

DOCTORAL THESIS

Applying a Congruity Model to Examine Tourists' Perceived Social Value and Interpersonal Connections when Communicating Travel Experience Online

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**Applying a Congruity Model to Examine Tourists' Perceived Social Value and
Interpersonal Connections when Communicating Travel Experience Online**

SZKUDLAREK Jakub Jan

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

Principal Supervisor
Prof Chan Kara K W
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June 2022

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma, or other qualifications.

I have read the University's current research ethics guidelines and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures in accordance with the University's Research Ethic Committee (REC). I have attempted to identify all the risks related to this research that may arise in conducting this research, obtained all the relevant ethical and /or safety approval (where applicable), and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants.

Signature: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jakub Skudlarek', written over a horizontal line.

Date: June 2022

Abstract

Destination personality plays a crucial role in understanding tourist's intention to travel to the place. This study focuses on identifying perceptions of Hong Kong's personality traits as a travel destination. Specifically, it attempts to recognize variety of impressions that travellers who have visited the city, communicate with others on the travel platform TripAdvisor. This is undertaken by analysing the content of 704 social media posts describing 15 famous tourist attractions located in Hong Kong. Diverse destination personality dimensions found in the literature were adopted. New dimensions specific to the selected location were discovered. The results of this part of the study identified four perceived dimensions of Hong Kong destination personality, including Excitement, Competence, Liveliness and Peacefulness. They were the most frequently observed among the sampled social media posts. Liveliness, which refers to vibrant and diverse ambience of the city, is an original dimension not identified in the literature. All four dimensions are adopted in the second part of the study. The objective is to consider how these dimensions influence actual, ideal, social and ideal social aspects of self-congruity. In this framework, self-congruity can be defined as the match between one's individual self-concept and the destination personality which individuals experience when building tourist-destination relationships.

The majority of studies investigating the links between these notions did not review two aspects of self-congruity – private and public – separately, and rather, considered it as one construct. The original idea of this study is that the private and public aspects of self-congruity, and their subsequent relationship with communicating travel experience were analyzed independently. Travelers who are digitally active often communicate their impressions of visited destinations on diverse platforms, including TripAdvisor. Prior research shows that the self-

congruity may positively influence the degree of online platforms usage and therefore determine the extent of communicating travel experience online. Tourists who regularly create and upload posts, pictures or videos, increase the visibility of the destination and encourage other persons to consider that travel destination.

Another aim of this study is to investigate which attributes of traveler's behavior – private (represented by actual and ideal self-congruities) or public (social and ideal-social self-congruities) more significantly influence the extent of communicating travel experience online. Although previous investigation looked into the relationships between self-congruity and intensity of using digital networks, it did not particularly focus on communicating travel experience online. Presented research investigates the consequences of creating posts with regards to Hong Kong tourist's attractions and their possible impact on perceived social value as well as interpersonal connections on online platforms. In the context of this study, perceived social value refers to the level of social approval received by individuals who decided to share their travel experiences with travel platform users. Interpersonal connections on the other hand, consider the outcome of establishing new relationships or maintaining existing relationship through communicating travel experience online. A theoretical model was proposed that had seven hypotheses relating to the key variables of perceived Hong Kong personality, private self-congruity, public self-congruity, creation of content online, perceived social value and interpersonal connection on social media platforms.

In the first part of the study, content analysis of social media posts among those tourists who visited Hong Kong in 2019 and before evaluates Hong Kong perceived personality traits. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and Phi correlation coefficient were used to measure the degree of relationships between different dimensions of perceived destination personalities of Hong Kong.

In the second part of the study, 700 social media users who visited Hong Kong for tourism-oriented purposes and communicated their travel experience completed an online survey during the period of April to August 2021. The sample was a purposive non-probability sample. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Models (SEM) were used to test the proposed theoretical model. The results of the second part of the study revealed that although perceived Hong Kong personality positively influences private self-congruity, it does not influence public self-congruity. In contrast to private self-congruity, public self-congruity positively influences the creation of online content. Finally, the creation of online content positively influences perceived social value as well as interpersonal connections on social media platforms.

The findings of both studies will assist tourism organizations as well as communication practitioners to better recognize both the physical and emotional needs of visitors to Hong Kong. Due to vast amount of online content presenting users feelings regarding specific destination, travel industry can learn more about the perceived personality of the travel destination in tourist's eyes. They gain the opportunity to apply this knowledge in favour of improving already established communication strategies and create new ones, unique to that travel destination.

Acknowledgements

"Travel isn't always pretty. It isn't always comfortable. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. But that's OK. The journey changes you; it should change you. It leaves marks on your memory, on your consciousness, on your heart, and on your body. You take something with you. Hopefully, you leave something good behind." - Anthony Bourdain

The travel journey of the last thirteen years has brought to me to the point where I truly understand the meaning behind these words. My life in Asia - people I have met, places I have visited, and diverse experiences I have had, have deeply shaped my heart and opened my mind. Both the highs and the lows of writing this thesis, have become a significant part of this journey. Now as I conclude my studies I feel ready to embrace a new chapter and share my travel experience by “hopefully, [leaving] something good behind”.

This would not be possible without the professional mentorship, academic guidance, and ongoing support from my supervisor Professor Kara Chan. Her meticulous scrutiny and infinite patience has been invaluable to the completion of this thesis.

My profound gratitude goes also to my family who have not only supported me in my academic studies, but also encouraged me during the times when being away from home “[wasn’t] always pretty”. With this in mind I would like to dedicate this paper to my mother, Alicja Zjawieńska-Szkudlarek, who always reminded me to follow my heart and never give up on my journey. I am indebted to her for all the sacrifices she made to enable me to be where I am today.

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List of Abbreviations

DMO: Destination Marketing Organization

GOVHK: The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China

HKTB: Hong Kong Tourism Board

PBS: Personality Brand Scale

SC: Self-congruity

SNS: Social Networking Service

UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organization

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Context

Scholars discovered that consumers' purchase desire is often driven by the similarity between their self-image and the brand image, which is known as self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1985). The greater the similarity between the individual's self-image and the image of the product, the more likely the consumer is to have positive attitudes towards the product, to purchase the product, and to be loyal to the brand (Sirgy, 1982; He, Li & Harris, 2012). The rationale behind this is that people are motivated by the need to maintain self-consistency and the need to increase their self-esteem (Sirgy, 1982). The former is concerned with whether a certain decision or behavior is coherent with the actual self-image of an individual, and the latter is concerned with whether a certain decision or behavior is coherent with an individual's ideal self-image. Additionally, self-congruity is driven by individuals' need for social consistency and the need for social approval. Both of these regard the social aspects of self-congruity. The first is determined by the match between how individuals believe they are understood and seen by others. The second is concerned by how consumers wish to be seen when communicating with other people. This means that certain behaviors are highly influenced by the need of being recognized and accepted in a social environment. Therefore self-image has four dimensions, including *actual self-image* – the way in which consumers actually see themselves; *ideal self-image* – the self that consumers wish to become; *social self-image* – the way in which consumers believe they are perceived by others; and *ideal social self-image* – the way in which consumers wish to be perceived by others (Hosany & Martin, 2012).

Research regarding self-congruity theory exposed the significant effect of the concept on consumer pre- and post-purchase habits and attitudes (Sirgy, 2018). Those include customer

loyalty towards the brand (Kang, Tang & Lee, 2015), purchase intention (Das, 2014), customer satisfaction (He & Mukherjee, 2007) and positive attitude towards the brand (Ekinci & Riley, 2003). Thorough examination of studies on self-congruity has also proven to be applicable in tourism settings (Chon, 1992; Beerli, Meneses & Gil, 2007; Boksberger, Dolnicar, Laesser & Randle, 2011). Tourists intend to visit destinations that have a greater possibility to match their own personalities (Sirgy, Lee & Yu, 2018). Furthermore, various studies show that people travel to places that will help them to reinforce their idealistic personality and therefore enhance their self-esteem (Beerli, Meneses & Gil, 2007). Despite this, the application of self-congruity in consumer-brand relationships, as well as tourists behaviour research, has primarily addressed the validity of private self-image constructs – actual and ideal (Kim & Hyun, 2013). There are not many studies considering the role of public self-image constructs – social and ideal social – especially in relation to travel destination choice. Tourism research has mainly scrutinized the influence of actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity on tourist behaviour (Chon, 1992; Beerli, Meneses & Gil, 2007; Boksberger, Dolnicar, Laesser & Randle, 2011). Although the theoretical impact of social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity on tourist attitudes was discussed in the integrative model of the relationship among destination image, self-congruity, and travel behaviour proposed by Sirgy and Su (2000), there is a lack of empirical research and supporting evidence on this topic. As noted by Kim & Hyun (2013) “past research mainly focuses on the actual and ideal SC effects rather than the social and ideal social SC effects” (p. 39). The aim of this study is to address this gap by including two public aspects of self-congruity in proposed theoretical model. This examination has the potential to enhance the knowledge on possible outcomes of self-concept needs and their relationship with consumers’ behaviours.

1.2 Problem Statement

The reports regarding global advertising spending in digital media environments have demonstrated stable growth year by year. Despite the ongoing global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, by the end of 2021 online advertising will reach half of the total spending on advertising worldwide (Glenday, 2021). The amount of money allocated to advertisements in digital channels should continue to grow in coming years due to changing trends. As opined by Huijboom (2021), “the shift in consumer behaviour experienced during the pandemic has changed the advertising landscape (...) such as the shift to digital, e-commerce and the need for greater personalisation in media targeting”. As a result, it is pertinent to scrutinize consumer behaviour on online platforms by reviewing their actual habits and examining the changes in attitudes and perceptions. One way of achieving that is by analysing already established online content as it responds to various functional, social, hedonic and psychological needs (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012).

Self-esteem is one of the principle cognitive drivers that motivates people to share their experiences in online networks (Kim & Jang, 2019). As noted in the previous section, self-esteem corresponds to actual self-image, self-consistency to ideal self-image, social consistency to social self-image and social approval to ideal social self-images (Sirgy, 2018). Different self-concept motives generate different aspects of self-congruity. This is especially visible during the process of selecting next destination and also when sharing opinions and experiences regarding that destination. Previous studies have pointed out that high correlations between tourists’ self-concepts and destination’s image may result in a higher possibility for these tourist to visit that destination (Beerli, Meneses & Dias, 2007). The potential relationships between different aspects of self-congruity and the perception of what the destination represents have attracted the

curiosity of researchers and communication marketing practitioners. In order to improve the understanding of these links, academic studies have proposed closer analysis of the term destination personality, which was derived from the research on brand personality.

Destination personality is defined as the set of human characteristics associated with a destination (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). These characteristics assist travellers to distinguish one place from another as all destinations present diverse tangible and intangible qualities (Kumar, 2016). Scholars have noted that recognizing the personality traits associated with a place by tourists and applying them in promotional campaigns works more effectively than solely focusing on functional aspects (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Functional aspects capture the physical elements of the destination such as famous landmarks, local food and the natural environment. Although these represent essential components of the travelling experience, some studies revealed that the utilitarian features of the destination failed to show any links with destination satisfaction (Kumar & Nayak, 2014). According to Kumar (2016), “functional attributes no longer are helpful in differentiating destinations” (p. 217). For this reason scholars and marketing communication practitioners should place more emphasis on exploring the concept of destination personality. Identifying the unique identity of the place appears to be an effective method to capture potential visitors attention, influence their decision to visit the place and also increase the understanding of their behaviours and needs. To the author's knowledge, there is yet to be a study that seeks to identify Hong Kong's personality traits. To identify a number of personality traits associated with different locations, researchers have typically conducted interviews and surveys with tourists during their visits (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011, Chen & Phou, 2013, Kumar, 2016). Due to the limited number of travellers to Hong Kong since March 2020, and thus an inability to

meet tourists in-person, this study proposes a different method not previously adopted to identify destination personality – content analysis of travellers’ online posts.

Following the unprecedented times and challenges in the tourism sector as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, all destinations around the world have had to adapt to new circumstances. The special report regarding the effects of the pandemic on global tourism prepared by the World Tourism Organization highlighted that tourism, out of all the economic sectors, has been hit hardest due to the rapid decline of travellers (UNWTO, 2020). This has been caused by a wide range of travel restrictions such as the closure of nation’s borders, introduction of quarantine requirements and extensive virus testing. In the case of Hong Kong, the effects of this have grown exponentially as the entry requirements introduced by the government are amongst the strictest globally. From 25th of March 2020 until 9th of August 2021, the local authorities implemented rigorous actions which included the ban of non-local residents from arriving into Hong Kong (GovHK, 2021). Furthermore, compulsory quarantine from 7 to 21 days is a requirement for those who decide to return to or visit the city and that significantly reduces the attractiveness of Hong Kong for international tourists. According to Koh (2020), “the pandemic has turned the state of tourism in many cities from “over-tourism” to “no-tourism” (p. 1015). Hong Kong has become a prime example of this, as the number of total visitor arrivals in 2020 was 93.6% lower than in 2019 (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique moment in history, having affected the lives of all global citizens and, in turn, changed people’s perceptions and behaviours, including their destination choices. Although the rapid decline of international travelers has had a detrimental effect on travel, tourism and hospitality sectors, in some respect, it has also offered a rare opportunity. Like never before, scholars and communication marketing experts working in the

tourism sector have time to analyse and review existing data. Moreover, by using this opportunity to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current communication strategies, they can build new plans of action to ensure a speedy recovery post-pandemic.

1.3 Research Objectives

As a result of fast growing online media platforms, people create and post content in order to exchange a wide array of personal experiences (Booth & Matic, 2011). With the prevalence of sharing travel narratives on social media, the visibility of traveling destinations has greatly increased in recent years (Tham, Croy & Mair, 2013). User-generated content helps people to gain more insight into desired travel destinations (Akehurst, 2009). Additionally, it offers a wide range of benefits for online users who have the opportunity to collaborate with each other and to manage impressions of themselves. Existing research regarding the contribution of online platforms to the tourism industry has shown that travel-related information created by those who actually visited the place is commonly considered as reliable and trustworthy (Lange-Faria, Elliot, 2012). According to Burgess et al. (2009), online posts, “can be trusted because they are real experiences by real people who are independent” (p. 1). For this reason, social media platforms that allow users to post comments, images, videos, blogs, vlogs and other types of content, have become the primary medium of information for a wide range of individuals. In order to improve their understanding of consumer decision-making processes, marketing communication specialists ought to address the changing nature of their communication practices and develop new strategies to satisfy their consumers’ needs.

In view of these arguments, there are four objectives of this study. The primary aim is to identify the perceived Hong Kong destination personality among online network users who

create content on the world's largest travel platform according to Similarweb (2021). This investigation will enhance the understanding of the relationship between the perceived idea of the destination and tourists' personal evaluation of their own identity. In view of existing academic lacuna regarding all self-congruity dimensions and their possible impact on travellers' attitudes, another purpose of this research is to identify which aspects of the theory (private or public) influence tourists' decisions to post online. Pursuing this objective, will shed light on the rationale behind user-generated content on social platforms which may consequently enable more effective communication strategies in the tourism sector. The final goal of this research is to explore the possible outcomes of sharing images, videos, posts, comments and other kinds of content in relation to travellers' experiences at the destination. This will be achieved by investigating how content creation influences travellers' perceived social value and their ability to build interpersonal connections with other network users. The application of modern technologies to build social connections has become a part of daily practices of this generation (Luna-Cortes, Lopez-Bonilla & Lopez-Bonilla, 2019). Identifying the relationships between constructs adopted in this study will provide valuable insight regarding the role of self-concept, the decision-making process behind sharing travel experiences online and the potential results of that behavior.

1.4 Research Question and Hypothesis

Taking into consideration the objectives outlined previously, the following research question and hypotheses are introduced to guide this study. The rationale for proposing the research question and all hypotheses to test the theoretical model is discussed more extensively in chapter four.

RQ1: What are the dimensions of personality traits that are attributed to Hong Kong by tourists?

H1. The personality dimensions of Hong Kong significantly influence private self-congruity (actual and ideal).

H2. The personality dimensions of Hong Kong significantly influence public self-congruity (social and ideal social).

H3. Private self-congruity (actual and ideal) has a positive influence on public self-congruity (social and ideal social)

H4. Private self-congruity (actual and ideal) has a positive influence on the creation of tourism-oriented content.

H5. Public self-congruity (social and ideal social) has a positive influence on the creation of tourism-oriented content.

H6. The creation of tourism-oriented content in online networks have a positive influence on perceived social value.

H7. The creation of tourism-oriented content in online networks have a positive influence on interpersonal connections in online networks.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study will contribute important empirical evidence to the relatively small body of work in the area of destination personality, self-congruity and its potential impact on creation of online content. Moreover, the presented dissertation may assist communication marketing practitioners in designing more effective campaigns to target their desired audience in the relevant tourism sector. This is a particularly urgent need in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, which has significantly reduced the percentage of tourism in Hong Kong, meaning that tourism specialists in the region will benefit from research that will help them to increase interest in Hong Kong, and subsequent revenue.

In Hong Kong, tourism belongs to the group of Four Key Industries responsible for economic sustainability and social stability in the city. Together with logistics, financial services, professional and producer services, it is responsible for providing a source of employment and increasing the growth of other sectors (Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2020). Despite the fact that among the four pillar industries, tourism is the smallest, it greatly assists the city's economy by creating a wide range of career opportunities, especially for low-skilled workers (Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2020).

In 2017, the local government submitted the Tourism Development Blueprint that determines four principal strategies with different implementation goals (Tourism Commission, 2017). The aim of this initiative was to increase the number of travelers to the city and develop a series of original measures to promote Hong Kong. One of the main focuses was reinforcing international campaigns by rectifying gaps in cultural, heritage, green and creative tourism. By consolidating these areas, the government aimed to strengthen the promotion of consumer goods and local attractions. The third tactic sought to increase tourists' use of advanced technologies.

One of the ideas was to introduce free Wi-Fi services around famous landmarks and spots. Finally, the fourth initiative concentrated on trade regulations with the intention of strengthening the quality of the service sectors.

The leading institution responsible for promoting the city abroad is the Hong Kong Tourism Board, which has 21 offices in six regions across the world. In addition to assisting tourists locally, HKTb focuses its efforts in 20 distinct countries which made up 96% of all visitors entering Hong Kong in 2019. Their campaigns target foreigners from important markets, such as China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and the United States which previously had the highest numbers of people visiting the city. They also promote in new markets with healthy economic development such as Russia, India and the Gulf Co-operation countries. To aid their campaigns, HKTb established www.discoverhongkong.com, which is available in 15 different languages.

Despite all the measures taken to enhance Hong Kong's accessibility by travelers, since mid-2019 the tourism industry has been negatively affected by two unprecedented situations. The first being the anti-government protests, sparked in response to the extradition bill. The legislation, created by Hong Kong government, enabled legal authorities to detain and transfer citizens to countries such as China or Taiwan without existing extradition treaties (Lo, 2020). For this reason, the total number of visitors dropped from approximately 65.1 million in 2018 to approximately 55.9 million in 2019 (Tourism Commission, 2020) resulting in a 22.7% reduction in tourism-related expenses. As previously mentioned in the research context section, tourist numbers further decreased in 2020 and 2021 due to a second unforeseen challenge – the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in January 2020. In August 2020, 4,449 individuals visited the city, which was a drop of 99.9% in comparison to August 2019, when around 3.59 million people arrived into Hong Kong. Due to the steady rise of COVID-19 cases, the local government implemented stricter border controls, keeping only three essential routes open. Those include two

land-based ports (Shenzhen Bay Port and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port) as well as the airport checkpoint, crucial for the trade of goods and services. Since the 25th of March 2020, non-residents arriving by planes from foreign countries were not permitted to enter the city until the 9th of August 2021. Due to rigorous entry policy implemented by local authorities, numerous airlines were temporarily suspended or significantly reduced passenger flights to Hong Kong. Consequently, the occupancy of hotel rooms decreased by 48% in the first half of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. Due to the great scarcity of travelers arriving to the city with the purpose of tourism, the unemployment rate in the tourism sector in the period of January to March 2019 – 2021 has continuously risen year by year from 3.6% to 6.8% and to 10.7% (Census and Statistic Department, 2021).

The adverse impact of these two challenges has forced marketing communication practitioners to rethink and subsequently revise the content of their destination communication strategies. In order to restore the number of visitors to pre-pandemic levels, the Hong Kong government and its tourism-oriented industries should thoroughly collaborate when establishing alternative courses of action. The new campaigns should not undervalue the feedback from individuals who visited the city in the past and openly shared their experiences in online networks. If it is confirmed that public self-congruity exerts more influence on tourist behavior, inviting online network users to join campaigns or allowing them to create more content may be a key factor for successful promotion of Hong Kong during the pandemic and especially after it. If advertising on social media may appeal to people's need to be socially consistent and to gain more social approval, the findings of this study may suggest a need for new tourism-oriented strategies that differ from previous campaigns.

1.6 Research Outlines

By identifying perceived Hong Kong destination personality and examining the relationship between recognized personality dimensions and various aspects of self-congruity, this study advances scholarly research in tourism and communication fields. The second chapter presents the literature review and is organized as follows. In the first section, the author reviews the literature on brand personality, destination personality and the possible impact on consumer behaviour. Next the theory of self-congruity is introduced. This section of the dissertation thoroughly analyses current research on the theory and emphasizes the need to review consumer self-concept motives to better understand actual, ideal, social and ideal social self-congruities. The next section concentrates on the creation of online content and its application in communication studies. Finally, the last section of the literature review further investigates empirical research regarding the concepts of perceived social value and interpersonal connections in online networks.

The third chapter addresses the proposed research questions and hypotheses. It outlines the grounds for their formulation and organization. By giving careful consideration to current research on selected concepts, it clarifies the approach to investigating the proposed relationships between these. It also presents the theoretical model for the analysis of all seven hypotheses elected in the second study.

The fourth chapter centers on adopted methodologies. Taking into account the complex nature of the discourse proposed for this study, this section explains in detail the choice of multimethodology. Using more than one method to explore the data is necessary to accomplish all the objectives. The content analysis of online posts regarding past travel experiences in Hong Kong is proposed in the first study. In contrast the second study is designed by implementing an online

survey method. The aim of the third chapter is to justify the choice of this sampling approach and measurement methods. Moreover, this section describes the coding procedures applied in the first study, the outline of the online survey deployed in the second study and the methods of data analysis in both.

In view of these previous chapters, the next two sections will present the findings of study 1 and study 2. The fifth chapter discusses the content analysis of Hong Kong personality traits among visitors' online communications. It interprets the results by providing descriptive analysis of identified personality dimensions. Furthermore, it explains in detail the relationship between the findings of study 1 and its adoption of the theoretical model proposed in study 2. Consequently, the sixth chapter highlights the results of the online survey of past experiences when visiting Hong Kong. This section comprehensively outlines the results of the hypotheses testing by providing descriptive analysis of all considered concepts.

Finally, the seventh chapter concludes the observations from the two studies adopted within the framework of this research. The main focus of this last chapter, besides explaining the complexity of the research, is to better understand the relationship between perceived Hong Kong destination personality, public and private self-congruities, the creation of online content and the outcomes of this behaviour. To achieve these goals, this section reviews the results of hypothesis testing, introduces theoretical implications and considers the impact on marketing communications. It concludes by outlining a number of limitations of this study and recommends additional research on these concepts.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the concepts of brand and destination personalities and will emphasize their important characteristics for better understanding consumer behavior decisions. Despite branding being used to identify and endorse products for more than 50 years, destination branding has only recently attracted the attention of communication practitioners (Kumar, 2016). In order to scrutinize the relationship between tourists' perceived personality of Hong Kong and their self-identity, this paper starts by reviewing previous research on the application of human personality traits in diverse settings. First, the paper introduces the notion of brand personality and explains its impact on human behaviors. Furthermore, it inspects the construct of destination personality to assess the extent of different dimensions that could be applied to Hong Kong's settings. One way of examining tourists' decision processes is by understanding their self-images and exploring the possible relationship therein, as well as their perceived idea about the destination. This is achieved by applying the theory of self-congruity and examining its relationship with destination personality, which is another objective of this project. Therefore, explaining four different forms of self-congruity is necessary to develop a deeper understanding of how different aspects of self-congruity play different roles on individuals' behaviors.

One of the most important features of a successfully managed brand is the ability to establish and maintain emotional ties between products and consumers (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2017). By doing so, the brand generates opportunities to access a substantial number of benefits, such as free promotion and advocacy from consumers. In online network environments this is achieved by receiving comments and general feedback about the characteristics of the product. According to Keller (2003), strong brands ensure and manage anticipated experiences provided to their customers, and consequently differentiate their own characteristics among competitors.

They are engaged in understanding consumers' needs, "so that the desired thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, perceptions, opinions and so on become linked to the brand" (p. 9). For this reason, this paper reviews studies on user-generated content and its possible relations with different aspects of self-congruity.

In the first part of this chapter, the author reviews the literature on brand personality, destination personality and their possible impact on consumer behavior. Following this, the theory of self-congruity and its relations with the usage of online networks are introduced. The next section discusses the characteristics of creating content in online media and presents some widespread travel-related social networks. Finally, the last part of literature review examines prior investigations and findings regarding the notion of perceived social value and its links with user-generated content.

2.2 Brand Personality

Previous research shows that people more commonly obtain products and services, not based on their functional and visual aspects, but mostly because of their symbolic values and attributes (Maehle, Otnes, & Supphellen, 2011). That is why the concept of brand personality has gained more attention among business and academic societies. As observed by Tong et al. (2018), "brand personality is an efficient way of creating and building a connection with consumers worldwide" (p. 196). According to Aaker (1997), the key success factor in branding relies not only on the skill of designing its own identity but especially in managing intended associations with a brand in consumers' minds. Although brands are inanimate objects, people have tendencies to identify and evaluate them using the same features and qualities that they use to define other individuals (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Aaker (1997), defines brand personality as "a set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 347). Brands that demonstrate

well-established personalities can influence consumers' behaviors and better acknowledge their decision-making processes (Sirgy, 1982). On the other hand, customers develop the ability to communicate and emphasize personal characters and perspectives by identifying themselves with selected brands (Tong, Su & Xu, 2018). As a result, brand personality provides self-expressive benefits for products, as well as their users (Aaker, 1999). It helps to generate and maintain connections between them, which are founded on perceived symbolic values that they tend to represent (Sung & Kim, 2010). Research on brand personality initiated and significantly helped to progress further studies on destination personality. As the outcome, the author of this project begins by reviewing the construct of brand personality which helps to observe and interpret human brand choices.

Aaker's (1997) "Dimensions of brand personality" which was published in the *Journal of Marketing Research* is considered to be the most prominent and influential work on the symbolic use of brands, ratified by the number of more than 11,000 citations. The study greatly encouraged the examination of the construct in the communication field by developing its theoretical framework. Researchers, who investigated the theory in different environments, aimed to provide empirical justification for the effects of symbolic traits and their potential impact on consumer behavior (Freling & Forbes, 2005). As brands are commonly recognized with human-like characteristics, their evaluation changes based on customers' personal experiences with their products (Maehle, Otnes & Supphellen, 2011).

