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The role of destination personality fit in destination branding: antecedents and outcomes

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Abstract

Drawing from fit research in strategic management, this study develops and investigates a model predicting destination attitude and (re)visit intention. The study introduces the concept of destination personality fit on the basis of how well consumer perceptions of a tourist destination's brand personality fits that of what the destination brand manager wishes to convey. A model incorporating destination advertising awareness as an antecedent of destination personality and consumer–manager destination personality fit is tested on international consumers with the destination personality of Switzerland as the study setting. Structural equation modelling results reveal that destination advertising awareness does indeed relate positively to both stronger perceived destination personality and destination personality fit in consumers' minds. Interestingly, the subsequent destination personality–destination attitude relationship is moderated by consumer–manager destination personality fit in such a way that the link grows stronger in cases where fit is high. The results have important implications for destination brand managers in that they reinforce the importance of strong and distinct destination personalities. The findings also show the importance of actively communicating the destination brand to consumers since the positive outcomes of a strong destination personality increase in magnitude when successfully communicated, and the vision of the destination brand manager has been adopted by the consumer.

Keywords: place branding, destination personality, fit, ad awareness, structural equation modelling

The role of destination personality fit in destination branding: antecedents and outcomes

Market globalization is affecting the tourism industry on many levels, from increased mobilization of people, through elevated demand and competition, to a pressure to stand out and attract visitors. Under these highly competitive conditions tourism managers are increasingly turning towards place and destination branding to face the challenge (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Place and destination branding represents a growing stream of research with important implications for brand management and tourism management alike. The destination brand is an especially important component due to its alleged link between the perceived destination brand image and the future behavior of tourists in the form of visits, revisits, and positive word of mouth (Qu, Kim, & Im 2011; Hultman, Skarmeas, Oghazi, & Beheshti, 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Favorable place brand associations are therefore vital for tourism managers in order to develop effective branding and positioning strategies (Kemp, Childers, & Williams, 2012).

In essence, a destination brand is a concept that ultimately exists in the mind of the consumer, it can be described by its brand identity, which corresponds to the unique set of brand associations that destination managers want to create and maintain in the consumer's mind to differentiate their place from other places (Rainisto, 2003). In order to create favorable brand identities and images, with oftentimes limited resources, it is essential for marketers to target promotional efforts towards the segments identified as the most receptive target markets, and focus on creating and enhancing positive destination images (Leisen, 2001).

However, positioning a destination on the basis of its functional attributes alone makes it easily imitable as well as substitutable (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). An essential part of the brand identity is therefore the brand personality, described as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p 347). The brand personality of a destination enables

it a possibility to differentiate itself in a more unique and viable fashion (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). Much extant research on destination personality draw on Aaker's (1997) original brand personality terminology, which treats a brand's personality as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of five distinct personality traits. In line with Aaker (1997), destination personality researchers define destination personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a destination” (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006, p. 127). Based on this, various different subsets of destination personality dimensions have emerged that are more-or-less similar to Aaker's (1997) original work.

Current destination personality research has focused on destination personality measurement and the relationship between destination personality and attitudinal and behavioral outcomes from a consumer perspective. It specifically includes studies on identification, emotional ties, satisfaction, loyalty, and intention to return and recommend, as well as different drivers of such relationships, such as affective and cognitive image, self-congruence, and lifestyle-congruence (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, & Preciado, 2013; Hultman et al., 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

Notwithstanding the body of existing literature, research is scarce with regards to the effects of positive or negative co-alignment between the destination brand managers' visions vis-à-vis and the consumers' actual perception of the destination as a brand. Calls for future research in the area have also highlighted the need to study the effect of branding activities such as marketing communications on brand personality construction (Demirbag, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010; Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009). In response to the identified gaps and future research calls, the aim of the current study is to investigate drivers and outcomes of, not only destination personality, but also that of fit between envisioned destination personality from destination brand managers' perspectives and consumers' perceptions. Or more

specifically: when, whether, and how destination personality fit matters for tourists' attitudes towards destinations and subsequent (re)visit intentions.

In doing so, the study makes three main contributions to the current body of literature. First, although research on fit, or congruence, in conjunction with destination personality is not new, the current study takes a novel approach by drawing from strategic management reasoning and methods (e.g., Venkatraman, 1989; Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985) to conceptualize destination personality fit. Specifically, whilst extant work has focused on the effects of self-congruity (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Sirgy & Su, 2000) and tourist identification (Hultman et al., 2015) on destination related outcomes, this research focuses on fit between the destination personality as envisioned by the destination marketer and the consumer's personality perception of the same destination. This externalization of the destination personality fit concept has not yet been empirically scrutinized. Second, although most of the current research has rather unanimously pointed towards the benefits enjoyed by destinations with strong personalities (e.g., Chen & Phou, 2013; Murphy, Beckendorff & Moscardo, 2007; Hultman et al., 2015), research efforts on potential boundary conditions of the destination personality–performance relationship are scarce. The current investigation contributes to this gap by testing how destination personality fit moderates the relationship between perceived destination personality and destination attitude. Finally, the research also contributes to the literature on antecedents to destination personality by shining light on how awareness of marketer controlled tools such as destination advertising influences perceptions of destination personality and destination personality fit, thus effectively responding to calls for research on this matter (e.g., Demirbag et al., 2010).

