VISIT INTENTION: IMPACT OF FAMILIARITY AND DESTINATION IMAGE IN THE BANGKA BELITUNG ISLANDS

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Abstract:

Background: The digital transformation of tourism has redefined how familiarity with destinations is constructed, blending experiential encounters with vast informational exposure. Understanding how these distinct sources of familiarity influence cognitive and affective image formation and subsequently visit intention is crucial, particularly for emerging island destinations characterized by limited global recognition and perceived risk factors.

Purpose: This study aims to: (1) develop and validate a multidimensional framework distinguishing experiential and informational familiarity, (2) examine the differential impacts of cognitive versus affective destination image components on visit intention, and (3) establish an integrated familiarity–image–intention model tailored to emerging island destinations, with Bangka Belitung, Indonesia, serving as the empirical context.

Design/methodology/approach: Employing a rigorous quantitative methodology, we conducted a comprehensive online survey with 544 domestic travelers. Measurement instruments for familiarity and affective image evaluation were carefully designed and adapted from seminal works. The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.0. Reliability tests, convergent validity, and discriminant validity assessments were applied to ensure robust psychometric properties.

Findings: The results reveal that both experiential and informational familiarity significantly influence cognitive and affective destination images, with affective image exerting a stronger predictive effect on visit intention. A direct positive relationship between familiarity and visit intention was also identified, independent of the mediating role of destination image. These findings support the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, positioning familiarity as the stimulus, destination image as the organismic response, and visit intention as the behavioral outcome.

Conclusion: This research demonstrates that affective destination image serves as a crucial mediator between familiarity and visit intention, particularly for island destinations. The findings provide both a theoretical framework for understanding tourist psychology and actionable insights for destination marketing organizations seeking to enhance visitation through targeted image management strategies.

Originality/value: The study contributes by: (1) integrating dual familiarity types with dual image dimensions, (2) providing empirical evidence from understudied island contexts, and (3) resolving theoretical ambiguities concerning the relative importance of image pathways.

Keywords: familiarity, destination image, visit intention, Island Tourism, Bangka Belitung

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INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by rapid digitalization and global mobility, the process by which travelers select destinations has become increasingly complex and multifaceted (Xiang et al. 2017; Buhalis & Law, 2008). Central to this complexity is the role of familiarity a psychological construct encompassing accumulated knowledge, emotional resonance, and an individual's subjective sense of connection with a destination (Prayag, 2009; Gursoy, 2019). Familiarity can substantially shape destination perceptions, reduce perceived risks, enhance trust, and ultimately influence behavioral intentions such as visit intention (Baloglu, 2001; Lehto, Kim, & Morrison, 2006).

Traditionally, familiarity was conceptualized primarily through experiential means rooted in direct, personal encounters with a destination (Kim, 1998). However, the rise of digital media, peer-to-peer platforms, and user-generated content has significantly expanded the sources of familiarity. Informational familiarity acquired through mediated exposure has become equally critical (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Mariani et al. 2021). Online reviews, social media posts, influencer endorsements, and virtual tours all contribute to travelers' mental representations of destinations (Gretzel, 2011; Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012).

Despite the acknowledged importance of familiarity in travel behavior, theoretical clarity remains limited. First, the tourism literature often conflates experiential and informational familiarity, without adequately distinguishing their potentially distinct cognitive and affective effects (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sanz, 2009; Li, Scott, & Walters, 2021). Experiential familiarity typically involves sensory-rich, emotionally charged memories, whereas informational familiarity is more cognitive, built from facts, images, and narratives encountered via mediated channels (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Stylos et al. 2016). Treating these two modes as homogeneous risks obscuring important decision-making pathways.

Second, existing studies frequently adopt a unidimensional perspective of familiarity, overlooking its multidimensional psychological structure (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). Research underscores that familiarity is not solely cognitive (knowledge-based) but also affective (emotion-driven). Affective familiarity emotional attachment or comfort toward a destination may exert stronger motivational power on visit intention than factual knowledge alone (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Papadimitriou et al. 2018).

