The Influence of Tourist Inertia on WOM Communication in Educational Tourism

Abstract

Educational tourism is the integration of the education and tourism industries, which is beneficial for students to observe real-world phenomena and apply what they have learned. Therefore, it has received high attention from the education department and the academic community. However, existing studies have mostly explored the topic from the perspective of educational tourism resources and planning. Less attention has met to scenic spots and tourist behaviors in edu-tourism context. This article aims to analyze the influence path of word-of-mouth in educational tourism and to clarify the moderating role of tourist inertia. Based on this, this study obtained 426 valid questionnaires through a questionnaire survey. Moreover, this study utilized methods such as correlation analysis and regression analysis to analyze the data, clarifying the correlations of variables, causal relationships, and the moderating effect of tourist inertia. Findings show that tourist satisfaction is an important antecedent of word-of-mouth in the field of educational tourism. Moreover, the findings of this paper not only confirm the tourist-land relationship between educational tourism scenic spots and tourists, and identify their important antecedents, but also enhance the applicability of the theory of place dependence and place identity. What is more special is that this study also found that tourist inertia is both strengthen and weaken variable. In the context of educational tourism, it is a bivariate moderating variable. Finally, the research suggests that managers of educational tourism destinations should take some measures to enhance tourist satisfaction and gain higher word-of-mouth from tourists.

Key words: educational tourism, tourist inertia, word-of-mouth, place dependence, place identity

1. Introduction

Educational tourism (edu-tourism) combines travel activities with learning content (Chen, Xi., Yu, Tse, and Zhang, 2025), and it is the integration of the education and tourism industries. This cross-industry integration model is beneficial for students to observe real-world phenomena and apply what they have learned (Yen, Lu, Yu, Han, Zen, and Chen, 2025). Earlier, educational tourism was defined as any type of project in which participants traveled to a certain place either individually or in groups, with the main purpose of participating or obtaining a learning experience (Rodger, 1998). Participants in educational tourism are usually referred to as educational tourists (edu-tourists), who are "individuals or groups who travel to places other than their usual environment for the purposes of study, business, leisure, etc., and stay for more than 24 hours but not more than one year" (WTO, 2012). However, considering the cost of travel and the issue of overnight stays, there have recently been one-day round-trip off-campus field trips (off-campus teaching), also known as study and learning tourism (Yen and Xiong, 2020). This kind of travel emphasizes students' field investigation and the cultivation of observation skills, analytical skills and problem-solving skills, as well as the improvement of learning enthusiasm and learning outcomes (Arcodia et al., 2021; Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Therefore, it is increasingly valued by the education sector and the tourism industry (Yen et al., 2025a).

In this context, an increasing number of scholars are devoting themselves to the research of educational tourism. For example, an educational tourism program exploring how to enhance knowledge, skills, cultural understanding, emotional intelligence quotient and personal growth (Choudhary, Srivastava, and Panwar, 2022; Xu, LaPan, Lewis, Holladay, and Dixon, 2024). There are also studies to understand students' motivations for seeking education in non-resident countries (Abubakar, Taher Shneikat, and Oday, 2014). Moreover, there are also studies exploring participants' motivations and views on field trips, examining whether and how students' views change over time, and exploring the main factors ensuring the success of experiential learning travel programs (Arcodia, Abreu Novais, Cavlek, and Humpe, 2020). Some studies have examined children's moral sentiments in dark tourist attractions and supplemented traditional classroom learning through different learning approaches (Dresler, 2023; Bedford, 2001). One more example is research on activities that utilize educational resources such as museum artifacts and connect them with visitors' lives and memories is conducive to learning and practice (Bedford, 2001). Furthermore, some studies have explored the application of tourism resources in regional children and adolescents' educational achievements and community development, and have examined the current cognitive status and deficiencies in existing research (Muhtasim Mir, Shelley, and Ooi, 2024). These studies have analyzed the travel motivations of some tourists, educational tourism plans, and the benefits of educational tourism in helping students learn, but have less clarified the needs of tourists and how educational tourism scenic spots acquire tourists.

In other words, educational tourism is mostly arranged by schools, and the main motivation for students' participation is to cooperate with curriculum learning (Yen et al., 2025). Based on sustainable tourism development, educational tourism destination still need to consider their own resource characteristics and consumer needs to formulate plans to attract tourists. For instance, consumers of rural and farm tourism are increasingly inclined to participate in educational and entertaining leisure activities. Moreover, the purpose of rural education tours is to understand the lives and activities of farmers, and to establish a positive agricultural image in the eyes of the next generation/urban resident consumers (Petroman, Mirea, Lozici, Constantin, Marin, and Merce, 2016). This paper explores the needs of consumers, but it still neglects the resource characteristics of scenic spots, especially the part of how educational tourism scenic spots attract tourists and create positive word-of-mouth (WOM).

Regarding the part of scenic spots attracting tourists and creating positive word-of-mouth, studies have confirmed that perceived value, tourist satisfaction, destination image, etc. are all important antecedents of word-of-mouth (Yen, Guo, Zeng, Xu, Lu, and Yu, 2025; Yen, Tian, Xiong, Zou, and Mei, 2025; Yen, He, Shi, Xie, and Ban, 2025). However, fewer studies exploring the paths that influence tourists' word-of-mouth in the field of educational tourism. If the influence of these factors on the WOM of scenic spots can be clarified, it will be conducive to the marketing decisions and sustainable development of scenic spots in edu-tourism context. Moreover, research has pointed out that if educational tourism destinations gain psychological dependence and emotional identification from tourists, they have a higher willingness to give positive evaluations and recommendations (Yen et al., 2025a). Tourism destinations may have different target focuses and positioning strategies at different stages of operation (Yen, 2025). Based on this, educational tourism scenic spots should consider these positioning strategies, which may make positive contributions to the sustainable development of the scenic spots. Study has indicated that in the initial stage of operation, the goal of scenic spots should be to enhance tourists' satisfaction and obtain their positive word-of-mouth (Yen, 2025). For medium and long-term operation goals, their word-of-mouth can be improved by enhancing tourists' place identity (Yen et al., 2025a). Based on these literatures, this paper incorporates the psychological linkages (place dependence) and emotional linkage factors (place identity) generated by tourists' visits to scenic spots into the research model for consideration.