Conceptual background and hypotheses

Advertising awareness and destination personality

A multitude of variables contribute to building brand personality and brand image, including user imagery and advertising (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Batra, Lehmann, & Singh, 2013). Destination image formation and travel destination selection are considered to be influenced by passive and active information gathering from various information sources, such as symbolic stimuli from promotional media efforts and social stimuli through recommendations and word-of-mouth (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Um & Crompton, 1990). Both the variety (amount) and type of information sources have been described as antecedents to the perceptual/cognitive component of destination image attributes and evaluations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). These perceptions, together with travelers' socio-psychological motivations, in turn influence the affective component, forming feelings and attitudes towards destinations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), as well as destination personalities which are very much mental associations of personality traits occurring in the consumer minds (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). The use of different promotional tools, such as media advertising, are therefore key instruments at the destination marketer's disposal for creating and maintaining a destination's strong and distinctive personality in the mind of the consumer (Hosany et al., 2007). Thus, it is expected that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between destination advertising awareness and consumer perceived destination personality.

As previously stated, the phenomenon of destination personality is rather well investigated, highlighting the importance of destination personality on place identification, the possibility of attracting target audiences, and the influence on subsequent attitudinal and behavioral intentions from the perspective of the consumer (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Ekinici, Sirakaya-Turk, & Preciado, 2013; Hultman et al., 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Incorporating a managerial perspective on destination personality is however crucial since the

envisioned brand personality (what consumers should think and feel about the brand from the brand manager's perspective) is not necessarily, nor automatically, the same as the realized and perceived brand personality (what consumers actually do feel and think) (Malär, Nyffenegger, Krohmer, & Hoyer, 2012). Only when the perceived brand personality is similar to that intended by brand managers the implementation of the brand personality can be considered successful (Malär et al., 2012). This degree of similarity is akin to the concept of fit in strategic management (cf. Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985). Borrowing from this research stream and the profile deviation perspective in particular (Venkatraman, 1989), destination personality fit is defined as the degree of adherence of destination personality profiles between the destination marketer and the destination consumer.

Research shows that destination marketers developing promotional campaigns need to devise branding strategies that communicate the distinctive place brand personality in order to achieve effective positioning and differentiation (Hosany et al., 2007). Consumer perception is selective in the regard that individuals tend to take note of stimuli considered relevant to their own interests and needs, while neglecting or distorting inconsistent stimuli (Moutinho, 1987). Creating a favorable image requires actively designing promotional efforts and enhancing positive destination images towards the most receptive target markets, in other words, communication which reaches and resonates with its intended recipients (Leisen, 2001). Consequently, the more successful the destination marketers are in getting their intended brand message through, the higher the adherence of destination personality profiles between the marketer and the consumer. Thus:

H2: There is a positive relationship between destination advertising awareness and destination personality fit.

Destination personality outcomes

The morphing of brands into personalized entities is argued to serve consumers' effectance motivation by increasing predictability and reducing risk and uncertainty in a complex and ambiguous world (Freling & Forbes, 2005). It also fulfils social needs such as social contact, social connection, and social approval from others by offering an expanded accessibility to social cues and sources for social connection in one's environment (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). Brand personality thus serves a purpose in terms of the feelings it generates, the self-expression it enables, the relationships it facilitates and results in, and the simplification of brand choice it entails (Freling & Forbes, 2005). The similar mechanisms are expected to be activated as a result of strong and distinct destination personalities (Hultman et al, 2015; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006).

Branding research indeed shows a positive effect of a brand's personality on product evaluation as consumers exposed to a brand's personality tend to show a greater number and quality of brand associations than those exposed only to product information (Freling & Forbes, 2005). In fact, a strong and well-established personality can result in consumers having stronger emotional ties to the brand, as well as greater feelings of trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1988).

Drawing from the theory of reasoned action where attitude influence behavioral intentions and actions (Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988), research on destinations show that perceived destination personality has a positive influence not only on destination attitudes but also, directly or indirectly, on tourists' loyalty manifested in intention to visit, revisit and recommend the destination to others (Hultman et al., 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Based on the above considerations:

H3: There is a positive relationship between consumer perceived destination personality and attitude towards the destination.

H4: There is a positive relationship between attitude towards the destination and intention to (re)visit the destination.

Moderating effect of destination personality fit

A strong perceived destination personality is however, in and of itself, no guarantee to achieve a positive attitude towards the destination. The general branding literature indeed points towards the fact that brand loyalty is positively influenced by the fit between the intended or envisioned brand personality and the consumer's perception of the same (Malär et al., 2012). Since generating and disseminating market intelligence and showing responsiveness to customer demands are key to achieving customer loyalty (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993), the destination manager's envisioned destination personality has to cater to the needs and wants of customers in order to appeal to the latter and inspire a favorable attitude towards the destination. High fit between the envisioned and perceived destination personality is therefore expected to positively moderate the relationship between consumer perceived destination personality and attitude towards the destination. Based on the above:

H5: The positive relationship between consumer perceived destination personality and attitude towards the destination is stronger in cases where destination personality fit is high.

