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Self-Congruity Theory: To What Extent Does it Hold in Tourism?

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Abstract

This paper investigates: (1) if, and to what extent, self-congruity theory is applicable in tourism, (2) to what extent travel and person characteristics explain the degree of self-congruity, and (3) how the operationalization of self-congruity affects the conclusions about whether self-congruity holds in tourism. Results derived from a large-scale study of Swiss travellers indicate that conclusions depend heavily on how self-congruity is measured. Using a relatively strict measure, more than half the trips under study can be classified as self-congruent. However, travel and socio-demographic characteristics are very limited in their ability to explain when self-congruity occurs.

Keywords

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Introduction

Since Landon (1974) highlighted the role of self-concept in consumer behaviour, consumer researchers have explained various constructs (including attitude, preference, choice, loyalty and so on) in terms of the relationship between one's self-image 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 (Kassarjian, 1971; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982, 1982a; 1982b). 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).

If self-congruity theory holds in the context of tourism (with destinations as brands), destination managers could position their destination to better match the market segments they seek to attract. Consequently, self-congruity theory could be of great practical benefit to the tourism industry. However, empirical support for self-congruity theory is difficult to assess, because — as noted by past commentators (for example, Sirgy, 1982a; 1982b) — a huge variation exists in the definitions, parameters and methodologies used, and these seem to raise more questions than they answer. Some notable researchers in the area, including Aaker (1997; 1999) argue that little empirical evidence has been provided to date supporting the validity of self-congruity theory.

This paper assesses self-congruity theory in the context of tourism destination choice. More specifically, we investigating the following research questions:

Research question 1: To what extent is there evidence of self-congruity in destination choice? The unit of analysis for RQ1 is the trip, so self-congruity is measured for every trip separately.

Research question 2: Do some people consistently choose destinations that are congruent with their self-concept, while others do not? The unit of analysis for RQ2 is the person, so self-congruity is measured for each person, and therefore typically includes more than one trip.

Research question 3: Are tourists who demonstrate high or low levels of self-congruity with destinations different? If so, in which respects? For RQ3, the unit of analysis is the person. Tourists with high destination self-congruity levels are compared to people with low destination self-congruities.

This study thus contributes to the currently small body of work that investigates the applicability of self-congruity theory in the field of tourism. As opposed to previous studies, we do not use data matching each tourist's self-assessment of personality with one single destination. Instead, we use data that contains multiple destinations per respondent, thus allowing the investigation of a novel research question: in the context of choosing tourism destinations, is self-congruity an individual trait, or does it depend on the travel context?

Literature review

Brand Personality in Tourism

Brand personality refers to the 'set of human characteristics associated with a brand' (Aaker, 1997). Studies of brand personality have traditionally focused on consumer goods (Aaker, Benet-Martinez and Garolera, 2001; Birdwell, 1968). However, the concept of brand personality has recently been applied more broadly to include other sectors and service industries, including travel destinations (Murphy, Moscardo and Benckendorff, 2007; Venable, Rose, Bush and Gilbert, 2005). In the tourism context, brand personality has been postulated as the central component of a destination brand (Ekinci, 2003), and is defined as 'the set of personality traits associated with a tourism destination' (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Baloglu, 2007, p. 436). In applying Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale to tourist destinations, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) found that tourists do associate personality attributes with destinations in terms of three key dimensions: sincerity, excitement and conviviality. However, the ability of tourists to describe destinations in terms of personality attributes has been demonstrated in only a limited number of studies involving national (Henderson, 2000) and regional destinations (Murphy, Moscardo and Benckendorff, 2007). Findings from these studies also indicate that destination personality dimensions positively affect an individual's intention to recommend, and return to, the destination (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Baloglu, 2007). Yet despite the growing evidence that brand personality is an important component of destination brands, various avenues of investigation remain overlooked. One such area is the influence of the level of similarity between an individual's own personality and the perceived personality of the destination — also known as self-congruity theory.

Self-Congruity Theory in Tourism

Self-congruity refers to the degree of match or mismatch between an individual's perception of a brand or product and the perception they have of themselves (Sirgy, 1980). Self-congruity theory postulates that the more similar the two concepts, the higher the preference for that brand, because its symbolic characteristics reinforce and validate the individual's self-perception (Swann, Stein-Seroussi and Giesler, 1992).

