

## **The ties that bind: An attachment theory perspective of social bonds in tourism**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The management of personal business-to-business (B2B) relationships is an important yet under-researched issue in tourism. Social bonds which develop for a business partner when individuals work together can impact positively on maintaining the relationship with the business partner's organization and prevent switching to a competitor. The literature suggests that the management of social bonds is especially significant for small tourism businesses. However there has been limited use of theory to explain what social bonds are and how they can be created. Attachment theory has been used extensively in researching personal relationships but in tourism, its application has been mainly limited to studies on place attachment. This research combines existing knowledge of social bonds and attachment theory to develop a multidimensional social bonds scale which was tested in three separate studies involving tourism and hospitality professionals. The results confirmed the existence of two distinct social bonds: the security bond and the closeness bond, and the scale items provide useful guidance for creating personalized strategies to manage B2B relationships with tourism partners. The new scale is proposed as an important tool to measure the strength of social bonds and recommendations are given on further tourism contexts where the scale could be tested.

Keywords: Relationship management; social bonds; attachment theory; B2B; security; closeness.

## **Introduction**

The analysis of relationships is recognised as a key research paradigm in the tourism management literature (Merinero-Rodríguez & Pulido-Fernandez, 2016). Su, Swanson, and Chen (2016) and Fyall, Callod, and Edwards (2003) note that relationship marketing has received considerable research attention in the tourism literature, however most studies focus on customer relationship management (CRM) such as Lo, Stalcup, and Lee, (2010) or the tourist's perspective, e.g., Murdy and Pike (2012). Other important tourism relationships have attracted far less research attention. Maggon and Chaudhry's (2015) 12-year review of relationship marketing and CRM literature in leading tourism and hospitality journals found little research on relationships among key tourism stakeholders.

Relationship marketing has been defined by Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) as 'a marketing orientation that seeks to develop close interactions with selected customers, suppliers and competitors for value creation through cooperative and collaborative efforts' (p. 399) which supports its relevance to partners and stakeholders as well as customers. Since the 1980s, researchers with a focus on business-to-business (B2B) relationships have developed our understanding of these relationships at an individual and organisational level, within dyads and networks (Cova, Prévot, & Spencer, 2010). Chicksand (2015) notes that as buyer-supplier relationships have become more complex, effective B2B relationship marketing can provide competitive advantages including access to key resources, strengthening competitive position, improved relationship performance, and enhanced innovation. Business relationships involve exchange, routine formation, adaptation and cooperation or conflict which connect actors and lead to an interdependence of activities and resources (Fonfara, Ratajczyk-Mrozek, & Leszczyński, 2018). Personal relationships with the business partners involved have been acknowledged as significant especially in the tourism literature. Beritelli (2011) states that cooperation among destination stakeholders is based on relationships

between individual actors rather than institutions. However, little research so far has examined the development of strong personal relationships with tourism partners and service providers.

Researchers have found that several bonds exist in business relationships (Liljander & Strandvik, 1995; Arantola, 2002) which form a barrier to switching business partners. Social bonds, in particular, have been found to be an important relationship construct by tourism researchers (Saxena, 2006; Crotts, Aziz, & Raschid, 1999). Some researchers (Halinen, 1997; Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002) state that social bonds are reciprocal and should be measured from a customer's and service provider's point of view. However other researchers (Liljander & Strandvik, 1995; Arantola, 2002) argue that the customer's perspective of social bonds is the most important. Since social bonds lead to valuable outcomes such as trust, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty (as discussed in the literature review), measuring the strength of customers' bonds is most useful to tourism service providers. Therefore, the researchers focused on the customer's view of social bonds in this investigation.

Wilson (1995) defines the social bond as 'the degree of mutual friendship and liking' (p. 13). In business, social bonds can be developed within the formal roles of client and service provider both at work and outside work (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997). However, there is little research on this construct in comparison to other relationship marketing constructs such as commitment and trust (Beetles & Harris, 2010; Maggon & Chaudhry, 2015). In particular, social bond scale development has thus far been very limited, and the researchers propose two main reasons for this lack of progress. First is the lack of strong theoretical support in developing scales which measure social bonds. Second, the tendency to conceptualise the social bond as unidimensional has limited our understanding and management of social bonds as an antecedent of positive relationship outcomes such as trust

(Bendapudi & Berry 1997), commitment (Crotts et al., 1999) and loyalty (Lin, Weng, & Hsieh, 2003).

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to propose and test the first theoretically-based multidimensional scale of social bonds developed for tourism business relationships. The scale was developed using attachment theory which emerged from the study of parent-child relationships (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970) and in more recent years, has been used to explain attachments people have to friends and romantic partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) as well as brands (Thomson, MacInnis, & Whan Park, 2005) and places (Cheng & Kuo, 2015). In the tourism literature, place attachment is a well-known concept (Lewicka, 2011); however, attachment theory has been used in very few tourism studies beyond place attachment. One such study examines senior consumers' attachment to other members of a social network site for tourism products and services (Kim, Lee, & Bonn, 2016). To the researchers' knowledge, there are no existing empirical studies which apply attachment theory to develop a social bonds scale in a tourism B2B context.

## **Literature Review**

### ***B2B Relationships in the Tourism Sector***

The interdependence of tourism firms and their partners is well-recognised since they need to collaborate to create a quality tourism experience and benefit their organisational performance (Czernek & Czakon, 2016). Merinero-Rodríguez and Pulido-Fernandez (2016) identify the interaction between stakeholders of a tourism destination as one of the most important strands of research into tourism relationships since stable bonds between stakeholders have a positive impact on tourism policy. Beritelli (2011) states that cooperation in tourism destination communities is based on relationships at the individual rather than institutional level. His research found that personal preferences and a relational approach

supersede formal rules and norms as the basis of cooperative behaviour. Alonso's (2010) qualitative study of 21 small accommodation operations suggests that collaborative relationships promote business referrals and commercial opportunities as well as enhancing a destination's image and providing a better experience for visitors.

