

Destination loyalty as explained through self-congruity, emotional solidarity, and travel satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine how tourists' self-congruity and emotional solidarity are related and how this thereby influences travel satisfaction and destination loyalty. Notably, the roles that the different dimensions (i.e., *communality* and *fairness*) of intragroup emotional solidarity played between the constructs were scrutinized for an enhanced understanding of the relationships. Addressing these research questions, this study collected survey data from South Korean tourists to Korea's Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)—a destination of symbolic and emotional significance to Koreans—and analyzed them via structural equation modelling. Results demonstrated positive relationships between self-congruity and all emotional solidarity dimensions. However, only *fairness* was a meaningful predictor of travel satisfaction which then translated into destination loyalty. The findings indicate that in an emotional destination like the DMZ, self-congruity with the destination can give rise to emotional solidarity toward others, but emotional solidarity dimensions may function differently in triggering further changes in travel satisfaction or destination loyalty. Implications for theory and practice are discussed within the close of the article.

1. Introduction

The Korean Demilitarized Zone (hereafter DMZ), a border zone between South and North Korea, is a historical area symbolizing the conflict between the two countries. Created in 1953 at the end of Korean War, the DMZ has been closed off from development and interference for almost six decades. The area encompasses sites that not only represent the war history but also soothe South Koreans' longing for land and family in North Korea. Thus, the DMZ embodies historical and emotional meanings—Koreans' collective memories of the war and the separation as well as shared desires for peace and reunification—and this has made it a major destination for both domestic and international tourists. The number of annual DMZ tourists is estimated to be 2.7 million, 80% of whom are domestic travelers (Oh, 2019).

Given its historical and emotional significance, Koreans view the DMZ as a symbolic area representing their ethnic and national identity and highlight their connection to the DMZ (Kim & Thapa, 2018). The self-congruity theory explains that people prefer destinations whose images are consistent with their self-concepts (Sirgy & Su, 2000). That

is, tourists who perceive greater self-congruity with a destination are more likely to feel satisfied with their visit to the destination (Chon, 1990), revisit, and recommend the destination (Sirgy & Su, 2000). This theory was used recently by Kim and Thapa (2018) to show how perceived value, travel satisfaction, and destination loyalty are intertwined in DMZ tourism; their study endorsed the positive influences of self-congruity on travel satisfaction and destination loyalty, however little consideration was given to the interaction between self-congruity with the destination and feelings toward other tourists.

Although it has been often overlooked, tourists, including those visiting the DMZ, are likely to develop emotional solidarity with one another when they hold collective beliefs (e.g., understand historical meanings) and shared behaviors (e.g., engage in similar touristic activities) related to their visit (Joo & Woosnam, 2019). The emotional solidarity theory describes that individuals' affective bonds with one another (i.e., emotional solidarity) evolves when there are shared beliefs, shared behaviors, and interaction between the individuals (Durkheim, 1912). The idea has been used in illustrating how social relationships shape individuals' perceptions and behaviors in tourism

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settings, such as tourists' expenditure patterns (Woosnam, Dudensing, & Walker, 2015), travel satisfaction, and destination loyalty (Ribeiro, Pinto, Silva, & Woosnam, 2017). As such, emotional solidarity among DMZ tourists is likely to contribute to travel satisfaction and revisit intentions as well.

The constructs of self-congruity and emotional solidarity are distinctive, as the former represents how tourists relate to a destination (Kim & Thapa, 2018), while the latter addresses the relationship among tourists (Woosnam, Norman, & Ying, 2009). Still, in destinations like the DMZ, tourists' self-congruity with the destination may be easily converted into their emotional solidarity toward others. Previous research has suggested that visiting heritage sites (Kim & Thapa, 2019) or border areas (Gelbman, 2008) entails symbolic consumption of the space where tourists parallel themselves with the place. This self-congruence with a destination may lead to heightened feelings of comradery with others in the same space. While such translation from self-congruity to emotional solidarity may only be insidious in some destinations, heritage or border tourism destinations—found upon collective memories of the past—would be an ideal setting for active conversion.

Furthermore, previous research on self-congruity has often assumed that destination images are mirrored in the appearances and the behaviors of tourists in the destination, and tourists are more likely to see themselves befitting to a destination when they are around others who appear similar. Likewise, emotional solidarity among tourists emerges from their interaction with others who hold similar beliefs and behaviors (Durkheim, 1912). Such resemblance between self-congruity and emotional solidarity calls into question how the two constructs are interrelated. Although self-congruity and emotional solidarity each have positive influences on travel satisfaction and destination loyalty (Kim & Thapa, 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2017), the two constructs have never been considered in tandem, thus it is unclear how they interact with one another or collectively affect tourists' destination choice, especially in unique settings like the DMZ.

Furthermore, emotional solidarity dimensions are unique in their meanings and roles. *Sympathetic understanding*, *emotional closeness*, and *feeling welcomed* (or *welcoming nature*)—which make up intergroup emotional solidarity—deviated from one another in how they explained residents' support for tourism (Woosnam, 2012), tourists' expenditure patterns (Woosnam et al., 2015), or tourists' perception of tourism impacts (Joo, Cho, & Woosnam, 2019). It is possible that such distinction also exists between *communality* and *fairness*, the two dimensions of intragroup emotional solidarity. In comparison to *fairness*, *communality* captures more superficial and causal aspects of the feeling and this difference may cause further divergence between the two dimensions. Finding out how *communality* and *fairness* differ from one another is pivotal to understanding intragroup emotional solidarity, but minimal empirical research has been undertaken on this.

As such, the purpose of this study is to examine how South Korean tourists' self-congruity with the DMZ is related to their emotional solidarity with other DMZ tourists and how this in turn leads to their travel satisfaction, and ultimately, destination loyalty. For a deeper understanding of the relationship, the role that each emotional solidarity dimensions played among other constructs were scrutinized. When addressing the research questions, this study utilized survey data collected from South Korean tourists to the DMZ for a few reasons. First, given its symbolic and emotional significance to Koreans, the DMZ was considered an optimal setting to examine tourists' self-congruity with a destination. Also, DMZ tourists often participate in pre-arranged tour programs done in confined areas, and this provides a greater chance of building emotional solidarity with others on-site. Finally, the recent political development including South Korea, North Korea, and the United States has brought much attention to the DMZ.

