



University of
Massachusetts
Amherst

Self-image and product-image: Compensatory self-incongruity in tourism

Item Type	event;event
Authors	Duguay, Benoit
Download date	2024-12-06 10:09:24
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/48556

Self-image and product-image: Compensatory self-incongruity in tourism

Benoit Duguay
DEUT – Department of Urban and Tourism Studies
ESG UQAM School of Management

ABSTRACT

Prior research demonstrates the influence of self-concept on consumption. The dominant theory is that of self-congruity, a concept that highlights the tendency of people to behave in a way that maintains consistency between their self-image and the product-image of goods and services they consume. This study differs from previous research in that it demonstrates the role of consumption as a means of compensation for people whose self-image is negative, as established by their weak self-esteem, and applies this knowledge to three products related to the tourism industry: restaurants, cultural shows and luxury products (e.g., lavish cruises and prestigious hotels).

Keywords: consumer behaviour, compensation, consumption, self-congruity, self-esteem, self-image.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing scholars agree that people use consumption to project an image; some have investigated the role of *self-concept* in buyer behaviour, a few in the tourism industry. The dominant theory is that of *self-congruity*, a concept that highlights the tendency of people to behave in a way that maintains consistency between their *self-image* and the *product-image* of goods and services they consume. Studies of *self-congruity* conducted by Chon (1992), Sirgy and Su (2000), Beerli, Meneses, (2007), and Boksberger, Dolnicar, Laesser and Randle (2011) use some form of self-assessment to determine a person's *self-image*.

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the role of consumption as a means of compensation for people whose *self-image* is negative, as established by their weak *self-esteem*. We have hypothesized that, in some cases, people whose *self-esteem* is weak, thus whose *self-image* is negative, may buy products whose image is positive to increase *self-esteem* and improve *self-image*. We refer to this relationship as *compensatory self-incongruity*.

To define a person's *self-image* more precisely, our study has used tools developed in psychology to measure *self-esteem* and explore the various dimensions of the *self*. It capitalizes on the work of prominent authors in that field, namely William James (1962), renowned for his study of the basic structure of the *self*, and René L'Écuyer (1978, 1990, 1994), reputed for his extensive study of *self-image* from childhood to old age.

This paper also demonstrates that the *compensatory self-incongruity* relationship between *self-image* and *product-image* applies to three products related to the tourism industry: *restaurants, cultural shows and luxury products* (e.g., lavish cruises, prestigious hotels, gourmet restaurants and trendy destinations).

LITERATURE

Self-image and self-esteem

William James

For James, consciousness of one's personal existence involves the interaction of two discriminated and related aspects of the total *self*: the *Me* and the *I* (James, 1962, p. 189). Our subject of interest is the former; the latter, the *I*, also referred to by James as the *Self as Knower* or *Pure Ego*, "is that which at any given moment *is* conscious, whereas the *Me* is only one of the things which it is *of*" (Ibid, p. 207). Nowadays, the *I* is often deemed to be the sense of identity or of continuity between the various components of the *self* (L'Écuyer, 1978, p. 45).

The *Me*, also referred to by James as the *Self as Known* or the *Empirical Self*, or even more succinctly the *Self* by some authors (Ibid, p 21), includes everything a person can call hers: "In its widest possible sense, however, a man's *Me* is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account" (James, 1962, p. 190). All elements trigger the same emotions: success or well-being, or inversely failure or distress, for oneself or a significant other person, will equally result in either delight or sorrow. The *Me* has three components: *Material*, *Social* and *Spiritual*.

The core of the *material self* is the body, other elements being clothing, the immediate family, the home, possessions and personal creations. Thus, the theft of a priceless painting may lead to a degradation of the *material self*. The *social self* is the respect that a person receives from relatives, friends, associates and other acquaintances; human beings like to be favorably noticed. In fact, a person has many *social selves* (James, 1962). Empirically, a person has a *social self* for each group of people whose opinion is important to her and presents to each a different facet, a distinct *social self*. The *spiritual self* refers to a person's states of consciousness.

