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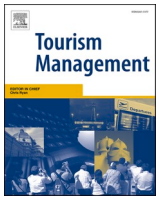

What makes a city cool? Understanding destination coolness and its implications for tourism

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ABSTRACT

Cool cities have an appeal with tourists and destination managers intuitively know that being considered cool pays out. Yet, existing literature does not provide an answer for what 'destination coolness' is and what attributes characterize cool cities. The current research is the first to address these important questions. The author employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative studies to conceptualize destination coolness and thereby identify what makes a city cool in the eyes of tourists: Cool cities are perceived as authentic, rebellious, original and vibrant. In two consecutive quantitative studies, the author develops a multi-dimensional reliable, valid and parsimonious coolness scale, and documents its importance for research and practice empirically. Coolness is an important driver behind relevant attitudinal and behavioral phenomena, such as intention and actual visit behavior, a destination's social return and city-self connection. The author concludes by explaning the implications of the study and paving new research avenues.

1. Introduction

Cool cities, such as Berlin, New York or Amsterdam attract millions of tourists every year. Tourists seemingly love 'cool' cities and long for visiting them, possibly also because such trips cut a nice figure in travelers' social media profiles. Cool cities exert a pull on tourists that is often difficult to explain with existing management tools, particularly when one city becomes cool overnight and another, long viewed cool, city looses its appeal. Thus, being considered as cool can be a unique asset of a city or even country. Not only tourists want to stay in cool cities; students, employees and companies alike seem to be drawn toward cool cities. Similarly, 'uncool' cities are considered as boring and thus struggle to attract tourists. Likewise, media outlets of different colors call cities or countries 'cool', such as in The Economist's title story on 'Cool Germany' (2018). Notwithstanding the importance of coolness for destinations, the potentially strong influence of coolness on tourists' decision-making, and hence the academic and practical importance thereof, existing research is scant of examinations of a coolness factor. Thus, the question of what makes a cool city, and whether and how coolness perceptions shape tourist decision-making remains unanswered. While coolness is a quality desired by countries, cities, hotels or restaurants, it is not widely understood in academia and very few tourism managers have an idea of how to make their product cool.

The dearth of tourism research on coolness is in part explainable by the intuitive yet impalpable nature of this concept: While almost every layperson knows when things are cool or uncool (i.e., easy to judge), people struggle, including researchers, to clearly articulate what coolness is and what it derives from (i.e., hard to define). Thus, our understanding of coolness is prototypical and therefore prevents theoretical examinations and practical applications. Existing tourism research has recently intensified efforts to understand the symbolic meanings of destinations as a determinant of destination choice, such as the social return of a destination (Boley, Jordan, Kline, & Knollenberg, 2018), ethnocentric biases (Kock, Josiassen, Assaf, Karpen, & Farrelly, 2019) or a destination's personality (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). These studies and others document that symbolic destination factors play a complementary role to functional factors that existing research has often empirically examined in the form of destination image (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kock, Josiassen, & Assaf, 2016). Contributing to this research stream that examines symbolic factors of destination choice, the present research sets out to examine what constitutes coolness in tourists' eyes and how it affects tourist behavior.

This research contributes to existing literature by combining a developed theoretical model of coolness with a qualitative pre-study to identify characteristics that tourists associate with cool cities. Based on these insights, this research develops and validates a reliable, valid and parsimonious higher-order measure of destination coolness in two consecutive empirical studies. It is found that cool cities are those that

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are perceived as authentic, rebellious, original and vibrant. This research empirically documents that this measure is able to distinguish cool from uncool cities, and to predict various managerially relevant dependent variables. Nomological tests show that coolness is related to tourists' intention to visit, and actual visits of the city, as well as intention to recommend and willingness to pay a higher price to go to that city. Further, this research finds that coolness also predicts the perceived social return of the city as well as tourists' city-self connection, and concludes by developing a large set of implications that can enhance future research and tourism practice.

2. Introducing cool destinations

2.1. Integrating coolness in existing tourism research

In a globalized world, tourists can choose from a myriad of potential destinations when planning their next trip. This development opens up new opportunities for destinations to attract tourists but also increases fierce competition for tourists between destinations. In response, tourism research has devoted considerable attention to understand how tourists choose their next holiday destination. Most approaches rest on the notion that destination choice is rooted in objective and functional destination quality criteria that tourists associate with the respective destination. This stream of research is prominently represented in the seminal concepts of destination imagery and image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kock et al., 2016), and continues to contribute to tourism research and practice in significant ways. Yet, complementary to these efforts, studies (e.g. Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, & Preciado, 2013; Moran et al., 2018) document that tourists' destination choice is also affected by symbolic assets of and socio-cultural meanings attributed to the destination. While coolness perceptions and their role in understanding tourist decision-making is yet to be examined in tourism research, existing studies increasingly examine symbolic factors to understand tourist behavior.

Among these efforts, I identify two important streams of research that the current study contributes to. First, one stream of research investigates symbolic, emotional and non-functional aspects of a destination and how they impact tourists' destination choice. In contrast to destination image studies that often deal with functional aspects of the destination (e.g., infrastructure, price level or safety), this stream investigates, among other things, a destination's personality (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006), destination affect (Kock et al., 2016), destination attachment (Hou, Lin, & Morais, 2005), destination affinity (Josiassen, Kock, & Norfelt, 2020), destination values (Ye, Lee, Sneddon, & Soutar, 2019), destination experience (Barnes, Mattsson, & Sørensen, 2014) or destination self-congruity (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Among studies in this stream of research, only two are identified that make mention of the destination attribute 'cool' (Pan, Zhang, Gursoy, & Lu, 2017; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), and both drop the item for statistical reasons. Also, these studies did not develop coolness conceptually but adopted it from an existing marketing conceptualization (Aaker, 1997). In addition, one recent study (Chen & Chou, 2019) examines coolness as an experimental state of young tourists in creative tourism. While that study uses coolness conceptualizations from existing research, it does not investigate, neither conceptually nor empirically, what characteristics make a cool destination. In conclusion, this literature stream is lacking in examinations of what coolness means in a tourism context, and specifically a validated instrument that can capture the component characteristics of destination coolness and quantify its effects on tourist behavior.

The second research stream that this study connects with and seeks to enhance, encompasses efforts that examine the social return and signaling value of destinations. This burgeoning research stream considers travel as a means of conspicuous consumption, that is, a means to signal or elevate one's own status and social standing by communicating trips to desirable destinations. Importantly, the emergence of conspicuous travel is fueled by social media which allows travelers to share their trips with others in conspicuous ways, such as through social media postings. The concept of conspicuous consumption dates back to Thorstein Veblen's classic treatise The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899) and has been frequently used in marketing research (e.g., Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010). In tourism research, initial studies have examined the social return of a destination (Boley et al., 2018), conspicuous travel patterns (Correia, Kozak, & Reis, 2016), prestige sensitivity of tourists (Kucukergin, Kucukergin, & Dedeoglu, 2020) and a destination's and brand's prestige and status (Correia & Kozak, 2012; Hwang & Lee, 2019). While these studies have contributed to our understanding on conscpicuous travel, it is yet to be examined what makes a destination a conspicuous or prestigious one, thus offering a social return. I suggest that cities considered as cool may be very attractive for conspicuous travelers. Hence, the examination of cool destinations can potentially enhance this research stream by testing whether coolness increases perceived social return of destinations.

2.2. Conceptualizing destination coolness

Many people know what is cool and what is not; they use the adjective 'cool' to describe all kinds of tangible or intagible objects (which I refer to as psychological objects) that they subjectively judge as cool, ranging from cool people (e.g., George Clooney) and cool brands (e.g., Apple) to cool cities (e.g., Berlin). However, conceptualizing or defining coolness, and particularly what makes things cool, is more difficult. While considerations of coolness are absent in the tourism literature, psychology and marketing research is devoting increasing efforts to examine the constituting components of coolness. I base my conceptualization of cool destinations on Warren and Campbell's (2014, p. 544) definition of coolness as "a subjective and dynamic, socially constructed positive trait attributed to cultural objects inferred to be appropriately autonomous". This definition implies five important facets of coolness (Anik, Miles, & Hauser, 2017; Warren, Batra, Loureiro, & Bagozzi, 2019): subjective, dynamic, socially constructed, positive and autonomous. First, coolness is subjective because it lies in the eye of the beholder what is cool and what is not. Thus, it is a perception that exists at the individual level, and should therefore be operationalized as an individual-level latent variable. Second, coolness is dynamic (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012), and what is cool today may be uncool tomorrow, or the other way round. This dynamic is exemplified through countless media releases that claim, for example, that 'Detroit Is Cool Again' (Ager, 2013) or Kochi's 'newfound coolness' (Lonely Planet, 2020).

