



DESTINATION BRAND BRILLIANCE AS A DIFFERENTIAL ADVANTAGE FOR A TOURIST DESTINATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to investigate the formation of tourist-based destination brand brilliance as a differential advantage for a destination according to Alderson's differential theory. This will be done via content generated on social media sites by both destination management organizations and tourists, and through the mediating role of three dimensions of Aaker's brand equity model: awareness, image and perceived quality. Alderson's differential theory in a tourism context, and investigating the brilliance aspect of a brand, are both new research areas. Data was collected by electronically distributing questionnaires to 398 WhatsApp and Telegram users in Iran. This study confirms the relationship between tourist-generated content and destination brand brilliance through the mediating roles of awareness, image and perceived quality, but the content generated by the destination management organization to make a destination brand brilliant is only possible through the mediating roles of image and perceived quality. There is also a significant positive relationship between the perceived quality of a destination and the formation of destination brand brilliance. The findings of this research will help destination management organizations to better think about, and better manage, content generated on social media sites by organizations and tourists to form brilliance for their destination brand.

KEYWORDS

destination brand brilliance, social media sites, destination management organizations, tourist-generated content, Alderson's differential theory, destination brand equity

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to ever increasing competition among tourism destinations, developing different competitive qualities is necessary (Hanafiah & Zulkifly, 2019). Every place

strives to attract visitors and investors, but to be successful in this aim, it must be distinctive from others (Ruzinskaite & Lee, 2010). For enhancing the image of the destination and providing added value, place branding plays a significant role (Petrea et al., 2010).



Destination branding is a place (be it a country, city, region or town) which is perceived from the viewpoint of tourists and the tourism industry (Hanna et al., 2021). Destination branding reveals a destination's uniqueness and making it visible leads to a competitive advantage for the destination in the global tourism market (Miličević et al., 2016).

Terms such as 'place branding', 'national branding' or 'country branding' are becoming increasingly important (Briciu, 2013), and the branding of a place is the sum of all marketing activities, including "creating a name, symbol, logo and other graphical characteristic to identify and recognize a place; continuous fulfillment of expectations of an unforgettable experience; strengthening emotional ties between a place and its target group" (Jovičić Vuković, 2018, p. 135). The brilliance of a brand which is a distinct characteristic, sets one brand apart from others (Browe, 2018). The goal in making a brand brilliant is making it the obvious choice for the target clients (Humberstone, 2017) which results in competitive advantage for that brand.

In their research, Agaba and Kalu (2019) found that brand equity has positive significant effect on competitive advantage, and state that, by knowing this, firms can increase competitive advantage by paying attention to its dimensions. Brand equity can be preserved and enhanced by strengthening its dimensions (Yoo et al., 2000) which leads to a strong competitive advantage. "Destinations which possess a positive brand equity and strong competitiveness attributes will have an advantage over their competitors in attracting more visitors" (Weng, 2019, p. 50). Gómez et al. (2016), by analyzing the application of city branding in five European capitals – London, Paris, Berlin, Rome and Madrid – found that the "brand equity of the European capitals consists of the awareness and perceived quality of a city as a destination and the influence of attitude on the brand and brand image" (Gómez et al., 2016, p. 1).

Brand equity, as assets of a firm, consists of "awareness, loyal customers, perceived quality and associations" (Aaker, 1991, p. 18) that are related to the brand's name and symbol. Brand equity is a valuable intangible asset for a company, but in an age when social media are hard to control, it gets harder and harder to manage (Seo et al., 2020). A brand has positive brand equity when consumers respond favorably to a product and when the brand is recognizable it has a 'differential effect' on consumer response (Keller, 2013). Each company always attempts to create some competitive advantage but the most important factor in competition is 'differential advantage', which can give a company an edge over what other competitors are offering (Alderson, 1957).

Today, use of the internet and social media sites (SMSs) is growing day by day and a large number of

travelers use SMSs for searching and getting needed information and recommendations for planning trips (Bechte, 2023; Kar et al., 2021; Litvin et al., 2008). SMSs have revolutionized the business of tourist destinations (Királová & Pavlíček, 2015) on which they have changed from 'passively' obtaining and using information on the internet to 'actively' produce content and communicate with others (Nong & Fong, 2022, p. 87). SMSs, a web-based technology, contribute to a direct and immediate relation between brands and their audiences in an online environment which, compared to traditional tools of communication such as TV, radio, news articles and magazines, turn one-sided communication into interactive communication and are very cost-effective, accessible and scalable techniques (Baruah, 2012; Bryikhanova et al., 2021). Among the advantages of SMSs is their freely and openly available content to users, generating and uploading huge numbers of videos and photos on its platforms for sharing trip experience with others (Kar et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

SMSs offer opportunities to advertise to various target markets. Given the impact of SMSs on tourism and tourism products in general, they are also effective digital marketing tools, continuously evolving and becoming a key factor in helping businesses make the right decisions. They not only make travel more convenient, but also play an essential role in the development of the tourism business (Gvaramadze, 2022). Millions of communicators throughout the world use SMSs in their everyday routines (Nusair et al., 2012). In tourism, generated content on social media can be classified into two forms of uncontrolled content generated by visitors/tourists (tourist-generated content [TGC]), and traditional, controlled content generated by destination management organizations (DMO-generated content [DMOGC]), both of which have greatly changed tourist perceptions concerning destination brand equity (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020).

