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**VISIT INTENTION TO EMERGING DESTINATIONS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA  
MARKETING PROMOTION: THE CASE OF SAUDI ARABIA**

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PhD

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**Visit Intention to Emerging Destinations through Social Media Marketing  
Promotion: The Case of Saudi Arabia**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy**

**June 2021**

## **CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY**

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**Fahad Mohammed A ALHUQBANI**

## **Abstract**

The rapid occurrence of emerging destinations requires destination management organizations (DMO) to use various channels to identify and promote these destinations to tourists. A key barrier to visiting new destinations is the image of emerging destinations as places where tourists lack sufficient information and perception of new destinations. DMOs are attempting to use all channels to promote tourist destinations, such as social media. With a plethora of information sources and the increase of competitiveness among destinations via social media platforms, promoting emerging destinations becomes difficult. Specifically, in finding credible sources that contribute to influencing the building of a destination image and behavioral intention to visit emerging tourism destinations. One of the factors that could influence the credibility of DMOs promotion via social media is by providing informative content. Another factor that plays a role in promoting tourism destinations that influence the credibility is the online travel community. The online travel community's role in endorsing the information provided by DMOs about emerging tourist destinations through social media could influence the sources' credibility.

Based on destination image formation and dual process theory, this study explores how informativeness and online travel community endorsement affect information credibility of DMO through destination image which in turn affects emerging destination visit intention. 646 questionnaires were collected through online survey and used for data analysis. The target samples were from selected countries that applied for tourist visas. The study conducted confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and multi-group analysis to test hypotheses through SPSS and AMOS. This study's results show that 7 out of 8 hypotheses are supported. "informativeness" "online travel community endorsement" significantly affects "information credibility." Also, the findings show "information credibility" significantly affects "cognitive

image,” “affective image,” and “behavioral intention.” Moreover, “cognitive image” significantly affects “affective image” and “behavioral intention.” Finally, the results revealed that “affective image” does not affect “behavioral intention.” Furthermore, the findings showed that the model could explain 55.6 percent of behavioral intention to visit emerging tourism destinations. The findings also indicated that participants using Twitter and percipients using different platforms to search for emerging destinations have partially influenced the model. Finally, this study adds a model that can evaluate the impact of these factors on promoting emerging destinations. It contributes to the understanding of the factors influencing emerging destinations’ images through social media platforms and the influence on tourists’ intentions to visit emerging destinations.

**Keywords**

DMO, Emerging Destinations, Endorsement, Online Travel Community, Information Credibility, Informativeness, Behavioral Intention, Affective Image, Cognitive Image, Saudi Arabia.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The tourism industry is one of the major industries across the world. The importance of this industry for many countries is increasing because when the growth rates in tourism increase, the economic development of a country increases as well (Lončarić, Bašan, & Marković, 2013). There are many new trends and rapid changes in tourism demands, and the rapid appearance of emerging destinations is attracting tourists, such as the appearance of newly developed Islands or developing historical attractions in areas that are less known to tourists. Emerging destinations have likewise gained importance in terms of differentiation with traditional tourist destinations and an increase in international arrivals (Martí & Javier, 2011). One of the key barriers to visiting new destinations is the ambiguous image of emerging tourism destinations as places where tourists lack sufficient information to develop, thus, they may become hesitant in visiting such destinations (Pike, Gentle, Kelly, & Beatson, 2018). Therefore, the main goal for marketing emerging destinations is to provide enough knowledge to potential visitors about the destinations and mitigate the lack of awareness or negative perceptions (Pike et al., 2018).

As tourists are looking for new experiences and new destinations, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) would need to meet tourists' demands by developing and promoting new destinations. (Rewtrakunphaiboon, 2009). DMOs attempt to reach targeted audiences and deliver their visions of tourism destinations to the global market by utilizing the existence of new media through websites, podcasts, and blogs because of their many benefits, especially for marketing emerging tourism destinations (Rein & Shields, 2009). DMOs, as official information sources, provide information about destinations through various advertising media, whether traditional media, such as newspapers; online media, such as websites; and social media, such as Twitter

(Morosan, 2014). Internet marketing has gained importance in marketing tourism because it is considered a useful tool with many advantages, such as accessibility, convenience, interactive communication, and unlimited services (Kim, Yuan, Goh, & Antun, 2009). Therefore, it is an efficient marketing tool for DMOs to promote their destinations. For instance, social media platforms, which are internet-based applications, contribute to increasing destination competitiveness through marketing tourist destinations (Pike et al., 2018).

However, the development of marketing strategies and the spread of information through social media would require further understanding of the influence of social media sources because it can prompt the travelers' decision-making process (Jalilvand et al., 2012). A key challenge for emerging destinations is marketing and introducing emerging destinations to tourists where knowledge of the destination's features is either limited or nonexistent (UNWTO & ETC, 2011). Especially in light of the increasing number of information sources, individuals are interested in the credibility of the sources' information (Hossain, Han, & Kim, 2017; Gunawan & Huarng, 2015). With an increase of online sources, tourists would need to search for credible information sources to find information, especially with regards to lesser-known destinations, such as emerging destinations. Therefore, DMOs play a role in introducing tourist destinations to potential tourists via promotion campaigns online, such as official websites and social media, which could eventually help form destination image and influence tourist behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations. The following part will further discuss the promotion of emerging destinations.

### **1.1.1 Emerging Destinations**

Esu and Ebitu (2010) conceptualized emerging tourist destinations as “a geopolitical area where tourism has just been accepted as a major socio-economic development tool and where the community has expressed willingness to leverage the tourism potentials to enhance their socio-



economic wellbeing” (p.21). Besides, they add that emerging destinations are based on the government’s perception and the community of accepting this new tourist destination to improve the country’s economy. Promoting emerging destinations will contribute to the development of potential competitive advantages, which leads to a unique trajectory in international tourist maps (Martí & Javier, 2011). However, building and promoting a tourism destination brand would not be an easy task (Morgan & Pritchard, 2005), especially if the emerging destination is located in the middle of well-known competitive destinations.

With the development of online marketing, DMOs have realized the importance of online advertisements about destinations because this helps introduce, market, and brand tourist destinations with less effort (Qi, Law, & Buhalis, 2008). Additionally, tourists consider looking for information highly important when they select destinations. Therefore, providing comprehensive information for tourists is necessary, especially through the Internet, given that tourists have recently become dependent on the Internet to search for information about destinations (Lončarić et al., 2013; Sun, Law, Luk, & Fong, 2017). Tourists are also using online information to search for travel information when they plan their trips because of the interactivity and ease of use (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013a). Therefore, with the frequent use of social media platforms, tourism organizations started commonly using social media (e.g., Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook), (Dwivedi, Yadav, & Venkatesh, 2011). Also, the tourism organizations' websites and social media are keys to the process of forming the image of tourist destinations (Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, & Anaya-Sánchez, 2017).

In the presence of information on social media platforms, different factors can influence tourists’ decisions. Thus, DMOs must choose appropriate marketing strategies to promote tourist destinations on social media platforms (Morosan, 2014). One of the key issues is the information

credibility. Information credibility may vary because the online tourism information space is extensive, including information from different stakeholders at the destinations, such as DMOs, hotels, airlines, and many others (Mack, Blose, & Pan, 2008). The spread of massive information, which could include false information on the internet, would make travelers face difficulties in finding trustful information (Wang, Chan, Leong, Ngai, & Au, 2016). Such scope makes controlling information difficult. Choosing unfamiliar destinations, such as emerging tourist destinations, is also difficult for tourists who lack information and experience about these destinations (Wood-side & Lysonski, 1989 as cited in Tham, Croy, & Mair, 2013).

Compared with well-known destinations with sufficient information, emerging destinations would need to provide a credible source of information since there is a lack of information that requires a source that can provide trustful information and provide an accurate image of tourist destinations online. The emergence of newly emerging tourist destinations would require implementing management strategies that meet with the development of information technology and ensure tourist destinations' sustainability (Foris, Florescu, Foris, Barabas, 2020). Understanding the impact on tourist intentions is important because such behavior plays a significant role in selecting travel destinations (Chu & Luckanavanich, 2018). To better understand tourists' behavioral intention toward emerging destinations, further research in knowing the factors influencing the destination image and behavioral intention are imperative because they help tourists gain perceptions of a place through their knowledge of destination attributes (Pike & Page, 2014 as cited by Pike, Gentle, Kelly, & Beatson, 2018).

Several countries are working on developing and promoting tourist destinations, such as Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is working to improve its economy through Vision 2030, which focuses on income diversity instead of relying on oil as a primary income for the country (Vision,

2030, n.d.). In Vision 2030, one of the sectors that the Saudi Arabian government wants to develop is tourism. Previous studies lack focusing on tourists' intention toward visiting newly emerging destinations in a country located in Middle East, such as emerging tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a major Islamic country because it has two holy mosques for Muslims, namely, the Holy Mosque in Makkah region and the Prophet's Mosque in the Al-Madinah region.

Given that Saudi Arabia is located in the Middle East, tourists might be misled by news related to political issues in the Middle East because these sources of information could describe and build the region's image through the news. These information sources may influence destination promotion. Besides, Saudi Arabia is surrounded by well-known tourist destinations, such as Dubai in the United Arabia of Emirates, Cairo in Egypt, and Amman in Jordan. Therefore, DMOs play a significant role in promoting and providing accurate information to tourists about tourist destinations. However, potential tourists may not consider the source credible enough to get information about emerging destination without checking the content provided and perceptions toward the source by other online users. The following part discusses challenges facing promoting emerging tourist destinations.

### **1.1.2 Challenges Facing Promoting Emerging Tourism Destinations Through Social Media**

One of the difficulties that tourists might face is to form a clear image of a tourist destination without actual visitations (Govers & Go, 2003). Therefore, information as a concept plays a significant role in understanding destination image and tourist choice (Molina, Gómez Rico, & Martín-Consuegra Navarro, 2010). Tourists would search for information about a tourist destination that has a positive image, thus, information sources can help them to form an image of a destination through information and information channels (Gartner, 1993). With the development of promotion channels, social networks have become essential for promoting tourist destinations

that are in weak positions on the tourism map, but have great potential because social networks can help in enhancing the image and the reputation of tourist destinations (Rodríguez Vázquez, Fernández, Armijos-Valdivieso, & Mahauad-Burneo, 2017).

Social media has changed the way in which tourists process information related to tourist destinations in terms of searching for information, sharing information, and deciding on visiting a tourist destination (Kim, Lee, Shin, Yang, 2017; Pan, Xiang, Law, & Fesenmaier, 2011). Furthermore, social media was found to be used by tourists before, during, and after holidays (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012). With the massive increase of information sources on social media, information source credibility becomes critical because of its impact on the message provided on social media (Cheung, Sia, Kuan, 2012). Therefore, DMOs play a significant role in providing information via creating a destination image, promoting, and positioning tourist destinations on tourism market maps for tourists (Lončarić et al., 2013). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2019) defined DMO as the entity organization that includes authorities, stakeholders, and professionals. Also, the UNWTO (2019) added that DMO facilitates tourism partnerships toward an objective collective vision about tourist destinations. The importance of DMOs in tourist destinations is to focus on enhancing tourism benefits (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). DMOs play a role in balancing the demand and supply from tourists on tourist destinations to utilize its resources (Pike & Page, 2014). DMOs are using various promotion methods to inform and encourage tourists to visit tourist destinations, including traditional and online promotions (Morrison, 2013). Also, DMOs utilized, as mentioned, the development of the Internet by providing online information about tourist destinations.

However, there are some challenges that could influence DMOs credibility as a source, and it could influence destination image and behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations. One

of these challenges is related to the content provided in social media. Creating content on social media about tourist destinations has become not exclusive to DMOs, such as tourists creating content to share their experience about tourist destinations (Fotis et al., 2012; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Tourists with a lack of experience of information about tourist destinations would require a cue of credibility to trust information (Tham et al., 2013). For emerging destinations, tourists might lack knowledge, experience, and information about tourist destinations, requiring DMOs to create content to introduce tourist destinations to tourists. With this amount of information provided on social media, accepting the provided information is not easy for travelers (Li & Suh, 2015), thus, the influence of how the content is informative enough to influence the source credibility on social media should be understood. Informativeness as a concept shows the ability to inform customers of product information (Ducoffe, 1996). Informative messages in advertisements would help enhance the effectiveness and the credibility of sponsors' messages (Earl & Pride, 1984). Previous studies likewise mentioned that informativeness in the message would enable customers to compare other products in e-commerce (Ahn, Ryu, & Han, 2004 as cited in Tien, Amaya Rivas, & Liao, 2019). With the increasing use of online information, informativeness in specific marketing messages was found to help increase customers' likelihood to consider the advertising messages (Louis, Sun, & Urcan, 2013).

In mobile marketing, Hossain et al. (2018) suggested the importance of building marketing credibility within informative content. The information's details would influence the message because customers like to receive advertisements and promotional messages about services or products (Fatima & Abbas, 2019). Previous literature indicated that users would accept informative advertising through social media (Logan, Bright, & Gangadharbatla, 2012, as cited in Hamouda, 2018). Previous studies have highlighted the influence of informativeness in

marketing, such as the influence of informativeness and credibility on attitudes towards advertisement (e.g., Arora & Agarwal, 2019; Pai, Liu, Kang, Dai, 2020), and the influence of E-word of mouth informativeness on E-word of mouth credibility (Bigne, Ruiz, Currás-Pérez, & Martí-Parreño, 2020).

For tourist destinations, informativeness of the content provided about tourists' destinations in social media would be significant, especially if this destination is relatively new in tourist destination maps. Informativeness contributes to persuading tourists towards information from online sources (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). Informativeness in the advertising content could influence the credibility of the source of information on social media. Previous studies are still lacking in investigating the influence of informativeness of the content on the credibility of source about newly emerging destinations, especially due to the lack of information and experience by tourists, making it challenging to build credible images for unknown destinations (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Social network sites are considered informational media by enabling users to share information, knowledge, and experiences (Tien et al., 2019). Previous literature pointed that several signs would indicate credibility in the messages provided via social media, such as the language used in the message and the topic related content provided by the source on social media and website (Mohd Shariff, 2020). Therefore, understanding the influence of informative messages on information credibility provided by DMOs on social media about tourist destinations is significant.

Previous literature indicated that DMOs are using different marketing strategies to attract tourists to destinations, such as marketing tourist destinations through endorsement from celebrities (Glover ,2009; Jolly, 2016; Chan, Lee, & Wong, 2018). Endorsements are forms of sponsorship, which could affect consumer behavior (Dean, 1999), and can be from any sponsor.

According to Daneshvary and Schwer (2000), advertisements' endorsement can be from either identifiable people, such as celebrities, or unidentifiable, such as customers. Previous studies have concentrated on the influence of endorsements on tourists through celebrities (Glover, 2009; Veen, 2009; Hakimi, Abedniya, & Zaeim, 2011; Chan, Ng, & Luk, 2013; Jolly & L, 2013).

With the increased use of online information, online communities have been considered important information sources and an effective marketing method (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). The online travel community contributes to branding through the Internet, such as social media (Dessart, Veloutsou., & Morgan-Thomas, 2015), making online community important in marketing strategy. Endorsers in social media share product information that contribute to creating links to the products (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2019). To promote tourist destinations, endorsers from the online travel community can be travelers with previous experiences or residents who share information about tourist destinations (Arsal, Backman, & Baldwin, 2008). Previous literature noted that tourists would search for credible information sources from agencies' websites and different sources about tourist destinations, such as residents or others from the online travel communities (Gulbahar & Yildirim, 2015). The online travel community would enable tourists to discover what others think about the facilities at tourist destinations (Agag & El-Masry, 2016). As endorsements were found in different fields to enhance brand images' credibility and influence corporate credibility (Kim, Wang, & Ahn, 2013), studies that focused on endorsements from unidentifiable individuals, such as locals or previous visitors influencing tourist destination marketing, are still lacking. Also, the role of the online travel community in endorsing information provided by DMOs about lesser-known destinations and influencing information credibility are still undiscovered.

Information credibility is considered to be crucial for consumers, and the online travel community could play a role in information credibility because they provide recommendations that can attract travellers (Shen & Yeh, 2017) such as foreign visitors would trust online travel community comments about tourist destinations (Kavoura & Stavrianea, 2015). Therefore, the online travel community could play a role in endorsing DMOs promoting tourist destinations, which could affect its credibility. As an example related to this study's case, Saudi Arabia has the highest number of active social media users in the Middle East (Albinahmed & Ahmed, 2017). Potential tourists might doubt the information provided by governmental organizations due to the biased or incorrect information about the region. Therefore, endorsements from the online travel community could affect the information credibility through the endorsement of messages from DMOs since online communities on social media can assist in future decision making (Chung & Buhalis, 2008).

Also, information credibility would help convince customers to accept advertising messages if the marketer can create credibility in their messages (Hossain et al., 2017). For new products or services, individuals would be concerned about the credibility of new products or services because it can impact their experiences (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000 as cited in Hanzaae & Taghipourian, 2012). A credible advertisement would grant consumers a good foundation of the message perception, however, credibility can be influenced by the suspicion that the message is manipulated, such as providing overly positive information (Hossain et al., 2018).

As DMOs are trying to utilize technology to promote tourist destinations, being a credible information source is significant because it helps enhance wise decision-making from people and stakeholders looking for tourism information (WTO as cited in Bulatović & Rajović, 2017). Thus, DMOs play a role in providing credible information about tourist destinations. Although



information sources on social media are assumed to be credible because they come from official accounts, the credibility of government agencies' accounts may be criticized, especially where there is a lack of information or relevant and updated information, which decreases the credibility of these accounts (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2014). Nevertheless, the online tourism information space is abundant in sources, which can affect the credibility and trustworthiness of the information, especially when promoting tourism online through blogs relies on trusting information sources (Mack et al., 2008). Besides, tourists might have an incorrect image of the region or country promoting emerging tourist destinations, which could require DMOs to gain credibility and influence potential tourists' perceptions toward visiting newly emerging destinations via the information provided on different platforms, such as social media.

Previous literature indicated that perceiving credibility would increase information source impact on destination image (Choi, Hickerson, & Kerstetter, 2018). Understanding the influence on destination image and behavioral intention is an essential aspect of marketing tourist destinations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), thus marketing newly emerging tourist destinations by DMOs would require understanding factors influencing destination image and behavioral intention to visit tourist destination. One of the DMOs functions is to create an image of tourist destinations (Lončarić et al., 2013) via providing information and attracting tourists to visit lesser-known destinations. Since there are many online information sources online, potential tourists might find it difficult to differentiate between organic and induced images (Choi et al., 2018).

Besides, tourist destinations might be located in a region where tourists might have an incorrect image of the region because of the media, which could require DMOs to gain credibility via the information provided on different platforms, such as social media. Destination image is significant in marketing tourist destinations because it helps evaluate tourists' knowledge and

emotions about destinations from the information provided and their plans to act according to their knowledge and emotions (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). The destination image components include cognitive image (beliefs or evaluations), affective image (emotions), and conative image (behavioral intention) contribute to form the image for a tourist destination (Agapito, Valle, & Mendes, 2013; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Kim & Richardson, 2003).

For marketing tourist destinations, tourists' behavioral intentions are based on tourist destinations' attributes (Jalilvand et al., 2012). Thus, tourist destinations' advertising focuses on providing information by promoting the destination image to have an indirect experience before visiting the destination (Hyun & O'Keefe, 2012). Previous studies reported that destination image has an impact on visit intention to tourist destinations (e.g., Byron & Zhang, 2010; Choi et al., 2018; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Thus, understanding potential tourists' travel intention is essential for destination tourism marketers through social media (Park, Hsieh, & Lee, 2017). Moreover, Chu and Luckanavanich (2018) emphasized that travel intention plays a role in selecting travel destinations. For emerging tourist destinations, tourists may encounter difficulty getting credible information even from official sources about new places because of the lack of knowledge and awareness about tourist destinations (Esu & Ebitu, 2010). Thus, their perception toward tourist destinations would influence their behavioural intention (Gartner, 1993; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Given that many people prefer to visit emerging destinations (Shirazi & Mat Som, 2013), understanding destination image components' influence on travel intention is significant for promoting tourist destinations.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

There are several problems regarding the existing studies on promoting tourist destinations that have been identified in this study. First, most substantial studies on promoting tourist

destinations have focused on promoting well-known destinations through social media during the last decades. However, the characteristics of emerging tourism destinations require specific strategies for promoting to tourists, such as promoting destinations through a positive community attitude and events or festivals (Esu & Ebitu, 2010), similar to the case of promoting tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia. Social media helps create destination brand and image (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012); however, enhancing perception toward a tourist destination is complicated (Bianchi, Pike, & Lings, 2014). This study fills the gap in the previous literature by focusing on factors influencing tourist intention to visit emerging tourist destinations via DMOs social media promotion in light of the lack of studies about factors impacting the promotion of emerging tourist destinations via social media.

Secondly, information credibility is a critical concept in social media marketing research. A previous study indicated that social media users yearn to discover new destinations and meet new people (Marine-Roig, Martin-Fuentes, & Daries-Ramon, 2017). When tourists search for information about tourist destinations, they would prefer to check for different content cues to ensure the credibility of information provided about tourist destinations, such as textual content, travel interest, and reviewer location (Park, Xiang, Josiam, & Kim, 2014). For information related to newly emerging tourist destinations, tourists might lack information sources, making DMOs one of the main sources they would consider when searching for information from a trustful source. The information quality is one aspect that DMOs need to pay attention to when they promote tourist destinations (Kim et al., 2017). Previous literature highlighted that informativeness can play a major role in affecting advertising values (Kim & Han, 2014). The content's informativeness would influence advertising through its elements, such as relevant information, provide informative content related to travel products, and comprehensive information (Jeon, Ok, & Choi,

2018). Promoting tourist destinations through social media would require DMOs to provide informative content to gain social media users' trust toward information provided. However, informativeness on the credibility of DMOs has yet to be broadly studied in previous literature related to the tourism field.

With DMOs attempting to utilize social media marketing, the online travel community could play a role in influencing the source credibility since user-generated content has power in marketing tourism (Pike et al., 2018). Tourists would prefer online travel community information since they share their travel experiences online (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016). Due to the lack of information about emerging tourist destinations and the increase of online sources, the online travel community could play a role in influencing the information credibility of DMOs. One of the roles that the online travel community could play is endorsing messages provided by DMOs about tourist destinations. The endorsement on information can also be seen as credible, especially from customers evaluating the products or items (Erdoğan, 1999; Schouten et al., 2019).

Previous literature highlighted the role of endorsements by celebrities or influencers involving in destination marketing via social media (e.g., Gretzel, 2018; Xu (Rinka) & Pratt, 2018). However, an endorsement from celebrities or influencers would not necessarily attract tourists to visit tourist destinations. A previous study indicated that several respondents would not visit tourist destinations due to celebrities' endorsement (Chan, Lee & Wong, 2018). Despite the importance of celebrities or influencers in promoting, individuals could convince customers that the message is credible, such as when online travel community supports source information about tourist destinations. However, previous literature did not study in-depth online travel communities' role in endorsing information about tourist destinations. Moreover, online travel community

endorsements may positively impact the information credibility of DMOs through social media by supporting messages provided by DMOs promoting tourist destinations. This study calls for further investigations to understand online travel communities' role in endorsing the information source credibility about emerging destinations on social media.

Thirdly, the influence of information credibility on the decision-making process has increased academia's interest in further investigating the factors influencing individual intentions. Moreover, several studies reported on the influence of attitudes on travel intention (e.g., Lam & Hsu, 2004; Di Pietro, Di Virgilio, & Pantano, 2012, Van Der Veen & Song, 2014; Bianchi, Milberg, & Cúneo, 2017; Park et al., 2017), the impact of customer engagement on behavioral intentions (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2016), and the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and destination trust on travel intention (Abubakar, Ilkan, & Sahin, 2016). Several studies have likewise discussed the role of DMOs in promoting tourism via social media (e.g., Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sánchez, & Buhalis, 2018; Mariani, Di Felice, & Mura, 2016; Trihas, Perakakis, Venitourakis, & Panteli, 2013; Uşaklı, Koç, & Sönmez, 2017). Academic research regarding providing information through social media has increased because online posts or tweets are linked to marketing and advertising to consumers (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013). Researchers studied the information and analyzed the contents of such studies about tourism in social media (e.g., Choi et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Martínez-Ruiz, Llodrá-Riera, & Jiménez-Zarco, 2018; Mariani et al., 2016).

However, there is still a gap that exist when talking about the influence of information credibility of DMOs in promoting emerging tourist destinations, a significant role in which DMOs play in marketing emerging destinations to tourists. In particular, an influence on destination image and behavioral intention to visit the destinations. Destination image plays an essential role in

promoting destinations and influencing tourists when choosing destinations (Gallarz, Saura, & García, 2002; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Also, destination image of tourist destinations can be influenced by social media content as information involves destination image agents (Pike et al., 2018). Limited studies have highlighted the influence of information credibility on destination image (e.g., Choi et al., 2018; Veasna, Wu, & Huang, 2013). Nevertheless, the impact of information credibility of DMOs promoting lesser-known destinations is still missing in current literature. Since this research focuses on promoting emerging tourism destinations, factors influencing visit intention to emerging tourist destinations through information disseminated by DMOs must be addressed.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Research Study**

To fulfil gaps in previous studies, this study focuses on understanding the impact of informativeness and online travel endorsements on the information credibility of DMOs. Since previous studies emphasized the importance of destination images as mediating between information sources and travel intention (Baloglu, 2000; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Chon, 1990; Chen & Tsai, 2007), this study likewise investigates the influence of information credibility of DMOs on the cognitive image, affective image, and behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations through social media marketing by DMOs. Moreover, this study focuses on how cognitive and affective images can impact tourists' behavioral intentions to visit emerging destinations. Given that destination image is accepted generally as a significant aspect in successful tourist destination marketing (Molina et al., 2010), this research examines the influence of these factors on information credibility and the influence of information credibility on destination image components and the influence of destination images on visit intentions through proposing a new model based on destination image formation according to the theory of Gartner (1993); the

developed models in previous literature, such as Baloglu, (2000), Chen and Tsai (2007), Chu and Luckanavanich (2018), Tasci and Gartner (2007). Besides, this study identifies the influence of choosing social media platforms to search for information about emerging tourism destinations on the proposed model. The research objectives of this research are divided into three main objectives as follows:

(1) To examine the hypothesis of factors influencing visit intention to emerging tourist destinations through social media marketing promotion, which will help to determine the impact of each factor in the proposed model. To achieve this target, this research will have 4 sub-targets as the following for the first main objective:

- To evaluate the impact of informativeness on information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations.
- To assess the impact of the online travel community endorsement on information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations.
- To identify the impact of information credibility of DMOs on the destination image and behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations.
- To evaluate the influence among destination image components on behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations.

(2) To evaluate the proposed model's effectiveness for predicting behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations.

(3) To evaluate the different impacts on the framework of users' preference of social media platforms when they search for information about emerging destinations.

#### **1.4 Contributions and Significance**

Previous studies reported the importance of all factors mentioned in this study. However, this study focuses on the influences of these factors on tourists' visit intention to emerging destinations by focusing on information provided by DMOs promoting through social media, such as providing information about tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia as one of the countries promoting emerging tourist destinations. Promoting emerging tourist destinations could require, as mentioned, specific marketing strategies which could influence destination image and visit the intention of tourists to emerging destinations. Previous studies claimed that tourist destinations have favorable images through their characteristics and attributes, such as beautiful landscape, infrastructure, activities, and safety (Lewis, Kerr, Pomeroy, & 2010; Jalilvand et al., 2012; Kim, 2014; Leong, Yeh, Hsiao, & Huan, 2015). According to Jalilvand et al. (2012), tourist behavioral intention is formed based on destination attributes, indicating that knowledge and emotion can influence behavioral intention. Thus, understanding the impact of factors related to destination images, in which cognitive and affective images are significant for tourist destination promotions, is essential because it helps marketers know the impact on visit intention to new places.

This research aims to provide theoretical and practical contributions by providing insightful information on promoting emerging destinations. For the theoretical contributions, the significance of this research is to expand academic studies regarding the impact of information credibility of DMOs on promoting tourist destinations through social media. Specifically, the majority of previous studies regarding DMOs promoting tourist destinations were focused on well-known destinations rather than promoting emerging destinations, which, as mentioned, is different from other destinations in terms of the importance of providing credible information about destinations. Also, potential tourists might have a lack of information or incorrect perceptions about newly



emerging destinations due to information sources. This study presents the influences of information credibility of DMOs as an important factor in promoting emerging tourist destinations.

This study enhances academia through contributing knowledge regarding the role of informativeness and the online travel community on information credibility by DMOs promoting tourist destinations through social media. Investigating the impact of informativeness on official tourism accounts' information credibility would enhance the knowledge of the importance of informativeness in creating content and how it can influence the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations in social media. This study also adds to academia by evaluating the influence of online travel community endorsement on DMOs' credibility, especially those from previous visitors and residents in online travel communities, given that previous studies greatly focused on endorsements from celebrities or influencers promoting tourist destinations. Furthermore, the study adds to existing literature through the proposed model in chapter 2, which examined the impact of both informativeness and online travel community endorsement on the information credibility of DMOs.

To the author's knowledge, no study yet has investigated factors influencing the promotion of emerging destinations in Saudi Arabia through social media exists. This study reveals tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions toward emerging tourist destinations. The new model focuses on the impact of informativeness and online travel community endorsements on the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations through social media. Moreover, the new model evaluates the impact of information credibility of DMOs on destination image and behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations. The model also tests the impact of cognitive and affective images on behavioral intention. The study's findings help fill the gaps in the literature on behavioral intentions in visiting emerging tourism destinations and to better

identify the impact of online travel communities on influencing source credibility promoting tourist destinations.

As for the practical contributions, this study provides information to understand factors influencing behavioral intentions to visit emerging destinations via focusing on the influences of destination image and information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations through social media. The findings help DMOs and tourism practitioners know the impact of factors on the destination image of tourist destinations and travel intention. This study provides in-depth information about the role of online travel communities in promoting emerging destinations. This study's results help DMOs modify their marketing strategies and allocate issues influencing travel intention to emerging tourist destinations. For instance, this study provides information about the online travel community's role in influencing information credibility about emerging destinations, which can endorse messages provided by DMOs about tourist destinations. Therefore, DMOs can encourage locals and previous travelers to participate in their social media accounts and endorsing DMOs content on social media based on their experience.

### **1.5 Definition of Keywords**

**Emerging Destination:** Esu and Ebitu (2010) identified emerging tourist destinations as a “geopolitical area where tourism has just been accepted as a major socio-economic development tool and where the community has expressed willingness to leverage the tourism potentials to enhance their socio-economic wellbeing” (p.21).

**Online Travel Community:** According to Wu, Xiao, and Wu (2017), defined online travel community is defined as “groups of people trying to achieve goals, with similar interests, and interested in building relationships, making transactions, and engaging in fantasy, governed by rules and using new information technology as the means” (p.358).

**Endorsement:** Dean (1999) described endorsement as “the form of sponsorship is another extrinsic cue reported to affect consumer behavior” (p. 1).

**DMO:** The UNWTO defined DMOs responsibilities as the entity organization that initiate, coordinate, and manage activities that develop and promote destination products, financing, strategic planning, marketing, and convention bureau activities (UNWTO, 2019).

**Information Credibility:** O’Keefe (1990) defined credibility as a “judgments made by a message perceiver regarding the believability of a communicator” (p. 130).

**Informativeness:** Oh and Xu (2003) identified informativeness as the ability to provide relevant information effectively.

**Cognitive Image:** Baloglu and McCleary (1999) described cognitive image as evaluating the knowledge and beliefs about a subject that individuals have.

**Affective Image:** Gartner (1993) related the affective component “to the motives one has for destination selection” (p. 196).

**Travel intention:** Ajzen (1991) defined behavioral intention as “the individual’s intention to perform a given behavior” (p. 181).

## **1.6 Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation was organized into the following chapters. Chapter 2 (i.e., Literature Review) discusses the theoretical foundations of this study based upon five streams of research: 1) behavioral intention, 2) destination image formation, 3) information credibility of DMOs, 4) informativeness, and 5) online travel community endorsements. Also, Chapter 2 includes proposed hypotheses and the framework based on previous studies. Chapter 3 describes the research methods employed, including the research method process, instruments and measurement, data collection, sampling design, and data analysis. Chapter 4 reports the results and the findings of this

study on the basis of the research questions. Chapter5 integrates the objectives and the findings of this study with extant literature. Furthermore, chapter 5 discusses the effectiveness of the proposed model and the various influences on the model. Also, chapter 5 discusses the theoretical implications and practical implications. Finally, chapter 6 points to the dissertation's limitations and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a literature review on factors influencing the behavioral intention of visiting emerging tourist destinations through DMOs social media promotions. It begins by providing an overview of emerging destinations, using Saudi Arabia as a case that promotes tourist destinations. This chapter provides a review of behavioral intention in the tourism context of previous literature. Additionally, it includes a review of destination image definitions and destination image formation which includes components, process, and factors influencing destination image. Thereafter, it discusses social media information and the marketing of tourist destinations. This chapter also addresses the information source credibility, informativeness of the content from DMOs through social media platforms, and the role of online travel community endorsements on the posts of DMOs through social media platforms. Finally, this chapter presents the research hypotheses and the proposed framework.

### **2.2 Promotion of Emerging Destinations**

Promoting emerging tourist destinations is one of the critical and challenging tasks of marketers. Tourism destination was defined by Buhalis (2000) as “individually produced amalgams of tourism amenities and services and a wide range of public goods” (p. 109). The life cycle of a destination based on Butler’s model (1980) has various levels to help describe the stage of a destination, such as the development of the tourism industry, the number of tourists, and the impact of tourism on the destination (Maria Barbini, & Presutti, 2014). Based on Arnold and Quelch (1998), there are economic standards for developing emerging markets, such as the market system's stability and the government’s support of economic liberalization. Furthermore, emerging destinations are mostly based on the premise that they can be original and extended brands (Kim,

Stepchenkova, & Yilmaz, 2019). The UNWTO and the ETC (2011) categorized destinations into destinations capable of developing new products to update their attractions and destinations with a long history of tourism, such as through convention centers and events. Furthermore, the other type was emerging destinations that require governments to provide all the crucial elements for tourism. When a positive perception of the country as a place for tourism is provided by creating the appropriate economic conditions and market awareness for emerging destinations, investors are attracted to invest in the country.

Many studies focused on developing and promoting well-known tourist destinations while promoting emerging destinations must follow specific strategies to present the uniqueness of the destinations and differentiate them by identifying specific attractions and products (Fernandes, 2011). There are many ways in comparing well-known destinations and emerging tourism destinations, such as hotels' numbers and being in stable conditions (Ruiz-Molina, Gil-Saura, & Šeric, 2013; Atadil, Turk, & Altintas, 2017). Emerging destinations must have unique characteristics different from those of well-known destinations in terms of several components, such as services, social, physical, psychological, and rich culture (Esu & Ebitu, 2010). According to Truong, Lenglet, and Mothe (2017), tourist destinations should have unique characteristics because these are crucial to the management and development of destinations. Furthermore, emerging tourism destinations must create a recognizable identity by crafting their uniqueness to brand themselves on the world tourism stage (Pritchard & Morgan, 1998).

The importance of emerging destinations accrued because it plays a significant role in the tourism market competitiveness as the number of arrivals to emerging destinations keep increasing (Claveria, 2016). Also, tourist destinations could attract different source markets through relying on tourism and developed emerging destinations (Hartl, 2002). However, owing to increasing

global competition and the emergence of new destinations, tourists are becoming more exacting in their choice and desire for diverse options (Fyall, Callod, & Edwards, 2003). Also, Pritchard and Morgan (1998) stated that destinations must ensure that all values effectively meet tourists' expectations, thus all branding activities must be credible, reasonable, durable, and deliverable and, most importantly, meet tourists' expectations successfully when they visit destinations. Given the lack of information on emerging destinations, DMOs are responsible for creating, attracting, and retaining valued tourists to the destination. The UNWTO (2019) specified some of the DMO's essential functions, which include: strategic planning, formulating (or participate) and implementing the policy of tourist destination, market information (gathering and analyzing information related to market), developing tourism product and business, digitalization and innovating, managing crisis, monitoring, training, marketing, promotion and branding, funding and encouraging investments. Also, they emphasized the importance of collaborating and coordinating with different stakeholders, such as local communities and residents. Thus, greater effort must be exerted to promote emerging destinations to tourists by building and maintaining the destination's image and reputation (Esu & Ebitu, 2010). Furthermore, DMOs must create positive tourist destination images for competitiveness, which can take place over a long period of time.

According to Esu and Ebitu (2010), promotion as a communicative activity helps provide information by creating and disseminating information to tourists about emerging destinations, thereby enabling tourists to decide whether or not to visit the destination. Hyde (2008) mentioned that the pre-vacation decision-making process is in three phases: searching for information about tourist destinations, making a plan, and booking needed elements at tourist destinations, such as accommodation. Providing enough information about emerging destinations is necessary because

of the lack of information tourists might have about tourist destinations (Pike et al., 2018). However, DMOs are facing many challenges due to constant technological progress, changes in the industry's markets and structures, economic slowdown, war and terrorist threats, climate changes, natural disasters, and many other issues that can have an impact on DMOs (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, & O'leary, 2006). Moreover, one of the issues that DMOs are facing is the increasing usage of online information, such as images that can impact tourists in emerging destinations; this information plays a significant role in influencing tourists' decisions (Lian & Yu, 2019). Individuals' expectations can be shaped and influenced by information sources during the pre-purchase stage (Spreng & Page, 2001 as cited in Lopes et al., 2013), which can be challenging for marketing emerging destinations when there are many online sources.

For marketing tourist destinations, it is significant to understand how potential tourists would search for information, how important the information source is and based on what factors they choose their tourist destination (Lončarić et al., 2013). For emerging tourist destinations, understanding factors influencing visit intention would be significant. However, there is still a lack of studies on emerging markets (Claveria, 2016), which has raised the need to focus on emerging destinations. The UNWTO (2015) indicated that the Middle East has the potential to grow in tourism, and the number of tourists visiting emerging destinations will increase. Thus, emerging destinations play a significant role in the tourism market. Previous studies focused on potential visits either to well-known and developed destinations or destinations located in western countries. However, promoting emerging destinations in the Middle East is different because countries in that region, such as Saudi Arabia, have unique sites, attractions, and characteristics that are different from other well-known destinations. Hence, tourists might have different perspectives and behaviors toward visiting emerging destinations in Saudi Arabia.



