

# British tourists' adjustment to cultural expectations in Muslim-majority countries

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## ABSTRACT

While many studies have examined how people in host communities adapt to tourist cultures, limited research has considered tourist adaption to host destination cultures. Successful adaptation can help tourists have more satisfying visits, while maladaptation may seriously decrease satisfaction. It may also compromise the wider wellbeing benefits of taking a holiday. Using an approach based on grounded theory, this paper examines how tourists acquire the cultural knowledge needed to interpret hosts' cultural expectations and the extent to which application of that knowledge results in successful adaptation. Based on insights from 20 interviews with British visitors to Muslim-majority countries, a conceptual model is developed to better understand cultural adaptation on the part of tourists. This is a necessary precursor to the provision of appropriate assistance to tourists to help them deal with any cultural stresses they encounter, which will help to address the adverse cultural impacts of tourism on host communities.

## 1. Introduction

Intercultural interaction has long been a major theme in tourism research (Nash & Smith, 1991), particularly regarding the impacts that tourists may have upon host destinations' indigenous cultures. Seminal texts (e.g., MacCannell, 1976; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Smith, 1989) have focused on the potential for hosts to adopt the culturally determined beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of guests. Known as 'acculturation', such adaptations may include adopting how hosts dress (e.g., in 'Western' rather than local style), their attitudes (e.g., towards religion, gender roles, or observing cultural traditions), and their language. The potential for such impacts to occur is hardly surprising given that tourism inevitably involves some degree of cultural interaction between hosts and guests (Mason, 2017; Ward, 2008).

More limited research has, in contrast, considered adaptation on the part of tourists, particularly how well they adjust to the different cultural expectations they encounter (Rasmi et al., 2014). Some form of adaptation is generally required of international tourists, particularly when travelling to places where the culture is very different to that of their home country. Indeed, the term 'culture shock' (Oberg, 1954; Irwin, 2007) has been used in a tourism context to describe the state of emotional disturbance or anxiety (Irwin, 2007) experienced by tourists

who encounter significant cultural differences (Moufakkir, 2013; AlSaleh & Moufakkir, 2019). Intercultural interaction may, as such, be a source of confusion, stress and anxiety for tourists. However, it also offers tourists opportunities for pleasurable social exchange, cultural learning and personal growth (Moufakkir, 2013). Successful adjustment strategies enable tourists to overcome the former and access the latter. Despite its pivotal role in tourism, however, scholars still do not agree about how best to understand the process of adjustment that can be required of tourists.

A long-standing disagreement is whether cultural adjustment on the part of tourists is analogous to that of longer-term travellers, and acculturation theory applied to both. Most tourists tend to stay in destinations for relatively short times, meaning they are less obliged to adapt to their new cultural environment. They may also have fewer cultural learning opportunities available to them. Furthermore, tourists have considerable freedom to choose how much intercultural contact they want (ranging from essentially none to full immersion), and have a variety of 'buffers' available (such as tour guides, hotel staff, organised excursions, etc.) to insulate themselves from host culture (Rasmi et al., 2014). These require hosts to adapt to guest culture rather than vice versa, enabling tourists to remain in their so-called 'tourist bubbles' (Jaakson, 2004).

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The appropriateness of acculturation theory in explaining how tourists can avoid culture is thus open to question. This study sets out to develop an alternative conceptual model that permits a better understanding of how tourists interpret and adjust to local cultural expectations when visiting cultures different to their own. This is a necessary precursor to helping tourists adapt to host cultures more quickly, more fully and without experiencing culture shock. This can be a vital component of a satisfying trip and, in turn, critical to the increased likelihood of return to and/or recommendation of a destination. It can also assist in addressing the adverse cultural impacts of tourism in a destination.

## 2. Literature review

Some authors have attempted to understand tourist responses to host culture through the lens of acculturation. Acculturation can be defined as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 149). Sam (2006) identified contact, reciprocal influence and change as the three key building blocks of the acculturation process, specifically noting that short-term visitors including tourists could potentially experience acculturation.

Further exploration of acculturation theory does, however, raise some concerns regarding its applicability to tourists. The most widely used theory of acculturation is based on Berry’s (1992, 1997) bi-dimensional model. This framework is typically applied to migrants and settlers, who may encounter cultural differences when they move to a new part of the world and adopt one of several strategies in response. **Assimilation** involves individuals embracing the host culture at the expense of their own. Those who prefer **separation** wish to maintain their own home culture rather than adopt their host’s. **Integration** represents a middle ground, as the individual adapts to the host culture while also partially maintaining their home culture. **Marginalised** individuals, meanwhile, find themselves unable to adapt to the new culture or maintain their own. Either they have not tried to adapt, or they have attempted one of the other strategies unsuccessfully. According to Berry (1997), such individuals are likely to experience ‘acculturative stress’ associated with culture shock.

The crucial question is whether this theoretical framework could successfully be applied to tourists. There are, indeed, certain similarities that can be drawn between the strategies adopted by migrants and tourists. An early study by Cohen (1972), for example, classified tourists into four groups based on preference for the familiarity of the home environment and culture, and desire for cultural contact with hosts. These categories – organised and individual mass tourist, explorer and drifter – would seem to correspond roughly to the first three of Berry’s strategies. Cohen (1972) argues that tourists with a strong preference for uncertainty avoidance tended to adopt strategies that minimise ‘cultural risk’, such as taking an organised mass tour, making shorter trips and visiting the same destination repeatedly. The degree of any correspondence with the Berry’s categorisation is not clear, however, and the extent to which Berry’s framework might be suitable for examining tourist cultural adjustment has not been widely investigated.

Acculturation theorists generally argue that the process of acculturation usually requires travellers to have close contact with local people outside of the often artificial cultural context of hotels and resorts, and to stay in the destination for a substantial period of time in order for cultural practices to be transmitted (Berry, 1992, 1997). Tourists may not be staying long enough in the destination for this to occur, or else may spend a lot of their time within hotels and other tourist-friendly places. As such, acculturation theory has usually been applied to international migrants (such as immigrants and refugees) or longer-term visitors to the destination, often called ‘sojourners’ (Furnham, 1984).

One group of sojourners might be volunteer tourists, who often stay

for much longer than leisure tourists and tend to have close contact with local people. Studies of volunteer tourists do, indeed, suggest that acculturation may occur (Grabowski et al., 2016; Lyons et al., 2012), even if this is mainly in terms of young people developing their outlook on life, rather than adjusting to local cultural expectations while they are in the destination.

Another type of tourism that has been subject to academic research with regard to cultural expectations is known as ‘halal’ or ‘Islamic’ tourism (Ainin et al., 2020; Moshin et al., 2020; Suhartanto et al., 2021). The emphasis on such forms of tourism is for the host to predict the cultural preferences of their Muslim guests and to provide an environment that is as fully compatible as possible with their cultural requirements. The adjustment is thus always expected of hosts rather than guests. Such studies are not, therefore, generally based on acculturation theory. The interest in halal tourism does, however, raise interesting questions about how far non-Muslim tourists to Muslim-majority countries might expect their cultural needs to be addressed.

