THE PRAGMATIC INFLUENCE OF DESTINATION PERSONALITY AND SELF-CONGRUITY ON TOURIST SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY

Justin Kitin
School of Marketing, Curtin Business School
Curtin University

2017002

Editor:

Dr. Isaac Cheah
School of Marketing

MARKETING INSIGHTS
Working Paper Series
School of Marketing

ISSN 1448 – 9716
Corresponding author:

Justin Kitin
School of Marketing, Curtin Business School
Curtin University
GPO BOX U1987
Perth, WA 6845
Australia
Tel (+61 8) 9266 3882
Fax (+61 8) 9266 3937
Email: justinkitin@gmail.com
The Pragmatic Influence of Destination Personality and Self-Congruity on
Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty

Abstract

Destination personality and self-congruence are both omnipresent concepts within consumer behaviour studies: however, their effects remain relatively unexplored within tourism research. The primary objective of this research is to conduct a comprehensive examination of the impacts destination personality and tourist self-congruence has on satisfaction and loyalty within the tourism sector. The moderating effects of nostalgia proneness and novelty seeking will also be examined. It is envisioned that tourists in Hong Kong and Macau will be recruited to compete the self-administered questionnaire. The current study’s findings will have significant theoretical and practical implications.

Key words: destination personality, self-congruity, tourism, nostalgia, novelty
Introduction

Contemporary research advocates destination personality has a profound effect on consumer behaviour, it affects tourists in an emotional capacity, which has the ability to dictate their product choices and post purchase behaviour (Prayag, 2007). Developing emotional attachments to destinations via their personalities enhances their equity and affects the future relationship a tourist forms with a destination. Destination personality is a relatively new concept within the tourism field; predominately it is examined with the accompaniment of branding theory adapted from Aaker’s brand personality research (Souiden et al, 2017). Despite the accumulative research, destination personality is still ambiguous as some of the branding theory is not applicable in a tourism capacity. Hence, additional research is required in this area to discover if these concepts can be expanded on, and if they are applicable cross culturally. Extensive research into other variables that influence the relationship between destination personality and tourist satisfaction, such as past experience, can give additional insight into tourist behaviour (Papadimitriou and Kaplanidou, 2013).

Self-congruity refers to the level of congruency between a consumer self image and the image of a brand, store, or place. Consumers select certain products or visit certain places based on how adept that image is similar to how they are, or want to be perceived. Self-congruity has been studied extensively in academia, although, similar to destination personality, the majority of research exists in the realm of products, stores, and brands, as opposed to a tourist destination (Yusof and Ariffin, 2013). Despite what recent self-congruity theory suggests, there is still a lack of evidence to support the notion that self-congruity has an impact on tourist satisfaction, specifically, if it has any role on the intention or motivation of a tourist’s destination decision (Beerli, Meneses, and Gil, 2007). This empirical research has the aptitude for greater insight, to discover how the relationship between self-congruity, tourist satisfaction and to a lesser extent, destination personality ultimately influences tourist post purchase behaviour.

The personality of a destination offers specific characteristics, given a tourist is susceptible to feelings of nostalgia or novelty; it may depict the type of destination chosen to visit. E.g., a tourist may visit China given their ancestral orientation to fulfill a nostalgic feeling. Likewise, they may also choose Las Vegas to fulfill a novelty inclination. These choices may decide how congruent the tourist feels these destinations align with their pre-existing personality traits (Holak et al, 2005). Nostalgia proneness and novelty seeking acting as moderators in the relationships between destination personality and satisfaction, self-congruity and satisfaction, will have some influence on the tourist decision-making process. Consequently, tourist destination decisions will differ dependent on whether they quantify as an urban or heritage type destination.

The objective of this study is to investigate the dynamics that influence tourist behaviour, how product branding and self-identity correlates with tourist destinations. Aligning with this research objective, three distinct questions are presented, consisting of:

- Research question 1: Does destination personality and self-congruity have an influence on tourist satisfaction and subsequently, loyalty behaviour?
• Research question 2: How does this differ for urban and heritage destinations?
• Research question 3: Does novelty seeking and nostalgia proneness moderate the relationships between destination personality and self-congruity under both destination conditions?

