The influence of perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction on destination loyalty intentions: the case of international students

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This study examines three psychological phenomena (perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction) in explaining destination loyalty of international students. A sample of 489, short-term (n = 174) and long-term (n = 315) international students completed an online survey. Results from structural equation model-AMOS (analysis of moment structures) indicated that (1) orientation to mainstream culture positively influences destination loyalty intention and (2) orientation to mainstream culture mediates the relationship between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention. These results suggest that to facilitate destination loyalty intention, institutions may need to develop a support system that can promote positive cross-cultural adjustment.

Keywords: destination loyalty intention; perceived discrimination; orientation to mainstream culture; life satisfaction; education tourism

1. Introduction

Education tourism includes being abroad for cultural learning, to work and apply abilities to be implemented in a classroom in a different environment (Ritchie, 2003). According to Swarbrooke and Horner (2007), education tourism includes students who attend language classes abroad and those who travel to another country to pursue a common interest in studies, for example archaeology, painting, cooking or anything new in a foreign environment.

Education tourism as an economic growth engine is well acknowledged. Benos and Zotou (2014) and Cuaresma, Doppelhofer, and Feldkircher (2014) found strong indications of education having a positive impact on economic and social growth. Besides the economic contribution, international students help foster close relationships between nations such as international trade. These contribute to raising worldwide understanding, promoting peace and global citizenship, and providing opportunities for the constructive exchange of ideas across societies (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Chirkov, Safdar, De Guzman, & Playford, 2008; Gaceł-Ávila, 2005; Gunesch, 2004; Hail, 2015; Williams, 2005).

International students’ loyalty and intention to choose foreign institutions are valuable to several stakeholders. This study applies the study of Oppermann (2000) and Yoon and Uysal (2005) which studied tourists and destination loyalty (intention to revisit and
recommend the destination to others). International students share similar characteristics with tourists. They travel to the host destination and their experiences with that destination will impact their destination loyalty. Most studies adopt a specific focus on an enterprise or destination in studying loyalty (McKercher, Denizci-Guillet, & Ng, 2012). This paper examines destination loyalty intention from the perspective of international students’ experiences through exploratory quantitative analysis using international students at a university in Norway as sample.

It is known that individuals pursuing exchange programmes for a semester or a year are different from those pursuing degree stretching over a couple of years. To Massey and Burrow (2012), the main motivation of the incoming exchange students is a new cross-cultural learning environment, followed by a specific academic opportunity, and finally, a unique social experience. For long-term students, the desire for cross-cultural experience (Carlson, 1990; Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006) and motivation to engage in academic and/or foreign language development (Caudery, Petersen, & Shaw, 2008) were the principal reasons for their participation in overseas study programmes. This research used both long-term and short-term data based on the findings of the t-test on the similarity of both data sets.

Specifically, this research focuses on the following research objectives: (1) identifying the impact of perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction on destination loyalty intention and (2) ascertaining the mediating effect of orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction on the relationship between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention.

2. Theoretical overview of constructs

2.1. Destination loyalty intention

Extensive studies have been carried out on destination loyalty intentions, but few have been done in the context of education tourism. Studies on consumer behaviour found commitment and temporal consistency to be the key components of loyalty (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Oliver, 1997). These studies defined loyalty intention as international students’ intention to commit to a destination, which is expressed in a stable form over a prolonged period of time. Having positive experience with the destination increases the intention to return and the possibility of being loyal (Dolnicar, Coltman, & Sharma, 2015).

Ajzen (1991) suggested that given the difficulty in measuring visitors’ actual loyalty behaviour, measuring their loyalty intentions to a given destination (i.e. destination loyalty intention) may be a more relevant and useful approach. Loyalty intention is more proximal to a given behavioural process and often leads to a corresponding actual behaviour, although it is not always consistent. An attitudinal approximation was used in this research to measure loyalty intention.

