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CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION APPLIED TO TOURISM DESTINATION

WooMi Jo Phillips
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ABSTRACT. This empirical study applied the marketing concept of conspicuous consumption (CC) to tourism destinations. First, six conspicuous (Las Vegas, New York City, Los Angeles, Miami, Washington, DC, and Boston) and inconspicuous destinations (Kansas City, Branson, St. Paul, Omaha, Fargo, and Boise) destinations were identified. In all, 17 conspicuous consumption measurement items were adapted from a previous study and were loaded onto four factors: interpersonal mediation, status demonstration, materialistic hedonism, and communication of belonging. Three out of the four factors had significant relationships with intentions to visit conspicuous destinations. Study implications and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

KEYWORDS. Conspicuous consumption (CC), conspicuous and inconspicuous tourism destinations, visiting intention (VI)

INTRODUCTION

People purchase, use, and own certain goods and services to enhance their sense of self, to present an image of what they are like, to represent what they feel and think, and to bring about the types of social relationships they wish to have (Belk, 1988; Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999; Ewen, 1988; Goffman, 1959). Since 1970, this social phenomenon has been recognized and apparent in the consumer market (Mason, 2000). Consumers are motivated by a desire to impress others with their ability to pay particularly high prices for prestige products. Thus, impressing others and gaining social standing influence consumers' decision to purchase certain products and services. This consumption tendency has been studied under terminologies such as "conspicuous," "status," "brand," "symbolic," and "luxury consumption" in sociology, economy, and consumer psychology and behavior (Dittmar, 1992; Eastman et al., 1999; Mason, 1981; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987; Raju, Lonial, & Mangold, 1995; Solomon, 1996; Veblen, 1899). Particularly, conspicuous consumption (CC) describes consumption of a product to demonstrate the superior status of the individual to others (Packard, 1959). The key objective of conspicuous consumers is to impress others by ostentatious display of wealth (Mason, 1981) to bolster their self-esteem and thus maintain

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or improve their social status (Veblen, 1934). Certain products or services like automobiles, clothing, cosmetics, and mobile phones can be used to display wealth.

Conspicuous consumption (CC) also can be also applied to choices of vacation destination. Because travel destination choice lies in the discretion of the consumer, the choice of travel destination is ideal for a study of CC. The CC concept can explain a tourist's desire to show off his/her economic success and status to impress others by taking a trip to luxury or prestige destinations (e.g., Dubai, Paris). Demonstrating the economic ability to visit a luxury resort presents a prestigious social self-image to others and enhances one's position in society. This phenomenon, however, may be more meaningful to some tourists than to others in making destination choices. Those who place great value on improving social standing and demonstrating social status through acquisition and consumption of products or services will be more likely to visit destinations that are more prestigious, noticeable, and conspicuous. Others, however, care less about visiting a more conspicuous destination to impress others. The concept of CC has not been investigated in tourist behavior intention. Before generalizing the concept to tourists and tourism destinations, some preliminary questions require answers. First, can one destination be designated more conspicuous than other destinations? Can tourism destinations be categorized as conspicuous or inconspicuous? Previous consumer researchers have identified conspicuous and inconspicuous consumer products (Kaiser, 1990; Goldsmith, Flynn, & Eastman, 1996; Wong & Zhou, 2005). From their findings, it may be possible to assume that one tourism destination is more conspicuous than another. Thus, identifying conspicuous and inconspicuous destinations would be essential to study CC in tourism. Second, characteristics of conspicuous destinations also need to be investigated. What would make tourists view one destination as conspicuous? The dimensions of destination conspicuousness would be another important question to answer.

Researchers in tourism need to understand how visiting a conspicuous destination can satisfy tourists' need to give a favorable impression and to manage their identities by receiving preferential treatment in the process. This study will help tourism researchers and destination marketers understand and segment today's very self-expressive and identity-conscious tourist market better, and thus develop and position products to better fill tourists' psychological needs.

The specific objectives of this study are (a) to identify examples of conspicuous and inconspicuous tourist destinations in the United States; (b) to investigate dimensions of destination conspicuousness by adopting conspicuous consumption scales developed by Marcoux, Filiatrault, and Chéron (1995); and (c) to determine how these dimensions influence tourists' visiting intention (VI) toward conspicuous destinations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conspicuous Consumption (CC)

One important motive influencing modern consumers is the desire to gain status or social prestige through acquisition and consumption of goods (Goldsmith et al., 1996). This important social and cultural phenomenon influences today's consumer consumption decisions and almost all daily events. Two terms refer to this: conspicuous consumption and status consumption. Most researchers in consumer behavior and psychology do not distinguish between these two terms. Both conspicuous and status consumption are often used in the literature as if they are inherently the same phenomena. One definition of status consumption reads, ". . . the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through the conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer and symbolize status both for the individual and surrounding significant others" (Kilsheimer, 1993, p. 341). On the other hand, CC is often used to refer to the practice of using products to signal social status aspirations to other consumers (Mason, 1981; Braun & Wicklund, 1989). From these definitions, status consumption focuses on gaining higher social

status, while CC emphasizes public display. While many researchers investigated the links between CC and status goods (Bernheim, 1994; Bourdieu, 1984; Echikson, 1994; Ferstman & Weiss, 1992; Ireland, 1992), O'Cass and Frost (2002) stated the terms both mean the same thing; CC and status consumption thus are often treated interchangeably.

