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## The Relationship between destination personality, self-congruity, and behavioral intentions

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESTINATION PERSONALITY,  
SELF-CONGRUITY, AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

by

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Bachelor's Degree in Tourism Management,  
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2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Master of Science Degree in Hotel Administration**  
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**Graduate College**  
**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**  
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## ABSTRACT

### **The Relationship Between Destination Personality, Self-Congruity, and Behavioral Intentions**

by

Ahmet Usakli

Dr. Seyhmus Baloglu, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of Hotel Administration  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The purpose of this research was to investigate the perceived destination personality of Las Vegas and to examine the relationships among destination personality, self-congruity, and tourist's behavioral intentions. A convenience sample of 382 visitors to Las Vegas was surveyed and 368 usable questionnaires were analyzed. The findings of the study indicate that tourists ascribe personality characteristics to destinations and perceived destination personality of Las Vegas is five dimensional: vibrancy, sophistication, competence, contemporary, and sincerity. These dimensions have a positive influence on intention to return and intention to recommend. The study also supports the self-congruity theory within the context of tourism destinations, indicating that both actual and ideal self-congruity has positive impact on behavioral intentions. The study concludes that self-congruity is a partial mediator on the relationship between destination personality and behavioral intentions. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed within the context of destination branding and self-congruity theory.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive market, consumers are not only surrounded by numerous brands but also exposed to many different marketing practices that are developed to differentiate these brands from their competitors. The concept of branding has been extensively applied to products and services in the generic marketing field (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005), but brands are found in many categories of tourism products and permeate almost all facets of tourism activities (Cai, 2002). A tourism destination can also be seen as a product or perceived as a brand since it consists of a bundle of tangible and intangible attributes (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Ekinici, Sirakaya-Turk, & Baloglu, 2007; Hosany, Ekinici, & Uysal, 2007).

Although the idea of branding tourism destinations is relatively new (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Cai, 2002; Gnoth, 1998), many destinations around the world have been trying to adopt branding strategies similar to those used by Coca Cola, Nike and Sony in an attempt to differentiate their identities and to emphasize the uniqueness of their products (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004). In today's world, companies/organizations are not only in a battle of products or services but also in a battle of perceptions in the consumer mind. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are also in this constant

battle to attract travelers since destinations are becoming highly substitutable due to the growing global competition (Pike & Ryan, 2004).

It has been suggested that destination branding has become a popular and powerful marketing tool because of increasing competition, product similarity, and substitutability in tourism markets. Many destinations still promote the similar attributes such as beautiful scenery, golden beaches, blue seas or friendly places in their advertisements (Ekinci et al., 2007; Murphy, Benckendorff, & Moscardo, 2007b). However, travelers can find many destinations with beautiful scenery, blue seas or golden beaches to travel. The use of such attributes in destination marketing does no longer help differentiate destinations from their competitors. Positioning destinations based on their functional attributes makes them easily substitutable. Therefore, Ekinci & Hosany (2006) state that destination personality can be seen as a viable metaphor for building destination brands, understanding visitors' perceptions of destinations and crafting a unique identity for tourism places. Thus, DMOs should focus on developing marketing campaigns emphasizing the distinctive personality of their destinations.

Destination personality refers to the brand personality in the context of tourism literature. Hosany et al. (2007) defined destination personality as the set of personality traits associated with a destination, adapting Aaker's (1997) brand personality terminology. While the product related attributes tended to serve a utilitarian function for consumers, the brand personality tended to serve a symbolic or self-expressive function (Keller, 1993). This is particularly relevant in the context of tourism, because the choice of a tourism destination is perceived as a self-expressive device, a lifestyle and status indicator (Clarke, 2000). Furthermore, there should be congruence between destination

personality and visitors' self-concept according to self-congruity theory. Aaker (1995) mentioned that the basic notion of self-congruity theory refers to drive for consumers to prefer brands with personalities congruent with their own personality. Applying the basic notion of self-congruity theory within the context of tourism destinations, it can be proposed that the greater the match between destination personality and visitor's self-concept, the more likely it is that the visitor will have a favorable attitude toward that destination. This attitude might result in a visit or word of mouth. Thus, understanding the congruity between destination personality and visitor's self-concept is important to acquire the ability to understand the complex travel behavior.

Destinations are stronger, more sophisticated and more aggressive than they have ever been in the past. Every major destination around the globe is competing for tourism dollars. Las Vegas is one of those major destinations with its luxurious hotels, casinos, fine dining restaurants, wonderful live entertainment and state-of-the-art convention facilities.

The number of visitors to Las Vegas increased dramatically from 2002 to 2007. While more than 35 million people visited Las Vegas in 2002, the number of visitors in 2007 has reached nearly 39.2 million, resulting in the fifth consecutive annual increase. With its 90.4% total occupancy level in 2007, Las Vegas has the highest occupancy rates in the United States. Additionally, in 2007 there were 23,847 conventions held in Las Vegas with more than 8 billion dollars in economic impact. Las Vegas room inventory currently stands at over 132,000 (Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority [LVCVA], 2008). Most importantly, the visitors to Las Vegas spent 41.5 billion dollars in 2007 (University of Nevada Las Vegas, n.d.).

Furthermore, Las Vegas was named the fifth most recognized brand in the US according to the 2005 ImagePower Newsmaker Survey conducted by Landor Associates, a leading branding and design consultancy, and the research firm Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (LVCVA, 2007). The success of Las Vegas continued in 2006 and it was placed the second most recognized brand after Google in the 2006 ImagePower Newsmaker Survey. The other brands among the top ten were Google, iPod, YouTube, eBay, Yahoo!, Target, Oprah, Sony and NFL, respectively. Also, Las Vegas followed Google at number 2 in the projected winners list for 2007 (Kavilanz, 2007).

It is evident from the figures presented above that Las Vegas is a strong destination brand. Even though Las Vegas as a destination brand continues to grow both in numbers and in popularity, the destination must stay competitive. In order to maintain its growth and stay competitive, destination marketers of Las Vegas should concentrate more on destination branding, especially in the areas of brand personality and self-congruence. Thus, they can better understand the perceptions of visitors to Las Vegas and create a unique brand identity.

#### Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived destination personality of Las Vegas and to empirically examine the relationships among destination personality, self-congruity and tourist's behavioral intentions. The study focuses on one of the important determinants of branding, the brand personality, and its application to tourism destinations. First, perceived destination personality of Las Vegas and its underlying dimensions are investigated. It has been argued that a distinctive brand personality

contributes to the brand differentiation from brands of competitors (Aaker, 1996), increases brand preference and usage (Aaker, 1999; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982), enhances the brand equity (Keller, 1993), builds strong emotional relationships between consumers and brands and thus results in greater trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998). Understanding brand personality is important because consumers select brands with personalities that are acceptable to them (Aaker, 1999). Second, the study examines the effects of destination personality on tourist's intention to return and intention to recommend behaviors. Third, the effects of self-congruity on behavioral intentions are examined. Finally, the relationship between destination personality, self-congruity and behavioral intentions is examined to identify any indirect effects of destination personality on behavioral intentions through self-congruity.

Self-congruity theory proposes that part of consumer behavior is determined by a matching between consumer self-concept and product/brand image (Sirgy et al., 1997). Several prior studies have examined such effects of self-congruity on consumer behavior. However, those prior studies have extensively focused on the match between self-concept and brand image, not on brand personality.

Brand image refers to both functional and symbolic benefits of a brand (Low & Lamb, 2000). On the other hand, brand personality only refers to the symbolic function of a brand (Keller, 1993). Brand personality may have a closer link to consumer self-concept than brand image since it focuses on personality traits associated with a brand. The findings of Aaker's (1999) study also support the brand personality congruence effect. Aaker (1999) found another self-congruity effect between consumer self-concept and brand personality. Thus, in this study, the product/brand image concept is replaced by

the brand personality concept and self-congruity is conceptualized as the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept.

According to Sirgy et al. (1997), there are four major types of self-congruity in the literature, namely actual self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity. This study will only concentrate on actual and ideal self-congruity, since these two types of self congruity have received the strongest empirical support and are most commonly used (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997).

#### *Proposed Model*

In the consumer behavior literature, self-congruity is defined as the match between a product/brand image and consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, 1985b; Sirgy, Johar, Samli, & Claiborne, 1991; Sirgy et al., 1997). It consist of two components, namely self-concept and product/brand image.

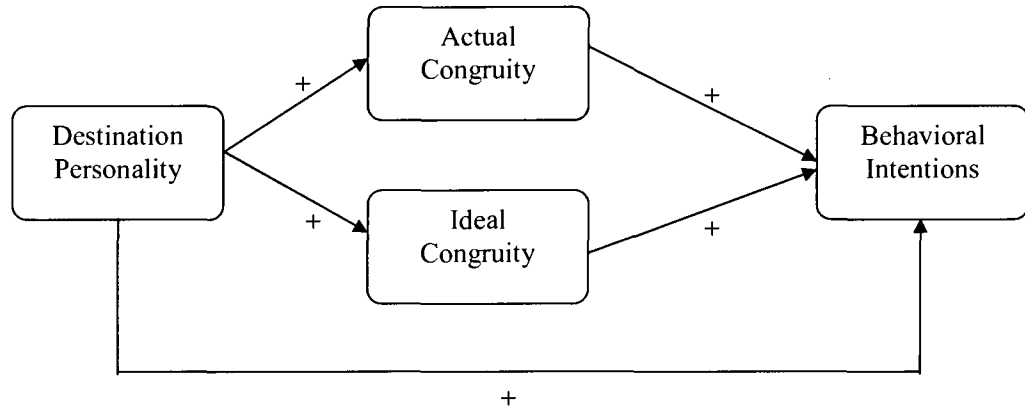
Several researchers have studied the congruence between consumer self-concept and product/brand image to predict consumer behavior variables, such as product/brand attitude, intention, behavior, loyalty and so on (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy, 1985a; Sirgy et al., 1991). However, previous studies almost exclusively focused on the match between the consumer self-concept and product/brand image, not on brand personality. Because of the poor conceptualization and a lack of empirical studies, there is much ambiguity in the relationship between brand image and brand personality (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006). Hosany et al. (2006) tested the relationship between brand image and brand personality in the context of tourism destinations and found that destination image and destination personality are two different but related concepts. While destination image is

an encompassing concept, destination personality is more related to the affective components of destination image (Hosany et al., 2006).

Additionally, brand image refers to both functional and symbolic benefits of a brand (Low & Lamb, 2000). On the other hand, brand personality only refers to the symbolic function of a brand (Keller, 1993). Thus, brand personality may have a closer link to consumer self-concept than functional benefits or attributes of a brand since it focuses on personality traits associated with a brand. Therefore, in this study, the product/brand image concept is replaced by the brand personality concept and self-congruity is conceptualized as the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept. Aaker (1999) also found evidence for another self-congruity between consumer self-concept and the brand personality. According to Aaker (1999), the main point of self-congruity is that consumers prefer brands with a set of personality traits congruent with their own.

Figure 1 outlines the hypothesized model in this research. It has been suggested that consumers prefer products or brands that are similar to how they see themselves or how they would like to see themselves (Landon, 1974; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). Aaker (1999) also argues that consumers select brands with personalities that are acceptable to them (Aaker, 1999). Thus, the hypothesized model posits that self-congruity will have a positive impact on tourist's behavioral intentions. In other words, the greater the match between the destination personality and tourist's self-concept, the more likely it is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination resulting in intention to return and intention to recommend.





*Figure 1. Hypothesized model*

Previous studies have investigated the effects of destination personality on tourist's behavioral intentions. For example, Ekinici & Hosany (2006) found that one of the dimensions of destination personality has a significant effect on intention to recommend. Ekinici et al. (2007) found that destination personality has a positive influence both on intention return and word of mouth. Furthermore, Helgeson and Supphellen (2004) compared self-congruity and brand personality both conceptually and empirically. The study revealed that the two concepts are empirically discriminant and both brand personality and self-congruity have independent and positive effects on brand attitudes. Following these studies, the present study proposes that destination personality will have a direct positive influence on intention to return and intention to recommend.

According to the proposed model, destination personality also influences intention to return and intention to recommend indirectly through self-congruity. Therefore, the proposed model hypothesizes that self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and tourist's behavioral intentions.

### *Research Questions*

The present study was designed to provide a better understanding of perceived brand personality of Las Vegas as tourist destination and to examine the relationship among brand personality, self-congruity and behavioral intentions. Accordingly, this study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the destination brand personality characteristics of Las Vegas as perceived by visitors of Las Vegas?
2. What is the impact of destination brand personality on intention to return and intention to recommend?
3. What is the impact of self-congruity (the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept) on intention to return and intention to recommend?
4. What is the impact of self-congruity on the relationship between destination personality and intention to return and intention to recommend?

### *Hypotheses*

The following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H1: Destination personality will have a positive impact on intention to return.

H2: Destination personality will have a positive impact on intention to recommend.

H3: Self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to return. (The greater the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept, the more likely it is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination resulting in intention to return.)

H3a: Actual self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to return.

H3b: Ideal self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to return.

H4: Self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to recommend. (The greater the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept, the more likely it is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination resulting in intention to recommend.)

H4a: Actual self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to recommend.

H4b: Ideal self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to recommend.

H5: Self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and intention to return.

H5a: Actual self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and intention to return.

H5b: Ideal self-congruity the relationship between destination personality and intention to return.

H6: Self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and intention to recommend.

H6a: Actual self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and intention to recommend.

H6b: Ideal self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and intention to recommend.

### Significance of the Study

The investigation and application of brand personality are relatively new in the tourism literature (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Gnoth, Baloglu, Ekinici, & Sirakaya-Turk, 2007). Ekinici & Hosany (2006) have researched the applicability and validity of Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework within the context of tourism destinations, and found that Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework is applicable to tourism destinations. Since then, few studies have emerged which have empirically examined the destination personality (e.g., Ekinici et al., 2007; Hosany et al., 2006, 2007; Murphy, Benckendorff, et al., 2007a, 2007b; Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). However, the destination personality has been largely unexplored and the research on destination personality is sparse (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). Furthermore, more research is needed to investigate the self-congruity theory within the context of destination personality framework. Although destination personality has been acknowledged; its specific dimensions and traits, as well as the relationship between destination personality and tourist's self-concept still remain to be identified.

This study directly contributes to the destination branding, destination personality and tourist's self-concept literatures, both theoretically and empirically. Especially, destination personality and the congruity between destination personality and tourist's self-image areas which are barely emerging but already lagging behind practitioners, are in need for further development and contributions. By focusing strictly on the personality

dimensions of destination brands, the study adds depth and complements existing knowledge within the destination branding literature. The study also helps destination marketers understand the personality dimensions of their brand and see which ones are driving tourist preference.

Since the self-congruity theory refers to the drive for consumers to prefer brands with personalities congruent with their own personality (Aaker, 1995), by focusing on this congruity, the study aids destination marketers to gain insight into the complex tourist choice behavior.

#### Definition of Terms

*Brand*: The American Marketing Association defines a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and service of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition” (Kotler & Gertner, 2004, p. 41).

*Brand Image*: Keller (1993, p. 3) defined brand image as “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory.”

*Brand Personality*: Brand personality is defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347).

*Destination Branding*: Blain, Levy & Ritchie (2005) defined destination branding as:

The marketing activities (1) that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates a destination; (2) that convey the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; and (3) that serve to consolidate and reinforce the

recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience, all with the intent purpose of creating an image that influences consumers' decisions to visit the destination in question, as opposed to an alternative one (p. 331).

*Destination Image:* According to Lawson & Baud Bovy (1977), (as cited in Jenkins, 1999), destination image is “the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place.”

*Destination Personality:* Adapting Aaker's (1997) research, Hosany, Ekinici, & Uysal (2006, p. 639) defined destination personality as “the set of human characteristics associated to a tourism destination.”

*Self-concept:* Self-concept has been defined as “the totality of individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object” (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7). Consumer self-concept is also referred to as self-image.

In the consumer behavior literature, self-concept has been treated as a multidimensional concept reflecting more than one type of self-perspective. For example, Sirgy (1982) identified four types of self-concept including actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, social self-concept and ideal social self-concept. Since this study focuses only on actual and ideal self-concept, the definitions of social self-concept and ideal social self-concept are not included in this section.

*Actual Self-Concept:* The actual self-concept generally refers to how a person perceives herself (Sirgy 1982). An individual's perception of how he/she actually is.

*Ideal Self-Concept:* The ideal self-concept refers to how a person would like to perceive herself (Sirgy, 1982). An individual's perception of how he/she would like to be.

*Self-Congruity:* Self-congruity represents the degree of similarity between product/brand image and consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). This similarity is called self-image/product image congruity, self-image congruence or self-congruity for short (Sirgy et al., 1991). In this study, self-congruity is conceptualized as the match between destination brand personality and tourist's self-concept.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived destination personality of Las Vegas and to examine the relationships among destination personality, self-congruity and tourists' behavioral intentions, initial part of the literature review is devoted to describe these terms and explain how they were conceptualized in the generic marketing literature. Next, the application of brand personality to tourism destinations will be discussed and a review of literature pertaining to destination personality will be presented, including the measurement of brand personality. Then, consumer self-concept, its dimensions and self-congruity theory will be outlined. Finally, empirical studies that are examining the destination self-congruity will be discussed.

