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THE ROLE OF SELF-CONGRUITY AND FUNCTIONAL CONGRUITY IN INFLUENCING TOURISTS' POST VISIT BEHAVIOUR

Vikas KUMAR[1]
Management Studies, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) – Roorkee, Uttrakhand, India

Jogendra Kumar NAYAK
Management Studies, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) - Roorkee, Uttrakhand, India

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationships among self-congruity, functional congruity, satisfaction, attachment, and loyalty in tourism context. The sample of 253 international tourists was collected in Shimla, a famous holiday destination of India. Using structural equation modelling technique (SEM), the study findings reveal that self-congruity positively influences destination satisfaction which in turn affects destination loyalty directly and also indirectly through destination attachment. On the contrary, functional congruity failed to show any relationship to destination satisfaction. In addition, self-congruity emerged as a significant predictor of functional congruity. The study findings offer important implications for both tourism practitioners and academicians.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism researchers always tend to find out why the tourists revisit and recommend a specific destination (Chen & Phou, 2013; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Successful assessment of destination loyalty offers strategic intelligence for destination marketers. It is apparent from the tourism literature that psychological (e.g. self-concept and attitudes) and

[1] Address correspondence to Vikas KUMAR, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Management Studies Roorkee, Uttrakhand, INDIA. E-mail: vikas4408007@gmail.com

functional variables positively influence tourist's loyalty to a destination (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Furthermore, Sirgy and Su (2000) stated that self-congruity and functional congruity are important elements to predict tourists' behaviour. Self-congruity refers to the match/mismatch between tourist self-image and perceived destination image, whereas, functional congruity is defined as to the match/mismatch between perceived performances of destination's utilitarian benefits and tourists' ideal performances of destination's utilitarian benefits. In consumer behaviour studies, a number of researchers have explained the role of self-concept in determining the consumer behavioural intentions in different segments of products and services (Landon, 1974; Malhotra, 1988). Surprisingly, most of the past researches have focused on what customers buy, how they buy, where they buy, but not on why they buy or re-buy. Hence, there is a need to find out the reasons behind this psychological phenomenon in various industries. The psychological phenomenon behind why customers buy or re-buy can be explained with the help of self-congruity theory. Since Chon (1992) first applied the theory of self-congruity to tourism, there have been various advances pertaining to self-concept and self-congruity in the tourism research. In addition, some researchers have also stressed the role of functional congruity in buying or re-buying the products (Kressmann et al., 2006; Sirgy, Johar, Samli, & Claiborne, 1991). However, there is a lack of empirical validation of these constructs in some aspects of the tourism industry, such as the effect of self-congruity and functional congruity on tourist's post visit behaviour (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Although, the recent studies have investigated the tourist behaviour in different settings, the self- and functional congruity research remain limited (Anderson, 2007; Sirgy & Su, 2000; Yuan & Wu, 2008). Therefore, this study endeavours to fill this void by evaluating self- and functional congruity theory's validity to determine tourists' post visit behaviour. In addition, this study also discusses the importance of tourists' satisfaction, attachment and loyalty to the destination in evaluating strategic competitiveness of the destination in the marketplace. Arguably, this is the first study of its kind which has been performed in Indian tourism context.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Consumer behaviour research shows that consumers use the products for their functional and symbolic values (Sirgy, Grzeskowiak & Su, 2005; Solomon, 1983). Sirgy et al. (1997) classified product value in two terms: functional and symbolic. Sirgy (1982) argued that people prefer those

products whose image has a greater match to their self-image, which is termed as the self-congruity. In literature, we found two main types of congruity: self- and functional congruity, where self-congruity represents self expressive aspects of congruity and functional congruity represents the knowledge aspects of congruity. Self-congruity has proved its major role in assessing different consumer behaviour aspects such as brand attitude, brand preference, advertising effectiveness, satisfaction and brand loyalty (Ekinci & Riley, 2003; He & Mukherjee, 2007). Kressmann et al. (2006) conceptualized functional congruity as "the match between consumers' ideal expectations of utilitarian brand features and their perceptions of how the product is perceived along the same features" (p. 955). In other words, people evaluate the benefits and costs of a transaction for their decision making. Despite the fact that the functional congruity is an easy approach; researchers have criticized it to be inadequate in explaining consumer behaviour. Researchers argued that functional congruity fails to elucidate symbolic expressive consumption behaviour, as consumers often favour to prefer products that match with their self-images instead of being functionally oriented (e.g., Chon, 1992; Landon, 1974). Hence, value-expressive attributes of a product can be the exclusive rationale for buying behaviour. Similarly, Sirgy and Su (2000) stated that self-congruity and functional congruity are necessary for examining tourist's post visit behaviour.

