

Sport Tourists' Involvement With a Destination: A Stage-Based Examination

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine sport tourists' involvement with a destination that hosts a sport event to enable understanding of how a tourist-destination relationship forms. To bolster this understanding, the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) is applied as a framework to assess sport tourists' involvement with a destination across four progressive stages. A questionnaire was administered to sport tourists in an international marathon event in the US ($N = 1029$). To allocate these sport tourists into distinct stages that represent an increased psychological connection to the destination, a three-step staging tool using Destination Involvement (DI) was applied. The findings indicate the progressive development of DI among these sport tourists results in increasingly high place attachment and revisit intentions. The results provide support for DI as an indicator that allows destination marketers to understand sport tourists' destination attitude, as well as predict behavioral intention.

KEYWORDS: *Destination Involvement, Sport Tourism, Segmentation*

Sport Tourists' Involvement with a Destination: A Stage-Based Examination

INTRODUCTION

Involvement is a construct derived from social psychology in the 1940s. In contemporary research literature, it remains a popular topic for examination by scholars of both marketing and consumer behavior. (e.g. Hu & Yu, 2007). As the level of perceived personal importance evoked by stimuli within a specific situation (Antil, 1984), involvement is considered to be an important means of understanding consumer behavior and the decision-making process (McGehee, Yoon, & Cárdenas, 2003). In many of these studies involvement is treated as a motivating or causal variable (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990). Depending on their level of involvement, individuals will differ greatly on the extensiveness of any information-search made during the purchase decision process, in the consuming experience, and in their attitude formation towards the object, or their receptivity toward promotional stimuli (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990).

Involvement can be used to describe the personal importance for individuals of a broad range of objects, such as products/services, brands, activities, promotional messages, and decisions (e.g., Kim, 2005; Lockshin, Spawton, & Macintosh, 1997). It is critical that marketers accurately identify the focus of consumer involvement if they are to develop meaningful marketing strategies. In the leisure tourism context, a place is both a setting for consumption and a consumable product in and of itself (Nelson, 2005). There is a distinct appeal for destination marketers to explore consumer involvement with this product – the destination – in order for them to facilitate consumer visitation, retention, and ultimately, loyalty. This interest stems from the notion that with the growth of globalization and with the increased competition in the expanding leisure travel market, tourists are now more flexible and spontaneous and can choose from an expansive array of destination options (Vanhove, 2001). The implication of these changes is that tourist involvement with a particular destination becomes more elusive.

Although it is difficult to achieve repeat visitation, it is often the foundation upon which destinations function. For example, the majority of visitors to destinations within the United States are repeat visitors travelling for leisure purposes (Office of Travel & Tourism Industries, 2005). A better understanding of an individual's connection with a destination becomes increasingly important for marketers who are attempting to highlight various destination attributes for different market segments.

For example, from a sport event perspective, it is not uncommon for destinations to host events to encourage non-local participation; leveraging the destination's attributes for the purpose of attracting non-local visitors (i.e. sport tourists) (e.g., Chalip & McGuirly, 2004; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). Interestingly however, sport tourists' initial connection with the destination is often secondary to the event itself. This is essential information for destination marketers trying to successfully implement marketing strategies that leverage destination attributes.

Sport tourists' decision to travel to a particular destination is primarily driven by involvement with the sport, not the destination (Turco, Riley & Swart, 2002). Ultimately, a thorough comprehension of the sport tourists' total involvement with the destination is important, if repeat visitation is to be realised. In addition to the immediate injection of economic and social benefits to the host destination, an event can enhance the profile of the destination resulting in an improved long-term image and re-visitation among tourists. Therefore, if destination marketers are to leverage the long-term benefits of hosting sport events, a greater comprehension is required of whether sport tourists develop a level of involvement with the destination as a result of attending a sport event. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to examine sport tourists' involvement with a destination that hosts a sport event. An understanding of destination involvement (DI) will allow destination marketers to leverage a sport tourist's connection to a destination beyond their initial

motivation to visit because of an event. Leveraging this connection can facilitate revisitation among sport tourists independent of the event.

This manuscript is divided into the following sections. First, a literature review provides an overview of the concept of involvement within leisure tourism research, introducing the construct of DI. Second, the theoretical framework for conceptualizing DI is reviewed leading to the advancement of two hypotheses. Third, the methods used to test these hypotheses are detailed. Finally, the results are discussed followed by conclusions of theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Involvement in Tourism Research

The construct of involvement is relevant across a variety of consumer behaviors and marketing contexts. Involvement reflects the extent to which an individual is dedicated to an activity or product (Kyle & Chick, 2002). The literature shows researchers conceptualize Involvement as being either a unidimensional concept (e.g. Zaichkowsky, 1985), or a multidimensional construct (Laurent & Kapferer, 1993). Within leisure and tourism literature most research chooses to use the multidimensional construct, with three facets: Attraction/Pleasure, Centrality, and Sign (Beaton, Funk, & Alexandris, 2009; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997).

The concept of involvement has been examined extensively in the leisure and tourism fields (Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; McGehee et al., 2003) because of its central role in understanding leisure experience and behavior (Reid & Crompton, 1993), and more specifically, because of its effectiveness in examining and predicting leisure consumer behavior (Gross & Brown, 2006). Most leisure and tourism involvement studies focus on activity contexts (Dimanche & Havitz, 1995; Lee, Scott, & Kim, 2008). For example, researchers have examined tourists' involvement with typical tourist activities such

as skiing and visiting national/amusement parks (e.g., Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1993), with the general touristic experience (e.g., Gross & Brown, 2006), or with specific leisure behaviors such as gambling (e.g., Lee et al., 2008; Park, Yang, Lee, Jang, & Stokowski, 2002) and shopping (Hu & Yu, 2007). Additional involvement research has been concerned with the travel decision (e.g., Cai, Feng, & Breiter, 2004). In relation to sport specifically, involvement has also been examined from an activity-based perspective (e.g. Beaton et al., 2009; Beaton, Funk, Ridinger, & Jordan, 2011).

