

## **IMPACT OF MEDIA EXPERIENCE ON INTENTION TO VISIT AGADIR REGION: MEDIATING ROLE OF ONLINE DESTINATION IMAGE IN POST COVID-19 CRISIS**

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### **Abstract:**

Recent research has shed light on the significant influence of social media (SM) on travelers' behavior in the tourism sector, particularly during and after the covid-19 pandemic. However, it remains unclear whether SM information alone determines travelers' intentions, as they rely on a variety of sources such as social media (SM), including and travel platforms ( TP) social networks (SNs), word-of-mouth (WOM) and Traditional Media. Depending on the information received from each medium, travelers' behavior may vary. The formation of destination image, influenced by information from different media types, plays a crucial role in shaping travelers' behavioral intentions. The aim of this study is to investigate how media experiences as sources of information impact travelers' behavioral intentions towards the Agadir region, with destination image acting as a mediator. Additionally, the study aims to compare the destination image between informed visitors during and after their travel experiences and informed non-visitors of Agadir during their tours in Morocco. The empirical model was tested using the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. The findings reveal that certain types of media positively impact both the cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that the type of media influences the formation of destination image and behavioral intentions, thereby affecting both informed visitors and informed non-visitors.

**keywords:** Word-of-mouth, social media, affective destination image, cognitive destination image, behavioral intentions

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a knowledge-intensive industry (Werthner & Klein, 1999), emphasizing the importance of understanding the impact of tourists' media experiences on their behavior during information search. Traditional media sources, such as leaflets, guidebooks, and word-of-mouth recommendations, have historically influenced destination selection (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Hanlan & Kelly, 2004). However, the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has given travelers direct access to multimedia and abundant information about destinations (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). Online platforms, including social media, blogs, and reputable travel websites, have become vital sources of shared experiences, photos, videos, and reviews for informed decision-making (Li et al., 2013).

The formation of a destination image is influenced by various information sources, including media providers, intermediaries, visitors, and other entities (Choi et al., 2007). With the rise of the Internet, the accessibility of information and content has increased significantly, shaping the image of the destination (Govers & Go, 2003). Online information systems, including official tourism websites, social networking sites, and review platforms like TripAdvisor, play a crucial role in dynamic destination image formation (Hunter, 2016; Molinillo et al., 2018). Destination marketing organizations have adapted their strategies to incorporate these communication platforms, recognizing their impact on tourist intentions and behavior.

Online platforms, particularly social networks, play a significant role in travelers' decision-making processes, influencing information search, evaluation, and behavioral intentions related to visiting, recommending, and purchasing (Cho & Sung, 2012). The availability of visual elements on destination websites creates a positive perception and promotes destinations effectively (Cho & Sung, 2012). Moreover, word-of-mouth from other travelers is often considered more current, enjoyable, and trustworthy compared to information from service providers (Yoo et al., 2007).

Destination Management Organizations focus on building and maintaining a favorable destination image through official websites, social media, and traditional media (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). The impact of online platforms on destination image and behavioral intentions has been extensively studied, emphasizing the role of content and information availability (Frias et al., 2008; Jeong et al., 2012; Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015; Mak, 2017; Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2015). While social media platforms offer diverse online information, DMO websites are more structured and accessible (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased internet usage for entertainment, shopping, and business activities, but travel-related information sharing has decreased. Media experiences significantly influence the destination image formed by individuals and subsequently impact their behavioral intentions. Online marketing plays a crucial role in information search and destination selection. However, little research distinguishes the specific impacts of word-of-mouth from friends and relatives versus the public. This study aims to investigate the collective influence of social media, traditional media, and word-of-mouth on travelers' intentions to visit the Agadir region, considering the launch of a new digital strategy to promote tourism in the area (Agadir Regional Tourism Council report 2020).

Empirical research comparing the effects of different media experiences on tourists' behavioral intentions toward the Agadir destination is limited. This article assesses the online reputation of the Agadir region among international tourists, examining the influence of social media, travel platforms, traditional media, and the perceived destination image on visit intentions. The study aims to determine which media type exerts the greatest influence on visit intentions toward Agadir, with the destination image acting as a mediating variable. Furthermore, it explores the differences in destination image perception between visitors and non-visitors.

To achieve these objectives, the study will analyze various sources of media experiences, including social media, travel platforms, direct Word-of-mouth and traditional media such as TV, documentaries, and print media. These media types are known to shape tourists' perceptions and influence their

behavioral intentions. By examining the effectiveness of each media type in shaping the Agadir destination image, the study will provide insights into the most influential sources of information.

It is important to note that the study considers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly altered travel patterns and information sharing. The reduced travel during this period has affected the flow of media experiences and information related to the Agadir region. Understanding how these changes have impacted tourists' behavioral intentions is crucial for destination marketers and policymakers.

Through this research, the study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the relationship between media experiences, destination image, and behavioral intentions. By focusing on the specific context of the Agadir region, it provides insights into the effectiveness of different media types in shaping tourists' perceptions and visit intentions.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Brief review of tourism potential of Agadir region (Agadir Regional tourism report CRT)**

Situated in Souss-Massa, Morocco, the Agadir region presents a wide range of captivating attractions for visitors. The coastal resort of Agadir itself boasts a picturesque seaside tourist zone with a pleasant climate and an abundance of sunshine throughout the year. Nature, authenticity, and exploration are at the heart of Agadir's tourism offerings, complemented by well-designed green spaces like Parc Phares and the culturally rich Medina, known for traditional craftsmanship.

Beyond Agadir, the region is home to remarkable natural wonders. The Win-Timdouine cave, one of Africa's longest cave systems, spans 18 km of underground galleries shaped by water erosion and houses lakes with diverse fauna, attracting spelunkers and scientists.

Historical and cultural sites abound in the Agadir region. The Timzguida Ougard Mosque in Aguerd village features a cemetery with the tombs of Saadian Cherifs and fallen soldiers, reflecting the lasting influence of the Saadians in the area. For panoramic views, the Telepheric Agadir offers a cable car experience showcasing the coastal scenery, cityscape, and surrounding landscapes.

Taghazout Agadir Bay has become a sought-after tourist destination, offering luxurious accommodations, recreational activities, and pristine beaches. Emphasizing environmental sustainability, it appeals to both domestic and international tourists looking for a memorable vacation integrating modern amenities with natural beauty.

In the town of Imouzzer Agadir, visitors can explore stunning waterfalls, traditional Berber architecture, and engage in outdoor activities amidst picturesque landscapes. For world-class surfing conditions and beautiful beaches, the coastal village of Imousouane provides a relaxed atmosphere attracting surfers and beach lovers.