Third, coolness is socially constructed, implying that individual perceptions of coolness parallel an impression that the cool or hip object is shared among smaller or bigger social reference groups. For example, several subcultures such as electronic music may consider Detroit as a cool city while a larger mainstream may consider New York as cool. Accordingly, coolness is similar to other socially constructed traits, such as social status and popularity (Hollander, 1958). Fourth, cool is a positively valenced attribute. Accordingly, people use positive adjectives when asked to describe cool people (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012) or brands (Warren et al., 2019). Indeed, the adjective cool may be considered unambigously positive, distinguishing it from other, more ambiguous attributes (e.g., cheap or touristy) that tourists use to describe destinations (Kock et al., 2016). Fifth, coolness implies a connotation of autonomy (Pountain & Robins, 2000). Autonomy is an object's willingness and ability to be self-determined and different rather than to conform with and be dependent on others' opinions and expectations (Warren & Campbell, 2014).

Going beyond conceptual cornestones of coolness, researchers in various disciplines have started to conceptualize and empirically validate component characteristics of coolness, that is, the content of coolness. Suggesting that coolness is a personality trait, Dar-Nimrod et al. (2012) distinguish between two dimensions of coolness which they label cachet and contrarian coolness. While cachet comprises attributes such as friendliness, attractiveness and competence, contrarian

comprises attributes such as rebelliousness and roughness. Examining coolness of technology products, Sundar, Tamul, and Wu (2014) develop a three-dimensional coolness concept, consisting of attractiveness, originality and subcultural appeal. Further, Warren et al. (2019) suggest brand coolness to consist of 10 dimensions. While these studies have significantly contributed to a better understanding of what makes a cool person, product or brand, they also document that coolness components vary with its context. For example, while friendliness is an important facet of coolness perceptions of people (e.g., Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012; Horton, Read, Fitton, Little, & Toth, 2012), it is absent from coolness perceptions of brands (Warren et al., 2019). It thus remains unclear what the constituent factors of cool destinations are because destinations are complex amalgams of different components such as residents, architecture or culture. In response, I now set out to investigate what makes a cool city through a qualitive pre-study that features depth interviews with tourists. I then discuss these qualitative findings in light of the existing coolness literature, and the dimensions conceptualized therein, in order to arrive at component characteristics of cool cities that can be tested empirically.

2.3. Pre-study: understanding what makes cool cities

In order to uncover the component characteristics of cool destinations and what makes them 'cool' in the eyes of tourists, 18 depth interviews were conducted with informants from the US (10) and Germany (8) that lasted between 20 and 45 min. This research uses depth interviews instead of focus groups because they often provide more detailed and deeper insights and are often less subject to social desirability (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Informants were recruited through two domestic online forums by randomly asking users whether they would participate in an interview about travel. The participation was voluntary and no financial incentives were offered. Informants were asked three specific questions in the following order: 1) 'Can you name cool (uncool) cities?', 2) What makes this city cool (uncool)?', and 3) 'Would you want to visit this cool city? If yes, why?'. While the interviews with the US informants were conducted in English, the interviews with the German informants were conducted in German. Germans use the English word "cool" in a similar way as native speakers, thus making data comparable. In the next step, comments were sorted into dimensions and interpreted vis-à-vis dimensions that existing research on coolness has identified. Five themes emerged through this method, and I discuss them now.

Authentic. Informants in the interviews frequently described cool cities as authentic in the sense of being 'non artificial', 'historically grown' and 'staying true to themselves'. While this view on authenticity has not been explicitly mentioned in tourism research, it shares similarities with the authenticity theme of continuity (Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015). Informants also described cool cities as those that behave in line with their values and do not pretend to be what they are not. Interestingly, this perspective of understanding authenticity as an idiosyncratic feature of the destination differs from the dominant view on authenticity in tourism research which focuses on the authenticity of the tourist experience (Farrelly, Kock and Josiassen 2019; Cohen & Cohen, 2012) but not on the perceived authenticity of a destination itself. Similarly, informants described uncool cities as 'artificial' or 'imitating cool cities'. The link between authenticity and coolness is supported by exisiting research on coolness (Nancarrow, Nancarrow, & Page, 2003).

Rebellious. Another characteristic that respondents used to describe cool cities is rebellious. Rebellious cities deviate from the norm, decide not to play by the rules and are seen as revolutionary in one way or the other. It emerged from the interviews that individuals infer these judgments from actions or viewpoints of the city, popular residents or historical events. For example, one informant outlined that San Francisco is cool because of its rebellious image rooted in Harvey Milk's legacy and the LGBT movement. Another informant noted that Belfast is rebellious because of its role in the Northern Ireland Conflict ('The Troubles'). Existing research has also linked coolness with rebellion and autonomy (Connor, 1995; Pountain & Robins, 2000), including research that finds autonomy to be intrinsic to coolness (Warren & Campbell, 2014), thus substantiating this component. Importantly, being rebellious is fundamentally different from being authentic because a city can stay true to itself and follow its values, without necessarily doing so in a rebellious way. In a similar vein, a city can be rebellious and be considered authentic at the same time. Consequently, these theoretical considerations indicate that rebellious and authentic may correlate in some, but not in other instances.

Subcultural/Original. Informants often linked cool cities to specific culturally unique movements, including music (Jazz – New Orleans), sports (football – Liverpool), philosophy (yoga – Rishikesh) or cuisine (nordic cuisine – Copenhagen). For example, one informant explained the coolness of Berlin as stemming from its electronic music scenes, and another associated Sydney's and Honolulu's coolness with their local surf cultures. While many of the mentioned cities can be considered as 'mainstream cool', they are still reminiscent of and maintain links to the subcultures originating from them. These observations indicate that there are many forms of subcultures which led me to attempt to find a common denominator among them. Thus, I followed up on mentions of subcultural meaning by probing to elicit what these associations give cause to. This step yielded the insight that the subcultures elicit a connotation of originality. Thus, considering a city as being the origin of a subculture or culture movement attributes uniqueness to the city and makes it original, consequently contributing to perceptions of coolness. As such, a city's originality stems from the subcultural value that it encompasses, and this value constitues an idiosyncratic, and thus hard to copy, facet of city coolness.

This notion is also substantiated by existing research documenting that cool psychological objects such as people are often tied to subcultures that are perceived as original (Danesi, 1994; Fiske, 2010). Being original encompasses a notion of uniqueness which is acquired through the subcultural identity of the city. As such, being original is fundamentally different from being authentic which rests on the notion of being true to itself, yet, these two dimensions share commonalities as they can reciprocally cause each other.

Symbolic. Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that cool cities are symbols in the sense that they connote meaning to and are valued by individuals. Hence, cool cities are often seen as icons of specific values, memories, movements, historical events, identities or worldviews. For example, one respondent indicated that the US, and New York in particular, are a symbol of unlimited opportunities and meritocracy, and another described Scandinavia, and Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm in particular, as a symbol of sustainability. Also, one said that "Berlin is a symbol for unity and freedom", a meaning that is also actively contrived by Berlin's tourism organization (Visit Berlin), calling Berlin the 'city of freedom'. The understanding of cities as symbols is a conceptually distinct source of coolness, yet, it may covary with other dimensions. For example, a city could derive its coolness from a symbolic event which is also considered as original to the city. The symbolic meaning of a psychological object has also received some attention in marketing research that documents the importance of symbolism for brands (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Morhart et al., 2015).

Vibrant. It also became apparent that cool cities are described as dynamic, active, energetic and lively, in other words: having a vibrant city life. Buzzing cities were often described as cool, for example, when one respondent indicated that 'London has its finger on the pulse of the time'. This perception is also evident in the expression 'The City That Never Sleeps', coined by Frank Sinatra for describing New York. The connotation of vibrant resonates well with coolnees being understood as something new and contemporary that exists in the state of becoming, rather than being (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012).

To summarize, the interviews yielded five component characteristics that, in the eyes of the informants asked in the interviews, make a city

cool. Being dimensions of an underlying latent coolness concept, they share natural communalities. These characteristics mirror efforts in existing research on coolness. Yet, the results are also insightful because they indicate clear differences in what makes a city cool compared to other psychological objects, such as cool people or cool brands, thereby highlighting the need to develop a tourism-specific coolness measure. First, the interviews yield that cool cities are not necesssarily the glamorous or exclusive ones; a finding that is in contrast to other research documenting that consumers consider glamorous brands to be cool (Warren et al., 2019). Indeed, many cool cities that informants mentioned are explicitly not glamorous (e.g., Belfast, Nashville, Barcelona) while other, more glamorous cities (e.g., Monaco, Las Vegas) were mentioned as uncool cities. Second, having aesthetic appeal did not emerge as a descriptor of cool cities. This observation is in contrast to existing research that finds cool brands to have aesthetic appeal (Warren et al., 2019). However, as for cities, having aesthetic appeal (such as through architecture) is likely not enough to be considered as cool. Likewise, the absence of aesthetic appeal of a city is unlikely to undermine its coolness. Lastly, and somewhat counterintuitive, cool cities are not necessarily those that are considered as youthful or new. For example, two informants described Dubai as uncool particularly because it is new.

