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Tourism Scholars' Confusion About the Locus of Causality and Locus of Control Theories: A New Theoretical Tendency and a New Measurement Scale

Abstract

Tourists' behavior has caused unprecedented studies to understand it. However, recent literature has exposed the fragility of understanding and reviewing tourist attribution, especially those established on the locus dimension. The locus dimension studies how tourists assign responsibilities to tourism events, whether internal and/or external causes. However, tourism literature is confused while utilizing the locus dimension. Tourism scholars mix between locus of causality (LOC) and locus of control (LOC) theories. Both have the same abbreviation, but both have different approaches. Therefore, the current study provides a new theoretical review tendency by applying a new concept, namely locus of personal traits (LOPT), with new measurement items for (LOC) and (LOPT). The study revealed that, far from the rhetoric occasionally linked with the locus of control, using the locus of personal traits will mitigate the substantial gap.

Keywords: locus of control, locus of causality, measurement scale, attribution theory, tourist behavior, consumer behavior, tourist destination

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1. Introduction

A tourism destination is a platform where tourists and tourism suppliers interact to achieve profit for tourism service providers (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020) and satisfy tourists (Chen & Dwyer, 2018). The interactions between tourism suppliers and tourists entail challenges (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020) while understanding tourists' judgments and interpretations toward tourism events in terms of unstable and unpredictable tourism events' (Jackson, 2019). Understanding visitors' interpretations and judgments is crucial in maintaining tourists' satisfaction because tourists' satisfaction drives tourists to have positive word of mouth (WOM) (Yan et al., 2018). Tourists' positive word of mouth indicates increasing the number of tourists to tourist destinations (Jackson, 2019).

Thus, the current research aims to identify and synthesize the prominent theory that helps fathom tourists' judgments and interpretations toward different events, namely the locus of causality theory. Locus of causality theory (LOC) considers one of the principal theories is investigating individuals' behaviors toward various events (Churchill et al., 2020; Galvin et al., 2018; Growth et al., 2019; Abay et al., 2017; Chang, 2008). The locus of causality refers to how people assign the responsibilities of their interpretations toward different events in their daily lives. Individuals may assign the events' causes with an internal LOC or an external LOC (Saleh, 2021). Individuals who assign the events' outcomes to an internal LOC believe that their life

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events result from internal psychological causes (e.g., beliefs, desires, self-control, etc.) (Abay et al., 2017). In contrast, individuals who assign the events' outcomes to an external LOC believe that events' outcomes result from external factors such as luck, fate, and service providers (Churchill et al., 2020).

Although LOC theory has the advantage of understanding tourists' attribution and judgments at tourism destinations (Jackson, 2019; Chang, 2008). However, there is an apparent confusion and gap between tourism scholars within the term locus, the locus of (causality) and locus of (control) theory confuse tourism psychology scholars. They are confused about interpreting the locus concept because they still mix both approaches with the same abbreviation (LOC). On the one hand, some scholars treat locus theory as individuals' traits to control the event itself (Munyon et al., 2019). They have named the theory "*the locus of control*" (Berry et al., 2018; Rotter, 1966). For instance, tourists during holidays may have an internal locus, which helps them control holiday events (Asante & Affum-Osei, 2019; Growth et al., 2019; Munyon et al., 2019). Whereas other tourists have an external locus and always ascribe to holiday events causing factors beyond their ability to control them (Fong et al., 2017). On the other hand, some scholars treat the locus as a part of an attributional style by treating the locus as a cognitive process regardless they can control the events or not (Zhang et al., 2021; Choi & Cai, 2016; Swanson & Hsu, 2011; Mattila & Ro, 2008; Chang, 2008), and they have named the theory to be the "*locus of causality*" (He et al., 2019).

