



The impact of tourism activity type on emotion and storytelling: The moderating roles of travel companion presence and relative ability

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Tourism activity type
Emotional arousal
Storytelling
Travel companion
Companion relative ability

ABSTRACT

This research starts by distinguishing how different emotion components may be stimulated by different product types. Based on initial findings, a conceptual model is developed and tested that investigates a tourist's emotional arousal as a mediating variable between the tourism activity type and subsequent storytelling intentions. Based on social facilitation theory and self-expansion model, this research further investigates the potential moderating effect of having a travel companion and that companion's relative ability related to the tourism activity type on the impact of tourism activity type on emotional arousal. Four experiments are used to test the hypothesized relationships. Findings indicate that an experiential purchase has a greater effect on emotional arousal (not pleasure) than the purchase of a physical good. A more challenging (relaxing) tourist activity has a stronger (weaker) positive impact on emotional arousal and a tourist's storytelling intentions. Emotional arousal fully mediates the effect of tourism activity type on storytelling intentions. Having a travel companion, or not, was found to moderate the relationship of tourist activity type and emotional arousal. A challenging tourism activity has a stronger positive effect on a tourist's arousal when traveling with a companion. The arousal effect of engaging in a challenging tourism activity is attenuated when traveling alone. Moreover, based on the moderating effect of having a companion, or not, the perceived ability of a travel companion regarding the type of activity engaged in, was also found to moderate the link between activity type and emotional arousal. The greater the traveling companion's relative perceived ability, the greater the effect on emotional arousal for challenging tourism activities. This effect is attenuated when the ability of the traveling companion is perceived as less than that of the tourist. The paper closes with a discussion of theoretical contributions and managerial implications derived from the findings.

1. Introduction

Emotions result from assessments of occurrences or one's personal thoughts (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Pozharliev, Verbeke, Strien, & Bagozzi, 2015) and can impact behavior (Cohen & Areni, 1991). Tourism consumption, as a typical experiential purchase, is an emotional experience (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015; Stone, Migacz, & Wolf, 2018; Su & Hsu, 2013). As such, emotions have been widely considered in the tourism literature (e.g., Ali, Kim, Li, & Jeon, 2018; Jepson & Sharpley, 2015; Prayag, Hosany, Muskat, & Del Chiappa, 2017; Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013; Sharma & Nayak, 2018; Zhang & Xu, 2019). Specifically, emotions perform an important function in the formation of

memorable tourism experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011), elicit positive intentions and behaviors towards a destination (Su & Hsu, 2013; Su, Huang, & Pearce, 2018; Su & Swanson, 2017), and can act as an important motivation for participating in leisure travel (Mitas, Yarnal, Adams, & Nilam, 2012).

Opaschowski (2001) proposes that travelers seek out emotional stimuli through their consumption of experiences, which contrasts with the purchase of physical goods. The motivation of material consumption is principally to gain a functional benefit (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Thus, it is likely that different emotional responses occur between experiential and material consumption. Prior research has compared the pleasure dimension of emotion by examining happiness as elicited by

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104138>

Received 28 June 2019; Received in revised form 23 February 2020; Accepted 30 April 2020

Available online 8 May 2020

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purchase type (e.g. Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) and supported that experiential purchases provide consumers with more pleasure. Yet happiness can vary in arousal level as it has been defined as feeling both excited and calm (e.g. Bronner & de Hoog, 2018; Chan & Mogilner, 2017; Hajdu & Hajdu, 2017; Mogilner, Aaker, & Kamvar, 2012; Nicolao et al., 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003; Zhang, Howell, Caprariello, & Guevarra, 2014). “A distinction between experiential and material purchases that has yet to be explored is how much emotion they evoke during consumption” (Chan & Mogilner, 2017, p. 915). The ‘how much emotion,’ or level of arousal, is investigated in this research to better understand how different emotional components may be stimulated by experiential and material product purchases.

Tourist segmentation research (e.g. Mehmetoglu, 2007; Mumuni & Mansour, 2014; Tangeland, Vennesland, & Nybakk, 2013) has identified a variety of different tourist-based market segments. Accordingly, the type of tourism activities sought after and engaged in by a particular segment may be associated with different emotional responses and subsequent behaviors. For instance, adventure tourism activities have been noted to be particularly emotionally, cognitively, and often physically engaging; thus, they are more intensively immersive (Holm, Lugosi, Croes, & Torres, 2017; Rokenes, Schumann, & Rose, 2015; Tsaour, Yen, & Hsiao, 2013). Having engaged in tourism-based activities, many tourists seek to share their experiences via storytelling (Manthiou, Kang, & Hyun, 2017). Tourism experience sharing can be a powerful value generator (Pera, 2014) impacting others to develop their own destination visit intentions (Liu, Wu, & Li, 2019). Unique and/or more challenging travel experiences might have a greater likelihood of being shared (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). However, the effect of tourism activity type on a tourist’s emotional response and storytelling has yet to be studied. In this research the broad segments of challenging and relaxing tourism activities are investigated.

The presence of a companion can impact people’s emotions (e.g. Hofmann, Platt, Ruch, Niewiadomski, & Urbain, 2015; Huang & Wang, 2014; Huang, Wu, Chuang, & Lin, 2014; Pozharliev et al., 2015; Wenzel & Benkenstein, 2018). In a restaurant context, for instance, customers who experience failures report having greater intentions to complain and are more dissatisfied when they dine with others, than when unaccompanied (Huang et al., 2014; Huang & Wang, 2014). When shopping, emotions are enhanced when a companion is present (e.g., Pozharliev et al., 2015; Wenzel & Benkenstein, 2018) and the experience produced is more hedonically oriented (Guido, 2006). Other researchers have reported that the presence of other people will decrease one’s attention (Baron, Baron, & Miller, 1973; Baron, Moore, & Sanders, 1978), and create a sense of pressure (Morey & Kritzberg, 2012; Wallace, Baumeister, & Vohs, 2005).

During travel, support from companions can be emotional, instrumental, and/or informational (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007; Wang, Wu, Xie, & Li, 2019). As such, a companion’s actual or perceived abilities are an area of growing interest to tourism researchers (Morey & Kritzberg, 2012; Porter & Usher, 2018). However, it is evident that different types of activities undertaken by tourists will be related to the level of companion support desired or needed (Carnicelli-Filho, Schwartz, & Tahara, 2010). The more novel a travel experience, the more potential stressors that may exist (Yang, Liu, & Li, 2019). Anxiety may be alleviated in these situations by traveling with a companion (Wang et al., 2019). Similarly, it is likely that when tourists engage in more, or less, challenging activities, the resources available from a companion will impact a tourist’s level of emotional arousal. Whether the companion relative ability effect would be different in different tourism activities is an interesting question that has not been broadly discussed, especially in the context of emotional response.

The contributions of this study can be summarized as follows. First, according to Russell’s (1980) classification on emotion, how different emotional components (i.e., pleasure and arousal) are stimulated by different purchase types (i.e., experiential and material) is identified.

