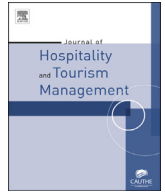




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The influence of travel agents and tour operators' perspectives on a tourism destination. The case of Portuguese intermediaries on Brazil's image

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse Brazil's tourism destination image taking into account travel agents and tour operators' perspectives. This paper thus seeks to complement previous research carried out based on travellers' viewpoints. This research, more specifically, sought to analyse the antecedents of Brazil's overall image from the perspective of Portuguese travel intermediaries. For that cognitive image, affective image and marketing communications were analysed as antecedents of Brazil's overall image, and visitation influence was modelled as a mediator. Based on a questionnaire completed by 132 Portuguese travel agents and tour operators, the results show that the total (direct and indirect) effect of both cognitive image and marketing communications are more important than the total effect of affective image. Moreover, the visitation influence exerts no mediation at all between affective image and overall destination image, although there is a mild partial mediation effect involving the other two antecedents (cognitive image and marketing communications).

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1. Introduction

Tourism is perceived as an economic and social driving force supporting regional and/or local development (Brouder, 2014; Brouder, Clavé, Gill, & Ioannides, 2016; Pimentel, Emmendoerfer, & Tomazzoni, 2014). However, with the increased competition between similar destinations and demand flexibility, many classic tourist destinations are being replaced (Li & Petrick, 2008; Mussalam & Tajeddini, 2016). The prosperity of destinations depends on a constant flow of tourists, but, with the emergence of new markets and competitors (Tasci & Gartner, 2007), only well managed destinations have the capacity to continue attracting visitors (Buhalis, 2000; Camisón & Forés, 2015).

Over the last few years, the development of this industry has made tourism marketing quite challenging, as alternative destinations are constantly expanding and tourist destination marketers are finding it increasingly difficult to influence individuals' decision making (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Souiden, Ladhari, & Chiadmi,

2017). According to García, Gómez, and Molina (2012), for destinations to gain competitive advantage, it is necessary not only to differentiate their image with regard to customer needs but also to understand the importance of creating unique features that distinguish them from similar destinations.

From this perspective, destination image has an important role because it influences tourists' behaviour (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Souiden et al., 2017). This influence starts when prospective travellers choose their destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), so persuading potential visitors to select particular destinations is an essential aspect of successfully developing any locality's tourism destination image. Some well thought-out effort, thus, is needed to build or improve destination image (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Grosspietsch, 2006; Kock, Josiassen, & Assaf, 2016; Mussalam & Tajeddini, 2016; Souiden et al., 2017; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007; Zins, 2010).

Tourism marketing strategies cannot be ignored as they are important vehicles in the social construction of tourism destinations (Kavaratzis, 2012). Tourism marketing strategies tend to homogenise and differentiate destinations in terms of context and content, which creates territorial boundaries (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003). The role of tourism travel intermediaries – as stakeholders – is important as they are important players influencing the

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representations and images of tourism destinations (Jeuring, 2016; Kavartzis, 2012).

In this context, tour operators and travel agents link tourism supply and demand, as they act as information providers and tourism product facilitators between the supply and the demand. Thus, both customers and suppliers rely on tour operators and travel agents, which gives the latter great influence in sales and distribution in this industry (Budeanu, 2005).

The importance of intermediaries in the tourism industry is not new, despite several claims that travel agencies and tour operators could disappear (Čavlek, 2013). Their persuasion knowledge is very important in the believability to publicity and advertising (Kim, Kim, & Marshall, 2016). With functions such as informing potential visitors and developing and promoting destination tourist packages, these professionals are key influencers in the tourism industry as 'their image of, and knowledge about, destinations will have a significant impact on potential travellers' vacation decision-making processes' (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001, p. 1). Nevertheless, the majority of research regarding marketing strategies has over-emphasised the representation of image among tourists overlooking the important role tourist travel intermediaries play in the construction of tourist destination images (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Calveras & Orfila, 2014; Grosspietsch, 2006; Čavlek, 2013).

Researchers' interest in tourism destination image has increased considerably over the last few decades (e.g. Kock et al., 2016; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010; Tasci et al., 2007; Zins, 2010). However, the existing literature is far from unanimous about the most appropriate methods to use when building tourism destination image, since this process is quite dynamic – changing markedly according to various situational factors.

Although there is plenty of research on tourism destination image (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kock et al., 2016; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010), few studies analyse the roles of business travel intermediaries as facilitators in the creation of Brazil's tourism destination image (Bandyopadhyay & Nascimento, 2010; Mariutti & Giraldi, 2014; Mariutti, Giraldi, & Costa, 2013; Mariutti, Trench, Montanari, & Giraldi, 2017; O'Neil, 2007; Pike, 2016; Rezende-Parker, Morisson, & Ismail, 2003). Moreover, as emphasised by Sonmez and Sirakaya (2002), it is important to carry out research on image in developing countries and add that these destinations have to consider carefully how they are positioned in the international market in order to develop and increase their participation in the tourism industry. Therefore, the article focuses on building of Brazil's tourism destination overall image specifically on Portuguese travel intermediaries' perception Brazil as a tourist destination. For that this paper analyses how Brazil's overall image is influenced by intermediaries' cognitive image, affective image and marketing communications strategy, taking into account the mediating effect of the intermediaries' influence after visiting Brazil. For that cognitive image and affective image are analysed as independent variables as antecedents of overall image. This latter variable is analysed as a compound, combined perspective of Brazil as a tourism destination.

To this end, this paper is organised as follows. After this introduction, the second section presents the theoretical framework constructed based on the assumptions underlying the various relationships discussed in the literature. It also presents Brazil as a tourism destination. Section three describes the research methodology, as well as the scales used, the sample and the data collected. Section four presents the results of the model's estimated parameters, followed by a discussion of the results. Finally, section five covers the study's conclusions and limitations and future research directions.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1. The importance of destination image studies for tourism marketing

Tourism products are subjective, resulting from both individuals' image and expectations. Thus, tourism policymakers need to assess their destinations' image and resources through proper image and marketing studies (Buhalis, 2000). According to Fakeye and Crompton (1991), the success or failure of tourism in many destinations strongly depends on the effective management of image, as well as an understanding of individuals' image of specific locations. The increased competition in the tourism industry has forced destinations to develop well-studied plans and efficient marketing strategies (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001).

In this context, marketing researchers have studied the impact of brand image on consumer behaviour, given that studies have provided proof of brand image's strong influence on attitudes (Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011). This concern is also found in tourism marketing as "marketers are interested in the concept of tourist destination image mainly because it relates to decision making and sales of tourist products and services" (Jenkins, 1999, p. 2). Tourism destinations are constantly being compared with their competitors in the market on the basis of their perceived image (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001).

According to Stepchenkova and Mills (2010, pp. 575–576), "destination image research has been one of the major areas in tourism scholarly inquiry for more than three decades due to its high practical importance for destination management, marketing, and branding." The concept of destination image has attracted much attention among tourism professionals and researchers due to the fact that image differentiates tourism destinations from their competitors and strongly influences future visitors' decision making (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). McLellan and Foushee (1983) also argue that, besides influencing tourists, destination image also affects business travel intermediaries such as travel agents and tour operators.

