Self-image congruence in consumer behavior

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ABSTRACT

Self-image congruence helps explain and predict different facets of consumer behavior. To date, application of self-congruence theories to tourist post-travel evaluations is limited. This study tests a model that includes self-image congruence, cruise ship passengers’ experiences, satisfaction, and behavioral intention. Path modeling tests the hypotheses using a sample of 169 cruise ship travelers. Results indicate that self-image congruence (actual and ideal) affects passengers’ experiences but indirectly influences satisfaction levels. Satisfaction positively relates to respondents’ propensity to recommend. Overall, this research advances the understanding of cruise ship passengers’ experiences and behaviors offering important managerial implications.

1. Introduction

The consumer behavior literature supports the proposition that individuals’ self images dictate specific purchase behavior patterns (e.g., Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987). Consumers buy products and brands they believe to possess symbolic images similar and/or complementary to their self-image, that is, to achieve image congruence (Heath and Scott, 1998). Strong supporting evidence show self-image congruence explains and predicts different aspects of consumer behavior (He and Mukherjee, 2007).

A relatively small body of work examines the self-image congruence construct to explain tourist behaviors (Litvin et al., 2001; Litvin and Goh, 2002; Sirgy and Su, 2000; Todd, 2001). Chon (1992) first empirically applies self-image congruence theory to tourism. He finds tourist satisfaction significantly correlates with self-image/destination image congruity. Tourists perceiving a low discrepancy between a destination’s image and self-image tend to be more satisfied with the trip experience.

Furthermore, Sirgy and Su (2000) propose an integrative model establishing the relationships among destination image, self-congruence, and tourists’ behaviors. Beerli et al. (2007) investigate the self-image congruence role in predicting destination choice. Findings reveal a match between a destination’s image and one’s self-concept, associates with a greater tendency to visit the destination.

Other studies, however, fail to provide empirical support for the theory in tourism. For example, Litvin and Goh (2002) investigate the effect of self-image congruence on travel interest and intention to visit. Litvin and Goh (2002) report contradictory results and question whether self-congruity theory is an effective tool for tourism marketers. Several other scholars call for research to establish the relevance of self-congruity theory and to further extend the conceptualization in tourism (e.g., Beerli et al., 2007; Boksberger et al., forthcoming; Kastenholz, 2004; Murphy et al., 2007). Tourists increasingly consume travel and tourism products (e.g., a cruise vacation) as a means of self-expression (Gross and Brown, 2006; King, 2002). Still, no known studies exist to simultaneously investigate the relationship among self-image congruence and the evaluative variable experiences, satisfaction, and intention to recommend. This study further validates self-congruity theory in tourism with specific reference to cruise ship passengers.

Cruise vacations are the fastest growing segment in the tourism industry with an average annual passenger growth rate of 7.2% (Cruise Lines International Association, 2010). Cruising enables tourists to express their self-concepts (Yarnal and Kerstetter, 2005). The activity offers tourists experiential benefits and opportunities to engage in a memorable experience (Duman and Mattila, 2005; Huang and Hsu, 2010). Despite a cruise vacation’s symbolic nature, the study of cruisers’ experiences and post-travel behavior remains under-explored in tourism research (Petrick, 2004).

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses development

2.1. Symbolic consumption, self-concept and self-image congruence

The consumer behavior literature establishes that people consume products/brands/services for both functional value and symbolic meanings (Belk, 1988; Lee and Hyman, 2008; Leigh and Gabel, 1992; Solomon, 1983). Levy (1959) concludes people buy products not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean. Product

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consumption symbolizes personal attributes, motivations and social patterns. Symbolic consumption reflects the personality and lifestyle of consumers, expressing social distinctions (e.g., Sirgy, 1982). For example, people consume luxury products (e.g., high-performance automobiles) to reinforce their status symbol in society (Bagwell and Bernheim, 1996; Eastman et al., 1999; O’Cass and Frost, 2002). Consumption serves as a vehicle of self-expression (Aaker, 1996) and consumers choose products/brands perceptually consistent with their own self-concept (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Sirgy, 1982). Purchasing and using products allow consumers to define, maintain, and enhance their self-concept.

