

Vacation satisfaction and vacationists' quality of life

Oksana Tokarchuk, Oswin Maurer

Faculty of Economics and Management, Free University of Bolzano (Italy),
Competence Centre in Tourism Management and Tourism Economics (TOMTE)
Email: oksana.tokarchuk@unibz.it, oswin.maurer@unibz.it

Abstract

Purpose. The aim of the present study is to investigate how satisfaction with different aspects of tourism destination contributes to the wellbeing of vacationist. We study the effect of self, functional, hedonic, economic, health and safety, moral and leisure congruities on the enhancement of quality of life reported by vacationists to Thailand.

Methodology. The study is based on a theoretical model developed in Tokarchuk, Maurer and Bosnjak (2015) according to which satisfaction with different aspects of vacation contributes to vacationists' quality of life enhancement due to vacation. We extend the model by suggesting that improvements in quality of life influence revisiting intentions and word of mouth intentions. The model is empirically tested on data collected among 976 vacationists to Thailand on their departure. Empirical investigation of the model is performed with the use of structural equation modelling (SEM).

Findings. We find that all considered congruities positively and significantly contribute to vacationists' quality of life enhancement. Their contribution can be seen as equally important. We find that quality of life enhancement has positive contribution to post-visit loyalty measured by visiting intentions and word of mouth intentions.

Practical implications. The model developed and tested in the present study helps practitioners to understand the most important aspects of destination image perceived by vacationists. The results of the model have wide range of application from developing of marketing campaigns to destination improvement and further development.

Originality/value. The present study provides additional insight into how satisfaction with various aspects of destination perceived by vacationists influences their wellbeing enhancement due to vacation taken in the destination.

Keywords:

Congruity model; Quality of life; SEM; Thailand

1. Introduction

Retaining and maintaining existing customers costs less than acquiring new customers (Reichheld, 1996). Not surprisingly, customer loyalty is a cornerstone of modern marketing and is a topic of a plethora of studies. One of the main determinants of tourist loyalty to destination is considered the image that tourists form of destination. The link between destination image and tourist loyalty towards destination has been largely studied (Zhang et al, 2014). A recent meta-study conducted by Zhang et al (2014) found that there exists significant relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty toward destination.

One of the approaches to destination image formation is destination self-congruity, which denotes the degree of congruence between destination image and tourists' self-image (Sirgy and Su, 2000). Self-congruity has been showed to affect destination loyalty, however, predictive power of this effect is rather limited, not exceeding 10% of the explained variance of this concept (Chon and Olsen 1991; Kastenholz 2004; Beerli et al 2007).

Bosnjak et al (2011) in order to increase predictive power of self-congruity model in explaining tourists' loyalty judgments extended the concept of self-congruity to include other criteria, on which tourists may base their post-visit evaluations of the destination. These criteria include: self-congruity, functional congruity (e.g. quality of the services at destination), hedonic criteria (e.g. extent to which experience pleases various senses: beauty, aesthetic sense, etc.), leisure criteria (e.g. entertainment value, extent of engagement in leisure activities), economic criteria (e.g. affordability of destination), safety criteria and moral criteria (e.g. reputation of the destination tourist businesses as socially responsible). Empirical testing of comprehensive congruity model proved that it explains most of variance of post-visit loyalty.

According to Chi and Qu (2008) relationship between destination image and destination loyalty is mediated by satisfaction with stay at destination. However, satisfaction with vacation in destination is a short-term consequence of tourism. A long lasting effect of vacation is measured through quality of life enhancement due to vacation. Previous studies in consumer research demonstrated that travel experiences are among the most prominent extraordinary life experiences that lead to highest happiness in life (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner, 2014). Tokarchuk et al. (2015) have shown that comprehensive congruity model is a good predictor of quality of life enhancement due to vacation in destination.

In the present study we broaden the reach of the comprehensive congruity model in the explanation of destination loyalty by including quality of life enhancement due to vacation in destination as a moderating factor of this relationship. According to our model evaluative judgments of vacation at destination captured by seven criteria composing comprehensive congruity model explain quality of life enhancement due to the stay at destination, which in turn defines destination loyalty judgments. We empirically test our model by using structural equation modeling (SEM) approach on a sample of 976 vacationers to Thailand.