Although many tourism scholars have started to utilize locus theory to understand tourists' attitudes. However, no prior study investigates the confusion between the locus of control and locus of causality; Both have the same abbreviation (LOC) and are considered the first dimension of attribution theory (locus, stability, and controllability). Additionally, when measuring LOC, sometimes scholars mix both concepts, as both are embedded in the mindset cognitive processes in assigning responsibilities of events' outcomes. Therefore, the current study aims to provide a view to understanding the current confusion by providing a "*locus of personal traits* (LOPT)" concept as an alternative to the locus of control (LOC). That is to mitigate the confusion between the locus of causality (LOC) and locus of control (LOC). Moreover, the study provides new measurement questions to measure LOPT as a new concept and locus of causality to avoid future research confusion.

2. The study point of view

2.1. The confusion between scholars within the LOC theory

The confusion between scholars comes through the judgment mechanism of the same individual's mindset by attributing different events to different causes. Thus, the current study will illustrate this confusion in literature by providing three scenarios with one example. Then the study will provide a new viewpoint of the theory to navigate this confusion. The example is as follows: "*imagine that many tourists have slipped off the mountain while experiencing an adventure holiday.*" (See Figure 1) In this case, three scenarios are likely to occur:

2.1.1. Locus as an attributional style

On the one hand, tourists may attribute this failure to adventure equipment's lack of quality tourism service providers provide. If individuals assign the event to external causes, this is called an external locus of causality (Qiu et al., 2012; Rotter, 1966). The external locus of causality has been distinguished into two types: firstly, change control, whereby events are the results of unordered factors (e.g., luck, chance, and fate). Secondly, control by powerful others, whereby persons perceive that event outcomes from interventions by other individuals (e.g., service providers provide them with defective quality equipment for adventure) (Folkes, 1987).

On the other hand, tourists may attribute this failure to themselves that they do not choose professional service providers. If individuals recognize that the event is related to their choices, attitudes, or permanent character, this is called an internal locus of causality (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Within locus of causality assumptions,

many empirical results highlighted those individuals are likely to attribute positive experiences to themselves and adverse events to service providers or luck (Saleh, 2021; Jackson, 2019; Chang, 2008; Jackson et al., 1996; Folkes, 1987; Kelley & Michela, 1980).

Attributing events to internal compared to external causes could be influenced by individuals' traits in controlling events.

2.1.2. Locus as an individual trait style

The same tourists may attribute this failure to their inability to control this adventure equipment: This is the case that scholars assume that the locus is likely to be the locus of control rather than the locus of causality (Growth et al., 2019; Fong et al., 2017). Twenge et al. (2004) have classified the locus of control into two models: Firstly, the independence model, which assumes that the internal locus of control has become more acceptable over 40 years: this occurred because of people's ability to control their causes now than they did before (e.g., travel is reasonably available for all social categories, and technology presents endless choices for services, varieties of communication and entertainment.). Also, individuals have the freedom to manage their lives and make their own decisions because of a lack of local social rules and etiquette as before. Moreover, Prejudice about gender or sexual orientation has declined. These assumptions imply that people have become more biased to an internal locus of control in their beliefs over time (Abay et al., 2017), contributing to widespread positive feelings (or positive word of mouth) (McGee & McGee, 2016).

Secondly, the alienation model assumed that the external locus of control had become more applicable over time because of the tendency to blame one's troubles or (failures) on external powers. This model reflects the distrust and alienation of modern generations, maybe because of the negative social trends that have been conducted by increased media on 24-hour news (Twenge et al., 2004). Consequently, if any negative results occur, people will ascribe these events to negative social trends (Avtgis, 1998), contributing to widespread negative feelings (or negative word of mouth) (Lefcourt, 2014). Thus, within the locus of control assumptions, many empirical results highlighted that individuals who have an internal locus of control are likely to have positive behavioral outcomes compared to those who have an external locus of control (Saleh, 2022; Asante & Affum-Osei, 2019; Munyon et al., 2019; McGee & McGee, 2016; Lefcourt, 2014).