2. Literature review

2.1. Self-congruity

Self-congruity is the extent to which a product image is consistent with how a person thinks and feels about oneself (i.e., self-concept) (Sirgy, 1985). Since there are multiple types of self-concept, self-congruity also exists in various forms (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Actual self-congruity indicates the coherency between one's view of a product and his/her actual self (Sirgy, 1985). Ideal self-congruity, on the other hand, is the agreement between one's view of a product and his/her ideal self (Sirgy, 1985). There are also social layers to the self-images which thereby lead to actual social self-congruity (i.e., match between a product image and a social self) and ideal social self-congruity (i.e., congruence between how one views a product and how he/she wants to be seen by others) (Sirgy & Su, 2000).

The notion of self-congruity has been used to explain why certain products are favored by people over others (e.g., Sirgy, 1985; Sirgy, Johar, Samli, & Claiborne, 1991). The self-congruity theory posits that actual- and ideal self-congruity collectively shape preferences (Sirgy & Su, 1985). That is, people prefer a product whose images conform to how they see themselves (i.e., self-consistency motivation) or want to be seen (i.e., self-esteem motivation). Dissonance between product images and self-images can cause psychological discomfort which discourages people from selecting the product under consideration (Sirgy, 1985). Thus, according to the theory, perceptions or emotions about a product can bias how its functions are evaluated (Sirgy et al., 1991).

In a similar vein, the self-congruity theory has been used in tourism research to examine how tourists choose and evaluate destinations. Chon (1990; 1992) found positive and significant relationships between tourists' self-congruity with a destination and their travel satisfaction. Given that travel satisfaction is a major determinant of travel behavior, Sirgy and Su (2000) further posited a positive relationship between self-congruity and travel behavior. In fact, a common finding is that self-congruity with a destination is positively associated with intentions to (re)visit or recommend the destination, validating the use of the theory across multiple tourism contexts (e.g., Beerli, Meneses, & Gil, 2007; Litvin & Goh, 2002; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

2.2. Emotional solidarity

Emotional solidarity, a construct originating from sociology, refers to an affective bond between people (Woosnam et al., 2009) who possess similar beliefs, engage in the same behaviors, and interact with one another (Durkheim, 1912). In tourism research, Woosnam et al. (2009) first used the emotional solidarity theory to suggest how residents and tourists can be in harmonious relationships when their interaction is accompanied by their shared beliefs and behaviors. Until recently, the application of the theory and the construct was mostly limited to resident-tourist relationships (e.g., Woosnam, 2011; Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013), but there also have been studies which utilized them in examining intragroup relationships, such as residents' feeling toward other residents (Woosnam, Maruyama, & Boley, 2016) or potential tourists' emotional solidarity with others they anticipate meeting in a destination (Joo & Woosnam, 2019).

Emotional solidarity between residents and tourists is measured by Woosnam and Norman's (2010) Emotional Solidarity Scale (ESS) which consists of 10 items across three factors (i.e., *welcoming nature*, *sympathetic understanding*, and *emotional closeness*). The ESS has helped to present quantitative illustrations of how intergroup emotional solidarity is related to people's perceptions or behaviors (e.g., Lai & Hitchcock, 2017; Li & Wan, 2017; Woosnam, 2011; Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2013; Woosnam et al., 2015). However, when tourist-to-tourist emotional solidarity is considered, a modified ESS (Joo & Woosnam, 2019) should be employed. This intragroup ESS (Joo & Woosnam, 2019) shares some of the items with the intergroup ESS

(Woosnam & Norman, 2010) but it includes three newer items (13 in total) and features a different factor structure (i.e., two factors; *communality* and *fairness*).

Specifically, *communality* consists of ten items that are mostly from the intergroup ESS (Woosnam & Norman, 2010), whereas *fairness* has three items, including two newly introduced ones (Joo & Woosnam, 2019). Although the research on these modified ESS factors is still ongoing, the items that compose each emotional solidarity dimensions allow a conceptual distinction between *communality* and *fairness*. Unlike *fairness*, whose items address more intricately and moral feelings like respect, equality, or righteousness, *communality* items tend to focus more on similarity or bondedness that people perceive from others (Joo and Woosnam, 2019). Similar distinctions between original ESS factors were also suggested by Woosnam, Maruyama, & Boley (2016). This ultimately implies that each ESS factors may play different roles when explaining other constructs of interest.

Despite potential differences between its dimensions, emotional solidarity has generally been recognized as a significant predictor of how people think or behave in relation to tourism. Previous research has indicated that residents who hold greater emotional solidarity toward tourists also tend to be more optimistic about tourism impacts and tourism development (e.g., Li & Wan, 2017; Woosnam, 2012). Likewise, tourists' emotional solidarity with residents is positively related to their perceived safety (Simpson & Simpson, 2017), expenditure patterns (Woosnam et al., 2015), travel satisfaction, and destination loyalty (Ribeiro et al., 2017). With respect to tourist-to-tourist emotional solidarity, Joo (2018) also confirmed its positive influence on travel intentions.

2.3. Travel satisfaction

Satisfaction is a cognitive or emotional response to a product or a service at a particular time (Giese & Cote, 2000), indicating how well expectations regarding the product or the service is met (McDowall, 2010). As a cognitive construct, satisfaction represents “a judgement that a product/service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumptions-related fulfillment” (Oliver, 2010, p. 8). However, in terms of an emotional outcome, it can also be illustrated by affective terms such as love, excitement, frustration, or thrill (Giese & Cote, 2000). Given that products and services usually cater to both functional and emotional needs, it is logical to see satisfaction as both a cognitive and affective outcome.