2.2. Perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction influences on destination loyalty intention

2.2.1 Perceived discrimination

Perceived discrimination is an individual’s perception that he or she is treated differently or unfairly because of that person’s membership (Cardo, 1994; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Ye, Zhang Qiu, & Yuen, 2012). An investigation of perceived discrimination in the tourism context may generate interesting results and useful suggestions. Many perceived
discrimination studies focus on employees’, ethnic representatives’ and customers’ understanding of their jobs and experiences as antecedents to intention (Becerra, 2012; Özer & Günlük, 2010; Walsh, 2009; Ye et al., 2012). These studies begin with the premise that active consideration of intention is affected by perceived discrimination experiences. In the relevant literature, perceived discrimination against customers can be damaging to a firm’s business through negative word of mouth and decrease repeat patronage (Walsh, 2009). In this research, international students are the customers. The experiences of being discriminated (perceived or real) against is damaging for the intended country of destination. Other studies also suggested that perceived discrimination of tourists will severely damage or negate any intention of repeated patronage (Ye et al., 2012). The institutional climate is critical to students who may want to retain their loyalty to it (Crump, Recupero, & Roy, 1992; Jacoby, 1991; Sedlacek, 1987). However, studies on the influence of perceived discrimination on international students’ loyalty intentions are sparse.

In the host country, international students are friends, partner, son and daughter, which affect the manner in which they are perceived. Discrimination comes in many forms depending on the perceptions of the individuals affected (Hanassab, 2006). Ye et al. (2012) found that international students often experience discrimination in their interactions with faculty, staff, other students and the community. This discrimination may have an impact on international students’ reluctance to revisit their institution if they feel discriminated against. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

\[ H1: \text{Perceived discrimination will be negatively related to destination loyalty intention.} \]

2.2.2 Orientation to mainstream culture

Acculturation is a multifaceted process of change occurring when at least two cultures come into continuous contact with each other (Berry, 1980; Berry & Sam, 2003). Levels of acculturation can manifest themselves in two fundamental ways; immersion in or adoption of the dominant society and retention or immersion in the ethnic society (Awad, 2010). Although acculturation models focus on orientations of one’s heritage culture and the culture of the society of settlement, these two dimensions are seen as independent of each other (Berry, 1997; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). This research is limited to international students’ orientation to the society of sojourn, more specifically the contact, experience and social ties with the host nation’s residents because contact and social ties with them have been shown to facilitate and enhance international students’ experience and adjustment (Campbell, 2012; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Shigaki & Smith, 1997; Stone, 2000). Moreover, studies on expatriates who stay at a destination temporarily also demonstrated that place adjustment, job satisfaction and job commitment influence destination loyalty intention (Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003).

For international students, cross-cultural transition can be a life-challenging process because it potentially involves both disruption of a well-established social network and replacing it with a new one (Ando, 2014). International students in Ireland for example, who knew their stay would be temporary, increased their desire to absorb and learn as much of the local culture as they could in that period (Horgan, 2000). There are indications that the more assimilated individuals are towards a host country’s culture, the greater the progression is made in taking up the attitudes and values of the host society (Faber, O’Guinn, & Meyer, 1987). With this in mind, well-adjusted students in the host communities are more likely to remain and have a sense of positive integration or assimilation, which arguably should strengthen their educational goals and commitment and loyalty to
the institution (Zea, Reisen, Beil, & Caplan, 1997). Acculturation requires immersion and even unlearning of home–culture associations because home culture impetuses interfere with learning about the host culture (Gudynkust & Kim, 1997). Home culture priming or heritage–culture cues can disrupt students’ performance abroad, such as speaking the local language (Zhang, Morris, Cheng, & Yap, 2013).

Previous studies have shown that international students’ orientation to the host culture influences their sense of connection and thereby positively influences destination loyalty intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis will be tested:

\[ H2: \text{A positive relationship is expected between orientations to mainstream culture destination loyalty intention.} \]

2.2.3 Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction is defined as the global evaluation of a person’s quality of life based on the person’s own chosen criteria (Shin & Johnson, 1978). Judgements made about one’s life satisfaction are based on a comparison with a standard that each individual sets for himself based on his own valuation (Sam, 2001). Studies on the relationship between life satisfaction and individual decisions and activities indicated people who are satisfied with life tend to be more successful and socially active (Diener, Kanazawa, Suh, & Oishi, 2015; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Otrachshenko & Popova, 2014).

