



The effectiveness of conative country image in creating tourists' memorable experiences through the effect of tourist destination competitiveness and intention to return

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ABSTRACT

It is understood that the tourism sector is a significant and expanding sector that has become the main source of revenue, livelihoods, and prosperity. One of the most important elements in establishing a competitive edge is a conative country image, which also affects visitors' perceptions, attitudes, assessments, and future actions. Thus, this study aims to examine how a conative country image affects tourists' memorable experiences and how this affects their behavior in the future. It also seeks to investigate the practical contributions in producing memorable experiences for visitors by examining the effects of tourists' destinations' competitiveness and their influence on future behavior.

A theoretical concept forms the foundation of the study's approach. Based on the quantitative findings and literature review, a questionnaire is developed, tested, and distributed to international visitors who visit Saudi Arabia. The study's results confirmed the assumption that a conative country image affects tourists' memorable experiences and enhances the competitiveness of tourists' destinations, affecting travelers' future behavior, including their willingness to return. This study provides a new perspective on how conative country image influences the development of memorable experiences and how that contributes to future behavior.

KEYWORDS: Tourism, Conative country image, tourist destination competitiveness, tourists' memorable experiences, intention to return

1. Introduction

The tourism sector's economic impacts have drawn a considerable amount of attention due to its capacity to produce foreign exchange, create jobs, and raise tax revenues (Ragab, Mahrous, and Ghoneim, 2020). As well, tourism is recognized as an important sector that is growing and as the primary source of income, livelihoods, and prosperity creation (Abbasi *et al.*, 2021). One of the key elements in the process of choosing a place to visit is the concept of an image applied to a certain destination (de Castro Mendes and Jose Cavenaghi, 2020). Hence, the choice of holiday destination and, thus, destination marketing is significantly influenced by the country's image (Jeannie Hahm and Tasci, 2019).

Thus, the individual's desired interaction with the destination might be represented as a result of the effect of the conative element of the country image which reflects consumers' behavioral intentions (Loureiro *et al.*, 2022). Hence, as an influencing element, the conative country image reflects the qualities of the place and is a major driver of visitor reactions and outcomes such as destination preference, destination choice, and intent to return (Loureiro *et al.*, 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the effect of a conative country image on creating memorable experiences and how it affects future behavior, including the desire to return. The study will contribute to the scope of the established literature through the inclusion of conative country image, tourists' experiences, and the desire to revisit, into an integrated conceptual model. Also, tourist destinations are highly competitive, and as they continue to grow and diversify, they often increase their overall

competitiveness, which is increasingly seen as crucial for gaining a competitive edge (Tosun, Dedeoğlu, and Fyall, 2015).

This study will also investigate the structure of place competitiveness within the context of tourists' memorable experiences, taking into account the importance of tourism destination competitiveness and its impact on behaviors. As Altinay and Kozak, (2021), state that developing destination competitiveness and maintaining market share requires flexibility and adapting to the shifting demand structure and global environment. Hence, the study establishes an association between the competitiveness of the conative country image and the effectiveness of tourist destinations to produce an impact on tourists and affect their future behavior.

Therefore, this study can be viewed as a comprehension discovery that will encourage further studies to better recognize tourists' interactions and explain their future behaviors. It is indeed that; the tourism sector is built on the experiences that visitors have. As competitiveness grows, there is a growing recognition of the need for destinations to be competitive and provide visitors with distinctive tourist experiences (Zhang, Wu, and Buhalis, 2018). Hence, tourists' unforgettable experiences can be utilized as the basis for this study's evaluation of the decision-making process about destinations. This study will present a unique viewpoint while providing policymakers with more insight. Therefore, considering the aforementioned aims, the following would be the study's objectives:

- To address the influence of conative country image on tourists' memorable experiences
- To determine the impact of conative country image on intention to return



- To assess the relationship between conative country image and tourism destination competitiveness
- To investigate the relationship between tourism destination competitiveness and tourists' memorable experience
- To illustrate the relationship between tourists' memorable experiences and intention to return

2. Literature review

2.1 Conative country image

According to Stylos et al., (2016), The conative image portrays travelers actively considering a location as a possible destination. Thus, conative is a significant element that affects travelers' intent to return by influencing their active assessment of a location as a possible travel destination and forming a desired future state they wish to reach for themselves. (Stylos et al., 2017). In addition, a conative country image can be viewed as a lead that reflects the actual actions of the visitor, signifying the tourists' emotional attachment to a location. (Carneiro and Faria, 2016).