Chon (1992) originally applied self-congruity theory to the tourism industry. In his post-trip study, 225 individuals who had recently visited Norfolk, Virginia, were recruited through the local tourism authority. They completed a mail survey that asked questions about their satisfaction with their trip, as well as how similar they considered themselves to typical visitors to Norfolk. Results showed a positive relationship between self-image congruity and satisfaction; that is, those tourists who considered themselves to be very similar to typical visitors to Norfolk also reported greater satisfaction with the travel destination.

Sirgy and Su (2000) proposed an integrative model to explain the effect of self-congruity on travel behaviour. Their theoretical model postulated that travel behaviour is not only influenced by self-congruity, but that other factors are also important in explaining travel behaviour, particularly functional congruity, or the match between the utilitarian features of the destination and the extent to which they match the visitor's expectations. The numerous propositions from Sirgy and Su (2000) detail the multiple factors they believe determine both of the above types of congruity and the relationships between the constructs; but the authors offer no empirical evidence to support the model.

Since Chon's (1992) original study, several others have sought to empirically validate self-congruity theory in the context of tourism destinations. For example, in a replication of

Chon's original (1992) study, Litvin and Goh (2003) investigated whether actual and ideal self-congruity influenced the satisfaction of tourists departing Singapore. Results indicated that, at the aggregate level, visitors who felt Singapore as a destination closely matched the way they saw themselves ('actual self') and the way they would like to be seen ('ideal self') were also more satisfied with their tourist experience than those with low levels of self-congruity.

The study by Beerli, Meneses and Gil (2007) was designed to validate empirically the role of self-congruity in destination choice and the moderator variables that influence behaviour. Applying semantic differential scales to a Spanish sample, semantic differential scales were used to measure self-concept and the image of typical visitors to that destination, and destination preference was measured using a Likert scale. Regression analysis shows that the greater the similarity between one's actual and ideal self-concept and the destination's image, the greater the tendency for the tourist to visit that destination. However, this effect is moderated by whether the individual had visited the destination before (reducing the self-congruity effect) or if the individual is highly involved in leisure travel (increasing the self-congruity effect).

The value of using personality attributes to measure congruity has also been demonstrated in the closely related hospitality industry (Ekinci and Riley, 2003). In this study, participants rated the degree to which eight personality attributes, measured using semantic differential scales, applied to them. They then rated the restaurant or hotel using the same list of eight attributes. Findings support the notion that the degree of congruity influences level of satisfaction with the service provider. However, results regarding the relative degree of influence of the two types of congruity measured (actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity) are inconclusive. Given that personality congruence was found to affect

satisfaction in this case and many cases in studies outside the tourism and hospitality context (for example, Kressmann et al., 2006), it seems likely that it will also be an appropriate measure of congruity in the context of tourism destinations.

Certain other studies fail to provide convincing support for congruity theory in the context of tourism destinations. Litvin and Goh (2002) conducted a pre-trip study to investigate the effect of self-image congruity with destination interest and likelihood of visiting. Using a sample of 139 Singaporeans, they used both a semantic differential scale (Malhotra, 1988) and a five-point Likert scale (Chon, 1992) to measure the level of congruence. Chon's method found significant, moderate level correlations between actual and ideal self-congruity and destination interest and purchase likelihood (all twelve correlation coefficients were found to be significant, ranging from 0.231 to 0.576). Malhotra's congruity scale provided weaker support for congruity theory, with significant relationships found for only nine of the twelve coefficients calculated. The authors conclude by questioning whether self-congruity theory is an effective tool for tourism marketing and call for further investigation to assess its validity in this context. This call is reinforced by Kastenholz (2004), who, following her empirical study of rural destinations, also questions the relevance of destination self-congruity in predicting tourist behaviour.

In their Australian study, Murphy, Moscardo and Benckendorff (2007) investigated two Queensland holiday destinations: Cairns and the Whitsunday Islands. Their research questions included whether individuals could associate brand personality attributes with destinations and if destinations could be differentiated on this basis, but also whether any differences corresponded with perceptions of self-congruity. They report results only at the aggregate level, and found that brand personality perceptions were more favourable for the Whitsundays than for Cairns, and that self-congruity for all four selves was higher for the Whitsundays than

Cairns. Notwithstanding these findings, past visits and intention to visit the destination was higher for Cairns than the Whitsundays. These results contradict self-congruity theory because the most congruous destination was lower on actual and intended visits.

