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## APPLICATION OF SELF-CONGRUITY THEORY TO DESTINATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived destination personality of Jaipur and the relationship among destination personality, self-congruity and behavioural intentions. 341 respondents who were tourists that visited Jaipur destination and stayed at the hotels in the destination were surveyed with the questionnaire. 26 personality traits were tested and destination personality of Jaipur was measured with the EFA. The findings of the study indicate that tourists ascribe personality characteristics to destinations and the perceived destination personality dimensions of Jaipur are sincerity, excitement and conviviality. The results also show that the most distinct dimension which has a positive impact on self-congruity and behavioural intentions to destination is sincerity.*

### KEYWORDS

Jaipur, destination personality, self-congruity, behavioural intentions.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world which is full of competition, understanding the factors that affect the destination choice is essential for both academicians and marketers alike, who have a role to play in tourism sector (Beerli et al., 2007). An effort on branding destinations is an effective tool (Uşaklı and Baloglu, 2011); only beautiful beaches, seas, hospitable people etc. are not sufficient for survival in today's environment (Hosany et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2007a). Tourism marketers have adapted Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale to apply it to tourism destinations. It is essential that a destination has its own characteristics and creates a different image on tourist's perceptions. A destination which replicates the tourist's own idea, characteristic and/or feeling, the tourist compares the characteristics of the destination with his own personality and this defines self-congruity (Opoku, 2009).

Jaipur is one of the famous destinations in India. The destination is famous for historical monuments and rich cultural diversity. Due to variety of architectural marvels, lakes, forts, etc., seen in the destination, tourists from different countries who have different personality characteristics from each other would like to visit the destination. So a survey was done to ascertain the perceived brand personality characteristics of this destination, the congruence between destination personality characteristics and visitor's self-concept and intention to revisit or intention to recommend the destination to others, this study was carried out in Jaipur.

The literature review indicates that directly no researches have been implemented in this specific destination related to the subject. The following were the objectives of the study to ascertain (1) the brand personality dimensions associated with Jaipur (2) the relationship between destination personality perceptions and self-congruity (3) the relationship between destination personality perceptions and behavioural intentions on the destination (4) the relationship between self-congruity and tourist's behavioural intentions on the destination.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 DESTINATION PERSONALITY

Destination personality is a concept approached within the brand personality concept. Brand personality is elaborated as the "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997) which means any human values that are associated and seen in brands (Vaidya et al., 2009). Brand is an inanimate term, consumers assign human characteristics like youthful, energetic, rugged etc. to a brand. For instance, consumers use the words cool, hip and contemporary when they talk about Absolute vodka; feminine to Chanel perfumes and intelligent to IBM computers (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006).

Destination personality is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a destination". Concept of destination personality is developed from Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale (BPS) which consists of five dimensions: excitement, sincerity, competence, sophistication and ruggedness and 42 descriptive traits. The applicability of Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale in context of tourism was first tested by Ekinci and Hosany (2006). The consequences of the study showed that tourists do ascribe personality characteristics to destinations, which suggests that the concept of brand personality can be used in tourism context as well.

Uşaklı and Baloglu (2011) studied Las Vegas and results of their study showed that the perceived destination personality dimensions: vibrancy, sophistication, competence, contemporary, and sincerity were related to the destination. Santos (2004) recognised Portugal's personality traits as modern and sophisticated, however Wales was characterised as honest, romantic and down to earth; Spain as friendly and family oriented; Paris as romantic; and London destinations. However, the authors established that destination personality comprises of three dimensions rather than the original five. Two were sincerity and excitement, same as in Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions, but conviviality was new and more specific to tourism destinations (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006).

Revealing a destination's personality is an extremely difficult process which requires a lot of effort and time. However, lack of researches in the context of destination leads the researchers to be more inclined in the topic. The review of literature shows that the researchers studying destination personality develop their own scales or use Aaker's (1997) scale to examine a destination (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003; Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Hosany et al., 2007; Uşaklı and Baloglu, 2011).