Self-concept research originated in the 1960s (Birdwell, 1968; Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Grubb and Hupp, 1968; Grubb and Stern, 1971; Hamm and Cundiff, 1969). In early studies, the self-concept’s operationalization was a one-dimensional construct. Scholars challenge the traditional approach and posit a person might have multiple ‘selves’ (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987). Recent conceptualizations construe self-concept as a multi-dimensional construct (Sirgy et al., 2000; Todd, 2001). The marketing literature identifies four dimensions of self-concept to explain and predict behavior: (1) actual self-concept (“me as I am”), how a person sees himself or herself; (2) ideal-self-concept (“the good me”), how a person would like to see himself or herself; (3) social self-concept, how consumers think others see them; (4) ideal social self-concept, how a person would like to be perceived by other people (Belch and Landon, 1977; Dolich, 1969; Hughes and Guerrero, 1971; Sirgy, 1982).

Table 1 shows the majority of consumer studies in marketing and tourism operationalize self-concept in terms of two components: actual and ideal. Accordingly, this study’s focuses on actual-self and ideal-self dimensions because they receive the most empirical support in research.

Self-image congruence refers to the cognitive match between consumers’ self-concept (e.g., actual self, ideal self, social self and ideal social self) and a product/brand image. store image, destination image or user image of a given product/brand/service (Sirgy et al., 1997, 2000; Sirgy and Su, 2000). User image is a stereotyped perception of a generalized user of a particular product/brand (Sirgy, 1986). Self-congruence, self-image congruence, self-congruity, and image congruence interchangeably describe this phenomenon. Following the tourism literature (e.g., Beerli et al., 2007), the study here uses the term self-image congruence to denote the match between tourists’ (‘cruisers’) self-concept (actual and ideal) and the image of other tourists (‘cruisers’).

Table 1 identifies two broad research streams on self-image congruence. Earlier research mostly focuses on the relationship between self-image congruence and consumer’s pre-purchase evaluations, such as purchase intentions (Landon, 1974), product preferences (Dolich, 1969) and product choice (Malhotra, 1988). However, some researchers highlight the benefits of extending self-image congruence conceptualizations to model post-consumption evaluations (e.g., Sirgy et al., 1997). Recent consumer behavior studies investigate the role of self-image congruence on various post-consumption variables such as satisfaction (Ekinci et al., 2008; Jamal and Goode, 2001; Jamal and Al-Marri, 2007; Sirgy et al., 1997), loyalty (He and Mukherjee, 2007; Kressmann et al., 2006), perceived quality (Kwak and Kang, 2009); and attitudes (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008).

Few tourism studies examine self-image congruence theories. Among the studies identified, three address post-consumption variables (satisfaction, intention to return and intention to recommend) (Chon, 1992; Kastenholz, 2004; Litvin and Kar, 2003) and two examine the relationship between self-image congruence and pre-travel variables (motivation to visit and destination choice) (Beerli et al., 2007; Litvin and Goh, 2002). To date, no studies exist that simultaneously investigate the relationships among self-image congruence, experiences, tourist satisfaction, and intention to recommend.

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Zinkhan, 1995), facilitates positive attitudes toward products/brands
(Ekinci and Riley, 2003; Sirgy et al., 1997), influences consumers' choice
(Quster et al., 2000), attitudes (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008),
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and Goode, 2001), and brand loyalty (Kressmann et al., 2006). Extant
research also reports a strong relationship between self-image congruence and satisfaction (He and Mukherjee, 2007; Jamal and
Al-Marri, 2007; Sirgy et al., 1997). Similarly, the tourism literature
Fierce competition to attract tourists compels destination marketers to better comprehend the distinguishing characteristics of tourist experiences (Gretzel et al., 2006). Tourists seek unique, extraordinary, and memorable experiences. A plethora of research seeks to understand tourist experiences across various settings (Andersson, 2007; Oh et al., 2007; Quan and Wang, 2004; Yuan and Wu, 2008). Cruise ship passenger experiences have received limited attention. Cruise vacations are consumption experiences enabling tourists to express and reinforce their self-concepts in society (Yarnal and Kerstetter, 2005). The cruise experience consists of intrinsic benefits or psychological outcomes that tourists obtain from taking a cruise vacation (Huang and Hsu, 2010). Arguably, greater congruity with one's self-concept results in a more pleasant experience. The above discussions frame the following hypotheses.

H1. The greater the congruity between one's actual self-concept and his/her image of other cruisers leads to high versus low satisfaction levels.

H2. The greater the congruity between one's ideal self-concept and his/her image of other cruisers leads to high versus low satisfaction levels.