Furthermore, that tourist satisfaction enhances word-of-mouth was evidenced in these studies in scenic spots context (Yen, 2025; Yen et al., 2025b; Yen et al., 2025c); higher place identity promotes positive evaluations of scenic spots by tourists (Yen et al., 2025a), etc. have all been confirmed. However, none of these studies took into account the issue of tourist inertia. Study has pointed out that the tourist inertia of tourists plays an important moderating factor in tourists' decision-making and loyalty (Wu, 2011). The behavioral intentions of tourists with different travel habits have different relationships with the preceding variables (Yen, 2017). Consumer behavior theory points out that consumers lack goal-guided behavior, lack perceptual decision changes (Huang and Yu, 1999), or repeat purchases due to old habits (Bozzo, 2002). They are repetitive purchases made under their own laziness, indolence and passivity (Oliver, 1997, 1999; Yanamandram and White, 2006). For instance, tourists are satisfied with the tourism products and services of a scenic spot, due to the inertia of tourism, they may not give positive evaluations or recommendations in the context of educational tourism. Based on this, this study incorporates tourist inertia variables to analyze their moderating effect on the variable relationships in the proposed model.

Based on the above, this paper aims to explore the correlation among tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity and word-of-mouth in educational tourism scenic spots, clarify the moderating effect of tourist inertia on the variable relationship, and finally put forward suggestions. To achieve the above goals, this study selects the Confucian Academy Scenic Area in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province as the empirical research base.

2. Research Methods

2.1 Research Framework and Hypotheses

 The research purpose of this article is to analyze the paths that influence the place identity and reputation of scenic spots in ethnic minority areas, and it is suitable to use quantitative research methods. The research framework of this article is shown in Figure 1, which includes research dimensions such as tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity, and word-of-mouth. Based on previous studies (Yen, 2019; Yen and Luo, 2019; Yen, 2020; Qiu et al., 2024; Yen et al., 2025a; Yen et al., 2025b; Yen et al., 2025c; Shum et al., 2025; Dionisio et al., 2025) on tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity, and word-of-mouth, we proposed Hypothesis 1 (In the relationship between tourists and tourist sites, tourists' tourist satisfaction significantly and positively affects their word-of-mouth); Hypothesis 2 (In the relationship between tourists and tourist sites, tourists' tourist satisfaction significantly and positively affects their place dependence); and Hypothesis 3 (In the relationship between tourists and tourist sites, tourists' tourist satisfaction significantly and positively affects their place identity). Based on previous studies on place dependency and place identity (Yen and Wang, 2020; Yen, 2019 Yen and Luo, 2019; Yen, 2020), we proposed Hypothesis 4 (In the relationship between tourists and tourist sites, tourists' place dependence significantly and positively affects their word-of-mouth). According to previous studies (Yen, 2018; Yen, 2020), we proposed Hypothesis 5 (In the relationship between tourists and tourist attractions, tourists' place dependence significantly positively affects their place identity) (Yen, 2019; Yen and Luo, 2019; Yen, 2020); and Hypothesis 6 (In the relationship between tourists and tourist sites, tourists' place identity significantly and positively affects their word-of-mouth).

 Secondly, in terms of the adjustment of the relationship between tourist inertia and research variables, tourist inertia has been proven to have an impact on the formation of tourists' word-of-mouth communication (Yen, 2018). Based on this, we proposed Hypothesis 7 (In the relationship between tourists and tourist sites, the different tourist inertia, the different relationship of the variables). Specifically, the six sub-hypotheses were listed below.

Hypothesis 7a (When the tourist inertia of tourists is different, the relationship between their satisfaction and word-of-mouth is different);

Hypothesis 7b (When the tourist inertia of tourists is different, the relationship between their satisfaction and place dependence is different);

Hypothesis 7c (When the tourist inertia of tourists is different, the relationship between their satisfaction and place identity is different);

Hypothesis 7d (When the tourist inertia of tourists is different, their place dependence and word-of-mouth relationship is different);

Hypothesis 7e (When the tourist inertia of tourists is different, the relationship between their place dependence and place identity is different.);

Hypothesis 7f (When the tourist inertia of tourists is different, their place identity and word-of-mouth relationship is different).



Figure 1 Research Framework

2.2 Variable Definition and Measurement

The definitions of research variables (i.e. tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity, and word-of-mouth) were made refer to previous studies such as perceived value, (Yen, 2019; Yen and Luo, 2019; Yen, 2020; Qiu et al., 2024; Yen et al., 2025a; Yen et al., 2025b; Yen et al., 2025c; Shum et al., 2025; Dionisio et al., 2025; Yen, 2025). Tourist satisfaction is defined as "the assessment of tourists visiting the Confucius Academy Scenic Area regarding the environmental landscape and their expected and actual experiences of the scenic area." We define place dependence as "the psychological tendency of tourists visiting the Confucius Academy Scenic Area to engage in a specific activity that is suitable for residents, tourists or stakeholders." We define place identity as "the attitudes, values and beliefs that tourists visiting the Confucius Academy Scenic Area gain from their actual experience of the scenic area's environment." We define word-of-mouth as "the positive evaluations of tourists visiting the Confucius Academy scenic Area towards the scenic area and their tendency to recommend others." Tourist inertia is defined as "the habit assessment of tourists visiting the Confucius Academy Scenic Area regarding their travel itinerary arrangements."