Similarly contradictory results are reported in a related study that examined whether the level of self-congruity of different segments of tourists influenced their satisfaction with the destination and their intention to visit (Murphy, Benckendorff and Moscardo, 2007). Again, the group with higher levels of congruity the destination (in this case, the Whitsundays) were less likely to have visited, and no difference was found between groups in their intention to visit the destination in the future. The authors conclude that further research is required to better understand the relationship between destination brand personality, self-congruity and travel behaviour.

Heterogeneity in Tourism

The lack of empirical support for self-congruity theory in the context of tourism is somewhat surprising, because choice of travel destination is increasingly seen as a status symbol and a means of self-expression (Clarke, 2000). One possible reason for the lack of clear support for the theory is that in all but one of the studies reviewed, applications of the theory in tourism contexts and the subsequent analysis and reporting of findings were conducted only at the aggregate market level — despite the vast evidence of the heterogeneous nature of the tourist market. Market segmentation has been postulated as one of the most powerful tools in the tourism industry (Dolnicar and Leisch, 2003) because of its ability to identify groups of tourists who share some traits and who have distinctive characteristics that enable them to be targeted by niche marketing campaigns. The value of segmentation in harnessing this heterogeneity has been empirically proven by studies that group tourists based on, for

example, past environmentally friendly behaviour at the destination (Dolnicar and Leisch, 2008), motivations (Loker-Murphy, 1996) and vacation styles (Dolnicar and Leisch, 2003).

Particularly salient to the present study is Leisen's (2001) work, which segmented the tourist market based on destination image. Leisen found segments that held different image perceptions of the same destination and were characterized by different socio-demographic profiles. Similarly, Dolnicar and Huybers (2007) used the perceptions-based market segmentation (PBMS) procedure to identify segments of the market with different image perceptions of the same destinations. The repeated findings of distinctly different groups within the tourist market point to the likelihood that if segments are found that differ in their level of self-congruity, they will also be characterized by distinct profiles.

Contribution of the Present Study to the Body of Work

The above literature review shows that self-congruity theory can be a useful foundation for destination marketing, but current studies do not provide convincing empirical evidence of its validity in the area. A large majority of studies took an inbound perspective with one or two destinations, with only one (that is, current or previous) trip under assessment. Moreover, they mostly investigated the stated assessment of self-congruence, instead of seeking a revealed degree of self-congruence by (for example) calculating a differential between two personalities (such as the self and the destination).

Our study fills this research gap by choosing an approach that differs from those previously taken in four significant ways (see also the following methodology section):

(1) All cases in the data set of our study are actual trips taken by one single person during one year (2007). Therefore, the perspective of our study is outbound, with multiple trips actually taken (and thus destinations actually visited) per person. In contrast, past studies either used

only the destination that the tourist was visiting at the time, had just visited or was about to visit. The assessments of other destinations are hypothetical, and behavioural intentions to visit destinations in the future are not as reliable as actual behavioural data.

(2) In our study, the personality of a destination was measured at a point in time different from the self-concept of a test person (several months elapsed between recording the two types of data, that is, trip related and person related). Respondents provided details on each trip taken during 2007 (including personality of the destination). They submitted completed questionnaires during the entire year (2007); whereas they provided their personal details (socio-demographics and other) as well data regarding their self-concept upon *termination* of the study period (at the beginning of 2008).

(3) The measurement of the degree of self-congruence between the individuals' and the destinations' personality was not the result of individual differential statements but of the calculation of differences from two separate statements (that is, individual and destination).

(4) Finally, and most importantly, ours is the first study to provide a detailed analysis of how the measurement and operationalization of congruity affects the conclusions of whether self-congruity holds in tourism.

