

# Factors that make a destination fascinating and motivate (re)visit

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to identify how destination fascination is perceived by all participants involved in the tourism sector.

**Design/methodology/approach** – An exploratory and qualitative study was undertaken based on a literature review and three focus groups with travelers and tourism and marketing professionals.

**Findings** – The findings revealed that different perceptions precede a destination fascination among the three groups and that the construction of fascination is related to other variables. Through consulting the three groups, 12 variables were identified, and a framework was proposed addressing the background of destination fascination and how it relates to memorable experiences and the intention to (re)visit. Another important finding is the need for tourism professionals to collaborate with marketing professionals to meet tourists' expectations. In addition, it was found that fascination can occur before visiting a place.

**Originality/value** – This paper advances the literature on four points: it presents evidence that fascination can occur even before visiting a destination; it verifies which variables are related to the multidimensional construct of destination fascination and how this relationship is observed by the three distinct groups; it identifies how the construction of destination fascination occurs; and it explains how tourism and marketing professionals can help fulfill travelers' wishes.

**Keywords** Consumer behavior, Destination fascination, Intention to visit, Tourism, Memorable experiences, Attention restoration theory

**Paper type** Research paper

## Factores que hacen que un destino sea fascinante y motivan la (re)visita

### Resumen

**Objetivo** – Identificar cómo perciben la fascinación por el destino todos los participantes implicados en el sector turístico.

**Diseño/metodología/enfoque** – Se realizó un estudio exploratorio y cualitativo basado en una revisión bibliográfica y tres grupos de discusión con viajeros y profesionales del turismo y el marketing.

**Resultados** – Los resultados revelaron que diferentes percepciones preceden a la fascinación por un destino entre los tres grupos y que la construcción de la fascinación está relacionada con otras variables. Mediante la consulta a los tres grupos, se identificaron 12 variables y se propuso un marco que aborda los antecedentes de la fascinación por el destino y su relación con las experiencias memorables y la intención de (re)visitarlo. Otra conclusión importante es la necesidad de que los profesionales del turismo colaboren con los del marketing

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para satisfacer las expectativas de los turistas. Además, se descubrió que la fascinación puede producirse antes de visitar un lugar.

**Originalidad** – Este artículo avanza en la literatura en cuatro puntos: (i) presenta evidencias de que la fascinación puede ocurrir incluso antes de visitar un destino, (ii) verifica qué variables están relacionadas con el constructo multidimensional de la fascinación por el destino y cómo esta relación es observada por los tres grupos distintos, (iii) identifica cómo ocurre la construcción de la fascinación por el destino, y (iv) explica cómo los profesionales del turismo y del marketing pueden ayudar a cumplir los deseos de los viajeros.

**Palabras clave** – Comportamiento del consumidor, Fascinación por el Destino, Intención de Visitar, Turismo, Experiencias memorables, Teoría de la Restauración de la Atención

**Tipo de artículo** – Trabajo de investigación

使一个目的地吸引人并促使人们（再）访问的因素

目的 – 确定参与旅游部门的所有参与者是如何看待目的地魅力的。

设计/方法/途径。 – 在文献综述和与旅游者、旅游和营销专业人士的三个焦点小组的基础上，进行了一项探索性和定性的研究。

研究结果。 – 研究结果显示，在这三个群体中，不同的认知会导致对目的地的迷恋，迷恋的构建与其他变量有关。通过咨询这三个群体，确定了12个变量，并提出了一个框架，解决了目的地魅力的背景，以及它与难忘的经历和（再）访问的意图之间的关系。另一个重要的发现是，旅游专业人士需要与营销专业人士合作，以满足游客的期望。此外，研究还发现，迷恋可以在访问一个地方之前发生。

原创性。 – 本文在四点推动了文献的发展：(i)它提出了证据，证明迷恋甚至在访问一个目的地之前就可以发生，(ii)它验证了哪些变量与目的地迷恋的多维构造有关，以及这种关系是如何被三个不同的群体观察到的，(iii)它确定了目的地迷恋的构造如何发生，以及(iv)它解释了旅游和营销专业人士如何帮助实现旅游者的愿望。

关键词。消费者行为，目的地魅力，访问意向，旅游，难忘的经历，注意力恢复理论。

文章类型 研究型论文

## 1. Introduction

Tourism has a direct impact on the growth and development of societies. The travel and tourism sector accounted for 8.8% of the USA's gross domestic product and employed 45 million professionals in 2019, representing 9.8% of the USA's workforce (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). In addition to its economic importance the tourism sector is dynamic and competitive (Elsharnouby and Elbanna, 2021) and was ultimately one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Wong *et al.*, 2022).

Choosing a preferential place is one of the most complex tasks (Pan *et al.*, 2021). To choose a place has yielded various related factors and has been the object of study by several authors (Pan *et al.*, 2021; Grigolon *et al.*, 2013; Petrick and Backman, 2002). Liu *et al.* (2017) have explained that tourists holistically evaluate destinations, select one and rely on the order of preference among alternatives for the final choice. However, the authors point out that it is not the sum of attributes that defines the chosen location, as the values of different attributes can be compared (i.e. a negative value can be offset by other positive values). Such features serve as assessment tools to achieve different results in the choice of destination (Liu *et al.*, 2017).

Observing that none of a diversity of factors are more important than another, Liu *et al.* (2017) and Wang *et al.* (2020) focused on understanding which elements are important to rendering a destination fascinating. They believe that tourists would have a greater intention of (re)visiting a fascinating destination and, by being there, they would achieve well-being. The concept of fascination is widely applied in the tourism industry, and categorizing a destination as fascinating can influence an individual's intention to visit (Liu *et al.*, 2017). Fascination leads people to travel, as tourists' choices vary according to different characteristics and the diversity of existing destinations (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989).

