

CITY NEIGHBORHOOD BRANDING AND NEW URBAN TOURISM

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Abstract

City authorities worldwide have sought to rejuvenate and diversify their tourism product offerings by dispersing visitors into less familiar and frequented locales. Despite calls to understand such ‘new tourism areas’ (NTAs) in urban areas, few researchers have examined visitor responses to the implementation of NTA strategies, particularly outside Europe. This quantitative approach considers the profiles, attitudes and behaviours of NTA visitors in an Asian city that was undertaking dispersal efforts pre-pandemic in the context of mass inbound Chinese visitation. Distinct profiles are found for NTA visitors relative to other city arrivals in response to Hong Kong’s branding propositions. It is found that NTAs appeal to repeat visitors seeking cosmopolitan experiences and may help tourist dispersal and product differentiation, though the proposition that NTA visitors are more highly educated was not supported.

Keywords: New Tourist Areas, brand identification, visitor dispersal, new urban tourism, Hong Kong.

Introduction

As visitation into many cities surged, scholars have shown increasing interest in the effectiveness of efforts by city destination management organizations (DMOs) to disperse visitors into less frequented ‘new tourism areas’ (NTAs). Though dispersal strategies have been more established in European destinations as they confronted the overtourism phenomenon, Asian cities were prompted to follow suit as they faced growing visitation, both intra- and inter-regional. It is likely that attempts to disperse and re-focus intra-urban tourism flows will continue in the “post-viral era”. To examine this context, the current paper analyses the profiles and behaviours of NTA visitors in Hong Kong, a global city and diverse territory of 1,106 sq km and 250 islands.

The current investigation is informed by the literature on the visitor dispersal strategies of European cities that followed the massification of tourism and easier visitor accessibility via low cost (airline) carriers (UNWTO, 2018). Dispersal initiatives offered potential to stimulate repeat visitation and lessen dependence on concentrations of first timers around “must-see” city attractions and sites. Richards and Marques (2018) noted the visitor dispersal initiatives of highly visited cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona and Copenhagen, including their identification of NTAs and promotion of ‘localhood’ initiatives when they reached a threshold or “tipping point” (Jansen-Verbeke & Govers, 2009; UNWTO, 2018). One of the rationales for pursuing visitor dispersal strategies into NTAs was the potential spending power of highly educated professionals. Destinations could potentially emphasise higher yielding markets to reduce their dependence on lower spending tour groups and “mass cultural tourism” (Maitland, 2008; Richards, 2018). To date, however, few scholars have evaluated how NTA-based branding strategies disperse or diversify visitor segments, based on attitudes. The current pursuit of insights into NTA visitor profiles and behaviours can inform whether dispersal initiatives reinforce the intended city brand and/or lead visitors to engage in local experiences.

The current study analyzes a large sample of visitors in one of the world’s most frequented city destinations - Hong Kong (Euromonitor, 2019; Koh, 2020). The large scale of pre-pandemic visitation and deliberate strategy of dispersing visitors by the destination authorities offers the prospect of extending previous scholarship. The first signal of a policy shift towards ‘new urban tourism’ in Hong Kong was the Tourism Development Blueprint (Hong Kong Tourism Commission, 2017), which sought to create a platform that would allow tourists to access the ‘real’ or ‘hidden’ city that previous incomers had neglected (Cheung & Xu, 2019). The new strategy was a move away from group tours concentrated in “hotspot” retail precincts (Leung, 2018; Yip, 2018). The advocacy of visitor dispersal by the Hong Kong Government was partly a response to alleged overcrowding (Cheung & Xu, 2019). Asian cities have been moving away from tourist concentrations in retail and commercial hubs and towards a new urban tourism of culturally oriented activities. These often occur in densely populated areas, thereby posing both challenges and opportunities which merit scholarly investigation.

The current study objectives are 1) to profile the attitudes and behaviours of NTA visitors in an Asian city - Hong Kong – and their response to destination brand propositions. 2), to assess how Hong Kong’s various localities are viewed by independent visitors - both Chinese and non-Chinese and: 3) evaluate the validity of Maitland’s (2019) observations about the profiles and attitudes of NTA visitors and the consequent role of NTAs in supporting tourism policy objectives.

Literature review

The evolving city visitor

Maitland (2008) was one of the first scholars to note the rapid growth of urban tourism and visits to NTAs, as popular city destinations struggled with congestion and with community resistance (Colomb & Novy, 2017; Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2015; Valls, Banchini, Falcon & Tunon, 2013). Meanwhile, scholars observed a tendency for experienced, repeat visitors to frequent “off the beaten track” areas (Alvarez, 2010; Maitland & Newman, 2014; Matoga & Pawłowska, 2018), prompting destinations to pursue “spreading” (van der Meer, 2019). Various tourism scholars highlighted a trend to ‘reinvent the local’ (Russo & Richards 2016) through the new urban tourism ‘ritual’ (Füller & Michel, 2014; Pasquinelli, 2015). This conceptualisation included the pursuit of relational engagements, infiltrating everyday city cultures, and engaging in creative tourism, supported by sharing economy lodgings, bike rentals, and guided walking tours (Richards, 2016). As such engagements have evolved, there is a widely held assumption that the respective profiles and behaviors of repeat and first-time visitors are distinct. Though an early study by McKercher, Shoval, Ng & Birenboim (2012) analyzed the behaviors of these two groups in Hong Kong, scholars have largely neglected to investigate NTA visitor distinctions in the context of the wider destination brand.

