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10-1-2021

## An Empirical Modeling of Transformation Process Through Trip Experiences

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### Original Citation

Tasci, A. D. A., & Godovykh, M. (2021). An empirical modeling of transformation process through trip experiences. *Tourism Management*, 86, N.PAG. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104332>

## **An Empirical Modeling of Transformation Process through a Trip Experience**

### **Abstract**

Transformative experience has been the buzz word in recent years. Many different types of experiences have been proposed to lead to transformation; tourism and hospitality experiences in natural, historical, cultural, and authentic spaces are some of them. However, to this date, specific dimensions of transformation or its process have not been empirically identified. This study reviewed the literature on transformation, used open-ended questions to collect free-elicited responses on the meanings of transformation, collected expert opinion, and developed a 101-item scale reflecting different dimensions and the steps of the transformation process. The scale was validated with a sequential scale validation procedure; Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) were used to test the psychometric properties of the scale and model the constructs of the transformation process. A measurable definition of the transformation process is provided along with the tested model. A comprehensive model with antecedents, outcomes, and moderators of transformation is also suggested to further transformation research.

**Keywords:** transformation, transformative experience, scale development, tourism, PCA, PLS.

### **To cite this article:**

Tasci, A. D., & Godovykh, M. (2021). An empirical modeling of transformation process through trip experiences. *Tourism Management*, 86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104332>

## **1. Introduction**

Tourism and hospitality scholarship has traditionally been focused on the wellness of the industry, where all stakeholders are studied to have healthy outcomes in attitudinal and behavioral metrics related to tourists, residents, and the industry itself. Even the resident attitude studies that measure the sentiments of locals about tourists or tourism aim to alleviate potential internal issues of the industry (e.g., Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990). Despite the emergence of sustainable development with a more holistic approach to all dimensions and stakeholders involved in the industry, the focus has traditionally remained on the wellness of the business side. Recently, a slow shift of focus has emerged towards the wellness of individuals and society, which resulted in concepts such as happiness (e.g., Filep, 2009), wellbeing (e.g., Knobloch, Robertson, & Aitken, 2017), and transformation (e.g., Bruner, 1991). Grounding their rationale in positive psychology, researchers call for tourism research and practice for transformative tourism experiences, which are not utilitarian or hedonic, but rather inner- and other-oriented and eudaimonic for potential transformation, well-being, and happiness (Filep & Laing, 2019; Gretzel et al., 2020; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017; Lengieza et al., 2019; Sheldon, 2020).

One of these greater good concepts, transformation, has been in the academic rhetoric for about two decades; several researchers discussed transformation in relation to different experiences (e.g., Brown, 2009; Bruner, 1991; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Everett, & Parakoottathil, 2018; Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015; Kirillova et al., 2017; Lean, 2009; Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011). Transformation has been investigated mostly in the context of adult learning where learning is prescribed as transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 1994; O'Sullivan, 2002; Sipos, Battisti, & Grimm, 2008; Taylor, 2007; Ulusoy, 2016). Recently, tourism and hospitality researchers focused on transformation since extraordinary activities in tourism are known to be strong catalysts of transformation (Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015; Kirillova et al., 2017). Tourism researchers treated transformation as a higher-level outcome of travel, typically discussed as a result of meaningful experiences from cultural and heritage tourism, more specifically, from the experience of authenticity (Andriotis, 2011; Barbieri, Santos, & Katsube, 2011; Brown, 2013; Lean, 2009). Transformation is the prescribed higher-level outcome not only for tourists but also for residents, typically discussed in the context of underdeveloped areas with marginalized locals (Reisinger, 2013, 2015).

Nonetheless, most literature on this concept remains conceptual and theoretical. Even though definitions and dimensions of transformation appear in silhouettes in the current literature, its exact shape has not been captured through psychometrically sound measures. Therefore, the current study uses Churchill's (1979) scale development process to develop a scale to measure the transformation process with structural (underlying dimensions) and psychometric (reliability and validity) properties as well as practical value for both the academia and industry practitioners. The constructs captured in the scale are then modeled to capture the transformation process starting with the transformative trip experiences that cause cognitive and affective stimulation, thus leading to self-change, and ultimately, behavioral change in travelers. Having a well-structured, psychometrically sound, and practical scale measuring the transformation process would enable more robust theory development on this concept by allowing researchers to use a uniform scale to measure the concept as well as its relationships with other concepts. Furthermore, it would enable the industry practitioners to assess the transformative qualities of the experiences through the consumption of their products and services.

## **2. Theoretical background**

Transformation is considered to be the ultimate goal in tourist endeavors. At the more dramatic end of the spectrum, drawing attention to the worsening environmental issues, Pritchard and Morgan (2013) state that "human survival is inextricably linked to human transformation" (p. 3). Due to this presumed significance, scholars endeavored to define transformation in its entirety, understand the triggers of transformation, and capture its dimensions and components. Capturing transformation in its entirety requires fine combing the definitions and measures of transformation first.

### **2.1. Definition and components of transformation**

Dictionary.com (n.d.) defines transformation as a "change in form, appearance, nature, or character" while the Free Dictionary by Farlex (n.d. ) specifies the nature of the change to be positive: "a marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better." Transformation in scholarly work typically refers to positive change in attitude, behavior, and/or personality rather than appearance.

Early definitions of transformation emerged in the adult learning context. O'Sullivan (2002) defined transformative learning as “a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world” (p.11). This definition refers to a change in consciousness and makes a general reference to the outcome, way of being, without indicating any specific dimensions of transformation or its triggers and outcomes. As can be seen in Table 1, similar general definitions are also provided in empirical studies in the tourism context. For example, Yang et al. (2015) defined transformation as “...positive changes leading to a natural status free of physical or mental diseases” (p. 1884). Collins-Kreiner (2010) equates transformation with “...enlightenment, life-changing events, and consciousness-changing events” (p. 445), all of which are magical or mystical experiences desired by the pilgrims. It needs to be noted that the author uses a transformation to refer to both change of tourists and the change in pilgrimage research.

Table 1 here

Other definitions in Table 1 reflect the dimensions of transformation. For example, Ulusoy (2016) defined transformation as “...changes in the thought or feelings of consumers and helps them take on identities that are different from their everyday identity” (p. 286). This definition reflects cognition and affect as dimensions of transformation while reflecting identity change as its outcome. Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai's (2017) definition also make a reference to the cognitive component of transformation as the new knowledge: “...a growth enhancing, irreversible change that is a fundamental break with the past or current practices that requires new knowledge for successful implementation” (p.501). On the other hand, Coghlan and Weiler's (2018) definition “...an individualized process which can lead to a critical awareness of the self, leading to a new self-definition” (p.567) reflects the procedural nature of transformation and its cognitive dimension, namely, awareness and a new definition of self. Nonetheless, some studies did not use any specific definition; some of these studies follow the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm (e.g., Everett & Parakoottathil, 2018), while others are guided by the positivist paradigm (e.g., Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011), which presumes precision in a definition for reliable and valid measures.

