

# Measuring the **influence of tourism experience dimensions as antecedents of tourist behaviour**: The case of **Marrakech, Morocco**

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**Abstract** | This study aims to examine the dimensions of tourism experience—emotions, co-creation, and memories—as key antecedents of destination image and overall satisfaction in the formation of destination loyalty, within an unified nomological framework. Adopting a quantitative approach, the study employed a survey questionnaire and applied structural equation modelling for comprehensive analysis. The findings indicate a substantial effect of emotions and co-creation experiences on tourists' assessments of the destination image. Furthermore, the study highlights the influence of the post-visit destination image on overall satisfaction and loyalty intentions. As a result, this study offers novel insights by moving beyond objective, attribute-based assessments to evaluate subjective tourist responses in a North African destination—an underexplored context in tourism literature. The research thus advances theoretical understanding of destination experience and provides practical insights for destination policymakers and tourism actors aiming to enhance experiential offerings and foster destination loyalty.

**Keywords** | tourist experience, destination attractiveness, overall satisfaction, destination image, loyalty intentions

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## 1. Introduction

Modelling the drivers of destination loyalty remains a central focus in tourism research, as it underpins a destination's competitiveness and attractiveness in the marketplace (Dey et al., 2020; Stylos & Bellou, 2019). Since the emergence of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), tourists desire emotionally engaging and memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) that enhance a hedonic connection with the destinations they visit. To enhance their willingness to revisit the destination and recommend it to others, though, it's not enough to just focus solely on delivering mere satisfaction through tourism attributes and service quality (Li et al. 2021; Sangpikul, 2018; Tasci et al., 2021); instead, destination managers must design captivating tourism experiences that engage the senses, evoke emotions, and create lasting memories (Chen et al., 2022; Melón et al., 2021; Sthapit et al., 2024). These experiential responses during encounters with the destination influence tourists' evaluations of the destination and shape their future behavioural intentions (Schmitt, 2003). Although tourism research acknowledges the importance of studying tourists' experiential responses, conventional approaches that consider cognitive evaluations and functional attributes are still predominant in tourism and marketing literature (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Shafiee et al., 2021). These tourism frameworks overlook the affective and subjective dimensions of the tourism experience, thereby limiting the comprehensive understanding of destination loyalty. In this context, the present study positions the dimensions of the tourism experience as critical to predicting tourist behaviour and loyalty intentions.

In tourism literature, previous studies on tourism attractiveness have traditionally linked the physical attributes of a destination to tourist satisfaction and decision-making processes (Mursid & Anoraga, 2022; Reitsamer et al. 2016). While Cutler and Carmichael (2010) acknowledge that the quality and availability of tangible attributes and tourism services are critical components of the destination experience, they emphasise that these elements represent only a portion of the overall tourist experience (Quan & Wang, 2004). Otto and Ritchie (1996) further caution that if researchers rely solely on objective, attribute-based measures of satisfaction, tourists may be encouraged to assess destinations primarily through functional and utilitarian criteria. Satisfaction, rather, should be conceived as an evaluative outcome of the overall consumption experience, reflecting emotional and affective responses to the tourist journey (Kim & Thapa, 2018). In this light, Sharma and Nayak (2019), building on Assaker et al.'s (2011) call for a more comprehensive approach, advocate for a holistic measure of

satisfaction—one that captures tourists’ summative evaluation of their experience after the visit. Nevertheless, research remains scant in this regard. Accordingly, this study adopts overall satisfaction as a central concept, emphasising its role as a cumulative response to the broader tourism experience in the destination.

A related stream of tourism research has examined the influence of destination image on tourist attitudes, decision-making, and future intentions (Akgün et al., 2020; Li et al. 2021; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2021). In doing so, a wide array of studies tends to focus primarily on pre-visit perceptions based primarily on cognitive evaluations of destination attributes. Alahkoon et al. (2021) emphasise that focusing solely on destination-specific characteristics fails to capture the complexity of tourists' perceptions. Additionally, despite growing calls for the inclusion of post-experience evaluations (Ragb et al., 2020), studies continue to underrepresent the image tourists form through lived experience. At the post-visit stage, Kim (2018) argues that the post-visit image formed through tourists' experiences has more effect than pre-visit expectations on tourist behaviour. Addressing this gap, the present study is to enhance the understanding of how tourists' attitudes and loyalty intentions are shaped by their actual experiences, rather than by expectations alone.

Tourist experiences are central to tourism research (Kim & So, 2022), and scholars agree on their multidimensional and complex nature (Bigné et al., 2020). Key dimensions identified in recent literature include emotional responses, co-creation, and memorable tourism experiences (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Huseynov et al., 2020). While these constructs have often been studied in isolation, few attempts have been made to integrate them within a unified nomological framework to predict tourist loyalty. The present study addresses this gap by empirically testing a model in which tourists’ emotional experiences, co-creation, and memory formation act as antecedents to overall satisfaction and post-visit destination image in the formation of loyalty intentions. This research addresses the gap by applying such a framework to the case of Marrakech, Morocco - compelling yet underexplored destination.

Despite its potential, tourism research on African tourist destinations remains limited compared to the extensive body of research on European and North American locales (Agustí, 2020). This imbalance constrains a comprehensive understanding of these regions' distinctive appeal and competitive potential. Marrakech, a leading tourist city in southern Morocco, provides an insightful case study. Founded in 1070 by the Almoravid dynasty, the city has long served as a cultural, commercial, and political hub. Among Morocco’s eight UNESCO World Heritage

sites, Marrakech's Jamaa El Fna square has been recognized for its intangible cultural heritage since 1985 (Rezaei et al., 2024). The city encapsulates the core experiential dimensions employed in our measurement model, offering a rich context for exploring tourist behaviour and loyalty.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Overview of destination attractiveness**

In recent decades, there has been a growing emphasis on the concept of destination attractiveness among both academics and practitioners, with a focus on its measurement in tourism literature (Formica & Uysal, 2006; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Krešić & Prebežac, 2011; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Vengesayi et al., 2009). Furthermore, research on this topic has been predominantly concentrated in Europe and North America, with African researchers notably less active in this area.

In the literature, studies on determinants of destination attractiveness often link it to the destination's physical features (Shafiee et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2015). These studies examine the importance of destination attributes in decision-making, affecting overall attractiveness and subsequent behavioural intentions (Vigolo, 2015; Lee & Chen, 2017). This traditional approach views destination attributes as key for marketing strategies and differentiating destinations (Lugosi & Walls, 2013; Morgan et al., 2009).

Within the realm of tourism literature, pioneers such as Hu and Ritchie (1993) and Mayo and Jarvis (1981) conceptualise destination attractiveness as the perceived ability of a destination to satisfy tourists' needs, closely linked to destination attributes as primary motivators in the decision-making process (Krešić & Prebežac, 2011). Scholars have devoted considerable efforts to identify both tangible and intangible destination features that satisfy tourists' needs and enhance a destination's attractiveness (Lee et al., 2014; Tomigova et al., 2016). However, despite these valuable contributions to the literature, we contend that there is a noticeable gap in comprehensively capturing the dynamic elements of a destination's tourism appeal, particularly its experiential components.

