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Xiangping Li

*Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*

Muzaffer Uysal

*Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*

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Li, Xiangping and Uysal, Muzaffer, "An Examination of Effects of Self-Concept (SC), Destination Personality (DP), and SC-DP Congruence on Tourist Behavior" (2016). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 3.  
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## **An Examination of Effects of Self-Concept (SC), Destination Personality (DP), and SC-DP Congruence on Tourist Behavior**

Xiangping Li  
Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

and

Muzaffer Uysal  
Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

### **ABSTRACT**

*Tourism literature has explored some critical concepts such as motivation, image, expectations and the like. However, such constructs as self-concept, destination personality, and self-congruence, have received little attention. This paper makes an effort to address these concepts by proposing and empirically testing a theoretical model that attempts to investigate the structural relationships between destination personality (DP), self-concept (SC), congruence between self-concept and destination personality (SC-DP congruence) and tourist behavior. The findings suggest significant influences of these concepts on tourist behavior. An understanding of what influences tourist behavior can aid in designing and implementing appropriate marketing programs.*

**Keywords:** *destination personality, self-concept, self-congruence, tourist behavior.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Factors influencing tourist behavior have been a focal point in tourism research for decades. Efforts to unveil the determinants that shape travel behavior stem not only from pure academic interest, but from practical business considerations (Pizam & Mansfeld, 1999). Sirgy and Su (2000) pointed out that past research efforts have focused on the issues of what, when, where, and how to purchase, but not much on why to purchase. Therefore, further analysis of why tourists make their choices is much needed (Beerli, Meneses, & Gil, 2007). Tourism literature has explored some critical concepts such as push and pulls factors; destination image; novelty seeking, etc. However, other topics, such as self-concept, destination personality, and self-congruity, have been largely ignored in the tourism research (Beerli, et al., 2007; Ksatenholz, 2004).

This paper makes an effort to address these research gaps by proposing and empirically testing a theoretical model that attempts to investigate the structural relationships between destination personality (DP), self-concept (SC), congruence between self-concept and destination personality (SC-DP congruence) and tourist behavior. In addition, self-concept consists of four aspects, including actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, social self-concept, and ideal social self-concept; hence SC-DP congruence also includes four facets: actual SC-DP congruence, ideal SC-DP congruence, social SC-DP congruence, and ideal social SC-DP congruence.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination personality has gradually gained academic attention; however, its research is only in its infancy. There is little empirical evidence that visitors can and do associate personality characteristics with destinations (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). The link between brand personality and self-concept has not been fully explored (Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). As a result, more academic effort is needed in this area (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Hosany, Ekinici, & Uysal, 2006, 2007; Murphy, Moscardo, et al., 2007).

Chon (1990) first introduced the constructs of self-concept and self-congruence into tourism satisfaction research. Sirgy and Su (2000) proposed that the greater the match between the tourist's self-concept and destination visitor image, the more likely the tourist has a positive attitude toward that destination, thus the more likely the tourist would prefer and visit that destination. Although several articles attempted to verify the roles of self-concept and self-congruity in tourism setting (Back, 2005; Beerli, et al., 2007; Chon, 1992; Chon & Olsen, 1991; Ekinici & Riley, 2003; Goh & Litvin, 2000; Litvin, Goh, & Goldsmith, 2001; Litvin & Kar, 2003; Todd, 2001), self-congruity is still a topic that has been under-studied and more empirical evidence is needed to clarify the role of self-congruity in tourist's destination choice process (Beerli, et al., 2007; Sirgy & Su, 2000). Furthermore, the mixed results of self-congruity research also suggest further validation of the application of self-congruity, and its relationship with destination selection in tourism research (Litvin & Goh, 2002).

In addition, the application of self-concept in the tourism research focuses mostly on actual self-concept. However, self-concept is a multidimensional construct. According to Sirgy (1982), consumer researchers have generally used four aspects of self-image in explaining and predicting consumer behaviors. These four aspects of self-image are actual, social, ideal, and ideal social self-concept. Therefore, more empirical study is needed to examine the application of all the four dimensions of self-concept in the context of tourism (Sirgy & Su, 2000; Todd, 2001).

