

# A DESTINATION PERSONALITY AND ITS ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES: AN APPLICATION OF PRODUCT BRANDING TO DESTINATION BRANDING

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## Abstract

The objective of this study was to empirically develop a new unified model of destination personality and its antecedents and consequences (DPAC) by examining the interactive effects between three destination branding variables, namely, destination experience (DE), destination personality (DP), and destination identity (DI), and the tourist-destination relationship (TDR), which is identified as a nostalgic connection. These relationships affect tourists' behavioral intentions which include revisit intention and spreading positive word of mouth following Bagozzi's (1992) reformulation of attitude theory and Wright's (2006) basic cognitive behavior model theory. The findings in this study also extend the body of knowledge in the literature and provide practical destination branding strategies.

**Keywords:** Destination branding, Destination experience, Destination identification, Destination personality, Tourist-destination relationship

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered to be one of the most significant industries in many countries (World Economic Forum, 2019) as tourism businesses are able to utilize the existing resources of a country to start a business. Many stakeholders such as locals, retail stores, small, medium, and large-sized enterprises, and transportation businesses, gain advantages from tourism. The tourism industry is a major source of income for many countries, especially Thailand, where the industry is considered as the backbone of the nation's economy, accounting for 18.4% of

the GDP (Tourism Statistics Thailand, 2019). In 2018, the number of tourists visiting Thailand was 38.2 million, having increased by 7.5 percent compared to the previous year, generating a revenue of around THB 2.01 trillion (Kasikorn Research Center, 2019; Royal Thai Embassy at Washington D.C., 2019).

However, this industry can be directly and aggressively impacted by a pandemic such as the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) that has had a massive impact on the tourism industry in many countries by preventing international travel (Gössling et al., 2020; Oxford Economics Company,

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2020). Consequently, many service businesses in this industry, such as hotels, airlines, restaurants, and travel agencies are facing an economic downfall, while many of them have permanently closed down. Thus, it is crucial for countries to speed up economic recovery in this sector when the situation of COVID-19 improves by adopting destination branding strategies to support and promote tourism.

Several studies on destination branding have suggested that destination personality (DP) helps to create a destination's identity and develops the uniqueness of the destination (Chen & Phou, 2013; Ekinci, 2003; Neto et al., 2020; Pan et al., 2017; Roodurmun & Juwaheer, 2010). Its distinctiveness and emotional attractiveness could strengthen the perceived image of the destination and affect when tourists choose to travel to specific destinations (Chen & Phou, 2013; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Destination experience (DE) could be considered as an antecedent of destination personality because the experience toward the destination through sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral aspects may provide more complete evaluation similar to brand experience (Barnes et al., 2014; Brakus et al., 2009). As a result, tourists perceive the personalities of their visited destinations. Destination identification (DI), perceived as oneness with the destination, could be considered as a consequence of destination personality, as when tourists perceive that the destination personality and their own personality are similar or congruent, they may identify themselves with the destination, considering that it can enhance their sense of self.

The purpose of this study was to explore destination personality and its antecedents and consequences in a tourism context. Based on relevant literature (Barnes et al., 2014; Brakus et al., 2009; Chen & Phou, 2013; Jiang et al., 2017; Jin et al., 2015; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018), although prior studies have examined the antecedents and consequences of destination personality, to the best of our knowledge, through the destination branding

lens, there is limited empirical evidence explaining the role of destination experience in influencing destination personality, and the role of destination personality in influencing destination identification, as well as the role of these three variables in influencing the tourist-destination relationship, which is seen as a nostalgic connection and considered as one of the most important aspects of brand relationship quality (Fourier, 1998; Smit et al., 2007) relating to a particular memory of some tourism destinations. These relationships between tourists and their visited destinations might bring out some tourist behaviors following Bagozzi's (1992) reformulation of attitude theory.

Thus, this study aims to empirically develop a unified model that provides a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents and consequences of destination personality which could have a significant effect on the emotional bonds between tourists and destinations and which could positively influence tourist behaviors in the long run. The findings of this study will answer a call for additional research to understand and explain the mechanisms of these variables and extend the current literature in the tourism context by adopting the branding strategy in building a destination brand, attracting tourists, and restoring the tourism industry and economy.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 The Concept of Destination Personality**

Destination personality is a concept originating from the field of brand personality which attempts to humanize a brand or destination (Aaker, 1997; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Geuens et al., 2009). The humanization of a destination can be described by adjectives, such as warm, nice, charming, etc. For example, Phi Phi Island is viewed as an energetic and brilliant destination, while the Temple of the Emerald Buddha is perceived as a cultured and traditional destination (Auemsuvarn &

Ngamcharoenmongkol, 2022). Destination personality is considered as a key destination branding strategy for helping to create the destination identity and uniqueness among its competitors (Chen & Phou, 2013; Chi et al., 2018; Ekinici, 2003; Roodurmun & Juwaheer, 2010). Destination personality helps to reduce destination choice and makes it easier to build a connection between tourists and a destination (Caprara et al., 2001; Chaplin & Roedder, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Khan & Ahmed, 2018). It might also increase destination equity by adding symbolic values and functions to the destination, resulting in an increased revenue for a particular tourist destination (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Hanna & Rowley, 2019; Murphy et al., 2007; Upadhyaya, 2012; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