Figure 1 presents the study's conceptual model.

- Figure 1 here -

Method

Data Collection and Sample

In order to test the conceptual model there was a need to identify a suitable destination and an appropriate sample. The choice fell on Switzerland as a destination from which the destination personality perceptions could be assessed. Switzerland as a tourist destination has experienced

a remarkable growth in travel during the past decades, with a total number of private leisure trips estimated at close to 15 million (Laesser, 2011). Switzerland's work with destination marketing dates back for centuries with the first destination management organization (DMO) being founded as early as 1846. The country is also continuously working at improving its destination brand towards all stakeholders (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2014). The fact that Switzerland as a country is actively and constantly working towards branding itself as a destination of choice makes it a good context for studying destination personality and its antecedents and outcomes.

The nature of the study required data to be collected from multiple sources. To capture the supplier perspective of the Switzerland brand, the Swiss tourism association was telephoned (www.myswitzerland.com) with a request to get in touch with someone in charge of the Switzerland brand towards tourists. Three names were provided out of which two agreed to participate in the study and respond to the survey as key informants (67%). The two key informants worked as Head of Digital Marketing and Marketing Manager respectively at the Swiss tourism association and had a combined experience of more than 10 years working with the Switzerland brand. The key informants were asked to complete a survey about the destination personality of Switzerland (described below). The informants were specifically instructed to respond to the destination personality items by taking into account how they wanted the Switzerland destination personality to be conveyed by customer stakeholders. The two marketing managers were in general agreement with each other with regards to the destination personality they wished to deliver, as evidenced by the high and significant intraclass correlation coefficient (.92, $p > .01$) (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979).

The study relied on the personal intercept method to capture the consumer perspective of Switzerland's destination personality alongside the other independent and dependent variables. Specifically, 500 visitors to a large UK airport were personally approached over the course of

three consecutive days. The approached respondents received an invitation to participate in a survey on Switzerland as a tourism destination; 261 respondents agreed to do so (52.2%). After eliminating 38 ineligible questionnaires because of missing data and unnatural response patterns with extreme outliers, 223 responses remained to make up the effective sample (44.6%). The sample was composed of a majority of women (64.5%) and most respondents fell within the 35-44 year age bracket (46.6%) followed by 25-34 (30.5%), and 45-54 years of age (10.8%). The respondents further reported an average income bracket of GBP 20.000-29.999 (44.8%) followed by GBP 10.000-19.999 (18.9%) and GBP 30.000-39.999 (18.7%). Less than half of the respondents (44.8%) had visited Switzerland at some point in their lives. Although the current study purpose did not require strict statistical representativeness with an underlying population, the sample statistics still fairly well correspond with that of UK based travelers in general (cf. Office for National Statistics, 2016).

Measures

The measures for the study constructs were sourced from existing research and refined for the study context via a series of interviews with potential respondents and experts in destination branding. In detail, four academic researchers with a background in consumer behavior and tourism research evaluated the content validity of the measures by judging the extent to which each item represents the construct in question. Ten potential respondents further answered a revised version of the questionnaire to ensure effective semantic design and instrument format.

The central construct, destination personality, has its origins in Aaker's (1997) original brand personality scale but has been adapted to this study based on Hultman et al.'s (2015) recent and more tourism specific six-dimensional conceptualization of destination personality, including items reflecting the personality dimensions excitement, sophistication, activeness,

dependability, philoxenia¹, and ruggedness. The destination personality dimensions were captured with 24 items in total. The study measured the exogenous construct, advertising awareness, with 3 items based on Kim et al. (2005), and drew from Kazeminia et al., (2016) to capture attitude towards the destination with 4 items. The ultimate variable, (re)visit intention, was adapted with a single indicator from Hultman et al. (2015).

The conceptualization of destination personality fit is based on the strategic management literature (e.g., Venkatraman, 1989; Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985) where the fit concept has long been considered an important building block for theory construction and testing. Venkatraman (1989) introduces 6 perspectives for classifying fit based on degree of specificity of the functional form, the number of variables in the fit equation, and the degree of criterion specificity. Specifically, fit can be classified in terms of moderation, mediation, profile deviation, gestalts, covariation, and matching. As the current study views fit in terms of the degree of adherence between the destination marketers' envisioned destination personality and the consumer's perceived personality, fit as matching and fit as profile deviation emerge as appropriate conceptualizations. This research specifically opted for the fit as profile deviation perspective in operationalizing destination personality fit since it views fit as "the degree of adherence to an externally specified profile" (Venkatraman, 1989, p. 443), which in the current case would be the destination personality profile of Switzerland as envisioned by the Swiss tourism agency managers.

The principle of profile deviation analysis is to first select a calibration group (i.e., the managers' envisioned destination personality profile of Switzerland) from which a deviation score is calculated using the remaining dataset (i.e., the respondents' perceived destination personality) and later compared against a criterion variable of interest (i.e., attitude towards the

¹ A Greek word specific to the tourism industry meaning the opposite of xenophobia (Hultman et al., 2015, p. 2229)

destination) (cf. Venkatraman, 1990; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005). Consequently the mean of the two Swiss tourism board respondents' responses on the six destination personality dimensions was used as the base for calculating the Euclidean distance to every observation across the destination personality dimensions among the 223 respondents, through application of the following equation:

$$\text{Euclidean distance} = \sqrt{\sum_j^N (X_{sj} - \bar{X}_{ij})^2},$$

Where:

X_{sj} = the score for the respondent in the sample on the j th dimension

\bar{X}_{ij} = the mean for the calibration group on the j th dimension,

j = the number of destination personality dimensions (1, 2, ..., 6).