Locus of control could be essentially forward-looking, including insight into one's ability to control the explained outcome (Galvin et al., 2018).

2.1.3. The interdependence between attributional and individual characteristics' style

Tourists may assign the responsibility of the event to an external cause (external locus of causality: adventure equipment's lack of quality). Nevertheless, they believe that they can control it (internal locus of control) by taking actual remedies for these events (e.g., bringing in advance their tools for mountain climbing).

The previous three scenarios might help to understand the difference between the locus of control and the locus of causality. The attribution literature lacks clarification of locus valence before treating it as a dimension besides stability and controllability. For instance, if scholars aim to investigate individual traits, they will treat locus as a trait (following scenario two: locus of control). Whereas if they aim to treat it as an attributional style, they will follow scenario one (locus of causality). Both scenarios have the same abbreviation, which is (LOC). In turn, many researchers find confusion when utilizing locus in their studies. The current thesis provides insight while dealing with the locus dimension to facilitate these dilemmas and enhance future research using attribution theory.

2.2. The study view to fill the confusion gap of the theory

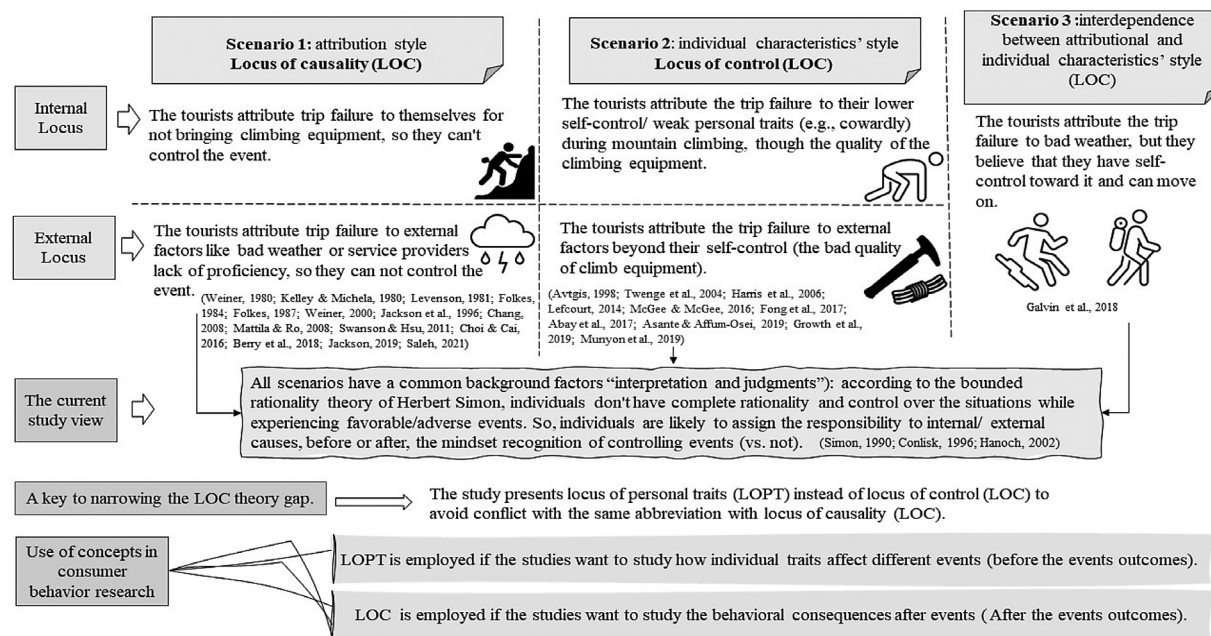
In the previous scenarios and before judgments, tourists' mindsets seek meaningful interpretations of the events' causes. The current study argues that individuals do not have complete rationality when making

decisions (Simon, 1990). Thus, individuals are likely to follow bounded rationality (Hanoch, 2002), which refers to those individuals who have limits and do not have complete preferences, complete control, and complete understanding. Thus, individuals may attribute different events by merging the locus of causality with control to reach pleased utility. When individuals achieve a satisfied utility, they can interpret or make choices (Conlisk, 1996; Simon, 1990). Consequently, tourists may attribute their failure to the lack of adventure equipment tools (locus of causality) and their inability to solve these issues while experiencing their holidays (locus of control).