Relevant Literature, Theory and Hypotheses

Destination Personality

Akin to brand personality, destination personality is essentially the application of branding products with humanistic traits, therefore, in a tourism circumstance; destination personality refers to the humanistic traits coupled to a tourism destination (Ye, 2012). Destination personality is correlated with the ideologies of one’s self-concept, in that, consumers are attracted to products and things that in some capacity reflect themselves as a person or to an extensive degree, their personality (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, and Baloglu, 2007). Destination personality is relatively significant for a tourist as the personality of a destination has symbolic value. Visiting a place and engaging in the symbolic value of the personality, tourists are able to construct an emotional bond, viewing the destination not just as a thing, but also as someone with humanistic traits (Ye, 2012). These factors ultimately affects tourist satisfaction, how well the interaction is between tourist and place, gauges whether their satisfaction is sufficient, and indirectly their loyalty to a specific place (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, and Baloglu, 2007). Thus,

\[ H_1: \text{There is a positive relationship between destination personality and tourist satisfaction.} \]

Self-Congruence

Self-congruity plays a pivotal role in the decision making process a tourist undergoes whilst considering themselves and the destination personality of a potential destination. Fundamentally, self-congruence is the alignment of the personality or image of a given destination, and how well that correlates with a tourist own self-image (Ahn, Ekinci, and Li, 2011). Amongst contemporary research two categories of self-congruity exists, the actual self and the ideal self (Usakli and Baloglu, 2010). The former referring to the current state of a consumer and how they perceive themselves within their collective constructs, aesthetically and socially. Ideal self is what the consumer wishes to be, a future state that has not yet been achieved, although, is in a constant state of flux (Kilic and Adem, 2012). For a consumer to attain the ideal self, they consume a product or place that has connotative traits they align their personality with. If the consumption of these traits meets the tourist’s psychological needs, satisfaction will likely ensue. Higher congruity between tourist and destination reflects higher satisfaction, leading to possible revisitation and a positive post purchase experience (Kumar and Nayak, 2014). Thus,

\[ H_2: \text{There is a positive relationship between self-congruity and tourist satisfaction.} \]
**Satisfaction and Loyalty**

Consumer satisfaction is quintessentially the analysis undergone by a consumer on a product, service, or place. In a tourism context, this relates to the fulfilment a tourist receives from visiting a destination and if it exceeded, fell short or met their expectations (Meng, Tepanon, and Uysal, 2008). Dependent on the level of satisfaction a tourist experiences, this can be a determinant factor that decides their post purchase behaviour, explicitly, their loyalty or intention to revisit a destination (Valle et al, 2006).

Customer loyalty is the true indication of a successful marketing strategy. No brand, product, or in this circumstance, destination can survive longevity without the loyalty of consumers (Gursoy et al, 2014). Loyalty in tourism is directly associated with satisfaction, low satisfaction from a destination will likely result in little or no loyalty. Due to tourism’s fickle nature, attitudinal and behavioural aspects need to be considered given tourist’s motivation to travel is for either leisure or escapism (Gursoy et al, 2014). The attitudes and feelings formed through destination personality and congruence with a destination can depict how loyal the tourist is. Thus,

\( H_3 \) - There is a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty.

**Novelty Seeking**

Novelty is professed as something that is unknown or new, hence the reasoning why the concept draws a parallel seemingly with tourism. Within tourism, consumers endeavour to achieve maximum stimulation from their holiday choice; emotional and physical stimulation are the motivators of taking a vacation initially. Tourists seek factors that are unattainable in their domestic environment; hence, travelling to a new place gives that sense of unfamiliarity and a feeling of “new” (Assaker, Vinzi, and O’Connor, 2010). However, novelty has a limited lifespan; tourists seeking novelty from a particular destination will only last a few occasions before the novelty becomes familiarity (Assaker, Vinzi, and O’Connor, 2010). Novelty seeking behaviour will ultimately depict the tourist decision-making process; tourists looking for a novelty factor that is inherit in their personality traits, will align with destinations that share those same aspects. This will also gauge how congruent the tourist feels with a destination.

\( H_{4a} \) - Novelty seeking will moderate the relationship between destination personality and the tourist satisfaction. Specifically, the effect of destination personality on tourist satisfaction should be relatively stronger for tourists who are novelty seekers.