Surprisingly, the combine effect of self-congruity and functional congruity on tourists' post visit behaviour is left largely under investigated. Sirgy and Su (2000) offered a more integrative model of destination image, which explored the relationships among tourist's self-concept, tourist's image, destination environment, self-congruity, functional congruity, and travel behaviour. Although, the model was comprehensive and followed the logic of self-congruity theory, it was not empirically proven. However, they offered a holistic view of destination-self-congruity in their model. The model suggests that self-congruity can be a valuable approach to elucidate tourist's behavioural intentions. The model also recommends that functional congruity is the outcome of a match between the tourists' desired performance attributes and destinations' utility based performance attributes. Along the same logic, Kastenholz (2004) explored destination self-congruity's effect on intention to visit in a rural destination. Later on Beerli, Meneses, and Gil (2007) studied the congruity between actual and ideal self-concept and destination image. They also examined the role of two moderators in influencing self-congruity: involvement in leisure tourism and past

visiting experience. Overall, there is a plethora of studies which have attempted to portray destinations as human-like and to demonstrate tourists' behavioural intentions as a function of destination self-congruity.

Hypotheses development

The relationship between self-congruity, functional congruity and satisfaction. Self-congruity has emerged as a significant predictor in determining consumer post purchase behaviour aspects such as satisfaction (Ekinci & Riley, 2003). The literature review reveals that numerous researchers have explored the role of self- and functional congruity in predicting the consumer satisfaction in various product categories (Back, 2005; Ekinci & Riley, 2003; Ekinci, Dawes, & Massey, 2008; He & Mukherjee, 2007; Sirgy et al., 1997). In applying Oliver (1980) expectation disconfirmation model in tourism context, it is apparent that tourists can develop expectations about a destination from various sources of communication. After visiting the destination, if the tourists' experiences match with their expectations, satisfaction is the likely result. Tourist satisfaction plays a vital role in the success of destination branding, because it affects the consumption of services and products, the decision to choose a destination, and the intention to revisit (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). Chen and Chen (2010) explained tourist satisfaction as a function of pre-visit expectations and post-visit experience. In the context of tourism, Chon (1992) was the first researcher who examined the role of self-congruity theory in evaluating tourist's post visit behaviour. The results of the study revealed that higher the agreement between self-concept and destination image higher the tourist's satisfaction. In extending the work of Chon (1992), Litvin and Kar (2003) demonstrated that the self-congruity is a significant predictor of the tourist's satisfaction. In other words, higher degree of congruence between self-image and destination image would engender a higher degree of satisfaction among tourists.

Chon and Olsen (1991) explained that functional congruity directly influences the tourist's post-visit behaviour (e.g. satisfaction). Subsequently, Sirgy and Su (2000) contributed to the knowledge of this domain by demonstrating the role of functional congruity in predicting the tourists' behaviour from a theoretical perspective. Further Ahn, Ekinci, and Li (2013) proposed that utilitarian destination attributes tend to fulfil the tourist's most fundamental travel needs such as convenience, safety, security, accessibility, comfort and relaxation. Arguably, higher self- and

functional congruity results in higher satisfaction. The following hypotheses have been proposed based upon the above discussions:
H1: Self-congruity significantly influences the destination satisfaction.
H2:Functional congruity significantly influences the destination satisfaction.