Most of the studies focusing on self-congruity in tourism literature conceptualize self-congruity as a matching process between tourist's self-concept and destination visitor image (Beerli, et al., 2007; Chon, 1990; Chon & Olsen, 1991; Goh & Litvin, 2000; Litvin & Goh, 2002; Litvin, et al., 2001; Litvin & Kar, 2003; Sirgy & Su, 2000). However, the congruence between tourist's self-concept and destination personality has rarely been tested. It is suggested that future studies could assess the direct impact of destination personality–self-concept congruence on destination choice and visitation (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Murphy, Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2007).

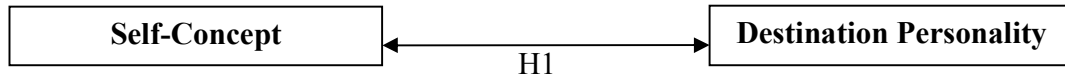
Thus, this study attempts to address these gaps by proposing and empirically testing a theoretical model that attempts to investigate the structural relationships between destination personality, self-concept, SC-DP congruence and tourist behavior. In order to better understand these relationships, two research questions are proposed and four research hypotheses developed as shown in Figure 1.

**Research question 1:** What is the relationship between self-concept and destination personality?

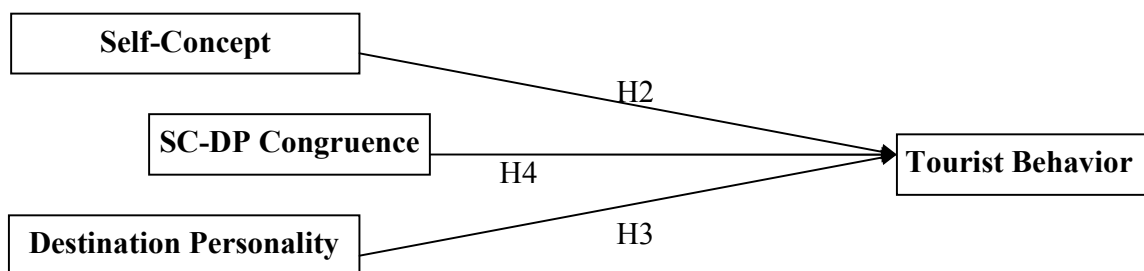
**Research question 2:** How is tourist behavior influenced by self-concept, destination personality, and SC-DP congruence individually?

**Figure 1 Proposed Model with Hypotheses**

**Figure 1a Interrelationship between Self-Concept and Destination Personality**



**Figure 1b Structural Relationships**



Based on the research questions, four research hypotheses are proposed to determine how tourist behavior is influenced by the following factors: self-concept, destination personality, and SC-DP congruence.

- H1: There is a relationship between self-concept and destination personality.
- H2: Self-concept has a direct positive influence on tourist behavior.
- H3: Destination personality has a direct positive influence on tourist behavior.
- H4: SC-DP congruence has a direct positive influence on tourist behavior.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Final questionnaire made up of five parts. Part I collects respondents' travel characteristics; Part II includes the items that measure destination personality. Part III includes scales of four aspects of self-concept. Part IV includes items that measure tourist involvement. The last part collects information on respondents' demographics.

Several statistical methods were conducted for the data analysis. The SPSS statistical package and LISREL were used to analyze the data. First, descriptive statistics was generated to describe the demographic profile of respondents. Second, Pearson correlation was employed to test H1. Third, structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized to test H2, H3, and H4 simultaneously.