2. Literature review

2.1. Destination image, tourists' satisfaction and destination loyalty

Tourism research accounts for numerous studies empirically demonstrating that positive destination image is a strong indicator of tourists' intentions to revisit and recommend the destination to other people (i.e. Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Mechinda et al, 2009; Ramkisoorn et al, 2011). If tourists hold high opinion on destination or form a positive overall judgment on it, it is very likely that they will tend to come to this location again. Moreover, it was demonstrated that correspondence between destination image and tourists'

self-conception increases possibility of revisiting the destination (Sirgy and Su, 2000; Bosnjak et al, 2011). Evaluation of different aspects of destination, measured by self-, functional, economic, hedonic, safety, moral and leisure congruities, increases overall satisfaction, intentions to come back and to recommend destination to others (Bosnjak et al, 2011).

On the other hand, past studies demonstrated strong relationship between satisfaction with vacation at destination and destination loyalty (i.e. Bramwell, 1998; Prentice and Andersen, 2000; Um et al, 2006; Meleddu et al, 2015). Tourists' satisfaction with their travel, positive experience with services, products and other resources provided at destination may be reflected in their willingness to revisit the destination and recommend it to friends, relatives and others. Recommendations by previous visits are seen as the most reliable sources of information about the destination for potential tourists.

In fact, Chi and Qu (2008) put together the constructs of destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. They demonstrate that revisiting intentions and positive word of mouth are determined by positive destination image passing through overall satisfaction as well as satisfaction with different aspects of destination.

2.2 Quality of life and tourists

The primary interest of the research in quality of life and tourism was in demonstrating the link between vacation taking and improvements of quality of life and determinants of this effect. It has been demonstrated that people that take vacation are more satisfied with their life compared with individuals who do not take vacation (Gilbert and Abdullah, 2004; de Bloom et al, 2011; Dolnicar et al., 2012). Positive effect of vacations has been demonstrated for different categories of people ranging from employed individuals to retirees, including individuals with chronic health problems, people affected by mental disorders and economically disadvantaged families (Chen and Petrick, 2013).

Factors that reinforce positive benefits that tourists derive from vacations are less studied. Detachment from work, participation in leisure activities and relaxation are shown to be contributors to wellbeing restoration on vacation (de Bloom et al., 2011; Fritz and Sonnentag, 2006; Cleaver and Muller, 2002).

Tourism marketing literature focused its attention on the transmission mechanism from tourists' experiences to wellbeing enhancement. For instance, Neal et al. (1999, 2007) showed that vacations contribute to satisfaction with life through satisfaction with services and leisure activities experienced on vacation. According to Sirgy et al (2011) tourism experiences generate positive and negative affect in social, leisure, family, love, arts and culture, work, health and safety, financial, spiritual intellectual, self, culinary and travel lives of individuals during their travel and affect their overall satisfaction with life. Tokarchuk et al (2015) showed that satisfaction with different characteristics of the destination, captured by self, functional, hedonic, economic, health and safety, moral and leisure congruities, generate the effect of vacation on quality of life. From this point of view comprehensive congruity model provides useful practical tool for marketers in order to measure satisfaction of visitors and develop plans in order to improve the situation.

2.3 Thailand as tourism destination

Several studies investigating travel satisfaction, destination loyalty or relationship between these two concepts have been based on Thailand as tourism destination. These studies addressed motivations and satisfaction of different groups of tourists: international, domestic, first-time and repeated visitors; as well as considered tourism destination Thailand or have been based on more specific tourist localities within the country like Bangkok or Pattaya.

Overall, satisfaction with the stay in Thailand is driven by factors like quality of lodging and restaurants, food, culture, natural attractions and scenery, entertainment, shopping

opportunities (i.e. Rittichainuwat et al, 2002; McDowall and Ma, 2010; Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000; Tavitiyaman and Qu, 2013).

Satisfaction with services, food, shopping and entertainment opportunities, cultural sightseeing and natural scenery, and hospitality of local residents were related with intention to come back and willingness to recommend visiting Thailand to others (Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000; Rittichainuwat et al, 2008; McDowall and Ma, 2010; McDowall, 2010).