The previously mentioned tourism involvement studies demonstrate the construct of involvement can be effectively applied to recreation or tourism products (Park et al., 2002). However, travelers' involvement with the actual travel destination has received minimal consideration. Havitz and Dimanche (1990) proposed that individuals could develop an involvement profile with a tourist destination, but few empirical examinations have yet been conducted to test their propositions. Some empirical studies examined involvement but they were predominantly concerned with involvement in the activity/experience context, rather than with involvement with the destination as the object.

An examination of activity involvement and its relationship with a destination is considered meaningful when the specialist activity (e.g. skiing, surfing, visiting parks) is acknowledged to be influential in participants' functional attachment to specific leisure settings or destinations (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003). For example, if someone is highly involved with skiing, their experience with that activity is inextricably connected to the destination. That is, to participate in the activity of skiing, the destination has to have appropriate slopes, snow and so on. However, when the activity is less reliant upon the destination, for example running, participants' relationship with the destination can be considered differently. That is, if someone is highly involved in marathon running, their ability to participate in that activity is not limited to a particular destination. One could expect

involvement with the destination in the former example (i.e. skiing) needs to be considered differently from involvement with the destination in the latter example (i.e. running).

Examination of DI from the latter perspective provides an interesting departure point, as DI may be more fragile given it is not necessarily tied to an activity and therefore, cannot leverage from the positive associations derived from activity involvement. Nonetheless, development of sport tourists' DI is important if the coveted revisitation objective is to be realised.

To date, involvement with a destination has been considered by few researchers. Hu (2003) examined the impact of DI on tourists' revisit intentions, under the mediating effect of satisfaction. Defining DI as a two-dimensional construct (i.e., psychological and behavioral involvement), the study measured each dimension by three elements – attraction, performance risk, and financial risk. An examination of the psychological involvement measurement items indicates the primary focus of the study is more about long haul travel than travel to a specific destination. Behavioral involvement appears to focus on behavioral antecedents and the consequences of tourists' psychological involvement with destinations such as tourist activities onsite, pre-trip planning or expenditures.

Similarly, Lehto, O'Leary and Morrison (2004) conceived DI in behavioral and psychological terms, though they operationalized it using four facets – prior involvement, risk involvement, activity involvement and economic involvement. The facets are considered to be antecedents or consequences of the psychological involvement of tourists with a destination. DI has also been examined in a tourist decision-making context (Carneiro & Crompton, 2010; Gursoy & Gavcar, 2003) through the adaptation of the well-established consumer involvement profile scale (Laurent & Kaupfer, 1985). Carneiro and Crompton (2010) considered how tourists' involvement with a destination influenced their search for

travel related information, while Gursoy and Gavcar (2003) examined involvement in relation to purchasing or taking vacations and tourists' subsequent destinations in general.

In contrast, in this study, DI is focused on extending the body of literature concerning an individual's psychological connection with a particular travel destination that hosts a sport event. While the previous studies purport to be examining DI, they are restricted in their focus (e.g. only long haul destinations), are concerned with the perceived cause and effect of DI, or are interested in the decision making aspects of involvement. Carneiro and Crompton's (2010) involvement with the destination appears to be the only DI study that can be considered conceptually similar to this study, however their operationalization of the DI construct was limited to two facets: interest or pleasure and sign.

Involvement is considered useful in explaining travelers' destination-related attitudes and decision-making process (Dimanche, et al., 1993). Based on a review of the literature, examination of DI from the perspective of an individual's psychological connection to a destination is limited and, therefore, warrants further investigation. This study responds to the call by leisure behavior researchers to add involvement, a psychological connection variable, to clarify leisure behaviors (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005).

Destination Involvement

As noted above, involvement represents the extent to which an individual is dedicated to a product or activity (Beaton et al., 2009; Kyle & Chick, 2002). This dedication is reflected in personal relevance or importance (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1985). In conceptualizing leisure involvement, Beaton and colleagues (2011) note that involvement refers to participation in an activity. However, involvement is not inherent to any specific activity, as an activity in which one individual finds involvement may be evaluated by another individual as lacking any importance or value (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Instead, the construct is conceptualized as an individual difference variable and

defined from a personal perspective; distinguished by the activity's relevance and importance, symbolic value, as well as the enjoyment derived from the act itself. Therefore, Beaton and colleagues define leisure involvement as an individual's evaluation of his or her participation in an activity as an integral aspect of their life that provides hedonic and symbolic value.

In the tourism context, visiting a destination can reflect the activity participation component of involvement. Again, involvement may not be inherent to a specific destination, instead the involvement found within a destination is dependent on the individual as with Beaton and colleagues (2011) assessment of involvement as an individual difference variable. In addition, a destination can hold importance for an individual, while visiting a destination can provide symbolic value and enjoyment. Based upon this, destination involvement can be defined as the meaning tourists' ascribe to a destination and how it serves as a central aspect of their lives providing both hedonic and symbolic value.

Similar to leisure involvement, DI is believed to capture the in-depth psychological state or connection tourists share with a leisure destination (Josiam, Smeaton, & Clements, 1999). This connection is assumed to have an influence on tourists' attitude formation and subsequent decision-making related to the destination. According to Havitz and Dimanche (1990), involvement is not static. An individual's involvement profile with a recreational activity or tourist destination can evolve, especially within a multiphase recreational experience such as travel. A leisure traveler's involvement with the destination might vary from the pre-travel choice stage, to the on-site participation stage, and to the post-travel recollection stage (Hammit, 1980). Consequently the related attitudes and behaviors of leisure travelers may progressively vary, driven by their developmental involvement profile (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990).

In consideration of the proposed progressive nature of leisure travelers' involvement with a destination, the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) (Beaton et al., 2009; Funk &

James, 2001) is adopted as the theoretical framework to examine the psychological connection between sport tourists and their travel destination. The PCM is a four-stage developmental framework describing how the psychological connection develops between an individual and various leisure objects such as sport and recreation activities (Beaton & Funk, 2008; Funk & James, 2006). The PCM framework has been utilized within both the leisure and tourism contexts (e.g., Beaton et al., 2009; 2011; Chen & Funk, 2010; Funk, Alexandris, & Ping, 2009; Funk, Toohey, & Bruun, 2007) and can facilitate the synthesis of leisure, tourism, and marketing literatures.

