

A structural model of liminal experience in tourism

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1 Introduction

For a long time, China's society has been strongly influenced by the moral and intellectual codes of Confucianism. Chinese society is conservative in terms of gender relationships in daily life, but holidays are typically considered as a temporary escape from the daily norms of life as normal responsibilities are suspended (Weichselbaumer, 2012). This liminal transition phase has the "potential for an enriching experience in short, limited and constrained time periods that makes holidays so different from other pursuits", and in a liminal world, people can behave in a way as if they are free from constraints and obligations. Yanyu, a rising tourism phenomenon which originally meant a favorable opportunity for an encounter with a beautiful woman and which violates Chinese cultural beliefs, values and traditions, becomes acceptable and even natural in this liminal world (Zhang & Xu, 2019).

2 Literature review

The term "liminal" was first developed by French folklorist Van Gennep for use in anthropology to describe the characteristics of rites in different stages of life; he divided the rites of passage into three stages. Liminality is widely used in tourism contexts. In the tourism world, destinations serve as liminal spaces where tourists experience an anonymous environment and an evasion of social control, responsibility, and obligation.

Opportunities to encounter means that a tourist may meet strangers of the opposite gender in a Yanyu destination by chance, or in other words, Yanyu is something that may come with luck, and not by deliberately searching. Sense of loss refers to the feelings of depression and anxiety when two parties in a Yanyu relationship are separated from each other after traveling; and aberration means that tourists do something they would not do in everyday life because these things are incompatible with general social norms, but in a liminal space, these norms can be accepted. Still, not everyone dares to pursue a Yanyu experience, even when they are out of their daily lives.

3 Hypothesis development

- H1. Physical tourscales positively influence: (a) emotional arousal and (b) liminal experience.
- H2. Social tourscales positively influence: (a) emotional arousal and (b) liminal experience.
- H3. Socially symbolic tourscales positively influence: (a) emotional arousal and (b) liminal experience.
- H4. Natural tourscales positively influence: (a) emotional arousal and (b) liminal experience.
- H5. Emotional arousal positively influences liminal experience.
- H6. Emotional arousal mediates the positive effects of: (a) physical (b) social (c) socially symbolic and (d) natural tourscales on liminal experience.
- H7. Sensation-seeking positively influences liminal experience.

To sum up, the hypotheses model is depicted in Fig 1.

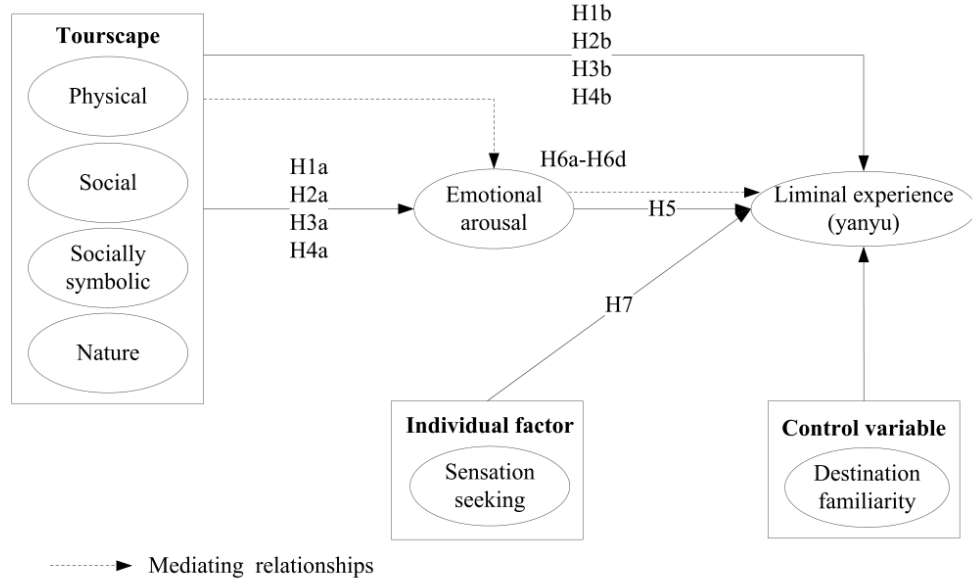


Figure 1: The hypothesis model.