To the best of authors' knowledge no study addressing Thailand visitors' self-congruity or quality of life enhancement due to vacation in Thailand was conducted.

3. Conceptual development

The model in the present study is based on comprehensive congruity model developed in Bosnjak et al. (2011). Comprehensive congruity model stems its origins from early destination marketing research on self-congruity (i.e. Chon and Olsen, 1991; Kastenholz, 2004; Beerli et al., 2007). Following the developments that congruity research experienced with introduction of functional congruity (Bojanic, 1996; Petrick et al, 1999) the comprehensive congruity model aimed at accounting for all important aspects of stay at destination in forming of destination image. Congruity in the terms of the model refers to the correspondence between tourists' expectations about the destination and their experience during the stay.

Comprehensive congruity model consists of seven congruities: self-, functional, hedonic, economic, safety and health, moral and leisure congruities. Self congruity corresponds to the match between individual vision of self and the destination image. Self-congruity is demonstrated to be an important factor in destination choice as well as post-visit judgments (Chon and Olsen, 1991; Kastenholz, 2004; Beerli et al., 2007).

Functional congruity evaluates satisfaction of tourists with services at destination, their correspondence to its functional use (Bojanic, 1996; Petrick et al, 1999; Bosnjak et al., 2011).

Hedonic congruity relates to hedonic aspects of vacation such as fresh air, natural beauty, arts and culinary experiences (i.e. Kreisel, 2004; Duman and Mattila, 2005).

Economic congruity corresponds to the economic characteristics of vacation at destination like financial affordability of services and quality-price judgments (Bosnjak, 2011).

Safety and Health congruity groups items that involve the needs for safety and health improvement during vacation (Bosnjak, 2011).

Moral congruity includes tourists' evaluations of the state of nature protection at destination and fare treatment of employees and consumers (Bosnjak, 2011).

Leisure congruity refers to the destination's capability to provide leisure activities or possibility to escape from drudgery of everyday life and routine (Bosnjak, 2011).

Bosnjak et al. (2011) demonstrated that comprehensive congruity model accounts for large part of variation in post-visit loyalty judgments. They suggest applying this model as a practical tool of measuring tourists' satisfaction with various aspects of destination stay in order to improve satisfaction, probability to come and to suggest staying at destination to friends and relatives. The original model has been tested on a sample of German vacationers.

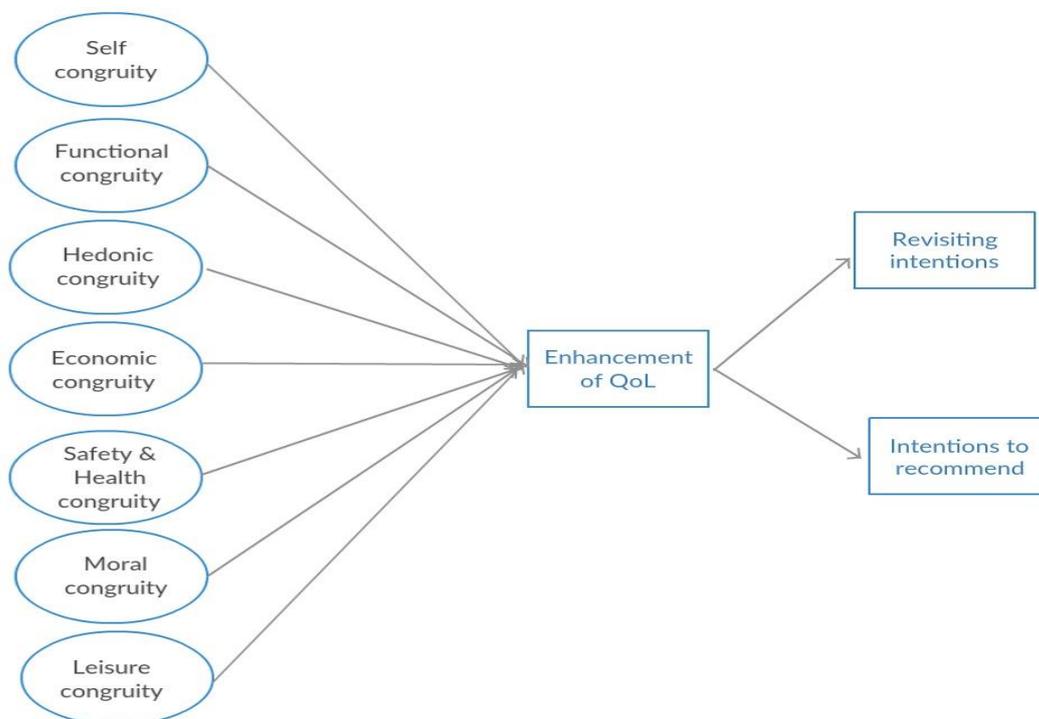
Tokarchuk et al. (2015) related this model to quality of life enhancement. They demonstrated that satisfaction with different aspects of the stay at destination contribute to the wellbeing improvement on vacation. This model has been successfully tested on a sample of recent vacationers in Tasmania, Australia.

