

A Behavioural Economics Perspective on the Influence of Country Image on Tourist Decision-Making

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Abstract *Behavioural economics is an emerging phenomenon within the tourism discourse, more-so within the African tourism context. The present paper hypothesises the influence of country image on the subjective contextualisation of tourism destination brand evaluations by tourists from a behavioural economics perspective. A quantitative-deductive exploratory study was conducted with a valid sample of n=233 inbound tourists to South Africa. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Multiple Regression Analysis were employed to analyse the data. The results were intriguing, providing important insights on tourist behaviour within an African context, with the empirical evidence suggesting that South Africa's perceived image as a country is based on both stereotypical and reverse Country-of-Origin effects. More significantly, the results indicate an intrinsic link between South Africa's image as a country and the consideration of South Africa's socio-cultural, competitive advantages, governance, tourism and marketing place brand dimensions. The findings of this study are novel and support the notion of the country image being a significant heuristic cue that influences the decision-making process of tourists. These findings are thus, of importance to both tourism practitioners and development economists in terms of modelling tourist behaviour in the consumption of African tourism 'exports'.*

Keywords: *Behavioural Economics in Tourism, Country Image, Place Branding, Tourist Behaviour, South Africa*

INTRODUCTION

Conventionally, tourists must circumscribe vast amounts of information about tourism destinations in their respective decision-making processes. However, as competitive supply-side forces increase and tourists become more circumspect in their consumptive decisions, places as brands are becoming decidedly more significant in tourism product consumption decision-making (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021). What is unique about the African tourism situation is the distinct information asymmetry associated with the continent (Signé, 2018). In the absence of adequate information about African countries, the present paper argues that from a behavioural economics (BE) perspective, tourists may utilise country image (CI) as a heuristic cue to

inform their evaluation of a tourism destination (Chaulagain, Jahromi & Fu, 2021; Di Clemente & Hantula, 2003; Kladou, Rigopoulou, Kavaratzis & Salonika, 2022; Wang, 2021). The tourism discourse has generally neglected academic inquiry into the (in)direct effect of CIs on tourist evaluations of countries as tourism destinations (Marinao-Artigas & Barajas-Portas, 2021; Rojas-Méndez & Davies, 2023; Zhang, Wu, Morrison, Tseng & Chen, 2018). Epistemologically, Cohen, Prayag and Moital (2014); McCabe, Li and Chen (2016) critique some of the contemporary tourism literature for being 'isolationist'. The authors indicate that tourism research predominantly assumes that the tourism decision-making process of tourists occurs in a vacuum - independent of other social and consumption decision factors.

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Additionally, notwithstanding the complexity of consumer behaviour, the conventional wisdom within the tourism discourse seems to assume the rationality of tourists in their decision-making processes, proposing that tourist behaviour may be explained by distinct explanatory variables (Cohen et al., 2014). Contrary to this notion, there is an emerging body of knowledge (Lee & Lockshin, 2012; Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly & Luk, 2008; Park & Nicolau, 2018; Ryu, Decosta & Andehn, 2016) relating to the increasingly important role of tourist behaviour outside the realm of the rationality postulated by conventional consumer behavioural modelling. Thus, the subjective nature of tourist behaviour compounded by the idiosyncratic process of perception formation may support the notion that tourists may inherently deviate from the traditional axioms and assumptions of conventional economic theory in their decision-making (Oliver, 2015).

Within the African context, the CI may be hypothesised as a stimulant of tourist biases associated with, and towards a tourism destination (Avraham, 2018; Bose, Pradhan, Bashir & Roy, 2021; Park & Nicolau, 2018; Ryu et al., 2016). Despite earlier attempts at modelling the effect of the CI on tourist behaviour (Chaulagain et al., 2021; Palau-Saumell, 2016; Zhang, Xu, Leung & Cai, 2016; Zhang et al., 2018), to the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has thus far attempted to model the potential influence of the CI on the evaluation of an African tourism destination's place brand factors, more-so from a BE perspective. Therefore, the present paper aims to address the apparent deficiency in academic inquiry by exploring the nexus between South Africa's CI and the place brand (macro supply-side) factors influencing tourist decision-making. By doing so, the present paper highlights and presents empirical evidence of the increasingly significant role of contemporary BE in the proficiency of tourism as an economic development catalyst within the African context. The value of this paper is in its relativistic nature, as it makes a significant contribution to the economics and tourism discourses, respectively. The paper confirms the reasonability of the notion that the CI may influence how tourists contextualise the information, more pertinently, how they frame their decision-making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Behavioural economics (BE) is a consequence of the assimilation of both psychology and economic theory to model human behaviour in decision-making (Braesemann, 2019; Truc, 2018). Fundamentally, BE ascribes to the notion that human limitations and complications influence and impact markets, thus challenging traditional economic theory which assumes the rationality of decision-makers in terms of consistent and coherent preferences, reasoning, as well as adequate comprehension and computation of alternatives (Oliver, 2015; Rabin, 1998). These limitations

and complications include but are not limited to the effects of heuristics and bias on consumer decision-making (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973).

