Previously, most studies developed measurement items from a literature review or some traditional qualitative methods, such as interviews (e.g., Choi et al., 2016; Kim, 2014; Yen, Tsaur, & Tsai, 2018). However, with the increasing popularity of social media communications in today's business world, customer reviews on social networking sites indicate many significant insights for service feedback and destination image reflection. Therefore, social media analytics is a critical approach to tourism research, especially in the field of customer study. In the

current literature base, most works have adopted this methodology for quantitative examinations or framework validation (e.g., Boo & Busser, 2018; Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). Our research is a pioneering study that has employed social media analytics to develop a scale of tourist trust with 8175 tourists' feedback blogs or posts for multiple destinations. Therefore, this study presents a novel research method to contribute to the body of knowledge on tourism conceptualization.

4.1.4. The power of tourist trust on destination image

The current study collected about 1100 tourists' responses at multiple destinations to demonstrate the significant impact of tourist trust on destination image. Building a positive destination image has been extensively discussed among academics in tourism. For example, some studies have indicated that the quality of tourism information and word-of-mouth on social media are conducive to building a positive image of a destination (Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari, 2012; Kim, Lee, Shin, & Yang, 2017). Tan and Wu (2016) reported that destination familiarity also plays an important role in shaping destination images. Veasna and his colleagues Li (2013) argued destination source credibility also has a positive impact on a destination's image. Our research validated the direct impact of tourist trust on the portrayal of a positive destination image and provided a new perspective for the establishment of a positive destination image.

4.2. Practical implications

Besides many theoretical contributions, this study also has numerous practical implications for destination management and operation.

First, the developed and validated scale of tourist trust could serve as an effective metric for destination managers to measure how trustworthy their destination is to their visitors. Previous studies have shown that tourists are more likely to visit a destination if they trust the place (Han & Hyun, 2015; Roodurmun & Juwaheer, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to establish a trustful destination image for tourists. Destination managers are able to monitor tourist trust by adopting this measurement scale. Based on the results, destination managers should maintain and consolidate all the aspects of tourists' trust (i.e., *trust in authorities, trust in other tourists, trust in employees, trust in residents, and trust in agency*) to achieve long-term trust. Destination managers should pay enough attention to the risks of losing tourist trust and take positive actions to enhance and restore the trust of tourists. For example, it is necessary to formulate good tourism policies to benefit tourists, improve tourism-supporting facilities, strengthen the training of service providers, and promote civilized travel behaviors. Second, the developed scale indicated five dimensions that contribute to the overall measurement of tourist trust; that is, authorities, employees, agency, residents, and other tourists. The five-dimension trust scale offered a reference list for the destination managers when enhancing the trust perception of their visitors. For example, the authorities at the destination, who control smooth traffic, clean roads, and so on, could help shape tourist trust. The behaviors of destination employees, such as tour guides, photographers, and others, are likely to influence tourist trust. This restates the importance of serving staff attitudes and behaviors in forming positive tourist trust in a destination. A rip-off incident or bad service experience (Chang, 2014) by a tour guide could detrimentally harm tourist trust in a destination. The professionalism of the travel agency for a destination, such as its tourism package values for price, service quality, and so on, could enhance tourist trust. The attitudes and behaviors of local residents toward tourists, such as honesty and hospitality, would make tourists feel more secure and have trust in the strange environment. In the interaction with other tourists at the destination, if other tourists are civilized, friendly, and helpful, the risk perception of tourists would be reduced, which helps to enhance tourist trust.

Third, through social media analytics in Study 1, we confirmed the importance and effectiveness of the role of social media posts in destination image management. Social posts could be a useful data source for managerial insights because all kinds of tourist feedback and comments on various aspects of destinations are collected, both positive and negative. Managers should ensure that tourism-related social networking platforms are professionally managed and become trusted online sites. Destination managers should pay attention to the important role of social posts in shaping the image of destinations. Considering that shared information on social media sites is considered to be an important source of information (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014), it is necessary to use social posts to spread positive information and establish a good network image. More attention should be paid to the content of social posts to find out what tourists are more concerned about and what can be trusted by tourists, especially the negative comments of tourists. These are the entry points for destination managers to improve products and services, enhance service quality, win tourists' trust, and establish a good destination image.

