

## **The Effect of Self-Place Congruity and Individualism on Visit Intention**

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Based on the metaphor of the brand as a person, marketers intentionally imbue their brands with human characteristics through advertising. Destination marketers have observed that tourists prefer to visit destinations reflecting their self-esteem and being congruent with their personality. Therefore, if marketers could better understand the relationship between the alignment of tourist personality with the personality of the place (i.e. self-place congruity) and visiting intentions, they could attract more visitors. Therefore, the current study aimed to explore the relationship between self-place congruity and visit intentions. Additionally, I examined whether and how the congruity between personalities of a tourist and a place interacts with another key variable for tourist behaviors: individualism. Existing literature suggests that individualism is one of the significant predictors of travel propensity; however, there has been a very limited number of studies on the effects of individualism and self-place congruity on tourists' behavior. The only existing empirical study by Matzler and his colleagues (2016) indicates that individualism negatively influences the relationship between self-place congruity and propensity to travel. However, this study was based on survey methodology and did not provide conclusive results. Therefore, I addressed this issue and thoroughly investigated it using experimental design.

As part of the empirical work for this dissertation, I conducted a series of literature reviews, both systematic and bibliometric, regarding key concepts used in the study, such as destination branding, destination personality, self-place congruity, individualism, and intention to visit. I observed a growing popularity of these terms in scientific publications, especially after 2000. The results of my work can contribute to a better understanding of tourist behavior issues and highlight new interesting areas for further scientific exploration.

Furthermore, I conducted two experiments to better understand the relationship between individualism, self-place congruity, and visit intentions. I found that both measured (Study 1) and manipulated (Study 2) self-place congruity has a positive impact on the intention to visit a tourist destination. However, depending on whether

individualism was manipulated (Study 1) or measured (Study 2), the effects of this variable vary significantly. When the self-place congruity is low, manipulated individualism reduces visit intentions; when the self-place congruity is high, manipulated individualism has no effect on the propensity to travel. Conversely, when the self-place congruity is high, measured individualism reduces visiting intentions; when the self-place congruity is low, measured individualism has no effect on the propensity to travel. The results of my experiments show that the way tourist destinations and tourist behaviors are studied can bring completely opposite empirical outcomes. Therefore, place brand managers and marketers should carefully analyze the research methodology and context of conducted studies before making strategic decisions regarding the management of tourist destinations. In summary, the relationships that I discovered can tangibly assist those persons who are responsible for promoting tourist destinations and help better understand tourist behaviors, as well as provide support in developing competitive marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** Personality of a Tourist, Personality of a Place, Self-Place Congruity, Individualism, Visit Intention, Experimental Research.