Even though no study endeavored a holistic capture of the dimensions and components of transformation as well as its process, many different concepts implied in different studies culminate into cognition, affect, and conation, the three components of attitude delineated by the Tri-Component Attitude Model (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960; Rosenberg et al., 1969) to apply to transformation as well. One of the early theorists on transformative learning, Mezirow (1978) mentioned enhancement of awareness and profound change in self, cognitive, emotional, unconscious, and even somatic dimensions. This definition reflects the cognitive and affective dimensions of the Tri-Component Attitude model, as well as self and unconscious. In another definition of transformative learning, O'Sullivan (2002) mentions a shift in one's understanding of himself/herself as well as their environment, leading to a heightened level of responsibility, helping connect with the needy. This definition reflects cognition as well as conation, in other words, a responsibility to help the needy. Researchers explaining transformative learning originally focused on cognitive dimension but shifted to include affective dimension as well (O'Sullivan, 2002; Sipos, Battisti, & Grimm, 2008; Taylor, 2007; Ulusoy, 2016). Some researchers deemed the affective dimension as the dominant dimension, where extraordinary experiences create arousal of emotions dominating the cognitive dimension (Carù & Cova, 2003; Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015).

In the context of tourism, similar references are made to cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of transformation. Some studies made general references to the dimensions of transformation. For example, Christie and Mason (2003) defined transformation specifically in the tourism context: "the practice of organised tourism that leads to a positive change in attitudes and values among those who participate in the tourist experience" (p.9). This definition mentions attitudes in general, which include cognition, affect, and conation. Similarly, Brown (2009) mentioned the change in attitude and behavior of study abroad students, which reflects an attitude in general as well as conation specifically.

Other studies on transformation in tourism reflect several other concepts that can be classified into cognition, affect, or conation. For example, Barbieri, Santos, and Katsube (2011) discussed changes in volunteer tourists such as a heightened level of social responsibility and commitment to alleviate poverty. Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai (2017) mentioned transformation to include intense complex emotions and a heightened level of cognition, causing the sense of transiency, separation, and link to something grand. They concluded that "transformative experience is an

extended and enhanced version of a ‘peak’ experience” (p.508). Fu, Tanyatanaboon, and Lehto (2015) listed transformation components as body, emotions, attitude, and skills. Similarly, Ulusoy (2016) identified three components of transformation: heightened empowerment, commitment to responsibility, and responsible behavior. She observed that “(a)s participants experience self-realization, evaluation, awareness, development, extension, and acquire self-esteem, they feel more emotionally and cognitively empowered concerning responsible behavior” (p. 293). She concluded that during these alternative break trips, learning transforms participants’ selves, beliefs, preferences, as well as actions. In a recent conceptual study, Pung, Gnoth, and Del Chiappa (2020) also listed skills, knowledge, attitude, habits, and behavior as the realm of changes in transformation.

Additionally, there are many references to personality and identity in explaining the nature of transformation. For example, Everett and Parakoottathil (2018) identified transformation into alternative or additional social identities as a dominant theme, besides a sense of escape and freedom and inter-personal social authenticity and camaraderie. Noy (2004) mentioned the areas of change in personality traits, attitude towards life, and self-confidence; he stated that “(t)hese changes are always markedly positive, and are described rhetorically in terms of a significant development and maturation in central personality traits” (p.86). Focusing on existential authenticity disposition, Brown (2013) discussed transformative experiences in the context of restoring existential authenticity through travel experiences by referring to change in values and behavior of tourists through the long-term engagement of educational, volunteer, and backpacker tourists. In this respect, Brown (2013) builds an analogy between psychotherapy and tourism. She elaborates on the transformative experiences of international students where “removal from the familiar home environment gave students freedom from cultural and familial expectations and the opportunity for self-discovery, whilst exposure to a new culture offered them the chance to improve their cross-cultural communication skills” (p.184). In humans’ attempt to restore existential authenticity of the self, she considers a spectrum of changes ranging from radical disruptions in character through dramatic experiences to small changes in everyday life habits to lead to good faith.

Furthermore, other researchers referred to values and even higher-level needs (e.g. self-actualization) in discussing transformation. For example, Lean (2009) mentioned enduring and sustained changes in values, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior which contributes to not only an

individual's wellness but also that of the greater good. Self-awareness, self-renewal, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, heightened levels of independence and empowerment are considered to be some of the outcomes of volunteerism (Brown, 2005; Ulusoy, 2016).

Scholars agree that transformation is a process rather than an end (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Holland-Wade, 1998; Mezirow, 1994; Pung, Gnoth, & Del Chiappa, 2020; Snyder, 2008). Holland-Wade (1998) defined transformation as “a dynamic, uniquely individualized process of expanding consciousness whereby individuals become critically aware of old and new self-views and choose to integrate these views into a new self-definition” (p. 713). The steps of this process of change are detailed by Mezirow (1991) as a disorienting dilemma, self-examination, an assessment of assumptions and alienation due to new roles, sharing and analyzing discontent with others, exploration of new ways of acting, building competence and confidence in new roles, planning a course of action, acquiring skills and knowledge for action, trying new roles and assessing feedback, and reintegrating into society with a new perspective.

In tourism, Coghlan and Weiler (2018) defined the transformation process as “a reflection upon the content of their knowledge, the process of knowing, the premise of what they know and the relational elements of their knowledge” (p. 567). Their study results revealed that voluntourism indeed leads to transformation, which is an individual process rather than an outcome. Recently, Pung, Gnoth, and Del Chiappa (2020) identified different phases of transformation starting with liminality, challenges, and cultural shock, leading to peak experiences, reflection, integration, and change in attitude, habits, and behavior. They provided a comprehensive definition of the transformation process: “...tourist transformation is facilitated by contextual stimuli which strike the tourists and lead to reflecting and integrating new knowledge, skills and beliefs, which ultimately enhance the tourists' existential authenticity and increase the tourists' cross-cultural understanding and pro-environmental awareness, with potential consequences on long-term behaviour” (Pung et al., 2020, p.2). This definition reflects transformation as well as its antecedents and consequences; the authors summarized this definition in a conceptual model. Even though this model captures many aspects of transformation, it lists example components from cognitive and conative domains and misses the affective domain entirely.

The process nature of transformation calls for Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model in delineating the steps of the transformation process.