Everyone experiences positive or negative emotions towards the *self*; they are not always objective. Thus, while a person may be respected by all, she may suffer from a lack of confidence. Conversely, a poorly gifted person may instead be conceited. This is called *self-esteem*. A person's *self*-related emotions drive her to take action to preserve the *self*. Consumption, the purchase of goods and services, is typically used for that purpose.

A certain rivalry, sometimes even conflict, exists between the various *selves*; intellectual excellence may be a hindrance to exceptional achievement in sports for example. Faced with this dilemma, a person chooses which potentiality she will actualize. Thus the measure of *self-esteem* proposed by James: the ratio of *successes* over pretensions in the domains of choice. A performance equal to or exceeding expectations increases *self-esteem* and vice versa, a lower performance below the falls. Self-esteem can thus be considered as a positive (high *self-esteem*) or negative (low *self-esteem*) measure of *self-image*.

James' works are the foundation that allowed other authors to develop tools to explore *self-image* and *self-esteem*.

René L'Écuyer

René L'Écuyer's GPS (Genèse des Perceptions de Soi – Genesis of Self Perceptions) method for the analysis of the *self* has been strongly influenced by James' original writing and by authors from *social psychology* and *personality theories*.

The foremost influence from *social psychology* is that of Charles Horton Cooley with his theory of the «looking-glass self», a sort of reflected image a person attempts to imitate (Cooley, 1964, p. 184). This pioneering work eventually resulted in more sophisticated models such as Chad Gordon's "self-configuration" model [1968], that outlines the multidimensional and evolutionary nature of the *self*. To identify the various elements of the *self*, Gordon uses an auto descriptive technique (WAY – Who Are You) first developed by Bugental and Zelen [1950] and perfected by Kuhn and McPartland [1954] (L'Écuyer, 1978, p. 51-55).

The individualist approach (*personality theories*) emphasizes the predominance of internal perceptual mechanisms on the formation of the *self-concept*, without however negating the influence of others in this process. James F.T. Bugental is amongst those who have significantly contributed to this approach [1949-1964]. His conceptual matrix distinguishes between elements that are an integral part of a person (*phenomenal self*) and those that are external (*phenomenal not-self*). Bugental has also outlined the necessity to analyze a person's *self-concept* through her own opinion.

L'Écuyer's GPS model is organized into a hierarchy of five structures, each of which is composed of two substructures, which in turn are further divided in categories.

The *material self* is made up of references to a person's body and possessions. It comprises two substructures. First, the *somatic self*, formed of a person's perceptions about her *features and physical appearance* (body traits, general appearance, clothing) and her *physical condition and health* (good or bad). Second, the *possessive self*, that contains a person's possessive references about *objects* and significant other *persons*.

The *personal self* represents cognitive and affective characteristics. It comprises two substructures. First, the *self-image* formed of a person's references to *aspirations* (ambitions, projects, ideals), *enumeration of activities* (practice of a cultural, intellectual or sports interest), *feelings and emotions* (range or positive or negative sentiments), *likings and interests* (preferences in products, activities, attitudes, values), *capacities and aptitudes* (talents or inaptitude without a value judgment), *qualities and failings* (merits or imperfection without a value judgment). Second, the *identity of the self*, that contains a person's references to the consciousness of being: *simple denominations* (name, age, gender, family surroundings, place of residence), *roles and status* (prestige derived from a social position, the belonging to a restricted group, a function), *consistency* (coherence, continuity, understanding, or the inverse), *ideology* (ideas, judgments, philosophies), *abstract identity* (sense of belonging to a category of people).

The *adaptive self* expresses a person's reactions to her perceptions of oneself and others. It comprises two substructures. First, the *value of the self*, formed of a person's value judgment about her *competence* (capacities and aptitudes) and her *personal value* (qualities and failings). Second, the *activities of the self*, that reflect actions taken to defend the *self*: *adaptation strategies* (conformity or divergence of actions in adjusting to the changing environment), *autonomy* (decisional capacity, level of initiative, sense of responsibilities), *ambivalence* (actions made to maintain coherence, continuity, understanding, or the inverse), *dependence* (impossibility to act or make a decision), *actualization* (evolution, blossoming of personality), *life style* (specific mode of life).

