

The influence of affective country image on the relationship between tourist destination competitiveness, tourists' memorable experiences, and revisit intention

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to investigate how tourists' memorable experiences are influenced by the effect of affective country image and how this influences their future behavior. It also seeks to explore the role of practical contribution in creating tourists' unforgettable experiences by analyzing the impact of tourist destination competitiveness and its influence on future behaviors. The study's methodology is based on a theoretical conception. Based on the literature study and quantitative results, a questionnaire is created, tested, and distributed to Saudi Arabian international tourists.

The study's findings supported the assumption that affective country image influences visitors' memorable experiences and boosts the competitiveness of tourist destinations, which in turn influences travelers' future actions, including their willingness to return. This in turn offered practical contributions to academic, practitioners and stakeholders in the Saudi Arabian tourism and marketing industries. This study provides a new perspective at how affective country image influences the creation of unforgettable experiences and how that influences future behavior.

Key words: Affective country image, tourist destination competitiveness, tourists' memorable experiences, revisit intention.

1. Introduction:

Tourism plays a significant role in economic and social development of many nations, as it has been anticipated that there will be 1.8 billion tourists' arrival worldwide by 2030 (Kontogianni and Alepis, 2020). One of the primary factors in choosing a place to visit is the country image, which can be applied to any given destination. (de Castro Mendes and Jose Cavenaghi, 2020). Hence, affective country image is one of the main drivers provide the value that travelers place on a place depending on their personal motives (Almeida-García et al., 2020).

Therefore, this study seeks to determine the influence of affective country image and its relation to tourists' memorable experience and its effects on their future behaviors including their revisit intention. The study will add to the body of current literature by integrating affective country image, tourists' experience, and revisit intention in the tourism field into a comprehensive conceptual model.

Furthermore, tourism destination competitiveness is an essential component for a destination to gain a competitive edge and secure a favorable position in the global tourism market (Cronjé and du Plessis, 2020). Considering the significance of tourism destination competitiveness, and its effects on behaviors, this study will also explore the mechanism of place competitiveness within the scope of unforgettable tourism experience.

Thus, this study can be seen as a breakthrough in the field of knowledge that will lead to more research in the future to better comprehend the tourists' engagement and explain their future behaviors. Moreover, in the terms of tourism industry, the study is demonstrating a connection between the competitiveness of the affective country image and the efficacy of tourism destinations, which leaves visitors with a lasting impression and influences their future behavior.

As Melón, Fandos-Herrera and Sarasa, (2021) asserts that producing unforgettable experiences is essential to destination competitiveness, feasibility, and profitability, as it can be the most important source of information when selecting a tourist location and determining future decision-making.

This study will be using tourists' memorable experience as a guide to evaluate the choice and the decision-making process by the travelers in terms of holiday destination. As a result, this study may highlight a fresh viewpoint and provide marketers with more insights. Therefore, based on the main aims above, the objectives of this study would be:

- To investigate the impact of affective country image on tourists' memorable experiences
- To explore the effect of affective country image on tourists' revisit intention
- To address the relationship between affective country image and tourism destination competitiveness
- To assess the relationship between tourism destination competitiveness and tourists' memorable experience
- To demonstrate the relation between tourists' memorable experiences and tourists' revisit intention

2. Literature review

2.1 Affective country image

The term "affective country image" describes the sentiments evoked by a location; individuals with varying motives assess a place differently based on whether that view meets their needs. (Almeida-García *et al.*, 2020). According to Hernández-Mogollón *et al.*, (2018), the affective image associated with tourism destination is the result of visitors experience and the impression they form of a place. Hence, travelers' perceptions of a place are affected by their knowledge and information about the destination (Ragb *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the affective component is resulting from the mental sensation that travelers have of a place that are more intangible, such the ambience, friendliness, and mood (Rojas-Méndez and Davies, 2023).

According to Styliadis, (2022), the affective component is the subjective interpretation of such interactions, along with the subsequently evoked feelings toward the destination. Therefore, before visiting a place, travelers use its perceived image as a basis to set expectations, which they then compare to the experience's outcomes. (De Nisco *et al.*, 2015). Hence, this perceived image can be thought of as a visitor's overall impression or a

comprehensive component that establishes the feelings, thoughts, and perceptions that a visitor has of a place. (Gorji, Garcia and Mercadé-Melé, 2023).