Ajzen and Madden (1986) found that the evaluation of an act is particularly useful in predicting intentions. To Soderlund and Ohman (2003) satisfaction can be divided into two parts: personal experience with an object (Hoch & Deighton, 1989) and emotional content (Babin & Griffin, 1998; Gottlieb, Grewal & Brown, 1994). Soderlund and Ohman (2003) suggest that satisfaction based on an event that has actually taken place is likely to produce a higher sense of ownership than any type of intention (i.e. future event that is yet to take place). Empirical evidence by Graham and Markowitz (2011) confirms that life satisfaction influences an individual’s intention to stay at a destination. They suggest that the chance of relocating is high when people are dissatisfied with their home country. Accordingly this research explores further this relationship based on the following hypothesis:

\[ H3: \text{Life satisfaction will have positive relationship to destination loyalty intention.} \]

2.3. Orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction as mediators between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention

Past studies that examined consumer behaviour and loyalty intention have paid special attention to satisfaction (Oppermann, 2000). It is generally believed there is a positive relationship between satisfaction and intention. Soderlund and Ohman (2003) claim that re-patronizing intention and word of mouth are dependent variables in satisfaction research. Graham and Markowitz (2011) assert that life satisfaction influences individuals’ intentions to stay at certain destinations. Loyal customers are more forthcoming with positive word-of-mouth endorsements, referrals and repeat visits.

Besides understanding the contributing factors to destination loyalty intention, this research acknowledges that between perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction, only perceived discrimination hypothetically has a negative impact on destination loyalty intention. Thus it is the aim of this study to determine whether this can be improved. Furthermore, although studies on tourist satisfaction have
been widely published, tourist dissatisfaction has received much less attention (Ye et al., 2012) and this includes perceived discrimination (Cheng, Lam, & Hsu, 2005; Foster & Botterill, 1995).

Perceived discrimination is negatively associated with loyalty intentions (Walsh, 2009; Ye et al., 2012). Disadvantaged or minority customers who experience marketplace discrimination become frustrated and dissatisfied. This decreases the likelihood of repeated patronage. Negative word of mouth will have a stronger impact on the business and transactional relationship (Ye et al., 2012). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) suggest that perceived discrimination is an important predictor of orientation to mainstream culture. Zea et al. (1997) contend that students who integrated well into the host communities are likely to remain, and this will positively integrate and further strengthen students’ educational goals and commitment to the institution (thus enhancing a sense of loyalty).

Studies on tourists’ perceptions of their being discriminated against are rare (Ye et al., 2012). Those done have helped to broaden the knowledge on perceived discrimination. This study is conducted using an empirical investigation of real settings to explore the antecedents of perceived discrimination, taking into account orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction from the perspective of education tourists. The link between perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture, life satisfaction and lowered intention is consistent with the conceptualizations of Ye et al. (2012), Walsh (2009), Berry et al. (2006) and Zea et al. (1997). Their studies suggest that perceived discrimination is linked to destination loyalty intention through its relationship with orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction.

In the case of international students, moving from relationships, affiliations and social routine environments may seem difficult in a foreign environment which offers limited personal connections. This study seeks to understand factors that assist the connection for international students in a new environment based on the assumption that the strength of the relationship between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention may differ with orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction. Given the limited empirical evidence on whether orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention, this research did not formulate any hypothesis regarding these relationships. Nonetheless, it does suggest the following hypotheses:

\[ H4: \] Orientation to mainstream culture mediates the relationship between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention.

\[ H5: \] Life satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling details

Registered international students at the university were eligible to participate in the study. A total of 1084 questionnaires were distributed to potential participants between January and June 2014. After inspecting and cleaning up the data, a total of 489 cases were used for the final analysis. The international student population included those on short-term programmes lasting about one semester \((n = 174)\) as well as those pursuing degrees \((n = 315)\). The majority of respondents were female as compared to males. In terms of age, most were between 20 and 30 years and more than half were Europeans. See Table 1 for details on the respondents’ profiles.
3.2. Measurement of the variables

3.2.1 Destination loyalty intention

Using destination loyalty intention as the dependent variable, Oppermann (2000) assessed three items, where two were on revisitation and one focused on recommendation made to friends and relatives. The items used were as follows: ‘After I have completed my course/study, I will travel to Bergen if my financial position permits it’ and ‘My overall feeling about Bergen is so good that I will come again after I completed my course/study.’ Responses were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

3.2.2 Perceived discrimination

Perceived discrimination was assessed using five items drawn from the Perceived Discrimination Scale developed by Berry et al. (2006) with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) about unfair treatment. Sample items were as follows: ‘I think that others have behaved in an unfair or negative way towards my ethnic group’ and ‘I feel Norwegians have something against me.’

