

Cognitive-affective-motivation factors influencing international visitors' destination satisfaction and loyalty

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to understand the interrelationships between destination attractiveness, satisfaction, attachment and visitors' loyalty and to determine the potential moderating effect of generational cohorts. Using expectancy disconfirmation and generational cohort theories, the paper explains how visitors' cognitive knowledge and motivation factors influence international visitors' attraction and maintenance and their behavioral/attitudinal loyalty.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 390 international visitors to South Africa during the Southern Hemisphere's summertime via a quantitative research method. A two-stage approach of structural equation modeling was used to analyze the hypothesized model.

Findings – There was no relationship between visitors' loyalty and destination image or destination image and destination trust. However, destination image has a significant effect on visitors' satisfaction. Additionally, visitors' experience had a positive effect on satisfaction and loyalty, while destination trust and destination attachment were positively related.

Practical implications – The findings show that the tourism sector could reap greater benefits from international tourists if a deeper understanding of different generational cohorts was obtained. There was a varying effect of destination marketing organizations' efforts on different generational cohorts' attraction, trust, satisfaction, feelings and expectations. This study proposes that direct marketing organizations should focus on building brand trust, as it is key to attracting different generational cohorts. Lastly, the study found that generational cohort segmentation accrues many benefits and creates and enhances superior advantages.

Originality/value – The paper provides evidence that more than a destination's attractiveness is required to achieve loyalty; segmenting and understanding different generational cohorts' cognitive, affective and motivation aids in generating better response actions to tourists' changing needs and meeting their demands.

Keywords Affective outcomes, Cognitive knowledge, Destination attractiveness, Generational cohort, Loyalty, Push and pull motivations

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was on the rise and there was increasing competition among tourism destinations (Gössling *et al.*, 2020; Jeon and Yang, 2021). While COVID-19 has slowed upward growth trends, several destinations are starting to experience a positive shift. Destinations have sought out opportunities to improve their financial inflows to boost local economies. In South Africa, tourism contributed 1.5 million jobs and R425.8 billion to the economy in 2018, which is 8.6% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (South Africa Tourism, 2020). However, within the period 2009 to 2019 the volume of tourists visiting South Africa declined. The figures show a decline of 7.0% in 2019, which is 1.6% down from 2018 (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2020). Hit by the effect of the pandemic, destinations such as South Africa are looking for ways to attract international tourists to revive its ailing tourism and travel sector. Achieving growth in international visits is imperative for a country such as South Africa, which is currently



grappling with low growth and unemployment challenges (Akadiri and Akadiri, 2021). Hence, this paper aims to establish how international tourists' attraction towards South Africa can be revived and developed and to understand such tourists' attraction to develop an attachment and loyalty towards the South African brand as a preferred tourism destination.

Although the importance of destination attractiveness in the tourism sector has been recognized (Breiby and Slåtten, 2018; Haarhoff and de Klerk, 2019), only a few attempts have been made to categorize those attributes crucial to destinations' attractiveness and to investigate their significance and contribution to destination attractiveness (Ariya *et al.*, 2017). One of the key aspects of the discourse that has not received adequate attention in the extent literature is the possible generational tourists' segmentation and its effect on visitors' satisfaction, attachment and loyalty. Additionally, the strength of international tourists' attributes, such as their cognitive values, motivations, or tourism experiences, the overall affective outcomes, and the behavioral/attitudinal loyalty towards a destination such as South Africa, has not received adequate empirical inquiry in a developing context in which its natural environment is the key attraction. While motivational factors have been extensively explored in the literature, including the relationship between green motivation and satisfaction (see Pekovic, 2021; Ermawati and Prihandono, 2018), the extent to which motivational factors influence destination trust have received limited attention, especially in developing contexts such as South Africa where the sector is heralded as vital to economic resurrection.

Destination trust and motivation factors are essential aspects of successful tourism (Cong, 2016). The relationship between the two remains unclear in relation to destination marketing (DM) and international visitors' attachment and loyalty. Artigas *et al.* (2017) assert that building destination trust can improve visitors' sense of safety. In this paper's attempt to provide both conceptual and empirical elucidation, we develop an integrative framework that links push and pull motivations to destination trust and attachment and visitors' satisfaction and loyalty, while investigating the possible moderating effect of young and mature visitors. Few studies have adopted generational cohorts to clarify consumer behaviors and attitudes, especially in the tourism literature (Preko *et al.*, 2019; Li and Hudson, 2013). Augustine (2017) asserts that the decline in tourism is usually a result of tourists' dissatisfaction when destinations do not meet their needs or expectations, which results in their non-sustenance and loss of competitive advantage.

The key contribution of this study lies in the fact that we use two main theories, the expectancy disconfirmation theory (EDT) and generational cohort approach to provide a holistic understanding of destination attraction in a highly competitive market, especially as the world recovers from the global pandemic. By adopting the generational cohort approach, we highlight how destinations should begin to segment their markets to better manage customer dynamics and tourism campaign budgets. By using an integrated framework to analyze a complex web of relationships between key tourism destination attraction and loyalty variables, we provide practical pathways to destination marketing organizations (DMOs). Using a developing context as our empirical context further provides important practical implications for such economies to boost their tourism potential to create jobs, move people out of poverty and to contribute to GDP.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: the theoretical background and hypotheses; methodology; analysis; discussion; and conclusion.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

This study relies on the EDT to explain how expectations and perceived experiences in conjunction with tourists' motivations can lead to pre/post-service satisfaction/

dissatisfaction. [Oliver \(1980\)](#) states that desires or expectations are connected to the pre-tourism journey, which can influence eventual satisfaction. The EDT is vital in explaining the role of tourists' satisfaction, trust and attachment in creating a loyal customer base ([Augustine, 2017](#)). For instance, the current study proposes that the degree of visitors' satisfaction is influenced by destination image and the visitors' experiences (cognitive), while trust is influenced by the push and pull motivation factors within the destination environment.