The aim of this article is to investigate the formation of tourist-based destination brand brilliance, which is considered a differential advantage for a destination brand based on the first three of Alderson's six differential bases i.e. market segmentation, selection of appeals and transvection. This is via content generated on SMSs by DMOs and by tourists, and through the mediating role of three dimensions of Aaker's brand equity model: awareness, image and perceived quality. This study also examines: (a) the effect of content generated on SMSs by DMOs and tourists on destination awareness, and destination image; (b) the impact of destination awareness and destination image on its perceived quality; and (c) the direct effect of the perceived quality of a destination on destination brand brilliance.

Since no study has been previously conducted on the brilliance aspect of a destination brand, and since

no study has yet used Alderson's differential theory in the tourism context, this work can be regarded as an innovation in this regard. This article in addition to making a significant contribution to the literature on tourism by adding another aspect of brand marketing to Alderson's differential theory and to brand studies, is theoretically important because it provides a new field of study on branding for future work. Therefore, this article can be taken as the threshold for future research on Alderson's differential theory in the tourism field and on destination brand brilliance. The impact of the two types of content on the formation of destination brand brilliance is compared and contrasted. In this case, the current research is relevant to a destination marketing and managerial perspective, since it will reveal the effects of DMO- and tourist-generated content, as sources of information, on raising tourist awareness and creating a mental image, on making brilliant a destination brand, and on the final decision of prospective visitors when choosing a destination for their trip.

The structure of this article is as follows: section 2 provides the theoretical framework of the study, while section 3 includes a review of literature for the model's conceptual variables together with research hypotheses. Following methodology, data analysis and results, its theoretical contribution, practical implications and conclusions are provided, along with limitations and suggestions for further studies.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To assess the effect of the content generated on social media sites by DMOs and tourists on making a destination brand 'brilliant', considered a differential advantage, this study uses three dimensions of Aaker's (1991) brand equity model, i.e. brand awareness, brand associations (mental image) and perceived quality, as the mediating factors between content generated on social media and destination brand brilliance.

According to Aaker (1991), awareness refers to familiarity, and people often prefer to purchase a familiar brand because for them such familiarity means reliability and good quality. People assess a brand by their awareness. For associations or mental images, people will have positive thinking or good feeling towards a brand to which specific associations are linked. Perceived quality has a direct influence on customers' buying decisions especially when there is no incentive to buy. Perceived quality means support for high prices and brand stretching. Awareness, image and perceived quality are not independent, have cause-and-effect relationships, and represent customer insights and responses to the brand.

This study also uses Alderson's (1957) differential advantage theory of competition which describes the forces that act as motivators for firms to struggle for survival in the marketplace. Each firm in competition seeks some advantage over rivals which Alderson labels 'competition for differential advantage'. This competition comprises a constant struggle for establishing and maintaining differential advantages over other firms. When they are successful in applying changes to the targeted incentives of specific customers, for instance by preparing market offerings of 'higher quality or lower prices', they have a 'differential advantage' over other firms. Competition is the struggle among competitors for advantages, and in competition, a differential advantage is important as it can give a firm a decisive advantage over what other firms are offering on the market (Hunt & Arnett, 2006).

According to Heriyanto et al. (2021) Alderson was one of the first to suggest that firms must be able to produce unique characteristics so that consumers can compare competing firms. In Hunt's (2015) view, the basis for differential advantage can be an innovation that provides a particular customer with greater location convenience, faster service, lower prices or other advantages for a subset of potential customers. Among them, lowering prices are a form of differential advantage that could be neutralized quickly and easily, therefore improving services and facilities is the most commonly used means of gaining a differential advantage. According to Hunt and Madhavaram (2014) differential advantage theory competition "(a) is dynamic, (b) is both initiatory and defensive, and (c) involves a struggle for advantages" (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2014, p. 84).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

3.1. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS-GENERATED CONTENT AND TOURIST-GENERATED CONTENT IN TOURISM

Today SMSs are a new tool for providing information and changing DMOs' classical marketing and communication strategies (Bosio et al., 2018). Many DMOs have turned to SM platforms as a rather inexpensive and also global marketing tool (Hays et al., 2012; Uşaklı et al., 2017). Through SMSs, tourism businesses benchmark the experience of the consumer against their rivals in the market and consider its impact on profitability (Ampountolas et al., 2019). The main purpose of DMOs, which have traditionally been described as destination developers and marketers, is to

market their destination to potential visitors (Blain et al., 2005; Presenza et al., 2005; Sotiriadis, 2021). Although, how the tourist perceives information, processes it and is motivated all impact on decision making for choosing a destination (Decrop, 2006), while information provided by DMOs about the destination plays a key role in tourists' intentions to travel (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2022). DMOs should be able to use both old and new media in an effective way to introduce and market their destination's attractions (Etuk, 2021). Their activities on these platforms are necessary for communication with prospective tourists in planning trips, and with real tourists throughout their trip (Bosio et al., 2018).

