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An Impact of Destination Marketing and Smart Tourism Applications on Tourist's Visit Intentions to Southern Africa

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Masters in Management in the field of Strategic Marketing

2023

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Declaration

I, Sherilee Steenkamp, student number 2556568, hereby declare that the work presented in this research paper titled "Destination Marketing, Smart Tourism Applications and Tourists' Intentions to Visit Southern Africa" is entirely my own. Any external sources utilized have been duly acknowledged and referenced. I affirm that this paper has not been submitted for any other academic assessment, and all data, information, or materials obtained from other works are appropriately cited.



Sherilee Steenkamp

Signed at Springs on the 27th day of February 2024.

Acknowledgements

With grace from above, this was made possible, and I would truly not have been able to do this on my own. All the glory goes to my saviour, God, for putting this drive and purpose in my heart so that I can make a difference in the world.

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Abstract

South Africa, a leading economy in Africa, faces challenges in its tourism sector despite its critical role in economic growth and employment. This study addresses the impact of destination marketing, focusing on digital marketing and user-generated content, and smart tourism applications like smart sightseeing, on tourists' visit intentions in Southern Africa. Using a quantitative approach with an online questionnaire administered to 402 international participants, the research investigates how these factors influence perceived destination image, attitude, and subjective norms. Findings reveal that digital marketing significantly enhances perceived destination image, which in turn positively affects tourists' attitudes. Familiarity also plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes, supporting existing theories on mere exposure. Moreover, attitude directly correlates with visit intention, supporting the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Subjective norms moderate this relationship, underscoring the influence of social approval on tourists' behavioural intentions. This study contributes insights into enhancing destination marketing and smart tourism strategies to strengthen Southern Africa's tourism sector.

Keywords: destination marketing, smart sightseeing, perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, subjective norms, and visit intention.

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Chapter 1: Overview & Background of the Study

1.1 Introduction

This study focuses on investigating the intricate dynamics influencing tourist visit intentions in Southern Africa amidst challenges and opportunities in the tourism sector. South Africa, positioned as one of Africa's most developed economies, relies significantly on tourism, contributing substantially to both its GDP and employment figures (Africanews, 2023). Despite its economic importance, the region faces persistent obstacles in attracting sustained tourist interest, exacerbated by factors such as inadequate technological infrastructure, ineffective smart tourism initiatives, and underdeveloped destination marketing strategies (Tourism News Africa, 2023; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023). This context underscores the critical need to explore the relationships between digital marketing, user-generated content, smart tourism applications, perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, and subjective norms. By understanding these relationships, this study aims to offer insights that can enhance marketing strategies and leverage technology to bolster tourist arrivals in Southern Africa.

South Africa, one of the most developed countries in Africa, boasts the second-strongest economy on the continent after Nigeria (Africanews, 2023). The country's diverse economy includes significant contributions from agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and services (Department of Tourism, 2023). Among these sectors, tourism stands out, significantly contributing to the GDP and providing substantial employment opportunities (Statista Research Department, 2023).

The South African tourism industry contributed 3.20% to the country’s GDP in 2021, considering the global tourism industry contributes 6.10% worldwide to the global GDP (Statista Research Department, 2023). The tourism industry in South Africa is employing just over 2.5 million people in South Africa directly and indirectly as recorded in 2021 which is a decrease in employment recorded the previous year due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Statista Research Department, 2024; Tourism News Africa, 2023). The industry is, however, expected to grow by 3.82% in the next four years after the pandemic

as part of the country's National Development Plan since the tourism sector has been identified as a priority sector in job creation, reducing inequality and poverty, and most importantly promoting economic growth (Department of Tourism, 2023).

South Africa has a diverse range of tourist attractions with something for everyone from its natural beauty in its beautiful coastlines, wildlife and scenic national parks, picturesque mountains, rich culture, and heritage sites including museums, art galleries, landmarks, and the well-known Table Mountain named as the 8th world wonder to name a few, drawing the attention of tourists from all over the world (South African National Parks, n.d.).

Despite its significant contribution to the economy and its flourishing tourist attractions, the South African tourism industry was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the travel restrictions imposed both locally and internationally, resulting in a marked decline in tourist arrivals since 2020 (Statista Research Department, 2023; World Tourism Organisation, 2023). The pandemic led to the permanent closure of numerous businesses within the industry, with the repercussions felt throughout the entire value chain (International Monetary Fund, 2024). However, with the lifting of travel restrictions and the implementation of a recovery plan by the South African government, the tourism sector is showing signs of recovery, as indicated by recent statistics (Statista Research Department, 2023). Although the pandemic had a severe impact on the global tourism sector, additional factors continue to pose challenges, negatively affecting visit intentions (Technofunc, 2023).

Beyond the pandemic-related challenges outlined in the Department of Tourism's annual performance plan for 2022-2023, various economic, political, and environmental issues also influence international tourists' visit intentions (Department of Tourism, 2023; Tourism News Africa, 2023; World Tourism Organisation, 2023). These challenges include load shedding, crime and tourist safety, poorly maintained infrastructure, corruption, mismanagement of tourism investments, neglected tourism attractions such as museums and heritage sites, lack of advanced technology, an unfocused approach to destination marketing, and the misapplication of smart tourism initiatives (Department of Tourism, 2023; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023; Revfine, 2021).

Collectively, these issues significantly impact the visit intentions of international tourists, preventing the sector from achieving its full capacity and potential.

In this study, not all challenges affecting the South African tourism sector will be addressed; instead, the focus will be on those applicable to the research objectives. Specifically, the challenges to be examined include the lack of advanced technologies, the misapplication of smart tourism, the mismanagement of tourism investment funds, neglected tourism attractions, and the lack of a strategic approach to destination marketing. These particular challenges have been selected due to their direct impact on the sector's recovery and potential for growth which is also the focus of the sector's recovery plan by the Department of Tourism (Department of Tourism, 2023).

The recent appointment of Patricia de Lille as the Minister of Tourism in March 2023 presents prospects for a sector recovery. Minister de Lille has announced that her primary focus will be on destination marketing, aiming to increase the number of visitors to South Africa and boost local employment (Department of Tourism, 2023). Her experience in managing the country's top tourist destinations positions her to implement a strategic approach towards destination marketing and the effective use of smart tourism to enhance both local and international visit intentions (Department of Tourism, 2023).

To provide a clearer rationale for this focus, the challenges can be categorized into specific groupings as shown in Table 1 below. This table also justifies why these particular challenges have been chosen for this study and are further discussed in detail under Chapter 2. It is evident that the tourism sector plays a crucial role in the country's economy and is a significant contributor to the GDP, therefore, it is important to explore the challenges faced in the sector to address these challenges or mitigate their impact on the visit intention while further improving the sectors' application of smart tourism to improve the destination marketing of the country.

Table 1.1: Tourism Sector Challenges

Category	Challenge	Rationale for Inclusion

Technology, Innovation & Digitalisation	Lack of advanced technologies	Directly impacts the competitiveness and modernization of the tourism sector (Lindner, Miloff, Zetterlund, Reuterskiöld, Anderson & Carbring, 2019).
Smart Tourism Applications	Misapplication of smart tourism	Influences the effectiveness of tourism strategies and visitor experiences (World Tourism Organisation, 2023).
Financial Management	Mismanagement of tourism investment funds	Affects the financial sustainability and development of tourism infrastructure (Knott, 2023).
Infrastructure & Tourist Attractions	Unmaintained infrastructure, Access to basic services and neglected tourism attractions	Directly impacts the attractiveness and maintenance of key tourist sites (Tourism News Africa, 2023).
Destination Marketing	Lack of strategic approach to destination marketing	Affects the ability to attract and retain tourists, thereby influencing overall visitor numbers and economic benefits (Department of Tourism, 2023).

The tourism sector in Southern Africa serves as a crucial driver of economic development, making substantial contributions to both employment and GDP (Africanews, 2023). Despite its economic significance, the region encounters persistent challenges in attracting sustained tourist interest. Issues such as inadequate technological infrastructure, ineffective implementation of smart tourism initiatives, and a lack of effective destination marketing strategies have impeded the sector's growth trajectory (Tourism News Africa, 2023; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023). Recent advancements in digital marketing and smart tourism applications have emerged as pivotal tools to enhance visitor experiences and intentions (George, 2019). Digital marketing efforts, including targeted advertising and user-generated content, play a pivotal role in shaping the perceived image of destinations and

fostering familiarity among potential tourists (Draper, 2015). Concurrently, smart tourism applications, particularly those facilitating interactive and personalized experiences, augment visitor satisfaction and engagement by providing real-time information and itinerary planning tools. These technological integrations not only enhance convenience but also positively influence tourists' perceptions and inclinations towards destination choices (European Union, 2022).

A positive destination image fosters favourable attitudes, making tourists more likely to choose the destination for their travels (Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2014). Familiarity with the destination, gained through repeated exposure to its marketing and content, further reinforces these positive attitudes. Subjective norms, encompassing the influence of social circles and societal expectations, also play a crucial role in shaping visit intentions (Copeland & Zhao, 2020). When potential tourists perceive that their friends, family, or social groups approve of and recommend the destination, their likelihood of visiting increases. This study aims to explore the impact of these tools on tourist visit intentions to Southern Africa by examining the interplay between digital marketing, user-generated content, smart tourism applications, perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, and subjective norms. Understanding these relationships will provide valuable insights for enhancing marketing strategies and leveraging technology to boost tourist arrivals in Southern Africa.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The South African tourism sector shows significant discrepancies when compared to other countries. Ranked 135th globally, South Africa attracts only 0.065 tourists per resident (World Data, 2023). Despite substantial growth from 6 million visitors in 2000 to 10.2 million in 2019, the sector still lags behind international standards, including those of developing countries like Indonesia, which effectively utilize smart tourism applications (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023). The Tourism 2022 report by Statistics South Africa reveals a severe decline in tourist numbers, with a 72.6% drop from 10,228,593 in 2019 to 2,802,320 in 2020, and a further 19.5% decline between 2020 and 2021. However, a significant increase of 152.6% was observed from 2,255,699 tourists in 2021 to 5,698,062 in 2022 (Statistics South Africa, 2023). These fluctuations

highlight the instability of the sector and underscore the need for strategic interventions to enhance its global competitiveness.

Given the substantial economic impact of the tourism sector, which plays a pivotal role in the national economy, coupled with the sector's ongoing recovery from the pandemic, understanding the correlation between smart tourism, destination marketing, and visit intention in Southern Africa becomes imperative. The recent appointment of Patricia de Lille as Minister of Tourism emphasizes the current strategic focus on revitalizing and enhancing the sector's competitiveness. Therefore, exploring these relationships is crucial not only for academic inquiry but also for informing practical strategies aimed at strengthening Southern Africa's position in the global tourism market.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of smart tourism, destination marketing, and factors influencing visit intention. However, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding a comprehensive synthesis and analysis of these factors' combined effects. This gap presents an opportunity for further exploration and a deeper understanding of visitor behaviour. Recent literature suggests that smart tourism applications, such as smart tourism management and smart sightseeing, positively impact visit intention (Tavitiyaman, Qu, Tsang, & Lam, 2021). For example, a study in Spain in 2020 found that online marketing through social media, blogs, and similar platforms creates a pre-experience for tourists, positively influencing their behavioral intentions (Ferrer-Rosell & Marin-Roig, 2020). Another study highlighted a positive relationship between online interactions and tourists' behavioral intentions (Barreto, Rubio, Campo, & Molinillo, 2019). Despite numerous studies establishing a positive correlation between smart tourism applications and visit intention (Bolin, 2021; Rafdinal, Susanto, Novianti & Juniarti, 2021; Susanto, Novianti, Rafdinal, Prawira & Septyandi, 2020), there is a lack of literature exploring this phenomenon in Southern Africa.

The constructs of destination marketing, user-generated content, perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, subjective norms, and visit intention have been extensively studied in various contexts. Common research methodologies include theoretical frameworks like the Technology Acceptance Model, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and the Theory of Reasoned Action.

For instance, Rafdinal et al. (2021) used the Technology Acceptance Model to examine smart tourism technology in predicting tourism destination visits in West Java, Indonesia, with a sample size of 324 tourists. Pereira et al. (2019) explored the impact of travel motivation on tourists' attitudes towards destinations, incorporating the Theory of Image and the Theory of Planned Behaviour with a sample size of 350. Al-Gasawneh and Al-Adamat (2020) investigated the relationship between perceived destination image, social media interaction, and travel intentions for Neom City, employing multiple theoretical frameworks with a sample size of 150.

Other relevant studies include Mendes-Filho et al. (2020) on the impact of user-generated content on travel planning using the Technology Acceptance Model with a sample size of 268. Nguyen and Tong (2022) on user-generated content and travel destination selection intentions with a sample size of 407. Sultan et al. (2021) on social media-based content's impact on image formation for sustainable destinations with a sample size of 425. Soliman (2019) extended the Theory of Planned Behaviour to predict tourism destination revisit intention with a sample size of 302. Shen et al. (2020) explored smart technologies' influence on the customer journey in tourist attractions within the smart tourism management framework, using a sample size of 503. Susanto et al. (2020) studied smart tourism technology's influence on visiting tourism destinations with a sample size of 324. Tavitiyaman et al. (2021) examined smart tourism applications' influence on perceived destination image and behavioural intention, using a substantial sample size of 1484.

The hypotheses in this study are developed to observe the influence of smart tourism and destination marketing on visit intention in Southern Africa, considering perceived destination image, attitude, and subjective norms. These hypotheses are based on previous literature, industry trends, and market data. Chapter 3 discusses the relationships between these constructs in detail, Chapter 5 evaluates the hypotheses through data analysis and interpretation, and Chapter 6 discusses the findings, contributing to the existing literature and providing practical insights for the tourism industry.

By addressing the identified gaps and synthesizing previous findings, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing visit intention in Southern Africa. This understanding will inform strategic interventions to enhance the region's global competitiveness and support the recovery and growth of the tourism sector.

1.2.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of destination marketing, with a focus on digital marketing and user-generated content as well as smart tourism applications (specifically smart sightseeing), in influencing tourists' visit intention to Southern Africa while considering the impact that tourists' attitude and subjective norms have on the visit intention.

1.2.2 Research Questions

The following research questions have been derived from the research problem as well as the research purpose in context of the study further discussed in Chapter 2.

i. To what extent does destination marketing and smart tourism sightseeing influence visit intention?
ii. To what extent does subjective norms moderate the relationship between attitude and visit intention?

1.2.3 Research Objectives

The following research objectives have been derived from the research problem as well as the research purpose in context of the study further discussed in Chapter 2 and illustrated in Figure 3.

i. To assess the relationship between destination marketing and perceived destination image
ii. To investigate the relationship between destination marketing and familiarity
iii. To evaluate the effect of perceived destination marketing and familiarity on attitude and in turn visit intention

iv. To determine the relationship between smart tourism sightseeing and destination visit intention.

v. To assess the moderating role of subjective norms between attitude and visit intention.

1.3 Ethical Considerations

The online questionnaire was conducted anonymously while no personal information is required ensuring that the participants will be respected throughout the study. The target population for this study consist of international tourists over the age of 18 who is not from or currently residing in Southern Africa. For the purpose of this study the following definition of a tourist from the Oxford Dictionary (2023) is used: “a person who is travelling or visiting a place for pleasure”, which relates to individuals traveling to a destination away from where they reside for leisure purposes. Measures are taken to ensure that all research questions are answered truthfully and completed in full to eliminate any data discrepancies. The selected sample from the population has the right to withdraw or refuse to participate in the study without any consequences. A consistent measuring instrument is utilized to ensure that the analysed data is reliable and eliminate potential human error by using an online analysis software program.

1.4 Organisation of the Study

Below is an outline detailing the document's structure and a summary of each chapter:

Chapter 1: Overview & Background of The Study. This chapter introduces the research at hand with an overview of the research problem, purpose, questions, and objectives.

Chapter 2: Tourism Industry: Global & Southern Africa Viewpoint & Theoretical Grounding. This chapter gives background information on the tourism industry across the globe as well as more insights into the tourism industry in Southern Africa highlighting current news, challenges, and opportunities while showcasing the latest available statistics of the industry. This chapter further offers a comprehensive discussion of the theories being used within this study while further exploring additional literature on the

constructs being studied. The discussion on the conceptual model and hypotheses will be further explored within this chapter giving more insight into the phenomena being studied.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approach. The research methodology used to conduct the research will be discussed within this chapter with comprehensive detail on the research approach,- design, populations, sample size, collection method, etc.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Interpretation. This chapter discusses the research results and further explore the hypothesis testing to conclude the research results and whether the research questions have been answered.

Chapter 5: Findings & Results Discussion. This chapter will discuss the data analysis and interpretation of Chapter 5 in greater detail to gain an understanding of the findings and provide insights into the research.

Chapter 6: Recommendations & Conclusion. The final chapter concludes the research while giving recommendations for future studies.

1.5 Conclusion

The following study explores the tourism industry from a marketing perspective, focusing on the Southern African tourism market to determine the extent to which smart tourism applications and destination marketing influence tourists' visit intention to Southern Africa. This quantitative study aims to gain an understanding of the relationship between smart tourism applications in destination marketing and their influence on visit intention, enabling effective application in the tourism industry while further exploring how current industry challenges can be overcome. The following chapter provides more insight into the global and local tourism market with additional information on current performance as well as challenges.

Chapter 2: Tourism Industry- Global & Southern Africa Viewpoint & Theoretical Grounding

2.1 Introduction

The tourism industry can be defined as the short-term travel of individuals to locations other than their usual place of residence for purposes such as business, social engagement, or leisure (Revfine, 2021). It is a multifaceted sector that significantly drives many global economies, involving a diverse range of industries. According to the World Tourism Organisation (2023), an individual is considered a tourist when they travel to a location other than where they reside for a period longer than one day but less than a year.

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the global tourism industry's performance and challenges, with a specific focus on the African market. It explores the unique challenges and growth factors within the Southern African market, discussing current industry trends and obstacles. The chapter aims to contextualize these issues within the broader framework of the study's objectives.

A comprehensive discussion of the theoretical foundations incorporated within this study will follow, explaining the premises of the selected theories, their suitability, and the challenges they present. This includes an exploration of key constructs such as destination marketing, smart tourism applications, perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, and subjective norms. Previous research and literature will be reviewed to provide context and support for these constructs.

Finally, the relationships between the various constructs will be analysed to facilitate the development of the study's hypotheses. This analysis will provide a foundation for understanding how destination marketing and smart tourism applications influence tourists' visit intentions in Southern Africa, thereby addressing the study's primary research objectives.

2.2 Introduction to the Tourism Industry

The tourism industry involves the temporary movement of individuals to destinations outside their usual residence for purposes such as business, social interaction, or leisure (Revfine, 2021). This chapter extensively explores the global tourism industry's performance and challenges, with specific emphasis on the African and Southern African markets. It investigates growth factors and challenges briefly discussed in Chapter 1, which will be further elaborated on, alongside current industry trends.

The expansion of the tourism sector is driven by globalization, improved communication technologies, and a globally interconnected world fostering a desire for cultural immersion and experiential travel (World Tourism Organisation, 2023). Economically, tourism significantly contributes to GDP across many nations, often ranking as the largest employment sector, offering diverse job opportunities spanning various skill levels and educational backgrounds. For instance, the tourism sector contributed 3.20% to South Africa’s GDP in 2021, underscoring its economic significance despite pandemic-related challenges (Statista Research Department, 2023).

Infrastructure development is essential for enhancing visitor experiences and facilitating ease of travel, alongside conservation efforts aimed at preserving natural and cultural heritage sites, pivotal for tourism attraction (Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development, 2023). In 2022, the tourism sector in South Africa employed over 2.5 million people directly and indirectly, reflecting its role as a major job creator (Statista Research Department, 2023).

Moreover, the tourism industry stimulates economic growth through multiple revenue streams, including foreign exchange earnings, cultural exchanges, and diversification of national economies (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). It also motivates developing countries to improve living standards, infrastructure, and industrialization to enhance their attractiveness as tourist destinations.

Sector-specific contributions to the tourism economy include transportation, encompassing airlines, car rentals, maritime, and public transport services, crucial for facilitating tourist mobility (Revfine, 2021). Accommodation options such as hotels, Airbnb rentals, hostels, and lodges, alongside the food and beverage sector with restaurants and catering services, play pivotal roles in hospitality (Global Connect, 2023). Entertainment services like tourist attractions, casinos, shopping, and leisure activities further enrich the tourism experience, bolstering ancillary industries such as financial services and tour operators (Revfine, 2021).

Emerging trends in the tourism industry include a growing emphasis on sustainable travel practices to minimize carbon footprints and technology integration, notably through smart tourism applications like voice-controlled services, contactless payments, virtual reality experiences, and personalized travel recommendations (Revfine, 2021). Countries embracing these trends effectively enhance their appeal to tourists seeking both convenience and enriched travel experiences.

Recent advancements in digital marketing and smart tourism applications have emerged as pivotal tools to enhance visitor experiences and intentions (George, 2019). Digital marketing efforts, including targeted advertising and user-generated content, play a crucial role in shaping the perceived image of destinations and fostering familiarity among potential tourists (Draper, 2015). Concurrently, smart tourism applications, particularly those facilitating interactive and personalized experiences, augment visitor satisfaction and engagement by providing real-time information and itinerary planning tools. These technological integrations not only enhance convenience but also positively influence tourists' perceptions and inclinations towards destination choices (European Union, 2022).

A positive destination image fosters favourable attitudes, making tourists more likely to choose the destination for their travels (Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2014). Familiarity with the destination, gained through repeated exposure to its marketing and content, further reinforces these positive attitudes. Subjective norms, encompassing the influence of social circles and societal expectations, also play a crucial role in shaping visit intentions (Copeland & Zhao, 2020). When potential tourists perceive that their friends,

family, or social groups approve of and recommend the destination, their likelihood of visiting increases.

This study aims to explore the impact of these tools on tourist visit intentions to Southern Africa by examining the interplay between digital marketing, user-generated content, smart tourism applications, perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, and subjective norms. Understanding these relationships will provide valuable insights for enhancing marketing strategies and leveraging technology to boost tourist arrivals in Southern Africa.

In conclusion, understanding these dynamics within the tourism industry is essential for stakeholders to navigate the complexities of global and regional tourism markets effectively. This chapter sets the stage for further exploration into the theoretical frameworks underpinning tourist behaviour, the relevance of current industry practices, and strategic responses to emerging challenges and opportunities.

2.3 Overview of the Global Tourism Industry

2.3.1 Global Market Performance

The global tourism industry experienced substantial growth, with France ranking as the most visited country in 2019 with 117.11 million tourists across the world (World Data, 2020). However, this growth was abruptly interrupted by the global pandemic and subsequent travel restrictions. According to The World Travel & Tourism Council (2023), there was a notable recovery in the sector globally, with a 22% increase in GDP reported from 2021 to 2022, reaching a 7.6% share of global GDP. This recovery represents a significant rebound, though still 23% below pre-pandemic levels in 2019. The travel and tourism sector also contributed to 22 million job creations in 2022, marking a 7.9% increase from the previous year. Between 2014 and 2019, the sector accounted for 1 in 5 job creations globally, contributing 10.3% to total employment opportunities, although this figure has slightly decreased compared to pre-pandemic levels (The World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023).

France continued to lead globally as the most visited country in 2022, welcoming 82.6 million visitors (Global Connect, 2023). Figure 1 illustrates the global GDP change and job creation in 2022, providing a visual representation of the sector's recovery post-pandemic.