As well as manifesting new urban tourism, NTAs epitomize ‘post-tourism’, a changing of travel styles and destination preferences during the relentless pre-pandemic growth of tourism movements (Feifer, 1985). Feifer argued that tourists are responding more independently and playfully to the “what is authentic?” question. Cities constitute places of consumption under the ever-present tourist gaze (Urry, 1990, 1995). Post-tourists pursue everyday life by exploring new areas “untouched” by tourism (Richards, 2011), eschewing established attractions and refusing to ‘worship the differentiations of modernity’ (MacCannell, 1976). Examples of post-tourism include “cool bohemian” creative clusters combining cultural capital and everyday activities (Pappalepore, Maitland & Smith, 2014). These are manifest when tourists explore metropolises ranging from Detroit to Berlin and engage in “ruin tourism” (Le Gallou, 2018) to re-appropriate marginalized areas (Maitland & Newman, 2014).

Maitland’s (2008) investigation of NTA dynamics in Islington, London observed that most of the international visitor interviewees were urban professionals. His respondents viewed ‘primary’ tourism attractions as unsatisfying and unappealing, which prompted them to engage in co-creation (Pappalepore & Smith, 2016). Respondents preferred “off the beaten track, quieter and more out-of-the-way secondary attractions” to “long-established tourist spots” and “primary attractions”. Stors, Stoltenburg, Somner and Frisch (2019) proposed three dimensions of new urban tourism – a) the extraordinary mundane, b) encounters and contact zones, and c) urban co-production. Russo and Richards (2016) noted that urban visitors enjoy the exoticism of “doing what the locals do”. Tourists are increasingly subtle in their pursuit of the multilayered and “authentic” that characterizes the daily routines of city workers and residents (Maitland, 2019). Visitor perceptions of buildings, spaces and physical character are shaped by the mundane. Maitland advised DMOs to formulate and implement tourism strategies that anticipate and avoid unintended consequences such as rising prices and degraded resident amenities. He noted an acceleration of gentrification and homogenisation in urban environments, even in cases where development is “bottom-up”. Conceptualizations of neighborhood have been changing, with

Australian scholars (Hayllar & Griffin, 2005, 2009) noting that urban precincts have increasingly emphasized the importance of playfulness.

The current investigation examines Hong Kong neighbourhoods, including NTAs, to test the validity of Maitland's (2019) observations about secondary destinations outside Europe. Maitland contended that when tourists are least drawn to crowded and predictable 'iconic' attractions when they are urban residents who have previously visited the destination or its equivalents. This observation may be particularly potent in Asian countries and territories, where urban residents increasingly form the majority (e.g., almost 60% of China's 1.4 billion population in 2018) (National Bureau of Statistics of China, n.d.) and more than 50% of Thailand's population (The World Bank, 2018). These dwellers of Asian cities may pursue the less familiar when visiting other cities and merit better understanding.

NTAs and New Urban Tourism

For Maitland, (2007) NTAs provide an "off the beaten track" visitor experience contrasting with familiar tourist attractions and offering participation in everyday city life. The mixed and gentrified populations in Maitland's London study areas encountered a cosmopolitan blend of facilities targeted at both residents and visitors. Though European city planners have been championing such areas to diversify tourist experiences (Maitland & Ritchie, 2009), few scholars have examined the effectiveness of such initiatives. The current study assesses responses to the branding and positioning of NTAs in Hong Kong amongst visitors from both China (which constitutes a majority of visitation) and from elsewhere. Though scholars have observed that the more experienced western travelers who typically frequent European NTAs are unimpressed by most iconic attractions and sites, the current study considers whether such responses apply in an Asian setting.

European scholars have encouraged more studies of both "host communities and mobility flows" (Novy 2018, p.436). Gravari-Barbas, Jacquot and Cominelli (2019) identified various new tourism practices, stakeholder groups and tourism geographies as evidence of changing city landscapes. Scholarship about European cities have noted the prevalence of gentrification, notably in Paris, with wealthier and more educated visitors attracted to localities offering: a) sophisticated service and experience offerings, though b) retaining working class "grit" (Freitag & Bauder, 2018). Other scholars opted for the term touristification in preference to gentrification (Sequera & Nofre, 2018). Though there is some support for Maitland's contention that NTAs in major European cities attract distinct visitor profiles, motivations and behaviours, the extent of empirical work remains limited. In practice, city DMOs have been incorporating new urban tourism within their marketing and branding scope, spreading visitors away from the most frequented tourist sites in pursuit of competitive advantage.

Hong Kong offers a suitable study setting because policymakers have been advocating NTAs to diversify their product offerings for Chinese and non-Chinese markets, whilst retaining overall destination brand coherence. Chinese inbound tourism is important in terms of volume and expenditures (Bu, Fu, Kong & Okumus, 2020). However, it may be considered a relatively immature market in the NTA context, and merits investigation. McKercher et al.'s (2012) study of the behavioral patterns of first-time and return visitors to Hong Kong concluded that the former travel more widely through the destination. A more recent investigation noted that repeat visitors confine themselves to fewer locales (Richards, King & Yeung, 2020).

Destination branding and NTAs in Hong Kong

There is an extensive literature on city destination branding. Qu, Kim and Im (2011) proposed a model combining branding and destination image concepts and is relevant to the current study which relies on distinctions between the overall city (destination) image and brand and its manifestation in local neighborhoods (NTAs). Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou and Salonika (2017) evaluated how commonplace symbolic elements - destination name, logo and tagline – contribute to establishing destination brands. Their conceptual framework advanced knowledge by combining the role and significance of symbolic brand elements for commercial brands with the literature on destination and place branding. Ruiz-Real, Uribe-Torril, and Gazquez-Abad (2020) identified recent trends in destination branding, notably social media, loyalty, strategy, place attachment, experience, customer-based brand equity and word-of mouth.