One study that did attempt to empirically test the appropriateness of acculturation theory to tourists (Rasmi et al., 2014) examined the adjustment strategies adopted by US, German and Chinese tourists visiting Australia. While the study did not specify length of stay in Australia, the assumption must be that they were shorter-term tourists rather than longer-term sojourners. The study was quantitative and identified three determining measures: cultural similarity, ethnocentrism (how far tourists considered their own culture to be superior to that of the hosts) and uncertainty avoidance. What is most interesting about this study, other than the application of acculturation theory directly to tourists, is that it found marginalisation to be the second-most-popular acculturation strategy. This is puzzling because around two-thirds of the tourists were from the US, i.e., the more similar culture. Indeed, US tourists were statistically more likely to adopt a marginalisation strategy than Chinese tourists. Even more confusingly, those tourists who chose the marginalisation strategy were statistically less likely to wish to avoid uncertainty than those who chose separation. Acculturation theorists consider marginalisation to be an atypical strategy, associated with uncommon cases of failure to adapt to a new culture. These observations cast doubt on the ability of Rasmi et al.’s (2014) study to explain cultural adjustment by tourists using the standard acculturation framework.

The present paper sets out, therefore, to explain how tourists adjust to the cultural expectations of their hosts without recourse to acculturation theory and its assumptions. One way forward is to explore the features of tourist contact with hosts that need to be considered in attempting to understand cultural adaptation on the part of tourists. These include the role of the host and the assumed relationship between risk, anxiety and worry, to which this paper now turns.

### 2.1. The role of the host

The delivery of the tourism product often involves hosts making substantial cultural adjustment. This is particularly the case with tourism employees, who will often be those with whom the tourists have the closest and longest cultural contact. The concept of ‘being hospitable’ is fundamental to tourism and making the tourist feel at ease is a foundational business practice (O’Connor, 2005). It is also a prominent feature of many countries’ cultures: for example, showing hospitality to guests is considered a fundamental tenet of the Islamic faith, albeit with differences in interpretation among different groups (Ghaderi, Hall, Scott & Béal, 2020).

Tourism is typically planned and managed accordingly. One example is the provision of ‘tourist bubbles’. These take the form of well-demarcated ‘tourist areas’, resorts or hotel complexes, in which tourists can remain in an environment designed to be culturally similar to their own, experiencing no significant culture shock and requiring minimal effort to adjust to local cultural expectations (Jaakson, 2004). Employees are likely to speak the tourist’s language and behave

according to their cultural norms; security staff will be employed to ensure that ‘undesirables’ are excluded; familiar food and drink will be served (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017). When tourists do venture out, they often travel on ‘tourist transport’ (e.g., minibuses and coaches), accompanied by guides to chaperone them and serve as cultural interpreters (McGregor, 2000).

While the tourist bubble might be considered a boon to many tourists, its disadvantages have been discussed (Belhassen et al., 2008). Chief among these is the lack of contact with the ‘authentic’ destination and its inhabitants. As Taylor (2001, p.8) observes, “the tourist ‘bubble’ ensures that international tourists do not go anywhere real”. Those who eschew the bubble do so because they believe the ‘real’ destination lies beyond it. As such, the tourist bubble can be understood as a barrier to adjustment (Rasmi et al., 2014).

## 2.2. Tourism anxiety, stress and worry

A variety of different concepts have been used in the literature to describe the emotional responses to culture shock, including stress, nervousness, anxiety, worry, and feeling unsettled or uncertain. These have often served to confuse the theorisation of tourists’ cultural adjustment. Jiang et al. (2020, p.290), for example, treat such terms synonymously, arguing that worry is “a state of anxiety and uncertainty due to uncontrollable causes”. Others draw distinctions. Fennell (2017) distinguishes between two types of tourist fear: horror, associated with emotions such as alarm, shock, fear, fright, etc., and nervousness, associated with emotions such as anxiety, worry, tenseness, etc. The former is considered to be more intense than the latter. As such, culture shock might be considered a form of horror, with anxiety and worry both being forms of nervousness. Such a typology might be unhelpful in several respects. First, fear is considered both a trigger and an emotional response, which renders the purpose of the emotion unclear. Secondly, worry and anxiety are seen as equivalent emotional responses to nervousness, which may not be a helpful way of thinking about them. Thirdly, rather than culture shock being a trigger to anxiety and worry, Fennell’s (2017) categorisation considers it simply to be a more intense expression of such. This is not particularly helpful in the context of tourists’ adjustment to unfamiliar cultures, where distinguishing between cause and effect is important.

Worry might therefore best be thought of as denoting an individual’s attempt at mental problem-solving relating to issues with uncertain outcomes with negative consequences (Larsen et al., 2009). It is a response to the anxiety experienced about an uncertain situation, actual or potential. As such, an individual may worry about a tourism trip even before they begin it. If they cannot resolve their worry, they may even decide not to go on the trip and cancel their travel arrangements.

Acculturation theory itself tends to assume a particular relationship between uncertainty, stress and worry, that is not well suited to transfer into the tourism context. Tourism can be considered an inherently risky activity, in that a wide range of adverse events may occur that might impair the tourist’s satisfaction. Larsen et al. (2009) define uncertainty as the actuarial probability of an event occurring (such as a tossed coin landing on ‘heads’), while risk is defined as that probability of an uncertain event occurring, multiplied by the magnitude of its consequences. Perceived risk is the subjective evaluation of such. In complex and turbulent environments – as typified by tourism destinations – uncertainty cannot easily be measured, so most researchers focus on risk perceptions (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). Research typically positions individuals along a continuum from those who embrace and even seek risk, to those who are risk-averse and make every effort to avoid it.

Risk perceptions, anxiety and worry should not, therefore, be viewed as conceptually synonymous in the tourism context (Sjöberg, 1998). For example, one person might perceive a destination to be risky because of its ‘unfamiliar culture’ but will not be anxious about travelling there and will not, therefore, worry about it. Another tourist may be anxious about travelling somewhere even with a familiar culture and will worry about

it. This is not very surprising, since risk perceptions and worry are shaped by different forces: perceived risk is believed to be shaped by external forces such as media reports (Lepp et al., 2011; Kapuściński & Richards, 2016), whereas worry is typically associated with a personality trait (neuroticism) and is internally driven (Tamir, 2005). Both risk perception and worry, however, relate to the uncertainties of tourism. Risk perception is an individual’s assessment of the uncertainties faced in undertaking an activity, while worry is a mental response to the emotional anxiety an individual may feel towards an uncertain event occurring that may adversely affect them.

