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BLOGS VS VLOGS: EVALUATION OF CHINESE AUDIENCE RESONANCE IN SLOW TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Slow tourism has been implemented in rural areas and small towns in China for over a decade. However, the effectiveness of utilizing blogs or vlogs for promoting slow tourism destinations varies significantly. This study explored the reasons for the differences in marketing effectiveness of slow tourism destinations from the perspective of audience resonance. A total of 231 college students participated in the study and PLS-SEM was employed for hypothesis testing. The study results revealed positive impacts of value accord, expectation fitting, and cultural credibility on cognitive resonance. Additionally, there were positive impacts of slowness, self-congruence, and entertainment on emotional resonance. These factors further contribute to audience resonance in slow tourism. Emotional resonance turned out to be the driving factor of audience resonance. In addition, this research has also proved that the degree of resonance is the same whether the information carrier is text, photo, or video. No prior research has quantitatively validated the audience resonance in a slow tourism setting. This study addresses this knowledge gap and adds to the body of knowledge on slow tourism marketing and resonance theory.

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INTRODUCTION

With the arrival of the leisure era (Hong, 2020; Li & Wu, 2020), Chinese tourists are highly inclined to stay in one place for several days, experience the local folklore and slow-paced life, and live like the locals (Ji, 2021). Concurrently, Chinese nationals also tend to choose leisure tourism activities in villages or small towns near their residences due to the influence of COVID-19 in recent years (Chao & Chen, 2020; Dai et al., 2021). During the Qingming Festival in 2022, the percentage of orders for trips to rural areas increased by 20% compared to 2019. Additionally, the proportion of local urban residents booking countryside B&Bs in hotels rose to 60%, marking a 35% year-on-year increase (Surging Views, 2022). The surge in travel demand and evolving preferences are expected to spur a new wave of growth in slow tourism within villages and small towns.

However, the promotion of slow tourism in rural China has faced challenges in marketing. Slow tourism offers a distinct experience from mass tourism (Mavric et al., 2021) and requires tailored marketing strategies to attract travelers to embrace this alternative travel style. Moreover, many villages and small towns in rural China are lesser-known tourist destinations, lacking a strong economic foundation and visibility. Limited marketing funds have forced many villages and small towns to choose low-cost marketing methods, such as incentivizing travelers to post travel blogs (texts and photos as the information carrier) or vlogs (video as the information carrier), to highlight the destinations. Nevertheless, the marketing outcomes achieved show significant disparities. For instance, the number of likes garnered by vlogs showcasing slow tourism on the Douyin platform varies widely, ranging from just a few to hundreds of thousands. Additionally, the engagement levels (e.g. likes and shares) for travel vlogs featuring the same slow tourism destination also show considerable fluctuations. In explaining this phenomenon, the sociological and communication literature has proposed the resonance theory (McDonnell et al., 2017). Many scholars believe the information will have a better dissemination effect if external information can resonate with the audience (Snow et al., 1986; Giorgi, 2017; McDonnell et al., 2017) and can cause changes in the audience's attitude and behavior (Wan, 2008).

Although resonance theory has been applied in previous empirical tourism research, these applications have primarily focused on exploring the relationship between various theoretically proposed factors of resonance and variables such as tourists' attitudes (Wan, 2008) and travel intentions (Cheng et al., 2020). It neglected to verify the relationship

between influencing factors and resonance, which was the basis of previous research. Therefore, this research attempts to fill in the missing link by utilizing quantitative research methods to clarify the influencing factors of cognitive resonance and emotional resonance and verify the relationship between cognitive, emotional, and audience resonances. In addition, some scholars mentioned that vlogs are superior to traditional blogs in information dissemination when studying the marketing effects of travel blogs and vlogs separately (Safko, 2010; Shao et al., 2019; Sizan et al., 2022) but this assertion lacks empirical evidence, and only a small number of scholars have conducted comparative studies on blogs and vlogs, with little research exploring their impact on the degree of resonance. Therefore, this study also utilized different information carriers (blogs or vlogs) as control variables to explore the degree of their influence on resonance.

This paper is structured as follows. Literature review provides insight into slow tourism, resonance theory, and the two information carriers, outlining the research hypotheses. Later, the research methodology is detailed, focusing on data collection and analysis. The research findings based on the five hypotheses followed by discussions and conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Slow Tourism

Slow tourism originated from a “Slow Food Movement” against fast food initiated by Carlo Petrini in 1986 (Petrini & Padovani, 2009; Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Meng & Choi, 2016; Shang et al., 2020; Huang & Jordan, 2021). The Slow Food Movement gave rise to the Cittaslow movement in Italy in 1999, which developed slow tourism (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010; Heitmann et al., 2011).

In the 1990s, slow tourism focused primarily on its sustainable characteristics, but today it is evident that it encompasses much more than that (Ildikó & Zsuzsanna, 2020). Although slow tourism has not been clearly defined in tourism literature, some scholars attempted to define it from the perspective of multiple principles, thoughts, and behavior patterns (Calzati & de Salvo, 2017). Slow tourism advocates reducing travel frequency and encouraging tourists to stay longer at their destination rather than travel more frequently. This encouragement leads tourists to prefer local resources and products and choose short-distance travel destinations by utilizing sustainable transportation modes (Caffyn, 2012; Losada & Mota, 2019). In addition to transportation, slow tourists are more likely to have an

immersive experience by buying from local vendors, enjoying local food, walking in the countryside, and interacting with locals in the local market (Rand & Heath, 2009; Losada & Mota, 2019). Chinese scholars primarily concentrated on the quality experience facilitated by slow tourism and underscored the importance of minimizing journey duration to maximize tourists' stay in the destination (Zong, 2011). Nevertheless, they did not pay sufficient attention to the mode of transportation as a significant experiential aspect (Chen & Yu, 2018). Resultantly, in recent years, the focus of slow tourism has shifted from purely environmental sustainability to time and space studies in ways that promote personal satisfaction and well-being (Li & Wu, 2020).

The Theory of Resonance

In the sociology of culture, media, and social movements, resonance is one of the most commonly utilized metaphors (Snow et al., 1986) and is employed to explain "how culture works" (Schudson, 1989). When examining the reasons behind the advantage of specific discourses, messages, or cultural objects over others, resonance serves as a criterion, whereby aligning with the general cultural worldview of the receiving audiences confers an advantage (McDonnell et al., 2017).

In the articles by McDonnell et al. (2017) and Giorgi (2017), resonance is discussed and analyzed as a theoretical concept. Both articles introduce the notion of resonance and explore the factors that contribute to its development. Giorgi (2017) refined various interpretations of resonance and defined it as the audience's personal and experiential connection to the content, emphasizing a fit on both cognitive and emotional levels. In contrast, McDonnell et al. (2017) viewed resonance as a dynamic process of formation rather than a static state, highlighting the interactions among individuals that lead to resonance when cultural elements assist in problem-solving or meaning-making. While these two perspectives differ, they both underscore the significance of cognitive resonance and emotional resonance in the formation of resonance.

Giorgi (2017) highlighted the importance of familiarity in creating cognitive resonance, contrasting with McDonnell et al. (2017), who emphasized the role of novelty in eliciting cognitive resonance experiences. Both researchers emphasized emotional resonance, with McDonnell et al. (2017) noting the potential for strong emotions to trigger resonance. Recognizing the critical roles of cognitive and emotional resonance, scholars in the tourism field have incorporated these aspects into their studies (Su et

al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2020). According to the discussions above, H1 and H2 are formulated as follows:

H1: *Cognitive resonance has a positive effect on audiences' resonance.*

H2: *Emotional resonance has a positive effect on audiences' resonance.*

Cognitive resonance

Cognitive resonance is based on the object's attraction to the audience's values, beliefs, and understanding (Shang et al., 2017), which is the perceived alignment of a message with central or prominent understandings and ideas for a certain audience (Giorgi, 2017). Wan (2008) has proposed that "expectation fitting" and "value accord" affect the generation of cognitive resonance, which encompasses the concept of overlap between those features stored in an individual's long-term memories and those contained in messages. A good fit between what is expected by audience and what is received from information is referred to as "expectation fitting". Similarly, "value accord" refers to the congruence of the message content with the values held by the individual. The match between external stimuli and the individual's expectations or values can have a resonance effect if the received information adequately matches the individual's expectations or targets their values (Wan, 2008).

Cognitive resonance may seem easy to achieve by getting to know the audience and connecting with their understandings, expectations, values, or beliefs. Nevertheless, even if the content fits the audience's beliefs, the process can be threatened by "empirical credibility," "cultural credibility," and "moderate novelty" (Giorgi, 2017). The message's relationship with the audience's personal experiences and lifestyles is referred to as "empirical credibility" (Snow et al., 1986; Benford & Snow, 2000). If the message is not aligned with the audience's lived experience, it may fail to resonate (Babb, 1996; Giorgi, 2017). On the other hand, "cultural credibility" refers to a relationship to the "cultural codes" that are prevalent and present in the public sphere at a given moment (Steinberg, 1998; Giorgi, 2017). According to "cultural credibility", the process of familiarity is enhanced when framing can align with accessible cultural norms, while it is hindered when it lacks coherence with the broader cultural context (Giorgi, 2017; Weber et al., 2008). Familiarity is fundamental to achieving resonance (Wan, 2008; Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010). Mixing familiar and unfamiliar elements can create a "moderate novelty" (Giorgi & Weber, 2015), ensuring intelligibility while stimulating audiences' interests, which is conducive to achieving cognitive resonance (Giorgi, 2017).

A similar concept of “moderate novelty” is also mentioned by Cheng et al. (2020), who argued that information acquisition could cause cognitive resonance among audiences. A moderate mix of familiarity and unfamiliarity enables the audience to acquire useful information driven by curiosity and need (Berger, 2014), thereby generating cognitive resonance (Cheng et al., 2020). Furthermore, another cognitive resonance driving factor in their investigation was “source credibility”. “Source credibility” refers to the perceived credibility of information sources by individual audiences, which is the likelihood that the speaker will provide reliable information (Chen et al., 2014; Cheng et al., 2020). According to previous studies on influencer marketing and communications, the credibility of “micro-speakers” substantially impacts customers, and these individuals are more susceptible to being persuaded by more reliable speakers (Xiao et al., 2018; Schouten et al., 2021). H3a-H3f are formulated as follows in light of the aforementioned discussions:

H3a-H3f: (a) *Expectation fitting*, (b) *value accord*, (c) *empirical credibility*, (d) *cultural credibility*, (e) *moderate novelty*, and (f) *source credibility have positive effects on cognitive resonance*.

Emotional resonance

The arousal of an audience’s emotions, enthusiasms, and wishes is the foundation of emotional resonance (Shang et al., 2017), which is a message’s emotional connection to the audience’s “passions,” “wishes,” or “aspirations” (Giorgi, 2017). It is the feeling of an emotion, or a collection of emotions, which binds a product or service to the target audience’s identity (Giorgi, 2017). In order to enhance this sense of identity, embedding emotion (Giorgi, 2017) when disseminating a product or service is necessary, which indicates embedding the main emotional concept to be expressed by the product or service into the dissemination content to evoke the audience’s corresponding emotions.

According to a previous theoretical analysis of emotional resonance, it is evident that measuring the emotional resonance of slow tourism necessitates focusing on the key emotional concepts expressed by slow tourism. Although slow tourism is a broad concept covering all aspects, from slowing down activities to the pursuit of happiness (Fullagar et al., 2012), some scholars have made conclusions regarding its characteristics. McKercher and Du Cros (2003) summarized the core value of slow tourism as bringing a slower rhythm to tourists. Honoré (2004) pointed out that making time to relax and enjoying the journey are principles of slow travel.

Yang and Zhou (2018) believed its characteristics include slow, pleasant, and self-actualization. Lin et al. (2020) indicated that slow tourism is characterized by the wise use of time, the free mentality of wandering, and enjoying the details of local life and the destination's scenery.

Based on the research by the aforementioned scholars on the characteristics of slow tourism, it can be concluded that the emotional concepts associated with slow tourism primarily encompass "entertainment" and "slowness". The term "entertainment" in the realm of social media pertains to how users utilize platforms for leisure and relaxation (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011; Lee & Ma, 2012); its value lies in fulfilling users' needs for escapism, enjoyment, emotional release, and anxiety reduction (McQuail, 2005). Consequently, "entertainment" serves not only as a key motivator for media consumption (Cheng et al., 2020) but also as a crucial aspect of the slow tourism experience (Conway & Timms, 2012). The slow tourism approach enhances the enjoyment and satisfaction of slow tourists or travelers (Oh et al., 2016; Kostilnikova et al., 2022). Hence, this study contends that "entertainment", as an emotional element, has the potential to evoke emotional resonance among audiences towards slow tourism.

Another essential feature of slow tourism is "slowness". The definition of "slowness" in this article is not literal but has two distinct meanings. On the one hand, "slowness" refers to modifying the daily time relationship (Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011). On the other hand, it indicates slowing down the whole process of the holiday (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011). The adjustment in time allocation and utilization starkly contrasts the sense of time urgency experienced under the pressures of daily life. This adjustment enables individuals to experience a slower sense of time and a more relaxed, comfortable emotional state. Thus, the slowness experience is anticipated to promote the audience's emotional resonance.

Emotional resonance also depends on enthusiastically identifying with a particular individual or product's connection to the self-concept (Voronov & Weber, 2016; Giorgi, 2017), leading to the concept of "self-congruence". The matching of a person's authentic or imagined self-concept with the image of another consumer is referred to as "self-congruence" (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Furthermore, researchers proposed that agreement with others' desired identity, image, or consistency between one's own beliefs and those of others would boost involvement (Rich et al., 2010). Therefore, it is posited that the consistency between the real or desired image of viewers and travel bloggers or vloggers could drive viewers' emotional

resonance. According to these statements, this study will test the following hypotheses:

H4a-H4c: *(a) Entertainment, (b) slowness, and (c) self-congruence have positive effects on emotional resonance.*

The Information Carrier: Travel Blogs and Vlogs

Travel blogs are personal online diaries regarding future, present, or past travel experiences to make the travel experience accessible to the public (Litvin et al., 2008), including friends, family, and other travelers (Pühringer & Taylor, 2008). This form of writing emerged with the advent of the internet, which is now flooded with travel blogs (Sales Oliveira, 2020). Travelers' online distribution narratives regarding their trip experiences are valuable information sources for gaining insight into their perspectives, actions, and expectations (Alrawadieh et al., 2018). Furthermore, as travel and tourism services are intangible (Law & Cheung, 2010), and blogs are considered more reliable than traditional marketing communications (Akehurst, 2009), travel blogs play a significant role as a form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that travelers consult during their vacation planning process (Tse & Zhang, 2013).

Compared with blogs, travel vlogs primarily record video bloggers' travel stories and personalized travel-related information through videos rather than texts and photos (Griffith & Papacharissi, 2010). Multimedia resources, such as images and videos, would simplify a text detailing a vacation experience (Chen et al., 2014). While browsing blogs containing such content, individuals are more likely to experience vivid, engaged, and emotive psychological states (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Govers et al., 2007). Hence, according to Safko (2010), vlogging is an effective means of communication since the audience can see body language, feelings, and voice. Video is a more effective technique than photographs or written information for communicating with viewers (Sizan et al., 2022). Other authors' qualitative research findings revealed that short videos and textual travel blogs thrive at revealing location images in distinct ways (Shao et al., 2019). Information carrier was used as a control variable in this study based on the discussions above. Specifically, we will test the following hypotheses:

H5: *Travel vlog (video as the information carrier) regarding slow tourism has stronger positive effect on audiences' resonance than travel blog (texts and photos as the information carrier).*

For illustration purposes, Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model that guided the investigation of the research hypotheses.

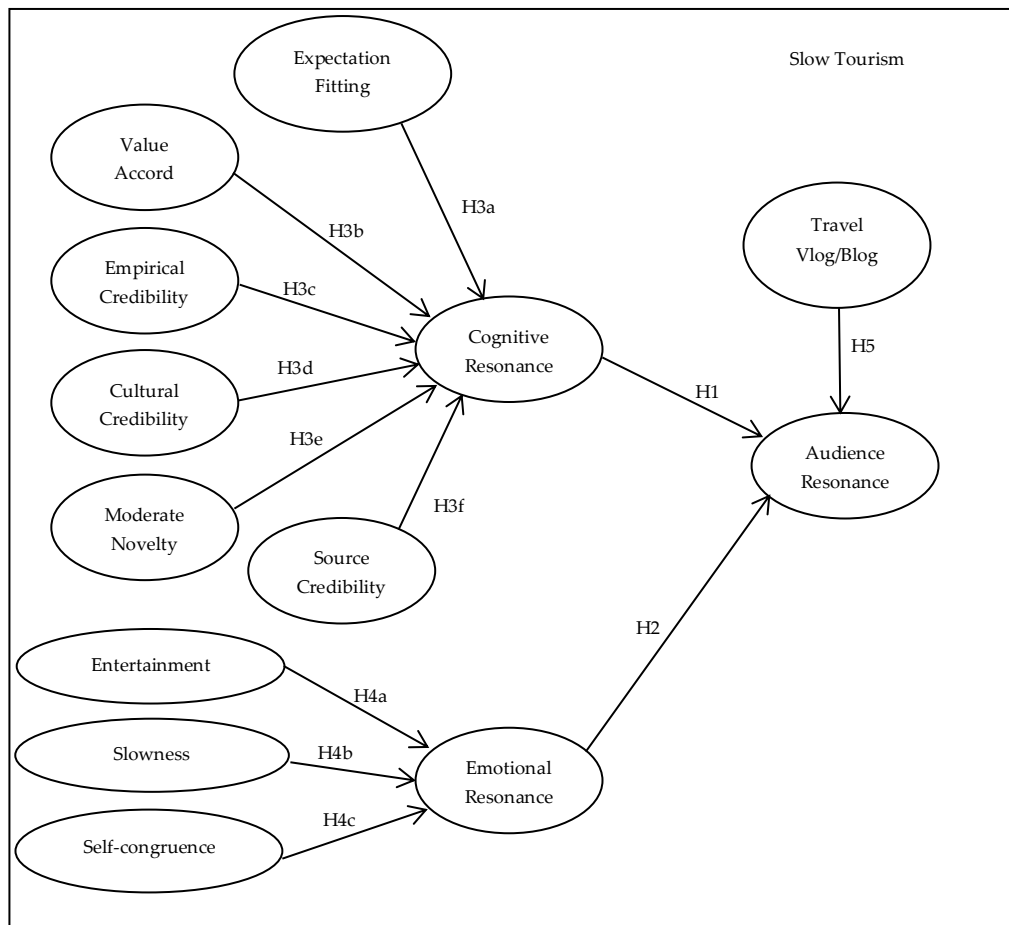


Figure 1. *Theoretical model and research hypotheses*

METHODOLOGY

Sample Procedure and Data Collection

This paper primarily verifies the applicability of resonance theory in slow tourism marketing. Hence, the theoretical application is the goal of this study. According to the conclusion of Calder et al. (1981), the theory must be evaluated by falsification procedures to evaluate its scientificity. In addition, a homogeneous sample of respondents must be selected and verified by experiment. Sample representativeness is less important in theory application (Calder et al., 1981) since the study aims to examine the impact in a specific research environment rather than extrapolate the findings to a real-world situation (Cook et al., 1979). Typically, theory

application studies involve lab experiments with student participants in carefully controlled circumstances (Sarstedt et al., 2018).

By following these principles, an experiment was conducted on college students at the same university in China. The subjects were randomly divided into two groups. One group filled out the questionnaire after reading a travel blog, and the other group filled out the questionnaire after watching a travel vlog. The travel blog and vlog both document slow tourism activities in Chinese villages or small towns. When choosing the travel blog, the search focused on the travel blog channel on Mafengwo, one of the three major travel websites in mainland China (Wu & Huang, 2014), using the keyword “slow tourism”, and the selection was based on the highest reading volume. Next, we chose a Chinese blog focusing on slow tourism in Qingmuchuan town. The blog comprises 733 words and 35 photos, primarily highlighting the slow tourism resources of Qingmuchuan. When selecting the travel vlog, a search was conducted using the keyword “slow tourism” on Douyin, one of the major video social platforms in mainland China (NETEASE, 2021). After considering the vlogs based on the number of likes, we ultimately chose a 42-second video showcasing a travel guide for Enhe Town. In the vlog, the video creator shared her slow tourism experience in Enhe in Chinese.

After a week of subject recruitment, 320 college students finished the experiment, and eventually, 320 questionnaires were returned in June 2022. As actual visitors tend to gather more information about a destination compared to potential tourists (Baloglu, 1998), there may be a variance in how potential and actual tourists resonate with destination travel blogs and vlogs. Thus, this study implemented a screening question to exclude actual visitors. 6 participants selected “Yes” for the screening question (“Have you been to the place in the travel blog or vlog?”), while 83 respondents failed to provide complete answers for all variables. Following the deletion of these replies, 231 (72.18%) legitimate responses were available for data analysis. A total of 104 responses were for the travel blog group, while 127 responses focused on the travel vlog group.

Measurement

All the measures and the corresponding items shown in Appendix 1 were mostly adapted or developed from previous studies. This study specifically utilized two items to measure expectation fitting and value accord, respectively, adopted from Wan (2008). Additionally, one item was added, measuring expectation fitting (“The information provided in the travel blog

or vlog met my expectations.”). Furthermore, another item was included, measuring value accord (“The information provided in the travel blog or vlog was very valuable to me.”). These items were developed based on the definitions of these variables in Wan’s (2008) study. Four items with moderate novelty were derived from Giorgi’s (2017) definition, which was adapted from the concept of ‘information acquisition’ in the research of Cheng et al. (2020). The scale for entertainment (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011; Lee & Ma, 2012), source credibility (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Zha et al., 2018), and self-congruence (Sirgy & Su, 2000) were previously validated in Cheng et al. (2020).

The items developed to measure empirical and cultural credibility were based on definitions by Giorgi (2017). Four items of slowness were developed by the authors in this study according to the meaning of slowness based on the conclusions by Serdane et al. (2020). Similarly, the audiences’ cognitive and emotional resonance instruments were developed by Shang et al. (2017) and Giorgi (2017). All items are measured by a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Analytical Methods

PLS-SEM was employed to estimate the measurement model and test the hypotheses using the statistical program SmartPLS version 3.3.9 (Ringle et al., 2015). The PLS-SEM technique provides the extra benefit of estimating the measurement and structural models (Hair et al., 2017). For PLS-SEM, previous research has suggested a sample threshold of as little as 100 samples (Reinartz et al., 2009). Alternatively, a more limited minimum sample size based on statistical power might be used (Roldan & Sanchez-Franco, 2012; Hair et al., 2014). G*Power was utilized to compute the sample size based on statistical power (Faul et al., 2009), which suggested that a sample size of 98 was needed for model testing. Resultantly, it can be fairly inferred that the sample sizes were sufficient to address the study’s objectives in both circumstances.

RESULTS

Common Method Bias

When the data is gathered by self-reported questionnaires, common method variance (CMV) must be addressed, particularly when both the predictor and criterion variables are received from the same individual (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Thus, the common method bias was tested using a

marker variable, attitude toward the color blue, as suggested by Miller and Simmering (2022). In this method, the R^2 of the three variables of cognitive resonance ($R^2 = 0.730$), emotional resonance ($R^2 = 0.689$), and audience resonance ($R^2 = 0.639$) was first calculated. Subsequently, the marker variable was added to the model, and the R^2 of the three variables was calculated. The results were 0.734, 0.690, and 0.644, respectively. The variation range of R^2 is less than 10%, indicating that common method bias is not a serious issue with the data.

