

A study on the influence of media opinion leaders on consumers' brand recognition of wine tourism destinations – the moderating effect of the degree of media informatization

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Abstract. Based on the extensive influence of opinion leaders in the media field and the prevalence of wine tourism, this study introduces the concept of the degree of media informatization and attempts to reveal the influence mechanism of media opinion leaders' communication contents on consumers' brand recognition of tourism destinations from the perspective of media informatization. Yantai, China, a famous wine grape producing area, was used as the study site for empirical analysis through 382 questionnaires. The results show that the expertise, interactivity and popularity characteristics embodied in opinion leaders' communication content positively influence consumers' flow experience and brand recognition; flow experience significantly and positively influences consumers' brand recognition; the degree of media informatization plays a moderating effect in the relationship between opinion leaders' characteristics and flow experience. The findings enrich and improve the research on the influence of media opinion leaders in the field of wine tourism, and provide insights for wine tourism destination brand building and wine business operators, guiding them to improve their business strategies, enrich wine tourism experiences, and enhance consumer brand recognition.

1 Introduction

The wine industry was initially focused on wine production and sales, but it has recently expanded its business to include wine consumption experiences and tourism [1]. Wine tourism refers to the journey of tourists visiting vineyards and wine production plants, tasting or experiencing wine products, and attending wine festivals and exhibitions [2]. Wine tourism is the experience of wine-related activities in wine-producing regions that prompt consumers to visit wineries and purchase wine [2-4]. Wine tourism represents a specific economic segment of tourism that is emerging as a new product or concept [5], globally [6-8]. Wine tourism is becoming an increasingly important part of the tourism industry [9]. Consider the various perspectives of wine tourism - wine producers, tourism organizations, and consumers. Wine tourism is both a consumer behavior and a marketing opportunity for wineries [10]. Wine tourism activities are rapidly growing worldwide and their role is recognized in other areas such as agricultural, cultural, rural and industrial tourism [11,12].

Recent research in the conceptualization of wine tourism has expanded beyond interest in wine itself to include complex personal experiences, consumer

behavior studies, and hedonism and utilitarianism [13,14]. Getz and Brown (2006) propose dimensions of consumer behavior in the context of wine tourism [5]; Mitchell and Hall (2006) propose a wine tourism motivation framework [15]. Charters and Maniva et al. (2010) analyzed the reasons that support tourists' choice of wine destinations. Since wine tourism relies on wine resources to induce amazing experiences. It is important to effectively promote wine tourism destinations and enhance consumer brand recognition. While in the field of tourism, scholars have focused on the needs and behaviors of members of virtual communities, network construction and evolution, user-generated content and its value impact, while less research has been done on media opinion leaders and their influence in the wine field.

This study takes “The City of Central Young - Microbrew Yantai - Sharing Night” as an example and proposes a study on the influence mechanism of wine tourism destination brand perception in the context of media convergence. The results of the study are intended to enrich the brand image communication of wine tourism destinations, and to provide a reference for media convergence in the promotion mode of tourism image of

wine tourism destinations. This study aims to answer the following three questions. First, the role of media opinion leader characteristics in influencing consumers' brand cognition of wine tourism destinations; second, the mediating role of flow experience between opinion leader characteristics and brand cognition; and finally, the moderating role of the degree of media informatization.

2 Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1 Flow theory

Flow theory, first proposed by the American psychologist Csikszentmihalyi, explains that immersion is achieved when individuals are fully immersed in what they are doing and maintain an ordered state of consciousness [16]. Flow is a highly focused and fully engaged emotional experience and is defined as a mental state that facilitates an individual's full participation in an activity. Flow Experience, a core concept of flow theory, has been widely used in various fields such as consumer behavior research, human-computer interaction and information systems [17,18]. The immersion experience arises from a particular stimulus of the environment [19]. It refers to a mental state when an individual devotes his or her attention completely to a situation, thus forgetting all irrelevant perceptions and only responding explicitly to a specific target [17]. In this paper, flow experience is understood as an unconscious experience. Flow experience is an internal state and experience that stimulates the curiosity of the user, has a certain degree of control, is fascinated and fully engaged and can enjoy everything in it while watching the content disseminated by the opinion leader.

