

## Travelling During Travel Bubble: Assessing the Interrelationship between Cognitive, Affective, Unique Image, and Future Revisit Intention

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### Abstract

This research study utilises Mehrabian and Russell's Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model to explore the connections between various components of a destination image (cognitive, affective, and unique) and the intention of travellers to revisit Malaysia. A total of 402 responses were collected using purposive sampling. The Partial-Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method was employed to examine the research model and its proposed hypotheses. The findings reveal that the cognitive and unique aspects of the destination image significantly influence the affective image. This quantitative analysis confirms that the destination image's unique and affective components significantly impact the intention to revisit. Interestingly, the cognitive image does not significantly impact the intention to revisit. The bootstrapping analysis demonstrates that the affective image mediates the relationship between the cognitive image and the intention to revisit. However, the unique image, indirectly through affective image, does not influence the intention to revisit. This study contributes to our understanding of the application of the extended SOR model by Mehrabian and Russell in the context of tourism, particularly regarding destination image dimensions in different settings, such as islands and travel bubble destinations. From a practical standpoint, the travel bubble is seen as an effective crisis management strategy employed by certain countries to stimulate their tourism industry in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders regarding creating a positive experience while maintaining appropriate preventive measures within the travel bubble program.

**Key Words:** Destination image, Stimulus-Organism-Response, travel bubble, revisit intention, S-O-R, cognitive image, affective image, unique image

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### 1. Introduction

Tourism has evolved into one of the world's largest and fastest-growing industries, contributing significantly to global economies (Moreno-Luna et al., 2021; UNWTO, 2020). However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted the tourism industry, causing it to face unprecedented challenges (Lincényi & Bulanda, 2023). Travel restrictions and health concerns led to a severe decline in international tourism (Ugurlu et al., 2022). In response to this crisis, many countries introduced travel bubble programs, also known as "Corona Corridors," as part of their crisis management strategies to revitalise the tourism sector (Luo & Lam, 2020). These travel bubble initiatives were seen as a lifeline

for the tourism industry, and there is a growing belief that the strategies implemented during these programs should continue beyond the pandemic to mitigate health risks (Fuste-Forne & Michael, 2023). However, the success of these programs depends on various factors, including the destination image that travellers associate with these travel bubble destinations.

Destination image is a crucial factor in the tourism industry, as it influences tourists' decisions to visit a particular destination (Kani et al., 2017; Saura et al., 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, countries' responses and coping strategies could shape their destination image, particularly during different pandemic phases (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Countries with high infection rates needed to redefine their destination image to reassure tourists about their safety (Lu & Atadil, 2021; Zenker & Kock, 2020). Understanding destination image is essential for improving a destination's competitive advantage and developing effective tourism policies and marketing strategies, often managed by Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) (Currie, 2020; Pike & Page, 2014). A positive destination image perception can boost tourists' confidence in visiting a destination, especially during crises. However, the existing research on destination image has been criticised for lacking a unified framework and measurement, particularly with regard to the affective component within the destination cognitive image formation dimension (Currie, 2020; Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2020). Furthermore, there has been limited focus on evaluating the unique image of destinations, even though each destination possesses its own unique attributes and selling points (Jeng et al., 2019; Marques et al., 2021). These unique attributes, often referred to as the "DNA" of a destination, are essential for competitiveness (Farhangi & Lalipour, 2021; Lalicic et al., 2021).

Research has also emphasised the importance of assessing the effectiveness of destination image in influencing people's behavioural intentions (Afshardoost & Eshangi, 2020; Tavitiyaman et al., 2021). While previous studies have confirmed the effects of perceived destination image components on behavioural intentions (Kanwel et al., 2019; Papadimitriou et al., 2018), there is a need to investigate these variables from different situational settings (Ragab et al., 2020). Thus, this study aims to fill these gaps by examining destination image dimensions and behavioural intentions in the context of travel bubble destinations. These offer unique attributes that can influence travellers' intentions to revisit. While previous studies have explored destination image in various contexts, there is a need for a more direct empirical approach to understanding destination image formation during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in the context of travel bubble programs. This study examines general and unique attributes of destinations and considers attributes related to the cognitive dimension, which is crucial during the pandemic. Enhancing the theoretical understanding of these concepts can provide valuable insights to assist destinations in their recovery process.

This study proposes an integrated research framework based on Mehrabian and Russel's Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model to achieve these objectives. This framework examines the influence of destination image components (cognitive, unique, and affective) on revisit intentions. It determines whether affective image mediates the relationship between cognitive and unique components and revisits intentions. While the SOR model has received limited attention from tourism researchers in recent years, it is widely used in studies of human actions and behaviour (Kim et al., 2020; Nunthiphatprueksa, 2018), making it a suitable choice for examining how tourists' perceptions affect their emotions and travel intentions. As such, this study makes several significant contributions to the field of tourism and hospitality. It provides insights into how destination image components influence tourists' revisit intentions, and it is among the first to apply the SOR model to investigate destination image in the context of travel bubble destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research is valuable for tourism policymakers and businesses, helping them understand the importance of managing destination image components (cognitive, affective, and unique) during travel bubble programs to attract future tourists when international borders reopen. Sustainability in portraying a positive destination image after the pandemic is essential to instil traveller confidence, ensure the effective implementation of response strategies, and maintain tourism facilities and attractions.

