*J*FTH
Vol. 18, Issue 2 (2021)
ISSN: 2314-7024
E-ISSN: 2682-2180

How Potential Tourists' Perception of Interaction With Local People Impact Their Overall Experience And Destination Image in Emerging Destination?

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of potential tourists' perceptions of their functional, hedonic, and expressive interactions with local people on their overall experience and their view of the destination. Also, this study examines how the potential tourists' mental image of their destination increases their intention to visit it and encourages them to talk about the location with others. A video of tourism in Saudi Arabia was showed to participants and data were obtained from 460 respondents who had never visited Saudi Arabia at the time of the study. Saudi Arabia was selected because it is considered an emerging tourism destination. Structural equation modeling was used to test the proposed hypotheses The findings indicate that all dimensions of interaction are important in increasing the potential tourists' positive perceived overall experience. Also, the study finds that potential tourists' positive perception of their overall experience positively contributes to a positive image of the destination. Lastly, this study provides theoretical, practical, and recommendations for future studies.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a social phenomenon in which a non-resident of a location and its local people exchange valuable information and resources (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016). During their trips, tourists share space, amenities, time, and services with local people, which creates an experience during which they interact with each other. Tourists' interactions with local people, other tourists, and places play a significant role in shaping their experience (White & White2008; Sharpley, 2014). Prior research indicates that tourists' positive interactions with local people increase their spending at attractions, satisfaction with destination, and attitude toward the development of tourism (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Nam, et al., 2016; Eus´ebio, Vieira, & Lima, 2018).

According to Martín-Santana et al., (2017), the tourist's image of a destination is more likely to change after an actual experience, or when additional information is received by the tourist about a destination (Gilbert & Hancock, 2006; Iordanova, and Stylidis, 2019). Konecnik and Ruzzier (2006) indicate that repeat visitors, compared to one-time tourists, create more mature and positive images of a destination. Exploring potential tourists' perceptions and expectations is vital, as it helps to understand why tourists wish to visit certain destinations (Stylidis & Cherifi,

2018). According to Iordanova, and Stylidis (2019), potential tourists do not obtain a clear image of a destination during the early stages of tourism development. This study focuses on destination images in the context of emerging destinations. Therefore, Saudi Arabia was selected as an emerging destination because it opened its doors for the first time to tourists in September 2019. This study defined potential tourists as those who may consider Saudi Arabia as a destination for their next trip.

Tourists' interactions with local people positively change their experience and image of the destination (Ji & Wall, 2015). Some researchers (i.e., Kislali et al, 2019) call for further research that provides new antecedents of destination image. Therefore, this study examines how potential tourists' perceived interaction with Saudi local people influences their overall experience, which ultimately influences their perceived destination image. This study defines tourist-to-local people interaction as the experience of exchanging feelings, information, and resources, which critically influences tourists' experiences and perceptions.

Perceiving a destination as positive increases potential tourists' intention to visit it (Terzidou et al., 2018), as well as their intention to spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (Papadimitriou et al., 2018). However, it was previously not clear how tourists' perceptions of an emerging destination influence their intention to visit and WOM. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between perceived destination image and the tourist's intention to visit and spread WOM. Specifically, this study aims to examine (a) the relationship between the tourists' perception of interaction (i.e., functional, hedonic, expressive) with local people and their overall interaction experience, (b) the relationship between tourists' overall interaction experience and the destination image, and (c) the relationship between the destination image and intention to visit and the spread of positive WOM.

Moreover, the study aims to contribute to the existing literature by utilizing three dimensions of interaction (i.e., functional, hedonic, expressive) to measure tourist perceptions of interaction with local people when they choose Saudi Arabia as a destination. All three dimensions of interaction are important to tourists' overall interaction experience with local people. Second, the study provides new antecedents for tourist behavioral intentions, which is important to the overall interaction experience and image of an emerging destination. Lastly, the findings of this study highlight how different dimensions of interactions that may occur between potential tourists and local people may influence the potential tourists' overall interaction experience. These findings will provide valuable implications for emerging destination marketers or policy makers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Emerging destination: The case of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a relatively unknown and emerging tourist destination. Back in 2016, Saudi Arabia announced its plan (Saudi Vision 2030) to reinforce and diversify the capabilities of the economy. Vision 2030 seeks to support Saudi's position as one of the top tourist destinations. In September 2019, the country opened its doors to tourists from 49 countries who can get an E-visa. Also, the country aims to attract 100 million local and

international tourists annually by 2030 (Ministry of Tourism). A campaign was released by the Saudi Tourism Authority to advertise Saudi Arabia as an emerging destination for both local and international tourists.