Based on these findings a model is constructed that examines the influence of the type of tourism activity (challenging or relaxing) on a tourist’s emotional arousal response and storytelling intentions. The potential mediating role of emotional arousal between the type of tourism activity and storytelling is also investigated. The model is extended by exploring the boundary condition of traveling with a companion, or not, on the effect of tourism activity type on a tourist’s emotional arousal response based on social facilitation theory. Finally, the potential sequential moderating effect of companion and then companion relative ability on the tourism activity type to emotional arousal response relationship is clarified. This study is one of the only attempts the authors are aware of to develop a systematic understanding of companion effect on a tourist’s emotional response.

1.1. Literature review and hypotheses development

1.1.1. Emotional response and purchase type

Emotion is “an affective state characterized by episodes of intense feelings associated with a specific referent and instigates specific response behaviors” (Cohen & Areni, 1991, p. 188). Two theoretical approaches, dimensional and categorical, have been developed to help classify emotions. Specifically, dimensional approaches are valence based, whereas the categorical approaches are emotion specificity based (Prayag et al., 2013, 2017). Dimensional approaches to distinguish emotions would include pleasure and arousal (Girish & Chen; 2017; Russell, 1980; Walsh, Shiu, Hassan, Michaelidou, & Beatty, 2011) of positive and negative emotions (Su et al.; Su & Swanson, 2017). Other researchers have conceptualized emotions as fitting into categories of specific affective states such as joy, love, and surprise (Prayag et al., 2017; Sharma & Nayak, 2018).

This research utilizes the dimensional theoretical approach to understanding emotions: arousal and pleasure. Han, Back, and Barrett (2010) defined pleasure as a positive affect state. Pleasure refers to the degree that an individual is satisfied, content, and gratified (Walsh et al., 2011). Arousal is the extent to which a person is excited, animated, stimulated, or alert (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Zhang & Xu, 2019).

Purchase types can be classified as being predominately experiential or material in nature (Nicolao et al., 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003; Zhang et al., 2014). Material purchases are tangible and capable of being perceived by the senses, particularly the sense of touch. Experiential purchases are intangible and incapable of being perceived by the sense of touch (Nicolao et al., 2009). Owing to the comparable extent of identity expression from the two purchase types, customer happiness and resulting life satisfaction have been shown to be equal whether a purchase is experiential or material (Hajdu & Hajdu, 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). Arousal derives from energy mobilization (Walsh et al., 2011) and for tourists experiencing emotional arousal, it can be a primary motivation for engaging in leisure activities (Opaschowski, 2001). Based on this prior research, it is predicted that an experiential tourism-based purchase, relative to a material purchase, will have different effects on the two emotion dimensions of pleasure and arousal. Specifically, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1a. An experiential purchase will have a stronger positive effect on emotional arousal relative to a material purchase.

H1b. Emotional pleasure will not significantly differ based on purchase type (i.e., experiential or material purchase).

1.2. Tourism activity type and emotional response

Tourism-based activities provide experiences beyond those that occur during one’s regular daily life doings (Liang, 2017; Tangeland et al., 2013). Classification of tourism-based activities vary (Mehmetoglu, 2007). Some scholars have focused on special interest tourism (SIT) (Hall & Weiler, 1992), which is a relative concept to general interest tourism (GIT). SIT is motivated by one’s existing interest or desire to

further develop a new interest (what to do) (Jin & Sparks, 2017; Trauer, 2006). Other studies use a tourism resource as a variable to distinguish tourism pursuits such as engaging in cultural activities (e.g. Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, & Chute, 2011), nature-based activities (e.g., Tangeland et al., 2013), or culinary activities (e.g., Stone et al., 2018). Tangeland et al. (2013) divided nature-based tourism activities into commercial and non-commercial activities depending on whether it was free to engage in the activity or there was a fee associated. According to Bhattacharjee and Mogilner's (2014) there are two kinds of tourist experiences: ordinary and extraordinary. Extraordinary and ordinary experiences can be distinguished by the frequency with which they are engaged in and the extent of emotion they produce (Duerden et al., 2018). More specifically, extraordinary experiences are associated with challenge, accomplishment, and physical engagement (Duerden et al., 2018; Jefferies & Lepp, 2012).

Mehmetoglu (2007) distinguished nature-based activities into challenging and relaxing based on the extent of demand required to participate in the activity. Participating in challenging tourism activities often require special skills and/or specialized equipment (Rokenes et al., 2015; Tsaour et al., 2013), whereas relaxing tourism activities don't require specialized skills and little in the way of specialized equipment (Mehmetoglu, 2007; Mumuni & Mansour, 2014). Many adventure tourism activities, which are generally physically challenging and involve greater physical risks (Rokenes et al., 2015; Tsaour et al., 2013), bring new and significant experiences to those who participate in them (Carnicelli-Filho et al., 2010). The physical exertion that is often an important part of engaging in challenging tourism activities yields a robust positive emotional reaction (Beckman, Whaley, & Kim, 2017). Experiencing these types of challenging activities can result in peak experiences (Holm et al., 2017), relative to less adventurous relaxing tourism activities (Mehmetoglu, 2007).

Following Mehmetoglu's (2007) suggested classification approach, this research examines tourist activities as being either challenging, or relaxing. Due to the activity intensity associated with the two types of tourist activities, it is predicted that emotional arousal will differ. Specifically, the following is hypothesized:

H2. Challenging tourism activities will have a stronger positive effect on emotional arousal than relaxing tourism activities.

1.3. Tourism activity type and storytelling

Storytelling, according to McGregor and Holmes (1999), is the recounting of experiences that takes into consideration the audience being shared with. Tourists often engage in word-of-mouth communication regarding their travel experiences through the sharing of stories (Delgadoillo & Escalas, 2004). Online reviews shared by tourists have been noted as being one type of storytelling (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Readers of these online tourist reviews have been found to report the information as being credible and helpful in making purchase decisions of their own (Black & Kelley, 2009). The development of social sharing sites have increased people's communication with others (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018; Liu et al., 2019) resulting in stories about one's travel experience, once shared, being accessible to a potentially large number of audience members (Liu et al., 2019; Pera, 2014). Those exposed to these stories interpret them based on their own experiences and beliefs. Thus, storytelling may be considered a co-creating behavior (Pera, 2014).

The stories tourists share frequently are comprised of descriptions that portray what they believe is particularly relevant to convey to others (Hsu, Dehuang, & Woodside, 2009). According to signaling theory, one way that identity demonstration is conveyed is via consumption patterns, which includes experiences (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). Through storytelling, tourists can relive their tourism experience and signal aspects of themselves (Manthiou et al., 2017; Pera, 2014). In doing so, they create or enhance self-brand connections that affect the

tourist's attitudes and behavioral intentions regarding a destination or tourist-based activity (Escalas, 2004).

