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Diaspora's intuitive role as cultural ambassador: toward a new cultural sustainability perspective

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ABSTRACT

A major motivation for international travel is to experience cross-cultural interactions. Such interactions may occur outside the typical travel milieu. They can even take place prior to the actual travel to impact travel intentions. This paper focuses on cross-cultural encounters between the members of a community and the diaspora from a potential host destination who live among them. The research investigates the willingness of individuals in the community to travel to the diaspora members' home country for the first time after having established relationships with them. Affect control theory and relational exchange theory are incorporated into a structural equation model to examine these relationships – focusing on natives of India living in the United States. The study identifies individual warmth and trust formed between the Indian diaspora and their American acquaintances as highly significant factors that could impact the latter's travel intentions – that is, the willingness of Americans who have not visited India to consider traveling there to further experience the Indian culture. The study provides insights into sustaining the diaspora communities' cultural identities and underscores their intuitive role as cultural ambassadors outside their countries of origin.

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Introduction

Increasing global awareness, expanding interests in diverse cultures and histories, and growing enthusiasm for fresh experiences have all contributed to the rapid development of tourism. Cultural sustainability has been identified as a key component of tourism sustainability (Font et al., 2021; McKercher, 1993), often involving local community engagement as well as safeguards concerning how local cultures are tapped into for tourism. From the point of view of tourists, engaging with locals can be a quest for authentic experiences, perceptions, and insights (MacCannell, 1973). Tourism is built upon cultural sustainability for individuals who travel to explore other horizons and perspectives, seek novelty in different cultures, and enjoy learning from different communities. A certain chemistry is likely to develop whenever people from different cultural backgrounds mingle. This can take place at regular tourist spots, but also outside such milieus. This is of particular interest in the present study, which focuses on the

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type of cultural sustainability in which the diaspora could be involved as intuitive cultural ambassadors for their countries of origin.

The study specifically treats first-time visit intentions of non-visitors who have had cross-cultural interactions with natives of a destination country. The term "non-visitor," used in tourism scholarship since the 1990s, refers to someone who has not visited a particular country or destination before (e.g. Baloglu, 1998). The focus here is on cultural interactions that have not occurred during a trip, as non-visitors' views of a new destination are influenced by the cultural identity and social norms of its natives (Baloglu, 1998; Lai & Wong, 2022). In the context of cross-cultural interactions, an individual may have an established long-term relationship with a native of another country but has not traveled to that destination. The established relationship is thus likely to shape their fundamental sentiments toward that country's cultural and social norms (Davidsen et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007; Schwartz, 2011). Concerning such relationships, the two constructs of interest in this study are warmth and trust, both of which emerge with time. The theoretical foundations of the study are affect control theory (Heise, 1987; Smith-Lovin, 1990) and relational exchange theory (Heide & John, 1992).

The study addresses a gap in scholarship by emphasizing the value of intercultural interactions prior to traveling abroad and stressing the possible role of natives of other nations as tourism and cultural ambassadors outside of their countries of origin. It offers insights into cross-cultural interactions between members of a community and the diaspora of a potential destination country living among them. The study thus examines the willingness of non-visitors to travel to a foreign country for the first time after having an established relationship with a native of that country living abroad. It investigates the quality of such relationships and explores warmth and trust in them as significant factors that could impact first-time visit intentions to the diaspora's countries of origin. Participants in the study included Americans who have established relationships with the Indian diaspora in the United States, but had not visited India. These Indians' behaviors can largely embody India's cultural values and social norms. They are therefore likely to influence how Americans with whom they are in contact come to perceive India, especially if they have never visited that country.

This study contributes to the literature by examining cross-cultural interactions prior to traveling overseas and emphasizes the possible role of the diaspora as tourism and cultural ambassadors. Awareness of such a role can motivate active (versus passive) players to contribute to cultural sustainability by safeguarding their unique cultural heritages (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). It may also serve as an alternative if some individuals choose not to travel globally due to their pro-environmental views. That is, having established relations with the diaspora could fulfill desires to explore other cultures even without traveling.

Literature review

This section has three subsections – cross-cultural interactions as the context, as well as the study's two core constructs: warmth and trust. Cross-cultural interactions influence and explain tourist-host relationships during a trip (Lehto et al., 2020). Quality of social interaction is one of the determinants of the affective and cognitive elements of cross-cultural interactions (Searle & Ward, 1990), which are both embedded in established relationships among people with different cultural backgrounds (Geertz, 1973; Hofstede, 2011; Schwartz, 2011). Trust is fundamental to the cognitive aspect and is meaningful over a long time (Davidsen et al., 2002). Warmth, associated with cooperative intents and positive behaviors (Fiske et al., 2007), is essential to cross-cultural interactions' affective aspects. The affective and cognitive dimensions of cross-cultural interactions are not always mutually exclusive (Lawler, 2018). Emotions triggered by cross-cultural interactions prompt a cognitive effort to investigate the source of such emotions (Ibid.), which is arguably rooted in an individual's cultural

background. Further examination of such interactions is necessary before the actual travel experience.