3. Study 1: scale development and validation

The reported qualitative pre-study demonstrates the need and paves the way for the development of a tourism-specific coolness measure. While research has started to empirically uncover the coolness of people (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012), brands (Warren et al., 2019) and technological products (Sundar et al., 2014), the constituent dimensions of what makes a city cool differ, thus, making a tailored destination coolness scale welcome and necessary. Following and enhancing established scale development procedures in tourism research (e.g., Kock, Josiassen, & Assaf, 2019a), an initial itempool was generated from two different sources. Specifically, this study drew on the insights from the interviews, as well as the existing coolness literature to develop a preliminary item pool for the identified five dimensions. This pool consisted of 34 items, of which 22 were adapted from existing research and the remaining items were derived from the qualitative interviews (and in several cases, items generated in the conducted interviews were corroborated by existing research). All items were judged for potential item redundancy and nine duplicate items were dropped. All items were judged for face and content validity by assessing how well they reflect the construct and not another construct (assessment of face validity), and how well they reflect the full content of the measure (assessment of content validity). After this procedure, 24 items remained in the item pool for further statistical analyses (please see Appendix 1 for details on all 24 items and their source).

3.1. Data collection procedure

In order to develop a destination coolness measure, a questionnaire with the 24 destination coolness items was designed. In addition, this study also included a global one-item measure of destination coolness ('Overall, I personally think that this city is cool'; measured on a 7-point ordinal scale), one item each for willingness to visit, intention to provide positive word-of-mouth and willingness to pay (Kock et al., 2016), and the demographics gender, age and education. Respondents were first asked to name any city that they consider to be a cool city, and then to answer the 24 items with that city in mind. Then, they were also asked to name an uncool city, and then to answer the same 24 coolness items.

This questionnaire was distributed among a sample of US respondents that was recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) online panel. MTurk, like other crowdsourcing online panels, is characterized by a large number of sufficiently diverse respondents and research indicates that it is of equal or higher data quality than student samples or street intercepts (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017). I purposely chose a diverse online panel over a thematic one that consists of tourists only for two reasons. First, limiting the sample to a specific group could have potentially imposed biases and confounders such as an over-representation of experienced travelers, affluent participants or those with a high openness to experience. Second, the phenomenon of coolness is not only relevant for those who are active travelers but also for those who are not travelling yet, as well as for consumers more broadly. Only respondents 18 or older, with sufficient travel funds (annual household income > $30.000) and who have travelled significant distances before (>70 miles (113 km) in the last two years) were invited to proceed to the questionnaire (Boley et al., 2018).

The most active respondents in the panel (i.e, most active 10%) were excluded, thereby controlling for non-naïvety (Rand, 2018). Further, an intentional manipulation check ('Please select agree as the answer here'; 7-point ordinal scale; Paas, Dolnicar, & Karlsson, 2018) was interspersed throughout the questionnaire in order to detect and prevent satisficing, straight-lining or other biasing response behavior (Barber, Barnes, & Carlson, 2013). Respondents from the sample who provided a wrong answer to the manipulation check question were deleted (38 respondents; 6.8% of total respondents). After cleaning the sample from manipulation check violations, completed questionnaires from 520 respondents were obtained. This sample size is adequate for the parameters this research intends to estimate (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Table 1 shows the characteristics of this sample, as well as characteristics of all other samples used in this research.

3.2. Operationalizing destination coolness

This study operationalized destination coolness as a higher-order construct that is reflective at the first and second order for three reasons. First, based on the conceptualization and conducted interviews, initial evidence exists to view coolness as a latent that manifests in each of the identified dimensions rather than being formed by it. Second, coolness, in contrast to formative constructs in tourism research (e.g., destination imagery; Kock et al., 2016) can be easily articulated by tourists, and hence is not a mere theoretical construct formed by its dimensions and theory. Third, modelling destination coolness as a reflective construct circumvents potential shortcomings that a formative measurement model could pose, such as limitations in interpreting the model's weights, high covariances among items or the lack of fit indices when estimated through a partial-least-squares approach.

Table 1
Sample characteristics.

Sample	Qualitative Pre-Study	Study 1: EFA	Study 1: CFA	Study 2: Nomological
Sample size	18	260	260	533
Age (%)				
18–25 years	33.3	14.2	18.1	12.9
26–39 years	33.3	63.3	50.4	52.0
40–55 years	27.8	16.9	25.8	28.0
>55 years	5.6	6.5	5.8	7.1
Gender (%)				
Female	44.4	43.1	44.6	43.0
Male	55.6	56.9	55.4	57.0
Education (%)				
Finished a master's degree or higher		19.6	12.7	15.8
Finished a bachelor's degree		54.6	52.3	55.5
Enrolled at university		10.0	14.2	9.9
Finished secondary school		15.0	17.7	16.5
Finished primary school		0.8	3.1	2.3

3.3. Exploratory factor analysis

The analysis began by assessing the 24 items obtained for the self-selected cool city with an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using maximum-likelihood in combination with a Promax rotation. In contrast to a Varimax rotation, a Promax rotation does not assume orthogonal factors, and hence matches the conceptualization of coolness better because its dimensions are likely to share some variance (a key assumption of higher-order reflective measurement models; Bagozzi, 2011). An EFA on the first half of the sample (n = 260) was conducted. This analysis met Bartlett's test of sphericity (BTS) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) criterion (KMO = 0.890; BTS = 3678.869; d. f. = 276, p = .000). In order to determine how many factors to retain, a parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) was conducted because the heavily used Kaiser–Guttman criterion (i.e., the retention of factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00) is often inaccurate in identifying the correct number of factors (Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006). The parallel analysis, similar to the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, yielded five factors, in support of the conceptualization and the qualitative pre-study that destination coolness is multi-dimensional.

I started by evaluating all coolness items consecutively along four criteria. First, I scrutinized factor loadings and item-to-total correlations sequentially, using 0.4 and 0.5 as the critical thresholds, and deleted those below the threshold (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Second, I also eliminated those items that cross-loaded onto multiple factors or did not load highly onto the factor they were intended to load (i.e., factor loadings of < 0.5). Third, very high inter-item correlations indicated item redundancy, and therefore also resulted in the deletion of items. Fourth, for each item, I tested whether its deletion would increase the composite reliability of the respective factor (and not Cronbach alpha which is sometimes inappropriately used for this procedure but suffers from sensitivity toward the number of items used). These four item-elimination steps resulted in the removal of eight items (see Appendix 1 for more details on the evaluation of each item).

The EFA indicated that the items that were intended to load on the 'symbolic' factor, did not load as intended or loaded on the 'original' factor. Given these cross-loadings between the symbolic and original factor, I further scrutinized the possibility of merging these two. While statistical parameters can be indicative, such a decision has to be based also on and be justified with the qualitative grounds that were obtained earlier in this research. Recall that the symbolic component conveys that a city connotes meaning to individuals and is seen as a symbol (for something) by the informants. Also recall that the original component describes the city as being unique in the sense of being the origin of a culturally meaningful entity (such as a subculture). These considerations obtained through the qualitative interviews draw obvious parallels between the two components. Specifically, a symbolic meaning is arguably also considered to be original (otherwise it would not be considered as symbolic). In addition, the subcultural entities from which the originality perceptions often stemmed in the interviews are also likely conveying symbolic meaning. Thus, one can invoke both statistical and qualitative evidence to conclude that the symbolic and original perceptions are often intertwined and occupy the same meaning structures in tourists' minds. Hence, it was decided to merge the symbolic and original factor. In conclusion, the EFA yielded four factors with four items in each factor.

3.4. Confirmatory factor analysis

I then conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the second half of the sample (n = 260) in order to assess the dimensionality and validity of the developed destination coolness scale. Like the EFA, this analysis has been conducted on the data obtained on the self-selected cool city. However, the parameters of items obtained on the self-selected uncool city are also reported in Table 2 in order to demonstrate that the developed scale also performs well for measuring uncool cities. In accordance with the conceptualization of destination coolness as a reflective multi-dimensional measure, I estimated a model with the four factors *vibrant*, *authentic*, *rebellious* and *original*. In this hierarchical model, the four factors are distinct, yet related constructs that are concrete reflective manifestations of the higher-order destination coolness construct. While all 16 items loaded satisfactorily on their respective factors, model fit indices indicated that the measurement model could benefit from further purification. Thus, in order to develop a more parsimonious scale while retaining reliability and validity (Wieland, Kock, & Josiassen, 2018), I conducted an iterated χ^2-difference test procedure. In this step, the item with the lowest item-to-factor correlation is selected and deleted, stopping only when the χ^2-difference test indicated no difference or the adjusted goodness-of-fit index did not increase. Each time an item was dropped, it was reassured that its deletion would not impair the content validity of its respective factor. Four more items were deleted through this procedure, leaving three items in each of the four factors. All items met the assumptions of multivariate normality of covariance-based analyses (Appendix 1 includes kurtosis, skewness, means and standard deviations for all items). Further, no variance inflation factor of any item exceeded the strict threshold of 3.3, thereby indicating that the analysis was unlikely to be impaired by multicollinearity.

Table 2
CFA factor loadings and parameters.

