

Literary celebrity, tourists' self-destination connection, and brand engagement: Based on a marketing perspective of celebrity endorsement effects

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing role of celebrity effects in shaping favorable tourist reactions to destination brands, little is known about how the construct is structured or functions in destination settings or niche tourism contexts. In response, this study hypothesized four elements for celebrity endorsement effects and examined how they influenced self-brand connection and brand involvement, which are antecedents to brand engagement and destination loyalty. The subjects of this study were potential tourists who were familiar with a Chinese literary celebrity (Jin Yong) and a related destination (the Shaolin Temple). SPSS 25 and AMOS 22 were used to analyze the 405 valid data obtained through an online survey from October 7 to 21, 2020. Structural equation modeling analysis results showed that all the measurement scales were valid and reliable. In addition, all four elements of celebrity effects (i.e., trustworthiness, expertise, celebrity-brand congruence, and familiarity) were successful predictors of self-brand connection and brand involvement. Also, self-brand connection and brand involvement contributed significantly to brand engagement, explaining substantial variance in destination loyalty. The findings suggest the contextual nature of celebrity effects and reveal how tourists react to destination brands.

1. Introduction

Tourists today are blessed with the range of destinations they can choose from. Granted the economic potential of tourism, many places—which used to be indifferent to tourism—are now positioning themselves as destinations for various groups of tourists (Kim et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this has intensified the competition between destinations (Ferns & Walls, 2012). The situation can be even more detrimental for domestic destinations which may lack clear destination images. Tourist choices will prefer other, similar competitors (Gómez et al., 2018). For their survival, destinations are making active marketing efforts, which often involve building destination brands and seeking celebrity effects.

Destination brands are signs, symbols, or logos that represent the characteristics and the qualities of their destinations (Gnoth, 2007). For instance, “Hong Kong • Asia’s world city” embodies the international and multi-cultural nature of the city and alludes to the types of experiences that tourists can get there. With proper design and

communication, destination brands can be an effective tool for destination marketing (Barnes et al., 2014). They help tourists identify and differentiate destinations among their competitors (Kerr, 2006). In some instances, destination brands can even be tourism attractions or merchants on their own (Gnoth, 2002) as in the cases of New York (“I Love New York”) and Amsterdam (“I amsterdam”).

Resultingly, there is an abundance of destination brands operating at the country, state, county, or city level, and destination brand, as a construct, has drawn a keen interest from researchers and practitioners in tourism (Chen et al., 2020). Regardless, destination brand research has shown slow progress (Chen et al., 2020; Gartner, 2014). When brand is considered in tourism research, it has been mostly about how tourists react to product or service brands (Gnoth, 2007), leaving destination brand an under-explored construct. There have been studies on how destination brand is constituted (e.g., Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011; Gnoth, 2007) or can be measured (e.g., Gartner, 2014; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014), but little attention has been directed to tourists’ reactions to destination brands (Chen et al., 2020). As Chen et al. (2020) claimed,

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there should be more empirical investigation of what makes tourists more involved and engaged in destination brands.

Seeking celebrity effects has been a popular way of destination branding and marketing. High profile sport or entertainment stars frequently appear in destination advertisements or serve as destination ambassadors (Zhang et al., 2020). With the exponential growth of the entertainment industry and the internet, destinations are now never short of celebrities they can choose (Teng & Chen, 2020) or ways to spread celebrity effects (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Celebrity effects can be supported by the associative network theory (Wang et al., 2020), which holds that the memory is a network composed of many nodes and links. Celebrities and destination brands represent nodes, while celebrities' works can be links, describing the relationship among nodes. So through celebrities' works, an associative connection will be established between the celebrities and destination brands. In this way, the positive image associated with the celebrities can be transferred to the recognized destination brands in their works, consistent with McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer theory (Kim & Chen, 2020). When a celebrity endorses a destination to the public, potential tourists can easily transfer the positive image of celebrities (e.g., trustworthiness, expertise, and familiarity) into the image of related destination brands (Kim et al., 2018). Especially when the celebrities' personality is congruent with the destination brand they endorse, the brand is viewed more favorably by the public (Dwivedi et al., 2016; Gilal et al., 2020).

Besides, according to Escalas and Bettman (2009), such positive image transfer may promote self-brand connection; that is, as people feel more confident about a destination brand, they are more inclined to adopt the brand as a means of expressing who they are. When self-brand connection becomes substantial, it is likely to make tourists more engaged and loyal to the destination brand as well (Joo et al., 2020; Sirgy, 1985). Similarly, celebrity effects can enhance people's brand involvement, another antecedent to brand engagement or brand loyalty (Hollebeek et al., 2014). The fact that a celebrity publicly endorses a destination brand helps the brand look more prominent and relevant to tourists and capture their attention (Arora et al., 2019).

Although general marketing literature provides enough evidence for the said effects of celebrities on brand reactions, it is unclear if the same findings would hold in tourism contexts. Tourism research concerning celebrity effects is nascent (Canavan, 2020; Gössling, 2019), and how celebrities influence tourists' perceptions and behaviors demands further investigation (Van der Veen, 2008). Furthermore, celebrity effects have mostly been examined in general tourism contexts, without making specific reference to the type of tourism or the mode of communication. Tourists' reactions to sport stars' messages may differ from those from renowned authors. Likewise, celebrities' messages delivered via text may be understood differently from visual or aural messages. As such, for a fuller understanding of celebrity effects on destination brand reactions, there should be more empirical and context-specific investigation.

In summation, there is a general lack of research concerning destination brand and celebrity effects for their practical importance. Not only tourism literature is short of empirical evidence connecting celebrity effects and destination brand reactions, but also the contextual nature of celebrity effects is largely overlooked. This study tried to fill this void in tourism research by examining the relationships between celebrity effects, self-brand connection, brand involvement, brand engagement, and destination loyalty. It chose a Chinese literary celebrity (i.e., Jin Yong) and the Shaolin Temple in China as the study context.