H3. The greater the congruity between one's actual self-concept and his/her image of other cruisers, the more pleasant cruisers perceive their experience.

H4. The greater the congruity between one's ideal self-concept and his/her image of other cruisers, the more pleasant cruisers perceive their experience.

2.2. The influence of self-image congruence on satisfaction and cruisers' experiences

Self-image congruence plays a significant role in influencing consumer behaviors (Kressmann et al., 2006; Sirgy and Samli, 1985; Sirgy et al., 1991). For instance, research finds self-image congruence affects advertising effectiveness (Bjerke and Polegato, 2006; Hong and Zinkhan, 1995), facilitates positive attitudes toward products/brands (Ekinci and Riley, 2003; Sirgy et al., 1997), influences consumers' choice (Quster et al., 2000), attitudes (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008), perceived quality (Kwak and Kang, 2009), brand preferences (Jamal and Goode, 2001), and brand loyalty (Kressmann et al., 2006). Extant research also reports a strong relationship between self-image congruence and satisfaction (He and Mukherjee, 2007; Jamal and Al-Marri, 2007; Sirgy et al., 1997). Similarly, the tourism literature recognizes self-concept's influence in modeling visitor behaviors. Chon (1992) examines the relationship between tourists' self-concept/destination image congruity and satisfaction and concludes self-image congruence affects satisfaction with destinations.
Fierce competition to attract tourists compels destination marketers to better comprehend the distinguishing characteristics of tourist experiences (Gretzel et al., 2006). Tourists seek unique, extraordinary, and memorable experiences. A plethora of research seeks to understand tourist experiences across various settings (Andersson, 2007; Oh et al., 2007; Quan and Wang, 2004; Yuan and Wu, 2008). Cruise ship passenger experiences have received limited attention. Cruise vacations are consumption experiences enabling tourists to express and reinforce their self-concepts in society (Yarnal and Kerstetter, 2005). The cruise experience consists of intrinsic benefits or psychological outcomes that tourists obtain from taking a cruise vacation (Huang and Hsu, 2010). Arguably, greater congruity with one's self-concept results in a more pleasant experience. The above discussions frame the following hypotheses.

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H4. The greater the congruity between one's ideal self-concept and his/her image of other cruisers, the more pleasant cruisers perceive their experience.

2.3. Relationship among cruiser experiences, satisfaction and intention to recommend

Cruise vacations offer experiential benefits and opportunities to engage in socially unique and memorable experiences (Kwortnik, 2006). Understanding cruisers' experiences provides insights on post-consumption evaluations, such as satisfaction and intention to recommend. Duman and Mattila (2005) demonstrate that the affective experience of cruise travel positively influences perceived overall satisfaction.
Huang and Hsu (2010) further establish that cruise experiences directly affect vacation satisfaction. Prior research shows consumer experiences relate to future behavior. For example, Chang and Chieng (2006) find creating a consistent experience drives customer loyalty. Several studies establish satisfied tourists tend to recommend a destination to other people (Bigné et al., 2001; Hui et al., 2007; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). These empirical perspectives inform the following hypotheses.

H5. A pleasant cruise experience relates positively to overall satisfaction.

H6. A pleasant cruise experience relates positively to intention to recommend.

H7. Cruiser's satisfaction relates positively to intention to recommend.