In a practical sense the resulting Euclidean distance deviation score should therefore be interpreted as a measure of misfit rather than a measure of fit since the larger the Euclidean distance, the larger the discrepancy between envisioned and perceived destination personality between the destination marketer and the consumer. Thus, the resulting variable is henceforth referred to as destination personality misfit in subsequent analysis, and should be interpreted as such.

To control for additional factors potentially influencing destination attitude and (re)visit intention several control variables were included such as demographic characteristics (gender, age, income bracket) and previous destination experience. To ascertain the unique influence of destination experience on the outcome variable, the study also included other brand equity related variables as covariates in the model. Specifically, scales adapted to capture destination brand image from Veasna et al., (2013), and destination brand quality from Aaker (1996) were accounted for in the data. The complete set of measures and their properties are available in Appendix.

Analysis and Results

Measurement Model

Construct validity was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis using the elliptical reweighted least squares (ERLS) estimation method. This method is less constrained by normality assumptions and thus yields unbiased parameter estimates for both multivariate normal and non-normal data (Sharma, Durvasula, & Dillon, 1989). Following established procedures (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988), each item in the model was restricted to load on its preassigned factor while the latent factors were set to correlate freely. For the single-item constructs (gender, age, income, destination experience, destination personality misfit, (re)visit intention) the error terms were set to .10 for model estimation purposes (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The chi-square statistic for the model is significant ($\chi^2_{(847)} = 1554.451, p < 0.01$) as can be expected because of the relatively large sample size. The remaining fit indices though, such as the normed fit index (NFI) of .99, non-normed fit index (NNFI) of .99, comparative fit index (CFI) of .98, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .08, and average off-diagonal standardized residual (AOSR) of .07 all meet recommended thresholds, implying acceptable model fit. The results of the measurement model appear in Table 1.

- Table 1 here –

As evidenced in Table 1, all item loadings are high and significant on their corresponding predetermined constructs (lowest loading = .51, $p > .01$) evidencing convergent validity. Further, as shown in Table 2, the composite reliabilities (≥ 0.72) and average variances extracted (AVE) (≥ 0.58) for the multi-item constructs are all above the recommended thresholds (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), and the AVE square roots exceed the correlations of all construct pairs, suggesting adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

- Table 2 here –

Since the study used the same data source for both some independent and dependent variables, there is a chance that common method bias (CMB) might have inflated or deflated the results. To come to terms with this potential issue, the research followed a number of recommendations (Podsakoff et al., 2003). During the data collection phase, recommended procedures were employed such as anonymized written questionnaires, assuring respondents that there were no right or wrong answers, adopting different scale formats, and counterbalanced ordering of some predictor and criterion variables. Moreover, the investigated model involves relatively complicated specifications of how the constructs relate to each other (e.g., interaction effects), which rules out easy prediction by respondents of how the variables are expected to interrelate. As previously explained, one of the central constructs (destination personality misfit) is also calculated based on multiple data sources, a procedure that by default eliminates common method bias.

In addition to these procedural remedies, the research statistically controlled for CMB by conducting a single-factor test in which a single superordinate construct was estimated, reflected by all the study's manifest variables using confirmatory factor analysis (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The model fit statistics show poor fit to the data $\chi^2_{(909)} = 6509$, $p < 0.01$; NFI = .81; NNFI = .81; CFI = .82; RMSEA = .62; AOSR = .26, suggesting that CMB is unlikely to severely impact the study results.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesized relationships were assessed through a structural equation modeling procedure using the ERLS approach. Because of sample size to estimated parameter restrictions, the study uses composite measures for the six destination personality dimensions using the mean value of each dimension as indicators of the second-order destination personality factor (Hultman et al., 2015). For estimation purposes, the study assumes the single-

item constructs to have reliabilities of .90 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The scales were mean-centered before the cross-product calculation of the interaction term, and the loading and error terms were calculated in accordance with Ping's (1995) equations and recommendations. The model fit indices point towards acceptable model fit ($\chi^2_{(296)} = 629$, $p < .01$; NFI = .98; NNFI = .99; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .08; AOSR = .07).

Table 3 shows the standardized parameter estimates (β), t-values, significance levels, and also indicate the hypotheses tested. Results suggest that all hypothesized paths are significant ($p < .05$) and the model's explanatory power is acceptable explaining 18% of the variance in destination personality, 16% of the variance in destination personality misfit, 74% of the variance in attitude towards destination, and 43% of the variance in (re)visit intentions.

