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Destination personality, self-congruity and tourism behaviour. The case of the city of Rome

Abstract

Competition among countries in the tourism industry has become increasingly intense between proximate areas and between global regions. Therefore, in a highly competitive market, tourist locations need to differentiate and to implement successful branding strategies. This study analyses the application of branding to destinations. In particular, this research analyses personality as a fundamental element for building a successful destination brand strategy.

This study has two research objectives. The study's first aim is to investigate the personality of a place – particularly, the city of Rome – by identifying traits and dimensions that underlie the city's personality. Second, the study examines the relationships among the following concepts: destination personality, self-congruity and travel behaviour.

To achieve the first objective, a specific scale was developed and tested on Rome. To achieve the second objective, a theoretical model was developed and empirically tested. In applying personality theory and self-congruity theory within the context of tourism destinations, the study proposes a model based on the hypotheses that tourist behaviour can be affected by destination personality and self-congruity.

Data were collected via self-administered questionnaires. A total of 445 national and international visitors to Rome were interviewed. Exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling were performed to test the research questions and hypotheses.

The findings indicate that tourists ascribe personality to places; fourteen traits and four dimensions identify Rome's personality. The study verifies the relationship between self-congruity and destination personality but does not suggest the hypothesized direct positive influence of self-congruity on tourist behaviour.

Knowledge of destination personality can be considered a critical starting point in defining appropriate marketing strategies and operations. The study also discusses managerial implications within the contexts of destination branding and self-congruity. Therefore, this study could serve as a theoretical reference point for future research.

Keywords: destination branding, destination personality, self-congruity, Rome

1. Introduction and objectives

Branding efforts aim to differentiate one product from other competitive products.

Personality represents one of a brand's major components (Aaker, 1997). Brand personality is "the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands" (Azoulay, Kapferer, 2003, p. 151). In branding process and strategy, a well-established personality can contribute to the differentiation of a specific brand from its competitors (Aaker, 1995), can increase brand preference and usage (Aaker, 1999; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982a), can enhance brand equity (Keller, 1993; Busacca, 2000), can build strong emotional relationships between consumers and brands or products, and ultimately can result in greater trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998).

Brand personality forms a major component of brand identity and has a direct positive impact on the formation of another of a brand's fundamental elements, the image. The brand image is a pivot in the product evaluation process. Marketing literature uses self-congruity theory to explain the central role played by image in this process. The belief that brand image is pivotal in a consumer's product evaluation is based on the assumption that consumers prefer brands they associate with a set of personality traits that are congruent with their own (Kassarjian, 1971; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982a, 1985a). Specifically, the construction of a strong and positive brand personality favourably influences the relationship between a consumer's self-image and a consumer's perceived image of a product or a service (Landon, 1974; Freling, Forbes, 2005). Self-congruity is defined as the match between a brand or product image and an individual's self-concept (Sirgy, Su, 2000), where self-concept is 'the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object' (Rosemberg, 1979, p. 7). Therefore, when consumers are exposed to a brand or product personality perceived as congruent with their own self-concept, they are more likely to evaluate the brand or product more favourably. A well-characterized brand personality and the congruity arising from this enable consumers to build greater, more favourable, stronger and unique brand associations that in turn positively affect their consumption attitudes and behaviours (Helgeson, Suphellen, 2004).

Brands are traditionally associated with consumer goods or services. In fact, the concept of branding has been extensively applied to products and services in the marketing field generally (Blain, Levy, Ritchie, 2005). Nevertheless, branding strategy can permeate other fields. Recently, some scholars focused on tourism destinations (Cai, 2002; Gnoth, Baloglu, Ekinici, Sirakaya-Turk, 2007). Destinations or places can be considered products because

they consist of both tangible and intangible elements identified as value-expressive attributes. These attributes, when applied to products during the choice and purchase process, are personified via personality traits and dimensions.

Starting from these assumptions, scholars hypothesize that branding and self-congruity theories could be of great practical benefit to the destination's management and to the tourism industry. Indeed, in this respect, as viewed by Henderson (2000), managers or promoters of destinations are increasingly adopting the branding technique to attract travellers because destinations are becoming highly substitutable due to growing global competition (Pike, Ryan, 2004). Hankinson (2001) argues that creating, discussing and defining brands is a more difficult and complex process when considering destinations and locations than when applied to other products in traditional marketing literature.

Despite the growing body of research on destination branding – including Chon's introduction of the construct of self-congruity in tourism literature in 1992 – few studies consider the concept of personality related to destinations and study personality and self-congruity.

This study assesses branding and self-congruity theories in the tourism context. More specifically, this research has two main objectives.

The first objective is to identify and to investigate the traits and dimensions of a location's destination personality. This part of the study is based on a survey research design. Specifically, two self-administered questionnaires were developed. The first, based on a thorough literature review, was used to select the traits correctly attributed to destinations by travellers. The second questionnaire, based on pre-test outcomes, was used on the one hand to assess the dimensions of the destination personality scale via an exploratory factor analysis, and on the other hand to establish the convergent and discriminant validity of the scale via a confirmatory factor analysis.