Ogden and McCorrison's (2007) study of UK venue managers' relationships with their suppliers found a high proportion (91%) had a long-term relationship. The main advantages were the good working relationships (46%) followed by consistency (39%), familiarity (38%) and responsiveness and flexibility (21%). These advantages were more important than cost benefits. Personal relationships may be especially significant for small tourism businesses since it is widely recognised that they are limited by a lack of networking opportunities and familiarity with other businesses (Page, Forer, & Lawton, 1999). Saxena (2006, 2015) suggests that the resource-related disadvantages of small businesses can be overcome through relational capital skills. For example, the sharing of market intelligence and advice are some of the many benefits which can result from forming social bonds with tourism business partners. These benefits are important since small businesses tend to lack skills in marketing and preparing business plans (Page et al., 1999). However, research into small tourism firms has been inconsistent despite the growth of interest in these businesses by tourism policy-makers (Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011).

Attachment and bonding among small tourism firms has received very little research attention (Saxena, 2015). Notable exceptions are studies by Saxena (2006), Crofts et al. (1999) and Thao and Swierczek (2008). Saxena's (2006) exploratory study suggests small tourism businesses utilise social bonds to enhance visual presence and competitive market position. By creating social bonds, they can better utilise local resources, develop structures to encourage tourism growth and better coordinate the visitor experience through synergies in delivery processes. Customers also benefit as long-term cooperation leads to reduced

operating costs through more efficient procurement procedures and inventory control. The second study by Crotts et al. (1999) examined social bonds in small businesses within the international travel trade. Social bonds were found to have the highest power in explaining the variance associated with small tourism suppliers' commitment to specific tour wholesale buyers. Moreover, social bonds had a greater impact on commitment than cooperation, trust, communication and other antecedents. Commitment is associated with effective cooperation and is recognised as a central construct in relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The third study by Thao and Swierczek (2008) examined social bonds from the buyer side (tour operator managers of travel SMEs) and found that they are significantly related to customer loyalty. These findings are supported by a study of travel agency owners/managers (although not in a small business context) which found that stronger social bonds lead to increased loyalty towards their travel suppliers (Schakett, Flaschner, Gao, & El-Ansary (2011). In addition, Narteh, Agbemabiese, Kodua, and Braimah (2013) found a strong and significant relationship between social bonds and customer loyalty in Ghanaian luxury hotels. Therefore, these findings suggest the importance of social bonds to tourism businesses as an antecedent to commitment and loyalty.

The place attachment literature has also recognised interpersonal relationships to be significant in human-place bonding. Researchers such as Kyle, Graefe, and Manning (2005) and Plunkett, Fulthorp, and Paris (2019) have added social bonding as a third dimension to place attachment, previously conceptualised as a two-dimensional construct consisting of place identity and place dependence (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). Social bonding brings personal meaning to a physical environment through shared memories and special connections with others (Kyle et al., 2005) and has a significant relationship with behavioural loyalty although researchers disagree over the direction of the relationship (Plunkett et al., 2019).

## ***Social Bonds***

Social bonds emerged from conceptual works by sociologists such as Turner (1970) and McCall, McCall, Denzin, Suttles, and Kurth (1970) who explored bonding within family and small group interactions. In the 1980s, bonds began to be explored in business relationships. Easton and Arujo (1986) identified that bonds exist, however weak, when economic exchanges take place between suppliers and customers. Several different bonds exist in these relationships; however, the type and number of relationship bonds is unclear. Liljander and Strandvik (1995) suggest 10 bonds and Arantola (2002) found 18 bonds although their definitions overlap. Berry and Parasuraman (1991) suggest that bonds develop at different levels such as financial, social and structural and can be combined over time to increase the strength of the relationship. Arantola's (2002) literature review on bonds concludes that although bonds are a core concept in relationship marketing research, there is no accepted definition or theory of bonds.

Of the relationship bonds, the social bond is most often researched in empirical studies within the business and marketing literature although few studies exist in the tourism literature. The term social bond is often used synonymously with social bonds and social bonding e.g., Selnes and Hansen (2001) and has not been defined consistently in the literature (Beetles & Harris, 2010). Brown and Brown (2006) suggest that this is because concepts such as bonds and relationship are in such common usage that researchers no longer believe it is necessary to define them. Indeed, some researchers argue (Turnbull & Wilson, 1989; Halinen, 1994) that bonds are the same as relationships. Definitions used in developing social bond scales (see Table 1) emphasise their personal/interpersonal nature, for example, 'personal ties and linkages' based on Turner (1970) and 'the degree of mutual personal friendship and liking' (Wilson, 1995, p. 13). Some researchers have identified characteristics



of social bonds within their definitions such as: emotion, reciprocity, social interaction, and attachment (see Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Table 2 sets out 29 social bond scales developed in a business to business or customer to business context which have been identified from our review of the literature. Most scales lack strong theoretical support (their authors briefly mention theory, refer to relationship marketing literature in general, or do not specify a theory in scale development). This can be seen as a weakness as DeVellis (1991) states the significance of theory in scale development: ‘the importance of [the scale] being well grounded in the substantive theories related to the phenomenon to be measured’ (p. 51). The social bond has been measured in every scale except one (Perry, Cavaye, & Coote, 2002) as a unidimensional construct unlike other relationship marketing constructs such as loyalty, trust and commitment, which are recognised as multidimensional (Czernek & Czakon, 2016; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Bardauskaite, 2014). The reason for this may be that the social bond is often conceptualised as one of several relationship or relational bonds (Liljander & Strandvik, 1995; Arantola, 2002) or one dimension of a larger construct such as relationship quality (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Lang & Colgate, 2003). This may have led to the assumption that the social bond is unidimensional.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Perry et al. (2002) developed the only multidimensional scale of social bonds found in the literature comprising: equity, trust/trustworthiness, commitment, benevolence, and conflict. However, there is no theoretical support provided for these five social bonds. Perry et al. (2002) define social bonds as ‘investments of time and energy that produce positive interpersonal relationships’ (p.76). Their model shows that the social bonds are not investments but lead to the technical bond of investment. Trust and commitment are

conceptualised as social bonds in the model, but the researchers argue that trust and commitment include not only social but also technical aspects. In addition, other researchers who have developed social bonds scales (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002; Crotts et al., 1999) show that trust and commitment are not social bonds but *outcomes* of social bonds. Therefore, there is some doubt about the social bonds identified in the Perry et al. study.

Developing the first theoretically-based multidimensional scale of social bonds will enable us to identify which dimension has the largest explanatory power in determining key relationship marketing outcomes. Social bonds are conceptualised as an antecedent which leads to beneficial outcomes such as loyalty (Lin et al., 2003; Guenzi & Pelloni, 2004); trust (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002); commitment (Crotts et al., 1999; Kuenzel & Krolikowska, 2008a); and satisfaction (Bolton, Smith, & Wagner, 2003). By distinguishing different social bonds, it will be possible to recommend different social bonding strategies to achieve these positive outcomes.

