

STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMUNICATION AND TOURISTS' BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS: A MEDIATION MODEL OF DESTINATION IMAGE IN A TOURISM CONTEXT

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of strategic public relations communication in shaping tourists' behavioral intentions by examining the mediating role of destination image in a tourism context. The study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among strategic public relations communication, destination image, and tourists' behavioral intentions. Data were collected from 526 respondents who had either previously visited Jordan or were actively considering visiting the destination and had experience with official or institutional communication related to Jordan. The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that strategic public relations communication positively influences destination image, while destination image positively influences tourists' behavioral intentions. However, strategic public relations communication does not have a statistically significant direct effect on tourists' behavioral intentions. The analysis further demonstrates a significant indirect relationship between strategic public relations communication and tourists' behavioral intentions through destination image, supporting its mediating role. These findings suggest that strategic public relations communication contributes to tourists' behavioral intentions primarily by shaping their perceptions of the destination rather than by directly influencing behavioral intentions. The study highlights destination image as an important explanatory mechanism linking institutional communication with tourists' behavioral responses and provides empirical evidence from the tourism context of Jordan.

Keywords: strategic public relations, destination image, tourists' behavioral intentions, tourism decision-making processes, Jordan

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INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning of tourism has progressively moved from direct acquaintance to destination characteristics toward mediated communication practices that frame tourists' assessments prior to travelling. Tourists, in existing tourism markets, trust largely on digital and institutional communication so that they may evaluate destination credibility, understand representative meanings, and minimize apparent ambiguity before making minds to travel. This conversion has been made quicker due to effective advertisement of information abundance, digitalized platforms and intensified risk-related sensitivity, especially in the destinations where institutional trust and reputational narratives robustly effect tourist awareness (Ahmad et al., 2025; Gretzel et al., 2020; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2020). In recent times, the evidence-based research endorse that institutionally and officially created communication plays a pivotal role in making tourists' observations and behavioral intents under information overload and uncertainty conditions (Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020).

In tourism research work, tourists' behavioral intents, generally measured as purposes to visit, revisit and suggest destinations, are broadly documented as critical predictors of destination competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

Afshardoost & Eshaghi (2020); Sabiote-Ortiz et al. (2024) argue that a quantitative evidence's substantial body establishes that these intentions are determined mainly by tourists' reasoning and perceptual assessments instead of objective features of destination. Destination image, among these perceptual determining factors, has reliably appeared as a significant descriptive concept. According to Styliadis et al. (2020); Marine-Roig & Huertas (2020), destination image is usually considered as a cognitive–touching demonstration that depicts tourists' emotions, beliefs and inclusive destination impressions: additionally, observation-based research frequently endorses its powerful impact on behavioral intentions of tourists across different tourism backgrounds.

Although there exists the significance of destination image in research related to tourism behavior, current critical reviews highlight that the literature remains inordinately result-focused. Whereas many studies articulate the destination image effects

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on behavioral intentions, relatively inadequate consideration has been given to conceptualizing the way destination images are tactically created through the processes of institutional communication (Alrahman, 2025; Alsharairi et al., 2026; Tasci et al., 2022). In this sense, communication is often observed as a functional effort, such as message frequency, information provision or promotional manifestation. It is not treated as a relational and strategic process entrenched within institution-based practices. Such theoretical decline constrains the descriptive tourism behavior models' depth by complicating the mechanisms with which communication frames interpretive frameworks of tourism before the formation of intention.

Within tourism studies, this mentioned restraint is specifically obviously observable in the strategic communication treatment. Huerta-Álvarez et al. (2020); Gorji et al. (2023); Alsharairi & Jamal (2021) argued, though the current research progressively recognizes the significance of engagement, credibility and transparency in communication of destination, these components are frequently investigated in isolated ways or included under wider branding and marketing frameworks. Subsequently, communication is mostly abridged to content quality or message efficacy, restraining tourism models the ability to constitute relational constructs such as institutional credibility, trust and perceived validity or legitimacy. Such exclusions are theoretically substantial, specifically in the destinations categorized by high-alleged menaces. In this risk, institutional signs instead of promotional claims powerfully form decisions made by tourists. Contrastingly, in view of Valentini (2021); Ki et al. (2021), scholarship of public relations theorizes strategy-based communication as an institutional procedure aiming to build long-standing relationships, trust and credibility through dialogic, planned and clear interaction held between organizations and their people. Fundamentally, strategic public relations communication is different from marketing-centered communication by giving priority to legitimacy, relationship management, and reputational solidity over persuasion of short-time nature. Strategic public relations communication, especially when applied to tourism contexts, can thus be theorized as the synchronized institutional usage of communication to frame how destinations are brought into interpretation, trust, and legalized by forthcoming tourists, specifically under uncertainty conditions.