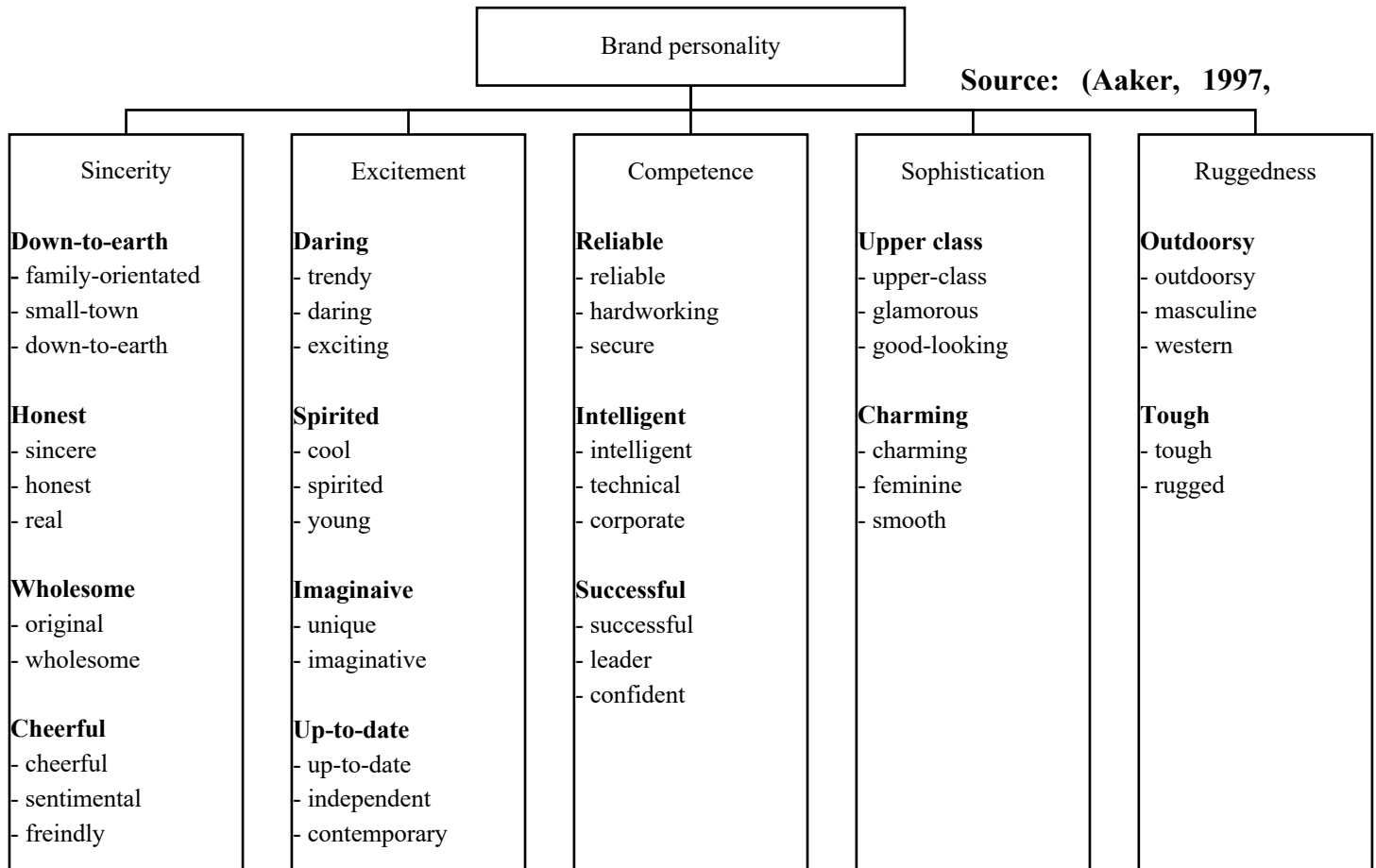
Well-established and visible personalities are key aspects of social values which people associate with the most iconic brands in the world. World-renowned companies such as Apple, Nike, Google, Coca Cola and Starbucks are universally identified with certain qualities. Being "creative", "trendy", "intelligent", "energetic" etc., distinguishes these firms among others and helps them to become leaders in diverse business sectors. Their communication specialists can

quickly identify key functions of certain characteristics that their brands represent and therefore, design communication strategies concerning these facets.

One of the biggest outcomes of Aaker's (1997) work was related to establishing a 42-item Brand Personality Scale (BPS) that considered five distinct dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Those dimensions included diverse facets that are represented by many personality traits associated with the brands (Table 2a). In this regard, companies that are considered sincere may be represented by qualities like family-oriented, down-to-earth, honest, or sentimental. The attributes of the excitement dimension will include qualities that are up-to-date, imaginative, unique, and cool. Competence is associated with brands that present themselves as reliable, hard-working, successful, and intelligent. Sophistication represents brands that are described as glamorous and may be connected with the upper class. Finally, ruggedness is affiliated with toughness, strength, and outdoorsy character. Although one brand can be represented by several dimensions, its communication strategy is typically based on one of its unique characteristics that are most commonly associated with its name. As stated by Maehle, et al. (2011), "sincere brands share family-related associations and high morals, exciting brands offer consumers the opportunity to experience exciting feelings and are related to special 'exciting' occasions, competent brands are mostly associated with expertise and quality, sophisticated brands are usually of feminine nature, whereas rugged brands are of masculine nature" (p. 290). When creating BPS, Aaker (1997) firstly derived the scale on the five-factor model of personalities and then adjusted it to the branding environment. The Big-Five structure can be considered as a categorized model of human traits, which were divided into five distinct domains representing unlike behaviors (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann, 2003). Those include Emotional Stability, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience. Each of these constructs represents certain characteristics of individuals and summarizes a much larger number

of tendencies that explain why people act, feel, and think in a specific way. Therefore, each domain can be explicit by contradictory human characteristics (closed vs. open, introverted vs. extraverted, etc.).

Table 2a: Dimensions of Brand Personality



p.353)

Additionally, BPS was also founded on other personality trait scales used in psychology, communication, marketing, as well as other studies regarding associations with the brands (Kosteljik, 2016). Aaker (1997) thought the scale may not adapt well when applied in a cross-cultural context and further research has validated these concerns. For instance, she examined how symbolic characteristics related to brands are designed and organized across diverse cultures,

in this case, Japan and Spain (Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera 2001). She found that some extent of dimensions may emerge differently, and some attributes can alter between dimensions when dealing with distinct cultures. Podnar (2014) also pointed out that people have the tendency to attribute human traits to non-human objects. Even though consumers are prone to ascribe goods with diverse assets, not all the terms which define people may be relevant when characterizing brands (Kosteljik, 2016). For marketing communication practitioners, the most positive outcome of customer identification with the product is the intention to repurchase it, as well as passing positive word of mouth to others (Kuenzel & Hallidays, 2008). People justify each other based on patterns of behavior, physical characteristics, opinions, assumptions, or demographic profiles (Aaker, 1997). On the other hand, the personalities of diverse brands are established through the communication processes between them and consumers (Klipfel, Barclay & Bockorny, 2014).

Maehle et al. (2011) investigated which elements form an understanding of brand personality and how individuals create their opinions on certain brands. The results indicate that perceived qualities associated with the brands strongly depend on particular product categories. Nike is a great example of a brand which successfully differentiated and established its personality traits for communication practices with its customers. By producing sports apparel and equipment, it has become the most valuable sports business brand in the world (Forbes, 2019). One of its keys to success is its ability to be strongly recognized with certain distinct qualities and traits which the company commonly exhibits in all marketing communication strategies. Allazawi (2019) studied which symbolic personalities apply to Nike and found that four dimensions (sincerity, excitement, competence, and sophistication) are typically linked with it. People tend to identify themselves with Nike as the brand is represented by positive aspects of human personalities. That identification brings beneficial effects for the company, as it often means loyalty towards the product and positive word of mouth (Lin, 2010).

Until now, the majority of researchers who decide to review the role of brand personalities choose the BPS scale to identify dimensions of studied subjects. Tong et al. (2018) who scrutinized luxury fashion brands, found that brand personality substantially affects trust as well as commitment towards the brand. In their empirical analysis of brand personality effect, Freling and Forbes (2005) confirmed its beneficial effect by pointing out that, “subjects exposed to a brand's personality will have a significantly greater number of brand associations” (p. 404). That is why brand personality concepts have been applied to the wide spectrum of contexts, environments, and cultures, like city brands (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri & Kurtulus 2010), sport (Carlson, Donovan & Cumiskey, 2009), restaurant industry (Lee, Back & Kim, 2009) or politics (Smith, 2009).

Although BPS is considered by some researchers as the most consistent, credible, and comprehensive instrument to evaluate brand personality (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006), it also has acquired numerous criticisms. Particularly, Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) have called into question the correctness of BPS as “existing measures for the construct of brand personality do not measure that construct and introduce conceptual confusion” (p. 153). In their view, BPS measures aspects of brand identity, and personality should only be considered as one among other facets. The main reason for this situation has to do with the lack of precise and strict definitions of the term brand personality, which ought to be reconsidered and defined again. According to Kumar (2016) BPS deserves attention for refinement and further discussion when applied in cross-cultural settings. Aaker (1997) agrees with this and points out that the scale should be expanded when investigating representatives of different backgrounds. Although BPS is the most commonly used instrument to measure brand personality, some researchers have decided to search for alternatives. On the ground of all the criticisms, Geuens and her colleagues (2009)

designed an original brand personality scale that was found to be more efficient, especially when applied in the intercultural context.

One crucial distinction between Aaker (1997) and other researchers from the area of psychology emanated from different interpretations of personality traits. Instead of using exclusively humanlike traits, she included social and demographic characteristics as well as gender roles, which in this case were unrelated to human personalities. Some researchers used extent components in their studies, that did not represent human traits but other attributes like “expensive”, “good looking”, “young” or “old” (Sung & Tinkham, 2008). Most of the criticisms were based on excessive reliance on the Big Five model, and the fact that not all personality traits should be used when studying brands (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). Considering all human characteristics may cause theoretical errors and therefore call findings into question. For this reason, Geuenes, et al. (2009), created a new measure which “proved to be reliable for between-brand between-category comparisons, for between-brand within-category comparisons, and for between-respondent comparisons” (p. 97). The intention was to establish a more stringent definition of the term which eliminated non-personality components. The principles of the scale were attributed to its transparency and a small volume of measure items. The new scale was evaluated and proved to be reliable after implementation to measure personalities in cross-cultural settings of 10 different countries. Ever since, numerous researchers who examined brand personalities used Geuens’ scale, as their findings had a higher chance to be replicable. One of these studies was done by Matzler et al. (2016) who explored how cultural characteristics influence brand personality perception towards touristic intentions. Scholars pointed out that tourism destinations often employ humanlike traits to generate beneficial responses, but the tourists’ feedback may differ between cultures. Despite that, brand personality turned out to be a “useful concept to describe different perceptions of nations as tourism destinations” (p. 507). This

project attempts to apply the notion of the brand into destination context by investigating tourists' perception of Hong Kong and more specifically its personality traits.

2.3 Destination Personality

Brand personality with the frame of reference to tourism-related context is commonly termed as destination personality. The most prominent and cited publication on the theoretical framework and its application to the tourism environment was done by Ekinci and Hosany (2006). Two scholars define the concept as “the set of personality traits associated with a destination” (p.127). For tourist destinations to be visible, they need to identify and manifest their unique and strong characteristics. A destination that can understand their persistent qualities may receive more attention from potential consumers and strengthen their position in the market. Additionally, it can efficiently affect the selection processes, particularly when it is possible to establish emotional connections between the place and visitors (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). For example, brands can be recognized as extrovert, youthful, or energetic. According to Lin & Roberts (2019), “a well-established destination personality facilitates differentiation of destinations and helps to create emotional loyalty and increase repeat visitors” (p. 1).

Ekinci and Hosany (2006) originated studies on brand personality by adopting Aaker's (1997) BPS scale. They wanted to recognize if tourists attribute any humanlike traits to destination choices. In their opinion, “tourism destinations are rich in terms of symbolic values and personality traits, given that they consist of a bundle of tangible and intangible components (e.g., visitor attractions, hotels, and people) associated with particular values, histories, events, and feelings” (p. 9). Their investigation revealed that people have tendencies to connote and ascribe several qualities to different places in the same way they do with consumer products. If the destination personality is well-communicated, the chances for promotions and

recommendations are significantly higher. Besides that, the authors determined three important dimensions of destination personality: sincerity, excitement, and conviviality. The dimension of sincerity includes traits such as reliable, sincere, successful, intelligent, and wholesome. The dimension of excitement comprises traits such as exciting, original, daring, and spirited. Finally, the original dimension of conviviality, takes into account traits such as friendly, family-oriented, and charming. Conviviality is a new dimension, specific to the tourism area and as observed by scholars, it plays an important role as it “moderate the impact of cognitive image on the intention to recommend” (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006, p.137). This dimension was not identified in previous studies on brand personalities.

Kaplan et al. (2010), after applying the brand personality concept into the cities, has also discovered two new and important dimensions: malignancy and conservatism. Both of these are associated with places that present rather adverse connotations and may end up in negative experiences with human experiences. Malignancy includes traits such as deception, unreliability, or rudeness. Conservatism takes into consideration religious traits and those that underline the importance of tradition. As observed by Chi et al. (2018) even though a vast number of researchers have applied Aaker’s BPS scale for measuring distinctive settings of consumer behaviors (tourism destination, commercial brands, cities, restaurants, or hotels) some of them decided to design original measurement instruments (Table 2b). For example, in recent years, researchers can observe an increasing number of studies concerning destination personalities from the perspective of Eastern cultures. For example, Chu and Sung (2011) were one of the first to investigate brand dimensions in China. They were able to detect some new scopes, like traditionalism, joyfulness, and trendiness which were more explicit to Chinese society. They interpreted these findings by pointing out that “symbolic meaning embedded in Chinese commercial brands is under considerable influence of both western modernism and Chinese

traditionalism” (p.163). The familiar situation was observed by Xie and Lee (2013) who considered the destination personality of the Chinese capital, Beijing. To examine which dimensions of personality are associated with the city, they applied Aaker’s (1997) BPS scale. The results revealed that only four out of five dimensions were verified: excitement, sophistication, competency, and ruggedness. Surprisingly the fifth dimension – sincerity, which commonly appeared in western context studies, did not emerge for Beijing settings. As acknowledged by Pan, et al. (2017), this situation may be explained by the fact that “Chinese travelers prefer different words and descriptions to express their understanding of sincerity” (p.340).

Discrepancies may be attributed to distinctive aspects of tourist destinations and consumer perceptions of their personality and beliefs, especially among different cultures. Aaker’s scale was established to measure the personality of brands and products that are conspicuous. On the other hand, during their holidays, travelers may experience certain situations that cannot be predicted by tourism agencies, informed by less visible aspects related to people's self-identities. Ekinci et al. (2007) noticed that destination ought to be considered as brands since there are comprising tangible and intangible attributes and each place may be represented by some unique attributes that can’t be associated with other destinations. Examples of tangible components are hotels, local food, souvenirs, famous spots, facilities, or local community. Intangible ones include tourists’ experiences, feelings, history, or culture (Shankar, 2018). Moreover, Sirgy and Su (2012) observed that individuals establish their images of potential destinations by taking into account two different aspects of place. The first may be regarded as controllable facets, such as the location, price, attractions, or methods of promotions. Tourism-related industries can adequately manage and monitor these aspects and quickly adjust them to the present market situation. The second one addresses more symbolic components, which are less controllable (especially for

tourism industries) as they rely on visitors' character traits, beliefs, preferences, and attitudes. These value-expressive attributes include things like the experiences with the local community, the feeling of safety, or attitude toward a destination which can be based on individuals match between own values and perceived image of the place.

In order to make their destinations exist and become visible for potential visitors, tourism organizations need to consider all of these attributes. Taking into account consumers' personalities as well as the perceptions of the place helps to attract travelers and what is the most important – differentiate its character from competitors (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Pike (2016), in his book on destination marketing, discusses the notion of commodification. He notices a growing number of destinations that are becoming less distinct, due to ineffective communication strategies and the challenges related to rising competition. In the battle of consumer, one of the first steps in building a successful plan that could attract travelers is to identify very particular, unique characteristics of the place. After distinguishing those exclusive qualities, the communication practitioners need to include them in their promoting strategies. In this way, destination receives the opportunity to be recognized and therefore present its own character which may enhance the chance for tourists' identification with the place.

2.4 Destination Personality and Consumer Perceptions, Attitudes and Behavior

Destination personality was implemented to anticipate and understand tourists' behaviors in numerous countries. The importance of establishing an explicit personality was observed by Gardner and Levy (1995) in their study on consumers' conceptions of brand characteristics. The authors underlined the major role of selected brand's name, which in general should represent symbolic values and assets, "the net result is a public image, a character or personality that may be more important for the overall status (and sales) of the brand than many technical facts about

the product” (p.134). In the context of destination personality, marketers must create campaigns that will consider humanlike traits that can precisely attribute particular features of the place. Using metaphorical connotations to personify tourist destinations represents only one aspect of a successful branding strategy. In addition to that, marketers need to constantly monitor and examine how destination personality is relevant and applicable among cultures. As certain values, attitudes, and beliefs differ between societies it is important to address these aspects when studying brands or destination traits.

In recent years, researchers commonly examine the relationship between individuals’ self-concepts and their impressions of certain locations. They also explore the possible outcomes of the match or mismatch between studied constructs. For example, Murphy et al. (2007) investigated the perceived destination personality for Whitsunday Islands and Queensland in Australia. Findings confirmed a strong relationship between motivation to visit a place and the observed traits of the place. Pitt et al. (2007) concentrated his research on 10 African countries and discovered that not all of them are able to successfully identify and communicate their brand qualities. Such a situation may negatively impact general recognition and intention for visiting, which was observed in that case. Sahin and Baloglu (2011) examined brand personality, and more specifically, general convictions among the representatives of various countries that decide to visit Istanbul. They found that the perceptiveness of the same place may vary for people who come from different cultures and societies. Ekinici et al. (2007) also based his study on Turkey’s destination area – the Mediterranean region, intending to investigate the role of local community members and their possible impact on the perceived image of destination among tourists. Researchers reported that visitors’ impressions of the residents play an important role in overall tourism experience. It can bring beneficial effects on destinations, such as recommendations to other individuals, which may in turn influence tourists traveling decisions and motivate them to

revisit the place. Hultman et al. (2015) asked Taiwanese respondents about their practices regarding visited places in the recent past. The study found relationships between the role of brand personality and tourists' satisfaction, which frequently determine people for positive word of mouth intentions and therefore, free promotion of the visited place.

Despite the significant aspects of studies related to the destination personality for better understanding tourist behaviors and desires, until now no study would try to investigate which human traits may be associated with Hong Kong. As a result, the first objective of this research is to recognize the city's specific individualities by establishing dimensions that would precisely characterize its personality. Although Hong Kong is a part of China, its image in a multicultural sense may be completely different for representatives of different cultural backgrounds, especially when in comparison with other Chinese cities. One of the reasons for this situation is related to its historical political transition, which impacted citizens' identification with China. As observed by Fung (2004, p.399) in postcolonial Hong Kong "people started to face the reality of appropriating a new dual Hong Kong- China identity, and hence there is a clear trend of increasing identification with Hong Kong as well as the Chinese authorities". As a multi-faceted tourist destination which attracts millions of visitors from around the globe every year, there is a necessity to better understand its personality in the eyes of the tourist.

This is especially important in the present years, which has brought vast changes for Hong Kong tourism. According to the Hong Kong Tourism Board (2019) – which promotes the place, as well as monitoring the number of travellers the city attracts – Hong Kong attracted approximately 65 million visitors in 2018, making it one of the most popular destinations globally. As one of the biggest international cities in the world, Hong Kong is considered to be an 'upscale' traveling destination with skyscrapers, luxury hotels, shopping malls, as well as being rich in traditional Chinese culture and natural beauty. Nevertheless, since June 2019, Hong

Kong has experienced the protest of citizens, demanding certain political reforms and changes in governing the city (Cheung & Hughes, 2020). That situation has significantly impacted the overall number of tourists, which has drastically dropped, and by the end of 2019 was 14.2% lower than it was in 2018 (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2020). In addition to that, due to the outbreak of Coronavirus disease, Hong Kong has encountered other serious social and economic challenges. The number of visitors in the first quarter of 2020 has dropped by 80.9% compared with the same period of the previous year. Additionally, from the 25th of March 2020, Hong Kong has not allowed any non-residents to enter the city and that restriction has also been applied to residents of China, Macau, and Taiwan. For this reason, at the end of March 2020, the number of visitors in comparison with the same month of the previous year has dropped by 99%.

This situation creates an opportunity for the destination communication practitioners and tourism organization in Hong Kong to review and implement the best possible strategy, to bring back tourists to the city once the circumstances allow for it. On this note, the first part of this project will investigate the destination personality of Hong Kong among international travelers in order to better understand its perceived image after two crises. Establishing destination personality and its unique attributes is necessary for developing communication strategies that will be adaptive for international tourists considering Hong Kong as a destination once the borders for visitors are opened again.

Table 2b: Summary of studies on Brand Personality

Author	Country where the study was conducted	Number of dimensions	Product/Services
Aaker (1997)	United States	1	Automotive brands
Ferrandi et al. (2000)	France	5	Consumer brands
J. L. Aaker et al. (2001)	Japan, Spain	6	Consumer brands
Aaker, Benet-Martinez and Garolera (2001)	Japan, Spain	5	Consumer brands
Caprara et al. (2001)	Italy	5	Consumer brands
Caprara and Barbaranelli (2001)	Italy	5	Consumer brands
Smit et al. (2003)	Netherlands	6	Consumer brands
D'Astous and Lévesque (2003)	Canada	5	Stores
Ekinci and Riley (2003)	United Kingdom	1	Restaurants and hotels
Hosany et al. (2006)	England	3	Tourism destinations
Bosnjak et al. (2007)	Germany	4	Consumer brands
Milas and Mlacic (2007)	Croatia	6	Consumer brands
Geuens et al. (2009)	Belgium	5	Consumer brands
Kim et al. (2010)	US	5	Media brands
Herbst and Merz (2011)	Germany	3	Business brands
Romero (2012)	Mexico	7	Consumer brands
Rauschnabel et al. (2016)	Germany	6	Universities

Source: (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006)

2.5 Self-Congruity Theory

Self-congruity is commonly categorized as the logical extension of self-concept. The notion of “self” is an essential aspect of every human being as it mediates between an individual’s awareness and their identities. This section of the literature review introduces and classifies a substantial amount of research on self-congruity theory as the natural extension of destination personality. Early studies related to consumer behaviors were mostly looking for symbolic links between products and the notion of self (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). Individuals can develop certain ideas and beliefs about themselves, but these may be reconsidered and transformed thanks to consciousness. One of the most important characteristics of “self” is the ability to acknowledge one’s own qualities and therefore, be distinctive among others. As pointed out by Baumeister

(2011), “the self is not contained in the brain, but rather the human brain learns to operate a self” (p. 48).

Rogers (1959) in his deliberations about the theory of personality, determined the three key components. The first one refers to self-image, the second to self-esteem, and the third, which is one of the foundations for this study, is the notion of ideal self. Since self-concept affects an individual’s needs, desires, and values, it was applied by researchers in the context of consumer behavior. One of the reasons for which people select specific brands, products, destinations, or services, is the persuasion of their role in determining their identity. Humans are prone to recognize and distinguish some products among others concerning their symbolic meanings (Aaker, 1997). If these meanings do not represent one’s perception of self, there is a high chance for converting patterns of behavior. According to Klipfel, et al. (2014), to achieve harmony between self-image and the concept of the ideal self, consumers are willing to “encourage behavior in others that will reinforce their beliefs about themselves” (p. 132). Lack of consistency between the self-image and the vision of the ideal self may adversely affect an individual’s self-esteem. On the other hand, if there is a bond between one’s self-concept and consumer product, the person is considered to have achieved self-congruity.

Researchers have found that in addition to the functional values of a product, consumers’ purchase desire is also driven by the similarity between their self-image and the brand image, which is known as the self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1985). This theory is applicable in diverse contexts, including tourism (Sirgy & Su, 2000). According to Chon (1992), during the decision process, consumers assess not just the functional features of the products, they choose ones that explicitly present their value-expressive qualities, like personality characteristics. For instance, if a technology brand obtained the image that describes the traits of their usual customer as innovative, passionate, and influential, the target audience may consider those qualities as it can

also be identified with them in case of purchase. As a result, the higher the similarity between an individual's self-image and the image of the product (innovative, passionate, and influential), the more likely the consumer is to have positive attitudes towards the product, to purchase the product, and to become loyal to the brand (Klipfel, Barclay & Bockorny, 2014; He, Li and Harris, 2012).

The rationale of this behavior is based on the fact that people are motivated to maintain their self-consistency and the need to enhance their self-esteem (Sirgy, 1982). The former is concerned with whether a certain decision or behavior is consistent with the actual self-congruity of an individual and the latter with whether a certain decision or behavior is consistent with an individual's ideal self-congruity. In other words, the former is concerned with whether this decision or behavior reflects who the individual is and the latter whether it will help them become who they wish to be. When considering the purchase of a new product, consumers select those items that are equivalent to the perceived images of the self-concept. As stated by Sirgy (2018), "incongruity with their self-concept tend to cause a dissonance and psychological discomfort that threatens the person's belief about the self" (p. 200).

Sirgy (1985) applied four observed dimensions of self-image into marketing communication research. Further literature on consumer behavior has examined the congruity between the image of products and all four self-images: actual self-image, which refers to how an individual sees himself; ideal self-image, which refers to how an individual likes to see himself; social self-image, which refers to how an individual believes he is seen by others; and ideal social self-image, which refers to how an individual would like to be seen by others (Hosany and Martin, 2012). Therefore, the first two, which concentrate on the private image are *actual self-congruity* and *ideal self-congruity*. They have gained much more attention from scholars than the other two dimensions, which focus on public perceptions. *Actual self-congruity* is determined

by the consistency between the brand's image and actual self-concept (this is the way I am). *Ideal self-congruity* between the brand's image and ideal self-concept (this is the best version of me). To explore more about the public sphere of self-congruity, Sirgy conceptualized two other dimensions of the theory. *Social self-congruity* can be observed when there is a high level of consistency between the brand's image and social self-concept (this is the way others see me). On the other hand, *ideal social self-congruity* can be determined by the brand's image and ideal social self-concept (this is the way I wish others would see me). In the digital era, public dimensions of self-congruity create a great chance to fill the gap in research, as they were not explored as much as other two related to private aspects of individuals. This study considers all four dimensions of self-congruity.

According to Klipfel et al. (2014), self-congruity can become a key factor in affirming brand personality, as much as it is the product of brand personality. There are two primary methods to measure its aspects. The traditional method is to tap into the subject's perception of the image of the product or destination, and the subject's perception of their self-image along a predetermined set of image attributes and add the self-congruity scores across all image dimensions (Sirgy et al., 1997). However, this method has not always produced valid results due to three inherent problems: the use of discrepancy scores, the possible use of irrelevant images, and the use of the compensatory decision rule (Sirgy et al., 1997). Based on these observations, Sirgy et al. (1997) obtained an original, valid method that directly measures self-congruence holistically, claiming "new method does not cue subjects to a specific image category or dimension. The method cues subjects to conjure up their own image of the product user" (p. 233). In a new, integrated model, researchers ask respondents to describe the typical user of the brand and product and then check its consistency with their self-concepts. The motivations for choosing

the selected brand by respondents is reflected by their self-motive socialness, which varies from private versus public (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak & Sirgy 2012).

The body of work on the validity of the self-congruity theory in the context of tourist behavior is less comprehensive than research in the context of consumer behavior. Researchers who completed studies related to the destination image and destination personality had mostly considered the private aspect of self-congruity. This research can be divided into two groups of interest: pre-visit and post-visit behaviors and intentions. Therefore, Chon (1992), was the first to link the theory within a tourism context in his study on self and destination image congruity. His paper underlined the importance of recognizing personality-related attributes by destination marketing organizations. The author distributed 382 mail questionnaires to individuals who visited Norfolk in Virginia. The study examined tourists' level of satisfaction with the trip and their perceived level of similarity with regular visitors to the city. The final results, based on 225 received surveys, revealed a strong correlation between the level of travelers' satisfaction and self-image/destination-image congruity. People who observed small inconsistencies between the typical city's traveler image and their actual or ideal self-image were more pleased with the past experiences of traveling. In contrast, those for who the disparities between images were much higher, the level of perceived satisfaction from the trip was much lower. These findings brought the attention of other scholars and opened a new line of research.