Rodriguez and Wilson (2002) and Bolton et al. (2003) confirm that the process of forming social bonds transforms relationships into value for the participants involved. Woodside and Baxter (2015) suggest that relationship managers need to invest in building strong social bonds with their suppliers since these bonds impact positively on resource allocations to customers in both new and mature relationships. Social bonds lead to customers receiving financial, physical, time, and important intangible allocations from suppliers (Woodside & Baxter, 2015). Saxena (2006) agrees that social bonds improve small tourism businesses' commercial viability and enable them to have access to additional resources. Bonds form at an individual level but create goodwill for the organisation (Bolton et al., 2003). Researchers (e.g., Coulter & Ligas, 2004; Haytko, 2004) propose different categories of business relationships based on their level of formality from strictly professional to highly

personal. In creating a multidimensional social bonds scale, it will be possible to personalise the social bonds to suit the business relationship and the individuals involved.

### *Attachment Theory*

Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding how affectional bonds develop (Ainsworth, 1989; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In the tourism literature, Saxena (2006) proposes that social bonds are characterised by attachment which Mayseless and Popper (2007) suggest is similar to bonding. Place attachment has also been defined as an affective bond between people and places (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001). Affectional (Ainsworth, 1989) or attachment bonds (Weiss, 1974) are identified as part of friendship and emotionally significant relationships. Yet researchers developing social bond scales (see Table 2) have not used attachment theory as a theoretical framework.

Attachment theory emerged from psychology and psychoanalysis and is founded on the relationship between parent and child. The principal attachment or parent figure is 'uniquely valued' (Ainsworth, 1991, p. 44) and not able to be easily replaced in this role. This primary attachment influences the child's mental model of self and the formation of other social attachments which continues into adulthood (Bowlby, 1973). Hazan and Shaver (1990) believe attachment theory extends to work relationships which include, according to Weiss (1982), 'relationships with professionals...for whom there is a genuine regard' (p. 173). Responsiveness to individual needs for comfort and security partly determine beliefs and feelings about the self (Bowlby, 1973). Weiss (1982) posits that adults' attachments to their peers lead to seeking them out in difficult times, feeling anxious when they are unavailable, and experiencing comfort in their presence.

Attachment has been conceptualised as a spectrum (Mayseless & Popper, 2007) which suggests that it can range from very strong attachment which a child may have for a

parent to weaker attachments between tourism business partners. Paulssen (2009) identifies a need to examine concepts based on attachment in the context of commercial relationships and argues that attachment theory is of greater importance in business relationships where collaboration is more frequent and intense. The attachment literature (Weiss, 1982; Ainsworth, 1982; Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Mayseless & Popper, 2007) identifies three characteristics of attachment: secure base, safe haven, and proximity-seeking. However, in a B2B context, Paulssen (2009) suggests that attachments can be conceptualised as secure or close. In personal relationships, security and closeness are interrelated; however, in business relationships, the two constructs are distinct (Paulssen, 2009). This means that a person may have a secure bond with a business partner but may not wish to become close to that person. While consumers use closeness as a way of determining whether they have relationships with companies (Beetles & Harris, 2010), in business situations not everyone wants to form close relationships with business partners (Price & Arnould, 1999; Haytko, 2004).

### *Security*

Attachment is characterised by ‘seeking to obtain an experience of security and comfort in the relationship with the partner’ (Ainsworth, 1991, p. 38). Two of the main dimensions of attachment have been identified by researchers as a secure base and safe haven (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Security is closely associated with safety and is founded on a perception of the attachment figure as consistent, stable, responsive and accessible (Weiss, 1974; Paulssen, 2009). Central to attachment is the child’s dependence on the parent to provide security. Partners also need to feel secure in relationships in the tourism business context; knowing they can rely on each other to cooperate and provide advice when required. Just as the parent’s responsiveness affects the child’s feeling of security (Bretherton, 1991), so in business relationships, responsiveness provides the business partner with a sense of worth

(Weiss, 1974) as the way the other party responds indicates how important he or she is. Availability is also an important criterion in attachment (Ainsworth, 1982) which develops the business partner's confidence.

The individual's attachment system is activated when there is an emergency situation (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2006) which leads to attachment behaviors becoming stronger (Mayseless & Popper, 2007). Morakabati, Page, and Fletcher (2017) note the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing among tourism partners when dealing with an emergency. The way that tourism partners behave when faced with a changeable and risky business environment may depend on the level of emotional support available. Emotional support has been found to provide comfort and reduce uncertainty in managing change (Krackhardt, 1992) and affective bonds among partners can reduce the perception of risk (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002).

### *Closeness*

Closeness is supported by the third dimension of attachment theory which is proximity-seeking, when the child wants to be close to the parent (Ainsworth, 1982). Closeness is related to social bonding (Ahmad & Buttle, 2001; Nielsen, 1998; Liang & Wang, 2007) and is often used synonymously with intimacy (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982). Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) suggest that people's desire to be close to a place is the main characteristic of place attachment and in a tourism business context, closeness is characterised by wanting to be close to business partners. Sternberg (1986) proposes that closeness originates from emotional investment in relationships. For example, a hotel director who wants to talk to her bank manager about things other than work such as family or hobbies is investing emotionally in the business relationship. The interviewees who took part in Saxena's study (2015) of 40 family-owned tourism micro-businesses recognised the role of gossip in

bringing people closer together. Smith (1998) and Turner (1970) argue that sharing advice also contributes to the development of social bonds.

Emotional investment drives a willingness to socialise (Sternberg, 1986) which is associated with closer and more friendly business relationships (Coulter & Ligas, 2004). Sharing pleasant experiences (Byrne, 1971) and having more frequent interactions (Homans, 1961) develops personal relationships more quickly. Intimacy or closeness is achieved through 'sharing experiences by virtue of doing things together' (Davis & Todd, 1982, p. 83). Shared experiences have also been identified by other researchers (Turner, 1970; Smith, 1998 and Liang & Wang, 2007) as part of social bonding. Tourism offers many opportunities for shared experiences with varying degrees of closeness or intimacy from deep bonds to more spontaneous moments of chemistry (Trauer & Ryan, 2015). The relationship between intimacy and shared experience has mainly been studied from the tourist's perspective e.g. Trauer and Ryan (2005); however, the use of shared experiences to create closer bonds among business partners has not been adequately addressed by tourism scholars.