Fascination is a concept derived from attention restoration theory (ART) (Wong *et al.*, 2022; Huang, 2021). ART holds that fatigue can be rectified by spending time in or observing natural environments (Gressler, 2014; Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989) and defines fascination as unintentional attention or an individual's ability to involuntarily capture the stimuli of an environment without making any mental effort. This allows the fatigued attention system to rest and restore the capacity for directed attention (Gressler, 2014). Liu *et al.* (2017) expand this concept, stating that fascination can arise from an ecological tourist destination and is formed by six dimensions: mystique, friendliness, attractiveness, richness, uniqueness and fitness.

Lee and Chuang (2021) show that fascination positively influences consumer satisfaction and quality of life. Still, on the fascination, it is expected to be related to the choice of dark tourism (Lewis *et al.*, 2021). Fascination has also been analyzed as a unique location (Zheng *et al.*, 2022). Although a significant amount of research has been done on fascination, studies that analyze destination fascination as a multidimensional construct are still incipient (Liu *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2020). There is still a need to understand how the variables involved in the construct of destination fascination relate to other factors in the tourism literature (Kankhuni and Ngwira, 2021).

There is, therefore, a necessity to broaden the discussion concerning both destination fascination and how these destinations are related to the intention to (re)visit and have a memorable experience. In addition, other variables associated with this multidimensional construct must also be recognized (Liu *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2020; Kankhuni and Ngwira, 2021). Furthermore, by realizing that people can feel fascinated by visiting a place and never physically having toured there, this research provides a holistic analysis of how a destination could become fascinating. Thus, a research objective is to identify how destination fascination is perceived by all participants involved in the tourism sector. To this end, tourists, travel agents and professionals in tourism marketing are interviewed.

This research contributes to expanding the concept of destination fascination and dispelling ART's claim that fascination only occurs at the destination. This research shows that this theory can be addressed outside the destination and that fascination can occur before the visit. Furthermore, the importance of studying destination fascination as a multidimensional construct is reinforced. Thus, this research advances the studies by Liu *et al.* (2017) and Wang *et al.* (2020), highlighting other variables related to destination fascination. For managerial contribution, it helps tourism managers understand which fascination variables are most relevant to manage them more effectively and attract target audiences. Furthermore, the research focuses on three groups, which the findings reveal have different interests. Therefore, for a destination to be considered fascinating, it must have particular characteristics in relation to each group. Finally, regarding the interests of tourists, it is suggested that marketing and tourism professionals work together.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Attention restoration theory

Continuous investment in environmental cognition research (the individual's ability to know, extract and store information) and environmental preferences resulted in the development of ART (Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). Accordingly, restoring attentional capacity after long periods of stress requires fascination.

Several ART-related studies have investigated the potential of natural and built environments for restoring one's attention, using rating scales to assess the four components of attention restoration. They found that participants considered natural environments more restorative than built and urban environments (Felsten, 2009). The results remained the

same when real and simulated environments were considered. No differences were found between the classification of individuals who walked through a forest and those who only saw a video of a walk through a forest; nor between students from different countries, such as Sweden, Finland and the USA (Hartig *et al.*, 1991).

ART indicates that natural environments can restore individuals after they have experienced stress (Kaplan, 1995). Going beyond the natural environment, several articles have suggested that nonroutine environments are also capable of restoring individuals (Wong *et al.*, 2022; Huang, 2021). Although it is an established theory, ART requires additional research (Joye and Dewitte, 2018). Nevertheless, a number of the current findings have demonstrated that restoration can occur in natural environments, cities or even through the use of technologies such as online experiences or augmented reality (Wong *et al.*, 2022; Huang, 2021). To advance this theory, this article focuses on fascination and its role in relation to tourist destinations.

Two critical aspects have been indicated in the literature regarding fascination. First, fascination occurs through an experiential process, such as participatory fascination. Games of chance, for example, can fascinate people, who may even lose control over them. Second, fascination can be experienced through content outside that environment, such as people, things or points of view (Kaplan, 1995). Fascination is, therefore, a multidimensional concept. Accordingly, it addresses the multiple aspects of an experience in a restorative environment (Liu *et al.*, 2017).

On the subject of cognitive attention, the study of restorative environments can offer several contributions to research on tourist destinations. This is because tourists' demands for destinations motivated by physical/mental fatigue have become an essential research topic in addition to tourists' destination choices (Lehto *et al.*, 2017). In this regard, the choice of a tourist destination is marked by the attentional capacities that a fascinating destination is capable of restoring (Gressler, 2014).

Finally, it is pertinent to highlight that fascination can be achieved online, which is applicable for people *en route* to a visit, post-visit and anticipating future visits. In this manner, the restoration described by ART can be achieved through virtual tourism (Wong *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, virtual reality can promote tourist destinations, even using senses beyond sight and hearing, such as stimulating the sense of smell with the area's scent (Flavián *et al.*, 2021).

## 2.2 *The concept of tourist consumption and the factors that influence the intention to (re) visit a fascinating destination*

The concept of tourist consumption refers to the processes by which goods are created, purchased and used. This concept also encompasses the motivations and decisions of each tourist when selecting a tourist destination (Horodyski and Gándara, 2017). By consuming, selecting and appropriating goods, people define what they consider valuable and develop ways to enter and differentiate themselves in society. Goods and related consumption spaces are critical elements for understanding the social relations established in contemporary Western societies (McCracken, 2003). Whether people consume goods and services for what they mean, consumption is perceived as an essential part of the experience (Lipovetsky, 2007; Wang *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, the consumption experience is marked by recognizing the consumer's role in creating their own experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). The consumer and related management parties are brought together in the growing pertinent literature, focusing on the experiential value resulting from interactions between companies and individuals (Kranzbühler *et al.*, 2018).