Factor/Items	Item Means		Item Factor Loadings		CR		AVE	
	cool	uncool	cool	uncool	cool	unc.	cool	unc.
Authentic			.69	.50	.88	.91	.73	.77
… is authentic.	5.90	4.42	.75	.86				
… doesn't seem artificial.	5.45	4.34	.71	.78				
… is true to its roots.	5.83	4.50	.85	.80				
Rebellious			.34	.80	.90	.95	.74	.86
… is nonconformist.	4.84	3.61	.89	.89				
… has revolutionary spirit.	4.93	3.47	.72	.88				
… is edgy.	5.17	3.48	.73	.89				
Original			.97	.94	.83	.91	.62	.77
… is original.	5.95	3.81	.74	.81				
… stands apart from the crowd.	5.91	3.63	.71	.88				
… is iconic.	6.03	3.70	.69	.78				
Vibrant			.75	.86	.89	.93	.73	.81
… is outgoing.	5.92	3.80	.85	.82				
… is vibrant.	6.10	3.63	.85	.86				
… is lively.	6.12	4.04	.82	.86				

Notes: The items are introduced as 'With this cool city in mind, please indicate now how you would describe it' and scored on a seven-point ordinal scale (1 = "strongly disagree"; 7 = "strongly agree").

Table 2 shows all final scale items, their respective factor loadings (as lambdas), item means, as well as composite reliabilities and average variance extracted (AVE) of all factors. The fit of the measurement model estimated in covariance-based structural equation modelling (AMOS 26) was good (χ^2/df = 2077; confirmatory fit index [CFI] = 0.958; Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = 0.945; root mean squared error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.064; standardized root mean residual [SRMR] = 0.048), thereby indicating that the measurement model satisfies conventional tests of adequacy. All first-order factor loadings are sufficiently high, ranging from 0.69 to 0.89. The composite reliabilities (CR) of the four factors ranged from 0.83 to 0.95, and the AVE ranged from 0.62 to 0.86 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), thereby documenting the reliability, and convergent validity respectively, of the measure and its four factors (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Further, Table 2 also reports higher-order factor loadings of each dimension, indicated as underlined loadings. In order to assess the construct validity (Peter, 1981) of the new destination coolness measure, covariances between the new scale and a one-item global coolness measure were estimated. The covariances are considerable, with 0.61 for the cool, and 0.79 for the uncool cities, thereby documenting, in support of the qualitative data, that the higher-order measure indeed captures coolness and not another concept.

3.5. Assessment of the dimensional structure

I continued by assessing the dimensional structure of destination coolness through testing of the discriminant validity of the four factors and competitive measurement models. Again, the data obtained on the self-selected cool cities was used. The first indication of discriminant validity between the four factors was obtained through the Fornell-Larcker criterion (1981). The AVE of all factors is higher than the pairwise squared estimated correlation for all possible pairs of constructs (Table 3). In addition, all pairwise squared estimated correlations are below the threshold of 0.85. Thus, this heuristic indicates discriminant validity. Further, the correlational matrix of the four factors (Table 3) shows that correlations range between 0.138 (for the pair authentic-vibrant) and 0.567 (for the pair original-vibrant), thereby indicating that the factors do indeed correlate (a requirement for second-order reflective constructs) but do not correlate highly (another requirement for higher-order constructs).

In order to benchmark the multi-dimensional structure against other measurement models, a one-factor non-hierarchical model was tested in which the items do not reflect a dimensional structure of brand coolness but are direct reflective manifestations thereof. The fit of this model was not satisfactory and considerably worse than the developed higher-order structure (χ^2/df = 10,459; CFI = 0.605; TLI = 0.517; RMSEA = 0.191; SRMR = 0.1293). Because the two models have the same covariance structure and are therefore nested, I conducted a χ^2−difference test which indicated the superiority of the higher-order model ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 460,952, Δdf = 4, $p < 0.01$). In addition, Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) was considerably lower for the multi-dimensional model (159,843 < 612,795), thereby further indicating its superiority. These results, in conjunction with the goodness-of-fit indeces, show that coolness is appropriately modeled as four distinct, concrete representations of a single higher-order coolness construct.

Table 3
Correlational matrix and Fornell-Larcker Criterion parameters (in parentheses).

	Authentic	Original	Rebellious	Vibrant
Authentic	(.852)			
Original	.546** (.535)	(.784)		
Rebellious	.138 ** (.145)	.293** (.287)	(.859)	
Vibrant	.426** (.429)	.567** (.548)	.276** (.274)	(.854)

Note: ** = p < .01.

3.6. Comparing cool and uncool cities

I continued by testing whether the scale can reliably distinguish between cool and uncool cities. Another CFA was conducted on the items obtained in the uncool self-selected city condition. This CFA documents that the dimensional structure also holds for uncool cities as factor loadings of all respective items are above 0.7 on their respective factors (Table 2). Both CR's and AVE's for all factors are satisfactory, being above 0.7 and 0.5 respectively. Further, the Fornell-Larcker criterion (1981) indicates discriminant validity between the dimensions. As can be seen in Table 2, the means of all coolness items along the four factors are considerably lower for uncool cities compared to cool cities. Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare the average ratings for the cool versus uncool cities across all items. These tests confirm that the cities that respondents nominated as being cool were perceived to be significantly more authentic (Mean cool = 5.73, Mean uncool = 4.42; p < .000), rebellious (Mean cool = 4.98, Mean uncool = 3.52; p < .000), original (Mean cool = 5.96, Mean uncool = 3.50; p < .000) and vibrant (Mean cool = 6.05, Mean uncool = 3.83; p < .000) than those they nominated as uncool. These results document that the developed coolness scale can reliably distinguish between cool and uncool cities.

3.7. Predictive validity

The analysis proceeded by testing whether coolness is a factor that can determine important outcome variables, that is, tourists' attitudes toward the destination. Testing how well a newly developed construct can explain variance in relevant outcome variables is crucial to document its importance because "scales are only as good as their usefulness to identify and explain pressing phenomena" (Kock, Josiassen, & Assaf, 2019b, p. 1227). Hence, a structural model was estimated in which the higher-order coolness construct served as the independent variable, and willingness to visit (WTV), intention to provide positive word-of-mouth (WOM) and willingness to pay (WTP) a higher price for visiting the respective city served as the endogenous dependent variables. It is suggested that higher destination coolness should increase all three dependent variables. This structural model was estimated with the global sample (n = 520), and fits the data well: χ^2/df = 3846; CFI = 0.925; TLI = 0.908; RMSEA = 0.074; SRMR = 0.0517. The analysis documents that destination coolness relates significantly to all three outcomes, with large effect sizes. Specifically, the path coefficients are 0.69 (p = .000) for WTV, 0.65 (p = .000) for WOM, and 0.45 (p = .000) for WTP. This result documents that destination coolness can significantly predict outcomes that are relevant to consider for both academics and tourism practitioners.

4. Study 2: nomological analysis

Study 1 has empirically developed and validated the new destination coolness scale. Yet, the contribution of a newly developed scale is best to be documented by testing important consequences and correlates thereof (Kock et al., 2019b). In response to this notion and with the purpose of documenting how the new scale can be related to and explain important tourism phenomena, Study 2 sets out to identify important consequences of the coolness scale, along with relevant covariates.

4.1. Nomological model development

Social Return. The first variable included in the questionnaire is social return, referred to as the perceived amount of positive social appreciation that one's travel to a destination generates (Boley et al., 2018). In recent years, researchers have shown increasing interest in understanding travel as a means of conspicuous consumption. Empowered by social media and thus the ease of sharing travel experiences online, tourists are able to utilize their trips (commonly pictures or videos thereof) as conspicuous signals to elevate their own social standing

among their peer groups. While pioneering studies in tourism have started to investigate this important development (e.g., Boley et al., 2018; Correia et al., 2016), it is yet to be examined what makes a destination a conspicuous one with a high social return. I put forward that the coolness of a destination should have a positive impact on its perceived social return. This is because cool cities are associated with the desirable attributes of originality, authenticity and being rebellious and vibrant, thus, attributes that a traveler may consider attractive to communicate in order to signal status online. Therefore testing whether cool cities are also the ones that promise a high social return, and are thus attractive to be talked about on social media, is both theoretically and managerially relevant.

City-self connection. Existing research in marketing (e.g., Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012) and tourism (e.g., Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Sirgy & Su, 2000) indicates that individuals can build strong relationships with psychological objects such as brands or destinations. Such strong relationships serve self-defining, self-verifying or self-enhancing goals for the individual (e.g., Escalas and Bettman 2005; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010), and are a key driver of managerially relevant outcomes, such as buying intention and loyalty. Thus, understanding what can increase self-object connections, and specifically self-destination connections, is of importance for both researchers and managers interested in understanding tourist decision-making. I put forward that city-self connection is a direct response, and thus a consequence of how cool an individual perceives the respective city to be. Coolness of cities comprises the symbolic aspects of a city such as authenticity and symbolism, thus aspects that are likely to resonate with a tourist's self-image and aspirational self-reference. While other aspects of a destination, particularly the functional and often interchangeable aspects that are commonly captured in its destination image (such as price level, tourism infrastructure or weather), are unlikely to address a tourist's self-realization aspirations, coolness is likely to do so. I thus hypothesize that coolness drives tourists' city-self connection.