According to this model, a stimulus in the environment triggers an individual to think and feel positively or negatively, thus leading to an approach or avoidance behavior. Combining the Tri-Component Attitude Model (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) and the S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), and considering that transformation alters individuals' selves, personality, beliefs, values, preferences, and actions, transformation can be defined as *a process of change in an individual's self (self-confidence, personality, outlook on life and others) and actions (conation) triggered by cognitive and affective stimulation from a significant experience; cognition being opinions, thoughts, and beliefs on self and the environment, affect being emotional reactions to self and the environment, and conation being behavioral intentions about self and the environment.* The current scale development study aims to capture this multidimensional nature and process of transformation with a practical scale that is anchored in laymen's descriptions of transformation refined and validated with scientific methodology. Below is a discussion of the beginning point of this process, the triggers or transformative tourism experiences.

## 2.2. Triggers of Transformation

Tourism is known to be a strong catalyst for transformation. However, transformation is not necessarily a common experience as not all tourism experiences lead to transformation (Brown, 2013; Graburn, 1983) and not all travelers feel the need to change (Brown 2013). In one of the earliest discussions of transformation, Bruner (1991) states that "most tourists are quite satisfied with their own society, most are not alienated, and they are not necessarily seeking an authentic experience elsewhere... willing to accept a reproduction, as long as it is a good one, or as one tourist brochure put it, as long as it is an "authentic reproduction." (p. 240-241). Thus, Bruner (1991) questions the validity of expectations on who is transformed in Third World tourism encounters. He argues against the common expectation built through the tourism brochures that the guest experiences a transformation where he/she would return home as a renewed, refreshed, and different person while the host remains the same as before the encounter; instead, he proposes that the opposite is the case where the change in the guest is minimal while the change in the host is profound.

Lean (2009) purported that tourism can be transformative when it results in enduring and sustained changes in values, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior which contributes to not only an

individual's wellness but also that of the greater good. Several studies found the transformation of international students into more individualistic, independent, flexible, and culturally aware due to their travel experience (Brown, 2009; Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2008; Ryan, 2005; Sovic, 2008). Several studies identified transformation through volunteer tourism (e.g., Barbieri, Santos, & Katsube, 2011; Brown, 2005; Conran, 2011; Lyons & Wearing, 2008; Ulusoy, 2016) or backpacker tourism (Cohen, 2011; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Muzaini, 2006; Noy, 2004; O'Reilly, 2006).

Some precursors for such enduring, sustained, and positive changes are proposed to be the length of the trip, place of the trip, and the nature of the trip activities/experiences, and tourist motivation. Researchers suggest that extended travel experiences are more likely to lead to transformation (Brown, 2009, 2013). Brown (2013) mentioned "removal from the familiar home environment... (and) exposure to a new culture" as the triggers of transformation for backpacker tourists (p.184). Noy (2004) listed seemingly risky and adventurous activities, significant experiences, authenticity, romantic and religious experiences as the culprits of change. Natural, exotic, and remote places are presumed backdrops of transformative experiences for backpacker and voluntourism travelers (Noy, 2004; Wearing, 2001). Ulusoy (2016) identified six factors facilitating transformation, namely, "organic community, unpretentious fun, embracing the other, developing and utilizing capabilities, challenge, and self-reflection" (p.284). Kirillova et al. (2017) listed nature, wildlife, culture, and meaningful connections and interactions with others as the environmental factors facilitating transformational experiences. Voluntourism is particularly relevant to transformation due to the participants' ideology-driven motivation and desire to do good rather than seek fun as the general market priority (Brown, 2005; Ulusoy, 2016).

Out of these factors, extraordinary, peak, and transcendent experiences received more attention from researchers. Such experiences are considered to lead to flow, and thus, a transformation of self, consciousness, and perception (Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015; Kirillova et al., 2017; Ulusoy, 2016). Graburn (1983) considered tourism as a ritual, a sacred journey where experiences with the sacred and extraordinary lead to knowledge, status, and self-transformation. Noy (2004) investigated Israeli backpackers' stories and interpersonal communications about their travel and identified a powerful self-change through unique experiences of adventure and authenticity. Andriotis (2011) mentions transformation while explaining influential authenticity by referring to Pine and Gilmore's (2007) attribution of authenticity to be "calling human beings

to a higher goal and providing a foretaste of a better way” (p. 50). He then argues that Mount Athos or the “‘Garden of the Panaghia’ ...under the special protection of the Virgin Mary” (Andriotis, 2011, p. 1626) may cause such a change through the spiritual engagement with monks and church services resulting in spiritual sustenance, transformation, and devotion to God. Fu, Tanyatanaboon, and Lehto (2015) analyzed 119 online reviews of popular Thai retreat centers to identify personal transformations due to the retreat experience, identify activities that trigger personal transformation for guests, and the relationship of the environment with transformation. They identified that physical, work-related, and existential challenges push for the search for retreat visit, where programmed activities, service delivery, and the physical setting trigger changes in the body, emotions, attitude, and skills. Kirillova et al. (2017) interviewed 10 participants who had transformative travel experiences and investigated triggers of transformative experiences in tourism, and identified them to be occurring at the end of travel. In the voluntourism context, service-learning activities, and group or individual reflection activities are considered as the main antecedents (Ulusoy, 2016). Activities such as yoga and meditation at retreats are also considered to allow meaning-making, reflection, finding authentic self, and self-transformation (Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015). Ulusoy (2016) discussed the relevance of extraordinary experiences that are positive, intense, and intrinsically pleasant to transformative learning. She classified extraordinary experiences into transcendent experiences, immersive experiences, and transformation. Her definitions of transcendent and immersive experiences are almost identical referring to the same outcome, involvement, immersion or absorption into the present through the experience. The above-discussed triggers, as well as the transformation process, have not yet been measured since most transformation research is conceptual or qualitative.

### 2.3. Measurement of transformation

Since transformation theory is still in the building stage, quantitative studies testing well-established theories are lacking in the literature. Thus the literature on transformation through tourism is mostly conceptual (e.g., Bruner, 1991; Christie & Mason, 2003; Pung, Gnoth, & Del Chiappa, 2020). Few empirical studies follow the constructivist paradigm (e.g., Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Noy, 2004; Everett & Parakoottathil, 2018; Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015; Kirillova et al., 2017; Ulusoy, 2016). Since transformation requires extraordinary experiences,

the focus of these empirical studies is typically the traveler groups seeking types of travel providing such experiences including, backpackers (e.g., Noy, 2004), gap year tourists (e.g., Lyons, Hanley, Wearing, & Neil, 2012), long-distance walkers (e.g., Saunders et al., 2013), and voluntourists (e.g., Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Lee & Woosnam, 2010).