## **2.2 Destination Personality and its Related Variables**

### **2.2.1 Destination Experience (DE)**

Destination experience is defined here as a blend of sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral experiences that affect individual tourists, evoked by destination-related stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). Tourists receive and interpret the personality traits sent by destinations via two methods. Firstly, the direct method occurs via the citizens of the destination country, including hotel and restaurant employees, and also simply through tourists' imagery. Secondly, the indirect method occurs through marketing campaigns, cooperative advertising, or celebrities of the country (Cai 2002; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). When tourists experience the destination, they tend to perceive and identify the destination's personality as a brand, with particular values, histories, events, and feelings, either during or after travelling (Brakus et al., 2009; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). Thus, this study hypothesizes that the more tourists experience a destination, the more they perceive the personality of the destination.

**H1:** Destination experience is positively associated with destination personality.

### **2.2.2 Destination Identification (DI)**

Destination identification is formally defined in this study as the psychological state of a tourist when perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her oneness with a destination he or she has visited (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Lam et al., 2010; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). In the tourism context, tourists consider not only the destination based on how it can satisfy their functional needs, but also how it fulfills their social and emotional values (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). In this study, it is expected that the clearer the tourists perceive the destination personality, the more easily they are able to identify themselves with the destination.

**H2:** Destination personality is positively associated with destination identification.

Evidently, destination experience (DE) is an antecedent of destination identification (DI) (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). In other words, the more a tourist experiences the destination, the more they perceive oneness or belongingness with the destination. An empirical study of the relationship between destination experience and destination identification in two different places in India, Rishikesh and Agra, revealed that sensory and affective DE have a positive effect on DI. To date, studies on the relationship between DE and DI are relatively limited and inconsistent across research studies (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). Researching this relationship may be crucial as it can reveal a clearer picture of these variables.

**H3:** Destination experience is positively associated with destination identification.

## **2.3 Tourist - Destination Relationship (Nostalgic Connection)**

Nostalgic connection (NC) is one of the most crucial dimensions of brand relationship quality (BRQ) (Fourier, 1998; Smit et al., 2007) as it relates to particular memories which could be recalled or retrieved when time passes. Consumption experiences that are intense become unique events carrying nostalgic meaning for consumers

(Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014). This study adopted this variable from a product branding context to a destination branding context and thus defines nostalgic connection as a sentimental longing for the positive feelings or memories in a certain period of life when an individual tourist is reminded of a destination they have visited.

Holak and Havlena (1992) found that apart from family and home, various persons, objects, and events can also be stimuli for nostalgia, with certain events such as birthdays and holidays being able to evoke robust memories associated with them. The details of sights, smells, and tastes, are also recalled. In accordance with several scholars, they agreed that experiences could produce strong nostalgic memories which may be later recalled (Baumgartner et al., 1992; Belk, 1988; Holbrook, 1993; Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2014). Thus, this study hypothesizes that when tourists have good experiences with a destination, they tend to form long-term memories which are relatively permanent and can last for minutes, hours, days, or even decades. These meaningful memories may be retrieved producing nostalgia when time passes.

**H4:** Destination experience is positively associated with nostalgic connection.

A consumer can form a relationship with a brand the same way they form a relationship with a person (Fournier, 1998; Smit et al., 2007). Like other products and services, it is believed that if a destination has a personality similar to human traits, tourists will establish a robust emotional relationship with that particular place (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Ekinci et al., 2007; Glinska & Kilon, 2014; Hanna & Rowley, 2019; Hosany et al., 2006; Kaplan et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2007; Pereira et al., 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011); this can lead to yearning when time passes. Thus, this study hypothesizes that the greater the tourists perceive the destination personality, the more they establish a nostalgic connection with that destination.

**H5:** Destination personality is positively associated with nostalgic connection.

When regarding the brand as part of the self, a consumer grows a sense of oneness with the brand, creating cognitive links that connect the brand with the self (Park et al., 2010). In a tourism context, the link between destination identification and the tourist relationship is underdeveloped. This study focuses on nostalgic connection, which is well known as a greatly persuasive and impactful marketing and advertising strategy (Marchegiani & Phau, 2012) that relates to memory and past experience and which influences consumer (or tourist) behaviors. Thus, this study hypothesizes that the more a tourist perceives oneness with a destination, the more the tourist establishes a nostalgic connection with that destination.

**H6:** Destination identification is positively associated with nostalgic connection.

## **2.4 Tourist Behavioral Intentions**

### **2.4.1 Revisit Intention**

Several studies agree that many destinations heavily rely on tourist revisits which can be a source of sustainable revenue (Hong et al., 2009). Additionally, the contributions of repeat visitors may include word-of-mouth which helps spread a positive image of the destination among new prospective tourists (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Pritchard, 2003), thereby reducing communication expenses and gaining a greater competitive advantage (Zhang et al., 2020).