Hence, conative image affects tourist enjoyable experiences and the possibility that they will recommend the destination or return, both during and after their trip. (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio and Nazzareno, 2017). As a result, tourists can use the image they have about a place to summarise the characteristics of the area, shaping their attitude toward the destination (Dedeoğlu, 2019).

The conative factor may be crucial in the decision-making process of tourists since it affects people's perceptions, familiarity, and openness to a place, as well as how their image of it, is formed (Chaulagain, Wiitala, and Fu, 2019). Consequently, this image plays a significant part in the decision-making process and seeks to create a memorable destination experience to influence travel choices. (Lee, Rodriguez and Sar, 2012). In addition, one of the key elements influencing the image both during and after the trip is the experience with the place, which is mostly determined by how intense the visit was or how much interaction occurred. (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio and Nazzareno, 2017). Thus, strong ties are formed between a place and the associations it experiences when an individual and that place interact frequently (Lopez and Balabanis, 2020).

Therefore, this image will affect how people perceive the offerings and destinations, as well as how they engage with the place, which is deemed to be a major predictor of human behavior that affects feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. (Elliot and Papadopoulos, 2016). Hence, a conative image symbolizes an idealistic and refined future state that the individual intends to create for themselves (Stylos et al., 2016).

2.2 Tourist Memorable Experiences

Tourist memorable experiences (TMEs) have gained more attention from scholars and professionals in recent years since they have been suggested to be the most accurate indicator of future behavior and set new benchmarks (Zhang, Wu, and Buhalis, 2018). Hence, this experience with the destination, which is mostly determined by the degree of engagement or the significance of the visit, is one of the key elements influencing

the image both during and after the journey (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio and Nazzareno, 2017). Similarly, tourists who already have a positive view of a destination will show that they consider their experiences to have a good impact on that location (Tosun, Dedeoğlu, and Fyall, 2015).

Therefore, the way visitors perceive a place is an outcome of their experiences there, and the beliefs that each forms (Hernández-Mogollón, Duarte and Folgado-Fernández, 2018). Hence, these perceptions suggest the understanding that tourists provide to their experiences, which are shaped by contrasting the present experience with their prior experiences in other places. They also sense the inherent quality and comparative value of the experience, which results in their judgment about the encounter with the place (Shaykh-Baygloo, 2021). According to (Nicoletta and Servidio, 2012), tourism destinations are seen to be motivating elements since they provide tourists with a sense of place attachment, showing that how a destination is perceived is a combination of subjective and social factors.

Therefore, consistent involvement can help individuals form attachments to a place, which are typically based on comparing experience and memory (Q. Liu et al., 2020). Place attachment is a term used to define this human-place relationship, which is essentially a positive affective bond between an individual and a particular location, with the main feature being the individual's willingness to stay in closeness to the location (Boley et al., 2021). Hence, place attachment is an individual's assessment of a recreational environment, and it has two components: emotional-symbolic meanings and functional meanings (Tsaur, Liang, and Weng, 2014).

Tourists usually recall experiences or memories created by a constructive process within them. One important outcome of a tourist experience is memorability, which has been found to influence behavioral intention (Vada, Prentice, and Hsiao, 2019). Hence, tourists form attachments to places through several processes that can be divided into three stages: pre-trip imagination, where they link the destination's image to identities and values; on-site experience, where they assign the positive emotions, they experienced to the location; and post-trip recall of special moments (Kastenholz, Marques and Carneiro, 2020).