3.2.3 Orientation to mainstream culture

Orientation to mainstream culture was measured in accordance to the Vancouver Index of Acculturation by Ryder et al. (2000). According to these authors, orientation to culture comprises two broad components: orientation to mainstream and heritage culture. These two components were measured by 10 items each, using a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) as response categories. For the purpose of this study only the 10 items pertaining to the level of orientation to mainstream culture was used. Examples of the questions used were as follows: ‘I often participate in mainstream Norwegian cultural traditions’ and ‘I enjoy social activities with typical Norwegian people.’

3.2.4 Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction was assessed using the scale developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). The study used five items by Diener et al. (1985). It was measured with a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Sample of the questions are as

| Table 1. Profile of respondents. | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender                           |           |            |
| Female                           | 275       | 56.2       |
| Male                             | 214       | 43.8       |
| Nationality                      |           |            |
| Africa                           | 84        | 17.2       |
| Asia                             | 67        | 13.7       |
| Caribbean                        | 1         | 0.2        |
| Europe                           | 288       | 58.9       |
| North America                    | 19        | 3.9        |
| Oceania                          | 9         | 1.8        |
| South America                    | 21        | 4.3        |
| Age                              |           |            |
| 20–30 years old                 | 383       | 78.3       |
| 31–40 years old                 | 91        | 18.6       |
| 41–50 years old                 | 13        | 2.7        |
| Above 50 years old              | 2         | 0.4        |
follows: ‘In most ways my life is close to my ideal’ and ‘The conditions of my life are excellent.’

3.3. **Data collection methods**

This research was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services. Students were contacted by email to participate by the university’s office for International Students.

4. **Results**

Before testing the hypotheses, an independent t-test was conducted to examine whether the two groups of students – short-term vs. full-time students – differed in their loyalty intention. The result showed no significant difference ($t(487) = 1.09, p > .05$). The subsequent analysis used the combined data of short-term and long-term international students to increase the statistical power of the data analysis. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations ranged from ($m = 4.12, sd = .74$) to ($m = 1.62, sd = .58$) for all the scales used in the study. With the exception of perceived discrimination, all the mean scores were above the neutral point of the scale (i.e. above 3), suggesting that respondents were on the positive side of the scale. Perceived discrimination was on the lower side of the scale.

Structural equation model (SEM) is used to test the hypotheses arising from the theoretical model. The data analysis was carried out in accordance with the two-step methodology recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Analysis and results concerning these two stages are discussed in more detail in the following section.

4.1. **The measurement model test**

To refine all measures for the structural model, a measurement estimated model using the maximum likelihood estimation method was applied. The initial items relating to four main variables (perceived discrimination, life satisfaction, orientation to mainstream culture and destination loyalty intentions) were subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA results on the remaining items revealed a good fit to the data $\text{cmin/df} = 3.07$, standard root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.04, parsimonious fit indices (PNFI) = .72 and (PGFI) = .71 and goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .89. From the analysis, one item for destination loyalty intention, two items for life satisfaction and seven items for orientation to mainstream culture were removed due to lower loading. Consequently, this measurement model was used for the analyses.

A reliability test was conducted to assess internal consistency of multiple indicators for each construct. As shown in Table 3, two variables were found to have Average Variance Extracted (AVE) higher than 0.5 and the remaining two variables are at the accepted value of 0.44 and 0.48. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Huang, Wang, Wu, and Wang (2013), if AVE is less than 0.5 but composite reliability is higher than 0.6, the

|                          | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Std. deviation |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Life satisfaction        | 1.60    | 5.00    | 3.65  | .66            |
| Orientation to mainstream| 2.10    | 5.00    | 3.68  | .47            |
| Perceived discrimination | 1.00    | 3.60    | 1.62  | .58            |
| Destination loyalty intention | 1.33 | 5.00    | 4.12  | .74            |
convergent validity of the construct is adequate. The composite reliability for almost all constructs stood between 0.69 and 0.85. Thus the multiple measures in this study are reliable for assessing each construct (Nunnally, 1978). However, for value of AVE and composite reliability which is lower than recommended, the Cronbach Alpha index was applied (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). The Cronbach Alpha values of 0.72 – 0.83 confirmed the factor reliability.

