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**Review of the doctoral dissertation of M.A. Nguyet Luong Tran**  
**titled „The Effect of Self-Place Congruity and Individualism on Visit Intention”**

**1. Basis for the Preparation of the Review**

The subject of this review is the doctoral dissertation authored by **Ms. Nguyet Luong Tran**, titled „The Effect of Self-Place Congruity and Individualism on Visit Intention”. The dissertation supervisor is Prof. dr. hab. Wawrzyniec Rudolf, and the role of co-supervisor is held by Prof. dr. hab. Małgorzata Karpińska-Krakowiak.

The review was prepared on the basis of the letter dated 13 June 2024 from the Chairperson of the University of Łódź Commission for Research Degrees in the Discipline of Management and Quality Sciences, Prof. dr. hab. Ewa Walińska, as well as the contract of mandate No. UODRD/8/221/05/2024 concluded with me on June 12 by the University of Łódź.

This review is part of the procedure for awarding Ms. Nguyet Luong Tran a doctoral degree in the field of Social Sciences, in the discipline of Management and Quality Sciences. Its purpose is to determine whether the dissertation in question meets the requirements specified in the in the Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science.

**2. General Overview of the Dissertation**

The dissertation's subject falls within the discipline of management and quality sciences, specifically within the area of marketing, with a particular emphasis on marketing and branding of tourism destinations and tourist behavior.

The choice of the subject for the dissertation should be evaluated very positively. The topics addressed are not only intellectually stimulating, but also highly relevant to current trends. The growing popularity of the concept of brand personality is connected to the increasing importance of non-functional brand attributes in consumer decision-making, especially as the functional properties of different brands within a given product category become increasingly homogeneous. Literature on the subject indicates that consistency between a tourist's self-concept and the personality of the destination leads to a favorable attitude towards that destination, which in turn influences the intention to visit. As the author herself highlights, previous research suggests that one of the crucial predictors of tourist behavioral intentions is individualism. However, limited scholarly attention has been given to the interaction effects of individualism and self-place congruity on travel intentions. Exploring the cause-and-effect relationship between self-place congruity, individualism, and a tourist's intention to visit a destination - the primary focus of this dissertation - fills a gap in the literature on destination marketing and branding.



### **3. Assessment of the Structure of the Dissertation**

The dissertation includes 150 pages of main text and 21 pages of bibliography. Additionally, it contains: List of Figures, List of Tables and four appendices with supplementary materials: Appendix A. Questionnaire of the first experiment for Adventure Island, Appendix B. Questionnaire of the first experiment for Romantic Island, Appendix C: The questionnaire of the second experiment (1), Appendix D: The questionnaire of the second experiment (2).

The dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. In the first chapter, the author presents theoretical insights on place branding, particularly in tourism. The second chapter systematizes the understanding of the concept of 'personality'. The third chapter focuses on explaining the variables considered in this dissertation, including self-place congruity, individualism, and visit intention. In the fourth chapter, the author describes the research methodology. The last chapter provides findings from two experimental studies and discusses the cause-effect relationship between self-place congruity, individualism, and visit intention. The conclusion includes general discussions, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

The structure of the dissertation is logical and clear. The order of the chapters, and within them the subchapters, follows the 'general to specific' principle. Such organization ensures that the reader can easily navigate through the content and understand the progression of the research and its findings.

There are certain disparities in the length (number of pages) of the individual chapters of the dissertation, which I note as part of my duty as a reviewer. However, in my opinion, this does not in any way diminish the value of the work.

### **4. Assessment of the Research Problem, Objectives, and Selection of Research Methods**

For the purposes of the dissertation, the following were formulated: the main objective, nine specific objectives, and four research questions.

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the effect of self-place congruity and individualism on the intention to visit a destination. The main goal of the study is to explore the cause-and-effect relationship between self-place congruity, individualism, and a tourist's intention to visit a destination. In order to achieve this main objective, several specific objectives have been outlined as follows:

Theory-related Objectives:

- (1) Systematising the concept of tourist personality and its impact on travel behavior.
- (2) Identifying the evolution of the concept of 'destination personality'.
- (3) Identifying the evolution of the concept of 'congruity'.
- (4) Examining the effect of 'individualism' in tourism research.
- (5) Identifying the antecedents of the visit intention.
- (6) Building and testing a theoretical model related to the interactions between the self-place congruity and individualism on visit intention.

Method-related Objectives:

- (7) Examining whether the interaction effect between self-place congruity and individualism on visit intention depend on the way a researcher manipulates (versus measures) the moderators in the experiment.

Managerial Objectives:

(8) Testing for the effect of self-place congruity on the visit intention.

(9) Testing the moderating role of individualism on the relationship between self-place congruity and visit intention.