In addition to these two dependent variables, a number of important covariates are included. Testing these allows to further scrutinize the validity of the developed scale, vis-à-vis existing constructs. First, and similar to Study 1, a global measure of destination coolness was included to test whether the developed higher-order scale shares significant variance with laypeople's coolness perception. Further, destination coolness should be related to, but both conceptually and empirically different from particular dimensions of destination personality. Specifically, while existing research captures destination personality dimensions such as sincerity, excitement, convivality or competence (e.g., Ekinci & Hosany, 2006), coolness as a personality attribute has not been investigated. Thus, it can be expected that coolness is not only theoretically but also empirical distinct from destination personality. In addition, this research provides a first investigation into what type of tourist might be particularly attracted by cool cities. It is argues that those tourists who describe themselves as autonomous and unique may be particularly drawn toward cool cities. This is because, as the interviews revealed, cool cities are associated with subcultures and rebellion, and thus can help tourists to realize a self-image that matches their personal aspirations of autonomy and uniqueness. Therefore, this study sets out to test this contention as a potential interaction effect between coolness and dependent variables. Lastly, while Study 1 has investigated intentions of visiting behavior, Study 2 tests the effect of coolness on actual behavior because intentions may differ from actual behavior. By doing so, this study seeks to provide additional externally valid evidence for the coolness effect in tourist behavior.

4.2. Sampling and data collection

Questionnaires were administered to a US sample that was recruited through a commercial online panel. This study uses the same stratification procedure as in Study 1, that is, only respondents who were 18 or older, who had travelled a significant distance before (>70 miles in the last two years) and who had sufficient funds to travel (i.e., an annual household income > 30.000$) were invited. Further, the same IMC question was included 43 respondents who failed it (i.e., 8.01% of total respondents) were deleted. After the sample was cleaned from manipualtion check violations, completed questionnaires from 533 respondents were obtained. Table 1 shows the characteristics of this sample.

4.3. Employed measures

All multi-item measures, their wordings and respective parameters are shown in Table 4. All employed items met the assumptions of multivariate normality (Appendix 1 shows kurtosis, skewness, means and standard deviations for all items). The newly developed coolness scale, consisting of the four dimensions, was included. In order to measure tourists' perceived social return of a destination, this study used Boley et al.'s (2018) social return scale, consisting of five items that are

Table 4
Constructs and their parameters used in Study 2.

Construct/Items	Factor Loadings (Higher order loading)	CR	AVE
Destination Coolness (newly developed) [City] …			
Authentic	.89	*.87*	*.69*
… is authentic.	.77		
… doesn't seem artificial.	.64		
… is true to its roots.	.80		
Rebellious	.65	*.87*	*.68*
… is nonconformist.	.72		
… has revolutionary spirit.	.74		
… is edgy.	.70		
Original	.96	.88	.71
… is original.	.77		
… stands apart from the crowd.	.80		
… is iconic.	.69		
Vibrant	*.90*	*.88*	*.71*
… is outgoing.	.79		
… is vibrant.	.75		
… is lively.	.72		
Social Return (adapted from Boley et al. 2018***)***		**.92**	**.69**
Travelling to [city] makes …			
… the traveler look cool.	.76		
… the traveler more popular.	.76		
… the traveler look savvy.	.78		
… the traveler stand out.	.84		
… the traveler look unique.	.79		
City-Self Connection (***adpated from*** Escalas and Bettman 2003)		**.91**	**.77**
This city reflects who I am.	.83		
I can identify with this city.	.80		
I feel a personal connection to this city.	.82		
Autonomy (Warren & Campbell, 2014)		**.87**	**.63**
I would describe myself as a person, who …			
… doesn't do things just to fit in.	.68		
… rarely caves into social pressure.	.74		
… pays little attention to established social norms or conventions.	.61		
… doesn't change who it is to suit others.	.83		
Destination Personality (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006) *[City] …*			
Sincerity			
… is sincere.	.77		
… is reliable.	.80		
… is intelligent.	.71		
Excitement			
… is exciting.	.75		
… is daring.	.64		
… is original.	.76		
Convivality			
… is friendly.	.76		
… is family oriented.	.60		
… is charming.	.74		

measured on an ordinal scale ranging from 1 to 7 (i.e., 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). Further, city-self connection was measured with three items by adapting the brand-self connection scale from Escalas and Bettman (2005). As for visit intentions, a two-item measure for WTV was included, and for actual visiting behavior, this study followed existing accounts (Kock et al., 2019a) that capture actual past behavior by asking respondents to indicate how often they have visited the respective city (measured on a 7-point ordinal scale ranging from 'never' to 'more than six times'). In addition, tourists' autonomy was measured with four items, adopted from Warren and Campbell (2014) and destination personality was measured with nine items adopted from Ekinci and Hosany (2006). These measures were complemented by the global destination coolness measure and the same control variables age, gender and education.

4.4. Results

The analysis was initiated by assessing the discriminant validity between all employed scales, using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (please note that the discriminant validity test for autonomy is conducted at the end of this section). For all pairs of constructs, the AVE is greater than the squared correlation (Table 5), thereby indicating discriminant validity. This result replicates and corroborates the result of Study 1 that the dimensions of coolness are statistically distinct, as well as the discriminant validity between all measures employed in this nomological model.

After confirming the discriminant validity of all pairs of constructs, this study proceeded by conducting a CFA on the measurement model of the destination coolness scale. By doing so, it was intended to replicate the results of Study 1 with a new data set to show the reliability and validity of the new measure. Confirming the results of Study 1, the data fits the four-dimensional measure of coolness well: $\chi^2/df = 3733$; CFI = 0.953; TLI = 0.937; RMSEA = 0.072; SRMR = 0.0385. Factor loadings range between 0.64 and 0.80, CR's range between 0.87 and 0.88 and AVE's range between 0.68 and 0.71. Further, higher-order loadings range between 0.65 and 0.96 (Table 4). These results corroborate the results obtained in Study 1, thereby documenting the statistical soundness and integrity of the coolness scale. In a next step, the global coolness measure was added as a covariate. The covariance between the four-dimensional coolness measure and the global one-item measure is .64 (p = .000), thereby documenting, in support of the findings in Study 1, that the scale indeed adequately represents a measure of perceived coolness.

The analysis continued by estimating a nomological model (Fig. 1) that tests how well coolness can predict the important endogenous variables social return, city-self connection, willingness to visit the city and actual visits to the city. The model fits the data reasonably well ($\chi^2/df = 4797$; CFI = 0.867; TLI = 0.848; RMSEA = 0.084; SRMR = 0.084) and provides broad support for the predictive validity of the coolness measure. More specifically, coolness positively relates to the perceived social return of a destination (0.47, p = .000), thereby indicating that tourists perceive cool cities to offer travelers a considerable higher social return. Hence, trips to cool cities are particularly likely to be communicated on social media because travelers can use them as a conspicuous consumption vehicle. Further, coolness positively relates to city-self connection (0.52, p = .000), thereby indicating that tourists are significantly and considerably more likely to identify and connect with cool cities. Importantly, coolness exerts a strong direct effect on willingness to visit the city (0.67, p = .000), while social return (0.23, p = .000) and city-self connection (0.17, p = .002) also relate positively and significantly to WTV. Adding the direct effect and the indirect effects through the two mediators yields the standardized total effect of 0.89 that coolness has on WTV, resulting in a standardized R^2 of 0.81. In turn, WTV exerts a positive and significant effect on actual city trips (0.16, p = .003). While the path coefficient is not considerably large, it explains variance in reported actual behavior, thereby documenting that coolness perceptions materialize in actual travel behavior. In summary, the nomological model tested herein provides compelling empirical evidence for the importance of the newly developed coolness measure.

In order to test the prediction that coolness should exert a stronger effect on WTV for those individuals who describe themselves as autonomous, this study examined whether autonomy interacts with the effect coolness has on WTV. For this purpose, a median split of the moderator variable autonomy was conducted. In order to test for measurement invariance of the two groups, an unrestricted model which fit the data well ($\chi^2/df = 3159$; CFI = 0.883; TLI = 0.858; RMSEA = 0.064; SRMR = 0.070) was estimated and compared to another model in which all factor loadings were constrained to be equal between the two groups ($\chi^2/df = 3307$; CFI = 0.865; TLI = 0.848; RMSEA = 0.066; SRMR = 0.114). The conducted χ2-difference test between these models was non-significant, thereby supporting metric measurement invariance.