As a reflection of tourist's preferences (Chen, Wang, & Prebensen, 2016), the type of activities engaged in by a tourist have been associated with post-travel behaviors (Mumuni & Mansour, 2014). For example, tourists having experienced a luxury cruise were found to engage in storytelling (Manthiou et al., 2017). Unique activities can create refreshing travel experiences for tourists (Liang, 2017), which may be more likely to be shared (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). In particular, adventure tourism activities often physically and/or mentally challenge participants (Rokenes et al., 2015; Trauer, 2006; Tsaour et al., 2013), whereas relaxing tourism activities do less so (Mehmetoglu, 2007). Challenging tourism activities may be viewed more as a type of conspicuous consumption compared with relaxing tourism activities. Although both challenging and relaxing aspects of tourism can act to signal a sense of self to others, the more challenging activities could provide a greater opportunity for identity demonstration, resulting in a greater likelihood of sharing these experiences through word-of-mouth (Petrick, 2004). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H3. Challenging tourism activities have a stronger positive effect, relative to relaxing tourism activities, on storytelling.

1.4. The mediating role of emotional responses

It has been widely demonstrated that emotion is an important driver of consumers' responses (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Richins, 1997). As previously discussed, it is predicted that the type of activity engaged in and the emotional arousal experienced will both directly influence the storytelling intentions of tourists. As such, emotional arousal may also mediate between activity type and storytelling. In fact, the influence of different experiences on positive word-of-mouth being mediated by emotion has been previously validated (Lin, 2018; Virabhakul & Huang, 2018). According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), an individual experiences a stimulus (S), generating internal states (O), which triggers a response (R). The stimuli are extrinsic to the individual and include diversified factors of physical settings and experiences, while the organism is viewed as the intrinsic process including an individual's affective states and mediates between the external stimuli and the subsequent practice or response. In the current context, a tourist engages in a particular type of activity, eliciting their affective experience (arousal) and ultimately a response (storytelling). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H4. The main effect of tourism activity type (i.e., challenging or relaxing) on a tourist's storytelling intentions is mediated by emotional arousal.

1.5. The moderating influence of a travel companion

As a way to reduce the stress of unfamiliar situations or dealing with a difficult travel environment, tourists often seek out the company of others (White & White, 2008). Having a travel companion has also been found to encourage travelers to be more accepting of a greater diversity of travel experiences and embrace more risk (Torres, 2016). Social facilitation theory examines how the simple presence of others can impact a person's emotions and behaviors (Castro, 1994). The co-action effect (Triplett, 1898) suggests that improved performance on a task is a result of simply the presence of another performing the identical or similar task. The phrase *social facilitation/inhibition* is used to signify that when in the presence of others, task functioning can be either facilitated or inhibited. Using Drive Theory, Zajonc (1965) maintained that the fundamental basis for these seemingly conflicting occurrences was emotional arousal. Drive refers to increased arousal to reach a particular goal. Drive theory suggest that when others are present an undifferentiated arousal is evoked that increases the probability of a person to respond to a situation. When that person is experienced with that exact

situation they are more likely to respond correctly in the presence of co-actors, while in unfamiliar or complex task situations the response is more likely to be incorrect (Zajonc, Heingartner, & Herman, 1969).

According to Kahneman's (1973) limited capacity theory, the easier the task, the fewer attentional resources required; the harder the task, the more attentional resources required. Engaging in relaxing tourism activities are often motivated by trying to establish a feeling of being physically and mentally detached (Lehto, 2013). The point of the experience is to obtain psychological disengagement from one's job and/or recurrent social schedule (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Being in an audience condition (Baron et al., 1978) or simply in the presence of a companion (Baron et al., 1973) can reduce a persons' attention on the task to be performed. As such, the presence, or not, of a travel companion is expected to differentially impact emotional arousal based on the type of activity being undertaken by a tourist.

H5. The presence of a tourist companion moderates the effect of tourism activity type on emotional arousal.

H5a. In the presence of a tourist companion, a challenging tourism activity will have a significantly greater effect on emotional arousal relative to a relaxing tourism activity.

H5b. In the absence of a tourist companion, there will be no significant difference in emotional arousal based on activity type (challenging or relaxing).

1.6. The moderating role of companion relative ability

When engaging in tourism-based activities, many people must deal with constraints (Wang et al., 2019; Yang & Tung, 2018). Francken and Raij (1981) distinguished constraints as being primarily internal or external to the traveler. For solo travelers, internal constraints might include ways of thinking, accessible information, and interests; whereas external constraints could include a lack of time or money (Yang & Tung, 2018). Other researchers (e.g., Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Nyaupane, Morais, & Graefe, 2004) suggest that travel constraints consist of intrapersonal (individual attributes and psychological states), interpersonal (lack of persons to participate in the travel activity), and structural dimensions (limited monetary resources or time away from work obligations). As noted by (Wang et al., 2019), a travel companion is often needed not only in situations when an activity requires at least one partner, but to aid in overcoming particular constraints.

The self-expansion model proposes that one can expand the self (i.e., who we think we are) by building relationships with others who have resources that can help us achieve our goals (Aron & Aron, 1986). Through the relationship, the other person's perspective and identity (i.e., resources) get included into our own sense of self (Aron, Norman, & Aron, 1998). When it comes to travel constraints, tourists may hope to include their companion's relative resources (e.g., emotional, instrumental, informational support, attitudes, knowledge) in the self to achieve goals associated with the travel activity (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007; Wang et al., 2019; Yang & Tung, 2018). Thus, companion ability can be a perceived self skill that helps to address particular travel constraints. Companion ability will differ across individuals (Morey & Kritzberg, 2012; Porter & Usher, 2018). As such, a travel partner provides abilities at a level that is relative to the other traveler's abilities. As such, this paper uses the concept of companion relative ability and examines if these abilities are greater than, equal to, or less than those of the traveling partner (Morey & Kritzberg, 2012).

With more constraints, there is a greater need to secure more resources from travel companions. When a travel companion's relative ability is perceived to be greater than one's own, positive affect can be experienced arising from the process of rapid self-expansion (Aron et al., 1998). Compared to relaxing tourism activities, tourists achieve more rapid self-expansion from challenging tourism activities as they face

more constraints in these activities (Bentley & Page, 2001; Frye, 2018; Page, Bentley, & Walker, 2005). Challenging tourism activities are often performed outdoors where an individual may have very little control of the situation, and a more thorough knowledge regarding the activity is needed (Carnicelli-Filho et al., 2010). As such, challenging tourism activities may suffer from more constraints compared to relaxing tourism activities. Some studies have associated challenging tourist activities with negative outcomes (Bentley & Page, 2001; Page et al., 2005). For example, when skydiving, tourists may be excited about the challenge but also experience stress and anxiety and have concerns about safety (Frye, 2018).

Prior research proposed that companions with comparable ability are often preferred (Morey & Kritzberg, 2012; Porter & Usher, 2018). If companion relative ability is comparable to one's own ability, needs can still be satisfied through resource exchanges with others both for relaxing and challenging tourism activities (Choo & Petrick, 2014). Therefore, companion relative ability is predicted to not change the effect of tourism activity type on a tourist's emotional arousal. When companion relative ability is lower than one's own, the person has a more difficult time getting resources from their companions and cannot as easily achieve self-expansion. When the tourist's need cannot be satisfied, the result can be weakening emotional responses (Morey & Kritzberg, 2012). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H6. Travel companion relative ability moderates the effect of tourism activity type on emotional arousal.