Profile of The Respondents

The research sample for this study is composed of university students, aged between 18 and 26 years old, from the same institution. The detailed sample profiles of the group blog and group vlog participants are presented in Table 1. In the group blog, there were 73 women (70%) and 31 men (30%), resulting in an imbalanced gender ratio, which was even more pronounced in the group vlog. Within the group vlog, 73% of the participants were science and engineering students majoring in mathematics, statistics, and computer engineering, while the remaining 27% studied business management, tourism management, or hospitality management. In contrast, the distribution of majors in the group blog was closer to a 1:1 ratio. The primary motivations for travel among both groups were physical health and cultural experiences. Due to the impact of COVID-19, over 60% of respondents in both groups typically took 1-2 trips per year, with 24% and 14% respectively indicating that they did not engage in any tourism activities during the year.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Variable	Category	Blog		Vlog	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	31	30	26	20
	Female	73	70	101	80
Travel motivation	Physical health motivation	45	43	43	34
	Cultural motivation	42	40	53	42
	Communication motives	9	9	19	14
	Motivation of status and prestige	6	6	7	6
	Other motivations	2	2	5	4
Annual number of trips	Never	25	24	17	14
	1-2 times	65	62	88	69
	3-4 times	10	10	17	14
	4-5 times	3	3	2	1
	6 times and above	1	1	3	2

Measurement Model

This study tested the model established utilizing a two-step approach, as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019) and Ramayah et al. (2018), the measurement model was first evaluated to determine the reliability and validity of the instruments utilized. Subsequently, to verify our proposed hypothesis, the structural model was examined. As shown in Table 2, the Average Variance Extracted (AVEs) all exceed 0.5, and the Composite Reliability (CRs) all surpass 0.7. Only one loading was below 0.7, which is as well acceptable (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2. *Measurement Model for Constructs*

Variable	Item	Loadings/Weights	CR	AVE
Cultural Credibility	CC1	0.890	0.933	0.823
	CC2	0.933		
	CC3	0.898		
Cognitive Resonance	CR1	0.953	0.961	0.892
	CR2	0.947		
	CR3	0.933		
Empirical Credibility	EC1	0.934	0.919	0.792
	EC2	0.927		
	EC3	0.802		
Expectation Fitting	EF1	0.949	0.955	0.877
	EF2	0.927		
	EF3	0.932		
Entertainment	EN1	0.694	0.904	0.704
	EN2	0.880		
	EN3	0.891		
	EN4	0.875		
Emotional Resonance	ER1	0.876	0.935	0.827
	ER2	0.927		
	ER3	0.925		
Moderate Novelty	MN1	0.871	0.925	0.755
	MN2	0.880		
	MN3	0.907		
	MN4	0.817		
Source Credibility	SC1	0.932	0.962	0.865
	SC2	0.926		
	SC3	0.919		
	SC4	0.943		
Self-congruence	SFC1	0.920	0.944	0.809
	SFC2	0.866		
	SFC3	0.923		
	SFC4	0.887		
Slowness	SL1	0.877	0.934	0.781
	SL2	0.895		
	SL3	0.893		
	SL4	0.868		
Value Accord	VA1	0.927	0.947	0.856
	VA2	0.924		
	VA3	0.925		

In step 2, the discriminant validity was examined by using the HTMT criterion, which was proposed by Henseler et al. (2015) and revised by Franke and Sarstedt (2019). The values of HTMT were all less than the mode lenient criterion of ≤ 0.90 , as indicated in Table 3. These validation evaluations demonstrated the reliability and validity of the scale items.

Table 3. *Discriminant Validity (HTMT)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Audiences Resonance													
2. Cognitive Resonance	0.657												
3. Cultural Credibility	0.553	0.745											
4. Emotional Resonance	0.831	0.746	0.609										
5. Empirical Credibility	0.551	0.723	0.817	0.572									
6. Entertainment	0.563	0.611	0.517	0.674	0.537								
7. Expectation Fitting	0.613	0.842	0.754	0.718	0.738	0.627							
8. Moderate Novelty	0.549	0.758	0.737	0.643	0.710	0.585	0.808						
9. Self-congruence	0.746	0.743	0.631	0.848	0.624	0.644	0.714	0.621					
10. Slowness	0.760	0.765	0.640	0.866	0.632	0.683	0.730	0.641	0.850				
11. Source Credibility	0.624	0.746	0.785	0.643	0.778	0.624	0.781	0.746	0.671	0.682			
12. Travel blog/vlog	0.040	0.060	0.106	0.033	0.065	0.152	0.075	0.088	0.055	0.042	0.107		
13. Value Accord	0.647	0.877	0.705	0.730	0.745	0.641	0.893	0.827	0.722	0.694	0.769	0.156	

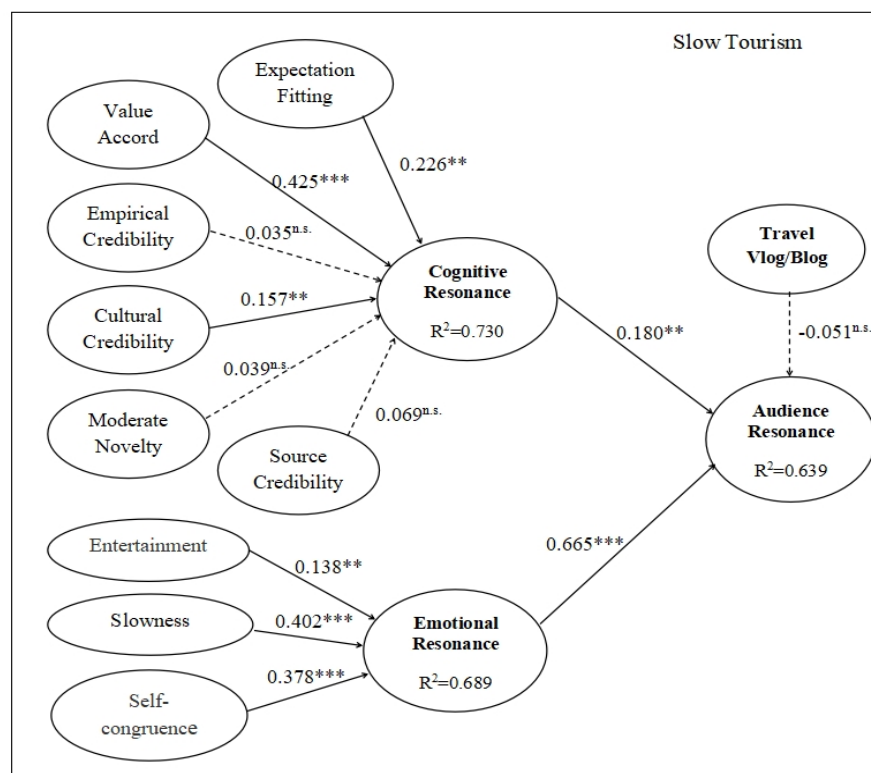


Figure 2. *PLS results for the research model testing*

Structural Model

The multivariate skewness and kurtosis were evaluated, as indicated by Hair et al. (2017) and Cain et al. (2016). The findings indicated that the data was not multivariate normal, Mardia's multivariate skewness ($\beta = 34.785$, $p < 0.01$) and Mardia's multivariate kurtosis ($\beta = 270.154$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, using a 5,000-sample re-sample bootstrapping approach (Ramayah et al., 2018), the path coefficients, the standard errors, t-values, and p-values for the structural model were calculated in accordance with Hair et al.'s (2019) recommendations. It was suggested to use a variety of criteria, including p-values, confidence intervals, and effect sizes, in response to the argument made by Hahn and Ang (2017) that p-values are not trustworthy criteria for testing the significance of hypotheses. The criteria that were used to evaluate the developed hypotheses are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. *Hypothesis Testing Direct Effects*

	Relationships	Std.Beta	Std.Dev.	t-value	p-value	BCI LL	BCI UL	f ²	Supported
H1	Cognitive Resonance -> Audiences Resonance	0.180	0.063	2.867	0.002	0.076	0.283	0.047	Yes
H2	Emotional Resonance -> Audiences Resonance	0.665	0.058	11.516	$p < .001$	0.567	0.758	0.646	Yes
H3a	Expectation Fitting -> Cognitive Resonance	0.226	0.084	2.701	0.003	0.096	0.373	0.048	Yes
H3b	Value Accord -> Cognitive Resonance	0.425	0.100	4.269	$P < .001$	0.264	0.587	0.174	Yes
H3c	Empirical Credibility -> Cognitive Resonance	0.035	0.058	0.599	0.275	-0.061	0.129	0.002	No
H3d	Cultural Credibility -> Cognitive Resonance	0.157	0.068	2.294	0.011	0.043	0.267	0.032	Yes
H3e	Moderate Novelty -> Cognitive Resonance	0.039	0.068	0.579	0.281	-0.062	0.158	0.002	No
H3f	Source Credibility -> Cognitive Resonance	0.069	0.067	1.029	0.152	-0.036	0.186	0.006	No
H4a	Entertainment -> Emotional Resonance	0.138	0.058	2.354	0.009	0.038	0.228	0.035	Yes
H4b	Slowness -> Emotional Resonance	0.402	0.075	5.331	$p < .001$	0.272	0.521	0.185	Yes
H4c	Self-congruence -> Emotional Resonance	0.378	0.072	5.215	$p < .001$	0.257	0.496	0.173	Yes

Note: 95% confidence interval with a bootstrapping of 5,000 was used

The six predictors' impact on Cognitive Resonance was examined first. As indicated in Figure 2, the R^2 was 0.730 ($Q^2 = 0.641$), which shows that the six predictors explained 73.0% of the variance in Cognitive Resonance. Expectation fitting ($\beta = 0.226$, $p < 0.01$), value accord ($\beta = 0.425$, $p < 0.01$), and cultural credibility ($\beta = 0.157$, $p < 0.05$) were all significantly related to CR. Thus, H3a, H3b, and H3d were accepted. The remaining three variables did not pass the test. Therefore, H3c, H3e, and H3f were not supported. The three predictors' impact on Emotional Resonance was tested. The R^2 was 0.689 ($Q^2 = 0.561$), which shows that all the predictors explained 68.9% of the variance in Emotional Resonance. Entertainment ($\beta =$

0.138, $p < 0.01$), slowness ($\beta = 0.402$, $p < 0.01$), and self-congruence ($\beta = 0.378$, $p < 0.01$) were all significantly related to ER. Thus, H4a, H4b, and H4c passed the test. The effect of Cognitive Resonance and Emotional Resonance on audience resonance was tested, with an R^2 of 0.639 ($Q^2 = 0.627$), indicating that Cognitive Resonance and Emotional Resonance explain 63.9% of the variance in audience resonance, which supports H1 and H2. And the control variable ($\beta = -0.051$, $p = 0.102 > 0.05$) did not pass the test. So H5 was not supported.

DISCUSSION

This paper first demonstrated the resonance theory of Giorgi (2017) and McDonnell et al. (2017) in the slow tourism context. Audience resonance arises from cognitive resonance and emotional resonance. Interestingly, the effect of emotional resonance was far greater than cognitive resonance ($f^2_{ER} = 0.646 > f^2_{CR} = 0.047$). This conclusion demonstrates the importance of emotional resonance in resonance theory, which is consistent with Wan (2008) and Cheng et al. (2020). The effect of cognitive resonance on audience resonance was smaller than expected, which is different from previous theoretical studies that equate the role of cognitive resonance with emotional resonance (Giorgi, 2017; Shang et al., 2017).

Another interesting finding, which is consistent with Wan (2008), is that expectation fitting and value accord positively affect cognitive resonance. Nonetheless, the factors of empirical credibility and moderate novelty for cognitive resonance proposed by Giorgi (2017) had not passed the verification. Nevertheless, only cultural credibility passed, but the effect was small ($0.02 < f^2 = 0.032 < 0.15$). Contrary to Cheng et al. (2020), source credibility did not affect cognitive resonance. Empirical credibility, moderate novelty, and source credibility were not the conditions for cognitive resonance. This situation may be due to the current prevalence of blogs and vlogs, which exposes the audience to various bloggers' blogs or vloggers' vlogs daily. Each blog or vlog has a different degree of novelty, which has given birth to a phenomenon of exaggeration and distortion of facts, including rumors and false information (Deng & Wang, 2014). This phenomenon has led to a hidden and profound crisis of trust among the public (Li & Wu, 2020; Wang, 2020). In the case of an unfamiliar blogger's or vlogger's work, the audience's judgment of the blogger's or vlogger's credibility is insufficient to form a cognitive resonance. Similarly, the novelty of the information cannot promote cognitive resonance. Cognitive

resonance can be generated by information content only when it caters to the audience's expectations or values.

Third, consistent with previous studies (Rich et al., 2010; Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011; Oh et al., 2016; Kostilnikova et al., 2022), this study also confirmed the positive effects of entertainment, slowness, and self-congruence on emotional resonance. Nevertheless, the effect sizes of these three factors were different. Both slowness ($0.15 < f^2 = 0.185 < 0.35$) and self-congruence ($0.15 < f^2 = 0.173 < 0.35$) had a medium effect size on emotional resonance, while entertainment ($0.02 < f^2 = 0.035 < 0.15$) had only a small effect size. In addition, travel vlog had been proven to haven't stronger effect on audience resonance than travel blog, in contrast to the previous speculations (Safko, 2010; Shao et al., 2019; Sizan et al., 2022). In the slow tourism context, no difference exists between travel blogs (texts and photos as the information carrier) and travel vlogs (videos as the information carrier) in the process of audience resonance.

CONCLUSION

Theoretical Implications

The literature in the areas of media consumption, slow tourism marketing, and resonance theory is uniquely enriched by this study. First, this study validates the resonance theory through quantitative research methods within the context of slow tourism. Although this study is not the first to introduce resonance theory into tourism issues, it is the first to validate the internal structure of resonance with quantitative data. The theoretical conjecture of cognitive and emotional resonance in previous literature (Giorgi, 2017; McDonnell et al., 2017) was confirmed. Besides, three factors affecting cognitive resonance and emotional resonance were verified, respectively. Concurrently, emotional resonance is a more important resonance condition than cognitive resonance. These findings offer two pathways for slow tourism blogs or vlogs to resonate with the audience, through cognitive and emotional connections, thus contributing to the advancement of resonance theory.

Second, this research verifies that value accord, expectation fitting, and cultural credibility can promote cognitive resonance in publicity for slow tourism. Besides, slowness, self-congruence, and entertainment can enhance emotional resonance in slow tourism promotion. The study's results provide useful inspiration for the research on slow tourism marketing. On the cognitive level, slow tourism marketing must cater to the

audience's own views, opinions, and expectations of slow tourism in a specific regional culture. On the emotional level, slow tourism marketing should incorporate the elements of slowness and entertainment while simultaneously ensuring that the audience perceives alignment with the image portrayed by the blogger or vlogger. From a resonance perspective, this study provides an in-depth analysis and validation of the characteristics of slow tourism as described in previous literature (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011; Fullagar et al., 2012; Yang & Zhou, 2018; Lin et al., 2020). Hence, this study contributes significantly to the theory and marketing research of slow tourism.

Finally, by exploring how blogs and vlogs resonate in the setting of slow tourism, this study contributes a new viewpoint to the literature on media consumption. Previous literature has shown the important role of travel blogs (Wang et al., 2019; Xu & Zhang, 2021) and travel vlogs (Le & Hancer, 2021; He et al., 2022), respectively, for travel marketing. Some scholars (Safko, 2010; Shao et al., 2019; Sizan et al., 2022) believe that travel vlogs (videos as the information carrier) have a better communication effect than travel blogs (texts and photos as the information carrier). This study found that travel blogs and vlogs have the same effect on audience resonance in the communication process. This study further reveals that emotional resonance plays a crucial role in achieving audience resonance, regardless of whether it is through blogs or vlogs. This finding enriches the existing literature on the impact of social media in the field of tourism (Cheng et al., 2020; Madriz & Tejedor, 2020).

Managerial Implications

Practical implications could be suggested for slow tourism destinations, travel bloggers, and vloggers. This study provides insights into leveraging travel blogs or vlogs for slow tourism destination marketing agencies to resonate with potential customers. Results demonstrate that the content of a blog or vlog is more significant in evoking emotional resonance among audiences than the specific format of the medium itself. Based on the clarification of potential tourists' perspectives and expectations toward slow tourism, slow tourism destination marketing agencies need to go beyond mere product promotion through collaboration with travel bloggers or vloggers. Instead, they should emphasize three factors that have the potential to stimulate emotional resonance within the context of slow tourism. By setting creative activities around the theme of slowness and entertainment, ordinary tourists are encouraged to publish their blogs or

vlogs to inspire potential tourists to resonate with these blogs or vlogs regarding slow tourism destinations.

Travel bloggers and vloggers need to work on inspiring their audiences' emotional resonance if they want their audience to resonate with their message. When creating blogs or vlogs regarding slow tourism destinations, bloggers and vloggers need to start with the three elements of slowness, self-congruence, and entertainment, and create content that can convey slowness and entertainment emotions and inspire audiences to identify with the image of bloggers or vloggers in the destination. Hence, the content will resonate with the audience, and getting the audience's preference is easier.

Limitations of The Study

This study has several limitations, which will provide opportunities for future research. First and foremost, the influencing factors of cognitive resonance and emotional resonance in this study are all from the previous literature. Although six of the nine variables finally passed the test, the possibility of other variables cannot be completely ruled out. In particular, some factors (cultural credibility, expectation fitting, and entertainment) had small effect sizes, suggesting that other variables may fully explain people's resonance or that there are deeper reasons to be discovered. Future research may consider qualitative research methods to address this limitation.

Second, this study reveals the resonance principle of travel blogs or vlogs regarding slow tourism but does not involve other tourism activities or information. In the future, it can be expanded in terms of application breadth. Similar methods can be used to verify the information resonance principle of other tourism activities and social fields.

Third, this study is one of the first to employ quantitative research to investigate the factors that influence people's resonance with information. In the future, the relationship between information resonance and factors such as customer satisfaction, destination image, and audience's WOM can be examined, and the research depth of resonance theory in the field of tourism should be explored.

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Appendix 1

Construct	Indicator	Description
Expectation Fitting (Wan, 2008)	EF1	The information provided in the travel blog or vlog met my expectations.
	EF2	The information provided in the travel blog or vlog was consistent with what I think should be provided when introducing slow tourism.
	EF3	The information provided in this travel blog or vlog was what I expected if I will travel to the same destination.
Value Accord (Wan, 2008)	VA1	The information provided in the travel blog or vlog was very valuable to me.
	VA2	The information provided in the travel blog or vlog was valuable for me to decide whether to go to the same destination.
	VA3	The information provided in the travel blog or vlog was very valuable for me to decide whether to take a slow tourism.
Empirical Credibility (Giorgi, 2017)	EC1	I thought what I just read/watched is true.
	EC2	I thought what I just read/watched is credible.
	EC3	Just read/ watched was consistent with my travel experience or lifestyle.
Cultural Credibility (Giorgi, 2017)	CC1	I discovered the slow culture shown in the reading/watching material.
	CC2	I agreed with the slow culture shown in the reading/watching material.
	CC3	I thought slow culture in reading or watching material is consistent with popular perceptions of slow culture in society.
Moderate Novelty (Giorgi, 2017; Cheng et al., 2020)	MN1	I found out something new about this travel destination that I did not know before.
	MN2	I found out something new about slow tourism that I did not know before.
	MN3	I got travel information that interested me.
	MN4	I learned how to plan my trip if I were to go to this destination.
Source Credibility (Cheng et al., 2020)	SC1	The blogger/vlogger was trustworthy.
	SC2	The blogger/vlogger was authentic.
	SC3	The blogger/vlogger was knowledgeable.
	SC4	The blogger/vlogger was credible.
Entertainment (Cheng et al., 2020)	EN1	It helped me to pass time.
	EN2	It helped me to combat with boredom.
	EN3	It helped me to relax.
	EN4	It was entertaining.
Slowness (Serdane et al., 2020)	SL1	It gave me a feeling of slowing down.
	SL2	It gave me a leisurely state of mind.
	SL3	Different from the previous travel (life) experience, it gave me a new sense of time experience.
	SL4	It freed me from the shackles of not having enough time in my daily life.
Self-congruence (Cheng et al., 2020)	SFC1	The image of the blogger/vlogger was consistent with how I see myself.
	SFC2	The image of the blogger/vlogger was consistent with how I like to see myself.
	SFC3	The image of the blogger/vlogger was consistent with how I believe others see me.
	SFC4	The image of the blogger/vlogger was consistent with how I would like others to see me.
Cognitive Resonance (Giorgi, 2017; Shang et al., 2017)	CR1	From my understanding of slow tourism, I resonated with this travel blog/vlog.
	CR2	From my point of view on slow tourism, I resonated with this travel blog/vlog.
	CR3	From my values about slow tourism, I resonated with this travel blog/vlog.
Emotional Resonance (Giorgi, 2017; Shang et al., 2017)	ER1	This travel blog/vlog stirred up a change in my emotions (mood).
	ER2	This travel blog/vlog aroused my passion for slow tourism.
	ER3	This travel blog/vlog inspired me to participate in slow tourism.
Audience Resonance	AR	In general, I resonated with this travel blog/vlog.

EVALUATING TOURIST DISSATISFACTION WITH ASPECT-BASED SENTIMENT ANALYSIS USING SOCIAL MEDIA DATA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism satisfaction is essential for encouraging tourists to stay longer, spend more and return. However, visitor dissatisfaction can also prove useful for understanding any shortcomings of a tourist destination, and Twitter, Instagram and TripAdvisor reviews might be able to provide an insight into tourist perceptions and experiences. This study examines the major causes of tourist dissatisfaction with a tourism destination using an aspect-based sentiment analysis approach to understand the key points of negative tweets, posts or reviews. We examined 19,340 tweets, 7,712 Instagram posts and 25,483 reviews about Granada in Spain in order to evaluate the negative user's perceptions, discover management-related problems and provide feedback to destination management organizations to enable them to improve their services and operations. Our work contributes to computational methods to address tourism (dis)satisfaction with a process to identify the most important entities (places), an algorithm to identify aspects and opinions, and the use of word-trees to show the most important aspect-opinion tuples. In practical terms, we provide to tourism industry professionals and managers, as well as travelers, with methods to identify the reasons for tourist dissatisfaction from available social media data, in such a way that managerial strategies or travel plans can be improved.

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INTRODUCTION

Computational methods, algorithms and techniques are currently used as the baseline for understanding the customer experience and are crucial in marketing, politics and tourism, particularly because every internet-based activity leaves a digital footprint (Alaei et al., 2019). Some researchers have proposed data analysis frameworks to understand the huge amount of data, including meta data and textual data on social media, which has been created by tourists who have traveled to certain tourist destinations (Viñán-Ludeña & de Campos, 2022a).

Satisfaction is of critical importance in the tourism domain since it enables managers not only to obtain insights into the customer experience and customer satisfaction (Oh et al., 2022) but also feedback. According to Kim and Kim (2022), the main objective of corporate marketing activities is to focus on customer satisfaction management since this can increase customer loyalty, repurchase intention and can contribute to higher profitability.

In the past, tourism researchers relied on surveys to discover customer satisfaction but nowadays, we can use social media data from different platforms (i.e. TripAdvisor, Yelp, Google Travel², Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) to collect data from users' posts or tweets. It is fairly simple to collect data from these platforms thanks to the use of APIs³, crawlers⁴ or scrapers⁵ (Viñán-Ludeña, 2019). The results of social media data analysis provide researchers and professionals with an important advantage and a cheaper way to discover the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the places and services available at a tourist destination.

Many computational methods and techniques (i.e. machine learning, deep learning, soft computing, etc.) have to date been used by researchers to understand consumers' experiences (Viñán-Ludeña et al., 2022) and satisfaction. Online reviews, posts, tweets, comments and forums are important sources of data, and these can provide tourism professionals and managers with useful information about these topics. One of the most promising techniques that has been used in social media analysis to discover user satisfaction is sentiment analysis (SA) and this is based on natural language processing and other computational techniques including

² www.google.com/travel

³ An API or application programming interface.

⁴ Software downloads web pages.

⁵ Software takes the downloaded web pages and extracts data from these pages.

machine learning techniques, computational linguistics, etc. to gather opinions about an entity.

Sentiment analysis can be used at three different levels: firstly, document-level sentiment analysis aims to classify the entire document as expressing a positive, negative or neutral opinion. Secondly, sentence-level sentiment analysis whereby a text is split into sentences to identify the emotions (i.e. positive, negative, or neutral) about each one. And finally, aspect-based sentiment analysis (ABSA), which is the most challenging task in sentiment analysis and provides us with more precise information about an opinion. In ABSA, an opinion is a quintuple comprising the sentiment (or opinion) target or entity; entity attributes or aspects; the positive, negative, or neutral orientation about entity aspects; the opinion holder; and the opinion posting time. ABSA therefore performs a detailed analysis of customer/user/traveler feedback data so that managers and service providers can learn more about their customers in order to improve their services and meet users' needs.

Visitor feedback from structured data (Viñán-Ludeña et al., 2022) and unstructured information such as reviews, tweets or posts about a tourist destination undoubtedly plays a crucial role in tourism management. However, understanding and considering not only travelers' opinions but also their complaints or negative opinions can enable tourism managers to understand, identify and reflect on how to deal with any weaknesses in order to improve their services and operations. Our main aim in this article, therefore, is to provide an approach through aspect-based sentiment analysis (ABSA) to analyze visitors' dissatisfaction with a tourism destination using Instagram posts, tweets and TripAdvisor reviews. Our study involves efficient techniques that must be considered in ABSA and these include aspect extraction, aspect clustering, opinion extraction, and summarization. Accordingly, our work makes the following research contributions: firstly, since in previous ABSA studies, the authors knew the entities in advance (e.g. hotels, laptops, cameras, etc.), we therefore propose an approach to identify entities using a semi-supervised process which includes the use of the Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (BERT) tool and to classify related terms (a tourist destination resident fine-tunes and improves previously identified entities). Secondly, we propose a rule-based approach to aspect identification (e.g. price is an attribute, or aspect, of any hotel, or entity) and the opinion assignation of the entity-aspect (positive/negative). Thirdly, we perform aspect clustering by means of word embeddings as a novel approach. Fourthly, we propose a summarization approach through visualization in

order to understand customer satisfaction and experiences for a tourism destination and the services offered and this provides tourism managers and practitioners with useful information. Finally, we conduct experiments with this proposed approach using data from Twitter, TripAdvisor and Instagram posts about Granada in Spain.