In addition to recognising image's importance for the success of tourist destinations, the literature reflects a consensus regarding this concept's complexity. Consequently, a profound understanding of its characteristics, components and relationships is required for the organisations managing tourism destinations to exploit the positive elements of destination image and alter any negative ones (Elliot et al., 2011).

As stated by Rodríguez del Bosque and San Martín (2008), destination image has been widely discussed because it influences individuals' behaviour. However, when researching what constitutes state of the art destination image building, the literature contains little research exploring how tour operators and travel agents perceive or influence destination image (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Grosspietsch, 2006; McLellan & Foushee, 1983; Rodríguez del Bosque, San Martín, & Collado, 2006; Santos, 1998). The reason for this gap is unclear since understanding how tour operators and travel agents influence tourism destinations is essential to tourism policymakers, professionals and academics.

McLellan and Foushee (1983) conclude that travel intermediaries as sources of information contribute to the creation of the destination images upon which tourists base their decisions. Santos (1998) contends that a country's projected image influences the image that tour operators project of that country to their clients, which be considered as the perceived overall image of the destination. Therefore, it is important to understand clearly how travel agents and tour operators' perceived images can assist tourist destination managers whenever the former professionals revise destination images in the market and influence these images and

related tourist behaviours (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001). Lasting partnerships with tourism travel intermediaries are thus essential for destinations' success (Buhalis, 2000). Based on these considerations, the following research hypothesis was proposed for the present study:

H1a. The projected image in marketing communications of the destination's country positively influences tour operators and travel agents' perceived overall image of that destination.

2.2. Components of tourism destination image

Many authors (e.g. Ahmed, 1991; Alcañiz, García, & Blas, 2009; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Buhalis, 2000; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Kasper, Helsdingen, & Gabbott, 2006; Rodriguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Tasci & Alcañiz, García, & Blas, 2009) agree that tourism destination image is the mental representation of knowledge, beliefs, ideas, expectations, feelings and global impressions that individuals have regarding tourism destinations. Other researchers define tourism destination image as the subjective perspective of tourists regarding a location, which influences their behaviour (Alcañiz et al., 2009; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008; Rodriguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Alcañiz et al., 2009).

As individuals have limited experiences before visiting destinations, their attitudes depend on their perceived image, which does not always correspond to reality. As such, potential images, beliefs and perceptions about locations significantly influence the growth of tourism destinations, as much or even more than these places' tangible features (Kock et al., 2016; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). Various researchers of destination image (Alcañiz et al., 2009; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Rodriguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002; Tasci & Gartner, 2007) agree that building an image involves at least two interrelated components – cognitive and affective images – in which the perceptions of a given location are contained (Rodriguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008).

To define these destination image components better, several authors explain that cognitive evaluations of destination image are consistent with individuals' knowledge and/or beliefs about destination attributes. In contrast, affective evaluations involve feelings or emotions and the value that individuals place on destinations based on their subjective motivations (Alcañiz et al., 2009; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Gartner, 1994; Konečnik & Gartner, 2007). Researchers have now reached a consensus that cognitive components influence affective evaluations (Elliot et al., 2011; Gartner, 1994).

Walmsley and Jenkins (1993) add that affective images are related to what is felt about locations. Although individuals may have distinctive motivations for visiting destinations, visitors may have the same feelings about the value of destinations that meet their needs.

Gartner and Shen (1992) suggests that tourists' analysis of affective image is often operative during the evaluation phase of their destination selection processes. The cited author discovered that the components of images are formed hierarchically so that, first, cognitive components are formed and, then, affective components. Qu, Kim, and Im (2011) add that, regardless of this hierarchical order, the cognitive and affective components of images can interact in unique ways when an overall image is built.

Various authors (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Baloglu, 2001;

Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Tasci & Gartner, 2007) argue that the sum of all perceptions that individuals have of destinations, that is, the combination of cognitive and/or affective elements, forms tourists' overall image of destinations. Echtner and Ritchie (1991), when discussing the connections between the components that form destination image, relate this formation to gestalt theory, namely, they consider image to be a holistic perception of all components of destinations. The cited authors explain that the formation of destination image is initially based on the little information individuals have, and they, later on, transform these fragmented images into something broader and more complete. Therefore, the following research hypotheses were proposed for the present study:

H2a. The affective image of the tourism destination positively influences tour operators and travel agents' perceived overall image of the country promoting that destination.

H3a. The cognitive image of tourism destinations positively influences tour operators and travel agents' perceived overall image of the country promoting that destination.

2.3. Influence of intermediaries on overall image

Corporate marketing communications are important tools for business development and brand recognition (Chakravarti & Janiszewski, 2003; Dahlén, Rosengren, & Thörn, 2008). However, previous studies analysing the effect marketing communications have mainly focused on brands and manufacturers rather than on service providers, as for example tour operators (Ailawadi, Beauchamp, Donthu, Gauri, & Shankar, 2009; Chan, Chan, & Tang, 2017; Modig, Dahlen, & Colliander, 2014).

Any individual involved in marketing is important (Lim, Soutar, & Lee, 2013; Quintal & Phau, 2014; San Martín, Camarero, & San José, 2011) as this has consequences for customers as decision makers. It is even possible that, the more involved an individual is, whether as a customer or an intermediary, with a product, service or tourism destination, the more intense that person's relationship will be with the product, service or destination. Tour operators are important players in creating a dynamic packaging and generating added value to the customers through self-packaged holidays, composed of single-based or bundled components (Cavlek, 2013), in order to serve several market segments. Calveras and Orfila (2014) defend that intermediaries are important players as providers of reputation regarding quality of a hotel establishment. As such, taking into account the important role of intermediaries, the following hypotheses were thus considered feasible:

H1b. The projected image in the marketing communications of the destination's country positively affects visitations' influence on tour operators and travel agents' image of that tourism destination.

H2b. The affective image of a tourism destination positively affects visitations' influence on tour operators and travel agents' image of that tourism destination.

H3b. The cognitive image of a tourism destination positively affects visitations' influence on tour operators and travel agents' image of that tourism destination.

The importance of image and advertising is present for example in food and nutrition advertising (Shah, Bettman, Ubel, Keller, & Edell, 2014) and tobacco and alcohol advertising (Capella, Webster, & Kinard, 2011) with significant and measurable effects on consumers, not only altering their beliefs, information search, and consumption. This indicates that tour operators may change their perception after visiting the tourist destination.

The literature on stayers and switchers indicates that differences have been found in satisfaction, switching costs and service quality perception (Ganesh, Arnold, & Reynolds, 2000; Moreira, Silva, & Moutinho, 2016; Wangenheim & Bayón, 2004). Although no studies in this area on travel intermediaries were found, it is likely that the more interested intermediaries are in certain products, services or destinations, the better these professionals' overall image perception of these products, services or destinations will be. Moreover, Moreira and Silva (2015) report that, although trust is a necessary component in successfully promoting customer commitment and loyalty, customer commitment does not necessarily lead to customer loyalty. As such, it is expected that tour operators and travel intermediaries that are involved in visiting tourism destinations are more prone to explore single-based or bundled components of Brazil and consequently have a better overall image and are more capable of exploring the intermediation of Brazil as a tourism destination (Calveras & Orfila, 2014). Based on this, the following hypothesis was put forward:

H4. The post-visitation image of tourism intermediaries of a tourism destination positively influences the overall image of that tourism destination.