2.2. Interaction and Perceived Overall Experience

Human beings interact socially to fulfill their needs of belonging and connecting with others (Bernstein et al., 2018). Prior research that investigated the impact of social interactions on tourists' experience concentrated on the interaction that occurs between tourists and service providers (e.g., Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008; Virabhakul & Huang, 2018), tourists and other tourists (e.g., Lin, Zhang, Gursoy, & Fu, 2019), and tourists and local people (e.g., Stylidis, 2020). The positive and negative effects of customer interactions on their experiences and behavioral intentions have been documented in previous studies (i.e., Nicholls, 2011; Lin, Zhang, and Gursoy, 2020). As an essential component of personal contact, interactions that occur between individuals can initiate actions and thus influence both parties' behaviors (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011).

This study views interaction as a multidimensional construct that contains functional, hedonic, and symbolic/expressive interactions that may occur between tourists and local people. Functional interactions reflect any exchange of information that is associated with a product or service and is likely to provide some utilitarian benefits (Kobia & Liu, 2017). Hedonic interactions refer to exchanges that contain emotional benefits (i.e., pleasure and enjoyment) (Voss et al., 2003). Symbolic/expressive interactions are those that enable tourists to project their self-concept and/or reflect their beliefs and values (Yang & Mattila, 2016).

Based on the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991), this study assumes that tourists' interactions with local people will influence their overall experience of a location. The social cognitive theory suggests that people are more likely to regulate their behaviors based on ongoing cognitive mechanisms. Therefore, during tourists' interactions with local people, tourists are more likely to evaluate whether their interaction will positively contribute to their overall experience. Additionally, Ekinci and Dawes (2009) find that individuals evaluate their overall experiences based on their interactions during their consumption, or tourism, experiences. Lin et al., (2019) state that the interactions that take place among tourists are critical to their experiences. Customers' experience is significantly influenced by other customers' behaviors and actions (Jung et al., 2017). Local residents and their interactions with tourists can make tourists' experiences more enjoyable (Nam et al., 2016). Previous studies indicated that potential tourists and those who actually visited the country have different interests (Davies & Prentice, 1995), personal values (Pitts & Woodside, 1986), motivations (Riscinto-Kozub & Childs, 2012), and mental images (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Stylidis and Cherifi, 2018). According to Pine and Gilmore (2011), all actions that individuals take during their consumption experience contribute to the creation of an optimal overall experience. The influence of potential tourists' perception of their interaction (functional, hedonic, expressive) with local people on their overall experience has not been investigated yet. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Potential tourists perceived functional interactions with local people positively influence their perceived overall experience.
H2: Potential tourists perceived hedonic interactions with local people positively influence their perceived overall experience.
H3: Potential tourists perceived expressive interactions with local people positively influence their perceived overall experience.

2.3. Perceived Overall Experience and Perceived Destination Image

Previous studies have argued that experience is an outcome of the set of interactions that may occur between customers and a company or its products or services (e.g., Addis and Holbrook, 2001; Gentile et al., 2007; Zatori et al., 2018). Other studies indicated that experience plays a significant role in shaping tourists' image of a destination (e.g., Suhartanto et al., 2018; Su et al, 2020). Destination image reflects tourists' perceptions and impressions regarding the destination, as well as the combination of ideas, emotions, and beliefs (Crompton, 1979). There are multiple factors that might play a role in shaping a destination image, such as the effects of experiences, length of stay, and passage of time (Pike et al., 2019). Experience plays an important role in influencing the formation of a destination image. According to Smith et al., (2015), a negative tourism experience might damage a formerly positive image of a destination.