4 Research methodology

Lijiang, located in northwestern Yunnan province, China, was chosen as the focus of this study for its high brand awareness and reputation as a Yanyu destination among Chinese people. Lijiang is a multi-ethnic community which includes Han, Naxi, Yi, Lisu, Pumi, Bai, Zang, and others. The Old Town of Lijiang is located in Lijiang City, which is a UNESCO Heritage Site. The data in Table 1 indicate that among the 422 participants.

Table 1: Sample profile.

name	value	Frequency	Percent
age	under 20	8	4.37%
	21-30	136	74.32%
	31-40	21	11.48%
	above 41	18	9.84%
edu	senior high school and below	29	15.85%
	university	49	26.78%
	master and above	105	57.38%
gender	male	75	40.98%
	female	108	59.02%
income	under 1500	23	12.57%
	1500-3000	27	14.75%
	3001-5000	64	34.97%
	5001-7500	38	20.77%
	above 7501	31	16.94%
time	1	156	85.25%
	2-3	19	10.38%
	4-5	2	1.09%
	> 6	6	3.28%

5 Results

The CFA results showed that the item (SY4, concentric lock) of a socially symbolic tourscape was lower than 0.5 (0.493), so this item was removed and a new CFA was conducted. Deleting this item is appropriate in that concentric lock is not as popular as in other socially symbolic toursapes such as doodle drawings in Lijiang. As shown in Table 2, all factor loadings were above 0.5.

Table 2: CFA results of tourscape.

items	Loading	CR	AVE
Physical_tourscape		0.774	0.536
Ambient	0.717		
Space	0.757		
Signs	0.718		
Social_tourscape		0.832	0.504
SO1. Casual behavior	0.515		
SO2. Trust	0.797		
SO3. Equal contacts	0.689		
SO4. Casual communication	0.742		
SO5. Communicate without worries	0.736		
Socially_symbolic_tourscape		0.757	0.513
SY1. Legends of love	0.785		
SY2. Modern love story	0.743		
SY3. Doodle love	0.609		
Natural_tourscape		0.779	0.539
NA1. Being away	0.677		
NA2. Fascination	0.833		
NA3. Compatibility	0.714		

Table 3: Discriminant validity test of tourscape.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Physical_tourscape	12.0	1.42	0.732			
Social_tourscape	16.6	3.41	0.425	0.710		
Socially_symbolic_tourscape	10.4	1.97	0.401	0.354	0.717	
Natural_tourscape	11.0	2.39	0.482	0.445	0.389	0.734

Note:

The bold diagonal elements are square roots of AVE for each construct. Below diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs.

Table 4: EFA and CFA results of liminal experience.

items	loading_cfa	eigenvalue	variance explained	loadings_efa	CR	AVE
romance_and_relax		7.84	0.189		0.887	0.519
LE1. Wonderful	0.815			0.823		
LE14. Freedom	0.803			0.690		
LE11. Relaxed	0.760			0.699		
LE2. Romantic	0.747			0.648		
LE15. Unconstraint	0.668			0.476		
LE5. Unique	0.707			0.557		
LE4. Legendary	0.596			0.424		
chance_encounter		1.66	0.158		0.866	0.566
LE10. A chance acquaintance	0.798			0.748		
LE9. Meet different people	0.658			0.683		
LE8. Encounter	0.796			0.669		
LE6. Meet by chance	0.749			0.617		
LE7. Mystery	0.743			0.563		
sense_of_loss		1.41	0.143		0.876	0.702
LE16. Sense of loss	0.818			0.750		
LE17. Anxiety	0.835			0.809		
LE18. A hint of sadness	0.862			0.761		
aberration		1.14	0.096		0.692	0.428
LE3. Dubious relationship	0.597			0.792		
LE13. Exceeding the bounds	0.710			0.450		
LE12. Self-indulgence	0.635			0.341		

Table 5: Discriminant validity test of sub-dimensions of liminal experience (AVE test).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
romance_and_relax	26.64	4.65	0.720			
chance_encounter	17.26	3.76	0.664	0.752		
sense_of_loss	9.01	2.73	0.542	0.441	0.838	
aberration	8.76	2.41	0.517	0.473	0.485	0.654

Note:

The bold diagonal elements are square roots of AVE for each construct. Below diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs.