The country image (CI) may be succinctly described as the generic summation of a plethora of country-specific aspects (governance, socio-economic, history, technology) into an informational point of reference for external stakeholders (De Nisco, Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2016; Ryu et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2018). Furthermore, the literature (Albu, 2013; Nadeau et al., 2008; Rojas-Méndez & Davies, 2023; Sun, Paswan & Tieslau, 2016; Wu, Ju & Dodoo, 2016) articulates, that the CI is the result of prevalent and communally-shared generalised beliefs about specific characteristics of a country or the evaluation of the products originating from the particular country. Consequently, of particular interest within the contemporary tourism discourse is the role of CIs as heuristic cues in coherently organising and interpreting stimuli to extract meaning within the tourist's decision-making process (Chaulagain et al., 2021; Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2016; Rojas-Méndez & Davies, 2023).

Adapting BE in the tourism context suggests that tourists may be susceptible to both intrinsic and extrinsic subjective influences and may consequently be biased in their behaviour towards a tourism destination. This notion is supported by the halo effect (Han, 1989; Lindblom, Lindblom, Lehtonen & Wechtler, 2018) which associates the perceived image of a country, with how tourists frame the context within which subsequent destination place brand dimensions are evaluated as part of tourist's decision-making process (Echeverri, Horst, Molina & Mohamad, 2019; Lee & Lockshin, 2012). Therefore, tourists may utilise the CI as a heuristic cue or as a schema, to infer meaning, contextualise, evaluate and process information related to a country as part of their decisions to visit a particular country (De Nisco et al., 2016; Lu, Heslop & Thomas, 2008; McCabe et al., 2016; Kemp, Childers & Williams, 2012; Lindblom et al., 2018). The nexus between the CI and tourist decision-making has to some extent been established in the cases of Finland, Sweden, and Denmark (Lindblom et al., 2018), Spain and Mexico (Palau-Saumell, 2016), as well as China (Zhang et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2018).

Place Brand Dimensions Influencing Tourism to South Africa

The significance of images as intangible cues is widely acknowledged within marketing practice. To this end, the literature (Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2016; Mariutti & Giraldi, 2020; Matiza & Slabbert, 2020; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017, 2021) views place brands as critical antecedent factors of consumer behaviour in various contexts, including tourism. A PB may be characterised as:

“[...] a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place and its’ stakeholders. These associations differ in their influence within the network and importance for the place consumers’ attitude and behaviour” (Zenker & Braun, 2017: 275).

It is the multi-dimensionality of PBs that results in their complex cognitive and affective effects on consumers in their evaluation of products including tourism destinations (Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2016; Scarborough & Crabbe, 2021; Zenker & Braun, 2017). Within the context of the present study, the place brand dimensions are primarily drawn from nation branding. Nation branding theory posits that external stakeholders to a country such as tourists are influenced by one or a combination of six distinct factors: governance, tourism, people, culture and heritage, investment and immigration, and exports (Dinnie, 2008; Matiza & Slabbert, 2020).

Exports were, however, excluded, and two novel factors were then also considered - Marketing and Negative Events, respectively. Each place brand dimension is operationalised as follows:

Culture and Heritage Dimension

Beyond the commercialisation of tourism activities, destination marketers are cognisant of the importance of both the traditional and historical connotations associated with their countries as tourism destinations (Moufakkir, 2014). The culture and heritage dimension of tourism is concerned with the sociological aspect of consumer behaviour - related to the influence of a country’s arts, traditions, history/heritage, landscape, as well as the way or quality of life on tourists (Cheer & Reeves, 2015; Scarborough & Crabbe, 2021; Smith, 2015). Within the South African context, the cultural and heritage factors considered by tourists may include the commonality of cultural values (Smith, 2015); colonial heritage (Cheer & Reeves, 2015); the nature and innovativeness of the populace (Omerzel, 2015) and; the friendliness/helpfulness of citizens (Moufakkir, 2014). Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₁: There is a relationship between South Africa’s country image and the evaluation of the Culture and Heritage dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

Governance Dimension

Governance refers to the efficient, effective accountable, inclusive and open management of a country through various government and quasi-government institutions (Bramwell, 2011; Moscardo, 2011; World Bank, 2016). To this end, Steyn and van Vuuren (2016) suggest that despite the marketing efforts of destination management organisations, the good governance of a country includes the management

of critical tourism-oriented aspects and is a crucial factor in the attraction of tourists to a destination. Within the South African context, the governance factors considered by tourists may include political instability (Steyn & van Vuuren, 2016); safety from crime (Biagi & Detotto, 2014); risk of terrorist attacks (Poprawe, 2015); the prevalence of corruption (Lv & Xu, 2017) and; the absence of visible policing (Moyo & Zirambi, 2013). Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₂: There is a relationship between South Africa’s country image and the evaluation of the Governance dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