2. Literature review

2.1. The relationship between the Shaolin Temple and author Jin Yong

The Shaolin Temple, also known as the Shaolin Monastery, is a Chan (i.e., Zen) Buddhist temple in Henan Province, China. Founded during

the Northern Wei Dynasty (A.D. 386–534), the Shaolin Temple and its Pagoda Forest constitute a UNESCO World Heritage Site—the Historic Monuments of Dengfeng in “The Centre of Heaven and Earth”—designated in 2010 (UNESCO, 2010). In addition to its spiritual prominence and leadership, the Shaolin Temple is also known for its martial arts tradition. It is believed that one of its founders—Bodhidharma—had developed physical exercises for monks which later evolved into Shaolin Kungfu (Shahar, 2008). As such, the Shaolin Temple has been viewed and depicted as a sacred and symbolic place for Chinese martial arts by the public and the media (Herrmann, 2020). Many international celebrities have visited the Shaolin Temple, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, Singapore President SR Nathan, and former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (Xu, 2015).

Such favorable images of the Shaolin Temple are well embodied in Chinese martial hero novels (i.e. Wuxia), stories of a young, ordinary boy maturing into a mighty, righteous chivalry (Zhao, 2015). The Shaolin Temple is portrayed in many Chinese martial hero novels as a pillar of Chinese Kungfu. To take Jin Yong (1924–2018)—the author of best-selling Chinese martial hero novels—as an example, he extolled the Shaolin Temple's heroic tradition and contributed greatly to the shaping of the Shaolin Temple's symbolic images. In all his novels, the Shaolin Temple represents the zenith of martial arts and moral virtues (Hung et al., 2017) and is a home to key characters in most of his novels (Liao, 2014). While similar noble depictions of the Shaolin Temple are found in others' works (Herrmann, 2020), Jin Yong is the most pioneering and influential author of all (Zhao, 2015).

The favorable images of the Shaolin Temple—set out by Jin Yong and reiterated by the film industry—are deeply ingrained into many Chinese people's mind (Herrmann, 2020). Jin Yong's novels are considered masterpieces of Chinese literature. They create the genre of adult fairy tales (Hu, 2019), and his 15 books have sold over 100 million copies worldwide (Jin & Daisaku, 2013). For those born in the 1970s and 1980s in China, Jin Yong's novels bring back their youth time memories (Sun, 2018). Furthermore, 92.7% and 76.4% of those born in the 1990s and 2000s, respectively, also read his novels (Sun, 2018). This indicates that Jin Yong and his novels are broadly popular with generations of Chinese. Such nostalgic feeling and continued popularity make the Shaolin Temple a valuable name that needs protection. Indeed, the Shaolin Temple has registered its name (i.e., Shaolin) as trademarks around the world (Liu, 2017) and now operates more than 40 branches world-wide, focusing on spreading its religious ideas and martial arts tradition (Yuen, 2015). Resultingly, the Shaolin Temple has established itself into a prominent brand.

Jin Yong contributed greatly to legitimizing and promoting the Shaolin Temple and its legacy to the public as tourist attractions, especially to his readers. There is a stele erected to commemorate Jin Yong's visit to the temple in 1981 and 2001 (Fig. 1). The upper half of the stele contains Jin Yong's words of compliment and respect for the Shaolin Temple, while the lower half features all his novel titles. This stele not only publicizes Jin Yong's recognition of the Shaolin Temple but also attracts many tourists who feel inspired by Jin Yong's literary legacy and wish to be in the original scene of his novels. Also, since the early 1980s, the Shaolin Temple has grown into a famous destination, because Jin Yong's novels and movies based on them have successfully transformed Shaolin Kung Fu. It became an art form with the characteristics of a cultural frame in the past decades (Herrmann, 2020). They created Kung Fu fever and promoted the revival of the Shaolin Temple (Herrmann, 2020). Moreover, as shown in Fig. 1, the words ‘Jin Yong’ and ‘Shaolin culture’ on the stele have been worn out due to heavy tourist traffic and touch. All these suggest a positive relationship between Jin Yong's novels and tourists' motivation to visit the temple. Besides that, McCracken (1989) stated that “the secret of the celebrity endorsement is largely cultural in nature” (p. 320) So, from this cultural perspective, Jin Yong can be regarded as a celebrity shaping how tourists view the Shaolin Temple.



Fig. 1. The stele commemorating Jin Yong's visit to the Shaolin Temple (Henan, 2018).

2.2. Celebrity effects

By making the public compliments to the Shaolin Temple and agreeing to erect the stele filled with his remarks and novel titles, Jin Yong made a celebrity endorsement and activated celebrity effects. Celebrity endorsement, by definition, is using celebrities to advertise products or services (Halonon-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010), so that the likeability and the creditability of the celebrities can be projected on the products or the services (i.e., celebrity effects) (Gholipour et al., 2020). Celebrity effects are effective in marketing almost any kinds of products and services (Erdogan, 1999; Shimp, 2000) as well as in promoting destinations and attractions to tourists (Kim et al., 2018). Messages from celebrities can appeal greatly to potential tourists and help them mitigate the pre-purchase hesitation (Kim et al., 2013).