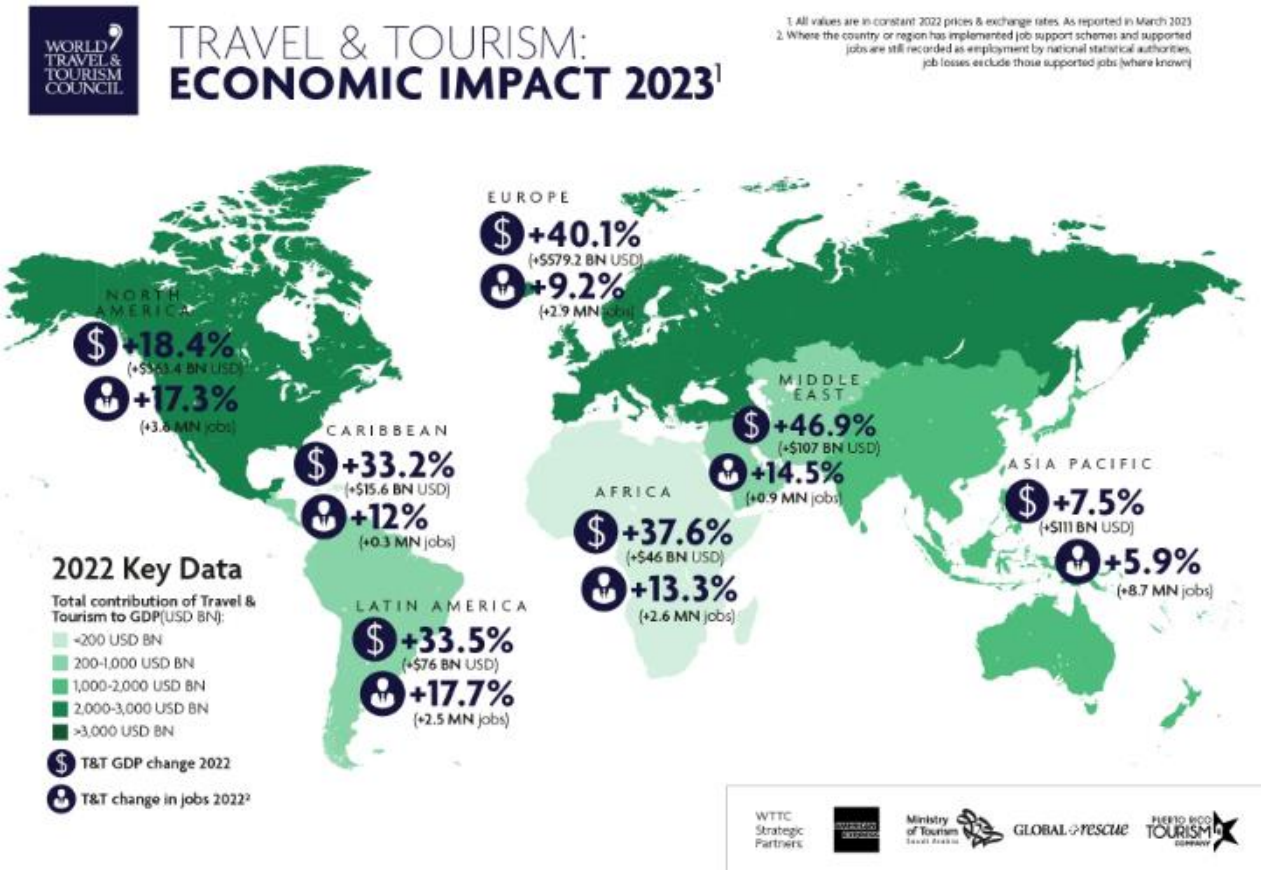


Figure 1: Travel & Tourism: Economic Impact (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023).

2.3.2 Global Market Challenges

The tourism industry experienced exceptional growth since 1980 and with the continuous advancements in globalisation, the tourism industry reached exceptional numbers of nearly 1.5 billion international arrivals across the globe in 2019 (Richter, 2023). However, despite the growth of the industry over the years and the significant comeback after the pandemic, some global market challenges hinder the industry. Currently, the biggest challenges in the tourism industry include the recovery from the pandemic, taxation and inflation, infrastructure, security, travel marketing and the use of technology, as well as cross-border regulations (Technofunc, 2023).

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the tourism industry globally with travel restrictions and caused numerous job losses, and businesses to permanently close (Neb, 2022). Although the travel restrictions have been lifted, millions of consumers were financially impacted by the pandemic meaning they cannot necessarily afford to travel like they used to before 2020. With area outbreaks, countries are placed on lockdown again meaning tourists cannot visit the country and residents cannot visit other destinations while nearly 70% of tourists are reported to avoid travelling to certain destinations (Neb, 2022).

Sector Taxation & Inflation

Furthermore, the taxation of the tourism industry causes challenges and hinders the industry as various taxes are levied across the industry from tour operators, transportation, and service tax to name a few which are passed onto the tourists (travellers) making it expensive to travel frequently and for some consumers, making it unaffordable to travel at all (Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development, 2023). Some other challenges contribute to the taxation challenge of the industry such as the continuous fluctuation in the exchange rates, inflation, and seasonal dependency (Neb, 2022). Another major challenge in the industry is the continuous rise in inflation as service providers in the industry need to increase their prices to combat the increasing inflation meaning the final costs are again passed onto the tourists hindering the industry revenue as 49% of consumers reported that they do not feel confident in their travel plans due to inflation (Neb, 2022).

Infrastructure & Tourist Attractions

Infrastructure plays a crucial role in the experience of tourists when visiting a new destination and when the infrastructure is insufficient tourists are less likely to visit the destination or would warn other tourists not to visit the destination which could cause reputational damage to a destination and its perceived image (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022). Furthermore, insufficient infrastructure will reduce the capacity of

tourists a country or destination can accommodate hindering the growth of the industry in that area (Neb, 2022).

Security

Security will be a continuous concern when tourists travel to new or unknown destinations especially when traveling to an area with a toxic political climate or where terrorist groups are active (Technofunc, 2023). Furthermore, natural disasters can also increase the security risk for tourists. Additionally, the cross-border regulations also pose challenges to the industry and to tourists with lengthy visa application processes or the lack of information resulting in denied applications or problematic paperwork (Neb, 2022).

Destination Marketing & Technology, Innovation & Digitalisation

Lastly, destination marketing and the use of technology in the industry is currently a challenge due to the fast advancements in technology such as smart tourism applications and the communication thereof to tourists and furthermore the implementation of these applications to attract tourists (Lindner, et al., 2019). Additionally, with the use of social media, tourists or influencers create their content about a destination from their personal experience and perspective which could sometimes cause damage as the content creator might not have had a good experience or dislikes the offering and then communicates that to other tourists who would likely buy into their opinion without further researching or trying it themselves (Zhang, Saengon, Pungnirund, & Kortana, 2022).

Despite the above-discussed challenges, the tourism industry is on the rise again, and with collaboration, some challenges could be used as opportunities to positively impact the performance of the industry.

2.4 Overview of the Tourism Industry in Africa

2.4.1 The African Market Performance

International arrivals across Africa increased by 171% in July 2022 compared to the previous year. In this context, Tanzania emerged as the second most popular tourist destination in Africa, attracting over 400,000 visitors (Okafor, 2023; Further Africa, 2023). Notably, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Morocco held the top position as the most visited African country, welcoming 12.3 million visitors in 2019 (Further Africa, 2023). In contrast, Egypt was the most visited African country in 2022, with 11.7 million tourists (Further Africa, 2023).

The World Travel & Tourism Council (2022) forecasts that the GDP of the tourism sector for Africa will grow at an average rate of 6.8% annually until 2032, while further predicting the creation of 1.4 million employment opportunities per year. These projections underscore the significant potential for recovery and growth in Africa's tourism industry, especially as tourism leaders prioritize addressing current challenges and achieving sustainable growth (World Tourism Organisation, 2023).

Numerous reports indicate immense growth potential for Africa’s travel and tourism sector, suggesting that the gap between current and pre-pandemic levels is closing. This optimistic outlook is bolstered by projected GDP and employment growth, highlighting the industry's critical role in the continent's economic development (World Tourism Organisation, 2023). The focus has shifted from merely increasing tourist numbers to establishing sustainable growth practices across the continent, ensuring long-term benefits for both the industry and local communities.

In this context, the study aims to investigate the specific growth factors and challenges unique to the Southern African tourism market, aligning with the broader objectives of enhancing the sector's competitiveness and sustainability. By examining these factors in detail, the research seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and inform strategic interventions that can support the ongoing recovery and development of the tourism industry in Southern Africa.

2.4.2 The African Market Challenges

The Conference on Rethinking Africa: Rethinking Tourism for Africa is a collaborative initiative aimed at improving the performance of the African tourism market by addressing the challenges hindering its growth (World Tourism Organisation, 2023). Although the global challenges experienced in the tourism industry are also felt in Africa, the continent faces additional, more pressing issues such as the lack of innovation, safety and health concerns, limited digitalisation, and a lack of differentiation in the experiences offered to tourists. Furthermore, foreign tourism investors are increasingly cautious, with a significant decrease of 63% in executed projects compared to 2019 (Irwin-Hunt, 2022).

Technology, Innovation, and Digitalisation

Despite the implementation and enhancement of smart tourism applications, there remains a substantial need for digitalisation to instill trust in foreign direct investment (FDI) from hotels, airlines, and other industry sectors (World Tourism Organisation, 2023). Digitalisation not only allows tourists to gather relevant information and become aware of previously unknown destinations but also aids in booking trips to African countries. Differentiation can be achieved by showcasing the unique experiences and attractions Africa offers, effectively communicated through digital platforms. This innovation is crucial for positioning Africa as a distinct tourist destination (Okafor, 2023). Although the current digitalisation landscape in Africa presents challenges, it also offers opportunities when approached with the right skills and resources.

Safety Concerns

Safety remains a significant concern for international tourists, with numerous incidents in recent years including terrorism, kidnappings, hijackings, and petty theft. These safety issues create a distrust among tourists, deterring them from visiting destinations across the continent (Further Africa, 2023).

According to the World Tourism Organisation (2023), the purpose of the Mauritius Declaration is “to promote sustainable and resilient tourism ecosystems through multi-sectoral partnerships, ethical practices, investment promotion, nature-based solutions,

decarbonization, coordination of public health, policy alignment, and data-driven decision-making."

The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of destination marketing, with a focus on digital marketing and user-generated content, as well as smart tourism applications, specifically smart sightseeing, in influencing tourists' visit intention to Southern Africa. Additionally, the research will consider the impact of tourists' attitudes and subjective norms on their visit intention. By addressing the study objectives, the study aims to provide an understanding of the factors influencing tourism in Africa and Southern Africa. This understanding will contribute to the development of strategic interventions designed to enhance the region's tourism industry, thereby improving its global competitiveness and supporting its economic growth.

2.5 Overview of the Tourism Industry in South Africa

2.5.1 The South Africa Market Performance

In 2022 the travel and tourism industry contributed 6.3% to the total GDP of the country and is forecasted to contribute 6.8% in 2023 (South African Tourism, 2023). Tourist arrivals in South Africa increased by 152,6% in 2022 compared to 2021 with more than 5 million arrivals. The 2023 forecasted performance will be 1% behind compared to 2019 if achieved indicating that the tourism industry in South Africa is busy recovering after the pandemic and with various initiatives, the industry in South Africa is expected to grow significantly going forward (Tourism News Africa, 2023). In 2022 95.3% of tourists visited South Africa for leisure whilst business-related travel accounted for 3.9% while most international tourists came from the United Kingdom and from Africa to South Africa most tourists came from Zimbabwe (World Data, 2023).

Despite the closing gap in the GDP contribution, tourist arrivals are still 44.3% below the arrivals compared to 2019, however, the numbers are gradually increasing with a strategic focus in place since the newly appointed minister of tourism, Patricia De Lille, implemented a tourism recovery plan with various tourism campaigns already executed to attract international tourists (Government of South Africa, 2023).

The travel and tourism industry further accounted for 8.4% of employment in 2022 and is forecasted to contribute 8.7% of employment across sectors within the industry which is estimated 1.3 million jobs in 2023 slightly below 2019 levels with an 8.3% difference (South African Tourism, 2023).

Below is a graph demonstrating the international arrivals to South Africa from 2019 until June 2023 indicating the decrease during the pandemic and the increase as the industry is recovering.

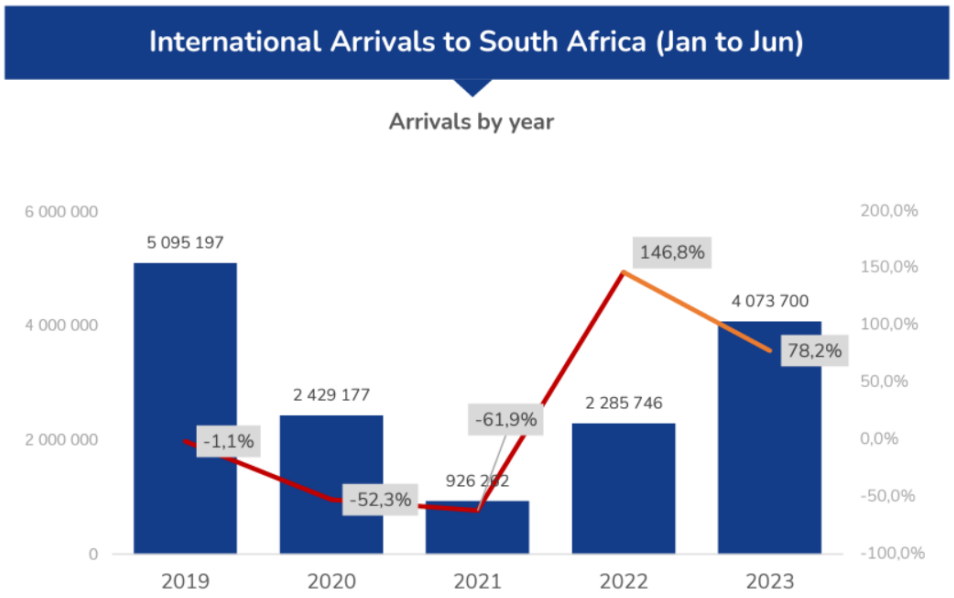


Figure 2: International Arrivals to South Africa (South African Tourism, 2023).

South Africa's brand performance has also increased this year, 2023, with the intention to visit at 17% compared to 14% in 2019 although the awareness decreased from 75% in 2019 to 67% in 2023, however, the positivity rate remains stable at 40% and the information search at 24% similar to the rates in 2019 (Department of Tourism, 2023).

2.5.2 Growth Factors of the Tourism Industry in South Africa

As a result of the reconstruction and recovery plan outlined by the recently appointed minister of tourism, Patricia De Lille, in March 2023 numerous growth factors have emerged to help boost the travel and tourism industry in South Africa such as the emphasis on destination marketing with various tourism campaigns, smart sightseeing, the focus on tourism and green investments, and various other factors outside of the plan such as the 8th world wonder, the preference of international tourists, sporting events

and more (Tourism News Africa, 2023). However, the appointment of Patricia De Lille can also be seen as a growth factor for the tourism industry as she has a vast portfolio of experience and previously managed the tourism capital of South Africa, as the mayor of Cape Town (Department of Tourism, 2023).

Cape Town Tourism, South Africa's globally praised Destination Marketing and Management Organisation (DMO), launched a new inclusive initiative to help create tourism experiences for all by giving equal opportunities and access to the destination by launching braille touchpoints at various tourist attractions and QR codes with access to audio content describing the attraction (I Love South Africa, 2023). This is a big leap forward in terms of smart sightseeing and smart tourism applications in South Africa not only for local tourists but also for international tourists making the tourist attractions more accessible. Ideally, this initiative will be rolled out across the country in the near future.

Although it has been some time since Table Mountain joined the list of world wonders, it remains an attraction point for international tourists year-round. Recently, Cape Town has also ranked as the second-best destination in Africa for solo travellers with Mauritius taking the top spot in Africa with a 3% higher ranking than the South African tourist capital (Ajam, 2023). Rankings and preferences like these create awareness about the tourist attractions located in Southern Africa which is a growth factor for the industry.

Lastly, there has been a series of marketing campaigns and destination marketing activities taking place since the appointment of Patricia De Lille reiterating her objective to focus efforts on destination marketing to grow the industry (Department of Tourism, 2023). South African Tourism launched a campaign aimed at US travellers to create awareness and interest in visiting Cape Town by using expats from the US who visited the province and decided to stay (I Love South Africa, 2023). The campaign objectives were not only to increase awareness and visit intention but to further increase trade and investment as well as job creation.

Furthermore, the national rugby team’s captain, Siya Kolisi has been named one of South Africa Tourism’s official ambassadors and created a campaign together with SA

Tourism UK to showcase the beauty of the country and its offering aimed at travellers in the United Kingdom while also aiming to lure South African expats back home for the holidays (Baxter, 2023). The Tourism Marketing Conference also took place this September 2023 where industry stakeholders came together on the topic of industry trends, strategies, and innovations in marketing tourism (Swart, 2023).

Together with the official destination marketing efforts by the Department of Tourism, user-generated content from micro to macro-influencers it is increasingly making an impact in the industry where lesser-known destinations and tourist offerings are showcased creating interest not only locally but also for international travellers (Swart, 2023).

With numerous other growth factors in the industry, the above-discussed can be summarised as the leading growth drivers in the industry.

2.5.3 Challenges of the Tourism Industry in South Africa

Despite the numerous growth factors in favour of the travel and tourism industry in South Africa, some persisting challenges threaten the industry's growth making international tourists hesitant to visit the destination. South Africa faces similar challenges to those encountered by the global and African tourism industries, as previously discussed. However, there are also distinct challenges specific to South Africa, which will be briefly examined in the following section.

Infrastructure & Tourist Attractions

The South African energy crisis, locally known as loadshedding causes various challenges including frustration amongst tourists as it disrupts their activities, delays their travel plans, or causes otherwise inconvenience creating a poor experience (Department of Tourism, 2023). Loadshedding not only affects the tourists but also the Organisations within the industry as they need to cut down on energy consumption and spend money for either solar panels or generators to accommodate tourists (South African Tourism, 2023). Organisations that can afford solar energy or generators take preference when tourists book accommodation or other activities, however, the challenge persists as those

Organisations that cannot afford alternative solutions cannot continue their operations during loadshedding despite having to pay their staff for that time (Tourism News Africa, 2023).

Financial Management

Furthermore, the mismanagement of funds and corruption alarms investors and tourists causing them to be hesitant about investing in South Africa or traveling to the country for example, a sponsorship worth R900 million was attempted by South Africa Tourism to sponsor the Tottenham Hotspur football club despite the misalignment of the sponsorship with the objectives of the department (Knott, 2023). After the appointment of Patricia De Lille, the proposed sponsorship was disregarded as it did not align with the mission and vision the department set out for the industry. Although the sponsorship did not take place, the mismanagement of funds or spending without a clear objective aligned within the industry causes distrust among external stakeholders (Knott, 2023). Many other challenges play a role in the industry, however, are experienced throughout Africa and globally.

2.6 Other Related Info

The tourism industry has changed quite significantly in the last few years and many more trends are emerging. Younger tourists prioritise travel above previously traditional norms such as settling down with property while more and more tourists are taking on full-time traveling or working while traveling referred to as digital nomads (Revfine, 2023). Digital nomads work remotely from wherever they are and have been widely adopted after the pandemic where people slow travel while working (Further Africa, 2023). Furthermore, many individuals can be referred to as self-acclaimed influencers, where they create content for their social media platforms and share things that they like, places that they visit, and more, creating awareness through user-generated content, while some of these influencers grow a big online presence and starts collaborating with brands or Organisations (Irwin-Hunt, 2022). These trends are all beneficial for the industry and sectors within the industry where organisations can benefit from increased

exposure without spending large budgets while tourists uncover destinations or offerings they would otherwise not have known about.

2.7 Theoretical Grounding

Considering previous literature in the travel and tourism industry, especially in the field of tourism or destination marketing various theoretical frameworks have been utilized which will be briefly discussed in this section. Selecting the appropriate theoretical framework for the research is dependent on the constructs being studied and the relationship with one another as well as the outcome that wants to be determined (Dilliard & Pfau, 2002). Applying the correct theoretical framework is crucial in understanding the underlying causes or influences of the observed phenomena (Nickerson, 2023).

From the previous literature that was explored five different theories were identified that were used across the literature dating back to the late 1990's until recent studies published in 2022. The five theories that were explored for these research topics include the Cognitive-Affective Model, Push-Pull theory, Expectancy Value theory, Theory of Reasoned Action, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

The Cognitive-Affective Model (CAM) is widely used in tourism studies as it is a comprehensive model that focuses on both the cognitive and affective factors that influence decision-making (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001). It further acknowledges the emotions and perceived experiences tourist can obtain which plays a significant role in selecting a destination. The advantages of using the CAM model as a theoretical framework includes its emotional emphasis as the model provides a balanced view of the emotional and rational aspect of decision-making (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001). Furthermore, the model allows an in-depth exploration of the cognitive process and emotional states that tourists go through when selecting a destination or considering choices for traveling (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001). However, the limitation of the model is that it has a complex nature making data collection and analysis challenging while further being subjective in nature making it difficult to measure it accurately. This model is especially appropriate when the experiences that are associated with the emotional and

hedonic aspects are being studied eliminating the model as the appropriate theoretical framework for this study (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001).

The push-pull theory introduced by Dann in 1977 is often used in tourism studies as the model seeks to explain the forces driving tourists either away from their place of origin or attracting them to a new destination (Dann, 1977). This theory and model are especially relevant in destination marketing studies aiming to understand the motivations behind travel decisions and are widely used in tourism marketing strategies to position a destination effectively to pull theories towards a destination (Dann, 1977). This theory offers a deeper understanding of tourist's motivation by analysing the factors pushing them to leave their place of origin and further the factors pulling them to a particular destination (Dann, 1977). However, this theory's limitation is that it oversimplifies complex travel decision-making processes and does not acknowledge the multifaceted aspect of motivation furthermore, the theory has limited predictive power and cannot predict the intended behaviour of the tourists (Dann, 1977).

The Expectancy-Value theory of Ajzen and Fishbein in 1975 studies individuals' behavioural intentions influenced by their attitude towards the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). This theory suggests that if tourists perceive a destination positively and feel it would be approved by their frame of reference, they are more likely to visit the destination (Ajzen, 1991). This theory acknowledges the impact of social influence through subjective norms and further provides a framework to predict potential behaviour intentions. However, this theory does not acknowledge the emotional aspect of decision-making assuming that travel decision-making is purely rational (Ajzen, 1991). This theory is closely aligned with the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Considering the three above-explained theories, it was evident that it is not the most appropriate theoretical framework for this study and the relationship being studied between the constructs and therefore, the selected theoretical framework is the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour discussed in detail hereunder.

2.7.1 Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1967 will be applied as this theory is rooted in social psychology research, persuasion models, and attitude theories incorporating the following three pillars: affective, cognitive, and conative (Nickerson, 2023). This theory was developed after attempting to determine the difference between attitude and behaviour and, therefore, will aid in explaining the actions and attitudes of individuals allowing the research to follow hereunder to measure the attitudes of tourists based on smart tourism applications and destination marketing and their behaviour as a result thereof which is the visit intention (Ajzen, 1991).

This theory is a cognitive theory grounded on attitudes and behaviour intentions while subjective norms and external variables are further considered to understand intentional behaviour (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). The theory allows researchers to predict the behavioural outcome of an individual based on their pre-existing attitudes (LaCaille, 2020).

This theory further studies individuals' attitudes towards the research object using the various pillars which will aid in understanding, explaining, and predicting individuals' intended behaviours (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This theory assumes that an individual's intention to engage in a certain behaviour is a direct result of their attitude and subjective norms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

The two key factors of this theory are further explained:

1. Attitude

Attitude can be defined as the reflection of an individual's feelings towards something and how they view or evaluate it (Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2014, p. 203). It is important to note that attitude is learned as a result of previous experiences, previously acquired information from peers as well as exposure to mass media communication, and attitude tends to be consistent with the behaviour it reflects (Copeland & Zhao, 2020). The ABC model of attitude additionally explains the

three components it consists of which are the same pillars of this theory. The affective component has to do with the feelings or emotions of an individual and in essence, captures the overall assessment by the tourist of the destination (Yang, Isa, Yao, Xia & Liu, 2022). The cognitive consists of the beliefs of the tourist about the destination including their knowledge thereof (Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019). There are informational beliefs and evaluative beliefs to consider meaning the cognitive component is more critical for complex decision-making (Torabi, Shalbafian, Allam, Ghaderi, Murgante & Khavarian-Garmsir, 2022). Conative also referred to as behavioural is concerned with the probability of the tourist acting in a certain way (Nickerson, 2023). This component indicated that a certain behaviour would take place meaning to visit or not to visit a destination in context of this study.

2. Subjective Norms

Within this theory, subjective norms play a crucial role. Subjective norms are directly influenced by the beliefs and opinions of peers and their assessment of a destination (Ham, Jeger & Ivković, 2015). Before acting on an intention, the feelings of relevant others are considered meaning if peers approve of the visit intention to a certain destination the likelihood of the tourist visiting is higher (Ham, et al., 2015).

The outcome is to assume an individual's behaviour is a direct result of their attitude and subjective norms. The more favourable the attitude and subjective norms are towards a behaviour or intention, the more likely an individual is to engage in that behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

The Theory of Reasoned Action does have some pitfalls although the theory has been widely influential. Some of these pitfalls include limited predictive power as the theory assumes individuals are rational decision-makers, which may not always be true (Yang, et al., 2022). It is difficult to predict actions only based on attitude and subjective norms as emotional and impulsive factors also play a critical role in decision-making (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Furthermore, assessing attitude and subjective norms can be difficult as it relies on self-report measures which may be subject to social desirability bias (Copeland & Zhao, 2020). The theory further emphasises intentions and

predicts individuals' intention to behave in a certain way, however, intentions do not always result in actual behaviour as external factors can interfere with an individual's intention (LaCaille, 2020).

Despite the pitfalls of the theory, this theory is appropriate as the research undertaken is studying tourists' behaviour that is driven by conscious decision-making where attitude and subjective norms are the main determinants of the studied intention. While the purpose is to understand the intention to visit and not necessarily the intention turned into action, this theory allows us to understand what influences tourists' intention to visit a destination and how these influences can be further used to increase the intention. Furthermore, the theory provides invaluable insights into understanding and predicting human behaviour which is crucial for the relevant tourism and travel industry stakeholders to understand as it can be used to direct their decision-making in terms of business, marketing, and operations, while further predicting the visit intention of tourists.