Litvin and Goh (2002), examined the validity of the theory in a tourism-oriented context. They applied Chon's (1992) measure method into their own investigation and added a second created by Malhotra (1988). The difference between the two original scales for measuring self-congruity was related to their frame of reference. Malhotra's (1988) scale included fifteen contrasting adjective pairs that were previously applied in a consumer product and behavior settings. Chon's five Likert scale questions, on the other hand, were used in a tourism-related

context. Compare with Chon's (1992) study, this one concentrated on examining the probability of traveling to selected destinations and the level of self-congruity with these places. The authors choose three countries – New Zealand, India, and Japan – due to their substantial differences and their recognition among study respondents. The findings were based on 139 questionnaires distributed in Singapore and included both scales as well as additional questions about the interest and likelihood of visiting three destinations. Surprisingly, there were visible differences in results among the scales. By using Chon's measurement instrument, the authors observed a strong relationship between the interest and possibility of traveling, and the actual and ideal self-congruity. On the contrary, Malhotra's scale did not expose any significant correlations in all aspects of congruity. Such findings brought into question the application of the theory in the tourism environment, which in the end progressed the research in destination personality, perception of self-image among tourists, particularly their attitudes before and after traveling.

Kastenholz (2004) explored how self-congruity may influence the decision to visit rural destinations. To categorize the characteristics of such places, the author identified certain qualities that were included in five distinct dimensions: pleasant, calm, informal, simple, and emotional. To measure the possible relationship between self-congruity and perceived image of the rural destination, the author decided to adopt the Malhotra's (1981) scale, which included sixteen semantic differences. The collection of 2280 questionnaires (with a participation rate of 85%) took one year and it was placed in Portugal. The results showed that theory may be applicable in a rural-oriented context. They also revealed a strong effect of self-congruity for revisiting the tourist destination, but it did not show any intention to recommend. As Kastenholz (2004) noted, "it is likely that repeat visitation and identification with the destination reinforce each other mutually" (p.721). These observations brought more questions about the applicability of the theory in the marketing of tourism.

One of the most commonly cited academic articles which applied self-congruity in the context of tourism was done by Beerli, et. al (2007). The authors were able to clarify the function of the theory, as well as re-examine and confirm the validity and reliability of Malhotra's (1988) scale in destination choice context. Their study population included 552 residents of Gran Canaria in Spain. The authors selected three diverse locations: Kenya, Paris, and the Dominican Republic, which were considered as three of the most popular holiday destinations among the local community. The questionnaires included Malhotra's (1981) scale which was purposely modified for the context of the study and additional questions concerned with destination preferences, as well as past experiences with discussed locations. Empirical research revealed that a strong relationship between self-concept and destination image may play a crucial role in tourists' goals to visit the place. If a person highly engages in the manner of selecting the desired destination, the chance of picking the place that is congruent with that individual self-concept will be also high. This condition may change for people who have previously visited the place, as there are distinctive aspects related to past experiences that may also influence their final decision. As mentioned by the authors, this group of travelers has tendencies to recognize and assess messages in another way than first-time visitors, according to their reminiscences about the destination. This means tourists who aim to revisit a destination, pay more attention to functional characteristics, and not the holistic features associated with the place.

Sirgy and Su (2000) pointed out that self-congruity engages in the procedure of linking tourists' self-concept to a destination visitor image. Nevertheless, different aspects of self-congruity affect general traveler behaviors as they are compromised by fulfilling various drives like self-consistency, self-esteem, or social approval. These observations may explain the findings of another study by Wang (2004). The author investigated the behaviors of mainland Chinese tourists who decided to revisit Hong Kong. He found that individuals who decide to

repeat their trips, commonly extend the length of stay and therefore spend more on shopping or hotels. Although they participate less in tourism-related activities, they engage more in ones concerning the life of the community. During the process of designing strategies, destination marketing organizations should recognize the distinct character of these groups and as a result, create different campaigns.

Most of the previously discussed studies regarding the theory of self-congruity and their application in a tourism context verified its major role in investigating both pre-visit and post-visit travelers' behaviors. However, the investigation done by Murphy et al. (2007), challenges some of these findings based on their own examination of relationships between travelers' needs, brand personality, self-congruity, behavioral intentions, and satisfaction. As a studied location, the scholars selected a famous Australian destination choice, Whitsunday Islands. Surprisingly, the final results revealed a lower probability to visit the destination by the group of individuals whose relationships between self-congruity and the place were stronger than the group where this relationship was lower. Despite that, Murphy, et al. (2007), showed that, "where [a] tourist can make an association between a destination and a destination brand personality, and where this destination is consistent with their desired holiday experience, a high level of self-congruity will exist between tourist's self-image and their perception of the destination" (p.45). At the same time, high levels of self-congruity may positively impact the level of satisfaction for those individuals who are familiar with the destination, but it does not necessarily mean a higher probability of visiting.

In his second article Murphy, et al. (2007) decided to examine the brand personality of two famous tourist locations in Australia, Whitsunday and Cairns. To do that, the authors applied Aaker's (1997) scale, which helped to investigate the possible variations between the perceived images of two locations. Additionally, they intended to recognize if these disparities also affect

the levels of self-congruity with locations. The final results revealed that the perceived personality traits of Whitsunday's were more positive than those associated with Cairns. The four aspects of self-congruity were also higher for Whitsundays. Despite these outcomes, the number of previous visits and the possibility of new ones was observed to be significantly higher for Cairns than for Whitsundays. Surprisingly, the location with a lower level of self-congruity received higher interest not only among individuals who had already visited the place but also among those who were considering traveling there in the future. The authors suggested additional studies of the theory concerning destination personalities and their roles in tourist' choices.

Usakli and Baloglu (2011) considered these suggestions by applying self-congruity theory into their study about the perceived personality of one of the most famous American tourist destinations, Las Vegas. They also wanted to examine how the possible relationship between one's individual perceived image of the city and of the self, may influence decisions to return and recommend that place to others. The findings, which were based on 368 respondents, revealed Las Vegas was identified with five diverse dimensions: vibrancy, sophistication, competence, contemporary, and sincerity. Additionally, the results underlined the strong implication of these dimensions on travelers' decisions to revisit, and to encourage others to include Las Vegas in their holiday plans. Based on the findings, self-congruity has proven to be one of the major mediators in the relationship between destination personality and travelers' choices.

Many endeavors and measures have been adopted to recognize the implications of self-congruity theory on distinct social behaviors. Those include intentions to promote the place by doing some recommendations, intentions to visit as well as return, the impact on satisfaction from past experiences, and loyalty towards the destination. Despite that, the literature on the validity of the self-congruity theory in the consumer behavior context is rich and has examined its validity regarding all four dimensions (Hosany and Martin, 2012). Nevertheless, literature in the context

of tourism has mostly examined its validity regarding the private self-congruity (actual and ideal) with no empirical data regarding the public self-congruity (actual social and ideal social). The reason for this inconsistency may be because products, such as clothes or new technological devices, are more visible to the consumer. As a result, the needs of self-consistency and self-esteem of the public self plays a significant role in influencing consumers' purchase decisions. On the other side, tourist destinations that people have travelled to used to be much less visible to others before the existence of social media, and especially social networks. This situation had changed only a decade ago after Sirgy (1982) developed the theory of self-congruity and consequently the needs of the public self became more frequently into play in tourist behavior.

The outline of research on self-congruity theory reveals its significant role in influencing tourist behaviors. Findings of previously mentioned studies support that the match between consumer's self-concept and the perceived image of the destination may positively influence a individual's pre-trip decisions and post-trip behavior. When selecting a holiday destination, people consider those places that highly match with their self-concepts. Experiencing a high level of self-congruity during the trip may impact the overall level of satisfaction (Bonsjak et al. 2014), loyalty towards the place (Chi & Del Chiappa, 2018), recommendations (Beerli et al. 2007), and intentions to revisit the destination (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). One objective of this research is to investigate self-congruity, and more precisely to divide its public and private dimensions in the hypothesized model and analyze the relationship of both individually with destination personality. Sirgy and Su (2000) recommended to examine and consider self-congruity as a multidimensional construct. They created an original integrated model to investigate the relationship between the concept and travel behavior. They emphasized that self-congruity is the key element that affects individuals' motivation and choice of travel destination. For this reason, private and public aspects of the theory should be equally investigated by the scholars.

The goal of this research is to consider four dimensions of self-congruity to investigate how they are influenced by tourists' perceived personality of Hong Kong. Social networking sites connect and enhance contact between existing and potential consumers (Vukasovic, 2013). Such use of digital technology in every aspect of individuals' lives is formed by new opportunities and challenges for commercial organizations. To create the most effective methods of interaction between the destination and visitors, marketing communication practitioners need to not only understand the characteristics of the place that they represent but foremost, the nature of their consumers. One way of doing that is by examining communication methods and especially the content that is created between users on diverse social media platforms. Owing to the visible limitations in a literature field considering private and public aspects of self-congruity and their influence on social behaviors in the online environment in the tourism context, this study aims to fill that gap.

Table 2c: Summary of studies on self-congruity and tourist destinations

	Type of self-congruity				Period		The Outcome					
	Actual self-congruity	Ideal self-congruity	Social self-congruity	Ideal social self-congruity	Pre-trip	Post-trip	Satisfaction	Intention to visit	Loyalty	Word of mouth	Re-visit intention	Perceived social value
Chan (1992)	X	X				X	X					
Sirgy & Su (2000)	X	X	X	X								
Goh & Litvin (2000)	X	X			X			X				
Litvin & Goh (2002)	X	X			X			X				
Kastenholz (2004)	X					X				X	X	
Murphy et al. (2007)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	
Beerli et al. (2007)	X	X			X							
Hung & Patrick (2011)	X	X	X	X	X							
Usakli & Baloglu (2011)	X	X			X					X	X	
Bosnjak et al. (2011)	X	X	X	X		X				X	X	

2.6 Self-Congruity and the use of Online Networks

Researchers who investigated tourism and identity-related motivations noted that each of the tourist experiences becomes an essential component for recognizing the reasons behind traveling. It also helps to identify the effects of such actions on a tourist destination. Bond and Falk (2013), found that the major role of traveling to new places and returning to previously visited ones is the opportunity to, “explore, maintain and even disengage from particular aspects of identity” (p. 430). Vuuren and Slabbert (2011) observed that among primary motives for traveling, social experiences and personal values are one of the most essential. People exchange, and actively seek ways to share their experiences to reinforce their identities. According to Lyu (2016), who examined travel selfies on social media, a substantial number of tourists carefully

manage and monitor their impressions, by customizing their photographs. The key aspect of this behavior is related to the possible benefits that may come after adjusting the images. Social media not only influences the behavior of individuals; it transforms online users' practices as they take the opportunity to enhance their self-esteem by contributing to pre-existing, strong communities (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011).

Munar and Jacobsen (2014) had similar observations after examining determinations for which people decide to share their tourism experiences through social media. They found that some practices of sharing the content online are based on the chance to provide social and emotional support more than the need for promoting the destination. Gonzalez and Hancock (2011) tried to identify the effects of exposure to Facebook on self-esteem. They observed that cautious and selective impression management in the online environment can influence the ways individuals perceive themselves not only in the digital context but also in the social environment. Luna-Cortes et al. (2019) investigated interpersonal connections on virtual networks by Generation Y tourists. The findings affirmed that self-congruity influences the perceived social value of millennials who use online networks to share their experiences. This sharing behavior may increase overall satisfaction and therefore encourage individuals to establish new social relationships with other network users. As observed by Amaro et al. (2016), in recent years, decisions on where to travel are highly influenced by social media. Despite that, there is a visible lacuna of research regarding connections between symbolic and utilitarian aspects of a destination and the impact of social media on tourists' behaviors. One of the most active scholars in investigating the possible relationship between self-congruity theory and the virtual network is Gonzalo Luna Cortes (2019). In one of his studies regarding symbolic consumption and social media effects, he intended to recognize the links between the theory, perceived social value, and the intensity of using online networks. Luna-Cortes examined past travel experiences and with

regard to those, the use of social networks by doing interviews and surveys on 380 students of the University of Valencia in Spain. The findings of his study revealed strong relationships between self-congruity and intensity of using the online networks. People who identified personalities of visited places quite similar to personal self-images, were more frequently using digital networks to create content about their travel experiences (Luna-Cortes, 2017).

One of the principal advantages of new technologies is related to its speed and free access to the great quantity of information. As noted by Amaro, et al. (2016), the result of this situation was observed in the growing popularity of online platforms that became, “the most powerful force driving travel planning and decision making, playing a crucial role in travelers’ overall travel experience” (p. 2). One of the goals of the presented research is to investigate the level of tourists’ perceptions of self and their effects on creating online content related to their past travel experiences in Hong Kong. In comparison to numerous studies that previously applied the self-congruity, this study will not concentrate only on private aspects of Sirgy’s theory. The goal of the proposed research is to include four aspects of the theory and identify which one most significantly influences further actions in the digital environment.

2.7 Communicating travel experience online

The internet has transformed the manner in which people who travel share and obtain information about world tourism destinations (Arsal, Backman and Baldwin, 2008). Using internet for travelling purposes provides certain advantages. One of the most significant changes is the increased opportunity to receive and follow information and experiences shared by other tourists, but to also generate own content pertaining to the same topic. Destination marketing organizations receive access to the knowledge, which they must analyze and consider in order to address tourist needs and to engage them in the process of promoting the place. They should not

only incorporate online social networks in their communication practices, but especially get involved in the process of information-sharing to better understand the travelers' nature (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2013). As a result, marketers receive the opportunity to influence tourists' choices by creating desired messages and therefore establish an anticipated destination image. For example, one of the most recognized social media networks where people extensively share their travel practices from all over the world is Instagram. Ten years since its launch, this photo-oriented smartphone application, attracts approximately one billion users monthly from which half are active every single day (Facebook for Business, 2020). Many of these users create or observe the diverse type of stories, including travel experiences and recommendations of other users. As a consequence, the visibility of travel destinations has been increased to a level comparable to that of conspicuous consumer goods which are likely to increase the influence of the public self on tourist behavior.

As mentioned in previous sections, most of the studies on self-congruity in the tourism-related context discuss two aspects of traveling: pre-visit and post-visit experiences. Recognizing how these distinct conditions affect the online environment is one of the key elements of a successful communication strategy. As observed by Gursoy (2019), the emergence of new technologies like smartphones as well as digital services that assist communication between individuals, have significantly influenced online users' behaviors. Thanks to the immense amount of information about the destination choice, travelers are able to gain some insight and knowledge regarding the place. Those who actively engage themselves in learning about feedback and guidance from other tourists have the chance to better recognize potential benefits and drawbacks. If some individuals distrust obtained data, by questioning the validity of presented facts, they will look for other sources of information to minimize the possibility of dissatisfaction (Lu, Gursoy & Lu, 2016). Most of the online connections are based on already established social relationships,

therefore seeking advice or recommendations among acquaintances has become a common behavior for travelers. One of the main reasons for this is related to the excessive amount of online information and human cognitive constraints. According to Gursoy (2019), “in the event of information overload and confusion, consumers are likely to heavily rely on third parties recommendations such as friends, relatives and online reviews in their decision making process” (p.58).

Kim and Stepchenkova (2017) explored written accounts of individuals who visited Jeju Island in South Korea and decided to share their observations in the online environment. As a study method, they selected content analysis, where they included 95 texts written by East-oriented representatives (in this case tourists from China and Japan) and 97 texts uploaded by individuals from West-oriented cultures (specifically from Europe and North America). The study aimed to identify a variety of characteristics that define the personality of the island and identify different impressions among tourists of two cultures. The findings emphasized the importance of shared experiences as informative components of online media. Moreover, results suggested that perceptions about the destination personality may differ in the socio-cultural aspect. Although both study groups were able to identify similar traits of the place (Excitement, Traditionalism, Ruggedness, Uniqueness, and Peacefulness), the understanding of their main aspects and interpretation of their characteristics varied highly between cultures. For example, the Uniqueness of the destination in the eyes of East-oriented individuals reflected on nature and environmental aspects. In comparison, among individuals representative of Western cultures, it was oriented in the context of history, customs and habits, and ability to socialize with local communities.

Fotis et al. (2012) investigated the ways social media usage influences tourist behaviors before, during, and after the holidays. The study was based on 346 questionnaires received from

individuals who used the internet, traveled at least once within a year, and were in residence of the Former Soviet Union Republics. Based on the literature within a tourism-related context, the authors selected and introduced their respondents to six distinct classifications of social media platforms. These included well-known social network sites, photo- and video-sharing websites, blogs, microblogs, tourism-related sites allowing for feedback, and wikis. The research results indicated the level of online platforms used to share the experience after traveling is increasing. The study also found a close relationship between the process of decision making and the potential impact of social media on the ultimate destination choice. Finally, it was observed that for the tourist, the most reliable source of the data is that which was published by online community members who made the personal decision to upload their content. Other types of information designed by tourism advertising-oriented sectors were considered as less trustworthy. Munar and Jacobsen (2014) examined how tourists share their experiences on digital media platforms. They observed that using social media was one of the most common ways to talk about holiday experiences among their respondents. The authors observed a growing tendency for sharing content online, where individuals received the chance to determine who becomes a viewer and who does not. Social integration and higher possibility for maintaining the relationship with the members of the network community impacts not only the recognition of the user but additionally, it promotes the destination among other members of the virtual network.

Another study underlying the significant aspect of visual user-generated content within a framework of tourism was done by Fatani and Suyadnya (2015). This time researchers examined social network accounts that considered two Indonesian destinations: Bali and Malang. As a method, researchers chose a photo-elicitation interview. For two months they observed and tracked the data then they selected different types of photographs from both accounts. In the final step, they invited study participants (visual communication students) to elicit comments about

the photographs. Among the findings, functions related to travelers' activities of posting pictures were found to play a significant impact on the popularity of the platform. Two aspects: geo-tagging, which help users to identify locations from posted pictures; and hashtags, which help them to quickly search as well as categorize the content, have contributed significantly in bringing tourist into the digital world. Individuals who use these type of online networks are able to actively communicate with others, as well as emphasize their real-time experiences during travels. What's even more substantial is that they gain an opportunity to manage their online reputation, be considered an authority on a topic, and in some cases, are considered as a new type of micro-celebrity (Barbe, Neuburger & Pennington-Gray, 2020).

Studies show that inviting online tourists to promote the destination may in many instances bring greater benefits than recruiting popular celebrities. As noted by Schouten et al. (2018), due to fact that tourists find own personalities more relatable with other travelers in comparison to celebrities, they will more likely trust and follow advice from members of their online networks. The major difference in perception of both groups is especially visible when comparing the aspects of credibility and brand attitude (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019). In contrast to many celebrities, online users promote their own experiences more comprehensively. This is because they engage more intensely in online activities with followers, and as a consequence, create the perception of being accessible and aware of individuals' needs. Strong engagement with actively created new content and focusing on a niche market like museums or hidden destinations, makes them experts in these categories and increaes their power for persuading others. That is one of the reasons why tourism-oriented virtual platforms have become so popular in recent years.

2.8 Perceived Social Value

Tourists creating content online provides the opportunity to receive feedback from other individuals which can influence the level of social recognition (Gursoy, 2019). This section discusses the construct of perceived social value, and more precisely, the extent to which people engage in online network activities to obtain the feeling of being socially accepted. According to Luna-Cortes (2019), perceived social value strongly affects network users' behavior. Prior research investigating consumers' attitudes identified three distinct aspects of perceived social value, and those include their functional, emotional, and social characters (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

Despite that, the understanding of the value depends on the nature of the research field. As noted by Hansjurgens, et al. (2017), "the definition of social values is ambiguous, as are the names expressing these types of value" (p. 10). Social value is based on the social interaction between human beings, and that is why it has the ability to affect people's behavior and transform their decision-making processes. According to Sanchez, et al. (2006), "perceived value is a subjective construct that varies between customers, between cultures and at different times" (p. 394). By investigating the notion of value in tourists' behaviors, he observed that people evaluate personal travel experiences based on collective impressions made on other members of society. Since tourists commonly use new technologies tools with access to the internet during their adventures (Cobasky, 2016), they have access to extensively communicate their travel encounters in real time. Since reviews and comments may affect the overall picture of network members, individuals passionately commit and dedicate their time to creating the best possible content. Sigala (2013), noted that receiving feedback after creating new content may strengthen and encourage engagement, affect overall satisfaction, and form additional motivations for online activities. Travel platforms vigorously invite their network participants to get involved in the

process of developing knowledge and consequently build authority among other users. In this environment, individuals receive the chance to engage in diverse online events for which they receive distinct benefits that can promote their online status and therefore influence the general opinion of expertise among other network users (TripAdvisor, 2020). Every new piece of content not only enhances the know-how about the person who uploads it, but it also provides the chance for the discussed tourism-oriented subjects to become better recognized and memorized. Furthermore, it gives users the opportunity to establish new connections and access the information providers directly. Users' opinions and recommendations may affect the final choices of other travelers. Additionally, becoming recognizable may bring diverse personal benefits for individuals who generate the content and therefore spread and shape new trends. That is why destination marketing organizations more commonly invite influencers to participate in their communication practices with network users.

Aside from generating beneficial aspects for promoting the destination and personal benefits, engaging travelers also provides entertainment and the feeling of satisfaction. According to Lyu (2016), “people have a belief that probability of acquiring preferred outcomes, including other’s approval and support, increases when desirable impressions are circulated through online channels” (p.186). Recognizing these individuals by destination marketing organizations and tourism sectors is important for two reasons. First of all, providing fully engaged travelers with desired promotional messages and knowledge about the place may positively influence the frequency and the context of the feedback. Secondly, as these individuals actively engage in creating and sharing new content, they develop the necessary credentials to be considered as authorities by members of online community networks, which may influence their perceived social value. That is why there is growing popularity of digital technology usage in tourism, which may be related to the notion of perceived control and authority. As noted by Munar et al.,

“tourist’s value the creation on the web changes power and responsibility relations in production processes and alters the value chain in tourism” (p. 1). Since travelers who decide to share their observations online may receive valuable comments and opinions, they actively involve and commit their time for promoting the place and in consequence, their own identity. Luna et al. (2019) concentrated on reviewing the behaviors of millennials due to their common use of new technology devices and significant influence on the tourism industry. The links among self-congruity perceived social value and intensity of online networks were explored among Spanish students. Once more, the results revealed that self-congruity positively affects perceived social value and the use of online networks.

Additionally, the findings implied that high social value may cause a higher level of satisfaction. The higher level of satisfaction may positively influence the probability of revisiting the destination, as well as recommending it to others by word of mouth. Simultaneously, word of mouth positively impacts the practice of using social media after holidays. Therefore, the fact that people post their pictures, videos, and opinions online in relation to their travel experiences may highly influence the recognition of the place and its overall evaluation. As mentioned by Pike (2016), the internet provides a great opportunity to integrate key components of media: information representation, collaboration, communication, interactivity, and transactions. Online users reach those functions for their own purposes.

Online users engage in diverse online activities joining others in their virtual communities. To achieve a sense of belonging, they create their online self-presentation, which they use to maintain their impressions in the eyes of others (Luna-Cortes, 2017). Kang and Schuett (2012) selected 543 social media users who completed an online survey to explore their reasons for sharing travel adventures with virtual communities. They investigated what possible factors may influence a final decision for posting their experiences, stories, and opinions, and found that

identification and internalization were key elements. This means that the feelings of belonging to the virtual community, as well as the need for recognizing own identity and values, are considered to be some of the most important motives for uploading travel content online. Tourists actively create stories, post photographs, share live locations during travels, and talk about their adventures to emphasize their position in society.

According to Barbe et al. (2020), members of virtual communities consider the uploaded content by other online users as highly trustworthy and unbiased. Scholars have pointed out that the trust between consumers surpasses the one towards commercial communication messages (Hu & Kim, 2018). People use digital networks to seek out recommendations of others, as well as share personal observations and opinions. Although they do not depend on any commercial controls and do not rely on communication strategies created by third parties, they look for feedback and opinions about posted content. Most of the tourists operate on online platforms such as mobile applications with user-generated content, social sites, forums, or subject-specific networks. The access to the information created on these tools is usually quick, easy and it comes at no cost. The common motivation behind generating information in a virtual environment is often associated with social recognition and the demand to reinforce own identity (Luna-Cortes, 2017). The decision on whether information deserves to be posted is also based on concerns regarding the perceived opinion of other online users. Amaro et al. (2016) noted that travelers have tendencies to produce and share more content if they feel pleased with their trip encounters. Although online posts are visibly less private than face-to-face conversations, they have a much higher chance of being spread beyond one's own social network and generate popularity. This situation positively prompts the decisions on uploading reliable messages, especially as their content can be preserved and retrieved at any time. Thanks to online social media, tourist destinations have become more conspicuous. Individuals who aim to obtain more information

about the place of interest can do it within a few seconds by visiting user-generated sites or using keywords in a search engine of network sites.

2.9 Interpersonal Connections in Online Networks

The creation of online networks has opened the possibility for tourists to publicly share knowledge and experiences concerning their travels. The extensive range of images, videos, reviews and other type of posts created by social media users has generated interest of scholars from different areas of research. Recent discourse on user-generated content in the field of communication has highlighted its major role as a source of information that has the ability to influence other travellers choices (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, Kang & Schuett, 2013). Before the evolution of social networking sites, in order to gain access to travel information, tourists had to rely on less universal and more traditional information providers, such as travel companies, tour guides or travel guidebooks (Gupta, 2019). Nowadays, the planning and decision making process for future travel greatly depends on the content generated in social networking websites (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In certain cases, the knowledge obtained from online content creators is thought to be more credible than information received from friends, relatives, tourism websites, travel agents and mass media advertising (Tan & Chen, 2012, Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012).

Luna-Cortes et al (2019) noted that tourists engage in online activities as these provide a wide spectrum of benefits including the ability to obtain information, exchange personal experiences, receive feedbacks and communicate with other individuals. According to Daxbock, et al. (2021), “while investigating the fundamental motives to share experiences on social media has received tremendous interests, it appears that there is no general consensus among researchers” (p. 246). Previous research regarding travellers behaviour when participating in

online activities, and especially when generating content, divided their motivations into two categories: internal – determined by traveller's personal values and goals and external – influenced by the others (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014, de Vries, Peluso, Romani, Leeftang & Marcati, 2017). However, there is a scarcity of empirical research addressing the influence of content creation to keep or build new interpersonal connections in online networks, which can be motivated by both. One of the main objectives of this dissertation is to fulfil the existing gap, by exploring in more detail how sharing travel experiences may impact the communication practises with other network users during and after their trips.

Interpersonal connections in the context of this study refers to diverse aspects of social interactions, established and maintained as a result of travel posts. According to Alalwan et al. (2017) who thoroughly reviewed current research on social media in marketing, companies who's content engages users on both an emotional and social level are likely to have greater customer interaction and affiliation with their brand. Furthermore, where the frequency of posts is higher and subsequently enables greater customer engagement, a more stable relationship can be established. This can also be applied in the context of travellers who's primary motivation to create the content is often determined by a desire to build emotional and social ties with other network users. As observed by de Vries et al. (2017), socialising along with self-expression motivation, are considered the most determining factors to generate content and to collaborate with others during its development.

One of the major benefits of joining and participating in virtual flows of information is the ability to communicate from anywhere at any time. Digital technologies has advanced asynchronous communication between their users, which means that a certain extent of online discussions take place not in real-time. This situation creates the opportunity for content creators

to carefully consider the ultimate decision of what to post and which community to address. On the other hand, as argued by Kim & Stepchenkova (2017), travellers who generate online content often communicate their impressions freely, presenting rather spontaneous views and feelings about their experiences. This perhaps might justify the reason why a wide range of digital users trust social media content more than ones created by travel advertising as it is deemed more authentic (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012). As noted by Belk (2013), “coupled with affinity groups, brand communities, and other virtual groups online, we can sustain an aggregate sense of self with a large number of others” (p. 493). People have tendencies to engage in creating extensive collections of posts on online platforms, as these turned out to be an effective method to communicate their sociability and emotional support (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

Current research about user-generated content and its impact on online interactions has recently emerged to address co-creation behaviour in tourism. Buonincontri et al. (2017) who investigated the results of these processes has affirmed that “experience co-creation positively affects the satisfaction of tourists, their level of expenditures, and their happiness”. Co-creation arises, when tourism sectors endeavour to reach actual and potential visitors with the intention to collaborate (Mathis, Kim, Uysal, Sirgy & Prebensen, 2016). This behaviour may bring beneficial effects for the destination as it receives a great opportunity to learn more about visitors needs and expectations. As a consequence, tourism sectors are able to provide an improved service whilst creating more memorable experiences for their visitors (Ivana, Dimitrios, Miguel & Mary-Beth, 2015). On the other hand, travellers who respond by engaging in online activities enhance their enjoyment, economic and relational value (Chen & Wang, 2016).