Although, some researchers argue that self-congruity and functional congruity are the competing theories (e.g. Mannetti, Pierro, & Livi, 2004), others (e.g. Sirgy et al., 2005) have proposed these both approaches as complementary. With the help of experimental design Anand, Holbrook, and Stephens (1988) tested the independence hypothesis (affect and cognitions are independent) and cognitive model (affect influences cognition). The findings suggested that affects play a mediating role in influencing cognitions. Later on, using the same concept, Sirgy et al. (1991) and Sirgy and Su (2000) suggested that self-congruity may have a substantial influence on functional congruity. In other words, people who find a greater congruence between product image and self-image are likely to evaluate product's functional congruity distorted in a positive direction. Moreover, the assessment of self-congruity is supposed to engender motivational tendency which in turn biases the interpretation of functional attributes (Kressmann et al., 2006). Although Hung and Petrick (2011) demonstrated empirically that self-congruity significantly affect functional congruity to influence the cruising intentions, there is a lack of strong empirical support to the relationship between these two constructs. Thus, in order to fill this void, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Self-congruity positively influences the functional congruity.

The relationship between satisfaction, attachment, and destination loyalty. Although some researchers have identified place attachment as the antecedent of satisfaction (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010), a more critical evidence from tourism research has emphasized the relevance of satisfaction as a predictor of place attachment, which in turn engenders conative loyalty (Esch, Langner, Schmitt, & Geus, 2006; Hou, Lin, & Morais , 2005; Lee & Allen, 1999; Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2007; Lee, Kyle, & Scott, 2012). Lee and Allen (1999) established that the destination attachment was influenced by the tourists' satisfaction with sun, sand and beach at Myrtle Beach. Thomson, McInnis, and Park (2005) proposed that a satisfied customer may develop an emotional relationship or bond with a brand. Hou et al. (2005) explored

visitors' opinions about destination satisfaction and found that satisfaction is a significant predictor of place attachment. Similarly, a sense of place attachment might get developed if satisfaction shows some positive effects on brand attachment and with a setting (Esch et al., 2006). Furthermore, Lee et al. (2012) demonstrated that satisfaction significantly influences the place attachment toward the destination. Thus, based on the above discussion following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Destination satisfaction significantly influences destination attachment.

Based on the literature review of tourism studies related to destination loyalty, satisfaction emerged as significant predictor of destination loyalty. Yoon and Uysal (2005) demonstrated the relationships between motivation, satisfaction, and destination loyalty. The results revealed that tourists' satisfaction with their experiences positively influenced the destination loyalty. Lee et al. (2007) proposed that satisfaction is an important antecedent to visitors' attitudinal loyalty. Wang, Wu, and Yuan (2010) explored visitors' intentions to revisit and their experiences for a heritage harbour destination, and established that satisfied visitors displayed more willingness to revisit the same place in the future. Prayag and Ryan (2012) explored the antecedents of destination loyalty to Mauritius as a holiday destination and demonstrated that satisfaction positively influences revisit intensions and recommendation intentions. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Destination satisfaction significantly influences destination loyalty.

Although, the tourism researchers have explored the relationship between destination attachment and destination loyalty (Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2003; Lee, 2003; Yuksel et al., 2010), many issues still require significant attention. Researchers have rarely tested the effectiveness of attachment in destination context. Thus, it is necessary to fill this void since tourists attach affective bond with a particular destination which may be an important antecedent to destination loyalty (Yuksel et al., 2010). Lee (2003) demonstrated that place attachment influences cognitive and affective loyalty. Later on Alexandris, Kouthouris, and Meligdis (2006) found a positive relationship between place dependence, place identity and destination loyalty among skiers in Greece. Yuksel et al. (2010) explored the relationships between satisfaction, attachment and loyalty and showed that destination attachment is the significant predictor of destination loyalty. They

demonstrated that the three elements of place attachment (i.e. affective attachment, place identity and place dependence) influenced cognitive and affective loyalty through overall satisfaction, which engendered conative loyalty. Similarly, Prayag, and Ryan (2012) confirmed in their study that place attachment positively influences intention to recommend and intention to revisit the destination. Furthermore, Lee et al. (2012) demonstrated how place attachment mediates the path between satisfaction and destination loyalty. Based on the above discussions, we propose following hypothesis:

H6: Destination attachment significantly influences destination loyalty.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model used in this study.