Table 6: Discriminant validity test of sub-dimensions of liminal experience (confidence interval test).

lhs	rhs	est	ci.lower	ci.upper
romance_and_relax	chance_encounter	0.729	0.644	0.814
romance_and_relax	sense_of_loss	0.595	0.486	0.704
romance_and_relax	aberration	0.613	0.484	0.742
chance_encounter	sense_of_loss	0.496	0.370	0.622
chance_encounter	aberration	0.621	0.490	0.752
sense_of_loss	aberration	0.622	0.492	0.752

Table 7: The overall measurement model.

items	Loading	alpha	CR	AVE
Physical_tourscape		0.775	0.769	0.534
Ambient	0.694			
Space	0.790			
Signs	0.700			
Social_tourscape		0.824	0.835	0.504
SO1. Casual behavior	0.530			
SO2. Trust	0.792			
SO3. Equal contacts	0.698			
SO4. Casual communication	0.736			
SO5. Communicate without worries	0.731			
Socially_symbolic_tourscape		0.753	0.748	0.505
SY1. Legends of love	0.739			
SY2. Modern love story	0.780			
SY3. Doodle love	0.609			
Natural_tourscape		0.776	0.780	0.539
NA1. Being away	0.677			
NA2. Fascination	0.822			
NA3. Compatibility	0.725			
Emotional_arousal		0.840	0.850	0.522
EM1. Romantic	0.648			
EM2. Love	0.809			
EM3. Lustful	0.669			
EM4. Excitement	0.752			
EM5. Desired	0.719			
Sensation_seeking		0.662	0.656	0.392
Experience_seeking	0.651			
Thrill_adventure_seeking	0.651			
Disinhibition	0.580			
Destination_familiarity		0.743	0.768	0.523
FM1. Know about Lijiang	0.816			
FM2. Know more than ordinary	0.819			
FM3. Know more than friends	0.515			
Liminal_experience		0.796	0.837	0.602
romance_and_relax	0.864			
chance_encounter	0.755			
sense_of_loss	0.654			
aberration	0.601			

Table 8: Discriminant validity test of all constructs (AVE test).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Physical_tourscape	11.96	1.42	0.731							
Social_tourscape	16.56	3.41	0.425	0.710						
Socially_symbolic_tourscape	10.42	1.97	0.401	0.354	0.711					
Natural_tourscape	10.95	2.39	0.482	0.445	0.389	0.734				
Emotional_arousal	16.06	3.65	0.223	0.321	0.378	0.422	0.723			
Sensation_seeking	19.08	3.96	0.238	0.338	0.336	0.349	0.384	0.626		
Destination_familiarity	8.55	2.05	0.154	0.180	0.214	0.144	0.238	0.321	0.723	
Liminal_experience	61.66	11.03	0.515	0.595	0.545	0.615	0.605	0.455	0.299	0.776

Note:

The bold diagonal elements are square roots of AVE for each construct. Below diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs.