Acculturation theory does not explicitly relate anxiety, or the worry that may be a response to it, to risk perceptions. Instead, it identifies marginalisation as the state in which anxiety remains unresolved and outlines three alternative strategies that those moving between cultures might adopt in order to avoid it. The need to do so successfully is not based on a need to minimise, maximise or in some way balance the risks involved. Nor is anxiety seen as a reaction or response to perceived risks; rather it is the result of failure to adopt one of these strategies. Unable to maintain their home culture, and unable or unwilling to acquire the new culture, such individuals are effectively ‘stranded’ between two cultures. This may cause them to continue to suffer culture shock, which is manifested in emotional responses such as anxiety or ‘acculturative stress’ (Berry, 1997).

## 2.3. Cultural expectations in muslim-majority countries

Given the breadth and complexity of inter-cultural interaction in the tourism context, the present study considers the specific case of British tourists visiting Muslim-majority countries. Many of these have become popular destinations, with Tunisia, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt being among some of the most-visited locations for UK tourists outside Europe (ONS, 2019).

Some Muslim-majority countries have developed national strategies to attract Western tourists, including providing classic tourist bubbles, such as Dubai in the UAE, where many of the usual cultural expectations placed upon tourists are relaxed (Anthonisz & Heap, 2017; Pike & Kotsi, 2018). Other countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, have made far fewer concessions to Western tourists (Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010). There is thus considerable variability between countries regarding the degree of adjustment required of Western tourists: there may also be variability between regions or cities *within* such countries. Such differences provide contrasts that can be harnessed to good effect in understanding tourists’ responses to the challenge of cultural adjustment, provided a suitable methodology is adopted. This paper argues that, in contrast to Rasmi et al. (2014), a qualitative approach is required.

It is important to note, however, that even in tourist areas such as those of Dubai, cultural expectations are likely to be very different to those in the UK. A quote from Radha Stirling, Director and Founder of the pressure group ‘Detained in Dubai’, serves to illustrate this point:

“You do see prostitutes in hotel lobbies, people consuming alcohol and you do see some pretty offensive behaviour take place ... This can be very confusing to tourists in a country which has such strict rules and where people have been arrested for holding hands in public, kissing and other displays of affection.” (Layton, 2021, n.p.).

Tourists can thus find even a constructed tourism-friendly culture difficult to interpret and adapt sufficiently to. Previous studies have, indeed, identified specific cultural aspects of Muslim-majority countries to which non-Muslim tourists often struggle to adapt. These include, *inter alia*, gender roles, dress codes, modes of greeting, the consumption of food and drink (including the taking of alcohol), gambling and bargaining conventions (Brown and Osman, 2017; Ghaderi et al., 2020; Gutberlet, 2016; Henderson, 2003). While these cultural aspects have been identified, however, it is acknowledged that more sophisticated

research is needed to understand them more fully (Reisinger and Moufakkir (2015).

Despite the profound importance of the topic, and the growth in number of studies on halal tourism, relatively few studies have adopted the reverse perspective and focused on Western tourists' experiences in Muslim-majority countries. Brown and Osman (2017) focused on Western female tourists in Egypt, finding them often unsettled by the absence of women in public places, the unwanted sexualised gaze of males, and the expectation that they fit in with cultural expectations regarding gender roles. They identified a range of strategies women adopted to reduce their discomfort. These included more conservative dress: a burdensome but necessary strategy to protect themselves from possible sexual harassment (Brown & Osman, 2017). Similarly, Ngwira et al. (2020) found conformity to local culture to be the most effective adjustment strategy among solo female travellers to African nations (including those with a Muslim majority).

### 3. Methodology

As noted in the previous section, Rasmi et al.'s (2014) study applied acculturation theory to explore tourists' (as distinct from sojourners') cultural adjustment strategies. Their study produced some counter-intuitive results, which cast some doubt upon the adequacy of this approach. Rather than to conduct further quantitative inductive research from a positivistic perspective, the present study sets out to reconceptualise the problem.

The present study thus adopted the grounded-theory approach advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This attempts to gather and interpret the voices of those involved in the phenomenon – in this case tourists – to develop a new conceptualisation based on those perspectives. As recommended in the use of grounded theory, this section describes the research process in order to enhance the study's dependability. The study focuses on British travellers to countries with a Muslim-majority population in order to provide a sufficiently narrow context to provide meaningful interpretations while also increasing the likelihood of interviewees' experiencing a noticeable cultural difference between their destination and home. British tourists tend to believe that travelling in the Muslim world is relatively risky (e.g., Morakabati et al., 2012; Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010), and this includes an assessment of cultural difference. It was therefore considered more likely that visiting such countries might potentially evoke culture shock. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect in-depth responses, which were analysed using an exploratory coding process involving open, axial and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

#### 3.1. Sample selection

Following established practice (e.g. Lau & Li, 2019; Tsaour & Tu, 2019), a theoretical sampling approach was employed to identify interviewees most likely to illuminate the subject (Decrop, 2004; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Two criteria were used to select interviewees. First, only non-Muslim UK residents were interviewed, to provide greater consistency in cross-cultural perceptions. Second, interviewees should have taken a holiday of no more than one month in length to one or more Muslim-majority countries in the last 10 years. Interviewees were aged 18 and over, and all institutional ethics requirements were met. Interviewees were recruited through appeals by email and social media. The interviews were undertaken in summer of 2019.

As open coding progressed, new interviewees were identified in order to explore emerging theoretical understandings (Homburg et al., 2017). Additional interviewees were identified until reaching data saturation: the point at which no new codes were deemed necessary to summarise the data effectively (Francis et al., 2010). This occurred after the fifteenth interview, consistent with best practice in tourism studies (e.g., Frost & Frost, 2021). A further five confirmatory interviews were then undertaken, bringing the total number of cases to 20. Grounded

theory relies not on the number of cases but the achievement of data saturation. A meta-analysis by Thomson (2010) of 100 grounded-theory studies published from 2002 to 2008 found the number of cases used to range from as few as five to as many as 114, with an average of 25.

Table 1 provides brief details of the interviewees, who had travelled to a number of different Muslim-majority countries for various holiday-related reasons. This was an intentional feature of the theoretical sampling approach, in which a strategy of maximum variation (Suri, 2011) was adopted to capture a wide range of different positionalities on the part of interviewees. In the case of this study, the researchers sought to include individuals who had stayed for varying lengths of time, with varying amounts and intensities of contact with local people. Interviews with those visiting large tourism complexes in Dubai, for example, allowed the researchers to investigate the 'tourist bubble' phenomenon, while those travelling independently around The Gambia, in contrast, permitted the researchers to investigate strategies where the tourists tried to blend in. Some interviewees were on package holidays while others were visiting family.