This approach contributes to the existing literature because the processes of rule based aspect identification, opinion assignment and aspect clustering by means of word embeddings have not been performed before in the context of tourism (dis)satisfaction.

The remainder of this paper is organized in the following way: Background presents a theoretical overview of the different approaches in every ABSA stage. Literature review explores aspect-based sentiment analysis in tourism. Methodology examines data collection, data processing, entity extraction, aspect and opinion identification, aspect clustering and summarization techniques. Then, discusses our results. Discussion explores the relationship of the findings to the existing literature and theories on tourist (dis)satisfaction. Finally, conclusions and implications outlines the practical and research implications and presents our future lines of research.

BACKGROUND

In order to properly understand the approach proposed in this work, it is necessary to introduce some theoretical concepts about aspect-based sentiment analysis. We will proceed to summarize basic concepts about sentiment analysis and aspect-based sentiment analysis, and we will briefly review the sub-tasks that we include to perform ABSA in order to understand tourist satisfaction with a tourism destination.

Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis (SA), or opinion mining, consists of identifying attitudes, moods and emotions towards entities (i.e. products, services offered by companies, events, topics, places and their attributes, or aspects). This is a very important field for understanding the social psychology of how a group or an individual (also called “influencers” on social media) might modify their beliefs, choices and perceptions of the world (Liu, 2015; Viñán-Ludeña et al., 2020).

Aspect-based Sentiment Analysis

ABSA is a sentiment analysis sub-task. In ABSA, an opinion is defined as a quintuple (e,a,s,h,t) , whereby e is an entity, place or service (e.g. a monument, a neighborhood, a restaurant, etc.), a corresponds to one of its attributes or aspects (e.g. price, cleanliness, etc.), s is the sentiment about the entity or aspect (positive/negative/neutral), h is the opinion holder (on social media, it is easy to see which individual or user wrote a particular review or post), and t is the time when the opinion is given since social media platforms store and show the date of each post or comment (Liu, 2015).

We identified the following sub-tasks to perform ABSA and we also provide a brief theoretical introduction for each of these:

- *Aspect-term extraction*: this task identifies positive or negative terms or aspects in texts (e.g. In the tweet “The Alhambra is one of the most beautiful monuments in the world”, the entity is the “Alhambra”, the aspect or characteristic of the Alhambra is “monument”, and the opinion might be recognized through a sentiment word or phrase, for example, “beautiful” or “the most beautiful”).
- *Aspect categorization or clustering*: This classification task clusters the words relating to the same aspect, since one aspect might be associated with different words.
- *Summarization*: The purpose of this task is to provide or generate a structured summary from all the resources found in previous tasks and in Section 2.5, we analyze a number of ABSA summarization approaches.

Aspect-term Extraction

Luo et al. (2019), use different approaches to identify aspects:

- *Rule-based methods*: These are commonly written by hand to extract aspects from text. Luo et al. (2019) employed six rules to extract the aspects. They also built an aspect graph to narrow the aspect space, performed clustering and finally identified the most prominent aspects.
- *Topic-modeling-based methods*: These methods extract topics from text and aspects from topics. A supervised approach is presented in Wang et al. (2014), where the authors first use seeding aspects obtained from the product descriptions; secondly, product reviews are classified according to these seeding aspects; and finally, they propose the fine-grained LDA and

unified fine-grained labeled LDA to discover aspects relating to seeding aspects. He et al. (2021) propose a Hierarchical Features-based Topic Model (HFTM) to extract aspects from online reviews and then capture specific features. Concept-LDA is presented by Ekinici and Ilhan Omurca (2020), where LDA is used to extract latent aspects by building a feature space before it is enriched with concepts and entities extracted from Babelfy⁶.

- *Neural network-based methods:* These methods apply deep learning architectures. A multi-domain aspect extraction using BERT combining 15 datasets from different domains to train the model is proposed by Santos et al. (2021). The results showed a competitive alternative compared to single-domain models. Poria et al. (2016) use a deep convolutional neural network and a series of linguistic patterns to perform aspect detection. A convolutional neural network model with dynamic filters to extract the aspects in a document is presented by Zhang et al. (2021), where aspects are categorized with a neural topic model. One approach which applies linguistic patterns (single word and multi-word aspects) to label aspects and builds a dataset which is used to train the deep learning model was presented by Chauhan et al. (2020).

Aspect Clustering

Before the aspects are clustered, it is important to convert each extracted aspect into a vector representation so that the lexical relationships between aspects can be understood. Word embeddings are vector representations of the words which take into account the surrounding words. These vectors can be generated with methods such as neural networks, co-occurrence matrix probabilistic models, etc. The most common tools which are used in this task are Word2vec (Mikolov et al., 2013) and Glove (Pennington et al., 2014).

Once the vectors have been represented, it is necessary to group or cluster similar aspects. According to Ansar et al. (2021), aspects can be grouped according to their similar scores (e.g. cosine similarity). The authors applied two clustering algorithms in combination (i.e. the single-linkage clustering algorithm and the group-average-linkage clustering algorithm).

An association rule-based approach to aspect cluster detection is presented by Kumar et al. (2020), where the authors find aspect category representative words using the statistical association between review

⁶ <http://babelfy.org/about>

words and aspect category through class-based association rules. Word embeddings are then trained on a specific domain dataset and the word embeddings are used to find the semantic association between the review words and aspect categories. Finally, class-based association rules are generated.

Summarization

According to Hu and Liu (2004), summarization has two important characteristics: firstly, it identifies the opinion targets (i.e. aspects) and their sentiments, and secondly, it is necessary to quantify how many positive and negative opinions there are about the opinion targets. Using these characteristics, this task can be presented in a bar chart, where each bar above the X-axis shows the number of positive opinions and those below the X-axis correspond to negative opinions about each aspect. Other approaches, meanwhile, apply text summaries.

Generally speaking, the summaries do not order the aspects and cannot show the most important aspect about an entity and how aspects are related to each other. These limitations are addressed by Carenini et al. (2013), who proposed an “extractive” and “abstractive” summarizer. Meanwhile, Di Fabrizio et al. (2014) propose a hybrid method which combines natural language generation and salient sentence selection techniques. These two approaches take advantage of natural language generation (NLG) to generate new sentences from the data extracted from their corpus to generate more coherent summaries. In order to identify how the aspects and opinions are related to each other, Carenini et al. (2013) propose the application of a user-defined feature taxonomy for the aspects and a large amount of training data can also be used to this end (Di Fabrizio et al., 2014). Finally, a framework that generates an aspect-based abstract from sentences/reviews of an entity without a feature taxonomy or training data is presented by Gerani et al. (2019), where the authors take a set of reviews about the entity (target) as the input, identify the aspects, their polarity and the strength of opinions about each aspect in each sentence, before generating the summaries with natural language generation tools using the relevance degree of the aspects in addition to the association between them.

In the following section, we will explore different studies connected with ABSA and the tourism domain.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the aims of ABSA is to offer fine-grained information from texts (i.e. posts, tweets, reviews, blogs, etc.) about entities (places, services, etc.), their attributes or aspects (price, cleanliness, etc.) and opinions about them (positive/neutral/negative). Researchers have proposed different ABSA approaches for the tourism domain. Moreno-Ortiz et al. (2019) validate an annotation schema for aspect-based sentiment analysis using reviews about accommodation, catering and car rental. However, they only focus on the corpus building process, which is an ABSA subtask. Afzaal et al. (2019) present a tourism mobile application whereby the authors apply a tree-based aspect extraction method and machine learning algorithms to identify aspects and perform a classification task. This application provides useful information and enables visitors to make better decisions on their journey.

A prospective design is presented in Maity et al. (2020), where a lexicon is used to identify features (aspects) from travel reviews about hotels or resorts. Stepaniuk and Sturgulewska (2021) created a methodology to analyze and visualize the emotional responses of social media users from a closed Facebook group. ABSA was used to semantically decompose 300 selected photos and the results showed the comprehension and visualization of photos (memes) as well as the emotional responses of the visual content recipient.

A methodology based on negative TripAdvisor reviews is presented by Valdivia et al. (2020), and this applies the deep learning approach presented by Poria et al. (2016). The authors use the k-means algorithm for aspect clustering and the summarization process using subgroup discovery by means of the use of description rules provides information about negative aspect reviews.

Survival prediction is crucial in tourism industry, Li et al. (2023) proposed a study to predict restaurant survival based on online reviews through ABSA using BERT, thus; authors defined aspects such as: "tastiness", "service", "location", "price" and "atmosphere" to train the model.

A weighted ABSA using extended ordered weighted average operators and Word2Vec is presented by Ghosal and Jain (2023), their model considers explicit and implicit aspect segmentation for review files, incorporates the meaning of slang words and location based geospatial analysis. Another study performed emotion analysis and ABSA to study

behavioral intentions of tourists (Mehra, 2023). Language interpretation in travel guidance platforms using BERT-based model is presented in Chu et al. (2022) to perform category recognition sentence-level sentiment classification and sentiment analysis. The popularity of BERT-based models has gained a lot of interest, however, the major limitation of BERT models in performing ABSA is that they require a training dataset with predefined aspects. Therefore, we propose an approach to identify automatically the most important aspects in a tourism destination.

One interesting application of ABSA is to identify service failures in the hotel sector, hotel guest satisfaction and user experiences (Sann & Lai, 2020): service failure items (aspects) were identified and grouped according to the hotel guest cycle and their corresponding operations. They also compared the expression patterns used by Asians and non-Asians in order to understand the homophily of service failure as well as their hotel experiences.

ABSA can also be used to evaluate the reputation of a tourist destination and so Ali et al. (2021) employed a technique to combine topic modeling (LDA) and lexicon-based algorithms to gather information about the reputation of a tourism destination using TripAdvisor reviews about different places and sights in the city of Marrakesh.

Finally, sentiment analysis allows a wide range of applications in the tourism industry. Polyzos et al. (2024) examine the characteristics that drive conflicting outcomes on the impact of Twitter data on tourism firm returns using financial micro data; they mine Twitter through an API and calculate sentiment analysis through a software package and emotion intensity using a lexicon approach. Gastronomy is an important part of the tourism industry and nowadays, due to climate change, green practices have been widely adopted. In Shahhosseini and Nasr (2024), the authors explore the determinants of satisfaction in green restaurants, analyzing TripAdvisor reviews; their work unveils important attributes such as value and service. In the same vein, Rauf and Pasha (2024) use textual analysis, content analysis, and sentiment analysis to examine how the Global North-South divide manifests in vlogged gastronomic tours and what responses such phenomena provoke among international audiences. Vegan and vegetarian tourists are being considered important in gastronomy. Zeng et al. (2024) examine comments about a vegetarian documentary in China; their results show that a vegetarian documentary on Chinese social media sparked resistance despite a solid cultural foundation, and flexitarian approaches may better resonate for vegetarian promotion. While other researchers

applied classical deep learning techniques to understand long-stay tourist experiences and satisfaction (Kim et al., 2024). To enhance tourism satisfaction, Calderón-Fajardo et al. (2024) constructed a thesaurus enabling the measurement of sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral dimensions in unique and emblematic attractions, experiences, and transportation within a tourist destination, based on visitor reviews.

Researchers have published various studies covering or evaluating tourist dissatisfaction and these are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Summary of studies about tourist dissatisfaction*

Author	Approach/ Methodology	Dataset	Tourist Destination	Context
(Prakash et al., 2019)	Qualitative analysis	TripAdvisor	Sri-Lanka	Wildlife tourism
(Hu et al., 2019)	Structural Topic Model	TripAdvisor	New York city	Hospitality
(Fernandes & Fernandes, 2018)	Content Analysis	TripAdvisor	Porto (Portugal)	Hospitality
(Mate et al., 2019)	Content Analysis	TripAdvisor	Cook Islands	Hospitality
(Taheri et al., 2020)	Partial Least Squares	Surveys	Iran	Airports
(Um & Kim, 2018)	Qualitative Analysis	Surveys	Korea	Medical Tourism
(Lam-González et al., 2021)	Covariance-based structural equations model	Surveys	Habana, Cuba	Cultural Tourism
(Rodrigues et al., 2020)	Qualitative Analysis	Booking.com	Thermal springs in Portugal	Spas

This study differs from the others when evaluating dissatisfaction in a number of ways: firstly, it uses data from general social networks such as Twitter, Instagram and TripAdvisor. Secondly, it provides an approach on how to use ABSA to evaluate dissatisfaction. Thirdly, a semi-supervised method is presented for entity detection by means of a BERT-based tool. Fourthly, we propose a visualization process to examine dissatisfaction factors. Finally, the results are summarized using BERT-based methods.

METHODOLOGY

In order to evaluate tourist dissatisfaction, we proposed an approach which applies ABSA as a sub-task of sentiment analysis, analyzing negative opinions about places, services, events, etc. in a tourism destination. In

Figure 1, we summarize the approach used. Each stage of the proposed approach is expanded in the following subsections.

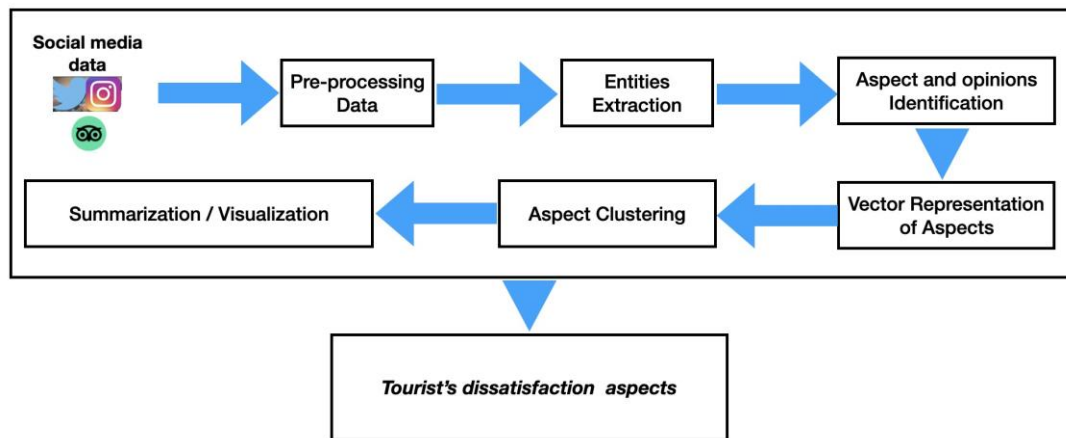


Figure 1. Proposed ABSA approach

Pre-processing data

In this study, we use data from Twitter and Instagram obtained in the study proposed in Viñán-Ludeña and de Campos (2022a, 2022b), in which, the python scraping tool called “Twint” were used to obtain tweets without its API; for Instagram, a Java program was necessary to obtain posts and the keywords used were: *granadaturismo*, *teenseñomigranada*, *alhambracultura*, *#alhambra*, *granada turismo*, *turismogranada*, *gastronomia granada*, *gastronomiagranada*, *hoteles granada*, *hotelesgranada*, *granadahoteles*, *restaurantes granada*, *restaurantesgranada*, *granadarestaurantes*, *#planesgranada*, *#albacín* and *#sierranevada*. The keywords chosen for English in both platforms are *#welovegranada*, *#granadatrip*, *#granadatrapel*, *granadatourism*, *granadatour*, *granadatours*, *granadatourisme*, *granadatourtravel*, *granadatrapelcenter*, *granadatrapels*, *travelgranada*, *granadatrapeler*, *traveleringranada*, *sixsensestravelsgranada*, *granadatrapeltips*, *triptogranada*, *thingstodoingranada*, *granadathingstodo*, *granadahotels*, *granadaluxuryhotels*, *cheaphotelsgranada* and *granadarestaurant*. Twint allows data collection since 2008, so we gathered tweets from 2008 to July 2020. TripAdvisor reviews were captured without date limitations, up to July 2022. Instagram posts were collected until July 2020, without any date restrictions. It is important to note that we utilized data from Twitter and Instagram until 2020 because the dataset was used in other studies (Viñán-Ludeña & de Campos, 2022a), and TripAdvisor reviews were captured until the project finished in July 2022.

The dataset corresponds to Granada, an important Spanish tourist destination. We used 19,340 tweets and 7,717 Instagram posts, all of which were written in English. Since ABSA requires that greetings, questions, compliments and farewells be discarded, we filter the tweets and posts accordingly and obtain 2,613 English tweets, 7,712 English posts (only 5 Instagram posts were removed as they do not generally contain greetings, unlike Twitter) and 25,483 TripAdvisor reviews about Granada in Spain (a python crawler was used to collect the reviews according to where they had been posted). It is essential to note that the tweets, posts, and reviews were used anonymously, and no personal user data was utilized in any analysis.

Once the input data has been loaded, every tweet, post or review is divided into sentences and the following operations are performed for each sentence:

- Removal of links using URL patterns
- Removal of user mentions
- Removal of hashtags
- Removal of non-ASCII characters (emoticons are not taken into account because the objective of this work is to find the entity attributes or aspects)
- Removal of punctuation marks
- Removal of stop words, i.e. irrelevant words included in the text

Entity extraction

Until this present day, researchers have applied ABSA with prior knowledge of the target or entity (i.e. restaurants, hotels, laptops, etc.). However, in this study we need to identify the entities that users mention on social media. We also use TripAdvisor reviews and on TripAdvisor, it is necessary to specify the entity or service in order to extract reviews about a particular entity, unlike Twitter or Instagram where the entity or service is not specified. We therefore use Twitter to identify the most important entities at a tourist destination and then apply our proposed approach with the three datasets (Twitter, Instagram and TripAdvisor). Since it is necessary to identify the tourist destination places (e.g. Alhambra⁷, Albaicin⁸, etc.), the service or event (e.g. Holy Week processions), we propose the following semi-automatic process for entity identification: (1) Entity candidates were identified using all the tweets by means of the

⁷ The Alhambra is a palace and fortress located in Granada, Andalusia, Spain.

⁸ The Albaicin is a district in the city of Granada.

approach⁹ proposed by Schweter and Akbik (2020), which is a 4-class named entity recognition (NER) BERT-model for Spanish. The four classes of name identified are the person (PER), location (LOC), organization (ORG) and miscellaneous (MISC). (2) The frequency was then calculated for each identified entity. (3) Finally, a tourist destination resident grouped the entities according to place, service or event. It is important to note that we used a frequency threshold to discard irrelevant entities.

This process was performed using 2,613 English tweets and we included 21,143 Spanish tweets so that there were a representative number of tweets. We noticed that keywords which belong to specific entities might be written in Spanish and English: for example, in the English tweet “The procession won’t continue its parade #SSantaGr” and the Spanish tweet “La Hermandad del Huerto tampoco sale a procesionar #SSantaGr #SemanaSanta #Granada” which announces that “the Hermandad del Huerto” canceled their procession, both tweets contain the same hashtag/keyword #SSantaGr, which refers to Holy Week. By including Spanish data, we obtained the following entities: Alhambra, Albaicin, Generalife, Semana Santa (Holy Week), Palacio de Carlos V, Patio de los Leones, Alpujarra, Guadix, Mirador de San Nicolás (San Nicolás Viewpoint), Sacromonte, Motril, Realejo, Parque de las Ciencias, Federico Garcíia Lorca, Almunécar, Valle de Lecrin, Paseo de los Tristes, Sierra Nevada. These identified entities mainly correspond to places in Granada, although there are also cultural events (e.g. Holy Week or the poet Federico Garcíia Lorca, who was born in Granada). As there are fewer negative tweets, posts and reviews than positive opinions, in order to perform the dissatisfaction analysis, we only used the following entities:

- Alhambra
- Albaicin
- Generalife¹⁰
- Sacromonte¹¹

Aspect and opinion identification

This approach applies grammar rules to aspect-term identification. This is important since nouns are commonly aspects and adjectives are connected with the opinion words and so we need to recall certain rules. Firstly, the order of a basic positive sentence is Subject-Verb-Object but negative and

⁹ The Flair Hugging Face website can be found at <https://huggingface.co/flair/ner-spanish-large>.

¹⁰ The Generalife is a summer palace and country estate of the Nasrid rulers of the Emirate of Granada.

¹¹ The Sacromonte is a gypsy neighborhood and is the flamenco capital of Granada.

question sentences might have a different structure. Secondly, adjectives usually come before a noun, except when a verb separates the adjective from the noun. Thirdly, when using two or more adjectives together, the usual order is opinion-adjective + fact-adjective + noun. Although there are many grammar rules, we have selected the most important ones in order to build a proper algorithm allowing aspect and opinion identification. In this study, we use English data but these rules can be applied in other languages such as Spanish, French, etc.

These grammar rules might be converted into a representation that can be understood by a computer. “Stanford typed dependencies” provide a simple representation of grammar rules and relationships which is accessible to people without any linguistic expertise. These dependencies are all binary relations between two sentence words, arranged in a hierarchy and contain 56 grammatical relations. Since a grammatical relation holds between a *head* and a *dependent*, we must therefore identify the grammatical relation, head and dependent. For example, the sentence: “The Alhambra is the most beautiful place.” has the following relations under this representation: (i) **nsubj**(place, Alhambra), (ii) **amod**(place, beautiful), (iii) **cop**(place, is), (iv) **det**(place, the), (v) **advmod**(most, beautiful). The grammatical relations (e.g. nsubj, amod, etc) were needed to build an algorithm which enables aspects-terms to be identified and these are described below.

We use the CoreNLP library¹² developed by the Stanford NLP Group in order to perform aspect and opinion identification through grammar dependencies expressed by a relation type, head and dependent¹³. Some rules were selected from (Dragoni et al., 2019) and two lexicons were used to identify word polarity: SenticNet¹⁴ and the opinion lexicon proposed by Liu (2010):

- **Compound:** If the head and dependent are nouns, we join them using the character “_” to obtain a compound aspect. For example, in the sentence “Great sunset view from the old Arab quarter”, one of the triples is (compound, sunset, view) and in this triple, both “sunset” and “view” are nouns and so the resulting aspect is sunset _view).

¹² <https://stanfordnlp.github.io/CoreNLP/>

¹³ <https://downloads.cs.stanford.edu/nlp/software/dependencies>

- **Adjectival modifier “amod”**: This rule is applied if the head is an aspect (noun) and the dependent is an adjective with a polarity value. For example, in the sentence “Very poor online booking system”, one of the triples is (amod, booking_system, poor), and in this triple, we have a compound aspect “booking system” as the head, and a negative adjective “poor” as the dependent.
- **Nominal subject “nsubj”**: The head should have a polarity value to apply this rule: for example, in the case of the triple (nsubj, fantastic, view), we have a positive opinion (fantastic) about the aspect (view).
- **Conjunction “conj”**: If the head and dependent are aspects, then if one of them is present in the “amod” rule, the other aspect should be assigned the same adjective. For example, in the sentence “This place has great music and decoration.”, we have the triples (amod, music, great) and (conj, music, decoration), and so we can generate the triple (amod, decoration, great). By way of contrast, if the head and dependent are adjectives or polarity words, then if one of them is present in a “nsubj” rule, the other adjective should be assigned the same aspect. For example, in the sentence “This service is bad and expensive”, we have the triples (nsubj, bad, service) and (conj, bad, expensive) and so we can generate the triple (nsubj, expensive, service)
- **Negation**: If the words such as not, never, neither, nor, can’t, etc. are present in the text, the polarity of the opinion words is modified.

Algorithm 1. *Aspect and opinion identification*

```

entities ← entities_identification_process()
for t in tweet/post/review do
  if t == review then
    important_entity ← Null
  else
    pub_entities ← get_entities(t, entities)
    important_entity ← get_entity(pub_entities, entities)
  end if
  aspect_opinion_rules ← [amod, nsubj, dobj, compound, conjunction, negation]
  sentences ← split_text(t)
  for s in sentences do
    rules ← get_rules(s)
    result ← get_aspects_opinions(rules, aspect_opinion_rules)
  end for
end for

```

In summary, we first identify entities from the text for every tweet, post or review (with the exception of TripAdvisor reviews since we already

know the entity). Secondly, we split the text into sentences, and for each sentence, we identify the most important entity according to the frequency and associate that entity with the sentence. For example, if a text has the two entities of Alhambra (2952) and Albaicin (197), we select Alhambra as the important entity in this sentence for the tweet or post (the process of identifying the most important entity is excluded for TripAdvisor reviews). Thirdly, we identify the rules and parts of speech for each word. Finally, we apply the previously described rules to aspect and opinion identification. This procedure is summarized in Algorithm 1.