While discussing from a theoretical point of view, the exclusion of strategic public relations communication from prevailing tourism behavior models becomes challenging (Alyaqoub & Alsharairi, 2020). Modern-day environments of tourism are categorized by information asymmetry, digital mediation, and elevated observations of risk; these are the situations in which tourists are improbable to interpret institution-based communications directly into behavioral dispositions. Actually, there should be affectively and communication processing, building image of destination as an explanatory mechanism where in tourists may assess destinations and then prepare their intentions (Alsharairi et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025; Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2024). While handling communication as a direct forbearer of intention, takes tourist decision-making to oversimplification and confines the existing models' theoretical accuracy. However, the current study aims to address the theoretical limitation mentioned above by creating a theoretically based mediation model through which is conceptualized as an institution-based antecedent building destination image formation prior to the development of behavioral intention. Along with it, strategic public relations communication works in such a way that its effect functions fundamentally with the help of destination image as a cognitive and influential mechanism interpreting institutional communication into behavioral results. While acting so, this study moves off from prevailing marketing-centered enlightenments repositioning communication as a strategy-focused institutional forebear within theory of tourism behavior. It is an important point that the current study, instead of expanding the Planned Behavior Theory, functions outside its attitudinal structure by conceptualizing strategic public relations communication as a pre-attitudinal, exogenous construct shaping image formation prior to intention development (Laskin & Freberg, 2024).

The utilized theoretical gap is specifically prominent in destinations where credibility of institutions, arbitrated reputation and safety discernments play a pivotal role in evaluations of tourism. According to the observation of Hassan & Soliman (2021), research related to tourism continues to be controlled by East Asian and Western backgrounds, highlighting apprehensions about the context-specific generalizability and robustness of dominating communication-focused models. Existing destinations in the Middle East, like Jordan, exemplify systematically expressive backgrounds in which institution-centered communication and external risk descriptions strongly form the destination images of tourists. Strategic public relations communication in such kind of settings ranges beyond the promotion, working as a critical mechanism to legitimize destinations and handle reputational improbability.

In order to ground the suggested relationships theoretically, the current study derives understandings from destination image research and public relations scholarship. This study theoretically has been grounded in the relational angle of public relations. These relations theorize strategic communication as an institutional process aiming at constructing trust, credibility and long-standing associations between the organizations and their masses instead of attaining short-duration persuasive results (Laskin & Freberg, 2024). Valentini (2021); Ki et al. (2021) are of the view that communication, especially from this point of view, does not prompt behavioral responses directly; rather, it directs the way stakeholders affectively and cognitively interpret organizational legitimacy and institutional messages. When it is applied to the backgrounds of tourism, the relational approach comes ahead proposing that official destination communication shows influence on tourists' assessments by constituting understandings of safety, credibility and institutional reliability instead of directly persuading travel plans. In order to elaborate how these communication-centered evaluations are interpreted into behavioral results, the destination image theory further assists the present study, and is theorized as a cognitive-affect based explanatory mechanism; through this mechanism, tourists incorporate institutional communication clues into general destination assessments that direct formation of intention (Alsharairi et al., 2025; Styliadis et al., 2020; Tasci et al., 2022). The current study, by incorporating the relational aspect of public relations with the destination image theory, adopts a process-based theoretical framework that elaborates behavioral intentions of the tourists as the result of arbitrated insight formation instead of direct communication impacts.

In this regard, the present study provides three theoretically based contributions to tourism related communication, and destination-based image research work. The current study, against this contextual background, makes tourism communication research advanced by clearly incorporating strategic public relations communication as an outsider descriptive variable within a destination image analytical framework. The study produces three theoretical contributions by establishing and experimentally verifiable testing a mediation-centered organizational model while utilizing quantitative data taken from the tourism context of Jordan. Firstly, in tourism research, conceptually it differentiates public relations communication from marketing-centered communication. Secondly, it strengthens destination image theory by placing image as a dominant explanatory mechanism instead of a simple behavior antecedent. Third, it makes the context-based reliability of tourism communication models strengthen by investigating a reputationally and geographically sensitive-centered destination background. The subsequent section advances the theoretical framework and hypotheses supporting the given model.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study theoretically grounds in the relational perception of public relations conceptualizing strategy-focused communication as a long-standing institutional process having an aim to build credibility, trust and shared discernment between the organizations and their masses (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). This aspect, especially within tourism background, indicates that institutional communication does not predominantly functions as a direct convincing mechanism; rather it develops stakeholders' affective and cognitive evaluations, which facilitate behavioral results.

The placement of this theoretical perspective is incorporated with the destination image theory, which theorizes destination image as a cognitive-influencing explanatory structure with which the tourists develop mediated information and institutional indicators while framing behavioral intents and evaluative results (Stylidis et al., 2020). With the incorporation of these two perceptions, the current study assumes a process-centered framework, which elaborates behavioral intentions of the tourists as the result of interceded viewpoint development instead of direct communication impacts.