In the tourism context, a revisit intention is the tendency of a tourist to repeat an activity or revisit a destination. Several studies have revealed that a memorable experience significantly influences revisit intention (Beckman et al., 2013; Jin et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2020). This study focuses on the revisit intention variable, which is defined here as a tourist's willingness to revisit a previously visited destination within their life span.

### **2.4.2 Spreading Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention**

One reaction of tourist behaviors is

spreading positive word-of-mouth (Barnes et al., 2014; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). Several scholars have viewed positive word of mouth (PWOM) as an important aspect of behaviors that reflect a tourist's desire to maintain a relationship with a destination, leading to a conceptualization of loyalty that is intertwined with advocacy and sharing with others (Şahin et al., 2019; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Thus, this study defined the spreading positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) intention as a tourist's intention to express any positive statements of a particular destination to others via offline or online platforms.

#### **2.4.3 Link between Nostalgic Connection and Tourist Behavioral Intentions**

Based on long-term memory theory, it is possible for some related destination stimuli to stimulate nostalgia among tourists, leading them to talk about or revisit a particular destination. In accordance with several studies, it is suggested that nostalgia has a significant positive effect on consumers' and tourists' behavior (e.g., WOM behavior, re-experience intention, perceived value, satisfaction, and tourists' destination loyalty intention) (Triantafyllidou & Siomkos, 2014; Verma & Rajendran, 2017). Based upon this concept, this study hypothesizes that the more a tourist thinks back to the destination, the more they will revisit and spread positive word-of-mouth regarding the destination.

**H7:** Nostalgic connection is positively associated with revisit intention.

**H8:** Nostalgic connection is positively associated with spreading positive word-of-mouth intention.

#### **2.5 Three Destination Branding Variables (DE, DP, and DI) and Tourists' Behavioral Intentions**

Destination experience has the ability to provide tourists with a more holistic experience that integrates sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral components. Moreover, experiences offer a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is precious and becomes a landmark in memory

which could lead tourists to revisit and spread positive WOM of a particular destination (Barnes et al., 2014; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018; Şahin et al., 2019). This study hypothesizes that the more tourists gain experience of a destination, the more they are likely to revisit the destination and spread positive word-of-mouth regarding that destination.

**H9:** Destination experience is positively associated with revisit intention.

**H10:** Destination experience is positively associated with spreading positive word-of-mouth intention.

In the marketing field, many studies have examined the relationships between brand personality and consumer behavior. For example, Brakus et al. (2009) found that brand personality positively affected consumer satisfaction and loyalty. In other words, a consumer will be more satisfied and loyal when a brand is more associated with human characteristics. This is in accordance with Xie, and Lee (2013), whose study revealed that sophistication, and competence dimensions drive tourists' behavioral intentions (word-of-mouth intention and willingness to spend more). However, empirical evidence of the impact of destination personality in influencing tourist behavior has been lacking (Chen & Phou, 2013; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

**H11:** Destination personality is positively associated with revisit intention.

**H12:** Destination personality is positively associated with spreading positive word-of-mouth intention.

Drawing on theories of social identity and organizational identification, several studies found that consumer-brand identification can affect brand loyalty and brand advocacy which are two important consequences that many companies desire (Kim et al., 2001; Stokburger-Sauer, et al., 2012). Specifically, when consumers perceive oneness with the brand, they tend to perceive sameness with the brand (when signifying a product with symbolic meanings), which helps them to satisfy one or more important

self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Tuškej et al., 2013). Based on this concept, this study hypothesizes that the stronger a tourist perceives oneness with a destination, the stronger he or she tends to commit to the destination, and the more likely they are to have intentions to revisit the destination and generate positive word-of-mouth.

**H13:** Destination identification is positively associated with revisit intention.

**H14:** Destination identification is positively associated with spreading positive word-of-mouth intention.

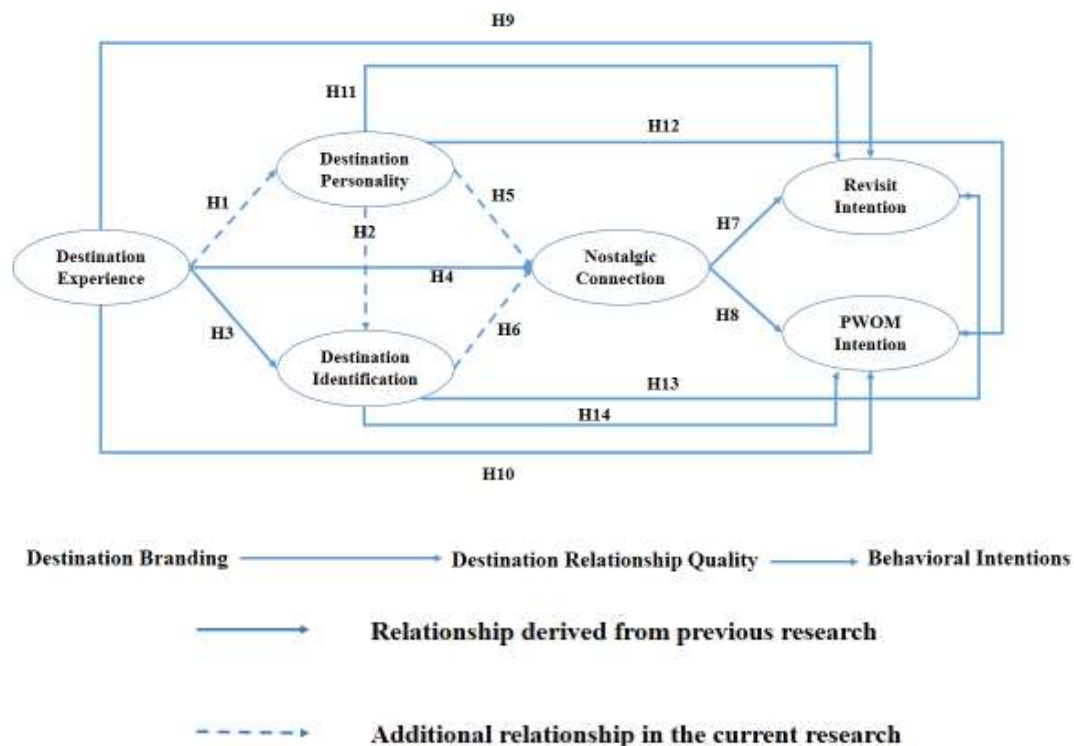
In order to support destinations in effectively competing with destinations in other countries in the 21st century, this study adopted some product branding variables into the tourism context (destination personality, destination experience, and destination identification); this can support destinations in creating memorable and remarkable experiences as well as representing the tourist's sense of self, leading to a nostalgic connection and positive tourist behaviors