The second objective is to propose a theoretical model that attempts to investigate the influence of self-congruity on tourism behaviour. Specifically, this paper aims to examine the relationships among different constructs: destination personality, self-congruity and tourism behaviour.

In particular, three research questions relate to this study's goals:

- Research Question 1: does a tourism destination possess a personality as a product or a service, and if it does, what are the traits and the underlying dimensions of destination personality?
- Research Question 2: what is the relationship between self-congruity and destination personality?

— Research Question 3: how is tourist behaviour influenced by destination personality and self-congruity?

To this end, a specific place was considered in the analysis: the city of Rome. Rome is the twelfth most visited city in the world and the most visited city in Italy (Euromonitor International, 2012).

2. Literature review

2.1. Personality, image and identity in the marketing field

Personality forms a major component of brand identity.

Kapferer (2008) defined brand identity as a brand's meaning as put forward by the firm. Brand identity reflects how a company wants to present its brand to its target groups. Brand image also has relevance to the branding strategy. Brand image is the consumers' perception and interpretation of the brand's identity (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, Van den Bergh, 2007). Brand personality refers to the "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997). This association made by consumers is identified as the personification process (Dobni, Zinkhan, 1990). As noted by Brown (1991), individuals feel a need to anthropomorphize objects to enhance their interactions with the non-material world. Through this process, individuals infer the personality in objects. Psychologists define the substance of personality as "the systematic description of traits" (McCrae, Costa, 1987, p. 81), where traits are "relatively enduring styles of thinking, feeling, and acting" (McCrae, Costa, 1997, p. 509). Therefore, personality can be considered as a set of overriding traits and dimensions (Guilford, 1973).

Marketing literature suggests that brands can be described in terms of a set of personality traits. The literature traces this idea back to Gardner and Levy (1955) and Martineau (1958). Since then, in this research stream, many scholars have conducted research on this topic. In 1985, Plummer asserted that any brand can be described in terms of three different classes of characteristics: physical attributes, functional characteristics, and brand personality. Sirgy (1985a; 1985b) also argued that many products or brands are assumed to have personality traits that are determined not solely by the actual physical characteristics of the products but also by a bundle of other factors such as advertising, price, stereotype of the generalized users, and other marketing and psychological associations. Belk (1988) claimed that possession of certain products could reflect part of the owner's personality. Batra, Lehmann and Singh (1993) suggested that a brand's personality is created over time by the brand's

entire marketing mix. In 1995, Olson and Allen defined brand personality as the set of meanings constructed by an observer to describe a brand's "inner" characteristics. Aaker and Fournier (1995) again stated that although brands are not people, they can be personified. Aaker (1997) affirmed that consumers assign human characteristics to brands due to the self-expressive and symbolic meaning the brand possesses. Fournier (1998) noted that consumers build a relationship with brands. Keller concurred that "brand personality reflects how people feel about a brand" (1998, p. 97).

Brand personality – represented by traits and dimensions – might be conceptualized similarly to human personality traits (Epstein, 1977; Aaker D.A., 1995; Aaker J., 1997; Aaker, Fournier, 1995; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Guido, 2001). In fact, as noted by Aaker (1997), "consumers often imbue brands with human personality traits" (p. 347), such as "honest", "cheerful", "charming", or "tough". Wee (2004) verified that the personality traits associated with a brand, like those associated with an individual, tend to be relatively enduring and distinctive.

Drawing on an approach from psychological studies to identify brand personality, marketing scholars have investigated and attempted to identify brand personality through different empirical analyses. In 1997, Aaker presented a work to the marketing community that became seminal. The researcher developed a valid, reliable, and generalisable scale – based on 42 traits – to measure personality and identified five distinct and robust personality dimensions¹ for brands. This scale was called the Brand Personality Scale (also referred in text as BPS). The five-factor model was developed through exploratory factor analysis and supported in a follow-up study involving a large number of brands and subjects. The five-factor model was supported by other researchers (e.g., Caprara, Barbaranelli, Guido, 2001), even though Aaker, while suggesting that five dimensions of BPS were generic and could be used across product categories, stated that the BPS might not perfectly fit different cultures and markets.

Since 1997, literature and research on brand personality have flourished.

The use of brand personality measurement instruments, such the BPS, contributed to the confirmation that brand personality greatly influences choice and contributed to the development of research designed to investigate the effects of brand personality when consumers treat this personality as a reflection and extension of their own personalities (Azoulay, Kapferer, 2003; Schiffman, Kanuk, 2004). Findings from this analysis have confirmed that consumers have a higher preference for brands that they perceive to possess a

¹ Henceforth, when discussing the personality field, the words "dimension" and "factor" will be used interchangeably in terms of meaning.

personality that reflects their self-identity and have therefore also confirmed the pre-eminent role of self-congruity in brand choice (Belk, 1988; Kaplan *et al.*, 2010; Sirgy, 1988).