Third, although the destination image literature robustly establishes that image formation is critical in shaping travel intention (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Tasci & Gartner, 2007), how different types of familiarity interact with cognitive and affective images to influence visit intention remains insufficiently theorized and empirically tested (Pike & Ryan, 2004; Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2007). Prior studies often treat image and familiarity as independent antecedents or neglect the mediating role of image between familiarity and behavior.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing a multidimensional familiarity framework that distinguishes between experiential and informational familiarity, and by examining how each distinctly influences cognitive (e.g., perceived quality, safety, facilities) and affective (e.g., pleasantness, excitement) components of destination image, which in turn drive visit intention. It is hypothesized that affective image will serve as a stronger mediator compared to cognitive image, consistent with emotion-driven decision theories (Bagozzi et al. 1999).

Building on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), familiarity is conceptualized as an external stimulus, destination image as an organismic response, and visit intention as the behavioral outcome. This theoretical framing provides an integrative lens for understanding the psychological processes underpinning travel decisions in a digitalized, risk-sensitive tourism landscape (Molinillo et al. 2019).

Accordingly, this study develops and empirically validates an integrated model that clarifies the psychological mechanisms through which different types of familiarity influence visit intention, with particular emphasis on the mediating roles of cognitive and affective destination images. The primary objective is to disentangle the multifaceted construct of familiarity by distinguishing its experiential and informational sources, then assess their differential effects on destination image formation. Finally, this research evaluates the relative predictive power of cognitive and affective images in shaping behavioral intention, testing a comprehensive familiarity–image–intention framework within the unique context of an emerging island destination.

The emerging context of island tourism provides a compelling setting to examine these dynamics. Islands often characterized by fragile ecosystems, cultural uniqueness, and infrastructural vulnerabilities present both opportunities and perceived risks for travelers (Sharpley, 2012; Baldacchino, 2015). For lesser-known islands such as Bangka Belitung in Indonesia, where experiential familiarity among broader tourist populations remains limited, informational familiarity acquired through digital content becomes critical in shaping destination image and visit intention (Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

This study aims to: (1) develop and validate a multidimensional framework distinguishing experiential and informational familiarity, (2) examine the differential impacts of cognitive versus affective destination image components on visit intention, and (3) establish an integrated familiarity–image–intention model tailored to emerging island destinations, with Bangka Belitung, Indonesia, serving as the empirical context. By integrating differentiated familiarity types with dual destination image dimensions and grounding the study in contemporary digital behaviors, this research contributes to advancing theoretical models of tourist behavior while offering actionable insights for destination management organizations (DMOs) operating in emerging tourism markets.

METHODS

This study employs a sequential mixed-methods approach. An initial qualitative phase was conducted to identify salient elements of informational and experiential familiarity from traveler narratives. This was followed by a quantitative survey designed to test the hypothesized model. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the quantitative data, providing a robust method for examining complex models with relatively minimal requirements regarding sample size and data distribution. The empirical context focuses on Bangka Belitung, which offers an ideal setting to investigate how destinations with low initial familiarity can strategically enhance their image and visit intention through digital channels.

The study utilized primary data collected through an online survey targeting domestic travelers familiar with Bangka Belitung as a tourist destination. The dataset comprised quantitative responses measuring destination familiarity, cognitive and affective destination image, and visit intention. Secondary data drawn from previous studies were used to inform the development of measurement scales.

An online questionnaire was administered using Google Forms to gather responses from domestic travelers. The survey instrument was adapted from validated measures applied in prior tourism research. Before full deployment, the questionnaire underwent expert review by tourism industry professionals and academics, followed by pilot testing to ensure clarity and reliability. Twelve trained students from Bangka Belitung University facilitated the data collection process. Out of 582 responses received, 38 incomplete questionnaires were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 544 usable responses.

The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. This method was selected for its suitability in handling complex models and its flexibility with smaller samples and non-normal data distributions. A two-stage analysis was conducted: first, the measurement model was evaluated for reliability and validity; then, the structural model was tested to examine hypothesized relationships. To assess the significance of path coefficients, the bootstrap resampling procedure was applied.

The study's hypotheses were grounded in established theories of consumer behavior and destination marketing. They were formulated to examine how different dimensions of familiarity (experiential and informational) influence the formation of destination images (cognitive and affective) and, in turn, visit intention. This focus is particularly relevant for Bangka Belitung, which, despite its cultural attractions and marketing efforts, has faced challenges in attracting sufficient tourist numbers (Antaranews, 2023). By testing these hypotheses, the research seeks to provide empirical evidence on the psychological mechanisms underpinning tourist decision-making in emerging island destinations.

