



## The Influence of Television Media Exposure on Cognitive Processing and Perceived Appeal of Tourist Destinations in China

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### Abstract

This study examines the influence of Chinese TV media exposure on tourists' cognitive processing and perceived appeal of tourist destinations. Television shapes public perceptions by portraying narratives, images, and emotions, allowing potential visitors to process information and discover new travel experiences.

Using quantitative research method, 400 respondents participated in a questionnaire survey, providing strong empirical evidence. The study analyzed viewers' TV media exposure habits, cognitive processing, and perceived appeal toward tourist destinations. Through statistical calculation, regression analysis showed that there was a significant positive correlation between TV media exposure and cognitive processing ( $R^2=0.819$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and a significant positive correlation between TV media exposure and perceived appeal ( $R^2=0.78$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Chinese TV media exposure significantly affects the relationship between cognitive processing and the perceived appeal of tourist destinations.

Findings reveal that extensive TV media exposure significantly enhances cognitive engagement, improving information processing, memory retention, and knowledge acquisition. It also strengthens emotional and aesthetic perceptions, increasing destination appeal through cultural identity and emotional resonance.

Overall, the study confirms that television media exposure plays a crucial role in shaping cognitive processes and the perceived appeal of travel destinations, especially among tourists aged 18-35. These insights highlight that TV media is not only a channel for information dissemination, but also an important medium for influencing tourists' psychological and behavioral decisions. With the continuous evolution of the media environment, tourism managers should pay more attention to the potential of TV media, combine content creativity with communication strategies, deepen audience cognition and stimulate tourism interest.

Future research can further explore the synergistic effect of different types of media, and provide more comprehensive theoretical support and practical guidance for the image building and marketing of tourist destinations.

**Keyword:** Television media exposure, tourist destinations, cognitive processes, perceived appeal

## Introduction

The development of modern technology and the advent of the digital age have made media an indispensable part of people's Daily life. Whether it's entertainment, education, or communication, media influences how people perceive and interpret the world around them, and at the heart of this impact is television, which despite the rise of new digital platforms remains a powerful and trusted medium for mass communication, especially when it comes to reaching a broad audience with diverse demographics. As a form of media, television occupies a special position in the dissemination of information. Its visual and auditory capabilities provide a multi-sensory experience that engages viewers in a way that no other medium can match. Media plays a key role in shaping travelers' perceptions and expectations of their destinations, which in turn influences their travel decisions and the quality of their experiences (Bennett, A. & Strange, N.2015). According to the 2023 Communication Market Survey in Taiwan, 38.5% of people aged 26 to 35 use cable TV as their main source of viewing. In addition, Nielsen's study notes that in 2022, 14 of the 25 programs that women aged 18 to 34 watched the most were classic TV shows, indicating that this group still watches traditional TV content.

By presenting scenic landscapes, cultural highlights and other attractive features, television helps viewers process information and form a good impression of potential tourist attractions (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). A prime example of this is New Zealand's long-running "100% Pure New Zealand" campaign, which debuted in 1999. This campaign used stunning visuals to showcase New Zealand's natural beauty, outdoor adventure opportunities, and vibrant culture (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004). Similarly, China's Hunan Satellite TV reality show *Dad, Where Are We Going?* contributed to the popularity of several rural tourist destinations by featuring them as filming locations (Zhao, 2015). This process has been reinforced by the medium of television engaging viewers on an emotional and intellectual level through storytelling techniques and high-quality visuals. One of the most critical aspects of television's impact is its ability to structure information in ways that shape how viewers understand and interpret it. According to framing theory, media don't just present information neutrally, it positively influences viewers' perception of information by emphasizing some aspects over others (Entman, 1993).

However, the effects of television on cognitive processes and perceived appeal are not limited to short-term effects. While an immediate response to a TV Advertising or program may generate initial interest in a destination, long-term exposure to TV media can have a lasting impact on how viewers view certain places (Morgan, 2012).

This study also provides valuable insights and strategies for tourism marketing, filling the current research gap that lacks long-term impact, and exploring in depth how narrative techniques and visual elements affect media effects. It aims to enrich the academic discourse around media effects and tourism.

In conclusion, television media remains an important tool in influencing public perceptions of tourist destinations. It combines visual storytelling, emotional engagement, and a wide reach, making it ideal for promoting travel and tourism (Shrum, 2009). Tourism marketers should make full use of television media, especially tourism programs and advertisements, to effectively shape and communicate the image of the destination and attract potential tourists (Voyer P. A. & Lee, W. H. 2017). By shaping how viewers cognitively process information and perceived appeal of different destinations, television media plays a key role in driving tourism interest and engagement (Kim & Richardson, 2003).