The Agadir region in Souss-Massa offers a diverse array of attractions, including coastal beauty, cultural heritage, natural wonders, and outdoor adventures, ensuring a memorable and enriching experience for all visitors.

## **2.2 Digital strategy of Souss-Massa, including Agadir region.**

Digital technology has had a significant impact on tourism brands, including the Agadir region destination. The Agadir Regional Tourism Council (CRT) acknowledges the need to incorporate digital strategies into their approach. They are actively working on embracing a complex digital ecosystem and fully integrating it into their comprehensive communication strategy. The CRT recognizes the changes in consumer behaviors driven by technological advancements and is evolving their communication and marketing approaches to meet these new expectations (CRT report 2020). They have launched the development and implementation of a digital strategy for the Souss Massa destination, including Agadir Region, with the aim of promoting, positioning, and managing the destination's e-reputation. Collaboration with stakeholders and tourism operators is a key aspect of their comprehensive and sustainable approach. The CRT is committed to establishing a competitive destination with a strong online presence, and they are analyzing digital tools, benchmarking successful initiatives, and implementing a budgeted action plan to achieve their objectives (CRT report 2020).

## **2.3 Source of information and destination image formation**

Research articles on destination management and marketing extensively explore the concept of "image." Understanding a destination requires considering its image, which encompasses ideas, impressions, and beliefs about its attributes, activities, and benefits. Tourists form these perceptions through information processing from various sources (Choi et al., 2007; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000). Information sources significantly influence the development of perceptions and evaluations, acting as stimulus factors (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Information sources are recognized as crucial in forming the destination image, impacting decision-making. This image can be shaped by personal experiences, external information sources, or even in the absence of promotional content (Tasci et al., 2007). Thus, the destination image encompasses information received from various sources about a specific destination. Gartner (1993) describes destination image formation as an ongoing process influenced by personal, sociocultural, information technology, and stimulus factors (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Josiassen et al., 2016; San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008).

Gartner categorizes general media information sources into three categories: over-induced, covert-induced, autonomous, and organic. Over-induced information is advertised by tourism bodies and institutions through mass media. Covert-induced sources include traditional print media, reports, articles, and promotional activities involving celebrities. Autonomous sources encompass traditional mass media like promotional documentaries, films, news, and destination-specific TV programs. Social media, on the other hand, encompasses various information sources in electronic form, such as videos, pictures, articles, reports, advertisements, and electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM). The organic source of information is word-of-mouth communication, considered the most reliable and trustworthy (Reza Jalilvand et al., 2012).

Numerous studies have examined how different information sources influence travelers' perceived image of a destination. However, assigning specific destination image attributes to each source poses a challenge. Furthermore, the nature of information is closely tied to its source, representing the portrayed reality. Therefore, investigating destination image involves analyzing the frequency and type of information sources individuals are highly exposed to or commonly use.

The primary aim of image research is to capture individuals' perceptions and contribute to understanding their behaviors influenced by their feelings, beliefs, and impressions. The concept of destination image has evolved from a one-dimensional framework to a multi-dimensional structure.

The one-dimensional aspect focuses on tourists' psychological and emotional perception of a destination, known as the overall image. In contrast, the multi-dimensional structure considers various components. These include the affective-cognitive and conative aspects, encompassing travelers' desires, expectations for future travel, or aspirations towards a potential destination (Pike & Ryan, 2004). Moreover, the multi-dimensional structure acknowledges unique aspects of a destination, such as its cultural attributes distinguishing it from others (Qu et al., 2011).

The approach to assess the image of a destination depends on specific research objectives. Many studies emphasize the cognitive-affective dimension to gain a deeper understanding of destination image (Pike & Ryan, 2004). In this study, we adopted the cognitive-affective component to investigate its mediating effect on tourists' behavior intentions. The cognitive component focuses on knowledge and beliefs derived from a destination's tangible attributes (San Martín & Del Bosque, 2008; Tasci et al., 2007). Conversely, the affective component of destination image pertains to the emotions and feelings individuals have towards a destination, based on their acquired knowledge (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007).

#### **2.4 Media experience and destination image and visit intention.**

Travelers are exposed to destination-related content through various media channels, including social media (SM), online travel platforms (TP), traditional print media (TM), personal recommendations from friends and relatives, and travel agents referred to as WOM. The classification of these information sources is challenging due to the abundance of channels through which each type of information can be found. This wide range of information sources and media experiences adds complexity to the formation of a destination's image attributed to each travel information source.

According to Shen et al. (2015), the less knowledge and understanding individuals have about a destination, the more significant its image becomes. Social media, official tourism websites, and tourism brochures have a substantial influence on shaping the destination image (Chu et al., 2022). Additionally, traditional communication channels such as television, movies, magazines, travel guides, newspapers, and brochures still play a role in recommending destinations to visit, although they are less frequently used compared to other communication channels (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). The content represented on many travel platforms referred to as user-generated content (UGC). UGC refers to information sources found online that are generated, initiated, shared, and utilized through texts, photos and videos by consumers with the purpose of educating one another and exchanging information regarding products, brands, services, personalities, and related matters (Alcázar et al., 2014). The impact of user-generated content (UGC) created by visitors to the destination can sometimes outweigh the influence of these formal communication channels (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). UGC is readily available and accessible on social media platforms and the internet in general. What distinguishes this type of information is that it reflects the real experiences of travelers in the destination.

Even if travelers have not yet visited a destination, they can still form an image of it by consulting various sources of information about that particular destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Greaves & Skinner, 2010).

## **2.5 Social media destination image and behavior intentions**

Social media platforms (SM), including social networks such as Facebook and Instagram and online travel platforms (TP) such as TripAdvisor and Wikitravel, provide a convenient and cost-free means for travelers to engage in instant information exchange. Users can post content, seek detailed information, leave comments, and provide feedback and responses, especially within travel communities on social networks consisting of many individuals who have experienced the destination. Studies conducted in this field suggest that social media as an information source is considered more credible and trustworthy compared to the information disseminated through various channels such as destination official websites as online travel-specific platforms by destination management and marketing organizations (DMOs) and local governments.

The positive effect of DMO websites on DI and the intention to visit has even been observed when a website shows cultural values that are inconsistent with the target audience. Researchers have shown the positive effect of DMO websites on DI and intention to visit (Jeong et al., 2012; Tigre Moura et al., 2015). This effect is better when emotional messages are employed on the website and when the tourist does not experience overload (Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2015).

