

## The influence of tourism experience self-congruity on the use of virtual social networks

Gonzalo Luna Cortés<sup>1, 2\*</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> PhD student at Universidad de Sevilla, Av. San Francisco Javier, s/n, 41018 Sevilla, Spain.

<sup>2</sup> Professor at Konrad Korenz Institution of Higher Education, Cra. 9 Bis #62-43, Bogota (Colombia); Tel: +573223687280, e-mail: Lunacortes1984@hotmail.com

\* Corresponding author

### Abstract

Based on previous research in the literature of symbolic consumption and social media, the present study analyses the relationship between tourism experience self-congruity, perceived social value and tourists' use of virtual social networks. The study presents a series of hypotheses and an empirical model, which establishes the relationship between these constructs. In order to contrast the hypotheses, a quantitative research was carried out in the city of Valencia (Spain), using a structured survey and personal interviews. During the analysis of the results, the reliability and the validity of the scales used to measure the constructs were verified by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Subsequently, the methodology of the structural equation models (SEM) was used to estimate the relation between the constructs. The results show that tourists perceive higher social value when they live a tourism experience that is congruent with their self-concepts and, when tourists perceive higher social value, the revisit intention increases. When it comes to virtual social networks, experience self-congruity and perceived social value influence their use. Finally, the use of social networks also increases the perceived social value of the experience.

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**Keywords:** symbolic consumption, self-congruity, digital social networks, social value, revisit intention.

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### Introduction

Symbolic consumption has been analysed from different perspectives since the 1980s. Most of the research have focused on two variables in order to define this construct: consumer identity and the meaning of products in society (Belk, 1984; Clammer, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992; Edson

and Bettman, 2005; Fenollar and Ruiz, 2006; Ger and Belk, 1996; Landon, 1974; Lee, 2013; Lorenzi, 1991; McCracken, 1987; Park *et al.*, 2010; Sun *et al.*, 2014). In this context of analysis, researchers have traditionally studied the symbolism of tangible objects (Belk, 1984; Clammer, 1992; Dittmar 1992; Fenollar and Ruiz, 2006; Ger and Belk, 1996; Landon, 1974;

Lorenzi, 1991). However, several studies have examined symbolic consumption in the area of tourism in the past few years (e. g. Chen, Leask and Phou, 2016; Kim and Jang, 2014; Kim and Jun, 2016; Kumar and Nayak, 2014; Servidio, 2015; Sharma and Shruti, 2015; Uchiyama and Kohsaka, 2016), and it can be observed that self-congruity is an important construct related to the symbolic consumption of tourism products and services (Ekinci, Sirakaya and Preciado, 2013; Nam, Ekinci and Whyatt, 2011; Chen, Leask and Phou, 2016).

Self-congruity is defined as the matching of the product's image with the consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). The studies of this construct in the tourism literature can be divided into two different fields of research: (1) self-congruity and pre-trip decision making (e. g. Ahn, Ekinci and Li, 2011; Beerli, Díaz and Moreno, 2007; Litvin and Goh, 2002; Souza, 2015); and (2) self-congruity and post-trip travel intentions (e. g. Bosnjak *et al.*, 2011; Kastenholz, 2004; Matzler *et al.*, 2016). This paper focuses on self-congruity and post-trip behavioural intentions.

When it comes to post-trip consumer behaviour, some authors have recently pointed out the importance of the use of social media by tourists after their trips (e. g. Amaro, Duarte and Enriques, 2016; Correia, Kozak and Reis, 2014; Kim, Lee and Bonn, 2016; Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012; Seidman, 2013). It has also been mentioned in the literature the need of research in this area, since "*the research on the analysis of virtual social networks in tourism is now in its beginnings*" (Hudson *et al.*, 2015, p. 70) and "*there is a need of analysis to examine the impact of virtual social networks in tourism*" (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014, p. 34).

There are several reasons that explain the use of social media by tourists during and after their trips. For example: sharing the experience with other tourists, getting information from friends and relatives, making contact with other people interested in traveling (Cabiddu, De Carlo and Piccoli, 2014), talking about an event and trying to convince friends and relatives to attempt it (Kim, Lee and Bonn, 2016), as well as other personal benefits, as, for example, having fun using their social networks (Amaro, Duarte and Enriques, 2016).

Some authors have also examined the importance of self-presentation by tourists in social media (Luo and Zhong, 2015; Maldonado, 2012; Martín and Torres, 2013; Sun *et al.*, 2014). Regarding this particular motivation, there seems to be a connection between perceived self-congruity and tourists' intensity of the use of social networks (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011; Hudson *et al.*, 2015; Kim and Jang, 2014; Manago *et al.*, 2009) as well as there seems to be a relationship between both constructs and the social value tourists' perceive from the experience (Bond and Falk, 2013; Chung and Koo, 2012; Kim, Lee and Bonn, 2015; Lyu, 2016; Molz, 2013; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014; Shanahan, 2009). Therefore, this research focuses on tourism self-congruity and its influence on the use of social networks. Furthermore, the research analyses the connection between those constructs with perceived social value and tourists' revisit intention.

## Literature review

### *Symbolic consumption*

First historical references of symbolic consumption appeared in the literature at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century (Flügel, 1930; James, 1890; Simmel, 1903). These authors mentioned that customers reinforce their identities throughout the products they acquire. However, the analysis of this concept as a marketing variable didn't appear in the literature until the middle of the twentieth century, mainly influenced by Levy, who established that "*managers must attend to more than the relatively superficial facts with which they usually concern themselves when they do not think of their goods as having symbolic significance*" (Levy, 1959, p. 117).

Since then, many studies have focused on the analysis of the symbolic meanings of products and brands in the literature. In order to examine symbolic consumption as a concept, different definitions obtained from the literature are presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, most of the authors focus on the relationship between products (or brands) and the consumer's identity when

**Table 1.** Definitions of “symbolic consumption”

Authors	Date	Definition of “symbolic consumption”
Landon	1974	“Use of the symbolic content of brands in other to express one’s identity” (p. 45).
Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton	1981	“Process of transaction between a consumer and an object, together with the communicative signs of that process” (p. 7).
Belk	1984	“Tendency of some buyers to add meaning to the products they acquire” (p. 266).
McCracken	1987	“Acquisition of products focused on qualities beyond functional attributes or commercial values, and based mainly on the ability of those products to transfer and communicate cultural meanings” (p. 140).
Lorenzi	1991	“Consumption action that takes part as a process of identity creation” (p. 405).
Clammer	1992	“Every act of consumption through which an individual pretends to project his or her identity, interests and social position” (p. 196).
Dittmar	1992	“Acquisition and use of products based on the meaning they have, and derived from what the possessor feels those products communicate to himself/herself and also to other people” (p. 380).
Ger and Belk	1996	“Acquisition and possession of goods as a communicative act that is crucial to an individual identity construction” (p. 57).
Edson and Bettman	2005	“Use of products as a mechanism of creation, development and preservation of individuals’ images” (p. 382).
Fenollar and Ruiz	2006	“Importance given by a consumer to others opinion about symbolic evaluation of products when those are conceived as social interaction tools” (p. 8).
Park et al.	2010	“Intention to project status, feeling of belonging or self-worth through the consumption of goods and services that transmit symbolic values” (p. 3).
Lee	2013	“It appears when individuals use consumption and its meaning in order to communicate something about themselves” (p. 175).
Sun et al.	2014	“Acquisition, creation, preservation and presentation of our existential identity through consumption” (p. 55).