Based on Csikszentmihalyi's research, many scholars have investigated immersion theory to varying degrees in different areas such as motion, reading, and online environments. Hoffman and Novak were the first to introduce flow theory to online environments. The results showed that flow enhances learning, sense of control over interactions, propensity to explore, and positive subjective experiences [20]. Existing research has focused on flow experience triggers in the Internet domain. The results suggest that flow experiences can have a significant impact on the quality of experience and behavioral intention of users. For example, Huang (2011) used control, attention, curiosity, and intrinsic interest as dimensions of flow to demonstrate their significant impact on user behavior [21]. In recent years, flow experiences have been introduced into the tourism industry and are considered as a fundamental concept for a deeper understanding of the tourism experience [22]. Kim and Thapa (2018) measured international tourism behavior and destination loyalty in ecotourism and showed that flow experience is an important factor in determining tourists' feelings and satisfaction during the trip [23]. Although opinion leader characteristics create conditions for tourists to generate flow experiences, relatively little research has focused on this area.

2.2 Opinion leader characteristics and flow experience

Media convergence refers to the integration of various media together, including traditional paper media, websites, WeChat, microblogs, clients, APP and other new media. These media are mostly disseminated in a combined three-dimensional way, such as pictures, videos and texts. Promoting media integration is both the future development trend of media and the new way of tourism destination image dissemination. The development of tourism cannot be separated from the application of various communication media. For example, the tourism industry reports on destination images and promotes and publicizes tourism resources in a variety of ways, such as posting short videos on social media and conducting real-time live broadcasts. These methods have brought the media closer to the development of tourism, and the promotion methods are endless and varied. Among them, some professional and high-profile mass media (e.g. CCTV) are becoming recognized as "opinion leaders". Opinion leaders are people who are very active in interpersonal networks and have a certain degree of representation and prestige [24]. They tend to actively share their opinions and influence others to a certain extent. A media opinion leader is a person who publishes an opinion in the mass media that is shared by the majority of people and has some influence on the participants [25]. Unlike the opinion leaders in traditional life, media leaders are no longer limited by time and space, and users can view the content disseminated by opinion leaders anytime and anywhere. Therefore, the emergence of opinion leaders can deepen the relevance between ordinary users and hot events.

A review of domestic and international literature reveals that some characteristics of opinion leaders themselves are expressed through specific behaviors. In this paper, we select expertise, interactivity, and popularity as opinion leaders' characteristics, which are expressed in the content sharing of media opinion leaders. First, media opinion leaders must have relevant expertise, skills and accurate information. They enhance their credibility and influence through extensive media socialization practices and become centers of interpersonal and online communication. Previous research confirms the positive impact of expertise; for example, professional information descriptions help reduce the perceived risk of uncertainty when consumers shop [26]. There is a close relationship between mass tourism and mass communication, and the degree of professionalism displayed in the content broadcast by media opinion leaders both significantly increases consumers' perception of the opinion leader's professionalism and thus the more likely they are to be fully engaged and thus have a flow experience. For example, the explanation of a phenomenon or an object by an authority, the work of a skilled craftsman, etc. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H1a: The expertise of opinion leaders positively influences the flow experience.

Second, interaction is a process of information exchange. This study integrates Rice's information exchange perspective and Anita's interpersonal interaction perspective and defines interactivity as communication and connection between media opinion leaders and visitors that has the role of information reinforcement, problem solving, and emotional exchange [27,28]. For example, visitors ask and solicit opinions about the content of programs broadcast by media opinion leaders through comments and pop-ups, as well as the content of programs presenting topics of consumer concern and the host as a representative of that opinion leader further explaining the consumer concerns. This process is similar to word-of-mouth communication [29], but the interactive sharing ability of media opinion leaders and the sense of program atmosphere enhance the generation of flow experiences during the interaction process. With the development of online media, media opinion leaders, such as CCTV, can generate content by posting before and after the broadcast of a program, and then interacting with each other in an unlimited number of postings, or they can use webcasts and other forms of "pop-ups" as a way to generate real-time interaction during the broadcast of a program. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H1b: The interactivity of opinion leaders positively influences the flow experience.

Finally, according to herd behavior theory [30], people tend to make similar decisions in their behavior and decision making based on the observed choices of others. In other words, there is a "herd mentality" in which people follow the opinions of most other people [31]. Studies confirm that when adopting certain information technologies and participating in socialization activities, ordinary people imitate and trust the "leaders" who are recognized as having more information resources and reliability [32]. Media opinion leaders who are centrally located and have more nodes in the tourism field tend to have a wider range of information sources and reliability of information. Thus, the higher the popularity of the opinion leader of the program broadcasted in the tourism sector, the more likely the consumer is to have a flow experience with it. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H1c: The popularity of opinion leaders positively influences the flow experience.