Travel satisfaction is a function of expectations and experiences that tourists have in distinctive domains (Chi & Qu, 2008) or in general (Chen & Tsai, 2007). People expect attractions or destinations to possess certain qualities, and their actual experiences are evaluated against pre-formed expectations (Chen & Chen, 2010). According to Chon (1990), one's expectations toward a destination are based on his/her images of the destination, and travel satisfaction arises when actual travel experiences conform to pre-held destination images. An alternative view to this expectation-experience approach is that tourists are satisfied when benefits exceed the money, time, and effort invested (e.g., Oliver & Swan, 1989). Regardless of the viewpoints, travel satisfaction is considered highly essential in cultivating supportive and loyal tourists (Chi & Qu, 2008).

2.4. Destination loyalty

When someone makes multiple visits to a destination or recommends it to others, the person is being loyal to the destination (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Destination loyalty can be revealed in one's behaviors, attitudes, or a combination of the two (Oppermann, 2000). According to the behavioral approach, only those who make an actual visit or intend to do so are showing destination loyalty. On the other hand, the attitudinal approach suggests that behaviors alone are insufficient as some people may just travel to wherever their time, money,

or knowledge allows and be only spuriously loyal to the destination without any positive attitudes toward it. Finally, the combination approach incorporates both behavioral and attitudinal aspects and defines destination loyalty as how much an individual is likely to revisit (i.e., behavioral) or recommend (i.e., attitudinal) a destination (e.g., Chi & Qu, 2008).

Destination loyalty is essential to the success of any destination, as each repeat tourist brings additional spending and positive word-of-mouth to the destination, eventually reducing marketing costs (Chi & Qu, 2008; Ribeiro et al., 2017; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). For this reason, studies have mostly, if not all, treated destination loyalty as their end-goal construct which is ‘being predicted’ instead of ‘predicting.’ As such, a host of constructs have been validated as antecedents to destination loyalty, such as celebrity fandom (Lee & Yoo, 2015), emotional solidarity (Ribeiro et al., 2017), push motivation (Yoon & Uysal, 2005), quality difference (Pritchard & Howard, 1997), self-congruity (Kim & Thapa, 2018; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), travel satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008; Pritchard & Howard, 1997), symbolic involvement (Pritchard & Howard, 1997), or perceived value (Lee, Yoon, & Lee, 2007).

2.5. The DMZ as a tourism destination

The DMZ refers to the land within 1.2 miles on each side of the 160-mile border between South and North Korea. It is where major battles of the Korean War took place and the military hostility between the two Koreas persists. At the same time, the DMZ is where occasional peace talks between the two sides are held. Such historical and political significance has made the DMZ a key destination for heritage or dark tourists (Bigley, Lee, Chon, & Yoon, 2010). It not only encompasses historic scenes of the inter-Korean dispute but also is where the bitter war-related memories still unfold. Tourists learn about the Cold War of the past and, at the same time, observe its present vestige. However, for many Koreans, the DMZ is more than a land of historic tragedies or international politics. It is widely viewed as a highly emotional land, which embodies not only the collective trauma (i.e., the Korean War) but also communal hope for peace, reunification, and prosperity. As such, a mixture of anxiety, hope, sadness, and endurance is often found among South Korean tourists to the DMZ, and their DMZ experiences are likely to be more emotionally charged than in other occasions.

The emotional nature of the DMZ tourism for Koreans is well-elucidated in Lee, Bendle, Yoon, and Kim's (2012) study of cross-border tourism to North Korea. The authors used the concepts of *haan* and *Han*—distinctively Korean feelings rejecting direct translation to Western ideas—to explain why South Koreans head to the North. In a nutshell, *haan* refers to “an unresolved feeling that rises out of the experiences of injustice” (Son, 2000, p. 42) or “spiritual pain held within” people (Lee et al. 2012, p. 90). To many Koreans, the Korean War and the division of the Korean Peninsula evoke the feeling of *haan*, and the DMZ, in that sense, is a destination where an abundance of *haan* exists. However, the DMZ can also be a destination of *Han* which, according to Lee et al. (2012), represents Koreanness or their desire for integration, harmony, or reconciliation. While the concept of *Han* is not predominantly solemn or sorrowful, it provides a good illustration of what Koreans desire in the future. More importantly, such feelings of collective sorrow (i.e., *haan*) and desire (i.e., *Han*) are what help Koreans relate themselves to the DMZ and feel bonded to it (i.e., self-congruity).

Among several tourist attractions in the Southern portion of the DMZ, Panmunjeom, a land jointly controlled by the two sides under United Nations' supervision, is one of the most popular places. This is where North and South Korean soldiers face each other from a few feet away, and many historic events (e.g., the Armistice Agreement in 1953, the inter-Korea Summits in 2018, and the three-way summit among the leaders of North and South Korea and the United States in 2019) unfolded. Therefore, Panmunjeom usually represents the latest status of the inter-Korean relationship and is considered the icon of the DMZ. However, visiting Panmunjeom requires people to follow numerous

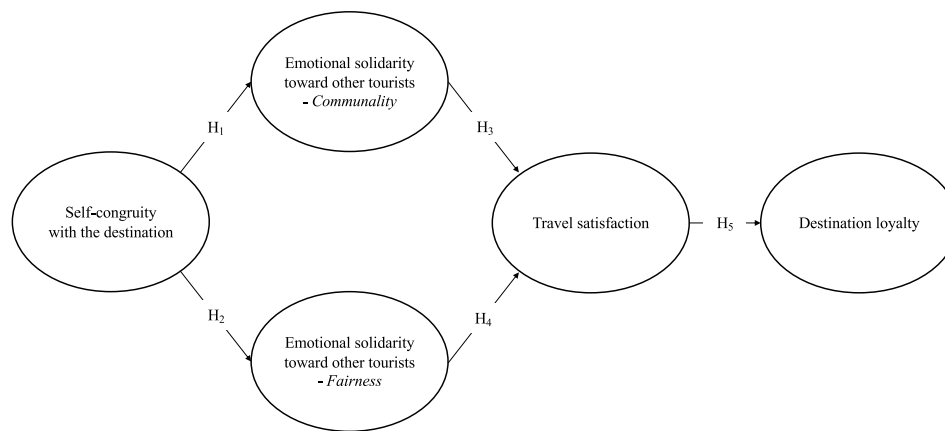


Fig. 1. Hypothesized relationships between the constructs.