In the present paper we extend the model developed in Tokarchuk et al. (2015) by proposing and testing the hypothesis that enhancement of quality of life due to vacation contributes to intention to revisit the destination and increases willingness to recommend

destination to others. As it has been demonstrated in Tokarchuk and Maurer (2016) overall satisfaction with vacation leads to long-term satisfaction represented by quality of life enhancement due to vacation. Individuals who experience quality of life enhancement during vacation should be more prone to come back to the destination to give a boost to their quality of life. Moreover, we expect that these individuals will be more ready to recommend destination to their friends and relatives as a vacation spot.

Figure 1 presents the overall model explaining the mechanism underlying the creation of positive effect of stay at destination on quality of life proposed in the study. The main constructs of comprehensive congruity model are: self-, functional, hedonic, economic, safety and health, moral and leisure congruities. Comprehensive congruity model enhances quality of life, which, in turn affects intentions to revisit and to recommend the destination to others.

Figure 1. Contribution of comprehensive congruity model to vacationers' quality of life enhancement and intentions to revisit and to recommend the destination.



Source: authors elaborations

Consequently, we formulate the following hypothesis subject to empirical test:

Hypothesis 1: Enhancement of quality of life due to vacation is a positive function of seven congruity factors: self-, functional, hedonic, economic, safety and health, moral and leisure congruities.

Hypothesis 2: Tourists' intention to revisit the destination is a positive function of enhancement of quality of life due to vacation at destination.

Hypothesis 3: Tourists' intention to recommend the destination to others is a positive function of enhancement of quality of life due to vacation at destination.

In the present study we conduct empirical test of the formulated hypothesis. Moreover, we aim to estimate relative importance of the constructs in contributing to intentions to revisit and to recommend the destination.

4. Method

4.1 Measurement instrument

The present study implemented construct of comprehensive congruity model that were adapted in Tokarchuk et al (2015) making the necessary adjustments in order to account for differences involved in vacation-taking in Thailand. The overall measurement model of comprehensive congruity model consisted of the following set of indicators: self-congruity (8 items), functional congruity (11 items), hedonic congruity (5 items), economic congruity (8 items), safety and health congruity (4 items), moral congruity (2 items), leisure congruity (9 items). All items were measured with a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 6 (“Strongly agree”).

Measurement of quality of life enhancement due to vacation was performed through a self-performed measure comparing the status of quality of life before vacation and quality of life after vacation as in Sirgy et al., 2011. Authors report that the items included in the measure were highly homogeneous (associated Chronbach’s alpha is 0.9) and corresponded to semantically similar formulations. It is demonstrated that if these conditions are met a single-item measure is acceptable for measuring quality of life (Diamontopoulos et al., 2012). The measure of quality of life is a complex construct. Posing too many semantically similar questions in order to account for different aspects may lead to confusion of the subjects, whose attention as a consequence is distracted by non-relevant factors (deBoer et al., 2004). Single-item measure permit to concentrate on more relevant aspect for each individual and provide a unique overall measure

Single-item measures of quality of life are used in large-scale consumer surveys as Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics in Australia study (HILDA) (Watson and Wooden, 2010).

