



Antecedents of Destination Fascination and Intention to Visit

Antecedentes do fascínio pelo destino e da intenção de visitar

Rosângela Andrade Pessoa 

Centro Universitário Fametro - Unifametro, Fortaleza-CE Brazil, ropessoa11@gmail.com

Lucas Lopes Ferreira de Souza 

University of Fortaleza, Fortaleza-CE Brazil, lucaslfsouza@unifor.br

Oderlene Vieira de Oliveira 

University of Fortaleza, Fortaleza-CE Brazil, oderlene@unifor.br

Juliana Silva Costa 

Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre-RS Brazil, julianacadm@gmail.com

Elnivan Moreira de Souza 

University of Fortaleza and State University of Ceara, Fortaleza-CE, Brazil, elnivan@unifor.br

Received: 20.05.2025; Revisions required: 07.07.2025; Accepted: 14.10.2025

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of destination fascination and intention to visit. We conducted the research through the lens of Attention Restoration Theory (ART), administering a survey to 352 tourists who had never visited the destination. The data was analysed through Structural Equation Modelling, and the study focused on four antecedents of Destination Fascination: Culture, Electronic Word of Mouth, Expectation, and Information Search. The results showed that Culture and Expectation had a significant positive impact on Destination Fascination, whereas Electronic Word of Mouth and Information Search did not. Furthermore, Destination Fascination had a positive impact on the intention to visit. Tourism agents can utilise the findings presented in this study to refine their marketing strategies and attract more tourists to their destinations. Finally, this study contributes to the literature on consumer behaviour and tourism by identifying the constructs that impact Destination Fascination and Intent to Visit.

Keywords: Destination Fascination, Intention to Visit, Culture, Expectation.

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo é examinar a influência do fascínio pelo destino e da intenção de o visitar. Conduzimos o inquérito na perspectiva da Teoria da Restauração da Atenção (TRA) e aplicámos um questionário a 352 turistas que nunca tinham visitado um destino. Os dados foram analisados através da Modelação de Equações Estruturais, e o estudo focou-se em quatro antecedentes do fascínio pelo destino: Cultura, Boca a Boca Eletrónico, Expectativa e Procura de Informação. Os resultados mostraram que a Cultura e a Expectativa tiveram um impacto positivo significativo no fascínio pelo destino, enquanto o Boca a Boca Eletrónico e a Procura de Informação não apresentaram um impacto significativo. Além disso, o fascínio pelo destino teve um impacto positivo na intenção de o visitar. Os agentes turísticos podem utilizar as descobertas deste estudo para melhorar as suas estratégias de marketing e atrair mais turistas para os seus destinos. Por fim, este estudo contribui para a literatura sobre o comportamento do consumidor e o turismo ao identificar os constructos que impactam o fascínio pelo destino e a intenção de o visitar.

Palavras-chave: Fascínio pelo Destino, Intenção de Visitar, Cultura, Expectativa.

1. Introduction

Tourism is an important industry that generates economic growth. Sector activities can reduce poverty rates in regions where tourism occurs, improve local infrastructure, and increase employment opportunities for local residents (Li et al., 2018). Even with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, this industry has already contributed to a resurgence in the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (WTTC, 2022). The tourism sector accounted for 5.3% of 2020 world GDP, a drastic reduction from the 10.3% it accounted for in 2019.

However, by 2021, the industry already accounted for 6.1% of the world's GDP. It recovered 18.2 million jobs, indicating a trend toward the sector returning to its normal level of economic activity within a short period (WTTC, 2022). In 2024, tourism's share of Global GDP is expected to normalise, returning to 10% with a financial impact of around US\$10.9 trillion.

Given tourism's relevance to the economy and the great diversity of destinations, it is important to examine how tourists make destination choices among so many options (Pessoa et al., 2022). Choosing a preferred travel location is a complex task, primarily because it involves various factors, which is why it has been the subject of study for decades (e.g., Pestana et al., 2020; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). According to Liu et al. (2017), tourists evaluate destinations holistically, selecting



one and ranking the alternatives to make their final choice. So, tourists' choices vary according to different characteristics and the diversity of existing destinations, resulting in a complex decision-making process (Lindblom et al., 2017; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

One subject studied in the context of tourist decision-making processes is how tourist destinations can become fascinating (e.g., Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Liu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019; Pessoa et al., 2022; Ding & Xu, 2024). According to the Attention Restoration Theory (ART), destinations that produce fascination possess properties that facilitate the restoration of our direct attention and the inhibition of distractions. These are essential skills for performing daily tasks, such as reading or driving. In contrast, fascination requires a type of attention that is effortless, and is known as involuntary attention (Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan & Berman, 2010). The modern lifestyle constantly demands our attention, consequently increasing the demand for tourism travel aimed at restoring well-being, motivated by the exhaustion and fatigue of everyday life (Lehto, 2012), thus highlighting the importance of this topic.

This study addresses a gap in the literature by examining the influence of specific antecedents on "Destination Fascination" and its subsequent impact on intention to visit, particularly among tourists who have never visited a destination. While previous research has explored tourist decision-making (Andrades et al., 2015; Lindblom et al., 2017), the concept of how destinations become fascinating has been studied, but there is no consensus on which variables influence its formation (Liu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2015).