The *social self* depicts the nature of a person's interactions with others. It comprises two substructures. First, *preoccupations and social attitudes*, that regroup interactions or desires of interaction with others: *receptivity* (open-mindedness, or lack of, to others), *domination* (domineering or submissive relationship), *altruism* (generosity, selflessness). Second, *references to sexuality*, that reflect a subject's consciousness of sexual influences: *simple references* (sexual

distinctions such as boy or girl) or *sexual appeal and experiences* (sexual attraction to a person, symbols of sensuality).

The *self-not-self* is formed of a person's implicit references about herself in the form of statements about others. It comprises two substructures. First, *reference to others*, that denotes a form of identification to persons of reference. Second, *opinion of others*, that reflects a person's perceptions concerning what others think of her.

Product symbolism and self-image

To demonstrate the compensatory value of consumption for people whose *self-image* is negative (low *self-esteem*), it is first necessary to establish a link between various products and *self-image*.

Perhaps one of the strongest and most culturally universal phenomena inspired by consumer behavior is the tendency to make inferences about others based on their choices of consumption objects. This phenomenon has certain potentially negative consequences in that it may involve prejudicial stereotyping and superficial interpersonal response criteria. On the other hand, this tendency is also a part of the processes that allow us to communicate non-verbally and to achieve the satisfaction of self-expression through consumption (Belk, Bahn and Mayer 1982, p. 4).

The authors present consumption as a means of expression for people; according to studies cited, "it appears that people see their possessions as a part or an extension of themselves" (Ibid). They have synthesized studies performed by several authors. Those studies demonstrate the existence of a relation between *self-image* and the *product-image* for specific product categories. Products listed influence the perception people have of others: people may thus use them as status symbols (Ibid, p. 5). Amongst those products at least one category, *leisure products and activities*, are related to tourism. They are used as status symbols in much the same way as clothing. However, whereas this research by Belk, Bahn and Mayer demonstrates a link between consumption and *self-image*, it does not specify the nature of this relationship.

Congruity between product-image and self-image (self-congruity)

Joseph Sirgy has also made a remarkable contribution to the study of *self-concept* in consumer behaviour. His most original work is the development of congruity theory between *self-image* and *product-image*. The formulation of his theory was influenced by the writings of several scholars.

In an article published in the Harvard Business Review [1959], Sidney Levy "argued that the consumer is not functionally oriented and that her behavior is significantly affected by the symbols encountered in the identification of goods in the marketplace" (Sirgy, 1980, p. 289). This proposition inspired several models attempting to explain the relationship between *self-concept* and consumption. One such model was developed by Grubb and Grathwohl [1967]. This model states three principles guiding consumer behavior (ibid):

- That a person's *self-concept* is important to her and thus that her actions will seek to protect and enhance her *self-concept*;
- That consumption, the purchase, display or use of products, is a way of communicating symbolic connotations;
- That a person's consumption of symbolic goods seeks to enhance her *self-concept*.

Inspired by this model, Sirgy has developed a congruity theory between *self-image* and product-image, using Schenk and Holman's *situational self-image* concept [1980]. *Situational self-image* is defined as "the meaning of self the individual wishes others to have" (Ibid); this image of the *self* is context dependent. Sirgy's theory is founded on two principles. First, the tendency for a person to behave in a way to enhance her *self-image* and increase her *self-esteem*. Second, the tendency for a person to behave in a way to maintain *consistency* between her *self-image* and the *product-image* of goods and services consumed.

Sirgy identifies four types of relationships between *self-image* and *product-image*: *Positive self-congruity* (positive *product-image* and positive *self-image*), *Positive self-incongruity* (negative *product-image* and negative *self-image*), *Negative self-congruity* (negative *product-image* and negative *self-image*) and *Negative self-incongruity* (negative *product-image* and positive *self-image*).

Although Sirgy does not explicitly claim that a consumer will reject a product involving a *positive self-incongruity* relationship, he does affirm that the consumer will experience conflict in purchasing such a product (Ibid, p. 289-290). Moreover, Sirgy's findings are based on the *situational self-image* instead of the *self-concept* as a whole, the latter being a broader much more complex concept.