This study aim to investigate if people who visited Hong Kong and decided to share their travel experiences in online networks, received any feedback regarding their posts, established

new relationships, maintained the contact with other after the trip and value these interpersonal connections. Recognizing the answers for these questions will further refine the understanding of tourists behaviours and decisions which may improve the effectiveness of communication practices in already designed strategies.

2.10 Conclusions of Literature Review and the Research Gap

There is a visible lacuna in research on self-congruity and its influence on the creation of online content, and consequently the impact of it on personal social value. Among those who decided to elaborate on relationships between these concepts is Luna-Cortes et al. (2019) who scrutinized the usage of online platforms by millennials. The findings of this study revealed that self-congruity positively affects the intensity of using social networks, as well as the experience value for people born between 1980 and 2000. These studies have certain limitations which are related to respondents' selection as they were conducted on students, who shared the same nationality, age and education level. They also did not investigate particular tourism experience, related to one location but rather examined variety of previous trips, which could be perceived differently and therefore affect the findings.

Moreover, when applying the theory of self-congruity, the studies did not focus on recognizing its different aspects – public and private – but rather considered it as one-dimensional construct. The purpose of this research is to address those limitations by applying four distinct facets of self-congruity and investigating their potential relation with perceived characteristics of Hong Kong as a traveler's destination choice. In order to do that, the online content created by tourists will be analyzed, selecting respondents that represent different socio-demographic characteristics. Although this study does not directly investigate the relationship between the match of self-congruity with the construct of perceived social value, it examines how the creation

of content during or after the vacations, actually influences tourists' evaluations about themselves. If it is supported that public self-congruity exerts more influence on tourist behaviors, inviting online network users to join tourism-oriented campaigns or allowing them to generate additional and original content may be a key factor in the successful promotion of the destination. If advertising on social media appeals to people's need to be socially consistent and to gain more social approval, the findings may suggest new tourism-oriented strategies that were not considered in previous communication campaigns. No study so far has investigated the destination personality of Hong Kong, although there is a wide array of user generated content describing its characteristics.

This project aims to fill that lacuna by doing content analysis of tourists' comments collected from one of the most popular websites for travellers and use these findings to test their potential relationship with different dimensions of self-congruity.

CHAPTER 3: Research Question and Hypotheses

3.1 Proposed Research Question

In light of the academic lacuna and the increased importance of the public self-congruity in tourism-related context due to the prevalence of social media, this study will examine the role that those constructs play in the creation of tourism-related online content during the process of traveling. The purpose of the first stage of the study is to identify the profile of characteristics associated with the examined location and answer given research questions:

RQ1: What are the dimensions of personality traits that are attributed to Hong Kong by tourists?

Destination personality was implemented to anticipate and understand tourists' behaviors in numerous countries. For instance, Hultman et al. (2015) observed strong relationships between the role of personality of the place and tourists' satisfaction, which frequently determine people for positive word-of-mouth intentions and therefore free promotion of the visited place. According to data organized by Euromonitor International, is a globally-oriented market research company which ranks the cities most visited by tourists, Hong Kong has been placed as number 1 over the last several years.

Despite that, there is no paper that would investigate destination personality of Hong Kong and the relationship between it and tourists' self-identities. Although the number of vacationers arriving in Hong Kong in 2019 was more than 2.5 million less than in 2018 (Euromonitor International, 2020), the city has remained as the leader in the ranking tables. Despite that, Hong Kong is the only place among the top 10 destinations that experienced a drop in overall arrivals. As previously mentioned the numbers of travellers with tourism-oriented purposes drastically decreased in 2020 and 2021 due to an outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The scarcity of

travellers since March 2020 has forced the tourism-oriented institution to rethink previously proposed strategies and investigate established opinions regarding previous experiences. Doing content analysis of online posts allows scholars and tourist institutions to scrutinize already existed data and potentially develop new approaches that would incorporate the knowledge from people's feedback.

3.2 Proposed Hypotheses

Additionally, based on the comprehensive literature review and limitations of other studies, this project presents 5 hypotheses which are integrated with the theoretical model. The first two investigate the relationship between destination personality of Hong Kong and two aspects of self-congruity – public and private. Prior communication and consumer behavior studies indicate that individuals prefer destinations that match with their own personality traits (Kumar, 2016). Despite that, most previous research that investigated both constructs, considered only actual and ideal self-congruities, which only represent private aspects of the theory. Prior academic work has not considered social and ideal social self-congruities, which could be key in advancing the understanding of the potential relationship between the theory and tourists' choices. Usakli and Baloglu (2011) observed that destination personality has the ability to influence tourists' actual and ideal self-congruities, however, they did not specify which one has a stronger effect. Additionally, these two scholars did not consider public facets. Sirgy (1985), who conceptualized self-congruity theory, emphasized the importance of understanding the different characteristics of its four core components – actual, ideal, social and ideal social. Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. (2011) investigated moderators of these components on people's choices and noted that private self-motives have rather larger effects in comparison to public ones. People select destinations that are congruent with private aspects to either preserve or improve the level

of self-acceptance. At the same time, they also search for new destinations that could maintain or increase their social recognition. Due to fact that different dimensions of destination personality can be explained by diverse emotional factors (Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal, 2006), this study will consider all components of self-congruity, in order to expand knowledge on all relevant components.

When it comes to tourism, Beerli et al. (2007) observed that travelers are more likely to not only visit, but also revisit, the places which are persistent with their individual nature. The scholars indicate that the level of involvement in tourism-oriented activities may influence the power of self-congruity on final destination choice. This power decreases after visiting the place due to new personal experiences and outcomes. Those may be either in line or in contrast to previous expectations and already established image by travelers. Scholars who examined the relationship between self-congruity and destination personality commonly ask their respondents to indicate the level of agreement or disagreement to diverse personality traits. Those which potentially match between destination and tourists, are dependent on primary motivational components of the self-concept. These can be divided into either private or public. For these reasons, the following two hypotheses distinguish different aspects of those, where the first is represented by actual and ideal self-congruities, and the second, by social and ideal social self-congruities. Finding out which builds a stronger relationship with the perceived destination personality of Hong Kong provides the chance to better understand visitor choices and fill the gap in academic studies on self-congruity theory. Therefore, two hypotheses are proposed:

H1. The perceived Hong Kong destination personality significantly influence private self-congruity.

H2. The perceived Hong Kong destination personality significantly influence public self-congruity.

In a digital era, smartphones and social media are pervasive in people's daily lives. The habit of using new technologies before, during, and after the tourism experience, has fundamentally transformed travelers' communication behaviors. It also altered destination organization practices which received the chance to thoroughly investigate and better understand their customers' needs. For the time being, only a few scholars have investigated the relationships between self-congruity and the usage of virtual networks, particularly the creation of content in tourism-related websites. Although Luna-Cortes (2019) noted that a high level of self-congruity results in increased utilization of online networks, he did not examine which precise aspects of the construct – private or public – are responsible for influencing human attitudes.

User-generated content in social networks is created based on diverse motivations. Actual and ideal self-congruities are respectively motivated by self-consistency and self-esteem. On the other hand, actual social and ideal social by social consistency and social approval (Sirgy, 2018). Finding out which ones stimulate online network users to create the content is necessary for scholars and tourism institutions to better understand the consumers' needs, as well as their intentions. The accessible character of online networks provides the ability to maintain and improve self-presentation among a wide range of users. Virtual networks also create opportunities to communicate certain personal qualities which can be difficult to express by any other means (Luo & Zhong, 2015). Private aspects self-congruity (actual and ideal) help people to reinforce own identities and build their self-confidence. Network users create posts about visited places to demonstrate not only the qualities of that destination, but also to manifest own attributes and skills. The level of emotional engagement in creating content online is triggered by social media interactions (Hudson, Roth, Madden & Hudson, 2015). These interactions may indicate whether users are portraying their actual nature and characteristics (this is the way I am) or whether they

are exhibiting some other characteristics that they aim to represent (this is the way I would like to be). Prior research on destination personalities of different countries and cities showed their associations with more than one dimension, and those are usually expressed by a vast number of personality traits. Thus, individuals who select a new travel destination carefully consider these traits and compare them with self-concept and distinct components that it represents. The emotional attachment with the destination can be significantly affected by the level of congruity between the tourists and the experiences they lived in during traveling (Kim & Jang, 2014). Public aspects of self-congruity (social and ideal social) may assist selective impression management in virtual environment. Creating content and engaging in network activities can influence the ways people will perceive themselves not only in the online settings but also offline, in social settings. As noted by Gonzales and Hancock (2011), “selective self-presentation in digital media, which leads to intensified relationship formation, also influences impressions of the self” (p. 79). Due to the scarcity of academic research trying to examine private and public elements of self-congruity with relation to sharing experiences in tourism networks, this study proposes another two hypotheses, which consider this lacuna:

H3. Private self-congruity (actual and ideal) has a positive influence on public self-congruity (social and ideal social)

H4. Private self-congruity (actual and ideal) has a positive influence on the creation of tourism-oriented content.

H5. Public self-congruity (social and ideal social) has a positive influence on the creation of tourism-oriented content.

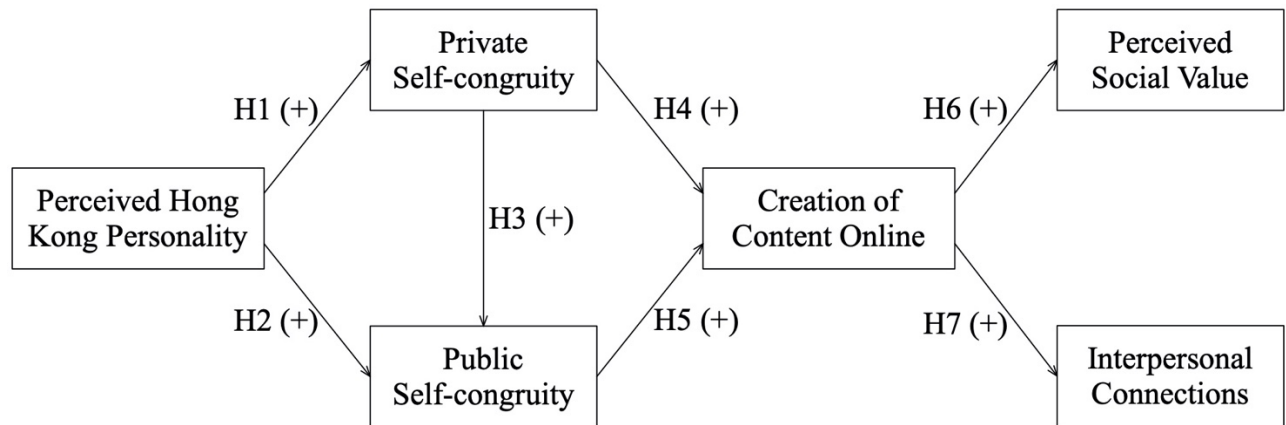
Finally, the last hypothesis tends to investigate how the experience of creating posts or comments on internet, may affect the perceived social value of their authors. According to Kang and Shuett (2012) identification and internalization are the essential elements behind the creation of content in an online environment. Resulting from simple act of uploading an opinion or feedback online, network users are able to communicate and exchange practical knowledge and beliefs with others. According to Kim and Tussyadiah (2013) individuals who actively engage in online activities do so in order to receive evaluations of own actions and gratify own needs. Luna-Cortes (2017) observed that people commonly share their travel experiences with the intention of achieving greater acceptance and that higher self-congruity affects the notion of perceived social value. The aim of this study is to examine how the development of widely spread online posts may determine social recognition and how that affects impressions about one's own self. Therefore, this study proposes two final hypotheses with respect to those concerns:

H6. The creation of tourism-oriented content in online networks have a positive influence on perceived social value.

H7. The creation of tourism-oriented content in online networks have a positive influence on interpersonal connections in online networks.

The following diagram summarizes the proposed theoretical model.

Figure 3a: Proposed theoretical model



“+” denotes positive relationship

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

4.1 Research Methods

The goal of this chapter is to present which research methods were selected for studies 1 and 2, and the rationale behind these choices. As observed by Kumar & Nayak (2014), when identifying the personality of the destination, there are two ways. The first one relies on predetermined traits, that are integrated to create an ultimate and consistent study tool. As an example, in the past the vast majority of scholars employed Aaker's (1997) BPS scale, as it was considered to be the most complete method to investigate the human-related qualities of brands and later on, destinations as well. Moreover, the scale has proven internal reliability and construct validity in the tourism study context. It also turned out to be universal for measuring perceived traits of brands, products, or diverse social environments. Scholars who use a structured method requested the study participants to determine their positions related to specified traits on the bipolar scales (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Xie & Lee, 2013). Despite that, some researchers question the idea of using only Aaker's (1997) BPS scale as it excludes negative characteristics and specific features that could differentiate one destination from another (Kumar & Nayak, 2014). As the scale includes previously established personality traits, there is no scope to incorporate new and exclusive elements that may be associated with a studied location by some individuals. For this reason, a number of academics used less structured methods (Prayag, 2007; Rojas-Mendez, 2013), which were usually conducted by interview or in focus groups. This method successfully addressed previously mentioned concerns and allowed the identification of other qualities, specific for the studied location.

Additionally, in view of the coronavirus pandemic outbreak during this research period, exploring travellers' impressions of Hong Kong is not possible due to an absence of tourists in Hong Kong at this time. Therefore, using content analysis of pre-established observations will

help to detect which qualities are strongly associated with Hong Kong. As stated by Kumar and Nayak (2014), “destination personality should be visualized in terms of two main components: symbolic attributes and holistic impressions of the destination” (p. 92). The open nature of feedback related to different tourism experiences in online networks and the ability to communicate with their authors, allows researchers and communication practitioners to more accurately investigate personalities of studied locations.

In order to identify the personality traits of Hong Kong among individuals who use travel platforms for traveling purposes, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to generate a list of measurement scales. This review showed that one of the current ways of identifying destination traits can be done using content analysis. This method was selected to find out what the perceived dimensions of Hong Kong as a tourist destination are. The profoundly growing number of posts, images, or videos projecting travelers' experiences regarding visited locations has become more widely visible in online networks. As a result, tourism industries as well as communication scholars are able to comprehensively examine visitors' impressions about the destination and get more know-how about their preferences. Lai and To (2015) noted that by, “using the information obtained from social media, researchers can gain valuable insights into the beliefs, values, attitudes, and perceptions of social media users with regard to the utility of user-generated content and trust formation” (p. 138). On that premise, selecting content analysis of posts created by tourists on tourism platforms may be considered more effective, as it directly investigates the data of already manifested opinions and not just the perceived ideas about the places.

4.1.1 Study 1 – A Content Analysis of Hong Kong’s Personality Traits Among Visitors Online Communication

Over the last few years, there has been a substantial growth of research in tourism and communication fields, that would adopt content analysis to investigate the online comments, written accounts, or posts created by travelers (Pantelidis, 2010). These also apply to several studies exploring the destination personality of different countries or cities (Kim & Lehto, 2013; De Moya & Jain, 2013). To recognize human-related qualities associated with Hong Kong, the author opts for the content analysis of tourists' posts that described their impressions after visiting the city.

According to Neuendorf (2002) content analysis, “follows the standards of the scientific method (including attention to objectivity- intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability and hypothesis testing based on theory)” (p. 18). This method has become a prominent way of interpreting user-generated content in online networks (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). It supports scholars when inspecting some extent of unstructured information, especially symbolic meanings and their impact on people's comprehension of the world (Krippendorff, 2013). It also helps to organize a large extent of data into various explicit categories (Neuendorf, 2002).

This study adopts the method previously applied by Kim and Stepchenkova (2017) who investigated the destination personality from a cultural perspective. The initial step includes selecting user-generated-content travel websites that comprise the vast number of comments addressing tourists' experiences in Hong Kong. Determining the group of categories (the dimensions of diverse personality traits) will be based on previous studies and the character of the collected data. Those will be implemented for coding, by establishing links between the dimensions and examples of written texts or keywords. In the next step, selected content will be

analyzed by the author and the second coder when conducting a reliability test. This will ensure the internal consistency of the proposed items. The data analysis matrix will be developed to report the range of categories. At the last stage, the examination of Hong Kong personality traits will be identified based on their frequencies from collected data. Those will be distributed among distinct dimensions that most accurately represent the nature of the traits. Nowadays a substantial number of the content created by tourists includes diverse non-text messages, like videos, photographs, or hashtags. However, due to the distinct character between textual and visual messages, the focus of this study is to identify the extent of personality traits based on written messages only.

4.1.2 Sampling Procedure and Data Collection

Online generated-content in English was assembled from tourism-oriented website TripAdvisor, which is classified among the most prominent ones sharing travel experiences (www.tripadvisor.com; Ahluwalia, 2017). This global network effectively maintains its strong position in the online tourism market thanks to the recognition of its key element – readiness of users to actively produce and provide feedback and share information with other individuals. Yoo et al. (2016), who examined this popular service, noted that its, “success is inherently built on continuously adding value to its services through the expansion of its co-creation ecosystem” (p. 254). To identify the feedback regarding Hong Kong, the author analyzed comments posted on 15 distinct and well-known tourists’ attractions within five categories. Those include Transportation (Ngong Ping 360, Hong Kong Tram, Star Ferry); Sights & Landmarks (Hong Kong Skyline, Victoria Peak, Victoria Harbour); Sacred & Religious Sites (Tian Tian Buddha, Chi Lin Nunnery, Ten Thousands Buddhas Monastery); Nature & Parks (Nan Lian Garden, Dragon’s Back, Lantau Island); and Shopping (Temple Street Night Market, Ladies Market,

Stanley Market). Each of these selected sights represents distinct characters and therefore it would be visited by different types of tourists and associated with diverse personality traits.

The prior research which applied the content analysis for determining the destination personalities (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009; Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013) selected different sampling methods to recognize unlike traits. This study adopted systematic sampling method (1/10), with the intention of collecting the data from every 10th post that describes one of the aforementioned 15 Hong Kong attractions in the entire year of 2019. The objective of this part was to categorize 704 comments regarding tourists' experiences which were written in English and posted in 2019. Due to the fact that from the 25th of March 2020, Hong Kong has not allowed any non-residents to enter the city, the number of visitors in comparison with the same month of the previous year has dropped by 99% (Leung, 2020). Therefore, to receive a wide range of data for further analysis and avoid the possible influence on perception about the city with difficulties to travel in 2020, this study does not include the comments created in that year.

4.1.3 Coding Categories

In order to effectively capture and analyze the data, a qualitative approach will be used by exploring comments found on virtual networks. This study reviews online content founded on previously established parameters since the procedure of category progress usually depends on two aspects – the nature of theory and available data (Neuendorf, 2002). To select the most comprehensive tool for identifying personality traits, eight dimensions from Kim and Stepchenkova (2017) will be selected. Those include Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, Ruggedness, Peacefulness, Uniqueness, and Traditionalism. Those dimensions are founded based on the results from previous studies done by Aaker (1997; 2001), Kim and Lehto (2013), and Sung and Tinkham (2005), and they are represented by diverse personality

traits. To determine which traits may be portrayed with Hong Kong, all the dimensions will be used for the process of coding and analyzing data. The final list will be based on the frequency of occurrence and it will be applied for measuring their influence on different aspects of self-congruity. Results from the first stage will be applied to guide the design of the survey questionnaire used in stage two. This part utilizes a quantitative method with the intention of testing variables from the theoretical model.

4.2 Study 2 – Testing the Theoretical Model

4.2.1 Method – Quantitative Survey

To test the theoretical model, this study applies an online survey research methodology (Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire). Survey design has been widely applied in empirical research, especially in studies from social science fields that explore human behaviors and personality characteristics (Kilic & Sop, 2012; Kumar & Nayak, 2014). As explained by Check and Schutt (2012), survey research is, "the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions" (p. 160). As noted by Wimmer and Dominick (2011), surveys are either descriptive or analytical, and the decision of which one to use should be judged by the nature of the research. Descriptive surveys aim to concentrate on explaining trends that already exist. On the other hand, the analytical ones focus on identifying the reasons and therefore tend to answer why certain trends take place. The purpose of this project is to find out if there are any relationships between variables, rather than precisely explain the reasons for why that happens.

Survey design has a considerable amount of advantages, as it allows researchers to measure a large number of randomly selected individuals, representing distinct social groups. Due to that, it ensures for generalizability, validity, and objectivity of findings (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

Additionally, thanks to the virtual networks, it is not controlled by geographic boundaries. It assists scholars in exploring relations between multiple variables at the same time. Since the number of tourists visiting Hong Kong in 2020 has dropped by 99% (Leung, 2020), online survey research provides a great chance to reach travelers who visited it in the past. This study aims to reach representatives of this group and investigate how their perceived image of Hong Kong influences different aspects of self-congruity. Another focus of this project is to observe which features of self-congruity – private or public – more significantly impact their intention to create content in online networks. Finally, it tries to answer the question if the creation of that content influences their perceived social value. Using a structured survey will help to measure the links between those variables.

4.2.2 Sampling

This research concentrates on travelers who use virtual networks and create content online during or after the trip. To be more specific, the interest of the study is with regards to different socio-demographic tourists who visited Hong Kong in 2019 and posted any kind of content that would describe their traveling experiences. Based on Hong Kong government statistics, the number of visitors in 2019 was approximately 55.91 million (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2020). Since it is unattainable to reach all of these individuals, this project proposes to use non-probability sampling and more explicitly purposive sampling, which can be defined as a “random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest” (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). Due to the open nature of online content, it is possible to access the target group. Every TripAdvisor user who created a web account are able to follow and observe the content established by other individuals and to share feedback and communicate with others by sending private messages. The goal of this project was to receive

the responses from 700 social media users, who visited Hong Kong in previous years and decided to share their travel experience in online environment. This samples size was determined by the limited time and efforts to recruit the respondents. The questionnaire was distributed using purposive non-probability sampling. The Qualtrics survey software was applied to distribute the survey. A pilot study was conducted before data collection to ascertain the transparency of the questionnaire. Each of the individuals who agreed to take part in the survey signed the consent form, detailing the guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of all responses. Before the survey was distributed, it received the approval from the Research Ethics Committee at Hong Kong Baptist University.

Although interviewing tourists at the studied destination assists research in avoiding the bias (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014) due to circumstances related to the outbreak of COVID-19, this project proposes an alternative method that will allow testing the hypothesis. The online questionnaire is selected based on the inability to reach tourists during their visit to Hong Kong.

4.2.3 Brand Personality

As previously stated, investigating the *brand personality* of Hong Kong will be the main goal of the first stage of this project. The results from the content analysis of comments from three tourism-related websites will be applied to define dimensions representing different qualities of Hong Kong. The participants of the study will be asked to think about Hong Kong if it were a person. Then they will be required to indicate to what extent selected personality traits accurately describe this destination. Distinct dimensions will be represented by the number of personality traits to be measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 refers to “strongly disagree” and 5 refers to “strongly agree”.

4.2.4 Self-Congruity

Previous studies on *self-congruity* applied diverse methods to match the perceived images of people's self-concepts and their understanding of the examined destination. From the traditional approach, the construct was measured using a gap score formula (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Malhotra (1981) designed a semantic differential scale that contained 15 items to measure the personality traits of products and to investigate their relationship with respondents' self-images. Sirgy (1997) questioned this method based on its three main issues: high chance of applying wrong images, using a multi-attribute model, and foremost selecting a mathematical discrepancy index as the measurement tool. For this reason, he created a new method, which concentrated on measuring the self-congruity of consumer goods, services as well as tourists' destinations. The new model asked respondents to think about the studied place, then to think about the typical person who would visit that place, and by using adjectives, to describe that individual. Afterwards, respondents were supposed to mark their agreement or disagreements with four different statements on a Likert scale. Each of them represented one type of self-congruity (actual, ideal, actual social, and ideal social).

According to Sirgy and Su (2000), the new method was more comprehensive as it comprised of fewer errors and could capture the construct more directly and globally. For this reason, to examine how consistent the self-concepts of tourists who visit Hong Kong and their images of the city are, the author of this study adopts Sirgy's (1997) method for this research. Nevertheless, since most of the scholars have only scrutinized private aspects of self-congruity actual and ideal (Luna-Cortes, 2019), the objective is to explore how additionally public dimensions of the theory – actual social and ideal social, affect the online network users to create the tourism-oriented content during their holidays. The study will ask participants to consider

Hong Kong as if it were a person and to think about the personality characteristics of this destination. Then, based on four statements regarding the private aspect of self-congruity and four statements examining its public nature, to state the consistency (congruity) between the respondent and Hong Kong. This will be done by indicating agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 refers to “strongly disagree” and 5 refers to “strongly agree”.

4.2.5 Creation of Content Online

To identify visitors' impressions about creating content online, this study adapted the scale by Ellison et al. (2007). Compared with the vast number of researchers who investigated how members of virtual communities generate the information, Ellison and his colleagues concentrated on the content itself and not on the numbers related to time or amount of posted data (Luna-Cortes, 2019). The objective of this approach is to find out what feelings accompanied individuals when sharing their tourism experience during or after holidays in Hong Kong. This will be assessed using six items, indicating the agreement or disagreement with their content on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 refers to as “strongly disagree” to 5 refers to “strongly agree”.

4.2.6 Perceived Social Value

The final aspect of the presented theoretical model and one of the certain points of this research is regarding online network users' perceived social value. Luna-Cortes et al. (2019), who has examined the usage of online networks by millennials, observed that self-congruity has the ability to affect the perceived social value and that may result in higher satisfaction from the tourist experience. This study is taking the opposite approach to investigate if the fact of creating content may influence one's individual perceived social value. In order to achieve that, this

project adopts the measurement tool from Sweeney and Soutar (2001), who developed a 4-item scale to examine customers' perceptions of the value of consumer brands. This study will include four items describing perceived social value and the possible agreement or disagreement with its content on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 refers to as “strongly disagree” to 5 refers to “strongly agree”.

4.2.7 Interpersonal connections on online networks

This study investigates if people who visit Hong Kong and decide to share their travel experiences in online networks, receive any feedback regarding their posts, establish new relationships, maintain the contact with others after the trip and value the interpersonal connections. Similar to previous constructs, interpersonal connections on online networks will be assessed using four items, indicating the agreement or disagreement with their content on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 refers to as “strongly disagree” to 5 refers to “strongly agree”.