For example, Coghlan and Weiler (2018) interviewed 10 voluntourism participants from the UK, USA, Belgium, Australia, and Canada who traveled to various developing countries to identify the elements of the transformational process. Kirillova et al. (2017) interviewed 10 participants who had transformative travel experiences and investigated triggers of transformative experiences in tourism. Everett and Parakootathil (2018) conducted 20 in-depth interviews and observations of participants at folklore tourism at the Robin Hood Festival in Nottinghamshire, UK. Ulusoy (2016) used semi-structured questions to interview the student volunteer participants who worked to help others or to improve the environment through the alternative break program in the US. These empirical studies help ground the concept into the real-life context; nonetheless, they await for extending their applicability or generalizability to the larger populations and other groups through quantitative studies.

Although several studies describe transformation as one of the important outcomes of tourism activities, there are no empirical studies or empirical scales of measuring visitor transformation. Existing quantitative studies on transformation reflect conceptual confusion and have not substantiated the meanings or measures of transformation. For example, Yang, Paek, Kim, and Lee (2015) conducted a quantitative survey and collected data from 383 visitors of healing resorts/centers in Korea to test the influence of needs for healing experience on behavioral intentions for transformation, using healing involvement as a mediator. However, their measurement items for the behavioral intention for transformation look more like behavioral intentions to use responsible and health tourism products and activities. In a similar context, Voigt, Brown, and Howat (2011) conducted a quantitative survey to explore the transformative benefits of wellness tourism. Following mixed-methods research, they developed a wellness tourism benefit scale; then they surveyed 509 beauty spa, lifestyle resort, and spiritual retreat visitors to Australian spas to compare the benefits that they desire. The study reflects confusion between transcendence and transformation since transcendence is the term revealed in factor analysis but transformation is the term used in the discussion. Nonetheless, survey items seem to reflect motivation for transformation.

Recently, Brown (2013) called for research on the “pivotal ‘moments of vision’ experienced” (p.186) during a trip. Even though he acknowledges that the nature of change (i.e., transformation) is important, he focuses on the role of tourism as the source of those pivotal moments of vision to be investigated in the research. Brown (2013) recommends a phenomenological method with unstructured interviews to reveal the truth of tourism experiences as a catalyst for transformation as interviewees describe their moments of vision while traveling and how they transformed after the trip. Such studies with the interpretivist or constructivist paradigms are necessary, especially at the onset of theory building; however, theory development requires testing through a positivist approach (Shoemaker, Tankard, and Lasorsa, 2004). Considering that a sizable body of literature has described the nature and components of transformation thus far, studies guided by the positivist paradigm, aiming to develop a reliable and valid measure of transformation is also long due.

Thus, the purpose of the current study is to develop a scale of transformation that can be used to measure change through diverse types of experiences. The current study uses the constructivist paradigm in identifying the real and layman meanings of transformation and its process, followed by the positivist paradigm to validate the findings for the masses. The study aims to identify transformative trip experiences that cause cognitive and affective stimulation initiating changes in the self and behavior of an individual, which has not been achieved empirically thus far.

### **3. Methods**

A mixed-methods approach was used to increase the study's level of internal as well as external validity (Creswell & Clark, 2019). An exploratory qualitative research inquiry was confirmed by a quantitative survey method by following the measurement development steps recommended by Churchill (1979). Due to the lack of a well-established theory on the dimensions of transformation and its empirical measurements, the measurement items had to be generated atheoretically, as was suggested by DeVellis (2016). To achieve a holistic capture of the transformation process, several techniques were used, by following the scale development processes (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Churchill, 1979, DeVellis, 2016) and PLS-SEM

modeling for theory development (Chin et al., 2008; Hair et al., 2013). The overview of the scale development and modeling phases is provided in Table 2.

Table 2 here

### 3.1. Study 1: Qualitative Study for Item Generation

The first task of the transformation scale construction was to create a pool of items reflecting different dimensions of transformation and components of the transformation process. Literature, layman feedback, and expert opinion were used to generate a list of items with the most unique, relevant, and layman descriptors in order to have content validity of the scales. First, a content analysis of the literature helped to identify the cognitive, affective and conative domains of transformation, identify the components of the transformation process, and different measures for a holistic capture. Several conceptual, qualitative, and quantitative studies described the triggers and components of visitor transformation; keywords from these studies were used to generate an initial item pool of the transformation scale.

This initial item pool was crosschecked and supplemented by the freely elicited responses from a sample of people who had transformative travel experiences. For this purpose, a semi-structured survey was conducted online with 40 respondents from the US, who previously experienced significant changes in worldview, attitude, behavior, personality, beliefs, or vision of self after the previous travel experience. The semi-structured survey was designed using Qualtrics XM, and respondents were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which has been tested and confirmed by researchers for time and financial efficiency in conducting scientific research, as well as the quality, validity, and reliability of study results (Buhrmester, Talaifar, & Gosling, 2018).

Respondents were asked questions about the place they visited, specific activities that caused a change, what these activities made them think and feel, changes in themselves, and their behavioral intentions after having these experiences. Keywords in each answer were categorized to identify a pattern of categories in the diversity of answers. Crosscheck with the initial item pool from the literature resulted in supplementing additional terms, elimination of redundancies,

and replacement of sophisticated words with layman terms. Modifications were made to some items for clarity. Then, these items were submitted to an expert panel to judge instrument consistency and appropriateness. Conventional guidelines regarding the wording of items, clarity, neutrality, simplicity, lack of ambiguity, and avoidance of jargon were followed (Schuman & Presser, 1996; Ap & Crompton, 1998). This resulted in 101 unique items reflecting transformative trip experiences, cognitive and affective stimulations, and self-change and behavioral change through travel experiences (the complete list of items is provided in Table 3). These items were incorporated into 7-point scales with different anchors (see Table 3) to be tested for reliability and validity in study 2.

### 3.2. Study 2: Quantitative Study 1 for Reliability and Validity Assessment and Item Purification

A sample of respondents (N=328) was surveyed for the initial tests of reliability and validity of the scale with 101 items. Similar to the first stage, the survey was designed using Qualtrics, MTurk respondents residing in the U.S. and had a transformative travel experience were recruited. To avoid missing data, the forced response was used to make respondents answer all scale questions and only those survey-takers with 80% or higher reliability rate in survey completion were allowed to take the survey. For improving the response rate, one USD incentive was offered. To improve the reliability and validity of the results, attention-check questions were randomly placed throughout the survey. To avoid Common Method Bias (CMB) or potential spurious variance due to the one-shot cross-sectional survey design rather than due to the measured constructs (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), the survey instrument was designed with clear and simple scale items for respondents to understand scales easily, in addition to providing anonymity without any identifiers in the survey for avoiding respondents' evaluation apprehension (Tehseen, Ramayah, & Sajilan, 2017). After multiple data cleaning steps to eliminate incomplete surveys, those who failed attention question checks, and invariant answers, 67 cases were eliminated and 328 cases were included in the analysis.