Chon (1992), Sirgy and Su (2000), Beerli, Meneses, and Gil (2007), amongst others, have applied the *self-congruity* concept to tourism related products. More recently, Boksberger, Dolnicar, Laesser and Randle (2011) confirmed the existence of *self-congruity* in tourism. However, "the authors [Boksberger et al.] conclude that further research is needed to better understand the relationship between destination brand personality, self-congruity, and travel behavior" (p. 456).

Authors mentioned above have explored the relationship between product and buyer image under the common assumption that both must be congruent. Could, under specific circumstances, some buyers not seek *self-congruity*?

Consumption as a defense strategy

Robins (1994) considers culture, therefore consumption, as a form of defense against vagaries of life. According to this author, a person's consumption may help protect her, acting either as a filter of reality or as a substitution to reality. The latter is particularly relevant to the study of the compensatory value of consumption. In this perspective, the person seeks to become independent of daily reality; she thus creates an altered world, a compensatory reality, such as the one provided by consumption. Consumption of a product, or rather of the perceived image of that product, can thus be considered a *self-image* defense strategy and, more importantly, as a means of compensation for people whose *self-image* is negative, as established by their negative *self-esteem* score. Our empirical research seeks to demonstrate this theory.

METHODOLOGY USED

As Sirgy indicated, a person whose *self-image* is negative may indeed choose not to buy a product whose image is positive to maintain consistency between *self-image* and *product-image* (*positive self-incongruity*). However, we have hypothesized that in some cases people whose *self-image* is negative, as established by their weak *self-esteem*, may buy products whose image is positive to increase *self-esteem* and improve *self-image*, a relationship we refer to as *compensatory self-incongruity*. Our main hypothesis reads as follows:

Consumption may aim to compensate for a low self-esteem.

To validate this hypothesis, we must demonstrate the existence of significant differences in attitudes towards consumption objects, between people whose *self-esteem* is weak and those whose *self-esteem* is strong. The null hypothesis (H_0) and alternative hypothesis (H_1) must be expressed as follows (SEI= Self-Esteem Inventory):

$H_0: \%SEI- = \%SEI+$

$H_1: \%SEI- \neq \%SEI+$

The null hypothesis (H_0) equation translates as follows: the percentage of people whose *self-esteem* is weak (%SEI-) is equal to the percentage of persons whose self-esteem is high (%SEI+). For the alternative hypothesis (H_1), these two variables are not equal. Rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) allows us to maintain that the *self-esteem* level influences the attitude towards consumption objects. fr A dual, or mixed, methodology was used: a quantitative study in order to identify compensatory relations between *self-image* and product-image, and a qualitative study to confirm the existence of compensatory relations and refine the understanding of the relationship between consumption and *self-image*.

Quantitative study

Our purpose was solely to demonstrate the existence of the hypothesized *compensatory self-incongruity* relationship; we did not seek to extrapolate our results to any given population subgroup. Thus, we used a non-probability convenience sample ($n = 175$) composed of 96 females, 77 males and 2 unspecified, whose age ranged between 19 and 61. To measure self-esteem, our survey used the *Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventories* (CFSEI-2) test developed by James Battle (1992). Composed of forty questions, it allows measurement of four aspects of *self-esteem*: general, social, personal and total. A significant advantage of this test is the possibility of using it with respondents of multiple cultures. To test the relationship between *product-image* and *self-image*, we used a list of thirty products, three of which being related to the tourism industry: *restaurants, cultural shows and luxury products* (e.g., lavish cruises, prestigious hotels, gourmet restaurants and trendy destinations). Respondents specified whether each product in the list was representative of oneself, or not. Data analysis was performed using the SPSS software.

Qualitative study

For the qualitative study, 19 respondents were selected from the 175 of the quantitative study: 9 whose personal aspect of the CFSEI-2 test is very strong (= 8) and 10 for whom it is very weak (= 1). The interview guide consists of 8 questions divided into 4 topics, the first two of which allow an analysis of the self-image according to the descriptive approach, the GPS method (Genèse des Perceptions de Soi - Genesis of Self Perceptions), developed by L'Écuyer (1990). Data collection was conducted through individual interviews. Data analysis was performed using the NVivo software.