In the words of Nicoletta and Servidio (2012), the affective image can broadly be seen as an element that influencing tourists' behaviors from their mental state about place attributes to decision-making process. Thus, it plays an essential role in influencing product and destination positively by affecting tourists' attitude and belief toward a certain destination (De Nisco *et al.*, 2015). As such, the affective country image can be thought of as a mental map structure that combines various aspects of history, politics, economy, culture, customs, and technology to produce the whole of people's perceptions and ideas about a place. (Chaulagain, Wiitala and Fu, 2019).

2.2 Tourist destinations competitiveness

According to (López-Molina and Pulido-Fernández, (2023), the competitiveness of a tourist site is based on how well it uses the tourism resources that comprise a tourist product. Hence, it should be considered as a system that includes infrastructure and resources, influenced by the location, time, and type of activity. In addition, with the goal of ensuring visitor happiness and enhancing their desire to return, destination management is a vital component of the place competitiveness and can assist form a significant competitive edge. (Gato *et al.*, 2022a).

According to Pearce and Schänzel, (2013), destination management is a decisive, visitor-centered strategy that combines and balances the interests of the community, service providers, and tourists to grow a destination's cultural and economic development. Therefore, destination management may be viewed as a fundamental approach that emphasizes the necessity of cooperation in tourist locations to maximize results for all parties engaged in the local delivery of tourism services. (Volgger, Erschbamer and Pechlaner, 2021). Thus, destination management has the potential to enhance the community both economically and socially, serving as crucial element for the effective efficient management of a destination (Coban and Yildiz, 2019).

On the other side, destination resources can also contribute to the value proposition by offering financial gain to the local tourism sector, which is influenced by the perceived value of each location by tourists. (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Destination resources are hence

assets that may be utilized as tourist attractions that satisfy the leisure needs of visitors and bring in revenues for the place of attraction. (Rosalina *et al.*, 2023).

In doing so, encouraging industry transition and specialization into novel possibilities, enhances local social values, fosters innovation and knowledge, and pursues local economic resilience. (Muštra, Perić and Pivčević, 2023). Therefore, efficient resource allocation in a location can boost competitiveness and, eventually, performance and productivity. (Kim, Liu and Williams, 2022).

2.3 Tourists' memorable experience

As Gato *et al.*, (2022b) acknowledge that, tourist experiences that involve creating memories, fulfillment, a sense of exclusivity, and excitement for visitors are seen as a value-added to tourism attractions. In other words, the core of a tourist attraction's memorable experience is its subjective perception, vision, and depth (Park, Choi and Lee, 2019). Hence, the meaningful way that a tourist interacts with an object, etc., during their activity determines its true value (Moore *et al.*, 2021). Hence, tourists' memorable experiences can be defined as an experience that is acknowledged and positively remembered after it has happened (Sharma and Nayak, 2019).

Indeed, being a service-oriented sector, the quality of visitors' experiences and their opinions of the amenities and services offered to them have a significant impact on the tourism sector's profitability (Abbasi *et al.*, 2021a). One of the key elements influencing the perception both during and after the trip is the experience with the destination, which is mostly determined by how intense the visit was or how much interaction occurred (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio and Nazzareno, 2017). Besides, travelers who already hold a favorable perception of a place will show that they enjoy the way their experiences have shaped that place (Tosun, Dedeoğlu and Fyall, 2015).

Likewise, it asserts that people's perceptions of their environment impact their experiences and actions (Gautam and Bhalla, 2023). Consequently, a potential traveler's perception of the place shapes their expectations for the experience, which will be used as a benchmark for comparison after the vacation is taken (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio and Nazzareno, 2017). Therefore, one could argue that tourists' memorable experiences set a new standard and are among the best indicators of future behavior (Zhang, Wu and

Buhalis, 2018). Tourists tend to develop memorable experience during their real touristic expedition, and their on-site experience is determined by their interactions with the place, making experience the main product of the tourism sector (Sharma and Nayak, 2019).

2.4 Revisit intention

According to Rasoolimanesh et al., (2021), revisit intention is a behavioral intention factor, which can be seen as a desire of a traveler to return to the same tourist location. In other words, it is a crucial future behavior that describes a person's preparedness, willingness, and interest to return to a certain destination (Bayih and Singh, 2020). Given that impressions about the place, which have a significant influence in assessing the likelihood of repeat visits. Destination image qualities affect intention to return and are covariate with place identity and place attachment (Nazir, Yasin and Tat, 2021a). Hence, positive perceptions of the destination will encourage satisfied travelers to return and refer others to it (Li, 2021).

