Not that into you? Lovers' traveling desynchronicity and its effects on the traveling satisfaction

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Although the romantic tourism industry has evidenced sharp growth, only a few studies investigated the factors that facilitate the traveling satisfaction of lovers who are in a relationship but have yet to be married. Particularly, the literature remains silent on the effects of interpersonal interactions between partners on traveling satisfaction. Based on a mixed-method approach, the study pinpoints that traveling desynchronicity leads to lower traveling satisfaction of lovers, but people with independent personalities suffer less. Overall, the study advances the understanding of romantic tourism, highlights the cross-effects of personality heterogeneities, and indicates that the traveling experience is helpful in testing the suitability of romantic relationships.

1. Introduction

Companionship traveling, such as group traveling (Su, Cheng, & Huang, 2021), female group getaways (Chen & Mak, 2020; Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, & Disegna, 2018), and honeymoon traveling (Lee, Fakfare, & Han, 2020), is an important topic in tourism research. Travel companionship is regarded as helpful in strengthening a relationship's closeness and ensuring a good traveling experience (Su, Cheng, & Swanson, 2020). A trip with the lover is also an important form of companionship tourism, where lover refers to a partner in a romantic relationship but outside of the marriage context. Traveling with a lover is generally perceived as a happy and memorable experience that fulfills couple's romantic fantasies (Kim & Agrusa, 2005a, 2005b; Lee et al., 2020).

Although the romantic and/or dating tourism segments have evidenced rapid growth (Forbes, 2013), research about this type of getaway remains largely underexplored (Lee et al., 2020). Hitherto, only a few studies have started to investigate factors that may facilitate lovers' traveling satisfaction, including plans provided by professional agents (Bertella, 2015), special arrangements, such as room decoration (Fakfare, Lee, & Ryu, 2020), and quality of traveling accommodation and dining (Lee, Huang, & Chen, 2010).

Although pioneering studies helped advance academic research and business practice, differences in traveling preferences between lovers are a crucial factor that has been overlooked. After all, individuals have diverse tastes and personalities (Chen & Mak, 2020; Jang, Lee, Lee, & Hong, 2007), which may be exposed and thus kindle conflicts during traveling. Statistical reports, for instance, one with 11, 000 participants conducted by Tencent in China (Tencent GuyuData, 2021), showed that many lovers broke up after traveling together. This finding suggests that traveling with a lover may not always guarantee enjoyable tourism experiences but may cause awful emotions, such as fear, sadness, and even disgust to the partner (Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016). However, to our best knowledge, few studies investigated the factors that may affect the traveling satisfaction of traveling lovers. However, reports have indicated that men's and women's different preferences might be a critical antecedent (Tencent GuyuData, 2021). Similarly, Jang et al. (2007) discovered that interpersonal conflicts arise when couples share different preferences and cannot agree on selecting a honeymoon destination. Although not about lovers' traveling, Su et al. (2021) suggested that interpersonal interaction and group familiarity among co-travelers may play an essential role in shaping traveling satisfaction. Chen and Mak (2020) identified that mutual dependence, including skill, time, knowledge, and psychology, might influence the traveling satisfaction of girlfriend getaway groups. Those phenomenological and theoretical examples indicate that lovers' interpersonal interactions might play a salient role in affecting the traveling satisfaction of lovers. Hence, explorations of lovers' interpersonal interactions during traveling and their consequent impacts on traveling satisfaction are needed to supplement the theoretical sketch of the contours of romantic tourism

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and implicate the practitioners' potential means to intervene.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates the interpersonal factors between traveling lovers that would impact their traveling satisfaction. Given the explorative nature, we took a mixed-method approach by first conducting a qualitative study to identify relevant influencers. Then, we conducted an experiment to verify the proposed relationships empirically. The qualitative and quantitative findings unveil that lovers' traveling desynchronicity leads to a lower level of traveling satisfaction. However, such a detrimental effect is less severe among people with independent personalities.

Overall, this study contributes to tourism research on three fronts. First, we unveil that traveling synchronicity significantly impacts the lovers' traveling experience for romantic getaways. Thus, the study cautions on the need to consider interpersonal aspects when examining traveling with companions, further advancing the understanding of romantic tourism. This study highlights that the characteristics of different types of tourism should be given more attention, particularly with regard to whether the trip involves companions. From another aspect, the findings also contribute to the knowledge of friends' getaways such that the partners' traveling synchronicity per se may predict satisfaction, even in the absence of an asymmetric power relationship (cf., Chen & Mak, 2020). Second, we introduce a novel perspective that connects personality differences with traveling satisfaction. The findings show that the traveling experience differs among people with different extents of independence, highlighting heterogeneities of travelers' personalities from a micro-foundation perspective. Third, the findings implicate a special meaning of traveling such that it can serve as an opportunity to check the suitableness of a relationship. Although couples are very keen to travel with the other half, they should make a good travel plan ahead, which may help prevent the potential traveling desynchronicity. From another aspect, they may give reasonable expectations toward the getaways and treat them as an efficient channel to know the suitableness of their relationship, albeit the unhappy quarrels that may happen. After all, it is better to have temporary pain for an unsuitable loving relationship.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourist satisfaction

Traveling satisfaction has always been an important topic in tourism research. Factors such as hotel service and transportation convenience (Lee et al., 2020; Song, van der Veen, Li, & Chen, 2012) and destination image (Kim, 2018) are believed as factors that may affect traveling satisfaction. The dining experience is regarded as another important dimension that shapes the satisfaction perception of tourists (Ha & Jang, 2010). In addition, various service experiences in tourism are one of the main factors affecting tourism satisfaction, such as the shopping experience of tourist shopping (Oviedo-Garcia, Vega-Vazquez, Castellanos-Verdugo, & Reyes-Guizar, 2016), and the interpersonal interaction with service providers such as hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies during the travel process (Kim & Agrusa, 2005a, 2005b). With the application of emerging technologies in tourism scenarios, the impact of smart tourism technologies on tourist satisfaction has also received attention in which smart tourism technologies include service robots and chatbots (Orden-Mejía & Huertas, 2021; Seo, 2022). As can be seen, many external factors affect tourism satisfaction.

