

EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG NEED- AND SELF-RELATED ASPECTS OF TOURIST EXPERIENCE DRIVERS

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Received: March 7, 2017
Accepted: November 17, 2017

ABSTRACT: *This paper addresses some central, yet neglected, motivational issues of tourist experiences. Tourists' motives for seeking uniqueness to create memorable experiences are addressed as significant aspects of destination decision making. Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore the self-related antecedents of consumers' need for uniqueness in the tourism context. Results of a quantitative analysis among 192 young travelers in Slovenia using structural equation modeling show that their independent self-construal is positively related to consumers' need for uniqueness. However, there was no relationship found to be significant between the interdependent self-construal and any dimensions of consumers' need for uniqueness. The findings of the study provide deeper insights into underlying motives for tourism experiences and offer implications for tourism practice.*

Keywords: *consumer behavior, tourism, tourist experience, consumers' need for uniqueness, independent self-construal, interdependent self-construal*

JEL Classification: Z31; D12

DOI: 10.15458/85451.57

1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism as an important economic sector and a growing industry has been consistently increasing in importance, as international tourism has increased each year; thus, tourism destinations worldwide are continuously making efforts to reach tourists with various offers (World Tourism Organization, 2016). To increase tourists' satisfaction, destinations are focusing on strategies to emphasize destinations' attractiveness and competitive positions (Dmitrović et al., 2009). Moreover, in recent decades, the tourism and hospitality literature has acknowledged the emerging meaning of tourist experiences (Cohen, 1979; Quan & Wang, 2004), especially in the field of tourism marketing, and have connected its economic value (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) to not only tourism products and services but also destinations (Volo, 2010). Thus, to build involved relationships with tourists, destination marketers should provide positive experiences to tourists (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016).

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In this vein, Williams (2006) claimed that the marketing strategies employed by tourist destinations should focus more on the customers than just the destination offer itself due to tourists' changing and diverse motivations and behaviors, since, as reported by several other authors (e.g., Kim, 2010; Pizam, 2010), tourism essentially offers and sells a range of experiences. As a result of these factors, customer experience management in tourism and hospitality has numerous challenges. As found by Hwang and Seo (2016), a large portion of studies remain conceptual and related to experiences measurement rather than with rigorous empirical studies that would provide insight into experiences antecedents that are managerially relevant. Among these drivers internal ones such as consumer motives are particularly neglected (Taheri, Farrington, Gori, Hogg, & O'Gorman, 2017). Hence, it is important to note that tourism offers are perceived differently by different tourist segments, depending on their specific needs (Wong & Wan, 2013).

In this paper, we follow the basic notion of uniqueness theory, which posits that individuals sometimes acquire a need for uniqueness motivation as they are uncomfortable when they feel too much similarity to others. They behave according to this feeling, which is reflected in their purchasing behavior (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; 1980). In terms of consumption, need for uniqueness (NFU) can be satisfied not only through products and services, but also through experiences (Lynn & Harris, 1997a). What is more, in order to satisfy this uniqueness-seeking motivation, individuals strive to enhance their social and self-image (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). Applying this notion to a tourism context, it can be assumed that the greater the similarity to others, the more tourists are motivated to satisfy their need for uniqueness and enhance/emphasize their selves when deciding where to travel and spend their leisure time. Since tourists connect their selves with the chosen destination in order to seek unique experiences (Wang & Hsu, 2010), the question arises whether, and how, tourist's actual experiences might satisfy this need for uniqueness and to what degree this is driven by their selves.

Considering this, a gap in tourism research exists in regard to underlying tourist motivations. Accordingly, these issues might pose new challenges for practitioners. Managerially, understanding tourism motivation and its determinant, the need for uniqueness can help them facilitate more memorable tourism experiences, while understanding different psychological motives could help marketers identify and attract different tourist segments.