Strategic Public Relations Communication in Tourism

In recent times, the tourism scholarship progressively recognizes the dominant role of communication in building tourists' perceptions and judgement processes, specifically in digital-oriented mediated situations. According to Huerta-Álvarez et al., (2020), much of this literature, however, goes on approaching communication with the help of a mainly marketing-centric lens, showing emphasis on content quality, message exposure, or promotional usefulness. Although, such perspectives have provided contribution in perceiving outcomes of destination promotion, they provide inadequate theoretical understanding into how institutional or organizational communication develops relational sense, trust, and legitimacy known as dimensions, which are critical in circumstances featured by perceived risk and improbability. Additionally, strategic public relations communication offers a distinctive theoretical perception which ranges beyond persuasive and marketing objectives. Strategic communication, when discussed in perspective of contemporary public relations theory, is brought to conceptualization as an institutional and relationship-intended process aiming at developing trust, credibility and long-standing legitimacy with the help of strategic, transparent and dialogic communication with shareholders (Alsharairi et al., 2026; Valentini, 2021). Contrary to the marketing communication that mainly pursues short-lived attitudinal responses, public relations communication stresses over management of relationship as well as reputational durability as strategic results. These distinctions, when discussed in tourism contexts, are especially prominent since tourists mostly assess destinations not merely grounded on attractiveness but on institutional trustworthiness and considered safety as well. Ki et al. (2021) argued that though studies on tourism progressively recognize concepts related to public relations like credibility, transparency and institutional reputation, such constructs are often investigated in segmented ways or included under wider marketing and branding frameworks. Consequently, communication grounded on strategic public relations is hardly put forward or tried as a distinctive illustrative construct in quantitative-based models of tourism. Such kind of conceptual uncertainty compels the tourism research ability to capture the institutional communication's unique role in building tourists' insights prior to intent development.

Destination Image as a Cognitive-Affective Interpretive Framework

In tourism research, destination image vestiges one of the most comprehensively investigated constructs; it is also broadly acknowledged as one of the main factors of behavioral or attitudinal intentions of tourists. Its definitions in recent times, as argued by Valentini et al. (2020), theorize destination image as a multifaceted construct incorporating both affective responses that consist of feelings and emotional touches toward the destination, and cognitive evaluations including knowledge and beliefs regarding characteristics of destination. A wide-ranging frame of experiential proof endorses that destination image expressively effects tourists' intentions of visiting, revisiting, and suggest destinations all over different tourism backgrounds (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Although it has empirical strength, critical reviews in recent times indicate continuous theoretical restrictions in the destination image research. Moreover, lot of the literature exists as outcome-centric concentrating initially on the behavioral destination image outcomes, however giving relatively inadequate focus to its formation processes and antecedents (Tasci et al., 2022). As the antecedents become under examination, they are mostly applied as experiential factors or fragmented information sources instead of as incorporated institution-based processes of communication. This isolated conduct restricts theoretical perception of the way destination images are built strategically prior to travelling. Similarly, studies conducted in recent times recommend that destination image should be considered not as a fixed insight; it should be understood as an energetic cognitive-affective explanatory structure in which tourists proceed interceded information and institutional indicators (Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020).

Destination image, from this viewpoint, works as an underlying process that interprets communication inputs into evaluative decisions, framing how destinations are evaluated and understood before the formation of behavioral intentions.

This kind of reconceptualization highlights the significance of investigating communication-guided image building process instead of concentrating completely on post-image behavioral or attitudinal results.

Tourists' Behavioral Intentions in Mediated Decision-Making Contexts

In tourism research, behavioral intentions of tourists are fundamental outcome variables, as they possess robust projecting validity for destination performance and real travel behavior. According to the findings of Sabiote-Ortiz et al., (2024), behavioral intentions are generally brought under operation as visit or revisit intentions, and suggest destinations; hence they are extensively utilized as signs of destination durability and competitiveness. In this regard, empirical research persistently reveals that objective destination characteristics do not influence but the perceptual and affective evaluations vigorously effect these intentions (Alsharairi et al., 2023; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020).

Whereas dominant behavioral models, like the Planned Behavioral Theory, accentuate on subjective norms, attitudes and interpreted behavioral control as direct intention determinants, the contemporary tourism-based research raises questions on the adequacy of these frameworks in high-uncertainty and digitally mediated circumstances. Tourists, in such environments, mostly develop intentions before having direct experiences, trusting deeply on organizational communication as well as mediated prompts. Subsequently, attitude-forming constructs like destination image has to play an important role in building formation of intention by constructing how one interprets information affectively and cognitively.

However, the current empirical research progressively back mediation-grounded elucidations of a tourist's behavior. Gorji et al. (2023); Li et al. (2025) claimed that these studies also represent the destination image that show impacts of constructs namely trust, reputation and observed menace on behavioral intentions. The findings recommend claiming that models having direct-effect tend to fabricate decision-making processes of the tourists by ignoring the explanatory systems in which communication effects behavior. Nonetheless, mounting empirical assistance for mediation-grounded methods, the research with limitations has investigated destination image considering it as a mediator involving strategic public relations-based communication behavioral tendencies of tourists.

Integrating Strategic Public Relations Communication and Destination Image

Public relations communication has its importance especially when it is linked with the institutions. In this regard, incorporation of strategic public relations-based communication with destination image research comes ahead to address a vital theoretical breach in the studies of tourism. In a unique way, position is given to public relations communication as it involves relationship management, credibility and transparency (Alyaqoub et al., 2023; Valentini, 2021).

Contrary to promotion-linked messaging, which may mainly influence impressive responses or awareness, strategic public relations communication frames how prospective tourists interpret, legitimize and trust the destinations. Destination image is considered a key element in tourism industry. Research on tourism conducted in recent times indicates the significance of institutional repute and reliability in determining destination image, especially in the circumstances categorized by intensified observed risk or negative storylines of the media (Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Tahat, 2025).