2.2. Self-concept and self-congruity in the marketing field

In 1974, Landon highlighted the role of self-concept in consumer behaviour. Before, in 1957 Tucker stated, “there has long been an implicit concept that consumers can be defined in terms of either the product they acquire or use, or in terms of the meanings products have for them or their attitudes towards products” (p. 186). This implicit concept is what Landon called self-concept. This conceptualization hypothesises that a consumer tends to select products or brands that correspond to the consumer’s self-concept. Consumers will have a higher preference for a brand or product and consequently have a higher intention to purchase that product based on how similar their personality concepts are to that of the brand. In marketing literature, self-concept has been advanced as a useful construct for understanding and explaining consumer choice behaviour. Rosenberg (1979, p.7) defined self-concept as “the totality of individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object”. Empirical analyses confirmed that consumers prefer products or brands that they consider similar in personality to how they see or would like to see themselves (Landon, 1974; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982a; 1982b). Many scholars believe that a consumer may buy a product because he feels that ownership of the product could enhance his self-image. On the other hand, a consumer may decide not to buy a product because the product’s personality is not consistent with his self perceptions (Belk, 1988; Birdwell, 1968; Dolich, 1969; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1980).

In 1982, Sirgy described the first conceptualization of self-concept as having two components: actual and ideal self-concept. This scholar progressed beyond this duality dimension and developed a multidimensional construct of self-concept that also includes a social component.

Self-congruity can be considered a natural extension of self-concept. Self-congruity refers to the degree of match or mismatch between consumers’ perceptions of a brand or a product and the perceptions they have of themselves (Sirgy, 1980). Self-congruity also has been treated multidimensionally. The literature unanimously identifies four types of self-congruity: actual, ideal, social and ideal social self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982a; 1982b).

2.3. Destination branding and destination personality

Destination branding refers to the practice of applying appropriate marketing strategies to differentiate cities, regions, countries or geographical places from places that compete with regard to economic, social, political, and cultural factors. According to Morrison and Anderson (2002), destination branding can be defined as a way to communicate a destination's unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors.

Similar to product brands in general, destination brands exert two important functions: identification and differentiation (Qu, Kim, Im, 2011).

As noted by Fan (2006), who adopted a broad approach to branding, destinations differ from conventional forms of goods and services with regard to offerings, attributes, image, associations, purpose, ownership and audience. More specifically, it may be suggested that attributes of places are difficult to define, that their image is more complicated, and that the associations they evoke are more numerous and diverse than in the case of goods and services. In addition, the ownership of a destination is unclear due to the existence of multiple stakeholders, which leads to a diverse audience.

A destination or a place can be classified as a product or even as a cross between a product and a service that generally represents a physical offering, which in certain cases can be easily modified. Moreover, a destination can be perceived as a brand because it consists of a bundle of intangible and tangible attributes (Ekinci, Hosany, 2006b; Hosany, Ekinci, Uysal, 2007). A place is a large entity that contains various characteristics to represent it (Florek, 2005). Tangible attributes could include features such as sites or facilities, natural resources such as scenery, landforms, historical sites or beaches, flora and fauna, or physical conditions such as weather (Dunn Ross, Iso-Ahola, 1991; Buckley, 1994). The use of such attributes in destination marketing no longer helps differentiate destinations from their competitors. Often, positioning destinations based on their functional attributes makes them easily substitutable. Social factors such as the friendliness of local people, the language spoken, the culture, the history, the customs, and the political and economic environment can be considered intangible attributes.

Destinations also involve many more factors (e.g., government, all visitors, past visitors, all hospitality enterprises and all supporting sectors) than do product and service brands, and these factors are more effective and less controllable (e.g., the uncontrollable interaction between visitors and locals or the geographic distance between destination and target markets). Moreover, the high level of diversification possible among products and services offered by a destination make managing destination branding a difficult task (Gnoth *et al.*, 2007). The complex nature of branding a destination makes it inevitable that a brand's identity

will be generalized through personality perception. Therefore, a longer and more strenuous effort is necessary to develop and manage a positive and attractive brand personality for destinations. These efforts would include understanding potential and actual visitors, monitoring their perceptions, creatively involving local residents in these efforts and combining the efforts of the government and private sectors (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, Baloglu, 2007).

In 2006, Ekinci and Hosany published a seminal work designed to identify a scale for measuring destination personality. The two scholars examined destination personality, testing the applicability and validity of Aaker's Brand Personality Scale in the context of tourism destinations. The BPS is one of the most common frameworks used in tourism literature and studies to understand the nature of personality. In their studies, Ekinci and Hosany (2006b) found that tourists ascribe personality characteristics to destinations. Thus, the concept of brand personality scale can be applied to tourism destinations. Despite this agreement, they concluded that destination personality consists of three salient dimensions, rather than the five dimensions identified by Aaker (1997).