2.3 Opinion leader characteristics and flow experience

Research has shown that flow experiences are more likely to motivate individuals and achieve positive outcomes [33], such as increased user engagement behavior, increased customer loyalty, and increased user stickiness. When individuals enter a flow experience, they feel happy, enjoyable, and want to have the experience again. Some scholars even argue that flow experience is a stronger predictor of behavior than satisfaction [34]. In a study of online circle groups, Mao Zhuoer (2022) showed that the influence of opinion leaders is manifested in the flow of information, thus having an impact on the

perceptions, values, and emotions of other individuals [35].

Cognition is the process by which people are guided and informed about external things [36]. In the field of consumer behavior, brand recognition refers to the extent to which consumers measure and distinguish the overall image of a brand [37]. The brand recognition referred to in this study refers to consumers' brand recognition of wine tourism destinations. Specifically, it refers to the extent to which tourists know, remember and recognize the destination. It encompasses not only the associations tourists hold with the wine tourism destination, but also their feelings about the unique features, attributes, or benefits of the products produced by the wine tourism destination, as well as their overall judgments about the emotions and values of the wine tourism destination. Consumers are more likely to be entertained and entertained by watching destination programs broadcast by media opinion leaders, which leads to a flow experience and destination brand recognition. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: The flow experience positively influences brand recognition.

H2a: The flow experience mediates between opinion leader's expertise and brand recognition.

H2b: The flow experience mediates between opinion leaders' interactivity and brand recognition.

H2c: The flow experience mediates between opinion leaders' popularity and brand recognition.

2.4 The moderating role of degree of media informatization

Media Richness Theory (MRT) argues that communication channels possess a series of objective characteristics that determine each channel's ability to convey rich information, thus effectively addressing the problem of message uncertainty [38]. Yuan Yuan's study found that media richness has an indirect effect on users' willingness to forward [39]. Black's study found that consumers adopt different consumption behaviors when faced with media usage channels of different richness [40]. In this study, the degree of media informatization is defined as the amount of content of programs broadcast by media opinion leaders, the diversity of topics and the degree to which consumer needs are met. Analyzed from the perspective of informatization, a high degree of informatization implies a wide spread of the media's communication power and influence. In an earlier study, Daft et al. (1986) argued that media richness should be measured by the media's multiple sensory capabilities and rich linguistic diversity and timeliness of feedback and level of personalization [38]. In studies on the impact of social presence in instant messaging, media richness was used to explore the impact on consumer behavior, including the stages of attention, interest, exploration, action, and sharing in mobile advertising [41].

The Internet era is characterized by a wealth of media information, which provides a good channel for consumers to learn about tourist destinations in order to increase tourists' recognition of them. Compared to

programs with a higher degree of information technology, a single brief program may be useful, but due to the high homogeneity of such programs, the attention is dispersed due to fierce competition and the communication effect is not ideal. In this case, if more expertise, interactivity, and recognition can be demonstrated in this type of program, people's recognition and trust in the program will be greatly enhanced because of these specialties. Therefore, such programs need to rely on content with high expertise, interactivity, and popularity if they expect to get good communication effects. This shows that the influence of opinion leaders' expertise, interactivity, and popularity on the communication effect of a program is greater when the information level of the program is low. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3a: The degree of media informatization plays a moderating role between expertise and brand recognition.

H3b: The degree of media informatization plays a moderating role between interactivity and brand recognition.

H3c: The degree of media informatization plays a moderating role between popularity and brand recognition.

Based on flow theory, this paper constructs a research model on the influence of consumers' brand recognition of wine tourism destinations in the context of content sharing by media opinion leaders. According to flow theory, the expertise, interactivity and popularity shown by opinion leaders create a sense of virtual reality and intimacy among consumers, and create an flow experience of the tourism destination or related products promoted by the opinion leaders, thus affecting consumers' brand recognition. Among them, the degree of media informatization plays a moderating role in the first half of the process. The model is shown in Fig. 1.

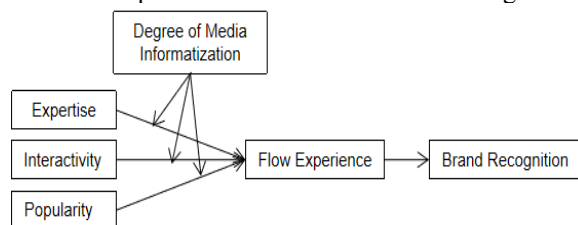


Figure 1. Research model.

