

Making Tourism Destinations More Attractive Via Eye Gaze: The Importance of Gender Congruity

Abstract

The human element is powerful and ubiquitous in tourism promotions. Since the eyes are often considered the gateway to one's inner self, does the direction of the model's gaze in tourism photographs matter? In this research, we demonstrate that for natural destination promotions, only when the model is the same gender as the viewer, the model looking away from the viewer (i.e., averted eye gaze) is more effective than making direct eye contact with the viewer (i.e., direct eye gaze). Specifically, in the case of a female (male) model, a photograph of a natural destination featuring an averted (vs. direct) gaze enhances the empathetic response of female (male) viewers, thereby increasing their visit intentions. However, for urban destination promotions, gender congruity is not important. Moreover, featuring a direct eye gaze is more effective among male viewers when the model in the photograph is a female.

Keywords: Destination marketing; Eye gaze direction; Gender congruity; Empathy; Destination type

Introduction

In tourism destination promotions, photographs typically feature humans such as tourists, celebrity endorsements, or local residents, aiming to capture people's attention, establish a specific ambiance, evoke emotions, and establish connections with potential consumers (Back et al., 2020; Glover, 2009; Park & Yim, 2020; Roy et al., 2012, 2019, 2021). Does where the human character's eyes look matter (i.e., averted or direct gaze) (see real examples in the Appendix)? As a proverb says, "Eyes are the window to the soul." Eyes allow people to read others' beliefs, intentions, feelings, and thoughts as a source of information (Hall & Knapp, 2013). In addition, the direction of others' eye gaze can modulate our social cognition. For example, when you see a person looking at something (i.e., averted gaze: look away from the observers), you are likely to follow that gaze and try to find what the person is looking at or try to figure out that person's feelings, resulting in joint attention (Frischen et al., 2007). When a person looks directly at you (i.e., maintains a direct gaze), you may feel that you are the target, and you pay attention to that person (Hall & Knapp, 2013). However, little is known about the role of eye gaze in tourism destination promotions – a gap that the present research addresses.

Most existing studies of the human element in tourism-related promotions mainly focus on the mere presence of humans (e.g., other customers vs. no customers in the hotel booking image; Back et al., 2020; Joe et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2025), the extent of human presence (e.g., low proportion of visitors vs. high proportion of visitors; Zhang et al., 2023), and identity (e.g., local celebrities vs. source celebrities; Li et al., 2022) while few focus on detailed human elements such as facial expressions (smiling people vs. non-smiling people in destination's social media posts; Schoner-Schatz et al., 2021). In addition, an analysis of advertising databases shows that 48% (vs. 32.6% with direct gaze) of print advertisements portrayed models with averted eye gaze (To & Patrick, 2021). Is using averted eye gaze better than direct eye gaze in tourism promotions? Drawing on social cognitive theory and relational demography theories, we extend prior research on human elements in tourism and destination promotions by examining the joint

effect of eye gaze and gender congruity on tourists' visit intention through empathy. This research provides important managerial implications for tourism destination promotions, such as when and how to use eye gaze to improve destination attractiveness and visit intention.

Theoretical Background

Human Elements in Tourism Promotional Advertisement

The human element is widely used in tourism promotions. It refers to the whole or part of a human image used in photographs, such as the mere presence of humans and human hands (Zhang et al., 2023). Using human elements, destination promotions can create a specific atmosphere to enhance effectiveness (Back et al., 2020; Glover, 2009; Park & Yim, 2020; Roy et al., 2012, 2019, 2021). For example, Back et al.(2020) found that the presence of humans enhances the impact of small photographs, whereas large photographs have greater effectiveness when humans are not present. Zhang et al.(2023) further explored the influence of varying proportions of human elements (none, low, and high) on viewers' perceptions and intentions when observing nature/culture-based photographs. Specifically, they found that photographs with a low proportion of human elements (0~1%) resulted in more positive perceptions than those with no humans and a high proportion (2~4%) of human presence. However, more detailed human elements like facial expressions have gained limited research attention. Schoner-Schatz et al. (2021), however, show that smiling (vs. non-smiling) pictures positively influence tourists' intention to visit. Similarly, our research considers the eye gaze as another detailed human element that may play a role in tourism promotions.

Gaze Direction and Empathy

Social cognitive theory indicates that individuals learn by observing others through social interactions, experiences, and media influences (Bandura, 1986). Eye gaze can be seen as a learning tool, shaping an individual's beliefs, motivations, and behaviors (Shepherd, 2010; Verma & Jain, 2022). A direct gaze can make observers feel that they are the target of the person's attention and thus pay attention to their facial expression, messages, and information they want to convey (Hall & Knapp, 2013). The learning process is about passively receiving information from others. In contrast, an averted gaze can shift observers' attention to where the person looks, eliciting joint attention (Frischen et al., 2007). Joint attention serves as a basis for developing advanced social cognitive abilities such as theory of mind and empathy (Slaughter, 2015; Stephenson et al., 2021). Theory of mind refers to attributing mental states, such as emotions, to oneself and others (Baron-Cohen, 1991). It helps individuals understand and interpret others' emotions, which is essential for eliciting empathy (Meltzoff, 2002). Empathy refers to the capacity of an individual to experience and understand the emotions of another person, indicating a deep involvement in another person's feelings (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Escalas & Stern, 2003). Previous research suggests that an averted eye gaze is more effective in eliciting empathy due to the elicitation of joint attention, such as for watching a movie, viewing an artwork, or a theatrical performance. Specifically, the human character's averted gaze elicits empathy by enhancing engagement with the audience (i.e., observers/viewers) through joint attention, encouraging the audience to learn the feelings and emotions of the characters and the portrayed subject (Morgan, 2005; Simons, 1988). This learning process is about perspective-taking, experiencing, and understanding the emotions and feelings of the characters behind the

averted gaze. In contrast, the character's direct gaze is a signal from within the image, reminding the audience of their role as passive information receivers (Wallis & Shepherd, 1998).

Numerous studies have also highlighted the positive impact of empathy on enhancing purchase intention (Arora et al., 2023; Fan et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023), prosocial behaviors (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Bartsch & Klobß, 2019; Bae, 2021; Fisher et al., 2008; Jung & Im, 2021; Goenka & Osselaer, 2019), and brand evaluations (Lee, 2016). Empathy is also important in destination promotions. Akgün, Keskin, Ayar and Erdoğan (2015) show that empathy evoked by travel narratives positively influences readers' intention to visit the destination. Yi, Li, Zeng, Xie and Xu (2022) examine the role of empathy as a mediator in the internal mechanism of film-induced tourism. Such positive influences of empathy can be explained by outcome expectations suggested in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Schunk & Usher, 2012). Outcome expectations are generated through observational learning. Observing and internalizing the consequences of others' actions shapes individuals' beliefs about the potential outcomes of similar actions, making them more or less likely to engage in similar behaviors (Schunk & Usher, 2012). As discussed above, in the context of tourism promotions, the averted gaze may encourage observers to take the model's perspective, experiencing and understanding the emotions and feelings behind the averted gaze. This empathetic experience then makes observers believe that they would have the same experience if engaged in similar behaviors, such as traveling to the same destination.

However, previous research on human elements and eye gaze has ignored the role of gender. Some show male and female models simultaneously in the photographs, while others only display female or male models without considering the gender match between the audience (i.e., observer) and the model (Back et al., 2020; Schoner-Schatz et al., 2021). In addition, when examining the effect of eye gaze, To & Patrick (2021) control the gender congruity by matching the model's gender in the advertisements to the participant's gender, indicating the potential influence of gender congruity. Therefore, in this research, we aim to provide empirical evidence on the importance of gender congruity between the observers and the model and understand the impact of eye gaze in tourism promotions.