Empirical studies on destination personality have since markedly emerged in tourism literature. In most published accounts of the destination branding process, personality traits and dimensions are identified. For example, Back and Lee's (2003) application of Aaker's framework provided some support for at least four dimensions. Hosany and Ekinci (2003) also tested the validity of Aaker's brand personality scale to assess its applicability to tourism destinations. Their results showed that the five dimensions of brand personality were not replicated. They found only three valid personality dimensions. In 2006, Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal identified, using the Brand Personality Scale, three of the five dimensions. The same conclusions resulted for Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Baloglu (2007). Murphy, Moscardo and Benckendorff (2007; 2007a; 2007b) identified three or four dimensions of the original five. Even D'Astous and Boujbel (2007) found six dimensions in their work using previously developed personality scales, and Sahin and Baloglu (2009) identified five dimensions in their work on Istanbul's personality.

In various ways, scholars have confirmed that destinations have personality. They have also found that Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale is applicable to place when used with suitable changes.

To summarize, personality is viewed as a critical component for a successful branding strategy. According to previous studies, destination attributes should combine to create a destination's personality. The destination's personality allows for the building of destination

brands and for crafting a unique identity for a place based on tourists' perceptions of this personality. The instrument to measure the destination personality could be better defined.

3. Proposed Model

To better understand the personality concept, its application to destinations and the possible relationships among destination personality, self-congruity and tourism behaviour, this study aims to identify the personality of a specific destination and then to conceptualize, develop and test a possible model that describes the above-mentioned relationships.

In particular, the research questions related to the purpose of the study include the following:

- ⤷ Research Question 1: does a tourism destination possess a personality as a product or a service, and if it does, what are the traits and the underlying dimensions of destination personality?
- ⤷ Research Question 2: what is the relationship between self-congruity and destination personality?
- ⤷ Research Question 3: how is travel behaviour – specifically destination preference – influenced by self-congruity and destination personality?

Following the aforementioned studies, and based on research questions 2 and 3, the following hypotheses were derived:

- ⤷ Hypothesis 1: there is a relationship between self-congruity and destination personality.
- ⤷ Hypothesis 2: destination personality has a direct positive influence on tourist behaviour.
- ⤷ Hypothesis 3: self-congruity has a direct positive influence on tourist behaviour.
 - Hypothesis 3.1: actual self-congruity has a direct positive influence on tourist behaviour.
 - Hypothesis 3.2: ideal self-congruity has a direct positive influence on tourist behaviour.

Figures 1a and 1b outline the model proposed in this research.

Fig. 1a – Interrelationship between Self-Congruity and Destination Personality

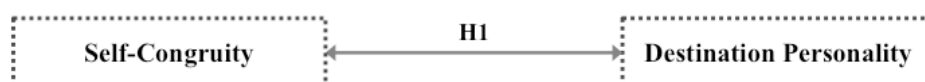
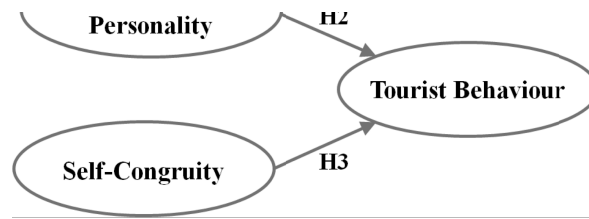


Fig. 1b – Structural relationships



To verify the proposed hypotheses, the following measurement scale will be used:

- ⤷ to capture the destination personality, an original scale that is derived from unique personality trait generation stages will be identified;
- ⤷ to measure actual and ideal self-congruity, this study used the statements from previous research conducted by Sirgy *et al.* (1997), Sirgy and Su (2000) and Helgeson and Supphellen (2004);
- ⤷ travel behaviour was operationalised as destination preference. This construct was measured using three items. These items were adopted from the general brand preference literature, and the language was modified (Helgeson, Supphellen, 2004; Sirgy *et al.*, 1991; 1992).

The analysis was conducted on the city of Rome.

4. Methodology and results

This study applied a survey research design.

Different self-administered questionnaires were developed based on previous literature. This study targeted travellers. The sample used in the empirical analysis that was conducted to answer the first research question was composed of 181 respondents. The second analysis, which addressed the second and third research questions and related hypotheses, was performed through an examination of 264 respondents. Although the main statistical technique used in this study is structural equation modelling (SEM), the study also uses descriptive statistics and exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA and CFA) and Pearson correlation.

4.1 Destination personality

To answer the first research question, a two-stage study was conducted.

