

# **The Role of Online Identity Orientation and Socializing for Information Search: A Case of Ethnic Minority Guests' Hospitality Experiences**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This paper investigates the impact of online identity orientation and online friendship homophily on online socializing, online information search, and ethnic guests' hospitality experiences.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study uses structural equation modeling (SEM) to test a conceptual model developed after reviewing hospitality literature. Data is collected from a sample of 514 Turkish-Dutch ethnic guests living in the Netherlands using a self-administered questionnaire.

**Findings** – The results show that online identity orientations aligned with minority and majority cultures impact online friendship homophily and online socializing, which subsequently impact online information search and hospitality experiences of ethnic guests.

**Originality/value** – The study examines the simultaneous effects of online identity orientations and online friendship homophily on online socialization and hospitality experiences of ethnic guests. It highlights the role of culture in explaining the use of social networking sites and its potential impact on hospitality-related behaviors and experiences of ethnic guest consumers.

**Practical implications** – On the whole, ethnic communities have considerable spending power. The findings point to heritage and mainstream cultural socialization accounting for travel and hospitality experiences within an ethnic minority group. The findings supply relevant information for hospitality sectors on services to endorse or promote to guests from ethnic communities.

**Keywords:** self-identity, online friendship homophily, online socialization, information search, hospitality experience

**Paper Type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen an increase in interdependence and integration across the globe, driven by advancements in innovative technologies, globalization, migration, and cross-border dissemination of information (Peñaloza and Gilly, 1999). This has triggered many social, cultural, and demographic changes at local, regional, and international levels, including a noticeable increase in cultural diversity among Western countries (Jamal, 2003; Kizgin *et al.*, 2020). While scholars have highlighted the importance of cultural diversity as an urgent research topic for the hospitality and travel industry (Manoharan and Singal, 2017; Manoharan *et al.*, 2021), research exploring ethnic minority segments and their travel-related choices remains scarce. Similarly, while a recent meta-analysis of research published in leading hospitality- and tourism-related journals (Moro *et al.*, 2017; Nusair, 2020) reveals social media usage as a popular research area, past studies seldom focus on ethnic minorities' use of social networking sites and its influence on subsequent online information search and hospitality experiences.

In this context, it is unclear if a person's cultural orientation affects their tendency to network and form relationships with people of their own culture or others. Therefore, it is important to investigate this phenomenon. On the one hand, a person's preference to maintain their own culture means they may end up socializing with people of their own heritage on social media. Furthermore, in the process, they might use social media as a resource linked to their culture of origin. On the other hand, a person showing a preference to adjust to host cultural traditions may socialize with people of the host culture through social networking sites. In this case, they may go beyond their ethnic group, taking advantage of newly formed relationships involving the host culture.

Scholars have investigated the relationship between purchase intentions and identification with mainstream and ethnic cultures (e.g., Bercerra and Korgaonkar, 2010).

Accordingly, consumers' purchase intentions are influenced by their cultural orientations and the information they use (Wang et al., 2012). Prior studies have identified social networks as an integral source for investigating the consumption choices of ethnic minorities (Kizgin *et al.*, 2018a; Laroche and Jamal, 2015), but only a few studies do so in an online context (Kizgin *et al.*, 2018b; 2018c). Ethnic minority consumers are driven by culture, media knowledge, and social empowerment. They aspire to an inclusive yet expressive multicultural identity (Nielsen, 2015). They are expected to use social networking sites to extract that is in line with the host or culture of origin while negotiating cultural differences and similarities (e.g., Askegaard *et al.*, 2004; Laroche and Jamal, 2015). This is because social networking sites allow users to stay connected to their heritage countries (Durham, 2004; Lee, 2004), seek social support (Ye, 2006), and develop interpersonal connections with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

While social networking sites act as an alluring way to create their identities (Makri *et al.*, 2021), research exploring self-identity-related antecedents in using social networking sites for hospitality-related behaviors such as online information searching and hospitality experiences by ethnic minorities remains scarce. Accordingly, one wonders how and in what sense self-identity impacts ethnic minorities' use of social networking sites for negotiating online identity and satisfying various socializing needs (Park *et al.*, 2009). To what extent do online identity orientation, online friendship homophily, and socializing influence information searching and sharing of hospitality experiences via social networking sites? The current study addresses these research questions, adding a new perspective to the literature on social media usage and hospitality experiences by focusing on ethnic minorities as a consumer segment.