This study thus continued with the moderation analysis by running the two freely estimated models in a multi-group analysis, only constraining one path (i..e, the moderation path) at a time. The estimation and conducted χ^2-square difference tests yielded significant differences as it was found that the effect coolness has on WTV is stronger for those tourists who are relatively lower on self-described autonomy (Autonomy low = 0.71, p = .000) compared to those relatively higher on autonomy (Autonomy high = 0.53, p = .000). This difference is significant ($\chi^2 = 7.621$, p = .006), thereby documenting a negative interaction effect. Similarly, a significant difference was found, documenting a negative interaction effect of autonomy on the effect coolness has on city-self connection (Autonomy low = 0.59, p = .000; Autonomy high = 0.31, p = .000; $\chi^2 = 4.711$, p = .030). While these results contradict the initial contention that autonomy should positively interact with the effect coolness has on endogenous variables (because it was expected that autonomous people value coolness more), it is plausible for two reasons. First, the obtained results may be indications of a compensatory effect: Those tourists who do not perceive themselves as relatively autonomous may be particularly drawn toward (i.e., manifesting in higher intention to visit and identification with) the cool city because it allows them to compensate for the low autonomy, eventually enabling them to increase it. Second, thist study has not experimentally manipulated but measured self-described autonomy, consequently resulting in a relatively high baseline level of autonomy (Autonomy mean = 5.25; St.D. = 1.12). Due to this high baseline, the predictive validity of a median split might have been impaired.

In addition to autonomy, this study also tested for the individual difference variables age and gender. As for age, research (Chen & Chou, 2019) suggests that coolness may be more appealing for young people,

Table 5
Fornell-Larcker Criterion parameters of Study 2.

	Authentic	Original	Rebellious	Vibrant	Social Return	City-Self Connection	Autonomy
Authentic	**.834**						
Original	.701	**.842**					
Rebellious	.417	.499	**.825**				
Vibrant	.592	.702	.435	**.843**			
Social Return	.280	.327	.381	.378	**.831**		
City-Self Connection	.505	.388	.305	.354	.524	**.879**	
Autonomy	.386	.341	.332	.258	.217	.261	**.794**

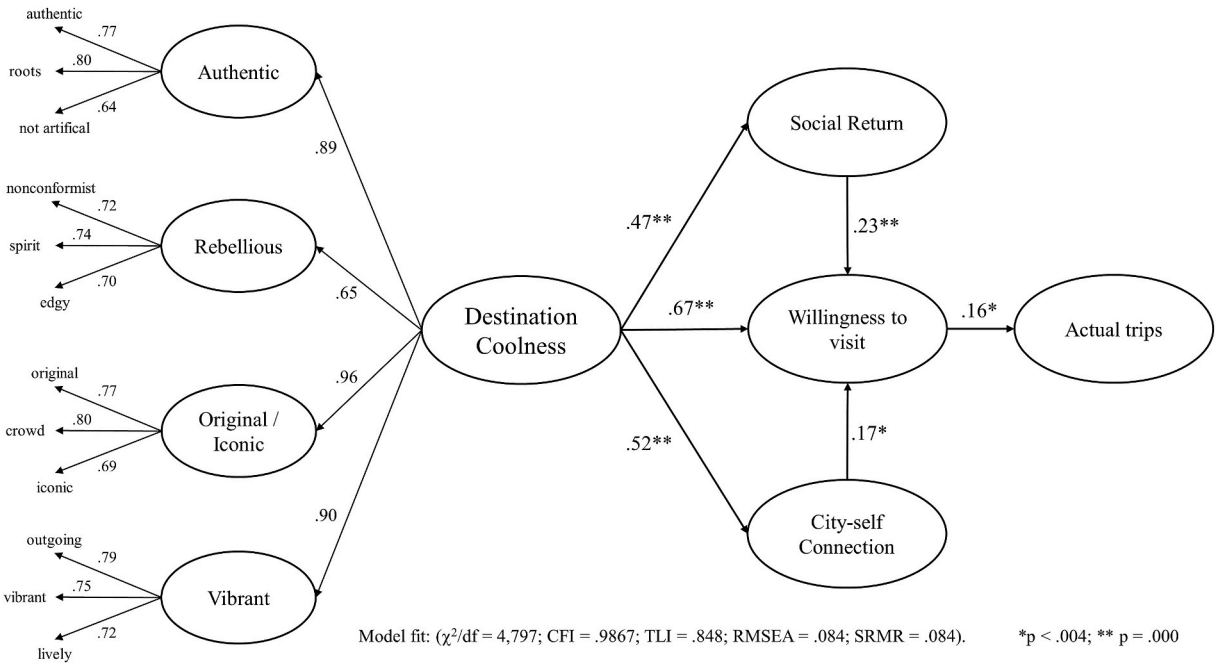

Fig. 1. Structural equation modelling results of Study 2.

compared to older people. As for gender, some studies indicate that males may be more receptive of coolness because coolness is an attribute associated with masculinity, but not femininity (Jackson & Dempster, 2009). Thus, it was tested whether coolness has a stronger effect for younger tourists, and those that are male. For that purpose, this study followed the same multi-group analysis approach as conducted before with autonomy. As for age, the results show no significant difference between younger and older tourists (tourists were divided into two groups by means of a median split). This result indicates that the coolness attribute is not less important for older tourists, thus further documenting the relevance of it for both researchers and managers. A similar result is yielded for gender: No significant difference was detected between female and male tourists, thereby indicating that both genders value coolness to the same high extent. These findings are insightful because they contradict the existing literature on coolness perceptions of men and women, and younger and older people respectively. Importantly, the findings indicate that coolness is an unambiguously positive characteristic of a city, thereby highlighting the importance of understanding it.

Lastly, discriminant validity of destination coolness was assessed against destination personality. Specifically, the correlations between the four coolness and the three personality dimensions were calculated, as well as the Fornell-Larcker criterion for all pairs of dimensions. All correlations were statistically significant below 1.0 (ranging from 0.33 to 0.91), and the AVE of all dimensions was higher than their squared estimated correlation, thereby meeting the Fornell-Larcker criterion and documenting discriminant validity between the destination personality dimensions and the newly developed destination coolness measure.

5. Conclusion

Most tourism managers intuitively know that being considered cool should pay out, and most tourists find cool cities particularly appealing. But what makes a cool destination? And is there a coolness effect impacting tourists' destination atittudes and choice? These are the questions that motivated this research, and that existing literature has not provided an answer for. As for the first question, this research reveals that cool cities are those that tourists describe as authentic, rebellious, original and vibrant. This dimensional structure emerged from the qualitative interviews conducted herein and was verified across two empirical studies. While not all dimensions are necessary for every city in order to be considered as cool, each dimension reflects the coolness of a destination. Informed by qualitative interviews, the first quantitative study developed a reliable, valid and parsimonious coolness measure. As for the second question, this research empirically documents the role of coolness in a nomological network, thereby indicating that it pays out to be cool because tourists have more favorable attitudes toward cool cities. Specifically, it was found that a city's coolness drives tourists' intention to visit it (Study 1 & 2), as well as their actual visits to that city (Study 2). Further, coolness also relates to tourists' willingness to recommend the city and pay more for a visit to that city (Study 1). It was also found that coolness relates to tourists' city-self connection and the social return that they attribute to the destination which in turn drive intention to visit and actual visits (Study 2), thereby indicating that coolness is an important symbolic asset of a destination.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to research in various ways. It is the first to conceptualize and empirically validate what makes destinations cool in the eyes of tourists. While a few existing studies have hinted a potential role of coolness in a tourism context, no study had investigated it academically. Thi study thereby contributes crucial insights to the role of coolness and also expands existing knowledge and burgeoning research efforts on understanding the symbolic assets and meanings of a destination, and how they can impact tourist behavior. As this study finds that coolness relates considerably to relevant conative and attitudinal tourism phenomena, it is important to highlight that the sole reliance on a destination's functional attributes (i.e., relying on tourists' destination image only, such as price or weather) is likely to result in an incomplete picture at best. Thus, a fundamental theoretical contribution is that coolness is important to include in future studies when investigating a destination's symbolic assets and tourist decision-making related to that destination.

This claim is empirically substantiated by both the identified relationships with relevant outcome variables, and the documented discriminant validity between the coolness dimensions and with destination personality. Importantly, this study also directly contributes to

the burgeoning literature on the social return of destinations. The study's findings document that the perceived coolness of a destination explains the amount of social return that tourists' ascribe to a destination, therefore directly addressing the call to "identify what exactly is driving the anticipated social return" of a destination (Boley et al., 2018, p. 126). Given that conspicuous travel is facilitated and fueled by social media, the importance of being cool is likely to grow in the future, thus rendering the insights of this study important for future research. The findings also enhance research that investigates tourists' relationships with destinations, such as destination attachment, destination identification and destination affinity. These efforts investigate important symbolic reasons that help explain destination choice but they lack an explanation for what characteristics of the destination make people bond with it. The present research provides an answer to this question by empirically documenting that perceived coolness of a city can increase the connections that tourists develop with destinations.

Importantly, this study found that cool cities have a particular appeal with those tourists who do not perceive themselves as relatively autonomous. This hints an interesting compensatory effect according to which cool cities allow those people, who are relatively low on autonomy, to psychologically make up for that lack by finding cool cities appealing and visiting them. While compensatory consumption is investigated in various fields, tourism research has not shown much interest in it yet. This study's findings show that compensatory effects may take place in tourism as well, and this research could potentially ignite a stronger interest in this interesting phenomenon.