While tangible features and services are important in shaping the destination experience (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010), Quan and Wang (2004) argue they represent only part of the broader tourist experience. Focusing solely on objective and technical aspects neglects experiential

dimensions, limiting stakeholders' understanding of tourist satisfaction (Williams & Soutar, 2000). Otto and Ritchie (1996) highlight that this approach misses affective elements and the full potential of destinations to deliver experiential benefits. Although tourist satisfaction is often assessed through both tangible and intangible attributes (Maunier & Camelis, 2013), recent research such as Hosseini et al. (2023) suggests that 'satisfaction' and 'quality' alone no longer fully capture contemporary travellers' preferences. In this research domain, there has been limited exploration into destination attractiveness from the experiential perspective, which considers the affective dimension of tourist satisfaction—personal and subjective reactions and feelings experienced during their stay, elements significant in the overall tourism experience (Maunier & Camelis, 2013).

Arguably, Park and Santos (2017) explore the impactful experiences of backpackers and find that personal and unexpected moments often leave a more vivid impression than tourist attractions and services. Otto and Ritchie (1996) argue that the tourist experience encompasses emotional, personal, and subjective responses to destination elements, contributing to satisfaction with the overall assessment of the tourist destination. These dimensions are crucial as they directly shape how visits make tourists feel and enrich their lives (Schmitt, 2003). Recognising the significance of these experiential aspects allows researchers and destination stakeholders to delve deeper into understanding the multifaceted dimensions of tourists' experiences (Bornhorst et al., 2010). By acknowledging and addressing the hedonic elements that shape perceptions and decision-making, destinations can enhance their overall attractiveness and competitive edge in the market. This underscores the importance of incorporating experiential elements into destination management strategies and marketing initiatives.

## **2.2. Tourism experience within the tourist destination**

Over the past few decades, consumer research has undergone significant changes in its theoretical and philosophical foundations (Firat et al., 1995; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1992). Researchers such as Cova (1996) and Brown (1994) have highlighted the prominence of hedonic meanings and symbolic values in consumers' thoughts and behaviours, making the topic of consumption experience increasingly important in academia and research. In the tourism and hospitality industry, this shift towards an experiential paradigm has compelled Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to prioritise the

delivery of tourism experiences over merely offering attractions and services as economic values (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Accordingly, a substantial body of studies has focused on the concept of the tourism experience, underscoring its pivotal role in the allure and success of destinations (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Kim & So, 2022). This increased attention highlights the importance of adopting an experiential perspective to fully understand the appeal of destinations (Ketter, 2018; Lugosi & Walls, 2013; Morgan et al., 2009; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). According to Buhalis (2000), destinations are now seen not just as collections of tangible and intangible elements but as providers of unique and enjoyable experiences linked to their distinct profiles. Similarly, Leiper (2000) defines destinations as places where people travel and stay temporarily to enjoy specific attractions and amenities.

In the realm of tourism and hospitality research, many studies (e.g., Cetin et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2012; Hosany et al., 2015; Huseynov et al., 2020) have explored the emotional aspects of tourists' experiences. According to Otto and Ritchie (1996), these dimensions constitute a significant portion of tourists' overall satisfaction with the quality of the tourism experience at a destination. In essence, these experiential dimensions matter to tourists, influencing how their visit makes them feel and how it enriches their lives. Their investigation into contentment with tourism services illuminates various aspects of experiential dimensions, including hedonistic pursuits, safety, comfort, participation in service delivery, and feelings of importance. Expanding beyond satisfaction as the primary outcome, Cutler and Carmichael (2010) recommend defining it as the assessment of components and emotions arising from cognitive and affective aspects of the consumption experience (de Rojas & Camarero, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to grasp how tourists respond to, interpret, or derive benefits from experiences at the destination (Fernandes & Cruz, 2016).

This paradigm shift challenges the traditional approach to destination marketing, particularly the assumption that consumer decisions and satisfaction result from a rational evaluation of destination attributes, neglecting affective reactions to the experience (Bernaki & Marso, 2023). Aligned with the experiential view of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), research relying predominantly on cognitive information-processing tends to overlook the subjective, symbolic, and aesthetic aspects of travel visitation, as well as the sensory and emotional responses of tourists.

To enhance the quality of the destination experience and fulfil tourists' experiential benefits, DMOs and tourism stakeholders must acknowledge the symbolic value and experiential aspects of their offerings (Lugosi & Walls, 2013; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). These benefits strengthen tourists' emotional connections with the destination, promoting loyalty (Lemke et al., 2011) and increasing the likelihood of recommending the destination experience to others (Cetin & Dincer, 2014). For instance, research by Hosany et al. (2015) and Prayag et al. (2013) has provided insights into tourists' emotional responses to holiday destinations.

Strategic experiential modules by Ketter (2018) and Schmitt (2011) highlight a shift in destination marketing from focusing on physical features to prioritising tourists' experiences for success. Dwyer and Kim (2003) emphasise marketing should showcase emotional benefits linked to experiences rather than just attractions. This aligns with Hudson and Ritchie's (2009) call to brand destinations based on emotional and experiential benefits over physical traits. Schmitt (1999) argues tourists seek products and campaigns that engage their senses, emotions, and minds, leading to positive marketing results.

In a different line of research, considering the inherently subjective and individualistic character of experiences taking place across diverse durations and intensities (Meyer & Schwager, 2007), DMOs are unable to directly provide experiences to tourists. Instead, they can only establish conditions for the environment and circumstances under which tourists can have experiences (Mossberg, 2007). Identifying the dimensions of the tourist experience is crucial for destination management to enhance the value of the destination experience (Cetin et al., 2019) and provide valuable insights into the critical factors shaping tourism experiences. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to advance the current theoretical understanding of the impact of crucial constructs of tourist experience (i.e., emotions, co-creation, and memories) on tourist attitude and loyalty intentions, investigating their influence on tourist satisfaction and perception of the destination's image.

### **2.3. Loyalty intentions**

In the realm of tourism and marketing literature, it is broadly recognised that customer experience plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behaviour and influencing the performance of businesses (Mahrous & Hassan, 2017; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018). Specifically, tourists who have a satisfying experience are more likely to be happy with their trip, return to the

destination (Kandampully et al., 2018), and recommend it to friends and relatives (Kim and Brown, 2012).

In the contemporary tourism industry, where enhancing customer loyalty is a shared goal across all sectors, including tourist destinations, integrating experience as a cornerstone of strategic thinking enables destinations to harness the profound impact of the experience economy on tourists' decision-making and behaviour (Ketter, 2018; Kirillova et al., 2017). Experiences have the transformative ability to establish a strong emotional connection between travellers and their destinations, encouraging frequent returns and a willingness to recommend the experience to others (Cetin & Dincer, 2014; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001).

Tourism research highlights the role of emotional experiences in shaping loyalty intentions (Hosany & Prayag, 2014; Prayag et al., 2013). Hosany et al. (2015) show that positive emotional experiences strongly influence tourists' intentions to revisit and recommend destinations. This suggests that delivering positive emotions enhances tourist loyalty. Likewise, Hosany and Prayag (2014) link positive emotions with satisfaction and stronger behavioural intentions. Expanding this, Huseynov et al. (2020) found that sensory and intellectual experiences at an amusement park predict loyalty intentions and increase repeat visits.