A tourist's decision to visit a destination is related to push and pull motivations, destination image and experiences. Thus, a destination's attractiveness and experience delivery influence tourists' satisfaction, attachment and loyalty ([Ridderstaat et al., 2014](#)). Once a tourist is triggered by a certain level of motivation, their affective responses follow, which eventually lead to their destination loyalty. Contrastingly, [Li and Hudson \(2013\)](#) argues that distinctive patterns and unique generational values, attitudes and behaviors have crucial effects on how visitors see and handle both social and public life while traveling. Generational theory is used to explain the travel attitudes and preferences of international visitors across different age groups. Recognizing generational behavior aids in implementing strategies to manage tourists' diversity and increases opportunities for tourism sustainability.

[Figure 1](#) explains the different relationships that are tested.

The information one possesses about a destination eventually creates an image in the visitor's mind ([Haarhoff, 2018](#)). The key to surviving and maintaining a competitive edge in tourism depends on a destination's ability to provide an attractive image and services tailored to meet visitors' changing needs. [Uner et al. \(2022\)](#) describe how a destination's tangible traits act as stimuli to create certain relationships, rather than representing the image and what the service is. This paper posits that destination image is a creation of belief of attraction rather than the outcome of the attraction. [Haarhoff \(2018\)](#) established a link

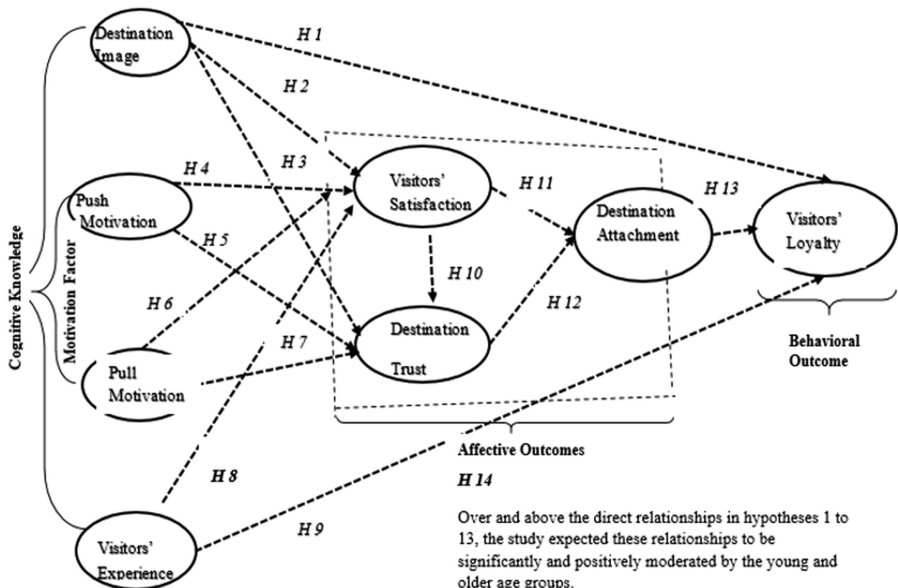


Figure 1.
Different relationship tested

Note(s): The study did not show moderation arrows for aesthetic reasons

between destination image and visitor loyalty. In essence, there are direct relationships between satisfaction, destination image and an intention to return. We therefore argue that a destination image is a creation of belief within a generational cohort that a destination meets their specific tourism needs better than the destination's competition. Hence, it is proposed that

H1. Destination image has a significant positive relationship with visitors' loyalty.

"Direct contact with the destination is not necessary in the formation of image" (Uner *et al.*, 2022, p. 5). Mohammad Shafiee *et al.* (2016) posit that destinations with high levels of positive images are more likely to satisfy tourists. Alcocer and Ruiz (2020) stress that the importance of general destination image is in its influence on satisfaction. Following on from this assertion, this study evaluates destination image as a contributory factor rather than an outcome. Kim and Lee (2015) established a positive relationship between destination image and satisfaction as part of a tourist's overall loyalty. From these observations, the study hypothesizes that

H2. Destination image has a significant positive relationship with visitors' satisfaction.

Destination image is a significant factor in the tourism industry, as it is an important antecedent to destination trust and loyalty (Marinao *et al.*, 2017). This study assesses the level of destination image in strengthening visitors' destination trust, which reflects the attractiveness and valuable images that a destination boasts. This study then proposes that destination image enhances the propensity to achieve trust accordingly. Endah *et al.* (2017) found that destination image shapes the visitor's trust, as the destination image influences the trust level positively in tourists with a low trust level. To achieve visitors' favorable perceptions of destination image, the destination must provide a trusted service. This must be coupled with the destination's safety and the destination's facilities' comfort and the convenience (Marinao *et al.*, 2017). In their research on components of trust in Chile, Marinao *et al.* (2012) found that perceived image assists as a background influence of trust. Therefore, it is proposed that

H3. Destination image has a significant positive relationship with trust.

Said and Maryono (2018) also investigated motivation as a push factor in visiting a tourist destination and found that push motivation has a strong positive influence on visitors' satisfaction. Push motivation drives prospective tourists towards a tourism experience of a specific destination, of which satisfaction is the most sought-after experience (Reihanian *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn (2016) stress that push motivation aids visitors' travel decision-making, which in turn leads to satisfying their internal needs. Thus, the subsequent hypothesis was reached:

H4. Push motivation has a positive significant relationship with visitors' satisfaction with a tourism destination.

The existing literature suggests that destinations that aim solely to meet visitors' expectations have a competitive advantage (Lee *et al.*, 2020). In this study, push motivation is perceived as the fundamental reason for destination trust (Artigas *et al.*, 2017). For instance, previous studies contend that trust is an outcome of the visitor's disposition towards a destination and have validated that destination trust could be the result of the visitor's destination image scaled by their perceptive awareness (Artigas *et al.*, 2017). Leninkumar (2017) claims that the tourist's motivation factor is the choice destination's new social trust. Ermawati and Prihandono (2018) acknowledge that tourism marketing programs' trust starts with understanding travel motivation and trust. Destination marketers must take cognizance of tourists' motivations and realize how to align

destination trust with those motives to achieve satisfaction, attachment and loyalty. For these reasons, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H5. Push motivation has a significant positive relationship with destination trust.