### **2.3 The Promotion of Emerging Travel Destination in Saudi Arabia**

This study focused on the Saudi government's promotion of emerging destinations in the country. Saudi Arabia is a major Islamic country with two holy mosques, Al-Masjid Al-Haram in the Makkah region and Al-Masjid al Nabawī (Prophet's Mosque) in the Al-Madinah region. Over 10 million people worldwide visit the country each year to perform the Hajj (pilgrimage) or Umrah. The Saudi General Authority for Statistics (2019) indicated that over 2 million visitors came to perform the pilgrimage in 2019. Saudi Arabia is located in an area rich in oil and natural gas, similar to Kuwait, Qatar, United Emirates, and all the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. These oil-producing countries have mainly relied on oil and natural gas as their main economic resources, which has made them known as oil-rich countries. The advent of oil in this country has been important in the past century, and currently, Saudi Arabia has one of the largest petroleum reservoirs globally (Al-Atawi, Kumar, & Saleh, 2015). The country has a very stable economy; it is one of the G20 members because of its strong economy and is ranked 20th country in the world in terms of GDP (SAMA report, 2018). Instead of relying on oil as the main income for the country, Saudi Arabia is working to improve its economy through Vision 2030, which is focused on income diversity and developing tourism as one of its aspects. ("Vision 2030," n.d.).

Saudi Arabia has recently focused on developing the tourism industry through several projects to develop tourism destinations and attract visitors. These projects aim to encourage tourism investment, develop the hospitality sector, discover historical sites, and develop museums and natural sites, among many other actions, to escalate the tourism industry in several tourist destinations. There are huge potential opportunities for developing the tourism sector in Saudi Arabia. The beauty, mystery, history, and faith that Saudi Arabia possesses are perfect for a tourism destination (Yusuf, 2014). Ageli (2013) also conducted a study on the relationship between

tourism expenditure and the growth of non-oil economic in Saudi Arabia throughout the 1970–2012 period. The study findings indicated a positive relationship between tourism expenditure and economic growth in Saudi Arabia, leading to positive overall economic growth. Hence, improving the tourism sector would have a positive influence on the country's economy.

According to the Travel and Tourism Economic report (2018), travel and tourism's total contribution in 2017 was 9.4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Saudi General Authority for Statistics also mentioned in their report (2018) that an estimated 24 million foreigners arrived in Saudi Arabia in 2018, indicating that the country could utilize those travelers to develop and promote tourists' destinations. Furthermore, the tourism statistics movement in 2018 from the Tourism Information and Research Centre (MAS) reported 299,000 inbound tourists and 2 million resident tourists who traveled within the country (Report MAS, 2018). These figures are expected to grow in the upcoming years with the development of several emerging tourist destinations. Therefore, Saudi Arabia wants to utilize natural and historical attractions to attract tourists and make tourism one of its major income sources. As one of the GCCs, Saudi Arabia has been described in recent years as having a strong drive for air travel and tourism (AlSumairi & Hong Tsui, 2017). In particular, the increase of inbound tourists—both citizens and foreigners—in Saudi Arabia has renewed and improved efforts to market the country as a tourist destination (Yusuf, 2014).

The Ministry of Tourism in Saudi Arabia (MT) is working on public and private sectors to develop and promote destination attractions to visitors. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness report (2019) indicated that Saudi Arabia had made progress in attracting businesses related to the tourism industry. When the government announced the country's opening for tourists by announcing tourist visas in 2019, they also promoted various events and activities in several

regions to attract tourists. For instance, Saudi Arabia has launched the Saudi seasons, wherein most of the region and cities in Saudi Arabia host major events and activities that allow tourists to experience each destination's uniqueness in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the country is developing and promoting emerging tourist destinations in different regions of the country. For example, one of the mega projects in Saudi Arabia is the creation of NEOM City on the Red Sea in northwest Saudi Arabia; this project will include the involvement of many fields, with tourism being one of the main sectors (NEOM, n.d). As the government focuses on creating and developing tourist destinations for the future, which could take years, they utilize the current potential to merge tourist destinations to attract tourists to visit and know more about the country.

One of the destinations the government is promoting for tourists is the AlUla city. AlUla is located in the Al-Madinah region in northwestern Saudi Arabia. It is considered to be one of the largest archaeological sites with a rich history around its ruins. This city's history extended to more than 2000 years when it was the largest settlement of civilizations and cultures relating to the Minaean, Dedanites, Nabataeans, and Lihyanite civilizations (Sauditourism, n.d.). Moreover, AlUla was a major city for trade owing to its unique location on the incense and spice route, which made the city a tourist destination for exploring its nature and the surrounding mountains (Sauditourism, n.d.). The most famous among the settlements in AlUla is Mada'in Salih, which is also known as the Al-Hijr archaeological site. The Mada'in Salih was the first site in Saudi Arabia to be recognized as a famous world heritage site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (UNESCO, n.d.). AlUla is considered as an open-air museum for its three historical places, Mada'in Salih, Al-Khuraybah, and Jabal' Ikamah, which have witnessed many historical events through decorations and inscriptions symbolizing the period or events happening in the area. According to UNESCO's website (n.d.), Mada'in Salih contains many

inscriptions in various languages, such as Lihyanite, Nabataean, Greek, and Latin. Diverse decorative and architectural influences from other cultures, such as Assyrian and Egyptian, are also present.

This region is considered an emerging destination with huge opportunities to be one of the top destinations on the international tourist destination map. The government had started to focus on developing the city since 2011 when it opened the local airports to serve community citizens and local tourists to visit the city. Additionally, the government wanted to develop and promote AlUla City to meet the Vision 2030 principles through various tourist activities and events. The government established the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU), which is mainly working to manage, develop and promote tourism opportunities, preserve historical sites, and conserve heritage. Furthermore, the RCU is working with locals to improve the city through their contributions to preserve historical sites and heritage and to develop tourism. According to the RCU website (n.d.), the RCU has announced initiatives designed to build local skills, preserve the historical sites and heritage, and develop modern infrastructure.

The RCU is also collaborating with the MT and other governmental agencies, such as the Ministry of Culture, to create tourism opportunities about destinations and attract tourists through plans and events for visitors, especially after the government issues tourist visas to attend events in Saudi Arabia. For instance, the RCU has launched its first event in AlUla City, namely, Winter at Tantora, because events and festivals are image makers for tourist destinations and help give new destinations a competitive edge (Esu & Ebitu, 2010). This festival includes a series of weekend activities where visitors can attend outdoor musical concerts at historical sites and experience a range of activities, such as the winter planting season, weekly cultural events, a spectacular Fursan equine experience (horse racing), and many other events ("Winter at Tantora,"

n.d.). Furthermore, the RCU has launched a hot air balloon event where tourists can experience the view of AIUla from the sky.

RCU and MT are using their official websites and social media platforms intensively to share information about AIUla. When social media entered the communication world, it influenced how tourist destinations market their products to tourists (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Arsal et al., 2008). The RCU, as a DMO of the destination and MT, greatly focuses on promoting this destination through different social media platforms, such as with providing information related to events or visitor programs for tourists to visit and discover tourist attractions in AIUla. However, using social media to provide information where many users would require further understanding of tourists' intention to visit emerging destinations because tourists might lack information or hold a different perception about the destination. Thus, understanding factors that would influence tourist behavior during the pre-decision process, such as information sources, are important because tourists could be exposed to many influences before making their decisions (Lončarić et al., 2013). The following part reviews the importance of understanding the behavioral intention of tourists.

## **2.4 Behavioral Intention**

Understanding tourist intention is important for any destination management because it emphasizes tourists' intent to travel (Jang, Bai, Hu, & Wu, 2009). Many scholars have defined behavioral intentions, such as Ajzen (1991), who defined behavioral intention as “the individual's intention to perform a given behavior” (p. 181). To clarify this definition, Zhang (2013) explained that individuals' intentions might affect behaviors when there is an opportunity, such as tourists' intention to travel to a destination or engage in an activity. In tourism, tourist visit intention can be described as their probability of visiting a specific destination within a particular time (Woodside & MacDonald, 1994). Additionally, Baker and Crompton (2000) mentioned that travel intention

is related to the likelihood of traveling to a destination. Therefore, individuals' choices about performing a specific act can lead an individual to behave according to his/her beliefs about this behavior (Phetvaroon, 2006; Zhang, 2013). Individuals' intentions can vary over time, especially during the decision process, and travel intention relies on tourists' trust and inhibitors toward a destination (Moutinho, 1987). Marketing campaigns of tourist destinations consider factors influencing tourists' behavioral intention to increase the possibility of tourists visiting the destinations (Hennessey, Yun, MacDonald, & James-Maceachern, 2010). Thus, understanding traveler intention plays an important role for marketers when planning for market destinations.

Previous studies related to tourist attitudes found that many factors impact travel intention by applying the theory of planned behavior (e.g., Ajzen, 1985, 1991, 2001; Amaro & Duarte, 2015; Han, 2015; Kaplan, Manca, Alexander, Nielsen, & Prato, 2015; Lam & Hsu, 2004; Sparks & Pan, 2009). Moreover, the travel intention of tourists can be influenced by several factors, which play an important role in influencing tourists' choices of destinations, such as information related to tourist destinations, accommodation, transportation, attraction, activity, shopping, and restaurants (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Gartner, 1986; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Um & Crompton, 1991; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989).

Furthermore, tourists' motivation is one factor related to the way tourists define their activities and interests (Crompton, 1979; Huang & Xiao, 2000; Holloway, 2004; Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004; Law, Cheung, & Lo, 2004). Dann (1977) also mentioned that motivations could be recognized through the push factors related to individuals' needs and pull factors related to tourist destinations' attributes and attractiveness. Tourist behaviors through travel intention and travel motivations are important to understand tourists' behaviors (Lam & Hsu, 2006). However, for marketing emerging destinations, the influence of motivations would not fully assist in promoting

destinations because tourists might lack knowledge about the destination attributes, making it difficult to determine motivation factors that influence tourist intention to visit. Furthermore, Crompton (1979) reported that one of the difficulties of understanding the influence of tourist motivations is the fact that the benefits the tourists might gain from visiting the destination are not related to the destination's attributes. Therefore, understanding tourists' intention to visit emerging destinations can require investigating other factors rather than motivations. One factor considered to be important in promoting new places and could influence behavioral intention is the destination image because introducing an image for a destination is a major element to attract tourists (Abdellatif, Ksouri, Ayoun, & Storai, 2015). Given that destination images are changeable, travel intention can be influenced by elements related to the destination image (Tsai, Chu, & Kobori, 2017). Therefore, the following part presents the destination image in previous literature.

## **2.5 Destination Images**

### **2.5.1 Definitions**

Image is a term that has already been used in many contexts, therefore, creating various meanings. In psychology, Jenkins (1999) referred to an image as “a visual representation, whereas in behavioral geography, the concept of image is more holistic, and it includes all of the associated impressions, knowledge, emotions, values, and beliefs” (p.1). Echtner and Ritchie (1991) reported that the definition of the destination image is unclear in describing the image. Many studies related to destination image supported this point, especially image as a term used in many studies but was not entirely clear (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Kim & Richardson, 2003). This research represents several definitions from the most cited scholars.

Reynolds (1965) described images as mental constructs based on a few impressions chosen from a flood of information. On the other hand, Crompton (1979) linked the definition to a

destination as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination” (p. 18). This definition was mentioned in Crompton’s study (1979) about an assessment of Mexico’s image as a holiday tourist destination. Assael (1984) reported that the image is related to the information from different sources during a specific time period to perceive the image. This definition showed that information on a destination is a major element in destination images. Gartner (1989) also defined image as “an underlying concept which when formed correctly will force a destination into a traveler’s evoked set” (p. 16). Reilly (1990) mentioned that the image reflects the overall impression of a destination in people’s minds.

About forming destination image, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) stated that “the image concept has generally been considered as an attitudinal construct consisting of an individual’s mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings, and global impression about an object or destination” (p. 870). Echtner and Ritchie (1993) also referred to destination image as comprised of attribute-based and holistic components. Kotler and Gertner (2002) added that destination image could be built or restore via residents, new tourist attractions, and events. These definitions show that destination image includes the formation of individuals’ feelings and ideas about a specific destination. Enhanced knowledge about the destination image improves a destination’s attractiveness and its ability to compete with other destinations (Sancho Esper & Álvarez Rateike, 2010). Moreover, tourists having a picture or idea about a destination they have not visited before affects their decision and intention about selecting a destination (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007).

Understanding destination image likewise enables DMOs to position themselves and compete in the market via their image for promoting tourist destinations (Guthrie & Gale, 1991; Pike & Ryan, 2004). Many studies conducted about destination images focused on the method and measurements of images (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gartner, 1993; Gunn 1972; Hunt 1975; Baloglu



& McCleary, 1999). Although many studies were conducted about destination images, there remains the problem of defining destination image and the lack of agreement about understanding image as a term (Jenkins, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). This condition is the reason behind different definitions due to different subjects and factors that have an impact on destination image (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007). Furthermore, defining the image itself is complicated because the image is influenced by different components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Pike & Ryan, 2004). The following part reviews tourist destination image formation in previous literature which includes theory, components, and factors influencing destination image.

### **2.5.2 Destination Image Formation Stages Theory**

Destination image is considered an important concept to understand tourists' decisions about a tourist destination (Mayo, 1973 as cited in Dominique-Ferreira, 2011). The process of forming the destination image by tourists was studied in previous literature to identify destination image stages. Gunn's theory (1972) proposed two types of images: the organic image formed on the basis of non-commercial sources about the destination, and the induced image, formed on the basis of promotions by the destination through advertisements and promotions (Iarmolenko & Schneider, 2016). The organic image is based on secondary sources of information that individuals perceived before visiting a destination, such as information from news, magazines, and television or movies. The induced image is also perceived from secondary sources of information and organic image, but more commercial information sources, such as travel guidebooks from travel agents. Gunn (1988) has divided these images into seven stages and represented those images with individual stages of the travel experience:

1. Accumulation of mental images by visitors about place experiences. (Organic image)

2. Modification of those images through more information to decide to travel. (Induced Image)
3. The decision to take a vacation trip is based on image, experience, and other constraints. (Induced Image)
4. Travelling to a destination may condition the image, such as landscape. (Induced Image)
5. Participating or experiencing activities, accommodations, and other services at the destination could impact the image. (Modified Induced Image)
6. Return travel and allow evaluation, comments, and sharing the experience of the destination. (Modified Induced Image)
7. Modification of accumulating images based on the vacation experience because it could be changed or the same as the original image. (Modified Induced Image).

Gunn (1972) suggested that the destination image construct has to have a post-stage of the visit. However, the image could be different between both first-timers and returning visitors, which could affect the image process. Gartner (1993) further developed Gunn's (1972, 1988) theory and proposed that destination image formation "can be viewed as a continuum of separate agents that act independently or in some combination to form a tourism destination image unique to the individual" (p. 197). Tasci and Gartner (2007) reported that Gartner's theory completes the link between the individual organic or induced image of tourist destinations by particular or exclusive sources. Gartner (1993) mentioned that "the key difference between organic and induced image formation agents is the control the destination area has over what is presented" (p. 196). Hence, information about what destinations offer to tourists is not easy because information sources might influence one another and, eventually, influence tourists (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). According to

the destination image formation by Gartner (1993), there are eight agents (Table 2-1) that have different effects and levels of credibility, market penetration, and destination cost.

**Table 2-1 Image Formation Agents and their Respective Credibility Levels Adopted from Gartner (1993, p. 214).**

<b>Image Change Agents</b>	<b>Credibility</b>	<b>Market Penetration</b>	<b>Destination Cost</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Overt Induced I	Low	High	High	Traditional advertising
Overt Induced II	Medium	Medium	Indirect	Tour operator information
Covert Induced I	Low/ Medium	High	High	Second party endorsement in advertisements
Covert Induced II	Medium	Medium	Medium	Second-party endorsement through relatively unbiased reports (e.g., newspapers)
Autonomous	High	High/ Medium	Indirect	News, movies, television programs
Unsolicited Organic	Medium	Low	Indirect	Unsolicited information received from family or friends
Solicited Organic	High	Low	Indirect	Solicited information from family or friends
Organic	High	----	Indirect	Actual visitation

The first agent is overt induced I, which provides general information through traditional advertising forms, such as television, radio, billboard, and brochures. Overt induced I is perceived

to have high control in marketing the destination and destination cost but low credibility for the promoters because of the general and mass information provided through one of the mentioned communication channels (Gartner, 1993). Choi, Lehto, and Morrison (2007) stated that managing the information source is not easy to match destinations' actual perceived images. In addition, spreading online information sources by sharing their information about destinations has created a mass of information about destination images and has become difficult to control (Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007).

Meanwhile, overt induced II is related to the information received from tour agents and wholesalers. Overt Induced I is perceived to have medium control in market destination and credibility and indirect relation with destination cost. These agents are more credible than the traditional form in providing the attributes and attractions of a destination because traditional advertisement aims to promote and may thus provide an unreal image about the destination (Gartner, 1993; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). The third agent is covert induced I formation, which uses second-party endorsements through traditional forms of advertising to help deliver messages to the targeted market about promoting destinations (Atkins & Block, 1983).

Covert induced I is also perceived to have low/medium credibility, which is better than that for overt induced I, and high market destination and destination cost. According to Gartner (1993), covert induced II messages probably come from unbiased sources, such as reports, travel articles, and newspapers. This image change agent is perceived to have medium credibility, market penetration, and destination cost, which means these sources have greater credible information than overt induced I. Given that individuals might have no realizations and direct connections with the destination marketers who have an influence on the contents, the information from second-party endorsements, such as endorsement in newspapers, would have medium credibility.

Additionally, Gartner (1993) provided one of the other formation agents, which is autonomous. Based on Table (2- 1), autonomous influences occur through news media, reports, news stories, movies, and television programs. All these autonomous agents have high credibility, a medium/high rating in market penetration, and indirect relation of destination cost. This component has high credibility due to direct relation individuals with either destination suppliers or service operators and the ability to change destination images positively or negatively in a short time. The other three components of formation agents were unsolicited organic, solicited organic, and organic (Gartner, 1993). Unsolicited organic comes from unsolicited information received from friends and relatives who have been to the tourist destination or their knowledge about the destinations. This component is perceived to have medium credibility, low-market penetration, and indirect destination cost. By contrast, solicited organic through solicited information received from friends and relatives is considered to have higher creditability than unsolicited information because these individuals share their perceptions or actual experiences of tourist destinations, which can be considered as word-of-mouth advertising. Finally, as Gartner (1993) referred to as actual visitation, organic agents have high credibility because of the actual visit.

The information from individuals who have visited a destination is also perceived to have high credibility because individuals share their experiences about tourist destinations via unsolicited and solicited information to potential tourists in many ways, such as endorsement or word of mouth. Reynolds (1965) stated that the influence of consumers' contributions leads to the understanding of the process of image formation. The information sources about a destination image are complicated because whether an individual has an organic, induced or complex image from a source of information can affect other potential tourists and influence the image and behavior (Tasci et al., 2007). The previous study also emphasized the importance of destination

image as determinants between information sources and travel intention (Baloglu, 2000; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Chon, 1990; Chen & Tsai, 2007). For instance, Agapito et al. (2013) confirmed the relationship among destination image components in their model on the basis of the hierarchical nature of Gartner's (1993) destination image formation, thus indicating that cognitive image impacts conative and affective images. Besides, it is mediated by the affective image, which will lead to increased managerial implications. Furthermore, Baloglu (2000) has mentioned that a tourist destination's cognitive and affective images can be deemed a base determinant of tourist behavior to travel.

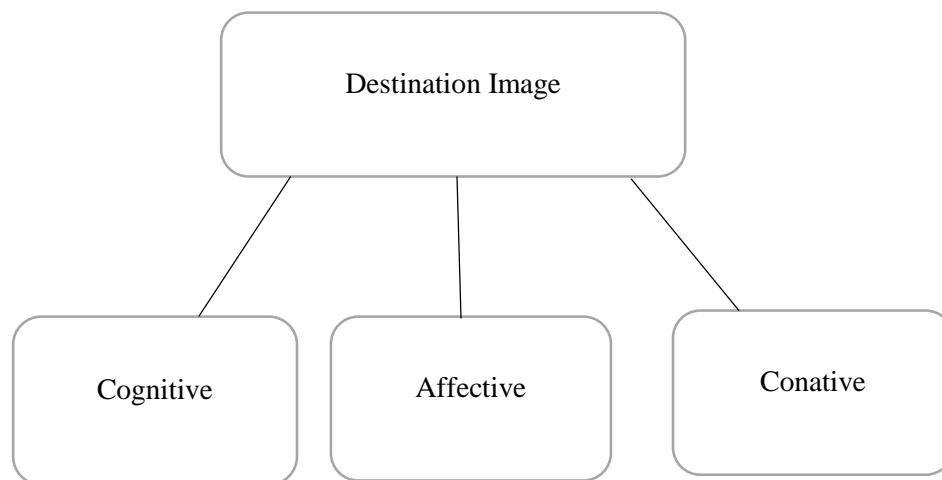
Many researchers have reported that cognitive components in destination image formation are the antecedent of affective components (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Choi et al., 2018; Gartner, 1993; Molinillo et al., 2018; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Tasci et al., 2007). Previous studies showed how destination image formation components are theoretically organized and indicated the influence of cognitive image and affective image on behavioral intention (e.g., Beerli & Martin, 2004; Kim et al., 2017; Choi et al., 2018, Zhong, 2012). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) reported that the affective image depends on a specific destination's cognitive image evaluations. Furthermore, the decision based on the affective image can be influenced by the destination image's cognitive images, especially by information from destination marketers, and how the information provided in destination promoting can create and influence destination images.

With Gartner (1993) focused on destination image formation, how to control destination images remains an obstacle given that there are different image formation agents in the tourism industry and many industries linked with the tourism industry in promoting tourist destinations, such as information sources and individual perceptions, which can influence destination images.

Many studies have developed this formation to evaluate different factors that influence destination image components and impact the destination promoted. The following part discusses previous literature about destination image components.

### 2.5.3 Destination Image Components

Understanding the importance of destination image is important because it can help destination managers compete with other destinations according to a perceived image (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001). Many studies have discussed destination image components and the influence of different components. Based on Gartner's theory (1993), previous literature indicated three main dimensions of destination image formation as pointed in Figure 2-1, which consists of cognitive, affective, and conative images and is multi-dimensional.



**Figure 2-1 Destination Image Dimensions.** (e.g., Dann, 1996; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Tasci et al., 2007).

As mentioned in the definitions of destination images from different scholars, the destination image is built according to the evolution of several dimensions, including cognitive and affective evaluations (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Pike & Ryan, 2004).

Moreover, Suhartanto, Lu, Hussein, and Chen (2018) explained that destination image includes what an individual thinks and understands, represented in the cognitive image. Destination image likewise includes individual emotion toward tourist destinations via affective image and how individuals behave based on the destination's information, which represents the conative image.

For cognitive image, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) described the cognitive image as evaluating the knowledge and beliefs about a subject that an individual has. San Martín and Del Bosque (2008) also mentioned that cognitive image is “external information of the tourist experience in order to form their own beliefs and judgments” (p. 553), a description that was supported by Baloglu and McCleary (1999). Furthermore, Gartner (1993) stated that cognitive image is created from the “sum of beliefs and attitudes of objects leading to some internally accepted picture of its attributes” (p. 193). Scholars in another study defined cognition as “a mental response that involves thinking about, paying attention to, remembering, understanding, interpreting, evaluating (good/bad, favorable /unfavorable), and making decisions about stimuli in the environment” (Tasci et al., 2007, p. 199).

Pike and Ryan (2004) noted that cognitive image is not necessarily built based on the previous visit to a place, but it might be created according to the knowledge of individuals from their lives, which might be organic or inorganic forms of information, eventually leading to cognitive knowledge about the destination. Zhong (2012) agreed that non-visitors could have a cognitive image of specific destinations through information about the destination attributes, which can influence potential tourist choices about visiting the destinations through organic and induced images of the cognitive image. Zhong (2012) likewise mentioned that organic images are formed based on information from different sources, such as mass media and actual visitation. For induced images, the images formed based on destination marketers' information, organic and



induced images, represent cognitive images, which indicate the importance of information about destinations on forming destination images (Zhong, 2012).

The second component of the destination image is the affective image. Previous researchers indicated that affective evaluations mean the feeling that an individual has about a specific destination or idea (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Pike & Ryan, 2007). Furthermore, Gartner (1993) related the affective component “to the motives one has for destination selection” (p. 196). Regarding the affective image, Gartner (1996) also stated that “the affective component of the destination image is related to motives in the sense that it is how a person values the object under consideration. It is the ‘feelings’ we hold about any object” (p. 457). Researchers found various factors that describe and measure affective images such as, namely, arousing/sleepy, pleasant/unpleasant, and exciting/gloomy (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007; Lee, Scott & Kim, 2008; Pike & Ryan, 2004). Understanding the emotions and feelings of people, especially their feelings toward a destination image, is important, and many studies have shown that understanding affective images is important in destination marketing (Lin et al., 2007; Nicoletta & Sevidio, 2012; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Trauer & Ryan, 2005; San Martín & Rodríguez Del Bosque, 2008). The importance of the affective image lies on tourists, that is, where they want to decide on visiting a destination (Gartner, 1993). A tourist destination's image can persuade visitors emotionally to visit tourist attractions (Kanwel, Lingqiang, Asif, Hwang, Hussain, & Jameel, 2019). Thus, the affective image plays a role in forming tourist destinations.

The third component is the conative image, which is part of the destination image formation, the developed behavior of cognitive and affective images (Gartner, 1993). The conative component is based on individuals' behavior using the information about destinations (Suhartanto

et al., 2018). This component of destination images has been investigated by many studies using destination image formation (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Gartner, 1993; Lam & Hsu, 2006; Lin et al., 2007; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010). The conative component and behavioral intention are similar because both terms indicate an individual's intention for future destinations (Agapito et al., 2013; Styliadis, Sit, & Biran, 2016), which this study relies on as theoretical background. Moreover, Pike and Ryan (2004) included the intention component into the destination image and suggested that individual decision choices are based on conative influences. The advantage of evaluating the impact of destination components (cognitive and affective components) is in knowing and understanding tourists' intentions to visit or revisit the destination (Agapito et al., 2013).

Also, previous studies have the overall image as a component instead of the conative image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004). Previous literature suggested that combining cognitive and affective images (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Sönmez & Sirakaya, 2002) can impact the overall image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002; Gartner, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Govers & Go, 2003; Tasci et al., 2007). However, the overall image component may not be suitable to predict behavioral intention as the conative image (Garner, 1993). Also, the different and separate influences of cognitive and affective images could lead to knowing more about the extent of influence for each component on behavioral intention (e.g., Agapito et al., 2013; Baloglu, 2000; Gartner, 1993; Li, Cai, Lehto, & Huang, 2010; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Moreover, Pike and Ryan (2004) concluded that by applying cognitive, affective, and conative components, they could identify destination features and help DMOs by providing the needed information related to tourist destinations. Previous literature has similarly indicated the

connections between destination image and travel intention (Allameh, Khazaei Pool, Jaberi, Salehzadeh, & Asadi 2015; Huang, Cai, Yu, & Li, 2014), given that both factors can build a perception and influence behavior (Prayogo, Ketaren, & Hati, 2017). Many researchers have reported that destination image formation's cognitive component is an antecedent of the affective component (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Tasci et al., 2007). Additionally, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) mentioned the two main components in destination image, namely, cognitive and affective images. They reported that affective image depends on the cognitive image evaluation of a specific destination or object.

Previous studies theoretically showed how the components of destination image formation are organized. Gartner (1993), who developed the destination image formation, believed that a hierarchical relationship exists between cognitive and affective components even though both components can be evaluated separately. Furthermore, Gartner (1993) pointed out that a direct relationship exists between the conative and cognitive/affective components of destination image constructs. When tourists choose a destination to visit, their choices can be influenced by the cognitive image and affective image they have about tourist destinations, which eventually influences their visit intentions. The next part presents the relationship between the destination image and behavioral intention.

#### **2.5.4 Destination Image and Behavioral Intention**

Tourist destinations can have an image representing destination features, such as landscape, safety, infrastructure, accommodations, shopping, cultural exchange, and activities (Lewis et al., 2010; Jalilvand et al., 2012; Kim, 2014). According to Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, and Chen (2015), when tourists have a positive image of a specific destination through its attributes, they might have a greater chance of visiting the destination. Moreover, Beerli and Martin (2004)

mentioned that evaluating a destination image helps to predict tourists' travel intention to the destination. Wu (2015) emphasized that tourist behaviors are based on logical and emotional situations. Therefore, knowing the impact of destination images on travel intention is significant, especially for marketing tourist destinations. Destination image relies on what tourists have from beliefs, ideas, and feelings about specific destinations (Chen & Phou, 2013). As each destination has different attributes that can influence travel intention, the destination image can be evaluated by tourists' knowledge, belief, and feelings about a specific destination (Chen & Phou, 2013; Chen, Ji, & Funk, 2014; Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014). Understanding that elements can influence destination image is important because travel intention is formed based on destination attributes (Jalilvand et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the harmony between destination image and travel intention was found to be significant in many studies (e.g. Chon, 1990; Beerli, Meneses, & Gil 2007; Goh & Litvin, 2000; Choi et al., 2018, Sirgy & Su, 2000). For instance, Oppermann (2000) mentioned the importance of destination image on behavioral intentions via repeated visitors. His study's findings showed that repeated travelers could transform the image of destinations and influence fellow travelers' behavioral intentions. According to Gartner (1996), "People hold perceptions of different destination areas, which, when assessed and evaluated, become a key component of site selection" (p.456). In the pre-visit phase, the destination image influences tourists' choices when choosing their destination vacation (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). When tourists have an appropriate image of a tourist destination, there is a higher probability of recommending and visiting tourist destinations (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Therefore, information plays a role in an individual's perceptions of a destination because tourists want to learn about their desired destination (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Information about tourist destinations leads to forming the destination image for travelers (Kim et al., 2017).

Destination image through information can have a link to the knowledge and emotions about destinations and impact tourist intention. Previous studies found that the destination image is important to understanding tourist behavior and the impact of destination choice (Assaker, 2014; Lin et al., 2007; Loureiro, 2015; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008). Tourists are getting information about tourist destinations from various channels, which has caused influence their behavior. For instance, Loureiro (2015) investigated the effect of website quality on travel on PAD, attitudes, and intentions to visit and recommended visiting islands as tourist destinations. The study found that pleasure, as an emotional response, directly influences the intention to visit and recommend the island. Also, the study focused only on the emotional aspects (e.g., pleasure, arousal, and dominance) rather than the impact of provided information and knowledge on travel intention, such as knowledge and feeling about the destination and how it can impact visit intentions.

Moreover, Tsai et al. (2017) conducted a study about national tourism organizations' promotional activities by using video clips in Taiwan's 2015 Global Tourism Transit Promotion Film. They found a positive relationship between destination image and visit intention. However, the study focused on only video clips of festivals and a well-known destination like Taiwan. It likewise did not fully evaluate components related to the destination image, which can have a different impact on travel intention. According to Park et al. (2017), understanding how travel behaviors are predicted and tourists' decision-making process is crucial for destination tourism marketers. Destination image was found to influence visit intention because both factors can build the perception and influence the behavior (Prayogo et al., 2017). Thus, destination image influence

on behavioral intention could help predict tourist behavior toward visiting emerging destinations. For promoting tourist destinations, destination image components could influence tourist behavioral intention through several elements, such as recommendation or endorsement on new products or services (Erdem & Swait, 1998, as cited in Kani, Aziz, Sambasivan, & Bojei, 2017).

Previous studies focused on the impact on the unidimensional construct (overall image) of destination on the basis of their study goals, while other studies developed different models about the relationship between both cognitive and affective images and behavioral intention. Given the importance of understanding the impact of destination images on behavioral intention, authors are creating and developing models to help investigate how destination image influences travel intention, such as Gartner (1993), who developed the destination image formation. The current study is also different from other studies because it focuses on emerging tourist destinations, where the characteristics of emerging destinations, such as lack of knowledge by tourists, can misrepresent the true image of the destination for tourists and influence their intentions to visit through information sources. DMOs could play a role as official information sources to form the destination image and influence behavioral intention to visit lesser-known destinations. Previous studies highlighted factors that can influence the destination image and tourist perception toward tourist destinations. The following part reviews the factors influencing destination image.

### **2.5.5 Factors Influencing Destination Image**

Several studies have proven the important role of the destination image components as a mediator between factors and behavioral intentions (e.g., Alcázar, Piñero, & Maya, 2014; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Khan, Chelliah, & Ahmed, 2017; Kim et al., 2017). Many studies have developed destination image formation through evaluating factors that influence destination image components (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Mackay & Fesenmaier,

1997). Previous studies have focused on developing models about destination images concentrated on evaluating specific major factors, such as individuals' sociodemographic characteristics, motivations, and information sources (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Baloglu and McCleary (1999), one of the famous studies, developed a model to measure the influence of certain factors on the cognitive, affective, and overall images of destinations. They reported that the variety of information sources and socio-psychological factors impact affective and cognitive evaluations. Moreover, the cognitive evaluation was found to have a much stronger impact on affective evaluation than travel motivations. They also found that the overall image is impacted by cognitive and affective components of the image construct. However, this study did not reveal how these factors influence destination image components and, in turn, affect tourists' behavioral intention, specifically for visitation to new places where tourists have a lack of knowledge about new destinations in terms of attractions and activities.

Also, Beerli and Martin (2004) developed a model from the formation of destination image in a study, including information sources and personal factors. They found that experience has a significant relationship with the cognitive image among first-timers and the affective image among repeaters. Additionally, they concluded that the Internet could impact the perceived image of a destination, assuming that the Internet is an induced source. Nevertheless, this model may help determine the factors that may influence the only post-visit image, focusing on tourists' experience during their visit. However, the study results did not provide important information about the factors that could influence the pre-visit image, which may help determine factors that may influence tourists' behavioral intention to visit the destination.

Moreover, Jensen, Chen, and Korneliussen (2015) conducted a study on culture's influence as a sociodemographic characteristic. They evaluated the influence of culture and geography on

destination images and found a relationship between cultural and destination images. However, tourists' culture and culture have many profound aspects, and each individual sees a unique image of a specific cultural aspect. Thus, identifying which part of culture influences destination image is a challenge (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000). Furthermore, measuring the impact of culture or other sociodemographic characteristics can be difficult, specifically for new places trying to encourage tourists to visit tourist destinations for the first time.

Additionally, motivation was evaluated in previous studies as a factor influencing the impact on destination image. Motivation is related to the status of need or the push toward a specific action or situation, which may lead to achieving satisfaction (Moutinho, 2000). Previous studies indicated that motivational factors have an influence on the cognitive image and may affect the image of a tourist destination (Baloglu, 2000; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Li et al., 2010; San Martín & Rodríguez Del Bosque, 2008; Khan et al., 2017). Beerli and Martin (2004) reported that motivations are directly associated with the affective image via the feelings toward a specific place, while the affective dimension of the image could influence the overall image. For example, Khan et al. (2017) conducted a study on young female travelers' travel motivations to India. They found that motivations influence cognitive and affective images, such as high motivations to know more about the culture. Despite the importance of the impact of motivation on destination image and tourist behavior, promoting tourist destinations requires integrating the place image in the messages provided to the potential tourists (Ponnareddy et al., 2018). Tourists might also lack information about emerging tourist destinations' attractions, making it difficult to determine motivational factors towards visiting unknown destinations.

One of the factors that influence destination images is information via advertising, such as promotional campaigns to visit specific destinations (Kim, Hwang, & Fesenmaier, 2005;



McWilliams & Crompton, 1997; Woodside, 1996). The information about tourist destinations is considered a promotional tool, with advertising and travel guidebooks as an example, which contribute to delivering the appropriate destination to tourists and affecting potential tourists (Tasci, 2009). Therefore, information is one of the factors that impact the destination image because it helps form a destination image for potential tourists (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Gartner, 1993; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). Information about the destination image is formed via collecting information (Frías, Rodríguez, Alberto Castañeda, Sabiote & Buhalis, 2012). Information sources can have an important role in the decision-making process regarding traveling (Gartner 1993; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Also, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) indicated that information sources significantly influence the perceptual/cognitive evaluations of destinations. Additionally, Beerli and Martin (2004) found that induced, organic, and autonomous information sources were significantly impactful in the destinations' cognitive image and organic source, such as how previous experience influences an affective image of tourist destinations.

In the model by Beerli and Martin (2004), the external sources of information, such as travel agencies, advertising, and previous experience, are parts of the stimuli factors and information sources on the destination, which may influence the perception of the destination image. However, tourists may not necessarily accept the information provided to them because they might perceive the information according to their perceptions or prior knowledge about the destination (Casas & Silverio, 2015). This situation could be challenging for destination marketers promoting tourist destinations because information sources about tourist destinations could influence the cognitive and affective images of the destination (Baloglu, 2000). Furthermore, information is perceived to be facing numerous challenges, especially with the rapid spread of

information and the Internet's use as a source of information (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). The Internet has become one of the modern communication channels in the tourism industry (Law, Leung, & Wong, 2004), and it has been developing in numerous ways, with individuals easily finding information. One of the Internet channels used by numerous users is social media. Social media platforms have become channels for information sources for tourists looking for information on tourist destinations (Kim, Kim, & Wise, 2014a). Various tourism organizations in numerous countries utilize new technological advances to promote information about tourist destinations by exploiting many tools, such as websites or social media (Tsai et al., 2017).

Social media has a strong influence on tourist behaviors about destination trust, travel intention, and the means information is transmitted (Abubakar, 2016). Information from these tools was found to contribute to creating the image for a specific destination in tourists' minds and influencing travel intention (Tsai et al., 2017). Today, social media platforms help tourists decide on visiting destinations. Also, Pabel and Prideaux (2016) reported that the importance of social media platforms for information search about tourist destinations is growing for first-time visitors compared with repeat visitors, indicating the importance of social media platforms in promoting tourist destinations. To promote emerging tourist destinations, DMOs could play a significant role as information providers in promoting tourist destinations through social media and influencing destination image and behavioral intention. The focus of previous studies was on promoting well-known or developed tourist destinations. However, previous studies still have not highlighted promoting emerging tourist destinations through social media and the role of DMOs as a credible source in influencing destination image and behavioral intention. The following sections discuss the information provided via social media platforms and the influence on destination image.

