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Research articles

EXAMINING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE, PLACE IDENTITY, AND DESTINATION LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

Emotions shape tourists' perceptions, experiences, and attachment to a destination, impacting loyalty. However, limited research has delved into the intricate relationships among these constructs. Based on the M-R Framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), the current study proposed and tested a destination loyalty model that examined tourists' emotional experiences and place identity. This study specifically aimed to explore the influences of love, joy, and positive surprise (as emotions experienced by tourists) on place identity and destination loyalty. Data obtained from 164 international tourists were utilized to examine the conceptual model by employing structural equation modeling. The study outcomes showed that joy and love significantly affected place identity and destination loyalty, and place identity significantly influenced destination loyalty. The study findings deliver important theoretical contributions for researchers by explaining the complex relationships among tourists' emotional experiences of, their sense of place identity, and loyalty toward a destination. From a practical perspective, the study's results entail various implications for destination policymakers and marketers. For example, exploring how tourists respond to their emotional experiences would assist destination marketers in the development of effective marketing strategies (e.g., segmentation and positioning) to foster loyalty among visitors.

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INTRODUCTION

In the current highly competitive marketplace, destinations face increasingly tough competition in attracting tourists, both domestically and internationally. In such a scenario, maintaining destination loyalty becomes a crucial focal point for ensuring the sustainability of the entire tourism industry (Wang et al., 2022). Consequently, destination loyalty has received significant attention as a critical metric (Tasci et al., 2022), and evaluating and understanding factors that affect tourists' destination loyalty has thus become a critical emphasis for destination marketers and tourism researchers (Jeong & Kim, 2019). It's important to recognize that sustainable success for a brand, product, or destination cannot be achieved through a one-time purchase; rather, it depends on repeat purchases from loyal customers (Assael, 1984; Lv et al., 2020). Hence, destination marketers must comprehend the factors that promote or hinder tourists' loyalty towards a destination, to ensure sustainable tourism development.

In previous literature, destination loyalty has preliminarily been attributed to a unique destination image (Chi & Qu, 2008). However, a deeper analysis reveals that even those destinations that have successfully cultivated a positive image face challenges in fostering loyalty among visitors (Lv et al., 2020). In this context, it is imperative to develop a more thorough and nuanced comprehension of the multifaceted factors that impact destination loyalty, surpassing the traditionally emphasized aspect of destination image (Kislali et al., 2020). While tourism researchers have started to place a greater emphasis on other factors such as tourists' emotions and their utility to elucidate their behaviors (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2015; Lee et al., 2012; Prayag et al., 2017), a notable paucity of investigations exists specifically addressing the aforementioned complex relationship. On the other hand, prior studies argued that employing generic sets of emotions drawn from psychology overlooks the nuances within particular situations, resulting in inaccuracies in findings (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). This highlights the necessity for a more contextualized approach to the examination of emotions in tourism literature, recognizing the uniqueness of each setting to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the conclusions drawn.

Therefore, by adopting the M-R framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and incorporating the Destination Emotions Scale created by Hosany and Gilbert (2010) into it, the present study formulated and empirically tested a theoretical model to evaluate international tourists' loyalty toward Nepal, a South Asian country, by scrutinizing their emotional experiences.

In addition to examining the association between emotional experiences of tourists and their loyalty toward the destination, place identity was integrated into the conceptual model to generate additional insights. The addition of place identity to the conceptual model serves as a strategic augmentation, justified by the inherently place-dependent nature of tourism (Wang & Xu, 2015). The current investigation sought to tackle the above-mentioned gaps by exploring the subsequent research questions:

1. *How do the emotional experiences of international tourists influence their destination loyalty toward Nepal?*

2. *How do the emotional experiences of international tourists affect their place identity toward Nepal?*

3. *How does the place identity of international tourists influence their destination loyalty toward Nepal?*

The present study significantly supports the corpus of literature in destination marketing domain. As tourists engage with the destination, their emotional experiences and interactions shape their place identity, influencing their attitudes, behaviors, and destination loyalty. In this regard, the theoretical model studied in the present study offers a nuanced and complete understanding of the intricate dynamics influencing tourists' behavioral intentions and commitment to a particular destination, shedding light on the position of identity formation in tourists' emotional experiences. From an applied standpoint, the study's outcomes offer several suggestions and implications for destination marketing and management organizations (DMO) and local policy makers in developing effective policies and implementing successful marketing programs to foster loyalty among international visitors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Emotion

Emotion has been defined as an affective condition described by intense episodes of feelings linked to a particular object or subject, which subsequently leads to specific behavioral reactions (Cohen & Areni, 1991). Scherer (2000) stated that emotions have several elements, including cognitive processes, neurophysiological activation, motivation (action tendencies), motor expression, subjective feeling, each with specific functions as follows:

- The cognitive element assesses objects and events.

- The neurophysiological activation is part of the somatic aspect of emotion. This element includes physiological responses in both central and peripheral aspects and is connected to the regulation function of the system.

- The motivational component, which involves alterations in action tendencies, serves as a means to prepare and direct actions.

- The motor expression element comprises facial and/or vocal expressions and psychophysiological symptoms, serving as a way to convey reactions and behavioral intentions through communication.

- The subjective feeling, which is synonymous with emotional experience, performs a monitoring role (Moors, 2009; Scherer, 2001; Tuerlan et al., 2021).

While there are conceptual distinctions, the terms "emotion" has often been used interchangeably with other affective concepts like feelings, moods, affects, and sentiments. Therefore, it is essential to explore how emotion differs from the aforementioned affective phenomena (Tuerlan et al., 2021).

Feelings, for example, encompass both physiological changes and cognitive evaluations of events (Sander & Scherer, 2009). They depict the perceptual and physical patterns closely correlated with the particular experience of an emotional occurrence. Additionally, feelings involve the focal demonstration of response organization influenced by the appraisal of emotions (Scherer, 2005). Mood is distinct from emotion, described by a less intense but relatively longer-lasting diffuse emotional state (e.g., cheerful, irritable, or depressed), typically lacking an apparent cause or trigger (Scherer, 2000). Affect is defined by a level of arousal that sets it apart from purely rational judgment, suggesting a heightened response. In a general sense, affect is often used to encompass various mental states, including emotions, interpersonal stances, moods, and affective dispositions. Lastly, sentiment is a construct rooted in cognition, characterized as a particular perspective encompassing attitudes, judgements, and thoughts (Sander & Scherer, 2009; Scherer, 2005).

Mehrabian – Russell Model (M - R Model)

Within the field of environmental psychology, there exists a model called the stimulus-organism response (S-O-R) framework, formulated by Woodworth in 1929. This framework delves into the connections between various elements, including inputs (stimulus), cognitive processes

(organism), and behavioral outcomes (response). S-O-R model elucidates how the cognitive processes within an individual act as intermediaries, influencing the connection between external stimuli and human behavior (Woodworth, 1929).

Drawing upon Woodworth's S-O-R framework from 1929, Mehrabian and Russell (1974) formulated their own S-O-R model. In their interpretation, they defined the "S" component (stimuli) as external factors, encompassing numerous factors within the physical environment (Bagozzi, 1986) and characterized the "O" component (organism) as comprising emotions, which are further broken down into three distinct and bipolar dimensions of emotion including *pleasure* (P), *arousal* (A), and *dominance* (D) (i.e., the PAD framework).

Pleasure denotes how much an experiences happiness or joy in specific circumstances. Arousal pertains to the degree of emotional stimulation, signaling both physical and rational awareness in reaction to external stimuli. Dominance, on the other hand, relates to the degree to which individuals perceives their ability to exert influence over their environment and maintain control over a given situation (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Subsequently, the researchers removed the dominance component from the model due to its irrelevant impact on behavior (Donovan et al., 1994; Russell & Pratt, 1980).

As outlined in the model (referred to as the M–R model hereafter), a range of environmental stimuli impact individuals' emotional condition (i.e., PAD dimensions) which, subsequently contribute to the formation of individuals' inclination to engage with (i.e., approach behavior) or refrain from certain behaviors (i.e., avoidance behaviors). Approach behavior encompasses a willingness to stay, engage in exploration of the surroundings, and interact with others in the environment. In contrast, avoidance behavior encompasses opposite actions, such as leaving the environment and disregarding attempts at communication from others (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The M–R model has been utilized and validated in service domains in various domains such as restaurants (Tan et al., 2022), themed hotels (Sun et al., 2021), Airbnb (Do et al., 2022) and consumer events (Manthiou et al., 2017).

The M-R model is useful in research that emphasizes the potential foundational aspects of customer emotions, namely their cognitive interpretations of environmental stimuli, rather than pinpointing the exact emotion elicited by external stimuli (Chamberlain & Broderick, 2007). In this context, the M-R model is well-suited for the current study since tourist

destinations frequently feature various elements that have the potential to trigger emotional responses in visitors, like welcoming tour guides, captivating exhibits, and enjoyable interactive activities (Kirillova et al., 2014; Pappalepore et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, earlier research contended that the application of basic sets of emotions derived from psychology tends to neglect the intricacies of particular contexts, resulting in inaccurate findings (Gilmore & McMullan, 2009; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). In addition, the measurement scale (i.e., PAD dimensions) within the M-R model provides a bipolar frame for gauging emotional reactions to external stimuli in the environment. While the primary structural aspect of emotional experiences is frequently identified as the widespread bipolar spectrum of pleasantness and unpleasantness (Russell, 1983), several constraints regarding its suitability in studies related to consumer emotions have been acknowledged (Jang & Namkung, 2009). For instance, Westbrook (1987) observed that the unipolar perspective seems more suitable when examining purchasing experiences, as the bipolar concept permits the coexistence of mixed emotions, where both pleasant and unpleasant conditions can occur simultaneously, where neither pleasant nor unpleasant conditions are experienced. Furthermore, Hosany and Gilbert (2010) highlighted the inadequacies of current emotion measurement scales, as they fail consider the distinctive characteristics of tourists and the destinations they visit.

To align more effectively with the realm of tourism, Hosany and Gilbert (2010) created a unipolar scale (i.e., Destination Emotion Scale - DES) encompassing three distinct dimensions: love, joy, and positive surprise, which they further confirmed their validity as documented in a subsequent research effort by Hosany et al. (2015). Therefore, based on the aforementioned discussion, we utilized the M-R model in the current study and replaced the PAD scale with DES scale to examine the impact of joy, love and positive surprise on place identity and destination loyalty.

Tourists' Emotional Experiences

The conceptualization of tourist emotions with multiple dimensions and the subsequent assessment of the influence of each dimension on tourists' behaviors present a promising avenue for advancing the comprehension of tourists' behavior within the field of tourism research. Emotions are crucial in affecting tourists' experiences and decision-making practices. By breaking down these emotions into multiple dimensions, researchers can delve deeper into the complex interplay of affective states, cognitive

processes, and behavioral outcomes (Hosany et al., 2015). In addition, this approach offers the potential for capturing a wider range of emotions, their intensities, and the complexity of their impact on tourists' decision-making process (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). Understanding the unique contributions of each dimension also allows for a complete and nuanced analysis of the factors that drive actions of tourists. This multifaceted approach not only enriches the theoretical framework of tourist behavior but also offers practical insights for tourism industry stakeholders seeking to optimize their services and marketing approaches grounded in a more precise comprehension of the emotional triggers and their effect on tourists' intentions. Consequently, this approach holds the potential to augment the effectiveness, competitiveness, and sustainability of tourist destinations and businesses (Hosany et al., 2015; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, this study utilized the DES to conceptualize various facets of emotions encompassing joy, love, and positive surprise. Joy, a fundamental emotional state characterized by positive affect, is intrinsically linked to a range of favorable outcomes, which is substantiated by seminal work in affective psychology (Izard, 1977). Notable scholars in the field, such as Izard (1977) and Lazarus (1991), have underscored the salient role of joy in promoting well-being and psychological health, demonstrating its importance in fostering resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms. The dimension of joy encompasses emotional elements like happiness and delight. Joy is linked with favorable results, particularly the attainment of something sought-after or desirable. It emerges when an individual perceives that they are making meaningful advancements toward the achievement of their objectives (Lazarus, 1991; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). In tourism, the pursuit of pleasure may become a central motive for individuals embarking on their travel journeys, constituting a primary intention underlying their tourist activities. This assertion finds support in the scholarly literature, with researchers like Goossens (2000) and Nawijn (2011) illuminating the centrality of pleasure-seeking as a driving force in tourist behavior.

Another emotional dimension, love, represents the fondness that consumers develop toward specific products and brands (Kleine et al., 1995). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have defined brand love as the extent of consumers' fervent emotional connection to a brand. Fournier (1998) suggests that customers establish connections with brands and introduces six primary relationship types, one of which encompasses love. This emotional dimension is not confined solely to the domain of consumer goods and brands; it can also be readily extended to the context of tourist

destinations as tourists often develop a profound affection for certain destinations due to their unique attributes, and the personal connections formed during their visits (Ahuvia, 2005; Albert et al., 2008; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010).

Positive surprise includes emotions like amazement and astonishment and is typically described as a neutral valence emotion that develops through pleasant and unexpected events (Izard 1977; Meyer et al., 1997). In tourist destinations, positive surprises may be elicited by unexpected and delightful encounters, which may include scenic vistas, cultural discoveries, or exceptional service (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010). Tourists frequently look for new and unique experiences, and the element of surprise can enhance the overall appeal of a destination (Hosany et al., 2015; Hosany & Gilbert, 2010).

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Tourists' Emotional Experiences and Destination Loyalty Relationship

In a general context, destination loyalty denotes a tourist's commitment or allegiance to a specific destination, and it is envisioned as the foundation stone of destination brand effectiveness, that governs the destination competitiveness (Krishna & Schwarz, 2014). Destination loyalty as a dependent construct in tourism research has continued to gain attention, and there are two main reasons behind it. The first one is that loyalty generates much-needed sustainable income via positive recommendations from visitors, leading to decreased marketing expenses (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018). The second explanation is that tourists' destination selection is often a complex issue influenced by their novelty-seeking behavior (Chew & Jahari, 2014). This makes it harder for marketers to build destination loyalty among new tourists. Therefore, it is widely agreed upon within the field of tourism research that destination loyalty holds significant importance. The recognition of destination loyalty as a crucial construct highlights its fundamental role in understanding and studying the dynamics of the tourism industry. This consensus implies that researchers and industry professionals alike acknowledge the impact and value of cultivating loyal visitors and repeat customers for destinations (Tasci et al., 2022).

In tourism, the commonly employed measures to assess destination loyalty are the repeat visit intention and the intent to recommend the destination to others through WOM, and several previous researches have

validated the conceptualization of destination loyalty as a combination of revisit and WOM intentions (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018; Chi & Qu, 2008; Meleddu et al., 2015; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In a similar vein, we conceptualized destination loyalty as a combination of the intent to revisit and recommend it to others in our study.

These two measures (i.e., revisit and recommend) capture important aspects of customer loyalty in the tourism domain. Revisit intention reflects the desire of customers to return to a destination for future visits, indicating their satisfaction and positive experiences. It signifies their intention to engage in repeat patronage and further explore what the destination has to offer. On the other hand, WOM intention reflects customers' inclination to suggest the destination to other prospective tourists based on their positive experiences. Positive WOM serves as a powerful marketing tool, as it influences potential travelers' perceptions and decisions (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Lv et al., 2020; Oppermann, 2000). By considering both revisit intention and WOM intention as indicators of destination loyalty, researchers and industry practitioners gain a comprehensive understanding of customers' loyalty behaviors and intentions. This combined conceptualization recognizes the importance of both repeat patronage and the potential influence on others in fostering destination loyalty.

As a research construct, emotions have gained significant attention among researchers due to their association with tourist behavior. Past research has established connections between emotions, and tourist behavior highlighting emotions' positive influence on experience appraisal and loyalty (Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Prayag et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). In certain studies, tourist emotions have been regarded as more effective predictors of purchase/repurchase intention than satisfaction (Koenig-Lewis & Palmer, 2008). Martin et al. (2013) further strengthened this notion by emphasizing the significance of emotions and asserting that emotional satisfaction can accurately predict destination loyalty. Drawing upon data gathered through tourists who visited two distinctive destinations, namely Jordan and Thailand, the study carried out by Hosany et al. (2015) explored the impacts of joy, love, and positive surprise on travelers' behaviors, specifically their willingness to recommend the destination and inclination to revisit. The study highlighted that all the aforementioned emotional dimensions exhibited a favorable and statistically significant impact on travelers' behavioral intentions.

Thus, considering the aforementioned argument, the subsequent hypotheses are put forward:

H1: *Joy positively impacts destination loyalty.*

H2: *Love positively impacts destination loyalty.*

H3: *Positive surprise positively impacts destination loyalty.*

Tourists' Emotional Experiences and Place Identity Relationship

As one of the elements comprising place attachment, place identity found its way in tourism and leisure studies during the 1980s. Place identity is emotional link between individuals and a place, and the meaningful social dealings among them (Schreyer et al., 1981). Place identity denotes the linkage established between an individual and a particular environment, encompassing a range of recollections, understandings, concepts, and associated emotions regarding physical locations and various kinds of surroundings (Proshansky et al., 1983).

Human-place bonds are the outcome of social ties between travelers and the place. Place identity is associated with emotions of belonging to a place and travelers often see the place as part of their extended self (Gursoy et al., 2019). Place identity pertains to visitors' comprehension of the symbolic significance of destinations and their profound internal connection to the place (Hallak et al., 2012). Place identity can manifest in one's perceptions and attitudes regarding the historical or cultural roots of the destination (Gursoy et al., 2019).

The association between the place and people involves several positive emotions like adore, joy, love, delight, and gratification (Hosany et al., 2015; Scannell & Gifford 2010). Prior literature review shows that there is often convergence between emotions and place attachment. Emotions experienced by tourists during their visits to specific places can shape and influence their attachment to those places. Positive emotions including joy and love have been found to foster a stronger sense of connection and attachment to the destination (Hosany et al., 2017). These emotions contribute to the development of positive memories and experiences, which in turn strengthen the emotional connection that exists between individuals and the place they have visited (Goolaup et al., 2018). Considering the earlier argument, it is logical to expect that when tourists' experience positive emotions toward the destination they visit, they will cultivate a heightened sense of attachment and connection to that destination. Hence:

H4: *Joy positively impacts place identity.*

H5: *Love positively impacts place identity.*

H6: *Positive surprise positively impacts place identity.*

Place Identity and Destination Loyalty Relationship

When individuals develop a deep-rooted connection and identification with a place, it fosters a feeling of loyalty and attachment, motivating them to revisit that destination in the future. Place identity serves as a psychological link between individuals and the destination, influencing their desire to maintain and strengthen their relationship with the place through repeat visits (Patwardhan et al., 2020a; Lee & Shen, 2013).

Prior studies have established an association between place identity and loyalty toward a destination. For example, a study by Patwardhan et al. (2020b) examined visitors' loyalty to a destination by examining their emotional connection with the place, specifically focusing on place identity. The study collected data from visitors during the Attur Church Feast in Karkala, India, and found that place identity had an impact on destination loyalty. Lee and Shen (2013) proposed and tested a behavioral model to investigate the correlation between place identity and destination loyalty amongst individuals who visit urban parks for recreational purposes. The empirical findings revealed that place identity was a reliable antecedent of loyalty amongst recreational visitors to urban parks. In research undertaken by Lee et al. (2012), the research delved into the intricate facets that shape festival visitor loyalty towards host destinations. The empirical results of their research unveiled a salient positive association between place identity and visitors' willingness to revisit the destination. Another study conducted by Mechinda et al. (2009) examined the influence of place identity on domestic and international tourists' loyalty toward Chiangmai, Tailand. The research findings substantiated the association between place identity and attitudinal loyalty; however, it was observed that place identity exerted a statistically significant impact solely on the behavioral loyalty of international tourists, with no discernible impact on domestic tourists. In a more contemporary investigation, Plunkett et al. (2019) also confirmed the significant influence of place identity on tourists' behavioral loyalty. Consequently, the following hypothesis is posited:

H7: *Place identity positively impacts destination loyalty.*

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework employed in the study.
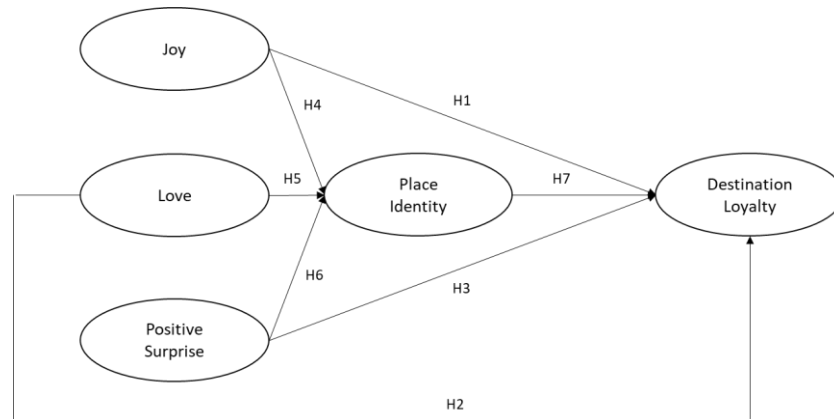
Figure 1. *Research Model*

METHODOLOGY

Study Site

Nepal is a small country situated between India and China, renowned for being home to the Himalayas, which house the world's tallest mountain range, and Mount Everest, the highest peak of the world. Nepal is blessed with hospitable people, diverse culture, and breathtaking beauty, particularly in the form of the majestic Himalayas, which attracts visitors from all over the globe (Thapa, 2004). The tourism sector plays a crucial role as a fundamental pillar of Nepal's economy and is widely recognized as a significant avenue for its development. A noteworthy example of this is the significant role that tourism plays in alleviating poverty in Nepal. Therefore, it can be confidently stated that tourism holds immense potential in Nepal and serves as a catalyst for its overall development.