#### *Attachment theory and tourism business relationships*

Beritelli (2011) believes that stakeholder theory does not explain why individuals cooperate in tourism destination communities. He discusses six theories which explain cooperation but one theory he does not consider is attachment theory, which suggests that business partners may cooperate because they become attached and come to depend on one another. Other studies also recognise the key role of dependence in tourism relationships. Saxena (2006) found that social bonds are characterised by attachment; however, she does not suggest that social bonds may be based on attachment theory. She also notes the importance of dependable relationships such as those characterised by informal ties in the marketing and promotion of destinations. Shi and Liao (2013) suggest that interdependence is central to

inter-organisational relationships since individual organisations do not have the resources and capabilities they require. They suggest that social exchange theory and resource dependence theory support inter-organisational relationships; however again, these theories do not consider social bonds which form between individuals within organisational relationships. Therefore, this research aims to fill the existing gap by using attachment theory to support the development of a social bonds scale for tourism B2B relationships.

## **Methodology and Results**

### *Development of the Social Bonds Scale*

The main aim of this research is to develop a scale to measure social bonds in tourism business relationships supported by attachment theory. Several authors who have developed measurement scales in a tourism context (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Wong & Wan, 2013; Chen, Bao, & Huang, 2014; Line & Wang, 2017) have referred prominently to the seminal work by Churchill (1979) as providing a framework for their scale development process. Boley and McGehee (2014) refer to Churchill's (1979) article as 'the gold standard for scale development within the marketing and tourism literature' (p. 88) and it has also been used as a guideline to develop the social bonds scale in this study.

### *Defining the Construct*

'Specify[ing] the domain of the construct' (Churchill, 1979, p. 66) is the first step in developing a scale (DeVellis, 1991; Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). An in-depth literature review identified several social bond definitions (Table 1) and 15 social bond scales (Table 2) but none of them were based on attachment theory. Therefore, a definition of social bonds was developed for this study as personal ties based on attachment which provide an incentive to maintain a relationship. As discussed in the literature review, attachment theory identifies security and closeness as the basis of social bonds.

### *Generating Items*

Stage two of Churchill's (1979) procedure is to generate a sample of items. First, a literature review was conducted to find a scale which could be used or adapted for use in the study.

Several attachment scales were found including: Hazan and Shaver's (1987) *Secure Prototype*; Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) *Security of Attachment*; Collins and Read's (1990) *Adult Attachment Scale*; and Asendorpf and Wilpers' (2000) *Security of Attachment*. However, these scales were unsuitable for the research since they measure respondent attachment style and reflections on individual attachment preferences, e.g., '*I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others*' (Collins & Read, 1990, p.647). In addition, the scales were developed for romantic and personal relationships. For this study, a scale was required to measure respondents' social bonds (based on security and closeness) with specific business partners.

Therefore, a pool of items for the bond of closeness was generated from conceptual descriptions in the attachment literature as well as other relevant scales from the love and liking literature such as Sternberg's *scale of intimacy* (1997), Sternberg and Grajek's (1984) 10 clusters for intimacy which were cross-referenced against Smith's (1998) *scale of social bonds* and Maxwell's (1985) study on *Measuring the Closeness of Relationships*. For the security bond, there were no relevant scales available as already discussed, so a preliminary pool of items was created based on a review of attachment theory literature, in particular: Ainsworth (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Ainsworth, 1982, 1989, 1991); Bowlby (1973, 1979, 1980, 1984); Hazan and Shaver (1987, 1990, 1994); Mayseless and Popper (2007); Marris (1982); Paulssen (2009); and Weiss (1974, 1982, 1991).

A preliminary 30-item scale was created from the literature comprising 19 items for the closeness bond and 11 items for the security bond. The number of items is similar to that reported in other research following a similar process of scale development, e.g., Chen et al.,



2014; Wong & Wan, 2013. The next section sets out how a mixed methods research design was used to further develop, modify and refine the scale prior to it being tested in three separate studies. A mixed methods research study consisting of six phases (Figure 1) was conducted to collect the data required. First, social bonds were explored using in-depth interviews; second, the qualitative data collected were analysed and used to modify the scale; third, the scale was reduced following feedback from a pilot study and finally, the scale was tested in Studies 1, 2 and 3, which are detailed in the following section.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Churchill (1979) suggests using a judgement sample of people who may offer some insights into the phenomena under study. Since there is little research available on social bonds in tourism, 47 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders including hotels and meeting venues, destination partners and various service providers. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes on average (from 30 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes), requiring around five months in total to conduct all the interviews. This exploratory phenomenological research captured first-hand experiences of business relationships and developing social bonds. This was important in ensuring that the items developed from the attachment, social psychology and personal relationship literature were relevant in a business relationship context. The interview data were transcribed and analysed using NVivo software. The outcomes of the research were to obtain support for the social bonds of security and closeness, to verify and modify the preliminary scale items and generate new scale items.

The interview data supported six of the preliminary scale items measuring the closeness bond and five items were modified, e.g., the original item ‘My service provider and I share advice’ was changed to ‘My service provider and I share advice beyond the scope of

our work.’ This addition was made to include all advice (work and personal) beyond the job being done which is more in line with the interview findings. Three items were found to measure the security bond so were moved to that scale, six items were deleted as they were not supported by the data and nine new scale items were created from the interview data.

The interview data confirmed seven of the security bond preliminary scale items and three items were modified to better fit the interview findings. As already mentioned, three items which were initially created to measure the closeness bond were moved into this scale, e.g., ‘I have a comfortable relationship with my service provider’ since the interviews suggested that these items tapped the security bond construct. Six new items to measure the security bond were developed from the interview data.

The modified 20-item closeness bond scale and 19-item security bond scale were pilot-tested with 15 small business owners who attended business development workshops at a university in the south of the United Kingdom. The participants completed a pilot questionnaire and commented in writing and verbally on its content and structure. The questionnaire items were measured on a five-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Following participants’ feedback, eight items were removed from the 39-item scale leaving 31 items: 17 for the closeness bond and 14 for the security bond (see Tables 3 and 4). The main criticism was that the questionnaire was too long and some of the items were quite similar. This resulted in the removal of seven scale items. An eighth item was removed ‘I relate to my service provider on a personal level’ since the meaning was found to be unclear and could be misunderstood by respondents.