Nowadays, in the tourism market, a destination's ability to build enough awareness of its attractions for potential visitors has become a real source of 'competitive advantage' (Etuk, 2021). Levin (2020) asserts that brand awareness is equal to brand reach and explains that increasing awareness means attracting the attention of as many customers as possible. However, potential tourists travel to destinations in which they have more awareness (Araújo Vila et al., 2021). Providing information before and during the trip can be considered an important incentive that has both benefits for potential visitors and low costs for destination organizations (Bosio & Scheiber, 2022). Social media platforms are also crucial elements in the process of forming the image of a destination (Molinillo et al., 2017). Tourist's mental images are mostly formed by the information searching process (Chon, 1990) and anyone can create an image of a destination even though never having been there (Ferreira Lopes, 2011).

Instagram, as the largest data-sharing social media platform, having more than five million active users, has a large amount of useful information obtainable by potential visitors (Wang et al., 2022) and allows users to post images and textual content (Ong et al., 2022). One of the challenges for destination marketing organizations is finding out if they are marketing their destination in the best way on Instagram (Nixon, 2022).

Based on this discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{1a}: DMO-generated content on SMSs has a positive impact on tourists' destination awareness.

H_{1b}: DMO-generated content on SMSs has a positive impact on tourists' destination images.

According to Liu et al. (2020), the investigation by Cox et al. (2009) was the first study that introduced the role of social media and its user-generated content (UGC) in the process of travel planning. Social media which consists of Web 2.0 applications allows its users to generate and share their content in the form of 'texts, videos, images and audios', and is supported by the huge amount of content produced by users on its platforms (İğneci & Pirnar, 2017; Kar et al., 2021). UGC has affected the tourism industry in three ways: (a) increasing SMSs

such as MySpace (in 2003), Facebook (in 2004) and Instagram (in 2010); (b) changing travelers' behaviors in searching for information and planning a journey; and (c) combining social media platforms with the marketing methods of tourism organizations (Ayeh et al., 2013; Blystone, 2022; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009).

UGC, by providing uncommercial, detailed and new information based on experience, meets the informational needs of customers (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011) and raises their awareness. In a tourism context, it brings destinations close to the prospective tourist, no matter where they are in the world (Királová & Pavlíčka, 2015). Consumer-generated content, by providing first-hand information and recommendations, is considered particularly important because they are from a consumer's point of view and people mostly rely on this content for indirectly experiencing their trip and also planning for it (Drews & Schemer, 2010; Gretzel et al., 2011; Tarannum, 2020). When a tourist visits a destination, the travel experience becomes an important tool for projecting a positive image of the destination to potential visitors (Juneja et al., 2022). Tourists share their travel experiences on SMSs, thus they become important representatives for providing destination images which influence the sustainable development of the destination (Zhu et al., 2022).

Hence, this article proposes the following hypotheses:

H_{2a}: Tourist-generated content on SMSs has a positive impact on tourists' destination awareness.

H_{2b}: Tourist-generated content on SMSs has a positive impact on tourists' destination images.

3.2. DESTINATION AWARENESS, IMAGE AND PERCEIVED QUALITY

'Destination awareness' is "what someone knows or thinks they know about a destination" (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007, p. 6). Destination awareness occurs once visitors have started the learning procedure and obtained knowledge about the destination brand (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). Awareness has positive consequences such as selection and differentiation (Etuk, 2021). The destination awareness of potential visitors depends on information availability; the more available information about a destination, the more awareness of potential tourists about it (Gartner, 1993; Goodall, 1988). Awareness at its best leads to curiosity which can result in a visit, and the visit may lead to repeat purchases, on the condition of visitor satisfaction (Etuk, 2021; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Milman & Pizam, 1995). As Aaker (1991) indicates brand awareness includes a continuum from a sense of uncertainty about brand recognition to the belief that it is the only brand in the product category.

The 'destination image' concept was first introduced in the early 1970s by Hunt (1975), Gunn (1972) and Mayo

(1973) and thereafter it became a major topic for research in tourism (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). Images of travel destinations are susceptible to stimuli from a variety of sources, including one's own experiences (Cardoso et al., 2019), thus creating a positive image of a destination can affect tourist satisfaction and willingness to revisit (Jebbouri et al., 2022). The image of a destination influences tourists' "travel decision making, their behavior towards a destination, and the level of satisfaction and memory about the experience" (Susanti et al., 2023). By UGC, tourists' perceptions of the destination image can be increased (Hidalgo Alcázar et al., 2014). In their work, Nowacki and Niezgodá (2019, 2020) also found that the image of a place in the public perception is subject to the influence of tourists' opinion which can change the public choice and can determine competitive advantage. The image of a place affects not only regional but also corporate competitiveness, therefore in a city that attracts tourists, the image of the destination affects the profitability of many service-provider companies in the tourism market.