According to [Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn \(2016\)](#), an investigation of international leisure travelers revisiting Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, affirmed that pull motivation significantly influences tourists' satisfaction and their return intention, more so than intrinsic motivation. Researchers such as [Reihanian et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Shukor et al. \(2017\)](#) show that the higher the level of pull motivation, the greater a destination's competitive advantage. Hence, the study argues that tourism destinations that have a high pull motivation are better able to offer and meet visitors' needs and thus attract and retain tourists. It is therefore hypothesized that

H6. Pull motivation has a positive significant relationship with visitors' satisfaction.

[Seebaluck et al. \(2015\)](#) indicated that physical elements like marketing promotions such as flyers also prompt the yearning to travel. The management perspective suggests that good pull motives can better enhance a destination's success in the long term ([Artigas et al., 2017](#)). [Seebaluck et al. \(2015\)](#) analyzed motivations for selecting Mauritius as "the" wedding destination and highlighted the positive outcomes of pull motivation, which include beaches and biodiversity, bringing exoticism to the destination. Therefore, the study argues that tourism destinations that use campaigns to promote and offer a safe environment and assure the destination's safety, assists both current and future visitors in choosing a destination and influences their trust of the destination. Subsequently, the study hypothesizes that

H7. Pull motivation is positively significantly related to destination trust.

[Genc and Gulertekin Genc \(2022\)](#) suggest that visitors' experiences are formed from past expectations and behaviors at the sites. This study conceptualizes visitors' experience as reflecting the tourism destination's ability to offer exact products and services as promised by their marketing campaigns and meeting tourist expectations. Additional findings by [Mohammad Shafiee et al. \(2016\)](#) indicate that visitors' former experiences at a destination and the extent of stay are crucial contributors to total satisfaction. Consequently, strong preferences are generated through positive experiences of the destination that leads to visitors' satisfaction ([Haarhoff, 2018](#)). [Alcocer and Ruiz \(2020\)](#) refer to the excitement that a visitor feels as the magnitude of the experience to meet their expectations. It is hypothesized that

H8. Visitors' experience has a significant positive relationship with visitors' satisfaction.

[Lee et al. \(2020\)](#) stated that experience significantly influences theme park visitors' loyalty, heritage values and attachments ([Gannon et al., 2021](#)). Therefore, a positive visitors' experience is key for sustainable destination tourism, as positive and memorable experiences lead to visitors' loyalty. [Hapsari \(2019\)](#) suggests that while services end with the performance, the visitor cognitively stores the value of the experience. This study sees visitors' experiences as reproducing the essentiality of a tourism destination and offering the necessary enchantments throughout the tourist's journey – before, during and after the experience. The destination's attractiveness and the overall value offering, which are geared towards meeting the tourist's value needs and expectations, create the destination loyalty required. Therefore, this study emphasizes that the experience and emotional connection to a place are important factors for destination managers to consider as they become inputs for marketing campaigns. Therefore, this paper hypothesizes that

H9. Visitors' experiences have a positive significant effect on visitors' loyalty.

Trust in a specific place is based on the destination's honesty and consistency, which is tied to the visitor's mental perception of facilities and the ecosystem (Artigas *et al.*, 2017). This study argues that destination trust is influenced by individual behaviors, such as push and pull motivations and satisfaction. Favorable visitors' satisfaction encourages visitors to trust the destination as it fulfills the destination's service delivery promises. Two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, satisfaction is an affective concept that is based on emotions and feelings and secondly, satisfaction is a dynamic construct that can be developed from the first instance or over time. Dabholkar and Sheng's (2012) study established a positive significant relationship between satisfaction and trust. Therefore, visitors' satisfaction is the covariate of destination trust, and this paper hypothesizes that

H10. Satisfaction of visitors increases destination's trust.

Visitors' satisfaction influences tourist destination attachment (see Chen and Phou, 2013) and their intention to return, which leads to destinations retaining their tourists. In the tourism literature, destination attachment has been adopted to mirror the personal connections that visitors develop towards a destination. This study theorizes visitors' satisfaction as an affective and representative relationship that visitors establish with tourism resources. Additionally, it is a destination's ability to continuously enhance its attractiveness to different international tourists' needs, i.e. both their emotional and psychological attachment towards the destination. Some studies (Shukor *et al.*, 2017; Shen *et al.*, 2019) established that satisfaction is a determinant of attachment. Consequently, we hypothesize that

H11. Visitors' satisfaction is positively related to destination attachment.

Trust is affective based, while attachment has been described as a bond of a visitor's emotional link to a specific surrounding. In the consumer context, Chinomona and Maziriri (2017) found that customers' brand trust is determined by their satisfaction. Hence, this study argues that any destination with a high level of trust can engage in successful DM and create destination attachment. Chinomona and Maziriri's (2017) findings confirmed this by showing that brands that focus on trust have a better competitive outlook than those brands that do not focus on trust to create brand attachment. Therefore, this study asserts a positive correlation between destination trust and destination attachment. Hence, the study hypothesizes that

H12. Destination trust has a significant effect on destination attachment.