PCM for Sport Tourists' Involvement with the Destination

When applying the PCM to the destination object, the framework conceptualizes the variety of ways sport tourists are involved with the destination in terms of four hierarchical stages operating along a vertical continuum: Destination awareness, destination attraction, destination attachment and destination allegiance. Each stage represents an upgraded level of psychological connection (i.e. DI) that a visitor may have with the destination (Beaton & Funk, 2008; Funk & James, 2001). This psychological connection at each successive stage is represented by distinct attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Specifically, the lowest level, *destination awareness*, describes an individual knowing about a destination, while lacking special interests or preference to visit. Destination awareness can be influenced by various socializing agents (e.g., media and marketing), cultural influences and the built environment of the destination. The second level of destination attraction indicates a distinct interest toward the destination has formed. Attraction is a product of the destination providing the opportunity to satisfy needs and receive benefits for an individual based on hedonic and dispositional needs, self-efficacy and the negotiation of perceived barriers (Funk et al., 2007). This stage is represented by an explicitly-formed connection to the destination represented by

attitude formation, destination associations, as well as travel behavioral intentions and can include the actual travel.

The third level, *destination attachment*, indicates a tourist has formed a meaningful psychological connection with the destination that is more complex and stable than the connection established within the destination attraction stage (Beaton et al., 2011). An individual begins to ascribe functional, emotional and symbolic value to a destination. Tourists with destination attachment have stronger attitudes and are more reluctant to change their preference for a specific destination than those at the attraction level. The final level, *destination allegiance*, represents the strength and continuance of a tourist's psychological commitment to the destination. Destination allegiance is generally formed over time and occurs when a tourist believes the destination is congruent with important values and is linked to self-concept. This level is reflected by a strong positive attitude toward the destination that is durable and influences cognitive processing, followed by consistent and enduring behavioral intentions (Funk & James, 2001). See Appendix A for a diagram of DI based upon the PCM framework.

Destination involvement is utilized as the construct to stage individuals based upon Funk and James' (2001) assertion that within the PCM, involvement can be used to characterize the stage of an individual's psychological connection to an object. A tri-dimensional involvement measurement drawing upon pleasure, centrality, and sign has been adapted and tested in empirical studies, in order to develop an effective staging tool to allocate individuals into each of the four PCM stages (Beaton et al., 2009; 2011; Funk, Beaton & Pritchard, 2011). However, to date, this procedure has not been applied to a tourism destination.

This study conceptualizes DI using the same tri-dimensional approach; affording the application of a three-step staging mechanism in a destination context. This application will

differentiate sport tourists' psychological connection levels with the destination according to their distinct profiles on each of the three DI facets (pleasure, centrality, and sign). The *pleasure* facet embodies the enjoyment derived from visiting the destination. Next, *centrality* reflects how central visiting a destination is to the individual's lifestyle. Finally, *sign* represents the self-expression value or level of symbolism derived from visiting the destination. Being able to allocate sport tourists into each of the four PCM stages will account for the heterogeneity across consumers' connection with the destination. This allocation can then facilitate the development of segmentation strategies to market the destination and to reinforce and strengthen a sport tourist's connection to the destination (DI) across each stage.

DI provides the capacity to allocate sport tourists into each stage of the PCM, thereby segmenting the travel market. In doing so, an examination of attitudinal and behavioral engagement towards the destination across the different stages can be realised. Logically, tourists assigned to specific stages will share similar attitudinal characteristics towards the destination, while these attitudinal characteristics will differ significantly across stages. Support for this proposition can be garnered through empirical tests examining similar attitudinal characteristics such as enduring involvement, strength of motivation, and future intentions, within stage and also how these characteristics might differ significantly across stages (e.g. Funk et al., 2011).

An individual's intention to revisit a destination represents an important attitudinal characteristic that can be conceptualised by behavioral intention, and can provide comparison across the different DI levels. As noted above in the description of each stage within the PCM, behavioral intentions develop and grow stronger as an individual advances through each stage of the hierarchy. Behavioral intentions reflect indications of how much effort an individual is willing to put forth in order to carry out the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the

tourism context, intention to revisit the destination encompasses the likelihood of an individual returning to that destination, and embodies a critical outcome for tourism operators. Accordingly, revisit intention is a sound attitudinal characteristic to compare across DI levels. This introduces the first hypothesis advanced within this research:

Hypothesis 1: Levels of sport tourists' intention to revisit the destination will incrementally increase as the stage of DI increases (i.e., from Awareness to Attraction to Attachment to Allegiance).

Beyond behavioral intention, an additional attitudinal characteristic that develops and strengthens across the different PCM stages is an individual's psychological commitment to an object. In the tourism context, place attachment is a well-established construct used to reflect an individual's commitment, and predict place loyalty and satisfaction (George & George, 2004, Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010).

The construct of place attachment originates from environmental psychology (Gross & Brown, 2008), and measures the affective bond or link between individuals and specific places (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001). The construct had been extensively studied in environment, resources management and community studies prior to receiving increased research interest from the leisure and tourism fields (Hwang et al., 2005). Place attachment consists of two dimensions: *place dependence* (i.e., a functional attachment to a place based on its importance as a setting for specific activities); and *place identity* (i.e., a symbolic or affective attachment to a place) (Kyle et al., 2003). Tourists are believed to develop attachment to a destination due to its capacity to fulfil their goals or needs, as well as the symbolic meaning derived from the destination (Yuksel et al., 2010). Furthermore, a positive relationship exists between place attachment and an individual's attitude toward a place and visit frequency (Brown & Perkins, 1992).

Researchers usually treat place attachment either as an outcome variable (e.g., predicted by involvement, place features, or motivations), or as an antecedent variable (e.g., predicting loyalty, satisfaction) (Yuksel et al., 2010). In light of this, place attachment represents a useful indicator to measure differences between stages of the PCM to determine the strength of a sport tourist's psychological commitment to the destination. This proposition introduces the second hypothesis advanced by this research:

Hypothesis 2: Place attachment of sport tourists will incrementally increase as the stage of DI increases (i.e., from Awareness to Attraction to Attachment to Allegiance).