Destination familiarity and destination Image

One of the most crucial factors in the marketing literature is the extent to which consumers are acquainted with a given brand or product. Familiarity is defined as the sum of the consumer's encounters with the product in question (Ha & Perks, 2005). Indirect experiences (such as exposure to commercials or evaluations from other consumers) have been shown to be just as effective as firsthand ones (such as making a purchase or using the product) in fostering familiarity. Likewise, numerous tourism-related research have attempted to define and operationalize the concept of "destination familiarity" (Kim et al. 2019; Chen et al. 2017). Chen and Lin (2012) proposed separating one's acquaintance with a tourist site into two categories: first-hand experience and background knowledge. Knowledge of a destination is said to be "experiential" if it has been gained via personal experience, while "informational" familiarity is gained through reading or hearing about it in the news or on television. According to Chen et al. (2017), the quantity of information tourists are exposed to before actually visiting the destination should be counted as indirect familiarity with the destination. Travelers, for instance, typically gain exposure to a location through numerous media before actually visiting there. These media include books, advertising, brochures, movies, online reviews, and websites (Xiang et al. 2015).

The brand image of a destination is the sum of its parts, as perceived by a potential visitor, including facts, opinions, and emotions (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Although the more nebulous and abstract parts of branding (like affect or emotion) serve to explain consumer brand knowledge, Vinhas Da Silva & Faridah Syed Alwi (2006) noted that other dimensions of brand knowledge (such as the cognitive element of brands) may also be relevant. In contrast to an individual's "affective image," which is formed by the individual's feelings or emotional responses toward a tourist destination (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997), an individual's "cognitive image" is comprised of their beliefs or knowledge about the characteristics or attributes of a tourist destination (San Martin & Del Bosque, 2008). Tourism destinations' economic growth, cultural and natural tourist attractions, technological progress, and safety and security are all examples of intangibles that can be evaluated using cognitive aspects. Affective visual features, on the other hand, are linked to internal emotions and sentiments regarding a vacation spot. Previous research solely looked at the "cognitive image," despite the fact that the "affective image" of the destination is just as important. Several studies have also explored the connection between mental and emotional representations of a final destination.

Several marketing studies have found that consumers are more likely to make purchases of well-known brands or products than those they are less familiar with. This is because they have a more positive impression of these items (Bang et al. 2020; Han, 2020). These good replies from customers can be broken down into four types. To start, patrons have more faith in well-known businesses. Copeland and Bhaduri (2020), for one, discovered that familiarity breeds trust in a brand, and trusting consumers are more inclined to buy a brand they are already familiar with. Second, when one's familiarity with a topic grows, a more organized network of related pieces of information is formed in their long-term memory (Cordón et al. 2016). Consumers' perceptions of familiarity with a brand are related to its perceived accessibility and the ease with which its associated information can be processed, all of which contribute to increased recall when customers believe they are well-versed in the product in question (Morrin & Ratneshwar, 2003). Third, consumers' confidence in their ability to anticipate the results of a purchase may increase as they gain familiarity through repeated exposure. Because they don't know enough about the brand, consumers may be skeptical of its quality (Lim & Chung, 2014). Because of the intangible nature of tourism products, travelers often feel uneasy about venturing abroad; this function is especially important in the travel and tourism industry (Chen et al. 2017). Last but not least, in the context of consumer-brand relationships, increased familiarity with a brand boosts sentiments and psychological comfort, both of which contribute to a deeper commitment to that brand. Emotional attachment and identification with a brand grow when consumers become more familiar with it through a variety of exposures (both indirect and direct) (Kim et al. 2019).

Similarly, studies in the field of tourism and travel have indicated that familiarity with a tourist destination is one of the most critical elements that determines consumer impressions, such as destination image (Chaulagain et al. 2019). Consumers form a more positive mental picture of a tourism destination the more they are exposed to it. For instance, Baloglu (2001) found that customers' perceptions of Turkey as a tourism destination differed according to their amount of prior knowledge about

the country. The beneficial effect of familiarity with a destination on impressions of that destination was also supported by empirical research (Chi et al. 2020). As a result, we anticipate that familiarity acquired via both direct and indirect experiences with a destination is sufficiently all-encompassing to influence both cognitive and affective pictures of the place. While the level of consumer familiarity with a tourist site is one factor in how they rate that location, there are other factors at play as well. Consumers are more likely to acquire niche expertise about a destination as they increase their level of familiarity with it. In contrast, one's emotional reactions to a destination's numerous qualities are significantly influenced by one's level of familiarity with the destination, as accrued through direct and indirect experiences. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Destination familiarity has a positive impact on cognitive image of the destination.