Vector representation of aspects

The process of transforming words into vector representations is an important step in natural language processing. These representations can be used for aspect categorization or clustering. After completing the aspect-term extraction, we transform each aspect into a vector representation of finite dimension using ConceptNet (CN) Numberbatch (Speer et al., 2017). This set of semantic vectors was selected because it is built using a set which combines ConceptNet data¹³, word2vec, GloVe, and OpenSubtitles 2016¹⁵. The word embedding or numeric vector representation of text used in this study through pre-trained CN Numberbatch thereby enables us to maintain the semantic and contextual relationships within the aspects in our dataset so that they can be clustered.

Aspect clustering

Since word embedding is necessary for aspect clustering, we apply word embedding to each aspect. This enables the information to be summarized through visualizations or summaries in order to understand traveler satisfaction with the tourism destination.

Once each aspect has been represented as a vector, aspect clustering is performed. Clustering is the process whereby sets of objects are grouped into classes on account of the fact that objects in the same group are more similar to each other than to those in another group. We therefore need to identify which aspects are similar to each other: for example, the aspects “customer service, reservation system” and “service” are similar and might be grouped into one cluster whereas the aspect “tour experience” should be grouped in another cluster. We use k-means to perform aspects clustering

¹³ <https://conceptnet.io>

¹⁴ <https://www.opensubtitles.org/en/search/subs>

with cosine similarity. Additionally, we use the Silhouette metric to determine the optimal number of clusters (Rousseeuw, 1987).

Visualization / Summarization

Once we have identified places and events in a tourism destination, the next stages must be performed. The visualization or word-tree shows the combinations entitycluster-aspect-opinion word(s) and comprises four levels: level 0 (root node) corresponds to the entity (e.g. Alhambra); level 1 contains the numbers which correspond to the clusters found with the k-means algorithm; level 2 corresponds to the aspects, which are commonly nouns (e.g. audio system, beauty, place and entrance, etc.); and level 3 corresponds to the sentiment words, which are commonly adjectives (e.g. awful, dull, sad, etc.). Every word-tree was created using the D3.js library¹⁶. Once we had obtained the final dataset, we used word trees to examine the opinions where different aspects appear. The chart gives us a general idea about the satisfaction of the entity.

Lastly, we performed the summarization process and this provide us with all the relevant and most important information from the tweets, posts and reviews without having to read every social media post. There are two summarization categories: *extractive text summarization*, which extracts the significant sentences from the text and *abstractive text summarization*, which is an advanced method to identify the important sections of the text, interpret the context and compile a summary with the core information in a different way. In this study, we used the first category because we have a series of posts, tweets and reviews rather than a large document and this is the best option for summarizing social media content.

In order to perform the summaries, we selected two tools which were constructed using BERT technology. The first of these is BART and was proposed by a Facebook team (Lewis et al., 2019), whereby the authors pre-trained their model using the English language and fine-tuned and improved it with the CNN Dailymail dataset¹⁷ (which contains over 300,000 unique news articles written by CNN and Daily Mail journalists). This tool achieves good results in terms of abstractive dialogue, question answering and summarization tasks.

¹⁶This is a Javascript library for producing interactive visualizations and further information can be found at <https://d3js.org/>.

¹⁷ More information about this dataset can be found at <https://huggingface.co/datasets/cnn-dailymail>.

The second tool was built using a transformer created by a Google team (Raffel et al., 2019). This transformer is called “T5” which stands for Text-To-Text Transfer Transformer¹⁸ and was fine-tuned with 4,515 examples of news articles from The Hindu, The Indian times and The Guardian¹⁹.

It is possible to generate summaries about entities by taking into account every aspect belonging to a specific entity, or selecting one cluster of an entity that includes any reviews, tweets or posts relating to aspects belonging to that cluster. Summaries can also be generated using sentences belonging to two or more clusters.

RESULTS

We will now proceed to analyze user dissatisfaction perceptions for each entity grouping data from Twitter, Instagram and TripAdvisor to perform the visualization and summarization.

The Alhambra

TripAdvisor reviews are subjective and so they provide opinion perceptions about a place or service. We apply the same tools in both Twitter and Instagram to identify aspects and opinions. Although users generally rate their TripAdvisor reviews as positive or negative, the aim of this study is to find aspects and the positive or negative opinions in these reviews. We therefore use every review regardless of its rating since positive reviews also contain negative aspects.

As the Alhambra is the most visited place in Granada, there were a lot of references to it (16,116 TripAdvisor reviews, 891 Instagram posts and 499 tweets). Figure 2 shows the more important aspects and the respective negative opinions in the TripAdvisor reviews, tweets and Instagram posts. For the sake of completeness, the word-tree including all the aspects for the Alhambra is displayed in the Appendix.

Although we have detected many clusters about the Alhambra, we have only selected Cluster 6 to show the automatic summaries:

- **BART Tool Summary:** “Once you are inside there is little or no information on signboards so unless you purchase their terrible audio guide

¹⁸ <https://ai.googleblog.com/2020/02/exploring-transfer-learning-with-t5.html>.

¹⁹ <https://huggingface.co/mrm8488/t5-base-finetuned-summarize-news>.

or have prebooked a tour you are walking blind. Long queues, badly organised and very rude staff. Very poor online booking system, ticketmaster has a very poor ticketing system.”

- T5-base fine-tuned Tool Summary:** “ticket office was ruined by the stupid ticket machine operated by ticketmaster I planned my night visit to Alhambra, and got the ticket at the ticket machine beside the ticket office. My visit was ruined by the stupid ticket system operated by ticketmaster. Long queues, badly organised and very rude staff. Worst part is the ridiculous ticket office. Unless you book your tour or audio guide, you are walking blind. You will likely be ruined by the poor online booking system.”

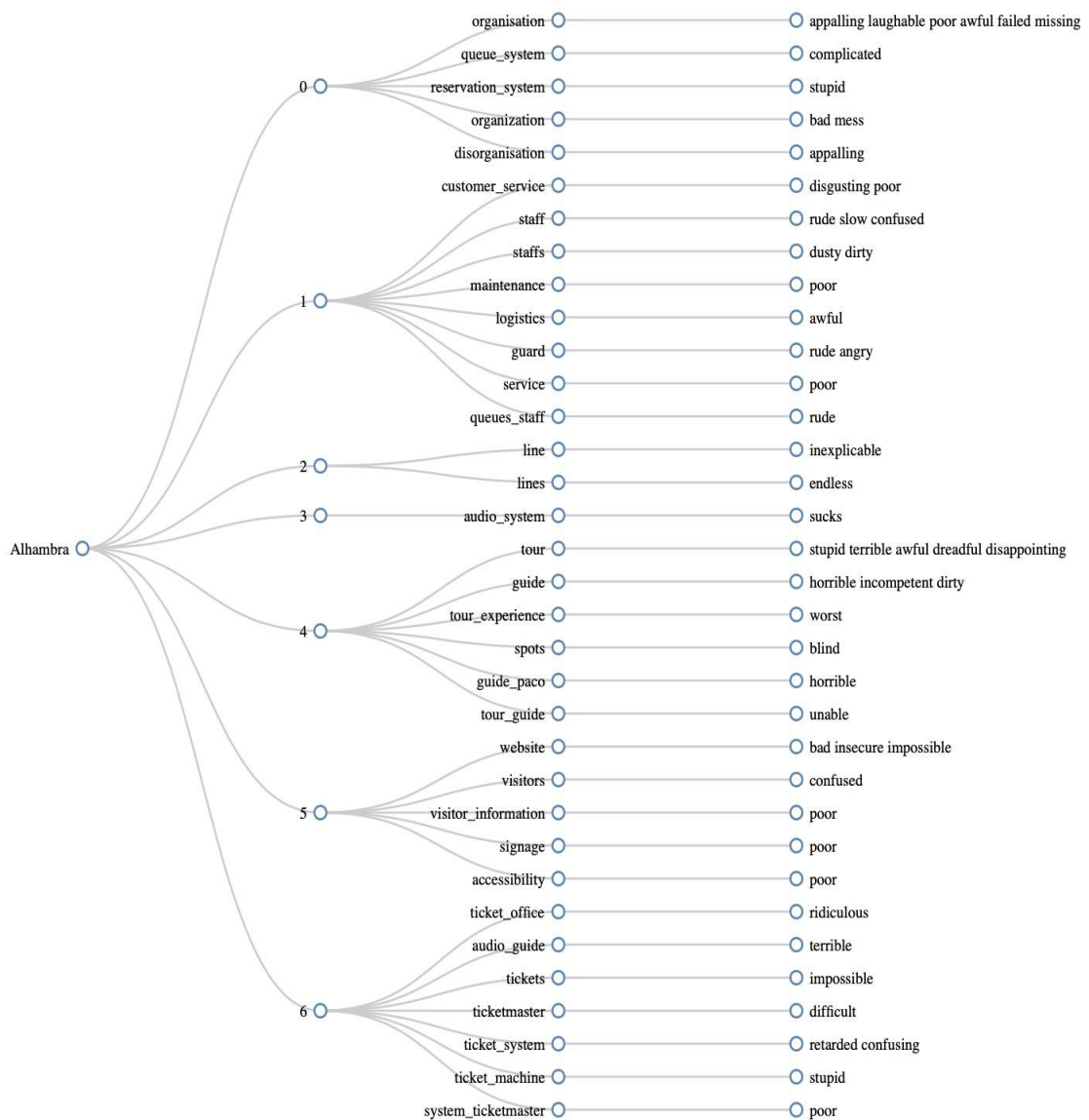


Figure 2. Negative perceptions about the Alhambra

The most important points that can be highlighted from the summaries corresponding to the Alhambra are problems with the ticket system, as well as with audio guides and signboards.

If the results are analyzed for each social media platform, the most important entity, according to Twitter data is the “Alhambra” as this is the most visited monument in Granada. However, the most important negative aspects and opinions or tourist dissatisfaction concern the ticket office, the online ticket booking system and the audio guides which narrate the history of the palaces, etc. These clues are essential to improve the services at this fortified palace complex. TripAdvisor data also shows that the most important entity is the “Alhambra” and tourists were most dissatisfied with the staff and organization, queues, ticket booking system, customer service, logistics, insecure website, visitor information, audio guide, ticket system, etc. Along the same lines, Instagram data reflects the fact that the most important entity is the “Alhambra” and some of the most important aspects and opinions include bad impressions, empty halls, annoying people, etc.

The Albaicin

The Albaicin is another important place in Granada. We obtained 2,456 reviews and the sentences express positive or negative opinions about the aspects. We obtained only 5 sentences with positive opinions and 1 with a negative opinion with twitter data and 16 Instagram posts and of these, 4 were negative. Figure 3 shows the word-tree about the negative aspects and opinions.

The following summaries were obtained from the tools used in this study:

- **BART Tool Summary:** “Small winding streets but dwellings mainly hidden behind high walls. Would be charming but for amount of dog faeces and dodgy loiterers. Full of totally useless souvenir shops that looks cool only in their context but when you actually buy it youll feel almost scammed. Poor signposting and poorer tourist maps mean it is easy to get lost.”
- **T5-base fine-tuned Tool Summary:** “We had a fixed walk with an awful guide called diego. Would be charming but for amount of dog faeces and dodgy loiterers. Poor signposting and poorer tourist maps mean that it is easy to get lost and end up in rough looking areas full of people and traditional shops. The whole atmosphere is fake and almost a tourist cash grab trap.”

The summaries about the Albaicin highlight the lack of cleanliness, poor signage and how easy it is to get lost in its labyrinth-like streets. According to TripAdvisor data, tourists expressed their dissatisfaction with the souvenir shops, guides, poor signposting, etc. On the other hand, Twitter and Instagram data does not contain enough negative aspects to draw conclusions about this entity.

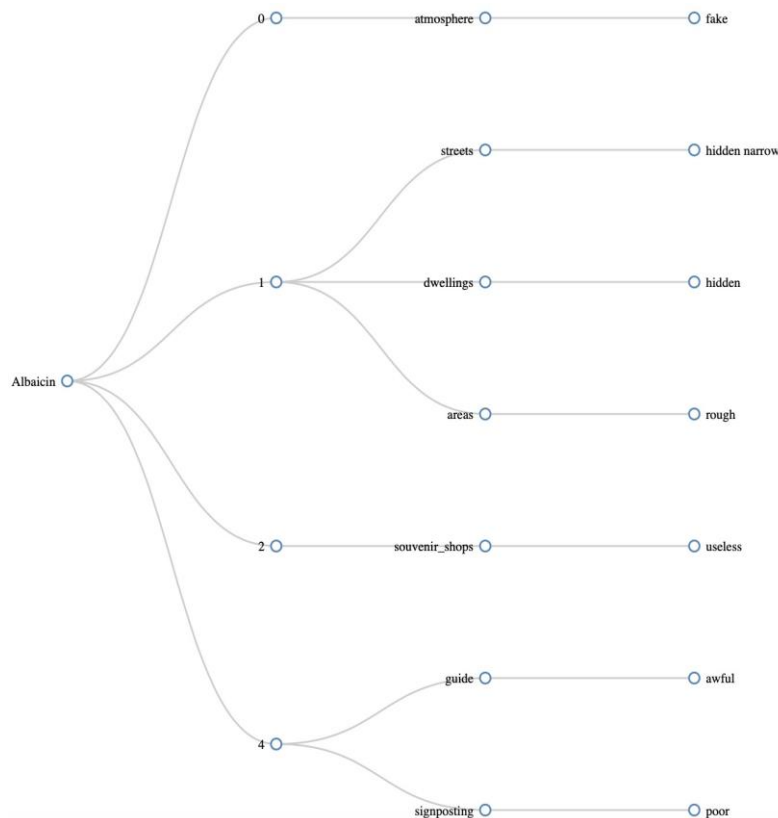


Figure 3. *Negative perceptions about Albaicin*

The Generalife

The Generalife is an important place to visit in Granada. We obtained 3,895 reviews and we employed the proposed approach to obtain only a few negative opinions and aspects about this entity. There are not negative opinions in Twitter and Instagram data about this entity. Figure 4 shows the aspects for the Generalife.

The following summaries were obtained from the tools used in this study:

- **BART Tool Summary:** “The gardens were in a mess and the plants on display were not the type of plants that would have been used so the character of the gardens was nothing like the original. The gardens were very tired with little or no consideration for autumn planting or colour. The

internet site was very confusing you don't get any idea what you are buying."

- **T5-base fine-tuned Tool Summary:** "Alhambra itself was nice however the tour was poor. The gardens were in a mess and the plants on display were not the type that would have been used. The staff at the venue need to do more to fulfill the hype and plant natives or give the effect of what the plantings were like originally."

In general, the negative aspects and opinions mention poor organization, poor tour, confusing website, the messy gardens, the lack of plants native to the site, etc.

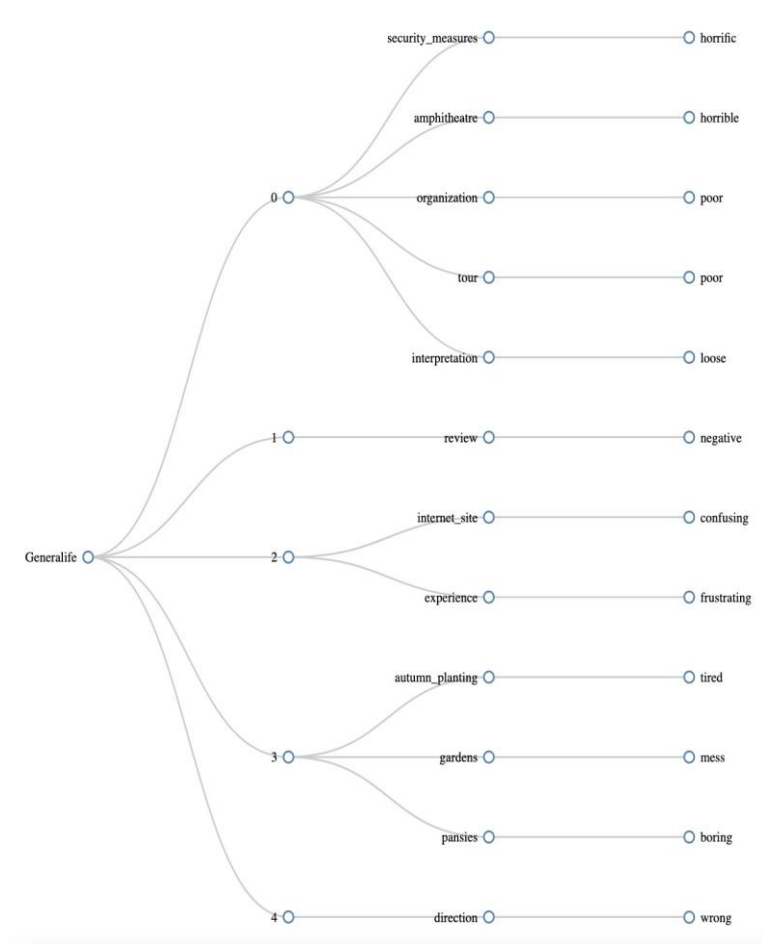


Figure 4. *Negative perceptions about the Generalife*

Sacromonte

Sacromonte is another important place to visit in Granada and we obtained 570 reviews and without opinions from Twitter and Instagram data about it. However, once the proposed approach had been employed, very few

aspects were obtained. Figure 5 shows the negative opinions and aspects about this entity.

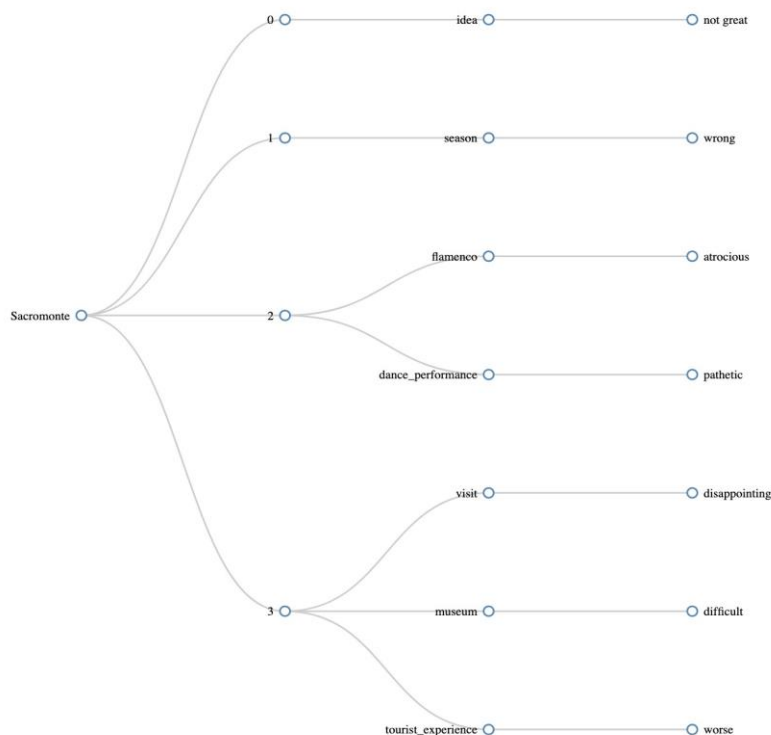


Figure 5. *Negative perceptions about Sacromonte*

The following summaries were obtained from the tools used in this study:

- BART Tool Summary:** “A long uphill walk to visit caves but the museum was closed even though it said opening hours were from 10:00 am. The museum of rural life at sacromonte is difficult to reach without a car and involves climbing several flights of steps from the road. The intention was to see a touristytype flamenco ie focus on the woman dancer with all her polka dotted finery.. the show itself was pretty much a disaster.”
- T5-base fine-tuned Tool Summary:** “I was accosted by a very aggressive young man who threatened me with bodily injury while walking through the old part of sacromonte. The museum of rural life at sacromonte is difficult to reach without a car and involves climbing several flights of steps from the road. It is the worse tourist experience i have ever had.”

The summaries that correspond to the Sacromonte highlight the difficult access to the “museum of rural life”, a disastrous flamenco show, awful dance performances and how dangerous it is to walk through the old part of this neighborhood.

DISCUSSION

Our approach uses APIs, crawlers or scrapers for data acquisition, which allows to easily automate this process in the tourism (dis)satisfaction literature. Furthermore, this study uses aspect-based sentiment analysis with grammar rules (i.e. no training data is needed) and thus it can be easily automated and implemented in a mobile/web application. In contrast, other studies use face-to-face semi-structured interviews to capture the (dis)satisfaction opinions of multifaceted spectrum of travelers (Bianchi, 2016). On the other hand, Taheri et al. (2020) use surveys and the data are analyzed with Partial Least Squares (PLS) and multi-group analysis (MGA) and focus on airport traveler dissatisfaction. Ma et al. (2022) also use surveys to explore the relationships between tourists' perceived deception, dissatisfaction, revisit intention and negative word of mouth. In view of the above, data collection is expensive and hard to replicate, and the automation is not possible with classical statistical methods.

One of the studies that should be highlighted is (Prakash et al., 2019) where the authors examined the major causes of visitor dissatisfaction during wildlife tourism through TripAdvisor reviews. Their results were obtained through content analysis and are related with management problems and sustainable tourism. We propose a simple method for obtaining the causes of tourism dissatisfaction, not only for wildlife tourism or another specific case but to tourism in general, and reaffirm the fact that tourism data from social media platforms are reliable to analyze visitor feedback information on travel destinations and services.

Tang and Zeng (2021) propose a method for calculating tourism e-commerce user satisfaction. They propose factors such as management service, tour guide service, travel support service, attractions tour service and contract travel service. To each of these factors, they assign a value corresponding to satisfaction. However, there may be more factors and categories and therefore, a more general method is more useful. In this sense, the proposed aspect clustering by means of word embedding is more suitable for finding the user perception factors posted on social media.

Kuhzady and Ghasemi (2019) propose a text mining method to show the positive and negative opinions through a word cloud. This approach does not show in a clear way which are the causes of dissatisfaction. While, Park et al. (2021) use a regression method to explore the dissatisfaction at luxury hotels.

It is important to note that there is no model that incorporates all the possible attributes that allow the evaluation of tourist dissatisfaction. Alegre and Garau (2010) mention 13 characteristics that were qualified in terms of dissatisfaction, such as destruction of landscape, too much building, too many people, expensive, and so on. However, having a general model that can involve the characteristics of tourist dissatisfaction is unfeasible, because destination management organizations incorporate new technologies and gradually becoming involved in industry 4.0 that incorporates a series of devices and sensors that are part of smart-tourism; this leads to incorporate new features to the dissatisfaction model, as is the case of a ticket system, digital twins for customer service, etc. In addition, a tourist destination that is located on the beach does not have the same dissatisfaction characteristics as mountain or adventure tourism. Therefore, our study does not propose a new model, nor does it incorporate new characteristics to the existing model; rather, it identifies the characteristics or complaints through social media data as a practical and inexpensive approach for the evaluation of tourist dissatisfaction, allowing to apply this study in any tourist destination of any type. Furthermore, none of the previously analyzed studies uses platforms such as Twitter or Instagram to explore tourists' complaints. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature with an automated approach that can be applied to any social media platform and furthermore it can be used in the field of accommodation, gastronomy and tourism in general.

Researchers base their research on specific types of tourism to evaluate dissatisfaction, such as medical tourism (Um & Kim, 2018), tourists' dissatisfaction caused by failures in tourist and cultural services (Jiang et al., 2022; Lam-González et al., 2021), dissatisfaction in thermal and mineral spas (Rodrigues et al., 2020), evaluating service failure situations at a restaurant (Jang et al., 2013), cultural heritage tourism destination (Thanyasunthornsakun, 2016) or airport servicescape (Taheri et al., 2020). Our study is based on the perceptions that travelers have about a destination, identifying the attributes of tourist dissatisfaction that allow us to evaluate the problems of a given tourist destination without a model based on surveys or traditional statistical methods, allowing managers to find the causes of dissatisfaction with the aim of improving the management of places, events or services.

Finally, the most significant contributions of this study lie in the psychological variables of motivations and attitudes related to tourist satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Unlike other researchers who have focused on designing and validating annotation schemas for aspect-based sentiment

analysis (ABSA) (Moreno-Ortiz et al., 2019) or methodological aspects (Ghosal & Jain, 2023), this study aims to identify the variables that motivate dissatisfaction in the tourism destination, in this case Granada, Spain. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of destination perception in determining tourist satisfaction. To achieve this, we first identify the main entities in a tourism destination and then evaluate the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the principal attractions within that destination. In contrast, other studies have focused on specific types of reviews, such as restaurant reviews (Li et al., 2023) or hotel reviews (Ozen & Ozgul Katlav, 2023; Shahhosseini & Nasr, 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).