The derived outcomes correspond with public relations theory, which suggests that legitimacy and trust building are key processes; through these mechanisms, institutional communication affects the perceptions of the stakeholders. Nonetheless, the research on tourism has still to systematically incorporate these kinds of mechanisms into models quantitative in nature that explicate behavioral intentions of tourists. The current study, while theorizing strategy-based public relations communication as an external institutional forbearer/antecedent and destination image as a mediating cognitive-emotional explanatory mechanism, reacts to calls for more interpretative and theory-guided tourist decision-making models. The current study, grounded on this incorporation, advances a mediation-rooted model connecting strategic public relations communication, behavioral intents of tourists and destination image. In view of that, the hypotheses given below are suggested.

Hypotheses Development

Development of hypothesis may lead to a direction connected to expected outcomes. Whereas strategic public relations communication concerns are well defined as the strategic institutional usage of communication performs aiming at constructing transparency, credibility, and long-standing relational trust with the shareholders (Valentini, 2021). Similarly, destination image is considered as a multi-faceted cognitive-touching demonstration depicting tourists' emotions, beliefs, and general views regarding a destination (Stylydis et al., 2020). Behavioral intentions of tourists speak of individuals' detailed possibility of captivating in upcoming travel-linked behaviors, together with visiting and suggesting destinations for tourism (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020).

Strategic Public Relations Communication and Destination Image

Strategic public relations communication in the present study leads to practices of institutional communication featured by transparency, integrity along with relationship-centered involvement aiming to frame destinations interpretations of the tourists. However, within present-day tourism contexts, tourists more and more depend on this institutional communication in order to assess destinations before going to travel, specifically under information asymmetry conditions as well as repute-based perception. In view of this aspect, public relations scholarship put emphasis that communication, having base on institutional legitimacy and trust developing, plays an influential role in building understandings of the stakeholders (Valentini, 2021). Such kind of communication practices, especially in tourism situations, are as a result estimated to leave an impact on destination image by constituting how tourists affectively and cognitively perceive destination-specific information (Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020). Additionally, destination image works as a cognitive emotion-based depiction illustrating tourists' destination-directed beliefs and emotions. In perspective of the interpretive role by destination image in

interceded decision-taking, planned public relations communication is anticipated to exercise a determinative impact on how tourists consider destinations before formation of their intention to travel. Therefore, the subsequent hypothesis is suggested:

H1: Strategic public relations communication has a prominent and positive influence on the destination image.

Destination Image and Tourists' Behavioral Intentions

Regarding different tourism situations, destination image has been regularly recognized as a key determining factor of behavioral intentions of tourists. Any supporting destination image enriches evaluation-based decision-making sense, decreases perceived vagueness, and boosts tourists' readiness of visiting, revisiting, and suggesting destinations. Empirical studies and meta-analytic facilitate strong proof that destination image leaves a prominent impact on behavioral intents by interpreting conceptual assessments into behavioral promptness (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Styliadis et al., 2020). The current proof also exhibits that a supportable destination image prominently encourages tourists' behavioral intentions, comprises visit, revisit, as well as suggestions referring intentions, especially in experientially and culturally enriched tourism backgrounds (Chuamuangphan et al., 2025). Destination image as a cognitive-affective concept plays a significant role in connecting pre-travel assessments to intention development. Within digital-mediated contexts, where the tourists depend greatly on non-direct information means, destination image functions as a main underlying process through which insights are transformed into behavioral results. For that reason, the succeeding hypothesis is suggested

H2: In this hypothesis it is claimed that destination image reflects a prominent positive impact on behavioral intentions of tourists.

Strategic Public Relations Communication and Tourists' Behavioral Intentions

Strategic public relations communication, however, is conceptualized to initially leave an impact on tourist's behavior with the help of perception-based mechanisms, before the tourism research recommends that institutional communication may also put a direct impact on behavioral intentions of the tourists. While official communication addresses destination credibility, institutional reliability and safety, it may build tourists' preparedness to think of or be engaged with a destination even before full consolidation of destination image (Gorji et al., 2023; Hassan & Soliman, 2021).

When this direct relationship is investigated, it permits for a more accurate evaluation to know whether strategic public relations communication reflects influence on intention framing beyond its non-direct effect with the help of destination image. Within the recommended theoretical placement, the direct impact of strategic public relations communication on the behavioral intentions of tourists is dealt as investigative instead of supposed to be in dominating position.

Resultantly, the hypothesis given below is suggested:

H3: The hypothesis reflects that strategic public relations communication depict a direct impact on tourists' behavioral intentions.

The Mediating Role of Destination Image

The current advancements in tourism research progressively assist mediated descriptions of tourist judgement finalizing, stressing that perception-centered concepts perform as explanatory mechanisms connecting communication contributions to behavioral results. To intercede the institutional reputation impacts such as trust, and perceived risk on behavioral intentions of tourists, destination image has been presented making its central role prominent in interpreting communication-centered assessments into behavioral reactions (Gorji et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025). Strategic public relations communication, from this point of view, is improbably to effect tourists' behavioral intentions not with first framing their affective and cognitive destination evaluations. According to the findings of Purwanto & Suryanto (2022), the studies conducted in the past progressively favor mediation-oriented interpretations of tourist's decision-making, manifesting that destination image works as an explanatory process with which underlying (antecedent) aspects leave impacts on visit-linked intentions.