Celebrity effects depend on multiple elements (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Ohanian, 1990). Based on the source credibility theory (Hovland et al., 1953) and the source attractive model (McGuire, 1985), Ohanian (1990) viewed attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise as the three elements of celebrity effects. That is, for greater celebrity effects, celebrities should not only look attractive and sincere (Erdogan, 1999) but also seem experienced and knowledgeable about the product, the service, or the destination they mention (Hovland et al., 1953). While there can be additional elements such as dynamism, sociability, or likeability (Desarbo & Harshman, 1985; Simpson & Kahler, 1981), this three-dimensional structure has been utilized more widely (e.g., Baniya, 2017; Jin & Phua, 2014; Kim & Chen, 2020). Nevertheless, understanding celebrity effects on destination brands requires a more delicate approach. For instance, attractiveness—one of the three elements of celebrity effects (Ohanian, 1990) may be of less meaning to potential literary tourists, since they are more enticed by familiar authors than good-looking authors (Kim et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). Familiarity, according to Erdogan (1999), is “knowledge of the source through exposure” (p. 299) and represents if the celebrity is known and relatable to the person influenced by celebrity effects. Although familiarity is usually less prioritized than attractiveness, it demands greater recognition in contexts like literary tourism, where physical appearance contributes little to celebrity effects.

Also, celebrity effects also require the congruence between celebrities and the subject they comment about. When there is much discrepancy between product, service, or destination attributes and public images of the celebrities, celebrity effects become less visible

(Kamins, 1990; Min et al., 2019). As such, even if a celebrity is not deemed an expert in what he/she talks about, there still needs to be some resemblance between the celebrity and the subject. This match-up hypothesis has been generally upheld in studies involving products (Carlson et al., 2020) and services (Dwivedi et al., 2016), including hotels (Magnini et al., 2008) and airlines (Gilal et al., 2020).

Renowned authors like Jin Yong can be especially influential to potential tourists. Authors are not only viewed as experts in their topic areas but also more credible (Herbert, 2001). For instance, Jin Yong's novels feature his deep knowledge of Chinese martial arts, and his remarks carried greater weight to the public images of the Shaolin Temple (Herrmann, 2020). Following famous authors' footprints, celebrating their achievements, and witnessing their fame can be major travel motivations (Hoppen et al., 2014; Zhang & Xu, 2020). Destinations associated with famous authors are often cherished for its cultural significance and positive impressions spilled over from the authors (Kim et al., 2018; Teng & Chen, 2020). With the growth of the popular culture, there has also been a vast amount of movies, TV shows, and songs based on renowned authors and their works, further extending the influence of literary celebrity to many destinations (Roy et al., 2021).

Celebrity effects are becoming more relevant to destination marketing (Van der Veen, 2008), and it is not unusual to see celebrities in destination advertisements (Yang, 2018). Nevertheless, prior research on celebrity effects has mostly focused on single product and service (Van der Veen, 2008). However, unlike products or services, destinations often lack clearly defined images and encompass a wide range of attributes (Joo et al., 2020), rejecting indiscreet application of findings from product or service contexts. Furthermore, non-sport or non-entertainment celebrities have rarely appeared in research concerning celebrity effects (Yang, 2018); although sport or entertainment stars might be more favored by tourism marketers, there are other groups of celebrities who appeal differently to the public. As such, this study viewed trustworthiness, expertise, congruence, and familiarity (in lieu of attractiveness) as the four vital elements of endorsement effects from literary celebrities.

2.3. Self-brand connection and celebrity effects

People's selection of a brand often reflects how they feel or think about themselves or want to be seen by others (Escalas & Bettman, 2009). In other words, tourists choosing the Shaolin Temple brand may

do so because it helps them establish or express who they are. Since people have multiple self-concepts and brand options, there can be more than one self-brand connection at a time (Escalas, 2004). However, only more salient self-brand connections are materialized into observable behaviors, and less solid ties remain unrevealed (Escalas, 2004). So, when a person selects a brand, it is believed that there is a meaningful connection between his/her self-concepts and the brand (Escalas, 2004). As such, self-brand connection is a clue to who consumers are and how their decisions are made (Ferraro et al., 2013).

Self-brand connections can also develop between tourists and a destination (Kemp et al., 2012b). When residents hold favorable views about a brand of their city and its quality and uniqueness, they are likely to build a self-brand connection which then promotes brand advocacy (Kemp et al., 2012a). This suggests similar possibilities between tourists and destinations—such as the Shaolin Temple—which have a well-established brand. In fact, tourists can develop a sense of self-congruency to a destination by looking at its overall image and atmosphere (Joo et al., 2020) and prefer destinations that are more self-congruent to them (Sirgy & Su, 2000).

Celebrity effects can weaken doubts about the brand and make people feel more confident about its benefits (Escalas, 2004). Such positive outlooks on a brand make it easier for people to relate themselves to the brand (Dwivedi et al., 2015, 2016; Escalas & Bettman, 2009; Takaya, 2019). This positive relationship between celebrity effects and self-brand connection can be even more salient for literary tourists. Many literary tourists, including fans of Jin Yong, admire not only authors but also characters and contexts depicted in their works. This encourages them to seek sensory connections to destinations like the Shaolin Temple which let them imagine being inside the works they cherish (i.e., literary pilgrimage) (Robertson & Radford, 2009). As such, for literary tourists, public remarks from their favorite authors can be even more significant, making the following hypothesis viable.

H1. Favorite authors' celebrity effects—as measured via trustworthiness (H_{1a}), expertise (H_{1b}), congruence (H_{1c}), and familiarity (H_{1d})—have a positive impact on potential tourists' self-brand connection.

2.4. Brand involvement and celebrity effects

When people see much relevance between a brand and their needs, values, and interests, they become highly involved in the brand (Zaichkowsky, 1994). Simply put, involvement represents if a brand is of importance or interest to a person (Howard & Sheth, 1969; Hupfer & Gardner, 1971). Therefore, when someone is little involved, the brand would not draw enough attention from that person, and there would be little room for meaningful reactions to take place. In high involvement situations, people are more likely to show a deeper understanding of brand attributes and be more committed to it (Howard & Sheth, 1969). As such, brand involvement marks the starting point of consumer-decision making (Kim & Kim, 2017).