A measure of attachment to a product is defined by consumer loyalty. Chatzigeorgiou and Christou (2016) support this notion by asserting that true loyalty to a destination is achieved after a repeat visit to a destination, a visit which entails the existence of a positive attitude and attachment towards the destination (Yuan *et al.*, 2019). Following on this assertion, this paper assesses loyalty as the study's total outcome. This study conceptualizes visitor loyalty as both conative and cognitive loyalty. Conative loyalty signifies a tourist's repeated return to the destination, while cognitive loyalty is the acknowledgment of values derived from recurrent actions compared to other preferences. Therefore, this study suggests that when both loyalties are integrated into the tourism destination by constantly finding ways to meet the satisfaction, destination image, experience, trust and attachment, there will be retention of tourists at the destination. Hence, the stronger the visitors' bonds with a destination, the more likely they are to revisit, which will lead to visitors' loyalty. The following hypothesis is presented:

H13. Destination attachment has a significant positive effect on visitors' loyalty.

Generational differences in terms of age are a reality that poses a challenge to tourism destinations. According to [Robinson and Schänzel \(2019\)](#), there are generation (age) related factors that cause shifts in global tourism, such as technological, climate, security, entertainment and accessibility advancements in tourism. Age can contribute important cognitive and affective meanings to a person, especially from a tourism perspective. This study argues that age affects visitors' cognitive and affective behaviors, which in turn affects behavioral outcomes within the intergroup tourism context. Based on the generational cohort theory, this study further argues that two different age cohorts are likely to have different cognitive and affective behaviors; hence, this would lead to different behavioral outcomes towards the destination. Therefore, in this study, young and older persons are considered to differ in their travel patterns, experiences and motives ([Robinson and Schänzel, 2019](#)). We, therefore, hypothesize that

- H14.* Over and above the direct relationships in hypotheses 1 to 13, the study expected these relationships to be significantly and positively moderated by the younger and older age groups.

Methodology

Sampling and data collection

The study collected data from international visitors visiting the Lion and Safari Park in Johannesburg, South Africa. This destination is one of the oldest in the sub-region, is considered a premium tourist destination and is one of the most sought-after destinations in South Africa's Gauteng province. Gauteng has many tourist attractions, such as the Nelson Mandela Square and the Nelson Mandela National Museum in Soweto, but the Lion and Safari Park stand out amongst these destinations and attracts more visitors. For over 50 years it has attracted international visitors all year round. Data were collected, in an intercept approach ([Hinson et al., 2012](#)), during the peak of the Southern Hemisphere's summertime when visits to the park are at their highest. Data collection took two months to realize a substantial number of respondents, which was deemed adequate for our estimation.

Since our cause and effect variables were from the same source, we assuaged the possible effect of common method bias (CMB) that is likely to occur during a data-gathering process. Constructs' items were jumbled to reduce the possibility of respondent inferences. Statistically, we accounted for the possibility of CMB through variance inflation assessment, thus VIF values, and the highest was 2.1, which is below the 3.3 value suggested by [Kock \(2015\)](#). Therefore, CMB was not a challenge in this study. [Malhotra et al. \(2017\)](#) propose conducting a pilot test to investigate and ascertain what participants might constitute errors to achieve more accurate results and a bias-free study. Hence, the data collection instrument was first piloted on 30 participants who were sampled from the target population. We incorporated the feedback received from the pilot testing to improve comprehension, clarity and ease of response before actual implementation. Permission was sought from and granted by park management prior to data collection.

Measures

To assess visitors' experience, destination image and visitors' loyalty, we adopted the measures promoted by [Wu \(2016\)](#) and the push motivation and pull motivation measures used the five-item scales adapted by [Khuong and Ha \(2014\)](#) and [Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn \(2016\)](#). The destination attachment measures were adapted from [Reitsamer et al. \(2016\)](#). Visitors' satisfaction and destination trust were modified using [Chen and Chen \(2010\)](#), [Cong \(2016\)](#) and [Chen and Phou's \(2013\)](#) proposed measures. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to each statement (1 = strongly disagree up to 5 = strongly agree).

Data analysis

Respondents aged 18 years and older were engaged. With the consent of the park managers, participants were approached and voluntarily completed the questionnaires during their time at the park, i.e. after the safari. Through this convenience sampling technique, a total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 390 useable responses were obtained. There were more female participants (209 participants = 53.6%) than males. The study grouped the respondents into those who were younger than 34 years of age (younger respondents – 144) and those who were 35 years and older (older respondents – 246). We adapted studies such as [Petry's \(2002\)](#) that considered people aged 35 and younger as young adults.

Results

Tourist profile

Among the respondents, 62.8% were employed, 85.3% held a college/university and higher degree. Concerning nationality, Asian and Australasian comprised 29.2% of the population, while Americans represented 37.4%, Europeans, 24.1% and Africans 7.4%. Fifty-eight percent were first-time visitors to South Africa.

The structural model testing

A two-stage approach of structural equation modeling was conducted using Mplus 8.3. To test the measurement model of scales, a confirmatory factor analysis was used. An eight-factor confirmatory measurement model was used to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validities of the study's factors. The scales for validity and reliability were assessed by examining the fit of the three measurement models – first for the total sample ($n = 390$) and then for the two separate groups: younger respondents ($n = 144$); and older respondents ($n = 246$). To ensure that the model fit the data reasonably well, the analysis used a series of modifications for purification purposes. A full model (including separate models for the younger and older samples) was tested across these hypotheses.

Measurement invariance testing using multi-group structural equation modeling was also performed, as the study compares two sample groups. The MGCFA produced fit of the configural model is as follows: ($X^2 = 1331.89, p < 0.00, X^2/df = 1.92, CFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.05$). This result shows that factors and their underlying structures are similar across the younger and older respondents, demonstrating evidence of configural invariance. Configural invariance is not adequate to establish measurement invariance ([Byrne et al., 1989](#)). Moreover, for the matrix of the factor loadings to be non-equivalent across the younger and older groups, the metric invariance was evaluated. The scores for the metric invariance are as follows: ($X^2 = 1365.238, p < 0.00, X^2/df = 1.91, CFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.05$). Thus, a comparison of the chi-square of the metric model was significant and higher than for the configural invariance model ($\Delta X^2(21) = 33.34, p < 0.05$). As further constraints are imposed in the scalar invariance, the invariance analysis is enhanced. Given that the X^2 difference between the scalar and metric invariance model is insignificant ($\Delta X^2(21) = 28.85, p > 0.05$), the study can conclude that the measurement invariance of the model is supported. The establishment of the measurement model allows both groups to be compared across the two groups. All the factor loadings were statistically significant (ranging from 0.56 to 0.85), serving as evidence for the convergent validity of measures. Overall, the measurement scales contain reasonable levels of reliability and validity of all the focal constructs (see [Tables 1 and 2](#)).