Specifically, this research investigates four antecedents of Destination Fascination (Pessoa et al., 2022): Culture, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM), Expectation, and Information Search. Although these variables have been analysed as predecessors to the "intention to visit" in other studies, their influence on the formation of "Destination Fascination" has not yet been established (e.g., Hernández-Méndez et al., 2013; Higgs et al., 2005; Jalilvand et al., 2012; Whang et al., 2016).

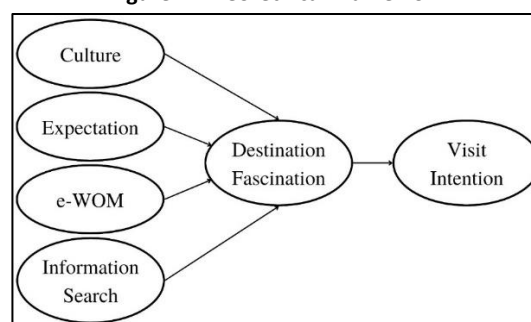
Furthermore, while the concept of "fascination" is widely applied in tourism and recognised as a factor influencing the intention to visit, it is also a multidimensional construct. Studies applying its scale lack consensus on the influencing variables (Liu et al., 2017). This study, therefore, contributes to the expansion of knowledge by identifying and testing which constructs impact "Destination Fascination" and "Intent to Visit," from the perspective of tourists who have not yet physically visited the destination.

Therefore, this study offers three main contributions. First, it advances theoretical understanding by empirically identifying the antecedents of Destination Fascination through the lens of Attention Restoration Theory, a relatively under-explored approach in tourism behaviour research. Second, it provides novel insights by focusing on tourists who have never visited the destination, demonstrating that fascination can be triggered during the pre-travel stage. Third, it presents practical implications for tourism managers by highlighting which psychological and informational cues are most effective in stimulating fascination and travel intention, enabling more targeted marketing strategies.

2. Framework

In this section, we present the theoretical bases that guided the development of our study. The Attention Restoration Theory (ART) is first described, along with its main aspects, followed by the conceptualisation of the antecedents that contribute to the formation of Destination Fascination: Culture, Expectation, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Information Search. We conclude with the conceptualisation of Destination Fascination. Figure 1 presents the framework that we analyse in this article.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



We used the model proposed by Pessoa et al. (2022) as the basis for our investigation. We applied this model to measure the variables that influence the formation of Destination Fascination and how it affects the intention to visit a tourist destination, using a sample of tourists who have never visited the intended travel destination.

2.1 Attention Restoration Theory

Research on restorative environments has gained greater visibility since 1980 (e.g., Altman & Wohlwill, 1983; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Korpela, 1989). The years of study on environmental cognition (the individual's ability to learn, extract, and store information)



and environmental preferences resulted in the development of the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (Hu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2025; Matthews et al., 2023). ART is guided by the concepts of voluntary and involuntary attention, valuing natural environments for the recovery of the directed attentional resource (Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). After hours of direct attention concentration or exposure to stress throughout the day, the individual will experience fatigue in the attentional process, necessitating a shutdown to rest and regain attention (Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan & Berman, 2010). In this way, the modern lifestyle, with its exposure to various information sources, depletes the attentional resource (Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan & Berman, 2010).

Among the environmental factors with restoration potential, fascination is central but not unique. In this way, a restorative environment has the presence of three more components: Being Away (the psychological possibility of distancing oneself from spaces one is used to, ie, a different setting); Extent (the existence of attributes that can promote the individual's engagement with the environment, it must be both fascinating and different from everyday stimuli); and Compatibility (the link between personal tendencies and purposes concerning the the environment for the practice of certain activities, and the responsiveness of this environment) (Kaplan, 1995).

Fascination can be defined as involuntary attention, that is, stimuli that capture attention on their own. Therefore, fascination promotes restoration because when we interact with stimuli that capture our indirect attention, our directed attention resources become inactive, providing the much-needed opportunity to restore them (Kaplan, 1995). Although the other three components promote restorative environmental qualities, fascination is the antecedent with the greatest strength in the perceived restorative quality scale (Kirillova & Lehto, 2016). Among the scale dimensions, fascination is the most likely to affect the intention to visit a destination; therefore, our study focuses solely on the fascination construct.

Furthermore, Kaplan (1995) mentions two aspects of fascination to be addressed. First, fascination can be produced through the experience process, such as participatory fascination – for example, gambling. Second, fascination can be generated through content that is foreign to the environment, such as people, animals, natural elements, and diverse points of view. A fascinating destination is rich in stimuli that capture involuntary attention, thereby promoting tourists' willingness to explore and experience greater enjoyment, helping them forget everyday life (Liu et al., 2017). Notwithstanding, the study by Pessoa et al. (2022) shows that fascination can occur even before the individual visits the destination. The explanation is that the antecedents of fascination can make a tourist become fascinated with a destination even before visiting it, such as by searching for information about it. We emphasise that our study is based on a sample of tourists who did not visit the destination in question.

Fascination is at the core of the restorative experience (Kaplan, 1995). Being on vacation at a fascinating destination helps with physical and mental recovery by increasing positive emotions and reducing fatigue and stress, thereby improving subjective well-being (Wang et al., 2019, 2025). Fascination is a valuable construct in the tourist experience, as it helps tourists to enjoy the destination better and create more positive connections with the place, increasing tourist engagement with the destination and allowing greater potential for physical and mental relaxation, as well as enabling a disconnection with everyday life (Liu et al., 2017; Pessoa et al., 2022). These positive attributes from a fascinating destination positively influence destination attachment and motivate tourists to pay close attention to the destination and explore it freely (Wang et al., 2019, 2025).