About the development of measurement items, three questions for tourist inertia, three questions for tourist satisfaction, five questions for place dependence, six questions for place identity, and two questions for word-of-mouth were proposed based on previous studies (Yen, 2019; Yen and Luo, 2019; Yen, 2020; Qiu et al., 2024; Yen et al., 2025a; Yen et al., 2025b; Yen et al., 2025c; Shum et al., 2025; Dionisio et al., 2025; Yen, 2025). The Likert 5-point scale adopted for measurement. 5 indicates strong agreement and 1 indicates strong disagreement. The higher the score, the higher the degree of agreement. In addition, in terms of demographic variables, questions such as gender, age, education level, occupation and average monthly income designed to understand the basic background of tourists. After the measurement tools were developed, this study sent the questionnaires to tourism experts and operators to confirm the way the questions were presented, the difficulty of the tourists' responses, and to seek their suggestions for revision. Secondly, this study also consulted local scholars to correct the choice of words and expressions, confirm the way the meaning is expressed, and make appropriate adjustments. Through the above steps, the scale of this study was completed.

2.3 Questionnaire Survey

The main purpose of this article is to analyze the correlations among variables, and it is suitable to use the questionnaire survey method. This study solicited voluntary participation from tourists in relevant scenic spots to fill out questionnaires, mainly in the Confucian Academy Scenic Area and the Ten-Mile River Beach Tourist Scenic Area in Guiyang City, Guizhou Province. Considering that the two scenic spots are connected (the Confucian Academy Scenic Area falls within the scope of the Ten-Mile River Beach Scenic Area), and most tourists will visit both at the same time, this study conducts a sampling survey in both scenic spots simultaneously. This study adopted a sampling method to select tourists to participate in the questionnaire survey activity. In terms of sample size, it is recommended that the number of samples in the initial test should be greater than the number of questions, preferably 3 to 5 times the number of questions. 80 copies should be distributed in the initial test, and all 80 valid questionnaires should be valid. When conducting the formal investigation, considering the number of questions in this study (a total of 19 questions) and subsequent analysis, a total of 450 samples were surveyed in this study.

In terms of sampling methods, this study adopts the quota sampling method. Based on field observations and the characteristics of relevant research samples while considering the feasibility of the study and subsequent analysis. Sampling was conducted with gender and age as the quota criteria to obtain the samples required for analysis. In terms of quota sampling, this study obtained the gender ratio of tourists (approximately six to four) through on-site observations and interviews with local security guards and merchants as the basis for quotas. Secondly, educational tourism is mostly targeted at students, followed by parents and members of the public. Based on this, a quota target of half for the student group is set.

In terms of the investigation methods, this study conducted a questionnaire survey through face-to-face interviews with interviewers, distributing responses on the spot. To ensure the quality of the survey, researchers conduct interviewer training before the formal investigation, enabling interviewers to be familiar with the purpose, content and methods of the questionnaire survey, and to master the coping strategies for various questions, so as to ensure that the questionnaire survey can be carried out safely and smoothly and obtain high-quality data. As the two sampling sites were connected, the investigators filled out the questionnaires only after confirming that the respondents had completed their visits. In other words, the interviewees were tourists who had completed their visit to the Confucian Academy. In addition to organizing a photo-taking record group, the researchers also went to the scene in person to participate, take photos for evidence, and ensure that the questionnaires were filled out by the tourists. The initial test was held in April 2025, and the formal survey period was from April 2025 to June 2025. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, 426 were retrieved, and 426 were valid, with an effective questionnaire rate of approximately 94.6%. Since both sampling sites have visited the Confucius Academy, combined data analysis will be adopted in the future.

In terms of sample characteristics, 54.7% were male and 45.3% were female. In terms of age, the proportion of respondents under 20 years old was 45.8% (195 times), those aged 21-25 were 12.2% (52 times), those aged 25-30 were 8.20% (35 times), those aged 31-40 were 10.3% (44 times), and those aged 41-50 were 15.3% (65 times). The proportion of those over 51 years old was 8.2% (35 times). In terms of educational attainment, 7.3% (31 times) attended junior high school, primary school or below, 17.6% (75 times) attended senior high school, 20.4% (87 times) attended junior college, and 54.7% (233 times) attended bachelor's degree or above. In terms of occupational distribution, military, police, public servants and teachers accounted for 4.2% (18 times), manufacturing accounted for 5.4% (23 times), commerce accounted for 16.4% (70 times), agriculture accounted for 9.2% (39 times), students accounted for 48.6%(207 times), and others accounted for 156.2%(69 times). The average monthly income (RMB) of less than 3,000 yuan accounted for 54.2% (231 times), 3,001-6,000 yuan accounted for 16.7% (71 times), 6,001-8,000 yuan accounted for 21.1% (90 times), and more than 8,001 yuan accounted for 8% (34 times). In terms of the number of visits, the first visit was 24.4% (104 times), and the repeat visit was 75.6% (322 times).

3. Empirical Results

This study conducted data analysis using SPSS 22.0, including descriptive statistics, validity and reliability, correlation analysis, and regression analysis, etc. The detailed description is as follows.