2.3 Tourist Destination Competitiveness

According to Hanafiah and Zulkifly, (2019), competitiveness is the capacity to use available resources to generate a higher return. A tourist destination's competitive advantage and comparative advantage are combined to create competitiveness. While competitive advantage focuses on the effectiveness and productiveness of resource management, comparative advantage is associated with a destination's resource endowment and management (González-Rodríguez, Díaz-Fernández and Pulido-Pavón, 2023). Hence, it is a crucial component associated with a variety of activities, such as developing, carrying out, overseeing, and assessing strategies and plans. (Albrecht and Raymond, 2021).

It comprises a procedure that aims for continuous improvement by continuous examinations of a community's



environmental, social, cultural, and financial stability, intended to evaluate each over time for strengths and shortcomings (Crotts, Magnini, and Calvert, 2022). As such, one of the most important aspects of a tourism destination's competence is destination management, which is the constant focus of services and providers for tourists on the demands of potential visitors (Pearce and Schänzel, 2013). Therefore, it seeks to establish an atmosphere where tourists may effectively engage, while also taking into account the necessity of offering marketing communication skills and identifying critical success characteristics for a competitive place to visit (Gato *et al.*, 2022a).

On the other hand, one approach for developing significant and distinctive products and offerings in a cooperative setting to accomplish several social and economic benefits is the distribution of destination resources (Gato *et al.*, 2022b). It is an effort that results in the acquisition of resources and their long-term, sustainable, and efficient application while taking into account the social and economic well-being of the community (Nadalipour, Imani Khoshkhou, and Eftekhari, 2019). As a result, sustaining competitiveness depends on how to apply available resources to get a more substantial return (Hanafiah and Zulkifly, 2019).

Stated differently, it is an act of managing resources that includes analyzing their properties and practicing their allocation and control. (Rosalina *et al.*, 2023). As Reisinger, Michael, and Hayes, (2019) stated, the primary resource drivers of destination competitiveness can be divided into three categories: external and adaptable factors, generated and managed determinants, and inherited and capitalizable determinants. Hence, since these factors are seen as essential resources for meeting the demands of tourists, they raise awareness, improve feelings, and improve the perception of the location (Stylidis, 2022).

2.4 Revisit intention

According to Bayih and Singh, (2020), revisit intention refers to the visitor's evaluation of the possibility of going back to the same destination or their wish to recommend it to others as part of behavioral intention or future action. Thus, behavioral intentions are people's views on what they intend to do in a certain circumstance (Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2022). In the tourism context, tourists who have a memorable experience are more likely to return and form bonds with the locations they visited (Sthapit *et al.*, 2024). Hence, experience has a significant impact on memory formation, and is one of the most reliable indicators of a visitor's behavioral intent (Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2021a).

According to Shaykh-Baygloo, (2021), interactions between tourists and destinations can lead to the development of an emotional attachment. Hence, revisiting the location and spending more time there would enhance and promote this person-place affective bond. Therefore, the extent of place attachment influences return intention, which makes it a significant factor in visitor experiences. Tourists' emotional attachment to a destination and level of satisfaction can be determined by unforgettable tourism experiences (Vada, Prentice, and Hsiao, 2019).

As Cheng *et al.*, (2022), state that, when tourists obtain enjoyment advantages at a tourist site, they tend to return regularly to meet their psychological requirements and develop an emotional attachment with the place. Thus, tourists are more likely to return to a destination if they are pleased with the quality of its attractions. Hence, a destination's attractions are a major factor in tourists' decisions to come or return, and as a result, they can provide economic value to travel destinations (Shaykh-Baygloo, 2021). Besides, one of the main achievements of the development of tourism is the involvement of locals in tourism social enterprises, which engage with tourists directly and provide them with experiences they will remember, influencing their intention to revisit (Kummitha, Kareem, and Paramati, 2023).

3. The theoretical rationale of the study

3.1 Association between conative country image and tourists' memorable experiences

According to Carneiro and Faria, (2016), the conative country image can be seen as a lead that represents the visitor's actual behavior and indicates the tourists' emotional attachment to a place. Conative image has an impact on tourists' positive experiences and the likelihood of returning or recommending the destination, both during and after their journey (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio, and Nazzareno, 2017). Hence, this image will have an impact on how individuals view the destination and their experiences there, which is regarded to be a significant predictor of human behavior that influences feelings, thoughts, and actions (Elliot and Papadopoulos, 2016). Therefore, based on the above arguments, it is proposed that:

(H1) Conative country image positively influences tourists' memorable experiences.