This study targeted 600 leisure tourists. A leisure tourist is one who is at least 18 years old or above and took at least one leisure trip for at least two nights away from home during the past 18 months. As the major statistical technique used in this study is structural equation modeling (SEM); SEM in general requires a larger sample. Schumacker and Lomax (2004) surveyed the literature and found sample sizes of 250 - 500 to be used in many articles. Hair et al.'s (1977) recommended sample size is 200, as they think 200 would provide a sound basis for estimation.

In addition, they suggest that as the sample size becomes larger than 400, the test becomes more sensitive and almost any difference is detectable. Based on the literature, the target sample size is 600. Three hundred were used for the model testing, and the other 300 were used for model validation.

Data were collected using an online panel survey, a marketing research method used with increasing frequency. ZoomPanel was utilized, an online panel of some 2.5 million customers, to collect data. The survey invitations were sent to 2600 respondents in December 2008. Within one week, 718 responses returned and 55 of them were incomplete. A final sample of 663 was used for the analysis, resulting in a response rate of 25.5%.

## **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

### **Demographic profile of respondents**

The demographic characteristics of gender, marital status, education, ethnicity, total annual household income, and age, are included in this section in order to provide a descriptive profile of the respondents. Of all 663 respondents, there were more male respondents (55.7%) than females. The majority of the respondents were living with spouse/partner. In terms of education level, 43.6% of the respondents had college degrees, 24.7% had some college or went to technical school, and 17.3% of them had master degrees. In addition, the majority of the respondents were Caucasians (87.5%). As far as the total annual household income is concerned, 33.3% of the respondents reported a total annual household income of \$40,000-\$70,000, 22.4% had an annual household income of \$70,001-\$100,000, and 26.0% of them reported an annual income of more than \$100,000. With regard to the respondents' age, their mean age is 43 with a standard deviation of 16.

### **Hypotheses testing**

Before hypotheses testing, the sample was first split into two sets. The first set was used to test the hypothesis. The second set was used to validate the results. The two sets of data used in this study were compared to identify if they had similar demographic patterns using chi-square tests and independent t-test. Results indicated that there is no significant difference between two groups in terms with gender, age, marital status, level of education, ethnicity, and total annual household income. Therefore, the two sub samples are comparable in their demographics.

Second, paired samples t tests were used to see whether the four aspects of self-concept are indeed different from each. The results showed that 16 out of 19 pairs of actual and social self-concept items were not significantly different at .05 level. In addition, 14 out of 19 pairs of ideal and ideal social self-concept items were not significantly different at .05 level. Therefore, actual self-concept and social self-concept are not distinct from each other; and ideal self-concept and ideal social self-concept are not distinct from each other. As a result, in the following analysis, social self-concept and ideal social self-concept were excluded. As SC-DP congruence score is calculated as the difference between destination personality and self-concept, social SC-DP congruence and ideal social SC-DP congruence were also not included in the following analysis. Finally, hypotheses were tested. Hypothesis 1 was tested with a series of Pearson correlation. Hypotheses 2-4 were tested using SEM.

### **Test of hypothesis 1: Pearson correlation**

A series of Pearson correlation analyses were used to test the first hypothesis: the relationship between destination personality and two aspects of self-concept (actual self-concept

and ideal self-concept). The results of Person correlation analyses indicated that there were positive relationships between destination personality and two aspects of self-concept (actual and ideal self-concept). Specifically, all the relationships were significant at 0.01 level. In addition, the correlation coefficients range from 0.170 to 0.490 between destination personality and actual self-concept; and from 0.144 to 0.359 between destination personality and ideal self-concept. Therefore, the overall results strongly suggest the existence of significant positive relationships between destination personality and two aspects of self-concept. As a result, the first hypothesis was strongly supported.