According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), destination image can be seen as attribute-based (i.e., individual perception of attributes such as attractions, price, and scenery) or holistic (i.e., destination's mental picture based on individuals' feelings, perceptions, and impressions) (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Also, destination image can be viewed as a multidimensional construct that contains the following dimensions: cognitive, conative, and affective. The cognitive dimension reflects the perception a tourist has of a destination's attractions or features (Pike and Ryan 2004). The affective dimension describes the feeling a tourist has about a destination (Lin et al. 2007). Lastly, the cognitive dimension refers to the action tourists would take based on the affective and cognitive images they have (Prayag, 2009). This study concentrates on cognitive destination image as it is observable, measurable, and descriptive (Walmsley & Young, 1998). Kim (2018) finds a positive relationship between memorable tourism and destination image. When tourists visit a destination and get actual experience, they are more likely to have a realistic, clear, and differentiated destination image (Gartner and Hunt 1987). Travel experience reinforced tourists' image of a destination collectively (Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012). The influence of potential tourists perceived overall experience on destination image has received minimal attention. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H4: Potential tourists perceived overall experience positively influences their perceived image of the destination.

2.4. Perceived Destination Image, Intention to Visit, and WOM

The influence of destination image and travel intention has been documented in previous studies (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chen et al., 2013; Stylos et al., 2016). Perceived destination image positively impacts tourists' intention to revisit (Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012; Kaur et al., 2016; Afshardoost, & Eshaghi, 2020). Local residents may promote the destination to potential tourists (Hudson and Hawkins

2006; Stylidis, Sit, and Biran 2016), thus they are more likely to influence the tourists' destination image and their behavioral intentions (e.g., Bigne et al., 2005; Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou, and Apostolopoulou 2018). Destination image significantly influences tourists' intention to visit and their intention to recommend a travel experience (Hahm and Severt, 2018). Understanding the influence of destination image is important to understand customers behavior (i.e., selection of a destination, visit intention, and satisfaction) (Stylos et al., 2016). Prior studies indicated that the destination image positively influences the tourists' intention to revisit it and the willingness to spread a positive WOM about it among others (Agapito et al. 2013; Hallmann et al. 2015; Kock, Josiassen, and Assaf 2016). When destination marketers fail to promote a positive destination image, tourists are more likely to be dissatisfied and spread negative word of mouth that may negatively impact prospective tourists' image of the destination (Tseng et al., 2015). This study assumes that when potential tourists perceive a destination image as positive, they are more likely to revisit the destination and spread a positive WOM. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H5: Perceived destination image positively increases the intention to visit a destination.
H6: Perceived destination image positively increases the intention to spread positive WOM.

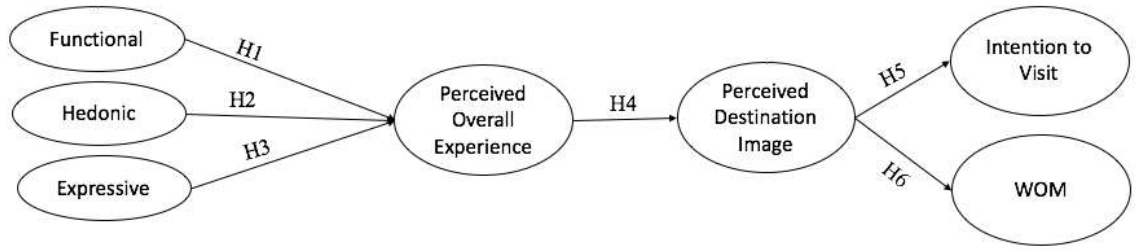

Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample Selection and Procedures

To achieve the purpose of this study, individuals who are 18 or older and have never been to Saudi Arabia before (potential tourists) were selected through MTurk (Amazon Mechanical Turk). MTurk is a platform through which researchers can collect reliable and valid data, especially for behavioral research (e.g., Buhrmester et al., 2011; Goodman et al., 2013; Paolacci and Chandler, 2014). According to Goodman et al., (2013) and Paolacci and Chandler, (2014), using check-attention questions is a good strategy to increase the validity of data collected from MTurk. Therefore, a check-attention question was planted in the questionnaire to ensure that respondents had paid enough attention to the survey's questions, for their responses to be valid. Respondents who did not pass that question were removed from the study.

A screening question was also used (i.e., have you ever visited Saudi Arabia before?) to determine whether the respondents were qualified to participate in the study. To examine the validity and reliability of the

current study's questionnaire, a pilot study was performed. The results of the pilot study showed that the questionnaire contains a satisfactory level of validity and reliability. The data used in the pilot study and the main study was collected by utilizing Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), and the survey was built using Qualtrics. Lastly, monetary incentive was given for participation.