The current study examines draws on the destination branding literature by profiling visitors to Hong Kong alongside brand propositions and intended destination-wide positioning. The authors evaluate how NTA visitors respond to destination branding propositions. Prior to COVID-19, DMOs in Asian cities confronted growing visitation and sought to understand diverse visitor behaviours and experiences, particularly in the growing mainland China market. The initial engagement of many mainland cities in outbound tourism followed the SARS outbreak in 2003 and double digit growth over the ensuing years led China to account for three quarters of Hong Kong's overnight visitation (Hong Kong Tourism Board [HKTB], 2018). Though scholars have investigated prominent Hong Kong sites that are frequented by group tours, few have explained how the neighbourhoods are perceived (e.g. mental preconceptions and/or the “personal baggage” that tourists bring). How does the emerging cohort of independent visitors (Chinese and non-Chinese) view Hong Kong's various localities? It is notable that though Chinese visitors share a common “motherland” and heritage, they emanate from diverse regions and provinces which may influence how they react to destinations.

Hong Kong attracted some 56 million visitors in 2019, including daytrippers and overnight tourists (HKTB, 2020). Though the mainland market was increasingly dominant, the ‘Asia's World City’ branding epitomised the authorities’ targeting of an increasingly sophisticated pan-Asian audience (Merrilees, Miller, Ge & Tam, 2018). The skewed visitor breakdown shows the challenge of balancing market sources. In 2019, Hong Kong attracted 16.2 million mainland Chinese overnight visitors, 4.1 million from short haul markets and 2.7 million long haul (mainly Europe and North America) (HKTB, 2020). Hong Kong has high repeat visitation, averaging 80% in 2019, with a higher share still amongst mainland Chinese (86%) (HKTB, 2020).

NTAs offer diverse and refined experiences at the local or micro level to more sophisticated repeat visitors, with a shift towards unique cultural experiences within local neighbourhoods (HKTB, 2021). The previous appeal of destinations was dependent on highly visited and established sites and localities such as shopping precincts, theme parks (Ocean Park and Disneyland), and heritage attractions (e.g., the Peak Tram and Big Buddha). The current initiatives enhance individual visitor experiences by refining an earlier and fragmented practice of bundling and packaging the arts (du Cros & Jolliffe, 2011; Lagarense, Kartika, Narottama, Riana & Setyawati. 2019). Recent destination branding has stressed interconnected visitor experiences at both the macro (Hong Kong-wide) and micro (e.g., neighbourhood) levels (Marafa & Ng, 2019).

In order to develop more complex destination portrayals, the HKTB strategy has adopted a multi-faceted *brandscape* or *brand DNA* – a communication of key attributes and intended visitor experiences aimed at both first-time novelty-seekers and repeat visitors as follows (HKTB, 2017):

NON-STOP INTENSITY

A city that never sleeps, Hong Kong is bursting with energy that never fails to exhilarate visitors. Dull moments do not exist.

FASCINATING CONTRASTS

East, West, urban, natural, modern or ancient, in Hong Kong strikingly different worlds coexist, offering visitors an amazing array of contrasting experiences.

COMPACT VARIETY

Hong Kong makes life easier for travelers! No other place packs such a variety of rich and diverse experiences into an area that is easy and fast to get around.

DISTINCTLY TRENDY

By adopting and adapting global trends, Hong Kong nurtures its own unique style to offer products and experiences sought after the world over.

Three of the four propositions apply to NTAs and to the current study: *fascinating contrasts*, *compact variety* and *distinctively trendy*. *Fascinating contrasts* juxtaposes emerging and more established and frequented tourist areas. *Compact variety* implies that visitors seeking diversity encounter a multitude of areas. This proposition aligns with HKTB's view that NTAs are constantly being invented and reinvented. The *distinctively trendy* initiative is epitomized by recent designation of Wan Chai and Sham Shui Po as "Design Districts" (Hong Kong Design Centre, 2020).

Specific *brand DNA* attributes target market segments and consumer moods, such as: "Tasting the Town", "Journeys of Discovery", "Hipster Stuff" and "Family Time". Though the initiative came from the destination authorities, it was swiftly embraced by private-sector operators of customized tour and by travel intermediaries (Culture Trip, 2020). The latter have encouraged prospective visitors to *explore neighbourhoods*, before proceeding to *featured* and *more neighbourhoods*. Culture Trip describes two adjacent areas (including one NTA) as follows: "If suits own Central, then hipsters control Sheung Wan." This slogan celebrates the juxtaposition of the bohemian Sheung Wan and the central business district (Central).

Study neighborhoods

The researchers examined visitor profiles and behaviours in four NTAs which epitomise Hong Kong's evolving tourist neighborhoods - Old Town Central (OTC), Wanchai in Hong Kong

Island, Sham Shui Po, and West Kowloon Cultural District in Kowloon. Old Town Central (OTC) is 10 minutes' walk from Hong Kong's busy and high-density central business district (CBD). The centrepiece is the recently redeveloped former Central Police Station heritage compound - Tai Kwun. Along with the nearby Police Married Quarters (PMQ), this large-scale Government-owned site exemplifies adaptive re-use for heritage buildings (Chan, Chang & Liu, 2020). OTC combines Chinese and colonial streetscapes with authentic tea houses, antique streets and heritage buildings (Setiawati, 2020). The second neighborhood - Wanchai design district - includes a business sub-area located north of Hong Kong's only tramline, with local residents concentrated to the south. Blending affluent and low income groups, it is frequented by architecturally distinct *Tong Lau* with balconies/terraces above and shop houses below and an outdoor market selling fresh local produce. HKTb promotions feature heritage and design for OTC and Wanchai respectively.

Sham Shui Po is amongst Hong Kong's poorest and most densely populated working-class neighbourhoods with residential and commercial elements. Over 10% of residents have received no schooling (Hong Kong SAR Government, 2021). The district combines pre- and post-war *Tong Lau*. The first public housing in Hong Kong was built during the 1950s in Sham Shui Po and tells an important story about the city's development. Prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, HKTb devoted considerable brand development to Sham Shui Po.

