

TOURIST SELF-CONCEPT, SELF-CONGRUITY, AND TRAVEL BEHAVIOR BASED ON CULTURAL EVENT

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ABSTRACT

Cities have been increasingly using cultural events to improve their image, stimulate urban development, and attract visitors and investment. In such a climate, cultural events in particular have emerged as a means of improving the image of cities. With the increasing awareness towards the importance of the events, it is also important to know that visitors perceive events differently in terms of the destination attraction's typical visitors. This research focuses on self-congruity between visitors' self-concept and visitors' perceived image to help explain the psychological underpinnings of travel behavior. The findings will provide insights into the tourists' perceptions of themselves and their consequent travel behavior.

Key Words: *self-congruity, destination image, self-concept, travel behavior, cultural event.*

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies on city marketing and tourism have emphasized the increasing use of events as a means to market places and major cities in particular (Schuster, 2001). Events may also encourage people to visit a place more than once and by hosting a series of different events, a city may promote itself to a number of different potential markets. Hall (1992, p. 14) noted that it is apparent that major events can have the effect of a shaping an image of the host community or country, leading to its favorable perception as a potential travel destination. This potential has been a reason for events being used as an image-enhancement tool, particularly for large cities (Law, 1993). Although many cities have claimed that cultural motives remain at the fore of the event, success is often measured in terms of the visitors it attracts. Given the differences in city image encountered for different visitor groups, event organizers need to be aware that visitor perceptions of the event's host city are unlikely to be homogeneous. Therefore, to indicate specific behavioral patterns, the aim of this research is to examine the perceived image of visitor associated with visitor's self-concept.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Landon (1974) highlighted the role of self-concept in consumer behavior, consumer researchers have explained various constructs (including attitude, preference, choice, loyalty, and so on) in terms of the relationship between one's self-concept and one's perceived image of a particular product or service. This notion has become known as self-congruity theory and is based on the assumption that consumers prefer brands they associate with a set of personality traits congruent with their own (Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). Self-congruity is defined as the match between a brand image and an individual's self-concept (Sirgy and Su 2000), where the self-concept is the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg 1979, p. 7). It seems this definition has been agreed and used by many other researchers (Chon, 1990; Todd, 2001). One such area is the influence of the level of similarity between an individual's own personality and the perceived personality of the destination.

Chon (1992) originally applied self-congruity theory to the tourism industry. Chon (1990, 1992) attempted to test the relationship between a tourist's self-concept and his or her satisfaction/dissatisfaction with a destination area using self-image/product image congruity model. He found that the higher the congruence between self-concept and destination image, the greater the satisfaction of the tourists. Chon and Olsen (1991) also examined the relationship between tourist's satisfaction/dissatisfaction and the functional congruity between the tourist's expectations and the effect of his/her perceptions of performance outcome on specific functional attributes of a destination. The findings revealed that tourist's satisfaction/dissatisfaction level is a function of both symbolic and functional congruity. Further, the functional congruity proved to be a better predictor of tourist's satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Goh and Litvin (2000) extended Chon's (1992) work to explore the relationship of actual and ideal self-congruence with pre-trip visit interest and purchase intention. They found that potential travelers are most likely to select destinations that seem to reflect their self-image.

Sirgy and Su (2000) proposed a theoretical model, integrating destination image, self-congruity, and functional congruity. They concluded that both self-congruity and functional congruity influence travel behavior. Kastenholz (2004) examined the role of destination-self-congruity in the context of rural tourism. They found that destination-self-congruity was a significant predictor of probability to return; however, no significance was detected in determining the probability to recommend. The author suggested that maybe ideal social self-congruity is more relevant to the probability to recommend, since this behavior should be affected by tourists' perception of how they would like to be seen by others. Todd (2001) indicated that tourism is a visible sign of conspicuous, hedonic consumption, which makes self-concept a perfect variable for explaining tourism behavior. She utilized self-concept to segment tourists. As a result, she concluded that tourist's self-concept affects the choice of tourism product consumed. Beerli, Meneses, and Gil (2007) attempted to look at the relationships among actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity, intention to visit, previous experience, and involvement. The empirical research found that the greater the agreement between a destination's image and one's actual and ideal self-concept, the greater the tendency for the tourist to visit that place. Moreover, self-congruity loses this determining power when one has already visited a place. Furthermore, the result indicated that the greater the tourist's involvement, the greater predictive power self-congruity has over destination choice.