Source: own elaboration.

defining symbolic consumption. However, when it comes to its analysis as a marketing variable, researchers have examined symbolic consumption from different perspectives, for example:

- Analysis of the extrinsic meaning of possessions: Cueto (1981); Kastanakis and Balabanis (2012); Martín (1982); Naredo (1981).
- Conspicuous consumption: Amaldoss and Jain (2005); Bagwell and Bernheim (1996); Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006); Corneo and Olivier (1997); Kim and Jang (2014).
- Materialism: Belk (1984); Dawson (1988); Dawson and Bamossy (1991); La Barbera and Gurhan (1997); Lipscomb (1988); Schroeder and Dugal (1995); Richins (1994a, 1994b); Richins and Dawson (1990, 1992); Richins, McKeage and Najjar (1992); Sangkhawasi and Johri (2007); Shrum, et al. (2013).
- Self-congruity: Edson and Bettman (2005); Fournier (1998); Giddens (1991); Grier and Deshpande (2001); Lee (2013); Park, et al.

(2010); Sirgy et al. (1995, 1998); Sun et al. (2014).

- Social influence in consumption: Edson and Bettman (2005); Fournier, (1998); Giddens (1991); Grier and Deshpande (2001); Lee (2013); Park, et al. (2010); Sirgy et al., (1995, 1998); Sun et al. (2014).

Most of these studies have traditionally focused on the symbolic consumption of tangible objects. However, some authors have recently analysed symbolic consumption of services and experiences (e. g. Arocena and Buffa, 2012; Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013; Ekinci, Sirakaya and Preciado, 2013; Rihova et al., 2015; Serra, 2013; Stokowski, 2011), including the examination of tourism symbolic consumption (Butler, Kevin and Prentice, 2012; Chen, Leask and Phou, 2016; Kim and Jang, 2014; Kim and Jun, 2016; Kumar and Nayak , 2014; Servidio, 2015; Sharma and Shruti, 2015; Uchiyama and Kohsaka, 2016).

Thus, according to Servidio (2015) current tourists' motivations and needs become complex, and tourists demand symbolic meanings to be shared between their vacations and themselves. Also, tourists want to show others what they did during their trip, emphasizing the symbolic meanings of their tourism consumption (Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013; Serra, 2013). In this context, Kerr, Lewis and Burgess (2012) introduced the term "*bragging rights*" in a model intending to explain the benefits of managing the tourists' intention to communicate their experience to others.

When it comes to destination choice and symbolic consumption, the study by Chen, Leask and Phou (2016) shows that, currently in tourism "*the effects of symbolic consumption are greater than that of functional consumption*" (Chen, Leask and Phou, 2016, p. 1). Research on destination characteristics and symbolic consumption have been examined by various authors in the literature (see e. g. Ballesteros and Ramírez, 2007; Kim and Jun, 2016; Kumar and Nayak, 2014; Yuksel, Yuksel and Bilim, 2010). One of the main conclusions of these studies reveals that tourists may choose destinations that represent social status (Kumar and Nayak, 2014; Lin, Pearson and Cai, 2011; Phillip and Back, 2011).

In addition, researches by White and White (2009), Sidali, Kastenholz, and Bianchi (2013), Uchiyama and Kohsaka (2016) and Wang (2016) focus on the influence on satisfaction of the symbolic connection between local population at destination and the tourist's identity.

Other studies have examined tourism symbolic consumption in different areas, for example: mountain tourism (Silva, 2012); sport mega-events (Banyai and Potwarka, 2012); pilgrimage (Blom, Nilsson and Santos, 2016); and screen tourism (Kim, 2012). In all these contexts of analysis it is emphasized the importance of tourist companies giving their clients a service according to their identities (for example: ecological orientation) and reflecting the characteristics of such services in their communication channels. These affirmations

are supported by Ekinici, Sirakaya and Preciado (2013), Gupta and Ahmad (2014) and Sharma and Shruti (2015).

As a construct, tourism symbolic consumption has been measure in the literature using different approaches, for example: materialistic tourism consumption (Kim and Jang, 2014); destination identification and lifestyle-congruence (Nam, Ekinici and Whyatt, 2011; Chen, Leask and Phou, 2016); and tourism self-congruity (Ekinici, Sirakaya and Preciado, 2013).

Therefore, it is observed that self-congruity is one of the construct used in the literature in order to measure tourism symbolic consumption. Based on the objectives of this research, the next sub-section focuses on the examination of self-congruity in tourism.

#### *Self-congruity in tourism*

Self-congruity is a construct related to symbolic consumption in the literature (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy, 2012). Authors use different terms to refer to this construct; "self-image congruence", "self-congruence," "self-congruity", and "image congruence" are used interchangeably in the consumer behavior literature (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006). Also, authors have provided different definitions in their researches. Some of the most important definitions are presented in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, in order to conceptualize self-congruity, authors have typically focused in the relationship between products' image and consumers' self-concept.

Nonetheless, it is observed in the literature that self-congruity is considered a complex multidimensional construct. In 1982, Sirgy was first to consider four self-concept facets when analysing self-congruity: (1) actual self (how one actually perceives the self); (2) ideal self (the self one desires to become); (3) social self (the person one believes others perceive); and (3) ideal social self (the person one desires others to perceive).