Molinillo et al. (2018) divided destination image into the cognitive image and affective image to examine the moderating effect of different online platforms on destination image and the visit intention, in which the cognitive image and affective image represented as the beliefs and feelings with respect to attractions (Molinillo et al., 2018). In other words, the destination image is not only a consequence of physical and spatial factors but also psychological factors that are subject to the traveler's individual characteristics and cognition toward the stimulus. The platforms used by tourists to collect information about a destination moderate their perceived image of it and, consequently, their intention to visit. The information obtained through social media often has a greater impact on the image than the information obtained from the destination's official website.

Distinguishing between online travel-specific platforms and broad social networks as information sources in the context of destination image and behavior intentions is crucial due to several reasons. Firstly, online travel-specific platforms like TripAdvisor provide travel-related information and are highly relevant for tourists seeking specific destination insights (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In contrast, social networks such as Facebook and Instagram have a wider scope, encompassing various content beyond travel, which may dilute the focus on destination-related information (Litvin et al., 2008).

Secondly, online travel platforms heavily rely on user-generated content, including reviews and recommendations, which are known to significantly impact behavior intentions of tourists (Xiang et al., 2017). Conversely, social networks also contain user-generated content, but the quality and reliability of travel-related information may vary due to the broader range of topics discussed (Pan et al., 2007).

Moreover, the purpose and user intent on these platforms differ. Users visiting online travel platforms have a specific travel-related purpose, actively seeking information to facilitate decision-making (Xiang et al., 2017). In contrast, social network users engage in various activities, and travel-related information might not be their primary focus (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

This distinction between online travel platforms and social networks is essential for understanding the mediating effect of destination image. Research has shown that destination image plays a crucial role in influencing tourists' behavioral intentions (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). By recognizing the specific characteristics and relevance of different information sources, we can gain insights into how they contribute to the formation of destination image and subsequent behavior intentions (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Thus, we hypothesize the influence of social media as a source of information on destination image as follows:

H1: Non-travel specific social media or social networks (SN) influence cognitive image

H2: Non-travel specific social media or social networks (SN) influence affective image

H3: Travel platforms influence (online travel websites) influence cognitive image

H4: Travel platforms influences (online travel websites) influence affective image

## **2.6 Word-of-mouth as a source of information and destination image**

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is a highly influential source of information, encompassing both face-to-face communication and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). The distinction between WOM and e-WOM is not clearly established in related studies. Kotler and Keller (2009) view WOM as a marketing activity that includes oral, written, and electronic communication channels. On the other hand, Jalilvand (2017) sees WOM as a non-promotional communication tool. In our study, we consider WOM as a source of information and communication where travelers directly receive information from personal connections, emphasizing the importance of the close relationship between the source and the receiver.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, a study on the Batam destination showed that WOM, mediated by WOM, significantly influenced visit intentions (Qadri, 2021). It was found that friends and family transmitting information about their travel experiences had a negative impact on destination image aspects like cleanliness, safety, and local friendliness. Accurate and truthful WOM messages are crucial for maintaining a positive destination image. Destination image formation is influenced by mass media, online social media, and WOM from acquaintances (Fodness & Murray, 1997). The perception of high service quality, a component of destination image, leads to repeat visits based on reliable media sources and real experiences (Žabkar et al., 2010). Therefore, we hypothesize that direct WOM, along with other information sources, influences cognitive and affective destination image and travel behavior intentions.

Regarding the impact of traditional media (TM), including newspapers, magazines, television, and brochures, they have been recognized as less used information sources that influence tourists' behavioral intentions, therefore we consider it other information sources of information as WOM. As such, we hypothesized this construct as follows:

H5: Other sources of information (WOM and TM) influences cognitive destination image.

H6: Other sources of information (WOM and TM) influences affective destination image.

H7: Other sources of information (WOM and TM) directly influences travel behavior intentions.

## **2.7 Cognitive image, affective image, and behavioral intentions (visit, revisit and recommend)**

The concept of destination image refers to the relationship between a destination and the available sources of information about that destination. This relationship, if positive, explains the positive association between destination awareness and destination visit behavior (Saeed & Shafique, 2020). Destination image plays a crucial role in understanding tourists' behavioral intentions and decision-making (Karl et al., 2020). Tourism stakeholders need to promote a positive image of a destination as it influences travelers' perceptions and intentions (Avraham, 2015). Destination image is a significant predictor of behavioral intentions, including destination choice and visit intentions (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Leisen, 2001; Pratt & Sparks, 2014). It is considered the most important antecedent of visit intentions (Alcañiz et al., 2005; Bigne et al., 2001). This holds true for both visitors and non-visitors of the destination (Greaves & Skinner, 2010).

Considering the cognitive-affective dimension of destination image, the coexistence of both cognitive and affective dimensions can better explain the influence on travelers' visit intentions (Pike, 2009). Furthermore, the cognitive image, which is based on knowledge about a destination, has been found to contribute to the formation of an affective image, which refers to the emotions and feelings towards a destination based on acquired knowledge (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Sönmez & Sirakaya, 2002; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007).

The relationship between cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image has been extensively studied, with consistent findings of a positive association (Agapito et al., 2013; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Moreover, both cognitive and affective dimensions collectively impact tourists' behavioral intentions. For visitors, their perceptions of both cognitive and affective image dimensions influence their intentions to revisit the destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Similarly, non-visitors' cognitive and affective image perceptions can influence their intentions to visit the destination in the future (Bigne et al., 2001). Therefore, understanding the interplay between cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image is essential in predicting and influencing tourists' behavioral intentions, irrespective of whether they have already visited the destination or not.

In conclusion, the cognitive image of a destination has a significant influence on the affective image, and both cognitive and affective dimensions collectively impact tourists' behavioral intentions. The positive relationship between cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image has been supported by various studies (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Moreover, both visitors and non-visitors are influenced by their cognitive and affective image perceptions in shaping their intentions to revisit or visit the destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Bigne et al., 2001; Kim & Richardson, 2003). Understanding the interplay between these dimensions is crucial for tourism stakeholders to effectively manage and promote destinations to attract and retain visitors. Thus, we propose our hypothesis as follows:

H8: Cognitive image influences affective image.

