

THE EFFECT OF DESTINATION TRUST ON TOURISTS' TRAVEL INTENTION AFTER THE COVID-19

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Abstract: Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, destinations are facing the crisis of losing benefits, tourists and reputations, and the negative evaluations of destination performances. Trust is an important variable which has been used in crisis management and destination development. Moreover, destination trust can be used as an effective tool to increase tourists' travel intention and revitalize tourism after the COVID-19. However, limited studies have examined the role of destination trust in tourists' travel decision after the pandemic. The purpose of this study was to explore antecedents of destination trust from cognitive perspective and to examine the role of destination trust in tourists' travel behaviors after the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire from Mainland Chinese tourists who plan to travel to Macau after the pandemic in May and June 2022. The results showed that destination trust was influenced by destination image, destination reputation and knowledge of government performance. Destination image and reputation were important antecedents of travel intention. Destination reputation had the strongest impact on destination trust and travel intention. This study extends the existing literature and provides a new conceptual framework to examine travel intention by emphasizing the effect of destination trust. From practical implications, this study provides suggestions to destinations to deal with crisis caused by the pandemic, and to facilitate the recovery of tourism industry. Destination managers should provide satisfying performances, and rebuild strong destination images and reputation to increase tourists' trust of destination and travel intention after the COVID-19.

Keywords: destination trust, destination reputation, travel intention, post COVID-19 pandemic, Macau

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), the COVID-19 pandemic severely damaged the tourism industry. The pandemic has brought economic loss along with health and psychological crisis to people all over the world. People tended to stop their travel or were reluctant to travel, or change their travel behaviors or methods due to greater tension, fear (Zheng, Luo, & Ritchie, 2021), and uncertainty (Rahmafita et al., 2021). With the loosening of restrictive cross-border policies and the development of vaccinations, it is foreseeable that the post-COVID-19 pandemic era is coming in the near future, and tourists cannot wait to restart their travel. Therefore, understanding tourists' shifting behaviors in order to re-increase tourists' demand can help recover the tourism industry recover. Destination trust refers to tourists' belief about a destination's attributions and performance (Liu, Wang, Fang, & Zhang, 2019). Thus, destination trust plays a critical role in examining tourists' perceptions of a place (Artigas et al., 2017), as well as the relationship between tourists and destinations (Kumar &

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Kaushik, 2017; Su, Hsu, & Swanson, 2017). Destination trust may have a significant impact on tourists' intention to travel after the pandemic. In tourism studies, researchers have already confirmed the importance of destination trust (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Han & Hyun, 2015). However, even though destination trust is a critical construct, few studies have examined how destination trust influences tourists' travel intention in a negative situation, especially in post COVID-19 pandemic times.

In addition, the antecedents of destination trust are also needed to be explored to understand how tourists form their trust in the destination. Tourists may reshape the perceptions toward their destination and re-evaluate its performance by collecting information before making traveling decisions. Therefore, destination image, destination reputation, and knowledge of destination performance are applied as the antecedents of destination trust. Destination image and reputation play an important role in tourists' travel decision-making, especially in forming their destination trust (Artigas et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019). A favorable image and reputation increases tourists' overall perceptions and evaluations of the destination, which increases their trust and thereby their travel intention. Additionally, the governments of tourism destinations make efforts to accelerate tourism's recovery (Wong & Lai, 2022). Therefore, how a destination's government deals with the pandemic can be a determining concept of travel decision-making. Good government performance, as perceived by tourists, can increase their belief and trust that the destination provides satisfying environment to ensure the safety and quality of their traveling experience. However, few studies have examine the latent links between the antecedents and outcomes of tourists' destination trust.

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of destination trust in tourists' travel decision and its effects on travel intention after the COVID-19 pandemic. Specific objectives were: (1) to test the effect of tourists' destination trust on their travel intention; (2) to examine the underlying antecedents of destination trust, including destination image, destination reputation, and knowledge; and (3) to explore the mediating role of destination trust in tourists' travel decision-making after the pandemic. This study provided a new theoretical model for analyzing tourists' travel intention after the pandemic. Findings can provide destination managers with effective suggestions to understand tourists' evaluations of the destination and their travel decision after the pandemic.