### 2.2 SELF-CONGRUITY

When consumer literature is reviewed, it is highlighted that the brand personality helps the consumers to express themselves. Consumers opt for products or brands whose characteristics and features are congruent with their own characteristics (Opoku, 2009; Beerli et al., 2007). This brings us to the concept of congruity or self-concept or self-image which is defined as "the totality of individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Sirgy, 1985; Uşaklı and Baloglu, 2011).

Self-congruity comprises of four dimensions. These are actual self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity. Actual self-congruity is the fit between how people actually see themselves in relation to the image of that the kind of people who purchase the product or brand. Ideal self-congruity refers to how people like to see themselves. Social-self congruity is the fit between how people believe they are seen by others in relation to the product or brand user image. Ideal social-self congruity is the fit between how people would like to be seen by others in relation to the product or brand user image (Sirgy and Su, 2000).

When self-congruity is studied in the context of tourism, it is portrayed as the fit between destination image and tourist's self-image (Murphy et al., 2007b). Tourism literature displays that actual self-congruity has been emphasized more than the other three dimensions in destination studies (Sirgy and Su, 2000). Uşaklı and Baloglu in their study (2011) have studied actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity. They studied the congruence between destination personality and the

two dimensions of self-congruity (how tourists see themselves and how tourists like to see themselves). In spite of the ongoing studies in tourism literature, self-congruity researches are still not commonly performed in tourism studies (Uşaklı and Baloglu, 2011).

### 2.3 BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

Behavioural intentions has been recognized as one of the more important determinant of success (Valle et al., 2006). The term loyalty is defined as “a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour” (Oliver, 1999).

Behavioural Intention can be elaborated as “the degree to which a person has formulated conscious plans to perform or not perform some specified future behavior” (Liu & Jang, 2009). Thus, behavioral intention is the most robust dimension to predict the behavior. Thus, understanding of the concept of behavioral intention will provide an insight information to the service providers on tourist intentions to say positive things and recommend.

### 3. HYPOTHESES CONSTRUCTION

This section consists of hypothesis construction with the help of rigorous literature review. Research model subsequently formulated is depicted in figure 1.

Recent researches suggest that the personification can be applied to destinations as people bestow destinations with human characteristics (Hosany et al., 2006). Positive trait given to the destination are result in favorable tourist outlook toward the destination (Aaker, 1997).

Applying the brand personality concept to destinations, past studies have studied the impact of destination personality on behavioral intentions of tourists. Ekinci and Hosany (2006) have recognized that the destination personality dimensions have a significant positive impact on intentions to recommend. Ekinci et al. (2007) have established that destination personality has an affirmative effect on both intentions to return and word of mouth. The present study proposes that destination personality will have a direct positive influence on tourist's behavioral intentions.

Congruence plays a remarkable role in influencing tourists' behavioural intentions (Ahn et al., 2013). Researchers have identified that congruence influences behaviour of tourists and also (Zhang et al., 2014), facilitates positive attitudes regarding a destinations (Hosany and Martin, 2012) which in turn affects the consumer decision making (Aguirre- Rodriguez et al., 2012).

Aaker (1999) suggested consumers choose brands which has personality characteristics which are similar and congruent to their own personality traits. Thus, the hypothesized model postulates that self-congruity will have an affirmative significant impact on tourist's behavioral intentions (Kressmann et al., 2006). Thereby stating that greater the congruence between the destination personality and the self-concept of the tourist, more is the probability that the tourist will have a favourable attitude toward that specific destination, thus, resulting in an intention to return and recommend (Aaker, 1999).