Of the seven empirical studies reviewed that investigated self-congruity in relation to tourist destinations, five measured self-congruity directly, for example, by asking respondents to indicate how similar they feel they are to typical tourists in a particular destination. This is often done by using multiple items and then calculating an average score of congruity. The other two studies take the more commonly used approach, which asks respondents to rate themselves on a number of semantic differential scales and then rate the destination on the same set of scales (for example young/old, conservative/liberal and so on). In one case (Litvin

and Goh, 2002), congruity was calculated by simply comparing the individual score and the destination score, and in the other (Beerli, Menzies and Gil, 2007), congruity was determined by calculating the squared difference between the respondents' self-assessments and their assessments of the destinations. Litvin and Goh (2002) compared these two different measurement methods in the context of tourist destinations, and they found large differences in the results and conclusions drawn, depending on the measurement approach taken. Similarly, the analyses used to conclude a relationship between self-congruity and the dependent variables (which, amongst others, included satisfaction, intention to visit, intention to return and intention to recommend) vary, ranging from multiple regression, correlation analysis to discriminant analysis. A specific definition of what the researchers considered 'congruent' was mostly not given, but instead was concluded based on whether the self-congruity variable was a significant determinant in a regression analysis or correlated significantly (but not necessarily highly) with the dependent variable. The author provides a specific explanation of how self-congruity is defined in their analysis in only one study (Chon, 1992), where it is achieved by taking a median split to create groups that have 'self-image congruity' and 'self-image incongruity' (p. 363). However, no explanation or justification is given as to why a median split was considered most appropriate in this case.

Methodology

Measures

Our study measures self-congruity as the difference between two assessments of personality: the self-assessment of the tourist's own personality and their assessment of the destination's personality. A personality measure therefore must underlie the self-congruity measure. We chose the personality measure proposed and validated in a German-speaking context by Hieronimus (2003). That measure of personality used ten items, five of which were designed to capture the rational dimensions of personality and five capture the emotional dimensions. Specifically, respondents were asked to respond to the following statements: 'The destination can be characterized as/ I consider myself to be (1) reliable, (2) of high spirit, (3) authentic, (4) passionate, (5) honest, (6) imaginative, (7) down to earth, (8) cheerful, (9) successful, (10) adventurous'. Respondents were offered five response options, in which they indicated their agreement from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The answer options between the extremes were labelled numerically.

The personality of the destination was assessed during the survey year 2007, and the assessment of the respondent's personality was recorded at the end of the study in early 2008.

Fieldwork Administration

The data was collected as part of a larger study on Swiss private travel behaviour (for details, see Laesser and Bieger, 2008). In this study, private trips were defined as all trips for non-business reasons with at least one overnight stay outside the traveller's home and usual living and working environment, for example, vacations, holidays, fun and leisure trips, visiting friends and relatives, weekend getaways and study tours.

Respondents had a choice of completing a paper-and-pencil or online version of the questionnaire. Sixty-nine per cent chose the online version. Respondents had to complete one questionnaire for each private trip they took in 2007. Trips to second homes were not recorded because they were considered to be part of the respondent's usual environment. To ensure that respondents did not forget to complete trip-related questionnaires, they were contacted four times during 2007, reminding them to either submit their completed questionnaires or indicate that they had not travelled within a given quarter. In early 2008, each participant received the final questionnaire recording personal as well as household characteristics. This process ensured that the collection of trip-related information was completely decoupled from the collection of personal data, including the self-assessment of the respondent's own personality.

Sample

We employed a quota sampling procedure, with quotas defined for region, size of household and type of household. Respondents were recruited in two ways: by phone and through an online panel. The response rate was 70 per cent, leading to a final usable sample of 1,898 households who participated in the study in all four quarters of 2007 (either by completing questionnaires or by indicating that they had not travelled). Responses were provided by 4,387 people living in these households, and they provided information on a total of 10,903 trips.

The data is representative of the Swiss population living in the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland (not the Italian-speaking part). However, this approach had some limitations: for survey technical reasons, persons in collective households were not registered. Also, small children and persons older than 80 were underrepresented. Most foreign citizens in the survey came from countries neighbouring Switzerland. As mentioned earlier, trips with

a regular and homogeneous repetition rate (for example, to their own holiday homes) were underrepresented. However, these limitations are not critical to the present study, because no attempt is made to estimate the proportion of the Swiss resident population for which the self-congruity theory holds.

Data Analysis

(1) Attribute-Level Congruity

All congruity measures in this study were based on computing the distances between the personality self-assessment and the destination personality assessment by each respondent. *Attribute-level congruity*, the building block of all other congruity measures, was computed by calculating the absolute difference at item level, leading to ten derived variables, one for each attribute, with values ranging from 0 (indicating that there was no difference between the self and the destination assessment = 100 per cent congruity) to 4 (indicating maximum difference = zero per cent congruity). For example, if a person assesses themselves as very adventurous (+2), but assesses the destination as not adventurous (-1), the attribute level congruity would have the value of 3, which indicates relatively low congruity. Attribute-level congruity computations were possible for 7,965 trips, because not all respondents provided complete responses.