- Table 3 here -

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted a positive relationship between advertising awareness and its outcomes: destination personality and destination personality fit. The results indicate a strong positive link between awareness and destination personality ($\beta = .42$, $p > .00$) in support of H1. As for H2, the aforementioned profile deviation operationalization suggests that misfit was captured rather than fit, implying that the significant negative association ($\beta = -.40$, $p > .00$) in fact speaks in support for H2. Basically, a negative relationship between advertising awareness and destination personality misfit can be inversely interpreted as a positive relationship between advertising awareness and destination personality fit. Hypothesis 3 is also supported given that there is a significant positive relationship ($\beta = .20$, $p > .05$) between destination personality and attitude towards the destination. Likewise, H4 is supported as evidenced by the positive and significant link ($\beta = .55$, $p > .00$) between attitude towards the destination and (re)visit intentions.

Although the interaction term used to test H5, that higher levels destination personality fit strengthens the destination personality–destination attitude linkage, is significant, the

negative reported relationship is not easily interpretable. To achieve clarity around the results, Aiken, West, and Reno's (1991) procedures were followed to decompose and interpret the interaction effect. Specifically, the effect of destination personality on attitude towards destination was first computed at one standard deviation below and one above the mean values of destination personality misfit and thereafter plotted to facilitate interpretation. The plotted findings in Figure 2 show that the positive relationship between destination personality and destination attitude is strengthened at lower levels of misfit and vice versa. Conversely, this also implies that the destination personality–destination attitude relationship is strengthened when fit is higher, thus supporting H5.

- Figure 2 here –

Discussion and Conclusions

Building on existing destination personality research and destination personality congruence research in particular (e.g., Hultman et al., 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014), this study has integrated findings on self–destination congruence with strategy fit. Thus showing that strong destination personalities are indeed important in driving positive attitudes towards tourism destinations, but importantly also, that the positive effect is strengthened in cases where there is strong fit between the intended (conveyed) destination personality in the eye of the destination marketer and the consumer's perceived personality. Importantly, the research further finds that a heightened awareness of the destination's marketing communication output will increase both the consumer perceived destination personality and the destination personality fit. As such, this study has contributed to extant knowledge by revealing that self-concept congruity with the destination (cf. Usakli & Baloglu, 2011) can be complemented with a more marketer-controlled type of destination personality fit in generating positive outcomes towards tourism destinations.

Interestingly, the control paths in the findings indicate that destination personality fit alone is not a very effective predictor of destination attitude, but seems to work rather well in conjunction with strong outright destination personalities. Thus implying that the achievement of destination personality fit in itself should not be strived for at all cost by destination brand managers. The current findings emphasize the importance of achieving strong combinations of destination personality traits in tourism destination management (Hultman et al., 2015; Hosany et al., 2006; Murphy et al., 2007), even in the presence of other related variables such as destination brand image, destination brand quality, and destination personality fit.

Interestingly, the current findings might even point towards potential caveats of achieving too much destination personality fit. As indicated in Figure 2, the impact of weak perceived destination personality on destination attitude is actually more severe in cases when misfit is low (fit is high). The study results imply that it might be better to have worse fit between the destination marketer and the consumer perceptions if the overall destination personality is weaker. To put in in other words, the ‘penalty’ for a weaker destination personality in terms of perceived destination attitude is lower in cases where fit between producer-conveyed and consumer-perceived destination personality is low (misfit is high); meaning that destination marketers who are lacking in confidence with regards to the strength of their destination’s personality, might not always want to strive for perfect destination personality fit in the mind of the consumers.

With regards to the formation of destination personalities, although perceived destination personality is very much a mental construct caused by human anthropomorphism (Hultman et al., 2015), the current findings indicate that marketers can facilitate the anthropomorphic processes through well targeted and executed destination advertising efforts. The identified strong connections between destination advertising awareness and both destination personality and destination personality fit speak in favor of active destination brand management through

mass communication media. In fact, there appears to be a general positive effect of destination marketing communication since advertising awareness also displays a highly positive relationship to (re)visit intentions. Destination marketers are therefore advised to not underestimate the importance and effect of well-designed and executed destination marketing campaigns that convey the intended personality of the destination in question. The six destination personality dimensions identified in this study might be helpful in this regard as they appear to generate relatively stable psychometric outcomes across tourism destination contexts (cf. Hultman et al., 2015).

From a theoretical point of view, the present study confirms the notion that tourists indeed attribute distinct personality traits to destinations as suggested in much tourism consumer research (e.g., Hosany et al., 2006; Murphy et al., 2007). The findings also support self-congruity reasoning (e.g., Sirgy, 1982) in tourism (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011) but adds the dimension of marketer-consumer destination personality fit by drawing from strategic management reasoning (e.g., Venkatraman, 1989) and evaluating destination personality fit against an external (destination marketer conveyed) destination personality profile. Such a destination personality concept is an interesting addition to extant research since it appears to affect the destination personality–attitude relationship significantly at the same time as it might be more controllable by means of effective marketing communication efforts by destination marketers.

Limitations and future research avenues

Like all studies, this study should be viewed in light of some limitations. First, the study is cross sectional in nature and relies on correlational hypothesis testing procedures, thus no true causal inferences can be made, and care should be taken in light of this fact. To overcome this inherent issue, data on the dependent variables should be collected at later points in time,

thus creating a longitudinal design. Second, the current study focused on the destination personality of Switzerland—a relatively known tourism destination globally (Beritelli et al., 2014) with a comparably strong destination personality (Mean = 4.83 in this study). Hence, care should be taken before generalizing this study's findings to other tourism destinations, especially less known destinations with expected weaker destination personalities. Future research could focus on comparing and contrasting the drivers and outcomes of destination personality fit between more and less known destinations with stronger versus weaker personality profiles.