such as revisit intention and the intention to spread PWOM when time passes (Barnes et al., 2014; Chen & Phou, 2013; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). Regarding the causal relationships between the above variables, this study aims to develop a unified model of destination personality and its antecedents and consequences (DPAC model) following the presented hypotheses (see Figure 1).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### Data Collection and Samples

The survey questionnaires were developed by adopting measurement constructs from previous studies, measured on a 7-point scale anchored by (1) = 'strongly disagree' and (7) = 'strongly agree'. *Destination experience* was measured using 16 items (Brakus et al., 2009; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018), representing four dimensions: sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual experience. *Destination personality* was assessed by 37 items



**Figure 1** Proposed Conceptual Framework of DPAC Model

(Auemsuvarn & Ngamcharoenmongkol, 2022). *Destination identification* was assessed using five items (Kim et al., 2001; Kumar & Kaushik, 2018; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). *Nostalgic connection* was assessed using five items (Smit et al., 2007). *Revisit intention* was assessed by three items (Hallmann et al., 2015; Taylor & Bearden, 2002), while *spreading positive word-of-mouth intention* was assessed with five items (Brown et al., 2005; Hong & Yang, 2009; Maxham III, 2001). Additionally, three academics in related fields (psychology, marketing, and tourism) helped to verify the content validity of both the Thai and English versions of the questionnaire. Lastly, a pretest of 30 tourists (both domestic and international) was conducted for verifying the surveys' understandability and the comprehensibility of the questionnaires.

Data were collected online from May to July 2021 via delivery of a Google form link in selected countries based on the ranking of the top 30 nationalities that visit Thailand with a few screening questions to check whether the participants met the research criteria. The inclusion criteria were participants of any gender, above 18 years old, who had visited Thai tourist destinations, were fluent in English, were from one of the 30 selected countries, and were willing to participate. The sample was selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling, by research assistants in each selected country who knew the sample group well and purposively selected respondents who met the sample criteria mentioned above. In total, 437 respondents (Comrey & Lee, 1992; Yong & Pearce, 2013) completed the survey. For Thai participants, the inclusion criteria were the same as in the international sample group, except that the survey was presented in Thai. The chance to win one first prize of \$70, one second prize of \$30, and eight third prizes of \$20 was provided for respondents who voluntarily sent a direct email address to the researcher after submitting the survey.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1. Socio-Demographic Profile

Table 1 illustrates the respondents' socio-demographic profile. Slightly more Thai respondents (55.1%) than international respondents (44.9%) completed the survey. Among the international tourists, the respondents came from 30 countries: 55% were from Asia, 19% from North America, 22% from the European Union, and 4% from Australia and Africa. By adopting a mixed sample group of both domestic and international tourists, the results of this study will represent the actual population of tourists who travel in Thailand according to the Ministry of Tourism & Sports (2019). Other elements of the socio-demographic profile are summarized in Table 1.

### 4.2 Measurement Model

Firstly, the construct validity and reliability were analyzed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) following the maximum likelihood estimation method. Fit indices were utilized to measure the adequacy of the model, and a preliminary CFA was conducted. In this step, the 69 items for the six constructs were analyzed using the AMOS program. The model fit indices showed that the questionnaire items were generally below the acceptable threshold. Thus, the results were modified to improve the model fit by following Hair et al. (2010), who recommended that model refinement should begin with deleting items associated with low factor loadings ( $< 0.50$ ), high cross loadings ( $> 0.40$ ), or low communalities ( $< 0.30$ ). The final confirmatory model had 39 items remaining. Table 2 shows the remaining items with the factor loading of each item being greater than 0.50. The construct reliability of each construct (destination experience = 0.89; destination personality = 0.92; destination identification = 0.85; nostalgic connection = 0.60; revisit intention = 0.56; spreading positive word-of-mouth

