

Fall 9-28-2016

Conceptualization of place attachment, self-congruity, and their impacts on word-of-mouth behaviors

Ning (Chris) Chen

university of canterbury, chris.chen@canterbury.ac.nz

Tina Šegota

University of Ljubljana, tina.segota@ef.uni-lj.si

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttracanada_2016_conference



Part of the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

Chen, Ning (Chris) and Šegota, Tina, "Conceptualization of place attachment, self-congruity, and their impacts on word-of-mouth behaviors" (2016). *2016-Conference*. 23.

http://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttracanada_2016_conference/23

This Refereed academic paper for presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the TTRA Canada at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2016-Conference by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

Conceptualization of place attachment, self-congruity, and their impacts on word-of-mouth behaviors

Introduction

The attachment theory and self-congruity theory have been widely used to explain and predict consumer behavior (Chen, *et al.*, 2015; Ericksen, 1997; Sirgy, *et al.*, 2008, Liu *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, the two theories have been also used in tourism studies with the aim to explain tourist destination choice (Ahn *et al.*, 2013; Chon, 1992; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Sirgy & Su, 2000; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Yuksel *et al.*, 2010). The latter studies showed that individuals form a match between their self-image and destination image (or image of a typical visitor of a destination) cognitively and affectively, which influences their behavior (i.e. intention to visit, intention to recommend, word-of-mouth, loyalty etc.) (Chen, *et al.*, 2015; Hwang, *et al.*, 2005; Prayag *et al.*, 2013; 2015). Placing a focus on destination visitors, the literature does not inform on the self-congruity effect among local residents, who also play a very important role in shaping destination image through their voluntary behaviors (Chen *et al.*, 2014b).

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, the study aims at extending self-image congruence research into the resident literature within the field of tourism, by examining the links between place attachment and self-congruity. The second objective is to propose and demonstrate that (actual, ideal, social, and ideal social self-congruity: a match between resident actual/ideal self-image and place image) is further positively related to residents' word-of-mouth (WOM) intention.

Literature Review

There are several ways to describe and interpret the psychological connections between residents and their place in terms of multiple research streams: *loyalty* (from branding and service marketing theories), *commitment* (from internal branding theories), *identification* (from knowledge of social identity and organizational identification), and *place attachment* (from environmental psychology studies). This psychological connection is the outcome of an internalization process where residents recognize, evaluate, fall in love with (or hate), form their memories with and expectations of a place. Chen *et al.*, (2014a) developed a six-dimensional construct of place attachment to capture the outcomes of this internalization process. These dimensions include *place identity*, *place dependence*, *affective attachment*, *social bonding*, *place memory*, and *place expectation*. A following study by Chen *et al.*, (2014b) further provided empirical evidence on the impact of dimensions of place attachment on residents' WOM behaviors.

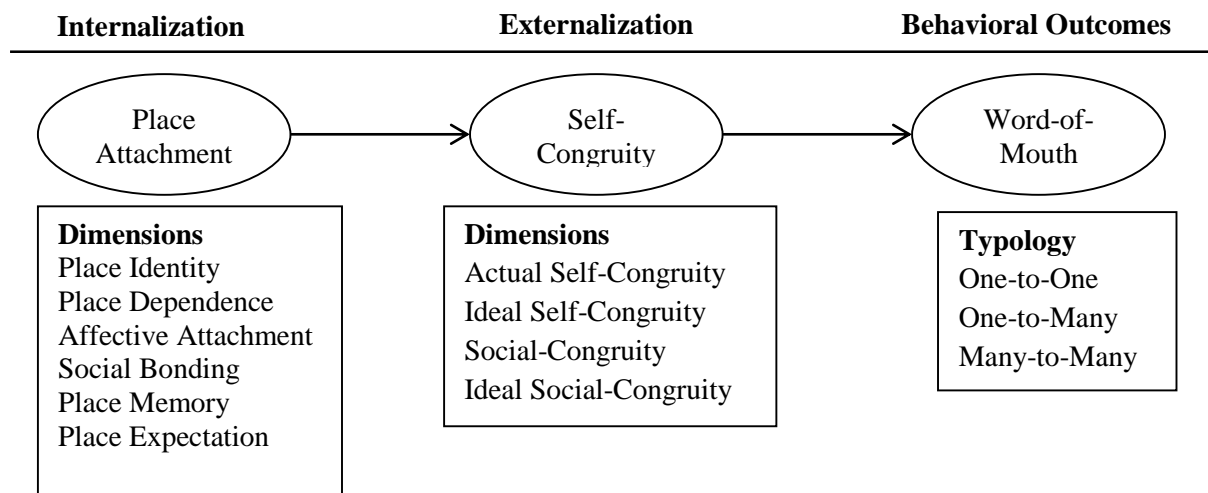
On the other hand, self-congruity refers to a match/mismatch between the image of a place perceived by an individual and his/her self-image (Chen & Šegota, 2015). Self-congruity is conceptualized through four types—actual, ideal, social and ideal social (Sirgy & Su, 2000), which proved to be relevant in explaining and predicting various consumer behavior aspects, such as advertising effectiveness, brand preference, satisfaction, buying and visiting intentions etc. (e.g. Ekinici & Riley, 2003; Das, 2014; Kressmann *et al.*, 2006). Previous literature focused on assessing the match between tourists and destination, and thus neglected the aspect of residents. However, not only is it known that residents play multiple roles (one of which is a role of tourists), but they also serve as advocates of their place of residence as a tourist destination. Therefore, it is also important to study how they form a match between different dimensions of self and, what they consider to be represented as, destination's typical visitor.