## **2.6 Social Media Information**

According to Buhalis and Law (2008), the existence and development of information communication technologies have been changing tourism worldwide via the development of search engines, carrying capacity, and network speeds. All these elements impact the number of travelers who use different technologies, such as social media platforms, for planning and experiencing their travels. These technological developments have allowed individuals to utilize multimedia features to enhance their tourism experiences (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Using the Internet as a platform has changed experiences radically because websites, such as social media platforms, started to be called Web 2.0 instead of Web 1.0 (O'Reilly, 2007). O'Reilly (2007) reported that marketers use Web 2.0 because it has a marketing buzzword, which attracts marketers during their marketing campaigns. Web 2.0 and social media platforms have a primary goal to enable communities to interact with others (Safko & Brake, 2009).

Social media platforms are one of the technological development tools. Poynter (2010) mentioned that social media is broad, which makes setting a definition difficult. However, social media is easy to recognize, and a major element of social media is that numerous models are available that allow users to create and share content. Scott (2010) indicated that social media provides people the ability to communicate through various online social media platforms. Additionally, Ahlqvist, Bäck, Heinonen, and Halonen (2010) tried to define social media based on three major elements: content, communication, and Web 2.0. They explained that content is related to user-created content, which may vary because they use different photos or videos, presence information, tags, and reviews. They also stated that communication is the act of interacting directly or indirectly with users. Ahlqvist et al. (2010) mentioned that Web 2.0 is related to developing web technologies and applications to make social media platforms easy for users to

engage with the social media content. Moreover, Bernal (2010) identified social media platforms as the implication of a virtual community where users can share content, collaborate in information, and discuss common interest topics.

Social media platforms have targeted businesses by creating content that can actively engage users interested in at least one of the four key social networking sites: Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and YouTube (Kujur & Singh, 2017). Buhalis and Law (2008) stated that “Tourism as international industry and as the biggest provider of jobs on the planet boasts a greater array of heterogeneous stakeholders than many other industries” (p. 609). The use of social media for tourism purposes is essential for tourists. According to Leung, Law, Van Hoof, and Buhalis (2013), social media has become popular among tourists who use social media platforms when they are planning to travel. The authors added that consumers considered the trustworthiness of the information provided on social media as the key to determining their decision. Therefore, the changes in technologies and individual behavior must be understood as these could influence the distribution of information related to travel and the accessibility of the information to tourists (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Also, Chung, Lee, and Han (2015) similarly emphasized that social media has an influence on the tourism industry via communication and may enable huge possibilities for users who are using social media to share and post-travel information via advertising, messages, instant messages, and replies with comments on posts. Numerous service providers have started to utilize social media platforms by establishing accounts to communicate with their customers, such as service providers in the hospitality industry, who have established accounts for themselves in social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter (Noone, McGuire, & V Rohlfs, 2011). In the midst of various information sources, Twitter is considered one of the more effective social

media platforms in terms of the high number of active users (Madani, Boussaid & Djamel Eddine, 2015; Barnaghi, Breslin & Ghaffari, 2016).

Furthermore, with a large amount of information potentially available to travelers, social media has become an important component in the tourism industry by facilitating interactions between online users (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The cost of promoting tourism destinations via social media is considered to be affordable (Jamaludin, Aziz, Mariapan, & Ain Lin, 2017). Social media is rich in information sources that could significantly influence how tourists find and search for information and, more importantly, decide about tourist destinations (Kim et al., 2017). As DMOs are trying to introduce undiscovered destinations through social media, it might be challenging due to the number of information sources that require DMOs to be credible enough to gain tourist trust towards information provided about tourist destinations.

## **2.7 Social Media Information and Destination Image**

Previous studies indicated that obtaining information from online sources impacts tourist behavior (Buhalis, 2000; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). Social media platforms contribute to form the image via the information provided by various providers and influence cognitive and affective information (Ghazali & Cai, 2013). The information provided on tourism in the media is referred to as destination image, which can be created via text in brochures, films, and television (Scarles & Lester 2013). With social media features such as enabling users to post images, videos, and blogs on their websites with the information provided, social media can influence potential tourists' perceptions of new destinations.

Social media platforms have become an important tool in promoting tourist destinations, contributing to creating an image for a destination, and increasing travel intention (Chu & Luckanavanich, 2018). For instance, Stepaniuk (2015) mentioned that social media photographs

attract users towards cognitive, affective, and behavioral activities. Furthermore, a recent study emphasized the importance of destination image as a mediator between social media and travel intention (Chu & Luckanavanich, 2018). The study found that social media users, directly and indirectly, influence travel intention through destination image components. The information provided via social media platforms may help promote and develop a tourist destination's cognitive and affective images (Banyai & Potwarka, 2012).

Månsson (2009) mentioned that media products are critical to tourists in creating awareness and knowledge about tourist destinations' attractions. Social media platforms have a direct influence on forming the destination image (Stepaniuk, 2015). As tourists lack knowledge about the destination they have not visited before (Chon, 1990), they may rely on the destination image based on information provided to them (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Previous studies showed that travelers are using social media to search for information about a destination and share photos, videos, opinions, and experiences, which may influence others' perceptions about a destination (Stepaniuk, 2015; Gretzel & Xiang, 2010; Månsson, 2009). Xiang and Gretzel (2010) found that search engine keywords are likely to direct travelers to social media platforms, such as keywords of attractions and accommodations. Additionally, Chu and Luckanavanich (2018) emphasized that social media influences destination image and travel intention, indicating that social media is effective as a marketing channel because it can influence the destination image.

Baloglu and McCleary (1999) and Beerli and Martin (2004) mentioned a range of secondary information sources that could influence image formation and found that social media causes complexity in the image formation process (Ghazali & Cai, 2013). In terms of affecting the destination, the information provided in social media platforms contributes to building and influencing an image for a destination via the information provided to tourists, such as those by

official Tourism Board accounts in social media, which may help attract potential visitors to destinations (Shen, Song, Li & Jiang, 2015). Therefore, DMOs play an essential role in forming a destination image via the information provided to tourists. However, online travel information is not exclusive to DMOs, especially in social media, because numerous online users share information, such as shared content by tourists (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Lian and Yu (2019) redefined online tourist destination image as “a tourist's holistic impression and perception of a destination, which is formed by acquiring a multitude of information concerning a destination from a variety of online information sources” (p, 636). Such shared content could play a role in forming a destination image for new destinations. For promoting new information, DMOs need to be considered credible sources since social media users might lack knowledge or wrong perceptions about the destination. The following section discusses social media marketing.

## **2.8 Social Media Marketing of Tourist Destinations**

DMOs are important in marketing tourist destinations since they are responsible for promoting destination brands to visitors (De Alwis & Andrić, 2016). DMOs are utilizing the development of technologies to promote their destinations (Park et al., 2016). Hays et al. (2013) reported that DMOs have been using online advertisements for years. However, the Internet has developed via Web 2.0, which increased the use of social media. Since then, DMOs have adopted technological development and play a role in promoting tourist destinations, especially in social media, as well as evolving with constant changes via acknowledging social media as a marketing tool (Roque & Raposo, 2016; Hays et al., 2013). Adopting technological innovation in tourism destinations, such as social media, has become a major movement for competitive advantage and key to success (Munar, 2012).

For example, Roque and Raposo (2016) conducted a study on DMOs using social media as a marketing tool and communication in tourism. They reported that DMOs use social media platforms in their communication and marketing strategies, such as Australia's DMO, which uses social media platforms to utilize improved marketing and communication opportunities. Social media platforms have driven DMOs to use social media as a marketing tool for numerous reasons, such as low cost and reach across the globe (Hays et al., 2013). Numerous DMOs have realized the importance of social media as a marketing tool to promote a destination, such as DMOs in the European Travel Commission, which already adjusted their Facebook accounts (Stankov, Lazić, & Pavluković, 2010; Gretzel et al., 2006).

DMOs seek to provide as much information as possible via Facebook or Twitter posts to promote destinations, attractions, and events. Additionally, they may provide critical information that would be classified into factual/historical information or opinion. However, DMOs need to be active via their social media platforms and provide updated information since travelers would prefer to obtain information in an accessible and wide manner (Hays et al., 2013). The DMO marketing strategy is crucial in ensuring an influx of tourists to the destination. DMOs could face challenges that may affect their performance and credibility in promoting tourist destinations, such as the lack of activities and informative information provided to tourists about new attractions. One of the issues that could affect DMOs' marketing through social media is that when they use the same traditional marketing activities without taking advantage of features and changes in social media (Uşaklı et al., 2017). According to Sevin (2013), DMOs lack marketing strategies when promoting tourist destinations. For instance, 64% of five official destination marketing accounts' tweets did not encourage dialogue or discussions with users.



According to Keller (2008), the high cost of introducing a new brand or product to the market has made marketers reconsider the appropriate strategies for branding. Social media as an information provider channel has become easy, affordable, and attractive to be used because it is designed to satisfy those looking for information (Westerman et al., 2014). For potential tourists, Marine-Roig et al. (2017) noticed in their study that users in social media like to discover a new destination and meet new people. However, there is still a gap in previous studies not focusing on visiting intention to emerging tourist destinations via DMOs marketing in social media. Jokinen (2016) stated that awareness about a new brand is important, but if knowledge about the new brand is lacking, this could cause hesitation about the image, such as the image that DMO and its stakeholders are trying to build and eventually influence tourists' visit intention towards the new destination. Nowadays, information is not limited to a specific information source because tourists can obtain information from friends, relatives, hotels, destination marketing organizations, and other sources (Fodness & Murray, 1998). With the huge amount of online users, individuals, such as consumers, would pay more attention to assessing the source credibility than the quality (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015).

According to Wu et al. (2016), the online travel community constructed to meet tourists' needs as a network to communicate and interact with other online users. They added that the online travel community has similar interests that they engage in and share with others. By sharing their recommendations and reviews through various online platforms, the online travel community likewise leads users to become a significant online information source (Wang, Chan, Leong, Ngai, & Au, 2016), thereby helping travelers obtain worthy information and assist them with their future trip plans. Furthermore, the online travel community is considered one of the rapidly developing tools along with media sharing sites, blogs, microblogs, and other online information forms (Leung

et al., 2013). Online travel communities could help in promoting tourist destinations via supporting DMOs posts about newly emerging destinations. However, there is still a lack of studies in previous literature about the possible impact of the online travel community on DMOs as a credible source in social media.

With the spread and increase of information, especially uninformative information, it would be challenging and complex for travelers to find credible advice (Wang et al., 2016), thus it could play a role in influencing information credibility of official sources promoting new places. As this study is focused on Saudi Arabia, it is important to know and understand the influence of information credibility provided by DMOs via social media platforms, where this country is considered to enter the tourism industry because there could be a lack of knowledge on tourist destinations. Also, tourists might have different perspectives on trusting the official sources promoting tourist destinations, such as AIUla in Saudi Arabia.

Additionally, this situation could influence the destination image components, especially for tourists who lack knowledge about the destination. Potential tourists may form an incorrect image of emerging tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia due to misleading information in social media about tourist destinations or the country. The credibility of the information provided may influence their decision. DMOs could play a major role in promoting tourist destinations by providing information to potential tourists about tourist destinations.

Previous studies discussed the role of the impact of DMOs' social media platforms on destination image (e.g., Molinillo et al., 2017; Molinillo et al., 2018) and the role of online travel community on destination image (e.g., Jalilvand et al., 2012; Shen & Yeh, 2017). However, previous studies did not evaluate how the information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations could influence destination image and behavioral intention. Tourists may likewise

have various perceptions toward the information provided about new places. To specify information credibility issues, which influence the promotion of tourist destinations, the present study focuses on a specific social media platform, Twitter. Twitter effectively attracts tourists to visit tourism destinations because social media is more effective in providing comprehensive knowledge than any traditional sources of information (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011; Parsons, 2017). The following section discusses Twitter as one of the most famous social media platforms and one of the marketing channels for DMOs to promote tourism.

### **2.8.1 Marketing Tourism via Twitter**

Social media is considered an important tool because it provides numerous ways for users to communicate (Baruah, 2012). With the development of the Internet, there are various social media platforms, and each has its characteristics. For instance, social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) allow users to have friends and fans to interact with, content communities (e.g., YouTube) focus on allowing users to provide videos and movies on the platform, and microblogs (e.g., Twitter) allow users to have and follow asymmetrical relationships with other users (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). Twitter can be distinguished among other social media platforms because it can be a portal to information and communication tools and a way to prompt the mobilization of followers (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

Twitter is a social media platform launched in 2006 (Twitter, n.d.). Twitter as a microblog has become a medium of any recent happenings (Kwak, Lee, Park, Moon, 2010). Users Through this platform can: type tweets (post), update their status, republish tweets from other accounts (re-tweets), write tweets while mentioning a specific account, replay to any tweet from different accounts, and even respond or create a tweet and mention it with a hashtag (Antoniadis, Vrana & Zafiroopoulos, 2014; Kwak et al., 2010; Zafiroopoulos, Antoniadis, & Vrana 2017). Several social

media platforms would require users to follow them to be their friends to see the users' posts, such as Facebook. However, Twitter allows users to read others' tweets without following their accounts as long as the Twitter user is not restricting his/her account. One of Twitter's features is that using retweet and hashtags can spread the information more than the circle of the original tweet's followers (Kwak et al., 2010). Compared to other social media platforms, Twitter is the most famous for short text conversations or discussions (Tenkanen et al., 2017). Furthermore, many businesses have joined Twitter and been using it for advertisements to spread information to consumers (Al-Husain & Mirza, 2015).

According to Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), as a microblogging site on social media, Twitter can be an effective tool for promoting events by sending information easily and effectively. One of Twitter's features is their capability to rapidly spread information about a specific topic, with an allowance of social media features to interact with online communities regarding a piece of information (Gaffar, Abdullah, & Novyanti Putri, 2018). Promoting through blogs, such as Twitter, was effective because the reader can easily be closer to the blogger, who is the source of information (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011, as cited in Schouten et al., 2019). Bokunewicz and Shulman (2017) noted that Twitter offers many features, such as low operating costs and easy connection with numerous users. When DMOs became aware of Twitter's ability to spread information about any event in the destination, they started to use Twitter for promotion (Bokunewicz & Shulman, 2017).

Twitter is a middle tool to enhance the prominence of the destination image by enabling users to interact via comments about the tourist destinations and have a degree of impact on other users (Hernández, Talavera, & López, 2016). In addition, Zafiroopoulos et al. (2017) reported that microblogs, such as Twitter, are used by travelers to find information, organize, share, and share

travel experiences. However, providing relevant information to the targeted needs is important (Shimada, Inoue, Maeda, & Tsutomu Endo, 2011). Therefore, promoting information to tourists on Twitter has to be informative enough about tourist destinations. DMOs worldwide have been using Twitter to market and deliver information about tourist destinations (Hay, 2010; Hays et al., 2013; Sevin, 2013; Bokunewicz & Shulman, 2017). For instance, Uşaklı et al (2017) conducted a study on 50 European DMOs using social media to promote their destinations and found that 93% of the total posts by the DMOs were via Twitter. The study showed that DMOs found Twitter to be much more interactive than other social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook. Antoniadis et al. (2014) mentioned that Twitter helps DMOs deliver information about tourist destinations and promote tourists' destination image.

Other users of the online community could also contribute to marketing through sharing and endorsing information about a specific subject, which may include individuals, previous travelers, residents, and others who are aware of the place, services, or activities provided at the destination, thus connecting with other tourists with similar interests (Kavoura & Stavrianea, 2015). The online travel community could support DMOs promoting emerging tourist destinations, especially where travelers trust others' comments and information on social media. Marketing via Twitter is dependent on the credibility of the information (Mack et al., 2008). However, online information could vary, especially on Twitter because there is vast information from various users, and such details could be mentioned by numerous Twitter accounts that may belong to the government or even individuals who have been using the site as a tool for various purposes, such as political propaganda (Castillo, Mendoza, & Poblete, 2011). Thus, the impact of information sources on tourist destinations may be huge because social media platforms, such as Twitter, provide users with the ability to express their positive or negative feelings towards the

content (Jamaludin et al.,2017). Tourists would consider information from a trusted source as credible information about the destination (Žanna & Xuedong, 2016), such as DMOs as official information sources. However, promoting new destinations through social media and convincing tourists of information credibility about tourist destinations would not be easy due to factors related to the content provided and information sources in social media.

For the case of Saudi Arabia, Twitter is particularly popular in Saudi Arabia. According to Statista (2021), Saudi Arabia is among the top counties in terms of the number of Twitter users and User-Generated Content. Saudi Arabia is one of the most active countries in the Middle East in terms of social media usage, especially on Twitter; it has more than 53% active users, making it the country with the highest Twitter penetration in the world (Albinahmed & Ahmed, 2017). Alasem (2015) conducted a study on the use of Twitter by Saudi authorities and found that the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities was the top official account in terms of the number of hashtags. Due to the lack of reputation about tourism in Saudi Arabia, potential tourists might find false online information about the country, or online users could mislead potential tourists about tourism development in Saudi Arabia, leading to establishing an incorrect image of tourism in Saudi Arabia. Promoting and providing information via Twitter could influence a tourist's perceptions about new destinations, especially through the content provided by DMOs and online travel communities interacting with information from official Tourism accounts, given that there are numerous active users in Saudi Arabia (Albinahmed & Ahmed, 2017). Therefore, information on a destination needs to have credibility for it to be persuasive (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). The following section discusses information processing and information source credibility.

## 2.9 Information Processing

Understanding the information processing is significant since the information process is influenced by informational factors (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Therefore, information about tourist destinations through social media can be influenced if the content is not informative enough, influencing the reader to perceive the content. One of the factors that is central in the information process is information source credibility. Previous studies highlighted that the perception toward information credibility is critical since the content can influence receivers, such as customers (Morosan & Fesenmaier, 2007). Therefore, understanding the influence of the information process would be significant due to the power of informational factors like information credibility. Previous studies have been conducted about the information process and quality via several theories, such as information processing theory (Mackie, Worth, & Asuncion, 1990) and dual-process theory by Deutsch and Gerrard (1955). One of the theories that could help understand information influences is the dual-process theory.

The Dual-Process Theory would help determine the content's influence from both content and social empowerment in affecting the source credibility. The dual-process theory by Deutsch Gerard (1955) is one of the psychological theories that help to clarify communication effectiveness. The theory focuses on normative and informational social influence as determinants to form reader judgment of the content. According to Deutsch and Gerard (1955), the normative social influence can be described as “an influence to conform to the positive expectations of another”. They also defined the informational social influence as “an influence to accept information obtained from another as evidence about reality” (p. 629). The Dual-process theories contribute to evaluating the content and factors related which eventually affect message credibility (Zhang & Watts, 2003). Also, some theories were developed based on the

dual-process approach. For instance, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and heuristic-systematic (HSM) models demonstrated the persuasive power of messages (Smith. & DeCoster, 2000). Both models help to understand information processing and decision-making by individuals about information provided through the internet (Baek, Ahn, & Choi, 2012) and examine information content and factors related to the context that could influence message receiver from assessing message validity (Gilbert, 1999).

The perception toward the information source as trustworthy and providing accurate information is essential for the message content to be convincing and effective. Due to the massive number of active social media users searching for information about new tourist destinations, it is significant to understand factors related to information sources and online recommendations (Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009). Moreover, the quality of the message content is a significant determinant of how the receiver would respond to the message (Worth & Mackie, 1987). This process can be described as forming a judgment toward the message through the cognition process to the information. Additionally, the quality of the message as an informational factor and support via recommendation as a normative factor could play a role in evaluating source credibility by a reader (Cheung et al., 2009). Also, both formative and informative impacts can help to shape an evaluation of information credibility by reviewers (Pinem, Anwar, Handayani, & Munajat, 2019).

Information source credibility would provide valid and compelling information comparing with sources with a lack of credibility, which gives source credibility importance as a factor in the information processing (Clark, Jason & Wegener, 2013). Previous studies highlighted that message receivers would evaluate information from message providers based on cues provided in the content as a cognitive tool to help them decide about the information they



received, such as message creator identity (Forman, Ghose, & Wiesenfeld, 2008). However, previous literature is still missing to evaluate the impact of informative content on perceiving source credible through social media since there are many content creators, such as contents related to tourism, where it can influence other users' perceptions toward tourist destinations. Furthermore, previous literature indicated that reviewers' recommendations or support could help as a cue and influence the source credibility. For instance, Baek et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine review credibility through dual-process theory, and they found that customers would use different information sources. Also, they found that peripheral cues, such as star ratings, would help search for information and determine source credibility. As this study focuses on promoting emerging tourist destinations through social media by DMOs, the online travel community could play a role in influencing DMOs information credibility. The following section discusses information credibility in previous literature.

## **2.10 Information Source Credibility**

Information credibility is defined as a judgment made on the source's believability, which relies on the perception of expertise and trustworthiness of information sources (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; O'Keefe, 1990). Metzger and Flanagin (2013) clarified the definition from Hovland et al. (1953) by linking credibility with psychology and communication, which largely focuses on source credibility, but other studies focused on the information credibility rather than the source. Therefore, determining the information's credibility could rely on various assessments. Peter and Olson (2008) defined destination source credibility in the tourism context as changes in the tourists' behavioral intention, attitudes, beliefs, and caused by a specific communication source context. The source credibility theory is grounded in two elements: trustworthiness and expertise (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991; Hovland et al., 1953). Veasna et al. (2013)

highlighted that source credibility as a concept in tourism literature is significant because a credible tourist destination source would help tourists perceive lower risk experience about information related to tourist destinations. In light of using the internet and social media, Chung et al. (2015) added that information credibility in tourism as the confidence level enables users to provide travel information and coordinate via sharing understanding between social media users.

Travel information became available on the Internet via websites and social media platforms, in which tourists can search for travel information via search engines, such as built-in search engines in social media platforms (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). With the development of social media sites and the rapid spread of information, social media has brought challenges to the credibility of the information. Therefore, travelers tend to look for reliable information on social media, focusing on the organic image (Ghazali & Cai, 2013). Travelers seek information that is accessible and credible (Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie, & Winter, 2013). Therefore, tourists' information must be credible and available to them when they want to know more about a specific destination. The information credibility is critical in influencing the information search process (Lee, Lee, & Kwon 2015) and tourist behavioral intention toward tourist destination (Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011; Choi et al., 2018). Kerstetter and Cho (2004) evaluated prior knowledge and source credibility and found that the latter is the strongest predictor of the type of information used. Thus, the source of information should be credible for influencing tourists' when searching for vacation information. According to Erdoğan (1999), information from a credible source can impact beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and/or behaviors through a process called "internalization." The internalization occurs when receivers embrace the source influence in terms of their attitude and value structures (p. 297).

The online information on tourist destinations has numerous features that may enable users to create travel information, modify, change, and spread information by the tourism provider to tourists or tourists themselves (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Given the enormous volume of online travel information sources via various online platforms, it is important to provide credible travel information (Choi et al., 2018). The vast majority of information sources on the Internet, especially on social media, raise concerns about the credibility, quality, and veracity of the information spread, becoming unclear (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). Previous studies mentioned the importance of information sources and how information credibility of travel information of online information can influence travelers (Ayeh et al., 2013a; Castillo, Mendoza, & Poblete, 2011; Chung et al., 2015; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Öz, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). For instance, Gretzel, Yoo, and Purifoy (2007) conducted a study on users using TripAdvisor.com and found that the reviewer's credibility relies on his/her travel experience. However, tourists might need cues to trust information sources, specifically for lesser-known destinations in social media.

The information source credibility of tourist destinations is related to their ability to influence tourists' beliefs towards information about tourist destinations (Ohanian, 1990). DMOs have the power as sources because people prefer content and images created publicly, believing that such sites are worth trust (Money & Crofts, 2003). The UNWTO (2019) has emphasized the importance of DMO to be credible and obtain all stakeholders' credibility. The increased use of social media in promoting has influenced the trust in spreading information (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). For information about tourist destinations, travelers look at the online information provided by reviewers, such as the online community, as a reliable source of information provided by tourism organizations (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008), indicating their desire to obtain information from users who

have experience. However, with a lack of indication of the source of information, users' online content can be perceived as less credible (Dellarocas 2006 as cited in Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009). Also, McKnight and Kacmar (2007) added that perceptions about information credibility could affect an unfamiliar website, and information plays a role in developing credibility. Also, the lack of experience about tourist destinations for newly emerging destinations and information source credibility through social media would influence tourist destination.

However, several factors can influence information source credibility. The information credibility through social media was found to be affected through several factors, such as argument strength, interactivity, transparency (Li & Suh, 2015), message valence (Wang, Cunningham, & Eastin 2015), and persuasiveness (Luo, Luo, Schatzberg, & Sia, 2013). As numerous online sources may provide information about tourism on social media, it is important to know the influence of these sources' credibility on new places. Referring to the mentioned credibility source theory, being an expert and trustful source would influence a tourist destination's source credibility. For promoting tourist destinations, DMO plays a significant role in promoting and providing information to potential tourists about tourism destinations. Due to the huge number of information sources in social media, the information provided through DMOs about tourist destinations could influence the destination image (Veasna et al., 2013). Also, the information credibility of DMOs could influence behavioral intention toward visiting new places because potential tourists might lack information from trusted sources about tourist destinations on social media, which could also influence the image of the destination. Therefore, it is important to perceive an informative message because it can help users decide (Johanes, Pinem, Hidayanto, & Shihab, 2016). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of studies focusing on factors influencing information source credibility for visiting emerging destinations for tourism context.

One of the factors that could influence DMOs information credibility in promoting tourist destinations through social media is the informativeness of the content provided related to tourist destinations. The informative message could play a role in the source's information credibility on emerging tourism destinations on Twitter. Furthermore, numerous active users are using Twitter in Saudi Arabia, which means the site has a role in marketing tourist destinations. Besides, the online travel community could help influence the credibility of the information provided on social media via endorsing the messages, such as endorsing information provided by DMOs via replying, retweeting, or liking tweets. This kind of endorsement could influence the information credibility from DMOs. Therefore, this research focused on evaluating the impact of informativeness and online travel community endorsement on the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations via Twitter. Also, this research focused on how information credibility provided by DMOs may influence destination image components, given that information source credibility is significant to destination image formation developed by and behavioral intention (Gartner, 1993).

### **2.11 Informativeness**

Information is considered an essential benefit for consumers when they receive any advertising messages because it can help them compare with other products/services and make their purchase decisions (Gao, 2007). Previous literature found that source credibility is an essential factor that helps customers to make a decision (Wathen & Burkell, 2002 as cited in Tien et al., 2019). The development of technologies has changed how customers process information, specifically online information that customers are using to purchase and search for information (Senecal, Kalczynski, & Nantel 2005). For instance, social media platforms in recent years have influenced how people receive and get information or news from social media (Lou & Yuan, 2019). With these massive information sources, customers would consider the information quality

and source credibility when they search for information (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008). Petty and Cacioppo (1983) suggested through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theory of information processing to persuasion that there are two routes for information processing assessments which are central that related to the content (e.g., quality of information) and peripheral, which is content-irrelevant indicators. The ELM indicates that elaboration in information would let readers evaluate the quality of information. There are many indicators that can be used in the ELM, but source credibility is still one of the most important cues which can positively influence readers' perceptions (Luo et al., 2013). This theory suggests that when customers can assess information credibility, they will be in the central route to carefully consider the information content (Lia & Suh, 2015). Previous studies highlighted that one of the factors that customers would seek and evaluate social media information based on informativeness (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Hayes, Golan, Britt, & Applequist, 2019).

Oh and Xu (2003) identified informativeness as the ability to provide relevant information. Ducoffe (1996) added that informativeness could be explained as the ability to deliver information through advertising to satisfy customers' needs. Furthermore, several authors described informativeness as the ability to provide necessary and helpful information to customers with accuracy and utility (e.g., Choi, Ok, & Cho, 2015; Jeon et al., 2018; Luo, 2002). Informativeness is derived from the uses and gratifications theory, which considers it a valuable factor in advertising for customers, and they would react positively when they receive an informed advertisement (Liu et al., 2012 as cited in Lin, Paragas, & Bautista, 2016). Besides, informativeness is a crucial factor in justifying advertisements (Lee, Byon, Ammon, & Park, 2016). According to King, Reid, Tinkham, and Pokrywczynski (1987), the informativeness of content through advertising should be a function of media content. Therefore, informativeness is

considered to be important in creating content. Schlosser, Shavitt, and Kanfer (1999) added that individuals' attitudes about Internet advertising for decision making are affected by enjoyment, informativeness, and the benefits of the advertisement. Thus, informativeness is essential for promoting a product or service to customers. Perceived informativeness of advertising differs among media, advertising types, and consumer characteristics (Huh, DeLorme, & Reid, 2004).

The content provided in advertisements is essential, and it shows an influence on customers' perceptions of the company's advertisements about a product (Blanco, Blasco, & Azorín, 2010). One of the main reasons for considering informativeness in promoting is that customers like to receive advertising and promotional messages with enough information about services or products (Fatima & Abbas, 2016). Informativeness in marketing messages may increase customers' chance to consider the advertising messages (Louis et al., 2013). Additionally, an informative advertisement of a product contributes to increasing the probability of capturing consumers' attention (Cho, Im, Fjermestad, & Hiltz, 2003). Several elements influence the message and individuals' perceptions of informativeness, namely, relevance, timeliness, and comprehensiveness (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014).

As social media platforms become essential in people's lives, content's informativeness plays an important role in social media (Hamouda, 2018; Murillo, Merino, & Nunez, 2016). The influence of informative advertising via social media has been mentioned in the academic field. For instance, Lee and Hong (2016) conducted a study on social media advertising and discussed informativeness as a factor predicting users' responses toward advertisement in social media. They found that the more users perceive informativeness in advertising through social media, the more positive attitudes they have to express. Therefore, providing enough information will enable users to make the right purchase decision. They also suggested that marketers make their advertising

messages informative because it helps induce users to express their empathy and make an optimal purchase.

Furthermore, Murillo et al. (2016) conducted a study on the advertising value of Twitter advertisements on Mexican millennials. They found that informativeness, entertainment, and credibility could significantly impact the perceptions of Mexican millennials toward advertising value and attitudes toward advertising on Twitter. Therefore, informativeness is significant because informative messages may help enhance the advertisement's effectiveness and could increase and enhance the sponsor's message credibility to the reader (Earl & Pride, 1984). For the information provided online, such as tourist destinations, having persuasive, logical, and supporting information by the review would result in high quality of information and an increase in perceived informativeness by readers (Lee & Shin, 2014, as cited in Johanes et al., 2016).

Owing to the existence of numerous online sources in social media, the informativeness in the post could play a role in influencing the information credibility with the informative messages because there are unknown individuals who use the Internet to provide a post or review, which would raise the question of information credibility (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007; Park & Lee, 2009). Previous literature has indicated that customers might obtain information about products and services from various information sources on social media, thus showing that information is not exclusive to a specific party. For the tourism context, evaluating travel information through its informativeness has become a significant part of the travel business online arrangement (Tien et al., 2019). Individuals would be concerned about the credibility of new products or services because it could impact their experience (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000). For promoting newly tourist destinations, tourists might be concerned about the credibility of the information provided about tourist destinations promotions on social media. Provided studies highlighted the



influence of informativeness on attitudes through social media advertising (e.g., Alalwan, 2018; Lee & Hong, 2016; Dao, Le, Cheng, & Chen, 2014).

Moreover, Tsang, Ho, and Liang (2004) found that that informativeness and credibility are positively correlated towards mobile advertising. Also, Hossain et al. (2018) found that informativeness can influence credibility through mobile advertising. Previous studies mentioned that message quality is considered a major factor in persuasion (Cheung et al., 2012). Also, the persuasiveness of a message provided to customers depends on attributes that have communicators to be persuasive (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Luo et al. (2013) found in their study the impact of informational factors on the online recommendation that informational factors play a role in readers' perception of credibility. Informativeness of contents can be through providing a relevant, sufficient, and comprehensive message that can impact perceptions toward information (Zhang et al., 2014). It can indicate that informativeness can be an informational factor that could influence readers' perceptions toward credibility. As previous studies examined the influence of informativeness in different aspects, however, the content's informativeness on influencing information credibility is still undiscovered.

Granter (1993) emphasized the importance of information in the formatting destination image. With numerous online sources capable of providing information about tourist destinations, it is important to understand the impact of informativeness on these sources' information credibility because the focus of the study is on DMOs and the online travel community. In the case of Saudi Arabia, several governmental agencies related to tourism use their social media accounts to promote a new destination, and there are numerous active users from the region that provide information about the destination. However, these promotions may not be informative enough to potential tourists, which could influence its credibility. Therefore, there is a need to study the

possible influence of informativeness on information credibility. The following part discusses the role of online travel communities in endorsing the information provided in social media.

## **2.12 Online Travel Community Endorsement**

Roy (2009) defined online community as “a group of individuals with common interests who interact with one another on the Internet” (p. 46). The online travel community has become an important information source for potential tourists, and their recommendation becomes similar to the recommendation provided by friends and family (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). The online travel communities provide travelers with a communication chance to share opinions and travel experiences through posting reviews (Ukpabi, Onyenucheya, & Karjaluoto, 2017). Information related to tourism is considered a major factor influencing potential tourists’ choice of a destination (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). Therefore, it is significant to understand the influence of these sources on marketing tourism destinations. The online travel community provides information about tourism destinations, and they may play an important role in promoting tourism destinations. Specifically, in social media, the online travel community plays a significant role in promoting and communicating with the public (Kavoura & Stavrianea, 2015). DMOs or destination design and create marketing strategies to promote tourism destination brands (Morrison, 2013). One strategy that can support and help promote is an endorsement, such as celebrity endorsement (Glover, 2009).

Dean (1999) described the endorsement as “the form of sponsorship is another extrinsic cue reported to affect consumer behavior” (p. 1). Also, Dean reported that endorsement is an important signal often used by consumers to infer beliefs and product advantages. An endorsement can bring numerous benefits to any organization. Moreover, the endorsement could be from any organization or association about a product or service that leads to the success of selling to customers

(Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000). Keller (2008) reported that companies could expect benefits from endorsers via increasing views of ads in TV, newspapers, or magazines, thus positively influencing a brand because of their credibility, and the endorser's characteristics can be linked to the brand's image.

According to Mathur, Narayanan, and Chetty (2018), an advertisement's endorsement is one of many advertising strategies, especially an endorsement via the Internet, because it allows famous content creators to invest their content endorsement in several Internet channels such as social media. Therefore, numerous organizations tend to utilize the Internet and social media to promote to their customers. Companies mostly evaluate their marketing success through social media through the number of likes, clicks, and shares (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2019). Thus, the endorsement of company posts through social media is important for marketing and to shape the image. According to den Hoven, Herrewijn, and De Veirman (2017), the endorsement has three advertising principles. First, the endorser of the product needs to be honest. Second, the promoter must provide proof of the endorser's experience in interacting with consumers. Lastly, the endorser and the marketer of the product could influence consumers' evaluations of the endorsements.

Celebrities are used in advertisements by marketers to promote their products (McCracken, 1989) because they are public personalities and their credibility or attractiveness or both (Zipporah & Mberia, 2014). In the tourism sector, destination marketers are using celebrities' endorsements to attract tourists to a destination (Chan, Ng, & Luk, 2013; Glover, 2009; Hakimi et al., 2011; Jolly & L, 2013; Veen, 2009). Previous studies mentioned the use of endorsements from various endorsers, such as the endorsement of celebrities (Glover, 2009; Hsu & McDonald, 2002; Yoon & Choi, 2005), employees (Hsieh & Chang, 2005), organizations (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000), or

even consumers (Yoon & Choi, 2005). Several studies focused on endorsement as a source of credibility through the source model theory (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2009; Ohanian, 1990, 1991; Kim, Lee, & Prideaux, 2014b), focusing on attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness of the endorser. Expertise refers to which extent the source is perceived to be valid assurances, and trustworthiness is related to the level of confidence in the source's intention to deliver the assertions that he/she considers to be most valid (Hovland et al., 1953). For attractiveness, Ohanian (1990) indicated that attractiveness on messages would be related to how messages sources attractiveness, likability, familiarity, and similarity to respondents.

Furthermore, previous theories related to endorsement focused on celebrity endorsement, such as match-up theory which focused on endorsers' influence on consumers on advertised products (Kim et al., 2014b). Also, celebrities' endorsement would produce trustworthiness enhance corporate credibility (Kang 2007 as cited in Kim et al., 2014b). This indicates that endorsement can play a role as a factor in impacting the credibility of the corporate. In the context of this study, online travel community endorsement on promotions about tourist destinations could enhance the credibility of DMOs promotion through social media.

The online travel communities can help strengthen the brand (Katsoni, 2014), and it could help build and approve the messages provided about tourism destinations. Organizations may also help develop the product via communication with consumers, which has a lower cost in spreading information in virtual tourist communities (Wang, Yu, & Fesenmaier, 2002, as cited in Aarsal, Backman, & Baldwin, 2008). Additionally, an endorsement can be obtained from identifiable and unidentifiable people (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000); an online travel community's endorsement can significantly impact tourists. Social media users participating in the post are considered effective in stimulating new products (Bruce, Foutz, & Kolsarici, 2012). Social media users were

also found in a study related to users' acceptance of the product in social networks to influence content credibility when they like and engage with the content (Lai & Liu, 2020). In this case, the online travel community on social media could become a part of the marketing of new destinations and increase the effectiveness of destination marketing for new places. With previous experiences, visitors or residents can play a role in the online travel community (Arsal et al., 2008).

Additionally, the online travel community is capable of endorsement because they have the knowledge or experience to promote such a product (Van der Waldt, Van Loggerenberg, & Wehmeyer, 2009). Previous studies focused on the influence of celebrities' or famous figures' endorsement on brand credibility (Spry et al., 2009; Kim et al. 2014b), however, there is still a lack of studies in providing a view of individuals' role in endorsements, such as customers or tourists. However, a gap exists in the tourism studies on online travel communities endorsing the information provided about new tourist destinations in social media.