2.2 Antecedents of Destination Fascination

Given the relevance of fascination to the experience of restorative travel, it is also important to understand which factors trigger the intention to visit fascinating destinations. Our article is limited to the study of Culture, Expectation, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Information Search. Culture is among the most significant motivations for tourists when choosing a destination (Richards, 2018), often serving as the central element of the tourism sector in various destinations (Seyfi et al., 2019). The intention to travel for cultural tourism is linked not only to history but also with heritage, people, cuisine, arts, music, traditions, and even the consumption of media content conveying information about a certain culture (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2015; Koo et al., 2016).

Culture is among the most central and influential motivational factors shaping tourist destination preferences (Vila-Lopez et al., 2024). Cultural tourism encompasses experiences tied not only to historical heritage but also to contemporary practices, including art, music, cuisine, language, and everyday life (Richards, 2018; Richards, 2025; Seyfi et al., 2019; Jim et al., 2022). Tourists are frequently drawn to destinations that offer opportunities for immersive cultural encounters, which can significantly enrich their perceptions of authenticity, uniqueness, and emotional resonance—dimensions that align with the theoretical framework of fascination as conceptualised by Kaplan (1995) and elaborated within Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

A culturally rich destination offers stimuli that evoke involuntary attention, a hallmark of fascination, by presenting novel and meaningful content that contrasts with a tourist's daily environment (Kaplan, 1995; Liu et al., 2017; Elshaer et al., 2024). This aligns with empirical findings suggesting that culture-based experiences contribute to the restoration of attention and enhanced psychological well-being (Lehto, 2012; Wang et al., 2025). Moreover, the consumption of cultural content—whether through in-



person interaction or pre-visit exposure via digital and traditional media—can evoke mental imagery and emotional anticipation, fostering fascination even before physical travel occurs (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2015; Koo et al., 2016).

Thus, Culture not only informs potential tourists about a destination's content but also serves as a psychological trigger that can evoke fascination and reinforce the intention to visit (Pessoa et al., 2022). It becomes a bridge between a place's structural attributes and potential tourists' cognitive and affective responses. Therefore, we hypothesise:

H1. Culture positively influences Destination Fascination

Expectation refers to an individual's belief and anticipation about how a product or service is likely to perform in the future (Higgs et al., 2005). In the context of tourism, expectations are shaped by prior experiences—personal or vicarious—and by cognitive associations with similar settings or narratives (Evangelidis & Osselaer, 2018). Within the framework of Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1995), expectations play a critical role in activating involuntary attention before the experience occurs. That is, pre-formed expectations may generate mental imagery and emotional anticipation that can simulate restorative potential. Tourists' expectations, thus, not only influence satisfaction and post-consumption behaviours (e.g., recommendations and intentions to repurchase) (Chiu et al., 2016), but may also trigger fascination in anticipation of the destination's environment. Since fascination is a core mechanism in ART for cognitive restoration, and given that Destination Fascination has been shown to increase the intention to (re)visit (Pessoa et al., 2022), we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. Expectation positively influences Destination Fascination.

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM) refers to online reviews and user-generated content shared on digital platforms, offering perspectives on products, services, and destinations from the perspectives of former consumers (Li et al., 2021). In the tourism context, E-WoM serves as a rich source of narratives and sensory cues—such as photos, testimonials, and ratings—that shape tourists' pre-travel perceptions (Soares et al., 2025). According to the Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1995), fascination is elicited by stimuli that capture involuntary attention and promote cognitive restoration. E-WoM may simulate this effect before the experience, providing vivid, emotionally charged content that enables individuals to project themselves into restorative scenarios mentally.

In this sense, E-WoM contributes to the formation of destination imagery with potential restorative attributes, helping prospective tourists identify places that evoke a sense of "being away" or enable mental escape—core components of ART (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Particularly in the pre-travel phase, E-WoM plays a crucial role in shaping expectations, guiding decision-making, and sparking fascination through indirect exposure to cultural, aesthetic, and emotional cues (Cao et al., 2014; Cox et al., 2009). Given its influence on perception and intention to visit (Setiawan et al., 2021) and its capacity to evoke fascination-compatible imagery, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3. Electronic Word of Mouth positively influences Destination Fascination.

Information Search is one of the primary steps in the decision-making process for a tourist destination (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). Information Search can occur before travelling to support vacation planning and destination choice, and throughout the trip to verify information or adapt the itinerary (Kah & Lee, 2015). From the perspective of Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1995), the act of searching for information is crucial for exposing individuals to stimuli that may evoke fascination, a key component of restorative experiences. Furthermore, the search can be internal, based on personal memories or those of acquaintances, or external, such as travel guides, maps, government websites, search engines, and social media (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). Information Search behaviour can be conceptualised as an ongoing process in which tourists obtain information during the trip and adjust their plans accordingly. Thus, travellers seeking tourism-related information before their trip tend to continue searching for information during the journey (Kah & Lee, 2015; Supryadi et al., 2022). For tourists to consolidate the Information Search they have collected and assess whether it meets their real needs, the search is seen as a process that evolves continuously, in which travellers use different information sources to plan their trips, thereby facilitating decision-making. Therefore, we elaborated the following hypothesis:

H4. Information Search positively influences Destination Fascination.