Furthermore, tourists' attitudes, assessments, and their future behaviors are influenced by their perception of the image of the country (Zhang, Wu and Buhalis, 2018). Hence, the perception has an influence on the degree of how satisfied tourists are, and how likely they are to recommend the destination or return (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio and Nazzareno, 2017). As well, it has further demonstrated that destination image is a useful tool for forecasting visitor future behavior while developing relevant and unique choices at the destination (Marques, Vinhas da Silva and Antova, 2021). Hence, physical characteristics that are related to response outcomes including destination preference, destination choice, and intentions to return are the primary focus of country image (Loureiro *et al.*, 2022).

Therefore, revisit intention is defined as the behavioral intention of a visitor to visit the destination again in the future and can be seen as a fundamental indicator of destination loyalty (Acharya, Mekker and De Vos, 2023a). In a similar spirit, the overall impression that a person gets from a journey to a place is frequently used to evaluate the quality of the destinations, which thus affects their future behaviors (Acharya, Mekker and De Vos, 2023b). Hence, tourists' overall impression of the destination and their future actions are influenced by their judgment of their experience at the destination (Sharma and Nayak, 2019).

3. Structural model development

3.1 Affective country image and tourists' memorable experiences:

Affective country image has been the focal point of fundamental investigation from various viewpoints. For instance, the affective image is often regarded as a factor that influences travelers' actions, ranging from their perception of the location's features to their decision-making process (Nicoletta and Servidio, 2012). Besides, tourists' experiences and impressions of the destination are the results of the affective image connected with a tourist destination (Hernández-Mogollón, Duarte and Folgado-Fernández, 2018). Hence, tourists base their expectations on the experience's perceived image, which they subsequently evaluate with the results. Therefore, based on the above arguments, it is purposed that:

- (H1) Affective country image has a positive influence on tourists' memorable experiences.

3.2 Affective country image and tourists' revisit intention:

Loureiro et al., (2022) claim that response outcomes such destination preference, destination choice, and intentions to return are related to affective country image. Thus, its relationship to post-visit intents makes it a useful tool for forecasting visitor behavior while developing options that are relevant and customized (Marques, Vinhas da Silva and Antova, 2021). Therefore, it is suggested that:

- (H2) Affective country image has a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention.

3.3 Affective country image and tourism destination competitiveness:

Destinations are fiercely competitive, and as they continue to develop and diversify, the global tourist market becomes more competitive overall (Tosun, Dedeoğlu and Fyall, 2015). According to Lee, Rodriguez and Sar, (2012), tourists' perceptions about a place have an impact on their travel choices and can be crucial in the decision-making process. Hence, the affective country image can be viewed as a mental map structure that creates the entirety of people's thoughts and impressions about a place by combining different elements of history, politics, economy, culture, customs, and technology (Rojas-Méndez and Davies, 2023). Therefore, based on the above arguments, the proposed hypothesis would be as follow:

- (H3) There is a positive relationship between Affective country image and tourism destination competitiveness.

3.4 Destination competitiveness and tourists' memorable experiences:

The competitiveness of tourist locations can be seen as a system that consists of resources and infrastructure and is impacted by the activity, time, experience, and place (López-Molina and Pulido-Fernández, 2023). Hence, experience is the primary product of the tourism competitiveness since visitors often create unforgettable memories during their actual touristic expeditions, and their interactions with the location form their on-site experience (Sharma and Nayak, 2019). Therefore, it would be suggested that:

- (H4) Tourism destination competitiveness has a positive influence on tourists' memorable experiences.

3.5 Tourists' memorable experiences and tourists' revisit intention:

According to Sharma and Nayak, (2019), tourists' memorable experiences are those that are recognised and favorably recalled after they have occurred. The overall quality of tourists' experiences and their perceptions of the facilities and services provided to them greatly influence their future actions (Abbasi *et al.*, 2021b). Hence, Tourists' evaluations of their experiences at the location impact their perception of the place overall and their future behavior (Sharma and Nayak, 2019). To this end, the following hypotheses are proposed as follow:

- (H5) Tourists' memorable experiences have a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention.