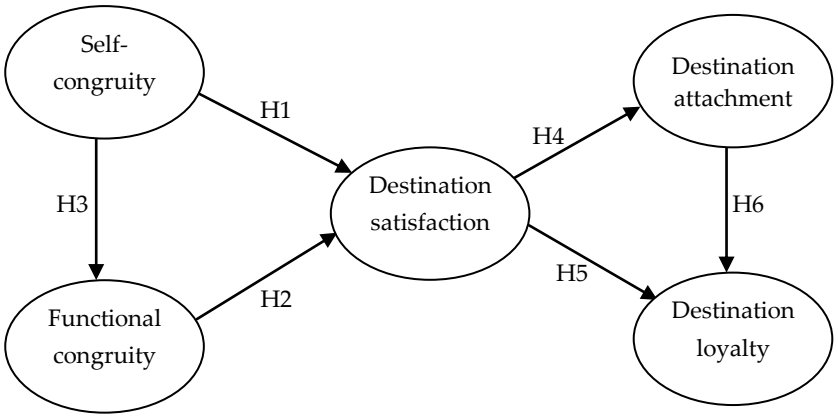

Figure 1. *Conceptual model*

METHODOLOGY

Measurements

The measurements of key constructs in this study were performed with the help of previously developed scales. In tourism research, researchers have usually practiced one or two methods to evaluate self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1997). The first method exercises gap scoring formula to calculate self-congruity. The second method measures the self-congruity directly. This method tends to be more valid and reliable in calculating self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1997). Thus, this study uses the direct method to assess the actual and ideal self-congruity. The self-congruity is

measured through eight statements on a seven point rating scale ranging from (+3) as strongly agree to (-3) as strongly disagree (Sirgy & Su, 2000, p. 350). The actual and ideal self-congruity statements are presented in Table 1.

Functional congruity is conceptualized as a variation of a multiattribute attitude model through the evaluation of utilitarian attributes. Utilitarian attributes refer to perceived characteristics related to convenience, customer service, performance or quality and reliability (Mangleburg et al., 1998; Park, Bernard, & Deborah, 1986). In order to measure functional congruity, 11 items have been derived from the literature (Bosnjak, Sirgy, Hellriegel, & Maurer, 2011).

The destination attachment measures were adopted from Yuksel et al. (2010): "This destination means a lot to me", "I am very attached to this destination", and "I feel a strong sense of belonging to this destination". The four items for destination satisfaction were adopted from Chen and Phou (2013): "My visit to this destination is worth my time and effort", "Compared to other destinations, this place is a much better one", "My experiences with this destination are excellent", and "Overall, I am satisfied with the travel experience in this destination". Similarly, the two items for the measurement of destination loyalty were adopted from Chen and Phou (2013): "It's likely that I will to revisit this destination in the future" and "It's likely that I will recommend this destination to my family and friends". All these items were measured on a seven point rating scale of (1) as strongly disagree to (7) as strongly agree. These scales were preferred over other scales because the same have been validated and checked for reliability in the similar context and have shown a high degree of validity and reliability.

Sample and data collection

The sample was collected from Shimla, a famous hill station among foreigners, through a personally administered questionnaire. This location was chosen because of the diversity of tourists visiting the destination. The simple random sampling method was used by picking random weeks, random days, random respondents and a number of different places such as hotels, famous sights and train stations to reach out the respondents. In total, 368 questionnaires were distributed and 253 usable questionnaires were collected. The sample was collected in 55 days starting from 6th February to 30th March 2014. The average age of the tourists was 38 years and varied in between 19 to 68 years. 53% of the sample was female and

47% is male. In total, 26% of visitors were repeaters and 74% first time visitors. The sample has respondents from Europe (39%), North America (18%), South America (23%), Africa (8%) and Asia (12%).

Since the questionnaire would be evaluated by the respondents, there is possibility common method variance occurrence (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). Thus, this study followed the guidelines suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) to reduce any potential common method variance. To minimize the evaluation apprehension, the respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, to minimize common method variance bias, Harman single-factor test was used in which all variables were loaded on a single factor in exploratory factor analysis. The result of the test revealed that the first factor accounted for only 28% of total variance, suggesting no issue of common method variance in the data.

Data analysis

The data analysis was performed in three steps. The first step represents the exploratory factor analysis conducted to explore the underlying structure of self-congruity and functional congruity. The second step involves the confirmatory analysis conducted to test the measurement model's goodness of fit and to check the how well the constructs in the model are represented by the measured variables. In the last step, AMOS 20 was used to run structural equation modelling to test the relationships among self-congruity, functional congruity, satisfaction, attachment, and loyalty.