Nepal began welcoming foreign tourists in 1951, and by 1964, it hosted 9,526 tourists. This number steadily increased over the years, reaching a record of 1.19 million in 2019 before the Covid-19 Pandemic (Napal Tourism Statistics, 2019; Sah et al., 2020). However, on January 23, 2020, Nepal recorded its first case of imported COVID-19, and upon confirming a second imported case on March 23, 2020, the government enforced a nationwide lockdown and ceased all domestic and international air travel (Sah et al., 2020). Nepal resumed standard international airline operations on August 17, 2020, nearly four months following their suspension as a measure to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sharma, 2020). In 2022, Nepal welcomed 614,148 foreign tourists, signifying a notable resurgence in the country's tourism industry when

compared to the figures of 230,085 visitors in 2020 and 150,962 in 2021 (Himalayan News Service, 2023).

Still, with these statistics, Nepal is often regarded as a nation with immense tourism potential, yet it has not fully capitalized on this opportunity. Therefore, nurturing loyalty among past visitors becomes crucial for the economic sustainability and the growth of Nepal.

Sampling and Data Collection

The study data was collected from international tourists who were visiting the five most popular tourist spots in Nepal (i.e., Thamel, Basantapur Darbar Square, Patan Durbar Square, Jamsikhel, and Tribhuwan International Airport). A convenience sampling technique namely, intercept survey technique was used to gather the study data. Graduate students were employed to administer the surveys after they were trained. The survey administrators approached international tourists and provided the self-administered paper-based surveys to the tourists at their respective sites between September 1 and November 30, 2019, which coincided with the peak tourist season in Nepal. Before distributing the surveys, screening questions were employed to confirm that the participants had visited Nepal from other countries, were comfortable communicating in English, and had spent at least five days in Nepal at the time of the survey.

Additionally, the respondents were presented with information about the study's objective and the voluntary nature of their involvement. They were also assured that their answers to survey questions would remain anonymous, and a consent form was made available for them to acknowledge their willingness to participate. In total, 180 surveys were collected, and after eliminating the incomplete surveys, the data analyses included a total of 164 surveys.

While there is no universally accepted technique for evaluating sample size for SEM, scholars frequently consider aspects including the number of observed variables (items) and the parameters estimated. For example, it is generally accepted that a ratio of at least five cases per observed variable is typically considered adequate when latent variables consist of multiple indicators (Bentler & Chou,1987). Additionally, Kline (2015) recommended a ratio of 20 participants per estimated parameter in a research model. The research model in the present study consisted of 22 observed variables (items) and seven estimated parameters. Therefore,

considering the information provided above, the size of the sample was deemed appropriate for data analyses in this study.

Measurements

In the present study, established scales were modified to assess the constructs under investigation. The scales used to measure love, joy, and positive surprise were all derived from the DES (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010) and five-items scales were utilized to assess these constructs. Place identity was assessed by five items scale barrowed from Kyle et al. (2004). Finally, destination loyalty was measured with four items, which was modified from Lee et al. (2008) and Grappi and Montanari (2011). A Likert-type scale with seven points, ranging from a strongly disagree to a strongly agree, was employed to quantify the study variables. A pilot test was completed to affirm the clearness and the comprehensiveness of the study survey.

Data Analyses

The first step of data analysis involved conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (i.e., with Varimax rotation) to identify the underlying dimensions associated with emotional experience. The second phase of the data analysis included performing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the measurement model by integrating the emotional experience dimensions obtained from the EFA with the other variables comprising place identity and destination loyalty. In the last step, the researchers employed covariance based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) as a method to evaluate and validate the study's hypotheses. Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) was utilized to perform both the measurement and structural model analyses.

In this study, the use of CB-SEM appeared to be a more suitable statistical analysis method when compared to partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM). It is crucial to highlight that both approaches are supplementary rather than mutually exclusive, and the selection of a particular method is contingent upon the research objectives. PLS-SEM proves advantageous when the researcher seeks prediction and theory development. Conversely, if there is a necessity to validate and test an existing theory or a conceptual model derived from an existing theory, the suitable method is CB-SEM (Hair et al., 2017).

In this study, employing a confirmatory approach and utilizing pre-validated scales, our primary aim was to examine and affirm a research

model derived from established theories. In other words, our focus was not on prediction, and we did not formulate a theory to structure our research model. Consequently, we opted for CB-SEM as a suitable data analysis approach to assess the study hypotheses.

RESULTS

Respondents' Profile

Table 1 displays the properties of the participants. The results indicated that 56% of the participants were male and 44% of the respondents were female. Around 35% of the participants belonged to the 25-34 age group. Regarding the education level, a bachelor's degree was possessed by 37% of the participants. The respondents were from 31 different nations such as United States (15%) Australia (14%), India (9%), and China (7%). Around 84% of the participants visited Nepal for the first time. Finally, around 67% of the respondents were travelling with friends, partners, or families.

Table 1. *Characteristics of the Sample*

Characteristic		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	92	56
	Female	72	44
	Total	164	100
Age	18-24	40	24
	25-34	58	35
	35-44	29	18
	45-54	12	7
	55-64	9	5
	65 years and older	12	7
	Missing	4	2
	Total	164	100
Education Level	High school or Associate degree	36	22
	Bachelor's degree	61	37
	Master's degree or higher	67	41
	Total	164	100
Country of Origin	United States	25	15
	Australia	23	14
	India	15	9
	China	11	7
	Others	90	55
	Total	164	100
Travel Frequency	First time	138	84
	Second time	14	9
	Third time or more	12	7
	Total	164	100
Membership in a Group	Alone	54	33
	With partners, friends or families	110	67
	Total	164	100

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Measure of sampling adequacy (i.e., Kaiser-Meyer-Oaklin Test) and Bartlett's test were performed to check if the data of the study was appropriate to run exploratory factor analysis. Bartlett's test was found to be significant (i.e., 1689.876), and measure of sampling adequacy value for the KMO test surpassed the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.5. (i.e., Measure of Sampling Adequacy 0.904). The findings verified that the selected study sample was appropriate for conducting factor analysis (Hair et al., 2010).

Items that exhibited loadings ≥ 0.7 were retained for further assessment, and factors that had eigenvalues equal to or exceeding one were considered significant and included in the data analysis (Kaiser, 1960). One positive surprise item (i.e., I feel fascinated) was rejected from further analysis due to its low loading. The outcomes of the EFA produced a model consisting of three factors, and these three factors collectively explained 71.06% of the variance. The first factor, namely Love, accounted for 51.47% of the variance, while the second factor, Joy, explained 12.63%, and finally, the last factor, Positive Surprise, contributed to 6.96% of the total variance. Factors' reliabilities were evaluated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The calculated values for all the factors varied between 0.826 to 0.916. These values surpassed the recommended benchmark of 0.70, illustrating that the scales were deemed reliable for subsequent analyses. (Nunnally, 1959) (Table 2).

Table 2. *Exploratory Factor Analysis*

Factors	Factor Loadings	Eigen Values	Variance Explained
Factor 1 (Love)		7.72	51.47
1. Sense of love	0.845		
2. Sense of affection	0.815		
3. Sense of tenderness	0.787		
4. Sense of warm-hearted	0.733		
5. Sense of caring	0.707		
Factor 2 (Joy)		1.89	12.63
1. Cheerful	0.793		
2. Sense of enthusiasm	0.765		
3. Sense of joy	0.761		
4. Sense of delight	0.710		
5. Sense of pleasure	0.700		
Factor 3 (Positive Surprise)		1.04	6.96
1. Sense of amazement	0.813		
2. Sense of surprise	0.781		
3. Sense of astonishment	0.770		
4. Sense of inspiration	0.735		

Measurement Model

Prior to conducting an examination of the measurement model, an evaluation of skewness and kurtosis values was undertaken to substantiate the normal distribution of the study data. The outcomes revealed that all skewness and kurtosis values adhered to the stipulated range of -2 and +2, thereby affirming the fulfillment of the normality assumption (George & Mallery, 2010).

Table 3. *Measurement Model*

Constructs	Loadings	CR	AVEs
Love *(During my visit to Nepal I feel…)*		0.914	0.682
1. … a sense of love.	0.867		
2. … a sense of affection.	0.892		
3. … a sense of tenderness.	0.818		
4. … a sense of warm-hearted.	0.789		
5. … a sense of caring.	0.750		
Joy *(During my visit to Nepal, I feel…)*		0.917	0.688
1. … cheerful.	0.815		
2. … a sense of enthusiasm.	0.845		
3. … a sense of joy.	0.815		
4. … a sense of delight.	0.846		
5. … a sense of pleasure.	0.826		
Positive Surprise (*During my visit to Nepal, I feel…*)		0.833	0.557
1. … a sense of amazement.	0.713		
2. … a sense of surprise,	0.781		
3. … a sense of astonishment.	0.819		
4. … a sense of inspiration.	0.660		
Place Identity		0.838	0.571
1. I identify strongly with Nepal,	0.895		
2. I have a special connection to Nepal.	0.727		
3. I am attached to Nepal.	0.534		
4. I have lots of fond memories about Nepal.	0.819		
Destination Loyalty		0.923	0.753
1. I will recommend visiting Nepal to other people.	0.898		
2. I will say positive things about Nepal to other people.	0.918		
3. I will revisit Nepal in the future.	0.933		
4. I will encourage friends and relatives to visit Nepal.	0.702		

A CFA was performed to assess the measurement model. Several fit indices were calculated to assess the measurement model fit. As mentioned previously, the CFA analysis included the factors obtained from the EFA (i.e., joy, love, and positive surprise) and the other study constructs including place identity and destination loyalty. The findings from the CFA indicated a reasonable model fit, as evidenced by a significant chi-square statistic (chi-square = 419.121; df = 199), along with other fit indices that met the acceptable criteria with RMSEA (.049), NFI (.90), CFI (.91), and GFI (.91) (Hair et al., 1998). The constructs' reliability was evaluated using Composite

reliability (CR) values. The determined CR standards for all study constructs surpassed the suggested value of 0.70, affirming that all the study constructs were reliable (Table 3).

The convergent validity for all study constructs was achieved because all of the factors' AVE standards were higher than 0.5 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) (Table 3). Furthermore, the square root values of AVEs were larger than the correlations among variables, indicating that discriminant validity was established (Table 4). Furthermore, the HTMT (i.e., heterotrait–monotrait) ratio of correlations was computed to consider the discriminant validity of the variables. The results disclosed that all HTMT values were below 0.85, affirming that there were no concerns regarding discriminant validity in this study (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 4. *Discriminant Validity*

	Destination Loyalty	Love	Joy	Positive Surprise	Place Identity
Destination Loyalty	**.868**				
Love	.502	**.826**			
Joy	.562	.777	**.830**		
Positive Surprise	.562	.455	.589	**.746**	
Place Identity	.569	.611	.571	.587	**.756**

Off-diagonal values = Inter-construct correlations
Values in bold = Squared root of AVEs

Structural Model Analysis

As mentioned earlier, SEM was performed to explore the suggested linear structural connections between the variables in the current study. The findings revealed that the structural model exhibited a favorable fit. The ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom was 2.106, which was below the suggested threshold of 3. Other fit indices demonstrated appropriate values including RMSEA (.50), NFI (.90), CFI (.91) and GFI (.91) (Hair et al., 2014).

The study findings demonstrated that positive surprise positively influenced destination loyalty and place identity (H3 and H6 were supported) and love significantly influenced place identity (H5 was supported). The study results further demonstrated that place identity positively impacted destination loyalty (H7 was supported). However, the study results revealed that joy did not have a statistically significant influence on destination loyalty and place identity (H1 and H4 were rejected) and Love was not associated with destination loyalty (H2 was rejected). The results of hypotheses testing, along with their corresponding path coefficients, are displayed in Table 5 and Figure 2. In addition, variance

explained (i.e., R²) was %49 for place identity and %44 for destination loyalty.
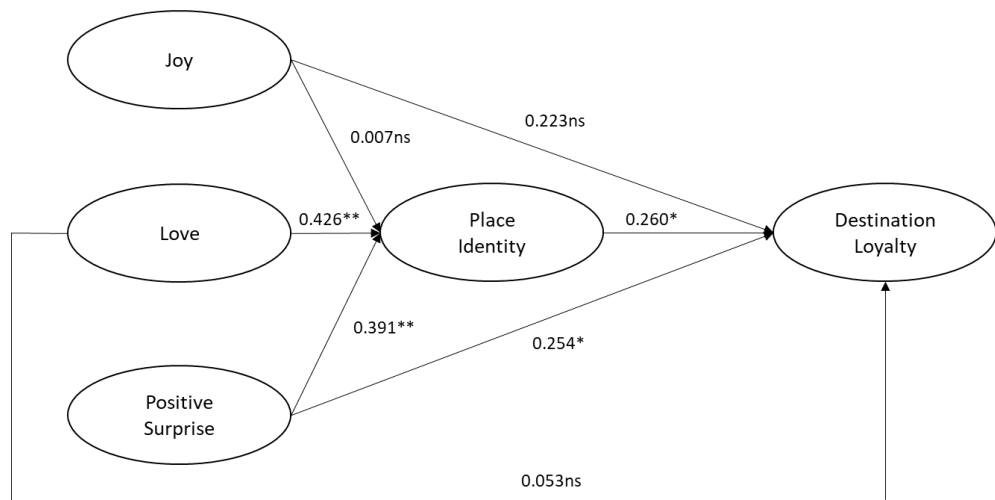
**p< 0.01; *p< 0.05;
"ns" represents non-significant relationships.

Figure 2. *Structural Model*

Table 5. *Hypotheses Testing Results*

Hypotheses	Standardized Path Coefficients
H1: Joy → Destination Loyalty	0.223ns
H2: Love → Destination Loyalty	0.053ns
H3: Positive Surprise → Destination Loyalty	0.254*
H4: Joy → Place Identity	0.007ns
H5: Love → Place Identity	0.426**
H6: Positive Surprise → Place Identity	0.391**
H7: Place Identity → Destination Loyalty	0.260*

**p< 0.01; *p< 0.05.
"ns" represents non-significant relationships.

After finding a not significant (direct) effect of love on destination loyalty, and a significant association between love and place identity and place identity and destination loyalty, we conducted additional analyses to examine if place identity serves as a mediator on the proposed model. In this regard, the indirect effect (i.e., mediation) of place identity on the associations between love and destination loyalty and positive surprise and destination loyalty were tested by using a bootstrap method in AMOS. The results demonstrated that the positive relationships between love and destination loyalty and positive surprise and destination loyalty were mediated by place identity (Table 6).

Table 6. *Indirect Effects*

Paths	Standardized Coefficient	Bootstrap Bias Corrected Confidence Intervals (% 90)		p-value	Result
		Lower	Upper		
Joy → Place Identity → Loyalty	0.002	-0.068	0.121	0.921	No Mediation
Love → Place Identity →Loyalty	0.102	0.018	0.246	0.046	Full mediation
Pos. Surprise → Place Identity → Loyalty	0.111	0.014	0.250	0.036	Partial Mediation

DISCUSSION

This study examined the impacts of emotional experiences of tourists (i.e., joy, love, and positive surprise) on place identity and destination loyalty. In addition, the impact of place identity on destination loyalty was examined. In accordance with prior studies (Prayag et al., 2013; Su & Hsu, 2013), the study findings indicated a positive correlation between positive surprise and place identity and positive surprise and destination loyalty. These findings suggested that when tourists are amazed and/or inspired by the unexpected situations (e.g., positive surprises derived from unexpected kindness from host community or unscheduled special events within the destination), then they are more likely to develop place identity and loyalty toward the destination (Jeong et al., 2022; Lee, 2014). Conversely, the study outcomes demonstrated that joy did not significantly impact place identity and destination loyalty. These findings were contradicting with prior studies (Hosany et al., 2017; Prayag et al., 2013; Su & Hsu, 2013), which explored a positive association between joy and place identity and joy and destination loyalty.

Some interesting findings were discovered regarding the relationships among love, place identity, and destination loyalty. Consistent with previous literature (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Hosany et al., 2017; Prayag & Ryan, 2012), The study findings demonstrated that love had a positive effect on place identity, which consequently positively impacted destination loyalty. Nevertheless, love was not directly associated with destination loyalty. However, a significant indirect association between love and destination loyalty was observed in the current study. More specifically, study results indicated that the association between love and destination loyalty was fully mediated by place identity. These outcomes suggest that tourists' one of the positive emotions, love, may not be sufficient to foster destination loyalty unless they also develop a sense of place identity with the destination.

Theoretical Contributions

This research donates significantly to the theoretical understanding of destination loyalty. Primarily, drawing on the theoretical framework established by Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) M-R Model, this study empirically tested a conceptual framework elucidating the dynamics of destination loyalty. The comprehensive examination yielded affirmative results, affirming the relevance and applicability of the M-R model within the intricate domain of tourist behavior. These findings add to the broader comprehension of the nuanced interplay between emotional experiences and destination loyalty, substantiating the theoretical underpinnings of the M-R Model in the context of tourism research.

As previously delineated, the integration of Hosany and Gilbert's (2010) Destination Emotions Scale (DES) into the M-R model was undertaken to scrutinize the distinct influences of joy, love, and positive surprise on destination loyalty. The empirical findings elucidated the success of incorporating the DES scale into the M-R model, thereby affirming its efficacy and applicability within the overarching framework of the M-R model. These outcomes contribute substantively to the refinement and validation of the M-R model, offering nuanced insights into the intricate dynamics of emotional experiences and their role in shaping destination loyalty.

In addition, the M-R model employed in the present study was extended through the inclusion of an additional place-oriented construct, specifically place identity. This augmentation served to enhance the comprehensiveness of the model, offering a more nuanced and intricate framework for understanding the interplay of emotional experiences and place-related perceptions in the context of tourist behavior. This strategic extension contributes to the refinement and sophistication of the M-R model, aligning it more closely with the intricacies inherent in the dynamics of destination loyalty and place identity.

Furthermore, this research brings attention to the construct of place identity's mediating function in the association between specific emotions and destination loyalty, uncovering new and significant insights. One notable discovery was that the association between love and destination loyalty was fully mediated by place identity. This result indicated that the emotional experience of love toward a destination influences loyalty primarily through the development of a strong sense of place identity. Additionally, this research indicated that place identity played a role of partial mediation in the association between positive surprise and

destination loyalty. Positive surprises experienced by tourists contributed to the growth of a sense of place identity, which in turn influenced their loyalty towards the destination. Although place identity only partially mediated this relationship, it still demonstrates the significant role it plays in shaping tourists' loyalty. These findings highlight the importance of fostering a profound emotional bond with the destination, as it enhances the formation of a strong sense of place identity, ultimately leading to increased loyalty. By uncovering these novel findings, this research expands our comprehension of the intricate interaction among emotions, place identity, and destination loyalty. It highlights the mechanisms through which specific emotions influence loyalty and emphasizes the crucial role of place identity as a mediating factor. These findings contribute to the existing body of literature on destination loyalty and provide constructive insights for researchers that specialize on destination marketing.

Finally, this study addressed a significant research gap identified by previous studies, which called for the testing of an integrated loyalty model in a developing country setting (Prayag et al., 2017; Wang & Hsu, 2010). By proposing and testing a loyalty model, this research lays the groundwork for future investigations to validate and further examine the research model in various developed and developing country contexts.

Practical Implications

On the practical side, the results of the study carry several significant implications for destination marketing experts and destination policy makers. Inevitably, destination loyalty represents a central objective for all stakeholders involved in a destination. This study highlights the significance of incorporating emotions like love and positive surprise as key mechanisms of destination marketing strategies aimed at building destination loyalty. By acknowledging the influential role of these emotions, destination marketers can develop targeted initiatives and campaigns that evoke and amplify these positive emotions in tourists.

For instance, destination marketers can strategically concentrate on curating memorable experiences that evoke profound feelings of love, such as orchestrating special events, cultural festivities, or romantic settings, to enhance visitors' emotional connection with the destination. Additionally, surprise elements can be tactically integrated into the tourism experience, manifesting through unexpected delights like exclusive tours, hidden gems, or novel attractions that captivate and intrigue tourists. By implementing

such strategies, destinations not only foster positive emotions but also create a distinctive and unforgettable identity, contributing to the overall satisfaction and loyalty of visitors.

Moreover, the integration of emotions in destination marketing can contribute to a more holistic comprehension of loyalty toward a destination. By recognizing the function of love and positive surprise, marketers can go beyond traditional measures of satisfaction and highlight the emotional aspects that truly resonate with tourists. This approach aligns with the growing recognition that emotions play a crucial role in shaping customer behavior and the processes involved in decision-making.

The present study also unveiled significance of place identity in the connection between emotions (i.e., love and positive surprise) and destination loyalty. In this regard, destination marketers should focus on cultivating a unique and distinctive identity for their location. This can be accomplished by emphasizing local culture, traditions, history, and natural beauty. By creating a strong sense of place, marketers can enhance the emotional bond among visitors and the destination.

Destination marketers should also emphasize authentic experiences that allow visitors to engage with the local community and immerse themselves in the destination's culture. This can be done through activities such as local festivals, traditional food and beverages, and interactions with local residents. Authentic experiences contribute to the development of place identity and enhance visitor loyalty. Furthermore, destination marketers should utilize storytelling techniques to communicate the unique characteristics and identity of the destination. This can be achieved through various marketing channels, including social media, websites, and promotional materials. Sharing compelling stories about the destination's history, landmarks, and local heroes can help create a sense of place and emotional connection with potential visitors.

Effective collaboration with local stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and community organizations, is imperative in the establishment and sustenance of a robust place identity. Consequently, destination marketers should actively engage these stakeholders in destination branding and marketing initiatives. This inclusive approach, incorporating local perspectives and community involvement, serves to enhance the authenticity and credibility of the place identity. Additionally, destination marketers must meticulously uphold consistency in brand messaging across diverse channels (e.g., destinations' official website, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and touchpoints. The messaging should

harmonize with the established place identity, eliciting the desired emotions and associations. The maintenance of uniform branding contributes to the reinforcement of the place identity, cultivating a distinct and recognizable destination image.