Table 4a: Study 2 – Constructs and Items of the Theoretical Model

CONSTRUCT	ITEMS
Perceived Hong Kong Personality	<p>This part of the survey contained four dimensions (Excitement, Competence, Liveliness and Peacefulness) identified in study 1. Each of them was represented by 5 distinct items recognized in previous studies through the literature review. The personality traits that represented each of the dimensions in the online survey are presented as follows:</p> <p>Excitement – “interesting”, “exciting”, “trendy”, “imaginative” and “cheerful”</p> <p>Competence – “hard-working”, “well-made”, “intelligent”, “confident”, “efficient”</p> <p>Liveliness – “energetic”, “outgoing”, “open-minded”, “vibrant”, “spirited”</p> <p>Peacefulness – “warm”, “relaxed”, “calm”, “family-oriented”, “easy”</p> <p>Source: Kim & Stepchankova (2017)</p>
Self-Congruity	<p>Private Self-congruity</p> <p>The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I am.</p> <p>The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I see myself.</p> <p>The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I would like to be.</p> <p>The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I would like to see myself.</p>

	<p>Public Self-congruity</p> <p>The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how the other believe that I am. The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I think the other people see me. The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I would like the others to see me. The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I ideally would like to be seen by others.</p> <p>Source: Sirgy & Su (2000)</p>
Creation of content online	<p>Uploading information on online platforms about the travel experience I lived in Hong Kong was an important part of my daily routine during the trip. Uploading information on online platforms about the travel experience I lived in Hong Kong was an important part of my daily routine after the trip. I was proud of people reading and watching information I uploaded on online platforms about my travel experiences in Hong Kong. During my trip, using online platforms to talk about my travel experience was an important activity for me. After my trip, using online platforms to talk about the travel experience was an important activity for me. I would be sorry if I couldn't share any information regarding my travel experience on online platforms.</p> <p>Source: Ellison et al (2007)</p>
Perceived social value	<p>Sharing my travel experience on online platforms about Hong Kong helped me to feel acceptable. Sharing my travel experience about Hong Kong on online platforms improved the way I am perceived. Sharing my travel experience about Hong Kong on online platforms made a good impression about me on the other people. Sharing my travel experience about Hong Kong on online platforms gave me social approval.</p> <p>Source: Luna-Cortes et al. (2019)</p>
Interpersonal connections on online networks	<p>I have communicated with other users who contacted me with regards to my travel experiences. As a result of my post(s) regarding travel experiences, I established new relationships with other users. I keep in contact with other users who I shared my experiences with. I value the relationships I established with other users due to posts regarding my travel experiences.</p> <p>Source: Luna-Cortes et al. (2019)</p>

CHAPTER 5: Results of Study 1

5.1 Study 1 – A Content Analysis of Hong Kong’s Personality Traits Among Visitors Online Communication

A content analysis of online posts on the TripAdvisor platform of Hong Kong’s major tourist’s attractions was conducted. This chapter of the study presents the results and discusses their implications. The author first provides all the findings, then interprets their possible meanings and general characteristics, and finally explains the significance of the first study for implementing its results in the second one.

In initial stage of data analysis, eight categories of personality traits (Table 5a) were adopted from prior research (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001; Kim & Lehto, 2013; Sung & Tinkham 2005). Those include Sincerity (references to local residents’ welcoming attitude towards travelers); Excitement (references to diverse positive emotions experienced by people when exploring the city); Competence (references to efficient and reliable services and resources provided by the government and tourism industry and the feeling of safety during the visit); Sophistication (references to luxurious and romantic character of described places); Ruggedness (references to availability of nature-based resources for outdoor activities); Peacefulness (references to tranquil atmosphere and availability of relaxing places); Uniqueness –(references to exclusive and original character of Hong Kong); and finally, Traditionalism (references to old and typical features of the destination including of those outlining daily life of local people) (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2017). Some of these dimensions were commonly recognized and applied in other studies investigating destination personalities of diverse countries and cities (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Li & Kaplanidou, 2013; Kumar & Nayak, 2014). In order to identify original ones and investigate which of those previously established are in connection with user-generated content on Hong Kong, the nature of data was interpreted and coded (Neuendorf, 2002). After

analyzing 704 posts describing 15 major Hong Kong tourists' attractions, a new dimension – Liveliness – was added. Liveliness describes a busy, vibrant and diverse ambience of the city. Due to the fact that travelers commonly referred to the dynamic character of visited tourist's attraction in their posts, the new dimension was established. This dimension is evident in posts which described Hong Kong tourist attractions as “energetic”, “outgoing”, “dynamic”, “open-minded”, “spirited”, “active”, “alive” or/and “busy”. Table 5a summarizes the coding manual.

Table 5a: Coding manual of the personality traits

Personality Trait	Items	Description	Examples
Sincerity (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001)	Considerable, thoughtful, moderate, down-to-earth, trustworthy, real, honest	References to local people's kind and friendly attitude toward tourists.	<i>“Nicer to shop and browse than the Ladies Market. Not as hard-selling and pushy for sales and sellers are more honest and calm.”</i>
Excitement (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001)	Happy, fun, daring, cool, imaginative, popular, playful, free, likable, exciting, amazing	References to emotions (i.e., exciting, refreshing, happy, interesting) experienced by tourists toward the destination and activities.	<i>“Some say that a trip to Disneyland is "overpriced" or "not worth it", well, it's not. It's really fun and exciting even from an adult point of view. We felt like kids again, lost in a huge playground.”</i>
Competence (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001)	Reliable, successful, confident, well-made, stable, efficient, satisfying, secure, intelligent	References to high quality of man-made resources and services that the tourism industry provides (e.g., roads, accommodations, transportation as well as perception of safety at the destination).	<i>“What a lovely job they’ve done of the promenade. Great for a morning walk, fantastic spot to view the evening city buildings 3D light show, raised viewing platforms, easy transport, huge open areas.”</i>

Sophistication (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001)	Glamorous, sophisticated, feminine, good-looking, glamorous, charming, smooth, upper class	Descriptions of the destination, its people, and man-built resources as luxurious, romantic, magnificent, and charming.	<i>“The night scene and view is mesmerizing, plus the peak restaurant during the winter season is so romantic”</i>
Ruggedness (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001)	Outdoor, western, wild, rugged, tough, masculine, outdoorsy, hard-working	References to availability of nature-based resources for outdoor activities. Descriptions of tourists engaging in outdoorsy and sport activities.	<i>“Decided to descend via hiking paths which was a super long, but unforgettable walk. Def recommend going at first light, on the first tram up to beat the crowds.</i>
Peacefulness (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001)	Funny, warm, easy, smooth, family-oriented, sentimental, playful	References to peaceful atmosphere and tourists experiencing a relaxing and calm moment. Includes descriptions of natural landscape.	<i>‘An absolutely beautiful, peaceful garden to take a stroll around and get away from the crowds of Kowloon. Extremely well kept, and well worth a visit.’</i>
Uniqueness (Kim & Lehto 2013)	Original, unique	References to unique features of the destination and outstanding value of Hong Kong in general.	<i>Providing an excellent service, the Star Ferry is a true Hong Kong icon. Somewhat worse for wear, the service is well run, frequent and inexpensive. The real deal!</i>
Traditionalism (Sung & Tinkham 2005)	Old, traditional, typical, small-town	References to tourists encountering traditional/local elements such as food, accommodation, and life style. Descriptions of everyday life and activities of local people.	<i>“Tucked in the corner of Hong Kong is this fishing village of Tai-O. It’s several hundred years of heritage was brought over from Chinese immigrants and till date it has preserved its history of the life in the early days of Hong Kong.”</i>
Liveliness (<i>New Dimension</i>)	Energetic, outgoing, open-minded, spirited, active, alive, busy	References to dynamic characters of visited places. Their vibrant and diverse ambience.	<i>“One is sure to experience high energies here ... There are people from all walks of life who come here and empty their souls”</i>

All the coding was conducted by the author of the study. An MA student was invited to serve as a second coder. This person analyzed 71 selected posts, which stands for 10% of final data (N=704). A formal reliability test was implemented by applying Krippendorff's Alpha to check the level of agreement between two coders. Selecting this statistical measure was justified by its conventional usage as well as its resilience and sterling reputation among other academics. As stated by Lombard, et al. (2004), this method, "can be used with multiple coders, accounts for different sample sizes and missing data, and can be used for ordinal, interval and ratio level variables" (p. 5). When it comes to content analysis of virtual network's accounts, each coder's skill of reviewing information and determining the results may be influenced by distinct attributes, like socio-cultural differences, linguistic and context-specific components. As observed by Feng & Zhao (2016), "coders' abilities vary significantly when coding task is culturally-bound or otherwise complex, even with the best training and instruction" (p. 145). Due to the ambiguous character of online data and the fact that all analyzed posts were created by multicultural representatives, the $\alpha = 0.87$ was considered by both coders as high in reliability.

To further establish the validity of the content analysis, we asked the original coder to code 10% more of the posts. The reliability scores for each dimension as well as the overall dimension were as follows:

Intercoder Reliability Test Results (Total of 146 posts)

	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha
Excitement	0.945	0.945	0.945
Competence	0.871	0.871	0.871
Liveliness	0.950	0.950	0.950
Peacefulness	0.979	0.979	0.979
Traditionalism	0.962	0.962	0.962
Uniqueness	0.903	0.903	0.903
Ruggedness	0.921	0.921	0.921
Sophistication	0.390	0.390	0.392
Sincerity	1.000	1.000	1.000
Mean	0.880	0.880	0.880

The final α of 0.88 was considered as high in reliability.

Once the reliability test affirmed the soundness of adopted categories, the written reviews were coded in order to recognize perceived personality of Hong Kong. To achieve this objective, 704 posts from TripAdvisor were interpreted and distributed among nine different dimensions. In comparison to previous study done by Kim & Stepchenkova (2017), which analyzed travelers' blogs, this project did not focus on counting separately each instance of specific trait in particular post but rather concentrates on examining their overall existence. As an illustration, although the author of the post #291 expresses his excitement several times:

“Another great sight in Hong Kong. What an amazing view of Hong Kong Island, and across Victoria Harbour to Kowloon. It is quite breathtaking and at night the view is amazing. You also get great view of fireworks that go off nightly. Also restaurant up top but was too crowded to get in. A must see if you are visiting Hong Kong.”

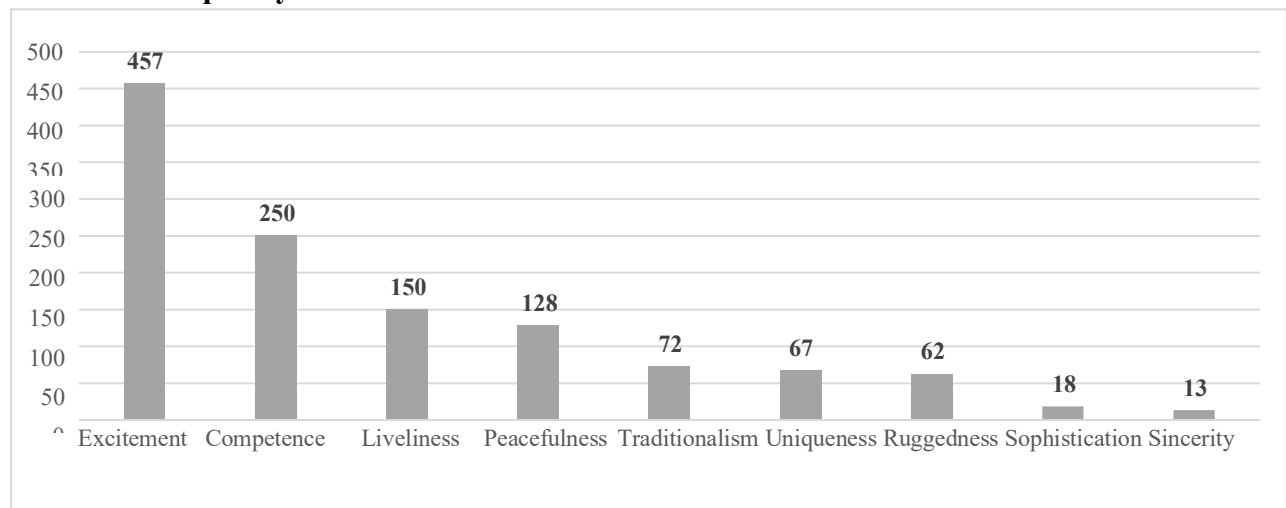
The overall score on dimension Excitement was coded as ‘1’. Texts that did not express any content applicable for certain dimensions received ‘0’ during the coding process. Each post was coded as either presence (1) or absence (0) for each of the nine dimensions.

After evaluating all selected posts, the frequencies were calculated to see if any of nine dimensions were more commonly communicated by tourists who decided to create online content regarding Hong Kong. Table 5b and 5c present the results for descriptive analysis of all content applied for this study.

Table 5b: Frequency of the nine personality dimensions (N = 704)

	Frequency	Percentage	SD
Excitement	457	64.9	0.48
Competence	250	35.5	0.48
Liveliness	150	21.3	0.41
Peacefulness	128	18.2	0.39
Traditionalism	72	10.2	0.30
Uniqueness	67	9.5	0.29
Ruggedness	62	8.8	0.28
Sophistication	18	2.6	0.16
Sincerity	13	1.8	0.14

Table 5c: Frequency of dimensions



Although two categories, Excitement and Competence, more frequently appeared in examined data, in order to ascertain which personality dimensions should be considered with regard to Hong Kong, the author of this study applied nonparametric tests among dimensions by selecting the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. Owing to the coding method ('1' for including a certain dimension and '0' for not including) and the fact that variables are nominal, which means that nine variables have two categories – 'yes' (coded as 1) and 'no' (coded as 0), this data does not follow normal distribution. To assess the accuracy of the results, selecting Wilcoxon signed-ranks test (Appendix 1) was pertinent and applicable. As observed by Zimmerman (1995), this method is, "widely used to analyze paired data when the normality assumption is doubtful and the paired-samples t test is inappropriate" (p. 29). After using a nonparametric statistical test between all dimensions, the results revealed that four of them – Excitement, Competence, Liveliness and Peacefulness – are much more substantial among all. The Table 5d outlines the results from Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. Each of the dimension is presented with the number to which its extent is significantly higher, significantly lower and without significant difference in comparison with others".

Table 5d: Results of Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

	Significantly more than	Lower than	Not significant
Excitement	8	0	0
Competence	7	1	0
Liveliness	5	2	1
Peacefulness	5	2	1
Traditionalism	2	4	2
Uniqueness	2	4	2
Ruggedness	2	4	2
Sophistication	0	7	1
Sincerity	0	7	1

These findings show that Hong Kong is considered an exciting destination (Excitement, 64.9%), commonly recognized as offering high quality resources and services (Competence, 35.5%), presenting a vibrant and dynamic atmosphere (Liveliness, 21.3%), as well as relaxing and nature-oriented sights (Peacefulness, 18.2%). Although three other dimensions – (Traditionalism 10.2%, Uniqueness 9.5% and Ruggedness 8.8%) were recognized to some extent, the overall score was not significantly higher than only two others among nine dimensions. For this reason, they were not considered as primary personality traits of categories from the perspective of analyzed posts. The findings revealed that tourists who share content on Hong Kong’s main attractions on TripAdvisor, do not regularly perceive the city with Sophistication (2.6%) and Sincerity (1.8%), which were commonly found in other destination personality studies regarding world famous tourist destinations (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou & Kaplanidou, 2015).

The perceived personality (combining Excitement, Competence, and Liveliness) between people who visited Hong Kong

for the first time and prior travellers were tested using independent t-tests. The results indicated a significant difference between the perceived personality between first-time visitors and visitors who returned to Hong Kong again. There are differences in perceived excitement and competence but not liveliness. This shows that even for those who never visited Hong Kong before, finding it as vibrant, dynamic and alive during the first visit, was more commonplace.

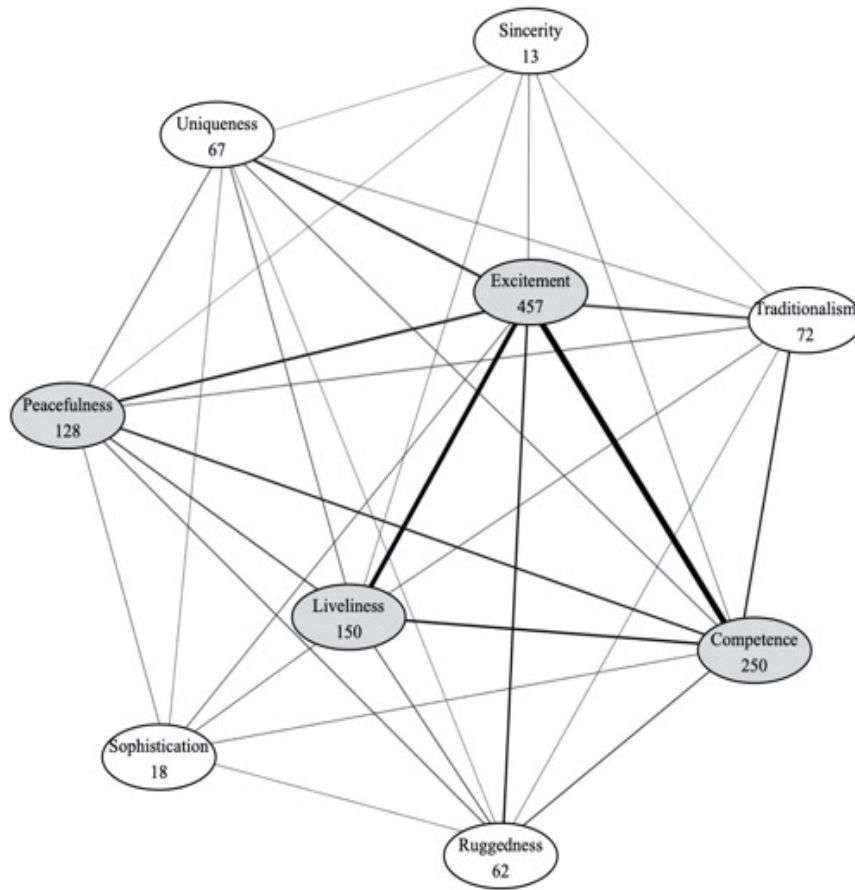
5.2 Hong Kong Personality Traits

The adoption of content analysis revealed four core dimensions: Excitement, Competence, Liveliness and Peacefulness. They define commonly perceived Hong Kong personalities in tourism-oriented online context and answer the first research questions, RQ1: What are the dimensions of personality traits that are attributed to Hong Kong by tourists? Although most of the observed dimensions were found in other studies, the cluster of them is to some extent quite original. In comparison to other cities and countries whose personality traits were identified before, Hong Kong shows some opposite dimensions (Liveliness and Peacefulness) among the primary ones, which underlines its distinctive character. For example, Xie and Lee (2013) performed exploratory factor analysis for Beijing (China) to investigate its qualities. By using Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (with an overall alpha of 0.82) they identified four core dimensions from which two of them are in line with Hong Kong (Excitement – $\alpha=0.78$ and Competence – $\alpha=0.75$) and two are not (Sophistication – $\alpha=0.71$ and Ruggedness $\alpha=0.58$). In comparison to the Chinese capital, Hong Kong is not frequently perceived as very sophisticated, glamorous charming place. Although it creates opportunities to engage in wild and rugged activities, in online environment tourists do not universally recognize and share about its outdoorsy character in contrast to those who visit Beijing. The differences in

findings may rely not only on the different character of two cities but also selected research methods (on-site survey of 500 foreign tourists visiting Beijing vs. content analysis of 704 posts describing tourist attractions and sites). Due to the fact that most of the studies in the area of destination personality employed already established dimensions, following advice from Kim & Stepchenkova (2017), the author of this project decided to additionally analyse, “unsolicited and freely expressed thoughts” (p.417). This provided the chance to not only operationalized on regular dimensions, but to also identify the original one (Liveliness), which would be not possible in a study concerning Beijing.

Content analysis of Hong Kong personality traits allows a better understanding of visitors’ mindsets and perception of their experiences as it relies on user-generated data created by personal decision for expressing own opinions. It also provides an ability to observe which of the personalities appear concurrently. As shown in co-occurrence matrix (Figure 5a), some of them create stronger links.

Figure 5a: Co-occurrence matrix between dimensions



Due to fact that, that four dimensions are considered as core Hong Kong personality traits, only these relations are discussed. For example, the matrix shows a strong bond between Excitement and Competence which appeared together in 143 posts (20.3%). Here are three examples of one of these:

Post #67 written by tourists from United Kingdom – “A must see attraction. Went sightseeing here before the start of the 7s tournament very easy to get to via the underground (COMPETENCE) a truly awesome site and a great day out (EXCITEMENT).”

Post #105 written by tourist from China – *“Lovely. Nice experience, makes for a nice half day trip. Not too expensive and safe, great staff service (COMPETENCE). The view whilst riding is incredible (EXCITEMENT).”*

Post #532 written by tourist from South Africa – *“Must do simply for the experience I read about this before arriving and was an awesome way to get around. (EXCITEMENT) Cheap, frequent and convenient. (COMPETENCE) Easy to navigate but they do get really full and cramped. Must do.”*

At the same time the second strongest link is between Excitement and Liveliness which appeared together in 107 posts (15.2%). Below are some example of these co-occurrences:

Post #53 written by tourist from Australia – *“Must see. Not only is the Buddha an incredible sight to see but the views from here are amazing (EXCITEMENT). We went early on a Sunday morning and escaped most of the crowds but it was certainly building when we left about lunchtime (LIVELINESS)”.*

Post #329 written by tourist from India – *“Nice place. A very busy place and quite crowded, however the walk in the surrounding is brilliant (LIVELINESS). One of the major highlights of Hong Kong (EXCITEMENT)”.*

Post #575 written by tourist from United Kingdom – *“Lively and Fun especially in the evening (EXCITEMENT). Great place to spend the evening. The laser show itself is nothing special, but not required, because the area is just spectacular and transforms itself as the sun goes down and the lights come up (LIVELINESS)”.*

These results may support the notion that visitors who experience positive emotions (Excitement) during their contact with local tourist services and site, also commonly recognize

them as reliable, efficient and satisfying (Competence) as well as spirited, energetic and busy (Liveliness).

The above findings suggest that due to common co-occurrence of certain dimensions, Hong Kong's attractions evoke distinct emotions among online users. These emotions are broadly shared in online environment. Tourists who decide to create the content to describe their opinions about visited places, often use personality traits directly in their posts (ex. Post#7 "The views are **wonderful** at the top.", Post#81 "The tram up is **crazy**.", Post#251 "You will see everything from the **traditional** Hong Kong sights sounds and smells, to the hipster areas where you can stop off and buy an expensive coffee, all the way through to the **ultra-modern** end of Hong Kong."). On the other hand, since user generated content in online environment is often based on unsolicited opinion, it may be interpreted with regards to certain personality traits, even if they are not directly named. As observed by Kim & Stepchenkova (2017), "tourists' unsolicited and freely expressed thoughts and opinion may yield valuable information regarding their original perceptions and attributions because they are part of the tourists' response to their very visitation experience" (p.417). In this study, among 704 all coded posts, only 33 (4.68%) did not reveal any impressions that could be matched with personality traits.

5.3 Interpretations of the Results of Content Analysis

The results of the first study have demonstrated that applying content analysis of tourists post regarding their experiences can significantly enhance understanding of the destination personality. Travelers written texts provide the ability to capture not only their judgements about functional characteristics of visited spots, but also allow to learn more about symbolic ones, regarding their emotions. Vast majority of content selected for this study depicted tourists personal feelings and sentiments, which offered the opportunity to identify specific personality

traits. When considered collectively, these traits become the components of different personality dimensions. For example, Sincerity was the least frequently observed in case of Hong Kong. This dimension represents posts which refer to emotions like “considerable”, “thoughtful”, “moderate”, “down-to-earth”, “trustworthy”, “real” and “honest” when discussing tourists’ attractions. These dimensions vary among cities, due to distinct character of different places. Some dimensions are usually more prominent among all, which can be interpreted in certain ways. In the case of Hong Kong, 4 unlike dimensions were more commonly observed. In this part of the study each of them is interpreted based on the prior academic literature, tourism-oriented reports and the nature of attractions selected for this study.

In order to better understand the results, the descriptive analysis of all nine dimensions was created for each category of tourists’ spots. Therefore, Transportation (N=262) refers to posts which described Ngong Ping 360, Star Ferry and Hong Kong Tramways (Ding Ding). Sights and Landmarks (N=251) contains posts of Hong Kong Skyline, Victoria Peak (The Peak) and Victoria Harbour. Sacred and Religious Sites (N=105) are represented by Tian Tian Buddha (Big Buddha), Chi Lin Nunnery and Ten Thousands Buddhas Monastery (Man Fat Sze). Nature and Parks (N=47) includes of posts about Nan Lian Garden, Dragon’s Back and Lantau Island. Finally, the category of Shopping (N=39) is covered by Temple Street Night Market, Ladies Market and Stanley Market. The diverse nature of selected attractions assists in identifying more precise destination personality. It also supports the interpretation of results, especially in explaining relations between certain dimensions and each category.

Table 5e: Descriptive Analysis of the Nine Dimensions for each Category

	Transportation (N =262)	Sights and Landmarks (N = 251)	Sacred and Religious Sites (N = 105)	Nature and Parks (N = 47)	Shopping (N = 39)
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Excitement	0.58	0.75	0.66	0.47	0.62
Competence	0.59	0.19	0.32	0.15	0.15
Liveliness	0.14	0.28	0.32	0.15	0.10
Peacefulness	0.15	0.13	0.32	0.48	0.03
Traditionalism	0.18	0.04	0.10	0.09	0.00
Uniqueness	0.08	0.13	0.11	0.06	0.00
Ruggedness	0.01	0.08	0.35	0.04	0.00
Sophistication	0.01	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.00
Sincerity	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.00	0.05

5.3.1 Excitement

The most evident personality traits regarding user generated content on Hong Kong tourist attractions were with reference to Excitement. The items used for examining this dimension addressed emotions like: “happy”, “fun”, “daring”, “cool”, “**imaginative**”, “popular”, “playful”, “free”, “likable”, “exciting” or “amazing”. These traits were observed in number of 457 posts (64.9%), which is significantly higher than any other dimension. Destinations which are frequently identified with great extent of exciting personalities, tend to easily attract attention of tourists thanks to positive attributes that they represent. One of the most common motivation for traveling is with regards to leisure activities, entertainment and pleasure (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). The results of content analysis showed that the substantial level of traits showing Excitement was especially visible for Sights and Landmarks category of Hong Kong attractions. These contain of three famous spots: The Peak, Victoria Harbour and Hong Kong Skyline, which allow tourists to enjoy panoramic views of the city. According to Lonely Planet (2021), The Peak

has become “a money-making circus with restaurants and two shopping malls” and it is one of the most visited places by tourists. The Peak also dominates on TripAdvisor (2021) with the highest number of reviews reaching more than 36000. People who create comments on it, often discuss the emotions that accompany them during the moment of watching daily or night views from the highest observation desk in the city – Sky Terrace 428. Those who review the city’s Skyline and Victoria Harbour, frequently refer to the daily A Symphony of the Light Show. They also write about the possibility to observe the development of skyscrapers, the mountains and surrounding them waters of South China Sea. Based on the content of written posts, all these attractions are highly exciting as they provide exclusive experiences, not possible to encounter in other cities. These attractions are popular, fun, likeable, amazing and in general make tourists happy and playful. These feelings can certainly explain the reasons for which travelers develop a sense of Excitement when visiting the city.

Likewise in this study, the dimension of Excitement was also found in prior academic research regarding some other destinations. For example, Kim & Lehto (2013) used content analysis of the official Korean tourism website to identify the projected destination personality of South Korea. Among five dimensions, Excitement was the most frequently observed one (33.9%). Another case is with regards to previously mentioned study on Beijing. Xie and Lee (2013) recognized Excitement as one of the core dimensions to drive tourists’ behavioral intentions. Additionally, Excitement has been also observed in studies on Athens in Greece (Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou & Kaplanidou, 2015) or Queensland in Australia (Murphy, Moscardo & Beckendorff, 2007).

5.3.2 Competence

The second most common personality traits in study on Hong Kong tourist attractions were with reference to Competence. The items used for examining this dimension addressed emotions like: “reliable”, “successful”, “confident”, “well-made”, “stable”, “efficient”, “satisfying”, “secure” or “intelligent”. These traits were observed in number of 250 posts ($f=35.5\%$). This dimension can be recognized in reviews describing high quality of man-made resources and services that Hong Kong tourism industry provides. Those can include of functional features like roads, accommodations or transportation. Additionally, some of the traits regarding Competence (ex. “secure”, “reliable”, “confident”) may refer to the perception of safety at the tourist destination. In most common sense, this dimension focus on the balance between persistent characteristics of the attractions and the original ones which make the overall experience less anticipated.