Generally, consumers use CC to enhance their prestige in society, which can be achieved through public demonstration signaling wealth and communicating affluence to others (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). One early researcher in CC, Veblen (1934), also stated that CC includes expenditures made to inflate the ego. Mason (1981) added that CC is also coupled with the ostentatious display of wealth. Bagwell and Bernheim (1996) have argued that Veblen's theory of CC is based on the premise that those who put wealth in evidence are rewarded with preferential treatment by social contacts and that such treatment depends signaling wealth through price, quantity, or quality.

Product conspicuousness refers to the extent to which a product is consumed in public, not in private. Bourne (1957) discussed one form of conspicuousness: visibility. This relates to products used either publicly (where consumption can be witnessed) or privately. According to Piron (2000), for consumption to be conspicuous, it has to be a social event, publicly witnessed by other consumers. Therefore, publicly used products are more conspicuously consumed/used than products that are privately consumed/used. Thus, visitors to a popular upscale resort might be more likely to talk about their vacations with family, friends, and colleagues than visitors to a lesser known tourist destination.

Some researchers have categorized conspicuous and inconspicuous products. Examples of conspicuous consumer products are clothing, automobiles, sunglasses, and mobile phones. Examples of inconspicuous consumer products are shampoo, toothpaste, bottled water, and beer (Goldsmith et al., 1996; Piron, 2000; Wong & Zhou, 2005). In the context of tourism, Sirgy and Su (2000) mentioned a term called "destination conspicuousness." A conspicuous destination is a destination where tourists believe they can be observed and/or judged by significant others. Categorizing tourist destinations as conspicuous or inconspicuous would depend on such things as culture, country of origin, resident regions, age, gender, income level, and other consumer social demographics.

Dimensions of Conspicuous Consumption (CC)

Marcoux et al. (1995) developed and explained five meanings of CC: *interpersonal mediation*, *materialistic hedonism*, *communication of belonging*, *status demonstration*, and *ostentation*. Interpersonal mediation corresponds to the influence of social relations; materialistic hedonism suggests pleasant aspects of consumption; communication of belonging associates in a positive or negative way to demographic, socioeconomic, ethnic, or cultural stereotypes and/or groups; social status demonstration signals success, wealth, and prestige; and ostentation relates to purchasing expensive products known by others (Marcoux et al., 1997). Applying these meanings to tourism destinations, tourists who are concerned about their social image are more likely to visit destinations that can induce respect, value, and popularity from others (*interpersonal mediation*); destinations that can make tourists feel unique and trendy (*materialistic hedonism*); destinations that make tourists feel a sense of belonging to their social groups because others have visited the same destinations (*communication of belonging*); destinations that symbolize success, prestige, and wealth to tourists (*status demonstration*); and destinations known as expensive and luxurious (*ostentation*).

These five dimensions of CC meanings included 18 items (Marcoux et al., 1997) applied to Polish consumers' purchase preferences of products made in Western countries. While the original study used consumer products like jeans, sports shoes, and watches to validate the scale, the present study adopts the same scale to discover dimensions and items pertinent to tourism destinations.

Goldsmith et al. (1996) stated that "one important motivating force that influences a wide range of consumer behavior is the desire

to gain status or social prestige from the acquisition and consumption of goods" (p. 309). This notion is consistent with Eastman et al. (1999) who asserted that "the more a consumer seeks status, the more he/she will engage in behaviors" (p. 43). The meanings that consumers place on gaining status or social prestige through acquiring and consuming goods influence the consumption decisions of modern consumers (Goldsmith et al., 1996). The more meaning that CC has for consumers, the more concerned they will be about enhancing their status and image, demonstrating their wealth, confirming social relations, and finally feeling good about themselves through such consumption. Thus, these motives influence consumer preferences for more conspicuous products and services. Marcoux et al.'s (1997) five dimensions of CC significantly influenced the Polish consumers' preferences for Western products. Wang and Chen (2004) also noted that Chinese consumers who see more meaning in CC have stronger intentions to buy imported products perceived as status symbols (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999; Batra, Venkatram, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000; Mason, 1981). Thus, the same proposition might be true for tourists who visit conspicuous destinations. Tourists who believe they can enhance their social status and self-image by visiting luxurious destinations for their vacations and to whom CC has more meaning are more likely to chose conspicuous than inconspicuous destinations. Thus, this study also investigates tourist visiting intentions to conspicuous destinations based on the dimensions of CC.

