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## Article

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## The formative nature of graduation travel

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### ABSTRACT

Graduation travel, or a trip taken after completion of undergraduate studies, is a niche phenomenon. Given the dearth of research on graduation travel, this study is first to investigate the stage-specific identity formation when a sense of self is initially established. Underpinned by the dual-cycle theory, the study considered two dimensions of identity consolidation - exploration in-depth and identification with commitment. Based on the survey with 393 Chinese university graduates, five benefits sought emerged: Social Fulfillment, Self-efficacy Improvement, Escape/Relaxation, Interest Pursuit, and Self-esteem Enhancement. Social Fulfillment and Self-Esteem had a positive effect on Exploration in-Depth, while Self-esteem Enhancement and Self-efficacy Improvement positively influenced Identification with Commitment. Tourism industry over-delivers on Escape/Relaxation and under-delivers on other benefits.

### 1. Introduction

Willingness of college students to participate in graduation travel, which is a leisure trip taken after the completion of undergraduate studies, is one phenomenon that stimulates development of contemporary tourism market (Cheng, 2019). With the increasing interest, graduation travel is considered an integral part of college experience in some world's regions, e.g. Greater China (Jiang & Zhang, 2018) as much as gap year tourism in other regions (e.g. the UK). Lvmama.com (2019) shows that 93% of the college graduates expressed the willingness to travel after graduation, more than double the previous year. The market size of graduation travel in China alone has exceeded 2.34 billion USD (China Daily, 2018). Although no reliable statistics on graduation tourist numbers exist post-2019 in light of the COVID-19 pandemics and worldwide restrictions on mobility, there is no evidence to believe that post-graduation tourism will stop its development in the post-COVID world. In fact, tourism agencies continue their promotional efforts targeting graduating students (China Educational Tours, 2021), with OTAs such as Agoda (2020) and travel bloggers dedicating pages to graduation tourism.

Despite much interest from the industry, existing scholarship on graduation travel consists of only four descriptive studies (only one of which is in English). Liu and Zheng (2014), for example, collated descriptive statistics on trip characteristics and preferences of graduate

tourists. Along with this, the other three studies (Cheng, 2019; Jiang & Zhang, 2018; Tsai, n.d.) focused on motivations of such tourists. Jointly, they find that major motives are personal development and emotional attachment rather than merely hedonic experiences, which is in line with the latest perspective of experience economy and meaningful experiences (Boswijk, Peelen, & Olthof, 2013). The contemporary tourism research investigating meaningful experiences is found in the stream of literature on transformative travel (e.g. Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015), from both demand (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017) and supply (Soulard, McGehee, & Stern, 2019) perspectives. Transformative tourism is well described in the context of backpacking (Noy, 2004), volunteer (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018), and wellness tourism (Fu et al., 2015). However, there has been a lesser attention to formative (vs. transformative) travel, during which young tourists' sense of self is first established (vs. re-formed as in transformative travel). Specifically, from the graduate tourism perspective, there is a need for theory-guided explanatory research to better understand this market niche not only in terms of its characteristics and antecedents but also effects and consequences.

Although studies on the role of tourism in identity construction among adolescents are available, as in the study abroad (e.g. Fu, Huang, Li, & Kirillova, 2018) or gap year (e.g. O'Shea, 2011) contexts, existing knowledge is not adequate to understand the phenomenon of graduation travel for two reasons. First, in both study abroad and gap year streams,

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tourism is embedded rather than dominate these experiences; both are longer in duration (e.g. up to one year) and therefore are less similar to a conventional leisure scenario than a graduation trip. Second, both are related to secondary school and undergraduate students who are at the developmental stage known as *identity exploration* when young people choose among various alternatives in life, try to understand who they are and who they may become (Arnett, 2000; Côté, 2018). At this developmental stage, youths do not reflect, invest, or evaluate their identity commitments. Identity commitment, however, is the characteristic of the transitional period immediately after graduation from a college or a university when individuals, already in their early 20s, are expected to settle in adult roles (Waterman, 1982). Thus, in theory, a trip taken during this critical period should provide tourists with the opportunity of *identity consolidation*; yet this potential has been overlooked in existing literature (Jiang & Zhang, 2018).

A suitable approach to understand formative experiences in tourism is through the lens of developmental psychology, which deals with psychological changes within and among individuals across the life span. The widely recognized eight-stage life cycle of psychosocial development by Erikson (1963) identifies key tasks at different stages of the life span. Identity formation is a typical concern of the adolescence stage, from puberty throughout the college years, ages 13 to 21. Nevertheless, sweeping demographic shifts have prolonged the development of identity to late teens and early twenties, which is a period of frequent change and exploration of possible life directions instead of entering and settling into long-term adult roles (Côté, 2018). In this sense, today's adolescents delay their adult commitments (e.g. starting a family, setting into a career) while searching for new identities (Côté & Levine, 1988). Specifically, the dual-cycle model of identity formation (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006; Marcia, 1966) conceptualizes the identity formation process as consisting of two stages. The first cycle corresponds to the proactive exploration of alternative identities, while the second cycle is about commitment to an identity that results in identity consolidation. The dual-cycle model describes the process, by which adolescents form and maintain their identity and which cannot be complete without identity commitment. In this sense, existing research in study abroad and gap year corresponds to the first stage of identity formation, which is *identity exploration*, while, theoretically, graduation travel should tap into the final step of identity formation – *identity consolidation*.

University students are likely to have already completed the first cycle of exploring alternative identities due to the diversity of experiences during college years (Waterman, 1982), as evidenced by existing literature on study abroad and gap year. Yet, what remains unclear is whether leisure tourism that is uniquely positioned after university graduation has the ability to foster the second stage of identity formation – identity consolidation. Thus, the overall goal of the study is to uncover the formative nature of graduation travel by assessing whether graduation travel helps *identity consolidation* among college/university graduates. Aside from the theoretical motivation, there is a lack of evidence-based guidance on how to design and market graduation travel products. For example, marketing communication geared towards graduating students tends to emphasize a destination, its attributes, and activities in the same way as for a typical package tour. As a case in point, *China Educational Tours (2021)* presents various domestic and international destinations and focuses exclusively on sightseeing activities.

The study's objectives are 1) to understand the role of graduation travel in identity consolidation, 2) to examine the benefits sought from graduation travel, and 3) to assess the extent to which benefits sought are fulfilled by the tourism industry. The findings are expected to provide insights into whether tourism, particularly graduation travel, has the power to facilitate the final step of identity formation. Using "benefits sought" as a conceptual tool to connect graduation experience with identity consolidation outcomes, the study examines the problem at the intersection of tourism and developmental psychology. Practically, the findings will help the industry design experiences that have the power to

help tourists with identity consolidation and are better positioned to satisfy the needs of this niche market.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Tourism and identity formation

Only few studies explicitly considered the role of travel in identity formation among university students; they are in the context of extended travel such as study abroad, volunteer tourism, and gap year experiences (Johan, Sadler-Smith, & Tribe, 2019; King, 2011; Shulman, Sidney, & Walsh's, 2006; Wearing, 2002). In Shulman et al.'s (2006) study on the extended journeys by Israeli youth, two themes emerged: travel as a personal experimentation to pursue a mature self-identity and travel as a rite of passage to adulthood. Similarly, Wearing (2002) argued that volunteer tourism facilitates young tourists' transitions to adulthood by providing opportunities for self-exploration, self-understanding, and the pursuit of independence. The gap year experience was considered as a means of identity work in the context of higher education (Bagnoli, 2009), whereas King (2011) asserted that the gap year experience allows young individuals to perform identity work by negotiating the shift from one life stage to the next.