#### 3.2. Data collection

Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, although some were undertaken by video-conference. Interviewees were first asked five short questions about their past experiences and future intentions regarding holidays in Muslim-majority countries. They were then asked about their worries prior to the visit, risk perceptions, actual experiences and coping strategies. The list of questions is provided in the appendix. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission, and transcribed verbatim. Each interviewee was given a pseudonym to

**Table 1**  
Interviewees.

| Pseudonym | Gender | Country  | When visited          |
|-----------|--------|--|-----------------------|
| Aled      | M      | Egypt, holiday with wife, two-three days   | 2016                  |
| Bryn      | M      | Morocco, holiday with wife, five days  | 2019                  |
| Cath      | F      | Egypt, family holiday, multi-site, one month   | 2011                  |
| Dave      | M      | Dubai, family holiday, five days   | 2019                  |
| Esther    | F      | Qatar, with son, visiting friends and family, one-day layover  | 2018                  |
| Florence  | F      | Egypt, 2004, two weeks diving; Jordan visiting Petra 2018  | 2004 and 2018         |
| Gabi      | F      | UAE, holiday and visiting family, two weeks  | 2018                  |
| Hester    | F      | Egypt, with daughter, diving holiday, two weeks  | 2015                  |
| Ioan      | M      | Jordan, couple, three or four times, holiday, visiting family  | 2014 onwards          |
| Jasmine   | F      | Turkey, family, one week, with previous experience of Malaysia   | 2017                  |
| Kayla     | F      | Turkey, family holiday, one week   | 2009                  |
| Leo       | M      | Tunisia, family holiday, one week  | 2019                  |
| Moe       | M      | Bangladesh, visiting friends and family; Turkey and Dubai, family holiday; Saudi Arabia, holiday   | 2015–16<br>2104, 2106 |
| Nia       | F      | UAE, with partner, holiday and visiting family, one week   | 2018                  |
| Owain     | M      | Malaysia, family holiday, visiting family, one week  | 2019                  |
| Penny     | F      | Tunisia, family holiday, one week  | 2019                  |
| Quinn     | F      | Morocco, secondary school geography trip, one week   | 2009                  |
| Roz       | F      | Egypt and Turkey, both twice, holiday with female friends, one week to 10 days   | 2014 onwards          |
| Sion      | M      | The Gambia, four times since 2016, visiting family, 10 days  | 2016 onwards          |
| Tegan     | F      | Egypt and Turkey, multiple times, holidays with partner and other female friends, one week to 10 days. Maldives, with partner, three weeks | 2009 onwards          |

preserve their anonymity (Saunders et al., 2015).

### 3.3. Data analysis procedure

An open-axial-selective coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to operationalise the theoretical sampling approach and monitor when data saturation had been achieved (see Sthapit & Björk, 2019). This was performed in a recursive manner, with each new transcript (re-)read line-by-line, taking different data ‘slices’ to identify discrete concepts. As these coalesced, they became categories. As new interviews were undertaken, the number and content of existing categories was monitored and, if necessary, modified to create the best fit with the new, expanded dataset. Earlier interview transcripts were re-examined to identify implications of such modifications for how they were coded. Credibility was enhanced through the constant comparison of the categories that emerged with the broader literature (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017).

Axial coding was then used to explore relationships between open codes and develop a schematic model to summarise them. This model underwent numerous iterations before the axial codes were deemed stable and the final model settled upon. Selective codes were used to label the model. Open codes that did not fit directly into the model were eliminated in the interest of parsimony (Homburg et al., 2017). Investigator triangulation was used to confer confirmability: the authors analysed the data independently, coming together periodically to compare and re-assess the coding scheme, building theory in an iterative fashion.

The range of issues discussed in the interviews is summarised in Table 2. A narrowing of the discussion topics raised by the interviewees is shown in the bottom row, confirming progression towards data saturation.

## 4. Findings

This section will first consider how interviewees acquired knowledge about the destination before and during their visit, along with difficulties encountered in applying it to specific inter-cultural contact situations. It will then examine the strategies taken by interviewees to address these difficulties and avoid experiencing the anxieties associated with culture shock.

### 4.1. Knowledge of behavioural expectations

While not all interviewees attempted to acquire cultural knowledge before their trip, those who did tended to adopt one of two broad strategies. The first was to acquire knowledge personally, for example from conversations with people who had previously visited the destination. The other was to be accompanied by someone experienced in the culture and able to advise on appropriate behaviour.

#### 4.1.1. Acquisition of personal knowledge

Some behavioural expectations were identified by participants before they departed. Sources of such knowledge varied greatly. Bryn searched the Internet to find out how his wife should dress, finding TripAdvisor particularly useful. Others sought counsel from family and friends. Before travelling to the UAE, Nia asked her mother’s advice, as a previous resident:

“I did speak to my mum about it because I was going to meet [the] family and what’s the conventions in the home, like how to greet people and that sort of thing.” (Nia, UAE)

Ioan contacted his Jordanian wife’s friends through social media before travelling there. Dave, meanwhile, had already visited Dubai and intended to remain largely within tourist areas, so he did not feel that any further research was required.

**Table 2**  
Cultural expectations discussed in interviews.

|                                     | Aled | Bryn | Dave | Esther | Florence | Gabi | Hester | Ioan | Jasmine | Kayla | Nia | Owain | Penny | Quinn | Sion | Cath | Leo | Moe | Roz | Tegan |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|--------|----------|------|--------|------|---------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Warmth of welcome                   | ✓    |      |      | ✓      |          |      | ✓      |      | ✓       |       | ✓   |       |       | ✓     |      |      |     |     |     |       |
| Conversing with local people        |      | ✓    |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Clothing and covering up            |      | ✓    |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Being a victim of petty crime       |      | ✓    |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Food safety and halal cuisine       |      | ✓    |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Hassle from beggars and hawkers     |      | ✓    |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Use of public transport and taxis   |      |      |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Rules about alcohol                 |      |      |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Unmarried couples staying in hotels |      |      |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Treatment of women and roles        |      |      |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Banter and (sexualised) staring     |      |      |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Bargaining and haggling             |      |      |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Acts of affection, e.g. kissing     |      |      |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Greeting people                     |      |      |      | ✓      |          |      |        | ✓    |         |       | ✓   |       |       |       | ✓    |      |     |     |     |       |
| Number of new topics                | 1    | 5    | 2    | 1      | 3        | 0    | 0      | 0    | 0       | 0     | 2   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0    | 0    | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0     |

Many of the cultural problems that arose did so during the trip: either these could not be predicted or lay beyond the scope of any pre-trip research. These proved more challenging because the tourist had not anticipated them and did not know how best to respond. Some adopted coping tactics, as discussed below.