3.2 Association between conative country image and tourists' revisit intention

Conative image is a crucial factor that influences visitors' intention for future visits by affecting their active evaluation of a place as a potential travel destination and helping them build a desired future state they aim to achieve for themselves (Stylos *et al.*, 2017). A conative image represents a created and advanced future state that the person hopes to establish for themselves (Stylos *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, it is suggested that:

(H2) Conative country image significantly influences tourists' revisit intention.

3.3 Association between conative country image and tourism destination competitiveness

As Stylos *et al.*, (2016) state, the conative image illustrates tourists actively assessing a place as a potential destination. Hence, given that it influences people's perceptions, familiarity, and willingness to a place, as well as how their image of it is developed, the conative factor is important in tourists' decision-making process (Chaulagain, Wiitala, and Fu, 2019). Thus, it consists of a process that seeks to continuously enhance a community's environmental, social, cultural, and economic stability by continuously assessing each for strengths and



weaknesses throughout time. (Crotts, Magnini and Calvert, 2022). Therefore, based on the above arguments, the proposed hypothesis would be as follows:

(H3) Conative country image positively influences tourism destination competitiveness.

3.4 Association between destination Competitiveness and tourists' memorable experiences

According to Hanafiah and Zulkifly, (2019), competitiveness is the ability to apply available resources and achieve a greater return. It is an essential part of various activities, including creating, implementing, managing, and evaluating plans and strategies. The experience with the location, which is mostly determined by the level of involvement or the importance of the visit, is one of the major factors impacting the image both during and after the trip (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio and Nazzareno, 2017). Hence, tourists perceive the destination's competitiveness and comparative significance, which influences their assessment of the experience there (Shaykh-Baygloo, 2021). Therefore, it would be suggested that:

(H4) Tourist destination competitiveness positively affects tourists' memorable experiences.

3.5 Association between tourists' memorable experiences and tourists' revisit intention

Tourists' experience is one of the most effective ways to determine an individual's behavioral motive and has an important effect on how memories are formed (Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2021a). Besides, an emotional bond can form between visitors and their destinations as a result of their experience (Shaykh-Baygloo, 2021). Hence, tourists are more likely to return and develop bonds with the places they visit when they have a memorable experience (Sthapit *et al.*, 2024). To this end, the following hypotheses are proposed as follow:

(H5) Tourists' memorable experiences significantly influence tourists' revisit intention.

Taking into account all hypotheses, *Fig. 1.3* displays the proposed research model for this study:

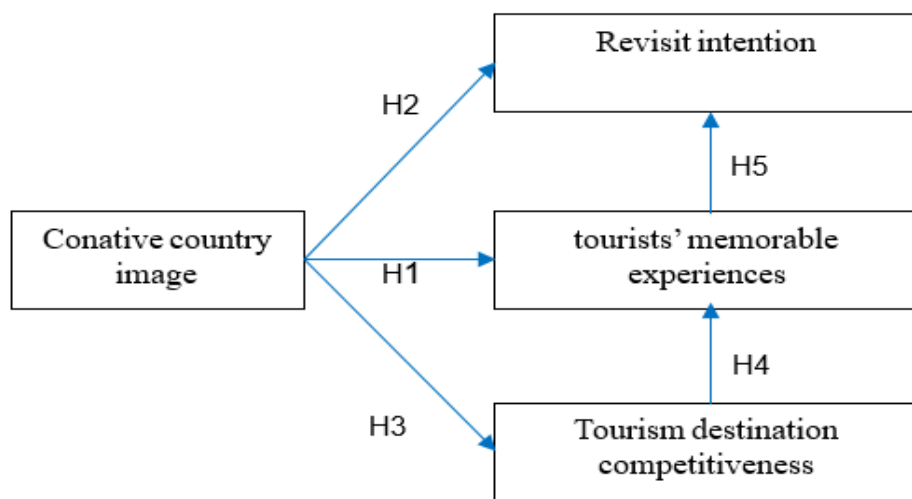


Fig. 1.3 The research model

4. Research methodology

This study seeks to determine the effect of a conative country image on tourists' memorable experiences through the influence of tourism destination competitiveness. The suggested study framework's theoretical foundation will be drawn from the social sciences' exciting theories such as place attachment theory. The chosen paradigm for testing the causal relationship between the tested hypotheses in a single framework will be a positivism paradigm. The study constructs were measured using five-point Likert-type scales based on each participant's degree of agreement or disagreement.

To achieve the objectives of this study, the measures utilized in the analysis were modified from scales that had been confirmed in previous research. The measurement of a conative country image is adapted from (Stylos *et al.*, 2017). The tourist destination competitiveness measurement is adapted from (Albrecht and Raymond, 2021). The tourists' memorable experiences measurement adapted from (Zhang, Wu, and Buhalis, 2018). The

revisit intention measurement was adapted from (Hanafiah and Zulkifly, 2019).

Further, a quantitative research approach was used for this study. This approach, which is typically guided by the objectives and research questions or the usefulness of existing knowledge, includes arithmetic analysis involving numerical data.

4.1 Questionnaire design and measure

The method employed to gather data for this study was a survey using a structured questionnaire. This method is commonly used in social studies such as Shaykh-Baygloo, (2021), Boley *et al.*, (2021), and Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, (2021b), as it is one of the most effective ways to get data and has a high response rate. A self-administered questionnaire was chosen as the study's questionnaire type. This pattern has a high response rate and is the most economical method of data collection. The study sample is a probability random sampling that represents a cross-sectional cultural subgroup. The study's target population consisted of international visitors who took trips to Saudi Arabia



and were at least eighteen years old and over. Four constructs were measured; conative country image, tourists' memorable experiences, competitiveness of the tourist destination, and intention to return.

4.2 Analysis method and process

Analysis of the survey data was conducted using SPSS (SPSS Statistics 22) for an exploratory study, EQS (EQS 6.3 for Windows) for a confirmatory analysis, and EQS for a structural analysis of the data. The measurement model was evaluated using the CFA and SEM methods. The suggested model's fit to the data was assessed using CFI, TLI, IFI, and NFI for incremental fit, PCFI and PNFI for parsimony fit, and the fit indices of χ^2/df and RMR for absolute fit, which were then compared to recommended values. Following validation of the validity and reliability of the measurement model, the hypothesized regression paths were examined using the structural equation method.

5. Findings and results

5.1 General characteristics of the respondents

(82%) of the sample was made up of male survey respondents, while the remaining (18%) were female. Respondents with a graduate or university degree comprise half of the sample (50%). Nearly half of the sample (47%) had visited Saudi Arabia multiple times, while around three out of ten respondents (34%) had been to the country for the first time. Nearly half of the respondents (42%) had only been to Saudi Arabia once, and (71%) of them said they were staying there for more than 20 days.

5.2 Measurement model analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) aimed to provide a framework for the sub-factors of conative country image, tourists' memorable experiences, competitiveness of tourist destinations, and intention to return by combining the variables into a set of factors that reached a significant degree of correlation. The overall significance of all correlations within the correlation matrix was assessed by the Bartlett's test of sphericity (BTS), and

it was significant with a value of 2435.07 ($\alpha=0.001$). The Kaiser Meyer-Olkin test (KMO) was above the acceptable threshold (MSA=0.933), with 0.6 recommended as the minimal value for a satisfactory factor analysis.

Confirmatory factor analysis and SEM method were conducted to assess the model. The measurement model is comprised of four latent variables including conative country image, tourists memorable experience, tourist destination competitiveness, and revisit intention. The following fit statistics were identified in the confirmatory factor analysis results: chi-square = 2435.07 df = 253. The RMR, or root mean square residual, was 0.05. The incremental fit indices, which are as follows: CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.89, IFI = 0.91, NFI = 0.84, and PNFI = .68. These fit indices were compared to the related acceptable ranges suggested by (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2014), and (Stevens, 2009) and revealed the hypothesized measurement model fit the data well.