Aaker (1991, p. 80) defines 'perceived quality' as "the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose". The overall quality of a destination by a visitor consists of "products, services and experiences" (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007, p. 8). Perceived quality of services is related to consumer perception and is the antecedent of satisfaction (Aliman et al., 2014). According to Chon (1990) if the quality of a tourist destination's services is not satisfactory, it may lead to sharing information and negative opinions about the destination and thus harm destination brand equity (Wang et al., 2017). All marketing managers should be aware of the importance of destination quality and should match the consumer's subjective quality with real quality (Vantamay, n.d.). Destination image is considered one of the brand equity factors that influences the perceived quality of a destination (Roostika & Putri Yumna, 2023). Online travel agencies (OTA), which are also mediators between DMOs and potential tourists (Kalbaska, 2011) by offering a superior value proposition strengthen their relationship with their customers. This means that a better value proposition for tourists comes not only from app features, but also from the physical quality of services and facilities booked. Therefore, to convert potential tourists into actual tourists, functional features of OTA apps and the physical quality of services at travel destinations are of great importance (Talwar et al., 2020).

Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₃: Destination awareness has a positive impact on tourists' perception of quality in a destination.

H₄: Destination image has a positive impact on tourists' perception of quality in a destination.

3.3. DESTINATION BRAND BRILLIANCE AS A DIFFERENTIAL ADVANTAGE FOR A DESTINATION

Tourist destination competitiveness is among the essential components of the tourism industry (Hanafiah & Zulkifly, 2019). Destination competitiveness is the destination's ability to attract more tourists and provide them with satisfying and memorable experiences (Weng, 2019). Just like consumer goods, evaluation of places is based on the 'brand' more than just actual or imagined features (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). A predominant brand leads to a strong competitive advantage, and since "a differentiating association can be a key competitive advantage" (Aaker, 1991, p. 102), if a brand has a good position on an important attribute, it will be harder for competitors to challenge. If a brand is brilliant it means that it communicates in a way that always enchants the audience (Humberstone, 2017). Brilliance means "great brightness; luster, excellence or distinction; readily visible ...; radiance" (Browe, 2018, pages are unnumbered). Brilliance is a feature related to the light which surrounds a product which can fascinate customers. In other words, it is the product and the light around it which causes organizational brilliance, and today a continuous effort is underway to raise the brilliance of products (Spoelstra, 2009). According to Weber Shandwick (2012, p. 2), "corporate reputation contributes to company market value". Weber Shandwick (2012, p. 2) also quotes from Gaines-Ross "it is now clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that a strong company reputation adds an undeniable brilliance to the brand". In a world that is getting louder and more crowded, a brand needs to communicate in a way that always charms the audience and keeps them interested and this is what a brilliant brand does (Humberstone, 2017).

Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₅: Tourists' perception of quality in a destination has a positive impact on destination brand brilliance.

Figure 1 demonstrates the relationships proposed in the hypotheses.

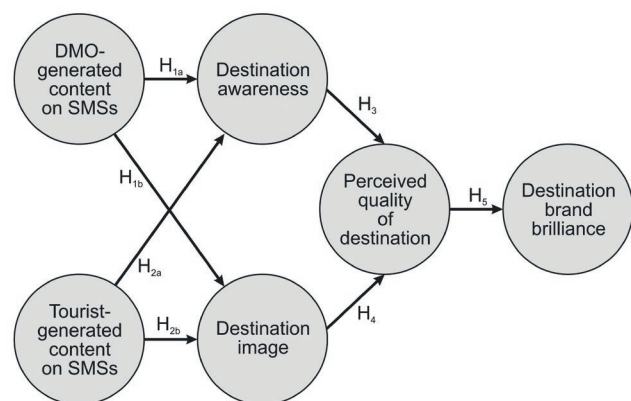


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the research
Source: modified from Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020)

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

In the current research, the method for collecting information was determined by a simple random selection of WhatsApp and Telegram SMS users in Iran. The participants, who were mobile SMS-users, were of different ages. To verify our hypotheses, the questionnaire, in which its statements were translated from English into Persian, was sent electronically to members of those communities (users of WhatsApp and Telegram). In Table 1 the demographic information of the respondents is presented. As shown, the number of female participants was larger than that of male (255 women/ 143 men), and the age range was young (80.4% under 45 years old). The sample was highly educated (91.2% were university graduates or above), and the majority were in employment (55.3%).

Table 1. Demographic profiles of respondents

	Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender	male	143	35.9
	female	255	64.1
Age	below 25	25	6.3
	25–35	136	34.2
	36–45	159	39.9
	46 and over	78	19.6
Education	below high school diploma	9	2.3
	high school diploma	26	6.5
	bachelor	151	37.9
	master or above	212	53.3
Job	employee	220	55.3
	self-employed	54	13.5
	jobless	31	7.8
	others	93	23.4
Isfahan trip experience	never	73	18.3
	once	86	21.6
	twice	61	15.3
	more than twice	178	44.7
Use of social media sites	WhatsApp	385	96.3
	Telegram	282	70.5
	Instagram	281	70.3

Source: authors.

For testing sampling adequacy, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was used to assess the appropriateness of using factor analysis on the data set, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was also used to test the homoscedasticity, which indicates if the samples are from populations with equal variances. Both tests had satisfactory indices: KMO = 0.931 > 0.7, and Bartlett's significance level = 0.00 < 0.01.

The questionnaire was created on a Google form and was structured in such a way that all the questions should have been answered (if a question was not answered, the next did not appear). Consequently, there were no outliers or missing data. Based on the critical value for the Mardia coefficient, which in this research is 1.84 and lower than 1.96, it is also concluded that multivariate normality was established (Kankainen et al., 2004).