METHODOLOGY

Phase 1

This study comprised two parts. The first part of the study identified conspicuous and inconspicuous leisure travel destinations within the United States. The destinations identified as conspicuous were used as stimuli in the second part of this study. For the first part, two separate survey groups were formed with 50 participants in each group. Participants were recruited randomly among students (both undergraduate and graduate), faculty, and administrative staff from the business and hospitality management departments at a major Midwestern university. The first group was asked to provide three conspicuous and three inconspicuous leisure destinations within the United States that best fit the adjectives that were provided for each type of destination. Four synonyms were provided for the conspicuous destination: *prestigious*, *noticeable*, *ostentatious*, and *pretentious*; another four synonyms were provided for the inconspicuous destination: *unremarkable*, *ordinary*, *low key*, and *obscure*. These adjectives were extracted by searching synonyms for each term from Merriam-Webster online dictionary (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/) and by consulting a professor from the English department at the same university. After scrutinizing the adjectives, participants listed three destinations for each category. No examples for each category were provided.

Table 1 provides the destinations for each category obtained through this process. The conspicuous and inconspicuous destinations are organized by the number of times they appeared in the survey. Destinations mentioned more than once are listed upper portion of the Table 1, and all destination mentioned just once are listed at the bottom. More destinations appeared for the inconspicuous category than the conspicuous. The most mentioned conspicuous destination is New York City (New York), and the most mentioned inconspicuous destination was Kansas City (between Kansas and Missouri). Interestingly, several destinations were listed in both categories (conspicuous and inconspicuous). These overlapping destinations are italicized in Table 1. For example, San Diego, San Francisco, and Los Angeles (all in California) were listed as both conspicuous and inconspicuous.

The second survey group validated the results from the first group. For the second group, another set of 50 participants was recruited as in the first survey. No person from the first group participated in the second group. Six conspicuous and six inconspicuous destinations extracted from the first survey were presented randomly to the second group. For conspicuous

TABLE 1. Samples of Conspicuous and Inconspicuous Tourism Destinations in the United States

Conspicuous destinations	Counts	Inconspicuous destinations	Counts
New York City, NY	19	Kansas City, KS/MO	9
Los Angeles, CA	12	Branson, MO	6
Las Vegas, NV	9	St. Louis, MO	5
Miami, FL	6	Topeka, KS	4
Washington, DC	6	Manhattan, KS	4
Boston, MA	6	*Denver, CO*	*3*
Chicago, IL	5	Atlantic City, NJ	2
Honolulu, HI	5	*Boston, MA*	*2*
Aspen, CO	3	Dallas, TX	2
Grand Canyon, AZ	3	*Key West, FL*	*2*
Orlando, FL	3	Lake of Ozark, MO	2
Austin, TX	2	Santa Fe, NM	2
Denver, CO	2	St. Paul, MN	2
San Francisco, CA	2	Wyoming General	2
1 Count		**1 Count**	
Anaheim (CA), *San Diego* (*CA*), *Daytona* (*FL*), Ft. Lauderdale (FL), Key West (FL), Juneau (AK), Mt. McKinley (AK), Philadelphia (PA), *South Padre Island* (*TX*), Yosemite National Park (WY)		Clinton (MO), Springfield (MO), *Aspen* (*CO*), Colorado Spring (CO), Vail (CO), Dodge City (KS), Garden City (KS), Liberal (KS), *San Diego* (*CA*), *San Francisco* (*CA*), *Los Angeles* (*CA*), Hot Spring (SD), Pierre (SD), Mitchell (SD), Corpus Christi (TX), *South Padre Island* (*TX*), San Antonio (TX), Galveston (TX), Houston (TX), Jackson Hole (WY), Cheyenne (WY), Omaha (NE), Lincoln (NE), *Daytona* (*FL*), Panama City (FL), Destin (FL), *Orlando* (*FL*), Nashville (TN), Gatlinburg (TN), Fargo (ND), Detroit (MI), Indianapolis (IN), *Chicago* (*IL*), Little Rock (AR), Moab (UT), New Orleans (LA), Oklahoma City (OK), *Philadelphia* (*PA*), Salt Lake City (UT), Sandusky (OH), Seattle (WA), Boise (ID)	

Note. Destinations listed in both conspicuous and inconspicuous categories are italicized.

destinations, six destinations (New York City, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Miami, Washington, DC, and Boston) were chosen from the list. For inconspicuous destinations, six destinations (Kansas City, Branson, St. Paul, Omaha, Fargo, and Boise) were chosen. As seen in Table 1, the top ranked inconspicuous destinations were mostly from Midwestern states. To avoid one concentrated area, other destinations from the list were randomly selected. Additionally, destinations that overlapped with conspicuous destinations were omitted from the selection. Respondents were asked to mark each of the 12 destinations as either conspicuous or inconspicuous based on the same two sets of four synonyms (Category A: *prestigious*, *noticeable*, *ostentatious*, and *pretentious* for conspicuous; and Category B: *unremarkable*, *ordinary*, *low key*, and *obscure* for inconspicuous) provided. The respondents could only mark one category for each destination.