To analyze dimensions of the *self*, respondents' statements are classified using the method proposed by L'Écuyer (1990). In this study, we thus counted the number of people who make a statement, regardless of the number of times that each person made that statement. As mentioned earlier, L'Écuyer's structure is composed of three levels: statements were coded at the lowest level (category) and then regrouped by sub-structure. Like L'Écuyer (1994, p. 69), we classified

the different statements relating to dimensions of *self* or to other topics, such as products mentioned or emotions, according to their degree of importance. Elements whose importance is central (C) are those for which one or more statements are made by 70% or more of respondents. Elements whose importance is intermediate (I) are those for which one or more statements are made by 31% to 69% of respondents. Elements whose importance is secondary (S) are those for which one or more statements are made by 30% or less of respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To reject the null hypothesis ($H_0: \%SEI^- = \%SEI^+$), we must demonstrate the existence of significant differences in attitudes towards consumption between people whose *self-esteem* is weak and those whose *self-esteem* is strong. We begin with the act of consumption itself. Cross-tabulation analysis between the level of consumption and personal *self-esteem* reveals that 60.0% of respondents whose *self-esteem* is very weak ($SEI = 1$ in 8) claim to buy more than most people whereas only 24.0% of those whose *self-esteem* is very strong ($SEI = 8$) claim the same thing [$p = 0.029$, confidence level > 95%].

Differences in attitudes also exist for several products. For instance, cross-tabulation analysis between *fragrances* and personal *self-esteem* reveals that 83.3% of persons whose *self-esteem* is weak or very weak ($SEI = 1$ or 2 in 8) refer to perfumes as a product representative of themselves, whereas only 48.3% of those whose *self-esteem* is strong or very strong ($SEI = 7$ or 8) make the same claim [$p = 0.015$, confidence level > 95%].

In the above mentioned analysis, results indicate that we must reject the null hypothesis (H_0), with a confidence level greater than 95%. On the one hand, people with weak *self-esteem* attach more importance to the purchase of goods and services and, on the other hand, they are more likely to establish a link between *self-image* and *fragrance-image*.

Results from the qualitative study refine our understanding of this relationship between consumption and *self-image*. We believe that people whose *self-esteem* is weak, indicating a negative *self-image*, use consumption to project a more positive image. This excerpt from an interview in the qualitative study illustrates this type of behaviour admirably well: “Beauty products would tell me: try me without regret, I shall make you beautiful even if you are not”.

To explain the above mentioned behaviour we present a cross-tabulation analysis of our qualitative data, establishing the relationship between products mentioned by type and dimensions of the *self* (see Table 1). In this analysis, the *personal self* structure and its *self-image* sub-structure are of central importance (C) for all product types: nondurable and durable goods, and services¹. The *identity of the self* sub-structure is of central importance (C) for durable goods and of intermediate importance (I) for nondurable goods and services. The *adaptive self* structure is of central importance (C) for durable and nondurable goods, and of intermediate importance (I) for services. The *activities of the self* sub-structure is of central importance (C) for durable goods and of intermediate importance (I) for nondurable goods and services.

These observations explain the influence of self-image on consumer behaviour. In the *personal self* structure, the *self-image* sub-structure is composed of six elements, four of which exert considerable influence on behaviour and thus on consumption: *aspirations* (ambitions, projects, ideals), *enumeration of activities* (practice of a cultural, intellectual or sports interest), *feelings and emotions* (range or positive or negative sentiments), *likings and interests* (preferences in products, activities, attitudes, values).

¹ Most products in the tourism industry are services: transportation, lodging, restaurants, attractions, events, etc.

Furthermore, in the *identity of the self* sub-structure, the *roles and status* category (prestige derived from a social position, the belonging to a restricted group, a function) may also influence consumption because of the symbols (prestige, power, wealth) associated with many goods and services. Lastly, the *life style* category (specific mode of life) in the *activities of the self* sub-structure (*adaptive self* structure) is also a major influence on consumption, because advertising frequently uses *life style* appeals to sell many goods and services.