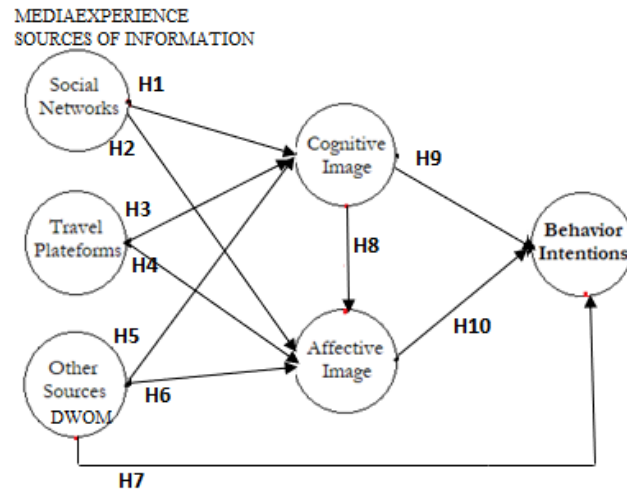
H9: Cognitive image influences behavioral intentions.

H10: Affective image influences behavioral intentions.



Based on the abovementioned hypothesis, our model for both visitors and non-visitors is as such:

**Figure 1.** Research model for both visitors and non-visitors



Source: authors

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Variables, items, and measurement scales

Our study examines the impact of different information sources (media experience) on the behavioral intentions of tourists towards Agadir, with a focus on the mediating role of destination image components (cognitive and affective). The study aims to compare the influence of information sources on behavioral intentions between visitors and non-visitors of the Agadir region while considering the mediating role of destination image components.

The sources of information are initially classified into three categories using mostly used social networks and travel platforms as well as other media types, namely direct word of mouth (travel agents, friends, relatives) and traditional media as other sources of information. The items are shown in Annex 1.

To ensure the reliability and effectiveness of our survey instrument, we followed a systematic approach. We engaged participants in identifying attributes relevant to Agadir's destination potential and tourists' motivation to visit. We used an initial list of 32 attributes proposed by Echtner and Ritchie (2003) and asked participants to highlight those not applicable to Agadir. Feedback on survey questions was obtained, and redundant questions were consolidated to streamline the questionnaire and reduce its length.

In selecting attributes for the study, we considered the variations in destination characteristics and the absence of a standardized scale for destination image attributes. We incorporated suggestions from tourists, experts in tourism promotion, and recommendations by Crompton, Fakeye, and Lue (1992), refining the attribute list to include the most distinctive characteristics relevant to Agadir. The survey assessed cognitive image with 17 items and affective image with 4 items using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly

agree) commonly employed by researchers studying the influence of different information sources (see Annex 2).

Regarding behavior intentions for non-visitors, they were measured using items adapted from Koo et al. (2013), while post-behavior intentions for visitors were measured with items from Torabi et al. (2022). (See Annex 2)

### **3.2 Data collection**

To validate the proposed research model, we conducted a paper-based survey that was randomly distributed to travelers visiting the Agadir region (referred to as visitors) as well as visitors exploring Essaouira and Marrakech, two other popular tourist destinations located 175 kilometers and 258 kilometers away from Agadir, respectively. The participants in the survey included both visitors and non-visitors who were budget-conscious travelers staying in low-ranked accommodations such as hotels, guest houses, riads, and hostels. We specifically targeted this population as budget travelers tend to engage in extensive information search prior to making their travel decisions, including destination and attraction selection. The survey was administered between December and February of 2023. The initial set of questions served as screening questions to ensure that respondents were familiar with Agadir as a destination and had acquired information about it from various sources. A total of 300 surveys were distributed to both visitors and non-visitors. Out of these, 222 visitor responses and 216 non-visitor responses were considered complete and valid for analysis. The participants' responses were recorded using an online survey platform, specifically Google Forms.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Socio-demographics:**

These findings present a breakdown of the respondents' characteristics based on their visitor status to a specific destination.

Regarding gender, the data reveals that among the non-visitors, 91 individuals were identified as female (42.1%), while 125 individuals were male (57.9%). Among the visitors, 117 individuals were female (52.7%), and 105 individuals were male (47.3%). The total sample size for each group was 216 and 222 respectively.

Examining the age variable, most of both non-visitors and visitors fell within the 21-30 age range, accounting for 54.2% and 52.7% respectively. The smallest age group for non-visitors was individuals above 50 years old (6.5%), while for visitors, it was individuals between 41-50 years old (5.9%).

Regarding educational level, the statistics demonstrate that the largest proportion of non-visitors held a university graduate degree (52.8%), whereas among the visitors, the largest group possessed a master's degree (24.8%). The smallest group for both non-visitors and visitors were individuals with a doctorate degree, comprising 2.8% and 3.6%.

In terms of marital status, the findings indicate that the majority of non-visitors were single (59.7%), while among the visitors, the largest group was individuals in a relationship (28.4%). The smallest group for both non-visitors and visitors were widowed individuals, accounting for 0.9% and 3.2% respectively.

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic variables

Variable	Non visitors		Visitors		
	respondents	Percentage	respondents	Percentage	
<b>Gender</b>	Female	91	42,1	117	52,7
	Male	125	57,9	105	47,3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Age</b>	<20	18	8,3	18	8,1
	> 50	14	6,5	7	3,2
	21-30	117	54,2	117	52,7
	31-40	59	27,3	67	30,2
	41-50	8	3,7	13	5,9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Educational level</b>	Doctorate	6	2,8	8	3,6
	Master	49	22,7	55	24,8
	Primary/ Secondary level	47	21,8	52	23,4
	University graduate	114	52,8	107	48,2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Marital status</b>	Divorced	5	2,3	7	3,2
	In a relationship	61	28,2	63	28,4
	Married	19	8,8	31	14,0
	Single	129	59,7	114	51,4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	Government employee	21	9,7	21	9,5
	NGO	1	,5	1	,5
	other	1	,5	4	1,8
	Private company employee	73	33,8	90	40,5
	retired	7	3,2	2	,9
	Self- employed	33	15,3	52	23,4
	Student	66	30,6	47	21,2
	unemployed	14	6,5	5	2,3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Considering the occupation variable, it can be observed that the largest group among non-visitors consisted of students (30.6%), while among visitors, the largest group comprised private company employees (40.5%). The smallest groups for both non-visitors and visitors

were individuals employed in NGOs (Non-governmental organizations), each accounting for 0.5%.

## **4.2 Data analysis**

To examine the factors that have a significant impact on the behavioral intentions of tourists (including potential tourists) in the Agadir region, a comparative study will be undertaken. This study will utilize a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach based on the LISREL (Linear Structural Relationships) framework. This approach is well-suited for our objective of empirically validating our theoretical model, as it necessitates a substantial sample size of 200 or more observations, as noted by Roussel et al. (2002). The analysis will specifically concentrate on examining the influence of information sources, cognitive image, and affective image on tourists' behavioral intentions.