Tourism experiences allow students to explore various identity alternatives during schooling years as such experiences can both trigger consideration of identity issues and suggest alternative resolutions for identity concerns (Tej Vir, 2015; Waterman, 1993). For example, Fu et al. (2018) found that study abroad in adolescence leads to improvements in young tourists' agency and autonomy. An increase in self-awareness and self-discovery are common outcomes in the tourism literature (e.g. Galani-Moutafi, 2000; Laing & Frost, 2017). In Wu, Kirillova, and Lehto (2021), traveling with one's family helps improve young adults' self-knowledge and understanding of one's place in life. However, in terms of identity formation process, the existing literature overemphasizes the identity exploration stage, while no tourism study was concerned with identity consolidation.

### 2.2. Identity formation process

The eight-stage life cycle scheme developed by Erikson (1968) described identity as the central developmental task of adolescence. While identity formation is portrayed as a lifelong process, in which the identity could be transformed as demanded by individual or contextual changes (Erikson, 1968), the initial formation process enables young individuals to construct a viable pathway towards their adulthood (Jyotsana, 2016). Identity transformation can only occur when an identity is already formed but it is no longer sustainable in the context of new life experiences (e.g. life crises). In Erikson (1963), adolescents explore alternatives and then commit to self-made choices in order to acquire self-identity.

Based on Erikson's (1963) central dilemma in late adolescence of "Identity diffusion" (lack of defined identity) vs. "Identity achievement" (maintenance of established identity), Marcia (1966) proposed two intermediate positions: Moratorium and Foreclosure statuses. Moratorium usually represents a crisis when commitments are vague but the person actively struggles to make decisions on the identity, while balancing parents' expectations, society's demands, and own talents. Foreclosure refers to the individual expressing a commitment without much exploration by adopting the goals set for him or her by parental and societal expectations. Marcia's (1966) initial theory, which later underlined what came to be known as the "dual model of identity formation" (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006), is essentially based on two dimensions: exploration and commitment. Marcia (1966) defined exploration as the extent to which young individuals' seek different alternatives with respect to their goals, values, and beliefs. Commitment, on the other hand, is the degree to which young individuals make choices in terms of their goals, values, and beliefs. In this sense,

Foreclosure is a combination of low exploration and high commitment. Identity achievement, which is the characteristics of successful adolescence, according to both Erikson (1963) and Marcia (1966), has high scores in both exploration and commitment.

Instead of focusing on Marcia's static statuses, scholars advocate adopting the process-orientated view on identity development (e.g., Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010; Luyckx, Goossens, Beyers, & Soenens, 2006; Mikolyski, 2008). In particular, Luyckx, Goossens, and Soenens (2006) differentiate two types of exploration (Exploration in-Breadth and Exploration in-Depth) and two types of commitment (Commitment Making and Identification with Commitments). They describe a dynamic process of identity formation in a 'dual-cycle model', which captures two consecutive cycles. The first cycle, termed as identity exploration, or commitment-formation, represents proactive exploration of various identity alternatives (i.e., Exploration in-Breadth) and decision making of an identity-defining direction (i.e., Commitment Making). The second cycle, termed as identity consolidation by Schwartz (2001), involves Exploration in-Depth and Identification with Commitment. The former involves active evaluation and consideration of the initial commitment choices, while the latter is the integration of one's commitments into an internal sense of identity. Therefore, the dual-cycle model describes the dynamic process, by which adolescents form and maintain their identity, explore commitment alternatives, make and validate initial commitments, and either identify with the initial commitments or start a new commitment formation cycle (Luyckx et al., 2008).

Grotevant (1987) sees an increase in exploration of identity alternatives during the first two years of university study, and on average, a decrease for alternative exploration tends to coincide with increasing commitment making. Pals (1999) found that increased ego-resiliency, or identity adaptation to changing circumstances and the environment, between 21 and 27 years of age was associated with successful identity consolidation. Overall, as adolescents mature, identity experimentation fades away as they settle into an adult identity.

The dual-cycle model has been a subject of much empirical research in developmental and personality psychology. Based on the cross-sectional sample of 1580 Dutch adolescents, Van Doeselaar, Mclean, Meeus, Denissen, and Klimstra (2020) demonstrated that a stronger increase in Exploration in-Depth and Identification with Commitment, or adolescents' identity consolidation, was predicted by a higher degree of agency. Luyckx, Goossens, and Soenens (2006) found that, although both cycles are closely correlated, identification with commitment decreased across the timespan of two years. In Luyckx et al.'s (2008) later study, high autonomy and high self-reflection were conducive to identity consolidation in college students. Self-construction, eudemonic self-discovery, and agentic personality are also related to identify consolidation in Schwartz (2006). However, there is a lack of research looking at the period immediately post-graduation and the need for identity evaluation after extensive exploration.

### 2.3. Benefits sought and hypotheses development

Importance of benefits sought is recognized by marketing and tourism researchers, since benefits sought have the potential to drive individuals to achieve desired outcomes (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983). In recent years, marketers increasingly emphasize the significance of experiential outcomes, as opposed to purely functional amenities and product attributes (Frochot & Morrison, 2000; Lehto, Fu, Li, & Zhou, 2013). Benefits sought as a specific representation of individuals' need could provide insights into the tourists' motivation, which is a more abstract psychological drive (Lehto et al., 2013). As a form of leisure travel, graduation tourism is likely to possess benefits commonly sought by leisure tourists. However, it may include unique benefits sought (e.g. commemorating the event with classmates), reflecting the special nature of such a trip. Thus, in developing the hypotheses we consult both streams of literature: conventional leisure tourism and graduation

tourism.