#### 4.1.2. Use of cultural guides

Tourists visiting unfamiliar cultures will often travel with family or friends who can serve as informal cultural guides, providing on-the-spot advice on cultural expectations. The ability to speak the local language was considered a major boon. These informal guides can also help tourists navigate transport systems and provide reassurance should culture become confusing. Nia, for example, travelled with her brother, an Abu Dhabi resident, when exploring the Emirates. Owain travelled to Malaysia with his Malaysian wife, reporting few problems with adaptation to local culture. Sion, visiting his ex-patriate parents, was fortunate to travel with one of their employees:

“My parents own a bookshop, so they have a driver who looks after their cars and sort of does odd jobs. He’s a very kind of smart bloke because of the job he’s doing ... I was travelling with him.” (Sion, The Gambia)

Those travelling without an informal cultural guide tended to remain within tourist areas. Dave travelled to Dubai with his family and had only visited there once before. He had done little pre-trip research and confessed that his cultural knowledge was weak. His strategy was to remain in the resort area and travel only once to the shopping mall. While some interviewees who used cultural guides had undertaken some pre-trip research, it was still considered useful, or comfortable, to have a cultural guide at hand to deal with unexpected problems.

#### 4.2. Uncertainties and the ability to solve cultural problems

The tourist’s ability to solve cultural problems can be frustrated or enhanced by a number of factors.

##### 4.2.1. Geographical generalisation

Two almost polar views were expressed around knowing, understanding and responding to cultural expectations. One focused on what Muslim-majority countries have in common, implicitly assuming that what works in one works in others. Ioan, for example, considered both Egypt and Jordan to be ‘Middle Eastern’ countries, tacitly expecting the cultural knowledge gained from researching the former to apply equally well to the latter. When asked of any concerns about travelling to Jordan he replied:

“I wasn’t too worried actually. I’d been planning a trip to Egypt years ago ... So I’d sort of done research into the Middle East, I sort of knew what I was sort of getting into in terms of going of a Middle-Eastern country.” (Ioan, Jordan)

Such generalisation is not unusual and has been noted previously (e.g., [Drakos & Kutan, 2003](#)). Tourists frequently believe risks arising in one country (for example a natural disaster) apply also in neighbouring ones, even if they do not. This ‘regional contagion effect’ ([Carlsen & Hughes, 2008](#)) seems, therefore, also to apply to cultural expectations.

The second approach was more nuanced, adopted typically by those with a more intimate knowledge gained from previous travel or family and friends living in the country. This view emphasised that each place has its own particular cultural norms, expectations and challenges. When asked about three Muslim-majority countries she had visited (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Maldives) Hester replied:

“All completely different places, completely different and in fact, probably I’d have to tell a different story about each one to get a different picture because they’re all completely different.” (Hester, Egypt)

##### 4.2.2. Local and micro-scale differences in culture

Even those who have travelled to a particular country before sometimes found it difficult to prepare themselves for local and micro-scale variations in cultural norms and practices. Local variations were also noted between urban and rural areas, and those that receive more tourists than others. Also noted were micro-level variations within destinations, for example between a shopping mall and the street outside, or between the hotel lobby and the beach. Tourists may be unaware they have crossed a cultural boundary, and how the culture of that new place differs – sometimes in subtle but important ways – from the one they just left. As Dave remarked about Dubai:

“Within the resort it’s highly Westernised ... [but] if you go further afield you have to be careful, even within the UAE ... that’s when you really shouldn’t be exposing [...] yourself or anything else.” (Dave, Dubai)

In Dubai, distinctions between tourist and non-tourist areas tend to be well-marked by zoning, maps and signage. Even so, Dave and his family failed to recognise such a transition when moving from the largely Westernised shopping mall to the light railway system, which was demarcated a public area and where stricter cultural rules applied. This led Dave to erroneously enter a women-only carriage with his family. Following some displays of body language and disapproving vocalisations from its occupants, he made a rapid exit to another part of the train.

Gabi noted micro-level differences in the UAE:

“Even going to the beach ... when we’re staying in hotels ... covering up more, even on my way down the beach. I guess maybe if I was somewhere in Europe on holiday I wouldn’t kind of care so much to kind of cover up.” (Gabi, UAE)

Gabi noticed that even the journey from hotel to beach might result in the crossing of a cultural boundary. She took precaution by taking extra clothing and shoes: an imposition because they were additional trappings to be looked after at the beach. It would have been easier for her to make the short journey in her swimwear.

The existence of such cultural boundaries represented an additional source of uncertainty for tourists. While they could prepare themselves for the country’s culture as a whole, applying it within individual places was more difficult. Where there were signs to follow, appropriate cultural behaviour could be quickly learned. Where such signs were absent, and rules therefore implicit, gaining cultural literacy was more difficult, particularly in the short space of time typical of a holiday.

##### 4.2.3. Changes in culture over time

In today’s rapidly globalising world, culture can change very quickly. Consequently, tourists who had undertaken some pre-trip research sometimes found this outdated upon arrival, and this was another source of uncertainty about cultural expectations. Nia asked her mother for advice about how to behave appropriately in the UAE, though this was of little practical use:

“... [it] turns out her information was about 30 years out of date.” (Nia, UAE)

Bryn also found his research about how his wife should dress was out of date:

“There were lots of women there with burqas on, all covered up, but lots that aren’t, and the sort of rules and procedures that we thought would be applicable for my wife weren’t really that applicable [due to], I think, a lot of French people coming across.” (Bryn, Morocco)

##### 4.2.4. Flexible practice by local people

Another reason why tourists sometimes found it difficult to adjust to cultural expectations was local people’s flexibility in their own

behaviour. Interviewees reported that local women frequently took a more relaxed approach to Islamic dress in certain places, wearing short sleeves or not having their hair well-covered:

“Some women wear scarves so their hair is still on show and then obviously you’ve got the ones who just show their eyes and the ones who look completely covered ... A lot of them will wear kind of the black dress. Sometimes they’ll just wear that, and they’ll have like tee-shirt and jeans underneath and that’ll be on show. So, like, I don’t really know what the rules are, if that’s what you call them.” (Gabi, UAE)

#### 4.2.5. Interpreting cultural norms

Tourists also found some elements of the host culture difficult to interpret, making it harder for them to adapt. One example is the tendency for local people to ‘stare’ at foreigners, interpreted by [Brown and Osman \(2017\)](#) as a ‘sexualised gaze’. As Hester noted on her Red Sea diving holiday:

“Around the pool areas, for example, on the beach, these groups, generally groups of men, just stare at all the women, all the time. It was horrible!” (Hester, Egypt)

Jasmine, meanwhile, recalls being the recipient of similar behaviour during a trip to Malaysia:

“I was about 23 when I went there ... with a friend who was also 23, and we did get a lot of negative attention off men and we did feel a little uncomfortable walking around in Kuala Lumpur.” (Jasmine, Turkey and Malaysia)

While interviewees recognised that such staring was culturally defined, and many felt very uncomfortable being subjected to it, it was not consistently recognised to be of a sexual nature. Nia even noted that staring at foreigners was not reserved for women:

“... my partner’s wearing shorts, and he does a lot of weightlifting and he’s got like kind of chunky legs and my brother pointed out that actually guys were looking at his legs. I don’t know if it was like ‘oh, he’s wearing shorts, that’s inappropriate!’, or ‘how did he get those calves!’ but they were actually looking at his legs.” (Nia, UAE)