In the first stage, an extensive list of personality traits – applicable generally to personality and more specifically to destinations – was composed. The list included the items from Aaker’s Brand Personality Scale (1997) that reflect personality as well as items from personality scales assumed to measure human personality using the Big Five (Costa, McCrae,

1992). Aaker's BPS is considered the most comprehensive instrument for measuring brand, product or service personality, even if some items could be considered redundant because they do not suitably define a tourism destination. The extensive list included items resulting from previous research on destination personality and from *ad-hoc* qualitative analysis using a focus group. The focus group was organized to brainstorm useful personality items regarding destinations. The focus group – carried out in March 2012 – had nine participants, including junior researchers in the marketing domain and graduate students in general or marketing management. The sample was composed in purposive way, considering the experiences and the competencies of the people in the managerial topics. The participants were asked to imagine a destination as a person and to describe in their own words the personality of specific places. The trained moderator explained that personality could be described as “relatively enduring styles of thinking, feeling and acting” (McCrae, Costa, 1987, p. 81). The moderator stressed the difference between personality traits and personality or image characteristics. These prompts were used to encourage and focus discussion. At the end of the discussion, a summary of the points made in their debate was fed back to participants allowing them to reflect and clarify. At the end of the focus group, participants were thanked for their valuable contribution to the research and invited to email the moderator with any further thoughts on the subjects. Data was recorded and transcribed in a list. The extensive list generated by this activity included 89 unique items.

Before application, to check and pare down the abovementioned list, the content validity of the scale was tested using tourists' evaluation. Subjects were asked to assess whether the 89 personality traits were relevant to their descriptions of tourism destinations and could be used to constitute the content validity of the scale. As already mentioned, given the explorative nature of this study, it was deemed appropriate to complement Aaker's 42 BPS items with other personality traits. Although past studies aimed at applying and validating a personality scale primarily have adopted Aaker's BPS, some studies adopted an approach similar to that used in the present study to identify an efficient and psychometrically better measurement scale, even if such an approach does not facilitate comparisons with past research.

Italian and international tourists were surveyed while visiting Rome, composing a convenience sample². The self-administered surveys³ were distributed in places mostly

2 Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. In this work, the subjects were selected because they were easiest to recruit for the study, but verifying that they were not resident in the city of Rome.

3 The questionnaires administered in the study were provided in two languages: Italian and English. All measures used in the instruments were based on previous research that was originally conducted in English.

populated by visitors: San Peter Square, the Roman Forum and tourism information kiosks. These places were deemed appropriate for data collection for two reasons. First, these places were very attractive and mostly populated by visitors. Second, a pilot study showed that the average time required to complete the questionnaire was six minutes, and visitors who were waiting in line for the monuments had sufficient time to complete the questionnaire.

Of the 181 questionnaires collected, six were not usable. Thus, a total of 175 questionnaires were coded for data analysis. Approximately half of the respondents were male (55%), and 70% were younger than 35, while 30% were aged 35 and older. Approximately 69% of the respondents held a post-secondary degree (i.e., college, university or equivalent degree). Thirty-four per cent of the respondents were from Italy, 35% were from EU Countries, 13% were from other European Countries, and 18% were from countries outside of Europe.

The data were collected over three weeks during February and March of 2012. Two days in each week were randomly selected, meaning data were collected on a total of six days.

The study's content validity criterion required that traits be chosen by at least 70% of the pre-test respondents; that is, 70% of participants needed to believe that these particular words would be suitable for defining a tourism destination (Churchill, 1979). Forty-one traits met this criterion and were included in the questionnaire developed to investigate Rome: real, original, cheerful, sentimental, friendly, trendy, exciting, spirited, cool, imaginative, unique, intelligent, successful, confident, glamorous, good looking, charming, genuine, dynamic, active, adventurous, creative, lively, energetic, romantic, emotional, bold, playful, jolly, passionate, pleasant, social, humorous, inspiring, traditional, entertaining, vibrant, alive, showy, noisy, and inimitable.

In the second stage of study regarding this pool of 41 items tested on Rome, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. As in the preceding stage, the data collection was conducted in four different locations in Rome: the Colosseum, San Peter Square, the Roman Forum and the Spanish Steps. The data were primarily collected close to the queues for the monument entrances. Tourists were approached randomly and asked to complete a questionnaire, offered, as in the previous case, in the Italian and English languages. In general, participants were responsive and willing to participate. Refusal rates were predominantly low (less than 10%).

The respondents were asked to rate Rome on each of the personality traits specified in the survey. Ratings for the identified 41 items were collected using a 5-point Likert-type scale

Therefore, two bilingual individuals were used to translate the items to Italian and to back-translate the items to English. Then, another bilingual individual compared the equivalency of the original and back-translated versions. Minor adjustments were made. This translation and back-translation procedure ensured semantic equivalence of the wordings of the Italian indicators (Blislin, 1970).

anchored by the terms 1 = not at all descriptive and 5 = extremely descriptive. These terms are consistent with Aaker's study (1997) and two recent research studies on brand and destination personality (i.e., Diamantopoulos, Smith, Grime, 2005; Hosany, Ekinci, Uysal, 2006).

The convenience sample consisted of 264 respondents and was divided almost equally between males (44%) and females (56%). In terms of age, 20% of the respondents were under 18 years, 29% were between 18 and 24 years, 21% were between 25 and 34 years, 13% were between 35 and 44 years, 10% were between 45 and 54 years, and 7% were 55 years or older. In terms of education, 46% had completed a high school education or less, 30% had completed a college degree, 21% had completed a masters degree, and 3% had completed a *post-lauream* course. Thirty-three per cent of the respondents were from Italy, 46% were from EU Countries, 10% were from other European Countries, and 12% were from non-European countries.