On Twitter, online users could also leave comments on messages that they endorsed and supported the information provided about specific subject (Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010). This would make other users notice the endorsements through comments, retweets, and likes. When online users retweet the posts or re-share, it indicates the interest, trust, and agreement in the message provided (Metaxas et al., 2014). Therefore, the endorsement from online travel communities could help increase the trust of promoting tourist destinations by DMOs through social media. Previous studies focused on evaluating celebrities' and influencers' roles in endorsing tourist destinations via social media (e.g., Chan et al., 2018; Xu(Rinka) & Pratt, 2018). However, the previous literature ignored the influence of non-celebrities, such as online travel communities endorsing DMOs posts in social media, which could eventually influence the information credibility of DMOs about tourist destinations, especially in Saudi Arabia. There are numerous

users in social media, and they can provide either positive or negative information about Saudi Arabia as an emerging country in the tourism map.

As this study is focused on promoting emerging destinations, an endorsement from the online travel community on the information provided could influence the information credibility about the destination. This study argues that informativeness and online travel community endorsement could influence the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia via Twitter, which could influence the destination image (cognitive and affective images) and visit intention of tourists to new places. Governmental agencies could gain control of information on tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia via social media platforms, given the credibility of information about new destinations could influence the destination image formation as trusted sources. When tourists start to trust the information provided by DMOs because of the supporting comments by the online community, it may lead to questions regarding the extent it can influence information credibility from DMOs. The following chapter discusses the impact of these factors, the destination image, and the impact of destination image and visit intention.

### **2.13 Research Model and Hypotheses Development**

This research investigates the factors that may influence the intention to visit tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia through social media marketing. Saudi Arabia is considered to be an emerging country in the field of tourism. Given the large number of information sources about tourist destinations via social media, it might be challenging for tourists to know about emerging destinations, which could influence the destination image and travel intention. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of informativeness and online travel community endorsement on the information credibility of DMO posts on Twitter, which promotes tourist destinations. This research evaluates the impact of the information credibility of DMOs on cognitive image and

affective image to determine the power of each factor on destination image. Also, this present study evaluates the influence of information credibility on behavioral intention. Finally, this research investigates the impact of cognitive image and affective image of tourist destinations on potential travelers' behavioral choice to visit emerging destinations.

## **2.14 Research Hypothesis:**

This research focuses on evaluating the impact of informativeness and online travel community endorsement on the information credibility of DMOs. This research also evaluates the impact of information credibility on cognitive and affective images and the impact of cognitive image and affective image on travel intention. The following sections explain the relationship of each element and the proposed hypotheses for this research.

### **2.14.1 Impact of Informativeness on Information Credibility**

Tourism information is one of the essential elements that tourists search for when they want to travel. Social media can provide tourists with more comprehensive knowledge than other traditional information sources (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011; Parsons, 2017). With an increase in the usage of online information, tourism information enables individuals to access and customize information (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Li, Pan, Zhang, & Smith, 2009), and DMOs use online search engines to provide information for individuals who seek information (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). However, accepting the provided information is difficult because of tourists' role during the search, which could face factors that influence their acceptance of information (Li et al., 2009). Also, Li et al. (2009) indicated that learning about the components that may cause effective positive responses is necessary.

The informativeness of the content on tourist destinations could have an impact on the information credibility of DMOs. Obtaining relevant and informative online information would make consumers gain confidence in the information (Hsieh, Hsieh, Chiu, & Yang, 2014). Also, informative content would help make a destination look familiar to potential visitors (Choi et al., 2015). Informativeness was indicated as essential for marketing and advertising value because it can show the effects of providing relevant and comprehensive information (Oh & Xu, 2003). For instance, Kim and Han (2014) conducted a study on a comprehensive and integrated model for smartphone advertisements. They mentioned that informativeness is considered one of the cognitive factors that affect advertising value.

Additionally, Kim and Fesenmaier (2008) mentioned the correlation between informativeness and advertising value because informativeness can help convince customers about the website's information. Previous studies reported the importance of informativeness in studies related to tourism (Tsang et al., 2004; Kim & Han, 2014; Jeon et al., 2018). Tham et al. (2013) indicated that potential tourists could ask for a different type of credibility as cues because of the absence of experienced credibility, which may be caused by the lack of visitors or information provided about the destination. Also, Huh et al. (2004) mentioned that consumers depend on the information provided in the advertisement messages that are credible and informative, indicating the importance of these two elements in promoting.

Also, informativeness was found to help persuade tourists about information provided on tourism websites. (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). Previous studies reported that informational factors, such as information quality and argument, can influence information credibility (Tien et al., 2019; Li & Suh, 2015; Luo et al., 2013; Fang, 2014). Despite the importance of informativeness as a valuable factor in advertising (Lee et al., 2016), less attention was paid to previous literature on



the influence of informativeness on information credibility in social media. Previous research found that informative content in social media can lead customers to have positive perceptions of advertising and suggested that it can contribute to trusting the content related to brands (Dao et al., 2014). Furthermore, Hossain et al. (2018) conducted a study on the impact of mobile advertising's perceived value via word of mouth. Their study focused on the word-of-mouth attitude toward mobile advertising. They indicated that informativeness plays a role in influencing credibility. However, such an attitude could not reflect the impact of information credibility in social media, which has several online sources.

As this research focuses on evaluating the impact of informativeness as a factor that could influence the credibility of information provided by official tourism accounts about tourist destinations, such as DMOs, informative content could play a role in tourist destination promotion via social media. Informativeness in the provided information may influence the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations. Credibility depends on three components: source, content, and channel (Tham et al., 2013). Since DMOs as a source are using social media as a channel, it is important to influence the content on tourist perception toward the source. Therefore, the content's informativeness contributes to providing the necessary and helpful information with accuracy and utility (e.g., Choi et al., 2015; Jeon et al., 2018).

Consequently, a need exists to evaluate the impact of informativeness on the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations. Informativeness of the content about tourist destinations may impact the information credibility of DMOs promoting via social media. This study investigates the impact of informativeness on the information credibility of DMOs via the information provided on Twitter. Theoretically, previous theories that been used in previous literature has focused on the cognitive determinants through dual-process theories, such as

information adoption model (Sussman & Siegal, 2003) and ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983) to investigate the relationship between informational factors and credibility. For this present study, the influence of informativeness on information credibility of DMOs is hypothesized based on the basis of dual process theory, which indicated that informational factors important in determining readers' perceptions, and supported studies found the influence of information characteristics on credibility (e.g., Luo, Luo, Schatzberg, & Sia, 2013; Lu & Suh, 2015; Hossain et al., 2018). Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Informativeness has a positive influence on information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations.

#### **2.14.2 Impact of Online Travel Community Endorsement on Information Credibility**

According to Gartner's (1993) classification of destination image formation, the endorsement is considered a Covert Induced II endorsement via unbiased reports. The level of credibility is considered to be medium, such as newspapers. Covert Induced I endorsement via advertisements and the level of credibility could be low or medium, such as commercials of products or services. With the development of online information, such as information provided in social media, endorsement becomes important in marketing products or services. An endorsement in online information can be considered through users' reliance on others or brands to indicate the trustworthiness of information (Klawitter & Hargittai, 2018). According to Schouten et al. (2019), endorsements play a role in the advertisement because endorsers are considered part of the message supported in social media posts.

A previous study indicated that experts would help persuade in advertising (Dean & Biswas, 2001). According to Wang (2006), there is a connection between consumer endorsements and credibility to generate a better attitude toward a product. Also, an endorsement from experts could

would have positively affected the endorsed information's reliability. Previous research indicated that endorsement contributes to tourist destinations' awareness for promoting tourist destinations (Jolly, 2016). Furthermore, destination marketers are utilizing social media's existent by marketing tourist destinations via celebrities or influencers endorsement to visit tourist destinations because they influence tourists' perceptions of the destination (Chan et al., 2018; Chen, 2018; Xu (Rinka)& Pratt, 2018). Also, tourists might lack information about tourist destinations; therefore, they would rely on recommendations from a celebrity who seems to be an expert about tourism products (Kim et al., 2014a; Wang, 2011). However, celebrities or influencers in social media may be unknown or unlikeable to tourists, thereby limiting the endorsement's influence on potential tourists (Chan et al., 2018).

One of the information sources that are used and recognized by tourists when they search for information is the online travel community (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). The online travel community gives visitors a chance to share travel experiences online, such as sharing their experiences via social media (Ukpabi et al., 2017). Tourists would seek advice and search for information about tourist destinations from online travel communities (Luo, Wang, Jin, Ni, & Zhang, 2019). With the development of online information through social media, online travel communities have grown in terms of number of posts related to recommended attractions, the experience of places or activities, and other posts that would attract travelers' attentions when they search for information about tourist destinations (Li, Lee, & Yang, 2018). Furthermore, tourists find information content provided by the online travel community to be reliable (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Fotis et al., 2012); therefore, the online travel community could play a role in promoting tourist destinations where tourists might have little information and trust in lesser-known destinations. The online community interactivity through social media could influence credibility.

Hajli (2018) found in a study about the online community and information credibility that social media's interactivity is associated with social credibility. Tourists could recognize the online travel community endorsement on organizations' posts as a cue to ensure the message's credibility about unknown tourist destinations.

Therefore, the online travel community could help tourism organizations by supporting their online promotional messages. Despite the importance of the online travel community in marketing tourist destinations, limited studies have focused on the role of online travel community marketing (Jung, Ineson, & Green, 2013). DMOs provide information about newly tourist destinations or new information about tourist destinations through different platforms. Visitors who search for tourist destinations that they had not visited before were impacted by the destination platform content (Jiménez Barreto, Rubio, Campo, Molinillo, 2020). However, they have to consider the credibility of online sources since many online information sources can impact tourists' perception of tourist destinations (Veasna et al., 2013).

DMOs provide information to potential tourists to introduce tourist destinations, however, promoting tourist destinations through social media could require specific marketing strategies, particularly to gain users' trust toward the information provided. One effective communication and marketing tool that could help in influencing the credibility of the brand is the endorsement (Spry et al., 2009). Previous studies in the tourism context have indicated the importance of endorsement for marketing tourist destinations via focusing on celebrities' involvement and endorsement in visiting tourists' destinations (e.g., Chan, Lee, & Wong, 2018; Chen, 2018; Glover, 2009; Johns, Weir, & Weir, 2015). However, there is little attention in previous literature on the online travel community's possible role in marketing tourist destinations since the online travel community would help build the brand for tourist destination (Arsal et al., 2008). Also, tourists

who share information on social media platforms may have a high value (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013) because an endorsement from society could strongly impact users' perception toward the advertisement content (Aral & Walker, 2014).

Information sources were found to influence the pre-purchase stage expectations (Spreng & Page, 2001, as cited in Lopes et al., 2013). DMOs and other official accounts provide information about tourist destinations via social media to promote and increase tourist destinations' popularity (Lian & Yu, 2019). As DMOs use social media to promote tourist destinations, tourists may be concerned about the credibility of information provided, particularly about new places. With the increase in online information sources, the online travel community plays a significant role in impacting the destinations' promotions (Braun et al., 2013). Given that the endorsement can be unidentifiable (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000), the online travel community could play a role through endorsements in influencing DMOs social media promotions and information credibility of tourist destinations.

For the online travel community's role in promoting new tourist destinations, the literature on the role of online travel community endorsement in the information credibility of DMOs is nonexistent. Previous studies' focus was more on celebrities and influencers endorsements, with whom the online travel community could play a role in conveying to potential visitors about information provided either from DMOs via their endorsements. Previous literature has studied the online travel community from different theoretical aspects, such as the source credibility of helpful reviewers by Lee, Law, and Murphy (2011), the technology acceptance model about the willingness of sharing information by Ting, Ting, and Hsiao (2014), and beliefs/attitude about online travel reviews by Sparks, Perkins, and Buckley (2013). However, previous studies pay less attention to identify the impact of individuals' endorsement on source credibility.

Previous studies indicated the impact of celebrities' or influencers' endorsements in tourism studies (e.g., Chan et al., 2018; Xu (Rinka) & Pratt, 2018). As there is an increase in online information sources promoting tourist destinations, tourists could be concerned about the credibility of information provided about tourist destinations. Since endorsing information is not exclusive to specific online users, this research argues that the online travel community's endorsement would impact the information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations through social media. Jolly (2016) mentioned that the endorsements must come from someone native to the destination or travelers who love to travel to the destination because it could make tourists feel the authenticity of the endorser. Also, endorsement was found in a previous study to be used as cognitive heuristics to evaluate information source credibility (Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010).

Therefore, an endorsement from the online travel community could convince potential tourists to trust the information and visit newly emerging tourism destinations. Previous studies related to endorsement have focused theoretically on the correlation of celebrities' endorsements and credibility (e.g., Han & Ki, 2010; Ohanian, 1990, 1991; Till & Busler, 2000; Spry et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2014b). This study investigates the impact of online travel endorsement on the information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging tourism destinations based on previous literature related to endorsement. Based on the associative of match-up theory which focused on how endorser effectiveness influence consumers (Kim et al., 2014b; Koernig & Boyd, 2009), the basis of dual-process theory, and supported studies of the relationship of endorsement and credibility (Kim et al., 2014b; Schouten et al., 2019; Spry et al., 2009), this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Online travel community endorsement has a positive influence on information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations.

### **2.14.3 Impact of Information Credibility on Destination Image**

Information credibility from personal experiences and sources is formed through destination image formation by Gartner (1993) as an "organic" image. Information credibility is a major factor that is important to tourists, and it could influence the information gathering process and travel decision making (Kim et al., 2011; Kerstetter & Cho, 2004), especially when the content of the information of tourist destinations is different and irregular (Martínez-Ruiz et al., 2018). With the spread of online information, the credibility of information provided has become a measure of destination websites' persuasiveness (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2008). Given that many people prefer to visit a new destination (Mostafavi Shirazi & Mat Som, 2013), credible and accurate information sources must be provided to tourists looking for credible information regarding tourist attractions (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). Veasna et al. (2013) defined destination source credibility based on previous studies as "the believability that the destination management is willing and capable of delivering on its promises related to a specific destination" (p. 512). As there may be a lack of knowledge about tourist destinations, DMOs should be willing to manage tourist destinations, such as providing information as a credible source to tourists, such as online through social media. Furthermore, they can promote their destinations via social media platforms (Hays et al., 2013) to attract tourists. Previous researchers indicated that tourism organizations are considered a powerful tool for marketing tourist destinations (Li, Wu, & Cai 2008, as cited in Choi et al., 2018).

However, with the massive amount of online information, DMOs could face some challenges regarding information credibility, especially when promoting online information relies

on information sources' trust (Mack et al., 2008). There may be incorrect or insufficient information on social media about tourist destinations. This situation could make tourists concerned about the credibility of DMOs and influence their perception toward visiting new places because they may lack knowledge. Therefore, information about tourist destinations is important because it contributes to shaping tourist destinations' image (De La Hoz-Correa & Muñoz-Leiva, 2019). Although the information provided about the destination is significant, knowing that credible information is necessary because it can influence potential tourists.

Additionally, the destination image can also be changed based on the credibility of information about a destination (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). With cognitive image and affective image, the main components in destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), the information credibility of DMOs could influence destination image. Information credibility is considered the main challenge for online search information (Mack et al., 2008; Xiang, Wöber, & Fesenmaier, 2008). Besides, each online user can be an information challenge via posting, reposting, and other features that could influence information credibility. Information credibility is critical, especially for emerging destinations, because it shows how tourists perceive tourist destination information to be trustworthy (Phau & Ong, 2007).

Previous studies evaluated the influence of information credibility on destination image in various aspects (e.g., Veasna et al., 2013; Alcázar et al., 2014; Choi et al., 2018). However, little attention was given to the influence of destination image and behavioral intention to visit unknown or emerging tourist destinations. Credibility is considered a central cue in making a decision (Kerstetter & Cho, 2014); thus, it is significant to understand the influence of information credibility on behavioral intention to visit tourist destination. With the massive social media



content produced by unknown users, Information credibility plays a role in decision quality (Chen, Shang, & Li, 2014).

For example, Veasna et al. (2013) conducted a study on the effects of destination source credibility on destination satisfaction, in which they confirmed the relationship between information credibility sources and destination image, thus reflecting the importance of the relationship between credibility and destination image in attracting tourists to visit the destination. However, they did not evaluate the influence of information credibility on cognitive and affective images deeply. Evaluating the impact on both cognitive and affective images would help identify the perceptions toward tourist destination. This study also lacks information on marketing new places via social media marketing and on the role of DMOs' credibility in the destination image and behavioral intention to visit tourism destination.

Choi et al. (2018) found the influence of information credibility on destination image in their study about understanding the destination's information sources. Choi et al. (2018) argued that various sources would significantly impact tourists' perceptions. However, their study focused on a specific type of information, a video clip, which they suggested to evaluate the impact with other types of information. Social media platforms are ubiquitous in terms of the availability of travel information sources (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Tasci and Gartner (2007) indicated that certain types of sources, such as tourism providers, would perceive credibility and influence destination image. Furthermore, Gartner (1993) indicated that information sources' credibility might increase individuals' possibility to decide about visiting a tourist destination. However, few studies evaluated how travelers perceive information credibility from DMOs, especially when the newly emerging destinations' knowledge and perception are lacking.

This study focuses on the impact of information credibility on emerging destinations' cognitive and affective image and the influence on behavioral intentions to visit emerging destinations. Based on the destination image formation theory by Gartner (1993) and the developed destination image models from previous studies (Baloglu, 2000; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Tasci & Gartner, 2007), and the relationship of credibility and destination image (Choi et al., 2018; Veasna et al., 2013), the present study evaluates the impact of the information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destination via social media on cognitive image and affective image. This study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: The credibility of information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the cognitive image.

H4: The credibility of information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the affective image.

H5: The credibility of information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on behavioral intention to visit tourism destination.

#### **2.14.4 Impact of Destination Image on Behavioral Intention (Visit Intention)**

Scholars defined destination image as the total of beliefs, impressions, perceptions, and ideas that any individual has about a tourist destination (Gartner, 1986; Kim et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). Previous studies mentioned that cognitive image (e.g., knowledge or idea) and affective image (e.g., emotions and feelings) should demonstrate destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Gartner, 1993; Kim et al., 2017). Destination image includes both cognitive and affective images (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), which help to form destination image attributes and cause an influence on behavioral intention (Agapito et al.,

2013; Baloglu, 2000; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1993; Lam & Hsu, 2006; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Zhong, 2012). Several studies indicated that cognitive components are antecedents of affective components (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Tasci et al., 2007). Understanding destination image formation will improve competitiveness (Stylidis & Cherifi, 2018), especially for emerging destinations where tourists may lack knowledge on new destinations. However, the literature on destination image's influence on emerging tourist destinations lacks, which could influence tourists' perceptions because of the information credibility through social media.

Destination image components can help by evaluating the impact on tourist destinations' knowledge and emotions via tourists' information (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). These components can help in knowing more about the impact on tourist intention (Agapito et al., 2013). Therefore, this research evaluates the impact of cognitive image on the affective image of information about tourist destinations because these components are linked (Agapito et al., 2013; Baloglu, 2000; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Gartner, 1993; Kim et al., 2017). The cognitive image can influence the affective image because a cognitive image can be an antecedent factor to the affective image (Lin et al., 2007). Also, tourist intention can be developed based on cognitive and affective factors (Baloglu, 2000; Sönmez & Sirakaya, 2002; Kim et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2008; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). The present study evaluates the impact of cognitive image and affective image on visit intention to emerging tourist destinations and the impact of cognitive image on the affective image. The hypothesis for this study is based on the destination image formation theory by Gartner (1993), the conceptualized framework of destination image as multidimensional, which is composed of cognitive (beliefs or assessments), affective (emotions), and conative images (behavioral intention) (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999;

Kim & Richardson, 2003). Also, the previous destination image models by several authors, such as Baloglu (2000), Chu and Luckanavanich (2018), Lee et al. (2008), Tasci and Gartner (2007), and Choi et al. (2018). The following are the suggested hypotheses for this research:

H6: The cognitive image of information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the affective image.

H7: The cognitive image of information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on behavioral intention to visit tourism destination.

H8: Affective image of information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on behavioral intention to visit tourism destination.

#### **2.14.5 Moderating Effect of Social Media Preference on Structural Equation Model**

The influence of social media platforms on traveler behavior has been argued on a wide range among academia and practitioners due to the intangible services provided in travel which could raise the perceived risk for travelers when they are in the decision-making process (Minazzi, 2015). Social media platforms with the uniqueness of their features can play a significant role during all travel journey stages, including pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip stages (Öz, 2015). Social media would enable marketers to take advantage of interactive virtual relationships with social media platforms to promote tourist destinations (Javed, Tučková, & Jibril, 2020).

Previous studies have analyzed and reported the impact of using social media on many aspects, such as travel decisions (Arsal et al., 2008; Sidali, Schulze, & Spiller, 2009; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008), and the impact of using social media regarding travel information (Ayeh et al., 2013b; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). For instance, Javed et al. (2020) conducted a study about the role of social media platforms as information channels in changing tourist behavior

in the Czech Republic. This study found that social media as an information source would predict tourist behavior in choosing a tourist destination, and promoting via social media would influence actual tourist behavior. Furthermore, previous literature compared social media platforms from different aspects, such as trust and privacy (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Passerini, 2007), the uses, and gratifications (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Since different social media platforms have their own specific features, users might have different behavior toward information provided due to the different features provided in each social media platform, hence, users' preferable social media platform could influence their travel behavior toward information provided about a tourist destination. For example, the famous and preferable use of a specific social media platform can be due to meeting their needs about friends and use the platform as a source of information (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Another study was by Icoz, Kütük, and Icoz (2018) about consumer buying decisions and social media in the tourism field. They argued that intensive interactions might influence consumers and information provided in the social media platforms due to the level of credibility found in each platform, which would influence tourists' decision-making process for tourism and hospitality services. In comparing Twitter with other social media platforms, users might prefer using one platform more than the other due to features unique in the platform. For example, Davenport, Bergman, Bergman, and Ferrington (2014) found that narcissism would prefer using Twitter more than Facebook because of the features provided on social media.

According to Wang, Min, and Han (2016), social media platform types influence adopting and trusting information. Furthermore, they added that virtual community plays a role in social media platforms, therefore, the preferable social media platform by users could play a role in influencing potential tourists' behavior on visiting emerging tourist destinations via information

display through their preferable social media platforms. Besides, many social media users are likely to have multiple accounts on different social media platforms to meet their disparate needs (Zafarani & Liu, 2013). Also, social media users might have a different level of engagement in different platforms, which led platforms to vary regarding their effectiveness (Paek, Hove, Jung, & Cole, 2013).

Previous studies highlighted that social media user might prefer specific social media platforms based on different topical interests (Lee, Hoang, & Lim, 2017), therefore, the preference of social media platforms could play a role in the proposed model of this current study about potential tourist behavior toward information provided about emerging tourist destinations through different social media platforms. This current study focuses on using Twitter as a platform to promote emerging tourist destinations by DMOs. The preference of social media platforms could play a role as a moderator and influence the proposed model. To the author's knowledge, there is still no study that has investigated the moderator role of the preferred social media platform on the influence of the relationship proposed in the framework. According to the different based on users' social media preferences, the hypotheses aforementioned will be tested to search for information about emerging tourist destinations between Twitter and other social media platforms.

Based on previous studies, the preference of using social media to search for information about emerging tourist destinations on social media is assumed to be likely to differ among Twitter and other social media platforms. Therefore, the path coefficients can change across the preferences of social media platforms. The statistical significances on paths beginning with informativeness and online travel community endorsement to behavioral intention through information credibility and destination image are likely to distinguish among Twitter and other platforms users.

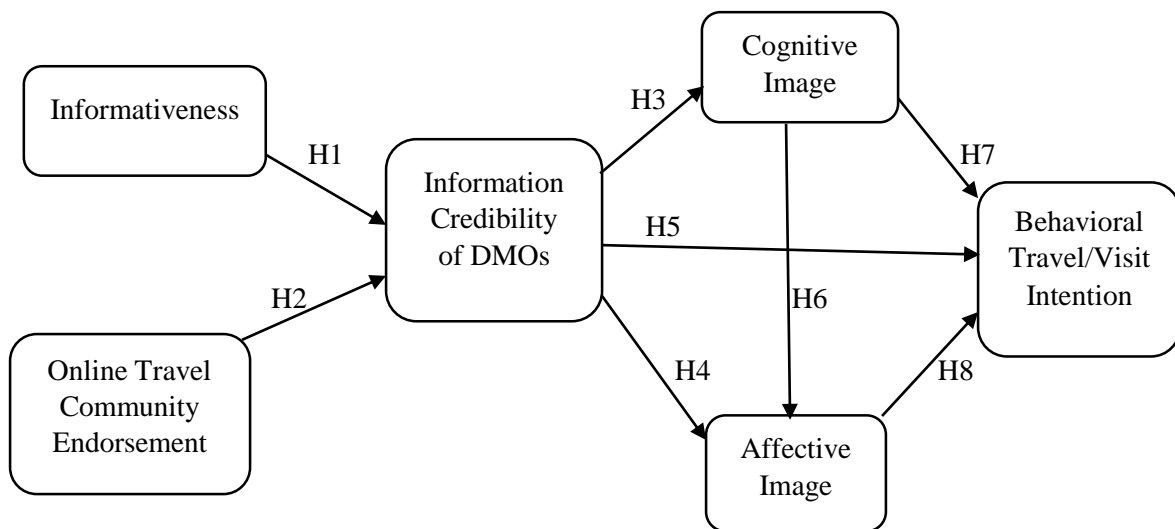
Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed for this research:

Hypothesis 9: The magnitude of significance or sign of path coefficients is likely to differ among Twitter users and other social media platforms users.

### 2.14.6 Research Framework

Figure 2-2 presents the proposed framework for the research, which includes six variables and eight hypothesized paths.

**Figure 2-2 Proposed Framework**



H9: Paths of this SEM will be various based to tourists' preferences/use of social media platforms.

## **2.15 Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed previous literature related to the topic of the present study. This chapter highlighted promoting emerging destinations in previous studies and the difference between well-known and unknown destinations. This chapter also provided more information about Saudi Arabia as a country that has emerging tourism destinations. Since the announcement of Saudi vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has been working to develop and promote emerging tourist destinations. Due to the enormous focus of previous studies on understanding behavioral intention to visit well-known destinations and the lack of studies of promoting emerging destinations and tourist destinations in the Middle East, this study focused on understanding factors that influence behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations through the focus on DMOs promotion via social media and the case of Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, this chapter reviewed behavioral intention in previous literature and highlighted factors that influence behavioral intention. One of the significant factors for marketing tourist destination and influence behavioral intention is the destination image. This chapter reviewed the importance of destination image in marketing and influencing behavioral intention. Also, this chapter reviewed previous studies about destination image components, destination image and behavioral intention, and factors influencing the destination image. Information was considered to be crucial in forming a destination image. This chapter reviewed information development of information through the focus on social media platforms. This chapter then reviewed previous literature about information in social media marketing tourist destinations and the correlation with destination image. Social media was considered an important information channel for DMOs and tourists where information can be found easily, and promotion can reach a broad audience. This chapter reviewed information processing in previous studies. One of the significant factors that



could influence tourist destination marketing and destination image is information credibility. Information credibility of DMOs is essential, especially for promoting emerging tourist destinations which tourists might lack information toward lesser-known tourist destinations.

This chapter reviewed information credibility and highlights the possible influence of credibility on destination image and behavioral intention. Also, this chapter reviewed factors that could influence information credibility in promoting emerging tourism destinations and highlighted the potential impacts of informativeness and the online travel community on information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging tourism destinations through social media. In previous studies, informativeness was considered a valuable factor in advertising, which could impact tourists' perceptions of information credibility provided by DMOs through social media. Furthermore, online travel community is an important information source for travelers because previous visitors and residents can share their opinions and support marketing campaigns about tourist destinations. DMOs as official organizations promote information about tourist destinations. However, tourists might be hesitant to find information from official tourism accounts on social media about newly emerging destinations or consider it as trustworthy sources; therefore, the online travel community could play a role in influencing the credibility of DMOs and marketing tourist destination via endorsing DMOs social media posts. Lastly, this chapter discussed the possible relationship and presents the proposed hypotheses and framework of this research.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the methodology for conducting and completing this study. This section discusses the research method process. The second section discusses the research design related to the literature review and provides the scales that the author used in the instruments. The third section discusses the demographic information. Next, both pre-test and-pilot test were conducted to improve the content and check the questionnaires' reliability and validity. This chapter provides insight information about the sampling and data collection procedure and identifies how this study was conducted. It then presents the data analysis, including data screening, descriptive analysis, reliability, and validity. The last section of this chapter discusses the techniques used to analyze and evaluate the data.

### **3.2 Research Method Process**

The constructs identified in this study, namely informativeness, online travel community endorsement, information credibility of DMOs, cognitive image, affective image, and behavioral intention to visit the destination, were examined separately in previous literature. The main focus of this study is to evaluate factors influence behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations via DMOs social media marketing. This study is focused on how factors can influence the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations via social media. Also, how the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations via social media can influence the cognitive image and affective image and behavioral intention. This part of the research presents the research design and measurement scale to measure these variables based on previous studies. According to DeVellis (2003), the measurement scale was defined as “an instrument that is a collection of items combined into a composite score and intended to reveal levels of theoretical

variables not readily observable by direct means” (p. 8–9). Therefore, the measurement scale is considered to be an essential step in building the survey questions.

The first step was to review previous studies to identify items that were used for the questionnaire. The second step was to generate a sample of items from a literature review. The third step was to purify the measure via a pre-test, which checks each item’s clarity and conciseness. The fourth step was the pilot test, which checks the content and assesses the proposed questionnaires’ reliability. The fifth step was to evaluate the reliability and validity of the survey. The sixth step was to perform Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to examine the overall model fit. The final step was to perform the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses and examine the modified scale. This study followed these steps as a guideline to achieve its targets, which is to identify the factors that may influence the visit intention via DMOs promoting emerging tourist destinations on social media platforms.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The research methodology is one of the critical processes of this research because it helps in evaluating the empirical study and the influence of the relationship between variables. This study’s methodology is quantitatively based on numerical data analysis, which involved testing the developed hypotheses according to the framework mentioned in Chapter 2. The quantitative method was chosen because it helps validate theory through testing hypotheses, which are used to build, validate, or revise a theory and solve a research problem (Nenty, 2009). This research also focuses on the factors influencing tourists’ intentions to visit emerging tourist destinations by evaluating their responses to the survey questionnaire related to variables in the proposed model. Therefore, the quantitative method was appropriate for this research to achieve the study goals.

Moreover, this research focuses on information credibility, which could influence the destination image of tourist destinations via social media marketing promotions through the information provided by DMOs. The hypotheses test the relationship of the factors that may influence destination image components, which could influence visitors' travel intention, including factors that could influence the information credibility, namely, informativeness and online travel community endorsement. This study examined the impact of information credibility via DMOs on cognitive image and affective image. This research used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the relationships between variables. The reason for choosing SEM among other statistical techniques in this study is because SEM has proven its usefulness in previous studies related to socialization and behavioral contexts (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Hsu & Lu, 2004; Hsu & Lin, 2008). SEM has also been used in tourism studies to test the conceptual models related to social media, such as Kim et al. (2017).

### **3.4 Instrument and Measurement**

This research includes a structured questionnaire developed to achieve the study's targets while knowing the factors that may influence travel intention. This study likewise considers adopting and modifying items for the questionnaire, such as the type of questions. All items were based on the research model and previous studies related to the constructs in the study. The questionnaire for this research was designed to evaluate the relationship between the model's variables. There are three parts in this chapter that represent the survey questionnaire. The first part includes questions related to the demographics of respondents. The second part contains the questions related to informativeness, online travel community endorsement, information credibility of DMOs, affective image, cognitive image, and behavioral intention. The last part has

three general questions about participants' previous visit history to Saudi Arabia and their use of social media platforms when they search for information about new tourist destinations.

For the second part, items related to informativeness were adopted and modified by Choi, Ok, and Choi (2015). Since previous researches focused on celebrities' and influencers' endorsements, this study focuses on online travel community endorsements on DMO promoting tourist destinations. Thus, items were adopted and modified from Xu (Rinka) and Pratt (2018) for this study to evaluate social media users' perception toward the endorser in endorsing DMOs promoting tourist destinations. Additionally, items related to the information credibility of DMOs were adopted and modified from Veasna, Wu, and Huang (2013). The items related to the affective image were adopted and modified from Lee, Scott, and Kim (2008), and the cognitive image items were adopted and modified from Kim et al. (2017). Finally, behavioral intention items as a dependent variable were adopted and modified from Choi et al. (2018).

As shown in Table (3-1), most measurement items were measured based on a seven-point Likert scale (i.e., from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). On the other hand, the affective image's four bipolar items were extracted and modified from previous studies (Baloglu & McCleary 1999; Lee et al., 2008). The four items were measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale. Furthermore, items related to the online travel community endorsement were measured using a 7-point semantic differential scale (Ohanian, 1990; Xu (Rinka), Pratt, 2018) to measure the influence of endorsement via the endorsers' attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. The seven-point Likert scale was chosen because a larger scale would increase the measurement's accuracy degree (Alwin, 1997). All these studies where the items were extracted have shown good reliability of above 0.70. (Nunnally, 1978).

**Table 3-1 The Measurement Items**

Constructs and Items	References
<b>Informativeness Items</b>	<b>Choi, Ok, and Choi (2015)</b>
<p><b>II.1</b> After reading the Twitter information about AIUla City, please read the following statements describing the informativeness of information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla &amp; @WinterAtTantora) on Twitter about AIUla City and <b>indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement.</b></p> <p>II.1.1 Information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is relevant.</p> <p>II.1.2 The information provided on Twitter about the travel-related products (e.g. tourist attractions, anthropogenic features, interesting events, tourist facilities, tourism culture, ...etc) to visit AIUla city is informative.</p> <p>II.1.3 The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is comprehensive.</p> <p>II.1.4 The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is Sufficient.</p>	
<b>Online Travel Community Endorsement Items</b>	<b>Xu (Rinka) and Pratt (2018)</b>
<p><b>II.2</b> After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please indicate your perceptions toward the endorsement of the online travel community on the information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla &amp; @WinterAtTantora) about AIUla city on Twitter by clicking the appropriate space (<b>1=very negative to 7= very positive</b>):</p> <p>II.2.1 Unattractive – Attractive.</p> <p>II.2.2 Not classy – Classy.</p> <p>II.2.3 Ugly – Beautiful.</p> <p>II.2.4 Plain – Elegant.</p> <p>II.2.5 Not sexy – Sexy.</p> <p>II.2.6 Insincere – Sincere.</p> <p>II.2.7 Undependable – Dependable.</p> <p>II.2.8 Dishonest – Honest.</p>	

<p>II.2.9 Unreliable – Reliable.</p> <p>II.2.10 Untrustworthy – Trustworthy.</p> <p>II.2.11 Not an expert – Expert.</p> <p>II.2.12 Inexperienced – Experienced.</p> <p>II.2.13 Not Knowledgeable – Knowledgeable.</p> <p>II.2.14 Unqualified – Qualified.</p> <p>II.2.15 Unskilled – Skilled.</p>	
<p><b>Information Credibility of DMOs Items</b></p>	<p><b>Veasna, Wu, and Huang (2013)</b></p>
<p><b>II.3</b> After reading the Twitter information about AIUla City, please read the following statements describing the credibility of information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla &amp; @WinterAtTantora) about AIUla City on Twitter, and <b>indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement.</b></p> <p>II.3.1 The information claims from the official tourism account about AIUla city on Twitter are believable.</p> <p>II.3.2 Over time, my experiences with the information provided by the official tourism account on Twitter about AIUla city led me to expect to keep its promises.</p> <p>II.3.3 The official tourism account on Twitter is committed to delivering on its claims about AIUla city.</p> <p>II.3.4 The official tourism account on Twitter has a name you can trust when promoting AIUla city.</p> <p>II.3.5 The official tourism account on Twitter has the ability to deliver what it promises when promoting AIUla city.</p> <p>II.3.6 The official tourism account on Twitter delivers what it promises when promoting AIUla city.</p>	
<p><b>Cognitive Image Items</b></p>	<p><b>Kim, Lee, Shin &amp; Yang (2017)</b></p>

<p><b>I.5</b> After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please read the following statements describing the cognitive image of AIUla city through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla &amp; @WinterAtTantora), and <b>indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement.</b></p> <p>II.5.1 AIUla city has friendly and receptive residents.</p> <p>II.5.2 AIUla city has interesting cultural heritage.</p> <p>II.5.3 AIUla city has interesting cultural events.</p> <p>II.5.4 AIUla city has good restaurants &amp; gastronomy.</p> <p>II.5.5 AIUla city is a good value for money travel destination.</p> <p>II.5.6 AIUla city has offered many good shopping opportunities.</p> <p>II.5.7 AIUla city has provided good accommodation facilities.</p>	
<p><b>Affective Image Items</b></p>	<p><b>Lee, Scott, and Kim (2008)</b></p>
<p><b>I.5</b> After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please use the below items to describe you feeling toward AIUla city as an emerging tourist destination through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla &amp; @WinterAtTantora). Please rate your feeling toward AIUla city by clicking the appropriate space. <b>(1=very negative feeling to 7= very positive feeling).</b></p> <p>II.5.1 Unpleasant - Pleasant</p> <p>II.5.2 Gloomy - Exciting</p> <p>II.5.3 Sleepy - Arousing</p> <p>II.5.4 Distressing - Relaxing</p>	
<p><b>Behavioral Intention (Visit Intention) Items</b></p>	<p><b>Choi, Hickerson &amp; Kerstetter (2018)</b></p>
<p><b>I.6</b> After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please read the following statements describing the behavioral intention toward visiting AIUla city through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla &amp; @WinterAtTantora), and <b>indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement.</b></p> <p>II.6.1 I will visit AIUla city after I viewed on the Twitter.</p> <p>II.6.2 I will seek more information about visiting AIUla city after I viewed on the Twitter.</p>	



II.6.3 I will recommend visiting AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter to a friend.	
II.6.4 I will say positive things about visiting AIUla city.	