The 15 business owners were used to evaluate content validity. The researchers followed a logical process of defining the constructs and items using the literature, interview data, pilot test data and discussion with relevant academics in the subject area as suggested by Blumberg, Cooper, & Schindler (2008) and Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2012).

[Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here]

### *Study 1*

Study 1 was conducted at an annual business-to-business exhibition for professionals and trade visitors wanting to meet international suppliers in destinations, hotels, resorts and meeting venues. The event was held in Barcelona but the main business language of the event was English. Some 160 managers were approached during the event. A total of 65 usable questionnaires were collected which represents a 40% response rate.

The nature of the statistical analysis to be conducted is an important consideration in deciding on the sample size. When performing factor analysis, some researchers have recommended the minimum number of cases to be included. Arrindell and van der Ende (1985) found that 50 cases was the minimum sample size to achieve a recognisable factor solution. Hair et al. (1998) also agree that 50 is the minimum sample size however 100 cases or more would be preferable. The Subject-to-Variables (STV) ratio has been found by other researchers to be a better indicator of the minimum desirable sample size. However, opinions on the acceptable STV ratio differ widely from 20:1 (Hair et al., 1998) to 1.3 (Arrindell & van der Ende, 1985). In light in these recommendations it can be concluded that the sample size for this study meets some of the suggested criteria but not all. So, it is best to treat the results of Study 1 with caution, which is why it was decided to proceed with Studies 2 and 3.

*Normality.* It is important to evaluate the normal distribution of the data. This is particularly important for the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with maximum likelihood (ML) estimation employed in Study 2 and Study 3. Maximum likelihood estimation requires data which are normally distributed (e.g., Hair et al., 2008; Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursoy, 2013). Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan (1999), advise that significant challenges may arise when the skew is greater than two (2) and kurtosis is

larger than seven (7). Since no variables had these high levels of skewness or kurtosis; none were excluded from the analysis (Table 5).

[Insert Table 5 about here]

*Descriptive Statistics.* The respondents were 60% female. Of the study participants, 66.1% were between the ages of 26-45 years and 27.7% were aged 46-65 years. Almost 77% were owners, partners or directors of the companies they represented at the conference. In terms of company size, 23.1% of the study participants worked for companies with 0-5 employees, 30.8% with 6-10 employees, 21.5% with 11-20 employees and 21.5% with 21-50 employees. The mean of the relationship length with their service provider was 5.5 years.

*Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).* Multivariate techniques enable researchers to comprehend complex relationships between multiple variables (Hair et al., 1998).

Exploratory factor analysis is useful for validating multidimensional scales since it provides an empirical estimate of the structure of the variables under consideration (Spector, 1992). Researchers are able to establish dimensionality by determining the number of factors and loadings of each variable on the factors (Hair et al., 1998).

The objectives of EFA are to reduce the number of variables into a smaller set of factors and to summarise or condense the data to lose minimum information. The recommendation is to achieve the most representative and parsimonious set of factors possible (Hair et al., 1998). Thus EFA can result in a smaller number of representative variables to use in subsequent multivariate analyses or the creation of an entirely new set of variables.

Results from the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was 0.75 and for the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity 340.88 ( $p < 0.001$ ) demonstrating that the sample was suitable to conduct exploratory factor analysis.

The suitability of the data matrix for EFA may be confirmed using two further checks (Hair et al., 1998). The first check is a visual examination to ensure that there are sufficient correlations greater than 0.3 to justify the application of factor analysis. Many correlations over 0.4, 0.5, 0.6 were found and even a few at over 0.7. The second check is an inspection of the anti-image correlation matrix which is the negative value of the partial correlation. Hair et al. (1998) suggest that the data matrix may not be suited to factor analysis if larger anti-image correlations are present. This was not the case therefore this check also indicated suitability for factor analysis.

The exploratory factor analysis was employed using principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Two factors with eigenvalues above 1 were found: Factor 1 Security Bond composed of seven variables and Factor 2 Closeness Bond composed of six variables (Table 6) explaining 52.1% of the variance. The minimum cut-off point of 0.4 was based on Hair et al. (1998). During the analysis, seven items from the Security Bond and eleven items from the Closeness Bond were removed because these items either loaded on more than one factor above 0.40 or had low factor loadings (Tables 3 and 4).

[Insert Table 6 about here]

All remaining items loaded on the two factors. However, items 6 and 7, part of the security bond, loaded less than 0.40 on the security bond. The reason for this may be related to the small sample size (Hair et al., 1998); however, two further issues may also have influenced this outcome. The first issue was language. English was not the first language of most respondents therefore they may have found it challenging to understand and differentiate fully between the items. The second issue was culture. The respondents came from various countries with different accepted norms of business relationships which may have influenced their experience of social bonds. However, it was decided to keep items 6

and 7 as part of the measurement instruments. Also, the results from earlier studies in different areas (e.g., Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001; Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003) show that deviating behaviour of single items is not unique to this study. What is important is to identify items which deviate consistently so this was further tested in Studies 2 and 3.

### *Study 2*

Studies 2 and 3 were conducted using two separate postal mailings to collect data from senior decision-makers from the UK hotel industry whose contact details were obtained from a list broker. The focus was on small hotels since they make up 86% of businesses in the UK hotel sector (People1st, 2013) yet researchers such as Thomas et al. (2011) note that small tourism businesses tend to be under-researched. Furthermore, previous studies (Saxena, 2006; Crotts et al., 1999) showed that personal relationships are especially important for small tourism businesses whose owners are not solely motivated by financial goals and who often do not belong to formal networking organisations (Saxena, 2015).

One of the biggest list brokers in the UK has 3,757 records of senior decision-makers from the SME UK hotel industry. One thousand from the sampling frame of 3,757 records based on stratified random sampling (Saunders et al., 2012) were selected for Study 2. The postal mailing was addressed personally to each respondent and contained: a cover letter, the questionnaire and a stamped-addressed return envelope. Some 120 fully completed questionnaires were returned with no missing data. Taking into consideration that these are senior managers, the response rate of 12% is very much in line with similar studies (e.g., Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004; Claycomb & Frankwick, 2010; Fang, Wu, Fang, Chang, & Chao, 2008).