The purpose of this paper is to respond to the identified imperatives and redress these gaps by investigating the influence of self-construal on consumers' need for uniqueness (CNFU) in a tourism context. Thus, the paper discusses and comprehensively explores (theoretically and empirically) relevant yet overlooked constructs, namely CNFU and self-construal. To obtain deeper insight into the self-related drivers of uniqueness-seeking motivation in terms of tourism experiences, more research should be done exploring the underlying psychological motivations of tourists in this regard. Firstly, the paper introduces the theoretical concepts of CNFU and self-construal. Further attention is given to empirical research, where the proposed conceptual model is empirically developed and confirmed. In line with the findings of the empirical study, we also indicate managerial

implications and provide some baselines for further research. Lastly, the limitations of the study are discussed.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Consumers' Need for Uniqueness

The notion of the need for uniqueness is based on the theory of uniqueness. Social psychologists and uniqueness theorists (e.g., Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980) argued that individuals often find themselves in a social position in which they feel either too similar to or too different from others. Evidence points to a desire on the part of individuals to belong in their comfort zone, while still projecting a degree of uniqueness (He, Cong, Liu, & Zhou, 2010). Uniqueness theory's original theoretical concept is closely related to Brewer's (1991) Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT), which posits that individuals have both a need to assimilate and a need to differentiate themselves from others. As such, they are always seeking to find a balance between the two (Ryu & Han, 2009). Ruvio (2008) stressed that everyone wants to feel unique to a certain degree without losing the sense that they are like everybody else (accepted as a part of a group while still sometimes wanting to be unlike others). In line with this notion, Snyder and Fromkin (1980) believe that people crave a feeling of uniqueness. In contemporary consumer behavior, Tian et al. (2001) conceptualized the concept of CNFU on the basis of the theory of uniqueness. As such, CNFU is simply the extension of NFU into the field of consumer behavior (Ruvio, 2008). Tian et al. (2001, p. 52) explained CNFU as "the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image and social image". The authors conceptualized CNFU as a multidimensional construct including three dimensions. The first dimension, creative choice counter-conformity (CC), explains consumer purchase choices as differentiation between them and other consumers while at the same time maintaining a choice that is still within social norms (Tian et al., 2001). The second dimension of CNFU, unpopular choice counter-conformity (UC), is the most extreme dimension, as it reflects consumer choices that deviate from social norms (Tian et al., 2001) and thus are considered as not acceptable by others (Knight & Kim, 2007). Finally, avoidance of similarity (AS), the third dimension of CNFU, is the tendency of consumers to strive to be different from others by avoiding purchasing products that are commonplace and accepted by the general population (Tian et al., 2001).

Tian et al. (2001) explained CNFU as an individual difference, while others consider it a psychological trait (e.g., Zhan & He, 2012) or a mere trait (e.g., Gentina, Butori, & Heath, 2014). Regardless, all understand the CNFU concept as the motivation on the part of consumers to purchase a particular product or service that helps them satisfy their NFU and differentiate them from the masses. Moreover, researchers tend to agree that consumers may acquire and satisfy their need for uniqueness through different means in the context of consumption. Early studies based on uniqueness theory have demonstrated that the need for uniqueness can be satisfied by possessing rare products (e.g., Snyder,

1992; Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Tian et al., 2001), products with distinct product designs (e.g., Bloch, 1995), and new products (e.g., Lynn, 1991). More recent research has indicated that consumers can display their uniqueness through possessions of conspicuous products (e.g., Jang, Ko, Morris, & Chang, 2015), unique products (e.g., Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Simonson & Nowlis, 2000), products with distinct aesthetic characteristics (e.g., Mowen, Fang, & Scott, 2010), personalized products (e.g., Halepete, Littrell, & Park, 2009), and memorable acquisitions (e.g., Song & Lee, 2013). Consumers can even meet their need for uniqueness through the possession of products that can be used in a creative way (e.g., Tian et al., 2001).

With the increasing academic attention to CNFU over the last decade, a rich body of literature has come to exist regarding how CNFU is applied to several product types that do not specifically express uniqueness itself, but represent or signal consumer uniqueness in some way and enable consumers to differentiate themselves from others, even in regard to everyday products or services. However, little research has been devoted to the focus of CNFU in relation to the purchase behavior for services. Even less empirical evidence exists about the role of CNFU in terms of tourism with an emphasis on experiences, with a few exceptions (e.g., Ding & Keh, 2016; Liu, Chen, & He, 2015). To the best of our knowledge, no studies have explored how tourists' need for uniqueness may influence their destination choice driven by its self-related antecedents, despite a call from prior studies (e.g., Ruvio, 2008; Ruvio, Shoham, & Makovec Brenčič, 2008) for further research in this setting. Due to the general consensus about the intangibility of tourism, we argue that tourism experiences might satisfy consumers' need for uniqueness motivation, which is driven and fostered by their self-construal.