Based on the above theoretical framework and hypotheses, a proposed research model was developed, as shown in Fig. 1, that considers three main antecedents in the creation of overall destination image. Two of the variables – affective and cognitive image – have been presented in previous studies, but the influence of marketing communications on the image of the destination's country differentiates this theoretical model from previous models presented in the literature regarding tourism destination image. Moreover, the role of post-visitation image promoted by intermediaries based on their trips to tourism destinations is an important contribution.

2.4. Characterisation of Brazil as a tourism destination

Portugal and Brazil have had a close historical relationship that lasts more than four centuries. Both countries belong to the Lusophone world, are united by common history, language, religious and family ties (Tengarrinha, 2000). Currently, the two countries maintain privileged relationships, cooperating in economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific areas.

Tourism marketing in Brazil has long been a topic of great interest in that country (Bigname, 2002; Castro, Guimarães, & Magalhães, 2013; Guimarães, 2013), especially since 2005, when *Plano Aquarela*, the first international tourism marketing plan in Brazil, was launched by the Instituto Brasileiro do Turismo

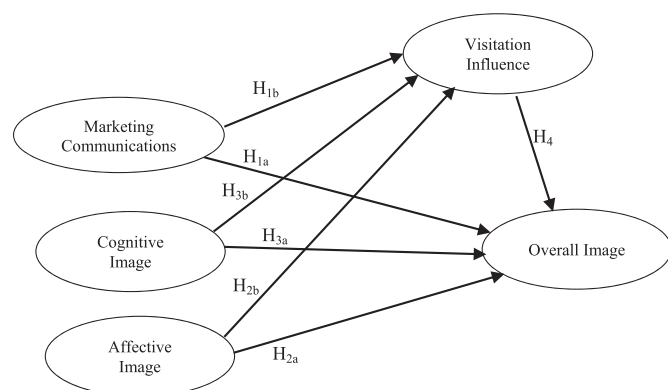


Fig. 1. Research model.

(EMBRATUR). Since then, three versions of the plan, which guides strategies and defines priority markets, have been presented in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism. One of the main initiatives of the *Plano Aquarela 2020* (Instituto Brasileiro de Turismo/Ministério do Turismo, 2009) seeks to raise the awareness of foreign travel intermediaries of Brazil's image, with Portugal being listed as the tenth most important nation among Brazil's tourist source countries. Therefore, the present research chose to focus on the perspective of Portuguese travel intermediaries since studying the perception of Brazil's tourism image abroad in this way follows the guidelines laid out in the *Plano Aquarela 2020* (Instituto Brasileiro de Turismo/Ministério do Turismo, 2009). A specific objective of this plan is to "update the image the world has of the country" (Instituto Brasileiro de Turismo/Ministério do Turismo, 2009, p. 22).

The *National Tourism Plan 2013–2016* (Ministry of Tourism, 2013a) includes holding the FIFA World Football Championship, in 2014, and the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, in 2016, as well as other large business, sporting, political and cultural events. These help project the country's image among international investors and potential tourist source countries. Despite all the efforts, the new *National Tourism Plan 2017–2020*, which was to be released in March 2017, is still under preparation (Mercado & Eventos, 2017). However, the Ministry of Tourism (2017) has already prepared ten important measures that are expected to boost tourism in Brazil:

- Issuance of Electronic Visas;
- Expansion of air travel connectivity;
- Modernization of Embratur's management model;
- Modernization of the General Brazilian Tourism Law (LGT);
- Better use of States resources;
- Improve professional qualification;
- Update of the Brazilian Tourism Map;
- Strengthening of Brazilian States tourism agencies;
- Deploy a partnership with the National Land Transport Agency to improve interstate communications;
- Develop and diversify thematic parks across Brazil.

According to Mariutti et al. (2017), most studies analysing Brazil as a tourism destination focus on the 'tourism' perspective, followed by, 'exports'. This complements previous perspectives from Rezende-Parker et al. (2003) who claim that little research had been done on Brazil as a tourism destination due to the lack of interest of the Brazilian government and the private sector in promoting Brazil abroad, as well as, a shortage of both academic and research institutions in Brazil that focus on tourism as an economic activity.

They believe that this is due to the lack of interest, until a few years ago, of the Brazilian government and the private sector in promoting Brazil abroad, as well as, a shortage of both academic and research institutions in Brazil that focus on tourism as an economic activity.

The *Anuário Estatístico de Turismo 2014* (Ministry of Tourism, 2013b, p. 41) provides figures on international arrivals in Brazil, categorised by major world regions. This information verifies that the largest tourist source market for Brazil is South America, generating almost half of all foreign tourists (50.5%), followed by Europe, which corresponds to 28.2%, of which Portugal represents 10.3% of European tourists entering Brazil.

Regarding international statistics, the data contained in the *Plano Nacional de Turismo 2013–2016* (Ministry of Tourism, 2013b, p. 41) shows that Brazil has a 0.64% share of the global foreign exchange earnings generated by tourism. In terms of revenue growth in South America between 2010 and 2011, Brazil registered a significant increase of 15% or US\$ 853 million. In 2012, foreign

tourists' spending while visiting Brazil reached US\$ 6.64 billion. These data demonstrate the positive momentum of inbound tourism in this country.

However, Brazil's broader destination image has some negative aspects. Based on real experiences of past visitors to Brazil, [Rezende-Parker et al. \(2003\)](#) report that the majority of these visitors have negative images of transportation and economic and social conditions, and they were concerned about their safety while visiting the country. This indicates a weakness in the Brazilian tourism product, which requires improvements to be made by Brazilian tourism authorities. [O'Neil \(2007\)](#) concludes that the image of Brazil in terms of crime and social problems is problematic for tourists. However, British tourists after visiting Brazil indicate that Brazil's reputation for crime is better than they originally thought, although Brazil's social problems are larger than they originally anticipated. [Loureiro and Araujo \(2015\)](#) also refer some negative effects of films on Brazil's cognitive and affective image. However, none of the research shows how tourism intermediaries perceive Brazil's image after visitation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Questionnaire development and measurement scales

Based on the reviewed studies' analysis, the information to be applied in the present study was specified as: (i) constructs, items and scales used to measure affective, cognitive and overall tourism destination image, (ii) other relevant information determining destination image (e.g. the regularity of information received through marketing in Brazil) and (iii) socio-demographic data for studies of destination image.

The literature review showed that most previous research on destination image has used semantic differential scales or five- or seven-point Likert scales. Nevertheless, even though these studies sought to measure the components of cognitive destination image, only a limited number were able both to develop a clear theoretical and conceptual framework and to verify the validity and reliability of the chosen scale ([Baloglu & McCleary, 1999](#); [Beerli & Martín, 2004](#); [Echtner & Ritchie, 1991](#); [Fakeye & Crompton, 1991](#); [Grosspietsch, 2006](#)).