H6a. Greater travel companion relative ability has a positive significant effect on emotional arousal for challenging tourism activities.

H6b. Comparable travel companion relative ability has a positive significant effect on emotional arousal for challenging tourism activities.

H6c. Lesser travel companion relative ability has no significant effect on emotional arousal between tourism activity types (i.e., challenging or relaxing).

2. Overview of studies

Controlling external and unimportant variables can generate high methodical quality (Wenzel & Benkenstein, 2018). Four scenario-based surveys are conducted to investigate the developed hypotheses. Study 1 is a preliminary experiment that tests whether purchase types (material and experiential) will have differential effects on emotional responses. In this case we can purify the unique emotion stimulated by experiential purchase. The relationships illustrated in Fig. 1 are explored in three additional studies. Study 2 examines the relationship between tourism activity type, emotional arousal, response and storytelling intentions (Hypothesis 2, 3, 4). Study 3 examines the boundary condition of travel companions on the effect of tourism activity type on emotional arousal (Hypothesis 5, 5a, 5b), which is investigated further in the next study. Study 4 investigates the boundary condition of travel companion relative ability on the effect of tourism activity type on emotional arousal

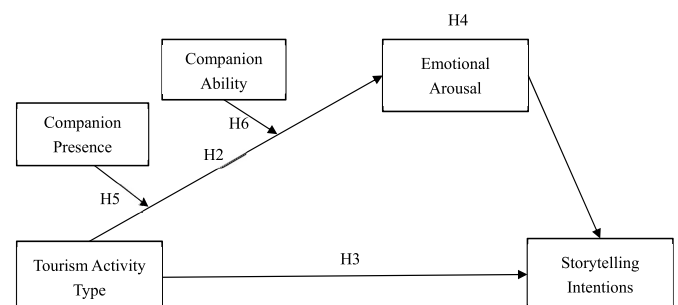


Fig. 1. Theoretical model.

(Hypothesis 6, 6a, 6b, 6c).

2.1. Study 1: purchase type and emotional response

2.1.1. Study 1 methodology

Study 1 examines the potential difference in experienced emotions (including arousal and pleasure) when purchasing a physical good (i.e., iPhone) relative to an experience (i.e., tourism consumption). As previously discussed, it is predicted that arousal will be more significantly positive for an experiential purchase, with no significant difference in reported pleasure. A one-factor between-subjects design (experiential purchase vs. material good purchase) was conducted with 93 undergraduate students from two Chinese universities. Students were recruited via class announcements made by one of the researchers who was not an acting instructor for the courses in question. Student involvement in the study was strictly voluntary. They were assured of confidentiality in their responses with the results from the study to be presented in combined form only, and individual responses not reported. It was made clear that there would be no stigmatization or ostracizing of students who declined to participate. Respondents were free to withdraw from participation at any point in time and were informed that there were no wrong answers. Study-specific informed consent was also obtained from each student.

Study 1 utilized undergraduate students as subjects for two primary reasons. First, the homogeneity of the student groups helps to ensure the internal validity of the study (Peterson & Merunka, 2014). Second, undergraduate students have been previously used as subjects in situational experiments focused on material and experiential purchase (Huang, Wu, & Shi, 2018; Pozharliev et al., 2015). Subjects were primarily female (82.8%) with the majority (93.5%) aged 18–25 years (26–35 years = 6.5%). During the experiment, each student was randomly assigned to one of two different scenarios: experiential purchase ($n = 44$) or physical good purchase ($n = 49$).

The experiential purchase focused on a tourism experience where the participant was asked to “*imagine that you bought a vacation trip a few days ago. The vacation trip was to a national forest park where you could participate in a variety of activities such as forest bathing and skydiving, the total cost of the trip was RMB 4800.*” In the physical good purchase scenario, the respondents were asked to “*imagine that you bought a mobile phone a few days ago. The mobile phone supports wireless charging and includes a 12 Megapixel Camera front and back, the total cost of the mobile phone was RMB 4800.*” After reading the assigned scenario, subjects were asked to complete a four-part questionnaire.

First, scenario authenticity was measured by asking each respondent to indicate (Yes/No) if they thought that the provided scenario “could happen in real life” (Liao, 2007). The majority (87.1%) of the participants indicated that the received scenario was realistic, and no differences were identified for perceived realism between the two provided scenarios. Second, a manipulation check was included that asked if “I paid for a tangible product” as indicated in the provided scenario. The manipulation of the purchase type (Yes vs. No) was successful ($\chi^2[1] = 32.789, p < .001$). Third, participants’ emotional responses were measured with scale items adapted from former studies (Girish & Chen, 2017; Russell, 1980; Walsh et al., 2011) using a seven-point response format with anchors of “Strongly Disagree” (1) and “Strongly Agree” (7). Arousal was measured using four items rating the situation shared in the provided scenario as being “stimulating”, “surprising”, “exciting”, and “cheerful”. Pleasure was measured using three items rating the situation shared in the provided scenario as resulting in “satisfaction”, “contentment”, and “pleased”. Both scales were found to be reliable ($\alpha_{\text{arousal}} = 0.945; \alpha_{\text{pleasure}} = .943$). The mean score of each scale was utilized in subsequent analysis. The questionnaire concluded with demographics (age and gender).

2.1.2. Study 1 results

Independent-sample t-tests were used to test H1. Purchase type was

used as the independent variable, with arousal and pleasure acting as dependent variables. Findings indicate that the experiential purchase group’s arousal ($M = 5.57, SD = 1.46$) was significantly ($t = 2.782, p = .007$) higher than that of the material purchase group ($M = 4.83, SD = 1.10$). No statistically significant difference ($t = 1.500, p > .05$) was found between the tourism experiential purchase group’s pleasure ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.33$) and material purchase group’s pleasure ($M = 5.00, SD = 1.09$). H1 was supported.

2.2. Study 2: tourism activity and storytelling

2.2.1. Study 2 methodology

The results of study 1 indicated that experiential purchases, as investigated in a tourism scenario context, have significantly greater effect on arousal relative to purchases of physical goods (e.g., mobile phone). In this study we further investigate the relationship of emotional arousal with tourism activities and resulting storytelling. Using a one-factor between-subjects design (challenging tourism activity vs. relaxing tourism activity), 91 undergraduate students from two Chinese universities were recruited who had not participated in Study 1. In Study 2, undergraduate students were utilized as subjects for the previously noted homogeneity of these groups (Peterson & Merunka, 2014), and the recognition that students at national universities are some of the most active tourists in China (Huang et al., 2018). Students were again recruited via class announcements made by one of the researchers who was not an acting instructor for the courses in question. Students’ involvement in the study was also strictly voluntary, and they were assured confidentiality in their responses. It was made clear that there would be no stigmatization or ostracizing of students who declined to participate. Respondents were free to withdraw from participation at any point in time. Study-specific informed consent was also obtained from each student. Subjects were primarily female (83.5%), with the majority (94.5%) aged 18–25 years (26–35 years = 5.5%).