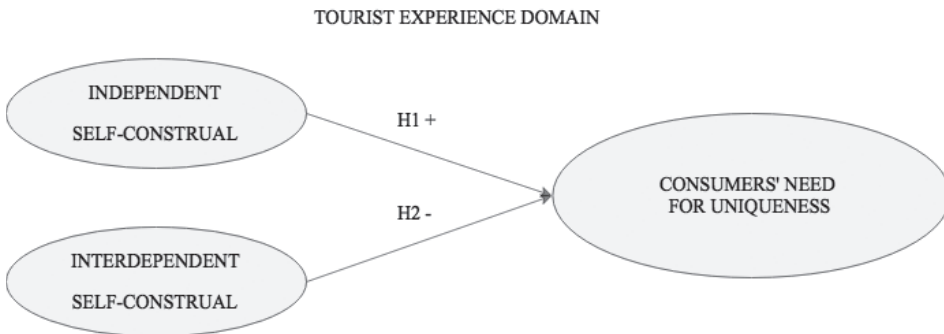
2.2 Self-construal

Academic attention in the field of psychology has long been paid to the research about the self (Cross & Madson, 1997), as well as in the field of consumer behavior following the notion that possessions can be considered as an extension of the self (Belk, 1988). In this vein, Tian et al. (2001) argued that drivers of CNFU can be found in the theory of consumption as an extension of self (Belk, 1988). In line with the research focus of this paper, we chose self-construal as a potential antecedent to CNFU as it refers to how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Lewis, Goto, & Kong, 2008; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This might be in line with the concept that CNFU is a motivation manifested in comparison with others. More specifically, Agrawal and Maheswaran (2005, p. 841) defined the concept of self-construal as "the extent to which individuals view themselves either as an individuated entity or in relation to others." Accordingly, Markus and Kitayama (1991) conceptualized it through two separate facets. The authors argued that individuals hold a different self-construal (independent vs. interdependent) depending on their cultural background, while others have claimed that individuals can hold (at the same time) both self-construals, regardless of the cultural context (e.g., Matsumoto, 2003).

However, the literature agrees that individuals with a predominately independent self-construal hold a more “bounded, unitary, stable self” and are aware of their separation from others (Singelis, 1994, p. 581). Independents see themselves as separate from the group, as they want to be autonomous, unique, and independent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Contrarily, individuals with predominantly interdependent self-construal value connectedness with others, as they value group harmony and group belonging (Singelis, 1994). In addition, interdependents are prone to being concerned with identity, which depends on their relationship with others, as they put a lot of emphasis on the opinions of others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and thus follow the goals of their social group (Triandis, 1995).

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this paper, which discusses and comprehensively explores (theoretically and empirically) two relevant yet overlooked constructs, namely CNFU and self-construal (independent and interdependent), which shape the tourist experiences domain. With this in mind, the central contention of this research is that self-construal plays a critical role as a relevant antecedent to CNFU in the domain of tourist experiences. Following the proposed framework, hypotheses development is discussed as follows.

Figure 1: *Conceptual framework of the impact of self-construal on CNFU in the tourist experience domain*



Note: For clarity, Figure 1 presents the CNFU concept as an overall concept, but in our research design it is conceptualized as a three-dimensional concept, namely CC (i.e., creative choice counter-conformity), UC (i.e., unpopular choice counter-conformity), and AS (i.e., avoidance of similarity).

2.3 Hypotheses development

CNFU motivates consumers to differentiate themselves from others with the aim of enhancing their social and self-image (Tian et al., 2001). Thus, in the current context, we follow the notion of Tian et al. (2001), who argued that antecedents of CNFU derive

from the theory of consumption as an extension of the self (Belk, 1988). As self-construal is considered a dimension of self that refers not only to the perception of one's self but his/herself in relation to others, we argue that in striving for a sense of uniqueness and specialness in relation to others, consumers' consumption is influenced by their self-construal. Applying this notion to tourism, we further follow Belk (1988), who stated that not only possessions but also experiences and even places can be considered as an extension of consumers' selves. In addition, although travel literature acknowledges that self-concept is an important driver of tourists' motivation and behavior, there is still scant research in this area (Cohen, Prayag, & Moital, 2014), especially regarding consumers' self-construal (Walker, Deng, & Dieser, 2001).