Klaus and Maklan (2013) highlight the strong impact of customer experience on satisfaction and its role in predicting loyalty intentions. Similarly, Prayag et al. (2013) argue that satisfaction alone is necessary but insufficient for behavioural intentions. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) define satisfaction as a positive response from favourable evaluations of consumption experiences. Kim et al. (2012) suggest that beyond satisfaction and quality, additional factors shape the experiences modern tourists seek. Consequently, travellers are more likely to recommend and revisit destinations after enjoyable experiences. For DMOs and stakeholders, understanding what drives satisfying tourism experiences is crucial to fostering positive experiences and favourable intentions.

### **3. Conceptual framework and hypotheses development**

#### **3.1. Conceptual framework**

Over the past two decades, investigating the antecedents of tourist loyalty intentions remains a primary area of study in the fields of tourism and marketing (So et al., 2025; Engeset & Elvekrok, 2015; Hosany et al., 2022; Kim, 2018; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Drawing from the

general literature, we introduce a framework, detailed in Figure 1, which highlights the interplay between the experiential dimensions of tourist experience and marketing variables influencing consumer behaviour. Given the intricate and multi-dimensional nature of the tourist experience concept (Kim & So, 2022), this study seeks to enhance comprehension of the dynamic aspects of experiential dimensions in tourist destinations, including emotions, co-creation, and memories (Godovykh & Tasci, 2021; Hosany et al., 2022; Rather et al., 2022). Specifically, we examine how these constructs interact with tourists' overall satisfaction and their perceived of post-destination image in the formation of their loyalty intentions. The latter is expressed through revisit intentions and word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations to others, which are among the most commonly used measures of tourist loyalty (Oppermann, 2000; Prayag et al. 2017). Given the substantial economic dependence of Marrakech on the tourism industry, it is imperative to investigate these variables to uncover the factors that drive tourist experiences in the destination and what influences destination loyalty.

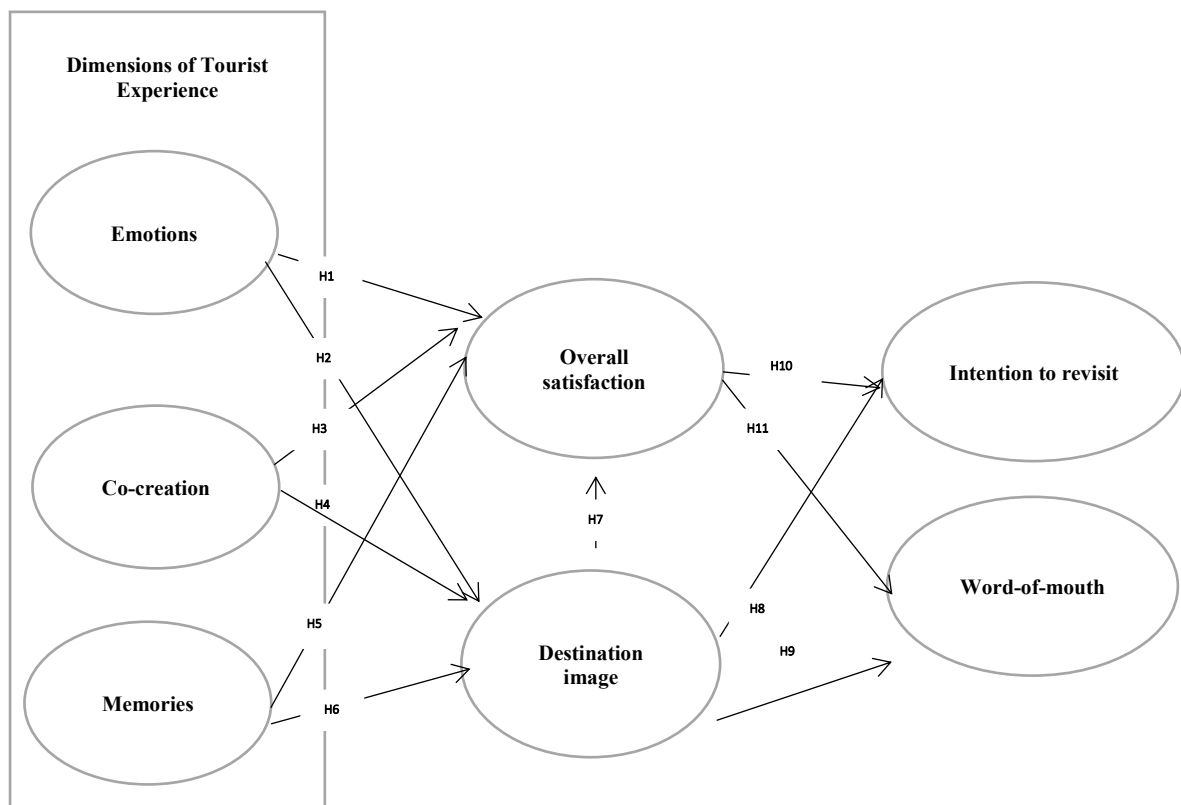


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Own Elaboration

### 3.2. Research hypotheses

Based on definitions, reflections, and literature on tourism and hospitality literature, eleven research hypotheses are proposed to investigate the effects of the experiential dimensions (i.e., emotions, co-creation, memories) of the tourist experience at the destination that contribute to the overall assessment of tourist satisfaction and perceived destination image, including their effect on tourists' loyalty intentions.

#### The effect of emotions

Several studies have acknowledged the pivotal role emotions play in the tourist experience across various contexts (Manthiou et al., 2020; Verhulst et al., 2020). In tourism research, emotions are a well-studied concept, receiving unprecedented recognition for their influence on various human behaviours, particularly as a cornerstone of destination marketing research within the broader context of tourist destinations. For example, Prayag et al. (2013) discovered that the emotions and feelings tourists experience have a significant impact on their overall satisfaction with their tourism journey. More recently, Chen et al. (2022) emphasised that honeymooners' positive emotional responses impact their overall satisfaction and post-destination behaviours toward the destination. In a related research stream, many scholars highlight the fundamental role of tourists' emotions in shaping their perceptions of destination image (Kim, 2018). As exemplified by Sharma and Nayak (2019), tourists' emotional experiences in yoga tourism strongly predict the post-destination image, which, in turn, positively influences their loyalty intentions. We posit that positive emotions elicited by tourists significantly enhance their overall satisfaction and perceptions of the destination image. Therefore, we proceed to test the subsequent hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Emotions will have a positive influence on tourists' overall satisfaction with their experience at the destination.
- **Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Emotions will have a positive influence on tourists' perceived destination image.

### **The effect of co-creation**

In recent years, the concept of consumer co-creation has garnered significant attention from both researchers and practitioners, particularly in the fields of tourism and marketing (Carvalho et al., 2023; Hollebeek et al., 2019). As destinations aim to provide unique and memorable experiences (Hosany et al., 2022), collaboration between service providers and tourists has become a key competitive advantage (Giuseppe et al., 2022). Buhalis and Park (2021) highlight co-creation's importance in tourism due to its interactive nature. Mathis et al. (2016) find that tourists actively co-creating their experiences report higher satisfaction and stronger loyalty. Prebensen et al. (2013) show that motivated, involved tourists value the experience more and perceive greater destination value. Tourists shift from passive to active roles in producing their experience, increasing satisfaction through participation (Rather et al., 2022). However, while tourism and marketing research often highlights value creation and co-creation, empirical studies exploring the impact of tourist co-creation within the destination setting on their overall satisfaction and destination image are limited. Hence, additional research is required to investigate these aspects in greater depth. To address this research gap, we present the subsequent research hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Co-creation will have a positive influence on tourists' overall satisfaction with their experience at the destination
- **Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Co-creation will have a positive influence on tourists' perceived destination image.