Table 2 illustrates the results of the second survey. Most of the destinations were identified distinctively as either conspicuous or inconspicuous. For example, 47 respondents (94%) labeled Las Vegas as conspicuous while only 3 respondents labeled it as inconspicuous. Similarly, 49 survey respondents said Fargo was inconspicuous while only 1 person said it was conspicuous. More than 80% of respondents labeled all conspicuous destinations as conspicuous. Clearly, the results of the first survey were verified. For inconspicuous, four out of six destinations were labeled as inconspicuous by more than 80% of respondents. However, Omaha was labeled inconspicuous by 76% of

TABLE 2. Verification of Conspicuous and Inconspicuous Destinations ($n = 50$)

Destinations: City, state	Category A: Conspicuous	Category B: Inconspicuous
Las Vegas, Nevada	47 (94%)	3 (6%)
New York City, New York	45 (90%)	5 (10%)
Los Angeles, California	44 (88%)	6 (12%)
Miami, Florida	44 (88%)	6 (12%)
Washington, District of Columbia	42 (84%)	8 (16%)
Boston, Massachusetts	42 (84%)	8 (16%)
Fargo, North Dakota	1 (2%)	49 (98%)
Kansas City, Kansas/Missouri	3 (6%)	47 (94%)
Boise, Idaho	3 (6%)	47 (94%)
Branson, Missouri	6 (12%)	44 (88%)
Omaha, Nebraska	12 (24%)	38 (76%)
St. Paul, Minnesota	15 (30%)	35 (70%)

the respondents, and St. Paul by 70%, making them not as distinctively inconspicuous as other destinations. The 70% versus 30% ratio is still, however, very distinctive. Thus, these results also verified the results of the first survey.

From these two surveys, the three conspicuous destinations—New York City, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas—and the three inconspicuous destinations—Fargo, Kansas City, and Boise—were selected as stimuli for the next part of this study.

Phase 2

The second part of this study aimed to identify various dimensions of conspicuousness of tourism destinations. A simple survey was developed with the 18 measurement items from Marcoux et al. (1997), using a 7-point Likert type (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, and 7 = strongly agree) scale for CC. Words for all 18 items were modified so they better fit tourism (e.g., from "Western products mean wealth" to "Traveling to destination XY means wealth."). The three conspicuous destinations identified in Phase 1 were presented to the respondents along with the 18 measurement items. Even though the three cities might be distinct in level of conspicuousness, a group comparison test showed no significant differences among the three cities.

The 3-item, 7-point Likert type (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*) scale for tourist visiting intention (VI) to the three conspicuous destinations was also adapted from Ajzen's work (2002) for measuring behavioral intention. Three items state, "I intend to spend my next vacation in one of the three destinations"; "I will try to go to one of the three destinations in next 24 months, if I cannot make it this year"; and "I would like to go to one of the three destinations in near future." Respondent demographic information was also collected. A pilot test was conducted on 40 undergraduate and graduate students in the hospitality program of a Midwestern university. Based on the pilot study and reliability test (Cronbach's alpha cutoff of .70), the survey was slightly revised to correct wording.

Sample and Data Collection

With approval of the university administration, the email addresses were obtained for university faculty and staff. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed via the university's online survey system to 1,860 faculty and administrative staff using their electronic mail addresses. The survey was set up to send out three times in 15 days, once every 5 days. As an incentive, respondents were informed that one U.S. dollar was donated to the university foundation for each complete survey at the end of the survey. A total of 323 responses were returned. After carefully examining the data, 52 responses were removed because of incomplete data. Thus, 271 responses were coded for data analysis, resulting in a usable response rate of 15%.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Table 3 shows the 271 respondents were almost evenly divided between male and female. More than half of them were between ages 41 and 60 (54.8%). Approximately, 86% had at least a 4-year college level education, and 72% were married. The previous year household annual income was almost evenly distributed among income brackets from 30,001 and $150,000 except for the income between 75,001 and $90,000 (14%). Not surprising in the Midwest, about 84% of respondents were Caucasians.

Dimensions of Conspicuous Tourism Destination

To validate the 18 conspicuousness measurement items and to adapt them to tourism, a series of tests on the measurement items and on the scale's psychometric properties were conducted. Item analysis, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, scale reliability, unidimensionality, and convergent and discriminant validity were examined (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003).

