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The Determinants of Mongolian Tourists' Purchase Intention: Moderating Effect of Involvement and Site Image

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between product characteristics, product preference and purchase intention for Mongolian tourists visiting Korea, and in particular, to analyze the moderating effect of product involvement and tourist image in the relationship between product characteristics and purchase intention. **Research design, data, and methodology:** A research model was derived through existing literature research and a survey was conducted on Mongolian tourists visiting Korea. SPSS and AMOS24.0 were used for data analysis and hypothesis testing. **Results:** The tourism product characteristics affect the product preference and purchase intention. Tourist image and involvement have moderating effects between product preference and purchased intention. **Conclusions:** This study demonstrated that product characteristics at travel destinations is a key factor in order to enhance the product preference and purchase intention for foreigners visiting Korea. On the other hand, since the purchase intention of the tourism destination vary depending on tourist image and involvement, it suggests that travel industry practitioners or researchers should try to various efforts to enhance the factors which affect the involvement or the tourists or image of the tourist site.

Keywords : Product Characteristics, Product Preference, Involvement, Tourist Image, Purchase Intention

JEL Classification Code: E44, F31, F37, G15

1. Introduction

Since the "Korean Wave" began in 1990, many foreigners have begun to pay keen attention to Korean culture, food, cosmetics, and fashion. The number of foreigners visiting Korea for tourism, business, education, and rest is increasing, and the proportion of Mongolian tourists is also holding an important part. Since 2023, an

average of 12,000 Mongolian tourists visit Korea per month, and shopping costs for goods per person averaged \$677, which is the second-largest after China (\$1,263). In particular, the proportion of Mongolian tourists among high-end buyers that spend more than USD 3,000 (KRW 3.57 million) accounted for 24% of all visitors to Korea, the highest among the top 20 countries compiled by the Korea Tourism Organization (www.visitkorea.or.kr).

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In consumer behavior theory, the most influential factor on consumers' purchases is the characteristics of the product, and the characteristics of the product affect the favorability of the product, so consumers make purchases. This phenomenon may also apply to tourists visiting foreign countries, and if the quality of the product is excellent, tourists have a higher affinity for the product, and as a result, they purchase the product (Lee & Ahn, 2010). Furthermore, many studies have been found that not only product characteristics but also a positive image of tourist destinations are important factors that significantly affect product purchase intentions (Hwang & Cho, 2019).

On the other hand, product involvement is also known to have an important effect on purchase intention in general consumer behavior (Hwang & Cho, 2019), but there is little research on how involvement affects product quality and purchase intention in overseas tourism.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between product characteristics, product preference and purchase intention for Mongolian tourists visiting Korea, and in particular, to analyze the moderating effect of product involvement and tourist image in the relationship between product characteristics and purchase intention. This study will contribute not only to the expansion of the academic horizon on the factors of overseas tourists' product purchase, but also to practical application in the tourism industry field.

2. Research Background

2.1. Product Characteristics

Product characteristics can be said to be the most important factor influencing consumers to choose or purchase a brand.

Product characteristics refer to the properties of a product, and consumers generally classify it into internal(intrinsic) and external(extrinsic) properties, consisting of a combination of various properties. Intrinsic properties refer to the physical properties of the product itself, and external properties refer to information attached according to other products. Kim (2008) and Zeithaml (1988) saw that the external properties of the product are related to the product, including price, brand name, and advertisement, and the intrinsic properties are related to the physical properties of the product and are colors, patterns, and textures that are maintained unless the product itself is changed.

Studies say that the characteristics of products in travel

destinations consist of practicality, quality, design, price, related service just like the characteristics of general other products (Kim, 2008; Varian, 1995, Wang & Li, 2022),

Evaluation of the specific characteristics and attributes of a product or service depends on the purpose of product purchase or benefit assessment criteria, the importance of attributes, and the type of product (Lee & Ahn, 2010). Taken together, product characteristics consist of factors such as product quality, design, price, and brand, and are the most important factors leading to purchase by improving favorability with the product.

2.2. Product Likeability

The dictionary meaning of like refers to 'good' or 'good feelings', and likeability is the degree to which you have good feelings about an object.