However, in consumer behavior literature, only a few studies have addressed the role of self-construal in uniqueness-seeking motivation. In particular, findings of a recent study in the case of scarce luxury fashion apparel, researchers found a positive relationship between independent self-construal and CNFU (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014). This implies that independents are inclined to obtain luxury products to satisfy their need for uniqueness in terms of all three facets of CNFU. In a similar vein, consumers with predominantly independent self-construal are motivated to seek uniqueness in their most important and most memorable product purchases (Song & Lee, 2013). Thus, the existing research evidence supports the conception of the role of independent self-construal in uniqueness-seeking motivation.

This is congruent with the main theoretical aspect of self-construal, as independents look for variety and uniqueness in their consumption (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; White & Argo, 2011) in order to differentiate themselves from other consumers (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Zhang & Shrum, 2009). Considering the notion that consumers who are motivated to satisfy their need for uniqueness through products and services that are less conventional and counter-conform (Snyder, 1992; Tian et al., 2001) and less popular (Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012), and that independents desire to be unique (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), they most likely have a higher need for uniqueness in comparison with others (in terms of all three facets of CNFU).

Moreover, it is important to note that meaningful tourism experiences play an important role in shaping tourists' self-identities (Noy, 2004), and some tourists like to be perceived by others through their travel experiences (Beerli, Meneses, & Gil, 2007). This implies that tourists who want to be independent, unique, and who value their originality most likely do not always follow the masses when choosing their vacation destinations. Thus, it can be expected that tourists who satisfy their need for uniqueness motivation through their travel experiences want to express and differentiate themselves in comparison with others, regardless of the CNFU facet. Reflecting this view, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1 (H1a-H1c): Independent self-construal is positively related to CNFU (i.e., creative choice counter-conformity, unpopular choice counter-conformity, and avoidance of similarity).

As aforementioned, consumers with predominantly interdependent self-construal are willing to conform to group norms and value group harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; White & Argo, 2011). Empirical evidence shows that interdependent self-construal is positively related to CNFU when consumers are purchasing what is most important and memorable to them (Song & Lee, 2013). On the contrary, Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012) expected a negative effect of interdependent self-construal on all three aspects of CNFU in the domain of luxury fashion. But in their context, they failed to prove the proposed negative relationship. Thus, it seems that there is some inconsistency in the extant research. It is important to note, however, that since its appearance in the consumer behavior literature, NFU is operationalized through different measures. In our research setting, we follow Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012, 2014), who conceptualized CNFU through three dimensions of uniqueness-seeking motivation. Indeed, if we adapt the previous findings to the context of tourism, we argue that interdependents do not strive to differentiate themselves from others, as they do not want to stand out from the crowd. When choosing a vacation destination, the more interdependents want to be similar to others by adapting to group harmony, the less they acquire NFU as they search for travel experiences, which are considered as acceptable and regular within their social group. In order to assimilate with others, they are not inclined to emphasize their individuality, as they feel comfortable with their existing selves and would rather stay within their regular travel habits. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2 (H2a-H2c): Interdependent self-construal is negatively related to CNFU (i.e., creative choice counter-conformity, unpopular choice counter-conformity, and avoidance of similarity).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample

The proposed model presented in Figure 1 was tested among undergraduate students from a Slovenian university. In total, 196 students were invited to participate in the survey, of which four students refused to participate. Thus, the final sample includes a total of 192 respondents (27.1% male and 72.9% female). All the completed questionnaires were usable, as the respondents were kindly asked to fill out the questionnaire to its end. Students represent a good sample for behavioral literature (e.g., Tian et al., 2001) since traits such as CNFU are not supposed to be influenced by, for example, income and social status.

3.2 Instrument

The respondents participated in a self-administered online survey. The questionnaire was developed based on the review of the literature and consisted of three parts, each part presenting the questions regarding the three constructs in a conceptualized model (i.e.,

CNFU, independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal). More specifically, CNFU was operationalized as a three-dimensional construct (i.e., CC, UC, and AS) using the CNFU-S shortened scale by Ruvio et al. (2008), each dimension consisting of four items. For the purpose of this study, items were adapted to the destination choice context. Participants were asked to rate each of the items regarding their most memorable vacation destination choice. The first dimension measuring creative choice counter-conformity (CC) included items such as “*I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by choosing special destinations.*” The second dimension measuring unpopular choice counter-conformity (UC) included items such as “*I enjoy challenging people’s tastes by visiting a specific destination even though my friends and/or family do not approve.*” The third dimension measuring avoidance of similarity (AS) included items such as “*When a destination I already visited becomes popular among the general population, I do not like to visit it anymore.*” In addition, two dimensions of self-construal (i.e., independent and interdependent) were measured using Singelis’s (1994) scale, combined with D’Amico and Scrima’s (2016) shortened version (SCS) of the scale. Ten items were used to measure independent self-construal (e.g., “*I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects*”) and nine items to measure interdependent self-construal (e.g., “*I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in*”). All the items were measured on 7-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree).