Finally, this study demonstrates that tourist trust in a destination helps shape a positive image of the destination. Therefore, to destination managers, establishing a positive destination image could be achieved through reinforcing tourist trust in the destination. The findings of the study indicate a plausible path for managers to improve destination images with significant and direct effects. Therefore, to establish a positive image, the destination should first establish a trusted image. As discussed above, strengthening tourists' trust in destinations needs to start with various stakeholders. Authorities, other tourists, residents, employees, and the agency all play an important role in tourists' trust perception. What needs to be emphasized here is that it is very important to establish a trust network connecting all stakeholders. When all stakeholders are restrained and guided by the trust network, the awareness of the importance of trust will be enhanced and actions will be taken to jointly maintain the trust network so that a trusted positive destination image can be established and maintained.

5. Limitations and future research directions

Despite many significant contributions, this study also has some limitations. First, the current study tested only the relation between tourist trust and destination image in the phase of quantitative examination. More variables, such as tourist experience or visit intention, to name a couple, should be tested to enrich the understanding of destination image management. Second, this study utilized data from one country (i.e., China), and the samples consisted of only Chinese tourists; generalization issues are a potential limitation. We recommend implementing the study design in other countries and consider the cultural differences caused by tourists of various nationalities in the research models to improve the generalization of the findings. This recommendation is consistent with the prior research reports that Western (individualist) tourists are more likely to visit less culturally distant destinations (Martin, Jin, & Trang, 2017) and that Western tourists' choices are shaped by the desire to avoid culture shock (Martin et al., 2017; Zhang, Li, & Wu, 2017). There might be other considerations in regards to tourists with different national/cultural backgrounds, for example, risk perceptions (Desivilya, Teitler-Regev, & Shahrabani, 2015). Third, with the increased growth of market segmentation applications in tourism management, it is suggested that further studies could segment the visitor population by unique traits in each market segment, such as generational cohort, gender, and family visitors versus single visitors, to examine the diversified importance of each dimension in the tourist trust scale and their relationship with destination image among various groups. Fourth, the top-three tourist destinations in China—Beijing, Shanghai, and Huangshan—were selected as the empirical quantitative research sites. The three destinations have been very popular among tourists, which may gain a higher tourist trust compared to less popular destinations. It might be interesting to compare the differences of tourist trust toward destinations in more and less popular tourist sites in future studies.

Authors' contribution statement

Each author of the article equally contributed to the present study.