Literature suggests that individuals travel mainly to escape from perceived mundane environments, the sedentary lifestyle at the workplace, to relieve daily stress, to get a break from an impetuous society and the demands of home environment (Crompton & Keown, 2009; Dann, 1977). Relaxation and a sense of being away are also a consistent theme in the literature (Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1990; Lehto, 2013; Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018). Specifically to graduation travel, Jiang and Zhang (2018) found that relaxation was sought during a trip as a way to take a break from study demands and associated stress. Here and thereafter, we hypothesize that actual acquisition of such benefits (termed as *benefits found*) will positively influence identity consolidation dimensions Exploration In-depth and Identification with Commitment. In other words, fulfillment of benefits sought in graduation tourism will allow tourists to complete the last stage of identify formation process. Specifically:

**H1a.** : Benefit found Escape & Relaxation positively affects exploration in-depth.

**H1b.** : Benefit found Escape & Relaxation positively affects identification with commitment.

Celebrating special moments, making memories together, sharing the same experiences with friends, and building a stronger bond are also common benefits sought in various types of leisure tourism (Lehto et al., 2013; Stasiak, 2013). Emerging literature on intimacy and friendship in tourism further establishes the idea that developing social bonds is the fundamental human motivation in leisure (Matteucci, Volić, & Filep, 2019). Cheng (2019) showed that graduation tourists tend to seek social interactions to strengthen relationships with friends or other reference groups. Commemoration and socializing are graduate students' motivations in Jiang and Zhang (2018) and Liu and Zheng (2014), whereas relationship enhancement and warm interpersonal connections are desired outcomes of graduation travel in Tsai (n.d.). Based on this, we hypothesize:

**H2a.** : Benefit found Socializing positively affects exploration in-depth.

**H2b.** : Benefit found Socializing positively affects identification with commitment.

Tourists place much importance on the benefits of excitement (Loker & Perdue, 1992), adventure (Wight, 1996), and novelty seeking (Bello & Etzel, 1985; Bricker, Cottrell, & Verhoven, 1998; Shu, Crompton, & Witt, 1996). Exploration of a destination in a form of sightseeing and similar activities are motivations for graduation travel in Jiang and Zhang (2018) and Liu and Zheng (2014). Experiencing new and surprising things was the top-scoring benefit of graduation travel in Tsai (n.d.). We therefore propose that

**H3a.** : Benefit found Exploration positively affects exploration in-depth.

**H3b.** : Benefit found Exploration positively affects identification with commitment.

The major benefits sought in graduation travel is cognitive experiences that contribute to graduate tourists' intellectual and personal development (Cheng, 2019; Jiang & Zhang, 2018; Tsai, n.d.). Similarly, benefits sought from the tourism portion of study abroad programs and gap year include informal education (Juvan & Lesjak, 2011). Learning and developing oneself is a desired benefit in family travel from the perspective of youth tourists (Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2011; Wu et al., 2021). Thus, we expect that

**H4a.** : Benefit found Learning positively affects exploration in-depth.

**H4b.** : Benefit found Learning positively affects identification with commitment.

Another benefit sought in leisure tourism is demonstrating one's achievements and prestige, tapping into the concept of conspicuous consumption. In Carr (2005), for example, despite low incomes and financial debts, students spend relatively high levels of money on travel experiences, for which they may not have time when employed full time (McDonnell, Sakal, & Petocz, 2008). Such trips are seen as essential experience of student life. Specifically to graduation tourism, Cheng (2019) found that a sense of self-validation from sharing one's travel experience after returning home through photographs and stories is a critical motivation. Another aspect of self-validation is mastery of new skills (Xu, Morgan, & Song, 2009). Mastering social skills and skills that allow youths to function independently were important outcomes (Wu et al., 2021) in the family tourism context. Fu et al. (2015) found that a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment derived coping with unanticipated issues in unfamiliar environments was a highly valuable outcome in educational tourism. Similarly, personal development and independence was a motivation for graduation tourism in Jiang and Zhang (2018) and Cheng (2019). Thus, we hypothesize that.

**H5a.** : Benefit found Achievement & Prestige positively affects exploration in-depth.

**H5b.** : Benefit found Achievement & Prestige positively affects identification with commitment.

Fig. 1 visually summarizes the above reasoning and the hypotheses. This study is based on the neoEriksonian approach, represented by the dual-cycle model (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). During Cycle 1, university graduates engage in exploration of different identity alternatives to sort out initial identity choices, the stage known as *identity exploration*. Cycle 2, which is of interest to this research, reflects *identity consolidation*, focusing on graduates' re-evaluation of identity commitments (Exploration in-Depth) and assessment on how they identify with such commitments (Identification with Commitment). An individual who has achieved both stages is seen as having achieved a consolidated self and thus completed the identity formation process (Grotevant, 1987). The five types of benefits found during a graduation trip are hypothesized to positively influence the two dimensions of identity consolidation.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Research design and sampling

Based on the ideas of benefits sought and found, this study aimed to determine the effects of graduation travel experience on tourists' identity consolidation. Given that the study did not intend to develop new theory and was rather concerned with applying an existing theory (the dual-cycle model), to understand a new phenomenon (graduation travel), a quantitative approach was deemed as appropriate. The sampling frame for this research consisted of individuals who graduated with a bachelor degree within three years and who undertook a trip within six months after graduation. It was also important that the participants have already completed the identity exploration stage to qualify for inclusion. Data were collected with help of a student organization on campus of a large university in Greater China. Out of 463 completed questionnaires, 70 responses were discarded because they failed to fulfill the criteria for inclusion. Out of these, 15 were eliminated because the total scores on the identify exploration dimensions was less than 26, suggesting that the participants had not yet passed this stage and thus did not qualify for the sample.

#### 3.2. Survey instrument

A structured questionnaire consisting of five sections was the research instrument. The first section asked for information relating to trip characteristics (e.g. length of stay, travel companion). Respondents

were also asked to write the destination they visited for a graduation trip. The second section consisted of questions probing the benefits sought by graduation travelers. The statements used for this section were developed through a two-stage process. A preliminary list of 30 items relating to the benefits sought in graduation travel was adapted from an extensive review of literature (see Table Appendix). Then, a panel of five judges composed of graduate tourism students and faculty researchers was asked to review and refine the benefit items, which resulted in a final list of 22 items (see Table 2). The 22 benefit sought items ("Before your graduation travel, to which extent did you seek the following benefits in graduation travel?") were measured based on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 ("not important at all") to 5 ("extremely important"). With the same scale and calibration, the third section evaluated the benefits found, or the extent to which the benefits sought were actually fulfilled during graduation travel ("To which extent have you found the following benefits in your graduation travel?"). All the questions referred to a graduation trip, defined as a trip taken within 6 months after graduation from a bachelor program.

Fourth, Dimensions of Identity Development Scale measuring dimensions in dual cycle model was adopted from Luyckx et al. (2008). The first two dimensions focused on respondents' state of identity exploration concerning exploration in-breadth and commitment making and were used as screening questions. The last two dimensions aimed to measure respondents' exploration in-depth and identification with commitment dimensions in identity consolidation during and after graduation travel. The Identity Development Scale's factor structure, reliability, and external validity were confirmed in various studies (Luyckx et al., 2008). Four dimensions in identity formation process were measured by 20 items (5 items for each dimension) on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The final section asked for socio-demographic information. The questionnaire was first developed in English and subsequently translated into Chinese. The translation was examined by two bilingual experts in Chinese language and literature.