The data were collected during four weeks in April 2012 by trained researchers. Two days in each week were randomly selected, meaning data were collected on a total of eight days.

As mentioned, the aim of this study is to identify a list of personality traits that tourists ascribe to Rome. Substantive as well as empirical considerations were used throughout the scale purification process (Chin, Todd, 1995). Established standards (Churchill, 1979; Hair *et al.*, 2005) were used in item reduction and assessment of the factor structure.

Using the data set from this survey, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify *a priori* dimensionality of the destination personality scale. The analysis was performed on the 41 personality items to reduce data and to identify the underlying dimensions. Principal component analysis with orthogonal rotation method and latent root criterion (eigenvalues > 1) was used, consistent with Aaker's study. As recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham (2005), factor loading greater than .50 is considered necessary for practical significance. Thus, a cut-off point of .50 was defined for including items in the interpretation of a factor. Moreover, factors with high cross loadings (> .40) or low communalities (< .30) were candidates for elimination (Hair *et al.*, 2005).

After inspection of item content for domain representation, 11 items were deleted. Applying the same empirical and substantive considerations in item trimming, 16 additional items were deleted. A final four-factor model was estimated with the remaining 14 items. The factor solution accounted for approximately 60.6% of the total variance. Table 1 illustrates the 14-item factor structure.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were computed to assess the appropriateness of factor analyses to the data. The KMO value was .815; Bartlett's test

was significant at the .00 level (p -value = .000; $\chi^2 = 1043,334$; $df = 91$). As noted by Hair *et al.* (2005), both results demonstrate the factorability of the matrices being considered.

Cronbach's alpha was used to test reliability. Cronbach's alphas were calculated for each of four dimensions. The reliability of the items was quite satisfactory, ranging from .692 to .788.

Table 1 displays the factors, factor loading, eigenvalues, the percentage of variance explained by the factors and the corresponding Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients.

From table 1, the four-factor solution was deemed adequate according to the acceptable eigenvalues and the satisfactory amount of total variance explained. These values provide evidence for the construct validity of the scale (Churchill, 1979).

After the factor solution had been derived, the next step was to assign a name to each factor. According to Hair *et al.* (2005), items with higher loadings are considered more important and have greater influence on the factor labelling. Rome destination personality factor one was renamed "amusement". Factor two was named "temperament" because two of the four items were similar to those in Aaker's study (1997). Factor three, consisting of "emotional, romantic, sentimental and genuine" and was labelled "emotionality". For factor four, the label "dynamism" was chosen.

Table 1 – Exploratory factor analysis of destination personality items

Factors	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Explained variance	Cronbach's Alpha
Amusement				
Jolly	.856	4.359	31.137	.788
Humorous	.770			
Playful	.753			
Temperament				
Successful	.744	1.621	11.579	.700
Cool	.685			
Confident	.670			
Trendy	.653			
Emotionality				
Emotional	.775	1.349	9.641	.692
Romantic	.722			
Sentimental	.682			
Charming	.587			

Dynamism				
Dynamic	.840	1.158	8.271	.764
Active	.829			
Adventurous	.696			
Total variance explained			60.628	

One of the major limitations associated with exploratory factor analysis technique is a potential difference in the meaning of the personality traits among different groups. Like Aaker's seminal work, also this paper tests four personality dimensions. Separate principal component factor analyses were run on two different subsamples of subjects. The data set was divided using gender information: female (n=147) and male (n=116). The similarity of the results was assessed qualitatively. As stated by Osgood, Suci, Tannenbaum (1957) and consistent with Aaker's analysis (1997), the qualitative analysis of the results showed that the four criteria for similar factor structures were met (tab. 2): (i) the same number of factors (four) were extracted, (ii) qualitatively similar factors resulted, (iii) similar weights for the four factors existed among the subpopulations, and (iv) the variance explained by each factor was approximately the same.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity computed on the first subpopulation resulted in the following: the KMO value was .801, and Bartlett's test was significant at the .00 level (p -value = .000; $\chi^2 = 664,367$; $df = 91$). On the second subpopulation, the KMO value was .763, and Bartlett's test was significant at the .00 level (p -value = .000; $\chi^2 = 438,516$; $df = 91$). The variance explained by each factor in the two subgroups was approximately the same. The largest difference was for the first factor, which explained the more than 33% variance for the female subjects versus a 28% variance for the male subject sample (see tab. 2).

Table 2 – Variance explained

Factors	Complete sample	Sub-sample 1: female	Sub-sample 2: male
Factor 1	31.137	33.328	28.277
Factor 2	11.579	12.090	13.563
Factor 3	9.641	9.379	10.021
Factor 4	8.271	7.728	8.463
Total variance explained	60.628	62.525	60.325

4.2 Self-congruity, destination personality and tourism behaviour

To answer the second and the third research questions and to test the proposed hypotheses, a model was developed consisting of two exogenous constructs (destination personality, self-congruity) and one endogenous construct (tourism behaviour). In conducting this empirical

analysis, the same sample as that used in the second stage of the previous empirical analysis was used. The measurement scales used in the questionnaire are explained below.