Despite its importance, there has been little discussion or application of brand involvement in tourism research. Havitz and Dimanche (1990) discussed how involvement could be useful to understanding people's recreational or touristic behaviors. However, only recently, there have been empirical studies using involvement to explain other constructs. For example, people who saw greater meaning and enjoyment from leisure (i.e., leisure involvement) were more likely to experience flow while hiking (Cheng et al., 2016). Likewise, involvement in cultural tourism was positively associated with flow experience (Zhang et al., 2019). Other studies have examined how involvement enhanced self-congruity (Wang & Wu, 2011) or revisit intention (Brown et al., 2016).

Since involvement is mostly treated as a causal construct (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990), tourism research has been slow in exploring its preceding constructs. Regardless, findings from general marketing literature suggest a positive relationship between celebrity effects and brand

involvement. Celebrity attractiveness successfully predicted people's involvement in soap or cell phone brands (Arora et al., 2019). In a study of sport fans, the high sport involvement group was more prone to celebrity effects than its counterpart (Düsenberg et al., 2016). This moderating effect of involvement (high vs. low) was also observed in how people reacted to celebrities' remarks of consumer products (El Hedhli et al., 2021). The same relationship is likely to hold in the literary tourism context as tourists would pay greater attention to destinations mentioned by their favorite authors.

H2. Favorite authors' celebrity effects—as measured via trustworthiness (H_{2a}), expertise (H_{2b}), congruence (H_{2c}), and familiarity (H_{2d})—have a positive impact on potential tourists' destination brand involvement.

2.5. Brand engagement, self-brand connection, and brand involvement

Brand engagement refers to peoples' degree of “motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind” (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 787). It is characterized by the extent of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions that people demonstrate during their direct interaction with a brand (Hollebeek, 2011). Tourists with high brand engagement to the Shaolin Temple brand, for instance, would show deep concentration (cognitive), delight (emotional), and vigor (behavioral) while visiting the temple (direct interaction). As such, more engaged people would be more motivated, invested, and committed to the brand or related behaviors (Ahn & Thomas, 2020). Although there are varying views on how brand engagement is constituted, this tripartite structure of cognition, emotion, and behavior is more prominent (Hollebeek, 2011).

Brand engagement is a powerful predictor of consumer loyalty (So et al., 2016), often outperforming more conventional constructs like perceived quality or consumer satisfaction (Bowden, 2009). Tourism research has considered engagement in various forms, such the strength of tourists' relationship with a resort brand (Ahn & Thomas, 2020), engagement with heritage tourism (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020), or intention to engage with a destination (Zhang et al., 2018). Regardless, the findings have reiterated the importance of engagement in shaping tourists' satisfaction (Alrawadieh et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020) or loyalty (Ahn & Thomas, 2020; Alrawadieh et al., 2019).

Self-brand connection can be an effective predictor of brand engagement. The self-congruity theory posits that people are more drawn to products, services, or destinations which seem more befitting to their self-concepts (Joo et al., 2020). Equally, people would be more committed to a brand if they can see greater connection between themselves and the brand. People's engagement with brand fan pages was highly dependent on how well the fan pages reflected their self-concepts (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). The same positive relationship between self-concept and brand engagement was observed for fashion brands (Nyadzayo et al., 2018). In tourism contexts, heritage tourists were proactive in their attitudes and behaviors if they identified themselves with the heritage site (Alrawadieh et al., 2019). Based on these theoretical and empirical grounds, this study hypothesized the following.

H3. Potential tourists' self-brand connection has a positive impact on their brand engagement.

For people to be engaged with and committed to a brand, they first need to see the brand relevant to their needs, values, and interests (France et al., 2016; Hollebeek, 2011). In that aspect, brand involvement is a gateway to brand engagement which then triggers further attitudinal or behavioral reactions (Harrigan et al., 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2014). People's brand engagement with social media or telecommunication service was significantly influenced by their brand involvement (Algharabat et al., 2020; Gómez et al., 2019). The same finding was replicated in a tourism context by Harrigan et al. (2018) who studied how people's involvement with online travel sites contributed to their

brand engagement and brand loyalty. As such, the following was assumed regarding the relationship between brand involvement and brand engagement.

H4. Potential tourists’ brand involvement has a positive impact on their brand engagement.

2.6. Destination loyalty and brand engagement

People’s loyalty to a product, a service, or a brand is manifested in two ways. They may make repeat purchases (i.e., behavior) or spread positive word-of-mouth about it (i.e., attitude) (Oppermann, 2000). By doing so, consumer loyalty helps to create additional revenue and reduce marketing costs. Given such practical importance, understanding antecedents to consumer loyalty has been a major concern in many fields of research (Chi & Qu, 2008; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Especially in tourism research, tourists’ loyalty to a destination has been commonly treated as an ultimate outcome dependent on other predictors like perceived value (Lee et al., 2007), service quality (Kim et al., 2013), nostalgia (Cho et al., 2020), or emotional solidarity (Joo et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2017).

People with high destination brand engagement would also be loyal to the destination. To begin with, Bowden (2009) viewed brand engagement as an intimate predictor of brand loyalty which can outperform other constructs. Expanding further, Hollebeek’s (2011) conceptual framework suggests positive links between brand involvement, brand engagement, and brand loyalty. This conceptual framework was also validated in Harrigan et al.’s (2017) study concerning online travel sites. Likewise, tourists’ engagement was a significant predictor of their loyalty toward hotel or airline brands (So et al., 2020) or destinations (Chen et al., 2020). Based on the theoretical and empirical underpinning, this study posited the following hypothesis, leading to the development of the conceptual framework presented in Fig. 2.

H5. Potential tourists’ brand engagement has a positive impact on their destination loyalty.

