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## Remodelling progress in tourism and hospitality students' creativity through social capital and transformational leadership



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### ABSTRACT

This study used statistical analyses such as structural equation modelling (SEM) and regression analysis to demonstrate how both transformational leadership and social capital influence creativity. A mediation-moderate model design reveals social capital and knowledge sharing as critical mediation attributes that connect the relationships between transformational leadership and creativity. The three-way interaction results also suggest that interaction frequency is the most important dimension for increasing creativity by creating both knowledge sharing and a cooperative culture in the learning environment. Several alternative models were used to confirm the model fit of this study.

### 1. Introduction

Individual creativity can be a powerful tool for measuring job performance (Esch, Wei, & Chiang, 2016) and customer satisfaction (Miao & Wang, 2016), creating organizational competitiveness (Gong, Cheung, Wang, & Huang, 2012; Wang, Tsai, & Tsai, 2014) and supporting organizational knowledge management and innovation (Amabile, 1996; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015). Creativity education is a foundation for developing an industry's future human resources, which should be a first-priority educational goal in the new millennium (Tsai, Horng, Liu, Hu, & Chung, 2015; Wyse & Ferrari, 2015). Especially in the tourism and hospitality industries, organizations experience a dynamic environment characterized by rapidly changing customer needs, shortened service and product life cycles, and globalization (Chaisawat, 2006; Kennedy & Dornan, 2009; Robinson & Beesley, 2010), all of which require universities to introduce new creativity concepts both to develop students' practical experiences and to encourage their creativity in generating new products and services that can not only survive and grow but also cope with the new requirements of a competitive and complex environment (Li & Liu, 2016). Although understanding how to develop student creativity is one of the primary goals in this study, many scholars have also increasingly called attention to identifying critical attributes of educational environments and learning effectiveness (Ali, Nair, & Hussain, 2016). In conclusion, identifying these critical attributes of creativity not only supports traditional education but also complements new forms of learning by using social perspectives to encourage the motivation that supports the process through which students generate creativity (Fischer, Oget, & Cavallucci, 2016; Wyse & Ferrari, 2015).

Interest is growing in the influence of leadership on students' creativity, innovative thinking and problem solving (Drapeau, 2014). Supervisor support or teacher's positive attitudes may encourage students to generate novel, useful ideas to meet the requirements of the industry (Sobaih & Moustafa, 2016). Sobaih and Moustafa (2016) also suggested that in developing countries, hospitality and tourism educators may build a learning environment and support students in developing their personal relationships to connect, communicate, and cooperate with other students to share new information, ideas, knowledge and experiences. Thus,

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transformational leadership is gradually becoming an effective weapon to enhance students’ creativity, especially in the face of market competition and evolving customer needs (Tsai et al., 2015). Therefore, it is critical to understand the creativity-generation process with regard to the contextual factors of transformational leadership and social learning attributes for creative performance in learning environment settings that involve higher education. Recently, researchers have raised the importance of social networks and leadership on creativity (Chow & Chan, 2008; Fischer et al., 2016). However, few studies have examined the effects of the learning environment and other attributes, such as interaction frequency, cultural co-operation, social capital and knowledge sharing, on student creativity. Therefore, the primary purpose of the present study was to determine the effects of multiple dimensions of the learning environment and to demonstrate how these attributes influence creativity among tourism and hospitality students.

Although research on the learning environment and student behaviour provides important insights into creativity studies and tourism and hospitality education, several unanswered questions remain. First, what critical attribute of the learning environment is likely to build relationships, both directly and indirectly, that promote values of creativity? This question has largely been overlooked, perhaps because of the limited definition of learning environment used in prior studies. From the perspective of the creativity generation process, Li and Liu (2016) asserted that creativity involves both individual processes and social processes in the learning environment. The present study proposes that transformational leadership can not only help students accumulate social capital but also encourage knowledge sharing, which enables students’ accumulation of useful ideas in anticipation of creativity generation. Additionally, previous studies have evaluated the effects of social networks on creativity in Western countries (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015; Sobaih & Moustafa, 2016), and it is unclear whether their findings would hold in an Eastern context, especially in tourism and hospitality higher education. The development of co-operative cultural and personal relations is likely to be particularly important in Chinese society (Ooi, Hooy, & Som, 2015). Furthermore, interpersonal relationships and interactions may serve as a means to strengthen the resolve to engage in knowledge sharing and therefore may improve creativity because they promote trust and frequent interaction with other students (Campopiano, Minola, & Sainaghi, 2016).

This study assesses the degree to which transformational leadership and social networks function together to influence student creativity (see Fig. 1). It proposes that transformational leadership helps students develop social capital through knowledge sharing to generate more novel ideas or solutions to problems that directly influence creativity. The study also proposes that the social network context, which is composed of both a co-operative culture and interaction frequency, directly increases the speed of knowledge sharing, which then indirectly influences creativity. In sum, the context of a college classroom with a positive learning environment composed of up-down relationships and a social context should result in increased learning motivation, emotional support, knowledge sharing, and overall creativity performance among students.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

### 2.1. The role of social capital and knowledge sharing as mediators

Transformational leadership refers to a leadership style that increases the creation of followers’ emotional links with their interests, inspires higher values, and helps students accomplish their collective goals (García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, & Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, 2012). Recently, transformational leadership has attracted a great deal of attention in the higher education field because it inspires students’ innovative thinking, enhancing their mutual learning and creativity skills (Spendlove, 2007). An increasing number of studies suggest that strategic leadership can either navigate the dynamic environment or constrain social capital accumulation (Bodin & Crona, 2008; McCallum & O’Connell, 2009; Zacharakis & Flora, 2005). Educators’ perceptions of their inspirational role in the classroom strongly influence their ability to promote both leadership in the learning environment and mutual trust among students.

Chen L (2016) suggest that transformational leadership, inspirational individual learning motivation and idealized behaviours incentivize the construction of internal and external social capital to sharpen people’s boundary-spanning abilities. Consequently, leaders help their followers develop social capital through the encouragement of learning-network behaviours, including information exchange, idea generation and knowledge sharing (Anderson & Sun, 2015). In a study of undergraduate students, Choi (2004) reveals that transformational leadership contextual factors not only influences students’ self-efficacy and creativity intention but also creates a direct link among individual ties, mutual trust and shared goals. Thus, transformational leadership generates socio-psychological

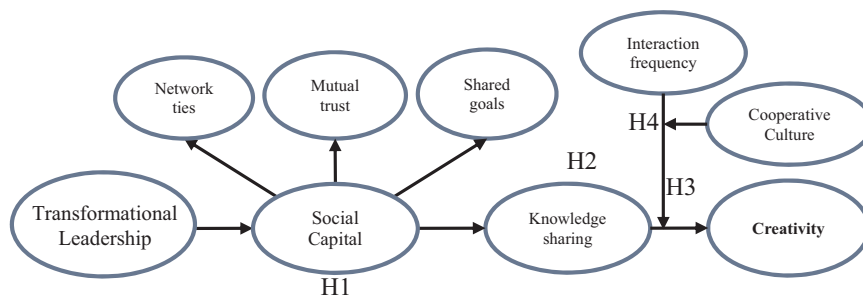


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of hypothesized relationships.

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