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The statistical analysis results are summarized in Table 1. The average value ranges from 3.72 to 4.28, which is at an average to acceptable level, and the standard deviation is between 0.882 and 1.217. Furthermore, the kurtosis coefficient is less than 3 and the skewness coefficient is less than 10, indicating that the data used in this study does not violate the normal distribution (Tabachnick, Fidell and Ullman, 2007), and subsequent analysis can be conducted.

3.2 Validity and Reliability

In terms of validity analysis, this study referred to existing literature to develop the measurement scale, which has a theoretical basis. Furthermore, the scale has been reviewed by experts and enjoys expert validity. Secondly, this study adopted the maximum variation method and conducted principal component analysis (PCA). Principal Component Analysis, covering the factor analysis process, uses Spherical verification to determine whether it is suitable for factor analysis; Check whether the Communalities among the questions are greater than 0.5 to verify the degree of intersection of the questions. By using the Maximum variation method axis, the factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 are extracted. In addition, the factor loading after the pivot was all greater than 0.7 and other processes were used to test the construct validity of the research variable items (Guadagnoli and Velicer, 1988).

The analysis results show that the Bartletts' Sphericity test for the five variables is significant, meaning they are suitable for factor analysis. In terms of the validity of tourist inertia, tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity and word-of-mouth, each scale extracts one factor, which named in sequence as tourist inertia, tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity and word-of-mouth. After rotating the axis, the factor load of all the questions was greater than 0.7. The variance extraction was as follows: tourist inertia 73.92%, tourist satisfaction 80.52%, place dependence 73.17%, place identity 68.25%, and word-of-mouth 86.14%. This indicates that the scale of tourist inertia, tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity and word-of-mouth used in this study has good construction validity. Finally, the reliability coefficients of tourist inertia, tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity and word-of-mouth were 0.820, 0.877, 0.907, 0.905 and 0.835 respectively, all greater than 0.7, belonging to the high reliability range (Hair et al., 2010), and the scales had good internal consistency (as shown in Table 2).

3.3 The correlations Analysis

To clarify the correlations among the variables, this study employed the Pearson correlation coefficient, and the analysis results are shown in Table 3. The analysis results show that all variables are significantly and positively associated. That is to say, tourist inertia is positively associated with tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity and word-of-mouth, with correlation coefficients of 0.777, 0.657, 0.784 and 0.783 respectively. Tourist satisfaction is positively associated with place dependence, place identity and word-of-mouth, with correlation coefficients of 0.761, 0.858 and 0.863 respectively. Place dependence is positively associated with place identity and word-of-mouth, with correlation coefficients of 0.834 and 0.728 respectively. place identity is positively associated with word-of-mouth, with a correlation coefficient of 0.825. Based on this, this study continues to conduct regression analysis.

3.4 The Regression Analysis

Based on the research hypothesis, this study requires three model regression analyses. The first model is the impact of tourist satisfaction on place dependence; The second model is the influence of tourist satisfaction and place dependence on place identity. The third model is the influence of tourist satisfaction, place dependence and place identity on word-of-mouth. The analysis results is shown in Table 4.

In Model 1, the mode fit is good (F value =582.145, p=0.000), VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) is 1 (theoretical recommended value, VIF<10), and the collinearity problem is not serious. The verification results show that tourist satisfaction has a significant and positive impact on place dependence (β= 0.761; t=24.128), Hypothesis 2 is statistically supported. The travel satisfaction of the respondents can effectively predict 57.9% of the variation in local dependency.

Table 1. The Descriptive Statistics

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Items | M | SD | SK | KU |
| SA1 I'm very happy to spend time participating in the activities of the Confucius Academy. | 4.03 | .989 | -.711 | -.120 |
| SA2 It's a good decision to watch the activities of the Confucius Academy. | 3.91 | 1.072 | -.597 | -.592 |
| SA3 I'm very glad that I have decided to participate in the Confucius Academy activities. | 4.00 | 1.041 | -.824 | .099 |
| PD1 XX have unique and representative meanings. | 4.28 | .931 | -1.212 | .996 |
| PD2 XX represent unique Confucian culture. | 4.19 | .971 | -.984 | .174 |
| PD3 XX represent the place Confucian culture. | 4.14 | 1.005 | -1.018 | .264 |
| PD4 XX represent historical manifestations. | 4.21 | .956 | -1.009 | .175 |
| PD5 XX represent a unique Confucian cultural atmosphere. | 4.22 | .930 | -.950 | .101 |
| PI1 The Confucian Academy is rich in the spirit of Confucian culture. | 4.15 | .958 | -.905 | .107 |
| PI2 The Confucian Academy is regarded as a symbol of Confucian culture. | 4.17 | .966 | -1.052 | .533 |
| PI3 The Confucius Academy is of great significance to me. | 4.05 | .990 | -.809 | .066 |
| PI4 I am extremely infatuated with the Confucian Academy. | 3.76 | 1.209 | -.624 | -.611 |
| PI5 The Confucian Academy makes me feel alive. | 3.72 | 1.217 | -.647 | -.537 |
| PI6 I agree with the Confucian Academy. | 4.02 | 1.007 | -.705 | -.382 |
| WO1 I will tell others about the advantages of the Confucius Academy festival activities. | 4.03 | 1.007 | -.802 | .066 |
| WO2 I will recommend others to participate in the Confucius Academy festival activities. | 3.97 | 1.091 | -.766 | -.306 |
| INE1 I'm used to the existing way of travel planning. | 4.04 | .882 | -.678 | .057 |
| INE2 Compared with trying new spots, I prefer to travel at the Confucian Academy. | 3.63 | 1.089 | -.218 | -.873 |
| INE3 I don't like unfamiliar tourist destinations. | 3.69 | 1.079 | -.415 | -.627 |

M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation; SK: Skew; KU: Kurtosis