#### Brand, Brand Personality, Self-Concept and Self-Congruity in General Marketing Literature

Although the concept of branding has been extensively studied and practiced in general marketing field, the idea of branding destinations is a relatively new development and academic studies in this area is just beginning to emerge (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Cai, 2002; Gnoth, 1998; Hosany, Ekinici, & Uysal, 2006). A strong brand differentiates a product from its competitors (Lim & O'Cass, 2001), reduces information



search costs (Biswas, 1992), minimizes perceived risks, delivers high quality (O'Cass & Grace, 2003) and satisfies consumers' both functional and emotional needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). Apparently, brands provide many benefits to consumers and sellers. So, what exactly is a brand? The American Marketing Association defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and service of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition" (Kotler & Gertner, 2004, p. 41). The basic assumption of destination branding is that places can also be branded just as products. However, creating destination brands is more difficult and a more complex process than creating brands for traditional products or services (Hankinson, 2001). In their study of investigating current destination branding practices among DMOs, Blain et al. (2005) found that most destination management organizations have been focusing more on selective aspects of branding such as creating logos. However, destination branding is "more than creating a catchy advertisement, logo or slogan" (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, & Baloglu, 2007, p. 435). Destination branding is about capturing the distinct elements of the destination in the brand and communicating these elements through the brand's components such as brand identity or brand personality.

Brand personality can be defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Although brands are inanimate objects, consumers often view them as having human characteristics (Aaker, 1997; Aaker, 1999; Plummer, 1985). These characteristics could be such traits as youthful, outdoorsy, sporty, energetic or sophisticated. For instance, one may use the word cool to describe Coca-Cola, whereas young to describe Pepsi (Aaker, 1997), masculine to describe Marlboro cigarettes (Ekinci

& Hosany, 2006), sophisticated to describe BMW (Phau & Lau, 2000) and unique to describe Dr. Pepper (Plummer, 1985).

A distinctive brand personality contributes to the brand differentiation from brands of competitors (Aaker, 1996), increases brand preference and usage (Aaker, 1999; Malhotra, 1988, Sirgy, 1982), enhances the brand equity (Keller, 1993), evokes emotional links between brands and consumers (Landon, 1974), builds strong emotional relationships between consumers and brands and thus results in greater trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998). Understanding brand personality is important since consumers select brands with personalities that are acceptable to them (Aaker, 1999). Many researchers attempted to understand the brand personality, but research on brand personality has remained limited due to the lack of conceptual framework and as no reliable, valid and generalizable scale to measure brand personality (Aaker, 1997).

Accordingly, Aaker (1997) developed a valid, reliable and generalizable scale to measure brand personality called The Brand Personality Scale (BPS) based on a representative sample and a comprehensive list of personality traits. As shown in Figure 2, Aaker (1997) not only developed a 42-item BPS but also developed a theoretical brand personality framework which consists of five personality dimensions: “sincerity”, “excitement”, “competence”, “sophistication” and “ruggedness”. These dimensions are derived from 15 personality facets of brands. She suggested that five dimensions of BPS were generic and could be used across product categories. On the other hand, she stated that the BPS may not be a perfect fit across cultures. Therefore, she called for further research to determine the extent to which personality dimensions are stable across cultures. Since then, literature and research on brand personality have flourished

(Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003) and many researchers applied the brand personality framework to various product groups and across different cultures. Some of these studies are discussed below.

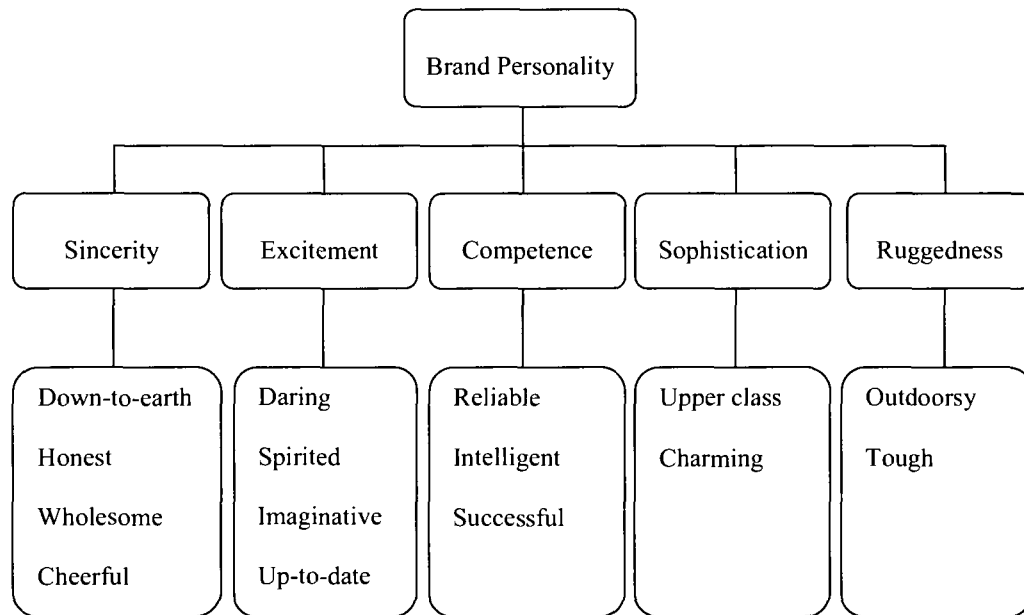


Figure 2. Brand Personality Framework. Adapted from “Dimensions of Brand Personality” by Jennifer L. Aaker, 1997, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34, p. 352.

Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera (2001) conducted four studies to examine the brand personality structures of commercial brands and investigated how these structures varies across three different cultures: United States, Japan and Spain. Studies revealed a 5-dimensional brand personality structure for the three cultures. The authors found that three dimensions (sincerity, excitement and sophistication) were common to all three cultures. While the dimension “passion” was specific to Spain, “ruggedness” was specific

to the United States. Additionally, the dimension “peacefulness” emerged in both Japan and Spain. Although some dimensions were common to all three cultures, the personality traits comprising the common dimensions were differed (Aaker et al., 2001).

Another cross-cultural validation of Aaker’s (1997) brand personality framework was tested in Russian culture by Supphellen & Grønhaug (2003). Supphellen & Grønhaug (2003) found a 5-dimensional brand personality construct in Russian culture which is similar to Aaker’s (1997) brand personality framework in the United States. The five dimensions emerged in this study are “successful and contemporary”, “sincerity”, “excitement”, “sophistication” and “ruggedness”. Although dimensions emerged in this study were similar to Aaker’s (1997) findings, some personality traits moved to different dimensions. For example, traits such as “up-to-date” and “upper class” shifted from dimensions “excitement” and “sophistication” and became a part of the dimension “successful and contemporary”. Furthermore, the first dimension “successful and contemporary” consisted of personality traits from four different dimensions of Aaker’s (1997) scale. Thus, the study supported the Aaker’s (1997) argument that BPS is probably less cross-culturally robust than human personality.

Freling & Forbes (2005) empirically tested the effect of brand personality on different performance outcomes using experimental research with 192 subjects. They found that brand personality has a positive effect on product evaluations and consumers are more likely to generate positive attitudes toward brands with strong and positive personalities. Freling & Forbes (2005) found that a strong, positive brand personality leads to more brand associations that are favorable, unique and strong. The authors also

suggested that developing a distinctly positive brand personality may enrich its brand equity (Freling & Forbes, 2005).

Siguaw, Mattila, & Austin (1999) studied the perceptions of brand personalities of nine restaurants in three restaurant segments: quick-service, casual and upscale. A sample of university students were asked to rate nine restaurants (three restaurants from each segment) on each of the 42 brand personality scale items. Results revealed that the restaurants within the segments were perceived differently based on the five brand personality dimensions. Upscale restaurants are perceived more sophisticated. Casual dining restaurants are found to be more sincere but less competent, whereas quick service restaurants are perceived less exciting and less rugged (Siguaw et al., 1999).

Seeing the gap in the literature regarding restaurant brand personalities across cultures, Murase & Bojanic (2004) used Aaker's (1997) BPS to examine the differences in the perceptions of brand personalities of three quick service restaurants across two cultures. They tested the ability of the BPS to observe cultural differences between the United States and Japan using a sample of university students in two countries. Wendy's, McDonald's and KFC were selected for their study. Murase & Bojanic (2004) found little cultural differences between brands across cultures. The Japanese consumers rated the restaurants more sophisticated and more rugged than the American consumers, but there were no significant differences for sincerity, excitement and competence dimensions. However, they found significant differences across brands. Wendy's was perceived more sincere and more sophisticated, whereas KFC was found less exciting and less competent. Also, additional differences between brands across countries were found. While brand personalities of McDonald's and KFC are viewed more positive in

Japan, the brand personality of Wendy's is viewed more positive in the United States (Murase & Bojanic, 2004).

It has been suggested that consumers prefer products or brands that are similar to how they see themselves or how they would like to see themselves (Landon, 1974; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). In consumer behavior literature, several researchers have concentrated on how personality of a brand enables consumers to express his or her own self (Belk, 1988; Birdwell, 1968; Dolich, 1969; Malhotra, 1988). Self-concept (also referred to as self-image) has been defined as "the totality of individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p.7).

While the earlier studies conceptualized self-concept as a unidimensional construct and treated it as the actual self-concept, the later studies conceptualized it as having two components: actual self-concept and ideal self-concept (Malhotra, 1988). Sirgy (1982) have gone beyond this duality dimension and developed a multidimensional self-concept construct not only consists of actual and ideal self-concept but also includes social self-concepts. According to Sirgy (1982), self-concept is a multidimensional construct having four major components, namely actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, social self-concept and ideal social self-concept. Within this multidimensional framework, actual self-concept refers to how a person actually perceives himself or herself, whereas the ideal self-concept refers to how a person would like to perceive himself or herself. Social self-concept refers to how an individual thinks others perceive him or her, while ideal social self-concept represents the way the individual desires to be perceived by others (Sirgy, 1982).

The basic hypothesis of self-congruity theory is a consumer tends to select products or brands that correspond to one's self-concept. This idea suggests that the greater the degree of congruence, the higher the probability of intention to purchase. According to Sirgy et al. (1997), the degree of consistency between consumer's self-concept and that of brand is referred to as self-image/product image congruity, self-image congruence or self-congruity for short. Self-congruity theory proposes that consumer behavior is determined, in part, between value-expressive attributes of a product or brand and consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, Johar, Samli, & Claiborne, 1991). Self-congruity consists of two components, namely self-concept and product/brand image.

Since self-concept has been treated as a multidimensional construct reflecting four major types of self-concept, self-congruity in turn, has been treated multidimensionally. Four major types of self-congruity are defined in the literature: actual self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982). The congruity between the actual self-concept and the product/brand image has been referred to as actual self-congruity, between the ideal self-concept and product/brand image as ideal self-congruity, between the social self-concept and product/brand image as social self-congruity, and between the ideal social self-concept and the product/brand image as ideal social self-congruity (Sirgy, 1985b).

Several researchers have studied the congruence between consumer self-concept and product/brand image to predict consumer behavior variables, such as product/brand attitude, intention, behavior and loyalty (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy, 1985a; Sirgy et al., 1991). However, previous studies almost exclusively focused on the match between the consumer self-concept and product/brand image. Although Aaker (1999) found another

self-congruity effect with respect to brand personality, there has been sparse investigation on the congruence between the consumer self-concept and brand personality (e.g., Aaker, 1999; Azevedo & Pessoa, 2005; Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004).

According to Aaker (1999), the main point of self-congruity is that consumers prefer brands with a set of personality traits congruent with their own. To empirically examine the relationship between the personality of a consumer and a brand, she conducted two experimental research designs. In her research, she used the malleable self-concept which suggests that the self is malleable rather than stable across situations. The malleable self-concept is put forth by Markus & Kunda (1986), which refers to any number of self-conceptions that can be made accessible at a given moment, such as good self, bad self, ideal self, feared self, ought self. In the first experiment, Aaker (1999) used familiar brands with strong personalities and the findings supported her hypotheses. She conducted another experiment to learn whether the same pattern of results would occur with brands that are less familiar to consumers. To do so, fictitious brands were imbued with personality traits. The second experiment also supported the study's hypotheses. As a result, her study provided evidence for the premise that people prefer brands with which they share personality characteristics. In other words, she found that brand personality influences consumer preferences. Furthermore, she found evidence for a brand personality congruity effect and stated that personality traits associated with a brand can influence consumer attitudes through their relationship to the malleable self-concept (Aaker, 1999).



## Application of Brand Personality to Tourism Destinations

Although product/brand personality research in the consumer goods domain began in the early 1960s (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006), the application of brand personality to tourism destinations is relatively new (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006, 2007; Pitt, Opoku, Hultman, Abratt, & Spyropoulou, 2007; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). A well-established brand personality contributes to brand differentiation from brand of competitors (Aaker, 1996), enhances the brand equity (Keller, 1993), increases brand preference and usage (Aaker, 1999; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982), develops strong emotional ties between consumers and brands and thereby results in greater trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998). Likewise, a distinctive and attractive destination personality can effectively leverage the perceived image of a destination and thereby influences tourist choice behavior (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006).

Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p. 347). Although brands are inanimate objects, consumers often view them as having human characteristics (Aaker, 1997; Aaker, 1999; Plummer, 1985). These characteristics could be such traits as young, spirited, outdoorsy, upper class, friendly or sophisticated. For instance, one may use the word cool to describe Coca-Cola, whereas young to describe Pepsi (Aaker, 1997), masculine to describe Marlboro cigarettes (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006), sophisticated to describe BMW (Phau & Lau, 2000) and unique to describe Dr. Pepper (Plummer, 1985). Similarly, brand personality can be easily applied to tourism destinations. For example, “Europe is traditional and sophisticated; Wales is honest, welcoming, romantic, and down to earth;

Spain is friendly and family oriented; London is open-minded, unorthodox, vibrant, and creative; and Paris is romantic” (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006, p. 128).

Brand personality can be formed and influenced by any direct or indirect contact that the consumer may have had with the brand (Plummer, 1985). According to Aaker (1997), personality traits can be associated with a brand in two ways: directly and indirectly. In a direct way, personality traits can be associated through people associated with the brand, such as user imagery, which is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with the typical user of a brand"; the executives or employees; and the product endorsers. Personality traits can be associated with a brand in an indirect way through product-related attributes, brand name, logo, symbol price, advertisements or distribution channels (Aaker, 1997). Similarly, personality traits can be associated with a destination in two ways. In a direct way, personality traits can be associated with a destination through user imagery (typical visitor of a destination), hotel or restaurant employees, local people, tourist attractions or citizens of the country, On the other hand, personality traits can be associated with a destination in an indirect way through marketing practices such as value pricing, cooperative advertising, logos, symbols or slogans (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006).

Although brand personality has been acknowledged as an important component of branding, a limited number of academics and practitioners have attempted to identify the salient personality characteristics of tourism destinations. For example, Western Australian Tourism Commission created Brand Western Australia in late 1990s and positioned Western Australia as a premier nature-based tourism destination. The core personality elements of Brand Western Australia were found to emphasize “fresh”,

“natural”, “free” and “spirited” (Crockett & Wood, 2004). Henderson (2000) surveyed a sample of both local residents and international tourists in Singapore and found that the brand personality of New Asia-Singapore Brand was comprised of personality characteristics such as “cosmopolitan”, “youthful”, “vibrant”, “modern Asia”, “reliability” and “comfort”. Santos (2004) conducted a framing analysis of the selected US newspapers’ (New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and USA Today) travel sections regarding feature articles between 1996 and 2002 about tourism in Portugal. Santos (2004) found that Portugal was represented in US newspapers’ travel sections with personality traits such as “traditional”, “contemporary”, “modern” and “sophisticated”.

Aaker (1997) mentioned that the research on brand personality has remained limited since there is no reliable, valid, and generalizable scale to measure it. Therefore, she developed a reliable, valid and generalizable scale that measures brand personality. Aaker’s (1997) BPS consists of five generic dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Since then, many researchers replicated Aaker’s (1997) brand personality framework within different product categories and across different cultures. Ekinci & Hosany (2006) suggested that tourism destinations can be seen as a brand based on the assumptions that a tourism destination consists of tangible and intangible components and is rich in terms of symbolic values due to the hedonic nature of the tourism experience. Adapting Aaker’s (1997) brand personality terminology, Ekinci & Hosany (2006) defined destination personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a destination” (p. 127) and examined the applicability and validity of Aaker’s (1997) BPS in the context of tourism destinations.

Since then, empirical studies on destination personality began to emerge in the tourism literature.