**Table 2. Definitions of “self-congruity”**

Authors	Date	Definition of “self-congruity”
Grubb and Grathwohl	1962	<i>“The link between psychological construct of and individual’s self-concept and the symbolic value of goods purchased in the marketplace” (p. 22).</i>
Ross	1971	<i>“Consumption of product or brands only when they are consistent, enhance, or in some way, fit well with the conception consumers have of themselves” (p. 38).</i>
Sirgy	1982	<i>“The matching of the product user image with the consumer’s self-concept” (p. 350).</i>
Graeff	1996	<i>“The process of buying products or brands that are perceived by consumers to be similar to their own self-concept” (p. 5).</i>
Aaker	1997	<i>“Perceived consistency between brand personalities and targeted consumers’ self-concepts” (p. 347).</i>
Barone, Shimp and Sprott	1999	<i>“Consumer’s preference for the brand or product whose image most closely corresponds to his/her own self-concept”</i>
Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg	2000	<i>“A process of matching a shopper’s self-concept to an image during consumption” (p. 127).</i>
Quester, Karunaratna and Goh	2000	<i>“Congruence between self-image and product-image” (p. 525).</i>
Jamal and Goode	2001	<i>“Individuals expressing themselves by choosing brands whose personalities are perceived to be congruent with their own personalities” (p. 483).</i>
Kressmann et al.	2006	<i>“The match between consumers’ self-concept (actual self, ideal self, etc.) and the user image (or “personality”) of a given product, brand, store, etc.” (p. 955).</i>
Ibrahim and Najjar	2008	<i>“Consumers behaving consistently with their self perceptions” (p. 209).</i>
Randle and Dolnicar	2011	<i>“Consumption of brands that reinforce individuals’ self-concept” (p. 741).</i>
Cho and Kim	2012	<i>“Consumers’ behaviour in order to confirm their internal self-concepts” (p. 32).</i>
Correia, Kozak and Reis	2014	<i>“Enhancement of self-conception through the consumption” (p. 3).</i>
Matzler et al.	2016	<i>“Consumers’ preference of products/brands they consider as being similar to themselves”(p. 507).</i>

Source: own elaboration.

According to the dimensions of the construct, in the research by Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg (2000) the following relationships between self-congruity and consumers’ motives are established:

Actual self-congruity → Self-consistency motive

Ideal self-congruity → Self-esteem motive

Actual social self-congruity → Social consistency motive

Ideal social self-congruity → Social approval motive

These four dimensions of the construct are accepted by many authors in the literature, who analysed the relationship between self-congruity and several variables in their studies, for example: consumers attitude (Johar and Sirgy, 1999); stores’ image (Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg, 2000; Chebat, Sirgy and St-James, 2006); product choice (Quester, Karunaratna and Goh, 2000); satisfaction

(Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008; Jamal and Goode, 2001); adoption decisions (Kleijnen et al., 2005); brand loyalty (Kressmann et al., 2006; Randle and Dolnicar, 2011; Mazodier and Merunka, 2012); perceived quality (Chebat, Sirgy and St-James, 2006; Kwak and Kang, 2009); and purchase intentions (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008).

In addition, according to the review by Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy (2012) several variables have been analysed in the literature as moderators of perceived self-congruency and consumers’ attitude/intention behaviour, for example: self-motive socialness, degree of self-enhancement sought, brand personality facet, product stimulus abstraction, impression formation process, and cognitive elaboration.

When it comes to its measurement, one of the most common ways of evaluating self-congruity

is through the use of personality traits, which individuals use to describe their perceptions of *self* (Malhotra, 1988). Research showed that individuals are able to use personality traits not only to describe themselves, but also to differentiate between brands and to link those brands with themselves (Aaker, 1997). However, numerous researches used scales in order to measure self-congruence. A significant amount of these scales are based on the study by Sirgy *et al.* (1997), as shown in Table 3.

Furthermore, the studies showed in Table 3 focus on different areas of analysis, for example: retailing (Chebat, Sirgy and St-James, 2006; Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008; Sirgy *et al.*, 2008); online retailing (Cho and Kim, 2012); volunteering organizations (Randle and Dolnicar, 2011); key chains (Barone, Shimp and Sprott, 1999); clothing (Ericksen and Sirgy, 1992); automobiles (Heath and Scott, 1998; Kressman *et al.*, 2006) services (Yim, Chan and Hung, 2006); sport business (Kwak and Kang, 2009), and advertising (Azevedo and Farhangmehr, 2005).

Also, self-congruity has been used as one of the main constructs related to the analysis of symbolic consumption in the area of tourism (e. g. Ahn, Ekinci and Li, 2011; Chen, Leask and Phou, 2016; Hung and Petrick, 2012; Kim and Jun, 2016; Matzler *et al.*, 2016; Qu and Qu, 2015). These researches suggest that self-congruity has a positive influence on pre-trip visitation interest and purchase proclivity (Ahn, Ekinci and Li, 2011; Beerli, Díaz and Moreno, 2007; Litvin and Goh, 2002; Souza, 2015) as well as on post-trip travel consequences and intentions (Bosnjak *et al.*, 2011; Kastenholz, 2004; Matzler *et al.*, 2016).

One of the most repeated pre-trip visitation constructs in the literature is destination choice (Ahn, Ekinci and Li, 2011; Beerli, Díaz and Moreno, 2007). For instance, Kastenholz (2004), and later Hung and Petrick (2012), analysed the effects of self-congruity in this context of research. As a result, they suggested that *“the more congruent images are, the more likely people would intend to travel”* (Hung and Petrick, 2012, p. 857). This affirmation was latter supported by Doran,

Larsen and Wolff (2015) and Qu and Qu, (2015).

More recently, Matzler *et al.* (2016) indicated that self-congruity can be a mediator of the relationship between tourism brand personality perception and visit intention. Kim and Jun (2016) also considered that self-congruity affects tourists' destination choices indirectly, through tourists' attitude towards a destination. And Gazley and Watling (2015) confirmed that *“when making consumption decisions, a tourist forms perceptions based on the likelihood that the product or experience will be congruent with their self”* (p. 639).

When it comes to post-trip consequences, authors have analysed the relationship between self-congruency and constructs as satisfaction (Chon, 1992; Liu, Lin and Wang, 2012), loyalty (Yuksel, Yuksel and Bilim, 2010), intention to recommend (Ekinci, Sirakaya and Baloglu, 2007; Han and Back, 2008; Usakli and Baloglu, 2011) and revisit intention (Beerli, Meneses, and Gil 2007; Bosnjak *et al.*, 2011; Kastenholz 2004).

According to the research goals of the present study, and in order to establish the first hypotheses of this investigation, the next subsection focuses on experience self-congruity and post-trip consequences, especially centered on tourists' perceived social value and revisit intention.

#### *Experience self-congruity, perceived social value and revisit intention*

In 2007, Ballesteros and Ramírez pointed out that a community is formed by members who shared common identities. When it comes to tourism, a community can emerge through common experiences and the shared use of contexts of meaning; these contexts of meaning shape situations in which the participants create social value. In connection with that, Kim and Jun (2016) explained that tourists associate symbolic meanings with a destination, and this has an effect on perceived value.