### **The effect of memories**

Nowadays, tourists seek memorable experiences when they travel (Kim et al., 2022). Memories are a key concept in tourism research, as memorable experiences are selectively formed during trips and recalled long after (Chen et al., 2022). They act as reliable references in tourist decision-making and behaviour (Kim, 2018). In other words, what tourists recall are their memories, and they base their decisions on the past experiences to which their memories are linked. For instance, Vada et al. (2019) argue that "when tourists are questioned about their holidays, they frequently refer to experiences which are memories constructed or reconstructed within the individual" (p. 332). Tourism research offers empirical evidence supporting the benefits of designing memorable experiences for destination marketing (Stone et al., 2018).

Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) suggest that tourists who have positive and memorable experiences tend to report greater satisfaction with their overall visit and are more inclined to share positive WOM. This is particularly significant for destination marketing and management, as delivering memorable experiences can create a sustainable competitive advantage (Tešin et al., 2024). More recently, a growing body of empirical research (e.g., Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2022) highlights both the direct and indirect positive effects of MTE on outcomes such as destination image, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty. To examine these relationships, many studies have employed on-site data collection methods, including surveys and interviews conducted at various stages of the travel experience—during the trip, at its conclusion, or while waiting for departure. In this study, we survey tourists after completing their tourism experience while they wait to board their flights at Marrakech Menara International Airport. Thus, we propose to examine the following hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 5 (H5):** Memories will have a positive influence on tourists' overall satisfaction with their experience at the destination
- **Hypothesis 6 (H6):** Memories will have a positive influence on tourists' perceived destination image.

### **The effect of post-destination image**

The concept of destination image is widely recognised as dynamic, evolving across different stages of the tourist journey—pre-visit, during the visit, and post-visit (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Lee et al., 2014). In the tourism literature, destination image is considered a critical construct that shapes tourist behaviour, decision-making, and destination choice (Carvalho, 2022; Dei et al., 2022). While substantial scholarly work has focused on the impact of pre-visit perceptions on tourist attitudes and behaviours, significant research also highlights the predictive power of post-destination image on loyalty (Stylos & Bellou, 2019; Sharma & Nayak, 2019). According to Fakeye and Crompton (1991), the post-visit stage is thought to create a more realistic and accurate impression of the destination than pre-visit expectations. There is broad consensus among researchers that tourists' perceptions of a destination after their visit significantly impact their satisfaction and future behaviours, such as revisiting and WOM promotion (Zhang et al., 2014). Post-destination image measures reflect tourists' overall

predispositions toward a destination, which can strongly influence destination loyalty (Stylos et al., 2017; Ragb et al. 2020). Kim (2018) found that the post-visit destination image formed through tourists' experiences in Taiwan predicts intentions to revisit, positive WOM, and overall satisfaction. Similarly, Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2022) report that a positive destination image correlates with higher satisfaction and favourable future intentions. Conversely, Li et al. (2021) show that a negative destination image can cause dissatisfaction and lead to negative WOM. The perception of destination image significantly influences tourist behaviour and attitudes. This image is inherently complex, shaped by subjective judgments. However, further research is needed to incorporate experiential dimensions into the evaluation of destination image throughout the tourist journey. Given the importance of considering the image formed after visiting the destination, we propose the outlined hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 7:** A post-positive destination image will positively influence tourists' overall satisfaction.
- **Hypothesis 8:** A post- positive destination image will positively affect the willingness of tourists to revisit the destination.
- **Hypothesis 9:** A post-positive image of the destination will positively affect the willingness of tourists to recommend the destination.

### **The effect of overall satisfaction**

Tourist satisfaction has been widely recognised as a key determinant of destination loyalty (So et al., 2025; Sangpikul, 2018). It serves as an essential metric of a destination's success in the marketplace (Dey et al., 2020). However, while its influence is well-established, other experiential and emotional factors are also likely to shape loyalty intentions and warrant further exploration. With the emergence of the experience economy in 1999, scholars have urged moving beyond purely objective, attribute-based assessments of destinations to consider subjective tourist responses (Guan & Huang, 2022). Satisfaction is thus seen as an evaluative outcome of the overall consumption experience (Carlos et al., 2017), reflecting both emotional and affective reactions to the tourist journey (Kim & Thapa, 2018). Consequently, many researchers emphasise the importance of adopting the concept of overall satisfaction as a cumulative evaluation of the tourism experience (Sharma & Nayak, 2019). Notably, tourists who report high levels of overall satisfaction with their experiences are more likely to exhibit

loyalty to the destination (Kandampully et al., 2018). The tourism experience is paramount in fostering an intense relationship between tourists and their destinations, which enables emotional connections and increases the likelihood of recommendations. Revisit intention and WOM are commonly used indicators of destination loyalty (Stylidis et al., 2017) and are crucial for destination policymakers and tourism stakeholders to consider (Kim, 2018). More empirical research is needed to verify such relationships across different contexts and settings. Therefore, we present the subsequent hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 10 (H10):** Tourists' overall satisfaction will result in higher willingness to revisit the destination.
- **Hypothesis 11 (H11):** Tourists' overall satisfaction will result in higher willingness to spread a positive word-of-mouth.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. A description of the study site: Marrakech, Morocco

The research model is tested within the broader context of the Marrakech tourist destination in Morocco. This choice is enhanced by Marrakech's esteemed position among the top experiential tourist destinations globally (Ali et al., 2021). Situated in southern Morocco, Marrakech is immensely popular, attracting visitors worldwide. In 2019, TripAdvisor recognised Marrakech as one of the world's most captivating tourist destinations. This international acclaim is based on several factors, notably its rich history, cultural diversity, and distinctive ambiance. As one of Morocco's Imperial cities, Marrakech is surrounded by an extensive palm grove and is often called the "Red City." Morocco boasts eight UNESCO World Heritage sites, with Marrakech's vibrant Jamaa El Fna square designated as intangible cultural heritage since 1985 due to its exceptional cultural properties and heritage (Razaei et al., 2024). Another reason for choosing Marrakech as the focus of this research is the city's amicable local population and laid-back lifestyle, which contribute significantly to providing diverse alternatives for experiencing the city uniquely. Overall, Marrakech has everything to amaze visitors on each visit. It encompasses the experiential dimensions outlined in the adopted measurement model, making it an ideal case study for this research.

#### 4.2. Sampling, administration and data collection

Employing a purposive sampling technique, we collected data from tourists in the departure hall of Marrakech-Menara Airport at the end of their tourism experience. This setting was chosen to ensure that participants could accurately recall and evaluate their overall visit without ongoing influences from their stay. Data collection took place during the peak tourist season, from March to July 2023. Trained research assistants, fluent in multiple languages, were stationed in the airport's departure area to facilitate the process. To enhance generalisability, trained research assistants actively sought a balanced representation of tourists across nationalities, age groups, genders, and travel purposes.

