

Telic Self-Concept Dimensions in Consumer Behavior Revisited: Exploring the Role of the 'Undesired Self' in Tourism

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Purpose and Background

Investigating the incremental value of a construct termed 'undesired self-image congruence' (in short: undesired congruity) on (1) the intention to search for information on a specific travel destination and (2) on attitudes/intentions to visit a randomly presented destination for the upcoming summer vacation.

Undesired congruity captures tourists' perceived closeness to negatively valenced destination-image attributes. Tourists are motivated to avoid those destinations high on undesired congruity.

Method

Study 1 was aimed at exploring the incremental value of undesired congruity to predict the intention to search for information on Croatia as a travel destination for the next summer vacation. $N= 280$ members of a representative German consumer panel participated in a questionnaire-based study assessing (a) functional congruity, (2) established self-image congruity facets and (3) undesired congruity.

Study 2 was aimed at assessing the incremental predictive value of undesired congruity within an extended Theory of Planned Behavior model (TOPB; Ajzen, 1991), applied to travel destination choice behavior. A questionnaire-based study was used to explain consumers' attitudes and intentions to visit a randomly selected destination for the upcoming summer vacation (convenience sample, $N= 266$). Exogenous variables included TOPB model components, self-congruity, and undesired congruity.

Results

Study 1

Undesired congruity proved its substantial and incremental value in predicting the intention to search for information on Croatia as a travel destination for the next summer vacation.

Step	Predictor variables	r	β	R ²
1	Functional	.44**	.44**	.19**
2	Functional	.44**	.34**	.22**
	Actual Congruity	.35**	.10	
	Ideal Congruity	.28**	-.02	
	Social Congruity	.23**	.05	
	Undesired Congruity	-.22**	-.13*	

Table: Hierarchical multiple regression analysis relating functional and self image congruence facets to the intention to search for information on Croatia as a travel destination for the next summer vacation ($N= 280$).

Study 2

Undesired congruity was systematically related to attitudes, but did not directly influence travel-choice intentions.

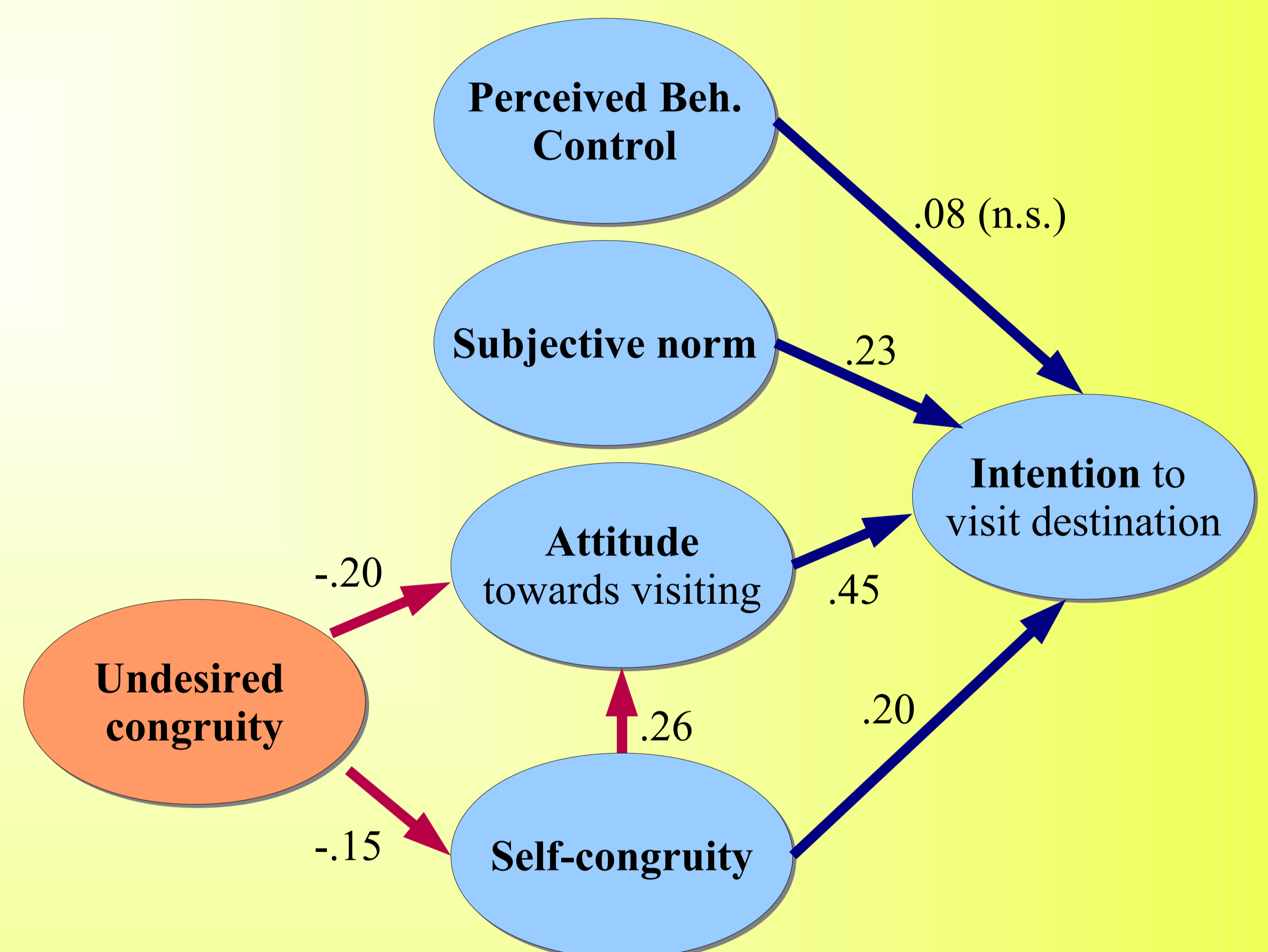


Figure: Structural model relating undesired congruity to self-congruity and TOPB model components (cross-correlations not shown; EQS robust methods used; $\chi^2= .99$, $df= 1$, $p= .32$; $CFI= .99$; $NNFI= .95$; $N= 266$)

Conclusions and Implications

Avoidance motives related to undesired destination images appear to influence purchase decisions at early stages of the decision-making process, namely in information search (study 1) and attitude formation / evaluative responding (study 2).

The value of the results lie in (1) testing the operation of undesired congruity and in (2) quantifying its incremental contribution in understanding consumer behavior in tourism.

Because negative stereotypical images appear to feed into decision processes at early stages of decision making (information search, attitude formation), due caution should be exerted in primary data collection and brand positioning. Primary data collection should capture both positive and negative brand-related meanings attributed by tourists. Because the results show that undesired congruity has an incremental explanatory effect, positive versus negative symbolic meanings are clearly not just 'two sides of the same coin'. Consequently, destination brand positioning should define its strategy by simultaneously maximizing both the closeness to desired symbolic meanings and the distance to undesired symbolic associations.