The present study, by placing destination image as a mediating process, goes beyond direct-impact elucidations, and provides a more theoretically accurate explanation of the way institutional communication shows impact on the tourist's behavior. In view of that, the current study examines whether destination image completely or to some extent mediates the association existing between strategic public relations communication and behavioral intentions of the tourists. In this sense, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H4: Destination image mediates the relationship between strategic public relations communication and tourists' behavioral intentions.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The present study, while focusing on public relations theory and destination image research, recommends a mediation-centered conceptual framework clarifying how strategic public relations communication leaves impact on the behavioral intention of tourists. The framework places strategic public relations communication as an institution-based antecedent that builds tourists' insights through transparent, credibility-oriented and practices of relationship-related communication. Instead of presuming a genuinely persuasive task, communication is developed as a strategy-grounded mechanism; this process constitutes how affectively and cognitively destinations are understood before moving to travel. Similarly, destination image, within this theoretical framework, is dealt as a fundamental cognitive-moving structure interpreting institutional communication into evaluation-based findings regarding destination. Moreover, destination image, going on consistently with prior tourism-grounded research, depicts tourists' emotions, beliefs and general impressions, and performs as a main factor of behavioral intents. Therefore, this model supposes that strategic public relations communication has impacts on tourists' behavioral intents chiefly through its influence on destination image, instead of through direct persuasive aspect only.

Simultaneously, the framework permits for the investigation of a prospective direct relationship existing between behavioral intentions of tourists and strategy-centric public relations communication. This way is involved to judge whether institutional communication that addresses safety, credibility and legitimacy may independently affect intention development of destination image or not. When both direct and indirect processes are integrated, the suggested framework makes the empirical assessment able to judge the aspect whether destination image entirely or to some extent mediates the relationship that appears between strategic public relations communication and behavioral intentions of the tourists.

In general, the suggested conceptual framework provides a theoretically based and empirically verifiable description of tourist judgement making in digital-based mediated as well as reputational concerning sensitive tourism environments. Similarly, with the integration of strategic public relations communication into a destination image-grounded model, the framework empowers tourism communication research moving beyond marketing-centered descriptions and offers a clearer elucidation of the way institutional communication builds tourist behavior. Underlying the suggested framework, these conceptual relationships have been demonstrated in Figure 1.

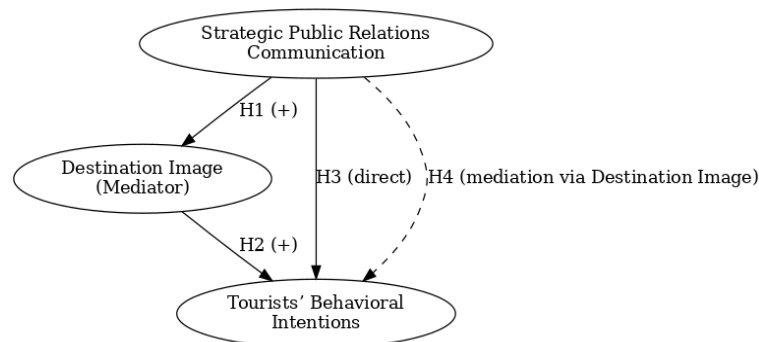


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The present study employs an explanatory, quantitative, cross-sectional research pattern/design to evaluate empirically the suggested conceptual framework and set hypotheses. A design explanatory in nature is considered suitable when the main objective is to investigate theoretical-based derived fundamental relationships among the underlying concepts (Hair et al., 2022). Considering that the aim of this study is to elaborate how strategic public relations communication shows influence on tourists' behavioral intentions by means of a mediating perceptual process, a quantitative approach makes systematic hypothesis able in assessing and theory authentication. The study employed cross-sectional design because the study concentrates on tourists' pre-travelling or contemporaneous assessments, instead of changes with the passage of time.

It reasons that in tourism research, cross-sectional designs are extensively utilized to investigate destination images and behavioral intents, specifically when constructs are made before being prepared to real visitation (Stylidis et al., 2020).

To collect data efficiently, this design facilitates and is considered methodologically appropriate to estimate direct and indirect associations within mediation-centered models. In this perspective, the present study bases on a positivist research pattern, which supposes that the links existing among constructs can be measured with objectively and tested statistically. Similarly, according to Kline (2023), positivist approaches govern tourism research implementing mechanized equation processing to elucidate tourist behavioral action and judging practices.

Study Context and Population

The tourism destination in Jordan is the empirical background of the present study. Jordan embodies a theoretically relevant environment because of its dependence on institutional communication regarding the management of destination image, alleged risk, as well as worldwide tourism reputational. The tourism research conducted in the past establishes that destinations positioned in regionally or politically sensitivity-based situations rely greatly on institutional and official communication regarding the formation of tourists' insights and ambiguity mitigation (Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020). In view of that, Jordan facilitates a suitable environment to investigate strategic public relations communication role in destination image building and behavioral intent shaping.