A construct validity test was conducted using the factor loadings within the constructs. As shown in Table 3, all standardized factor loadings emerged fairly high, showing the measurement had convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Results in Table 4 indicate that discriminant validity is well established. Following Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), the squared root of AVE should also be higher than the inter-construct correlation and no correlation among the latent variables exceeded 0.9, thus suggesting good discriminant validity. Furthermore, Table 4 suggests that the correlation coefficients among the latent constructs did not exceed 0.9, and therefore the model is assumed to be free from multicollinearity problems (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006; Hair et al., 2010). Comparison between the square root of AVE and inter-construct correlation also established discriminant validity. From the tests for reliability and validity, strong evidence emerged showing the constructs satisfied the requirement for their reliability, convergence and discriminant validity.

### 4.2. The structural model test

Results suggest that the fit indices of the hypothesized model meet the minimum requirement for $cmin/df = 4.60$, $SRMR = 0.03$, parsimonious fit indices (PNFI) = 0.67 and

Table 3. Validity and reliability analysis.

| Variables                      | Loadings | Convergent validity (AVE) | Composite reliability | Cronbach alpha |
|-------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Destination loyalty intention | .82      | .89                       | .73                   | .85            | .74            |
| Orientation to mainstream culture | .52      | .77                       | .44                   | .69            | .76            |
| Life satisfaction             | .61      | .64                       | .48                   | .73            | .72            |
| Perceived discrimination      | .74      | .72                       | .53                   | .85            | .83            |

Table 4. Discriminant validity test.

|                  | 1.     | 2.     | 3.     | 4.     |
|------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Destination loyalty intention | .86    |        |        |        |
| Orientation to mainstream culture | .50    | .66    |        |        |
| Life satisfaction            | .20    | .29    | .70    |        |
| Perceived discrimination      | −.28   | −.49   | −.29   | .73    |
(PGFI) = 0.60, CFI = 0.91 and GFI = 0.92 > 0.90 (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, the hypothesized model could be accepted as providing a good fit (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) and met the requirement for reliability and validity. Accordingly, the proposed structural model satisfies the conditions of unidimensionality. The structural results of the proposed model are depicted in Figure 1.

The relationship between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention was not significant ($\beta = -0.04, p = .540$), indicating that perceived discrimination was not related to destination loyalty intention. Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported. In contrast, the relationship between orientation to mainstream culture and destination loyalty intention was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.47; p < .001$), indicating that hypothesis 2 was supported. However, hypothesis 3 was not supported as the relationship between life satisfaction and destination loyalty intention was not significant ($\beta = .05; p = .325$). Results from these hypotheses testing are summarized in Table 5.

![Figure 1. Structural model on the relationship between perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction to destination loyalty intention.](image-url)

| Hypothesized path                                                | Beta  | $p$   | Decision     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|--------------|
| H1 Perceived discrimination → Destination loyalty intention      | -.04  | .540  | Not supported|
| H2 Orientation to mainstream culture → Destination loyalty intention | .47   | .000  | Supported    |
| H3 Life satisfaction → Destination loyalty intention             | .05   | .325  | Not supported|
4.3. Mediating analysis

Structural equation model was used to estimate structural relationships among the proposed latent variables simultaneously (Adam & Shauki, 2014). Figure 1 illustrates the path diagram and the direct effects are shown as path coefficients.

Hypothesis 4 dealt with the role of orientation to mainstream culture as the mediating variable between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention. By employing analysis of moment structures (AMOS), indirect and total effects were computed in the final model. All effects are shown in Table 6 together with the squared multiple correlations ($R^2$) associated with destination loyalty intention. All effects were statistically significant ($p < .001$), except those effects referring to perceived discrimination against destination loyalty intention.

Guidelines recommended by Cohen (1988) were followed in interpreting the magnitude of effects found in the structural model. As summarized in Table 6, the direct effect of perceived discrimination ($\beta = -0.04$) was insignificant and orientation to mainstream culture ($\beta = 0.47, p < .001$) was significant on destination loyalty intention. However, the relationship of perceived discrimination to destination loyalty intention was found to be improved with orientation to mainstream culture as a mediator. Hence, hypothesis 4 was supported in this study.