Third, following precedence in the literature (e.g., Hultman et al., 2015), the study investigated the effect of destination personality and destination personality fit as a whole. Although such a conceptualization was appropriate for the purposes of the current investigation, a decomposed operationalization into individual personality dimensions might be able to paint a more detailed picture, thus indicating what destination personality dimensions are more important in generating positive destination outcomes and which ones interact the strongest with destination personality fit. Such findings might be important from a practitioner point of view. Fourth, the study opted for the fit as profile deviation approach (Venkatraman, 1989) when operationalizing destination personality fit. Although there were good reasons for the chosen fit conceptualization since it is likely the most appropriate one for the problem at hand, all fit estimation methods come with inherent advantages and disadvantages. Future researchers are therefore recommended to apply alternative and complementary fit estimation techniques, such as fit as matching (cf. Hultman, Robson, & Katsikeas, 2009), to investigate the robustness of the findings across a range of contexts and methods.

Fifth, the results indeed revealed a positive association between destination advertising awareness and the destination personality-related outcomes; yet, the current conceptualization of destination advertising awareness could be considered quite crude and overly general by

some. Although the adopted conceptualization served its purpose to expose the potentially antecedent mechanism of effective destination advertising, what would be really interesting is a deeper investigation into which type of advertising is more-or-less effective in generating destination personality perceptions and destination personality fit. Increased knowledge of what type of message, appeal, media, and execution style is the most effective in conjunction with destination personality generation would enhance the field greatly. Finally, the study employed a non-random sampling technique by targeting travelers at an airport during a limited point in time. For this reason one can expect that the average respondent has more travel experience and knowledge than the underlying population. Although generalizability was not vital for current study purposes, future researchers are advised to employ random sampling techniques in order to decrease any selection bias effects and increase the overall generalizability.

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Table 1: Measurement Model

| Factors and items | β (t-value ^a) | Factors and items | β (t-value ^a) |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| First order factors | | First order factors | |
| Gender | .76 (11.36) | Excitement | |
| Age | .97 (18.62) | Excite1 | .73 ^b |
| Income | .99 (19.78) | Excite2 | .75 (10.62) |
| Destination experience | .78 (11.92) | Excite3 | .82 (11.59) |
| Destination advertising awareness | | Excite4 | .87 (12.30) |
| Aware1 | .84 (13.99) | Excite5 | .72 (10.19) |
| Aware2 | .92 (16.09) | Ruggedness | |
| Aware3 | .69 (10.75) | Rugged1 | .70 ^b |
| Destination brand image | | Rugged2 | .92 (10.57) |
| Image1 | .86 (14.43) | Rugged3 | .87 (16.03) |
| Image2 | .70 (10.97) | Activeness | |
| Image3 | .70 (10.98) | Active1 | .78 ^b |
| Destination brand quality | | Active2 | .85 (13.30) |
| Qual1 | .68 (10.74) | Active3 | .90 (14.29) |
| Qual2 | .86 (15.17) | Active4 | .83 (12.97) |
| Qual3 | .85 (14.84) | Philoxenia | |
| Qual4 | .95 (17.64) | Philo1 | .71 ^b |
| Destination personality misfit | .97 (18.68) | Philo2 | .62 (7.92) |
| Attitude towards destination | | Philo3 | .83 (9.88) |
| Att1 | .91 (16.76) | Sophistication | |
| Att2 | .90 (16.32) | Soph1 | .65 ^b |
| Att3 | .90 (16.40) | Soph2 | .69 (7.19) |
| Att4 | .87 (15.60) | Soph3 | .83 (7.88) |
| (re)visit intention | .99 (19.45) | Soph4 | .79 (7.74) |
| Dependability | | Second order factor | |
| Dep1 | .71 ^b | Destination personality | |
| Dep2 | .71 (9.01) | Dependability | .51 (5.97) |
| Dep3 | .67 (8.62) | Excitement | .95 (11.02) |
| Dep4 | .75 (9.51) | Ruggedness | .50 (4.78) |
| Dep5 | .70 (8.98) | Activeness | .76 (9.78) |
| | | Philoxenia | .82 (9.01) |
| | | Sophistication | .59 (6.02) |

Fit indices: $\chi^2_{(847)} = 1554.451$, $p < .01$; NFI = .99; NNFI = .99; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .08; AOSR = .07