In this study, the selected target population involves international tourists who either have performed their visit to Jordan or have keenly considered the destination visit. The reason of the population selection was that the study concentrates on communication-guided evaluations which may be occurring both prior to and following the visitation. As argued by Afshardoost & Eshaghi (2020), tourism research, overall, persistently manifests that destination image along with behavioral intentions are widely structured with the help of mediated information source prior to travelling, molding potential visitors a theoretically suitable target population regarding the current investigation.

Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

Since there has been no comprehensive sampling frame to facilitate international tourists especially exposed to destination-connected communication about Jordan, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed. As far as purposive sampling concerns, it is generally employed in tourism-based research specifically when the aim is to target

respondents possessing particular characteristics or informational experience pertinent to the objectives of the study (Dolnicar et al., 2018). Accordingly, in this study, the main standard was the exposure of respondents to official or institutional communication linked with the destination.

All the respondents were included in the sample based on the criteria given below:

- (1) they were 18 years of age or more;
- (2) had visited Jordan previously or having been actively searching to get information about Jordan to visit it;
- (3) having experience in institutional or official-level communication about the destination, like official websites of tourism, promotional campaigns or social media pages

Such selected criteria make it sure that respondents have enough cognitive as well as informational base to purposefully evaluate and assess destination image, strategic public relations communication and behavioral intents (Alyaqoub et al., 2024; Peng et al., 2018). Regarding adequacy of sample size, methodological literature highlights that mediation-centered structural equation models need adequately big samples to make sure that there should be model stability, enough statistical strength and trustworthy valuation of both direct and indirect impacts (Hair et al., 2022; Kline, 2023). A minimum sample size of 200 respondents is generally commended for the models that consist of multiple experiential indicators and three underlying constructs. In the current study, data of 526 respondents were collected, considerably higher than the suggested limit. It was done purposefully aiming that such kind of sample size facilitates strong statistical power to test the suggested mediation model. Moreover, on one side it reduces the issues of estimation bias, and enhances the trustworthiness and strength of the findings on the other hand. To prove this logic, Sabiote-Ortiz et al. (2024) argue that larger sample sizes are specifically helpful in tourism research depending on communication and perceptual-based conceptualizations.

Along with handling the minimum sample size commendations, there was availed further support for the appropriateness of the sample by the “10-times rule”. According to the findings of Hair et al. (2022), this rule is generally employed in PLS-SEM, in which it is recommended that the size of sample should be no less than ten times the maximum number of structural avenues focused on any underlying construct in the given model. Within the structural form of the suggested model, the gotten sample size of 526 respondents considerably goes above this requirement, making it sure that there should be model stability and enough statistical power.

Data Collection Procedure

Regarding the collection of data, there was used an online self-managed questionnaire, which was furtherly distributed through digitally oriented platforms frequently visited by international level visitors, together with social media groups related to travelling and tourism debating platforms. In modern tourism research, online surveys are accepted on a large level due to their ability and efficacy to reach the respondents, geographically disseminated (Dolnicar et al., 2018).

However, the questionnaire of this study was arranged in English, the leading language of global tourism communication. At the commencement of the survey, screening questions were included to make sure of the eligibility of the respondent was based on the pre-established sampling criteria. In order to minimize the potential influence of common method biasness, respondents were made sure of privacy; questionnaire items were made accessible in a non-evaluative and neutral way, reliable with suggested technical solutions (Podsakoff et al., 2016).

Ethical Considerations

The present study was managed according to the established ethics-based principles for social science research. Voluntary participation was administered; similarly knowledgeable consent was obtained from all the respondents before data collection process. It was ensured that not any kind of personal-based detectable information was generated and collected, and likewise confidentiality was maintained in all responses guaranteeing that data would be used entirely for academic research drives. In this way, the present study followed established ethical procedures while conducting survey-based research as suggested by Bryman (2021).

Common Method Bias Assessment

Harman's single-factor test was utilized in order to evaluate the prospective effect of common method biasness. The outcomes pointed out that there was no single factor responsible for the variance majority, signifying that common method biasness was not a serious issue in the obtained data (Podsakoff et al., 2016). Additionally, procedural solutions such as assuring secrecy to the respondent and reducing item uncertainty were executed before collection of data to further minimize latent method biasness.

MEASUREMENT SCALES AND MEASUREMENT MODEL

Measurement of Constructs

Though strategic public relations communication and destination image have been theorized as multifaceted concepts in a few strands of literature, earlier empirical research has established the suitability to specify these constructs as unidimensional underlying variables while the analytical emphasis is on overall evaluations of tourists as well as behavioral results instead of dimensional variation. In perceptual tourism kind of research, respondents incline to make incorporated decisions that integrate affective and cognitive assessments into a single overall evaluation, especially in pre-visit kind of environments in which direct experience does not exist. Regarding destination image as a single latent construct, it has regularly been functionalized to capture tourists' all-inclusive cognitive-affective assessment of a destination during the examination of intention making and behavioral eagerness (Stylidis et al., 2020; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). Likewise, public relations research theorizes strategy-centric communication as a combined institutional

insight depicting transparency, credibility and relationship-based aspects when the objective of the research is to test the theory at the structural ground (Valentini, 2021). In accordance with these recognized approaches and corresponding with the conceptual framework of the study, all concepts in the current study were particularized as one-dimensional underlying variables in order to increase conceptual clarity, closeness and model interpretation.