H2. Destination familiarity has a positive impact on affective image of the destination.

Destination familiarity and visit intentions

Marketing and advertising studies have shown that consumers are more likely to be interested, attentive, and positively evaluate a product when they recognize and link it with a well-known, familiar brand name (Kunamaneni et al. 2019). The "exposure effect," which describes the impact of brand familiarity, suggests that continuous exposure to the brand through direct and indirect experiences favorably effects not just attitude towards the brand but also confidence in the brand (Kim et al. 2019).

Perceived risk and trust have been shown to support the favorable association between customers' familiairy and their intentions to acquire a product or service (Marriott & Williams, 2018). With more product use under their belt, consumers are better equipped to do product-related tasks and make educated choices. In turn, this boosts sales because fewer people will need to spend time researching products before buying (Ursu, 2018). Also, since familiarity with a brand can drastically lessen the risk associated with purchasing that brand, consumers are more inclined to make a purchase if that brand is well-known (Chang & Chen, 2014). Specifically, familiarity plays an essential role in lowering risk and enhancing confidence in buying decisions when customers lack knowledge about a product's qualities (Park & Stoel, 2005).

The concept of familiarity was initially used to tourism by Milman and Pizam's (1995) study. They looked into the connection between customers' prior knowledge of a destination and their propensity to travel there. In other words, the more people are exposed to a place, the more trust they develop in it, and the more likely they are to travel there. Consumers' trip-planning and destination-searching anxieties are inversely correlated with a lack of interest in a specific travel destination. Yet, consumer intent to travel to the place will increase as consumers gain comfort in making selections based on their direct and indirect experiences. As was mentioned before, an appreciation of the concept of perceived risk is essential to making sense of the positive correlation between familiarity and intentions. As shown by Reisinger and Mavondo (2005), travelers' risk perceptions affect their decision to travel there. These impressions are strongly linked to concerns over visitors' safety. As a result, tourists' chance of visiting a location is influenced by their level of familiarity with, and knowledge of, that location. For instance, the likelihood of other potential tourists visiting a destination would improve if their experiences, like viewing movies depicting the destination or TV commercials promoting the destination, reduced the amount of uncertainty and risks in a future decision-making circumstance. Accordingly, it would seem reasonable to propose the following hypothesis:

H3. Destination familiarity has positive impact on intention to visit.

Destination image and visit intention

Several studies have shown that an appealing mental picture of a destination is crucial to its success in the marketplace (Kusumah et al. 2022; Peralta, 2019; Lopes, 2011). Customers prefer to base their decisions on preconceived notions about a destination rather than hard data, as tourist items are relatively immaterial and customers have limited information based on experience and actuality (Lian & Yu, 2019). A tourist's chance of visiting a given destination and their overall opinion of that destination are both heavily influenced by the tourist's impressions of that destination (Phau et al. 2014). Customers who rate a destination highly and have a positive mental picture of the destination are more likely to travel there (or revisit). According to Hazel et al. (2022), travelers' actions both before and after making a destination choice are impacted by the destination's perceived quality. Their studies suggest that perceptions of a destination have a major impact

on travelers' decisions to return there or to promote it to others. These findings lead to the following two hypotheses:

H4. Cognitive image of destination has positive impact on intention to visit.

H5. Affective image of destination has positive impact on intention to visit.

On the basis of the preceding discussion, we postulate that consumers' prior knowledge of a tourist destination is a crucial factor in forecasting their impressions of the destination and, in turn, their inclinations to travel there.

The conceptual framework of this study establishes a theoretical model examining the interrelationships between three core constructs: destination familiarity, destination image, and visit intention. The model operationalizes destination familiarity through two distinct dimensions - cognitive familiarity (knowledge-based understanding) and affective familiarity (emotion-based connection) - which are posited to differentially influence the formation of destination image. Correspondingly, destination image is conceptualized as comprising parallel cognitive (rational evaluation of destination attributes) and affective (emotional response to the destination) components, both hypothesized to collectively determine tourists' behavioral intentions. This multidimensional approach enables a comprehensive investigation of the psychological mechanisms underlying travel decision-making processes.