Therefore, the cognitive component (COGN_IMAG), based on a five-point Likert scale, of tourism destination image was adapted from [Echtner and Ritchie \(1991, 1993\)](#) study. Of 35 attributes of cognitive image suggested by the cited authors, 23 were selected. Eight items were added based on other research ([Beerli & Martín, 2004](#); [Chen & Tsai, 2007](#); [Rodríguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008](#); [San Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008](#)).

To measure the affective component (AFFCT_IMAG) of destination image, semantic differential scales were used, in which four items of bipolar adjectives were included (i.e. unpleasant – pleasant; sleepy – arousing; gloomy – exciting; calm – stimulating; stressful –relaxing) and measured on a scale of seven points. The attributes used for the affective scale were also developed based on previously validated scales ([Agapito, do Valle, & Mendes, 2013](#); [Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997](#); [Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001](#); [Baloglu & McCleary, 1999](#); [Baloglu, 2001](#); [Beerli & Martín, 2004](#); [Pike & Ryan, 2004](#); [Pike, 2009](#); [Qu et al., 2011](#); [Rodríguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008](#); [Rodríguez del Bosque et al., 2006](#)).

Tools to measure marketing communications' projected image (MKTG_COMM) and visitations' influence (VISIT_INFL) were all generated using deductive scale development, as the knowledge required to understand the phenomena under study was the result of the researcher's knowledge and expertise ([Hinkin, 1998](#)). For marketing communications, two items were generated: (i) how

frequently marketing communications are used in Brazil to promote tourism destinations and (ii) marketing communications' influence on Brazil's image as a tourism destination. The two items used in the visitation's influence variable were: (i) how much visiting Brazil has influenced professionals' level of motivation to recommend and sell Brazil as a tourism destination and (ii) how much visiting Brazil has influenced the country's image as a tourism destination. Both variables were analysed using a five-point Likert scale.

As [Echtner and Ritchie \(1991\)](#) and [Bigné et al. \(2001\)](#) confirm, individuals' overall image of a destination encompasses much more than the sum of cognitive and affective images. In relation to a structured approach to overall image, respondents were asked to assess their overall image of Brazil (GLOB_IMAG), using a five-point Likert scale, based on the following two items (e.g. [Alcañiz et al., 2009](#); [Baloglu & McCleary, 1999](#); [Beerli & Martín, 2004](#); [Bigné et al., 2001](#); [Prayag, 2009](#); [Qu et al., 2011](#)): (i) what their overall image of Brazil as a tourism destination was and (ii) how likely was it that they would recommend Brazil as a tourism destination.

3.2. Sample and data collection

To achieve the research objectives, the empirical study was based on a non-random convenience sample of travel professionals to whom a semi-structured questionnaire was distributed. This survey was conducted among tourism travel intermediaries in Portugal, namely, both Portuguese travel agents and tour operators. The sampling technique was chosen based on its speed and ease of contact and low cost of data collection.

Generally speaking, the roles of these professionals in the tourism supply chain can be distinguished from each other only by the fact that tour operators focus on acquiring tourism services from suppliers. They then organise and sell these services in attractive packages, either directly to end-clients or through travel agents ([Budeanu, 2005](#)).

Portugal was selected as the target country for data collection in the present research because this country is among the largest tourism source markets for Brazil – in eleventh position in 2011 and 2012 and in tenth position in 2013 – which demonstrates a growth in the number of Portuguese tourists in Brazil ([Ministry of Tourism, 2013b](#), p. 41). In recent years, according to [UNWTO \(2017\)](#), although the number of Portuguese tourists arriving in Brazil have been decreasing between 2012 (168 649 tourists) and 2016 (149 968 tourists), Portugal remains in tenth position.

The database of the National Register of Tourism was used to obtain information about travel agents and tour operators. Although 1494 registered businesses were found initially, based on research carried out online and further manual refinement, 701 businesses were eliminated as transport companies, event organisers, agencies and receptive tour operators or agencies focused on niche destinations. The questionnaire was thus emailed to a final sample of 793 travel agents and tour operators, who were asked to fill out the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was online for four months using LimeSurvey, a resource platform run by the University of Aveiro, Portugal. A total of 132 completed questionnaires were obtained, which represents a response rate of 16.64% – an acceptable response rate for the tourism industry ([Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001](#); [Paxson, 1995](#)).

The sample is small, compared to what is normally desirable when using structural equation modelling (SEM) regression. [Kline \(2005\)](#) states that it is possible to use SEM techniques on samples ranging from 100 to 150. However, according to [Reinartz, Haenlein, and Henseler \(2009\)](#) and [Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt \(2014\)](#), partial least squares (PLS) can be used when the sample size is

small. Moreover, the 10 times rule for PLS-SEM indicates that the sample size should be at least equal to 10 times the largest number of structural paths directed at a particular construct in the structural model (Hair et al., 2014), which, in the present study, was 40. This made it possible to use the PLS-SEM technique.

Before testing the hypotheses, we engaged in a scale purification process following basic descriptive statistics analysis (i.e. normality, skewness, kurtosis, means and standard deviation). For all items, the skewness and kurtosis values are below Curran, West, and Finch (1996) recommendation of the absolute values of 2.0 and 7.0, respectively, to ensure item normality. We then subjected the purified data to exploratory factor analysis (EFA). In these analyses, items were grouped into a priori conceptualised scales.

Considering that the scales used to measure cognitive destination image were composed of various items proposed in previous studies, EFA was conducted as a preliminary study to assess the nature and scope of the data.

The relational structure between the 31 scale items of cognitive image was evaluated through EFA supported by a correlation matrix with an extraction of factors through principal components analysis, followed by Varimax rotation. The common factors were retained if they presented an eigenvalue greater than one, according to the scree plot and percentage of variance retained (Marôco, 2007). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) criterion was used to estimate the validity of the EFA.

After completing the EFA, we analysed the data to test the psychometric properties of the measurement scales used, namely, the reliability, validity and unidimensionality of the constructs, through specific statistical tests (Hair et al., 2014). Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

The statistical data analysis of the model was carried out through PLS-SEM using SmartPLS 3.0 software. This methodology was justified in the present study because it is robust (i) when working with non-normal data and (ii) when the theoretical framework is at an early stage of development, which entails testing and validating an exploratory model (Chin, 2010).

The measurement model was evaluated in terms of reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

As PLS employs bootstrapping to test the significance of relationships, it works well when dealing with non-normal variables, which is usually the case when multiplying two normally distributed variables (Bollen & Stine, 1990; Efron, 1988). Consequently, PLS performs well in analysis of mediation (Hair et al., 2014).

When testing mediation effects (Hair et al., 2014), first a direct significant effect between the independent and dependent variable must be established when the mediator variable is excluded. Second, the indirect effect of the mediator variable must be significant when the mediator variable is included in the path model. Finally, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables must be significantly reduced when the mediator is added. These three steps will be performed in this study using PLS. In order to determine the extent of the indirect effect in relation to the total effect we use the variance accounted for (VAF) (Hair et al., 2014).