The paper is structured in five sections: Section 2 clarifies the destination image components and several attributes related to the travel bubble program, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. By adopting the SOR theoretical model, the researchers proposed seven hypotheses about destination image formation and their influence on tourists' intention to revisit. Section 3 reports the study methodology, where the data collected was analysed via PLS-SEM to fulfil the study objectives. Section 4 discussed the study results by reporting the measurement and structural model assessment statistics. Section 5 brings insights from the study findings and discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the destination image and travel behaviour perspectives. Lastly, Section 6 concludes the study and elaborates on its limitations and recommendations for future studies.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Travel Bubble

From a psychological perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected individuals from various nationalities, including xenophobic attacks against tourists and migrants (Farbenblum & Berg, 2020). The pandemic has profoundly affected travel mobility, causing economic contractions in many tourist destinations due to the fluctuating COVID-19 restrictions and requirements. This has compelled these destinations to pivot toward catering to the needs of local consumers (Lapointe, 2020). As pandemic-related restrictions gradually eased, numerous countries established temporary travel arrangements (Sharun et al., 2020).

The highly dynamic nature of the pandemic has often forced travellers into strict isolation upon their return home, sometimes burdened with the expense of hotel quarantines (Ritchie, 2021). In response, "travel bubbles," also known as "Corona corridors," emerged as an initiative to stimulate trade and economic recovery during the pandemic crisis. Travel bubbles involve two or more neighbouring or bordering countries that agree to allow their citizens to travel between them without the need for quarantine (Fuste-Forne & Michael, 2023). Many researchers consider travel bubbles to be one of the most resilient strategies to implement in pandemic situations (Toubes et al., 2021).

Ironically, the sustainability of travel bubbles has come under scrutiny. Establishing and effectively maintaining travel bubbles poses challenges for decision-makers (Sharun et al., 2020). Firstly, quarantine-free travel corridors should only be established between countries with similar COVID-19 incidence rates and the capability to implement efficient real-time disease surveillance (Fuste-Forne & Michael, 2023). Furthermore, airline operational costs have increased as travel bubbles necessitate additional expenses, such as individual hotel rooms for crew members during layovers and regular COVID-19 testing. This can influence both people's intention to travel and their actual travel behaviour, even within the context of a "travel bubble" campaign (Kock et al., 2019).

Despite concerns about travelling under the travel bubble program, a study by Yu et al. (2021) found that people are eager to travel during this period to relieve stress, improve their emotional well-being, and boost their enthusiasm. Therefore, Luo and Lam (2020) suggested that governments should focus on reducing travel-related anxiety related to COVID-19 and provide positive attributes to promote travel bubble destinations, restoring travellers' confidence. However, it is worth noting that the promotion of travel bubble tourism may also give rise to xenophobic issues, potentially damaging a destination's image and affecting tourism's socioeconomic benefits for the local economy (Fuste-Forne & Michael, 2023).

Research on travel bubbles during the COVID-19 pandemic has garnered limited attention from tourism researchers, particularly regarding destination image (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021) and behavioural intentions (Girish et al., 2022). These researchers emphasised the need for proper guidelines related to cleanliness and services to ensure that guests feel safe and comfortable during their

visits (Chen, 2022). In this study, the researchers focused on Langkawi Island in Malaysia as a successful travel bubble program destination (Tourism Malaysia, 2022). Langkawi Island served as the inaugural pilot project for travel bubbles in Malaysia, allowing interstate travel. Despite the increase in COVID-19 cases, the Langkawi travel bubble was extended to foreign tourists by carefully implementing crisis management strategies to contain the virus transmission (Tang, 2021).

## 2.2 Destination Image

Over the past five decades, scholars have extensively examined and debated the definition, concept, and formation of tourism destination image, varying across different academic disciplines (Madden et al., 2016; Qu et al., 2011). According to Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), destination image comprises two sequential phases: cognitive and affective. The cognitive aspect involves the assessment of destination attributes through thoughts or knowledge (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Kladou and Mavragani (2015) describe the cognitive image as individuals' awareness and knowledge regarding specific destination attributes. Huete-Alcocer et al. (2019) note that most tourism and hospitality studies have utilised cognitive images to identify dimensions and attributes, with the specific attributes determined based on the study's context and objectives. Madden et al. (2016) emphasise that there are no rigid constraints on defining cognitive attributes, allowing researchers to identify features, functions, and characteristics that align with the chosen destination. On the other hand, affective image pertains to the emotions, mood, and emotional responses associated with a destination (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Lee et al., 2010). Research on the affective image is still in its nascent stage and has primarily focused on evaluating four items: arousing/sleepy, pleasant/unpleasant, exciting/gloomy, and relaxing/distressing (Alcázar et al., 2014; Papadimitriou et al., 2015; Styliadis et al., 2017).

A study conducted in Thailand expanded the evaluation of affective image by incorporating three additional attributes: positive/negative, not enjoyable/enjoyable, and boring/fun (Nunthiphatprueksa, 2018). Their study incorporates several affective attributes proposed by previous research, perceived as offering a more comprehensive evaluation of emotional perspectives. On the other hand, recent studies look at a novel destination image attribute: unique image, which is the third component in the destination image formation model proposed by previous scholars (Marques et al., 2021). The unique image shapes destination identities and enhances marketing differentiation strategies to boost a destination's competitiveness (Lin & Kuo, 2018). Researchers have noted that the unique destination image encompasses both tangible and intangible characteristics, including customs, culture, history, and the atmosphere or mood (Santana & Gosling, 2018; Toral et al., 2018). While Marques et al. (2021) found that the unique elements of a destination are more crucial than the affective component in explaining destination image, the unique component has received limited attention in destination image literature (Widayati et al., 2020). Therefore, destinations with a robust and unique image are more likely to cultivate a favourable overall image and increase the likelihood of being chosen by travellers (Kani et al., 2017; Marques et al., 2021).