Ethnic minority consumers are continually exposed to home and host cultures through direct and indirect contact routes (Sobol *et al.*, 2018) and emergent global consumer culture (Askegaard *et al.*, 2005). Prior research reflects this tension, documenting mixed findings on

cultural patterns and subsequent behavioral outcomes (Kizgin *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the cultural patterns and hospitality experiences of ethnic minority guests.

The study proposes a theoretical model to examine the impact of identity (Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver, 2006; Askegaard *et al.*, 2005) on the use of social networking sites for online friendship orientation, information searching, and sharing of hospitality experiences. The paper significantly advances existing knowledge by establishing that self-related cultural identity positions drive friendship and socializing tendencies on social networking sites, which in turn impact information searching and sharing of hospitality-related experiences. The paper discusses the theoretical and practical implications.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Cultural Diversity and Identity*

Countries across the West have seen significant growth in ethnic minority populations (Jamal, 2003; Laroche and Jamal, 2015). For example, Nielsen (2015) provides a refreshing perspective on African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans as emerging consumer forces in the USA. Altogether, the three consumer groups represent the fastest-growing demographic in the United States and are predicted to become the numeric majority by 2044 (*ibid.*). Elsewhere and across Europe, immigrant minority populations have increased fast due to growth in international trade, globalization, tourism, and wars in areas like the Middle East, Syria, and Afghanistan. The subsequent rise in cultural diversity is affecting and shaping the leisure and hospitality industry as sectors such as food and beverages, accommodation, travel, entertainment, and recreation must cope with a multicultural clientele with specific culinary, food, dress, travel, and social media usage habits.

Acculturation is learning a new culture (Laroche and Jamal, 2015). Applied in the context of consumption choices made by the ethnic guests, acculturation explains the degree an individual chooses to maintain their cultural heritage or adapt to the host community as well as the changes that follow from their attempts to coexist in societies with multiple cultural identities (Jamal, 2003; Peñaloza, 1994). Acculturation also helps explain how ethnic guests can learn the “skills and information important to consumer behavior” in a cultural sense (Peñaloza, 1989, p. 110) through social interactions. Ethnic guests are expected to steer between two cultures, negotiating the differences and similarities between host and heritage cultures (Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver, 2006; Jamal, 2003). An individual ethnic guest favoring the maintenance of heritage culture and preferring social interactions within the ethnic social network may be termed a minority culture maintainer. On the contrary, a person who prioritizes assimilating into the host culture and tends to interact with individuals of mainstream society may prefer mainstream social interactions.

However, scholarly work shows that cultural change involving ethnic guests can be more complex than a simple linear regression from the heritage to the host cultures (Gentry et al., 1995; Laroche et al., 1996; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). For example, an ethnic guest may believe that the legal justice system of the host country propagates equality and diversity irrespective of the cultural background of its citizens and may, therefore, make an effort to fit in with the host society's social and cultural norms. That same person may also value and appreciate self-identification with their own ethnic culture, triggering a fluid disidentification with the host consumer culture (Josiassen, 2011). Support comes from Askegaard *et al.*'s (2005) study of Greenlanders in Denmark that reveals identity positions such as cultural maintenance and assimilation to Dutch consumer culture as discursive outcomes of negotiating between cultural forces aligned with heritage, host, and global consumer cultures. The Danish-

Greenlandic cultural context exhibits multiple conflicting ideological positions that mirror the patterning of different ethnic identity positions.