3. Methods

The questionnaire includes rating scales to capture the study's main variables: cruisers' self-concept, experiences, satisfaction, and intention to recommend. Other variables of interest include: gender, age, travel companion, and nationality. Congruence between cruiser's self-concept and his/her image of other tourists was measured using the traditional method using a two-step procedure (Helgeson and Supphellen, 2004). First, respondents provide ratings to a set of pre-specified image characteristics of the typical cruise tourist. Next, respondents rate their self-concepts (actual and ideal) using the same characteristics. Mathematically, congruence is established by calculating the absolute discrepancy score between respondents' self-concept and their perceptions of other tourists. Consistent with past studies, cruiser's self-concept (actual and ideal) and his/her image of other tourists (user image) were captured on a 7-point semantic differential scale (e.g., Beerli et al., 2007; Birdwell, 1968; Kastenholz, 2004; Malhotra, 1981). Self-concept is operationalized in terms of two dimensions, actual and ideal, following the rich traditions in consumer (e.g., Dolich, 1969; Kressmann et al., 2006) and tourism research (e.g., Beerli et al., 2007; Chon, 1992; Litvin and Goh, 2002). The self-concept scale was adapted from Beerli et al. (2007) consisting of six items: young/old, conservative/liberal, sophisticated/un sophisticated, modern/traditional, non-conformist/conformist, and like new experiences/dislike new experiences. For each item, respondents evaluated their actual self-concept by answering the question “Using the following list of adjectives, how do you see yourself?”, and their ideal self-concept “How would you like to see yourself?” Similarly, respondents evaluated their mental representation of other tourists onboard: “Using the following list of attributes, what is the image you have of the tourists onboard this cruise?”
Four items, adapted from Oh et al. (2007), measured cruisers' overall experiences. Respondents evaluated the extent to which their experience was interesting (M = 5.79; SD = 1.16), stimulating (M = 5.51; SD = 1.08), exciting (M = 5.75; SD = 1.12) and enjoyable (M = 5.92; SD = 1.14) on 7-point scales ranging from [1] not at all to [7] very much. Satisfaction is conceptualized as tourists' post-consumption evaluation of their overall cruise vacation and measured by a two-item scale (Spreng and Mackoy, 1996). Respondents provided
overall satisfaction ratings of their cruise experience on two 7-point scales: [−3] extremely dissatisfied to [3] extremely satisfied (M = 2.18; SD = 1.00); and [−3] terrible to [3] extremely satisfied (M = 2.11; SD = 0.91). Finally, behavioral intention is tourists' intention to recommend (M = 2.17; SD = 1.00) using the question “How likely is it that you would recommend this cruise to friends or family members” with anchors extremely unlikely [−3] and extremely likely [3] (Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

Data were collected from guests on a two-week cruise vacation onboard the megaship “Rhapsody of the Seas” cruise liner, owned and operated by Royal Caribbean International Cruise Line. The cruise left Singapore and traveled to Hong Kong, with scheduled stops in Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand. At each port, passengers could freely disembark and/or take organized excursions. To capture an individual’s experience, Manfredo et al. (1996) recommend data collection immediately after the trip or activity. Accordingly, disembarked passengers waiting for onward transportation (coach transfers) were approached to participate in the survey. Tourists’ evaluations were obtained within less than an hour after the consumption had taken place and thus minimized bias associated with retrospective recall (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Data were obtained from a sample of 169 passengers consisting of 53 percent males and 47 percent females. Respondent age groups ranged from 8 percent (16 to 25 years old); 21 percent (26 to 35 years old); 15 percent (36 to 45 years old); 15 percent (46 to 55 years old); 17 percent were (56 to 65 years old); and 15 percent (above 65 years old). Respondents mainly were accompanied by either their child (5%), Norway, and Russia.

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### 4. Results

Following Beerli et al. (2007), three exploratory factor analyses with a Varimax rotation were performed prior to testing the hypotheses. This procedure identified the dimensions of the self-concept (actual and ideal) and user (other tourists) image scales. Results indicate four items – namely sophisticated/unsophisticated, modern/traditional, non-conformist/conformist, and like new experiences/dislike new experiences – were common across the three scales and explain most of the variance. Consistent with past research (Birdwell, 1968; Dolich, 1969; Kressmann et al., 2006; Sirgy, 1985), self-congruity was then computed using absolute arithmetic difference scores between respondents’ ratings on each of the four attributes describing the image of tourists onboard and the corresponding actual and ideal self-concept (see Table 2). As a result, the coefficients (see Table 3 and Fig. 1) between self-image congruence (actual and ideal) and the dependent measures (experiences, satisfaction and intention to recommend) are negative because lower absolute discrepancy score indicates a closer match between self-image and perceived cruisers’ image and hence higher congruity levels.

Partial Least Square (PLS) path modeling (Lohmöller, 1989) tested the hypothesized research model. PLS method is a non-traditional alternative to covariance-based structural equation modeling (CBSEM). In PLS, structural models are estimated using an iterative procedure which maximizes the strength of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. PLS is suitable for predictive applications and theory building (Chin, 1998). Unlike CBSEM, PLS imposes less restrictive assumptions about normality and the procedure works well with small samples (Chin, 1998; Chin and Newsted, 1999; Wold, 1982).