Importance of Gender Congruity

As the social cognitive theory indicates, similarity is crucial for evaluating behavioral appropriateness, shaping outcome expectations, and gauging one's self-efficacy (Schunk, 1987). According to the relational demography theory, it is human nature to evaluate similarity with others by employing demographic characteristics like gender (Sacco et al., 2003). Previous research further indicates that individuals focus on gender when assessing similarity (Brickson, 2000; Turban et al., 2002). Previous research in social psychology and interpersonal relationships suggests that gender congruity is critical in enhancing motivation, learning, and empathy (Schunk, 1987; Schunk & Usher, 2012). Gender congruity refers to the gender consistency between the two parties (i.e., gender similarity). For example, female consumers prefer gender congruity with the Airbnb host, making them more inclined to book an Airbnb property hosted by a female (Su & Mattila, 2020). The social cognitive theory further posits that individuals are inclined to mimic observed behaviors. Accordingly, Petersen (2018) found that girls tend to mimic other girls' behaviors, whereas boys mimic other boys' behaviors. Perceived similarity, especially perceived gender similarity (i.e., gender congruity), elicits empathy, as individuals often show more empathy when judging people of the same gender (Davis, 1994; Olesker & Balter, 1972; Feshbach & Roe, 1968; Stotland, 1969). The initial findings by Feshbach and Roe

(1968) demonstrate that children exhibit greater empathy towards a child of the same (vs. opposite) gender, and these findings also extend to adults (Olesker & Balter, 1972). The gender congruity effect on empathy is also observed in the context of sexual harassment. Bongiorno, Langbroek, Bain, Ting and Ryan (2020) indicate that women (vs. men) are more likely to blame the male perpetrator due to their greater empathy for the victim but lesser empathy for the male perpetrator. In this paper, we argue that an averted gaze induces empathy, especially when there is an alignment between the observer's gender and the model in the photograph, increasing the effectiveness of destination promotion.

Therefore, we propose that:

H1: When the model in the photograph is the same gender as the viewer, an averted (vs. direct) eye gaze will elicit more empathy among viewers.

H1a: A photograph featuring a male model with an averted (vs. direct) gaze will elicit more empathy among male viewers. Such a superior effect of an averted gaze is attenuated among female viewers.

H1b: A photograph featuring a female model with an averted (vs. direct) gaze will elicit more empathy among female viewers. Such a superior effect of an averted gaze is attenuated among male viewers.

H2: When the model in the photograph is the same gender as the viewer, an averted (vs. direct) eye gaze will result in higher destination visit intention.

H2a: A photograph featuring a male model with an averted (vs. direct) gaze will result in higher destination visit intention among male viewers. Such a superior effect of an averted gaze is attenuated among female viewers.

H2b: A photograph featuring a female model with an averted (vs. direct) gaze will result in higher destination visit intention among female viewers. Such a superior effect of an averted gaze is attenuated among male viewers.

H3: When the model in the photograph is the same gender as the viewer, empathy mediates the influence of gaze direction on destination visit intention.

Destination Type

The tourism literature typically categorizes designations into natural and urban types (Byun & Jang, 2015; Wang & Spark, 2016). Urban destinations are generally more familiar to visitors than natural destinations (Li et al., 2024). This is because urban destinations are man-made, human-centered design structures that are closely related to the daily lives of human beings, whereas nature destinations usually emphasize their pristine, undeveloped landscapes, which are generally far away from people's daily lives (Araújo et al., 2019; Luo & Deng, 2008). Previous research suggests that familiarity makes it easier for individuals to shape outcome expectations, thus reducing the reliance on learning from others (Li & Wan, 2025; Yim et al., 2021). Familiarity refers to a person's knowledge of something, typically shaped by prior interactions and experiences (Gefen, 2000). With high levels of familiarity, individuals can generate a greater sense of self-efficacy in making relevant decisions themselves (Oyinseye et al., 2022; Yoon & Rolland, 2012). For example, when people are unfamiliar with natural landscapes, they may struggle to imagine their interactions with such environments or form expectations based on their daily experiences. As a result, they rely on certain hints and cues (e.g., human presence) to construct and anticipate potential scenarios and behavioral intentions. In contrast, people's familiarity with urban settings allows them to more easily anticipate and simulate potential behaviors and activities (Li & Wan, 2025). Similarly, in our case, people may not need the empathetic experience of observing others to infer that they would have the same experience if

they traveled to the same urban destination. Specifically, for familiar urban destinations, the interaction effect of eye gaze direction and gender congruity shall be attenuated:

H4: The proposed effects in H1-H3 will be attenuated for the promotion of urban (vs. natural) destinations.

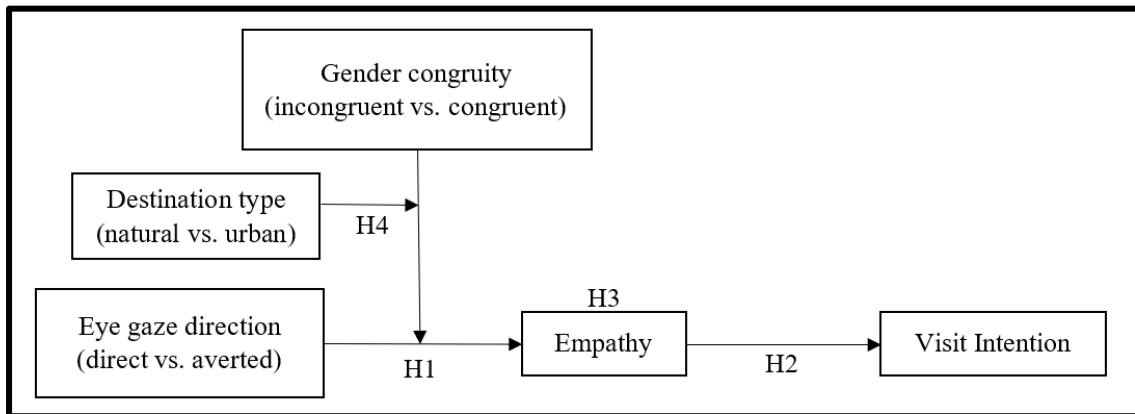


Fig 1. Conceptual Model

Study 1: Natural Destination Promotion

Study Design and Participants

This study was designed to demonstrate the moderating effect of gender congruity on the influence of gaze on the effectiveness of natural destination promotion. A 2 (eye gaze direction: direct vs. averted) by 2 (gender congruity: incongruent vs. congruent) between-subjects quasi-experimental design was employed. Gender congruity was coded based on the gender of participants (0=incongruent (female participant), 1=congruent (male participant)). From Prolific, we recruited 200 U.S. participants. Those who failed attention checks ($n=3$) or failed to share their gender information ($n=3$) were excluded, resulting in 194 participants. The majority (78.4%) of the participants fell within the age range of 18 to 49 years. Among the participants, 49% were female, 43.8% possessed a college degree, and 74.7% had an annual household income exceeding \$40,000.

Stimuli and Procedures

Two photographs were created, one featuring a male model (a fake senior blogger) looking directly at the viewers and the other with the male model looking away (see appendix). Participants were asked to imagine that they were planning to travel during the upcoming vacation, and they were searching for information online. They were shown the promotions for Dal lake, Kashmir, and one of the two photograph versions was randomly shown. In addition, they read about the travel experiences shared by the model. Then, participants indicated visit intention on three 7-point scales (e.g., “I will consider visiting this destination in the future.” 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree; $\alpha=.90$; Han et al., 2010) and how much they could vicariously merge with the model’s feelings (i.e., empathy) on five 7-point scales (e.g., “While watching the ad, I felt as though the situation in the ad was happening to me.” 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree; $\alpha=.97$; Escalas & Stern, 2003). To access the manipulation of eye gaze direction, participants were asked to indicate the direction of the model’s gaze (“Is the

model featured looking at you or away from you? 1=looking at me, 2=looking away from me; To & Patrick, 2021).

Results

Manipulation check. Through crosstab analysis, it was observed that 87 out of 97 participants in the direct gaze condition and 91 out of 97 participants in the averted gaze condition accurately identified the direction of the gaze.

Empathy. A two-way ANOVA on empathy revealed a significant interaction between eye gaze direction and gender congruity ($F(1, 190)=3.95, p<.05$). As visualized in Fig. 2, the photograph featuring a male model with averted (vs. direct) gaze is more effective in eliciting male participants' empathy (i.e., congruent condition) ($M_{\text{averted}}=3.64, M_{\text{directed}}=2.87; F(1, 190)=5.06, p<.05$). However, no significant differences were identified in empathy across the two gaze conditions among female participants (i.e., incongruent condition) ($M_{\text{avert}}=3.16$ vs. $M_{\text{direct}}=3.37, F(1,190) =.33, p>.05$). Therefore, H1a was supported.