This study utilizes a video that was created by the Saudi Ministry of Tourism and published on social media and international TV (i.e., YouTube). This video was selected because it was used by the ministry to promote tourism when the country announced its E-visa back in September 2019. The length of the video is one minute. The video displays Saudi landscapes, Saudi local people, Saudi hospitality, and interactions between local people and tourists. Scholars have commonly used videos in tourism studies (e.g., Lim, Lee, & Foo, 2017). After watching the video, interested respondents were asked to fill out the survey, to examine their perception of interactions with local people and how that would impact their experience and view of the destination.

3.2. Measurement

The measurement items used in the current study were adopted from previous studies. For purposes of the current study, items were slightly modified. The functional dimension of interactions was measured by using four items adopted from Zhang et al. (2017). The hedonic dimension of interaction was measured by using five measurement items borrowed from Voss et al. (2003). The expressive interaction dimension was measured by using four items adopted from Jahn and Kunz (2012). Overall experience was measured using four items adopted from Hosany and Withams (2010). The destination image was measured by utilizing eleven measurement items adopted from Khan et al., (2017) and Park et al. (2017). WOM was measured using a three-item measurement developed by Maxham and Netemeyer (2002). Three measurement items were adopted from Lam and Hsu, (2004). Demographic information (i.e., age, gender, marital status, region, and income) were also obtained. A 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from (*strongly disagree* [1] - *strongly agree* [7]) was used to measure all constructs.

3.3. Data Screening

A total of 500 responses were obtained. Only 460 responses were used due to some respondents' failure to pass the check attention questions or the screening question. Baumgartner and Homburg (1996) proposed that using the number of free parameters is appropriate to determine the minimum sample size. The proposed model of this study contains 91 free parameters, and ensuring five responses per parameter is recommended. This study satisfies the minimum sample size proposed by Baumgartner and Homburg (1996) (91×5=455). Additionally, the normality assumption was assessed by checking skewness and kurtosis. The value of skewness ranged from -.657 to -1.219, whereas the kurtosis ranged between .556 and 2.031. The results of skewness and kurtosis indicated an acceptable distribution (Kline, 2011). The multicollinearity of the study's constructs was checked, and all variance inflation factors (VIF) did not exceed 10 (Neter et al., 1996). Therefore, multicollinearity is not an issue in this study.

3.4. Data Analysis

First, descriptive analysis was performed to collect respondents' demographic information and measure data distribution (i.e., means and

standard deviations). The current study followed the two-step approach indicated by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Therefore, to assess the validity of the measurement model, it conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). In order to examine the proposed hypotheses, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used. Furthermore, SPSS v. 24.0 and Mplus v. 7.3. was used to analyze the measurement and structural models. Lastly, three tests were used (i.e., Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and the average variance extracted (AVE)) to test the construct validity.

4. Results

4.1 Sample Profiles and Demographic

The sample contains 460 respondents, of which 57.4% were males. In terms of nationality, 57.6% of respondents were American (57.6%), Indian (27.8%), British (3.3%), Italian (2.8%), Brazilian (1.7%), and 6.7 % were from different countries such as France, Canada, Mexico, Cameroon, Nigeria, China, and Venezuela. The majority of respondents (66.6%) were between 25 years old and 44 years old. Additionally, about 60% of respondents have a Bachelor's degree. Half of the respondents (51.5%) earned annually between $25,000 and $75,000. Lastly, the majority of respondents (68%) are not married.

Table. 1 Demographic Information

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	264	57.4
Female	196	42.6
Nationality		
American	265	57.6
Indian	128	27.8
Brazilian	15	1.7
Italian	13	2.8
British	8	3.3
Others	31	6.7
Age		
18-24	10	2.2
25-34	136	29.6
35-44	170	37.0
45-54	78	17.0
55-64	40	8.7
65 and over	26	5.7
Education		
Less than high school	3	.7
High school diploma or equivalent	32	7.0
Some college	66	14.3
Bachelor's degree	276	60.0
Graduate degree	83	18.0
Income		
$25,000 and less	80	17.4
$25,001 to $50,000	132	28.7
$50,001 to $75,000	105	22.8
$75,001 to $100,000	87	18.9

$100,001 and over	46	10
Prefer not to disclose	10	2.2
Marital status		
Married	313	68.0
Widowed	4	.9
Divorced	15	3.3
Separated	2	.4
Never married	126	27.4