Considering all the hypotheses, the suggested research model in this study is shown in Fig. 1.3.

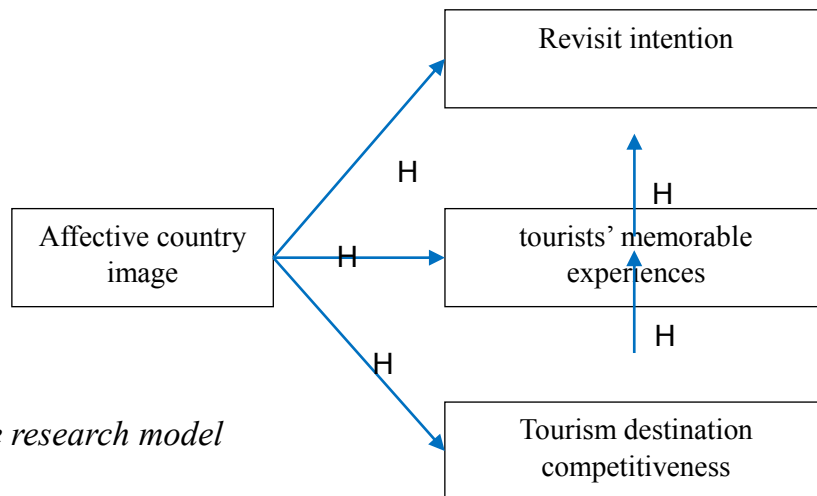


Fig. 1.3 The research model

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research instrument:

This research intends to examine the effectiveness of affective country image on the relationship between the competitiveness of tourist destination, tourist' memorable experience and the consequences on the future behaviors. Based on well-established theory in social science such as place attachment, the study's theoretical framework was constructed. Five-point Likert-type scales were used to measure the study constructs according to the level of agreement or disagreement each person had. (1= strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree).

The measures used in the analysis were adapted from scales that had been validated in earlier studies to meet the goals of this research. The measurement of affective country image adapted from (Stylidis, 2022b). The tourist destination competitiveness measurement adapted from (Gato *et al.*, 2022a). The tourists' memorable experiences' measurement adapted from (Sharma and Nayak, 2019). The revisit intention's measurement adapted from (Loureiro *et al.*, 2022).

4.2 Survey procedure and sample

A survey with a structured questionnaire is the strategy used to collect data for this study. This technique is one of the most efficient approaches of collecting data that yields a high response rate, which is frequently employed in social studies as those by Almeida-García *et al.*, (2020), Stylidis, Woosnam and Kim, (2022), and (Dedeoğlu, 2019). This study uses a probability random simple sample that represents a cross-sectional cultural subgroup. International tourists who traveled to Saudi Arabia and were older than 18 years old made up the target study population. four constructs were measured: affective country image, tourists' memorable experiences, tourist destination competitiveness, and revisit intention.

4.3 Data analysis

A structural equation model was conducted to evaluate the proposed model, using the relationships provided and the concepts previously specified in the theoretical framework. The data analysis concludes multivariate tests to examine direct and indirect links between the theoretical variables, 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.

5. Finding and discussion

Exploratory factor analysis, or EFA intended to set a structure of the sub-factor of affective country image, tourist destination competitiveness, tourists' memorable experience, and revisit intention, through grouping the variables into a set of factors to reach a considerable level of correlation.

In addition, this analysis aimed to create a set of uncorrelated variables, to handle multicollinearity. The Bartlett's test of sphericity (BTS) which measure the overall significance of all correlations within correlation matrix was significant with a value of 1838.6 ($\alpha=0.001$). Kaiser Meyer-Olkin test (KMO) is the measure of sampling adequacy (MSA), with 0.6 suggested as the minimum value for a good factor analysis, was over the accepted level (MSA=0.906). These results show that the research sample was suitable for factor analysis. Items that had factor loadings of 0.5 or above were retained for the data analysis. Moreover, factors were considered significant and retained if their eigenvalues were one or higher.

5.1 Respondents profile:

The male gender of participated in the survey accounted for most of the sample with (82%) while female accounted for the remaining (18%). (50%) of the sample is made up of respondents with a graduate or university degree. Roughly 3 of 10 of the respondents (34%) have visited Saudi Arabia for the first time, while almost half of the sample (47%) had visited Saudi Arabia several times. Just under half of the respondents (42%) had visited Saudi Arabia alone; also, (71%) of the respondents indicated that they stayed more than 20 days in their visit.