Results from the analysis indicated that life satisfaction (hypothesis 5) was unrelated to destination loyalty intention. We found that the direct effect of perceived discrimination ($\beta = -0.04$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.05$) on destination loyalty intention was extremely low and insignificant ($p > .001$). No evidence was found to suggest that life satisfaction has a significant relationship with destination loyalty intention. Hypothesis 5 was not supported in this study.

Apart from path coefficients, squared multiple correlations ($R^2$) were also employed as an indicator showing the integrated effect size for predicted endogenous variables. The $R^2$ of destination loyalty intention was .25, indicating a large effect (Cohen, 1988). Based on the $R^2$, it can be assumed that the proposed structural model had a robust statistical ability in explaining destination loyalty intention of international students in education tourism.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This research suggests that feelings concerning being discriminated against can result in poor orientation to the mainstream culture. This in turn may lead to lower destination

| Hypothesis | Relationships | Direct effect | Indirect effect | Total effect | Decision |
|------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|----------|
| H4         | Destination loyalty intention ($R^2 = .25$) | 0.04* | 0.01 | 0.48 | Supported |
|            | Perceived discrimination | 0.04* | 0.01 | 0.48 | Supported |
| H5         | Destination loyalty intention ($R^2 = .25$) | 0.04* | 0.00 | 0.05 | Not supported |
|            | Perceived discrimination | 0.04* | 0.00 | 0.05 | Not supported |
|            | Life satisfaction | 0.05* | 0.00 | 0.05 | Not supported |

*Non-significant causal relationship ($p > .001$).
loyalty intention. This finding may, however, be attributed to cultural proximity, as the majority of our study sample originated from countries that are culturally close to Norway, and thus may not experience much discrimination and be more culturally involved. The link between perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture and destination loyalty intention may elucidate the understanding in this area. On the impact of perceived discrimination, orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction on destination loyalty intention, results indicate that orientation to mainstream culture is the only variable significantly explaining destination loyalty intention.

Hypothesis 1, on the negative relationship between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention, was not supported. This is inconsistent with several previous studies (Stainback & Irvin, 2012; Ye et al., 2012) and may be due to more than 50% of the respondents’ in the study coming from Europe. Lee and Rice (2007) note that not all international students are subjected to similar hardships. Students from Western and English-speaking countries usually encounter minimal to no discrimination compared to students from elsewhere. Future research should seek to observe the impact of perceived discrimination on destination loyalty intention in other countries and/or using samples from other regions of the world. Despite there being many commonalities, differences among the subgroups of international students do exist. Thus, it is necessary to further examine students’ experiences and needs based on their nationalities.

Perceived discrimination significantly influences orientation to mainstream culture. Although this relationship was not hypothesized in this study, and suggested based on a modification index from AMOS, it can be argued that perceived discrimination influences destination loyalty intention. This finding was substantiated and found to be consistent with the finding of Berry et al. (2006) who suggest that perceived discrimination is an important predictor (positive or negative) of orientation to mainstream culture. This study suggests that experienced discrimination leads to lower orientation to mainstream culture, which again would negatively influence destination loyalty intention. This research recommends institutions to consider ways to counter problems undermining the international experience. Members of the education community should be aware of this issue and their responsibility in creating healthy atmospheres that foster cross-national acceptance and learning. Furthermore, international students should be made aware of the intercultural issues they are likely to encounter. They must be informed or advised about avenues of support should they encounter unfairness or threatening situations.

The second hypothesis was accepted ($p < .001$). This shows that orientation to mainstream culture influences destination loyalty intention which supports the finding of Zea et al. (1997) who suggest that well-adjusted students in the host communities are more likely to remain and have a sense of positive integration or assimilation, which arguably should strengthen their educational goals, commitment and loyalty. International students who have positive experience and have strong relationship with the host society will be more likely to return to the host destination or recommend it to others. Results of this research have significant practical ramifications. They suggest that it is important for everyone to consider orientation to mainstream culture to ensure that destination loyalty intention by international students is stimulated. This study supports the suggestion by Brown et al. (2013) that social challenges cannot be underestimated by fellow researchers. This may be true for international students who have to adapt socially and quickly if they are to successfully navigate new environments at the university level.