Overall, empirical support for both hypotheses would support the capacity of the PCM staging procedure to differentiate travelers' psychological connection to a destination. That is, the study replicates and extends the use of the PCM as a reliable stage-based framework within destination research. To test the two hypotheses advanced within the current research, quantitative data were collected. The method employed to collect this data follows.

METHOD

A questionnaire was developed to collect data from an international marathon event, located in the southeast of the United States. The event attracted over 15,000 participants with 52% traveling to the host destination. The event is a major annual event utilized to leverage tourism and bolster the image of the destination. The questionnaire was administered to participants online following the event, to assess their DI, place attachment, and intention to revisit the destination.

Participants

The sample consisted of 1029 non-local individuals, (82% American citizens) who traveled to participate in the marathon event. The gender breakdown was approximately even with 53% female participants, while 55.6% of respondents were married or living with a partner. Seventy-six percent were aged between 25~49. In terms of ethnicity, 68.6% were

Caucasian and 20.3% Hispanic or Latino. The majority of the sample (87.7%) had completed higher education, and 45% possessed a graduate degree or above. Seventy-four percent were employed full-time, with the median annual household income in the range of \$100,000~149,000. Only 21.1% were first-time visitors. Among the majority who had visited the destination before, 66% were frequent visitors (≥ 5 times).

Procedures

Three weeks after the completion of the event, the online survey was distributed through email by the event organizer to all participants ($N = 15,000$). A reminder email was sent two weeks later to promote a higher response rate. A total of 2600 responses were returned. Since the current study focuses on sport tourists' (i.e., non-local participants) involvement with the host destination, all local respondents (41%) were excluded. A total of 1029 responses were deemed usable, giving a response rate of 14.5%. All completed responses were exported into a SPSS data file for further analysis.

Measurements

A nine-item measurement scale with three items for each involvement facet of pleasure, centrality, and sign was utilized to measure sport tourists' involvement with the destination (Beaton et al., 2011). A six-item measurement, adapted from Kyle et al., (2003), was adopted to measure the two-dimensional place attachment (place identity, place dependence). Seven-point Likert scales, anchored with "1" = strongly disagree to "7" = "strongly agree", were used to assess all items (*see* Table 1 for a listing of all items used to assess DI and place attachment). The revisit intention of sport tourists was examined by asking respondents to rate their likelihood of revisiting the destination for vacations on a seven-point Likert scale, anchored with "1" = "Extremely Unlikely" to "7" = "Extremely Likely". To account for the temporal effect of revisit intention, three timeframes: short-term

(within the next 12 months), mid-term (within the next three years) and long-term (within the next five years) were applied (Jang & Feng, 2007).

 Insert Table 1

Data Analysis and Results

The data were analyzed in SPSS 18.0. Data analysis consisted of the following six steps. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for each facet of DI as well as place attachment. Second, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the measurement of DI. Third, the convergent and discriminant validity of DI was tested. Fourth, the three-step staging procedure was implemented to allocate the sample into the four stages of DI. Next, descriptive statistics for place attachment, short-term revisit intention, mid-term revisit intention, and long-term revisit intention were calculated across the four stages. Finally, multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the relationships among the variables DI, place attachment, and revisit intention. The results of each step of analysis are relayed below.

Correlations, descriptive statistics, and reliability analysis for the DI facets and place attachment are presented in Table 2. According to the benchmark typically quoted by social science (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), these items are all satisfactory measures ($\alpha \geq 0.70$).

In

this study of sport tourists' DI, the DI facet pleasure represents the highest mean value and the lowest standard deviation; the facets centrality and sign showed relatively low means, but larger standard deviations than pleasure. In regards to correlations, sign and centrality had the strongest correlation, while pleasure had the weakest correlations. Place attachment was most highly correlated with sign, followed by centrality, with the weakest relationship shown with pleasure.

Insert Table 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, using AMOS 18.0 to analyze the measurement properties of the three-dimensional DI construct. A measurement model with three factors was drawn, each factor being one dimension of the DI construct. The first item for each factor was constrained to a regression weight of “1”, all error terms were constrained to be uncorrelated, and the three factors were left to freely correlate. Maximum likelihood estimation was employed in the CFA, since it is the most widely used estimation that demonstrates robustness against moderate violation of normality (Hair, Joseph, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995). Moreover, maximum likelihood estimation is considered favorable to other estimation methods when sample size is medium to large (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

In assessing the goodness-of-fit, six types of fit indices were tested: (1) the Chi square (χ^2) & the normed Chi square (χ^2/df); (2) the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) & Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI); (3) the Normed Fit Index (NFI); (4) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), (5) the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and (6) the Standardized Root Mean-square Residual (SRMR). The results were as follows: the Chi square had a value of 296.6 ($df = 24$, $N = 1029$), $p = .000$, indicating an unacceptable match between the proposed model and the observed data. However, researchers argue that Chi-square is highly sensitive to sample size, and may not represent the best reflection of the extent to which a model does or does not fit (Byrne, 2001).

Results of other five fit indices support the proposed model. First, Both GFI and AGFI values (.95 & .90) were close to the benchmark (e.g., Byrne, 2001) and indicated acceptable fitness. Second, the NFI and the CFI yielded values of .96 and .97, indicating an

excellent fit of the model (i.e., > 0.95) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In addition, the standardized RMR is 0.039, much lower than the benchmark of 0.05 (Byrne, 2001). Collectively, this suggests that the model is a good fit. The RMSEA was .105 – slightly above the upper limit of the range of mediocre fitness (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). However, the RMSEA is sensitive to the number of estimated parameters in the model, as well as to the sample size (Byrne, 2001; Jackson, 2001). Overall, the three-dimensional model of destination involvement was supported. Next, the three DI dimensions were examined for discriminant and convergent validity.