The approach of computing attribute-level congruities is well aligned with previous work where self-image and brand image are measured separately and a sum of the differences is then used to compute the overall congruity score (Kastenholz, 2004; Kressmann et al., 2006).

(2) Trip Congruity to Investigate Research Question 1

For every respondent and each one of the trips they took, a trip congruity was computed by calculating the mean of all attribute-level congruity values across all ten attributes for any given trip. Consequently, trip congruity values range from a minimum of 0 (100 per cent congruity) to 4 (zero per cent congruity).

To assess how many trips can be considered as congruent with the self-image, it was necessary to define a maximum permissible difference (threshold) between the destination and the self-assessment. Thus, if a trip differed from the self-assessment by a value higher than the threshold, it was classified as non-congruent; if not, it was classified as congruent. It is important to note that the selection of the threshold is arbitrary. The strictest operationalization of self-congruity would be that no deviation was permissible at all (for example, if a respondent slightly agrees that Beijing is adventurous, while strongly agreeing that they are themselves adventurous, this would be deemed non-congruous using such a strict criterion). However, this does not appear to be reasonable, given that even a repeat measurement of the same brand-attribute associations across two measurements is known to vary (Dolnicar and Rossiter, 2008). We therefore set a threshold of 1 unit of difference on average at the attribute level: if the mean difference in self-assessment and destination assessment across all attributes was more than 1, we classified it as having no congruity. This approach ensured that two assessments on the positive end of the scale would be accepted as being the same, and two assessments on the negative side of the scale would also be viewed as the same, but a change from the positive to the negative side would not be acceptable.

Because selection of the threshold is arbitrary in self-congruity research, studies conducted previously are not comparable. This lack of comparability means that cumulative knowledge about whether self-congruity holds in tourism cannot be developed. Therefore, this study also

presents how, for our data, the operationalization of self-congruity affects the final conclusions about whether self-congruity holds in tourism.

(3) Person Congruity to Investigate Research Question 2

An individual's tendency to choose tourism destinations that are congruent to their personality (*person congruity)* was computed by averaging the attribute-level congruity values across all trips one respondent undertook in 2007 and then summing the values across all attributes. As previously, we set a threshold for the trips of a person to be self-congruent at 1 point.

(4) Building a Test Group and Control Group to Investigate Research Question 3

Based on the person congruity scores, two extreme groups of respondents were created: high self-congruity respondents and low self-congruity respondents. The quartile of respondents with the highest difference between self-assessment and destination assessment was assigned to the low self-congruency group (coded '0'), the bottom quartile to the high self-congruency group (coded '1'). These extreme groups, which had 820 respondents each, and undertaking 2,037 trips in total, were used to answer research question 3: whether individual differences in people can explain self-congruity, and thus be used by destination management to improve their marketing.

Assumptions about possible explanatory variables guided the choice of statistical analysis. We hypothesized that the following seven characteristics could explain the extent of self-congruity: destination travelled to (Switzerland compared to neighbouring countries, Switzerland compared to Europe, Switzerland compared to overseas; nominal scale), travel motivation (25 items, measured on a five-point importance scale; ordinal scale), travel type (11 types, measured on a five-point applicability scale; ordinal scale), vacation activities

(intensity of engagement with more than 70 vacation activities; metric), socio-demographic characteristics including gender and age (nine categories), education level (10 categories) and professional position (15 categories). For a full overview of constructs and metrics refer to Laesser and Bieger (2008). Consequently, we computed seven separate binary logistic regressions where the dependent variable was being a member of the high or low self-congruity group. This approach - as opposed to just one overall regression - had the additional advantage of enabling us to compare directly the explanatory power of each of the hypothesized groups of explanatory variables.

Results

Research question 1:To what extent is there evidence of self-congruity in destination choice?

Table 1 shows how the measurement of self-congruity affects the percentage of cases which are deemed to be self-congruent. For example, if the threshold (the maximum permissible difference between self-assessment and destination assessment) is 0.2, only one per cent of trips and three per cent of people are deemed to be self-congruent. At the other extreme, if the threshold is set at 2, almost all trips and people are self-congruent.