Respondents gave a wide range of interpretations for this behaviour, including sexual aggression or attempts to befriend women in order to scam them (described as ‘bumsters’ by Sion, The Gambia). Others put it down to curiosity, it being unusual to see fair-haired and blue-eyed people. Gabi’s impression was that in the UAE:

“Blonde women do kind of get looked at more in the malls and things and less so me. When I’ve been with my mum, she’s Philippino, so she’s quite dark as well and they kind of look at her less as well ... it’s also kind of white people would get more and also blue eyes.” (Gabi, UAE)

This explanation might be considered surprising, however, given the number of Western tourists now visiting the UAE, particularly tourist areas in Dubai and Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi. Other interviewees explained the behaviour simply in terms of different cultural norms. Gabi, for example, was ultimately at a loss to explain the staring behaviour she encountered, putting it down to mere cultural difference:

“I think like here in the UK we’re very much like “oh, don’t stare” but there I guess not. I don’t know if it’s not rude to them or like they don’t care but they will just stare and even in like supermarkets, if I’m being served by someone, they just constantly stare, even if they’ve moved on the next customer.” (Gabi, UAE)

Whatever the explanation, several of the women interviewed found this behaviour greatly disturbing and could not help but be anxious that

they were breaking some unwritten cultural code. Only women raised this cultural behaviour in the interviews, with men only mentioning it when prompted.

#### 4.3. Adjustment strategies

Analysis revealed three generic strategies that British tourists to Muslim-majority countries adopted to meet the behavioural expectations of the local culture. No interviewee remained entirely faithful, however, to one strategy at the expense of others: a degree of flexibility was evident, dependent on context. Thus, an interviewee may adopt one strategy as a general rule but be prepared to adopt another when visiting a particular location (e.g., a religious site) or undertaking a particular activity (e.g., eating a meal).

##### 4.3.1. “Do as the Romans do”

The first strategy involves a willingness both to leave one’s home culture and to embrace the culture of the place being visited. This strategy might be termed “Do as the Romans Do”:

“... wherever I go, I try to be respectful and just think ‘well if that’s how they want things to go’; then obviously the UK has certain expectations of how we want people to be; so as I say, ‘when in Rome do as the Romans do’ ... You can just accept that’s the way it is so just abide by it.” (Gabi, UAE)

This strategy involves tourists adapting to some degree to their hosts’ cultural expectations. In a Muslim-majority-country context this could, for example, involve adopting Islamic dress, eating Halal food, and embracing the practice of bargaining in street markets. With regard to haggling, Quinn noted:

“I do remember doing a lot of sort of bargaining and being ... sort of scared to do that at first but as the trip went on, when I had my friends beside me, we felt a bit more confident.” (Quinn, Morocco)

For several interviewees, the desire to see the ‘authentic’ destination was a motivation for adopting this strategy.

“I was quite lucky in Jordan because I wasn’t living in hotel, I was actually in living ... in a house, just sort of surrounded by just normal Jordanians. You know, who weren’t in right next to a hotel, so they weren’t used to tourists being around, you know. It made more sense: ‘I’m getting a more authentic experience just from that’.” (Ioan, Jordan)

The tactic of looking local was clearly a benefit in this respect. As Quinn commented:

“I think that is the exciting thing about travelling is going to see a country how it just is, and so you can experience their culture and like widen your thinking a little bit more maybe.” (Quinn, Morocco)

For such tourists, adoption of local habits was more about ensuring they see the authentic destination: being dressed and behaving like an outsider would not provide them such privileged access. As Hester noted, during the time she lived in Saudi Arabia:

“I would be covered up there, completely covered up, ‘cos until I spoke nobody really knew who I was. I actually, in a way, didn’t mind being covered up. I quite liked being anonymous. It was good fun. It is a ‘protection’ in a way.” (Hester, Egypt)

This ‘protection’ allowed Hester to visit places and meet people she otherwise would not because she would be instantly marked as a tourist and treated differently. Such a strategy is not unknown in tourism research ([Muzaini, 2006](#)) but its use in an Islamic context has not been noted previously. Where previous studies have noted the adoption of Islamic dress and behaviour, it has been as a strategy for increasing personal safety by women ([Brown & Osman, 2017](#)).

The present study found 'Doing as the Romans do' to be frequently adopted by those who had a cultural guide to show them what to do. Frequently these tourists were visiting family and a family member was accompanying them. This enabled them to feel 'culturally safe' even in spaces where authenticity is not being 'staged' for the benefit of tourists (MacCannell, 1976). Other users of this strategy were those who had visited the country multiple times and had hence had time to learn cultural expectations, although these were not always consistent and often changed between visits. Would-be tourists were frequently cautioned against applying knowledge gained from one destination, or even one location in a destination, to another. Cultural knowledge was thus not seen as either durable or easily transferrable.

#### 4.3.2. "Be wise"

This strategy involves tourists retaining much of their home culture but also adopting some host culture behaviours. The guest adjusts by leaving the safety of the tourist 'bubble' – from time to time – to 'explore' the local destination and, in so doing, feels a need to adopt certain elements of its culture. For example, women might carry a scarf or other 'cover-up' for areas where cultural expectations are stricter. This selective strategy was described by Florence (Egypt) as 'being wise'.

A major feature of this strategy is using the tourist bubble as refuge from the culture of the destination, moving in and out of it to experience the benefits that those following the assimilation strategy received in terms of seeing the 'real' destination:

"I was there with the family. It was a case of you'd go to the car and you'd try to make the air conditioning [work] more and then you're in the mall [but] we did go to a couple of restaurants, smaller restaurants in side streets as well, it's the kind of restaurant [where] locals would go." (Owain, Malaysia)

Frequently, tourists will use cultural guides to facilitate forays outside tourist areas. They may therefore often see a highly managed version of the destination – the one the guide wants them or can get them to see – rather than the true destination they might be hoping to experience. Tegan (Egypt, Turkey, Maldives) recognised this but still considered it to be an optimal strategy. Cultural safety was, in this case, prioritised over experiential authenticity.

Motivations for adopting an integration strategy could be the wish to avoid showing disrespect to local hosts, frequently mentioned by those striving to 'be wise'. This may result from positive connotations of following the tradition of reciprocity wherein hosts show hospitality to their guests and guests show respect to their hosts in return, a strong tradition in Islamic culture (Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010). As Bryn remarked:

"I didn't mind being respectful of where you are really and conscious that there are traditions, customs, rules, regulations, laws, that may not be applicable in your home country but of course you've got to have respect for those in a foreign country." (Bryn, Morocco)

Whether showing respect is a proximate or ultimate objective of conforming to cultural expectations remains, however, an open question. It may be that interviewees were giving lip service to the more 'worthy' reason for conforming, simply to avoid giving their genuine rationale, which was more related to fear of punishment.