The Sobel test is a traditional method of testing the significance of mediation effects (Sobel, 1982). It examines the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable vis-à-vis the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable including the mediating construct (Hair et al., 2014; Helm, Eggert, & Garnefeld, 2010). Bootstrapping was used to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients and estimate the standard error as Bootstrapping makes no assumptions about the shape of the variables' distribution or the sampling distribution of the statistics and can be applied to small samples with more confidence (Hair et al., 2014).

4. Analysis and discussion of results

4.1. Sample characterisation

The collected sample comprised 132 Portuguese travel agents and tour operators. These were mostly female (52.7%) and worked with less than 49 employees (96.8%), as shown in Table 1.

As referred above, EFA was conducted as a preliminary study to assess the nature and scope of the data. EFA showed that none of the 31 scale items had to be excluded. To estimate the validity of the EFA, the KMO returned a value of 0.720, which is a good result.

The seven components considered in the factor analysis explain 71.3% of the variance of cognitive image. Only Factor 7 ('crowdedness') was eliminated from the study as it had low internal consistency (i.e. a Cronbach's alpha of 0.390), according to Pestana and Gageiro (2008) guidelines. Factor 1, 'tourism infrastructure and activities', resembles the 'infrastructure' factor used by Chi and Qu (2008), as it includes items related to general and tourism infrastructure and outdoor activities. Factor 2, 'natural attractions', resembles Chi and Qu (2008) 'natural attractions' factor as it includes items related to the natural environment (i.e. flora and fauna, landscapes and natural attractions, pristine and wildlife nature, scenic tours and rural areas). Factor 3, 'cultural attractions', resembles the 'cultural environment' factor included by San Martín and Rodríguez del Bosque (2008) and Chen and Phou (2013), as it consists of items related to local culture and historical attractions. Factor 4 is similar to Chi and Qu (2008) 'entertainment and events' factor, defined as festival activities, and is likewise labelled 'entertainment and events'. Factor 5, 'accessibility', includes items relating to ease of access to roads and transportation, as well as affordability. Factor 6 resembles the factor with the same name, 'sun and sand', defined by Chen and Tsai (2007). It includes items related to good weather, the beauty of beaches and opportunities for adventure. Factor 7 resembles the factor of the same name, 'crowdedness', included by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) and covers items related to intense, massive tourism destinations.

All dimensions first order dimensions have Cronbach's alpha coefficients larger than the minimum cut-off of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978), suggesting a good internal consistency of the scales in question.

Table 2 presents the items' loadings and t-values. T-values were obtained by bootstrapping with 5000 iterations, indicating that all loadings are statistically significant at the 0.01% statistical level ($|t\text{-values}| \geq 3.291$). All items have higher loadings than the minimum recommended threshold of 0.7 (Gotz, Liehr-Gobbers, and Krafft (2010)). The results support the reliability of the measurement indicators.

Table 3 describes the average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR) and correlations of each latent variable. The CR values are higher than the recommended minimum of 0.6 (Gotz et al. (2010)), indicating that all constructs have adequate internal consistency. Moreover, the AVE of each construct is greater than the expected minimum threshold of 0.5 (Gotz et al. (2010)), which

Table 1
Characterisation of the sample.

Gender	%	Position of respondent	%
Male	47.3	Owner/president	45.2
Female	52.4	General Director	17.2
		Sales managers	18.3
Size (number of employees)	%	Head of operations	4.3
<49	96.8	Marketing managers	1.1
50 to 99	3.2	Travel agents	10.8
		Tour operators	3.2

Table 2
Loadings and cross-loadings using PLS-SEM.

	AF1	AF2	AF3	AF4	AF5	AF6	AFFCT_ IMAGG	GLOB_ IMAG	MKTG_ COMM	VISIT_ INFL
AF1_1	0.780	0.340	0.490	0.511	0.369	0.411	0.344	0.451	0.146	0.241
AF1_2	0.730	0.385	0.305	0.362	0.346	0.370	0.318	0.289	0.092	0.044
AF1_3	0.788	0.272	0.437	0.454	0.501	0.263	0.339	0.273	0.043	-0.010
AF1_4	0.782	0.240	0.467	0.488	0.523	0.308	0.356	0.382	0.047	0.278
AF1_5	0.720	0.263	0.471	0.453	0.549	0.272	0.330	0.365	-0.021	0.012
AF1_6	0.719	0.340	0.483	0.274	0.331	0.376	0.432	0.352	0.250	0.118
AF1_7	0.777	0.340	0.532	0.592	0.522	0.498	0.321	0.466	0.007	0.175
AF1_8	0.712	0.503	0.605	0.511	0.380	0.533	0.468	0.329	0.201	0.111
AF2_1	0.373	0.888	0.547	0.366	0.062	0.585	0.125	0.261	0.245	0.233
AF2_2	0.378	0.915	0.552	0.445	0.031	0.697	0.227	0.253	0.222	0.240
AF2_3	0.271	0.7954	0.419	0.428	0.057	0.399	0.164	0.159	0.033	0.183
AF2_4	0.440	0.881	0.571	0.511	0.113	0.716	0.322	0.317	0.266	0.150
AF2_5	0.423	0.752	0.481	0.476	0.182	0.427	0.309	0.205	0.159	-0.002
AF3_1	0.602	0.565	0.934	0.638	0.365	0.490	0.543	0.441	0.255	0.224
AF3_2	0.413	0.410	0.841	0.552	0.302	0.321	0.285	0.214	0.080	0.192
AF3_3	0.533	0.518	0.842	0.623	0.311	0.548	0.394	0.415	0.196	0.181
AF3_4	0.508	0.514	0.788	0.605	0.212	0.451	0.369	0.286	0.175	0.191
AF3_5	0.562	0.504	0.716	0.397	0.255	0.558	0.374	0.407	0.272	0.242
AF4_1	0.466	0.420	0.449	0.864	0.419	0.453	0.208	0.335	0.174	0.204
AF4_2	0.626	0.453	0.691	0.899	0.472	0.571	0.304	0.357	0.087	0.107
AF4_3	0.520	0.516	0.649	0.883	0.383	0.473	0.369	0.291	0.196	0.054
AF5_1	0.496	0.192	0.263	0.502	0.811	0.124	0.209	0.130	0.015	-0.038
AF5_2	0.513	0.125	0.323	0.417	0.899	0.165	0.156	0.242	0.046	0.038
AF5_3	0.515	0.040	0.283	0.372	0.873	0.034	0.160	0.341	0.020	0.100
AF5_5	0.386	-0.076	0.299	0.245	0.674	-0.068	0.315	0.358	0.129	0.110
AF6_1	0.460	0.631	0.501	0.476	0.078	0.916	0.150	0.242	0.181	0.100
AF6_2	0.518	0.578	0.561	0.542	0.117	0.936	0.221	0.328	0.185	0.162
AF6_3	0.431	0.663	0.526	0.549	0.066	0.903	0.109	0.237	0.144	0.141
MKTG_COMM_1	0.111	0.139	0.183	0.131	0.038	0.160	0.217	0.318	0.881	0.136
MKTG_COMM_2	0.119	0.259	0.246	0.172	0.059	0.174	0.211	0.386	0.927	0.199
AFFCT_IMAG_1	0.507	0.301	0.449	0.329	0.212	0.213	0.909	0.386	0.185	-0.032
AFFCT_IMAG_2	0.457	0.289	0.475	0.321	0.270	0.247	0.887	0.315	0.213	0.074
AFFCT_IMAG_3	0.167	0.503	0.302	0.326	0.037	0.394	0.833	0.195	0.034	0.167
AFFCT_IMAG_4	0.133	0.216	0.182	0.025	0.040	0.210	0.766	0.220	-0.004	0.133
VISIT_INFL_1	0.098	0.100	0.122	0.048	0.013	0.078	-0.086	0.433	0.136	0.940
VISIT_INFL_2	0.207	0.250	0.333	0.193	0.084	0.191	0.103	0.468	0.215	0.957
GLOB_IMAG_1	0.317	0.177	0.322	0.207	0.163	0.173	0.258	0.787	0.218	0.391
GLOB_IMAG_2	0.483	0.291	0.399	0.394	0.335	0.305	0.341	0.889	0.416	0.411