2.3 Travel Intention and Destination Fascination

An individual's intention to visit a destination is shaped by assumptions based on the information they have acquired about that location. The intention to visit reflects the likelihood that a tourist will travel to a given destination (Whang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2025), and it can also be viewed as the final act in a complex process of destination choice (Mohsin, 2005). This process involves evaluating a wide range of competing attributes, making the decision increasingly intricate (Lindblom et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2022). Previous literature identifies several antecedents of travel intention, such as destination image, attitude, place attachment, and



familiarity (Hosany et al., 2019); however, no study has directly examined the specific effect of Destination Fascination on travel intention.

Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1995) offers a valuable lens for understanding this relationship. According to ART, fascination is a key element in environments that promote mental restoration by engaging involuntary attention. When a destination evokes fascination, it mentally transports individuals away from routine and cognitive fatigue, fostering positive emotional states and psychological restoration. These restorative properties contribute to a stronger emotional connection with the destination and may increase the likelihood of behavioural intentions, such as visitation.

Moreover, the decision-making process in tourism is not linear, but dynamic and continuous, involving successive evaluations influenced by both internal (e.g., motivation, memories) and external (e.g., social influences) factors (Andrades et al., 2015; Vila-Lopez et al., 2024). Traditional decision models—including the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Push and Pull theory, and Choice-Set model—focus on these variables (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005), yet often overlook the psychological and emotional mechanisms central to ART, such as mental restoration and recovery from attentional fatigue.

Sirakaya and Woodside (2005) argue that many tourism models stem from marketing paradigms centred on product purchases, which fail to capture the distinct experiential nature of tourism experiences. While perceived destination image has been extensively used as a predictor of travel intention with positive results (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2013; Jalilvand et al., 2012; Whang et al., 2016; Li et al., 2024), Wang et al. (2019) suggest that fascination itself can be viewed as an essential component of that image.

Therefore, we propose that fascination—by engaging involuntary attention and simulating restorative experiences even before travel—acts as a psychological bridge between perception and behavioural intention. According to Liu et al. (2017), fascination is a multidimensional construct composed of mystique, friendliness, attractiveness, richness, uniqueness, and fitness—attributes aligned with the experience of restorative environments. Since fascination arises from environmental stimuli that capture attention effortlessly, it has the potential to increase the likelihood of visiting a destination. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5. Destination Fascination positively influences the intention to visit a destination.

3. Methodology

We developed the study using a descriptive investigation and a quantitative approach. We used the survey method for data collection, which made it possible to obtain opinions and measure the attitudes of the individual (tourists who have not yet visited the tourist destination). We calculated the ideal sample size using G*Power, resulting in a minimum of 206 participants. The collection was conducted in November 2021, and we obtained 352 responses to the questionnaire, which was made available via Google Forms. Links were sent by email and WhatsApp to potential respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 53 prepared closed questions based on scales adapted from previous studies (Table 1).

Table 1. Constructs, Authors and Questionnaire Questions

Constructs	Questions
Culture Westjohn <i>et al.</i> (2009)	C1 - I like to dive into different cultural environments.
	C2 - I like to receive news from all over the world.
	C3 - World issues worry me a lot.
	C4 - When I make an important decision, I look for information from a diverse set of sources.
	C5 - I like to have contact with people from different cultures.
Expectation Miller, Kahn and Luce (2008)	E1 - I would like to travel to this location.
	E2 - I am looking forward to travelling to this location.
	E3 - It will be fun to travel to this location.
E-WoM Zarrad and Debabi (2015)	BB1 - I often read other tourists' online travel reviews to see which destinations make a good impression on others.
	BB2 - To make sure I choose the right destination (like this location), I often read online travel reviews from other tourists.
	BB3 - I often consult online travel reviews from other tourists to help them choose an attractive destination (like this location).
	BB4 - I often collect online travel review information from tourists before travelling to a certain destination (like this location).
	BB5 - If I don't read tourists' online travel reviews when I travel to a destination (like this location) I worry about my choices.
	BB6 - When I travel to a destination (like this location), online travel reviews from tourists make me more confident to travel to the destination.
Information Search Noble, Griffith and Adjei (2006)	BI1 - I usually look for information about places to travel.
	BI2 - I spend a lot of time looking for information about places to travel before making a purchase.
	BI3 - I like to have a lot of information before deciding where I'm going to travel.
	BI4 - I usually look for information about the place before going.
DestinationFascination	Mystique M1 - My curiosity is aroused when I think about visiting this place.