Cross-cultural interaction as context

Cultural interactions involve uncertainty (Blumer, 1969, p.71) since on the one hand the nature of culture is mysterious and complicated due to the co-existence of individual values (Fischer et al., 2010), and on the other hand, cultural differences exist at national or continental levels (Geertz, 1973). Sustaining cultural identity is at the core of culture scholarship (Geertz, 1973; Hofstede, 2011; Schwartz, 2011). Meanwhile, culture has a dynamic nature (Sussman, 2000) because it evolves over time and thus, a transformative potential is embedded in cross-cultural interactions (Geertz, 1996).

According to Hofstede (2011), culture is described as a collection of shared meanings, statutes, and customs among individuals in a society that distinguishes one member of a society from another. Schwartz (2011) defines culture as the normative value systems that people perceive as the foundation of social practices. Cultural traits impact social structures and relatively less stable pre-established forms of interactions, joint actions, rules, and norms (Blumer, 1969, pp. 6–7). Culture is derived from how people behave (Merton & Rossi, 1968). Brown (2009) empirically demonstrates that “exposure to a new culture has transformative potential” because it “evolves from a confrontation with a new culture into an encounter with the self.” Such transformative potential is affected by learning about other cultures and situations (Geertz, 1996). Therefore, learning is involved in transformation.

Learning is the social process of constructing and appropriating new or revised interpretations of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide for future action (Mezirow, 1994). Intentional or unintentional symbolic models in individuals’ minds based on past experiences give meaning to their recognition, intuition, feeling, or awareness (Ibid.). In the same vein, the interpretation of meanings shapes sensation and determines perceptions, feelings, and cognition, which ultimately leads to transformative learning (Lambie & Marcel, 2002; Singer-Landau & Meiran, 2021). Accordingly, perceptions about a destination are reflective of all impressions, thoughts, and emotions affiliated with whatever is related to that destination – including natives of that destination.

Promoting cross-cultural understanding through transformative learning has long been regarded as one of the advantages of international travel, as it can lead to changes in tourists’ perceptions of themselves, their countries, and the world – in terms of self-discovery, rediscovery of their home country, and globalized ways of thinking (Biber, 2021; Brown, 2009; Pu et al., 2023).

Yet, cross-cultural interactions themselves are not sufficient for transformative learning. Merely being exposed to “the other” does not necessarily lead to intercultural understanding. Rather, being interested in learning about others is a prerequisite (Makransky & Petersen, 2021). In a study of five Balinese villages, Blapp and Mitas (2018) identified key factors for successful creative tourism in a community-based setting, such as host enthusiasm for intercultural exchanges and tourists’ interest in learning about the local culture. In addition, volunteer tourism is often seen as a means to promote cross-cultural understanding. Many organizations use it to achieve their goal of fostering intercultural connections. Transformative learning through cross-cultural interactions is one of the goals of sustainable volunteer tourism experiences, which can also help reduce negative stereotypes (Knollenberg et al., 2014).

In the digital age, social media and electronic word of mouth have become the primary sources of information for tourists seeking destination information (Mehraliyev et al., 2021). These platforms have facilitated connections among people from different countries and shaped their perceptions of travel destinations. However, the digital depiction of a destination may not always reflect reality (Gursoy, 2019) and can potentially have negative psychological impacts

on travelers (Qiu et al., 2018). This discrepancy may be due to subjective information provided by various sources (Gursoy, 2019; I Agustí, 2018) and may lie in the fact that individuals have different cognitive processing capabilities (Park et al., 2021; Tang & Jang, 2012). Therefore, the ability to trust information shared on social media and processed by individuals is crucial in a traveler's decision-making process.

Natives of other countries are also sources of information about their countries of origin (Kim & Chen, 2020; Souiden et al., 2017; Yin et al., 2020) and reflect the culture embedded in their societies. Actual cross-cultural interactions with people from different backgrounds can encourage individuals to ask questions, explore social media, or even decide to travel to a destination they may have never considered before. These interactions can lead to transformative learning, which increases knowledge about people of other national and cultural backgrounds and builds trust. As a result, promoting cross-cultural interactions can have positive effects on individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward people from other cultures.

This study emphasizes the importance of transformative learning through cross-cultural relations prior to traveling to a specific destination. An individual's perception of a destination can be influenced by their established relations with the natives of that country, who may act as cultural ambassadors and inspire them to visit. Unlike volunteer tourism or creative tourism, this type of interest in another culture is not self-initiated. Rather, it is triggered by an established relationship with a native of a country that the individual has not yet visited. This person may inadvertently influence the destination choices of their acquaintances, such as colleagues, friends, neighbors, or classmates, when they plan international trips in the future. Therefore, building cross-cultural relations can have a lasting impact on individuals' travel decisions and contribute to promoting cross-cultural understanding.