Herzberg's Motivator and Hygiene Factor Theory (Chan & Baum, 2007) is applied to identify the factors that satisfy and dissatisfy tourists, including hygiene factors such as cleanliness and amenities. Our study found important aspects related to the theory, such as organizations, staff, and customer service. Furthermore, we identify the factors that contribute to dissatisfaction as a crucial theoretical aspect in destination management and, we emphasize that the use of satisfaction as a driving force for loyalty and the development of marketing strategies that cater to the needs and wants of tourists is essential. Our approach can be used to identify problems in tourism destinations and their services, providing insights on enhancing tourist satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

User-generated social media content plays a fundamental role in monitoring tourist satisfaction or dissatisfaction. We have analyzed Twitter, TripAdvisor and Instagram data using an aspect-based sentiment analysis approach based on rules and this is presented in this study. This approach includes: a semi-supervised algorithm to identify the most important entities (places or events) at a tourist destination; a rule-based algorithm for aspect identification and opinion calculation (and although this can be applied using data in other languages, we only use English tweets, posts and reviews in our study); a visualization process, which includes vector representation of aspects through ConceptNet Numberbatch in order to keep the semantic and contextual relationships within the aspects and a clustering process using k-means and word-trees to better understand the aspect-opinion or dissatisfaction factors. This final stage of our approach applies two different summarizer tools which generate short summaries. Although these might be generated using whole word-tree or by cluster, if there are many aspects or opinions, it is advisable to apply these tools for

each cluster. The information provided enables managers and other operators to improve their services.

We examined 19,340 tweets, 7,712 Instagram posts and 25,483 TripAdvisor reviews of Granada (an important tourist destination in Spain). The entities analyzed were the Alhambra, Albaicin, Generalife and Sacromonte.

As the results demonstrated, TripAdvisor and Twitter provide more subjective information than Instagram. In terms of the number of aspects displayed, TripAdvisor might reflect a greater use to spread complaints about a certain resource, Twitter has a moderate number of dissatisfaction factors while Instagram seems less useful, with users sharing news and leisure activities (i.e. sad stories, tragic love stories, bad movies, terrible companies, etc); in addition, Instagram users usually share their experiences at specific points of their trip to show sights and landscapes from the tourist destination whereby, they also tend to show their meals and drinks (i.e. beer cold, happyhour michelada cold) and, there is also a tendency for these posts to be written in a poetic or metaphorical way. This study can be used either to evaluate the current situation of the places, events and services relating to a specific tourist destination or event or to perform an independent audit to identify problems so that any necessary action can be taken and improvements made.

The present study has some limitations. Classifying the posts/reviews into domestic tourism and international tourism would be of great importance to compare how dissatisfaction attributes differ between these two segments. On the other hand, the classification by age or gender of the posts/reviews has not been taken into account and would be very useful to focus improvement plans to a specific population. In addition, fake news and bots are not taken into account, which can have a negative impact on the results.

In the future, we will train a BERT model to improve aspect-opinion identification, which is an important stage in aspect-based sentiment analysis. The construction of a recommender system which incorporates dissatisfaction factors and management strategies and monitors their effectiveness may be useful for tourism sector professionals and managers. Furthermore, summarization is an important feature to understand tourism (dis)satisfaction with social media data, so that managers can obtain insights about user perceptions through few sentences. However, we utilized only two tools to perform this process and these can be improved. Thus, we will propose, train and evaluate a BERT-based model to

summarize social media text with special focus in tourism (dis)satisfaction. We will also evaluate our novel aspect clustering by means of word embeddings with another approaches, in order to use it with other algorithms and applied in other domains. In addition, since the results of this study can be potentially very useful to managers of a tourist destination, in the future we plan to conduct a dedicated study for users' evaluation with the active participation of the administrators of the places, events or tourist services.

Finally, our work has important implications not only for professionals and managers but also for researchers.

Research Implications

Smart-Tourism refers to the interaction and/or combination of communication networks, internet, sensors, internet of things and tourism. Therefore, the contribution made in this study to the field of Smart-Tourism is important, due to the fact that the data that were analyzed come from social media that tourists use while they are visiting some place and thus, communication networks, their mobile devices and internet are necessary. Therefore, this study contributes to the area of smart tourism by using an interesting approach based on computational methods, considering that previous studies about complaints in the tourism domain use descriptive statistical methods and mostly focus on hotel complaints. Our findings, therefore, supplement the limited amount of knowledge and research into tourist complaints and opinions on social media and they establish the baseline for future studies and analysis based on traveler satisfaction with a tourist destination.

Practical Implications

For tourism industry professionals and managers, it is extremely important to be aware of what is happening on social media where travelers voluntarily share their experiences about a tourist destination. Analysis of this data affords us with an excellent opportunity to identify the causes or reasons for tourist dissatisfaction so that managerial strategies can be improved. The approach proposed in this study can be easily applied to construct a software or application to re-evaluate tourist services and strategies every so often since it is fully available on Github for further research and practical purposes.

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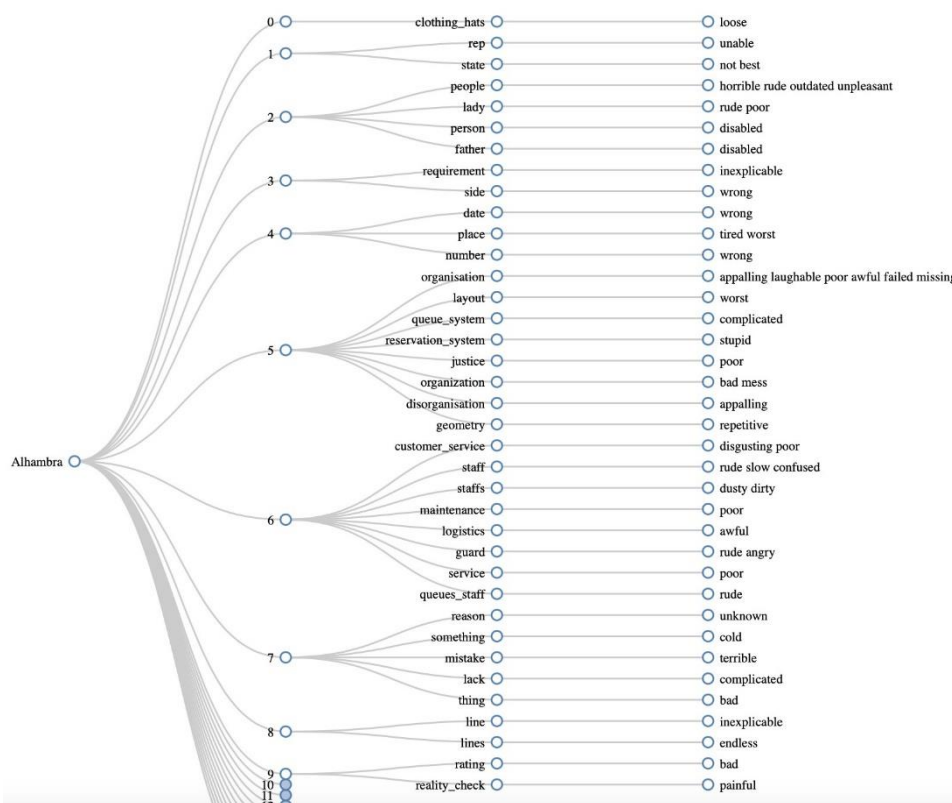
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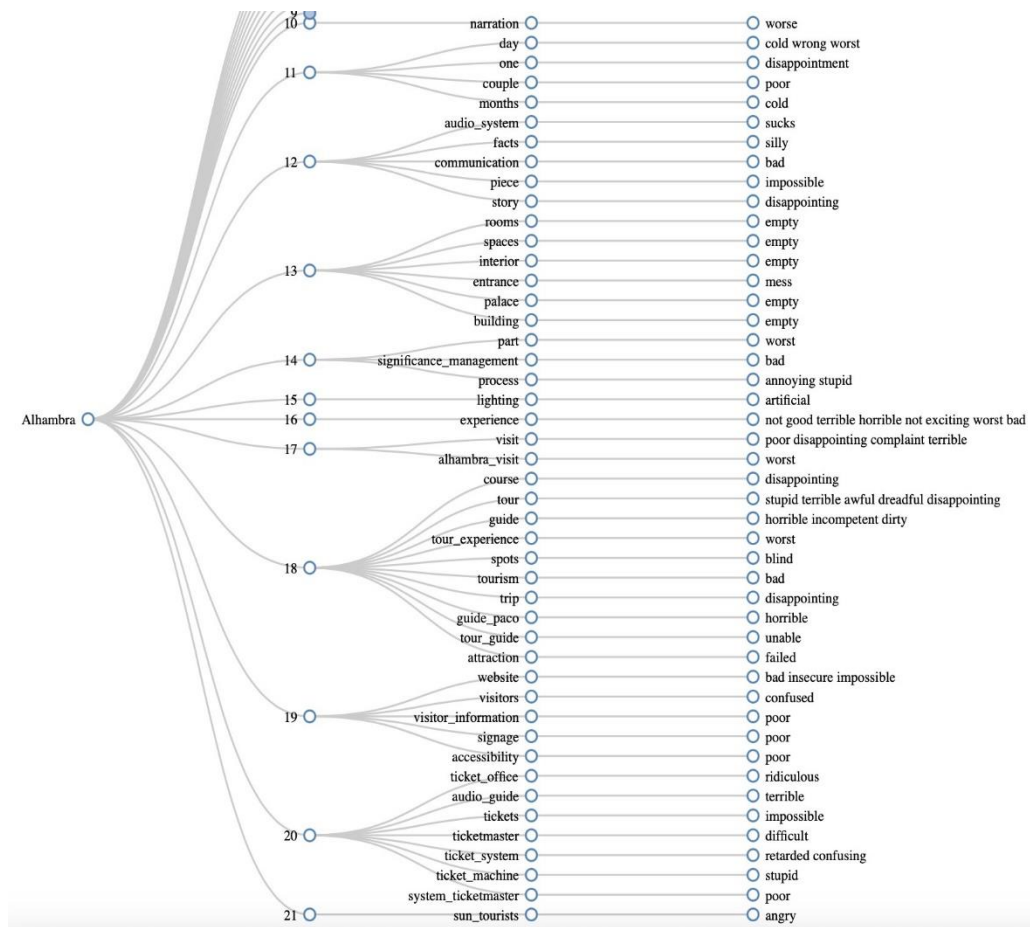
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Appendices

Appendix 1. Negative perceptions about the Alhambra-part1



Appendix 2. Negative perceptions about the Alhambra-part2



RESIDENT'S WILLINGNESS TO TRAVEL AMIDST INCREASED POST-CRISIS INBOUND CHINESE TOURISM: A COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN EFFECT PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

There is a scant academic inquiry into the influence of crisis and post-crisis events on residents' perceptions, their attitude towards international inbound tourists, and how their subsequent domestic travel behaviour is nuanced by the re-introduction of international tourists post-a-crisis. A conceptual model was developed to explore the influence of China's post-zero-COVID-19 policy country image on host country resident behaviour. Based on an n=499 South African residents' sample, the cross-sectional deductive study utilised partial least squares structural equation modelling to explore the proposed hypotheses. Contrary to the extant literature, China's post-pandemic and policy country-of-origin effect positively influenced South African residents' willingness to engage in domestic tourism despite the potential influx of inbound Chinese tourists. However, there is intriguing heterogeneity in the nuances of the country-of-origin effect, stereotypes, risk perception and interventions on resident perception, and conation. The study confirms the underlying mechanisms in resident post-crisis domestic travel behaviour and contributes to the burgeoning body of knowledge.

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pharmaceutical and non-
pharmaceutical interventions

INTRODUCTION

"The philosophy of Ubuntu is centred on people and their wellbeing, offering people an understanding of themselves in relation to other people and the world at large..." (Francis, 2010, p. 30)

The hyper-transmissibility of the COVID-19 virus through social contact implied that travel and tourism became vectors for the transmission of the

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virus (Chung et al., 2021; Iaquinto, 2020). Therefore, as a stop-gap measure for the lack of a known vaccine or cure at the time, wide-ranging and far-reaching moratoriums on non-essential social contact, such as travel and tourism, were initiated to stem the spread of COVID-19 globally (Ang & Mansouri, 2023; Hamid & Bano, 2022). Such measures included China's stringent 'zero-COVID' policy, which in 2020 contributed to losses of up to US\$22 billion in tourism spending attributable to a corresponding decline in Chinese outbound tourism demand (Wen et al., 2021). Despite implementing one of the world's most isolationist interventions (Mallapaty, 2022), the pandemic resulted in China going through a significant international image crisis, characterised by the global proliferation of anti-Asian sentiment as the origins of COVID-19 were linked to China and its people (Floribert, 2022). The resultant phobic attitudes towards primarily Chinese and other peoples of Asian descent transcended from the height of the pandemic to the post-crisis era (Matiza, 2023). In December 2022, however, despite still reporting some of the world's highest post-crisis infection rates, China became the last country to lift its primary lockdown policy (Mallapaty, 2022), sparking a global debate around the reintegration of Chinese tourists into the global international tourism market (Ang & Mansouri, 2023; Matiza, 2023).

According to Statistics South Africa (2020), pre-pandemic China was ranked as South Africa's 8th largest overseas tourist source market, peaking at just over 93,000 Chinese tourists visiting South Africa in 2019. Due to the pandemic, this declined to zero as the international tourism sector ground to a halt and did not rebound when other source markets opened post-pandemic, seeing only 12,187 Chinese tourists (-87% on 2019 arrivals) visiting South Africa in 2022 (Statistics South Africa, 2022). The rescinding of the zero-COVID policy in December 2022 corresponded with an upsurge in outbound Chinese tourism - signalling a welcome boon for the recovery of the global tourism industry, including South Africa, which recorded a 136.8% increase in inbound tourism from China between January 2023 and January 2024 (Statistics South Africa, 2024). The recension also ignited an intense global debate around receiving inbound tourists from the country amid growing COVID-19-induced anti-Asian sentiment (Antwi et al., 2022; Armutlu et al., 2021; Lantz & Wenger, 2023; Li, 2020).

Global phobic anti-Asian sentiment is symptomatic of China's severely compromised country image (CI) as the country's association with the pandemic stems from China being widely considered to be the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic (Antwi et al., 2022; Floribert, 2022; Zha et al., 2022). To this end, Shen et al. (2022) opine that due to the pandemic and

heterogeneity in the effects and reactions of countries to the pandemic, CIs have become more prominent as heuristic cues in tourist's crisis-induced decision-making than the conventional tourism destination image. Thus, as Chinese tourists flocked to international destinations post-the-pandemic, the CI of China became a critical antecedent to the critical moral and behavioural questions that arose about the behaviour of residents towards Chinese tourists both as hosts (Armutlu et al., 2021; Lantz & Wenger, 2023; Matiza, 2023), and now, within the scope of the present study, as domestic tourists potentially interacting with inbound Chinese tourists, respectively.

Domestic tourist demand and supply have traditionally been independent of external shocks and events (Nguyen & Su, 2020); however, the far-reaching impact of the pandemic and its residual effects on domestic tourism are indicative of the increased 'glocalization' of contemporary tourism crises (Cheer et al., 2021). One of the pandemic's positive effects was an upsurge in domestic tourism as a crisis-induced alternative to international travel and tourism (Nyikana & Bama, 2023). Bearing in mind that South Africa was under varying levels of a lockdown regime between March 2020 and June 2022, domestic tourism statistics indicate exponential post-crisis growth in domestic tourism. Between 2021 and 2022, South African domestic day and overnight trips increased by 29.4 million (over 100%) to 56.3 million (Statistics South Africa, 2023).

Considering the pervasiveness of contemporary crises and their subsequent impact on domestic tourism, the discernible lack of academic inquiry into the behavioural aspects of domestic tourism during and post-crisis has become more apparent. More so there is a significant lack of research into resident travel behaviour amid inbound tourism after a significant crisis event such as COVID-19 (Matiza, 2023; Moghavvemi et al., 2023); thus, providing impetus for the present paper. The present study investigates the influence of China's CI on South African residents' willingness to engage in domestic tourism, considering renewed inbound Chinese tourism. This relationship is further explored in the context of the potential intervening effects of perceived risk, negative and positive stereotypes, and the potential moderating effect of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions in residents' domestic tourism decision-making.

Tourism research has been critiqued for being reductionist - focusing on the simplicity of structures and establishing equilibrium and linear relationships, often at the expense of interrogating key events that trigger major paradigm shifts in tourist behaviour (Russell & Faulkner, 1999).

Furthermore, due to the ad hoc nature of major health crises and natural disasters, crisis-oriented research in tourism has, to date, predominantly focused on economic and financial crises (Hall, 2010; Wen et al., 2021). However, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has buoyed contemporary studies (Cheer et al., 2021; Moghavvemi et al., 2023; Nie et al., 2022; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Senbeto, 2022; Zheng et al., 2021), calling for a more concerted research effort to further explore tourist behaviour during and post-crisis. Significantly, while the current surge in behavioural research can be commended for challenging and adapting established notions and models to explain crisis-induced paradigm shifts in contemporary tourist behaviour, this has almost exclusively been from predominantly Western epistemologies focusing on demand and extrinsic constraints in international tourism. This has translated into academic inquiry generally neglecting the perspective of the Global South, as well as limited acknowledgement of how resident perception, perceived risk, stereotypes, and interventions associated with crisis influence their post-crisis behaviour towards inbound tourists and, more pertinently, domestic tourism activity (Kock et al., 2020; Moghavvemi et al., 2023; Senbeto et al., 2024). The study thus makes three primary contributions.

First, to the best of the author's knowledge, this study is one of the first to model the influence of resident perceptions towards inbound Chinese tourists [based on China's CI post-the-'zero-COVID-19' policy] on their willingness to engage in domestic tourism while adjusting for the potential intervening effect of residents' risk perception and their generic positive and negative stereotypes, as well as the potential moderating effect of crisis interventions. This represents a new discourse that addresses an interesting theoretical gap in modelling post-crisis tourist behaviour as alluded to by Cheer et al. (2021) and Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021). Second, the study addresses the empirical knowledge gap in research on the behaviour of residents as nuanced by the re-introduction of international tourists post-a-crisis (see Matiza, 2023; Zha et al., 2022). Third, the study collects data from a specific population (South African residents as domestic tourists) to gain critical insights into the under-researched emerging market tourism consumer segment, and how inbound tourism from a specific country influences their consumptive behaviour. Hence, a discernible population gap, as identified by Senbeto et al. (2024) regarding insights into the global South's domestic tourists' crisis-induced behavioural dynamics, is addressed. The study results suggest that a more holistic and nuanced approach is needed to understand the complex dynamics of resident behaviour, particularly in the context of crisis events.

Theoretically, the study is significant to the growing body of knowledge around modelling the potential impact of inbound tourists' crisis-induced CI on domestic tourist's post-crisis behaviour towards them. From a practical perspective, tourism practitioners and policymakers involved in bilateral tourism promotion between China and South Africa, as well as domestic tourism promotion agencies, benefit from critical insights into the consumptive behaviour of residents as domestic tourists considering increased post-crisis inbound tourism from China.

The following section is an overview of the literature and the development of hypotheses. The next section outlines the methodology and then moves on to the results section. The paper concludes with a discussion section, including the discussion, conclusion, theoretical and management implications, and limitations and future research areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

From a Post-Traumatic Growth perspective, Miao et al. (2022), consider crisis-induced behaviour to be post-traumatic and experiential. This implies that the COVID-19 pandemic may be viewed as a catalyst for behaviour shifts that may transcend the crisis and manifest tourist's post-pandemic behaviour in a new restructured 'normal' for tourists (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In their conceptual framework for post-pandemic post-traumatic tourist behaviour, Miao et al. (2022) advance the notion that, contrary to post-traumatic growth theory, maladaptive behaviour may occur because of traumatic experiences. From a restructured assumptions standpoint these may include: (1) the residual cognitive and affective effects of travel moratoriums and social distancing, which may ferment negative CI connotations for specific countries (Floribert, 2022; Zha et al., 2022); (2) deglobalisation and regionalism, which may be symptomatic of phobic behaviour towards and associated with heightened perceived risk and stereotypes towards certain groups of people (Matiza, 2023); and (3) self-diminishment via stress and life-changing negative experiences that may result in disinterest or reduced enjoyment in travel and tourism in a post-crisis scenario (Williamson et al., 2021). Therefore, the present study considers that the residual effects of China's prolonged 'zero-COVID' isolationist policy may have exacerbated China's negative post-pandemic CI and manifested into a phobia that heightens risk perceptions and stereotypes. Given the increased likelihood of social contact, the subsequent estrangement associated with inbound Chinese tourists may influence

South African residents' unwillingness to engage in domestic travel and tourism.

Country Image and the Country-of-origin Effect

Characterised as the “total of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs one has about a particular country” (Martin & Eroglu, 1993, p. 193), CI is a cognitive and affective construct that is an aggregate of the heuristic cues that influence perceptions towards a country (Buhmann, 2016). Rooted in international marketing theory (Chaulagain et al., 2019; Elliot et al., 2011; Micevski et al., 2021), the effect of CI on consumptive decision-making is well established; however, the influence of CI on tourist behaviour is still the subject of emerging tourism research and is yet to be fully examined in the crisis and post-crisis context (Chaulagain et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2022). When consumers’ beliefs about a particular country influence their consumptive decision-making towards products and services originating from the country, this is referred to as the Country-of-Origin (COO) effect (Buhmann, 2016). Grounded in Han’s (1989) notion of summary effect, the COO effect is the subsequent often subjective ‘halo’ effect that the CI as a summative heuristic cue has on the perceptions and behaviour of consumers (Elliot et al., 2011; Micevski et al., 2021; Shen et al., 2022). For instance, in the respective cases of the Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) disease outbreaks, anti-African and anti-Asian sentiments affected how tourists of African and Asian descent were subjected to phobic treatment by residents and other tourists (Hall et al., 2020; Kock et al., 2020). In the case of China, recent studies (Chen et al., 2020; Mallapaty, 2022; Matiza, 2023) have found that the pandemic-induced COO effect of China’s CI invariably influenced how Chinese people were perceived and how individuals behaved towards them.

Within the contemporary CI literature, Buhmann and Ingenhoff’s (2015) 4D Model has gained traction as a multidimensional explanatory framework for the effect of CI on consumer behaviour (Dubinsky, 2023). The 4D model comprises functional (competencies, political, and economic performance), aesthetic (appeals such as culture, scenery, and beauty), and normative (subjective norms and values) aspects as cognitive dimensions of CI that influence consumers’ beliefs (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015; Buhmann, 2016). Some of the literature (see Shen et al., 2022) has established that both cognitive (beliefs) and affective (emotion-based opinions or responses) influence behavioural intention. Although not overtly measured as an exogenous variable in this study, the fourth dimension of the 4D

model of CI is the affective dimension, which encapsulates how consumers feel about a country (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015). Therefore, source country CI [functional, aesthetic, and normative] and its influence on resident perceptions of inbound tourists and their conation as domestic tourists are discernible and requires further inquiry within the post-crisis context. Hence, the following hypotheses were formulated,

H_{1a-c}: The aesthetic [H_{1a}]; functional [H_{1b}]; and normative [H_{1c}] country image of China influences the willingness of South African residents to engage in domestic tourism considering increased inbound Chinese tourism.

Prior empirical evidence suggests that COO-oriented heuristic cues evoke intrinsic country-based stereotypes (Micevski et al., 2021). To this end, Moghavvemi et al. (2023) suggest that "...residents with higher negative emotions towards the origin country of the incoming tourists would have a lower intention to support such tourism and less motivation to be hospitable towards this group of tourists.". Thus, the influence of the CI-based COO effect on forming positive or negative stereotypes towards certain groups of people cannot be understated (Micevski et al., 2021; Tung et al., 2020; Yousaf, 2017). As a result, the following hypotheses were formulated,

H_{2a-c}: The aesthetic [H_{2a}]; functional [H_{2b}]; and normative [H_{2c}] country image of China influences the negative stereotypes of South African residents towards inbound Chinese tourists.

H_{3a-c}: The aesthetic [H_{3a}]; functional [H_{3b}]; and normative [H_{3c}] country image of China influences the positive stereotypes of South African residents towards inbound Chinese tourists.