Ekinci & Hosany (2006) examined the applicability and validity of Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework in the context of tourism destinations. Destination personality was captured using Aaker's (1997) BPS. At a preliminary stage, they tested the content validity of BPS with 20 native British subjects. After content validity, 27 personality traits, split across five dimensions, were retained for the study. The study was conducted with two different samples both consisting 250 travelers from UK. The first sample was approached in UK. Respondents were asked to recall the last tourism destination they had visited outside the UK in the previous three months; thereby a number of tourism destinations were evaluated. The second sample was approached in the departure lounge of a major European airport and this method enabled respondents to evaluate the destination immediately after visiting. The results revealed that tourists ascribe personality characteristics to destinations, that is, the BPS can be applied to tourism destinations. Ekinci & Hosany (2006) found that destination personality consists of three salient dimensions rather than the original five dimensions: "sincerity", "excitement" and "conviviality". Sincerity and excitement were found to be the two main factors. Conviviality was new and also specific to destinations. The study also revealed that destination personality has positive impacts on tourists' intention to recommend behavior. Furthermore, the authors found that destination personality moderated the impact of destination image on intention to recommend (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006).

Ekinci et al. (2007) studied the relationships between tourists' perceptions of host image, destination personality and behavioral intentions. They surveyed a convenience

sample 365 German travelers to the Mediterranean region of Turkey. Since the results of the study in terms of personality dimensions were similar to Ekinici & Hosany (2006), the study supported the external validity of Ekinici & Hosany's (2006) findings. Ekinici et al. (2007) found that destination personality was comprised of three salient dimensions, namely sincerity, excitement and conviviality. They found evidence that host image is one of the antecedents of destination personality by finding a positive and statistically significant impact of host image on destination personality. Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that destination personality has a positive impact on intention to return and intention to recommend. Finally, they found that host image has an indirect influence on intention to return and intention to recommend. Although the use of a non-probability sampling method and investigating only the perceptions of German travelers in only one destination make the generalizability of findings difficult, the study makes important contributions both at theoretical and practical level (Ekinici et al., 2007).

Hosany et al. (2006) investigated the relationship between brand image and brand personality in the context of tourism destinations. While destination image was operationalized in terms of cognitive and affective components, destination personality was measured using Aaker's (1997) BPS. The 42 personality traits of BPS were tested for content validity before application. The content validity results revealed 27 personality traits, split across five dimensions. A sample of 148 British respondents was asked to recall their travel experiences regarding the most recently destination they have visited. First, they tested the validity of both destination image and destination personality scales and found valid. Next, they found that Aaker's (1997) BPS is applicable to tourism places and destination personality was found to comprise of three salient dimensions, namely

sincerity, excitement, conviviality. Then, they tested the relationship between destination image and destination personality using canonical correlation analysis. The findings of the analysis indicated that destination image and destination personality are two different but related concepts. Moreover, the study indicated that destination image is an encompassing concept and destination personality is more related to the affective components of destination image (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006).

Murphy et al. (2007) examined whether tourists could differentiate the two tourism destinations on the basis of brand personality perceptions. A sample 480 respondents were surveyed in two destinations (Cairns and Whitsundays Island) in Queensland, Australia. Destination personality was captured using both 20 personality traits of BPS (5 dimensions and 15 facets of BPS) and a free elicitation method with open-ended questions. The entire list of 42-item BPS was not used because of the risk of respondent fatigue. The study found some evidence that brand personality can be used to differentiate tourism destinations. However, Murphy et al. (2007) suggested that Aaker's (1997) BPS does not directly translate to tourism destinations. In particular, open-ended responses of personality descriptors were not as common as Aaker's (1997) personality traits. Thus, they called further research to develop a brand personality scale that is valid and reliable for tourism destinations (Murphy et al., 2007).

Murphy, Benckendorff et al. (2007a) explored the brand personality of a tourism destination (Whitsundays Island) in Queensland, Australia. The study also investigated the relationships between destination personality, travel motivations, self-congruity, actual and intended visitation. A total of 277 respondents were surveyed. Destination personality was measured using 5 dimensions and 15 corresponding brand facets of

Aaker's (1997) BPS. Exploratory factor analysis revealed that destination personality of Whitsundays Island is four dimensional: "sophistication and competence", "sincerity", "excitement", "ruggedness". However, the study found no relationship between actual and intended visitation. Sirgy & Su's (2000) proposed measures of self-congruity were employed to measure the actual, ideal, social and ideal social self-congruity. The study found stronger relationships between brand personality and actual and ideal self-congruity. Additionally, the study showed a relationship between travel motivation and brand personality. According to this relationship, respondents who are strongly motivated by the novelty/learn dimension were found to perceive the Whitsundays Islands as exciting (Murphy, Benckendorff et al., 2007a).

Pitt et al. (2007) investigated how African countries use official tourism websites to communicate their brand personalities. The aim of their study was not to measure brand personalities of selected African countries, but rather to understand what these countries say about themselves in terms of brand personality. Twenty-five official tourism websites of 10 African countries analyzed using Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework. The authors used a content analysis to analyze the websites and a correspondence analysis to identify the associations between the websites and brand personality dimensions. First, the authors collected a list of 922 synonyms to Aaker's (1997) 42 brand personality traits. Next, these synonyms were categorized according to Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions. Then, the selected websites were content analyzed using these synonyms. Finally, authors conducted a correspondence analysis to identify the relationships between the brand personality dimensions and the websites. The authors found that some countries are communicating specific brand personality

dimensions. For instance, Kenya and Zimbabwe communicate the brand personality dimension of “ruggedness”; South Africa and Angola emphasize the “competence”; Botswana and Zambia convey the “sincerity”. On the other hand, some countries such as Malawi do not communicate any of the five brand personality dimensions. In this study, only 10 countries were covered out of 53 African countries and websites are selected in a non-random manner because of the non-English and non-functioning websites. Even though these limitations make the sample less representative, the intent of authors, in this study, was to demonstrate a research method that shows how brands communicate their brand personalities online (Pitt et al., 2007).

Prayag (2007) studied the international visitors’ perceptions of destination image and destination personality of two destinations, South Africa and Cape Town. The author utilized a different research approach to elicit the destination specific personality characteristics of South Africa and Cape Town based on the future research call of Hosany & Ekinci (2006). Hosany & Ekinci (2006) suggested that future research could use qualitative methods such as focus groups or projective techniques to elicit the destination specific personality traits. Thus, the author used projective methods, such as word association, brand fingerprint and brand personification. In-depth interviews with 85 international tourists were conducted at accommodation establishments in Cape Town. The brand personification technique revealed that Cape Town was perceived as “young” and more “adventurous” than South Africa. The brand personification technique was found effective to elicit the destination specific traits. Indeed, it revealed personality traits that are quite different from Aaker’s (1997) BPS scale (Prayag, 2007).



Recently, d'Austos & Boujbel (2007) developed a scale to capture the personality traits of countries. A total of 82 human personality traits were generated after individual interviews with six French speaking Canadian residents. An additional list of 250 personality traits were derived from personality scales that developed by psychologists and marketing researchers. By asking ten French-Canadian adults to rate the probability of using the 250 personality traits to describe the personality of countries, the number of personality traits derived from previous scales reduced to 96 traits. Thereby, 82 personality traits from individual interviews and 96 traits from previous scales left a total of 178 adjectives. Two empirical studies were conducted to reduce the list of personality traits using different numbers of countries as stimuli. A convenience sampling method was employed. Finally, a 37-item and 6 dimensional country personality scale was developed. The dimensions were labeled as: “agreeableness”, “wickedness”, “snobbism”, “assiduousness”, “conformity”, and “unobtrusiveness”. Then, a short form of this scale with 4 personality traits from each dimension was developed. The 24-item scale was also found to be as good as the 37-item scale. The impact of these 6 dimensions on general attitude, product-country attitude and travel destination attitude was examined. Even though all three models were found statistically significant, the snobbism, assiduousness, unobtrusiveness dimensions were found not significant to predict travel destination attitudes. Thus, authors concluded that this scale might be less useful for predicting people’s perceptions of countries as travel destinations. The study had some limitations such as using convenience samples and conducting the research in a single city in Canada. Also, the scale was developed originally in French, thus its translation to English might not fully represent the original scale. However, the scale development procedure

revealed interesting results about people's perceptions of countries. Mexico and Australia were found the most agreeable country; United States perceived as a wicked country; France was found the most snobbiest country; Japan got the highest ratings on assiduousness; China was the most conformist and Canada was perceived as the most unobtrusive (d'Astous & Boujbel, 2007).

### Measurement of Brand Personality

Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used in the measurement of brand personality. Qualitative methods are generally used to reveal the product or brand specific personality traits. For example, brand personification is one of the qualitative methods used to measure brand personality. In this approach, respondents are asked to think the brand as if it were a person and to ascribe human personality traits to it (Davies, Chun, & da Silva, 2001). Prayag (2007) utilized brand personification technique to examine the brand personalities of two destinations and found that the brand personification technique was effective to elicit the destination specific traits. Another qualitative method can be used in this area is Zaltman's Metaphor Elicitation Technique. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, enable researchers to compare different products or brands simultaneously and facilitate to make generalizations. Quantitative methods usually employ a variety of scales to assess brand personality. Romaniuk (2008) compared the personality traits generated by a five-point scale (Aaker's BPS) and a free choice association method and found that the free choice method discriminated more between brands and generated a greater variety of traits. However, this does not mean that qualitative methods are better than quantitative methods in measuring brand

personality. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, before making a decision, researchers should consider the strengths and weaknesses associated with each method and their objectives as well.

Two types of brand personality scales are found in the literature (Aaker, 1997; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004). These are ad hoc scales (idiographic approach) and general scales (nomothetic approach). Ad hoc scales measuring brand personality have been constructed using a pre-qualitative study to elicit the relevant personality characteristics for a brand. Therefore, ad hoc scales contain only personality traits that are descriptive of the brand under examination (Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004). Although ad hoc scales are useful to capture the product or brand specific personality characteristics, some aspects of brand personality might be overlooked and the key traits might be missed while developing the ad hoc scales. Also, ad hoc scales are often criticized in terms reliability and validity. In this approach, the personality traits are often chosen arbitrarily which overshadows the reliability and validity and thus, such scales cannot be thoroughly validated (Aaker, 1997).

The second approach in measuring brand personality is more theoretical in nature and contains scales that define brand personality in terms of abstractions (Aaker, 1997; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). According to Aaker (1997) these scales are based on human personality and are taken directly from the field of psychology such as the Big Five. In psychology, the Big Five are five broad factors or dimensions of human personality traits developed through lexical analysis. The dimensions of the Big Five are “extraversion”, “agreeableness”, “conscientiousness”, “openness to experience” (also called intellect) and “neuroticism” (also called emotional stability) (Srivastava, 2008). The previous research

on brand personality generally relied on ad hoc scales or general scales that use the Big Five. Although human personality and brand personality might share a similar conceptualization, they differ in how they are formed and some dimensions of human personality may not reflect a brand in terms of personality (Aaker, 1997). Kassarian (1971) states that “instruments originally intended to measure gross personality characteristics such as sociability, emotional stability, introversion, or neuroticism have been used to make predictions of the chosen brand of toothpaste or cigarettes” (p. 415). Therefore, Kassarian (1971) argues that consumer behavior researchers should develop their own concepts and scales to measure the relationship between the personality variables and purchase decision rather than using scales that are specifically designed to measure human personality. The only general scale that is specifically developed to measure brand personality is Aaker’s (1997) BPS. Aaker (1997) developed a generalizable framework and scale to understand the symbolic use of brands which consists of five generic dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Aaker (1997) argues that the three dimensions of brand personality correspond to three dimensions of the Big Five human personality. Sincerity relates to agreeableness; excitement corresponds to extroversion; competence matches to conscientiousness. However, sophistication and ruggedness differ from the dimensions of the Big Five (Aaker, 1997). This similarity might be associated to the approach that Aaker (1997) followed while developing her scale. Azoulay & Kapferer (2003) states that while developing her brand personality framework, Aaker (1997) largely followed the steps that psychologists pursued in the identification of dimensions of human personality.

No matter what kind of scale is employed, either ad hoc or general scales such as BPS, first personality characteristics are listed and then, respondents are asked to rate how descriptive each characteristic is of the brand (Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004).

### Self-Concept

Self-concept has been advanced as a useful construct for understanding and explaining consumer choice behavior. In the consumer behavior literature, it has been hypothesized that consumers have greater preference for products or brands which are more congruent with their self-concept. Based on this notion, several researchers have studied how personality of a product or brand enables consumers to express his or her own self (Belk, 1988; Birdwell, 1968; Dolich, 1969; Malhotra, 1988). Although there is ambiguity on the precise conceptualization of self-concept in the consumer behavior literature (Sirgy, 1982), several researchers have utilized Rosenberg's (1979) definition of self-concept. Rosenberg (1979) defines self-concept (also referred to as self-image) as "the totality of individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (p. 7).

Another definitional debate discussed in the literature is whether self-concept is a unidimensional or multidimensional construct. The earlier studies viewed self-concept as a unidimensional construct and treated it as the actual self concept (as the perceptions of oneself), whereas the later studies have discussed it as having two components, namely actual self-concept and ideal self-concept ( Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). Other investigators have gone beyond this duality dimension and conceptualized self-concept as having more than two components. For example, Sirgy (1982) have employed a

multidimensional view and added social self-concepts to the actual and ideal self-concept. According to Sirgy (1982), self-concept consists of four major dimensions: actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, social self-concept and ideal social self-concept. Within this framework, actual self-concept refers to how a person actually perceives himself or herself, whereas the ideal self-concept refers to how a person would like to perceive himself or herself. Social self-concept (sometimes referred to as looking-glass self) refers to how an individual thinks others perceive him or her, while ideal social self-concept represents the way the individual desires to be perceived by others (Sirgy, 1982). The dimensions of self-concept that have received the most theoretical consideration and empirical support are actual self-concept and ideal self-concept. These two dimensions have shown the most significant effects on consumer behavior (Sirgy, 1982).

Schenk & Holman (1980) brought the idea of situational self-concept. According to this view, the self includes attitudes, perceptions and feelings an individual wishes others associate with him or her. In other words, an individual may perceive himself or herself differently in different situations and the choice of which self to express depends on situation, and as a result, his or her behavior may also differ. Sirgy (1982) suggests that once an individual decides which self to express in a given situation, he or she looks for ways to express it and he or she might use products or brands to express his or her self-concept in that situation.

Markus & Kunda (1986) focused on the extent of the stability of self-concept and put forth the term of malleable self-concept (also referred to as working self-concept) which means that the self is malleable rather than stable across situations. The term malleable self-concept refers to any number of self-concepts that can be made accessible

at a given moment such as good self, bad self, feared self, ought self, ideal self (Markus & Kunda, 1986).

Another issue in self-concept research is its measurement. Earlier studies utilized Q-sort methodology to measure the self-concept which groups products on dimensions such as “most like me” to “least like me”. A number of studies modified the Q-sort method by using a rating scale (Sirgy, 1982). For instance, to investigate the link between actual self-concept, ideal self-concept and purchase intentions, Landon (1974) utilized a measurement approach very much like the Q-sort method. In Landon’s (1974) study, actual self-concept was measured on a nine-point scale ranging from “very strongly like me” to “very strongly unlike me”; whereas the ideal self-concept was measured on a similar scale ranging from “very strongly like I want to be” to “very strongly unlike I want to be”. Another practice used in the measurement of self-concept is the semantic differential. This method enables respondents to rate a specific type of self (such as actual or ideal self-concept) along a number of bipolar adjectives. However, Sirgy (1982) criticizes the use of semantic differential scales in the measurement of self-concept because of their social desirability bias and halo effect biases. Furthermore, Malhotra (1981) developed a scale to measure self-concepts, person concepts and product concepts. The scale employs semantic differential method and consists of 15 bipolar adjectives. Malhotra (1988) used this scale to investigate the effect of self-concept on house preferences and found that ideal self-concept has the primary influence on house preferences rather than actual self-concept.

Even though self-concept has been studied widely in the consumer behavior literature, it has not been studied that often by tourism researchers (Todd, 2001). Seeing

this gap in tourism literature, Todd (2001) examined the applicability of self-concept as a basis for segmentation in the context of tourism. The author has employed Hoelter's (1985) validated scale of self-concept and respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of how they felt while on holiday on a 5-point Likert type scale. The results revealed three distinct clusters in terms of how respondents perceive themselves while on holiday, namely happy holidaymakers, striving, and holiday partners. For example, happy holidaymakers perceive themselves as relaxed, happy and confident, in contrast, holiday partners feel unimportant, passive and powerless. Results also revealed the behaviors of these three groups. To illustrate, holiday partners were more likely to visit the domestic destinations and engage in few activities. The striving group, on the other hand, was more likely to visit foreign destinations. As a result of her study, Todd (2001) suggests that the application self-concept not only gains insight into how people perceive themselves in the tourist role but also provides an alternative segmentation base.

### Self-Congruity

Self-congruity can be seen as a natural extension of self-concept. Consumer researchers have been very interested in the relationship between consumers' self-concept and product/brand image because it has been proposed that consumers try to achieve congruity between the way they perceive themselves and the images of products or brands that they use (Todd, 2001). Indeed, research in consumer behavior literature has shown that the consumer attitude toward a product or brand is influenced by the match between product/brand image and consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, 1982).



Products are assumed to have images, just as people do. These images are determined by a number of factors such as packaging, advertising, price or stereotypes of the typical user (Sirgy, 1982). Sirgy (1982, 1985) mentioned that a consumer's self-concept interacts with a corresponding product-image perception in terms of the generalized user of the product and as a result, this interaction generates a subjective experience which is referred to as "self-image/product image congruity" or "self-image congruence" or "self-congruity" for short. In other words, self-congruity is the match between product/brand image and consumer's self-concept.