At the less-strict threshold chosen for this study (1), more than half of all trips (53 per cent) can be considered as self-congruent.

< Table 1 here >

Research question 2: Do some people consistently choose destinations that are congruent with their self-concept, while others do not?

Applying the threshold of 1, 58 per cent of the trips of any given person can be considered as self-congruent.

Comparing the results of RQ1 and RQ2, we observe that the share of self-congruity is slightly higher in relation to the person than in relation to the trip: the median as well as all quartiles are lower in the case of the person perspective than with the trip perspective (that is, a higher self-congruity exists in the case of the person perspective compared to the trip perspective).

Research question 3: Are tourists who demonstrate high or low levels of self-congruity with destinations different?

The results of the binary logistic regressions are presented in Table 2. For readability, only significant coefficients are included.

In relation to *trip characteristics*, the predictive power produced was very modest. In addition, most coefficients were small, in that they did not indicate a high degree of association with self-congruity. In particular, travel motivations with R2=.180 and 67 per cent of all cases correctly classified were among the best predictors of self-congruity. Among the travel motivations suggesting comparably higher likelihood of self-congruity were *rest and relaxation*, *sports* (active) and the desire for *time with partner*. In addition, but with less predictive power, were travel types. Among those suggesting high likelihood of self-congruity were *touring with multiple stops* and *holiday in the snow*. In contrast, the choice of destination did not have any predictive power at all with the exception of Switzerland (reference case),

which showed the highest self-congruity likelihood of all destinations tested in this model. The lack of predictive power can also be observed in relation to the activities pursued while away on travel. However, there were a small number of activities which suggested a very high likelihood of self-congruity between the visitor and the destination: *mountaineering*, *golf*, *downhill skiing* and *participating in learning languages* — all activities where a considerable amount of communication with co-travellers occurs.

With respect to *person characteristics*, the predictive power of the models was also very modest. However, the coefficients were signifying higher differences of self-congruity between categories denominating a person compared to categories denominating a trip (or combination of person-trip, as signified with motivation). Most importantly, the age of a given person was significantly associated with the likelihood of self-congruity. Basically, and especially true for people older than 55, the older one gets, the less likelihood there is of self-congruity. This might be because, with increasing age, the formation of personality slows, so personality congruity is less sought after. With regard to education, the results did not indicate a specific pattern. In contrast, and in relation to professional position, extreme professional positions (such as unemployed on one side and CEO on the other) were associated with a higher likelihood of self-congruity than 'middle' professional positions (such as students, middle management and so on). In contrast to the above, gender proved to be non-significant.

< *Table 2 here* >

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigates whether the theory of self-congruity holds for destination choice. We chose a mature market (Switzerland) for our investigation, mainly because this country provides a sophisticated buying environment, and its customers can be considered savvy (having both financial means and buying knowhow to behave according to this theory).

The following key findings emerged:

(1) Our study provides the first empirical demonstration of the extent to which the operationalization of self-congruity affects the outcome of the study. Table 1 illustrates that choosing a very strict operationalization of self-congruity leads to only a very small proportion of cases being self-congruent. Here, we must conclude that self-congruity does not hold in tourism. However, if the definition of self-congruity is less strict, up to 100 per cent of all cases can be classified as self-congruent. The key conclusion from this analysis is that future studies into self-congruity should report the same analysis as provided in Table 1, to enable the reader to assess to what extent the result of any study is determined by the strictness of the self-congruity measure.

(2) Using a threshold of 1 (ensuring that two assessments on the positive end of the scale are accepted as being the same, and two assessments on the negative side of the scale are viewed as the same, but a change from the positive to the negative side is not acceptable), more than half of all cases (both at trip and person level) demonstrate self-congruity. We interpret this as evidence for the existence of self-congruity in tourism.

(3) Our analysis shows that the attempt to identify factors that explain when self-congruity holds and when it does not, was not really successful. Therefore, it is difficult at this stage

to make recommendations to tourism destinations regarding the market segments they should target if communicating a congruity message. Additional psychographic factors, which were not included in this study, may provide better predictive power than the travel-related and socio-demographic characteristics.