#### 3.3. Data analysis

Aside from descriptive statistics, paired *t*-tests were used to compare the mean score of benefits sought with that of benefits found in graduation travel. Since the five groups of benefits were developed based on the existing literature, they were assembled in these groups theoretically. To verify whether these groups actually represent the benefits sought by graduate tourists, which is a new context, we conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis.

Maximum Likelihood Analysis with an Oblique rotation<sup>1</sup> was used with a predetermined cut-off Eigenvalue of 1. For the purpose of interpretation of factors, a loading cut-off of 0.40 was adopted in this study, although one can find different "rules of thumb" in the literature, ranging from 0.4 (Ertz, Karakas, & Sarigöllü, 2016) to 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). There, however, needs to be theoretical significance of the resulting factors. In this study, utilizing the 0.4 "rule" produced the most theoretically sound solution. In fact, most items loaded between 0.6 and 0.9, with exception of two items "Satisfying my curiosity" (0.466) and "Deepening the understanding about myself" (0.472) that had marginal loadings but made theoretical sense.

Finally, the hypotheses were tested by estimating two hierarchical regression models: one for exploration in-depth and one for identification with commitment. Hierarchical regression modeling examines the

<sup>1</sup> We opted for oblique rotation (vs. orthogonal) because it implies that factors are correlated (Hair et al., 2010). Logically we cannot assume that one factor of benefits sought has no correlation with one or more other factors. Existing literature on benefits sought also does not suggest that seeking of one benefits does not depend on other benefits. Thus, logically oblique rotation is in line with Hair et al.'s (2010) suggestions regarding psychological research.

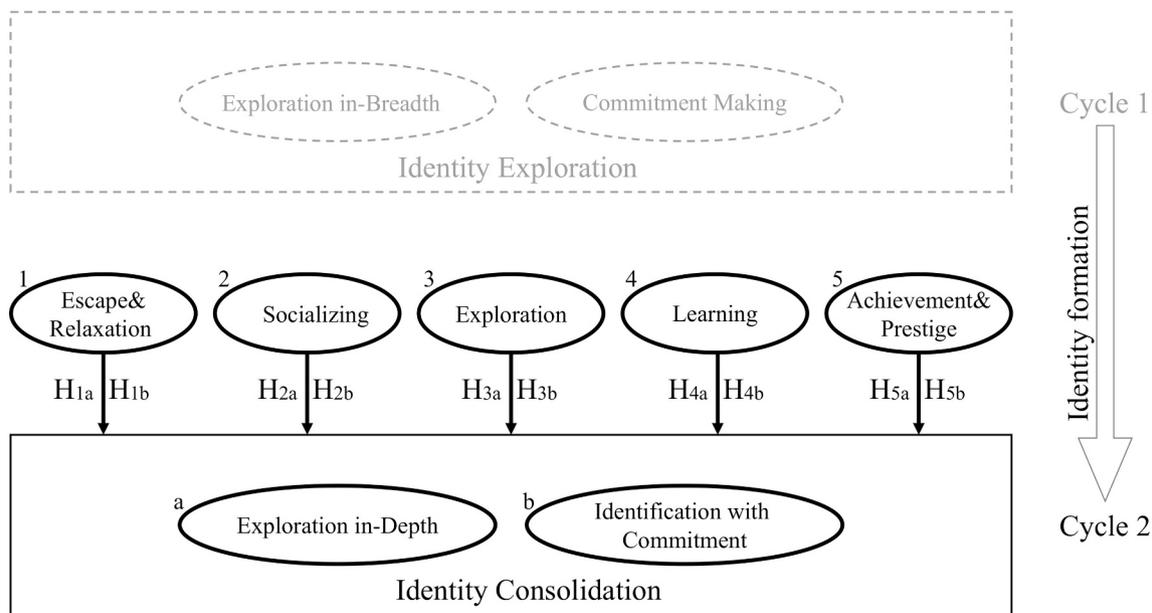


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.  
 Note: Concepts in the dashed greyed area not part of empirical testing.

influence of several independent variables in a sequential way. Socio-demographic variables are typically used as control and entered first, followed by variables based on their conceptual significance and research relevance (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Based on these guidelines, socio-demographic variables (as controls) were first introduced, followed by trip characteristic variables (as controls) and benefits found (as variables of interest). As multiple items measured exploration in-depth, identification with commitment, and benefits found, their means were used in the regression models.

Prior to carrying out the multiple regression analysis, baseline statistical assumptions were verified. Variance inflation factors calculated in each model ranged from 1.01 to 1.81, indicating the absence of multicollinearity in the models (Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, the examination of residuals did not report violations of normality, which was confirmed by acceptable Skewness and Kurtosis value in each model (−0.613 and −0.153 for Exploration in-Depth; −0.158 and −0.116 for Identification with Commitment) and insignificant Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests ( $p > .01$  for Identification with Commitment). Besides, the Q-Q plots and histograms demonstrated that the data were approximately normally distributed. No missing values were present in the data.

4. Results

4.1. Baseline information

The sample was almost equally distributed between men (46.8%) and women (53.2%), with an average of 23.42 years of age. All of the respondents were educated at tertiary level or above, and their undergraduate major varied. Accounting and Finance comprised 25.6% of the respondents, followed by Business English and Hotel and Tourism Management which accounted for 12.4% and 12.1% respectively. Full-time graduate students represented the highest proportion (23.5%), followed by human resource staff (9.5%) and administrative staff (9.5%).

In terms of trip characteristics of the respondents (Table 1), the majority (70.9%) traveled independently, while 24.7% were partial packaged travelers who only reserved transportation and accommodation via travel agencies. About 94.2% of these visitors traveled with either classmates (56.3%), friends/partners (26.5%) or family (11.4%).

Table 1  
 Demographic and trip data of the respondents, N = 393.

		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	177	46.8
	Female	201	53.2
Occupation	Student	89	23.5
	Production staff	0	0
	Salesperson	12	3.1
	Marketing and PR staff	22	5.8
	Customer service	27	7.1
	Administrative staff	36	9.5
	Human resource staff	36	9.5
	Financial staff and auditor	17	4.4
	Civil servant	2	0.5
	Technician	25	6.6
Travel pattern	Management	24	6.3
	Teacher	7	1.8
	Counselor	21	5.5
	Professional (Accountant, Lawyer, Journalist, Doctor, etc)	35	9.2
	Others	25	6.6
	Package tour	13	3.4
	Independent travel	268	70.9
Companionship	Partial package tour	97	25.7
	Classmate	213	56.3
	Friend/Partner	100	26.5
Destination	Family/Relative	43	11.4
	Solo	22	5.8
	Domestic	225	59.5
	International	153	40.5

Only about 5.8% went alone. About half of the respondents had stayed five to nine nights (mean = 8.71 days, SD = 4.039) at destinations, which varied from domestic rural destinations to international urban locations.