The framework proposes three key pathways of influence: (1) the impact of cognitive familiarity on cognitive destination image, (2) the effect of affective familiarity on affective destination image, and (3) the combined influence of both image components on visit intention. This tripartite structure facilitates nuanced analysis of how informational and experiential familiarity differentially shape destination perceptions,

while accounting for both rational and emotional drivers of travel behavior. The model is particularly relevant for island destinations like Bangka Belitung, where marketing challenges necessitate deeper understanding of these psychological determinants.

This theoretical model makes significant contributions to tourism research by: (1) providing a comprehensive framework for analyzing destination familiarity's multifaceted effects, (2) elucidating the distinct pathways through which cognitive and affective factors influence travel decisions, and (3) offering empirical insights applicable to destination marketing strategies. The hypothesized relationships will be rigorously tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), allowing for robust examination of the complex interactions between these psychological constructs in determining visitation intentions to emerging island destinations. Figure 1 shows a potential conceptual model.

RESULTS

Profile of respondents

The demographic information of the study's participants is presented in Table 1. The gender breakdown of the sample was 45.2% male and 54.8% female. People of all ages were represented, but between the ages of 21 and 30 made up the largest group by far (61.4%), followed by those younger than 20 (33.5%). The vast majority of those who took part (74.6%) had at least a high school diploma, and nearly one-third (19.3%) had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Ninety-one percent of respondents were not married, while 7.5% were in a committed relationship. Instagram is used by 64.5% of tourists in Bangka Belitung to research attractions, followed by WhatsApp (11.9%) and Titktok (11.2%).
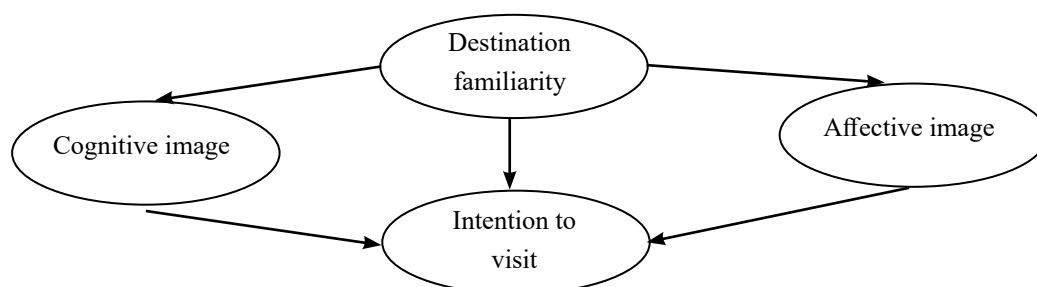

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Assessment of measurement model

When discussing the connections between a latent construct and its corresponding indicators, we talk about the measurement model. The PLS-SEM reflective measurement model is evaluated initially based on its internal consistency of reliability and validity of measures (Hair et al. 2017). Cronbach's values for construct reliability were above the cutoff of 0.70 and composite reliability (CR) values were within the range for all constructs (Hair et al. 2017), as reported by the measurement model results (Table 2).

Table 1. Demographic profile

n = 544	Catagories	n	%	n = 544	Catagories	n	%
Gender	Male	246	45.2	Marital Status	Single	498	91.5
	Female	298	54.8		Married	41	7.5
Age	Under 20 years	182	33.5		Divorce	5	0.9
	21-30 years	334	61.4	Most frequent	Instagram	351	64.5
	31-40 years	17	3.1	social media	Facebook	28	5.1
	41-50 years	8	1.5	for identifying	WhatsApp	65	11.9
	Above 51 years	3	0.6	tourist	Tiktok	61	11.2
Last Education	High School	406	74.6	destinations	Linkedn	2	0.4
	Diploma	24	4.4	in Bangka	Telegram	1	0.2
	Undergraduate	105	19.3	Belitung island	Others	36	6.6
	Postgraduate	9	1.7				