Appendix A. Appendix

Themes	Categories	Memos	Examples of supporting posts
Trust in scenic spot	Transparent and customized pricing policy	The destination scenic spot had a customized and transparent pricing policy.	"The brand marked the one-day tour of the Great Wall is 100 yuan, which is the same as the price and content I asked on the first day." "Ticket special pit, and ticket window did not do any hint to sell student tickets. This point, very inhuman!" (reverse) "Tickets are not worth the price, I felt so screwed up." (reverse)
	Good traffic management	The destination scenic spot managed the traffic well.	"The Terra-Cotta warriors are the most crowded, the most chaotic and the most commercial destination." (reverse) "There are many point of sales in the scenic spot exports, making tourists forced to buy." (reverse)
	Quality of landscaping/environments	The destination scenic spot had good quality of the landscapes and general environments.	"The natural scenery of Huangshan is very beautiful. It also attaches great importance to environmental protection, both the guardrail and the garbage can be integrated with the surrounding environment." "It is incredible to find so large, so numerous and so lifelike terracotta figures underground." "But the first time I saw it, it was really amazing. I can't believe it was made by human before BC, it's more realistic than watching TV or pictures."
	Facility quality	The destination scenic spot provided good and convenient facilities for tourists.	"When you climb the Great Wall, you have to take a block and a cable , because they are very good quality, high safety factor, very fast and convenient." "There are too few battery cars in the scenic area, I can't believe this is a high-level scenic area." (reverse) "The cable-way is old and I'm worried about its safety. And we walked for almost an hour to see the toilet, a seedy latrine." (reverse)
Trust in administration	Tourism-friendly policy	The destination administration implemented tourism-friendly policy.	"The supporting facilities in all aspects of Beijing are convenient and suitable for self-help tour. For example, the traffic is very convenient and one card can solve all travel problems." "Recently, however, it has been surrounded by local departments to build scenic spots to charge 50 yuan for admission tickets, which seriously damaged the original natural and primitive environment, which is simply a robbery!" (reverse) "There are different preferential policies for students, senior tourists and other special groups."
	Public security	The destination administration provided sound security management for tourists.	"Airport security has been significantly enhanced, as has the train station, where there are armed police and police cars on the road." "There are too many black cabs here and many fake and irregular tour buses. It makes me feel unsafe." (reverse) "As soon as we got out of the train station, a crowd of people came up to us and asked us where we were going. Some even forced us into their cars. It was terrible." (reverse)
	Sound organization	The destination administration provided sound organization over its employees.	"Huangshan is well managed because the local government attaches great importance to it and can effectively organize the sanitation workers to clean up the garbage constantly." "Here must be blame xi 'an tourism management, really not so good." (reverse) "The whole process of getting on the bus is orderly and orderly, unlike the bad phenomenon mentioned by other netizens on the Internet, I think this should be attributed to the local government's efforts to rectify the situation."
Trust in destination agency	Service offerings	The destination agency provided comprehensive and customized service for tourists.	"Travel company makes the best mountain tourist routes for us according to our actual situation and requirements, books the mountain accommodation comply with our request, and contacts the traffic car, etc. We enjoy all the services." "Package tour is trustworthy, the bus from the travel agency picked we up at the hotel entrance, and then picks up all tourists on the way to the Terra-Cotta warriors, which is very good and thoughtful!" "The hotel is a five-star brand hotel, however, neither the hardware nor the software can reach the standard of five-star. It's disappointing!"
	Service reliability	The service offered by the destination agency was reliable.	"There is a three-star standard in the room, facilities is full and relatively new, The most eye-catching is a pot of angry flowers on the table, still dripping water, and there is a red card on the table that says you are welcome to check in." "In order to save money, some black-travel agency pull tourists to the Great Wall of Shuiguan and deceive tourists that this is Badaling." (reverse) "The tourist distribution center is a misnomer, with government signs but no different from the black-travel agency, which is something of a surprise." (reverse)
	Tourism package value for price/reasonable pricing	The tourism package/product offered by the destination agency was worth the value.	"The reason why I decided to go to Huangshan with my mother is mainly the pricing on Ctrip group purchase is very reasonable and favorable, which is irresistible." "The service provided by tourist distribution center is out of proportion to its name and price." (reverse) "I chose this travel agency because the price is reasonable and it has no compulsory consumption."
	Service quality	The destination agency provided quality of service for me.	"The APP recommended by mobile phone can be said to be a very important tool for me to travel. I am very satisfied that I can easily book the room all I need with Ctrip APP." "We chose to stay in xi 'an hotel. Service quality is good, location is good, parking is convenient." "The travel agency provided us with sun protection suits, sun protection hats, and various kinds of preventive drugs. It can be seen that they are carefully arranged and made us feel trustworthy."