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic Profile of the Study Respondents

<b>Variables</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Nationality</b>		<b>Purpose of travelling</b>	
Thai	55.1	Business Travel	5.9
International (30 Countries)	44.9	Long-term Slow Travel and others	8.1
<b>Gender</b>		Visiting Friends or Relatives and others	11.7
Female	54.2	The Gap Year Travel	4.8
Male	45.8	The Weekend Break Vacation Travel and others	59.7
<b>Age</b>		Studying Abroad	2.7
18 – 24 years	7.8	Volunteer Travel and others	4.3
25 - 34 years	37.8	Event	2.5
35 - 44 years	40.0	Others	0.3
45 - 54 years	10.8	<b>Money Spending while travelling</b>	
55 - 64 years	2.5	Less than 1,000	61.5
65 years or older	1.1	\$1,001 - \$2,000	15.3
<b>Educational level</b>		\$2,001 - \$3,000	14.0
Senior High school	2.5	More than 3,000	9.2
Associate Degree	1.6	<b>Travelling categories</b>	
Bachelor Degree	49.0	Arts and Sciences Educational Attractions	1.0
Master Degree	36.4	Beach and Seaside Attractions	18.8
Doctoral Degree	10.5	Cliff & Cave Attractions	9.8
<b>Occupation</b>		Cultural Attractions	14.9
Private Officer	35.0	Eco-tourism Attractions	2.1
Government Employee Official	25.2	Hot spring Attractions	1.0
Self-employed	13.3	Historical Attractions	6.6
State Enterprise employee	4.1	Island Attractions	15.3
Student	15.6	Natural Attractions	18.3
Freelance	6.1	Raft Canal Rivers	1.4
Others	0.7	Recreational Attractions	8.3
<b>Monthly income</b>		Waterfalls Attractions	2.5
Less than \$1,000	31.0	<b>Communication Media</b>	
\$1,001 to \$5,000	67.7	Advertising	16.7
\$5,001 - \$10,000	21.0	Celebrities	7.3
More than \$10,000	6.3	Friends, Relatives, Family, etc.	18.1
<b>Time of Last Visited to Thai Destinations</b>		Online Social Media	51.0
Less than 1 year	44.6	Print Media	2.3
1 year – 3 years	38.0	Websites	4.1
More than 3 years	17.4	Other	0.5



**Table 2.** The Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Constructs	Items	Mean	Std.Dev	Loading	CR	AVE
<b>Destination Experience (DE)</b>						
Sensory DE	This destination made a strong impression on my senses (vision, hearing, smell, touch, or taste)	5.79	0.927	0.79	0.89	0.56
	This destination, person, or media relevant to the destination were interesting in a sensory way	5.86	0.921	0.80		
Affective DE	This destination induced my feelings and sentiments	5.78	0.886	0.78		
	I did not have strong emotions toward this destination, person, or media relevant to the destination	5.87	0.965	0.61		
	This destination was an emotional place	5.74	0.97	0.72		
	I was not influenced by sentimental feelings or emotions when I visited this destination	5.79	0.882	0.50		
Behavioral DE	I engaged in physical activities and behaviors when I was in this destination	5.63	0.639	0.79		
	This destination gave me physical experiences such as joining in various activities	5.56	0.69	0.76		
Intellectual DE	I engaged in a lot of thinking when I visited this destination	5.39	0.738	0.75		
	This destination gave me a new perspective of life	5.41	0.754	0.64		
	This destination stimulated my curiosity and problem solving skill	5.42	0.865	0.72		
<b>Destination Personality (DP)</b>						
Traditionalism	Ethical	5.68	1.436	0.83	0.92	0.56
	Dignified	5.76	1.334	0.79		
	Traditional	5.95	1.193	0.55		
	Neat	5.48	1.46	0.68		
Kindness	Pleasant	5.78	1.235	0.62		
	Likable	5.68	1.345	0.77		
Excitement	Excited	5.82	1.201	0.91		
	Enthusiastic	5.72	1.205	0.83		
Easygoingness	Easy-going	5.74	1.448	0.88		
	Informal	5.47	1.59	0.72		
Liveliness	Vivacious	5.94	1.368	0.70		
	Vigorous	5.93	1.423	0.81		
	Showy	5.91	1.383	0.64		
Trendiness	Fashionable	5.64	1.615	0.70		
	Modern	5.37	1.674	0.64		
Charm	Admirable	5.78	1.248	0.70		
	Charming	5.89	1.241	0.81		
<b>Destination Identification (DI)</b>						
	Destination Identification [I feel that my personal values and values of this destination are very similar.]	5.61	1.538	0.74	0.85	0.72
	Destination Identification [When someone praises this destination, I feel like he/she compliments me.]	5.18	1.694	0.95		
	Destination Identification [When someone criticizes this destination, I feel like he/she criticizes me.]	4.99	1.853	0.84		
<b>Nostalgic Connection (NC)</b>						
	Nostalgic Connection [Thinking of this destination brings back memories.]	5.98	1.03	0.69	0.60	0.70
	Nostalgic Connection [This destination will always reminds me of a certain period in my life.]	5.97	0.94	0.81		
	Nostalgic Connection [This destination is part of my history and related to particular memories.]	5.99	1.02	0.76		
<b>Revisit Intention (RI)</b>						
	Revisit Intention [I intend to revisit this destination in my life span.]	6.12	1.013	0.65	0.56	0.54
	Revisit Intention [I would like to revisit this destination with my family, relatives, friends, partners, and so on. ]	6.23	0.928	0.81		
<b>Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention (PWOMI)</b>						
	Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention [I will spread positive words of this destination to my family, relatives, friends, partner, and so on.]	6.18	0.994	0.95	0.74	0.68
	Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention [If other people are looking for a tourist destination, I would recommend this place to them.]	6.27	1.018	0.67		