Another important theoretical implication derives from the multidimensionality of the developed coolness scale. This operationalization does not only allow for capturing the level of coolness of a destination, and compare it with other destinations on objective grounds, but it enables both researchers and managers to understand through which characteristics coolness materializes. This operationalization removes the prototypical understanding of coolness by substituting it with concrete, directly actionable dimensions (i.e., authenticity, rebelliousness, originality and vibrance). A direct implication for future studies therefore is to intensify research on the four identified dimensions. While existing tourism research has devoted considerable efforts to understanding authenticity in tourism, the other three dimensions have received only limited attention from researchers.

5.2. Managerial implications

This research also provides valuable insights for practitioners. First, by conceptualizing and measuring coolness, it makes this phenomenon tangible to the many managers who intuitively know that coolness is desirable, yet lack knowledge on what it actually is and how it can be managed. Thus, this study allows for the coolness phenomenon to be considered when developing, managing and marketing tourism offerings and communications. While many existing destination marketing efforts are based on communicating established associations such as price, weather or nature, this study highlights to managers that building a cool image (in contrast to merely building a positive destination image) may attract many tourists. By establishing a dimensional structure of coolness, a tool is made available to managers to build cool destinations. With this tool, managers can scrutinize the coolness of their own destination vis-à-vis competitors, and understand why and how it potentially lacks coolness. This scale helps managers to understand on which dimension to focus in order to build a cool destination. For example, drawing again on the data sets used in Study 1 and 2, it can be seen that Paris scores high on authentic ($M = 6.41$) while relatively low on rebellious ($M = 4.59$), and Las Vegas is high on vibrant ($M = 6.39$) while relatively low on authentic ($M = 4.16$). Managers can utilize these insights to strategically position their own destination in order to increase its coolness, and consequently generating more favorable attitudes among tourists.

Another important insight for managers is the empirical documentation that building a cool destination indeed pays out. While most practitioners may intuitively agree that being cool is desirable, the concrete consequences of destination coolness remained unclear until now. This research provides initial empirical support that coolness is not a peripheral 'nice to have' asset but is likely to increase the actual performance of a destination because it relates to higher willingness to pay, to recommend and to visit, including actual visits. Thus, it provides accountability and provides concrete arguments for marketing managers to focus on building cool destinations. In addition, being considered as cool may be a particularly unique asset that other destinations find difficult to copy. Such sustainable marketing efforts may particularly pay out in today's market where competition for tourists is fierce.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This research also has certain limitations. Firstly, the exploratory insights and empirical results were derived from Western tourists, more specifically Americans and Germans. Future research is therefore needed to replicate these results and to investigate whether coolness is equally important across other cultural contexts. Coolness may be subject to cultural specifics, and what makes a cool city in the eyes of Western tourists may differ from perceptions of coolness in other cultures, like those in Asia or the Middle East. Understanding such differences is important for destination managers who market to different cultural markets, and may thus tailor their coolness communications accordingly.

Secondly, it was not tested whether coolness perceptions may vary across segments of tourists. For example, do culture-oriented and nature-oriented tourists consider the same destinations as cool? This study calls for future research to investigate this question. Finding an answer to it is not only theoretically intriguing but bears managerial implications for destinations that are interested in attracting particular segments.

Thirdly, drawing on the notion that tourists use their trips for reasons of self-actualization, this study finds that less autonomous tourists are particularly attracted to cool destinations; a finding that can be explained through a potential compensatory effect. This finding hints that coolness perceptions are a particularly useful starting point for future research seeking to examine compensatory consumption through travel. While research in marketing (e.g., Rucker & Galinsky, 2008) indicates that useful insights can be generated from examing behavior as a compensatory one, tourism is lacking in these research efforts.

Fourthly, this research shows the status of coolness perceptions at one point in time, yet, coolness perceptions are likely to be dynamic (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012). Thus, what is perceived as cool may not only vary across countries and tourist segments but also over time. What is cool today may be uncool tomorrow, and the other way round. This research provides the theory and tool to track changes in coolness over time. Future research can capitalize on it, by running longitudinal studies on the coolness developments of cities. Interestingly, the qualitative pre-study indicated that mere popularity was not a characteristic of cool cities, thereby contrasting existing research that found popularity to be related to coolness. This observation motivates future research to test the effect mass tourism has on the coolness of destinations. Specifically, some destinations may be considered as insider tips and thus are perceived as cool (a business model on which Lonely Planet Publications greatly capitalizes) but then loose coolness as they become more popular and attract masses of tourists. This research is capable of examining such developments, and may therefore help managers to monitor the coolness of their destination. In addition, future endeavors could build even further on this idea and model what can be refered to as 'coolness cycles', a framework that could test regularities in the dynamics of coolness. Fourthly, finding that coolness plays a considerable role in understanding tourist behavior, it is suggested that coolness perceptions may also impact residents' attitudes and behavior toward their own city. Research can investigate how residential coolness perceptions impact

support for tourism, residential hospitality or attachment toward the own city.

Going beyond tourism research on destinations, there are other promising avenues for future research. Similar to cool cities, tourists may want to stay in cool hotels and eating in cool restaurants. This study provides the theoretical and empirical ground for starting such innovative research. In addition, coolness perceptions of cities or whole countries may also impact people's behavior beyond tourism. For example, are companies more willing to invest in cool cities or people more willing to move to cool cities? Further, do consumers favor products originating in cool countries? The current study provides the insights for launching such intriguing research.

Declaration of competing interest

none.

Acknowledgements

none.

Appendix 1

Note: Own interviews: OI; Existing research = ER; Items of the final coolness scale are in **bold**.
Study 1: The initial 24 items, their source and statistical parameters.

Item	Source	Main reason for dropping the item
Authentic		
… is authentic	OI & ER	
… doesn't seem artificial	OI & ER	
… is true to its roots	OI	
… doesn't try to be something it's not	OI & ER	High inter-item correlation
… is genuine	OI	High inter-item correlation
Rebellious		
… is nonconformist	OI & ER	
… has revolutionary spirit	OI	
… is edgy	OI	
… is rebellious	OI & ER	High inter-item correlation
… is defiant	ER	High inter-item correlation
Original		
… is original	OI & ER	
… stands apart from the crowd	OI & ER	
… is unique	OI	Low factor loading
… is creative.	OI	High cross-loadings
… is often copied.	OI	Low factor loading
Symbolic		
… is iconic	OI & ER	
… is a cultural symbol	ER	High inter-item correlation
… means something to people	Ow OI	Low factor loading
… is leading in what it does	OI	Low factor loading
Vibrant		
… is outgoing	OI & ER	
… vibrant	OI	
… is lively	OI & ER	
… exciting	OI	High inter-item correlation
… is energetic	ER	High inter-item correlation

Study 1: Item Means, StD.'s, Skewness and Kurtosis.

Item	Mean	StD.	Skewness (Std. error)	Kurtosis (Std. error)
Coolness				
… is authentic.	5.88	1.083	−1.166 (.107)	1.921 (.214)
… doesn't seem artificial.	5.53	1.381	−1.078 (.107)	.917 (.214)
… is true to its roots.	5.84	1.163	−1.081 (.107)	.960 (.214)
… is nonconformist.	4.76	1.685	-.564 (.107)	-.475 (.214)
… has revolutionary spirit.	4.95	1.603	-.761 (.107)	.063 (.214)
… is edgy.	5.11	1.581	-.942 (.107)	.370 (.214)
… is original.	5.90	1.047	−1.100 (.107)	1.383 (.214)
… stands apart from the crowd.	5.88	1.120	−1.287 (.107)	2.170 (.214)
… is iconic.	5.89	1.143	−1.151 (.107)	1.530 (.214)
… is outgoing.	5.94	1.126	−1.391 (.107)	2.522 (.214)
… is vibrant.	6.07	1.010	−1.375 (.107)	2.871 (.214)
… is lively.	6.00	1.022	−1.373 (.107)	2.799 (.214)
Endogenous Variables				
Willingness to Visit	4.18	1.991	-.328 (.107)	−1.222 (.214)
Willingess to Recommend	3.33	2.048	.320 (.107)	−1.326 (.214)
Willingness to Pay more	3.03	2.033	.553 (.107)	−1.168 (.214)

Study 2: Item Means, StD.'s, Skewness and Kurtosis.