A person can experience multisensory stimuli captured from the environment (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014). This experience provides opportunities for a phenomenological exploration of the relationships between tourists, destinations and a destination's influence on the intention to revisit (Berto, 2005). A person could become fascinated by this experience (Liu *et al.*, 2017).

Destination fascination is related to how much the tourist pays attention to details that interest them and the extent to which they explore the destination in search of personal meanings. In this way, destination fascination is a multidimensional concept formed by six related dimensions: mystique, friendliness, attractiveness, richness, uniqueness and fitness. Furthermore, it was found that destination fascination is related to behavioral intention, memorable experiences, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and information searches (Kankhuni and Ngwira, 2021; Chen and Huang, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2016; Jenkins *et al.*, 2014; Wong and Dioko, 2013) (Table 1).

The behavioral intention in this research concerns the intention to (re)visit. This refers to one's motivation or encouragement to visit a destination (Mohsin, 2005). This process can occur when a tourist plans a trip. It is, therefore, a complex process related to decision-making and tourist behavior (Suciati *et al.*, 2017). Thus, the actual behavior of a tourist is explained by their intention to select a location as a tourist destination (Kim *et al.*, 2016).

In tourism literature, the intention to revisit stems from the memories of tourists who have already visited a destination. Tourist loyalty is significantly affected by tourists' perceptions of a destination, yet the impact of a destination's image on a tourist's image can be complex and multi-faceted (Zhang *et al.*, 2014). Several factors drive tourists to (re)visit a destination. They usually choose their vacation destination based on their experience, friends or family. They perceive an emotional connection with the destinations and nurture the desire to revisit those previously appreciated (Chi, 2012). Furthermore, destination fascination influences attitudes and increases the trust of tourists, inducing them to repeat their intention to visit (Vg *et al.*, 2021).

The literature review reveals that first-time travelers are more likely to be attracted by crucial tourist attractions. Therefore, tourism managers must satisfy new guests' motivations by providing informational resources and promotional incentives. Furthermore, the way information is transferred has been analyzed in other studies that show the goal of the search can be for hedonic or utilitarian factors (Akdim *et al.*, 2022). User behavior changes depending on the device used to perform the search (Barta *et al.*, 2021) and how users' online searches can affect their emotions and moods (Flavián *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, repeat visitors must receive information and occasionally engage in social and cultural activities (Frias-Jamilena *et al.*, 2013).

### 3. Methodology

This study is exploratory and qualitative (Skinner *et al.*, 2000). First, a literature review was conducted. Focus-group interviews were then undertaken, as they are considered suitable for qualitative research (Nóbrega *et al.*, 2015). The focus-group methodology allows for an open and accessible debate concerning a topic of common interest among participants (Gaskell, 2002). In this study, three focus groups were established, consisting of travelers and tourism and marketing professionals. Their travel experiences were used as a reference (Table 2).

The focus-group interviews ranged from 5 to 10 (Pizzol, 2004). Thirty participants were invited, 9 withdrew and 21 agreed to participate, satisfying the study's objective. The number of focus-group interviews per group was 10 (Group 1), 6 (Group 2) and 5 (Group 3). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus-group interviews were conducted via Google Meet on alternate days. The participants of the three focus groups were between 18 and 60 years of age.

| Factor         | Description  |
|----------------|--|
| Mystique       | <i>Mystique regards how a destination arouses tourists' motivations to explore and discover its stories.</i> Mystical destinations stimulate fascination and induce exploration and discovery, such as the ghosts, and other paranormal entities promised as enlivening visits to Scotland (Inglis and Holmes, 2003). Mystical journeys aim to discover places considered energetic, and tourists feel encouraged to return when the destination is fascinating (Inglis and Holmes, 2003; Liu et al., 2017)  |
| Friendliness   | <i>Friendliness represents feelings related to human interactions and services in destination visits</i> (Liu et al., 2017). They define friendliness as tourists' subjective perception of the friendliness of human interactions and services. Accordingly, destinations with high friendliness make tourists feel welcome, reduce their anxiety about staying in an unfamiliar place, and empower them to explore a fascinating destination   |
| Attractiveness | <i>The attractiveness of a fascinating destination is measured according to the chosen tourist destination and the time allotted to enjoy a pleasant experience. It is primarily determined by the aesthetic judgment of tourists</i> (Kirillova et al., 2014). Destinations with high attractiveness can make tourists interested in further exploring the place. Attraction represents the first step to inducing the desire to visit. Therefore, destination advertisements often focus on attractiveness (Du Rand and Heath, 2006; Liu et al., 2017)   |
| Richness       | <i>The richness of tourist resources includes both natural and cultural diversity and is essential to the competitiveness of a tourist destination</i> (Gomezelj and Mihalič, 2008). Furthermore, Liu et al. (2017) point out that destination richness improves the place's perceived restoration and maintains the destination's competitiveness through the strong intentions of tourists to revisit. Therefore, tourists prefer to visit destinations with varied tourist resources that, in abundance, stimulate the intention to revisit and allow tourists to enjoy several experiences in a single visit (Wang et al., 2010) |
| Uniqueness     | The uniqueness of a fascinating destination relates to the difficulty of replacing one destination with another. Tourists subjectively determine the uniqueness of a destination according to their perception of its uniqueness and the difficulty of replacing the destination with others (Liu et al., 2017). The perceived uniqueness of a destination also allows tourists to enjoy the sense of mentally being away, thereby detaching them from their daily obligations and routines (Lehto, 2013)  |
| Fitness        | <i>Fitness concerns the subjective perceptions of tourists regarding the fit between their self-image and a destination</i> (Liu et al., 2017). Accordingly, tourists perceive that experiences at a destination fit with their self-image, allowing them to be themselves in the destination and enjoy involuntary attention freely (Liu et al., 2017). In summary, destination fitness results in tourists' high loyalty and willingness to remain longer in a specific place, reflecting expenses and maintaining a long-term relationship with the destination (Liu et al., 2017)  |
| Expectation    | <i>Tourist expectations regarding the intention to visit a particular destination are stimulated by the different sources of information concerning that place.</i> These expectations are aligned with the  |