The effects of self-congruity have been explained by self-congruity theory which proposes that consumer behavior is determined, in part, between value-expressive attributes of a product or brand and consumer self-concept (Sirgy et al., 1991). This theory suggests that the greater the congruity between consumer's self-concept and the image of a product or brand, the more likely that the consumer will have a favorable attitude toward that product or brand. Based on this notion, several researchers have studied the congruence between consumer self-concept and product/brand image to explain and predict different facets of consumer behavior such as product/brand attitude, product/brand use, purchase intention, behavior and loyalty (Sirgy, 1982; 1985a; Sirgy et al., 1997; Sirgy et al., 1991).

Since self-concept has been treated as a multidimensional construct reflecting four major types of self-concept, self-congruity in turn, has been treated multidimensionally. Four major types of self-congruity are defined in the literature: actual self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982). The congruity between the actual self-concept and the product/brand image has been

referred to as actual self-congruity, between the ideal self-concept and product/brand image as ideal self-congruity, between the social self-concept and product/brand image as social self-congruity, and between the ideal social self-concept and the product/brand image as ideal social self-congruity (Sirgy, 1985b).

The discussion of self-concept and product image congruity can be traced back to 1950s. Gardner & Levy (1955) and Levy (1959) initiated the discussion of self-concept and product image congruity (Landon, 1974; Sirgy, 1982). Levy (1959) claimed that the consumer is not only functionally oriented and thus, they use products not only for their functional utility, but also for their symbolic meaning. Although his argument did not constitute a theory, did attract consumer behavior researchers to focus on the self-concept and its effect on consumer behavior (Sirgy 1982). Earlier studies focused on the image projected by various products and consumers were thought to prefer products with images which are congruent with self-concept (Landon, 1974). The most popular product used to investigate the self-congruity, especially in the earlier studies, has been automobiles (Malhotra, 1988). For example, Birdwell (1968) studied the brands of cars and measured the extent to which self-image is congruent with purchase and found that there is a significant congruity between how respondents perceive their cars and themselves. He also concluded that income is an enabling factor to the consumer's ability to make purchase compatible with self-image (Birdwell, 1968).

Empirical support for the relationship between product/brand preference and congruency with self-concept has been provided by several studies. For instance, Dolich (1969) studied self-concept and product images of most and least preferred brands within four product categories and found that there was greater congruity between self-image

and most preferred brand over all four product categories. Grubb and Hupp's (1968) study also supported the self-congruity argument. Landon (1974) reported positive correlations both for the ideal self-concept and purchase intention and for the actual self-concept and purchase intention. The findings in Malhotra's (1988) study indicated house preference is congruent with ideal and actual self-concept. Ericksen (1996) conducted a study to determine the congruence between self-image and product image for Ford Escort consumers. Results indicated a positive relationship between self-image/product image congruity and intention to purchase.

Recently, Helgeson and Supphellen (2004) compared self-congruity and brand personality both conceptually and empirically, examining if they are conceptually different. Based on a sample of Swedish female consumers, the authors found that the two concepts are empirically discriminant. Thus, Helgeson & Supphellen (2004) concluded that two concepts should be used separately and for different purposes. The study also revealed that both brand personality and self-congruity have independent and positive effects on brand attitudes.

Self-congruity is based on the notion of cognitive matching between value-expressive attributes of a product/brand and consumer self-concept. Functional congruity, in contrast, is based on the perceived utilitarian aspects of a product or brand (Sirgy et al., 1991). Sirgy et al. (1991) proposed that consumer behavior is more influenced by functional congruity than self-congruity and conducted four studies to test their hypothesis. They found that consumer behavior is a positive function of both functional and self-congruity. Results also revealed that functional congruity is more predictive of consumer behavior than self-congruity. However, they found that self-congruity biases

functional congruity. Thus, they suggested that self-congruity indirectly enhances a favorable attitude through producing a motivational bias to process the functional product attributes in a positive way.

#### Empirical Studies of Destination Self-Congruity in Practice

Although self-congruity theory is often ignored in destination branding literature (Beerli, Meneses & Gil, 2007; Jenkins, 1999; Kastenholtz, 2004), it is also true that the impact of self-congruity has been studied by some scholars within the tourism context. Some of these studies are discussed below.

Chon (1992), who first applied the self-congruity theory to tourism, examined the effect of destination image/self-image congruity based on the notion that a tourist's satisfaction is a function of symbolic evaluative congruity between a destination's image and the tourist's self-image. A sample of visitors to the city of Norfolk, Virginia was surveyed after their visit. Self-congruity was measured using a 5-point Likert type scale and destination image was operationalized through the typical visitor to the city Norfolk. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of congruity between their self-concept and the image of the typical visitor of the destination studied. Chon (1992) found that tourist satisfaction is significantly correlated with self-image/destination image congruity. The author suggested that tourists who perceive high congruity between a destination's user image and their self-concept were most satisfied with the destination, whereas tourists who perceive low congruity between a destination's user image and their self-concept were least satisfied (Chon, 1992).

Litvin & Goh (2002) applied the theory of self-congruity to tourism destinations by employing both Chon's (1992) 5-question Likert type scale and Malhotra's (1981) scale. Three destinations were studied (New Zealand, India and Japan) using Singapore as the test location. A convenience sample of 167 people from Singapore was surveyed, but 139 questionnaires were found to be useable for the study. Self-congruity and interest in visiting the three destinations were found statistically significant when authors employed Chon's (1992) method to determine congruence. However, the results of the Malhotra's (1981) scale were found to be far from robust.

Kastenholz (2004) conceptualized destination self-congruity as a result of a direct comparison between actual self-image and affective destination image and examined the effects of destination self-congruity on tourists' future travel behavior. She measured self-image and affective destination image using a semantic differential scale based on instrument developed by Malhotra (1981) which was developed to measure self-concepts, person concepts and product concepts. Initially, she adapted this scale to a rural destination via an exploratory research using a student sample. Then, she tested the scale using a sample of international tourists. After scale developing stages, she conducted a one-year survey with 2280 respondents in Portugal. To assess destination self-congruity, Kastenholz (2004) used the traditional method of measuring self-congruity. Based on this method, first, the respondent's perception of his or her self-image is calculated along a predetermined set of attributes. Next, the respondent's perception of affective destination image is calculated. Then, discrepancy scores between self-image and affective destination image is computed. Kastenholz (2004) found that a scale by scale comparison is not appropriate to assess self-congruity and therefore, she conducted the global

measurement of self-congruity by employing a single scale comparison. The author found evidence for the applicability of self-congruity theory in the context of a rural destination. The results indicated that destination self-congruity has impact on intention to return. However, no significant effect found for intention to recommend. Further, Kastenholz (2004) suggested that using a global and holistic approach is more appropriate to assess destination self-congruity.

Chon & Olsen (1991) studied both the functional congruity and self-congruity regarding consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction in the context of tourism destinations. Functional congruity is referred to as the match between the tourist's expectations and his/her perceptions of performance outcome on specific functional attributes of a destination. Self-congruity, on the other hand, is referred to as the symbolic congruity between the tourist's self concept and the destination's personality image. The findings of the study indicated that tourist satisfaction/dissatisfaction is related to both functional and symbolic congruity. However, Chon & Olsen (1991) found that functional congruity explains consumer satisfaction better than self-congruity in a tourism context.

More recently, Beerli et al. (2007) tested the role of self-congruity in tourism using a modified version of Malhotra's (1981) scale. The data was gathered by means of personal surveys of individuals over 18 years living in Gran Canaria, Spain. The authors utilized a stratified random sampling method using the population census and determined 552 individuals as the sample of the study. Respondents' self-concept was measured on a 7-point differential scale. Destination image was conceptualized as the stereotypic image of the typical visitor of a destination and respondents were asked to indicate their images of tourists visiting Kenya, Paris and the Dominican Republic on the same 7-point

differential scale. The study revealed that the greater between the destination image and one's actual and ideal self-concept, the greater the tendency for the tourists to visit that destination. However, if the tourist has already visited the destination, both actual and ideal self-congruity lose its power in influencing tourist's destination choice behavior. Additionally, the study found that the greater the involvement with tourist leisure travel is, the greater the power of self-congruity to determine the destination (Beerli et al., 2007).

Sirgy & Su (2000) applied the self-congruity theory to tourism field and developed a theoretical study to explain the relationships between tourists' self-concept, destination image, self-congruity, functional congruity and travel behavior. Although it is not an empirical study, its contribution to the tourism field is very important. Sirgy & Su (2000) applied the product symbolic cues to a destination and suggested that tourists perceive destinations differently in terms of the destination's typical visitors. Thus, they defined self-congruity as the match between the destination visitor image and tourists' self-concept (actual, ideal, social and ideal social self-image). Destination visitor image is referred to the stereotypic image of the kind of people who typically visit a destination. The authors proposed that the greater the match between destination visitor image and the tourists' self-concept, the more likely that the tourist has a favorable attitude toward that destination. Additionally, Sirgy & Su (2000) proposed that tourists not only evaluate a destination based on the symbolic attributes but also evaluate destinations by focusing on the destination's functional and utilitarian attributes such as price, service quality, aesthetics of the destination, variety of activities, and accessibility. In line with this view, the authors defined functional congruity as the match between the destination's utilitarian

attributes and the tourists' expectations of those attributes. The authors suggest that functional congruity affects travel behavior as self-congruity does. Sirgy & Su (2000) also propose that self-congruity influences functional congruity and the predictive effects of self-congruity versus functional congruity are moderated by a number of factors. These moderating factors are tourists' knowledge, prior experience, involvement and time pressure. They argue that the effects of self-congruity on travel behavior are likely to be greater for tourists who have less knowledge, less experience and who are not very involved with touring. Also, the effects of self-congruity on travel behavior are likely to be greater for tourists who experience greater time pressure in contrast to tourists who experience little time pressure. Further, Sirgy & Su (2000) mention that self-congruity biases functional congruity and propose that tourists who experience destination self-congruity are likely to process the utilitarian attributes of the destination in a favorable way. This is because a tourist who experiences a match between destination visitor image and his or her self-image forms an initial favorable attitude toward that destination; and this initial favorable attitude biases the evaluation of utilitarian attributes of the destination in the positive direction (Sirgy & Su, 2000).

### Measurement of Self-Congruity

Developing valid measures of self-congruity is an important issue. There are two primary methods of measuring self-congruity in the literature. These are traditional method (also referred to as gap score formula) and new method (also referred to as direct score formula) (Sirgy et al., 1997; Sirgy & Su, 2000; Ekinci & Riley, 2003; Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004).



### *The Traditional Method of Measuring Self-Congruity*

The traditional method is based on tapping the subject's perception of the product/brand image and subject's perception of his or her self-concept in relation to the product/brand image (Sirgy et al., 1997). This method consists of two steps. First, subjects rate a product or brand using a set of predetermined image characteristics or dimensions. Usually, subjects rate the product or brand vicariously through the image characteristics of a typical user of the brand because the image of the typical user of the brand is believed to be reflective of the product/brand image. Next, subjects rate their self-concepts using the same predetermined image characteristics or dimensions. Then, a discrepancy score is computed for each image characteristic/dimension and the discrepancy scores are summed across all characteristics/dimensions. Although different mathematical indexes have been used in previous studies to measure the self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1991; Sirgy et al., 1997), the most common model is the use of absolute discrepancy scores (Ekinici & Riley, 2003; Helgeson & Suphellen, 2004; Sirgy et al., 1997; Sirgy & Su, 2000). The sum of absolute discrepancy scores is mathematically indicated as:

$$\sum_{i=1}^n |P_i - S_i|$$

In this model,  $P_i$  is the rating of product/brand image on characteristic  $i$  or along image dimension  $i$ .  $S_i$  is the rating of self-concept on characteristic  $i$  or along image dimension  $i$ . Since absolute discrepancy score is employed, the lower the score the higher the congruity.

Sirgy et al. (1997) emphasize that there are three problems inherent in traditional method of measuring self-congruity, namely the use of discrepancy scores, the possible use of irrelevant images, and the use of the compensatory decision rule. The use of discrepancy scores have been criticized due to its limitations such as being potentially unreliable, having systematic correlations with their components, having questionable construct validity. The second problem involved in traditional method is the use of predetermined image characteristics. Predetermined attributes force subjects to indicate their perceptions regarding themselves and a product or brand. However, subjects may not associate the predetermined attributes with the product or brand under examination. Also, subjects might have much more valid attributes in their minds. The third problem is the use of a compensatory decision rule. Compensatory decision rule integrates the self-congruity scores across all characteristics or dimensions. However, Sirgy et al. (1997) argue that value-expressive benefits of brands are processed holistically, not analytically. According to Sirgy et al. (1997), these problems come from the assumption that self-congruity is a piecemeal process. However, Sirgy et al. (1997) propose that self-congruity is a holistic process, gestalt-like perception rather than a piecemeal process. Thus, they argue that a measurement method based on a piecemeal process may not capture the self-congruity thoroughly and may have limited predictive validity. Because of these problems associated with the traditional method, Sirgy et al. (1997) developed a new method which measures self-congruity directly and globally.

#### *The New Method of Measuring Self-Congruity*

Sirgy et al (1997) developed a new method to alleviate the problems associated with the traditional method. The new method (also referred to as direct score formula or

global measurement approach) is based on tapping the psychological experience of self-congruity directly and globally. It assumes that self-congruity is a holistic, gestalt like perception rather than a piecemeal process. By measuring self-congruity directly rather than measuring self-concept and product/brand image separately, the new method deals with the problem of discrepancy scores. The new method does not contain any predetermined attributes, thus deals with the use of irrelevant attributes. Since the new method measures self-congruity holistically, it avoids the problem of the compensatory decision rule (Sirgy et al., 1997). The new method of measuring self-congruity which is applied in a tourism context by Sirgy & Su (2000) is illustrated as follows:

Take a moment to think about [destination x]. Think about the kind of person who typically visits [destination x]. Imagine this tourist in your mind and then describe this person using one or more personal adjectives such as classy, poor, stylish, masculine, sexy, old, athletic or whatever personal adjectives you can use to describe the typical visitor of [destination x]. Once you have done this, indicate your agreement or disagreement to the following statement:

“This [destination x] is consistent with how I see myself” (actual self-image).

“This [destination x] is consistent with how I would like to see myself” (ideal self-image).

“This [destination x] is consistent with how I believe others see me” (social self-image).

“This [destination x] is consistent with how I would like others see me” (ideal social self-image) (p. 350).

In this method, subjects are asked to indicate their response on a Likert-type scale regarding to the four self-image statements. Sirgy et al. (1997) argue that the new method guides subjects to indicate their congruity between how they see themselves and the product/brand user image (for destinations, typical visitor image) rather than asking subjects their perceptions of congruity with predetermined image characteristics. Thus, the authors argue that the new method captures self-congruity directly and globally.

Sirgy et al. (1997) conducted six studies to assess the predictive validity of their proposed new method. They compared the predictive validity of traditional method and new method in these six studies including different products, populations, and dependent variables. They found evidence for the high predictiveness of the new method over and beyond the traditional method. The results also revealed that the traditional method may contain more measurement error than the new method because of the use of predetermined images.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a survey research design. A self-administered questionnaire was used to investigate the perceived destination personality of Las Vegas and to examine the relationships among destination personality, self-congruity and tourist's behavioral intentions. Both close-ended and open-ended questions were used in the questionnaire to collect the required quantitative and qualitative data for the study.

#### Brand Personality Scale Development

Even though Aaker's (1997) BPS is the most comprehensive instrument for measuring brand personality and widely used within different product categories and across different cultures, it is not specifically designed for tourism destinations. Hosany, Ekinçi & Uysal (2006) suggest that some items of Aaker's BPS are redundant for tourism destinations, because they are not suitable to define a tourism destination. Therefore, to ensure that personality traits used in this study are pertinent to Las Vegas, a two-stage scale development procedure was conducted. In the first stage, a free-elicitation task was conducted to identify the unique traits that describe Las Vegas. In the second stage, the BPS 42 personality traits were tested for content validity.

### *Stage 1: Unique Personality Trait Generation*

In this stage, to identify the unique traits to Las Vegas, a free-elicitation task was conducted to a group of 28 tourists visiting Las Vegas. Subjects were recruited using a convenience sampling technique on the Las Vegas Strip. Subjects (n=28, 54% female, 46% male) were asked to think of Las Vegas as if it were a person and to write down the personality traits that first came to mind. It was predetermined that if a trait was mentioned by at least 25% of the subjects, it would be included in the pool of personality traits. The 9 unique traits resulting from this task met this criterion and were added to the pool of personality traits. These personality traits, their frequencies and percentages were as follows: exciting (15, 54%), sexy (14, 50%), energetic (10, 36%), vibrant (9, 32%), independent (9, 32%), unique (8, 29%), alive (8, 29%), showy (8, 29%), and naughty (8, 29%).