^a All factor loadings are significant at $p < .01$

^b Parameter fixed at 1 to set the scale

Table 2: Measurement statistics and interconstruct correlations^a

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|-----|----|
| 1. Gender | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | -.03 | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Income | .01 | .29 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Previous experience | -.03 | -.29 | -.18 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 5. Advertising awareness | -.13 | -.06 | -.01 | -.26 | 1 | | | | | | |
| 6. Brand image | .05 | -.08 | -.04 | -.23 | .53 | 1 | | | | | |
| 7. Brand quality | .03 | -.03 | -.02 | -.27 | .51 | .63 | 1 | | | | |
| 8. Destination personality | -.09 | -.13 | -.09 | -.03 | .33 | .51 | .44 | 1 | | | |
| 9. Destination personality misfit | .15 | .19 | .13 | .07 | -.39 | -.32 | -.22 | -.021 | 1 | | |
| 10. Attitude towards destination | -.03 | -.10 | -.06 | -.16 | .52 | .73 | .68 | .63 | -.35 | 1 | |
| 11. (re)visit intention | .01 | -.26 | -.08 | -.07 | .48 | .44 | .52 | .37 | -.27 | .62 | 1 |
| Composite reliability | - | - | - | - | .83 | .72 | .84 | .80 | - | .88 | - |
| Average variance extracted | - | - | - | - | .69 | .58 | .70 | .53 | - | .80 | - |
| \sqrt{AVE} | - | - | - | - | .83 | .76 | .84 | .72 | - | .89 | - |

^aCorrelations < $\pm .13$ are significant at the .05 level.

Table 3: Structural equation model estimation results

| Independent variables | Dependent variables | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| | Destination personality β (t-value) | Destination personality misfit β (t-value) | Attitude towards destination β (t-value) | Intention to (re)visit destination β (t-value) |
| Gender | | | .03 (.48) | -.09 (1.14) |
| Age | | | .06 (1.23) | -.27 (-4.16)*** |
| Income | | | -.01 (-.18) | .01 (.18) |
| Destination experience | | | -.00 (-.09) | .00 (-.31) |
| Advertising awareness | .42 (4.46)*** (H1) | -.40 (-5.40)*** (H2) | .14 (2.20)* | .29 (3.61)*** |
| Destination brand image | | | .44 (4.37)*** | .30 (2.08)* |
| Destination brand quality | | | .24 (2.46)* | .21 (1.76) |
| Destination personality | | | .20 (2.23)* (H3) | -.09 (-.92) |
| Destination personality misfit | | | -.09 (-1.83) | -.03 (.40) |
| Personality \times misfit | | | -.11 (-2.27)* (H5) | |
| Attitude towards destination | | | | .55 (3.88)*** (H4) |
| | R ² = .18 | R ² = .16 | R ² = .74 | R ² = .43 |

Fit indices: $\chi^2_{(296)} = 629$, $p < .01$; NFI = .98; NNFI = .99; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .08; AOSR = .07

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Critical t-values are respectively 1.96, 2.58, and 3.29 (2-tailed test)

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

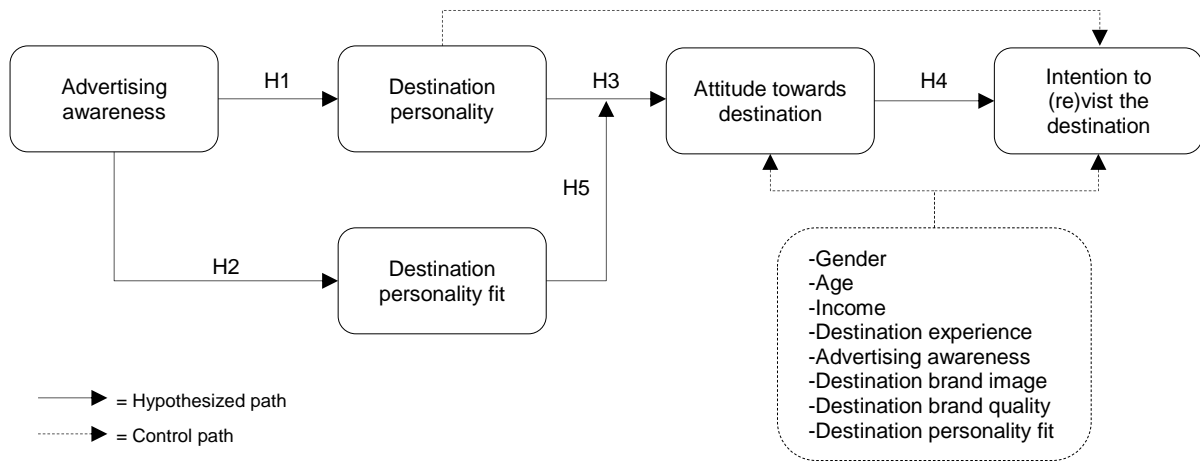
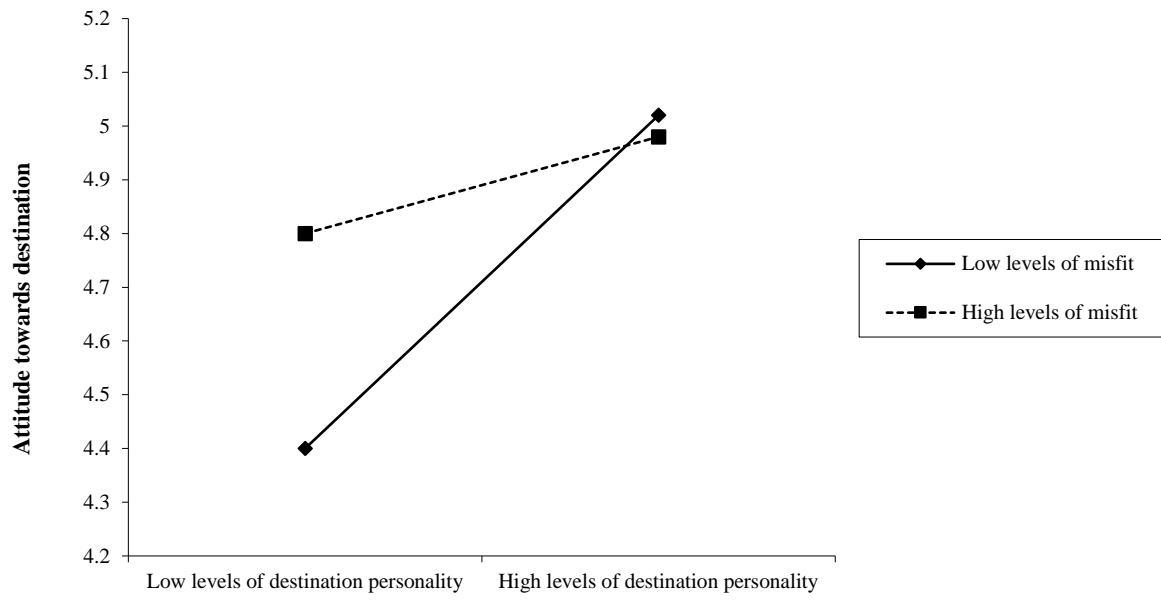