Table 2. The Validity and Reliability

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Items | FL | Eig. | %V | α |
| SA1 I'm very happy to spend time participating in the activities of the Confucius Academy. | .883 | 2.416 | 80.527 | 0.877 |
| SA2 It's a good decision to watch the activities of the Confucius Academy. | .912 |  |  |  |
| SA3 I'm very glad that I have decided to participate in the Confucius Academy activities. | .897 |  |  |  |
| PD1 XX have unique and representative meanings. | .825 | 3.659 | 73.173 | 0.907 |
| PD2 XX represent unique Confucian culture. | .897 |  |  |  |
| PD3 XX represent the place Confucian culture. | .832 |  |  |  |
| PD4 XX represent historical manifestations. | .843 |  |  |  |
| PD5 XX represent a unique Confucian cultural atmosphere. | .877 |  |  |  |
| PI1 The Confucian Academy is rich in the spirit of Confucian culture. | .797 | 4.095 | 68.256 | 0.905 |
| PI2 The Confucian Academy is regarded as a symbol of Confucian culture. | .784 |  |  |  |
| PI3 The Confucius Academy is of great significance to me. | .847 |  |  |  |
| PI4 I am extremely infatuated with the Confucian Academy. | .863 |  |  |  |
| PI5 The Confucian Academy makes me feel alive. | .816 |  |  |  |
| PI6 I agree with the Confucian Academy. | .847 |  |  |  |
| WO1 I will tell others about the advantages of the Confucius Academy festival activities. | .928 | 1.723 | 86.145 | 0.835 |
| WO2 I will recommend others to participate in the Confucius Academy festival activities. | .928 |  |  |  |
| INE1 I'm used to the existing way of travel planning. | .846 | 2.218 | 73.920 | 0.820 |
| INE2 Compared with trying new spots, I prefer to travel at the Confucian Academy. | .883 |  |  |  |
| INE3 I don't like unfamiliar tourist destinations. | .849 |  |  |  |

FL: Factor Loading; Eig: Eigenvalue; %V: % Variation; α: Cronbach’s α(Coefficient of Reliability)

Table 3. The Correlation Analysis (n=426)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Items | M | SD | SAT | PD | PI | WO | INE |
| SAT | 11.67 | 2.72 | 1 |  |  |  |  |
| PD | 20.30 | 4.19 | 0.761\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |
| PI | 23.25 | 5.15 | 0.858\*\* | 0.834\*\* | 1 |  |  |
| WO | 7.84 | 1.86 | 0.863\*\* | 0.728\*\* | 0.825\*\* | 1 |  |
| INE | 11.36 | 2.63 | 0.777\*\* | 0.657\*\* | 0.784\*\* | 0.783\*\* | 1 |

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01; M: Mean; SD: Standardized Deviations; SA: Tourist Satisfaction; PD: Place Dependence; PI: Place Identity; WO: Words of Mouth; INE: Tourist Inertia

Table 4. The Regression Analysis for Proposed Model

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| IV | DV |
| PD(M1) | PI(M2) | WO(M3) |
| β(t) | β(t) | β(t) |
| SAT | 0.761\*\*\*(24.128) | 0.532\*\*\*(16.494) | 0.581\*\*\*(12.671) |
| PD |  | 0.429\*\*\*(13.316) | 0.046(1.083) |
| PI |  |  | 0.289\*\*\*(5.354) |
| F(p) | 582.145(.000) | 929.591(.000) | 478.621(.000) |
| VIF | 1 | 2.373 | 3.368-5.895 |
| R2 | 0.579 | 0.815 | 0.773 |

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001; SA: Tourist Satisfaction; PD: Place Dependence; PI: Place Identity; WO: Words of Mouth; INE: Tourist Inertia; VIF: Variance Inflation Factor; △R2: Adjusted R Squire

In Model 2, the model fit is good (F value =929.591, p=0.000), the VIF is 2.373 (theoretical recommended value, VIF<10), and the collinearity problem is not serious. The verification results show that the respondents' travel satisfaction (β=0.532; t=16.494) and place dependence (β=0.429; t=13.316) significantly and positively affects place identity, and Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 5 are supported. The travel satisfaction and place dependence of the respondents can effectively predict 81.5% of the variation in place identity.

In Model 3, the model fit is good (F value =478.62, p=0.000), the VIF is 3.368-5.895 (theoretical recommended value, VIF<10), and the collinearity problem is not serious. The verification results show that the respondents' travel satisfaction (β=0.581; t=12.671) and place identity (β=0.289; t=5.354) significantly and positively affects word-of-mouth, and Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 6 are statistically supported. The respondents' tourist satisfaction and place identity can predict a 77.3% variation in word-of-mouth.

3.5 The Moderating Effect of Tourist Inertia

To clarify the moderating role of tourists' travel inertia in the research model, this study adopted stepwise regression for analysis. The analysis results are shown in Table 5. In terms of the analysis steps, this study first calculates the interaction terms of the three regression equations (SA\*INE, PD\*INE, PI\*INE). Then, the moderated analyses of place dependence (model 6 and model7), place identity (model 8, model 9, model 10 and model 11), and word-of-mouth (model 4, model 5, model 12 and model 13) are respectively handled. Since the influence of place dependence on word-of-mouth has not reached a significant level, this study does not address the moderating effect of tourist inertia on place dependence - word-of-mouth.