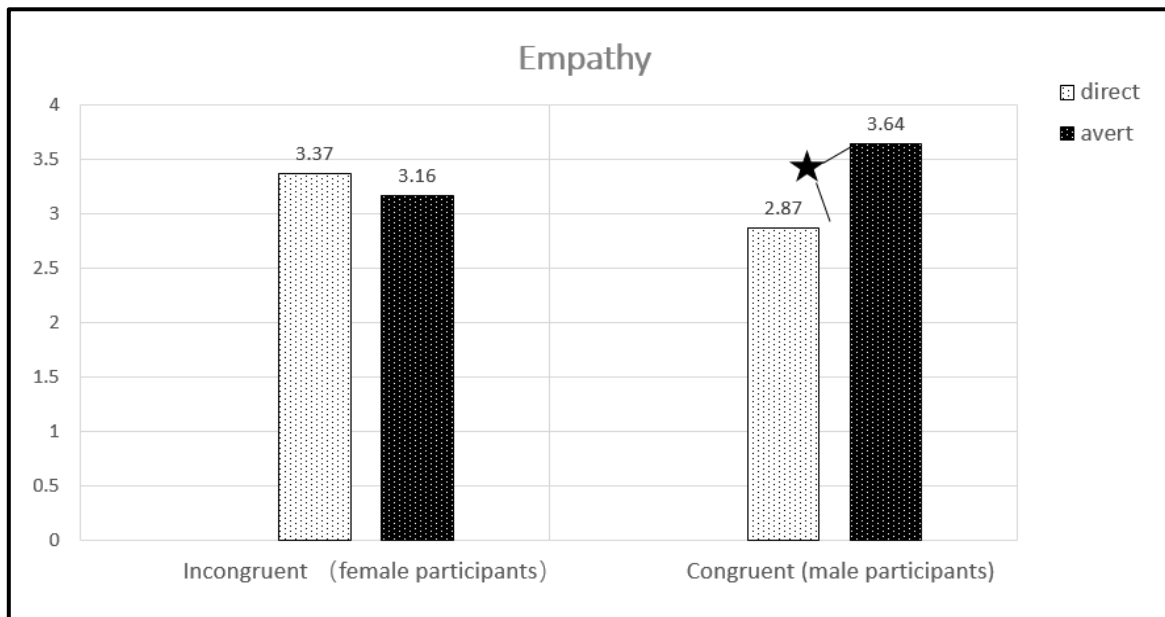


Fig 2. Empathy as a function of eye gaze direction and gender of viewers

Visit intention. A two-way ANOVA on visit intention revealed a significant main effect of eye gaze direction ($F(1,190)=5.35, p<.05$), qualified by a significant interaction with the gender congruity ($F(1, 190)=4.83, p<.05$). As visualized in Fig. 3, significantly higher visit intention was observed when the male model's gaze was averted (vs. direct) among male participants (i.e., congruent condition) ($M_{\text{averted}}=4.75, M_{\text{directed}}=3.82; F(1, 190)=10.38, p<.05$). However, no significant differences were identified in visit intention across the two gaze conditions among female participants (i.e., incongruent condition) ($M_{\text{avert}}=4.41$ vs. $M_{\text{direct}}=4.39, F(1,190) =.006, p>.05$). Therefore, H2a was supported.

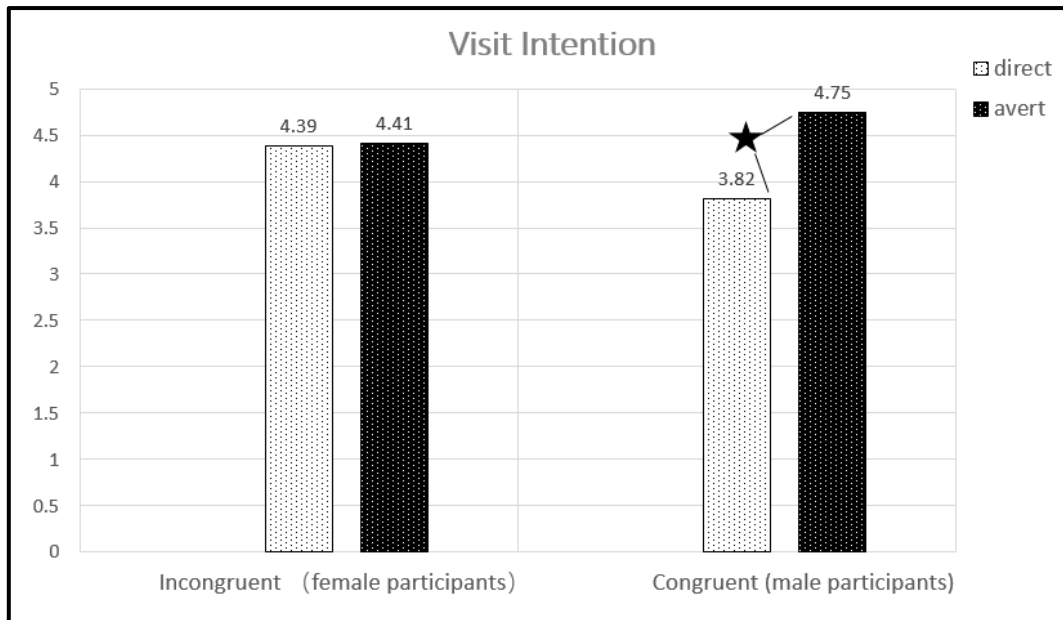


Fig 3. Visit Intention as a function of eye gaze direction and gender of viewers

Moderated mediation analysis. A moderated mediation analysis using bootstrapping was performed (PROCESS model 8, Hayes, 2017). In this analysis, the independent variable was eye gaze direction, the moderator was gender congruity, the mediator was empathy, and the dependent variable was visit intention. A significant index of moderated mediation was identified ($B=.57$, $SE=.29$, $95\%CI=[.0076, 1.1265]$). Specifically, male participants were more likely to vicariously merge with the male model's feelings (i.e., stronger empathy in gender congruent condition) when the model looked away (i.e., averted gaze), and thus were more likely to visit the destination ($B=.45$, $SE=.22$, $95\%CI=[.0186, .8781]$). However, empathy didn't mediate the impact of eye gaze direction on visit intention ($B=-.12$, $SE=.18$, $95\%CI=[-.4697, .2528]$) among female participants (i.e., gender incongruent condition). These results supported H3.

Study 2: Natural Destination Promotion – Replication Using Female Model

Study Design and Participants

The objective of this study is to replicate Study 1 using a female model. The design was the same as in Study 1. Gender congruity was coded based on the gender of participants (0=incongruent (male participant), 1=congruent (female participant)). A total of 198 participants were recruited from Prolific. Those who failed attention checks ($n=2$) or failed to share their gender information ($n=2$) were excluded, resulting in 194 participants. The majority (79.4%) of the participants fell within the age range of 18 to 49 years. Among the participants, 64.4% were female, 46.9% possessed a college degree, and 67.5% had an annual household income exceeding \$40,000.

Stimuli and Procedures

Two versions of photographs were created, as in Study 1, with one featuring the female model looking directly at the viewers and the other with the female model looking away. Except for the model's gender, other stimuli (e.g., guidelines and the promoted tourism destination) and

procedures were the same as in Study 1. In addition, visit intention ($\alpha=.90$), empathy ($\alpha=.97$), and manipulation check were measured as in Study 1.

Results

Manipulation check. Upon conducting a crosstab analysis for the gaze manipulation check, all 99 participants in the averted gaze condition accurately recognized that the model was gazing away from them, while 88 out of 95 participants in the direct gaze condition correctly perceived that the model was looking at them.

Empathy. A two-way ANOVA on empathy was conducted. The results showed that the main effect of eye gaze direction was significant ($F(1,190)=4.23, p<.05$), qualified by a significant interaction with gender congruity ($F(1,190)=4.12, p<.05$). As visualized in Fig. 4, the photograph featuring a female model with averted (vs. direct) gaze is more effective in eliciting female participants' empathy (i.e., congruent condition) ($M_{\text{averted}}=3.59, M_{\text{directed}}=2.60; F(1,190)=11.87, p<.001$). However, no significant differences were identified in empathy across the two gaze conditions among male participants (i.e., incongruent condition) ($M_{\text{averted}}=2.80$ vs. $M_{\text{directed}}=2.79, F(1,190) < 1, p>.05$). Therefore, H1b was supported.