In conclusion, by recognizing the importance of place identity and implementing these practical implications, destination marketers can enhance visitor loyalty, differentiate their destination from competitors, create a memorable and meaningful experience for visitors, cultivate destination loyalty and drive sustainable growth in the tourism sector.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study possesses certain limitations, and further investigation is necessary to validate and expand upon its findings. The current study primarily focused on international tourists visiting Nepal, which, as a destination, attracts its distinct types of tourists. Owing to this, the outcomes may not be generalizable to the tourists visiting other nations. Hence, the replication of this study in different Asian countries is recommended.

Another limitation is that the study assessed only tourists' positive emotional experiences including love, joy, and positive surprise. Future studies, which include negative emotions such as terror, grief, sadness, and anger would provide valuable insights. In addition, the study has concentrated explicitly on place identity due to its association with feelings, memories, and experiences. Scholars are encouraged to investigate the mediating impacts of other variables such as satisfaction, quality, image on tourists' destination loyalty.

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INFLUENCE OF PLACE PERSONALITY OVER RESIDENTS WELCOMING TOURIST THROUGH SELF-CONGRUITY AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

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ABSTRACT

This model targets to specify the welcoming attitudes of residents towards tourists through place personality, place attachment and self-congruity amidst Covid-19 Pandemic. A whole range of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to the variables. Following the First Level Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), the validity and reliability of the variables were evaluated. Then CFA, Structural Equation Modeling was performed with the remaining variables. Results show that the sincerity (21%) and excitement (32%) affect the residents' welcoming attitude through self-congruity and place attachment; and the competence (21%) directly affects the welcoming attitude. While place attachment (11%) directly affects the welcoming attitudes, self-congruity (53%) indirectly affects the welcoming attitudes. Also, self-congruity affects the welcoming attitude through place attachment. Another significant result is the strong effect (45%) of self-congruity on place attachment. Some studies revealed locals adopted a negative attitude towards tourists during the pandemic while others indicated locals adopted positive attitudes towards tourists. Within this context this study, as addressing this controversial issue contribute to the development of more sustainable plans and policies by destination management organizations.

INTRODUCTION

With COVID-19 Pandemic, the economic fragility of the tourism industry increased, and uncertainties disturbed the societal structure and the sector (Bieber, 2022). Despite the particularly significant economic influences of

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the pandemic on tourism, its negative effects on social psychology are also noteworthy. In this regard, pandemic reminded people the idea of mortality. Therefore, pandemic caused societies to become more attached to their own cultural values and traditional worldviews, and thus to adopt a negative attitude towards foreigners. In this context, along with the pandemic, the nationalist tendencies of world nations (Elias et al., 2021), xenophobia (Kock et al., 2019), discrimination towards tourists (Sharma et al., 2022) increased significantly. For example, this discrimination and tension, which first emerged against the Chinese at the beginning of the outbreak, have later turned into a generalized discontent towards foreigners (Sybilla & Cavataro, 2020). A Singaporean youngster was attacked in London due to COVID-19 (BBC, 2020). The applications of many students from Hong Kong who wanted to go to Italy with Bologna were rejected for the same reason (Wassler & Talarico, 2021). In sub-Saharan African countries, western tourists were asked to leave the country if they were carriers (Simoncelli, 2020). These statements indicate that some societies have a negative attitude towards foreigners in sub-Saharan African countries.

One of the sectors where the mentioned violence and discrimination are experienced the furthest is the tourism sector (Wassler & Talarico, 2021). On the other hand, there are various interest groups in tourism. One of these interest groups are the locals. The locals' attitudes towards tourism and tourists are of vital importance for sustainable development of tourism (Khonom et al., 2019). However, global crises such as COVID-19 pandemic have always brought uncertainty, risk and major changes for human beings. Risk, uncertainty and changes have deeply affected human behavior. In times of crisis, people avoid uncertainty, do not take risks, and adopt more protective behaviors. People simplify their decision-making processes with an aim to reduce uncertainty (Leach et al., 2021). In this context, locals do not want to interact with strangers such as tourists in order not to be infected. For this reason, locals differentiate themselves from strangers such as tourists, visitors, and they can treat them inimically. On the other hand, there are also communities that developed hospitable attitudes towards tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Thailand, the most popular destination for Chinese tourists, opened its borders 18 months after the COVID-19 outbreak. Even though Thailand did not close its borders, it did not impose a travel ban and even adopted a hospitable attitude towards tourists; China imposed travel restrictions and quarantines for the duration the epidemic. Thai government warm welcomed Chinese tourists due to the economic benefits of tourism (BBC, 2021). As a result, while some studies

(Kock et al., 2019; Sybilla & Cavataro, 2020; Simoncelli, 2020; Elias et al., 2021; Wassler & Talarico, 2021) revealed that the locals adopted a negative attitude towards tourists during the pandemic; others (Joo et al., 2021; Woosnam et al., 2021; Patwary et al., 2022; Erul et al., 2022) revealed that locals adopted positive attitudes towards tourists. At this point, the results obtained with this study and addressing this controversial issue contribute to the development of more sustainable plans and policies by destination management organizations. In addition, the fact that there have been scarce studies (Armutlu et al., 2021; Erul et al., 2022) that evaluate the attitudes of residents towards tourism in Turkey during the pandemic indicates the importance of this study.

As of 15 May 2021, Turkey has abolished the requirement of showing a negative Covid-19 test results for tourists from many countries. Even in this period, Foreign Affairs Minister's statement, "*We will vaccinate everyone a tourist is likely to see*", drew reaction (BBC, 2021). Economist (2021) stated that tourists, exempted from restrictions to stimulate the tourism sector, enjoy the sea and empty streets. However, it is he stated that Turks who did the same were fined above the minimum wage. Also, closing down the country to residents, while rolling out the red carpet for tourists was not welcomed (Economist, 2021). Moreover, place attachment attitude, as a human and place-oriented concept, not only predicts the residents' welcoming attitudes (Woosnam et al. 2018), but also strengthens it (Patwary et al., 2022). Also, despite so many studies that address the place attachment and residents' welcoming attitudes (Woosnam et al. 2018; Chen & Dwyer 2017; Woosnam et al. 2018; Aleshinloye et al., 2020; Patwardhan, 2020; Ruttanavisanon & Agmapisarn. 2022), there isn't any study that deals with these two variables in tandem during the pandemic. Additionally, Pasquinelli et al. (2021) emphasized the significance of destination personality for the development of destinations in a sustainable manner. Even though the measurement of destination personality based on tourists' perspective is valuable for the destination marketing; the evaluation of the place personality, which is defined as the human qualities attributed to the place based on residents' perspective (Unurlu, 2022), is equally significant for the place for achieving a sustainable competitive edge. This study aiming to measure the residents' place personality attitudes during the pandemic will give the place an opportunity to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Also, although there are many studies measuring the impact of residents' welcoming attitudes on tourism support attitude (Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2009; Woosnam, 2012; Almeida García et al. 2016; Erul et al., 2020; Erul & Woosnam, 2022; Erul et al., 2023), the influence of

the residents' place personality attitudes on welcoming attitudes towards tourists during the pandemic has yet to be studied. These explanations indicate the significance of this study, aiming to measure the locals' welcoming tourists through place personality, place attachment and self-congruity and was carried out in Istanbul in November 2021.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Place Personality

Personality, which is a social indicator, is the unique, idiosyncratic, consistent, and unchanging characteristics of an individual that show how they are perceived by other people (Kırel & Ağlargöz, 2013). Although there are many approaches over the formation of personality, Kluckhohn and Murray (1964) stated that our personality is shaped by biological, cultural and sociological processes. Staw et al. (1986) revealed in his research that personality traits are effective in the way that an individual perceives the world. Tatlılıoğlu (2014), on the other hand, defined personality as the behaviors that determine the way consumers interact with physical and social environments.

Aaker (1997) stated that a brand can have manwise qualities. Fournier (1998) stated that consumers tend to humanize brands. Satıcı (1998) revealed that the products purchased reflect the personality of the consumer. Belk (1988) and Malhotra (1988) stated that consumers express themselves, their idealized personalities, and different aspects of their personalities through brand personality. Cushman (1990) and Elliott (1997) argued that through symbolic meanings, the consumer compensates for the deficiencies in their own personality. All these statements show that consumers associate the products they prefer with symbolic meanings and perceive the products with these symbolic meanings as an extension of their own personality. This attitude causes consumers to approve, appreciate, and respect themselves more (Lau & Ian, 2007).

Brand personality is the attribution of human qualities (sincerity, excitement, competence, exclusivity, rigidity) to brands (Aaker, 1997). Place personality, on the other hand, is based upon Aaker's (1997) brand personality approach. According to the brand personality approach, the consumer expresses their self through the brands they prefer (Wang & Yang, 2008). In the place personality approach, local people express themselves through the place where they live, perceive the place as an extension of their own existence, and thus gain a social identity. In

summary, the human qualities attributed by the consumer to the brand are described as the brand personality (Prayag, 2007); the human qualities attributed to the destination based on tourists' perspective are described as the destination personality (Hankinson, 2004, Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Uşaklı & Baloğlu, 2011); the human qualities attributed to the countries are described as the country personality (d'Astous & Boujbel, 2007); and the human qualities attributed by the locals to the place are described as place personality (Unurlu, 2022). For example; studies revealed that Singapore has a cosmopolitan, young, modern; Asia has a reliable and comfortable (Henderson, 2000); Portugal has a traditional, modern and intellectual (Santos, 2004); Europe has a traditional and intellectual; Wales has an honest, hospitable, romantic and realistic; Spain has a family- friendly; Paris has a romantic personality and lastly London has an open-minded, extraordinary, vibrant and creative (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006).

Self-Congruity

Understanding the 'self' approach is essential for the comprehension of consumer behavior. Therefore, after the 1950s, the concept of 'self' began to be intensively investigated in marketing research. Studies conducted during these periods introduced the concept of symbolic consumption to interpret how people consume (Sop, 2017). The self, which is an important subject of sociology and psychology, is defined as the most basic features that distinguish a person from others. In a deeper perspective, it is the thought of the subject "I" about the object "me" (Sop, 2017). On the other hand, consumers express themselves through the symbolic values of the products they buy, and they perceive these products as an extension of their own selves (Fournier, 1998). The self-congruity theory is formed at this stage. In self-congruity theory, which is a multidimensional theory, (1) true self-congruity refers to the harmony between the image of the individual and the product; (2) ideal self-congruity means the harmony between the idealized image of the individual and the product image; (3) social self-congruity reference to the harmony between the individual's social image and the product image, and (4) the ideal social self-congruity refers to the harmony between the idealized social image of the individual and the image of the product (Uğur, 2017). Self-congruity and brand personality are symbolic benefits that complement each other (Branaghan & Hildebrand, 2011). Also, brand personality is more comprehensive than the self-congruity, the brand personality has been evaluated as an antecedent of the

self-congruity in many studies (Willems & Swinnen, 2011; Sop & Kozak, 2019).

H1: Place personality has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1a: Excitement has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1b: Sincerity has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1c: Competence has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1d: Sophistication has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

H1e: Ruggedness has a statistically significant effect on self-congruity.

Place Attachment

To talk about the existence of an object, first of all, time and space must exist. Place is defined as a specific location where various activities can be done (Karaçor, 2012). Arslan (2009) describes the place not only as a physical space, but also as a psychological and sociological interactive concept. Place attachment comes into existence as a result of the individual experiences in a certain place. Therefore, the individual may adopt the place (insiderness), and feel the sense of belonging to the place (rootedness). Also, it is possible for the individual to become alienated from a place (outsiderness), and to lose the interest to the place (placelessness). The sum of the emotions and thoughts which an individual has developed over time by interacting with their environment can be called place attachment (Güler, 2019). Research on place attachment reveals that people become more attached to place as they get older. Additionally, place attachment attitude formed during childhood is stronger than those formed in adulthood (Sobel, 1990).

Studies show that people's personality traits affect their attitude of attachment. As such, Ocak et al. (2017) indicated a significant relationship between personality and organizational attachment. Malär et al. (2011) and Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021) stated that brand personality affects brand attachment. In regard to place personality, individuals attributing human qualities to the place living in will identify themselves via the place.

H2: Place personality has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2a: Excitement has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2b: Sincerity has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2c: Competence has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2d: Sophistication has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

H2e: Ruggedness has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

Hull (1992) puts forward a correlation between place attachment and self-image. Styvén et al. (2020), Sirgy & Su (2000), Ahn et al. (2013) and Liu et al. (2012) showed an important relation between the place attachment and self-congruity. Chen and Šegota (2016) and Chen et al. (2017) stated that self-congruity is mediator between place attachment and behavioural results. Kumar and Navak (2014) found that self-congruity affects destination attachment through destination satisfaction.

H3: Self-congruity has a statistically significant effect on place attachment.

Residents Welcoming Tourists

Tourism is an environment-based economic activity (Briassoulis & van der Straaten, 2000). For this reason, locals-tourist interaction is inevitable. Locals' perspective on tourism and tourists determines the future of tourism in that region (Tsang et al., 2016). Therefore, it is vital to ensure support from the locals for the regional development of tourism. However, tourism can cause social, environmental, and economic deterioration in the region (Ko & Stewart, 2002). These deteriorations affect the locals at maximum. Thus, the locals can adopt a negative attitude towards tourists. In this context, gaining the support of locals is essential for a sustainable improvement of tourism (Dyer et al., 2007).

Ekinci et al. (2013) and Chen and Šegota (2015) stated individuals who show high self-congruity do not only adopt a more positive attitude

towards the place, but they also support the place more. Joo et al. (2020), on the other hand, revealed that the self-congruity attitude affects residents' welcoming attitudes. Tajfel & Turner (1986) also stated that individuals would be fair and respectful to people and groups that they see as consistent with their own selves.

H4: Self-congruity has a statistically significant impact on residents' welcoming attitude towards tourists.

Gursoy & Rutherford (2004) stated that locals with strong place attachment attitude show tendency to acquire much more positive perspective on the social and economic effects of tourism than those with weaker place attachment attitude. Stylidis et al. (2017) stated that place attachment positively affects the perception towards tourism. In their studies, Woosnam et al. (2018) and Patwardhan et al. (2020) revealed an important relation between place attachment and welcoming attitudes of residents. Aleshinloye et al. (2020) proved that residents welcoming attitudes is mediator variable between place attachment and social distance. All these statements show that there is a significant relationship between place attachment and residents welcoming tourists.

H5: Place attachment has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6: Place personality has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6a: Excitement has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6b: Sincerity has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6c: Competence has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6d: Sophistication has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

H6e: Ruggedness has a statistically significant effect on residents welcoming tourists.

METHOD

Survey Instrument and Construct Measurements

Aaker (1997) brand personality scale was used to measure locals' attitude towards place personality, and this attitude was measured with 42 items. The self-congruity scale was taken from the study of Sirgy et al. (1997), and this attitude was measured with 5 items. Place attachment scale was taken from Lewicka's (2010) study, and this attitude was measured with 12 items. The welcoming attitude of the locals was taken from the study of Woosnam (2012), and this attitude was measured with 4 items.
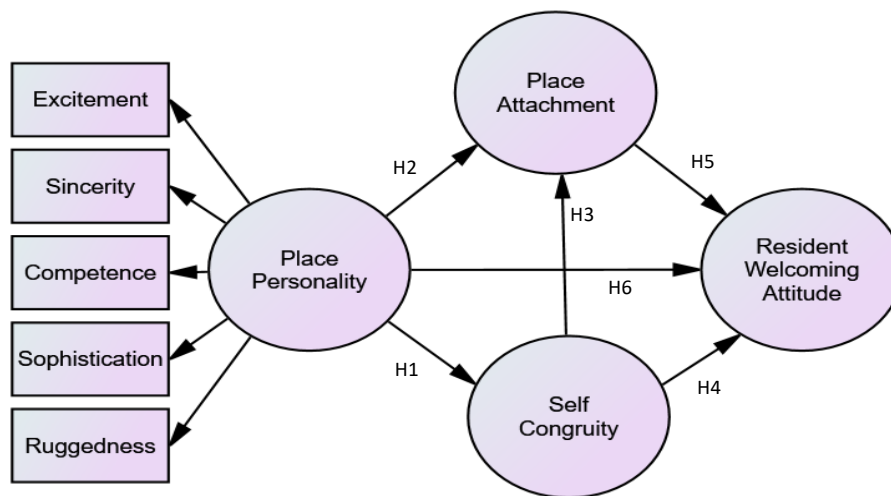
Figure 1. *Conceptual Model*

The conceptual model, being considered as related, is shown in Figure 1. There are four variables in total (place personality, self-congruity, place attachment, residents' welcoming attitudes) in the model developed to measure the residents' welcoming attitudes towards tourists during the COVID-19 epidemic. The questionnaire consists of two parts. There are 6 demographic questions in the first part and 63 attitude items in the second part. So as to measure attitude questions, A 5-point Likert Scale was utilized. In this measure, "1 represents strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree".

Data Collection

The population of the research is the locals living in Istanbul. The most significant rationale of conducting this study in İstanbul is the fact that Istanbul is the 9th most visited city in the world according to Global Destinations index (Mastercard, 2018). For this research conducted in 2021, the population of Istanbul in 2020 was taken as a basis. The population of Istanbul in 2020 is 15 462 452 (TUIK, 2021). As the sampling method,

convenience sampling method was used in which everyone who answered the questionnaire was included in the sampling (Altunışık et al., 2007). The data were collected in November 2021. Due to COVID-19, an e-survey was conducted. Students attending Edirne Social Sciences Vocational School distributed e-surveys prepared on Google forms over their social media accounts to local people living in İstanbul. In order to increase student's motivation, a small addition was made their grades. The surveys were answered only by local people living in İstanbul. A total of 858 analyzable data were obtained.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The model was analyzed by using SEM. 18 hypotheses were tested in total in this study. At this stage, a series of EFA (Explanatory Factor Analyzes) were conducted in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for every scale. In these analyses, Varimax rotation method was used in order to maximize the factor variance. Items with factor loading values below .50 and showing tendency to overlapping were removed from the analysis. Following the EFA, first level CFA was performed for unidimensional variables. Then, both first level CFA and second level CFA have been made for multidimensional variables in AMOS. Then, validity and reliability of the structures in the research model were evaluated. Following CFA, SEM was performed with the remaining variables. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the participants included in the study.

In the factor analysis carried out for the place personality scale, items with a less than 0.50 factor loading were excluded from the analysis. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that there were 3 components with an eigenvalue above 1. The contribution of these three factors to the total variance was determined as 66.334%. In the factor analysis carried out for resident welcoming tourist, there was no item with a less than 0.50 factor loading. There was 1 dimension with an eigenvalue above 1. The contribution of this dimension to the total variance was 71.775%. In the factor analysis carried out for the self-congruity, there was no item with a less than 0.50 factor loading. There was 1 dimension with an eigenvalue above 1, and the contribution of this dimension to the total variance was 71.309%. In the factor analysis for the place attachment scale, there was no item with a less than 0.50 factor loading. Also, it was determined that there was 1 dimension with an eigenvalue above 1 and the contribution of this dimension to the total variance was 60,309%.

Table 1. *Sample Profile*

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	433	50,5
	Male	425	49,5
	Total	858	100,0
Age	29 and below	315	36,5
	30-59	437	51,5
	60 and above	106	12,0
	Total	858	100,0
Length of stay	1-10 years	192	22,4
	11-20 years	370	43,1
	21-30 years	234	27,3
	31-40 years	45	5,2
	41-50 years	17	2,0
	Total	858	100,0
Occupation	Public sector	259	30,0
	Private sector	236	27,5
	Freelance	51	6,5
	Retired	162	18,5
	Nonworking	150	17,5
	Total	858	100,0
Education	Elementary education	67	7,8
	Secondary education	200	23,3
	High school	380	44,3
	University	211	24,6
	Total	858	100,0

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

In Table 2, the validity and reliability of the scales in the research model were evaluated. In the table, the standard coefficients of the expressions obtained as a result of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Cronbach's Alpha values are given. Internal consistency of the structures was tested with the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The Cronbach' Alpha values of the structures are above the threshold value (> 0.70). Also, according to the table, CR values are above 0.80, and AVE values are above 0.50. These results indicate the convergent validity of the structures (Hair et al., 2010). Fornell & Larcker (1981) stated that CR values (> 0.70) should be higher than AVE values (> 0.50) for the validity and reliability of the structures. All these statements point to the validity and reliability of the measurement. In order to evaluate discriminant validity, MSV and ASV

values of the scales were calculated. Hair et al. (2010) stated that MSV and ASV values of the scales should be greater than AVE values for the discriminant validity. According to Table 2, the MSV and ASV values of the scales are higher than the AVE values. This indicates that discriminant validity is achieved and the variables are apart from each other. In order to evaluate whether the multicollinearity problem exist, VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) scores were considered. The condition of the VIF scores equal to or greater than 10 indicate that there is a multicollinearity problem (Hair et al., 2010). According to Table 2, the VIF scores of the explanatory variables are less than 10. This shows that there is no multicollinearity problem in the analysis.