Liu <i>et al.</i> (2017)		M2 - I believe this location has items and things worth exploring.
		M3 - I believe this place has mystery.
		M4 - I believe this place offers different experiences from my daily life.
		M5 - I believe that this place offers space and attractions that are worth exploring.
		Richness
	R2 - I believe that this place offers several leisure activities.	
	R3 - I believe that this place provides me with different sensory experiences.	
	R4 - I believe I would be bored when I was in this place.	
	R5 - I believe that in this place I would find spaces and things that are worth enjoying.	
	Attractiveness	A1 - I believe that in this place my mood will change.
		A2 - I believe that the sensory experiences offered at this location appeal to me.
		A3 - I believe this place would help me to perceive good feelings.
		A4 - I believe I would like to stay longer at this location.
		A5 - I believe this place offers unique experiences.
	Uniqueness	U1 - I believe this place has a unique style.
		U2 - I believe this place looks visually different from the others.
		U3 - I believe this place is different from the others.
		U4 - I believe that this place has typical characteristics of the region.
		U5 - I believe this place has special themed areas.
		U6 - I believe this place can be related to my life experiences.
	Fitness	FT1 - I believe the atmosphere in this place has the style I like.
		FT2 - I believe this location really reflects parts of my personal style.
		FT3 - I believe this place reflects my true self.
FT4 - I believe that visiting this place can represent how I want to be.		
Friendliness	FR1 - I believe that the local population supports the development of tourism in this place.	
	FR2 - I believe that around these places there are hospitable and friendly local residents.	
	FR3 - I believe this place has kind and welcoming staff.	
	FR4 - I believe that the service facilities at this location can satisfy my needs.	
	FR5 - I believe this location offers attractive tourism services.	
Intention to Visit George (2010); Jalilvand <i>et al.</i> (2012); Whang, Yong and Ko (2016); Woosnam <i>et al.</i> (2015)	IV1 - I predict that I will visit this place in the future.	
	IV2 - I would visit this place instead of any other tourist destination.	
	IV3 - If everything goes as I planned, I intend to visit this place in the future.	
	IV4 - I am willing to visit this place.	
	IV5 - I am motivated to save money to visit this place.	

Regarding the data analysis stage, we adopted the following procedures: missing value analysis - incomplete data, which was not the case in this study because all the participants answered all the questions; Analysis of univariate outliers - according to Hair *et al.* (2007), in large samples, with a quantity greater than 80, observations in which the standardised values exceed 3 to 4 standard deviations should be removed. Based on these definitions, four respondents were selected from the sample; multivariate outliers were identified using the Mahalanobis D2 distance, which analyses observations that are furthest from the centroid. Since outliers are values that deviate from the pattern observed in the collected data, they ultimately fail to represent the population studied (Triola, 2012). According to the analyses, it was not necessary to remove any respondents.

Regarding normality, the results indicated that the data are non-normal, necessitating the use of the PLS-SEM methodology within Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), as the CB-SEM methodology requires normal data (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach was applied using SmartPLS 3.0, with the data split into two orders. We followed the convergent and discriminant validity criteria suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and the values indicated by Hair *et al.* (2019) for hypothesis testing and the predictive capacity of the model. The criteria used are defined below.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) is a causal-predictive approach to SEM that emphasises prediction in estimating statistical models whose structures are designed to provide causal explanations (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2017). Initially, we analysed the convergent and discriminant validity of each construct using the procedures proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), examining the factor loadings, which must exceed 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). According to Fornell & Larcker (1981), composite reliability (CR) is satisfactory when it exceeds 0.7, and average variance extracted (AVE) is satisfactory when it exceeds 0.5, both of which are indices of convergent validity.

For discriminant validity, Fornell & Larcker (1981) indicate that it is achieved when the variance extracted from each construct is greater than the variances shared (square correlations) with other constructs. In addition, to recognise the fit of the model, the Standardised Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) was used, which must have a value lower than 0.8, and the minimum discrepancy indicator per degree of freedom (CMIN/DF), which must have a value lower than 5 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, we included the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) test (Henseler *et al.*, 2015; Hair *et al.*, 2017). According to Henseler *et al.* (2015), HTMT values should ideally be less than 0.90 for conceptually distinct constructs.



After validating the constructs, we analysed the hypothesis tests and the model's predictive capacity. For hypothesis tests, $p < 0.05$ was considered (Hair et al., 2019). For the prediction of the model, f^2 was used, which must have a value greater than 0.02, Q^2 , which must have a value greater than 0.025, and R^2 , which must have a value above 0.10 (Hair et al., 2019). For Cohen (1988), when applied to the social and behavioural sciences, the coefficients of determination are classified as small ($R^2 = 2\%$), medium ($R^2 = 13\%$), and significant ($R^2 = 26\%$). Also, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) must be less than 5.

4. Results

We start this section with a descriptive analysis of the collected data (Table 2). After treatment, our final sample consisted of 348 participants. Regarding gender, 26.4% of the respondents identify as male, and 73.6% as female. The average age was around 42 years. As for educational attainment, 3.4% have an elementary or high school education, 10.6% have incomplete higher education, and 86% have completed higher education. Regarding the respondents' occupation, 6% neither study nor work, 31.6% work, 9.5% study, and 52.9% study and work. Regarding the participation in the composition of the respondents' monthly income, 4.6% answered that they rely only on their income, 23.3% responded that there is only one person who contributes to their family income, 48.3% have the help of 2 more people, and 23.9% have help from 3 or more people in their family income. Finally, considering the gross family income, 11.5% receive up to BRL 4,500.00, 29.7% receive between BRL 4,501.00 and BRL 10,000.00, and 58.9% receive more than BRL 10,000.00.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Participants