## 2.3 Revisit intention

The behavioural intentions concept is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991). Behavioural intentions have been posited as an antecedent of one's readiness to carry out certain behaviour (attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control). As a result, many studies treated behavioural intention as a dependent variable perceived as an important concept for understanding tourist destination choices and their future motives to travel (Afshardoost, & Eshaghi, 2020). Tourism researchers described revisiting intention as an individual's judgement, effort, and willingness to have a repeat visitation at the same country or destination (Stylos et al., 2016). The travel experience is a powerful predictor of traveller's behaviour intention and can

affect their future decision such as revisit intention (Liang & Xue, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Certainly, many tourism destinations rely heavily on repeat visits as it could reduce marketing and promotional costs to retain repeat visitors compared to attracting new ones.

#### 2.4 Underpinning Theory: Stimulus – Organism – Response (SOR)

Consumer psychology and behaviour theory have become increasingly significant in the field of tourism research (Stergiou & Airey, 2018). Initially, consumer behaviour evaluation primarily focused on the Stimulus (S) – Response (R) perspective, commonly referred to as the SR model, which considered only the input and output without delving into individuals' internal assessments (Jacoby, 2002). However, this model evolved to include the Organism (O) component, representing an individual's internal evaluation (Nunthiphatprueksa, 2018). The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework posits that a stimulus (S) can impact an individual's internal organism, comprising emotional and cognitive conditions. The internal evaluation stemming from the organism process (O) can subsequently lead to changes in an individual's behaviour (R) (Sarilgan et al., 2020; Ying et al., 2021).

In recent times, scholars in the fields of tourism and hospitality have employed the SOR model to explore tourist behaviour (Kim et al., 2020; Su & Swanson, 2017; Zhang & Xu, 2019). They have adapted this model to assess various aspects of tourism, including accommodations (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Gupta et al., 2019; Mody et al., 2017), shopping activities (Hew et al., 2018), pilgrimage or religious purposes (Lee et al., 2021), and tourism events (Kim et al., 2020). Notably, these researchers have customised the SOR model to suit their studies and incorporated diverse factors into their research frameworks. For example, previous studies have examined controllable stimulus factors such as information quality (Chakraborty, 2019; Kim et al., 2017; Nunthiphatprueksa, 2018) and uncontrollable dimensions like social factors (Brewer & Sebby, 2021; Zhu et al., 2020). Other studies have investigated the use of current technology devices as stimuli to enhance people's perceptions, such as virtual reality (VR) (Kim et al., 2020) and the quality of restaurant self-service technology (Ahn & Seo, 2018; Brewer & Sebby, 2021). Importantly, they have evaluated multiple online stimulus factors or dimensions as independent variables in their proposed SOR conceptual frameworks.

Regarding the organism factor, Li (2019) used destination image as the organism process in examining the link between the quality of short video applications and the intention to visit China. Similarly, Kim et al. (2020) conducted a study in Korea using destination image (both cognitive and affective) as a substitute for the organism factor. The final component of the SOR model is the response, which represents the outcome of the organism process, including an individual's intention or actual behaviour. Mody et al. (2017) argued that behavioural intention is the most common manifestation of attitudinal loyalty in SOR literature. Likewise, previous studies have employed visit or revisit intention (Gupta et al., 2019; Li, 2019; Nunthiphatprueksa, 2018), word-of-mouth (WOM) or willingness to recommend (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Mody et al., 2017), willingness to book or purchase (Gupta et al., 2019), willingness to use, and willingness to share the experience (Kim et al., 2020) as measures of the response factor. Given recent literature propositions, this study selects revisiting intention as the primary tourist response to be examined.

This study argues that the SOR paradigm provides a relevant theoretical framework for examining the impact of perceived destination image components on behavioural intentions. Moreover, the study adopts the extended SOR model due to its aptness for assessing people's perceptions, emotions, and subsequent responses, such as revisiting intentions. Existing research has also demonstrated the flexibility of the SOR model in accommodating and examining a wide array of variables in tourism research compared to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Asyraf et al., 2023). Therefore, the researchers have chosen the extended Mehrabian and Russel's SOR model as the foundational theory to investigate the causality and effects of the four key variables in the structured research framework.

## 2.5 Hypotheses developments

### 2.5.1 Destination image formation components

Previous researchers have a consensus regarding the formation of destination image, which typically encompasses three distinct constructs: cognitive, affective, and overall image (Wang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, some scholars have advocated for a simplified evaluation of destination image based on just two components: cognitive and affective (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Styliadis et al., 2017). Conversely, certain researchers have highlighted a predominant focus on the cognitive dimension while neglecting the influence of the affective image in the formation model (Artuger & Centinsoz, 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Stylos et al., 2016). In this context, it is argued that assessing cognitive image attributes can have a more pronounced impact on destination image when considering the presence of the affective factor. Past studies have provided compelling evidence that cognitive image can indeed influence affective image (de la Hoz-Correa & Muñoz-Leiva, 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Papadimitriou et al., 2018; Styliadis et al., 2017). Thus, this study posits the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Perceived cognitive destination image significantly influences perceived affective destination image.*

Another aspect explored in this study pertains to establishing the positive influence of the unique image on the affective image. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, research on the relationship between these two variables has received limited attention and has been somewhat overlooked in the literature on tourism destination image (Huete-Alcocer et al., 2021; Marques et al., 2021). In fact, it has been suggested that the unique image exerts a greater influence on the affective image than on the cognitive construct. Researchers have postulated that enhancing and showcasing the destination's local culture, environment, way of life, cuisine, infrastructure, and other unique attributes can captivate travellers' emotions and future intentions (Pereira et al., 2022). Given these considerations, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Perceived unique destination image significantly influences perceived affective destination image*