## *2.2 Online Friendship Homophily*

According to Titzmann (2014), while inter-ethnic friendships can be regarded as one of the best measures of social and cultural adaptation to a new cultural setting, friendships between ethnic guests may mainly originate from within their ethnic community. This phenomenon is called friendship homophily. In general, most ethnic guests are collectivist in orientation (Laroche and Jamal, 2015), seeking to use social networking sites to create and strengthen to generate and reinforce social and cultural capital (e.g., Li, 2004) and exchange resources and expertise. Social networking sites also act as a vehicle for a cultural change process influenced by multidimensional and multifaceted cultural orientations and preferences (Forbush and Foucault-Welles, 2016). These sites enable and empower ethnic guests to develop interpersonal relations and friendships not only with people from their own communities but also with those from around the world (Takhar *et al.*, 2021), supporting minority consumers' self-representations and identity presentation (Jafari and Visconti, 2015) on social media.

According to Dwivedi *et al.* (2015), online social networks offer fresh opportunities for interpersonal communication to preserve social bonds. Through communication with members of their cultural background, ethnic guests can use social media as a tool to strengthen their social and cultural ties, which aids in the formation of consumer learning processes. According to Lindridge *et al.* (2015), social media gives users a place to establish and strengthen their values and beliefs online—such as the desire to uphold or reject their ancestry—and gradually translate those values offline. As a result, social media is seen as an agent that strengthens the identity of ethnic guests' identity (Foroudi *et al.*, 2020). However, while ethnic minority segregation of friendship networks remains a constant in Western societies' social lives, little

is yet known about how and in what sense individual preferences operate and drive ethnic homophily (Leszczensky and Pink, 2015), especially on social media. Applying Turner and Tajfel's (1986) social identification theory to friendship formation on social networking sites, we propose that ethnic guests' cultural orientation can explain ethnic homophily to the extent that persons favoring minority culture maintenance are expected to seek friendships on social media predominantly with members of their own ethnic group. On the other hand, those who favor majority culture assimilation are expected to seek friendships predominantly with mainstream individuals (Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver, 2006). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

*H1 Minority culture maintenance is negatively associated with online friendship homophily.*

*H2: Majority culture assimilation is positively associated with online friendship homophily.*

### *2.3 Online Socializing*

The consensus in research is that the virtual connections available in advanced information sources have an increased impact on the individual's choices and preferences. Networking sites are documented as online socializing agents that facilitate and establish relationships (Chu and Sung, 2015; Shen *et al.*, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2012). Social networks give individuals immediate access to social networks not limited to one culture (Kizgin *et al.*, 2020), allowing individuals to build new or maintain existing relationships with other people, communicate, search for information, express their opinions, and socialize (Kizgin *et al.*, 2019). Online socialization refers to the participation in social networking sites to satisfy social needs in general, get peer support, and promote the development of a sense of social community (Kizgin *et al.*, 2019; Park *et al.*, 2009).

Social networks are participatory by nature; sharing content and expressing ideas are ways for people to express themselves and connect (van House *et al.*, 2005). Studies have

identified socializing as a significant impact affecting the use of social media and information sharing (Ho and Dempsey, 2010; Ma and Chan, 2014; Ma and Yuen, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2009; Plume and Slade, 2018).

Previous research has found that a sense of community positively impacts the intention to participate in online brand communities (Yeh and Choi, 2011) and participation in electronic word-of-mouth communications (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003; Tseng, 2014; Yoo *et al.*, 2013). For example, Arica *et al.* (2021) find that travelers who share their experiences online affect others to disclose information. Moreover, in-group experiences are perceived as more reliable and authentic. Studies reveal that people use social networking sites to maintain relationships with current friends and make new ones (Acquisti and Gross, 2006; Ellison *et al.*, 2007). As a result, social networking sites enable people to preserve and grow their social capital in general. In line with Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver (2004), we expect ethnic guests' cultural orientation to correlate with online socializing efforts via social networking sites. Thus, we also hypothesize:

*H3: Minority culture maintenance is positively associated with online socializing.*

*H4: Majority culture assimilation is positively associated with online socializing.*

Traditional scholarship investigating ethnic segregation and ethnic homophily points out that minority consumers prefer same-ethnic rather than inter-ethnic friends (e.g., Leszczensky and Pink, 2015; Moody, 2001; Mouw and Entwisle, 2006; Smith *et al.*, 2014; Wimmer and Lewis, 2010). However, ethnic guests' acculturation experiences do not exist in a social vacuum. Instead, these are impacted by extensive interaction of socialization forces aligned with global, host, and heritage consumer cultures (e.g., Askegaard *et al.*, 2004; Laroche and Jamal, 2015) both in offline and online contexts (Kizgin *et al.*, 2019) triggering individual preferences for



not only having similar friends but also building and building one's social capital in general. Accordingly, we propose the following:

*H5: Friendship homophily is positively associated with online socializing.*

#### *2.4 Online Information Search for Hospitality and Travel Choices*

Following Sigala *et al.* (2012), we define 'online information search' as an individual's tendency to use social media networking sites for hospitality and tourism-related information. Social media has changed how travelers and tourists search for, find, and read information on hospitality, tourist suppliers, and travel destinations (Chung and Koo, 2015; Sigala *et al.*, 2012). Hospitality- and travel-related information is increasingly shared by word of mouth – personal comments by socially and digitally connected individuals on social networking sites, blogs, tweets, and online search engines (Jang *et al.*, 2013). Online information search provides such benefits as enjoying a social networking site while browsing for information (Thaler, 2008) and reducing perceptions of risks associated with making hospitality and travel-related decisions (Brogan and Smith, 2009).

While some may seek information assistance, others can be very keen to share their knowledge and expertise with other users of social media networking sites (Qu and Lee, 2011). Through extensive interactions and socializing, those keen to socialize, share knowledge, and assist others can significantly impact destination selection and trip-planning behaviors (Nezakati *et al.*, 2016). Online socialization provides opportunities for individuals to communicate, build, and sustain social relationships with relatives or friends. The interactions result in exchanging information, discussing opinions, and making suggestions on diverse issues (Ellison and Boyd, 2013), including those related to the hospitality and travel industry. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H6: Online socializing is positively associated with online information search.*

### *2.5 Hospitality Experience After Travel*

According to Fotis et al. (2012), social media is mostly used to share experiences—such as pictures and videos—with friends and other travelers after a trip. Social media has become a powerful platform driving hospitality decisions, especially based on the information about the overall experience (Amaro *et al.*, 2016) shared by other guests. Research has stressed the influence of social media on hospitality decisions (e.g., Sparks and Browning, 2011) as well as the components that motivate guests to write online reviews (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2014). During the decision phase, guests typically conduct widespread searches for hospitality-related information and make online bookings. However, they tend to share their hospitality-related activities, services, and products in the post-experience phase (Jeng and Fesenmaier, 2002).

Social media enables people to connect and exchange stories about their experiences in the hospitality industry by uploading images and videos (Parra-Lopez *et al.*, 2011). The substantial number of social media users and their level of interaction indicate that sharing hospitality-related knowledge on social media helps guests select destinations and their hospitality-planning behavior (Huang *et al.*, 2010). Likewise, suppose an ethnic guest wants to learn about someone else's experience of a particular hospitality. In that case, they will make an effort to use social media to communicate with other users and search for information (Chung and Koo, 2015). Users of hospitality and the tourism industry can view searching for information on social media as an integral element of their overall hospitality experience. Accordingly, our next hypothesis is:

*H7: Online information searching is positively associated with hospitality experience.*

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Sample and Data Collection*

This study's data examines a non-Western ethnic minority in the Netherlands, and its participants were chosen through a reputable Dutch survey company based on a probability sample. Potential respondents were emailed a screening question ("Do you have a Turkish background?") to check whether they had the relevant background. A sample of 514 Turkish-Dutch individuals living in the Netherlands participated in the self-administered survey. Male respondents comprised 54% of the sample, while female respondents comprised 46%. Sixty-six percent of the respondents were born in the Netherlands, 32 percent in Turkey, and two percent in other European nations. The respondents were between the ages of 18 and 73. The sample, representing the largest ethnic group in the Netherlands (the Turkish-Dutch), is evenly distributed regarding age, education, and occupation.