The paired sample t-test was applied to the mean scores of the 22 benefits sought and benefits found in graduation travel. As evident from Table 2, which provides a summary of variables of interest and its mean comparisons, four benefits found by graduation travelers were significantly higher than benefits sought (i.e. positive mean difference). These are *getting away from the demands of home*, *escaping from the daily routine*, *getting a change from a busy job or life*, and *indulging in luxury*. For four attributes with a negative mean difference, the benefits sought

**Table 2**  
Paired t-tests between benefits sought and benefits found.

	Benefits found mean	SD	Benefits sought mean	SD	Mean difference	t-value
Getting away from the demands of home	3.76	0.872	3.49	1.108	0.27	6.043***
Escaping from the daily routine	3.68	0.93	3.39	1.147	0.29	6.505***
Getting a change from a busy job or life	3.76	0.941	3.57	1.162	0.19	3.556***
Relaxation and stress relief	4.02	0.931	4.11	1.026	-0.09	-2.127*
Doing the things I like to do	4.21	0.809	4.21	0.809	0.00	0.00
Doing things I was looking forward to before the trip	4.06	0.938	4.06	0.939	0.00	-1.00
Discovering and visiting interesting sights	4.26	0.755	4.26	0.755	0.00	0.00
Satisfying my curiosity	3.92	0.965	4.17	0.943	-0.25	-5.113***
Meeting people with similar interests	3.27	0.955	3.21	0.946	0.06	1.272
Creating memories together with my travel companion	3.92	0.916	4.17	0.863	-0.25	-5.243***
Staying with people who share a same passion	3.83	0.876	4.02	0.852	-0.19	-4.457***
Strengthening the relationship with my travel companion	3.93	0.876	4.07	0.862	-0.14	-2.999**
Seeking intellectual enrichment	3.34	1.023	3.7	0.912	-0.36	-7.705***
Refine my skills	3.11	0.956	3.22	0.937	-0.11	-2.048*
Being able to apply my knowledge	3.11	1.053	3.17	1.029	-0.06	-1.232
Showing other people my knowledge	2.78	0.998	2.87	0.939	-0.09	-1.564
Deepening the understanding about myself	3.58	0.834	3.66	0.899	-0.08	-1.71
Indulging in luxury (such as luxury hotels or fine dining)	2.92	1.149	2.67	1.087	0.25	4.623***
Showing the independence from family	3.37	1.095	3.3	0.994	0.07	1.564
Increasing my feeling of self-worth	3.26	1.074	3.42	0.961	-0.16	-3.187**
Deriving a feeling of accomplishment	3.26	1.009	3.41	0.96	-0.15	-3.168**
Being able to share my travel experiences after returning home	3.48	1.091	3.51	0.989	-0.03	-0.681

Note: \*significant at  $p < .05$ , \*\*significant at  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* significant at  $p < .001$ . All variables are rated on the 1 to 5 scale.

outweighed benefits found. These were *satisfying my curiosity, creating memories together with my travel companion, staying with people who share a same passion, and seeking intellectual enrichment.*

#### 4.2. Benefits sought by graduation travelers

The Bartlett test of sphericity was significant ( $p < .05$ ), indicating significant correlations among some of the variables in the matrix (Hair

et al., 2010). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value obtained was 0.82, which indicated a good level of interrelations among the variables. Overall, the data set demonstrated the appropriateness for conducting factor analysis. For the purpose of interpretation of factors, a loading cut-off of 0.40 was adopted in this study. Three benefit items were discarded for low communalities and factor loading ( $<|0.40|$ ). As shown in Table 3, five factors were extracted with eigenvalues ranging from 1.101 to 6.067, which accounted for 71.9% of the total variance. Although the factors

**Table 3**  
Factor analysis results of benefits sought in graduation travel.

Factor loading	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	Communality
<b>Factor 1. Social Fulfillment</b>						
Creating memories together with my travel companion	0.909					0.779
Staying with people who share a same passion	0.901					0.89
Strengthening the relationship with my travel companion	0.948					0.767
<b>Factor 2. Self-Efficacy Improvement</b>						
Seeking intellectual enrichment		0.607				0.564
Refining my skills		0.887				0.791
Being able to apply my knowledge		0.877				0.74
Showing other people my knowledge		0.733				0.408
<b>Factor 3. Escape/Relaxation</b>						
Getting away from the demands of home			-0.88			0.472
Escaping from the daily routine			-0.953			0.836
Getting a change from a busy job or life			-0.874			0.812
Relaxation and stress relief			-0.615			0.911
<b>Factor 4. Interest Pursuit</b>						
Doing the things I like to do				0.92		0.601
Doing things I was looking forward to before the trip				0.698		0.762
Discovering and visiting interesting sights				0.624		0.806
Satisfying my curiosity				0.466		0.608
<b>Factor 5. Self-Esteem Enhancement</b>						
Showing the independence from family					-0.718	0.747
Increasing my feeling of self-worth					-0.964	0.83
Deriving a feeling of accomplishment					-0.808	0.758
Deepening the understanding about myself					-0.472	0.58
Eigenvalues	6.067	3.834	2.366	1.636	1.101	
Percentage of variance (%)	27.622	19.621	12.944	7.17	4.554	
Cumulative variance	27.622	47.243	60.187	67.357	71.911	
Cronbach's alpha	0.944	0.885	0.91	0.826	0.889	
Number of items (total = 19)	3	4	4	4	4	

roughly correspond to those proposed in Conceptual Framework (as based on the literature review), we renamed some factors to better reflect the comprising items.

The first factor, Social Fulfillment (previously Socializing), explained the greatest amount of the variance (27.622%) and three items including *creating memories together with my travel companion*, *staying with people who share the same passion*, and *strengthening the relationship with my travel companion*. It carried items related to the social benefits of sameness, togetherness, and cohesiveness. The next factor was labeled as Self-Efficacy Enhancement (previously Learning) since it incorporated the items *seeking intellectual enrichment*, *refining my skills*, and *being able to apply my knowledge*, emphasizing the desire for enhancing perceived cognitive abilities through travel.

The third factor Escape/Relaxation reflected benefits of escaping from the daily routine with items such as *getting away from the demands of home*, *getting a change from a busy job or life* and *relaxation and stress relief*. The fourth factor, Interest Pursuit (previously Exploration), which included items such as *discovering and visiting interesting sights*, pertained to the benefits sought to fulfill personal interests. The fifth and final factor, Self-esteem Enhancement (previously Achievement & Prestige), was comprised of *showing the independence from family*, *deriving a feeling of accomplishment*, and *deepening the understanding about myself*. They were categorized in self-esteem enhancement because a better understanding of self, together with the feeling of independence, development, and accomplishment, contributed to a positive conception of oneself, which is in line with the self-esteem concept. This factor highlighted the benefits of enhancing self-worth and achieving self-actualization through travel.