The content analysis of TripAdvisor posts revealed that the great extent of written texts showing Competence was particularly visible in the category of Transportation. This group included of three attractions – Ngong Ping 360, Star Ferry and Hong Kong Tramways (Ding Ding). Selected for this study means of transport differ with respect to their functionality. Therefore, the first one facilitates the access to other famous spots for visitors (Tian Tan Buddha, Po Lin Monastery, Ngong Ping Village). The Ngong Ping 360 was opened in 2006 and since then it was named as one of the best cable car rides in the world by internationally recognized media (NP360, 2017). Tourists who create the content on it on TripAdvisor, often refer to it as “successful”, “intelligent” and “secure” way to travel and link attractions. On the contrary, Star Ferry and Ding Ding are not only tourists spots of interest, but also one of the most common means of transport for local people. In addition, they represent one of the oldest man-made

resources among all selected attractions for this study. Hong Kong Tourism Board (2020) promotes Star Ferry and Trams as unique and iconic ways of travelling through Victoria Harbor. Despite that, most of the tourists who decided to share their experiences regarding the ride on at least one of these forms of transport, more often recognize their “efficient” and “reliable” characteristics, rather than features related to their Uniqueness and Traditionalism. Tourists appreciate the fact, that Tram and Star Ferry are cheap, easily available, and located in the neighborhood of other famous places. As noted by Xu et al. (2018), taking a ride on a tram create the chance to come across different attractions which are readily accessible along its way. Thanks to that, tourist may encounter extensive experiences, which “can be involved in intrinsic value including visual appeal, entertainment value, escapism and intrinsic enjoyment, and extrinsic value referring to tourist interactions with the servicescape” (p. 606). This could explain the reasons why heritage transportation systems receive thousands reviews on TripAdvisor. High number of posts regarding Star Ferry (approx. 24470) and Hong Kong Tramways (approx. 10700), creates the opportunity for communication scholars to not only recognize diverse personality traits regarding one of the oldest forms of public transport in the city. Additionally, it enables to determine certain characteristics with respect to local community. This results from the opportunities to socialize with residents or witness some parts of their daily life by travelers. On TripAdvisor, Star Ferry has received around 24400 reviews, which makes it the second most frequently commented spot among all Hong Kong tourists’ attractions after The Peak.

According to Choi et al. (1999) who combined qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the image of Hong Kong as a tourist destination, The Peak and Star Ferry are recognized as the most distinctive images of Hong Kong. This is in line when comparing the number of comments for each of Hong Kong spots on TripAdvisor. These two attractions are the

most popular by the users who create the reviews on the website. Despite that, the category of Sights and Landmarks, which includes of The Peak, was not frequently recognized with Competence (Table 5.5). Various attractions may present some commonalities as they “tell a story, make the asset come alive and make the experience participatory, make it relevant to the tourist, focus on quality, ... [and] function effectively as a tourism products” (McKercher et al., 2004, as quoted in Xu et al. 2018, p. 611). Nevertheless, due to their distinct nature as a tourist experience, the personality traits that exemplify their character in online networks are also usually different.

According to Pan et al. (2017), who developed destination personality scale for mainland Chinese travelers, Competence is one of two “most critical dimensions that explain the impact of destination personality on tourists’ behavioral intentions”. This dimension was also observed in other prior academic work on Las Vegas in the United States (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011) or Andalusia in Spain (Gomez Aguilar, Yague Guillen & Villasenor Roman, 2014).

5.3.3 Peacefulness

The fourth most frequent personality traits identified through content analysis on tourist attractions in Hong Kong were in relation to Peacefulness. The items used for examining this dimension addressed emotions like: “peaceful”, “funny”, “warm”, “easy”, “smooth”, “familyoriented”, “sentimental” and “playful”. These traits were observed in number of 128 posts (%f=18.2%). As noted by Nelson (2014), “peaceful personality is defined as the consistent manifestation of peaceful states, attitudes, and behaviors over time and across relevant contextual domains” (p. 7). This dimension refers to relaxing atmosphere and ability to experience peace of mind by tourists during their travels. Posts which included descriptions of natural landscape and

enjoyment accompanying visitations of outdoor areas were common for Peacefulness. The content analysis of TripAdvisor reviews showed that this dimension was especially visible in the category of Nature and Parks. This group similarly to others included of three distinct locations - Nan Lian Garden, Dragon's Back and Lantau Island. These spots offer different kinds of adventures and connections with nature. Nan Lian Garden creates the opportunity to take break from the hustle and bustle of the city. Tourists can wander around its paths, bridges and pavilions which are surrounded by trees, flowers, rocks and waterfalls. On the other hand, Dragon Back is considered as one of the most popular Hong Kong's hiking trails. CNN (2019) has named it as one of the world's 23 best trails. Beside hiking, this spot provides ability to enjoy spectacular views of the coastline and offer the chance to visit the beach located at the end of it. Similar situation is for Lantau Island, where tourists can find lots of trails and beaches as well as fishing villages and small towns. Despite some dissimilarities of these three locations, personality traits regarding Peacefulness are strongly associated with all of them.

Some of the earlier analysis on destination personality of different countries and cities also identified Peacefulness as one of the core dimensions. Kim & Stechpenkova (2017), investigated the impact of cultural differences between tourists from West and East on destination personality of Jeju in South Korea. Peacefulness was recognized by both of the groups, which suggested application of campaigns and strategies that would include of descriptions of natural surroundings and "easy", "smooth" or "relaxing" characteristics of the place. Hanna & Rowley (2019) examined tourism websites of 10 European capital cities with a goal to establish their destination brand personality scale. The final scale included of six different dimensions. Peacefulness was the second most explicitly reported one, coming after Excitement and before the Competence.

5.3.4 Liveliness (Original Dimension)

This study has identified wide array of personality traits with reference to dynamic characters and vibrant ambience of tourists' attractions in Hong Kong. As a consequence, traits like "energetic", "outgoing", "open-minded", "spirited", "active", "alive" or "busy" were clustered together to represent a new dimension. Liveliness has been recognized in 150 posts (%f=21.3%) and it has been especially visible for Sacred and Religious Sites category. Furthermore, this group was represented by three tourist spots: Tian Tan Buddha (Big Buddha), Chi Lin Nunnery and Ten Thousands Buddhas Monastery (Man Fat Sze). Tian Tan Buddha is the second largest seated Buddha in the world (Ngong Ping 360, 2021). It is considered as one of the top attractions to visit in Hong Kong and on TripAdvisor (2021) is ranked as number 1 on travelers' favorites. It was reviewed by more than 14700 individuals who decided to share their feelings and experiences regarding this famous landmark. Due to remote location and diverse range of attractions along the way to its entrance, this spot has been also recognized as one of the most crowded and time-consuming for tourists (DeWolf, 2010). That is line with some of the characteristics of Liveliness, which represents sites that are "alive", "busy" and "energetic". Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery is less popular in number of visitors and it also received far fewer comments (approx. 2300). The fact that is located in the middle of the city, along roads, shopping malls and high rising buildings, it is commonly known for its "spirited" character. Tourists who come to this spot, need to climb hundreds of stairs to reach the temple, passing on their way statues of monks, wild monkeys and other visitors. Finally, Chi Lin Nunnery which is in neighborhood to Nan Lian Garden is commonly recognized with its "outgoing" character, allowing visitors to enter certain parts of nunnery and experience the spiritual energy of the place. Tourists notice the vibrant ambience of the place, located in the middle of busy part of Kowloon side. The character of peaceful places

like those included in Sacred and Religious Sites category, is highly influenced by surroundings and wide spectrum of international tourists. Thereby, based on content analysis of tourists' attractions regarding this category, three dimensions – Liveliness, Peacefulness and Competence received the same number of reviews with regards to represented by them personalities. These dimensions (beside Excitement, that is clearly visible in each category) are part of Hong Kong destination personality.

5.4 The Relation Between Study 1 on Hong Kong Personality Dimensions and Study 2 Regarding Proposed Theoretical Model

Study 1 provides the personality traits from visitors in the year of 2019. The aim of Study 2 is to test the theoretical model. The first two hypotheses examined the possible relationship between the perceived personality traits as well as private and public self-congruities. Kim & Lehto (2013) observed that destination personality makes a substantial contribution in determining tourist's overall evaluation of the place, especially when they are able to enhance or adapt their previously established impressions during traveling. Additionally, Sirgy & Su (2000) noted that destination personality supports visitors in evaluating the congruence between own personal characteristics and those represented by the destination. The consequences of such bonds may let to diverse benefits for the destination, like intention to return (Usakli & Baloglu) and stay loyal towards the destination (Kilic & Sop, 2012). What is even more significant, Ekinici et al. (2007) pointed out that the set of personality dimensions, affects tourist's intention to spread positive word-of-mouth, which may influence other individuals to travel to that destination. Word-of-mouth, according to Yoon & Uysal (2005) exemplifies the most trustworthy information source for tourists. Those, who observe and review online posts describing Hong Kong's attractions, receive the ability to not only learn more about the city, but also notice its perceived destination image. The recognition of

personality characteristics may motivate some of these individuals to travel to that destination. Self-congruity is defined by the match between one traveler self-concept and destination image. Owing to fact that destination image is directly related to destination personality (Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal, 2007), there is also strong connection between destination personality and self-congruity (Chi, Pan & Del Chiappa, 2018). In other words, there is a strong possibility that great extent of tourists who decided to travel to Hong Kong and create posts describing their experiences, portray themselves with personality traits represented by dimensions detected from analysis of these posts. In order to find out if these individuals associate own personal characteristics with traits represented by Excitement, Competence, Peacefulness and Liveliness, the relationship between them and self-congruity needs to be examined. As stated by Kim & Stepchenkova (2017) “tourists’ written accounts provide rich information to understand visitors’ experiences and emotional connection to the destination through which destination personality manifest itself” (p.416). Despite that, in order to assess the exact relationship between destination personality and self-congruity, its different aspects – private and public, ought to be investigated separately, as they denote different motivations for travelling to these places. Different aspects of self-congruity affect general travel behaviors and possible consequences of that decisions as they are compromised private and public drives. Understanding which one has stronger relationship with destination personality, may help to predict tourists’ behavior intentions and their decisions to share (or not) their travel experiences on the internet. In order to find out what can happen when tourist experience high levels of private aspects of self-congruity with the destination but low levels of public ones with its image (or vice versa), the relationship between them needs to be tested.

Identifying which facets of self-congruity are in link with dimensions of Hong Kong perceived destination personality among online network users, may assist tourism organizations in

developing communication strategies in different ways. First of all, these institutions receive the chance observe and identify what unique personality traits are in with regard to Hong Kong and what makes the city special among others. As noted by Cizel & Ajanovic (2016) “the high competition between all destinations in the world, product similarity and growing substitutability has resulted in tourists becoming immune to promotion solely on destinations’ functional attribute, as they are not able to help in attracting the potential tourists, which was the case in the past” (p. 14). The vast changes of adapting social media influencers by Destination Management Organizations in different kinds of tourism promotions have only proven the power of online branding and its ability to influence tourists’ decisions making processes (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). For this reason, another implication is with respect to stronger awareness of the possible links between travelers’ self-concepts and Hong Kong destination personality. Tourists, when recognizing the city with personality traits representing certain dimensions (in this scenario: Excitement. Competence, Liveliness and Peacefulness) may decide to visit it and share their impressions online. This choice may be justified by the need of demonstrating own identity which can be in line with the place, or by the wish to be identified with that place despite the absence or discrepancies between certain traits. Tourism organizations ought to create campaigns which consider that match.

CHAPTER 6: Results of Study 2

6.1 Method

6.1.1 Data Collection and Survey Design

The second study presents quantitative research. In order to collect the data, the structured online questionnaire was posted on two commonly known social sites – Facebook and TripAdvisor. Each month, Facebook is visited by more than 2.9 billion users, which makes it the most popular social network globally (Murphy, 2021). This platform has built and organized the status of social media nowadays. It provides opportunity for network users to create and share posts, which are commonly related to their encounters during trips and holidays. At the same time, TripAdvisor – one of the most popular tourism-oriented platforms (Nicoli & Papadopoulou, 2017), relies on user-generated content and the ability to share travel experiences in online environment. As a result, these two networks were chosen based on their universal character and common usage among tourists. Thanks to vast thematic groups established on these platforms, there was a high probability to reach individuals who potentially visited Hong Kong in the past and created some images, reviews or comments regarding their experiences in the city.

The pilot study was carried out, with the purpose of identifying any possible flaws and to verify the feasibility of considered survey. The questionnaire was sent to 30 individuals who created comments under the posts of two Facebook’s tourism-oriented groups “Discover Hong Kong” and “Hong Kong Tourism”. Due to this action, some concerns in relation to the wording used in the questionnaire were considered and revised. Some of the individuals who filled in the survey did not precisely understand the word “content”. Therefore, questions that included of this word, more specifically explained that creation of online content refers to the action of posting pictures or videos on social media, sharing the reviews or comments concerning tourists’

attractions, accommodation or restaurants, and creating blogs or vlogs about. There were no issues concerning the format of the survey.

After the revision the questionnaire was posted on numerous groups and communities on Facebook, which were linked to travelling, e.g., “Travel with Tourist Guides!”, “Digital Nomads Around the World”, “Travel and Tourism” or “Traveling Around Asia”. It was also sent to TripAdvisor users, who previously created content regarding their visits to Hong Kong. The study information sheet was placed at the beginning of the survey. Respondents were asked to express their consent before participating the survey. They were also informed about the purpose of the survey which was to identify their perspectives on travel practices and to know more about the content that they possibly posted on online platforms during or after their stay in Hong Kong. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was built of three distinct parts. The first one considered questions regarding visiting experiences of the respondents during or after their stay in Hong Kong. In this section, they were asked about the number of previous visits as well as the year, the purpose, the company and the duration of last visit. This phase also intended to find out more about tourist’s content creation – the type of it, the number of posts and the feedback. On the other hand, the second part was based on the scales allied with constructs that were discussed in the literature review part. The Likert scale of five points (1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree) was used for examining each item. The answers from this part were applied to examine the theoretical model. Final stage of the survey included of demographic characteristics, and more precisely the age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, education background and nationality of the respondents.

To target the anticipated respondents, a convenience sampling method was applied. This method allows to reach people which are most conveniently available (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). The questionnaire was available online from the 1st of May to 15th of August 2021. During this

time, the author would repost it on Facebook groups every week. Members of these groups were asked to fill in the survey after entering the link provided in each post. At the same time the survey was sent to TripAdvisor users, who created comments on Hong Kong tourists' attractions in the past. This was done by sending private messages which beside the same link, also included of information regarding proposed study. In total, 924 respondents have participated in the survey. Those who did not provide complete and valid response were excluded from data analysis. Only fully filled questionnaires were considered for further analysis and for this reason 224 (24.25%) were excluded due to lack of answers to some items. The final sample for further examination included 700 valid responses from online network users. The number of collected survey was sufficient to test the model. As noted by Singh et al. (2016) the minimal sample size for study applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to measure the relationships between constructs should be higher than 200. Additionally, Kline (2016) adds that median sample size of these kind of studies should equal 200 in order to present statistical power.

6.1.2 Data Analysis Methods

R programming language was applied to scrutinize the data and test the hypotheses. The proposed model was tested by applying confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) methods. In the first step of data analysis, CFA, reliability tests and validity tests were performed. Both first-level and second-level factors were evaluated. CFA is considered as an essential analysis instrument for measuring the validity for each construct implemented in the study model. As pointed out by Brown & Moore (2012), "the results of CFA can provide compelling evidence of the convergent and discriminant validity of theoretical constructs" (p. 5). Additionally, in order to review discriminant validity of proposed theoretical model, the relationships among variables were compared. As noted by Farrell & Rudd (2009, p. 2) "if a factor

analysis is misinterpreted, and discriminant validity is not established, then measurement scales used in research may not function correctly, and conclusions made regarding relationships between constructs under investigation may be incorrect”.

CFA can be considered as preliminary step of structural equation modeling (SEM), which was applied in the further part of data analysis to test hypothesis. The difference between both measurement methods relies on the fact that CFA emphasizes the connection among indicators and latent variables, while SEM comprises of structural or casual links among the study constructs (Harrington, 2009). This study applied CFA to calculate composite reliability (CR) as well as Cronbach's Alpha and therefore evaluate internal consistency of the factors. In both cases the cut-off values were expected to be higher than .7 to verify the reliability of items (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins & Kuppelwieser, 2014). Furthermore, in order to identify if all the items were affiliated to particular factor, convergent validity was assessed by measuring average variance extracted (AVE). If the CR is higher than the AVE, and the cut-off value for the AVE is higher than .5 then convergent validity is affirmed (Hair, 2009). Additionally, to review the discriminant validity the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) was compared with inter-construct correlation values. In compliance with the suggestions from Fornell & Larcker (1981), the square root of every construct's AVE is expected to indicate higher value than inter-construct correlation in data analysis. According to Hamid et al. (2017, p.1) “the assessment of discriminant validity is of utmost importance in research that involves latent variables along with the use of several items”. As a result, it supposed to be examined before testing the hypothesised model.

Finally, structural model analysis was conducted to verify the goodness of fit of the structural model and to scrutinize relationships between the constructs. For the purpose of exploring possible relationships between previously recognized constructs, this study applied structural equation modeling (SEM) by using R programming language. SEM was also adopted to

examine the adequacy of the suggested model. According to Fan et al. (2016, p. 1) “structural equation modeling (SEM) is a powerful, multivariate technique found increasingly in scientific investigations to test and evaluate multivariate causal relationships”. SEM provides the ability for testing substantial theories in quantitative studies and what is crucial – it explicitly enlightens the errors in the measurement model (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2006). There are two main objectives for applying SEM - to enhance the understanding of correlation and covariance between variety of constructs adopted in the study as well as to fully clarify their inconsistency with the predetermined model (Kline, 1998). SEM differs from alternative methods as it allows to test both – direct as well as indirect impacts on pre-assumed interrelationship. In comparison to conventional measurement approaches, in SEM the adequacy of model fit to the data is subject to not one, but multiple tests (Suhr, 2006). As a result, this study adopted numerous fit indices to appraise the fitness of the structural model. As observed by Fan et. Al (2016, p.4) “the more fit indices applied to an SEM, the more likely that a miss-specified model will be rejected – suggesting an increase in the probability of good models being rejected”. In this analysis, instead of just presenting the traditional chi-square statistics (χ^2), relative chi-square (χ^2/df) was also calculated “as it takes into consideration the complexity of the model and is less sensitive to sample size” (Ellingsen, Coleman, Lunda & Mejdella, 2014, p.12). In order to appraise the good model fit the relative chi-square was expected to be less than 3 (Kline, 1998). This study emphasized the importance of identifying the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI) as well as Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). RMSEA evaluate the degree of how far the hypnotized model is from the ideal one, whereas comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) focus on comparing “the fit of a hypothesized model with that of a baseline model (i.e., a model with the worst fit)” (Xia & Yan, 2018, p. 409).

CFI ought to compare the proposed structural model with a null model. As noted by Fan et al. (2016), CFI describe the number of possible variances which are addressed in a covariance matrix, and it ranges from 0.0 to 1.0. Adequate model fit should demonstrate the value of 0.95 or higher than that (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Another measure applied in SEM was RMSEA, which can be defined as the square root mean difference among the anticipated and observed values (Beran & Violato, 2010). The value of RMSEA implies better model fit. This measure is commonly used to identify the model's misspecification. The value of RMSEA should be lower than 0.06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) in order to assess the acceptable model fit. Furthermore, TLI was considered in study with expected value of higher than 0.95 (Hu and Bentler 1999). The main benefit of this measurement comes down to the fact that it is not affected from the sample size. Following the guidance from Hu & Bentler (1999), all the other acquired values (TLI> .95, CFI> .95, RMSEA< .06, SRMR< .08) were assessed in this study and the results are presented in structural model analysis and hypothesis testing section.

6.2 Results

6.2.1 Demographics

Table 6a presents profiles of 700 respondents, who fully completed online survey. The sample compromised of 455 female (65.0%) and 245 male (35.0%). Majority of travelers who took part in the study were in the group of age 35-49 years old – 274 (39.1%), followed by 25-34 years old – 243 (34.7%). Two groups of ethnicity were dominant in comparison to others – 423 (60.4%) respondents declared to be White and 235 (33.6%) were represented by Asians. Slightly more individuals were married – (50.9%) prior to those who considered themselves as singles –

300 (42.9%). Finally, as for education background, 334 (47.7%) respondents hold the bachelor's degree, followed by the number of 312 (44.6%) people who obtained their Master's or PhD degree.

Table 6a: Demographic information of the respondents (N=700)

	N*	Percentage (%)
Age		
18 - 24	54	7.7
25 -34	243	34.7
35 - 49	274	39.1
50 - 68	119	17.0
69 or above	10	1.4
Gender		
Male	245	35.0
Female	455	65.0
Ethnicity		
White	423	60.4
Asian	235	33.6
Black	3	.4
Hispanic, Latino	15	2.1
Mixed ethnicity	13	1.9
Others	11	1.6
Marital status		
Single	300	42.9
Married	356	50.9
Divorced	37	5.3
Widowed	3	.4
Others	4	.6
Education background		
High school or less	22	3.1
Bachelor	334	47.7
Master or PhD	312	44.6
Other professional degree	32	4.6

*Figures may not add up to 700 due to missing values

The sample contained of people from 62 countries (Table 6b), out of which majority - 121 (17.3%) were from United Kingdom, 83 (11.9%) from United States, 49 (7.0%) from China and 44 (6.3%) from Australia. Surprisingly, this number goes in pair with other previously established statistics. Published annually by Hong Kong Government “A statistical Review of Hong Kong

Tourism” (PartnerNet, 2019, p.41) discusses the visitor arrivals to the city in details. Its last issue from 2019, showed that the travelers from four earlier mentioned countries were the highest in total number of visitors from each continent (excluding Africa).

Great group of respondents in this study was represented by South-East Asian countries – Philippines 25 (3.6%), Malaysia 24 (3.4%), Indonesia 22 (3.1%), Singapore 19 (2.7%) and Vietnam 16 (2.3%). There were 15 (2.1%) citizens of more than one country for which “Multiple nationality” item was established.

Table 6b: Nationality of the respondents

Nationality	N	Percentage (%)
United Kingdom	121	17.3
United States	83	11.9
China (Mainland)	49	7.0
Australia	44	6.3
Poland	40	5.7
Canada	27	3.9
Philippines	25	3.6
Malaysia	24	3.4
Indonesia	22	3.1
Singapore	19	2.7
Vietnam	16	2.3
Germany	15	2.1
France	12	1.7
New Zealand	12	1.7
Italy	10	1.4
Russia	10	1.4
India	9	1.3
Ireland	9	1.3
Netherlands	9	1.3
South Africa	7	1.0
Switzerland	7	1.0
Mexico	6	.9
Spain	6	.9
China (Taiwan)	5	.7
French	5	.7
Japan	5	.7
Austria	4	.6
Belgium	4	.6
China (Hong Kong SAR)	4	.6
Finland	4	.6
Denmark	3	.4
Portugal	3	.4

Slovakia	3	.4
Sri Lanka	3	.4
Albania	2	.3
Costa Rica	2	.3
Croatia	2	.3
Czech	2	.3
Egypt	2	.3
Kazakhstan	2	.3
Pakistan	2	.3
Romania	2	.3
Serbia	2	.3
South Korea	2	.3
Sweden	2	.3
Thailand	2	.3
Ukraine	2	.3
Bahrain	1	.1
Brazil	1	.1
Bulgaria	1	.1
Jamaica	1	.1
Luxembourg	1	.1
Myanmar	1	.1
Nigeria	1	.1
Norway	1	.1
Palestine	1	.1
Peru	1	.1
Zimbabwe	1	.1
Slovenia	1	.1
Turkey	1	.1
Uganda	1	.1
Venezuela	1	.1
Multiple nationality	15	2.1
Not specify	19	2.7

*Figures may not add up to 700 due to missing values

6.2.2 Descriptive Analysis

6.2.2.1 Visiting Experiences of the Respondents

In order to better understand traveler's experiences with respect to their trips to Hong Kong, the set of questions was established. The first question investigated the total number of visits to Hong Kong in last 5 years (Table 6c). During this period, most of respondents – 238 (34.0%) came to the city at least four times. Slightly lower number – 198 (28.3%) visited the place once in last five years. Majority of people arrived in 2019 – 210 (30.0%), followed by 130 (18.6%) individuals who visited in 2016 or before that. The main purpose for coming to Hong Kong was with reference

to tourism – 317 (45.3%) and the usual duration of stay was between 3-6 days (46.3%). Respondents traveled mostly with family, relatives and partners – 289 (41.3%) or alone – 281(40.1%).

Table 6c: Visiting experiences of the respondents

	N	Percentage (%)
The number of visits to Hong Kong in last 5 years		
0	66	9.4
1	198	28.3
2	119	17.0
3	79	11.3
4 or more	238	34.0
The year of last visit		
2021	102	14.6
2020	74	10.6
2019	210	30.0
2018	109	15.6
2017	75	10.7
2016 or before that	130	18.6
The purpose of last visit		
Tourism	317	45.3
Business or employment	171	24.4
Visiting relatives or friends	118	16.9
Return to Hong Kong	47	6.7
Study	43	6.1
Others	4	.6
Duration of last visit		
1-2 days	85	12.1
3-6 days	324	46.3
1-2 weeks	95	13.6
more than 2 weeks	196	28.0
Travelled with		
Family/relatives/partner	289	41.3
Alone	281	40.1
Friends	114	16.3
Tour group	4	.6
Others	12	1.7

6.2.2.2 Communication of travel experience online

The next series of questions concerned travelers' experiences of creating content online. Significant majority of people – 502 (71.7%) answered “yes” when asked about past behavior of uploading any kind of material regarding their visits in Hong Kong (Table 6d). More than half of these individuals – 353 (28.3%) shared at least 4 or more posts concerning their travel experiences during or after the stay in the city. Among those, great number of people posted pictures - 485 (69.3%) or videos 230 (32.9%). All respondents could create more than one type of content. There was a significant number of online network users who wrote reviews regarding local restaurants they visited – 110 (15.7%), accommodations that they stayed in – 104 (14.9%) or shared some experience about tourist attractions that they visited – 90 (12.9%). The data was collected from tourists who shared the content on a range of social networks, however only 132 (18.9%) of respondents stated that they posted on tourism-oriented platforms. Large percentage of all respondents who created the content – 476 (68%) received some feedback from the other networks users.

Table 6d: Communication of travel experience online

	N	Percentage (%)
The creation of content including review		
Yes	502	71.7
No	198	28.3
Type of content (can choose more than 1)		
Posted pictures	485	69.2
Posted videos	230	32.8
Wrote a review about food/restaurant	110	15.7
Wrote a review about accommodation	104	14.8
Wrote a review about the tourist attraction	90	12.8
Shared my experiences on a blog	33	4.7
Shared my experiences on a video blog	16	2.2
Others	2	.2

Number of posts regarding experiences in Hong Kong		
0	121	17.3
1	58	8.3
2	79	11.3
3	89	12.7
4 or more	353	50.4
Received feedback of the post		
Yes	476	68.0
No	224	32.0
Created of content on tourism-oriented platform		
Yes	132	18.9
No	568	81.1

6.2.3 Model Validation and Hypotheses Testing

6.2.3.1 Measurement Model Analysis

Once the traveler's experiences and behaviors were identified, measurement model was evaluated by conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). CFA was first conducted to assess the reliability and validity of personality, which was constructed as a second-level factor based on the identified destination personality dimensions in the study 1. As it can be observed in the Table 6e, the factor loading of peacefulness (.48) was significantly lower in comparison to three other dimensions with values higher than .7. As proposed by Hair et al. (2010), factors with loading lower than .5 should be excluded from further data analysis. Based on this, Peacefulness was removed from the list of the core dimensions characterizing destination personality of Hong Kong.

Table 6e: Results of confirmatory factor analysis of personality including peacefulness

Second-level factors	First-level factors	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Personality	Excitement	.80	.814	.533
	Competence	.73		
	Liveliness	.86		
	Peacefulness	.48		

Notes: CR = Composite Reliability. AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

In order to better understand the low factor loading of Peacefulness the previous findings from study 1 were re-visited. Although, among all 4 dimensions previously identified as core personalities of Hong Kong, Peacefulness (18.2%) was the least frequent one. Despite that, the situation changed after taking into consideration descriptive analysis of four core dimensions from Study 1 (Table 6f). Among five previously established categories of Hong Kong tourist attractions, Peacefulness scored the highest in Nature and Parks (M=.45). When comparing with the results of other dimensions in the same category, it was still lower than Excitement (M=.47). Peacefulness was also quite visible in the group of Sacred and Religious Sites (M=.32). In this instance, once again it scored lower than Excitement (M=.68), however same as Liveliness (M=.32), which by nature represents contrary traits to Peacefulness (for example energetic vs calm). The distinct character of chosen spots may be the key to better understand the findings. Although there are places in Hong Kong, in which travelers may experience the feeling of the relaxing atmosphere and calm moments, in general they do not necessarily recognize the city with these traits. Liveliness has also scored higher in two other categories – Sights and Landmarks as well as Shopping which altogether were represented by significantly higher number of posts in this study. The dynamic character and vibrant ambience of the city was more commonly recognized by visitors than the peaceful atmosphere around nature sites.