#### *Survey Instruments*

Minority culture maintenance and majority culture assimilation were measured with eight items. The survey questions were developed using the two-statement method (Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver, 2007). The first statement of the method evaluates the respondent's cultural orientation toward the heritage culture (e.g., "I spend most of my social time with Turkish people"), and the second statement evaluates the respondent's behavior toward the host culture. (e.g., "I spend most of my social time with Dutch people"). Each item was scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Five scale items are used to measure online friendship homophily, adapted from Xu et al. (2004) (e.g., It is important for me to connect with Turkish/Dutch friends on social network sites). Online socializing items are adopted from Park *et al.* (2009) using four items (e.g., I meet interesting

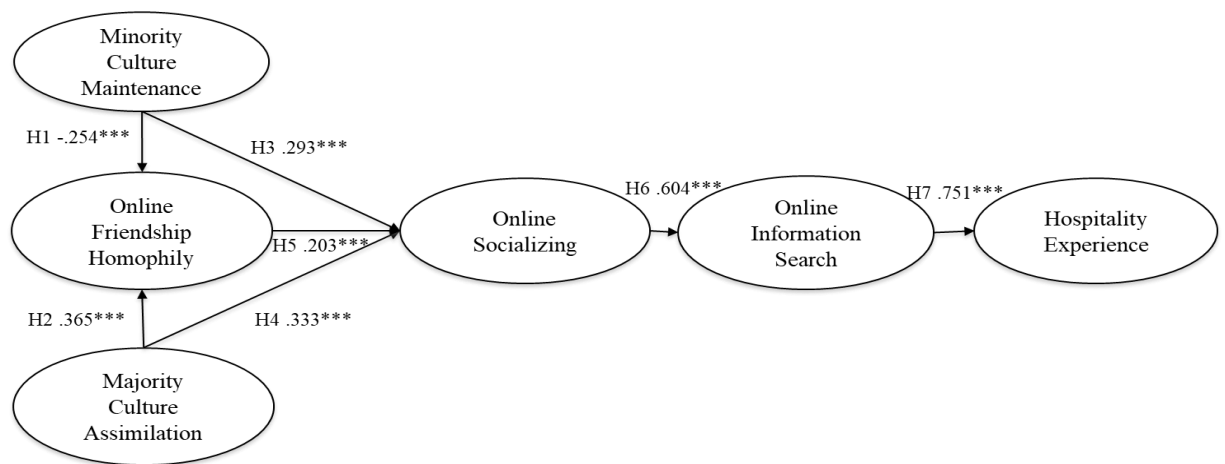
people while using social networking sites). Online information search items are adapted from Amaro *et al.* (2016) using four items (e.g., I search for hospitality information posted on social networking sites). Finally, hospitality-experience items are adapted from Tussyadiah and Zach (2012) using three items (e.g., Using social networking sites helped me to enjoy my hospitality experience). All items were scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

### *3.2 Data Analysis and Findings*

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) were used to test the conceptual model, following the tradition of past studies in the hospitality and tourism sector (Nunkoo *et al.*, 2013). The constructs exhibit convergent validity, as indicated by their high factor loadings, which surpass the suggested threshold of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Kline, 2011). Cronbach's alpha scores are between 0.786 and 0.899, and the average variance extracted (AVE) estimates are between 0.618 and 0.889. The composite reliability scores for each construct are above the threshold point and exceed 0.70 (Field, 2000). The measurement model's validity is confirmed by the data yielded by the three assessment criteria (standardized factor loading, AVE, and reliability score) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). According to the CFA, every item has a high loading on the corresponding factor and offers strong support for its validity. The measurement model indicates a good overall fit: parsimony fit  $\chi^2/df = 2.518$ ; adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) = 0.89; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.95; incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.95; and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05.

Harman's single-factor test was employed to examine if one latent factor can explain all the variables. The results show a total variance of 31.42% by a single factor below the threshold of 50%, indicating that common method bias does not affect the results. A common method

bias was also utilized to ascertain whether the measurement model is robust to common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The indicators' average explained variance is 11%. The results of the small method variance indicate that neither the measurement model nor the findings presented in this study are affected by common method bias. The relationships between the latent variables were evaluated through structural equation analysis with AMOS 22.0 (Figure 1 and Table 1). The goodness of fit (GOF) statistics show an acceptable fit, given the large sample size of 514 (Hair *et al.*, 2010):  $\chi^2/df = 2.539$ , AGFI = 0.89, CFI = 0.95, IFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.05. The structural model accounts for 56.5% of the variance in respondents' *Hospitality Experience* while using social media for travel purposes.