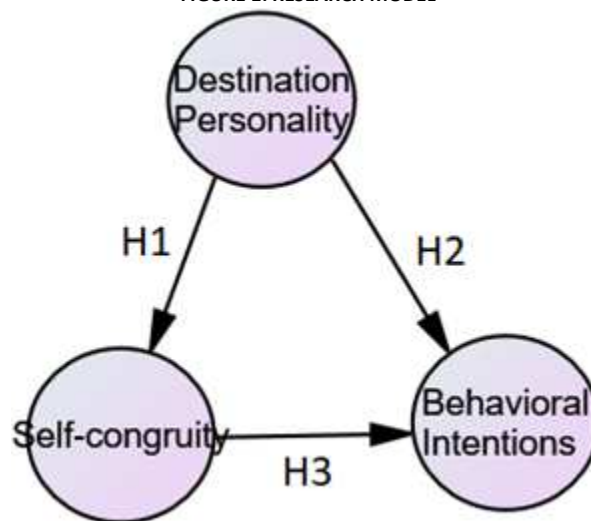
Past researches have displayed and emphasized that the destination personality has a direct significant impact self-congruity and behavioral intentions (Usakali and Baloglu, 2011). It is essential to note that there are majorly four types of self-congruity namely, actual, ideal, social, and ideal social (Sirgy et al., 1997). This study only concentrates on actual, because it has received the strongest empirical support and is the most commonly used (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997; Sirgy and Su, 2000). On the basis of above discussion, we have derived the below given hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>. Destination personality will have a direct impact on actual self-congruity

H<sub>2</sub>. Destination personality will have a positive impact on behavioural intentions

H<sub>3</sub>. Self-congruity will have a positive impact on behavioral intentions

FIGURE 1: RESEARCH MODEL



### 4. METHODOLOGY

The relationship among destination personality, self-congruity and loyalty was investigated in Jaipur destination, India. Jaipur has always been visited by foreign and domestic tourists. People living in different regions of India would like to visit this destination. Objectives of the study include: understanding tourist's perceptions of destination personality characteristics were measured; secondly, the congruity between tourist and destination were measured. Lastly, behavioural intentions were examined.

The necessary data for the study came from a survey of tourists carried out by the author in the tourism context in India. The instrument a structured questionnaire and was prepared for obtaining the required information from the respondents. Multi-item scales were used for measuring destination personality, self-congruity and behavioural intentions.

Destination personality items that we used in the study were based on the Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale. 42 item scale was further modified by various researchers to match characteristics of a destination. These studies are Hosany (2006), Murphy et al. (2007), Ecinci et al. (2008), Papadimitriou et al., (2013), Bilim and Bilim (2014), Gürbüz (2016). In our study we will be using a 26 items, which are: Honest, reliable, intelligent, successful, wholesome, down to earth, exciting, daring, original, friendly, family oriented, charming, upper class, glamorous, spirited, appealing, sophisticated, outdoorsy, up-to-date, competent, imaginative, rugged, cheerful, tough, western and sincere. The items were measured using a 7-point Likert type scale, with anchors (1) not at all descriptive and (7) extremely descriptive.

Actual self-congruity statements for our study are taken from the research conducted by Usakli and Baloglu (2011) which was originally formulated by Sirgy et al. (1997), Sirgy and Su (2000), and Helgeson and Suphellen (2004). Five point likert scale was used for measurement (1 = not at all likely and 7 = extremely likely). It consists of 3 items that can be elaborated as: (1) "X is consistent with how I see myself"; (2) "I am quite similar to the personality of X"; (3) "The personality of X is congruent with how I see myself" (X indicating the respective tourist destination).

Behavioral intentions, specifically includes intention to re-visit and intention to recommend the destination to others. Behavioral intention was operationalized using a two-item scale adapted from Chen and Tsai (2007). Seven point likert scale was used for measurement (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

## 5. SAMPLE

The target population of this study comprised of domestic and foreign visitors to Jaipur. A convenience sampling method was used in the research process. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the tourists staying at the hotels and at famous tourist attraction. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 365 were received. 54 questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to missing values and a total of 341 questionnaires were further used for the analysis. Demographic profile of respondents is displayed in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS (IN %)**

	Jaipur (N=341)
<b>Characteristics</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	55.9
Female	44.1
<b>Age</b>	
18-25	29.7
26-35	31.6
36-45	17.8
46 and above	20.9
<b>Qualification</b>	
Graduate	25.6
Post Graduate	22.8
Professional Degree	34.7
Ph.D	6.0
Others	10.9
<b>Occupation</b>	
Service	47.4
Business	11.2
Retired	6.5
Student	23.7
Homemaker	9.2
Unemployed	2.0
<b>Home Country</b>	
India	72.6
Others (Denamark, Holand, Scotland, Pakistan, China, Brazil, Dubai, England, Japan, etc.)	27.4
<b>Visit to Jaipur before</b>	
Repeat visitor	34.4
First time visitor	65.6
<b>Purpose of visit</b>	
Visiting friends	6.6
Visiting family	9.6
Travel and tourism	69.3
Business	8.8
Others	5.7

The collected data were first edited and coded and then analyzed with the help of various statistical tools analysis of mean, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and multiple regression were employed SPSS 21 software.