Interviewees who adopted this strategy tended not to have the convenience of a family or friend to serve as a cultural guide. They tended, however, not to be staying in resort hotels, so they typically booked excursions from local operators.

#### 4.3.3. "Stay in the bubble"

Those who adopt this strategy are trying to insulate themselves from the host culture. They do this by remaining within the cultural 'safe zone' of the so-called 'tourist bubble':

"Just go with the flow and enjoy it, and when you're on the bus on the way to the resort just don't look out the window. Don't worry about it because that's not like what it is [in the tourist areas]. You have poor areas – people still working in the fields – and you just think 'oh my God!', you know?" (Penny, Tunisia)

Penny's clear preference was to remain in the tourist bubble. Trips from and to the airport were seen as negative experiences: ones that would result in instant culture shock if she was to get off the bus. Penny's concern was that she would be bothered by beggars and hawkers in such areas, or that she may become the victim of petty crime. For Penny, the bus represented a place from which she could practice the tourist gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011) from a position of safety, avoiding becoming overwhelmed by local culture norms.

The tourist bubble represents, of course, a highly artificial destination: one that is oriented towards leisure rather than daily living and one in which the host adjusts to the culture of their guests. Such 'tourism enclaves' are highly inauthentic in cultural terms, as the guests' culture is generally practiced there.

When tourists experience anxiety, they will sometimes withdraw further into the bubble. Mari, for example, remarked that next time she visits Tunisia she would remain in the resort. During her diving holiday in Egypt, Hester and her daughter found the 'sexual gaze' of male Muslim guests around the hotel swimming pool incredibly disturbing. They did not find much else of interest to do, so between dives they wanted to lie by the pool and swim. Their coping strategy, which had both spatial and temporal elements, was to remain in their hotel rooms during the day and choose times to use the pool when men were less likely to be there:

"We worked out that they wouldn't come out in the morning – they'd probably be sleeping – but they be out in the afternoon, so we sort of turned our days around and did other things in the afternoons when we had twigged what their pattern was." (Hester, Egypt)

When they did occasionally venture out, interviewees who opted usually to 'stay in the bubble' tended to have negative motivations for adhering to behavioural expectations, based around fear of the personal consequences of transgression. Such consequences ranged from shows of body language and disapproving noises from members of the host population, to being reprimanded by private citizens, subjected to some form of physical intervention, or spoken to or even arrested by officials or police officers. As Quinn stated:

"I think there is a bit of that you know because you hear things in the news, stories about people who haven't followed the rules of that country, I would be very scared to not follow the rules." (Quinn, Morocco)

Tourists interviewed who adopted this strategy were more likely to be women and to be staying in hotel complexes, often stating that they considered it safer to do so. When pressed on what they meant by safety, most cited physical safety but many also discussed the concept of 'hassle'. Tegan (Egypt, Turkey, Maldives) became frustrated with the aggressive sales tactics of hawkers and adapted by:

"Walking faster [and] going a different route when I can see that there are, you know, men out there looking to try and get you."

#### 4.3.4. Worry and failure to adjust

Acculturation theory suggests a fourth strategic option which occurs when the traveller declines to adapt to the host culture but is unable to maintain their home culture. Trapped between two cultures, the traveller is likely to feel anxiety in the form of homesickness. If this cannot be alleviated by worrying, stress could build up and become intolerable, the only solution for them being to return home.

No interviewee in this study noted returning home even as a

possibility. In the case of tourism, the host can try to bridge the cultural gap by showing hospitality to their guest. In many cases, therefore, hosts will be able assist the guest to resolve the stress they are experiencing. Some interviewees also noted that, like many migrants, returning home is not a realistic strategy, due to the difficulties of re-arranging home-ward travel, the need to stay together to provide childcare, and so on. The interviewees thus considered it usual for tourists who are experiencing unresolvable anxiety to have to tolerate it until the trip is over.

Such situations can, however, be stressful for those experiencing them, as the associated emotions can be strongly negative. The tourist is likely therefore to feel very uncomfortable and distressed while they wait for their holiday to end. The interviewees did, however, believe such instances to be comparatively rare. Indeed, none of the interviewees had found themselves in such situations or knew anyone who had. Ultimately, this study found no support for the idea of a marginalisation strategy in a tourism context, and it is perhaps more intuitive to imagine that individuals who can predict such feelings about travel are more likely to travel within places that share their cultures or, in the most extreme cases, not at all. This finding is, of course, in sharp contrast with the study of Rasmi et al. (2014), where marginalisation was found statistically to be the second most-common strategic option adopted by tourists.

5. Conclusions

Based on these findings, the model shown in Fig. 1 is proposed. An adjustment process that is substantially different to that proposed by acculturation theory emerges, Expectations about how to behave are influenced by host culture and can often be predicted. The tourist’s ability to do that depends on the cultural knowledge acquired before travel, whether from previous visits, friends and family, the media, Internet searches, etc. Unpredicted cultural expectations can also, however, arise during the trip, and these can give rise to culture shock.

The tourist’s cultural knowledge is then applied in a process labelled as ‘problem-solving’, as the tourist assesses how best to respond to the cultural expectations (s)he may encounter. The grid at the bottom of the figure shows the three main strategies observed. It also suggests motivations for adopting each strategy and implications for who adjusts to whose cultural expectations. Effective application of this knowledge is, however, constrained by various uncertainties (shown on the right). These may cause cultural problems to remain unresolved, in which case the tourist may experience cultural stress, a form of anxiety associated

with not being able to maintain home culture or to adjust to that of the destination.

Lastly, the model proposes that rather than being synonymous with cultural stress or anxiety, worry is a possible response to unresolved anxiety associated with culture shock. It is used when the individual is unable to apply their cultural knowledge successfully within one of the three adjustment strategies and experiences the cultural anxiety associated with culture shock.

This study argues that trying to integrate tourists (as opposed to sojourners) into existing theoretical models of acculturation lacks credibility, resulting in misinterpretations such as those found in Rasmi et al. (2014). It thus proposes a new, more nuanced way of thinking about how tourists adapt to host cultures. The added value of the present study is therefore threefold. Firstly, the proposed framework provides further insight into several new dimensions of cultural adjustment in a tourism context, including who makes adjustments (the guest, the host, both or neither) and the nature of the destination (authentic, managed or artificial). This allows the framework to be applied in more nuanced ways to a wide range of contexts, not simply British tourists taking holiday trips to Muslim-majority countries. Secondly, the framework offers a significantly different interpretation of the ‘marginalisation’ strategy to Rasmi et al. (2014) – one that incorporates the notions of ‘culture shock’ and anxiety (or ‘acculturative stress’ as per Berry, 1997), although it understands these concepts in a very different way. Thirdly, the framework provides a context for tourist worries relating to ‘strange and different cultures’ (Larsen et al., 2009), in that these may be understood to be a means of dealing with unresolved anxiety linked to culture shock.