#### 4.3. Impact of benefits found on identity consolidation

As seen from Tables 4 and 5, which presented the results of hierarchical regressions, R<sup>2</sup> changed with each additional set of variables. However, the third block of variables significantly improved the model fit of the Exploration in-Depth model (F = 7.420, p < .001) and Identification with Commitment model (F = 13.743, p < .001). This suggests that benefits found contributed to empirical explanation in the variance in Exploration In-depth and Identification with Commitment, while no significant effects of socio-demographic and control variables on were observed. These results suggest that, when it comes to Exploration in-Depth, Social Fulfillment (β = 0.183, p < .001) and Self-esteem Enhancement (β = 0.161, p < .05) were significantly and positive influencing factors. However, for Identification with Commitment,

besides Self-esteem Enhancement, which positively affected Identification with Commitment (β = 0.263, p < .001), Self-efficacy Improvement was another contributing factor (β = 0.130, p < .05). Escape/Relaxation as well as Interest Pursuit had no influence on either Exploration in-Depth or Identification with Commitment. In sum, only H2a, H4b, as well as H5a,b were empirically supported.

## 5. Discussion

In this section, we first discuss the discrepancies between benefits sought and benefits found in graduation tourism. This baseline information provides valuable insights into the tourism industry’s performance in terms of helping graduation tourists fulfill their benefits sought. Then, we discuss how and why fulfilling certain benefits sought contribute or do not contribute to the two dimensions of identity consolidation (exploration in-depth and identification with commitment) in graduation tourism.

### 5.1. Benefits sought vs. benefits found

The item-by-item paired t-test analysis identified the gaps between benefits sought and actual benefits acquired during graduation travel, suggesting the industry’s inadequate performance in this travel market. A significant divergence between what consumers seek and what the industry provides was identified. On one hand, the industry over performed in terms of benefits of Escape/Relaxation; on the other hand, unique benefits sought in graduation travel such as Interest Pursuit, Self-efficacy Improvement, Social Fulfillment, and Self-esteem Enhancement remained unfulfilled. It could be seen that the industry did well in providing the experiences of escape and relaxation due to those being the most basic motivational drive (Lehto, 2013). This also implies that the industry provides excessive benefits of Escape/Relaxation, which actually do not contribute to identity consolidation.

Of interest is that the benefit item “indulge in luxury” was the least important benefit sought (M = 2.67, SD = 1.087), yet it was the area where the industry over-delivered. Although the reports indicate that a decreasing proportion of graduation travelers remains price-sensitive, the graduation traveler who, in most cases, is yet to be financially independent, is more prudent and less likely to indulge in luxury (Liu & Zheng, 2014; Tuniu, 2017). In sum, the industry seems to consider the graduation travel market as part of mass leisure market and does not customize its offerings to incorporate specific benefits sought by recent graduates. The situation is perhaps due to the relative novelty of

**Table 4**  
Regression results of Exploration in-Depth on benefits found.

Variable	Block 1		Block 2		Block 3		Conclusion
	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	
Constant	3.351***(0.859)		3.409***(0.935)		1.380 (0.972)		
Gender (man vs. woman)	0.081 (0.087)	0.048	0.070 (0.088)	0.042	0.055 (0.085)	0.033	
Age	-0.003 (0.036)	-0.005	0.002 (0.036)	0.003	0.007 (0.035)	0.010	
Occupation (student vs. working)	0.079 (0.102)	-0.040	0.077 (0.102)	0.039	0.148 (0.100)	0.075	
Trip duration			-0.018 (0.011)	-0.088	-0.014 (0.010)	-0.069	
Travel companionship (solo vs. accompanied)			-0.074 (0.049)	-0.079	-0.052 (0.048)	-0.056	
Travel pattern (package vs. independent vs. partial package)			0.038 (0.089)	0.022	0.018 (0.086)	0.011	
Travel destination (domestic vs. foreign)			0.020 (0.090)	0.012	-0.025 (0.089)	-0.015	
Benefits found							
Escape/Relaxation					0.046 (0.068)	0.038	H1a:not supported
Social Fulfillment					0.183** (0.066)	0.149	H2a:supported
Interest Pursuit					0.045 (0.071)	0.035	H3a:not supported
Self-Efficacy Improvement					0.076 (0.073)	0.066	H4a:not supported
Self-Esteem Enhancement					0.161* (0.075)	0.142	H5a:supported
R <sup>2</sup>	0.004		0.018		0.109		
Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	-0.004		0.001		0.080		
R <sup>2</sup> change	0.004		0.014		0.091		
F value	0.496		1.345		7.420***		

Note: \*significant at p < .05, \*\*significant at p < .01, \*\*\* significant at p < .001.

**Table 5**  
Regression results of Identification with Commitment on benefits found.

Variable	Block 1		Block 2		Block 3		Conclusion
	B (S.E.)	$\beta$	B (S.E.)	$\beta$	B (S.E.)	$\beta$	
Constant	2.334***(0.752)		2.727***(0.8)		1.087 (0.812)		
Gender (man vs. woman)	0.052 (0.076)	0.035	0.028 (0.076)	0.019	0.001 (0.071)	0.007	
Age	0.028 (0.031)	0.046	0.029 (0.032)	0.049	0.029 (0.029)	0.049	
Occupation (student vs. working)	0.068 (0.089)	0.039	0.073 (0.089)	0.042	0.119 (0.084)	0.069	
Trip duration			-0.019*(0.009)	-0.103	-0.015 (0.009)	-0.081	
Travel companionship (solo vs. accompanied)			-0.111** (0.077)	-0.135	-0.075 (0.040)	-0.091	
Travel pattern (package vs. independent vs. partial package)			-0.036 (0.042)	-0.024	-0.045 (0.072)	-0.030	
Travel destination (domestic vs. foreign)			0.015 (0.078)	0.010	-0.011 (0.074)	-0.007	
Benefits found							
Escape/Relaxation					-0.087 (0.057)	-0.082	H1b: not supported
Social Fulfillment					0.079 (0.055)	0.074	H2b: not supported
Interest Pursuit					0.069 (0.060)	0.060	H3b: not supported
Self-Efficacy Improvement					0.130*(0.061)	0.133	H4b: supported
Self-Esteem Enhancement					0.263*** (0.063)	0.265	H5b: supported
R <sup>2</sup>	0.005		0.035		0.188		
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	-0.003		0.016		0.161		
R <sup>2</sup> change	0.005		0.029		0.153		
F value	0.646		2.820*		13.743***		

Note: \*significant at  $p < .05$ , \*\*significant at  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* significant at  $p < .001$ .

graduate tourists as a niche market but also the lack of practical guidelines on how to satisfy such tourists.

## 5.2. Graduation travel and identity consolidation

The groups of benefits identified by factor analysis encompass five aspects: Social Fulfillment, Self-efficacy Improvement, Escape/Relaxation, Interest Pursuit, and Self-esteem Enhancement. Benefits found in terms of Social Fulfillment, Self-efficacy Improvement, and Self-esteem Enhancement assisted adolescents to consolidate their identity, evidenced positive changes in Exploration in-Depth and Identification with Commitment. This outcome supported the previous studies on timing of identity development that the period immediately after college involved consolidation rather than a continued exploration of identity alternatives (Waterman, 1982).