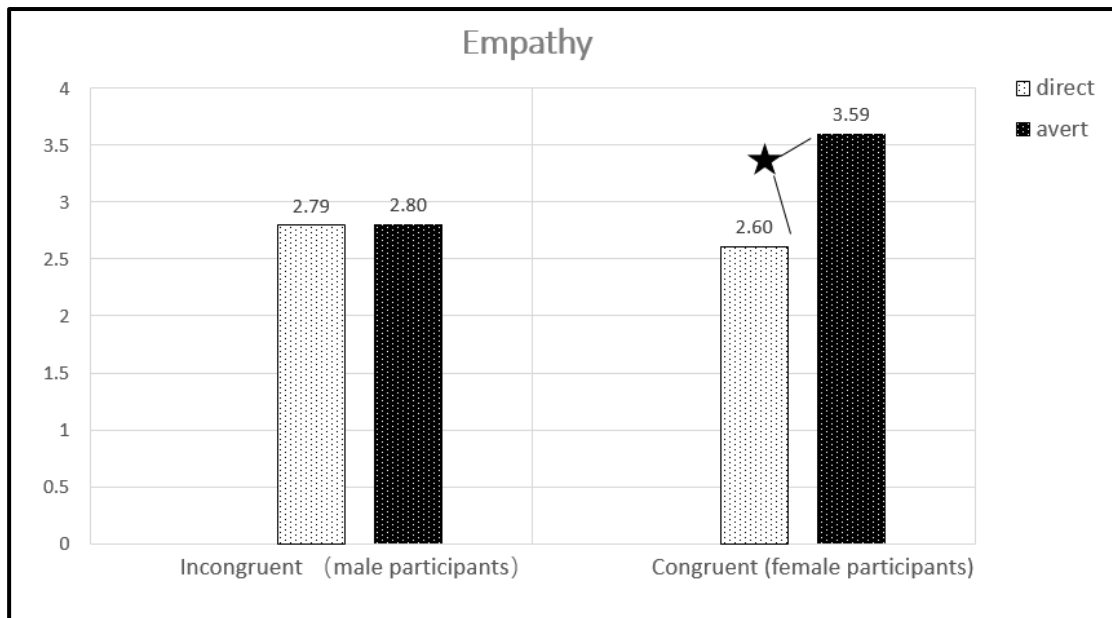


Fig 4. Empathy as a function of eye gaze direction and gender of viewers (female model)

Visit intention. A two-way ANOVA on visit intention revealed a significant interaction between eye gaze direction and gender congruity ($F(1,190)=8.12, p<.05$). As visualized in Fig. 5, significantly higher visit intention was observed when the female model's gaze was averted (vs. direct) among female participants (i.e., congruent condition) ($M_{\text{averted}}=4.17, M_{\text{directed}}=3.62; F(1,190)=4.23, p<.05$). Conversely, visit intention was significantly higher when the female model's

gaze was direct (vs. averted) among male participants (i.e., incongruent condition) ($M_{\text{averted}}=3.79$, $M_{\text{directed}}=4.52$; $F(1, 190)=4.09$, $p<.05$), supporting H2b.

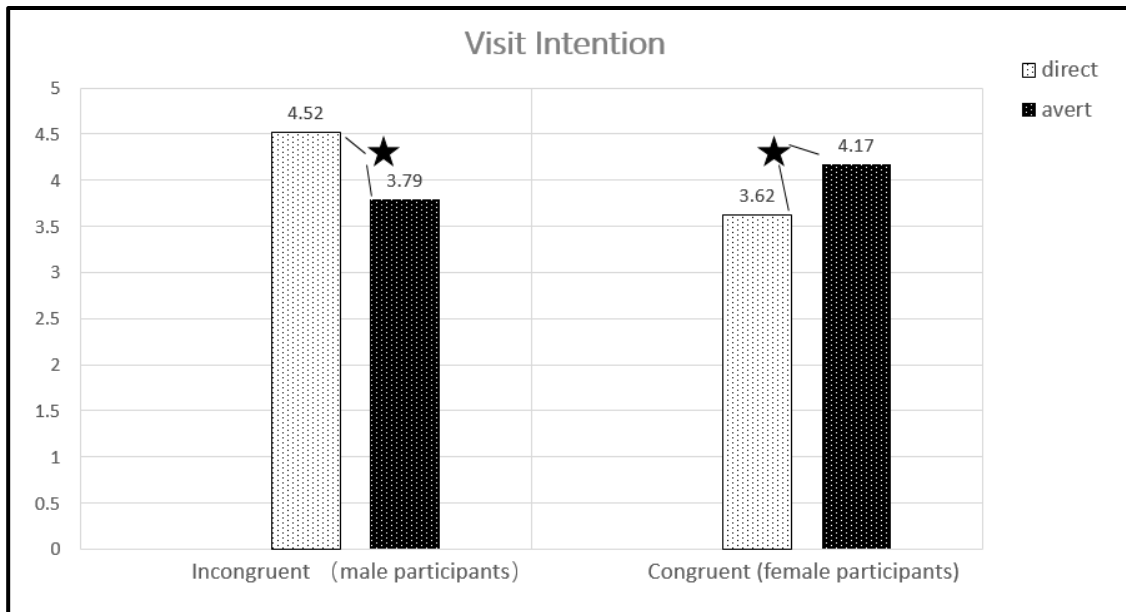


Fig 5. Visit Intention as a function of eye gaze direction and gender of viewers (female model)

Moderated mediation analysis. A moderated mediation analysis using bootstrapping was performed (PROCESS model 8, Hayes, 2017). In this analysis, the independent variable was eye gaze direction, the moderator was gender congruity, the mediator was empathy, and the dependent variable was visit intention. The index of moderated mediation was significant ($B=.60$, $SE=.30$, $95\%CI=[.0197, 1.2244]$). Specifically, female participants were more likely to vicariously merge with the female model's feelings (i.e., stronger empathy in gender congruent condition) when the model looked away (i.e., averted gaze), and thus were more likely to visit the promoted tourism destination ($B=.61$, $SE=.19$, $95\%CI=[.2500, .9981]$). However, empathy didn't mediate the impact of eye gaze direction on visit intention ($B=.004$, $SE=.25$, $95\%CI=[-.4831, .4765]$) among male participants (i.e., gender incongruent condition). These results supported H3.

Unexpected results. Surprisingly, the visit intention among male observers was higher when the female model's gaze was direct (vs. averted). However, there were no differences in visit intention among female observers across the gaze conditions with a male model (in Study 1). In other words, a direct eye gaze can potentially increase the effectiveness of natural destination promotions when there is gender incongruence (i.e., when the model does not share the same gender as the viewer), but only among male viewers. In the case of gender incongruence, no significant differences were observed in empathy across the two gaze conditions, regardless of the observer's gender. These findings imply that another potential underlying mechanism may be driving the influence of direct eye gaze. Mason et al. (2005) show that when viewing female faces, male participants perceived the female models as more attractive when they looked directly at them (vs. looking away from them). However, the influence of eye gaze on attractiveness was not observed among female participants. In addition, previous research on gender differences

shows that males are more likely to be influenced by the attractiveness of the opposite gender than females (Dahl et al., 2009; Karremans et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2018). Taken together, perceived attractiveness may explain why a direct eye gaze enhances destination promotions in the situation of gender incongruence, but only among male viewers. We test this explanation in Study 3.

Study 3: Urban Destination Promotion

Study Design and Participants

To explain the unexpected results in Study 2 and test H4, an urban destination promotion featuring a female model was adopted. The design was the same as in Study 1. Gender congruity was coded based on the gender of participants (0=incongruent (male participant), 1=congruent (female participant)). A total of 200 participants were recruited from Prolific. Those who failed attention checks (n=2) or failed to share their gender information (n=1) were excluded, resulting in 197 participants. The majority (72.1%) of the participants fell within the age range of 18 to 49 years. Among the participants, 49.2% were female, 43.1% possessed a college degree, and 82.2% had an annual household income exceeding \$40,000.

Stimuli and Procedures

Two versions of photographs were created, one featuring a female model looking directly at the viewers and the other with the female model looking away (see appendix). Participants were asked to imagine that they were planning to travel during the upcoming vacation and they were searching for information online. They were shown the promotions for Paris, France, and one of the two photograph versions was randomly shown. In addition, they read about the travel experiences shared by the model. Then, visit intention ($\alpha=.94$), empathy ($\alpha=.98$), and manipulation check were measured as in Study 1. The perceived attractiveness of the model was also measured, followed by demographic questions.

Results

Manipulation check. Based on crosstab analysis for the gaze manipulation check, 99 out of 101 participants in the averted gaze condition accurately recognized that the model was gazing away from them, while 92 out of 96 participants in the direct gaze condition correctly perceived that the model was looking at them.

Empathy. A two-way ANOVA on empathy was conducted. The results showed that neither the main effects of gaze direction ($F(1, 193)=1.93, p>.05$) and gender congruity ($F(1, 193)=3.15, p>.05$) nor the interaction ($F(1, 193)=3.35, p>.05$) was significant.

Visit intention. A two-way ANOVA on visit intention revealed a significant interaction between eye gaze direction and gender congruity ($F(1, 193)=6.46, p<.05$). As visualized in Fig. 6, significantly higher visit intention was observed when the female model's gaze was direct (vs. averted) among male participants (i.e., incongruent condition) ($M_{\text{averted}}=4.97, M_{\text{directed}}=5.71; F(1, 193)=8.43, p<.05$). However, no significant difference was identified across the two gaze conditions among female participants (i.e., congruent condition) ($M_{\text{averted}}=5.77$ vs. $M_{\text{directed}}=5.58, F(1,193) <1, p>.05$).