Two-age cohort's comparison/samples

A two-age cohort's comparison was undertaken to investigate differences in the hypothesized relations in a structural path analysis between the younger and older samples. A two-group

Table 1.
Inter-construct
correlations

#	Constructs	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Destination image	4.11	0.08	0.81	0.71							
2	Push motivation	4.25	0.08	0.81	0.61	0.73						
3	Pull motivation	4.10	0.11	0.81	0.75	0.61	0.71					
4	Visitors' experience	4.34	0.08	0.80	0.56	0.55	0.58	0.77				
5	Visitors' satisfaction	4.32	0.05	0.87	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.66	0.77			
6	Destination trust	4.19	0.06	0.85	0.54	0.53	0.53	0.65	0.64	0.77		
7	Destination attachment	3.95	0.05	0.82	0.53	0.52	0.53	0.48	0.58	0.63	0.73	
8	Visitors' loyalty	4.34	0.14	0.72	0.59	0.60	0.58	0.69	0.68	0.68	0.69	0.72

Note(s): All inter-construct correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$
Combined sample

SEM was executed to examine all the moderation sub-hypotheses individually in the younger and older samples. The fit indices deriving from both samples are presented as follows. For the young travelers group: $X^2 = 533.66$, $df = 347$, $X^2/df = 1.54$, $RMSEA = 0.06$, $CFI = 0.91$, $TLI = 0.90$, $SRMR = 0.07$. For the older traveler's group: $X^2 = 592.94$, $df = 376$, $X^2/df = 1.71$, $RMSEA = 0.05$, $CFI = 0.92$, $TLI = 0.91$, $SRMR = 0.05$. The two figures below depict the path coefficients for both groups and Table 3 shows the structural coefficients/hypotheses of the two-aged cohorts, young and old adults, investigated differently and the combined sample results of both cohorts (see Figures 2 and 3).

Discussion and conclusions

Conclusions

The results show that the relationship between destination image and visitors' loyalty was not significant in both age groups. This finding is in line with the combined sample analysis and the outcome, therefore indicating that destination marketers and policymakers emphasize the reputation, access and level of service excellence of tourism sectors. Neither age group considered the reputation nor the natural, historic and service quality of a tourism destination as the only reason to show destination loyalty. Regarding destination image and visitors' satisfaction, the young adults' cohort returned that destination image significantly and positively influences their satisfaction, while the older adults reported an insignificant relationship. These findings indicate that younger and older cohorts differ in terms of what satisfies them. For example, Aksu et al. (2022) "showed that the needs and preferences of tourists can be met by the provided services and marketing activities when the service suppliers consider the differences in market segments" (p. 9). Practitioners should concentrate more on destination image to satisfy the older generation. Tourism managers should also focus more on understanding the travel needs of more mature adults regarding their image of the intended destination. Directed focus will enhance visitors' decision-making processes and increase the satisfaction point of this cohort.

The results of the two age groups indicate that destination image is not significant in the influence of destination image on destination trust. This shows that destination image does not enhance feelings of trust. In terms of push and pull motives on visitors' satisfaction and destination trust, the results, in both the younger and older adults' samples, show insignificant influence on satisfaction and trust. It was found that pull motivation negatively influences destination trust in both young and older adults. Therefore, this indicates that external and internal motivations do not lead to tourists' satisfaction and trust towards the tourism destination.

Regarding the effect of visitors' experience on satisfaction and loyalty, both age groups recorded significant and positive influences on satisfaction and loyalty. This finding

Measurement items	Combined sample			Younger sample (less than 35 years)			Older sample (above 34 years)		
	λ	CR	AVE	λ	CR	AVE	λ	CR	AVE
<i>Destination image</i>									
Entertainment and events	0.75	0.81	0.51	0.73	0.80	0.50	0.75	0.82	0.53
Historic and cultural attractions	0.69			0.68			0.69		
Accessibility of the destination	0.67			0.66			0.67		
Level of service quality	0.74			0.76			0.79		
<i>Push motivation</i>									
To learn something new and interesting	0.63	0.78	0.54	0.61	0.76	0.52	0.70	0.81	0.59
To fulfill my dream of visiting a foreign land/country	0.77			0.74			0.78		
To meet new people and socialize with the local community	0.80			0.79			0.81		
<i>Pull motivation</i>									
Good physical amenities: accommodation, transportation and recreation facilities	0.74	0.81	0.51	0.72	0.80	0.50	0.74	0.81	0.51
Festival/special events and activities	0.69			0.67			0.69		
Warm and sunny weather	0.70			0.74			0.71		
Historical, cultural, art and religious attractions	0.72			0.69			0.70		
<i>Visitors experience</i>									
My experience in South Africa was what I expected	0.67	0.81	0.59	0.61	0.75	0.51	0.70	0.84	0.63
The visit to South Africa made me happy	0.83			0.80			0.84		
My choice to visit South Africa was a wise one	0.79			0.71			0.84		
<i>Visitors' satisfaction</i>									
I am satisfied with my decision to visit South Africa	0.73	0.88	0.59	0.73	0.85	0.59	0.73	0.88	0.66
I have positive feelings regarding South Africa	0.79			0.81			0.79		
This experience is exactly what I need	0.83			0.79			0.84		
This was a pleasant visit	0.81			0.74			0.84		
<i>Destination trust</i>									
I am comfortable that South Africa is a good tourist destination	0.78	0.88	0.59	0.73	0.83	0.54	0.82	0.84	0.63
South Africa is a destination that meets my expectation	0.83			0.78			0.84		
South Africa guarantees tourist satisfaction	0.81			0.75			0.85		
South Africa is a destination that never disappoints me	0.68			0.68			0.68		