3 Empirical results

3.1 Survey Instrument

In order to minimize the impact of common method bias issues, it is important to have a sound structural design of the questionnaire and accuracy in the description of the questionnaire items. The measurement variables designed for the questionnaire used in this study were taken from validated and established scales, with modifications made to fit the scenario of this study, for a total of six variables. The content of the questionnaire in this study consisted of six parts. The first part is the study description and screening information, and subjects who have not watched the program “City of Central Youth” will end their responses. The second part is the study variable

measures, in which opinion leader characteristics refer to Netemeyer and Bansal [42,43], with a total of 10 question items; flow experience refer to Huang [44], with a total of 4 question items; brand perception refer to Huang Yiting [45], with a total of 4 question items; and media informatization refer to Daft [38], with a total of 5 question items. The third part is demographic information (gender, age, education, occupation, and monthly salary level). The Likert7 scale was used for the questionnaire items, with “1” indicating “not at all” and “7” indicating “fully”.

Table 1. Sample demographics and characteristics.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Gender	Female	145	49.3
	Male	149	50.7
Age	29 or younger	67	22.8
	30~39	144	49.0
	40 or older	83	28.2
Edu	High school or less	25	8.5
	University degree	214	72.8
	Master's or PHD	55	18.7
Occu	Students	5	1.7
	Teachers	24	8.2
	Government-affiliated institutions	37	12.6
	Civil servant	23	7.8
	Self-employment	21	7.1
	Private-owned company	75	25.5
	State-owned Company	34	11.6
	agriculture	16	5.4
	Construction	23	7.8
	retirement	4	1.4
	other	32	10.9
	Monthly salary level	2500 yuan or less	9
2501~5000 yuan		52	17.7
5001~7500 yuan		83	28.2
7501~10000 yuan		65	22.1
10001~12500 yuan		31	10.5

Table 1. Continued.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Monthly salary level	12501~15000 yuan	22	7.5
	15001~20000 yuan	17	5.8
	20000 yuan or more	15	5.1

3.2 Descriptive analysis

The data of this study was edited questionnaires and put through questionnaires, and 382 questionnaires were collected, and after eliminating invalid questionnaires, 296 valid questionnaires were finally recovered, with an effective rate of 77%. The basic situation of the sample is shown in Table 1. In terms of gender, women accounted for 50.7%; the age range was mainly concentrated in 30-39 years old, accounting for 49%; the education was mainly concentrated in bachelor's degree, accounting for 54.8%.

3.3 Confidence and validity analysis

SPSS 25.0 was used to analyze the reliability of the questionnaire data collected from the research. The analysis results showed that the Cronbach's alpha values of the six measured variable scales of professionalism, interactivity, awareness, immersion experience, degree of media informatization, and brand perception were all greater than 0.7. This indicated that all six scales passed the internal consistency test, and each scale had good reliability. The results of KMO and Bartlett's spherical test showed that KMO=0.973, which is greater than 0.9, indicating that the factor analysis was good. And the χ^2 myopic value was 11875.801 ($p<0.01$), indicating good questionnaire validity.

Table 2. Reliability analysis.

Variable	Number of terms	Cronbach's Alpha value
Expertise	4	0.955
Interactivity	3	0.943
Popularity	3	0.945
Flow Experience	4	0.962
Degree of Media Informatization	5	0.967
Brand Recognition	4	0.957

3.4 Hypothesis testing

In this study, the hypotheses of opinion leader characteristics, flow experience, brand recognition, and degree of media informatization were tested using cascade regression, and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's sphericity test.

KMO	0.973	
Bartlett's sphericity test	Pseudo Chi-aquare	11601.143
	df	253
	p	0.000