2.2. Travel companion

Although those external factors are certainly important, more recent studies started investigating whether companions would make a difference as more people are traveling with two or more people (Park, Woo, & Nicolau, 2020). Travel companionship is the most common form of travel. For instance, family travel and travel with friends/lovers (Lee, Fakfare, & Han, 2020), and other forms of travel companionship such as

girlfriend getaways (women traveling with other women) and mancations (men traveling with male friends) are also becoming increasingly popular (Durko & Stone, 2017). It has been postulated that traveling companions may shape tourists' experiences and their evaluations of a trip (Su et al., 2021). Particularly, the length of time that companions have known each other (Rojas-de-Gracia & Alarcón-Urbistondo, 2020), the degree of familiarity between companions (Durko & Petrick, 2016; Su et al., 2021), and individual educational background (Rojas-de-Gracia & Alarcón-Urbistondo, 2020) are conceived as critical factors that facilitate traveling satisfaction.

Travel companions play a crucial role in shaping tourists' experiences and their evaluations of a trip (Park et al., 2020). Tourism activities involve a higher level of uncertainty than daily life, and travel companions who provide social support offer one way for tourists to alleviate their discomfort because of the sense of uncertainty, but they can also lead to conflict (Huang, Qu, & Montgomery, 2017; Song, Wang, & Sparks, 2018). When two or more people travel together, the dynamics of interpersonal interactions and the travel party characteristics make the group travel experience special (Park et al., 2020; Zhao, Lu, Liu, Lin, & An, 2018). In addition to the common group travel, traveling with a lover is another common form of companionship traveling (Song et al., 2018; Su et al., 2021).

Traveling is generally conceived as a good way to maintain intimate relationships between lovers. Shared leisure activities may provide a world of two thus opportunities for improving mutual understanding and caregiving (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Durko & Petrick, 2013). Hence, traveling with a lover is considered fantastic and romantic (Fakfare & Lee, 2019). This case can lead to memorable moments and satisfying traveling experiences (Li, He, & Qiao, 2021), and is also identified as an effective way to improve their martial or affective relationships (Li et al., 2021). Romantic tourism is becoming more popular among young generations particularly in those emerging economies, such as China with annual industry growth in more than double digits (Forbes, 2013), attracting burgeoning research attention.

Particularly, some pioneering studies started to explore factors that may contribute to the satisfaction and/or delight of lovers' getaways. For instance, situated in the wedding tourism context, Bertella (2015) proposed that the meticulous plan drafted by the wedding professionals significantly affects the traveling experience. Destinations' physical attributes and images are also important antecedents of lovers' romantic travel experiences (Li et al., 2021; Xu & Ye, 2018). Lee et al. (2010) found that romance is an important attribute that determines the attractiveness of a honeymoon destination, where visiting an exotic place with various dreaming activities is typically joyful. In parallel, Lee et al. (2020) stressed the impacts of the quality attributes of honeymoon tourism, which can be manifested in the comfortableness of the destination, service quality during the trip, hotel accommodation, and dining experience. For instance, a romantic dinner or an evening drink is usually arranged for lovers to fulfill their romantic fantasies or memorable moment (Lee et al., 2020). Similarly, based on a study conducted in Thailand, Fakfare et al. (2020) found that special arrangements such as room decoration, special recognition, and special offers are important influencers. Moreover, honeymoon cake, surprise events, and other "wow" elements are crucial for lovers to experience a romantic holiday. Following this genre of logic, tourism practitioners can refer to the knowledge repository of general getaways to improve the traveling satisfaction for traveling lovers.

However, romantic tourism might differ from general ones. One of the most important attributes of romantic travel is the travel companions (Li et al., 2021). As individuals have diverse tastes and personalities (Chen & Mak, 2020), the presence of a companion during traveling may either heighten or deter the emotional arousal of the focal person (Su et al., 2020). Their different preferences over the perceived importance of destination attributes and travel values (Meng & Uysal, 2008) and even the traveling information searching channels (Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007), which might be influenced by the age and education

differences (Kim & Agrusa, 2005a, 2005b), may also prevent the lovers from making a consensus about the honeymoon destination (Jang et al., 2007). For instance, Hasford, Kidwell, and Lopez-Kidwell (2018) proposed that romantic relationships influence eating behaviors. Previous studies also implicated that traveling may magnify friends' shortcomings and generate psychological distance between them (Heimtun & Jordan, 2011). Most adults tend to experience romantic relationships while traveling, but a promising continuation of the relationship is not inevitable (Saleh, 2022).

Therefore, similar to a scenario where intragroup conflicts lead to lower group performance (Jehn & Mannix, 2001), some potential conflicts with the traveling companion may hurt overall satisfaction. Although none of the issues have been incorporated as antecedents of traveling satisfaction for romantic tourism, it can be inferred that traveling with a lover may turn out to be an unhappy experience, and interpersonal interactions should be considered crucial parameters to supplement previous emphases on external determinants (e.g., Lee et al., 2010, 2020). In a nutshell, as summarized in Table 1, romantic tourism has been relatively underexplored in the genre of companionship traveling, where most existing studies focus on other types of companionship traveling such as girlfriend getaways (e.g., Durko & Stone, 2017). Moreover, previous studies have mainly explored external factors that may affect the level of traveling satisfaction (e.g., Fakfare et al., 2020), paying insufficient attention to interpersonal interactions among those traveling companions.

3. Study methods

Given the paucity of research and the complex nature of interpersonal interactions, we employed a mixed-method approach. We started with an inductive qualitative study to identify the influential factors that may affect lovers' traveling satisfaction, and then a deductive experiment to corroborate their effects empirically.

3.1. Study 1: Qualitative exploration

3.1.1. Sample and data collection

In-depth interviews could help unmask the influential factors as traveling satisfaction emerges from subjective feelings and justification (Lee et al., 2020). We selected candidates from China, a typical transitioning and fast-growing country with an enormous market potential for tourism.