Table 2. *Reliability and Validity of the Model*

Constructs and Variable	Std. Coeff.	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	VIF	Cronbach Alpha
Place Personality							
1. Excitement		.927	.586	.159	.139	1.336	.940
Spirited	.883						
Cool	.875						
Exciting	.858						
Up-to-date	.724						
Unique	.723						
Imaginative	.709						
Young	.702						
Trendy	.698						
Contemporary	.681						
2. Sincerity		.919	.612	.209	.107	1.362	.915
Sincere	.875						
Honest	.820						
Original	.806						
Real	.787						
Family-oriented	.759						
Wholesome	.724						
Down-to-earth	.681						
Friendly	.668						
3. Competence		.900	.602	.072	.053	1.124	.931
Successful	.873						
Corporate	.859						
Reliable	.835						
Leader	.731						
Confident	.672						
Hard-working	.656						
Self-Congruity		.925	.711	.430	.129	1.988	.898
This place mirrors who I am	.897						
The personality of this place is congruent with how I see myself	.892						
The image of this place consistent with my identity	.854						

If this place were a person, we would have the same personality with that.	.832						
People who live this place have the same personality with me.	.732						
Place Attachment		.901	.604	.430	.207	2.058	.862
I miss it when I am not here	.861						
It is a part of myself	.817						
I am proud of this place	.776						
I don't like this place (-)	.752						
I leave this place with pleasure (-)	.733						
I would not like to move out from here	.716						
Welcoming Attitude		.909	.713	.108	.068		.855
I am proud to have visitors come to this place	.888						
I feel the community benefits from having visitors in this place	.863						
I appreciate visitors for the contribution they make to the local economy.	.814						
I treat visitors fair in this place.	.812						

Following the validity and reliability tests regarding the measurement, the conceptual model was tested with Structural Equation Modeling. In Table 3, fit indices of the tested model are given. According to the table, the model fits the data. In Table 4, the structural equations obtained as a result of SEM are given. According to the table, when the regression coefficients showing the relationships between the structures and the significance values of these coefficients are examined, that all paths are seen to be significant *(p < .000)*.

Table 3. *Studies Fit Indices of the Model*

Chosen criterion	Good fit	Acceptable fit	Fit value of model	Reference
χ^2 (CMIN)	-	-	-	
χ^2/df (CMIN/df)	≤ 3	≤ 4-5	.334	(Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.89-0.85	.999	(Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)
CFI	≥ 0.97	≥ 0.95	.989	(Hu & Bentler, 1999; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)
RMSEA	≤ 0.05	0.06-0.08	.060	(MacCallum et al., 1996; Hu & Bentler, 1999)
NFI	≥ 0.95	0.94-0.90	.999	(Kline, 2015; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)
RMR	≤ 0.05	0.06-0.08	.003	(Kline, 2015)

According to Table 4 and Figure 2, the excitement accounts for 40% of the variance in self-congruity, the sincerity explains 36% of the variance in self-congruity, and the competence explains 27% of the variance in self-congruity *(p<0.000)*. The excitement explains 38% of the variance in place

attachment, the sincerity explains 44% of the variance in place attachment, and the competence explains 12% of the variance in place attachment (*p<0.000*). The excitement explains 32% of the variance in residents' welcoming attitudes; The sincerity explains 21% of the variance in residents' welcoming attitudes; The competence explains 21% of the variance in residents' welcoming attitudes (*p<0.000*). While self-congruity a explains 45% of the variance in place attachment (*p<0.000*); place attachment explains 12% of the variance in residents' welcoming attitudes (*p<0.003*). One of the conclusions of the study is that self-congruity does not have a direct effect on residents' welcoming attitudes but has an indirect effect. Self-congruity influences residents welcoming attitudes via place attachment.

Table 4. *Structural Equations*

Structural Equations	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects	T Value	P Value	Supp.
Self -Congruity ← Excitement	.403	-	.403	14.741	***	Yes
Self -Congruity ← Sincerity	.359	-	.359	13.138	***	Yes
Self -Congruity ← Competence	.265	-	.265	9.705	***	Yes
Place Attachment ← Excitement	.200	.183	.382	7.452	***	Yes
Place Attachment ← Sincerity	.279	.163	.442	10.638	***	Yes
Place Attachment ← Competence	-	.120	.120	-	-	No
Welcoming ← Excitement	.278	.045	.323	8.209	***	Yes
Welcoming ← Sincerity	.157	.052	.209	4.503	***	Yes
Welcoming ← Competence	.200	.014	.214	6.360	***	Yes
Place Attachment ← Self-Congruity	.454	-	.454	15.228	***	Yes
Welcoming ← Place Attachment	.117	-	.117	3.013	.003	Yes
Welcoming ← Self-Congruity	-	.053	.53	-	-	No
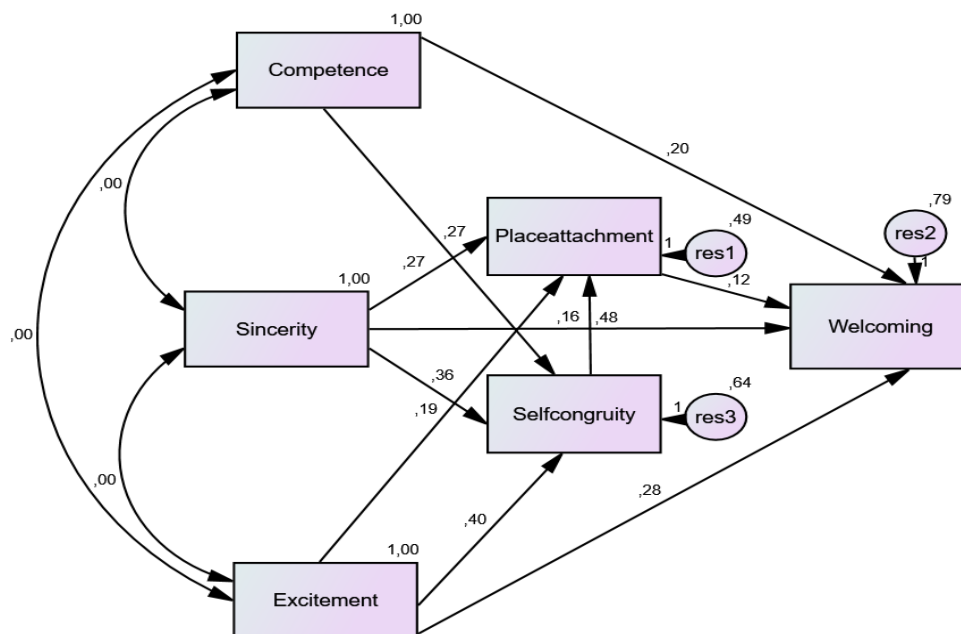
Figure 2. *Model Testing*

CONCLUSION

Discussion of the Findings

Results of this study, which aims to measure the welcoming attitudes of the locals towards tourists amidst COVID-19 pandemic via residents' place personality, self-congruity, and place attachment attitudes, are as follows:

Regarding the place personality, which is one of the predictive variables, locals' excitement, sincerity and competence attitudes towards place formed. Locals' place personality attitude did not form in the ruggedness and sophistication dimensions of the place personality. Locals perceive the place as bold, cool, exciting, modern, unique, creative, new, contemporary, and up-to-date in terms of the excitement dimension of the place personality. Locals describe the place as sincere, honest, authentic, realistic, family-oriented, reliable, candid, and friendly as to the sincerity dimension of the place personality. For the competence dimension of the place personality, locals described the place as successful, institutional, reliable, leader, confident, and hardworking. In this study, locals described Istanbul as exciting, friendly and competent. These results are within a parallelism with other studies in the literature (Şahin & Baloglu, 2011; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Unurlu & Uca, 2017).

Locals' self-congruity attitudes, which have been formed, indicate that the locals' self-image and the place image match. In other words, there are some similarities between the place and the locals. The significant relationship between place personality and self-congruity shows that the locals' self-congruity attitude is shaped by their perception of the place. Excitement, sincerity and competence dimensions are effective in shaping of the self-congruity attitude of locals, respectively. Consequently, excitement dimension of place personality explains 40%, the sincerity explains 35%, and the competence explains 27% of self-congruity attitude. In terms of place personality, people describing the place as exciting, sincere, and competent contend that the place they live in reflects their own personalities. In other words, people who describe place as exciting, sincere, and competent think that place image and their self-image match. Pan et al. (2017) have already stated that there is a significant relationship between tourists' self-images and the destination personality. Matzler et al. (2016) stated the brand personality is the precursor of the self-congruity, and that the self-congruity attitude forms when the personality of the destination and the tourists' own personalities/self-images match. Su and Reynolds (2017) stated that hotel brands with the image of excitement and sincerity

affect the self-congruity attitude of tourists positively. These explanation shows that results are consistent with previous studies (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Kılıç & Sop, 2012; Matzler et al., 2016; Pan et al., 2017; Su & Reynolds, 2017).

The sincerity dimension of place personality explains 44%, and the excitement dimension explains 38% of place attachment. The effect of the sincerity dimension on place attachment is stronger than the excitement dimension. Upon place attachment, competence dimension does not pose a direct significant effect; but has an indirect significant one. In terms of sincerity attitude, locals who describe the place as sincere (honest, authentic, realistic, family-oriented, reliable, candid, and friendly) feel that they belong to the place, are proud of the place where they live, describe themselves as part of the place and miss the place they live when they are away. Locals, who describe the place as bold, cool, exciting, modern, unique, creative, new, contemporary, and up-to-date in terms of excitement, feel that they belong to the place, are proud of the place where they live, describe themselves as part of the place, and miss the place they live in when they are away. Accordingly, Huang et al. (2017) found that the excitement and charm dimensions of destination personality have a significant effect on destination attachment. All these statements show that the locals' feelings, thoughts, and perceptions towards themselves are transferred to the place, thus creating an emotional bond with the place. The more the locals' self-perception and the feelings and thoughts attributed to the place match, the stronger the locals' attachment to the place will be. In accordance, Sedikides and Strube (1995) stated that human beings act with the motivation to feel good and maintain their self-esteem. Huaman-Ramirez et al. (2021) stated that destination attachment can be formed through destination personality. One of the most intriguing results gained through the study is the strong effect of sincerity on place attachment. Individuals who attribute qualities such as honesty, authenticity, being realistic, family-oriented, reliable, candid, and friendly to the place they live in have a stronger place attachment attitude, and they also embrace the place more and see the place as a part of their own selves.

Excitement explains 32%, sincerity explains 20%, and competence explains 21% of the residents' welcoming attitudes. In terms of excitement dimension, those who describe the place as bold, cool, exciting, modern, unique, creative, new, contemporary, and up-to-date are pleased that the tourists visit the place and they treat tourists fairly. Also, they think that tourists contribute to the local economy. In terms of sincerity dimension, locals who describe the place as honest, authentic, realistic, family-oriented,

reliable, candid, and friendly are pleased with the visiting of tourists to the place where they live, and they appreciate that tourists contribute to the local economy. Also, they treat tourists fairly. In terms of competence attitude, locals, who describe the place as successful, institutional, reliable, leader, self-confident, and hardworking, are pleased with the arrival of tourists to the place where they live, think that tourists contribute to the local economy, and treat tourists fairly. These results are consistent with other studies in the literature (Moghavvemi et al., 2017; Kumar & Nayak, 2018). Also, there is only one research investigating the place personality and residents welcoming tourist in tandem (Unurlu, 2022). As a result of this research conducted in Edirne, it was found that excitement and sincerity dimensions of place personality positively affected residents welcoming tourists. However, the sophistication dimension of place personality negatively affected residents welcoming tourists. As a result of this research conducted in İstanbul, it has been determined that the residents' excitement, sincerity and competence attitudes formed, but residents' ruggedness and sophistication attitudes did not form. In this study, as in other study, excitement, sincerity and competence dimensions of place personality positively correlated with residents welcoming tourists.

Place attachment attitude explains 12% of residents' welcoming attitudes. In other words, individuals who feel they belong to the place they live in are proud of it, describe themselves as a part of it, and miss it when they are away are pleased with tourists' arrivals to the place. Also, they treat tourists fairly, and think that tourists contribute to the local economy. These results are consistent with other studies in the field (Kyle & Chick, 2004; Woosnam et al., 2018; Aleshinloye et al., 2020). Additionally, self-congruity attitude does not have any direct significant effect on residents' welcoming attitudes, but does have indirect effect. Because the total effect of self-congruity attitude on residents' welcoming attitudes is *.53*. This result indicates that self-congruity does not affect residents' welcoming attitudes directly, but affects indirectly. This result is consistent with other studies in the literature (Joo et al., 2020; Hajar et al., 2021).

Theoretical Implications

This study, drawn upon the theory of anthropomorphism (Guthrie, 1997), self-congruity theory (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1998), and emotional solidarity theory (Durkheim, 1992), has shed new light on the role of place personality on self-congruity, place attachment, and residents' welcoming attitudes. While previous studies on place personality, which is based on the theory of anthropomorphism,

measured the place personality' effect on welcoming attitude through the positive and negative effects of tourism, it is the first study measuring the residents' welcoming attitudes towards tourists during the pandemic process, based on place personality, self-congruity and place attachment.

In terms of sustainable tourism, research on the residents' place personality attitude is a very limited in the tourism literature (Unurlu, 2022). This research has determined that place personality is intimately related to place attachment, self-congruity and residents' welcoming attitudes. In other words, place personality strengthens the effect of place attachment, self-congruity and residents' welcoming attitude. All these explanations indicated that the place personality construct is a strong predictor. Considering residents are the most important interest group in sustainable tourism (Choi & Murray, 2010), these findings of this research on local people's place personality attitude can be a reference for future studies. On the other hand, for the first time, this research was conducted during the pandemic, measured the welcoming nature, which is a sub-dimension of the Emotional Solidarity Scale (Woosnam et al., 2009), applying quantitative research methods upon the perspective of locals. Thus, this study has enlarged the horizon of the Emotional Solidarity by associating it with the attachment theory, self-congruity theory and anthropomorphism theory.

Additionally, during the pandemic, the hospitality attitude of the locals towards tourists in Istanbul was determined as positive. This result is consistent with SET. According to this theory, as long as the tourism costs do not exceed the tourism benefits, the residents' attitudes towards tourists will be positive (Perdue et al., 1990). Warm welcoming attitudes of residents living in İstanbul indicates that tourism costs do not exceed the tourism benefits during the pandemic.

Managerial Implications

First of all, the results show that the most outstanding personality traits of Istanbul are excitement, sincerity, and competence. In the integrated marketing communication to be made for Istanbul, these features of the city should be brought to the fore, and the residents' attitudes about excitement, sincerity, and competence should be strengthened. In terms of excitement, the modern, unique, creative, contemporary, and bold features of Istanbul should be highlighted. In this sense, opportunities and facilities that make the residents say "I really live" should be provided to them, and these opportunities should be introduced with integrated marketing

communication. For example, Vialand with its concerts and cultural events, Istanbul Sea Life Aquarium also called Turkuazoo, Legoland Discovery Center, Mio Park entertainment center, Pirate Island situated in Tuzla, Escapist, Museum of Illusions, Xtrem Aventures Istanbul, entertainment and excitement-themed places such as VR Hause and Snowpark should be highlighted in marketing communications. In addition, investments in excitement-themed outdoor sports activities such as parasailing, paragliding, rock climbing, surfing, scuba diving, buildering, mountain biking, Wingsuit flights and Creeking should be encouraged. In terms of sincerity, the qualities of Istanbul such as honest, authentic, realistic, family-oriented, reliable, candid, and friendly should be highlighted, and investments should be encouraged in this direction. Also, city-specific themes of food, beverage, culture, friendliness, affordability, livability, hospitality, and happiness should be handled more in integrated marketing communications. In terms of competence, the city's successful, institutional, reliable, leader, confident, and hardworking qualities should be highlighted and emphasized in integrated marketing communications. Successful, safe, technical, and institutional features of the investments in the city should be emphasized and integrated marketing communication should be made in this direction.

The most striking result obtained as a result of this study is that despite COVID-19 pandemic, locals' welcoming attitudes towards tourists have formed. Results show that the locals living in Istanbul developed self-congruity attitudes. For the locals, Istanbul has some symbolic traits such as excited, sincere, and competent, and the locals express their identity through these symbols. In this respect, Istanbul is a place of symbolic value for the locals. In terms of self-congruity attitude, locals want to achieve status via the place they live in. Therefore, both local governments and destination management organizations should provide the residents with the excitement, sincerity, and competence they seek, both with public facilities and private sector investments. In this regard, the market should be segmented in terms of place personality. Different products, different prices, different place (attractions) and different promotions should be used for each market segment.

In terms of the significant effect of place personality on place attachment, the themes of excitement, sincerity, and competence should be brought to the fore in the city in order to increase the place attachment of the residents. Emphasizing these features of public services and private investments will also contribute to the locals' place attachment attitude. In terms of the significant effect of place personality on residents' welcoming

attitudes, locals who describe the place as exciting, sincere, and competent show positive attitudes towards tourists and tourism. In this context, the excitement, sincerity, and competence attitudes of the locals should be reinforced and the awareness of the locals about tourism should be increased. In terms of the effect of place attachment on residents' welcoming attitudes, increasing locals' place attachment levels will also improve locals' positive attitudes towards tourism and tourists. "Consciousness of a resident of Istanbul" should be developed in order to increase the locals' attitude towards place attachment, and various activities should be organized to reinforce this awareness. In addition, some investments should be made on infrastructure and superstructure, recreation facilities, and measures to increase the quality of life of the locals should be taken and arrangements should be made regarding recreation areas where the locals can spend time together. Fair conduct should be ensured between locals and tourists in accessing resources in the city, and a win-win strategy should be created in the interaction between locals and tourists.

In Istanbul, as a well-branded city, both tourism planners and destination management organizations need to make efforts to encourage emotional solidarity between tourists and locals. In this regard, interactions between locals and tourists should be encouraged through special events, and social distance should be reduced. Such special events can be held in historical and cultural areas specific to the destination, or within accommodation establishments. Through these activities, common values and behaviors can be created between locals and tourists. As a result, to ensure the sustainability of tourism in Istanbul, the personality characteristics of the local people, their self-concordance and their commitment to the destination should be taken into account, and emotional solidarity between the local people and the tourists should be encouraged in this regard. These incentives will positively affect the hospitality attitude of the local people towards tourists and contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in the destination.

Limitations and Future Research

For this study, which was carried out in Istanbul during the COVID-19 pandemic, convenience sampling method in which everyone who responded to the survey was included in the sample was used as the data collection method. However, the data obtained by simple random sampling method has a higher ability to represent the population. Therefore, future studies can use simple random sampling method for this research model. In addition, future studies can also examine this conceptual model in terms

of demographic variables such as age, income, occupation, gender, family size. Also, dramatic results can be obtained from the data to be collected from the participants, especially those with and without tourism-related occupations.

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AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH TO REVEAL THE HABITS, MOTIVATIONS, AND TENDENCIES OF GENERATION Z TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AS A LEISURE ACTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z's (Gen-Z) technology-centered lifestyles have resulted in a departure from traditional behavior patterns, particularly in their use of social media platforms (SMPs) for leisure activities. In this regard, an exploratory, qualitative research approach was adopted in the present study, which deeply understands the perceptions and feelings of Gen-Z members' engagement with the SMPs for their leisure pursuits. Inductive content analysis was performed on the data collected from 107 Gen-Z member university students selected using convenience sampling. The perspectives and internal and external motivations of Gen-Z members towards producing content on SMPs are discussed within the scope of social comparison and social presence theories, while their views on whether to perform recreational activities are built on the theoretical foundations of leisure constraints (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural) and facilitators. Gen-Z behaviors regarding joining or not joining groups were framed based on social media engagement (behavioral, affective, and cognitive) and leisure constraints. The results obtained will lead to the opening of new discussion areas for the creation of modern marketing strategies for the recreation industry, marketing organizations, and public institutions and organizations.

INTRODUCTION

In the past 25 years, social media platforms (SMPs) have profoundly reshaped how we interact and form relationships, providing instant communication across the globe with friends, family, and professional

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contacts (McCarthy et al., 2023). These platforms offer immediate global communication among friends, family, business associates, and social groups, facilitating interactions beyond traditional networks and providing diverse information including leisure activities (Da Mota & Pickering, 2020). At the same time, platforms have become central to our lives as crucial channels through which people spend their leisure time intensively. SMPs can highlight the unique features of destinations and motivate visitors to share attractive travel experiences, which can lead to increased visitor density or overcrowding in regions. In addition, SMPs can highlight the unique features of destinations and motivate visitors to share attractive travel experiences, which can lead to increased visitor density or overcrowding in regions (Song & Abukhalifeh, 2022), while encouraging community members to develop content, create value, and interact effectively with other community members (Nusair et al., 2024). Da Mota and Pickering (2020) attributed the surge in popularity of recreational activities in protected areas to shared content, including visuals, narratives, and geolocation details.