During the experiment, each student was randomly assigned to read a tourism-based challenging (i.e., skydiving) or relaxing (i.e., forest bathing) scenario. The challenging tourism activity scenario ($n = 44$) asked the subject to “*Imagine that you had taken a trip out of your town a few days ago and you went skydiving. You exited the plane at an altitude of 4000 m which gave you 50 s of free falling through the air at 200 km per hour before opening the parachute.*” The scenario of relaxing tourism activity ($n = 47$) asked the respondent to “*Imagine that you had taken a trip out of your town a few days ago and you went forest bathing at a national forest park. You walked in a relaxed way to enjoy the fresh air in beautiful scenery as a way to calm and rejuvenate yourself.*” After reading the assigned scenario, subjects were asked to complete a four-part questionnaire. Scenario authenticity was determined following the same procedure used in Study 1. Most of the subjects (78%) reported that the provided scenario was realistic. The manipulation check involved asking respondents to indicate if the scenario provided would best be described as being either “Challenging” or “Relaxing.” The manipulation of the tourism activity (challenging vs. relaxing) was successful ($\chi^2[1] = 21.006, p < .001$).

Subject arousal was measured using the same scale as in Study 1 and was found to have adequate reliability ($\alpha = 0.866$). To measure subjects’ likelihood of engaging in storytelling, four seven-point items (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) were adopted from Manthiou et al. (2017). Specifically, subjects were asked to indicate if: “I will post photos of this trip online” “I will tell others about this trip,” “I will tell the story of my trip to close friends and relatives”, and “I will show photos of this trip to others”. The storytelling scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .926$) and the mean score was used in subsequent analysis.

2.2.2. Study 2 results

Independent-sample t-tests were used to investigate H2 and H3. Using tourism activity as the independent variable and arousal as the

dependent variable, results showed that the challenging tourism activity group's arousal was significantly ($t = 2.987, p = .004$) higher ($M = 5.55, SD = 1.38$) than the relaxing ($M = 4.71, SD = 1.28$) tourism activity group. Using storytelling as the dependent variable, findings indicate that the challenging tourism activity group was significantly ($t = 3.237, p = .002$) more likely to engage in storytelling relative to those in the relaxing tourism activity group ($M_{challenging} = 6.26, SD = 1.03; M_{relaxing} = 5.51, SD = 1.19$).

PROCESS model 4 (independent variable, mediating variable, and dependent variable in the model at the same time) was used to test the mediation model. PROCESS is an add-on package for SPSS that allows for statistical mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis based on ordinary least squares or logistic regression (Hayes, 2016). Mediation analysis was conducted using bootstrapping mediation tests with 5000 replications and a 95% confidence interval (Hayes, 2013). Arousal served as the mediator between tourism activity and storytelling ($b = -0.39, SE = 0.17; 95\% CI: -0.78 \text{ to } -0.11$). The direct effect of tourism activity on storytelling was not found to be significant ($b = -0.36, SE = 0.20; 95\% CI: -0.77 \text{ to } 0.04$). Findings suggest that arousal fully mediates the main effect of tourism activity on storytelling. H2, H3 and H4 are supported. Table 1 provides additional information in regard to the mediation.

2.3. Study 3: companion and tourism activity

2.3.1. Study 3 methodology

Study 3 examines how the presence, or absence, of a companion may moderate the effect of the type of tourism activity on a tourist's emotional arousal. A 2 (challenging tourism activity or relaxing tourism activity) \times 2 (alone or with a companion) factorial between-subjects design was utilized. Study 3 used convenience sampling via an intercept approach with tourists visiting Yuelu Mountain, Changsha, Hunan province, a well-known vacation site in China. Potential respondents were approached, qualified as domestic tourists, and asked to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary, and the respondents were anonymous as no names or contact information was requested. The experiment was conducted by the researchers over several hours on a weekend at a quiet rest area where each subject received a questionnaire that included a scenario description. Individuals who agreed to participate in the experiment were given a souvenir worth approximately ¥2 as a small token of appreciation. Subjects ($n = 253$) were randomly designated to one of four different scenarios: challenging tourism activity with a companion ($n = 68$), challenging tourism activity with no companion ($n = 63$),

“Imagine that you (and a good friend) had taken a trip out of your town a few days ago. You (and your friend) decided to take a lesson to learn the basics of skydiving. You then decided to experience skydiving on your own (together). You (and your friend) exited the plane at an altitude of 4000 m which gave you (and your friend) 50 seconds of free falling through the air at 200 km per hour before opening the parachute(s)”.

Or relaxing tourism activity with a companion ($n = 55$), relaxing tourism activity with no companion ($n = 67$).

“Imagine that you (and a good friend) had taken a trip out of your town a few days ago. You (and your friend) went forest bathing alone (together) at a national forest park. You (and your friend) walked (together) in a relaxed way to enjoy the fresh air and beautiful scenery as a way to calm and rejuvenate yourself (yourselves).”

Subjects were more likely to be female (59.7%) and younger with 80.2% reporting to be between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Table 2 provides a more complete description of the characteristics of the subjects.

After reading the assigned scenario, scenario authenticity was determined following the same procedures used in Study 1 and Study 2. Most of the subjects (79.4%) reported that the provided scenario was real for them, and they could imagine the scenarios easily. The manipulation check involved asking respondents to indicate if: 1) the scenario provided would best be described as being either “Challenging” or “Relaxing,” and 2) in the scenario the respondent was, or was not, “traveling alone.” The manipulation of the tourism activity (challenging vs. relaxing) was successful ($\chi^2[1] = 89.388, p < .001$), as was that for having a travel companion, or not ($\chi^2[1] = 97.081, p < .001$). Participants' arousal ($\alpha = 0.771$) and storytelling ($\alpha = 0.870$) were measured using the same scale as in Study 2 and demonstrated adequate reliability. The mean score was used in subsequent analysis.

2.3.2. Study 3 results

A 2X2 ANOVA with tourism activity and companion as independent variables and arousal as the dependent variable was utilized to test H5, H5a, H5b. A statistically significant interaction ($F_{1,249} = 9.490, p = .002$) was identified; thus, H5 was supported (see Fig. 2). Independent-sample t-tests were used to confirm the direction of the moderating effect. In the presence of a companion condition, the challenging tourism activity group's arousal was significantly ($t = 5.936, p < .001$) greater ($M = 5.78, SD = 0.88$) than that of the relaxing tourism activity group ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.14$). In the no companion condition, no significant ($t = 1.14, p > .05$) differences between the challenging and relaxing tourism activity group's levels of arousal were identified ($M_{challenging} = 5.22, SD = 1.29; M_{relaxing} = 4.99, SD = 1.03$). H5a and H5b are supported.

PROCESS model 7 (independent variable, moderating variable, mediating variable, and dependent variable in the model at the same time) was used to test the moderated mediation model. We conducted a

Table 1
Study 2 mediation analysis results.