Lee et al. (2022) also explains the meaning of 'likability' as 'good feeling' or 'feeling good'. Good feelings for people can occur not only through appearance, but also through attitudes and speech, and they are emotions that can naturally occur in organizations and social life where people and people live together.

The attitude formed by external or internal factors such as belief and perception of a product's characteristics determines whether a consumer likely to purchase of a product. In a study by Regan et al. (1974), likability is an individual's attitude related to various social activities, and the more one likes a specific object, the more active he is. In addition, in the case of Heider (1958), in general, individuals expect to act positively toward the person they like and negatively toward the person they dislike, and this varies depending on the individual type.

Taken together, product preference shows a continuous friendly attitude toward a specific product and can be measured by preference or positive attitude, belief, and interest in the product.

2.3. Purchase Intention

The purchase decision-making process is the process of solving the problem of consumers' desire, and is the degree of willingness and desire to purchase a product now or in the future.

Purchase intention is generally defined as the probability that beliefs and attitudes will be translated into action, which is the intention to purchase the product when the need for purchase arises, and if the purchase intention is high, the probability of actual purchase increases.

Cheng and Park (2008) defined purchase intention as the consumer's willingness to take specific future actions when purchasing a product. They argued that consumers have a belief in a product and have an attitude accordingly,

and that attitudes cannot be directly observed, so they should be inferred by appropriate measurement methods. Aaker (1997) said that purchase intention means the future behavior of consumers, and that the attitude of belief is likely to be made by action, and that purchase intention means the future behavior of consumers. In other words, it can be seen that the purchase intention may occur because the product wants to be purchased, or it may occur due to internal factors such as personal characteristics or external surrounding situations such as advertisements. Onofrei et al. (2022) found that homophily and post quality partially mediate the relationship between social media interactions and purchase intention. Han (2019) suggested that purchase intentions are expressed through decision-making processes such as cost, time, and effort to purchase products that consumers want, and purchase intentions become clearer through understanding consumer behavior that supports purchase.

According to previous studies, purchase intention is a future plan or expectation that appears to consumers about consumers' purchasing behavior, and it also refers to the possibility that consumer attitudes and beliefs will lead to purchasing behavior, which means planned and predictable behavior.

2.4. Involvement

Involvement was first introduced in the marketing field by Krugman (1971), and he conceptualizes the degree of involvement that consumers feel about a specific product and defines it as "personal relevance when consumers accept or reject a product when they encounter it in communication." Mitchell (1979) and Zaichkowsky (1985) thought that involvement is an important antecedent factor that affects purchasing behavior in relation to material products, as it is an individual's unique need, level, internal situation variable, or perception of an individual's unique desire, value, interest, and importance. Cohen (1983) classified situational involvement, which means temporary nature, and continuous involvement, which is essential information obtained from past experiences.

In consumer behavior, involvement is known to have a great influence on the product evaluation or selection process of consumers. Celsi and Olson (1988) believes that the essential characteristic of product involvement is the personal relevance that a product provides to consumers, which improves when the image or characteristics of the product and its potential usefulness meet consumers' personal goals and values.

Mitchell (1979) reveals that the higher the consumer's involvement in a particular product, the higher the degree of interest or emotional attachment to the product. But if

the degree of involvement is low, the degree of interest or emotional attachment is low. Antil (1984) argues that there is a difference between information search and alternative evaluation between the two groups, saying that high involvement refers to an inner state with a high level of awakening, interest, and emotional relevance caused by a product.

Based on previous studies, involvement can be defined as the perceived relevance or importance of consumers based on their own needs, interests, and values for a specific object, and differs in purchasing decision-making according to the degree of involvement.

2.4. Image of Tourist Site

Although it is not a product or service, the image of a tourist destination has also been of interest in the field of tourism as it plays an important role in motivating tourists in selecting a tourist destination. The initial study of tourist attraction images was first presented by Hunt (1975) and defined as the visual interest and linguistic ideas that the group has about the environment, conditions, residents, and scenery of other regions other than their residence. The image of a tourist destination refers to the overall appearance of a tourist destination composed of information obtained in various forms or actual experience at a tourist destination before visiting the tourist destination (Day, 2002) or concept or perception (Crompton, 1992). Kotler (2000) defined images as a combination of expectations, emotions, beliefs, and impressions of a specific object or region, and Bu (2003) said that not only is the process of visiting or tourism, but also has a significant impact on the perception that people around the region have.