Table 6f: Descriptive statistics of the Four Dimensions for each category

		Excitement	Competence	Liveliness	Peacefulness
Transportation (N =262)	M	.58	.59	.14	.15
Sights and Landmarks (N = 251)	M	.75	.19	.28	.13
Sacred and Religious (N = 105)	M	.68	.32	.32	.32
Nature and Parks (N = 47)	M	.47	.15	.15	.45
Shopping (N = 39)	M	.62	.15	.10	.03

After excluding Peacefulness, another CFA was conducted to tests reliability and validity of personality. Bearing this in mind, Table 6g was presented to test all the items. In each instance the inter-construct correlation was lower than square root value of Average Variance Extracted, which indicated that all constructs used in the study were notably different over each other (Kumar, 2016).

Table 6g: Results of reliability test, validity test, and confirmatory factor analysis of first-level factors after the removal of peacefulness

	M	SD	α	Factor loading	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	4.1	.68	.76	.592-.843	.781	.548	.740									
2	3.7	.69	.71	.593-.794	.724	.470	.557	.686								
3	4.2	.61	.76	.698-.770	.772	.530	.736	.622	.728							
4	3.0	.94	.91	.870-.951	.907	.831	.422	.357	.471	.912						
5	2.9	.98	.92	.905-.943	.921	.854	.475	.402	.530	.798	.924					
6	2.9	.92	.90	.881-.928	.900	.819	.320	.271	.357	.625	.704	.905				
7	2.9	.97	.94	.935-.947	.939	.886	.400	.338	.446	.781	.879	.732	.941			
8	2.5	1.00	.87	.805-.869	.869	.690	.117	.099	.131	.195	.219	.197	.246	.831		
9	2.7	1.00	.91	.850-.920	.909	.768	.118	.099	.131	.219	.247	.213	.266	.674	.876	
10	2.6	1.00	.88	.712-.883	.888	.665	.059	.050	.066	.108	.122	.088	.110	.597	.530	.815

Notes: M = mean, SD = standard deviation, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, 1 = excitement, 2 = competence, 3 = liveliness, 4 = actual private self-congruity, 5 = ideal private self-congruity, 6 = actual public self-congruity, 7 = ideal public self-congruity, 8 = content creation, 9 = self-value, 10 = interpersonal communication.

Values in the diagonal line that are highlighted in bold are the square root value of corresponding AVE values.

Values in the lower triangle are correlation values between the corresponding constructs.

Grounded on the validity and reliability of measurement model, another CFA of second-level factors was proposed to measure the factor loading of the constructs. Standardized factor loadings for each personality dimensions (Excitement, Competence and Liveliness) as well as Private self-congruity (actual and ideal) and Public self-congruity (actual social and ideal social)

were greater than .6. According to Kline (1994), if the factor loadings are greater than .6 they should be considered as high.

Table 6h: Results of confirmatory factor analysis of second-level factors

Second-level factors	First-level factors	Factor loading	CR	AVE
Personality	Excitement	.812	.846	.650
	Competence	.686		
	Liveliness	.906		
Private self-congruity	Actual self-congruity	.842	.891	.804
	Ideal self-congruity	.948		
Public self-congruity	Actual social self-congruity	.765	.855	.750
	Ideal social self-congruity	.956		

Notes: CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted.

The purpose of the next step was to investigate the goodness-of-fit of a measurement model. All the fit indices presented in Table 6i, fit in model criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Based on all conducted analysis, it was evident that measurement model was valid, reliable and the structural equation modeling could be carried out.

Table 6i: Model fit indices of measurement model

χ^2	df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
724.627	302	.000	.967	.962	.045	.041

Notes: χ^2 =Chi-Square; df=Degree of Freedom; p=p-value; TLI=Tucker-Lewis Coefficient; CFI=Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR=Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

6.2.3.2 Structural Model Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

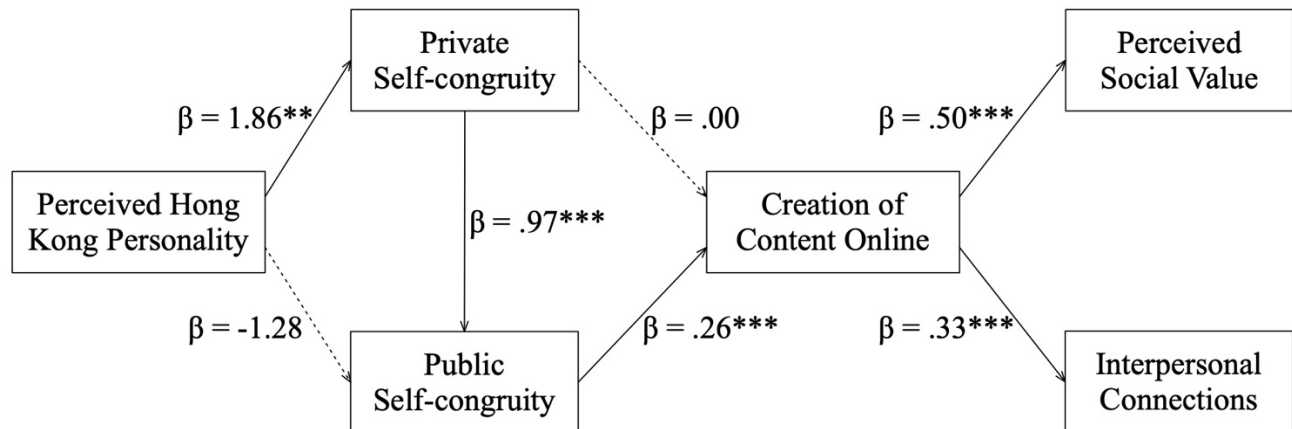
After proving the reliability and validity of the constructs, this study further examined the hypothesized model and tested the hypotheses. Table 6l presents descriptive statistics of key variables. Figure 6a on the other hand presents the results from a regression analysis.

Table 6j: Descriptive statistics of key variables

	M*	SD
Hong Kong Personality	4.0	0.54
Private Self-congruity	2.9	0.89
Public Self-congruity	2.9	0.86
Creation of content online	2.5	1.00
Perceived social value	2.7	1.00
Interpersonal connections	2.6	1.00

Notes: M = mean, SD = standard deviation,
*5-point scale

Figure 6a: Standardized coefficients of relationships in the proposed model



Note: $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$. Dotted lines refer to non-significant relationships. Solid lines refer to significant relationships.

Table 6k: Correlation matrix of key variables

	Perceived Hong Kong Personality	Private Self-Congruity	Public Self-Congruity	Creation of Content Online	Perceived Social Value
Private Self-Congruity	.616**				
Public Self-Congruity	.515	.968***			
Creation of Content Online	.128	.250	.262***		
Perceived Social Value	.087	.170	.178***	.678***	
Interpersonal Connections	.076	.149	.156	.596***	.530***

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The results of model fit indices presented in Table 6j unveiled a goodness of fit for the hypothesized model based on the criterion from the literature ($\chi^2/df < 3$, TLI $> .95$, CFI $> .95$, RMSEA $< .06$, SRMR $< .08$) (Kline, 1998; Hu & Bentler, 1999). In the present case, the value of chi-square to df ratio was 2.40, which correspondingly fit in the measure norms.

Table 6l: Model fit indices of structural model

χ^2	df	χ^2/df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
741.291	309	2.40	.000	.966	.962	.045	.046

Notes: χ^2 =Chi-Square; df=Degree of Freedom; p=p-value; TLI=Tucker–Lewis Coefficient; CFI=Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR=Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

As demonstrated in Figure 6a and Table 6k, two of the previously proposed hypotheses were not supported (H2 and H4). Among other five that were confirmed, four of them were considered as statistically highly significant with *** $p < .001$ ((H3, H5, H6, and H7) or statistically significant with ** $p < .01$ (H1). To justify these findings non-standardized coefficient (b),

standardized coefficient (β), standard error (SE), z-score (z) and p-value (p) are shown in Table 6k. This section presents the results of hypotheses testing.

Perceived Hong Kong destination personality positively influences private aspects of self-congruity ($b=1.20$, $\beta=1.86$, $p < .01$). Therefore, hypothesis H1 was supported.

Perceived Hong Kong destination personality did not show an effect on public aspects of self-congruity ($b= -.88$, $\beta= -1.28$, $p > .05$) and for this reason hypothesis H2 was rejected.

SEM analysis exposed significant relationship between private aspects of self-congruity and public self-congruity ($b = 1.02$, $\beta = .97$, $p < .001$). Consequently, H3 was supported.

The results revealed that there is no positive and significant relationship between private self-congruity and the creation of content online ($b = .00$, $\beta = .00$, $p > .05$) and therefore H4 was not supported.

Public self-congruity has ability to influence that creation of content online ($b = .19$, $\beta = .26$, $p < .001$). Accordingly, H5 was supported.

Higher creation of content online value leads to higher perceived social value ($b = .53$, $\beta = .50$, $p < .001$) thus H6 was supported.

Finally, the creation of content online has a strong effect on interpersonal connections established in virtual networks ($b = .35$, $\beta = .33$, $p < .001$). As a result, H7 was also supported.

Table 6m: Results of Hypothesis Testing

	b	β	SE	z	p
H1: Perceived Hong Kong Personality →Private Self-congruity	1.20	1.86	.45	2.70	**
H3: Private Self-congruity → Public Self-congruity	1.02	.97	.06	17.67	***
H2: Perceived Hong Kong Personality → Public Self-congruity	-.88	-1.28	.46	-1.89	n.s.
H5: Public Self-congruity → Creation of content online	.19	.26	.03	6.11	***
H4: Private Self-congruity → Creation of content online	.00	.00	.02	-.22	n.s.
H6: Creation of content online → Perceived Social Value	.53	.50	.04	11.92	***
H7: Creation of content online → Interpersonal connections	.35	.33	.04	7.89	***

Notes: n.s. = non-significant, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, b = non-standardized coefficient, β = standardized coefficient, SE= Standard Error, z=z-score, p=p-value.

In order to better understand the relationships between variables, the goal of the next part of analysis was to investigate the possible mediations between constructs. As noted by Pan et al. (2018, p.1), “the aim of mediation analysis is to determine whether the relation between the independent and dependent variables is due, wholly or in part, to the mediating variables”. Such examination allows to not only to better explain possible links between the constructs, but also may justify why some of the proposed hypotheses are being rejected. As can be seen in Table 6m, private self-congruity plays a role of mediator between Hong Kong destination personality and public aspects of self-congruity ($b = 1.23$, $\beta = 1.80$, $p < .01$). Moreover, public self-congruity mediates between private self-congruity and the creation of the content online ($b = .20$, $\beta = .25$, $p < .001$).

Table 6n: Results of Mediation Analysis (including non-significant relationships)

	b	β	SE	z	p
Perceived Hong Kong Personality → Private Self-congruity → Public Self-congruity	1.23	1.80	.47	2.63	**
Private Self-congruity → Public Self-congruity → Creation of content online	.20	.25	.03	6.05	***

Notes: ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, b = non-standardized coefficient, β = standardized coefficient, SE= Standard Error, z=z-score, p=p-value.

In the interest of examining the adequacy of the model without non-significant relationships, the SEM was applied. The values of various fit indices presented in Table 6n proved the good model fit based on the criterion from the literature ($\chi^2/df < 3$, TLI $> .95$, CFI $> .95$, RMSEA $< .06$, SRMR $< .08$) (Kline, 1998; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 6o: Model fit indices of the final model (without non-significant relationships)

χ^2	df	χ^2/df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
753.61	311	2.42	.000	.965	.961	.045	.046

Notes: χ^2 =Chi-Square; df=Degree of Freedom; p=p-value; TLI=Tucker–Lewis Coefficient; CFI=Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR=Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

Consequently, all the interrelationships between the constructs included in final model were once again examined. As presented in Table 6o as well as Figure 6b, all anticipated hypothesis (H1, H3, H5, H6, H7) were supported demonstrating significant and positive influence among studied constructs.

Table 6p: Results of Hypothesis Testing in the final model (without non-significant relationships)

	b	β	SE	z	p
H1: Perceived Hong Kong Personality → Private Self-congruity	.38	.58	.04	1.92	***
H: Private Self-congruity → Public Self-congruity	1.00	.96	.06	17.49	***
Public Self-congruity → Creation of content online	.19	.26	.03	6.18	***
Creation of Content Online → Perceived Social Value	.55	.50	.04	11.92	***
Creation of content online → Interpersonal connections	.35	.33	.04	7.89	***

Notes: *** $p < .001$, b = non-standardized coefficient, β = standardized coefficient, SE= Standard Error, z=z-score, p=p-value.

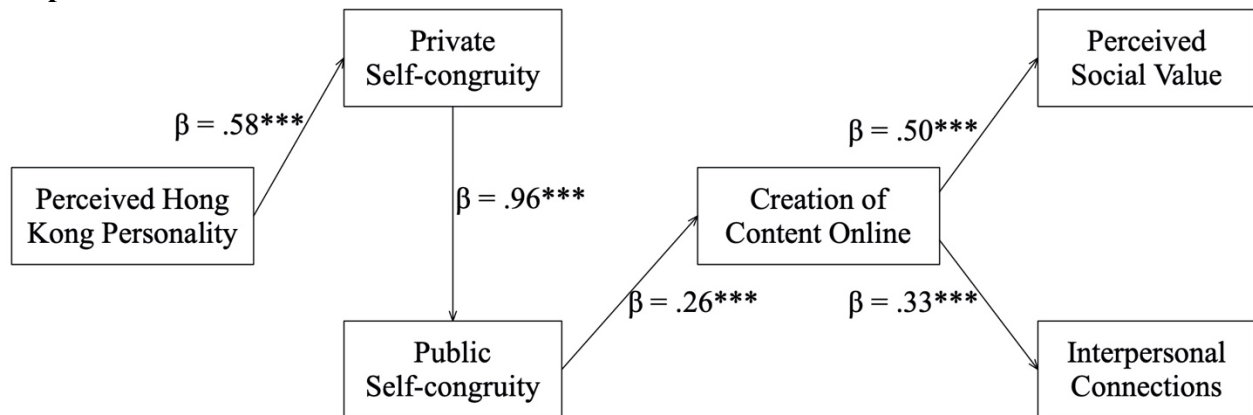
The mediation analysis was also conducted based on the model without non-significant relationships. As presented in Table 6p, once again private self-congruity plays a role of mediator between Hong Kong destination personality and public aspects of self-congruity ($b = .38$, $\beta = .56$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, public self-congruity mediates between private self-congruity and the creation of the content online ($b = .19$, $\beta = .25$, $p < .001$)

Table 6q: Results of Mediation Analysis in the final model (without non-significant relationships)

	b	β	SE	z	p
Perceived Hong Kong Personality → Private Self-congruity → Public Self-congruity	.38	.56	.04	1.64	***
Private self-congruity → Public self-congruity → Content creation	.19	.25	.03	6.16	***

Notes: *** $p < .001$, b = non-standardized coefficient, β = standardized coefficient, SE= Standard Error, z=z-score, p=p-value.

Figure 6b: Standardized coefficients of relationships in the final model informed by empirical evidence



Note: *** $p < .001$. Solid lines refer to significant relationships

CHAPTER 7: Discussion

7.1 Chapter Summary

The focus of this chapter was to gain insights from this research by looking into the results from study 1 as well as results of the hypothesis testing. The intention of this chapter was also to explain the complexities of this research, elaborate the results of two studies and provide various marketing communication implications for the tourism industry in Hong Kong. The findings and discussion of content analysis of tourist posts applied in study 1 were already considered in more details in chapter 5. Despite that, in order to achieve the previously stated objectives, it is necessary to review these results again. The goal of Study 1 was to identify the perceived Hong Kong destination personality. The established personality dimensions were considered as fundamental component of study 2, which was dedicated to checking the links between the constructs included in the theoretical model, with a particular focus on explaining which aspects of self-congruity (private or public) motivates travellers to create posts during or after their visits. In order to achieve these goals, this section concentrates on discussing the findings from both studies, then introduces theoretical implications, followed by marketing communication implications and finally limitations of this study and future directions.

7.2 Perceived Hong Kong Destination Personality

The first objective was to identify the perceived Hong Kong destination personality. This was done by determining which personality dimensions are more commonly visible in the online posts created by travellers who previously visited the city and decided to share their experiences with other network users. The results of the first study demonstrated that the identification of destination personality using content analysis of online reviews is feasible. The results suggest that

tourist posts provide abundant information regarding not only functional attributes of Hong Kong (e.g., comments regarding accommodation, the level of safety or various advice) but also symbolize attributes of the place. This is especially visible in reviews concerning local tourists' attractions and famous spots. When sharing personal experiences about the destination, content creators often communicate their emotional and cognitive reactions which can be associated with personality traits more commonly ascribed to humans. These distinct qualities can be clustered in specific dimensions, which will establish a destination personality of that location. Travelers written texts provide the ability to capture not only their judgements about functional characteristics of visited spots, but also allow to learn more about symbolic ones. Vast majority of content selected for this study depicted tourists personal feelings and sentiments, which offered the opportunity to identify specific personality traits. When considered collectively, these traits become the components of different personality dimensions. As observed by Kim & Malek (2017), people tend to favour consumer brands for their symbolic rather than cognitive qualities. This also applies to tourists as they more frequently prioritize the places that are affiliated with variety of symbolic impressions, rather than functional aspects (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

The first research question proposed in this study intended to identify the perception of Hong Kong among previous travellers to the city. Four distinct dimensions – Excitement, Competence, Peacefulness and Liveliness were identified. Travellers who visited the city commonly associated it with humanlike traits which were represented by personal qualities concerning these dimensions. Excitement was the most frequently observed in posts regarding Hong Kong's attractions. The perceived destination personality varies among tourist destinations as it is commonly represented by the set of different dimensions which is in line with findings of other studies. Ekinci & Hosany, who applied the notion of personality into tourism context as first

by adopting Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale, identified excitement, sincerity, and conviviality as core dimensions of three selected cities in United Kingdom. Excitement was also recognized as predominant characteristic in study on Greece (Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2014) or North Queensland in Australia (Murphy, Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2007). The second most common dimension in study on Hong Kong was Competence which referred to high quality of man-made resources and services that the tourism industry provides.

This dimensions was also evident in study on Las Vegas in United States (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), Bodrum in Turkey (Kilic & Sop, 2012) and South Korea (Kim & Lehto, 2013). Each of these study destinations was recognized with Competence but none of them considered Liveliness, which was the third most common dimension in posts regarding Hong Kong. Liveliness refers to dynamic characters of the city and more precisely its vibrant and diverse ambience. In this study, it was represented by several personality traits like "energetic", "outgoing", "open-minded", "spirited", "active", "alive" or "busy". Although Liveliness was observed in a study of Kumar and Nayak (2014), who developed a scale for measuring destination personality of India, the interpretation of dimension characteristics was somehow different in comparison to this study. In actual scale dimension, Liveliness was represented by Creativity which was associated with traits like "enthusiastic", "passionate", "exciting", "energetic" and "creative". These traits clearly vary from the ones adopted into the dimension of Liveliness in this investigation of Hong Kong destination personality. Liveliness was established with references to spirited, outgoing, open-minded and busy character of Hong Kong observed by people who visited it and decided to share their reflections in online environment. Finally, Peacefulness was also identified as one of the core dimensions of perceived Hong Kong destination personality based on travellers posts. This personality was adopted from Kim & Stepchenkova (2017), who also acknowledged its presences

in tourism-oriented blogs describing Jeju in South Korea. Nevertheless, as all four dimensions were once again examined in the survey employed in study 2, Peacefulness was removed from the final list of dimensions characterizing destination personality of Hong Kong. In comparison to Excitement, Competence and Liveliness, it was not frequently recognized by majority of study participants, and therefore the extent of its relevance in explaining the relationship between study constructs was excessively low.

Brand Hong Kong (BrandHK) was launched in 2001 by the Hong Kong government (BrandHK, 2021a). The key objective of this campaign was to establish communication strategies to promote the destination globally. With help from international communication experts and opinion leaders, the government has selected “Asia’s world city” as the primary motto of the campaign. Five distinct personality traits – “cosmopolitan”, “dynamic”, “secure”, “diverse” and “connected”, were designated to underline the individual character of the city. These attributes served as the foundation and structure for developing graphic identification of the city. The final Brand Hong Kong signature contained three core elements – the Brand Hong Kong logotype, the motto “Asia’s world city” and the image of the flying dragon. The ribbons extending from the dragon’s body suggested different character of the city (versatility, diversity and dynamism) and symbolised strong ties between Hong Kong’s old history and modern times. Although these attributes are positively correlated with Excitement, Competence and Liveliness identified in study one, their actual adoption in the city’s promotional communication campaigns over the last twenty years is disputed.

In order to present Hong Kong to a global audience, the Hong Kong Tourism Board has established discoverhongkong.com (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2021). The aim of this website is to further amplify their promotional campaign and subsequently encourage more international

tourists to visit the city. On this website, the Hong Kong tourism board has created and shared a diverse range of campaigns as well as their annual reports outlining tourism performance, the last of which was produced in 2019. The organisation has endorsed the ‘Asia’s world city’ vision to promote the destination worldwide. One of the campaigns launched in 2010 was called ‘Faces of Hong Kong’ under a theme ‘World’s meeting place’. The initial idea behind this project was to present Hong Kong society representatives from all walks of life, including both local’s and expatriates, through their own stories. The intention of this campaign was to show a more personable and softer side of Hong Kong, as according to Chu (2015), the previous campaigns “failed to recognise that the distinguishing characteristics of Hong Kong is it’s ‘emergent community’, where genuine cosmopolitanisms find a space to emerge” (p. 309). Although the new campaign refreshed the previous communication strategy, it has also been criticised for hiding the challenges faced by Hong Kong residents as a result of vast political and economic change. As again noted by Chu (2015), who more thoroughly examined ‘Faces of Hong Kong’, the campaign “simply placed the emphasis on highlighting the neighbourhood spirit in the good old days so as to soothe public discontents” (p. 319).

Owing to the results of study 2, which indicates a strong relationship between perceived Hong Kong personality and private self-congruity, this study proposes a novel communication strategy. The new campaign could present Hong Kong as an exciting city with high technological development and a dynamic character. For example, instead of showing local people that tourists may struggle to affiliate with, the new advertisements could include tourists that possess personality traits in line with Excitement (interesting, exciting, trendy etc.), Competence (confident, hard-working, intelligent etc.) and Liveliness (energetic, open-minded, outgoing etc.). To project their actual self-congruity, these individuals could share their

experience by saying “Hong Kong is the place that people like us travel to”. To project their ideal self-congruity, the advertisement could present tourists during the travel selection process observing these tourists and saying, “I wish to be like them, so let’s go to Hong Kong!”. This approach would bridge the gap between potential visitors and those who already visited the city as it is easier to find a connection with another tourist, rather than someone who permanently lives in the city.

There is further evidence to suggest potential challenges with more recent campaigns such as “Connect and Excel” launched in 2018 and “Hong Kong. A world of opportunities.” launched in 2021. The 2018 campaign focused on connectivity, particularly with mainland China, however the protests in 2019 could call into question whether this campaign truly reflects how some members of Hong Kong society would depict the city. Equally, as claimed by BrandHK (2021b) the latest campaign which concentrates on ‘the cities positioning as the most desirable place in Asia to live, work and invest’ appears to be misaligned with current government legislation that does not allow free movement in and out of Hong Kong.

From a scholarly standpoint, both campaigns also failed to recognise the importance of symbolic components, focusing instead on functional attributes such as financial services, economic development and a strong legal system. Existing research shows that symbolic aspects, which refer to psychological and emotional components such as personality dimensions, more effectively promote the destination than solely using functional attributes (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006, Usakli & Baloglu, 2011, Chen & Phou, 2013). Souiden, et al. (2017) stated that “positioning destination on the basis of their functional attributes makes them less distinguishable and easily substitutable” (p. 56). Adopting personality traits, would enable Hong Kong to distinguish itself through its own unique characteristics. Moreover, it would enable

communication marketing practitioners to implement new strategies that would help to differentiate Hong Kong from other tourist destinations, positioning the city as a place filled with of Excitement, Competence and Liveliness.

7.3 Discussion of Findings from the Examination of Theoretical Model

Apart from identifying the perceived destination personality of Hong Kong, the main purpose of this study was to empirically test the possible connections between selected constructs. These include destination personality, private and public aspects of self-congruity, creation of content online, perceived social value and interpersonal connections. These constructs as well as designed hypotheses were identified after an extensive academic literature review on subjects of consumer self-concept, brand personality and self-congruity effects. Checking these relationships creates an opportunity to not only enhance understanding of travellers motivations to visit particular destination, but also provides insights into their behaviour during and after their trips. Understanding the perception of visitors minds should become a principal target for tourism-oriented organizations (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

Prior research on self-congruity have noted that brand personality plays crucial role in influencing visitor choices (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Murphy, Benckendorff & Moscardo, 2007a, 2007b). In this study, private self-congruity includes of two aspects of self-congruity – actual and ideal. Both of them refer to individuals self-motives (“The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I am”, “The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I would like to be”) which, following Sirgy’s (2018) framework, are driven by the need for self-consistency and the need for self-esteem. Majority of this study respondents perceive Hong Kong with humanlike traits such as interesting, exciting and trendy (Excitement) and portray it as well-made, efficient and hard-

working (Competence) with energetic, open-minded and vibrant atmosphere. The results showed that people who visited the city in the past, commonly consider themselves with the same traits, and therefore they were able to experience high level of actual self-congruity (Sirgy, 2018). Sirgy and Su (2000) hold the view that different aspects of self-congruity shape tourists' attitudes through gratifying personal motivations. On that account, actual self-congruity is driven by the need for self-consistency and more precisely how consumers actually portray themselves. For example, people may decide to visit Hong Kong after reading posts in online networks as they believe this can reinforce and confirm their identity. One way of building the level of self-confidence is by verification of own self-concept. This can be done, by selecting destinations which may help the travellers to preserve their identities. If visitors find themselves in a place that does not reflect who they are, they may face the threat of cognitive dissonance, which in consequence might bring negative evaluation of the destination (Sirgy, 1985).

Furthermore, ideal self-congruity is motivated by the need for enhancing the level of self-esteem (Beerli, Meneses & Gil, 2007). In this scenario, visiting Hong Kong by some individuals may be justified by the intention to better understand their ideal-self and satisfy their aspiration to represent the same traits as their chosen destination. After identifying Hong Kong as exciting, efficient and vibrant city, the majority of study respondents confirmed that they also wish to represent the same qualities, and they wish to be like Hong Kong. Travellers who recognize the city with positive and desirable characteristics, wish to represent similar in order to boost their own self-esteem. Although the disparity between actual and ideal self-congruities are clearly visible (e.g. travellers may not associate themselves with Hong Kong personality traits, but they wish to change that and become like them) in this research they represent one and the same

construct. Both facets – self-consistency and self-esteem are altered by self-appraisal aspects and for this reason they were referred to as private self-congruity.