(continued)

**Table 1.**  
Key factors  
motivating the  
intention to (re)visit a  
fascinating  
destination



| Factor                   | Description  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Electronic word of mouth | authenticity found by tourists when enjoying a tourist destination. Therefore, satisfaction affects the tourists' choices and may intensify their interest in a future trip (Gândara, 2008)<br><i>Electronic word of mouth consists of online communication that discusses product and service information. It also refers to consumers' observations.</i> In this regard, people share their opinions and experiences and judge the quality of products or services to help other consumers choose (Lee et al., 2008). Electronic word of mouth plays an essential role in the pre-trip stage when tourists consult online information and evaluate alternatives before traveling. Tourists often base their choices on acquired information (Cao et al., 2014; Lange-Faria and Elliot, 2012) |
| Information search       | <i>An information search is an initial stage of tourists choosing a tourist destination. It is "the motivating stimulus of knowledge stored in memory or acquisition of information from the environment" (Engel et al., 1995, p. 119).</i> It is seen as a continuously changing process in which travelers use different sources to plan their trips (Guerra et al., 2014). Information search thus facilitates decision-making, as the tourist can be fascinated by the place (Zhang et al., 2016)  |

Table 1.

|   | Focus groups | Participants            | Description                                    | No. of participants |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Description of the focus-group participants | 1            | Travelers               | People who frequently travel (>3 times a year) | 10                  |
|   | 2            | Tourism professionals   | People who work in tourism                     | 6                   |
|   | 3            | Marketing professionals | People who work in marketing                   | 5                   |

Table 2.

The focus-group interviews asked the participants to make a general comment on the analyzed topic. The participants were then asked to introduce themselves and share further information (Gatti, 2001). This approach has considerable advantages when conducted online, as it is convenient, widespread, less costly and rapid (Malhotra, 2011).

The participants were initially asked to describe how they chose tourist destinations and to identify the variables influencing their intention to (re)visit them – this exploratory process allowed for describing the consumers' choices. Then, the following questions were asked:

- Q1. Please describe a fascinating destination and provide examples.
- Q2. Do you think a tourist can be fascinated by a place without having visited it?
- Q3. What key aspects are you interested in when choosing a tourist destination?
- Q4. Based on the current COVID-19 pandemic and a postpandemic scenario, what factors would you consider in choosing a fascinating destination?

Content analysis was used to analyze data (Bardin, 2011). Therefore, the NVivo (Version 11) software was used to facilitate the qualitative data analysis. In addition, this software provided suitable analytical tools to support data coding and subsequent analysis (Nodari et al., 2014). Furthermore, this software is efficient, inexpensive and allows for exploring data meticulously.

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An individual analysis of the answers provided by each focus group was undertaken before conducting a content analysis of all interviews. A frequency analysis of the answers per focus group was then performed. Frequency analysis revealed the most frequent and, therefore, relevant words. The resulting frequency was compared to the theoretical framework, thereby excluding the words that were not conceptualized. For a clear visualization of the distinctions between the main concepts found in the focus groups and the phrases that represent these concepts, the results are presented in tables, as suggested by [Barta et al. \(2022\)](#). In the following section, the analysis reveals that all three focus groups answered similarly.

#### 4. Results

This section presents the results according to each focus group's content and frequency analyses. Invitations to participate were issued via email and WhatsApp. When all participants were online on Google Meet, a preprepared set of questions was followed to guide the discussions appropriately. When choosing a tourist destination, the participants highlighted 12 factors influencing their intentions to (re)visit a fascinating destination. Nine factors (friendliness, attractiveness, e-WOM, information search, enchantment, expectation, mystique, richness and uniqueness) had already been mentioned in the literature, and three (culture, memorable experience and safety) emerged from the focus groups. The principal results can be viewed in [Table 3](#).

##### 4.1 Focus group 1

Ten participants met online on the morning of July 18, 2020 (Saturday). The duration of the first focus group was 2 hours. It is noteworthy that the online format does not differ from face-to-face focus groups. This focus group was composed of people who frequently travel.

The participants were invited via email and WhatsApp. When all ten participants were online on Google Meet, a predetermined set of questions was followed to guide the discussions appropriately. When choosing a tourist destination, the participants highlighted: safety; culture; memorable experience; a place that is welcoming to visitors (friendliness); differentiated services (attractiveness); information search; and fantasy (enchantment).

Participants highlighted safety as the most crucial factor in a fascinating destination. According to [Grünewald \(2007\)](#), tourism safety refers to protecting the lives, health, physical, psychological and economic integrity of tourists, service providers and residents. Tourists' intentions to visit are primarily influenced by safety concerns ([Azim, 2010](#)). Regardless of the many attributes that underlie tourists' experiences and motivations, safety is arguably one of the most critical factors ([Santana, 2001](#)).

Culture is a crucial factor in fascinating destinations because tourists are likely to visit distant places to experience the culture of another country ([Timothy and Boyd, 2006](#)). Furthermore, culture leads to unique interpretations of each tourist destination. Therefore, tourism enterprises must invest in cultural attractions to preserve destinations' cultural heritage. To understand the culture of a particular place, one needs to consider the integration of tourists with the local population, as culture is dynamic and suffers from local and international influences ([Pezzi and Santos, 2012](#)).