Measurement model corresponding to comprehensive congruity model poses requirements on cognitive and time efforts from respondents. In order to reduce the overall effort associated with filling in the questionnaire we chose to adopt single-measure construct of wellbeing enhancement. Interviewers were asked to evaluate a single statement “My trip to Tasmania enhanced my quality of life” on Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 6 (“Strongly agree”). Tokarchuk, Maurer and Bosnjak (2015) successfully adopted this measure in order to study the impact of vacation in Tasmania on tourists’ quality of life enhancement.

4.2 Data and sample description

An internet-based survey was administered to recent vacationers in Thailand. A total of 1271 responses were collected. Overall, 976 individuals, 77%, reported vacation as their primary reason of their trip to Thailand. The analysis in the present paper is focused on the responses of these individuals.

The demographic profile of respondents is as the following: 55% of the respondents were female. 43% are married or in de-facto partnership, 39% are single; average age of the travellers was 36 years. 38% of tourists in the sample are coming from Asia, 27% are coming from Europe, 12% from Oceania, 9% from Americas. 58% hold University degree or higher.

52% of holiday-takers primarily stayed in Eastern region (in Pattaya). Other places were: Bangkok 15%, Chiang Mai 13%, Phuket 11%.

33% of visitors travelled by themselves, 21% as a family with children, 12% with a tour group. Most of vacationers, 84%, stayed in hotel. Majority of vacationers, 58%, stayed five days or less. Average spending on the trip was 1340 US dollars. For 31% of respondents it was the first holiday in Thailand.

5. Results

5.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

Our empirical strategy follows two-step approach to SEM estimation (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). First of all, we conduct unidimensionality test for each construct separately (Sethi and King, 1994). The aim of this analysis is to ensure that each set of indicators defines only one latent construct. This analysis is performed in order to improve the fit of the model and to identify indicators that have real significance and substantial meaning for the proposed model. Operationally, unidimensionality analysis consists of sequential modification of indicators included in a set of individual latent construct following indication of modification indices. This analysis reduced the number of items composing each individual latent construct.

Based on obtained unidimensional constructs we moved to overall measurement of the model (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The measurement model consisted of seven factors of comprehensive congruity model (self congruity, functional congruity, economic congruity, health and safety congruity, moral congruity, hedonic congruity and leisure congruity).

Table 1 presents Chronbach's alpha calculated for each latent variable. As can be seen from table 1 all constructs are reliable given that the value of Chronbach's alpha is larger than 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978).

Overall measurement of the model presented in table 1 confirms satisfactory model fit. The measure of chi-square (222 with 200 degrees of freedom) indicates good fit of the model (Barrett, 2007). The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is 0.000, which is lower than the threshold of 0.05 indicated as the upper level for good fit (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2000). The value of Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is equal to 0.999, which provides a further confirmation of the good fit of the model (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Overall, the measurement model provides good fit and is suitable for the empirical analysis presented in the study.

Table 1. Chronbach's alpha and CFA's standardized coefficients of congruity measurement model. $\chi^2(200)=222, p=0.14, comparative\ fit\ index\ (CFI)=0.999; root\ mean\ square\ residual\ (rmsr) = 0.000; root\ mean\ square\ error\ of\ approximation\ (rmsea) = 0,011$

	Chronbach's alpha	CFA standardized coefficients
Self congruence	0,9993	
Do people who are important to you think you should spend your holidays in a place such as Thailand?		0,9991***
Do you feel that your holiday in Thailand reflects the kind of person you are?		0,9989***
Do your friends think that you are the kind of person who would spend a holiday in a place such as Thailand?		0,9990***
Functional congruence	0,9998	
Does Thailand have a good reputation and a long- standing history as a tourist destination?		
Have you generally been satisfied with the services int provided by tourism and hospitality operators in Thailand?		0,9993***
Do you believe that Thailand has good facilities for tourists?		0,9995***
Is Thailand a convenient tourist destination?		0,9996***
Hedonic congruence	0,9997	
Did you see beautiful landscapes in Thailand?		0,9994***
Did see any beautiful artwork or architecture at the places you visited in Thailand?		0,9995***
Is Thailand peaceful and quiet (at least at the places you visited)?		0,9993***
Did you enjoy the food and drink you consumed when visiting Thailand?		0,9995***