## 6. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

In order to understand the personality traits associated with Jaipur, 26-item five dimensional destination brand personality scale proposed by Aaker (1998) was assessed using EFA.

EFA was performed using the principal component method based on varimax rotation. Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.905 (cut-off: KMO >.6) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $p < .001$ ) (Hair et al. 1998), confirmed the appropriateness of using exploratory factor analysis.

For Jaipur, the factor solution was adequate, as all eigenvalues were greater than 1 and accounted for 64.6% of the total variance in the data. The first factor was labelled sincerity, given that five of the scale items were the same as in Aaker's (1997) study and explained most of the variance (46.81%). The second factor was labelled as excitement given that three of the scale items were the same as in Aaker's (1997) study. This dimension explains 10.9% of the total variance. The last factor was labelled conviviality given that the scale items were combination of sophistication, competence and ruggedness dimension in Aaker's (1997) study and accounted for 6.8% of the total variance.

Many researchers have confirmed that destination personality includes three distinct dimensions rather than five. These are excitement, sincerity and conviviality (Ecinci and Hosany, 2006, Ecinci et al. 2007, Papadimitriou et al 2015, Gürbüz et al. 2016. In our study also these three factors emerged. Table 2 gives the details of the analysis.

TABLE 2: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS: DESTINATION PERSONALITY (JAIPUR)

Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>					
	Component			Mean	Std dev
	1	2	3		
<b>Sincerity</b>				<b>5.37</b>	<b>1.02</b>
Family oriented	.800			5.504	1.41
Charming	.741			5.317	1.1
Spirited	.735			5.166	1.37
Imaginative	.675			5.234	1.41
Reliable	.668			5.142	1.36
Original/ authentic	.663			5.509	1.22
Friendly	.652			5.778	1.25
Down-to-earth	.645			5.373	1.33
<b>Excitement</b>				<b>5.16</b>	<b>1.15</b>
Daring		.824		4.908	1.39
Western/ modern		.822		5.178	1.55
Up-to-date		.816		5.184	1.41
Exciting		.575		5.409	1.41
<b>Conviviality</b>				<b>4.91</b>	<b>1.122</b>
Tough			.868	5.217	1.32
Rugged			.815	4.777	1.44
Competent			.568	4.736	1.46
Eigenvalues	7.021	1.643	1.021		
Cumulative % of variance	46.805	57.758	64.562		

6.1 REGRESSION RESULTS

6.1.1 Regression results between Destination personality and Self congruity

Test was conducted to find out the combined impact of destination personality on self-image congruence. Results indicated that 30% (R<sup>2</sup>) of the variance in congruence is explained by the destination personality dimensions which can be seen in the table 3 given below.

TABLE 3: DESTINATION PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS AND SELF-IMAGE CONGRUENCE: REGRESSION RESULTS

	B	t-statistics	P-value
Dependent variable: Self-image congruence			
Independent variables: Destination Personality Dimensions			
Constant	1.494	4.120	.000
Sincerity (β1)	.351*	5.548	.000
Excitement (β2)	.149***	1.888	.060
Conviviality (β3)	.122***	1.866	.063

Note: Significance level: \* p < 0.01, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.10

Model Summary

R <sup>2</sup>	30%
F- statistics	47.776
Significance	.000
Number of observations	341

According to the t-test and beta values destination personality dimension sincerity is the most important predictor of self-image congruence followed by excitement and conviviality.

6.1.2 Regression results between Destination Personality and Behavioural Intentions

Then the test was conducted to find out the combined impact of destination personality on behavioural intentions. Results indicated that 33.6% (R<sup>2</sup>) of the variance in behavioural intentions is explained by the destination personality dimensions which can be seen in the table 4 given below.