In subsequent studies, the image of a tourist destination is defined as an explanation of an individual's overall interest in the tourist destination or overall understanding and thoughts (Kim et al., 2010), and a series of reactions, impressions, and thoughts (Jung et al., 2018).

In summary, the image of tourists about tourist destinations can be said to be tourists' psychological perception and understanding of tourist places. The image of tourist destinations is influenced by tourist destination products and services, and has a positive effect on the purchase of tourist destinations (Kotler, 2000).

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Model

As shown in existing literature studies, travelers visiting foreign countries have a preference for products

depending on the characteristics of travel destination products, and it seems that there is an effect of product involvement or tourist image in the relationship. This study aims to empirically study the moderating effect of travelers' product involvement and travel destination image in relation to product characteristics, preferences, and purchase intention for Mongolian tourists visiting Korea

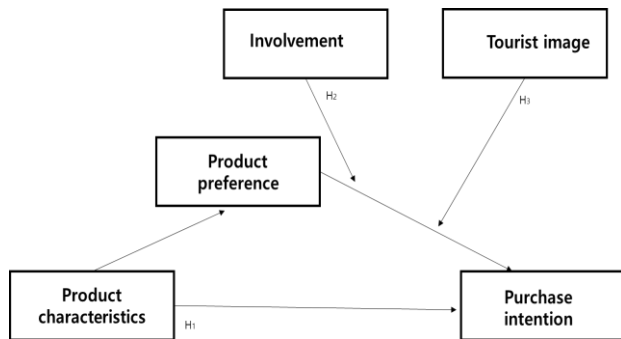


Figure 1: Research model

3.2. Hypothesis

Consumers generally form an attitude (preference) based on their perception and belief in a product, and decide whether to purchase it (Fishbein, 1963). The five stages of purchase decision-making, which are widely known to many scholars, consist of necessity recognition, information collection, evaluation and selection, purchase decision-making, and post-purchase behavior (Engel et al. 1982).

There are many proven research that the characteristics of products in the tourism field have an important effect on tourists' attitudes and purchase intention. Studies demonstrated that the quality factor of the product was the most important factor in determining the purchase of a tourist at a tourist destination (Murphy et al., 2011), and this phenomenon appeared in the purchase of a smartphone and travel souvenirs (Kim, 2008; Cheng & Park, 2008). The per capita purchase amount of Mongolian tourists visiting Korea was the second-highest after China, and the relationship between the product characteristics, favorability, and purchase intention of tourist destinations is expected to apply equally to Mongolian tourists visiting Korea. Therefore, this study establishes the following hypothesis [H1] for the relationship between the characteristics of the product, favorability, and purchase intention based on prior research and theoretical exploration.

H1: The characteristics of tourist destinations' products will have a positive (+) effect on tourists' product

preference and purchase intention

Previous studies demonstrated that the perception of the various characteristics that make up the tourist image affects the evaluation of products made in a country by suggesting that a country's favorable and unfavorable attitudes and emotions toward social, political, and economic conditions affect the evaluation of products. A number of studies have proven that the country's politics, economy, culture, and nationality are related to the purchase intention of foreign products, and studies on the relationship between the components of tourism image, evaluation of tourism products, and purchase intention are reported (Clark, 1990, Chen et al., 2022).

Since the 1990s, as the Korean Wave has spread abroad, foreigners' interest in Korea and positive attitudes have been spreading, and this trend has also affected foreigners' perception of Korean products. According to a study by Han (1988), when consumers are not familiar with Korean products and lack product information, tourists infer product quality from the tourist image, which directly affects consumers' beliefs about product attributes. A study of foreigners found that attitudes toward Korea affect Korean products, and attitudes toward Korea and Korean products have a positive effect on purchase intention (Oh et al. 2003).

Based on prior research and theoretical exploration, this study established the following hypothesis [H2] for the relationship between product preference and purchase intention according to the tourist destination image.

H2: There will be a difference in the relationship between product preference and purchase intention depending on the image of the tourist destination.