Item Analyses

First, all 18 items were checked for item correlations. The Cronbach's alpha was .93, indicating the reliability among items. However, one item, "I travel to these destinations, because it is more expensive to visit than other destinations" had low correlation with other items. Therefore, this item was deleted.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

A series of exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted on the remaining 17 items to identify the item dimensions. The initial EFA identified four dimensions with a cumulative percentage of variance explaining 71.93% of the factors and with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) of .92. This indicates the sample accuracy is more than 92%, which is well over the suggested threshold value of .60 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The Bartlett's test of sphericity was 3107.77 ($p < .001$). Items in each factor were checked for low factor loading (.40 or higher), high cross-loadings (> .40), or low communalities (< .30). Factors with an eigenvalue more than 1 are captured for each factor grouping. From this process, all 17 items were kept as shown in Table 4. The original five dimensions of CC (Marcoux et al., 1995) were changed

TABLE 3. Description of the Respondents ($n = 271$)

Criteria	Case	%	Criteria	Case	%
Gender			Education		
Female	136	50.2	High school diploma	25	9.2
Male	134	49.4	2-year college/Associate degree	12	4.4
Age			4-year college/Bachelor degree	67	24.7
30 or less	47	17.4	Masters degree	62	22.9
31–40	53	19.5	Doctoral degree	104	38.4
41–50	75	27.7	Relationship status		
51–60	73	27.1	Single	53	19.6
61–70	21	7.7	Married	195	72.0
Above 71	1	0.4	Divorced/Widowed	16	5.9
Annually household income			Unmarried, living with partner	6	2.2
Below $20,000	22	8.1	Ethnicity		
20,001 – $30,000	19	7.0	American Indian	1	0.4
30,001 – $50,000	63	23.2	Asian/Pacific Islander	18	6.6
50,001 – $75,000	64	23.6	African American	7	2.6
75,001 – $90,000	40	14.8	Hispanic/Latin American	9	3.4
90,001 – $150,000	55	20.3	White	227	83.8
$150,001 or more	7	2.6	Other	8	3.0

TABLE 4. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Conspicuous Destination Items

Cognitive images (reliability alpha)	Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained
Factor 1: Interpersonal mediation (.92)		8.39	49.36%
Traveling to these destination would increase my value from the point of view of others	.84		
Traveling to these destinations would make me more attractive than others	.83		
Traveling to these destinations allows popularity among my friends and colleagues	.81		
Traveling to these destinations means wealth	.80		
Traveling to these destinations makes me feel more important	.72		
Traveling to these destinations induces respect from others	.66		
I want to travel to these destinations because everybody has been	.61		
By traveling to these destinations, I intent to please others	.47		
Factor 2: Status demonstration (.89)		1.62	9.55%
Traveling to these destinations is a social status symbol for me	.83		
Traveling to these destinations is a symbol of success and prestige	.81		
I travel to these destinations to show off, to be noted	.78		
Factor 3: Materialistic hedonism (.72)		1.21	7.12%
I travel to these destinations to be fashionable	.78		
I travel to these destinations for uniqueness, to have travel experience others do not have	.77		
I travel to these destinations to enhance my image	.66		
If I could afford it, I would travel to these destinations more often	.52		
Factor 4: Communication of belonging (.82)		1.00	5.91%
I want to travel to these destinations because my friends and colleagues have been	.85		
I want to travel to these destinations because my acquaintances have been	.80		
Total variance explained			71.93%