### 2.5.2 Destination image and Revisit Intention

Past research has highlighted destination image as a key antecedent in explaining behavioural intentions from various perspectives. It can manifest either before a visit (Chaulagain et al., 2019; de la Hoz-Correa & Muñoz-Leiva, 2018; Kim et al., 2020), during the visit itself (Kani et al., 2017), or even after the visit (Artuger & Centinsoz, 2017; Prayag et al., 2017). For instance, Kani et al. (2017) discovered that the perceived destination image significantly influences tourists' intention to revisit. Additionally, Artuger and Centinsoz (2017) contended that the cognitive image is linked to Arab tourists' intention to revisit Istanbul, whereas the affective image indicates the opposite. Interestingly, residents of Hong Kong have perceived the affective image as a crucial intangible quality influencing their intention to visit more than the cognitive image (Xu et al., 2018). Focusing on the unique image, Marques et al. (2021) found that the uniqueness of Sofia, Bulgaria, significantly influences tourists' intentions to recommend and their intentions toward the country's products. However, a study conducted by Ragab et al. (2019) suggested that the uniqueness of culture, climate, and attractive sea attributes failed to entice tourists to revisit Egypt in the future. They added that while tourists are willing to recommend Egypt based on their experiences, they do not intend to revisit it, as making another trip to the same destination is perceived as more challenging. In summary, the uniqueness of one destination is distinct from all others. In the face of increasing competition among tourist destinations, it is essential to identify the attributes that set a cultural destination apart as unique and encourage tourists to perceive it as such. Therefore, this study aims to establish the relationship between perceived destination image components and tourists' intentions to revisit in the future. The proposed hypotheses are as follows:

- H<sub>3</sub>: Perceived cognitive destination image significantly influences tourists' intention to revisit.
- H<sub>4</sub>: Perceived affective destination image significantly influences tourists' intention to revisit.
- H<sub>5</sub>: A perceived unique destination image significantly influences tourists' intention to revisit.

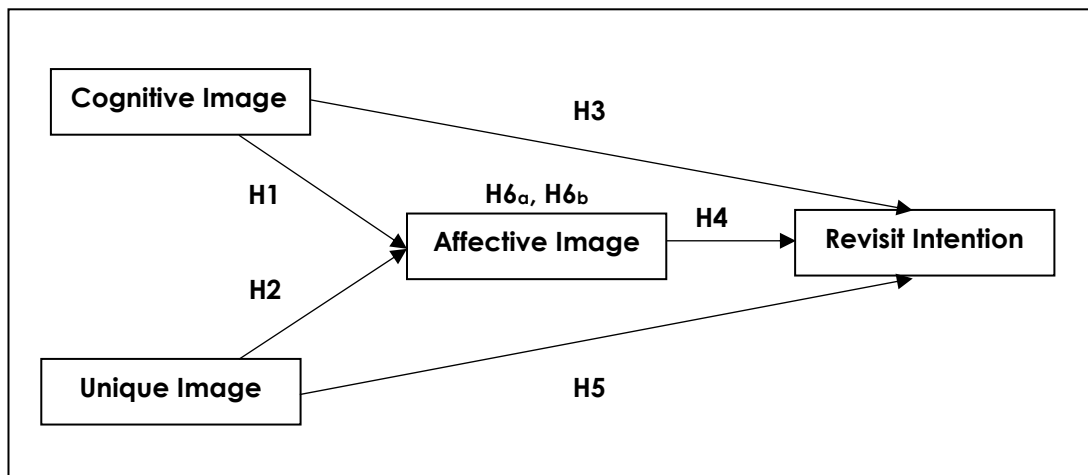
**2.5.3 Mediating role of Affective Image**

While numerous studies on destination image have been conducted over the past five decades, the role of destination image as a mediating variable remains relatively unexplored in tourism literature (Liang & Xue, 2021). Specifically, the mediating role of the organism within the extended Mehrabian and Russel's Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory has begun to capture the attention of researchers in the field of tourism and hospitality. Many studies examining the organism as a mediating variable have focused on emotional components (Lin et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Su & Swanson, 2017; Zhang & Xu, 2019). Conversely, certain studies investigating affective responses have not considered the organism as a mediator within the SOR theory (Ahn & Seo, 2018; Kim et al., 2020; Lockwood & Pyun, 2019; Nunthiphatprueksa, 2018). Therefore, the researcher posits that evaluating the organism as a mediator should depend on its relevance to fulfilling the study's objectives. Oddly, the researcher identified a gap in tourism literature where no study had extended the theoretical focus of the SOR model to explore the mediating effect of affective image between the cognitive and unique image as stimulus factors and revisit intention as the ultimate response. Consequently, the proposed hypotheses to investigate the mediating role of perceived affective image are as follows:

- H<sub>6a</sub>: Perceived affective destination image mediates the relationship between perceived cognitive image and tourists' revisit intention.
- H<sub>6b</sub>: Perceived affective destination image mediates the relationship between perceived unique image and tourists' revisit intention.

The study framework (Figure 1) was developed based on the literature review and hypotheses propositions. There are two independent variables (cognitive and unique image), while affective image as the mediator and revisit intention being the study's predictor.

Figure 1. Study framework



Source: Huete-Alcocer et al. (2021) and Marques et al. (2021)

**3. Methods**

This study aimed to establish a causal relationship between the components of destination image and tourists' intentions to revisit Langkawi Island, one of the destinations included in the travel bubble program. Langkawi Island was chosen as the focal point of the study because the Malaysian government designated it as the inaugural travel bubble pilot project for the country, expecting to host 400,000 visitors by the end of 2021 (Tourism Malaysia, 2021). A quantitative approach was employed in this research, and data were collected through an online survey questionnaire with a cross-sectional time frame. The study's target population comprised domestic and international tourists who had experience travelling to Langkawi, Malaysia, during the travel bubble program period, which spanned from November 15th to December 31st, 2021. Utilising purposive sampling, the minimum required sample size for this study was determined to be 138 through G Power 3.1 analysis.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 27 items, drawing on previous research and adapted to suit the specific context of Langkawi as a tourism destination. The items from these earlier studies were selected based on their relevance to the characteristics of Langkawi as a tourism destination. The survey questionnaire was structured into five sections: (A) Cognitive image, consisting of eight items adapted from Huete-Alcocer et al. (2019) and Lam et al. (2020); (B) Affective image, comprising six items adapted from Styliadis et al. (2017) and Stylos et al. (2016); (C) Unique image component, assessed with nine items derived from Marques et al. (2021), Huete-Alcocer et al. (2019), and Qi et al. (2011); (D) Revisit intention, with four items adapted from Stylos et al. (2016) and; (E) Demographic profile of the respondents, collected at the end of the survey questionnaire.