administrative procedures and security rules. Regardless of their nationalities, all tourists have to file an application months prior to their intended date of visit, only visit in a group of at least 25 tourists, and follow strict safety and security rules while in Panmunjeom. Given these restrictions, there are other places outside the DMZ (e.g., Imjingak, Dorasan [Mt] Station, and Dorasan [Mt] Observatory) which provide less quintessential but more generalized experiences. These places are also considered DMZ tourism spots as tourists can have a clear view of North Korea and experience remnants of the Cold War. Even in these less heavily controlled places, tourists often elect to participate in various tour programs. Thus, a typical tour of the DMZ consists of pre-arranged tour programs to nearby destinations and/or Panmunjeom.

2.6. Conceptual framework

This study developed a conceptual framework for examining South Korean DMZ tourists' travel satisfaction and destination loyalty, as influenced by both self-congruity and emotional solidarity (Fig. 1).

Unlike the relationship between self-congruity and other constructs of interest, little is known about how self-congruity with a destination is associated with emotional solidarity toward others in the destination. Conceptually, the two constructs address two distinctive relationships of people to a destination (self-congruity) and people to people (emotional solidarity). However, destinations like the DMZ where collective memories and hopes are engraved (Kim & Thapa, 2019; Lee et al., 2012), high self-congruity is likely to accompany high emotional solidarity as well. Tourism in border areas (Gelbman, 2008; Kim & Thapa, 2018; Lee et al., 2012) or heritage sites (Chen & Chen, 2010) entails a symbolic consumption of the space where tourists see high congruence between themselves and the destination. That is, tourists in such a destination are likely to be similar in how they view themselves and the destination. This would, in turn, lead to shared beliefs among tourists, a key antecedent of emotional solidarity (Woosnam et al., 2009).

Especially, in the DMZ, where collective memories and identity (i.e., *haan* and *Han*) resonate, South Korean tourists are more likely to see themselves befitting to the destination (Kim & Thapa, 2018) and regard the DMZ as a symbolic representation of themselves. Since these feelings are analogous to shared beliefs—one of the three theoretical antecedents of emotional solidarity (Durkheim, 1912)—South Korean tourists would develop positive feelings toward others in the DMZ (Joo & Woosnam, 2019). This connection between self-congruity and emotional solidarity can also be postulated from the items that make up *communality* and *fairness*, the two factors of the intragroup ESS. *Communality* items primarily highlight how people see others in terms of perceived similarity or felt bondedness. Such perceived similarity is what underpins self-congruity with a destination as tourists are likely to align themselves to the destination when they see others on-site are

comparable to them. *Fairness* takes a step further than *communality* and represents the feeling of equality and righteousness in relationships, but this may also depend on perceived similarity; according to Tajfel and Turner (1988), people are more likely to be fair and respectful to those who view befitting to them (i.e., ingroup bias). As such, the following hypotheses were developed.

H1. South Korean tourists' self-congruity with the DMZ has a positive impact on their feeling of *communality* with other tourists on-site.

H2. South Korean tourists' self-congruity with the DMZ has a positive impact on their feeling of *fairness* with other tourists on-site.

Previous research has indicated a positive relationship exists between emotional solidarity and travel satisfaction. Ribeiro et al. (2017), in their study of international tourists, confirmed that all intergroup ESS factors contributed significantly to travel satisfaction. In another empirical study, Huang and Hsu (2010) found that positive interaction among cruise tourists not only made the cruise experiences more relaxing and informative but also more satisfactory. Notably, Brocato, Voorhees, and Baker (2012) stressed how perceived similarity (i.e., *communality*) between customers in the same service setting can affect how they evaluate their whole service experience. This was also validated in the studies of Choi and Mattila (2016) and Hwang and Han (2015). Perhaps, the most compelling support for the positive influences of *communality* and *fairness* on travel satisfaction can be found within Rihova, Buhalis, Moital, and Gouthro's (2015) model of C2C co-creation in tourism. *Communitas*, according to Turner (1969), is the state of liminality, togetherness (i.e., *communality*), and equality (i.e., *fairness*) between people, and Rihova et al.'s (2015) model suggests tourists in *communitas* would engage in active co-creation where their collective inputs make their experience more satisfactory. Based on the previous research, this study postulated the following relationships.

H3. South Korean DMZ tourists' feeling of *communality* with other DMZ tourists has a positive impact on their travel satisfaction with the destination.

H4. South Korean DMZ tourists' feeling of *fairness* with other DMZ tourists has a positive impact on their travel satisfaction with the destination.

Travel satisfaction is closely related to destination loyalty, and this has made travel satisfaction one of the most popular constructs in tourism research (Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim, Lee, & Sirgy, 2008). Low travel satisfaction is an indication of a destination's failure of ensuring quality products, services, or environments (Bramwell, 1998), and as a result, dissatisfied tourists are less likely to revisit the destination or recommend it to others (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Chen & Chen, 2010; Gursoy, Chen, & Chi, 2014; Kim & Thapa, 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2017). In fact, the importance of travel satisfaction to a destination's success is widely supported, and the relationship between the two constructs may

Table 1
Sociodemographic and travel characteristics of the sample.