Literature Review

Destination Trust

Destination trust is defined as tourists' confidence in and certainty about the products, services, and performance of a tourism destination (Mariano, Chasco, & Torres, 2012). Destination trust can be evaluated by destination attributes, destination performance, and service quality. Trust in the destination can significantly reduce tourists' perceived risks and uncertainty concerning the destination, as well as increase their belief that the destination can provide a satisfying performance, which can further create long-term relationships between tourists and destinations, and lead to sustainable tourism development (Liu et al., 2019).

Studies have demonstrated that tourists' destination trust is influenced by various factors, such as destination performance (Kumar & Kaushik, 2017), reputation (Artigas et al., 2017), and positive word-of-mouth (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). Trust in a destination is critical for reduce tourists' perceived risk, developing a positive destination image, and increasing their positive traveling experience and loyalty (Han & Hyun, 2015; Kumar & Kaushik, 2017). Destination trust is critical for creating long-term relationship between destinations with tourists, improving destination reputation, and leading to

sustainable tourism development. Researchers have also revealed that tourists' trust toward the a destination's safety, services, and performance measures during COVID-19 strongly influences their travel behaviors (Shen, Jo, & Joppe, 2022; Shin, Kang, Park, & Lee, 2022; Shin et al., 2022). Traveling after the COVID-19 pandemic may depend on how much tourists trust the destination in terms of its performance and pandemic management. However, very few studies have explored the impact of destination trust after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Destination Image

Destination image is a sum of impressions, perceptions, feelings and beliefs that people have about a destination (Zhang, Fu, Cai & Lu, 2014). Previous studies have developed destination image from cognitive, affective and conative dimensions. This study uses the cognitive perspective of destination image to reflect tourists' overall evaluations of the attributes and performance of the destination (Chew & Jahari, 2014). Moreover, a large number of studies have emphasized that safety, security, and healthy are still considered the major factors that tourists use to evaluate a destination (Cham et al., 2021; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Tung, Tse & Chan, 2021). Therefore, this study selected image items that primarily related to post COVID-19 pandemic attributes.

Al-Ansi and Han (2019) showed that Muslim tourists who held more favorable destination image are more critical and concerned with destination trust. Tourists' level of destination trust was significantly greater than those who did not perceive favorable destination image. However, the causal relationship between destination image and destination trust still needs to be further examined. The following hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: Tourists' destination image positively influence their destination trust.

Destination Reputation

Destination reputation is defined as tourists' attitudes, knowledge and opinion toward a given destination (Artigas et al., 2017). Destination reputation is formed through tourists' evaluations of a tourism destination (Wang et al., 2020), past experiences, the destination's performance (Artigas et al., 2017), and online or offline information (Darwish & Burns, 2019). Destination reputation plays a critical role in destination tourism management: a favorable destination reputation can significantly increase tourists' trust in the destination (Artigas et al., 2017), along with their satisfaction and loyalty (Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011). Some studies have also shown that destination reputation can affect tourists' destination choice behaviors (Petrick, 2011) before traveling. However, few studies have adopted destination reputation in tourists' decision-making before their trip. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many destinations faced difficulties and serious problems, which potentially damaged their reputations. Therefore, it is critical to maintain or increase a destination's reputation to increase its competitiveness and attract more tourists after the pandemic.

Previous studies demonstrated that destination reputation is an important antecedent of trust. A destination with a good reputation is perceived as more reliable and credible (Chen & Dubinsky, 2003). Johnson and Grayson (2005) showed that destination reputation directly influence tourists' destination trust. When destination shows a good reputation, tourists tend to generate a high level of destination trust and eventually increase their travel intention (Su, Lian & Huang, 2020). Al-Ansi and Han (2019) found that tourists' trust toward halal friendly destination significantly increase their visit intention in the near future. Artigas et al. (2017) indicated that tourists are more likely to show higher level of trust

toward the destination while they perceive a better reputation. Therefore, destination reputation is regarded as an important antecedent of destination trust. Based on literature, the hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Tourists' destination reputation positively influence their destination trust.

Knowledge of Government Performance

Knowledge and information are critical in decision-making. In this study, knowledge is defined as tourists' assessment of government performance in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowledge of government performance is also used interchangeably with other terms, such as quality of government (Wong & Lai, 2022). Governments' performance should be considered as a critical antecedent for tourists' travel decision-making. Ramesh (2017) showed that a government's high level of performance increases public trust, as the government is/was the most important sector for dealing with the pandemic (Rastegar, Seyfi, & Rasoolimanesh, 2021). However, before traveling to the destination, tourists can only collect information through the Internet and social media (Rahmafita et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021) which may be unclear and temporary. Therefore, how tourists' traveling behaviors are influenced by their perceptions of governments' performance in dealing with the pandemic needs to be further examined.