Table 2. Measurement model assessment results

Constructs/measured items	Loadings	AVE	α	CR
Cognitive Image				
Bangka Belitung has a wealth of cultural heritage sites that attract tourists.	0.766	0.651	0.817	0.838
The cultural assets of Bangka Belitung are exceptional.	0.781			
The scenery in Bangka Belitung is stunning.	0.765			
The culture of Bangka Belitung has been successfully preserved.	0.719			
There is a wide range of exotic and exciting tourist spots in Bangka Belitung.	0.801			
Affective Image				
Unpleasant – Pleasant traveling to Bangka Belitung	0.766	0.673	0.801	0.831
Difficult – Easy traveling to Bangka Belitung	0.739			
Sleepy – Arousing traveling to Bangka Belitung	0.800			
Bored – Excited traveling to Bangka Belitung	0.810			
Destination Familiarity				
It's great that I can learn about Bangka Belitung's attractions both online and offline, where the information is just as comprehensive.	0.791	0.719	0.680	0.800
As a result of my trip to Bangka Belitung, I have a better knowledge of its popular destinations.	0.818			
Intention to Visit				
Perhaps I will take a trip to Bangka Belitung.	0.854	0.809	0.800	0.853
I intend on taking a vacation to Bangka Belitung	0.853			

Convergent validity was supported by item loadings of all reflective indicators being greater than the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al. 2017; Kusumah, 2023) and AVE statistics for each construct ranging from 0.651 to 0.809 (Table 2), which are adequately above the suggested threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al. 2017). For discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion has been widely employed in the scientific community (Hair et al. 2017). However, the Fornell-Larcker criterion's efficacy in determining discriminant validity has come under fire from more recent studies (Henseler et al. 2015). To address this, Henseler et al. (2015) suggested the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations, which measures the degree to which associations between traits are correlated with associations within traits.

To evaluate discriminant validity in PLS-SEM, HTMT criterion is advised (Hair et al. 2017). Table 3 shows that all latent construct HTMT values are below the cutoff value of 0.90 (Henseler et al. 2015), ranging from 0.629 to 0.717. According to the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion, the constructs have no issues with discriminant validity.

Structural model and hypotheses testing results

The structural model analysis revealed that all hypothesized relationships were statistically significant and aligned with theoretical expectations (Table 4). Destination familiarity exerted a significant positive effect on intention to visit ($\beta = 0.247$, t = 4.728, p < 0.001), while cognitive image also influenced intention positively ($\beta = 0.266$, t = 5.180, p < 0.001). Beyond these direct effects on intention, familiarity had a strong impact on both dimensions of destination image, significantly predicting cognitive image ($\beta = 0.620$, t = 12.677, p < 0.001) and affective image ($\beta = 0.687$, t = 18.444, p < 0.001). These findings confirm that prior exposure to Bangka Belitung enhances both rational evaluations and emotional responses toward the destination, with a notably stronger effect on affective image than cognitive image. All path coefficients were significant at the 0.001 level, lending robust support to the hypothesized relationships. Taken together, familiarity, cognitive image, and affective image explained 61.8% of the variance in intention to visit, indicating satisfactory explanatory power of the model (see Figure 2). This level of explained variance highlights the importance of familiarity not only as a precursor of destination image but also as a direct driver of intention, while also emphasizing the complementary roles of cognitive and affective images in shaping tourist decision-making.

The purpose of this study, which built on prior studies, was to investigate the links between familiarity with a destination, cognitive and affective images of the destination, and the intent to travel there. The data we gathered lends credence to our assumptions, demonstrating that a more in-depth understanding of a destination and its features corresponds to a larger degree of familiarity with the destination gained from personal experience. As a result of having this information, a favorable affective image of the vacation spot has formed. Consumers' travel plans are influenced by cognitive and affective aspects of a destination's image.

Table 3. Results of Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	Affective Image	Cognitive Image	Destination Familiarity	Intention to Visit
Affective Image				
Cognitive Image	0.629			
Destination Familiarity	0.717	0.631		
Intention to Visit	0.703	0.636	0.697	