PLS path models are defined in terms of two sets of linear relation — inner and the outer models. The inner model specifies the relationship between unobserved or latent variables, similar to CBSEM structural models. The outer model (or measurement model in CBSEM), shows the relationship between a latent variable and observed or manifest variables (Lohmöller, 1989). Unlike conventional SEM, PLS does not produce an overall test statistic, such as the χ² Goodness of Fit (Rigdon, 2005). PLS model evaluation is based on multiple fit indices, including r-square values, average variance explained (AVE), regression weights, and path loadings (Fornell and Cha, 1994; Lohmöller, 1989). The hypothesized model was estimated using SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle et al., 2005). In addition, the model stability was tested via a bootstrap resampling procedure.

#### 4.1. Measurement model

Following Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) recommended procedure, the study’s main constructs (see Tables 2 and 3) were first

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**Table 2: Reliability and convergent validity.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Item loading</th>
<th>t-statistic</th>
<th>Composite reliability</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual self-image congruence</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophisticated/unsophisticated</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>3.56b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern/traditional</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>3.67b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-conformist/conformist</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>5.88b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like new experiences/dislike new experiences</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>7.78b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal self-image congruence</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophisticated/unsophisticated</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>6.59b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern/traditional</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>5.74b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-conformist/conformist</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>5.80b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like new experiences/dislike new experiences</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>13.59b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruisers' experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience was stimulating</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>19.51b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience was exciting</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>28.05b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience was enjoyable</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>27.92b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience was interesting</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>20.23b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely dissatisfied/ extremely satisfied</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>24.68b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrible/delighted</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>79.42b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to recommend</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Intention to recommend is a single item measure. AVE = average variance extracted.

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*a* Actual self-image congruence is computed using absolute arithmetic difference scores between ratings of other cruisers’ image and actual self-concept.

*b* Significant at the 0.05 level.

*c* Ideal self-image congruence is computed using absolute arithmetic difference scores between ratings of other cruisers’ image and ideal self-concept.

*d* 7-point scale, where 1 = not at all and 7 = very much.

*e* 7-point semantic differential scale: −3 to +3.
examined for reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity before testing the structural model. Reliability assessment uses composite reliability estimates (Werts et al., 1974). From Table 2, composite reliabilities are above the recommended 0.70 cut-off value (range from .79 to .92), suggesting the scales are reliable (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

Factor loading's significance and average variance extracted (AVE) assess convergent validity. From Table 2, factor loadings are higher than .57 and significant (p<.01) with r values ranging from 3.56 to 79.42. Average variances extracted are above 0.50 establishing the measure's convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Discriminant validity was examined by comparing the square root of AVE for individual constructs with the correlations among the latent variables. For adequate discriminant validity, the diagonal elements in Table 3 should be greater than the off-diagonal elements (Barclay et al., 1995). Comparing all correlation coefficients with square roots of AVEs in Table 3, the results suggest strong evidence of discriminant validity.

### 4.2. Structural model

The structural model (Fig. 1) was evaluated using r-square estimates, standardized path coefficients (β) and significance level (t statistic). The r-square values measure the structural model's predictive power, while path loadings (interpreted as standardized regression coefficients) indicate the strength between independent and dependent variables. From Fig. 1, r-square coefficients are greater than the recommended .10 value (Falk and Miller, 1992) suggesting the structural model exhibits adequate explanatory power. Specifically, the model explains 22 percent of cruisers' experiences, 43 percent of satisfaction, and 66 percent of intention to recommend. A bootstrapping procedure calculated path loadings and t-statistics for the hypothesized relationships (see Fig. 1).

For H1 and H2, PLS parameter estimates (β = −0.04 and β = −0.05) are not significant (p>0.05), and thus leading to the rejection of H1 and H2. However, the path loadings from actual self-image congruence to cruisers' experiences (β = −0.25) and from ideal self-image congruence (β = −0.35) are significant (p<0.01), providing support for H3 and H4. Findings also confirm the relationship between cruise experience and overall satisfaction (β = 0.62; p<0.01). Contrary to theoretical expectations, the path between cruisers' experiences and intention to recommend is not significant (β = 0.15; p>0.05) and therefore H6 is rejected. Finally, H7 states cruiser's satisfaction positively relates to intention to recommend. The significant coefficient (β = 0.71; p<0.01) between satisfaction and intention to recommend supports H7.