Foreign travellers were approached and asked screening questions to determine eligibility, such as: *'Are you a tourist?'* *'Have you visited Marrakech?'* *'How old are you?'* *'What is your nationality?'* *'What was the primary reason for your trip to Marrakech?'* This method ensured that only relevant respondents aligned with the study's goals. Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on their most recent tourism encounter in Marrakech, with the survey taking approximately 15 to 18 minutes to complete. Trained research assistants were instructed to survey only foreign tourists and to clearly communicate the study's objectives. If individuals did not meet the eligibility criteria or declined participation, the assistant would approach the next available respondent. This method of sampling has been utilised in previous studies, as seen in the works of researchers like Hosany et al. (2015) and Prayag et al. (2017).

In this research, we calculated the necessary sample size by considering the ratio of the sample size to the variables being studied, as outlined by Hair et al. (2017). Accordingly, the sample-to-variable ratio suggests a minimum observation-to-variable ratio not less than 5:1, but ratios of 15:1 and 20:1 are preferred (Hair et al., 2017). In other words, this implies that a minimum of five to twenty respondents is strongly recommended for each independent variable in the model. Applying the Sample-to-variable ratio method, considering 39 variables representing the studied constructs, a minimum sample size of 585 (i.e.,  $39 \times 15 = 585$ ) was considered adequate according to Hair et al. (2017). Seven hundred tourists were approached for data collection. Of these, 610 tourists completed and submitted their questionnaires through email for the field investigation. Among the 610 collected questionnaires, 22 were excluded due to missing values and outliers. Ultimately, 588 questionnaires were retained for further analysis, resulting in an 84% response rate (i.e.,  $588/700 = 84\%$ ).

Before the final data collection, various precautions were implemented, contributing to an acceptable response rate exceeding 50% in this study. For instance, the questionnaire was conducted via Survey Monkey, enabling faster, simpler email delivery and access to hard-to-reach respondents. Additionally, a QR code option was provided to facilitate survey completion. This approach aimed to put respondents at ease and encourage honest answers. Although respondents completed the questionnaires themselves, assistance was available on request, with an interviewer present to address any questions or concerns. A preliminary test of the questionnaire was conducted, ensuring the exclusion of questions of a confidential, embarrassing, or sensitive nature. To gauge nonresponse bias, a t-test was employed to scrutinize potential variations in characteristics between respondents and non-respondents in the sampled data ( $p > .05$ ; no significant distinctions between the two groups). Furthermore, nonresponse bias was assessed by comparing early and late responses through the t-test ( $p > .05$ ; no significant differences between the two groups). Hence, these results suggest that nonresponse bias was not a significant concern in the dataset.

#### **4.3. Variables and measurement**

In this research, a survey questionnaire was utilised, comprising multiple-item measures to assess each construct depicted in Figure 1. Through these multi-item measures, participants provided ratings for the primary constructs investigated in the study, including emotions, co-creation, memory, destination image, overall satisfaction, intention to revisit the destination, and word-of-mouth intentions. The measurement and operationalisation of all constructs in this study primarily relied on established multi-item scales from existing literature, as outlined below:

First, following Chen et al. (2022), we used the Destination Emotion Scale (DES) to measure tourists' emotions during their Marrakech experience. Developed by Hosany and Gilbert (2010) and applied in studies like Prayag et al. (2013), Hosany and Prayag (2014), and Prayag et al. (2017), the DES includes three dimensions: Joy, Love, and Positive Surprise. This study employed five items each for joy (e.g., "I felt a sense of joy during my tourism experience in Marrakech"), love (e.g., "I felt love during my tourism experience in Marrakech"), and positive surprise (e.g., "I felt fascinated when I was visiting Marrakech"). Respondents rated these on a 7-point scale from not at all (1) to very much (7).

Following Rather et al. (2022), tourist co-creation was measured by using Hollebeek and Rather (2020) four items employed in hospitality industry and which they originally adopted from Im and Qu (2017) and Grisseemann and Stockburger-Sauer (2012). A sample of item as follows “I have spent a considerable amount of time arranging this destination visitation.” Respondents rated their responses considering the above-mentioned experiential constructs on the 7-point scale anchored by not at all (1) and very much (7).

To measure memories, we adapted the MTE scale from Sharma and Nayak (2019), originally derived from studies such as Kim (2018), Kim et al. (2012), and Kim et al. (2010). The MTE scale has been used in numerous studies (Chen et al., 2022; Vada et al., 2019; Sthapit & Coundounaris, 2018; Kim, 2018). Items included “I really enjoyed this tourism experience,” “I was revitalised through this tourism experience,” “I learned something about myself from this tourism experience,” “I had a chance to closely experience the local culture of the destination,” and “I experienced something new during this tourism experience.” Respondents rated these on a 7-point scale from not at all (1) to very much (7).

In this study, following Kim (2018), destination image was estimated using a six-item scale, adopted from the study of Prayag and Ryan (2012), as follows: “Marrakech has an exotic image”, “Marrakech offers good quality of service”, “Marrakech offers a variety of entertainment”, “Marrakech is accessible”, “Marrakech offers a variety and good quality of accommodations”, “Marrakech offers a variety of cultural and historical attractions”. Tourists rated their perception of destination image of Marrakech on the 7-point scale where 1 = very dissatisfied and 7 = satisfied by asking respondents, “How would you describe the image that you have of Marrakech in terms of...?”.

Overall satisfaction with tourist experience at the destination was operationalised as an overall summative construct using the following statement adapted from Prayag et al. (2013) “Please indicate your satisfaction toward your experience at Marrakech.” Respondents rated their responses on a 7-point scale: (1= very dissatisfied and 7= very satisfied; 1= terrible and 7= delighted, and 1= disliked very much and 7= liked very much).

Finally, loyalty intentions were measured using two separate constructs in this study. First, word-of-mouth recommendation was estimated using three-item scales (i.e., "I will recommend Marrakech to other people,"; "I will say positive things about Marrakech to other people,"; "I will encourage friends and relatives to visit Marrakech"). The measures were borrowed from previous studies (e.g., Kumar & Kushik, 2020; Prayag et al., 2013), which were taken from

Grappi and Montanari (2011) and Lee et al. (2008). Second, the construct of revisit intention was measured using three-items scales adapted from the studies of Lee et al. (2008) and Abubakar et al. (2017). All items used to estimate the constructs of loyalty intentions employed seven-point Likert scales to measure all the constructs, ranging from 1= not at all likely to 7= extremely likely.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Sample profile

The research included a nearly balanced distribution of male and female participants, with percentages of 49.30% and 50.69%, respectively, as detailed in Table 1. The predominant age group among respondents was the 25-40 category, making up the majority at 72.28%. A noteworthy portion of participants possessed a higher level of education, with 49.32% holding a master's degree. Regarding nationality, the largest proportion originated from Europe, making up 64.86% of the respondents. Participants from America constituted 19.82%, and those from Africa represented 6.3% of the participant pool.