4.2. MEASUREMENT

The information needed for this survey was collected through a questionnaire with 31 questions in order to measure the items and socio-demographic characteristics. The study was carried out by adopting a set of measurement items for each construct, all of which were from existing sources that had been tested before in the literature (Appendix). Each item was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*). Before conducting the field work and in order to carry out a pilot test, the questionnaire was given to both experts and ordinary people to verify that it was comprehensible by all respondents. According to the pilot test results, the translation of some study statements was modified. In total, 398 responses to the questionnaire were collected.

The reliability of the scales was also established. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the scales and the results demonstrate that all dimensions reached optimal levels of reliability, with Cronbach's alpha indices above 0.7. With regard to the internal consistency of the constructs, construction reliability (CR) indices were all higher than the cut-off level of 0.7; average variance extracted (AVE) values also exceeded the minimum recommended level of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017), except for destination image, whose result was marginal (Table 2).

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to evaluate the proposed structural model and to test H_1 – H_5 (Figure 2). The data were analyzed using IBM statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) Version 23.0 software, and to test all hypotheses,

Table 2. Measurement model estimation (dimensionality, consistency and validity)

Construct	Items	CR (<i>t</i> -value)	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
DMO-generated content on SMS	DGC1	–	0.818	0.848	0.850	0.59	0.43	0.214
	DGC2	18.305	0.840	–	–	–	–	–
	DGC3	17.625	0.812	–	–	–	–	–
	DGC4	12.281	0.604	–	–	–	–	–
Tourist-generated content on SMS	TGC1	–	0.777	0.858	0.870	0.64	0.43	0.308
	TGC2	16.857	0.858	–	–	–	–	–
	TGC3	12.792	0.763	–	–	–	–	–
	TGC4	13.413	0.822	–	–	–	–	–
Destination awareness	DA1	–	0.726	0.712	0.720	0.59	0.58	0.430
	DA2	9.501	0.511	–	–	–	–	–
	DA3	14.765	0.803	–	–	–	–	–
Perceived quality of destination	PQD1	–	0.744	0.873	0.860	0.56	0.47	0.460
	PQD2	13.806	0.706	–	–	–	–	–
	PQD3	15.997	0.807	–	–	–	–	–
	PQD4	14.600	0.739	–	–	–	–	–
	PQD5	15.299	0.772	–	–	–	–	–
Destination image	DI1	–	0.809	0.701	0.760	0.53	0.51	0.410
	DI2	8.949	0.579	–	–	–	–	–
	DI3 ^a	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	DI4	15.611	0.778	–	–	–	–	–
Destination brand brilliance	DBB1	–	0.821	0.863	0.908	0.66	0.57	0.437
	DBB2	19.027	0.819	–	–	–	–	–
	DBB3	20.833	0.872	–	–	–	–	–
	DBB4	17.935	0.786	–	–	–	–	–
	DBB5	17.742	0.780	–	–	–	–	–

Note: CR – construction reliability, AVE – average variance extracted, MSV – maximum shared squared variance, ASV – average shared squared variance.

^a DI3: Q19 relating to the measurement of destination image was eliminated because it presented a load under 0.5.

Source: authors.

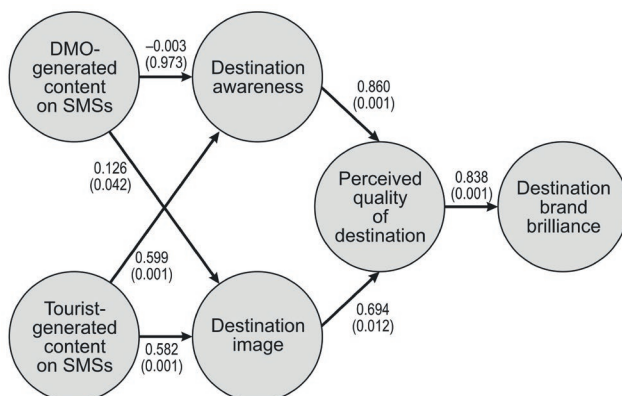


Figure 2. Structural equation model (SEM) estimation, standardized path coefficient

Note: *p* – statistic value between brackets; fit indices: degrees of freedom (*df*) = 2.34, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.058, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.924, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.925

Source: modified from Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020)

analysis of moment structures (AMOS) was used. In particular, this study adopted the multiple mediation method via bootstrapping with 2000 samples. It applied the bias-corrected percentile of 95% for calculating each mediating effect. After using AMOS and regarding refinement of the measurement scales, one item (Q19) relating to the measurement of the destination image was eliminated because it presented a load under 0.6 (Hair et al., 2017).

5.1. MODEL REFINEMENT, RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

In the first estimation of the research model, it did not have satisfactory fit with goodness-of-fit indices. Using the covariance matrix between 16 measurement items as input, SEM analysis was performed to investigate the relationships between each pair of constructs as hypotheses. The fit indices of the model are shown in Table 3. The model's indicators of goodness-of-fit are:

degrees of freedom (df) = 2.34 < 3, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.058 < 0.08, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.913 > 0.90, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.924 > 0.90, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.925 > 0.9.