### *Stage 2: The BPS Content Validity*

The same sample of visitors was used in the second stage. In this stage, the BPS 42 personality traits were tested for content validity (Churchill, 1979). The items were measured using a 5-point Likert type scale with anchors (1) not descriptive at all and (5) extremely descriptive, consistent with Aaker's (1997) study. Subjects were asked to rate the degree to which they perceived each of the 42 personality traits accurately described Las Vegas. To isolate the most relevant traits, the cutoff for the 42 BPS personality traits was a scale with a mean rating of 3.00 or above. A set of 23 items, split across 4 dimensions, was retained from the BPS and were as follows: sincerity (original, cheerful, friendly); excitement (daring, trendy, exciting, spirited, cool, young, imaginative, unique,

up-to-date, independent, contemporary); competence (intelligent, successful, leader, confident); sophistication (upper class, glamorous, good looking, charming, feminine).

The three personality traits, exciting, independent and unique, which were generated in the first stage, were also among the 23 items elicited in the content validity stage. Thereby, the two stages left 29 personality traits for the final study.

### The Measurement

The destination personality was captured using personality traits derived from unique personality trait generation stage and to a great extent Aaker's (1997) BPS's content validity stage. A total of 29 destination personality items was measured on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

The ongoing debate in measuring self-congruity is whether to use gap score formula (traditional method) or direct score formula (global measurement, new method) (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Sirgy et al. (1997) argue that measuring self-congruity with direct score formula is more predictive than the gap score formula because it captures self-congruity more directly and globally, contains less measurement error and is more holistic in capturing the self-congruity. Thus, self-congruity was measured with an adaptation of the global measurement method developed by Sirgy and his colleagues (Sirgy et al., 1997; Sirgy & Su, 2000). According to this model, the subject first describes the typical user of the brand (for destinations, the typical visitor) and then states directly the consistency between the typical user of the brand and his or her self-concept. The image of the typical user of the brand is believed to be reflective of the brand image. However, brand personality can be formed and influenced by any direct or indirect

contact that the consumer has with the brand (Aaker, 1997). Brand's user imagery, which is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with the typical user of a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 348), is just one of the several ways of brand personality formation. Thus, brand personality is a broader and more inclusive concept than the image of the typical user of a brand (Helgeson & Suphellen, 2004). Additionally, Keller (1998) cautions that the user imagery and brand personality may not always be in agreement (as cited in Phau & Lau, 2000). Aaker (1996) states that there are occasions where the user profile is inconsistent with the personality that the brand projects. Furthermore, there might be more than one type of user imagery for a brand. Thus, respondents first were asked to think the destination as if it were person. Next, they were asked to think the personality characteristics of the destination and their self-concept. Then, respondents were asked to compare both the personality of the destination and their self-concept in their minds. Finally, they were instructed to state the consistency between the destination personality and his or her self-concept by indicating their levels of agreement to actual and ideal self-congruity statements. Actual self-congruity statements were as follows: "Las Vegas is consistent with how I see myself"; "I am quite similar to the personality of Las Vegas"; "The personality of Las Vegas is congruent with how I see myself". On the other hand, ideal self-congruity were measured using the following statements: "Las Vegas is consistent with how I would like to see myself"; "I would like to be perceived as similar to the personality of Las Vegas"; "The personality of Las Vegas is congruent with how I would like to see myself". Both actual and ideal self-congruity statements were derived from the previous research conducted by Sirgy et al. (1997), Sirgy & Su (2000),



and Helgeson & Suphellen (2004). These congruity statements were measured using a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

Behavioral intentions (intention to return and intention to recommend) were measured using numerical scales. Intention to recommend was operationalized using a 10-point numerical scale with (1) representing not recommend at all and (10) definitely recommend. Intention to return was also measured using a 10-point numerical scale where (1) means do not intend to visit and (10) means very likely to visit. Overall destination brand personality evaluation was captured using a 10-point numerical scale with (1) representing very negative and (10) very positive.

There were four open-ended questions in the survey that allow respondents to think freely about the destination and to express their original and unique views. First, respondents were asked to describe their general images of Las Vegas using three words or phrases. Second, respondents were asked to list three personality traits associated with Las Vegas. Third, respondents were asked to visualize and describe the typical visitor to Las Vegas in order to identify the typical user imagery, consistent with Sirgy and Su's (2000) suggested approach. Finally, respondents were asked to write down a tourism slogan or a tagline for Las Vegas in their own words.

Trip related questions including how long the visitor had been in Las Vegas, their past visits to Las Vegas, the main purpose of their trip, the party size, trip companions, tourist activities pursued by visitors and information sources used in holiday decision making were all asked. The demographic questions, including age, gender, country/state of residence, marital status, level of education, household income were also asked to provide additional background on the respondents.

### Pilot Study

To reveal any potential deficiencies and test the feasibility of the proposed questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 20 visitors to Las Vegas. There were no concerns with the question wording and format based on the pilot study results. Thus, all questions were retained. The average response time to complete a questionnaire took 15 minutes.

### Sample

The target population of this study was visitors to Las Vegas. A convenience sampling method, which refers to the sampling procedure used to obtain units or people who are most conveniently available (Zikmund, 2003), was used during the research process. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed in front of the “Fountain Show” at Bellagio, one of the largest casino hotels on the Las Vegas Strip. This place was deemed appropriate for data collection for two reasons. First, it was a popular place on the Las Vegas Strip and therefore it was mostly populated by visitors. Second, the pilot study showed that average response time took 15 minutes to complete a questionnaire and visitors who were waiting for the “Fountain Show” were more interested in the study and had the sufficient time to complete the questionnaire. To participate in the survey, respondents were approached randomly rather than approaching to all available visitors in a systematic way. The students approached the visitors who were waiting for the Fountain Show, identified themselves, informed visitors about the study, and indicated that participation was confidential and voluntary.

### Analysis of Data

SPSS 16.0 was used to analyze the data. Data analysis included several stages. First, the data were explored for any possible entry error and outliers; and descriptive statistics were reported. Next, factor analysis was performed to identify the underlying personality dimensions of Las Vegas. After assessing the reliabilities by using Cronbach's alpha, factor scores for the identified dimensions were calculated using the Anderson and Rubin method. Then, the reliability of the self-congruity measures were assessed by examining the Cronbach's alpha coefficients and the six self-congruity measures were reduced to two measures (actual and ideal congruity) by calculating their mean scores. Finally, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine relationships among destination personality, self-congruity, and behavioral intentions.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Response Rate

The data were collected from January 19, 2009 to March 8, 2009. There were seven weeks in this data collection period. Two days for each week were randomly selected, reaching a total of 14 days. Respondents were recruited in front of the “Fountain Show” at Bellagio, one of the largest hotels on the Las Vegas Strip. The surveys were conducted by three trained graduate students. The average response time was 15 minutes.

In general, the visitors were participatory and exhibited a high level of interest. The number of refusals was recorded. The refusal rates were relatively low (around 15%). Out of 382 questionnaires collected, a total of 14 questionnaires were not usable due to the excessive missing data or response bias (i.e., consistently checking a particular number on a scale). Thus, a total of 368 questionnaires were coded for data analysis.

#### Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. There were slightly more female respondents (51.4%) than male respondents. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 69, with a mean score of 36.6 years. The majority of respondents (73%) were from the US, with the most of them coming from California (29.3%). This

was followed by respondents from Arizona (10.3%) and Texas (7.6%). The rest of the US respondents were from states such as Utah, New York, Iowa, and Washington among others. Of the 27% of the respondents from outside the US, 38.3% were from the UK and 25.2% from Canada. While 50.5% of the respondents (50.5%) were married, the remaining 44.9% were single. About 38% of the respondents held a university degree; 29.2% of them had some college, and 14.7% reported an education level of high school or less. The proportion of respondents with a graduate degree (Master or PhD) was 18.3%. The proportion of respondents who reported an annual household income of less than \$30,000 and the income group of \$90,000-\$119,999 were exactly the same, 15.4%. The majority of the respondents (27.5%) were in the income group of \$60,000-\$89,999. In addition, 17.4% of the respondents had an annual household income of \$120,000 or more.

### Trip Characteristics

Table 2 and Table 3 summarize the trip characteristics of the respondents. As shown in Table 2, 62.5% of the respondents indicated that they were first-time visitors to Las Vegas. The remaining 37.5% had visited Las Vegas previously and the mean number of previous visits within the past three years was 2.9 times (median=2.0). More than half of the respondents (50.8%) traveled with friends and 38.3% traveled with family and/or relatives. Only 1.6% indicated that they were traveling with tour groups. The average party size was 3.5 persons (median=3.0). Respondents stayed an average of 4 days (median=4.0) in Las Vegas.

Table 1

*Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Characteristic		n	%
Gender (N=368)	Male	179	48.6
	Female	189	51.4
Origin (N=366)	USA	267	73.0
	International	99	27.0
US Origin (n=263)	California	77	29.3
	Arizona	27	10.3
	Texas	20	7.6
	Utah	13	4.9
	New York	12	4.6
	Other	144	43.3
International Origin (n=99)	UK	38	38.3
	Canada	25	25.2
	South Korea	8	8.1
	Japan	6	6.1
	France	5	5.1
	Other	17	17.2
Marital Status (N=368)	Single	186	50.5
	Married	165	44.9
	Other	17	4.6

Characteristic		n	%
Education Level	High School or Less	54	14.7
	Some University	107	29.2
	University	139	37.9
	Master or PhD	167	18.3
Annual Income (N=363)	Less than \$30,000	56	15.4
	\$30,000-\$59,999	87	24.0
	\$60,000-\$89,999	100	27.5
	\$90,000-\$119,999	56	15.4
	\$120,000 or more	64	17.6

Table 2

*Trip Characteristics (N=368)*

Characteristic		n	%
Previous Visitation	First Time	230	62.5
	Multiple Times	138	37.5
Travel Companion	Alone	10	2.7
	Family/Relatives	141	38.3
	Friend(s)	187	50.8
	Tour Group	6	1.6
	Other	24	6.5

Table 3

*Trip Characteristics - Average Scores*

Characteristic	Mean	Median
Number of previous visits (n=131)	2.9	2.0
Party Size (N=366)	3.5	3.0
Length of Stay (N=365)	4.0	4.0

Motivational Factors to Visit Las Vegas

The motivational factors that influenced or motivated respondents for their trip to Las Vegas are presented in Table 4. The primary motivational factor for visiting Las Vegas was “Fun/Excitement” (32.9%), followed by “Escape” (26.9%). Nearly 11% of the respondents reported that their primary reason was “Business”. About 9% of the respondents came to experience “new things/different life styles” and 7.3% came to visit “family, friends or relatives.” The least popular motivational factor group was “Relaxation” (4.1%). One in then (10.6%) of all respondents reported “other” motivational factors such as wedding, conferences, conventions, and sport events (e.g., NASCAR, bowling tournament, basketball tournament).

Tourist Activities in Las Vegas

We asked the respondents to report the activities that they actually took part or planned to take part in during their trip to Las Vegas. Since respondents were surveyed while they were on their trip to Las Vegas, some of these activities may only be planned



and not be done. Thus the results regarding the tourist activities in Las Vegas should be carefully interpreted.

Table 5 shows the distribution of tourist activities in Las Vegas. The most frequently reported tourist activity is shopping (67.4%), followed by shows/revues (65.0%) and gaming (61.2%). What is noteworthy is that although Las Vegas is known as a gaming destination in most people's minds, gaming is the third most frequently reported tourist activity. The fourth most frequently reported tourist activity is night clubs and dancing (40.2%). Only 5.4% of the respondents indicated that they attended or planned to attend to sport events while in Las Vegas. The least frequently reported activity is golfing by only 3 respondents.

Table 4

*Motivational Factors to Visit Las Vegas (N=368)*

Motivation	n	%
Escape / Getting away from the demands at home and/or work	99	26.9
Relaxation	15	4.1
Fun/Excitement	121	32.9
Experiencing new things/different life styles	32	8.7
Visiting friends, family or relatives	27	7.3
Business	39	10.6
Other	35	9.5

Table 5

*Tourist Activities in Las Vegas (N=368)*

Activity	n	%
Gaming	228	61.2
Shopping	248	67.4
Shows / Revues	239	65.0
Nightclubs / Dancing	148	40.2
Golfing	3	0.8
Sport Events	20	5.4
Other	5	1.3

#### Information Sources

The information sources that respondents utilized while they are planning their current trip to Las Vegas are presented in Table 6. The most popular information source that influenced respondents' current visit to Las Vegas is friends, colleagues and relatives (54.1%). This finding shows the importance of word of mouth in travel decision making. The second popular information source is internet (47.0%), and the third popular information source is prior visit (29.1%). The importance of prior visit as a source of information emphasizes that destination marketers of Las Vegas should make sure that visitors to Las Vegas are satisfied with their trips and are leaving with happy memories. Other popular information sources used by respondents are movies/TV shows (18.5), newspapers, magazines, travel books (11.1%) and travel and tourism fairs (4.6%). Only 3.5% reported that they used a travel agency to plan their current visit to Las Vegas.

Since the information sources used by visitors play an important role in travel decision making process, DMOs should select the right information sources to attract travelers.

Table 6

*Information Sources Used by Respondents (N=368)*

Source of Information	n	%
Prior visit	107	29.1
Movies / TV shows	68	18.5
Travel agency	13	3.5
Friends, colleagues and relatives	199	54.1
Newspapers, magazines, travel books	41	11.1
Internet	173	47.0
Travel and tourism fairs	17	4.6

#### Qualitative Perceptions

Respondents were also asked to answer four open-ended questions in order to learn their original and unique perceptions regarding the image and personality of Las Vegas. These questions were focused on the following areas:

1. General image or characteristics of Las Vegas
2. Personality characteristics associated with Las Vegas
3. Typical visitor to Las Vegas
4. A tourism slogan or a tagline for Las Vegas

For the first three areas, respondents were asked to list three words or phrases that first come to their mind when they read the question. For the tagline part, respondents were given a free space to write down a tourism slogan or tagline for Las Vegas in their own words. The findings of these open-ended questions are content analyzed and the most frequent ten responses are presented in tables.

#### *General Image or Characteristics of Las Vegas*

Top ten responses for general image or characteristics of Las Vegas are presented in Table 7. As shown in Table 7, Las Vegas is mostly associated with gambling (33.1%) by respondents. This is not a surprising result since Las Vegas is known as a popular gaming destination in the world.

When respondents are asked to indicate what comes to their mind in terms of general image of Las Vegas, they reported shows (21.5%) most frequently after gambling. The third most frequently response is fun and entertainment (18.7%). The second (shows) and third (fun/excitement) most frequently images associated with Las Vegas shows that Las Vegas is not only perceived as a gaming destination but also viewed as an entertainment destination in visitors' minds.

Other images associated with Las Vegas by respondents are as follows: drinking/alcohol (17.9%), casinos/slot machines (17.6), lights/bright lights (11.7%), sex (9.2%), night life/night clubs (7.9%), The Strip (6.2%) and Sin City (4.6%). Although Sin City is in the end of the list, one can say that the Sin City image of Las Vegas is still dominant in visitors' minds because other images associated with Sin City such as gambling, sex, drinking are placed in the top of the list.

Table 7

*Top Ten Open Ended Responses for General Image of Las Vegas (N=368)*

	n	%
Gambling	122	33.1
Shows	79	21.5
Fun / Entertainment	69	18.7
Drinking / Alcohol	66	17.9
Casinos / Slot Machines	65	17.6
Lights / Bright Lights / Neon Lights	43	11.7
Sex	34	9.2
Night Life / Night Clubs	29	7.9
Las Vegas Strip	23	6.2
Sin City	17	4.6

*Personality Characteristics Associated with Las Vegas*

Of the 368 respondents, eight did not answer to the open-ended question that was designed to elicit the personality characteristics associated with Las Vegas. In this question, respondents were asked to think Las Vegas as if it were a person and then asked to list three personality traits that reflect Las Vegas. The ten most frequent personality characteristics are shown in Table 8.

The most frequent personality characteristic was fun/fun-loving (24.7%), followed by exciting (16.4%) and outgoing (13.3%). Sexy (11.7%), energetic (8.3%), adventurous (8.0%), friendly (5.8%), alive (5.0%), flamboyant (4.7%), rich/wealthy

(3.9%) were the other most common personality characteristics, respectively. As can be seen from the table, except that exciting and friendly, open-ended responses of personality characteristics were not as common as Aaker's (1997) personality traits. Additionally, this open-ended question generated a greater variety of personality characteristics (191 unique traits).

Based on these results, we can say that a free elicitation approach is an effective way to elicit the destination specific personality traits.

Table 8

*Top Ten Open Ended Responses for Brand Personality Characteristics of Las Vegas*  
(N=360)

	n	%
Fun / Fun Loving	89	24.7
Exciting	59	16.4
Outgoing	48	13.3
Sexy	42	11.7
Energetic	30	8.3
Adventurous	29	8.0
Friendly	21	5.8
Alive	18	5.0
Flamboyant	17	4.7
Rich / Wealthy	14	3.9

### *Typical Visitor to Las Vegas*

In this open-ended question, respondents were asked to describe the typical visitor to Las Vegas using personal adjectives because Aaker (1997) argues that personality traits can be associated with a brand in a direct way through the typical user of a brand. To identify the typical visitor imagery to Las Vegas, Sirgy and Su's (2000) suggested approach was utilized. According to this approach, respondents are being asked to visualize and describe the typical visitor to a destination. However, in this approach, a number of personality traits are being given as examples. The original model suggested by Sirgy and Su (2000) is as follows:

“Take a moment to think about [destination *x*]. Think about the kind of person who typically visits [destination *x*]. Imagine this tourist in your mind and then describe this person using one or more personal adjectives such as classy, poor, stylish, masculine, sexy, old, athletic, or whatever personal adjectives you can use to describe the typical visitor of [destination *x*] (p. 350).”