A qualitative study prefers a theoretical sampling such that data collection is based on a general subjective area rather than random statistical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Hence, each of the authors has approached relatives, acquaintances, and even strangers through social media who are unmarried and have traveling experiences with their lovers. We excluded those married ones because married couples may possess some special responsibilities and commitments to each other that may obfuscate the findings. Eventually, we interviewed 17 respondents, 11 females and seven males, with diverse backgrounds. Among them, students constitute the primary body of interviewees (14 out of 17). The composition is expected as most people have romantic relationships during their college time. Moreover, students and newly graduated young people have more flexible time for romantic travel as compared to other groups, providing the perfect context to collect detailed information. Overall, 82.4% of interviewees are between 20 and 30 years old, 64.7% are currently in a romantic relationship, and all interviewees had the experience of traveling with the other half in the past. Table 2 shows their demographic information.

Owing to the pandemic, the interviews were conducted via online meeting applications such as What's App, WeChat, and Zoom, and each lasted 15–25 min. Interviews were performed within two rounds from March 1, 2022, to May 6, 2022, The first round of interviews was conducted between March 1 and March 31 and we performed a semi-structured interview with the sampled participants one by one. The

authors analyzed and coded the collected interview data and then conducted a second round of interviews between April 1 and May 6, focusing on some in-depth details with some interviewees. Promising confidentiality while obtaining the agreements from the respondents, we audiotaped and transcribed each of the interviews verbatim to supplement our notes for further data analysis. The interviews were conducted using the respondent's mother language and translated into English then back to their mother language to ensure the consistency of meaning. We have further called the respondents later if we need clarification about their answers.

The interviews were conducted with semi-structured questions, which can be obtained upon request. That is, for each interview, we started with nine specific questions to get their general demographic characteristics that are believed as relevant to the traveling experience and four open-ended questions, such as *"Do any unexpected things happen during your traveling with your lover?"*, *"Have you and your partner ever had an unpleasant experience of traveling?"*, *"What situations lead to the unpleasantness and conflicts ignited by some behaviors of the other half during the travel?"*, and *"Do you feel that you and the other half's traveling preferences match with each other during the travel process?"* to identify the potential factors given the antecedents of lovers' traveling satisfaction that remain largely underexplored. We kept asking the respondents to provide more details and/or explanations about their answers until we can get a detailed description of the potential factors that may affect their traveling experience with the lovers. Within 24 h after each interview, the corresponding interviewer summarized any reoccurring themes or patterns and took additional notes for further analysis.

3.1.2. Data analysis and coding

We adopted a constant comparison approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), by creating as many snippets as possible in the first stage. We then looked for axial coding to make connections across those snippets as informed by the existing literature. We went back and forth between the data and our coding until we could not find any construct containing any pairs of the identified factors. Two authors coded the interviews independently to minimize personal bias and the third author summarized their disagreements. For items on which the two authors disagreed initially, they then negotiated until reaching a consensus. Then, the third author further triangulated if those changes were semantically and theoretically reasonable.

3.1.3. Results

As shown in Table 3, we coded female respondents from F1–F11 and male interviewees from M1–M6. Some have mentioned that traveling planning (F4), traveling experiences, such as traffic jams (F2, F4), and service quality (F2) may affect their traveling satisfaction and relationships. However, there emerge three critical themes that are shared among the respondents. Table 3, as shown in the appendix, offers an overview of representative quotes and evidence for the general factors across the 17 cases.

First, most couples have either directly or indirectly implicated that the synchronicity of their traveling preferences saliently influences their emotion, satisfaction, and relationships. F11 described an unpleasant travel experience with her boyfriend:

> *"My boyfriend and I wanted to go to the mall, which was a 40-minutes walk from our hotel. At that time, I felt tired and hungry after playing for almost the whole day. I wanted to take a taxi, but my boyfriend thought it was still early and insisted to walk there to enjoy the scenery along the way. That led to discontent!"*

Another typical example stressed by F5 who has broken up with her boyfriend was mainly about time allocation during the travel.

> *"(The breakup) It happened at our traveling destination. I like to plan everything ahead and stick with it, but he doesn't. He still wanted to play more and said that the purpose of traveling is to have fun, so there is no*

need to strictly follow the original plan [….], which caused an argument between us. It was a very bad trip, so I still remember it."

F8 shared a somewhat similar story:

"We have to go to the next place; otherwise, there won't be enough time to visit the planned place. But my boyfriend said that we did not need to rush and think it was fine even if we don't have time to visit it. I feel angrier after hearing what he said and I went to the next attraction without saying a word."

When sharing about an unpleasant experience during traveling, F7 who has been with his boyfriend for 2 years complained that:

"[….], My partner likes to spend money indiscriminately during traveling, especially in dining. For example, he likes to order a large table of dishes […]. We always ended up quarreling over this matter, and this affected our mood."

F10, who has been in love with her boyfriend for 5 years, mentioned some details that made her agitated and unhappy during the travel, which can also be attributed to the problem of traveling desynchronicity.

"[….] My boyfriend likes buying souvenirs, but I feel it is unnecessary and a bit of wasting money. I complained to him many times, and sometimes it even causes quarrels between us" and *"my partner likes to wander around during traveling, which makes me feel it was waste of time. And I am tired of traveling together with him in this way."*

M2 complained to us about his girlfriend's behavior that made him unhappy during the traveling.

"I remember it was an unplanned trip with my girlfriend. But it turned out to be a bad one since we ended up going nowhere because we kept debating where to go and how much we can spend."

Consistently, couples express different preferences and behaviors during traveling, particularly about how long to spend in a scenic spot, and how to coordinate each other's preferences in tourism. Such differences cause traveling dissatisfaction and even hurt the couples' romantic relationships. We term those as traveling desynchronicity, which indicates that traveling lovers have inconsistent preferences for a series of travel activities, such as scenic spots, accommodation, and catering. Accordingly, we have the following propositions.

Proposition 1. *Compared with those synchronized ones, lovers' traveling desynchronicity leads to a lower level of traveling satisfaction.*

However, the general pattern presents some variations in the extent across interviewees. For the similar desynchronicity and negative traveling experiences, some respondents said they were not greatly affected, but others claimed the opposite. For instance, M2 described the following traveling experience:

"At that time, we were on a trip for hiking. Someone was selling fake tickets, and I told her that there is no need for a mountain pass. However, she insisted on buying it, and it eventually turned out to be a fraud. It led to a bad mood for that trip. I can still remember this experience very clearly because I was very disappointed that she didn't listen to my advice."