RESULTS

Dimensionality of self-congruity and functional congruity

The first stage involved the validity check of the self-congruity and functional congruity scales. In order to achieve this, two different exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were performed. The varimax rotation method was adopted to run the analysis. The Kaiser Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.83 and the value of Bartlett test of sphericity was significant ($p<0.001$). These findings validated the applicability of exploratory factor analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The cut-off value of the factor loadings was set at 0.40 on the sample size of 250 (Hair et al., 1998,

p. 112). The exploratory factor analysis resulted in a two-factor solution explaining 77.25% of the total variance (Table 1). These factors were labelled as the actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity and explained 22.83% and 54.42% of total variance respectively. These results provided the support for the construct validity of the scale. The reliability of the factors varied from 0.80 to 0.83 providing evidence for scale reliability (Churchill, 1979).

Table 1. *Exploratory factor analysis of self-congruity*

Factor/items	Factor loading	Variance explained (%)	Cronbach's α
SC1: Actual self-congruity		22.83	0.827
The image of the typical visitor is similar to how I am	0.827		
The image of the typical visitor is similar to how I see myself	0.783		
The image of the typical visitor is similar to how others believe that I am	0.847		
The image of the typical visitor is similar to how others see me	0.812		
SC2: Ideal self-congruity		54.42	0.802
The image of the typical visitor is similar to how I would like to be	0.736		
The image of the typical visitor is similar to how I would like to see myself	0.768		
The image of the typical visitor is similar to how I would like others to see me	0.838		
The image of the typical visitor is similar to how I ideally like to be seen by others	0.784		

Similarly, another EFA with varimax rotation was performed on items functional congruity. The results revealed a three factor solution with 63.52% variance explained of the total variance (Table 2). The three factors were labelled as (1) facilities and heritage (2) convenience (3) hospitality, explaining 28.53%, 18.67% and 16.32% of the total variance, respectively. The reliability values of all the factors varied from 0.76 to 0.80, suggesting scale reliability (Churchill, 1979).

Table 2. *Exploratory factor analysis of functional congruity*

Factor/Items	Factor loading	Variance explained (%)	Cronbach's α
FC1: Facilities and Heritage		28.53	0.804
Do you believe that the destination has good amenities for tourists?	0.754		
Is the vacation spot a high-quality tourist destination?	0.710		
Has the vacation spot been long regarded as a high-quality tourist destination?	0.738		
Does the vacation spot have a long history and good reputation of being a tourist destination?	0.783		
FC2: Convenience		18.67	0.796
Is the vacation spot a convenient tourist destination?	0.735		
Has it been difficult for you to find selected sites you wanted to visit?	-0.763		
Did you have any language problems during your vacation?	-0.684		
Do you regard the destination as convenient to travel to from your home?	0.667		
FC3: Hospitality		16.32	0.763
Do you think that the municipality of the destination made it easy enough for tourists to navigate through the place?	0. 693		
Have you had headaches dealing with services provided by tourism and hospitality organizations during your stay?	-0.678		
Have you been satisfied generally with the services provided by the tourism and hospitality organizations?	0.742		

Measurement model

In the second stage, the confirmatory analysis was performed to check the reliability and validity of the conceptual model. The goodness of fit of the model was analysed by the fit indices as suggested by Hair et al. (1998). The analysis results are given in Table 3 and it shows that the factor loading of each item is greater than 0.60. The average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct is well above the 0.50 and construct reliability values are greater than 0.70 (Hair et al., 1998). Hence, the model has a good convergent validity. The model fit indices are also shown in Table 3, suggesting a good model fit.