As mentioned in Table (3-1), behavioral intention items were used to identify the influence of destination image components on travel intention via the effects of information credibility of the official tourism accounts on Twitter. The items related to destination image components reflect the knowledge and emotional effects on the destination image. Additionally, information credibility items exhibit the effect of the source credibility via Twitter on AIUla’s image as an emerging tourist destination and behavioral intention to visit. Informativeness items are also related to the influence of informative content on the official tourism accounts’ information credibility, which provides information via Twitter about AIUla city. Items related to online travel community endorsement may help determine the influence of online travel community endorsement via Twitter on the official tourism accounts’ information credibility. The reason behind these questions is to know which factors influence behavioral intention to visit the emerging tourist destination and the magnitude differences of the effect of these factors on destination image and travel intention. All items were developed and modified from previous studies.

### **3.4.1 Demographic Information**

Six questions were used to gather the participants’ demographic information, including gender, age, marital status, educational level, employment type (occupation), and annual income. The survey questionnaire was in English. The official language in Saudi Arabia is Arabic, but Arabic and English are used in street signs, media, and other facilities (Alnasser, 2018). The reason for choosing English for the survey is that it enables easy communication, and official tourism

accounts via social media are using the English language to promote tourists' destinations to foreign tourists. Besides, participants were asked to review a sample of tweets from DMOs and the online travel community; therefore, selecting English was appropriate to target the participants for this study. Besides, the survey targeted potential tourists from Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Malaysia. Citizens from these countries are the top applicants for tourist visas to Saudi Arabia and might not understand the Arabic language; therefore, the survey was conducted in English.

### **3.5 Pre-test and Review of Questionnaire**

A pre-test was conducted to review the modified questions and revise the wording, vocabulary, sequence of questions, and confusing sentences. The pre-test rationale would help avoid any issues regarding the accuracy of the questionnaire and the resulting data (Ruel, Wagner III, & Gillespie, 2016). According to the rule of thumb, the pre-test should test more than 12 participants before the targeted participants for this study. A large enough sample would note issues in the survey questions (Ruel et al., 2016). For this study, the survey questionnaire was distributed via convenience sampling to 15 postgraduate students at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University because of the easy access to the participants, their level of education, and their ability to understand the English language. The inclusion criteria of postgraduate students were irrespective of age or gender. Postgraduate students were from various schools at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Participants were asked to complete and evaluate the questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was revised based on the results, and changes were applied to the survey instrument for better readability and understandability. Five questions were modified, as shown in Table 3-2, based on minor comments provided by participants in the pre-test to be clearer for the

pilot test participants. Also, samples of DMOs and online travel community tweets were added to review before answering the survey questions.

**Table 3-2 Items Modification**

<b>Item Before Modification</b>	<b>Item After Modification</b>
II.2. After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please indicate your perceptions by clicking the appropriate space	II.2 After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please indicate your perceptions toward the endorsement of the online travel community on the information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) about AIUla city on Twitter by clicking the appropriate space
II.3.3 The official tourism account on Twitter is committed to delivering on its claims.	II.3.3 The official tourism account on Twitter is committed to delivering on its claims about AIUla city.
II.3.4 The official tourism account on Twitter has a name you can trust.	II.3.4 The official tourism account on Twitter has a name you can trust when promoting AIUla city.
II.3.5 The official tourism account on Twitter has the ability to deliver what it promises.	II.3.5 The official tourism account on Twitter has the ability to deliver what it promises when promoting AIUla city.
II.3.6 The official tourism account on Twitter delivers what it promises.	II.3.6 The official tourism account on Twitter delivers what it promises when promoting AIUla city.

Table (3-3) provides the construct's operational definitions based on the concept and items direction in the study. Also, this table presents the number of items for each construct and its sources.

**Table 3-3 Operational Definitions**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Operational Definitions for this Research</b>	<b>No. of Items</b>	<b>Sources</b>
<b>Travel Intention</b>	The social media users' behavior that has the intent or action related to the tourism destination	4	Pike & Ryan (2004), Kim et al. (2017).
<b>Cognitive Image</b>	The social media users' knowledge and beliefs attached to the tourist destination via the information provided by DMO in their social media accounts	7	Baloglu & McCleary (1999); Kim et al. (2017).
<b>Affective Image</b>	The social media users positive or negative feeling toward the tourist destination via the information provided by DMO in their social media accounts	4	Baloglu & McCleary (1999); Kim et al. (2017).
<b>Information Credibility</b>	The information credibility and level of confidence that the DMO enable to provide travel information via their social media accounts	6	Chung et al. (2015)
<b>Informativeness</b>	The informativeness of DMO posts via social media as their ability to effectively provide relevant and comprehensive information	4	Oh & Xu (2003)
<b>The online travel community Endorsement</b>	The online travel community endorsement as the form of sponsorship to DMO and other online travel community promoting tourism destination via social media to affect tourist behavior	15	Dean (1999)

### **3.6 Pilot test**

A pilot test was conducted through Qualtrics, an online survey company, after a pre-test. The pilot test was conducted by asking 79 respondents from Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. All these selected countries represent the top nationalities who have applied for tourist visas since the beginning of Saudi Arabia issuing tourist visa in 2019 based on the Communication and Media Center at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Saudi Arabia (2019). The pilot test was conducted from August 2020 to September 2020. All the items in the pilot test were stated in the English Language. Respondents were asked to answer and check the questionnaire. A pilot test was necessary before the data collection to guarantee the understanding and clarity of the questionnaire. The pilot test was also used to help check the time each respondent takes to complete the survey. Additionally, it helped confirm the proposed instruments' reliability and suitability by checking the scale and questionnaire's reliability before launching the main survey.

### **3.7 Data Collection and Settings**

This research focuses on factors that may influence visitors' travel intention to visit AIUla as a tourist destination promoted by DMO via social media platforms. Since Saudi Arabia opened its doors to tourism, the survey questionnaires were distributed to respondents from Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The main data collection was conducted via Qualtrics, an online survey company, because they can reach the targeted respondents. The online survey company was also able to allocate the selected countries' participants and follow the targeted respondents' provided criteria. Additionally, the online survey company helped save time and effort to reach participants from the mentioned eight countries.

### **3.8 Sampling Design**

The participants for this research include all participants from countries with high numbers of people obtaining tourist visas to Saudi Arabia. With Saudi Arabia trying to promote new tourist destinations to visitors via social media platforms, such as AlUla, these target respondents were contacted by Qualtrics, an online survey company, so that this company can reach the targeted participants. Saudi Arabia has the largest geographic size of other GCC countries, such as Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. Furthermore, it has the largest population compared to other GCC countries. More than 30% of Saudi Arabia's population comprises foreign residents who might be interested in visiting tourist destinations and attractions promoted via social media. Saudi Arabia recently opened its door to the world by announcing its tourist visa. The UNWTO (2017) forecasts that less well-known destinations such as destinations in Saudi Arabia will attract more visitors in the next five to ten years. Therefore, this research used AlUla in Saudi Arabia to evaluate factors influencing potential visitors to visit emerging destinations by focusing on DMO promoting AlUla in social media.

Saudi Arabia is considered an important country for Muslims, and one of the reasons for that is that the two holy mosques are located in Saudi Arabia. As this study focuses on promoting tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia, this study focuses on potential tourists who applied for the tourist visa from the top nationalities list to ensure the diversities of source markets rather than targeting visitors who might apply for a religious visit visa only to perform pilgrimage or pay a visit to the Prophet's Mosque. Therefore, respondents were selected based on the top nationalities that have received tourist visas based on The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' announcement in Saudi Arabia (2019) after launching the tourist visa. Moreover, respondents were required to understand the English language before answering the survey questions. Also, respondents were asked to

answer two questions about their familiarity with Twitter or any equivalent platforms and how many times they read messages posted on Twitter or equivalent platforms. After passing the two screening questions, respondents were asked to review samples of tweets from official tourism accounts of AlUla and the online travel community endorsements before answering the survey questions. Following the scenario-based experiment, a description was provided to participants before reviewing the sample of DMO tweets and online travel community tweets. Then, participants have to review DMO tweets and online travel community tweets about promoting AlUla in Saudi Arabia. Thus, participants can be familiar with the case before answering the survey questions.

### **3.9 Sample Size and Data Collection Procedure**

This research's sample size estimation was based on factors that function in the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) case. Moreover, the sample size should be based on the number of items used; structural equation models usually run with 300–600 respondents and 10–15 indicators (Siddiqui, 2013). 1: 10 ratios are suggested to collect the data in the case of multivariate analysis, as mentioned in the multivariate data analysis by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010). For example, if the number of items available for the factor analysis is 25 items, then the number of respondents should be 250. For this study, the number of items is 40. Therefore, the number of respondents should be 400, but to gain enough sample size, the number of respondents for this research was planned for 600 respondents.

The survey questionnaire was evaluated via the pre-test and pilot test to confirm the clarity and wording mentioned in the previous sections. The research instrument was finalized for the main survey distribution in this study. For the main data collection, a link of the survey questionnaires in the English language was distributed to participants by Qualtrics, an online

survey company, from September 2020 to November 2020. The data collection was also collected via convenience sampling to participants by the online survey company, targeting participants from each of the eight countries. Participants were recruited by the online survey company Qualtrics via targeting participants from the selected eight countries online (i.e., Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America). Then, participants' identities were checked by Qualtrics to ensure participants' eligibilities, such as checking the IP addresses by the online survey company to ensure participants' eligibility to participate in the survey. Also, participants were required to have access to the internet to respond to the survey questions. Furthermore, the author checked data details, such as the time duration spent to finish the survey to ensure participants read and answer the survey questions.

The survey included several parts. The first part of the survey described the purpose of the study, in which the author is looking for factors from the visitors' perspectives that can impact their visit intentions. The respondents were asked to turn to answer two screening questions first. After passing the screening questions, participants can proceed to the next page, including questions about demographic information. Then, participants were asked to review samples of tweets by DMO promoting AIUla city before answering questions. Furthermore, participants were required to review a sample of tweets by the online travel community endorsing AIUla and information provided by DMO. This step aims to provide the participants with a scenario and sample of tweets to be aware and familiar with the DMO promoting AIUla city and the online travel community's endorsement. Then, participants were asked to complete the survey questions for all items. For the last part, participants were questioned to answer general information questions about their usage of Twitter's social media platform when they search for tourist destinations and their previous visit to Saudi Arabia (Please see the Appendix).



### **3.10 Data Analysis**

The data screening was conducted to refine and remove data in terms of outliers and deal with missing data for analyzing the data. The targeted sample size was 600 respondents, and more than 800 surveys were distributed. Moreover, a descriptive and frequency analysis was applied to learn about the respondents. Also, Normality tests and the CFA were conducted as part of the analysis.

### **3.11 Data Screening**

Data screening is a necessary process before running a statistical analysis for the data. It helps identify and control the missing data and outliers from the respondents. According to Hair et al. (2010), outliers can be univariate, which is the score of a single item that is unusual or mean, and multivariate outliers, which are irregular cases of values on more than one item (p. 612). The current research then examined the normality of univariate and multivariate outliers to guarantee the data's normal distribution. Moreover, this research uses the maximum likelihood estimation method via SEM, which requires normal distribution for the data. The descriptive analysis was conducted for this research by SPSS 20.0 to detect possible outliers (Hair et al., 2010). Responses with excessive "straight liners" to the survey items were not counted in the analysis. All the items were designed to be fully answered; therefore, no missing values were observed in the data. However, the data was re-examined to guarantee no missing values using SPSS 20.0, and no missing values were found in the data. For the normality of the data before the main data collection, all variables were checked and were skewed based on (George & Mallery, 2010) (See Table 3-4). The pilot test indicated that the data could be considered normally distributed. Lastly, the same steps were followed before analyzing the main data collection.

**Table 3-4 Results of The Descriptive Analysis and Univariate Normality Test**

<b>Results of the descriptive analysis and univariate normality test for Pilot Test (N= 79)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>	<b>Skewness</b>		
<b>Items</b>	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
<b>(Informativeness)</b> 1-Information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is relevant.	4.86	1.41	0.24	0.53	-0.61	0.27
<b>(Informativeness)</b> 2-The information provided on Twitter about the travel-related products (e.g. tourist attractions, anthropogenic features, interesting events, tourist facilities, tourism culture, ...etc) to visit AIUla city is informative.	4.89	1.36	-0.03	0.53	-0.59	0.27
<b>(Informativeness)</b> 3-The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is comprehensive.	4.80	1.37	0.04	0.53	-0.60	0.27
<b>(Informativeness)</b> 4-The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is Sufficient.	4.54	1.37	0.09	0.53	-0.59	0.27
<b>(Online Travel Community Endorsement)</b>						
Please indicate your perceptions toward the endorsement of the online travel community on the credibility of the information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) about AIUla city on Twitter by clicking the appropriate space (1=very negative to 7= very positive).						
1-Unattractive - Attractive	4.63	1.94	-0.79	0.53	-0.57	0.27
2-Not classy - Classy	4.75	1.72	-0.57	0.53	-0.49	0.27
3-Ugly - Beautiful	4.67	1.87	-0.92	0.53	-0.43	0.27
4-Plain - Elegant	4.56	1.70	-0.60	0.53	-0.43	0.27
5-Not sexy - Sexy	4.05	1.50	-0.07	0.53	-0.39	0.27
6-Insincere - Sincere	4.48	1.71	-0.75	0.53	-0.36	0.27
7-Undependable - Dependable	4.66	1.52	-0.12	0.53	-0.53	0.27
8-Dishonest - Honest	4.70	1.84	-0.82	0.53	-0.52	0.27
9-Unreliable - Reliable	4.65	1.74	-0.54	0.53	-0.42	0.27
10-Untrustworthy - Trustworthy	4.57	1.80	-0.72	0.53	-0.51	0.27
11-Not an expert - Expert	4.70	1.70	-0.64	0.53	-0.41	0.27
12-Unexperienced - Experienced	4.66	1.74	-0.44	0.53	-0.58	0.27
13-Unknowledgeable - Knowledgeable	4.75	1.78	-0.69	0.53	-0.53	0.27
14-Unqualified - Qualified	4.70	1.83	-0.60	0.53	-0.62	0.27
15-Unskilled – Skilled	4.61	1.79	-0.50	0.53	-0.61	0.27

<b>(Information Credibility of DMO)</b> 1-The information claims from the official tourism account about AIUla city on Twitter are believable.	4.68	1.47	-0.35	0.53	-0.47	0.27
<b>(Information Credibility of DMO)</b> 2-Over time, my experiences with the information provided by the official tourism account on Twitter about AIUla city led me to expect to keep its promises.	4.61	1.48	-0.15	0.53	-0.68	0.27
<b>(Information Credibility of DMO)</b> 3-The official tourism account on Twitter is committed to delivering on its claims about AIUla city.	4.77	1.52	-0.11	0.53	-0.55	0.27
<b>(Information Credibility of DMO)</b> 4-The official tourism account on Twitter has a name you can trust when promoting AIUla city.	4.77	1.45	0.13	0.53	-0.68	0.27
<b>(Information Credibility of DMO)</b> 5-The official tourism account on Twitter has the ability to deliver what it promises when promoting AIUla city.	4.92	1.42	0.27	0.53	-0.63	0.27
<b>(Information Credibility of DMO)</b> 6-The official tourism account on Twitter delivers what it promises when promoting AIUla city.	4.70	1.37	-0.02	0.53	-0.56	0.27
<b>(Cognitive Image)</b> 1-AIUla city has friendly and receptive residents.	4.71	1.57	0.23	0.53	-0.76	0.27
<b>(Cognitive Image)</b> 2-AIUla city has an interesting cultural heritage.	5.15	1.64	-0.27	0.53	-0.69	0.27
<b>(Cognitive Image)</b> 3-AIUla city has interesting cultural events.	5.29	1.45	-0.41	0.53	-0.57	0.27
<b>(Cognitive Image)</b> 4-AIUla city has good restaurants & gastronomy.	4.63	1.42	0.28	0.53	-0.63	0.27
<b>(Cognitive Image)</b> 5-AIUla city is a good value for a money travel destination	4.61	1.41	-0.17	0.53	-0.18	0.27
<b>(Cognitive Image)</b> 6-AIUla city has offered many good shopping opportunities.	4.76	1.42	-0.12	0.53	-0.59	0.27
<b>(Cognitive Image)</b> 7-AIUla city has provided good accommodation facilities.	4.75	1.41	0.50	0.53	-0.61	0.27

<b>(Affective Image)</b>						
Please select the below item to describe your feeling toward AIUla city as an emerging tourist destination through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora). Please rate your feeling toward AIUla city.						
1-Unpleasant - Pleasant	4.94	1.83	0.09	0.53	-1.03	0.27
2-Gloomy - Exciting	4.97	1.71	-0.16	0.53	-0.80	0.27
3-Sleepy - Arousing	4.77	1.65	0.16	0.53	-0.84	0.27
4-Distressing - Relaxing	4.97	1.56	0.20	0.53	-0.75	0.27
<b>(Behavioral Intention)</b>	4.27	1.61	-0.68	0.53	-0.25	0.27
1-I will visit AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter.						
<b>(Behavioral Intention)</b>	4.59	1.58	-0.19	0.53	-0.58	0.27
2-I will seek more information about visiting AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter.						
<b>(Behavioral Intention)</b>	4.20	1.61	-0.55	0.53	-0.20	0.27
3-I will recommend visiting AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter to a friend.						
<b>(Behavioral Intention)</b>	4.65	1.53	0.19	0.53	-0.59	0.27
4-I will say positive things about visiting AIUla city.						

### 3.12 Descriptive Analysis

This step is important in data analysis because it describes the basic information of respondents. Descriptive analyses may help provide a summary of the sample and the measures to understand and explain this study's phenomena and the decisions made (Hair, Babin, Money, & Samouel, 2003). In this study, the descriptive analyses presented the means and standard deviations of the respondents to the questionnaire and applied the frequency analysis to select the socio-demographics of the respondents' profiles via the latter's answers to sociodemographic questions.

### 3.13 Reliability and Validity Test

The reliability and validity scale can help avoid any issue in the risk of jumping to conclusions. Therefore, this part of the analysis was related to reliability and validity. According to Said, Badru, and Shahid (2011), "Reliability is the degree of consistency of an instrument" (p.

1098). Reliability analysis is a significant examination to determine that the scale associated with measuring a construct is reliable (Hair et al., 2010). The agreement of the lower limit for the level composite reliability ranges between 0.60 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and 0.70 (Hair Money, Samouel, & Page, 2007) to reach the acceptable level. Another study suggested that reliability has a range of values that may determine the reliability, and the suggested acceptable composite reliability values are between 0.60 and 0.90 (Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursoy, 2013). The reliability check was run to check the scale's reliability based on the Pilot Test respondents.

The Pilot Test result showed strong reliability, and the reliability scale of each variable was between 0.83 to 0.96. The reliability scale was also run for the main data. The average variance extracted estimate (AVE), which helps evaluate the amount of variance identified by a set of items in a scale related to the measurement error (Kelloway, 1998), suggests that the rigorous level of 0.50 or above is acceptable for AVE. This study conducted the reliability analysis via the calculation of the composite reliability in CFA. The validity is related to determining the probability of a construct as the reason for the variation between items. According to Hair et al. (2010), two types of validities, namely, converging and discriminant validity, may help show the validity of the model by performing CFA to confirm the result. For convergent validity, it shows to what extent the constructs are correlated within a model (Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity helps determine how the indicator converges or is shared in a single construct (Said et al., 2011). The discriminant validity shows to which extent constructs are distinct from each other in a model (Hair et al., 2010).

Moreover, the discriminant validity test helps show how much variance is in the indicators that are eligible to demonstrate variance in the construct, and the validity of the construct is determined via the value of the AVE (Said et al., 2011). The AVE helps to achieve discriminant

validity by comparing between AVE and a pair of traits. Thus, discriminant validity is obtained when the AVE value has more than a squared correlation among a pair of traits (Nunkoo et al., 2013). Discriminant validity is to obtain all squared correlation values between a pair of traits below 1.00 (Bagozzi, Yi, & Philips, 1991), and the AVE should be higher than 0.50 (Pervan, Curak, & Pavic Kramaric, 2017).

### **3.14 Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is one of the statistical techniques that test the hypothesis's relationship between both observed variables and underlying latent construct (Hair et al., 2007) to confirm the factor structure of a set of observed variables. The CFA was likewise applied to test the proposed theoretical model via the relationships between variables and confirm the proposed structure's presence. Thus, it can validate the procedure in measurement research. Previous studies have used the CFA to evaluate the reliability and validity of the model item measurement (e.g., Chiu et al., 2006; Lin, 2007; Hsu & Lin, 2008). Additionally, items via CFA are hypothesized to load under specific factors to test how statistically meaningful they are, thus confirming the results based on these procedures (Zikmund, 1994). In the SEM, CFA helps evaluate and test the instrument's validity and reliability, which describes the pattern of observed variables for the latent construct hypothesized model (Said et al., 2011).

The CFA works based on specific requirements. According to Suhr (2006), CFA requires the specified pre-model, the number of factors, factor loading, a specific model supported by theory or previous literature, and error. Several elements can influence the CFA. CFA can be influenced by research hypothesis testing, measurement instruments, parameter identification, outliers, missing data, multivariate normality, sample size (e.g., the required sufficient sample size is 5–20 cases per parameter estimate), and interpretation of model fit indices (Suhr, 2006).

### **3.15 Model Fit Indices**

CFA may help determine the extent of the model fit to the data via several statistical tests, such as the chi-square test. The chi-square test is related to the comparison between expected and observed covariance matrices values. The theoretical model significantly increases the copy of the sample variance/covariance relationships within the matrix (Kelloway, 1998). If the chi-square value is close to 0, then a slight difference exists between expected and observed covariance matrices. Thus, the probability level should be greater than 0.05 or equal to 0.05, which indicates the acceptable model fit.

The comparative fit index (CFI) compares the existing model's covariance to the observed covariance matrix and measures the lacking model fit (Hayduk, 1996). It is equal to the discrepancy role adjusted for the sample size (Suhr, 2006). The CFI values close to the threshold of 0.90 show a good fit. Therefore, CFI's acceptable model fit is equal to or greater than 0.90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kaplan, 2000). Then, the root mean is equal to the square error of approximation (RMSEA), which helps report any error/discrepancy in the model per degree of freedom, especially due to the model complexity (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). Therefore, RMSEA was used for this study. As the RMSEA is based on the non-centrality parameter, the values range between 0.05 and 0.10, indicating a fair fit (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008), and the best model fit of between 0 and 1 (Suhr, 2006), where the acceptable model fit by the RMSEA value is close to 0.06 or lower (Hu & Bentler, 1999). This study followed these processes to analyze the data and achieve the target of this study.

### **3.16 Structural Equation Modeling**

SEM is a statistical technique that helps analyze data. Hair et al. (2010) defined SEM as a “family of statistical models that seek to explain the relationships among multiple variables” (p.

634). Byrne (1998) described the SEM as “a statistical methodology that takes a confirmatory (i.e., hypothesis-testing) approach to the multivariate analysis of a structural theory bearing on some phenomenon” (p. 3). According to Kaplan (2000), SEM is a class of methodologies that represent hypotheses testing in a study by representing the means, variance, and covariance of the observed data with regard to a smaller number of structural parameters selected via a hypothesized basic model. There are numerous SEM functions to analyze data.

Schumacker and Lomax (2004) reported that SEM’s task lies in the modeling of interactions, correlated independents, measurement error, nonlinearities, and correlated error terms. SEM can analyze multiple latent independents, each measured by multiple indicators, and analyze one or more latent dependents, each with multiple indicators (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). The SEM processes are represented via a series of structural equations and relations, which help build a clear picture of the theory (Yoon, 2002). The SEM task is similar to multiple regression, path analysis, and factor analysis, and thus it has more powerful functions to combine several analyses (Bollen, 1989). Additionally, SEM helps understand the relational data in multivariate systems because it can recognize indirect and direct relationships between variables (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). SEM is useful in analyzing relationships between latent variables without random errors, differentiating it from other relational modeling operations (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). It can also determine the strength of the relationships among latent constructs in the research model (Hsu & Lin, 2008).

Hair et al. (2010) identified SEM's specific characteristics, namely, representing unobserved concepts, estimating multiple and interrelated dependence relationships, counting the measurement error during the estimation process, and determining a model to explain the full set of relationships. SEM is similar to multiple regression, except when it uses a CFA, which has



multiple indicators per latent variable to minimize measurement error. Therefore, SEM helps interpret the analysis via flexible assumptions (Hayduk, 1996). SEM has other features aside from analysis, namely, modeling error terms, modeling mediating variables, and testing models, instead of testing coefficients individually and testing coefficients across multiple groups and dealing with difficult data, such as time series or incomplete data (Jöreskog, & Sörbom, 1996; Kelloway, 1998). Furthermore, SEM can compare alternative models to evaluate the relative model's fit, which helps avoid an interpretation error (Bollen, 1989).

However, SEM has several challenges for analysis, including its complexity because it is linked to the large parameters involved and its sensitivity to the sample size to run this statistical technique. SEM has several model fit indices, but these indicators are not widely accepted because the technique can already assess the overall model fit (Kaplan, 2000). Despite these challenges, the SEM is popular for model testing and is frequently used and accepted as a statistical method. Testing confirmatory modeling provides the ability to determine the model's unreliability (Diamantopoulos & Sigauw, 2005).

Given that SEM is a statistical technique that helps test and estimate the relationship via a combination of statistical data and hypothesis (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), the current study used this method to analyze the relationship of the hypotheses study. SEM is used to construct the confirmatory model. SEM is helpful because it can provide a useful analytical tool to understand the relationship between latent variables. Based on the explanation above, this study used AMOS Statistics 26 Versions, which is one of most popular SEM software programs in research to examine the proposed model.

### **3.17 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the research methodology. The chapter described each step of the methodology for this study. The survey instrument and measurement were adopted and modified based on previous studies. This chapter presents demographic information for the survey. This study used AIUla in Saudi Arabia since Saudi Arabia is promoting AIUla as an emerging tourist destination. DMO in Saudi Arabia is promoting AIUla through social media, mainly Twitter. This study's target was potential tourists from countries that were listed as on the top listed nationalities who applied for a tourist visa, and they are familiar with social media (i.e., Twitter). Participants were asked to read an intro about promoting AIUla, city in Saudi Arabia, and then they were asked to review a sample of tweets about AIUla provided by DMO and a sample of tweets provided by online travel community endorsement toward DMOs promotion before answering the survey questions. Therefore, the survey questionnaire was in the English language since English is commonly used to promote Saudi Arabia's tourist destination. The survey questions included demographic questions, 40 items of questions related to the framework, and three general questions related to participants' usages of social media.

This survey questionnaire was checked through pre-test and pilot test before launching the main survey. The results of both pre-test and pilot test were concluded to be acceptable in order to proceed to the next step. The survey was conducted via a well-known online survey company "Qualtrics." The total number of participants who participated in the survey exceed 600 participants participated in the survey. This chapter explained the process of data analysis for the collected questionnaire. The data analysis included data screening, descriptive analysis, reliability test, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the results of the main survey. This chapter provides information about the data screening, and the missing data were checked before proceeding to the analysis steps. Also, this chapter presents information about the descriptive information and the normality test. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and the structural equation modeling (SEM) results are then presented, followed by the hypothesized model testing.

### **5.2 Data Screening**

The main data were screened to ensure suitability for investigation of the main questionnaire. The target samples for this survey were international tourists from Australia, Canada, China, Germany, France, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The reason behind choosing participants from these selected countries is that these were the top nationalities who applied for tourist visa when Saudi Arabia launched it for the first time in September 2019. Therefore, participants from these countries would fit to participate in the main survey. Before answering the screening questions, participants were asked if they agreed to participate and understand the English language; if they click yes, they can see the screening questions.

Since this research investigates factors influencing behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations through social media marketing promotion, two questions were included for the main survey participants before answering the survey questions. The two screening questions were, "Are you familiar with the social media platform Twitter or any equivalent platforms?" and "How often do you read messages posted on Twitter?". Respondents who are not familiar with Twitter or any equivalent social media platforms and do not check messages posted on Twitter

were excluded immediately from further analysis. Only respondents who answered “yes” to these two questions were able to complete the questionnaire. A total of 647 responses remained for the next stage. Table 4-1 shows the country of origin of all responses. The number of participants from each country was between 70 to 78, except the number of participants from China was 115. However, the respondents' percentage met the methodology requirement, which was 10% from each country. The lowest percentage was 10.8%, which represented participants from Australia, and the highest percentage was 17.8 %, which represented participants from China.

**Table 4-1 The Country of Origin of All Responses**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Australia	70	10.8
Canada	77	11.9
China	115	17.8
Germany	77	11.9
France	75	11.6
Malaysia	78	12.1
United Kingdom	77	11.9
United States	78	12.1
Total	647	100.0

#### **4.2 Missing Data and Outliers**

There is no missing data for this study. The reasons behind checking the missing data are to avoid any issues in the multivariate data analysis (Kline, 2011). Additionally, both box plots and descriptive analysis were conducted to search for outliers, and 33 outliers were detected.

Therefore, 614 questionnaires were used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis.

### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics and Normality Test

This section presents the descriptive statistics for all the measurement items. Prior to CFA and SEM analyses, checking the normality is an important step via skewness and kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). The data is considered normal when skewness is between -2 to +2 (George & Mallery, 2010) and a kurtosis value of between -7 and +7 (Byrne, 2010). Table 4-2 shows that skewness's absolute values fell between 1.10 and 0.30, and kurtosis is between 0.01 to 1.31.

**Table 4-2 Results of the Descriptive Analysis and Univariate Normality Test**

(N= 614)						
Items	Mean	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness		
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
<b>Informativeness 1</b>	5.03	1.25	0.79	0.19	-0.72	0.09
<b>Informativeness 2</b>	5.29	1.19	1.13	0.19	-0.82	0.09
<b>Informativeness 3</b>	5.01	1.26	0.50	0.19	-0.66	0.09
<b>Informativeness 4</b>	4.84	1.29	0.01	0.19	-0.45	0.09
<b>Endorsement 1</b>	5.32	1.44	0.56	0.19	-0.96	0.09
<b>Endorsement 2</b>	4.94	1.41	0.20	0.19	-0.63	0.09
<b>Endorsement 3</b>	5.37	1.55	0.63	0.19	-1.10	0.09
<b>Endorsement 4</b>	4.99	1.46	0.11	0.19	-0.71	0.09
<b>Endorsement 5</b>	4.11	1.53	-0.35	0.19	-0.30	0.09
<b>Endorsement 4</b>	4.99	1.40	0.26	0.19	-0.71	0.09
<b>Endorsement 7</b>	4.84	1.33	0.18	0.19	-0.55	0.09
<b>Endorsement 8</b>	5.05	1.41	-0.08	0.19	-0.64	0.09
<b>Endorsement 9</b>	5.04	1.35	0.37	0.19	-0.71	0.09
<b>Endorsement 10</b>	5.00	1.39	0.28	0.19	-0.68	0.09
<b>Endorsement 11</b>	4.93	1.38	-0.15	0.19	-0.48	0.09
<b>Endorsement 12</b>	5.17	1.31	0.55	0.19	-0.75	0.09

<b>Endorsement 13</b>	5.23	1.35	0.58	0.19	-0.84	0.09
<b>Endorsement 14</b>	5.14	1.39	0.39	0.19	-0.83	0.09
<b>Endorsement 15</b>	5.05	1.37	0.11	0.19	-0.61	0.09
<b>Information Credibility of DMO 1</b>	5.11	1.19	1.31	0.19	-0.89	0.09
<b>Information Credibility of DMO 2</b>	4.96	1.21	0.28	0.19	-0.51	0.09
<b>Information Credibility of DMO 3</b>	5.15	1.16	0.58	0.19	-0.60	0.09
<b>Information Credibility of DMO 4</b>	5.07	1.20	0.57	0.19	-0.58	0.09
<b>Information Credibility of DMO 5</b>	5.06	1.17	0.85	0.19	-0.67	0.09
<b>Information Credibility of DMO 6</b>	5.05	1.20	0.21	0.19	-0.52	0.09
<b>Cognitive Image 1</b>	5.18	1.20	1.01	0.19	-0.74	0.09
<b>Cognitive Image 2</b>	5.58	1.20	1.02	0.19	-0.94	0.09
<b>Cognitive Image 3</b>	5.44	1.19	1.14	0.19	-0.86	0.09
<b>Cognitive Image 4</b>	4.99	1.20	0.35	0.19	-0.52	0.09
<b>Cognitive Image 5</b>	4.94	1.25	0.12	0.19	-0.42	0.09
<b>Cognitive Image 6</b>	4.93	1.25	0.16	0.19	-0.50	0.09
<b>Cognitive Image 7</b>	5.03	1.19	0.70	0.19	-0.57	0.09
<b>Affective Image 1</b>	5.52	1.24	1.10	0.19	-0.99	0.09
<b>Affective Image 2</b>	5.45	1.33	0.67	0.19	-0.92	0.09
<b>Affective Image 3</b>	5.02	1.31	0.74	0.19	-0.81	0.09
<b>Affective Image 4</b>	5.36	1.26	0.64	0.19	-0.75	0.09
<b>Intention 1</b>	4.21	1.56	-0.46	0.19	-0.36	0.09
<b>Intention 2</b>	4.76	1.61	-0.23	0.19	-0.67	0.09
<b>Intention 3</b>	4.39	1.56	-0.29	0.19	-0.45	0.09
<b>Intention 4</b>	4.91	1.31	0.51	0.19	-0.52	0.09

#### 4.4 Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

This section shows the demographics profile for all respondents in the main survey. Six demographic variables were investigated: gender, age, marital status, educational level, occupation, and annual income. Table 4-3 shows the demographic profile for 614 valid responses. The frequency analysis indicated that 51.1% were female, and 59.1 were married. The participants'

age range showed that 29.8% were between 25-34 years old, and 26.9 % were between 35-44 years old. Regarding education level, the results showed that 46.9% had a college degree, 23.7 had a Master's degree, and 16.3 % had High school or less. For the occupation, Table 5-3 shows that 50.2% were company employees, 9% were retired, and the rest were distributed in varying proportions, such as 6.8% owned businesses and 6.5 % were professionals. Regarding annual income, participants were asked to select their annual income before taxation. The results showed that the highest percentage of participants earned an annual income of US\$20,000-39,999, followed by 18.6% earned less than US\$20,000, and 18.5 % earned US\$ 40,000-59,999 for their annual income.

**Table 4-3 Demographics of Respondents in The Main Survey (N=614)**

Category		Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	314	51.1
	Male	300	48.9
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	224	36.5
	Married	363	59.1
	Others	27	4.4
<b>Age</b>	Under 18 year	2	.3
	19-24	55	9.0
	25-34	183	29.8
	35-44	165	26.9
	45-54	100	16.3
	55-64	67	10.9
	65 and older	42	6.8
<b>Education</b>	High school or less	100	16.3
	College student	60	9.7
	College degree	288	46.9
	Master degree	146	23.7
	Doctoral degree	20	3.4
<b>Occupation</b>	Company employee	308	50.2
	Own business	42	6.8
	Civil servant	17	2.8
	Agricultural/fishery	5	.8
	Professional	39	6.5
	Housewife	27	4.4
	Student	37	6.1
	Sales/Service employee	24	3.3

	Education	22	3.6
	Retired	55	9.0
	Others	38	6.5
<b>Annual Income</b>	Less than US\$20,000	116	18.6
	US\$20,000-39,999	139	22.6
	US\$ 40,000-59,999	113	18.5
	US\$ 60,000-79,999	83	13.6
	US\$ 80,000-99,999	50	8.2
	US\$ 100,000-119,999	54	8.8
	US\$ 120,000 or above.	59	9.7

#### 4.5 General Information

This part presents the general information part, which presents three questions about their previous visit to Saudi Arabia, and their social media uses when they search for information about emerging tourism destinations. As present in Table 4-4, the results showed that more than 95.9% of respondents have not been to Saudi Arabia before, and 4.1% have been to Saudi Arabia. The results showed that participants in the main survey who have been to Saudi Arabia had visited major cities, such as Riyadh (the capital city), Makkah, and Madinah (the major Islamic religious sites are located in both cities).

**Table 4-4 Previous Visitation to Saudi Arabia**

	Frequency	Percent
Have not been to Saudi Arabia (No)	589	95.9
Have been to Saudi Arabia (Yes):	25	-
Jeddah	3	96.6
Al Khobar	1	96.8
Makkah	6	97.7
Madinah	6	98.6
Riyadh	8	99.8
Taif	1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>614</b>	<b>100.0</b>



For the second part of the general information, the results in Table 4-5 showed whether participants would rely on official tourism organizations' information on social media platforms/websites when they are planning to visit new/emerging destinations. The results showed that 70 % would rely on official tourism organizations' information on social media platforms/websites. On the other hand, 30 % answered that they do not rely on official tourism organizations' information on social media platforms/websites when planning to visit new/emerging destinations, which indicated that potential tourists would prefer to receive information from people who had experience in visiting those tourism destinations instead of relying on information from a government agency. Therefore, further analysis was done to evaluate the influence of the preferred platforms searching for information about emerging tourism destinations on the model.

**Table 4-5 Rely on Information Provided by The Official Tourism Organizations on Social Media Platforms/Websites**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	430	70.0
<b>No</b>	184	30.0
<b>Total</b>	614	100.0

The third part in the general information section asked participants if they use Twitter to find information about new/emerging destinations. If not, they were asked to write the name of the social media platform/website they use when looking for new/emerging destinations. The findings shown in Table 4-6 showed that 66.3 % of participants use Twitter to search for information about the emerging destination. Also, the results showed that 33.7 % of participants are using different

platforms. Table 4-7 shows the list of other online platforms used by participants, such as social media (Facebook, Instagram, WeChat) Travel platforms (Booking, TripAdvisor, Expedia). Furthermore, the results showed that participants are using Google as a search engine to search for a tourism website.