Companies can create unique services to attract other clientele while enabling memorable experiences ([Schmitt, 1999](#)). These memorable experiences generate sensory, emotional, cognitive and behavioral values. Such experiences also allow the identification of values that replace functional values and differentiation strategies to attract tourists ([Pine II and Gilmore, 1999](#)). As a result, memorable experiences influence tourists' intention to (re)visit a destination. Understanding this novel means of offering tourism services and reflecting on



| Factor/Focus group  | Description  | Example of interviewees' statements   |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Safety</i><br>F1, F2 and F3                                      | Tourism safety refers to protecting the lives, health, physical, psychological and economic integrity of tourists, service providers and residents (Grünewald, 2007)   | "... the safety, the aesthetics of the place, the enchantment, the art, the dance, the dream, the fantasy ... in 6 months, the parks will not return to normal." (Interviewee F1.1)<br>"Safe places, mainly in terms of hygiene, without crowds. The future is uncertain, unfortunately." (Interviewee F2.6)<br>"Turkey, the London Underground, ... fascination from a place like Peru's cotton culture and clothing, ... the fascination of Paris." (Interviewee F1.2)<br>"Undoubtedly, the culture of a place is fascinating and extraordinary ... how much you get involved in receiving the environment ... it is the immersion, how much you get into that culture." (Interviewee F2.1) |
| <i>Culture</i><br>F1 and F2   | Culture is related to people's previous and current way of life in a region, i.e. the history of a place and its people in their contemporary life (Smith, 2009)   | "Experience and ... impressions of the place ... the fascination for a place that has never been visited ..." (Interviewee F1.3)<br>"Everything is magical and kept as a memory ... the characters, environment, technology, food, and other factors ..." (Interviewee F2.2)<br>"... Making the expectation a fascinating, remarkable experience." (Interviewee F2.1)   |
| <i>Memorable experience</i><br>F1, F2 and F3                        | Experiences are memorable when regarded as economic goods that can provide unforgettable memories by supporting the services and scenarios provided during the consumption process (Pine II and Gilmore, 1999) | "The people I love to be with me on the trip ... a good company changes everything. Cordiality and hospitality are also important." (Interviewee F1.10)<br>"Experience, joy, magic, hospitality ..." (Interviewee F3.5)   |
| <i>Friendliness</i><br>(people/hospitality)<br>F1, F2 and F3        | Friendliness is a function of how friendly, kind and receptive the hosts are to visitors (Vg et al., 2021)   | "An element in the location that makes up the attractiveness of the destination propels me to visit the place" (Interviewee F1.9)<br>"Satisfying consumers with different attractions." (Interviewee F3.4)  |
| <i>Attractiveness</i><br>(differentiated services)<br>F1, F2 and F3 | This study defines attractiveness in destination fascination as the extent to which a destination motivates tourists to take the time to enjoy a pleasant experience (Liu et al., 2017)                        | "What is fascinating is getting to know the place through available information. Exploring the place and its main sights, getting to know villages, less frequently visited places ..." (Interviewee F1.4)  |
| <i>Information search</i><br>F1 and F3                              | Information search is characterized as a scan of information and implies a conscious recognition of the need for more decision-relevant information (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021)                                 | "The child's dream that persists even as an adult would be a motivating factor. Discovering Disney is a childhood fantasy that remains in adult life." (Interviewee F2.4)   |
| <i>Fitness</i><br>F2  | Fitness in destination fascination is the subjective perceptions of tourists regarding the fit between their self-image and a destination (Liu et al., 2017)   |   |

**Table 3.**  
Focus-group results

(continued)

| Factor/Focus group                       | Description   | Example of interviewees' statements  |
|--|---|--|
| <i>Richness</i><br>F2                    | Richness in destination fascination represents the diversity of tourism resources in a destination (Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2017)   | "The richness of content offered by its heritage is a key factor." (Interviewee F2.2)  |
| <i>Expectation</i><br>F2 and F3          | The expectation is a belief concerning a product's attributes or performance sometime in the future (Wang <i>et al.</i> , 2021)   | "What fascinates the customer is what generates expectations." (Interviewee F2.7)  |
| <i>Mystique (magic)</i><br>F1, F2 and F3 | Mystique in destination fascination is defined as the extent to which a destination arouses the motivation of tourists to explore and discover stories regarding the destination (Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2017)   | "An exotic country like Singapore, India . . . I do spiritual study, and I like to travel to mysterious places too, which brings mystery, magic." (Interviewee F1.8)<br>"Exploring the mystical culture and attractions. Mapping tourist attractions." (Interviewee F2.4)<br>"An under-explored place, unlike anything people have ever visited or seen." (Interviewee F3.5) |
| <i>Uniqueness</i><br>F2                  | Uniqueness refers to a "positive striving for differentness relative to others" (Tian <i>et al.</i> , 2001)   | " . . . for example, the uniqueness of a tourist destination may influence me to choose it." (Interviewee F2.5)  |
| <i>Electronic word of mouth</i><br>F3    | Electronic word of mouth refers to "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company which is made available to multitudes of people and institutes via the Internet" (Kankhuni and Ngwira, 2021) | "Websites, photos, Instagram, getting information, pieces of advice, and opinions from other people (electronic word of mouth)." (Interviewee F3.1)  |

**Notes:** F1 = Focus group 1; F2 = Focus group 2; F3 = Focus group 3

**Table 3.**

the tourism experience can help managers capture the experience to provide differential services to consumers. Doing so also constitutes an important marketing advancement (Trigo, 2010). Due to increased competition, it is paramount for tourism managers to create and deliver memorable experiences to consumers (Neuhofer *et al.*, 2012, 2015). Interviewees pointed out that a memorable experience is a critical factor in a fascinating destination.

Focus Group 1 interviewees mentioned enchantment (fantasy) as a critical factor in a fascinating destination, classifying the Walt Disney Company as a fascinating place. However, given that this study aims to identify the factors that influence the intention to (re) visit a tourist destination, this fascinating destination would be considered an enchanted place. Therefore, there is substantial proximity of meaning between enchantment/fantasy and destination fascination. Thus, fantasy was not considered a key variable in the study. Group 1 also reported the following variables: hospitable places (friendliness), differentiated services (attractiveness) and information search were already reported by the literature.