2.7.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour

Developed by Icek Ajzen, the Theory of Planned Behaviour is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action. This theory consists of attitude, and subjective norms the same as the Theory of Reasoned Action but includes perceived behaviour control which aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of human behaviour which should also be considered when assessing the visiting intention of a destination as this could be seen as a barrier to the ability to change the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

The theory of Planned Behaviour will be incorporated into the study as this psychological theory establishes an interconnection between beliefs and behaviour intention which further can be divided into three components (Ajzen, 2011). This study stems from the Theory of Reasoned Action and was developed by Icek Ajzen in 1980. The three components; attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour are believed to determine an individual's behavioural intention (Nickerson, 2023). Although these components are not necessarily subconsciously considered during the decision-making process, it plays a significant role in the formulation of decision-making (Rafdinal, et al.,

2021). The theory of planned behaviour includes behaviour control which is the additional determinant of intention as well as behaviour (Ajzen, 2011).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour also studies attitudes and subjective norms in the same manner as the Theory of Reasoned Action, as discussed in detail earlier in the chapter. However, this theory further includes the element, of perceived behaviour control which is unique to this theory (Solimon, 2019). This reflects the individual's belief in their ability to see the behaviour which can be further influenced by factors like self-efficacy and external constraints. This is a strong predictor of actual behaviour, although it can be influenced by other external factors (Rafdinal, et al., 2021).

The limitations of this theory include that although it is effective in predicting behaviour it cannot always accurately predict actual behaviour as other external factors or unforeseen circumstances can influence the actions of the individual (Ajzen, 1991). It is, however, serving as a guide to potential intentions which is still a valuable measurement of what tourists intend to do and how the intentions can be further influenced positively (Ajzen, 2011).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour is appropriate for this study as it serves as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action by providing a more comprehensive framework to understand and predict human behaviour. Both theories are widely used in social psychology, communication, marketing, and consumer behaviour studies.

2.7.3 Theory Rationale

In the context of this study, focusing on destination marketing, smart tourism applications, and visit intentions, it is crucial to apply theoretical frameworks that comprehensively capture the relationships between these constructs and predict tourists' behavioural intentions. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) were selected for several reasons, based on their robustness, relevance, and application in previous tourism research. These theories are both appropriate to study the constructs outlined in this research as they follow a structured approach. The Theory of Reasoned Action focuses on attitudes and subjective norms while the Theory of Planned Behaviour further focuses on predicting behaviour control

together, these two theories offer a comprehensive view of how various factors influence tourists' intention to visit a destination like Southern Africa.

Both theories suggest that destination marketing including digital marketing and user-generated content efforts will influence tourists' attitudes towards a destination and therefore, the theories can aid in assessing the attitudes by asking questions about the effectiveness of marketing about a destination, what the perceived attractiveness is due to these destination marketing efforts (Pemberton, 2016). Furthermore, the subjective norms can also be influenced by destination marketing by assessing the influence of recommendations by family and friends or the influence of online influencers whom the individuals value as a frame of reference (Chaulagain, et al., 2019).

Smart tourism applications like smart sightseeing and smart information systems may influence tourists' attitudes by enhancing their experience through information, recommendations, inclusion in tourism opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and much more (Torabi, et al, 2022). The influence on tourists' attitudes can be measured by asking about the perceived attractiveness and satisfaction of the STAs, the impact of convenience can be explored while it can further influence their frame of references' recommendations and how in return that influences the tourists (Tavitiyaman, et al., 2021).

In terms of perceived destination image, both theories can aid in assessing tourists' beliefs about the attractiveness of the destination, its offerings, cultural appeal, safety, and tourist reputation (Blazquez-Resino, Rodriguez, & Perez-Jimenez, 2016). The perceived destination image of a destination will influence their intention to visit the destination as well as their familiarity with a destination and its offerings and whether is it aligned with their interests, likes, and dislikes including that of their family or friends (Hashim, Hanafiah, & Jamaluddin, 2019).

In this research, the attitude of the tourist toward the probability of traveling to Southern Africa will be assessed considering their feelings towards the destination whereafter their beliefs about the destination will be evaluated based on the

informational and evaluation beliefs of the tourist allowing the conative component to be determined whether the intention is to visit or not to visit (Chaulagain, et al., 2019).

Assessing the attitude and ABC model of the attitude of tourists who previously have not travelled to Southern Africa, it is possible to determine the influence and result of smart tourism applications in combination with destination marketing and the direct result thereof on visit intention (Ferrer-Rosell & Marin-Roig, 2020). Therefore, this theory and its pillars are crucial to answer the research questions determining how the two phenomena of smart tourism applications and destination marketing influence visit intention and potentially further give insight into how it can be used in the future to improve visit intention.

Together these two theories encapsulate the relationship between attitude, subjective norms, and the potential outcome of behaviour allowing research to determine the relationship between various concepts and the potential outcome when the concepts are used interchangeably (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This will allow the research question to be answered and give insights into whether previous literature that has shown a positive outcome on visit intention has the same results when applied to Southern Africa. Previous literature in tourism and destination marketing has widely used these theories. Studies have shown that attitudes towards a destination, influenced by marketing efforts and subjective norms, play a crucial role in shaping visit intentions (Chaulagain et al., 2019; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The inclusion of perceived behavioural control in TPB adds depth to understanding how external factors and personal capabilities affect tourists' decisions (Ajzen, 1991).

The Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour provide robust theoretical frameworks for this study. They offer a comprehensive understanding of how destination marketing, smart tourism applications, and various constructs influence tourists' visit intentions. By applying these theories, the study aims to deliver valuable insights for enhancing marketing strategies and leveraging technology to boost tourist arrivals in Southern Africa.

2.8 Conceptualisation of Key Concepts

2.8.1 Destination Marketing

The American Marketing Association (2008, p. 10) defines destination marketing as: “the coordinated use of marketing tools supported by a shared customer-oriented philosophy, for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging urban offerings that have value for the city's customers and the city's community at large.” Destination marketing is further defined as a marketing discipline within the tourism industry where a destination which could be a country, town, holiday resort or city is the “product” being promoted to the selected target audience to establish awareness of the destination while creating a positive “product” image within the consumers’ mind (George, 2019). It is crucial to note that destination marketing incorporates other interrelated marketing disciplines as well as tourism management strategies (Hashim, et al., 2019). Destination marketing is further defined by the World Travel Market (2021) as: “the marketing approach in the travel industry promoting a specific location and its benefits”. Destination marketing is often referred to as tourism marketing or place marketing, however, for this study the term destination marketing will be utilized with the definition from Richard George (2019) which will be adopted in the context of this research.

The purpose of destination marketing is to create awareness about a location to inspire future visit intention by creating a desire to explore and experience the destination using techniques like video content, guides, recommendations, and previous tourist testimonials (World Travel Market, 2021). The focus of destination marketing is on the location instead of a specific tourist offering for example a game drive. By pushing destination marketing trust can be established in the location creating a desire to visit and experience the offering while increasing the interest of tourists (World Travel Market, 2021). Destination marketing can take form in various ways like previously mentioned video content, recommendations, and testimonials as well as social media, exhibitions, print media, travel agencies, content creators, films, and much more. Destination marketing needs to be explored in the travel and tourism industry to understand how STAs can form part of the marketing strategy to influence tourists’ intention to visit the destination.

Previous literature explored brand equity and its effect on visit intention directing future research toward the role of destination marketing and the likelihood to visit and revisit a destination (Chi, Huang, & Nguyen, 2020). Brand equity allows a higher brand recognition and favourability compared to lesser-known brands and by applying it in the tourism industry, the same principle applies that higher destination recognition and favourability is given to destinations tourists are aware of and trust compared to destinations they do not know (Mcloughin, 2021). Through destination marketing, brand equity can be attributed to the country in question assigning a premium value to it (World Travel Market, 2021).

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that without destination marketing tourists cannot familiarize themselves with a destination meaning a perceived destination image cannot be formed. Without the awareness of a destination, the tourists are not likely to visit the destination. Numerous studies have been conducted on the phenomenon of destination marketing researching various relationships such as visit intention, revisit intention, celebrity endorsement, familiarity, and destination attractiveness to name a few (Sotiriadis, 2021). However, limited literature on destination marketing in the context of Southern Africa is available and, therefore, the study aims to explore the relationship between destination marketing, STA, and the visit intention to Southern Africa. However, destination marketing is a multifaceted construct that encompasses various disciplines, therefore, the study will focus on two of the marketing disciplines under the construct which are digital marketing and user-generated content.

2.8.2 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing can be defined as marketing that occurs online through various platforms such as websites, social media, online forums, blogs, search engines, and much more (Investopedia, 2023). It is the promotion of a product or service using various techniques and strategies online where brands aim to connect with their target audience while providing a solution to a challenge they are facing (Zhang, et al., 2022).

Digital marketing is a multifaceted construct encompassing various marketing tools and techniques to promote a product or service and brand online through various channels and platforms (Digital School of Marketing, 2023).

A study conducted in Spain in 2020 found there is a positive relationship between the online destination experience and the visit intention focusing on online communication and how it has transformed the way destinations are promoted online (Barreto, et al., 2019). Online (or digital) marketing forms part of destination marketing and as noted earlier it is crucial that destination marketing is fully utilized to create desirable experiences and incorporate STAs such as online bookings, online payments, and smart sightseeing before the visit to create a positive online experience (Barreto, et al., 2019). If a tourist has a positive online experience through the STAs and gains the needed information about a location through destination marketing, the intention to visit is more likely compared to a poor online experience or insufficient information about a location (Zhang, et al., 2022).

Therefore, this study will focus on digital marketing as a component of destination marketing to gain an understanding of what role digital marketing plays in influencing tourists' perceived destination image, their attitude, and familiarity with a destination and to further explore the impact on visit intention to determine should there be a greater focus on digital marketing as a component of destination marketing especially in Southern Africa. Digital marketing will further be explored in more detail using user-generated content.

2.8.3 User-Generated Content

User-generated content (UGC) was created in the 1990s inspired by the concept of user-generated data but gained popularity in 2005 amongst consumers who argued that the popularity of the concept coincided with the rise of the web and online network platforms (O'Reilly, 2007). In a recent study, it was found that 84% of millennials claim that UGC influences their purchasing choices while a further 93% of customers believe UGC is helpful when making purchasing decisions (Pemberton, 2016).

Content is any form of media such as text, videos, images, or reviews that conveys information about a product or service usually created by the brand for marketing purposes (Digital School of Marketing, 2023). UGC is when consumers create the content as opposed to the brand and share it on their social network which will likely be shared by the brand onto their official brand social network channels (Nguyen & Tong, 2022). UGC can further also be defined as content created by consumers, customers, or users of a product or service rather than the brand and its marketing team (Daubs, 2019). Furthermore, UGC is defined by Oxford as content created by the users of the platform instead of media professionals (Oxford, 2023). UGC establishes a higher sense of trust in a product or service as it is mostly created by people who have used it and are satisfied with the results, therefore, the definition by the Digital Marketing School will be adopted for this research as tourists share their experiences when traveling to new destinations which familiarise other tourists about the destination influencing their attitude and perceived destination image regarding the destination.

In a recent study, it was found that 90% of consumers are more likely to purchase from UGC (Digital School of Marketing, 2023). UGC can help build trust and influence decision-making since it is perceived to be more credible reflecting real experiences from actual customers (Bolin, 2021). An emotional appeal is also added to UGC as it often evokes emotions with user stories and testimonials creating a powerful emotional connection with potential customers and the brand (Zhang, 2021). UGC is voluntarily driven by personal interests and experiences while not being limited to a specific form or medium which is allowing this phenomenon to be widely adopted by various consumers across product categories (Mendes-Filho, Mills, Tan & Milne, 2018).

Tourists sharing their experiences while exploring a destination is a source of information for other tourists who are then more likely to be interested in the destination or want to visit the destination themselves. From the exploration of UGC, it can be concluded that UGC plays an important role in digital marketing as a source of information to customers and further as a source of awareness for brands. Therefore, UGC is a key component of this study, to determine what effect UGC has on tourists and their visit intention to Southern Africa.

2.8.4 Smart Tourism Applications

The emerging use of information communication technology (ICT) within the tourism industry including the application of new technology to simplify the user experience is known as smart tourism applications (STA) (Tavitiyaman, et al., 2021). This includes but is not limited to online booking platforms, transportation, and online payment facilities also referred to as smart information systems which are allowing Organisations in the industry to have a competitive advantage over other destinations not utilizing smart tourism technology (Revfine, 2023). Other components also called STAs are smart sightseeing which includes online maps, online itineraries, e-commerce, and more. STAs are the application and implementation of the aforementioned tourism-related activities or experiences that are also further enhancing the globalization within the tourism industry meaning through smart tourism tourists can easily access destinations across the globe, research, book, and pay for their holidays before visiting the destination (Tavitiyaman, et al., 2021). Besides the simplified pre-experience, smart tourism further enhances the experience for tourists through mobile applications such as online maps, online itineraries, online information, and more (Rafdinal, et al., 2021). To clearly outline the purpose of STAs, the European Union (2022) defined it as "a destination facilitating access to tourism and hospitality products, services, spaces and experiences through ICT-based tools."

Destination marketing aims to communicate to potential tourists what the location has to offer using tactics to increase the interests and to increase interest in a location, however, the location must fulfil certain requirements otherwise tourists will overlook the location as a potential travel destination (World Travel Market, 2021). Part of these requirements include STA and while some STAs operate on their own, numerous STAs form part of marketing tactics to increase interest like the way digital marketing or other marketing tactics are used for products and services.

The more time tourists spend researching a potential destination that utilizes different smart tourism applications (STA) such as smart sightseeing, smart information systems, e-commerce, and more, the stronger the relationship becomes between perceived destination image and future behaviour intention (Tavitiyaman, et al., 2021).

This key finding came from literature researching tourist perceptions of STA and the effect on perceived destination image which could potentially influence the behaviour intention (Susanto, et al., 2020). This study focused on international tourists visiting Hong Kong finding that STA does play an influential role in visit intention stemming from perceived destination image (Tavitiyman, et al., 2021). It is evident that STAs play a crucial role in the consideration of visiting a destination, however, it is crucial to acknowledge that STAs are dependent on destination marketing as without the latter, STA would not be possible or be communicated to tourists.

For the purpose of the study, the focus will not be on STAs as a whole since it is a multifaceted construct, the focus will be on smart sightseeing.

2.8.5 Smart Sightseeing

A modern tourism marketing concept, smart sightseeing, encompasses technology, data, consumer preferences, and inclusive tourism offerings to enhance the tourist experience meaning smart sightseeing leverages innovative technologies to make tourist attractions and destinations more efficient, personalized, and engaging for various types of tourists (Lan, Huang, Zeng, Guan, Xing, & Cheng, 2021).

Various technologies are integrated to create smart sightseeing such as smartphones, wearable devices, mobile applications, the internet, augmented reality, and virtual reality which allows tourists to have real-time access to information and to engage in interactive tourism attractions (Tavitiyaman, et al., 2021). The technology integrations allow for personalization to different types of travellers enhancing the experience they receive from visiting a destination as the experience can be tailored to their preference (Solimon, 2019). This further enhances the tourist's satisfaction and engagement, creating a positive experience, which will likely lead to the recommendation of the destination to others.

Tourists can benefit from location-based services which is especially important for tourists visiting new destinations while it further opens the opportunity to explore the destination beyond what the tourists know before visiting (Lan, et al., 2021). Interactive experiences can be created for all tourists like the braille touchpoints at various tourist

attractions and QR codes with access to audio content describing the attraction in Cape Town (I Love South Africa, 2023). An inclusive experience is created with smart sightseeing allowing tourists with disabilities to also enjoy the tourist attractions. Real-time information is available for tourists while businesses can receive user feedback and reviews on the experience of the tourists that can not only help the business improve but also guide other tourists that are visiting the destination or attraction (Technofunc, 2023).

Furthermore, smart sightseeing benefits the travel and tourism industry with data analytics where data can be collected and analysed on tourists' behaviour, preferences, feedback, and challenges which allows various industry stakeholders to improve their resources, optimize resources, and create data-driven marketing strategies (Mcloughin, 2021). Visitor satisfaction can be increased with data-driven marketing encouraging tourists to either spend more, stay longer, revisit the destination, or recommend the destination to friends and family increasing the likely visit intention of the destination (Word Tourism Organisation, 2023). To gain an understanding of how visitor satisfaction can be increased while travelling in Southern Africa and to determine how resources can be better optimised, smart sightseeing is a key component in this study to gain insight into the effect on visit intention and the overall perception of tourists regarding the use thereof.

2.8.6 Perceived Destination Image

Perceived destination image is synonymous with perceived brand image and can be defined as the perception of the customer about the product or brand based on previous interactions which are either through marketing communication, personal experience, or word-of-mouth (Blazquez-Resino, et al., 2016). Travitiyaman (2021, p. 3) defined perceived destination image as: "an attitudinal concept consisting of the sum of beliefs, ideas, and sensations which individuals hold of a place or destination". Within the tourism literature, perceived destination image is often referred to as the impression a tourist has of a place while most consider it to be the mental representation of a destination the tourists hold in their mind (Hartanto, Firmansyah, & Adhrianti, 2021). In the travel and tourism industry, perceived destination image is an important foundation as it represents the mental and emotional perceptions and impressions tourists hold

about a specific destination (Yang et al., 2022). These perceptions play a crucial role in decision-making and tourists' choice of a specific destination for leisure or business purposes. According to Crompton (1979, p. 18), the destination image is "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination", which is the definition that will be adopted in this research.

This mental representation and impressions are influenced by various factors such as destination marketing, attitude, and subjective norms amongst other influences, however, two components have been identified that make up the perceived image namely the cognitive and affective dimensions (Pereira, Gupta, Hassain, 2019).

The perceived destination image encompasses a cognitive component that relates to what an individual understands and knows about a destination such as tourism and recreational offerings, geographical location, landmarks, and cultural heritage (Blazquez-Resino, et al., 2016). The cognitive component influences the perception of the destinations' appeal to them and what they expect to experience when visiting the destination (Ferrer-Rosell & Marin-Roig, 2020). Furthermore, the emotional aspect, the affective component, encompasses the emotional parts of how tourists feel about a destination and what emotions they associate with the destination which can influence their motivation to travel or not to travel to the destination (Yang, et al., 2022).

Together with the cognitive and affective influence on tourists' perceived destination image is the positioning of the destination and whether the destination is aligned with the tourist's needs (LaCaille, 2020). The positioning not only influences the perceived destination image but also the type of tourists that are attracted to the destination. With destination marketing, awareness can be created and over time familiarity with the location will be created (Chi, et al., 2020). As the tourist becomes aware of the destination and familiar with its offerings, the cognitive component of the ABC attitude model is active by influencing both the informational and evaluative beliefs of the destination based on the characteristics the tourist ascribes to the destination (Mothersbaugh, Hawkins & Keiser, 2020). Creating a desirable experience through destination marketing, the perceived image of the destination will be influenced

by the tourists' attitude relating to their emotions or feelings about the location (Ferrer-Rosell & Marin-Roig, 2020).

Therefore, the marketing and communication efforts of a destination determine the perceived perception of the destination and influence tourists as these efforts shape how the destination is portrayed which further leads to influences in their attitude towards the destination and the visit intention (Pereira, et al., 2019).

Extensive literature work has been undertaken on perceived destination image in the tourism marketing field where the focus was on the attitude theory encompassing the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components of Ajzen who developed the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour which is theories that will be adopted in this research and will be further used to measure the influence of the perceived destination image on tourists' attitude and their visit intention (Yang, et al., 2022).

2.8.7 Familiarity

Baker, Hutchinson, Moore & and Nedungadi (1986) defined familiarity as "rand familiarity is a unidimensional construct that is directly related to the amount of time that has been spent processing information about the brand, regardless of the type or content of the processing that was involved." Familiarity can further be defined as a deeper level of knowledge and understanding about the offering of a product or brand implying the customer is more than just aware of the offering (Draper, 2015). Lastly, familiarity in the context of travel and tourism can be defined as tourists' subjective assessment of a destination based on their knowledge about the destination which is the definition that will be adopted for this research as it is the most appropriate given the context of the research and the use of the term (Xue, Zhou, Majeed, Chen, & Zhou, 2022). The level of awareness, recognition, and knowledge that a consumer holds about a brand is their level of familiarity which is a valuable asset for brands as it not only influences purchase decisions but further influences brand trust and brand loyalty (Mendes-Filho, et al., 2018). Familiarity plays a fundamental role in marketing and decision-making and involves the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components (Dilek, 2022).

The mere exposure effect can be defined as the continuous exposure to a stimulus which leads to a greater preference for the stimulus, and this further suggests that familiarity is a critical factor in determining customer decisions as individuals are more likely to choose a product or brand, they have been more exposed to as they are more familiar with its offering (Lindner, et al., 2019).

Familiarity is achieved through consistent marketing efforts to make individuals aware and further inform them about a product or brand and can achieved in various ways through the logo or slogan, colour psychology, music, type of advertisement appeal, and influencers amongst other tools (Adam, 2020). This includes the features, attributes, and associations customers can recall about the marketing efforts as well as the product or brand (Dilek, 2022). Familiarity further has an emotional aspect, the affective component, which is related to the feelings and emotions a customer associates with the product or brand (Pereira, et al., 2019). Furthermore, familiarity contributes to trust and credibility while instilling a competitive advantage (Draper, 2015).

After awareness familiarity is a deeper level of knowledge about a product, brand, or destination which can further be defined as the knowledge the consumer has about the product and goes further than just being aware but being familiar with its offering, the features, benefits, etc., and in this research report it refers to how aware the tourist is of a destination and further how familiar they are with the offering of the destination (Adam, 2020). Being aware is a crucial step for visit intention, however, familiarity will likely influence visit intention as there is knowledge about the destination (Susanto, 2020). Familiarity is driven by destination marketing aimed at informing tourists about destinations they would likely consider when travelling. It was further found in previous literature that an increase in destination awareness and familiarity positively influences visit intention (Chi, et al., 2020). Brand equity can be established for a location through effective destination marketing attributing a value premium to the destination increasing the desire and likelihood to visit (Lindner, et al., 2019). Familiarity has been studied in tourism marketing for many years with the relationship between familiarity, destination image, and future visit intention where the intended behaviour was measured as the outcome of the familiarity level utilizing experimental studies in Hong Kong (Chi, et al., 2020).

Therefore, familiarity with destinations and the tourism offering of the destination is a crucial deciding factor when tourists are searching for a travel destination.

2.8.8 Attitude

Attitude is a reflection on an individual's feelings, approaches, or views regarding something, and with various definitions of attitude, it is defined in marketing terms as: "a person's continuing positive or negative evaluations, emotional feelings, and action tendencies towards some object or idea" (Parumasur, & Roberts-Lombard, 2014, p203). Attitudes are learned and mostly consistent although they can change over time (LaCaille, 2020). Marketing aims to influence the attitudes of consumers towards a certain product or brand using the ABC model referred to in the theoretical foundation. Attitude although it tends to be consistent, is learned and influenced by other factors such as subjective norms, resulting in a favourable attitude towards something when accepted within their frame of reference which can include family, friends, colleagues, or society and is encouraged (subjective norms) resulting in a higher motivation or intent to behave in a certain way (Mothersbaugh, et al., 2020). This is also the framework of the Theory of Reasoned Action.

The information gathered through destination marketing influences the feelings and emotions of the tourist which results in either a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the destination (Chaulagain, et al., 2019). Attitude further has an influence on behaviour meaning that the attitude towards the destination will result in a specific behavioural outcome (Yang, et al., 2022).

Attitude is continuously studied across marketing, consumer behaviour, and destination marketing and is measured using the theories outlined in this study, the Theory of Reasoned Action, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, where the attitude determines the intended behaviour. Attitude is a crucial measurement in this study as the aim is to determine how likely tourists are to visit Southern Africa based on their familiarity and perceived destination image as a result of their knowledge gained through digital marketing and user-generated content.

Previous literature suggests that attitude plays a critical role in destination selection and therefore, attitude is measured in this research context to determine the visit intention of tourists to Southern Africa and to also evaluate the attitude towards the destination based on current destination marketing.

2.8.9 Subjective Norms

Subjective norms can be defined as the beliefs of important people within one's frame of reference and their approval or support of certain behaviour meaning that an individual will not behave in a way that is not approved by people whose opinions they value, and they will further not comply to certain standards if it is not viewed as accepted by this reference group (Ham, et al., 2015).

Subjective norms play a crucial role in understanding consumer behaviour and the decision-making process (LaCaille, 2020). As previously defined, subjective norms represent the social influence that individuals experience when making decisions and are more likely to engage in behaviour that will be approved by their frame of reference (Copeland & Zhao, 2020). Individuals are often influenced by the opinions, beliefs, and values of those around them that they believe to be trustworthy and credible whether it be friends, family, colleagues, or societal norms (Ham, et al., 2015).