Model fit statistics: CFA results indicate that the measurement model fits the data reasonably well ( $\chi^2 = 1321.67$ ;  $df = 524$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.52$ ; RMSEA = 0.057; CFI = 0.96; GFI=0.86).

intention = 0.74) was considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker 1981; Nunnally & Bernstein 1994). The average variance extracted (AVE) of the six constructs was good and with all values being above the recommended cut-off of 0.5. These fit indices revealed good convergent validity of the measurement model. Additionally, discriminant validity was evaluated by the estimated correlation between the constructs with the average variance extracted. An average variance extracted that is greater than

0.50 indicates high validity of the construct. As can be seen, all the constructs met the criteria of discriminant validity, as the variance extracted estimates of each construct were greater than the squared correlation between the constructs (see Table 3). This means that the constructs can be statistically differentiated from each other. Hence, the measurement tool is valid and reliable to examine the structural relationships among the constructs.

**Table 3** Discriminant Validity

Constructs	DE	DP	DI	NC	RI	PWOM
DE	<b>0.75</b>					
DP	0.61**	<b>0.75</b>				
DI	0.34	0.51**	<b>0.85</b>			
NC	0.59**	0.57	0.57**	<b>0.75</b>		
RI	0.39	0.49	0.52**	0.56	<b>0.73</b>	
PWOM	0.58*	0.58*	0.48**	0.69*	0.44	<b>0.82</b>

Note: The bold numbers in the diagonal row are the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE); inter-construct correlation is shown below the diagonal,  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table 4.** Results of the Hypothesis Testing with Direct and Indirect Effects of all Variables

Path				SPC	t-Value	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
H1:	DP	< ---	DE	0.525	6.818**	0.525	-	0.525
H2:	DI	<---	DP	0.392	5.106**	0.392	-	0.392
H3:	DI	<---	DE	0.073	1.014	0.073	0.206	0.279
H4:	NC	<---	DE	0.411	5.687**	0.411	0.149	0.561
H5:	NC	<---	DP	0.1	1.483	0.100	0.136	0.236
H6:	NC	<---	DI	0.347	5.769**	0.347	-	0.347
H7:	RI	<---	NC	0.043	0.479	0.043	-	0.043
H8:	PWOM	<---	NC	0.301	3.082*	0.301	-	0.301
H9:	RI	<---	DE	0.114	1.31	0.114	0.189	0.303
H10:	PWOM	<---	DE	0.221	2.348*	0.221	0.356	0.578
H11:	RI	<---	DP	0.08	1.078	0.08	0.184	0.264
H12:	PWOM	<---	DP	0.208	2.542*	0.208	0.181	0.389
H13:	RI	<---	DI	0.442	5.742**	0.442	0.015	0.457
H14:	PWOM	<---	DI	0.28	3.428**	0.280	0.105	0.385

Note: SPC = Standardized path coefficient; \* =  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