Post-Crisis Risk Perception and Resident Behaviour

The correlation between health crises and perceived risk, as well as the inverse relationship between risk perception and travel intention is well established (Chung et al., 2021; Hamid & Bano, 2022). More pertinently, pre-pandemic tourism studies have predominantly interrogated the risk of crime, drugs, and pollution on host communities and how these inbound tourism-related threats influence resident attitudes and behaviour towards tourists (Moghavvemi et al., 2023). The pandemic, however, represents a potentially critical inflexion point in tourist-resident interactions. The existence of limited emerging studies (see Joo et al., 2021; Matiza, 2023; Micevski et al., 2021; Nghiem-Phu & Pham, 2022) associates the severity and pervasiveness of the COVID-19 pandemic with heightened risk perception

amongst residents and their potential subsequent negative behaviour towards inbound tourists and tourism in general. The uncertainty and negative evaluation of potential consequences (Hamid & Bano, 2022) associated with travel and tourism in the post-crisis era potentially leads to residents' heightened risk perception, mainly as prior studies (Li, 2020; Nghiem-Phu & Pham, 2022) have established from potential interaction with tourists from countries with pandemic-compromised CIs, like China. Moreover, the multifaceted nature of the pandemic may have exacerbated resident risk perception across several dimensions (Li, 2020; Shelat et al., 2022; Zenker & Kock, 2020), including the three perceived risk dimensions modelled by this study: physical (potential health risk posed by the pandemic and the hyper-transmissibility of the virus); social (fear of estrangement stemming from potential crisis-induced phobic behaviour); and psychological (anxiety towards outsiders due to the residual effects of interventions such as social distancing) risk. Thus, the study examined the following hypotheses:

H_{4a-c}: China's aesthetic country image influences the physical [H_{4a}]; psychological [H_{4b}]; and social [H_{4c}] risk perceptions of South African residents.

H_{5a-c}: China's functional country image influences the physical [H_{5a}]; psychological [H_{5b}]; and social [H_{5c}] risk perceptions of South African residents.

H_{6a-c}: China's normative country image influences the physical [H_{6a}]; psychological [H_{6b}]; and social [H_{6c}] risk perceptions of South African residents.

The Role of Stereotypes in Tourist Behaviour

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) (Fiske et al., 2002) establishes the symbiotic relationship between the COO effect and the simplification, albeit generalisation of beliefs. By assessing perceived intent and the propensity of the individual to act on the intent, the SCM considers that while stereotypes are subjective, they are dichotomous – with implicit or explicit stereotyping having either a discernibly positive or negative effect on conation (Diamantopoulos et al., 2017). Some authors (Yousaf, 2017) believe that “stereotypic expressions are also evaluative to the extent that they manifest reverence or irreverence to certain characteristics of a group”. The extant literature (Gajić et al., 2023; Micevski et al., 2021; Tung et al., 2020) corroborates this view suggesting that the COO effect may translate into intuitive stereotypes about people originating from a specific country and influence perceptions held of them as well as the behaviour they are subjected to. Citing the case of Pakistan's negative CI and how it adversely influences how its citizens are perceived, Yousaf (2017) submits that

stereotypes are an external cue of unconscious beliefs that inform sometimes negative inferences. While in the case of Serbia, Gajić et al. (2023) observe a correlation between the stereotypes (for instance, perceived arrogance) held by citizens and with willingness of tourists to visit the country as a tourism destination.

In sum, one may infer from the literature that, due to the pandemic, perceived risk may be one of the dimensions most influenced by the subjective characteristics of inbound tourists (Gajić et al., 2023). Thus, the present study extends the COO effect to the South African residents' positive or negative evaluations of Chinese inbound tourists and the perceived risk associated with their travel and tourism activity in a host destination country. Moreover, the notion that stereotypes held by residents may negatively influence their willingness to engage in domestic tourism if there is potential interaction with a 'segregated' tourist group that is susceptible to existing negative stereotypes has some credence. The opposite effect may be true, whereby positive stereotypes may enhance residents' willingness to engage in domestic tourism. Subsequently, the following direct hypotheses were formulated,

H₇: Negative stereotypes influence the willingness of South African residents to engage in domestic tourism, considering increased inbound Chinese tourism.

H_{8a-c}: Negative stereotypes influence the physical [H_{8a}]; psychological [H_{8b}]; and social [H_{8c}] risk perceptions of South African residents.

H₉: Positive stereotypes influence the willingness of South African residents to engage in domestic tourism, considering increased inbound Chinese tourism.

H_{10a-c}: Negative stereotypes influence the physical [H_{10a}]; psychological [H_{10b}]; and social [H_{10c}] risk perceptions of South African residents.

H_{11a-c}: Physical [H_{11a}]; psychological [H_{11b}]; and social [H_{11c}] risk perceptions of South African residents influence their willingness to engage in domestic tourism, considering increased inbound Chinese tourism.

Moderation Hypotheses

Health crises generally trigger one of a triad of behavioural responses from tourists, namely avoidance, mitigation, or management (Li & Wang, 2020; Miao et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2021). From a Protective Motivation Theory (PMT) (Rogers, 1975) perspective, pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions in tourism seek to positively influence tourists' adaptive behaviour by mitigating and managing the risk and fear associated with

travel and tourism activity (Zheng et al., 2021). Furthermore, the perceived risk posed by inbound tourists (Kamata, 2022). To this end, Sharun et al. (2021) indicates that the resuscitation of international tourism post-a-crisis the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic is predicated on the implementation of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions that seek to, in part, protect residents given the prospect of post-crisis inbound tourism. Prior studies have observed that pharmaceutical interventions such as vaccination (Nie et al., 2022), and non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as the digitalisation of travel and tourism services; issuance of travel advisories; and the enforcement of health protocols (Hüsser et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2016) influence tourist behaviour. Hence, the notion of a potential moderating effect of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions on the relationship between tourist cognition [resident's risk perception associated with, and the influence of stereotypes towards inbound tourists] and conation [willingness to engage in domestic tourism] is viable. This study explores the potential moderating effect of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions by testing the following hypotheses;

H₁₂: Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions influence the willingness of South African residents to engage in domestic tourism, considering increased inbound Chinese tourism.

H_{13a-c}: Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions moderate the relationship between physical [H_{13a}]; psychological [H_{13b}]; and social [H_{13c}] risk perceptions of South African residents and their willingness to engage in domestic tourism, considering increased inbound Chinese tourism.

H_{14a-c}: Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions moderate the relationship between the aesthetic [H_{14a}]; functional [H_{14b}]; and normative [H_{14c}] country image of China and the willingness of South African residents to engage in domestic tourism, considering increased inbound Chinese tourism.

H_{15a-b}: Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions moderate the relationship between negative [H_{15a}] and positive [H_{15b}] stereotypes and the willingness of South African residents to engage in domestic tourism, considering increased inbound Chinese tourism.

Figure 1 is the conceptual framework for the study.

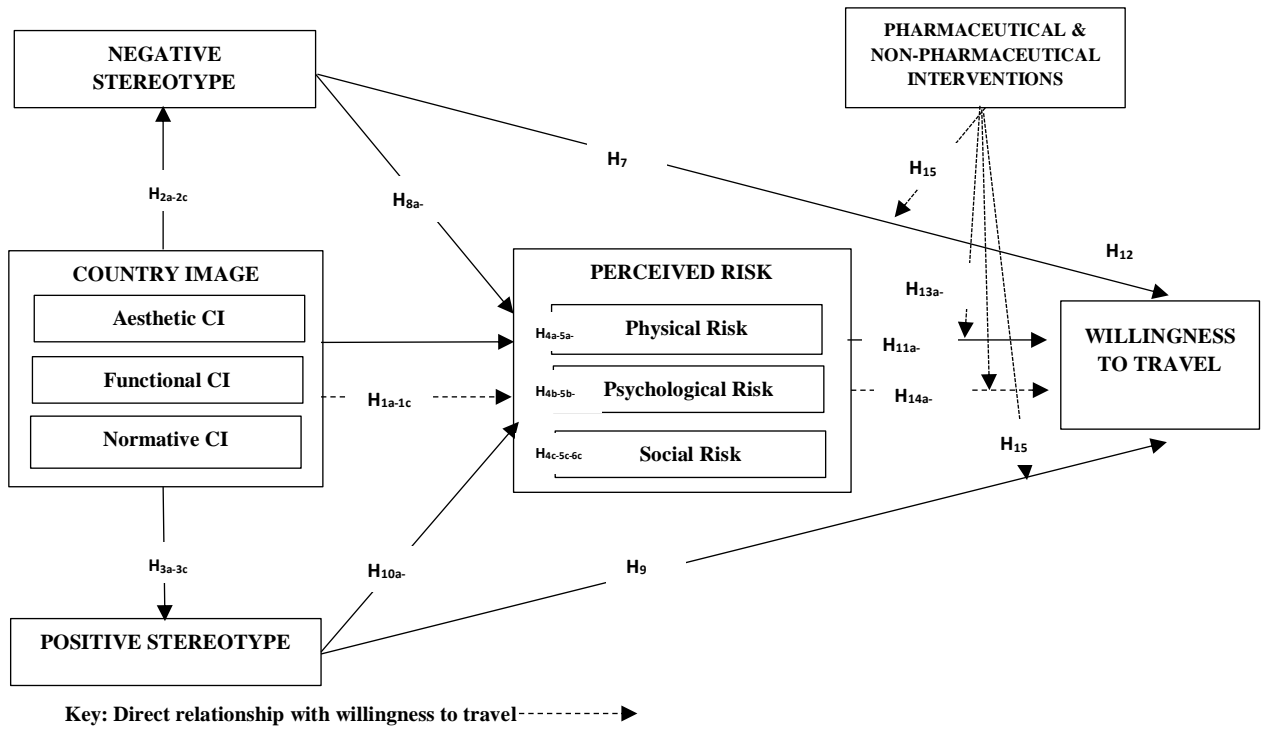


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional deductive study was conducted in February 2023, two months after China announced the easing of its zero COVID-19 policy (Mallapaty, 2022). To mitigate logistical and financial challenges, an online survey was published on QuestionPro to generate data from a sample of South Africans across South Africa’s 9 geographically vast provinces. In line with sampling approaches in online surveys (Nayak & Narayan, 2019), a non-probability sample of South African residents as potential domestic tourists was drawn from a pre-recruited panel managed and administered by an international South African research firm, InfoQuest Africa. The final sample of n=499 respondents adhered to Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) sampling heuristics, which, for populations of over 1 million individuals, practical significance is based on a sample of $n \geq 384$. The socio-demographic profile confirmed the geographical spread of respondents across all 9 of South Africa’s provinces, with the majority typically originating from South Africa’s major economic and domestic tourist hubs of Gauteng (31%) and the Western Cape (24%).

Measuring Instrument

A composite scale (see Supplementary Table I) was developed for the study and subjected to an expert scientific panel and ethics review process by the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee [Ethics number: NWU-00551-23-A4], respectively. Unless otherwise stated, the variables were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale of agreement, where 1 = 'Strongly disagree' and 5 = 'Strongly agree'. The measuring instrument was structured as follows:

- *Independent variables:* The CI of China amongst South Africans was the independent variable. The scale comprised of 18 items adapted from Buhmann (2016) to measure the Functional, Normative and Aesthetic dimensions of CI.
- *Mediators:* The modelled mediators were the generally positive (five items) and negative (five items) perceptions of South Africans towards Chinese tourists based on Tung et al.'s. (2020) scale. Perceived risk of Chinese tourism to South Africa was also modelled as a mediator composed of 12 items associated with perceived psychological, social, and physical risk, respectively (see Adam, 2015; Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Olya & Al-ansi, 2018; Wang, 2017).
- *Moderator:* The moderating effect of the perceived effectiveness of pharmaceutical & and non-pharmaceutical interventions in protecting South Africans was measured. Six items were adapted from a previous study by Liu et al. (2016), with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale of effectiveness, where 1 = 'Very ineffective' and 5 = 'Very effective'.
- *Dependent variable:* The willingness of domestic tourists to travel considering the potential increased inbound tourism from Chinese tourists was measured as the dependent variable. Five items were adapted from the literature (Hao et al., 2021; Whitehead & Wicker, 2018).

Data Analysis

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using SMART-PLS4 was employed to analyse the data. As a multivariate analysis approach, SEM accommodates complex models (including mediation and moderation) that require the testing of multiple variables and relationships in a single model (German, et al., 2022). SEM is also helpful in modelling cause-and-effect relationships based on multiple exogenous and endogenous variables (Hair et al., 2021). Hence, employing maximum likelihood estimation, the present study

employed variance-based Partial Least Squares - SEM (PLS-SEM) as it generated better construct validity and reliability for composite measurement scales, is less susceptible to parameter estimation bias and is less sensitive to sample size (German et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021).

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

The sample (Supplementary Table II) consisted of an even split of male (50%) and female (50%) respondents. Apart from this, the typical respondent was a South African citizen (95%), aged between 25 and 44 years old (57%), had comparatively more domestic travel experience (56%), possessed at least a high school certificate (36%) or bachelor's degree (36%) at the time of the survey. The typical respondent was also married (46%) and employed in the private sector (44%), earning above the average income in South Africa (28%) while travelling either with their partner (32%) or family (30%). The typical respondent (63%) had also travelled domestically more than once in the two years prior to the survey and planned to engage in domestic tourism (91%) in 2023. More pertinently, respondents had either not interacted (39%) or interacted (more than once: 37%) with Chinese tourists when travelling domestically.

Measurement Model

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.28) was used to conduct Harman's test of Common Method Variance (CMV). The CMV statistic of 24.43% indicated that there was no concern for bias, as it was within the established threshold of 50% (Zheng et al., 2021). There was no missing data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy statistics ranged between 0.660 and 0.898, while Bartlett's test of Sphericity statistics for all the variables was statistically significant at ($p < 0.05$) (Hair et al., 2014). The reliability and validity of the measurement models were assessed using SMART-PLS4. Kurtosis (between -10 and +10) and skew (between -3 and +3) statistics (Supplementary Table I) were within the acceptable parameters for normality assumptions (Griffin & Steinbrecher, 2013). As indicated in Table 1, the outer loadings (see Supplementary Table I for complete item and statistics list) for all the variables were within accepted parameters except for *PHR* and *IWT*, which reported minimum outer loadings less than the recommended $OL = 0.40$ but did not adversely influence the subsequent statistics (Abbasi et al., 2024).

As summarised in Table 1, the Cronbach Alpha ($\alpha > 0.70$), Composite reliability ($CR > 0.70$) and the Average Variance Extracted ($AVE > 0.50$) statistics for all the variables were above the threshold criteria, thus internal consistency reliability and convergent reliability were confirmed (Hair et al., 2020).

Table 1. *Measurement model summary*

*Variable	*Items	*OL		*VIF		(α)	CR	AVE
		Min	Max	Min	Max			
Aesthetic Country Image (ACI)	6	0.658	0.819	1.436	2.180	0.850	0.861	0.573
Functional Country Image (FCI)	6	0.623	0.811	1.416	2.510	0.832	0.852	0.545
Normative Country Image (NCI)	6	0.791	0.880	1.967	3.652	0.923	0.928	0.721
Positive Perception (PSV)	5	0.748	0.876	1.633	3.176	0.850	0.857	0.628
Negative Perception (NGV)	5	0.754	0.862	1.476	2.510	0.882	0.886	0.680
Physical Risk (PHR)	4	0.349	0.867	1.149	1.531	0.699	0.775	0.513
Psychological Risk (PSR)	4	0.772	0.914	1.531	3.954	0.878	0.883	0.733
Social Risk (SCR)	4	0.846	0.895	2.157	2.936	0.893	0.895	0.756
Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions (PNI)	6	0.723	0.851	1.955	2.645	0.889	0.902	0.640
Willingness to Travel (IWT)	5	0.373	0.883	1.064	2.857	0.741	0.825	0.509

Key: ACI = Aesthetic Country Image; FCI = Functional Country Image; NCI = Normative Country Image; PSV = Positive Perception; NGV = Negative Perception; PHR = Physical Risk; PSR = Psychological Risk; SCR = Social Risk; PNI = Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions; IWT = Willingness to Travel; OL = Outer Loadings; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor; α = Cronbach Alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted

Note: * Supplementary Table I for full item list

The Variance Inflation Factor ($VIF < 0.50$) statistics range for all variables were below the threshold criteria of 0.50 (Table 1), confirming the absence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2020). Discriminate validity was assessed based on the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria (Table 2), as well as Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations ($HTMT < 0.85$) as summarised in Table 3.

Table 2. *Discriminate validity - Fornell & Larcker criteria*

	ACI	FCI	IWT	NCI	NGV	PHR	PNI	PSV	PSR	SCR
ACI	0.757									
FCI	0.604	0.738								
IWT	0.352	0.365	0.714							
NCI	0.590	0.609	0.288	0.849						
NGV	0.536	0.488	0.347	0.615	0.825					
PHR	-0.039	-0.105	-0.334	0.055	-0.107	0.716				
PNI	0.363	0.362	0.250	0.403	0.264	0.027	0.800			
PSV	-0.417	-0.374	-0.207	-0.406	-0.628	0.279	-0.134	0.793		
PSR	-0.172	-0.157	-0.308	-0.066	-0.262	0.502	0.051	0.396	0.856	
SCR	-0.229	-0.213	-0.325	-0.062	-0.277	0.626	-0.010	0.473	0.644	0.870

Key: ACI = Aesthetic Country Image; FCI = Functional Country Image; NCI = Normative Country Image; PSV = Positive Perception; NGV = Negative Perception; PHR = Physical Risk; PSR = Psychological Risk; SCR = Social Risk; PNI = Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions; IWT = Willingness to Travel

As shown in Table 2, the square root of AVE statistics is greater than the correlations of the constructs. Therefore, discriminate validity is confirmed based on the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria. Table 3 indicates that all the ratios of correlations in the matrix are below the 0.85 threshold; hence discriminate validity is further affirmed (Abbasi et al., 2024).

Table 3. *Discriminate validity - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)*

	ACI	FCI	IWT	NCI	NGV	PHR	PNI	PSV	PSR	SCR
ACI										
FCI	0.716									
IWT	0.455	0.465								
NCI	0.663	0.682	0.343							
NGV	0.611	0.550	0.417	0.667						
PHR	0.199	0.221	0.467	0.145	0.173					
PNI	0.416	0.403	0.330	0.441	0.294	0.126				
PSV	0.479	0.427	0.262	0.449	0.723	0.313	0.149			
PSR	0.189	0.170	0.364	0.099	0.293	0.543	0.064	0.449		
SCR	0.252	0.243	0.360	0.083	0.311	0.676	0.051	0.539	0.714	

Key: ACI = Aesthetic Country Image; FCI = Functional Country Image; NCI = Normative Country Image; PSV = Positive Perception; NGV = Negative Perception; PHR = Physical Risk; PSR = Psychological Risk; SCR = Social Risk; PNI = Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions; IWT = Willingness to Travel

Structural Model

SMART-PLS4 was utilised to investigate the structural model of the study and test the proposed hypotheses. Based on the blindfolding procedure in SMART-PLS4, Table 4 indicates that the model had predictive relevance ($Q^2 > 0.000$) with Q^2 statistics ranging between 0.066 to 0.427 (Hair et al., 2013). The R^2 statistics assessed the variance in the endogenous variables as explained by the exogenous variables in the model. The R^2 coefficient statistics ranged between weak (0.118) and substantial (0.425), suggesting that the variance explained by the endogenous constructs was significant (Cohan, 1988).

Table 4. *Coefficient and model predictive power*

Variable	Complete Sample	
	R^2	Q^2
IWT	0.311	0.142
NGV	0.425	0.417
PHR	0.118	0.017
PSV	0.215	0.206
PSR	0.172	0.025
SCR	0.263	0.066

Notes: R^2 - Coefficient of .02 = Weak; .13 = Moderate; .26 = Substantial; Q^2 - Predictive power of $> .000$

Key: PSV = Positive Perception; NGV = Negative Perception; PHR = Physical Risk; PSR = Psychological Risk; SCR = Social Risk; IWT = Willingness to Travel

Table 5 summarises the results of the direct and moderation hypotheses testing. As summarised in Table 5, the PLS-SEM results indicate

that all the hypothesised direct effects were significant except for H_{4a} and H_{5a}, whereby *ACI* did not have a direct effect on *PHR* (H_{4a}: $\beta = 0.048$, $t = 0.756$, $p = 0.225$) and *PSR* (H_{5a}: $\beta = -0.047$, $t = 0.775$, $p = 0.219$). Moreover, H_{1c}, H_{8a}, H_{8c} and H_{11c} were also rejected as *NCI* (H_{1c}: $\beta = 0.066$, $t = 1.007$, $p = 0.157$) had no direct effect on *IWT*, while *NGV* had no direct effect on *PHR* (H_{8a}: $\beta = 0.003$, $t = 0.041$, $p = 0.484$) and *SCR* (H_{8c}: $\beta = -0.041$, $t = 0.670$, $p = 0.251$). The direct effect of *SCR* on *IWT* (H_{11c}: $\beta = -0.078$, $t = 1.151$, $p = 0.125$) was also insignificant.

Table 5. *Direct and moderation hypotheses*

Hypotheses		β	STDV	t-value	p-value	Output (Result)
H _{1a}	ACI -> IWT	0.112	0.065	1.724	0.042	Accept
H _{1b}	FCI -> IWT	0.114	0.054	2.098	0.018	Accept
H _{1c}	NCI -> IWT	0.066	0.065	1.007	0.157	Reject
H _{2a}	ACI -> NGV	0.232	0.055	4.249	0.000	Accept
H _{2b}	FCI -> NGV	0.091	0.047	1.929	0.027	Accept
H _{2c}	NCI -> NGV	0.423	0.050	8.533	0.000	Accept
H _{3a}	ACI -> PSV	-0.231	0.063	3.665	0.000	Accept
H _{3b}	FCI -> PSV	-0.111	0.056	1.997	0.023	Accept
H _{3c}	NCI -> PSV	-0.203	0.057	3.563	0.000	Accept
H _{4a}	ACI -> PHR	0.048	0.064	0.756	0.225	Reject
H _{4b}	ACI -> PSR	-0.047	0.060	0.775	0.219	Reject
H _{4c}	ACI -> SCR	-0.104	0.053	1.958	0.025	Accept
H _{5a}	FCI -> PHR	-0.170	0.060	2.842	0.002	Accept
H _{5b}	FCI -> PSR	-0.074	0.055	1.345	0.089	Accept
H _{5c}	FCI -> SCR	-0.135	0.056	2.410	0.008	Accept
H _{6a}	NCI -> PHR	0.269	0.063	4.307	0.000	Accept
H _{6b}	NCI -> PSR	0.222	0.067	3.322	0.000	Accept
H _{6c}	NCI -> SCR	0.301	0.058	5.212	0.000	Accept
H ₇	NGV -> IWT	0.184	0.065	2.848	0.002	Accept
H _{8a}	NGV -> PHR	0.003	0.068	0.041	0.484	Reject
H _{8b}	NGV -> PSR	-0.102	0.064	1.607	0.054	Accept
H _{8c}	NGV -> SCR	-0.041	0.061	0.670	0.251	Reject
H ₉	PSV -> IWT	0.200	0.064	3.119	0.001	Accept
H _{10a}	PSV -> PHR	0.347	0.053	6.510	0.000	Accept
H _{10b}	PSV -> PSR	0.374	0.053	7.118	0.000	Accept
H _{10c}	PSV -> SCR	0.476	0.052	9.187	0.000	Accept
H _{11a}	PHR -> IWT	-0.257	0.059	4.353	0.000	Accept
H _{11b}	PSR -> IWT	-0.139	0.059	2.349	0.009	Accept
H _{11c}	SCR -> IWT	-0.078	0.068	1.151	0.125	Reject
H ₁₂	PNI -> IWT	0.127	0.053	2.415	0.008	Accept
H _{13a}	PNI x PHR -> IWT	0.019	0.055	0.342	0.366	Reject
H _{13b}	PNI x PSR -> IWT	-0.055	0.062	0.882	0.189	Reject
H _{13c}	PNI x SCR -> IWT	0.080	0.071	1.136	0.128	Reject
H _{14a}	PNI x ACI -> IWT	-0.077	0.074	1.043	0.149	Reject
H _{14b}	PNI x FCI -> IWT	0.036	0.062	0.587	0.278	Reject
H _{14c}	PNI x NCI -> IWT	0.077	0.073	1.057	0.145	Reject
H _{15a}	PNI x NGV -> IWT	-0.023	0.061	0.378	0.353	Reject
H _{15b}	PNI x PST -> IWT	0.058	0.066	0.874	0.191	Reject

Key: ACI = Aesthetic Country Image; FCI = Functional Country Image; NCI = Normative Country Image; PSV = Positive Perception; NGV = Negative Perception; PHR = Physical Risk; PSR = Psychological Risk; SCR = Social Risk; PNI = Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions; IWT = Willingness to Travel; B = Beta Coefficient, STDV = Standard deviation; t-value = t – Statistics, p-value = Probability (P) value.

Relationships are significant at: * $p < 0.100$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$ β = Beta Coefficient; t-value = t – Statistics; p-value = Probability (P) value

The study also assessed the moderating effect of *PNI* on the relationships between the country image (*ACI*, *NCI* and *FCI*); perceived risk (*PSR*, *PHR* and *SCR*); generic perception (*PSV* and *NGV*) and *IWT*. As it emerged, *PNI* does not have a statistically significant effect on the hypothesised relationships; hence hypotheses H_{13a-c} , H_{14a-c} , as well as H_{15a} and H_{15b} were rejected.