By contrast, M5 presented an unpleasant traveling experience:

"There was once a time when my girlfriend didn't seem satisfied with the photos that I took and was a little bit angry. Although my girlfriend quickly regained her happy mood from anger just now, I felt sad for the whole tour."

Similarly, M1, M3, and F8 all expressed relaxed concerns for the conflicts, and M3 specifically mentioned that

"Some unpleasantness will inevitably occur during the trip with my partner. But I choose to deal with it quickly to ensure that I can maintain a

good mood on the trip later. Moreover, a dispute during the trip might deepen our relationship."

Such variations persist across respondents of different ages and gender, and we suspect that the detrimental effects caused by traveling desynchronicity would be less severe for people who tend to be independent, given that group dynamics are primarily delimited by the dyads' interdependence (Chen & Mak, 2020). That is, independent individuals tend to care more about their own feelings (Singelis, 1994) and are thus less likely to become dissatisfied about the trip triggered by the traveling desynchronicity. Therefore, we have reasons to believe that independent personalities may restrain the proposed effects.

Proposition 2. *Independent individuals are less likely to experience traveling dissatisfaction because of the traveling desynchronicity with his/her lover.*

In parallel, we found that communication style was another critical element that could affect disputes and unhappiness during the lovers' vocations. Communication may vary on preciseness, emotionality, and other dimensions (Oguri & Gudykunst, 2002; William et al., 1996), and good communication may pacify potential conflicts and negative feelings (Liu & Min, 2020). Based on the interviews, we found that the negative consequences are less severe for couples with good communication. For example, F8 illustrated one experience:

"We were debating about where to eat. But we did not give each other a clear answer right away. When we knew where to go, the restaurant was already fully booked. In the end, we had to return to the hotel famishing, which causes unpleasantness between us."

Similarly, M6 shared her following traveling experience:

"Once on a trip, we played too late and were tired. My girlfriend asked me whether we could cancel the hotel we booked before and find another one nearby, and I replied that either option is okay. But she suddenly got angry and stopped talking to me, which made me feel very inexplicable."

F3, who broke up with his boyfriend right before the interview, told us about one of her traveling experiences with her ex-partner:

"Travel always involves various decisions, such as when to leave, what types of transportation to take, what to eat, etc. In my impression, whenever I asked my ex-boyfriend something, he always replied that you can figure it out by yourself or that it's acceptable to choose anything. This annoyed me particularly when we had different preferences."

All these pieces of evidence suggest that proactive communication between lovers may soften the potential conflicts caused by their traveling desynchronicity. It has been proved that open negotiations and discussions could alleviate task- and process-related tensions and conflicts (Chen & Mak, 2020). Therefore, we suspect that communications with a direct and clear expression of genuine opinions to others, may weaken the adverse effects caused by the traveling desynchronicity.

Proposition 3. *Individuals who tend to communicate proactively are less likely to experience traveling dissatisfaction because of the traveling desynchronicity with his/her lover.*

In sum, we have strong reasons to believe that traveling (de)synchronicity determines lovers' traveling satisfaction, and such effects may vary on their independent personalities and proactive communications. Fig. 1 shows the conceptual model.

3.2. Study 2: Quantitative corroboration

Given that experiment is the only method to draw causal conclusions (Dolnicar, 2020), we have further conducted a laboratory experiment to corroborate the qualitative findings as this type of experiment is particularly useful for identifying psychological changes and when the intervention is hard to be manipulated in the field (Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020).
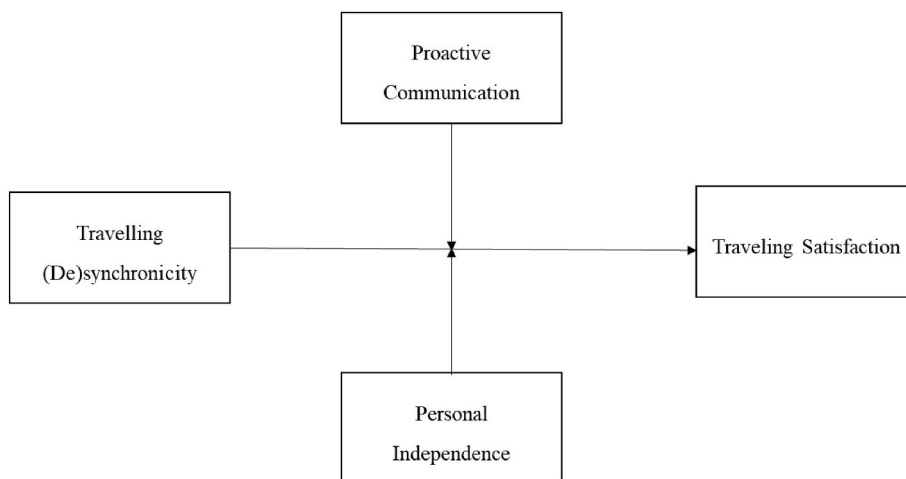
Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

3.2.1. Experiment design

Before the main experiment, we conducted a pretest with 70 participants to check whether the wording and format of the questionnaire were precise and appropriate. At the same time, we found preliminary support for our hypothesized effects of traveling synchronicity on traveling satisfaction (t = −1.239, p < 0.01), and we have revised the questionnaire referring to any feedback. All the questions strictly followed the translation and back-translation process to ensure the consistency of meanings (Brislin, 1980).

We invited 232 participants via a professional online survey company in China (https://www.wjx.cn), an agent frequently consulted in earlier studies as well (Yan, Zhou, & Wu, 2018). Each participant, who passed the manipulation checks, would receive 10 RMB as a reward once the experiment was completed. Among them, 45.3% are male, 65.8% are between 18 and 35 years old, 94.8% hold a bachelor's or higher degree, and 86.2% of participants had the experience of traveling with the other half in the past. The sample should largely resemble the target population, given that most young and well-educated online respondents are the main body of potential consumers of romantic tourism. Since randomization helps avoid confounding influences (Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020), the participants were randomly assigned to either the control group or the experiment group. That is, 115 were in a manipulated desynchronized setting (i.e., experiment group) whereas another 117 were in a manipulated synchronized setting (i.e., control group). Referring to our qualitative study, we presented the experiment group with the following setting:

"Suppose you and your partner travel to a scenic spot for a vacation. After visiting a tourist attraction in the scenic spot for a while, you express that you do not want to continue to play in this spot and want to go to the next one. However, your partner hasn't had enough time at the attraction and insists on continuing to play at the attraction after your partner knows what you think."