Table 3. *Confirmatory factor analysis' results*

Constructs	Standardized factor loading	Error variance	t-value	AVE	Construct reliability
Self-congruity (SC)				0.545	0.705
SC1	0.763	0.417	10.591		
SC2	0.712	0.493	_		
Functional congruity (FC)				0.542	0.780
FC1	0.786	0.382	_		
FC2	0.735	0.459	8.963		
FC3	0.683	0.533	7.628		
Destination Satisfaction (DSAT)				0.550	0.828
DSAT1	0.784	0.385	_		
DSAT2	0.734	0.461	11.645		
DSAT3	0.674	0.545	8.548		
DSAT4	0.769	0.408	13.467		
Destination Attachment (DATT)				0.551	0.787
DATT1	0.746	0.443	14.357		
DATT2	0.693	0.519	12.467		
DATT3	0.785	0.383	_		
Destination loyalty (DL)					
DL1	0.783	0.386	_		
DL2	0.825	0.319	13.548		

Model fit statistics: χ^2 = 643.038, d.f. = 335, p-value = 0.002, GFI = 0.942, AGFI = 0.929, CFI =0.971, RMSEA = 0.036, RMR = 0.012

Furthermore, the discriminant validity of the model was assessed and presented in Table 4. The value of the AVE of each construct was greater than the squared correlation between each construct, suggesting the discriminant validity of the model. Hence, the structural relationship among the constructs can be tested.

Table 4. *Discriminant validity*

Constructs	Mean	S.D.	SC	FC	DATT	DSAT	DL
SC	3.86	0.38	**0.738**				
FC	3.68	0.33	0.609*	**0.736**			
DSAT	4.15	0.42	0.514*	0.567*	**0.741**		
DATT	4.04	0.52	0.506*	0.606*	0.556*	**0.742**	
DL	4.27	0.49	0.569*	0.548*	0.612*	0.682*	**0.804**

Note: Bold values are the square roots of the average variance extracted; *p<0.01

Structural model and hypothesis testing

In order to examine the various interrelationships among the constructs of the model, maximum likelihood method was adopted. The overall fit indices of the model were χ^2=644.21, p=0.002, χ^2/d.f.=1.923, GFI=0.942, AGFI=0.927, CFI=0.969, NFI=0.923, IFI=0.972, RMR=0.012, and RMSEA=0.038. These fit indices provide evidence for goodness of fit for the hypothesized model. The estimated model with standardized coefficients is shown in Figure 2. As can be seen in Figure 2, except for the path between functional congruity and satisfaction, all the hypotheses are supported. Self-congruity positively influences destination satisfaction (0.564, t=7.236) and functional congruity (0.298, t=3.647), hence supporting H1 and H3. Destination satisfaction significantly influences the destination attachment (0.683, t=9.364) and destination loyalty (0.432, t=6.152), hence supporting H4 and H5. Moreover, destination attachment positively influences the destination loyalty (0.364, t=4.327). Among all the hypothesis proposed in this study, H2 was rejected, which proposed a relationship between functional congruity and destination satisfaction.