In terms of marketing and consumer behaviour, subjective norms are a crucial part of communication and positioning that encompass the perceived expectations, normative beliefs, motivation, and attitude-behaviour relationship (Susilowait & Sugandini, 2020). In the majority of literature where the relationship between subjective norms, attitude, and behaviour is studied the Theory of Reasoned Action or Theory of Planned Behaviour is utilized to understand the likelihood of certain behaviour. Individuals are likely to comply with the expectations of others and would rather engage in a behaviour that is approved by those whose opinions they value (Ham, et al., 2015).

In terms of marketing, various marketing strategies and communication campaigns utilize the use of social influence and subjective norms in their campaigns to create social approval that aligns with the social expectations or preferences of certain reference groups (Susilowait & Sugandini, 2020). Therefore, word-of-mouth is a crucial marketing

tool that relies on subjective norms (Copeland & Zhao, 2020). When tourists have a satisfactory experience when visiting a destination, they are likely to tell their reference group and influence their perception or attitude towards the destination increasing the likelihood of the reference group wanting to visit the destination as well.

2.8.10 Visit Intention

Within the travel and tourism industry, visit intention is a key construct and refers to the tourist's willingness to visit a specific destination (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020). Destination marketing Organisations, travel agencies, and other businesses in the industry must understand the visit intention to attract and engage potential visitors.

The tourists' level of awareness and information about a destination is the first visit intention deciding factor and, therefore, access to accurate information is essential and can be distributed through various channels (IGI Global, 2023). Through the information obtained, tourists will create a perceived destination image and the perceived value they will experience when visiting the destination. Online influencers and user-generated content can also inspire other tourists to visit a destination by merely sharing their experiences and showcasing the value others can potentially experience (IGI Global, 2023). Therefore, destination marketing plays a crucial role in the travel and tourism industry to inform, create awareness, and ultimately influence the visit intention (World Tourism Organisation, 2023).

Visit intention is further dependent on the attitude of tourists about the destination as well as their subjective norms and motives to visit. Recommendations from family, friends, colleagues, and online reviews can significantly influence the visit intention as it can instil trust in the destinations' offerings and the expected experience of visiting (Barreto, et al., 2019). Furthermore, individual factors also play a role in visit intention such as the seasonality and timing and destination appeal to personal preferences (Chaulagain, et al., 2019).

Although visit intention will not necessarily result in actual behaviour it is a good determinant and can be determined using the theories previously outlined that aim to study and predict human behaviour using attitude and subjective norms.

It is crucial to understand what influences and drives the visit intention of tourists to specific destinations as the aim of destination marketing is to capture and nurture the visit intention to drive the growth of the travel and tourism industry.

It is evident in past literature that there is a positive relationship between certain variables resulting in a likely visit intention, however, past literature has been conducted on other countries or specific regions within other countries with a gap in the literature for Southern Africa or developing countries. Therefore, the study aims to explore the relationship between these variables and the effect on visit intention for Southern Africa, and since South Africa is a developing country, insights can be gained from other developing countries.

2.9 Conceptual Model & Hypothesis Development

The following conceptual model (as seen in Figure 3) was developed after assessing past literature and the theoretical foundation of this research with the following hypothesis development to present the constructs and their relationship to one another with the aim to determine the effect on visit intention. The constructs: destination marketing (digital marketing), user-generated content, smart tourism applications (smart sightseeing), perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, subjective norms, and the outcome visit intention are being studied with the respective hypothesis discussed in further detail below.

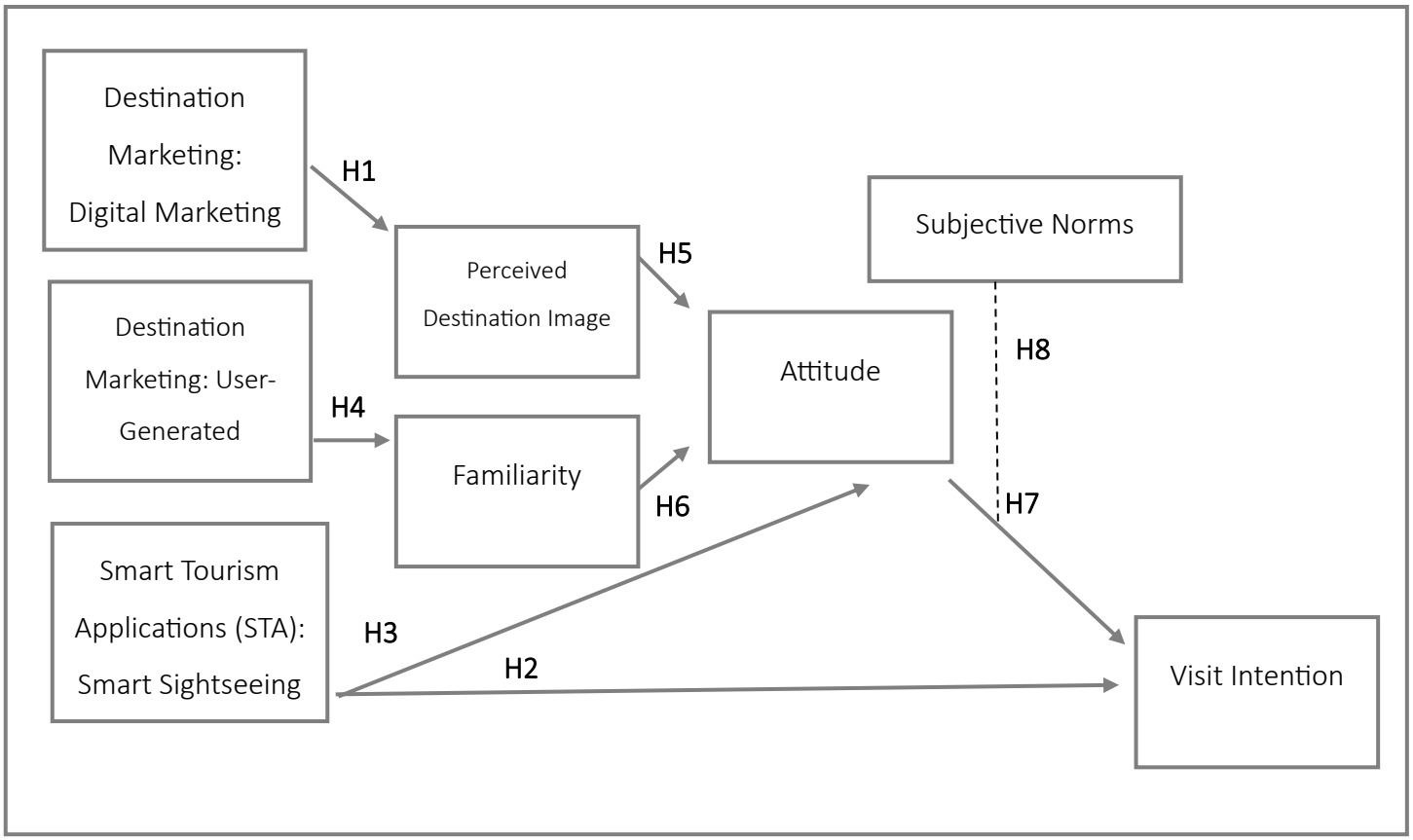


Figure 3: Conceptual Model

Source: Created by the author (2023).

2.9.1 Digital Marketing and Perceived Destination Image

The positive relationship between marketing and brand image has been widely studied. Keller's brand equity model argues that brand equity is established through brand knowledge which is then reflected in customers' perceptions meaning that through brand awareness and continuous communication through various marketing tools customers form a brand image which refers to the perception the customer holds of the brand (Klopper & North, 2015). Perception is what the customer knows and could potentially experience from the brand or product which is caused by the perceived image the customer holds in their mind (Hashim, et al., 2019). Digital marketing creates a direct relationship between the brand and the customer as it requires continuous engagement and further allows the brand to communicate with its customers while being in closer contact with them compared to traditional marketing tools (Blazquez-Resino, et al., 2016). Digital marketing, therefore, aids a brand to build and improve their brand image

wherever their customers are present with almost immediate feedback from their customers allowing brands to adjust quicker to the target audience's likes, dislikes, needs, and wants (Mcloughin, 2021). The enhancement in digital marketing has simplified customers' lives with immediate and direct access to brands, information, e-commerce, and after-sale services. In a study on the relationship between digital marketing and brand image, it was found that digital marketing plays a crucial role in building and improving brand image while another study found that a positive perceived destination image is likely to increase the intention to visit, the study explored the role of Instagram on perceived destination image and visit intention (Copeland & Zhao, 2020). Instagram is a tool utilized in digital marketing to convey visual information on a destination and to advertise the potential experience a tourist can expect when visiting the destination (Copeland & Zhao, 2020).

In another recent study investigating the perceived destination image, social media, and visit intention to Saudi Arabia using the Theory of Planned Behaviour, it was found that the perceived destination image was significantly influenced by social media with a conclusion that there is a relationship between the perceived destination image and visit intention (Al-Gasawneh & Aldamat, 2020). Another study explored the implementation of digital marketing to build an image for the destination and it was found that although digital marketing plays a key role in the perceived destination image of Rejang Lebong Regency, it will need support from other destination marketing tools as well as environmental factors (Hartanto, et al., 2021). In Spain, it was found in a recent study that destination marketing Organisations should utilize user-generated content amongst other social media tools (that is part of digital marketing) to analyse the perceived image of a destination and to influence it further after analysing more than 70 000 online reviews (Ferrer-Rosell & Marin-Roig, 2020). Furthermore, a study conducted in 2020 in Indonesia explored the influence of traditional word-of-mouth compared to electronic word-of-mouth on perceived destination image using 174 respondents (Susilowait & Sugandini, 2020). The study concluded that in certain areas traditional word-of-mouth is more effective whereas in other destinations electronic word-of-mouth is increasingly influencing the perceived destination image and perceived destination quality (Susilowait & Sugandini, 2020).

As digital marketing aids as a tool to build and change a customer's perceived image, the following hypothesis was developed to test whether digital marketing influences tourists' perceived destination image of a destination:

H1: Digital marketing as part of destination marketing has a significant influence on tourists' perceived destination image.

2.9.2 Smart Sightseeing, Attitude and Visit Intention

Digitalization is part of everyday life and are more so incorporated in various ways to simplify and enhance the customer experience across industries. Smart sightseeing which forms part of smart tourism applications has made significant changes in the travel and tourism industry and is increasingly applied to improve the tourist experience and to attract more tourists to a destination (Shen, Sotiriadis & Zhang, 2020). This is also true for the travel and tourism industry where smart sightseeing allows tourists to enjoy destinations and tourist attractions in a new way further allowing the inclusion of all individuals who might have been left out before digitalization and smart tourism applications due to various reasons such as disabilities or other restrictions (Lan, et al., 2021).

There has been a wide spread of smart tourism technology and adoption of these technologies within the industry which caused a shift in the consumer behaviour of tourists (Shen, et al., 2020). It is crucial to understand how this changed consumer behaviour can be utilized to continuously improve the tourist experience.

A recent study conducted in Indonesia in 2021 explored whether smart tourism technology helps predict visit intention using the Technology Acceptance Model with a sample group of 324 tourists (Rafdinal, et al., 2021). The study found that the adoption of smart tourism technology by destination marketing Organisations significantly affected the perceived usefulness which further significantly influenced the attitude towards the destination (Lan, et al., 2021). It was also found in this study that the visit intention was directly influenced by the attitude towards the destination being studied (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020). The literature from this study is a fundamental source for this

research and future research on the relationship between smart tourism applications, attitude, and visit intention.

Another study conducted in Indonesia explored whether smart tourism affects the visit intention whereas the previous study aimed to understand whether it predicts the visit intention. Both studies were done in different destinations in Indonesia. Furthermore, this study found that smart tourism such as e-commerce, smart information systems, smart sightseeing, smart safety and more does affect the visit intention of a destination (Susanto, et al., 2020). A recent study in 2022 explored the revisit intention through smart tourism technology and memorable tourism experiences using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Torabi, et al., 2022). The study concluded that the attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control of smart tourism technology significantly positively influenced visit intention while also determining that tourists' experience with smart tourism technology significantly influenced their memorable experiences which increased revisit intention (Lan, et al., 2021). This study opened future research on the importance of smart tourism applications in geographical areas to encourage revisit intention amongst locals.

The influence of smart tourism technology and the impact on the consumer journey was studied in the context of China where the researchers found that smart tourism technology has a profound impact on the customer journey especially in the prospective phase where the tourists are planning their trip and considering various tourism destinations (Shen, et al., 2020). Lastly, a study conducted in China that examined the tourism psychology using personalised smart tourism found that tourists have a more positive experience when exposed to personalised smart tourism solutions. Having a positive experience created a favourable attitude towards the destination as seen in the psychology of attitude and consumer behaviour (Bolin, 2021).

There are numerous of literature showcasing the importance of smart tourism applications amongst smart sightseeing and the relationship between the use thereof, the influence on their attitude towards the destination and the visit intention of a destination. Previous literature helped inform future literature and created a foundation for this study to explore the relationship between smart sightseeing and visit intention in

Southern Africa, therefore, the following hypothesis was developed to test whether smart sightseeing will also influence the visit intention.

H2: Smart sightseeing has a favourable effect on visit intention.

H3: Smart sightseeing significantly influences tourists' attitude towards a destination.

2.9.3 User-Generated Content and Familiarity

With the widespread use of UGC, consumers are moving outside of the traditional marketing funnel due to the way they gather information about products or services before purchasing (Court, Elzinga, Mulder & Vetvik, 2009). This led to the creation of the customer decision journey as shown in Figure 4 below, that aims to help marketers navigate this process.

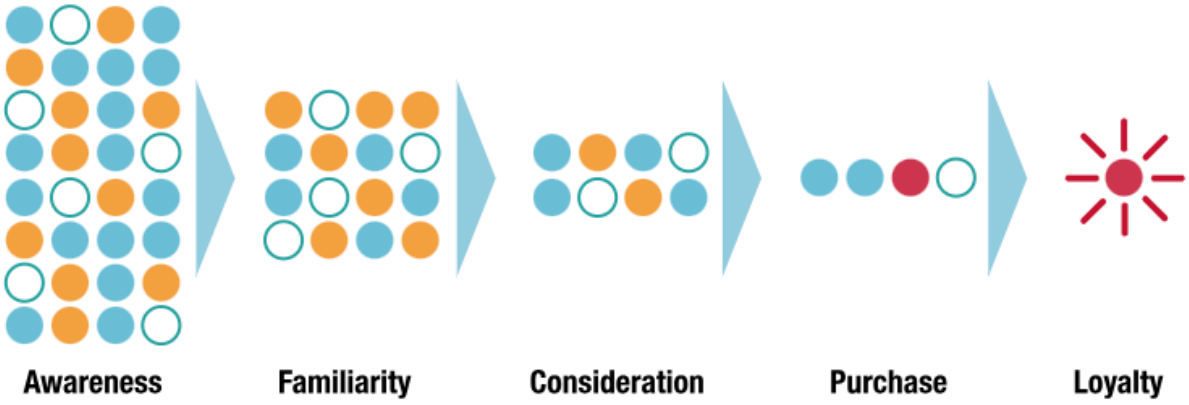


Figure 4: Customer Decision Journey (Court, Elzinga, Mulder & Vetvik, 2009).

This model was formulated after studying 20,000 customer purchases UGC promotes engagement and facilitates two-way communication between customers and brands and further allows brands to indirectly reach potential customers they would not otherwise have reached through one-way brand-created content or communication (Nguyen & Tong, 2022). With the exposure to a brand through UGC customers are introduced with an initial touch point which can be seen as stimuli (Court, et al., 2009). Stimuli are external objects that customers are exposed to frequently allowing the mere exposure effect to take place (Dilek, 2022). After the initial touch point, if customers resonate with the content, they are likely to engage with the content and future content regarding the product or engage with the brand itself (Pemberton, 2016). The second

phase of the customer decision journey takes place over time the more the customer is exposed to stimuli from the product or brand (Daubs, 2019). It can then be argued that UGC can lead to familiarity as the consumer is informed about the product or brand and is gaining an understanding of the offering.

The customer decision journey allows the mere exposure effect to take place from the first phase and in between the first two phases furthermore, UGC can positively influence the journey with additional stimuli being provided in an authentic way establishing familiarity.

In a recent study conducted in 2022, the impact of UGC on the intention to select a destination was explored and it was found that UGC not only positively influences attitude and perceived destination image but also that UGC influences familiarity of destination increasing the intention to select the destination as an option (Nguyen & Tong, 2022). The study aimed to develop a model from the data collected using 407 respondents (Nguyen & Tong, 2022). Another study explored the use of UGC in travel planning using the Technology Acceptance Model and survey data from 268 backpacker travellers (Mendes-Filho, et al., 2018). The study concluded that UGC empowers tourists to take more control of their travel planning and selecting destinations, however, familiarity was not a key construct in the study, it was found to influence decision-making (Mendes-Filho, et al., 2018).

Most literature explores the importance, impact, and use of UGC on visit intention, attitude formation, or other related constructs with limited literature exploring the relationship between these two constructs, however, familiarity is seen as an influence in visit intention or attitude formation.

Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed to test whether UGC content has a direct positive influence on tourists' familiarity with a destination:

H4: User-generated content has a direct positive influence on tourists' familiarity with a destination.

2.9.4 Perceived Destination Image and Attitude

As previously discussed, the perceived destination image is the cognitive component of what the tourist knows and understands about a destination and what they expect to experience from the destination. The affection component includes the emotional aspect of the feelings a tourist has towards a destination based on the information they encompass. Attitude also include the cognitive and affect components together with the conative component, however, psychology and numerous consumer behaviour literature state that perception generates attitude based on the information the individual holds (Nickerson, 2023).

Literature from 2019 studied the effect of travel motivation on attitude with perceived destination image as a mediator using the Theory of Planned Behaviour with a sample of 350 and found a positive relationship between tourists' travel motivation and attitude mediated by their perceived destination image and also found a positive destination image influences the attitude towards the destination increasing the travel motivation (Pereira, et al., 2019). Furthermore, a study in Saudi Arabia explored the relationship between perceived destination image, social media, and travel intention where a positive relationship between the perceived destination image and visit intention was found using the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Technology Acceptance Model, and Protection Motivation Theory (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020). The study further found that the use of social media encourages interaction with the destination which also increases the visit intention in the area (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020).

The perceived destination image can likely generate a positive attitude towards a destination based on the information and exposure the tourist has been exposed to about the destination, therefore, the following hypothesis was developed to determine whether this is true:

H5: Perceived destination image has a direct effect on tourists' attitudes towards a destination.

2.9.5 Familiarity and Attitude

The mere exposure effect suggests that the more customers are exposed to a stimulus the more they will prefer the stimulus and through this process, the customer becomes familiar with the stimulus they have been exposed to over time (Lindner, et al., 2019). Customers who are familiar with a particular offering have a deeper understanding of the offering and are more than just aware (Dilek, 2022). The mere exposure effect further suggests that the more exposed an individual is to something the more they tend to like it while developing a preference for the product or brand simply because they are familiar with it (Adam, 2020).

While the mere exposure effect takes place subconsciously, cognitive ease is also taking place. Cognitive ease allows for easier information processing when an individual is already familiar with the information meaning that cognitive processes are less strained which causes a more positive attitude towards the object (Chi, et al., 2020). However, the opposite is also true where cognitive dissonance takes place when a customer is exposed to a new product or brand with which they are unfamiliar causing difficulty in processing the information which leads to a negative attitude (Chaulagain, et al., 2019). The exposure to information regarding an object can lead to attitude formation and since there is already cognitive ease and the individual is familiar with the object the likely attitude formation will be positive (Shen, et al., 2020).

It is further important to remember that attitude is learned over time and if an individual is feeling comfortable with the stimulus they are being exposed to and become familiar with the information they are more likely to develop a favourable attitude.

In a recent study conducted in 2020 regarding brand familiarity and attitude formation, it was found that brand familiarity had a strong positive impact on attitude formation considering the advertising tools used, however, in the study it was found that familiarity from online advertising influenced attitude formation positively (Soliman, 2019).

Therefore, it is suggested that familiarity has a favourable influence on the attitude of tourists towards a destination although the opposite can also be true, however, for this study, the following hypothesis was developed:

H6: Familiarity has a favourable influence on the attitude of tourists toward a destination.

2.9.6 Attitude and Visit Intention

Considering the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour and how it approaches attitudes, subjective norms, and the respective result on behaviour, it can be assumed that a favourable attitude toward a destination can result in an intention to visit. Although as previously mentioned, visit intention will not necessarily result in actual behaviour it can however be used to determine and predict human behaviour using attitude and subjective norms.

Both the theories in the theoretical framework of the study suggest that attitude determines consumer behaviour and as it was found in previous literature, a favourable attitude towards China increased the revisit intention of the tourists due to their positive experiences influenced by smart sightseeing and various other factors.

Considering the theoretical framework and previously discussed literature, as well as the above-discussed hypotheses development between the other constructs, the following two hypotheses were developed to determine if a positive attitude does influence the visit intention and what influence the subjective norms have on the visit intention of a tourist to a destination:

H7: Attitude has a direct influence on tourists' intention to visit a destination.

H8: Perceived destination image has a direct effect on tourists' attitudes towards a destination.

2.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, the global tourism industry is a multifaceted sector that has faced both growth and challenges in recent years. The industry's expansion has been driven by

globalization, improved communication, and an increasing desire among individuals to explore new cultures and experiences (Revfine, 2023). It plays a crucial role in many economies, contributing to GDP and creating diverse job opportunities across various industries. Despite the impact of the pandemic, the travel and tourism industry has shown recovery, with significant increases in GDP and job creation in the last year (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022). Trends like sustainable travel and smart tourism applications are shaping the industry, influencing tourists' choices and expectations.

The African tourism market is experiencing substantial growth, with countries like Egypt and Tanzania drawing in international visitors. The potential for further growth in Africa is significant, with forecasts suggesting increased GDP and job opportunities in the coming years. Challenges in the African market, including safety concerns and limited digitalization, are being addressed through initiatives like the Mauritius declaration (Knott, 2023).

South Africa's tourism industry is also recovering from the pandemic, with growth factors such as destination marketing, smart sightseeing initiatives, and the appointment of experienced leaders driving its recovery (South African Tourism, 2023). Challenges like the energy crisis and mismanagement of funds persist but are being addressed by industry stakeholders. Trends like digital nomadism and user-generated content are reshaping how tourists explore and share their experiences. The tourism industry must adapt to these changes to remain relevant and continue attracting visitors to diverse destinations worldwide (Revfine, 2023).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter explains the research methodology of the study providing more information on the research philosophy and approaches used to explore the research problem outlined in Chapter 1 while further elaborating on the research design, measurements, sample, population, data collection, and analysis amongst under subjects. The foundation of the research is crucial in order to achieve the research purpose and address the research problem, therefore, the information hereunder will be discussed in detail to provide a clear understanding and justification for the research methodology undertaken.

As the aim of the study is to understand the influence of destination marketing, smart tourism applications, and tourists' intention to visit Southern Africa, the study will be quantitative with a correlational research design. A positivist paradigm will be used with a deductive approach to ensure the research questions can be accurately addressed and the hypothesis tested as further explained hereunder.

3.2 Research Philosophy & Approaches

Research philosophy is defined by John Dudovskiy (2023), as "the belief about how data about a phenomenon should be collected, analysed, and used". Furthermore, research philosophies are concerned with the source and development of knowledge and serve the following functions within business and economics:

1. Demystifying: showing, assessing, and supporting the assumptions and inconsistencies the research may contain (Dudovskiy, 2023).
2. Informing: provide an understanding of where research stands in the field of knowledge-producing activities (Dudovskiy, 2023).
3. Method-facilitating: dissecting and understanding the methods being used and improving the methods for improved data collection and research quality (Dudovskiy, 2023).

The research philosophy is associated with the nature of the study and deals with the way knowledge is developed therefore it is crucial to select the appropriate research philosophy as researchers may have different assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the research philosophy helps to provide an understanding of these assumptions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Each stage of the research process is based on the assumptions of the sources utilized and the knowledge provided. The research philosophy will reflect the researchers' assumptions which serve as the base of the research strategy (Saunders et al., 2019). As illustrated in Figure 4 below, there are four main research philosophies: positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism.