Convergent & Discriminant Validity

As Fornell and Larcker (1981) argued, convergent validity can be achieved if the average variance explained (AVE) in items by their respective constructs is greater than the variance due to error (i.e., $AVE > 0.5$). To assess the convergent validity of the three facets of DI, the AVE was calculated for each of the three factors. All three AVEs were above 0.7, showing all three facets recorded values above the benchmark of 0.5, convergent validity was verified. In addition, from the standardized regression coefficients (β) shown in Table 3, all indicator loadings for respective DI facets revealed t -value > 1.96 indicating significance at $p < .01$. Thus, convergent validity was demonstrated (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

 Insert Table 3

As for the discriminant validity, it is believed that if the AVE for each construct is greater than the square of the correlations between the constructs, discriminant validity exists (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, the AVE of each facet in Table 3 is greater than the square of the correlations between the three facets, as shown in Table 2; thus discriminant validity was achieved. However, more recent authors (e.g., Cheng, Lam, & Hsu, 2006; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004) have adopted the procedure recommended by Anderson and

Gerbing (1988) to assess the discriminant validity of measures. That is, for each pair of constructs in the measurement model, two different models were conceptualized. The first model was the constrained model in which the correlation parameter was constrained between each pair of constructs to one, while the second model was the unconstrained/free model allowing correlations to vary. The χ^2 was generated for both models with the respective degrees of freedom. A significantly lower χ^2 value for the unconstrained model indicated that discriminant validity had been achieved (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The results of this test are presented in Table 4. All unconstrained models outperformed the constrained one, which demonstrates that all three DI facets possess discriminant validity.

 Insert Table 4

Three-Step Staging Procedure

The PCM three-step staging procedure was employed to allocate the sport tourists into four stages based upon their psychological connection towards the destination. The four stages are Destination Awareness, Destination Attraction, Destination Attachment, and Destination Allegiance. Prior research suggests that in order to best use information contained in an involvement profile, each facet of the multi-dimensional involvement construct should be examined (Beaton et al., 2011; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). The different involvement profiles can be used to operationalize the staging procedure to organize participants into theoretically meaningful groups within a comprehensive, stage-based theoretical framework (Beaton et al 2009, 2011; Funk et al., 2011). These a priori theoretical profiles are presented in Appendix B.

The staging procedure consisted of the following three steps and each step is presented in Appendix C. First, mean scores were calculated for each of the three DI facets: pleasure, centrality, and aign. Next, the mean scores for each DI facet was rated as being low (L),

medium (M), or high (H), to create involvement profiles for each respondent based upon cut-points developed and tested for the PCM. Mean scores of 4.50 and below were rated low. Mean scores above 4.50 and below 5.65 were rated medium, and mean scores of 5.65 and above were rated high. See Beaton and colleagues (2009; 2011) for a detailed justification of these cut points to create categories. Finally, an algorithm was employed to allocate subjects into the four PCM stages to determine DI stage. The algorithm includes six sequential actions. These six actions are detailed in Appendix C. This procedure resulted in the following distribution of respondents: 193 respondents were allocated into the destination awareness stage, 686 within destination attraction, 123 within destination attachment, and 27 within destination allegiance. From there, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine whether the four groups categorized based upon DI differed in terms of place attachment and their intention to revisit the destination. MANOVA was adopted to analyze the data, since this analysis is useful when the dependent variables are correlated (Hair et al., 1995). This analysis addressed hypotheses 1 and 2.

Descriptive Statistics by Stage and MANOVA

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics by stage of PCM. The overall trend was that all means increased from Destination awareness to Destination attraction, to Destination attachment, and on to Destination allegiance. The MANOVA results revealed that DI had a significant effect on the dependent variables of place attachment and three revisit intention measurements, $F(12, 3072) = 55.92, P < .001, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .179$. Individual analysis of the three revisit intentions of sport tourists showed that all means scores significantly increased as the involvement stage increased: Short-term Revisit Intention, $F(3, 1025) = 95.27, P < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .218$; Mid-term Revisit Intention, $F(3, 1025) = 102.31, P < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .23$; and Long-term Revisit Intention, $F(3, 1025) = 100.01, P < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .226$. Additionally, significant differences for place attachment occurred across all DI levels: $F(3,$

1025) = 256.94, $P < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .43$. Post hoc tests were next conducted to determine if significant differences were actually present across the four stages of the dependent variables. Given the variation in sample sizes across the four stages, homogeneity of variance was not assumed and Tamhane's post hoc analysis was utilized. Results revealed significant difference for each of the three revisitation intent measures and for place attachment across the PCM stages. Collectively, these findings provide support for hypotheses 1 and 2.

Insert Table 5

DISCUSSION

To examine sport tourists' involvement with a destination that hosts a sport event, their involvement with the destination was conceptualized as a continuum containing four progressive stages. The results reveal an increase in both sport tourists' behavioral intention (i.e., intention to revisit a destination) and their psychological commitment (i.e., place attachment) across the four stages. The current research provides both a theoretical rationale, as well as examples of practical relevance, for leisure destination marketers utilizing DI as a means to understand visitors' attitudes and behavior.

The results suggest the first hypothesis was supported. Sport tourists' revisit intentions incrementally increased along with their involvement with the destination. Travelers demonstrating higher DI were more likely to indicate intention to revisit the place in the short-, mid-, or long-term timeframe than those with lower involvement. These findings are consistent with previous studies disclosing the linkage between involvement and travel behaviors (e.g., Hu & Yu, 2007; McGehee et al., 2003). This indicates that DI could perform well in terms of predicting sport tourists' attitudes and behaviors toward the destination. Furthermore, the means of the place attachment construct also increased with the

four progressive stages. This result provides support for the second hypothesis advanced in this research.

Theoretical Implications

Three main theoretical implications emerge from this study. The first is that involvement, as a tri-dimensional construct, can be applied to a destination. In doing so, this study has established that sport tourists can develop a connection to the destination beyond the sport event attended. Furthermore, through the application of the PCM framework and the staging mechanism, evidence is afforded that sport tourists can exhibit different levels of DI. This outcome has implications for revisitation. DI is defined as a multifaceted construct representing the degree to which visiting a destination becomes central in a traveler's lifestyle, and provides both hedonic and symbolic value. This notion represents empirical evidence of involvement with a destination as multidimensional rather than uni-dimensional (Carneiro & Crompton, 2010).