Tourism Dimension

The tourism dimension refers to the generic tourism destination image and resources associated with the place by tourists (Scarborough & Crabbe, 2021). From an information economics perspective, the pre-emptive perceptions of tourists and their resultant affective and conative behaviour concerning the destination are grounded in the tourism destination image of the place (Baalbaki, 2012; Cardoso, Dias, de Araujo & Marques, 2019). It is the generic tourism image that is associated with a tourism destination that presents a pull factor in the decision-making process of tourists (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Within the South African context the tourism factors considered by tourists may include: the proximity of the tourism destination to the tourist’s home country (Jeuring & Haartsen, 2017); sports attractions and entertainment attractions (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017); the proximity of the tourism destination to other African tourism destination countries (Yang, Fik & Zhang, 2013) and; the relations between the tourism destination and the tourist’s home country (Stepchenkova, Schichkova, Kim & Rykhtik, 2018). Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₃: There is a relationship between South Africa’s country image and the evaluation of the Tourism dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

Immigration Dimension

The immigration dimension refers to the perceptions of a nation as a place to live, visit, work or study. Apart from the willingness to stay or visit a country, the ease of access to the country plays a significant role in the decision-making process of tourists, particularly the immigration regime associated with visa processes and requirements (United Nations World Tourism Organisation - UNWTO, 2014). Aspects such as the quality of life/wellbeing and the availability and efficiency of public resources and essential utilities (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017), ease of immigration visa procedures when travelling to the tourism destination (Moufakkir, 2014) and, visa policy of the tourism destination towards the tourist’s home country

(Stepchenkova et al., 2018) are influential to tourist decision-making. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₄: There is a relationship between South Africa's country image and the evaluation of the Immigration dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

People Dimension

People are a critical component of tourism, and the inherent perceptions held of the citizens of a particular nation are significant antecedents for tourism (Vengesayi, Mavondo & Reisinger, 2009). The extent of the tourism literature supports people as an aspect of nation branding - suggesting that critical human-related elements such as the friendliness and helpfulness of locals (Das & Mukherjee, 2016; Wang, 2021), commonalities in language with the host tourism destination (De Carlos, Alén, Pérez-González & Figueroa, 2019), acceptance of foreigners by locals (Kocka, Josiassena & Assaf, 2019); the reputation of famous/infamous citizens associated with the nation (Wang, Kim & Agrusa, 2018), as well as the prevalence of endemic health conditions within the population such as HIV/AIDS (Shaw, Saayman & Saayman, 2012) - are influential to the attraction of inbound tourists.

H₅: There is a relationship between South Africa's country image and the evaluation of the People dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

Negative Events Dimension

The negative events that occur or are associated with a particular place are inextricably linked to the formation of negative perceptions (Avraham, 2018). Within the tourism context, crises or negative events adversely influence the perceptions of tourists, thus impinging on the 'visibility, marketability, perceptions, and viability' of the tourism destination (Dinnie, 2011). Within the South African context, the factors of the negative event considered by tourists may include the susceptibility of the tourism destination to drought (Park & Reisinger, 2010); food safety (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006); the prevalence of illegal poaching of wildlife (Muboko, Gandwi, Muposhi & Tarakani, 2016); the association of the tourism destination with the illicit trade in animal parts (Buckley & Mossaz, 2015) and; the prevalence of social unrest (Ferreira & Perks, 2016). Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₆: There is a relationship between South Africa's country image and the evaluation of the Negative events dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

Marketing Dimension

The marketing dimension is concerned with the "...the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that

have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large" (Font & McCabe, 2017:870). Marketing within the tourism context involves value creation, consumer purchase motivation and need satisfaction, and is principally responsible for the quantity (tourist numbers), quality (the type of tourist) and origin (COO) of tourists (Edgell, Ruf & Agarwal, 2000; Font & McCabe, 2017). With this in mind, the marketing factors considered by tourists within the South African context may include acceptance of tourists by locals (Huong & Lee, 2017); the value for money received from tourism products (Saayman, Krugell & Saayman, 2016); the attractive uniqueness of the location compared to other destinations (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017); positive marketing advertisements/promotions related to the destination (McCabe, 2014) and; perception held of the country as a tourism destination of choice (Albu, 2013; Palau-Saumell, 2016). Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₇: There is a relationship between South Africa's country image and the evaluation of the Marketing dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

Fig. 1 illustrates the hypothesised model.

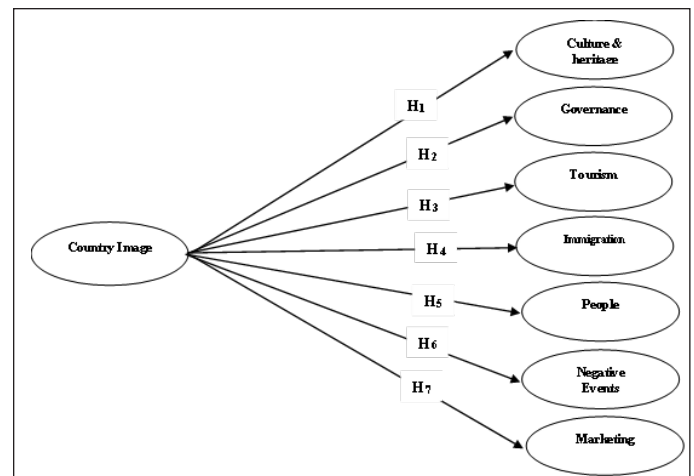


Fig. 1: Hypothesised Model

The following section outlines the methodology applied in the generation and analysis of the data.