### 4.3 Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

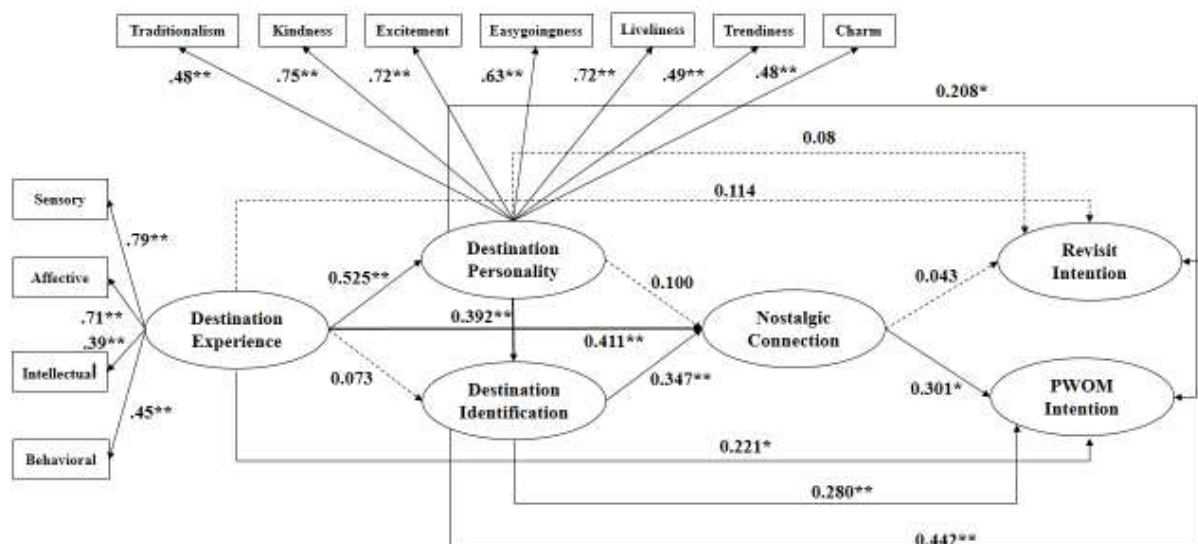
Structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) was conducted to test the hypotheses and confirm the relationships among the variables, following the above-mentioned theories, using the AMOS program. A total of 437 usable samples were analyzed. The respondents, including both Thai and international tourists were requested to rate each item in the self-administered questionnaires using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The fit statistics suggested it was an acceptable model,  $p\text{-value} < .05$ ,  $\chi^2 = 245.564$ ,  $df = 70$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.508$  (Carmines & McIver, 1981; Marsh & Hocevar, 1985; Wheaton et al., 1977),  $GFI = 0.927$  (Forza & Filippini, 1998; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1998),  $CFI = 0.916$  (Hooper et al., 2008; Hair et al., 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1998),  $NFI = 0.888$  (Forza & Filippini, 1998),  $IFI = 0.917$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.076$  (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hair et al., 2010; Hooper et al., 2008; MacCallum et al., 1996; Steiger, 2007). This indicates that the hypothesized model fit the empirical data well. Table 4 illustrates the results of

hypotheses testing and direct and indirect effects of all constructs.

As can be seen in Figure 2, all hypotheses were supported, except for the following paths: destination experience – destination identification (H3), destination personality – nostalgic connection (H5), nostalgic connection – revisit intention (H7), destination experience – revisit intention (H9), and destination personality – revisit intention (H11).

### 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study contributes to tourism branding research by empirically investigating the inter-relationships among destination experience, destination personality, destination identification, nostalgic connection, and tourists' behavioral intentions (revisit intention and spreading positive word of mouth intention). The findings in this study can also extend the existing literature by 1) confirming the paths that are congruent with prior research studies, namely destination experience → nostalgic connection (H4), nostalgic connection → spreading positive word of mouth (H8),



**Note:** Solid lines represent significant paths while the dashed line represents non-significant paths

**Figure 2.** Results of Hypotheses Testing

destination experience → spreading positive word of mouth (H10), destination personality → spreading positive word of mouth (H12), destination identification → revisit intention (H13), and destination identification → spreading positive word of mouth (H14); 2) extending understanding by providing additional significant paths as tested in this study, namely destination experience → destination personality (H1), destination personality → destination identification (H2), and destination identification → nostalgic connection (H6); 3) explaining the paths that are incongruent with prior research studies, namely destination experience → destination identification (H3) (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018), destination experience → revisit intention (H9) (Barnes et al., 2014), destination personality → revisit intention (H11) (Brakus et al., 2009), and nostalgic connection → revisit intention (H7) (Triantafyllidou & Siomkos, 2014); and 4) extending understanding through the recognition of non-significant paths additionally tested in this study, namely destination personality → nostalgic connection (H5). Details of each path are as follows:

The results of the structural equation modeling show that destination experience has a significant positive direct effect on nostalgic connection (H4), which corresponds to the long-term memory theory of Milner (1970) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975), which described the importance of long-lasting and precious experiences with excitement and enjoyment, then becoming a memory which can be recalled or retrieved when time passes. Thus, creating an exciting and enjoyable experience for tourists will help them remember it as part of their memories, such that they develop a nostalgic connection with the destination, which may be expressed by mentioning the place in conversation and spreading positive word of mouth to others (H8, H10). Destination personality was also shown to have a significant positive direct influence on spreading positive word of mouth. Specifically, when tourists perceive a destination personality which matches their

own actual or ideal personality, they will spread positive word of mouth to others about that destination (H12). Regarding destination identification, this study found that when tourists identify themselves with the destination, they perceive a oneness or belongingness with the destination, leading to revisit intention (H13) and spreading positive word of mouth for that destination (H14).

New additional paths found in this study extend the understanding of mechanisms among destination experience, destination personality, and destination identification. Destination experience could be an antecedent of destination personality (H1), similar to the relationship between brand experience and brand personality (Brakus et al., 2009). Destination identification could be a consequence of destination personality (H2), while destination identification also leads tourists to establish a nostalgic connection with the destination (H6). Specifically, tourists perceive the personality of a certain destination, after receiving a more holistic appraisal of the destination through their five senses, searching for information about the destination, or participating in activities within the destination. Furthermore, the association between destination experience and destination identification is substantially mediated by destination personality. In other words, when tourists experience a destination, they can identify a sense of oneness with the destination through their perception of destination personality which can be described with the theory of self-congruence (Sirgy, 1982). To illustrate, when tourists perceive that destination personalities are congruent with their own personality (actual-self/ideal-self), they may feel a sense of belongingness to that destination. These findings provide emphasis for researchers and practitioners to create effective marketing strategies. Apart from creating an experience that can impress tourists, it is necessary to position destination personality clearly so that tourists can perceive it easily, as this is another strategy to encourage tourist-destination identification leading to revisit intention and spreading

positive word of mouth in the future.