### 5. Discussion and implications

Self-congruity theory postulates the congruence resulting from a psychological comparison involving the product–user image and the consumer's self-concept influences consumer behavior (Sirgy et al., 1997). The self-image congruence effect on tourist post-consumption evaluations remains an under-studied topic (Beerli et al., 2007; Kastenholz, 2004). This study furthers the understanding of tourist behavior by investigating inter-relationships among self-image congruence, tourists’ experiences, and intention to recommend. The study implications are discussed below and future research areas are highlighted.

From a theoretical perspective, the current study establishes the validity of self-congruity theory in tourism. Specifically, the results suggest higher congruity between cruisers' self-concept (actual and ideal) and perceived images of other tourists contribute to overall favorable trip experiences. The findings reveal ideal-image congruity is more important than actual-image congruity. This result is consistent with previous studies identifying ideal self-image congruence as the main variable in consumer research (Ekinci et al., 2008; Graeff, 1996; Hong and Zinkhan, 1995; Malhotra, 1988). Graeff (1996) suggests conspicuous products consumed publicly (e.g., a cruise vacation) are more influenced by ideal-image congruity than actual-image congruity.

The results do not confirm self-image congruence's relationship to satisfaction. This finding differs from previous tourism studies (Chon, 1992; Litvin and Kar, 2003). Both Chon (1992) and Litvin and Kar (2003) find actual self-image and ideal-image congruence significantly relate to tourist satisfaction. Methodological differences plausibly explain the divergent results. First, the present study adapts Beerli et al.’s (2007) self-image congruence measure using a variant of

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**Table 3**

Inter-construct correlations: discriminant validity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASIC</th>
<th>ISIC</th>
<th>CExp</th>
<th>Satis</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASIC</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIC</td>
<td>0.49b</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CExp</td>
<td>−0.29b</td>
<td>−0.41b</td>
<td>0.84</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satis</td>
<td>−0.25b</td>
<td>−0.32b</td>
<td>0.65b</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** *b* Single item measure

**Fig. 1.** Results for the hypothesized model.

Second, Chon (1992) and Litvin and Kar (2003) operationalize satisfaction as a dependent variable; the present study considers satisfaction a mediating variable between self-image congruence and intention to recommend. Chon (1992) and Litvin and Kar (2003) measure satisfaction using three questions: (1) a seven-point facial scale (smiling to angry face); (2) a seven-point delighted-terrible scale; and (3) a non-verbal graphic scale. This study conceptualizes satisfaction as an overall evaluation of the cruise vacation and assesses the construct using two statements on a 7-point scale: extremely dissatisfied/extremely satisfied; and terrible/delighted.

Findings support Landon's (1974) and Malhotra's (1988) assertions that the extent self-concept affects consumer behavior depends on consumption situations. To further advance knowledge of self-image congruity's role in tourism, additional research needs to consider recent studies (e.g., Beerli et al., 2007) and compare the image congruity's role in tourism, additional research needs to on consumption situations. To further advance knowledge of self-concept affects consumer behavior depends appeals congruent with one's self-concept are more superior to customer's self-concept. Previous research establishes that consumer behaviors also can be driven by functional congruity (e.g., Sirgy et al., 1991, 2000). Functional congruity refers to the match between consumers' (tourists') ideal expectations of a product, brand, or destination's utilitarian features and how the product/brand/destination is perceived along the same attributes (Kressmann et al., 2006).

Future studies should incorporate both self-congruity and functional congruity in modeling tourists' experiences, satisfaction and intention to recommend. Finally, findings are limited to collecting data from one cruise vacation. Future studies should collect data from cruise passengers at different times of the year, on different ships, at different locations and destinations, and on multiple cruise lines.

References


5.2. Limitations and future research

Results advance theory about self-image congruence in tourism but some study limitations exist. First, this study only investigates the effects of self-congruity on cruisers’ experiences and post-travel behaviors. Previous research establishes that consumer behaviors also can be driven by functional congruity (e.g., Sirgy et al., 1991, 2000). Functional congruity refers to the match between consumers’ (tourists’) ideal expectations of a product, brand, or destination’s utilitarian features and how the product/brand/destination is perceived along the same attributes (Kressmann et al., 2006).

Future studies should incorporate both self-congruity and functional congruity in modeling tourists’ experiences, satisfaction and intention to recommend. Finally, findings are limited to collecting data from one cruise vacation. Future studies should collect data from cruise passengers at different times of the year, on different ships, at different locations and destinations, and on multiple cruise lines.