In contrast, the control group's setting is that *"Suppose you and your partner travel to a scenic spot for a vacation. After visiting a tourist attraction in the scenic spot for a while, you express that you do not want to continue to play in this spot and want to go to the next one. Your partner expresses that he or she also agrees to go to the next attraction after your partner knows what you think."*

To verify whether the respondent has understood and entered the setting (Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020), we introduced a manipulation check question by asking the respondent to answer: *"My partner and I have different (or same for the control group) opinions during the traveling"*, with 1 indicating extremely disagree and 7 indicating extremely agree. An agreement (including partially agree, agree, and strongly agree) should

indicate a complete understanding and participation in the setting. After discarding 52 responses that did not pass the manipulation check, a total of 180 valid questionnaires were retained for data analysis, where 64 were for the experimental group and 116 for the control group.

3.2.2. Measures

After reading the scenario, participants were asked to imagine themselves in the scenario described above and reported their *traveling satisfaction*. Serving as the dependent variable caused by the causal effect of traveling desynchronicity, *traveling satisfaction* was measured by 3 items derived from Lee, Jeon, and Kim (2011), namely *"I am very satisfied with the tour"*, *"I have enjoyed myself from the tour"*, and *"I will look forward to the next trip"*. The participants indicated their agreement with the items from 1 (extremely disagreement) to 7 (extremely agreement).

As inferred from the findings of our qualitative study, the respondent's *personal independence* and *proactive communication* may function as moderators that affect the baseline relationships. A seven-point Likert scale measured personal independence with 4 items adapted from Singelis's study (1994). The reason why the items were adapted is that the original items were designed for a general situation and thus cannot be directly applied to the scenario of tourism. For the present study, specifically, the participants were asked four questions *"Even with my partner, I act the same way as I prefer"*, *"I'd rather say no directly to my partner even with the risk of misunderstanding"*, *"Independency is very important to me in a romantic relationship"*, and *"Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me in a romantic relationship"* to measure their personal independence.

On the other hand, *proactive communication* was measured by a 3-item scale derived from the work of Liu and Min (2020) and that of William et al. (1996), which asked *"I will express my opinion and preferences directly"*, *"I will avoid expressing my opinion and preferences unclearly"*, and *"I usually will give an accurate answer"* respectively. Similarly, the participants responded to these questions from 1 (extremely disagreement) to 7 (extremely agreement). All scales used in this study strictly followed Brislin's (1980) multistage translation/back-translation processes. Although Likert scales have their drawbacks (see Dolnicar, 2021 for a review), those may not be critical concerns for the present study. First, we only had a short list of questions that help facilitate the experiment, thus the scales would not create too much time burden for the respondents. Second, the sample was extracted from respondents with similar cultural backgrounds, and the questions do not suffer from socially desirable pressures (Dolnicar, 2020), restraining the potential reduction in data quality caused by the Likert scales. Third, the Likert scale with a neutral midpoint is particularly

suitable for studies contextualized in Asia countries where people are not used to select yes/no answers in a straightforward way (Hinkin, 1998). To capture the nuanced personal interpretations, we chose the seven-point scale same as recent publications in the tourism domain (e. g., Li & Chen, 2022).

Prior literature and the findings of our qualitative study implicate that several factors may also influence traveling satisfaction (Su et al., 2021), and we included those as control variables asked before the introduction of the experiment setting. We first controlled the length of time that the respondent has known her/his partner. This is because the *previous relationship* may bias the respondent's perception of their traveling (Rojas-de-Gracia & Alarcón-Urbistondo, 2020). Similarly, we controlled the number of trips the respondent has taken with her/his partner before, given that the lovers' *traveling experience* may influence their judgment even under the manipulated scenario (Durko & Petrick, 2016; Su et al., 2021). Such experience is also suspected of helping avoid conflicts between couples (Smith, Pitts, Litvin, & Agrawal, 2017), this may affect the lovers' traveling satisfaction. In parallel, we suspect that the demographic differences of the respondents may introduce some heterogeneities to their reflections. Therefore, we controlled the participant's gender, age, and educational background (Rojas-de-Gracia & Alarcón-Urbistondo, 2020). The detailed questions items were presented in the additional appendix titled Survey Questionnaire.

3.2.3. Data analysis and results

Validity and reliability are the cornerstones of a good research design (Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020), and we first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to verify the reliability and validity of all constructs. As shown in Table 4, the value of Cronbach's alphas of all constructs was greater than the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating that all items in the questionnaire exhibited internal consistency and strong reliability (Nunnally, 1967). Convergent validity was assessed with three measures: indicator loadings, composite

Reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4 suggested that indicator loadings for all items exceed the recommended minimum of 0.70 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In parallel, the values of composite reliability (CR) were higher than the threshold of 0.7 for most latent variables, and the average variance extracted (AVE) in Table 4 was greater than the threshold value of 0.5, indicating an acceptable convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

We further tested the discriminant validity through the Fornell–Larcker criterion of cross-loading indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As presented in Table 5, the square root of the AVE values of all constructs on the diagonal was larger than the concerned correlation coefficients. The results indicated that the scales exhibit good discriminant validity. Collectively, the measurements of constructs in our research model exhibited high reliability and good validity.

Because the measurements of constructs were self-reported, we further checked if the common method variance (CMV) was an issue. Specifically, we adopted Harman's one-factor test to investigate the potential CMV bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Based on the principal component extraction method, the results unveiled that the first emerging factor accounts for only a 35.12% contribution rate of the total variance, which was lower than the threshold of 50%. In other words, it indicated that CMV did not bias the results.

The results of our manipulation checks indicated that most participants perceived their respective situations as intended. For participants in the desynchronized setting, 64 (out of 115) passed the manipulation check and acknowledged their partners' preference choice for tourist attractions is different from their own (Mean = 5.250, SD = 0.79). For participants in the synchronized setting, 116 participants (out of 117) passed the manipulation check and they confirmed that they traveled to the scenic spots and that their partners share the same preferences for tourist attractions (Mean = 5.868, SD = 0.71). Following the prior lead

(Hou, Zhang, & Li, 2021), we have adopted the G*Power software and confirmed that the final sample size is sufficient to test the hypothesized effects.