The preservation of cultural identity is a central theme in cultural scholarship, as noted by influential researchers such as Geertz (1973), Hofstede (2011), and Schwartz (2011). At the same time, culture is dynamic and constantly evolving (Sussman, 2000), and cross-cultural encounters have the potential to facilitate transformative learning (Geertz, 1996). Thus, engaging in cross-cultural interactions requires an open-minded and flexible approach, recognizing the complexity and diversity of cultural perspectives.

In this study, transformative learning *via* cross-cultural relations before international travel to a specific destination is considered pivotal. An individual's perception of a destination is impacted by the established relations that they have with the natives of that country, and they may decide to travel there one day. Unlike volunteer tourism or creative tourism, this type of interest in another culture is not self-initiated. Instead, it is triggered by long-term relations with a native of a country that they have never been to who may intuitively have been acting as a tourism and cultural ambassador for their country of origin. This person may influence the destination choice of their acquaintances – colleagues, friends, neighbors, or classmates – when they want to take an international trip in the future.

Warmth as a construct

Affective experience takes various forms (Lambie & Marcel, 2002). Warmth, the goodwill individuals feel toward others, is the main affective construct of this study for two reasons – it is a prerequisite to relationship development (Abelson et al., 1982; Tucker, 2016) and one of the main dimensions of social cognition (Fiske et al., 2007). Behavioral cues related to warmth include smiling faces and explicitly positive statements about other people (Bayes, 1972). Warmth of the natives is arguably an attribute of a destination. According to Scannell & Gifford (2010), place-related distinctiveness can also provide information about an individual's distinctiveness or similarity based on physical or social features. Cohen (1979) suggested that all tourists are initially strangers in the host society. The degree to which and how they affect each other

depends largely on the extent and variety of relationships tourists and hosts have during a trip. These interactions can happen anywhere – either at the destination itself or before the actual travel experience. Relationships with natives of other countries outside their countries of origin can arguably lead to potential tourists experiencing types of warmth similar to what they could expect during an actual future trip to that destination. This study highlights that human interaction among people with different national or cultural backgrounds can arguably occur anywhere and at any time – after, during, or before a destination experience.

Several studies underscored different indicators of warmth, which generally include being generous, wise, happy, good-natured, humorous, sociable, popular, humane, good-looking, persistent, serious, restrained, altruistic, imaginative, strong, honest, and, most importantly, reliable (Asch, 1946). People intrinsically seek warmth in their social relations, and enjoyable relations depend on the social desirability of the people involved. Rosenberg et al. (1968) reexamined some of Asch's (1946) findings in a multidimensional analysis while focusing on social desirability. Their study revealed that positive social personality traits include being honest, modest, tolerant, helpful, sincere, sentimental, humorous, happy, good-natured, popular, sociable, and warm.

Tourism scholarship on examining the decision-making process of potential travelers addresses some aspects of warmth. Based on Tucker's (2016) study, empathy is an essential component of cross-cultural understanding. According to Fiske et al. (2007), warmth is reflected in kindness, politeness, positivity, sincerity, helpfulness, friendliness, sociability, generosity, consistency, and consideration. The friendliness of locals is included in the majority, if not all, of the related literature (Zou & Yu, 2022). To develop measurement scales for hosting, some studies focused on elements like respect and politeness, friendliness and welcoming attitude, and willingness to help and support (Blain & Lashley, 2014; Tasci & Semrad, 2016).

Established long-term relations with natives who live outside their country of origin can act as a gateway for socializing, and different levels of experienced warmth would have their own positive or negative impacts. Heise's (1987) affect control theory (ACT) was applied to this study to examine the impact of the level of warmth experienced during these relationships on visit intention. The affect control principle indicates that people behave in ways that maintain their affective expectations and align with their perception of the situation. ACT suggests that individuals maintain affective meanings through actions and interpretations associated with their identities. Individuals typically try to maintain a transient state that is close to the fundamental sentiment tied to their identity – in this case, their cultural identity is associated with the country they come from. Transient impressions develop as long-term relations operate on the affective associations evoked by cognitive classifications of such relations and further impact the impression formed by established relationships (Smith-Lovin, 1990; Thye, 2000). If relationships leave individuals in a state that they evaluate as positive, then positive emotions arise. In contrast, if relationships leave individuals in a state they evaluate as negative, then negative emotions arise (Averett & Heise, 1987; Kemper & Collins, 1990; Lulham & Shank, 2023).

Established relationships are important in this study, as the affect control principle is reflective of confirmation of the emotional impact – which can occur over time. According to Heise (1987), while situation definitions and other cognitive processes provide the foundation for social interaction, social dynamics are primarily regulated by an affective system involving principles, motivations sentiments, and so on. Positive affective associations could make a relationship more pleasant, generate new feelings about an individual with a different cultural and national background, and enhance potential tourists' interest in the individual's country of origin to the extent that they may consider visiting it. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: When an individual is in close contact with a person with a different cultural and national background, that person's higher/lower warmth promotes/discourages the individual's willingness as a non-visitor to travel to that person's country of origin.