3. Methods

3.1. Survey instrument

Besides basic socio-demographic questions, this study asked questions regarding celebrity effects, self-brand connection, brand involvement, brand engagement, and destination loyalty concerning the

Shaolin Temple and its brand. Celebrity effects had four sub-dimensions of trustworthiness, expertise, congruence, and familiarity (See Table 1). Trustworthiness and expertise were each measured using three items from Ohanian (1990). Three items for congruence were adopted from Choi and Rifon’s (2012) study, and three additional items were borrowed from Simonin and Ruth’s (1998) study to capture familiarity. For self-brand connection, six items by Escalas (2004) were utilized, and for brand involvement, Ferns and Walls’s (2012) four items were used. Brand engagement was measured via 10 items devised by Harrigan et al. (2017). Finally, for destination loyalty, five items from Dedeoğlu’s (2019) and Kim et al.’s (2018) studies were used. All scale items were in a five-point Likert scale, where ‘1’ indicated strong disagreement and ‘5’ meant strong agreement to a positively worded statement.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

The survey instrument was back-translated and pre-tested to ensure reliable and valid responses. To begin with, the survey instrument, initially developed in English, was translated into Chinese. Then, the Chinese version was back-translated into English by three tourism researchers who were fluent in both languages to see if there was any substantial difference between the initial version and the back-translated version. Then, using the Chinese version, a pilot test was undertaken with 80 college students from several Chinese universities who were familiar with this study context (literary celebrity Jin Yong

Table 1
Dimensions and sources of constructs.

Constructs	Dimensions	Items	Sources	
Celebrity endorsement effects	Four -dimensional	Trustworthiness	3	Ohanian (1990)
		Expertise	3	Ohanian (1990)
		Congruence	3	Choi and Rifon (2012)
		Familiarity	3	Simonin and Ruth (1998)
Self-brand connection	Single-dimensional	6	Escalas (2004)	
Brand involvement	Single-dimensional	4	Ferns and Walls (2012)	
Brand engagement	Single-dimensional	10	Harrigan et al. (2017).	
Destination loyalty	Single-dimensional	5	Dedeoğlu (2019); Kim et al. (2018)	

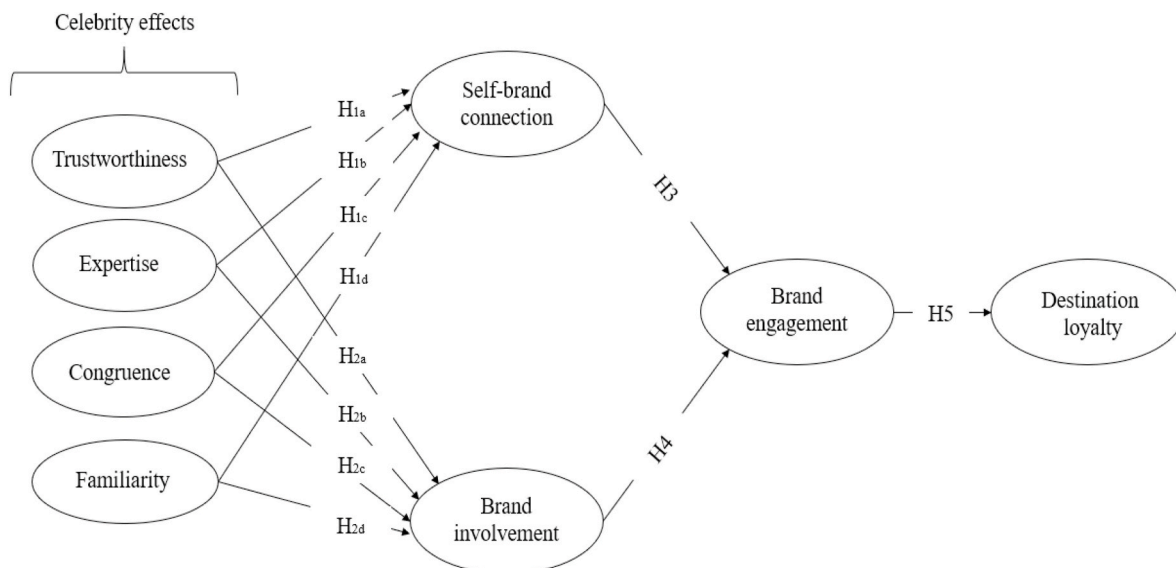


Fig. 2. Conceptual framework.

and the Shaolin Temple). Based on respondents' feedback, problematic questions or scale items were deleted or revised.

The actual data collection was undertaken via Sojump (www.sojump.com), an online survey platform and a Chinese equivalent of Amazon Mechanical Turks. By default, people needed to be 18 years or older to participate in surveys distributed via Sojump. Additional filter was set to include only those who knew about Jin Yong and his works. After confirming that all respondents had read Jin Yong's novels, texts and photos (e.g., the stele in Fig. 1) illustrating Jin Yong's recognition of the Shaolin Temple were provided to respondents. For instance, several Shaolin Temple characters in Jin Yong's works were introduced, such as 'Sao di' monk in 'Demigods and semi-devils' or 'Fang Zheng' master and his brother 'Fang Sheng' from 'The smiling, proud wanderer.' Respondents were asked to carefully review the texts and photos before answering questions, so they could be familiar with the relationship between Jin Yong and the Shaolin Temple.

Descriptive analysis was conducted in SPSS 25.0 to obtain an overview of sample characteristics. Then, structural equation modeling (SEM) was undertaken following the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). That is, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was ran first to establish a best fitting measurement model to the data. Once a satisfactory measurement model was achieved, a structural model was built to test the hypothesized relationships. All SEM procedure was done in AMOS 23.0.

4. Results

4.1. Sample overview

Data was collected from October 7 to 21, 2020. Of the 490 responses collected, 85 were discarded for incompleteness or disengagement. The sample included more males (215, 53.1%) than females (190, 46.9%) (Table 2). Almost half of the sample were born in 1990s (182, 45%). The majority of the sample completed or were attending a four-year university (214, 52.8%). In terms of monthly income, most respondents were in the 5,001–10,000 yuan (\$ 764–1,526) group (176, 43.5%).