METHODOLOGY

Research Instrument

The quantitative survey instrument utilised in this study was developed from the literature. Seven of the nine CI items representing the independent variable(s) were adapted from scales that were operationalised and validated by Lala, Allred and Chakraborty (2008); Mugo and Mwencha (2017);

Nadeau et al. (2008) and; Zhang et al. (2018). Two unique items were added to the scale for the present study:

- *Physical Amenities* - Perceptions of the country based on its accessibility and available infrastructure such as accommodation, restaurants and transport systems (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017) and;
- *Natural Resources* - Perceptions of the country based on its key agricultural products/outputs, climate, and naturally occurring factor endowments such as minerals, water, flora/fauna or wildlife (Huong & Lee, 2017; Sun et al., 2016).

The CI of South Africa was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Very negative influence to (5) Very positive influence. The place brand factors were extracted from a 44-item scale (extrapolated from the empirical literature), also measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Not at all influential to (5) Extremely influential. The results of the place brand factors representing the dependent variable(s) are the subject of related study, which is beyond the scope of the present paper. However, a summary of the results is presented in Table 2.

Data Collection

Data was generated from a self-administered quantitative survey distributed to a convenient sample of 400 international tourists visiting the world-renowned Table Mountain Aerial Cableway in Cape Town South Africa between the 6th and 9th of November 2018. Tourists were approached by fieldworkers to participate in the survey while in line waiting to access the cable car to ascend to the top of Table Mountain (ground station) or descent from the mountain (top station). However, from the sample as mentioned earlier, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25.0) utilised the data from a valid sample of $n=233$ which was deemed suitable for analysis within the scope of this exploratory study.

Data Analysis

Data generated during the survey was collated onto a Microsoft Excel Sheet. The data was then exported to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25.0) software for analysis. To determine the factorability of the data, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (at ≥ 0.50) and Bartlett's test of sphericity with a null significance value were conducted (Pallant, 2016). An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was then performed (Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation) to identify the CI factors associated with South Africa. Factors with an Eigenvalue

of >1 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006), and is constituted of at least three items (Costello & Osborne, 2005) with a factor loading coefficient of ≥ 0.40 (Hair et al., 2006) were deemed valid. Subsequently, the reliability of the identified scales was determined by a Cronbach's alpha test with a lower limit of ≥ 0.65 which is considered as suitable for exploratory studies in the social sciences to accommodate scales with fewer items (Zhang et al., 2018).

The data presented for the place brand dimensions are a summary of the data presented in a related paper that is beyond the scope of the present study. However, the data was subjected to a similar EFA procedure. Pearson product-moment correlations analysis was employed to determine the potential strength and direction of the linear relationship between the independent variable(s) and the dependent variables at $r \geq 0.3$ (Cohen, 1988). Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) was then employed to test whether South Africa's CI could statistically predict the Brand-SA dimensions considered by tourists in their decision-making process. Statistical significance was accepted at the critical t-value of >3.09 at $p < 0.001$ and between 1.96 and 3.09 at $p < 0.05$, with p-values of $p < 0.001$ or $p < 0.05$ for significance.

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

Most of the respondents surveyed were male (52.8%), while a more substantial proportion of the respondents surveyed (45%) were aged between 26 and 37 years old and over the age of 50 years old (20.2%) respectively. At least 59.6% of the respondents indicated they possessed a university qualification. In comparison, a significant proportion of the respondents (74.2%) were employed, with 8.2% indicating that they were retired. In terms of country of origin, the four main tourist source countries, the United Kingdom (18.9%); Germany (15.0%); the United States of America (13.3%) and; the Netherlands (7.7%) accounted for over 50% of the respondents, with the remainder of respondents surveyed being resident in various European and Latin American countries. Lastly, the vast majority of the respondents (74.7%) were first-time visitors to South Africa at the time of the survey. In terms of the communication channels, most of the respondents had seen images of or heard about South Africa through word of mouth (80.6%), the internet (73.4%) social media (62.2%), and television (61.4%). Relatedly, respondents indicated that the most influential channels to their decision to visit South Africa were, word of mouth (42.4%) the internet (24.1%), previous visits (10.7%) and social media (10.3%).

Results of the Validity and Reliability Tests

Table 1 summarises the results of the validity and reliability of the independent variable(s).

Table 1: Validity and Reliability for the Independent Variable(s) - The Country Image of South Africa

Statement	*Factor 1	*Factor 2
Image as a country	.484	
General openness to international visitors (immigration, visa requirements)	.723	
Rich cultural heritage	.863	
The people of South Africa	.710	
Physical amenities (hotels, resorts, air/seaports)	.661	
Rich natural resources	.526	
Ability to manage its affairs (resources, economy, institutions, relations with other countries)		.807
Branded products available in foreign markets (wine, food, art, music, manufactured goods, services)		.577
Various international business-related opportunities		.844
Eigenvalue (EV)	3.55	1.33
Variance explained (%)	39.47	14.79
Cronbach's alpha (α)	.775	.694

*KMO = .823; Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2(36) = 488.746, p < 0.001$).