Cao et al. (2024) emphasize that people mainly engage with SMPs such as TikTok for entertainment, social connection, and to capture and share special moments. As such, in the present research, we intended to scrutinize the perceptions, behaviors, and motivations of Gen-Z members towards recreational activities by focusing on members of Gen-Z who use SMPs intensively and actively. Gen-Z is a digital generation that leads the way by voluntarily participating in various online platforms, always online, and is connected by using social media applications. Gen-Z's exposure to technology pushes members of the generation to actively use SMPs to perform functions such as communicating with their families and friends, making travel decisions (Rahimi & Stylos, 2022), and obtaining information about various topics (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). In addition, Gen-Z trusts SMPs and can be influenced by intense exposure to attractive visuals on social media and advertisements (Rahimi & Stylos, 2022). Since Gen-Z is a hyper-connected generation with different travel arrangements and needs, investigating their usage habits, motivations, values, attitudes, and behavior patterns of SMPs towards recreational activities using SMPs are not only a significant contribution to the literature but also a vital necessity for the recreation industry as a rising consumer segment. The growth of this tourist/recreationist segment requires the development of new models based on the implementation of a visually appealing and integrated cross-device marketing strategy (Rahimi & Stylos, 2022) rather than traditional consumer marketing strategies (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). In this

respect, this study aims to shed light on the usage habits, behavioral tendencies, and motivations of Gen-Z based on their leisure time activities on SMPs and to pioneer the creation of modern marketing strategies by revealing their behavioral patterns on SMPs as an important consumer segment. Considering that Gen-Z will be the main consumer of tourism products in the future (Nowacki et al., 2023), it is crucial to reveal the habits, motivations, and tendencies of the generation members in using SMPs in a holistic manner to create new marketing strategies and make the necessary plans (Uysal, 2022; Tanase et al., 2023). As underlined by Robinson and Schanzel (2019), generation-based research that identifies different consumer groups and their specific needs and desires plays a key role in the development of marketing strategies for businesses and industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SMPs

Social media, one of the most powerful online networking tools, has been integrated into real-world social and economic life (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Social media is an online setting (Zhao et al., 2018) or effective marketing channel (Ho et al., 2022) that provides users with an ultimate venue for engagement through features such as participation, open communication, dialogue, community building, and connection (Zhao et al., 2018). It is also acknowledged as an innovative Internet-based information-sharing platform that allows users to create and share content through social interactions (Ghaderi et al., 2023). The most important feature of social media is that it offers new technological frameworks (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, Facebook) that enable users to create and share their own media instead of being passive media consumers (Cox & Paoli, 2023). Additionally, Cohen (2011) compiled the characteristics and nature of the term from the definitions of social media as follows: a) it depends on information technology, as social media encompasses online tools, applications, and platforms; b) social media affects human behavior and real lives because it directs users to create a virtual community by using cross-platforms; and c) social media are important communication channels that enable the interaction and cooperation of participants (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

In today's digital age, social media is indispensable for information exchange, socialization in virtual spaces, and real-time life-sharing (Naeem & Ozuem, 2022; Zhao et al., 2018). These platforms include online forums, blogs, chat rooms, discussion boards, and social networking sites such as

Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube (Yağmur, 2020; Ghaderi et al., 2023). These online platforms allow people with similar interests to come together, discuss common problems and issues, obtain information, and offer support on a variety of topics, such as health, recreation, and vocational and technical issues (Bronstein et al., 2016). SMPs are frequently used to share geolocation data associated with images, text, and routes for recreational activities (Da Mota & Pickering, 2020). As social media is seen as a new way for people to connect socially, it has turned into fulfilling the mission of a completely online environment built on the contributions and interactions of participants rather than a new way of communicating (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). On the flipside, on social media, tourists/recreationists share not only information-related features (price, weather, tourist attractions) (Ho et al., 2022) but also experiences that refer to the subjective evaluations of individuals and the experience of activities. Information, emotions, dreams, and fantasies related to a trip or recreational activity are also included in this experience and are shared through photos, videos, emoticons, and other linguistic markers on network platforms (Zhao et al., 2018).

The SMPs play a vital role in the decision-making of tourists/recreationists (Chu et al., 2020; Yağmur, 2020; Aktaş et al., 2024), word-of-mouth communication, and travel recommendations (Cheng & Edwards, 2015). Whereas SMPs enable travelers to discover new destinations/activities, it influences behavior in triggering or discouraging visits/activities to the destination. Furthermore, SMPs also affect collective responses to disasters, including coordination of activities in crisis situations, communication with society, and communication between citizens, while reducing the risks of participating in the activity/exploration of the destination (Aktaş et al., 2024). However, the use of SMPs can have a positive impact on users' sense of social connectedness by creating social capital, disseminating innovative ideas (Jabeen et al., 2023), and contributing to personal representation, while users making negative comparisons with themselves (McCarthy et al., 2023) cause many negative experiences such as social media addiction, fatigue, exhaustion, fear of missing opportunities, and fake news (Jabeen et al., 2023).

Gen-Z

Generation Z, commonly known as Gen-Z, represents a new sociological cohort that is deeply influenced by information technology, the Internet, and social networks (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). Generation Z is designated by a plethora of monikers, including iGeneration, Online

Generation, Post-Millennials, Gen Tech, and others; each epithet, such as Generation C—derived from "constantly clicking" and "connectivity"—and Generation R—indicative of responsibility—captures a distinct facet of this cohort's identity (Uysal, 2022). In addition to these labels, the names "postmillennial", "centennials", "pivotals" or "digital natives" are also used for members of Gen-Z (Robinson and Schanzel, 2019). There is a debate in the body of knowledge on the beginning and ending year of Gen-Z (Viţelar, 2019; Goh & Okumus, 2020; Jeresano & Carretero, 2022; Giachino et al., 2023; Singh & Sibi, 2023), leading to a flexible birth year range for generation membership. Nonetheless, there is scholarly agreement that the birth years spanning 1995 to 2012 delineate the Generation Z demographics (Fisu et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Generation Z is distinguished by attributes, such as technological adeptness, flexibility, intelligence, and cultural tolerance, underpinning their robust global interconnectivity and significant virtual engagement (Fisu et al., 2024). In this regard, Gen-Z witnesses a series of facts in virtual areas, from political situations to natural disasters/environmental crises, social movements, war, and terrorism (Çalışkan, 2021). These global events affect the collective consciousness of Gen-Z and cause the development of human values, such as universality, helpfulness, self-direction, success, and security in generation members (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). Additionally, Generation Z is recognized for its open-mindedness and affinity for ad hoc culture, although there may be diminished sensitivity to privacy concerns. Nevertheless, they are broadly acclaimed for their compassion, community spirit, independence, self-affection, determination, ambition, preparedness, and prudence (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021).

Gen-Z has a life intertwined with the Internet, as it grew up with instant global connections provided by tools such as smartphones, tablets, wearable devices, and SMPs (Viţelar, 2019), and they see the Internet as an inseparable part of their lives (Monaco, 2018). Gen-Z is a generation that stays up to date or follows the current issues spread through mass media or the Internet and is competent in using the Internet for entertainment, learning, and business purposes (Fisu et al., 2024). Additionally, GenZ is conceptualized in connection with mobility, social networks, and digitalization (İlhan et al., 2022; Jeresano & Carretero, 2022) because they have grown up with access to digital technologies, and they skillfully use these tools (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022) to collect information from various sources, analyze it, and draw meaningful conclusions (Singh & Sibi, 2023).

Gen-Z is seen as a content creator because it uses social media and instant Internet connection to access resources (Vitelar, 2019), and they heavily prefer SMPs to better connect with their friends and family. This situation causes both Gen-Z members to spend more time on SMPs and Internet tools, and traditional forms of communication to change into online communication relationships, which have become a new norm (Uysal, 2022). Gen-Z not only uses social media for communication but also for creative purposes, work, learning (Fisu et al., 2024), and recreational activities. Uysal (2022) underlines that the members of Gen-Z are active social media users and have contact at many points, causing them to comment on reality and the environment in which they live or engage in recreational activities, and to share their opinions and attitudes via SMPs. In addition, while members of this generation tend to share photos and videos on SMPs, it is also emphasized that they not only use content on the Internet but also contribute to the content using their creativity. In this respect, Nalçacı İkiz and Öztürk (2022) characterized Gen-Z as a transforming society that uses information and communication technology, and the digital world also changes them. The resulting two-way interaction causes Gen-Z to develop different understandings of relationships, contacts, conversations, and learning, and to turn into individuals who evaluate their leisure time differently (Nalçacı İkiz & Öztürk, 2022). While Gen-Z prefers experiences rather than owning things, and the search for "unforgettable experiences" makes these group members stand out, their open-minded, to-do list-oriented lives and tendency to visit unusual places and do new things push them to intensely travel and carry out recreational activities (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019). Additionally, Generation Z's approach to activities such as opportunities for celebration, social engagement, meaning creation, and empowerment illustrates their inclination to transform such experiences into forms of hedonistic behavior (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study employed an exploratory, qualitative research methodology to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's perceptions and behaviors, specifically related to their use of SMPs for leisure activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research was designed based on the phenomenological pattern, which is the most frequently preferred qualitative research pattern. In phenomenology, light is shed on

individuals' subjective experiences regarding the facts or situations they experience (Lester, 1999). In this way, in-depth data are provided to help researchers understand the experiences of the participants in detail. In addition, in this study, transcendental phenomenology was chosen because its focus is on revealing and understanding lived experiences (Yalçın, 2022). An interview form with eight questions was created by examining relevant literature in detail. The prepared questions were sent to two academicians with expertise in qualitative research methods in the fields of tourism and recreation science, and their opinions were asked. Their feedback prompted modifications to the wording to augment clarity, culminating in the formulation of eight open-ended questions that were suitable for a pilot test. The pilot test was administered to five university students representative of Generation Z. Following the affirmation that the questions were well received and clear, the main field study commenced. The research questions were structured to elicit detailed responses as follows:

• *Please specify your three most preferred SMPs when sharing content/posts (pictures, photos, videos, information, etc.) related to your leisure activities.*

• *On average, how much time do you spend per day on SMPs (X platform (Twitter), Facebook, WhatsApp, Threads, Instagram, etc.)?*

• *Which content (images, photographs, videos, information, etc.) do you share most among the content related to your leisure activities?*

• *What do you think about sharing content/posts on the SMPs about any leisure activity?*

• *What factors push or direct you to share content/posts about your leisure activities via social media tools?*

• *How do the contents/posts you encounter on social media tools affect your ability to engage in leisure activities?*

• *What effect does a content or post you encounter on any social media tool about leisure time have on you regarding participating in or not participating in this activity?*

• *Why do you think people participate or do not participate in groups created on social media tools related to leisure activities?*

Sampling and Data Collection

The study was conducted among students at Siirt University, members of Generation Z, using a convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling is frequently used in exploratory research (Cochran, 1997). Convenience sampling has advantages such as time, cost, and speed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013), providing appropriate conditions and studying

volunteers who want to participate in the research (Christensen et al., 2015), and allowing the study of situations that are thought to contain rich information (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The reasons why Gen-Z was included in the research focus are that they have a lifestyle intertwined with technology, they prefer digital communication (Ali et al., 2023) and social platforms instead of face-to-face interaction (Ali et al., 2023) and they are technologically competent (Tang, 2019). Also, the reason why Siirt University was chosen as the study area was that the recreational opportunities around the campus and city center were limited. For a person to be a member of Generation Z, it is necessary to be born between 1995 and 2012 (Fisu et al., 2024), and since all participants are in this age range, they are considered members of Generation Z (Please see Table 1). Research data were collected between October 15 and November 30, 2023, from 11 departments (Table 1) by academics (3) and students (3) who were informed/trained (Informational meeting on points to consider before data collection) in the qualitative method. The data collection process was carried out on a voluntary basis in the classroom environment, before the beginning of the course or during breaks, to ensure that the participants felt comfortable and provided sincere answers. After analyzing the responses of 107 participants, it became evident that data saturation had been achieved, as no new information was forthcoming, thereby signaling the completion of the data collection phase. The duration for completing the interview forms ranged from 10 to 20 minutes.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was carried out on the data collected from the participants, in line with the stages specified by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013) and Altunışık et al. (2022). In this regard, inductive precoding was performed on the data obtained, and the categorized codes and initial codes were discussed and transformed into final codes. Themes were created based on the codes, and then the suggested codes and themes were agreed upon and transformed into findings.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure construct validity, participants were provided with information about the purpose and subject of the research, and any explanations that would direct them were avoided. In line with the internal and external reliability of the research, all processes of the qualitative research method were specified in detail, and the results obtained were interpreted through analytical generalization, away from the influence of the researcher. In this

study, two academicians were asked to code the data for reliability and to ensure consistency between coders, as stated by Miles and Huberman (1994). All kappa values indicate high agreement between the coders (Karagöz, 2017) and are presented in the relevant tables. Also, support was received from two academics working at a university that provides English education in the field of tourism science regarding the suitability of the Turkish-English translations of the participant opinions in the interview forms.

RESULTS

This research focuses on the tendencies, values, attitudes, and motivations of Generation Z university students regarding their utilization of SMPs for leisure purposes. The objective is to elucidate the behavioral patterns of this emergent demographic on SMPs, thereby informing the formulation of contemporary marketing strategies. Initially, the research presented data on the characteristics of the participants and their SMPs usage patterns. Subsequently, participants' responses were analyzed and organized into various codes and themes via content analysis, aligned with the sequence of questions posed in the interview protocol.

Considering the demographic profile of the participants, more than half of the participants are women (58.9%). The participants mainly consist of 1st and 2nd year students (69.1%) and the age range of 18-23 (86.9%), while approximately half of the participants (53.3%) were students at the School of Tourism and Hotel Management. While roughly 60% of Gen-Z members spend 0-4 hours of their lives on SMPs, nearly 1 in 10 tend to spend time on social media whenever they have free time, and half of the participants (56.0%) tend to prefer sharing photos/pictures on these platforms.

In terms of leisure activities, Instagram and WhatsApp have emerged as the platforms of choice for communication among Gen-Z members. A marginal portion of respondents (1.1%) disclosed not utilizing the SMPs. The primary reasons cited by this minority for eschewing SMPs include perceived time wastage and opposition to systemic impositions. The sentiments of the participants disinclined towards SMPs usage were encapsulated as follows:

"…wasting time on these platforms is nonsense! It feels like it's stealing most of our precious time…(P20), *…it eliminates the confidentiality of private life by revealing our private lives and beautiful moments…* (P84), *...I do not prefer it because I see it as an*

imposition or extension of capitalism, which causes people to consume more and want more of everything… (P36)"

Table 1. *Demographic profile*

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	63	58.9
	Male	44	41.1
Year of being a student	1st	23	21.5
	2nd	51	47.6
	3rd	11	10.3
	4th	22	20.6
Age	18-20	39	36.4
	21-23	54	50.5
	24 -26	14	13.1
Departments	Tourism and Hotel Management	57	53.3
	Education	12	11.2
	Physical Education and Sports	8	7.5
	Economic and Administrative Sciences	7	6.5
	Arts and Science	6	5.6
	Health	6	5.6
	Social-Technical Services	3	2.8
	Veterinary	3	2.8
	Foreign Languages	2	1.8
	Design	2	1.8
	Theology	1	0.9
Spend leisure time on social media (X platform, Facebook, WhatsApp, Threads, Instagram, etc.)	0 < leisure time ≤ 2 hours	30	28.0
	2 < leisure time ≤ 4 hours	34	31.8
	4 < leisure time ≤ 6 hours	22	20.6
	6 < leisure time ≤ 8 hours	10	9.3
	Every moment I find free	11	10.3
Total		**107**	**100.0**
Shared Content	Photograph/picture	84	56.0
	Video	45	30.0
	Info	21	14.0
Total		**150**	**100.0**

The analysis of participants' perspectives on sharing leisure activity-related content on SMPs yielded two distinct thematic categories: positive and negative. Members of Gen-Z have a predominantly positive view of content sharing. A positive perspective is presented through three themes: personal, social, and third parties (businesses, marketing organizations, etc.). Among these themes, members of Gen-Z highlighted elements related to the personal contribution of sharing content for recreational activities on the SMPs. While Gen-Z expresses fewer comprehensive opinions on its social contribution, they emphasize that these shares are prominent for the recreation industry, marketing companies, and other third organizations that collect data on the Internet and that they make significant contributions

to the recognition and advertising activities of businesses, especially with the shared content.

Table 2. *Preferred platforms for sharing content/posts at leisure activities*

SMPs	Frequency	Percent
Instagram	91	34.0
WhatsApp	76	28.4
X Platform (Twitter)	30	11.2
TikTok	18	6.7
Facebook	15	5.6
Snapchat	14	5.2
YouTube	6	2.2
Telegram	5	1.9
Threads	5	1.9
I do not use/prefer	3	1.1
VSCO	3	1.1
SUGO	2	0.7
Total	**268**	**100.0**

The category of negative features of shared content for recreational activities was divided into personal and societal themes. Gen-Z sees the personal effects of negativity as gaining unnecessary information, causing a waste of time, eliminating freedom and creativity, and exposing private life in an unlimited way for an infinite period. Regarding societal aspects, despite the presence of content related to leisure activities on social media platforms, the absence of regulatory mechanisms for the content shared, coupled with Generation Z's concerns about social deterioration, the erosion of cultural values, the transformation of traditional communication channels and forms, and normalization of potentially negative exemplars, fosters a sense of unease within this demographic cohort.

Table 3. *Participant opinions regarding content production on the SMPs*

Positive		Negative	
Theme	Code	Theme	Code
Personal	Making learning easier	Personal	Unnecessary information
	Self-improvement		
	Talent discovery		
	Useful information provider		
	Delivering experience		Waste of time
	Socialization		
	Easy access to information		
	Arousing desire		
	Creativity		Violation of privacy
	Increasing self-confidence		
	Immortalize memories		
	Effective and efficient use of time		Restricting freedom/creativity
	Reflecting thoughts and perspectives		
	Awareness (activities done and to be done)		
	Economy		

Societal	Social development	Societal	Reduced respect for moral values
	Tolerance		
	Making others happy		Disruption of communication (such as with family, friends, and others)
	Stress reduction		
	Integration		
Third parties	Recognition/Advertising		Bad example - taking it for granted
	Gaining knowledge		

Kappa value: 0.95

The motivations of Generation Z members for engaging with SMPs for leisure pursuits are analyzed through the lens of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, as delineated by Ryan and Deci (2000). While intrinsic or self-determined motivations describe the realization of an action in individuals through an innate desire, belief, or attitude to perform an action (Dodds et al., 2022), extrinsic or controlled motivations describe people's aspirations, life goals (Correia & Kozak, 2017) which refers to motivation arising from influences outside the individual (Mehmetoğlu, 2012). The bulk of Gen-Z members' motivation to share recreational activities on SMPs stems from internal desires, rather than external influences. Participants' opinions on intrinsic motivations:

"…the content I share is liked by others…(P4), …showing others the moments when I am happy…(P6), …to be able to assist people in any matter while performing recreational activities… (21), …to inspire people by touching them…(P38), …to feel better and be happier by breaking the daily routine by staying in touch with a wide audience… (P42), … ...discovering new activities and especially doing the activities of people I follow closely on social media… (P69)".

Participant expressions for extrinsic motivations:

"…for popularity by showing my expertise while performing the activities I enjoy…(P45), …due to the need to show those around me and other people how active a person I am…(P56)".

Table 4. *Motivations that lead to sharing content on SMPs*

Theme	Code
Intrinsic	Feeling better
	Being happy
	Be satisfied
	Increase self-confidence
	Touching people
	Get rid of boredom
	Snobbism
	Desire to share experiences
	Posts/content being liked by others
	Arouse curiosity/jealousy
	Socializing/interacting
	Flaunting
	Remaining as a memory

	Helpful to others
	To be an example/inspire someone
	Reaching a wide audience
	Make good use of your leisure time
	Distracting people from daily routine
Extrinsic	Ability to mobilize others
	Awareness
	Helping people gain experience/expand their horizons
	Social perception (appearing active, being accepted, introducing yourself to others, being famous/popular)

Kappa value: 1.00

Perspectives of Gen-Z members on the values and attitudes created by the content they encounter on SMPs related to recreational activities, Based on Hadinejad et al.'s (2019) attitude classification, a thematic classification was made as favorable and unfavorable. Attitude is a psychological concept that expresses a person's positive and negative evaluations of objects, places, and topics, and can shape an individual's future behavior (Hadinejad et al., 2019). In other words, attitude has a leading function in shaping a person's behavior, that is, in forming behavioral intentions (Kim & Kwon, 2018). The favorable opinions of Gen-Z regarding the contents encountered were reflected in the participants' opinions more broadly than the unfavorable ones. While favorable attributes emphasize broadening one's interests, enriching one's knowledge of an activity or subject, and discovering new talents, emphasizing one's self-knowledge and development, they also refer to time management and activity expertise in terms of making good use of time, increasing activity expertise, and preventing routines. Unfavorable attitudes and values reflect views related to laziness and addiction caused by the following factors.

Table 5. *Participant values and attitudes towards content encountered on SMPs*

Theme	Code	Theme	Code
Favorable	Increasing or triggering the urge/curiosity to participate in the activity	Unfavorable	Addiction
	Realizing the need		
	Inspire the desire to share similar content on the platform		
	Expand your interests		
	Enriching information		
	Discovering new talents		
	Transforming leisure activities into productive ones (specialization)		Becoming passive - becoming lazy instead of turning to activity
	Using time efficiently and effectively		
	Preventing routine		

Kappa value: 0.90

Gen-Z's views on the transformation of the contents they encounter in SMPs for recreational activities into behavior are divided into three upper dimensions: personal, interpersonal, and structural facilitators. Raymore (2002) based on the facilitator factors that determine which factors enable or encourage participation in an activity. The views of Gen-Z members mainly include opinions associated with intrapersonal facilitators' aggregate dimension, which compromises personal characteristics, emotions and feelings, and personal development themes. While the interpersonal facilitators aggregate dimension consists of the theme of socialization and social acceptance, which includes interaction, group membership, and the ability to perform the activity with other people, structural facilitators cover the global system that emerges when a fact or situation turns into a trend. In contrast, the perspectives that the content they encounter on SMPs for recreational activities pushes people not to participate in the activity are divided into aggregate dimensions based on intrapersonal and structural leisure constraints developed by Crawford and Godbey (1987). Leisure constraints urge factors that hinder participation in any activity, preference, and leisure experience (Son et al., 2024). The aggregate dimension of intrapersonal constraints is represented by the theme of individual characteristics, and while the theme is associated with shared content having negative characteristics, not containing information, and being outside the scope of interest, it also symbolizes the absence of mood and antisocial characteristics. The aggregate dimension of structural constraints includes the themes of material insufficiency and the global system, which point to the capitalist system's control of constant purchasing or consumption.