Table 1
Importance of dimensions of the *self* by product type

Dimensions of the self	Nondurable goods	Durable goods	Services
MATERIAL SELF	I	I	I
Somatic self	I	S	S
Possessive self	S	S	S
PERSONAL SELF	C	C	C
Self-image	C	C	C
Identity of the self	I	C	I
ADAPTIVE SELF	C	C	I
Value of self	I	I	I
Activities of the self	I	C	I
SOCIAL SELF	I	I	I
Preoccupations and social attitudes	I	I	I
References to sexuality	S	S	S
SELF-NOT-SELF	I	I	S
Reference to others	S	S	S
Opinion of others	I	S	S

Products in the tourism industry

We have also identified significant differences in attitudes between people whose *self-esteem* is weak and those whose *self-esteem* is strong for the three tourism related products mentioned in our methodology.

Cross-tabulation analysis between *restaurants* and personal *self-esteem* reveals that 89.7% of persons whose self-esteem is weak or very weak (SEI = 1, 2 or 3 in 8) refer to *restaurants* as a product representative of themselves, whereas only 69.1% of those whose *self-esteem* is strong or very strong (SEI = 6, 7 or 8) make the same claim [p = 0.037, confidence level > 95%].

Cross-tabulation analysis between *cultural shows* and personal *self-esteem* reveals that 89.7% of persons whose self-esteem is weak or very weak (SEI = 1, 2 or 3 in 8) refer to *cultural shows* as a product representative of themselves, whereas only 70.2% of those whose *self-esteem* is strong or very strong (SEI = 6, 7 or 8) make the same claim [p = 0.029, confidence level > 95%].

Cross-tabulation analysis between *luxury products* and personal *self-esteem* reveals that 66.7% of persons whose self-esteem is weak or very weak (SEI = 1 or 2 in 8) refer to *luxury products* as a product representative of themselves, whereas only 38.3% of those whose *self-*

esteem is strong or very strong (SEI = 7 or 8) make the same claim [$p = 0.020$, confidence level > 95%].

For the above mentioned products, results indicate that we must reject the null hypothesis (H_0), with a confidence level greater than 95%. People with weak *self-esteem* are indeed more likely to establish a link between *self-image* and *product-image*.

Why does use of the above mentioned services have a positive impact on a person's *self-image*? First, we must mention the escape from day to day reality this form of consumption brings. This excerpt from an interview conducted in the qualitative study illustrates this point: "Dining out in a restaurant, going to the theater, cinema or disco [...] I think these are all means of escaping somewhat, that it allows you to get away from everyday life."

We also believe that positive emotions, pleasure, well-being or excitement, evoked by respondents emphasize the intense satisfaction derived from consumption. The following excerpts from interviews illustrate this point very well:

Restaurants... I would say that this is the product that best describes me. Perhaps I associate food, fine food, to a good relationship, to friendship. For me this is something one does for pleasure.

For me, dining in a restaurant is a pleasure. It is thus symbolic... The pleasure aspect comes into play. There is the aspect of escaping daily life to live an enjoyable experience.

Everything about restaurants... I enjoy the pleasure of food. It shows a trait... having pleasure in life, good things, fine wine, top-quality food, relaxing with friends.

The [dream] product would be a tour of all Italy. A one month trip at least, during which I could visit all cities, stay in all the major hotels, the finest restaurants. In my mind... touring Italy... I always wanted to do so luxurious. First, I'll feel... I feel I do not know where to turn. It will be... I do not know where to start, what to begin with. I'll be eager to do everything. A second thing, I will... I am happy. For sure, I'm super happy. I'll forget everything that happens. If you want, I'll forget everything that happens at home.

CONCLUSION

The compensatory role of consumption

In our results analysis, we have demonstrated the existence of significant differences in attitudes towards consumption between people whose *self-esteem* is weak and those whose *self-esteem* is strong. This indicates that *self-esteem* affects a person's perception of consumption. This influence of *self-esteem* appears to apply to the act of consumption itself and to several goods and services, including three products related to the tourism industry. More specifically, people whose *self-esteem* is weak are indeed more likely to say that *restaurants*, *cultural shows and luxury goods* are related to their *self-image*. According to Sirgy, people whose *self-esteem* is weak should experience conflict in purchasing those products (*positive self-incongruity*). Yet, people whose *self-esteem* is weak say that those products are related to their *self-image* and likely buy, or would like to buy, those products. This is what we refer to as *compensatory self-incongruity*, the compensatory role of consumption.