As can be seen above, seven personality traits (classy, poor, stylish, masculine, sexy, old, athletic) are given to respondents as examples. We thought that these sample personality traits given in the original model might affect the respondents thinking. Therefore, two different questionnaires were used in this study. The only difference between the two questionnaires was that one of them included sample personality traits as in the original model suggested by Sirgy and Su (2000), whereas the other did not include any sample personality traits. The two questionnaires were administered to two equivalent groups from the same target population. Group 1 consisted of 183 respondents and filled out the questionnaire with sample personality traits. Group 2 consisted of 185

respondents and filled out the questionnaire without sample personality traits. The respondents in both samples were selected randomly.

Table 9

*Top Ten Open Ended Responses Provided for Typical Visitor to Las Vegas - Separate Data*

	With Examples <sup>a</sup>			Without Examples <sup>b</sup>	
	n	%		n	%
Sexy	57	31.1	Young	65	35.1
Old	52	28.4	Fun/Fun Loving	38	20.5
Stylish	47	25.7	Partier	32	17.3
Classy	43	23.5	Adventurous	27	14.6
Rich/Wealthy	37	20.2	Gambler	25	13.5
Fun/Fun Loving	26	14.2	Rich/Wealthy	18	9.7
Gambler	23	12.6	Outgoing	17	9.2
Adventurous	19	10.4	Energetic	15	8.1
Young	16	8.7	Risk Taker	14	7.6
Outgoing	8	4.4	Excitement Seeker	11	5.9

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> n=183, <sup>b</sup> n=185.

In Group 1, the four most common descriptors of a typical visitor to Las Vegas were sexy, old, stylish and classy respectively. These four most common responses were



among the personality characteristics provided as examples in the original model. On the other hand, none of the personality characteristics provided as examples were listed in the top ten responses of Group 2. Therefore, we can say that the personality characteristics given as examples have influenced the answers of respondents in Group 1. Briefly, this is a good example of how the questions or examples shape the answers. Table 9 shows the other most frequent responses for a typical visitor to Las Vegas for both Group 1 and Group 2.

Table 10

*Top Ten Open Ended Responses for Typical Visitor to Las Vegas - Aggregate Data*  
(N=368)

	n	%
Young	81	22.0
Fun / Fun Loving	64	17.4
Sexy	57	15.5
Rich / Wealthy	55	14.9
Old	52	14.1
Gambler	48	13.0
Stylish	47	12.8
Adventurous	46	12.5
Classy	43	11.7
Partier	32	8.7

The most common open ended responses for a typical visitor to Las Vegas for all respondents in the study are presented in Table 10. In Table 10, the responses of Group 1 and Group 2 were combined. The ten most common descriptors for a typical visitor to Las Vegas are Young (22.0%), followed by Fun/Fun-Loving (17.4), Sexy (15.5%), Rich/Wealthy (14.9), Old (14.1%), Gambler (13.0), Stylish (12.8%), Adventurous (12.5), Classy (11.7%) and Partier (8.7%).

#### *Tagline for Las Vegas*

Aaker (1997) proposes that brand personality can be formed in two ways: directly (through people) and indirectly. In an indirect manner, personality traits can be associated with a brand through product related attributes such as packaging, brand name, symbol, logo or advertising. Within the tourism destinations, it has been proposed that brand personality can be formed in an indirect manner through marketing programs such as cooperative advertising or media construction of destinations (Cai, 2002; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). Accordingly, this study argues that one of the indirect ways of destination personality formation is through destination slogans or taglines. Furthermore, these slogans or taglines can be used to understand the brand personality of destinations.

More than one fourth of the (99 respondents, 26.90%) respondents answered to this question and wrote down a tagline for Las Vegas. These taglines were content analyzed to understand respondents' perceptions regarding the personality of Las Vegas. The words, especially the personal adjectives, which were used in the taglines, were analyzed. The content analysis of the taglines revealed that respondents mostly associate Las Vegas with the personality trait "exciting". Other personality characteristics that were emphasized in the taglines are: free, fun, showy, unique, sexy, and alive.

## The Analysis of Mean Scores for Overall Destination Personality and Behavioral Intentions

Table 11 shows the mean scores and standard deviation scores for overall destination personality of Las Vegas and behavioral intentions. The higher the mean scores the more positive the personality. Overall destination personality of Las Vegas was rated 7.48 over 10. It can be said that respondents' perceptions regarding the overall personality of Las Vegas are positive.

For intention to recommend, Las Vegas got 7.51 over 10, indicating that respondents are satisfied with the destination and very likely to recommend it through word of mouth. However, Las Vegas was rated relatively low for intention to return (6.95 over 10). This might be explained by the variety seeking nature of tourists. Visitors have generally certain travel budgets and each time they might prefer different destinations for their future trips.

Table 11

*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Overall Destination Personality, Intention to Return and Intention to Recommend (N=368)*

	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD
Overall Personality of Las Vegas	7.48	2.00
Intention to Return	6.95	2.91
Intention to Recommend	7.51	2.42

<sup>a</sup> Items measured on a 10-point scale.

### Exploratory Factor Analysis of Destination Personality Items

An exploratory factor analysis was performed on 29 personality items to reduce data and identify the underlying dimensions. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used in the factor analysis. As recommended by Hair et al. (2005), factor loadings greater than .50 are considered necessary for practical significance, therefore a cut-off point of .50 was established to include items in the interpretation of a factor. After the factor analysis, 5 items exhibited low factor loadings ( $<.50$ ) and were removed. The items eliminated from the analysis are “original, spirited, cool, contemporary, and naughty.” After removing these items, the analysis was repeated. All items exhibited factor loadings greater than .50 and no items were cross-loaded.

The results of Barlett’s Test of Sphericity (p value 0.000, Chi-square 5631.535, df 276) showed that sufficient correlations exist among the variables to run factor analysis. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (.920) was excellent, indicating that principal component analysis was very appropriate to use on this data. The latent root criterion (eigenvalues  $> 1$ ) revealed five-factor solution and explained 69.6% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha was used to test for factor loadings for reliability. The reliability of the items was very satisfactory, ranging from .812 to .915. Table 12 displays the factors, factor loadings, eigenvalues, the percentage of variance explained by the factors and corresponding Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients.

A name for each factor was assigned based on the following criteria: factor loadings, the nature of the items in each factor and the comparison of the items and factor names extracted in this study with those in Aaker’s (1997) study. According to Hair et al. (2005), items with higher loadings are considered more important and have greater

influence on the factor labeling. Destination personality factor one consisted of “energetic, alive, vibrant, showy, exciting, sexy and daring”. Thus, factor one labeled as “vibrancy”. Destination personality factor two consisted of “feminine, charming, upper-class, good looking, glamorous”. Factor two was named as “sophistication” because the items in factor two were similar to the original study conducted by Aaker (1997). Destination personality factor three was comprised of “leader, successful, confident, independent, and intelligent”. Factor three was labeled as “competence” given that four of the five items were similar to Aaker’s (1997) study. Although the item “independent” was loaded on the “excitement” dimension in Aaker’s (1997) study, it loaded on the “competence” factor in this study. Destination personality factor four consisted of “unique, up-to-date, imaginative, young, and trendy”. Although the items in factor four were also included in Aaker’s (1997) study, it was named as “contemporary” rather than “excitement” as in the original study given that the items (e.g., exciting, daring) which had greater influence on the factor name “excitement” were not included in factor four. Destination personality factor five consisted of “friendly” and “cheerful”. For factor five, the name “sincerity” was chosen since these items were also loaded on the sincerity dimension in Aaker’s (1997) study.

As can be seen in Table 12, Aaker’s (1997) original five personality dimensions were partially replicated. In three of the five factors (sophistication, contemporary, sincerity), the personality items loaded under the original dimensions of Aaker’s (1997) study (the factor “contemporary” corresponds to Aaker’s (1997) “excitement” dimension). In one factor (competence), the personality items were also similar to the Aaker’s (1997) study but the item “independent” which was loaded on “excitement” in

Aaker's (1997) study also loaded on the "competence" dimension rather than "contemporary". Since Aaker's (1997) ruggedness dimension was failed in the content validity stage, it was not used in the study. Instead, destination specific personality traits were used, such as energetic, sexy, alive, vibrant, showy and naughty. These destination specific personality items were loaded on one factor, except naughty (failed to meet the .50 factor loading criterion). However, "exciting" and "daring" also loaded on the factor (vibrancy) that includes the destination specific items.

Similar to Aaker's (1997) findings, five dimensions of brand personality emerged for Las Vegas as a tourist destination. In general, four of the five factors appear to replicate the original dimensions of Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework. Thus, findings of this study indicate that Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework is applicable to tourism destinations. However, a fifth factor appears to be relatively specific to Las Vegas. This specific factor explained the majority of variance (45.1%). Thus, this study proposes that a specific brand personality scale is needed for tourism destinations, consistent with Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal (2006) who suggest that some items of Aaker's BPS are redundant and not suitable for tourism destinations.

The factor scores were calculated using the Anderson and Rubin method through SPSS 16.0 since this method was found unbiased and superior to the other two methods (the regression and Barlett's method) used to estimate factor scores (Lastovicka & Thamodaran, 1991; Sirakaya, Uysal & Yoshioka, 2003). Additionally, Anderson and Rubin method is the standard practice when factors are used as an input for subsequent analyses (multiple regression analyses in this case) (Sirakaya et al., 2003).

Table 12

*Exploratory Factor Analysis of Destination Personality Items<sup>a</sup>*

Factors	Factor Loading <sup>b</sup>	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Reliability <sup>c</sup>
Vibrancy		10.835	45.147	.915
Energetic	.823			
Alive	.821			
Vibrant	.809			
Showy	.738			
Exciting	.585			
Sexy	.584			
Daring	.555			
Sophistication		2.142	8.924	.867
Feminine	.771			
Charming	.735			
Upper Class	.675			
Good Looking	.649			
Glamorous	.562			
Competence		1.516	6.317	.844
Leader	.823			
Successful	.808			
Confident	.769			

Factors	Factor Loading <sup>b</sup>	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Reliability <sup>c</sup>
Independent	.564			
Intelligent	.514			
Contemporary		1.133	4.721	.812
Unique	.676			
Up-to-date	.667			
Imaginative	.630			
Young	.554			
Trendy	.525			
Sincerity		1.079	4.498	.833
Friendly	.832			
Cheerful	.682			
Total Variance Explained			69.607	

*Note.* a. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: .920. Barlett's Test of Sphericity p value .000 (Chi-Square: 5631.535, df 276).

b. Item loading less than 0.50 omitted.

c. Reliabilities were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

#### Analyses of Self-Congruity Measures

Respondents were asked to indicate their levels of agreement to the six self-congruity statements. Since the factor structure of these statements was known, they were



not submitted to factor analysis; only the reliability scores were computed for these measures. As shown in Table 13, both actual and ideal self-congruity statements demonstrated a strong internal consistency, shown by  $\alpha=.984$  and  $\alpha=.985$ , respectively.

Table 13

*Reliability Estimates for Self-Congruity Statements (N=368)*

Self-Congruity	Reliability <sup>a</sup>	Number of Items
Actual Congruity	.984	3
Ideal Congruity	.985	3

a. Reliabilities were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

After the reliability assessment, the six measures of self-congruity were reduced into two variables by computing their mean scores. Table 14 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for the new two variables: actual congruity and ideal congruity.

Table 14

*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Actual and Ideal Congruity (N=368)*

Self-Congruity	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD
Actual Congruity	3.32	1.24
Ideal Congruity	3.42	1.28

a. Items measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

## The Model and Hypothesis Testing

The proposed model and the relationships between destination personality, self-congruity and behavioral intentions were tested using several multiple regression analyses. The findings were reported in the following sections.

### *Destination Personality Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions*

Multiple regression analyses were run using the five factors of the destination personality as independent variables and the behavioral intentions as dependent variables. The results are presented in Table 15. As can be seen in Table 15, destination personality dimensions were statistically significant in estimating intention to return and intention to recommend ( $p$  values = .000).

The multiple  $R$  coefficients showed that the correlation between the destination personality and the two behavioral intentions are strong to moderate ( $R$  values > .30) (Cohen, 1988). In Model 1, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was .243, indicating that approximately 24% of the total variation in intention to return was explained by the destination personality factors. On the other hand, the  $R^2$  was .297 in Model 2, which means that 29.7% of the total variance for the estimation of intention to recommend is explained by the destination personality factors. These results show that destination personality is more predictive in the estimation of intention to recommend than intention to return since the  $R^2$  was higher in Model 2 than in Model 1. There was no effect of multicollinearity in both models based on the fact that all VIF scores were 1.000.

The four personality dimensions, Vibrancy ( $\beta = .208, p = .000$ ), Sophistication ( $\beta = .317, p = .000$ ), Competence ( $\beta = .108, p = .026$ ) and Sincerity ( $\beta = .283, p = .000$ ), had significant and positive impact on intention to return. Only the Contemporary dimension

was not statistically significant ( $\beta = .084, p = .82$ ). However, all five dimensions of destination personality were statistically significant at .050 or lower probability level and had positive impact on intention to return. Based on the multiple regression analyses, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, destination personality will have a positive impact on intention to return and intention to recommend, were supported.

Table 15

*Regression Analysis: Relationship between Destination Personality and Behavioral Intentions*

	Model 1 <sup>a</sup>			Model 2 <sup>b</sup>		
	Intention to Return			Intention to Recommend		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Vibrancy	.208	4.332	.000	.280	6.038	.000
Sophistication	.317	6.605	.000	.322	6.942	.000
Competence	.108	2.242	.026	.171	3.689	.000
Contemporary	.084	1.746	.082	.105	2.269	.024
Sincerity	.283	5.895	.000	.273	5.902	.000
(Constant)		48.867	.000		65.375	.000
Multiple $R$	.493			.545		
$R^2$	.243			.297		

Note. <sup>a</sup> $F = 21.046, p = .000$ , <sup>b</sup> $F = 27.649, p = .000$

### *Self-Congruity and Behavioral Intentions*

In this stage, both intention to return and intention to recommend were regressed on the two measures of self-congruity. The results are presented in Table 16.

The multiple  $R$  coefficients showed that the correlation between the two measures of self-congruity and the two behavioral intentions are strong ( $R$  values  $> .50$ ) (Cohen, 1988). The two measures of self-congruity explained 53.4% and 52.5% of the variation in intention to return and intention to recommend, respectively. The two regression models predicting intention to return and intention to recommend were significant at the .001 or lower probability level, indicating that there was a significant relationship between self-congruity and behavioral intentions. Multicollinearity between the independent variables was examined by calculating the VIFs. There was no effect of multicollinearity problem in both models as the VIF scores were 1.199.

Both actual and ideal self-congruity were found to be the significant predictors of intention to return ( $\beta_{\text{actual}} = .502, p = .000; \beta_{\text{ideal}} = .364, p = .000$ ) and intention to recommend ( $\beta_{\text{actual}} = .382, p = .000; \beta_{\text{ideal}} = .476, p = .000$ ). These findings not only support many prior research studies in the consumer behavior literature that have found the similar effects of self-congruity on consumer attitudes (see Sirgy, 1982 for a review) but also provide support for Sirgy and Su's (2000) arguments regarding the effects of self-congruity within the tourism literature. Sirgy & Su (2000) proposes that the greater the match between destination image and tourist's self-concept, the more likely it is that the tourists will be motivated to visit that destination.

In Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4, it was hypothesized that self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to return and intention to recommend, respectively.

Based on the results of multiple regression analyses, Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4 were supported. Accordingly, the greater the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept, the more likely it is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination resulting in intention to return and intention to recommend.

In particular, the standardized beta coefficients were reviewed to see which measure of self-congruity has relative importance on behavioral intentions. As can be seen in Table 16, actual self-congruity has relatively more impact on intention to return ( $\beta = .502$ ), whereas ideal self-congruity has relatively more impact on intention to recommend ( $\beta = .479$ ).