Variable/Categories	n (%)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	165 (47.4%)
Female	183 (52.6%)
<i>Age (M = 38.39)</i>	
19 or younger	34 (9.8%)
20–29	78 (22.4%)
30–39	76 (21.8%)
40–49	77 (22.1%)
50 or older	83 (23.9%)
<i>Education completed or pursuing</i>	
Middle school or less	2 (0.6%)
Highschool	39 (11.2%)
2-year college	37 (10.6%)
4-year college	221 (63.5%)
Graduate school	49 (14.1%)
<i>Monthly household income</i>	
1.5 million KRW or less	12 (3.4%)
1.51 million ~ 3 million KRW	53 (15.2%)
3.01 million ~ 4.5 million KRW	82 (23.6%)
4.51 million ~ 6 million KRW	83 (23.9%)
6.01 million ~ 8 million KRW	68 (19.5%)
8.01 million ~ 10 million KRW	34 (9.8%)
10.01 million KRW or more	16 (4.6%)
<i>Family or relatives in North Korea</i>	
Yes	31 (8.1%)
No	317 (91.1%)
<i>Displaced people in the family</i>	
Yes	54 (15.5%)
No	294 (84.5%)
<i>Number of previous visits to the DMZ</i>	
1	178 (51.1%)
2	104 (29.9%)
3 or more	66 (19.0%)
<i>DMZ destinations visited</i>	
Panmunjeom	143 (41.1%)
Imjingak	232 (66.7%)
Dorasan (Mt.) Station	105 (30.2%)
Dorasan (Mt.) Observatory	169 (48.6%)
The 3rd Infiltration Tunnel	149 (42.8%)
Tongilchon (Village)	64 (18.4%)
Camp Grieves	24 (6.9%)
Others	14 (4.0%)
<i>Groups visited with</i>	
Family	193 (55.5%)
Relatives	15 (4.3%)
Friends	81 (23.3%)
Colleagues	36 (10.3%)
Organizations	91 (26.1%)
Alone	15 (4.3%)
Others	4 (1.1%)

as well be “a matter of faith” (Chi & Qu, 2008, p. 624), as demonstrated in Kim and Thapa's (2018) study focused on DMZ tourists. Based on this empirical support, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H5. South Korean DMZ tourists' travel satisfaction with the DMZ has a positive impact on their loyalty to the destination.

3. Methods

3.1. Survey instrument and construct measurements

Self-congruity was measured by four items from Liu, Lin, and Wang's (2012) study across two dimensions (i.e., two items for *actual* and two items for *ideal*). Respondents were asked to rate their self-congruity with the DMZ based on user images. As for emotional solidarity, eight items from Joo and Woosnam's (2019) two-dimensional (i.e., *communality* and *fairness*) intragroup ESS were utilized. To assess how satisfied respondents were with their DMZ tourism experiences, a four-item, unidimensional scale was developed based on Lee et al.'s

(2007) study. Finally, a scale from Ribeiro et al. (2018)—with six items across two dimensions (i.e., *revisit intention* and *likelihood of recommendation*)—was used to capture destination loyalty. All scale items were presented using a five-point Likert scale format, where 1 indicated ‘strong disagreement’ and 5 represented ‘strong agreement’ to a given statement.

3.2. Data collection

The target population in this study was South Korean tourists to the DMZ. To access the target population, Embrain (a survey company based in South Korea) provided a survey respondent panel (hereafter called a ‘panel’) and oversaw the data collection. A panel refers to a group of qualified people who have agreed to complete an online survey instrument voluntarily or for compensation. Since using a panel necessitates collecting data online, it also shares shortcomings of online surveys. However, conducting an on-site survey within the DMZ entails various safety and security issues, so it was considered more appropriate and efficient to use a panel in this study.

Participants of the panel included Koreans who were at least 18 years of age and who had previously visited a DMZ destination as a tourist. To ensure the quality of the data, systematic and rigorous procedures were undertaken when collecting data. For instance, each respondent was cross-checked between his/her legal name and membership ID. If a respondent completed the survey instrument much faster than normally expected or responded with patterns (e.g., 333, 444), the response was automatically discarded. Additionally, the survey instrument was pre-tested using a group of 26 undergraduate tourism majors in a Korean university.

Initially, 3214 individuals accessed the survey instrument administered online, but 2830 provided disqualified (i.e., non-tourists to the DMZ) or incomplete responses. As a result, 384 responses were garnered from the panel. Of the 384 responses, only 348 were used in this study, as 36 responses were further eliminated in the data screening stage due to straight-lined answers, multivariate outliers, or both.

3.3. Data analysis

Prior to analysis, the data were reviewed in SPSS 23.0 for any disengaged responses or multivariate outliers. To detect disengaged responses, the standard deviation of all responses from each respondent was calculated. Once an extremely high (i.e., $z > 2.58$) or small (i.e., $z < -2.58$) standard deviation was found, the researchers looked for oscillation between the two extremes (i.e., 1 and 5) or straight-lined answers. Then, Mahalanobis' distance was consulted to identify any multivariate outliers.

After the data screening, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) were undertaken using Mplus 8.1 following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach. The researchers first undertook CFA to establish a solid measurement model and ensure the psychometric properties of the constructs and factors within the model. Once a satisfactory measurement model was achieved, the hypothesized relationships between the constructs were tested.

4. Results

4.1. Sample overview

As shown in Table 1, slightly more females (52.6%) than males (47.4%) comprised the sample. The sample was 36 years old on average and represented all age groups alike. The sample was relatively well-educated (i.e., more than 70% completed or were pursuing a bachelor's degree or higher) and had high incomes (i.e., almost 60% earned more than 4.51 million KRW each month). About 15% of the sample said that they had a family member who fled from the North, and 8.1% still had

Table 2
Results of the confirmatory factor analysis.