Fascination is widely valued in tourism because tourists require a fascinating environment to mentally relax and disconnect from daily tasks, ensuring effective psychological recovery. In addition, a fascinating environment stimulates people to pay close attention to their surroundings and explore the destination freely for personal

meaning. Consequently, such an environment improves a destination's ability to foster mental recovery and attract visitors to natural environments (Kaplan, 1995).

#### 4.2 Focus group 2

The focus group that occurred on July 15, 2020, was comprised of six tourism professionals and lasted for 3 hours. The participants highlighted the following factors influencing the choice of a tourist destination: culture, enchantment (fantasy/fascination), people (friendliness), safety, memorable experience, attractiveness, richness, expectation, mystique and uniqueness. Culture, enchantment (fantasy), safety and memorable experiences were emphasized by Focus Group 1 interviewees and reinforced by Focus Group 2 interviewees. For the same reason that occurred in group 1, enchantment (fantasy) was removed.

Attractiveness, mystique, friendliness, expectation, richness, fitness and uniqueness were mentioned by Focus Group 2 interviewees. However, these factors had already been described in the literature as key in choosing a fascinating tourist destination. Mystique, friendliness, attractiveness, richness, uniqueness and fitness were proposed by Liu *et al.* (2017), who developed a destination fascination scale based on ART.

Holistic and unique images are significant in determining how a particular destination is categorized (stereotype holistic impressions) and differentiated (unique attractions, auras) in the minds of the targeted customers (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). This is due to a place's unique features (Kim *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, the "need for uniqueness" personality trait may act as a moderator in the association between destination attractiveness factors and tourist destination choice (Zinelabidine *et al.*, 2018).

People seek to be moderately different from others, as they find high levels of similarity to others unpleasant (Snyder and Fromkin, 1977). Tian *et al.* (2001) define the consumer need for uniqueness as the "trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's self-image and social image." The "need for uniqueness" is an influential factor in decision-making for consumers attempting to create differentiation (Tian *et al.*, 2001).

In fact, it is known that the greater the congruity between a destination's image and one's real and ideal self-concept, the greater the tendency for a tourist to visit that place (Beerli *et al.*, 2007). The practical implications stemming from these observations highlight the need to manage images to capture tourists successfully. Thus, the tourists' feelings toward the destination adjust to their interests and reveal a sense of personal fitness.

Mystical destinations arouse individuals' curiosity, stimulate fascination and induce exploration and discovery (Inglis and Holmes, 2003). Furthermore, mystical journeys promote fascination and the intention to visit a destination (Liu *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, encouraging the search for new experiences and offering mystical journeys can produce a unique experience. Therefore, tourism enterprises should develop measures to attract tourists to fascinating destinations.

#### 4.3 Focal group 3

The July 16, 2020 focus group consisted of five marketing professionals and lasted for 2 hours. When choosing a tourist destination, the participants highlighted: differentiation (attractiveness), safety, memorable experience, people/hospitality (friendliness), e-WOM, information search, expectation, magic (mystique) and enchantment.

All factors identified in Focus Group 3 were highlighted in Focus Groups 1 and 2, except for the e-WOM. This factor was pointed out in the literature as a critical factor influencing destination fascination. Word of mouth plays a particularly significant role for those

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services that need trust, such as the tourism industry (Jalilvand *et al.*, 2012). Thus, e-WOM is relevant when choosing a fascinating destination (Lee *et al.*, 2008). By extension, tourism professionals need to share experiences regarding a particular destination.

When tourists have high expectations, they are likely to pay more attention to available information regarding tourism services and products (Dawar and Pillutla, 2000). The interest in visiting a particular destination is aligned with the tourist's objective of undergoing experiences that fit their expectations rather than a restricted interest in a destination's physical characteristics.

Therefore, tourism enterprises should invest in attractions that create underlying expectations characterized by the tourists' interaction with the situation in which they are inserted. The subjective aspects inherent to the tourists and the context in which they are inserted will influence their perception of the lived experience (Pine II and Gilmore, 1999).

## 5. Discussion

The results reveal that the three groups have their own characteristics. Despite the repetition of certain variables, it is noteworthy that the definition of fascination differs between the groups. Five of the 12 variables mentioned are repeated in all groups: safety, memorable experience, friendliness, attractiveness and mystique, with the last three variables belonging to the destination fascination construct (Liu *et al.*, 2017).

Safety is highlighted among the five variables repeated in all groups, indicating that safety is an impacting variable in choosing a fascinating destination regardless of the consumer's profile (Qi *et al.*, 2009). In this sense, it is worth mentioning that the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing at the time of the research. Therefore, this context may have influenced this result, although the participants also highlighted physical and property security. Thus, it appears that those involved with tourism should reinforce the safety of tourists, as this variable would be a significant differential.

A memorable experience was another variable presented in the three groups. Other articles have discussed this variable (Kankhuni and Ngwira, 2021). It demonstrates that tourists seek memories of an experience, and tourism professionals and marketers know the tourists seek a memorable travel experience (Kankhuni and Ngwira, 2021). The other three variables, related to the destination fascination construct, demonstrate that everyone involved understands the importance of being well received at a place (i.e. friendliness). The place must be attractive, and the person feels a mystique before and after their visit. A friendly reception and the ease of having a positive relationship with residents have already been highlighted in other research (Vg *et al.*, 2021). Everyone understands that tourists want a safe trip that prompts a memorable experience in an attractive place with mystique where people are friendly.