moderately due to the deletion of one item. First, the numbers of dimensions (*interpersonal mediation*, *materialistic hedonism*, *communication of belonging*, *status demonstration*, *ostentation*) are changed from five to four. The biggest change was from the first. The original study included four items labeled as "interpersonal mediation." However, this study included four additional items ("By traveling to these destinations, I intend to please others," "Traveling to these destinations makes me feel more important," "I want to travel to these destinations because everybody has been," and "Traveling to these destination means wealth") from the remaining factors. Since most of the items fell within the first factor, the original label for this factor is used: interpersonal mediation. The items in Factor 2 were similar to the original study other than one item. Thus, the original label "status demonstration" was used. Factor 3 also stayed almost the same as in the original study, but two items were included in Factor 1 ("By traveling to these destinations I intent to please others," and "Traveling to these destinations makes me feel more important"). The same label, materialistic hedonism, was also used. Finally, the numbers of items in Factor 4 were reduced to two. The factor is called "communication of belonging." Thus, the last factor "ostentation" from the original study was omitted. As shown in the Marcoux et al. (1995) study, ostentation had a very low reliability of .49. The item "I travel to these destinations, because it is more expensive to visit than other destinations" shows low correlation with other items, so the item was deleted from this study. The reliability for the other four factors from the original study (ranging from .74–.89) and what we found in this study (ranging from .72–.92) were similar.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 16 (Arbuckle, 2007) was used to evaluate the measurement model to refine the manifest variables for each of four latent variables. The measurement model was estimated from the covariance matrix and was considered for any modification based on suggested modification indices. The model fit indices were shown as χ^2 (113) = 315.83, $p < .000$; non-normed fit index (NFI) = .90; comparative fit index (CFI) = .93; and root mean squared approximation (RMSEA) = .082. The chi-square per degree of freedom (*df*) was 2.80, which is within the acceptable threshold value of 3 (Carmnines & McIver, 1981). However, other indices indicated marginal acceptance. The model can be improved by inspecting item squared multiple correlations and modification indices (Byrne, 2001). As the modification indices suggested, the model was re-estimated after setting three pairs of error covariance as free, and the model fit improved slightly. The chi-square was χ^2 (110) = 262.17, $p < .000$, $\chi^2/df = 2.38$; NFI = .92; CFI = .95; and RMSEA = .07. The modification indices were again carefully investigated. No further items were modified. The final CFA indicated that the 17-item four-dimension model fits the data reasonably well (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998; Hu & Bentler, 1995). In sum, the model was strongly supported. Table 5 shows the results of the final CFA.

Scale Reliability and Unidimensionality

Internal consistency was tested using a reliability test. As seen in Table 6, Cronbach's alpha estimates all exceed the cutoff value of

TABLE 5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Conspicuous Destination Items

Latent variables	Standardized factor loadings	*t*-value
Factor 1: Interpersonal mediation		
Traveling to these destinations would increase my value from the point of view of others	.90	–
Traveling to these destinations would make me more attractive to others	.92	24.33
Traveling to these destinations allows popularity among my friends and colleagues	.82	18.45
Traveling to these destinations means wealth	.85	20.11
Traveling to these destinations makes me feel more important	.76	16.11
Traveling to these destinations induces respect from others	.66	13.00
I want to travel to these destinations because everybody has been	.80	17.70
By traveling to these destinations, I intend to please others	.62	11.81
Factor 2: Status demonstration		
Traveling to these destinations is a social status symbol for me	.94	–
Traveling to these destinations is a symbol of success and prestige	.82	18.37
I travel to these destinations to show off, to be noted	.82	18.32
Factor 3: Materialistic hedonism		
I travel to these destinations to be fashionable	.51	–
I travel to these destinations for uniqueness, to have travel experiences others do not have	.60	7.86
I travel to these destinations to enhance my image	.76	7.09
If I could afford it, I would travel to these destinations more often	.59	6.45
Factor 4: Communication of belonging		
I want to travel to these destinations because my friends and colleagues have been	.76	–
I want to travel to these destinations because my acquaintances have been	.87	11.11

Note. χ^2 (110) = 262.17, $p < .000$; non-normed fit index (NFI) = .92; comparative fit index (CFI) = .95; root mean squared approximation (RMSEA) = .07. All significant at the .001 level.

TABLE 6. Standardized Correlations (Squared), Reliabilities, and Average Variance Extracted

	FC1	FC2	FC3	FC4
FC1: Interpersonal mediation	1			
FC2: Status demonstration	.65 (.42)	1		
FC3: Materialistic hedonism	.53 (.28)	.51 (.26)	1	
FC4: Communication of belonging	.62 (.38)	.43 (.18)	.44 (.19)	1
Mean	3.03	3.99	4.68	3.61
Standard deviation	1.31	1.58	1.19	1.57
Cronbach's alpha	.92	.89	.72	.82
Composite reliability	.93	.90	.71	.80
Average variance extracted (AVE)	.64	.74	.40	.67

Note. Values in parentheses are squared correlations.

.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), ranging from .72–.92, and the composite reliability ranged from .71 to .93. Both tests indicated acceptable reliabilities. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE), which estimates the amount of variance captured by a construct's measure relative to measurement error between each pair of constructs (Hair et al., 1998), can also test reliability. The suggested cutoff threshold is .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Factors 1, 2, and 4 met the cutoff value. However, AVE for materialistic hedonism (Factor 3) was .40, below the acceptable criterion of .50. Unidimensionality measures how well each observed item reflects the latent variables. This can be tested by investigating the standardized factor loadings, shown in Table 5. All standardized factor loadings successfully met the minimum value of .40, ranging from .51–.94.

Convergent and Discriminant Validity

The AVE was also used for testing convergent and discriminant validity. For convergent validity, as in reliability, three factors out of four met the suggested minimum value of .50. Thus, a marginal convergent validity was found with three factors (1, 2, and 4). The standardized factor loadings can be also used to test convergent validity. As shown in Table 5, all factor loadings were significant at the .001 level. However, the factor loadings for materialist hedonism were all somewhat lower than other factors, indicating some consistency with the AVE results.