Economic congruence	0,9997	
Regarding your expenses traveling to and from int Thailand, were these expenses reasonable and affordable?		0,9995***
Regarding your travel expenses for touring within int Thailand, were these expenses reasonable and affordable?		0,9998***
Regarding accommodation in Thailand, were accommodation costs reasonable and affordable?		0,9995***
Health and Safety congruence	0,9992	
....that visiting Tasmania had a positive impact on your health?		0,9992***
...that your trip to Tasmania was safe for you, in general?		0,9991***
Moral congruence	0,9986	
Do you believe that businesses, companies and government agencies in Tasmania are more concerned about making money than being concerned with the comfort and well-being of visitors?		0,9988***
Do you believe that businesses, companies and agencies are law-abiding and socially responsible?		0,9986***
Leisure congruence	0,9998	
Did your visit to Thailand make you feel rejuvenated?		0,9995***
Did your visit to Thailand allow you to engage in one of your favourite leisure time activities?		0,9995***
Did the travel to Thailand help you to be the real you, living and enjoying the moment without worrying about daily problems?		0,9994***
Has your visit to Thailand helped you to feel free from the pressures of life?		0,9995***
Did you feel you were able to escape the drudgery of work by holidaying in Thailand?		0,9996***

Source: authors elaboration on the database

5.2 Structural equation modeling

The analysis was performed with structural equation modeling estimation with Stata 13. Overall fit of the model and relative standardized coefficients are presented in Figure 2. The model presents good fit demonstrated by the measure of chi-square (278 with 256 degrees of freedom, associated probability 0.16). The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is 0.001, which is lower than the threshold of 0.05 indicated as the upper level for good fit (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2000). The value of Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is equal to 0,999, which provides a further confirmation of the good fit of the model (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

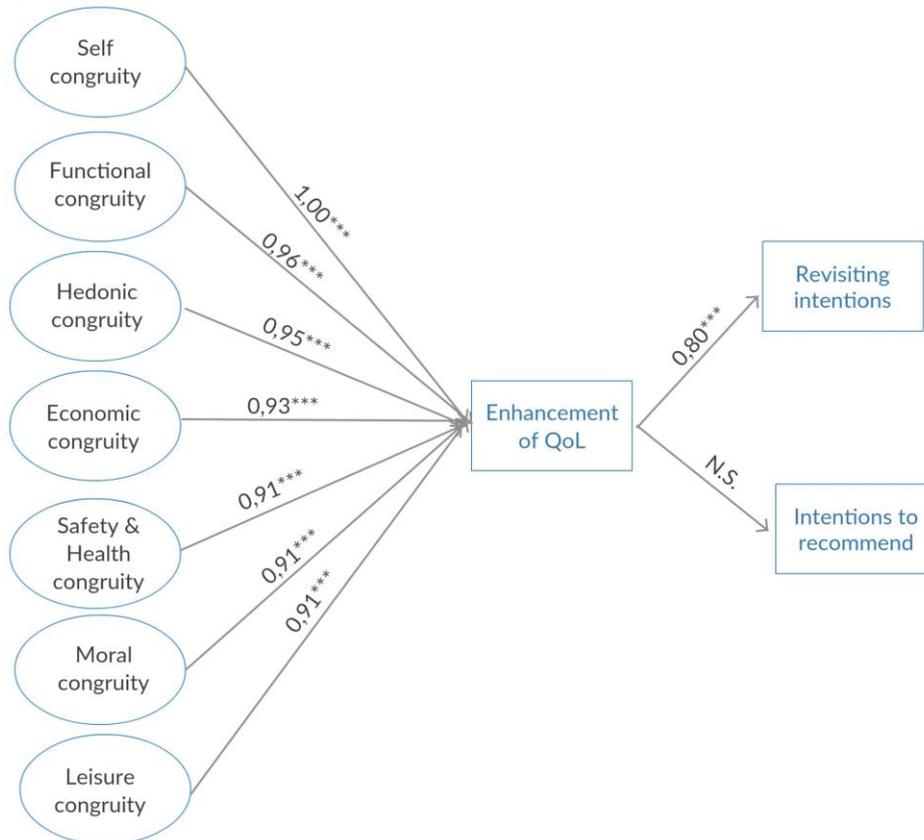
Figure 2 shows that satisfaction with various aspects of vacation (functional, economic, hedonic, leisure, health and safety, moral congruities) and alignment between the vision of self and destination image (self congruity) have positive impact on enhancement of quality of life due to vacation in Thailand. All coefficients relative to comprehensive congruity model are positive and statistically significant at 0,01 level. Hypothesis 1 has been confirmed.