To accomplish this, as an initial step, we will undertake an exploratory factor analysis utilizing the SPSS software to provide a contextual understanding of the factors (latent variables) within our theoretical model. The factorization process will employ the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method, incorporating an orthogonal Varimax rotation. Through this approach, we aim to identify the factors and their constituent items, ultimately constructing a robust measurement model that ensures the utmost reliability for our modelling process.

In the subsequent stage, we will verify the validity of the aforementioned models (Visitors and Non-Visitors) through the utilization of a conventional confirmatory factor analysis approach within the IBM AMOS software. This phase will encompass three crucial criteria concerning validity and reliability: composite reliability (CR) for evaluating the reliability of the composite constructs, average variance extracted (AVE) for ascertaining convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The adequacy of the final model's fit will be evaluated utilizing three fit indices: an absolute fit measure (SRMR or RMSEA) to assess the overall fit, a parsimony fit measure (CMIN/DF) to gauge the model's parsimony, and an incremental fit index (CFI *Comparative fit index*) to compare the fit of the model with other potential models.

Lastly, we will implement the two structural models and compare them using the chi-square test and by examining differences in the structural relationships.

## **4.3 Exploratory factor analysis**

### **4.3.1 Visitors**

The items with inadequate representation (Bad communalities) were eliminated due to their low factor loading (<0.5) or because they exhibited correlations with multiple factor components (Cross-loading). The excluded items consist of: Dest\_IMG\_6, Dest\_IMG\_8, Dest\_IMG\_9, Dest\_IMG\_10, Dest\_IMG\_17, TP\_Lp1t, SI\_DOW, SI\_Blg, and SI\_PRV.

**Table 2.** Summary table of factorization results - visitors

Factor	Item	Load ing	% of var exp	Eigen- value	Cronba ch Alpha
<b>Travel platforms (mean = 4,07)</b>	TP_Pin	,754	13,180	4,349	0,871
	TP_RBnB	,739			
	TP_Bok	,737			
	TP_Wkt	,731			
	TP_TAd	,718			
	TP_Exp	,716			
<b>Destination image 1 (mean = 3,82)</b>	Dest_IMG_16	,757	10,923	3,605	0,839
	Dest_IMG_13	,711			
	Dest_IMG_15	,682			
	Dest_IMG_12	,679			
	Dest_IMG_11	,657			
	Dest_IMG_14	,622			
<b>Destination image 2 (mean = 3,32)</b>	Dest_IMG_5	,679	8,003	2,641	0,725
	Dest_IMG_4	,649			
	Dest_IMG_3	,623			
	Dest_IMG_1	,598			
	Des_IMG_7	,522			
	Dest_IMG_2	,501			
<b>Social networks (mean = 4,39)</b>	SN_Inst	,689	7,234	2,387	0,761
	SN_Twi	,610			
	SN_Lkd	,566			
	SN_Ytb	,564			
	SN_Fb	,526			
<b>Affective image (mean = 4,38)</b>	Aff_IMG_1	,703	6,699	2,211	0,58
	Aff_IMG_3	,692			
	Aff_IMG_2	,593			
	Aff_IMG_4	,467			
<b>Other sources of information (mean = 4,69)</b>	SI_Friends	,812	6,417	2,117	0,658
	SI_TrAg	,716			
	SI_TRM	,643			
<b>Behavior Intentions (mean = 3,66)</b>	Beh_INT_1	,681	5,126	1,692	0,51
	Beh_INT_2	,626			
	Beh_INT_3	,452			

**Table 3.** KMO index and Bartlett's

<b>KMO index and Bartlett's test</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy measure.		<b>,819</b>
	Approximated chi-square.	2902,988
Bartlett's test of sphericity.	ddl	528
	Significance of Bartlett	<b>,000</b>

We observe that from the visitors' perspective, the variable "Destination Image" is divided into two main categories (mention the two existing categories here), indicating that this factor will be represented as two different latent variables in the respective measurement model.

Regarding the loadings, it is evident that the majority have satisfactory values, typically starting from a value of 0.452 for the lowest value, "Beh\_INT\_3," and reaching approximately 0.812 for the item "SI\_Friends."

In terms of the percentage of explained variance, the factor "Travel platforms" explains the highest amount of variance, accounting for nearly 13%. This is followed by the factor "Destination Image 1" with approximately 11%, and the factor with the fewest items, "Behavior intentions," accounts for 5.17% of the variance. These seven factors together account for a total of 57.7%, representing a significant portion of the variance.

Regarding the reliability of these latent variables, Cronbach's alpha shows acceptable values for the majority of them (>0.7), except for the factors "Affective image" with only 0.58 and "Behavior intentions" with 0.51. Since alpha does not account for measurement errors, we will not be too strict because we will rely on the composite reliability index "Composite reliability CR," which will be more appropriate, in the subsequent analysis.

#### **4.3.2. non-visitors**

Items that exhibited inadequate representation (low communalities) were eliminated from the analysis due to their low factor weight (<0.5) or their correlation with multiple factors (cross-loading). The excluded items consist of SN\_Fcb, SI\_DOW, SI\_TRM, SI\_TrAg, Dest\_IMG\_2, Dest\_IMG\_6, Dest\_IMG\_8, and Beh\_INT\_1.

**Table 4.** KMO index and Bartlett's

<b>KMO index and Bartlett's test</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy measure.		,825
	Approximated chi-square.	3098,153
Bartlett's test of sphericity.	ddl	528
	Significance of Bartlett	<b>,000</b>

**Table 5.** Summary table of factorization results : non-visitors

Factor	Item	Loading	% of variance explained	Eigenv alue	Cronbach Alpha
<b>Destinati on image (mean = 3,55)</b>	Dest_IMG_15	0,769	19,767	6,523	0,908
	Dest_IMG_10	0,740			
	Dest_IMG_14	0,715			
	Dest_IMG_9	0,715			
	Dest_IMG_13	0,713			
	Dest_IMG_11	0,702			
	Dest_IMG_16	0,690			
	Dest_IMG_7	0,674			
	Dest_IMG_17	0,648			
	Dest_IMG_5	0,598			
	Dest_IMG_12	0,590			
	Dest_IMG_3	0,569			
	Dest_IMG_4	0,559			
	Dest_IMG_1	0,533			
<b>Affective image (mean = 3,53)</b>	Aff_IMG_3	0,817	8,891	2,934	0,800
	Aff_IMG_2	0,798			
	Aff_IMG_4	0,666			
	Aff_IMG_1	0,594			
<b>Travel platforms (mean = 1,926)</b>	TP_Rbnb	0,707	8,565	2,826	0,765
	TP_Bok	0,677			
	TP_Wkt	0,655			
	TP_Pin	0,617			
<b>Social networks (mean = 1,22)</b>	TP_TADV	0,546	8,061	2,660	0,820
	SN_Twit	0,778			
	SN_Lkd	0,764			
	SN_Ytb	0,625			
<b>Other sources (mean = 1,56)</b>	SN_Inst	0,530	7,327	2,418	0,785
	SI_Blg	0,766			
	SI_DOW	0,745			
	SI_Friends	0,628			
<b>Behavior intentions (mean = 2,6)</b>	SI_TrAg	0,562	4,801	1,584	0,51
	Beh_INT2	0,707			
	Beh_INT3	0,675			