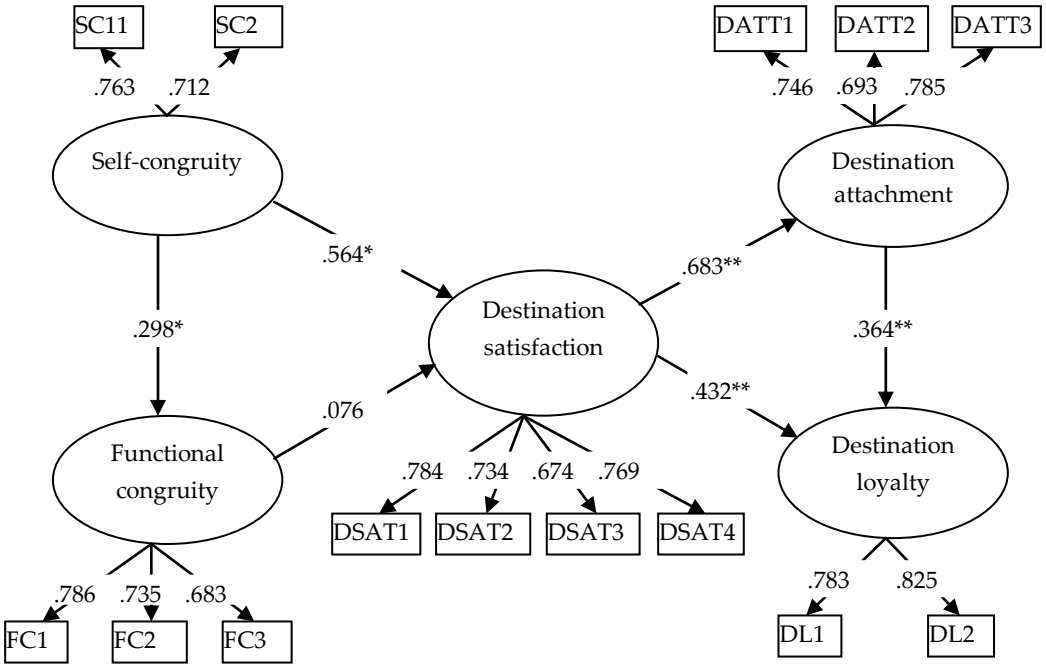

Figure 2. *Estimated model*
*p < 0.05, ** p < 0.001

Table 5 reports the direct and indirect effects of the variables involved in the model. Self-congruity has a direct effect both on destination satisfaction and functional congruity. Destination satisfaction has a direct effect on destination attachment and both direct and indirect effects on destination loyalty. In addition, destination attachment directly affects the destination loyalty. Destination satisfaction has greater effect on destination loyalty as compared to destination attachment.

Table 5. *Hypotheses testing*

Path			Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Result
H1: Self-congruity	→	Destination satisfaction	0.564*	_	0.564	Accepted
H2: Functional congruity	→	Destination satisfaction	_	_	Null	Rejected
H3: Self-congruity	→	Functional congruity	0.298*	_	0.298	Accepted
H4: Destination satisfaction	→	Destination attachment	0.683**	_	0.683*	Accepted
H5: Destination satisfaction	→	Destination loyalty	0.432**	0.315*	0.747	Accepted
H6: Destination attachment	→	Destination loyalty	0.364**	_	0.364	Accepted

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the current understanding of tourists' behaviour by investigating the interrelationships among self-congruity, functional congruity, destination satisfaction, attachment, and loyalty. The findings of this study confirm Chon (1992), Ekinci and Riley (2003), Litvin and Kar (2003) and Murphy, Benckendorff, and Moscardo (2007) which reveal that self-congruity has a positive and significant effect on destination satisfaction. Chon (1992) and Litvin and Kar (2003) examined the post consumption effect of self-congruity on satisfaction in tourism and argued that self-congruity positively influences the satisfaction. Murphy et al. (2007) demonstrated the effect of self-congruity on satisfaction levels of the tourists and found that higher satisfaction levels were associated with higher levels of self-congruity. Thus, destination marketers who understand the relevance of self-congruity can formulate target marketing and positioning strategies to influence destination satisfaction. They should design marketing campaigns highlighting the destination's unique and distinctive affective attributes. In other words, destination marketers are advised to identify the unique and most competitive affective attributes of the destination and should highlight those in order to

influence tourists' post visit behaviour. Consistent with tourism literature, the findings of this study suggest that self-congruity has a direct and positive effect on functional congruity (Hung & Petrick, 2011). This indicates that higher the similarity between tourists' self-images and destination affective image, more the congruity they perceived about the perfect images of destination attributes and cognitive images. Hence, understanding both constructs is necessary in order to influence tourists' post visit behavioural intentions. In contrast to the previous studies, functional congruity failed to show any influence on destination satisfaction (Sirgy & Su, 2000). This finding may be due to several reasons. First, tourists' tend to evaluate affective attributes of a destination rather than functional ones because the former create a sense of association with the destination. The tourists are valuing affective attributes more than functional attributes due to increase in number of similar destinations in terms of utilitarian benefits. Second, the destination considered in the study may have not highlighted the functional attributes enough to evoke the functional significance of the place as a vacation destination. Some follow up studies, considering the functional nature of destinations may provide deeper insights on relationships examined.