Table 4. Path coefficient results

|	Std. β	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Affective Image → Intention to Visit	0.378	7.099	p < 0.001	Supported
Cognitive Image → Intention to Visit	0.266	5.180	p < 0.001	Supported
Destination Familiarity → Affective Image	0.687	18.444	p < 0.001	Supported
Destination Familiarity → Cognitive Image	0.620	12.677	p < 0.001	Supported
Destination Familiarity → Intention to Visit	0.247	4.728	p < 0.001	Supported
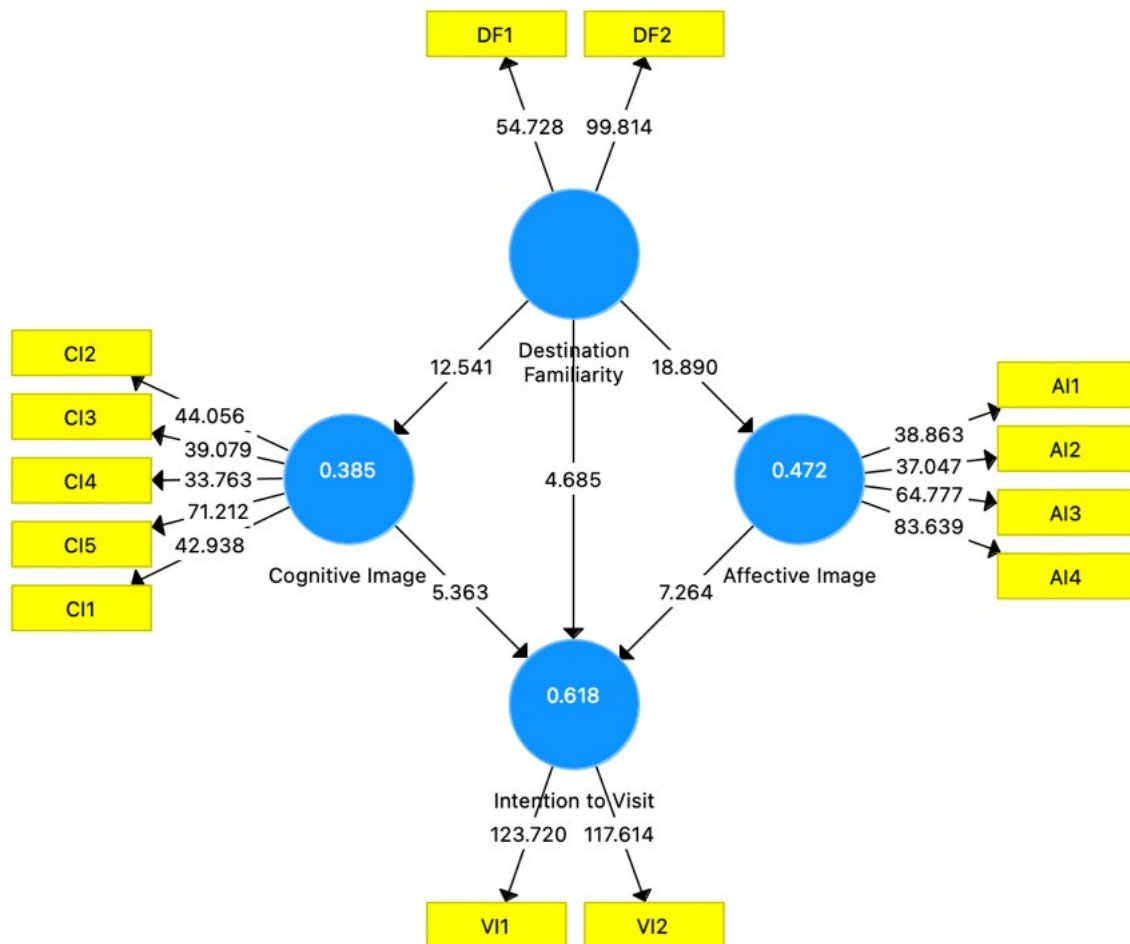
Figure 2. Bootstrapping Result

The findings of the current study add to our knowledge of how tourists' minds, hearts, and budgets work in regard to a vacation spot, which might help destinations with marketing challenges. The purpose of this study is to investigate the link between prior exposure to a destination and subsequent interest in visiting that destination. The findings provide credence to the hypothesis that the familiarity idea offers a useful theoretical framework for understanding consumers' attitudes and decisions in relation to travel destinations (Kim et al. 2019). Both the acknowledgement of familiarity as a crucial predictor and the insights into our understanding of destination image add to the current literature on variables that influence the intention to visit a particular site.

This study also aids in comprehending the idea of familiarity with one's destination. While prior research in the field of travel and tourism has acknowledged the significance of familiarity (Carneiro & Crompton, 2010; Tasci & Knutson, 2004), it has not gone into detail as to why familiarity of a site is so important. With the goal of understanding how familiarity influences people's perceptions and decisions, this study conducted an in-depth literature assessment of consumer behavior and psychology literature.