Trust as a construct

Trust is a firm belief in reliability and has influential social aspects embedded in relationships. One of the easiest situations in which people can feel trust is through their acquaintances and existing ties (Davidsen et al., 2002; Molm et al., 2000). Trust occupies the space between knowledge about a person and a lack of awareness; it enables a hypothesis to be made about an individual's behavior (Czernek & Czakon, 2016) and, arguably, the country that the individual is affiliated with. To reduce uncertainty, people tend to have interactions with people they already know. However, this may also inhibit building new relations with others (Macy & Sato, 2002) – the very type of relations that may one day cultivate generalized trust. Therefore, trust is meaningful in a relatively uncertain and risky environment.

People's opinions about themselves and others as trustworthy are verified as a result of sustained exposure to others under moderate social risk circumstances (Kuwabara, 2015). Trust begets trustworthiness as well as trust in others (Cohen & Isaac, 2021). Trusting a native of another country could tentatively lead to trusting other people from that country and, eventually, the country of origin itself as a tourist destination. Despite the importance of trust in tourism, very few tourism studies have dealt with this factor or have only done so indirectly. This study underscores the social aspects of trust, which can arguably be built among individuals through long-term relations with their acquaintances – colleagues, friends, neighbors, or classmates.

Trust, whether viewed as an individual characteristic or as an institutional phenomenon, is described as the willingness of one side/person/entity to rely on the other with confidence (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Molm et al., 2000; Rotter, 1967). Relations can flourish if both sides move beyond narrow self-interest and achieve mutual trust (Simpson & Willer, 2015). In this regard, relational trust exists if each party behaves in ways that consider the interests of both parties in the relationship (Rotter, 1967; Selnes & Sallis, 2003). Interpersonal trust arises as a generalized expectancy that an individual feels they can rely on another individual's words (Rotter, 1967). In this study, natives from other countries are indeed sources of information about their countries of origin for non-visitors they have been in established relationships with.

Relational exchange theory (RET), as a version of social exchange theory, is the second theoretical framework in this study because social exchange frameworks require mutual dependence between the two sides, and the practicality of mutual dependence depends on who the two sides are (Savage & Whitman, 2018). Meanwhile, one of the affective aspects of social exchange (Lawler, 2018) is that global emotions from an exchange trigger a cognitive effort to understand their sources or causes. Lawler (2018) further underscored how this assumption is motivational and can lead to actions that would unleash cognitive efforts.

RET views trust as a relational governance mechanism that helps deter opportunistic behavior because it lessens perceived vulnerability between partners. Relational exchange is characterized by trust, deterring opportunistic behavior, long-term orientation, and high information exchange (Heide & John, 1992; Lulham & Shank, 2023). Trust cannot exist in an environment of certainty, at the same time, it reflects an aspect of predictability (Bhattacharya et al., 1998) in the tourism context (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2016). It can be expected that if trust is embedded in an established relationship with a native of another country, then the non-visitor's tendency to travel to that person's country of origin increases accordingly. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: When an individual is in close contact with a person with a different cultural and national background, higher/lower relational trust between the two promotes/discourages the individual's willingness as a first-time traveler to travel to that person's country of origin.

Based on the affect control principle, people behave in ways that maintain their affective expectations in line with the context of a relationship and how aware they are of their relations with the other person. ACT assumes that people want to experience a world they understand

and in which they feel comfortable (Heise, 1987; Kemper & Collins, 1990; Smith-Lovin, 1990). When it comes to cross-cultural interactions among non-visitors and natives of other countries, individuals, established relationships decreases the likelihood of misinterpreting unfamiliar personality traits of others from different cultural backgrounds. Such awareness is indicative of a higher level of trust. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3: Trust mediates the relationship between warmth and visit intention: Visit intention increases when warmth is experienced, and relational trust exists.

Aligned with the domains defined for the study constructs above and the suggested theoretical framework, the mediating role of trust was examined in a structural equation model.

Methodology

Sampling strategy and data gathering

India, a world-renowned tourist destination, was selected as a potential country for Americans to travel to. American participants who had not previously traveled to India were recruited through Amazon MTurk for this study in mid-2021. Americans were chosen for the sample because they are expected to have had quality social interactions and long-term relationships with Indian natives in businesses, schools, universities, or neighborhoods. To take the survey, the respondent was asked to have only one Indian acquaintance in mind when responding to the questionnaire.