As in Study 1, all variables were checked for skewness or kurtosis (Table 5). Also since CFA with maximum likelihood (ML) estimation is used in Studies 2 and 3, the data

were examined to determine if there were any outliers. The squared Mahalanobis distance was used to identify any values that strayed from the mean (e.g., Nunkoo et al., 2013; Gnanadesikan & Kettenring, 1972). Two cases were identified as outliers and consequently removed, which meant 118 cases were used for the analysis.

The problem of non-response bias has been discussed by several researchers (e.g., Yu & Cooper, 1983; Greer, Chuchinprakam, & Seshadri, 2000), since an inadequate number of responses from the population affects the results obtained. The response rate has been recognised as a main determinant of the external validity of survey research (Larson & Poist, 2004) and an indicator of survey quality, assuming a high response reduces the probability of non-respondent bias affecting survey results (Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, & Vehovar, 2008). However, studies such as Groves (2006) and Keeter, Miller, Kohut, Groves, & Presser (2000) demonstrate that lower response rates do not necessarily increase non-response error. The extrapolation method (Armstrong & Overton, 1977) has been found to be effective in testing for non-response bias by comparing the mean differences of early and late respondents. This technique assumes that late respondents are similar to non-respondents. The research team implemented this method in comparing responses from Studies 2 and 3 and non-response bias was not found to be an issue.

*Descriptive Statistics.* Over two-thirds (70%) of respondents were male and just under one third (30%) were female. Since the respondents were senior decision-makers, nearly 70% of respondents were between the ages of 46-65 and 25% were under 46 years of age. Just over 60% were hotel owners, 20.7% managing directors and 10.8% were partners. Respondents were evenly divided between hotels with 0-5 employees (17.2% of respondents), 6-10 employees (23.3% of respondents) and 11-20 employees (19% of respondents) with a higher rate of response (37.1%) from individuals representing the largest category of hotels in the study – 21-50 employees. The mean of the relationship length was 10.3 years.

*Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)*. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was 0.89 and for the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity 1,070.63 ( $p < 0.001$ ) demonstrating that the sample for Study 2 was suitable for conducting exploratory factor analysis. The exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis with varimax rotation identified two factors with eigenvalues above 1 explaining 68.1% of the variance. All items loaded on their respective factors using the same criteria applied in Study 1. It was also important to examine if the problems with items 6 and 7 were, highlighted in Study 1, re-surfaced in Study 2. The loadings for these two items were clearly well above the threshold level, so this may have been caused by the small sample in Study 1.

### ***Validation of the Social Bonds Scale***

#### *Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*

For further analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with LISREL 9.20 and the maximum likelihood (ML) method (Jöreskog, Olsson, & Wallentin, 2016) was used to analyse the data from Study 2 (e.g., Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; DeVellis, 1991).

A number of different fit indexes are typically reported in CFA studies. Smith and Langfield-Smith's (2004) work has identified the goodness of fit index (GFI) and adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) as popular fit indexes. Nonetheless, the sample size can have a disproportionate effect for both indexes (Fan, Thompson, & Wang, 1999). Since there are also recognised issues with the chi-square in SEM (e.g., Smith & Smith-Langfield, 2004), other more stable indexes were accentuated in this research. Furthermore, Hu and Bentler (1999, p. 5) advise that AGFI and GFI perform 'poorly and are not recommended for evaluating model fit'.

Bentler (1990) amended the normed fit index (NFI) to take account of sample size and proposed the more stable comparative fit index (CFI). Bollen (1989) proposed the



incremental fit index (IFI), which also considers the size of the sample. The model was evaluated with the  $\chi^2/df$  ratio, CFI, IFI and the popular root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). To examine the results of CFA the following recommendations were followed:  $\chi^2/df$  ratio = 2.0 to 5.0, CFI  $\geq$  0.90, IFI  $\geq$  0.90, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)  $\leq$  0.10 (e.g., Hair et al., 1998; Bentler, 1990).

The model provided a good fit to the data: ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.98$ , CFI = 0.94, IFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.09). All indexes performed well and were well within acceptable limits. However, while the RMSEA met the recommended threshold; it was perhaps the weakest performing index in this research. This is not surprising because the study utilised a reasonably small sample with a simple two-factor model and RMSEA tends to over-reject both complex and simple models especially with smaller samples (e.g., Kenny & McCoach, 2003; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Unidimensionality was upheld with the overall goodness of fit (Steenkamp & van Trijp, 1991). All loadings were significant and supported convergent validity (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988) ranging from 0.56 to 0.89 (Table 6). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 6. Composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha and average variance extracted (AVE) are reported in Table 7. All the values for Cronbach's alpha were above 0.60 (Nunnally, 1978). The values for average variance extracted should be above 0.50 and for composite reliability above 0.60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981) to ensure internal consistency. All values were clearly higher than the postulated benchmarks and as a result showed good internal stability.

[Insert Table 7 about here]

### *Discriminant Validity*

Furthermore, three different methods were used to evaluate the scales in terms of their discriminant validity. First, the correlation between the two constructs should be lower than

0.85 to demonstrate discriminant validity (Kline, 2005). Second, a procedure proposed by Bagozzi and Phillips (1982) was employed which involves analysing a two-factor model for the dimensions twice. Initially, the two factors were fixed to correlate at 1.00 and then the model was unconstrained. To compare the models a  $\chi^2$ -difference test was employed and the  $\chi^2$ -statistic was significantly lower for the unconstrained model thus demonstrating discriminant validity. Third, the squared correlation between construct pairs was compared with the AVE of individual scales (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results are shown in Table 8. Discriminant validity was supported because the AVEs exceed the squared correlations.

[Insert Table 8 about here]

### *Study 3*

Hair et al. (1998) suggest the most straightforward methods of substantiating the results of CFA are either with a split sample of the original data or a separate sample. It is perhaps most common in many tourism studies on scale development to split one sample into two separate samples (e.g., Choi, Law, & Heo, 2016; Kim, Jun, Walker, & Drane, 2015), where one sample is used for calibration and the other one is treated as validation sample. However, the researchers decided to obtain a separate sample which meant collecting a completely new sample from another group of respondents. This is supported by Field (2009) who recommends using a different sample to test the factor structure or else it may be restricted to the sample collected. The factors identified in Study 2 were retested to make sure that the scales were reliable. It was decided not to reduce the number of items in the questionnaire for Study 3 following the results of Studies 1 and 2. The reason for this is the researchers wanted to be cautious due to the small samples of Studies 1 and 2. Therefore, it was preferred to test the bonds again using the same questionnaire as in Studies 1 and 2.