The results from structural equation modeling exposed a strong relationship between private aspects of self-congruity and perceived Hong Kong destination personality (H1). This implies that the way people identify themselves (or wish to identify themselves) was strongly influenced by their perceived image of the city, and more precisely by the personality traits that they associate with Hong Kong. The results of confirmatory factor analysis proved that majority of study participants feel like their personality represents the same characteristics as the city and they wish for it to remain that way. These findings are in line with Pan et. al (2017) who developed a destination personality scale considering only Chinese respondents. Their research showed that out of five selected dimensions (Competence, Sacredness, Femininity, Vibrancy and Excitement) four of them predict tourist's private aspects of self-congruity. Only Vibrancy did not exhibit strong relationships. Although this dimensions may seem to be closely associated with Liveliness, their meanings were substantially different in both studies. Usakli and Baloglu (2011) intended to examine destination personality of Las Vegas. They identified five dimensions (Sophistication, Contemporary, Vibrancy, Sincerity and Contemporary) that were in most instances different from those associated with Hong Kong. Despite that, they also observed a significant relationship between the perceived destination personality and actual and ideal self-congruities of visitors to Las Vegas. Kumar (2016), who examined cities in India, also observed that destination personality has a significant influence on visitors actual and ideal aspects of self-congruity.

Nevertheless, none of these three studies looked into two other aspects of the theory – social and ideal-social. As noted by Usakli & Baloglu (2011, p. 118), “this study only concentrates on actual and ideal self-congruity, because these two types of self-congruity have received the

strongest empirical support and are most commonly used”. Similar statement was shared by Kumar (2016), who also justified lack of public self-congruity in his study by extensive analysis of only private self-congruity in prior research. However, respectively, ten and five years passed since these papers were published, and since then the visibility and ease of using online networks has considerably influenced the way people create and share their impressions in online environments (Lyu, 2016). For this reason, in order to better understand travellers motivations for targeting certain destinations, it is essential and necessary to consider public self-congruity. This is because two aspects of public self-congruity are determined not by self-motives, but by social standards and the public perception of who they are. Nowadays, more frequently that perception plays a major role in online networks, and therefore it can stimulate people’s attitudes and actions, including the choice of next travel destination.

With this in mind, the aim of this study was to find out the possible relationship between perceived Hong Kong destination personality and public self-congruity (H2). Based on the results from structural equation modeling, it was observed that perceived Hong Kong destination personality has no direct effect on public self-congruity. In other words, the fact that Hong Kong is recognized with certain personality dimensions, does not directly indicate that travellers are also being seen by others as having the same qualities. Moreover, the fact that Hong Kong is associated with Excitement, Competence and Liveliness, does not necessarily mean that these dimensions will instantly influence visitors perception of how they wish to be identified by others. These results partly follow the findings of Rodriguez et al. (2012), who investigated moderators of self-congruity effects by doing meta-analysis of over 100 empirical studies regarding that theory. The results revealed that in comparison to private self-motives, public self-motives represented by social and ideal social self-concepts do not manifest strong influence of self-congruity on people

attitudes. As noted by Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. (2012, p.1180), “because private self-motives capture both inner and social standards of the self, they should exert greater weight, producing stronger self-congruity effects than public self-motives”.

In this scenario, public self-congruity comprises of social and ideal social aspects of the theory. The first aspect is related to the match between travellers understanding of how they are being portrayed by others with respect to destination personality (“The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how the other believe that I am”). Social self-congruity is stimulated by social consistency (Sirgy, 2018), which indicates that travellers behaviour is driven by other people expectations. Individuals who travel to Hong Kong and believe that they are closely associated with the city’s perceived image, tend to maintain that image to reinforce their social identity. On the other hand, ideal social self-congruity is justified by the match between the way travellers wish to be portrayed by others with respect to destination personality (“The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I would like the others to see me”). The outcomes of this match are driven by social approval motive (Sirgy, 2018). In order to avoid disapproval from society, people may adjust their behaviour and take actions that will enhance their recognition and respect amongst others. Despite that, the results suggest that the image of Hong Kong was able to only influence travellers personal self-evaluation. However, it did not directly affect the way they were seen by others, until the moment they decided to engage themselves in portraying their own identity by creating the online content, which could determine other people’s observations.

The third relationship proposed in the examination of theoretical model, assists in better understanding of why destination personality does not influence public self-congruity. One of the objectives of this research was to examine if actual and ideal self-congruities have any effect on social and ideal social aspects of the theory. This hypothesis was proposed after reviewing Sirgy’s

(2018) article regarding the history of studies on self-congruity. The results indicate that the congruency between perceived Hong Kong destination personality and private self-congruity leads to higher public self-congruity (H3). That implies that, travellers self-motives which were influenced by the image of the city, positively affect their aspiration to be associated with Hong Kong. The results of mediation analysis have confirmed these findings, showing that private self-congruity strongly mediates between the perceived destination personality of Hong Kong and public self-congruity. The fact that people who visited Hong Kong found their personality similar to this place or they wished to become alike, made a strong impact on how they wished the others would see them or how they think the others may already see them. The results show that private self-congruity (actual and ideal) which relies on intra-personal thoughts about one self has a strong ability to influence public self-congruity (social and ideal social) in order to avoid isolation from society and achieve social inclusion. So far, the empirical research of self-congruity in tourism context did not investigate these links. However, the results from prior studies, that only considered self-congruity as unidimensional construct formed of actual and ideal aspects, provide a chance to briefly explain and justify the findings of presented study. It is because the self-congruity often plays the role of a mediator between destination personality and diverse behavioural intentions (Yang, Mohd Isa & Ramayah, 2020). Accordingly, a considerable amount of empirical studies have noted that actual and ideal congruity mediates between destination personality and travellers loyalty towards the destination (Kumar, 2016) intention to visit (Matzler, Strobl, Stokburgher-Sauer, Bobovnick & Bauer (2016), intention to return and recommend the place (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011) and destination brand attachment (Huang, Zhang & Hu, 2017). These results point out that for travellers behaviours are strongly affected by the congruency with their own self, which means that satisfying the demand for self-consistency ("I am like Hong Kong") and self-

enhancement (“I wish to be like Hong Kong”) may gratify the demand to manifest these outcomes further. Unless travellers will not decide to maintain their desire image (“I wish others to see me as Hong Kong”) or maintain the image that think they already established with the city (“Hong Kong is the way the others see me”), other people will not be able to recognize and associate Hong Kong’s personality traits with these visitors. As a result of this, another objective of the study was to investigate which congruity – public or private, affects the creation of online content.

Results indicate that actual and ideal self-congruities have no direct effect on the creation of content online (H4). In other words, the fact that travellers highly associate themselves with their perceived idea of Hong Kong, does not directly impact the reasons for which they decide to post images, videos or comments regarding destination. Moreover, even the fact that they wish to become like Hong Kong and represent similar personality traits (based on their evaluation of the city), does not directly influence their attitude to share their travel experience on online platforms. These results challenge the findings of few other examinations, especially those by Luna-Cortes (2017) and Luna-Cortes et al. (2019) who investigated the use of virtual networks by travellers. In particular, it was observed that self-congruity directly and positively influence the use of virtual social networks. However, in these studies self-congruity, have only investigated the theory’s private aspects – actual and ideal, without taking into consideration two other aspects – social and ideal social. According to Sirgy & Su (2000), due to fact that self-concept comprise of private and public motives, self-congruity should also be addressed with private and public aspects of the construct. In order to gain better understanding of travellers behaviours and their personalities, researchers should consider all four components of the theory when examining its effects.

Consequently, the results of this study exposed that public self-congruity directly influence creation of content online (H5). Therefore higher congruency between visitors perceived images

of Hong Kong and their impression of how the others see them, leads to higher chance to use online platforms to share their travel experiences. Majority of study respondents engaged themselves in online activities regarding Hong Kong to maintain their image. In addition to that, the results pointed out that individuals who ideally would to be associated by others with Hong Kong, had even more extensively took advantage of virtual networks to create the online content regarding their visits. These observation are in line with Lenhart & Fox (2006) who noticed that need of belonging and determining own status by people is often driven by impressions management in online networks. Stephen (2016) concluded that virtual networks have created a great opportunity for people for self-extension as social media environment significantly impacts travellers personal decisions to create the content. Additionally Luna-Cortes (2017), emphasized that the reason for using online networks by tourists, is with regards to the ability of presenting certain aspects about the self, that would be difficult to demonstrate in any other way. This study indicates that public self-congruity plays a role of a mediator between private self-congruity and creation of content online. That implies indirect effect of how travellers see themselves or how they wish to see themselves and verification of their self-concepts in virtual networks by creating content. Although in general sense people have tendency to expose more favourable images of themselves (Gonzalez & Hancock, 2011), the final decision on sharing personal experiences in Hong Kong will highly depend on their perceive idea how the others already see them or how they wish to be seen by others. The impression that engaging online helps to avoid social disapproval and increases chances to reinforce social identity results from public aspects of self-congruity – social and ideal social.

Another goal of this study was to scrutinize the connections between creation of online content and possible outcomes regarding perceived social values (H5). The intention of this

premise was to find out if sharing the experience on online platforms improves the way travellers are being perceived. The results of hypothesis testing indicate that the higher engagement in creating online content may lead to higher social value. That implies that posting images, videos or review regarding Hong Kong will help visitors to experience the feeling of social approval. These findings are in line with observations of Munar & Jacobsen (2014) and Seidemen (2013) who also point out that ability to create and manage online identity, can become a successful strategy to avoid social exclusion and enhance own reputation amongst others. Moreover, Qu & Lee (2011) noted that travellers tend to actively engage in online tourism-oriented communities as they provide beneficial effects on social identity. Luna-Cortes (2017) who examined direct affects between intensity of using online networks and perceived social value, additionally noted that these two constructs influence each other. That implies effectiveness of virtual networks to generate desire self-impressions, especially when these impressions are congruent with tourists perceived ideas of how the others see them or how they wish the others would see them. Rihova et al. (2014, p. 356) beside demonstrating that value is socially constructed and embedded in tourists' social practices, also exposed that tourists have tendencies to "bond, cement social relationships and enhance their social skills thus co-creating social value". The 71.1% of the respondents confirmed strong engagement to share their travel experiences online during their stay in Hong Kong and/or after their visits. Majority of them affirmed that thanks to these behaviours, they were able to create good impressions about themselves which in consequences made them feel more acceptable in social environment.

Finally, the last objective was with respect to other possible outcomes of creating the content regarding Hong Kong. More precisely, this examination intended to explore if sharing travel experience in virtual networks has any effect on developing social interactions with other

network users (H7). The results revealed that higher engagement in creating online content leads to higher chances to create interpersonal connections on online platforms. In other words, travellers who decided to make posts on Hong Kong, were able to maintain their current relationships and also establish new ones as a result of these posts. Moreover, the results indicate that Hong Kong visitors highly value their new connections. These observation are partly consistent with another study on the influence of social value and self-congruity on interpersonal connections in virtual networks (Luna-Cortez, Lopez-Bonilla & Lopez-Bonilla, 2019). Although the objective of their study was to examine opposing links – that is influence of interpersonal connections on creation on online content, the results confirmed strong relationship between these constructs. Tosun (2012) who investigated motivations to use Facebook and present “true self” in online environment, observed that ability to make new friends is one of the key factor for social media networks users. Furthermore, for those who established new friendships during their travels, using online networks is often only option to where they can further communicate and keep relationship in progress (Nusair, Bilgihan & Okumus, 2013). As noted by Luna-Cortes (2017, p. 44). “consumer’s choice of a tourism destination can be perceived as a symbol of status”. In this study, majority of people (68%) who decided to create the content and share the travel in Hong Kong, confirmed receiving the feedback with relation to their posts. That signify and underlines the reasons for which social inclusion is one of the major outcome for letting other online network users to become a part of travellers experiences during and after their visit to Hong Kong.

7.4 Theoretical Contributions

From a theoretical perspective, this research offers a few significant contribution to prior academic work on destination personality and self-congruity. Regarding the first study, it is apparent that people willingly and extensively share their traveling experiences by creating online content. The content frequently includes diverse personality traits that people tend to attribute to visited destination. To our knowledge, so far no other scholars intended to identify perceived destination personality based on the tourists online comments of destination attractions. The findings of this study reveal that the virtual environment offers abundant information concerning travellers personal evaluations of the place. Analysing the content of online posts, increases our understanding of tourists intensions and behaviours. The results of this study have shown that one of the main reasons for sharing images, videos and different kinds of reviews regarding tourist experiences is their authors desire for satisfying social approval motives. Visiting locations which represent anticipated personality traits and creating posts regarding these experiences may contribute in gratifying these motivations.

Online networks typically enable users to freely manifest their own reflections and feelings about tourism experiences. The analysis of posts concerning Hong Kong shows that a wide range of users willingly share more personal and comprehensive information. Therefore, the content of online posts assists in identifying travellers perceived ideas of visited places. This observation is in line with other scholars who also analysed existing content to identify destination personality. According to Kim & Stechpenkova (2017 p.417) “personality perceptions and attributions generated in response to a survey or interview question may not necessarily mirror those originally experienced at the destination, nor will they reflect those occurring in response or reaction to the personal visitation experience”. Using non-structured questions creates the opportunity for

researchers to identify not only already established personality dimensions but also discover original ones as the analysed content often includes more natural thoughts and observations. Additionally, due to the fact that online content is created on a regular basis during or after travellers visits, it provides the ability to notice and follow potential changes in tourists behaviours and their opinions regarding visited places. It has been 15 years since the Ekinçi & Hosany (2006) applied the construct of brand personality into tourism context. Since then, the vast majority of researchers who investigated personality dimensions of distinct locations rather adopted previously formed and organized dimensions, significantly lowering the opportunity to recognize the novel ones – unique for the studied destination (Pan, Zhang, Gursoy & Lu 2017).

Another theoretical contribution revolves around the self-congruity concept and its adoption into existing empirical research. The extensive academic literature review on the effects and outcome of the match between the perceived ideas of destination and self-concept, have failed to consider two key elements of the theory – social and ideal social self-congruities. This research fills the existing gap by pointing out how two public aspects of the theory affect tourist attitudes to create the content in virtual network. The results emphasize strong and significant relationship between destination personality of studied city (Hong Kong) and private aspects (actual and ideal) of self-congruity, and these observations are in line with findings of current research on subject matter. However when it comes to the impact of private aspects on behavioural intentions, the obtained results demonstrate how the opinions of others highly influences individuals choices and attitudes. Therefore, this study calls into question the validity of the prior examinations regarding possible relationships between self-congruity and diverse behavioural outcomes. Existing empirical research indicates that self-congruity positively affects destination satisfaction (Kumar, 2016), perceived social value (Luna-Cortes, Lopez-Bonilla & Lopez-Bonilla, 2019), destination

choice (Beerli, Diaz & Moreno, 2007), intention to return and recommend (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011) and loyalty towards the destination (Kim & Thapa, 2018). Despite that, when applying self-congruity to measure the relationship with referred constructs and outcomes, none of these studies scrutinized public aspects of self-concept. According to Sop (2020), who conducted a systematic review of 53 academic articles regarding the theory of self-congruity in tourism context, 82% addressed actual self-congruity and 57% ideal self-congruity. In comparison, social self-congruity was only examined by 13% followed by ideal social self-congruity which was mentioned in 12% from all selected articles. These numbers are clear evidence for the existing gap in the analysis of self-congruity in tourism and communication studies and on that account this research suggest to address this lacuna in academic research.

7.5 Marketing Communication Implications

The aim of this section is to present a number of marketing communication implications that could be adopted by the tourism sector. The focal point of proposed research is to underline the importance of the relationship between travellers perceived ideas of themselves and their perceived idea of Hong Kong as a tourist destination. We argue that better understanding of these links by the tourism industry can lead to the better development of communication strategies that could, in turn, influence the number of potential visitors into the city.

One of the most significant findings of this analysis revealed that travellers actively engage in creating online content by sharing their experiences and observations regarding Hong Kong and its perceived personality. The fact that 68% of them received feedback from other online users, emphasizes the pervasive character of virtual networks and their ability to reach wide audiences, including those who never thought or considered visiting Hong Kong. This is the main reason for which the tourism sector ought to encourage and assist visitors to promote the city online by

creating for them specific platforms where they can not only materialise their travel experience but also create content together with other tourists. The results show that 71,1 % of respondents used online platforms to talk about the travel experiences they had in Hong Kong. The examination of theoretical model revealed that the creation of content online strongly and positively influences the perceived social value as well as ability to establish interpersonal connections with other networks users. One way of engaging people to share their travel experience could be founded on developing unique tourism-oriented mobile apps, for example online games, which at the end could be beneficial for both sides. In that context, playing would mean visiting local attractions and posting images, videos and comments with reference to these places. These behaviours could be rewarded with discounts and free access to other locations, desired to be promoted by the tourism sector. Another idea is to engage travellers in offline group events using for this online resources. For examples, creating social events for visitors which would help them to interact and recognize other individuals with similar interests. These events would promote different kinds of activities and attractions, but they all would emphasize positive aspects of personality dimensions that are associated with Hong Kong.

Tourism industries and local governments are able to recognize the range of characteristics that the location is associated with and adapt their communication strategies and campaigns to present a consistent image of this destination. In case personality traits, which are shared online by tourists, are incompatible with the preferred destination images that travel authorities want to project, tourism authorities may engage in promotional efforts to develop the preferred destination image through in house content creation. In amplifying the preferred destination image, tourism authorities simultaneously begin to negate any undesirable imagery. As noted by Kim & Stechpenkova (2017, p.423), “a consistent experience will reduce the gap between pre-travel

expectations and on-site experiences of tourists, which in turn can lead to increased tourists' satisfaction". Tourism industries should pay attention to destination personality traits invoked not only by previous visitors but also those individuals who are currently staying in the city. More importantly, they should present Hong Kong as an exciting and interesting destination, with one of the most efficient and reliable transportation systems in the world that allows visitors to quickly and safely reach their intended attractions. Furthermore, the campaigns should project Hong Kong as a destination where travellers have the opportunity to achieve the feeling of liveliness. They need to consider the energetic, outgoing and dynamic atmosphere of the city, especially with regards to those tourists' attractions that are located in the heart of the city centre.

A number of great ideas that could influence the perception of the city were already considered by the government of Hong Kong. Hong Kong Tourism Board was set up to promote the destination among international communities. This institution aims to engage visitors to discover the city and stay online during their city tours. It offers the possibility to share the traveling experience on purposely created for that occasion accounts on distinct social media channels. The list of these can be found on the official tourism board organization's website (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2020). It includes the most famous ones like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Sina Weibo, YouTube, WeChat, and Discover Hong Kong e-News. These platforms can be used in English and Chinese, but some selected mediums offer also other language options. Individuals who decide to join chosen accounts, can observe the adventures and activities of other tourists, and be informed about the present as well as incoming events and happenings. Sharing the content with others on official government accounts creates an opportunity for an increased amount of feedback. Creating opportunities to engage travellers in online activities may help them to develop and facilitate the sense of belonging and identification with a destination choice (Kang

& Schuett, 2012). According to Zivkovic et al. (2014) more than half of all individuals, during the process of selecting their next holiday destination, will decide to download the tourist-oriented mobile application. This tendency is systematically growing year by year, due to the further development of technology and the creation of original products that impact the way people communicate and obtain the information. One way for tourists to understand how these new tools operate is by being vigorously online, especially with creating new content and sharing it among other users. The ability to post from anywhere and anytime during their tourist experiences, provides a great opportunity to present themselves to other members of the network. It also creates the opportunity to identify and recognize certain personality traits that may or may not match with visitors' self-concept.

Despite that, since march 2020 the tourism sector in Hong Kong like many other cities around the globe has experienced unprecedented event in history, which removed the opportunity to travel. This situation creates an unique opportunity to analyse and evaluate the existing online content and therefore identify the perceived personality of the city. Online platforms provide access to a great quantity of information, which has significantly influenced the way that people around the world see and recognize Hong Kong. Acquiring this knowledge may help to better understand the expectations and needs of tourists, once they are able to return to the city. Moreover, for local tourism industry these insights should create greater awareness of what Hong Kong is, what Hong Kong wants to be, how the other see Hong Kong and how does the Hong Kong wish to be seen by people around the world.

7.6 Limitations and Future Lines of Research

This research was able to recognize several shortcomings from previous empirical work in the area of consumer self-concept, destination personality and self-congruity effects. Despite that, the findings of this study are also not free of limitations which are more precisely discussed in the present section.

First of all, it can be suggested that the results do not validate behaviours of entire population of travellers to Hong Kong. Purposive sampling method from two social networks was used to test the relationships between construct adopted in this study. Due to fact, that some of visitors do not use or engage in online activities, especially participating in online surveys, the obtained results should not be generalized and deemed to represent all visitors. With this in mind, the future examinations could apply random sampling techniques to more accurately choose desired respondents.

Secondly, the initial idea of this projects was to interview and survey travellers to Hong Kong during their stay in the city. Due to an outbreak of Covid-19 and lack of ability to visit Hong Kong by non-residents since March 2020, the data was collected using online surveys to recall about past travelling experiences. Therefore the findings of this study may not necessarily reflect the tourist's actual impressions of the city when they visited it due to the time lapsed. Their responses will rely on the recollections of memories which may not precisely represent the genuine feeling and experiences during their visits. The future research should attempt to collect the data from those individuals who are currently visiting the city, assuming travel has resumed. By doing so, scholars receive the ability to get even more valuable insights regarding travellers perspectives and impressions of Hong Kong.

Moreover, the results of this study do not distinguish diverse characteristics of travellers to Hong Kong. For example, the prior research show that repeat visitors are more likely to return to the destination in comparison to first time visitors (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Marketing communication practitioners should create different promotional campaigns for those who never visited the city as their perceived ideas of the place is not affected by own experiences. Despite the fact that 62.3% respondents visited Hong Kong more than once in last five years this study did not examine distinct aspects between first time and repeat visitors. Future investigations on subject area could address this matter and seek to scrutinize the potential differences between these two groups of travellers.

The presented results of the hypotheses testing in study 2 take into account all types of visitors, without considering their different motivations for travelling. Although tourism was a main reason to come to Hong Kong for 45,3% of respondents, many of others arrived into the city due to their business and employment opportunities (24,4%) or to visit their friends and relatives (16,9%). Distinct motivations may affect the way visitors spend time in Hong Kong and this can influence their thoughts and opinions about the city. Scholars as well as marketing communication specialists should recognise that different kinds of tourism experiences may offer diverse results about perceived destination personality of studied place.

Finally, this study investigated influence of destination personality as well as private and public self-congruities on creation of content in virtual networks. The findings emphasize the strong impact of social and ideal social self-congruities to share tourism experiences, calling for additional research that could examine their links with other behavioural intentions and outcomes. Future studies could explore the link between two social aspects of the theory and other variables

such as loyalty towards destination, satisfaction from the experience, intention to return and recommend the destination to the other travellers.

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Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

The purpose of this survey is to identify your perspectives on travel experiences during your stay in Hong Kong and to know more about the content that you possibly posted on online platforms during or after your stay.

All information provided by you will be kept with strict confidentiality. There are no right or wrong answers, so please answer as openly and thoughtfully as you can. Please answer all the questions since only fully filled questionnaires will go for further analysis.

Thank you!

Please answer the following questions:

PART 1

1. How many times have you visited Hong Kong in the period of last 5 years?
a) 0
b) 1
c) 2
d) 3
e) 4 or more than that
2. When was the last time you visited Hong Kong?
a) 2021
b) 2020
c) 2019
d) 2018
e) 2017
f) 2016 or before that
3. What was the purpose of your last visit?
a) Tourism
b) Business
c) Education
f) Visiting relatives or friends
e) Others / Please specify: _____
4. How long did you stay in Hong Kong for during your last trip?

a) 1-2 days
b) 3-6 days
c) 1-2 weeks
d) more than 2 weeks

5. With whom did you travel to Hong Kong with during your last trip?
a) Traveled alone
b) Family/Relatives
c) Friends
d) Tour group
e) Others / Please specify: _____

6. Have you ever created any kind of online content regarding your time in Hong Kong? (ex. posted pictures or videos on social media; shared the review concerning tourists' attractions, hotels or restaurants; created a blog or a vlog, etc.)
a) Yes
b) No
6.1 ONLY IF YES / IF THEY PUT NO THEN THE NEXT QUESTION NO. 6
6.1 What kind of online content was that? (Can choose more than 1)
a) Posted pictures
b) Posted videos
c) Wrote a review regarding local tourist attraction I visited
d) Wrote a review regarding the hotel I stayed in
e) Wrote a review regarding the restaurant I visited
f) Shared my experiences on a blog
g) Shared my experiences on a video blog
h) Others / Please specify: _____

7. How many posts regarding your experiences in Hong Kong have you posted online?
a) none
b) 1
c) 2
d) 3
e) 4 or more than that

8. Have you ever received any feedback from other people (questions, likes, comments, etc.) regarding experiences in Hong Kong that you shared online?
a) Yes
b) No

9. Have you ever shared your experiences regarding Hong Kong on tourism-oriented online platforms?
a) Yes
b) No

PART 2

10. In this part of the study you are asked to think of Hong Kong if it were a person. Based on your perception, please specify to which level of following personality traits describe Hong Kong. Please tick the relevant box for each presented below personality on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

Dimensions of Hong Kong perceived personality traits:

Hong Kong is ...	1 - Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neither agree or disagree	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly agree
interesting					
exciting					
trendy					
imaginative					
cheerful					

Hong Kong is ...	1 - Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neither agree or disagree	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly agree
hard-working					
well-made					
intelligent					
confident					
efficient					

Hong Kong is ...	1 - Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neither agree or disagree	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly agree
warm					
calm					
family-oriented					
relaxed					
easy					

Hong Kong is ...	1 - Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neither agree or disagree	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly agree
energetic					
outgoing					
open-minded					
vibrant					
spirited					

11. In this part of the study please continue to think of Hong Kong if it were a person. Please indicate to what extent do you agree or disagree with following statements on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = “Strongly disagree” and 5 = “Strongly agree”.

Self-Congruity / Private and Public	1 - Strongly Disagree	2- Disagree	3 - Neither agree or disagree	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I am.					
The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I see myself.					
The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I would like to be.					
The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I would like to see myself.					
The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how the other believe that I am.					
The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I think the other people see me.					
The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I would like the others to see me.					
The personality of Hong Kong is similar to how I ideally would like to be seen by others.					

12. Please rate the following statements on a 5–point Likert scale where 1 = “Strongly disagree” and 5 = “Strongly agree”

Creation of content online	1 - Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neither agree or disagree	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly agree
Uploading information on online platforms about the travel experience I lived in Hong Kong was an important part of my daily routine during the trip.					
Uploading information on online platforms about the travel experience I lived in Hong Kong was an important part of my daily routine after the trip.					
I was proud of people reading and watching information I uploaded on online platforms about my travel experiences in Hong Kong.					
During my trip, using online platforms to talk about my travel experience was an important activity for me.					
After my trip, using online platforms to talk about the travel experience was an important activity for me.					
I would be sorry if I couldn't share any information regarding my travel experience on online platforms.					

13. Please rate the following statements on a 5–point Likert scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”

Perceived Social Value	1 - Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neither agree or disagree	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly agree
Sharing my travel experience on online platforms about Hong Kong helped me to feel acceptable.					
Sharing my travel experience about Hong Kong on online platforms improved the way I am perceived.					
Sharing my travel experience about Hong Kong on online platforms made a good impression					

about me on the other people.					
Sharing my travel experience about Hong Kong on online platforms gave me social approval.					

14. Please rate the following statements on a 5–point Likert scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”

Interpersonal connections on online platforms	1 - Strongly disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neither agree or disagree	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly agree
I have communicated with other users who contacted me with regards to my travel experiences.					
As a result of my post(s) regarding travel experiences, I established new relationships with other users.					
I keep in contact with other users who I shared my experiences with.					
I value the relationships I established with other users due to posts regarding my travel experiences.					

PART 3

Demographics

15. What is your age?	
a) 18-24	
b) 25-34	
c) 35-49	
d) 50-68	
e) 69 and more	

16. What is your gender?	
a) Male	
b) Female	

17. What is your ethnicity?	
a) White	
b) Asian	

c) Black
d) Hispanic, Latino
e) Other / Please specify: _____

18. What is your nationality?
Please specify: _____

19. What is your marital status?
a) Single
b) Married
c) Divorced
d) Widowed
e) Other / Please specify: _____

20. What is your education level?
a) High School or less
b) University
c) Masters or PhD
d) Other professional degree

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