**Table 4-6 Use Twitter to Find Information about New/Emerging Destinations**

	Frequency	Percent
I use Twitter (Yes)	407	66.3
I do not use Twitter (No)	207	33.7
<b>Total</b>	614	100

**Table 4-7 List of Other Different Platforms Stated by Participants**

Name of Platforms	Frequency	Name of Platforms	Frequency
Airbnb	1	Kayak	1
Bing	1	Tour Operator Websites, Trip Advisors, get guide and other platform offering services. Plus, use a paper guide	1
Booking, Google search, The City Official Site	1	TripAdvisor or Expedia	1
Booking.com	1	Websites	1
Countries Tourist Website	1	Instagram	16
Escape.com.au	1	Instagram or Google	1
Expedia	1	Instagram or Travel Sites	1
Facebook	25	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook	1
Facebook and Google	2	Instagram, Trip Advisor	1
Facebook and Instagram	5	Lonely planet	2
Facebook and Pinterest	1	Main websites and Facebook	1

Facebook and Website travel agency	1	TripAdvisor	21
Facebook and TripAdvisor	2	Quora	1
Facebook and YouTube	1	Saudi Arabia Travel Bureau	1
Google	23	Tourism websites/Travel agents	
Getaway.com.au	1	Travelocity	1
Trip Advisor, Booking.com, Google	1	traveloka	1
Trip Advisor, other	1	TRIP	1
Usaa	1	Google go through every website.	1
YouTube	6	YouTube and Facebook	1
Other	69	WeChat	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>207</b>		

#### 4.6 CFA of the Measurement Model (N=614)

The CFA was performed to analyze the measurement before conducting a path analysis of the structural model. The structural equation modeling (SEM) has two main components: the measurement model and the structural/path model. The measurement model is a combination of several indicators for a variable (Hair et al., 2010); therefore, CFA was applied to confirm the underlying dimensions and items extracted, which guided model specification (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). Kline (2011) mentioned that CFA must be examined to check the proposed measurement model to fit the data.

To examine the model fit, Hair et al. (2010) referred to check  $\chi^2/df$  statistic, Normed Fit Index (NFI), Goodness-Of-Fit Index (GFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA). The Chi-square helps identify the differences among the evaluated covariance matrices to test the null hypothesis; however, the chi-

square is very sensitive to the sample size. The significance of the value is exposed to decrease if the sample size increases (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 4-8 provides a brief description of the Goodness-of-fit indices. Also, CFA enables to check convergent and discriminant validity, which helps test construct validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). There are three points to check the convergent validity which are (1) standardized factor loadings should be above 0.5, (2) average variance extracted (AVE) should exceed 0.5, and (3) construct reliability (CR) should be more than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010).

Also, CFA enables checks on the convergent and discriminant validity, which helps test construct validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). There are three points checks to check the convergent validity which are (1) standardized factor loadings should be above 0.5, (2) average variance extracted (AVE) should exceed 0.5, and (3) construct reliability (CR) should be more than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). When the AVE for each construct is higher than the squared multiple correlation coefficients for each corresponding construct, then it can confirm the Discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 4-8 Goodness-of-Fit Indices**

<b>Goodness-of-fit indices</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Acceptable level</b>	<b>Scholars who recommended the criterion</b>
<b>Normed Chi-square (<math>\chi^2/df</math>)</b>	evaluates the overall fit and differences between covariance matrices and the sample. Sensitive to sample size.	2.0–5.0	(Wheaton, Muthén, Alwin, & Summers, 1977; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).
<b>Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)</b>	Measure the proportion of variance between the hypothesized model and the observed covariance matrix.	>0.90	Hair et al. (2010)
<b>Normed Fit Index (NFI)</b>	analyzes the model via the focus on the discrepancy of the chi-squared value of the hypothesized model and a null model.	$\geq 0.90$	Bentler & Bonett (1980)

<b>Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)</b>	compares the normed of chi-square values for the null and specified model.	>0.90	Bentler & Bonett (1980)
<b>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</b>	An incremental fit index to compare the fit model with the hypothesized model and the null model of the fit of an independent.	≥ 0.90	Hair et al. (2010)
<b>Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)</b>	Attempt to edit the tendency of the $\chi^2$ , and to know how the model fit via correcting both model complexity and sample size.	<0.80	Hair et al. (2010)

The CFA was conducted to examine the model fit and factor loadings. The factor Endors5 was eliminated at the starter of running CFA due to the factor loading of 0.42, which was lower than 0.5 “Please indicate your perceptions toward the endorsement of the online travel community on the credibility of the information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) about AIUla city on Twitter by clicking the appropriate space Endorsement 5. Not sexy - Sexy”. The standardized factor loading should exceed 0.5 to reach convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 4-9 shows the CFA results and supportive level of fit for the overall model fit. The CFA showed that the chi-square value was significant ( $\chi^2(638) = 1667.17, p=0.000$ ) due to its sensitivity to the sample size. However, the normed Chi-square value was 2.61 and acceptable. Besides, other fit indices showed support to the model fit. The model’s goodness-of-fit was evaluated via CFA, and the results showed the following indices: CFI=0.94, TLI=0.93, NFI=0.91, RMSEA=0.05, and GFI=0.87.

Additionally, the results presented in Table 4-9 showed all the standardized factors exceeded the threshold of 0.5. The range of the standardized factors was from 0.68 to 0.89. Furthermore, All the AVE values were higher than 0.50, which indicated that the convergent

validity was confirmed. Moreover, the results showed that all CR values were above 0.86, and the requirement for CR values is to exceed 0.8. Therefore, both AVE and CR met the criteria to confirm convergent validity. Furthermore, Table 4-10 showed the results of the assessment of discriminant validity. The AVE values before testing the hypothesis were compared the squared correlation coefficients to evaluate discriminant validity. The results showed that each construct's AVE value was higher than squared correlations on the whole data sets.

**Table 4-9 CFA Results of The Measurement Model (N=614)**

(N= 614)

<b>Constructs</b>		Estimate	Standard error	t-value	p-value	Standardized factor loading	AVE	CR
Informativeness	Inform1	1.00	-	-	-	0.80		
	Inform2	1.00	0.05	19.34	*	0.73		
	Inform3	0.94	0.05	17.72	*	0.79	0.62	0.87
	Inform4	1.05	0.06	16.71	*	0.83		

Endorsement	Endors1	1.00	-	-	-	0.68	
	Endors2	1.00	0.05	19.87	*	0.70	
	Endors3	1.16	0.05	20.73	*	0.73	
	Endors4	1.09	0.05	19.94	*	0.73	
	Endors6	1.03	0.06	16.84	*	0.73	
	Endors7	0.95	0.05	16.29	*	0.70	
	Endors8	1.11	0.06	17.89	*	0.78	
	Endors9	1.10	0.06	18.39	*	0.80	0.56 0.95
	Endors10	1.19	0.06	19.21	*	0.84	
	Endors11	1.10	0.06	17.92	*	0.78	
	Endors12	1.09	0.05	19.84	*	0.82	
	Endors13	1.10	0.05	18.50	*	0.80	
	Endors14	1.25	0.06	20.22	*	0.89	
	Endors15	1.18	0.06	19.39	*	0.85	
Credibility	Credib1	1.00	-	-	-	0.81	
	Credib2	1.04	0.04	21.72	*	0.83	
	Credib3	0.93	0.04	20.08	*	0.77	0.67 0.92
	Credib4	1.01	0.05	19.71	*	0.81	
	Credib5	1.01	0.04	20.76	*	0.84	
	Credib6	1.05	0.05	20.69	*	0.84	

Cognitive	Cogn7	1.00	-	-	*	0.81		
Image	Cogn6	0.97	0.03	25.71	*	0.76		
	Cogn5	1.00	0.04	21.34	*	0.78		
	Cogn4	0.98	0.04	21.76	*	0.80	0.60	0.91
	Cogn3	0.85	0.04	18.60	*	0.70		
	Cogn2	0.72	0.04	15.04	*	0.80		
	Cogn1	0.96	0.05	19.18	*	0.78		
Affective	Affec1	1.00	-	-	-	0.86		
Image	Affec2	1.09	0.05	21.68	*	0.88	0.66	0.89
	Affec3	0.86	0.05	15.95	*	0.70		
	Affec4	0.95	0.04	19.24	*	0.80		
Intention	Intention1	1.00	-	-	-	0.87		
	Intention2	0.96	0.03	25.04	*	0.81	0.70	0.90
	Intention3	0.96	0.03	27.20	*	0.86		
	Intention4	0.77	0.05	19.34	*	0.80		

$\chi^2$  (638) = 1667.17(p=.000); CFI=0.94; TLI=0.93; NFI=0.91; GFI=0.87; RMSEA=0.05

Note: 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)=  $(\sum \text{standardized factor loadings}^2) / [(\sum \text{standardized factor loadings}^2) + \sum \text{measurement errors}]$

2. Composite Construct Reliability=  $(\sum \text{standardized loadings})^2 / [(\sum \text{standardized loadings})^2 + (\sum \text{measurement errors})]$  3. \* p<0.001



**Table 4-10 Correlations (Squared Correlations), Mean, and Standard Deviations (N=614)**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>(1)</b>	1.00					
<b>(2)</b>	0.45** (0.20)	1.00				
<b>(3)</b>	0.70** (0.49)	0.49** (0.24)	1.00			
<b>(4)</b>	0.68** (0.46)	0.48** (0.23)	0.73** (0.53)	1.00		
<b>(5)</b>	0.45** (0.20)	0.72** (0.51)	0.50** (0.25)	0.55** (0.30)	1.00	
<b>(6)</b>	0.51** (0.26)	0.40** (0.16)	0.64** (0.40)	0.64** (0.40)	0.47** (0.22)	1.00
<b>Mean</b>	5.03	5.01	5.06	5.15	5.33	4.56
<b>Std.Dev.</b>	1.33	1.08	0.95	0.99	1.09	1.02

*Note:-* (1) Behavioral Intention, (2) Affective Image, (3) Cognitive Image, (4) Information Credibility of DMO, (5) Online Travel Community Endorsement, (6) Informativeness.

\*\**.* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

#### **4.7 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (N=614)**

The CFA results showed support to the model fit in terms of the model fit, reliability, and validity. Therefore, this part presents the results of the SEM after conforming to the measurement model. The SEM test the main conceptual model of this research, which has seven hypotheses. This research used a maximum likelihood estimation method to check if the hypothesized model is consistent with the data collected.

The CFA results showed support to the model fit in terms of reliability and validity. Therefore, this part presents the results of the SEM after conforming to the measurement model. The SEM tests the main conceptual model of this research, which has seven hypotheses. This research used a maximum likelihood estimation method to check if the hypothesized model is consistent with the data collected. The model was evaluated for goodness-of-fit before reaching the hypotheses evaluations. The result of chi-square the value was significant ( $\chi^2$  (640) =1951.39,

$p < 0.000$ ); however, the normed Chi-square value was 3.04 and acceptable. The other indices' results were shown to support the model as follows: CFI=0.93, TLI=0.92, RMSEA=0.058, and GFI=0.87. Despite the GFI did not meet the cut-off criterion of 0.9 (Hair et al., 2010), GFI's result indicated a reasonable fit since GFI scored between 0.80 and 0.89 (Doll, Xia, & Torkzadeh, 1994). Furthermore, the other alternative indices for the goodness-of-fit have shown support to the conceptual model.

## **4.8 Hypotheses Testing**

This section shows the results of seven out of eight hypotheses that evaluate the influence and relationship between variables. All eight hypotheses were examined via testing the direct effects. The direct regression paths among the six constructs were examined to test 8 hypotheses. The reasons for proposing the hypotheses were addressed in Chapter 3. The statistical results are reported in Table 4-11. The overall structural model is displayed in Figure 4-1; seven estimated path coefficients were statistically significant at 0.001 level, except for one path coefficient was not statistically significant.

### **4.8.1 Direct Effects**

Hypothesis 1 states that informativeness has a positive influence on information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations. This Hypothesis was examined by testing the path coefficient between “Informativeness” and “Information Credibility”. For Hypothesis 1, the results showed that the path coefficient was statistically significant ( $\beta=0.70$ ,  $t=14.72$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Thus, perceiving informativeness on the tweets about tourism destinations positively influences the information credibility of DMO on Twitter. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposes that online travel community endorsement positively influences information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations. This Hypothesis was

examined by testing the path coefficient between “Online Travel Community Endorsement” and “Information Credibility”. For Hypothesis 2, the results indicated that the path coefficient was statistically significant ( $\beta=0.23$ ,  $t=6779$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). The online travel community endorsement on tweets about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the information credibility of DMO on Twitter. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

Hypothesis 3 states that the credibility of information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the cognitive image. This Hypothesis was Tested by examining the path coefficient between “Information Credibility” and “Cognitive Image”. The results showed that the path coefficient was statistically significant ( $\beta=0.85$ ,  $t=17.23$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). The information credibility of DMOs about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the cognitive image. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Hypothesis 4 proposes that the credibility of information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the affective image. This Hypothesis was examined by testing the path coefficient between “Information Credibility” and “Affective Image”. The results revealed that the path coefficient was statistically significant ( $\beta=0.25$ ,  $t=3.45$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). The information credibility of DMOs about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the affective image. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Hypothesis 5 proposes that the credibility of information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations. This Hypothesis was examined by testing the path coefficient between “Information Credibility” and “Behavioral Intention”. The results revealed that the path coefficient was statistically significant ( $\beta=0.31$ ,  $t=4.22$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). The information credibility of DMOs about

tourism destinations has a positive influence on the affective image. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Hypothesis 6 states that the cognitive image of information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the affective image. This Hypothesis was examined by testing the path coefficient between “Cognitive Image” and “Affective Image”. The results showed that the path coefficient was statistically significant ( $\beta=0.37$ ,  $t=4.50$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). The cognitive image of tourism destinations has a positive influence on the affective image. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is supported.

Hypothesis 7 suggests that the cognitive image of information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations. This Hypothesis was examined via testing the path coefficient between “Cognitive Image” and “Behavioral Intention”. The results showed that the path coefficient was statistically significant ( $\beta=0.42$ ,  $t=5.67$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). The cognitive image of tourism destinations has a positive influence on behavioral intention to visit tourism destinations. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is supported.

Hypothesis 8 proposes that Affective image of information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on visit intention. This Hypothesis was examined via testing the path coefficient between “Affective Image” and “Behavioral Intention”. The results showed that the path coefficient was statistically not significant ( $\beta=0.07$ ,  $t=1.77$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). The Affective image of tourism destinations does not influence behavioral intention to visit tourism destinations. Therefore, Hypothesis 8 is not supported.

**Table 4-11 Results of The Direct Path for The Structural Model (N=614)**

(N= 614)

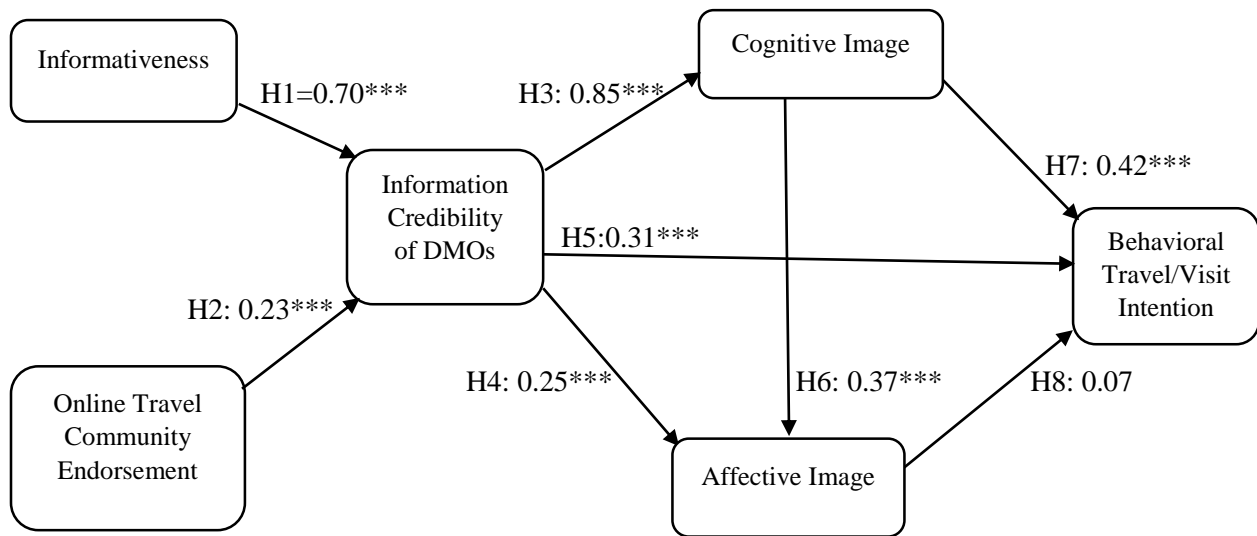
Hypothesis	Path	Standard coefficient	t-value	P-value	Decision
H1 Informativeness	→Information credibility	0.70	14.72***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H2 Endorsement <sup>a</sup>	→Information credibility	0.23	6.77***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H3 Information credibility <sup>b</sup>	→Cognitive Image	0.85	17.23***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H4 Information credibility <sup>b</sup>	→Affective Image	0.25	3.45***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H5 Information credibility <sup>b</sup>	→Behavioral Intention	0.31	4.22***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H6 Cognitive Image	→Affective Image	0.37	4.99***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H7 Cognitive Image	→Behavioral Intention	0.42	5.67***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H8 Affective Image	→Behavioral Intention	0.07	1.77	0.075	<b>Reject</b>

Note:  $\chi^2$  (640) =1951.39,  $p \leq 0.000$ , CFI=0.93, TLI=0.92, RMSEA=0.058, NFI=0.90, GFI=0.87. \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \* $p \leq 0.05$

a: Online Travel Community Endorsement

b: Information Credibility of DMOs

**Figure 4-1 Results of The Direct Path for The Structural Model**



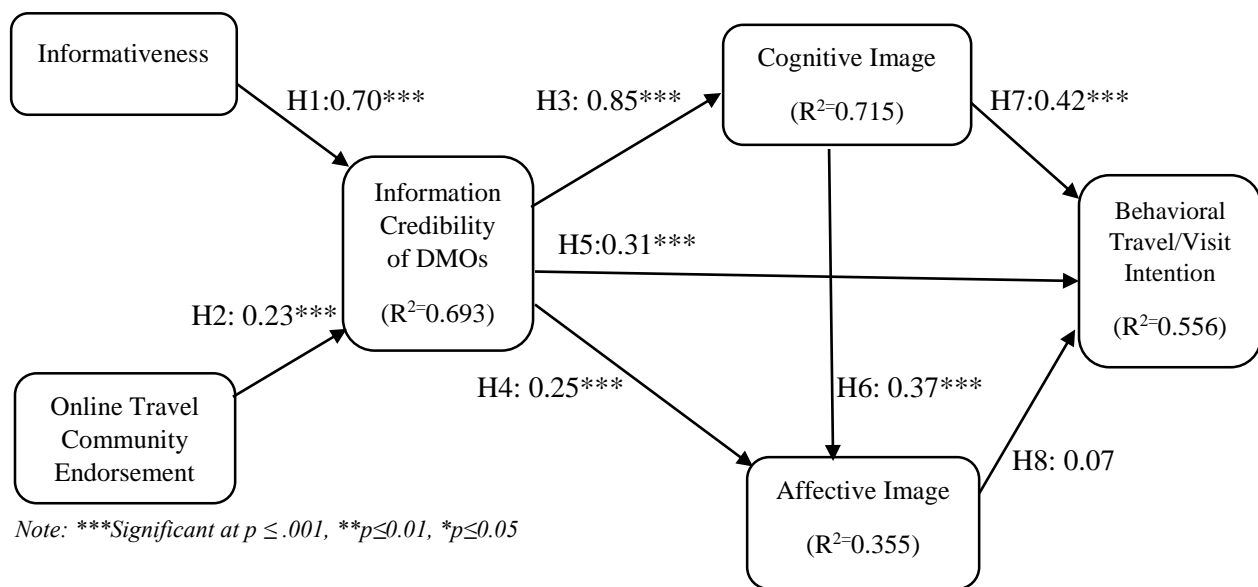
Note: \*\*\*Significant at  $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \* $p \leq 0.05$

#### 4.8.2 Variance Explained ( $R^2$ )

This step evaluates the structural model as the current conceptual framework allocates theoretical relationships that involve information credibility, cognitive image, and affective image to determine behavioral intention to visit emerging tourism destinations. The SEM was used to evaluate the explained predictions of the structural model. According to Chin (1998), ( $R^2$ ) of endogenous latent variables values of 0.67, 0.33, or 0.19 in the inner path model are described as substantial, moderate, or weak (p. 323). Figure 4-2 shows that the model could explain 55.6 percent of the variance in behavioral intention to visit emerging tourism destinations. Furthermore, the

structural model explains 69.3 percent of the total variation in information credibility, 71.5 percent of the total variation in the cognitive image, and 35.5 percent of the affective image variation. The R<sup>2</sup> values indicate a strong statistical ability to predict information credibility, affective image, and behavioral intention. Therefore, the structural model can be considered sufficient to reflect behavioral intention to visit emerging tourism destinations.

**Figure 4- 2 The R<sup>2</sup> Results in The Direct Path for The Structural Model**



### 4.8.3 Moderating Effect

The current study examined the moderating effect of tourists' preferences of social media platforms by conducting a multi-group analysis. This study focused on promoting emerging tourist destinations via Twitter. Also, this study investigated the influence of searching information about tourist destinations through other social media platforms. Due to the respondents' answers to the general questions, this study identifies two groups, namely, respondents using Twitter and respondents using other social media platforms.

#### 4.8.4 Measurement Invariances

The measurement invariance between groups was checked to ensure if the measurement is supported. Otherwise, the findings can be mistaken from the structural invariance (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). The measurement invariance was checked to decide if the measurement across groups is invariant. The Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) difference test was used to evaluate the measurement invariance. When the  $\chi^2$  does not show a significant difference, the measurement models become invariant (Yoo, 2002). The non-restricted model was evaluated using CFA as recommended in previous studies (Han, Back, & Barrett, 2009; Yoo, 2002). The CFA model's full metric invariance and the CFA model's partial metric invariance between participants using Twitter and participants using other platforms when they search for information about emerging tourist destinations.

The goodness-of-fit indices demonstrated that the proposed measurement model fit the data well for each model. On the other hand, the findings in Table 4-12 showed that the full metric invariance of CFA was not supported because of the significant chi-square differences found between the non-restricted and the full metric invariance models ( $\Delta\chi^2$  (df)=74.5 >  $\chi^2$  .001 (39) = 72.06). These findings showed that factor loadings were not equivalent (i.e., the influence of tourist's social media use in affective image and behavioral intentions). Previous studies advised using partial invariance where a set of parameters is constrained to be equal, and other parameters are allowed to vary (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Yoo, 2002).

Therefore, the partial metric invariance was employed for further structural analysis (Yoo, 2002). The results showed that the partial metric invariance model was effectively used as the baseline model for the structural analysis. This study released five items (Item Affective2, Item Affective3, Item Intention1, Item Intention2, and Item Intention3), and the rest of the items were



constrained for the invariance. Lastly, the invariance constraints of the partial metric model were supported after releasing five-items ( $\Delta\chi^2$  (df)=55.73< $\chi^2$  .01 (34) = 56.06). Table 4-12 shows the invariance results of participants who are using Twitter when they search for information about emerging tourist destinations and participants who use other platforms.

**Table 4-12 Invariances For Respondents Using Twitter (N=407) And Respondents Not Using Twitter (N =207)**

Models	$\chi^2$ /df	$\Delta \chi^2$ /df	CFI (RMSEA )
Non-restricted	2583.6/1276		0.93 (0.041)
Full Metric invariance of CFA mode. (IN*)	2658.07 /1315	74.5/39 <sup>a</sup>	0.93 (0.041)
Partial metric invariance of CFA	2639.34/1310	55.7/34 <sup>b</sup>	0.93 (0.041)

**Note:** \*IN=invariance

a Chi-square difference test:  $\Delta\chi^2$  (df)> $\chi^2$  .001 (39) = 72.06; therefore, the full metric invariance is not supported.

b Chi-square difference test:  $\Delta\chi^2$  (df)> $\chi^2$  .01 (34) = 56.06; therefore, the partial metric invariance is supported (with five items of invariance constraints released).

#### 4.8.5 SEM results of Respondents Using Twitter (N=407) and Respondents Using other platforms (N =207)

This section presents the result of the structural invariance test. The results of the two groups are shown in Tables 4-13 and 4-14. The SEM was conducted to identify whether the usage of different platforms when tourists search for emerging tourist destinations would influence this structural equation model. For the dataset of respondents using Twitter, the results in Table 4-13 showed the fit was acceptable. The chi-square value was significant  $\chi^2$  (644) =1589.1,  $p=0.000$ ), however, the other model fit indicators were satisfactory CFI=0.92, TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.06, and GFI=0.84. Out of 8 path coefficients, 6 were statistically significant. The results as presented in Table 4-13 and figure 4-3 showed that “Informativeness“ and “Information Credibility” ( $\beta=0.77$ ,  $t=11.68$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ , significant), “Online Travel Community Endorsement” and “Information

Credibility” ( $\beta=0.12$ ,  $t=3.15$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ , significant), “Information Credibility” and “Cognitive Image” ( $\beta=0.84$ ,  $t=11.91$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ , significant), “Information Credibility” and “Affective Image” ( $\beta=0.05$ ,  $t=.646$ ,  $p>0.05$ , not significant), “Information Credibility” and “Behavioral Intention” ( $\beta=0.22$ ,  $t=2.79$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ , significant), “Cognitive Image” and “Affective Image” ( $\beta=0.48$ ,  $t=5.12$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ , significant), “Cognitive Image” and “Behavioral Intention” ( $\beta=0.59$ ,  $t=6.33$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ , significant), “Affective Image” and “Behavioral Intention” ( $\beta=0.04$ ,  $t=1.21$ ,  $p>0.05$ , not significant).

**Table 4-13 Results of The Direct Path for The Structural Model for Participants Using Twitter to Search for Information about Tourism Destinations**

(N=407)

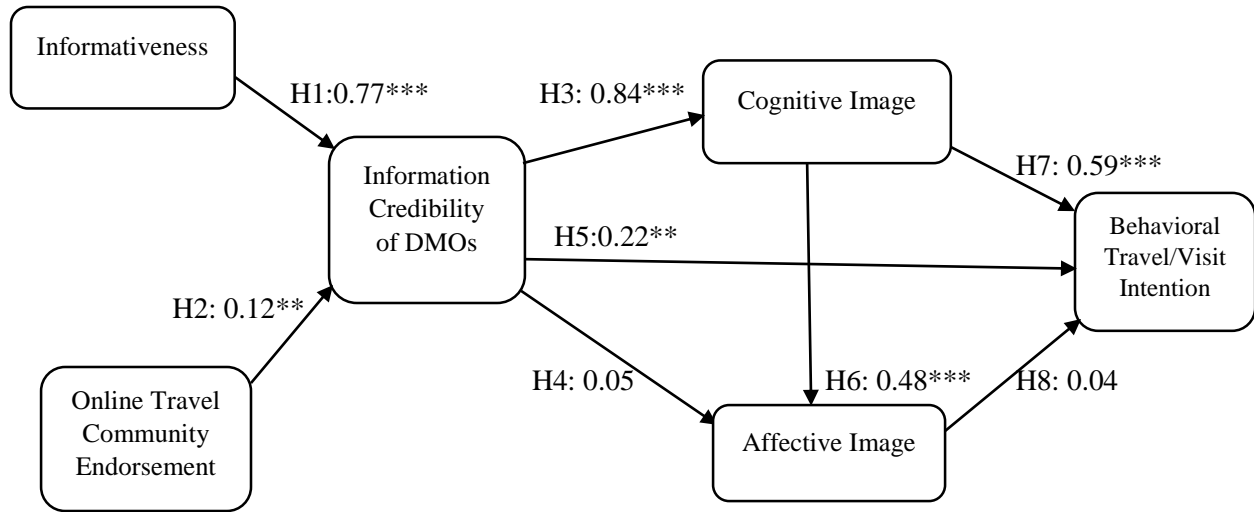
Hypothesis	Path	Standard coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1 Informativeness	→Information credibility	0.77	11.68***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H2 Endorsement <sup>a</sup>	→Information credibility	0.12	3.15**	0.002	<b>Accept</b>
H3 Information Credibility <sup>b</sup>	→Cognitive Image	0.84	11.91***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H4 Information Credibility <sup>b</sup>	→Affective Image	0.05	0.646	0.518	<b>Reject</b>
H5 Information Credibility <sup>b</sup>	→Behavioral Intention	0.22	2.79**	0.005	<b>Accept</b>
H6 Cognitive Image	→Affective Image	0.48	5.12***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H7 Cognitive Image	→Behavioral Intention	0.59	6.33***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H8 Affective Image	→Behavioral Intention	0.04	1.24	0.214	<b>Reject</b>

Notes: ( $\chi^2(644) = 1589.13$ ,  $p\leq 0.000$ ), CFI=0.92, TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.06, and GFI=0.84. \*\*\*  $p\leq 0.001$ , \*\* $p\leq 0.01$ , \* $p\leq 0.05$

a: Online Travel Community Endorsement

b: Information Credibility of DMOs

**Figure 4- 3 Results of The Direct Path for The Structural Model for Participants Using Twitter to Search for Information about Tourism Destinations**



Note: \*\*\*Significant at  $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \* $p \leq 0.05$

Secondly, for respondents who are using different platforms, the results of model fit were acceptable. The chi-square value was significant ( $\chi^2(644) = 1320.21, p = 0.000$ ), however, the other model fit indicators were acceptable CFI=0.90, TLI=0.88, RMSEA=0.07, except for GFI value was 0.76. Out of 8 path coefficients, 6 were statistically significant. The results as presented in Table 4-14 and figure 4-4 showed that “Informativeness” and “Information Credibility” ( $\beta = 0.55, t = 7.42, p < 0.001$ , significant), “Online Travel Community Endorsement” and “Information Credibility” ( $\beta = 0.37, t = 6.13, p < 0.001$ , significant), “Information Credibility” and “Cognitive Image” ( $\beta = 0.75, t = 8.70, p \leq 0.001$ , significant), “Information Credibility” and “Affective Image” ( $\beta = 0.36, t = 3.51, p \leq 0.001$ , significant), “Information Credibility” and “Behavioral Intention” ( $\beta = 0.36, t = 3.37, p \leq 0.001$ , significant), “Cognitive Image” and “Affective Image” ( $\beta = 0.37, t = 3.50, p \leq 0.001$ , significant), “Cognitive Image” and “Behavioral Intention”

( $\beta=0.19$ ,  $t=1.74$ ,  $p>0.05$ , not significant), “Affective Image” and “Behavioral Intention” ( $\beta=0.12$ ,  $t=1.35$ ,  $p>0.05$ , not significant). Finally, the results indicated that the significant relationships showed positive coefficient paths in each group.

**Table 4-14 Results of The Direct Path for The Structural Model for Participants not using Twitter to Search for Information about Tourism Destinations**

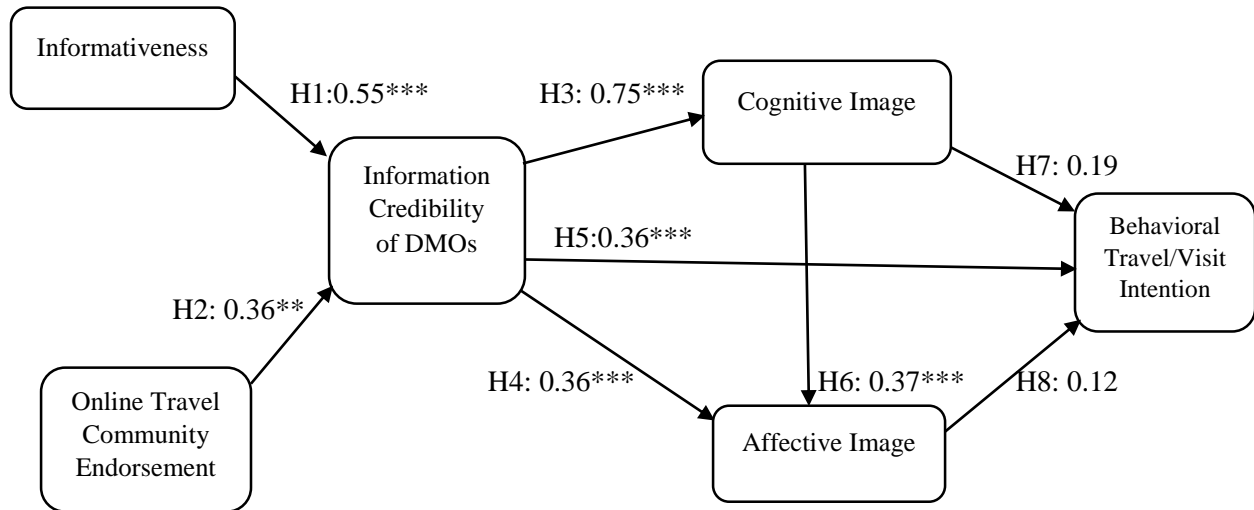
(N= 207)					
Hypothesis	Path	Standard coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1 Informativeness	→Information credibility	0.55	7.42***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H2 Endorsement <sup>a</sup>	→Information credibility	0.36	6.19***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H3 Information Credibility <sup>b</sup>	→Cognitive Image	0.75	8.70***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H4 Information Credibility <sup>b</sup>	→Affective Image	0.36	3.51***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H5 Information Credibility <sup>b</sup>	→Behavioral Intention	0.36	3.37***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H6 Cognitive Image	→Affective Image	0.37	3.50***	0.000	<b>Accept</b>
H7 Cognitive Image	→Behavioral Intention	0.19	1.74	0.082	<b>Reject</b>
H8 Affective Image	→Behavioral Intention	0.12	1.35	0.175	<b>Reject</b>

( $\chi^2 (644) =1320.21$ ,  $p\leq 0.000$ ), CFI=0.90, TLI=0.88, RMSEA=0.07, and GFI=0.76. \*\*\*  $p\leq 0.001$ , \*\* $p\leq 0.01$ , \* $p\leq 0.05$

a: Online Travel Community Endorsement

b: Information Credibility of DMOs

**Figure 4- 4 Results of The Direct Path for The Structural Model for Participants Not Using Twitter**



Note: \*\*\*Significant at  $p \leq .001$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \* $p \leq 0.05$

#### 4.8.6 Structural Invariance

As the following step, this research examined structural invariance. The baseline model was created based on the partial metric invariance model through running the entire structural model. Furthermore, the full path invariance model was fixed to be invariant across two groups. This constrained model was generated (see Table 4-15). The main target of this step is to compare the chi-square difference between the baseline and constrained models. As recommended, the minimum sample size for invariance is 200 (Koh & Zumbo 2008); thus, this section focuses on the differences between those using Twitter to search for information about tourist destinations and those who are not using Twitter.

Table 4-15 shows that both models were a satisfactory fit. However, the findings show that the chi-square difference between the partial metric invariance model and the full path invariance

model (constrained model) was significant. Therefore, full structural invariances were not supported between the groups using Twitter and not using Twitter ( $\Delta\chi^2$  (df)= 35.6 >  $\chi^2$  .001 (8) =26.12). This finding indicated that the paths between users who are using Twitter when they search for information about emerging tourist destinations and others who use different online platforms were not at least equivalent or differed from each other.

**Table 4-15 Structural Invariances For Respondents Who Are Using Twitter (N=407) And Respondents Not Using Twitter (N =207)**

	Models	$\chi^2$	df	$\Delta \chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Respondents who are using Twitter and respondents not using Twitter when they are searching for information about emerging destination	Partial metric invariance model	3000.1	1327		0.91	0.90	0.04
	Full path invariance model	3035.7	1335	35.6/8 <sup>a</sup>	0.91	0.90	0.04

Note: <sup>a</sup> Chi-square difference test:  $\Delta\chi^2$  (df) >  $\chi^2$  0.001 (8) =26.12, thus the full structural invariance is not supported, and paths across two groups are different.

#### 4.9 Invariance Test for The Paths

Table 4-16 presents the invariance test results for the specific paths of both the participants who are using Twitter when they search for information about emerging tourist destinations and those who do not use Twitter. The invariance of a specific path among the two groups was tested, such as the particular parameter of interest (“Endorsement” to “Information Credibility”) compared with the participants who are using Twitter and others who are not using Twitter samples in the tested model was constrained across the two groups to be equal.

Besides, all paths in the baseline model were estimated freely. The findings showed that the cross-group invariance tests for those who use Twitter when they search for information about emerging destinations and those who use different online platforms demonstrate that significant chi-square differences were found on seven paths.

Referring to tables 4-13 and 4-14, the coefficient value of the path from “Informativeness” to “Information Credibility” in participants using Twitter was significantly greater than the coefficient value in those different online platforms to search for information about emerging destinations. The coefficient value of the path from "Endorsement" to "Information Credibility" in participants not using Twitter was significantly greater than the coefficient value in participants using Twitter to search for information about emerging destinations. The coefficient value of the path from “Information Credibility” to “Cognitive Image” in participants using Twitter was significantly greater than the coefficient value in those different online platforms to search for information about emerging destinations. The coefficient value of the path from “Information Credibility” to “Affective Image” in participants not using Twitter was significantly greater than participants using Twitter to search for information about emerging tourist destinations.

The coefficient value of the path from “Information Credibility” to “Behavioral Intention” in participants not using Twitter was significantly greater than participants using Twitter to search for information about emerging tourist destinations. Additionally, the coefficient value of the path from “Cognitive Image” to “Behavioral Intention” in participants using Twitter was more significant than the coefficient value of participants using different online platforms to search for information about emerging destinations. Finally, the coefficient value of the path from “Affective Image” to “Behavioral Intention” in participants not using Twitter was slightly greater than the coefficient value of participants using Twitter to search for information about emerging tourist

destinations. Based on the findings in table 4-16, the chi-square differences were not significant for the path from “Cognitive Image” to “Affective Image” in participants using Twitter was more significant than the coefficient value of participants using different online platforms to search for information about emerging destinations. Therefore, the moderating role of tourists’ preferences of social media platforms when they search for information about tourist destinations has been partially verified, and Hypothesis 9 is partially supported

**Table 4-16 Results of The Invariance Tests of Paths**

Hypothesis	Path	$\chi^2/df$	$\Delta \chi^2/df$
	Free model	3000.1/1327	
H1	Informativeness → Information credibility <sup>a</sup>	3007.1/1328	7/1***
H2	Endorsement <sup>b</sup> → Information credibility	3010.1/1328	10/1***
H3	Information credibility <sup>a</sup> → Cognitive Image	3007.1 /1328	7/1***
H4	Information credibility <sup>a</sup> →Affective Image	3007.6/1328	7.5/1***
H5	Information credibility <sup>a</sup> → Behavioral Intention	3003.6/1328	3.5/1*
H6	Cognitive Image →Affective Image	3000.8/1328	0.7 /1
H7	Cognitive Image → Behavioral Intention	3004.2/1328	4.1/1***
H8	Affective Image → Behavioral Intention	3004/1328	3.9/1**

**Note:** \* the source of significant differences ( $\Delta \chi^2/df > \Delta \chi^2 0.1 (1) = 2.701$ )

\*\* the source of significant differences ( $\Delta \chi^2/df > \Delta \chi^2 0.05 (1) = 3.842$ )

\*\*\* the source of significant differences ( $\Delta \chi^2/df > \Delta \chi^2 0.001 (1) = 6.635$ )

**a:** Information Credibility of DMOs

**b:** Online Travel Community Endorsement



#### **4.10 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the research results. This chapter provided information about the findings of each step of the analysis through figures and tables. The data screening was checked to ensure participants' eligibility to participate in the survey. More than 600 participants who participated in the survey were from the following countries: Australia, Canada, China, Germany, France, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Since participants were required to review a sample of tweets in English, all participants were required through the online survey company to understand English and familiar with social media platforms. Secondly, this chapter presents the missing data, outliers, and normality test results before running further analysis. There were no missing data, and 33 outliers were detected and deleted from the data before conducting further analysis.