Variable	Frequency	%
Total sample	348	100
Gender		
Male	92	26,4
Female	256	73,6
Age		
Average	42,26	-
Education level		
Complete primary education	4	1,1
Incomplete high school	0	0
Complete high school	8	2,3
Incomplete higher education	37	10,6
Complete higher education	66	19,0
Postgraduate	233	67,0
Occupation		
Do not study or work	21	6,0
Just work	110	31,6
Just study	33	9,5
Study and work	184	52,9
Number of people living together		
None - I live alone	33	9,5
Me and 1 other person	83	23,9
Me and 2 other people	88	25,3
Me and 3 other people	98	28,2
Me and 4 other people	32	9,2
Me and 5 other people	11	3,2
Me and 6 other people	3	0,9
Me and 7 or more people	0	0,0
Number of people with income		
Nobody	16	4,6
1 person	81	23,3
2 people	168	48,3
3 people	56	16,1
4 people	25	7,2
5 or more people	2	0,6
Gross income		
Up to BRL 1,045.00	6	1,7
Between BRL 1,045.00 and BRL 2,000.00	3	0,9
Between BRL 2,000.00 and BRL 3,000.00	17	4,9
Between BRL 3,001.00 and BRL 4,500.00	14	4,0
Between BRL 4,501.00 and BRL 6,000.00	35	10,1
Between BRL 6,001.00 and BRL 7,500.00	18	5,2
Between BRL 7,501.00 and BRL 10,000.00	50	14,4
Between BRL 10,001.00 and BRL 15,000.00	68	19,5
Between BRL 15,001.00 and BRL 20,000.00	42	12,1
More than BRL 20,000.00	95	27,3

The results section of a research paper tells the reader what you found, while the discussion section tells the reader what your findings mean. The results section should present the facts in an academic and unbiased manner, avoiding any attempt at analyzing or interpreting the data. Think of the results section as setting the stage for the discussion section by making all the necessary information known to the reader (Amon, 2022).



4.1 Structural Equation Model

In this second part, we present the results of the structural equation modelling. The Attractiveness construct was removed from Destination Fascination because it had a low Cronbach's Alpha (0.585) and a discriminant validity problem with the Richness construct. Variables R4, FR2, U5, U6, and M3 were also removed from the model because they had low factorial loading. The Mystique and the Richness constructs present problems of convergent validity, with Cronbach's Alpha below 0.7 and AVE below 0.5. However, we decided to retain the constructs because the CR was above 0.7, enabling a more comprehensive analysis of the model. There was no problem with discriminant validity. In this way, we used the Destination Fascination construct as a second-order factor, composed of the dimensions Mystique, Richness, Fitness, Uniqueness, and Friendliness. Table 3 presents the model's convergent and discriminant validity values. The model presented the following fit values: SRMR (0.077) and CMIN/DF (2.90).

Table 3. Convergent and Discriminating Validity Values

	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	EWM	IS	CUL	DF	EXP	FT	FR	IV	M	R	U
EWM	0.887	0.918	0.692	0.832										
IS	0.857	0.903	0.700	0.713	0.836									
CUL	0.706	0.819	0.533	0.258	0.206	0.730								
FD	0.843	0.811	0.4634	0.212	0.228	0.469	0.6807							
EXP	0.533	0.760	0.516	0.216	0.184	0.382	0.516	0.718						
FT	0.843	0.895	0.682	0.225	0.269	0.334	0.688	0.360	0.826					
FR	0.781	0.860	0.607	0.218	0.166	0.329	0.687	0.442	0.338	0.779				
IV	0.835	0.889	0.668	0.247	0.167	0.246	0.319	0.462	0.276	0.192	0.817			
M	0.627	0.781	0.473	0.038	0.102	0.311	0.686	0.341	0.271	0.275	0.254	0.688		
R	0.516	0.733	0.407	0.061	0.064	0.308	0.692	0.305	0.378	0.359	0.197	0.501	0.638	
U	0.771	0.856	0.604	0.116	0.115	0.299	0.636	0.274	0.201	0.283	0.149	0.444	0.271	0.777

CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; EWM = Electronic Word of Mouth; IS = Information Search; CUL = Culture; DF = Destination Fascination; EXP = Expectation; FT = Fitness; FR = Friendliness; IV = Intention to Visit; M = Mystique; R = Richness; U = Uniqueness.

We also performed the HTMT test. Table 4 presents the model's discriminant validity values. We emphasise that values greater than 1 for the DF variable are normal, as it is a second-order construct (Hair et al, 2017).

Table 4. HTMT Test for Discriminat

	EWM	IS	CUL	DF	EXP	FT	FR	IV	M	R	U
EWM											
IS	0.819										
CUL	0.324	0.262									
FD	0.260	0.277	0.612								
EXP	0.311	0.259	0.596	0.750							
FT	0.261	0.317	0.434	0.786	0.512						
FR	0.260	0.207	0.450	0.830	0.650	0.412					
IV	0.270	0.190	0.297	0.368	0.700	0.320	0.233				
M	0.140	0.164	0.482	0.969	0.605	0.365	0.381	0.346			
R	0.107	0.122	0.506	1.072	0.588	0.568	0.574	0.294	0.859		
U	0.141	0.162	0.409	0.806	0.432	0.246	0.366	0.180	0.634	0.423	

EWM = Electronic Word of Mouth; IS = Information Search; CUL = Culture; DF = Destination Fascination; EXP = Expectation; FT = Fitness; FR = Friendliness; IV = Intention to Visit; M = Mystique; R = Richness; U = Uniqueness.