To test discriminant validity, the AVEs were compared with the squared correlations between constructs. This is the most rigorous way to test discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table 6, the model supported good discriminant validity; all squared correlations between each pair of constructs were less than the AVE.

Visiting Intention (VI) to Conspicuous Destinations

A linear least squares regression test was conducted to investigate the effect of destination conspicuousness on the respondents' VI to the identified conspicuous destinations (New York, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles) in Phase 1. The four destination conspicuousness factors from the factor analyses were regressed on VI. The factor scores and the mean score of the three VIs were used in the regression model. The linearity between dependent and independent variables and multicollinearity were checked. All VIF (variance inflation factors) met the criterion value of 10 (Kennedy, 1998), ranging from 1.53–2.39. Table 7 presents the results of the regression analysis.

The regression results indicate that three destination conspicuousness factors (interpersonal mediation, status demonstration, and materialistic hedonism) significantly influence respondents' VI, meaning self-image would be enhanced by traveling to the conspicuous destinations (interpersonal mediation), so that factor would be very important when a vacation decision is made. The more visitors believe that conspicuous destinations will help to enhance their

TABLE 7. Effect of Destination Conspicuousness on Visiting Intention to Three Destinations

Regression	Visiting intention	
Conspicuousness factors	Standardized coefficients (β)	*t*-value
FC1: Interpersonal mediation	.21**	2.69
FC2: Status demonstration	−.22**	−3.22
FC3: Materialistic hedonism	.53**	8.70
FC4: Communication of belonging	.06**	.90
F-value	35.49	
R	.59	
R-square	.35	

Note. $^{**}p < .01$.

self-image, the higher their intention to visit these destination. Interestingly, status demonstration showed a negative significant relationship with VI, so the more respondents believe people visit a destination to present successful social status, the less they are willing to visit that destination. The destination as a good way of showing off their vacation to other people actually diminishes the desire to pick that destination as their vacation spot. This contradicts the original claim that people who care about publicizing what they can afford to do for their vacation are more likely to visit conspicuous destinations to let others know their social status. Materialistic hedonism was the strongest positive influence ($\beta = .53$, $t = 8.70$) on VI among the four factors. The more the respondents believed the three destinations were trendy, fashionable, and unique, the more they were inclined to visit the destinations. They were more willing to travel to a destination if fewer people have traveled there. This makes a destination unique for them. The last factor, communication of belonging, had no effect on any of intentions, knowing their friends and acquaintances have been to a certain destination would not affect their decision to go there. The test results also indicated that 35% of variance (the explanatory power) in VI was explained by the four destination conspicuousness factors.

DISCUSSION

This research adapts the relatively new construct of conspicuous consumption in tourism to see if tourism destinations can be categorized as conspicuous or inconspicuous. Conspicuous destinations (New York City, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Miami, Washington DC, and Boston) and inconspicuous destinations (Kansas City, Branson, Denver, Omaha, Fargo, and Boise) in the United States were identified by the Midwesterners. This finding indicates some evidence that tourists perceive destination conspicuousness at different levels and that a tourism destination can be either conspicuous or inconspicuous. Not surprisingly, most major cities in the United States were categorized as conspicuous and less well-known destinations and smaller cities were perceived as inconspicuous. As Sirgy and Su (2000) stated, tourists have a higher chance to be observed and/or noticed by others when they visit conspicuous destinations like New York City, Los Angeles, or Las Vegas than when they visit Boise, Branson, or Fargo. Some destinations were not clearly categorized as conspicuous or inconspicuous (e.g., Denver, Boston, Key West, Aspen, San Diego, South Padre Island, Daytona, Orlando, and Philadelphia). Most of these destinations would be recognized as second-tier cities or suburbs of major cities. Since these second-tier cities share many of the same characteristics of both major cities and smaller towns, some people could perceive them either conspicuous or inconspicuous. These cities are well-known (conspicuous character) to most people, but at the same time, they are small enough for people to enjoy their time at these destinations without displaying conspicuous consumption.

Identifying such neutral destinations is another important outcome of this study. In sum, tourism destinations can be categorized as inconspicuous, neutral, or conspicuous.

Destination marketing organizations need to know how their destinations are perceived by potential visitors. People who visit conspicuous destinations might be more satisfied with their visits if they have opportunities to share their visits with friends and acquaintances before and after the visit. Offering special dining or lodging experiences, directing visitors to high-end brand retail stores for shopping, or offering special events (e.g., fashion shows) could provide ways for visitors to flaunt their visit to the destination to create a "wow" effect on others. Destination marketing organizations can better target their market and develop more appropriate tourism products according to the level of perceived destination conspicuousness. All three levels—conspicuous, neutral, and inconspicuous—must be considered. All destinations, whatever their level, should periodically survey their visitors to find out how average visitors perceive them. Investigating tourists' behaviors and activities commonly occurring will also serve to segment visitors. While people who like to visit conspicuous destinations might participate in more notable tourist activities (e.g., attending a special show), visitors to inconspicuous destinations might prefer quiet time with their family.