As can be seen in Table 4, the direct path coefficient of the effect of expertise on consumer destination brand recognition is significant 0.928 ($p<0.001$); the direct path coefficient of the effect of interactivity on consumer destination brand recognition is significant 0.909 ($p<0.001$); the direct path coefficient of the effect of popularity on consumer destination brand recognition is significant 0.918 ($p<0.001$). Immersion experience was added as a mediating variable between opinion leader characteristics and consumer destination brand recognition. The results of Model1 and 2 showed that the coefficient of the direct effect of expertise on brand recognition changed from 0.928 ($p<0.001$) to 0.601 ($p<0.001$), and the positive effect of flow experience was still significant ($\beta=0.349$, $p<0.001$), which indicated that flow experience partially mediated the effect of expertise on brand recognition, and H2a was supported. Models 3 and 4 were used to verify the mediating role of flow experience between interactivity and brand recognition. The results show that the regression coefficient of interactivity changes from 0.909 ($p<0.001$) to 0.488 ($p<0.001$) after adding the mediating variable flow experience, while the positive effect of flow experience on brand recognition remains significant ($\beta=0.458$, $p<0.001$), which indicates that flow experience partially mediates the effect of interactivity on brand recognition, and H2b is verified. The results of Model5 and 6 showed that the direct effect coefficient of popularity on brand perception changed from 0.918 ($p<0.001$) to 0.463 ($p<0.001$), and the positive effect of flow experience remained significant ($\beta=0.501$, $p<0.001$), indicating that flow experience partially mediated the effect of popularity on brand recognition, and H2c was verified. In summary, the positive effect of flow experience on brand recognition was significant in all three paths, and H2 was verified.

To further verify the stability of the mediating effect of flow experience, Bootstrap test of the model was conducted using PROCESSv3.3 plug-in [46]. The sample size was chosen to be 5000, and the test results at 95% confidence interval showed that the mediating effect of

flow experience was significant in all the influence paths of expertise, interactivity, and recognition affecting brand recognition, with mediating effect values of 0.3084 (LLCI=0.1684, ULCI=0.4448, not including 0), 0.3937 (LLCI=0.2749, ULCI=0.5210), and 0.4234 (LLCI=0.0721, ULCI=0.5552, excluding 0).

Models 7, 9, and 11 in Table 5 were used to test the role of independent variables expertise, interactivity, and popularity on the flow experience. The results showed that to expertise, interactivity and popularity had a positive effect on the flow experience ($\beta=0.928, 0.909, 0.918, p<0.001$), and H1a, H1b and H1c were validated. Model7 and 8 are to verify the moderating effect of the degree of media informatization between expertise and immersion experience. Model8 added the interaction term between the degree of media informatization and the degree of expertise and media informatization on the basis of Model7, and the results showed that the interaction term had a significant effect on the flow experience ($\beta=0.070, p<0.05$), and H3a was verified. Similarly, Model9 and model10 were used to verify the moderating effect of the degree of media informatization between interactivity and flow experience, and the results showed that the coefficient of the interaction term was significant ($\beta=0.083, p<0.05$). And Model11 and 12 were used to verify the moderating effect of the degree of media informatization between popularity and flow experience, and the interaction term coefficient was significant ($\beta=0.066, p<0.05$). H3b and H3c were validated.

Table 4. Results of the mediational analysis.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Gender	0.007	0.015	0.004	0.016	-0.010	0.010
Age	0.063 ^②	0.051 ^②	0.063 ^②	0.048 ^①	0.029	0.026
Edu	0.068 ^②	0.069 ^③	0.096 ^③	0.086 ^③	0.050 ^①	0.058 ^②
Occ	0.027	0.033	0.053 ^①	0.050 ^②	0.003	0.023
MS L	-0.008	-0.003	-0.002	0.002	0.041	0.025
EXP	0.923 ^③	0.612 ^③				
INT			0.904 ^③	0.495 ^③		
POP					0.914 ^③	0.463 ^③
FE		0.333 ^③		0.445 ^③		0.497 ^③
R ²	0.908	0.921	0.884	0.911	0.869	0.916
ΔR^2		0.013		0.027		0.047

Notes : ^① $p < 0.05$, ^② $p < 0.01$, ^③ $p < 0.001$.

In order to reveal more intuitively the moderating effect of media informatization degree on the relationship between opinion leaders' expertise, interactivity and popularity and flow experience, the related moderating effects were plotted, as shown in Figs. 2-4. Media informatization degree was divided into high media informatization degree group and low media informatization degree group according to the mean value of variables plus or minus one standard deviation, and the positive effects of media informatization degree on the relationship between expertise, interactivity and popularity and brand recognition were all facilitated.

Table 5. Results of the modulatory analysis.

Variable	Mode 17	Mode 18	Mode 19	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Gender	-0.024	-0.020	-0.027	-0.020	-0.040	-0.026
Age	0.036	0.019	0.036	0.017	0.006	0.005
Edu	-0.005	-0.001	0.023	0.014	-0.017	-0.001
Occ	-0.019	0.005	0.007	0.021	-0.041	0.007
MS L	-0.015	-0.004	-0.009	0.002	0.032	0.016
EXP	0.934 ^③	0.482 ^③				
INT			0.917 ^③	0.398 ^③		
POP					0.906 ^③	0.304 ^③
DMI		0.545 ^③		0.388 ^③		0.720 ^③
EXP × DMI		0.070 ^①				
INT × DMI				0.184 ^①		
POP × DMI						0.066 ^①
R ²	0.881	0.918	0.861	0.907	0.812	0.906
ΔR^2		0.037		0.045		0.094

Notes : ^① $p < 0.05$, ^② $p < 0.01$, ^③ $p < 0.001$.