Secondly, the PCM framework helps to conceptualize DI as a progressive stage-based continuum along four psychological connection levels, rather than being a dichotomous or static variable as has been advanced in existing studies (e.g., McGehee et al., 2003; Reid & Crompton, 1993). Antil (1984) advocated for involvement being on a continuum rather than being a dichotomous variable while the PCM allows for both perspectives to be integrated. The developmental nature of the PCM helps DI successfully avoid the misunderstanding that involvement consists of two mutually exclusive and exhaustive states, one being "high" and the other "low". This developmental perspective facilitates a more in-depth understanding of different segments and how they form.

Thirdly, this study replicates and extends the use of the PCM framework to examine the psychological connection of individuals with a travel destination. The PCM was developed for application to a broad range of sport and leisure objects, but thus far has been

mainly tested on sport or physical activities (Chen & Funk, 2010). This study provided empirical support for its predictive ability within the sport tourism context and opens new avenues to use this theoretical framework.

The staging procedure was tested to support the theoretical propositions of the PCM framework (Funk & James, 2001). Individual attitudinal (e.g. place attachment) and behavioral intention differences (e.g. revisit intention) among stages demonstrated the feasibility of applying the PCM staging mechanism to segment sport tourists. Although involvement has been frequently utilized as an effective tool in segmenting the leisure market (e.g., Havitz & Dimanche, 1990; McIntyre & Pigram, 1992), previous studies failed to provide an a priori theoretical rationale for their segmentation (Beaton & Funk, 2008). Most of these studies used cluster analysis (e.g., Kyle, Kerstetter, & Guadagnolo, 2002; Park et al., 2002) or other mathematical scales (e.g., Fesenmaier & Johnson, 1989; Josiam, Kinley, & Kim, 2005). Segmentation in these studies was based on how the data performed in each study. This study used a theoretical basis to underpin the process of segmentation, achieving results that are conducive to comparison across studies (Antil, 1984).

The staging of the PCM based on the conceptual differences of each DI facet can overcome the shortcomings of previous studies in comparing research findings due to overlap or misclassifications (Antil, 1984). This is because the staging mechanism can be replicated in subsequent segmentation studies based on a theory. This is in contrast to cluster analysis, for example, that has been criticized for lacking an underlying theoretical rationale and for being subject to research judgement (e.g. Ketchen & Shook, 1996); making comparison between studies difficult due to potential lack of consistency. In addition, utilizing a staging mechanism to segment travelers into groups in order to predict outcome variables such as place attachment and intention to revisit represents an additional post hoc predictive method for segmentation. (e.g., Chen, 2003).

Practical Implications

Sport tourists' primary motivation to visit a destination is to participate in, or watch a sport event. This study has demonstrated that sport tourists can also develop a psychological connection to the event destination in isolation of the event itself. This connection can be considered progressive in its development. Accordingly, the higher stages of destination attachment and destination allegiance reflect a stronger and more stable commitment to the destination, as evidenced by the individuals' place attachment. Place attachment is considered to be positively associated with revisit intention (e.g. George & George, 2004). Destination marketers who want to leverage the benefits of hosting a sport event beyond the event itself should also seek to develop sport tourists' psychological connection (i.e. destination involvement) with the destination in order to ultimately realize revisitation.

As a consistent measure of traveler attitudes towards the destination, DI is believed to be attractive to tourism marketing researchers (McGehee et al., 2003). The findings of this research may assist in two managerial domains. Segmentation strategies for tourists have been based upon factors such as sociocultural elements, demographic characteristics, and trip type (e.g., Sung, Morrison, Hong, O'Leary, 2001). The conceptualization of DI and its employment to stage-classify sport tourists provides destination planners with another effective tool to better understand existing tourist segment markets. The segmentation results provide implications for tasks such as target marketing, developing promotions, and distributing services. In addition, a better understanding of the factors that influence an individual's connection with a destination may allow destination marketers to develop and plan events and activities that can leverage these factors, while facilitating movement through the different levels of DI.

Different destination marketing/promotion strategies are required for the different levels of involvement across tourist segments. Facilitating movement from destination

awareness to destination attraction, as well as from destination attraction to destination attachment, may be most important for destination marketers due to the development of preference and psychological connections within these progressions (Funk & James, 2006). According to Hightower, Brandy and Baker (2002), emphasising the importance of consumer involvement in the marketing of hedonic service is crucial given that involvement leads to favourable emotions that have a positive influence on behavioural intentions. While previous studies tend to concur that tourism related products are likely to be high in both hedonic and utilitarian attributes (Gursoy, Spangenberg & Rutherford, 2006), it is the hedonic attributes that have the strongest influence over consumer behavior, such as event attendance (Gursoy et al. 2006). Therefore, attention is afforded to emphasising such hedonic attributes in the marketing of the tourism product.

Evidence of the importance of hedonic value to the individual can begin to appear at the destination attraction stage (Beaton et al., 2009; 2011). Based on past experience of attending a sport event at a particular location, sport tourists' who have developed DI, to a minimum degree, are more likely to be at the destination attraction stage as they have potentially more knowledge of the destination and its attributes, than prior to visitation. Accordingly, marketing efforts to attract individuals who were previously sport tourists who have subsequently started to develop DI, should place an emphasis on the hedonic attributes (e.g. having fun, socialization, imagery, uniqueness and symbolic meaning) derived from the destination. Strictly focusing on the utilitarian attributes of the destination may be too narrow an approach given that hedonic attributes have been found to have a stronger influence on people's behavior (e.g. Gursoy et al., 2006).

Attachment to a destination is reflected by increased symbolic value and centrality, underscoring the strong psychological connection the individual feels towards the destination (Beaton et al., 2011). Marketing efforts to foster this stronger connection should reinforce

the overall importance of the destination to the individual tourist, as well as highlight the destination as a reflection of the tourist's personality. In doing so, marketers can promote the attributes of the destination to select psychographic segments to demonstrate alignment between the personality of the destination and the personality of the tourist. The marketing of an action-oriented destination such as Queenstown, New Zealand to adventure sport enthusiasts provides an example of this. Highlighting the different attributes of a destination based upon these involvement facets across the variety of different communication mechanisms and resources available to consumers may be particularly effective as involvement has demonstrated an impact on consumers' information search of destinations (Carneiro & Crompton, 2010).