India has a unique culture, offers special adventures that would be attractive to potential American tourists, is covered in the American media, and has presented no explicit barriers for Americans traveling to the country over the last few decades. Americans who have not traveled to India may already have been exposed to Indian movies and have a perception of India through Indian movies or Indian characters in movies from other countries (Biswas & Croy, 2018; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006), which may impact the willingness of Americans to travel to India (Kainthola et al., 2021; Kumar & Nayak, 2018; Reddy et al., 2010). Meanwhile, Indian natives are part of a diaspora in the U.S. and have received different types of work visas in the U.S. over the last three decades (Badrinathan et al., 2021).

Ensuring the quality of the gathered data was a main priority for assuring the results of this study. The data was obtained from MTurk's permanent participants to increase the reliability of the responses since being a permanent participant subsequently impacts the quality of the responses (Krupnikov & Levine, 2014; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). To ensure the purposiveness of the sample, this study defined specific recruitment statements to gather information from a full range of respondents (Burnham et al., 2018; Mize & Manago, 2022). The questionnaire included several screening questions, filtering criteria, and question checks. This study also checked the time spent on taking the survey as an indicator of poor attention to the questions or computer-generated responses. The screening questions were presented as follows:

1. Do you intend to travel internationally in the years ahead – post-COVID-19 and after there are no health-related considerations? (The answer should be “yes” to proceed.)
2. Do either of your parents originally come from India? (The answer should be “no” to proceed.)
3. Have you previously traveled to India? (The answer should be “no” to proceed.)
4. Have you been in close contact with at least one person originally from India for longer than 6 months? (The answer should be “yes” to proceed.)

To improve the survey and make it as transparent and convenient as possible for MTurk workers to take, scale items were improved in different iterations to eliminate any ambiguity. To assure content validity and ensure that respondents would provide accurate answers with minimal task difficulty, a pilot study was conducted before it was distributed on MTurk. A total of 20 individuals with diverse demographics in terms of age, ethnicity, academic background, and career took the survey and provided feedback from different perspectives. All of the pilot study's respondents also met the recruitment criteria (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). A total of 308 responses from Amazon MTurk were used for the analysis *via* Stata 17.0. The socio-demographic profiles of the participants are provided in Table 1. The majority of the participants were 50 years old or younger (79.9%) and held degrees from a college or university (82.8%). Meanwhile, 93.7% of the participants have been colleagues, friends, neighbors, or classmates of a person originally from India.

Measurement items

The main constructs of this study are warmth, trust, and visit intention. An SEM model was instituted to examine the integral relationships across different measurement items associated with each construct, with visit intention as the dependent variable. Each measurement item was a declarative statement. All constructs were measured using a 5-point, Likert-type, multiple-item scale, anchored with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5) for the

Table 1. Socio-demographic information ($N=308$).

Characteristics	Percentage
Gender	
Male	48.7%
Female	51.3%
Age range	
20–30 years	23.7%
31–40 years	36.4%
41–50 years	19.8%
51–60 years	11.9%
Older than 61 years	8.2%
Education level	
Highschool	1.1%
Some college (no degree)	16.1%
Bachelor	48.9%
Master or Ph.D. or M.D. or J.D.	33.9%
Ethnicity	
White	72.9%
Asian	12.5%
African American	10.7%
Hispanic	1.4%
Other	2.5%
Household income	10.8%
Below 19,999\$	
20,000–39,999\$	8.7%
40,000–59,999\$	24.8%
60,000–79,999\$	18.9%
80,000–99,999\$	12.1%
More than 100,000\$	24.7%
Relationship with diaspora	
Colleague	34.2%
Friend	38.1%
Neighbor	12.4%
Classmate	8.9%
Significant other (e.g. spouse)	1.8%
Relative (e.g. brother-in-law)	1.9%
Other	2.6%

convenience of the respondents and to ensure consistency in the response process. Likert scales were chosen as they are appropriate for a large group of measurement items and allow for individual ratings regarding feelings, attitudes, or perceptions toward a series of statements (Norman, 2010) about warmth, trust, and visit intention to be later summated or aggregated. Consistent with Harpe's (2015) review paper, this study treated rating scales (with at least five categories) as continuous data for aggregation purposes.

To obtain representative factors, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed for warmth and trust. To measure warmth, Fiske et al. (2007) scale was incorporated, and participants were asked to rate their Indian acquaintance using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree") on the following ten items: kindness, politeness, positivity, sincerity, helpfulness, friendliness, sociability, generosity, consistency, and consideration. EFA resulted in one factor with no cross-loading, while a reliability analysis of the items indicated a satisfactory level of consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .921). In the same vein, to measure trust, Doney and Cannon (1997) scale was incorporated and, participants were asked to rate their Indian acquaintance using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree") on the following eight items: keeping promises, honesty, providing accurate information, being concerned about the mutual relationship, being fair in crucial situations, keeping everyone's interests in mind, trustworthiness, and no need to be cautious with this person. EFA resulted in one factor with no cross-loading, while a reliability analysis of the eight items showed a high level of consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .903). One measurement statement was used to ask the visit intention, and to be consistent with the other items, again the 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree") was incorporated.