For Gazley and Watling (2015), when consuming an experience abroad, tourists look beyond functional utility to social meaning. And

**Table 3. Scales used in the literature in order to measure Self-congruency**

Authors and date	Scale	Characteristics of the scale
Barone, Shimp and Sprott (1999)	Rosenberg's (1965)	Ten items that measure the perceived level of congruence between an object and their self-image. The items focus on social self-congruence (e. g. <i>For me to own this item would be looked o favorably by my friends; My friends would evaluate my owning this item in positive terms</i> ).
Johar and Sirgy (1999)	Self-made based on Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997).	Measured by the summation of scores from four self-congruity constructs: actual self-congruity (10 items), ideal self-congruity (10 items), social self-congruity (10 items), and ideal social self-congruity (10 items).
Quester, Karunaratna and Goh (2000)	Self-made scale based on Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1985)	A series of items were separated in two sections, in order to measure actual and ideal self-image.
Jamal and Goode (2001)	Adapted from Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997).	Two items that measures actual self-congruence.
Kang (2002)	Self-made based on Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997)	Adopted from Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997) in order to measure the degree of image congruence between self and stereotypic image of sport participants.
Litvin and Goh (2002)	Adapted from the scale by Malhotra (1988)	For each item, the respondents evaluated their actual self-concept by answering the question: " <i>Using the following list of adjectives, how do you see yourself?</i> ", and their ideal self-concept by answering: " <i>How would you like to see yourself?</i> "
Kastenholz (2004)	Adapted from Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997)	The scale adds a series of questions related to attributes of the product where respondents answered in a scale if those attributes matched their self-image (from very similar to very different).
Chebat, Sirgy and St-James (2006)	Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997).	Three items (e.g. " <i>I can identify with the typical customer who shops at this shopping center?</i> ") that measure actual self-congruence.
Kressmann <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Aaker's (1997)	The self-congruity scores were computed using absolute difference scores between each brand personality ratings and its corresponding self-image ratings (actual and ideal self-image), and then averaged across all personality attributes for each respondent.
Yim, Chan and Hung (2006)	Scale adapted from Chon (1992).	Four items that measure the congruence between the service and consumer's self-image.
Beerli, Díaz and Moreno (2007)	Adapted from the scale by Malhotra (1981)	For each item, the respondents evaluated their real self-concept by answering the question: " <i>Using the following list of adjectives, how do you see yourself?</i> ", and their ideal self-identity by answering: " <i>How would you like to see yourself?</i> "
Ibrahim and Najjar, (2008)	Self-made scale	The scale was made through a study involving item development and reliability assessment, resulting in 21 items that measures actual and ideal self-congruity.
Kwak and Kang (2009)	Kang (2002)	A four-item scale was adopted from Kang's (2002) self-participant image congruence scale.
Boo, Busser and Baloglu (2009)	Adapted from Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997)	Four items that measure the degree of customer self-image and social image.
Randle and Dolnicar (2011)	Self-made scale based on Kressmann <i>et al.</i> (2006)	The scale measures the congruence between a series of attributes of an organization and the individuals' self-image.
Cho and Kim (2012)	Poddar, Donthu and Wei's (2009)	Congruity scores were calculated by the gap score formula as following: Self-congruity = $\Sigma$ Online store personality – Self personality .
Mazodier and Merunka (2012)	Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997)	Three items scale adapted from Sirgy <i>et al.</i> (1997).
Hung and Petrick (2012)	Adapted from Baloglu and Love (2005)	The scale doesn't focus on the congruency between the object and the consumer's self-concept, but on a series of parameters based on the study by Baloglu and Love (2005): Exciting-gloomy / Pleasant-unpleasant (ISC3) / Relaxing-distressing / Enjoyable - not enjoyable / Comforting – uncomfortable / Calming – annoying / Fun-boring.
Correia, Kozak and Reis (2015)	Self-made	A series of items measuring self-fulfillment and social identity.
Kirilova, Xinran and Cai (2016)	Lenton <i>et al.</i> (2013)	A measurement instrument consisting of six pairs of circles with varying degrees of overlap between them. The left circle symbolized ' <i>tourism experience</i> ', while the right circle of each pair represented ' <i>who you truly are</i> '. The participants marked a pair of circles that ' <i>best represents how close you feel that the tourism experience represents your real self.</i> '

Source: own elaboration

Kim and Jang (2014) indicated that consumers choose experiences following materialistic tendencies, related to the perceived social value of the experience.

Furthermore, in the study by Correia, Kozak and Reis (2014) there is a relationship between conspicuous consumption, self-congruity and perceived social value. Respondents in this qualitative study associate conspicuous tourism experiences with being recognized and with gaining popularity. Social value is examined in this research based on the fact that respondents affirmed they photographed everything, to show others they lived experiences congruent with their lifestyles, and they expected it would confer social recognition upon them.

Murphy, Benckendorff and Mascardo (2007), Kwak and King (2009), Sparks, Bradley and Jennings (2011) and Hosany and Martin (2012) supported in their researches the affirmation that perceived value of a brand can be affected by self-congruity. Based on these studies, the following hypothesis is established:

*H1: Experience self-congruity directly and positively influences the perceived social value of the experience.*

When it comes to revisit intention, on the one hand Beerli, Díaz and Moreno (2007) suggested that “self-congruity loses its determining power when one has already visited a place” (p. 571). On the other hand, Ekinci, Sirakaya and Baloglu (2007) mentioned that destination self-congruity has a positive influence on both intention to return and word of mouth. Also, Usakli and Baloglu (2011) suggested that “the congruency between a tourists and the experience has a positive influence on tourists’ intention to return” (p. 114). And for Aaker (1997), the greater the match between the destination personality and the tourist’s self-concept, the more likely it is that the tourist will have a favorable attitude toward that destination. This attitude can be based on others’ responses, and may result in an intention to return (Aaker, 1997).

Furthermore, in the study by Chew and Jahari (2014) is indicated that the congruity between

the consumer’s image and the destination’s image has an effect on perceived social value, since “it might affect others’ opinion of the consumer” (p. 386), and these opinions influence tourists’ revisit intention.

In addition, social value could arise from “the approval of reference groups toward the choice of destination” and “consequently, a positive destination image would exude positive future behavioral intentions” (Kim and Jang, 2014, p. 387). Also “individuals compare themselves with other people to show they are trendy or keeping up with peers” (Kim and Jang, 2014, p. 5). Therefore, Kim and Jang (2014) proposed that perceived social value can trigger consumers’ intention to revisit a place. Based on these affirmations, the following hypothesis is established:

*H2: Perceived social value of the experience directly and positively influences revisit intention.*

Subsequently, and according to the main purpose of the present study, the next subsection focuses on the relationship between tourists’ use of social media, self-congruity and social value.