Culture is a variable that appears in the groups of tourists and tourism professionals (Wong *et al.*, 2022). This variable indicates that tourists seek to know the culture of the places visited, and that tourism professionals are aware of its importance for tourists. However, marketing professionals did not recognize this variable as important and should therefore implement strategies to disseminate information about the culture of the destinations visited. Nonetheless, marketing professionals saw the search for information regarding a destination as critical, as did tourists (Tavitiyaman *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the importance of searching for information is highlighted as it can affect the tourist's perception of the destination (Flavián *et al.*, 2011; Barta *et al.*, 2021; Akdim *et al.*, 2022). However, tourism professionals did not view this search for information as a relevant variable.

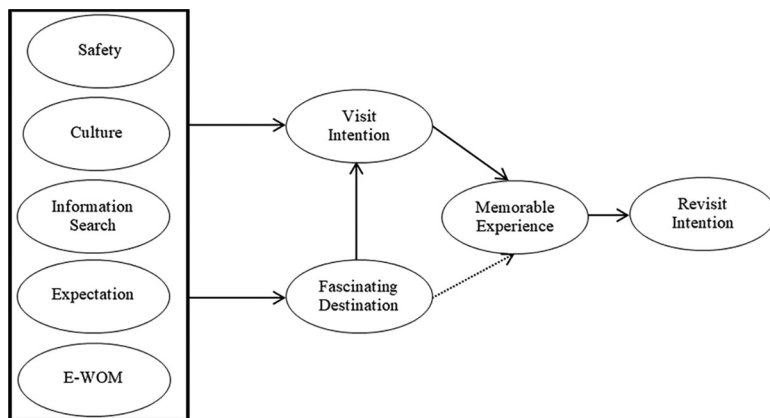
These two variables (culture and search for information) demonstrate that tourists want to learn about the culture of a place and seek information about it, which underscores the

need for a joint effort between tourism and marketing professionals. Such collaboration is crucial because tourism professionals possess knowledge about destinations, and marketing professionals understand where to disseminate this information. Furthermore, this cooperation would render it much more straightforward for tourists to find the information they are seeking and provide more details concerning the cultures of the desired destinations.

In comparing tourism and marketing professionals, it is noteworthy that both indicated expectation and mystique as relevant variables. It is believed that both groups understand that they need to manage tourists' expectations, as disconfirmation of this expectation can influence satisfaction (Wang *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, the mystique is a variable of the destination fascination construct. These professionals understand that, for some tourists, the chosen places carry mystical implications that must be addressed (Lee, 2021; Du Preez and Govender, 2020).

Tourism professionals highlighted three important variables but did not appear in the other groups: richness, uniqueness and fitness. These two variables belong to the destination fascination construct. Richness indicates that the place has a range of varying attractions. The focus is not on having a spectacular attraction – as the attractiveness variable suggests – but on having quantity (Wang *et al.*, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2017). In this way, it is understood that tourism professionals try to render a place unique by demonstrating the most significant number of attractions a place presents to tourists. In addition, these professionals know that the number of attractions of the place must meet the interests of tourists (i.e. fitness), further reinforcing that the place is unique. While this emphasizes the importance of tourism professionals' knowledge, it must be disclosed because tourists often do not have access to such knowledge. This can result in tourists being unable to recognize the richness of a place's attractions and not identifying a place as unique.

Concerning marketing professionals, the variable e-WOM emerged as important but did not appear in the other groups. e-WOM is an admittedly important variable for marketers (Kankhuni and Ngwira, 2021). They understand that this variable needs to be studied and used. Therefore, forums, blogs and influencers are important sources of information dissemination that can make a place a fascinating destination. The following framework is suggested after examining how the three groups analyze the relationship between variables and destination fascination (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.**  
What makes a tourist destination fascinating and motivates the (re)visit

The model proposed here indicates that safety, culture, information search, expectations and e-WOM are predictors of the intention to visit (Kankhuni and Ngwira, 2021; Chen and Huang, 2021; Kucukergin and Gürlek, 2020) and destination fascination. These variables can cause a person to become fascinated with a destination before visiting and therefore affect the intention to visit (Wong *et al.*, 2022; Huang, 2021).

One way to promote a destination previsit is through virtual reality, which can stimulate the tourist's sensory aspects (Flavián *et al.*, 2021). After the visit, the individual is expected to have had a memorable experience (Zhang *et al.*, 2014) and a consequent intention to revisit (Kankhuni and Ngwira, 2021; Chen and Huang, 2021). The dashed arrow between destination fascination and memorable experience indicates that a person may have been fascinated by a place before intending to visit. However, it is recognized that fascination can occur in the place itself (Wong *et al.*, 2022). However, it is believed that the intention to visit is a mediate variable in this relationship between a destination fascination and a memorable experience. Furthermore, it should be noted that the destination fascination construct presented in this framework is formed by the six dimensions provided by Liu *et al.* (2017), all of which were mentioned in the focus groups.

## 6. Conclusion

The study aimed to understand how destination fascination is perceived by participants involved in the tourism sector and identify the variables that influence the intention to (re) visit a tourist destination. The objectives were met through three focus groups with tourists, tourism professionals and marketing professionals.

This study identified 12 variables influencing the intention to (re)visit a fascinating destination; nine of which (fitness, friendliness, attractiveness, e-WOM, information search, expectation, mystique, richness, and uniqueness) were found in the literature, and three of which (culture, memorable experience and safety) emerged from the focus groups. These variables allow the formulation of managerial strategies for tourism professionals and present theoretical implications for researchers.