Limitation & Future Directions

Two limitations of this research should be acknowledged. The first is the generalizability of the research findings because the research is case-study based. In order to augment the generalizability of this research, replication studies are required (Yin, 1994). In particular, the findings should be tested more generally in a tourism context as this study's population of interest was confined to sport tourists. In addition, the data collected provided a snapshot of individual sport tourist's DI, place attachment, and intention to revisit. This snapshot examined these factors following event participation, and for many respondents, after their visit to the destination. Longitudinal data collected before, during and after a visit to a destination could provide a more comprehensive assessment of DI and help determine potential movement between stages of DI. This longitudinal data can account for the dynamic nature of involvement (e.g., Havitz & Dimanche, 1990)

Using this research as a starting point, a number of future studies can be conducted. First, the factors that impact the transition between DI stages can be explored. Qualitative data can be collected with participants at each stage as a means to explore the various aspects

of a destination that initiate advancement across the stages. Focus groups may be an effective mechanism to uncover these factors as this research method can be used to collect experiential data via group interaction (Asbury, 1995).

Second, the relationship between DI and additional outcome variables, beyond place attachment and revisit intention, can be examined. Behavioral measures such as, length of stay and expenditure, as well as additional intention measures such as, willingness to recommend the destination to a friend, can be aligned with the different stages of DI. Uncovering these relationships can further bolster tourism marketers' segmentation strategies based upon DI.

Finally, a comparison can be made across different types of tourists to further investigate DI. International and domestic tourists can be examined to determine differences among DI, place attachment, and intention to revisit among the two groups. This investigation could serve as a starting point towards uncovering the different destination characteristics that appeal to domestic and international tourists.

CONCLUSION

This study examined destination involvement in the context of sport tourism, utilizing the PCM as the theoretical framework. The current research represents an initial step towards programmatic and systematic research into the examination of sport tourists' involvement with a destination. Both the place attachment and revisit intentions of sport tourists demonstrated an increase along the progressive DI levels within the PCM stage-based framework. Therefore, DI can serve as a tool for destination marketers to enhance prediction, understanding and management of visitors in order to attract repeat patronage.

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Table 1 Destination Involvement & Place Attachment Construct Items**Destination
Involvement**

<i>Pleasure</i>	<i>Pleasure 1: I really enjoy visiting Destination X. Pleasure 2: Visiting Destination X is pleasurable. Pleasure 3: Visiting Destination X is very interesting.</i>
<i>Centrality</i>	<i>Centrality 1: A lot of my life is organized around Destination X. Centrality 2: Destination X has a central role in my life. Centrality 3: Lots of my time is organized around Destination X.</i>
<i>Sign</i>	<i>Sign 1: Visiting Destination X allows me to really be myself. Sign 2: Visiting Destination X says a lot about who I am. Sign 3: When I visit Destination X, others can see me the way I want them see me.</i>

**Place
Attachment**

<i>Place Identity</i>	<i>PI 1: Destination X means a lot to me. PI 2: I am very attached to Destination X. PI 3: I feel like Destination X is part of me.</i>
<i>Place Dependency</i>	<i>PD 1: No other place can compare to Destination X for traveling to attend a sport event. PD 2: I enjoy traveling to Destination X to attend a sport event more than at other places. PD 3: Destination X is the best sport tourism destination.</i>

Table 2 Construct Correlations

	Pleasure	Centrality	Sign	PA	M	SD	α
Pleasure	1.00				5.10	0.97	0.90
Centrality	0.34	1.00			2.63	1.33	0.93
Sign	0.45	0.81	1.00		2.98	1.31	0.90
PA	0.57	0.79	0.84	1.00	3.21	1.29	0.94

Table_3 CFA Results for DI Facets & Items

Construct & Items	(AVE) β	t-value
<i>Pleasure</i>	(0.76)	
<i>I really enjoy visiting Destination X.</i>	.863	33.61
<i>Visiting Destination X is pleasurable.</i>	.940	38.43
<i>Visiting Destination X is very interesting.</i>	.807	30.51
<i>Centrality</i>	(0.82)	
<i>A lot of my life is organized around Destination X.</i>	.865	34.53
<i>Destination X has a central role in my life.</i>	.945	40.16
<i>Lots of my time is organized around Destination X.</i>	.912	37.73
<i>Sign</i>	(0.75)	
<i>Visiting Destination X allows me to really be myself.</i>	.810	30.92
<i>Visiting Destination X says a lot about who I am.</i>	.925	38.27
<i>When I visit Destination X, others can see me the way I want them to see me.</i>	.856	33.71