### **Objectives of Study**

- 1) To explore the influence of exposure to Chinese television media on how viewers process information about tourist destinations.
- 2) To investigate the relationship between Chinese television media exposure and viewers' perceptions of the appeal of tourist destinations.
- 3) To analyze how Chinese television media exposure influence on the connection between cognitive processing and the perceived appeal of tourist destinations.

### **Literature Reviews**

#### **1) Concept of Media Exposure**

Media exposure is a key concept in understanding how information is absorbed, processed, and ultimately influences audience perception and action (Voyer P. A. & Lee, W. H. 2017). At the core of media exposure is the frequency and duration of audience interaction with media content, which can shape both conscious and subconscious perceptions (Cohen & Kaim, 2017). In the context of this study, media exposure is examined through Chinese television, which influences audience perception, understanding, and ultimately the attractiveness of tourist destinations through carefully curated visual and aural content. Moreover, the concept of media exposure encompasses multiple levels, from the frequency and intensity of content engagement to the cognitive and emotional responses that content elicits. Exposure to well-crafted content can significantly shape the cognitive processes associated with the perceived appeal of a tourist destination (Cohen & Kaim, 2017). Television media attracts audiences through narrative, emotional appeal and cultivating quasi-social relations, and becomes a powerful tool to influence audience perception, thus enhancing the attraction of characteristic destinations and promoting tourism interest.

## 2) Cognitive Processing Theory

Cognitive processing theory is a theoretical framework that discusses how humans acquire, organize, store and use information. It emphasizes how human beings process information through the processing mechanism of the brain, especially the role of visual and auditory information in multimedia environment (Mayer, R. E. 2005). In this study, cognitive processing theory can help to understand how viewers construct their impressions and views on a tourist destination through visual and linguistic information of TV media, and form the cognitive and perceived appeal of the tourist destination. Cognitive processing theory provides a comprehensive perspective that explains how television media exposure shapes viewers' cognitive framework of tourist destinations through cognitive processes (attention, understanding, memory, evaluation, and construction) and further influences perceived appeal and behavioral decisions.

## 3) Theory/Concept of Perception

Perception refers to the process of receiving external stimuli through the senses and forming cognition and understanding of these stimuli through the processing and interpretation of the brain. Perception is an important part of the cognitive process that helps individuals receive information from their external environment and react to it (Bennett & Strange, 2015). In this study, perception means that the audience receives the relevant information of the tourist destination through TV media, and generates their own understanding and feeling of the destination through cognitive processing, which helps the audience to further deepen their cognitive processing and perceptual understanding of the information transmission of TV media, so as to create a positive impression on the tourist destination (Cohen & Kaim, 2017).

## 4) Tourist Destinations in China

Tourist destination is the geographical area or specific place that tourists choose and go to, usually with unique natural landscape, cultural heritage, historical background, recreational activities and other attractive factors. The core purpose of a tourist destination is to attract tourists, provide a good experience, and promote the development of the local economy and culture (Voyer & Lee, 2017). As a country with a rich history, culture and natural landscape, China has a diverse range of tourist destinations, attracting tourists from all over the world.

## Research Methodology

### 1) Research Design

This study employs quantitative research methods to obtain more comprehensive and detailed information. To facilitate data collection, a questionnaire survey is utilized. The data was collected between October and December 2024, and the questionnaire was distributed through a combination of online and offline methods to ensure coverage of young people from diverse backgrounds. In order to improve the data quality, all questionnaires were accompanied by filling instructions and anonymous commitment. 432 questionnaires were collected in the end, and 400 were valid after screening, with an effective rate of 92.6%.

## 2) Population

According to China's latest 2021 census, the total population of China is 1411.178 million. The target age group for this study was set to be individuals aged 18-35 years. This group represents about 266 million people in China. Adults 18 years of age or older can usually travel and use transportation independently according to their preferences, and this group generally exhibits a positive attitude toward television media, making them an ideal sample for research. In contrast, people over 35 years old have more conservative information processing methods, and their travel behaviors are more influenced by health, family and other factors. At the same time, the inclusion of samples with a large age span may lead to excessive data heterogeneity, which affects the stability and explanatory power of regression analysis.

## 3) Samples and Sampling Method

In order to study the effects of TV media exposure on the cognitive process and perceived appeal of tourist destinations, we will adopt a structured sampling method to ensure the reliability of the data. The target sample for this study included individuals aged 18-35 years in China, estimated to be about 266 million. To determine a representative sample size from this large population, Taro Yamane's formula was used with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. In the end, the study required a sample size of 400 participants.

## 4) Data Analysis

This study utilized a quantitative data collection approach to investigate how exposure to Chinese television media influenced viewers' cognitive processing and perceptions of tourist destinations. The data collection tool was a structured questionnaire, which was designed to capture various dimensions of the research questions and objectives.