The research instruments were reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee. The questionnaire items were paraphrased in simple English to ensure clarity and reduce potential ambiguities. Experts in travel behaviour and travel bubbles from Tourism Malaysia reviewed the instruments for face validity. A pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to refine the questionnaires based on feedback and constructive opinions from the assessors. The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach Alpha, and all constructs demonstrated values above 0.70, which is considered acceptable for further analysis. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the items on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Section (F) collected basic information about the respondents' backgrounds. The survey began with a brief introduction explaining the study's purpose, and a screening question regarding the respondents' travel experiences in Langkawi during the travel bubble program was included at the beginning of the questionnaire to confirm their eligibility.

Table 1. Results of Cronbach Alpha's Reliability Test

Variable	Reliability Test Value	No of Item
Cognitive image	0.933	11
Affective image	0.958	6
Unique image	0.929	9
Revisit intention	0.940	4

Source: own elaboration

An online survey was meticulously designed to gather data from January 2022 to March 2022. Multiple channels were utilised for data collection. To ensure comprehensive data acquisition, the researchers conducted a self-administered survey in Langkawi during the travel bubble period, with the assistance of several designated local travel agencies. These travel agencies were appointed by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture to be part of Malaysia's international travel bubble program. Opting for a face-to-face self-administered survey approach offered advantages as it allowed the researchers to explain the study's objectives and each questionnaire item clearly. Recognising the potential challenges of data collection during the pandemic, digital platforms were also leveraged to



disseminate the online survey link. This was accomplished primarily through email, various social media platforms, and messaging applications to ensure a broader reach.

In the initial phase, the researchers utilised mailing lists provided by the designated local travel agencies, which included tourists who had visited Langkawi during the travel bubble program. Additionally, they identified several online travel groups on selected social media platforms. Tourists were identified through posts or tags associated with Tourism Malaysia's official account, primarily using the hashtag #langkawitravelbubble, which had amassed over 1,000 posts during that period.

A total of 402 valid responses were collected and deemed suitable for analysis. Among these, 101 respondents (25.1%) identified as male, while the remaining 301 (74.9%) were female. The majority were 35 to 44 years old ( $n=141$ , 35.1%), and most were employed in the private sector ( $n=127$ , 31.6%). Nearly half of the respondents had stayed in Malaysia for a period ranging from four to seven days ( $n=198$ ; 49.3%), and 57.6 percent had previously visited the country. In terms of nationality, aside from Malaysians ( $n=125$ , 31.1%), tourists from Asian countries constituted the highest number of visitors to Langkawi during the travel bubble period (133, 33.1%). Facebook emerged as the dominant information source for respondents, with the highest cumulative number ( $n = 179$ ; 70.2%) relying on this social platform to obtain information about Malaysia, highlighting the global prominence of Facebook as a social network.

To address any potential common method bias, Harman's single-factor test of Common Method Bias (CMB) analysis was employed, as Podsakoff et al. (2003) suggested. The CMB analysis yielded a value of 35.101, indicating the absence of any significant issues related to common method bias in this dataset, as the total variance extracted by a single factor was below the recommended threshold of 50 percent. Subsequently, the study's model and hypotheses were rigorously tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis. The PLS-SEM approach was conducted in two stages: measurement and structural model assessment (Hair Jr et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2019). This choice was made due to its advantages over the covariance approach. As Ramayah et al. (2018) noted, PLS-SEM is an advanced statistical analysis method that examines intricate predictive relationships between constructs, determining whether there is a connection or influence between the investigated constructs. Furthermore, the PLS-SEM approach was selected because it aligns with the study's prediction-oriented objective, does not require data to follow a normal distribution, and is well-suited for smaller sample sizes.