(continued)

Table 2.
Measurement model

Measurement items	Combined sample			Younger sample (less than 35 years)			Older sample (above 34 years)			
	Scales	λ	CR	AVE	λ	CR	AVE	λ	CR	AVE
<i>Destination attachment</i>										
South Africa is the best place for what I like to do on holidays	0.72	0.82	0.54	0.85	0.86	0.60	0.82	0.88	0.64	
I am very attached to South Africa	0.81			0.83			0.84			
Holidaying in South Africa means a lot to me	0.78			0.83			0.85			
No other place can provide the same holidaying experience as South Africa	0.62			0.56			0.68			
<i>Visitors' loyalty</i>										
I would recommend others to visit South Africa	0.72	0.77	0.52	0.69	0.75	0.50	0.71	0.75	0.50	
I will visit South Africa in the future	0.74			0.73			0.58			
I will say positive things about South Africa	0.71			0.70			0.72			
<i>CFA fit indices</i>										
X^2	647.98			533.66			592.94			
df	348			347			376			
X^2/df	1.86			1.54			1.71			
RMSEA	0.05			0.06			0.05			
CFI	0.93			0.91			0.92			
TLI	0.92			0.90			0.91			
SRMR	0.04			0.07			0.05			
Note(s): λ = standardized factor loadings										
Combined data and multigroup analysis										

Table 2.

indicates that their visiting experiences were greater than their expectations, that they were satisfied with their experiences, and that they intended to revisit the destination. Visitors' satisfaction is significant and positively influences the destination trust in both the young and older adults. The results show that both age groups were satisfied with the product offerings and services rendered, leading to an increase in their destination trust. Nonetheless, this was insignificant as a combined sample and may be due to generational differences in their satisfaction levels.

Consistent with the combined sample findings, the effect of destination trust on destination attachment was significantly positive in both young and older adults. The findings show that positive destination trust such as visitors' comfort, safety and low risk met their expectations and strengthened their destination attachment. This is in line with [Chen and Phou's \(2013\)](#) argument that visitors' attachments increase when trust towards a destination has been developed. Regarding the effect of destination attachment on visitors' loyalty, the findings indicate that destination attachment significantly and positively influences visitors' loyalty in both the young and older groups.

The negative effect of destination image on visitors' loyalty indicates that visitors did not consider the destination image as the sole reason for their behavioral loyalty. However, it is stressed in the literature that destination image is an important mechanism to elevate or enhance visitors' loyalty at a destination ([Kanwel et al., 2019](#); [Haarhoff, 2018](#); [Chen and Phou, 2013](#)). For example, [Haarhoff's \(2018\)](#) study asserts that a destination's physical attributes

Hypothesis/path analysis	Combined sample		Younger sample (less than 35 years)		Older sample (above 34 years)	
	Estimates	<i>t</i> -value	Estimates	<i>t</i> -value	Estimates	<i>t</i> -value
H1 Destination image → Visitors' loyalty	0.04	0.60	0.14	1.09	-0.02	-0.21
H2 Destination image → Visitors' satisfaction	0.10	1.03	0.33	2.58*	-0.08	-0.54
H3 Destination image → Destination trust	0.13	1.09	0.17	0.96	0.06	0.35
H4 Push motivation → Visitors' satisfaction	0.13	1.56 ⁺	0.09	0.48	0.12	1.14
H5 Push motivation → Destination trust	0.13	1.18	0.10	0.58	0.17	1.22
H6 Pull motivation → Visitors' satisfaction	0.09	0.82	0.07	0.26	0.20	1.30
H7 Pull motivation → Destination trust	-0.01	-0.05	-0.10	-0.41	0.03	0.14
H8 Visitors' experience → Visitors' satisfaction	0.67	9.79**	0.57	4.36**	0.74	8.45**
H9 Visitors' experience → Visitors' loyalty	0.42	5.68**	0.35	3.36**	0.49	4.88**
H10 Visitors' satisfaction → Destination trust	0.58	7.63**	0.69	3.81**	0.56	6.22**
H11 Visitors' satisfaction → Destination attachment	0.10	0.1.01	0.28	0.99	0.06	0.59
H12 Destination trust → Destination attachment	0.67	6.76**	0.44	1.98*	0.74	7.82**
H13 Destination attachment → Visitors' loyalty	0.63	7.73**	0.61	4.50**	0.60	6.03**
<i>SEM fit indices</i>						
χ^2	672.01		550.50		608.22	
df	357		356		355	
χ^2/df	1.88		1.55		1.71	
RMSEA	0.05		0.06		0.05	
CFI	0.93		0.90		0.92	
TLI	0.92		0.89		0.91	
SRMR	0.05		0.07		0.05	

Note(s): ⁺*p* < 0.05, **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01 (figures with asterisks are significant)

Table 3. Structural coefficients

play an important role in the selection process of a destination's attractiveness and purchase decisions at a destination. This study found this relationship to be non-significant, and therefore, concludes that the South African tourism industry should not rely on destination image as the sole strategic tool to attract, retain and maintain visitors to the destination, but recognize that it influences the "creation of belief of attraction" of generational cohorts. This outcome concurs with Endah *et al.* (2017), who found destination image to be insignificant in the behavioral intentions at the visitor village in Lemah, Yogyakarta. In addition to destination image, this study found that visitors' experiences motivate their loyalty, thus expanding the understanding of cognitive determinants of destinations. These findings are consistent with related studies, such as Lončarić *et al.* (2017) and Wu (2016), which indicated that when visitors experience unique tourism services and product offerings at a destination, strong, positive loyalty ensues.