Figure 2: Interaction plot of the moderating effect of destination personality misfit



Appendix: Measures

Gender (M = 1.64; SD = .48)

Please indicate your gender (1 = Male; 2 = Female)

Age (M = 2.97; SD = 2.23)

Please indicate your age (1 = 18-24; 2 = 25-34; 3 = 35-44; 4 = 45-54; 5 = 55-64; 6 = 65 and over)

Income (M = 3.71; SD = 3.48)

Please indicate your approximate annual income (GBP) (1 = <10000; 2 = 10000-19999; 3 = 20000-29999; 4 = 30000-39999; 5 = 40000-49999; 6 = 50000-59999; 7 = 60000-69999; 8 = 70000-79999; 9 = 80000-89999; 10 = >90000)

Destination experience (M = 1.55; SD = .50)

Have you ever visited Switzerland (1 = Yes; 2 = No)

Destination advertising awareness (M = 3.51; SD = 1.84; $\alpha = .85$)

Please state your level of disagreement/agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)

Aware1: I am aware of advertising for Switzerland as a tourism destination

Aware2: I have seen advertisements for Switzerland as a tourism destination

Aware3: I am aware of the current Switzerland Tourism campaign

Destination brand image (M = 5.44; SD = 1.14; $\alpha = .80$)

Please state your level of disagreement/agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)

Image1: Switzerland as a tourism destination has a good image/reputation

Image2: Switzerland as a tourism destination is well developed (infrastructure etc.)

Image3: Switzerland is a destination with hospitable and friendly people

Destination brand quality (M = 5.53; SD = .1.21; $\alpha = .90$)

Please state your level of disagreement/agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)

Qual1: I associate the tourism destination Switzerland with high quality

Qual2: Switzerland provides high quality tourism services and products

Qual3: Switzerland is higher in quality than other destinations

Qual4: The overall quality of Switzerland as a tourism destination is high

Attitude towards destination (M = 5.48; SD = 1.30; $\alpha = .94$)

Please state your level of disagreement/agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)

Att1: I like Switzerland as a tourist destination

Att2: I feel favourable towards Switzerland as a tourism destination

Att3: My overall evaluation of Switzerland as a tourist destination is positive

Att4: Switzerland is an attractive tourism destination

(Re)visit intention (M = 4.90; SD = 2.02)

I am planning to visit Switzerland within a foreseeable future (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)

Destination personality (M = 4.83; SD = .85; $\alpha = .78$)

If Switzerland was a person, how would you describe its characteristics? Please indicate to what extent the following personality traits best describe the destination Switzerland. (1= Not at all descriptive; 7= Extremely Descriptive)

Dep1: Honest

Dep2: Sincere

Dep3: Reliable

Dep4: Responsible

Dep5: Stable

Excite1: Charming

Excite2: Exciting

Excite3: Spirited

Excite4: Imaginative

Excite5: Original

Rugged1: Rugged

Rugged2: Tough

Rugged3: Bold

Active1: Dynamic

Active2: Active

Active3: Energetic

Active4: Lively

Philo1: Funny

Philo2: Warm

Philo3: Cheerful

Soph1: Sophisticated

Soph2: Upper-class

Soph3: Glamorous

Soph4: Elegant

Dependability (M = 5.47; SD = .99; $\alpha = .83$)

Excitement (M = 4.94; SD = 1.31; $\alpha = .88$)

Ruggedness (M = 4.16; SD = 1.26; $\alpha = .73$)

Activeness (M = 4.90; SD = 1.34; $\alpha = .90$)

Philoxenia (M = 4.23; SD = 1.26; $\alpha = .76$)

Sophistication (M = 5.27; SD = 1.13; $\alpha = .81$)