An Empirical Review of Cultural Distance in Tourism

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Abstract: Cultural distance is an important factor affecting tourist behaviour. This study qualitatively analyses the application of cultural distance in the tourism industry. The analysis shows that most researchers use cultural distance as an independent variable to explore the relationship between tourist behaviour, followed by the moderating variable and the dependent variable. The objective way and the subjective way (perceived cultural distance) are the main models of cultural distance measurement. International tourists and inbound and outbound tourists are the targets chosen by most researchers. This study is conducive to promoting the development of related research on cultural distance and has guiding significance for tourism managers and cultural enhancement of tourism product development.

Keywords: Cultural distance (CD); Perceived cultural distance (PCD); Culture; Tourism.

1. Introduction

Culture refers to the common meanings, rituals, traditions, and norms that exist among members of an organization or society (Solomon & Panda, 2004), and differences and similarities determine the cultural distance between the two (Ng et al., 2007). Every place has its own culture, which influences the practice (Martin et al., 2017). For example, different socio-cultural backgrounds affect their behaviours, travel patterns and preferences as tourists (Santos et al., 2016). In tourism research, cross-cultural differences and cultural distance (CD) are considered important, because tourists' familiarity with culture is related to the participation they seek, which in turn affects tourists' attitudes and behaviours (Jung et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2020). Therefore, it is of great significance to study the cultural distance between tourists to improve their consumption behaviour. This paper comprehensively analyses the empirical research of cultural distance in the field of tourism.

2. Definition of cultural distance

The first scientific definition of culture was given by British anthropologist Edward Taylor in 1870s. In his book Primitive Culture, he clarified that culture is a complex of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and all abilities and habits acquired by people as a member of society (Tylor, 1924).

Culture also represents "the sum total of people's perceptions of themselves and the world" (Urriola, 1989). Hofstede (1980,1990) believes that culture refers to the formation of common and specific values and behaviour patterns due to the similarity of people's growth environment, life experience and educational background in a certain region. Under the same cultural background, people's thinking mode, perception and behaviour performance are all similar. He also sees culture as "the collective programming of ideas that distinguish members of one human group from another" (Hofstede, 1980). Culture is also an invisible "psychological process" (Hofstede, 2006), which can affect people's objects of concern, behaviour activities and habits of value judgment, resulting in cultural differences. Differences do not represent the "good" or "bad" or "excellent" or "bad" of the culture, but cultural differences can be measured quantitatively, and cultural distance is a quantitative research method for cultural differences (Jung et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2020).

Cultural distance (CD) refers to the degree of similarity or difference between two cultures (Shenkar, 2001). In the late 1970s, some scholars turned the study of cultural differences from qualitative to psychological measurement methods and began to measure the differences in cultural values of different groups and the differences in individuals' perception of different cultures. Cultural distance was used to represent the degree of cultural differences (Spradley & Phillips, 1972). The cultural dimension is the basis of the cultural differences of different nationalities, indicating that there are differences between cultures. The main cultural differences are reflected in cultural values, language, religion, diet, etc. (Demes & Geeraert, 2014; Fan et al., 2023). Cultural distance can be measured objectively or subjectively (Cheng & Leung, 2013). Some specific indicators and data are used to measure the objective aspects. The commonly used methods include Kogut and Singh's (1988) cultural distance index. Clark and Pugh's (2001) cultural cluster distance index, West and Graham's (2004) linguistic distance, Jackson's (2001) cultural diversity index. The subjective aspect is measured by the perceived cultural distance (PCD). Perceived cultural distance is an individual difference that measures perceived differences between two cultures in particular social and physical aspects. Since perceived cultural distance is a measure of individual difference, any given cultural distance is likely to be perceived as high or low (Cheng & Leung, 2013). In tourism literature, cultural distance usually refers to the cultural difference between the destination and the place of origin (Liu, et al., 2021), which has a significant impact on destination selection. According to the theory of consumer culture, culture is the basis of consumer activities and shapes consumers' feelings, thoughts and behaviours, thus affecting consumers' performance (Geertz, 2008; Wu et al., 2016), consumer cultural differences are also the source of their behavioural classification (Moon et al., 2008). It can be seen that cultural distance is very suitable for predicting individual destination choice, because individual attitudes and opinions directly drive tourists' behavioural decisions (Drogendijk & Slangen, 2006). The existing tourism literature shows that cultural distance is an independent variable, a moderating variable or a dependent variable, and the relationship between cultural distance and tourist behaviour is discussed.

3. Cultural distance as independent variable

The research results of cultural distance as an independent variable are the most, and most of them are measured in a subjective way (perceived cultural distance). Literature shows that cultural distance is an important factor affecting tourist destination choice, tourist behaviour, tourist flow and tourist attitude. Cultural distance is a key factor in international tourism and inbound and outbound tourism. Studies have shown that cultural distance has a negative and significant impact on international tourism flow or inbound and outbound tourism flow (Yang & Wong, 2012; Yang et al., 2019) or positive influence (Qin et la., 2023). However, under the adjustment of cultural motivation, perceived cultural distance has a positive impact on the international destination selection of respondents with higher cultural motivation, and a negative impact on the international destination selection of respondents with lower cultural motivation (Liu et al., 2018).