Knowledge about administration affects trust (Islam, Mahmud, & Ahmed, 2021), which ultimately influences tourists' trip intention and behaviors. Van Ryzin (2007) demonstrated that better government performance increases individuals' trust in that government. Islam et al. (2021) found that without knowledge about government performance, people may not form beliefs and perceptions, and thus may not trust the government. Rahmafitra et al. (2021) showed that adequate knowledge collected by tourists increases their favorable traveling attitudes and intentions. However, studies about tourists' knowledge of government administration are scant. Therefore, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Tourists' knowledge of government performance positively influence their destination trust.

Travel Intention

Travel intention is defined as tourists' willingness to visit a destination (Xie et al., 2021). A number of studies have already indicated that understanding tourists' travel intention influences a destination's future strategies and planning (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). This study used travel intention as tourists' future behavioral intention to visit Macau after the pandemic. The relationship between destination trust and travel intention have already been examined in various studies. tourists are more likely to visit a medical destination wherein they showed high levels of trust (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2017; Han & Hyun, 2015).

Chew and Jahari (2014) found that destination image significantly influenced travel intentions to Japan after the tsunami, and Park et al. (2017) revealed that destination image positively influenced college students' intentions to travel to Japan. Destination reputation can be viewed as a critical factor that influences tourists' travel behaviors. However, studies on the impact of destination reputation on tourists' behaviors are still scarce. Wang et al. (2020) indicated that tourists' perceived destination reputation positively influences their consumption behavior and their destination loyalty.

Tourists' knowledge of destination performance also determines their destination choice and travel behaviors. Zhu and Deng (2020) showed that Mainland Chinese tourists' knowledge of the pandemic and the then-current tourism situation indirectly reduced their willingness to travel, through attitude. Yang, Isa, and Ramayah (2021) revealed that the misleading knowledge provided by different social media may confuse tourists and decrease their willingness to believe the destination and its authorities. Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Tourists' destination image positively influences their travel intention.

Hypothesis 5: Tourists' destination trust positively influences their travel intention.

Hypothesis 6: Tourists' destination reputation positively influences their travel intention.

Hypothesis 7: Tourists' knowledge of government performance positively influences their travel intention.

Based on the hypothesis, the research framework was proposed:

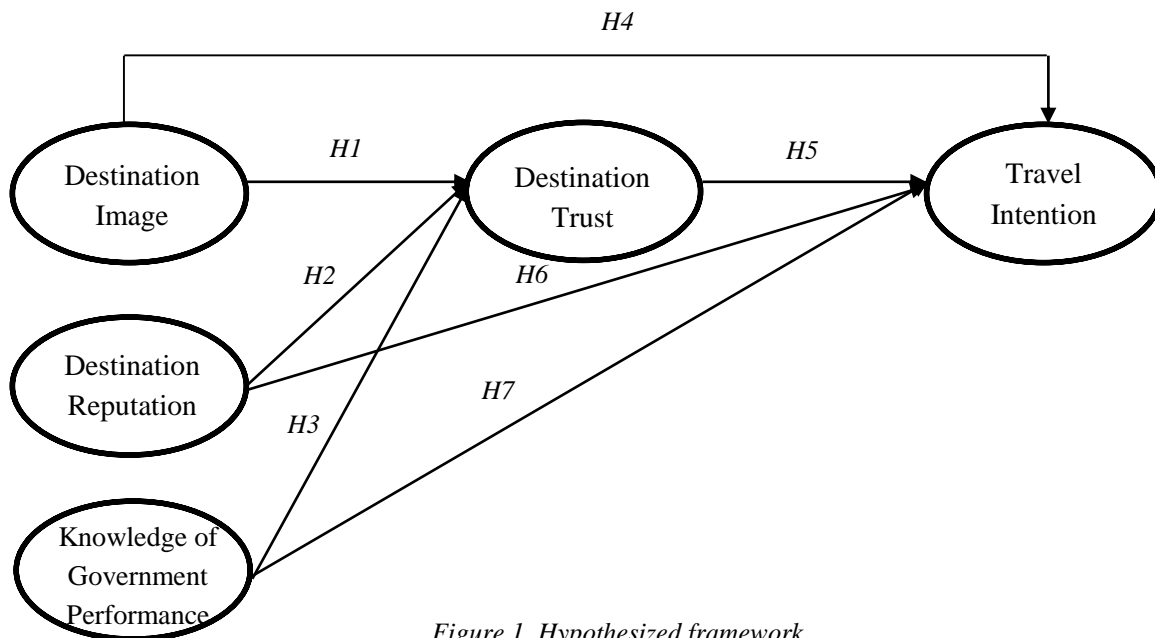


Figure 1. Hypothesized framework

Method

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020, Macau has implemented very strict strategies to prevent the spread of the virus and has maintained stringent cross-border policies and related strategies, such as health codes and nucleic acid testing, to prevent the possibility of new cases in the city. Macau reported 83 cases in total from January 2021 to May 2022, which confirmed that the destination's pandemic management was successful (Serviços de Saúde de Macau, 2022). Macau did well in managing the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a safety and secure environment. However, as the virus still exists, the pandemic still influences Macau and has significantly influenced tourism recovery. The pandemic surged in June 2021, October 2021, and July 2022, postponing the recovery of the local tourism industry and strongly increasing tourists' uncertain attitudes and their perceived risk

of traveling to Macau after the pandemic ebbed. Even so, Macau became one of the earliest tourist destinations to restart its tourism.

This study used a web-based questionnaire as the survey instrument. The questionnaire comprised six categories. The first section consisted of questions related to Macau destination image (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Park & Song, 2021). The second section focused on destination reputation (Artigas et al., 2017). The third section examined tourists' knowledge about Macau government performance (Wong & Lai, 2021; Pan, Pan, & Devadoss, 2005). The fourth section consisted of 6 items to measure tourists' destination trust. The fifth section asked 3 items about travel intention (Park, Hsieh, & Lee, 2017). The last section collected respondents' socio-demographic information. Items in section one to five was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire was first developed in English and translated into simplified Chinese using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). Prior to the data collection, a pilot test was conducted to ensure the questionnaire's clarity and readability.

The target population of this study was Mainland Chinese tourists (MCTs) who had the opportunity to travel to Macau after the pandemic. Data was collected using Wenjuanxing, an online survey questionnaire platform. Two screening questions were asked to ensure that the respondents met the requirements of the target population: (1) Do you live in Mainland China? (2) Are you planning to travel to Macau after the pandemic? Data was collected from May to June 2022. A total of 440 questionnaires were collected and 410 of them were valid, yielding a 93.2% of the response rate. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was manipulated to assess the overall fit of the measurement model, and Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to examine the proposed model. The data was analyzed using SPSS 25.0 and AMOS 24.0.

Results

Demographic Profile

As shown in Table 1, 220 (53.7%) respondents were female. Most respondents (81.2%) were aged between 18 and 40 years. 52.2% of the respondents were married. Approximately 65.6% of them held at least a Bachelor's degree. 38.3% reported a monthly income between 20,001–30,000 Yuan.

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile of respondents (n=410)

Demographic	Amount	%	Demographic	Amount	%
Gender			Education		
Male	190	46.3	High school	129	31.5
Female	220	53.7	Associate degree	12	2.9
Age			Bachelor degree		
18-29	171	41.7	Master or higher	210	51.2
30-39	162	39.5	Monthly Income (MOP)		
40-49	47	11.5	12,000 or less	71	17.3
50 or over	30	7.3	12,000-20,000	116	28.3
Marital Status			20,001-30,000	158	38.3
Single	196	47.8	More than 30,001	66	16.1
Married	214	52.2			

Measurement Model

CFA was performed to assess the measurement model, which included five latent variables and 27 observed variables. A two step-approach including convergent and discriminant validity was undertaken (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The measurement model showed a satisfactory goodness-of-fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.474$, CFI = 0.974, GFI = 0.923, AGFI = 0.908, RMSEA = 0.034, SRMR = 0.037). Moreover, for all the items, the standardized factor loading of observed variables were greater than 0.60 (Hair et al., 2010), indicating that all items were acceptable in the model. The composite reliabilities (CR) of each scale ranged from 0.82 to 0.92, demonstrating the internal consistency of items for all constructs (Hair et al., 2010). The range of average variance extracted (AVE) of each scale was 0.52 to 0.68, exceeding the suggested value of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Therefore, convergent validity of all constructs and items were satisfied (Table 2). The discriminant validity was established using Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square roots of AVE ranged from 0.72 to 0.83, greater than the standardized correlation between the associated constructs which ranged from 0.31 to 0.69 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), suggesting a satisfying discriminant validity (Table 3).