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure yielded a value of 0.825, indicating that the items share variance with their respective factors. Additionally, the Bartlett's test is statistically significant ( $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ), implying that the correlation matrix significantly deviates from the identity matrix.

### Summary of Factorization Results - Visitors:

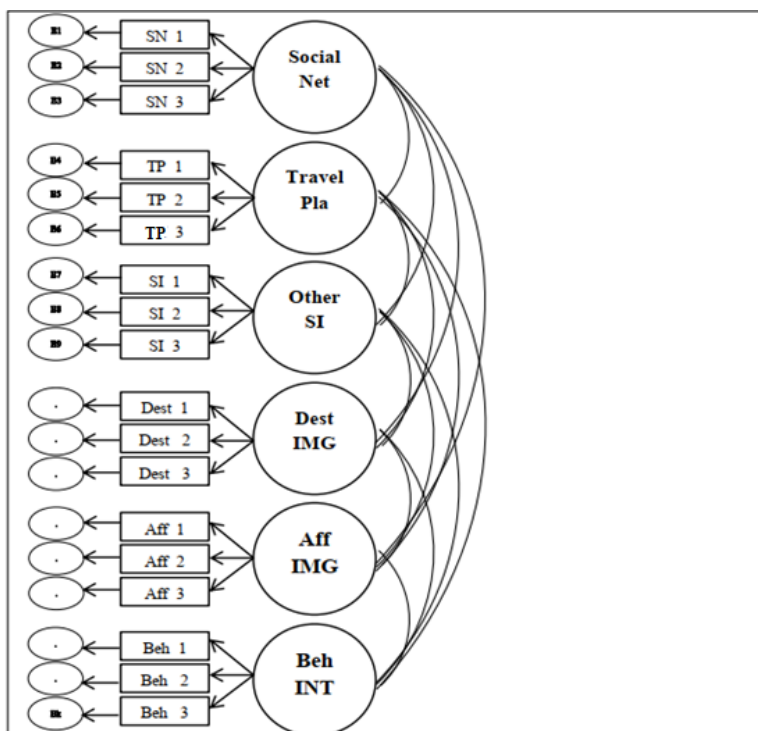
Regarding the perspective of non-visitors, based on the factorization results, the variable "Destination image" will be represented as a single latent variable. This could be attributed to the fact that these tourists may not yet have the ability to differentiate between various destination images, a distinction they might make during their visit, as indicated by the earlier findings.

In terms of factor loadings, an improvement is observed, and all loadings are deemed acceptable ( $>0.5$ ). The "Destination image" factor accounts for approximately 20% of the variance among the 33 selected items, and it is considered the most reliable, exhibiting a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.908. Conversely, the "Behavior intentions" factor explains 4.8% of the variance and displays the lowest Cronbach's alpha value (0.51). Ultimately, these seven factors collectively explain approximately 57.4% of the variance, a proportion that closely aligns with the findings of the visitor model.

## 4.4 Confirmatory factor analysis

At this stage of analysis, we aim to evaluate the reliability and validity of the two measurement models (for the two categories of tourists) to construct a structural model with these latent variables and compare them. We will first assess the model fit quality and then examine the causal relationships.

**Figure 2.** Measurement model diagram in the confirmatory factor analysis.





Reliability (and validity) will be assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (1971) after implementing the two measurement models in IBM AMOS (version 23).

To achieve this, each latent variable will be linked to its underlying reflective items, with each item being associated with its respective error term. Subsequently, the latent variables will be correlated pairwise, as illustrated in the figure 2.

#### 4.4.1 Assessing measurement model.

##### Visitors

**Table 6.** The Fornel Larker Criteria for reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the measurement model of visitors

Factor	CR	AVE	Dest_I MG_A	Dest_I MG_B	TP	SN	Aff_I MG	SI	Beh_I NT
Dest_IMG_A	0,831	0,556	<b>0,746</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dest_IMG_B	0,713	0,684	0,602	<b>0,827</b>	-	-	-	-	-
TP	0,866	0,521	0,551	0,635	<b>0,722</b>	-	-	-	-
SN	0,753	0,539	0,732	0,589	0,720	<b>0,734</b>	-	-	-
Aff_IMG	0,606	0,643	0,108	0,248	0,371	0,243	<b>0,802</b>	-	-
SI	0,738	0,586	0,099	0,186	0,193	0,188	0,441	0,766	-
Beh_INT	0,581	0,555	0,074	0,027	0,149	0,125	0,025	0,148	<b>0,745</b>

Fit indexes : CMIN/DF = 2,056, CFI = 0,91, SRMR = 0,071, RMSEA = 0,069 (Hu and Bentler (1999, "Cutoff Criteria for Fit Indexes in Covariance Structure Analysis: Conventional Criteria Versus New Alternatives") recommend combinations of measures)

##### Non visitors

**Table 7.** The Fornel Larker Criteria for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement model of non-visitors

Factor	CR	AVE	Dest_I MG	SN	TP	AFF_I MG	SI	Beh_I NT
Dest_IMG	0,919	0,555	<b>0,674</b>	-	-	-	-	-
SN	0,840	0,574	0,058	<b>0,674</b>	-	-	-	-
TP	0,770	0,503	0,283	0,627	<b>0,758</b>	-	-	-
Aff_IMG	0,820	0,545	0,509	0,118	0,382	<b>0,635</b>	-	-
SI	0,798	0,499	0,278	0,646	0,629	0,298	<b>0,738</b>	-
Beh_INT	0,561	0,511	0,057	0,234	0,400	0,368	0,106	<b>0,706</b>

Fit indexes : CMIN/DF = 1,786, CFI = 0,905, SRMR = 0,067, RMSEA = 0,060 (Hu and Bentler (1999, "Cutoff Criteria for Fit Indexes in Covariance Structure Analysis: Conventional Criteria Versus New Alternatives") recommend combinations of measures)

It is worth noting that the Composite Reliability (CR) index is more appropriate for assessing the reliability of a factor as it accounts for measurement error, unlike Cronbach's Alpha. The CR value should be above 0.7 (or at least > 0.5 as a minimum threshold of acceptability), which is the case for all six factors in our study.