Study 3 was conducted with 1,200 senior decision-makers in the SME hotel sector in the UK who received a questionnaire by post in the same format as Study 2. The decision was made to increase the sample size to 1,200 records taken from the sampling frame of 2,757 records (as 1,000 records were previously selected for Study 2, the original sampling frame of 3,757 records was reduced). A total of 159 fully completed questionnaires were received with no missing data and the response rate of 13% was similar to Study 2. As in Studies 1 and 2, all variables were examined for skewness or kurtosis (Table 5), and a check was made for any outliers. The squared Mahalanobis distance was employed to detect any values that strayed from the mean (e.g., Nunkoo et al., 2013; Gnanadesikan & Kettenring, 1972). Two cases were identified as outliers and consequently removed, leaving 157 cases for the analysis.

Almost two thirds (65%) of respondents were male and about one third (35%) were female. Approximately 62% of respondents were between the ages of 46-65 and 7% were under 46 years of age. 58.3% were hotel owners, 18.1% managing directors and 14.6% were partners. Participants represented hotels with 0-5 employees (26.7% of respondents), 6-10 employees (20.7% of respondents), 11-20 employees (25.3% of respondents) and 21-50 employees (24.7%). The relationship length mean was 12.3 years.

In Study 3, the model provided a good fit to the data: ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.76$ , = 0.97, IFI = 0.97, RMSEA= 0.07). All indexes performed very well and were clearly within acceptable limits. In line with the previous studies all loadings were significant and are reported in Table 6. The means and standard deviations can be seen in Table 6. Composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted (AVE) are stated in Table 7 and all values met the previously stated thresholds. The same tests to evaluate the discriminant validity as for Study 2 were again conducted and discriminant validity was

supported for Study 3 (see Table 8). The final Social Bonds model consisting of two dimensions is shown in Figure 2.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

### *Nomological Validity*

It is also important to assess the nomological validity of the social bond dimensions. Consequently, it was determined if the social bond dimensions impacted affective commitment. Affective commitment is conceptualised by a number of authors as the emotional dimension of commitment (e.g., Allen & Meyer, 1990; Cater & Zabkar, 2009) and reflects how much the relationship partners like to maintain their relationship (Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer, & Kumar, 1996). There is strong evidence in the literature for such a relationship based on the work by Cater and Zabkar, 2009; Fullerton, 2003; Young and Denize, 1995. A four-item measurement instrument ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) for affective commitment was used to examine this positive relationship. The items are very much in line with the work by Kumar, Scheer, and Steenkamp, 1995; Cater and Cater, 2009; Theron, Terblanche, and Boshoff, 2008. The items and their means, standard deviations, and factor loadings are reported in Table 9.

A structural equation model was examined for the two social bond dimensions and their influence on affective commitment. All paths were positive and significant with an excellent model fit ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.74$ , CFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.07). Security had positive effect on affective commitment (path coefficient= 0.79) and closeness had a significant influence as well, but the effect was considerably smaller (path coefficient = 0.19). These findings support the nomological validity of the social bond dimensions.

[Insert Table 9 about here]

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

Social bonds have been under-researched compared to other relationship marketing constructs such as commitment and trust (Beetles & Harris, 2010; Maggon & Chaudhry, 2015). Social bond scale development has been limited due to a tendency to conceptualise this construct as unidimensional (Smith, 1998; Crotts et al., 1999) and the lack of a strong theoretical framework (e.g., Lin et al., 2003; Selnes & Hansen, 2001). Yet social bonds are valuable as they lead to important relationship outcomes such as trust (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2002), satisfaction (Bolton et al., 2003), affective commitment (Cater & Zabkar, 2009) and loyalty (Lin et al., 2003; Guenzi & Pelloni, 2004). Therefore, this research aimed to improve our understanding of social bonds to more effectively manage tourism B2B relationships.

This research is the first to use attachment theory as a framework to conceptualise social bonds as multidimensional. Few studies of social bonds exist in the tourism literature and Saxena (2006) called for more research in this area since maintaining social bonds requires a large investment in time and effort. Building social bonds at an individual level by tourism business partners may be seen as a relationship marketing strategy to acquire tangible and intangible resources for the business and personal value for the individual (Woodside & Baxter, 2015; Bolton et al., 2003). The researchers used a mixed methods approach to develop a social bonds scale by reviewing the literature and conducting a qualitative interview study; and then tested the scale by carrying out three separate studies. The literature suggests that social bonds may be particularly important for tourism SMEs (Saxena, 2006, 2015); therefore, the main quantitative surveys involved senior decision-makers in the UK small hotel sector. The results identify two new social bonds based on attachment: the security bond and the closeness bond. This is the first multidimensional scale of social bonds based on attachment theory.

### *Theoretical Implications*

Attachment theory has been widely used in studies on place attachment in tourism (Lewicka, 2011). However, attachment theory emerged from the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis and has been extensively used in researching personal relationships such as those between parent and child (Bowlby, 1973, 1979; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970), romantic partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and more recently, business partners (Paulssen, 2009). This research extends attachment theory to support relationships between tourism business partners, in particular, focusing on SMEs in the hotel industry. The literature on personal B2B relationships in tourism is limited; therefore, this enquiry makes an important contribution in improving our understanding and hence management of these relationships. However, to confirm external validity, the scale needs to be tested in different tourism business contexts. This section makes recommendations on tourism relationships which could benefit from a greater understanding of social bonds.

One promising context is hotel-travel agent relationships. Medina-Munoz and Garcia-Falcon (2000) found that a large percentage of these relationships are unsuccessful and suggested that greater knowledge of factors contributing to relationship success could aid the ongoing management of these relationships. Kattiyapornpong (2009) found that social relationships are particularly important to travel agencies. Therefore, testing the social bonds scale in this context would enable better management of personal relationships which could lead to stronger relationships at an organisational level (Bolton et al., 2003).