To conceptualize the destination personality, the results of the previous analyses were considered. The 14 items identified in the first stage of the research were used. Both the destination personality and the self-congruity are measured using a Likert-type scale (5 points). As mentioned previously, the construct travel behaviour was operationalised as destination preference. For the dataset composed of 264 observations, several statistical methods were conducted for the analysis. The SPSS® statistical package and LISREL 8.54 were used to analyse the data. First, descriptive statistics were generated to evaluate the distribution of variables. Then, Pearson correlation and structural equation modelling were performed to test the hypotheses. Pearson correlation was employed to test H1, and SEM was utilized to test H2 and H3.

As noted by Zikmund (2003), Pearson correlation could be considered the most popular technique to investigate the relationship of one variable to another. It is a measure of linear association ranging from +1.0 to -1.0 to indicate a perfect positive relationship or a perfect negative relationship, respectively. A series of Pearson correlation analyses were used to test the relationship between destination personality and self-congruity. The results (see tab. 3) indicated that there was a positive relationship between the concepts. All of the relationships were significant at the 0.01 level, and the correlation coefficients ranged from .179 to .336. Therefore, the overall results suggest the existence of a significant positive relationship between destination personality and self-congruity.

As a result, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 3 – Correlations between destination personality and self-congruity

Factors	Pearson Correlation
Amusement	
Jolly	.257**
Humorous	.336**
Playful	.254**
Temperament	
Successful	.246**
Cool	.263**
Confident	.262**
Trendy	.227**
Emotionality	
Emotional	.231**
Romantic	.245**
Sentimental	.235**
Charming	.254**
Dynamism	

Dynamic	.179**
Active	.196**
Adventurous	.248**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A structural equation model was used to test hypotheses 2 and 3 simultaneously. Destination personality consisted of four dimensions: amusement, temperament, emotionality, and dynamism. Therefore, before testing the structural relationships, we conducted a CFA to test the proposed measurement model (Anderson, Gerbing, 1988; Jöreskog, Sörbom, 2001).

The tested model revealed indices that were generally below acceptable thresholds (see tab. 4).

The value of *Root Mean Square Error of Approximation* (also indicated as RMSEA) equal to .0348 was below the recommended cut-off value of .06. Conventionally, there is a good model fit if RMSEA is less than or equal to .06 (Hu, Bentler, 1999). The *Comparative Fit Indices* (also indicated as CFI) yielded results greater than .95. All of the modification indices were predominantly low. Furthermore, the composite reliability estimates were considered acceptable: tourist behaviour =.71, amusement =.79, temperament =.70, emotionality =.69, dynamism =.78, ideal self-congruity = .91, and actual self-congruity = .91 (Fornell, Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, Bernstein, 1994). All of the average variance extracted (AVE) estimates equalled or exceeded the recommended .50 cut-off: tourist behaviour =.50, amusement =.56, temperament =.50, emotionality =.51, dynamism =.55, ideal self-congruity = .71, and actual self-congruity = .77. The squared correlations between pairs of constructs were less than AVEs, providing empirical support for the discriminant validity of the measures (Fornell, Larcker, 1981).

Tab. 4 – CFA model fit indicators

Fit indicators	Value
χ^2	275.594
df	209
RMSEA	.0348
CFI	.985
Convergent Validity	All > 3.29 ($p = .001$)

Using structural equation modelling as a means of analysing the relationships in a simultaneous manner, the two hypotheses were tested by deploying a maximum-likelihood estimation procedure. The fit statistics were generally acceptable (see tab. 4).

Tab. 5 – SEM model fit indicators

Fit indicators	Value
χ^2	343.414
df	211
RMSEA	.0487
CFI	.974

Individual hypothesised structural paths were examined next. The structural model consisted of six exogenous variables and one endogenous variable. The relationships between tourist behaviour and its variables were assessed via the path coefficients. As stated in the literature, if an estimated *t-value* is greater than a critical value 1.96 ($p < 0.05$), the hypothesized relationship is supported.

H.2 examines the direct positive influence of destination personality on tourist behaviour. The results (see tab. 6) indicated that all the dimensions have significant impact on tourism behaviour. This hypothesis was supported.

However, neither actual nor ideal self-congruence significantly impacted tourist behaviour. Therefore, H3.1 and H3.2 were not supported.

Tab. 6 – Structural Equation Model

HP	Standard Error	<i>t-value</i>
Destination personality → Tourist behaviour		
<i>Amusement</i>	.533	-2.271*
<i>Temperament</i>	1.675	-2.710*
<i>Emotionality</i>	1.565	3.032*
<i>Dynamism</i>	.590	2.712*
Actual Self-Congruity → Tourist behaviour	.461	-0.452
Ideal Self-Congruity → Tourist behaviour	.442	1.414

**significant with $p < 0,01$*

4. Discussion and conclusion

The objective of this study was to identify the perceived personality of Rome and to investigate and empirically examine the relationship between destination personality, self-congruity and tourists' behavioural intentions. The findings represent important theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of personality, self-congruity and behavioural intentions in the destination context.