5 Conclusions

This study examines the role of opinion leaders' communication content on consumers' destination brand recognition under the wine tourism domain, with two main theoretical contributions. First, the research on the combination of opinion leaders and tourism has been less focused by scholars in the wine tourism field in the past. In this paper, we further refine and expand the traits of opinion leaders from three dimensions: expertise,

interactivity and recognition, and establish a model of the influence mechanism of media opinion leaders on consumers' brand recognition in wine tourism, which further enriches and improves the research on the influence of opinion leaders on tourism information exchange and the mechanism of the role of media opinion leaders in tourism decision-making. Secondly, it further broadens the application scope and research content of flow theory, and confirms the mediating role of flow experience and the degree of media informatization in moderating the relationship between consumers' perceptions of opinion leaders' expertise, interactivity and popularity and flow experience.

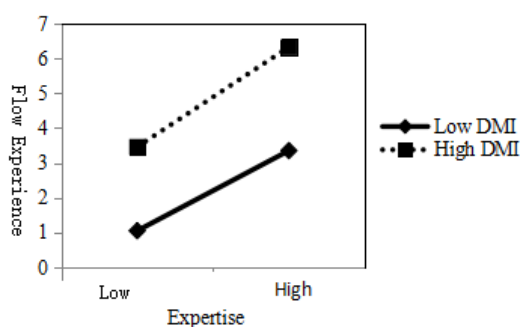


Figure 2. The moderating effect of media informatization on expertise and flow experience.

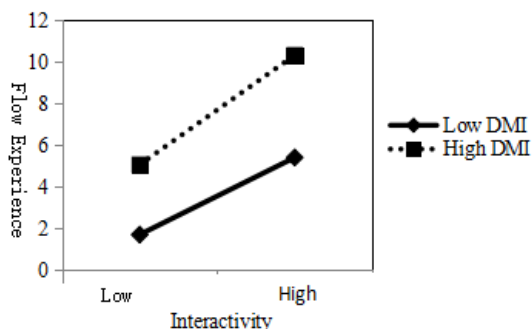


Figure 3. The moderating effect of media informatization on interactivity and flow experience.

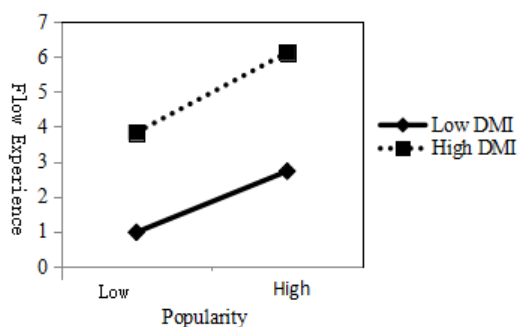


Figure 4. The moderating effect of media informatization on popularity and flow experience.

Media convergence is an inevitable trend in the development of deep communication of urban tourism images. Media convergence is penetrating all levels of urban life with a rapid development momentum, and it also provides new opportunities for the communication of

wine tourism destination images. Suggestions are provided for how wine tourism destination managers should promote their destinations on mass media platforms in order to maximize the effect of media engagement. First, opinion leaders should focus on learning relevant domain expertise and conduct communication activities based on a thorough understanding of the destination and related things. Companies can share some of their internal resources with the opinion leaders and expand their resources through the influence of the opinion leaders themselves. Secondly, tourism destinations should recognize the importance of media opinion leaders in the wine tourism sector and the wide impact of their messages. The companies concerned should establish connections and communication with the integrated media, create a high level of rich content and adopt a targeted promotion strategy.

This study also has certain limitations. Firstly, consumers' brand recognition of tourist destinations is a complex process, and there may be other influencing factors in addition to the variables proposed in this paper, for example, involvement may affect customers' flow experience, and emotion and motivation may play a moderating role, and other variables can be considered to build a more complete theoretical model in the future. Secondly, online research uses open-ended sampling, which inevitably has problems such as self-selection bias and inability to count the recall efficiency.

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