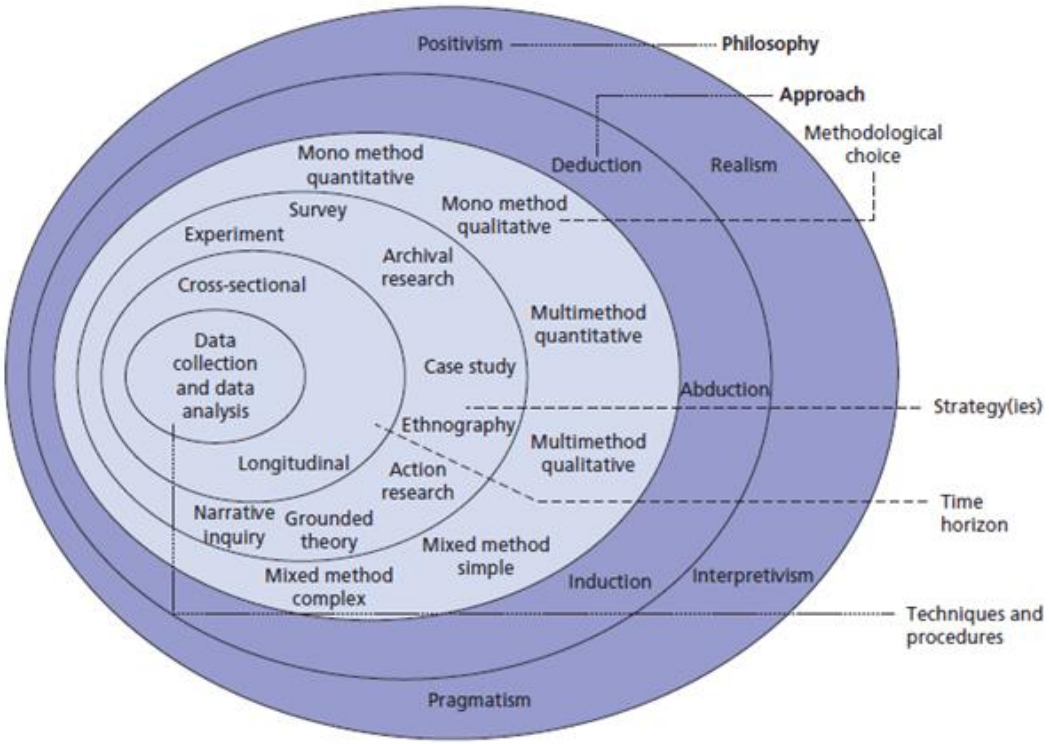


Figure 4: Research Onion (Dudovskiy, 2023).

This study will be conducted from a positivist paradigm as the purpose of the study is to investigate the role of destination marketing, with a focus on digital marketing and user-generated content and smart tourism applications (specifically smart sightseeing), in influencing tourists' visit intention to Southern Africa.

According to Dudovskiy (2023), "positivism is a paradigm that relies on measurement and reason, that knowledge is revealed from a neutral and measurable

(quantifiable) observation of activity, action, or reaction." If it cannot be measured in this way, it cannot be known, and this study uses measurements and reason to measure and observe the actions of tourists in terms of visit intention (Wiid & Diggines, 2015).

The ontological position of the positivism paradigm is that reality is an external object governed by law and since the reality of the constructs of this study includes objects from the physical environment, the purpose and the paradigm of the study are aligned (Creswell, Ebersöhn, Eloff, Ferreira, Ivankova, Jansen, Nieuwenhuis, Pietersen & Plano Clark, 2018). In the context of the study, the physical environment refers to the travel and tourism industry and its challenges and opportunities.

The study aims to understand how tourists' visit intention is influenced by destination marketing, the application of STAs, and the role perceived destination image and familiarity have on their attitude towards a destination. This aligns with the epistemological position of the positivist paradigm since the positivist paradigm uses knowledge to discover generalizable laws to predict and control (Dudovskiy, 2023).

The positivism paradigm suggests that if something cannot be observed and measured it carries little to no value and in this instance, the human behaviour can be observed from which insights and data can be drawn making it measurable although the visit intention is a predicted phenomenon, the industry role players can use it to their advantage (Dudovskiy, 2023).

The Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour will be used to observe and measure the actions as per the positivism paradigm meaning that a deductive approach will also be applied in this study. A deductive approach means that the research will start by using a theoretical framework and hypotheses to test through observations and the data collected (Creswell, et al., 2018).

3.3 Marketing Research Process

The marketing research process followed within this study has been adapted from the research process outlined by (Creswell, et al., 2018) and summarized into five steps which will be followed throughout the study. The process is visually displayed in Figure 5.

Step 1: Identify the research problem – this step is crucial to the research process as the foundation needs to be set and the steps to follow will depend on the scope of the research problem. This step further includes the research objectives to be achieved and the research questions to be answered after the study (Cresswell, et al., 2018).

Step 2: Develop research plan – the second step includes the information need analysis, the identification of the appropriate research and analysis methods as well as the initial proposal to the ethics committee (Cresswell, et al., 2018).

Step 3: Conduct research – firstly, secondary research will be conducted to gain an understanding of what previous literature entails, to identify gaps in the literature, and to get a clear picture of what is available and appropriate to inform the current research project. Thereafter, the primary data collection will take place using a suitable research methodology (Cresswell, et al., 2018).

Step 4: Data analysis and interpretation – after the primary data collection, the data will be analysed and interpreted to present the results. The results will then be discussed, and the results of the tested hypothesis will be reported (Cresswell, et al., 2018).

Step 5: Recommendations and conclusions – lastly, recommendations will be made to inform and guide future studies while the findings of this study can be used and applied to the industry where applicable (Cresswell, et al., 2018).

The research process outlined above and shown below is evident throughout the study and divided into separate chapters of which each is discussed in more detail.



Figure 5: Adapted Research Process (Creswell, et al., 2018).

3.3.1 Research Problem

The research problem addressed in this study encompasses both theoretical inquiry and practical application. A notable gap exists in the literature concerning the insufficient exploration of constructs and their interrelationships specific to Southern Africa's tourism sector, particularly focusing on visit intentions to the region. South Africa's global tourism ranking of 135th highlights its challenges in attracting tourists, prompting an exploration into strategies to uplift the tourism industry, as detailed in Chapter 2.

Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of smart tourism applications and user-generated content within the broader context of digital marketing underscores the need to comprehend their effects on perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, and ultimately, visit intention. Understanding these dynamics is critical for industry organizations to refine their business and marketing strategies, thereby enhancing Southern Africa's tourism sector, contributing to the country's GDP and employment.

The limitations and recommendations drawn from existing literature, coupled with current market trends and challenges, form the foundational basis of this study. By addressing these gaps and offering new research directions, this study aims to advance the understanding of how these concepts can be practically implemented. The research methodology aligns with the aim of gaining insights into tourist inputs, perceptions of destinations, decision-making influencers, and visit intentions.

3.3.2 Literature Review

Previous literature studying the constructs of destination marketing, user-generated content, perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, subjective norms, and visit intention have explored the constructs in various areas (or destinations) in different relationships to one another. However, the current literature does have certain research methodologies in common including the theoretical frameworks used. Below is a summary of previous literature and their research approach, theoretical framework, and sample size, however, the summary only contains 10 kinds of literature from 2019 until 2022 although a vast majority of literature has been consulted.

The following literature all studied either one or more of the constructs currently being studied in this study while some of the literature explored the similar relationships between some of the constructs in a different region or destination which contributes to the literature of this study.

In the study titled "Is smart tourism technology important in predicting visiting tourism destinations? Lessons from West Java, Indonesia," conducted in 2021, Wahyu Rafdinal, Eko Susanto, Syifaa Novianti, and Cahaya Juniarti utilized the Technology Acceptance Model to examine the significance of smart tourism technology, with a sample size of 324 tourists (Rafdinal, et al., 2021).

Vijay Pereira, Jeevan Jyoti Gupta, and Shabir Hussain, in their 2019 research, explored the "Impact of travel motivation on tourist's attitude toward destination: evidence of mediating effect of destination image" using a quantitative approach and incorporating the Theory of Image and Theory of Planned Behaviour, with a sample size of 350 (Pereira, et al., 2019).

Jassim Ahmad Al-Gasawneh and Abdullah Matar Al-Adamat, in 2020, investigated "The relationship between perceived destination image, social media interaction, and travel intentions relating to Neom city," employing a quantitative approach with the integration of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Technology Acceptance Model, and Protection Motivation Theory, and a sample size of 150 (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020).

"Empowering the traveller: An examination of the impact of user-generated content on travel planning," conducted in 2020 by Luiz Mendes-Filho, Annette M. Mills, Felix B. Tan, and Simon Milne, utilized the Technology Acceptance Model with a sample size of 268 (Mendes-Filho, et al., 2020).

Thao Thanh Thi Nguyen & Shurong Tong, in their 2022 study, explored "The impact of user-generated content on intention to select a travel destination" through a quantitative study aimed at developing a theoretical model, with a sample size of 407 (Nguyen & Tong, 2022).

In a 2021 study, Mohammad Tipu Sultan, Farzana Sharmin, Alina Badulescu Darie Gavrilut, & Ke Xue investigated "Social media-based content towards image formation: A new approach to the selection of sustainable destinations" using a quantitative approach with a sample size of 425 (Sultan, et al., 2021).

Mohammad Soliman, in 2019, extended "The Theory of Planned Behaviour to predict tourism destination revisit intention," employing a quantitative approach and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, with a sample size of 302 (Soliman, 2019).

"The Influence of smart technologies on customer journey in tourist attractions within the smart tourism management framework," investigated by Shiwei Shen, Marios Sotiriadis, and Yuwen Zhang in 2020, utilized a quantitative approach and the Consumer Journey model, with a sample size of 503 (Shen, et al., 2020).

Eko Susanto, Syifaa Novianti, Wahyu Rafdinal, Mega Fitriani, Adiwarna Prawira, and Chandra Budhi Septyandi, in a 2020 study, explored "Visiting Tourism Destination: Is It Influenced by Smart Tourism Technology?" using a quantitative approach with a sample size of 324 (Susanto, et al., 2020).

Pimtong Tavitiyaman, Hailin Qu, Wing-sze Lancy Tsang, Chin-Wah & Rachel Lam, in 2021, investigated "The influence of smart tourism applications on perceived destination image and behavioural intention: The moderating role of information search behaviour." The study employed a quantitative approach with the Theory of Reasoned Action and a substantial sample size of 1484 (Tavitiyaman, et al 2021).

3.3.3 Hypothesis Development

A hypothesis is a prediction made about a new construct or combination of constructs being studied in different relationships or influences on one another and observed using a particular theory (Creswell et al., 2018). These hypotheses that are developed are predictions of what will happen in the study by considering previous literature and existing evidence and further using reasoning to predict new findings in the context of the constructs being studied (Creswell et al., 2018).

The hypothesis developed within this study which was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 was observed from previous literature to determine what is currently known about the constructs and the relationships between one another that have been previously explored in different contexts or different regions. Furthermore, industry and market trends have been considered which were discussed in Chapter 2 and were used as information sources to inform the research problem as well as the hypothesis to study and test the relationship between the hypothesis developed to contribute to the existing literature while making practical contributions within the industry.

All the hypothesis developed for this study aims to observe the influence on visit intention to Southern Africa which will be tested to either prove or disprove the hypothesis. All the hypotheses were motivated in Chapter 3 where previous literature regarding the relationship between the constructs is highlighted. Furthermore, the hypothesis for this study will be evaluated in Chapter 5 with the data analysis and interpretation and further discussed in Chapter 6 with the data findings.

3.3.4 Research Design

A non-experimental research design will be used, specifically a correlational research design which is most suited for the quantitative research approach (Saunders, et al., 2019). A correlational research design investigates the relationship between various variables to determine the strength or direction between these variables without the researcher manipulating or controlling the outcome meaning the outcome of the relationship between the variables can be either positive or negative (Creswell, et al., 2018).

3.3.5 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of destination marketing, with a focus on digital marketing and user-generated content and smart tourism applications (specifically smart sightseeing), in influencing tourists' visit intention to Southern Africa.

Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the aim is to further understand the relationship between smart tourism applications in destination marketing and the

influence thereof on visit intention so that it can be effectively applied in the industry within Southern Africa to also contribute to the existing literature undertaken in different regions and that tested different relationships between the same or similar constructs. The purpose of this research will be achieved through the research methodology outlined in this chapter to test the hypothesis developed in Chapter 3 using the theoretical grounding and previous literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

3.4 Sampling Design

Various factors should be considered when creating the sampling design of a study such as the target population of the study, the sample frame that will be the best suited and the most appropriate sampling technique as well as the best suited sampling method, and the sample size given the available time frame of the study (Saunders, et al., 2019). Herewith follows the sampling design for this study considering all the previously mentioned factors and discussing it in more detail.

3.4.1 Target population

In research, the population refers to the entire group of individuals or entities that share common characteristics, from which a sample is drawn for the study (Wiid & Diggines, 2015). For the scope and objectives of this study, the population is delineated to align with the research aims and ensure clarity in sampling and data collection processes.

According to the Statista Research Deparment (2024), there were 1,300.11 million international tourist arrivals globally. For this study, the definition of a tourist from the Oxford Dictionary (2023) is used: “a person who is travelling or visiting a place for pleasure,” which relates to individuals traveling to a destination away from where they reside for leisure purposes.

The target population for this research comprises potential tourists from outside Southern Africa who have the means and interest to travel internationally for business, social interaction, or leisure. This selection is crucial for understanding how external perceptions and marketing efforts influence the decision-making process of prospective

visitors to Southern Africa. The study specifically targets individuals who are active internet users and engage with digital content related to travel. This includes people who frequently use social media, travel websites, and online booking platforms, as well as those likely to interact with user-generated content and smart tourism technologies.

Inclusion Criteria

- Geographical Location: Individuals residing outside Southern Africa.
- Internet Usage: Active internet users who regularly engage with digital travel content.
- Travel Experience: Individuals who have previously travelled internationally or have expressed a clear interest in doing so.
- Age Range: Adults aged 18 and above, ensuring they have the financial independence to make travel decisions and to ensure all ethical requirements are met and that all participants have the authority to give consent in their participation and are old enough to make informed decisions (Cresswell, et al., 2018).
- Language Proficiency: Proficiency in English, as the survey and digital content are presented in English.

Exclusion Criteria

- Residents of Southern Africa: To maintain an external perspective on the region.
- Non-Internet Users: Individuals who do not engage with digital travel content, as the study focuses on digital marketing and smart tourism applications.
- Minors: Individuals under the age of 18 are excluded due to ethical considerations and financial dependency.

3.4.2 Sample frame

A sample frame is a set of elements from which the sample is drawn, such as a list or record (Wiid & Diggines, 2015). The sample of the research is then drawn from the sample frame, and it is essential that the sample frame allows for an accurate and suitable sample without any shortcomings or weaknesses (Wiid & Diggines, 2015). A reliable sample frame must meet certain criteria: all elements of the population must be

represented, it must be up-to-date, and details must be correct with no duplications (Wiid & Diggines, 2015).

For this study, the sample frame included a list of employees from the voestalpine group. This group was chosen due to its diverse, international workforce, which provides a broad perspective on potential tourists who do not reside in Africa. The voestalpine group is a global company specializing in steel and technology, with employees located in various countries outside Southern Africa. This global presence makes it a suitable source for identifying individuals who have the means and interest to travel internationally for business, social interaction, or leisure.

Criteria for Choosing the voestalpine Group

- - International Diversity: The voestalpine group has a multinational workforce, ensuring a wide range of perspectives from different countries.
- - Interest in Travel: Within the voestalpine group, employees who indicated an interest in travel and adventure were identified, aligning with the study's focus on potential tourists.
- - Non-Residents of Africa: The selected individuals do not reside in Africa, maintaining the external perspective needed for the study.

The voestalpine group is managed by a corporate human resources department that maintains an up-to-date list of employees. This list was utilized to identify potential participants based on the specified criteria. Employees were contacted through internal communications and invited to participate in the study voluntarily.

The initial list from the voestalpine group allowed for the clear identification of appropriate participants. However, to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the sample, the questionnaire included screening questions. These questions helped eliminate any incorrect entries, ensuring that only suitable participants were included in the final sample. In addition to using the voestalpine group list, other sampling techniques were employed to reach a broader sample group. This multi-faceted approach ensured that the sample size was large enough to deliver quality and reliable research results.

3.4.3 Sample Method & Technique

The sampling method can be divided into two categories, non-probability sampling and probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is based on the judgment of the research where potential bias can occur; it is, however, less time-consuming compared to probability sampling which leads to non-probability sampling being the preferred method in market research with a time constraint (Wiid & Diggines, 2015). Non-probability sampling includes the following techniques: convenience sampling, judgment sampling also known as purposive sampling, snowball sampling, and quota sampling (Wiid & Diggines, 2015). Probability sampling means that each unit in the population has a chance to be selected meaning it is a random selection which is more time-consuming and costly compared to non-probability sampling, however, this method allows researchers to estimate the sampling error of a given sample size (Saunders, et al., 2019). Probability sampling includes the following techniques: simple random sampling, cluster sampling, stratified sampling, and system sampling (Wiid & Diggines, 2015).

Due to the study being cross-sectional and time being a constraint with no limited financial resources, non-probability sampling is best suited and will be used where a sample will be drawn from the population (Schindler, 2022). Although a sample frame exists in this study, non-probability sampling is still the best-suited sampling method because not every individual in the sample frame list has an equal chance to be selected, as only individuals fitting the target population will be contacted meaning it is not the whole sample frame who will be invited to participate but rather individuals on the list that will be purposively be selected. Non-probability sampling methods are often used in situations where it is challenging or impractical to obtain a random sample (Schindler, 2022). This method is more cost- and time-effective as mentioned previously (Schindler, 2022). Moreover, potential bias has been eliminated within this study as the researcher does not know the sample group personally but has easier access to the sample group through the sample technique employed allowing for more data to be collected in a shorter time frame.

A combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling will be further used within this study. Purposive sampling in particular will be used as the units (population)

have certain characteristics that are needed in the sample group such as certain psychographic characteristics for example “enjoys traveling” or “frequent travellers” and certain demographic characteristics which are individuals not from or currently residing in Southern Africa (Schindler, 2022). Having a specific purpose to fulfil, purposive sampling will be the best method to select the sample size from the population using the sample frame. The sample elements are subjectively selected by the researcher (Wiid & Diggines, 2015).

Furthermore, snowball sampling will be used which is a method of purposive sampling as the respondents selected using purposive sampling are used to identify other respondents with the same characteristics to take part in the study allowing a larger sample size to be reached within a shorter time frame (Wiid & Diggines, 2015).

The sample is individuals interested in traveling, exploring new destinations, and responsive to destination marketing. This unit of analysis is the best qualified to complete the research instrument which will allow the research questions to be answered which can further lead to the determination of the relationship between the constructs with the effect on visit intention.

3.4.4 Sample Size

Selecting the correct sample size is crucial to ensure that the collected data accurately represents the population and is sufficient for reliable data analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). A larger sample group allows for a clearer representation of the population, enhancing the reliability of the data (Saunders et al., 2019).

Criteria for Determining Sample Size

When determining the sample size for this study, several key factors were considered:

- Statistical Requirements: A minimum of 200 responses is generally required to run robust data analysis on statistical programs (Pallant, 2016).
- Cost of Data Collection: The budget available for data collection influenced the feasible sample size.

- Time Availability: The time available to collect and process the data also played a role in determining the sample size.
- Access to the Sample: The ease of accessing a sufficiently large and diverse sample was another important consideration (Pallant, 2016).

This study aimed to use a scientifically established sample size of 400 participants to ensure sufficient statistical power and representativeness. The target was based on recommendations from existing literature and methodological guidelines.

Statistical Power Analysis: A power analysis was conducted to determine the appropriate sample size. Using a significance level of 0.05, an effect size of 0.5 (medium effect), and a desired power of 0.80, the minimum required sample size was calculated to be approximately 200. To enhance the robustness and reliability of the findings, the target sample size was doubled to 400.

Comparison with Previous Studies: Previous literature on similar studies indicates a range of sample sizes from 150 to 1484 (see Table 4.1). The chosen sample size of 400 aligns well within this range and is sufficient to deliver reliable results for interpretation.

The study successfully collected 402 valid responses, exceeding the target sample size. This high response rate, as elaborated in Chapter 5, ensures the reliability and validity of the data, meeting all established criteria for robust data analysis.

In conclusion, the sample size for this study was determined using a combination of statistical power analysis and methodological guidelines, ensuring a scientifically sound basis for the sample size. This approach ensures that the study is examinable and capable of providing clear, reliable, and representative results.

3.5 Research Instrument

When employing a quantitative research approach, researchers have several data collection methods at their disposal. Each method has its strengths and limitations, making it suitable for different research contexts and objectives. The primary quantitative data collection methods include:

Surveys

Surveys are one of the most commonly used methods in quantitative research. They involve administering structured questionnaires to gather data from a large number of respondents (Wiid & Diggines, 2015). Surveys can be conducted through various modes, including online, face-to-face, or by mail. They are efficient for collecting standardized data and are particularly useful for studies that require a broad and diverse sample (Wiid & Diggines, 2015).

Mail Surveys

Mail surveys involve sending questionnaires to respondents through postal mail and requesting them to complete and return the forms (Saunders et al., 2019). This method can be useful for reaching a wide and diverse population, particularly those who may not have access to the internet. However, mail surveys generally have lower response rates and longer turnaround times (Saunders et al., 2019).

Web-based Surveys

Online questionnaires (Web-based surveys) are administered online and have become increasingly popular due to their convenience and efficiency (Saunders et al., 2019). They allow researchers to reach a large and geographically dispersed sample quickly. Online questionnaires can incorporate various multimedia elements, such as videos and images, to enhance respondent engagement. They also offer advantages in terms of data management and analysis, as responses are automatically recorded and can be easily exported for statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2019).

Observations

This method involves systematically recording observable behaviours or events in a natural or controlled setting (Cresswell, et al., 2018). Observations can be structured or unstructured and are often used in studies where direct interaction with participants is not feasible. Observational data can provide insights into actual behaviours, which may differ from self-reported data (Cresswell, et al., 2018).

Experiments

Experiments are a powerful method for establishing causal relationships between variables. In an experimental design, researchers manipulate one or more independent variables and measure the effect on dependent variables while controlling for unrelated factors (Cresswell, et al., 2018). Experiments can be conducted in laboratory settings or in the field, allowing for high levels of control and precision in testing hypotheses.

Personal Interviews

Personal interviews involve direct interaction between the researcher and the participant, typically conducted face-to-face (Wiid & Diggines, 2015). This method allows for the collection of in-depth and detailed quantitative data. Structured interviews with pre-determined questions can ensure consistency across interviews while still allowing for some probing and clarification (Wiid & Diggines, 2015).

Telephone Interviews

Similar to personal interviews, telephone interviews involve direct interaction but are conducted over the phone (Wiid & Diggines, 2015). This method can reach respondents who are geographically dispersed and may not be accessible for face-to-face interviews. Telephone interviews can be more cost-effective and time-efficient compared to personal interviews (Wiid & Diggines, 2015).

In summary, each data collection method in quantitative research offers distinct advantages and is suited to specific research needs and contexts. Researchers must carefully consider their research objectives, the nature of the study population, and the resources available when selecting the most appropriate data collection method.

Development & Pre-Testing of Research Instrument

Considering the research methodology in this study as well as the population and selected sampling technique, an online questionnaire is the most appropriate data collection instrument. This method effectively measures participants' perceptions of various constructs using a Likert scale (Creswell et al., 2018). Each of the eight constructs

in the study had five items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Advantages of Online Questionnaires

An online questionnaire offers several advantages. It allows for timely distribution and collection of data via platforms such as Google Forms, making it ideal for a sample group not located in Southern Africa (Wiid & Diggines, 2015). The ease of exchange between participants and researchers enhances response rates and ensures the efficiency of data collection (Saunders et al., 2019).

The research instrument's quality and efficiency are crucial, and thus, the questionnaire will undergo development and pre-testing before the main data collection phase (Saunders et al., 2019). The questionnaire was initially developed to measure constructs on a Likert scale, with measurements adapted from previous literature to ensure reliability and validity. It included demographic and profiling questions, reviewed for readability, user experience, and the logical flow of questions (Saunders et al., 2019).

Pre-testing and Reliability Testing

After the review, the questionnaire was sent to a sample group of 42 participants for pre-testing. This group was selected using purposive sampling from the sample frame, matching the study's criteria: individuals over 18 years old, with a passion for travel and adventure, and not residing in Southern Africa.

A reliability test using Cronbach’s Alpha was conducted to determine each construct's reliability in the pilot study before distributing the questionnaire to the larger sample. A recommended threshold of 0.7 for Cronbach’s Alpha ensures the constructs' reliability (Pallant, 2016). The constructs showed reliability with values above 0.7: digital marketing (0.770), user-generated content (0.712), smart sightseeing (0.802), perceived destination image (0.812), familiarity (0.929), attitude (0.752), subjective norms (0.749), and visit intention (0.717). However, the smart information systems construct (0.577) fell below the threshold and was excluded from the main study to maintain data quality.

In conclusion, the online questionnaire method, due to its efficiency, broad reach, and robust data collection capabilities, is best suited for this study. It ensures high-quality, reliable data collection essential for addressing the research questions effectively.