#### Test of hypotheses 2-4: SEM

SEM was used to test the hypotheses 2-4 simultaneously. Before assessing the structural model, measurement models of multi-item constructs were evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Specifically, CFA was used to assess measurement model of tourist behavior, and that of destination personality, consisting of four dimensions (Excitement, Sophistication, Sincerity, and Ruggedness). Additionally, CFA was used to determine the uni-dimensionality of four dimensions of destination personality and construct of tourist behavior before the test of the overall measurement model. As summated scales for actual and ideal self-concept and actual and ideal SC-DP congruence were created by averaging their indicators; they were measured by single indicators (summated scale). Therefore, no CFA analyses of the four constructs were needed to determine the uni-dimensionality. After satisfactory results were obtained from measurement model assessment, SEM was utilized to test the structural relationships.

CFA analyses resulted in an overall measurement model, including nine constructs: tourist behavior, four dimensions of destination personality (Excitement, Sophistication, Sincerity, and Ruggedness), actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, actual SC-DP congruence, and ideal SC-DP congruence. Specifically, as summarized in Table 1, tourist behavior was measured by three items, Excitement by three items, Sophistication by three items, Sincerity by four items, and Ruggedness by four items, and the other four constructs were all measured by a single summated indicator. The structural model then was tested. The structural model consisted of eight exogenous variables (four dimensions of destination personality: Excitement, Sophistication, Sincerity, and Ruggedness; actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, actual SC-DP congruence, and ideal SC-DP congruence), and one endogenous variable (tourist behavior).

The relationships between tourist behavior and its exogenous variables were assessed based on t-values associated with the path coefficients. If an estimated t-value is greater than a certain critical value ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $t\text{-value} = 1.96$ ), the hypothesized relationship was supported. The results indicated that dimensions of Excitement and Sincerity have significantly positive impacts on tourist behavior. Thus Hypothesis 3 was partially supported. In addition, actual self-concept has a significantly positive influence on tourist behavior ( $t = 0.15$ ,  $p = 0.042$ ); however, ideal self-concept is not a significant predictor. Therefore, H2 was partially supported. In terms of the relationship between SC-DP congruence and tourist behavior, actual SC-DP congruence failed to show significant effect on tourist behavior while ideal SC-DP congruence had a significantly negative impact on tourist behavior ( $t = -0.21$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). As a result, H4 was partially supported.

#### **Model validation**

Hair et al. (1977) pointed out that the researcher must strive not only to estimate a significant model but to ensure that the model can also be used to generalize to the whole population. To validate the results, the researcher can split the sample to two, one for the model

estimation and the other one for predictive accuracy estimation. In this study, total sample was split into two, and the second sample (334 cases) was used for the validation purpose. Both CFA and SEM were employed for this purpose.

CFA of validation measurement model suggested that the model fit the validation sample adequately. For the validation of structural model, only significant path coefficients from the original structural model were estimated. The results of validation model suggested that the paths from dimension Excitement, dimension Sophistication, and ideal SC-DP congruence to tourist behavior were still significant. However, the path from actual self-concept to tourist behavior was only significant at .10 level.

**Table 1 Summary of Constructs and their Indicators<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<b>Tourist Behavior</b>	Preference1: I like this destination better than any other destination Preference2: This destination is my preferred destination over any other destination Preference3: I have a favorable impression of this destination.
<b>Destination Personality</b>	
<i>Excitement</i>	Spirited Exciting Imaginative
<i>Sophistication</i>	Upper-class Confident Good-looking
<i>Sincerity</i>	Sincere Wholesome Family-oriented
<i>Ruggedness</i>	Rugged Tough Masculine Western
<b>Actual Self-Concept</b>	Single indicator (summated scale)
<b>Ideal Self-Concept</b>	Single indicator (summated scale)
<b>Actual SC-DP Congruence</b>	Single indicator (summated scale)
<b>Ideal SC-DP Congruence</b>	Single indicator (summated scale)

## **DISCUSSIONS**

Overall, the findings of the study indicated that there is a positive relationship between the destination personality and self-concept. In addition, findings suggested that actual self-

<sup>1</sup> All the scales were subjected to pretest. Due to space limitation, pretest was not discussed.

concept, destination personality, and ideal SC-DP congruence had significant impact on tourist behavior. However, ideal self-concept, actual SC-DP congruence did not.

