

Brand Personality Self-Congruity and the Product Life Cycle: Assessment of Behavioral Intentions Toward Tourism Destinations: An Abstract

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Abstract Previous studies have assessed the effects of brand personality in various product categories (Freling & Forbes, 2005; Lin 2010), including tourism destinations (Bekk et al., 2016; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). However, no known research has examined the effects of brand personality self-congruency on consumers in the context of destination brands across different stages of the product life cycle (PLC). The consideration of brands' life cycle positions is critical for marketing strategy to maintain the desired brand recognition, given the relationship between product evolution and performance in the market (Lau, 2014; Shankar et al., 1999). Therefore, this research investigated the role of brand personality self-congruency in predicting behavioral intentions toward tourism destinations, considering two different positions in the PLC (introductory vs. maturity). The study also examined the effects of social needs (Sheth et al., 1991) and venturesomeness (Plog, 2002), a psychographic construct from the travel and tourism literature.

Using a sample of 450 consumers in the United States, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis revealed the statistically significant effects of brand personality self-congruity (.682, $p < .001$) and venturesomeness (.120, $p < .001$) on intentions to visit tourism destinations, accounting for more than half of the variance explained ($R^2 = .550$). Results showed that consumers' social needs alone do not directly predict behavioral intention, but a significant interactive effect with brand personality self-congruity (.057, $p < .05$) suggests that social needs influence intention only when consumers experience identification with the brand, in consistency with the image congruence hypothesis (Sirgy et al., 1997).

Multigroup analysis (MGA) was conducted using the introductory/maturity stages of the destinations as a dichotomous variable to assess differences accounted for by the brand life cycle positions. Findings showed that consumers with more venturesomeness were more likely to prefer the destination in the introductory stage

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than the destination in the maturity stage (introductory = .164, maturity = .068, $p < .10$), consistent with the frameworks of Plog (1974, 2002) and Butler (1980). MGA also showed that the interactive effects of brand personality self-congruity and social needs on behavioral intentions yielded different coefficient signs (introductory = .074, maturity = $-.060$, $p < .05$), indicating opposite preferences for destinations in the two PLC stages, similarly to the early adopters and laggards described by Solomon (2015).

References Available Upon Request.