Table 3. Goodness of fit indices of the model

Indices of the model	Criteria	Indicators
CMIN/ df	< 3	3.160
Refined CMIN/ df	< 3	2.483
Fit indices		
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.084
TLI	> 0.90	0.888
CFI	> 0.90	0.890
IFI	> 0.90	0.849
Refined fit indices		
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.061
TLI	> 0.90	0.927
CFI	> 0.90	0.938
IFI	> 0.90	0.939

Note: CMIN – chi-square minimum, df – degrees of freedom, RMSEA – root mean square error of approximation, TLI – Tucker-Lewis index, CFI – comparative fit index, IFI – incremental fit index.

Source: authors.

The reliability of the model constructs (as shown in Table 2) was assessed by using Cronbach's alpha, construct reliability and validity by all constructs'

CR (>0.7), average variance extraction (AVE) (>0.5), maximum shared squared variance (MSV), and average shared squared variance (ASV), which indicated sufficient convergence effectiveness for these constructs (Hair et al., 2017). All constructs' CR are greater than AVE, and all AVEs are greater than MSV and ASV. The results indicate that all dimensions reach optimal levels of reliability with Cronbach's alpha indices above 0.7 (Table 2). According to univariate and multivariate normality tests, data normality was tested based on skewness and kurtosis indices for the scale items included in this study. No violation of the normality assumption was indicated based on the recommended absolute values of 3 and 7 respectively (Kline, 2011). According to an evaluation of the theoretical model, the result of path coefficient estimation (Table 4) was determined. According to Table 4 in hypothesis H1, that content generated on social media sites by DMOs has an effect on tourists' understanding of destination awareness with a path coefficient of -0.002 and $p = 0.982$, is not significant at the 95% level. Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected.

As shown in Table 4, the six other hypotheses are however significant at the 95% level. Thus, these hypotheses are confirmed. According to the result, there is no significant relationship between content generated on social media sites by DMOs toward tourists' destination awareness. The Sobel test also showed no evident mediating effect of destination awareness between DMOGC on SMSs and perceived quality of the destination (Table 5). Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4. Significance testing results for model path coefficients

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient	p -value	Significant levels	Hypothesis support
H _{1a}	DMO-generated content on SMS → destination awareness	-0.003	0.973	NS	NO
H _{1b}	DMO-generated content on SMS → destination image	0.126	0.042	*	SP
H _{2a}	Tourist-generated content on SMS → destination awareness	0.599	0.001	**	SP
H _{2b}	Tourist-generated content on SMS → destination image	0.582	0.001	**	SP
H ₃	Destination awareness → perceived quality of destination	0.860	0.001	**	SP
H ₄	Destination image → perceived quality of destination	0.694	0.012	**	SP
H ₅	Perceived quality of destination → destination brand brilliance	0.838	0.001	*	SP

Note: NS – not significant, NO – no support, SP – support; standardized path coefficient significant at $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, according to Hair et al. (2017) and Pritschet et al. (2016).

Source: authors.

Table 5. Sobel test results of the moderation effect

Path	Sobel test	<i>p</i> -value	Significant levels	Hypothesis support
DMO-generated content on SMS → destination awareness → perceived quality of destination	-0.045	0.963	NS	NO
DMO-generated content on SMS → destination image → perceived quality of destination	2.077	0.037	*	SP
Tourist-generated content on SMS → destination awareness → perceived quality of destination	6.731	0.001	**	SP
Tourist-generated content on SMS → destination image → perceived quality of destination	5.606	0.001	**	SP
Destination awareness → perceived quality of destination → destination brand brilliance	7.790	0.001	**	SP
Destination image → perceived quality of destination → destination brand brilliance	6.644	0.001	**	SP

Note: NS – no significant, NO – no support, SP – support; standardized path coefficient significant at $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. Source: authors.

6. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

“Alderson’s contributions to marketing/management thought and theory are so far reaching that they are considered by some to be essential in building an understanding of marketing” (Tamilia, 2006, p. 473). Alderson (1957) adopts the term ‘differential advantage’ as “the term which best characterizes the dynamics of competitive advantage” (Alderson, 1957, p. 116). Differential advantage is a means for a firm to survive (Wooliscroft, 2006).

Until now, Alderson’s differential advantage theory has not been used in the context of tourism and destination branding. In this research, an attempt has been made to examine tourist-based destination brand brilliance from the perspective of Alderson’s differential advantage theory and, in this sense, the present article has made a contribution to that theory. The theory refers to the differential feature of a product or service, and the brilliance of a brand is also a differential feature of the product or service, considered a competitive advantage of the brand. Differential advantage makes the brand succeed over competitors. In addition this article has made a contribution to destination marketing and management thought and theory development from an Aldersonian differential advantage perspective.

This research investigated the formation of brand brilliance via DMOGC and TGC on SMSs through the mediating effects of the brand equity dimensions: destination awareness, image and perceived quality. However, this is the first time that the brilliance aspect has been studied and regarded as a brand competitive differential advantage, so it can be said that the present research contributes to the marketing and tourism literature by investigating the formation of the brilliance

of a brand and especially destination brand. The positive and direct effect between destination perceived quality and destination brand brilliance illustrates that the quality of a destination and its services is important for forming brilliance for a destination brand.