Moreover, the measurement of all constructs was furnished while employing earlier authenticated multi-item measuring scales adapted from the recognized tourism as well as public relations related literature. Trivial modifications in wording were furnished to confirm context-based relevance to the tourism background of Jordan not altering the genuine conceptual items' meanings. All these items were measured while utilizing a five-point Likert scale stretching from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) (Stylidis et al., 2020; Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2024).

Strategic Public Relations Communication

The measurement of strategic public relations communication was made with the usage of five items adapted from previous strategic communication and public relations research theorizing communication as a transparency, credibility and relationship-generated institutional mechanism (Valentini, 2021; Ki et al., 2021). These items acquire tourists' all-inclusive perceptions connected to official destination-based communication as reliable, transparent and oriented towards long-standing relationships construction instead of short-time promotional prompt. All items were stipulated to map onto a unified underlying concept demonstrating strategic public relations communication.

Destination Image

To measure destination image, five items were used, taken and adapted from the scales extensively used for destination image in tourism-specified research (Stylidis et al., 2020; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020). The chosen items depict tourists' incorporated cognitive-affective assessment regarding the destination by encapsulating impressions, beliefs and emotional reactions and experiences. These evaluation-based constituents were conceptualized as gauges of an only underlying concept being representative of collective destination image.

Tourists' Behavioral Intentions

Accordingly, behavioral intentions of the tourists were evaluated utilizing four items taken and adapted from the tourism research conducted in the past measuring intention-based results, together with visit intentions and intentions in recommending destinations as argued by Afshardoost & Eshaghi (2020); Sabiote-Ortiz et al. (2024). These items prove capturing respondents' inclination to be engaged in upcoming travel-linked behaviors, and thus were made specific to map onto a unified underlying concept signifying behavioral intents.

Data Analysis Strategy

The study conducted data analysis employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Two stages were managed while proceeding analysis. At first, the measuring model was tested to evaluate indicator trustworthiness, internal reliability, discriminant validity and convergent validity. Secondly, the testing of structural model was managed to investigate the hypothesized associations aligning with H1, H2, H3, and then mediation analysis was held to assess H4.

Similarly, the importance of both direct and indirect effects was evaluated by means of a bootstrapping process that offers healthy estimations not depending on assumptions regarding data distribution. Explanatory power of the employed model was assessed with the usage of determination coefficient (R^2) for constructs quantified as endogenous.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The following section provides the demographic characteristics of the respondents as participants in this study. For the final analysis, a total 526 valid questionnaires were engaged. Accordingly, the demographic profile offers an impression of the sample arrangement providing necessary context-based information in order to explain understandings, insights and behavioral intentions of the tourists. In data sample, both male and female respondents were included, which indicates a relatively balanced gender distribution. Regarding the age of the respondents, their majority were determined within the socially and economically active age groups consistently connected with advanced levels of worldwide destination assessment and travel participation. Such kind of age configuration is reliable with prior research on tourism investigating before travel decision taking and intention building. Most of the respondents, when discussing their educational proficiency, had not less than a university-level education.

This specific feature is specifically pertinent in perspective of the study's concentration on communication-based assessments. It reasons that individuals having such educational qualification of higher-level are expected to dynamically engage with digital tourism and institutional communication to proceed destination-centered information systematically. Regarding the experience of travelling, a significant respondents' proportion demonstrated their previous international-level travelling experience, whereas others claimed that they had actively been looking for information about latent travelling destinations. In this sense, it recommends that the data sample include the individuals who have familiarity with tourism-associated communication, and are as a result proficient in assessing the destination image, strategic public relations communication as well as behavioral intentions in a purposeful way.

Similarly, respondents' meticulous demographic features, including gender, their age, and travelling history, are reflected in Table 1. As a whole, the demographic profile demonstrates that the data sample facilitate a suitable empirical base for investigating communication-grounded tourist decision formation within this study's background.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N = 526)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	268	50.9
	Female	258	49.1
Age	18–24 years	96	18.3
	25–34 years	214	40.7
	35–44 years	128	24.3
	45–54 years	62	11.8
	55 years and above	26	4.9
Education Level	High school or below	84	16.0
	Bachelor's degree	276	52.5
	Postgraduate degree	166	31.6
International Travel Experience	Yes	372	70.7
	No	154	29.3
Active Destination Information Search	Yes	401	76.2
	No	125	23.8

Measurement Model Results

Before the evaluation of the assumed structural relationships, the model of measurement was judged to investigate the validity and reliability of the theorized constructs of this study. Adhering the recognized strategies for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the assessment showed focus on internal constancy reliability, indicator consistency, and convergent validity as argued by Hair et al. (2022) and Leguina (2025). Likewise, indicator reliability was evaluated with the usage of factor loadings having standards; reliability in internal consistency was investigated through composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, and finally the convergent validity was assessed utilizing the average variance extracted (AVE).