Bold values are the Outer Loadings.

Table 3
AVE, CR and correlations among latent variables.

	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	CR	Correlations											
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
1. AF1	0.890	0.565	0.912	0.752											
2. AF2	0.901	0.720	0.927	0.450	0.848										
3. AF3	0.882	0.684	0.915	0.638	0.611	0.827									
4. AF4	0.858	0.778	0.913	0.615	0.526	0.685	0.882								
5. AF5	0.835	0.671	0.890	0.587	0.105	0.352	0.483	0.819							
6. AF6	0.907	0.844	0.942	0.512	0.678	0.577	0.569	0.095	0.919						
7. AFFCT_IMAG	0.873	0.723	0.912	0.485	0.274	0.483	0.337	0.242	0.175	0.850					
8. GLOB_IMAG	0.588	0.705	0.826	0.487	0.287	0.433	0.372	0.309	0.294	0.361	0.840				
9. MKTG_COMM	0.749	0.817	0.900	0.127	0.227	0.241	0.170	0.055	0.185	0.236	0.393	0.904			
10. VISIT_INFL	0.889	0.899	0.947	0.166	0.191	0.249	0.133	0.054	0.147	0.017	0.476	0.188	0.948		

Note: Bold values of the diagonal are the square root of AVE.

ensures its convergent validity. Finally, discriminant validity was obtained for each construct, as the square root of the AVE is greater than the absolute value of all correlations with other constructs. Furthermore, according to Table 2, the cross-loadings are lower than the loadings on all the metrics, which reinforces the conclusion that discriminant validity is present (Gotz et al. (2010)).

4.2. Findings

The structural model shown in Fig. 2 was evaluated via (i) the sign, magnitude and statistical significance of the parameters of

structural relations and (ii) the explained variance (R²) of the endogenous latent variables, as suggested by Gotz et al. (2010). Not all structural relationships have parameters, which range between -0.134 and 0.372, with signs compatible (i.e. positive) with the assumptions made in the research model. The full results can be seen in Table 4.

The relationship between affective image and visitations' influence has a negative sign, so H_{2b} was rejected, which does not confirm previous research on affective image (e.g. Agapito et al., 2013; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Rodríguez del Bosque et al., 2006). One possible explanation for that might be the fact that

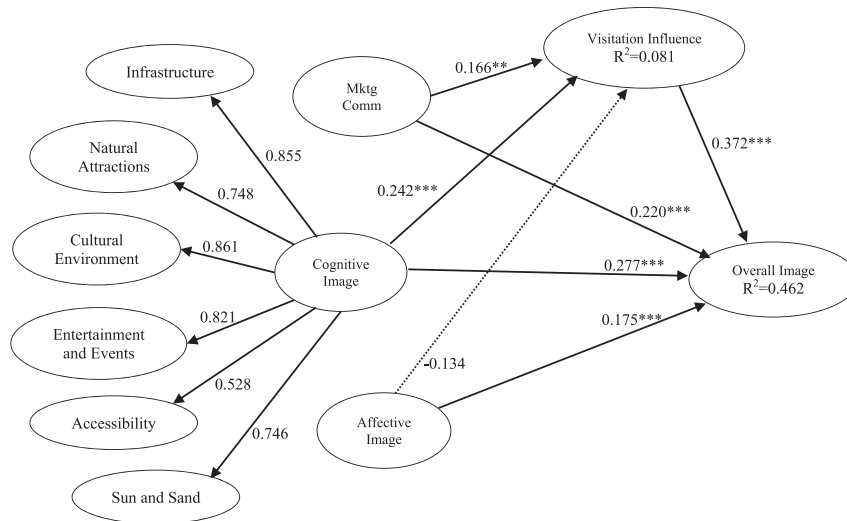


Fig. 2. Structural model.

Table 4
Direct, indirect and total effects.

	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Total effects
	Path Coefficients (t-values)	Path Coefficients (t-values)	Path Coefficients (t-values)
AFFCT_IMAG → GLOB_IMAG	0.175 (3.022)	-0.050 (1.123)	0.126 (2.140)
AFFCT_IMAG → VISIT_INFL	-0.134 (1.545)		-0.134 (1.545)
COGN_IMAG → GLOB_IMAG	0.277 (4.351)	0.090 (3.192)	0.367 (5.822)
COGN_IMAG → VISIT_INFL	0.242 (2.808)		0.242 (2.808)
MKTG_COMM → GLOB_IMAG	0.220 (3.627)	0.062 (2.239)	0.282 (4.772)
MKTG_COMM → VISIT_INFL	0.166 (2.342)		0.166 (2.342)
VISIT_INFL → GLOB_IMAG	0.372 (5.782)		0.372 (5.782)

there is a gap between the affective image of Brazil among Portuguese (Bandyopadhyay & Nascimento, 2010) and the pragmatic reality of tour operators as business intermediaries that visited Brazil, trying to develop self-packaged holidays based on asymmetric information they possess. This means that whenever intermediaries visit a tourism destination for business purposes, they do it much more influenced by the desire to develop and explore single-based or bundled components to better explore the intermediation than by affective motives.

All other hypotheses are statistically significant at the 1% level, except H_{1b}, which is statistically significant at the 5% level. The results indicate that 46.2% of the variation in overall image perceived by Portuguese travel agents and tour operators is explained by the explanatory variables of affective image, cognitive image, visitations' influence and marketing communications. However, only 8.1% of the variation in visitations' influence is explained by variations of the explanatory variables, with cognitive image being the most influential, as shown in Fig. 2 and Table 4.

Table 4 shows the direct, indirect and total effects among the variables analysed. It is possible to conclude that both marketing communications and cognitive image positively influence overall image, both directly and indirectly. However, affective image directly influences overall image, but does not have a statistically significant indirect effect on overall image, which means that visitations' influence does not mediate the relationship between affective image and overall image.