**TABLE 1 : SAMPLES PROFILE**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Female</b>	298	50.69%
	<b>Male</b>	290	49.30%
<b>Age</b>	<b>18 to 25</b>	102	17.42%
	<b>26 to 40</b>	425	72.28%
	<b>41 to 55</b>	90	15.36%
	<b>Above 56</b>	30	5.06%
<b>Origin of location</b>	<b>Africa</b>	37	6.31%
	<b>North America</b>	116	19.82%
	<b>Asia</b>	8	1.44%
	<b>Europe</b>	381	64.86%
	<b>Others</b>	44	7.57%
<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Bachelor</b>	188	31.97%
	<b>Diploma-level</b>	41	6.97%
	<b>Master</b>	290	49.32%
	<b>Ph.D.</b>	32	5.44%
	<b>Professional qualifications</b>	33	5.61%
	<b>Others</b>	4	0.68%

Source: Own Elaboration

## 5.2. Measurement model

Following the guidelines of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the first phase involved establishing the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the primary constructs before proceeding to test the structural model. Following a standard criterion, the Skewness and Kurtosis for each variable were assessed, and none of the variables deviated beyond the acceptable range of +/-8 for kurtosis and -3 /+3 for skewness. Consequently, all variables in the study exhibit minimal skewness, indicating that the data utilised in the study adhered to normal distribution properties and did not violate them (Kline, 2012). Moreover, none of the variables displayed leptokurtic or platykurtic characteristics, confirming the normal distribution of the data.

Quantitative analysis in the form of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to test and validate the measurement model, which specifies the relationships between the observed variables and underlying constructs. The analyses were conducted using AMOS 24. The Maximum Likelihood (ML) method of parameter estimation was chosen due to the large usable sample size (N=588), the continuous nature of the observed indicators, the fulfilment of the normal distribution assumption based on skewness and kurtosis results, and the belief in the validity of variables in the hypothesized model.

The psychometric properties of the scales were assessed by estimating a seven-factor measurement model. The initial confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model showed a mediocre fit, indicating the need for further refinement to improve goodness-of-fit. Upon reviewing t-values, standard error squared multiple correlations, and standardised loadings, modifications were suggested to create a more parsimonious model. Specifically, six statements related to emotions, two items from destination image, and one item from memories, were deleted due to their low contributions, high standard error, and low explained variances.

The refined model was re-tested, resulting in a final CFA with a Chi-square value of 1522.593, 5 degrees of freedom ( $p < .01$ ), and improved fit indices. The descriptive global fit measures, including goodness-of-fit index (.714), comparative fit index (.923), and incremental fit index (.923), exceeded the recommended cutoff of .9 (Byrne, 1998), except for the GFI. Additionally, statistical inference tests supported the appropriateness of the measurement model, with a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .079 and  $\chi^2_{df} = 4.699$  (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

According to Table 2, the composite reliabilities (CR) for each construct ranged from .77 to .955, surpassing the recommended threshold of .70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This indicates the reliability of the measures. To evaluate construct validity, both convergent and discriminant validity were assessed. Convergent validity was established by examining the significance and magnitude of factor loadings, along with the average variance extracted (AVE). Every factor loading not only demonstrated statistical significance ( $p < 0.1$ ) but also surpassed the recommended threshold of .5. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded the minimum cutoff of .50. The study argues that AVEs equal to or surpassing 50% signify the convergent validity of the measurement scale, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981). The AVEs in this study, surpassing 50%, affirm the presence of convergent validity in the measurement scale.

**TABLE 2: RELIABILITY AND CONVERGENT VALIDITY**

Variables/ Constructs	Items	Standardised Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Maximum Shared Variance
<b>Emotions</b>	EM1	.828	.927	.932	.606	.936
	EM2	.668				
	EM3	.736				
	EM4	.789				
	EM6	.795				
	EM11	.786				
	EM13	.732				
	EM14	.815				
	EM15	.841				
<b>Co- creation</b>	CC1	.881	.770	.898	.746	.724
	CC2	.896				
	CC3	.848				
	CC4	.846				
<b>Memories</b>	ME1	.864	.895	.915	.730	.724
	ME3	.906				
	ME4	.829				
	ME5	.817				

<b>Destination Image</b>	DI2	.778	.887	.874	.636	.684
	DI4	.764				
	DI5	.902				
	DI6	.735				
<b>Word-of-Mouth</b>	WOM1	.964	.920	.939	.837	.732
	WOM2	.910				
	WOM3	.867				
<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	OS1	.819	.923	.896	.742	.732
	OS2	.866				
	OS3	.897				
<b>Intention to revisit</b>	IR1	.851	.955	.862	.758	.653
	IR2	.842				
	IR3	.898				
<i>Model Fitness: X<sup>2</sup>=1522,593, df=324, X<sup>2</sup>/df= 4,699, RMSEA=.079, GFI=.714, CFI=.0,923, SRMR=0,054; TLI=0,910</i>						

Source: Own Elaboration

Discriminant validity was evaluated by contrasting the square root of the AVE for each construct with the squared inter-construct correlations. To establish satisfactory discriminant validity, the values on the bold diagonal, representing the square root of AVE, should surpass the off-diagonal elements. This criterion, specified by Fornell and Larcker (1981), has been satisfied. Upon scrutinising all correlation coefficients alongside the square roots of AVEs in Table 3, this study noted a consistent pattern where the AVEs were greater than the squared inter-construct correlations. This observation supports the existence of discriminant validity among the conceptualised constructs, consistent with the criteria delineated by Hair et al. (2015).

**TABLE 3: DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY**

Variables	EM	CC	ME	DI	WOM	OS	IR
<b>Emotions</b>	<b>0,778</b>						
<b>Co-creation</b>	0,752***	<b>0,863</b>					
<b>Memories</b>	0,813***	0,851***	<b>0,854</b>				
<b>Destination image</b>	0,764***	0,827***	0,747***	<b>0,797</b>			
<b>Word-of-mouth</b>	0,694***	0,588***	0,798***	0,699***	<b>0,915</b>		
<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	0,743***	0,655***	0,760***	0,792***	0,856***	<b>0,861</b>	
<b>Intention to revisit</b>	0,598	0,538	0,747	0,583	0,808	0,746	<b>0,871</b>

† p < 0.100

\* p < 0.050

\*\* p < 0.010

\*\*\* p < 0.001

**Note:** EM =Emotions; CC= Co-creation; ME= Memories;

Source: Own Elaboration

### 5.3. Structural model and hypothesis testing

The hypothesised relationships were examined using structural equation modelling. The evaluation of the theoretical structural model revealed a Chi-square value of 597,986 with 7 degrees of freedom ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating suboptimal model fit. Recognising the Chi-square test's sensitivity to sample size (Byrne, 1998), alternative goodness-of-fit indices were considered for a more comprehensive model assessment (Bentler, 1990).

Analysis of the goodness-of-fit statistics suggested that the theoretical model reasonably fit the data, implying its potential suitability for testing the proposed hypotheses in this study. The incremental fit measures, including the Tucker-Lewis Index (.712), Comparative Fit Index (.904), and Incremental Fit Index (.904), exceeded the recommended threshold of (.90) (Byrne, 1998). Additionally, statistical inference tests indicated a satisfactory structural model, with Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) at (.073) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) at (.379), although the latter failed to meet the desired threshold (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). It's worth noting that RMSEA values ideally should be less than (.08) for adequate model fitness.

Based on the standardised estimates of path coefficients detailed in Table 4, we evaluated numerous hypotheses. All hypotheses were supported, except for H1. This is due to its estimate not meeting the conventional threshold for statistical significance ( $p > 0.05$ ), contradicting our initial expectation.