\*\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.001$

**Figure 1: Results for Structural Equation Modelling**

**Table 1: Structural Model Estimates**

		Estimates	Std. Error	C.R.	$p$	Std. Estimates
H1	Minority Culture Maintenance → Online Friendship Homophily	-0.113	0.022	-5.198	0.000	-0.254
H2	Majority Culture Assimilation → Online Friendship Homophily	0.199	0.029	6.769	0.000	0.365
H3	Minority Culture Maintenance → Online Socializing	0.223	0.040	5.598	0.000	0.293
H4	Majority Culture Assimilation → Online Socializing	0.311	0.054	5.724	0.000	0.333
H5	Online Friendship Homophily → Online Socializing	0.347	0.094	3.697	0.000	0.203

H6	Online Socializing → Online Information Search	0.782	0.071	11.041	0.000	0.604
H7	Online Information Search → Hospitality experience	0.657	0.045	14.545	0.000	0.751

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### 3.3 Hypotheses

The study results indicate important links between the constructs with a coefficient of determination of  $R^2$  as 0.565. Structural parameter estimates (Table 1) show that all paths are significant. The analysis shows a significantly negative influence of *Minority Culture Maintenance* ( $\beta=-0.254, p=0.000$ ) and a significantly positive influence of *Majority Culture Assimilation* on *Online Friendship Homophily* ( $\beta=0.365, p=0.000$ ). These findings support H1 and H2. *Minority Culture Maintenance* has a significantly positive influence on *Online Socializing* ( $\beta=0.293, p=0.000$ ), and *Majority Culture Assimilation* significantly influences *Online Socializing* ( $\beta=0.333, p=0.000$ ). These results support H3 and H4. *Online Friendship Homophily* has a significantly positive influence on *Online Socializing* ( $\beta=0.203, p=0.000$ ), providing support for H5. Reviewing the relationship between *Online Socializing* and *Online Information Search* reveals a significantly positive effect ( $\beta=0.604, p=0.000$ ). Therefore, this significant relationship provides support for H6. *Online Information Search* has a significantly positive influence on *the Hospitality Experience* ( $\beta=0.751, p=0.000$ ). This finding provides support for H7.

### 3.4 Mediation Analysis

To determine whether online friendship homophily acts as a mediation variable, Preacher and Hayes (2004) suggest a bootstrapping methodology based on 5000 bootstrap resamples. The results show that the effect of *Minority Culture Maintenance* on *Online Socializing* is significantly negative ( $\beta= -0.052, p= 0.001$ ), demonstrating that *Online Friendship Homophily* mediates the effect of *Minority Culture Maintenance* on *Online Socializing*. The effect of

*Majority Culture Assimilation* on *Online Socializing* strengthens ( $\beta = 0.074, p = 0.001$ ) with the mediating effect of *Online Friendship Homophily*. Preacher and Hayes (2004) further recommend evaluating the significance of the mediating effect, bias-corrected, and confidence intervals (CIs). *Online Friendship Homophily* as the mediating factor shows 95% bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap of CIs. Excluding zero within the 95% in the lower and upper bounds of the CIs (Preacher and Hayes, 2004), for *Minority Culture Maintenance* the lower bound is -0.095, the upper bound is -0.023, while for *Majority Culture Assimilation* the lower bound is 0.035 and the upper bound is 0.125. The results indicate that *Online Friendship Homophily* has a significant indirect effect on the relationship between *Minority Culture Maintenance* and *Online Socializing* and shows a significant effect on the relationship between *Majority Culture Assimilation* and *Online Socializing*. These results support *Online Friendship Homophily* mediating the relationship between *Minority/Majority Culture Assimilation* and *Online Socializing* through social networking sites.