Visitations' influence has the strongest direct effect on overall image ($\beta = 0.372$), followed by cognitive image ($\beta = 0.277$) and marketing communications ($\beta = 0.220$), all statistically significant at the 1% level. In what pertains to indirect effects, visitations'

influence mediates both the relationship between cognitive image and overall image and marketing communications and overall image, being the former the most important, directly and indirectly. As shown in Table 5 and Fig. 2, H_{1a}, H_{1b}, H_{2a}, H_{3a}, H_{2b} and H₄ are confirmed, while H_{3b} is rejected.

The projection of Brazil's destination image through marketing communications has an important impact on this country's perceived overall image among Portuguese tourism intermediaries. This means that, as intermediaries, travel agents and tour operators play a significant role in the creation of a strong overall image of tourism destinations.

Regarding the relationship between Brazil's cognitive and overall image as a tourism destination among Portuguese tourism intermediaries, the results support the conclusion that the total effect of cognitive image is the most important of the three proposed antecedents ($\beta = 0.367$). The total effect of affective image, however, is the least influential of the three main antecedents

Table 5
Confirmation of hypotheses.

Hypotheses and causal relations	Std structural coefficient	Results
H _{1a} : MKTG_COMM → GLOB_IMAG	0.220	Confirmed ***
H _{1b} : MKTG_COMM → VISIT_INFL	0.166	Confirmed **
H _{2a} : AFFCT_IMAG → GLOB_IMAG	0.175	Confirmed ***
H _{2b} : AFFCT_IMAG → VISIT_INFL	-0.134	Rejected
H _{3a} : COGN_IMAG → GLOB_IMAG	0.277	Confirmed ***
H _{3b} : COGN_IMAG → VISIT_INFL	0.242	Confirmed ***
H ₄ : VISIT_INFL → GLOB_IMAG	0.372	Confirmed ***

Note: ***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.1.

($\beta = 0.126$).

Another important result is the importance of the intermediaries' visits to Brazil as a tourism destination, as H₄ confirms that the relationship between visitations' influence and overall image is the most important one of the research model. This clearly indicates that travel agents and tour operators' visits are an important means of influencing destination image and these direct experiences affect the intermediaries' level of motivation to recommend Brazil as a tourist destination.

The main difference between the results for how cognitive and affective image influence overall image might be explained by the close cultural, historical and linguistic proximity between Portugal and Brazil. In addition, Portuguese tourism intermediaries may perceive Brazil as an unpleasant, unsafe and insecure destination, which could negatively affect the image that they have about this country.

Table 6 and Figs. 3–5 presents the results of mediation analysis taking into account each specific path, i.e. cognitive–overall image, affective–overall image and marketing communications–overall image, in which visitation influence was introduced as a mediator. The significance of the mediation effect was assessed using the Sobel test, which was statistically significant at the 0.01 level for cognitive–overall image and marketing communications–overall image. As the VAF is lower than 0.2 it is possible to conclude that visitation influence has a mild mediation effect on the cognitive–overall image relationship, whereas visitation influence has a partial mediation effect on the marketing communications–overall image path.

4.3. Discussion of results

Despite past studies consider them as interrelated, these results complement previous studies (Alcañiz et al., 2009; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Rodríguez del Bosque & San Martín, 2008) on tourism destination images as cognitive and affective images, when analysed independently and perceived by travel agents and tour operators, behave differently.

Regarding affective image, it is possible to claim that the feeling of belonging based on the affective image (e.g. Alcañiz et al., 2009; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993), which is associated with individual values formed by the relationship between Brazil and the Portuguese intermediaries, is not affected by the intermediaries' visit to Brazil. Thus, one can affirm that the perception before and after the visit of the intermediaries remains relatively unchanged. This can be explained by the cultural, linguistic and historical proximity between Portugal and Brazil, which may be gradually ingrained in relation to Brazil, as a "brother country".

The feeling associated to the cognitive evaluation, associated to the knowledge and beliefs about Brazil as a tourist destination (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Baloglu, 2001; Bigné et al., 2001; Echtner

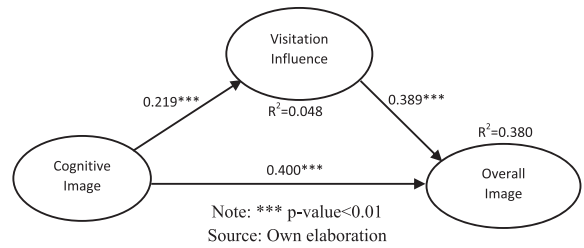


Fig. 3. Structural model – Group 2 (reactive external stimuli).

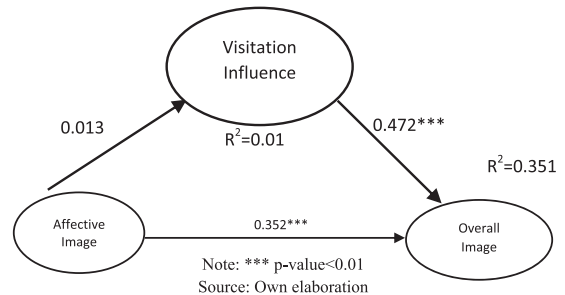


Fig. 4. Structural model – Group 2 (reactive external stimuli).

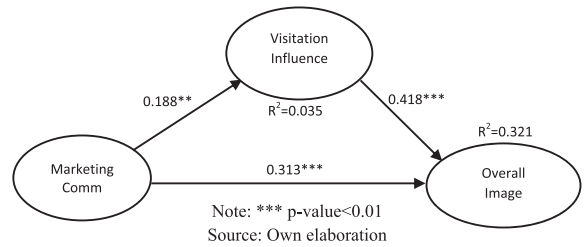


Fig. 5. Structural model – Group 2 (reactive external stimuli).

& Ritchie, 1991; Gartner, 1994; San Martín & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008; Tasci & Gartner, 2007), is influenced after the visit of the Portuguese intermediaries to Brazil. Here, one can conclude that the visitation's influence mildly mediates the relationship between cognitive image and overall image, clearly indicating that feelings and knowledge of intermediaries change after visiting Brazil. This indicates that the rational interpretation of the visit to Brazil has consequences in the way intermediaries interpret the different segments, facilities, programmes and information they deploy, influencing their overall image of Brazil as tourism destination.

The relationship marketing communications–overall image is the one that is influenced the most after the intermediaries visit the tourism destination. This is a clear indication that the knowledge provided by the intermediaries is important for them to not only develop proper communications of the tourism destination but also

Table 6
Sobel test and VAF for each of the antecedent variables.