(4) Finally, the results reveal that self-congruity is slightly higher in relation to the person than in relation to the trip. These differences may have emerged because the trip perspective encompasses not one, but potentially multiple trips by one and the same respondent. Irregardless, the differences in the comparison of the results of the two perspectives suggest that an increase in trips of a given person within a given timeframe might be associated with a decrease in self-congruity per trip. The association of congruity and the frequency of travel is a very interesting finding, which could be explained by the fact that people who only undertake one major vacation a year seek a higher level of congruity, whereas people who take more vacations may seek more variety and thus be more willing to deviate from self-congruity in search of new experiences.

Our study has several limitations. First, we used a German personality scale, which was much less extensive than the one normally used in such studies (Malhotra, 1988). Second, highly repetitive trips (such as weekend trips to second homes and other) were not included in the sample. From previous studies (Weinert, Laesser and Beritelli, 2007) we know that second home ownership and usage is highly associated with the personality of the owner, which, if included in this study, might have produced a different outcome. Finally, Sirgy and associates (Sirgy et al., 1997; 2007) advocate the use of direct measures of congruity, for example, asking respondents to indicate their agreement with statements such as ‘wearing Reebok shoes in casual situations is consistent with how I see myself’ and/or ‘people similar to me wear Reebok shoes in casual situations’ (Sirgy et al., 1997, p. 235). This measurement

approach, they argue, results in greater predictive validity and overcomes the problems associated with many studies of self-congruity (such as the use of possibly irrelevant image attributes), and enables the self-congruity experience to be captured in a holistic manner. In a follow-up study it would be interesting to investigate if the direct way of measuring self-congruity indeed leads to different results.

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Tables

Table 1: Extent of Congruity dependent of the Congruity measure (descriptive)

Congruity measure (maximum difference permissible for the self-assessment and destination assessment still deemed congruent) (points)	**Level of congruity, given the measure of congruity chosen (%)**	**Percentage of congruent trips (%)**	**Percentage of people behaving congruently (%)**
0.2	95	1	3
0.4	90	6	9
0.6	85	17	21
0.8	80	33	39
1.0	**75**	**53**	**58**
1.2	70	70	72
1.4	65	82	83
1.6	60	89	89
1.8	55	94	94
2.0	50	96	97
2.2	45	97	98
2.4	40	99	99
2.6	35	99	99
2.8	30	99	100
3.0	25	100	100
> 3.0	20	100	100

Table 2: Results of the Regressions

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	Log odds (%)
Destination							
***Ref: Switzerland**; R^2 (Nagelkerke): .050; 55% correctly classified*							
Austria	-0.539	0.142	14.466	1	0.000	0.583	-42
Italy	-0.365	0.124	8.725	1	0.003	0.694	-31
Spain	-0.398	0.141	8.002	1	0.005	0.672	-33
Netherlands	-0.922	0.343	7.242	1	0.007	0.398	-60
United Kingdom	-0.575	0.287	4.023	1	0.045	0.563	-44
Asia	-0.462	0.179	6.630	1	0.010	0.630	-37
constant	0.153	0.048	10.206	1	0.001	1.165	17
Type of trip							
R^2 (Nagelkerke): .110; 65% correctly classified							
touring with multiple stops	0.134	0.030	20.314	1	0.000	1.143	14
cruise	-0.079	0.030	7.032	1	0.008	0.924	-8
health-oriented trip/wellness trip	0.058	0.025	5.265	1	0.022	1.059	6
holiday in the snow	0.163	0.027	35.871	1	0.000	1.177	18
study tour	-0.066	0.024	7.316	1	0.007	0.936	-6
visit friends and relatives	0.089	0.024	14.112	1	0.000	1.093	9
other	0.211	0.026	67.955	1	0.000	1.235	23
constant	0.538	0.055	95.003	1	0.000	1.713	71
Motivation							
R^2 (Nagelkerke): .180; 67% correctly classified							
visit and experience sights and culture	0.065	0.032	4.297	1	0.038	1.067	7
rest and relaxation	0.111	0.034	10.509	1	0.001	1.117	12
experience of exotic	0.073	0.031	5.524	1	0.019	1.075	8
enjoyment of comfort and pampering	-0.091	0.026	12.320	1	0.000	0.913	-9
prestigious character of trip	-0.151	0.034	20.173	1	0.000	0.860	-14
sports (active)	0.111	0.033	11.281	1	0.001	1.117	12
experience of nativeness	0.085	0.034	6.429	1	0.011	1.089	9
time for partner	0.138	0.023	35.518	1	0.000	1.148	15
constant	0.229	0.069	10.969	1	0.001	1.257	26
Activities							
R^2 (Nagelkerke): .089; 60% correctly classified							
mountaineering	2.858	0.866	10.889	1	0.001	17.423	1642
bicycling	-0.437	0.219	3.975	1	0.046	0.646	-35
mountain biking	-1.666	0.589	8.006	1	0.005	0.189	-81
swimming/bathing	0.380	0.140	7.388	1	0.007	1.462	46
diving/snorkelling	-0.942	0.397	5.617	1	0.018	0.390	-61
sailing	-6.972	2.778	6.297	1	0.012	0.001	-100
golf	2.457	0.899	7.473	1	0.006	11.673	1067
boccia/lawn bowling	-1.223	0.606	4.068	1	0.044	0.294	-71
downhill ski/carving on slopes	1.713	0.726	5.570	1	0.018	5.545	454
strolling/shopping	1.925	0.395	23.698	1	0.000	6.854	585
sightseeing natural sights	-0.319	0.137	5.393	1	0.020	0.727	-27
go to the theatre/movies	-0.348	0.095	13.453	1	0.000	0.706	-29
learn languages	0.792	0.257	9.466	1	0.002	2.207	121