## 4. Results

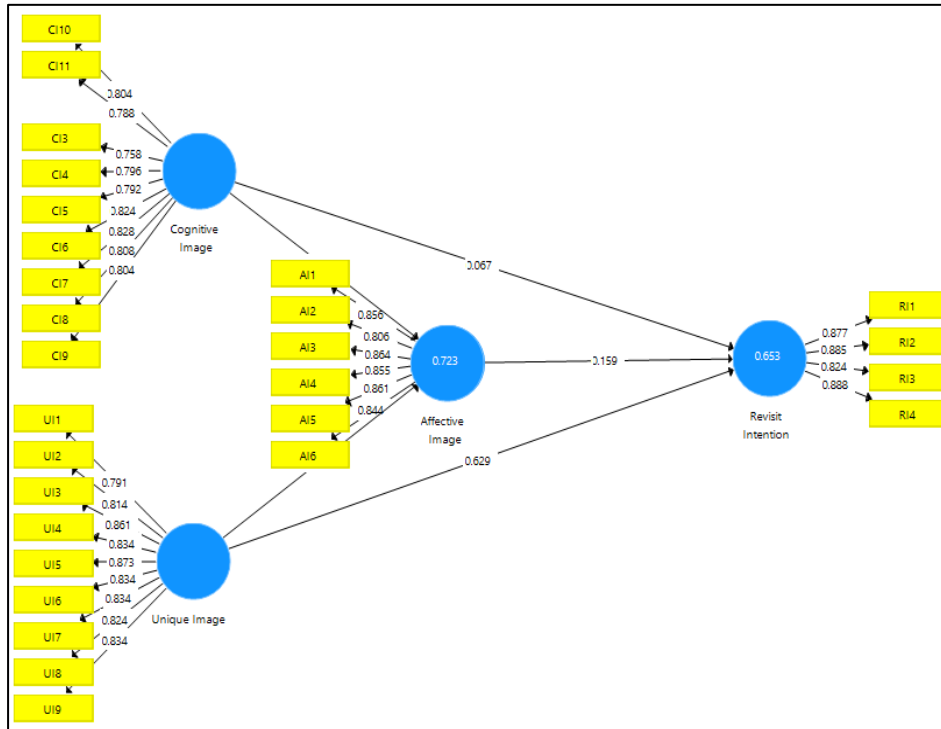
### 4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The first step in assessing the reflective measurement model is examining loads of indicators (Figure 2). Based on the results shown in Table 2, the range of loading indicator scores between 0.758 (CI3) and 0.888 (RI4) exceed the recommended value. Item (CI2) is removed because the loading value is less than 0.70. Consequently, the second step is evaluating the internal consistency using composite reliability. The composite reliability values of the four constructs are between 0.925 and 0.953, exceeding the acceptable value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Next, convergent validity was assessed by examining the average variance extracted (AVE) scores. All constructs of convergent validity were deemed acceptable according to Fornell and Larcker (1981) because the AVE values ranged between 0.650 and 0.869, higher than 0.50. Results of discriminant validity based on Fornell-Larcker's Criterion are illustrated in Table 3.

Besides the Fornell-Larckers criterion, the discriminant validity is established based on the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT). Henseler et al. (2015) claimed that the HTMT values should not be high, and values above 0.90 suggest that discriminant validity is absent. The

HTMT analysis could not identify any collinearity problems among the latent constructs (all items with <.90 value), which indicates that the discriminatory validity of the model is confirmed. Results of the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) are summarised in Table 4.

Figure 2. Reflective Measurement Model



Source: own elaboration

Table 2. Reflective Measurement Model Results

Latent Variable	Code	Items	Outer Loading	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Cognitive Image (Removed CI2)	CI1	Langkawi has a beautiful nature tourism product.	0.804	0.930	0.941	0.641
	CI3	Langkawi has a tidy and clean environment.	0.788			
	CI4	Langkawi has various leisure and recreational activities	0.758			
	CI5	Langkawi has adequate basic infrastructure.	0.796			
	CI6	Langkawi has adequate travel-related facilities during the travel bubble program.	0.792			
	CI7	Langkawi has special travel packages to offer during the travel bubble program.	0.824			

	<b>CI8</b>	Langkawi has a safe and secure environment during the travel bubble program.	0.828			
	<b>CI9</b>	Langkawi has friendly local citizens that reflect the “Malaysian Hospitality”.	0.808			
<b>Affective Image</b>	<b>AI1</b>	Langkawi is a pleasant destination.	0.856	0.922	0.939	0.719
	<b>AI2</b>	Langkawi is a relaxing destination.	0.806			
	<b>AI3</b>	Langkawi is a fun destination.	0.864			
	<b>AI4</b>	Langkawi is a favourable destination.	0.855			
	<b>AI5</b>	Langkawi is an exciting destination.	0.861			
	<b>AI6</b>	Langkawi is an enjoyable destination.	0.844			
<b>Unique Image</b>	<b>UI1</b>	Langkawi is an interesting UNESCO Geopark destination.	0.791	0.945	0.953	0.695
	<b>UI2</b>	Langkawi has unique local handicraft products/souvenirs.	0.814			
	<b>UI3</b>	Langkawi has unique local foods.	0.861			
	<b>UI4</b>	Langkawi has value for money for shopping as a duty-free zone.	0.834			
	<b>UI5</b>	Langkawi has a unique heritage and cultural products.	0.873			
	<b>UI6</b>	Langkawi has colourful nightlife and entertainment.	0.834			
	<b>UI7</b>	Langkawi has suitable water sports activities (kayak, jet skiing, boat tour).	0.834			
	<b>UI8</b>	Langkawi is an excellent scuba diving and snorkelling destination.	0.824			
	<b>UI9</b>	Langkawi is an excellent destination to do adventure activities.	0.834			
<b>Revisit Intention</b>	<b>RI1</b>	I will make an effort to revisit Langkawi in the future.	0.877	0.892	0.925	0.755
	<b>RI2</b>	I intend to visit and experience Langkawi again in the future.	0.885			
	<b>RI3</b>	I will consider Langkawi as my next destination if I visit Asia.	0.824			
	<b>RI4</b>	I think Langkawi is a good	0.888			

		destination that deserves my next visit.				
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Items removed: Indicators items below 0.7 – CI2

Source: own elaboration

Table 3. Results of Discriminant Validity based on Fornel-Larcker’s Criterion

	Affective image	Cognitive image	Revisit intention	Unique image
Affective image	<b>0.848</b>			
Cognitive image	0.820	<b>0.800</b>		
Revisit intention	0.683	0.650	<b>0.869</b>	
Unique Image	0.746	0.720	0.796	<b>0.834</b>

Source: own elaboration

Table 4. Results of Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)

	AI	CI	UI	RI
AI	1			
CI	0.884	1		
UI	0.796	0.765	1	
RI	0.747	0.709	0.866	1

Source: Own elaboration

#### 4.2 Structural Model Assessment

The collinearity test was first conducted to determine the multicollinearity issue among the independent variables. The results indicate the VIF values for the structural model are between 2.118 and 3.730. It shows the absence of a strong indication of multicollinearity among predictors (Hair et al., 2019). The proposed hypotheses of the study are tested by examining the path coefficient ( $\beta$ ) from a bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples. Results of the hypotheses testing, summarised in Table 4, show that only four hypothesised paths in our research model are significant and supported.

