



Enlightening Tourism.

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TOURISM BROKERS' PERSPECTIVE ON TURKEY'S IMAGE: MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AND SUBJECTIVE NORMS AS MEDIATORS

Mohammad Najjarzadeh

Semnan University (Iran)

mnajjarzadeh@semnan.ac.ir

Nazanin Amirzade

Semnan University (Iran)

Nazanin.amirzade72@gmail.com

Mohammad Reza Asadi Zarch

Semnan University (Iran)

Mohammed.reza.asadii@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

There is growing investment in the tourism industry, especially in the countries with potential attractions. All tourism destinations attempt to compete with other opponents and be distinctive. They also try to provide more particular experiences for visitors. The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the tourism brokers' perspective on Turkey's image as a tourism destination through the mediating role of marketing communications and subjective norms. This study is an applied research based on descriptive correlational studies. The research population includes all the tourism brokers in Iran (travel agencies, tour operators, and travel agents) who provide outgoing Turkey tours. The samples (including 250 tourism brokers) are selected using a convenience sampling method and data were collected by using a questionnaire. To analyze data, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is applied using the

Smart PLS 3 software. Results show that cognitive and affective images have a significant direct effect on tourism destination image while they have a significant indirect effect on destination image through the mediating role of marketing communications and subjective norms. Marketing Communications and Subjective Norms have a significant direct effect on destination image. Previously, there were not adequate information on and attention to the factors affecting tourism brokers in promoting Turkey as a cross-border destination, so this study is conducted to present new ideas for marketers and tourism brokers.

KEYWORDS

Cognitive Image; Affective Image; Marketing Communication; Subjective Norms; Destination Image

ECONLIT KEY

Z32; M31; M37; M11

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism destinations try to compete with their rivals to be distinguished accordingly and also attempt to provide distinctive experiences for visitors (Farzin et al., 2018). Destination image considers the visitor's understanding and future decisions regarding a particular destination, so it could be useful for promoting the tourism sector. If a particular destination is successful in attracting future visitors, it would be considered as an achievement in the development of destination image. Destination image can include a set of people's feelings, perceptions, and beliefs about a specific destination. According to the relevant literature review, destination image comprises different dimensions such as cognitive image, which is derived from the knowledge and beliefs of visitors relating to a particular destination, or affective (emotional) image, which comes from the feeling and emotions towards a destination. (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Kim et al., 2017).

The other factor investigated is marketing communications. Today, various societies seek to be unique in different areas, e.g. tourism, sports, music, and services, i.e. to have distinguished features from the others. So, to reach this target, marketing and destination brand would be the best choices. Recently, the investment of numerous resources is in progress by the governments and stakeholders to make a big difference in their economy and destination image (Souiden et al., 2017).

Subjective norms, as one of the subcategories of the Theory of Planned Action (TPA), is another influential factor on the destination image, which investigates the effect of influential or reference people such as family, friends, or colleagues on

individuals' behaviors (Ahmad et al., 2020). Reviewing the relevant literature shows that subjective norms have a positive influence on destination image. For example, a groundbreaking study by Zhang et al. (2007) can confirm that "subjective norms have a positive relationship with people's perspectives", or a study by Cook et al. (2002) asserted that social "norms directly affect the individuals' attitudes".

The last factor, which is being investigated in this study, is tourism brokers including travel agencies and experts in different areas of tourism services. They can play a significant role in the tourism industry by turning a destination into a desirable tourism destination. That means they must highlight a particular destination in relation to other places for the visitors (Da Silva et al., 2018).

Given the geographical proximity as well as cultural, historical, and religious similarities, Iran and Turkey have been in close contact for several years. Nowadays, the tourism industry has been developing and is regarded as one of the main industries in Turkey. Also, it should be noted that thousands of Iranian tourists visit Turkey every year. Like other tourism destinations around the world, Turkey's visitors also have dipped significantly for the last two years so that recent statistics are much lower compared to the years before the covid-19 pandemic; however, there was a jump in arrivals following the reduction of restrictions around the world. According to the newest statistics provided by the Culture and Tourism Ministry of Turkey in 2021 and the trading economics website report 2021, "about 10.88 million foreigners visited Turkey in the first seven months of 2021 and Iran had the fifth-biggest tourist population with 4.3% in Turkey following Russian (15.41%), Germany (12.5%), Ukraine (11.08%), and Bulgaria (4.85%) during this period". With regard to the above, Turkey has been selected as the target destination in the present study due to the increasing growth of the tourism industry and the large number of Iranian tourists. Therefore, this is a significant study in the area of brokers and it aims to interpret the influence of the tourism brokers such as travel agencies, tour operators, and travel agents on destination image. Tourism brokers can play a significant role in the visitors' decision-making by providing information to the tourists as well as developing tourism packages for that special destination. In this regard, tourism brokers' knowledge, feeling, and mental image of the destination are regarded as the determining factors in choosing a particular destination and the destination image for the visitors. Therefore, the present study aims to highlight tourism brokers' perspectives on the total image of Turkey in

order to evaluate the effectiveness of cognitive image, affective image, marketing communications, and subjective norms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1) DESTINATION IMAGE