Pleasure of gastronomy, of good company or of luxury. Pleasure of the senses or of satisfying one's desires. Pleasure of escaping from everyday reality. Those are all powerful

justifications that help explain the appeal of consumption and the compensatory role it can play for people whose *self-esteem* is weak.

Implications for research and industry

Our study demonstrates that people whose *self-esteem* is low are more vulnerable than those whose *self-esteem* is high to sales and advertising appeals related to *self-image*. To develop sustainable tourism, it is essential to learn more about the relationship between product-image and *self-image* in the tourism industry. Cynics may say that our studies could be used to target these vulnerable people more effectively by using advertising to play on their vulnerabilities. On the contrary, efforts by organizations such as CCSR (Canadian Business for Social Responsibility) to promote more ethical business practices lead us to believe that this knowledge will contribute to improve business practices. Advertising too often uses taunting symbolisms or argumentations to attract potential customers.

For tourism related products, consider the Hedonism II resort Web site². It makes extensive and explicit use not of sensual but of overtly sexual appeals. Such overt appeals to hedonism in advertising for leisure related products are neither necessary nor desirable. Such product appeals lead Lipovetsky to say: “Nothing better illustrates the hedonistic aspect of consumption than the increasing role of leisure in our society” (2006, p. 56). Tourism is directly challenged by these questions.

Limitations

The objective of this article is to develop awareness about the relationship between product-image and *self-image* in the tourism industry. We feel that we have achieved this objective, having demonstrated the existence of significant differences (confidence level > 95%) in attitudes between people whose *self-esteem* is weak and those whose *self-esteem* is strong, for three tourism related products. However, our study features two limitations. First, the sample size of our quantitative study is somewhat limited (n = 175). Second our questionnaire and interview guide were designed to test a limited number of tourism related products.

Further research is required using larger size probabilistic samples and questionnaires specifically tailored to cover a wide range of tourism related products. Such research could:

- Validate our findings about the compensatory role of consumption in tourism;
- Identify for what products product-image is more likely to be related to *self-image*;
- Identify population subgroups that may be more vulnerable to *self-image* appeals in advertising.

REFERENCES

- Battle, J. (1992). *Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventories*, Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Berli, A., G. D. Meneses, and S. M. Gil. (2007). “Self-congruity and Destination Choice.” *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34 (3), 571-587.
- Belk R. W., K. D. Bahn and R. N. Mayer (1982). Developmental Recognition of Consumption Symbolism. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 9 (1), 4-17.
- Boksberger P., S. Dolnicar, C. Laesser and M. Randle (2011). Self-Congruity Theory: To what extent does it hold in Tourism. *Journal of Travel Research*, 50 (4), 454-464.
- Chon, K.-S. (1992). “Self-Image/Destination Image Congruity.” *Annals of Tourism Research*, 19 (2), 360-363.

² Hedonism II Web site, accessed December 6 2011: <http://www.hedonism.com/what-is-hedonism/>

- Cooley, C. H. (1964)³. *Human Nature & the Social Order*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.
- James, W. (1962)⁴. *Psychology (briefer course)*. New York, NY: Collier-Macmillan.
- L'Écuyer, R. (1978). *Le concept de soi*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.
- L'Écuyer, R. (1990). *Méthodologie de l'analyse développementale de contenu*. Quebec, QC: Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- L'Écuyer, R. (1994). *Le développement du concept de soi de l'enfance à la vieillesse*. Montreal, QC: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Lipovetsky, G. (2006). *Le bonheur paradoxal, Essai sur la société d'hyperconsommation*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Robins, K. (1994). Forces of consumption: from the symbolic to the psychotic, *Media, culture & society*. Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 449-468.
- Sirgy, J. (1982). Self-Concept in Consumer Behavior: A critical review. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 9 (3), 287-300.
- Sirgy, M. J., and C. Su. (2000). "Destination Image, Self-Congruity and Travel Behaviour: Toward an Integrative Model." *Journal of Travel Research*, 38 (2) 340-352.

³ The original text dates back to 1902.

⁴ The original text dates back to 1890.