4.2. Measurement model and CFA

First, CFA was conducted to identify the best-performing measurement model. The initial measurement model, which encompassed all scale items, showed a good fit to the data: $\chi^2_{(611)} = 858.095$, $\chi^2/df = 1.428$, CFI = 0.935, TLI = 0.928, and RMSEA = 0.033. All factor loadings were above 0.5, which was satisfactory as per Fornell and Larcker (1981) (Table 3). CR values ranged between 0.771 (trustworthiness) and 0.935 (brand engagement), exceeding the cut-off value of 0.7 suggested by Hair et al. (2013). Values for Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were all above 0.5, which was needed for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2013).

Table 2
Overview of sample population's socio-demographic characteristics.

Variable	N (%)	Variable	N (%)
Gender		Monthly income (Yuan)	
Male	215 (53.1%)	5,000 or less	97 (24%)
Female	190 (46.9%)	5,001–10,000	176 (43.5%)
Age (Year of birth)		10,001–15,000	78 (19.3%)
2000 or after	53 (13.1%)	15,001–20,000	42 (10.4%)
1995–1999	70 (17.3%)	20,001–30,000	7 (1.7%)
1990–1994	112 (27.7%)	30,001 or more	5 (1.2%)
1985–1989	55 (13.6%)	Education	
1980–1984	32 (7.9%)	Less than high school	21 (5.2%)
1975–1979	15 (3.7%)	High school	39 (9.6%)
1970–1974	17 (4.2%)	Two-year college	111 (27.4%)
1965–1969	14 (3.5%)	Four-year university	214 (52.8%)
1964 or before	37 (9.2%)	Graduate school or more	20 (4.9%)

Note. 1 yuan = \$ 6.54.

Table 3
Confirmatory factor analysis results.

Item	Factor loading	Mean	SD
Trustworthiness (CR = 0.771, AVE = 0.529)			
The writer is trustworthy.	0.559	4.12	0.578
The writer is reliable.	0.581	4.28	0.607
The writer is honest.	0.573	4.25	0.669
Expertise (CR = 0.817, AVE = 0.598)			
The writer is qualified.	0.595	4.23	0.573
The writer is expert.	0.598	4.21	0.637
The writer is experienced.	0.604	4.19	0.631
Congruence (CR = 0.794, AVE = 0.564)			
It is a good fit between the writer and the Shaolin Temple.	0.529	4.19	0.633
It is relevant between the writer and the Shaolin Temple.	0.552	4.25	0.604
There is a match-up between the writer and his works and the Shaolin Temple.	0.64	4.20	0.620
Familiarity (CR = 0.804, AVE = 0.579)			
The writer is familiar to me.	0.589	4.18	0.673
The writer offers me comfortable feeling.	0.657	4.20	0.628
The writer offers me awareness.	0.513	4.16	0.669
Self-brand connection (CR = 0.905, AVE = 0.614)			
The Shaolin Temple brand reflects who I am.	0.545	4.18	0.666
I can identify with the Shaolin Temple brand.	0.54	4.08	0.541
I feel a personal connection to the Shaolin Temple brand.	0.614	4.12	0.616
I think the Shaolin Temple brand helps me become the type of person I want to be.	0.638	4.17	0.641
I think the Shaolin Temple brand reflects who I consider myself to be.	0.592	4.09	0.547
The Shaolin Temple brand suits me well.	0.671	4.15	0.562
Brand involvement (CR = 0.879, AVE = 0.645)			
The Shaolin Temple brand means a lot to me.	0.634	4.21	0.599
The Shaolin Temple brand matters to me.	0.639	4.21	0.560
For me, the Shaolin Temple brand is interesting.	0.621	4.12	0.605
For me, the Shaolin Temple brand is appealing	0.616	4.13	0.627
Brand engagement (CR = 0.935, AVE = 0.591)			
When someone criticizes the Shaolin Temple brand, it feels like a personal insult.	0.609	4.11	0.634
When someone praises the Shaolin Temple brand, it feels like a personal compliment.	0.563	4.13	0.683
I am passionate about the Shaolin Temple brand.	0.6	4.11	0.614
I feel excited about the Shaolin Temple brand.	0.58	4.16	0.634
Anything related to the Shaolin Temple brand grabs my attention.	0.708	4.12	0.598
When I am interacting with the Shaolin Temple brand, I forget everything else around me.	0.554	4.12	0.694
When I am interacting with the Shaolin Temple brand, I am immersed.	0.577	4.06	0.653
I enjoy interacting with like-minded others in the Shaolin Temple brand community.	0.682	4.11	0.597
I often participate in activities of the Shaolin Temple brand community.	0.627	4.10	0.623
In general, I like to participate in the Shaolin Temple brand community discussions.	0.586	4.11	0.662
Destination loyalty (CR = 0.858, AVE = 0.549)			
In the following years, I intend to travel to the Shaolin Temple (again) for tourism.	0.552	4.22	0.650
I would like to visit the Shaolin Temple (again) in the near future.	0.589	4.12	0.774
I would still consider a trip to the Shaolin Temple even if the travel cost increases.	0.598	4.18	0.642
I would recommend the Shaolin Temple to others.	0.603	4.17	0.705
I would say positive things about the Shaolin Temple.	0.562	4.13	0.752

For a measurement model to demonstrate its discriminant validity, AVE values for each of its constructs should be greater than their squared inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Again, this requirement was met by the measurement model as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
AVE value and squared inter-construct correlations of the constructs.