*Tourists’ use of social media, self-congruity and perceived social value*

Social media is a “group of Internet-based applications which build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and which allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Cabiddu, De Carlo and Piccoli, 2014, p. 175). There are different reasons that explain user generated content in social media. One of the most important reasons is the motivation of sharing opinions and interests, a phenomenon also known as eWOM (Cantallops and Salvi, 2014; Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Ladhari and Michaud, 2015). Although the relationship between psychologically driven motivations and eWOM is still an open question (Cobasky, 2016), one of the main conclusions of the studies of eWOM is that positive sentiments about products and services are more likely to be shared on the internet (Kim and Jang, 2014; Cobasky, 2016). Due to eWOM, social networks have become important information



sources for current travelers (Amaro, Duarte and Enriques, 2016; Okazaki and Hirose, 2009; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

Other reasons of the use of social media by tourists are: making contact with other people interested in traveling (Colás, González and De Pablos (2011); publishing personal experiences (journalism) (Cabiddu, De Carlo and Piccoli, 2014); talking about an event and trying to convince friend and relative to attempt it (Kim, Lee and Bonn, 2016); as well as other benefits, as, for example, having fun using a social network (Amaro, Duarte and Enriques, 2016).

In this context of research, it has been established that some tourists use their virtual social networks for self-presentation, in order to express personal aspects of their identities that are in other ways difficult to express (Luo and Zhong, 2015; Maldonado, 2012; Martín and Torres, 2013; Sun *et al.*, 2014). The act of self-presentation through virtual social networks is sometimes motivated by the tourists' need for belonging and their need for sharing their status (Lenhart and Fox, 2006).

According to Bond and Falk (2013), the more important a role is to an individual the more that individual will commit to it; the stronger this commitment is the more salient the role is to a person's identity; lastly, the more salient the role is to that identity, the more a person will engage in behaviors to express the role. Thus, individuals want to show others the experiences they lived and they look for ways to be able to do it. Some authors have recently highlighted souvenirs buying and social media posting as some of the most important tourists' actions in order to reinforce their identities after a tourism experience (Boley, Magnini and Tuten, 2013).

Other authors have mentioned that, when there is an attachment with a tourism experience, tourists tend to use more their social networks (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011; Hudson *et al.*, 2015; Kim and Jang, 2014; Manago *et al.*, 2009). This attachment can be influenced by the perceived congruity between the experience and the tourist's self-concept (Kim and Jang, 2014).

In connection with that, Gonzales and Hancock (2011) affirmed that in social media "*consumers present more positive information about the self while filtering negative information*" (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011, p. 79). Furthermore, individuals tend to engage in a social networks with other individuals with common identities (Ren *et al.*, 2012; Ren, Kraut and Kiesler, 2007), as well as they create more content about subjects related to these identities (Kim, Lee and Bonn, 2015). Based on these affirmations, the following hypothesis is established:

*H3: Experience self-congruity directly and positively influences the use of virtual social networks.*

When it comes to the relationship between social media and perceived social value, according to Hwang and Kim (2015), "*internet-based communication can be regarded as a means of reinforcing existing relationships and even increasing social capital by extending the spheres of social contact and fostering the globalization of many ties*" (p. 481). Therefore, "*social media can be an effective method for coping with social disconnection, as it enables peer acceptance and relationship development and boosts self-esteem*" (Seidman, 2013, p. 402).

Kim, Lee and Bonn (2015) explained that social media usage is found to interact with measures of psychological well-being, suggesting that it provides greater benefits for users experiencing low life satisfaction by assessing bonding and bridging related to social capital. Some researches in the literature have considered that identity attachment can be formed by online knowledge sharing, and the used of social sites can lead to perceived social value (see e. g. Bond and Falk, 2013; Chung and Koo, 2012; Hudson *et al.*, 2015; Kim, Lee and Bonn, 2015; Lyu, 2016; Molz, 2013; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014; Shanahan, 2009). For example, the study by Molz (2013), based on the social network "*Coachsurfing*", explains how social media helps tourists bonding before, during and after their holidays. One of the main uses of social media by tourists after their trips is sharing content with other tourists, what adds social value to the experience.

For Munar and Jacobsen (2014) "*sharing practices through social media appear as valuable articulations of sociability and emotional support*" (p. 46). For these authors, identifying as a part of a community is an important factor of tourists' generated content. In addition, tourists select and post information they consider congruent with the image they want to show to others.

Also, tourists believe that talking about their experience helps others in some way (informational or recreational), indicating values of virtual community cultures, and the recognition as a good provider of resources may raise a person's status within the group (Ooi and Ek, 2010). Moreover, "*although tourists may have a tendency to employ altruistic and community-related terms when explaining reasons for their sharing behaviour, they may also be aiming at individual benefits such as strengthened reputation or increased feelings of self-efficacy*" (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014, p. 48).

Lyu (2016), in a study center on travel *selfies* posted on social media as objectified self-presentation, explained that, when tourists use social networks in order to talk about the experience, they perceived more value of the experience they lived, because, normally, they receive positive responses and compliments. In fact, "*anticipated beneficial consequences encourage social media users to purposefully fabricate their images. Specifically, many people have a belief that probability of acquiring preferred outcomes, including others' approval and support, increases when desirable impressions are circulated through online channels*" (Lyu, 2016, p. 186).

Based on these affirmations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: The use of digital social networks directly and positively influences the perceived social value of the experience.*

Furthermore, based on previous studies, there might be an added relationship between these two constructs, since perceived social value might at the same time increase the use of social media. For example, Okazaki and Hiroze (2009) and Luo and Zhong (2015) pointed out

that some factors as social class and self-congruity influence information processing and consumers' generation content in social media. And, Kim and Tussyadiah (2013) stated that the high level of social presence and self-disclosure on the internet allows tourists to refer to their social networks for acceptable behavior and good judgment.

These affirmations are connected with the fact that people are concerned about reactions of others as reference groups. The theory of self-concept indicates that consumers value consumption that results in recognition and reinforces reactions from the social network, so as to strengthen the conception about themselves (Tussyadiah, Kausar and Soesilo, 2015).

Rihova *et al.* (2015) stated that value is socially constructed and embedded in tourists' social practices, since: "*in the course of their social experiences, tourists bond, cement social relationships and enhance their social skills thus co-creating value*" (p. 356). In this context of analysis, tourists may want to keep in touch with other people with whom they shared a bond during their vacations, and in order to do that they may use their social networks (Nusair, Bilgihan and Okumus, 2013). Therefore, perceived social value due to the interaction during vacations with other tourists may influence the use of social media (Rihova *et al.* (2015). Also, when tourists perceived that a trip provided them social value they use social media to talk about a topic of interest with other geographically dispersed friends (Nusair, Bilgihan and Okumus, 2013).