The findings also suggest that destination satisfaction influences destination attachment. These findings confirm Halpenny (2006) and Lee et al. (2012) which have shown destination satisfaction as the antecedent to destination attachment. This implies that the satisfied tourists tend to form a sense of attachment to the destination. Destination satisfaction emerged as the most significant predictor of destination loyalty with direct and indirect effects. Moreover, destination attachment positively influenced the destination loyalty. The comparison between satisfaction and attachment shows that satisfaction has the most direct influence on destination loyalty. In line with previous studies by Hosany and Witham (2010), Wang et al. (2010), and Yuksel et al. (2010) the findings of this study reveal that satisfaction is the most significant dimension of relationship variables, and contributes largely in creating an emotional relationship or bond between destinations and tourists as well as influencing tourist's post visit behavioural intentions. Hosany and Witham (2010) examined the relationship between cruisers' experiences, satisfaction and intention to recommend and found that satisfaction positively influences intention to recommend. Similarly, Yuksel et al. (2010) demonstrated the positive effect of satisfaction on conative and affective loyalty. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the emotional

attachment tourists' show with the destinations influences their post visit behavioural outcomes.

Although, tourist-destination relationship has been considered as an essential tool for destination branding (Ekinci & Riley, 2003), it remains under examined among the tourism researchers and practitioners. The findings of this research further enhance the current understanding how the self-congruity affects the satisfaction which in turn engenders a sense of attachment and loyalty among the tourists towards the destination. In accordance to the brand relationship theory which states that consumers form a bond or relationship with brands (Thomson et al., 2005); this study suggests that tourists have relationships with the destinations. This study contributes to the literature of the tourist-destination relationship, especially with regard to destination satisfaction and attachment. The extensive literature review of tourism studies reveals that there are few studies which have examined the relationship between satisfaction, attachment and loyalty. Our study focused on this issue and attempted to find out the critical relationship between these constructs, where self-congruity emerged as an important antecedent to this relationship. Therefore, our study lends support to the notion that emotional relationships or bonds do exist in tourism (Chen & Phou, 2013).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study provide a number of implications by understanding the antecedents and consequences of tourist-destination relationship. These findings lay foundation for designing and implementing branding campaigns to attract current and potential tourists. The purpose of understanding the processes behind tourist-destination relationship formation helps the destination marketers to better differentiate the destination among competitors and hence provide them a unique holiday experience. The study reveals that travellers value affective images more than the utilitarian attributes of the destination. Thus, the destination marketers are required to develop promotional campaigns that highlight the distinctive and unique symbolic attributes of the destination. For example, the destination marketers should portray a destination as a place where visitors can perform the things they feel comfortable and based on their true self. The promotional campaign should state what visitors want themselves to be and how the destination can facilitate them in achieving their ideal self. As found in the study, functional attributes of the destination are no longer enough to achieve

competitive advantage and attract tourists because of the increase in the number of similar destinations (Chen & Phou, 2013; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

Moreover, the study findings also suggest the benefits from the sustainable and economic advantages offered by the loyal tourists. The destination satisfaction and attachment have emerged as significant predictors of destination loyalty. Thus, destination marketers are recommended to focus on these two key variables in order to develop a strong tourist-destination bond or relationship. Destination marketers should focus more on managing positive experiences of the tourist which in turn leads to satisfaction and attachment. Thus, the destination marketing organizations should invest on affective components of the destination in order to increase its ability to induce a sense of attachment among tourists so that they may build a strong bond or relationship with the destination. Furthermore, destination marketing organizations should strive for providing better quality of services and customer mix in order to generate higher levels of satisfaction and sense of attachment among tourists visiting a destination. Both satisfaction and place attachment are related to tourists' perceptions how well a destination meets their interests and needs. In other words, whether the tourists' expectations are met or exceeded leads to the satisfaction and attachment and both of these increase the level of tourists' loyalty towards the destination particularly the intention to recommend to others and intention to revisit the destination. Hence, in order to develop long term relationship with the tourists, destination marketers should not only count on satisfaction, but also on other attributes of a tourist-destination relationship such as attachment. In addition, destination marketers should understand the complex process of destination loyalty since loyal tourists tend to be more interested in and appreciative of the destination (Mitchell, Carroll, & McLaughlin, 1993).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of the study should be evaluated in the light of some limitations. First, the data collection only at a single destination may limit the generalizability of the findings. Thus, future studies should include a number of different destinations. Second, this study has employed direct scoring method to capture symbolic images of the destination. Hence, other image based research method should be employed to get a deeper understanding of this construct (Sirgy et al., 1997). Third, the use of

previously developed measures may have limited our ability to fully capture the meaning of relationships in our proposed model. Hence, the use of qualitative methods might prove deeper into the tourists understanding about the different attributes of the destination.

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