The result of the descriptive statistics and normality test was presented in this chapter. The findings showed the variety among participants in terms of demographic information and the information related to social media use when they search for information about tourist destinations. This study presents the CFA analysis results to confirm the model measurement before running the structural model's SEM. The results showed a satisfactory model fit to proceed further with the analysis. Then, this chapter presents the result of SEM, which showed that 7 out of the eight hypotheses were supported. This study conducted a further analysis by checking the variance explained in the model by variance explained to check the model's effectiveness to predict behavioral intention. The results showed an acceptable percentage of how the model can predict behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations through DMOs social media marketing. Furthermore, this study ran another test to check the difference among participants who chose Twitter to search for information about emerging destinations and other participants who chose

other online platforms. Finally, the results showed a partial difference between participants who chose Twitter when searching for information about emerging tourist destinations and other participants who chose other online platforms. Therefore, the last hypothesis regarding the social media preference to use Twitter as a moderator to search for information about tourist destinations was partially supported.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents the research objectives of this study and the results of this research. Also, this chapter discusses how these objectives have been addressed and provides theoretical and practical implications.

### 5.2 The First Main Research Objective: To Examine the Hypothesis of Factors Influencing Visit Intention to Emerging Destination Through Social Media Marketing Promotion.

This section discusses the main objective of this research and the results. This research examined 8 hypotheses to reach the main objective, knowing factors influencing behavioral intention to visit an emerging tourist destination via social media marketing promotion by DMOs. Below are the four sub-sections of the research objectives.

#### 5.2.1 To Evaluate the Impact of Informativeness on Information Credibility of DMOs Promoting Emerging Destinations.

This research claims that informativeness of the content offered by DMO in social media about tourist destinations has a positive influence on the information credibility of DMOs. This target was examined via the proposed Hypothesis for this research in the first Hypothesis,” informativeness has a positive influence on information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations.” The results showed that the Hypothesis was supported ( $\beta=0.65$ ,  $t=14.72$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). This finding is in line with previous studies (e.g., Luo et al., 2013; Hossain et al., 2018). Ráthonyi (2013) emphasized that blog posts should be informative because they could help to promote a tourism brand. Also, Saadeghvaziri and Khodadad Hosseini (2011) added that advertisements through mobile should be informative enough about new products or any changes

in products. This present study adds that informativeness can influence the source credibility of DMOs in promoting emerging tourist destinations via social media.

Additionally, the findings were consistent with previous studies that showed the importance of informativeness and credibility in advertising (e.g., Brackett & Carr, 2001; Deraz, Awuah & Gebrekidan, 2015; Abu-Ghosh, Dmour, Alalwan & Aldmour, 2018). The standardized value findings showed that informativeness strongly influences the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations via social media, indicating the importance of believing content about tourist destinations would require the content to be informative enough for online users. A previous study by Kim and Fesenmaier (2008) found that informativeness can help persuade potential tourists toward tourism websites' messages. Previous literature lacks an understanding of informational and advertising factors in promoting emerging tourist destinations through social media. The present research findings add that informativeness in the content by providing enough and relevant information via social media can influence social media users toward the credibility of DMOs as official tourism accounts to promote tourist destinations. Specifically, many tourists would consider searching for information about tourist destinations through social media (Uysal, Sirgy, Perdue, 2012); since there are many information sources, providing informative content would help to perceive credible content.

The findings indicated that the informativeness of DMO promoting tourist destinations via social media platforms, such as Twitter, positively and significantly influence information credibility. The findings of the mean of informativeness items showed that participants somewhat agree with the following statements “Information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is relevant,” “The information provided on Twitter about the travel-related products (e.g., tourist attractions, anthropogenic features, interesting events, tourist facilities, tourism culture, ...etc) to

visit AIUla city is informative”, and “The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is comprehensive.” This finding showed that these statements help evaluate informativeness as an important factor in creating social media content and influence source credibility about promoting tourist destination.

Also, these statements include the relevance of the information provided by DMO about tourist destination, the informative information about travel-related products, comprehensive information, and the sufficiency of the information provided by DMO. Choi et al. (2015) mentioned in their study that informative telepresence helps DMO web in marketing destination and make a tourism destination appear familiar. This research adds to previous studies that informativeness plays a significant role in influencing the information credibility about promoting tourist destinations, especially if there might be a lack of knowledge about tourist destinations. Also, this study's findings showed that informativeness has a higher impact on the information credibility of DMOs than online travel community endorsement. Therefore, this study emphasizes informativeness as a significant factor that impacts the credibility of the content about newly emerging destinations.

Since information via social media plays an essential role in the travel planning process (Chung & Buhalis, 2008), this research found how informativeness of the content can influence the credibility of DMO promoting tourist destination. In the case of promoting AIUla as an emerging destination, the result indicates that participants perceived informativeness of the contents provided on Twitter about AIUla city influences their perceptions toward information credibility. This positive and significant impact of informativeness on information credibility presented the importance of the informative content provided about tourist destinations via social media platforms, such as Twitter. Creating content to promote newly emerging destinations would

require considerations on how relevant or comprehensive, or how the content is related to travel products, and how sufficient information can positively influence trusting the information from DMOs.

### **5.2.2 To Assess the Impact of the Online Travel Community Endorsement On Information Credibility of DMOs Promoting Emerging Destinations.**

This study investigated how the positive perception of the online travel community endorsement would influence the information credibility provided via sharing their knowledge and experience about visiting undiscovered places by DMO. Hypothesis 2 proposes that online travel community endorsement positively impacts information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations. This hypothesis examined perceptions toward the online travel community endorsing information about emerging tourist destinations. Also, this hypothesis examined the impact of online travel community endorsement on the information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging tourist destinations through social media. The results indicated that online travel community endorsement on information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations was statistically significant ( $\beta=0.22$ ,  $t=6779$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). This result shows that the perception toward the online travel community endorsement contributes to influencing the information credibility by DMOs about tourist destinations.

Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is supported. The standardized coefficient findings showed a positive and significant influence on the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations via social media. Additionally, the findings showed that the majority of the participants somewhat agreed with the statements provided about the online travel community endorsement. The lowest mean among all the 15 items was about the perception toward the online travel community endorsement “Not sexy – Sexy.” However, this item was eliminated because it

showed low factor loadings. The results showed that online travel community endorsement on DMOs promoting AIUla city via Twitter has a positive influence on information provided by DMO about AIUla, which demonstrates that the online travel community plays a role in marketing tourist destinations and increase the credibility of DMOs. This result supports previous studies of the relationship between endorsement and credibility (Schouten et al., 2019; Wong & Scheinbaum, 2018; Wang, Kao, & Ngamsiriudom, 2017). Schouten et al. (2019) found that influencer endorsements on the post would lead to perceived trustworthiness. Previous studies also reported the importance of online travel communities in influencing tourists' perceptions and attitudes (e.g., Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004; Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Kavoura & Stavrianea, 2015). However, there was a gap in identifying the online travel community's role in marketing unknown or undiscovered destinations and influencing the source credibility. Previous studies intensively investigated celebrities' role or influencers' endorsements in promoting tourism destinations (e.g., Kim et al., 2014b; Glover, 2009; Veen & Song, 2014; Chan et al., 2018).

According to Lee et al. (2011), sources credibility can be influenced by several factors, as mentioned in previous studies, such as expertise and trustworthiness. As endorsers can be a source via their attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Ohanian, 1990), the endorsers could influence the credibility through supporting the brand messages (Kim et al., 2014b). By reviewing previous literature, the online community's role in improving the source credibility about tourism products/services was found to be missing in previous studies related to the tourism context. This present study examined the influence of the online travel community via grouping all items together. These items were used to examine the influence on information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging tourist destinations via social media.

According to the results mentioned, this study found that online travel community endorsement positively influenced information credibility of DMOs. Also, the findings showed that informativeness of the content provided by DMOs has more influence on information credibility than online travel community endorsement. Previous studies related to tourism studies focused on investigating the impact of celebrities' or influencers' endorsements (e.g., Jolly, 2016; Xu (Rinka) & Pratt, 2018; Kim et al., 2014b). However, choosing the appropriate celebrities or influences that can positively influence potential tourists searching for information about tourism destinations is not an easy task for marketers (Chan et al., 2018). Also, Chan et al. (2018) found that respondents might not visit the destination because of the celebrities' involvement in promoting tourism destinations because they might not like the celebrity promoting the destination. Thus, online travel community endorsement from previous visitors or residents can be more effective in influencing information source credibility about tourist destinations. Additionally, Social media interactions through eWOM would help create marketing opportunities for firms and enhance credibility and information usefulness online (Hajli, 2018). This study adds that the online travel community would help to promote and support DMOs credibility about new destinations or services promoted in social media. Besides informativeness, the source credibility can be enhanced by the online travel community endorsement, which helps social media users trust and believe in the information provided on newly emerging destinations.

### **5.2.3 To Identify the Impact of Information Credibility of DMOs on the Destination Image and Behavioral Intention to Visit Emerging Tourist Destinations.**

Since there might be a lack of knowledge and trusted sources about new places in social media, this target evaluates the information credibility of DMOs on the destination image of tourist destinations. There were three hypotheses presented in this research to help achieve this target of



identifying the influence of information on destination image. Hypothesis 3 proposes, “The credibility of information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the cognitive image,” and hypothesis 4, “The credibility of information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the affective image.” Also, Hypothesis 5 “The credibility of information provided by DMO on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on behavioral intention to visit tourism destination.”

The result showed that Hypothesis 3, Hypothesis 4, and Hypothesis 5 were supported ( $\beta=0.88, t=17.23, p\leq 0.001$ ;  $\beta=0.33, t=3.45, p\leq 0.001$ ,  $\beta=0.46, t=4.22, p\leq 0.001$ , respectively). Thus, the information credibility of DMOs about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the cognitive image, affective image, and behavioral intention. These findings showed that the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations via social media has a significant and positive influence on destination image and behavior intention to visit emerging tourist destinations. These findings are in line with previous studies (e.g., Veasna et al., 2013; Choi et al., 2018; Rahman, Sharmin, & Akhter, 2020). The information source credibility plays an essential role in expecting tourists' behavior (Rahman et al., 2020). The findings in this regard showed the information credibility of DMOs impacts tourists' knowledge and emotions toward tourist destinations, indicating that perceiving source credibility helps to form destination image through information provided by DMOs in social media.

The findings showed that information source credibility influences cognitive image more than the affective image in forming a tourist destination image. The findings of this study showed that information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations has more influence on the cognitive image and behavioral intention comparing with previous studies that focused on well-known destinations. The findings showed that the path coefficient of information credibility to the

cognitive image was much higher than affective image mentioned in previous studies (Choi et al., 2018; Veasna et al., 2013; Rahman et al., 2020). As tourists may lack information about emerging tourist destinations, the study findings showed that the source information credibility is important in forming knowledge about tourist destinations more than the feelings toward tourist destinations. These findings can also indicate that DMOs information credibility through social media can influence more the cognitive component to enhance tourist knowledge of tourist destinations.

Social media users post information related to tourist destinations, which eventually influences potential tourists' perception of content credibility. For this study, the information credibility of DMOs was measured by asking about information claims from the official tourism account about AIUla city on Twitter. Social networking services, such as Twitter, could ease the spread of false or misleading information because of rapid forwarding (Lee & Choi, 2018). Therefore, the information provided in social media might be experiencing a lack of monitoring content (Li & Suh, 2015). Therefore, the information about tourism destinations is significant and has to be truthful and believable (Phau & Ong, 2007). Limited studies addressed the influence of DMOs credibility as one of the main sources of information of newly emerging destination can influence destination image and behavioral intention based on social media marketing. The results showed that the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations via social media demonstrated how the destination source credibility has a significant antecedent on the cognitive image, affective image, and behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations.

In promoting emerging tourist destinations through social media, finding a trusted source of tourism information is not only linked with verifying DMOs accounts on social media platforms. The findings in this study showed that the informativeness of the content and online travel community endorsement had influenced the information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging

tourism destinations. In Saudi Arabia's case, potential tourists could be misled by anonymous information sources through social media due to a lack of information from trusted sources, which would eventually influence the destination's truth image. The results showed that information credibility has power in helping form destination image for emerging tourist destinations. The hypotheses of the impact of information credibility were designed to evaluate cognitive and affective images' influences since affective and cognitive images lead to behavioral intention (Choi et al., 2018). The results supported these claims and found positive impacts of information credibility on the cognitive image, affective image, and behavioral intention. The results showed that posts from official tourism accounts on Twitter are believable, and the official sources can be trusted when promoting emerging tourist destinations, such as AIUla city.

#### **5.2.4 To Evaluate the Influence Among Destination Image Components On Behavioral Intention to Visit Emerging Tourist Destinations.**

This study aimed to investigate the impact of destination image of promoting emerging destinations via social media and the influence on behavioral intention to visit the destination. This research examined the influences of the cognitive image on affective image, the cognitive image on behavioral intention, and the affective image on behavioral intention to achieve this target. This study examined three hypotheses that were proposed for this target. First, the result of Hypothesis 6, “The cognitive image of information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on the affective image,” was supported ( $\beta=0.37$ ,  $t=4.50$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). This result is in line with previous studies (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Choi et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2008; Styliadis et al., 2016). The findings showed strong support to the positive influence of cognitive image on affective image based level of support criteria by Baloglu

and McCleary (1999), which indicated that above 0.301 of the estimated path coefficient is considered strong.

Additionally, Stylidis et al. (2016) support this result in their study and found a positive impact of the cognitive image on the affective image. In line with previous studies, this research found that the cognitive image of tourist destinations via social media has a significant positive influence on the affective image. The cognitive image component exerts a significant influence in forming destination image and plays a role as an antecedent of the affective image (Rahman et al., 2020; Molinillo et al., 2018). In promoting tourist destinations, this study found that the cognition aspect is essential in forming destinations through social media promotions. The findings indicate that the knowledge that tourists would have through information provided by DMOs would help build an image for a destination that they did not hear about it before or never visited. Based on the results, the 7 items of the cognitive image can be used as a measurement to evaluate the influence on affective image toward information provided about emerging tourist destinations.

Secondly, Hypothesis 7 proposed the positive impact of cognitive image on behavioral intention to visit an emerging destination, “The cognitive image of information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive influence on behavioral intention to visit tourism destination.” The result was supported and showed a significant impact ( $\beta=0.42$ ,  $t=5.67$ ,  $p\leq 0.001$ ). This result is in line with previous studies (e.g., Pike & Ryan, 2004; Choi et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2008; Stylidis et al., 2016). The findings showed that perceiving information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourist destinations significantly impacts behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations. The findings of both hypotheses 6 and 7 reconfirmed the proposed model by Gartner (1993) to promote emerging tourist destinations through social media. Also, the findings suggest the cognitive image is more significant with behavioral intention than affective

image. The findings showed that information provided through social media about tourist destinations helps form cognitive image, which eventually led to behavioral intention to visit tourist destinations. This finding indicates that social media particularly, Twitter, would influence social media users' behavioral intention to visit less-known destinations based on their knowledge about tourist destinations more than their emotions.

Lastly, Hypothesis 8 indicated that the impact of affective image on behavioral intention, “Affective image of information provided by DMOs on Twitter about tourism destinations has a positive and significant influence on behavioral intention to visit tourism destination.” The result did not support and showed no significant impact ( $\beta=0.07$ ,  $t=1.77$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). This finding is not in the same direction as previous studies that mentioned the significant impact of affective image on behavioral intention (e.g., Baloglu, 2000; Chan et al., 2018; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Choi et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2008; Li et al., 2010; Styliadis et al., 2016). This finding shows that only cognitive image components can influence behavioral intention to visit tourist destinations promoted through social media. The findings showed that emotions or feelings would not significantly influence behavioral intention toward visiting tourist destinations. This finding showed that social media users' emotions toward emerging tourist destinations through information provided by DMOs would not influence their behavioral intentions to visit tourist destinations. This study measured the affective image via 4 items, which are “Pleasant,” “Exciting,” “Arousing,” and “Relaxing.” The results did not support the hypothesis that affective image of tourist emerging destinations can influence behavioral intention to visit through social media marketing. This study was based on content provided by DMOs on Twitter; therefore, participants might not feel that posts by DMOs would influence their feelings toward emerging destinations. Therefore, the results showed affective image does not significantly influence behavioral intention.

In terms of the affective image's impact not supporting behavioral intention, previous studies have reported that affective image could not influence behavioral intention. For example, Artuger and Çetinsöz (2017) found in their study that affective image does not have a significant impact on revisit intention. The results revealed that affective image does not influence behavioral intention to visit tourist destinations for the current study. In promoting emerging tourist destinations on social media, the cognitive image about tourist destinations influences destination image formation and impacts behavioral intention. Therefore, knowledge and beliefs about emerging tourist destinations through DMOs social media promotion can significantly influence tourist visit intention.

### **5.3 The Second Main Objective: To Evaluate the Proposed Model's Effectiveness for Predicting Behavioral Intention to Visit Emerging Tourist Destinations.**

The second objective is to evaluate the proposed model's effectiveness in predicting behavioral intention to visit tourist destinations via DMOs promotion through social media. The structural model results showed that the proposed model explains up to 55.6 percent of the variance in behavioral intention to visit emerging tourism destinations. The results also demonstrated that the structural model explains 69.3 percent of the total variation in information credibility, 71.5 percent of the total variation in the cognitive image, and 35.5 percent of the affective image's total variation. The results support the proposed model and prove the proposed model's effectiveness in evaluating visiting intention to emerging destinations through DMOs marketing in social media. The conceptual framework has shown that the tested variables would help to predict behavioral intention and factors influencing marketing less known tourist destinations to potential tourists.

#### **5.4 The Third Main Objective: To Evaluate the Different impacts on the Framework of Users' Preference of Social Media Platforms When They Search for Information About Emerging Destinations.**

The SEM analysis findings show that there are similarities and differences among participants using Twitter to search for information about emerging destinations and others using other platforms. The findings indicated that hypothesis 9 “Paths of this SEM will be various based to tourists’ preferences of social media platforms” was partially supported.

First, informativeness influenced the information credibility of DMO promoting emerging tourism destinations according to the two groups. Both groups supported the impact of the online travel community endorsement on the information credibility of DMO promoting emerging tourism destinations. These findings indicate that despite the difference in using any online platforms to search for information about newly emerging destinations, informativeness in the contents provided about emerging destinations by DMOs plays a significant role in influencing the information credibility of DMOs. Besides, the perceptions toward online travel community endorsement on DMOs posts positively influences the information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations in any online platforms.

Also, the findings show that both groups supported the influence of information credibility on the cognitive image. However, the findings showed that participants using Twitter to search for information about emerging tourism destinations did not support the hypothesis of “Information Credibility” and “Affective Image.” This study focused on information credibility DMO in promoting emerging tourist destinations as a source. This finding showed that the DMO would influence the knowledge and beliefs of respondents through cognitive image rather than their emotions and feelings through the affective image. Since the DMOs promote through social

media where many social media users can influence potential tourists' perceptions toward a destination through information provided, therefore, the findings showed that the source credibility as a DMO would influence their knowledge, especially about emerging tourist destinations since tourists might have lack of sufficient information about emerging tourist destinations, such as AlUla in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the source credibility plays a significant role for Twitter users in influencing their cognitive image toward a tourist destination.

Regarding the impact of information credibility on behavioral intention, the findings indicate that both groups supported the impact of information credibility on behavioral intention. On the other hand, participants not using Twitter did not support the path "Cognitive Image" to "Behavioral Intention." As mentioned in the findings, participants using other platforms indicated that they use various other platforms when searching for information about tourist destinations. The findings showed that information provided via Twitter could enhance their knowledge about the destination, but it would influence their intentions to visit emerging tourist destinations. Previous studies highlighted that participants would use platforms that can meet their needs (Zafarani & Liu, 2013), therefore, the cognitive image created through DMOs information about emerging tourist destinations via other social media platforms influences behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations.

The findings of both groups did not support the impact of affective image on behavioral intention. This indicates that both groups did not find affective aspects on information provided online (i.e., social media, travel websites, blogs) that would influence their intention to visit emerging destinations. Regarding the findings of the invariance test of the path in Table 5.16, the significant chi-square differences and the findings indicate that 7 paths were identified significant chi-square differences. The finding of path analysis indicated that a significant difference with



“informativeness” to “Information Credibility” in participants using the Twitter sample is greater than the coefficient value identified in the participants using other online platforms when they search for information about emerging destinations. This indicates that informativeness is significantly essential in creating content through Twitter about emerging tourism destinations. The result of path analysis showed that the difference coefficient value with “Online Travel Community Endorsement” to “Information Credibility” in participants not using the Twitter sample is greater than the coefficient value identified in the participants using the Twitter sample. This suggests that DMOs should consider the significant role of online travel community endorsement on information credibility in other online platforms when providing information about emerging tourism destinations instead of focusing on a specific platform.

For path analysis of “Information Credibility” to “Cognitive Image”, the results showed significant path analysis differences. The path coefficient was slightly higher with respondents using Twitter when they search for information about emerging destinations. The result of path analysis showed that the difference coefficient value with “Information Credibility” to “Affective Image” in participants using the Twitter sample is slightly more significant than the coefficient value identified in the participants using the Twitter sample. For path analysis of “Information Credibility” to “Behavioral Intention”, the results showed significant path analysis differences.

The finding of the invariance tests of the path “Cognitive Image” to “Affective Image” showed no significant differences in term of chi-square finding. Therefore, there is no significant different between the path “Cognitive Image” to “Affective Image” for respondents using Twitter and respondents not using Twitter. For the path analysis of “Cognitive Image” to “Behavioral Intention”, the results showed significant differences in the path coefficient. The path coefficient was slightly higher with respondents using Twitter when they search for information about

emerging destinations. Lastly, the result showed that the difference coefficient value with “Affective Image” to “Behavioral Intention” in participants not using the Twitter sample is greater than the coefficient value identified in the participants using Twitter when they search for information about emerging destinations. The other online platforms mentioned by participants included different platforms, such as social media platforms (Facebook & Instagram), Travel platforms (Booking & TripAdvisor), and search engine (Google).

## **5.5 Contributions and Practical Implications**

This section provides academic contributions and practical implications based on the findings of this research. This research has significant contributions to academia and industry. First, this research focused on promoting emerging tourist destinations. Secondly, this research focused on promoting via social media platforms. Third, it evaluated the influence of informativeness and online travel community endorsement on information credibility. Fourth, this research examined the influence of information credibility of DMOs on destination image and behavioral intention. Lastly, this research evaluated how destination image influences behavioral intention to visit tourist destinations via DMOs social media promotion. The following presents the contributions of the study.

### **5.5.1 Academic Contributions**

This research has several academic contributions. Firstly, the main of this study is to investigate factors influencing behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations. This research expands the range of researches on promoting tourism destinations. The extant literature has studied different aspects of promoting tourism destinations (Antoniadis et al., 2014; Govers, 2007; Sevin, 2013; Roque & Raposo, 2016). Also, previous studies have declared the significant role of destination image in promoting tourism destination (e.g., Baloglu, 2000; Chon, 1990; Chen

& Tsai, 2007; Tasci & Gartner, 2007), and the role of celebrities and influencers in endorsing tourism destinations (Chan et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Glover, 2009; Xu (Rinka)& Pratt, 2018).

Few studies were focusing on promoting new developed or emerging destinations (e.g., Esu & Ebitu, 2010; Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2018). Also, there was still a gap in investigating factors that can influence visitors' intention to visit undiscovered or unknown tourist destinations through social media marketing. For instance, the findings of this study reported different influences of information credibility and destination image than the once were done in previous studies about well-known destinations (Choi et al., 2018; Veasna et al., 2013). This research provides a significant theoretical contribution by conceptualizing factors influencing visiting intention through DMOs promoting tourist destinations via social media. This research highlights the influence of informative content and online travel community endorsement on promoting tourist destinations via social media. This study also highlighted the impact of information credibility on the cognitive image, affective images, and behavioral intention since credibility can play a role in influencing marketing tourism destinations and influencing destination image (Choi et al., 2017; Veasna et al., 2013).

Secondly, this study investigated the influence of informativeness of the content provided by DMOs about tourist destinations via social media. Providing informative content is considered to be essential in advertising (Ráthonyi, 2013). The results contribute to this knowledge by proving that informativeness should be considered one of the main factors in creating promotional content related to marketing tourist destinations. Additionally, the findings showed how informativeness has a positive and significant influence on information credibility, enhancing the existing studies by knowing more about the role of informative content in promoting and influencing information credibility. For emerging tourist destinations, there might be less comprehensive knowledge and

information about these unknown destinations. This study showed that informative content plays a role in gaining the trust of potential tourists on information about emerging destinations. The findings raised the important role that informativeness can play in creating content as a part of information quality and influence the credibility of new information, especially regarding unfamiliar tourist destinations.

Thirdly, this research investigated the influence of online travel community endorsement in the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations via social media. As mentioned, previous studies focused on celebrities' or influencers' endorsements in endorsing tourism destinations (Glover, 2009; Chan et al., 2018; Van Der Veen & Song; 2014, Xu (Rinka)& Pratt, 2018). However, there was a lack of studies highlighting the role of online travel community endorsement about tourist destinations. This study enhanced the knowledge about promoting tourism destinations by focusing on the online travel community's endorsement. The online travel community plays an important role in the virtual world, and travelers seem to trust e-WOM's information than traditional marketing (Lange-Faria, Wendy & Elliot, 2012). As the results showed significant influence, this study contributed to tourism studies by highlighting the online travel community's role in endorsing DMOs social media posts can influence the information credibility by official social media accounts, such as DMOs. Besides, this research provides insightful knowledge about the online travel community's role in marketing tourism destinations via social media platforms. Additionally, the findings added to academia that online travel community endorsement through comments, likes, shares, or other social media features would help to prove messages provided by official tourism accounts about newly emerging destinations. Previous studies did not highlight the possible influences of the content characteristics and individuals' endorsement on source credibility of tourist destinations. This study contributed to

academia by focusing on the impact of informativeness and online travel community endorsement on the source credibility.

Fourth, this research contributes to previous studies by enhancing knowledge about marketing emerging tourist destinations via social media platforms. This research also provides more information about the role of DMOs in promoting emerging destinations and how credible information from DMOs can influence cognitive and affective images of tourist destinations and behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations. This results' importance lies in embracing the role of providing credible and trustful information via online platforms (Choi et al., 2018; Sharifpour et al., 2013), especially for emerging destinations where potential tourists might lack information regarding the source promoting newly emerging tourist destinations. The findings in this study showed that DMOs credibility plays an important role in influencing destination image and behavioral intention to visit tourist destinations. Also, potential tourists could have an incorrect image of emerging destinations via vast online information on social media. The findings would enhance the knowledge by understanding how information credibility contributes to shaping a destination's destination image through social media promotion campaigns by DMOs. Furthermore, this study contributes to academia by examining the direct impact of information credibility on behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations. The findings showed that credible information via social media influences tourists' intention to visit emerging tourist destinations.

Fifth, this research contributes to academia by providing knowledge of cognitive images' influences on affective images. The findings also enhance the knowledge of the influence of cognitive and affective image of tourist destinations on behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations. The findings in this study are in line with previous literature (e.g., Baloglu &

McCleary, 1999; Baloglu, 1999; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Choi et al., 2017), except for affective image and behavioral intention. The findings interestingly showed that affective image does not influence behavioral intention to visit an emerging tourism destination. This finding was also confirmed by comparing participants who use Twitter to search for information about emerging tourism destinations with participants who use other online platforms. This result revealed that the information provided by DMOs on Twitter about emerging destinations did not help create an affective image influence tourist intention to visit emerging tourist destinations. Thus, these results contribute to academia by acknowledging that there is no influence of affective image on behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations through DMOs promotion in social media. The findings also showed different perceptions of the influences of factors in the model between participants using Twitter and others using different online platforms to search for emerging or undiscovered tourist destinations. This result adds to academia that preference over online platforms plays a role as a moderator—in the model about marketing emerging tourist destinations through social media.

To the best of the author's knowledge, this research is among the first studies that provide empirical evidence of factors influencing the promotion to visit emerging tourist destinations through social media. Assessing the proposed model's effectiveness for predicting behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations demonstrated a strong prediction, and the proposed model can explain more than 55 percent. Hence, the second objective is achieved, and the proposed model can enhance the academia about factors influencing visit intention to emerging tourist destinations through DMOs promoting. Besides, this study enhances the knowledge regarding the dual-process theory through the findings of informativeness and online travel community endorsement influences on information credibility of DMOs introducing tourist destinations

through social media. The findings added to the academia that information credibility by DMOs was influenced by an informational factor related to the content promoting emerging tourist destinations. Also, the findings showed that the online travel community endorsing DMOs posts plays a critical role in destination marketing and determinant for information credibility.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the literature with regards to destination image formation. The findings showed that information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging tourist destinations can directly influence cognitive image, affective image, and behavioral intention to visit tourist destinations. While this study contributes to academia because the research context focuses on tourist destinations located in Saudi Arabia, it brings insightful knowledge in factors influencing visiting intention to emerging tourist destinations by marketing those destinations in social media. Additionally, the findings of this research added that the preferable social media platform for users when they search for information about tourist destinations would influence their perceptions toward tourist destinations due to the social media platforms used by DMOs to promote tourist destinations. This result enhances academia by using social media platforms as a moderator to the proposed framework, and the findings showed that moderation was partially supported.

Finally, the proposed model's findings can be generalized and applicable to other developed and well-known tourist destinations. Providing informative content in promoting tourist destinations through social media would influence the source's credibility in providing information about a tourist destination. Also, the results highlighted the role of online travel community endorsement about promoting through social media, which can help any tourist destinations take advantage of using online travel community endorsements to promote tourist destinations. Furthermore, the findings showed the impacts of information credibility of DMOs on destination

image and behavioral intention, which indicated that the credibility of social media sources about tourist destinations could influence tourists' perceptions and behavior toward tourist destinations. However, the relationships' strength should be different from emerging tourist destinations due to the differences in well-known destinations, such as the differences in information sources and destination image.

### **5.5.2 Practical Implications**

The current research provides insights to DMOs and other related industries in promoting emerging tourist destinations and using social media as a destination marketing tool. First, the study investigated factors influencing the behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations through DMOs social media promotion. This study provides information on what is needed by DMOs to enhance online content by providing informative content about the destination. This study found that informativeness as a factor has more influence on the information credibility of DMOs than online travel community endorsement. Therefore, ensuring credible information when promoting tourism would require providing informative and comprehensive contents about emerging tourist destinations. This study's findings concluded that information about tourist destinations needs to be relevant, informative, comprehensive, and sufficient. Thus, DMOs need to review their marketing strategy for content management when promoting any tourist destinations. Also, DMOs and destination branding companies need to utilize the features provided in social media platforms to present informative content to persuade tourists about tourist destinations.

Secondly, DMOs should consider the role of the online travel community in marketing tourism destinations. The online travel community could include previous visitors or locals; therefore, it is necessary to consider their roles in endorsing DMOs messages in social media.



DMOs could pay more attention to online travel community comments via re-posting their comments, encouraging previous users to post comments, tag the DMOs accounts, and pay recognition of online travel community endorsements via promotion campaigns. Hence, it will contribute to increasing the credibility level of information provided by DMOs about tourist destinations. Furthermore, this contribution will help to gain trust in information provided about tourist destinations via social media. Utilizing online travel community contributions in marketing on social media will help promote tourism to potential tourists. Additionally, it will help to increase the connections and relationships between previous visitors or locals on a side and DMOs on the other side. This study also improves marketing strategy by considering reliance on individuals promoting destinations instead of the total reliance on celebrities or influencers to promote tourist destinations. This step will help DMOs to spread information about tourist destinations to a wider range and save costs by utilizing online travel community endorsement on their posts.

Thirdly, the National Tourism Organization (NTO) and the Ministry of Tourism may also utilize from this study's findings to improve marketing tourism strategy by collaborating more with DMOs. There is a massive number of online users providing information about tourism destinations. Also, some online sources can negatively vilify reports about tourism in such a country as Saudi Arabia. These sources can mislead potential tourists about the accurate image of a destination and the country. One of the issues tourists might face when searching for travel information about emerging destination is finding a trusted source about tourism destination. Therefore, this study suggests more collaborations between all governmental stakeholders related to tourism development and private sectors to ensure that all parties can access the information and provide relevant and informative information about tourist destinations. Also, DMOs of

emerging destinations should pay attention to the online community comments on social media platforms, such as local comments. Without acceptance by locals, it could be challenging to promote and develop tourism.

Fourthly, DMOs should consider creating different accounts in the online platforms to attract specific source markets. For instance, China is one of the biggest tourism markets in the world. Obtaining information about tourist destinations in Saudi Arabia from social media platforms, such as Twitter, might be difficult for Chinese tourists because they use different social media platforms. Therefore, the Ministry of Tourism, NTO, and DMOs should consider using famous social media platforms in each major source market, such as using Sina Weibo, QQ, or WeChat, to attract tourists from China. This suggestion can help direct the message to the targeted source markets by providing information in their languages to promote tourism in Saudi Arabia. Besides, it will help reach many users from such a source market and deliver accurate messages since many users in social media could provide false information about tourism in such a country as Saudi Arabia.

Finally, tourists who use different social media and other platforms have different perceptions of Twitter information. In relation to this, respondents in this study did find that destination image would not influence their visit intention to emerging tourist destinations. Therefore, as mentioned, DMOs and other involved sectors should use various social media platforms to reach a wider range of potential tourists to provide information about emerging tourist destinations. Furthermore, the study found that information credibility would influence cognitive image only, which means that DMO as an official source would influence the knowledge and beliefs toward emerging tourist destinations.

## 5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the research findings and discusses how the results have achieved the research objectives. The chapter also discussed the measurement developed and the proposed model's effectiveness for predicting behavioral intention to visit tourist destinations. Moreover, this chapter discussed the various information on the model based on using online platforms to search for information about tourist destinations. Also, this chapter provided contributions and practical implications.

The results showed that 7 hypotheses were supported, except the impact of affective image on behavioral intention. The findings showed that there was no significant impact between affective image and behavioral intentions. The possible explanation for this finding is that participants did not feel emotional regarding information provided from DMOs about tourist destinations that would influence their intention to visit. The results showed that both informativeness and online travel community endorsement have influenced DMO as a source of information about emerging destinations.

The study checked the effectiveness of predicting behavioral intention through the proposed model; the results showed that more than 55 percent of the proposed model would predict behavioral intention. Besides, this study added objectives and examinations for choosing online platforms to search for information about tourist destinations. The results showed a significant difference among participants using Twitter and participants using other online platforms to search for information about tourist destinations. Finally, this chapter presented theoretical and practical contributions through the proposed model to examine the influence on visiting intention to emerging destinations through DMOs marketing in social media.

Lastly, this study provided theoretical contributions through examinations of the influence of informativeness as an informational factor that can influence information sources in promoting newly emerging destinations through social media. The findings proved that informativeness as a factor is significant in influencing source information in social media advertising and the source credibility. Also, this chapter highlighted the role of online travel community in endorsing and influencing information source through social media marketing tourist destinations. Furthermore, this chapter indicated the contribution of this study to the current literature by highlighting the importance of information credibility of DMOs for promoting emerging destinations and influencing destination image and behavioral intention.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS**

### **5.7 Chapter Introduction**

This chapter provides concluding remarks about the study. Also, this chapter includes limitations and suggestions for future studies. Finally, it contains an overview of the study.

### **5.8 Concluding Remarks**

Promoting emerging tourist destinations is not an easy task considering the extensive marketing by competitive tourist destinations through various platforms. By reviewing previous literature about marketing tourist destinations, there is a lack in studies focusing on promoting emerging tourist destinations. This study highlighted the differences in terms of characteristics and reputation between well-known and emerging tourist destinations. Since DMOs utilize social media to promote tourist destinations, this study focused on factors influencing behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations through social media promotions. This study confirmed the importance of understanding destination image and behavioral intention in marketing tourist destinations. This study found that promoting emerging tourist destinations through social media can be an effective tool to form the destination image. Therefore, social media as a channel can help DMOs to deliver information in a way that can help to form an image of tourist destinations and influence behavioral intention.

This research develops a framework based on previous literature to understand factors that can influence destination image and behavioral intention. Since this study focused on DMO promoting emerging tourist destinations, tourists might lack information and trust in social media information sources. Therefore, this study focused on information credibility because of its importance in marketing tourist destinations. This study's findings showed that the information credibility of the DMOs positively impacts destination image and behavioral intention to visit

emerging destinations. The findings indicate that the information credibility of DMOs in social media is important for promoting emerging destinations. It also contributes to forming destination image via the information provided through social media and directly influences tourist intention to visit emerging destinations.

Moreover, informativeness as a valuable factor in advertising was found to impact information credibility of DMOs social media promotion. Since many sources provide information about tourist destinations on social media, providing informative content about tourist destinations is significant because it can influence the source's credibility. Informative content has to be relevant, comprehensive, and sufficient to gain tourist trust toward information provided online by DMOs. Furthermore, this study found that online travel communities can play a role as marketers and influence source credibility. Previous literature has studied the impact of celebrities' or influencers' endorsement toward tourist destinations intensively. While DMOs want to gain potential tourists trust about information related to tourist destinations, the online travel community was found in this study to influence source credibility through endorsement. Utilizing the online travel community's positive comments and interactions through social media will help DMOs to prove messages about less-known destinations, promote tourist destinations, and reach a wider audience.