Then, the person correlation coefficient is used to show that there is a significant positive correlation between TV media exposure and audience cognitive processing. It can also show that there is a significant positive correlation between TV media exposure and the perceived appeal of tourist destinations.

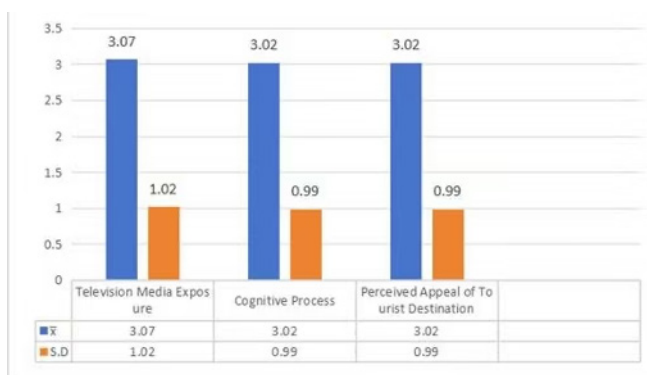
Regression analysis is used to show that TV media exposure has a positive predictive effect on the audience's cognitive processing, that is, the higher the TV media exposure, the better the audience's cognitive processing. The TV media exposure also has a positive predictive effect on the perceived appeal of tourist destinations, that is, the higher the TV media exposure, the stronger the perceived appeal of tourist destinations.

Finally, the hypotheses are tested, and these results jointly establish the significant impact of TV media exposure on cognitive processing and perceived appeal, as well as the interrelationship between them, emphasizing the key role of TV media in shaping the audience's perception and decision-making of tourist destinations.

### 1) Demographic Information

Men accounted for 51.75 percent of the respondents. In terms of age, participants aged 18-25 made up the majority at 38.25%. This provides a sample group of young people with travel experience, who are usually the main force of travel and media consumption (Cohen & Kaim, 2017), and their high frequency TV viewing habits provide an ideal analytical framework for the study. The larger number of respondents in the 18-25 age group is also because they are more willing to participate in online questionnaires, respond faster, and are more familiar with electronic media. In terms of educational attainment, the majority of participants chose other options, at 52.25%. In terms of travel experience, 67.25% of the participants had travel experience in China in the past year. At the same time, TV series became the most frequently watched TV program by participants, accounting for 72.75%

### 2) Television Media Exposure, Cognitive Process and Perceived Appeal



As can be seen from the above table, the average agreement level of the sample group on the frequency and attitude of TV media use is 3.07, and the standard deviation is 1.02. The average identification level and standard deviation of the impact of TV media exposure on the tourist destination cognitive process are 3.02 and 0.99. The average identification level and standard deviation of the impact of TV media exposure on the audience's perceived appeal are 3.02 and 0.99. According to framing theory (Entman, 1993), the media can influence the audience's cognitive framing by selectively highlighting or downplaying certain information. This study shows that through visual and emotional resonance, TV programs can effectively shape the audience's cognitive processing and emotional identification of the destination, and enhance the audience's emotional participation.

### 1) Hypothesis Testing Results

**H1: Exposure to Chinese television media significantly influences how viewers process information about tourist destinations.**

The results strongly support this hypothesis. The Pearson correlation coefficient between TV media exposure and cognitive processing is 0.905 ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a significant positive relationship. Regression analysis further confirms this effect, with an  $R^2$  value of 0.819, demonstrating a strong model fit.

The F value of 1802.47 ( $p < 0.001$ ) reinforces the significance of the regression model. Additionally, collinearity statistics, including tolerance value and VIF of 1, confirm the absence of multicollinearity issues. The regression equation  $Y = 0.844X + 0.420$  shows that greater exposure to TV media enhances cognitive engagement, improving information processing and comprehension of tourist destinations. Thus, H1 is accepted. This also indicates that television media enhances the audience's cognitive processing ability through continuous visual and emotional guidance (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), which enables them to understand the relevant information of the tourist destination more deeply.

**H2: There is a significant relationship between Chinese television media exposure and viewers' perceptions of the appeal of tourist destinations.**

This hypothesis is also supported by the findings. The Pearson correlation coefficient between TV media exposure and perceived appeal of tourist destinations is 0.883 ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a strong positive correlation. Regression analysis confirms the relationship, with an  $R^2$  value of 0.780, demonstrating a solid model fit. The significance of the regression model is further validated by an F value of 1407.933 ( $p < 0.001$ ). Collinearity statistics, including a tolerance value and VIF of 1, indicate no collinearity issues. The regression equation  $Y = 0.835X + 0.450$  highlights that higher TV media exposure enhances the perceived appeal of tourist destinations. These results provide clear evidence of the positive impact of TV media exposure on shaping viewers' perceptions. Thus, H2 is accepted. This result is consistent with the formulation of emotional connection theory, suggesting that television programs enhance the attractiveness of destinations through cultural identification and emotional resonance, especially among young people.