### 5.2.1. Exploration in-depth

This study found that benefits found related to Self-esteem Enhancement and Social Fulfillment positively affect the Exploration in-Depth aspect. This means that graduation experiences that lead to improvements in one's conception of self and allow to foster fulfilling relationships with others are at a better position to help graduation tourists explore their existing commitments from various lenses. This is in line with existing tourism research on younger adolescents. For example, Jyotsana (2016) found that a positive conception of self (which is self-esteem) was associated with an adolescent's sense of identity, while Fu et al. (2015) reported affiliation as an important aspect of adolescents' educational travel experiences abroad. Like in our study, Fu et al. (2015) noted that this affiliation was mostly related to traveling with existing friends to strengthen the interpersonal relationships that were not as intimate back home. In the case of gap year (King, 2011), participants noted the distinction in psychosocial attributes between a present and past self. That was, having come back from the gap year, young people felt better prepared for the transition into the university identity. Improvements in perception of self-worth, better self-esteem help complete the identity formation process.

In accordance with the definition of identity as a subjective feeling of continuously being the same person over time and maintaining an image others have of them (Erikson, 1968), the desire to be coherent and to have a stable sense of self involves 'feeling to be the distinctive as I am' as well as 'the sense of sameness to others.' Our study exemplifies this principle in that self-esteem addresses the need for personal distinctiveness while social integration leverages the need for belongingness

and assimilation to drive identity consolidation. Experiencing social bonding vigorously sought in graduation travel tends to fulfill the desire to integrate into reference groups while maintaining the sense of personal uniqueness. Therefore, Social Fulfillment and Self-esteem Enhancement are the two mechanisms that jointly work to influence Exploration in-Depth, thus contributing to the task of identity formation in graduation travel.

Contrary to our hypothesis, Interest Pursuit did not contribute to Exploration in-Depth. This suggests the lesser importance of individuation in comparison with social integration in exploration in-depth, which is also confirmed by a smaller standardized beta coefficient for Self-esteem Enhancement than for Social Fulfillment in Table 4. However, this can be explained that graduation travel is often used to commemorate an important life milestone with classmates, as opposed to pursue a graduate's personal aspirations (Jiang & Zhang, 2018).

The finding that Self-efficacy Improvement has no influence on Exploration in-Depth was surprising since mastery is a common finding in tourism literature on identity work and quality of life (e.g. Fu et al., 2015). However, Exploration in-Depth was negatively correlated with independence from parents in Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2006), suggesting the limits in mastery's effect on exploring one's commitment from different perspectives. In other words, unlike exploration, the consolidation stage does not benefit from self-efficacy improvement.

### 5.2.2. Identification with commitment

Identification with Commitment implies that a person identifies with and feels certain about a commitment that becomes central to his/her identity. Identification with Commitment involves the alignment between a chosen commitment and one's actual potentiality (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). Thus, graduation travel at this stage should facilitate the assessment of this alignment for the sake of completing the identity formation process. This study found that Self-esteem Fulfillment and Self-efficacy Improvements are the two types of benefits found that positively affect Identification with Commitment. This result supports much research in adolescent psychology and tourism literature. For example, the meta-analysis by Ryeng, Kroger, and Martinussen (2013) revealed that Identification with Commitment was strongly associated with high self-esteem. Identification with Commitment was also positively related to self-esteem in Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2006). Although no tourism study focused on identify consolidation and Identification with Commitment as its integral part, self-esteem is a common travel motivation (e.g. Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006) and

outcome (Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012).

The results revealed that self-efficacy acquired by graduation tourists had a positive effect on Identification with Commitment. This shows that an increase in self-efficacy leads to increase in the formation of achieved identity and contributes to higher commitment to goals (Mikolyski, 2008). This corroborates Cheng (2019) on the role of self-efficacy in relation to transitions throughout adolescence, in that the commitment to a career goal was positively related to the belief that one can reach that goal (Gangloff & Mazilescu, 2017). The result suggests that that self-efficacy is a key to facilitating commitment and thus identity consolidation. Therefore, self-efficacy is the aspect that helps maintain identity consistency with the critical self-reflection and evaluate investment made during commitment making. Although no tourism study focused on the role of tourism in identity consolidation, self-efficacy, or mastery, is a common outcome of a tourism experience in children, adolescents, and young adults (Fu et al., 2015; Noy, 2004; Wu et al., 2021). Interestingly, unlike the case of Exploration in-Depth, Social Fulfillment as a benefit found on a graduation trip did not contribute to Identification with Commitment. This points to a greater importance of the individuation than integration in facilitating Identification with Commitment, which supports the conceptualization of Identification with Commitment as an alignment between one's potentiality and a commitment. Unlike exploration in-depth, identification with commitment does not require an investigation in-depth and from different perspectives but emphasizes the knowledge one's skills, interest, and value orientations.

Contrary to our hypotheses, the benefits found Escape/relaxation did not contribute to either Exploration in-Depth or Identification with Commitment. When it comes to Escape/relaxation, our finding supports the literature on transformative tourism (e.g. Kirillova et al., 2017), where hedonic pursuits were shown not to trigger the identity work. Escapist travel experiences may be pleasantly relaxing but they have a limited effect on eudemonic outcomes, for which physical challenges, self-development and -discovery are required (Matteucci et al., 2019).

## 6. Conclusion and implications

This research was motivated by the dearth of studies on the role of tourism in identity formation and specifically its consolidation stage, as well as the lack of industry insights into the particulars of the phenomenon of graduation travel. The study found five benefits sought by graduation tourists: 1) Social Fulfillment, 2) Self-efficacy Improvement, 3) Escape/Relaxation, 4) Interest Pursuit, and 5) Self-esteem Enhancement. The item-by-item analysis of benefits showed that the tourism industry over-delivers on Escape/Relaxation and under-delivers on other benefits, which are of higher order and more important to graduate tourists. In terms of the effect on identity consolidation, successful fulfillment of benefits sought in the domains of Self-esteem Enhancement and Social Fulfillment positively affects Exploration in-Depth, while Self-efficacy Improvement and Self-esteem Enhancement positively influence Identification with Commitment. Jointly, these findings suggest that graduation tourism helps identity consolidation of recent university graduates when high-order benefits are sought and found. Yet, the current market lacks the focus on unique needs that actually assist the identity formation process.