Table 4. Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ ), T-Value and Significance Level

Relationship	$\beta$	T Values	P Values	Decision
Cognitive Image -> Affective Image (H <sub>1</sub> )	0.588***	12.709	<b>0.000</b>	<b>Supported</b>
Unique Image -> Affective Image (H <sub>2</sub> )	0.322***	6.159	<b>0.000</b>	<b>Supported</b>
Cognitive Image -> Revisit Intention (H <sub>3</sub> )	0.067	1.208	0.227	Not Supported
Affective Image -> Revisit Intention (H <sub>4</sub> )	0.159**	2.039	<b>0.042</b>	<b>Supported</b>
Unique Image -> Revisit Intention (H <sub>5</sub> )	0.629***	10.919	<b>0.000</b>	<b>Supported</b>

99% confidence interval: p-value<.000\*\*\*

95% confidence interval: p-value<.050\*\*

Source: Own elaboration

Looking at the destination image formation dimension, cognitive image positively influences affective image ( $\beta = 0.588***$ ,  $t = 12.091$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ), H<sub>1</sub> is supported. Similarly, unique image was significantly associated with the affective image ( $\beta = 0.322***$ ,  $t = 5.530$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ),

supporting H<sub>2</sub>. Interestingly, the cognitive image shows insignificant influences toward revisit intention of tourists to Langkawi ( $\beta = 0.067$ ,  $t = 1.238$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.216$ ). Hence, H<sub>3</sub> is not supported. On the other hand, unique and affective images positively related to tourists' revisit intention, strongly supporting H<sub>4</sub> ( $\beta = 0.322^{***}$ ,  $t = 10.532$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ) and H<sub>5</sub> ( $\beta = 0.159^{**}$ ,  $t = 2.124$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.034$ ). Therefore, hypotheses H<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>5</sub> are supported. Results of the path of coefficient ( $\beta$ ), t-value and significance level (p-value) are presented in Table 2.

In the proposed research model, the cognitive and unique image explained 72.1 percent of the variance in the affective image. Meanwhile, the three-destination image dimensions explained 65.0 percent of the variance in the revisit intention. Hair et al. (2019) claimed that R<sup>2</sup> values of more than 50 percent are considered moderate and substantial, indicating a greater explanatory power. In terms of effect size, the changes in cognitive ( $f^2 = 0.601$ ) and unique image ( $f^2 = 0.180$ ) significantly affect affective image, respectively. The cognitive image shows almost no or minimal effect on the revisit intention ( $f^2 = 0.004$ ). In addition, changes in the affective image have a medium effect on the revisit intention ( $f^2 = 0.020$ ). This study also discovers that unique images influence revisit intention in large value ( $f^2 = 0.465$ ).

Hair et al. (2019) stated another analysis that can be utilised to evaluate the predictive accuracy by assessing the Q<sup>2</sup> value of the inner model. Q<sup>2</sup> values should be greater than zero for a particular endogenous construct as it indicates the path model's predictive relevance for the particular construct. This study found the Q<sup>2</sup> value for the affective image is 0.513, and the Q<sup>2</sup> value for revisit intentions is 0.479. The result indicates cognitive and unique images have large prediction power of 51.3% on affective images. Meanwhile, revisit intention as the exogenous variable has a moderate Q<sup>2</sup> value, with 47.9% predictive power or relevance.

### 4.3 Mediating effect of Affective Image

The sampling distribution of the indirect effect via bootstrapping analysis is considered a powerful method to check the mediation effect (Memon et al., 2019). Ringle et al. (2015) suggest researchers should refer to specific indirect effects results rather than total indirect effects. For the interpretation, this study adopts the reporting approach by Ramayah et al. (2018) and Hashim et al. (2017), where they only report whether there is a mediation effect rather than reporting the size of the mediation effect. Similarly, previous researchers suggest that researchers should avoid using complete and partial mediation when interpreting the effects (Rungtusanatham et al., 2014). This study tested two different hypotheses between destination image components and visitors' revisit intention. The researchers discover affective image mediates the relationship between cognitive image and revisit intention ( $\beta = 0.093$ ;  $t = 2.095$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.037^*$ ). Hence, H<sub>6a</sub> is supported.

Table 5. Results of Mediating Effect of the Perceived Affective Image

	Beta ( $\beta$ )	P Values	T - Values	Confidence Interval (Bias Corrected)		Result / Decision
				2.5%	97.5%	
CI -> AI -> RI (H <sub>6a</sub> )	0.093	0.037**	2.095	0.004	0.195	Mediate (Supported)
UI -> AI -> RI (H <sub>6b</sub> )	0.051	0.048**	1.982	0.002	0.110	Mediate (Supported)

99% confidence interval:  $p\text{-value} < .000^{***}$

95% confidence interval:  $p\text{-value} < .050^{**}$

Source: own elaboration

Similarly, affective image also was found to exhibit mediation effect on the relationship between unique image and tourist's revisit intention ( $\beta = 0.051$ ;  $t = 1.982$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.048$ ). Based on the result,

the hypothesis of H6b is supported as the p-value less than 0.05 at a 95% confidence interval. The results of the mediation analysis of perceived affective image on the relationship between cognitive, unique image and revisit intention are exhibited in Table 5.