Previous literature categorizes WOM as WOM and eWOM in terms of the format of the information communicated. Litvin *et al.*, (2008) propose a typology of WOM by the scope of

the scenarios of how and why initiating the WOM: *one-to-one WOM*, *one-to-many WOM*, and *many-to-many WOM*. *One-to-one WOM* refers to WOM that generated by one person and communicated to another person or a small group of people in private, such as WOM through conversation with family or friends via emails, instant messaging, telephone, etc. (Chen *et al.*, 2014b). Earlier research found that motives of this type of WOM include *concern for others*, *message intrigue*, and *a desire to help* (Sundaram *et al.*, 1998), which suggested towards a social nature of driving this type of WOM behavior. *One-to-many WOM* could be defined as WOM generated by one individual with the purpose of sharing with others, while without identifying the audience, e.g. WOM in public speech, blogs, social networks websites, and other Web 2.0 media. Research in information communication and technology (ICT) found that people use this type of WOM mainly for sociability, spontaneity, community building and emotional expressiveness (Murphy *et al.*, 2010). *Many-to-many WOM*, different from the previous two types of WOM, referred to those WOM behaviors in open group discussions or themed online communities, where conversations occur with almost no focus on participants' identities. Creators and receivers of this type of WOM do not necessarily recognize anyone in the discussion and they emphasize on pure information exchange. Due to the different natures of how and why WOM is created and communicated, motives of *one-to-many WOM* and *many-to-many WOM* will be fundamentally different from *one-to-one WOM* behavior.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual model based on the relationships between place attachment, self-congruity, and different types of WOM is proposed to explore the psychological mechanisms by which an individual forms his/her self-congruity based on his/her attachment to a place, and further affect different WOM behaviors (see Figure 1).



Conclusion

Recent research on place attachment found its influence residents' behaviors, including WOM. However, the specific inherent mechanisms of why and how dimensions of place attachment affect different types of behaviors remain understudied. This research proposes the four types of self-congruity as the mediator between place attachment and WOM behaviors and positions self-congruity as an important construct in the externalization process, when residents transform their relationship with a place to physical behaviors. Empirical studies examining this structural framework will be designed and conducted.

References

- Ahn, T., Ekinci, Y., & Li, G. (2013). Self-congruence, functional congruence, and destination choice. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(6): 719-723.
- Chen, N., Dwyer, L., & Firth, T. (2014a). Conceptualisation and measurement of the dimensionality of place attachment. *Tourism Analysis*, 19(3), 323-338
- Chen, N., Dwyer, L., & Firth, T. (2014b). Effect of dimensions of place attachment on residents' word-of-mouth behavior. *Tourism Geographies*, 16(5), 826-843.
- Chen, N., Dwyer, L., & Firth, T. (2015). Factors Influencing Chinese Students' Behavior in Promoting Australia as a Destination for Chinese Outbound Travel. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 32(4), 366-381.
- Chen, N., & Šegota, T. (2015). Resident attitudes, place attachment and destination branding: a research framework. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 21(2), 145-158.
- Chon, K. S. (1992). Self-image/destination image congruity. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19(2), 360-363.
- Das, G. (2014). Linkages between self-congruity, brand familiarity, perceived quality and purchase intention: A study of fashion retail brands. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 6(3): 180-193.
- Ekinci, Y., & Hosany, S. (2006). Destination Personality: An Application of Brand Personality to Tourism Destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45(2): 127-139.
- Ekinci, Y., & Riley, M. (2003). An investigation of self-concept: actual and ideal self-congruence compared in the context of service evaluation. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 10: 201-214.
- Ericksen, M. K. (1997). Using self-congruity and ideal congruity to predict purchase intention: a European perspective. *Journal of Euromarketing*, 6(1): 41-56.
- Hwang, S. N., Lee, C., & Chen, H. J. (2005). The relationship among tourists' involvement, place attachment and interpretation satisfaction in Taiwan's national parks. *Tourism Management*, 26(2), 143-156.
- Kressmann, F., Sirgy, M. J., Herrmann, A., Huber, F., Huber, S., Lee, D.-J. (2006). Direct and indirect effects of self-image congruence on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(9): 955-964.
- Liu, F., Li, J., Mizerski, D., & Soh, H. (2012). Self-congruity, brand attitude, and brand loyalty: a study on luxury brands. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(7/8): 922-937.
- Murphy, H. C., Centeno Gil, E. A., & Schegg, R. (2010). An investigation of motivation to share online content by young travelers—Why and Where. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2010*, 467-478.
- Prayag, G., Hosany, S., Muskat, B., & Del Chiappa, G. (2015). Understanding the Relationships between Tourists' Emotional Experiences, Perceived Overall Image, Satisfaction, and Intention to Recommend. *Journal of Travel Research*, 0047287515620567.
- Prayag, G., Hosany, S., Nunkoo, R., & Alders, T. (2013). London residents' support for the 2012 Olympic Games: The mediating effect of overall attitude. *Tourism Management*, 36(6), 629-640.
- Sirgy, M. J., & Su, C. (2000). Destination image, self-congruence, and travel behavior: towards an integrative model. *Journal of Travel Research*, 38(4): 340-352.
- Sirgy, M. J., Lee, D. J., Johar, J. S., & Tidwell, J. (2008). Effect of self-congruity with sponsorship on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business research*, 61(10): 1091-1097.
- Sundaram, D. S., Mitra, K., & Webster, C. (1998). Word-of-Mouth Communications: A Motivational Analysis. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 25, 527-531.

- Usakli, A., & Baloglu, S. (2011). Brand personality of tourism destinations: An application of self-congruity theory. *Tourism Management*, 32; 114-127.
- Yuksel, A., Yuksel, F., & Bilim, Y. (2010). Destination attachment: Effects on customer satisfaction and cognitive, affective and conative loyalty. *Tourism Management*, 31(2), 274-284.