The following research questions were formulated: RQ1: What is the main effect of self-place congruity on visit intention? RQ2: What is the main effect of individualism on visit intention? RQ3: Is there an interaction effect between self-place congruity and individualism on visit intention? RQ4: Does the interaction effect between self-place congruity and individualism on visit intention depend on methodological approach (whether moderators are measured or manipulated)?

I positively assess the way in which the main goal of the dissertation has been formulated along with the specific objectives and research questions. In my opinion, this represents a logically developed and internally coherent framework for the doctoral thesis.

I believe it was a good idea to divide the goals into three groups: theoretical, methodological, and managerial. This division makes it easier for the author to demonstrate the contribution to the development of management and quality science across cognitive, methodological, and implementation layers. For the last group, referred to as 'managerial objectives' I think 'practical objectives' or 'utilitarian objectives' would be a more appropriate name.

To achieve the intended objectives of the dissertation, the author designed and conducted original research, employing methods such as systematic and bibliometric literature reviews, as well as experimental research.

Regarding the first method, it was used to review the literature on three thematic areas: place branding in tourism, tourist personality and place personality, as well as self-place congruity, individualism, and visit intention. The author conducted several systematic analyses for each relevant concept, focusing on dominant topics, with the results presented in the first three chapters of the dissertation. Bibliometric analyses of the literature were also employed in the development of Chapters 1-3, supplementing the systematic literature reviews with quantitative data. For the bibliometric analyses, the author used the Bibliometrix R package and the web-based Biblioshiny platform. I very much appreciate the addition of systematic and bibliometric analysis to the traditional literature review. By employing such a procedure, the dissertation presents a more comprehensive picture of the of researcher's contributions in areas related to the chosen topic.

The second research method employed by the author of the dissertation was the experiment. Considering that experiments are designed to establish causal relationships, the choice of this method to achieve the intended goals appears to be fully justified. As part of the research process, two online experiments were conducted with the aim of determining the relationships between the variables: individualism, self-place congruity, and visit intentions.

The strengths of the methodology used in the reviewed dissertation include:

- The use of a hybrid approach in the literature review process by combining systematic and bibliometric analysis of publications related to the dissertation's topic,
- The selection of the experiment as the research method, which is appropriate for the dissertation's intended goal,
- Proper planning of the design and the various stages of the procedure for implementing the experimental method,
- Correct and engaging development of research tools for both experiments,
- Justified selection and sufficient sample size for both experiments,
- The use of appropriate statistical techniques for analyzing the data obtained from the research.



Some limitations of the adopted methodology include: the exclusive use of the Web of Science database for the systematic and bibliometric literature review, the reliance solely on a quantitative research method, whereas in studies related to brand personality and destination branding, it is recommended to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, as well as the lack of visualization of the stages of the research process, which would have facilitated the reader's understanding.

Like any research method, an experiment has both strengths and weaknesses, which the author discusses in her work. Therefore, I ask the Doctoral Candidate to address the following questions during the public defense of the dissertation: *What factors influence the validity of the experimental method? How did she ensure the validity of the experimental research she conducted?*

## **5. Substantive Assessment of the Dissertation**

In my opinion, the Introduction has been properly developed in accordance with the requirements for doctoral dissertations. The author convincingly justified the choice of the dissertation's topic by highlighting a knowledge gap identified in the literature related to the subject matter. This part of the dissertation includes all the essential elements that should be presented in the introduction of a doctoral thesis: research problem, research objectives and questions, contributions, and a description of the structure.

Regarding Chapter 1, I positively evaluate both its structure and content. The discussions presented in this part of the dissertation organize the ways of defining and clearly illustrate the evolution of the concept of place branding. An important addition to this section is the author's focus on clarifying research approaches to destination branding. I find Table 1.1 particularly valuable from a cognitive perspective, as it provides a summary of several literature review papers on destination branding. However, what I found lacking was a deeper and more critical analysis of the conducted review. Overall, the considerations regarding branding orientation in tourism destination management are logical and coherent. The conclusions drawn from the literature studies are well-documented with references, and the bibliometric analysis of the literature is an important addition.

In Chapter 2 of the dissertation, the author discusses the concept of personality in relation to both the tourist and the tourism destination. The chapter begins with an overview of personality definitions and selected personality theories. This serves as a theoretical background, introducing the discussion of the concept of tourist personality and methods for studying it in the context of travel behavior, as well as the concept of brand personality and the related idea of destination personality. The flow of arguments in Chapter 2 is logical and includes numerous references to the literature, including the most recent works. Similar to Chapter 1, the bibliometric analyses included in this part of the dissertation serve as a valuable addition to the literature review.