Table 16

*Regression Analysis: Relationship between Self-Congruity and Behavioral Intentions*

	Model 1 <sup>a</sup>			Model 2 <sup>b</sup>		
	Intention to Return			Intention to Recommend		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Actual Congruity	.502	12.829	.000	.382	9.676	.000
Ideal Congruity	.364	9.299	.000	.479	12.114	.000
(Constant)		5.284	.000		12.474	.000
Multiple $R$	.731			.724		
$R^2$	.534			.525		

Note. <sup>a</sup> $F = 208.858, p = .000$ , <sup>b</sup> $F = 201.436, p = .000$

### *Destination Personality Perceptions, Self-Congruity, and Behavioral Intentions*

Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6 dealt with the mediating impact of self-congruity on the relationship between destination personality and tourist's behavioral intentions. To test these hypotheses, Baron and Kenny's (1986) suggested approach for determining mediation was used. Mediation is a hypothesized casual chain in which one variable affects a second variable that, in turn, affects a third variable. The intervening variable mediates the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. The mediation can be graphically displayed in the following way:

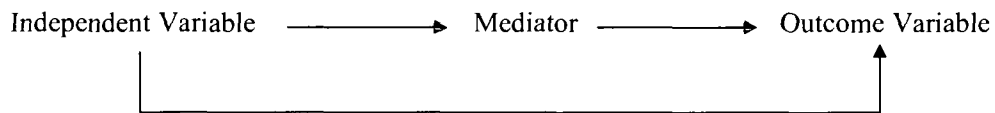


Figure 3. The mediation model

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a variable functions as a mediator when it meets the following conditions: (a) variances in levels of the independent variable significantly account for variations in the presumed mediator, (b) variances in the mediator significantly account for variations in the outcome variable, and (c) when path between independent variable and mediator as well as between mediator and dependent variable are controlled, a previously significant relation between the independent variable and outcome variable is no longer significant. To evaluate the mediation, either Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or a series of regression analyses can be used (Hair et al., 2005). In this study, the mediation was tested using Baron and Kenny's (1986) suggested

approach in which several regression analyses are conducted. Baron and Kenny's (1986) suggested approach is summarized as follows:

Step 1: Regressing the dependent variable on the independent variable. In this step, the independent variable must affect the dependent variable. If not, the mediation is not possible and there is no need for further analyses.

Step 2: Regressing the mediator on the independent variable. In this second step, the independent variable must affect the mediator.

Step 3: Regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator. The mediator must affect the dependent variable.

Step 4: If all the above conditions are met in the predicted direction, then the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable must be less in the third step than in the first step. If not, mediation is not supported. If the independent variable is no longer significant in the third step, then perfect mediation is supported.

It should also be noted that not only the significance of the coefficients but also their absolute sizes should be examined (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Because in some situations small coefficients can be statistically significant with large sample sizes and very large coefficients can be nonsignificant with small sample sizes (Kenny, 2008). Thus, the absolute size of the coefficients should be examined in the final step to evaluate the mediation. According to Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham (2005), if the effect of independent variable is reduced but remains significant when the mediator is included in the model, then partial mediation is supported. If the effect of independent variable is reduced to zero when mediator is included in the model, then full mediation is supported (Hair et al., 2005).

In Hypotheses 1 and 2, behavioral intentions were regressed on all dimensions of destination personality and it was found that destination personality had statistically significant effect on behavioral intentions ( $p$  values = .000). This denotes the first step in Baron and Kenny' (1986) suggested approach, in which we have sufficient evidence that this relationship might be mediated by another variable.

In the second step of Baron and Kenny's (1986) suggested approach, both actual and ideal self-congruity were regressed on all dimensions of destination personality. The results are reported in Table 17. As can be seen in Table 17, the two models investigated were found to be significant at the .001 or lower probability level, indicating that there was a significant relationship between destination personality and self-congruity, which is consistent with Murphy, Benckendorff & Moscardo's (2007b) findings. The multiple  $R$  coefficients showed that the correlation between the dimensions of destination personality and the two measures of self-congruity are moderate ( $.30 < R$  values  $< .50$ ) (Cohen, 1988). The five dimensions of destination personality explained 13.0% and 21.1% of the total variation in actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity, respectively. Although the amount of variance explained by the regression model for actual self-congruity was low ( $R^2 = .130$ ), the  $F$  value was highly significant ( $p = .000$ ). Only the Competence dimension was not statistically significant in predicting actual self-congruity ( $p = .157$ ). Additionally, the Contemporary dimension was not statistically significant in predicting ideal self-congruity ( $p = .371$ ). However, the four of the five destination personality dimensions were statistically significant in both models. Since the overall regression models were significant at .001 or lower probability level, the second step in



Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach was completed and the condition (the effect of independent variable on the mediator) was met.

Table 17

*Regression Analysis: Relationship between Destination Personality and Self-Congruity*

	Model 1 <sup>a</sup>			Model 2 <sup>b</sup>		
	Actual Congruity			Ideal Congruity		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Vibrancy	.132	2.567	.011	.204	4.163	.000
Sophistication	.181	3.515	.001	.277	5.651	.000
Competence	.073	1.419	.157	.144	2.942	.003
Contemporary	.102	1.971	.050	.044	.896	.371
Sincerity	.253	4.903	.000	.264	5.387	.000
(Constant)		40.391	.000		53.131	.000
Multiple $R$	.360			.459		
$R^2$	.130			.211		

Note. <sup>a</sup> $F = 9.776, p = .000$ , <sup>b</sup> $F = 17.584, p = .000$

In the third step, both intention to return and intention to recommend were regressed on the five dimensions of destination personality and on the two measures of self-congruity. The results of the multiple regression analyses are shown in Table 18. As seen in Table 18, the regression models that include both the independent variable

(dimensions of destination personality) and the mediator (actual and ideal self-congruity) were statistically significant in estimating intention to return and intention to recommend ( $p$  values = .000).

The multiple  $R$  coefficients showed that the correlation between the destination personality, self-congruity, and the behavioral intentions are strong ( $R$  values > .50) (Cohen, 1988). In Model 1, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was .711, indicating that 71.1% of the total variation in intention to return was explained by both the dimensions of destination personality and the two measures of self-congruity. On the other hand, the  $R^2$  was .664 in Model 2, which means that 69.4% of the total variance for the estimation of intention to recommend is explained by both the dimensions of destination personality and the two measures of self-congruity.

It should be also noted that the explanatory power ( $R^2$ ) of the models are increased when actual and ideal self-congruity are added to the equation ( $R^2$ = .243 in Step 1,  $R^2$ = .711 in Step 3 for intention to return;  $R^2$ = .297 in Step 1,  $R^2$ = .694 in Step 3 for intention to recommend). The potential multicollinearity problem was examined through VIFs. The VIFs ranged from 1.012 to 1.690, indicating that there were no concerns with the multicollinearity problem. The third step of testing mediation required that self-congruity (mediator) affect behavioral intentions (dependent variables).

As seen in Table 18, the regression coefficients representing the effect of actual and ideal self-congruity on intention to return and intention to recommend were statistically significant ( $p$  values = .000). These findings satisfied the third step of Baron and Kenny's (1986) test of mediation.

Table 18

*Regression Analysis: Relationship between Destination Personality, Self-Congruity and Behavioral Intentions*

	Model 1 <sup>a</sup>			Model 2 <sup>b</sup>		
	Intention to Return			Intention to Recommend		
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Vibrancy	.052	1.705	.089	.140	4.246	.000
Sophistication	.105	3.370	.001	.132	3.910	.000
Competence	.003	.094	.925	.076	2.332	.020
Contemporary	.031	1.031	.303	.062	1.907	.057
Sincerity	.060	1.906	.058	.078	2.295	.022
Actual Congruity	.265	7.208	.000	.184	4.633	.000
Ideal Congruity	.592	15.312	.000	.565	13.539	.000
(Constant)		2.628	.009		11.333	.000
Multiple $R$	.843			.815		
$R^2$	.711			.664		

Note. <sup>a</sup> $F = 114.730, p = .000$ , <sup>b</sup> $F = 92.032, p = .000$

The final step for mediation in Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach required that the regression coefficients representing independent variable's effects on the dependent variable be lower in magnitude in the regression equations that included the mediator (regression results shown in Table 18) than the regression coefficients obtained from the regression equations that excluded the mediator (regression results shown in Table 15). A

comparison of the regression coefficients and p values (results in Table 15 vs. Table 18) for regression analyses in Step 1 and Step 3 are presented in Table 19.

As can be seen in Table 19, three dimensions of destination personality (vibrancy, competence and sincerity) are no longer significant in predicting intention to return when the two measures of self-congruity are controlled. The Contemporary dimension was already not significant in Step 1 and also is not significant in Step 3 for intention to return. Only the Sophistication dimension was still significant when the two measures of self-congruity are controlled.

On the other hand, four of the five destination personality dimensions (vibrancy, sophistication, competence, sincerity) were still significant in predicting intention to recommend when the two measures of self-congruity are controlled. Only the Contemporary dimension was no longer significant in predicting intention to recommend when actual and ideal self-congruity are controlled.

The comparison of the regression coefficients revealed that the effects of all dimensions of destination personality were on intention to return and intention to recommend were all lower in magnitude when the two measures of self-congruity were controlled. Thus, Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6, proposing that self-congruity mediates the relationship between destination personality and behavioral intentions, were supported.

Since all regression coefficients of destination personality dimensions are reduced but some of them still remain significant when self-congruity is included as a mediator, it is concluded that self-congruity is a partial mediator between destination personality and behavioral intentions.

Table 19

*Comparison of Regression Coefficients and P Values for Destination Personality**Dimensions between Step 1 and Step 3*

	Model 1				Model 2			
	Intention to Return				Intention to Recommend			
	Step 1		Step 3		Step 1		Step 3	
	$\beta$	$p$	$\beta$	$p$	$\beta$	$p$	$\beta$	$p$
Vibrancy	.208	.000	.052	.089	.280	.000	.140	.000
Sophistication	.317	.000	.105	.001	.322	.000	.132	.000
Competence	.108	.026	.003	.925	.171	.000	.076	.020
Contemporary	.084	.082	.031	.303	.105	.024	.062	.057
Sincerity	.283	.000	.060	.058	.273	.000	.078	.022

*Note.* Step 1: Regression analyses predicting the behavioral intentions (dependent variable) with destination personality (independent variable). Step 3: Regression analyses predicting the behavioral intentions (dependent variable) with destination personality (independent variable) and self-congruity (mediator).

*Testing the Assumptions of Multiple Regression Analyses*

The assumptions of the multiple regression analysis were tested to ascertain non-violations and met before proceeding. The following assumptions were tested for each multiple regression analysis conducted in this study:

Linearity between the independent variables and dependent variables were assessed by plotting the residuals. No non-linear patterns were found. Constant variance of the error terms (homoscedasticity) were tested through the examination of the residuals and no pattern in the data points were found, indicating that the homoscedasticity assumption was met. The normality assumption was examined by a visual examination of the Q-Q plots (normal probability plots) of the residuals and the normality assumption was met. The multicollinearity between variables was examined with the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) and no concerns were found.

#### Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Destination personality will have a positive impact on intention to return.

Results: The regression model predicting the effect of destination personality on intention to return was found to be statistically significant at .001 or lower probability level. Four of the five destination personality dimensions had significant and positive impact on intention to return. Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Destination personality will have a positive impact on intention to recommend.

Results: The regression model predicting the effect of destination personality on intention to recommend was found to be statistically significant at .001 or lower probability level. All of the five destination personality dimensions had significant and positive impact on intention to recommend. Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to return. In other words, the greater the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept, the more likely it is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination resulting in intention to return.

Hypothesis 3a: Actual self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to return.

Hypothesis 3b: Ideal self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to return.

Results: The regression model predicting the effect of self-congruity on intention to return was found to be statistically significant at .001 or lower probability level. Both actual and ideal self-congruity had significant and positive impact on intention to recommend. Hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Hypothesis 4: Self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to recommend. In other words, the greater the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept, the more likely it is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination resulting in intention to recommend.

Hypothesis 4a: Actual self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to recommend.

Hypothesis 4b: Ideal self-congruity will have a positive impact on intention to recommend.

Results: The regression model predicting the effect of self-congruity on intention to recommend was found to be statistically significant at .001 or lower probability level.

Both actual and ideal self-congruity had significant and positive impact on intention to recommend. Hypothesis 4 is accepted.

Hypothesis 5: Self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and intention to return.

Hypothesis 5a: Actual self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and intention to return.

Hypothesis 5b: Ideal self-congruity the relationship between destination personality and intention to return.

Results: To test the hypothesis, Baron and Kenny's (1986) suggested approach for determining mediation was used. Self-congruity was found to be a partial mediator on the relationship between destination personality and intention to return. Thus, it was concluded that destination personality has a positive indirect effect on intention to return.

Hypothesis 6: Self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and intention to recommend.

Hypothesis 6a: Actual self-congruity will mediate the relationship between destination personality and intention to recommend.

Hypothesis 6b: Ideal self-congruity the relationship between destination personality and intention to recommend.

Results: To test the hypothesis, Baron and Kenny's (1986) suggested approach for determining mediation was used. Self-congruity was found to be a partial mediator on the relationship between destination personality and intention to recommend. Thus, it was concluded that destination personality has a positive indirect effect on intention to recommend.



### Reliability and Validity Assessment

The reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which is a measure of the internal consistency of an instrument. For destination personality dimensions, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients showed satisfactory reliability, ranging from .812 to .915. The results of the regression analyses (regressions predicting the effects of destination personality on behavioral intentions) provided some evidence for the predictive validity of the destination personality dimensions. Furthermore, the fact that findings from qualitative and quantitative responses converged provided additional support for both reliability and validity of the personality items included in the study.

The reliability of the actual and ideal self-congruity statements were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha scores. Both actual and ideal self-congruity statements demonstrated a strong internal consistency, shown by  $\alpha=.984$  and  $\alpha=.985$ , respectively. The findings of the regression analyses (regressions predicting the impact of actual and ideal self-congruity on behavioral intentions) were provided some evidence for the predictive validity of the two self-congruity measures. In addition, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the six measures of self-congruity to learn whether these measures will load on their original dimensions. Indeed, the three measures of actual self-congruity were loaded on the actual congruity dimension and the three measures of ideal self-congruity measures were loaded on the ideal congruity dimension. Thus, additional support was provided for the validity of the measures of self-congruity.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived destination personality of Las Vegas and to empirically examine the relationships among destination personality, self-congruity and tourist's behavioral intentions. A convenience sample of 382 visitors to Las Vegas was surveyed, but 368 questionnaires were found to be usable for data analysis. The results indicate that the present study makes important contributions to the understanding of brand personality and its relationship between self-congruity and behavioral intentions in the context of tourism destinations.

This study focused on the visitors to Las Vegas and respondents were surveyed during their visit to Las Vegas. There were slightly more female respondents (51.4) than male respondents. The majority of respondents (73%) were from the US. The remaining 27% were international visitors to Las Vegas, with most of them coming from UK and Canada. More than 60% of respondents were first time visitors to Las Vegas. Findings indicated that Las Vegas is visited mainly for the purposes of fun/excitement and escape from problems at home and/or work. Even though Las Vegas is known as a gaming destination in most of the travelers' minds, respondents reported the gaming as the third most frequently tourist activity in Las Vegas after shopping and shows. Friends,

colleagues, relatives and internet were found to be the most influential information sources for decision making.

The open ended questions provided valuable insights into respondents' perceptions about the image and personality of Las Vegas. The image of Las Vegas is mostly associated with gambling, shows, fun and entertainment. This is not surprising given that Las Vegas is known as a gaming destination with its numerous entertainment opportunities in travelers' minds. Most of the respondents described the personality of Las Vegas using personality traits, such as fun/fun loving, exciting, outgoing, sexy, energetic, and adventurous. Young, fun-loving, partier, adventurous, gambler, risk-taker were among the most common personality descriptors used by respondents to describe a typical visitor to Las Vegas. The content analysis of the taglines written by respondents provided another important information source for understanding the brand personality within the tourism destinations. The respondents mostly emphasized the personality traits, such as exciting, free, fun, showy, unique, sexy, and alive in their taglines.

The overall personality of Las Vegas was rated 7.48 over 10, indicating that respondents perceive personality of Las Vegas as positive. The intention to return was rated 6.95 over 10. The intention to recommend, on the other hand, was relatively high (7.51 over 10).

Exploratory factor analysis produced five dimensions for the destination personality of Las Vegas. These five dimensions explained 69.6% of the total variance in the personality items. The first dimension, vibrancy, was specific to Las Vegas and includes personality traits to a great extent that are quite different from Aaker's (1997) study. It should be noted that some personality traits loaded on different dimensions than

in Aaker's (1997) study. It consists of traits such as energetic, alive, vibrant, showy, exciting, sexy, and daring. The second dimension, sophistication, includes traits such as feminine, charming, upper class, glamorous, and good looking. The third dimension, competence, was comprised of five personality traits: leader, successful, confident, independent and intelligent. The fourth dimension, contemporary, consists of traits such as unique, up-to-date, imaginative, young, trendy and corresponds to "excitement" dimension in Aaker's (1997) study. The fifth dimension, sincerity, includes two traits that are similar to those in Aaker's (1997) study: friendly and cheerful.

The regression analyses showed that destination personality has a positive impact on intention to return and intention to recommend. While all personality dimensions had statistically significant positive impacts on intention to recommend, the contemporary dimension was not significant in intention to return.

The present study supports the self-congruity theory (the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept) in the context of tourism destinations. The regression analyses indicated that both actual and ideal self-congruity has positive impact on intention to return and intention to recommend, indicating that the greater the match between how tourists see themselves and how they see the destinations (in terms of personality characteristics), the more likely it is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination resulting in intention to return and intention to recommend.

The study found another effect of destination personality on intention to return and intention to recommend through self-congruity. The results strongly indicated that self-congruity is an intervening variable (a partial mediator) between destination

personality and behavioral intentions. In other words, destination personality indirectly influences behavioral intentions through self-congruity.