Today, the destination image is recognized as a strong management tool to empower the tourism industry in the competitive and dynamic world. This concept has been presented for the first time by Gunn (1972), Hunt (1971), and Mayo (1973) (Afshardoost and Eshaghi, 2020). It plays a significant role in tourists' decision-making process while implementing positive attitudes as well as word-of-mouth and peer-recommendation methods to choose a specific destination (Kim et al., 2017). Destination image is the combination of tourists' feelings, beliefs, ideas, and perceptions about a specific destination. There are numerous factors such as tourists' understanding and impression of the destination before, during, and after the visit, the differences between the national, international visitors, and even habitats of a particular region, affecting the destination image and they may lead to substantial changes (Nazir et al., 2021). This image is formed by the socio-demographic and psychological characteristics of an individual (Lordanova, 2015). Each destination has some unique features regarding its products and services, facilities, cultural or social attributes, and natural attraction, which may be similar to or different from other destinations. These features can also be implemented by other countries enriched in that particular characteristics like marketing strategies, service management, and infrastructures as well. Although, sometimes, countries are deprived of the ability to duplicate these features due to the restrictions in digital knowledge, time, and budget problems, and the functionality of their employees (Gajdosik, 2019; Tavitiyaman et al., 2021).

Tourism experiences are formed through visiting, learning, and benefiting from activities conducted far from home. Tourists are currently seeking attractive, unique, and memorable experiences which are formed based on their motivations, previous traveling experiences, interaction with the environment, and their beliefs about the destination (Mainolfi and Marino, 2020). Destination image plays an important role in

the tourists' decisions and their future traveling behaviors (Baloglu and Mc Cleary, 1999). The role of destination image has been approved in choosing the destination, tourists' purchase behaviors, and their behavioral preferences. Thus, it has been taken into account by those who are involved in tourism destinations (Heidarzadeh et al., 2018). Tourists' behaviors, comprehension, and preferences followed by developing new attractions result in the improvement of products (Arefieva et al., 2021). According to these theories, those destinations with a stronger positive image are more likely to be chosen by the tourists and also to be visited for the second time (Kim and Lee, 2015).

In the case of Turkey, most of the tourism destinations in this country promote and present products and services containing European culture. Although it is accepted as a European country, there are some barriers between Eastern and Western values (Kislali et al., 2020). Nowadays, the majority of international visitors really enjoy the sense of local culture in various items like souvenirs, food, or local attractions. In other words, they prefer variety in destination characteristics that are in contrast with their traditions and cultures, so variety-seeking may lead to the experience of new products and services by target audiences (Tasci et al., 2022).

2.2) COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE (EMOTIONAL) IMAGES

Various researchers have presented some different approaches to the concept of destination image, and the reason lies in the complex (comes from the wide range of explanation), multiple (emerges from the diversity of its components), relativistic (drives from the subjective nature, which means everyone has a specific perception of destination), and dynamic nature (changeable based on time, place and experience) of the destination image (Stylidis and Cherifi, 2018).

In Table 1, three groups of commonly suggested studies have been selected to have a deep insight and perception into the literature of the destination image (Ragb et al., 2020). The third one would be the primary approach of this study.

Approach	Feature	Components	by
First	Destination image as a three-continuum-component approach	Consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attribute-holistic (refers to the overall perception of the factors) • Functional-psychological (measurable functional factors like food and accommodation; factors difficult to measure like hospitality and safety) • Common-unique features. (general characteristics vs. unique ones) 	Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Ragb et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2019
Second	It has provided a simpler classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive image (how tourists perceived the destination) • Affective image (emotional responses and feeling toward destination) • Conative or behavioral image (how cognitive and affective images affect the customers' buying behavior). 	Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997, Michael et al., 2018; Nazir et al., 2021; Ragb et al., 2020; Zhang et al, 2014; Woosnam et al., 2020
Third	It could be considered a more common approach consisting of a three-component structure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive image • Affective image • Overall image (the combination of cognitive and affective images) 	Baloglu and Mc Cleary, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Da silva et al., 2018

Table 1: Three popular approaches relating to the destination image

The cognitive image refers to the individuals' actual knowledge of the destination's characteristics. Whereas the affective image refers to the individuals' feelings about a destination based on such knowledge (Deng et al., 2019). In the case of the cognitive image, different characteristics can help to attract visitors to a particular destination. For example, one can refer to weather, rich heritage, natural attractions, infrastructure, social setting, hygiene standards, etc. (Llodra-Riera et al., 2015). In other words, if tourists have a better awareness of the positive characteristics of the destination, they can have a more reliable cognitive evaluation (Pezeshki et al. 2019). In the scale planning of the cognitive image's attributes, it is vital to consider the attractions,

locations, and goals of different destinations, because each destination has some unique features. For instance, Lee et al. (2005) have considered health, accommodation, transportation facilities, and shopping centers cognitive factors in Antalya, Turkey. Recently, Akgun et al. (2020) have proposed attractions, infrastructure, environment, and value variables for cognitive factors in Istanbul.

On the other hand, the affective image demonstrates the emotions and total feelings about a particular destination. For example, one can refer to conceptions such as a pleasant or unpleasant destination, gloomy, exciting, stimulating, arousing or calm, etc. (Fu et al., 2016; John and De'villiers, 2020). Although destination image has a multi-dimensional nature, researchers have a great tendency to combine these dimensions to achieve a comprehensive perception of the destination image. Hence, cognitive and affective dimensions create an overall image of the target destination (Martin et al, 2018). However, Hernandez-Mogollon et al. (2018) has claimed that cognitive image has a greater impact on the total image of a destination. The individuals' cognitive image of the destination is directly related to their satisfaction with the trip. In other words, cognitive images reflect the whole experience of the trip (Kiani and Behboodi, 2010). The cognitive image of a destination triggers the tourists' behaviors and forms their attitudes and new behaviors.