3.3 Results and hypotheses testing

Since the theory for all the measurement items for each considered construct was already established and adapted from previous research work (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014), there was no need to explore the factor structure to test the measurement model. Thus, to test the measurement model, first, separate confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the items measured following Kastanakis and Balabanis (2014). CFA analyses were employed with LISREL 8.80 using the Maximum Likelihood estimation method. Due to high error variances, one item was eliminated for the CC dimensions of the CNFU construct, six items for independent self-construal, and five items for interdependent self-construal. Thus, 19 items were left which still allowed us to continue with the analysis.

After assessing the separate constructs, CFA analysis was employed to test the overall measurement model. The results of the measurement model have acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2=161.69$; $df=142$; $\chi^2/df=1.138$; $p=0.123$; $RMSEA=0.027$; $GFI=0.918$; $CFI=0.986$; $NNFI=0.983$ $SRMR=0.05$). Table 1 presents the measurement constructs along with the values of mean and standard deviation, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. The values for CR and Cronbach’s alpha are all above the cut-off value 0.6 - therefore, internal consistency is accepted (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Additionally, the constructs’ reliability was assessed with AVE. Following Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) suggested cut-off value for AVE (i.e., 0.5), all sub-dimensions of the CNFU construct have good reliability (above or very close to 0.5), except the independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal, which have an AVE less

than 0.5. However, we decided to continue with the analysis following several authors (e.g., Bodlaj, 2010; Chen & Huang, 2016; Flynn & Goldsmith, 2017), retaining the constructs with AVEs less than 0.5 but more than 0.4. In particular, if we take into account that this is a first-time study in the present cultural environment, we considered both self-construals as adequate for further analysis. Moreover, as all the factor loadings for all items are statistically significant, convergent validity is still supported (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics, average variance extracted, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficients*

	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Composite reliability (CR)	Cronbach's alpha
Independent self-construal	5.46	0.944	0.404	0.718	0.657
Interdependent self-construal	5.26	0.868	0.417	0.734	0.714
CNFU (CC)	5.02	0.942	0.485	0.620	0.710
CNFU (UC)	3.93	1.228	0.531	0.811	0.790
CNFU (AS)	3.62	1.469	0.674	0.891	0.889

Table 2 shows the correlation matrix to provide additional insight into the relationships between proposed constructs. In addition, discriminant validity was evaluated following Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010). The AVE values for each construct were higher than the squared correlations between each pair of constructs. Based on the results, discriminant validity was achieved (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which additionally confirms our decision to continue with the analysis. Thus, we argue that the constructs are suitable for further analysis in this setting.

Table 2: *Correlation matrix*

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. CNFU (CC)	1	0.239	0.191	0.270	0.097
2. CNFU (UC)		1	0.290	0.024	-0.062
3. CNFU (AS)			1	0.156	-0.039
4. Independent self-construal				1	0.000
5. Interdependent self-construal					1

After assessing the measurement model, structural equation modeling was employed in order to examine the hypothesized relationships in the final model. Table 3 shows the

results for the final structural model, where the structural relationships are presented, including independent self-construal, interdependent self-construal and all three dimensions of CNFU. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the overall structural model are acceptable ($\chi^2=183.87$; $df=145$; $\chi^2/df=1.26$; $p=0.016$; $RMSEA=0.037$; $GFI=0.908$; $CFI=0.969$; $NNFI=0.964$; $SRMR=0.08$).

As proposed in H1, the results of the study show that independent self-construal has a positive and significant effect on two dimensions of CNFU, namely CC ($\beta=0.327$) and AS ($\beta=0.196$) - thus H1a and H1c are supported. However, the findings of the study do not support the significant positive relationship between independent self-construal and UC (H1b not supported). Thus, H1 is partially supported. Moreover, although we assumed a significant negative effect of interdependent self-construal on each dimension of CNFU (H2a-H2c), the empirical evidence does not support the proposed relationship. Therefore, H2 is not supported.