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	Log odds (%)
spend time reading books/journals/newspapers	0.266	0.101	6.868	1	0.009	1.305	30
spend time at the beach	0.429	0.133	10.412	1	0.001	1.535	54
go to casinos, play games in casinos	-0.631	0.218	8.406	1	0.004	0.532	-47
play games	0.350	0.118	8.853	1	0.003	1.419	42
play with the children/undertake activities with children	0.227	0.093	5.915	1	0.015	1.255	26
spend value time with the partner	-1.023	0.285	12.910	1	0.000	0.359	-64
take pictures/videos	0.291	0.100	8.475	1	0.004	1.338	34
constant	-0.122	0.063	3.712	1	0.054	0.885	-11
Age (years)							
Ref: age >74; *R^2 (Nagelkerke): .063; 59% correctly classified*							
5–14	1.315	0.197	44.331	1	0.000	3.725	272
15–24	0.972	0.183	28.278	1	0.000	2.645	164
25–34	1.425	0.156	83.164	1	0.000	4.157	316
35–44	1.020	0.150	46.479	1	0.000	2.774	177
45–54	1.289	0.155	69.224	1	0.000	3.629	263
55–64	0.961	0.150	41.024	1	0.000	2.615	161
65–74	0.346	0.148	5.486	1	0.019	1.413	41
constant	-0.915	0.129	50.590	1	0.000	0.401	-60
Education							
Ref: compulsory schooling; *R^2 (Nagelkerke): .010; 51% correctly classified*							
apprenticeship/vocational school	-0.476	0.139	11.808	1	0.001	0.6210	-38
vocational master diploma	-0.486	0.171	8.051	1	0.005	0.6151	-38
technical school	-0.464	0.200	5.379	1	0.020	0.6290	-37
higher technical school	-0.464	0.158	8.595	1	0.003	0.6290	-37
university of applied sciences	-0.678	0.168	16.279	1	0.000	0.5077	-49
university	-0.452	0.151	8.994	1	0.003	0.6366	-36
constant	0.424	0.125	11.437	1	0.001	1.5285	53
Profession							
Ref: retiree; *R^2 (Nagelkerke): .043; 58% correctly classified*							
home economics/housewife/househusband	0.464	0.119	15.176	1	0.000	1.5908	59
unemployed, looking for a job	1.062	0.513	4.286	1	0.038	2.8912	189
in training: student at university or tertiary education	0.850	0.287	8.799	1	0.003	2.3401	134
CEO, top management, chief public servant	1.015	0.268	14.381	1	0.000	2.7593	176
self-employed in trade and other	0.741	0.167	19.652	1	0.000	2.0971	110
middle management member	0.887	0.110	64.714	1	0.000	2.4275	143
general employee, public servant	0.582	0.087	44.853	1	0.000	1.7888	79
constant	-0.430	0.062	48.203	1	0.000	0.6508	-35