The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 6. The results show that the traveling desynchronicity is negatively and significantly correlated with traveling satisfaction ($\rho = -0.301$, $p < 0.01$), presenting preliminary support for the primary proposition. We further conducted the variance inflation factors (VIFs) analysis and found that none of the values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 10 (max = 2.15 and mean = 1.55), indicating multicollinearity is not an issue.

Table 7 presents the results of pooled regressions, which test the propositions derived from the qualitative study. Model 1 is the baseline model that includes all the control variables only while Models 2-4 address the three hypotheses, respectively. More specifically, Hypothesis 1 (Proposition 1) hypothesizes that traveling desynchronicity is negatively associated with traveling satisfaction. As shown in Model 2, the coefficient of the traveling desynchonicity is negatively significant ($\beta = -0.660$, $p < 0.01$), providing strong support for Hypothesis 1 (Proposition 1).

Hypothesis 2 (Proposition 2) posits that personal independence negatively moderates the negative relationship between lovers' traveling desynchronicity and the level of traveling satisfaction. As shown in Model 3, the result shows that the coefficient of the interaction term is positive and significant at the 0.05 level ($\beta = 0.305$, $p < 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 2 (Proposition 2). It suggests that personal independence plays a significant moderating role as it changes the direction of the relationship between traveling desynchronicity and traveling satisfaction from negative to positive. We further plotted the moderating effect in Fig. 2. It could be seen that the lovers' traveling satisfaction increases if the focal personal rated one standard deviation higher on the independent personality, providing additional evidence that individuals with personal independence would be less dissatisfied with traveling in a desynchronized setting.

Hypothesis 3. (Proposition 3) posits that proactive communication weakens the negative relationship between lovers' traveling desynchronicity and the level of traveling satisfaction. As shown in Model 4, however, the coefficient of the interaction term is positive but insignificant at the 0.1 level ($\beta = 0.002$). It suggests that proactive communication does not generate a significant role in weakening the hurts caused by traveling desynchronicity on the level of traveling satisfaction. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 (Proposition 3) was not supported. The potential explanations will be discussed later in the discussion section.

3.2.4. Robustness tests

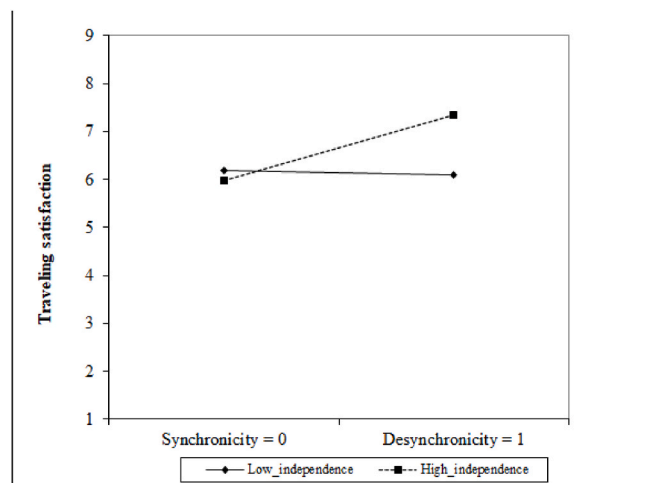In tandem with the pooled regression, we have further conducted t-

Fig. 2. The moderating effect of personal independence.

tests across the experiment and control groups to check whether the unbalanced sample size biased the results. As shown in Table 8, we obtained consistent results that participants in the desynchronized setting, as compared to those in the synchronized setting, expressed a significantly lower level of traveling satisfaction (t = −0.679, *p* < 0.01).

Moreover, we have examined whether the composite measurement can cause the insignificant moderating effect of proactive communication. Notably, we separated the 3 items used to measure proactive communication and examined whether any of them can generate a significant effect. While the negative effect of traveling desynchronicity remains quantitively similar, we found that none of the items generates a significant moderating effect, which indicates that any potential measurement issues should not cause an insignificant effect. Due to the space limitation, the results can be obtained upon request.

4. Discussion

The rising popularity of romantic tourism calls for insights into what factors may influence traveling lovers' satisfaction. While previous studies have primarily attributed the satisfaction level to external contingencies like service being provided (Lee et al., 2010, 2020), special arrangements such as room decoration, surprise events, a romantic dinner, etc (Fakfare et al., 2020). By taking a mixed-method approach, the current study brings in an important caveat that interpersonal interactions between traveling lovers could also play a critical role in determining the traveling satisfaction of romantic tourism.

Specifically, we started with an inductive study to identify the influential factors that may affect lovers' traveling satisfaction. We performed intense interviews to collect qualitative data and then tried to identify relevant factors from coding and abstraction. Our qualitative study has unveiled that traveling desynchronicity, personal independence, and proactive communication significantly impact lovers' traveling satisfaction. In particular, we found that traveling desynchronicity between lovers is a common issue and it often leads to unpleasant experiences and dissatisfaction. However, such detrimental effects induced by traveling desynchronicity were significantly different across individuals and interviewees also indicated that proactive communication might ease the detrimental effects caused by traveling desynchronicity.

We then conduct a quantitative experiment to corroborate the identified factors' effects empirically. The study finds that the traveling desynchronicity between lovers significantly reduces traveling satisfaction, yet such adverse effects are less severe for people who possess an independent personality. Extending previous research that emphasizes the importance of mutual dependence on companionship travel (Chen & Mak, 2020), our study demonstrates that interpersonal factors like the traveling desynchronicity between lovers exerted negative effects. Moreover, we found that people that are more personally independent are less likely to be influenced by the traveling desynchronicity in romantic tourism whereas previous studies pointed out that group familiarity among co-travelers plays an essential role in shaping tourist satisfaction (Su et al., 2021).

Contrary to our speculation, however, the proactive communication between the lovers does not help alleviate the detrimental consequences caused by traveling desynchronicity. We speculate that the lovers may get used to the partner's communication style before any trips as it can be easily observed during their daily interactions. Consequently, it may only help a little when disputes or conflicts arise. Overall, we uncovered important interpersonal factors that may affect lovers' traveling satisfaction through a combination of qualitative research and a quantitative experiment, which supplements previous research paucity. There are some theoretical and practical implications worth to be elaborated on.