SPSS version 25 was used to check the descriptive statistics and to conduct the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with the Varimax rotation method to define the reliability and the underlying structure among the newly developed scale items (Table 3). PCA provides the tools for analyzing the structure of the interrelationships among a large number of items by defining sets of variables that are highly interrelated (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Following

Hair et al.'s (2010) guidelines, items having loadings of less than 0.5, cross-loading on more than two factors, and items loading onto a factor with a Cronbach Alpha lower than 0.70 were excluded from the analysis. The factors having Eigenvalues of less than 1 were considered insignificant and were deleted. The results revealed the existence of 14 factors loading onto five constructs with significant loadings of all items on each factor representing the multidimensional components of transformation. These 14 factors had Cronbach Alpha values ranging from 0.74 to 0.92.

Table 3 here

In identifying the concepts for underlying dimensions or assigning the names for these factors, variables with higher loadings were considered as more important and have a greater influence on the name or label selected to represent a factor (Hair et al., 2010). As can be seen from Table 3, 12 transformative trip experiences were reduced to eight items significantly loading onto two factors, one reflecting positive activities and accomplishments, named as Novelties & Gains, and one reflecting negative ones termed as Toils & Pains. The Novelties & Gains extracted most of the variance in the data (42%), had a higher factor grand mean (4.85), but a slightly smaller Cronbach's Alpha value (.74) compared to those of the Toils & Pains. 15 Cognitive Stimulation items were reduced to 14 items that loaded onto three factors that were termed as Self-Affirmation, Self-Challenge, and Opening to Others. Even though Self-Affirmation extracted the highest variance (37%), opening to others had the highest factor grand mean (5.14), and Self-Challenge had the highest Cronbach's Alpha value (.91). All 10 original Affective Stimulation items loaded onto two factors, negative states reflecting Distress and positive states reflecting Euphoria. Distress extracted over half of the variance (54%) and had a higher Cronbach's Alpha value (.92), but Euphoria had a higher factor grand mean (5.38). 35 Self-change items were reduced to 20 items loading onto three factors, Propelled Inner Power with the highest variance extracted (40%) and the highest Cronbach's Alpha value (.91), followed by Personality Change, Change in Outlook on Life with the highest factor grand mean (.91), and Change in Outlook on Others. Finally, 29 Behavioral (Conative) Change items were reduced to 18 items loading onto three factors, Eudaimonic Tendencies with the highest variance extracted

(39%), factor grand mean (4.94), and Cronbach's Alpha value (.88), followed by Regression to Basics, and Gregarious Tendencies. These procedures reduced 101 initial items to 70; these remaining items were further subjected to refinement in the second study. Additionally, in line with the principles of the Tri-Component Attitude Model (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) and the S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), these constructs were built into a conceptual model (Figure 1) to be tested in the second study. To see the relative influence of cognitive and affective stimulations separately, the original model is designed with their dimensions separately affecting self-change. Nonetheless, an alternative model is also proposed to compare the explanatory power of a model with cognitive stimulations' influence on affective stimulations.

Figure 1 Here

### 3.3. Study 3: Quantitative Study 2 for Reliability and Validity Assessment & Model Test

The remaining 70-item scale was further tested for reliability and validity, followed by model testing in the second quantitative study (N=552). The same data collection tools and platform were used and the same procedures were followed to avoid CMB, missing values, and data invariance. After data cleaning for incomplete surveys, those who failed attention question checks, and invariant answers, 143 invalid cases were eliminated, and 552 cases were included in the analysis. Additionally, Common Method Variance (CMV) was also checked through a full collinearity assessment approach (Kock, 2015), by taking a moderate cutoff value of 5 as suggested by Ringle et al. (2015). Only one item had a VIF value over 5 and deleted from model testing (see Table 6). Furthermore, normality checks were performed through inspection of histograms, skewness, and kurtosis. Standardized residuals were plotted to check for normality. P-P plot showed residuals distributed on the diagonal line, and histogram displayed approximate normal distribution along the bell curve. Even though both Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test results indicate nonnormal distribution at  $p < .05$ , these tests are often found to be questionable. Thus, researchers rely on the value of Kurtosis and Skewness values; between -2 +2 are accepted as an approximately normal distribution (Byrne, 2010; Field, 2000; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014; George & Mallery, 2010; Hair et al., 2010; Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). Based

on these indicators, data are assumed to be approximately normal. Scale data normality check revealed skewness and kurtosis values between -2 and +2, which is the commonly accepted range for normality.

SPSS version 25 was used to check the descriptive statistics and SmartPLS 3.0 was used to perform partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis to test the proposed model in Figure 1. PLS-SEM can model both latent and measured variables, irrespective of normality and the sample size (Hair et al., 2013). PLS is accepted as an analysis method to build and test a theory by exploring the predictive power of a set of concepts and estimating relationships in the absence of well-established theories, rather than confirming preexisting theoretical structures (Sarstedt et al., 2014). Using SmartPLS 3.0, a two-step process was followed to assess the outer model for reliability and validity of measures and the inner model for the strength of the associated relationships among variables (Hair et al., 2013). Factor loadings and path coefficient significance were determined with the bootstrapping (2000 re-sample) for the significance of the proposed relationships (Chin et al., 2008).

Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) suggestions, the scale was first assessed for reliability and validity to further trim the scale items and constructs a posteriori to develop the theory on the proposed modeled relationships. Several indices including factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) scores were used to assess the constructs' reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2013). Convergent validity was assessed through three measures. 1) Significant factor loadings of each of the measures on the factors that were greater than .70. Only eight items were deleted in this process as listed in Table 6. 2) AVE for each factor more than 0.5 implies that the variance due to the measurement error is smaller than the variance due to the construct. 3) Convergent validity is assumed when composite reliability (CR) is larger than AVE and AVE is larger than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Discriminant validity shows the level of difference between the intended measures and the examined measures used to indicate different constructs (Clark-Carter, 1997). Discriminant validity was examined using two measures. The inter-construct correlations smaller than .85 (Kline, 2015) and smaller than AVE values for the respective constructs are considered to indicate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2013). Moreover, the nomological validity of the scale was tested by assessing the correlation

coefficient for the relationships among the constructs. R2 values were computed to evaluate how well the predictor variables explained the dependent variables.