Furthermore, the effect of destination image on destination trust was insignificant in this study. Inconsistent with extant studies, the effect showed that the development of destination

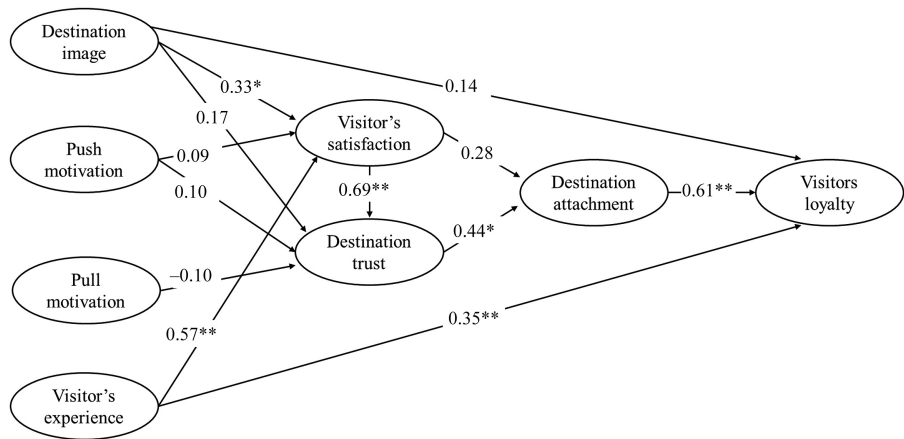


Figure 2.
SEM path analysis for
younger cohorts <35

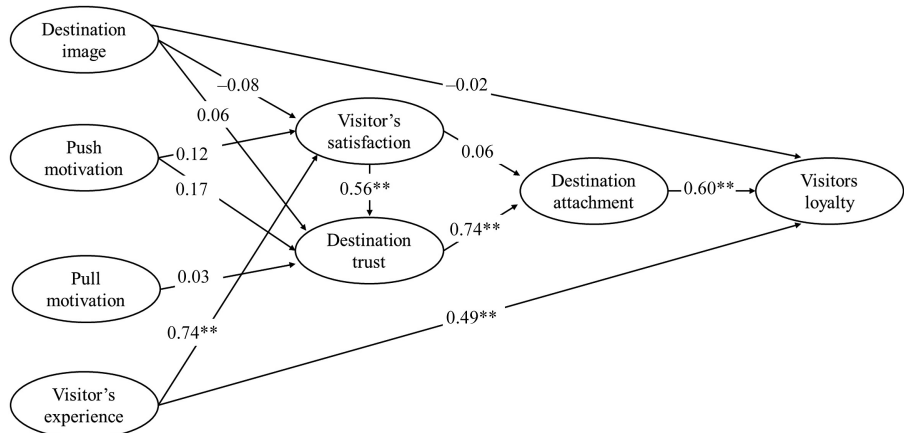


Figure 3.
SEM path analysis for
the older adults >34

image does not lead visitors to believe that a destination can fulfill all their promises, which could seal a mutual relationship between a destination and its visitors. For instance, previous studies such as [Endah et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Marinao et al. \(2012\)](#) found a significant influence of destination image on trust, and that satisfaction significantly influences trust. Our findings show that destination image alone does not stimulate trust and may not, on its own, lead to stronger ties and successful future relationships. The results also reveal that push motivations do not influence destination trust. This indicates that international visitors do not consider push motivation towards a destination as the only reason for them to trust the destination.

This study's findings confirmed that visitors' satisfaction has a significant influence on destination trust, which [Ahamad et al. \(2014\)](#) emphasized, stating that a visitor cannot have loyalty without the destination trust. [Leninkumar \(2017\)](#) viewed visitors' trust as the thoughts, feelings, or behaviors demonstrated by service providers towards them, without losing control of their visitors' best interests. On the other hand, [Chang \(2014\)](#) opposes this finding and suggests that trust precedes satisfaction, stating that tourists' trust of service providers at a destination is based on certain satisfaction factors.

Previous studies (see [Rahmatiyah et al., 2017](#); [Pedeliento et al., 2015](#)) assert a positive relationship between satisfaction and attachment. The aspect of visitors' satisfaction suggests a relationship with destination attachment, such that if visitors are satisfied at the destination, they will develop a destination attachment. Our study result agrees with the study by [Rahmatiyah et al. \(2017\)](#). The perceived trust of a destination contributes to destination attachment and holidaying visitors' experience. The best tourist destinations are those that offer unique experiences and are thereby able to improve the visitors' trust towards the destinations, hence increasing the visitors' destination attachment ([Rahmatiyah et al., 2017](#)).

According to [Marinao et al. \(2017\)](#), brand trust has a positive relationship with brand attachment. This relationship is the second strongest in this study. In brand management literature, increasing trust in a tourism destination is commonly cited as an important element for successful relationship building, which results in enhancing visitors' emotional attachments to a destination ([Endah et al., 2017](#)). The conclusion from the findings is that visitors perceive that trust towards a destination enhances their experience, and it is an important influence on their attachment to the tourism destination, which in turn leads to loyalty. The study findings confirm a positive relationship between destination attachment and visitors' loyalty.

The current findings concur with the findings by [Pedeliento et al. \(2015\)](#), which indicate the role of attachment as a driver of loyalty and that destination attachment is also positively associated to loyalty. The study by [Rahmatiyah et al. \(2017\)](#) on the Yamaha brand community indicates that brand attachment significantly influences brand loyalty. The conclusion drawn from the findings is that the greater the destination attachment, the greater the visitors' loyalty to the destination, and visitors are likely to remain attached to South Africa as a tourist destination if it continues to satisfy them and remains trusted.