4.1. Theoretical implications

First, this study enriches the tourism literature by reminding the heterogeneities across different types of travel. We supplement the

paucity of research on romantic tourism, particularly regarding the interpersonal antecedents of traveling satisfaction. That is, deviating from prior leads that emphasize factors like accommodation and dining qualities that apply to all kinds of traveling (Lee et al., 2010, 2020), we unveil that the interpersonal interactions between lovers would also significantly affect the traveling satisfaction of romantic tourism. This highlights that the characteristics of different types of tourism should be given more attention, particularly in regard to whether the trip involves companions or not. On the other hand, the findings also contribute to the knowledge of friends' getaways and other types of companionship traveling such that the partners' traveling synchronicity per se may predict satisfaction, even in the absence of an asymmetric power relationship (cf., Chen & Mak, 2020). Considering the research dearth of romantic tourism segments, we encourage further explorations of the unique characteristics of lovers' traveling.

Second, we introduce a novel perspective that connects personality differences with traveling satisfaction. Although demographical characteristics like age, gender, and education are well recognized in tourism research (e.g., Kim & Agrusa, 2005a, 2005b; Kim et al., 2007), the majority of them are treating them as direct influencers of traveling satisfaction, especially in the domain of companionship traveling (e.g., Fakfare et al., 2020; Su et al., 2021). Instead, we highlight that those personality differences could serve as critical boundary conditions that either strengthen or weaken the effects of other determinants. As such, any interventions to improve traveling satisfaction should take account of those granular heterogeneities at the micro-foundations level. In other words, this cautions that traveling satisfaction is co-determined by both the external quality attributes and internal personal differences simultaneously.

Third, comparing the moderating effects of personal independence and proactive communication further implies that traveling together may indeed facilitate mutual understanding (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Durko & Petrick, 2013), but not necessarily caregiving or closer relationship. As shown by our qualitative findings and the warnings from some statistics reports (Tencent GuyuData, 2021), many of those getaways would expose the defects of the lovers' personalities thus hurting their romantic relationships. The findings provide a more balanced view of companionship traveling such that not all those travels are beneficial to the companion's relationship (cf., Li et al., 2021). This in turn indicates an additional function of traveling such that it can be a touchstone to test the suitableness of a relationship.

4.2. Practical implications

The current research also provides several valuable implications for practitioners. Although lovers are very keen to travel with the other half, they should make a good travel plan ahead, which may help prevent the potential traveling desynchronicity. On the other hand, they may give reasonable expectations toward the getaways and treat them as an efficient channel to know the suitableness of their relationship albeit unhappy quarrels may happen. After all, it is better to have temporary pain for an unsuitable loving relationship.

We also remind travel agents and service providers of the importance of designing detailed traveling plans that could tie the lovers together. Well-designed touring routes that involve the couples in completing specific tasks together and even with some rewarded souvenirs may motivate them to stick with the plans, leaving limited space for personal discretions thus they are less likely to experience desynchronicity. It may in turn increase the general traveling satisfaction for couples, which in turn helps the focal city to earn a reputation of being a good destination for romantic tourism. For instance, travel agents and service providers may purposefully package traveling itineraries with each day designed for different preferences, supplemented by romantic dinners and other surprise events. Those lovers would be provided with a mission list, and those who successfully complete all the tasks together can win memorable souvenirs like photos that record their romantic

moments during the trip. In this way, those lovers are better prepared to maintain minimum synchronicity in both psychological and physical aspects, which helps foster their subsequent traveling satisfaction. This type of traveling plan can be further branded as specialized products and/or services of travel agents and service providers, especially considering the rising market potential of romantic tourism.

Our findings also suggest that developing a romantic relationship may be a process of cultivating synchronicity from desynchronicity, and traveling is a practical way to achieve this goal. Lovers should not escape from the unpleasant experience induced by desynchronicity but need to learn how to minimize its negative impact to increase traveling satisfaction. As mentioned above, this precipitates the business potential of those packaged traveling plans.

4.3. Limitations and future research

Our study certainly has limitations but opens new windows for future extensions. Although the motivation of the present study is to supplement the omissions in the interpersonal aspects by assuming the same quality attributes via an experiment setting, it is promising to juxtapose the external and internal factors simultaneously to comprehensively investigate the influencers of traveling satisfaction for romantic tourism. Second, if given a sufficient budget, a field experiment that tracks the traveling lovers' feelings and relationships across several trips might better portray the underlying mechanisms in a real-life scenario (Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020). Third, the experiment was conducted in one single country and future tests contextualized in cross-country samples could help unveil any institutional heterogeneities that would further complete the theorization. Although personal independence is both theoretically and empirically orthogonal to traveling desynchronicity, the two might be related to some extent. It might be fruitful to explore other personal characteristics that might affect the traveling dissatisfaction caused by traveling desynchronicity. Finally, with the increasing popularity of bloggers seeking advice and suggestions before traveling (Mainolfi, Lo Presti, Marino, & Filieri, 2022), further research could explore factors that influence lovers' traveling satisfaction through text-mining methods. For instance, researchers can extract potential variables from the text of lovers' traveling blogging to further examine their impact on traveling satisfaction through empirical methods.

4.4. Summary

While the industry of romantic tourism is proliferating, the understanding of this type of traveling remains underdeveloped. Based on a mixed-method approach, the study has indicated that traveling with lovers could be dissatisfying and their traveling desynchronicity is the primary trigger. However, the detrimental consequences are less severe for people with independent personalities. If there is only one message that is allowed to deliver, we would like it to be that the particular characteristics of different types of tourism and individual personalities should be considered in studying and managing the tourism industry. We hope our study could inspire additional efforts in advancing the knowledge about romantic tourism.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2023.01.013.