Although using Locus valences' merging (causality and control) is essential to shedding light on the methodology that scholars should use when utilizing attribution theory. However, applying both locus valences simultaneously with the same construct may vague the expected outcomes. Therefore, the current study suggests a new phenomenon as an alternative to the locus of control besides the locus of causality to reduce confusion while measuring tourists' locus.

The new phenomenon is called "*locus of personal traits*" (LOPT), reflecting the physical and mental abilities that lead tourists to steer (vs. not) events outcomes. Thus, the internal locus of personal traits (ILOPT) refers to individuals with sufficient knowledge, experience, and mental and physical abilities to control events' outcomes. Individuals who have an *internal locus of personal traits* are likely to steer their events' processes, regardless of the obstacles (Galvin et al., 2018). Also, tourism service providers find difficulties convincing them to change their decisions (McCanne & Lotsof, 1987). In comparison, an *external locus of personal traits* (ELOPT) refers to service providers' ability to control individuals' knowledge, experiences, and mental and physical abilities. Individuals with an external locus of personal traits are easily convinced by service providers' campaigns (Hassan et al., 2022; McCanne & Lotsof, 1987).

Figure 1
The study's contribution to fulfilling the scholars' confusion toward the locus dimension in attribution theory



The reason that leads individuals with internal (vs. external) locus of personal traits to have the ability to perform their decisions and judgments is locus antecedents. Unique traits, in general, have very mind-tick antecedents (e.g., Including parenting style, social and economic conditions, and childhood experiences)

(Anderson, 1983). Hence, while upbringing, if individuals' environment steers them to be with an internal locus, they will be likely to think that they are the reasons for their daily life events outcomes. Then, they feel self-trust and self-control (Saleh, 2021; McCanne & Lotsof, 1987), leading them to judge events regarding their personalities and traits (Hampson et al., 2021). The study argues that locus of personal traits (LOPT) measures could be used if the study aims to investigate phenomena that affect the events. In contrast, the study argues that locus of causality (LOC) measures could be used if the study aims to examine behavior consequences after the events. The current study adopts a locus of causality because it mainly aims to study tourists' attribution toward different events.

2.3. The locus of personal traits and locus of causality new measurement scale

Thus, when measuring the "locus" as one of the attribution theory dimensions, it is crucial to focus on the measurement items that treat the locus of personal traits and locus of causality. Thus, the current study contributes with suggested items for both (LOPT) and (LOC) items to measure both approaches. For instance, as for internal locus of personal traits (ILOPT), we can measure it with these items: *"I have the physical ability to control the outcome of the events"*, *"I have mental skills to gain the most profit from these events"*, *"My pure knowledge helps me control the events"*, and *"I can navigate all events actions because of my skills."* Whereas we can measure external locus of personal traits (ELOPT) as follows: *"My lack of physical ability influences the service provider to control my events outcome"*, *"My lack of mental ability led me to miss events control"*, and *"I do not have the personal skills to go beyond service providers' control."*

In contrast, the items supposed to measure locus of causality (LOC) have to focus on the event itself instead of individuals' traits. For instance, as for internal locus of causality (ILOP), we can measure it with these items: *"I get what I want during holidays because of my well-preparation for these holidays in (selected destination)"*, *"My mood while experiencing these holidays in (selected destination) helps me reach what I want"*, and *"During holidays in (selected destination), my curiosity influences me to achieve my plans."* Whereas we can measure external locus of causality (ELOC) as follows: *"Service providers control all the events' itinerary during my holidays in (selected destination)"*, *"I always got convinced by others during my holidays in (selected destination)"*, *"The weather leads me to lose the control on events during my holidays in (selected destination)"*, and *"Holiday's events incidents (selected destination) outpace my planes to get what I want."* These semi-differences in measurement items may help fill the gap about the confusion within the term "Locus" within attribution theory.