Paulssen (2009) suggests business relationships differ conceptually from personal relationships as they involve power and authority. Indeed, power dynamics shape partnerships (Chicksand, 2015) so may have a bearing on the development of social bonds in tourism business relationships. Turner (1970) suggests that different bonds will form the

basis of attachment in relationships characterised by an imbalance of power i.e. having a stronger and a weaker member. Therefore, further research should examine social bonds and attachment in tourism relationships where there is an unequal balance of power between the parties. One such context is franchise partnerships, where franchisees are dependent on the franchisor for their brand reputation, training and marketing support. Altinay and Brookes (2012) found that personal chemistry and social bonds contribute significantly to the development of international hotel franchise relationships; however, the researchers do not explore social bonds in depth. The social bonds scale could be used to better understand and improve the management of these relationships.

Merinero-Rodríguez and Pulido-Fernandez (2016) suggest that further research into stakeholder relationships needs to consider factors and conditions which facilitate interaction between components of tourism activity. Therefore, the social bonds scale could be included in a more complex model which considers different types of bonds such as financial and structural bonds and their impact on tourism management outcomes. By comparing social bonds to other types of bonds such as the psychological bond which has been found to lead to behavioural loyalty (Kuenzel & Krolikowska, 2008b), it would be possible to find out the best return on investment on marketing effort. Different moderators could also be included to show the effects of demographics such as age, gender and culture on social bonds. Saxena (2006, 2015) found that ethnic ties encourage the development of social bonds among tourism micro-businesses. Studies of older consumers (Kim et al., 2016; Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010) suggest that bonds may become more important with age; however, this would need to be tested in a business relationship context.

### ***Managerial Implications***

Social bonds may form naturally in business relationships as some individuals are more skilled at developing social bonds or have a personal preference for a close relationship.

Ogden and McCorrison's (2007) study found that the largest disadvantage of long-term supplier relationships named by 62% of meeting venue managers was complacency.

Therefore, tourism stakeholders need to invest time in creating and nurturing social bonds as business relationships need to be strategically managed to fulfil their objectives. Mende and Bolton (2011) suggest that personalised strategies need to be developed in marketing relationships based on the individual's preference for attachment. The social bonds scale differentiates between the security and closeness bond and can be used to measure the strength of social bonds among tourism business partners.

This research found that the security bond is significant in most business relationships. Most people want to have a comfortable relationship with their tourism partner and expect that person to be responsible, dependable and available when required. This may be difficult to achieve when managing stakeholder relationships with individuals who have different needs, preferences and expectations, especially in an international or multicultural context (Morakabati et al., 2017). Hyperactivation of the attachment system can result in continuous insecurity which leads to over-dependence (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Therefore, tourism partners need to consider how to effectively manage the security bond so there is shared responsibility and decision-making to avoid one party becoming overburdened and constantly assuming the role of the parent figure. However, deactivation of the attachment system can result in detachment (Bowlby, 1980) which leads to avoiding dependence. In this case, an emergency situation may provide an opportunity to develop the security bond. Since the strongest bonds are formed in adversity (Mayselless & Popper, 2007), a crisis can test the social bond which has been recognised as an indicator of the strength of



the relationship (Liljander & Strandvik, 1995). The way the business partner behaves and supports the other in times of need cements the security bond and can lead to a stronger relationship.

Whereas the security bond can be managed, the closeness bond is based on personal preference as not everyone wants to be close to business partners (Price & Arnould, 1999; Haytko, 2004). Kattiyapornpong (2009) found that tourism relationships vary considerably across the very close to very distant spectrum. Therefore, a tourism manager needs to find out whether their partner prefers a closer or more distant relationship since building the closeness bond takes time and effort. Those business partners who invest emotionally in the relationship will want to talk about things other than work, share advice and will value less formal communications such as gossip. It is important to invest time in having these more personal, deeper conversations to develop the closeness bond. Finding a shared interest such as a love of football can also create the closeness bond based on something meaningful to both parties. Page et al.'s (1999) study found that most small tourism business owners are motivated by enjoyment of their work, so the closeness bond may develop while working together. Other strategies for creating the closeness bond include socialising together during or outside work and sharing memorable experiences since doing pleasant things together is likely to increase liking for the other person (Byrne, 1971). Trauer and Ryan (2005) define tourism encounters as 'service relationships with emotional attachments' (p. 481), which suggests that the tourism sector offers the opportunity to create unforgettable experiences not only for visitors but also for tourism stakeholders and partners as part of a business relationship. For example, familiarisation trips are well recognised as a strategy used for tour operators and the travel trade (Reid, Smith, & McCloskey, 2008); however, their value in facilitating networking between tourism stakeholders through showcasing what the destination has to offer, has not been fully explored.

## ***Conclusion***

This study has developed and tested the first multidimensional scale which measures social bonds based on attachment theory in tourism business relationships. A preliminary scale created from the attachment literature was modified following in-depth interviews and then tested in three separate questionnaire-based surveys involving tourism and hospitality professionals. Following Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the data, results confirmed two distinct social bonds: the security bond and the closeness bond, which reflect the main characteristics of attachment. The social bonds scale is the main contribution of this study. The authors have suggested further tourism business contexts which may benefit from using the social bonds scale and proposed how tourism managers can develop and maintain security and closeness bonds with their business partners as a strategy to benefit from the positive outcomes of strong business relationships.

## ***Research Limitations***

It is important to acknowledge the main limitations of this research. The first limitation is the sample sizes of participants for the three studies so it is recommended to retest the scale using a larger sample. The second limitation is that only one party in the relationship was asked to complete a questionnaire. This may have led to a biased view of the relationship. If the hotel's business partner had also been asked to complete the questionnaire, then the social bonds may have been perceived differently. The third limitation is that the participants in the research were mainly from the UK (Study 1 included international participants but it was a small-scale study) so the scale needs to be tested in different cultural contexts. Rodriguez and Wilson (2002) included both US and Mexican managers in their study of social bonds among partners in strategic alliances and found differences attributed to the US individualist and

Mexican collectivist cultures. The fourth limitation is the study's focus on dyadic relationships instead of wider tourism networks. Bosse and Coughlan (2016) identify different relationship bonds (though not social bonds) from the perspective of stakeholders and propose that bonds can create value in stakeholder relationships. They propose that managing relationship bonds is central to stakeholder theory; therefore, it is suggested that the study is repeated in the context of a tourism stakeholder network such as a destination management organisation (DMO) and its partners. Morakabati et al.'s (2017) study found collaboration and knowledge-sharing to be important among tourism stakeholders in emergency management; therefore, it would be useful to explore the role of social bonds as an antecedent of collaboration and knowledge-sharing in this context.

#### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the researchers.