	Emotional Arousal			Storytelling		
	Coefficient	SE	95% CI	Coefficient	SE	95% CI
Constant	6.38	0.45	5.49, 7.26	4.00	0.56	2.88, 5.12
Tourism activity type	-0.83	0.28	-1.39, -0.28	-0.36	0.20	-0.77, 0.04
Emotional arousal				0.47	0.07	0.33, 0.62
R			0.30			0.63
R ²			0.09			0.39
F			8.92			28.22
p			.003			<.001
				Effect	SE	95% CI
Direct effect				-0.36	0.20	-0.77, 0.04
Indirect effects				-0.39	0.17	-0.78, -0.11

Table 2
Study 3 subject characteristics.

	n	%		n	%
Gender			Age in Years		
Female	151	59.7	18 to 25	94	37.2
Male	102	40.3	26 to 35	109	43.1
			36 to 45	34	13.4
			46 and older	16	6.3
Monthly Income			Level of Education		
<2000¥	41	16.2	Less than High School	30	11.9
2000 to 4999¥	39	15.4	High School/Technical School	44	17.4
5000 to 7999¥	83	32.8	Undergraduate/Associates Degree	146	57.7
8000 to 9999¥	63	24.9	Postgraduate Degree	33	13.1
≥10000¥	27	10.7			

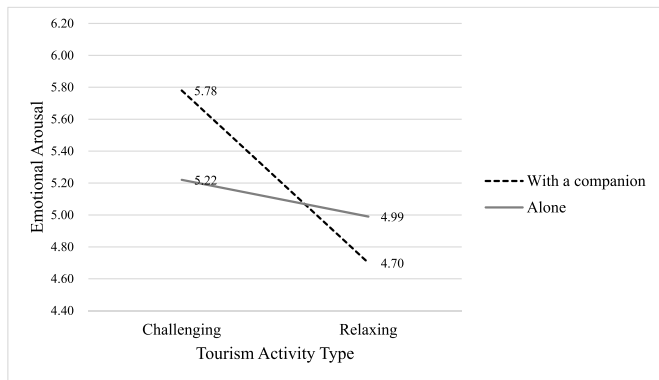


Fig. 2. The moderating effect of companion. Notes: Emotional arousal presented as estimating marginal means. Tourism activities with a companion significant at $p > .001$.

moderated mediation analysis using bootstrapping mediation tests with 5000 replications and a 95% confidence interval (Hayes, 2013). Having a companion, or not, served as the moderator for the effect of tourism activity type on a tourist’s storytelling, and a tourist’s emotional arousal served as the mediator. The effect of tourism activity type on a tourist’s storytelling was mediated overall by a tourist’s emotional arousal ($b = 0.36$, $SE = 0.15$; 95% CI: 0.12 to 0.69). Decomposing the mediation analysis into different companion conditions revealed that this mediation was significant when having a companion ($b = -0.46$, $SE = 0.11$; 95% CI: -0.70 to -0.26) and not significant in the no companion condition ($b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.09$; 95% CI: -0.26 to 0.09). Table 3 provides additional information about the moderated mediation.

2.4. Study 4: companion relative ability and tourism activity

2.4.1. Study 4 methodology

Based on having a companion, Study 4 extends Study 3 findings by examining the potential moderating role that companion relative ability may play regarding the effect of tourism activity type on a tourist’s emotional arousal response using a 2 (challenging tourism activity or relaxing tourism activity) \times 3 (higher, comparable, or lower relative ability) factorial between-subjects design. Specifically, as companion relative ability increases, does it have a greater effect on a tourist’s emotional arousal response in a challenging activity context, relative to more relaxing tourism activities? In Study 4 a second sample of tourists visiting Yuelu Mountain in China were intercepted by the researchers and asked to contribute to the study several weeks after the completion of Study 3 (please see Table 4 for characteristics of the subjects). This

Table 3 Study 3 moderated-mediation analysis results.

	Emotional Arousal			Storytelling		
	Coefficient	SE	95% CI	Coefficient	SE	95% CI
Constant	8.26	0.68	6.93, 9.59	2.99	0.37	2.26, 3.71
Tourism activity type	-1.93	0.44	-2.79, -1.06	0.32	0.12	0.08, 0.56
Emotional arousal				0.43	0.05	0.32, 0.53
Companion	-1.40	0.43	-2.25, -0.56			
Tourism activity type \times Companion	0.85	0.28	0.31, 1.39			
R			0.34			0.46
R ²			0.12			0.21
F			11.13			33.47
p			<.001			<.001
Conditional indirect effects				Effect	SE	95% CI
Mediator emotional arousal						
Having a companion				-0.46	0.11	-0.70, -0.26
Having no companion				-0.10	0.09	-0.26, 0.09
Index of moderated mediation				Index	SE	95% CI
Having a companion, or not				0.36	0.15	0.12, 0.69

experiment was conducted over several hours on a weekend following the same procedure as Study 3. Again, individuals who agreed to participate in the experiment were provided with a souvenir worth approximately ¥2 as a small token of appreciation. Subjects ($n = 326$) were randomly assigned to one of six different scenarios: challenging tourism activity with a companion whose relative ability is greater than ($n = 62$), comparable with ($n = 60$), or lower than ($n = 51$) the tourist;

“Imagine that you and a good friend had taken a trip out of your town a few days ago. You and your good friend decided to go skydiving together. Your friend is much more experienced with skydiving than you and was able to encourage you and provide you with the knowledge needed to have a great skydiving experience/Your friend and you have very comparable experiences with skydiving so you were able to equally encourage each other and provide each other with the knowledge needed to have a great skydiving experience/You are much more experienced at skydiving than your friend and you were able to encourage your friend and provide them with the knowledge needed to have a great skydiving experience. You and your good friend exited the plane at an altitude of 4000 m which gave you both 50 seconds of free falling through the air at 200 km per hour before opening your parachutes”.

And a relaxing tourism activity with a companion whose relative ability is greater than ($n = 51$), comparable with ($n = 50$), or lower than ($n = 52$) the tourist.

“Imagine that you and a good friend had taken a trip out of your town a few days ago. You and your good friend went forest bathing together at a national forest park. Your friend is much more experienced with forest bathing than you and was able to encourage you and provide you with the knowledge needed to have a great forest

Table 4 Study 4 subject characteristics.

	n	%		n	%
Gender			Age in Years		
Female	179	54.9	18 to 25	122	37.4
Male	147	45.1	26 to 35	134	41.1
			36 to 45	41	12.6
			46 and older	29	8.9
Monthly Income			Level of Education		
<2000¥	65	19.9	Less than High School	10	3.1
2000 to 4999¥	79	24.2	High School/Technical School	29	8.9
5000 to 7999¥	101	31.0	Undergraduate/Associates Degree	191	58.6
8000 to 9999¥	42	12.9	Postgraduate Degree	96	29.4
$\geq 10000¥$	39	12.0			

bathing experience/Your friend and you have very comparable experiences with forest bathing so you were able to equally encourage each other and provide each other with the knowledge needed to have a great forest bathing experience/You are much more experienced with forest bathing than your friend and you were able to encourage your friend and provide them with the knowledge needed to have a great forest bathing experience. You and your friend walked together in a relaxed way to enjoy the fresh air and beautiful scenery as a way to calm and rejuvenate yourselves.”