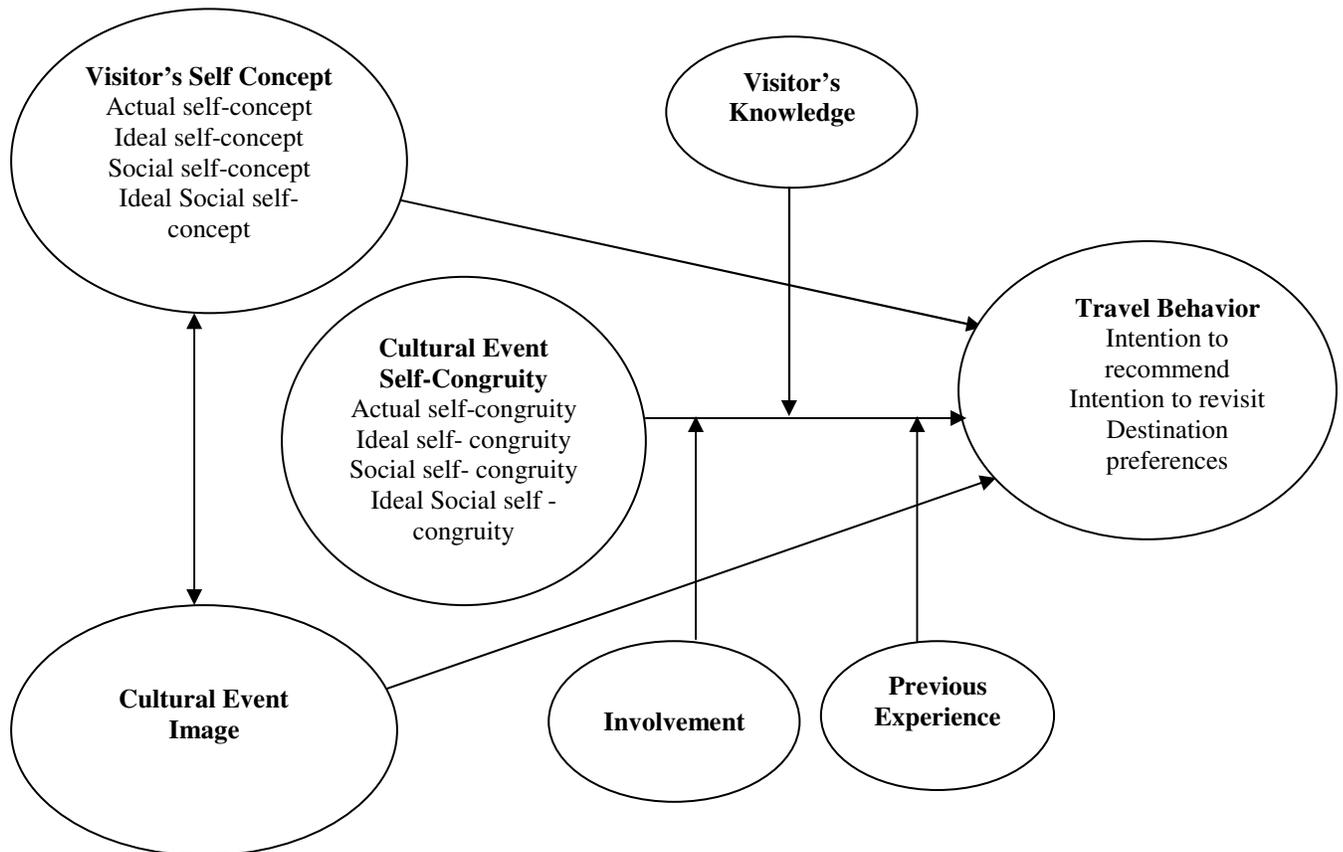
According to Sirgy (1982), consumer researchers have generally used four aspects of self-image such as actual self-concept, social self-concept, ideal self-concept, and ideal social self-concept in explaining and predicting consumer behavior. However, the application of self-concept in tourism research focuses mostly on actual self-concept. 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). The goal of this study is to apply the self concept/self-congruity theory used in consumer research within the context of event tourism to help explain the psychological underpinnings of travel behavior. The objectives of this research are to (1) examine the relationships between a visitor's self-concept and a visitor's perceived image using four different self-concept dimensions, (2) investigate moderators affecting the relationship between self-congruity and travel behavior, and (3) determine the effect of visitor's self-congruity on tourist behavior.

METHODOLOGY

Convenience sample selected from the Texas Folklife Festival will be used. Self-administered questionnaires will be used to collect the data at the 2011 Annual Texas Folklife Festival held from June 10 through 12 in San Antonio, Texas. San Antonio takes full advantage of its history and its multicultural heritage to enrich the lives of citizens and to embrace its visitors. This three-day cultural extravaganza brings more than 40 ethnic groups together in one place to showcase their authentic food, traditional music and dance and authentic crafts. Based primarily on self-congruity literature, research hypotheses will be drawn from an integrated model of destination image, self-congruity, and functional congruity (Sirgy & Su, 2000). The hypotheses will be the following. H1: We expect that there is a relationship between a visitor's self-concept and a visitor perceived image using four different self-concept dimensions such as

actual, ideal, social, and ideal social self-image. H2: We expect that visitors' level of knowledge, prior experience, and involvement will moderate the relationship between self-congruity and travel behavior. H3: We predict that self-congruity will affect travel behavior. That is, the greater the self-congruity between one's self-concept and his/her perceived image of the event, the greater the overall event satisfaction and future visit intention. To measure self-congruity, participants will be asked to answer questions regarding their affective image toward the event and their self-concept respectively by using the same set of measurement scale items derived from the previous procedures. For instance, for affective image toward the event, participants will be asked to choose the most appropriate number for each semantic differential scale to best describe their feelings toward the event. Pearson's correlation, structural equation modeling (SEM), and hierarchical multiple regression analysis will be performed to test the proposed hypotheses.

Figure 1.
Proposed Model



IMPLICATIONS

This study is important for stakeholders in event tourism because it can help provide important insights into what motivates tourists to visit a cultural event, which would allow marketers and managers to effectively target and develop markets. By understanding how tourists make their decisions to attend events as a destination attraction from the psychological

perspective, we would be able to gain a better understanding of their decision-making processes and intervene accordingly.

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