Table 9: Discriminant validity test of all constructs (confidence interval test).

lhs	rhs	est	ci.lower	ci.upper
Physical_tourscape	Social_tourscape	0.528	0.393	0.664
Physical_tourscape	Socially_symbolic_tourscape	0.520	0.375	0.666
Physical_tourscape	Natural_tourscape	0.616	0.489	0.744
Physical_tourscape	Emotional_arousal	0.252	0.089	0.415
Physical_tourscape	Sensation_seeking	0.348	0.169	0.527
Physical_tourscape	Destination_familiarity	0.161	-0.011	0.334
Physical_tourscape	Liminal_experience	0.662	0.548	0.777
Social_tourscape	Socially_symbolic_tourscape	0.467	0.322	0.612
Social_tourscape	Natural_tourscape	0.538	0.407	0.670
Social_tourscape	Emotional_arousal	0.374	0.228	0.520
Social_tourscape	Sensation_seeking	0.422	0.258	0.586
Social_tourscape	Destination_familiarity	0.191	0.027	0.355
Social_tourscape	Liminal_experience	0.707	0.609	0.805
Socially_symbolic_tourscape	Natural_tourscape	0.542	0.402	0.682
Socially_symbolic_tourscape	Emotional_arousal	0.474	0.331	0.616
Socially_symbolic_tourscape	Sensation_seeking	0.472	0.304	0.640
Socially_symbolic_tourscape	Destination_familiarity	0.221	0.051	0.392
Socially_symbolic_tourscape	Liminal_experience	0.696	0.587	0.806
Natural_tourscape	Emotional_arousal	0.489	0.352	0.626
Natural_tourscape	Sensation_seeking	0.475	0.312	0.639
Natural_tourscape	Destination_familiarity	0.137	-0.033	0.308
Natural_tourscape	Liminal_experience	0.772	0.680	0.864
Emotional_arousal	Sensation_seeking	0.510	0.357	0.663
Emotional_arousal	Destination_familiarity	0.240	0.080	0.400
Emotional_arousal	Liminal_experience	0.683	0.582	0.785
Sensation_seeking	Destination_familiarity	0.371	0.199	0.544
Sensation_seeking	Liminal_experience	0.597	0.456	0.739
Destination_familiarity	Liminal_experience	0.316	0.161	0.471

Table 10: Estimated standardized coefficients.

label	path	est	z	pvalue
H1a	Physical->Emotional_arousal	-0.365	-2.013	0.044
H1b	Physical->Liminal_experience	1.870	2.164	0.030
H2a	Social->Emotional_arousal	0.180	1.340	0.180
H2b	Social->Liminal_experience	2.276	3.362	0.001
H3a	Symbolic->Emotional_arousal	0.318	2.984	0.003
H3b	Symbolic->Liminal_experience	1.095	2.085	0.037
H4a	Natural->Emotional_arousal	0.311	3.033	0.002
H4b	Natural->Liminal_experience	1.426	2.787	0.005
H5	Emotional_arousal->Liminal_experience	2.064	4.153	0.000
H7	Sensation_seeking->Liminal_experience	0.188	0.596	0.552
-	Destination_familiarity->Liminal_experience	0.506	1.458	0.145

Table 11: Mediating effect (bootstrap =2000).

label	Independent variable	Mediator	Dependent variable	ci.lower	ci.upper
H6a	Physical tourscape	Emotional arousal	Liminal experience	-1.553	0.045
H6b	Social tourscape			-0.192	0.936
H6c	Socially symbolic tourscape			0.153	1.162
H6d	Natural tourscape			0.161	1.122

6 Conclusions, contributions and implications

This study takes two theoretical approaches to empirically investigate the factors influencing tourists' liminal experience at a Yanyu destination-Lijiang. The SOR theory is applied to examine the influences of a tourscape on tourists' emotional arousal and liminal experience, and then sensation seeking theory is used to investigate the effects of sensation-seeking on liminal experience.

The model should be further investigated and implemented with other more generic perspectives. First, in order to generalize the findings to a wider population, it would be worthwhile to expand this re-search to other Yanyu destinations such as Yangshuo and Fenghuang. Second, this study uses a quantitative method to empirically test the hypothesis model based on cross-sectional data, and future research could use qualitative methods to explore how the image of Yanyu has developed in the Chinese domestic market. Further, as liminal experience is a unique and complex phenomenon, future studies are needed to investigate other antecedents of liminal experience, such as tourist motivation, as well as consequences of liminal experience such as destination loyalty.

References

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