Furthermore, G\*POWER 3.1.9.3 software (Faul et al., 2009) was used to check post-hoc if the sample size (N=552) was enough for statistical power to the measurement model, by following Lu et al. (2016) recommendations. For a two-tailed test with a moderate effect size (0.3) and error probability of 0.05, the power (1-B err prob) is 1, which is well above the recommended threshold of 0.8.

### 3.3.1. Sample characteristics

The socio-demographic characteristics of all respondents are displayed in Table 4. The average age of the sample is 39 years, with a slight dominance of the male group (56.5% for male and 43.5% for female). About 66% of respondents are married (51% married with kids, 15.0% married without kids). About 62% of respondents have college or university graduates, and about 60% of respondents have an annual income of more than \$50,000. The sample is dominated (74%) by the respondents of Caucasian origin.

Table 4 here

Table 5 demonstrates that the average number of international trips taken by participants is 5.7 and the mean number of visited countries is 5.4. The most transformative trips were related to pleasure travel (47.6%) followed by visiting friends or relatives (21.6%). Even business travel caused transformation (17%). More interestingly, only 8.7% of the respondents reported the purpose of the transformative trip to be self-development. Among the activities or events that triggered the biggest changes in respondents were meeting with new people (26.3%), uniting with nature (22.6%), having romantic relationships (10.7%), and engaging in cultural activities (9.4%). Many different countries (U.S., Mexico, Japan, Canada, Italy, India, UK, France and China among others) and smaller-scale destinations are provided as the destination of the most transformative trip experiences.

Table 5 here

### 3.3.2. Descriptives of the scale items

Descriptives of scale items are provided in Table 6. The majority of ratings are above the mid-point or the natural point (4) on the 7-point scale. The highest-rated transformative trip experiences are meeting with new people (M=5.43), engaging in cultural activities (M=5.29), and uniting with nature (M=5.15). As for cognitive and stimulation items, positive items were rated between 4.25 and 5.73 while negative items were rated between 3.22 and 3.75. The highest-rated cognitive stimulations were connection with people (M=5.63), inspiration (M=5.62), and freedom (M=5.53), while the highest-rated affective stimulations were happiness (M=5.73), excitement (M=5.71), and surprise (M=5.71). All self-change items except for two were rated above the neutral point (4); the highest-rated items were I grew personally (M=5.82), I started to appreciate more (M=5.79), and I changed my perception of the world (M=5.70). Behavioral (conative) change items were rated between 3.66 and 5.61, the highest-rated items being acquiring new knowledge (M=5.61), taking new initiatives (M=5.52), and making life-changing decisions (M=5.40). Interestingly, regressive items such as retiring, traveling less, socializing less, disconnecting from social circles, spending more time alone, and downshifting were the lowest-rated items, on average.

Table 6 here

### 3.3.3. Results of PLS-SEM

#### 3.3.3.1. Measurement model (outer model)

PLS was applied to check the reliability and validity of the factors identified in PCA. As marked in Table 6, only one item (shame in affective stimulation) was deleted for a VIF value higher than 5, and eight items were deleted for factor loadings lower than the threshold of 0.70. Table 7 displays factor loadings of remaining constructs and indicator items to their respective constructs as well as construct reliability and validity of the measures. The Cronbach's Alphas and

Composite Reliability (CR) of all factors were above the threshold of 0.60 and all AVEs were above 0.5, indicating the convergent validity of the model's factors. As displayed in Table 8, the inter-construct correlations were lower than .85 and the square roots of the AVE, shown on the diagonals, were greater than the correlations between the factors, shown as the off-diagonal elements, confirming the discriminant validity of the model.

Table 7

### 3.3.3.2 Structural model (inner model)

The proposed structural model (inner model) was assessed using 2000 bootstrap resamples and the confidence intervals at 95%. Table 9 displays structural estimations and Figure 2 displays standardized beta values, and  $R^2$  values, reflecting the explanatory power of the model. The significance of the path coefficients between the exogenous and endogenous variables and  $R^2$  values were evaluated for model fit. Of the 42 paths tested, 27 were supported at  $\alpha < 0.05$ .

Transformative trip activities named as Novelties & Gains had positive influences on positive cognitive and affective influences, namely Self-Affirmation, Opening to Others, and Euphoria; the highest influences were on Self-Affirmation ( $\beta=.473$ ,  $t=9.266$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and Euphoria ( $\beta=.466$ ,  $t=8.442$ ,  $p<.01$ ). On the other hand, those transformative trip experiences dubbed as Toils & Pains had an influence on all cognitive and affective stimulations except for Self-Affirmation. The highest influences were on Distress ( $\beta=.594$ ,  $t=18.512$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and Self-Challenge ( $\beta=.589$ ,  $t=17.212$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Expectedly, the influence on Euphoria was negative ( $\beta=-.207$ ,  $t=4.246$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

As for the influences of cognitive stimulations, positive cognitive stimulations, namely Self-Affirmation and Opening to Others showed positive influences on all self-change dimensions while the negative cognitive stimulation, Self-Challenge, had a positive influence only on the Propelled Inner Power dimension of self-change ( $\beta=.193$ ,  $t=2.954$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The highest influences of Self-Affirmation were on Propelled Inner Power ( $\beta=.555$ ,  $t=9.063$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and Personality Change ( $\beta=.405$ ,  $t=5.709$ ,  $p<.01$ ) while the highest influences of Opening to Others were on Change in Outlook on Others ( $\beta=.466$ ,  $t=10.128$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and Change in Outlook on Life ( $\beta=.263$ ,

$t=5.212, p<.01$ ). On the other hand, only the Distress dimension of affective stimulations had only one influence, namely on the Personality Change dimension of self-change ( $\beta=.151, t=2.212, p<.05$ ).

Finally, Propelled Inner Power, Personality Change, and Change in Outlook on Others dimensions of self-change had positive influences on all behavioral (conative) change dimensions at  $p<.01$  levels with Beta values ranging between .164 and .419. The fourth dimension of self-change, namely Change in Outlook on Life had a negative influence only on one dimension of self-change, Regression to Basics ( $\beta=-.434, t=10.886, p<.01$ ).

An examination of the  $R^2$  values for all endogenous variables revealed that positive trip experiences explain about 20% of Self-Affirmation, negative trip experiences explain about 37% of Self-Challenge, and 35% of Distress, while both negative and positive experiences explain 14% of Opening to Others, and 16% of Euphoria. In return, Self-Affirmation, Opening to Others and Self-Challenge explain 52% of Propelled Inner Power, Self-Affirmation, Opening to Others and Distress explain 37% of Personality Change, Self-Affirmation and Opening to Others explain 34% of Change in Outlook on Life and 47% of Change in Outlook on Others. Eventually, Propelled Inner Power, Personality Change, and Change in Outlook on Others explain 58% of Eudaimonic Tendencies and 53% of Gregarious Tendencies while all four dimensions of self-change explain 39% of Regression to Basics.