Moreover, an instrument of measurement is considered valid if it measures what it was intended to measure (Nunnally & Johnson, 1978). Two validity criteria are relevant in this

context: convergent validity and discriminant validity. For convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values should exceed 0.5, indicating that the factor shares more than 50% of its variance with its items. This criterion is also satisfied by the factors in both models. As for discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion states that the square roots of the AVE values (on the diagonal of the table) should be greater than the correlations of that factor with the other factors. This implies that the factor shares more variance with its own items than with the items from other factors, which can be easily observed from the two tables.

The model fit of both models is acceptable. The parsimony index of chi-square CMIN/DF (between 1 and 3) is 2.056 for visitors and 1.786 for non-visitors. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) exceeds 0.9, with values of 0.91 for visitors and 0.905 for non-visitors. Additionally, the two absolute fit indices (SRMR and RMSEA) are either acceptable or excellent for both models. (Refer to Hu and Bentler, 1999, "Cutoff Criteria for Fit Indexes in Covariance Structure Analysis: Conventional Criteria Versus New Alternatives" for recommended combinations of measures.)

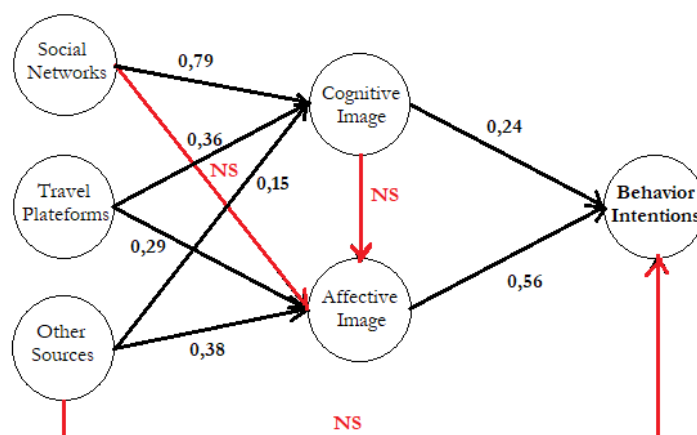
In conclusion, based on the various obtained results, we can conclude that both models are reliable, convergent, and discriminant. Therefore, they can be used as the basis for structural models, which we will evaluate in the following section.

#### **4.5 Comparison of the two structural models**

In the preceding discussion, we evaluated the measurement model (at the level of the two categories of tourists) by establishing various reliability and validity criteria for the six factors. This allowed us to rely on the measurement model to test the hypotheses of the structural model initially and subsequently attempt to draw differences in the behavior of these two categories through a comparison of the significance of these relationships.

After implementing the two models in AMOS23, we began by testing the assumption of data normality, which is a necessary condition for using the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation method. This was done through the examination of the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of each item, which were found to be within acceptable ranges, with values ranging from -2 to 2 for the first coefficient and from -7 to 7 for the second coefficient (see Hair et al., 2010, and Bryne, 2010).

**Figure 3.** Graph of Structural model– visitors



CMIN/DF = 2,021, CFI = 0,955, SRMR = 0,071 et RMSEA = 0,068 (NS: Non-significant).

The three types of information sources have a significant positive effect on the variable "Cognitive image," with respective standardized coefficients of 0.79 for "social networks," 0.36 for "travel platforms," and 0.15 for "other sources." This indicates that social networks have a greater impact on the cognitive image of visitor tourists compared to the other sources.

**Table 8.** Detailed results of significant relationships: visitors

	Relation		E estimate	St estimate	S.E.	t statistic	P
<b>Aff_IMG</b>	<--	TP	0,209	0,292	0,07	3,012	0,003
<b>Aff_IMG</b>	<--	SI	0,377	0,383	0,112	3,367	***
<b>Cog_IMG</b>	<--	TP	0,272	0,358	0,099	2,741	0,006
<b>Beh_INT</b>	<--	Aff_IMG	0,32	0,564	0,203	1,575	0,015
<b>Cog_IMG</b>	<--	SN	0,784	0,788	0,094	8,361	***
<b>Cog_IMG</b>	<--	SI	0,161	0,149	0,079	2,046	0,041
<b>Beh_INT</b>	<--	Dest_IMG_B	0,126	0,235	0,102	1,233	0,017

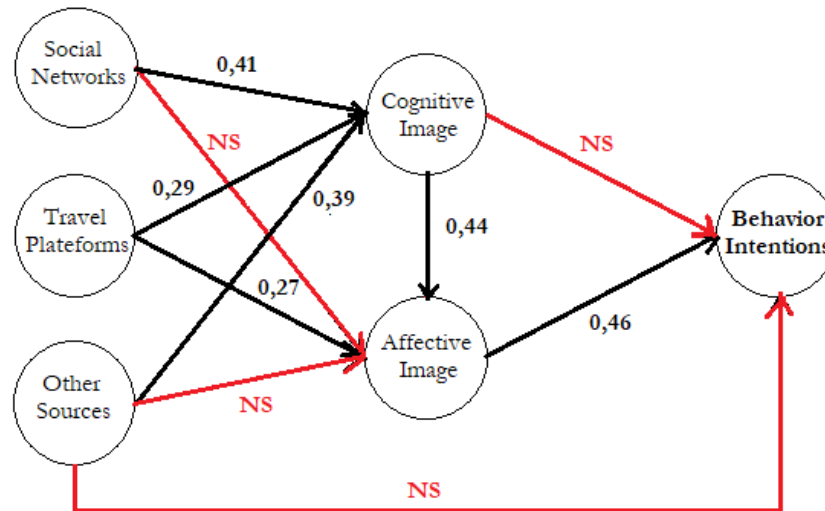
(\*\*\* : p-value is less than 0,001)

On the other hand, the affective image of visitors is positively influenced only by "travel platforms" with a coefficient of 0.29 and by "other sources" with a coefficient of 0.38.

The affective image has a significant effect on the dependent variable "Behavior intention" with a coefficient of 0.56, which is larger than the coefficient for cognitive image (0.24).

Table 8 shows detailed results of the significant relationships.