Enhancement of quality of life due to vacation has positive and statistically significant effect on the revisiting intentions. Hypothesis 2 has been confirmed. However, the effect of quality of life enhancement on the intentions to recommend destination to others is not significant. Hypothesis 3 has been rejected.

The model accounts for 93% of overall variability in the sample. That means that 93% of variation in intentions to revisit is explained by the proposed model.

Figure 2. Standardized coefficients for the comprehensive congruity model contribution to the enhancement of quality of life and intentions to revisit and to recommend the destination.

Latent constructs are shown in ellipses, observed variables are shown in rectangles. $\chi^2(256)=278, p=0.16$, comparative fit index (CFI)=0.999; root mean square residual =0.001. QoL = quality of life.
 Note: *** - indicates coefficient statistically significant at 0.01 level, N.S. – indicates coefficient that is not statistically significant



6. Discussion and conclusions

The present study shows that intentions to revisit the destination are related not only with satisfaction with the stay at destination and the image that individuals form of destination as it has been previously shown in the literature. This relationship is moderated by quality of life enhancement experienced during vacation at destination. The present study extends the knowledge of contribution that vacations have in quality of life enhancement of individuals. Vacationers who feel that their quality of life has been improved due to vacation at destination are more inclined to come back to the destination.

The strongest contribution to quality of life enhancement in the present study is observed by self-congruity. The more destination image is close to vacationer's self-image the more the individual will experience quality of life enhancement. This result positions Thailand within status symbol destinations. Self-congruity is a well-established concept in explaining destination loyalty measures (i.e. Kastenholz, 2004; Bosnjak et al., 2011).

Functional congruity is the next factor in terms of importance of its contribution to quality of life enhancement followed by hedonic and economic congruities. Safety and health, moral and leisure congruities are elements that present lowest contribution to quality of life enhancement due to vacation.

Past research on satisfaction and tourists' revisiting intentions in Thailand have found that destination loyalty is affected by a set of factors that can be reflected by hedonic, leisure,

functional and economic congruities. In particular, the most frequently observed in previous research are hedonic and leisure congruities (i.e McDowall, 2010; Tavitiyaman and Qu, 2013), and to much less extent functional and economic evaluations (Rittichainuwat et al, 2002; Rittichainuwat et al, 2007; McDowall and Ma, 2010; Tavitiyaman and Qu, 2013). The present investigation is the first study addressing Thailand as destination that included self-congruity in the list of criteria, based on which tourists form their image of Thailand as tourism destination, to find that it is one of the most important factors for visitors of Thailand. In line with existing evidence functional, hedonic, leisure and economic aspects are also important factors affecting revisiting intentions.

Comprehensive congruity model has been tested in different destination contexts. For instance, in explaining quality of life enhancement due to vacation in Tasmania functional congruity took the first place, followed by hedonic congruity and leisure congruity (Tokarchuk et al., 2015). Functional together with hedonic congruities were the main criteria that explained post visit loyalty judgments of Germans on their vacation (Bosnjak et al., 2011).

The present study adds to the existing evidence on comprehensive congruity model and demonstrates that destination image of different destinations is characterized by different aspects. Comprehensive congruity model one more time proved its utility for destination marketers in order to evidence and measure the most important facets that distinguish destination in the image of tourists. Thus, in order to stimulate loyalty feelings by tourists to Thailand destination managers should underline aspects related to self-congruity, depict it as a destination offering high quality services, affordable in economic sense and satisfying aesthetic senses of tourists.

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Biographical sketch

Oksana Tokarchuk holds PhD in Economics and Management. She is assistant professor of Management and Marketing at Faculty of Economics and Management, Free University of Bolzano, Italy. Her research interests include consumer behavior in tourism and behavioral economics.

Oswin Maurer is Dean of Faculty of Economics and Management at Free University of Bolzano, Italy, where he is professor of Marketing. His research interests include investigation of tourism impact on quality of life of residents and tourists.