**H3: Chinese television media exposure significantly influences the connection between cognitive processing and the perceived appeal of tourist destinations.**

The results confirm that TV media exposure plays a crucial role in linking cognitive processing with the perceived appeal of tourist destinations. Higher exposure fosters deeper cognitive engagement, leading to improved information processing, memory retention, and knowledge acquisition. Additionally, TV media exposure strengthens emotional and aesthetic perceptions, enhancing destination appeal through cultural identity and emotional resonance. The strong correlations and significant regression outcomes provide substantial support for this relationship. Thus, H3 is accepted. Television media exposure helps viewers process information by promoting deeper cognitive engagement. This process is related to the theory of emotional transmission (Sternberg, 1986), that is, television media enhances the audience's attraction to tourist destinations through higher frequency of emotional resonance and aesthetic perception.

## Discussion

With the development of digital media in recent years, although TV media is faced with the challenge of reducing the number of fixed users, it still has unique advantages in covering a wide population and providing in-depth narrative content. Television media also, due to its high exposure to repeated broadcasts, can establish a mental framework that affects how viewers process new information (Atkin, 2010). The more often viewers watch travel shows or advertisements, the more positive their perception of the destination will be. At the same time, different people will have different cognitive understanding through TV media. Demographic characteristics such as age, interest and travel experience regulate the influence of TV media content on cognition. This study verifies that TV media can not only stimulate the audience's interest in the destination in the short term, but also form a lasting good impression on the audience through long-term repeated exposure.

High-quality programs can not only attract the audience's attention, but also strengthen the memory of the tourist destination through deep cognitive processing. Television media attract the audience's attention through bright pictures, dynamic scenes and emotional narration, so that the audience gives priority to the information related to the tourist destination in the information input stage (Zillmann, 2000). At the same time, TV media has narrowed the emotional distance between the audience and the destination by shaping emotional resonance. Perception is a direct response to features of the environment, and media enhance this response through a rich and authentic sense of image (Gibson, 1966). By repeatedly displaying a certain feature of the tourist destination, the TV media shapes the brand image of the tourist destination in the eyes of the audience (Entman, 1993).

For a long time, television media has been regarded as the key medium to shape the audience's concept and influence the audience's behavior. In existing research, however, few studies distinguish between cognitive processes and specific mechanisms of perceived attraction. This study not only verifies the different effects of media exposure on the two, but also reveals that TV, as a traditional media, still has a unique communication effect in the digital age. For the media industry, this study has certain research value. In the future development, TV media can further design differentiated content according to the interest and cultural background of the target audience, which can promote the long-term and stable development of tourist destinations.

## Suggestions

### 1) Suggestion from this Study

1.1) In view of the loss of regular viewers in recent years, TV media can design diversified program content according to the age, gender and interest differences of viewers. This differentiation strategy can more effectively attract the attention of different groups and increase the durability of the development of television media.



1.2) Although television still has unique advantages, digital media has gained momentum in recent years, and combining digital platforms can help expand the effectiveness of the promotion of tourist destinations.

1.3) In recent years, many cities in China have become hot spots for tourism. Constant media exposure contributes to the permanence of a tourist destination's image. It is recommended that the tourism sector work with the television media to develop a long-term publicity plan to clarify the publicity tasks and objectives of different cycles, so as to strengthen the brand impression.

1.4) Improve the production quality of TV programs, focusing on narrative structure and picture expressiveness. Showcase the unique charm of the destination through high-quality visual and aural elements and engaging story content

## 2) Suggestion for Further Study

2.1) According to the characteristics of tourist destinations and audience needs in recent years, more attractive TV media content is designed, the structure of TV programs is optimized, and the audience's immersive experience is increased by using high-quality visual presentation.

2.2) Use celebrity effect and brand linkage to enhance the awareness and attractiveness of the destination, through their influence to attract more audiences. In addition, cooperation with popular brands or movies, film and television works can further expand the influence of the tourist destination.

2.3) In the process of development, the concept of sustainable development of the tourist destination is promoted through television media, supporting the development of local communities. This will not only attract tourists who care about environmental protection and social values but also enhance the brand image of the destination and promote the long-term development of the tourism destination.

2.4) Relevant tourism management departments and media organizations cooperate to optimize communication strategies through data analysis, using audience viewing data and tourist behavior data to evaluate the actual effects of TV media exposure.

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