For Ayeh, Au and Law (2013) tourists generate more content when they are creating information about a topic of interests of friends. Thus, "*in studies on social groups, shared interests, values and passion symbolize the basis for consumers' interaction. This tendency might have led to the rapid increase in numerous online communities based on shared interest. The resultant websites have yielded enormous amounts of generated-content*" (Ayeh, Au and Law, 2013, p. 135).

Finally, Gyimothy (2013) explained that, as in other social networks, on the internet users establish hierarchies and share information

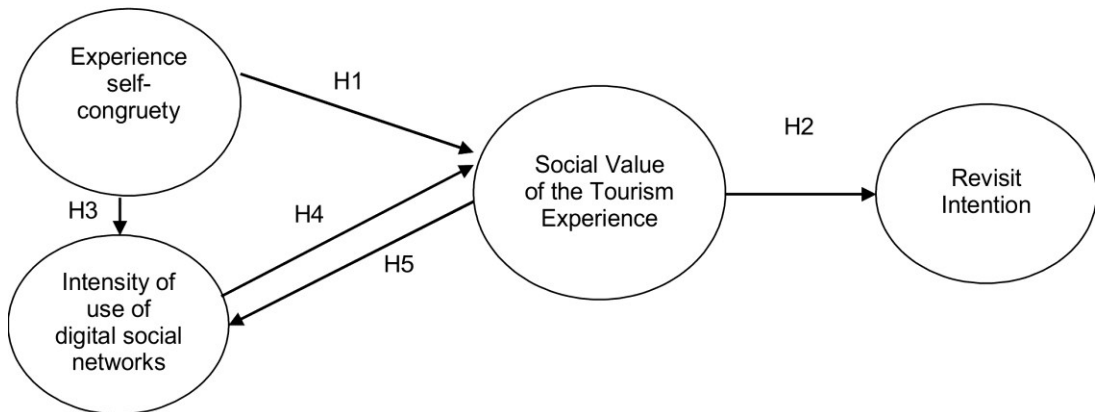


Figure 1. Empirical model

about their experiences in order to achieve higher ranks. Thus, consumers tend to talk about personal experiences when they think it conferred social value (Gyimothy, 2013; Olufwote, 2006; Weick, 1995). Based on these previous studies, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H5: The perceived social value of the experience directly and positively influences the use of digital social networks.*

Figure 1 shows the empirical model built by the hypotheses of his research.

## Methodology

### Data Collection

An exploratory research was performed in order to achieve the proposed goals and to contrast the hypotheses. More precisely, a quantitative research was carried out by using a structured survey and personal interviews. The universe of the study was based on students of the University of Valencia (Spain) who came back recently from their vacations. The selection of the sample was performed by non-probability sampling trials.

The students were interviewed in different places around the university (the cafeteria of the campus, places where they relax near the library and other resting spots in the campus of the university). The interviewer explained them that the survey was a part of a project conducted by the University of Seville, and

were invited to participate in the study. As a result, 380 valid surveys were collected during October of 2013, near the longest vacation time in Spain for students: summer vacation (months of July, August and September).

### Questionnaire design

In order to introduce the respondents, the questionnaire explained them that the survey was a part of a project conducted by the University of Seville, and invited them to participate in the study. Subsequently, two filter questions were asked in order to know: (1) if they traveled for holidays at least one time in the last two months (in case the answer was “no” respondents were asked to stop completing the survey); and (2) if during or after their vacations they posted pictures, videos or comments about the trip on their social network sites (100% of the respondents used some digital social network in order to show their experience during and after their vacations).

After that, respondents were asked to remember their trip and to answer the questions of the questionnaire, formed by scales related to the constructs of this study. These scales were selected from the literature review. Thus, the scale by Sirgy *et al.* (1997) was adapted to this study in order to measure experience self-congruity and ideal self-congruity (questions 1-3: actual self; questions 4-5: ideal self). This scale has been used by several authors in the literature (Chon, 1992; Sirgy *et al.* 1995; Litvin and Goh, 2002;

**Table 4. Items of the scales**

<i>Self-Congruence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I completely identify myself with the tourism experience I lived during my last trip</li> <li>• This tourism experience is a lot like me</li> <li>• This tourism experience reflects what I am</li> <li>• Living this kind of tourism experience is consistent with how I like to see myself</li> <li>• The experience I lived corresponds to how I like to see myself</li> </ul>
<i>Perceived Social Value</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This tourism experience helps me to feel acceptable</li> <li>• This tourism experience improves the way I am perceived</li> <li>• This tourism experience makes a good impression on other people</li> <li>• This tourism experience gives me social approval</li> </ul>
<i>Intensity of used of social networks</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uploading information about the tourism experience I lived in my social network was an important part of my daily routine during and after my trip</li> <li>• I was proud of people reading and watching the information I uploaded in my social network about the tourism experience I lived</li> <li>• During my trip and after it, using my social network to talk about my trip was an important activity for me, every day</li> <li>• I felt out of touch when I couldn't log onto my social network during and after my trip in order to give information about it</li> <li>• During and after my trip I felt I was giving information to a social community that we have created in our social network</li> <li>• I would be sorry if my social network shut down and I couldn't give information about my trips</li> </ul>
<i>Intention to revisit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I intent to revisit the destination of my last trip in order to live this tourism experience again</li> </ul>

Mazodier and Merunka, 2012). Although most of the authors mentioned the four dimensions of self-congruity in their studies, the majority of them focus on the two first dimensions (actual-self and ideal-self) when measuring the construct (see Beerli, Díaz and Moreno, 2007; Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008; Kang, 2002; Karunaratna and Goh, 2000; Kressmann *et al.*, 2006; Litvin and Goh, 2002; Mazodier and Merunka, 2012; Quester, Karunaratna and Goh, 2000). The social dimension of the scale by Sweeny and Soutar (2001) was adapted to measure perceived social value; the scale by Jones *et al.* (2000) was used in order to measure revisit intention; and the scale by Ellison *et al.* (2007) was used to measure intensity of the use of digital social networks. Table 4 shows the items of the scales.

Respondent answered to each item in a Likert scale of seven points (from 1-totally disagree to 7-totally agree).

Finally, the questionnaire asked the respondents to answer the questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. The respondents gave information about their gender, age, educational level and

job situation. According to this information, 57% of the respondents were women and 43% were men. The age of the respondents vary considerably, but more than 90% of the sample was between 20 and 35 years old. More than 75% of the respondents were study at under degree level and less than 30% had a job.