#### **4. Conclusions and Discussion**

This research focused on investigating ethnic guests' use of social media networking sites to construct and negotiate self-identity based on minority and/or majority cultural maintenance and their subsequent tendencies for friendship homophily, socializing, information search, and sharing of hospitality experiences. The findings support the proposed conceptual framework. First, the study finds that minority culture maintenance negatively impacts online friendship homophily, whereas majority culture assimilation is positively related to online friendship homophily, which in turn impacts online socializing. In line with Lindridge *et al.* (2015), our findings show that, on the one hand, social networking sites appear to be utilized by ethnic guests to foster relationships with people who share their cultural heritage and strengthen social and cultural ties. At the same time, those who prefer majority culture maintenance seek friendships predominantly with mainstream individuals (Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver,

2006). However, both minority and major culture maintainers seem to be using social network sites for online socializing, extending the boundaries of their bonding and friendship tendencies, and socializing with individuals from multiple cultural backgrounds. As a result, they appear to have a greater inclination to connect, maintain, and share with larger online social networks (Brown et al., 2007). In consumer terms, the finding suggests that participant ethnic guests have become acculturated or have undergone a process of culture change (Peñaloza, 1994) and that their acculturation has expanded to include socializing with broader online networks (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, the potentially long-established, identifiable ethnic minority community of guests does not seem to be seeking separation from its social network that is inherently cultural.

Social identity theory (Turner and Tajfel, 1986) suggests that individual behavior reflects individuals' larger societal units, i.e., the predominant societal structures such as groups, organizations, and cultures. The internal structures and processes of the individual are determined by their identification with these societal units. It could be reasoned that individuals belonging to ethnic minority groups might see that the norms of the majority culture, along with other situational factors, encourage and value online participation to enhance social capital compared to the home culture. In this sense, identification with the host culture encourages the online friendship homophily that develops social capital and leads to favorable online socialization.

Our findings also show that ethnic guests' online socialization is favorably related to online information searches related to hospitality and tourism-related products and services. This meant that while utilizing social networking sites, participants received peer support from others, developing a sense of belonging to a broader community. This triggered reading and browsing hotel/destination-related reviews, searching for travel-related information, and reading and benefitting from other travelers' experiences. Our findings support past research



(Chung and Koo, 2015; Sigala *et al.*, 2012) that has reported tourists searching for, finding, and reading information on hospitality, tourist suppliers, and travel destinations.

We also find that ethnic guests' online information search positively relates to their hospitality experiences. This meant that the more hospitality and travel-related information they searched online, the more enjoyable and meaningful travel experiences they had when using social networking sites. Therefore, our findings align with those who report social networking sites as a powerful tool driving hospitality decisions, especially based on the information about the overall experience (Amaro *et al.*, 2016; Sparks and Browning, 2011) shared by other guests. They also seemed to view searching for information on social networking sites as an integral element of their hospitality experience (Chung and Koo, 2015).

#### *4.1 Theoretical Implications*

Overall, these findings differ from earlier research that viewed the identity positions of ethnic minorities as fixed and exclusive (El Banna *et al.*, 2018), our findings point to ethnic guests' identity positions that are inherently dynamic allowing participants to negotiate cultural duality as well as intermingling of cultures (Gaviria, 2016) through the use of social media networking sites. Thus, our study contributes to a growing body of literature (e.g., Takhar *et al.*, 2021), which considers online virtual spaces to be a crucial resource that ethnic guests use to assert their identities aligned with heritage/majority cultures (Makri *et al.*, 2021) and to develop/maintain cultural and social capital via friendship homophily and online socializing (Leszczensky and Pink, 2015; Li, 2004). In so doing, our participants are exposed to heritage, host, and global consumer cultures in both offline and online contexts, thus experiencing and benefitting from multiple cultural identities (Jamal, 2003; Kizgin *et al.*, 2018a; Laroche and Jamal, 2015) that underpins their online search behavior and overall hospitality experiences. Importantly, this study shows the availability of a significant data set representative of this

ethnic minority and arguably demonstrates nationwide data access that stretches beyond the reach of the main conurbations in the Netherlands, where such communities typically settle and live.