The evaluation method of cognitive image would be a structured technique or a multi-attribute approach of the specific factors of the destination, and for assessing the affective image, the bipolar adjectives scale would be proper (Akgun et al., 2020; Beerli and Martin, 2004).

2.3) MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Marketing communications refer to the description of all the different types of planned messages to create a brand image and are developed in order to raise awareness, motivate, and influence the customers (Ouwersloot and Duncan, 2008). In other words, the various activities regarding marketing communications help to strengthen brand equity, add value, and meet the competitive demands of the destination (Cant et al., 2017). The basis of marketing communication is the exchange relationship between customers, rivals, channel members, and the broader environment of the market (Martin et al., 2020). The marketing of destination image is

the starting point in successful tourism marketing because the visitors' image and expectations of future trips can shape their thoughts of a particular destination. Destinations may not be able to attract visitors and maintain their competitive advantages without the successful marketing of destination image (Mansuri-Moayed and Soleymani 2012).

Based on the study by Mkhize and Ellis (2020), marketing communications stick the destination image to the customers' long-term memory by acquainting customers with product brands, so marketers have a large assemblage of marketing communication tools in order to stimulate the visitors to choose the best destination. They have gathered some of the famous marketing communication tools in their research. Table 2 indicates the tools selected by them.

Marketing communication tools	Features and examples	Have done by
Advertisement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The superordinate of all categories • The most famous and productive tools for marketers • Refers to the provision of impersonal products or services for the costumers with a determined price by a company 	Cant et al., 2017; Keller and Kotler, 2012; Mkhize and Ellis, 2020; Ouwersloot and Duncan, 2008
Personal Selling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face communication • Common in marketing communication mix of different organizations • Profitable for a new organization or firm 	Cant et al., 2017 Mkhize and Ellis, 2020
Sale promotion	Various targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retailer promotion (price reduction, retailer coupon, free goods, bundling etc.) • Trade promotion • Consumer promotion Destination image technique: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal • External 	Bunghez, 2020; Cant et al., 2017; Mkhize and Ellis, 2020
Direct Marketing	Using of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • letter, • telephone, • email, • internet 	Keller and Kotler, 2012; Mkhize and Ellis, 2020; Musadik and Azim, 2020

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Or generally digital media for making connections with customers. 	
Public Relations	<p>Using of the various programs to promote the company's image or for marketing individually:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internally, in relation to the firm's staff • Externally, in relation to the customers (in other words, it helps to the adaptation of organization and customers) 	Keller and Kotler, 2012; Mkhize and Ellis, 2020
Sponsorship and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A contract in order to subsidize or provide the other supports (from an organization or an individual). 	Cant et al., 2017; Mkhize and Ellis, 2020
Digital Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital media including Internet and Email • Social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram • Mobile technology such as mobile phones and laptops 	Cant et al., 2017

Table 2: Marketing Communication Tools

It is important to evaluate these tools in order to obviate the visitors' needs and requests; it can also affect their perception of the destination image. Therefore, destination organizations and marketers constantly use marketing tools in order to develop and propose particular destinations (Amar et al., 2017). Based on the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), in order to maximize the impact of marketing communication tools and the intelligibility and stability of using these tools, it would be better to combine them. This strategic marketing technique is called Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), which helps to merge promotional mix for planning, implementing, evaluating, and organizing brand image and finally, has the most effect on target audiences (e.g. customers, visitors, travel agencies, and tourism organizations) (Lasi and Rahim, 2021). Target audiences acquire the destination's informational and communicational messages from various resources like the destination, exhibition, radio, and television, and particularly travel brokers (Wang et al., 2009).

Tourism marketers and travel agencies try to use a wide range of marketing communication tools to promote products, services, and destination images to increase audiences' demand and make a profit. The most common methods used by tourism brokers are the combination of advertisement tools (as the most famous tools

which have a significant influence on target customers' attitudes, their perception of destination, and their travel objectives) (Zhang et al., 2018), sale promotion (especially bundling, which means to combine two or more products in one package with a lower price), digital marketing (using technological strategies like internet, e-commerce, and social media channels), and corporate marketing communication (using marketing collaboration methods with internal or external travel agencies) (Bunghez, 2020; Da silva, 2018; Ku et al., 2013). This research, therefore, considers the effect of Integrated Communication Marketing tools as a mediating factor used by Turkish travel intermediaries, on the destination image.

2.4) SUBJECTIVE NORM

Besides the destination image, the subjective norm is the other cause behind purchasing behavior and visiting a destination (Cheah et al., 2015). Subjective norms refer to the individual's perception of the pressure of social norms or other important references' beliefs (relatives, friends, or coworkers) which determine the necessity to conduct or avoid a specific behavior (Wang et al., 2021).