7. Appendix

Table 1
Literature review on companionship traveling

Authors (Year)	Antecedents	Outcomes	Method	Companionship traveling types	Consideration of interpersonal factors
Bertella (2015)	Emotional bonds, creativity, spontaneity	Wedding travel experience	Qualitative study	Wedding travel	N.A.
Chen and Mak (2020)	Power relations; Mutual dependence; Conflicts	Group dynamics	Qualitative study	Girlfriend getaways	Y
Durko and Stone (2017)	Female bonding; Partner's personal constraints; Escape from daily routine;	Travel satisfaction	Qualitative study	Girlfriend getaways	N.A.
Fakfare et al. (2020)	Honeymoon quality dimensions	Destination relational value	Survey	Honeymoon tourism	N.A.
Khoo-Lattimore et al. (2018)	Travel Motivations	Accommodation decisions	Survey	Girlfriend getaways	N.A.
Lee et al. (2020)	Accommodation; Privileges; Local residents; Dining experience; Service providers; Accessibility; Local tour products	Travel satisfaction	Mixed methods (Interview and survey)	Honeymoon tourism	N.A.
Li et al. (2021)	Travel companions; Physical attributes; Destinations' services, Social; Cultural interactions; Meanings	Romantic travel experience	Qualitative study	Romantic tourism	N.A.
Park et al. (2020)	Types of travel companion	Travel expenses	Survey	Group travel	N.A.
Song et al. (2018)	Travel timing, activity, cost, climate	Travel decisions	Qualitative study	Group travel	N.A.
Su et al. (2021)	Group size	Travel satisfaction	Experiment	Group travel	N.A.

Table 2
Demographic information

Interviewee #	Age	Background	Relationship Status	Time of Interview (Mins)
Female				
F1	29	Private Tutor	In Relationship	17
F2	18	Bachelor Student of Communication Studies	In Relationship	24
F3	26	Nursery Owner	Parted	22
F4	18	Bachelor Student of Public Health	In Relationship	18
F5	28	Master Student of Engineering	Parted	23
F6	25	Programmers working on the internet	In Relationship	18
F7	22	Bachelor Student of Financial Management	Parted	16
F8	22	Master Student of Logistics Engineering and Management	In Relationship	20
F9	26	Ph.D. Student of Economics	In Relationship	17
F10	30	Ph.D. Student of Tourism Management	In Relationship	18
F11	23	Master Student of Logistics	In Relationship	20
Male				
M1	19	Bachelor Student of Geological Engineering	Parted	20
M2	19	Bachelor Student of Actuarial Science	In Relationship	22
M3	23	Master Student of Logistics	Parted	22
M4	23	Master Student of Transportation and Control Engineering	Parted	22
M5	26	Ph.D. Student of Marketing	In Relationship	19
M6	23	Ph.D. Student of Management in Science and Engineering	In Relationship	23

Note: *"Parted" refers to those who have been in a relationship and traveled together before, but are currently not in a relationship. "In Relationship" refers to those who have been in a relationship and traveled together before and are still together now.*

Table 4
Measurement scales reliability and validity

Factor	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Traveling satisfaction	TS1	0.769***	0.840	0.833	0.626
	TS2	0.736***			
	TS3	0.863***			
Personal independence	IS1	0.784***	0.760	0.846	0.579
	IS2	0.742***			
	IS3	0.745***			
	IS4	0.773***			
Proactive communication	PC1	0.814***	0.779	0.864	0.680
	PC2	0.875***			
	PC3	0.782***			

Table 5
Discriminant validity

	1	2	3
1. Traveling satisfaction	**0.791**		
2. Personal independence	−0.086	**0.761**	
3. Proactive communication	0.100	0.023	**0.825**

Note: *Diagonal elements (bolded) are the square roots of AVEs. Below the diagonal elements are the correlations.*

Table 6
Descriptive statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Traveling satisfaction	1								
2. Traveling desynchronicity	−0.301***	1							
3. Personal independence	−0.086	0.109	1						
4. Proactive communication	0.100	−0.245***	0.023	1					
5. Previous relationship	0.067	−0.166**	−0.076	0.056	1				
6. Traveling experience	0.124*	−0.234***	0.001	0.079	0.094	1			
7. Gender	−0.071	0.130*	0.240***	−0.245***	0.055	−0.096	1		
8. Age	0.066	−0.429***	−0.189**	0.009	0.327***	0.141*	−0.079	1	
9. Education	−0.167**	0.596***	0.059	−0.219***	0.000	−0.007	0.108	−0.240***	1
Mean	5.648	0.356	4.729	4.726	2.828	1.406	1.522	2.783	2.322
Std.	0.984	0.480	1.021	1.225	1.051	0.595	0.501	0.654	0.690

Note: *, **, and *** indicates a significance level at 10%, 5%, and 1%, respectively.

Table 7
Regression results

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Previous relationship	0.059	0.039	0.023	0.035	0.020
	(0.074)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.073)	(0.073)
Traveling experience	0.189	0.091	0.119	0.085	0.112
	(0.124)	(0.125)	(0.125)	(0.125)	(0.125)
Gender	−0.092	−0.068	−0.024	−0.076	−0.029
	(0.148)	(0.144)	(0.147)	(0.149)	(0.153)
Age	−0.021	−0.142	−0.164	−0.138	−0.159
	(0.123)	(0.126)	(0.126)	(0.127)	(0.127)
Education	−0.234**	0.010	0.019	0.035	0.042
	(0.110)	(0.131)	(0.130)	(0.134)	(0.133)
Desynchronicity		−0.660***	−0.695***	−0.656***	−0.688***
		(0.206)	(0.205)	(0.208)	(0.208)
Personal independence			−0.043		−0.043
			(0.073)		(0.073)
Desynchronicity × Personal independence			0.305**		0.298*
			(0.156)		(0.156)
Proactive communication				0.002	0.008
				(0.063)	(0.062)
Desynchronicity × Proactive communication				0.125	0.111
				(0.125)	(0.123)
_cons	5.816***	6.021***	6.278***	6.088***	6.194***
	(0.477)	(0.469)	(0.603)	(0.633)	(0.692)
N	180	180	180	180	180
R^2	0.046	0.100	0.125	0.106	0.129

Note: *, **, and *** indicates a significance level at 10%, 5%, and 1%, respectively.

Table 8
T-test of dependent variables by tourism synergy

Dependent variable	Tourism synchronization	Obs (0)	Mean (0)	Mean-diff
Tourism satisfaction	desynchronized setting	62	5.226	−0.679***
	synchronized setting	98	5.905	

Note: *, **, and *** indicates a significance level at 10%, 5%, and 1%, respectively.

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