After reading the randomly assigned scenario, scenario authenticity was determined following the same procedures used in Studies 1–3. Most of the participants (79.4%) reported that the provided scenario was were real for them and they could imagine the scenarios easily. The manipulation check involved asking respondents to indicate if: 1) the scenario provided would best be described as being either “Challenging” or “Relaxing,” and 2) in the scenario if the friend being traveled with has greater, comparable, or less experience regarding the activity described. The manipulation of the tourism activity (challenging vs. relaxing) was successful ($\chi^2[1] = 131.928, p < .001$), as was that for the relative experience of the travel companion ($\chi^2[4] = 215.452, p < .001$). Subjects’ arousal ($\alpha = 0.841$) and storytelling ($\alpha = 0.903$) were measured using the same scale as in the prior studies and demonstrated adequate reliability. The mean score was used in subsequent analysis.

2.4.2. Study 4 results

A 2×3 ANOVA with tourism activity and companion relative ability as the independent variables and arousal as the dependent variable was utilized to test H6, H6a, H6b, H6c. A statistically significant interaction was identified ($F_{2,320} = 3.934, p = .021$). H6 was supported (see Fig. 3). The independent-sample *t*-test was used to confirm the direction of the moderating effect. Greater companion relative ability results in a significantly ($t = 5.318, p < .001$) greater reported arousal level for the challenging tourism activity ($M = 5.89, SD = 1.00$) relative to those in the relaxing tourism activity group ($M = 4.67, SD = 1.42$). In the comparable companion relative ability scenarios, the challenging tourism activity group’s arousal ($M = 5.43, SD = 1.24$) was significantly ($t = 3.729, p < .001$) higher than relaxing tourism activity group ($M = 4.63, SD = 0.95$). When companion relative ability is presented as less than that of the tourist, there is no significant ($t = 1.783, p > .05$) difference between the challenging tourism activity group’s arousal and the relaxing tourism activity group’s arousal ($M_{\text{challenging}} = 5.06, SD = 0.93; M_{\text{relaxing}} = 4.70, SD = 1.10$). H6a, H6b, and H6c are supported.

PROCESS model 7 (independent variable, moderating variable, mediating variable, and dependent variable in the model at the same time) was used to test the moderated mediation model. We conducted a moderated mediation analysis using bootstrapping mediation tests with 5000 replications and a 95% confidence interval (Hayes, 2013).

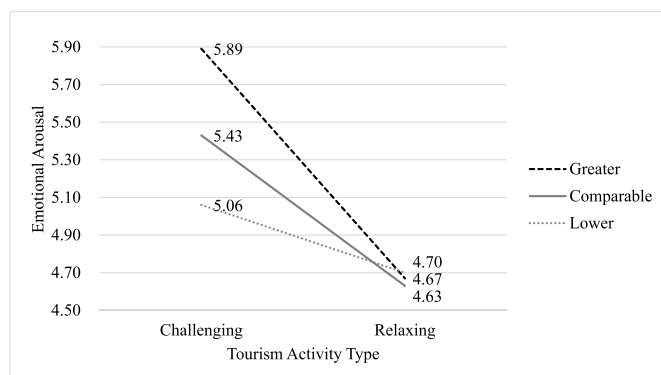


Fig. 3. The moderating effect of companion relative ability. Notes: Emotional arousal presented as estimating marginal means. Tourism activities with a companion whose relative ability is greater, significant at $p > .001$.

Companion relative ability served as the moderator for the effect of tourism activity type on a tourist’s storytelling, and a tourist’s emotional arousal served as the mediator. The effect of tourism activity type on a tourist’s storytelling was mediated overall by a tourist’s emotional arousal ($b = 0.23, SE = 0.09; 95\% CI: 0.07$ to 0.41). Decomposing the mediation analysis into different companion relative ability conditions revealed that this mediation was significant when companion relative ability is greater than the tourist’s ($b = -0.64, SE = 0.14; 95\% CI: -0.94$ to -0.39) and comparable to the tourist’s ($b = -0.41, SE = 0.08; 95\% CI: -0.59$ to -0.26), but not significant when companion relative ability is lower than tourists ($b = -0.19, SE = 0.10; 95\% CI: -0.38$ to 0.002). Table 5 provides additional information regarding the moderated mediation.

3. Discussion and implications

The findings in Study 1 suggest that an experiential purchase, such as tourism, may result in elevated emotional arousal when compared to the purchase of a physical good. Based on this finding the type of tourism experience is then probed to better understand the relationship of emotional arousal associated with different types of tourism activities. Study 2 findings indicate that there is a relationship between the type of tourism activity engaged in and resulting emotional arousal response. Specifically, there is a positive arousal effect for more challenging tourism activities relative to relaxing tourism activities. Interestingly, a tourist’s arousal fully mediates the effect of tourism activity on a tourist’s storytelling. To better understand these relationships, the boundary condition of traveling with a companion on the arousal effect of tourism activity types is investigated. Results of Study 3 can be summarized as when traveling with a companion, the arousal effect for challenging tourism activities still exists, but when traveling alone, this effect is attenuated. To further understand the impact of traveling with companions, the relative abilities of a travel companion are taken into consideration in Study 4. Findings suggest that when a travel companion has a recognized relative ability that is greater than, or comparable to one’s own ability, the arousal effect of challenging tourism activity still exists. When the travel companion’s perceived ability is lower than one’s own, this effect is attenuated.

3.1. Theoretical contributions

Prior studies have empirically supported that experiential (material) acquisitions make people more (less) happy (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018; Chan & Mogilner, 2017; Nicolao et al., 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), or failed to identify differences in emotional response based on the type of purchase (Hajdu & Hajdu, 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). These dualistic findings view may be owing to different conceptualizations of emotion (Mogilner et al., 2012). Dividing emotional responses into arousal and pleasure according to Russell (1980), Study 1 identified that an experiential purchase (tourism) has a greater impact on the arousal dimension of emotion relative to a material purchase. Based on empirical research, Study 1 provides a reasonable explanation for prior mixed findings and enriches the theoretical literature regarding the effect of purchase type on emotional response. Moreover, the unique emotional dimension stimulated by tourism experiences was ascertained.

Study 2 focused on tourism activity types. Previous research has mostly focused on one specific activity type (e.g., Beckman et al., 2017; Holm et al., 2017), thus ignoring the potential different effects elicited by different contexts. A limited number of past studies have paid attention to the relationship between different types of tourism activities and the resulting emotional response (e.g., Jepson & Sharpley, 2015; Stone et al., 2018), or tourist’s emotions and subsequent storytelling (e.g., Ladhari, 2007; Manthiou et al., 2017). Study 2 examined two specific kinds of activities and their effect on a tourist’s emotional arousal response. To the best of our knowledge, no prior study has explored the relationship between tourism activity type and storytelling intentions,

Table 5
Study 4 moderated-mediation analysis results.