### 6.1. Theoretical implications

The study is a systematic cross-disciplinary approach to examine the problem at the intersection tourism and developmental psychology. It investigated the stage-specific task of identity formation involved in travel, with the focus on recent university graduates when of a sense of self is firstly established. Although the literature on transformative tourism and identity work in tourism is burgeoning, insights regarding the formative potential of travel are lacking and the focus on identity consolidation is non-existent. Underpinned by the dual-cycle theory, it is the first tourism-specific study to consider the two dimension of identity

consolidation - exploration in-depth and identification with commitments – and the role of travel in establishing and committing to (as opposed to exploring) one's identity. In addition, the study emphasized the growing (even despite the COVID-19 situation, e.g. China Educational Tours, 2021) graduation travel market. Graduation tourists are uniquely positioned within their life course and in the context of stage-specific identity work. Thus, the study is one of very few to bring a much-needed scholarly attention to graduation tourists and tourism. Finally, we showed that graduation tourists seek generic (e.g. Escape/Relaxation) as well as unique (e.g. Self-efficacy Improvement) benefits from travel, which is hoped to build a foundation for tourism scholars to further dissect graduation tourists' needs and experiences.

### 6.2. Practical implications

The results provide insights for the tourism industry into how to design tourism products catered to recent university graduates. Given that fulfillment of the three groups of benefits sought (Self-efficacy Improvement, Social Fulfillment, and Self-esteem Enhancement) are direct contributors to identity consolidation, the industry players are advised to incorporate related activities into travel product offerings. Identified trip characteristics coupled with the need for social fulfillment suggest that graduation travel is more about creating lasting memories and strengthening social relationship than pursuing personal interests or meeting new people. Tour products therefore should be geared towards small close-knit groups. In this sense, graduation tourists would be more interested in partially packaged tours with discounted rates on small group purchases, customized tours, or independent tourism activities that can engage the whole travel party. Hospitality industry (e.g. hotels, restaurants) could consider providing a special arrangements for small group purchases (e.g. joint rooms), while travel agencies could design experiences that include parallel (e.g. attending a performance) and joint (e.g. beach volleyball, kayaking) geared towards strengthening social bonds.

To tap into the domain of Self-efficacy Improvement, tour guides should strive to engage tourists in the narratives of attractions by asking questions or assigning tasks (e.g. treasure hunt). Similarly, activities that involve a task completion such as participating in a cooking competition and handicraft workshop can be developed. This is because mastery experiences provide authentic evidence that an individual has the capability of performing a certain task, and such experiences are the strongest source of efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977). To contribute to Self-esteem Enhancement, travel agencies are advised to make efforts to trigger the identity consolidation process by subsequent meaning making through recording and sharing formative moments. Tour guides could record special occasions during trips and send photos/videos to tourists afterwards. Tourists should be also encouraged to write about and to share their experiences on social media platforms, triggering meaning making. Through this tangibilization of triggering episodes, tourists can solidify their accomplishments and enhance a sense of self-worth. Finally, we advise tour operators against including passively recuperating activities in graduation tours. While basic benefits sought in a conventional leisure trip scenario, relaxing and escaping the routine are unlikely to satisfy graduation tourists and to contribute to their identity formation.

The study also suggest that educational institutions whose goal is to graduate a wholesome individual could consider incorporating carefully designed graduation travel into their programs. This could be delegated to alumni networks (as an initiation ritual) or student associations (as an exit ritual). Universities or colleges are advised to collaborate with travel agencies on preferable rates for graduating students and to welcome the agencies on campus to facilitate bookings.

### 6.3. Limitations and future research

The study is not free of limitations. First, the non-probability sample

does not allow for generalization to a broader population. Second, the study focused on traditional graduates with a bachelor degree, and thus the results might not be applicable to older graduates or graduates from associate/higher diploma or master degrees. As the case with other survey-based research focused on past experiences, there may be a recollection bias in graduation travelers' recall of their benefits sought/found. Cross-national and cross-cultural research designs are also encouraged to enhance external validity of the findings. Activities taken in graduation travel represent an additional meaningful avenue for future research since they are an essential component of tourism experience that crystallize the benefits sought and entails complex interactions between tourists and a destination (Lehto et al., 2013). Finally, as a deductive quantitative research, this study was based on existing literature. Qualitative approaches into graduation tourists' experiences will be better positioned to contribute to theory building.

**What is the contribution to knowledge, theory, policy or practice offered by the paper?**

Although the literature on transformative tourism and identity work in tourism is bourgeoning, insights regarding the formative potential of travel are lacking and the focus on identity consolidation is non-existent. The results provide insights for the tourism industry into how to design tourism products catered to recent university graduates. The study also suggest that educational institutions whose goal is to graduate a wholesome individual could consider incorporating carefully designed graduation travel into their programs.

**How does the paper offer a social science perspective/approach?**

The study is a systematic cross-disciplinary approach to examine the problem at the intersection tourism and developmental psychology. It investigated the stage-specific task of identity formation involved in travel, with the focus on recent university graduates when of a sense of self is firstly established. Underpinned by the dual-cycle theory, it is the first tourism-specific study to consider the two dimension of identity consolidation - exploration in-depth and identification with commitments - and the role of travel in establishing and committing to (as opposed to exploring) one's identity.

**Declaration of Competing Interest**

None.

**Appendix: Initial list of benefits sought.**

Getting away from the demands of home	Lehto et al., 2013
Escaping from the daily routine	Lehto et al., 2013
Getting a change from a busy job or life	Lehto et al., 2013
Relaxing and relieving stress	Crompton & Keown, 2009
Being able to do nothing <sup>a</sup>	Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1990
The things I like to do can be done at the destination	Lehto, 2013
The things I could do at the destination were things I was looking forward to before the trip	Lehto, 2013
Seeing interesting sights	Bricker et al., 1998
Satisfying my curiosity	Shu et al., 1996
Fulfilling my dream of visiting a place <sup>a</sup>	Zhang & Lam, 1999
Meeting people with similar interests	McDonnell et al., 2008
Making memories together	Lehto et al., 2013
Sharing the same experiences with friends <sup>a</sup>	Lehto et al., 2013
Building a stronger bond	Lehto et al., 2013
Celebrating special moments <sup>a</sup>	Stasiak, 2013
Staying among people who share a passion	Stasiak, 2013
Enjoying the company of the people who came with me	Shu et al., 1996
Renewing personal connections with people other than family <sup>a</sup>	Crompton & Keown, 2009

(continued on next column)

(continued)

Doing something that impress others <sup>a</sup>	Shu et al., 1996
Showing other people my knowledge	Shu et al., 1996
Increasing knowledge about a foreign destination <sup>a</sup>	Zhang & Lam, 1999
Indulging in luxury (such as luxury hotels or fine dining)	McDonnell et al., 2008
Showing the independence from family	Zhou, 2010
Increasing my feeling of self-worth	Shu et al., 1996
Helping me feel like a better person <sup>a</sup>	Shu et al., 1996
Deriving a feeling of accomplishment	Shu et al., 1996
Being able to share my travel experiences after returning home	Zhang & Lam, 1999
Engaging in activities that require skills	Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2011
Seeking intellectual enrichment	Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2011
Learning about yourself	Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1990

<sup>a</sup> Not included in the final list.

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