After the convergent and discriminant validity analyses, we proceeded to the hypothesis testing and predictive analysis of the model (see Table 5). The results showed that the Culture and Expectation antecedents positively influence Destination Fascination, which, in turn, influences the Intention to Visit a tourist destination. For all significant relationships, there was predictive validity, as indicated by f^2 values greater than 0.02, R^2 values greater than 0.02, and Q^2 values greater than 0.



Table 5. Hypothesis Test

HYPOTHESIS TEST										
	f ²	VIF	Original sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P value	R ² adjusted	Q ²	Hypothesis
EWM > DF	0,001	2,049	-0,035	-0.032	0,065	0,535	0,593	0,366	0,09	Rejected
IS > DF	0,011	1,996	0,118	0.117	0,068	1,741	0,082			Rejected
CUL > DF	0,125	1,212	0,309	0.313	0,048	6,458	0			Accepted
EXP > DF	0,211	1,184	0,401	0.401	0,052	7,631	0			Accepted
DF > IV	0,113	1	0,318	0.327	0,058	5,476	0	0,099	0,063	Accepted

EWM = Electronic Word of Mouth; IS = Information Search; CUL = Culture; EXP = Expectation; DF = Destination Fascination; IV = Intention to Visit.

5. Discussion

We begin the discussion by analysing Hypothesis H1, which posits that Culture positively influences Destination Fascination—an effect confirmed by our results. H1 supports the idea that a tourist's cultural interests can lead them to perceive a destination as fascinating. Many tourists travel to distant places specifically to experience or learn about the Culture (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2015; Richards, 2018), which is also a known driver of travel intention and destination choice (Andrades et al., 2015; Chen & Gursoy, 2000). Tourism organisations should, therefore, prioritise marketing cultural attractions and sharing information about a destination's Culture before and during travel (Pessoa et al., 2022). Preserving cultural heritage also plays a crucial role in shaping a destination's image and perceived authenticity (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015). Our findings are supported by Kusumawati et al. (2022), who found that cultural authenticity and uniqueness influence tourist decisions, aligning with the richness and uniqueness dimensions of fascination.

Hypothesis H2, which suggests that tourist Expectation positively influences Destination Fascination, was also supported. Prior studies suggest that satisfaction can be influenced by whether expectations are met (Andrades et al., 2015; Higgs et al., 2005). Our findings extend this by showing that expectations alone—formed via digital content, storytelling, or others' experiences—can spark fascination, even in the absence of direct experience (Pessoa et al., 2022). Tourism organisations should thus create experiences and communications that stimulate expectations aligned with the destination's identity. This content aligns with Guo et al. (2023), who found that destination advertising enhances mental imagery and emotional anticipation, thereby reinforcing fascination and the intention to visit.

Hypothesis H3, which proposed that Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM) positively influences Destination Fascination, was rejected. Although studies have shown E-WoM can affect intention to visit (Jalilvand et al., 2012; Setiawan et al., 2021), our findings suggest it does not directly trigger fascination. This may be due to E-WoM's more informative and less immersive nature compared to traditional WoM. E-WoM is typically used in the pre-travel phase and tends to influence service choices (e.g., restaurants, hotels) rather than destination fascination itself (Cao et al., 2014). Moreover, its credibility may be lower when the content comes from anonymous sources (Cox et al., 2009; Hernández-Méndez et al., 2013), especially if the tourist has already decided on a destination. Alhawamdeh et al. (2023) also note that E-WoM's impact may depend on interactions with other factors, such as digital content or service quality, supporting the idea that fascination requires more affective and immersive stimuli.

Hypothesis H4, which tested whether Information Search positively influences Destination Fascination, was also rejected. While information search is a key stage in the decision-making process (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012; Kah & Lee, 2015) and helps reduce perceived risk (Chen & Gursoy, 2000; Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005), our findings indicate that it does not directly contribute to fascination. Like E-WoM, information search occurs in various travel phases and comes from diverse sources, whose credibility may vary (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). Moreover, highly educated tourists may be more sceptical of online sources (Kah & Lee, 2015). Eman and Refaie (2023) reinforce this, showing that the presentation of information—especially on visually driven platforms like Instagram—may be more important for fascination than the act of searching itself.

Pessoa et al. (2022) offer interesting insights: Culture was mentioned as a key antecedent by tourism professionals and frequent travellers, but not by marketers; E-WoM was noted mainly by marketers; and Information Search was valued by both frequent travellers and marketers, but not by tourism professionals. However, both professional groups recognised the expectation. These contrasts highlight the need for better alignment between marketing and tourism professionals, especially in Brazil, to ensure strategies reflect effective fascination drivers.



From a practical perspective, marketing and tourism professionals should promote cultural content through digital channels to enhance exposure to cultural elements before the trip (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2015; Koo et al., 2016). Tour packages can emphasise cultural immersion by including local interactions and authentic experiences. Managing tourist expectations is equally important. Unrealistic expectations—such as those shaped by entertainment media—can result in dissatisfaction. Managing them helps avoid frustration and supports future behaviours, such as repurchase or referrals (Evangelidis & Osselaer, 2018). Expectation also influences how tourists engage with and interpret E-WoM (Li et al., 2021).