Since there is no scale measure to tourism destination conspicuousness specifically, this study adapted 17 measurement items from Marcoux et al. (1997). Four destination conspicuousness dimensions (interpersonal mediation, materialistic hedonism, communication of belonging, and status demonstration) were identified from these items, changing the numbers of dimensions from five to four by omitting one item because of low correlation. The various test results indicated that the four dimensions are a relatively good fit for tourism destination conspicuousness. However, the measurement items for materialistic hedonism were loaded somewhat weakly. Both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were only marginally satisfied. The low average variance extracted (AVE; .40) was also problematic. This means that these four items do not represent materialistic hedonism very well, possibly because we used measuring items developed for consumer products. Even though the wording for the measure items were modified for tourism, the measurement items borrowed from consumer behavior research may not fully reflect the values that tourists might use in choosing conspicuous destinations. For this reason, we see a need for developing a measurement scale specific to tourism destination conspicuousness. More elicitation studies could identify items specific to tourism destination conspicuousness.

Finally, this study also attempted to discover the influence of each conspicuousness dimension on intentions to visit conspicuous destinations. Three out of four dimensions showed significant influence on VI. Interpersonal mediation and materialistic hedonism had positive influence on VI while status demonstration, in an unexpected result, affects visiting intention negatively. How a conspicuous destination can enhance one's self-image and how trendy and unique a destination appears to be to visitors are important to consumers in making a decision to visit a destination. The three items included in status demonstration were "traveling to these destinations is social status symbol for me," "traveling to these destinations is a symbol of success and prestige," and "I travel to these destinations to show off, to be noted." These would be the core values of the CC concept. These would be the main reasons people seek out opportunities to visit conspicuous destinations. Study results did not support this, however. Again, this result might be related to the wording of the statements. For instance, few consumers will proudly say he or she is "showing off" by purchasing something. The symbols of social status, success, and prestige are not exactly expressed by traveling to conspicuous destinations. Communication of belonging had no influence on visiting intention, so people do not visit destinations just because others have visited them. Visiting the same places their friends visit means the destination is not so unique. Although not all proposed paths were significant, the test results are useful for destination marketing segmentation and for positioning tourist products and services. Destination marketers should categorize visitors based on

their motives for visiting conspicuous versus inconspicuous destinations (or neutral destinations for that matter), which may reveal other demographic or psychographic characteristics that might better represent visitors to a particular type of destination. In addition, these different tourist profiles might differentiate tourist segments to which various tourist products appeal or for which advertising strategies could be implemented. Destination managers also should identify specific visiting motives, focusing on strong motives for visiting conspicuous versus inconspicuous destinations. The advertising message can then be changed to emphasize the benefits of visiting their destination.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Despite the careful design of the study, this study does have a few limitations. First, the sample was limited. Although university faculty and administrators might represent Midwesterners well, they also represent the "educator" segment of tourists. Educators might have their own characteristics as tourists. They might not visit conspicuous destinations over inconspicuous ones or might not want to publicly signal wealth and communicate affluence to others because of their perceived conservative image as educators. Thus, the study results may not generalize to other segments of the population. Defining a destination as more conspicuous or inconspicuous is subjective, depending heavily on respondents' sociodemographics. This study is limited to Midwesterners' perceptions of the conspicuousness of travel destinations within the United States. Residents of New York City, for example, might not think of the city as conspicuous, while people who live in a small town in the Midwest might think that it is. Therefore, future research needs to focus on tourist demographics in classifying destinations as either conspicuous or inconspicuous. Residents from different regions of the country would possibly find different destinations in the United States more conspicuous. In consumer behavior research, several studies have found that consumer demographics significantly influence conspicuous consumption (Chen, Aung, Zhou, & Kanetkar, 2005; Wong & Zhou, 2005; Quelch, 1999). Thus, future studies should also expand the scope of this study to international destinations instead of limiting to the destinations in the United States. Visiting international destinations could be very ostentatious, and the results could be even more distinctive than categorizing destinations within a country.

The current study results broaden our understanding of CC in tourism. Widely used with mostly consumer products, CC can also be important for tourists choosing a destination that allows them to enhance their sense of self and present an image of what they are like to others. Selecting a highly regarded destination could help consumers to fulfill this need. The concept is relatively new in tourism and needs to be refined through a closer examination of the concepts and through more formalized empirical study.

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