\( H_{4b} \) - Novelty seeking will moderate the relationship between self-congruity and tourist satisfaction. Specifically, the effect of self-congruity on tourist satisfaction should be relatively stronger for tourists who are novelty seekers.
**Nostalgia Proneness**

The concept of nostalgia is based on someone’s yearning for an experience, or psychological state whereby they reminisce of a time gone by (Hammoud et al, 2016). Tourists whom are seeking nostalgic factors from travel destinations; there are those who are further prone to nostalgia, in an attitudinal, behavioural, or emotional capacity (Hammoud et al, 2016). Proneness to nostalgia is dependent on an individual’s personal circumstance, the higher the fluidity or state of flux a person’s life is in, often they desire a sense of nostalgia, wanting to divert to a previous lifecycle state whereby they felt emotionally or physically satisfied (Holak et al, 2005). Nostalgia proneness will have a profound effect on tourist destination decisions, similar to novelty seeking. Tourists feeling nostalgic for sentimental reasoning will lean toward those destinations that fulfil this aspect of their personality. The level of congruency experienced will be dependent on nostalgic satisfaction.

**H₅ₐ** - Nostalgia proneness will moderate the relationship between destination personality and the tourist satisfaction. Specifically, the effect of destination personality on tourist satisfaction should be relatively stronger for tourists who are prone to nostalgic sentiment.

**H₅ₐ** - Nostalgia proneness will moderate the relationship between self-congruity and tourist satisfaction. Specifically, the effect of self-congruity on tourist satisfaction should be relatively stronger for tourists who are prone to nostalgic sentiment.

The research model is summarized in Figure 1.

---

**Figure 1: Research Framework**

![Research Framework Diagram](image-url)
Methodology

A quantitative approach will be utilised in this study. Data will be collected in Singapore (urban destination) and Macau (heritage destination) to examine potential destination typology effects. Self-administered questionnaires will be utilised for this study. It is estimated that approximately 300 responses will be required for each of the destination types. A systematic sampling method will be implemented to avoid sampling bias.

Existing scales will be utilised to measure destination personality, specifically, Aaker’s Brand Personality Scale (BPS) that will undergo an adaption for a tourism scope (Ye, 2012). Although destination personality is an indefinite concept, this scale is a suitable measurement for this study as it has garnered validity and reliability across multiple, cross-cultural studies. To ensure reliability, all scales should measure higher than 0.70, which the BPS has an average Cronbach alpha of 0.838. (Ye, 2012).

A measure for self-congruity will be an amalgamation of numerous existing studies performed within consumer behaviour and tourism research. Current self-congruence studies measure the tourist of a destination against a potential tourist. For this research, an independent scale will be developed that measures a tourist to a destination, as opposed to a visitor of a destination. Primarily self-congruity will utilise elements from Sirgy’s scale (Kumar and Nayak, 2014), given its extensive use and reliability in research. Cronbach alpha is 0.827 for actual self-congruity and 0.802 for ideal self-congruity (Kumar and Nayak, 2014).

Measuring tourist satisfaction will primarily utilise fundamentals from the scale developed by Oliver (Kouthouris and Alecandris, 2005). Elements of this scale will be adapted for a tourism framework, given its high reliability within recent studies. The Cronbach alpha for this particular scale is 0.92 (Kouthouris and Alecandris, 2005).

Measuring tourist loyalty is impractical for this study, as it requires comprehensive research across an extended period to hold any legitimacy. Loyalty by definition is a concept that shows consumers repeated purchase of a product over time (Prayag and Ryan, 2011). However, tourist satisfaction is a constituent of loyalty, and is considered a sufficient concept that tourist loyalty can be measured by (Prayag and Ryan, 2011). This approach will be utilised for this study.

Quantitative data will be examined using exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Theoretical Contributions

- The objective of this study is to acquire further research of consumer behaviour frameworks, and discover if they are applicable within a tourism context.
- This research has the capacity to contribute to existing literature that could be applicable across multiple marketing frameworks, given the collaborative nature of the concepts.
Managerial Contributions

- Improved marketing strategies can be implemented from the research made evident in this study. DMOs can put into practice differentiating market tactics and gain a comprehensive understanding of tourist behaviour.
- Provide cross-cultural knowledge for international markets. DMOs seeking to expand business outside of their domestic market have valid insight into the Asian tourism marketplace.
- This research is not only beneficial to DMOs, but also tourism authorities, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), councils, conventions, and tourist bureaus. A synchronized marketing strategy from these entities has the potential to improve the overall image, and perception of a destination.

References