Table 3: *Hypotheses testing and results*

Path	H	Proposed direction	Standardized coefficient	t-value	Hypotheses
Independent self-construal → Consumers' need for uniqueness (CC)	H1a	+	0.327*	3.074	Supported
Independent self-construal → Consumers' need for uniqueness (UC)	H1b	+	0.068	0.654	<i>Not supported</i>
Independent self-construal → Consumers' need for uniqueness (AS)	H1c	+	0.196*	1.979	Supported
Interdependent self-construal → Consumers' need for uniqueness (CC)	H2a	-	0.162	1.254	<i>Not supported</i>
Interdependent self-construal → Consumers' need for uniqueness (UC)	H2b	-	-0.094	-0.719	<i>Not supported</i>
Interdependent self-construal → Consumers' need for uniqueness (AS)	H2c	-	-0.053	-0.434	<i>Not supported</i>
R ² (CC)=0.085; R ² (UC)=0.007; R ² (AS)=0.031					

4 DISCUSSION

The findings of the research revealed that self-construal is a relevant self-related and psychological predictor of CNFU, but only in terms of independent self-construal. In particular, the strongest effect was found between independent self-construal and the first dimension of CNFU (i.e., creative choice counter-conformity – CC) – thus H1a is

supported. This is congruent with the notion of the origins of uniqueness theory, where authors (e.g., Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980) have stressed that consumers only want to be moderately different from others in terms of consumption. Moreover, findings indicate that tourists with more predominantly independent self-construal strive to acquire their need for uniqueness in regard to vacation destination choice to a level that is still within acceptable social norms. This implies that they want to express their uniqueness, be unique and special, and want to create a personal unique image with their destination choice, but only to the extent that they still receive social approval. Motives may be found in social psychology and marketing, where research has long recognized the fact that others influence individuals' behavior (Ryu & Han, 2009). In addition, in modern society, individuals are keen, if not even somehow forced, to adapt to group harmony (Song & Lee, 2013). This can be explained by conformity in terms of the emergence of group norms (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975).

Another positive effect found in this study was between independent self-construal and the third dimension of CNFU (i.e., avoidance of similarity – AS) – thus H1c is supported. The findings indicated that some tourists desire to acquire their independent self and satisfy their uniqueness motives by choosing destinations unpopular among the general population. These research findings are congruent with findings of previous research conducted by Song and Lee (2013) and Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012, 2014). Although a positive relationship was expected between independent self-construal and all three aspects of CNFU, as was indicated in previous studies (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012, 2014; Song & Lee, 2013), we failed to prove a significant relationship between independent self-construal and the second dimension of CNFU (H1b), namely unpopular choice counter-conformity (UC). Therefore, H1 is partially supported. This means that tourists avoid seeking rebellious uniqueness when choosing their vacation destination, despite having independent self-construal. In particular, we argue that the reasons could depend upon the sample characteristics, as it seems that young travelers tend to avoid too strongly deviating from social norms. To some degree, this might be expected, as young people most often avoid social exclusion; therefore, they tend to not choose destinations that would affect or threaten their assimilation in their group.

Additionally, this study revealed that interdependent self-construal is not a relevant antecedent of any dimension of CNFU (H2a-H2c); therefore, no empirical evidence supported H2. More specifically, it means that tourists' interdependent self-construal does not influence their need for uniqueness motivation when they choose their vacation destination. This is in line with the findings of Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012), who also proposed that there is a negative relationship between interdependent self-construal and all three facets of CNFU using the same measure as we did but did not support the significant relationship. However, there are inconsistencies in the previous studies, since, to the contrary, Song and Lee (2013) proved that interdependents also acquire a need for uniqueness motivation. Yet, in their study the authors measured the concept of CNFU as unidimensional, using a desire for unique consumer products (DUCP) scale (Lynn & Harris, 1997b) rather than the three-dimensional shortened version of the CNFU-S scale (Ruvio et al., 2008) as did we and Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012). The inconsistency in

the existing research findings could depend on the conceptualization and measurement of CNFU, as DUCP measures the desire for unique products, while CNFU assesses the desire to feel different from others in terms of uniqueness. However, it seems that in satisfying uniqueness-seeking motivation by young travelers, their interdependent self-construal does not play a significant role. This might be a result of the sample frame of this study. As reported by several other authors (e.g., Gazley & Watling, 2015; Sirgy & Su, 2000), public self-image influences young travelers' travel behavior. Thus, future research might consider the moderating influence of specific groups with which young travelers compare each other in order to enhance their interdependent self-construal in uniqueness-seeking motivation.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the results of the study show that independent self-construal is a relevant antecedent to CNFU, namely in terms of its two dimensions (i.e., CC and AS). Despite the fact that we expected a significant negative influence of interdependent self-construal on each dimension of CNFU, empirical evidence showed that there is no significant relationship between the constructs.