4.2. Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the overall measurement model. The initial model produced an acceptable data fit (χ^2= 1520.660, *df* = 506, p< 0.001, TLI =0.906, CFI = 0.916, SRMR = 0.046, RMSEA= 0.070). However, three measurement items were removed. Two measurements of destination image construct (DIM 7, DIM 11) were removed for poor loading factors (below 0.60). Additionally, one item from hedonic introduction (HED 2) was removed due to a high standardized residual, which was higher than 2.5. According to Hair et. al., (2006) items that have standardized residual of 2.5 or higher may affect the accuracy of the measurement model. After removing the items mentioned above, the measurement model showed better goodness-of-fit (χ^2= 1193.289, *df* = 413, p< 0.001, TLI =0.920, CFI = 0.929, SRMR = 0.042, RMSEA= 0.068).

Table 3 shows means, standard deviation, and correlation between variables. The convergent validity was achieved in this study based on the factor loading of all items higher than 0.60 (Hair et al., 2010). The values of AVE were all above the minimum required values of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010), and all values of composite reliability (CR) were higher than 0.60 (Hair et al., 2006). In order to test the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha was examined. The scores of the test ranged from 0.819 to 0.925, which is considered excellent reliability (See Table 2). Lastly, all of the square roots of AVE were higher than the correlations between constructs (except correlations between functional and hedonic, and between destination image and overall experience.) Since the differences between the square roots of AVE values of variables mentioned above were slightly lower than the correlations between those latent values, and the construct has met the criterion of minimum AVE and CR, discriminant validity is not an issue in this study (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 2. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Constructs Validity and Reliability

Variable	Std. loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Functional Interaction (FUNC)		0.83	0.56	0.835
My interactions with Saudi local people will be helpful (FUNC1)	0.779			
My interactions with Saudi local people will be functional (FUNC2)	0.779			
My interactions with Saudi local people will be beneficial (FUNC3)	0.776			
My interactions with Saudi local people will help me solve certain problems (FUNC4)	0.662			
Hedonic Interaction (HED)		0.879	0.64	0.895
I think I will feel pleased during my interactions	0.792			

with local people (*HED*1)				
I think my interactions with local people will help me relax (*HED*2)*	———			
I think my interactions with local people will be joyful (*HED*3)	0.821			
I think my interactions with local people will make me happy (*HED*4)	0.836			
I think my interactions with local people will be entertaining (*HED5*)	0.765			
Expressive Interaction (EXP)		0.835	0.55	0.835
I think I can make a good impression on local people through my interactions with them (EXP1)	0.750			
I think I can improve the way I am perceived through my interactions with local people (EXP2)	0.767			
I think I can present others who I am through my interactions with them (EXP3)	0.738			
I think I can present others who I want to be through my interactions with them (EXP4)	0.737			
Overall Experience (OEX)		0.823	0.53	0.819
I think interactions with local people will make me think that this service experience stimulated my curiosity to learn new things (OEX1)	0.760			
I think the more I interacted with local people, the more I thought the experience was captivating (OEX2)	0.766			
I think the more I interacted with local people, the more I felt a real sense of harmony (OEX3)	0.749			
I think the more I interacted with local people, the more I thought the experience let me imagine being someone else (OEX4)	0.657			
Destination Image (DIM)		0.923	0.55	0.920
Saudi Arabia has a quality tourism infrastructure (DIM1)	0. 736			
Saudi Arabia has a good climate (DIM2)	0.687			
Saudi Arabia is safe and stable (DIM3)	0.785			
Saudi Arabia has a good quality of life (DIM4)	0.799			
Saudi Arabia has appealing local cuisine (DIM5)	0.700			
Saudi Arabia has a variety of unique attractions (DIM6)	0.661			
Saudi Arabia is rich in cultural heritage (DIM7)*	———			
Saudi Arabia is a good place for shopping (DIM8)	0.699			
Saudi Arabia people are interesting and friendly (DIM9)	0.777			
Saudi Arabia is a pleasant place to visit (DIM10)	0.840			
Saudi Arabia has several springs (DIM11)*	———			
Word-of-Mouth (WOM)		0.924	0.80	0.923
Encourage others to visit Saudi Arabia (WOM1)	0.916			
Spread good aspects about Saudi Arabia (WOM2)	0.846			
Recommend to others to visit Saudi Arabia (WOM3)	0.924			
Intention to Visit (ITV)		0.925	0.80	0.925
I think I intend to revisit Saudi Arabia (ITV1)	0.883			
I think I intend to recommend Saudi Arabia to others (ITV2)	0.905			
I think I will plan to revisit Saudi Arabia (ITV3)	0.904			

Note: * denotes the dropped items

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Matrix (*n*=460).