The majority of the previous studies have regarded subjective norms as the effective factors in willingness to conduct a particular behavior; they also claimed that people may be more likely to perform a specific behavior if they have positive subjective norms for target behaviors (Nigg et al., 2009). Hence, subjective norms show the perceived external pressure to use the system or avoid it. Those who accept other people's expectations to use the system are more likely to obtain higher scores of intention to use the system, even if they may not develop positive feelings toward that system (in this study system implies the destination) (Ismail et al. 2006).

Subjective norms are considered one of the elements of the Theory of Planned Behavior, which itself comes from the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, 1991; Ramadhani et al., 2020). The Theory of Planned Behavior is a basic concept describing and anticipating consumer behavior. This Theory consists of three main elements namely attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Attribute refers to a desirable or undesirable attitude regarding a certain behavior. Subjective norms or normative beliefs show the willingness of an individual to perceive his references' expectations (relatives, friends, and colleagues) relating to his particular behavior and

his motivations towards doing or not doing that behavior. At last, perceived behavioral control represents the prominent capability of customers to control behavior and pass over the obstacles (Ahmad et al., 2020; Sun et al, 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Subjective norms can regulate behavior in various ways. Cialdini et al. (1991) have divided normative social influence into descriptive and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms represent the information about the best behavior based on the perception of what other people do. For instance, tourists visiting a site might try to avoid littering due to the fact that the other people do not drop the litter on the site. Injunctive norms indicate an individual's behavior and belief, which would be accepted or disapproved based on the other expectation. Base on that in the previous example, tourists avoid littering because they believe this act would be rejected by others or cause social exclusion (Doran and Larsen, 2016).

2.5) TOURISM BROKER

Although there are few studies on tourism intermediaries, the perception of the total image toward the products, services, or destination will be improved because the brokers develop a positive interest in these items (Da Silva et al., 2018). In the process of selection of the destination, tour operators and travel agencies, as the tourism brokers, are implemented both as distribution channels and as the agents creating the image.

A travel agency is a broker that sells the tourism industry to the consumers either as separate items or as an integrated product (Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001). In other words, travel agencies are defined as the eligible companies to organize retail services regarding traveling by the representatives of different tourism industries (Goldblatt and Nelson, 2001). Travel agencies can play the following roles in tourism development: compared to other industries, they are influential enough to affect and increase demand among the customers in tourism. Moreover, they are not merely brokers and they act as a link between the supply and different parts of the demands. Traditional travel agencies were only regarded as the brokers between customers and service providers. They are now facilitated with the advent of fast internet services, distribution of the information, and complex communication networks which were previously the monopoly of traditional travel agencies (TTAs); hence, modern travel agencies are

available with different varieties to future tourists and reflect very complex relationships (Pastiu et al. 2014; Zare and Chukwunonso, 2015).

Travel Agencies in Iran are divided into three categories. The first one is Air travel agencies (class A), which focus on selling and reserving plane tickets for passengers. Their licenses relating to the creational and operational activities are issued by the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran. The other one is Travel and Tourism agencies (class B), which work under the authorization of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicraft, and Tourism. The main roles of this group are to sell tickets, organize domestic and foreign tours, and prepare visa services. Tour operators, additionally, cooperate with this section. The last group, which provides travel services for pilgrims and organizes religious tours, includes Pilgrimage Agencies (class C) and is managed under the permission of Pilgrimage and Hajj Organization (Amirfakhriyan and Moeini, 2017). With respect to these categories, classes A and B have been considered in this research.

On the other hand, tour operators, which are under the control of class B in Iran, are recognized as a company negotiating with hotels, communication companies, and other tourism service providers, and then integrating these services into a travel package. Tour operators are responsible for all the aspects of the contracts with the customers unless there is an unpredictable incidence (Mbiyu 2014). According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), reported by Saffery et al. 2007, tour operators are divided into three groups of national, international, and local agents. On the other hand, travel agencies are also divided into three groups of national, international, and local agents. They tend to buy recreational packages from the tour operators and sell them directly to the customers. Tour operators and travel agencies are the only stakeholders in tourism who are responsible to build a link between tourism products and people in society. In addition, they can help develop a positive image toward the destination; and therefore, they have an impact on the selection of the destination by the customers (Da Silva et al., 2018; Tapper, 2001).

2.6) RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the main objective and according to the research literature, the following hypotheses were proposed and tested in this study:

- 1) Cognitive image affects the destination image.

- 2) Affective image affects the destination image.
- 3) Marketing communications affect the destination image.
- 4) Subjective norm affects the destination image.
- 5) Cognitive image affects the destination image through the mediating role of marketing communications.
- 6) Affective image affects the destination image through the mediating role of marketing communications.

3. METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study is cross-sectional and correlational in nature because the researchers have attempted to report the findings regardless of any mental deduction. The researchers have examined the parameters of the statistical population by selecting samples (which are an indicative of the society) using a convenience sampling method. The present study is applied research in terms of purpose; using cognitive framework and context as well as the findings of grounded studies.

3.1) STATISTICAL POPULATION AND SAMPLING

In the present study, the statistical population included all the Iranian tourism brokers such as travel agencies, tour operators, and all those who are involved in the tourism industry. Equational modeling methods are based on variance and applied using the Smart PLS 3 software. Accordingly, the rule of thumb method used to determine the sample size is as follows:

Barclay et al. (1995) have proposed a well-known method to determine the required sample size using the Smart PLS 3 software. They have asserted that the minimum sample size for analysis using the Smart PLS software is equal to the largest number, which can be calculated through one of the following equations (Davari and Rezazadeh 2013):

- 1) The total number of indices in the measurement model with the highest index among the measurement model in the main study multiplied by 10. The highest number of indices regarding the construct of perceived effectiveness in the organization includes 5 items; thus, a sample size of 50 would be enough.