### 6.1 Managerial implications

Most companies aim to offer options for differentiated products and services to their target audiences. It was found that tourists seek safety, culture, memorable experiences, friendliness, attractions and mystique. In addition, it was identified that tourists seek this information and, to provide it, a collaboration between tourism and marketing professionals is necessary. While both groups understand consumers, they demonstrate differences regarding two key variables. Culture is important for tourism professionals, while marketing professionals highlight the search for information. This result reveals that tourism professionals have knowledge of a place, but marketing professionals are responsible for disseminating that knowledge. Therefore, cooperation between these two professional groups would significantly facilitate tourists' search for information. Tourism professionals providing content to a website or dissemination tool developed by marketing professionals would simplify and enhance tourists' search for information and increase intentions to visit. Tourism destination managers can do this by bringing together marketing and tourism professionals and asking them to create a destination website or inviting a digital influencer to promote content sent by tourism professionals.

The use of digital influencers has proven to be an effective way of sharing information and attracting consumers. Suppose the content disseminated by influencers is created by marketing and tourism professionals. In that case, it can be expected that a satisfied tourist will have a greater intention of following the influencer and commenting, thus expanding



the dissemination of the place (Casaló *et al.*, 2017a). Another possibility is to have more significant interaction between Instagram or another communication tool between tourists and the place. Dissemination of photos or videos in the place must be published on Instagram or the destination's official network; this will lead to greater satisfaction on the part of the tourist (Casaló *et al.*, 2017b). Using Instagram and these tools creatively will amplify tourists' positive emotions about the destination (Casaló *et al.*, 2021).

In addition, it was identified that tourists could be fascinated both before and during the visit. Therefore, managerial strategies should focus on two periods. Before the visit, the strategy should focus on displaying attractiveness, facilitating the information search, and informing tourists of a place's mystique. During the trip, the focus should be on safety and friendliness to ensure the journey is a memorable experience the tourist intends to repeat on a revisit. Finally, the culture must be easily accessible to tourists and disseminated before and during a trip. The disclosure of these factors on the websites can improve the tourist's quality of life and satisfaction at the place. This way, market segmentation is suggested to attend tourists on a pretrip and tourists who want to return.

This research assists managers by emphasizing the relevance of searching for information about a destination. It is noteworthy that such information must be aligned between marketing and tourism professionals to meet the needs of tourists and that the way it is disseminated can affect the destination fascination. Tourism managers should thus consider technologies such as virtual reality to amplify this fascination and enhance the variables of safety, culture, friendliness, attractiveness and fantasy.

### *6.2 Theoretical contributions*

The research contributes by highlighting that ART can occur not only in natural environments but that destinations alone can fascinate. In addition, the results presented here expand the discussion concerning fascination. Although it is quite a research construct, this research extends the discussion of its use as multidimensional and its relationships with other variables. Furthermore, the results reinforce the understanding that fascination can occur even before visiting a place and that the concept of destination fascination has much to contribute to the awareness of tourist behavior. In addition, all the six variables of the destination fascination construct were found and are noticeable by those involved in the tourism sector. This research also contributes by demonstrating that different agents have different perceptions. Therefore, the perception of a group does not always represent the whole, and the actions of one group may not have an impact on the other. In addition, this research reinforces the need for joint studies between marketing and tourism professionals, as the two balance each other and can aid tourists in finding information about the destination.

The research also contributes to constructing a framework relating variables that influence the destination fascination and its influence on the intention to (re)visit and a memorable experience. It notes the importance of the search for information and its role in the development of fascination; if the search is well developed with new methodologies, it has the potential to expand fascination and enhance the variables related to it. The variable safety role as an important variable in this pandemic context is also highlighted.

Furthermore, this study contributes to consumer-behavior literature by identifying the factors that influence tourists in choosing a destination and several other relevant factors. It also adds to scholarly discussions regarding the theoretical linkage among these factors, subjective norms and the intention to (re)visit a tourist destination. Finally, it also highlights the importance of using new technologies to fascinate and immerse tourists outside the destination, amplifying the effect of smart tourism technologies that can reduce worries and ease novelty seeking (Goo *et al.*, 2022). Table 4 summarizes the study's conclusions and theoretical and managerial implications.

**Table 4.**  
Conclusions and  
theoretical and  
managerial  
implications

| Conclusions   | Theoretical and managerial implications  |
|---|--|
| Travelers, tourism managers, and marketing professionals perceive destination fascination differently     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelers prioritize safety, culture, memorable experiences, friendliness, attractiveness, information search and fantasy to choosing a destination</li> <li>• There is a need for joint work between tourism and marketing professionals to meet travelers' wishes</li> </ul>  |
| Fascination can occur before visiting a destination   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important to recognize how the search for information occurs and can affect the perception of destination fascination</li> <li>• Strategies must be implemented to fascinate tourists before they visit the place</li> </ul>  |
| The actions of destination managers must be divided into two moments: before the trip and during the trip | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before the visit, the strategy should focus on displaying attractiveness, facilitating the information search and informing tourists of a place's mystique</li> <li>• During the trip, the focus should be on safety and friendliness to ensure the trip is a memorable experience that the tourist intends to revisit</li> <li>• Knowledge of the culture must be easily accessible to tourists and disseminated before and during a trip</li> </ul> |

### 6.3 Limitations and suggestions for future investigations

The study was limited by using only online focus groups during the pandemic. Because of this, lesser interaction between participants happened. Another limitation was that the interviewees did not have trips planned because of the pandemic. Therefore, tourists who traveled frequently were chosen. Finally, due to the research period, interviews should be conducted to understand how these variables' effects have changed the way tourists and/or professionals act after the pandemic.

Scholars may empirically test our framework and conduct cross-cultural studies (that analyze how people from different cultural backgrounds communicate) to verify whether the identified factors are observable in other contexts. This will help tourism enterprises to know their customers more comprehensively. Furthermore, as tourism is global in scale, tourism enterprises should learn tourists' preferences and behaviors. Consequently, such enterprises will be more likely to satisfy tourists' demands. Thus, further research is necessary to capture other complex factors underlying the intention to (re)visit fascinating destinations.

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