## 5. Discussion and implications

This study underscores the multidimensional nature of destination image by examining the relationship between cognitive and affective constructs. The findings align with previous research (de la Hoz-Correa & Muñoz-Leiva, 2018; Kim et al., 2017; Papadimitriou et al., 2018; Styliadis et al., 2017), demonstrating that the coexistence of cognitive and affective evaluations provides a more comprehensive understanding of perceived destination image. This suggests that cognitive attributes related to destination features influence visitors' affections. Similarly, the study confirms that the unique image significantly impacts the affective image of the tourism destination, consistent with recent research (Huete-Alcocer et al., 2021; Marques et al., 2021). Langkawi, known for its UNESCO Global Geo Park status, duty-free zone, and diverse offerings, entices travellers with its unique attributes, stirring their emotions and feelings towards the island.

Notably, this research reveals that cognitive image does not significantly affect revisit intention. This challenges prior studies (Artuger & Centinsoz, 2017) that emphasised the role of cognitive image in shaping tourists' future visit intentions. The lack of impact in this context may stem from the similarity of destination attributes, reducing the influence of cognitive image elements. Instead, government promotions and risk management measures influenced visitors' decisions during the travel bubble (Yu et al., 2021). Conversely, the study affirms that affective image is a robust predictor of tourists' revisit intentions compared to cognitive image. This aligns with previous findings (Marques et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2018), emphasising the significant role of positive emotions and experiences during a stay in shaping future intentions. The unique image emerges as the most influential factor for visitor revisit intentions in Langkawi, supporting the concept that unique image is the third dimension of destination image (Qu et al., 2011; Marques et al., 2021). Langkawi's niche tourism offerings and services effectively stimulate visitors' desire to return.

Furthermore, bootstrapping analysis reveals that affective image mediates the relationship between cognitive image and revisit intention. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the mediating role of affective elements between stimulus and response variables, emphasising the importance of positive emotional experiences during travel (Zhang & Xu, 2019; Lin et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). As such, this research significantly contributes to the field by confirming the extended applicability of Mehrabian and Russell's Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model in the tourism context. It validates the model's ability to elucidate the influence of perceived cognitive and unique destination image, stimulating perceived affective image as an internal organism and predictor of the final response, revisit intention. Additionally, it underscores the importance of considering the affective image as a mediating variable, enhancing the model's explanatory power.

Langkawi offers captivating tourism features that international tourists positively perceive. Tourism authorities and industry players should leverage social media and online platforms to promote Langkawi's ecotourism products, capitalise on its natural beauty, and align with Malaysia's National Ecotourism Plan 2016–2025. Furthermore, focusing on the strict implementation of COVID-19 standard operating procedures can reduce perceived travel risks and instill confidence in future travellers. Lastly, emphasising Langkawi's unique attributes, such as its UNESCO Geopark status, duty-free zone, scuba diving sites, and heritage, can attract repeat visitors. These findings emphasise the importance of maintaining a positive destination image, especially in post-pandemic times, to inspire tourists to return.

## 6. Conclusion

Destination image is a potent tool in the arsenal of modern marketers, wielding the ability to sway people's behavioural intentions. This study focused on unravelling the intricate image formation process of Langkawi, a Malaysian island and COVID-19 travel bubble destination. As widely accepted empirically, destination image is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective, and unique dimensions. This research delves deep into the complex web of relationships between these perceived destination image components and the revisit intentions of visitors. The findings shed light on how these components contribute to image development and influence visitor intentions.

One key insight emerging from this study is the interplay between cognitive and unique image components, which influence the affective image. Furthermore, it becomes evident that the unique and affective image components directly impact visitors' intentions to revisit. The cognitive image, which encompasses attributes and knowledge about the destination, must be accentuated in tandem with affective elements such as excitement, enjoyment, and relaxation to persuade visitors to intend to return effectively. On the other hand, the unique image emerges as a powerful tool for enticing travellers to revisit, with this dimension gradually cultivated in the minds of visitors. Ultimately, travellers construct their perceptions of Langkawi as a travel bubble destination and an island tourism spot, not solely based on their factual understanding of the site's characteristics but also on their emotional response to the unique experiences it offers.

However, it's crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The research provides a promising foundation for further exploration in the future. Expanding the scope to encompass a more extensive and more diverse population could provide broader insights. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 travel bubble program in Malaysia, necessitating the use of online survey platforms due to safety concerns. While 402 responses were collected, a larger sample size would enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings, particularly when targeting specific population segments. Future research could extend the investigation by considering additional destination image components like overall and conative images, providing a more comprehensive view of travellers' perceptions, especially in the Malaysian context. Besides, the cross-sectional nature of this study offers a valuable snapshot of the population under examination. However, it's important to acknowledge the inherent limitation of capturing a single moment in time. A longitudinal approach, tracking individuals or groups over an extended period, could provide deeper insights into temporal trends, causal relationships, and changes in variables of interest. This would lead to a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

The study's bootstrapping analysis has highlighted the existence of mediating factors that determine the influence of affective image. However, this research did not delve into the moderating roles of variables. Future studies might explore the moderating effect of perceived destination images and revisit intentions by employing Multi-Group Analysis (MGA). When applied in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), MGA can uncover significant differences between various groups within the structural equation model. A promising avenue for future research could involve examining demographic profile differences, such as potential visitors versus first-timers versus repeat visitors. Such an analysis could yield fascinating insights, as repeat visitors are likely to exhibit more positive perceptions and behavioural intentions than the other market segments. Furthermore, the study's application of the extended Mehrabian and Russel's Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model has garnered attention from scholars in tourism and hospitality. This research serves as a stepping stone for future investigations, encouraging the adoption of the proposed framework in diverse study settings. Researchers can apply this model to test its validity in different tourism and travel bubble destinations, comparing the results with those obtained in this study.

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