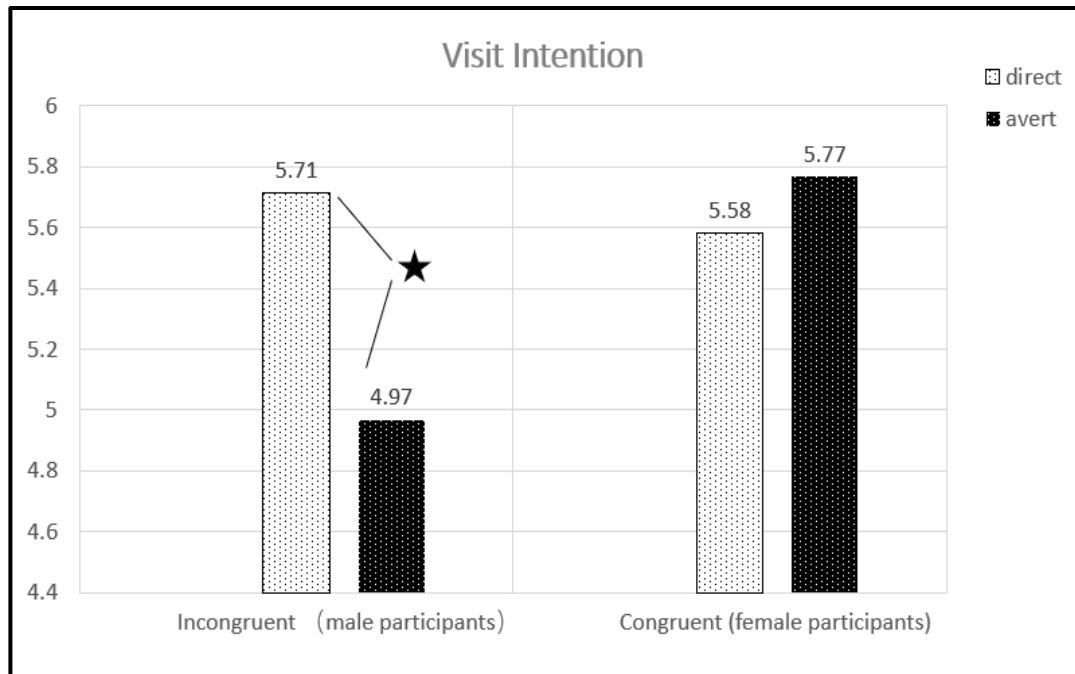


Fig 6. Visit Intention as a function of eye gaze direction and gender of viewers (female model in urban destination promotion)

Moderated mediation analysis. A moderated mediation analysis using bootstrapping was performed (PROCESS model 8, Hayes, 2017). In this analysis, the independent variable was eye gaze direction, the moderator was gender congruity, the mediator was empathy, and the dependent variable was visit intention. The index of moderated mediation was not significant ($B=.47$, $SE=.27$, $95\%CI=[-.0190, 1.0189]$).

Taken together, H4 was supported.

The perceived attractiveness of the model. A two-way ANOVA on perceived attractiveness revealed a significant main effect of gaze direction ($F(1, 193)=5.78$, $p<.05$). In addition, as visualized in Fig 7, significantly higher perceived attractiveness was identified when the female model's gaze was direct (vs. averted) among male participants (i.e., incongruent condition) ($M_{averted}=5.25$, $M_{directed}=5.82$; $F(1, 193)=5.53$, $p<.05$). But no significant difference was observed in congruent condition ($M_{averted}=5.68$ vs. $M_{directed}=5.94$, $F(1,193) = 1.12$, $p>.05$). Besides, a mediation analysis using PROCESS model 4 showed that in the incongruent condition, the influence of eye gaze direction on visit intention was mediated by perceived attractiveness of the model ($B=-.29$, $SE=.15$, $95\%CI=[-.6437, -.0461]$). Specifically, male participants perceived the female model to be more attractive when the female model's gaze was direct (vs. averted), which, in turn, enhanced visit intention to the same urban destination.

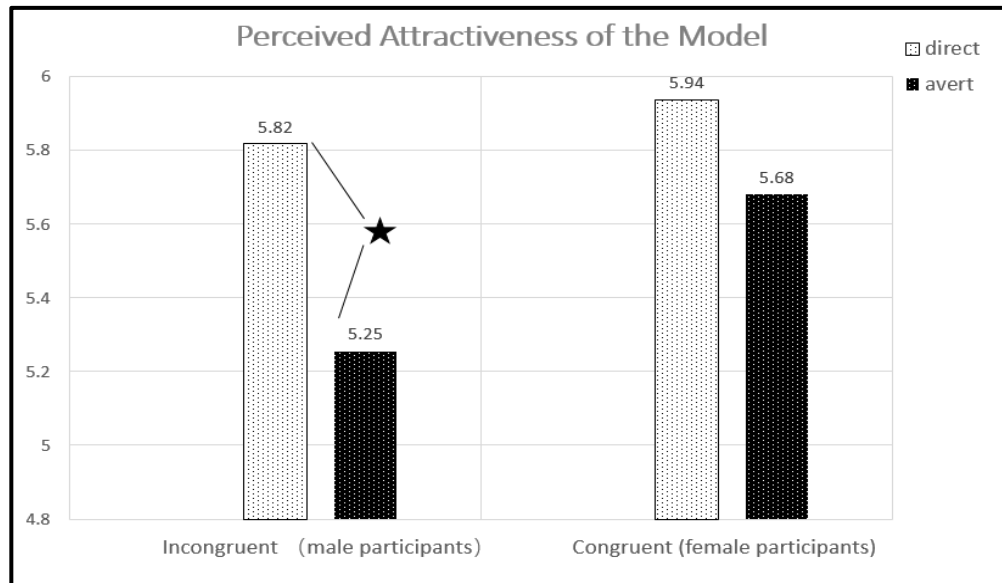


Fig 7. Perceived attractiveness of the model

Conclusion and Discussion

This research demonstrates how eye gaze, together with gender congruity, enhances the effectiveness of destination promotions via empathy. Drawing on the social cognitive theory, prior research suggests that eye gaze is a learning tool (Shepherd, 2010; Verma & Jain, 2022). Compared to a direct eye gaze, an averted eye gaze in the photograph encourages observers to actively learn and understand the emotions, feelings, and reasons behind the averted eye gaze via joint attention, eliciting empathy (Frischen et al., 2007; Morgan, 2005; Slaughter, 2015; Stephenson et al., 2021). Positive emotional feedback and empathy induce outcome expectations that shape the observers' beliefs about visiting the same destination (Schunk & Usher, 2012). However, the effectiveness of the averted eye gaze is contingent on gender congruity between the model and the observer. We show that when the model's gender in the photograph aligns with the viewer's gender, an averted gaze enhances empathy, enhancing visit intention of natural destinations. Specifically, a photograph featuring a male model with an averted gaze (vs. direct gaze) heightens the empathetic reaction of male viewers, thereby augmenting the effectiveness of destination promotion. Similarly, a female model with an averted gaze (vs. direct gaze) intensifies the empathetic response of female viewers, resulting in a greater destination visit intention. These findings align with the tenets of social cognitive theory. The social cognitive theory suggests that similarity (e.g., gender similarity) is crucial for evaluating behavioral appropriateness, eliciting empathy, and shaping outcome expectations, leading individuals to engage in similar behaviors (Schunk, 1987; Schunk & Usher, 2012).

However, when promoting urban destinations that are closely related to the daily lives of human beings, the importance of gender congruity is attenuated. People are quite familiar with the urban style and life, so no extra cues are necessary to shape their outcome expectations. In addition, the findings from Study 2 and Study 3 consistently show that the female model's direct eye gaze is more effective in attracting a male audience to visit the same destinations. Though we argue that the perceived attractiveness of the model drives the influence of direct eye gaze, more empirical evidence is needed.

Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to theory in several ways. First, it provides new theoretical insights into destination marketing research by identifying eye gaze as a human element to increase the effectiveness of destination promotions and showing empathy as the underlying mechanism. Most previous research on human elements in tourism-related promotions mainly focuses on the human presence, such as the mere presence of visitors, the proportion of visitors, and the identity of the destination endorser (Back et al., 2020; Joe et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). However, the human element also covers parts of the human image, such as facial expressions, hands, and eyes (Zhang et al., 2023). How do such detailed human elements influence consumer perceptions of tourism destination promotions? To address this gap, this research empirically investigates the impact of eye gaze on the effectiveness of a destination promotion.