Table 3.1: Pilot Study Reliability Test Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
Digital Marketing	0.770	5
User-Generated Content	0.712	5
Smart Sightseeing	0.802	5
Smart Information Systems	0.577	2
Perceived Destination Image	0.812	5
Familiarity	0.929	5
Attitude	0.752	5
Subjective Norms	0.749	4
Visit Intention	0.717	5

3.6 Data Collection Method

The data will be collected from the previously discussed sample group through an online questionnaire which will import all the data into a Microsoft Excel sheet that can be used in the data analysis programs mentioned above. The online questionnaire was created using Google Forms and started with a short explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire, what it will be used for, and including contact details should they have any concerns. Thereafter, participants have the option to voluntarily participate in the questionnaire by indicating whether they are willing or not.

Screening and demographic questions followed which were used to eliminate any responses that do not meet the sample group criteria. Each construct was questioned using five statements to which the participants had to indicate on a Likert scale whether they disagree with or agree with. The Likert scale was measured from strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, strongly agree, and agree.

The online questionnaire was distributed through various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and LinkedIn as well as email with a short introduction text to invite them to participate below:

Discover the Future of Tourism: Your Insights Matter 🌍

As I embark on my Master's journey, I'm delving into the exciting world of destination marketing and smart tourism applications and the effect on visit intention to Southern Africa. However, I need your help to uncover the secrets that can transform Southern Africa into a sought-after destination. Before you click away, here's the catch – this survey is exclusively for individuals who aren't currently residing in or originally from Southern Africa and are older than 18 years.

I understand that your time is precious, but if you could spare just a few moments, your input could be the key to unlocking new possibilities for this remarkable region. Your participation will be strictly confidential, and your contribution is paramount to the success of my research.

Ready to shape the future of tourism? Click the link below to take the survey and be part of something extraordinary!

🔗 *Survey Link: https://forms.gle/2qQ392rgWcbBwMqh9*

Please share this survey with friends, family, or colleagues, who love travel and adventure as much as you do, it would be appreciated. Thank you in advance for your invaluable insights!

A cross-sectional design was used in this research as the data was collected at a one-time point during October 2023. The questionnaire including the consent brief is available in Appendix A.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data analysis is a crucial part of the study and was executed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), also known as IBM SPSS Statistics version 29 as well as AMOS version 29 where various statistical tests and models were performed such as frequencies, custom tables, summary statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and structured equation modelling.

Frequencies were used in the descriptive statistics to determine the number of times a variable occurred (Pallant, 2016). Custom tables were used to measure the perceptions of the participants using the 5-point Likert scale while confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the structure of the constructs (Pallant, 2016). The reliability of the data was tested using both Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability while the structured equation modelling was used to test the direct and indirect relationship between the constructs to determine whether the hypothesis was supported or not supported (Pallant, 2016). Furthermore, the validity of the study was tested using convergent validity, and discriminant validity to assess the measurement model. For the convergent validity, AVE was assessed while the correlation between the constructs was compared with the square root of the average variance extracted for the discriminant validity (Pallant, 2016).

The above-mentioned data analysis methods are explained in greater detail in Chapter 5 where the findings are also presented.

3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research methodology for this research study has been carefully selected to ensure that quality research can be carried out that will accurately analyse and interpret the data to contribute to the current literature as well as the industry in Southern Africa. Furthermore, the research methodology selected will aid in answering

the research questions and test the research hypothesis accurately. The following chapter will discuss the data that was collected using the above-discussed methodology.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter provides the empirical findings and analysis of the data collected in the study with the online research questionnaire in order to test the research objectives of the study. The online research questionnaire consists of three demographic items and further includes the nine constructs that were measured. The SPSS software version 29 was used to analyse the data. This chapter includes the following analysis: frequencies, custom tables, summary statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and structured equation modelling.

4.2 Response Rate

All respondents who took part in the study were required to be 18 years or older and not from or currently residing in Southern Africa. The data was collected over a period of four weeks and was distributed through online platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and email. During the data collection period, a total of 500 online questionnaires were distributed and 404 were returned giving a response rate of 81.00% out of which only 402 were valid for the analysis giving a valid response rate of 99.50%.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

To gain a better understanding of the collected data, descriptive statistics are used to measure the demographics of the respondents such as country of origin, gender, and age which will be presented hereunder to further show the statistical sample distribution. For the demographic data analysis frequencies, standard deviations, custom tables, and summary statistics were used to gain a clear view of the respondents and their demographic profile as well as their perception of the constructs measured.

4.3.1 Country of Origin

All respondents were required to not be from or currently residing in Southern Africa and as shown in Table 4.1 below it is seen that the majority of respondents were from Europe with 56.00% (n = 225) followed by North America with 13.20% (n = 53) and

Asia with 12.90% (n = 52). Participants were asked to indicate their country of origin as part of the profiling section in the questionnaire as seen in Appendix B.

Table 4.1: Country of Origin

Country of Origin	Valid Percent
Asia	12.90
Australia	4.50
Europe	56.00
Northern America	13.20
Africa	4.50
South America	4.50
Other	4.50
Total	**100.00**

4.3.2 Gender

Table 4.2 below indicates the gender of the respondents with the majority of the respondents being female with 60.00% (n = 241) and the rest being male with 40.00% (n = 161) meaning no respondents indicated otherwise.

Table 4.2: Gender

Gender	Valid Percent
Male	40.00
Female	60.00
Total	**100.00**

4.3.3 Age

The respondents that took part in the study were between the minimum age of 18 years and the maximum age of 59 years old with the average age being 29 years old as seen in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: Age Group

Age	Mean	Minimum Age	Maximum Age
	29 years	18 years	59 years

4.4 Custom Tables

The purpose of the custom tables is to measure the perceptions of the participants who are tourists on the eight different constructs namely digital marketing, user-generated content, smart sightseeing, perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, subjective norms, and visit intention. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the perception participants had of the statements on the various constructs, however, for a concise representation of the data the two upper scales (strongly disagree and agree) as well as the two lower scales (strongly agree and agree) have been combined (Creswell et al., 2018).

4.4.1 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing was measured to determine how aware tourists are of the tourism offerings in Southern Africa and to what extent digital marketing as a tool for destination marketing influences their decision-making. From all five statements that were measured under the construct, the mean was above 3 with the smallest mean being 3.72 and the largest mean being 3.92 suggesting that the majority of the respondents strongly agree or agree with the statements. Evaluating the individual statements under the construct in Table 4.4 below it is shown that 72.90% (n = 293) of respondents strongly agree and agree that digital marketing is helpful when searching for destinations online. The majority of respondents 72.90% (n = 293) also agree that they can obtain quality information through digital marketing. Furthermore, 79.30% (n = 319) of respondents strongly agree or agree that it is easy to make comparisons between destinations when booking online while a further 81.60% (n = 328) of respondents agreed that it is easy to do comparisons when searching for destinations online. Lastly, 69.90% (n = 281) of respondents strongly agree or agree that opinion exchange is easy online with other

individuals. It is also seen that the highest strongly disagree or disagree rate for the construct was 10.70% with the rest being lower suggesting that most respondents either had a neutral response or agreed to the statements. From Table 4.4 below it is further evident that the responses are closely aligned when observing the standard deviation indicating there is a consistency in the responses captured by the participants meaning there is a similar view amongst tourists with regards to the use and influence of digital destination marketing.

From Table 4.4 a clear image is represented of how the respondents answered the statements under the construct and provides insights into how the majority of respondents feel about the statements.

Table 4.4: Custom Table- Digital Marketing

Digital Marketing		Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
DM1: Digital marketing helps me to search for the right destination online.	Count	43	66	293	3.83	0.99
	Row N %	10.70%	16.40%	72.90%		
DM2: I can obtain quality information about a destination through digital marketing.	Count	39	70	293	3.81	0.91
	Row N %	9.70%	17.40%	72.90%		
DM3: It is easy to do comparisons with other destinations while booking online.	Count	38	45	319	3.93	0.91
	Row N %	9.50%	11.20%	79.30%		
DM4: Opinion exchange with other is possible through destination social networking sites.	Count	39	82	281	3.72	0.84
	Row N %	9.70%	20.40%	69.90%		
	Count	30	44	328	3.98	0.82

DM5: It is easy to do a comparison with other destinations when searching online.	Row N %	7.50%	10.90%	81.60%		

4.4.2 User-Generated Content

User-generated content was measured in this research to gain an understanding of how content created by other tourists influences the decision-making of tourists to either visit or not a destination and further to understand the relationship between this construct and familiarity by measuring the responses of tourists with five statements. From all five statements that were measured under the construct, the mean was above 3 with the smallest mean being 3.44 and the largest mean being 4.15 suggesting that the majority of the respondents strongly agree or agree with the statements. Evaluating the individual statements under the construct in Table 4.5 below it is shown that 81.60% of respondents (n = 328) strongly agree and agree that user comments and reviews from other tourists are more beneficial compared to the information provided by the brand or destination custodian. The majority of respondents 71.40% (n = 287) agree that they trust comments or reviews from other tourists online to be an accurate representation of the destination. Furthermore, 80.80% (n = 325) of respondents agreed that they trust reviews from friends or people they follow online on social networking sites while only 2.50% (n = 10) of respondents disagreed with this statement. Moreover, 68.10% (n = 274) of respondents agreed that they would trust a destination review online from another tourist while 16.70% (n = 67) of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. Lastly, the statement with the lowest agreement rate, only 51.50% (n = 207) of respondents feel they can easily exchange ideas with tourists on digital platforms while 31.60% neither agreed nor disagreed.

From Table 4.5 below it is further evident that the responses are closely aligned with a standard deviation mostly ranging between 0.80 and 0.81 with the lowest standard deviation being 0.78 and the highest standard deviation being 0.93.

From Table 4.5 a clear image is represented of how the respondents answered the statements under the construct and provides insights into how the majority of respondents feel about the statements regarding user-generated content.

Table 4.5: Custom Table- User-Generated Content

User-Generated Content		Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
UGC1: I believe user comments / reviews of a destination are more beneficial than brand provided information	Count	18	56	328	4.04	0.80
	Row N %	4.50%	13.90%	81.60%		
UGC2: I trust user comments / reviews of a destination to be a reasonable accurate representation of a destination.	Count	26	89	287	3.82	0.81
	Row N %	6.50%	22.10%	71.40%		
UGC3: I trust reviews from friends or people I follow on social networking websites.	Count	10	67	325	4.15	0.80
	Row N %	2.50%	16.70%	80.80%		
UGC4: I would trust a destination review posted by another tourist.	Count	30	98	274	3.74	0.78
	Row N %	7.50%	24.40%	68.10%		
UGC5: I generally find it easy to exchange ideas with tourists on digital platforms.	Count	68	127	207	3.44	0.93
	Row N %	16.90%	31.60%	51.50%		

4.4.3 Smart Sightseeing

For the purpose of the study, it was crucial to understand the respondents understanding and perception of smart sightseeing to further evaluate the relationship between the construct on tourists' attitude as well as their visit intention. This construct was also measured using five statements to which the respondents had to answer using

the Likert scale. From all five statements that were measured under the construct, the mean was closely aligned with all the statements with a mean above 3 with the smallest mean being 3.24 and the largest mean being 3.93 suggesting that the majority of the respondents strongly agree or agree with the statements. The individual statements had a lower agreement rate compared to the previous two constructs. Only 67.10% (n = 270) of respondents agreed that they would prefer to visit a destination that offers personal itineraries while 22.40% (n = 90) respondents did not disagree nor agreed. The statement with this highest agreement rate under this construct had 77.10% (n = 310) of respondents agree that they would like to visit destinations where they can get online tourism recommendations easily while only 4.20% (n = 17) disagreed. Further, only 54.50% (n = 219) of respondents agreed that e-tour maps are important to them when visiting a destination while only 44.80% of respondents agreed that e-commerce systems are important to them when visiting a destination. Lastly, 67.90% of respondents agreed that intelligent guide systems make it easier to navigate a destination.

From table 4.6 below it is evident that the standard deviation is widely spread ranging between 0.76 and 1.07 meaning that the responses are not closely aligned with one another, and the majority of respondents did not agree with all the statements.

Table 4.6: Custom Table- Smart Sightseeing

Smart Sightseeing		Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
SS1: I would prefer to visit a destination that offer personal itineraries according to my likes and dislikes.	Count	42	90	270	3.69	0.94
	Row N %	10.50%	22.40%	67.10%		
SS2: I like to visit destinations where I can get online tourism recommendations easily.	Count	17	75	310	3.93	0.76
	Row N %	4.20%	18.70%	77.10%		
SS3: E-tour maps is important to me when visiting a destination.	Count	80	103	219	3.46	0.99
	Row N %	19.90%	25.60%	54.50%		
	Count	105	117	180	3.24	1.07

SS4: E-commerce systems is important to me when visiting a destination.	Row N %	26.10%	29.10%	44.80%		
SS5: Intelligent guide systems make it easier to navigate a destination when traveling.	Count	37	92	273	3.75	0.85
	Row N %	9.20%	22.90%	67.90%		

4.4.4 Perceived Destination Image

To gain insight into the perception of tourists regarding Southern Africa, the respondents were asked to respond to five different statements which evaluated the perceived destination image of the destination. From all five statements that were measured under the construct, the mean was above 3 for four of the statements with the smallest mean being 2.50 and the largest mean being 4.29 suggesting that the majority of the respondents strongly agree or agree with most of the statements. Evaluating the individual statements under the construct in Table 4.7 below it is shown that 73.20% (n = 294) of respondents agree that Southern Africa offers exciting and interesting places to visit while a further 87.60% (n = 352) of respondents agree that Southern Africa has beautiful scenery and national attractions. More than half of the respondents, 54.00% (n = 217) neither disagreed nor agreed that Southern Africa offers good value for money while only 41.80% (n = 168) agreed that the destination does offer value for money. Furthermore, 59.50% (n = 239) of respondents agreed that Southern Africa has great recreation activities and tourism attractions while 10.40% (n = 42) respondents disagreed with the statement. Lastly, 54.00% (n = 217) of respondents disagreed with the statement that Southern Africa feels safe and secure to visit while only 15.90% (n = 64) agreed that the destination feels safe and secure.

From Table 4.7 below it is further evident that the responses are not all closely aligned with a standard deviation ranging between the lowest being 0.79 and the highest standard deviation being 1.01. From Table 4.7 a clear image is represented of how the respondents answered the statements under the construct and provides insights into how the majority of respondents perceive Southern Africa.

Table 4.7: Custom Table- Perceived Destination Image

Perceived Destination Image		Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
PDI1: Southern Africa offers exciting and interesting places to visit.	Count	15	93	294	3.98	0.80
	Row N %	3.70%	23.10%	73.20%		
PDI2: Southern Africa has beautiful scenery and natural attractions.	Count	11	39	352	4.29	0.80
	Row N %	2.70%	9.70%	87.60%		
PDI3: Southern Africa offers good value for money.	Count	17	217	168	3.48	0.79
	Row N %	4.20%	54.00%	41.80%		
PDI4: I perceive Southern Africa as a destination with great recreational activities and tourism attractions.	Count	42	121	239	3.69	0.97
	Row N %	10.40%	30.10%	59.50%		
PDI5: Visiting Southern Africa feels safe and secure.	Count	217	121	64	2.50	1.01
	Row N %	54.00%	30.10%	15.90%		

4.4.5 Familiarity

To determine how familiar tourists are with the offerings of Southern Africa, the construct was measured using five statements, however, comparing the custom table for familiarity to the custom tables of the other constructs, familiarity had the highest disagreement rate for all the statements meaning it can be assumed that tourists are not familiar with the destination offerings. The mean was closely aligned for all the statements; however, the mean is below 3 for all five statements with the smallest mean being 2.16 and the largest mean being 2.54 suggesting that the majority of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statements. Evaluating the individual statements under the construct in Table 4.8 below it is shown that 60.00% (n = 241) respondents disagreed that they are familiar with the wide variety of tourism offerings in Southern Africa while only 21.60% (n = 87) of respondents agreed to be familiar with the tourism offerings. More than half of respondents, 53.80% (n = 216), disagreed that they are familiar with the tourism offerings in Southern Africa compared to their friends. Furthermore, 68.80% (n = 276) of respondents disagreed indicating that

they do not often spend time looking at content information about Southern Africa while only 15.30% (n = 62) agreed. The majority of respondents, 65.40% (n = 263) of respondents disagreed that they are familiar with information on Southern Africa. Interestingly, compared to people who travel a lot 67.47% (n = 271) of respondents disagreed that they are familiar with vacation destinations across Southern Africa while only 14.20% (n = 57) agreed that they are familiar with vacation destinations in Southern Africa. From Table 4.8 below it is clear that they standard deviation is closely aligned, however, for all the statements it is above 1.

Table 4.8: Custom Table- Familiarity

Familiarity		Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
FM1: I am familiar with a wide variety of tourism offerings in Southern Africa.	Count	241	74	87	2.47	1.11
	Row N %	60.00%	18.40%	21.60%		
FM2: Compared to my friends, I am very familiar with a wide variety of destinations in Southern Africa.	Count	216	83	103	2.54	1.24
	Row N %	53.80%	20.60%	25.60%		
FM3: I often spend time looking at content information about Southern Africa.	Count	276	64	62	2.16	1.11
	Row N %	68.80%	15.90%	15.30%		
FM4: I am very familiar with information on Southern Africa.	Count	263	86	53	2.22	1.06
	Row N %	65.40%	21.40%	13.20%		
FM5: Compared to people who travel a lot, I am very familiar with a wide variety of vacation destinations in Southern Africa.	Count	271	74	57	2.20	1.06
	Row N %	67.40%	18.40%	14.20%		

4.4.6 Attitude

Attitude towards Southern Africa was measured to determine whether tourists have a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the tourism offerings in Southern

Africa and to what extent it influences their decision-making. From all five statements that were measured under the construct, the mean was above 3 with the smallest mean being 3.38 and the largest mean being 3.90 suggesting that the majority of the respondents strongly agree or agree with the statements. Evaluating the individual statements under the construct in Table 4.9 below it is shown that 52.50% (n = 211) of respondents indicated that they have a favourable attitude towards tourism attractions using social media while 31.30% (n = 126) neither disagreed nor agreed. Majority of respondents 70.00% (n = 281) agreed that they feel visiting Southern Africa will be worth it, however, 63.40% (n = 255) of respondents feel tourism attractions are interesting to them while only 8.20% of respondents disagreed. Furthermore, 61.60% (n = 248) of respondents agreed that they enjoy visiting tourist attraction they have seen on social media which is a crucial consideration when evaluating destination marketing. Lastly, 55.30% (n = 222) of tourists agreed that attraction in Southern Africa is valuable while only 6.90% disagreed with the statement.

From Table 4.9 below it is further evident that the responses are closely aligned with a standard deviation the lowest standard deviation being 0.81 and the highest standard deviation being 0.92. It can be assumed that majority of tourists have a favourable attitude towards Southern Africa and its tourist offerings.

Table 4.9: Custom Table- Attitude

Attitude		Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
ATT1: I have a favourable attitude towards tourism attractions that use social media.	Count	65	126	211	3.38	0.89
	Row N %	16.20%	31.30%	52.50%		
ATT2: Visiting Southern Africa will be worth it.	Count	22	99	281	3.90	0.92
	Row N %	5.40%	24.60%	700%		
ATT3: Southern Africa's tourism attractions are very interesting to me.	Count	33	114	255	3.71	0.89
	Row N %	8.20%	28.40%	63.40%		
	Count	42	112	248	3.55	0.81

ATT4: I enjoy visiting tourist attractions I have seen on social media previously.	Row N %	10.50%	27.90%	61.60%		
ATT5: Visiting tourist attractions in Southern Africa is very valuable.	Count	28	152	222	3.60	0.87
	Row N %	6.90%	37.80%	55.30%		

4.4.7 Subjective Norms

Subjective norms can influence attitude and ultimately alter behaviour and, therefore, it is crucial to understand what role subjective norms play in the visit intention of tourists. From all five statements that were measured the mean was not above 3 for two of the statements measuring below 3. The smallest mean was 2.60 and the largest mean was 3.45 meaning that not all the participants consistently agreed to the statements. Evaluating the individual statements in Table 4.10 it is shown that only 56.20% (n = 226) agree that the people whose opinion they value would support their decision to visit Southern Africa while only 26.20% agreed that it matters to them what their peers think of their destination choice while 50.70% (n = 204) disagreed. Furthermore, only 44.50% (n = 197) of respondents agreed that people who are important to them think they should visit Southern Africa if they want to. Moreover, only 23.40% (n = 94) agreed that they are planning to visit a destination in Southern Africa with their friends while 46.50% disagreed. Lastly, 40.80% (n = 141) of respondents agreed that they intend to travel to a destination in Southern Africa that they have seen online before while 31.30% disagreed.

From Table 4.10 it is further evident that the responses are closely aligned with one another, however, most of the standard deviations are above 1 meaning there is variance in the data collected for this construct. The data collected and presented in Table 4.10 is interesting to observe in terms of subjective norms and the perception of the respondents.

Table 4.10: Custom Table- Subjective Norms

Subjective Norms		Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
SN1: People whose opinion I value would support my decision to visit Southern Africa.	Count	67	109	226	3.45	1.00
	Row N %	16.70%	27.10%	56.20%		
SN2: It matters to me what my peers think of my destination of choice and if they will support it.	Count	204	93	105	2.60	1.10
	Row N %	50.70%	23.10%	26.20%		
SN3: People who are important to me think I should visit Southern Africa if I want to.	Count	75	148	197	3.29	1.00
	Row N %	18.70%	36.80%	44.50%		
SN4: My friends and I plan to travel to a destination in Southern Africa that we had wanted to visit.	Count	187	121	94	2.67	1.12
	Row N %	46.50%	30.10%	23.40%		
SN5: I intend on traveling to a destination in Southern African that I have seen online before	Count	126	112	141	3.04	1.11
	Row N %	31.30%	27.90%	40.80%		

4.4.8 Visit Intention

The last construct that was measured was the visit intention which is a crucial measurement in order to gain an understanding of whether tourists are intending to visit Southern Africa or not. From the data shown in Table 4.11, it is evident that the responses were overall aligned where the majority of the respondents had the same response as the mean is above 3 for all five of the statements with the smallest mean being 3.0 and the largest mean being 3.92. Evaluating the individual responses, 42.50% (n = 171) of respondents neither disagreed nor agreed that they would rather visit destinations utilizing smart tourism applications while only 33.80% (n = 136) of respondents agreed. The majority of respondents 66.70% (n = 268) agreed that they are likely to travel to a destination they have seen online before while only 13.90% (n = 56) disagreed. Furthermore, 37.30% (n = 150) of respondents agreed that they are likely to travel to a destination they saw on social media that was recommended by an influencer while 32.80% (n = 132) neither disagreed nor agreed. Interestingly 75.40% (n = 303) of

respondents agreed that they are willing to visit Southern Africa in the future while only 7.40% (n = 30) disagreed, however, only 52.40% (n = 210) of respondents indicated that they intend to visit Southern Africa in the future.

From Table 4.11 it is further evident that the responses are closely aligned with one another, however, two of the standard deviations are above 1 meaning there is variance in the data collected for this construct with the smallest standard deviation being 0.94 and the largest standard deviation being 1.10.

Table 4.11: Custom Table- Visit Intention

Visit Intention		Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
VI1: I intend to rather visit destinations with Smart Tourism Applications.	Count	95	171	136	3.07	1.00
	Row N %	23.70%	42.50%	33.80%		
VI2: I am likely to travel to a destination I have seen on social media.	Count	56	78	268	3.60	0.94
	Row N %	13.90%	19.40%	66.70%		
VI3: I will likely visit a tourism destination that I saw on social media recommended by an influencer.	Count	120	132	150	3.00	1.10
	Row N %	29.90%	32.80%	37.30%		
VI4: I am willing to visit Southern Africa in the future.	Count	30	69	303	3.92	0.95
	Row N %	7.40%	17.20%	75.40%		
VI5: I intend to travel to Southern Africa in the future.	Count	13	139	210	3.58	1.04
	Row N %	13.20%	34.60%	52.20%		

4.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in this study to validate the factor structure of the following constructs: digital marketing, user-generated content, smart sightseeing, perceived destination image, attitude, familiarity, and visit intention. IBM analysis of the moment structure AMOS version 29 was used to perform the CFA. The factor structure of the constructs in the study was confirmed and validated using the

absolute and relative model fit indices as shown in Table 4.12 below and discussed hereunder.