- 2) The highest number of relationships in the structural part of the main model of the study, which are related to a single variable, multiplied by 10. The highest number of relationships is reported as 5 based on the main model of the study; therefore, a sample size of 50 would be enough.

As a result, the minimum sample size was calculated as 50. Hence, the final sample size of 250 individuals was considered optimal in order to be able to generalize the results of the model. Finally, after the removal of 20 incomplete questionnaires, the ultimate analysis was conducted on 230 questionnaires. The questionnaire used in the present study included 15 items in 5 distinct categories (variables) of questions.

3.2) DATA COLLECTION

Deductive approach: the primitive theoretical framework and the research literature were gathered using library resources, articles, books, as well as World Wide Web (national and international internet-based studies).

Inductive approach: the following standard questionnaires were used for data collection in the present study.

- Cognitive Image Questionnaire developed by Da Silva et al., 2018; Llodra-Riera et al., 2015.
- Affective Image Questionnaire developed by Da Silva et al., 2018; John and De'villiers, 2020.
- Marketing Communications Questionnaire (integrated tools) developed by Da Silva et al., 2018; Mirimi, 2018.
- Subjective Norm Questionnaire developed by Cheah et al, 2015; Ramadhani et al., 2020.
- Overall Destination Image Questionnaire developed by Da Silva et al., 2018; Kumar, 2016.

4. RESULTS

4.1) MEASUREMENT MODEL

The Reliability of the measurement instruments:

- 1) Observed factor loading values: the researchers asserted that a minimum absolute factor loading of 0.4 is required for each observed variable with respect to their hidden counterparts in order to change the reflective measurement model to a homogeneous model. For this purpose, outer loadings values were examined (Hair et al., 2012).
- 2) Significance of factor loadings: the results of the analysis of outer loadings are presented in Table 3. The relationships or the hypothesis will be approved if the obtained value is higher than the lowest statistic at the given level of significance. Therefore, the minimum t-value should be considered as 1.64, 1.96, and 2.58 at the 90%, 95%, and 99% levels of significance, respectively.
- 3) Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability: Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure the internal consistency of the instruments including the questionnaires or the tests examining different variables. As a result, the participants might respond to each question with different values.

Variables	No.	Questions	Factor Loading	t-value	p-value	Cronbach's alpha	CR
Cognitive image	Q1	Infrastructure & Accessibility	0.827	46.294	0.000	0.732	0.846
	Q2	Natural attractions & cultural environment	0.785	31.283	0.000		
	Q3	Entertainment, events and sun & sand activities	0.800	30.767	0.000		
Affective image	Q4	Unpleasant/ Pleasant	0.885	67.238	0.000	0.837	0.902
	Q5	Gloomy/ Exciting	0.879	58.224	0.000		
	Q6	Calm/Stimulating	0.841	46.352	0.000		
Marketing Communications	Q7	The Rate of Use of MC Tools	0.903	96.327	0.000	0.891	0.932
	Q8	Effect of New and Innovative Marketing Tools	0.933	116.025	0.000		
	Q9	Total Impact of MC Means	0.882	54.766	0.000		
Subjective norm	Q10	The Impact of Relatives	0.898	85.449	0.000	0.889	0.931
	Q11	The Impact of Friends' Ideas	0.905	82.644	0.000		
	Q12	Having Positive view based on Others' views	0.910	80.656	0.000		
Destination image	Q13	Overall Image Assessment	0.875	85.426	0.000	0.872	0.909
	Q14	Overall Satisfaction	0.863	55.823	0.000		

	Q15	The Probability of Destination Recommendation	0.880	70.611	0.000		
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Table 3: The reliability of measurement instruments and average variance extracted

Table 3 shows that the obtained factor loading values are above 4 for all the items; therefore, the measurement model is a homogeneous model after the deletion of these items, and the factor loading values are also acceptable. The results of the analysis of t-values in Table 3 indicated that the observed t-values are reported as greater than 2.58 for all the remaining items. In other words, there is an acceptable relationship between the items with respect to the latent variable at the 99% level of significance. According to Table 3, the results of Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability showed that the respective values are above 0.7 for all the hidden variables; thus, the reliability of the measurement instruments was approved based on these two indices (Hair et al. 2012; Henseler and Fassott 2010).

The Validity of the Measurement Instruments

- 1) Convergent Validity: it refers to the extent to which observable variables can explain the hidden variable through the convergent validity index (Barclay et al, 1995). It should be noted that the minimum value of 0.5 is regarded as acceptable for the average variance extracted (AVE) index. In other words, the observable variables can at least explain 50 percent of the variance of the respective hidden variable.
- 2) Discriminant or Divergent Validity: it is calculated using the Fornell-Larcker test. Compared to other hidden variables, a single hidden variable should have a greater dispersion among the respective observable variables. As a result, the target hidden variable would have high discriminant validity. In this regard, the square root of the extracted average of each hidden variable should be greater than the maximum correlation between that hidden variable and other hidden variables (Fornell and Larcker 1987).