Table 1 shows evidence that all nine CI items loaded onto two distinct factors. From the literature (Aichner, Forza & Trentin, 2017; Albu, 2013; Maier & Wilken, 2017) CI formation can be decomposed into two main conduits, as either being stereotypical or Country-of-Origin (COO) in

nature. Factor 1 which was labelled *Stereotypical Image (SI)* loaded six items (EV=3.55, explaining 39.47% of the variance, $\alpha=.775$), with factor loading coefficients of $\geq .40$ (Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation) ranging between .484 and .863. *SI* was deemed valid and reliable with $EV > 1$, factor loading coefficients of $\geq .40$ and $\alpha > .650$. Stereotypes may be characterised as an amalgamation of various environmental forces and represent a pervasive characteristic in consumer behaviour, more-so in the formation of either positive or negative perceptions towards countries (Albu, 2013; Avraham, 2018). Previous studies (Albu, 2013; Avraham, 2018; Woosnam, Maruyama, Boley & Erul, 2018) to some extent articulate that there is a discernible correlation between the stereotypical images of countries and the behaviour (cognitive, affective and conative) of tourists.

Factor 2 was labelled *Reverse Country-of-Origin (r-COO)* and loaded three items (EV=1.33, explaining 14.79% of the variance, $\alpha=.694$), with factor loading coefficients of $\geq .40$ (Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation) ranging between .577 and .844. *r-COO* was deemed valid and reliable with $EV > 1$, factor loading coefficients of $\geq .40$ and $\alpha > .650$. The COO of a product/service is a heuristic/informational cue for consumers whose effect is the underlying, often positive bias of consumers towards a product, based on the country from which it is perceived to have originated from (Aichner et al., 2017; Stepchenkova et al., 2018; Maier & Wilken, 2017). However, within the tourism discourse, the reverse-COO (*r-COO*) effect is critical for the CI formation for tourism destinations. The *r-COO* effect occurs when tourists utilise the products (touristic or non-touristic) associated with a particular country to inform their general CI perceptions (Albu, 2013; Lee & Lockshin, 2012; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Ryu et al., 2016). Previous studies (Brodie & Benson-Rea, 2016; Chen, Chung, Gao & Lin, 2017; Lee & Lockshin, 2012) suggest that there is a discernible correlation between the induced images (primarily COO) of places and the behaviour of tourists. Table 2 summarises the validity and reliability of the dependent variables.

Table 2: Validity and Reliability for the Dependent Variables - Influential Place Brand Dimensions

Dependent Variable	Items Loaded	Factor Loading		EV	Variance (%)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Socio-Cultural (SCL)	IMM3, IMM4, IMM5, CLH1, CLH2, CLH3, CLH4, CLH5, PEO1, PEO2, PEO3, PEO4	.478	.789	13.01	29.58	.918
Governance (GOV)	GOV1, GOV2, GOV4, GOV5, GOV6	.669	.786	3.17	7.20	.860
Marketing (MKT)	PEO7, MKT3, MKT4, MKT5, MKT6, MKT7	.499	.806	2.74	6.23	.885
Tourism (TOR)	TOR3, TOR5, TOR6, TOR7, GOV3	.519	.693	2.35	5.35	.659
Negative Events (NEV)	NEG1, NEG2, NEG3, NEG4, NEG5, NEG6	.457	.751	1.92	4.36	.864
Competitive Advantages (CAV)	TOR2, TOR4, TOR7, IMM1, IMM2	.507	.659	1.47	3.34	.682

Key: SCL = Socio-cultural; GOV = Governance; MKT = Marketing; TOR = Tourism; NEV = Negative Events; CAV = Competitive Advantages; IMM = Immigration; CLH = Culture & Heritage; PEO = People.

Table 2 summarises the six dependent variables which were composed of a total of 39 items, loading onto the factors: Governance (GOV: EV=3.17, explaining 7.20% of the variance, $\alpha=.860$); Marketing (MKT: EV=2.74, explaining 6.23% of the variance, $\alpha=.885$); Tourism (TOR: EV=2.35, explaining 5.35% of the variance, $\alpha=.659$); and Negative Events (NEV: EV=1.92, explaining 4.36% of the variance, $\alpha=.864$) at a factor loading coefficient of $\geq .40$ (Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation). After the PCA and EFA, *Immigration* and *People* did not load as place brand factors in the case of South Africa. However, two new factors emerged and were labelled Socio-Cultural (SCL: EV=13.01, explaining 29.58% of the variance, $\alpha=.918$) and Competitive Advantages (CAV: EV=1.47, explaining 3.34% of the variance, $\alpha=.682$) respectively. As described in Table 2, the factor loading coefficients for the dependent variables ranged from a minimum of .457 to a maximum of .806 across the variables, all with Eigenvalues >1 , accounting for a cumulative 56.06% of the variance in the data. All the dependent variables were deemed reliable, reporting Cronbach’s alpha’s $\geq .65$, ranging between $\alpha=.659$ and $\alpha=.918$.