5.3 Structural model analysis

The results of the structural model showed that all the paths were statistically significant ($p<0.01$) and positively correlated. For instance, the findings confirmed the effect of conative country image on tourists' memorable experience ($\beta= +0.44$; $p < 0.01$), revisit intention ($\beta= +0.94$; $p < 0.01$), and tourist destinations competitiveness ($\beta= +0.83$; $p < 0.01$) were positively significant. It means that **H1**, **H2**, and **H3** were supported. As well, the results showed that a tourist's memorable experience is positively correlated with the competitiveness of the tourist destination ($\beta= +0.58$; $p < 0.01$). This refers to the support for **H4**. The findings revealed the support of **H5** that proposed tourists' memorable experience has a positive impact on revisit intention ($\beta= +0.83$; $p < 0.01$).

The standardized format of the acquired coefficients and the significance level that provides the foundation for accepting or rejecting the suggested hypotheses are summarized in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Summary of hypothesis testing results

Summary of hypothesis testing results			
Hypothesis path description	Estimate	p	Results
(H1) Conative country image positively influence tourists' memorable experiences	0.44	***	Supported
(H2) Conative country image significantly influence tourists' revisit intention	0.94	***	Supported
(H3) Conative country image positively influence tourism destination competitiveness	0.83	***	Supported
(H4) Tourist destination competitiveness positively affects tourists' memorable experiences	0.58	***	Supported
(H5) Tourists' memorable experiences significantly influence tourists' revisit intention	0.83	***	Supported



The table also demonstrates the highest relationship was related to the influence of conative country image on revisit intention ($\beta=+0.94$ with $p<.01$). While the lowest significant link pertained to the effect of conative country image on tourists' memorable experience ($\beta=+.44$ with $p<.01$).

6. Conclusion and limitations

This study expands the body of theoretical and empirical research in the marketing and tourism fields by examining how a conative country image affects tourists' memorable experiences and how that affects their behavior in the future. Besides, the study demonstrated the importance of the competitiveness of the tourist destination and its influence on future action by developing and confirming a structural model. For instance, this study confirmed the results of other studies (Stylos *et al.*, 2017), and (Carneiro and Faria, 2016) that demonstrated the importance of offering tourists a memorable experience and how it relates to the image of the country. As well, the findings are in line with other research that confirmed the impact of the competitiveness of the destinations on tourists' memorable experience (Shaykh-Baygloo, 2021), and how those experiences affect future behaviors (Sthapit *et al.*, 2024).

The results are consistent with the theory of place attachment. This theory found important results from the interaction between the place's features and attributes, resulting in a variety of experiences that are beneficial to individuals (Xu and Zhang, 2016) (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). This theory contributes to identifying the crucial role of a conative country image in building an individual bond with the space, providing

them with purpose and enabling them to experience destinations around them (Vada, Prentice, and Hsiao, 2019).

This study provides a new perspective on how conative country image influences the development of memorable experiences and how that contributes to future behavior. The findings have implications for the tourism industry both theoretically and practically. For example, it has brought together multiple approaches of thought into a single integrative approach and gathered a substantial amount of relevant literature. In addition, the research findings have produced beneficial recommendations for academics and professionals on how to effectively present the advantages of destination to influence and boost the desire of tourists to make the journey.

The objectives of the research have been met by verifying how tourists' memorable experiences, intention to return, and competitiveness of travel destinations are impacted by the conative element of the country's image. As well, the results showed how tourists' memorable experiences and the competitiveness of a place are related. Further, the data also showed a strong correlation between tourists' intention to return and their memorable experiences. Nonetheless, the study investigated revisit intention as a stand-alone outcome to assess the significance of the conative country image. Therefore, additional outcomes must be considered, as they might contribute to further research and contribute to the theory's development. For instance, as Y. Liu *et al.*, (2020) state, the importance of emotion in the context of tourism must be clarified, with an emphasis on satisfaction, as destinations are rich in experiential and affective qualities.

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