Constructs/factors/items	Loading	Mean	SD
Self-congruity (CR = 0.771; AVE = 0.629)			
<i>Actual</i>			
[SCA ₀₁] The typical visitor of the DMZ is consistent with how I see myself.	0.838	3.35	0.777
[SCA ₀₂] The typical visitor of the DMZ is consistent with how I believe others see me.	0.802	3.463	0.749
<i>Ideal</i>			
[SCI ₀₁] The typical visitor of the DMZ is consistent with how I like to see myself.	0.831	3.05	0.771
[SCI ₀₂] The typical visitor of the DMZ is consistent with how I would like others to see me.	0.772	3.04	0.841
Emotional solidarity - <i>Communality</i> (CR = 0.897; AVE = 0.635)			
[ESC ₀₁] I feel affection toward other DMZ visitors.	0.829	3.14	0.818
[ESC ₀₂] I feel close to other DMZ visitors.	0.852	3.12	0.914
[ESC ₀₃] I have a lot in common with other DMZ visitors.	0.784	3.18	0.910
[ESC ₀₄] I am proud to be welcomed as fellow DMZ visitors.	0.783	2.98	0.901
[ESC ₀₅] I share similar views with other DMZ visitors.	0.732	3.09	0.947
Emotional solidarity - <i>Fairness</i> (CR = 0.821; AVE = 0.605)			
[ESF ₀₁] I treat other DMZ visitors fairly.	0.796	3.39	0.795
[ESF ₀₂] I get along with other DMZ visitors.	0.749	2.94	0.936
[ESF ₀₃] I have respect for other DMZ visitors.	0.787	3.46	0.786
Travel satisfaction (CR = 0.972; AVE = 0.945)			
[SAT ₀₁] Overall, I am satisfied with my experience in the DMZ.	0.828	3.68	0.675
[SAT ₀₂] Compared to my expectations, I am satisfied with my experience in the DMZ.	0.876	3.62	0.759
[SAT ₀₃] Considering my invested time, I am satisfied with my experience in the DMZ.	0.931	3.63	0.758
[SAT ₀₄] Considering my invested effort, I am satisfied with my experience in the DMZ.	0.864	3.54	0.705
Destination loyalty (CR = 0.866; AVE = 0.764)			
<i>Intention to revisit</i>			
[LOY_RV ₀₁] I will visit the DMZ again in the future.	0.802	3.51	0.809
[LOY_RV ₀₂] I will try to visit the DMZ again in the future.	0.829	3.35	0.901
<i>Intention to recommend</i>			
[LOY_RC ₀₁] I will say positive things about the DMZ to others.	0.629	3.73	0.717
[LOY_RC ₀₂] I will post positive comments on SNS about my experience in the DMZ.	0.689	3.26	0.907
[LOY_RC ₀₃] I will recommend others visit the DMZ	0.911	3.46	0.800
[LOY_RC ₀₄] I will encourage family, relatives, and friends to visit the DMZ.	0.932	3.47	0.857

Note. All the items were asked in a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*.

family or relatives living there.

The majority of the sample (51.1%) visited the DMZ only once, while 29.9% made two visits. Only 19.0% said that they engaged in DMZ tourism three or more times. Almost an equal number of first-time ($n = 178$) and repeat ($n = 170$) DMZ tourists were captured in the sample. When asked about the DMZ destinations they visited, about two-thirds (66.7%) of the sample chose Imjingak which was then followed by Dorasan (Mt.) Observatory (48.6%), the 3rd Infiltration Tunnel (42.8%), and Panmunjeom (41.1%).

4.2. Measurement model

Before testing the hypotheses, CFA was conducted to identify a suitable measurement model to the data. All eight factors of the scales were added one after another to form an initial measurement model. This initial model (Table 2), which had all 22 items and no error covariance terms, showed a good fit to the data: $\chi^2_{(df)} = 464.433_{(193)}$, CFI = 0.944, TLI = 0.933, and RMSEA = 0.059 [90% CI: 0.052, 0.065].

Composite Reliability (CR) estimates of the scales ranged from 0.771 (self-congruity) to 0.972 (travel satisfaction) (Table 2), indicating solid internal consistency as per Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010). All factor loadings were greater than 0.50, averaging out to over 0.70 for each factor; also all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). These outcomes supported the convergent validity of the scales (Table 2). Finally, the discriminant validity of the scales was confirmed as the square root of AVE values were greater than their corresponding correlation coefficients (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) (Table 3).

4.3. Structural model and hypothesis testing

To examine the hypotheses, multiple structural models were built

and tested, and the full structural model is presented in Fig. 2. The full model, which included all the hypotheses, showed solid fit index values as per Hu and Bentler (1999): $\chi^2_{(df)} = 542.787_{(198)}$, SRMR = 0.054, CFI = 0.947, TLI = 0.938, and RMSEA = 0.053 [90% CI: 0.047, 0.060].

First of all, direct paths between all constructs were examined. Self-congruity had significant influences on both *communality* ($\beta = 0.918$) (H_1) and *fairness* ($\beta = 0.915$) (H_2). However, only *fairness* demonstrated a meaningful influence on travel satisfaction ($\beta = 0.379$) (H_4), significant at the 0.10 significance level. On the other hand, the path from *communality* to travel satisfaction (H_3) was not significant at all. Finally, travel satisfaction and destination loyalty were significantly related ($\beta = 0.798$) at the 0.01 significance level (H_5).

To examine indirect effects between the constructs, a bias-corrected bootstrap test with 1000 samples was conducted (Cheung & Lau, 2008). Among the six indirect paths considered, only three yielded meaningful results at the 0.05 significance level (Table 4). Self-congruity had a moderate influence on travel satisfaction, with *fairness* serving a mediating role in between the two constructs ($\beta = 0.347$). Likewise, self-congruity indirectly affected destination loyalty via *fairness* and travel satisfaction ($\beta = 0.277$). When *fairness* was considered, it exerted a moderate indirect effect on destination loyalty, mediated by travel satisfaction ($\beta = 0.303$). Confidence intervals did not include 0 for each path, so the mediating effect was determined to be significant (Table 5).

5. Conclusion

5.1. Discussion of the findings

The purpose of this study was to elucidate a) how tourists' self-congruity with a destination translated into their emotional solidarity toward other tourists on-site and b) how this in turn affected their travel satisfaction and destination loyalty. The major assumption was

Table 3
Discriminant validity of the constructs.

	Self-congruity	Communality	Fairness	Travel satisfaction	Destination loyalty
Self-congruity	0.793				
Communality	0.333	0.797			
Fairness	0.299	0.728	0.778		
Travel satisfaction	0.162	0.175	0.204	0.972	
Destination loyalty	0.166	0.277	0.294	0.615	0.874

Note. Squared root of AVE values for each construct are presented in the diagonal line. Correlation coefficients are provided in the off-diagonal matrix.