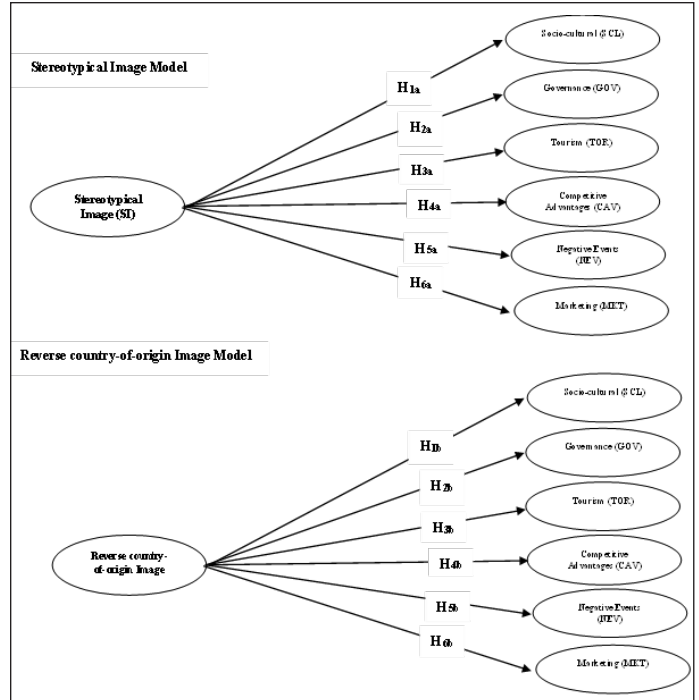


Fig. 2: Revised Hypothesised Models

Reformulation of Hypotheses

Based on the outcomes of the PCA, EFA and Cronbach’s alpha tests on both the independent and dependent variables, the hypotheses for the study were reformulated and modelled (Fig. 2) as follows:

H₁: There is a relationship between South Africa’s stereotypical [H_{1a}] and reverse country-of-origin [H_{1b}] image and the evaluation of the socio-cultural dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

H₂: There is a relationship between South Africa’s stereotypical [H_{2a}] and reverse country-of-origin [H_{2b}] image and the evaluation of the governance dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

H₃: There is a relationship between South Africa’s stereotypical [H_{3a}] and reverse country-of-origin [H_{3b}] image and the evaluation of the tourism dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

H₄: There is a relationship between South Africa’s stereotypical [H_{4a}] and reverse country-of-origin [H_{4b}] image and the evaluation of the competitive advantages dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

H₅: There is a relationship between South Africa’s stereotypical [H_{5a}] and reverse country-of-origin [H_{5b}] image and the evaluation of the negative events dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

H₆: There is a relationship between South Africa’s stereotypical [H_{6a}] and reverse country-of-origin [H_{6b}] image and the evaluation of the marketing dimension in the decision-making process of tourists.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the independent and dependant variables, respectively.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the SI and r-COO as Independent Variables and the Place Brand Dimensions

Variable	Mean (\bar{x})	Std Dev(σ)
Stereotypical Image (SI)	4.09	.554
Reverse Country-of-Origin Image (r-COO)	3.44	.729
Socio-Cultural (SCL)	3.42	.756
Governance (GOV)	3.12	.977
Marketing (MKT)	3.62	.816
Tourism (TOR)	2.97	.950
Negative Events (NEV)	3.18	.833
Competitive Advantages (CAV)	3.86	.696

Key: SI = Stereotypical Image; r-COO = Country-of-Origin Image; GOV = Governance; MKT = Marketing; TOR = Tourism; NEV = Negative Events; CAV = Competitive Advantages; IMM = Immigration; CLH = Culture & Heritage; PEO = People.

As Table 3 shows, the surveyed tourists’ general perception of South Africa based on the SI ($\bar{x}=4.09$) had a ‘positive

influence’ on them (tending towards 4 on the 5-point Likert scale). While Tourists’ general perception of South Africa based on the *r-COO* (\bar{x} =3.44) was ‘fairly influential’ on them (tending towards 3 on the 5-point Likert scale). Concerning South Africa’s place brand dimensions, the dependent variables *SCL* (\bar{x} =3.42), *GOV* (\bar{x} =3.12), *TOR* (\bar{x} =2.97), and *NEV* (\bar{x} =2.97) were found to be ‘Somewhat influential’ (tending towards 3 on the 5-point Likert scale). *MKT* (\bar{x} =3.62) and *CAV* (\bar{x} =3.86) as Brand-SA dimensions were deemed to be ‘Quite influential’ (tending towards 4 on

the 5-point Likert scale). The standard deviations for both the independent and dependant variables ranged between σ =.554 and σ =.977.

Results of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis

Table 4 presents the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix of SI and r-COO Images as Independent Variables and the Influential Place Brand Dimensions

Variable	SI	r-COO	SCL	GOV	MKT	TOU	NEV	CAV
SI	1.000							
r-COO	.436**	1.000						
SCL	.327**	.160*	1.000					
GOV	.050	.153*	.420**	1.000				
MKT	.191**	.147*	.521**	.338**	1.000			
TOR	.192**	.388**	.328**	.387**	.247**	1.000		
NEV	.089	.093	.554**	.411**	.390**	.390**	1.000	
CAV	.359**	.280**	.437**	.328**	.493**	.345**	.358**	1.000

Notes: *p < 0.001 level (2-tailed) **p < 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 provides evidence of statistically significant ($p < .01$) moderate correlations between *SI* and the *SCL* ($r = .327$) and *CAV* ($r = .359$) place brand dimensions of South Africa. Weak significant ($p < .01$) correlations were reported between *SI* and the *MKT* ($r = .191$) and *TOR* ($r = .192$) place brand dimensions of South Africa. Table 4 also provides evidence of a statistically significant ($p < .001$) moderate correlation between *r-COO* and the *TOR* ($r = .388$) place brand dimensions of South Africa. A weak significant ($p < .01$) correlation was reported between *r-COO* and the *CAV* ($r = .280$) place brand dimensions of South Africa. Weak significant ($p < .001$) correlations were also reported between *r-COO* and the *SCL* ($r = .160$), *GOV* ($r = .153$), and *MKT* ($r = .147$) place brand dimensions of South Africa.

Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was carried out to establish whether the perceived image(s) of South Africa could influence the place brand factors tourists considered to be influential to their decision-making process when considering South Africa as a tourist destination. Table 5 summarises

the model significance for the independent variables *SI* and *r-COO*, and the dependent variables.

Table 5: Summary of Model Significance

Dependent Variables	df	F	Sig.
SCL	2(213)	12.77	.000*
GOV	2(225)	2.727	.068
MKT	2(208)	4.504	.012*
TOR	2(225)	20.090	.000*
NEV	2(206)	1.193	.306
CAV	2(227)	19.701	.000*

*p < .05

As shown in Table 5, the model analyses reported predictor significance for the independent variables and the *SCL*, *MKT*, *TOR*, and *CAV* at $p < .05$. The independent variables also reported a Tolerance value of $> .1$ (.810) and a variance inflation factor ($VIF < 10$) at 1.235, suggesting the absence of multi-collinearity. Table 6 summarises the empirical results of the multiple regression analysis.

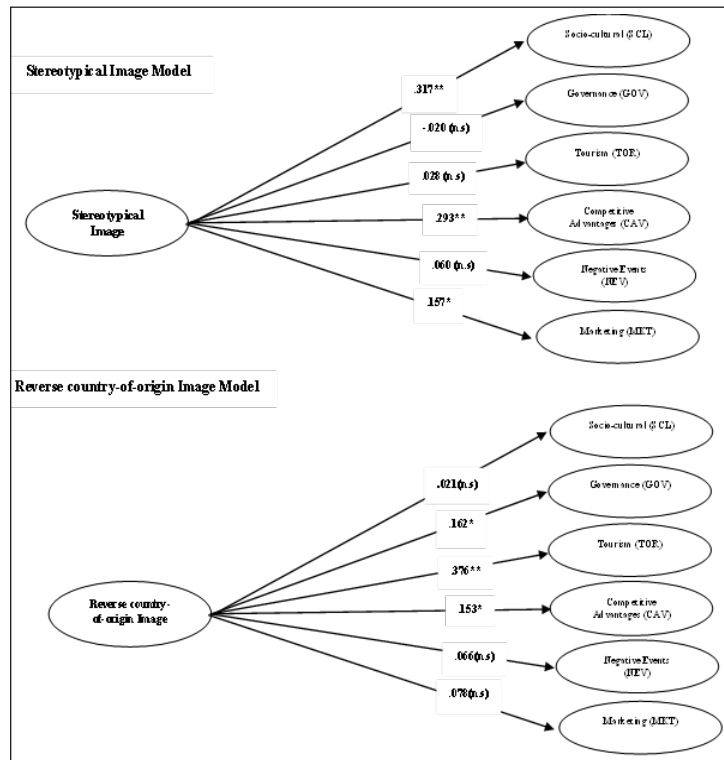
Table 6: Summary of the Results of the Multiple Regression Analyses

	R ²	β	T-Value	Sig. (p)	Hypothesis No.	Decision
Independent Variable: SI						
SCL	.107	.317	4.410	.000**	H _{1a}	Accept
GOV	.024	-.020	-.276	.783	H _{2a}	Reject
TOR	.152	.028	.414	.679	H _{3a}	Reject
CAV	.148	.293	4.299	.000**	H _{4a}	Accept
NEV	.011	.060	.776	.439	H _{5a}	Reject
MKT	.042	.157	2.083	.039*	H _{6a}	Accept
Independent Variable:r-COO						
SCL	.107	.021	.298	.766	H _{1b}	Reject
GOV	.024	.162	2.207	.028*	H _{2b}	Accept
TOR	.152	.376	5.511	.000**	H _{3b}	Accept
CAV	.148	.153	2.241	.026*	H _{4b}	Accept
NEV	.011	.066	.863	.389	H _{5b}	Reject
MKT	.042	.078	1.036	.301	H _{6b}	Reject

p<.05*, p<.001**

From Table 6 and Fig. 3, there is evidence of statistically significant (p<.001) relationships between *SI* and the *SCL* (R²=.107, p=.000) and *CAV* (R²=.148, p=.000) dimensions. The t-values for both relationships exceeded the critical value of 3.09 at p<.001. Thus, hypotheses H_{1a} and H_{4a} were accepted. There is also evidence of a statistically significant (p<.05) relationship between *SI* and the *MKT* (R²=.042, p=.039) dimension. The t-value for this relationship was

between the critical values of 1.96 and 3.09 at p<.05, thus H_{6a} was accepted. The magnitude of the path coefficients (β) for *SI* was weakly positive for *MKT* (β=.157, p<.05), and moderately positive for *SCL* (β=.317, p<.001), as well as *CAV* (β=.293, p<.001). No significant relationships were reported between *SI* and *GOV* (p=.783), *TOR* (p=.679), and *NEV* (p=.439) hence, hypotheses H_{2a}, H_{3a}, and H_{5a} were rejected.