West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) exemplifies a purpose-built NTA. This waterfront cultural and recreation complex is adjacent to West Kowloon High Speed Rail Station which connects with major Chinese cities. It was unprecedented in Hong Kong to use a vast tract of reclaimed land for culture, tourism and recreation. WKCD houses performing arts and Xiqu (Chinese Opera House), M+ Pavilion and the Hong Kong Palace Museum.

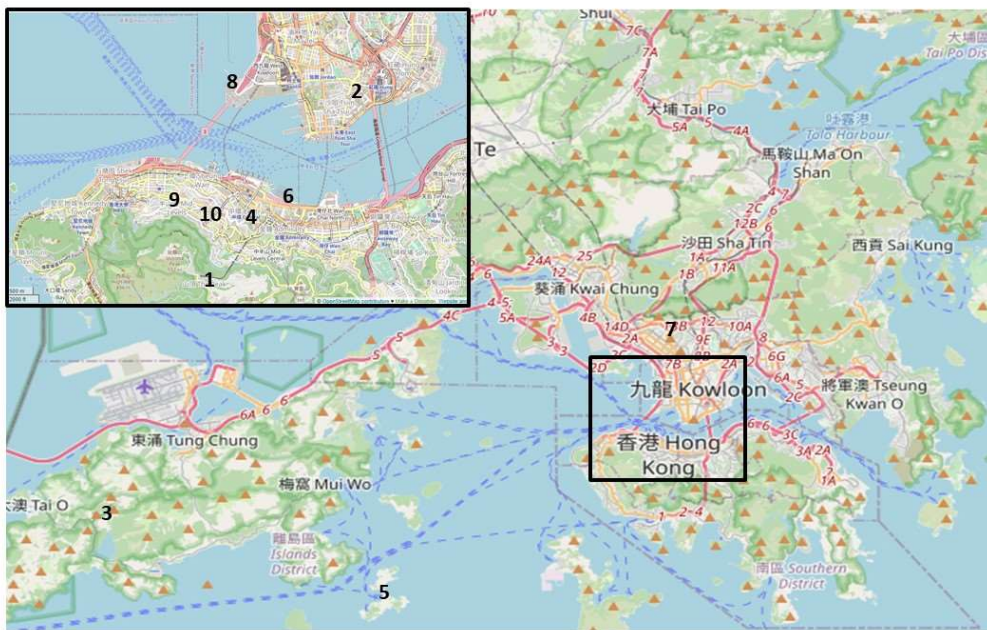
Research methods

This quantitative study is based on a large-scale survey of tourists in Hong Kong. The research methods that were used were reported in a previous study (Richards, King and Yeung, 2020) which covered a complementary research objective on visitation to attractions and events. A total of 1,460 respondents was interviewed, with 24 excluded on the basis of age (under 16). Of the remaining 1,432 respondents, 1,220 (85%) indicated that they had visited at least one of the four NTAs featured in the study. The questionnaires were prepared in English and in both Traditional and Simplified Chinese. Traditional Chinese is applicable for respondents from Hong Kong and Taiwan whereas Simplified Chinese is suited to visitors from mainland China. Intercept interviews were conducted between April and September 2017 using Qualtrics software. Trained student interviewers approached visitors *in situ* to minimise deficient respondent recall. The survey included questions on visitor demographics, motivations, travel behaviours, experiences and receptiveness to the applicable HKTb brand messaging and the data were analysed using SPSS 26. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of the data and Chi Square Tests were deployed to distinguish the visitor demographics of NTA sites and of more established attractions and sites. Independent Sample T-tests and One Way ANOVAs were conducted to identify different brand responses by visitor groups.

Comparing visitors to the city generally and to NTAs in particular for the current study, was achieved by conducting intercept interviews at sites located across Hong Kong. The design of the survey questions was based on the previously discussed HKTb Brandscape strategy. A total of

nine statements was developed. Two statements drew from aspects of the Brandscape which were in the “Trendy” category, namely: “A trendy place”; and “a unique place”. “Fascinating contrasts” are represented by the three following statements: “a place of strong contrasts”; “a Chinese city”; and “An Asian world city”. “Compact variety” is denoted by “a place with lots of variety”. Finally “Non-stop intensity” is covered by “a place where life is lived intensely”. The sites where intercept interviews were administered are shown in Figure 1. They included both NTAs and more familiar and mainstream citywide attractions such as the Peak Tram in Hong Kong Island. Though the sample cannot represent the totality of NTA visitation, the substantial dataset provides potentially meaningful insights into the diverse city visitation. Having noted McKercher et al.’s (2012) contention that first-timers travel more widely throughout the destination, the current authors sampled both visitors to NTAs and to more frequented iconic settings.

Figure 1 Data collection sites



No.	More established tourism attractions
1	The Peak
2	History Museum
3	Ngong Ping / Big Buddha

4	Lantern Festival
5	Bun Festival, Cheung Chau
6	Dragon Boat Festival
	New Tourism Areas (NTAs)
7	Mei Ho House (Sham Shui Po)
8	West Kowloon Cultural District
9	Sun Yet San Memorial Trail (Old Town Central/Wan Chai)
10	PMQ (Old Town Central/Wan Chai)

Results

The following section presents respondent demographics and their reactions to the proposed brand statements. Differences are explored between visitors to NTAs and to more established attractions and sites.