Table 2. Results of CFA

Note: CR: Composite reliability, AVE: Average of variance extracted

Constructs and Items	Mean	Loading	CR	AVE
Destination Image			0.92	0.52
Friendly local communities	3.63	0.79		
Beautiful landscape and nature scenery	3.74	0.71		
Mixed-cultural architecture and monuments	3.69	0.71		
Wide selection of restaurants and gastronomy	3.65	0.69		
Quality of tourism service	3.67	0.73		
High quality accommodations	3.74	0.69		
Convenient transportation	3.66	0.73		
High quality of tourism infrastructure	3.62	0.69		
Standard hygiene and cleanliness	3.81	0.69		
Safety and Security	3.81	0.76		
Destination Reputation			0.87	0.68
Macau has a very good reputation	4.11	0.85		
People speak very well of Macau	3.97	0.80		
Macau's good reputation is backed up by its history	3.99	0.83		
Knowledge of Government Performance			0.88	0.60
The government made efficient strategy to deal with the COVID-19	3.89	0.80		
The government provided sound safety management related to the COVID-19 for the tourists	3.79	0.76		
The government disclosed the current situation of the COVID-19 in Macau	3.77	0.74		
The government disclosed safety cross-border policies during the COVID-19	3.78	0.77		
The government provided sufficient information related to the COVID-19 to tourists	3.83	0.78		
Destination Trust			0.87	0.53

Macau is reliable	3.93	0.75
Macau provides high quality of products and services	3.70	0.72
Macau benefit tourists	3.67	0.67
Macau takes responsibility for tourism management	3.76	0.71
Macau provides a sense of security	3.86	0.78
I can rely on Macau to solve problems during my trip	3.74	0.73
Travel Intention		0.82 0.61
I am willing to travel to Macau	4.10	0.76
I tend to travel to Macau	4.00	0.77
Travel to Macau will be the first choice for me after the pandemic	4.05	0.81

Table 3. Results of Discriminant Validity

	DI	DR	KGP	DT	TI
DI	0.72				
DR	0.51	0.83			
KGP	0.44	0.31	0.77		
DT	0.47	0.51	0.37	0.73	
TI	0.48	0.69	0.31	0.57	0.78

Note: DI: Destination image, DR: Destination reputation, KGP: Knowledge of government performance, DT: Destination trust, TI: Travel intention. The bold numbers on the diagonal are the square root of AVE; off-diagonal numbers are the values of correlations among constructs.

Results of SEM

The overall goodness-of-fit statistics for the structural model were acceptable ($\chi^2/df = 1.474$, CFI = 0.974, GFI = 0.923, AGFI = 0.908, RMSEA = 0.034, SRMR = 0.037). The relationships between destination image and destination trust ($\beta = 0.230$, $p < 0.001$), destination reputation and destination trust ($\beta = 0.338$, $p < 0.01$), knowledge of government performance and destination trust ($\beta = 0.157$, $p < 0.01$), destination trust and travel intention ($\beta = 0.265$, $p < 0.001$), and destination reputation and travel intention ($\beta = 0.508$, $p < 0.01$) were significant, supporting hypothesis 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6. The relationship between destination image and travel intention was not significant ($\beta = 0.082$, $p > 0.05$), indicating that hypothesis 4 was not supported. Additionally, the relationship between knowledge of government performance and travel intention was not significant ($\beta = 0.018$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis 7 was not supported.

The direct, indirect and total effects of each hypothesized path are summarized in Table 4. The results indicate that destination trust plays a conceptual mediating role in the framework. However, the indirect effect was not strong.