5.2 Measurement model analysis

The evaluation process of the validity in this study meets the suggested values from the literature. For instance, as recommend by Hoyle, (2011), and Haier et al. (2009), CFI, TLI, IFI, and NFI were used to evaluate incremental fit, PCFI and PNFI were used to test parsimony fit, and the fit indices of χ^2/df and RMR were used to examine absolute fit.

Therefore, the following *table 5.1* shows the selected fit indices from the output used in the assessment of the model:

Table 5.1

Fit index	Indices	Obtained Fit Indices	Suggested Fit Indices
Absolute Fit Indices	chi-square	276.5	≤ 5 ; $p > .05$
	x ² /df	132 p=.000	$\leq .08$, fit well.
	RMR	0.07	$\leq .05$, fit very well
Incremental Fit Indices	CFI	0.84	$\geq .90$
	TLI	0.81	$\geq .90$
	IFI	0.84	$\geq .90$
	NFI	0.74	$\geq .90$
Parsimony Fit Indices	PCFI	0.72	$> .50$
	PNFI	0.63	$> .50$

According to the above *table 5.1*, the results of the confirmatory factor analysis showed the following fit-statistics; chi-square=276.5, df =132, and it is in the suggested range to the criteria ≤ 5 ; $p > .05$. A root mean square residual (RMR) was 0.07. Regarding the incremental fit indices, they meet the suggested range $\geq .90$ as followed: CFI = .084, TLI= 0.81, IFI= .0.84, and NFFI = 0.74. and PNFI= .63.

On the other hand, PCFI and PNFI values, as measures for parsimony fit, were scored at 0.72 and 0.63 respectively. In light of the model's complexity, these statistics demonstrate how well the model corresponds to the data. Using composite reliability (CR), the reliability of the measuring scales was examined. Reliability was demonstrated by the fact that the CR values for each dimension fell between the recommended ranges of 0.8 and 0.5, respectively.

5.3 Structural model analysis.

Table 5.2 illustrates the structural equation modelling results for the study variables: affective country image, tourist destination competitiveness, tourists' memorable experience, and revisit intention.

Table 5.2

Summary of hypothesis testing results			
Hypothesis path description	Estimate	p	Results
(H1) Affective country image has a positive influence on tourists' memorable experiences	0.43	***	Supported
(H2) Affective country image has a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention	0.80	***	Supported
(H3) There is a positive relationship between Affective country image and tourism destination competitiveness	0.11	0.04	Supported
(H4) Tourism destination competitiveness has a positive influence on tourists' memorable experiences	0.84	***	Supported
(H5) Tourists' memorable experiences have a positive effect on tourists' revisit intention	0.57	***	Supported

As it can be seen from *the table 5.2* above, all the paths were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) and positively correlated, in accordance with the structural model's results. The *table 5.2*, also presents the obtained coefficients in a standardized format along with the significance level that forms the basis for approving or disapproving the proposed hypotheses.

Hence, affective country image has a positive influence on tourists' memorable experiences, tourists' revisit intention, and tourism destination competitiveness ($\beta = +0.43$; $p < 0.01$, and $\beta = +0.80$; $p < 0.01$, and $\beta = +0.11$; $p < 0.05$ respectively), thus supporting **H1**, **H2**, and **H3**.

In addition, the findings illustrate that tourism destination competitiveness has a positive relationship with the tourist memorable experience ($\beta = +0.41$; $p < 0.01$). Thus, supporting **H4**. As well, tourists' memorable experience has a positive influence on revisit intention ($\beta = +0.88$; $p < 0.01$). Thus, supporting **H5**.

Furthermore, as *the table 5.2* shows, all five of the hypothesized correlations between the research variables were significant. Additionally, it shows the strongest correlation

between the tourists' intention to return and their memorable experience ($\beta=+.88$ with $p<.01$). However, the influence of country image on tourist destination competitiveness had the lowest significant link ($\beta=+.11$ with $p<.005$).

6. Conclusion and future study

This study aimed to determine the connections between affective country image, competitiveness of a destination, travelers' memorable experiences, and tendency to return. The examination of Saudi Arabia's tourism insight in this study offers a distinctive viewpoint on a place that hasn't been fully explored yet. This study addresses the need for greater focus on the relationship between a country's affective image and its impact on visitors' memorable experiences and its consequences on the future behaviors Chaulagain, Wiitala and Fu, (2019) and Dedeoğlu, (2019).