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Functional	5.55	0.97	0.748						
2. Hedonic	5.64	0.95	0.750**	0.800					
3. Expressive	5.53	0.90	0.710**	0.756**	0.741				
4. Overall Experience	5.42	0.93	0.709**	0.721**	0.732**	0.728			
5. Destination Image	5.30	0.99	0.617**	0.662**	0.658**	0.756**	0.741		
6. Intention to Visit	5.08	1.48	0.550**	0.495**	0.544**	0.625**	0.738**	0.894	
7. WOM	5.24	1.39	0.538**	0.536**	0.555**	0.636**	0.770**	0.893**	0.894

Bold: Square Root of AVE
**$p < .01$

4.3. The Structural Model

To check the proposed hypotheses, this study utilizes structural equation modeling (SEM) and a maximum likelihood estimation. The goodness-of- fit statistics of the model exhibited that the model fits the data (χ^2 = 1215.460, *df* = 424, p < 0.001, TLI = 0.921, CFI = 0.928, SRMR = 0.043, RMSEA = 0.068) (Kline, 2011).

As expected, the results indicate that functional interaction (β= 0.20, $p < 0.001$), hedonic interaction (β= 0.26, $p < 0.001$), and expressive interaction (β= 0.47, $p < 0.001$) all positively influence potential tourists' perception of overall experience. Therefore, H1, H2, and H3 were supported. The overall experience positively increases potential tourists' perception of the destination (β= 0.84, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H4 was supported. Perceived image of the destination was found to positively influence potential tourists' intention to visit (β= 0.81, $p < 0.001$) and to spread positive WOM (β= 0.83, $p < 0.001$), meaning that H5 and H6 were supported. The standardized coefficient estimates of the hypothesized relationships between constructs are presented in Table 4.

Fig. 2 presents the structural model's result.

Table 4. Direct effects (*n*=460).

Hypothesis	Linkage	Standard Estimates	P-value	Results
H1	FUNC → OEX	0.20	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H2	HED → OEX	0.26	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H3	EXP → OEX	0.47	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H4	OEX → DIM	0.84	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H5	DIM → ITV	0.81	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H6	DIM → WOM	0.83	$p < 0.001$	Supported

Note: FUNC: Functional interaction; HED: Hedonic interaction; EXP: Expressive interaction; OEX: Perceived Overall experience; DIM: Perceived Destination Image; ITV: Intention to Visit; WOM: Word-of-Mouth.

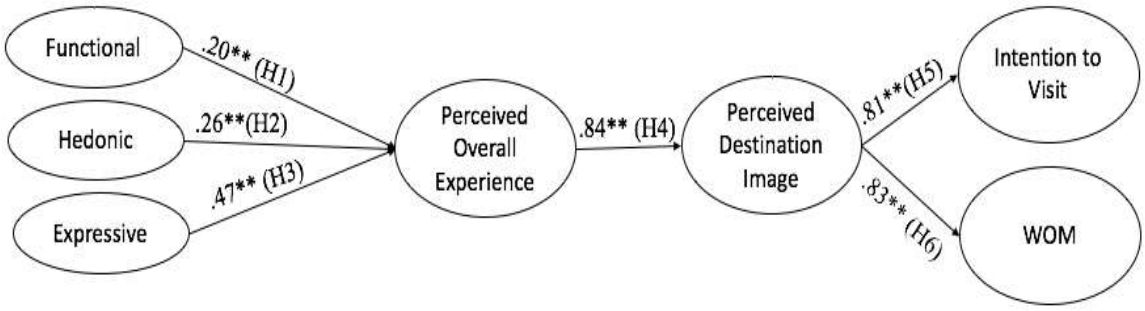

Fig. 2. The Results of Structural Model.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to provide new information on the importance of a future-traveler's image of a destination. A conceptual model was tested to examine how the potential tourists' perception of functional, hedonic, and expressive interaction would influence their perceived overall experience. Perceived experience ultimately influences a potential tourist's perception of the destination. Saudi Arabia was chosen for this study since the country opened its door on September 2019 and expected to receive 100 million tourists in 2030. Therefore, Saudi Arabia can be considered an emerging destination. Although previous studies have examined the influence of destination perception on tourists' behavioral intentions, there is a lack of research about how potential tourists' perceived image of the emerging destination would lead to a higher intention of visit and spread WOM.