The aforementioned Cronbach's alphas reflect that one factor underlies each of the constructs, namely Warmth and Trust, in EFA with the iterated principal factor estimation method using promax rotations. Since this is an initial exploratory phase of the methodology, it was expected that some measurement items would be deleted during the model fit phase (Humphreys & Montanelli, 1975). It should be noted that promax rotations are more realistic as they allow for the correlation of the measurement items during the model fit phase. If orthogonal rotations (varimax) were used, then completely uncorrelated factors would have been kept in this phase, and further correlation of the measurement items in the final stage of model fit to improve the model fit indices would have been questionable (Grieder & Steiner, 2022; Nguyen & Waller, 2022).

Model fit

To test the proposed hypotheses, structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was employed in this study. Recommended by Bollen (1989), this section provides the chi-squared estimate along with several other fit indices (p. 281) – including RMSEA (Root Mean Square of Approximation). Until recently, there has been no globally agreed model fit test (Roos & Bauldry, 2021, p. 49).

Although the cut-off points for CFI (Comparative Fit Index), IFI (Incremental Fit Index), and TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) indices were all .9 or .95, the decision to accept the model is still subjective since the sampling distributions of these fit indices are unknown, confidence intervals cannot be constructed, and inferential tests cannot be conducted. In other words, no formal statistical test is possible (Bollen, 1989, pp. 126–128; Cole et al., 2022). To overcome the cons of a highly restricted baseline model, this study also assessed an absolute goodness-of-fit index – RMSEA (Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation), for which the cut-off points for model fit are (<.05 for excellent model fit) – and SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual), for which the cut-off point is less than .08. According to Brown (2015), SRMR is conceptually better for less restricted models because the impact of the sample size is not embedded in it (p. 70).

Table 2 includes the measurement scale properties of the model related to the final iteration. As for the two latent variables – namely, "warmth" and "trust" – the measurement part of the

Table 2. Measurement scale properties – standardized effect results (N = 308).

	Items	Standardized factor loadings	Composite reliabilities	Average variance extracted	Cronbach's alphas	M	SD
Warmth	W1	.82	.90	.69	.92	4.12	.71
	W2	.65				4.05	.97
	W3	.75				3.92	1.07
	W4	.68				3.80	1.08
	W5	.65				4.32	1.01
	W6	.70				3.94	1.12
	W7	.76				4.02	.95
	W8	.78					
Trust	T1	.64	.92	.86	.90	4.02	1.01
	T2	.72				4.32	.89
	T3	.71				3.93	1.00
	T4	.72				3.87	.95
	T5	.74				3.94	1.11
	T6	.75				4.11	.93
	T7	.69				4.04	.98
Covariance	W1 with W3	.32					
	W4 with W8	.29					
	T1 with T7	.51					

- W1: Kindness.
- W2: Politeness.
- W3: Sincerity.
- W4: Helpfulness.
- W5: Friendliness.
- W6: Generosity.
- W7: Consistency.
- W8: Consideration.
- T1: Keeping promises.
- T2: Honesty.
- T3: Providing accurate information.
- T4: Being concerned about the mutual relationship.
- T5: Being fair in crucial situations.
- T6: Keeping everyone's interests in mind.
- T7: Trustworthiness.

model indicated that the r-squares were high for all of the indicators (ranging from 0.72 to 0.94), the factor loadings were statistically significant, and the related reliabilities were high. Therefore, all hypotheses were supported.

During the estimation of the path model, the main goal was to select values for the model parameters (based on sample data) so that the means, variances, and covariances derived from the model are as close as possible to those of the population through different iterations – until maximum likelihood converged. Table 3 provides the comparison of different models after each correlation of errors – based on examining the modification indices – regarding the CFA results in the SEM model. As indicated in Table 3, although the model fit indices were good in the initial model, estimating the modified indices and correlating errors within constructs improved the model fit (Nguyen & Waller, 2022; Schreiber, 2022).

Table 3. Different iterations for fitting the W-T-IVI path model.

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	CD	Notes
Initial model (no correlation of error)	360.89 (112)***	.906	.911	.066	.078	.903	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model fit indices are good but not excellent. Cross-loading was not needed. Correlation of errors was considered. Modification indices were assessed.
First error correlation: W1 and W3	319.48 (111)***	.946	.949	.064	.071	.901	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model has improved. CFI and TLI show very good model fit. Modification indices were assessed again.
Second error correlation: T1 and T7	290.47 (110)***	.951	.967	.052	.064	.898	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model fit indices have all improved. CFI and TLI show excellent model fit. Model still falls short for the RMSEA. Modification indices were assessed again.
Third error correlation: W4 and W8	219.28 (109)***	.963	.957	.039	.060	.861	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modification indices were assessed again. No correlation within component is possible. All major fit indices show excellent model fit.