This study offers a unique investigation into the impact of affective country image and the competitiveness of tourist destinations, as well as the resulting effects on the experience of visitors and their future actions. For the tourism sector, the results thus have theoretical as well as practical consequences.

For example, it has developed an integrative perspective by combining and connecting several schools of thinking and literature. The current study aimed to close the gap in the literature by examining how travelers' memorable experiences are influenced by the effect of affective country image as well as by assessing the fundamental role of tourist destination competitiveness. Hence, this study supported the findings of previous research that showed the significance impact on the visitors to have a memorable experience and its relation to the affective country image. As such, the affective image associated with tourism destination is the result of visitors experience and the impression they form of a place (Hernández-Mogollón, Duarte and Folgado-Fernández, 2018), and the outcome of visitors' perceptions of a location that are more intangible, like the atmosphere, friendliness, and mood (Rojas-Méndez and Davies, 2023). Therefore, the affective component is the subjective interpretation of such interactions, along with the subsequently evoked feelings toward the destination (Stylidis, 2022a).

This study also in line with other investigations that confirmed the influences of affective country image on tourist destination competitiveness (Tosun, Dedeoğlu and Fyall, 2015),

and the impact of affective country image on revisit intention (Marques, Vinhas da Silva and Antova, 2021). As well, the impact of tourism destination competitiveness on memorable experience (López-Molina and Pulido-Fernández, 2023), and the role of tourists' memorable experience on the decision of having revisit intention (Abbasi *et al.*, 2021b). The results of this study are consistent with the theory of place attachment. This theory found important results from the interaction between the place's feature and attribute, resulting in a variety of experiences that are beneficial to people (Nazir, Yasin and Tat, 2021b).

This study has accomplished its five primary aims. First, the findings supported the assumption that tourists' memorable experiences are influenced by the affective image of the country. Second, the results validated the effect of affective country image on the intention of tourists to return. Thirdly, the study demonstrated the connection between competitiveness as a travel destination and affective country image. Fourth, the study illustrated the connection between travelers' memorable experiences and the competitiveness of tourism destinations. Finally, the findings offer compelling proof of the connection between travelers' tendency to return and their memorable experiences.

However, in order to investigate the role of country image, the study selected affective country image as a single predictor. Therefore, other country image dimension factors would be considered, as they may contribute to future research and aid in the theory's development. As well, given the range of nationalities, it would be beneficial for future research to involve Saudi Arabian locals in order to examine various viewpoints about the measurement of various behaviors and perceptions.

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تأثير الصورة النمطية للوجهة والعلاقة بين تنافسية الوجهات السياحية، تجارب السياح، ونية تكرار الزيارة

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الملخص:

هدفت الدراسة الى التحقق في كيفية تأثير الصورة النمطية للبلد على التجارب السياحية للسياح وكيف يؤثر ذلك على سلوكهم المستقبلي، وأيضاً الى استكشاف كيفية خلق تجارب لا تُنسى للسياح من خلال تحليل تأثير تنافسية الوجهات السياحية وتأثيرها على السلوكيات المستقبلية.

وتستند منهجية الدراسة إلى مفهوم نظري واستناداً إلى الدراسات الأدبية والنتائج الكمية، تم إنشاء استبيان واختباره وتوزيعه على السياح الدوليين في المملكة العربية السعودية، توصلت الدراسة الى تأكيد الفرضية القائلة بأن الصورة النمطية للدولة تؤثر على تجارب الزوار وتعزز من تنافسية الوجهات السياحية، مما يؤثر بدوره على تصرفات المسافرين المستقبلية، بما في ذلك استعدادهم للزيارة مرة أخرى.

وتقدم نتائج هذه الدراسة مساهمات عملية للأكاديميين والممارسين وأصحاب المصلحة في صناعة السياحة والتسويق في المملكة العربية السعودية، وكذلك، تقدم منظوراً جديداً حول كيفية تأثير الصورة النمطية للدولة على خلق تجارب لا تُنسى وكيف يؤثر ذلك على السلوك المستقبلي للسياح.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الصورة النمطية للبلد، تنافسية الوجهات السياحية، تجارب السياح التي لا تُنسى، تكرار الزيارة