Given the limited studies that investigate the relationships between international generational cohorts' motivation towards a destination, this study helps to expand the inadequate literature on the effect of cognitive and affective motivational aspects related to visitors' loyalty. The findings provide us with a better understanding of the relationships among the constructs as well as their determinants in a tourism destination context. The findings reveal three significant factors (pull, push and trust) that need to be considered in international generational cohorts in terms of analyzing them to achieve loyalty towards a destination. Thus, it is necessary to compartmentalize influences rather than adopt a "one size fits all" approach to determine what attracts, pulls and gives confidence to visitors to visit and remain loyal to the destination.

The study's use of an integrated model provides a theoretical understanding of the complex relationship between pull and push motivation, destination image and visitors' experiences regarding destination trust, satisfaction, attachment and loyalty from a perspective in which South Africa is considered one of the top African destinations.

Theoretical implications

Theoretically, the study's contribution to the literature highlights the effects of the push-pull motivations on international visitors' destination trust and their attachment and loyalty to South Africa as a tourist destination. Additionally, the study assesses the analytical application and strength of each theoretical perspective within a contrastive description approach. In particular, the study found that the relevance of the EDT in the context of image and satisfaction differs between the younger and older adult cohorts ([Grimmelikhuijsen and Porumbescu, 2017](#)). Furthermore, this study used the generational theory to contribute to answering the question of the role that satisfaction and trust play in destination attachment. We found that relationships differ per generation, which provides useful theoretical, practical relevance in emphasizing visitors' adaptation and green motives that lead to sustainable promotional and marketing strategies ([Pekovic, 2021](#)).

Moreover, when there is an increase in tourism competitiveness and a decrease in the entry of international visitors to a destination, it is challenging to find ways to influence visitors' interaction with the destination's characteristics and its attractiveness. Thus, this study adds to the marketing and destination attractiveness literature by delivering a theoretical context that clarifies the relationships between the framework variables and visitors' loyalty. The hypothetical review of the generation theory and the quantitative study performed show that the segmentation of the generational cohorts to access the motivations and cognitive and affective behaviors of the different cohorts proves that they are predictors of visitor loyalty. [Uner et al. \(2022\)](#) concurs that image can differ, based on visitors at a destination. Hence, it is necessary to adapt marketing strategies to meet different generation cohort needs, as a "Rainbow nation" is crucial; there is no room for standardization of marketing ([Wang et al., 2021](#)). The new knowledge produced will increase the understanding of the effect of destination attractiveness on visitors' loyalty to destinations such as South Africa.

This study has specifically examined the role that age cohort has on factors influencing loyalty to South Africa as a destination. This study established that tourism destination attractiveness contributes to the cognitive and affective behavioral outcomes of international visitors' loyalty. Therefore, it is worthwhile DMOs appealing to international tourism visitors to build visitors' trust and satisfaction through the constant improvement of destination attractiveness. Furthermore, the study makes a valuable contribution to the literature on international tourism, hence benefiting practitioners, academics and the tourism sector alike. This study has highlighted the areas on which DMOs need to focus to establish visitors' trust. In so doing, this could help tourism sector managers to better compete with the global tourism industry, to market destinations, to formulate strategies to increase destination attractiveness and to tap into past and potential international visitors.

The push-pull model, EDT, generational theory and the empirical analysis show that the overall motivation to visit a destination is a multidimensional phenomenon consisting of feelings, socializing, good physical amenities, historical sites, cost, wages, safety and easy access to a destination. Therefore the study contributes to the South African tourism sector and policymakers in terms of understanding the importance of the different generational cohorts' attractions, beliefs and perceptions of a tourist site's cost-effectiveness and their tourist's feelings and expectations regarding the destination. This study indicates that the push-pull motivations of both younger and older adults negatively affect destination trust and satisfaction. Hence, it is essential to focus on destination image and push-pull motivations, which are relatively more important in establishing and enhancing visitors' satisfaction and destination trust ([Ermawati and Prihandono, 2018](#)).

Practical implications

From a practical perspective, the study contributes to understanding the role that satisfaction and trust play in the destination attachment of South Africa as a tourism destination for international visitors. The study used generational cohorts to understand international tourists' cognitive, motivation and affective behaviors. The application of the push-pull model aided in investigating the motivational dimensions and effects of trust in terms of attachment and loyalty. The current study found that in addition to destination attractions, push and pull motivations related to mental applications such as learning, discovery, imagery before and after the tour, all impact international tourist satisfaction. Among the three motivational features, the coefficient of satisfaction on destination trust attractions was higher than that of visitor's experience. Managers need to develop and implement strategic plans according to the different generational cohorts' needs.

This finding supports the prior literature ([Leninkumar, 2017](#); [Chen and Phou, 2013](#)), indicating that the degree of destination trust that a visitor has can be a function of several

points of reference, such as information obtained from families, media and friends and comfortability, and therefore, visitors' satisfaction can be associated with and contribute to the overall trust in a destination. Destination marketers and tourism businesses could establish and nurture long-term relationships by satisfying their visitors by delivering promised appropriate services, thereby establishing trust in a destination.

Limitations and future research

While this study presents an exclusive and valuable contribution to literature by being the first attempt to utilize generational cohorts as moderators for the interrelationships between cognitive, affective and motivational factors that influence visitors' loyalty in choosing South Africa as a tourism destination, it nonetheless has limitations that need to be highlighted. Firstly, despite choosing an empirical context that realizes a significant number of international visitors annually, there are several tourist attractions within South Africa. Thus, our empirical context does not necessarily represent the entire country, and therefore, findings may not be generalizable to the whole country. Future research could use a larger sample size and include more tourist attractions in other provinces. Additionally, to the extent that destinations share similar attributes to our empirical context and could apply our recommendations, we urge users to adapt our findings and their implications to their respective contexts, as circumstances may differ slightly or significantly. Future research should consider comparative studies of similar and dissimilar emerging and developing countries to enrich an understanding of the relationships tested in the study. Lastly, our study was purely quantitative and did not allow further probing of the study participants' responses. Future studies could use a qualitative approach to probe further and generate further insights.

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Further reading

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