Product involvement is a concept that includes the degree of awareness of product interest, emotional obsession, and importance when a consumer encounters a product, and is evaluated as an important factor in decision-making in consumer behavior. In general, consumers with low involvement lead to purchasing behavior after purchasing knowledge about the product, and if they are highly involved, they form an attitude toward the brand first before purchasing the brand.

Krugman (1971) argues that consumers' attitudes toward brands vary depending on their involvement, and Mitchell (1979) demonstrated that consumers with high involvement are active and cautious in information exploration and alternative evaluation. Kim (2010) explained that consumers' product knowledge and product involvement are all closely related to consumer behavior because they utilize information stored in consumers' long-term memories. Antil (1984) said that the higher the

involvement, the stronger the brand loyalty and brand preference, and Lee and Choi (2008) demonstrated that shopping involvement has a moderating effect on consumers' hedonic motivation and impulse purchase behavior.

Mongolian tourists visiting Korea will have different levels of involvement in Korea depending on the each person. Those with high involvement are expected to be careful in purchasing products by forming strong brand loyalty and brand preference when purchasing tourist destinations, while those with low involvement are expected to make purchase decisions relatively easily due to relatively low personal interest and low anxiety about purchase results.

Based on prior research and theoretical exploration, this study establishes the following hypothesis [H3] for the relationship between product favorability and purchase intention according to the degree of involvement.

H3: There will be a difference in the relationship between product preference and purchase intention depending on the degree of involvement.

3.3. Scale of Variable

For this study, items of product characteristics are based on the research of Kim (2008) and Varian (1995). Product preference items are based on Heider (1958), Fishbein and Middlestadt (1995) while Engel et al. (1982), Guimares and Davis(1995) are used for the item of intention. Involvement items are drawn by Zaichkowsky (1985) and Krugman (1971) and Tourist imaged are made from the items of Kotler (2000) and Kim et al. (2010).

The questionnaire items were modified and used according to the purpose of this study and used on a Likert 5-point scale.

Table1: Measurement items

Construct	Item	Source
Product Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practicality • quality • design • price • fashion 	Kim (2008) Varian (1995)
Product Preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preference • confidence • accessibility • interest • devise 	Heider(1958) Fishbein and Middlestadt, (1995)
Intention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intention • desire • information • comparison • recommend • purchase plan. 	Engel,Blackwell and Miniard(1982) Guimares and Davis(1995)
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interest • plan • data information • experience • trust 	Zaichkowsky (1985) Krugman (1971)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • needs • information gathering • value • importance 	
Tourist Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • culture • charm • attractiveness • experience • learning study • enjoyment • belief • know ledge • thrill 	Kotler (2000) Kim et al. (2010)

3.4. Data Collection

The survey of this study was conducted for Mongolian visitors in Korea for a total of 150 days from September 2022 to December 2022. A total of 286 visitor copies were used for the final analysis and the analysis results are provided in the next section.

Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of 286 visitors who answered the questionnaire for this study.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics

		Prequency	%
Gender	Male	71	40.1
	Female	106	59.9
Age	1-20	19	10.7
	21-30	35	19.8
	31-40	79	44.6
	41-50	26	14.7
	51-70	16	9.0
	71-	2	1.1
Marriage status	Married	108	61.0
	Unmarried	69	39.0

4. Results

4.1. Data Validity and Reliability

To analyze the data collected from the questionnaire, this study utilized SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 24.0 for data coding. To verify the convergent and reliability of the data, an exploratory factor analysis and construct reliability, internal reliability using Cronbach's a testing was conducted. Table 3 shows the results of validity and reliability test.

Table 3: Results of Validity & Reliability

Variable	item	Construct Reliability	Internal reliability
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			(Chronbach's α)
Product Characteristics	5	0.730	.876
Product Preference	5	0.700	.868
Purchase intention	6	0.837	.913
Product involvement	9	0.864	.915
Tourist Image	11	0.870	.936

4.2. Correlation Analysis

To confirm the relationship and direction of variables, as well as their discriminant validity and possible causal analysis, a correlation analysis was arranged. The results of the investigation showed that the correlation coefficient of each variable have value from 0.520 to 0.766, indicating a positive (+) relation between the variables. To further verify the segregate validity, the square value of the correlation coefficient was correlated with the mean-variance extraction index (AVE), and it was found that each variable had secured discriminant validity. Additional information could be added to explain the importance of discriminant validity in research and how it is established through correlation analysis.