Table_4 Results of Discriminant Validity Tests

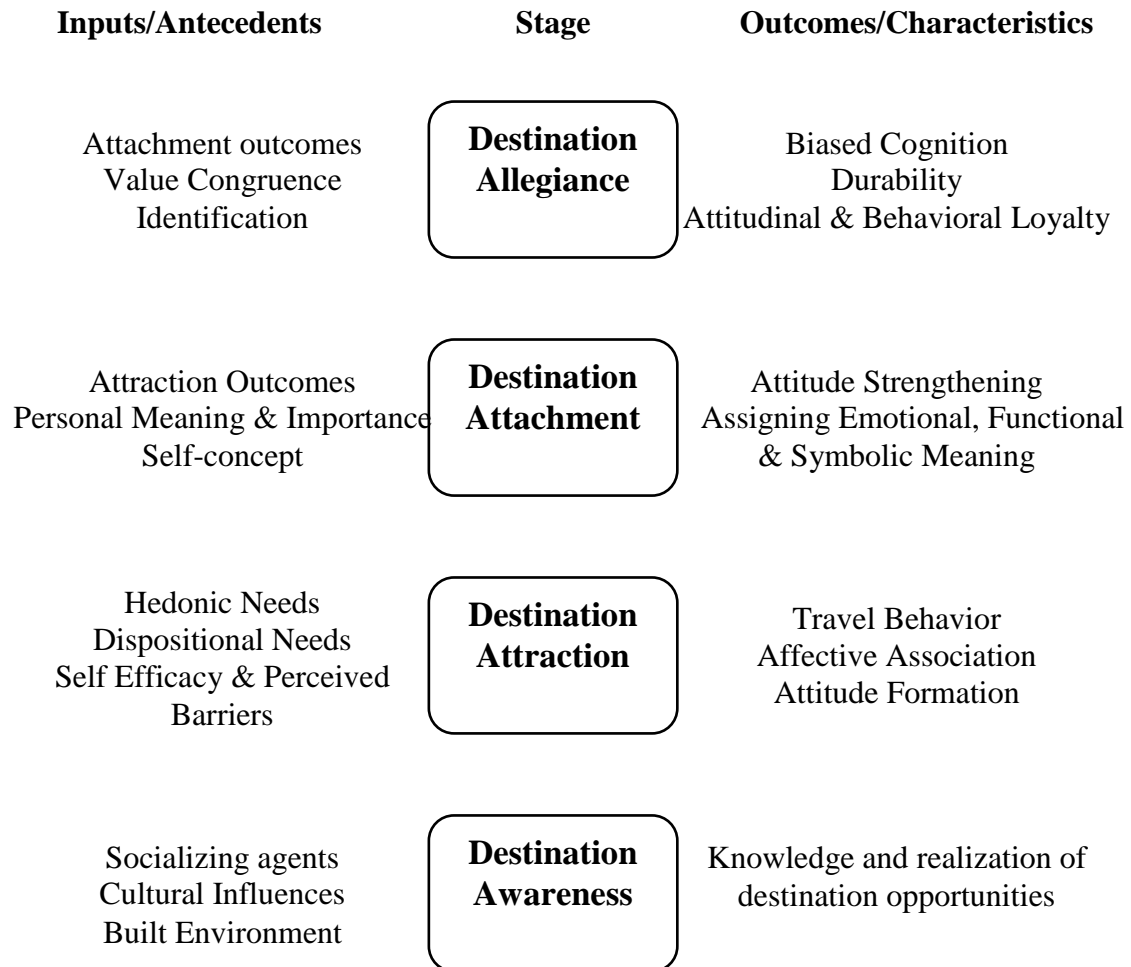
	Correlation	Constrained Model		Unconstrained Model		Change		Significance level
		χ^2	df.	χ^2	df.	χ^2	df.	
<i>Pleasure – Centrality</i>	0.35	1845.8	9	51.8	8	1794.0	1	.00
<i>Pleasure – Sign</i>	0.47	1566.1	9	75.9	8	1490.2	1	.00
<i>Centrality – Sign</i>	0.89	546.4	9	187.0	8	359.4	1	.00

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics for Constructs by the Destination Involvement Stages

Destination Involvement (N = 1029)	Place Attachment	Short-term Revisit Intention	Mid-term Revisit Intention	Long-term Revisit Intention
Stage 1	2.10*	3.16*	3.67*	3.89*
Destination Awareness (n = 193)	(1.00)	(1.70)	(1.82)	(1.82)
Stage 2	3.14*	4.84*	5.56*	5.76*
Destination Attraction (n = 686)	(1.01)	(1.74)	(1.51)	(1.46)
Stage 3	4.78*	6.11*	6.25*	6.31*
Destination Attachment (n = 123)	(.81)	(1.36)	(1.30)	(1.29)
Stage 4	5.85*	6.48*	6.70*	6.85*
Destination Allegiance (n = 27)	(.46)	(1.25)	(.87)	(.46)
Overall	3.21	4.72	5.32	5.50

Note *: post hoc test revealed significant difference from all other stages at $p < 0.05$.

Appendix A: PCM Diagram of Destination Involvement



Adapted from Beaton et al., 2009

Appendix B:

Theoretical Distribution of Destination Involvement Profiles across PCM Stages

Destination Awareness			Destination Attraction			Destination Attachment			Destination Allegiance		
*P	C	S	P	C	S	P	C	S	P	C	S
L	L	L	M	L	L	L	L	M	M	H	H
			H	L	L	L	L	H	H	H	M
						L	M	L	H	M	H
						L	M	M	H	H	H
						L	M	H			
						L	H	L			
						L	H	M			
						L	H	H			
						M	L	M			
						M	L	H			
						M	M	L			
						M	H	L			
						M	M	M			
						M	M	H			
						M	H	M			
						H	L	M			
						H	M	L			
						H	M	M			
						H	L	H			
						H	H	L			

*: P=Pleasure Facet; C=Centrality Facet; S=Sign Facet

** : L = Low; M = Medium; H = High

Adapted from Beaton et al., 2009.

Appendix C:

PCM Three Step Staging Procedure

Step 1: Calculate Involvement Facet Mean Scores and Average

	Pleasure	Centrality	Sign
Item 1	P1 = 4	C1 = 6	S1 = 7
Item 2	P2 = 5	C2 = 5	S2 = 6
Item 3	P3 = 4	C3 = 5	S3 = 6
Total Score	= 13	= 16	= 19
Average	P = 4.33	C = 5.33	S = 6.33

Step 2: Develop Profile

Low (L)	Medium (M)	High (H)
Mean Score ≤ 4.49	Mean Score 4.50 – 5.64	Mean Score ≥ 5.65
P = L	C = M	S = H

Step 3: Employ Algorithm using Theoretical Profiles from Appendix B

Action 1: If **All** three facets rated low (L), Stage = Awareness. If condition not satisfied then;

Action 2: If **Pleasure** facet is rated low, then stage = Attachment
If condition not satisfied then;

Action 3: If **both Centrality and Sign** facets are rated low, then stage = Attraction
If condition not satisfied then;

Action 4: If **either Centrality and Sign** facets are rated low, then stage = Attachment
If condition not satisfied then;

Action 5 If **any two facets** are rated as high (H), then stage = Allegiance
If condition not satisfied then;

Action 6: **All remaining**, stage = Attachment