DISCUSSION

The study provides empirical evidence of the underlying mechanisms in the willingness of South African residents to engage in domestic tourism amid a potential influx of inbound Chinese tourists post the country's 'zero COVID-19' policy. Seven key results emerged from the study. First, contrary to the empirical evidence from the extant of literature (Ang & Mansouri, 2023; Armutlu et al., 2021; Floribert, 2022; Miao et al., 2022; Matiza, 2023) related to the negative crisis and post-crisis CI of China, as well as the subsequent perceived negative COO effect on Chinese tourists, China's [aesthetic and functional] CI positively influenced the willingness of South African residents to engage in domestic tourism despite the potential influx of inbound Chinese tourists. Second, in line with the extant burgeoning literature (Gajić et al., 2023; Micevski et al., 2021; Moghavvemi et al., 2023; Tung et al., 2020; Yousaf, 2017) China's post-crisis CI increases South African residents' negative stereotypes and has a diminishing effect on residents' positive stereotypes of Chinese people. This may suggest that the positive COO effect of China's CI may be overridden by South African residents' pre-existing and crisis-induced phobic anti-Asian sentiment (Yousaf, 2017). What is potentially novel is that all three CI dimensions exhibited the same COO effect on resident stereotypes.

Third, normative aspects of China's CI typically heightened South African residents' risk perceptions, hence supporting the COO effect of China's norms and values on how residents interpret potential perceived risk (see Chen et al., 2020; Micevski et al., 2021; Moghavvemi et al., 2023; Yousaf, 2017). Interestingly, contrary to most of the post-crisis literature, the COO effect of China's aesthetic and functional CI had a predominantly diminishing effect on the risk perceptions of South African residents. Fourth, the positive and negative stereotypes of Chinese tourists positively affected South African residents' willingness to engage in domestic tourism. This result further highlights the complexity of modelling consumer behaviour in that the results may imply that positive stereotypes, such as Chinese tourists being polite, clean, friendly, and open to interaction,

reinforced that they would most likely adopt and adhere to local health protocols such as masking and social distancing when engaging in tourism (see Moghavvemi et al., 2023). However, these positive stereotypes heightened South African residents' physical, psychological and social risk perceptions due to the increased potential for some resident-host interaction. On the other hand, negative stereotypes such as Chinese tourists being believed to be annoying, aggressive, and not open to interaction may diminish the likelihood that some inbound Chinese tourists would actively interact with South African residents, thus mitigating the prospect of crowding at popular tourist destinations (see Nie et al., 2022). This may also account for how negative stereotypes diminished residents' psychological and social risk perceptions of risk associated with inbound Chinese tourism.

Fifth, physical and psychological risk perceptions associated with inbound Chinese tourists diminished South African residents' willingness to engage in domestic tourism. This is consistent with contemporary post-crisis studies (Armutlu et al., 2021; Joo et al., 2021; Matiza, 2023; Ryu et al., 2023), which have established that risk perception transcends to period of crisis and influences post-crisis tourist behaviour. Sixth, consistent with some of the literature (Nie et al., 2022; Sharun et al., 2021), pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions positively influenced South African residents' willingness to engage in domestic tourism. However, these interventions did not moderate the influence of China's CI on their willingness to engage in domestic tourism. Nor did the interventions affect the influence of stereotypes and risk perceptions on South African residents' willingness to engage in domestic tourism. The result corresponds with the findings of Moghavvemi et al. (2023) that interventions such as vaccination, mask-wearing and social distancing did not influence residents' often negative conation in relation to the threat posed by post-crisis inbound tourism. However, the results contradict most of the literature (Chung et al., 2021; Hüsser et al., 2023; Nie et al., 2022; Ryu et al., 2023) concerning the established significant effect of health-protective behaviour via the adoption and efficacy of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the study results confirm that ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and risk aversion are some of the long-term effects of the pandemic that appear to have transcended the pandemic to influence post-crisis resident behaviour

in the South African context (Kamata, 2022; Miao et al., 2022). The CI, stereotype, and risk perception-oriented nuances in resident behaviour support prior studies (see Armutlu et al., 2021; Matiza, 2023; Ryu et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2021) that alluded to the heterogeneity in their effects, as well as the fact that health-crisis induced behaviour [akin to SARS and Ebola-induced shifts in tourist behaviour] transcends the COVID-19 crisis period and influences residents' behaviour post-the-crisis. The heterogeneity in the effect of China's perceived post-crisis CI on various cognitive [positive and negative stereotypes and risk perceptions] and conation [willingness to engage in domestic tourism] dimensions of residents' behaviour suggests that even residents from the same community may differ in their views on risk, sources of risk, its mitigation, and its influence on their conation (see Moghavvemi et al., 2023).

Theoretical Implications

To the best of the author's knowledge, this study is one of the first to attempt to model the relationship between the effect of China's post-crisis CI and the willingness of residents to engage in post-crisis domestic tourism amid the potential influx of Chinese tourists. By adjusting for the intervening effects of positive and negative stereotypes, the perceived risks associated with Chinese tourists, as well as crisis interventions, the more complex model makes significant theoretical contributions to the burgeoning literature (Armutlu et al., 2021; Joo et al., 2021; Kamata, 2022; Matiza, 2023; Moghavvemi et al., 2023; Nghiem-Phu & Pham, 2022; Ryu et al., 2023) which has advocated for more advanced post-crisis behavioural research from a resident, as well as a resident-tourist perspective. The results affirm Miao et al's. (2022), post-pandemic post-traumatic tourism behaviour model by partially validating the notion of restructured assumptions [the significance of the COO effect, stereotypes, and phobic risk perception] in tourist behaviour, hence providing empirical evidence that is an antonym to the post-traumatic growth theory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), more so from a resident's domestic tourism behaviour perspective.

The study expands Buhmann and Ingenhoff's 4D Model of CI (2015) and Han's (1989) notion of the summary effect to post-crisis resident behaviour and domestic tourism in the global South, thus improving the understanding of the perception-oriented constructs from an under-researched tourism segment. The study also broadens the scope of Rogers's (1975) Protective Motivation Theory (PMT), extending it to better comprehend how crisis mitigation measures potentially influence adaptive post-crisis resident behaviour and domestic tourism. The results have

implications for applying the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) in tourism, as the results confirm the COO effect as an antecedent to positive and negative stereotype formation, as well as establishing stereotypes as viable intervening variables in tourist decision-making. Thus, opening new avenues for tourism research that seeks to adapt the model. Going forward, the results have theoretical implications for the broader Social Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) in post-crisis domestic tourism, whereby CI has a verified influence on the value formation process between inbound tourists and residents via its effect on stereotypes and risk perceptions. Hence highlighting the increasing complexity of modelling resident-tourist interaction in tourism, particularly in a post-crisis scenario. Lastly, the heterogeneity in the effects of CI, stereotypes, risk perceptions and pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions provides a myriad of empirical evidence that confirms and, as in most instances in this study, challenges established notions and behavioural models in tourism research.

Practical Implications

The interrogation of resident-tourist interaction within the context of the willingness of residents to engage in domestic tourism amidst inbound tourists from China is imperative and timely. A better understanding of resident perception and behaviour is imperative to the sustainable post-crisis recovery and development of both domestic and international tourism. Heterogeneity in the impact of the COO effect on the various behavioural dimensions explored in this study suggests that while there is a general willingness of South African residents to engage in domestic tourism despite the influx of Chinese tourists post-the 'zero-COVID-19' policy, there may be underlying factors that may impact the resident-tourist interaction when both groups engage in travel and tourism in the same locale. Hence, the outcomes of this study provide destination management and tourism practitioners, as well as public policymakers, with critical insights into the value of residents as key stakeholders within the tourism ecosystem. The results have two key practical implications.

First, resident behaviour and their attitude towards inbound tourists have significant experiential and satisfaction implications for international tourists. However, what this study highlights, is how resident perceptions of inbound tourists also influences their post-crisis domestic travel behaviour. Chinese tourists engage in group travel, visit renowned tourist attractions, attend large-scale events, and are known for the penchant for being patrons at high-end tourism facilities such as restaurants and casinos (see Wen et al., 2021). This suggests that Chinese tourists are a high-value

tourist segment and would be critical to the recovery of tourism in any destination. Additionally, it will be inevitable for residents to interact with Chinese tourists when they engage in domestic tourism. Therefore, there is a need for concerted tourism-oriented social marketing to coordinate initiatives such as cultural exchange activities, media briefings and social media campaigns aimed at dispelling and managing the underlying negative stereotypes about China, particularly addressing health and safety issues post-the pandemic. Furthermore, in the case of South Africa, 'Ubuntu' (I am what I am because of who we all are) is the mainstay and hallmark of the South African tourism experience (see Hemmonsbeey & Tichaawa, 2020). Whereby, South African friendliness and the welcoming attitude of its people towards international visitors have been touted as being key in the overall positive tourism experience for inbound tourists. Hence, the concept of 'Ubuntu' can be harnessed as the basis for a bi-lateral tourism policy that seeks to the COO effect of China amongst South Africans, as well as reintegrate Chinese tourists post their isolationist COVID-19 policy. Second, the value of Chinese tourists to the global tourism market cannot be understated. Tourism practitioners and public officials must coordinate public diplomacy initiatives to promote bi-lateral tourism. Public diplomacy and progressive mutually beneficial policies such as technology transfer in travel and tourism biosecurity and pre-emptive travel bubble protocols will be key to managing intra and post-crisis CI, as well as subsequent crisis-induced perceptions and behaviour. This approach also promotes post-crisis resident domestic tourism behaviour, whereby effectively managed risk perception and stereotypes associated with inbound tourists after a crisis enhance their *home is safer bias* (see Wolff et al., 2019).

Limitations and Future Research

The study provides some interesting *in situ* insights into resident post-crisis behaviour. However, there are some limitations to be noted. As a cross-sectional deductive study, the data provides a snapshot of resident perceptions during the period immediately preceded by the rescinding of the zero-COVID policy by China. For a more longitudinal perspective on the effect of the pandemic on China's CI and its subsequent COO effect, replication of the study is recommended, as the present study provides a good basis for a future comparative study. The population sampled consists of South African residents only; hence, results can only be generalised in the South African context. Replication of the model and study in various emerging market destinations is therefore recommended to further validate

the model as well as contribute various destination insights based on the model presented in this study. Future scholarship may also expand the model by adapting other seminal theories, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Disclosure statement

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UNDERSTANDING THAI TOURISTS' MEANING- MAKING OF ATTACHMENT TO JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how Thai tourists interpret their attachment to Japan using a qualitative approach. Employing a four-dimensional framework, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 frequent Thai visitors to Japan. The narratives revealed all four dimensions of place attachment: place identity, place dependence, place social bonding, and place affect. Japan emerged as a unique destination offering irreplaceable travel experiences. Place dependence was most significant in fostering attachment, while place affect was an accumulation of the other three dimensions. The study found that attachment resulted from a combination of diverse factors rather than a single cause. It underscores the role of place attachment in promoting repeat visits and destination loyalty, providing insights to enhance Japan's tourism appeal. However, the reliance on qualitative methods limits generalizability. Future research should explore attachment in non-visitors, the longevity of attachment, and factors reducing attachment to a place.

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INTRODUCTION

With the successful introduction of the Japanese government's policy to establish the tourism industry in the country in 2003, aiming to position the tourism sector as a key industry in 21st century (Liu, 2023), the past decade has witnessed a significant surge in the number of foreign tourists (Japan National Tourism Organization - JNTO, 2023). In the period of 2013-2019, Japan welcomed international tourists from all around the globe, with the number increasing substantially each year (JNTO, 2023; World Bank Group, 2024). JNTO's (2023) data shows that the number of international visitors

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surpassed 10 million in 2013 and had risen to 31.9 million by 2019. This massive growth in inbound tourism reflects the significant contribution made by inbound tourism to bolster the Japanese economy (Nguyen, 2020).

The success of inbound tourism in Japan can be attributed to various factors, categorized as push and pull factors. Push factors, rooted in the internal needs of foreign visitors driving them to visit Japan, are largely associated with the characteristics of visitors, who are typically well-educated, intellectually curious, and highly inquisitive. They are inclined to deepen their understanding by immersing themselves in local traditions, cultures, and natural environments that differ from their own country (Kurihara, 2022; Shapoval et al., 2018). Shapoval et al. (2018) further highlight that specific motivations, such as attending conferences, participating in incentive travel programs, and pursuing educational opportunities, along with anticipated future experiences, are also significant push factors influencing tourism decisions. Regarding pull factors which involve the Japanese government's initiatives to boost the nation's image through various marketing campaigns, thereby increasing global recognition of Japan as a premier tourism destination. Furthermore, the relaxation of short-term visa requirements for foreign visitors (Liu, 2023) and Japan's unique attractions, including its cuisine, accommodations, shopping, transportation, entertainment, natural beauty, and cultural resources, play significant roles in drawing visitors to the country (Liu, 2023; Shapoval et al., 2018).

The substantial rise in the number of international tourists visiting Japan was also fuelled by several external factors (Andonian et al., 2016; Bangkok Post, 2015; Liu, 2023; Nguyen, 2020) including the depreciation of the Japanese yen, China's economic growth and the introduction of low-cost air travel options from various Asian countries to Japan (Andonian et al., 2016; Bangkok Post, 2015; Nguyen, 2020).

However, the tourism industry in Japan witnessed a significant downturn between 2021 and 2022 in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent imposition of global travel restrictions (Yagasaki, 2021). JNTO (2023) reports a staggering 87 percent decline in the number of foreign visitors in 2020, with only 4.1 million people travelling to the country, compared to nearly 32 million in the previous year. Due to the ongoing pandemic, the number of international arrivals in 2021 dropped to an all-time low of 246,000, representing a 99 percent decrease from 2019 (JNTO, 2023; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2023). However, in the latter part of 2022, as the COVID-19

situation started to improve and the Japanese government relaxed its entry restrictions for foreign visitors, inbound tourism began to recover. The reinstatement of visa-free entry for foreign visitors also contributed to the resurgence of inbound tourism in Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2023). In the first two months of 2023, Japan experienced a marked rise in the number of international tourists, attracting approximately 2,972,600 visitors (JNTO, 2023).

According to data released by JNTO (2023) and JTB Tourism Research & Cons, Asia is the main source of international tourists visiting Japan, contributing to over 50% of total foreign visitors, with China and South Korea being the leading markets, followed by Taiwan, the USA, and Thailand. Thai visitors have emerged as a significant market for Japan's tourism industry, as evidenced by the visa exemptions for short-stay Thai tourists in July 2013 (Japanese Embassy to Thailand, 2014). Prior to the pandemic, Thai visitors ranked sixth in overall international tourist numbers and were the highest in Southeast Asia, with 1,318,977 people recorded in 2019 (JNTO, 2023). However, due to Japan's closed borders, the number of Thai visitors fell to 219,830 in 2020 and only 2,758 in 2021 (JNTO, 2023; Yagasaki, 2021). Since Japan reopened its borders at the end of 2022, the number of Thai tourists has rebounded quickly, reaching around 136,700 during January and February 2023 (JNTO, 2023). For several years, Japan has consistently been the most popular destination for Thai travellers (Bangkok Post, 2015). Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of this segment of Japan's tourism industry is imperative.

Although Japan has become a favoured destination for international tourists, including those from Thailand, there is global competition from other destinations. To maintain Japan's competitive edge, destination management organisations (DMOs) and other stakeholders must devise effective strategies. One such approach could be to cultivate a sense of attachment to the country among selected markets. The literature recognises the importance of tourists' place attachment in driving repeat visits and loyalty to a particular destination (Isa et al., 2020; Patwardhan et al., 2019; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Zou et al., 2022). Developing a strong sense of attachment is also a key factor in branding destinations, and consequently contributes to their competitive advantage (Su et al., 2018; Veasna et al., 2013). By focusing on a comprehensive understanding of how the target tourists develop a sense of attachment to a country, and how enhancing such feelings of attachment, DMOs and other tourism-related stakeholders in Japan can ensure that the country remains an appealing

destination for its target tourists. Therefore, the importance of gaining insights into tourists' attachment to the country cannot be overstated.

The study of place attachment has gained significant attention from scholars and researchers in the tourism field in recent decades (Dwyer et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2018). However, the current literature on place attachment in the Japanese context is limited and predominantly quantitative in nature, emphasising the connection between tourists' attachment to a specific place and their behaviour. For instance, Uesugi & Kudo (2020) investigated the relationship between tourists' connection to a place and their tendency to adopt environmentally-friendly behaviours in natural areas; Abdulsalam & Dahana (2022) explored the connection between place attachment, overall satisfaction, and visit frequency; and Basu et al. (2020) examined the role of place attachment as a mediator between nature connectedness and human well-being. Although these studies have provided valuable insights, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding the qualitative study of place attachment in the Japanese tourism context.

This study addressed the gap in the literature by investigating how Thai tourists made sense of their connection to Japan. This study focused on Thai tourists, as they contribute significantly to Japan's inbound tourism. Specifically, this study explored how Thai tourists interpreted their attachment to Japan in four different dimensions: place identity, place dependence, place social bonding, and place affect. The application of this four-dimensional framework lies its ability to capture the intricate, dynamic, and multifaceted aspects of place attachment, addressing cognitive elements (knowledge and beliefs), emotional dimensions (feeling), and behavioural components (Brown et al., 2016; Han et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2017). By utilising this framework, the study contributed to a more holistic understanding of place attachment, as it took into account the cognitive, social and emotional dimensions of this construct.

The structure of this paper is as follows: it begins with an overview of Japan's inbound tourism industry, delving into the crucial role of place attachment in its successful development while also identifying a research gap in this area. Following this, a thorough literature review on place attachment concepts is presented, exploring meanings, determinants, significance, and components. The methodology section offers insights into the chosen approach, while the results report the findings. The final part of the article is the discussion and conclusion section, which analyzes and interprets findings within the existing literature, synthesizes implications,

acknowledges limitations, and offers suggestions for future research, providing a comprehensive overview of the study's contributions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Place attachment is a theoretical construct that was originally developed in the field of environmental psychology (Dwyer et al., 2019; Wang, 2023), and has since been adopted by various disciplines, including tourism studies (Dwyer et al., 2019; Han et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2022). Within tourism research, place attachment has been a valuable tool for comprehending the ties that individuals establish with specific places, or both those held by tourists (e.g., Han et al., 2019; Hashemi et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023; Tonge et al., 2015; Woosnam et al., 2018a) and local residents (e.g., Chen et al., 2018; Stylidis, 2018; Woosnam et al., 2018a).

Table 1. *Examples of definitions and terminologies used to describe place attachment*

Definition	Terminology	References
The effective bond between people and place or setting	Topophilia	Tuan (1974, p.4)
A multidimensional construct comprising: (1) beliefs about the relationship between self and place; (2) feelings toward the place; and (3) the behavioral exclusivity of the place in relation to alternatives.	Sense of Place (SOP)	Jorgensen & Stedman (2001, p. 233).
The positive emotional bonds that develop between individuals and their socio-physical environment	Place attachment	Strzelecka et al. (2017, p.61)
The formulation of positive emotional bonds between individuals and their socio-physical environment.	Place attachment	Woosnam et al. (2018a, p.139)
[It] can be conceptualized in terms of two main dimensions: (1) relationship to place which refers to the different ways that people are linked to places and the types of bonds (genealogical/historical, narrative/cultural, economic, ideological, cosmological, and dynamic); and (2) place attachment which reflects the depth and types of attachments to one place (place identity, place dependence, affective attachment, social bonding, place memory, place expectation)	Sense of place	Chen et al. (2021)
Individuals' affective and cognitive bonds toward environments they perceive as meaningful	Place attachment	Lee et al. (2022, p. 726)

Place attachment is a positive connection or bond that individuals form with a specific place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Su et al., 2018; Williams & Vaske, 2003) and the degree to which they identify with and value it (Moore & Graefe, 1994). According to Giuliani (2003), place attachment refers to both the process of connecting oneself to a place, which involves multiple reasons for attachment, and the resulting outcome of this process, which generates a sense of attachment. Place attachment is widely acknowledged as an important aspect of human-place relations, as it sheds

light on the complex ways in which individuals interact with particular physical and social environments (Dwyer et al., 2019). Table 1 details some of the definitions of place attachment and terminologies used to refer to this construct.

Numerous determinants that contribute to tourists' place attachment to a specific destination have been identified in existing literature in an attempt to unpack this complex construct, including recreational activities (Ednie et al., 2010; Wilkins & de Urioste-Stone, 2018), repeat visits (Moore & Graefe, 1994; Williams et al., 1992), destination image (Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Veasna et al., 2013), destination reputation (Yuksel et al., 2010), satisfying or memorable tourist experiences (Halpenny, 2006; Trinanda et al., 2022), perceived value of tourism activities (Jiang & Hong, 2023), perceived authenticity of a place (Yi et al., 2021), nostalgia (Cho, 2021), local events, beautiful natural landscapes, significant people, symbolic meaning (Yuksel et al., 2010), and perceived solidarity (Woosnam et al., 2018b).

Place attachment is also a significant factor in influencing tourists' tendency to revisit a destination (Isa et al., 2020; Kil et al., 2012; Neuvonen et al., 2010) and their overall satisfaction with it (Hashemi et al., 2023; Loureiro, 2014; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Veasna et al., 2013; Xu & Zhang, 2016; Yuksel et al., 2010). Moreover, many scholars (Lee, 2003; Lee & Shen, 2013; Patwardhan et al., 2019; Wickham, 2000; Yuksel et al., 2010; Zou et al., 2022) have also emphasised the strong association between tourists' place attachment and their loyalty to a particular destination, and arguing that a sense of attachment to a place leads tourists to become more loyal to it, even when alternatives exist. Such findings are of particular significance to tourism industry professionals, who can utilise place attachment as a strategic tool to enhance tourist satisfaction and loyalty towards a destination.

Several studies (e.g., Halpenny, 2010; Li et al., 2023; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Tonge et al., 2015; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001) also suggest that place attachment is critical in shaping tourists' sense of community and their propensity to engage in pro-environmental behaviours. For examples, studies conducted by Li et al. (2023) and Tonge et al. (2015) examined how place attachment affects visitors' intentions to engage in environmentally responsible behaviours and concluded that, once tourists develop a strong connection with a place, they are more likely to take actions that protect and preserve the environment. These studies provide empirical support for the idea that tourists' place attachment can lead to a sense of responsibility

towards and ownership of a particular destination, prompting them to act accordingly.

Place attachment is a complex and multi-faceted construct (Dwyer et al., 2019; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Williams & Vaske, 2003). While the emotional connection of individuals with a particular place is often highlighted, it is not the only factor that contributes to place attachment. As Vorkinn and Riese (2001) have observed, place attachment also involves cognitive and behavioural connections. Additionally, Knez (2014) underscores that the concept of 'places' extends beyond physical boundaries, and encompasses social, psychological, historical, and spiritual aspects. Consequently, an individual's attachment to a place may include physical features or social ties (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Lewicka, 2010).

During the initial phase of studying environmental psychology and tourism (e.g., Gross & Brown, 2008; Williams et al., 1992; Williams & Vaske 2003; Yuksel et al., 2010), place attachment was conventionally conceptualised as consisting of two key dimensions: place identity and dependence. However, scholars have acknowledged that this does not fully capture the multi-faceted nature of this construct (Tonge et al., 2015) and additional dimensions have been suggested (Halpenny, 2010; Ramkissoon et al., 2012). This study employed a framework of place attachment that encompasses four dimensions: place identity, place dependence, place social bonding and place affect. This framework has the capacity to comprehensively grasp the complex and multi-faceted nature of place attachment, as it encompasses essential elements of cognition (i.e., beliefs and knowledge), affection (feeling), and behaviours (Han et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2017; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015).

Place identity denotes the psychological bond between an individual and a particular setting (Proshansky, 1978; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Williams et al., 1992). It enables individuals to express, reflect and/or affirm their identities (Kyle et al., 2004; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). It also serves as a symbolic link between an individual and the place (Stedman, 2002), which can take many forms, such as ancestral or familial ties, spiritual or sacred significance, or commemoration of personally meaningful events (Droseltis & Vignoles, 2010). Hence, place identity can be seen as a cognitive evaluation that results from an individual's attachment to a particular place.

Place dependence refers to the extent to which the distinctive physical features and conditions of a particular destination meet the desired goals and needs of tourists in relation to specific activities compared to other alternatives (Moore & Graefe, 1994; Ramkissoon et al., 2012; Stokols &

Shumaker 1981; Williams et al. 1992). It represents the functional connection that an individual develops with a particular place (Gross & Brown, 2008; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), influenced by distinctive physical and social features or resources that facilitate leisure activities, like hiking and exploring local culture (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Therefore, the assessment of place dependence typically relies on the appropriateness of the physical characteristics and conditions of a destination (Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

Place social bonding refers to an individual's interpersonal connections with others in a particular location such as family, close friends, social groups, and cultures (Kyle et al., 2005). Place serves as a significant context wherein individuals establish social relationships, share memories and the associated meanings of that particular place with others, and foster a sense of group membership (Low & Altman, 1992).