Table 9 and Figure 2 Here

An alternative model was also tested to see if cognitive stimulations' influence on affective stimulations would reveal model results with higher reliability and validity. The summary of indicators reflected in Table 10 and Figure 3 shows that even though the cognitive stimulations' influences on affective stimulations boost the explanation of Distress to 73% and Euphoria to 59%, the explanation levels of self-change and behavioral change dimensions do not change at all. Therefore, either model can be used in future analysis depending on if the focus is on the self or behavioral change or the affective stimulation through transformative trip experiences.

#### 4. Discussion and implications

This study endeavored into developing a psychometrically sound and practically useful scale of transformation to be used in future studies for the advancement of transformation theory and managerial use by practitioners. First, a comprehensive and critical review of the literature on transformation was conducted to identify the conceptualization and measurement of transformation. Since a uniform conceptualization is lacking, a comprehensive definition of transformation is provided: *Transformation is a process of change in an individual's self (self-confidence, personality, outlook on life and others) and actions (conation) triggered by cognitive and affective stimulation from a significant experience; cognition being opinions, thoughts, and beliefs on self and the environment, affect being emotional reactions to self and the environment, and conation being behavioral intentions about self and the environment.*

To operationalize this complex concept, a mixed-method approach was applied and diverse perspectives were integrated during the development of the scale, following the procedures prescribed by Churchill (1979). A comprehensive list of key terms initiated by the past literature was supplemented by laymen terminology through freely-elicited responses by travelers. An initial scale was subjected to a quantitative survey for refinement.

The results of the qualitative study revealed that transformation means a lot of things to different people, which corroborates with all different references to transformation in academic rhetoric. Researchers refer to self, personality, identity, values, attitude, behavior, self-actualization, emotion, beliefs, and thoughts while explaining transformation (e.g., Brown, 2013; Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015; Kirillova et al., 2017; Lean, 2009; Noy, 2004; O'Sullivan, 2002; Sipos, Battisti, & Grimm, 2008; Taylor, 2007; Ulusoy, 2016). This multidimensional concept of transformation is reflected in the freely-elicited responses in the qualitative study; 101 unique terms relevant to transformative trip experiences, cognitive and affective stimulations, and self-change and behavioral change were identified. Both positive (e.g., uniting with nature) and negative (witnessing tragedy) trip experiences can be transformative. Transformation can involve both positive (e.g., confidence, joy) and negative (e.g., self-doubt, fear) cognition and affect. Even though some negative self-changes can happen (e.g., I became unsocial, deleted in PCA), the essence of self-change is positive. Along the same lines, even though some seemingly

negative behavioral changes may appear (e.g., spending more time alone), the majority of behavioral changes are positive and beneficial for the individual as well as the greater good. This positive essence of transformation was still captured in the remaining items despite the removal of several of the items in the subsequent two quantitative studies. This result is in line with the dictionary definition of transformation as change usually for the better (Free Dictionary by Farlex, n.d.) the results also confirm the definitions in academic research that transformation is a positive change (Yang et al., 2015), changes in consciousness (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Quantitative Study 1 revealed the applicability of the Tri-Component Attitude Model (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) in explaining the transformation process by including cognition, affect, and conation as were also reflected in definitions used in transformation research (e.g., Brown, 2009; Christie and Mason, 2003; Lean, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2002; Pung, Gnoth, & Del Chiappa, 2020). Results showed that the transformative trip experiences and subsequent cognitive and affective stimulations can be categorized into two general positive and negative groups. Both positive (Novelties & Gains) and negative (Toils & Pains) activities can trigger cognition and affect. This result confirms that transformation involves changes in thoughts (Coghlan and Weiler, 2018; Fu, Tanyatanaboon, and Lehto, 2015; Lean, 2009; Mezirow, 1978; O'Sullivan 2002; Ulusoy, 2016) and feelings (Kirillova et al., 2017; Lean, 2009; Mezirow, 1978; O'Sullivan, 2002; Sipos, Battisti, & Grimm, 2008; Taylor, 2007; Ulusoy, 2016). Results also revealed that both cognition and affect can be positive or negative. Positive (Self-Affirmation and Opening to Others) and negative (Self-Challenge) cognition as well as positive (Euphoria) and negative (Distress) affect can be involved in an individual's transformation process. This result implies that tourism experiences do not have to be pampering, self-glorifying, or self-boosting to be transformative. Negative experiences leading to negative thoughts and feelings can also be transformative depending on the type of traveler. Study results revealed that self-change, on the other hand, is positive with fortified in inner power, and changes in personality and outlook on life and others. This finding confirms the postulation that transformation is a new definition of self (Coghlan and Weiler, 2018; Mezirow, 1978) and confirms that transformation involves changes in personality and disposition (Brown, 2013; Everett and Parakoottathil, 2018; Noy, 2004). Study results also revealed that transformation ends with behavioral changes, reflected in intentions in the current study, thus confirming the conative component of transformation (Lean, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2002; Pung, Gnoth, & Del Chiappa, 2020; Ulusoy,

2016). These behavioral changes are revealed to be more altruistic, holistic, sustainable, and conscientious, thus confirming positive outcomes of transformation in past research (e.g., Brown, 2005; Everett and Parakoottathil, 2018; Kirillova et al., 2017; Lean, 2009; Pung, Gnoth, and Del Chiappa, 2020; Ulusoy, 2016). Results also revealed that this heightened level of conscientiousness may even result in regressive tendencies such as socializing less and spending more time alone, which may be interpreted as either positive or negative depending on the perspective such as reducing carbon footprint.

Quantitative Study 2 confirmed the applicability of the Tri-Component Attitude Model (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960) and additionally revealed the applicability of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) in explaining the process nature of transformation. PLS-SEM test results confirmed researchers' conceptualization of transformation as a process (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Holland-Wade, 1998; Mezirow, 1994; Pung, Gnoth, & Del Chiappa, 2020; Snyder, 2008) as different components, antecedents, and outcomes of this process were identified by building and testing a causal model with quantitative data. This process can start with either a positive or negative trip experience that leads to both cognitive and affective stimulation but what matters most is the positive cognitive stimulation (i.e., Self-Affirmation and Opening to Others) as these are the main agents of change in self.