The concept of brand personality is closely tied in the literature to the idea of brand identity and image. Many authors have conceptualized the notion of identity and brand image as multidimensional constructs in which brand personality is a very important component. Therefore, I ask the Doctoral Candidate *to provide a few examples of different researchers'*



*approaches to the relationship between brand personality, identity, and image during the public defense of the dissertation.*

I find Chapter 3 to be particularly interesting from a cognitive perspective. The author starts it with a description of the evolution of self-congruity theory, and generally does so correctly. However, in my opinion, greater emphasis has been placed on presenting the results of the bibliometric analysis rather than on a critical (more qualitative) interpretation of the works by selected authors conducting research in the field of self-congruity. The author then systematizes a comprehensive understanding of individualism at both the national and individual level. Another concept discussed in this section of the dissertation is visit intention, which, as the author notes, attracts the attention of not only scholars but also practitioners. The chapter concludes with a description of the relationships between self-place congruity, individualism, and visit intention identified in the literature, upon which the research model underlying the experiments is proposed. This is a valuable part of the dissertation, clearly written and well-grounded in the relevant literature.

Chapter 4 provides a description of the research methodology used to achieve the objectives of the dissertation. It consists of two parts. The first part describes the methodology of the systematic and bibliometric literature review conducted to meet the theoretical objectives of the dissertation. The description of the adopted assumptions and research procedures related to the literature analysis is comprehensive and clear. In the second part of the chapter, the author describes the specifics of the experiment as a research method, highlighting the popularity of this method in studies on tourist behavior. The description of the methodology also includes a characterization of the types of experiments, the advantages and disadvantages of the experimental method, as well as the components of experimental design. This part of the methodology description also fully satisfies me as a reviewer.

In Chapter 5, the author describes in detail the research design, procedure, sample, stimuli, measures, findings, and discussions of each experimental study. All elements of the research process were presented in a clear, convincing, and comprehensive manner. The results of experiments revealed a three-way interaction between self-place congruity, individualism, and visit intention. They showed that self-place congruity (both measured and manipulated) always has a positive effect on visit intention. Furthermore, depending on whether individualism was manipulated or measured, the moderation of individualism in the relationship between self-place congruity and visit intention varied. These conclusions are intriguing; *however, I ask the Doctoral Candidate to explain during the public defense why, in her opinion, the results differ depending on whether individualism was manipulated or measured.*

Summarizing my substantive assessment of Chapter 5, I would like to emphasize that, in my opinion, the Doctoral Candidate has demonstrated a strong command of research methodology, particularly in terms of designing experimental methods. The research plan that she designed and implemented undoubtedly allowed her to answer the research questions, thereby achieving the specific objectives as well as the main goal of the dissertation.



The conclusions presented in this part of the thesis are appropriate and aligned with the research findings. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the contribution of the conducted research to the development of management and quality sciences. The author also does not neglect to describe the limitations of the conducted empirical research or to suggest directions for further studies.

In summary, I highly evaluate the reviewed dissertation in terms of its substantive content.

#### **6. Assessment of the Selection and Use of Literature**

The results of the empirical research conducted by the Doctoral Candidate are well-grounded in the relevant literature. The list of cited literature includes nearly 270 scientific publications, which is quite impressive and attests to the Author's extensive scientific insight. She has referenced most of the significant scientific publications known to me in the areas of marketing and branding of tourist destinations, as well as those related to brand personality.

#### **7. Assessment of the Dissertation in Terms of Technical and Editorial Aspects**

The doctoral dissertation meets the formal requirements expected of such works. It has been correctly prepared in terms of technical and editorial aspects. The scientific argument is presented in a coherent and logical manner, demonstrating the Doctoral Candidate's in-depth understanding of the topic (both substantively and methodologically). In my opinion, the Doctoral Candidate has mastered the art of academic writing well.

#### **8. Conclusion**

I assess the dissertation authored by Nguyet Luong Tran as very valuable from a cognitive perspective, original, and contributing new insights to the concept of place branding, particularly in the area of destination branding and tourist behavior. The work is based on thorough literature studies and well-planned and executed empirical research.

I would like to emphasize with full conviction that the doctoral dissertation titled „The Effect of Self-Place Congruity and Individualism on Visit Intention” meets the statutory requirements for doctoral theses as specified in the Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science. It represents an original solution to a scientific problem, demonstrates the theoretical knowledge of the Doctoral Candidate in the discipline of Management and Quality Sciences, and confirms her ability to independently conduct scientific research. Considering the above, I recommend acceptance of the reviewed dissertation and admission to the next stages of the doctoral examination process.

Taking into account the high substantive quality of the dissertation, including its originality, the significance of the problem addressed, as well as the scope and quality of the research, **I request that it be awarded with distinction.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'As Anne', located at the bottom right of the page.