Table 1 Demographics of visitors to NTAs and to established attractions and sites

		n	NTAs	More established attractions and sites	X ²	Sig
		%				
Residence	China	331	44	18.5	206.182	0.000***
	Macau	33	3.6	2.2		
	Taiwan	150	17.8	9.5		
	Other countries	706	34.5	69.7		
Gender	Male	524	38.4	45.5	6.383	0.007*
	Female	692	61.6	54.5		
Age group	16 - 25	325	30.4	21.1	79.275	0.000***
	26 - 35	587	49.6	41.8		
	36 - 45	312	15.8	24		
	46 - 55	145	3.6	10.1		
	56 - 65	34	0.5	2		
	66 or over	29	0	1		
Education	Primary school	10	0	1.3	24.857	0.000***
	Secondary school	93	7.1	6.1		
	Vocational	198	20.4	13.3		
	Higher education (first degree)	850	56.4	62.1		
	Postgraduate	264	16.1	17.3		
Occupation	Director or manager	115	2.2	6.8	55.479	0.000***
	Professional (e.g. doctor, lawyer)	183	13.2	12.2		
	Paraprofessional (e.g. technicians, nurses)	352	21.5	27.7		
	Clerical/administration	272	26.1	17.9		

Service and sales personnel	224	20.5	15.2
Blue collar	27	1.5	2.3
Student	193	13.9	14.4
Household work	40	1.2	3.6

*Sig < 0.05; ** Sig < 0.01; ***Sig < 0.001

Table 1 presents respondent demographics by residence, gender, age group, education and occupation. Prospective differences were identified based on origin, gender, age, education and occupation using a Chi Square test. It was found that Chinese visitors accounted for 42% of the respondents (originating from Greater China and including Mainland China, Taiwan and Macau), with 58% emanating from other (i.e. non-Chinese) countries and territories. The largest occupational group consisted of paraprofessionals and a high proportion were well-educated. The largest cohort was aged 26-35. Established attractions and sites were found to attract higher proportions of older, more educated visitors (79.4% of the applicable respondents possess a University degree at bachelor or postgraduate level vs 72.5% for NTAs). This contrasts with Maitland's (2008) characterization of NTA visitors as younger and more professional. The current finding that NTA visitors are no more highly educated than those visiting mainstream locations may derive from the prominence of younger Chinese origin visitors in Hong Kong and points to the potential merit of conducting research in different urban contexts by drawing out behavioural patterns.

NTA visitor profiles and demographics

Table 2 focuses on visitation to specific NTAs and shows distinct profiles amongst those who visit NTAs.

Table 2 Visitor profiles to Hong Kong and to four NTAs

	Tourists to Hong Kong [#]	Wanchai	Old Town Central	WKCD	Sham Shui Po
	(%)				
<u>Country of origin</u>					
China	68.3	26.5	22.3	17.1	33.5
Macau	1.2	3.1	2.5	2.1	4.2
Taiwan	2.5	11.4	11.8	12.2	16.9
Other	28	59	63.4	68.6	45.5
χ^2		11.329	2.086	19.281	90.301
Sig		0.01**	0.555	0.000***	0.000***
<u>Gender</u>					
Male	43	41.8	43.2	43.1	45.2
Female	57	58.2	56.8	56.9	54.8
χ^2		1.827	0.138	0.094	0.665
Sig		0.177	0.711	0.759	0.415
<u>Age</u>					

16 - 25	24.5	21.7	20	26.4
26 - 35	46.6	42.6	40.8	48.1
36 - 45	17.9	22.1	26.5	19.5
46 - 55	9	9.2	9	5.3
56 - 65	1.5	2.6	1.5	0
> 65	0.4	1.9	2.3	0.7
χ^2	41.299	4.426	14.957	50.314
Sig	0.000***	0.49	0.011*	0.000***
<u>Education</u>				
Primary	0.3	0.9	0.4	0
Secondary	5.8	5.7	4	6.5
Vocational	16.1	11.9	12.1	19.1
Higher ed (1st degree)	62.1	62.2	63	60.5
Postgraduate	15.8	19.3	20.4	13.9
χ^2	14.321	10.435	13.716	24.469
Sig	0.006*	0.034*	0.008**	0.000***
<u>Occupation</u>				
Director/manager	6.4	8.2	8.1	3.8
Professional (e.g., doctor, lawyer)	11.7	14.9	13.5	9.9
Para-professional (e.g., technicians, nurses)	26.2	26.6	27.8	29.9
Clerical/administration	23.2	17.4	20.7	22.2
Service & sales personnel	14.9	15.8	17.8	18.7
Blue collar	1.8	1.5	1.5	1.8
Student	13.6	13.1	8.9	11.9
Home duties	2.1	2.5	1.7	1.8
χ^2	19.3	12.971	23.288	36.124
Sig	0.007**	0.073	0.002**	0.000***

*Sig < 0.05; ** Sig < 0.01; ***Sig < 0.001

Overnight tourist arrival statistics (HKTb 2019)

The study respondents to different NTAs exhibited considerable demographic diversity. At one end WKCD visitors were older and more highly educated, perhaps because this district is associated with the arts and “high culture”. The more advanced education profile of the visitors is consistent with the offerings of upscale and more formal Chinese and international cultural attractions. OTC also attracted more educated visitors, with 20.4% possessing a postgraduate qualification (19.3% for WKCD). These two were also the most frequented by professionals. By contrast Sham Shui Po reported the smallest share in the director/manager category (3.8%), a larger proportion of younger visitors and the highest share of Chinese visitors (also the lowest proportion of non-Chinese).

The current sample is not representative of the 78% of overnight visitors to Hong Kong in 2019 who were from Mainland China (HKTb, 2020). The study does however offer some support for McKercher et al.’s observation (2002) that relatively few Mainland Chinese visitors to Hong

Kong participate in cultural activities. Chinese visitors constituted a majority in only one of the NTAs within the scope of the current study (54.5% in Sham Shiu Po). This contrasts with WKCD where other (non-Chinese) tourists accounted for over two thirds (68.6) of visitation. Though the proportions of Chinese and non-Chinese visitors differed substantially across the four NTAs, non-Chinese constituted a higher proportion overall. The absence of a distinct visitor profile in OTC may be attributable to its overlap with Hong Kong's CBD, thereby diversifying the possible reasons for visiting. NTA visitors were relatively younger, more highly educated and professional. There was a preponderance of repeat visitors, consistent with the relatively high share of repeaters amongst overall visitation to the city.