This study also, by comparing and contrasting the impact of SMS generated content by both DMOs and tourists on potential tourists’ destination awareness and image, has reached a different result from previous studies that suggest that content generated on SMSs by DMOs has no positive impact on creating awareness in potential tourists and only has positive impact on creating a destination image in tourists’ minds. Therefore, this research has a managerial application because with the obtained results it helps DMOs to optimally use SMSs and content, and also by knowing the impact of the content of destination visitors on potential tourists, better manage the content produced by tourists.

Hunt and Arnett (2006, p. 334) refers to Alderson (1957) identifies six bases of differential advantage for manufacturing companies: “market segmentation, selection of appeals, transvection, product improvement, process improvement and product innovation” (Hunt & Arnett, 2006, p. 334). What Alderson means by ‘market segmentation’, which has the potential for a differential advantage, is that firms can have an advantage over rivals if they fill segments of demand not served or poorly served by competitors. What he means by ‘selection of appeals’ is that some companies can gain an advantage with the images that are conveyed to consumers through advertisements and other promotional tools. By ‘transvection’ he refers to gaining market share through a unique distribution channel. Since this article is about the tourism industry and providing services

for tourists is different from products, we have used only the first three of Alderson's six differential bases as the theoretical basis of this article.

The tourist destination studied in this research was Isfahan province which, by possessing more than 22.000 historical monuments and sites, is called the top Iranian tourist destination by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Hateftabar, 2020), and is regarded as the tourist hub of Iran (Abyareh, 2007). According to the first three bases of Alderson's differential advantage, Isfahan can be said to have a differential advantage compared to other tourist destinations because of its architectural-historical attractions which are based on unique Iranian-Islamic architecture that cannot be found anywhere else. Based on the first of Alderson's differential advantages (market segmentation), this tourist destination is of interest to a certain group of tourists who are looking for architectural-historical attractions in an Iranian-Islamic style. The second of Alderson's differential advantages (selection of appeals) refers to the three elements of brand equity (image, awareness, perceived quality) of the destination, and also the advertising which is generated through content on social media sites by Isfahan DMOs, and by real tourists which convey the three elements of brand equity to the tourists. In this article, the third of Alderson's differential advantages (transvection) refers to the unique distribution channel of social media sites through which potential tourists get to know the attractions and services of this tourist destination.

7. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research have different implications for destination marketing and management. Since the brilliance of a destination brand leads to the attraction of visitors and, therefore, results in economic benefits for the destination, it is essential for destinations to build brilliance into their brand in order to overcome their rivals. Since, according to the results of this study, perceived quality positively affects the formation of brilliance for a destination brand, if a tourist destination wishes to enchant its visitors and reach a brilliant level to get a differential advantage over its competitors, it must give attention to the quality of the services it provides to visitors and try to gain their satisfaction in order to leave unique memories of the trip. For this aim, DMOs should know about the needs and preferences of different types of tourists and visitors.

Today SMSs are of great importance and use in the tourism industry, so DMOs should not neglect building a base of satisfied visitors on SMSs to build trust in potential tourists and provide the imagery of

an accepted and successful brand for them (Aaker, 1991). Proper and coordinated messaging must be sent by destinations to encourage consumer trust while also assuring safe travel within the region notwithstanding difficulties (European Travel Commission, 2022). For building destination brand brilliance and reaching a differential advantage, DMOs should also focus on providing necessary information about the destination on SMSs for potential visitors and raising their awareness about the destination. According to the findings of this research, poor content on SMSs generated by DMOs will fail to raise the awareness of potential tourists and also fail to build destination brand brilliance. So, effective content on SMSs by DMOs is of high importance in making a competitive and differential advantage for a destination.

Another implication of this research is that its findings confirm that there is a positive relationship between tourist-generated content on SMSs and raising the awareness of potential tourists which results in the brilliance of the destination brand and gains the attention of potential tourists. By knowing this, DMOs should find ways to stimulate or encourage visitors to produce positive content about the destination and about their travel experience on SMSs, as a result of which they can attract more visitors to the destination.

8. CONCLUSION

This research, by considering the mediating role of three dimensions of brand equity i.e. awareness, image and perceived quality, compares and contrasts the effects of the two types of content produced on SMSs, by DMOs and tourists, on forming the brand brilliance of a destination as a differential advantage according to Alderson's differential theory. There are many studies that overview the impact of social media content generated by DMOs or tourists on destination brand equity dimensions but this study took the initiative of studying the formation of brilliance for a destination brand by using Alderson's differential theory, for the first time in tourism literature, so contributing to the body of knowledge in the fields of destination branding and tourism.

In literature, the study conducted by Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020) explored the content generated on social media sites by DMOs and tourists to positively influence tourist destination image. Gurung and Goswami (2017), and Hidalgo Alcázar et al. (2014), in their studies, also confirm that there is a positive impact of social media content generated by tourists on destination image. Seo et al. (2020) agree that UGC has significant effects on brand awareness while Roostika and Putri Yumna (2023) concluded that destination awareness and destination image positively impacted perceived

quality. Therefore, the results of this study related to H_{1b} , H_{2a} , H_{2b} , H_{3} , and H_{4} are consistent with these studies.