While previous research has examined perceived narrative transportation and perceived similarity as separate underlying mechanisms that explain the influence of human elements in tourism-related promotions (Back et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022; Pachucki et al., 2022), we introduce empathy to integrate the two concepts. Empathy can influence an individual's transportation experience, and it is more likely to happen when individuals perceive others as similar to themselves (Davis, 1994; Green & Brock, 2000). Narrative transportation and empathy both entail a profound sense of engagement and involvement. In the case of narrative transportation, individuals immerse themselves in a story, whereas with empathy, individuals emotionally connect with others' experiences (Escalas & Stern, 2003; Green & Brock, 2000). Previous research has focused on eye gaze as a visual cue for conveying information and its influence on narrative transportation in non-personal communications (To & Patrick, 2021). We argue that the eye gaze can also serve as a social cue that elicits empathy, emphasizing individuals' connection and emotional responses.

Second, this research enriches the literature on sensory marketing by thoroughly exploring how gender congruity, a crucial but often disregarded human factor, can influence the impact of eye gaze on destination promotions. While previous research has demonstrated the impact of averted eye gaze, the current study highlights the importance of gender congruity. By uncovering the gender-specific effects of averted eye gaze on empathy and destination promotions, this research provides a deeper understanding of how an eye gaze can be strategically employed to resonate with diverse consumer segments. Moreover, this research contributes to the research on gender congruity. The influence of gender congruity has been extensively investigated across different contexts, such as nursing, service encounters, leader-subordinate relationships, and mentoring, utilizing the similarity-attraction paradigm (Berkovich, 2018; Turban et al., 2002; Martin, 2012; Su & Mattila, 2020). Individuals are more likely to respond favorably to those of the same gender because gender similarity can enhance interpersonal attraction, trust, compatibility, and rapport (Sacco et al., 2003; Su & Mattila, 2020). However, in tourism promotions depicting human images, many other human factors, such as facial expression, eye gaze, manner of dressing, and gestures, can influence consumers' perceptions and reactions. Our findings indicate that gender congruity is important when promoting natural destinations with the model's averted eye gaze. However, when promoting familiar urban destinations, the direct eye gaze of the female model is more appealing among male viewers (i.e., gender incongruity). Therefore, this research highlights the intricate interplay between gender congruity and eye gaze when promoting different types of tourism destinations.

Third, this research adds to research on empathy. Previous studies have examined the favorable outcomes of empathy, such as increasing service quality perceptions (Barlow & Maul,

2000) and visitors' altruistic motivation (Miles, 2002; Stone, 2006). Further, recent tourism research has investigated factors evoking empathy, such as storytelling (Modlinm et al.,2011; Akgün et al., 2015), audience identity (Yi et al., 2022), and unfair reviews (Allard et al., 2020). Our research contributes to this body of knowledge by identifying gaze direction, in conjunction with gender congruity, as a means to enhance empathy and by highlighting destination type as a key factor that influences empathetic responses. By uncovering how these specific factors influence empathetic responses to destination promotions, our study offers a fresh perspective on the psychological processes underlying empathy elicitation in promotional campaigns.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have several practical implications for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and tourism industries. The nuanced understanding of how potential tourists respond to various destination marketing elements can enhance the effectiveness of advertising campaigns and, ultimately, influence visit intentions. Our findings suggest that destination marketing featuring humans should take into account not only the gender of the model and the model's gaze direction but also the gender of the audience and the types of destinations being promoted. We show that when the model in the photograph is the same gender as the viewer, an averted (vs. direct) eye gaze is more effective in promoting a natural destination. However, when promoting an urban destination, a direct (vs. averted) eye gaze of a female model in the photograph is more effective in attracting male viewers. Therefore, considering the potential for significant disparities in responses between genders to the model in destination promotions, this study provides nuanced suggestions for destination marketers targeting either male or female tourists.

Firstly, a rising phenomenon is the increasing popularity of "all-female travel." It pertains to female travelers engaging in leisure activities with other women, such as friends, family members, colleagues, sports team members, and fellow members from organizations they belong to (Gibson et al., 2012; Junek et al., 2006; Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2015). For such "all-female travel" markets, marketers should feature female models looking away when promoting natural destinations and nature-based activities. In addition, the same strategy could also be effective for family tourism. As females (or mothers) often organize travel plans and make the final decision for their family (Koc, 2004; Barlés-Arizón et al., 2013; Wang & Li, 2021), increasing females' visit intention is conducive to driving a larger market. Conversely, for campaigns aimed at male tourists, photographs should either feature male models looking away or female models making direct eye contact, when promoting natural destinations or nature-based activities, such as adventure tourism (Cater, 2013) and hunting (Oltean & Gabor, 2021). However, when promoting urban destinations or urban-based activities such as city tours, marketers may consider using female models with direct eye contact in promotional photographs.

Secondly, given the vast array of marketing channels available in today's business landscape, our findings prompt tourism marketers to tailor promotions to different genders. This strategic segmentation ensures that the right message reaches the right audience through the right channel. For instance, a promotional photograph of a natural destination featuring a female model with a direct eye gaze or a male model with an averted eye gaze could be strategically placed in media outlets that predominantly cater to male audiences, such as specific genres of magazines or during sports live streaming events. This tailored approach not only enhances the appeal of the destination but also contributes to a more efficient allocation of marketing resources, ensuring that each advertisement reaches its full potential in terms of audience engagement and communication.

However, not every tourism authority or company may clearly understand their target market's demographic profile. In such cases, tourism marketers can use photographs featuring an averted-gaze male model when promoting natural destinations. This recommendation is based on our findings that a male model's averted (vs. direct) gaze enhances destination visit intention among the male audience while having no significant negative impact on female observers. On the other hand, when promoting urban destinations, tourism marketers can use photographs featuring a direct-gaze female model, as both males and females respond favorably, according to our results. The above strategies minimize the potential backlash of specific eye gaze preferences among females while being more effective in increasing visit intention among males.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations point to future research. First, many visual cues, such as facial expressions, manner of dressing, and gestures, can influence consumers' perceptions and reactions. However, we only focus on eye gaze in the current research. In addition, in Study 2, the sample was not balanced across participants' gender, thus leading to potential biases. Therefore, a replication study is needed, and it would be interesting for future research to examine other human element-related cues. Second, we examine the influence of eye gaze and gender congruity on destination visit intention. A field study or secondary data examining consumers' travel behaviors would add value. Future research can collaborate with a travel agency or a Tourism Bureau to track consumers' actual booking behaviors and number of visits while manipulating the model's eye gaze direction and gender. Third, our findings show that the proposed interaction effect of gender congruity and eye gaze direction is attenuated with urban destinations. In addition, direct eye contact of a female model is more effective among males. Although we attribute this to opposite-gender attraction, more empirical evidence is needed to demonstrate the underlying mechanism of perceived attractiveness when featuring direct eye contact. Lastly, we collected data in the U.S., so that the results and findings may vary across different cultures. Wang et al. (2018) show that Chinese (vs. US) consumers process information more deeply when a model displays an averted gaze, indicating cultural differences in the eye gaze effect. Thus, future research should examine the moderating role of culture to enrich our research findings.