Table 4. Results of direct effect, indirect effect and total effect

Hypothesis	Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Result
H1	Destination Image → Destination Trust	0.230***	-	0.230***	Supported

H2	Destination Reputation → Destination Trust	0.338***	-	0.338***	Supported
H3	Knowledge of Government Performance → Destination Trust	0.157**	-	0.157**	Supported
H4	Destination Image → Travel Intention	0.082	0.061	0.143	Rejected
H5	Destination Trust → Travel Intention	0.082	0.061	0.143	Rejected
H6	Destination Reputation → Travel Intention	0.508***	0.090	0.598	Supported
H7	Knowledge of Government Performance → Travel Intention	0.018	0.042	0.059	Rejected

Notes: ***: $p < 0.001$, **: $p < 0.01$

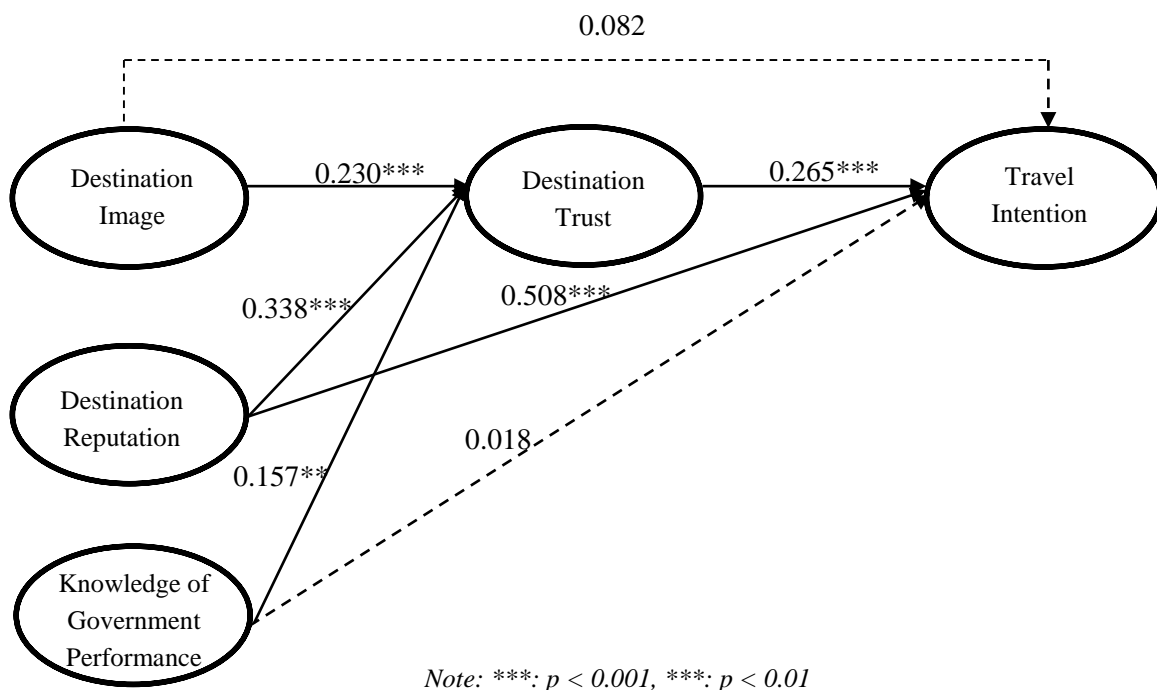


Figure 2. Results of hypothesis testing

Discussions

The findings revealed that destination image is an important antecedent of destination trust. This study used image as tourists' cognitive perception which focused on evaluations of the facilitates, safety and environment. However, the results revealed that destination image did not directly influence travel intention, which is not consistent with previous studies (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Park et al., 2017), wherein the causal relationship between destination image and travel intention has been widely supported. Two possible reasons can explain the insignificant relationship. First, this study focused on measuring tourists' cognitive destination image before visiting the destination. Even though tourists showed a favorable evaluation of Macau, their perceptions may not be clear and specific as they have not visited the destination. Therefore, the effect of destination image may be weakened (Wu & Liang, 2021). Second, destination image is one of the many variables influencing travel intentions, especially

during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, other factors such as perceived risk and fear (Zheng et al., 2021) may have a stronger effect than destination image.

Knowledge can significantly increase tourists' favorable destination trust through their understanding of a destination's performance. However, knowledge did not directly influence tourists' travel intention. Two possible reasons can explain this result. First, tourists' perceptions and evaluations may not become clear and specific by only through evaluating collected knowledge and information. Second, even though tourists showed favorable perceptions of government performance, they are still biased to select the information that they prefer. Therefore, the impact of knowledge may be weakened.