**TABLE 4: RESULTS OF HYPOTHETICAL MODEL**

	Paths			Estimate/ path coefficient	Supported ?
<b>H1</b>	Emotions	→	Overall Satisfaction	,041ns	<b>No</b>
<b>H2</b>	Emotions	→	Destination image	,295***	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H3</b>	Co-creation	→	Overall Satisfaction	,590***	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H4</b>	Co-creation	→	Destination image	,978***	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H5</b>	Memories	→	Overall satisfaction	,878***	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H6</b>	Memories	→	Destination image	,094**	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H7</b>	Destination image	→	Overall satisfaction	1,241***	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H8</b>	Destination image	→	Intention to revisit	,271***	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H9</b>	Destination image	→	Word-of-mouth	,153***	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H10</b>	Overall satisfaction	→	Intention to revisit	1,167***	<b>Yes</b>
<b>H11</b>	Overall satisfaction	→	Word-of-mouth	,971***	<b>Yes</b>

**Note : ns=non significant**

Source: Own Elaboration

Delving deeper into our analysis (Table 5), additional tests uncover significant indirect effects of emotions ( $SE=0.269$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ,  $95\% \text{ CI}=0.240$  to  $0.362$ ) and co-creation ( $SE=0.554$ ,  $p\text{-value}<0.001$ ,  $95\% \text{ CI}=0.571$  to  $0.732$ ) on overall satisfaction through destination image. These findings highlight that tourists' positive emotional experiences and active participation in the co-creation of their tourism experience enhance their perceptions of the destination's positive image, which in turn influences their overall satisfaction.

**TABLE 5: INDIRECT EFFECTS**

		Bootstrap		<i>p</i> value	Standardised estimate
		Lower	Upper		
		95% Confidence interval			
Indirect path	Unstandardised estimate	Lower	Upper	<i>p</i> value	Standardised estimate
Emotion → Destination image → Overall satisfaction	0,294	0,240	0,362	0,001	0,269***
Memories → Destination image → Overall satisfaction	-0,071	-0,147	-0,006	0,075	-0,066†
Co-creation → Destination image → Overall satisfaction	0,652	0,571	0,732	0,001	0,554**

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ \*\*  $p < 0.010$ \*  $p < 0.050$ †  $p < 0.100$ 

Source: Own Elaboration

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

### 6.1. Discussion

This study moves beyond traditional cognitive-behaviourist models of destination attractiveness, which still rely on attribute-based assessments (Guan & Huang, 2022; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Li et al., 2021), by developing and testing an integrated framework that incorporates tourism experience dimensions as antecedents of tourist attitudes and behaviour (Godovykh & Tasci, 2021; Kim & So, 2022). The results indicate that emotional responses, co-created travel experiences, and memories—despite having similar valence in tourism and marketing literature—exert differential effects on satisfaction and destination image outcomes. These findings offer relevant implications for destination managers and marketers seeking to better understand tourist loyalty.

The current study emphasises that positive emotions significantly influence destination image, aligning with Prayag et al. (2017), who highlight how emotions shape tourists' perceptions and foster favourable evaluations. Positive emotional experiences during a trip fulfil tourists'

expectations, leading to more positive destination image evaluations. This concurs with Sharma and Nayak (2019), who found that emotional responses at a yoga tourism destination enhance perceptions of a positive overall image. However, while positive emotions influence the evaluation of destination image, they do not directly affect overall tourist satisfaction. This finding is unexpected and diverges from existing predictions in tourism literature (Mathis et al., 2016). Several factors might explain these inconsistencies. First, the challenge of encapsulating the complex assessment of emotional responses within a single retrospective self-report measurement scale may skew results (Verhulst et al., 2020). Second, the nuanced and dynamic nature of tourists' emotional experiences, characterized by various types, intensities, and fluctuations, could contribute to these discrepancies, as suggested by Bagozzi et al. (1999). Third, this study's focus on an entire tourist destination offers a broader perspective than much of the prior research, potentially influencing findings.

Although empirical evidence linking tourists' co-creation of experiences with destination image and overall satisfaction remains limited, this research examines co-creation as a potential precursor to both. This aligns with Buonincontri et al. (2017), who suggest tourists' co-creation of experiences predicts satisfaction and influences future behaviour. Specifically, co-creating imagined experiences positively affects behavioural and attitudinal responses. Tourists seek to be co-producers through interactions with service providers, creating subjective value (Rather et al., 2022). Assiouras et al. (2019) highlight that value co-creation in the destination experience boosts customer citizenship behaviour and satisfaction, reflected in engagement, reciprocity, and sharing. Giuseppe et al. (2022) note that co-creation between tourists and service providers enhances the destination's competitive advantage. In the same vein, Foroudi et al. (2019) observed that when students perceive a university website as a platform that facilitates their interaction, they are more eager to participate in value co-creation, leading to benefits such as an enhanced university image and reputation. Within the scope of this research, the findings underscore the significant positive impact of tourists' co-creation on their perception of Marrakech destination image. This outcome highlights the critical importance of co-creation for destination service providers.

Aligned with earlier research, the results of this study highlight how tourists' positive memories significantly influence their overall satisfaction with their destination experience. This is consistent with previous studies in consumer behaviour, which have highlighted the critical role of memories in shaping satisfactory consumption experiences (Hosany et al., 2022). Indeed,

Melón et al. (2021) confirmed that MTEs positively impact satisfaction. This underscores the importance for tourist destinations to create unforgettable experiences. Contrary to expectations, while the positive correlation between tourist memories and their perception of the destination image is well-documented (Kim, 2018), our study did not find a significant causal relationship along these lines. As a result, it indicates that memories of the tourist experience at the destination play a more determining role in overall satisfaction than in influencing the perception of the destination image. These findings contradict those of Sharma and Nayak (2019), who confirmed the influence of the valence of memories as the basis of the perception of destination image.

Moreover, as evaluating destination image through specific attributes may not fully capture tourists' perceptions or loyalty drivers (Alahkoon et al., 2021), this study focuses on tourism experience dimensions as key antecedents of destination image. To maximise the role of destination image in loyalty, it considers the post-visit image, offering a holistic assessment beyond stereotypes. Building on this perspective, the study highlights that positive emotions and active co-creation significantly enhance destination image evaluation. It also confirms destination image as a foundation for overall satisfaction, aligning with Prayag et al. (2017), who found that favourable destination perceptions increase satisfaction. Additionally, destination image is emphasised as a vital driver of loyalty intentions. These outcomes agree with previous research (Ragb et al., 2020; Stylidis et al., 2017), which show that destinations with a notably positive image tend to be revisited and receive positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Thus, tourists who perceive a positive image of the destination demonstrate higher satisfaction with their experience and are more inclined to engage in positive future behaviours.

However, upon delving deeper into the predictors of loyalty intentions, our study highlights overall satisfaction as a key antecedent of destination loyalty, aligning with extensive research (Melón et al., 2021) showing its strong, direct influence. For example, Ali et al. (2016) found that higher overall satisfaction significantly impacts tourists' future behaviour towards the destination. This implies that the higher the satisfaction tourists have with their destination experience, the more inclined they are to recommend it and visit it again in the future, a relationship further supported by Suhartanto (2018). In line with past studies (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), this research confirms that satisfaction alone is insufficient to predict tourist behaviour. Instead, tourists' overall satisfaction with their destination experience is directly

influenced by positive memories formed during their visit and their active involvement in the destination. Additionally, this satisfaction is further preceded by the perception of a positive destination image.