The results of this study indicate that functional interaction positively influences potential tourists perceived overall experience. When potential tourists interact with local people and exchange valuable and helpful information, their perceived overall experience is more likely to positively increase. Also, hedonic interaction positively influences potential tourists perceived overall experience. Interacting and communicating with local people is a crucial part of tourists' experience. Therefore, the more tourists enjoy an interaction with local people, the more positive their experience will be. The findings of this study propose new antecedents of destination image. When tourists perceive their overall experience in a destination as positive, their perceived destination image is more likely to be positive. Lastly, the results indicate that positive destination image increases potential tourists' intention of visit and spread positive WOM.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

First, a comprehensive conceptual framework was proposed to examine potential-tourist-to-local people interactions in the context of emerging destinations. Unlike previous studies that dealt with interaction as unidimensional constructs (i.e., Eus´ebio, Vieira, & Lima, 2018), this study tests interaction as a multi-dimensional construct that includes functional, hedonic and expressive dimensions to gauge potential tourists' interaction (Moore et al., 2005). This study contributes to the existing literature by finding that the expressive dimension of interaction is the strongest predictor among the other dimensions of interaction.

Additionally, this study contributes to the existing knowledge by finding that all dimensions of interaction (i.e., functional, hedonic and expressive) are important because they provide more insightful perspective to measure potential tourists' perception of interactions.

Second, in the tourism literature, there is much emphasis on tourist experience (i.e., Terzidou, Stylidis, Terzidis; Selby, 2003). However, the role of each dimension of interaction (i.e., functional, hedonic, expressive) in impacting potential tourists' overall experience has received minimal attention from scholars. This study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the influence of each dimension (i.e., functional, hedonic and expressive) in increasing potential tourists perceived overall experience. The current study's findings indicate that each dimension of interaction positively influences overall experience.

Third, this study provides overall experience as a new antecedent to perceived destination image. This study contributes to the existing knowledge by indicating that when potential tourists perceive their overall experience as positive, they are more likely to form a positive image of a destination. This finding is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Smith, Li, Pan, Witte, & Doherty, 2015; Suhartanto, Clemes, & Wibisono, 2018). Also, the findings of this study show that destination image is important to increase potential tourist intention to visit and WOM. These findings confirm the findings of Chen, Chen, et al., (2013), Chen & Tsai, (2007), and Hallmann et al., (2015) in which they find a relationship between mental image of the destination and tourists' behavioral intentions.

5.2. Practical Implications

This study clearly highlights the importance of local people's interactions with tourists. Therefore, the local tourism authorities of emerging tourism destinations need to educate local people about the importance of having an effective interaction with tourists. That could be done by providing workshops or scholarships for local communities that receive tourists. Also, this study recommends that local tourism authorities highlight the functional, hedonic, and expressive dimensions of interaction in advertisements that targets potential tourists in order to positively increase their perceived positive overall experience.

Destination operators have to ensure that potential tourists perceive an experience they have in a destination as positive, which increases a favorable perception of the destination and ultimately increases their intention to visit and spread positive WOM. This can be achieved by 1) studying the behavior, needs, and expectations of potential tourists and then developing experiences that are in line with tourists needs, and 2) involving local people in the tourism activities that tourists would have during their visit in the destination.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study contains several limitations. First, the current study uses a video and cross-sectional survey to collect data from potential tourists. Therefore, potential perceptions of the destination might change if data were collected during different times using different marketing means (i.e., articles or brochures). Thus, this study recommends that future studies collect data during a different time and using use different means, which may yield different results and insights.

Second, this study only focuses on potential tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond the target population. For future studies, it would be beneficial to measure the proposed variables after tourists visit of the destination. Third, this study did not examine the influence of demographic differences (i.e., age or gender), which may influence the destination image formation. Examining the influence of demographic differences would provide new insights about how potential tourists from different age groups or genders would perceive the destination or overall experience.

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