Variables	Cognitive image	Destination image	Affective image	Marketing Communications	Subjective norm	AVE
Cognitive image	0.804					0.647
Destination image	0.683	0.817				0.668
Affective image	0.590	0.804	0.868			0.754
Marketing Communications	0.601	0.814	0.779	0.906		0.821
Subjective norm	0.534	0.734	0.694	0.857	0.904	0.818

Table 4: The Fornell-Larcker test and variance extracted values

According to Table 4, the variance extracted values for the hidden variables showed that the respective value was above 0.5 for all the variables. Hence, the convergent validity of the measurement instruments was approved based on the obtained AVE index.

Moreover, Table 4 indicates that the square root of the average variance extracted for each hidden variable is greater than the maximum correlation value between that variable and other hidden variables. Consequently, the discriminant validity of the measurement instrument was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker test.

4.2) STRUCTURAL MODEL TEST

Given that the results of the factor analysis of the inner and outer variables represented the approval of the validity and reliability of all the variables, the whole construct of the research conceptual model should be examined in order to determine whether the obtained data can confirm the theoretical relationships between the variables provided that the researchers intended to investigate it during the development of the proposed conceptual model (see Figure 1 below). In this regard, we can elaborate on the following three issues:

1. Positive and negative values for the parameters regarding the linking paths between hidden variables determine if the calculated parameters have confirmed the direction of the hypothetical relationships.
2. The values of the estimated parameters show the power of the estimated relationships. These estimated parameters should be significant in this case i.e. the absolute t-value should be greater than 1.96.
3. Multiple correlations square (R^2) indicates the variance of each inner hidden variable (dependent), which is explained by the outer hidden variables

(independent). The greater the R² value, the more powerfully it can explain the variance.

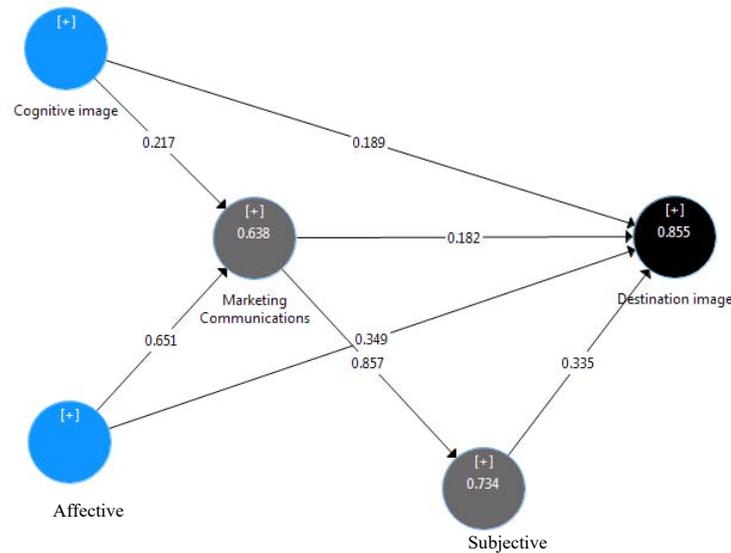


Figure 1. The beta index chart

The determining coefficient (R²) shows the extent to which independent variables can explain the dependent variable variance. R² overestimates the success of the model almost regardless of the independent variables and sample size. Therefore, some researchers prefer to use another index, i.e. adjusted R² (Sarookhani 2008). The results of the R² coefficients are presented in Table 5.

Variables	R-squared coefficient	Adjusted R-squared coefficient
Destination image	0.855	0.853
Marketing Communications	0.638	0.636
Subjective norm	0.734	0.734

Table 5: R-Squared coefficients

The adjusted R² coefficient for the destination equals 0.853, indicating that more than 85% of the changes in destination image are influenced by the study variables. The remaining changes are due to the factors that have not been included in the present study.

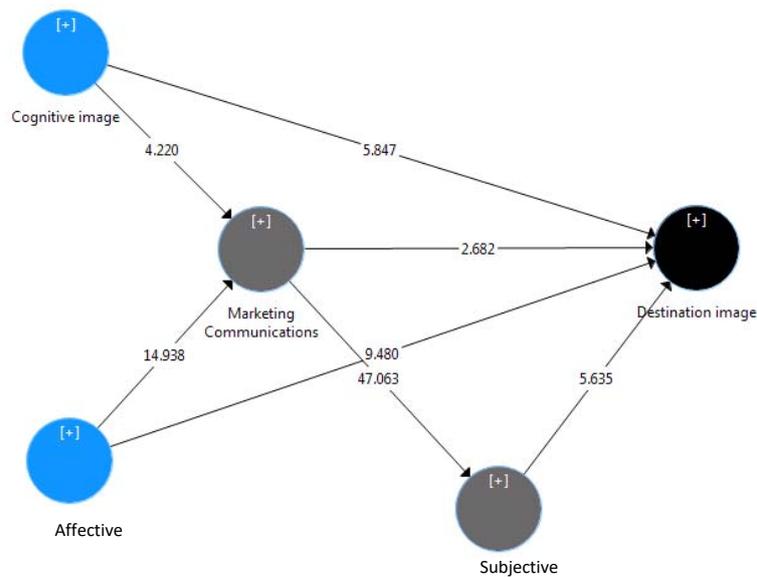


Figure 2. The level of significance of the beta indices using t-value

If beta indices are significant, then the relationships in the structural model will be confirmed. The significance of the beta indices complements the power and the direction of the beta coefficient of the model. The obtained value was greater than 1.96 for all the relationships i.e. all the relationships are confirmed at the 95% level of significance (see Figure 2 above).