Item	Mean	StD.	Skewness (Std. error)	Kurtosis (Std. error)
Coolness				
… is authentic.	5.86	1.123	−1.271 (.106)	2.115 (.211)
… doesn't seem artificial.	5.61	1.346	−1.210 (.106)	1.373 (.211)
… is true to its roots.	5.82	1.171	−1.127 (.106)	1.368 (.211)
… is nonconformist.	5.12	1.353	-.664 (.106)	.248 (.211)
… has revolutionary spirit.	5.32	1.383	-.781 (.106)	.264 (.211)
… is edgy.	5.23	1.495	-.806 (.106)	.115 (.211)
… is original.	5.87	1.104	−1.117 (.106)	1.620 (.211)
… stands apart from the crowd.	5.90	1.068	−1.006 (.106)	.843 (.211)
… is iconic.	5.80	1.167	−1.065 (.106)	1.008 (.211)
… is outgoing.	5.86	1.101	−1.160 (.106)	1.578 (.211)
… is vibrant.	5.96	1.093	−1.420 (.106)	2.617 (.211)
… is lively.	5.88	1.043	−1.312 (.106)	2.443 (.211)
… the traveler look cool.	5.23	1.280	-.883 (.106)	.897 (.211)
… the traveler more popular.	5.08	1.364	-.700 (.106)	.351 (.211)
… the traveler look savvy.	5.26	1.326	-.815 (.106)	.736 (.211)
… the traveler stand out.	5.13	1.404	-.714 (.106)	.121 (.211)
… the traveler look unique.	5.11	1.407	-.771 (.106)	.356 (.211)
This city reflects who I am.	5.25	1.316	-.954 (.106)	.939 (.211)
I can identify with this city.	5.45	1.302	−1.048 (.106)	1.198 (.211)
I feel a personal connection to this city.	5.45	1.354	−1.016 (.106)	.863 (.211)
… doesn't do things just to fit in.	5.38	1.339	−1.063 (.106)	.983 (.211)
… rarely caves into social pressure.	5.24	1.438	-.894 (.106)	.461 (.211)
… pays little attention to established social norms or conventions.	5.00	1.512	-.697 (.106)	-.191 (.211)
… doesn't change who it is to suit others.	5.39	1.344	−1.017 (.106)	.877 (.211)
… is sincere.	5.54	1.170	−1.113 (.106)	1.676 (.211)
… is reliable.	5.55	1.194	−1.024 (.106)	1.303 (.211)
… is intelligent.	5.54	1.209	-.900 (.106)	1.066 (.211)
… is exciting.	5.82	1.152	-.836 (.106)	.621 (.211)
… is daring.	5.41	1.328	-.868 (.106)	.535 (.211)
… is original.	5.74	1.245	−1.184 (.106)	1.529 (.211)
… is friendly.	5.62	1.261	-.990 (.106)	.821 (.211)
… is family oriented.	5.21	1.384	-.662 (.106)	-.091 (.211)
… is charming.	5.63	1.197	-.970 (.106)	1.037 (.211)
I strongly intend to visit this city (again) in the future.	5.85	1.159	−1.189 (.106)	1.535 (.211)
It is likely that I will visit this city in the near future.	5.33	1.370	-.812 (.106)	.344 (.211)
Have you been to that city before?	5.38	3.597	.259 (.106)	−1.711 (.211)

Dr. Florian Kock is an associate professor of marketing and tourism research at the Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. His research involves the cognitive and affective processing of destinations, destination image, tourist behaviour and psychology. He has published in the premier tourism and hospitality journals and serves on the editorial board of Journal of Travel Research.

While coolness is an important characteristic of a destination that can attract tourists, existing research is lacking in examinations of what destination coolness is and how it manifests in the eyes of the tourist. As a consequence, tourism managers, while intuitively knowing that 'cool' is desirable, lack insight into how to build cool destinations. The present research examines what makes a cool destination, and what role coolness plays in understanding tourists' destination atittudes and choice. By developing a coolness measure, this research makes a tool available to managers that enables them to build cool destinations. With this tool, managers can scrutinize the coolness of their own destination vis a vis competitors, and understand why and how it potentially lacks coolness. As the developed scale is multidimensional, it helps managers to understand on which dimension to focus in order to build a cool destination. Further, this research also documents that being cool is not just 'cool' (i.e., nict to have) but indeed pays out as it shapes various managerially relevant outcomes, such as intention and actual visit behavior, a destination's social return and city-self connection.

Questionnaire Study 1 (administered with Qualtrics)

Stratification questions before entering the actual questionnaire:

- Are you 18 or older? (Yes/No)
- Is your annual household income above 30.000$? (Yes/No)
- Have you travelled at least 70 miles in the last two years? (one trip) (Yes/No)

1. Please name a city that you really think is cool (or that comes closest to it). (open ended question)
2. With that city in mind, please answer the following questions.

- Overall, I personally think that this city is cool. (7-point ordinal scale)

3. With this cool city in mind, please indicate now how you would describe it. (note: randomized order; 7-point ordinal scale).

- … is lively.
- … is energetic.
- … is outgoing.
- … is exciting.
- … is vibrant.

- … is authentic.
- … is true to its roots.
- … doesn't seem artificial.
- … doesn't try to be something it's not.
- … is genuine.
- … has revolutionary spirit.
- … is rebellious.
- … is defiant.
- … is nonconformist.
- … stands apart from the crowd.
- … is edgy.
- … is unique.
- … is original.
- … is a cultural symbol.
- … is creative.
- … is often copied.
- … is iconic.
- … means something to people.
- … is leading in what it does.

4. With the cool city in mind that you stated in the beginning, please describe your intentions (7-point ordinal scale).
   - I intend to visit that city (again) in the future.
   - I would pay a higher price to visit that city than to visit other cities.
   - I recommend that city as a tourist destination to other people when asked.
5. Now, please name a city that you like but that you personally **do not think is cool.** (open ended question)
6. With that uncool city in mind, please answer the following questions.
   - Overall, I personally think that this city is cool. (7-point ordinal scale)
7. With this uncool city in mind, please indicate now how you would describe it.
   - … is lively.
   - … is energetic.
   - … is outgoing.
   - … is exciting.
   - … is vibrant.
   - … is authentic.
   - … is true to its roots.
   - … doesn't seem artificial.
   - … doesn't try to be something it's not.
   - … is genuine.
   - … has revolutionary spirit.
   - … is rebellious.
   - … is defiant.
   - … is nonconformist.
   - … stands apart from the crowd.
   - … is edgy.
   - … is unique.
   - … is original.
   - … is a cultural symbol.
   - … is creative.
   - … is often copied.
   - … is iconic.
   - … means something to people.
   - … is leading in what it does.
8. With the uncool city in mind that you stated in the beginning, please describe your intentions (7-point ordinal scale).
   - I intend to visit that city (again) in the future.
   - I would pay a higher price to visit that city than to visit other cities.
   - I recommend that city as a tourist destination to other people when asked.
9. Your gender?
   - Female/Male
10. Your age?
    - 18–25
    - 26–39
    - 40 -55
    - 56 and older
11. Your highest education?
    - Finished a master's degree or higher
    - Finished a bachelor's degree
    - Enrolled at university

- Finished secondary school
- Finished primary school

12. Intentional Manipulation Check
- … please select 'Agree' here.

Questionnaire Study 2 (administered with Qualtrics)

Stratification questions before entering the actual questionnaire:

- Are you 18 or older? (Yes/No)
- Is your annual household income above 30.000$? (Yes/No)
- Have you travelled at least 70 miles in the last two years? (one trip) (Yes/No)

1. Please name a city that you really think is cool (or that comes closest to it). (open ended question)
2. With that city in mind, please answer the following questions.
- Overall, I personally think that this city is cool. (7-point ordinal scale)

3. With this cool city in mind, please indicate now how you would describe it (note: randomized order; 7-point ordinal scale).
- … is lively.
- … is outgoing.
- … is vibrant.
- … is authentic.
- … is true to its roots.
- … doesn't seem artificial.
- … has revolutionary spirit.
- … is nonconformist.
- … is edgy.
- … is iconic.
- … is original.
- … stands apart from the crowd.

4. Have you been to that city before? (7-point ordinal scale)
- Never/Once/Twice/3 times/4 times/5 times/6 or more times

5. With the cool city in mind that you stated in the beginning, please describe your intentions (7-point ordinal scale).
- I strongly intend to visit this city (again) in the future.
- It is likely that I will visit this city in the near future.

6. With the cool city in mind that you stated in the beginning, please describe your thoughts about it.

Travelling to that city, makes …
- … the traveler look cool.
- … the traveler more popular.
- … the traveler look savvy.
- … the traveler stand out.
- … the traveler look unique.

7. With the cool city in mind that you stated in the beginning, please describe your thoughts about it.
- … is sincere.
- … is sincere.
- … intelligent.
- … is exciting.
- … is daring.
- … is original.
- … is friendly.
- … is family oriented.
- … is charming.

8. With the cool city in mind that you stated in the beginning, please answer the following statements.
- This city reflects who I am.
- I can identify with this city.
- I feel a personal connection to this city.

9. Now, we would like to hear how you would describe yourself.

I would describe myself as a person, who …
- … doesn't do things just to fit in.
- … rarely caves into social pressure.
- … pays little attention to established social norms or conventions.
- … doesn't change who it is to suit others.

10. Your gender?
- Female/Male

11. Your age?
- 18–25
- 26–39

- 40 -55
- 56 and older

12. Your highest education?
    - Finished a master's degree or higher
    - Finished a bachelor's degree
    - Enrolled at university
    - Finished secondary school
    - Finished primary school
13. Intentional Manipulation Check
    - … please select 'Agree' here.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104317.

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