W1: Kindness.

W3: Sincerity.

T1: Keeping promises.

T7: Trustworthiness.

W4: Helpfulness.

W8: Consideration.

The last row of Table 3 presents the model fit indices of the SEM model. Based on SRMR (0.060), RMSEA (0.039), CFI (0.963), and TLI (0.957), it can be concluded that the overall model fit is excellent. Figure 1 represents the visit intention path model including the standardized path coefficients; Table 4 demonstrates that all of the hypothesized paths in the proposed model were significant at the alpha level of .001.

As illustrated in Table 4, Warmth significantly influenced Visit Intention ($\gamma_1=0.322, p=0.00$), supporting $H1$. In other words, when an individual is in close contact with a person with a

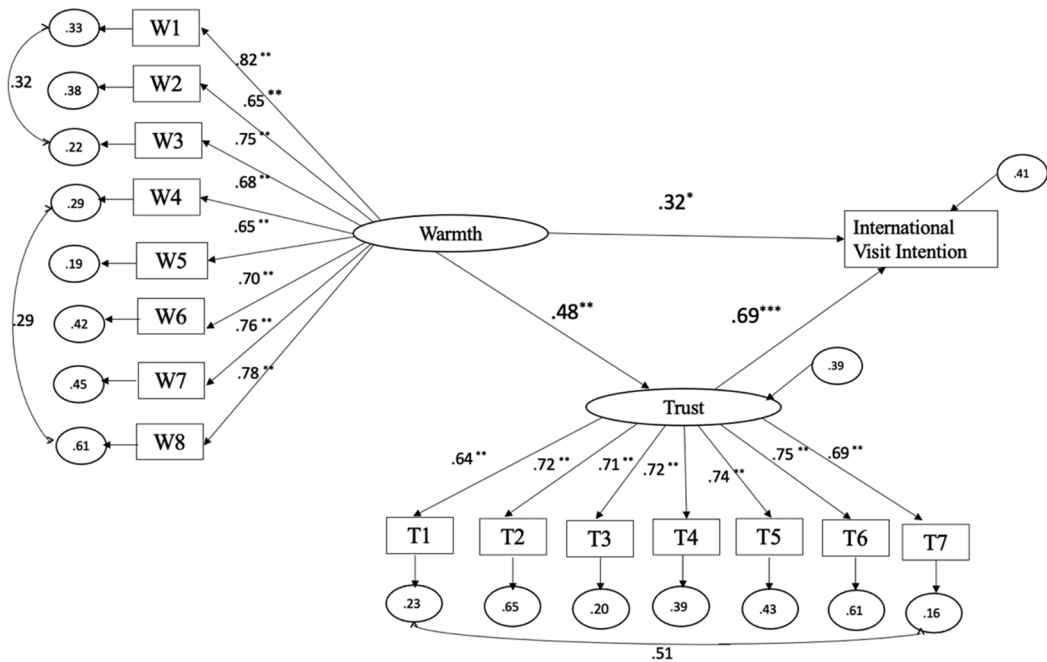


Figure 1. Visit intention path model.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

W1: Kindness.

T1: Keeping promises.

W2: Politeness.

T2: Honesty.

W3: Sincerity.

T3: Providing accurate information.

W4: Helpfulness.

T4: Being concerned about the mutual relationship.

W5: Friendliness.

T5: Being fair in crucial situations.

W6: Generosity.

T6: Keeping everyone's interests in mind.

W7: Consistency.

T7: Trustworthiness.

W8: Consideration.

different cultural and national background, that person's higher/lower warmth promotes/discourages the individual's willingness as a non-visitor to travel to that person's country of origin. As seen in Table 3, Warmth had a significant impact on Trust ($\gamma_2=0.486, p=0.00$), supporting $H2$. Meanwhile, the mediation effect of Trust on Warmth and Visit Intention was also significant ($\beta_1=0.698, p=0.00$), supporting $H3$. Thus, Trust mediated the relationship between warmth and visit intention. Visit intention increased in the presence of experienced warmth and relational trust. Therefore, $H3$ is supported, and one can deduce that Trust mediates the relationship between Warmth and Visit Intention. Indeed, (international) visit intention of non-visitors who

Table 4. Structural parameter estimates ($N=308$).

Hypothesized path	Coefficient	p -value	R -square
Warmth \rightarrow international visit intention (γ_1)	0.32	0.00*	0.69341
Warmth \rightarrow trust (γ_2)	0.48	0.00**	0.861003
Trust \rightarrow international visit intention (β_1)	0.69	0.00***	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

have had long-term relations with natives of another country increases in the existence of Warmth and Trust. According to the R -squared in Table 4, Warmth explains 69.34% of the variance in Visit Intention in the path model, while both Warmth and Trust explain 86.1% of the variance in the visit intention. Therefore, Trust partially mediates the relationship between Warmth and Visit Intention.