Disaster may be a blessing in disguise. Huang et al. (2022) analysed the impact of cultural distance on the recovery of post-disaster tourism destinations by taking the number of international tourists to Sichuan Province from 2000 to 2016 from 13 major source countries before and after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in China as an example. The results show that cultural distance can explain the

"blessing in disguise" phenomenon of heterogeneity and has both positive and negative effects on the restoration of tourist destinations. That is, the "double-edged sword effect" of cultural distance was discovered. The mediating role of tourists' social contact between perceived cultural distance and tourism attitude has also been confirmed. The study also found that the relationship between perceived cultural distance and travel attitudes is "touch resilient." Perceived cultural distance is not correlated with existential authenticity, while existential authenticity is positively correlated with happiness and well-being (Yu et al.,2020). In terms of hotel accommodation, tourists with high cultural distance respond more negatively to the hotel environment than those with low cultural distance (Martin et al.,2017). Cultural distance also has negative effects on repeat visits, stay time and expenditure (Qian et al., 2018).

Li et al.(2024) extended the study of cultural distance from a single national scale to a multi-regional scale to study the obvious influence of cultural distance on tourism destination selection, and this influence is heterogeneous among different regions and travel distances. Specifically, most short-haul travellers prefer culturally similar areas, but there is a small percentage of travellers who prefer culturally different areas. While most long-distance tourists prefer culturally diverse areas, the study reveals regional heterogeneity and distance effects of travel motivation.

However, some scholars have found that cultural distance has no effect on behavioural intention. For example, Le and Hsu (2024) adopted the partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) and found that the perceived cultural distance of Taiwanese overseas students had a significant impact on the cognitive and emotional image of the destination but did not affect the behavioural intention. Cognitive image plays a mediating role in the interrelationship between perceived cultural distance, perceived discrimination, and behavioural intention, while affective image does not.

4. Cultural distance as moderating variable

Cultural distance, as a moderating variable, was measured in objective ways. Matzler et al.(2016) studied the influence of Hofstede's(1990) two dimensions of cultural distance (individualism and uncertainty avoidance) on the relationship between brand self-consistency and travel intention based on the representative samples of consumers from Italy, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Poland and Russia and Slovakia as the sample tourist destination. The results showed that individualism and uncertainty avoidance had a negative moderating effect on the relationship between consistency and interview intention, contrary to the expectation. This is of great significance to tourism research and destination management. In order to conceptualize the multi-dimensional structure of consumer complexity, Soroker et al.(2023) takes tourists from different countries as examples and refers to Hofstede's (1990) individualism and collectivism dimensions to empirically test this structure, and then studies the nature of the relationship between "individualism and collectivism" and consumption performance and the role of culture in this relationship. The results show that market experts, external search, risk avoidance, product knowledge and negotiation willingness are important dimensions of consumer sophistication. Culture moderates the relationship between consumer maturity and consumer performance, which is concretely reflected in the positive impact of culture on consumer maturity on consumer performance. Mature consumers from individualistic cultures achieve higher economic benefits (lower perceived prices) than those who are less mature. Daryanto and Song (2021) found through meta-analysis that the overall influence of place attachment on pro-environmental behaviour is positive and the intensity of the influence is moderate. Under the moderating effect of culture (collectivism and individualism culture), the influence is greater, that is, the influence of place attachment on behaviour is greater in collectivism countries than in individualism countries.

In addition, some scholars study a certain dimension of culture as a moderating variable. For example, Kim et al. (2022) conducted a survey on tourists who had tasted local food in Hong Kong and found that among tourists whose food culture was similar to that of Hong Kong, food culture had a greater moderating effect on the relationship between food novelty and satisfaction. However, for tourists from food culture different from Hong Kong food culture, food culture has a greater moderating effect on the relationship between food quality and satisfaction. Wibowo and Khoiruddin (2022) examined the moderating relationship between "religious" travel motivation and tourist satisfaction, confirming

that the availability of Islamic norms and practices related to tourism in destinations contributes to overall tourist satisfaction, and strengthens the relationship between traditional destination attributes and tourist satisfaction for Muslim tourists.

5. Cultural distance as dependent

In the field of tourism, there are few studies on cultural distance as a dependent variable. Fan et al. (2017) verified the measurement tools of social contact and perceived cultural distance in the context of tourism and discussed the impact of social contact on perceived cultural distance. The results show that the quality of contact negatively affects tourists perceived cultural distance. In terms of the number of contacts, social contact has a negative impact on tourists' cultural distance perception, while service contact has a positive impact on tourists' cultural distance perception.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study comprehensively analyses the application of cultural distance in the tourism industry. The analysis shows that researchers take cultural distance as an independent variable, a moderating variable or a dependent variable to explore the relationship between cultural distance and tourist behaviour. Among them, the perspective of independent variable is the most studied, followed by the perspective of moderating variable, and the perspective of dependent variable is not many. In terms of cultural distance measurement, cultural distance as an independent variable is mostly measured by subjective methods (perceived cultural distance), while the moderating variables and dependent variables are mostly measured by objective methods. In terms of research scale, international tourists and inbound and outbound tourists are the objects chosen by most researchers, and there are few cases of regional tourists.

This study comprehensively shows the achievements of cultural distance in tourism research, which is conducive to promoting the development of related research on cultural distance and has certain guiding significance for the enhancement of cultural characteristics in tourism product development. However, there are still some limitations in this study. For example, this review is qualitative research, not quantitative research. This review also did not conduct interdisciplinary comparative studies. In addition, literature shows that the influence of cultural distance on tourism behaviour is complex and diverse, so future research needs to be supplemented by multi-scale and more empirical cases.

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