## **6.2. Theoretical contributions**

This study offers several theoretical contributions to tourism and marketing literature. It primarily seeks to advance theoretical understanding by examining destination attractiveness through an experiential lens (Huseynov et al 2020; Lugosi & Walls, 2013). In this context, the study evaluates the relevance of key tourism experience dimensions, in contrast to traditional attribute-based assessments (Fajriyati et al., 2022; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017), to better capture the experiential factors that shape tourist attitudes and behaviours. Accordingly, we develop and test a conceptual framework that integrates emotions, co-creation, memories, overall satisfaction, destination image, and loyalty intentions into a single nomological framework to capture the elements influencing tourist loyalty intentions.

Additionally, this research extends existing literature on destination image formation by emphasising post-visit image evaluation, offering critical insights into the drivers of destination loyalty beyond pre-visit perceptions (Stylos & Bellou, 2019; Ragb et al. 2020). While conventional research has predominantly focused on pre-visit image formation, this study highlights how emotional experiences, co-creation, and memorable interactions shape tourists' retrospective evaluations of a destination. The findings provide empirical evidence that destination image is influenced by emotional associations and tourists' active involvement in the co-creation process of their tourism experience. In addition, although research on co-creation dynamics within tourism contexts remains limited, particularly concerning tourist destinations, the results support the positive impact of tourist co-creation on attitudes (Rather et al., 2022).

The notion of overall satisfaction reflects the outcome of the overall consumption experience at the destination, capturing emotional, subjective, and hedonic responses to destination encounters (Kim & Thapa, 2018; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In this study, the findings demonstrate that overall satisfaction is significantly influenced by memorable moments and tourists' active participation in co-creating their experiences. This addresses the call of Sharma and Nayak (2019) for a holistic measure of overall satisfaction as a summative response to the

tourism experience. By showing that satisfaction stems not only from service quality and tangible attributes of a destination but primarily from emotional engagement and co-creation perspective, this research offers new insights into destination branding and loyalty strategies.

### **6.3. Practical implications**

The findings provide several practical implications, primarily highlighting the integral role of positive emotions and tourists' active participation in co-creating experiences in shaping Marrakech's destination image. This underscores the importance of emotional resonance in promotional strategies. Successful examples from destinations like Taiwan ("Touch Your Heart") and Slovenia ("I Feel Slovenia") illustrate how campaigns emphasising sensory and emotional connections can enhance tourist engagement (Ketter, 2018). For Marrakech, leveraging its rich cultural heritage through authentic, visually compelling advertising can establish a strong emotional bond with tourists, fostering loyalty and a positive perception of the destination. This approach aims to establish a strong emotional connection with tourists, further enhancing their loyalty and positive perception of the destination. Moreover, to ensure tourists enjoy their experiences, policymakers in Marrakech should consider implementing regulations regarding fair prices and haggling practices. This will help tourists perceive a safe and positive image of the destination and enjoy their experience (Kozak, 2016). By ensuring fair and transparent pricing practices, tourists are more likely to perceive Marrakech as a trustworthy and welcoming destination, which can significantly impact their decision to revisit in the future and to share positive word-of-mouth recommendations about the destination.

The study also emphasises the impact of tourists' active co-creation in shaping the destination image and influencing overall satisfaction with the destination experience. These insights provide valuable guidance for destination marketers and service providers to design environments that facilitate meaningful tourist engagement during the planning and execution of their travel experiences, thereby enhancing overall satisfaction (Buonincontri et al., 2017; Mathis et al., 2016). Viewing the destination as a dynamic entity, where tourists actively shape their experiences, is critical for long-term success. In the case of Marrakech, allowing tourists to immerse themselves in an environment where they can co-create experiences tailored to their preferences is essential. To achieve this, collaboration among local stakeholders is key to developing programs that promote tourist involvement and foster social interactions. For example, offering tourists the opportunity to stay in local homes for authentic homestay

experiences can create deeper cultural connections and enhance the memorability of their travel experience. Additionally, the development of a mobile application providing easy access to the city's attractions is crucial for enriching the tourist experience. This app should feature detailed maps, tourist circuits, and a variety of tourism programs. Furthermore, incorporating a platform within the app where tourists can share experiences and suggestions will encourage interaction and co-creation of itineraries. By supporting these co-creative behaviours, the application will not only meet but exceed user expectations, enriching their overall experience and fostering value co-creation within the tourist community.

Moreover, the current study highlights the lasting effect of memorable experiences on post-travel behaviour. Tourists seek unique and impactful travel moments, and the more memorable their experience at a destination, the stronger their emotional connection with the place. This increased connection makes them more likely to revisit in the future and recommend the destination to others (Chen et al., 2022). In this context, the tourism industry should focus on creating distinctive and meaningful experiences by integrating both educational and enjoyable activities into their offerings. Values such as hospitality, honesty, and helpfulness can enhance the emotional appeal, leaving a lasting impression on tourists (Hosseini et al. 2023). Storytelling and personal narratives further strengthen the emotional connection, reinforcing Marrakech as a memorable destination and increasing tourists' desire for ongoing engagement. Creating a lasting experience not only fosters positive memories but also increases tourists' desire to maintain ongoing communication with the destination. Satisfied and motivated tourists are more likely to recommend the destination to others.

#### **6.4. Limitations and further research**

While the study offers valuable insights, like any research endeavour, it has certain limitations that present opportunities for future research.

Although it explored the impact of experiential aspects of the tourism experience on overall satisfaction and destination image in shaping loyalty intentions, the study focused solely on Marrakech as a tourist destination, which consequently limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could overcome this limitation by replicating the research in other emerging countries where tourism is a significant industry and economic driver, including destinations in North Africa. Such research would enhance the generalizability of the findings

and allow for a deeper exploration of the interplay between affective dimensions and tourists' attitudes and intentions.

Another limitation of this research concerns the demographic composition of the sample, which is notably skewed toward individuals aged 26–40 (72%) and those with higher education, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future studies should strive for more representative samples to validate the results across a wider population. Additionally, due to concerns about survey length, this study excluded certain tourist behavioural variables, which may limit the understanding of how socio-cultural backgrounds, previous visits, and individual preferences influence tourists' experiences. Future research should include these moderating factors, enabling destination managers and policymakers to tailor investments, communication, and marketing strategies more effectively.

Last but not least, the study adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey questionnaire with multi-item measures from existing literature to assess the tourist experience. Although structured methodologies can effectively gauge tourists' experiential responses, they may fall short in capturing the holistic components of the tourist experience, especially the intricacies of hedonic responses often associated with tourism experiences (Verhulst et al. 2020). Relying solely on conventional and retrospective report metrics might miss the dynamic aspects of tourists' emotional and hedonic responses and the genuinely dynamic nature of the holistic tourist experience at the destination (Godovykh & Tasci, 2021). Recognising that the tourist experience encompasses immersion and dynamic interactions within the tourism system from pre-experience expectations to post-experience evaluations, it is essential to understand how tourists interpret experiences offered by the destination. These interpretations, typically expressed in personal terms, play a critical role in enhancing tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions toward the destination.

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