Trust in destination employees	Integrity	The destination employees were reliable and honest to me.	"But the boss really is a good person, always sincerely for our service, send us to the foot, return to the hotel, one person carry two boxes on the seventh floor!" "In the parking lot, a black-driver told me that it would take more than an hour to get to the back of the mountain, and that it would cost 100 yuan to get there. But it's actually about ten minutes." (reverse) "As soon as we got on the bus, the conductor began to tell us about the route, but don't trust her, because the route he introduced was not good." (reverse)
	Friendliness	The destination employees were hospitable friendly to me.	"Some of the employees we met in Huangshan were also very friendly and enthusiastic to us!" "A security guard yelled at me like a mad dog and warned me to leave. I reasoned with him: couldn't I just stand outside and look? He threatened to shoot me if I didn't leave. This kind of unfriendly security guard makes me feel very dangerous." (reverse) "One of the guys at the restaurant had a worse attitude.One customer wanted to be divided into two packages, Not only do employees not provide them, but they are constantly hurling insults at customers.This attitude makes people afraid to come again." (reverse)
	Professionalism	The destination employees provided pro-fessional services for me.	"The driver and attendant tacit cooperation to help passengers to carry their luggage, assist elderly passengers in their seats, give up their seats to the elderly and provide timely help to passengers along the way." "The little girl at the toll booth was smiling, polite, well trained, and reassuring." "The quality of tour guides is mixed, some tour guides are lazying in explaining and have low enthusiasm." (reverse)
Trust in destination residents	Honesty and reliability	The destination residents were honest to me. The destination residents were reliable to me.	"When we got lost at the fork road, we met a local aunt who not only gave us directions, but also took us a long way, and we found the right way at last." "A semi-disabled old man with an inconvenient waist spent 200 yuan to ask a local man to push the wheelchair to show him around, but he was kicked out of the wheelchair halfway through the tour." (reverse)
	Hospitality	The destination residents were hospitable to me.	"When asking the local residents for directions, they will respond with great enthusiasm. "The villagers also entertain them with their own herbal tea When they stopped to have a rest." "The local people in xi' an are so nice and humorous that we can rest assured."
	Rapport	I had great interpersonal interactions with the local residents in the destination.	"The local residents are very happy to talk to us when we are resting here." "Remember not to talk to the people at the foot of the mountain. They are fierce!" (reverse)
Trust in other des-tination tour-ists	Friendliness of other tourists	The other tourists in the destination were friendly to me.	"We met a group of climbers on the way to the mountain, they kindly remind me what to pay attention to and patiently answer my questions." "I came across a very friendly young tourist who helped me with my luggage."
	Civilized travel behaviors of other tourists	The travel behavior of other tourists in the destination was civilized.	"As we headed toward the grand canyon, we met a wave of tourists, One-Line-Sky were crowded, but the tourists were queuing up." "Along the way, I was shocked to saw some tourists jumping on the railings to take photos." (reverse)
	Helpfulness of other tourists	The other tourists in the destination were willing to help me.	"The beautiful woman who came with the same car lent me money when I found out I didn't have my wallet." "I asked a young couple to take a picture of me and my boyfriend and they happily agreed."
	Interpersonal interac-tions of other tourists	I had great interpersonal interactions with other tourists in the destination.	"We make friends with some of the tourists who come here and communicate with each other like a big family." "On the way, we met a couple tourists who were also going to the Great Wall. We walked together, talking and laughing, very happy."

Appendix B. Appendix

B.1. Interview protocol

Fifty individual interviews were conducted to explore the tourists' trust perceptions about a destination. Each interview began with an introduction to the study objectives and general background related to the study. For example,

Recently, many trust-crisis incidents took place in the tourism and hospitality sector. For example, unfair or dishonest treatments by tour guides/agencies (Chang, 2014) and the failure to provide quality services as promised by hotels (Lien et al., 2015), and so forth. The concept of tourist trust plays an important role in destination management and marketing.

The study objectives are as follows: 1) to develop and validate a scale for tourist trust and 2) to evaluate the role of tourist trust in developing a destination image.

Then, two researchers asked the interview informants if they had visited a tourism destination within the last three months. Only the interviewees who had the destination visits within the three months were invited to proceed with the interviews. The informants were instructed to concentrate on their most recent destination visit experience and following the guidelines to answer the interview questions.

The interview questions were open-ended and served as the guiding tools for informants to reveal their tourist trust perspectives. The specific interview questions were as follows.

1. When was your most destination visit? Where did you visit? What activities did you have during the visit?
2. Overall, did you trust the destination you visited? Please explain your reasons.
3. In your opinion, what role did the scenic spot/administration/agency/employees/residents/other tourists play in shaping your trust toward the destination?
4. What other stakeholders did you feel important in shaping your trust toward the destination?

5. What memorable visit experiences did you have regarding the destination trust?
6. Do you feel tourist trust plays an important role in developing a positive destination image? Why?

The main interview questions were asked as is stated above and some follow-up questions were asked in some interviews if the informants mentioned any specific incidents related to the study subjects.

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