REFERENCES

- Adams Jr, R. B., & Kleck, R. E. (2003). Perceived gaze direction and the processing of facial displays of emotion. *Psychological Science, 14*(6), 644-647. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.0956-7976.2003.psci_1479.x
- Allard, T., Dunn, L. H., & White, K. (2020). Negative reviews, positive impact: Consumer empathetic responding to unfair word of mouth. *Journal of Marketing, 84*(4), 86-108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224292092438>
- Akgün, A. E., Keskin, H., Ayar, H., & Erdoğan, E. (2015). The influence of storytelling approach in travel writings on readers' empathy and travel intentions. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 207*, 577-586. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.10.129>
- Araújo, D., Brymer, E., Brito, H., Withagen, R., & Davids, K. (2019). The empowering variability of affordances of nature: Why do exercisers feel better after performing the same exercise in natural environments than in indoor environments?. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 42*, 138-145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.12.020>
- Argyle, M., Ingham, R., Alkema, F., & McCallin, M. (1973). The different functions of gaze. *Semiotica, 7*, 99-32. <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.1973.7.1.19>
- Argyle, M., & Cook, M., (1976). *Gaze and Mutual Gaze*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Arora, N., Rana, M., & Prashar, S. (2023). Empathy toward social media advertisements: The moderating role of ad intrusiveness. *Journal of Promotion Management, 29*(4), 535-568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2022.2163038>
- Back, R. M., Park, J. Y., Bufquin, D., Nutta, M. W., & Lee, S. J. (2020). Effects of hotel website photograph size and human images on perceived transportation and behavioral intentions. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 89*, 102545. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102545>
- Bae, M. (2021). The effect of sequential structure in charity advertising on message elaboration and donation intention: The mediating role of empathy. *Journal of Promotion Management, 27*(1), 177-209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2020.1809597>
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Moore, D. J. (1994). Public service advertisements: Emotions and empathy guide prosocial behavior. *Journal of Marketing, 58*(1), 56-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429940580010>
- Barlés-Arizona, M. J., Fraj-Andrés, E., & Martínez-Salinas, E. (2013). Family vacation decision making: The role of woman. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 30*(8), 873-890. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.835681>
- Barlow, J., & Maul, D. (2000). *Emotional value: Creating strong bonds with your customers*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Bartsch, A., & Kloß, A. (2019). Personalized charity advertising. Can personalized prosocial messages promote empathy, attitude change, and helping intentions toward stigmatized social groups?. *International Journal of Advertising, 38*(3), 345-363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2018.1482098>
- Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action. *Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1986*(23-28), 2.
- Baron-Cohen, S. (1991). Precursors to a theory of mind: Understanding attention in others. *Natural theories of mind: Evolution, development and simulation of everyday mindreading, 1*(233-251), 1.
- Berkovich, I. (2018). Effects of principal-teacher gender similarity on teacher's trust and organizational commitment. *Sex Roles, 78*, 561-572. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017->

- Bongiorno, R., Langbroek, C., Bain, P. G., Ting, M., & Ryan, M. K. (2020). Why women are blamed for being sexually harassed: The effects of empathy for female victims and male perpetrators. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 44(1), 11-27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843198687>
- Brickson, S. (2000). Exploring identity: Where are we now?. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 147-148. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.27711642>
- Byun, J., & Jang, S. S. (2015). Effective destination advertising: Matching effect between advertising language and destination type. *Tourism Management*, 50, 31-40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.01.005>
- Cater, C. (2013). The meaning of adventure. In S.VTaylor , P. Varley & T. Johnston(Eds.), *Adventure Tourism: Meanings, experience and learning* (pp. 7-18). London: Routledge.
- Dahl, D. W., Sengupta, J., & Vohs, K. D. (2009). Sex in advertising: Gender differences and the role of relationship commitment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36(2), 215-231. <https://doi.org/10.1086/597158>
- Davis, M. H. (1994). *Empathy: A social psychological approach*. Madison: Westview Press
- Eisenberg, N., & Strayer, J. (1987). Critical issues in the study of empathy. In N. Eisenberg & J. Strayer (Eds.), *Empathy and its development* (pp. 3–13). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Escalas, J. E., & Stern, B. B. (2003). Sympathy and empathy: Emotional responses to advertising dramas. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(4), 566-578. <https://doi.org/10.1086/346251>
- Ewing, L., Rhodes, G., & Pellicano, E. (2010). Have you got the look? Gaze direction affects judgements of facial attractiveness. *Visual Cognition*, 18(3), 321-330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13506280902965599>
- Fan, H., Han, B., & Wang, W. (2024). Aligning (in) congruent chatbot–employee empathic responses with service-recovery contexts for customer retention. *Journal of Travel Research*, 63(8), 1870-1893. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875231201505>
- Feiereisen, S., Broderick, A. J., & Douglas, S. P. (2009). The effect and moderation of gender identity congruity: Utilizing “real women” advertising images. *Psychology & Marketing*, 26(9), 813-843. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20301>
- Feshbach, N. D., & Roe, K. (1968). Empathy in six-and seven-year-olds. *Child Development*, 133-145.
- Fisher, R. J., Vandenbosch, M., & Antia, K. D. (2008). An empathy-helping perspective on consumers' responses to fund-raising appeals. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(3), 519-531. <https://doi.org/10.1086/586909>
- Frischen, A., Bayliss, A. P., & Tipper, S. P. (2007). Gaze cueing of attention: visual attention, social cognition, and individual differences. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133(4), 694-724. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.133.4.694>
- Gefen, D., 2000. E-Commerce: the role of familiarity and trust. *Omega*, 28 (6), 725–737. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-0483\(00\)00021-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-0483(00)00021-9)
- Gibson, H. J. (1998). Sport tourism: a critical analysis of research. *Sport Management Review*, 1(1), 45-76. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3523\(98\)70099-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3523(98)70099-3)
- Gibson, H. J., Berdychevsky, L., & Bell, H. L. (2012). Girlfriend getaways over the life course: Change and continuity. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 15(1), 38-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2012.670963>
- Glover, P. (2009). Celebrity endorsement in tourism advertising: Effects on destination image. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 16(1), 16-23.

<https://doi.org/10.1375/jhtm.16.1.16>

- Goenka, S., & Van Osselaer, S. M. (2019). Charities can increase the effectiveness of donation appeals by using a morally congruent positive emotion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46(4), 774-790. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucz012>
- Green, M. C. & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 701721. 10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701
- Hall, J. A., & Knapp, M. L. (Eds.). (2013). *Nonverbal communication* (Vol. 2). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Han, H., Hsu, L.-T. J., & Sheu, C. (2010). Application of the theory of planned behavior to green hotel choice: Testing the effect of environmental friendly activities. *Tourism Management*, 31(3), 325–334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.03.013>
- Hayes, A. F. (2017). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. New York: Guilford publications.
- Hemsley, G. D., & Doob, A. N. (1978). The Effect of Looking Behavior on Perceptions of a Communicator's Credibility 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 8(2), 136-142. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1978.tb00772.x>
- Hutton, S. B., & Nolte, S. (2011). The effect of gaze cues on attention to print advertisements. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 25(6), 887-892. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1763>
- Ignatov, E., & Smith, S. (2006). Segmenting Canadian culinary tourists. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 9(3), 235-255. <https://doi.org/10.2167/cit/229.0>
- Joe, S., Choi, C., & Busser, J. (2021). The impact of virtual presence on willingness to book: The moderating role of self-construal and gender. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 98, 103021. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2021.103021>
- Junek, O., Binney, W., & Winn, S. (2006). All-female travel: What do women really want?. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 54(1), 53-62.
- Jung, N., & Im, S. (2021). The mechanism of social media marketing: influencer characteristics, consumer empathy, immersion, and sponsorship disclosure. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(8), 1265-1293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1991107>
- Kampe, K. K., Frith, C. D., Dolan, R. J., & Frith, U. (2001). Reward value of attractiveness and gaze. *Nature*, 413, 589. <https://doi.org/10.1038/35098149>
- Karremans, J. C., Verwijmeren, T., Pronk, T. M., & Reitsma, M. (2009). Interacting with women can impair men's cognitive functioning. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45(4), 1041-1044. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.05.004>
- Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Prayag, G. (2015). The girlfriend getaway market: Segmenting accommodation and service preferences. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 45, 99–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2014.12.003>
- Koc, E. (2004). The role of family members in the family holiday purchase decision-making process. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 5(2), 85-102. https://doi.org/10.1300/J149v05n02_05
- Krishna, A. (2012). An integrative review of sensory marketing: Engaging the senses to affect perception, judgment and behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 22(3), 332-351. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2011.08.003>
- Larsen, R. J., & Shackelford, T. K. (1996). Gaze avoidance: Personality and social judgments of people who avoid direct face-to-face contact. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 21(6), 907-917. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869\(96\)00148-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(96)00148-1)
- Lee, E. J. (2016). Empathy can increase customer equity related to pro-social brands. *Journal of*