Fit index	Observed value	Optimal value	Result
SRMR	0.075	< 0.08	Appropriate
NIF	0.95	> 0.9	Appropriate
d-G	0.014	< 0.95	Appropriate
d- ULS	0.04	< 0.95	Appropriate
RMS	0.32	around 0	Appropriate

Table 6: The total fit index of the model

The total fit indices of the model included standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and normed fit index (NFI). The comparison of the optimal and observed values in Table 6 showed that the research model has an acceptable fit index.

No.	Hypotheses	Beta index	t-value	p-value	VAF	Result
1	Cognitive image -> Destination image	0.189	5.847	0.000		Approved
2	Affective image -> Destination image	0.349	9.480	0.000		Approved
3	Marketing Communications -> Destination image	0.182	2.682	0.007		Approved
4	Subjective norm -> Destination image	0.335	5.635	0.000		Approved
5	Cognitive image -> Marketing Communications -> Destination image				0.017	Rejected
	Direct effect	0.189	5.847	0.000		
	Indirect effect	0.039	2.034	0.042		
	Total effect	0.228	7.230	0.000		
6	Affective image -> Marketing Communications -> Destination image				0.24	Approved
	Direct effect	0.349	9.480	0.000		
	Indirect effect	0.118	2.711	0.007		
	Total effect	0.467	12.517	0.000		

Table 7: The summary of the results of hypothesis testing

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The destination image is the starting point in successful tourism. It is, therefore, important for tourism destinations to create unique features differentiating them from other destinations in order to gain a competitive advantage. Since tourism brokers play an important role in creating the destination image in the tourists' mind, this research

has investigated the Iranian tourism brokers' perspective on Turkey's overall image based on two main cognitive and affective attributes with the mediating role of marketing communication and subjective norms.

According to Hypotheses 1 and 2 (Table 7), cognitive and affective images affect the destination image, so the results of hypothesis testing indicated that cognitive (T-value=5.847) and affective (T-value=9.480) images have a direct effect on tourism destination image. They also have an indirect effect through the mediating role of marketing communication and subjective norms. In addition, there is evidence for the effectiveness of marketing communication and subjective norms on the relationship between cognitive and affective images. These findings were consistent with the results of some previous studies, e.g. Akgun et al. (2020), Da Silva et al. (2018), Folgado-Fernandez et al. (2017), and Pezeshki (2019). The findings can be explained as follows: the characteristics of the destination (e.g. Infrastructures, Accessibility, Natural attractions, Cultural environment, Entertainment, Events, and beach activities) have influenced the Iranian brokers' perception and judgment toward the superiority of the products and services provided (by Turkey in this case study); moreover, based on outcomes, Turkey, as a tourism destination, have had a strong impression on the brokers' feelings; for instance, it is considered a pleasant, exciting, and stimulating destination amongst the Iranian brokers, so they will evaluate the overall image of Turkey as an appropriate tourism destination.

According to Hypotheses 3 and 4, marketing communication and subjective norms affect the destination image; the results of hypothesis testing showed that subjective norms (T-value=5.635) and Marketing communication (T-value=2.682) influence tourism destination image directly. This result is consistent with the studies by Ouwersloot and Duncan (2008) and Avraham (2016). These findings have been explained as follows: Turkish marketers and brokers' practices like using different communication marketing tools simultaneously (e.g. sale promotions, digital marketing, corporate marketing, and advertisement) in promoting destination image were acceptable and influential for the Iranian brokers. Indeed. Marketing strategies cause the development of destinations (Park and Song, 2021). The Iranian brokers' perspective is impressed by the use of integrated marketing communication tools by marketers and travel agencies in Turkey, for example, bundling or packaging methods of sales promotion, digital marketing (the use of Internet and social channels like

Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube), word-of-mouth, advertisement through social media, face-to-face communication, and corporate marketing between travel agencies. This result is in agreement with Kozak and Buhalis' study (2019) on cross-border marketing between two countries. Hence, this kind of relationship can be interpreted in a way that Turkey uses different means of communication and planned messages to build relationships with Iran's market, which can affect the tourism brokers' point-of-view and may lead to their overall satisfaction, revisit intention, and loyalty toward the destination. As a result, the number of arrivals and visitors to Turkey will increase dramatically. In the case of subjective norms, Turkey would be effectively and efficiently distinguished from other competitors, highlighted in the minds of the customers, and finally, the Iranian tourists are more likely to introduce Turkey to their relatives, friends, and colleagues as a tourism destination. The Iranian brokers also are not an exception and tend to trust the recommendation of important references (family, relatives, and co-workers). Subjective norms would enhance the probability of visitors' revisit intention, and loyalty towards a destination (Tajeddini et al., 2021).