Table 6. *Participants' opinions on participating or not participating in activities in relation to the content they encounter on the SMPs*

Participate (why)			Not participate (why)		
Aggregate Dimension	Theme	Code	Code	Theme	Aggregate Dimension
Intrapersonal Facilitators	Individual characteristics	Offering difference-diversity	Having negative attributes	Individual characteristics	Intrapersonal Constraints
		Being in the field of interest	Inability to obtain information - it is useless		
		Personal satisfaction			

					Structural Constraints
	Affections-feelings	Entertaining, delighting, exciting, giving pleasure, well-being.	Being out of interest		
	Self-enhancement	Containing information - being useful	Anti-sociality		
			Mood		
		Querying perspective	Financial impossibility	Money	Structural Constraints
		Providing development			
Interpersonal Facilitator	Socialization and social acceptance	Socialization	Constant push to buy and participate (capitalist system)	Global system	
		Joining groups			
		Allowing others to do the activity			
Structural Facilitators	Global system	Becoming a trend			

Kappa value: 0.80

The opinions of Gen-Z members about groups created for recreational activities on the SMPs are presented under the headings of joining and not joining. Gen-Z members' opinions about joining groups are classified as aggregate dimensions within the framework of social media engagement, which is widely accepted in the literature and underlined by Dessart (2017). It consists of three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The behavioral aspect of engagement comprises manifestations of participation, including sharing, learning, and validation, associated with the level of energy, effort, and time spent on behavioral engagement (Dessart et al., 2016). Affective engagement refers to enthusiasm and pleasure towards an attachment object. Cognitive engagement represents a general mental activity that focuses on something, including attention and focus (Dessart, 2017). The aggregate dimension of behavioral engagement is broadly reflected in the views of Gen-Z and is presented with the themes of sharing on SMPs, being approved by group members or others, and learning-based extroversion-social group membership and self-enhancement. The aggregate dimension of affective engagement is given on a smaller scale and with a narrower scope under the theme of personal characteristics. Similarly, the aggregate dimension of cognitive engagement is grouped under the theme of addiction, which has become a trend among Gen-Z, and is presented on platforms as a new form of communication and interaction. Conversely, opinions about not joining groups related to recreational activities on SMPs emerged on a smaller scale and narrower scope than joining. The non-joining category is based on the theoretical framework of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural leisure

constraints, as presented by Crawford and Godbey (1987). Intrapersonal constraints were presented under the theme of personal characteristics, revealing that a person's wide social circle, active personality traits, and social anxiety are the key features that prevent group participation. In groups formed for recreational activities, the absence of accompanying people from the immediate circle on those platforms is presented as the aggregate interpersonal dimension under the theme of a lack of companions. The structural aggregate dimension consists of the security theme, which reflects the concerns that the groups created will turn to unintended activities and the personal information given in the groups will spread, and the addiction theme, which indicates the concern that the groups will become addicted to the groups they are members of or that the groups will create addiction due to the groups gaining popularity on a global scale.

Table 7. *Participant opinions about joining and not joining in groups on SMPs*

Joining			Not joining		
Aggregate Dimension	**Theme**	**Code**	**Code**	**Theme**	**Aggregate Dimension**
Behavioral engagement	Extroversion - social group membership	Performing activities with others	Sociability	Personal traits	Intrapersonal constraints
		Being involved in different environments	Social anxiety		
		Being with people with similar characteristics /traits			
		Meeting people-socializing	Doing activities with people who are not from your family and friends circle	Lack of companions	Interpersonal constraints
		Act as a group			
		Sharing information			
		Acceptance			
		Snobbism	Groups orienting towards different goals	Security	
	Self enhancement	Learning new things – self - enhancement			
Affective engagement	Personal traits	Having a productive and fun time	Dissemination of private information-cyber security		
Cognitive engagement	Addiction	Change in the way of interaction and communication	Anxiety about addiction	Addiction	Structural constraints
		Becoming a trend			

Kappa value: 0.85

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

SMPs enable people to communicate and interact with each other more than ever before (Irfany et al., 2024). These platforms are the lifeline of Gen-Z (Singla & Agrawal, 2024). The fact that Gen-Z was born into technology causes them to be labeled as an iGeneration or Generation C and constitutes the source of change in behavioral tendencies (Irfany et al., 2024). Unlike other generations, Gen-Z frequently interacts with other people through SMPs and spends a significant part of their daily time on these platforms. The vital needs and other responsibilities of participating Gen-Z members constitute approximately eight hours of sleep, eating, and drinking, and two hours of personal care, needs, and responsibilities in an average human life. In terms of time, when eight hours are allocated to business life/six hours to education, they do not want to be exposed to stereotyped and inflexible working conditions (Kavak & Şener, 2021), it is revealed in Table 1 that generation members spend a significant part of their remaining 6-8 hours on SMPs. In this respect, it can be inferred that leisure time for members of this generation is centered on social media. However, owing to the intense impact of technological developments on human life, it should be taken into consideration that in this classification of time, the clear distinction between traditional leisure and work time has become blurred. In this context, people tend to spend much more time on SMPs than on the period specified above. In addition, although SMPs itself stand out as a recreational activity, the groups created for recreational activities and shared content also have a vital and irreplaceable function in terms of obtaining information, learning, sharing, and then turning into behavior. This indicates that recreation has now become digital and will become more digital each passing day.

Gen-Z members mainly shared photos and videos on platforms (86%). This shows that members of Gen-Z are active and intense users of social media (Hernandez-de-Menendez et al., 2020), and that they are important guides in obtaining information about something and achieving something. Woodside et al. (2024) highlight that social media and specialized opinion platforms are now common sources of information for consumers, tourists, or recreators who seek to validate their choices and inform other users to make wise purchasing decisions.

Gen-Z was born into technology, causing them to use internet technologies actively and effectively. These features coincide with the research findings, as many of the participants actively used the platforms, and the minority group had the ability to use them despite having a reaction

and choosing not to use them. While Instagram is at the forefront of the platforms preferred by Gen-Z to share content related to recreational activities, WhatsApp is relatively less preferred by Gen-Z. Approximately half of the participants used both platforms to share recreational activities. Instagram allows users to share photos and videos, add captions to photos, categorize photos with hashtags and tag users, and apply various filters to provide images with a variety of looks, while shared content is distributed to the news feeds of friends or followers and becomes an archive of life experiences (Shannon, 2022). These features can be used extensively for transforming the recreational activities experience carried out by Gen-Z members into permanent ones, viewing the shared content by their followers, self-actualization, follower-environment approval, or recognition. WhatsApp, one of the most popular social media tools among all age groups, allows users to transmit a range of content, such as images, audio, video, text, documents, and location sharing in real time over the Internet (Agrawal & Mittal, 2024). All of these reasons lead to the active and intensive use of Gen-Z in recreational activities. Among Gen-Z university students, Instagram is preferred over WhatsApp because it is a platform based on photo and video sharing, the ability to prepare reel videos, and the opportunity to easily communicate and interact with different people and groups. However, Facebook, which was very popular in the past, was not preferred by members of Gen-Z. Kaplan (2020) underlines that Gen-Z is moving away from using Facebook and instead turning to other applications where their content disappears and their posts do not come to mind again in the future.

When the positive opinions of Gen-Z about producing content on social media are considered within the scope of social comparison and social presence theories, an important perspective is presented as to why participants produce content on social media and the conditions that push them to share can be better illuminated. According to Suls and Wheeler (2012), social comparison theory refers to the search for and use of information about other people's situations and opinions for the purpose of self-evaluation and is based on judging the accuracy of a person's views, beliefs, and abilities. Individual vanity-status and social-network effects push people to make intense comparisons, and this comparison increases people's potential for prejudice, affects the maintenance of self-esteem, and can lead to the desire to look more attractive (Naeem & Ozuem, 2022). In this respect, many codes mentioned under the personal theme of Gen-Z members (awareness, immortalization of memories, talent discovery, etc.) can be associated with this theory. Gen-Z tends to share content for

recreational activities on social media because they show off, prove themselves to others, and create a social impact on networks. Social presence theory reflects the ability to interact with others to exchange information on social media platforms (Naeem & Ozuem, 2022). In the context of social presence, Gen-Z's reasons for producing content for recreational activities arose from factors such as personal development, information acquisition, and interaction, as shown in Table 3. One of the important attributes of Gen-Z is that it is sensitive and active in social development (Fisu et al., 2024). Gen-Z also believes that sharing content for recreational activities is related to social contact, and these characteristics of Gen-Z have the purpose of serving social wellbeing, such as integration, tolerance, and social development. Further, Z's are aware that shared content creates brand awareness for third organizations, and that content shared on platforms can be used as an important source of information for other organizations. On the other hand, members of Gen-Z reflected the negative characteristics of producing content for recreational activities on an SMPs on a personal and social basis. Although these platforms have begun to play a key role, almost as much as the education system, in terms of the development of individuals and societies, they can lead to personal negativities, such as preventing the individual's creativity/freedom due to passivity, providing ready-made information, and being exposed to excessive unnecessary and irrelevant information. In addition, SMPs are seen as important triggers of striking negativities, such as causing the deterioration of social culture and values, especially taking the wrong people as idols.

The main components that push Gen-Z to share content for recreational activities are intrinsic motivation. This situation can be associated with the characteristics of narcissism, being self-centered (Kavak & Şener, 2021), and preference for individuality (Nalçacı İkiz & Öztürk, 2022). Since Gen-Z spends a lot of time on technology, their attention span is short, they need to receive frequent feedback, and since they lack independence and grow up in the digital world, they tend to spend less time directly communicating with their friends and loved ones (Gould et al., 2020). In this regard, the fact that Z's lives are in the orbit of technology and social media may cause them to turn to self-induced rather than external factors. The elements revealed within the scope of this research can also be discussed within the scope of social existence and comparison theories. Individuals' behavior towards sharing on platforms by making comparisons may be due to factors such as status indicators, ostentation, creating an impact on social networks, personal development, and

interacting with other people. In terms of extrinsic motivations, their characteristics of changing or touching society lead them to share, albeit relatively narrowly, elements such as raising awareness, informing, mobilizing people, and social perception.

The attitudes and behaviors of Gen-Z towards the content they encounter on social media fall into two categories; favorable and unfavorable. While Gen-Z university students see the contents of recreational activities as mostly useful, they may evaluate them negatively, especially in terms of their potential to create addiction and turn an active life into passive. As a reflection of the characteristic feature of Gen-Z, they are open-minded towards the content they encounter; that is, they do not have any prejudices. The fact that Z's have positive values and attitudes in their minds towards the content feeds their urge to perform recreational activities and share similar content. This is because individuals' value judgments and attitudes are important in shaping their future behavior (Dolnicar & Demeter, 2024). Arousing curiosity about positive attitudes and values, awareness of the need, and desire to share similar content reflect the components that trigger the individual's urge to turn into behavior in the future, arising from internal characteristics. Instead, Gen-Z, who grew up in technology and developed a strong digital bond towards the Internet (Jabar et al., 2024), is sensitive to issues such as creating addiction to content, pacifying human life, and restricting active life, which are important negative effects of technology. This may be due to Gen-Z members' lives becoming lazy or indolent because they can quickly access the things they want because of technology (Tapscott, 2009), and they constantly spend time on social media.

Gen-Z considers participating in recreational activities if the content they encounter supports their personal development in participating in an activity, is compatible with their personal characteristics, and more importantly, contains emotions that make them feel good. As positive emotions are strong triggers for individuals to perform a behavior, negative emotions push individuals to avoid or move away. Gen-Z tends to engage in activities focused on emotions and feelings that cause them to feel well-being, and in this regard, encountering content that makes them feel good is a vital element in turning into behavior. In the content encountered, elements such as making friends, being part of a group, and socializing were reflected in the views as noticeable interpersonal facilitators. Growing up with Internet technologies and communicating through SMPs cause them to create a life based on interactions with other people and social groups (Uysal, 2022), and this coincides with the views of the participants

and the obtained themes. Structural facilitators refer to social and physical institutions and organizations operating outside individuals (Son et al., 2024), and the contents encountered have emerged as significant facilitators for many people to engage in these recreational activities or for this situation to turn into a trend. This situation is evaluated by the characteristics of Gen-Z; they do not lag in the face of global developments, do not have prejudices against any issue, and are open to innovation. All of these facilitators point out that Gen-Z is constantly adaptable (Madden, 2017) and has a highly marketable/influenceable digital mindset (Viţelar, 2019). In contrast, regarding the personality, behavior, and belief characteristics of Gen-Z, components such as people's mood, anti-social personality, and obtaining information constitute intrapersonal constraints on recreational activities. This has emerged as the most important reason for non-participation, as it is associated with the characteristic feature that members of Gen-Z are more narcissistic/self-centered than other generations (Nalçacı İkiz & Öztürk, 2022). The fact that they see the content for recreational activities on the SMPs as an imposition of the system on themselves and the costs incurred by actively carrying out recreational activities have been identified as important structural constraints.

Gen-Z has a weak bond with management and authority (Tapscott, 2009), which fuels their tendency to exhibit negative behavior when something is imposed or dictated to them. Gen-Z is a generation with high economic concerns (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019). Although the cost of carrying out an activity digitally is almost zero, actively carrying out the activity requires covering expenses such as transportation, participation fee, food and beverage, equipment, and guidance services. Considering the fact that the participants are students, the cost/money element has become evident as a limiting factor in performing an active activity. Additionally, one of the striking findings is that the interpersonal constraints mentioned by Crawford and Godbey (1987) are not reflected in opinions. The fact that family ties are weak (Nalçacı İkiz & Öztürk, 2022) and Z's development of personality traits and life skills in a socioeconomic period driven by chaos, uncertainty, variability, and complexity (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019) may cause Gen-Z to not participate in recreational activities and to develop behavior that does not require the presence of an accompanying person.

As revealing the tendencies of Gen-Z towards groups created for recreational activities on SMPs contributes to social media engagement and the creation, maintenance, and vitality of communities (Dessart, 2017), it is crucial for a business to make a valuable contribution to its brand value and e-WOM (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014), as well as to create management and

marketing strategies. Gen-Z's views on behavioral engagement were revealed in the broadest sense, based on the elements of sharing, learning, and validation, in the form of self-enhancement and extroversion-social group themes. The affective engagement dimension includes personal characteristics, based on pleasure and enthusiasm. Gen-Z members focus on joining groups to ensure their well-being and to enjoy an enjoyable time. Global situations that express chaos, such as political events in the world, natural disasters/environmental crises, social movements, war, and terrorism, can also lead people to escape from current realities (Çalışkan, 2021); that is, joining groups where they will feel good and have a pleasant time.

The cognitive engagement dimension covered the themes of attention and focus-based addiction. Joining groups has become a trend, or their traditional lives are now realized through social media, leading Gen-Z members to groups. In addition, it can be concluded that the theme of addiction has come to light because of Gen-Z's preference for communication via social media instead of traditional face-to-face communication, and their openness to innovations and global developments. On the other hand, Gen-Z's views on not joining groups reflect intrapersonal constraints such as being sociable and having social anxiety characteristics, while the absence of familiar people in the groups or the absence of a companion were revealed as interpersonal constraints. Gen-Z sees being sociable in an individual's environment or having extroverted personality traits as key elements that constrain participation in groups. It can be inferred that not participating in groups is because of the concern that the absence of an accompanying person may cause a lack of approval/motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) in individuals. The security risk and addiction concerns of Gen-Z members that may arise from joining groups are external constraints for not joining groups. Although Gen-Z faces many limiting elements, it has developed coping mechanisms due to growing up in a period of chaos (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019). In this respect, it can be said that Gen-Z is extremely talented in terms of developing strategies (negotiation) to overcome all the constraints they encounter.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study has theoretical and practical implications. A holistic and comprehensive investigation of the habits, values, attitudes, motivations, and behavioral patterns of Gen-Z members, who are university students, towards recreational activities on SMPs will make significant contributions to the body of knowledge of recreation, tourism, and consumer behavior.

Evaluations of Gen-Z regarding content production on SMPs and their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2000) have been scrutinized in depth in the context of social comparison and social presence theories. The values and attitudes of Gen-Z members towards the content they encounter on the platforms are presented as favorable and unfavorable characteristics (Hadinejad et al., 2019) because they are the antecedent of their behavior, that is, they shape their behavior. The views of Gen-Z members that the contents they encounter on the platform lead them to engage in behavior or avoid behavior are built on the theoretical foundations of Crowford and Godbey's (1987) leisure constraints and Raymore's (2002) leisure facilitators. Finally, their behaviors regarding joining or not joining groups are framed as social media engagement (Dessart, 2017) and leisure constraints (Crowford & Godbey, 1987).

As for practical implications, Gen-Z is a generation that is very aware of their personal needs because they know themselves well (Kavak & Şener, 2021), and their technology-oriented lifestyle has led them to have an adaptable (Madden, 2017) and highly marketable/influenceable digital mindset (Vițelar, 2019). In this regard, Gen-Z behaves differently than other generations and people. Thus, the recreational industry, marketing organizations, public institutions, and organizations need to develop new strategies based on this difference in recreational activities and consumer behavior. It is believed that addressing social media behavior patterns and representations in a holistic and comprehensive manner in the present research will lead to the opening of new discussion areas for the creation of modern marketing strategies.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study had some limitations that will be overcome in the future. The fact that qualitative research focuses on revealing individuals' experiences of a phenomenon in depth rather than generalizing it means that analytical generalizations can be made based on rich internal predictions of the results. The research was conducted within the orbit of Gen-Z members, who are students of Siirt University, located in the Southeastern Anatolia region of Türkiye. This study aims to shed light on the experiences of Gen-Z, which has a technology-oriented lifestyle and a high rate of technology adoption, regarding the recreational activities they perform on SMPs, which are a vital part of digital recreation. Considering that people's lifestyles are becoming technology-centered on a daily basis, qualitative research can be conducted on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of Gen-Z or members of different generations towards important tools of digital

recreation such as meta-leisure, virtual-augmented and mixed reality, and digital games. The research can be expanded on a quantitative and mixed-method basis in the context of different geographies, cultures, and Gen-Z individuals. Additionally, research can be enriched based on social comparison and availability theories, leisure constraints and facilitation, and social media engagement with a focus on digital recreation.

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DETERMINANTS OF USERS' INTENTIONS TO USE AI-ENABLED TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN HOTELS: A HYBRID APPROACH USING PLS-SEM AND FSQCA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing hotel guests' intentions to adopt next-generation technologies enabled by artificial intelligence (AI). Both affective and cognitive processes, which led to guests' intentions to adopt these new technologies, were considered to have antecedents in the form of intrinsic and extrinsic motives, respectively. The data collected from 331 respondents were analyzed using a combination of methods, including the asymmetrical fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) and the symmetrical partial least square-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The results of the symmetrical study indicated that novelty and compatibility have a good impact on both enjoyment and usefulness, which ultimately lead to behavioral intentions. In contrast, asymmetrical studies have shown that all the criteria are

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necessary conditions to produce users' intention to embrace AI-based technology. By integrating IDT and TAM, this study extends the comprehension of factors driving customers to use AI-enabled technologies during their hotel stays. This study also adds to the existing literature by exploring configurational modeling with fsQCA, as opposed to prior studies that have relied on net impact modeling via SEM.

INTRODUCTION

Technology use in the hotel industry can be traced back to the 1940s when the earliest versions of property management systems were used. In the decades that followed, the hotel industry adopted computers, reservation systems, in-room phones, electronic locking systems, energy management systems, the internet, websites, and online booking technology. Finally, the 2000s brought about Wi-Fi, the iPhone, mobile technology, and smartphone applications. These technologies gave hoteliers additional capabilities to reach customers, enhance customer relationship management, and develop loyalty programs. As a result, hoteliers have expanded to include a wide range of applications, notably target advertisements, payment services, point-of-sale terminals, high-definition televisions with personalized welcome messages, high-speed Wi-Fi, videos on demand, smart TVs, voice technology, as well as virtual assistants for service requests and in-room controls (Bilgihan et al., 2016; Mercan et al., 2020). All these technologies, including recent developments in augmented and virtual reality, have been assessed to bring repeat business to hotels and attract new customers (Flavian et al., 2020).

The technological progress noted across various economic activity sectors significantly contributed to expanding the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled technologies—involving voice technology, biometrics, smartphone integrations, service automation, and robotics. Ivanov et al. (2017) postulated that robotics, service automation, and AI provide the hotel industry with numerous prospects for enhancing the quality of service through consistent performance, leading to improved performance. These novel technologies use AI to offer personalized services and are perceived as attractive because of their newness and coolness (Law et al., 2023). However, Lai (2016) argued that technological progress brings possibilities for innovative service offerings but can also threaten established business models. As many hoteliers have started to adopt AI-based solutions and robotics in their operations (Nam et al., 2021), it is essential to ponder whether they are implementing the right technologies

in their properties based on their guests' perceptions. Even though various studies are conducted regarding hotel technologies, only a few have steered their investigations toward AI-enabled technologies.

Several theoretical models were developed to explain consumers' behavioral intentions toward new information technologies. These include the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991); the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) (Rogers, 1995); the Theory of Task-technology Fit (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995); the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis et al., 1989) along with its extensions TAM 2 (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) and TAM 3 (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008); and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Although these frameworks have proved beneficial to researchers due to their workable applicability in various contexts, they do not capture users' perceptions and evaluations of innovative technologies. AI-enabled technologies are relatively new, and hotels are still adopting them for their operations. The models mentioned above have been updated to provide applicability in various domains. Most current models explaining users' behavioral intentions towards new information technologies consider intrinsic and extrinsic considerations. Both perceptions of usefulness and enjoyment have been recognized as essential factors in hotel guests' adoption of AI-enabled technologies (Chiu & Cho, 2020). Although the intrinsic-extrinsic conceptualization has already been discussed in the literature, only a few investigations focused on the inter-relationships within hotel settings. There is also a lack of models assessing the perceived value of novelty regarding AI-enabled technologies. To the best of the authors' knowledge, the novelty variable did not receive much attention in the hotel context. Novelty can be seen as essential for guests' experiences at the hotel. For instance, the presence of robots and their interactions with customers were found to foster memorable experiences (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018). AI-enabled technologies at the hotel—including robots—were also found to elicit curiosity and weigh a lot in the hotel selection process.