The third hypothesis regarding the relationship between life satisfaction and destination loyalty was not supported. The findings indicate that life satisfaction was not related to destination loyalty intention. The non-significant relationship of life satisfaction on destination
loyalty intention may have to do with the measurement of the variable. In this study, life satisfaction was measured on a broader view without considering factors specifically focusing on destination loyalty intention such as time orientation and destination experiences as factors that would influence the level of destination loyalty intention among international students. Thus, it is recommended that future study should address these issues.

Another important contribution of this research relates to the second research question on the mediating effect of orientation to mainstream culture and life satisfaction. Hypothesis 4 dealt with the role of orientation to mainstream culture as a mediator of perceived discrimination towards destination loyalty intention. As summarized in Table 6, we found the pattern of causal relationships to be consistent with what should be expected theoretically. In predicting destination loyalty intention, orientation to mainstream contributes the most as compared to other variables. The relationship of perceived discrimination to destination loyalty intention was found to be improved and statistically significant ($p < .001$) with orientation to mainstream culture as a mediator. As perceived discrimination increases, orientation to mainstream culture decreases. This reduces destination loyalty intention and means that predictive power of perceived discrimination on destination loyalty intention may increase or decrease according to orientation to mainstream culture of international students in the context of tourism education. The relationship between perceived discrimination and destination loyalty intention was found to be improved with the existence of orientation to mainstream culture as a mediator with the total effect figure of 0.48. Hence, hypothesis 4 was supported in this study.

Finally, hypothesis 5 was not supported in this study as no evidence was found to suggest that perceived discrimination has a significant relationship to destination loyalty intention, even with life satisfaction as a mediator. It was found that the direct effect of life satisfaction on destination loyalty intention was extremely low and insignificant ($p > .1$). The non-significant relationship of life satisfaction with destination loyalty intention may have to do with how the variable was measured. In this analysis, life satisfaction was measured on a broader view without considering factors specifically focusing on destination loyalty intention such as time orientation and destination experiences as factors that would influence the level of destination loyalty intention among international students. Future studies should address these issues.

6. Recommendations and limitations

Before drawing any firm conclusions, we acknowledge that the findings from this research are based on correlations; as such we do not infer causality between the predictors and outcome. Being also the first study of its kind, this research does not have any other supporting findings to the conclusions. However, it can be concluded that orientation to mainstream culture is integral to the concept of destination loyalty intention. This factor may be among some of the driving forces on destination loyalty intention in an increasingly competitive and global education tourism market.

The findings here are based primarily on destination loyalty intentions, which are not the primary motive for international student exchange. The findings, however, are clear enough as indicating a need to look into this area more closely. With students’ and the education tourism markets growing steadily in recent years, it is recommended that institutions build on this market through close collaboration with international student mobility programmes such as the ERASMUS/SOCRATES (EU countries) and NORDPLUS (Nordic countries).
The research concludes that the two questions guiding the study of destination loyalty intention produced answers that are both consistent with and contrary to the literature on destination loyalty intention. Future avenues of research exploration are therefore suggested. The respective bodies may assist the international students to tap into their emotional resources by diminishing negative affective conditions and optimizing adaptation to mainstream culture through various activities and programmes. These results underscore the fact that facilitating loyalty intention may be important for an institution to create and maintain a support system that promotes cultural adjustment.

The research acknowledges the limitations of the approach taken to analyse the total process of destination loyalty intention. In the setting of this study, few items were removed from the selected measurement based on statistical requirement. The total items removed for the analysis might suggest that further work on the predictors of destination loyalty intention is necessary. Although each of these findings represents an important contribution to the understanding of student loyalty intention, a significant amount of research is still required in order to explicate relational exchanges in this context.

Future studies should seek to use more heterogeneous and larger samples, namely samples that include domestic students (i.e. mainstream country students) and international students from other cultures. This study only looked at assimilation (host culture orientation) as a predictor of destination loyalty intention. The question of whether integrated (i.e. acquires the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture) students would be inclined to revisit and recommend their destination can also be explored further.

This study also recognizes that the data collection, which was limited to only international students at one Norwegian university, may be suffering from single-source bias and great caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings to other countries.

In spite of the limitations of this study, we think the findings from the study are clear enough to suggest that international students’ destination loyalty intention is influenced by perceived discrimination and orientation to mainstream society.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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