Table 3 displays respondent reactions to the Hong Kong brand statements along a 7-point scale amongst those who reported visiting NTAs. Identification is strongest with Hong Kong as a *unique place* (6.16) and as *Asia's World City* (6.02), followed by *offering variety* (6.01) and a *place where life is lived intensely* (5.89). There is a fairly strong association between Hong Kong and *trendiness* (5.84). The least recognized brand propositions are *Traditional place* (5.34) and a *Chinese city* (5.38).

Table 3 Responses to brand statements by NTA visitors

	A place of strong contrasts	A trendy place	A place with lots of variety	A place where life is lived intensely	A traditional place	A place full of culture	A Chinese city	An Asian World City	A unique place
Overall descriptive statistics									
n	1175	1204	1192	1185	1196	1196	1184	1201	1204
Mean	5.65	5.84	6.01	5.89	5.34	5.65	5.38	6.02	6.16
s.d.	1.020	0.909	0.950	1.036	1.280	1.096	1.321	0.982	0.920
Visitor origin	ANOVA – Mean Difference against country/region of origin								
China	5.56	6.01	6.25	6.14	5.54	5.80	5.68	6.23	6.31
Macau	5.45	5.76	5.81	6.00	5.47	5.39	5.36	5.88	6.06
Taiwan	5.73	5.87	6.03	5.97	5.36	5.58	5.45	6.01	6.18
Other sources	5.68	5.77	5.90	5.75	5.23	5.60	5.22	5.92	6.09
F	1.603	5.377	10.953	11.127	4.581	3.180	9.336	7.579	4.284
Sig.	0.187	0.001**	0.000***	0.000***	0.003**	0.023*	0.000***	0.000***	0.005**
Frequency of prior visitation	ANOVA – Mean Difference against frequency of visit								
Once	5.26	5.53	5.71	5.55	4.86	5.30	5.14	5.60	5.75
2-5 times	5.69	5.91	6.15	6.03	5.51	5.75	5.60	6.11	6.25
5-10 times	5.75	5.97	6.09	6.04	5.74	5.94	5.74	6.17	6.23
> 10 times	5.98	6.16	6.24	6.21	5.78	5.84	5.45	6.48	6.37
F	6.162	6.775	5.279	5.926	10.511	5.323	3.954	9.677	6.617

Sig. 0.000*** 0.000*** 0.001** 0.001** 0.000*** 0.001** 0.008** 0.000*** 0.000***

Note:7-point scale was used with 1= Strong disagree and 7= strongly disagree

*Sig < 0.05; ** Sig < 0.01; ***Sig < 0.001

(Mean Difference - All visitors)

Significant differences were evident between Chinese and non-Chinese visitor responses to the brand statements. Amongst the former, Mainland Chinese visitors view Hong Kong as *unique*, and agreed most strongly that Hong Kong offers *variety* and is *Asia's world city*. Taiwanese expressed strongest agreement with Hong Kong as *a place of strong contrasts*, perhaps because many Taiwanese have visited previously. The lowest ratings amongst Chinese visitors for Hong Kong as *a place of strong contrasts* and *full of culture* were amongst those emanating from the nearby city of Macau. This may be attributable to the contrasts prevalent in their home city (Macau), notably between World Heritage sites, mega-resorts and casinos. Consistent with previous findings, the current investigation suggests that brand responses are influenced by cultural distance between visitors and the destination. The brand propositions evidently have differential appeal amongst Chinese and non-Chinese visitors.

There is a significantly stronger identification between Hong Kong and brand statements amongst those who had visited most frequently, perhaps because of their greater familiarity with the destination. The exception was *A Chinese City*, which may relate to the large number of Chinese respondents in the sample. We now explore Maitland's contention that repeat visitors are more likely to visit NTAs, whether NTAs are more attractive to repeat visitors and if visiting NTAs leads to stronger brand identification.

Table 4 NTA Visitor responses to brand statements by country of origin and repeat visitation

	A place of strong contrasts	A trendy place	A place with lots of variety	A place where life is lived intensely	A traditional place	A place full of culture	A Chinese city	An Asian World City	A unique place
<u>Differences between first time tourists from Greater China and other first-timers in all attractions</u>									
Greater China [#]	5.55	5.99	6.17	6.08	5.34	5.56	5.44	6.13	6.29
Other Countries	5.68	5.76	5.89	5.75	5.23	5.63	5.23	5.93	6.09
Sig	-1.472	3.241	4.032	4.352	1.058	-0.695	2.029	2.941	2.767
t	0.142	0.001**	0.000***	0.000***	0.29	0.488	0.043*	0.003**	0.006**
Mean Diff.	-0.129	0.23	0.278	0.327	0.114	-0.061	0.205	0.202	0.197
<u>Differences between repeat tourists from Greater China and other repeaters in all attractions</u>									
Greater China [#]	5.64	5.92	6.15	6.08	5.59	5.82	5.71	6.15	6.22

Other Countries	5.68	5.8	5.91	5.73	5.22	5.5	5.17	5.9	6.06
Sig	-0.299	1.429	2.534	3.106	3.149	2.876	4.483	2.344	1.551
t	0.765	0.154	0.012*	0.002**	0.002**	0.004**	0.000***	0.02*	0.122
Mean Diff.	-0.031	0.126	0.237	0.35	0.367	0.315	0.543	0.253	0.164

Note:7-point scale was used with 1= Strong disagree and 7= strongly disagree

*Sig < 0.05; ** Sig < 0.01; ***Sig < 0.001

#Greater China includes China, Taiwan and Macau

The process of separating the two effects can help to clarify the prospective role of NTAs in destination marketing. Using data for NTA visitors, Table 4 presents the results of an Independent T-test to confirm whether brand perceptions are affected by visitor origin (country or territory) and/or patterns. The results show that Chinese rank most brand statements significantly higher than non-Chinese respondents when controlling for repeat visitation. This provides preliminary evidence that cultural distance affects brand identification, independent of frequency than of visitation. It may be surmised that those visiting more established attractions and sites for the first time may draw more on organic imagery, whereas the image of NTAs may depend more on the actual visit experience. No significant differences are evident between 1) first-time and repeat Chinese NTA visitors, and; 2) first-time and repeat non-Chinese visitors.