As such, the research gap in this study also extends to the comprehension of factors driving customers to use AI-enabled technologies during their hotel stays. To be specific, this study aims to understand the effect of perceived novelty, perceived compatibility, perceived usefulness, and perceived enjoyment on users' behavioral intentions toward using next-gen technologies in hotels. By integrating IDT and TAM, this study's main contribution is to extend the comprehension of factors driving customers to use AI-enabled technologies during their hotel stays. This study also contributes to the human computer interaction literature at the

methodological level. In addition to symmetrical analysis via PLS-SEM, this study uses asymmetrical analysis based on fsQCA to explore how four antecedent conditions (perceived compatibility, perceived enjoyment, perceived novelty, and perceived usefulness) are sufficient for high scores in the outcome condition (i.e., behavioral intentions). Complexity theory provides support for the application of asymmetrical analysis. Complexity theory has been employed for developing theories in several disciplines, including hospitality and tourism (Ali et al., 2023). Complexity theory provides a richer insight into the asymmetric pattern of causal recipes in stimulating outcome conditions (Goel et al., 2022). As such, our study adds to the existing literature by exploring the configurational modeling with fsQCA (fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis), as opposed to prior studies (Goel et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2020) that have relied on net impact modeling via SEM (structural equation modeling). For this reason, the current research may be seen as an attempt to convey the broad picture of how guests' experiences with AI-enabled technology in hotels shape their impressions of these tools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AI Technology Within Hotel Settings

The survival of service businesses' often relies on their financial performance, capacity to respond to changing environments, and services to meet customers' changing customer expectations (Wikhamn, 2019). Recent technological innovations which can be qualified as next-gen technologies are being implemented within hospitality-related businesses, i.e., hotels, food and beverage, and events (Yang et al., 2020). Those cutting-edge technologies are likely to impact several aspects of delivering hospitality as hoteliers gradually adopt AI-enabled technologies and robotics to provide customer service and enhance the guest experience (Choi et al., 2020; Goel et al., 2022). For those reasons, several hotel chains started deploying AI technologies across their properties (Zhang & Jin, 2023). In the United States, butler and concierge robots were introduced in the Sheraton Los Angeles San Gabriel Hotel (Mills, 2018). The Flyzoo Alibaba Hotel in China placed next-gen technologies at the center of the guest experience. The Henn-na Hotel in Japan employed 250 robots. Nevertheless, with those experiences, it is noticeable that hotel guests have also started to accept AI technologies in their service experience as they interact with them, yielding various and differentiated responses (Ivanov & Webster, 2024).

Innovative technologies bring about the prospect of bringing customers' perspectives to the forefront of operations as they contribute to reducing human labor. Redmore (2018) identified four types of representative technologies powered by AI and adopted by hotels: chatbots or voice recognition systems, in-room technologies, robots, and analytics. Chatbots are the most used by hotels, and this may be due to their actual popularity within current smart devices (Louriero et al., 2024). In-room technologies control elements inside the room, including temperature, lighting, and curtains, and are subject to less resistance to guests' acceptance. Delivery and concierge robots are also gaining in popularity and are quickly adopted by guests as they can serve to brighten up experiences on property. In parallel with those technological developments, hotel guests' perceptions and acceptance of AI-enabled technologies are also changing (Law et al., 2023). The 21st-century hotel guest expects technologically driven products and personalized experiences. According to Cai et al. (2022), customers' perceptions about integrating AI-enabled technologies with traditional hotel stays can be an excellent indicator to assist hoteliers in their strategic planning. For this study, hotels' AI-enabled technologies (also referred to as next-gen technologies) are categorized as voice command technology, facial recognition, smartphone integrations, service automation, robotics, and virtual and augmented reality.

Previous literature assessed the multiple ways through which AI-enabled technologies impact hotel operations and guest experiences. As summarized by Nam et al. (2021), those innovations allow guest experiences with innovations such as robots or voice assistants such as Alexa; they attract the millennial segment and contribute to anticipating guests' needs and preferences for the provision of personalized services. It is to say that the use of AI-enabled technologies has become a mean of differentiation between hotel brands and de facto represent a competitive advantage. Consequently, discussing the acceptance of AI-enabled technologies in the hospitality industry is crucial. A combination of various factors influences the adoption of new technologies. Thus, this study investigates factors in users' decisions regarding AI-enabled technology adoption. It is achieved using an extended TAM integrated with the compatibility variable from the IDT, and the perceived novelty of AI-enabled technologies, together proposed as antecedents to behavioral intentions to use.

The Technology Acceptance Model

TAM is studied in hospitality and tourism literature to understand consumers' acceptance of technological innovations (Okumus & Bilgihan, 2014). It originally featured extrinsic motivations—i.e., perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis et al., 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003) as the essential antecedents to technology acceptance. The TAM predicts that users are more prone to use new technologies when they experience their usefulness and ease of use. Accordingly, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness were deemed necessary for determining factors of behavioral intentions toward using different technologies. Nevertheless, prior literature had already assessed that using these sole variables represents a constraint, advocating for more factors in play for predicting behavioral intentions (King & He, 2006). A study by Kucukusta and colleagues (2015) in the context of online booking technologies found that perceived usefulness had a stronger effect than perceived ease of use. They concluded that functionality, efficiency, and effectiveness—all denote usefulness—had a far more critical role than ease of use. This preeminence of perceived usefulness over perceived ease of use has been confirmed by several studies, notably in the contexts of the airline reservation system, e-learning, and human-robot interaction (Song et al., 2022). Moreover, recent technological innovations are relatively easy and do not bring many user challenges. Therefore, recent studies have advised enhancing TAM's explanatory power by adding additional contextual factors (Pillai & Sivathanu, 2020). Considering the preponderance of perceived usefulness over perceived ease of use, the present study considers extrinsic motivation as the construct of perceived usefulness. It extends the original TAM through the inclusion of the perceived enjoyment construct.

Davis et al. (1992) predicted that although extrinsic motivations (e.g., usefulness, ease of use) represent the main determinants for intention to use, intrinsic motivations (e.g., enjoyment) would have much more explanatory power for individual variances in usage intention. A line of researchers argued that the investigation of functional benefits such as perceived usefulness suffers the exclusion of attitudinal effects such as perceived enjoyment, mainly since consumers' attitudes vary accordingly with different internal and external attributes (Ozturk et al., 2016). As such, using TAM within various settings calls for introducing new external constructs to understand better users' acceptance of the technology being studied (Tao et al., 2018). Previous technology acceptance-related studies reported a strong positive influence and antecedence of perceived enjoyment to behavioral intentions (Chiu & Cho, 2020). Therefore, it can be

considered that new technologies perceived by hotel guests as fun and useful are more likely to be adopted. Consequently, the present study assumes that perceived enjoyment complements perceived usefulness in predicting users' behavioral intention. The modified TAM is utilized in this study to make sense of the different factors that hotel guests evaluate using AI-enabled technologies (See Figure 1). Although using those technologies has been the subject of many studies in consumer behavior literature, very few focused explicitly on customers' perceptions of AI-enabled technologies within hotel settings. Therefore, this study contributes by providing hoteliers with actionable insights on which technologies they should invest in and heuristics regarding hotel guests' acceptance of AI-enabled technologies.

Research Model and Hypotheses Development

Theories Integration Rationale

Researchers in this study proposed a model on the foundations of the critical factors related to TAM and IDT. In addition, they perceived novelty in understanding the intention to use AI-enabled technologies. Research has shown that human behavior toward accepting a technology is multifaceted and warrants more than a single model, i.e., an integrated approach. Integrated models offer an all-inclusive and wide-ranging view of the causal mechanism underlying the relationships and bring an entire understanding which cannot be accomplished by models grounded on a single theory (Thusi & Maduku, 2020). Consequently, owing to the above discussions, it can be fair to assume that integrating TAM, IDT, and perceived novelty will provide a comprehensive viewpoint on AI Technological Innovations-adoption in hotel settings.

Novelty and Users' Evaluations

Technological innovations' innate characteristics are their novelty and newness (Yuan et al., 2020). The word novelty is usually linked with positive attributes and outcomes of technology use and adoption, also referred to as a honeymoon effect (Fichman & Kemerer, 1993). Wells et al. (2010) advanced that innovation novelty is viewed as fostering affective reactions, including excitement. A novelty that can be experienced through certain technologies is related to fun or pleasure. As users seek novelty, instant gratification favors the elicitation of enjoyment (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2015). Perceived enjoyment thus denotes the excitement or fun an individual derives when using a particular technology (Rosenbaum &

Wong, 2015). In the context of blog usage, Chen et al. (2013) noted that novelty positively influences perceived enjoyment. Similarly, Merikivi et al. (2017) also found novelty to influence perceived enjoyment significantly. Robots, for instance, perform actions that humans usually perform. Service robots and other next-gen technologies spark guests' interests as they elicit enjoyment, a motivation towards adopting such technologies. Thus, novel products can be viewed as eliciting intrinsic motivations in users. As perceived enjoyment is considered an intrinsic motivation, perceptions of AI-enabled technologies' novelty are bound to enhance hotel guests' perceived enjoyment. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Perceived novelty has a significantly positive impact on perceived enjoyment

Regarding extrinsic reactions, Lin and Yu (2006) explained that individuals seeking novelty in technologies were more likely to increase their perceived usefulness. It is confirmed by Baccarella et al. (2021), who also found that perceptions of novelty influenced perceived usefulness in the context of autonomous vehicles' use. Furthermore, regarding mobile payments technology, Flavian et al. (2020) contended that knowing its novelty heightens perceived usefulness, especially when users can acknowledge how they differ from other payment methods, for example, in terms of convenience and usefulness. In addition, Kristi and Kamasuwati (2021) focused on augmented reality and found novelty to impact perceived usefulness positively. Recent studies assessed that using new products or technologies goes to subjective judgments or evaluations of these products. During this process, consumers proceed to an evaluation of the risks versus rewards of using a novel technology, which represents a cognitive process of evaluating the extrinsic benefits of using that technology. As such, users tend to find innovative products that meet their needs useful. In other words, products and technologies that users view as increasing their efficiency are more likely to adopt new technologies. In this context, perceived novelty can be viewed as supporting cognitive beliefs such as the perceived usefulness of adopting technological innovation. However, studies assessing the relationship between perceived novelty and perceived usefulness are scarce in the hotel context. To fill this gap in the literature, we propose the following:

H2: Perceived novelty has a significantly positive impact on perceived usefulness

Compatibility and User Evaluations

Compatibility is the degree to which new information technologies fit the lifestyle and experiences of individuals (Ozturk et al., 2016). In the present

study, compatibility is best understood from the lifestyle lens, comprising beliefs, ideas, values, and needs that users identify to adopt new technologies. There have not been many studies done to investigate the connection between perceived compatibility and perceived enjoyment. Lai and Ulhas (2012, p. 332) stated that technological features such as compatibility "strengthen intrinsic motivations, i.e., perceived enjoyment, then intensify extrinsic motivation, i.e., perceived usefulness, and finally reinforce intention to use". Oh and Yoon (2014) investigated haptic-enabling technologies and found that product compatibility positively affected perceived enjoyment. Regarding m-learning, Cheng (2015) found that compatibility positively influenced perceived enjoyment. Tan and Chou (2008) found that perceived compatibility regarding mobile information and entertainment services is positively linked to perceived playfulness. The concept of playfulness relates to the pleasure and psychological drive for intrinsically interesting interactions (Moon & Kim, 2001). It thus can be equated to enjoyment, which denotes in this study the extent to which AI-enabled technologies are perceived as enjoyable, regardless of external rewards. In mobile banking, Mohammadi (2015) associated high compatibility with a higher tendency to adopt the technology. In the context of online learning, Ifinedo (2017) found that students finding the technology to fit their learning needs were more likely to be pleased with the experience. The current study uses the previous discussion to propose a positive influence of perceived compatibility on the perceived enjoyment of AI-enabled hotel technologies. Thus, the following hypothesis is tested:

H3: Perceived compatibility has a significantly positive impact on perceived enjoyment

Wu and Wang (2005) further explained that the influence of compatibility on behavioral intention occurs through perceived usefulness. The construct of usefulness proposed by Davis (1989) within the original TAM has previously been used extensively in studies related to hospitality technologies (e.g., Bilgihan et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2012; Kim & Qu, 2014). Perceived usefulness is a belief that influences consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward using information technologies. For example, Chau and Hu (2001) found that compatibility strongly impacted perceived usefulness in a study evaluating long-distance medical technologies. Similarly, Kanchanatanee et al. (2014) found that perceived compatibility directly impacts the perceived usefulness of e-marketing. Moreover, empirical support has also been provided for the significant positive association between compatibility and perceived usefulness (Park & Kim, 2020). Within the context of mobile banking, Hanafizadeh et al. (2014) found

compatibility to be one of the factors influencing technology adoption, as influencing the perceived usefulness. It implies that the high compatibility of AI-enabled technologies with hotel guests' lifestyles will likely shape their adoption decisions. However, the relationship between compatibility and usefulness was not much tested within hotel settings. Therefore, the impact of compatibility on AI-enabled technologies at hotels is evaluated through perceived usefulness in the current study:

H4: Perceived compatibility has a significantly positive impact on perceived usefulness

Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment, and Behavioral Intentions

Verma et al. (2018, p. 795) provide an updated definition of perceived usefulness: "the degree to which an individual believes that the use of an innovation helps to enhance his/her work". According to the TAM, perceived usefulness positively influences users of new technologies (Davis et al., 1992). Several studies within various contexts have confirmed this positive relationship. Chang et al. (2012) found perceived usefulness positively related to purchase intention in the context of the quality of travel agency websites. Kim and Qu (2014) also assessed perceived usefulness as positively impacting behavioral intentions. In the context of online booking, several studies assessed perceived usefulness as one of the determinants for predicting usage intention (Kucukusta et al., 2015). In the context of AI-enabled voice assistants at hotels, Cai et al. (2022) found a positive influence of perceived usefulness on intentions to use. Perceived usefulness influences consumers' decision-making toward new technologies, e.g., virtual reality (Holdack et al., 2020). In addition, the construct was also found to be a powerful predictor of behavioral intentions to purchase, as consumers are more engaged when they assess the high usefulness of using a technology (Lee & Koo, 2015). It means that if hotel guests perceive a high level of usefulness for the presence of AI-enabled technologies on a property, they would be more prone to experience an enhanced stay. Thus, in the context of hotel AI-enabled technologies, perceived usefulness refers to the hotel guests feeling that using those technologies presents valuable advantages for their stay.

H5: Perceived usefulness has a significantly positive impact on behavioral intentions

Compared to usefulness, enjoyment is an intrinsic motivation. It has been assessed by previous information systems and technology acceptance literature as contributing factor to users' intention towards adopting new

systems (e.g., Alalwan et al., 2018; Davis et al., 1992). Prior studies have also confirmed perceived enjoyment's positive relationship with consumers' behavioral intentions (e.g., tom Dieck et al., 2017). In the context of online booking, perceived enjoyment was found to have a positive influence on booking intentions (Sahli & Legoherel, 2015). Therefore, perceived enjoyment was incorporated into the modified TAM to evaluate how this attitudinal construct plays besides functional variables (i.e., perceived usefulness) for influencing hotel guests' behavioral intention toward using AI-enabled technologies. Furthermore, several studies used other hedonic constructs like enjoyment, recognizing their influence on users' attitudes toward using new technologies (Chen et al., 2019). Therefore, hedonic perceptions such as perceived enjoyment are crucial for users' intention to use adaptation to the technology. The following hypothesis is then proposed for the context of AI-enabled technologies:

H6: Perceived enjoyment has a significantly positive impact on Behavioral intentions
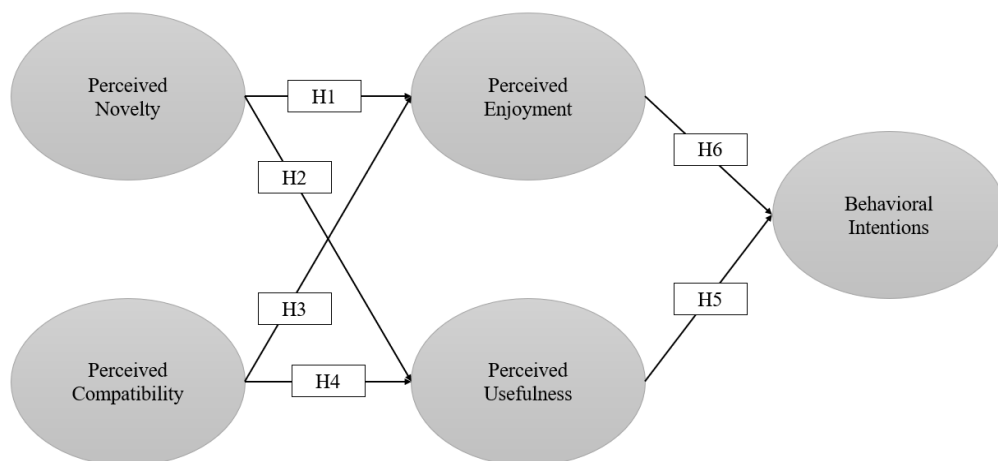
Figure 1. *Research Model*

METHODOLOGY

As an online survey platform used by several scholars within hospitality and tourism studies (Ali et al., 2021), Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) was used to collect the necessary data to conduct this investigation. A self-selection sampling method was deemed relevant since respondents' decision to participate in the research is based on their free will, an essential characteristic of digital surveys (El-Manstrly et al., 2020). The target population consisted of users above 18 years old who have stayed in a US hotel at least once during the past 24 months. Due to the novel character of

the technologies presented in this study, and in the optic of providing context for the respondents, survey participants were exposed to a three-minute video clip featuring next-gen technologies used in Alibaba Flyzoo futuristic hotel in China[2]. The Flyzoo hotel was chosen as it features a quasi-comprehensive package of guest-facing AI technologies used at hotels. The clip was judged as most appropriate to present next-gen technologies. It featured mobile check-in, facial recognition technology for room entry, voice technology to control room amenities, service robots, and augmented reality. For data quality purposes, the online survey targeted respondents who scored a minimum of 95% in the Human Intelligence Task Approval due to their high reputation on the MTurk platform. In addition, two attention checks were included in the online survey to ensure that respondents effectively watched and understood the video. Data collection through Amazon MTurk yielded a total of 1033 responses. The validity and reliability of the data were ensured through several attention-check questions disseminated in various steps of the survey. All respondents who failed attention check questions were excluded from the final data set. In addition, a bot check tool was used to prevent bots from taking the surveys (i.e., humans need to click on the circles with traffic lights). After this cleaning, a net of 405 respondents was used for the final analysis. Then, respondents not meeting the exclusion criteria were removed from the study, and incomplete survey responses were excluded from the final dataset. At the end of the process, 331 valid responses were accepted for analysis.

The study's sample encompasses a rich demographic tapestry, capturing a wide array of participants. Gender distribution is well-balanced, with approximately 45% identifying as female and 55% as male. Age-wise, a predominant 40% falls within the 25-34 age range, highlighting a significant representation of the younger demographic, while another 30% belong to the 35-44 age group, ensuring a diverse age distribution. Educational backgrounds exhibit diversity, with 25% holding undergraduate degrees, 35% possessing postgraduate qualifications, and 10% holding doctoral degrees. In addition to demographic characteristics, participants' technology usage behaviors are integral to the sample, with a noteworthy 61% reporting frequent use of technology during their travel. Moreover, approximately 70% reported engaging in frequent travel, showcasing a sample that actively participates in the hospitality and tourism domains.

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[2] (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn28gSlQUMc)

Regarding measurement, the scales used in this examination were derived from previous studies in consumer behavior, marketing, and technology acceptance literature (Table 1). While only the behavioral intentions variable was measured through a seven-point Likert scale, all other measures employed a five-point Likert scale. Before data collection, the instrument was dispatched to six hospitality and hotel technology experts to confirm face validity. Their valuable comments improved the questionnaire's readability from users' hands-on involvement with next-gen technologies.

Common Method Variance

Common method variance was justified using various methodological and statistical tools. Psychological separation among respondents was also achieved using different cover stories for each scale. The survey instrument had 30 questions, which presents the advantage of being short to avoid confusion and tiredness, which can have an adverse impact on the respondents' cognitive capabilities/efforts to provide accurate answers to the questions. Results from Harman's single-factor test confirmed that a single factor did not account for the majority of the variance. As such, this investigation could not be affected significantly by common method bias.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This study used Partial least squares (PLS-SEM) performed on the SmartPLS 3.3.3 software to test the linear relationships in the research model depicted in Figure 1. Similarly, for configurational modeling, authors have used fsQCA software (Ragin, 2009). Recently, the scholarly community in hospitality and tourism has suggested employing causal asymmetrical analysis to understand the complex issues within consumer behavior (Kumar et al., 2023). The asymmetrical approach suggests that a high value of X is both necessary and sufficient for a high value of Y to occur and that a low value of Y occurs with low values of X (Woodside, 2016). In addition, the asymmetrical approach suggests that the four antecedent conditions leading to high scores in an outcome condition are often not the mirror opposites of the antecedent conditions leading to low scores (Woodside, 2016). Failure to examine asymmetric analysis can lead to incomplete results, implying an unfitting causal understanding of the issue. Also, the asymmetric analysis provides richer and deeper insights to explain reality than the symmetric analysis, allowing researchers to understand the complex causal relationships and the effects of causal

recipes of outcome conditions (Ali et al., 2023). There are three main components of fsQCA analysis, i.e., data calibration, truth table analysis, and necessary component analysis. First, data calibration converts raw data to more exact standard values (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). Subsequently, transforming the Likert-type scale data from a discrete value (1 to 5) into a fuzzy form (0 to 1), where 1 signifies complete participation, .5 marks the crossover point, and 0 denotes an entire absence of membership. Since the dataset did not follow a multivariate normal distribution as indicated by Mardia's coefficients, PLS-SEM was considered suitable for testing the model, especially since the study is exploratory per se (Ali et al., 2018). Moreover, the independent t-test revealed that all measures had a statistically non-significant difference, thus confirming the absence of non-response bias.