### Implications

The present study makes important theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical standpoint, the study indicated that tourists do attribute personality characteristics to tourism destinations. This is in line with the previous research on destination personality (e.g., Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk & Baloglu 2007; Murphy, Benckendorff, & Moscardo (2007b). Similar to Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework, in this study, five dimensions of destination personality emerged for Las Vegas. However, this study partially replicates Aaker's (1997) original five personality dimensions given that four of the five dimensions appear to replicate the those in Aaker's (1997) study. In three of the five factors (sophistication, contemporary, sincerity), the personality items located under the original dimensions of Aaker's (1997) study (the factor "contemporary" corresponds to Aaker's (1997) "excitement" dimension). In one dimension (competence), four of the five personality traits were same with those in Aaker's (1997) study. However, one trait (independent), which was located under the "excitement" dimension in Aaker's (1997) study, loaded on the competence dimension in this study. Another dimension, vibrancy, included five destination specific personality traits and two traits from Aaker's (1997) BPS. These two traits, exciting and daring, shifted from the "excitement" dimension of Aaker's (1997) study and became a part of "vibrancy" dimension in this study. The shifting of the personality traits from one dimension to another was also observed in the past research (e.g., Ekinci & Hosany,

2006; Murphy, Benckendorff et al. (2007b). Ekinçi & Hosany (2006) explains this issue with the argument that the personality traits designed for consumer goods tend to shift when applied to tourism destinations. It should also be noted that Aaker's (1997) ruggedness dimension was not used in this study since it failed in the content validity stage while identifying the personality traits that will be included.

Furthermore, the results support Ekinçi & Hosany's (2006) argument that Aaker's (1997) BPS may not fully represent all personality traits associated with tourism destinations. Indeed, destination specific personality traits loaded on one dimension and explained the majority of the variance. Additionally, the open ended responses revealed personality traits that are quite different from those in Aaker's (1997) study.

The findings of the study indicate that destination personality have positive impact on intention to return and intention to recommend, consistent with previous research (Ekinçi & Hosany, 2006; Ekinçi et al., 2007).

Another significant theoretical contribution of this study is that the findings support the self-congruity theory (the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept) in the context of tourism destinations. Although self-congruity has been studied widely in the consumer behavior literature, there is a lack of research on it in the tourism literature. By supporting the self-congruity theory, this study makes an important contribution to the literature. The study found evidence that self-congruity has a positive impact on tourist's behavioral intentions. That is, the greater the match between destination personality and tourist's self-concept, the more likely is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination resulting in intention to return and word of mouth. Additionally, the study found evidence that self-congruity is a partial mediator

between destination personality and behavioral intentions. In other words, destination personality has a positive indirect effect on intention to return and intention to recommend through self-congruity.

Another theoretical implication of this study is methodological. The study showed that both qualitative and quantitative approach should be used in the measurement of destination personality, which is similar with the findings of Baloglu & Love's (2005) study. Baloglu & Love (2005) investigated the association meeting planners' images of five convention cities and found that open-ended (unstructured) questions revealed unique perceptions that could not be captured by closed-ended (structured) questions. In this study, the open-ended questions generated a greater variety of personality traits that are quite different from those in Aaker's (1997) study. Also, they converged in part with the quantitative responses (scale evaluations) and thus provided additional support for the validity of the study.

The final theoretical contribution of this study is also methodological. In one of the four open-ended questions, respondents were asked to describe the typical visitor to Las Vegas. In that question, Sirgy and Su's (2000) suggested approach, which was developed to identify the typical visitor imagery to a destination, was used. According to this approach, respondents are being asked to visualize and describe the typical visitor a destination. However, in this approach, a number of personality traits are being given as examples. We thought that these sample personality traits given in the original model might affect respondents' thinking. Therefore, two different questionnaires were distributed in the study. The only difference between the two questionnaires was that one of them included sample personality traits as in the original model suggested by Sirgy

and Su (2000), whereas the other did not include any sample personality traits. The two questionnaires were administered to two equivalent groups from the same target population. Group 1 filled out the questionnaire that includes the sample personality traits. Group 2 filled out the questionnaire that does not include the sample personality traits. The responses were content analyzed and the most frequent ten responses were listed. In Group 1, the top four common descriptors of a typical visitor to Las Vegas were among the personality traits provided as examples in the original model. On the other hand, none of the personality characteristics provided as examples were listed in the top ten responses of Group 2. These findings indicate how the question shapes the answer. Thus, future researchers should be careful when providing examples to their respondents.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of the study provide important implications for destination marketers. Today, destinations are faced with increasingly tough competition than they ever before. Promoting the functional attributes of destinations does no longer help destinations to attract travelers because of the high product similarity and growing substitutability. The findings of the study provide evidence that the symbolic functions or benefits of a destination brand is crucial in understanding the complex travel behavior. Indeed, the results indicate that destination personality have positive impact on tourist's behavioral intentions. Thus, destination marketers should focus on developing marketing strategies emphasizing the distinctive personality of their destinations.

The study has also specific practical implications for the destination marketers of Las Vegas. The perceived destination personality of Las Vegas has five dimensions: vibrancy, sophistication, competence, contemporary and sincerity. While all five



personality dimensions of Las Vegas were found to be the significant predictors of intention to recommend, only the contemporary dimension was not significant in predicting intention to return. Destination marketers of Las Vegas could differentiate Las Vegas based on these personality dimensions or these dimensions can be utilized in the positioning efforts of Las Vegas. In particular, three of the five personality dimensions were found to have relatively more influence on tourists' behavioral intentions. The sophistication was found to be the most influential personality dimension on both intention to return and intention to recommend. The second and third most influential dimensions on intention to return were sincerity and vibrancy, respectively. On the other hand, the second and third most influential dimensions on intention to recommend were vibrancy and sincerity, respectively. The destination marketers of Las Vegas should concentrate more on these three dimensions (sophistication, vibrancy and sincerity) in their marketing efforts.

An additional practical implication is that tourists who experience a match between how they see the destinations and how they see themselves or how they would like to themselves are more likely to have favorable attitudes toward those destinations resulting in intention to return and intention to recommend. Therefore, destination marketers should place greater emphasis on building connection between destination personality and tourist's self-concept and develop marketing campaigns emphasizing this match. The combination of destination personality and self-congruity might provide a more comprehensive understanding of how visitors choose their destinations.

### Limitations of the Study

Like any other study, the present study has some limitations which have to be taken into account when considering the findings. First, the findings of this study are specific to one tourism destination (Las Vegas) and cannot be generalized to other tourism destinations. Second, the present study focused on the visitors to Las Vegas and therefore the results may not be generalizable to those who have not visited Las Vegas. For the time and financial constraints, this study did not aim to survey the sample based on the real proportions of the nationalities or other demographic characters of the actual visitors of Las Vegas. Third, the results are limited to the time period of the data collection. The sample was surveyed in the months of January, February and March 2009. Thus, for more generalizable results it is advisable that the sample is surveyed throughout the whole year in order to prevent any possible seasonal bias.

Fourth, this study measured self-congruity directly, using global measurement method developed by Sirgy et al. (1997). However, there has been a considerable debate about whether to use direct score formula or gap score formula. Future research could measure self-congruity using gap score formula (measuring self-concept and brand personality separately) or could employ both the direct score formula and gap score formula and compare the results.

Fifth and the most significant limitation of this study is the lack of random sampling. The data were collected via convenience sampling, in which accessible and available visitors were chosen for data collection. Therefore, the data did not reflect the whole population of the visitors to Las Vegas from which the respondents chosen. Therefore, the results would not be generalizable to all visitors to Las Vegas. In order to

obtain more precise generalizations about the population of this study, it is recommended that future research be undertaken using random sampling techniques.

### Future Research

The findings of this study indicated that tourists ascribe personality traits to tourism destinations, which is consistent with previous research on the application of brand personality to tourism destinations. The study also found that destination personality has a positive impact on tourist's behavioral intentions. However, the findings of this study are specific to one tourism destination. Therefore, a future research replicating this study with larger sample size, with random sampling method, and in other destinations will increase our understanding of this important research area, namely the destination personality.

Although the study found that Las Vegas has a five dimensional destination personality, both the qualitative and quantitative responses found support for the argument that Aaker's (1997) BPS may not fully represent the personality traits associated with tourism destinations. Indeed, open ended questions elicited personality traits that are quite different from Aaker's (1997) BPS and exploratory factor analysis revealed that the majority of variance was captured by the vibrancy factor which mostly consists of personality traits that are different from Aaker's (1997) BPS. Thus, a brand personality scale that is specifically designed for tourism destinations is essential. Future research could fill this important gap in the tourism literature by developing a valid, reliable and generalizable destination personality scale.

Furthermore, the present study found evidence for the self-congruity theory within the tourism destinations. In particular, the results revealed that self-congruity has a positive impact on tourist's behavioral intentions. This is in line with the previous research in the consumer behavior literature proposing that consumers prefer products or brands that are similar to how they see themselves or how they would like to see themselves (Landon, 1974; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). However, the current study employed only the two dimensions of self-congruity, namely actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity. The other two dimensions, social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity were not included in this study. It should be noted that social self-congruity has been increasingly drawing attention, especially in the tourism area. Because the destination choice behavior is not only affected by personal factors but also by influenced by social factors. Thus, a future research could investigate the effects of social self-congruity within the context of tourism destinations.

Finally, the findings presented in this study indicated that there is a mediating effect of self-congruity on the relationship between destination personality and tourist's behavioral intentions. This mediating effect needs additional examination. Also, future studies could investigate the moderating impact of travel motivation on the relationship between destination personality and behavioral intentions given that different travel motivations may influence destination personality perceptions differently which, in turn, may influence tourist behavior.

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APPENDIX A  
LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS



University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Hello and thank you for visiting Las Vegas and participating in this survey. My name is Ahmet Usakli and I am a graduate student working on my Masters in Hotel Administration at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

#### Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into how visitors to Las Vegas perceive the destination personality of Las Vegas. Your truthful responses will help the tourism authorities of Las Vegas to better understand your perceptions. The data obtained from this research will be used to complete a Master's thesis at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

#### Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you have visited Las Vegas and your responses to the questions are of vital importance for the success of the study.

#### Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Give approximately 10-15 minutes of your time to answer some destination brand personality questions regarding Las Vegas.

#### Benefits of Participation

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to evaluate destination personality of Las Vegas in order to provide feedback for tourism and local authorities of Las Vegas and to aid them in designing and managing a more effective brand image.

#### Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. You may become uncomfortable when answering some questions.

#### Cost/Compensation

There will be no financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take 10-15 minutes of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

#### Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact my faculty advisor Dr. Seyhmus Baloglu at 702-895-3932 or at [seyhmus.baloglu@unlv.edu](mailto:seyhmus.baloglu@unlv.edu) or myself at [usaklia@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:usaklia@unlv.nevada.edu).

#### Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

#### Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered in will be destroyed.

Should you want a copy of the results of the survey, please feel free to send a separate e-mail to [usaklia@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:usaklia@unlv.nevada.edu).

Thank you for your time and cooperation!



**APPENDIX B**  
**SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

**TO BE FILLED OUT ONLY BY VISITORS TO LAS VEGAS**

1. Is this your first visit to Las Vegas?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes          \_\_\_\_\_ No, I have visited Las Vegas ..... *time(s)* in the past 3 years.

2. With whom are you traveling on this trip?

a) Travel alone      b) Family/relatives      c) Friend(s)

d) Tour group      e) Other (*Please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_

3. How many people are traveling with you during Las Vegas visit, excluding you?  
..... *person(s)*

4. What is the length of your stay in Las Vegas? ..... *day(s)*

5. What is **the primary motivational factor** that motivates or influences your current visit to Las Vegas? (*Please check only ONE*)

\_\_\_\_\_ Escape / Getting away from the demands at home and/or work

\_\_\_\_\_ Relaxation

\_\_\_\_\_ Fun/Excitement

\_\_\_\_\_ Experiencing new things/different life styles

\_\_\_\_\_ Visiting friends, family or relatives

\_\_\_\_\_ Business

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Which of the following **activities** did you **actually take part** or **plan to take part** in during this trip? *Please check ALL that apply.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Gaming

\_\_\_\_\_ Shopping

\_\_\_\_\_ Shows or Revues

\_\_\_\_\_ Nightclubs/Dancing

\_\_\_\_\_ Golfing

\_\_\_\_\_ Sport Events

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (*Please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_

7. Please identify your most **popular information sources** in influencing your visit to Las Vegas. *Please check ALL that apply.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Prior visit

\_\_\_\_\_ Newspapers / magazines / travel books

\_\_\_\_\_ Movies or TV shows

\_\_\_\_\_ Internet

\_\_\_\_\_ Travel agency

\_\_\_\_\_ Travel and tourism fairs

\_\_\_\_\_ Friends, colleagues and relatives

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (*Please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_

8. When you think of Las Vegas, please list what comes to your mind first in terms of general image or characteristics of Las Vegas?

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_ 3) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Take a moment to **think Las Vegas as if it were a person**. This may sound unusual, but think of a set of human characteristics you associate with this destination. We are interested in finding out which personality traits or human characteristics come to mind when you think of Las Vegas. Please list what comes to your mind first in terms of personality traits that reflect Las Vegas using personal adjectives.

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_ 3) \_\_\_\_\_

10. Now, think about Las Vegas as a tourist destination. Think about the **kind of person who typically visits Las Vegas**. Imagine this tourist in your mind and then **describe this person using one or more personal adjectives** such as classy, poor, stylish, masculine, sexy, old, athletic, or whatever personal adjectives you can use to describe the typical visitor of Las Vegas.

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_ 3) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Listed below are some personality traits that might be associated with Las Vegas. We would like you to **think of Las Vegas as if it were a person**. Please indicate to what extent these personality traits accurately describe Las Vegas. Check the appropriate box for each personality trait.

Personality Traits	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Original	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cheerful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Daring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trendy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exciting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spirited	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cool	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Young	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Imaginative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unique	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Up-to-date	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contemporary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intelligent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Successful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leader	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Confident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Upper class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glamorous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good looking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feminine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Energetic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vibrant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Showy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Naughty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. First, please think Las Vegas as if it were a person and think about the personality characteristics of Las Vegas. Next, think about how you see yourself and how you would like to see yourself. Then, state directly the congruity or consistency between you and Las Vegas in terms of personality characteristics by indicating your agreement or disagreement to following statements using the scale below:

RATING SCALE from 1 to 5

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Please check the appropriate number.

Las Vegas is consistent with <i>how I see myself</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
I <i>am quite similar</i> to the personality of Las Vegas.	1	2	3	4	5
The personality of Las Vegas <i>is congruent with how I see myself</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
Las Vegas is consistent with <i>how I would like to see myself</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
I would like <i>to be perceived as similar</i> to the personality of Las Vegas.	1	2	3	4	5
The personality of Las Vegas <i>is congruent with how I would like to see myself</i> .	1	2	3	4	5

### 13. YOUR OVERALL DESTINATION PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

A) Please rate the **overall personality of Las Vegas** as a vacation destination on a scale from 1 to 10, where

**1=Very negative**      **10=Very positive**  
1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐

B) Please indicate if you would **recommend Las Vegas** as a vacation destination to your friends and relatives on a scale from 1 to 10

**1=Not Recommend at all**      **10=Definitely recommend**  
1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐

C) Please rate the level of your **intention to revisit Las Vegas** for vacation purposes over the next two years.

**1= Do not intend to visit**      **10= Very likely to visit**  
1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐

### 14. CREATING A UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION FOR LAS VEGAS

Take a moment to think about Las Vegas as a tourist destination. Please write down a **tourism slogan or a tagline in your own words** which reflects the unique characteristics of Las Vegas and also differentiates it from competing destinations.

Please write your slogan/tagline: .....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### 15. Demographics about you

Age: ..... Gender:      ☐ Male      ☐ Female

The country of residence: ..... If USA, please indicate your state: .....

Marital Status:      ☐ Single      ☐ Married      ☐ Other

Education:      ☐ High School or less      ☐ Some university  
                         ☐ University      ☐ Master or PhD

#### Household income in US Dollars:

☐ Less than \$30,000      ☐ \$30,000-\$59,999  
☐ \$60,000-\$89,999      ☐ \$90,000-\$119,999  
☐ \$120,000 or more

APPENDIX C  
NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION



## **Social/Behavioral IRB – Exempt Review Approved as Exempt**

**DATE:** December 24, 2008

**TO:** **Dr. Seyhmus Baloglu**, Tourism and Convention Administration

**FROM:** Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

**RE:** Notification of IRB Action by Dr. Paul Jones, Co-Chair  
Protocol Title: Destination Personality of Las Vegas  
OPRS# 0811-2935

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This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

Attached to this approval notice is the **official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form** for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.

The protocol has been reviewed and deemed exempt from IRB review. It is not in need of further review or approval by the IRB.

*Any* changes to the exempt protocol may cause this project to require a different level of IRB review. Should any changes need to be made, please submit a **Modification Form**.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at [OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu](mailto:OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu) or call 895-2794.

## VITA

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Thesis Title:

The Relationship Between Destination Personality, Self-Congruity, and Behavioral Intentions

Thesis Examination Committee:

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Committee Member, Dr. Curtis Love, Ph.D.  
Committee Member, Dr. Carola Raab, Ph.D.  
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Richard Lapidus, Ph.D.