Lastly, this research's findings emphasized the importance of the factors mentioned above in forming destination image and influencing behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations. This study showed that tourists would use several social media platforms to get information about newly emerging destinations. Therefore, DMOs should not only focus on specific social media platforms when promoting tourist destinations. This research can be an initial step in contributing

to knowledge about marketing emerging tourist destinations, especially regarding marketing through social media platforms.

## **5.9 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Despite this study's unique contributions, this research is not excluded from the limitations that should be addressed. This study focused on promoting emerging tourist destinations through emphasizing focus on promoting AlUla city in Saudi Arabia. However, other emerging tourist destinations might have different attractions that would influence DMOs marketing strategies and tourist intention to visit, such as developing new islands. Therefore, future studies should study the factors influencing tourist intention to visit different types of new attractions. This study's measurement was developed mainly based on destination image formation theory; however, the current model did not evaluate all items' direct impact on behavioral intention. Future research should consider testing the impact of the current factors, including informativeness and the online travel community endorsement on behavioral intention.

The factor loadings of online travel community endorsements have shown lower factor loading in one item, and this item was deleted as explained in chapter 5. This study grouped all items that belong to the three dimensions to evaluate the influence of online travel community endorsement on the information credibility of DMOs promoting tourist destinations. Future studies can evaluate the influence of online travel community endorsement by evaluating the impact of each of the three dimensions (attractiveness- expertise- trustworthiness) separately. This step can help future studies to identify the extent in which each dimension can influence information credibility.

Also, this study provided information about the demographic of participants and their nationalities; however, the influence of demographic information (e.g., gender, marital status, age)

or participants nationalities on behavioral intention to visit emerging tourist destinations remained unidentified due to the focus of this study on visiting intention to emerging tourist destination through social media promotions by DMOs. Future studies should consider conducting the possible influence of participants' nationalities and the demographic profile in behavioral intention to visit tourist destinations. Additionally, future studies could explore the role of online travel community endorsement as a moderator to the influence of DMOs credibility on destination and visit intention. For this study, the survey questionnaires were collected by an online survey company. However, in 2019, the global health pandemic (COVID-19) has started to influence many countries, which has an extensive influence on the tourism sector, especially in 2020. For instance, many countries have closed their borders to prevent the spreading of the pandemic among their citizens. Therefore, people's willingness to travel could be affected due to the risk of traveling during the pandemic. Hence, future studies consider the possible influence of COVID-19 on tourist intention to visit tourist destinations.

This study highlighted the importance of Twitter as a social media platform in promoting tourist destinations. Moreover, this study provided insightful knowledge about the influence of using various social media platforms in searching for information about tourist destinations. Future studies can investigate promoting emerging tourist destinations on different social media platforms. Furthermore, the findings showed that more than 30 % of participants do not rely on official tourism organizations' information about the newly emerging destination through social media. Future studies could investigate the sources that potential tourists use besides DMOs when searching for information about newly emerging tourist destinations. Also, future studies can investigate more about factors that influence behavioral intention through DMOs promoting tourist destination in different selected online and social media platforms. This study used the English



language to ask participants to review samples of DMOs and online travel community tweets about emerging destinations and ask participants to complete the survey questionnaire. Future research should consider using several languages to target a larger sample size.

Finally, Saudi Arabia is located in the Middle East, a region that has unique cultures, political situations, and other aspects. However, data and studies related to the development and marketing of the tourism industry in this region are insufficient, and obtaining enough data about the status of tourism would contribute to academia. Thus, future studies should investigate tourism marketing and development in this region to enhance the academia by conducting more studies related to tourism in a country located in this region.

### **5.10 Overview of The Study**

This research aimed to provide contributions to understanding the influence of factors related to DMO promoting emerging destinations through social media, the influence of information credibility on destination image (cognitive and affective images), and behavioral intention. The influence of destination image on behavioral intention to visit tourism destinations is included. This part presents a summary of each chapter in this research.

Chapter 1 introduced the logical basis for conducting the study. Studying marketing tourism destination is significant in the tourism context; however, studies related to marketing tourist destinations through social media, the influence of destination image, and promoting emerging destinations remain limited. Previous studies have not focused on investigating the challenges that might face DMOs when promoting unknown or emerging tourism destinations. This leads to the research objectives of the present study.

The main objective of this research was to examine factors influencing visit intention to an emerging destination through a social media marketing promotion; thus, this research examined, namely, (1) the impact of informativeness on information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations, (2) the impact of the online travel community endorsement on information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations, (3) the relative impact of information credibility of DMOs on the destination image of the emerging destinations and behavioral intention, (4) the influence of destination image on behavioral intention to visit an emerging destination, and (5) evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed model to predict behavioral intention, and (6) examine the users' impact of using different social media platforms when they search for information about emerging tourist destinations.

Chapter 2 reviewed relevant previous literature on the subject. The literature review presented previous literature about emerging tourist destinations and more knowledge about this study's case. This chapter also reviewed the importance of understanding behavioral intention in previous literature (e.g., Tsai, Chu, & Kobori, 2017; Jalilvand et al., 2012). This chapter led to review previous literature about the influence of destination image and showed the importance of engaging destination image in this study since destination image considered an important factor in marketing tourism destination (e.g., Kim et al., 2005; McWilliams & Crompton, 1997; Woodside, 1996). This chapter discussed the link between destination image and behavioral intention (e.g., Beerli et al., 2007; Goh & Litvin, 2000; Sirgy & Su, 2000). Chapter 2 reviewed previous literature about the destination image formation theory, components, and factors influencing destination image (e.g., Beerli & Martín, 2004; Gartner, 1993; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). This chapter highlighted the importance of the information provided about tourism destinations and the influence on destination image and behavioral intention.

Moreover, this chapter reviewed the importance of social media platforms in promoting tourism destinations, and the role of DMOs in promoting tourism destinations via social media and influencing destination image (e.g., Chu & Luckanavanich, 2018; Molinillo et al., 2017; Roque & Raposo, 2016). Furthermore, this chapter highlighted the importance of credibility and the influence of information credibility of travel information on travelers (e.g., Ayeh et al., 2013a; Castillo et al., 2011; Chung et al., 2015; Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Furthermore, Chapter 2 reviewed previous literature on factors influencing information credibility. This chapter reviewed the importance of informativeness as a factor in providing online information (e.g., Hamouda, 2018; Murillo et al., 2016). Also, this chapter reviewed previous studies about the endorsement in tourism contexts (e.g., Chan, Ng, & Luk, 2013; Glover, 2009; Hakimi et al., 2011; Jolly & L, 2013; Veen, 2009).

Furthermore, Chapter 2 presented the conceptual framework to examine the hypotheses among the identified constructs. Lastly, 9 hypotheses were proposed to investigate behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations through official tourism accounts on Twitter. Informativeness was hypothesized to affect the information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations positively. The online travel community was proposed to affect the information credibility of DMOs promoting emerging destinations positively. The information credibility of DMOs was hypothesized to affect Cognitive image positively, information credibility of DMOs was proposed to influence affective image positively, and information credibility of DMOs was proposed to positively influence behavioral intention. The cognitive image was hypothesized to influence affective image positively, and it was hypothesized to influence behavioral intention to visit emerging destinations. The Affective image was

hypothesized to influence behavioral intention to visit an emerging destination positively. The last hypothesis was to evaluate tourists' preferences/use of social media platforms as a moderator.

Chapter 3 demonstrated the methodology of the research. This chapter provides information about the research method process. The instruments and measurements used for this study were identified. The items of the questionnaire are generated through a literature review on studies. A pre-test was performed among doctoral students at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University to check on the content validity and clarity or wording before proceeding to the pilot-test. A pilot test was conducted through Qualtrics, an online survey company with a sample of 79 participants from eight selected countries. Also, chapter 4 presented information about the descriptive analysis, reliability, and validity test. Finally, this chapter identified confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling in checking the model and reaching the result.

Chapter 4 presented the results of the main survey study. First, 649 questionnaires were obtained and screened to exclude participants who are not familiar with social media platforms. Outliers and missing data were detected and deleted. Thus, 614 questionnaires were used for the analysis. The respondents were analyzed through CFA to achieve the validation of the data and the model fit. The results proved to be satisfactory and acceptable. Then, SEM was conducted to examine the proposed hypotheses. The SEM investigated the influence of informativeness on information credibility and online travel community endorsement on information credibility.

Also, SEM tested the influence of information credibility on cognitive image and information credibility on the affective image. Additionally, the SEM examined the impact of cognitive image on affective image and cognitive image on behavioral intention. Moreover, SEM tested the impact of affective image on behavioral intention. Moreover, the findings showed that seven paths specified direct relationships in the structural model are statistically significant out of

eight paths. Additionally, the variance value was checked to evaluate the proposed model's effectiveness in predicting behavioral intention to visit emerging tourism destinations. Lastly, this study performed invariance to evaluate the impact of two groups on the structural model.

Chapter 5 discussed the research results and provides the theoretical contributions and practical implications for DMOs and marketers in promoting emerging destinations via social media. Discussion was provided to coincide with research objectives. Each part was discussed to achieve the research objective. The findings of each hypothesis were discussed based on previous studies and meeting achieving this study's objectives. This study successfully investigated factors influencing visit intention to emerging destinations promoted by DMO via social media, and the hypothesized outcomes confirmed the final model.

Finally, this chapter provided concluding remarks of the study and summarizing the key findings. Also, Chapter 6 included the study's limitations and recommendations for future research and an overview of the study that summarizes all chapters.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix.1 Pre-test Questionnaire

#### QUESTIONNAIRE REVIEW

For measurement items of informativeness, online travel community endorsement, information credibility, cognitive image, affective image, and behavioral intention.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently a Ph.D. student studying at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and now conducting a survey about visit intention to emerging destinations through social media marketing promotion: the case of Saudi Arabia. Kindly evaluate the applicability and representativeness of the measurement items by choosing the appropriate value on a scale of 1 (highly inapplicable) to 5 (completely applicable). Please note that participants in the pilot test and main survey will be asked to answer the screening questions and review sample of tweets before answering the survey questions. If there are any suggestions to improve the items' conciseness, please write in the feedback section.

Thank you very much for your collaboration, much appreciated!

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## 1. Informativness

The informativeness of DMO posts via social media as their ability to effectively provide relevant and comprehensive information.					
Items	Applicability				
Information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is relevant.	1	2	3	4	5
The information provided on Twitter about the travel-related products (e.g. tourist attractions, anthropogenic features, interesting events, tourist facilities, tourism culture, ...etc) to visit AIUla city is informative.	1	2	3	4	5
The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is comprehensive.	1	2	3	4	5
The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is Sufficient.	1	2	3	4	5

**1: Highly inapplicable 5: Completely applicable**

## 2. Online Travel Community Endorsement

The online travel community endorsement as the form of sponsorship to DMO and other online travel community promoting tourism destination via social media to affect tourist behavior.					
Items	Applicability				
Please indicate your perceptions by clicking the appropriate space:					
Unattractive - Attractive	1	2	3	4	5
Not classy - Classy	1	2	3	4	5
Ugly - Beautiful	1	2	3	4	5
Plain - Elegant	1	2	3	4	5
Not sexy - Sexy	1	2	3	4	5
Insincere - Sincere	1	2	3	4	5
Undependable- Dependable	1	2	3	4	5
Dishonest - Honest	1	2	3	4	5

Unreliable - Reliable	1	2	3	4	5
Untrustworthy - Trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
Not an expert - Expert	1	2	3	4	5
Inexperienced - Experienced	1	2	3	4	5
Unknowledgeable - Knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5
Unqualified - Qualified	1	2	3	4	5
Unskilled - Skilled	1	2	3	4	5

**1: Highly inapplicable 5: Completely applicable**

### 3.Information Credibility

The information credibility and level of confidence that the DMO enable to provide travel information via their social media accounts.					
Items	Applicability				
The information claims From the official tourism account about AIUla city on Twitter are believable.	1	2	3	4	5
Over time, my experiences with the information provided by the official tourism account on Twitter about AIUla city led me to expect to keep its promises.	1	2	3	4	5
The official tourism account on Twitter is committed to delivering on its claims.	1	2	3	4	5
The official tourism account on Twitter has a name you can trust.	1	2	3	4	5
The official tourism account on Twitter has the ability to deliver what it promises.	1	2	3	4	5
The official tourism account on Twitter delivers what it promises.	1	2	3	4	5

**1: Highly inapplicable 5: Completely applicable**

#### 4. Cognitive Image

The social media users' knowledge and beliefs attached to the tourist destination via the information provided by DMO in their social media accounts.					
Items	Applicability				
AIUla city has friendly and receptive residents.	1	2	3	4	5
AIUla city has an interesting cultural heritage.	1	2	3	4	5
AIUla city has interesting cultural events.	1	2	3	4	5
AIUla city has good restaurants & gastronomy.	1	2	3	4	5
AIUla city is a good value for a money travel destination.	1	2	3	4	5
AIUla city has offered many good shopping opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5
AIUla city has provided good accommodation facilities.	1	2	3	4	5

**1: Highly inapplicable 5: Completely applicable**

#### 5. Affective Image

The social media users positive or negative feeling toward the tourist destination via the information provided by DMO in their social media accounts					
Items	Applicability				
Please use the below items to describe your feeling toward AIUla city as an emerging tourist destination through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora):					
Unpleasant - Pleasant	1	2	3	4	5
Gloomy - Exciting	1	2	3	4	5
Sleepy - Arousing	1	2	3	4	5
Distressing - Relaxing	1	2	3	4	5

**1: Highly inapplicable 5: Completely applicable**

6. Behavioral Intention

The social media users' behavior that has the intent or action related to the tourism destination.					
Items	Applicability				
I will visit AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5
I will seek more information about visiting AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5
I will recommend visiting AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter to a friend.	1	2	3	4	5
I will say positive things about visiting AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5

**1: Highly inapplicable 5: Completely applicable**

**Feedback:**

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**Thank you very much for your help!**

## Appendix.2 Pilot Survey Questionnaire

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently a Ph.D. student studying at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and now conducting a survey about visit intention to emerging destinations through social media marketing promotion: the case of Saudi Arabia. All the information will be kept confidential and be used for RESEARCH PURPOSE ONLY. Please complete the questionnaire if you are familiar with social media platform Twitter or any equivalent platform and understand English Language. The questionnaire will take 15 minutes.

Thank you very much!

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-Please answer the following questions by clicking the appropriate answer:

\*Are you familiar with the social media platform Twitter or any equivalent platforms?

- Yes (please continue the survey)
- No (please disregard the survey)

\*How often do you read messages posted on Twitter or any equivalent platforms?

- 1-3 times each week
- 4-6 times each week
- 1-3 times each day
- >3 times each day
- Never (please disregard the survey).

\*Saudi Arabia opened its doors to tourism in 2019. The Tourism Ministry and Destination Management Organizations utilize the social media platforms as one of the marketing tools they use to promote tourist destinations. One of the emerging destinations which they are promoting via Twitter is AIUla city.

Before you start answering the survey questions, please check the samples below and the next pages of information provided by the official tourism account of AIUla city on Twitter (@ExperienceAIUla) and (@WinterAtTantora). Please check the samples of tweets provided by the online travel community on the official tourism account about AIUla city (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) before answering the survey questions.

**Experience AIUla | ... استك...** · 12/28/19

2000 years on and we are still fascinated by the red-rocked UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hegra.

Book your packages now: [bit.ly/WinterAtTantora](https://bit.ly/WinterAtTantora)

Taken via Instagram: [eye.of.ty](https://www.instagram.com/eye.of.ty)

#WinterAtTantora  
#AIUla

1 2 4

**Experience AIUla | ... استك...** · 1/19/20

Experience endless civilizations & majestic creatures all in one place, @ExperienceAIUla - exclusively through our #WinterAtTantora. Don't miss out on your experience and book your tickets now: [bit.ly/2R8dVEY](https://bit.ly/2R8dVEY)  
By: thomascox



5 9

**Experience AIUla | ... استكش...** · 2/5/20

It's the kind of view that you can never tire of. Experience the unbridled beauty of #AIUla county from 19 Dec to 7 Mar, exclusively for #WinterAtTantora Festival. Book your tickets now through [bit.ly/2R8dVEY](https://bit.ly/2R8dVEY)



8 13

**Winter At Tantora ... شتاء طن...** · 2/9/20

Land of Wonders prepares for "Jamil and Bouthayna" week, performed by "Caracalla"! Plus Desert X AIUla and unprecedented events in the middle of #AIUla's desert! Book your ticket for weekend package or one day package [bit.ly/380Wkpg](https://bit.ly/380Wkpg) or call 920000997  
#WinterAtTantora



157K views

16 42



Winter At Tantora ...شتاء · 2/12/20

Drive through the beauty of #AlUla in a classic car and explore its history with "Uber Vintage". Order through Uber app and start the adventure!

#WinterAtTantora  
@Uber\_KSA



124K views

10 13 16



Winter At Tantora ...شتاء · 2/12/20

Notice:

- Service is available on weekends only.
- Limited cars available.
- Vintage Cars are available to any location in AlUla ( hotel, winter park, elephant rock ) except Hega & Ashar area.

3 3



Experience AlUla | استك... · 2/14/20

A 4X4 riding experience will take you to The Arabian Leopard Trail, where you can explore wild flora and geological formation of #AlUla!

#WinterAtTantora  
#ExperiencealUla



1 4 14

Experience AlUla | استكشاف العلا Retweeted



Winter At Tantora ...شتاء · 2/18/20

#العلا تجمع محبي السفر والاستكشاف من روسيا وجورجيا وفرنسا للاستمتاع بالطبيعة الفريدة من لوعها والأجواء الرائعة ضمن موسم #شتاء\_طنطورة!

unites travelers from Russia, #AlUla Georgia and France to explore dazzling nature and enjoy a wonderful vibe during #WinterAtTantora



201K views

28 46



Experience AlUla | استك... · 5/18/20

#AlUla, an open-air living museum, where for over 200,000 years nature and humans carved breathtaking landmarks together, creating incredible heritage to preserve. Immerse yourself in our 360 tours: [bit.ly/3fYxsmP](https://bit.ly/3fYxsmP)

#ExperienceAlUla  
#InternationalMuseumDay 🎨:Mike.Karas



2 12 21



Winter At Tantora ... شتاء ط... 3/6/20

نود تذكيركم أعزاءنا الحضور بمواعيد انطلاق باصات #شتاء\_طنظورة من مسرح مرايا إلى المطار. #العلا

Departure time of the buses from Maraya #WinterAtTantora to Airport at. #AIUla

4 3 11

Winter At Tantora ... شتاء ط... 3/6/20

مواعيد انطلاق باصات #شتاء\_طنظورة من المنتزه الشتوي إلى مسرح مرايا: 7:00م و 7:15م

Departure time of the buses from Winter Park to Maraya at 7:00 pm & 7:15 pm

1 1

Experience AIUla | استكشف... 6/3/20

It's official! We're excited to announce #AIUla will be open to visitors from October 2020 as a year round destination. Start exploring an unforgettable journey through time here: [experiencealula.com](http://experiencealula.com) #ExperienceAIUla #TravelTomorrow #WatchThisSpace IG Credit:theglobewanderer

4 20 42

Experience AIUla | استكشف العلا @ExperienceAIUla

"I was amazed by the great hospitality of Saudi people and the love you feel from each person we passed through our journey in #AIUla, you can feel the positive vibes and their love to their country is transferred to you to have the full experience."

#AIUlaExplorers

12:01 AM - Jul 7, 2020 - Twitter Web App

9 Retweets 12 Likes

Experience AIUla | استكشف العلا @ExperienceAIUla

#AIUla, a dreamlike destination with breathtaking experiences and sensational memories that captures a special place in your heart and memory. #ExperienceAIUla

Memory of #WinterAtTantora

Dotzsoh

10:00 PM - Aug 26, 2020 - SocialSakers

36 Retweets 132 Likes



\*Please check the below sample of tweets and comments by the online travel community about AIUla City on tweets provided by @ExperienceAIUla and @WinterAtTantora



Replying to @RCU\_SA @ExperienceAIUla and @Saudi\_Airlines

جمال #العلا لا يقاوم

Translated from Arabic by Google  
Beauty #العلا does not resist



5:46 PM · 6/24/20 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Like

Replying to @ExperienceAIUla

جمال تضاريس وجو وكرم اهلها

Translated from Arabic by Google

The beauty of the terrain, the atmosphere and the generosity of its people

11:26 PM · 6/12/20 · Twitter for iPhone

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#AIUla has awe inspiring sunsets and a surreal ambiance late in the evening.



1 reply, 10 retweets, 11 likes

Ultimately it is the people, the beautiful people, of #AIUla that continue to make this ancient crossroads of trade & tourism a place where everyone feels 'home'. x @ExperienceAIUla @AmrAlMadani @BadrFAISaud @pololikashvili @UNWTO @UNESCO @ConnectSDGs @RCU\_SA



6 likes

Reach for bright things. The world needs more light ✨ @saudiarabia @ExperienceAIUla @WinterAtTantara



3 replies, 7 retweets, 26 likes

Experience AIUla | استغنى... 4/23/20  
Stunning! 😍 We hope you had a breathtaking experience at the Infinity Room ✨

Replying to @ExperienceAIUla  
It was amazing! Beautiful ✨💕

5:26 PM · 4/24/20 · Twitter for iPhone


  
 Replying to @ExperienceAIUla  
 #AIUla great things built by great nations creating great history



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC  
 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

4:05 PM · 6/15/20 · Twitter for Android

4 Retweets 2 Likes

استكشف العلا | In reply to Experience AIUla  

  
 @ExperienceAIUla January 2020 I've had one of the best experience in my life with my family, I'm coming back in October ! So excited 🙌❤️



1 Comment 1 Retweet 1 Like 1 Share


  
 Replying to @ExperienceAIUla and 
  
 من اجمل المناطق التي زرتها واستمتعت بها محافظة العلا . وسوف تتكرر الزيارات لها بأذن الله .

Translated from Arabic by Google  
 One of the most beautiful areas that I visited and enjoyed Al-Ula governorate. And her visits will be repeated, God willing.

2:06 AM · 7/9/20 · Twitter for iPhone


  
 Replying to @ExperienceAIUla  
 #العلا عروس الجبال

Translated from Arabic by Google  
 #العلا Mountain bride



9:50 PM · 7/12/20 · Twitter for Android


  
 Replying to @ExperienceAIUla  
 Thanks, And AIUla is the most beautiful place in my country KSA that I have ever had ❤️

8:38 AM · 5/21/20 · Twitter for iPhone


  
 احد التجارب المميزة في #العلا  
 One of the coolest things to do in Alula  
 @ExperienceAIUla Experience More  
 #stargazing #Alula  
 #the\_best\_kept\_secret #SaudiArabia



12:01 AM · Aug 24, 2020 from Al Ula, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia · Twitter for iPhone

6 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 19 Likes

**PART I.** Please choose the appropriate response about the demographic questions:

**I.1.** Gender:

- Female
- Male

**I.2.** Marital Status:

- Single
- Married
- Others

**I.3.** Your Age:

- Under 18 year
- 19-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 and older

**I.4.** Your Final Educational Status:

- High school or less
- College student
- College degree
- Master degree
- Doctoral degree

**I.5.** Your occupation:

- Company employee
- Own business
- Civil servant
- Agricultural/fishery
- Professional
- Housewife
- Student
- Sales/service employee
- Education
- Retired
- Others

**I.6.** Which of the following best describes your annual income (before tax):

- Less than US\$20,000
- US\$20,000-39,999
- US\$ 40,000-59,999
- US\$ 60,000-79,999
- US\$ 80,000-99,999
- US\$ 100,000-119,999
- US\$ 120,000 or above.

**Part II.1.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla City, please read the following statements describing the informativeness of information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) on Twitter about AIUla City and **indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement based on the below scale.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

<b>1.</b> Information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is relevant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>2.</b> The information provided on Twitter about the travel-related products (e.g. tourist attractions, anthropogenic features, interesting events, tourist facilities, tourism culture, ...etc) to visit AIUla city is informative.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>3.</b> The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is comprehensive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>4.</b> The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is Sufficient.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Part II.2.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please indicate your perceptions toward the endorsement of the online travel community on the information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) about AIUla city on Twitter **by clicking the appropriate space (1=Very Negative to 7= Very Positive).**

Strongly Negative	Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Positive	Strongly Positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

<b>1.</b> Unattractive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Attractive
<b>2.</b> Not classy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Classy
<b>3.</b> Ugly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Beautiful
<b>4.</b> Plain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Elegant
<b>5.</b> Not sexy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sexy

6. Insincere	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sincere
7. Undependable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dependable
8. Dishonest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Honest
9. Unreliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Reliable
10. Untrustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
11. Not an expert	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Expert
12. Inexperienced	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Experienced
13. Unknowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Knowledgeable
14. Unqualified	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Qualified
15. Unskilled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Skilled

**Part II.3.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla City, please read the following statements describing the credibility of information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) about AIUla City on Twitter, and **indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement based on the below scale.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. The information claims From the official tourism account about AIUla city on Twitter are believable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Over time, my experiences with the information provided by the official tourism account on Twitter about AIUla city led me to expect to keep its promises.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The official tourism account on Twitter is committed to delivering on its claims about AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The official tourism account on Twitter has a name you can trust when promoting AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7



5. The official tourism account on Twitter has the ability to deliver what it promises when promoting AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. The official tourism account on Twitter delivers what it promises when promoting AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Part II.4.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please read the following statements describing the cognitive image of AIUla city through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora), and **indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement based on the below scale.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. AIUla city has friendly and receptive residents.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. AIUla city has an interesting cultural heritage.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. AIUla city has interesting cultural events.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. AIUla city has good restaurants & gastronomy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. AIUla city is a good value for a money travel destination.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. AIUla city has offered many good shopping opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. AIUla city has provided good accommodation facilities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Part II.5.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please use the below items to describe your feeling toward AIUla city as an emerging tourist destination through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora). Please rate your feeling toward AIUla city by **clicking the appropriate space (1=very negative feeling to 7= very positive feeling).**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. Unpleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Pleasant
2. Gloomy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Exciting
3. Sleepy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Arousing
4. Distressing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Relaxing

**Part II.6.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please read the following statements describing the behavioral intention toward visiting AIUla city through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora), and **indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement based on the below scale.**

Strongly Negative	Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Positive	Strongly Positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. I will visit AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I will seek more information about visiting AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I will recommend visiting AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter to a friend.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I will say positive things about visiting AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Part III.** Please choose the appropriate response to the following questions:

III.1. Have you been to Saudi Arabia? If yes, please write the name of the city you have visited, and the year of your visit.

Yes

No

III.2. Do you rely on information provided by the official tourism organizations on social media platforms/websites when you are planning to visit new/emerging destinations?

Yes

No

III.3. Do you use Twitter to find information about new/emerging destinations? If no, please write the name of the social media platform/website that you use when you look for new/emerging destinations.

Yes

No

**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**

### Appendix.3 Main survey questionnaire

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

**I am currently a Ph.D. student studying at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and now conducting a survey about visit intention to emerging destinations through social media marketing promotion: the case of Saudi Arabia. All the information will be kept confidential and be used for RESEARCH PURPOSE ONLY. Please complete the questionnaire if you are familiar with social media platform Twitter or any equivalent platform and understand English Language. The questionnaire will take 15 minutes.**

**Thank you very much!**

**Fahad Mohammed A Alhuqbani (Ph.D. Student)**

**Email: fahad.alhuqbani@**

**Phone: +852-34002322**

**School of Hotel & Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**

-Please answer the following questions by clicking the appropriate answer:

\*Are you familiar with the social media platform Twitter or any equivalent platforms?

- Yes (please continue the survey)
- No (please disregard the survey)

\*How often do you read messages posted on Twitter or any equivalent platforms?

- 1-3 times each week
- 4-6 times each week
- 1-3 times each day
- >3 times each day
- Never (please disregard the survey).

\*Saudi Arabia opened its doors to tourism in 2019. The Tourism Ministry and Destination Management Organizations utilize the social media platforms as one of the marketing tools they use to promote tourist destinations. One of the emerging destinations which they are promoting via Twitter is AIUla city.

Before you start answering the survey questions, please check the samples below and the next pages of information provided by the official tourism account of AIUla city on Twitter (@ExperienceAIUla) and (@WinterAtTantora). Please check the samples of tweets provided by the online travel community on the official tourism account about AIUla city (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) before answering the survey questions.

**Experience AIUla | استكش...** · 12/28/19

2000 years on and we are still fascinated by the red-rocked UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hegra.

Book your packages now: [bit.ly/WinterAtTantora](https://bit.ly/WinterAtTantora)

Taken via Instagram: eye.of.ty

#WinterAtTantora  
#AIUla

1 2 4

**Experience AIUla | استكش...** · 1/19/20

Experience endless civilizations & majestic creatures all in one place, @ExperienceAIUla - exclusively through our #WinterAtTantora. Don't miss out on your experience and book your tickets now: [bit.ly/2R8dVEY](https://bit.ly/2R8dVEY)

By: thomascox



5 9

**Experience AIUla | استكش...** · 2/5/20

It's the kind of view that you can never tire of. Experience the unbridled beauty of #AIUla county from 19 Dec to 7 Mar, exclusively for #WinterAtTantora Festival. Book your tickets now through [bit.ly/2R8dVEY](https://bit.ly/2R8dVEY)



8 13

**Winter At Tantora ... شتاء طن...** · 2/9/20

Land of Wonders prepares for "Jamil and Bouthayna" week, performed by "Caracalla"! Plus Desert X AIUla and unprecedented events in the middle of #AIUla's desert! Book your ticket for weekend package or one day package [bit.ly/380Wkpg](https://bit.ly/380Wkpg) or call 920000997

#WinterAtTantora



157K views

16 42



Winter At Tantora ...شتاء • 2/12/20

Drive through the beauty of #AIUla in a classic car and explore its history with "Uber Vintage". Order through Uber app and start the adventure!  
#WinterAtTantora  
@Uber\_KSA



124K views

10 13 16



Winter At Tantora ...شتاء • 2/12/20

Notice:

- Service is available on weekends only.
- Limited cars available.
- Vintage Cars are available to any location in AIUla ( hotel, winter park, elephant rock ) except Hega & Ashar area.

3 3



Experience AIUla | استك... • 2/14/20

A 4X4 riding experience will take you to The Arabian Leopard Trail, where you can explore wild flora and geological formation of #AIUla!

#WinterAtTantora  
#ExperiencealUla



1 4 14



Experience AIUla | استكشف العلا Retweeted

Winter At Tantora ...شتاء • 2/18/20

#العلا تجمع محبي السفر والاستكشاف من روسيا وجورجيا وفرنسا للاستمتاع بالطبيعة الفريدة من نوعها والأجواء الرائعة ضمن موسم #شتاء طنطورة!

unites travelers from Russia, #AIUla Georgia and France to explore dazzling nature and enjoy a wonderful vibe during #WinterAtTantora



201K views

28 46



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#ExperienceAIUla  
#InternationalMuseumDay 🎨:Mike.Karas



2 12 21

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نود تذكيركم أعزائنا الحضور بمواعيد انطلاق باصات #شتاء\_طنطورة من مسرح مرايا إلى المطار.  
#العلا

Departure time of the buses from Maraya #WinterAtTantora to Airport at.  
#AIUla

4 3 11

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Departure time of the buses from Winter Park to Maraya at 7:00 pm & 7:15 pm

1 1

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IG Credit: [theglobewanderer](https://www.instagram.com/theglobewanderer)

4 20 42

Experience AIUla | استكشف العلا @ExperienceAIUla

"I was amazed by the great hospitality of Saudi people and the love you feel from each person we passed through our journey in #AIUla, you can feel the positive vibes and their love to their country is transferred to you to have the full experience."

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#AIUla, a dreamlike destination with breathtaking experiences and sensational memories that captures a special place in your heart and memory.

#ExperienceAIUla

Memory of #WinterAtTantora

Dotzsoh

10:00 PM - Aug 26, 2020 - Socialtakers

36 Retweets 132 Likes

**Experience AIUla | استك... 4/18/20**

In honour of #WorldHeritageDay we share the legacy of Hegra, founded by the Nabataeans two millennia ago, and listed as Saudi Arabia's first #UNESCO World Heritage site in 2008.

#SharedCultures #SharedHeritage  
#SharedResponsability #ExperienceAIUla



33K views

2 20 43

\*Please check the below sample of tweets and comments by the online travel community about AIUla City on tweets provided by @ExperienceAIUla and @WinterAtTantora

Replying to @WinterAtTantora

من أجمل الأماكن اللي زرتها في السعودية

Translated from Arabic by Google

One of the most beautiful places I visited in Saudi Arabia



6:00 PM - 2/11/20 - Twitter for Android

Replying to @ExperienceAIUla

نجوم فاتنه من جبال #العلا الشاهقة !!  
The charming stars of the high mountains of AI-Ula ..! [justice] #Discover\_Up

#اكتشف\_العلا



الهيئة الملكية لمحافظة العلا and 6 others

9:03 PM - 4/21/20 - Twitter for iPhone

393 Retweets 79 Likes



Replying to @RCU\_SA @ExperienceAIUla and @Saudi\_Airlines

جمال #العلا لا يقاوم

Translated from Arabic by Google  
Beauty #العلا does not resist



5:46 PM · 6/24/20 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Like

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6

Reach for bright things. The world needs more light ✨ @saudiarabia @ExperienceAIUla @WinterAtTantara



3 7 26

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Stunning! 😍 We hope you had a breathtaking experience at the Infinity Room ✨

1 7

Replying to @ExperienceAIUla  
It was amazing! Beautiful ✨💕

5:26 PM · 4/24/20 · Twitter for iPhone


 Replying to @ExperienceAIUla  
 #AIUla great things built by great nations creating great history



4:05 PM · 6/15/20 · Twitter for Android

4 Retweets 2 Likes

استكشف العلا | Experience AIUla  
 In reply to Experience AIUla | استكشف العلا | Experience AIUla  
 @ExperienceAIUla January 2020 I've had one of the best experience in my life with my family, I'm coming back in October ! So excited 🙌❤️



1 1 1 1


 Replying to @ExperienceAIUla and 
 من اجمل المناطق التي زرتها واستمتعت بها محافظة العلا . وسوف تتكرر الزيارات لها بأذن الله .

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 One of the coolest things to do in Alula  
 @ExperienceAIUla Experience More  
 #stargazing #Alula  
 #the\_best\_kept\_secret #SaudiArabia



12:01 AM · Aug 24, 2020 from Al Ula, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia · Twitter for iPhone

6 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 19 Likes

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- Male

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- High school or less
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**I.5. Your occupation:**

- Company employee
- Own business
- Civil servant
- Agricultural/fishery
- Professional
- Housewife
- Student
- Sales/service employee
- Education
- Retired
- Others

**I.6. Which of the following best describes your annual income (before tax):**

- Less than US\$20,000
- US\$20,000-39,999
- US\$ 40,000-59,999
- US\$ 60,000-79,999
- US\$ 80,000-99,999
- US\$ 100,000-119,999
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1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. Information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is relevant.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The information provided on Twitter about the travel-related products (e.g. tourist attractions, anthropogenic features, interesting events, tourist facilities, tourism culture, ...etc) to visit AIUla city is informative.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is comprehensive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The information provided on Twitter about AIUla city is Sufficient.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Part II.2.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please indicate your perceptions toward the endorsement of the online travel community on the information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) about AIUla city on Twitter **by clicking the appropriate space (1=Very Negative to 7= Very Positive).**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. Unattractive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Attractive
2. Not classy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Classy
3. Ugly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Beautiful
4. Plain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Elegant
5. Not sexy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sexy

6. Insincere	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sincere
7. Undependable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dependable
8. Dishonest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Honest
9. Unreliable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Reliable
10. Untrustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Trustworthy
11. Not an expert	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Expert
12. Inexperienced	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Experienced
13. Unknowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Knowledgeable
14. Unqualified	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Qualified
15. Unskilled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Skilled

**Part II.3.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla City, please read the following statements describing the credibility of information provided by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora) about AIUla City on Twitter, and **indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement based on the below scale.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. The information claims From the official tourism account about AIUla city on Twitter are believable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Over time, my experiences with the information provided by the official tourism account on Twitter about AIUla city led me to expect to keep its promises.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The official tourism account on Twitter is committed to delivering on its claims about AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The official tourism account on Twitter has a name you can trust when promoting AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. The official tourism account on Twitter has the ability to deliver what it promises when promoting AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. The official tourism account on Twitter delivers what it promises when promoting AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Part II.4.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please read the following statements describing the cognitive image of AIUla city through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora), and **indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement based on the below scale.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. AIUla city has friendly and receptive residents.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. AIUla city has an interesting cultural heritage.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. AIUla city has interesting cultural events.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. AIUla city has good restaurants & gastronomy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. AIUla city is a good value for a money travel destination.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. AIUla city has offered many good shopping opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. AIUla city has provided good accommodation facilities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Part II.5.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please use the below items to describe your feeling toward AIUla city as an emerging tourist destination through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora). Please rate your feeling toward AIUla city **by clicking the appropriate space (1=very negative feeling to 7= very positive feeling).**

Strongly Negative	Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Positive	Strongly Positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. Unpleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Pleasant
2. Gloomy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Exciting
3. Sleepy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Arousing
4. Distressing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Relaxing

**Part II.6.** After reading the Twitter information about AIUla city, please read the following statements describing the behavioral intention toward visiting AIUla city through information provided on Twitter by (@ExperienceAIUla & @WinterAtTantora), and **indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement based on the below scale.**

Strongly Negative	Negative	Somewhat Negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Positive	Strongly Positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. I will visit AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I will seek more information about visiting AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I will recommend visiting AIUla city after I viewed on Twitter to a friend.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I will say positive things about visiting AIUla city.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7



**Part III.** Please choose the appropriate response to the following questions:

III.1. Have you been to Saudi Arabia? If yes, please write the name of the city you have visited, and the year of your visit.

Yes

No

III.2. Do you rely on information provided by the official tourism organizations on social media platforms/websites when you are planning to visit new/emerging destinations?

Yes

No

III.3. Do you use Twitter to find information about new/emerging destinations? If no, please write the name of the social media platform/website that you use when you look for new/emerging destinations.

Yes

No

**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**