The chi-square test for model fit produced non-significant p-values for digital marketing (p = 0.11), UGC (p = 0.17), smart sightseeing (p = 0.05), familiarity (p = 0.72), attitude (p = 0.46), and visit intention (p = 0.29). These results suggest that the model fits the data well for these constructs, as the obtained chi-square values are not significantly different from the expected values. However, for perceived destination image, (p = 0.00), and subjective norms (p = 0.00) the chi-square test for model fit resulted in a significant p-value of below the threshold of >0.05. This indicates that the model does not fit the data well for this construct, as the obtained chi-square value is significantly different from the expected values. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.06 for digital marketing, 0.05 for UGC, 0.07 for smart sightseeing, 0.00 for familiarity and attitude, and 0.02 for visit intention indicating a close fit to the data. This suggests that the model provides a good representation of the observed relationships. However, the RMSEA was 0.16 for perceived destination image, and 0.22 for subjective norms suggesting that the model does not provide a close fit to the data for these constructs. This higher RMSEA value may indicate potential issues with the model's representation of the relationships within the perceived destination image. The Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) was 0.02 for digital marketing. 0.01 for UGC, 0.02 for smart sightseeing, 0.02 for perceived destination image, 0.00 for familiarity, 0.01 for attitude, 0.10 for subjective norms, and 0.01 for visit intention suggesting a minimal discrepancy between the observed and predicted covariance matrices. This indicates a good fit of the model to the data. The Goodness-of-fit Statistics (GFI) produced a value of 1.00 for digital marketing, 1.00 for UGC, 0.99 for smart sightseeing, 0.99 for perceived destination image, 1.00 for familiarity, 1.00 for attitude, 0.90 for subjective norms, and 1.00 for visit intention close to the ideal value of 1.00. This indicates a strong overall fit of the model to the data. The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.97 for digital marketing, 0.98 for UGC, and 0.95 for smart sightseeing, 1.01 for familiarity, 1.00 for attitude, and 1.00 for visit intention exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.95. This suggests a high likelihood that the proposed model adequately represents the observed data. However, the TLI for the perceived destination image was 0.83, and 0.46 for subjective norms suggesting that

the proposed model may not adequately represent the observed data for this construct. The TLI falling below the recommended threshold of 0.95 indicates potential limitations in the model's ability to capture the relationships within the perceived destination image. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) generated a value of 0.99 for digital marketing, 1.00 for UGC, 0.98 for smart sightseeing, 0.98 for perceived destination image, and 1.00 for familiarity and attitude and visit intention surpassing the threshold of 0.95. This indicates a high degree of fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data, however, the value for subjective norms was 0.73 which is below the recommended threshold indicating weak fit. The Normed-Fit Index (NFI) was 0.99 for digital marketing, 1.00 for UGC, 0.98 for smart sightseeing, 0.98 for perceived destination image, 1.00 for familiarity, 1.00 for attitude, and 1.00 for visit intention which is all above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.90. This suggests a satisfactory fit of the model to the observed data. However, the NFI for subjective norms was 0.72 which is below the recommended threshold indicating a potential limitation in the model fit. The Relative Fit Index (RFI) generated a value of 0.94 for digital marketing, 0.97 for UGC, 0.93 for smart sightseeing, 1.00 for familiarity, 0.99 for attitude, and 0.99 for visit intention exceeding the threshold of 0.90. This suggests a reliable fit of the model to the data. However, the Relative Fit Index (RFI) generated a value of 0.81 for perceived destination image, and 0.45 for subjective norms falling below the threshold of 0.90. This indicates a potential limitation in the model's fit to the data for the perceived destination image construct. The Incremental Fit Index (IFI) was 0.99 for digital marketing, 1.00 for UGC, 0.98 for smart sightseeing, 0.98 for perceived destination image, and 1.00 for familiarity, attitude, and visit intention surpassing the threshold of 0.95. This implies a strong fit between the proposed model and the observed data, however, for subjective norms a value of 0.73 was generated indicating a potential limitation in the model fit for this construct.

In summary, the evaluation of model fit using various statistical indices reveals a generally strong fit for constructs such as digital marketing, UGC, and smart sightseeing, as indicated by non-significant chi-square p-values, low RMSEA, and high GFI, TLI, CFI, NFI, RFI, and IFI values. However, for the Perceived Destination Image, a significant chi-square p-value and higher RMSEA suggest a potential lack of fit. While most constructs exhibit reliable and strong fits, the lower TLI and RFI for Perceived Destination Image

indicate limitations in the model's representation of relationships within this specific construct.

Table 4.12: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Absolute & Relative Fit Indices	Recommended Values	References	Digital Marketing	User-Generated Content	Smart Sightseeing	Perceived Destination Image	Familiarity	Attitude	Subjective Norms	Visit Intention
Chi-Square p-value	> 0.05		0.11	0.17	0.05	0.00	0.72	0.46	0.00	0.29
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	≤ 0.06	Browne and Cudeck (1993), Steiger and Lind (1980).	0.06	0.05	0.07	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.02
The Root Measure Square Residual (RMR)	Close to 0	Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993).	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.10	0.01
Goodness-of-fit Statistics (GFI)	Close to 1.0	Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993).	1.00	1.00	0.99	0.99	1.00	1.00	0.90	1.00
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	> 0.95	Tucker and Lewis (1973).	0.97	0.98	0.95	0.83	1.01	1.00	0.46	1.00
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	> 0.95	Bentler (1990).	0.99	1.00	0.98	0.98	1.00	1.00	0.73	1.00
Normed-Fit Index (NFI)	> 0.90	Bentler and Bonett (1980).	0.99	1.00	0.98	0,98	1.00	1.00	0.72	1.00
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	> 0.90	Bentler and Bonett (1980).	0.94	0.97	0.93	0.81	1.00	0.99	0.45	0.99
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	> 0.95	Bollen (1989).	0.99	1.00	0.98	0.98	1.00	1.00	0.73	1.00

4.6 Reliability Test

A reliability test was conducted to determine how free the data is from error meaning how consistent the measurements are. A measure is considered reliable when it delivers consistent outcomes under consistent conditions (Creswell, et al., 2018). For this study, both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were performed. Cronbach's alpha indicates the average correlation amongst all the constructs that make up the scale which has a value ranging from 1 to 0 where a higher value indicates a better reliability (Pallant, 2016). When there a fewer than 10 items in the scale the Cronbach alpha value can be small. However, the suggested threshold for Cronbach's alpha value is 0.70 or greater (Pallant, 2016). Furthermore, composite reliability is another measure of internal consistency in scale items with a recommended threshold of 0.70. A high composite reliability value means the items constantly measure the same construct (Creswell, et al., 2018).

As seen in Table 4.13 below Cronbach's alpha value is above the suggested threshold of 0.70 for digital marketing (0.73), user-generated content (0.73), smart sightseeing (0.75), perceived destination image (0.72), familiarity (0.92), and attitude (0.73) meaning the constructs and measurements are reliable. However, for subjective norms (0.69) and visit intention (0.64) the value is below the recommended threshold.

The composite reliability test delivered similar results as seen in Table 4.13 below with values above the recommended threshold for digital marketing, smart sightseeing, perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, and visit intention with values below the recommended threshold for user-generated content and subjective norms.

Table 4.13: Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha & Composite Reliability)

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	No of Items
Digital Marketing	0.73	0.54	5
User-Generated Content	0.73	1.02	5
Smart Sightseeing	0.75	0.66	5

Perceived Destination Image	0.72	0.80	5
Familiarity	0.92	1.00	5
Attitude	0.73	0.82	5
Subjective Norms	0.69	0.68	4
Visit Intention	0.64	0.88	5

4.7 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was performed in this study to determine the relationship between smart tourism sightseeing and destination marketing in tourists' visit intention. The correlation analysis within this study was done using the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) which ranges from-1 to 1. The strength of the relationship between the variables is indicated by the size of the absolute value. The sign which can either be a + or a – indicates whether there is a positive or negative correlation among the variables (Pallant, 2016). A positive correlation means as one variable increase so does the other while a negative correlation means as one variable increases the other decreases (Pallant, 2016). The values can be explained as follows: 1 indicates a perfect positive linear relationship, 0 indicates no linear relationship, and-1 indicates a perfect negative linear relationship (Pallant, 2016). Cohen (1988) suggests the following guidelines when interpreting the strength of the relationship and the values of the correlations while further suggesting a value of < 0.05 represents a significant p-value when interpreting the correlation analysis:

Weak: r = 0.10 to 0.29

Moderate: r = 0.30 to 0.49

Strong: r = 0.50 to 10.00

In Table 4.14 there is a statistically significant (p-value < 0.05) weak positive correlation (r = 0.19) between digital marketing and perceived destination image. There

is also a statistically significant (p-value < 0.05) weak positive correlation (r = 0.25) between smart sightseeing and attitude. Lastly, there is a statistically significant (p-value < 0.05) weak positive correlation (r = 0.27) between smart sightseeing and visit intention.

Furthermore, there is a statistically significant (p-value < 0.05) moderate positive correlation (r = 0.38) between familiarity and attitude while there is a statistically significant (p-value < 0.05) strong positive correlation (r = 0.68) between perceived destination image and attitude as well as a strong positive correlation (r = 0.63) between attitude and visit intention and lastly a strong positive correlation (r = 0.53) between subjective norms and visit intention.

There is a statistically insignificant (p-value> 0.05) weak negative correlation (r =-0.03) between user-generated content and familiarity.

Considering the above interpretation and data shown in Table 4.14 it is evident that most variable relationships demonstrate a positive correlation amongst the constructs that were measured.

Table 4.14: Correlation & Discriminant Validity Analysis

		Digital Marketing	User Generated Content	Smart Sightseeing	Perceived Destination Image	Familiarity	Attitude	Subjective Norms	Visit Intention
Digital Marketing	Pearson Correlation	0.65							
	Sig. (2-tailed)								
	N	402							
User Generated Content	Pearson Correlation	0.48**	0.65						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001							
	N	402	402						
Smart Sightseeing	Pearson Correlation	0.35**	0.18**	0.70					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001						
	N	402	402	402					
Perceived Destination Image	Pearson Correlation	0.19**	0.08	0.08	0.71				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	,109	,094					
	N	402	402	402	402				
Familiarity	Pearson Correlation	0.11*	-0.03	0.08	0.44**	0.87			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,034	,527	,120	<,001				
	N	402	402	402	402	402			
Attitude	Pearson Correlation	0.32**	0.12*	0.25**	0.68**	0.38**	0.75		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	,016	<,001	<,001	<,001			
	N	402	402	402	402	402	402		
Subjective Norms	Pearson Correlation	0.16**	0.08	0.22**	0.55**	0.48**	0.51**	0.64	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	,136	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001		
	N	402	402	402	402	402	402	402	
Visit Intention	Pearson Correlation	0.36**	0.21**	0.27**	0.51**	0.33**	0.63**	0.53**	0.70
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	
	N	402	402	402	402	402	402	402	402
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).									

4.8 Structural Equation Modelling

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was conducted in this study to determine whether smart sightseeing influences tourists' visit intention as well as to determine the relationship between attitude and visit intention moderated by subjective norms. SEM was done using SMART PLS version 4. In assessing a structural equation model the measurement model is first assessed followed by the structural model.

4.8.1 Assessment of the Measurement Model

The reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were examined to assess the measurement model. For the study to assess the reliability of the measurement model, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability for each construct were calculated as indicated in Table 4.13. It was evident from Table 4.13, that the study constructs were reliable.

4.8.2 Assess Convergent Validity

In this study, convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE is used to assess the degree to which a construct explains the variance of its indicators. The results of AVE can range from 0 to 1 where the suggested threshold is 0.50 to indicate a good convergent validity (Pallant, 2016). A higher AVE is desirable.

As seen in Table 4.15 below the following constructs had a higher AVE of above the suggested threshold (0.50); digital marketing (0.63), user-generated content (0.693), smart sightseeing (0.56), perceived destination image (0.72), familiarity (0.75), attitude (0.73), subjective norms (0.60), and visit intention (0.89) meaning that at least 50% of the variance in the indicators is attributable to the latent construct, indicating strong convergent validity. This means that the latent construct is effectively capturing the shared variance among its indicators.

Table 4.15: Convergent Validity

Construct	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Digital Marketing	0.63
User-Generated Content	0.69
Smart Sightseeing	0.56
Perceived Destination Image	0.72
Familiarity	0.75
Attitude	0.73
Subjective Norms	0.60
Visit Intention	0.89

4.8.3 Assess Discriminant Validity

To assess the discriminant validity the correlation between the constructs was compared with the square root of the average variance extracted as indicated in Table 4.14. For the dimensions to be discriminant valid the square root of the AVE should be greater than the correlation between the constructs (Pallant, 2016). As seen in Table 4.14 all the constructs are discriminant valid.

4.8.4 Assess the Structural Model

After assessing the measurement model, the structural model was then assessed using the path coefficients, t-values, p-values and coefficient of determination as presented in Table 4.16 and Figure 4.1 below. In Table 4.16 below there is a positive and statically significant relationship between digital marketing and perceived destination image ($\beta = 0.27$, $t = 5.97$, p-value = 0.00) supporting hypothesis 1. There is a positive and statically significant relationship between smart sightseeing and attitude ($\beta = 0.13$, $t = 2.95$, p-value = 0.00) supporting hypothesis 3. There is a positive and statically significant

relationship between perceived destination image and attitude (β = 0.68, t = 18.19, p-value = 0.00) supporting hypothesis 5. Furthermore, a positive and statically significant relationship between familiarity and attitude (β = 0.15, t = 4.07, p-value = 0.00) supports hypothesis 6. A positive and statically significant relationship between attitude and visit intention (β = 0.53, t = 12.66, p-value = 0.00) supports hypothesis 7. Lastly, a positive and statically significant relationship between subjective norms and visit intention (β = 0.30, t = 8.59, p-value = 0.00) supports hypothesis 8a.

However, a positive and statically insignificant relationship between smart sightseeing and visit intention (β = 0.01, t = 0.24, p-value = 0.81) does not support hypothesis 2 while a negative and statically insignificant relationship between user-generated-content and familiarity (β =-0.10, t = 1.73, p-value = 0.08) does not support hypothesis 4.

Table 4.16: Structural Equation Model Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path-coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Digital Marketing -> Perceived Destination Image	0.27	5.97	0.00	Supported
H2	Smart Sightseeing -> Visit Intention	0.01	0.24	0.81	Not Supported
H3	Smart Sightseeing -> Attitude	0.13	2.95	0.00	Supported
H4	User-Generated Content -> Familiarity	-0.10	1.73	0.08	Not Supported
H5	Perceived Destination Image -> Attitude	0.68	18.19	0.00	Supported
H6	Familiarity -> Attitude	0.15	4.07	0.00	Supported
H7	Attitude -> Visit Intention	0.53	12.66	0.00	Supported
H8	Subjective Norms -> Visit Intention	0.30	8.59	0.00	Supported

H8b	Subjective Norms x Attitude -> Visit Intention	-0,05	2.50	0.01	Supported

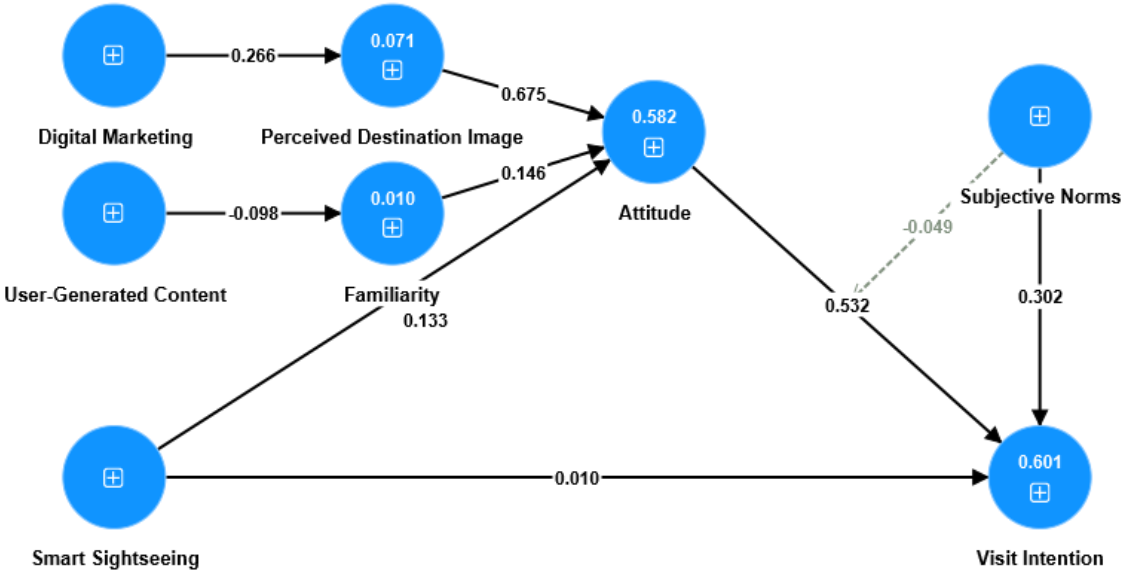


Figure 6: Structural Equation Model Results

4.9 Moderation

The study results are shown in table 4.16 revealed a negative and statically significant moderating impact of subject norms on the relationship between attitude and visit intention (β =-0.05, t = 2.50, p-value = 0.01) supporting hypothesis 8.

These results suggest that the presence or the moderating effect of subjective norms does weaken the relationship between attitudes and visit intentions.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the data analysis of the study from the data collected using the online questionnaire while further insights into the hypothesis testing will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings & Result Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter will provide further insights into the data analysis and hypothesis testing presented in Chapter 4 as well as a summary of the participants' demographic profile and their perceptions of the constructs measured. The discussion to follow will answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and determine whether the research objectives were met. The following results discussion will add to the current literature in the respective fields of tourism and destination marketing.

5.2 Participants' Demographic Profile

As previously discussed, the responses for the online questionnaire were recorded anonymously while participants only answered selective questions used to profile them such as their age, to ensure they are older than 18 years, gender, and country of origin, to ensure they are not from Southern Africa. The participants' (n = 402) responses were analysed and presented in the previous chapter.

The study focused on the travel and tourism industry of Southern Africa to address the present literature gap and to gain insights into the attractiveness of the tourism industry within this region. Further, the aim was to explore the various influences on the visit intention to this area. Therefore, it was crucial to reach a large sample from various destinations to gather insights into their perceptions of the constructs that were measured.

From the data presented, it is interesting to see responses from travellers across the globe and not just from one country allowing more in-depth insight into the general perception of tourists. The majority of respondents were from Europe and secondly from Asia as seen in Table 4.1 giving a broad overview of what tourists think of Southern Africa.

The majority of the participants identified as female (60.00%) based on the data collected as seen in Table 4.2, however, there were no limitations on gender, and the information was merely collected for profiling purposes. The average age of the

respondents was 29 years although the age varied from 18 years to 59 years as seen in Table 5.3 allowing a broad overview of travellers from different age groups.

The demographics of the participants allow the research to give a broad overview of travellers in general and not a particular age or gender group or from travellers in a specific region allowing a general assumption to be drawn from the results presented and further discussed.

From this broad demographic profile of travellers, it was found that 72.90% of respondents feel digital marketing helps them search for the right destination online while 80.80% of respondents trust online reviews from friends or people, they follow on social media. This establishes the importance of destination marketing online as well as the importance of user-generated content. The majority of the travellers prefer to visit a destination where they can get personalised tourism recommendations online (77.00%), while 73.20% believe Southern Africa offers interesting places to visit. However, there is a misalignment in the perceived destination image of Southern Africa amongst international tourists as only 41.80% of respondents think visiting Southern Africa is value for money while 15.90% feel visiting the destination will be safe and secure.

It is further evident that tourists are not familiar with the tourism offerings in Southern Africa (21.60%), however, 70.00% feel it will be worth visiting the destination although only 40.80% of respondents intend to visit the destination that they have seen online before.

The data collected further illustrated that 75.40% of respondents are willing to travel to Southern Africa in the future, however, only 52.20% of respondents intend to travel to Southern Africa in the near future. There is a large group of respondents who are willing to travel but do not intend to travel to the region and this misalignment or gap must be narrowed to a minimum through various tourism offerings to increase the visit intention. This allows for a clearer understanding of what tourists know, feel, and think of Southern Africa as a tourism destination.

5.3 Hypothesis Discussion

The hypotheses outlined in Chapter 2 were all tested although not all the hypotheses were supported. The following discussion will outline the results of the data how it either supports or does not support the hypothesis and what it further means. The path coefficient (presented with the symbol β) measures the strength of association between the constructs while the P value indicates the confidence level of the relationship between the constructs being measured (Pallant, 2016).

5.3.1 Hypothesis 1

H1: Digital marketing as part of destination marketing has a significant influence on tourists' perceived destination image.

Digital marketing as part of destination marketing has a significant influence on perceived destination image as indicated by the study results. The results show a significant and supported hypothesis with the path coefficient, and P value (β = 0.27, p-value = 0.00). This means that there is an influence on perceived destination image through digital destination marketing.

With the initial awareness phase of marketing, digital marketing allows destinations to make tourists from different regions aware of their destination and its offerings, creating the initial perceived destination image (Mcloughin, 2021). This result is further supported by previous literature with a study between digital marketing and brand image where it was found that digital marketing plays a crucial role in building and improving brand image (Copeland & Zhao, 2020). Another study found that the perceived destination image of Saudi Arabia was significantly influenced by social media which increased the visit intention to the destination (Al-Gasawneh & Aldamat, 2020). Furthermore, with the direct relationship between the customer and the brand, digital marketing aids in building and maintaining the relationship with almost direct access to the customer allowing more frequent and personalised updates. This allows the brand to utilise digital marketing to improve the perceived image of the customer (Blazquez-Resino, et al., 2016).

Well-managed marketing through digital marketing and its various tools can help create awareness and build the perceived destination image of tourists as proven by the study's hypothesis. This is further evident in previous literature as well as digital marketing serves as the tool to create and inform the perception of what the tourist knows about the destination (Hashim, et al., 2019). This further reiterates the importance of destination marketing especially digital marketing to reach tourists from across the globe and indicates the importance of the marketing tool to create and form perceptions.

5.3.2 Hypothesis 2

H2: Smart sightseeing has a favourable effect on visit intention.

An insignificant relationship is demonstrated by the path coefficient and P value, (β = 0.01, p-value = 0.81) means the hypothesis is not supported and, therefore, smart sightseeing cannot be considered to have a favourable effect on the visit intention.

Although the hypothesis was not supported, previous studies indicated that there is a relationship between smart sightseeing and visit intention. The psychology of attitude and consumer behaviour demonstrates the likelihood of intended behaviour and in previous literature, it was evident that the accessibility and use of smart sightseeing had a favourable effect on the tourists' attitude (Bolin, 2021; Susanto, et al., 2020). A study found that smart sightseeing influenced the attitudes of tourists, however, the study further found that the visit intention was influenced by the attitude toward the destination and not only by the use of smart sightseeing (Rafdinal, et al., 2021). From previous literature as mentioned, it is evident that smart sightseeing has a favourable effect on visit intention, however, the hypothesis was not supported meaning it could be true for some tourists or some destinations but cannot be generalised for all tourists. Therefore, it is concluded that smart sightseeing can aid in influencing the visit intention but cannot alone influence or determine the visit intention.

5.3.3 Hypothesis 3

H3: Smart sightseeing significantly influences tourists' attitude towards a destination.

Smart sightseeing does have an influence on tourists' attitudes towards a destination as indicated by the study results with a significant path coefficient, and P value, (β = 0.13, p-value = 0.00), supporting the hypothesis. This means that smart sightseeing and the availability thereof influence the attitude of a tourist towards a destination.

Previous studies found that there has been a shift in tourists' behaviour with the wide adoption of smart tourism applications (Shen, et al., 2020). In previous literature, it was found that the use of smart sightseeing and the accessibility thereof improve the experience of the tourists and in effect their attitude towards the destination while visiting the destination (Torabi, et al., 2022). Bolin (2021) found that a positive experience created a favourable attitude toward a destination, and in previous literature, conducted in China and tourists visiting the destination, it was concluded that smart sightseeing created a positive experience increasing the revisit intention of tourists (Shen, et al., 2020). Once a positive attitude is established, the likelihood of the positive attitude turning into actual behaviour is the premise of the theoretical framework adopted in this study by the Theory of Reasoned Action and the theory of Planned Behaviour which further indicates that these findings are true (Mothersbaugh, et al., 2020). Not only was it found in previous literature that the positive attitude towards smart sightseeing influenced the visit intention, but it was also found that the memorable experience the tourists had by using smart sightseeing triggered their revisit intention increasing the intention to visit the destination again (Lan, et al., 2021).

Lastly, a study found that the adoption of smart sightseeing amongst other smart tourism applications by the destination influenced the attitude of tourists positively while also concluding that the visit intention was influenced by the attitude of the tourists and not by smart sightseeing on its own (Rafdinal, et al., 2021). Therefore, it is concluded that smart sightseeing has a significant influence on the attitudes towards a destination but cannot alone influence the visit intention to the destination.

5.3.4 Hypothesis 4

H4: User-generated content has a direct positive influence on tourists' familiarity with a destination.

A negative and insignificant relationship presented by the study results with the path coefficient, and P value, (β =-0.10, p-value = 0.08), means that the hypothesis is not supported and UGC does not have a direct positive influence on tourists' familiarity with a destination.

UGC is a relatively new concept in marketing and is increasingly being adopted by brands and individuals. Through UGC the mere exposure effect takes place, making consumers familiar with a brand after the first phase of awareness (Nguyen & Tong, 2022). However, there is not yet sufficient literature that supports the relationship between UGC and familiarity of a destination, although, UGC is increasingly being adopted in the tourism industry with numerous travel bloggers on social media (Word Travel Market, 2023). In a recent study, it was found that UGC helps tourists with their travel planning to a destination, however, familiarity was not a key construct but was found that UGC influences the familiarity of the destination offerings (Mendes-Filho, et al., 2018). It was also found in previous literature that UGC has a positive influence on the attitude toward a destination and does influence the familiarity of the destination although the mere exposure effect can argue differently (Dilek, 2022).