#### *Methodology used for data analysis*

Before testing the hypotheses, the reliability and the validity of the scales were verified by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using EQS 6.1. The methodology of the structural equation models (SEM) was used with EQS 6.1, in order to evaluate the structural model and to estimate the set of coefficients for the causal relations between variables.

## **Results**

### ***Measurement instrument validation***

Convergent validity is demonstrated since all the items were found to have significant factor loads over 0.60 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988) and the Lagrange multipliers test did not suggest significant relations for a factor other than those for which they were indicators (Hatcher, 1994). The model showed a significant good fit, presenting a Chi-square of 2956,707 on 153

**Table 5. Reliability and convergent validity**

Factor	Indicator	Load	Robust t	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
Self-congruity	CON1	0.762**	8.885	0.707	0.706	0.662
	CON2	0.779**	17.101			
	CON4	0.913**	10.146			
	CON5	0.792**	13.554			
Intensity of use of social networks	RED1	0.796**	5.659	0.715	0.759	0.731
	RED2	0.717**	7.790			
	RED3	0.985**	9.408			
	RED4	0.853**	6.457			
	RED5	0.765**	9.356			
	RED6	0.979**	10.275			
Revisit intention	INREC	0.907**	9.208	-	0.836	0.822
Social Experience Value	VALS1	0.768**	9.017	0.920	0.722	0.682
	VALS2	0.779**	12.609			
	VALS3	0.905**	10.380			
	VALS4	0.846**	18.817			

N = 380; \*\*p<0.01; \*p<0.05; N/A = not computed;  $\chi^2= 2956.707$  on df = 153; NNFI = 0.957; CFI = 0.968; IFI = 0.969; RMSEA = 0.073.

**Table 6. Discriminant validity**

	Congruency	Intensity	Revisit	Exp. Value
Congruency	<b>0.662</b>	(0.192-0.301)	(0.085-0.161)	(0.091-0.387)
Intensity	0.060	<b>0.731</b>	(0.061-0.277)	(0.139-0.219)
Revisit	0.015	0.028	<b>0.822</b>	(0.352-0.788)
Exp. Value	0.571	0.032	0.324	<b>0.682</b>

Note: The diagonal represents the average variance extracted AVE. Above the diagonal is the 95% confidence interval for the inter-factor correlations. Below the diagonal is the variance shared by each pair of factors (squared correlation).

degrees of freedom. And several indicators also showed the measurement model presents good fit (see it at the bottom of Table 5).

Reliability was measured with Cronbach's alpha. The threshold value for this coefficient is 0.70, what guarantees internal consistency of the scales (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). As Table 5 shows, all Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (Cronbach, 1951) were above the recommended value of 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The composed reliability index was also calculated and for all values it was over the recommended value of 0.70 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Average variance extracted (AVE) values were over 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) (see Table 5).

Discriminant validity was evaluated following two criteria (see Table 6). Firstly, it was found that none of the 95% confidence intervals for correlation estimations between the pairs of factors contained the value 1 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Secondly, the variance shared between each pair of constructs (squared

correlation), was below the corresponding variance extracted indexes (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

#### *Estimation of the conceptual model*

Table 7 shows verification of the hypotheses for the whole sample. It can be seen that the five hypotheses are supported. Thus, higher congruency between experience and identity leads to higher social value (H1 supported); higher social value leads to higher revisit intention (H2 supported); higher congruency between experience and identity leads to a higher intensity of the use of digital social networks (H3 supported); a higher intensity of the use of digital social networks leads to higher social value (H4 supported); and a higher social value leads to an increase in the intensity of the use of social networks (H5).

#### **Discussion**

Based on the results, the first hypothesis of the proposed model was supported. Thus, it can be stated that there is a relationship between tourists' self-congruity and perceived social

**Table 7. Hypotheses testing**

Relation	$\beta$	(t)	Hypothesis
H1: Self-congruency $\rightarrow$ Exp. Value	0.330**	5.728	Accepted
H2: Exp. Value $\rightarrow$ Revisit Intention	0.876**	7.583	Accepted
H3: Self-congruency $\rightarrow$ Social Net. Use	0.422**	4.196	Accepted
H4: Social Net. Use $\rightarrow$ Exp. Value	0.335**	4.530	Accepted
H5: Exp. Value $\rightarrow$ Social Net. Use	0.262**	2.665	Accepted

N = 380; \*\*p<0.01; \*p<0.05; N/A = not computed;  $\chi^2$  = 2956.707 on df = 153; NNFI = 0.957; CFI = 0.968; IFI = 0.969; RMSEA = 0.073.

value. This hypothesis was based on previous research (e. g. Ballesteros and Ramírez, 2007; Gazley and Watling, 2015; Hosany and Martin, 2012; Correia, Kozak and Reis, 2014). However, some of these studies did not measure the relationship through a quantitative research. For example, the study by Ballesteros and Ramírez (2007) highlighted the effects of social identities and the role of the symbolic community in the development of heritage tourism, but only theoretically, since no statistical data was presented in order to establish the relationship of the constructs. And Correia, Kozak and Reis (2014) also pointed out that self-congruency can influence perceived social value, but they conducted a qualitative research, and the results are based on the commentaries of thirty six Portuguese citizens who were interviewed after an event.

In the quantitative research by Kim and Jun (2016), in order to measure self-congruity, the authors used a similar scale as the one of the present research, but their study focuses on self-congruity and pre-trip decision making. Furthermore, Hosany and Martin (2012) focused on self-congruity and post-trip consequences and, although they did not measure the relationship between this construct and perceived social value, they confirmed that self-congruity influences satisfaction. In addition, the authors highlighted that, in this context of research, satisfaction can be based on the perception of social distinction. These findings are similar to the conclusions of the research by Kim and Jang (2014), who indicated that consumers choose experiences related to the perceived social value of the experience, and social value influences post-experience behavioural intentions. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this research supports these affirmations.