However, some paths found in this study are inconsistent with prior studies. The first of these is the effect of destination experience on destination identification, as this study did not indicate a significant positive direct effect as shown in previous studies (H3) (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). However, when destination personality acts as a mediator, tourists will be able to identify themselves with the destination. Specifically, when tourists have experience with the destinations, and can perceive the destination personality, they tend to easily identify themselves with the destination as they can match their own personality with the destination personality, helping tourists to achieve their actual-self or ideal-self and helping them to perceive oneness with such destinations more easily. This finding is consistent with previous studies of brands, which proved that individuals find it easier to identify themselves with the attractiveness and distinctiveness of the brand or brand personality (Kim et al., 2001; So et al., 2017).

The second path which shows inconsistency with prior studies is the effect of destination experience on revisit intention, this path was also shown to have no significant positive direct effect (H9) (Barnes et al., 2014). It was also found that two other paths, destination personality to revisit intention (H11), and nostalgic connection to revisit intention (H7), did not show a significant positive direct effect, contrary to prior work (Brakus et al., 2009; and Triantafyllidou & Siomkos, 2014). This can be explained by the reason that although tourists have nice and impressive experiences, as well as perceiving the destination personality, they may not revisit the destination due to demographic reasons. Firstly, tourists may have a limited budget, or their budget may not be enough for revisiting the visited destinations or countries repeatedly. Secondly, the major sample groups in this study were 25-34 and 35-44 years old; the respondents may prefer to travel around many destinations or countries, choosing to travel to unseen destinations and countries to gain

more experience and knowledge from many cultures instead of revisiting the same destinations. Thirdly, the survey was conducted during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may cause tourists to be uncertain about revisiting destinations and countries. Additionally, political situations such as protests or civil wars in certain countries may also reduce tourists' revisit intention due to their concerns over safety during travel. Nevertheless, if tourists are able to see destination related stimuli (e.g., seeing the destination on Facebook, someone mentioning the destination, or seeing destination advertising), they may spread positive word of mouth about a destination that they visited and which made an impression in their memory.

Lastly, additional path testing in this study, revealed that destination personality does not have a significant positive direct influence on nostalgic connection (H5). One possible reason for this is that even though tourists are able to perceive the personality of a destination, if they do not identify the destination personality as being congruent with their own actual or ideal self-image, the destination personality will not result in a sense of oneness or being a part of the destination and will not lead to a feeling of nostalgia when time passes.

To summarize, the DPAC model indicates that building a distinctive destination personality should impact tourists' level of self, leading to tourist-destination identification in a similar way to consumer-brand identification; this further results in a nostalgic connection, revisit intention, and eventually the intention to spread positive word of mouth. This mechanism can be explained by nervous system theory; starting from having an impressive experience which could reach the tourist's identity, allowing their brain to store long-term memories in a way that the tourist can always retrieve information in the form of a nostalgic connection. This can lead to certain actions such as spreading positive word-of-mouth about the destination, recommending the destination to others in a

way that they perceive themselves as the part of destination or that they feel a sense of belonging to that destination. They may generally pass positive information of tourist destinations to others by adding symbolic value in accordance with their sense of self (actual self-image, ideal self-image) via both online and offline platforms (Belk, 1988; Tuškej et al., 2013). In other words, creating an impressive experience before tourists perceive a destination personality is likely to be an essential strategy for destination branding. More importantly, it is likely to be crucial for tourists to perceive a destination personality before they can identify themselves with the destination. In other words, without destination personality, it is relatively difficult for tourists to identify themselves with the destination.

## **6. CONTRIBUTIONS**

Theoretically, this research offers a unified (DPAC) model, expanding the inadequate theoretical understanding of the antecedents and consequences of destination personality. The findings extend the literature on destination branding by incorporating brand relationship quality (BRQ) to explain destination relationship quality (DRQ), the development of a nostalgic connection from destination experience, destination personality, and destination identification. The findings of this study also extend previous research in the tourism context by adding destination personality as a mediating variable between destination experience and destination identification. Some findings in this study are inconsistent with the existing literature, particularly regarding the paths for revisit intention. In practical terms, these findings extend the application of product branding to destination branding, allowing governments, policymakers, destination marketers, and DMOs, to develop effective communication strategies, and emphasize the key variables by creating exciting and memorable destination experiences as well as building distinctive and attractive destination personalities which impact tourists'

identities and self.

## **7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research has some limitations. Firstly, this study does not explore the differences in how gender, age, or nationality, impact the DPAC model. Therefore, in future studies, moderating variables (e.g., age between early adult and later maturity, gender between male and female, nationalities between domestic and international tourists, and online social networks (OSNs) interaction among heavy, medium, and light interactions) should be tested. Secondly, the number of the international sample group was relatively small due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Therefore, further studies should collect more data from the international sample group to help gain a better understanding of tourists from each country.

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