There is limited literature currently available studying the relation between UGC and familiarity and from the data collected in this study, the hypothesis was not supported.

53.5 Hypothesis 5

H5: Perceived destination image has a direct effect on tourists' attitudes towards a destination.

The perceived destination image influences tourists' attitude towards a destination as indicated by the study results supporting the hypothesis with a significant path coefficient, and P value, (β = 0.68, p-value = 0.00).

From consumer behaviour and psychology studies, it was established that perception generates attitude since perception is formed from the cognitive component of what an individual knows and feels about something (Mothersbaugh, et al., 2020). Attitude consists of three components which include the cognitive component (Ferrer-Rosell & Marin-Roig, 2020). The theoretical framework of this study further supports the hypothesis as attitude formation is established by the perceived image an individual holds of a destination and this perception determines the attitude (Chaulagain, et al., 2019).

According to previous literature regarding travel motivation, it was found that a positive perceived destination image influenced the attitude towards a destination increasing travel motivation (Pereira, et al., 2019). A study conducted on Saudi Arabia as a tourist destination it was also found that there is a positive relationship between perceived destination image and visit intention (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020). In previous studies it was found that perception generates attitude and from this finding, it is evident in this study that the perception of the tourists influences their attitude (Nickerson, 2023). It is concluded from both previous literature, consumer behaviour, and psychology studies as well as the data collected in this study, that perceived destination image has a direct effect on tourists' attitudes towards a destination.

5.3.6 Hypothesis 6

H6: Familiarity has a favourable influence on the attitude of tourists toward a destination.

From the study results, a significant relationship is present between familiarity and attitude with the path coefficient, and P value, ($\beta = 0.15$, p-value = 0.00), supporting the hypothesis that familiarity influences the attitude of tourists towards a destination.

Considering the mere exposure effect suggests that the more an individual is exposed to a stimulus, the more they will prefer the stimulus and in effect become more familiar with it (Adam, 2020). The more the individual is exposed to the stimulus they will develop a preference for it (Dilek, 2022). During this process, cognitive ease takes place allowing easier information processing and causing a likely positive attitude toward the

information or object (Chi, et al., 2020). Past literature found that brand familiarity has a positive influence on attitude (Soliman, 2019).

Not only is this hypothesis supported by previous literature, but it is also proven by the mere exposure effect and further supported by the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour on attitude and how it is influenced (Adam, 2020).

5.3.7 Hypothesis 7

H7: Attitude has a direct influence on tourists' intention to visit a destination.

A significant relationship between attitude and visit intention is present from the study results with the path coefficient, and P value, ($\beta = 0.53$, p-value = 0.00), supporting the hypothesis that attitude has a direct influence on tourists' intention to visit a destination.

The Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour suggests that attitude influences intended behaviour and has been widely studied in consumer behaviour and psychology. Both theoretical frameworks suggest that the more favourable the attitude is towards something, the more likely the intended behaviour is (LaCaille, 2020). As the previously supported hypothesis indicates a positive relationship between, smart sightseeing and attitude, perceived destination image and attitude, and familiarity and attitude it can be concluded that this favourable attitude will result in visit intention (Torabi, et al., 2022; Bolin, 2022; Chaulagain, et al., 2019; Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020; Pereira, et al., 2019; Adam, 2020; Chi, et al., 2020; Soliman, 2019).

A favourable attitude will result in action (behaviour) and as the supported hypothesis indicated, the attitude has a direct influence on tourists' visit intention to a destination.

5.3.8 Hypothesis 8

H8: Subjective norms significantly moderate the relationship between attitude and visit intention of tourists towards a destination.

The hypothesis is supported by the study results with a significant path coefficient, and P value, (β = 0.30, p-value = 0.00). It demonstrates that subjective norms have a moderating relationship between attitude and visit intention towards a destination.

Behaviour intention is a result of attitude; however, attitude is influenced by subjective norms as presented in the theoretical framework (Mothersbaugh, 2020). Individuals are less likely to take an action or behave in a way that is not approved by their frame of reference (Yang, et al., 2022). The opposite is also evident where individuals are more likely to engage in a behaviour that is supported by the frame of reference or is something their frame of reference did previously (Ham, et al., 2015). Individuals are often influenced by the opinions of those around them and if those individuals think a destination is worth visiting, it is likely that the attitude of others towards the destination will be influenced (Copeland & Zhao, 2020).

5.4 Conclusion

From the above discussion, the research questions have been satisfactorily answered in the study as it was found that destination marketing and smart tourism applications do influence the visit intention through perceived destination image, familiarity, and attitude where attitude is moderated by subjective norms.

Chapter 6: Recommendations & Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The final chapter of the research concludes the research and will further provide the theoretical and practical implications, recommendations for future research, the limitations of this study as well as suggestions for future research.

6.2 Conclusion of the Study

In conclusion, this research study has provided a comprehensive examination of the South African tourism sector, its challenges, and the potential impact of digital marketing, smart tourism applications, and other factors influencing tourists' visit intention. The findings provided insights while emphasizing the vital role the tourism industry plays in Southern Africa's economy and employment.

The study highlighted the diverse economic contributions of various sectors, with tourism standing out as a significant contributor to GDP and job creation. Despite the severe setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the sector is showing signs of recovery, maintained by lifted travel restrictions and government recovery initiatives.

However, challenges beyond the pandemic were identified, ranging from technological deficiencies and mismanagement of tourism investments to neglected attractions and a lack of strategic destination marketing. These challenges, coupled with Southern Africa's comparatively lower international tourism ranking of 135th, signify the need for focused interventions to enhance the sector's competitiveness on the global stage.

The study investigated the role of digital marketing and smart tourism applications in influencing tourists' visit intentions. While digital marketing, specifically, had a significant positive influence on tourists' perceived destination image, the study found mixed results for smart sightseeing. While smart sightseeing did not exhibit a direct favourable effect on visit intention within this study but did show the opposite in previous literature, it did significantly influence tourists' attitudes toward a destination.

Furthermore, the study explored the impact of user-generated content (UGC), familiarity, perceived destination image, and attitude on tourists' visit intention. UGC did not demonstrate a direct positive influence on tourists' familiarity with a destination, highlighting the need for further exploration in this area. However, perceived destination image, familiarity, and attitude were found to have significant and positive effects on visit intention.

The study's hypotheses were based on sound theoretical frameworks, the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The findings suggest a complex relationship of factors influencing tourists' decisions, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach to destination marketing and management.

As seen in the previous chapter, it is concluded that digital destination marketing has a significant influence on tourists' perceived destination image. This was further confirmed by previous literature and can be used going forward to create, change, or improve the perceived destination image of a destination through destination marketing campaigns. It is crucial to understand from this research that destination marketing is often the first touch point the tourist interacts with before visiting or deciding to visit a destination. Furthermore, more importance is drawn to the attitude of tourists towards a destination and as seen from the data collection and analysis, smart sightseeing, perceived destination image, and familiarity had a significant influence on the attitude of tourists towards a destination. Not only was this conclusion drawn from this study's results, but it is supported by previous literature discussed. This insight can be used as a tactic in destination marketing and within the travel and tourism industry as a whole to attract, make aware, and invite tourists to visit a destination. This will increase the visit intention but furthermore, the actual behaviour followed from the visit intention.

Not only is attitude influenced by a variety of constructs, but attitude also determines the visit intention and is moderated by the subjective norms of the tourist. This insight should be extensively studied and applied throughout the travel and tourism industry for both local and international tourists. By applying this knowledge from this study, Africa has the opportunity to reach the estimated tourism growth of 6.8% by 2032 or more while South Africa has the opportunity to improve their ranking. This

improvement can be reached by applying industry research insights while also addressing the current challenges.

The appointment of the new Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, adds a hopeful dimension to the sector's future. Her focus on destination marketing and experience in managing top tourist destinations could contribute to a strategic approach that leverages technology, improves destination image, and enhances visit intention.

In conclusion, this research contributes valuable insights into the Southern African tourism industry's challenges and opportunities. As the sector aims for recovery and growth, addressing the identified challenges and leveraging the potential of digital marketing and smart tourism applications will be crucial. The findings provide a foundation for future research and practical interventions to ensure the sustained development and competitiveness of the Southern African travel and tourism industry.

6.3 Implications of the Study

The travel and tourism industry are recovering after the pandemic and with tourism numbers close to pre-pandemic levels, it is important to understand the influences on the visit intention to Southern Africa. Therefore, destination marketing, smart tourism applications, and tourists' visit intentions to Southern Africa were explored. Herewith follows the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

6.3.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the knowledge and understanding of destination marketing, smart tourism applications, and the influences through perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude, and subjective norms on the visit intention to Southern Africa. Furthermore, a contribution is made to the understanding of the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Theory of Reasoned Action in terms of the tourism industry to measure and determine the visit intention of a destination. This research contributes to the understanding of how visit intention is influenced by various factors and can further be used to support the findings of future research.

Considering the empirical findings of this study, destination marketing and smart tourism applications influence the visit intention of a destination. Destinations that focus on tourist preferences and communicating tourism offerings through destination marketing can benefit from a higher visit intention with the likelihood of the intention resulting in actual behaviour.

6.3.2 Practical Implications

The research study investigates the influence of digital marketing, smart sightseeing, UGC, perceived destination image, familiarity, and attitude on tourists' visit intention, with a focus on the moderating role of subjective norms. The following practical implications can be drawn from the study's findings.

Destination marketers should invest in well-managed digital marketing campaigns to create awareness, reach global tourists, and positively shape the initial perceived destination image. While smart sightseeing alone may not determine visit intention globally, destination managers may still consider incorporating smart tourism applications to enhance tourists' attitudes and overall experience. Destinations can enhance the overall attitude of tourists by providing and promoting smart sightseeing options, thereby contributing to a positive visitor experience.

While UGC may not directly impact familiarity, destinations can still leverage UGC for travel planning assistance and to influence tourists' perceptions and attitudes. Destination marketers should focus on creating and promoting a positive perceived destination image to shape favourable attitudes among potential tourists. Destinations should also consider employing strategies that increase exposure and familiarity, creating a positive cognitive ease, and consequently influencing tourists' attitudes.

Destination managers should prioritize initiatives that enhance positive attitudes among tourists, as this is likely to translate into increased visit intentions. Understanding and considering subjective norms can guide destination managers in aligning marketing strategies with the prevailing social and cultural norms of the target audience.

This research provides valuable insights for destination marketers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders. By understanding the relationship between digital marketing, smart tourism applications, and user-generated content, destinations can tailor their strategies to positively influence tourists' perceptions, attitudes, and ultimately, their visit intentions. The study also highlights the importance of considering subjective norms in shaping tourists' behavioural intentions towards a destination.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed for destination marketers, tourism departments, and other stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry.

Destination marketing plays a crucial role in the promotion of a tourism destination and its offerings and influences the perceived destination image, familiarity, attitude and ultimately the visit intention of tourists. Utilizing various digital tools allows destinations to create awareness and build a positive perceived image among potential tourists from diverse regions (Mcloughin, 2021). Engaging in personalized updates through direct communication channels helps in enhancing the relationship between the destination and the tourists (Blazquez-Resino, et al., 2016). It is, therefore, recommended that targeted digital marketing strategies should be developed that utilises social media, online advertising, and content marketing to effectively reach and engage tourists across the globe. While UGC forms part of digital marketing, it is also suggested that destinations collaborate with travel influencers, and encourage tourist reviews and testimonials, and create platforms for tourists to share their experiences, contributing to a positive destination image while raising awareness of the destination and its tourism offerings.

Although the research showed that smart sightseeing alone does not influence visit intention, it is recommended that destinations develop and promote smart sightseeing options that provide added value, convenience, and unique experiences for tourists to create a positive experience when visiting which will likely influence the word-of-mouth to friends and family of the tourist establishing the relationship between attitude and subjective norms and visit intention. Recognising the shift in tourists' behaviour towards

smart tourism applications, destination marketers should prioritise the adoption and promotion of smart sightseeing experiences. Providing accessible and innovative smart sightseeing options positively impacts tourists' experiences and, subsequently, their attitudes towards the destination (Torabi, et al., 2022). Emphasizing the connection between positive attitudes and increased revisit intentions, stakeholders can leverage smart sightseeing to create memorable experiences that contribute to long-term positive perceptions of the destination. While destination and digital marketing influence the perceived destination image, it is further recommended that campaigns are developed that highlight unique selling points, cultural attractions, and positive experiences to shape a favourable destination image amongst tourists.

Given that the perceived destination image directly influences tourists' attitudes, destination marketers should focus on consistently portraying a positive image. Recognising the correlation between positive perceived images and increased travel motivation, stakeholders should implement strategies to enhance the destination's appeal (Pereira, et al., 2019). The study establishes a significant relationship between familiarity and tourists' attitudes towards a destination. Understanding the impact of the mere exposure effect, destination marketers should seek to increase exposure and familiarity with their destination. Consistent exposure fosters cognitive ease, leading to positive attitudes (Adam, 2020). Employing strategies that enhance brand familiarity, such as frequent and varied marketing efforts, contributes to positive attitudes and preferences among potential tourists.

It is crucial that destinations offer high-quality services, create memorable experiences, and engage in community-driven initiatives to foster positive attitudes among tourists to increase the revisit intention but also the visit intention of other tourists. By implementing these recommendations, destinations can enhance their competitiveness, attract a diverse range of tourists, and ultimately increase visit intentions.

6.5 Limitations

Research Method: Due to the time frame of the study, a quantitative research method was conducted, however, it limited the insights into tourists' perception of Southern Africa as a tourism destination and to gain a more in-depth understanding of their visit intention. Although the research delivered quality insights, no follow-up questions could be asked, and no interviews could be conducted. The collected data provided a general overview, but it cannot be generalised for all tourists.

Sample Size: A larger sample size could not be reached due to the time frame of the research and, therefore, the findings that are presented cannot be generalised for all tourists and provides insights into a small sample group out of the population. A larger sample size could deliver a broader overview of tourists' perceptions of the constructs and deliver a broader understanding of the visit intention to Southern Africa.

6.6 Suggestions for Future Research

For future research, it is suggested that a larger sample size should be used to gain a better understanding of tourists from various regions as this study has concluded with the sample size of 402 respondents. It is estimated that there are larger groups of tourists whose insights can add value to the research and therefore, collecting data from more respondents might deliver different or improved results.

It is further suggested that focus groups should be used together with a questionnaire to gain a more informed understanding of why tourists feel a certain way about tourism offerings and to further gain more insight into their attitude towards destination marketing, smart sightseeing, and to better understand how their perception influences their attitudes and ultimately the effect thereof on their visit intention.

It is further suggested that future research do a comparison or experimental study to gain an understanding of what tourists think of Southern Africa compared to other destinations in developing countries and determine whether there is a difference. This will allow for insights into the destination and its offering compared to other destinations

and what changes can be made to the destination to improve the perceived destination image.

Lastly, the study results were generalised, although the questions could have been interpreted differently in the different regions or have other meanings due to language or cultural barriers. Despite the adequate results from the study, it could be beneficial to gain a broader understanding of how tourists perceive destination marketing and smart tourism applications what it means to them, and how it influences their visit intention overall. Future research can benefit from the above study while using it for research on each phenomenon discussed and its various dimensions.

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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Questionnaire ID

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Sherilee Steenkamp, a student at the University of Witwatersrand. I am conducting a research project for my master's degree titled, "**An Impact of Destination Marketing and Smart Tourism Applications on Tourist's Visit Intentions to Southern Africa"**. My study focuses on the role of smart tourism applications and destination marketing and the impact it has on tourists' visit intention to Southern Africa. The research serves to fill a gap in the tourism industry of Southern Africa to understand how smart tourism applications and destination marketing can be utilized by various businesses in the industry to increase the visit intention.

Your participation is voluntary, and no risk is associated with your participation. You are welcome to withdraw from this questionnaire at any time. Your participation is confidential and anonymous and therefore no personal information is required. This questionnaire will only take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Should you have any questions you are free to contact Sherilee Steenkamp. My supervisor, Dr Melissa Zulu, will also be available for any concerns regarding the study or questionnaire. Ethical clearance with reference number WBS/SM2556568/801 has been obtained to conduct this study. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0)117171408, email hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za

Yours Sincerely

Researcher: Sherilee Steenkamp
Email: s.steenkamp77@gmail.com / 2556568@students.wits.ac.za
Contact number: 074 805 3270

Supervisor: Melissa Zulu

Email: melissa.zulu@wits.ac.za

Contact number: 011 717 8161

Appendix B: Research Instrument – Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Please indicate your answer by marking (x) to the appropriate block or write a response where indicated.

Screening Question:

SQ1: I agree to participate in this study and have my responses used for research purposes.

Yes	1	No	2

SQ2: From which country are you?

Asia	Australia	Europe	Northern America	Africa	South America	Other
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Kindly note that the questions below will be seeking your responses regarding traveling and destination marketing.

Section A: Profiling Information (used for statistical purposes only)

Please mark with an **(x)** in the appropriate box.

A1. What is your gender?

Male	Female	Other
1	2	3

A2. What is your age in years?

A3. Have you travelled to Southern Africa before?

Yes	1	No	2

If you answered yes to question A3, please answer question A4 otherwise proceed to question A5.

A4. To which Southern African country have you travelled?

Angola	Botswana	Lesotho	Mozambique	Namibia	South Africa	Swaziland	Zambia	Zimbabwe
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

A5. Can you recall seeing any marketing campaigns to visit any of the countries in Southern Africa?

Yes	1	No	2

A6. How often do you travel to new destinations?

Not very often (every two years or more)	Somewhat often (at least once a year)	Very often (more than once a year)
1	2	3

A7. How likely are you to travel to Southern Africa?

Not likely	Neutral	Very likely

1	2	3

Section B: Experimental factors

Kindly indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below. 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree

Table 0-1. Destination Marketing: Digital Marketing (DM)

Digital Marketing		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
DM1	Digital marketing helps me to search for the right destination online.	1	2	3	4	5
DM2	I can obtain quality information about a destination through digital marketing.	1	2	3	4	5
DM3	It is easy to do comparisons with other destinations while booking online.	1	2	3	4	5
DM4	Opinion exchange with other is possible through destination social networking sites.	1	2	3	4	5
DM 5	It is easy to do a comparison with other	1	2	3	4	5

	destinations when searching online					

Table 2. Destination Marketing: User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-Generated Content		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
UGC1	I believe user comments / reviews of a destination are more beneficial than brand provided information.	1	2	3	4	5
UGC2	I trust user comments / reviews of a destination to be a reasonable accurate representation of a destination.	1	2	3	4	5
UGC3	I trust reviews from friends or people I follow on social networking websites.	1	2	3	4	5
UGC4	I would trust a destination review posted by another tourist.	1	2	3	4	5
UGC5	I generally find it easy to exchange ideas with tourists on digital platforms	1	2	3	4	5

Table 3. Smart Tourism Applications: Smart Sightseeing (SS)

Smart Sightseeing		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

SS1	I would prefer to visit a destination that offer personal itineraries according to my likes and dislikes.	1	2	3	4	5
SS2	I like to visit destinations where I can get online tourism recommendations easily.	1	2	3	4	5
SS3	E-tour maps is important to me when visiting a destination.	1	2	3	4	5
SS4	E-commerce systems is important to me when visiting a destination.	1	2	3	4	5
SS5	Intelligent guide systems make it easier to navigate a destination when traveling.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 4. Perceived Destination Image (PDI)

Perceived Destination Image		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
PDI1	Southern Africa offers exciting and interesting places to visit.	1	2	3	4	5
PDI2	Southern Africa has beautiful scenery and natural attractions.	1	2	3	4	5
PDI3	Southern Africa offers good value for money.	1	2	3	4	5

PDI4	I perceive Southern Africa as a destination with great recreational activities and tourism attractions.	1	2	3	4	5
PDI5	Visiting Southern Africa feels safe and secure	1	2	3	4	5

Table 5. Familiarity (FM)

Familiarity		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
FM1	I am familiar with a wide variety of tourism offerings in Southern Africa.	1	2	3	4	5
FM2	Compared to my friends, I am very familiar with a wide variety of destinations in Southern Africa.	1	2	3	4	5
FM3	I often spend time looking at content information about Southern Africa.	1	2	3	4	5
FM4	I am very familiar with information on Southern Africa.	1	2	3	4	5
FM5	Compared to people who travel a lot, I am very familiar with a wide variety of vacation destinations in Southern Africa	1	2	3	4	5

Table 6. Attitude (ATT)

Attitude		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
ATT1	I have a favourable attitude towards tourism attractions that use social media.	1	2	3	4	5
ATT2	Visiting Southern Africa will be worth it.	1	2	3	4	5
ATT3	Southern Africa's tourism attractions are very interesting to me.	1	2	3	4	5
ATT4	I enjoy visiting tourist attractions I have seen on social media previously.	1	2	3	4	5
ATT5	Visiting tourist attractions in Southern Africa is very valuable.	1	2	3	4	5

Table 7. Subjective Norms (SN)

Subjective Norms		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
SN1	People whose opinion I value would support my decision to visit Southern Africa.	1	2	3	4	5
SN2	It matters to me what my peers think of my destination of choice and if they will support it.	1	2	3	4	5

SN3	People who are important to me think I should visit Southern Africa if I want to.	1	2	3	4	5
SN4	My friends and I plan to travel to a destination in Southern Africa that we had wanted to visit.	1	2	3	4	5
SN5	I intend on traveling to a destination in Southern African that I have seen online before	1	2	3	4	5

Table 8. Visit Intention (VI)

Visit Intention		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
VI1	I intend to rather visit destinations with Smart Tourism Applications.	1	2	3	4	5
VI2	I am likely to travel to a destination I have seen on social media.	1	2	3	4	5
VI3	I will likely visit a tourism destination that I saw on social media recommended by an influencer.	1	2	3	4	5
VI4	I am willing to visit Southern Africa in the future.	1	2	3	4	5

VI5	I intend to travel to Southern Africa in the future.	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our questionnaire!

Appendix C: Ethical Clearance Certificate

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/SM2556568/801
This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

Project title	Destination marketing, smart tourism applications and tourists' intentions to visit Southern Africa.
Investigator / Researcher	Ms Sherilee Steenkamp
Nature of Project	MM (Strategic Marketing)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.
Issue Date of Certificate	2023-07-03
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project / research report
Chairperson	Dr Pius Oba ☎ +27 11 717 3976 +27 82 733 6587 ✉ pius.oba@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

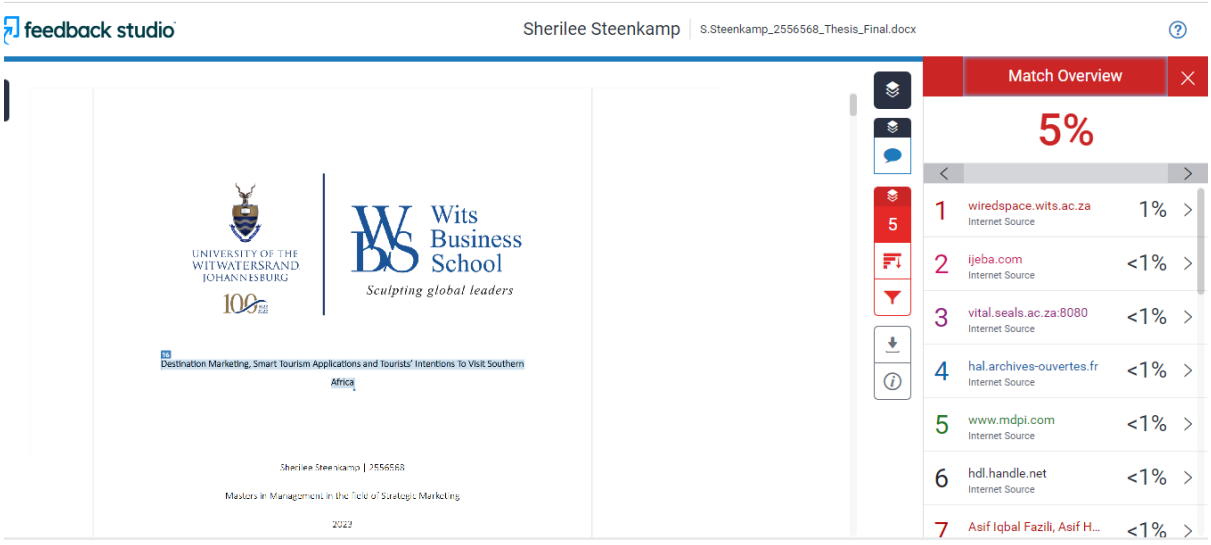
One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

1 August 2023
Date:

Appendix D: Turnitin Report



S.Steenkamp_2556568_Thesis_Final.docx

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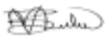
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