### **Self-concept**

Self-concept research has revealed the great diversity and complexity and its importance in regulating behavior (Markus & Nurius, 1986). A number of investigators have conceptualized self-concept as a single construct and treated it to mean the actual self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). Others argued that self-concept should be multi-dimensional (James, 1890; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987; Todd, 2001). According to Sirgy (1982, 1985), consumer researchers have generally used four aspects of self-image in explaining and predicting consumer behavior. These four aspects of self-image are actual self-concept, social self-concept, ideal self-concept, and ideal social self-concept. Therefore, this research initially adopted this perspective that self-concept should include four aspects. However, paired samples t tests of the four self-concept aspects suggested otherwise. The results of t tests showed that 16 out of 19 pairs of actual and social self-concept items were not significantly different; and 14 out of 19 pairs of ideal and ideal social self-concept items were not significantly different. Possible explanation is that since all the respondents were engaging in the same or similar activity (tourism), the social situation is somewhat similar. As a consequence, social aspect and ideal social aspect of self-concept are not distinct enough to be included in the analysis. However, more empirical tests are necessary.

### **Destination personality**

Ekinci and Hosany (2006) recognized the importance of destination personality and made the first attempt to adapt Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale to tourism destination. This study used Ekinci and Hosany's (2006) 27 items as the starting point. Four dimensions instead of three emerged, including Excitement (Spirited, Exciting, Imaginative, and Original), Sophistication (Upper-class, Glamorous, and Good-looking), Sincerity (Sincere, Wholesome, and Family-oriented), and Ruggedness (rugged, tough, masculine, Western). The results differed from Ekinci and Hosany's (2006). Their final scale consisted of three dimensions with 11 items: sincerity (reliable, sincere, intelligent, successful, wholesome), excitement (exciting, daring, original, spirited), conviviality (friendly, family oriented, charming). The difference possibly is due to the sample used in the two studies. This study utilized the sample of American residents while Ekinci and Hosany's (2006) study interviewed a sample of British residents.

### **Research hypotheses**

A series of Pearson correlation analyses were used to test the first hypothesis: the relationship between destination personality and two aspects of self-concept (actual self-concept and ideal self-concept). The results of Pearson correlation analyses indicated that there were positive relationships between destination personality and two aspects of self-concept (actual and ideal self-concept). These findings were consistent with previous studies (Bellenger, Steinberg, & Stanton, 1976; Ericksen, 1996; Goh & Litvin, 2000). These findings indicated that there was congruence between self-concept and destination personality. However, for some items, the congruence was larger, while for others, the congruence was smaller.

The results of this study revealed that only actual self-concept had a significantly positive influence on tourist behavior; while ideal self-concept did not. Previous studies did suggest that self-concept affects consumer behavior, such as Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), Heath and Scott (1998) and Franken (1994). Empirical studies also found that self-concept influence consumer



behavior. Jacobson and Kossoff (1963) advocated that self-concept is related to attitude towards the purchase of American small cars. Chang (2002) also argued that individuals with certain self-concepts may respond more positively toward the ads and brands than others. Xue (2008) was one of the first authors who applied Aaker's sophistication dimension items to measure respondents' self-concept and found a significant effect of self-concept on brand choice. However, no studies were found to test the impacts of different aspects of self-concept on consumer behavior.

The results suggested that the dimensions of Excitement and Sincerity had significantly positive impacts on tourist behavior; but Sophistication dimension and Ruggedness dimension did not. Previous research supported the hypothesis that destination personality influences destination attitude; however, due to different samples, different dimensions of destination personality emerge, therefore, dimensions of destination personality that influence destination attitude vary. For example Ekinçi and Hosany (2006) found that Conviviality dimension significantly influences tourist behavior. Murphy and his colleagues (2007) revealed that only Excitement dimension of brand personality positively influence travel motivation. Therefore, more empirical tests are needed.