Despite the lack of a direct link between E-WoM and fascination, prior research indicates that both WoM and E-WoM shape perceived destination image, especially among less experienced tourists (Chen & Gursoy, 2000), and influence culturally motivated travel (Koo et al., 2016). Tourism companies should monitor and moderate user reviews, as they offer valuable feedback and may influence decisions related to services like hotels or travel agencies—even if they do not directly spark interest.

Similarly, although Information Search did not influence fascination in our model, it remains an important tool for travel personalisation (Hernandez-Méndez et al., 2013). Agencies should be mindful of tourists' information overload and potential dissonance during travel. Kah and Lee (2015) found that searching for information during a trip—especially online—can lead to last-minute changes in plans, which may disrupt the overall experience. We suggest that the abundance and format of information, rather than the act of searching itself, may affect the tourist's cognitive processing and ultimately, the travel experience.

6. Conclusions

Our paper aimed to identify the antecedents of Destination Fascination and its influence on the intention to visit. The analysed antecedent variables were defined by Culture, Expectation, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Information Search. The results support the H1 and H2 hypotheses that the Culture and Expectation constructs positively influence Destination Fascination, but reject the influence of e-WoM and Information Search, as stated in H3 and H4, respectively. Hypothesis H5, that Destination Fascination positively influences the intention to visit a destination, was also supported.

These findings are consistent with emerging perspectives in recent tourism literature. For instance, Kusumawati et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of cultural authenticity in shaping tourist engagement, while Guo et al. (2023) highlight the impact of destination advertising on shaping expectations and emotional connections. Eman and Refaie (2023) further demonstrate that social media—particularly Instagram—can elevate destination desirability through visually appealing content, aligning with our view that fascination can be triggered before travel occurs. Although our findings did not support a significant role for E-WoM or general information search in forming fascination, Alhawamdeh et al. (2023) and Setiawan et al. (2021) have shown that these constructs can influence trust, satisfaction, and destination image in complementary contexts.

6.1 Managerial Contributions

Tourism professionals can collect and disseminate more information about the Culture of available destinations when carrying out their sales activities. Regarding the cultural aspect, tourism packages can include more cultural activities in the suggested itinerary for tourists. Therefore, tourism agencies can utilise technological resources to disseminate information about a destination's Culture, thereby influencing the intention to visit. Additionally, technological resources can aid tourism agencies in shaping expectations about a destination, as the consumption of online content, storytelling, and third-party experiences helps build these expectations. The investment by agencies is crucial to ensure that tourists have realistic expectations grounded in real travel experiences, thereby avoiding the frustrations and disappointments that arise when expectations do not align with the destination's reality.

We recommend taking actions to create expectations among tourists and increase their contact with local Culture, given that our study shows these antecedents affect Destination Fascination. Although E-WoM and information search did not positively influence destination fascination, these variables can still affect consumption and decisions regarding other tourist products and services. Therefore, we suggest that tourism professionals, if possible, moderate their customers' e-WoM activities and encourage them to produce WOM for their relatives. Additionally, the agency must play an active role in providing tourists with travel-related information and serve as a reliable source. It is necessary to develop strategies to moderate the Destination Fascination antecedents, as perceiving a destination as fascinating increases the intention to visit.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

Our study contributes to understanding how fascination operates as a psychological bridge between destination attributes and travel intention, reinforcing Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (1995). It provides empirical support for the idea that fascination is not solely experience-based, but can also emerge from pre-visit perceptions and affective reactions to cultural and promotional cues.



We advance our understanding of Destination Fascination as a concept by identifying and testing the variables that precede it and the variables that mediate its impact on the intention to visit. The results of our study present the perspective of tourists who have never visited the destination before. These results support the idea that Destination Fascination can occur even before a person has physically visited the destination, that is, even before travelling to it.

We also provide a data collection instrument that can be adapted and used as a basis for future studies. In addition, it is essential to note that, since destination fascination is a multidimensional construct, its definition still requires refinement. The Attractiveness construct was removed from this research, and Wang et al. (2019) also reported problems with discriminant validity among the constructs Uniqueness, Attractiveness, and Richness. This demonstrates that the variables that make up the destination fascination are closely related. However, the effect of each variable still needs to be better explored.

6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Among our study limitations, we note the lack of distinction between the possible sources of WoM and Information Search, since information or opinions acquired online may be perceived as less credible and therefore have less impact on tourists' decisions or perceptions. Furthermore, WoM content, such as a complaint, which is more common on the internet, can be discarded by tourists because, although negative, it does not provide constructive information for elaborating or adjusting a travel plan.

We encourage future research to examine interaction effects, such as the interplay between expectation and media exposure, or the mediating role of trust in the impact of E-WoM on fascination. A multidimensional analysis of fascination components, possibly incorporating real-time user-generated content and virtual experiences, could also help refine the model.

Complementary future studies may examine whether there is a difference in the effects of WoM and E-WoM on the perception of a destination as fascinating, as well as whether there is a difference in the effect on Destination Fascination perception between online and other sources of information. Additionally, as a suggestion for future studies using WoM as a Destination Fascination antecedent variable, it would be beneficial to examine whether having already chosen a destination, versus not, will differently impact fascination and the intention to visit. Finally, we emphasise that the Attractiveness dimension cannot be tested. This way, we suggest that other researchers examine this construct more closely and, if necessary, develop a new scale.

Credit author statement

All authors have contributed equally. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest: None.

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