3. Conclusion and contribution

In the process of attribution theory utilization in the tourism context to understand tourist behavior, it is essential to comprehend attribution theory dimensions, especially the Locus dimension (Jackson, 2019). The locus dimension aims to study how individuals assign responsibility for event outcomes. The responsibility could be attributed to internal causes (e.g., desires, abilities, psychological causes, etc.) or could be attributed to external causes beyond individuals' control (weather, luck, service providers, etc.) (Churchill et al., 2020; Galvin et al., 2018; Growth et al., 2019; Abay et al., 2017). For the actions in the locus dimension utilization in the context of consumer behavior, scholars have encountered confusion while using the locus dimension. Scholars have still mixed between two locus approaches, locus of control (LOC) and locus of causality (LOC). Both approaches study to whom individuals assign the responsibility for actions, whether to internal causes or external causes (Zhang et al., 2021; Choi & Cai, 2016; Swanson & Hsu, 2011). Studying causes itself is attributed to the locus of causality but studying why individuals assign these causes is that they feel that events' outcomes could be under or beyond their control is attributed to the locus of control. Hence, scholars encounter a problem, so they sometimes mix both dimensions or use measurement items related to control and use them in causality and vice versa (Harvey et al., 2014).

4. Theoretical and managerial implications

This research proposes a new concept that may mitigate the misunderstanding between scholars while using the locus concept to address this problem. This concept is the locus of personal traits (LOPT) presented with the proposed measurement items instead of the locus of control to vanish the current misinterpretation of the locus dimension. The study also finds it possible to apply (LOPT) concept and the suggested measurement items when studying behaviors that navigate the events. In other words, if the study aims to explore the consumer psychological factors that steer the events' outcomes, it will be accurate if scholars utilize LOPT. In contrast, the study also finds that it is also possible to apply (LOC) concept and the suggested measurement items when studying behavioral outcomes after events occur. In other words, if the study aims to explore the consumer psychological after the events' outcomes, it will be accurate if scholars utilize LOC.

Therefore, the contributions of this research are multifold. First, our study is one of the first to shed light on the locus dimension confusion utilization in consumer behavior studies. Most other studies have only considered using mixed measurement items regardless of the valence of the locus as an individual trait or causality style. Therefore, the current study contributes to the contemporary literature on attribution theory in tourism (e.g., Zhang et al., 2021; Fu et al., 2021; Saleh, 2021; Hsu & Chen, 2019; Jackson, 2019; Berry et al., 2018; Fong et al., 2017; Choi & Cai, 2016; Swanson & Hsu, 2011; Mattila & Ro, 2008; Chang, 2008) by fixing this gap to better forecast tourist behavior in tourism destinations.

Second, the present study makes a meaningful and initial attempt to apply a new concept, namely locus of personal traits (LOPT). Individual characteristics as an essential source of behavioral outcomes, LOPT could be employed in studies that aim to investigate how tourists' traits locus (internal vs. external) affect their decisions in destinations (Growth et al., 2019; Munyon et al., 2019). Finally, applying the locus dimension with accurate approaches will help tourism scholars to unveil crucial managerial implications for destination managers based on precise measurements and investigations.

The study has several limitations in terms of locus theory. As we mentioned, locus theory is one of the vital dimensions of attribution theory. Therefore, we suggest future scholars investigate the recommended dimensions besides the other dimensions of attribution theory, namely controllability, and stability. Furthermore, we suggest future scholars consider the personal traits types of tourists and consumers when utilizing the locus of personal traits measurement scale. In summary, future research should consider the tourist's unpredictable behavior by employing the suggested dimensions in the current study.

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