	Emotional Arousal			Storytelling		
	Coefficient	SE	95% CI	Coefficient	SE	95% CI
Constant	7.94	0.50	6.95, 8.93	3.19	0.36	2.49, 3.89
Tourism activity type	-1.65	0.33	-2.29, -1.01	-0.16	0.12	-0.39, 0.08
Emotional arousal				0.52	0.05	0.43, 0.62
Companion relative ability	-0.85	0.24	-1.32, -0.38			
Tourism activity type×Companion relative ability	0.43	0.15	0.13, 0.73			
R			0.39			0.55
R ²			0.15			0.30
F			19.61			69.96
p			<.001			<.001
Conditional indirect effects				Effect	SE	95% CI
Mediator emotional arousal				-0.64	0.14	-0.94, -0.39
Greater				-0.41	0.08	-0.59, -0.26
Comparable				-0.19	0.10	-0.38, 0.002
Lower						
Index of moderated mediation				Index	SE	95% CI
Companion relative ability				0.23	0.09	0.07, 0.41

nor the potential mediating role of emotions on storytelling intentions. Dividing tourism activity into two types (relaxing and challenging), results indicated that experiencing a challenging tourism activity acts to stimulate a tourist's emotional arousal and storytelling intentions more substantially. Although the findings do not seem to be a great surprise, such judgment is more of a post hoc justification and, thus, this study provides empirical evidence for the assumption. Furthermore, the full mediating role of arousal between tourism activity type and storytelling intentions suggests that the effect of tourism activity on storytelling occurs through emotional response. The more challenging the activity, the stronger the arousal and storytelling intentions, which contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between destination attributes and a tourist's emotional response and behavior intention.

The presence of a companion has previously been shown to impact people's emotion in shopping and restaurant contexts (e.g. Huang et al., 2014; Huang & Wang, 2014; Pozharliev et al., 2015; Wenzel & Benkenstein, 2018). In the tourism literature, the importance of a travel companion has tended to focus on aspects of the travel experience (Choo & Petrick, 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011) or as a descriptive variable that influences behavior (e.g. Jang, Bai, Hong, & O'Leary, 2004; Liang, 2017). Study 3 examined the moderating impact of having a travel companion on the effect of tourism activity type on a tourist's emotional arousal response based on social facilitation theory. Findings indicate that a travel companion has a different impact on a tourist's emotional response across different types of tourism activities. Specifically, when traveling with a companion, the arousal effect of challenging tourism activity will exist; conversely, when traveling alone, this effect will be attenuated. The study is an innovative application of social facilitation theory, which explains the differential effect of companionship in distinct tourism contexts and enriches the theoretical literature about social facilitation/inhibition. Moreover, the study findings show that a tourist's emotional arousal is not only influenced by destination attributes, but also driven by the social context and, thus, provide suggestions for developing and designing tourism experience by taking advantage of tourist-to-tourist interaction (Lin, Zhang, Gursoy, & Fu, 2019). Based on an extensive literature review, the current study may be the first to explore the joint effect between tourism activity type and companion on a tourist's emotional arousal.

The effect of a travel companion's relative ability on individual choice behaviors has been studied (Morey & Kritzberg, 2012; Porter & Usher, 2018), yet there is a gap regarding the effect of travel companion relative ability on emotional response. Self-expansion theory suggests that a person can obtain needed resources from others, and this would appear to be particularly relevant for those who encounter travel constraints. By distinguishing different tourism activity types, Study 4 findings demonstrated that having a travel companion with higher or

comparable ability in challenging rather relaxing tourism activity will result in greater emotional arousal. This study relates tourists with their companions through the resources they have. Those resources can serve as a boundary condition, which makes a theoretical contribution to the literature by addition to our understanding of the travel companion relative ability effect in tourism overall. More specifically, it improves our understanding of the influence mechanism of tourism activity type on a tourist's emotional response. In addition, this study attracts more attention on the relationship between social context and a tourist's emotional response and provides new insight for tourism marketing. Moreover, this study is an application of self-expansion theory in a tourism context, which extends the theoretical literature of self-expansion theory.

3.2. Managerial implications

Research findings indicate the importance of understanding emotional arousal for the tourism industry. Tourism activity type appears to be a predictor of a tourist's level of arousal with more challenging activities resulting in more arousal and a greater likelihood of sharing experiences with others. Destination management organizations (DMOs) need to understand these effects and can devise strategies to address them. Specifically, to encourage storytelling for those engaging in less challenging activities, DMOs could provide incentives to encourage participants to share their experiences or possibly promote these activities in a manner that emphasizes greater arousal via terms such as "stimulated", "excited", or "surprising."

It has been reported that 24% of tourists have journeyed alone on their latest excursion (Brown, 2015). Attracting the solo travel market is more and more vital for DMOs and tourism operators globally (Rosenbloom, 2012). If promoting relaxing tourism activities, DMOs that cater to the solo travel market should continue to emphasize the characteristics of relaxation and escape from ordinary life. However, DMOs focused on providing more challenging activities could develop approaches to appropriately pair up individuals with companions when engaging in the endeavors. For some travelers, the issue is not so much about where they go, but rather, whom they go with (Morey & Kritzberg, 2012). Considering the interaction effect of tourism activity type with travel companion relative ability, DMOs could take advantage of the social facilitation effect by: 1) recommending challenging activities to non-solo travelers, and 2) developing strategies aimed at encouraging tourists to travel with a companion such as pricing discounts.

Taking companion relative ability into consideration, tourists who travel with companions of lower relative ability may encounter more constraints. According to self-expansion theory, these tourists may not achieve self-expansion through their companions' limited resources.

Therefore, the destination could look for ways to compensate for this deficiency to better sustain high emotional responses. For instance, they could provide price deals for a low ability companion (i.e., special rates for beginners). In addition, tourism destinations could provide support for tourists via employees with greater relative abilities to help achieve greater emotional response in tourists who are facing challenging tourism activities.

3.3. Research limitations and future research directions

Like all studies, this research has some limitations that future researchers may want to further investigate. First, this research examined its hypotheses by employing Chinese students or tourists for all of the studies. Generalizability concerns indicate that the relationships studied could be further validated by using samples from other countries. Second, travel companion and travel companion relative ability were used as moderating variables in this research, but other companion-based variables such as companion type or companion gender (Huang et al., 2014) may provide additional insights regarding moderation of the effect of tourism activity type on emotional response. Finally, this research distinguished tourism activities into challenging and relaxing, more classifications could be explored for an extended study in the future. As such, there is a rich range of opportunities available to further research and improve our understanding of these important relationships.

Author contribution

Dr. Lujun Su, Dr. Scott R. Swanson and Jin Cheng contributed equally to this research.

Declarations of interest

None.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the National Science Foundation of China (No.71774176; 71974206; 71573279), the State Key Program of National Natural Science of China (No. 71991483); National Science Foundation of Distinguished Young Scholars of Hunan Province (No, 2017JJ1032) and Major Consulting Projects of Chinese Academy of Engineering (2019-ZD-38-05).

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