Finally, *place affect or affective attachment* pertains to an individual's emotional or affective bond with a particular place (Halpenny, 2010; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). Some researchers (Ramkissoon et al., 2012; Relph, 1976) note that spending time in a specific place can evoke positive emotions, leading to the formation of emotional bonds with that place. Additionally, Blondin (2021) notes that individuals who have an emotional bond with a specific place have enhanced adaptability and increased capacity to endure staying in that place.

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of how Thai tourists interpreted their attachment to Japan. It did not focus on any specific area in Japan but studied the Thai tourists' attachment to Japan in general. This decision was motivated by the desire to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the country's overall appeal from the perspectives of Thai tourists. This approach allows the researcher to explore common themes and factors contributing to attachment that may transcend geographical boundaries, providing insights that can inform broader strategies for tourism promotion and destination management.

Following the interpretive paradigm and employing qualitative research, this study strategically chose respondents based on their potential to provide in-depth insights. The criteria aimed at selecting Thai tourists who exhibited a strong attachment to Japan through frequent visits before and after the COVID-19 outbreak. As a result, the study established the following selection criteria: (1) being Thai tourists who had visited Japan at

least once a year before the COVID-19 outbreak and had also visited the country after the outbreak; and (2) being eighteen years old and above for ethical reasons.

Similarly, the determination of the total number of respondents followed a technique commonly used in qualitative studies. Guided by data saturation, where information is collected until no new insights emerge (Patten & Newhart, 2018), the selection process aimed at achieving a rich, in-depth understanding of Thai tourists' place attachment to Japan. In contrast to quantitative practices, which typically involve statistical considerations for generalization, this approach was considered more suitable for the study's specific goal of nuanced exploration rather than broad statistical inference. As a result, a total of 28 participants were selected.

The first group of participants (eight individuals) were recruited using purposive sampling, based on their direct experiences and potential to provide in-depth insights, through the researcher's personal connections. The remaining respondents (20 individuals) were identified through snowball sampling, whereby participants nominated others who met the selection criteria and were willing to participate. The respondents consisted of 13 males and 15 females, with ages ranging from 20 to 58 years old. The detailed profiles of the respondents are shown in Table 2.

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method for this study. An interview guide, informed by relevant literature, directed the interviews. This data collection approach was chosen due to its potential to facilitate the researcher's understanding of the multi-faceted nature of the sense of attachment that Thai tourists have to Japan. The technique allowed the participants to express their perspectives and experiences without undue constraint (Carey, 2013) while also allowing the researcher to probe further (Jennings, 2011). This enabled a thorough exploration and more comprehensive understanding of the issue of tourists' place attachment. Interview questions focused on the respondents' perception of their connection with Japan and centred on the "how" and "why". Examples of such questions include, "*what do trips to Japan mean to you, and why?*", "*why do you visit Japan frequently?*", "*what sparked your initial interest in Japan, and how has that interest grown over time?*", and "*how do you feel when you are in Japan?*", "*What emotions or sensations do you associate with the country, and why?*" A pilot study was carried out with six participants to confirm the interview guide's effectiveness and clarity of the questions (Jennings, 2011). Additionally, the pilot study helped to familiarise the

researcher with the interview questions (Jennings, 2011). The primary study was then conducted from December 2022-February 2023.

Table 2. *Profiles of the respondents*

Codename	Gender	Age	Approx. number of visits to Japan per year	Total number of visits to Japan
R1	M	21	Twice	More than 10
R2	F	43	Two or three times	More than 15
R3	F	20	Twice	More than 10
R4	F	42	Two or three times	More than 15
R5	M	39	Once	More than 10
R6	M	34	Once or twice	More than 10
R7	F	20	Once	More than 5
R8	F	26	Once or twice	More than 10
R9	M	42	Once	More than 15
R10	F	55	Once or twice	More than 15
R11	F	39	Once	More than 10
R12	F	58	Once or twice	More than 10
R13	M	38	Once	More than 5
R14	F	47	Once or twice	More than 10
R15	M	50	Once	More than 10
R16	F	58	Twice	More than 10
R17	F	52	Twice	More than 10
R18	F	32	Once	More than 5
R19	M	29	Once	More than 5
R20	M	31	Once	More than 5
R21	F	37	Once or twice	More than 10
R22	M	41	Once or twice	More than 10
R23	F	42	Once or twice	More than 10
R24	M	26	Once	More than 5
R25	M	29	Once	More than 5
R26	F	37	Once	More than 10
R27	M	49	Once	More than 10
R28	M	55	Once or twice	More than 10

Each interview, ranging from 55-90 minutes in duration, was audio recorded with the interviewees' consent for the sake of convenience in data analysis. All interviews were conducted online using either Zoom or the Line Application with respondents who were located in Thailand at the time. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their information. Pseudonyms were used in the publication and their shared information was utilised solely for research and educational purposes. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study. As the interviews were conducted in Thai, they were initially transcribed in Thai and subsequently translated into English by the researcher. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, a native English-speaking lecturer at a Thai university who is fluent in Thai reviewed the translation.

Table 3. *The themes, associated codes and examples of the respondents' extracts*

Theme	Associated Code	Example of the Respondents' Extract
1. Place identity	1.1 A sense of belonging to Japanese society (e.g. "belong", "true self", "feel like it is more suited with my personal value" etc.)	"I feel like I belong more to Japan than to Thailand" (R21).
	1.2 Concerns/worry about possible loss of certain value (e.g. "worried about the loss of traditional value"; "pity to see some undisciplined behaviour" etc.)	"I am worried that one day in the future, some of the good Japanese values will disappear" (R19).
	1.3 Nostalgic experience (e.g. "bringing back memories"; "recalling the past"; "invoking memories" etc.)	"Visiting Japan brought back joyful memories of my youth" (R24)
2. Place dependence	2.1 Japan's unique attributes align with travel motivations/ expectations (e.g. "meeting my expectation"; "no better destination for skiing"; "matching my preferences" etc.)	"Japan is always my favourite destination with a lot of things to do and places to visit" (R9).
	2.2 Opportunities to experience activities and sight learned from manga and drama (e.g. "seeing how...actually like"; "witnessing the real-life version of ..." etc.)	"I could see what Shinto shrines and Japanese castles actually looked like after seeing them in the manga" (R14).
	2.3 Loyalty to the country (e.g. "never getting bored of Japan"; "many things left to do"; "my ever-favourite country" etc.)	"Although I have visited Japan many times, I still want to visit it in the future... There are still many great places left to visit" (R17)
3. Place social bonding	3.1 A place where a sense of shared joy and satisfaction is being developed (e.g. "having a good time with..."; "having a great shared moment with..." etc.)	"My family and I always had a great time when we visited Japan together" (R3)
	3.2 A destination marking a memorable occasion in lives (e.g. "a special place for my life"; "marking a memorable occasion" etc.)	"Japan is the first overseas country I visited with my family" (R11).
	3.3 Good relationship with Japanese people (e.g. "becoming friends with..."; "friendship" etc.)	"I met one Japanese girl during one of my trips to Japan... We became good friends since then" (R19).
4. Place affect	4.1 Positive emotion (e.g. "highly impressed"; "memorable"; "enjoyable" etc.)	"Japan is always the most enjoyable destination" (R9)
	4.2 Unpleasant feelings due to being unable to visit Japan during the COVID-19 (e.g. "missing..."; "longing to revisit" etc.)	"I miss Japan a lot" (R10)
	4.3 Worry and sadness arising from the natural disaster occurring in Japan (e.g. "sad"; "worried" etc.)	"I was sad when I heard the news about natural disasters in Japan" (R21)

In terms of data analysis, the research did not utilise any statistical software or tests but employed thematic analysis, a well-known qualitative approach. Despite the availability of computer software for qualitative data,

such as Nvivo, the researcher chose manual analysis to immerse herself in the information. Personally, transcribing the interviews, though time-consuming, proved a valuable process that fostered a deep familiarity with the data. Thematic analysis is renowned for allowing themes to organically emerge from the data in a flexible manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Unlike strictly deductive or theory-bound approaches, this technique facilitates the identification and analysis of patterns or themes within a given dataset (Braun & Clarke 2012). Although this study was guided by the four-dimensional framework of place attachment, as mentioned earlier, the data analysis not only sought latent themes aligned with the theory but also aimed to uncover semantic themes that explicitly reflected participants' expressions. However, the main results of the analysis only revealed latent themes.

The analytical process adhered to the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, the researcher familiarised with the data by carefully reading the transcripts. Subsequently, the author interpreted the data, searching for patterns and meanings, and generated initial codes based on the prevalent ideas and recurring meanings observed in the data. Relevant data extracts were then grouped together within each code. The identified codes were then reviewed and analysed alongside their corresponding extracts to discern recurring themes. During this process, the meaning of each code and its connections with others were examined and analysed. Consequently, themes were derived from the compiled codes and their associated extracts. These themes were developed and named based on the meaning of the data extracts or the narrative they conveyed. All identified themes, codes, and grouped data extracts were thoroughly scrutinised to ensure they effectively addressed the research objective. Table 3 illustrates the themes, associated codes and examples of the respondents' extract.

RESULTS

The data indicated that all the respondents made yearly visits to Japan, with the number of trips per year varying from one to three. Some respondents also disclosed that while they also travelled to other countries, Japan was always their first choice. When asked why, participants expressed a sense of attachment to Japan. Even though some participants did not explicitly use the terms 'attachment', 'bond' or 'connection', other expressions indicated a sense of attachment to the country, as shown in the following examples: *"Visiting Japan never fails to excite me, and I doubt I will ever tire of it"* (R4); *"My husband and I eagerly anticipate our winter vacation so we can visit*

Japan" (R2); "Each time our journey in Japan comes to a close, I am left with the certainty that I will be back to the country in the near future" (R12); and "During our free time, my wife and I make it a habit to discuss and plan out the places to explore and the activities to experience during our upcoming trips to Japan" (R15). The strong attachment of the respondents to Japan was vividly conveyed during discussion of the period in which the country closed its borders to international tourists due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Several respondents expressed their longing to return to Japan, and eagerly awaited the reopening of the country to international tourists, emphasising their fondness for and deep connection to Japan. Some participants also stated that they monitored updates on when Japan would reopen to international tourists and were among the first Thai people to visit the country when the government began to ease its entry restrictions.

In the narratives of all the respondents, it was evident that multiple factors played a role in their attachment to Japan, including its natural beauty, unique culture and values, tourism activities, the hospitality of local people, nostalgia, satisfying and memorable tourism experiences and the symbolic meaning of Japan. Respondents highlighted that their attachment to Japan was not based on a single factor, but rather arose from a combination of diverse factors that made Japan stand out as a distinctive, providing travel experiences that could not be replicated elsewhere. For example, R10 noted that

"While I do find attributes like cherry blossom, autumn leaves, and snowy mountains in Japan to be particularly noteworthy, they alone may not be enough to compel me to repeatedly visit the country. What makes Japan truly special and irreplaceable to me is the combination of its many unique attributes that set it apart from other countries and renders it irreplaceable."

The findings from the data analysis were classified based on the dimensions of the place attachment concept (identity, dependence, social bonding, and affect), each discussed below.

Place Identity

Only six respondents provided narratives that were interpreted as place attachment in the form of place identity. Out of these, three respondents expressed a sense of belonging to Japanese society. This was due to their perception that the culture, values, and/or lifestyles of Japanese people were more closely aligned with their personal values and lifestyle preference than the Thai society. They also found that their visits to Japan gave them greater clarity in understanding their true selves. This point was clearly

illustrated by R9 who expressed his admiration for Japanese people's discipline and respect for others: *"Whenever I'm in Japan, I can't help but imagine living there permanently. I feel like I belong more in this type of society than in Thai society."* He also shared his concerns about the possible loss of certain Japanese values over time, which could result in Japan losing its appeal. He revealed that, on his last visit to Japan, he observed a lack of discipline among some Japanese teenagers compared to older generations. Specifically, he recounted an instance where he saw teenagers crossing the road while the traffic light was still red, and this suggested to him a lack of traditional values, which made him sad. R21 said expressed that Japan allowed her to express her true self more freely through fashion, saying that

"I have a great admiration for the way Japanese people dress and I enjoy emulating their style. However, it might be perceived as peculiar to wear Japanese clothing in Thailand and draw unwanted attention. That's why I long to visit Japan, where I feel free to express my authentic self through fashion."

Among the six respondents, two mentioned that they had become acquainted with Japanese culture through popular manga, drama, and song during their youth. Their visits to Japan, therefore, were nostalgic experiences that brought back memories of their happy and carefree days. For example, R23, who grew up reading Doraemon and Sailor Moon manga, had always dreamed of visiting Japan. When she finally had the change to do so, the experiences rekindled happy memories of her youth, leaving her feeling content.

Place Dependence

The data analysis indicated that the narratives of respondents predominantly reflected their attachment to Japan through a sense of place dependence. According to the respondents, Japan's physical features, activities, culture, weather and other attributes were the perfect match for their travel motivations and expectations. They highly praised various attributes, including but not limited to cherry blossom, snowy mountains for winter sports, autumn leaves, hot springs, food, cultural activities, public transportation networks, accommodation, clean cities, safety and more. For example, *"For me, there's no better destination for skiing than the snowy mountains of Hokkaido, which is why I go there every year"* (R9); *"Compared to other countries, I find travelling in Japan incredibly convenient. The food is incredible, the public transportation is top-notch, and the accommodation is immaculate. Everything seems to be just right"* (R17); *"Japan has lots of great places to visit and things to do. I will always love visiting there and never get bored"*

(R11); and *“Japan is a destination that can be visited year-round. The country is beautiful in all seasons. Personally, I find the country’s nature to be among the most exquisite in the world”* (R8).

Some respondents expressed that trips to Japan allowed them to experience activities and sights that they had learnt from Japanese manga and drama. This view was predominantly shared by middle-aged and older respondents, who were born at a time when Japanese culture was widely popular in Thailand through various forms of media. For example, R27 stated that

“When I was young, I loved reading Japanese manga and watching Japanese dramas. I often wondered if the things like castles and shrines I saw in them looked the same in real life. I also wanted to try Japanese fish-shaped cake and a pancake called ‘Dorayaki’ that I saw in a Doraemon manga. Later on, I got the chance to visit Japan, and I finally got to see those castles and shrines and taste those sweet treats. Looking back, I believe that my familiarity with Japanese culture and the satisfying experiences I had there have forged a deep connection to the country within me.”

The respondents’ attachment in the form of place dependence was also demonstrated by their loyalty to the country. Several participants cited the steep increase in the expense of travelling to Japan after the country reopened to international tourists. They noted that the cost of airfares, lodging, food, and transportation within the country had risen significantly since the COVID-19 outbreak. However, despite the high cost, they still expressed their desire to revisit Japan. They thought that the experiences they would have there were unique and priceless, and they could not get them anywhere else. For example, R15 said that:

“Although travel expenses to Japan, including airline tickets, accommodation and train tickets, have significantly increased since the COVID-19 situation, my wife and I are still eager to visit the country, as we believe that the unique experiences it offers are still well worth the additional expense.”

Place Social Bonding

Majority of the respondents visited Japan with their partners, family members, or friends. They mentioned that Japan was a preferred destination for both themselves and their companions, which enabled them to share positive experiences with their loved ones, and creating a sense of shared joy and satisfaction. For example, R2 said that, *“My husband and I love skiing, admire Japanese culture, and are fans of Japanese food. Japan offers us the opportunity to engage in enjoyable activities together.”* Moreover, three

respondents indicated that Japan was a meaningful destination for them as it marked a memorable occasion in their lives. R11 recollected that Japan was the first foreign country she had visited with her family, and that this trip had left a lasting impression because she had so much fun with her family. R18 associated Japan with the moment her husband proposed to her, while R5 reminisced about visiting Japan on honeymoon. It is evident that Japan represents a place of pleasant memories for all three participants.

R9 shared that, on one of his trips to Japan, he met and befriended a Japanese couple who owned a guesthouse. Since then, he had stayed at their guesthouse every time he visited Japan as he valued the relationship with the couple. He emphasised that his friendship was one of significant motivators for his continued interest in visiting Japan, as illustrated below:

“During one of my trips to Japan, I stayed at a charming guesthouse where I became friends with the owners, a very kind and polite couple. Since then, we have become good friends, and I make it a point to stay with them every time I visit Japan, and our friendship has only grown stronger over time. In fact, they have become one of the main reasons why I keep going back to Japan.”

Place Affect

The respondents expressed a diverse array of emotions when sharing their views on Japan, all of which demonstrated a strong emotional connection to the country. These feelings can be classified into three distinct categories. The first group can be characterised as positive emotions arising from fulfilling experiences gained through visits to Japan. The respondents used terms such as ‘highly impressed’, ‘memorable’, ‘enjoyable’, ‘amazed’, ‘peaceful’, ‘relaxed’, ‘safe’ and ‘warm’ to convey their attachment to Japan. It is evident that the respondents’ positive sentiments were clearly influenced by satisfying encounters with various aspects of Japanese culture, tourism infrastructure and facilities, leisure activities, and the hospitality of local people during their trip. Furthermore, the joy of experiences these things with companions contributed to these positive feelings. For example, R10 stated that, *“My family and I always find Japan to be the most enjoyable destination.”*

The second group of emotions were unpleasant feelings that arose when they were unable to visit Japan, during the period when Japan closed its borders to international tourists due to COVID-19. The respondents expressed emotions such as *“missing many things in Japan”, “longing to visit the country again”,* and *“feeling like something was disappearing in my life”*.

The final group of emotions were worry and sadness at the frequent occurrence of natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis in Japan. This concern was expressed by four respondents, who were also concerned at the potential damage to cultural landmarks and infrastructure in the affected areas, reflected their emotional attachment. When asked about their reasons continuing to visit the country despite the risk of natural disasters, three respondents, including R19 who had first-hand experience of an earthquake in Japan, expressed confidence in the Japanese government's ability to handle such situations. R18 stated that she was not fearful of such incidents and believed that if it did happen during her trip, it would simply be a matter of fate.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The data analysis indicates that the respondents' frequent visits and loyalty to Japan were primarily attributed to their strong sense of attachment to the country. This reinforces the argument in the existing literature that highlights the critical influence of place attachment in shaping tourists' propensity to make a return visit to a destination and develop loyalty towards it (Isa et al., 2020; Kil et al., 2012; Neuvonen et al., 2010; Patwardhan et al., 2019; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Zou et al., 2022). This study also finds that attachment to Japan reduced the likelihood of participants considering alternatives. This was demonstrated by the respondents' assertion that Japan was an irreplaceable destination, again supporting the existing literature (Lee, 2003; Lee & Shen, 2013; Patwardhan et al., 2019; Wickham, 2000; Yuksel et al., 2010; Zou et al., 2022).

The participants in the study had varying interpretations of their connection to Japan, which can be classified into four dimensions: place identity, place dependence, place social bonding, and place affect. Some respondents shared narratives that reflected their bond with Japan across all four dimensions, while others mentioned only two or three dimensions. This finding is in line with earlier studies that emphasise the complex and multi-faceted nature of the concept of place attachment (Dwyer et al., 2019; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Williams & Vaske, 2003). This study yields an interesting finding regarding the relative significance of the four dimensions of place attachment. All respondents had a strong place attachment towards Japan in the form of place dependence. This consistently emerged as the primary aspect mentioned by participants when describing their connection to the country and was cited by all respondents. This highlights the crucial role that Japan's unique features

play in fulfilling the respondents' desires and expectations. This form of connection influenced their decision to choose Japan over other destinations. As such, this study suggests that place dependence plays a more critical role than other dimensions in fostering a sense of attachment to a place.

In addition, this study also revealed a relationship between the four dimensions of place attachment, with place affect being influenced by the other three dimensions. This was reflected in the respondents' expressions of their sentiments towards Japan, as they consistently linked their emotions to particular attributes or experiences. For instance, they attributed their joy at discovering and expressing their true selves (place identity), their amazement to the opportunity at Japan's natural beauty (place dependence), and their happiness at the creation of shared memories with loved ones (place social bonding).

Several factors were discovered to affect the respondents' attachment to Japan, all of which have also been reported in previous studies. These include, but are not limited to, engaging in various leisure activities (Ednie et al., 2010; Wilkins & de Urioste-Stone, 2018), making repeated visits (Moore & Graefe, 1994; Williams et al., 1992), satisfying or memorable travel experiences (Halpenny, 2006; Trinanda et al., 2022), perceiving value in tourism activities (Jiang & Hong, 2023), feelings of nostalgia (Cho, 2021), and the presence of beautiful natural landscapes, the hospitality of local people and symbolic meanings (Yuksel et al., 2010). However, this study finds that no single factor was enough to create a strong sense of attachment to Japan among the respondents by itself. Rather, their attachment was the result of a combination of diverse factors that made Japan a unique and irreplaceable destination.

One interesting finding from this study is that individuals developed a sense of place attachment to Japan before they visited it, and this attachment was significantly heightened during the actual visit. Respondents already had a bond with Japanese culture from their youth, through exposure to popular manga, dramas, and songs. Visiting Japan brought fond memories of their earlier experiences, and they felt a stronger connection to the country as a result. Furthermore, this study reveals that place attachment of individuals may be demonstrated in the form of concern for the fragility of a destination's cultural values and worry and sadness about potential damage to the destination caused by natural disasters. Interestingly, this study also finds that the respondents were not discouraged from visiting Japan by the possibility of natural disasters

themselves, as they had faith in the government's ability to handle such events or believed them to be a matter of fate. Additionally, it was also discovered that the respondents' emotional connection to Japan was expressed through unpleasant feelings that arose when they could not visit the country, leading them to yearn to return.

This study adds to the existing knowledge on tourists' place attachment, particularly in the context of Japanese tourism, by providing additional empirical evidence. First, this study employed a qualitative approach, which allowed deeper investigation of the topic. The findings not only support previous quantitative research on the complex and multi-dimensional nature of place attachment, its role in repeat visits and loyalty to a particular destination, and the factors that contribute to it, but also shed light on how individuals perceive and interpret their attachment to the destination. Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing knowledge on tourists' place attachment by highlighting the crucial role of place dependence, as compared to other dimensions, in cultivating a sense of connection. The study also illuminates the relationship between place affect and the other three dimensions of place attachment, as well as the combined effects of various factors in fostering attachment. Finally, the study underscores the diversity in expressions of tourists' attachment, which may manifest as concerns, worries and/or sadness over changes in the destination and unpleasant feelings arising from the inability to visit the country.

The findings of this study have practical implications for DMOs and other tourism-related stakeholders in Japan. The respondents identified a combination of unique attributes that make Japan a unique destination, which has important implications for promotion efforts. To maximise the appeal of Japan as a tourist destination and foster a sense of attachment among both current and potential visitors, it is essential that DMOs and other stakeholders emphasise the country's unique attributes and underscore that these can only be experienced in Japan. Additionally, they should provide information on how these unique attributes can enhance visitors' tourism experiences, such as recommending the best times of the year and places to engage in specific tourism activities, such as viewing cherry blossom or autumn leaves, engaging in winter sports or trying local cuisine. It is also crucial to make this information available in multiple languages and to direct it towards both current and potential visitors.

This study has some limitations that require attention. The first relates to the generalisability of the findings, which is a common issue with

qualitative studies. The findings of this study were obtained by analysing and interpreting data gathered from a small group of respondents via non-probability sampling. Therefore, the findings only apply to the respondents of this study and cannot be generalised to other respondents. However, the primary objective of this study was not to achieve generalisability, but to obtain a detailed and thorough comprehension of the issue being studied. The study's second limitation pertains to the exclusive use of semi-structured interviews, which limited triangulation. Using other data collection methods, such as a focus group, in conjunction with semi-structured interviews, could have provided additional data. The researcher originally intended to organise at least one focus group discussion, but it proved impossible due to conflicting schedules. Consequently, the findings may lack some insights that might have been gained from multiple participants engaging in a discussion with one another.

The present study has yield certain insights that require further investigation. One noteworthy discovery was that an individual's attachment to a specific destination can manifest even before their physical visit. This raises the question of how non-visitors form a sense of place attachment to a specific destination. Therefore, future research may delve into the construct of place attachment among individuals who have not yet visited a particular place by examining the factors that contribute to the development of attachment in non-visitors. Moreover, the research findings also reveal that, despite some concerns for travellers visiting Japan, such as higher travel costs and the potential of natural disasters, many respondents still expressed a desire to visit the country. This raises important questions about the durability of an individuals' attachment to a specific place and to what extent external changes can impact such attachment. Furthermore, this also underscores the significance of identifying the factors that can potentially reduce visitors' sense of attachment to a particular place. Future researchers may seek to investigate these issues, as the insights gained could prove valuable to DMOs seeking to sustain visitors' sense of place attachment.

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