Firstly, in terms of the moderation of tourist inertia on tourist satisfaction-place dependence paths (models 6 and 7), the main effect is significant (β= 0.761; t=24.128) and the regulatory effect was also significant (β=0.067; t=2.136). This result shows that, without considering tourist inertia, tourist satisfaction significantly and directly affects place dependence, with a predictive power of 57.9%. If the tourist inertia factor of tourists is taken into account, the impact of tourist satisfaction on place dependence will significantly increase the predictive power by 1.5%. In addition, tourist inertia also directly and significantly affects place dependence. Based on this, it is assumed that 7b is supported. In this moderating effect, the tourist inertia of tourists plays a positive moderating role. That is to say, the higher the tourist inertia of tourists, the greater the impact of tourist satisfaction on place dependence.

Secondly, in terms of the moderation of tourist inertia on the path of tourist satisfaction -place identity (models 8 and 9), the main effect is significant (β= 0.858; t=34.466) and the moderating effect was significant (β=0.072; t=3.097). This result shows that, without considering tourist inertia, tourist satisfaction significantly and directly affects place identity, with a predictive power of 73.7%. If the tourist inertia factor of tourists is taken into account, the impact of tourist satisfaction on place identity will significantly increase the predictive power by 4%. In addition, tourist inertia also directly and significantly affects place identity. Based on this, H7c is supported. In this moderating effect, the tourist inertia of tourists acts a positive moderating role. That is to say, the higher the tourist inertia of tourists, the greater the impact of tourist satisfaction on place identity.

In terms of the adjustment of tourist inertia on the path of place dependency -place identity (models 10 and 11), the main effect is significant (β= 0.834; 31.116) and the moderating effect was not significant (β=0.022; t=0.955). This result shows that, without considering tourist inertia, place dependence significantly and directly affects place identity, with a predictive power of 69.5%. If the tourist inertia factor of tourists is taken into account, the influence of place dependence on place identity remains significant. In addition, tourist inertia also directly and significantly affects place identity. Based on this, the H7d is not supported.

Finally, in terms of the adjustment of tourist inertia on the tourist satisfaction-word-of-mouth path (models 4 and 5), the main effect is significant (β= 0.863; t=35.219) and the moderating effect was also significant (β=-0.059; t=-2.553). This result shows that, without considering tourist inertia, tourist satisfaction is significant and directly affects word-of-mouth, with a predictive power of 74.5%. If the tourist inertia factor of tourists is taken into account, the predictive power of tourist satisfaction on word-of-mouth will increase significantly by 3.5%. In addition, tourist inertia also directly and significantly affects place identity. Based on this, the H7a is supported. In this moderating effect, the tourist inertia of tourists plays a negative regulatory role. That is to say, when tourists' travel inertia is higher, the impact of travel satisfaction on word-of-mouth is lower.

In terms of the adjustment of tourist inertia on the place identity-word-of-mouth path (models 12 and 13), the main effect is significant (β= 0.825; t=30.098) and the regulatory effect was not significant (β=-0.025; t=-0.974). This result shows that, without considering tourist inertia, place identity is significant and directly affects word-of-mouth, with a predictive power of 68.1%. If the tourist inertia factor of tourists is taken into account, the influence of place identity on word-of-mouth will not be significantly enhanced. In addition, tourist inertia also directly and significantly affects word-of-mouth. Based on this, the H7e is not supported.

Table 6 The Moderated Analysis for Tourist Inertia

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Paths** | **M4** | **M5** | **M6** | **M7** |
| **β(t)** | **β(t)** | **β(t)** | **β(t)** |
| SA-WO | 0.863\*\*\*(35.219) | 0.630\*\*\*(17.151) |  |  |
| INE-WO |  | 0.291\*\*\*(7.976) |  |  |
| SA\*INE-WO |  | -0.059\*(-2.553) |  |  |
| SA-PD |  |  | 0.761\*\*\*(24.128) | 0.648\*\*\*(12.989) |
| INE-PD |  |  |  | 0.156\*(3.151) |
| SA\*INE-PD |  |  |  | 0.067\*(2.136) |
| △F(p) | 1240.359(.000) | 33.434(.000) | 582.145(.000) | 7.954(.000) |
| VIF | 1 | 1.026-2.586 | 1 | 1.026-2.587 |
| △R2 | 0.745 | 0.035 | 0.579 | 0.015 |
| **Paths** | **M8** | **M9** | **M10** | **M11** |
| **β(t)** | **β(t)** | **β(t)** | **β(t)** |
| SA-PI | 0.858\*\*\*(34.466) | 0.646\*\*\*(17.462) |  |  |
| INE-PI |  | 0.285\*\*\*(7.777) |  |  |
| SA\*INE-PI |  | 0.072\*(3.097) |  |  |
| PD-PI |  |  | 0.834\*\*\*(31.116) | 0.570\*\*\*(18.391) |
| INE-PI |  |  |  | 0.410\*\*\*(13.718) |
| PD\*INE-PI |  |  |  | 0.022(0.955) |
| △F(p) | 1187.914(.000) | 37.659(.000) | 968.196(.000) | 101.599(.000) |
| VIF | 1 | 1.026-2.587 | 1 | 1.122-1.973 |
| △R2 | 0.737 | 0.040 | 0.695 | 0.099 |
| **Paths** | **M12** | **M13** |  |  |
| **β(t)** | **β(t)** |  |  |
| PI-WO | 0.825\*\*\*(30.098) | 0.543\*\*\*(13.067) |  |  |
| INE-WO |  | 0.356\*\*\*(8.650) |  |  |
| PI\*INE-WO |  | -0.025(-0.974) |  |  |
| △F(p) | 905.880(.000) | 37.418(.000) |  |  |
| VIF | 1 | 1.034-2.687 |  |  |
| △R2 | 0.681 | 0.048 |  |  |

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001; SA: Tourist Satisfaction; PD: Place Dependence; PI: Place Identity; WO: Words of Mouth; INE: Tourist Inertia; VIF: Variance Inflation Factor; △R2: Adjusted R Squire

4. Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

Educational tourism is the integration of the education industry and the tourism industry. A large number of students closely relates its development to the acquisition of extracurricular knowledge and practical experience. As students grow and revisit, it is an important factor in promoting the development of the tourism industry. Based on the above analysis and discussion, this study has reached the following conclusions.