Furthermore, Hernandez-Mogollón et al. (2018) found that the findings suggest that the cognitive and affective parts of destination image are empirically distinct and that they influence destination image in various ways. Preference for a familiar destination was more significant than other factors. The results imply that customers' emotional associations with a destination are influenced more by real travel experiences at the destination than by rational judgements. In other words, visitors' direct experiences with a place were more influential in shaping their impressions of that place than any abstract knowledge they might have gained.

Managerial Implication

For destination marketers, a deeper comprehension of passengers' visit intent and the factors that influence that purpose is crucial. This study contributes significantly to that understanding (Jang et al. 2009). As we suspected, familiarity has a significant impact in encouraging customers to choose a destination for a future trip

and in creating positive image of that destination. The theorized links are further supported by research in the field of tourism, which suggests that an experience's excellent quality is what makes a particular product stand out. The findings imply that familiarity influences visit intentions via cognitive image, but predominantly via the affective image function. There will be more visitors to tourism hotspots on Bangka Belitung island that visitors feel are more familiar with. It follows that the general public's unfamiliarity with certain vacation spots likely contributes to the area's inability to draw in a sizable visitor population. While seeing advertising on the web, consumers may become aware of a certain location. Consumers' familiarity with destinations showcased in the media can be a driving force in the tourist industry. That's why it's crucial to implement a variety of marketing communication campaigns aimed at increasing familiarity with the destination among the demographic most likely to visit. Many forms of advertising and social media marketing can help achieve this goal.

This study further indicates that before planning, designing, or advertising a destination, marketers should determine how well acquainted potential visitors are with it. While conducting market research or surveys of tourists, for instance, it would be useful to ask about levels of familiarity as a means of categorizing respondents so that targeted marketing campaigns can be developed. The findings of this study show that familiarity with a tourist site is associated with a variety of various meanings for different people. It is possible for destination marketers to establish and modify appropriate promotional activities based on the familiarity of potential tourists with these destinations. In particular, as affective image was discovered to be a more powerful predictor in shaping visit intentions than cognitive image, destination marketers should search out effective strategies to appeal to consumers' emotions. Therefore, experiential familiarity had a more significant impact on affective image than did informational familiarity. Marketers should appeal to visitors' sentiments in order to make a sale, especially those who have been to the destination before and have some familiarity with it. Informational messages may be more effective at encouraging visits from people who aren't acquainted with the destination from personal experience.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study confirms that familiarity with the destination (Bangka Belitung) significantly influences both the cognitive and affective images of the destination, ultimately enhancing visit intention either directly through familiarity or indirectly via cognitive and affective images. These findings are consistent with previous studies but extend the understanding by distinguishing the effects of informational and experiential familiarity.

The study contributes to the literature by integrating the dual dimensions of destination image cognitive and affective into a unified framework. The results indicate that the affective image serves as a stronger mediator in the familiarity–intention relationship compared to the cognitive image, highlighting the critical role of emotional factors in tourism decision-making.

This study is limited by a non-random sample, predominantly consisting of respondents aged 21–30 years, and a cross-sectional design. Nevertheless, the use of PLS-SEM and discriminant validity assessment enhances the reliability of the findings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, destination marketers are encouraged to prioritize campaigns that enhance destination familiarity, particularly through social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. This recommendation is supported by the fact that 64.5% of respondents reported using these platforms to research travel destinations. Rather than focusing solely on delivering factual information, marketers should emphasize emotionally engaging content that stimulates affective responses. For instance, user-generated content such as travel vlogs and authentic visitor testimonials can be more effective in shaping positive affective images, which have shown a stronger influence on visit intention compared to cognitive images.

For future research, it is recommended to employ a longitudinal approach to better understand the causal relationships between familiarity, destination image, and visit intention. This would provide a more robust framework for testing the direction and

strength of these relationships over time. Additionally, incorporating potential moderating variables such as perceived risk, local culture, or travel experience may yield deeper insights into the mechanisms influencing tourist behavior. Expanding the sample to include international tourists is also necessary to evaluate the generalizability of the current findings and to explore whether cultural and regional differences affect the strength of these relationships.

From a policy perspective, local governments should collaborate with digital influencers and content creators to increase the destination's exposure, particularly to target groups with low familiarity, such as older age cohorts. Such partnerships could help bridge the familiarity gap and attract a wider demographic of potential visitors. Furthermore, governments should invest in supportive digital infrastructure, including virtual tours and interactive destination previews, to enhance informational familiarity and reduce uncertainty for prospective tourists prior to their visit.

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