TABLE 4: DESTINATION PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS AND BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS: REGRESSION RESULTS

	B	t-statistics	P-value
Dependent variable: Behavioural intentions			
Independent variables: Destination Personality Dimensions			
Constant	2.184	6.920	.000
Sincerity (β1)	.435*	7.057	.000
Excitement (β2)	.218*	2.830	.005
Conviviality (β3)	-.045	-.705	.481

Note: Significance level: \* p < 0.01, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.10

Model Summary

R <sup>2</sup>	33.6%
F- statistics	56.362
Significance	.000
Number of observations	341

According to the t-test and beta values destination personality dimension sincerity is the most important predictor of behavioural intentions, followed by excitement.

6.1.3 Regression results between Self-Congruity and Behavioural Intentions

Test was then conducted to find out the impact of self-image congruence on behavioural intentions. Results indicated that 23.6% (R<sup>2</sup>) of the variance in behavioural intentions is explained by the self-image congruence which can be seen in the table 5 given below. Results indicate that congruence positively and significantly influences behavioural intentions.

TABLE 5: SELF-IMAGE CONGRUENCE AND BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS: REGRESSION RESULTS

	B	t-statistics	P-value
Dependent variable: Behavioural intentions			
Independent variables			
Constant	2.339	8.227	.000
Self-image congruence ( $\beta_1$ )	.486*	10.242	.000

Note: Significance level: \*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.10$

Model Summary

R <sup>2</sup>	23.6%
F- statistics	104.901
Significance	.000
Number of observations	341

For all the above regression results it may be stated here that the multicollinearity among the independent variables was assessed through computations of tolerance and VIF statistics. Both these statistics indicated absence of multicollinearity among the independent variables. The VIF and Tolerance scores are  $<10$  and  $>0.1$  respectively, thus, the regression outcomes are not affected by the multicollinearity problems. Also the bird nest view in the scatter plot shows that the regression is free from heteroscedasticity.

## 7. RESULTS, INTERPRETATION AND LIMITATIONS

In changing environment which is characterized by numerous corporations, infinite services and declining market shares, service brands should concentrate on improving customer loyalty and word of mouth in order to grow and survive. The main point here is how to make consumers believe and trust in something intangible. Formulating a strong destination personality can do the trick, as it will influence the self-congruity of the tourists, and will thus, lead to behavioral intentions.

On the basis of the mean values of the destination personality dimension, sincerity emerged as the most construct for destination Jaipur. Personality traits that tourist associate with Jaipur are friendly, family oriented, down-to-earth and charming. Destination marketing organisations can make use of these results to build a stronger and unique personality for the city.

Hypothesis one focuses on the relationship between destination personality and self-image congruence. It was highlighted that destination personality influences congruence significantly. Sincerity emerged as the most important predictor. Hypotheses two illustrate the relationship of destination personality with behavioural intentions. Results indicate that sincerity dimension again emerged as the most significant predictor and conviviality has a negative insignificant relationship. This affirms that the destination marketers while portraying the destination personality of Jaipur they should focus on attributes like family oriented, charming, friendly rather than displaying it as tough and a rugged destination. Also, third hypotheses suggest that in order to behavioural intentions the marketers should focus on self-image congruence. The tourist should be able to relate to the destination, this will in turn lead to intention to revisit and recommend.

Overview of the results, suggest that destination personality dimensions of sincerity and excitement positively and significantly influences congruence and behavioural intentions whereas highlighting a negative relationship with conviviality dimension of personality. It can be deduced that when the perception about the destination Jaipur will improve, if it portrayed correctly by the destination marketing organisations.

The current research shows empirical proofs, which present destination personality as a vital component in competitive market. Keeping this in mind, the managers should be motivated in marketing field to bring their own brand an effective destination brand personality. It is proved that personality impacts congruity and behavioural intentions. It would be beneficial for managers to use these results which will empower them in deciding on the objectives and realizing their goals. It is essential to acknowledge some limitation of the study. This study is based on the investigation of a single destination, Jaipur. So the results obtained cannot be generalized for the entire tourism industry. Secondly, difference in perception of the destination personality is different among the demographic which is not dealt with in this study. Lastly, pure random sampling is almost impossible in the tourism industry. Thus, future research should develop a design that better represents the population.

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