Based on Hypotheses 5 and 6, cognitive image and affective image affect the destination image through the mediating role of marketing communication. The results of testing Hypotheses 5 and 6 showed that cognitive image and affective image are inter-related (like the study by Park and Song 2021, which indicated cognitive plus affective image influence the overall destination image) and can help the brokers form a positive destination image through the mediating role of marketing communication, with the total T-values of (7.230) and (12.517), respectively. This result is in agreement with the study by Martin et al. (2018); for interpretation, the use of planned marketing methods not only influenced the brokers directly but also was useful for a better understanding of the cognitive attributes of Turkey. In other words, the cognitive feature of Turkey like accessibility, transportation, beautiful landscapes, rural zones, heritage, rich cuisine, people friendliness, events and cultural festivals, adventurous sun, and sand opportunities are better perceived by the Iranian tourism brokers if the Turkish marketers and intermediaries utilize the integration of communication tools properly based on the cognitive features of Turkey. To sum up, the Iranian brokers had a positive perspective towards cognitive and affective features of Turkey, and also they are impressed indirectly by main references' believes and emotions. Marketing communication tools used by Turkish marketers almost doubled the influence of the

cognitive attributes of the destination as well. At last, all of these factors would cause the Iranian brokers' satisfaction with the overall image and the increased likelihood of Turkey being recommended to potential tourists as a desirable destination. This result is consistent with the study by Wu and Lai (2021). So, Turkey as a destination marketing manager should always seek to improve effective relationships with target audiences so that it can be regarded as a distinct destination regarding cognitive and affective perspectives and doesn't forget the important role of marketing communication and cognitive image of the tourism brokers.

5.1) THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

To begin, this is the first study that examined the Iranian tourism broker's perspective on Turkey's image. Although tourism intermediaries' perception and satisfaction of the overall image between two neighboring countries is important, the research literature required in this area is very limited. Moreover, in the majority of previous studies, data were collected from visitors directly not tourism brokers. For example, a survey has been done by Wu and Lai (2021) on 375 individuals after visiting Dinguha Mountain in China. They have examined the effect of mental imagery on the formation of cognitive-affective images of the destination. In another research by Marques et al., 2021, data were collected from 314 visitors to Bulgaria, to investigate the relationship between destination image (cognitive, affective, and unique) and satisfaction. De Lima Pereira et al. (2021) have also examined the influence of personal values of 1100 respondents in Amazon Mechanical Turk on the overall image of coastal tourism destinations. At last, in the study by Akgun e al. (2020), data were collected from 2 groups in Istanbul after their visitation to investigate the relationship among nostalgic emotion, destination images (cognitive-affective image), and tourist behaviors; so, this research can enrich the literature of the tourism brokers' perspective on the destination image. After that, investigating the effects of marketing communication and subjective norms as the mediating factors on the overall image is unique. Based on the results of this research, the integrated communication tools used by marketers and travel retailers like agencies in Turkey would affect the Iranian Broker's perspective. The attitudes and thoughts of relatives, friends, and colleagues

can also be effective factors changing the brokers' minds and making them satisfied with the overall image.

With regard to practical implications, the findings of this study will help Turkish brokers and marketers to reduce their asymmetric information about the cognitive and affective components of Turkey's image. Therefore, by promoting Turkey as a tourism destination, they not only internalize the cognitive and affective images of the destination themselves but also increase overseas brokers' satisfaction and foreigner visitors' reliability about the image through marketing communication techniques. Furthermore, with this study, Turkish operators and tour guides can gain a proper perceived image of Turkey as a whole. So, they can make a better connection with the Iranian peers and arise the Iranian visitors' interest in Turkey as a successful destination. All of these factors can be applied for the Iranian marketers and brokers to take some measures in order to improve Iran's image as a tourism destination. The other benefit is that in the literature review, the information and empirical evidence provided about the 4 main variables of this research would be effective and applicable for academic society, researchers, and post-graduate students in different countries. They can use them as a rich literature in the area of tourism brokers and their perspective about different image components of the destination in future studies, or the information passes through their minds to combine it with other variables or evaluate it in detail to discover a new area and perspective about the relationship between brokers and destination image.

Finally, the Turkish and Iranian marketing managers, DMOs, and policymakers would become aware of factors influencing destination image and they can manage some bilateral collaborations with neighboring governments and their tourism intermediaries. According to the adjusted R² coefficient for the destination in this study, more than 85% of the changes in destination image are influenced by the study variables, thus it can make a way for future planning behaviors in order to enhance the numbers of arrival visitors and encourage different countries for new investment based on the attributes of the destination.

5.2) LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study has some shortcomings and limitations. Its main problems were the lack of literature and the novelty of the subject in the field of the relationship between tourism brokers and destinations, which has practically prolonged the research process. This study was conducted irrespective of the current socio-economic issues in Iran including reassignment of the sanctions against Iran as a result of withdrawing of the USA from the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA) since August 2018 followed by a sharp depression in national currency. Thus, it is proposed to consider these factors to see whether they are potential factors or not. After that, there was a significant decrease in total inbound and outbound tourists due to the restrictions on travel introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Financial Tribune 2020); So investigating the factors influencing the destination image during the pandemic is highly recommended for future research.

This study was quantitative research, so it would be better to apply qualitative research tools, like an interview, to put importance on the issue in the future. For instance, interviews with accomplished tourism brokers of Iran and also Turkey would be beneficial for the development of tourism in both countries and give subjectivity to research. In the current investigation, only 4 significant variables were studied, in terms of their impacts on the destination image, so it would be valuable to consider other effective factors in future studies. At last, destination image can be integrated with innovative ideas such as smart tourism and IT marketing strategies among different countries, whether they have similar or different cultural behaviors.

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