Destination reputation is a critical antecedent of destination trust, which is consistent with previous studies (Artigas et al., 2017). Moreover, the effect of destination reputation on travel intention is stronger than that from destination trust. This suggests that increasing destination reputation is an effective strategy to increase destination competitiveness and the probability that tourists tend to choose the destination.

Finally, destination trust positively influence tourists' travel intention, which is consistent with previous studies (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Shen et al., 2022). Moreover, destination trust plays a conceptual mediating role among its antecedents and outcome. Previous studies have revealed that tourists' travel behaviors can be enhanced through their favorable evaluations of destinations in terms of image (Chew & Jahari, 2014), reputation (Su, Lian, & Huang, 2020) and performance (Wong & Lai, 2022). This study demonstrated that tourists' favorable evaluations toward the destination increase their destination trust, resulting in favorable travel intentions. This finding opens up new theoretical directions for future research on tourists' decision-making process after the pandemic.

Conclusions

This study examined the mediating role of destination trust in tourists' decision-making in the post-pandemic period and its effects on travel intentions after the pandemic. The findings revealed that destination trust has a positive impact on tourists' travel intentions. Destination trust is influenced by destination image, destination reputation, and knowledge of destination performance. Additionally, destination trust plays a conceptual mediating role between these three antecedents and travel intention. The results confirmed the findings from previous studies and extended the existing literature, thereby providing theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

The current research offers the following theoretical implications. First, this study filled the research gap on the changes in tourists' travel patterns and behaviors in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period by investigating the effect of destination trust on travel intention. This study also applied other important factors related to tourists' perceptions of a destination, including destination image, destination reputation, and knowledge of the destination government's performance. Second, although the effect of destination trust has been previously examined in tourism research (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2017; Artigas et al., 2017), this study highlighted the importance of destination trust for travel decision-making, in particular its role in travel behavior in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. Third, the strongest relationship shown by the respondents is seen with destination reputation, which indicates that reputation is a critical factor that influence tourists' choices (Petrick, 2011) and affects tourists'

perception that the place made promises it fulfilled. A favorable reputation perceived by potential tourists can not only maintain a destination's competitiveness but also facilitate its tourism recovery.

Practical Implications

In terms of practical implications, first, destination marketers and service providers should understand tourists' levels of destination trust and their perceptions of destination performance. Destination service providers should offer satisfying services and products, and the government needs to implement effective strategies for tourism management and recovery to increase the competitiveness, reputation, and attractiveness of the destination.

Second, knowledge is one of the factors that influences tourists' travel decision-making. The results found that tourists' knowledge of a government's strategies and performance increases their trust in the destination. Tourism authorities and governments should provide adequate information and effective strategies to let tourists inform themselves of the current situation at the destination and its strategies.

Third, destination image has a significant impact on increasing destination trust. Destination managers should be aware of tourists' changes in expectations, in order to increase their trust and travel intentions, as tourists showed overall favorable evaluations of destination image and moderate attitudes toward the products and services provided by the destination. Furthermore, managers and organizers should conduct surveys to understand tourists' needs and wants. In addition, compared to how things were before COVID-19, the tourism and gambling industries need time to recover. In the meantime, Macau can focus on promoting leisure tourism, such as events and nature sources, to attract tourists.

Fourth, this study reveals that reputation is a significant determinant of destination trust and travel intention. The results showed that the impact of tourists' destination reputation on their travel intention is the strongest of all the hypothesized paths. Macau had a moderate to positive reputation among respondents; additionally, the government has also indicated that the destination is perceived as having a good reputation with tourists (DSEC, 2021). Therefore, Macau destination managers should pay attention to their reputation management and should implement strategies that maintain its favorable reputation. Destination managers can also take advantage of social media to promote the destination's good performance to tourists.

Limitations

This study has two limitations. First, international tourists are unable to visit Macau, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant policy restricting cross-border travel. Since the data were only collected from Mainland Chinese tourists, the findings may not be applicable to international tourists who come from different cultural and social backgrounds, or to other international tourism destinations. Therefore, a replication of this study with other destinations and/or other target populations may be needed to confirm the constructs and the results. A cross-cultural comparison study is also encouraged to explore whether people from different countries show different levels of trust in and evaluations of Macau.

Second, the findings revealed that destination trust plays a conceptual mediating role in the research model; however, this study did not propose a mediating effect of destination trust between its antecedents and the outcome. Future studies can further explore the mediating role of destination trust to provide more theoretical contributions.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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