This study contributes importantly toward understanding the concept of CNFU in relation to self-related constructs, namely in the tourism experiences domain when tourists choose their vacation destinations. Hence, the findings indicate important managerial implications for destination marketers. As tourism experiences mostly depend on tourists' motivation (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016), they can satisfy tourists' need for uniqueness motivation, which is, based on these research findings, driven by their independent self-construal. Thus, these consumer segments could represent a specific and separate target group for particular destinations, since in order to be different from others, tourists strive to satisfy their need for uniqueness to enhance their independent self. More specifically, it means that tourists (in this case young travelers) with an independent self-construal acquire a need for uniqueness since they want to stand out from the crowd in order to feel special and different from others.

In particular, when offering experiences, destination practitioners could highlight uniqueness seeking motives, which help them to emphasize their individuality and originality. As the destination choice by specific tourists segments is driven by a desire to experience something special (Uriely, 2005), tourists who acquire a need for uniqueness motivation can represent a relevant target group, for example in one-to-one marketing. In addition, tourism and hospitality practitioners could implement their marketing strategies by underlying the uniqueness-seeking motivation in both designing and promoting products and services that offer memorable experiences to their visitors. For instance, specialized travel agencies, customized tourism products and services, and small boutique destinations have great potential to offer special experiences that help to differentiate tourists from the masses in order to enrich their "self".

The idea also relates to the notion that tourists connect with places (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001) and their selves could influence their choice of vacation destination (Beerli et al., 2007). As our study further consolidates, the tourists' independent self-construal could be triggered when a destination is being described and promoted. Kwon and Mattila (2015) even argued that tourists' self-construal can be, at least temporarily, manipulated through different marketing activities. In terms of promotional activities of destinations, practitioners could attract independents by incorporating promotional messages in their communication strategies such as "be original/unique" or "enjoy your uniqueness and be different from others, "chose your destination in your own way", etc., in order to enhance their selves. Consequently, by offering experiences, which could manage to satisfy their need for specialness, tourists feel that their selves are enhanced when they choose a particular destination and thereby expresses their individuality and independence. Thus, destination managers could solicit tourists with independent self-construal when trying to promote and sell experiences within their destination offer.

The study also contributes to the theoretical knowledge of CNFU in terms of testing the psychological antecedent (i.e., self-construal) in the tourism context. What is more, the concept of CNFU was tested using the shortened CNFU-S scale developed and proposed by Ruvio et al. (2008). Given the fact that the CNFU concept is still a relatively new phenomenon in consumer behavior literature, having been examined most extensively in the last decade, the important contribution is in testing the proposed relationship using CNFU as a three-dimensional concept rather than as unidimensional, which has been the case in the majority of extant studies. To our knowledge, only Kastanakis and Balabanis (2014) used the shortened version of the CNFU-S scale in relation to both dimensions of self-construal, yet only in the UK sample in terms of luxury fashion.

Despite the fact that this study offers several important insights, several limitations should be addressed. Although student samples are appropriate for theoretical predictions (Calder, Phillips, & Tybout, 1981), they limit the generalizability of the research findings. In respect to its representativeness, in further studies sampling should be different from the convenience sample. Another limitation is the lower AVE value for independent and interdependent self-construal. The reasons behind this are discussed in the analysis section of the paper, and thus the conclusions of this study should be considered with caution. The study examines a relatively narrow set of experiences/drivers, which were not found to explain a large share of variance, so it is likely that other factors affect tourist experiences as well. According to Hwang and Seo (2016), tourist experience is considered to be a multidimensional concept influenced by a variety of factors, both internal (e.g., knowledge, personality, familiarity, past experience, etc.) and external (e.g., product quality, physical characteristics, social environment etc.). Thus, in future research, a replicated and extended model could be tested by considering other relevant psychological, self- and social- related antecedents and behavior, such as experience-related consequences. Future research involving tourists from other cultures would also be useful in confirming the results of this research, as well as including various age groups.

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