The second hypothesis was also supported, which indicates that perceived social value influences tourists' revisit intention. There are different opinions regarding this relationship in the literature. For example, Beerli, Díaz and Moreno (2007) affirmed that constructs related to symbolic consumption, as self-congruity and social value, might not be main predictors of revisit intention, because after visiting a destination the influence of these constructs are weaker. However, the theoretical foundation of the relationship in this study is based on a single research focused on advertising efficiency (Johar and Sirgy, 1999), which concludes that "*the difference in selection mechanisms occurs between those who are familiar with the product or brand being advertised and those who are not*" (p. 575). Beerli, Díaz and Moreno (2007) also states that "*no work has been found that measures the moderating function of experience related to the mechanism of self-congruity as a decisive factor in destination choice*" (p. 575). However, some authors in the literature have demonstrated that both self-congruity and social value do influence revisit intention (e. g. Aaker, 1997; Chew and Jahari, 2014; Ekinci, Sirakaya and Baloglu, 2007; Usakli and Baloglu, 2011). This is based on the fact that other people's reactions (Chew and Jahari, 2014) perception of social approval (Kim and Jang, 2014) and social congruity (Ekinci, Sirakaya and Baloglu, 2007) are variables related to perceived social value that affect tourists' intention to return to destination (Usakli and Baloglu, 2011). Therefore, the second hypothesis of the present study supports the affirmations by these last authors, and strengthens the fact that perceived social value, as a consequence of self-congruity, influences tourists' revisit intention.

Furthermore, one of the main objectives of this research was to find a connection between

experience self-congruity and tourists' use of social networks. It is established in the literature that there is a relationship between experience self-congruity and intention to recommend (Ekinci, Sirakaya and Baloglu, 2007), both offline and online (Cantallops and Salvi, 2014; Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Ladhari and Michaud, 2015). More precisely, Boley, Magnini and Tuten (2013) indicated that posting pictures on social networks after the experience is one of the main tourists' actions for self-presentation. And Kim, Lee and Bonn (2015) stated that tourists create more content in social networks about subjects related with their identities and lifestyles. Thus, the findings of the present research support previous connections between constructs related to symbolic consumption and tourists' self-presentation in social media, in this case based on the fact that experience self-congruity influences tourists' use of social networks during and after their trips.

In addition, it was indicated during the literature review that consumers normally present positive information about their *self* in social media, while filtering negative information (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011). It can be added that tourists not only filter information, but also, based on the third hypothesis of this research, they probably share more quantity of information if the experience is congruence with their *self*, since they use more their social networks in order to show the experience.

Finally, the present research proposed two direct relationships between perceived social value and tourists' use of social networks (hypotheses 4 and 5). It was established in the empirical model that the use of social networks influences tourists' perceived social value of the experience and, also, when tourists perceive higher social value from the experience, they tend to use more their social networks.

When it comes to hypothesis 4, social networks can increase social value because they permit further social contact after the trip, something that tourists find socially valuable. Some authors have focused on this dimension of perceived social value (e. g. Hwang and Kim, 2015; Molz, 2013). However, the present

research doesn't focus on the value of interactions between tourists. In fact, the hypothesis was based on previous socio-psychological researches. In this context, authors have analysed: social acceptance (Seidman, 2013); psychological benefits from showing the experience to others (Hudson *et al.*, 2015); emotional support (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014); recognition (Ooi and EK, 2010); social prestige (Kim and Jang, 2014); and impressing friends and relatives by showing their experience on the internet (Lyu, 2016) as predictors of the use of social media. In relation to this line of research, Hypothesis 4 was supported, which indicates that using social networks to show the experience increases the perception of tourists that it helped them to feel acceptable, to create good impressions and to find social approval (see measurement of social value in table 4).

Regarding hypothesis 5, some authors proposed that people are concerned about reactions of others as reference groups, and thus, when they perceived that some event provides them social value, they will probably talk about it (Kim and Tussyadiah, 2013) and they might use the internet in order to do it (Okazaki and Hiroze, 2009; Luo and Zhong, 2015). Once again, this relationship could be established based on the importance of interaction between tourists, since they may want to keep in touch with people they met during their trip, if they valued the interaction positively (Nusair, Bilgihan and Okumus, 2013; Rihova *et al.*, 2015). However, this hypothesis was based on the fact that variables as social acceptance and social approval, as well as the good impression that tourists think the experience makes on others, will motivate them to show it more, for example by showing pictures or souvenirs (Boley, Magnini and Tuten, 2013), or more practically nowadays, by using social networks (Ayeh, Au and Law, 2013). Hence, as shown in the results and according to the affirmations by Gyimothy (2013), tourists will use more social sites if they perceive the experience provides them social value.

## Conclusions

This research focuses on the analysis of experience self-congruity (an important construct related to symbolic consumption),

perceived social value and the use of digital social networks. Based on the results, it can be established that experience self-congruity influences perceived social value, and these constructs affect the use of social networks by tourists during and after their trips. In addition, perceived social value, a consequence of experience self-congruity, affects revisit intention.

Therefore, the offer of current tourism companies must enable the perception of congruency between the experience and the tourists' self-concept. This will lead to consumers perceiving higher social value, which will positively influence the intention to return in the future. Furthermore, it has been proven that tourists feel the need to show their consumption during their vacation to others when it is congruent with their *self*, and they might do it currently using tools and resources that permits them to materialize something as intangible as a tourism experience, for example, the possibilities provided by social sites.

By using digital social networks, tourists can show pictures, videos, sounds, they can write what they felt, respond to commentaries of relatives and friends, share emotions with them, etc., and in doing so, they can perceive more social value from their experience. That's why tourism companies should facilitate the access to resources that help their customers in materialising the experience. For example, in some theatres or museums in which making pictures is not permitted, it might be possible that consumers wish to show what they saw, but they can't because they don't have the resources to recreate the experience on the internet, and then, they may perceive less value from the experience.

Also, it is very important to improve the relationship between clients who live the same experience. As examine during the literature review, this might be especially important when tourists visit a place or participate in an event where they perceive common interests. In these situations, tourists will probably share ideas, a lifestyle and even an identity. If the company achieves to create an environment that influences self-congruity of different

tourists at the same time, in a place where clients can share emotions with each other, this could improve the existing use of social networks, the value of the tourism experience and the revisit intention.

### **Limitations and future line of research**

This research has some limitations mainly related with the selected participants, since a convenience sampling was performed and it was circumscribed to students in the city of Valencia. These limitations make it difficult to extrapolate the results to every tourism experience or every kind of tourist. Therefore, it would be interesting to observe the results obtained from the approach of this research applied to different profiles of people surveyed, in different situations, for example, tourists surveyed during their holidays.

Another limitation refers to the fact that the respondents of this survey were students, which limited the analysis of the results based on socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, since they share country of origin, age and level of education. It would be interesting to perform this kind of investigation including differences between consumers based on their socio-demographic characteristics.

Finally, this research took into consideration a series of constructs in order to link self-congruity and digital social networks with perceived social value and revisit intention. However, it would be interesting to include variables such as satisfaction, perceived quality, word of mouth, or consumer's loyalty, increasing the knowledge of self-congruity and social media in the area of tourism.

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