Note that the total number of measurement items was 15–8 for warmth and 7 for trust. Therefore, the sample size ($N=308$) is proper for the incorporated methodology because it exceeds the total number of measurement items multiplied by ten and will not lead to unexpected error due to high statistical power or jeopardize the reliability and validity of the outcome (Schreiber, 2022; Wang & Rhemtulla, 2021). Furthermore, two steps were conducted to check discriminant validity. First, the square root of AVEs in Table 2 had to be more than the row of the correlation matrix – which was the case. Second, *Phi-square* method was used – the correlation matrix of each cell was multiple to itself and each was compared with the AVEs to make sure they were larger than the AVEs. Accordingly, no discriminant validity issue was found.

Conclusions

The current study provides a new cultural sustainability perspective in terms of tapping into the cultural identity of the diaspora so that they could intuitively play the role of cultural ambassadors outside their countries of origin. Related cultural sustainability studies carried out previously have mainly focused on traditional festivals in other countries (e.g. Suntikul, 2018) or different dimensions of authentic dining (e.g. Kim & Song, 2022). Others have had a narrower focus on local cultural sustainability, such as Scott's (2003) study on the gambling culture or Robinson's (2021) paper on rural wine and food.

Cross-cultural interactions among people with different national/cultural backgrounds over the long term have been the main interest of the study. The focus has been on established relationships through which sense of warmth could be conveyed and trust could be built among individuals. In line with the purpose of investigating such relationships, the study's results indicate that more cross-cultural interactions would lead to more intercultural learning, which would in turn increase people's knowledge about those from other national/cultural backgrounds. In the eyes of non-visitors, diaspora members are representative of the cultural identity of their homelands. The sample used for field research included Americans who had established relationships with the Indian diaspora. The study incorporated affect control theory and relational exchange theory in a structural equation model, and provided empirical evidence that warmth and trust built through established cross-cultural relationships between the Indian diaspora and Americans significantly impacted the willingness of the latter to visit India.

Sustaining cultural identity is reflected in seminal studies on culture (Geertz, 1973; Hofstede, 2011; Schwartz, 2011). Cross-cultural encounters were initially seen as triggering more international travel (MacCannell, 1973). However, sustaining cultural identities proved challenging as increasing interactions among people from different national/cultural backgrounds through the rapid expansion of international travel would also accelerate cultural change (Cohen, 1979). While culture is certainly a major asset – as reflected in the inscriptions of intangible cultural heritages by UNESCO – it is also evolving continuously as a result of more explorations and encounters.

Cultural ambassadorship has universal implications. This study underscores the intuitive role of the diaspora as tourism and cultural ambassadors. The recognition of such a role by both the individuals and the governments can induce active (versus passive) participants to contribute to cultural sustainability by preserving their distinctive cultural heritages. Government policies can be developed to advocate for this new perspective of cultural sustainability, and to bring awareness to individuals about their potential roles as cultural ambassadors. This role can serve to create travel alternatives as some people opt out of making trips abroad due to their environmental concerns. Having developed relationships with the diaspora could instead satisfy their needs to explore other cultures. In the same vein, for the potential cultural ambassadors to act properly, they should be aware of their impacts and pay more attention to preserving their cultural identities with a view to contribute to cultural sustainability. Consciousness about such an ambassadorial role can be inspiring and lead to a more inclusive, rather than disparate, global community.

The present study sheds light on two positively labeled research constructs – Warmth and Trust. Experiencing different cultural values and social norms is not always pleasant (Brown, 2009; Hofstede, 2011; Mezirow, 1994). For future research, constructs of a different nature – such as those associated with stereotypes or geopolitics – could be examined. While the existence of cultural differences has been a main reason for international travel, cross-cultural interactions can either facilitate or impede communication and understanding between people from different cultural backgrounds (Brown, 2009; Hofstede, 2011; Mezirow, 1994). In fact, cross-cultural interactions impact and largely explain the travel experience during international travel (Eusébio et al., 2018; Lim & Ok, 2021; Pu et al., 2023; Styliadis, 2022) and beyond. Moreover, cross-cultural interactions inevitably have dynamic contexts that could be examined among people with different cultural and national backgrounds. The cultural ambassadorship roles investigated in this study are thus likely to assume significant variety in different cultural contexts.

As suggested in this study, members of the diaspora can act as sources of knowledge and information about their countries of origin in their interactions with people from other nationalities. When members of the diaspora are aware of their cultural ambassadorship roles, they can collectively contribute to reducing conflicts and misunderstandings at the global level. This helps to transcend global divisions toward forging a civic culture that respects the differences and leverages commonalities – which is further enhanced through education that seeks to comprehend the diversity of human culture (Lawrence, 1997). Ultimately, encouraging cross-cultural understanding is one of the primary benefits of tourism, which is arguably linked to interactions among individuals of diverse national/cultural backgrounds that can happen outside the typical travel milieu.

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