4.1. Implications

Previous literature recognized the importance of a personality linked to destinations, and this study made some attempts to adapt Aaker's BPS to places. This study's results, considered

from a theoretical standpoint, confirm that travellers do attribute personality characteristics to destinations. This result aligns with previous research (e.g., Ekinici, Hosany, 2006a; 2006b; Ekinici, Sirakaya-Turk, Baloglu, 2007; Murphy, Benckendorff, Moscardo, 2007; 2007a).

Extending previous research, this study proposes an original scale developed to measure the destination personality of Rome. The analysis enables us to identify four dimensions and fourteen traits.

Moreover, the findings of this study indicate that there is a relationship between self-congruity and destination personality. A series of Pearson correlation analyses were used to test the hypothesis. The statistical results confirmed that there were positive relationships. However, for some items, the congruence was larger, while for others, the congruence was smaller.

The second proposed hypothesis was supported. The results suggested that the dimensions identified had a positive impact on tourist behaviour. These results are similar to and complement previous research. For example, Ekinici and Hosany (2006) found that the identified dimension significantly influences tourist behaviour; Murphy *et al.* (2007a; 2007b; 2007c) revealed that only the “Excitement” dimension of personality positively influences travel behaviour. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to identify a set of specific traits regarding a destination.

The third hypothesis – the impact of self-congruity on tourist behaviour – was not supported. The study showed that self-congruity was not a significant predictor of actual or ideal tourist behaviour. Previous research revealed mixed results; these results are not completely consistent with previous results.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that destinations could be described using personality traits. Destination personality has a positive impact on tourism behaviour. Therefore, could be relevant for the destination marketing organizations (intended in broadest possible way), in order to position and differentiate places, to comprise and manage the personality of a destination and to invest in developing a unique and distinctive one. In fact, a correct knowledge of personality, as in other product categories, may have an impact both at the strategic and operational level.

Within the branding strategies, the creation and management of an appropriate destination personality must be viewed as a key to ensuring the competitiveness of a place. The first step in this process could be identified in the aforementioned proposed procedures. Indeed, due to the importance of an appropriate and effective destination positioning, any destination marketer may improve via the personality measurement and the comparison among the measured personality and the desired one, the positive impact of this on the strategies of

differentiation from other competitors places. Then, in operation terms, any marketer could use the place personality to the arrangement of components of the offer, to better define the advertising policies, the qualification of the communication contents and the promotional materials to develop or improve the destination positioning in the competitive environment.

The study also has specific practical implications for the destination marketers of Rome. The perceived destination personality of Rome has four dimensions: amusement, temperament, emotionality, and dynamism. The destination marketers should concentrate on these dimensions in their marketing efforts. An additional practical implication is that destination personality and self-congruity have a relationship. Therefore, destination marketers should place great emphasis on building this congruence because the combination of destination personality and self-congruity might provide a more comprehensive understanding of how visitors choose their destinations.

From a theoretical perspective, destination personality is a relevant topic of study, but the research is only in its infancy. Although destination personality and self-congruity have been studied widely in the consumer behaviour literature, there is a lack of research in the tourism literature. The application of both destination personality and self-congruity in tourism research has been limited. This study empirically tested the relevance of personality in the tourism environment, the relationship of destination personality and self-congruity and the impact of personality and self-congruity on a particular aspect of tourism behaviour. This study makes a significant contribution in finding that brand personality exists in tourism environments; moreover, this study shows that self-congruity theory applies in the context of tourism destinations, despite the contrast between the present work and previous studies on the topic regarding the third.

4.2. Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations.

The first and the most significant limitation is the lack of statistical sampling. The data were collected via a convenience sampling method. Therefore, the sample utilized did not reflect the entire population of visitors to Rome from which the respondents were chosen.

Second, the findings of this research are specific only to one tourism destination. For this reason, the results cannot be generalised to other destinations. These limitations enable future researchers to replicate the study with a larger sample size constituted via the random sampling method.

Third, research studies chose to measure self-congruity directly via the global measurement approach developed in 1997 by Sirgy *et al.* This approach results in greater predictive validity

and overcomes the problems associated with many studies of self-congruity, enabling the self-congruity experience to be captured in a holistic manner. Future studies could determine whether directly measuring self-congruity indeed leads to different results.

Fourth, the current study employed only two dimensions of self-congruity: actual and ideal. The other two dimensions – social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity – mapped in the literature were not included in the field research.

Future research could also consider these two dimensions because destination choice behaviour is affected not only by personal factors but also by social factors. Although this study specifically designed a destination personality scale built on the city of Rome, future research could fill the gaps that result from conducting analysis in only one place. Future research can use the proposed procedure to test and develop a valid, reliable, and more generalisable destination personality scale.

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