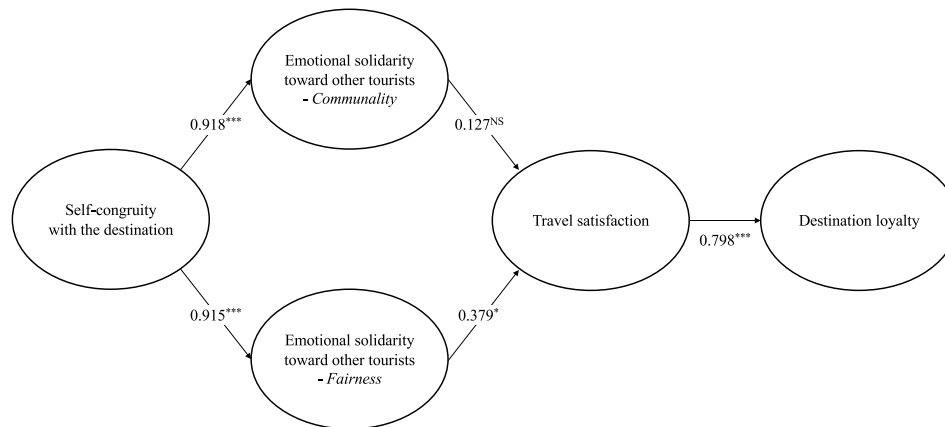


Fig. 2. Results of the full structural model.

Note. *** indicates that the relationship was significant at an $\alpha = 0.01$ level, and * indicates that the relationship was significant at an $\alpha = 0.10$ level, whereas ^{NS} indicates non-significance.

Table 4
Indirect and total effects.

Path	Indirect effect	Total effect
Self-congruity → Travel satisfaction		0.463
Self-congruity → ES - <i>Communality</i> → Travel satisfaction	0.116	
Self-congruity → ES - <i>Fairness</i> → Travel satisfaction	0.347**	
Self-congruity → ES - <i>Communality</i> → Travel satisfaction → Destination loyalty	0.093	0.370
Self-congruity → ES - <i>Fairness</i> → Travel satisfaction → Destination loyalty	0.277**	
<i>Communality</i> → Destination loyalty		0.101
<i>Communality</i> → Travel satisfaction → Destination loyalty	0.101	
<i>Fairness</i> → Destination loyalty		0.303
<i>Fairness</i> → Travel satisfaction → Destination loyalty	0.303**	

Note. ** indicates that the result was significant at an $\alpha = 0.05$ level.

that, in destinations with significant history and collective emotion, tourists are likely to parallel their self-images with those of the destinations (i.e., self-congruity), and this would thereby promote emotional solidarity among tourists which would then enhance travel satisfaction and destination loyalty. For a deeper understanding of the

relationships, *communality* and *fairness* (i.e., ESS factors) were scrutinized for their relationships with other constructs. To this end, this study examined South Korean tourists to the DMZ, the land of collective trauma (i.e., *haan*) and hope (i.e., *Han*) for many Koreans.

This study marks the first instance where the two constructs of self-congruity and emotional solidarity were examined in tandem, and the results suggested that tourists' self-congruity toward the DMZ was strongly related to *communality* and *fairness*, which together represent their emotional solidarity toward other tourists. Given the relatively recent introduction of emotional solidarity in tourism research, little focus has been placed on the association between self-congruity and emotional solidarity. While the two constructs may seem discrete from one another, the results suggest that they are intimately related at least in heritage or border tourism settings. Heritage sites or border areas are laden with historic and emotional meanings which often seem cryptic to those who have little connection (i.e., self-congruity) to the past and the present of the destinations. Especially in the DMZ, tourists develop clearer distinctions between what are relatable to them (e.g., *this side* of the DMZ or us) and what are not (e.g., *that side* of the DMZ or them), and the fact that they share the same space suggests that there is much similarity in between them. In that sense, the intimate links between self-congruity and the emotional solidarity dimensions seem logical.

However, it is interesting that *communality* was not related to travel

Table 5
Bootstrap test results for the indirect effects.

Path	Lower 2.5%	Indirect effect	Upper 2.5%
Self-congruity → ES - <i>Fairness</i> → Travel satisfaction	0.097	0.347**	0.778
Self-congruity → ES - <i>Fairness</i> → Travel satisfaction → Destination loyalty	0.073	0.277**	0.620
ES - <i>Fairness</i> → Travel satisfaction → Destination loyalty	0.074	0.303**	0.621

Note. ** indicates that the result was significant at an $\alpha = 0.05$ level. 1000 bootstrap samples were used for each path.

satisfaction and *fairness* was the only meaningful contributor. This disputes the widely held belief regarding the importance of similarity to people's perceptions and experiences. *Communality* with others is what bonds people together (Turner & Oakes, 1986) and how tourists may judge if a destination is right for them or not (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Also, according to Brocato et al. (2012), customers' view of other customers significantly affects their service experiences. As such, the negligible relationship between *communality* and travel satisfaction comes as a surprise. However, the positive impact of *fairness* on travel satisfaction enables an alternative understanding. Items comprising *fairness* focus more on reciprocal and exquisite feelings such as fairness, respect, or righteousness, which are distinctively different from *communality* items that address a more surficial layer of emotional solidarity. As such, it might be possible in more solemn settings like the DMZ, that the two dimensions of emotional solidarity have diverging influences and only more weighty feelings of *fairness* may remain influential, a possibility suggested also by Woosnam, Aleshinloye, et al. (2016) and Woosnam, Maruyama, et al. (2016).

The indirect effects identified in this study mirror what Hosany and Martin (2012) and Kim and Thapa (2018) found with respect to the relationship between self-congruity and travel satisfaction. In Hosany and Martin's (2012) study, tourist experience was considered a mediator, whereas Kim and Thapa (2018) assigned such a role to perceived value. Although only partial mediation was reported by Kim and Thapa (2018), the results from this and other studies correspond to the self-congruity theory; that the greater the match between self-images and destination images, the more the tourists are satisfied. At the same time, the results suggest that researchers should consider a mediator when using the theory to illustrate tourism phenomena. As Usakli and Baloglu (2011) suggested, self-congruity is not only essential to behavioral outcomes but also emotional and perceptual states and thus permits room for various theoretical expansion.