**Figure 4.** Graph of the structural model - non-visitors



CMIN/DF = 1,813, CFI = 0,91, SRMR = 0,067 et RMSEA = 0,061 (NS: Non significant).

The following are the detailed results of the significant relationships:

**Table 9.** Detailed results of significant relationships: non-visitors

	Relation	E estimate	St estimate	S.E.	t statistique	P
Cog_IMG	<-- SN	0,445	0,413	0,155	2,869	0,004
Cog_IMG	<-- TP	0,156	0,285	0,065	2,419	0,016
Cog_IMG	<-- SI	0,329	0,389	0,114	2,876	0,004
AFF_IMG	<-- TP	0,183	0,266	0,054	3,41	***
AFF_IMG	<-- Dest_IMG	0,558	0,444	0,104	5,346	***
Beh_INT	<-- AFF_IMG	0,514	0,46	0,142	3,629	***

Cognitive image" among non-visitors, with respective standardized coefficients of 0.41 for "social networks," 0.29 for "travel platforms," and 0.39 for "other sources." This indicates that, for non-visitors, the information sources have similar magnitudes of influence on cognitive image, as evidenced by the close values of these coefficients. Regarding the affective image of non-visitors, it is only affected by "travel platforms," yielding a coefficient of 0.27. The variable "affective image" acts as a mediator in the model for non-visitors, as the direct effect of "cognitive image" is not significant. Instead, its effect is indirectly.

**Table 10.** Summary table of comparison results.

Hypothesis	Visitors		Non visitors	
	Effect (t-statistic)	Decision	Effect (t-statistic)	Decision
H1 : Social networks affects cognitive image	<b>0,79</b> (8,361)	Validated	<b>0,41</b> (2,869)	Validated
H2 : social networks affects affective image	-	Rejected	-	Rejected
H3 : Travel platfoms affects cognitive image	<b>0,36</b> (2,741)	Validated	<b>0,29</b> (2,419)	Validated
H4 : Travel platforms affects affective image	<b>0,29</b> (3,012)	Validated	<b>0,27</b> (3,41)	Validated
H5 : Other sources(WOM) affects cognitive image	<b>0,15</b> (2,046)	Validated	<b>0,39</b> (2,876)	Validated
H6 : Other sources (WOM) affects affective image	<b>0,38</b> (3,367)	Validated	-	Rejected
H7 : Other sources (WOM) affects behavior intentions	-	Rejected	-	Rejected
H8 : Cognitive image affects affective image	-	Rejected	<b>0,44</b> (5,346)	Validated
H9 : Cognitive image affects behavior	<b>0,24</b> (1,233)	Validated	NS	Rejected
H10 : Affective image affects behavior intentions	<b>0,56</b> (1,575)	Validated	<b>0,46</b> (3,629)	Validated

transmitted through "affective image." In this case, the indirect effect is equal to  $0.44 \times 0.46 = 0.2$ , with 0.44 representing the effect on "affective image" and 0.46 representing the effect of "affective image" on "behavior intentions."

## 5. CONCLUSION

In summary, the structural models exhibit similarities in terms of the chi-square distance, number of relationships, and goodness of fit. However, notable differences emerge in the causal (structural) relationships, as evidenced by the analysis of significant effects and standardized coefficients in the respective directed graphs.

Specifically, the findings indicate that visitors rely on all three types of information sources to inform their decision-making processes regarding destination choice. This influence extends to both cognitive and affective image constructs. Conversely, non-visitors primarily rely on "travel platforms" to shape their affective image, which assumes a pivotal role as the principal mediating variable within the model.

These results highlight the nuanced distinctions between the two groups and underscore the importance of understanding the differential effects of information sources on cognitive and affective image formation. Such insights can enhance our comprehension of tourist

behaviour and facilitate the development of targeted marketing strategies tailored to each segment.

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Annex 2: items and abbreviations

<i>Sources of information</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
<b><i>Social networks (SNs)</i></b>	
<i>YouTube</i>	<i>SN-Ytb</i>
<i>Facebook</i>	<i>SN--Fb</i>
<i>Instagram</i>	<i>SN--Inst</i>
<i>LinkedIn</i>	<i>SN--Lkd</i>
<i>Twitter</i>	<i>SN--Twi</i>
<i>Blogs</i>	<i>SIF-Blg</i>
<b><i>Travel platform (TP)</i></b>	
<i>Pinterest</i>	<i>TP--Pin</i>
<i>Booking</i>	<i>TP--Bok</i>
<i>Wikitravel</i>	<i>TP--Wkt</i>
<i>Expedia</i>	<i>TP--Expd</i>
<i>Airbnb</i>	<i>TP--Rbnb</i>
<i>TripAdvisor</i>	<i>TP--TAd</i>
<i>Lonely planet</i>	<i>TP--Lplt</i>
<i>Destination Official websites</i>	<i>TP-DOW</i>
<b><i>Other sources</i></b>	
<i>Friends and relatives Direct WOM</i>	<i>SI-Friends</i>
<i>Travel agents Direct WOM</i>	<i>SI-TrAg</i>
<i>Previous visits</i>	<i>SI-PRV</i>
<i>Blogs</i>	<i>SIF-Blg</i>
<i>Traditional Media (TV, Newspaper, ...)</i>	<i>SIF-TRM</i>

Annex 2 : Items and abbreviations

Destination image items	Abbreviation
Various leisure and recreation activities	DEST_IMG_1
great nightlife and entertainment	DEST_IMG_2
various tour activities	DEST_IMG_3
unique historic and cultural attractions	DEST_IMG_4
Great shopping opportunities	DEST_IMG_5
major sport facilities	DEST_IMG_6
beautiful scenery and various natural attractions of countryside	DEST_IMG_7
clean environment	DEST_IMG_8
pleasant weather	DEST_IMG_9
various local food and beverage	DEST_IMG_10
suitable accommodation	DEST_IMG_11
good transportation facility	DEST_IMG_12
optimal quality of travel service.	DEST_IMG_13
good value for money	DEST_IMG_14
friendly local people	DEST_IMG_15
safe and secure place to travel	DEST_IMG_16
good reputation	DEST_IMG_17
Sleepy                      Arousing	Aff_IMG_1
Gloomy                      exciting	Aff_IMG_2
Unpleasant                  Pleasant	Aff_IMG_3
Distressing                  relaxing	Aff_IMG_4
During and Post visit intentions (visitors)	
I would recommend visiting Agadir region.	Beh_INT1
I would probably revisit Agadir region in the future.	Beh_INT2
I would share my experience in Agadir with other people.	Beh_INT3