The alternative model test revealed the substantial influence of cognition on affect but did not increase the explanatory power of the model. This result is against the postulation that extraordinary experiences create arousal of emotions dominating the cognitive dimension (Carù and Cova, 2003; Lindberg and Østergaard, 2015). Therefore, either model can be used in future research depending on if the focus is on the affective stimulation through transformative trip experiences. Similarly, the three dimensions of self-change, Propelled Inner Power, Personality Change, and Change in Outlook on others are the main agents of change in behavior towards Eudaimonic Tendencies, Regression to Basics, and Gregarious Tendencies. These positive and negative behavioral tendencies are similar to approach-avoidance outcomes in the S-O-R Model. Interestingly, Change in Outlook on Life is the most influential agent of change on Regression to Basics while Personality Change is the second. This implies that change in personality and change in outlook on life may sometimes be in a way that may be interpreted as negative, depending on the perspective.

Altogether, the model explains a little over half of the behavioral change in Eudaimonic Tendencies and Gregarious Tendencies while the explanatory power on Regression to Basics is to a lesser extent. This may imply that transformative trip experiences may sometimes lead to regressive tendencies which may be contingent upon the situational factors, or individual characteristics such as cultural background and personality of the travelers. However, its greater influence is on the tendencies for the greater good. Therefore, Pritchard and Morgan (2013) are correct in their assessment of transformation's role in human survival, as transformation means positive changes (Barbieri, Santos, and Katsube, 2011; Brown, 2005; Christie & Mason, 2003; Everett & Parakoottathil, 2018; Kirillova et al., 2017; Mezirow, 1978; Lean, 2009; Pung, Gnoth, & Del Chiappa, 2020; Ulusoy, 2016; Noy, 2004; Yang et al., 2015).

The sample descriptives in Study 2 revealed a relatively high number of respondents' international trips to different countries. Even though one might think that a first-time traveler may have a more profound impact from extraordinary trip experiences, the results may signal the cumulative impact of repeated travel experiences culminating into transformation. Even though this culmination is hard to measure through repeated measures with different trips over time, a proxy measure can be achieved by comparing visitors with different levels of experiences in terms of the level of transformation after the same trip experience.

Results also revealed the types of transformative activities can involve nature, people, challenge, culture, and tragedy, confirming Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai's (2017) list of nature, wildlife, culture, and meaningful connections and interactions with others as transformative experiences. Results also showed that any destination can provide transformative trip experiences, even domestic US destinations in this study; this challenges the postulations that transformation can be experienced in extended trips (Brown, 2009, 2013; Jandt, 2001) or extraordinary trips with exposure to a new culture (Brown, 2013). Additionally, the results demonstrated that transformation is more likely to happen on a pleasure trip rather than a business trip, even though business trips are also likely to lead to transformation. More interestingly, transformation is not a by-product of only those trips viewed as self-development trips. Transformation can happen on any trip, as long as the activities present those extraordinary preconditions for cognitive and affective stimulations to initiate the change in self and subsequently behavior. These findings challenge the postulation that transformation is not necessarily a common experience as not all tourism experiences lead to transformation (Brown, 2013; Graburn, 1983).

Results imply that destination marketing organizations, as well as tourism providers, should understand their consumers to design transformative travel experiences based on activities and events that trigger the biggest changes, be it social interactions with new people, admiring natural places such as wildlife, mountains, ocean, forest, and observing uncomfortable places like tragedy places or poor neighborhoods. It is possible that going beyond the beaten tracks of traditionally provided tourist routes and attractions will contribute more to changes in tourists' outlook on life and others, personality, and behavior, which in turn may lead to higher levels of tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The scale developed in this study may help practitioners to study the transformative tourism experiences for different types of travelers. The scale is lengthy; however, different sections of the scale can be used to measure the individual components of the transformation process depending on the purpose; it can help to measure if consumers consider offerings as transformative, or if offerings cause cognitive or affective stimulations, or if offerings lead to changes in self or behavior.

## **5. Limitations and future research suggestions**

Despite following a mixed-method approach for a comprehensive capture, the current study was conducted in an online setting with respondents who had different recency on their transformative trip experiences. The respondents reported on their trip experiences *ex post facto*, some of which may be spoiled through several different biases due to memory limitations. Due to different recency on the transformative experiences, the reliability of the reports on changes may be affected. Another respondent group with the same recency, for example, one month after the transformative trip experience, may reveal more robust results. Along the same lines, the study measured the change process through a cross-sectional survey design. Capturing the true nature of transformation with all components and change requires measurement in different phases of a transformative experience, before, during, and after. Measuring transformation with all components to be measured before and after experiences longitudinally requires extensive measurement instruments as well as precision for capturing the change at the right time intervals, which may be difficult and costly, if not impossible. Nonetheless, future studies following this longitudinal procedure would provide benchmarks for the validity of cross-sectional study findings on transformation.

Besides, respondents in the current study had different types of experiences on different trips; a respondent group with the same travel experiences in the same type of trip may also reveal more robust results. Also, the sample is skewed towards males with a college education and white/Caucasian respondents, and as such, the study results' generalizability to other groups need to be checked in future studies. Furthermore, several items including some of the highest-rated items were eliminated from the model test; this may be due to the nature of the sample and thus it is recommended that the full set of items are included in future studies until stabilizing the final scale in different cultures, segments, and contexts.

Finally, the study did not include several concepts in the model including potential moderator factors such as sociodemographics and motivation and personality traits. The study revealed that personality change is a dimension of self-change in the transformation process; however, which personality traits are the subject of this change remains a question to be answered in future research. Science is cumulative and the degree of the formal development of a theory depends on past research (Shoemaker et al., 2004). Personality trait theory has identified many different traits, as global concepts, free of study contexts, applicable to different contexts once measured with reliability and validity. Several of these trait scales are publicly available in the international personality item pool (Goldberg et al., 2006) and can be used in future research to identify which traits of personality endure change through transformative trip experiences. Thus, the conceptual model in Figure 4 is suggested to guide future research on transformation. Different components in this model can be investigated in detail including change personality traits as well as the moderators such as the length of trip, trip experience, and individual characteristics.

Figure 4 Here

Despite its limitations, the findings of the current study reveal insightful results in terms of the components and process of transformation and offer insightful suggestions to further the theory on transformation. Not all transformative experiences may lead to psychological and physical well-being and happiness of consumers. Tasci and Pizam (2020) mention that a wellness center may provide different influences on transformation compared to those of a holocaust museum. These differential influences of different experiences need to be identified for their positive

influence not only on the personality traits of consumers but also on their relationship with happiness and well-being. Additionally, since transformation is conceptualized not only for tourists but also for the locals (Reisinger, 2015), the transformation of residents in different host-guest interactions through different types of tourism interactions can also be identified for more sustainable tourism outcomes.

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