In this study, travel satisfaction was a significant predictor of destination loyalty and the partial mediator in the relationship between emotional solidarity and destination loyalty. The findings expand what Ribeiro et al. (2017) found in regard to tourists' emotional solidarity toward residents and provide additional evidence for the importance of emotional solidarity in explaining travel satisfaction and destination loyalty. Although this study was the first to consider emotional solidarity among tourists as a determinant of travel satisfaction, the findings are consistent with what has been implied in previous studies (e.g., Rihova et al., 2015). In a confined environment like the DMZ (Huang & Hsu, 2010), positive relationships among tourists can be more crucial in promoting tourist-to-tourist value co-creation, which in turn leads to greater travel satisfaction and destination loyalty (Rihova et al., 2015).

5.2. Theoretical implications

First, by considering self-congruity in tandem with emotional solidarity, this study elucidated their interrelated relationship and collective influence on tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. Self-congruity and emotional solidarity are intimately and causally connected, especially in solemn and historic destinations like the DMZ. It is also noteworthy that only one of the two emotional solidarity dimensions played a meaningful role in shaping the tourist decision-making process. This suggests that different dimensions of emotional solidarity may form a hierarchical structure where one dimension carries more weight than the rest in certain situations.

Initial research by Woosnam (2012) alluded to the potential of emotional solidarity in explaining additional outcome constructs. The current study is one of the first to shed light on how the relationship among on-site tourists can contribute to individuals' satisfaction and what that means for degrees of loyalty to the destination as measured through both intentions to revisit and recommending to others. Longitudinal studies may even consider how such loyalty intention can materialize into actual behavioral loyalty of further visits, as Hosany

and Martin (2012) purports.

Finally, for the first time, this study presented an empirical illustration of emotional solidarity solely among tourists using quantitative research methods. In so doing, this study expands the scope of emotional solidarity (Woosnam et al., 2009) to encompass the relationship among tourists. To date, the notion of emotional solidarity has mostly been used to understand the nature and the role of tourist-resident relationships. However, tourist-to-tourist relationships make up a significant part of travel experiences (Fairley, 2003) and can be increasingly prominent in confined settings like the DMZ (Huang & Hsu, 2010). Given the relationship among tourists is an emerging area in tourism research (Huang & Hsu, 2010), the findings can serve as a reference for future studies.

5.3. Practical implications

First and foremost, emotional solidarity among tourists significantly contributes to a degree of satisfaction with their DMZ experiences, which in turn encourages their intentions to revisit and recommend the destination. As such, DMZ tourism planners and managers need to engage in a number of endeavors to foster greater emotional solidarity between tourists. For example, efforts are needed to create special events and activities held on-site that foster a greater degree of interaction between tourists and create opportunities for increased perceived closeness between tourists (Derrett, 2003). Also, tour guides and interpreters need to engage tourists in activities on-site that focus on historic events between the two Koreas. Doing so can bring tourists together, ultimately contributing to a sense of shared beliefs and behaviors that have been shown to lead to emotional solidarity (Woosnam & Norman, 2010).

Much of emotional solidarity among DMZ tourists is attributable to their self-congruity with the DMZ. Tourists' self-congruity with a destination is highly dependent upon the congruence between them and other tourists (i.e., tourists reflect the destination). Ensuring that each tourist dresses and behaves in ways conforming to others' expectations can enhance both self-congruity and emotional solidarity. For instance, DMZ tourists are required to follow specific dress and behavioral codes for safety, and this can help them feel greater self-congruity with the destination. Obviously, imposing such strict rules is neither viable nor desirable in many destinations as it can interfere with tourists' experiences and undermine their satisfaction. However, placing some instructions or restrictions based on mutual understanding can help to nurture tourists' satisfaction as observed in many religious and heritage sites.

5.4. Study limitations and research suggestions

In an effort to cast a wider net for greater coverage of tourists across numerous DMZ destinations and with various travel experiences, it was deemed appropriate to use a panel when collecting the data. As such, people with any prior visitation experiences to the DMZ were included. No time parameter was indicated so as to be as inclusive as possible of tourists, irrespective of how much time had passed since their visit. An issue with this approach concerns the potential for recall bias and likelihood of generalizability of findings. Assumptions were made by the researchers that all would remember their experiences in the DMZ, having forgotten about little. To allay the potential for such recall concerns, future research should aim to collect data on-site after tourists return from the DMZ. This would allow access to the most recent tourists in efforts to compare findings with the current study.

Future research should incorporate more theoretically-derived constructs into the existing model so that a greater degree of variance may be explained in destination loyalty. Some potential constructs for inclusion can be degree of interaction between tourists on-site (Joo & Woosnam, 2019), psychological attachment (Prayag & Ryan, 2012), quality of visit (Radder & Han, 2013), and quest for authenticity (Yi,

Lin, Jin, & Luo, 2017), each of which has revealed significant relationships with destination loyalty in prior research. Also, it will be insightful to explore how non-Korean tourists to the DMZ feel and think about their experiences in the destination. Relative to Korean tourists, non-Korean tourists are likely to show less emotional attachment and historical understanding of the DMZ. Still, they make up a considerable portion of tourists visiting the DMZ. As such, casting light on non-Koreans to the DMZ and comparing them against Koreans will lead to more a vivid understanding of tourism within the DMZ. In a similar vein, it would be insightful to consider differential influences of generation, gender, or previous visitation. In their studies of Taiwan tourists to China, Chen, Lai, Petrick, and Lin (2016) found that the relationships between international stereotype, destination image, and travel intention showed meaningful differences among those who had prior visits to China and those who had not. Likewise, Chung and Chen (2019) found generational and gender differences in how South Koreans viewed and intended to visit North Korea as tourists.

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