- Business Research*, 69(9), 3748-3754. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.05.018>
- Li, B., Chen, S., & Zhou, Q. (2023). Empathy with influencers? The impact of the sensory advertising experience on user behavioral responses. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 72, 103286. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2023.103286>
- Li, C. S., Zhang, C. X., Chen, X., & Wu, M. S. S. (2021). Luxury shopping tourism: views from Chinese post-1990s female tourists. *Tourism Review*, 76(2), 427-438. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-08-2019-0335>
- Li, Y., Liu, B., & Xie, L. (2022). Celebrity endorsement in international destination marketing: Evidence from eye-tracking techniques and laboratory experiments. *Journal of Business Research*, 150, 553-566. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.06.040>
- Li, Y. W., & Wan, L. C. (2025). Inspiring tourists' imagination: How and when human presence in photographs enhances travel mental simulation and destination attractiveness. *Tourism Management*, 106, 104969. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2024.104969>
- Lin, L., Hoegg, J., & Aquino, K. (2018). When beauty backfires: the effects of server attractiveness on consumer taste perceptions. *Journal of Retailing*, 94(3), 296-311. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2018.04.003>
- Luo, Y., & Deng, J. (2008). The New Environmental Paradigm and nature-based tourism motivation. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46(4), 392-402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875073083>
- Martin, B. A. (2012). A stranger's touch: Effects of accidental interpersonal touch on consumer evaluations and shopping time. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(1), 174-184. <https://doi.org/10.1086/662038>
- Mason, M. F., Tatkov, E. P., & Macrae, C. N. (2005). The look of love: Gaze shifts and person perception. *Psychological Science*, 16(3), 236-239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0956-7976.2005.00809.x>
- Meltzoff, A. N. (2002). Imitation as a mechanism of social cognition: Origins of empathy, theory of mind, and the representation of action. *Blackwell handbook of childhood cognitive development*, 6-25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996652>
- Miles, W. F. (2002). Auschwitz: Museum interpretation and darker tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(4), 1175-1178. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(02\)00054-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(02)00054-3)
- Modlin Jr, E. A., Alderman, D. H., & Gentry, G. W. (2011). Tour guides as creators of empathy: The role of affective inequality in marginalizing the enslaved at plantation house museums. *Tourist Studies*, 11(1), 3-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797611412007>
- Morgan, D. (2005). *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press.
- Olesker, W., & Balter, L. (1972). Sex and empathy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 19(6), 559-562. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0033552>
- Oltean, F. D., & Gabor, M. R. (2021). Cross-cultural analysis of the consumer profile of hunting tourism and trophy hunting from tradition to protected areas: Study Case on Romania and Spain. *Land*, 10(11), 1218. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land10111218>
- Oyinseye, P., Suárez, A., Saldaña, E., Fernández-Zurbano, P., Valentin, D., & Sáenz-Navajas, M. P. (2022). Multidimensional representation of wine drinking experience: Effects of the level of consumers' expertise and involvement. *Food quality and preference*, 98, 104536. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2022.104536>
- Pachucki, C., Grohs, R., & Scholl-Grissemann, U. (2022). No story without a storyteller: The impact of the storyteller as a narrative element in online destination marketing. *Journal of Travel Research*, 61(8), 1703-1718. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875211046052>

- Palcu, J., Sudkamp, J., & Florack, A. (2017). Judgments at gaze value: Gaze cuing in banner advertisements, its effect on attention allocation and product judgments. *Frontiers in Psychology, 8*, 881. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00881>
- Park, S. Y., & Yim, M. Y. C. (2020). Do celebrity endorsements benefit familiar luxury brands? A perspective from social adaptation theory. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising, 41*(1), 20-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.2018.1519471>
- Peters, K., Elands, B., & Buijs, A. (2010). Social interactions in urban parks: Stimulating social cohesion?. *Urban forestry & urban greening, 9*(2), 93-100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2009.11.003>
- Petersen, J. L. (2018). The gender similarities hypothesis. *The SAGE handbook of personality and individual differences: Origins of personality and individual differences*, 431-449.
- Pfeiffer, U. J., Vogeley, K., & Schilbach, L. (2013). From gaze cuing to dual eye-tracking: novel approaches to investigate the neural correlates of gaze in social interaction. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, 37*(10), 2516-2528. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2013.07.017>
- Roy, S., Gammoh, B. S., & Koh, A. C. (2012). Predicting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements using the balance theory. *Journal of Customer Behaviour, 11*(1), 33-52. <https://doi.org/10.1362/147539212X13286273975238>
- Roy, S., Guha, A., Biswas, A., & Grewal, D. (2019). Celebrity endorsements in emerging markets: Align endorsers with brands or with consumers?. *Journal of International Business Studies, 50*, 295-317. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-018-00209-1>
- Roy, S., Dryl, W., & de Araujo Gil, L. (2021). Celebrity endorsements in destination marketing: A three country investigation. *Tourism Management, 83*, 104213. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104213>
- Sacco, J. M., Scheu, C. R., Ryan, A. M., & Schmitt, N. (2003). An investigation of race and sex similarity effects in interviews: A multilevel approach to relational demography. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(5), 852. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.852>
- Sajjacholapunt, P., & Ball, L. J. (2014). The influence of banner advertisements on attention and memory: Human faces with averted gaze can enhance advertising effectiveness. *Frontiers in Psychology, 5*, 70413. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00166>
- Schoner-Schatz, L., Hofmann, V., & Stokburger-Sauer, N. E. (2021). Destination's social media communication and emotions: An investigation of visit intentions, word-of-mouth and travelers' facially expressed emotions. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, 22*, 100661. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2021.100661>
- Schunk, D. H. (1987). Peer models and children's behavioral change. *Review of Educational Research, 57*, 149-174. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543057002149>
- Schunk, D. H., & Usher, E. L. (2012). Social cognitive theory and motivation. *The Oxford handbook of human motivation, 2*, 11-26.
- Shahid, S., Paul, J., Gilal, F. G., & Ansari, S. (2022). The role of sensory marketing and brand experience in building emotional attachment and brand loyalty in luxury retail stores. *Psychology & Marketing, 39*(7), 1398-1412. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21661>
- Simons, P. (1988), Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture. In N. Broude & M. D. Garrard(Eds), *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (pp.38-57), London: Routledge.
- Slaughter, V. (2015). Theory of mind in infants and young children: A review. *Australian Psychologist, 50*(3), 169-172. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12080>
- Smith, M. K. (2018). Wellness in the "U-bend" of life: why the core market is middle aged and female. *International Journal of Spa and Wellness, 1*(1), 4-19.

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/24721735.2018.1438480>
- Song, H. (2017). Females and tourism activities: An insight for all-female tours in Hong Kong. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 13(1), 83-102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2017.1327385>
- Shepherd, S. V. (2010). Following gaze: gaze-following behavior as a window into social cognition. *Frontiers in integrative neuroscience*, 4, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnint.2010.00005>
- Stephenson, L. J., Edwards, S. G., & Bayliss, A. P. (2021). From gaze perception to social cognition: The shared-attention system. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(3), 553-576. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620953773>
- Stone, P. R. (2006). A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 54(2), 145-160.
- Stotland, E. (1969). Exploratory investigations of empathy. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 4, 271-314. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60080-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60080-5)
- Su, N., & Mattila, A. S. (2020). Does gender bias exist? The impact of gender congruity on consumer's Airbnb booking intention and the mediating role of trust. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 89, 102405. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2019.102405>
- To, R. N., & Patrick, V. M. (2021). How the eyes connect to the heart: The influence of eye gaze direction on advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(1), 123-146. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucaa063>
- Turban, D. B., Dougherty, T. W., & Lee, F. K. (2002). Gender, race, and perceived similarity effects in developmental relationships: The moderating role of relationship duration. *Journal of vocational behavior*, 61(2), 240-262. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2001.1855>
- Verma, A., & Jain, S. (2022). Social Cognition Theory and Physical Activity among Local Population: An Overview. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research & Development*, 13(2), 82-85.
- Wallis, M., & Simon, S. (1998), *Studying Plays*, London: Arnold.
- Wang, L., Chen, Y., Xu, Y., & Lin, Z. (2025). From faces to feels: The impact of human images on online review usefulness. *Journal of Travel Research*, 64(2), 284-298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875231217738>
- Wang, Q., Wedel, M., Huang, L., & Liu, X. (2018). Effects of model eye gaze direction on consumer visual processing: Evidence from China and America. *Information & Management*, 55(5), 588-597. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2017.12.003>
- Wang, Y., & Sparks, B. A. (2016). An eye-tracking study of tourism photo stimuli: image characteristics and ethnicity. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(5), 588-602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287514564598>
- Wang, Y., & Li, M. (2021). Family identity bundles and holiday decision making. *Journal of Travel Research*, 60(3), 486-502. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287520930091>
- Yi, K., Li, F., Zeng, Y., Xie, C., & Xu, Z. (2022). The Mediating Role of Empathy in the Internal Mechanism of Film-Induced Tourism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 900998. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.900998>
- Yim, M. Y. C., Kim, Y. K., & Lee, J. (2021). How to easily facilitate consumers' mental simulation through advertising: the effectiveness of self-referencing image dynamics on purchase intention. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(5), 810-834. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1801014>
- Yoon, C., & Rolland, E. (2012). Knowledge-sharing in virtual communities: familiarity, anonymity

and self-determination theory. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 31(11), 1133-1143.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2012.702355>

Zhang, K., Zhang, J., & Yang, J. (2023). The influence of human elements in photographs on tourists' destination perceptions and intentions. *Tourism Management*, 95, 104684.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104684>