5.1. Implications

In addition to the conceptual contributions highlighted above, the findings have important management implications. Destination managers might be advised to adopt interventions to reduce the uncertainties that tourists face when choosing an appropriate inter-cultural adjustment strategy at their destination. These could help tourists adjust effectively and avoid experiencing the anxiety that may result from culture shock. Pre-departure advice and realistic goal setting could also be considered, e.g., by travel agents and tour operators or on inbound flights through an in-flight film.

Shifting the focus from guest to host, involvement of residents in destination design and planning remains paramount. In places where

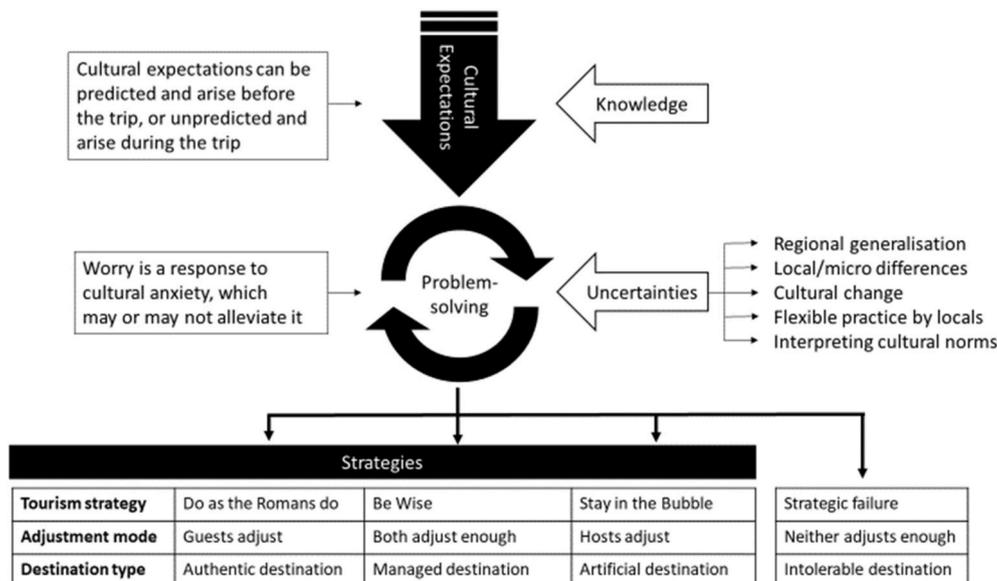


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of tourist cultural adjustment.

guests' cultures differ considerably from the host's, better understanding of host communities' tolerance levels for different behaviours can inform identification of where and how to encourage interaction and where to perhaps shield from obtrusion. As noted by one participant, consistency of messaging in terms of appropriateness of different behaviours in different venues or regions is an imperative responsibility of destinations that desire to minimise cultural conflict. Ultimately, the quelling of any culture shock and maximisation of meaningful and intercultural interactions has the potential not only to heighten tourists' satisfaction, but also to lessen the likelihood of negative reaction to tourism or anti-tourism sentiment on the part of hosts.

More fundamentally, this study highlights a critical national and local policy decision, namely the extent to which a destination (at any scale) wishes to actively attract visitors potentially unwilling to adapt to some extent to a culture different to their own. A multicultural ideology on the part of destinations is not always matched by that on the part of potential visitors; some destinations might perhaps be more willing than others to (continue to) provide sanitised alternatives for visitors not interested in their unique characteristics. A preference to welcome those most receptive to new and different culture, i.e., those willing to integrate or assimilate, should be matched with a development and marketing emphasis on the opportunities for interaction and immersion opportunities that those destination can offer.

## 5.2. Limitations and future research

A limitation of this study is that some of the travel undertaken by visitors was as far back as 2008. Not only is it likely that the precise cultural expectations faced by tourists to those destinations are likely to have changed since then but it is also possible that interviewee's memories may have been distorted by the passage of time and an inability to fully recollect their experiences. It should be noted, however, that no lack of recollection ability was noted in the interviews, with all of the interviewees being able to recollect their experiences with much detail and fluency. Following good practice in qualitative research, the findings are not claimed to be representative or generalisable. A detailed description of a theoretical framework has, however, been provided – using authentic tourist quotes – which can assist in decision making across a range of contexts.

Additional factors worthy of greater emphasis in the model include various individual- and group-level variables such as age, education, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, religion, personality traits and attitudes, cultural knowledge and identity, and relevant language ability. Differences between travellers based on party size and composition, trip purpose (leisure, VFR, business, etc.), trip length, and between one-time, repeat and prospective visitors are additional dimensions of interest. These could be useful topics for further research. A more detailed investigation of the circumstances in which would-be tourists do and do not conduct information searches on the internet prior to the trip could also add sophistication to the model presented.

It is important to recognise that any individual is likely to adopt different strategies under different circumstances and exploration of triggers would be desirable. This is an exploratory contribution and many further avenues of both qualitative and quantitative investigation remain open. Identification and discussion with those who have chosen not to travel to a Muslim-majority destination, or to other types of destination, would therefore also be instructive in informing understanding of those who consciously choose to avoid culture shock by staying home. This is a presently under-researched subject that would benefit from further investigation. Even so, it can be argued that the findings of this study provide a sound basis upon which such investigations may fruitfully proceed.

## Author credit statement

The two authors of this paper took an equal share in all elements of

the design, conduct, analysis and writing of this paper.

## Impact statement

Muslim-majority countries are increasingly popular as tourist destinations. Many Western tourists to them encounter cultural expectations, often implicit, which they often find hard to predict and sometimes difficult to adjust to. As long as adjustment is unsuccessful, culture shock may occur. There are, however, sets of strategies that both tourists and destinations can adopt to minimise the potential for culture shock. This paper sets out to gain an improved understanding of the operation and choice of such strategies, the successful application of which should provide tourists with a more satisfying holiday experience by helping them to avoid the marginalisation effect of culture shock and attendant worry. This, in turn, will likely have benefits to the destination tourism economy as it continues to develop in many Muslim-majority countries. The destination community will also benefit as more tourists will be able and willing to meet local cultural expectations.

## Declaration of competing interest

Both authors confirm that they have no conflict of interest in this paper.

## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW. QUESTIONS

Thinking about one specific time you went on holiday to a Muslim-majority country:

1. Where did you go?
2. When was that?
3. How long did you stay?
4. What was the purpose of your visit?
5. What did you do while you were there?
6. Can you remember what you thought might be problems, difficulties or concerns *before you went*?
7. How anxious or worried would you say you were about these?
8. What was your most serious concern?
9. What was it like *when you were there*? Did your anxieties or worries come to anything? Did new ones arise?
10. What changes or adaptations did you make to what you did/how you behaved?
11. Did you mind making these changes or adaptations?
12. Would you go there on holiday again?
13. What advice you would give people who are thinking of going there on holiday?
14. What kinds of things do you think the country should do to be more welcoming to people from the UK.

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