To provide further insight about the distinct roles and functions of NTAs, Table 5 compares brand responses amongst visitors to NTAs and to more established attractions and sites.

Table 5 Brand responses from visitors to NTAs and to more established attractions and sites

	A place of strong contrasts	A trendy place	A place with lots of variety	A place where life is lived intensely	A traditional place	A place full of culture	A Chinese city	An Asian World City	A unique place
	<u>Difference between NTAs and more established tourist attractions</u>								
NTAs	5.73	5.98	6.25	6.11	5.57	5.76	5.74	6.24	6.29
Established	5.61	5.77	5.88	5.78	5.21	5.59	5.19	5.9	6.09
T	1.97	3.845	6.366	5.629	4.633	2.473	7.614	6.279	3.579
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.049*	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.014*	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
Mean Diff.	0.121	0.207	0.364	0.333	0.36	0.166	0.544	0.339	0.2

Note:7-point scale was used with 1= Strong disagree and 7= strongly disagree

*Sig < 0.05; ** Sig < 0.01; ***Sig < 0.001

NTA visitors exhibit greater brand recognition and agree more strongly with all of the brand statements to a significant degree. They particularly value Hong Kong as a *unique place* (6.29)

offering *lots of variety* (6.25) and as an *Asian World City* (6.24). Visitors to more established attractions and sites attach the highest rating to Hong Kong as *a unique place* though are less appreciative of diversity. NTA visitors rated all other statements lower than 6.0. This pattern suggests that NTA visitors were more likely than other respondents to identify with the Hong Kong's cosmopolitanism.

It has previously been noted that frequency of prior visitation and country/territory of origin influence the formation of brand perceptions. Table 6 exhibits significantly different responses to NTAs amongst Chinese and non-Chinese visitors. The HKTb brand statements were recognised more strongly by Chinese than other visitors in almost all cases, irrespective of the territory of origin (Mainland China, Taiwan or Macau). This may be attributable to either cultural proximity and/or to greater prior visitation due to their visit origins relatively closer nearby.

Table 6 Responses to branding from NTA visitors by origin

	A place of strong contrasts	A trendy place	A place with lots of variety	A place where life is lived intensely	A traditional place	A place full of culture	A Chinese city	An Asian World City	A unique place
Greater China [#]	5.59	5.94	6.15	6.07	5.48	5.70	5.59	6.13	6.24
Other Countries	5.65	5.75	5.87	5.72	5.18	5.53	5.17	5.84	6.02
Sig	0.332	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.008**	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
T	-0.971	3.900	5.255	6.451	4.351	2.674	6.063	5.547	4.089
Mean Diff.	-0.056	0.191	0.275	0.351	0.295	0.167	0.420	0.291	0.216

Note: 7-point scale was used with 1= Strong disagree and 7= strongly disagree

*Sig < 0.05; ** Sig < 0.01; ***Sig < 0.001

[#]Greater China includes China, Taiwan and Macau

Finally, Table 7 reports on an independent sample t-test about the impact on brand perceptions of prior visitation to NTAs. The findings suggest that those visiting NTAs most frequently aligned closest with the brand, an indication that destination familiarity fosters brand attachment. NTAs can play a potentially growing role in diversifying destination products.

Table 7 Responses to branding by number of NTAs visited

	1-2 NTAs		3-4 NTAs		T	Sig.	Mean Difference
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation			
A place of strong contrasts	5.620	0.990	5.738	0.976	-1.764	0.078	-0.117
A trendy place	5.783	0.922	5.990	0.764	-3.837	0.000***	-0.207
A place with lots of variety	5.936	0.977	6.098	0.806	-2.825	0.005**	-0.161
A place where life is lived intensely	5.808	1.062	6.032	0.881	-3.583	0.000***	-0.224
A traditional place	5.264	1.287	5.423	1.229	-1.838	0.066	-0.158
A place full of culture	5.559	1.125	5.698	1.071	-1.857	0.063	-0.139
A Chinese city	5.257	1.339	5.541	1.241	-3.315	0.001***	-0.284
An Asian World City	5.888	1.027	6.210	0.828	-5.457	0.000***	-0.322
A unique place	6.080	0.943	6.261	0.805	-3.208	0.001***	-0.181

Note:7-point scale was used with 1= Strong disagree and 7= strongly disagree

*Sig < 0.05; ** Sig < 0.01; ***Sig < 0.001

-Independent Sample T-Test

Conclusions

This study set out to: 1) profile the attitudes and behaviours of NTA visitors in an Asian city - Hong Kong – and their response to destination brand propositions. 2), assess how Hong Kong’s various localities are viewed by independent visitors - both Chinese and non-Chinese and: 3) evaluate the validity of Maitland’s (2019) observations about the profiles and attitudes of NTA visitors and the consequent role of NTAs in supporting tourism policy objectives.

In the preceding sections we have provided an evidence-based analysis of NTA visitors. It was found that the profile of NTA visitors was oriented towards younger and repeat visitors from Mainland Chinese with somewhat lower educational attainment and occupational levels that their counterparts in previous European studies (Maitland’s NTA visitors were more highly educated than city visitors generally). In the current Hong Kong context, NTA visitors exhibited stronger

identifications with the relevant brand propositions than those frequenting more established attractions and sites. In particular, the authors found substantial alignment between the profiles and behaviours of NTA visitors and the *brand DNA* and *local lifestyle experiences* propositions. NTA visitor respondents emphasized particular aspects of the Hong Kong Brand, namely uniqueness, variety and *Asia's World City*. There was a relatively weaker perception of Hong Kong as *a trendy place*, though there was a significantly stronger response amongst NTA visitors than from those frequenting more established attractions and sites. NTAs can evidently play a role in strengthening destination branding, resonant with Maitland's European observations.