Measurement Model Assessment

PLSc algorithm was applied, given that the variables used in this study are reflective. First, the model fit using Standardized Root Mean Square Residual Value (SRMR) yielded a value of .074, indicating a good fit to the data (Ali et al., 2018). Second, d_ULS and d_G values were 2.513 and .077, less than the 95% bootstrapped quantile. Third, the discriminant validity, convergent validity, and internal consistency reliability were evaluated through rho_A, composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha (CA). The results show that CR is above .70 (See Table 1)—the suggested lower limit for these measures (Ali et al., 2018). In addition, the AVE is also above the threshold of .5. Consequently, the model presents acceptable results regarding convergent validity and intrinsic reliability values. Additionally, discriminant validity was assessed for the variables through the Fornell-Larker criterion. Correlations in the respective rows and columns were lower than all the AVE square roots (See Table 2). Table 2 also displays all values for HTMT, which satisfy the condition of HTMT .90 and support the satisfactory discriminant validity for all study constructs.

Table 1. *Validity and Reliability*

Variables	Items	Statements	Loadings	CA	Rho_A	CR	AVE
Perceived novelty (Im et al., 2015)		Compared to other technologies used in hotels, the AI-enabled technologies presented		.889	.889	.901	.534
	PN1	in the video clip: Are very novel for me	.701				
	PN2	Are very innovative for me	.766				
	PN3	Are very original to me	.746				

	PN4	Are radically different	.738				
	PN5	Can be considered revolutionary	.771				
	PN6	Are really out of the ordinary	.753				
	PN7	Provide something not commonly found	.590				
	PN8	Incorporates new ideas/concepts	.769				
Perceived compatibility (Wu & Wang, 2005)	PC1	Using AI-enabled services is compatible with many aspects of my transactions	.866	.854	.857	.911	.775
	PC2	Using AI-enabled services fit my lifestyle	.865				
	PC3	Using AI-enabled services fit well with the way I like to engage in online transactions	.908				
Perceived enjoyment (Nysveen et al., 2005)	PE1	Using AI-enabled services is fun	.835	.89	.891	.924	.752
	PE2	Using AI-enabled services is enjoyable	.882				
	PE3	Using AI-enabled services is exciting	.867				
	PE4	Using AI-enabled services is pleasant	.883				
Perceived usefulness (Nysveen et al., 2005)	PU1	Using AI-enabled services make me save time	.858	.841	.846	.904	.758
	PU2	Using AI-enabled services improve my efficiency	.866				
	PE3	AI-enabled services are useful to me	.888				
Behavioral intentions (Ali et al., 2021)	BI1	I think that I will be using AI-enabled services	.891	.894	.896	.934	.825
	BI2	I would leave positive comments about AI-enabled services	.906				
	BI3	I would recommend my friends and family to use AI-enabled services	.926				

Table 2. *Discriminant Validity*

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
F&L criterion					
Behavioral intentions	.908				
Perceived compatibility	.768	.880			
Perceived enjoyment	.736	.756	.867		

Perceived novelty	.495	.552	.483	.732	
Perceived usefulness	.759	.773	.700	.559	.871
HTMT criterion					
Behavioral intentions					
Perceived compatibility	.848				
Perceived enjoyment	.823	.844			
Perceived novelty	.543	.558	.531		
Perceived usefulness	.850	.808	.821	.633	

Structural Model Assessment

The variance inflation factor (VIF) results revealed no multicollinearity concerns in the structural model since the values found were lower than the threshold of 5. Also, path estimates were calculated along with 5,000 subsamples. As displayed in Figure 2, the perceived novelty has a significant positive impact on perceived enjoyment, and perceived compatibility positively impacts perceived usefulness. Moreover, perceived enjoyment and perceived usefulness were found to have a positive impact on behavioral intentions.
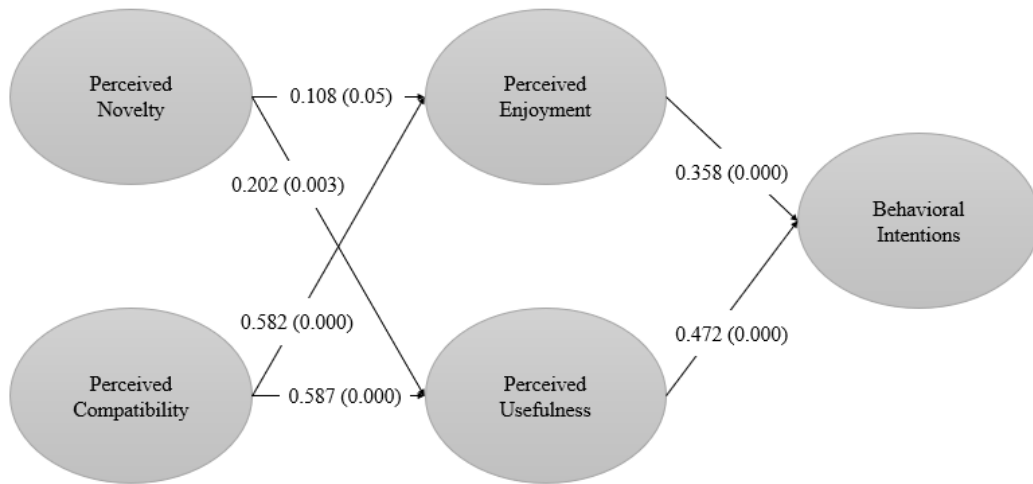

Figure 2. *Structural model*

Table 3. *Hypotheses Testing*

Paths		Original sample	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
H1	Perceived novelty -> Perceived enjoyment	.108	2.331	.05	Supported
H2	Perceived novelty -> Perceived usefulness	.202	3.032	.003	Supported
H3	Perceived compatibility -> Perceived enjoyment	.582	7.384	.000	Supported
H4	Perceived compatibility -> Perceived usefulness	.587	8.285	.000	Supported
H5	Perceived usefulness -> Behavioral intentions	.472	6.732	.000	Supported
H6	Perceived enjoyment -> Behavioral intentions	.358	4.637	.000	Supported

Necessary Conditions Analysis (NCA)

NCA was conducted to identify the critical necessary factors for the study's high and low outcome, i.e., intentions to adopt and use next-gen/AI-enabled technologies by hotel guests (See Table 4). Whenever the values of consistency and coverage are more than .9 and .5, a condition is necessary (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). Findings in Table 4 reveal that all conditions, including perceived novelty (PN), perceived compatibility (PC), perceived enjoyment (PE), and perceived usefulness (PU), were necessary for developing the high intention intentions to adopt and use next-gen/AI-enabled technologies. It means that the user's high behavioral intention will not be developed without the presence of PV, PC, PE, and PU.

Table 4. *Table for NCA for both high and low outcomes*

Conditions Tested High BI.	Consistency	Coverage
PN	**.915**	**.915**
~PN	.185	.896
PC	**.909**	**.961**
~PC	.209	.804
PE	**.948**	**.934**
~PE	.152	.795
PU	**.912**	**.948**
~PU	.191	.803
Conditions Tested Low BI.		
PN	.896	.186
~PN	.509	.592
PC	.754	.165
~PC	.820	.652
PE	.810	.165
~PE	.677	.730
PU	.774	.165
~PU	.755	.658

Note: PN: Perceived novelty; PC: Perceived compatibility; PE: Perceived enjoyment; PU: Perceived Usefulness.

1. Conditions in bold represent necessary conditions.

Configurational Analysis

We used truth table analysis to determine if the sample data adequately explained the expected results. Outcomes from the fsQCA (see Table 5) indicate that the configurations were enough to forecast high and low scores of the study outcome based on evaluating the complex set of interconnected studied components leading to users' behavioral intention. Because coverage and consistency were above the preset standards of >.2 and .80, respectively, the solutions were accepted (Ragin, 2009). In addition, Pappas and Woodside (2021) recommended that the recognition and recording of both peripheral and core components in each configuration be conducted to achieve a deeper understanding. In Table 5, the absence of a condition is

represented by a circle with a cross through it (⊗), whereas the presence of a causal event is represented by a black circle (●). The vacant spaces denote circumstances regarded to be "do not care" scenarios. Larger circles depict more significant conditions, smaller ones less so.

Table 5. *Configurational Analysis*

Conditions	Solutions for High BI. frequency cut off: 1 consistency cut off: .828			Solutions for Low BI. frequency cut off: 1 consistency cut-off: .705	
	M1	M2	M3	M1	M2
Perceived Novelty		●		^	●
Perceived Compatibility	⊗	⊗	●	⊗	⊗
Perceived Enjoyment	⊗	●	●	⊗	⊗
Perceived Usefulness	⊗		●		
Raw Coverage	.132	.204	.877	.625	.690
Unique Coverage	.004	.003	.680	.024	.090
Consistency	.804	.928	.968	.788	.736
Overall Coverage	.889			.715	
Overall Consistency	..935			.734	

Note:
1. (Black circle (●) indicates the existence of a causal condition, blank cross circle (⊗) indicates the absence or negation of a condition, and blank cells belong to situations where the presence or absence of such a condition does not matter for the outcome.
2. ^ represents the core conditions, whereas a small black circle (●) represents the peripheral conditions.

The overall solution consistency (.935) demonstrates how the three causal solutions lead to a high level of behavioral intent to use AI-based technology. In particular, the overall solution coverage (.889) indicates the probability that the three causal configurations will predict a high proposed outcome. For example, considering Table 5's data, configuration 1 had a consistency of 80% and a coverage of 13.2%. Comparatively, configuration 2 explained 92.7% of the result's variance with coverage values of 20%. Ultimately, solution 3 had the maximum coverage and consistency values (.877 and .968, respectively) to generate high intention toward AI-based technologies. Accordingly, two causal solutions with overall consistency and coverage values of .734 and .715, respectively, were developed for low behavioral intention regarding AI-based technology. Model 1 of the two causal models has 62% coverage and 78.6% consistency, including the lack of PC, PE, and PU. Nevertheless, model 2 has greater coverage (.690) and a consistency score of 73.6%, including the existence of PN and the lack of PC and PU.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the main factors shaping users' behavioral intentions toward using next-gen technologies in hotels. As such, extrinsic (i.e., perceived usefulness) and intrinsic (i.e., perceived enjoyment) aspects were considered the main drivers of users' behavioral intentions to use next-gen technologies in hotels. In addition, the study hypothesized that perceived novelty and compatibility significantly impact both perceived enjoyment and usefulness, leading to behavioral intentions. All hypothetical relationships between constructs in this study were tested, and empirical support was provided for these hypotheses. Thus, this study underlined the importance of including extrinsic and intrinsic motivations in shaping users' behavioral intentions toward using AI-enabled technologies. The outcomes of this analysis are consistent with previous studies that assessed the significant influence of perceived usefulness on behavioral intentions (Alalwan et al., 2018; Cobanoglu et al., 2015). The positive relationship between perceived enjoyment and behavioral intention is also corroborated by similar studies, reinforcing the importance of intrinsic motivations in users' adoption of new technologies (Alalwan et al., 2018; Chang & Chen, 2021; Holdack et al., 2020). Furthermore, this study uncovered that perceived novelty positively impacted perceived enjoyment and perceived compatibility positively impacted perceived usefulness. Again, these findings are in line with findings from previous studies (Chen et al., 2013; Kanchanatanee et al., 2016; Koenig-Lewis et al., 2015; Merikivi et al., 2017). In addition, the present study demonstrated the impact of intrinsic motivators on extrinsic evaluations in that perceived novelty had a positive impact on perceived usefulness. However, perceived compatibility had a positive impact on perceived enjoyment. It implies that hotel guests can evaluate next-gen technologies based on how well these fit with their beliefs, ideas, and needs (compatibility). Guests will likely consider these technologies useful, enjoyable and use them if these technologies are novel. Thus, the extended TAM and IDT interpretation offers a detailed understanding of users' beliefs, impacting their intention to use next-gen technologies. The following paragraph compares these findings with those of previous studies.

First, the study found support for the positive impact of perceived novelty on perceived enjoyment and usefulness. These results suggest that users perceive the novelty of technological innovation shapes their evaluations of the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits they gain from using those technologies. It is in line with Kristi and Kamasuwati (2021), who found that novelty in augmented reality positively influenced perceived usefulness

and enjoyment. Contradictorily and apropos of novelty-seeking, Baccarella et al. (2021) could not confirm a positive relationship between novelty-seeking and perceived usefulness. Secondly, perceived compatibility was found to have a positive impact on perceived enjoyment and perceived usefulness. It suggests that the degree to which technological innovations align with users' beliefs, ideas, values, and needs, is also a function of their perceptions of benefits, both on affective and cognitive levels. This understanding is also consistent with previous studies. For example, Cheng (2015) found a positive effect of compatibility on both perceived enjoyment and usefulness in mobile learning. Oh and Yoon (2014) also assessed compatibility to impact the perceived enjoyment and usefulness of haptic-enabled technologies positively. Finally, concerning e-textbook applications, Lai and Ulhas (2012) also found compatibility to affect both perceived enjoyment and perceived usefulness positively. Lastly, perceived usefulness and perceived enjoyment were found to have a positive impact on behavioral intentions. These findings support the rationale that about technological innovations, intrinsic and extrinsic factors significantly influence users' behavioral intentions toward using those technologies, regardless of the technological context. For example, Chang and Chen (2021) found that perceived enjoyment and usefulness positively affected behavioral intention in online shopping. It is also confirmed in several other studies: Chiu and Cho (2020) about health and fitness apps; Alalwan et al. (2018) about mobile internet adoption in Saudi Arabia; Han and Conti (2020) in the context of telepresence robots in an educational setting. As such, this study provides empirical findings in a hotel setting. While Koenig-Lewis et al. (2015)—referring to the context of mobile payment technology—also found a positive effect of perceived usefulness on behavioral intentions, they did not find a significant direct relationship between perceived enjoyment and behavioral intentions. Nevertheless, Cha's (2020) investigation regarding the intention to use robot services in restaurants corroborated the positive influence of perceived enjoyment on behavioral intentions. The direct relationship between perceived usefulness and behavioral intentions is also supported in various studies (e.g., Cobanoglu et al., 2015; Lin & Chang, 2011).

Finally, this research presents a novel asymmetrical approach to confirming the preliminary assumptions of complexity theory, complementing the standard symmetrical analysis. Equality of outcomes, asymmetry, and conjunctural causation are the three cornerstones of complexity theory. All the crucial assumptions of complexity theory are proven true, and the results fill a crucial context absent from the more

common SEM study. The results of applying fsQCA to the key concepts of complexity theory are summarized in Table 5. To begin with, the results of the fsQCA analyses provide credence to the idea that asymmetrical correlations exist between the variables in the research, proving a key premise of fsQCA. The findings demonstrate that the suggested consequence, namely the purpose of employing AI-based technology, may be explained by several conditions. The context for the result is provided by the fact that both high and low PE and PC components can be found in different configurations (M2 and M3). The results of the truth table analysis further showed that numerous conditions (PE and PU) did not matter. Meanwhile, the more traditional PLS-SEM-based analysis showed that they did matter significantly. These results suggest that the relationship between the investigated factors and the outcome is complex and multifaceted. Equifinality refers to the idea that there are many ways to arrive at the same destination (in this case, BI). Findings of the dataset's asymmetrical relationships show that the results from using either PE or PC are consistent and comprehensive, further justifying equifinal outcomes. Conjectural causality was proven to be an acceptable research premise. Multiple combinations of antecedents contribute to BI, and the researchers concluded that each of these accounts for the predicted outcome. Moreover, the findings in Table 4 also reveal that all conditions are found to be necessary to generate the desired outcome.

Theoretical Implications

This study explores the determinants of hotel guests' intentions to adopt and use next-gen/AI-enabled technologies, employing a dual approach of symmetrical and asymmetrical methods while integrating aspects of Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Symmetrically, our investigation advances the comprehension of perceived enjoyment and usefulness in influencing hotel guests' behavioral intentions toward the adoption of next-gen technologies, aligning with TAM. The research model posits that perceived enjoyment and usefulness positively influence hotel guests' behavioral intentions, with intrinsic and extrinsic motivations serving as antecedents impacting cognitive and affective processes. This study contributes to the theoretical landscape by enhancing the combination of IDT and TAM, providing greater clarity on how the integration enriches our understanding within the framework of AI technology in the hospitality industry. We extend traditional TAM by underscoring the pivotal role of intrinsic motivations in users' assessments of adopting newer technologies, emphasizing the need for affective

considerations in technology adoption. Aligning with IDT, we acknowledge the evolving nature of technology adoption in the hospitality sector, shifting from predominantly utilitarian guest-facing technologies to the current emphasis on hedonic facets. Specifically, the "fun" aspect of these technologies cannot be ignored, and this study delves into the factors contributing to their adoption by users. The hedonic aspect of AI-enabled technologies, particularly their degree of personalization, is a focal point, integrating both IDT and TAM perspectives. Recent studies, incorporating perceived enjoyment, highlight intrinsic motivations as potent predictors of behavioral intentions, prompting the inclusion of additional variables. Drawing on IDT and TAM principles, personalized services within hotel operations, offering special attention and treatment, are posited to significantly contribute to guests' enjoyment and usefulness, reducing information search time and providing intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. In employing asymmetrical techniques rooted in complexity theory, this research uncovers nuanced phenomena in human behavior, particularly in the tourism industry's use of AI-based technology. Beyond detailing the overall impact of each variable, the study utilizes fsQCA to present alternative pathways for achieving desired goals, optimizing for both low or high behavioral intention (BI). This approach enhances our theoretical contribution by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the adoption of AI-enabled technologies in the hospitality industry, firmly grounded in the integrated perspectives of IDT and TAM.

Practical Implications

In terms of practical implications, new technologies are vital for the hotel guest experience and can provide hoteliers with a satisfactory return on substantial investments in AI-enabled technologies. This study thus contributes by extending to hoteliers willing to gain further insights regarding guests' acceptance of next-gen technologies, leading to a better selection and implantation policy. Although the novelty of those technologies may elicit enjoyment and other intrinsic benefits to users, they should answer to specific demands and needs of customers. It shows that hoteliers should not neglect the human factor beyond the system itself, likely to elicit extrinsic motivations. To achieve this, hoteliers should tailor technology offerings, providing alternatives or flexible usage conditions to accommodate the varied expectations of their clientele. A practical example involves implementing a smart room system with customizable features, allowing guests to personalize their experiences based on individual preferences. In addition, hoteliers should make sure that their investments

in technologies are of quality products, as related to the example of Hen-na hotel in Japan, which was aimed to be entirely operated by robots but ended as a fiasco due to malfunctioning robots. Some users may not find all AI-enabled technologies useful; as such, there should be alternatives or flexibility in the conditions of their use. It can also be recommended that hoteliers focus on innovative technologies that align with their customer base's beliefs, values, and needs. For instance, a hotel focusing on millennials may invest in mobile technology because of this generation's heavy usage of smartphones.

Ultimately, our study assessed the importance of intrinsic motivations, i.e., perceived enjoyment, in justifying behavioral intentions toward using next-gen technology in hotels. It can be said that guests at a hotel would be less inclined to use technologies that do not offer intrinsic benefits. It can be attributed to the fact that technologies enabled by artificial intelligence usually involve personalized features, which tend to increase customers' feelings of pleasure and enjoyment from using those technologies. A contradicting viewpoint is from Koenig-Lewis et al. (2015), who found that perceived enjoyment did not strongly influence the intention to use mobile payment services but assessed a significant indirect effect through perceived usefulness. Koenig-Lewis et al. (2015) also argued that perceived enjoyment is not essential in adopting financial services. As financial services are designed for their productivity and convenience attributes rather than the fun aspect, enjoyment's effect on behavioral intentions is not uniform across various sectors. Nevertheless, the present study assessed the critical role of enjoyment in the context of hotel technologies. Within hospitality, perceived enjoyment is a critical factor for leisure travelers, who tend to place more importance on amusement over productivity. With the panoply of technologies competing for consumers' attention, adoption, and use, hoteliers must provide technologies that users may find fun and enjoyable. Koenig-Lewis et al. (2015) also noted that perceptions of novelty and instant gratification are essential for young people, thus emphasizing the importance of intrinsic evaluations and benefits for consumers. If guests perceive AI-enabled technologies in hotels as enjoyable, they are also more likely to be perceived as productive and beneficial. As such, by enhancing levels of perceived enjoyment, hoteliers would benefit from an increased willingness to adopt and improve the perceived usefulness levels. Hoteliers' promotional and marketing efforts should be directed at positioning AI-enabled technologies from an affective standpoint. Along with those efforts, practitioners also need to provide

services with assured quality and reliability to not fail on the perceived usefulness of those technologies.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

While the present study yielded intriguing and meaningful insights, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations that may guide future research endeavors. The study's nature, centered on next-gen technologies in hotels, necessitated the utilization of a video clip showcasing the innovative Flyzoo Hotel in China. However, it is worth noting that these technologies are still in the introductory stage, limiting the number of hotel guests with direct, hands-on experiences. To address this limitation, future research could intentionally focus on guests who have had firsthand encounters with these technologies, providing a more nuanced understanding of their perceptions and attitudes. Furthermore, as the adoption of next-gen technologies unfolds, it becomes evident that flexibility is paramount to cater to users' specific needs. Subsequent studies could enhance the model employed in this research by incorporating additional variables, such as exploring the intricate dynamics of trust and privacy concerns. This expansion would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing users' intentions to adopt and use these technologies in a dynamic hotel environment. Another avenue for future research lies in exploring the evolving landscape of user experiences with next-gen technologies in diverse hospitality settings. This could involve investigating how users from various demographic backgrounds and technological familiarity levels engage with these innovations. Moreover, delving into the potential cultural nuances influencing technology adoption and acceptance could provide valuable insights for hoteliers and technology developers aiming to tailor their offerings to different markets. Additionally, recognizing the rapid evolution of technology, longitudinal studies tracking the changes in user perceptions and behaviors over time would offer valuable insights into the long-term impact of next-gen technologies in the hotel industry. This could involve periodic assessments of user experiences, preferences, and concerns as these technologies mature and become more ingrained in the hospitality landscape.

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