	TRS	EXP	CNG	FML	SBC	BI	BE	BL
Trustworthiness (TRS)	0.529							
Expertise (EXP)	0.323	0.598						
Congruence (CNG)	0.091	0.327	0.564					
Familiarity (FML)	0.163	0.320	0.334	0.579				
Self-brand connection (SBC)	0.278	0.464	0.352	0.421	0.614			
Brand involvement (BI)	0.301	0.521	0.402	0.406	0.521	0.645		
Brand engagement (BE)	0.245	0.305	0.417	0.232	0.480	0.416	0.591	
Destination loyalty (BL)	0.164	0.378	0.457	0.388	0.388	0.444	0.417	0.549

Note. Diagonal values (bolded) are AVE values.

Note. Off-diagonal values (plain) are squared inter-construct correlations.

4.3. Structural model and hypothesis testing

Upon completion of the CFA, the measurement model was converted into a structural model by specifying paths between the constructs. This structural model also generated satisfactory fit indices as follows: $\chi^2_{(621)} = 933.504$, $\chi^2/df = 1.525$, CFI = 0.919, TLI = 0.912, and RMSEA = 0.036.

H₁ assumed that there would be positive associations between the elements of celebrity effects and self-brand connection. Results were in support of this hypothesis, as trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.207$, $p = 0.02$), expertise ($\beta = 0.327$, $p = 0.004$), congruence ($\beta = 0.246$, $p = 0.015$) and familiarity ($\beta = 0.273$, $p = 0.006$) all had positive impacts on self-brand connection (Table 5).

H₂ posited that the celebrity effect elements would also predict brand involvement. In fact, trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.211$, $p = 0.015$), expertise ($\beta = 0.278$, $p = 0.015$), congruence ($\beta = 0.306$, $p = 0.003$), and familiarity ($\beta = 0.222$, $p = 0.012$) contributed positively to brand involvement.

Results also indicated that self-brand connection ($\beta = 0.468$, $p < 0.001$) and brand involvement ($\beta = 0.373$, $p < 0.001$) exerted positive influences on brand engagement, supporting H₃ and H₄, respectively. Lastly, brand engagement was also a significant predictor of destination loyalty with $\beta = 0.695$ and $p < 0.001$ (H₅ supported).

All four elements of celebrity effects explained 65.6% and 70.9% of the variance in self-brand connection and brand involvement, respectively. As for brand engagement, 59.1% of its variance was attributable to self-brand connection and brand involvement. Finally, the R² value for destination loyalty was 0.483, meaning about a half of the change in destination loyalty was explained by brand engagement.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The results validate trustworthiness, expertise, congruence, and familiarity as the four distinctive elements of celebrity effects. They did not cause any issues regarding internal reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Furthermore, all of them were significant predictors of self-brand connection and brand involvement, demonstrating their ability to predict theoretically connected constructs (i.e.,

Table 5
Hypothesis testing results.

Hypothesis	β	p-value
H _{1a} : Trustworthiness → Self-brand connection	.207	.020*
H _{1b} : Expertise → Self-brand connection	.327	.004**
H _{1c} : Congruence → Self-brand connection	.246	.015*
H _{1d} : Familiarity → Self-brand connection	.273	.006**
H _{2a} : Trustworthiness → Brand involvement	.211	.015*
H _{2b} : Expertise → Brand involvement	.278	.012*
H _{2c} : Congruence → Brand involvement	.306	.003**
H _{2d} : Familiarity → Brand involvement	.222	.021*
H ₃ : Self-brand connection → Brand engagement	.468	.000***
H ₄ : Brand involvement → Brand engagement	.373	.000***
H ₅ : Brand engagement → Destination loyalty	.695	.000***

predictive validity) (Arora et al., 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2015). Besides, the findings indicate the contextual and fluidic nature of celebrity effects. When the goal is to appeal to the public by visual means (e.g., videos, photos), attractiveness helps to grasp people’s attention and favorable responses. However, when communicating via non-visual modes, attractiveness is likely to lose much of its efficiency. Tourism products and services regarding literary celebrities maybe have specific needs and tastes which transcend just favorable appearance.

All four elements of celebrity effects contributed significantly to self-brand connection, which is in keeping with findings related to sports drinks (Dwivedi et al., 2016) or telecommunication services (Dwivedi et al., 2015). However, the size of the impact that each element had on self-brand connection deviated from one another. Of the four elements, expertise ($\beta = 0.327$) and familiarity (0.273) were especially conducive to self-brand connection, while trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.207$) was relatively underperforming. This may reflect the unique nature of literary tourists who often hold deep knowledge and appreciation of authors and their works. It is quite possible that for those without sufficient literary understanding, expertise or familiarity would have less significant influences. Brand involvement was also dependent on all four elements of celebrity effects, but a slightly different pattern was discovered. Expertise ($\beta = 0.278$) was still influential but not so much as congruence ($\beta = 0.306$). This confirms the idea that celebrity effects are most salient where there is a consistency in images of the celebrity and the subject being endorsed (Dwivedi et al., 2015, 2016). Moreover, few scholars have discussed the role of celebrity congruence in the tourism context (Gilal et al., 2020; Magnini et al., 2008). Interestingly, trustworthiness was the least effective predictor of self-brand connection or brand involvement. These weak associations may imply that potential tourists in this study were aware of the subjective nature of tourism experiences, especially at the destination level. That is, because they knew that actual experiences would be subject to various factors, they might have been less swayed by trustworthiness.

The positive impacts of self-brand connection and brand involvement on brand engagement are in line with the self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1985) or the conceptual model of brand involvement, brand engagement, and brand loyalty (i.e., destination loyalty in this study) (Hollebeek, 2011). When potential tourists to the Shaolin Temple found its brand intimately related to them (i.e., self-brand connection), they were more likely to be committed to the Shaolin Temple (i.e., brand engagement), thereby shaping favorable intentions (i.e., destination loyalty). Brand involvement also encouraged brand engagement; however, its influence was not as prominent as that of self-brand connection. It might be due to the nature of the items constituting brand involvement. Unlike self-brand connection—whose items addressed affective and cognitive aspects—brand involvement items included more abstraction, which could have undermined its predictive power. Still, the results were substantial enough as relevant studies have often reported even smaller values, such as in 0.23–0.28 reported in Algharabat et al. (2020).