The work of Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020) also found that DMO-generated content on social media has a positive effect on destination awareness. On the contrary, the results of the present study show that DMO-generated content on social media sites has no impact on tourist destination awareness, and according to the results, H_{1a} is rejected. Its rejection may come from a variety of reasons including (a) the lack of trust of the users of SMSs and potential tourists in the content produced by Isfahan DMOs, therefore, they prefer to refer to TGC for getting needed information; (b) insufficient advertising or the production of not very attractive content by Isfahan DMOs on their SMSs which causes a potential tourist to find TGC more attractive. Other reasons may be that since the study of Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020) was conducted in Europe, there may be a cultural difference between Asians and Europeans in using the SMSs of their DMOs; that is, maybe Asians do not have much desire to refer to DMOs to get information for planning their trip.

In this study, it was found that there is a positive impact of the perceived quality of a destination on the formation of destination brand brilliance (H_4). Since no study has been conducted before on destination brand brilliance, no comparison can be made regarding this result. Based on the findings of this research, the perceived quality of the destination plays an important role in creating brilliance for the destination brand. Perceived destination quality has a positive impact on tourist satisfaction (Nikhashemi, 2017), which comes from receiving services of the desired quality. Eight main attributes contribute to the formation of the quality structure of the destination namely "amenities, accessibility and logistics, core tourism experience, hygiene, information, security, value for money and hospitality" (Rajaratnam et al., 2015, p. 466). These eight attributes, in addition to services, can be helpful in providing the best service to tourists and satisfying them, which leads to tourist revisits and finally to the brilliance of the destination brand.

The result of this study can be helpful for DMOs, and especially Isfahan DMO, to manage their content on SMSs, more accurately seek to troubleshoot and solve existing problems, and be able to try as best they can to gain potential tourists' trust and attract more to their destination.

9. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Although this research presents significant theoretical and practical implications, some limitations must be noted. First, the fact that it was carried out only in the

Isfahan region in Iran can be regarded as a limitation in terms of the generalizability of research results. So, it is suggested that a similar study be conducted in the most similar cities to Isfahan on six continents, i.e. Kuala Lumpur (Asia), Johannesburg (Africa), Barcelona (Europe), Montreal (North America), Curitiba (South America), and Melbourne (Oceania) (Talebian et al., 2014), the results can be broadened by repeating the study. Second, this research used only a quantitative research method, so future research could apply a mixed-method that provides richer results. Third, the reasons why the content produced by Isfahan DMO do not affect the awareness of potential tourists is not investigated. Future research could help to clarify why the content generated by Isfahan did not create any effect on the destination awareness of potential tourists. Finally, more research is also needed to study potential tourists' incentives for explaining the reasons for their referring to and relying on TGC.

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APPENDIX. CONSTRUCTS AND ITEM STATEMENTS

Construct	Statement		References
DMO-generated content on SMSs	DGC1	I'm satisfied with the content generated on social media sites by the destination organization in Isfahan	Adapted from Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020)
	DGC2	The level of the content generated on social media sites and other technologies by the destination organization in Isfahan meets my expectations	
	DGC3	Content generated on social media sites by the destination organization in Isfahan is very attractive	
	DGC4	Content generated by the destination organization in Isfahan is more effective compared to the content generated by other destinations	
Tourist-generated content on SMSs	TGC1	I'm satisfied with the content generated on social media sites by other tourists about Isfahan as a tourist destination	Adapted from Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020)
	TGC2	The content generated on social media sites by other tourists about Isfahan is very attractive	
	TGC3	The content generated on social media sites by other tourists about Isfahan gives me different ideas about this destination	
	TGC4	The content generated on social media sites by other tourists about Isfahan helps me gain ideas about this destination	
Destination awareness	DA1	I can imagine what Isfahan is like as a tourist destination	Adapted from Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020)
	DA2	I know about Isfahan	
	DA3	I can confirm Isfahan as a tourist destination	
Perceived quality of destination	PQD1	The quality of accommodation in Isfahan is excellent	Adapted from Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020)
	PQD2	The quality of infrastructure in Isfahan is excellent	
	PQD3	As a tourist destination, Isfahan offers excellent quality	
	PQD4	The reliability of Isfahan as a tourist destination is very high	
	PQD5	Considering what is offered in Isfahan, I can expect excellent services	
Destination image	DI1	I can imagine several features of Isfahan as a tourist destination in my mind	Adapted from Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020)
	DI2	Isfahan is different from other tourist destinations	
	DI3 ^a	<i>Isfahan is superior to other tourist destinations</i>	
	DI4	I know Isfahan is a tourist city	
Destination brand brilliance	DBB1	The services provided by Isfahan win my trust	Adapted from Krystallis and Chrysochou (2014)
	DBB2	In terms of receiving good services, I can rely on Isfahan	
	DBB3	I'm satisfied with the quality of services in Isfahan	
	DBB4	Compared to other tourist destinations, the services provided by Isfahan are attractive and excellent	
	DBB5	Isfahan meets my main needs in terms of providing services	

^a DI3 was eliminated following dimensionality analysis.

Source: authors.