	Cognitive Image – Overall Image	Affective Image – Overall Image	Marketing Comm – Overall Image
	Path coefficients (T-values)	Path coefficients (T-values)	Path coefficients (T-values)
Direct effect no mediaton	0.492 (8.217)	0.361 (5.325)	0.405 (6.580)
Direct effect with mediaton	0.400 (6.609)	0.352 (5.775)	0.313 (4.514)
Independent Variable/mediator	0.219 (2.628)	0.013 (0.157)	0.188 (2.599)
Mediator/Dependent Variable	0.389 (6.627)	0.472 (8.082)	0.418 (6.256)
Sobel Test	2.436 (p-value = 0.015)	0.156 (p-value = 0.875)	2.422 (p-value = 0.015)
VAF	0.175	0.017	0.201

to adequate all information and knowledge internalised to complement their previous overall image, based on previous cognitive and affective components. This complements previous studies on marketing communications and visitations' influence (e.g. Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Calveras & Orfila, 2014; Kock et al., 2016; Rodríguez del Bosque et al., 2006) as tour operators and travel agents, despite their cognitive and affective bonds to certain tourist destinations, need to adequate their marketing communications strategies and objectively pinpoint Brazil's image as a tourism destination. As such, visitation influence is an important tool to overcome asymmetric information prior to visiting Brazil.

Finally, the visitation influence should not be ignored. When dealing with intermediaries it is important to realise that they are not only influenced by their own cognitive and affective images, but they also have the capability both to understand tourism destination in particular ways and to customise different products to the segment characteristics they want to exploit. This is an important contribution as this complements previous studies (Kock et al., 2016; Mariutti et al., 2013; O'Neil, 2007; Souiden et al., 2017) in which the role of intermediaries are not taken into account.

5. Conclusion

Tourism marketing is an extremely important area of destination planning, especially in terms of building image. Successful marketing policies depend on understanding how destinations are perceived by individuals because, without a consistent understanding of what is expected from destinations, making intelligent decisions about their management is extremely difficult.

As building a destination image is a complex and dynamic process, destination managers must develop a deep understanding of the characteristics, components and relationships of image so that proper decisions can be made about how to manage destination image. In this context, the first conclusion based on the present study's results is that travel agents and tour operators are important stakeholders who help determine the overall image of tourism destinations.

With regard to Brazil's affective image, respondents consider it to be a pleasant, relaxing, exciting and stimulating destination. The intermediaries surveyed have a quite positive image regarding Brazil's attributes as a destination (i.e. cognitive image), mainly emphasising nature (i.e. attractive beaches, beautiful landscapes and natural attractions, climate and fauna and flora), culture (i.e. gastronomy, cities, hospitality, history and heritage), leisure (i.e. events, nightlife and entertainment) and infrastructure (i.e.

accommodations and accessibility). However, Brazil is not considered a safe place to visit, which is in line with previous studies.

Regarding Brazil's overall image, this study confirms that the components studied contribute significantly towards forming the country's overall image, being the total effect of both cognitive image and marketing communications more important than the total effect of affective image. Another important conclusion is that, besides affective and cognitive image, these intermediaries are important players not only as a result of Brazil's marketing communications but also as a direct consequence of these professionals' visits to the destination market.

In terms of managerial implications, it is important to emphasise that tour operators have an important role in intermediating the relationship between tourists and business firms in the provision of services (single or composed self-packaged offers). As such, in order to diminish the asymmetric information they may have regarding the destination markets, it would be advisable to promote visits among travel agencies and tour operators for them not only to internalise the cognitive and affective image of the tourism destination, but also for them to objectively increase the believability of the images they convey to the tourists through marketing communications plans.

This study is important because it emphasises travel agents and tour operators as the research population, while most other studies of destination image have focused on tourists. Nonetheless, this research has some limitations that need to be mentioned. First, it is based on a general tourist destination and not on a specific tourist destination. Second, the conclusions are based on a somewhat small convenience sample. Third, this study is based on Brazil as a tourist destination as perceived by a sample of Portuguese intermediaries, which may be somewhat specific as a result of cultural, historical e linguistic proximity.

As such, future studies need to differentiate between more specific destinations – e.g. comparing main emitting markets with secondary emitting markets, or culturally distinctive countries –, in order to assess if differences appear in results for these destinations and to analyse the roles played by travel intermediaries in these contexts. Moreover, a larger, stratified sample would be advantageous so that different destinations and professionals could be compared, including intermediaries from different countries, which could make the results broader and more meaningful.

Appendix A. Measurement items used.

Scale	Items
Infrastructure (Cognitive Image) (Chi & Qu, 2008; Qu et al., 2011)	AF1.1 Offer of quality restaurants. AF1.2 Opportunities for outdoor activities. AF1.3 Quality of tourism Services. AF1.4 Shopping opportunities. AF1.5 Good level of hygiene and cleanliness. AF1.6 Infrastructures for aquatic/nautical activities. AF1.7 Accommodation offer. AF1.8 Tranquil, relaxing and a place to rest.
Natural Attractions (Cognitive Image) (Chi & Qu, 2008; Qu et al., 2011)	AF2.1 Variety of fauna and flora. AF2.2 Beautiful landscapes and natural attractions. AF2.3 Unspoilt nature and fascinating wildlife. AF2.4 Fabulous panoramic walk ways. AF2.5 Interesting rural zones.
Cultural Environment (Cognitive Image) (Chen & Phou, 2013; San-Martín & Rodríguez-del-Bosque, 2008)	AF3.1 Interesting cultural attractions. AF3.2 Interesting history and heritage. AF3.3 Interesting cities. AF3.4 Rich and varied gastronomy. AF3.5 Hospitality and friendliness.

(continued)

Scale	Items
Entertainment and Events (Cognitive Image) (Chi & Qu, 2008; Qu et al., 2011)	AF6.1 Interesting nightlife. AF6.2 Varied entertainment and recreational activities. AF6.3 Events and cultural festivals.
Accessibility (Cognitive Image) (Agapito et al., 2013; Chi & Qu, 2008)	AF5.1 Easily accessible location. AF5.2 Good airports, ports and roads. AF5.3 Good infrastructures and transport. AF5.4 Good cost-benefit relations. AF5.5 Is a safe location.
Sun and Sand (Cognitive Image) (Alcañiz et al., 2009; Chen & Tsai, 2007)	AF6.1 Attractive beaches. AF6.2 Pleasant climate. AF6.3 Adventure opportunities.
(Affective Image) (Rodriguez del Bosque and San Martin (2008); Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Rodriguez del Bosque and San Martin (2008); Qu et al., 2011)	Affct_Imag.1 Unpleasant – pleasant. Affct_Imag.2 Sleepy – arousing. Affct_Imag.3 Gloomy – exciting. Affct_Imag.4 Calm – stimulating. Affct_Imag.5 Stressful – relaxing.
Marketing Communications (generated using deductive scale development)	Mktg_Comm.1. How frequently used are marketing communications means in Brazil as Tourism Destinations. Mktg_Comm.2. Marketing communications means influence Brazil as tourism destinations.
Visitation Influence (generated using deductive scale development)	Visit_Infl.1. Having visited Brazil has influenced my motivation to recommend and sell Brazil as Tourism Destination. Visit_Infl .2. Having visited Brazil has influenced the image as Tourism country destination.
Overall Image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Agapito et al., 2013; Alcañiz et al., 2009; Chi & Qu, 2008; Qu et al., 2011)	Glob_Imag.1. What is your overall image of Brazil as tourism destination Glob_Imag.2. What is the likelihood of recommending Brazil as tourism destination

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