Table 4 : Results of Correlation Analysis(n=286)

item	1	2	3	4	5
1. Product Characteristics	1				
2. Product Preference	.628**	1			
3. Product involvement	.520**	.597**	1		
4. Tourist Image	.766**	.682**	.697**	1	
5. Purchase intention	.538**	.683**	.600**	.626**	1

Note: ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

4.3. Hypothesis Verification Result

(Hypothesis 1) Regression analysis was conducted to verify the relationship between product characteristics, favorability, and purchase intention. As a result, the relationship between product characteristics and favorability is $B=.524$ ($p=.000$), $Adj. R^2=.392$, and the relationship between product characteristics and purchase intention is $B=.495$ ($p=.000$), $Adj. R^2=.287$, and the effect of favorability on purchase intention is $B=.753$ ($p=.000$). It was found that the product characteristics had a positive (+) effect on the favorability and purchase intention of the product

(Hypothesis 2) Stepwise regression analysis was conducted to verify the moderating effect of tourism image in the relationship between product preference and purchase intention.

Table 5 : Results of stepwise regression

Variable	Model1 (Moderating value : Product involvement)		
	Model 1-1	Model 1-2	Model 1-13
Constant	1,081***	.939***	3.542***
Independent variable : product preference (X)	.753***	.753***	-.053***
Moderating variable : tourist image (M)	-	.267***	-.445
Interaction (X*M)(-	-	.256***
R ²	.466	.514	.529
Adj R ²	.465	.511	.524
R ² change	.466	.048	.014
F change	249.143	28.113	8.456
F (Sig)	249.143 (.000)	150.479 (.000)	105.772 (.000)

Note: ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

In Table 5, model 1-1 is the relationship between favorability and purchase intention, 1-2 is the tourist destination image, and 1-3 is the case of adding interaction variables, and the coefficient of the intersection term in model 1-3 is .256 ($t=2.908$, $p=.004$), it was found that the image of the tourist destination had a moderating effect in the relationship between the favorability of the product and the purchase intention.

(Hypothesis 3) Finally, Table 6 shows the results of a regression analysis to verify the moderating effect of product involvement in the relationship between product favorability, and purchase intention.

In Table 6, model 1-1 is the relationship between favorability and purchase intention, 1-2 is the case of adding product involvement, 1-3 is the case of adding interaction variables, and the coefficient of the cross term in model 1-3 is .178 ($t=-2.679$, $p=.008$), it was found that product involvement has a moderating effect in the relationship between product favorability and purchase intention.

Table 6 : Results of stepwise regression

Variable	Model1 (Moderating value : Product involvement)		
	Model 1-1	Model 1-2	Model 1-3
Constant	1.081	.656	-2.579
Independent variable : product favorability (X)	.753	.556	1.288
Moderating variable :product involvement(M)	-	.297	1.095
Interaction (X*M)	-	-	-.178**
R ²	.466	.524	.536
Adj R ²	.465	.521	.531
R ² change	.466	.058	.012
F change	249.143	34.409	7.177
F (Sig)	249.143 (.000)	156.378 (.000)	108.912 (.000)

Note: ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

4.4. Discussion

This study examined the effect of product characteristics of product favorability and purchase intention for Mongolian tourists visiting Korea, and the moderating effect of Korean image and product involvement in the relationship. As a result, product characteristics had a significant positive (+) effect on product favorability and purchase intention, which was consistent with studies on the relationship between product and purchase intention in consumer behavior theory and purchase intention of other tourist destinations. On the other hand, additional hypotheses on the moderating effect of tourist attraction image and product involvement were established and verified in the relationship between product favorability and purchase intention, and the two hypotheses also showed statistical significance. As a result of this study, it can be seen that consumers in tourist attractions make purchase decisions not only by direct attributes such as product quality and function, but also by environmental factors such as tourist attraction image and personal characteristics such as product involvement.

In this study, an additional analysis was conducted on how the relationship between product favorability and purchase intention changes depending on the level of tourism image and involvement.