* In terms of the correlation of research variables, tourist inertia is positively associated with tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity, and word-of-mouth.
* Research has found that in the field of educational tourism, tourists' travel satisfaction, place dependence, and place identity are all powerful influencing factors of their word-of-mouth. At the same time, tourist inertia also significantly affects tourists' perceived place dependence, place identity and word-of-mouth.
* In terms of the moderating role of tourist inertia, it acts an important moderating factor in the word-of-mouth dissemination of educational tourism. Specifically, it significantly reduces the impact of tourist satisfaction on word-of-mouth and significantly enhances the influence of tourist satisfaction on place dependence and place identity. In other words, tourist inertia is a moderating variable with multiple roles.

4.2 Theoretical Implications

Research has found that in the field of educational tourism, tourists' satisfaction with their trips not only directly affects word-of-mouth but also influences it through place dependence and place identity. When educational tourism researchers emphasize students' field trips and stress the cultivation of observation skills, analytical skills and problem-solving skills to enhance learning enthusiasm and learning outcomes (Arcodia et al., 2021), they might have overlooked the relationship chain between people (students and tourists) and the local area (place dependence and place identity). Moreover, the existed study’s verified the educational tourism plans (Choudhary et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2024; Arcodia et al., 2020), motivation (Arcodia et al., 2020), supplementation of curriculum knowledge (Dresler, 2023; Bedford, 2001), and the application of educational tourism resources (Muhtasim Mir et al., 2024). The relationship between tourists and scenic spots and how educational tourism scenic spots acquire tourists are less focused. The findings of this study precisely make up for the lack of these literatures.

First of all, educational tourism sites have good infrastructure and activities, etc. Educational tourism resources are the main body of educational tourism. However, tourists are the most important objects of educational tourism. An educational tourism scenic area without tourists will be an empty city, and it will be difficult for it to play the role of educational tourism resources and tourism services. Moreover, in the absence of tourists, it is even more difficult for it to fulfill the mission of researching and inheriting Chinese culture. The empirical results of this study show that tourists' travel satisfaction is relatively high, confirming that tourists' travel satisfaction will guide their positive word-of-mouth. Moreover, tourists' satisfaction with their trips will also enhance their reliance and identification with the scenic spots. These findings indicate that the relationship between tourists and scenic spots in educational tourism needs to be managed and strengthened. When the relationship between tourists and scenic spots is valued and improved (tourist satisfaction), the probability of them giving positive evaluations and recommendations to scenic spots is higher (word-of-mouth). At this point, it is more conducive to the dissemination of positive information about the scenic area, attracting more tourists, and subsequently promoting the sustainable development of educational tourism scenic areas. Similarly, tourists' satisfaction with their trips enhances their place dependence and identity in scenic spots, strengthening the relationship between people and the local area. This gives Chinese culture a higher chance of being disseminated and known. The confirmation of this relationship between people and places is positive and beneficial for fulfilling the mission of preserving and passing on Chinese culture. Therefore, the research findings of this paper fill the theoretical gap of existing educational tourism, that is, to confirm the relationship between scenic spots and tourists.

Furthermore, most studies on place dependence and place identity focus on the relationship between people and places (Woosnam et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2021; Dixon et al., 2014, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Dionisio et al., 2025; Yen, 2018), less research has been conducted on the people-place relationship involving educational tourist attractions (destinations). Research has found that in the relationship between educational tourism scenic spots and tourists, after tourists are satisfied with their travels can they develop place dependence and place identity. That is to say, the prerequisite for tourists to form a psychological connection (place dependence) and an emotional connection (local identity) with the local area is that their tourism experience in educational tourism scenic spots exceeds their expectations (tourist satisfaction). This study found an extension of the existing tourist satisfaction research (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Hill and Alexander, 2006). The insights also make up for the deficiencies in the research on place dependence and place identity.

Moreover, there are existing studies (Yen, 2019; Yen and Luo, 2019; Yen, 2020) has explored the relationship between people and places (place dependence and place identity) and the subsequent results (word-of-mouth and repeat visits), but lacks empirical evidence of educational tourism sites. The research in this paper finds that place dependence can affect tourists' word-of-mouth through place identity, which happens to extend the existing research results to the educational tourism field. This research finding has expanded the application scope of the theory of place dependence and place identity, and strengthened the applicability of the theory.

In addition, in the field of educational tourism, travel inertia has a special regulatory significance. Because, in either educational tourism research or studies on place dependence and place identity, no research has touched upon the issue of tourists' travel inertia. Traditionally, tourists' satisfaction with the destination can lead to more positive word-of-mouth (Yen et al., 2025a; Yen et al., 2025b; Yen et al., 2025c), recommendations and revisit (Kim et al., 2014; Mutanga et al., 2017), these studies lack consideration and evaluation of tourist inertia. This study finds that although educational tourism scenic spots satisfy tourists, they may have difficulty obtaining a high positive reputation. Because, in a situation where tourists have a high travel inertia, their satisfaction with the scenic area will not generate more positive word-of-mouth. This indicates that tourists may be accustomed to existing ways of traveling, and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction has a relatively low correlation with their word-of-mouth. This might indicate that tourists are simply unwilling to change their travel methods, which leads to a decline in their satisfaction and word-of-mouth relationship. At this point, word-of-mouth in the context of high tourist inertia may be similar to false loyalty; it is not genuine word-of-mouth. Conversely, in a context of low tourist inertia, the word-of-mouth driven by self-satisfaction with travel might be genuine word-of-mouth. Because in this situation, the tourist may not have a fixed travel pattern, and his travel experiences may be relatively rich. In this situation, if the products and services of the educational tourism scenic area can satisfy her, the word-of-mouth it leads will be closer to the real word-of-mouth.