p<.05*, p<.001**

Fig. 3: Final Model of the Influence of Country Image on Place Brand Dimensions

Table 6 and Fig. 3 also shows evidence of statistically significant ($p < .05$) relationships between r -*COO* and the *GOV* ($R^2 = .024$, $p = .028$) and *CAV* ($R^2 = .148$, $p = .026$) dimensions. The t-values for both relationships were between the critical values of 1.96 and 3.09 at $p < .05$. Thus, hypotheses H_{2b} and H_{4b} were accepted. A statistically significant ($p < .001$) relationship was also reported between r -*COO* and the *TOR* ($R^2 = .152$, $p = .000$) dimensions. The t-value exceeded the critical value of 3.09 at $p < .001$. Hence H_{3b} was accepted. The magnitude of the path coefficients (β) for r -*COO* was weakly positive for *GOV* ($\beta = .162$, $p < .05$) and *CAV* ($\beta = .153$, $p < .05$), as well as moderately positive for *TOR* ($\beta = .376$, $p < .001$). No significant relationships were reported between r -*COO* and the *SCL* ($p = .766$), *MKT* ($p = .301$) and, *NEV* ($p = .389$) dimensions, thus hypotheses H_{1b} , H_{6b} and H_{5b} were rejected.

CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesised effect of CIs as heuristic cues that stimulate tourist bias, and the resultant halo effect of CIs on tourist perceptions as a primer to the tourist decision-making process, may hold in the case of South Africa (Boseet et al., 2021; Chaulagain et al., 2021; Han, 1989; Echeverri et al., 2019; Lindblom et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2016). This concurs with previous studies that have established significant relationships between CIs and tourist perceptions of Spain and Mexico (Palau-Saumell, 2016), as well as China (Zhang et al., 2018). As it emerged, the empirical evidence suggests that South Africa's organic stereotypical image (SI) as a heuristic cue influences tourist perceptions of place, a conclusion supported by some ancillary evidence from studies by Albu (2013), Chen et al. (2016), Marinao-Artigas and Barajas-Portas (2021), as well as; Woosnam et al. (2018). Relatedly, the induced reverse country-of-origin image (r -*COO*) associated with South Africa was also, to some extent, prognostic and correlational to the decision-making process of tourists when considering South Africa as a tourist destination. This notion is supported by previous studies by Brodie and Benson-Rea (2016); Chen et al. (2017); Montanari, Giraldi and Galina (2020); Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin (2017) as well as Ryu et al. (2016).

However, what is unique about the South African context is that the country is susceptible to both the stereotypical and reverse country-of-origin CI effects. Hence, contradicting previous notions (Aichner et al., 2017; Maier & Wilken, 2017) that the CI of a particular place may be based on either stereotypes or the COO effect and not both. The case of South Africa is thus, very interesting since both stereotypes and the reverse of the COO effect influence the place brand dimensions international tourists consider in their evaluation of the country as a tourism destination (Montanari et al., 2020; Rojas-Méndez & Davies, 2023). Furthermore, the

findings point to the potential for irrationality in the decision-making process of tourists due to predisposed biases related to the tourism destination (De Nisco et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2008; McCabe et al., 2016). The sparse literature (Avraham, 2018; Park & Nicolau, 2018; Ryu et al., 2016) concurs with this finding, suggesting that other African tourism destinations apart from South Africa may also be prone to idiosyncratic biases of tourists. Relatedly, the findings of this paper somewhat challenge the isolationist view of tourist behaviour by providing empirical evidence that suggests that while the CI is intricate, multi-dimensional and complex (Kemp et al., 2012; Pike, 2005), it is an influential heuristic cue that contextualises tourist decision-making. Meaning that tourist decision-making does not occur in a vacuum and as a process, is susceptible to the subjective preferences, heuristics and bias attributed to economic behaviourism. These findings represent a potentially novel contribution to the literature, and they may open a new vein of research on CI and destination marketing for South Africa, and the wider African tourism region.

A complementary qualitative study is recommended as it may provide in-depth perspectives on how tourists circumscribe the vast amounts of available information on a country such as South Africa and contextualise their evaluation of the country as a tourism destination. Relatedly, the influence of South Africa's CI may be further interrogated as part of a broader international study that explores the perspective of tourists who have previously visited, are considering visiting or, have considered visiting but decided not to visit South Africa. This will broaden the scope of the inquiry into the CI-South African place brand nexus, thus better informing the tourism destination promotion decisions of South African tourism marketers and destination managers, while contributing to the broader tourism discourse. While the link between BE and the efficacy of tourism economics within the African development context may not be overt, further research into this nexus is recommended across other African tourism destination countries to grow the body of knowledge in this emerging avenue of academic inquiry.

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