5.1. Theoretical implications

The findings explain how celebrity effects shape tourists' reactions to destination brands. Tourism research surrounding celebrity effects has mostly focused on single product or service brand, often overlooking the complex and comprehensive nature of destinations. Even when celebrity effects were considered at the destination level, it focused on commercial messages delivered via visual means. The three elements of celebrity effects (Ohanian, 1990) may perform well in such instances. However, not all celebrity effects are activated in the same way or context; when visual images are not the primary means of communication, the conventional approach to celebrity effects would be less relevant. In that sense, this study has extended the theoretical model and the applicable context of celebrity effects. This enables a better understanding of the role of literary celebrities in a meaning transfer process, involving a literary celebrity-related site as a destination. Moreover, the findings from this study highlight the contextual nature of celebrity effects and call for more flexible use of the construct based on the mode of communication (e.g., visual, textual, aural) or its audience (e.g., general tourists, niche tourists).

Furthermore, the findings enrich the understanding of people's reactions to destination brands. Although much research has been done with respect to destination image, there has been slow progress in tourism research in examining destination brand (Gartner, 2014). The complex and evolving nature of destinations makes it challenging to develop destination brands (Gnoth, 2007), but brands are becoming increasingly inseparable from many consumption behaviors. Recognizing the eminent need for additional research on destination brand, this study validated Hollebeek's (2011) conceptual model of brand involvement, brand engagement, and brand loyalty in a destination context. Prior to this study, the model was used limitedly in understanding tourists' responses to hotel and airline brands (So et al., 2020). In this regard, the findings highlight the process through which destination brands grasp people's attention and trigger their behaviors.

5.2. Practical implications

The findings support the relevance and prominence of celebrity effects in literary tourism context, especially when connecting tourists with the Shaolin Temple brand and seeking positive reactions from them. This urges destination managers to seek the possibilities of tourism related to literary celebrities in their destinations and utilize celebrity effects to turn the potential into the reality. With its long history, China is abundant in cultural resources which are beneficial to the development of literary sites. Especially, with the rapid growth of new media (Internet, mobile, etc.) in recent decades, the works of literary celebrities have a wider audience. This makes literature and tourism more widely and deeply combined. As a result, the popularity of literary celebrities gradually increases. However, little practical effort has been made to nurture literary tourism sites or related celebrities using endorsement effects.

When authors mention or illustrate a destination in their works, their expertise in the destination and its culture should be highlighted. Destination-related celebrities can enhance specific emotional attachment for consumers (Saldanha et al., 2018). Moreover, when tourists perceive a high congruence between the destination and the celebrity, they form more favorable attitudes toward the destination brand (Magnini et al., 2008). As for the Shaolin Temple, destination managers may stress how knowledgeable Jin Yong was about the temple and its Chinese martial arts tradition by hosting related exhibitions on-site or in tourist generating regions. That way, the positive chain between expertise, brand involvement, brand engagement, and destination loyalty can be fully utilized. There can be tour programs inside the Shaolin Temple which highlight how the temple was illustrated in Jin Yong's novels and what are stories associated with each location inside the temple. This would not only promote brand involvement but also help

potential tourists to establish self-brand connection.

Self-brand connection was highly conducive to brand engagement, even more so than brand involvement. As such, destination managers should look for ways to strengthen self-brand connection, so people can see the destination more befitting to them. For that, destination brands should present more favorable and relatable impressions, since people want to associate themselves with the brands that they view positively. The Shaolin Temple has been doing a relatively good job in developing and defending its brand, but their focus has been limited to teaching religious and martial arts tradition. It is suggested that more active and inviting approaches—such as cultural performances and exhibitions—can help to increase the public presence of its brand while providing it with a more modern feeling.

5.3. Study limitations and research suggestions

Firstly, this study focused on how Jin Yong's affected people's reactions to the Shaolin Temple brand. However, as a renowned temple in China, the Shaolin Temple has multiple sources of celebrity effects, so how people view the temple and its brand may depend on various messages they get from other media portrayals or works of other authors. As such, it would be interesting to see how multiple sources of celebrity effects contribute to tourists' reactions to the Shaolin Temple brand. In a similar vein, future research may also consider controlling for the influences of tourists' past travel experiences, religious beliefs, and familiarity to the history of the Shaolin Temple. Given the religious and cultural eminence of the temple, those who travelled more, believe in Buddhism, or knowledgeable about the history may show favorable brand reactions regardless of Jin Yong's celebrity effects. Besides, future research can include the variable of age to observe its moderating effect. Considering the significant changes in information dissemination in recent decades, people of different ages may have different cognitive ways on this literary celebrity. For example, most of the younger generation learned about Jin Yong and his works through video media. This differs from the previous age groups using paper/novels as media. Therefore, in future research, age can be considered as a moderating variable.

Secondly, the conceptual framework in this study was limited to the context of literary celebrity. The nature of celebrity effects is likely to be contextual, so the findings from this study may not be applicable to other types of tourism involving sport (Ateke & Onwujiariri, 2016), religion (Kim & Chen, 2020), or film (Chen, 2018). Therefore, further efforts are needed to test the conceptual framework of this study across various settings.

Third, besides what appeared in this study, there can be additional factors affecting celebrity effects, such as tourist characteristics, brand trust, or brand awareness. Likewise, the influence of product placement or social media marketing would also be worthwhile investigating.

Finally, since many of Jin Yong's novels have been published in English, some Western readers are also exposed to his portrayal of the Shaolin Temple and Shaolin Kungfu (Hu, 2019). Therefore, it will be of significance to examine how this study's conceptual framework holds across people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

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