Figure 2 is a schematic of the degree of change in the relationship between product favorability and purchase intention by dividing it into high and low groups of involvement, and Figure 3 is a schematic of the degree of

change by dividing the image of tourist destinations into high and low groups.

In Figure 2, the group with low involvement showed that the purchase intention was relatively low when the likability was low, but the purchase intention increased relatively as the likability increased. High involvement in the purchase product usually determines the purchase attitude of the product, so the degree of product characteristics or favorability is low, but low involvement shows a passive attitude toward the purchase product. This can explain how impulsive and hedonic motivations change in product purchase at tourist destinations, and suggests that tourist participation should be evaluated or the level of involvement should be analyzed for each tourist or product-specific sales strategy.

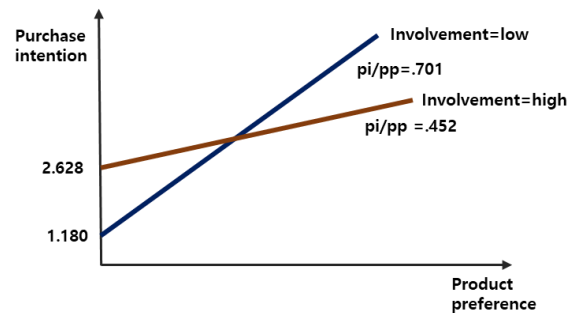


Figure 2: Moderating effect of involvement

In the relationship between the image of a tourist destination and the intention to purchase a product, the effect of product preference on purchase intention was also found to be higher in the group with a low image of a tourist destination than in the group with a high image. Since the image of a tourist destination is usually formed through service or atmosphere in the process of short-term travel, it shows that it is necessary to focus on enhancing the image of a tourist destination, especially for tourists who have a negative or low perception of the image of a Korean tourist destination.

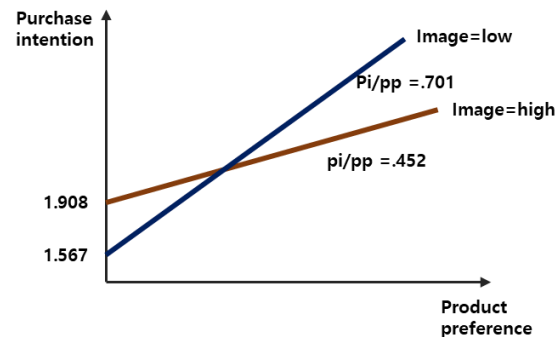


Figure 3: Moderating effect of Image

5. Conclusion and Limitations

This study investigated how product involvement and image of tourist destinations affect the process of reaching purchase behavior by recognizing the characteristics and favorability of tourist destination products for Mongolian tourists visiting Korea. As a result of the study, it was found that product characteristics have a positive (+) effect on product preference and purchase intention for tourists, and product involvement and tourist attraction image have a moderating effect in the relationship. In particular, it was found that the degree of influence of favorability on purchase intention was greater in the group with relatively low product involvement and tourist destination image. The results of this study, which takes into account the environmental factors of tourist attraction image and personal characteristics of product involvement in the field of purchasing tourist attractions, have expanded the existing theoretical horizon and provide useful implications for practitioners in the tourism industry. On the other hand, despite the academic and practical contribution of this study, this study has the following limitations.

First, this study has a limitation in its representation that it conducted research only on Mongolian tourists who visited Korea. It is necessary to verify the universality of the research results by expanding research to various foreigners visiting Korea. It will also be necessary to expand the scope of research to tourists visiting not only Korea but also other countries.

This study revealed that involvement and image have a significant moderating effect in tourists' product purchase behavior, but it did not study what factors of tourists form involvement and image. In the future, demographic research on what characteristics and types of tourists form the image of participation and tourist destination is needed, and the results will enable related researchers and practitioners to provide individual customized services for tourists and increase product sales.

This study considered variables such as product preference, tourist image, and product involvement in the purchase intention of tourist destinations, and it is necessary to further study various other variables. For example, it will be necessary to further consider tourists' psychological factors and product type such as product purchase heuristics, psychological power, personal values and face, and this study will be left as a follow-up study.

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