Similarly, the regulation of tourist inertia also occurs in the relationship between educational tourism scenic spots and tourists' tourist satisfaction - place dependence and tourist satisfaction -place identity. Specifically, tourists' tourist inertia will strengthen the relationship of tourist satisfaction - place dependence and tourist satisfaction -place identity. This indicates that the more accustomed tourists are to the existing travel methods, the more likely their satisfaction is to boost their assessment of place dependence and place identity. In this context, for tourists with high travel habits, as long as the managers of educational tourist attractions find ways to enhance their travel satisfaction, it can more easily strengthen tourists' place dependence and place identity in the scenic spots. In this way, the possibility for the scenic area to achieve research and inheritance of Chinese culture is even higher. In other words, this study confirms the moderating role of tourist inertia in the relationship between educational tourist attractions and tourists, including paths such as tourism satisfied-word-of-mouth, tourism satisfied-place dependence, and tourism satisfied-local identity. Moreover, tourist inertia can both strengthen variable relationships (tourist satisfaction - place dependence, tourist satisfaction -place identity) and weaken them (tourist satisfaction - place dependence, tourist satisfaction -place identity). It is a bivariate moderating variable.

Based on the above, the research findings of this paper not only confirm the human-land relationship (place dependence and place identity) between educational tourism scenic spots and tourists, and identify their important antecedents (tourist satisfaction), but also enhance the applicability of the theory of place dependence and place identity. What is more special is that this study also found that tourist inertia can both strengthen and weaken variable relationships. In the context of educational tourism, it is a bivariate moderating variable.

4.3 Practical Implications

Since tourist satisfaction can lead to positive word-of-mouth, it results in a higher degree of place dependence and place identity. Managers of educational tourism destinations should regard tourist satisfaction as a routine task and evaluate the items that tourists are satisfied and dissatisfied. Moreover, managers of educational tourism destinations should consider how to enhance the positive experience of tourists and enable them to have an experience that exceeds expectations.

Secondly, place dependence can significantly enhance place identity. Managers of educational tourism destinations should, based on their own resource advantages, plan and design various cultural and literary activities. Then, through these activities, managers enable tourists to experience the unique cultural significance of the scenic area, thereby generating a higher degree of place dependence. After continuously attracting tourists to participate, the degree of tourists' infatuation and identification with the scenic area will increase. In this way, it is easier to achieve the goal of obtaining and enhancing tourists' place identity.

Furthermore, place identity significantly guides word-of-mouth. Managers of educational tourism destinations should consider how to improve tourists' infatuation and identification with scenic spots. For young students, apart from the visits and study tasks arranged by the school, they may need places and experiences for leisure and sharing with like-minded people online. In this situation, the scenic area can clarify the dining, photography or topic preferences of this group of tourists and launch services or products that meet the preferences of the young customer group. Secondly, scenic spots can consider organizing activities that are favored by young people. This way, there is a higher probability that they will develop a sense of infatuation and identification. For non-young groups, when scenic spots consider how to enhance tourists' sense of fascination and identification, they should also give priority to their needs. For instance, this group already has jobs during the day and might visit on Saturdays, Sundays or weekday evenings. If conditions permit, scenic spots should combine their own educational and cultural resources and create attractive cultural courses to meet the cultural learning needs of tourists. Secondly, for the leisure and social needs of non-youth groups, scenic spots can also design relevant activities to attract them to participate and share. In this way, scenic spots have a higher chance of winning the infatuation and recognition of non-youth groups.

In addition, tourists' tourist inertia plays a role in regulating the relationships of tourist satisfaction - word-of-mouth, tourist satisfaction - place dependence, and tourist satisfaction -place identity. Managers of educational tourism destinations should consider how to identify tourists' travel habits and develop marketing plans for groups with the same habits. Specifically, the administrative department should attach importance to the opinions of tourists and conduct regular research. In terms of data acquisition, scenic spots can obtain data through online mini-programs or by conducting surveys of visitors. The content of the data should at least cover the travel inertia information of tourists. In this way, educational tourism scenic spots can clarify the reasons for the authenticity of word-of-mouth and develop marketing plans for tourists with different travel habits.

4.4 Future Research Recommendations

In the research of educational tourism scenarios, this study has analyzed the correlations among tourist satisfaction, place dependence, place identity and word-of-mouth, and clarified the moderating effect of tourists' tourist inertia on the research variables. However, this study only takes tourist satisfaction, place dependence and place identity as the antecedents for predicting word-of-mouth. There may be more important or more suitable antecedents for word-of-mouth. For instance, factors such as cultural involvement and tourists' self-efficacy, which influence word-of-mouth, need to be continuously explored and clarified through subsequent research.

Secondly, in terms of moderating variables, this study only adopts tourist inertia. There may be other more important or meaningful moderating variables that affect the word-of-mouth of tourists in educational tourism. For example, variety seeking, social stress, etc. This part awaits continuous exploration in subsequent research.

Furthermore, five of the six fundamental hypotheses of this study have been confirmed. However, the direct impact of place dependence on word-of-mouth is not significant. This analysis result is similar to that in the literature, and this study has already provided an explanation. The real cause may need to be further clarified through subsequent research.

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