We have identified heterogeneous ethnic-based reactions to neighbourhood branding amongst NTA visitors. Chinese tourists reported significantly higher ratings for most brand statements than non-Chinese, when controlling for repeat visitation. This provides preliminary evidence that brand identification is influenced by cultural distance affects, independent of frequency of visit. The capacity of NTAs to attract specific visitor groups offers potential support for destination brand initiatives. The current study has shown that NTAs generate stronger responses and higher brand identification in aggregate, thereby providing a tentative indication that aspects of Hong Kong's branding have been effective. In assessing the distinctiveness of NTAs we found that the heritage-focused OTC scored lowest, perhaps because of its central location and multiple functions. Meanwhile and away from the CBD, Hong Kong's poorest area - Sham Shui Po - offers contrast, consistent with the desire of NTA visitors for more authentic, everyday experiences.

Despite the divergence from some of the previously noted European findings, our research has confirmed Maitland's idea that NTAs are frequented by repeat visitors pursuing everyday experiences. However, the younger age profile of NTA visitors in the current study means that this group has lower spending power and less advanced education than the typical NTA visitor in Europe. These latter observations merit further investigation, given the prevalence of educational attainment that might be anticipated amongst a younger cohort in an era of expanding higher education provision. Hong Kong neighbourhoods are appreciated by mainland Chinese for offering a diverse, cosmopolitan experience of an Asian world city. Our findings offer some support for the retention of Hong Kong's post-handover credentials as a global city. For visitors from Hong Kong's major market - mainland China - NTAs offer distinction from everyday life, thereby addressing concerns that a less globalized Hong Kong is becoming "just another Chinese city".

Contributions to theory and practice

The current study contributes to tourism research by offering an Asian perspective on NTAs and NTA visitors. Knowledge about 'new urban tourism' has been extended through the distinctions identified between behaviours and attitudes amongst Chinese and non-Chinese NTA visitors. The heterogeneity of observed patterns suggests an important role for context and visitor cultural backgrounds and thereby extend Maitland's more European oriented findings. Prevailing visitor profiles are extended by the analysis of the diverse responses to brand propositions and preliminary insights about the opening up of NTAs in Asian cities.

Our findings confirm and extend previous new urban tourism research by demonstrating how NTAs contribute surprise and novelty to destination branding, though did not validate Maitland's observation that NTA visitors are more educated. The findings do however suggest that NTAs are a viable channel for post COVID-19 dispersal strategies, pointing visitors towards settings

that offer experiences of everyday life away from crowded hotspots. The preceding evidence can also inform a more refined approach to spreading defined and measurable visitor segments into NTAs who are offered distinct experiences from the offerings of more established attractions and sites.

Noting the large scale of pre-pandemic visitation from mainland China to Hong Kong, the continued pursuit of visitor dispersal presents a clear opportunity, though some attendant risk for destination authorities. Pushing visitors more assertively towards NTAs might prompt the earliest adopting visitors towards even lesser prepared city areas, if they resist being part of an influx that is contributing to a lessening of local character in designated NTA precincts. Noting Hong Kong's dense residential population, destination authorities will face an ongoing challenge to accommodate daily neighborhood life as visitation shifts towards NTAs. Large-scale mainland visitation is already resuming post COVID-19, and the apparent visitor desire for local immersion and customized experiences will require further adaption by Hong Kong residents. The evidence presented in this paper can provide some scientific basis for the decision-making by destination authorities as they manage competing interests.

Limitations and opportunities for further research

Despite the substantial visitor sample, the current study may not provide a complete representation of the Hong Kong Tourism market, with underrepresentation of mainland Chinese. Some “non-Chinese” respondents may also have ethnic Chinese backgrounds (e.g., Singaporeans or those from other Southeast Asian countries) thereby impacting on representativeness. Any conclusions about visitor dispersal into NTAs by ethnicity are preliminary.

Future researchers might investigate how local dynamics and resident responses impact on the development and marketing of NTAs. With substantial inbound visitation resuming post-pandemic, the monitoring of resident attitudes to tourism could potentially contribute to forming a more complete picture of NTA dynamics. Future investigations could also embrace more innovative qualitative approaches that provide deeper and more nuanced insights into NTA visitation in the context of new urban tourism. To advance knowledge about destination marketing, researchers might address whether it is visiting NTAs that enhances brand identification, or whether such neighborhoods are simply more attractive to repeaters. Research to separate these two effects would offer the potential of further validation.

Building on the current investigation, more research is needed to identify driving the attitudes and behaviors of NTA visitors from outside Europe, Whilst the current study has added an Asian dimension by highlighting distinctions amongst Chinese visitors – e.g. from those mainland China and from Macau - scholars could also investigate distinctions within mainland China, such as shorter-haul mobilities and city breaks which have been facilitated in the Hong Kong case by enhanced accessibility via road and fast rail developments.

Scholars should continue to evaluate the applicability and validity of the “new tourist” label as a characterization of emerging NTA groups and their receptiveness to brand initiatives. Such distinctions merit further consideration in light of the differences that have been found between the current study and Maitland's Europe-based research. Given the increasing attention being paid to ‘cool’ destinations (Kock, 2021), future scholars could assess whether labels such as

distinctly trendy signal the arrival of “edgy” neighbourhoods that have visitor appeal. It would also be interesting to investigate the edginess or “coolness” of neighbourhoods expressly constructed for tourism. Can coolness be created top-down, or is it dependent on more organic “bottom-up” processes?

Finally, though the current findings did not validate Maitland’s observation that NTAs attract more highly educated visitors, the authors contend that further research is merited to continue exploring the potential of NTAs within the wider context of city destination branding.

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