Moreover, our findings also contribute to current research on social media that provides insights into the role of social media as a driver both within and between communities (Ye *et al.*, 2023). In doing so, our findings highlight the significance of self-identity-related antecedents in impacting the use of social networking sites for hospitality-related behaviors, such as online information searching (Chung and Koo, 2015) and sharing of hospitality experiences (Fotis *et al.*, 2012).

Consequently, this study contributes significantly to digital marketing knowledge through its empirical findings and the presentation and testing of a model that integrates self-identity, online socialization, and online information searching related to hospitality experiences. This study considers ethnic minorities as consumers of hospitality experiences and online information searchers with dual consideration for heritage and host culture socialization. The findings are relevant to the study context and a potentially more comprehensive international application.

The findings show that cultural processes play a vital role in consumer socialization. This is in line with the earlier works on ethnic minorities where strong identification with the heritage culture prevents ethnic minorities from socializing with the mainstream or host culture (e.g., Laroche *et al.*, 2007; Schwartz *et al.*, 2010). The data assessment supports the assertion that the Turkish-Dutch hospitality guests in this study embrace the Dutch and heritage cultures to hold and bond with wider social networks. In both instances, the ethnic minorities would be able to find and disseminate information that influences decision-making on various issues with other members of the social network. Therefore, by identifying the socialization drivers, our study adds to the body of existing literature and elucidates the relationship between cultural

transformation, socialization, and hospitality experiences.

#### *4.2 Managerial Implications*

Ten percent of the Dutch population comprises Turkish-Dutch immigrants, who comprise the largest group of non-Western immigrants (Kizgin *et al.*, 2018a). Putting the findings of this research together with the growth in this population could provide substantial entrepreneurial opportunities for managers in the hospitality industry who want to promote culturally authentic products and services to the Turkish-Dutch community. Given that heritage and host cultures have significant but opposite influences on online friendship, the hospitality sector could target these consumers using different, more personalized marketing strategies that match their priorities and interests. Likewise, travel agencies could lure both Dutch and Turkish-oriented people to communities they think are more strongly associated with their ideology and trends. To achieve that, hospitality sectors could provide links to the reviews, blogs, and chatrooms specifically pertinent to the respective communities. These platforms would allow people from the two broader categories to find other people of their choice to interact and share their views with. By reading reviews and travel blogs and following chatroom discussions, these people can learn more about the places they want to visit before, during, and after the trip. Their positive experience could help other potential visitors to learn from them and adopt their recommendations. The hospitality sector could adopt an affiliate marketing strategy that asks loyal customers to bring in more visitors in return for a business reward for each visitor brought in. Targeting customer segments on social media platforms is a successful marketing strategy, as argued in prior literature (Kapoor *et al.*, 2017).

Hospitality businesses could also identify and apply the help of influencers in the specific community, who could endorse the products/services that the businesses want to promote to potential guests from the same community (Aswani *et al.*, 2017; Song and Kim,

2022). While engaging with their immigrant community on social media sites, mainstream opinion leaders might choose to use either mainstream or heritage language based on the requirements of the recipients (Kizgin *et al.*, 2018b). In the context of ethnic marketing, prior research has also demonstrated the necessity and significance of assimilating and integrating linguistic preferences to win over consumers who are connected to the community (Jamal *et al.*, 2015). In conclusion, hospitality businesses should harness the strength of influencers emphasizing the commonalities among ethnic cultural traditions and Dutch cultural values on social media to encourage the continued participation of ethnic guests with service providers.

### **5. Limitations and Future Research**

This study was undertaken in the Netherlands and only considered the Turkish community, which may have resulted in state- and community-specific findings. Therefore, there is an opportunity to extend this work to other ethnic minorities located either in the Netherlands or elsewhere in Western Europe and other leading economies in the world. Future research could consider additional factors that contribute to ethnic consumers' behavior. The current study did not include social influence to identify the behavior of the network members. Future studies could look at the moderating effect of social influence and other determinants of social capital, such as propensity to share information, privacy concerns, and intensity of use. This study focused on network members conducting online information searches before a trip to determine the likely hospitality experience. Future studies should include social media use after a trip to examine the influence of sharing experiences. Finally, this study focused solely on hospitality experience in general. Future research could examine this in terms of specific hospitality segments as well.

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