The study showed that actual SC-DP congruence was not a significant predictor of tourist behavior while ideal SC-DP congruence was. However; ideal SC-DP congruence significantly influenced tourist behavior negatively. These results were not entirely consistent with previous studies, as previous research revealed mixed results. For example, Goh and Litvin's (2000; 2002) suggested that both actual and ideal self-congruence were correlated significantly with visit interest and purchase intention. Kastenholz (2004) only examined actual congruence and found no significant relationship between actual congruence and tourist behavior. Ekinçi & Riley (2003) also found that both actual and ideal self-congruence influenced satisfaction, attitude, service quality and behavioral intention. However, ideal self-congruence has more relevance in estimating attitude, customer satisfaction and service quality in restaurant setting; whereas the second study proposes that actual self-congruence has more influence in hotel setting. One possible explanation of the negative influence in this study is that SC-DP congruence was measured by the difference scores of destination personality and self-concept. Destination personality was measured with the shortened Aaker's (1997) BPS scale while other studies utilized some other adjectives. Another explanation is that other studies utilized correlation analysis to test the relationship between self-congruence and tourist behavior, while this study employed SEM. Third, as ideal SC-DP congruence in this study was measured with multiple items, ideal SC-DP congruence itself should be multi-dimensional. However, this study only used the summated scale of ideal SC-DP congruence as previous studies did. Detailed analysis of the possible dimensions of ideal SC-DP congruence could provide some explanation why ideal SC-DP congruence had a negative impact on tourist behavior.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

As expected in all research, this one is not without its limitations. First, this study was focused only on residents in the U.S. Therefore, the findings were culturally bound and not generalizable. More research is needed for other cultural groups. Second, this study only collected data from leisure tourists. It is understood that the results would be different if tourist with different traveling purposes were surveyed. Third, this study surveyed tourists who have been to the destination. Although the study found significant effects of destination personality, self-concept, and SC-DP congruence on destination preference, social desirability could be an

intervening effect. Therefore, future study could examine the role of social desirability in self-congruence study. Fourth, different studies utilized different items to measure self-concept. In this study, the self-concept was measured with the same items that measured destination personality, but with different instructions. Therefore, the measurement problem of self-concept should be further explored. It would be of great significance if a generalizable measurement scale for self-concept could be developed in tourist research.

Fifth, this study only explored the relationship between destination personality, self-concept, and SC-DP congruence on tourist behavior. There are other relevant factors that could influence tourist behavior, such as destination image, tourist motivation. Future research could try to integrate these elements. Sixth, although Sirgy (1982) embraced the idea that self-concept includes four aspects: actual self-concept, social self-concept, ideal self-concept, and ideal social self-concept, this study only suggested two distinct aspects: actual and ideal. Therefore, future study should investigate the aspects of self-concept and determine under what circumstances social and ideal social aspects are also salient. Finally, this study failed to support the moderating role of tourist involvement in the relationship between SC-DP congruence and tourist behavior as suggested by previous studies. Future study should continue to examine this issue. In addition, other possible moderators should be explored, such as destination type, travel purpose.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study proposed and tested a theoretical model that attempts to investigate the influence of destination personality, self-concept, and SC-DP congruence on tourist behavior. The findings suggested significant influences of destination personality, self-concept, and SC-DP congruence on tourist behavior. Findings of this study also showed that there are significant and positive relationships between destination personality and self-concept.

This study contributed to tourist behavior literature by providing a theoretical model by which a simultaneous empirical treatment of the elements influencing tourist behavior was investigated. Additionally, the study added that there is congruence between destination personality and self-concept. Limitations of this study were presented and future research suggestions were provided.

The results of this study also provided important implications for destination marketing strategies. An understanding of what influenced tourist behavior tested in this model can aid in designing and implementing marketing programs for creating and enhancing tourist destination personality; tailoring unique destination personality to attract particular markets; differentiating and positioning tourist destinations; and designing and promoting tourism advertising and programs.

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