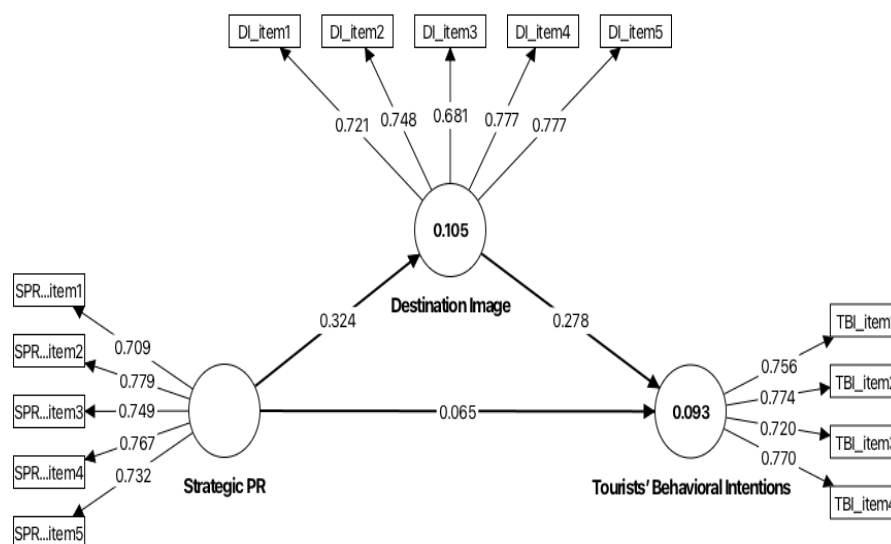


Figure 1. Measurement model with standardized factor loadings

In Figure 1, the study's measurement model has been presented, illustrating the associations found between the underlying constructs and their detected indicators together with loadings of standardized factor. All of the constructs were made specific as unidimensional and reflective, reliable with the adopted conceptualization in the current study. All the indicators, as shown in Figure 1, keep positively loading on their corresponding underlying specified constructs, with the consistent factor loadings going from 0.681 to 0.777 regarding destination image and from 0.709 to 0.779 for strategic public relations communication. Similarly, the ranging regarding tourists' behavioral intentions was from 0.722 to 0.770. These derived values demonstrate adequate indicator reliability, since the majority of loadings go above the suggested limit of 0.70 as suggested by Hair et al. (2022). One of the items related with destination image reflects a loading a little below 0.70; somehow, this derived value can be acceptable in the perspective of overall validity and reliability of the specified construct.

Table 2 the outcomes of the measurement model assessment have been stated in detail; it also includes Cronbach's alpha, factor loadings, composite reliability, as well as AVE derived values for each of the constructs. These results highlight that internal consistency reliability is positively determined. The table calculations show that Cronbach's alpha values move from 0.750 to 0.803, surpassing the generally acceptable at least edge of 0.70; it indicates adequate internal consistency existed among the measuring items (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Similarly, values of composite reliability further provide sustenance to this result along with all the constructs showing values more than 0.80. Moreover, the values ratify the consistency and stability of measuring scales. Accordingly, there exists also support for convergent validity; the AVE values for destination image are up to (0.550). Strategic public relations communication remains up to (0.559), and similarly tourists' behavioral intentions range (0.570), thus all surpass the conceptualized verge of 0.50. According to the derived results, it is judged that each construct explicates more than half of

the variance in its corresponding indicators; thus satisfactory level convergent validity is confirmed (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). There came further assessment of discriminant validity with the usage of the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio, as it has been suggested as a vigorous standard regarding the evaluation of discriminant validity in variance-centered structural equation modeling. For all construct pairs, HTMT values were under the traditional verge of 0.85, highlighting that constructs of the study are empirically distinctive, and that the discriminant validity is established in satisfactory manner (Henseler et al., 2015). In Figure 1 and Table 2, the results indicate that the measuring model demonstrates internal consistency reliability, acceptable indicator reliability and convergent validity. The suitability of the measuring model offers a solid ground for the succeeding evaluation of the hypothesis testing as well as structural model.

Table 2. Measurement Model Results

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Destination Image (DI)	DI_item1	0.721	0.795	0.859	0.550
	DI_item2	0.747			
	DI_item3	0.681			
	DI_item4	0.777			
	DI_item5	0.777			
Strategic Public Relations Communication (SPRC)	SPRC_item1	0.709	0.803	0.864	0.559
	SPRC_item2	0.779			
	SPRC_item3	0.749			
	SPRC_item4	0.768			
	SPRC_item5	0.731			
Tourists' Behavioral Intentions (TBI)	TBI_item1	0.763	0.750	0.841	0.570
	TBI_item2	0.770			
	TBI_item3	0.722			
	TBI_item4	0.765			

Structural Model Results

The structural model, through the evaluation of the measuring model, was assessed to investigate the hypothesized expected associations among strategic public relations communication, behavioral intents of the tourists and destination image. According to the recognized guiding principles for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the assessment concentrated on the magnitude and importance of all standardized and normalized path parameters, together with the expounding model power as pointed out by the determination coefficient (R^2) (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022).

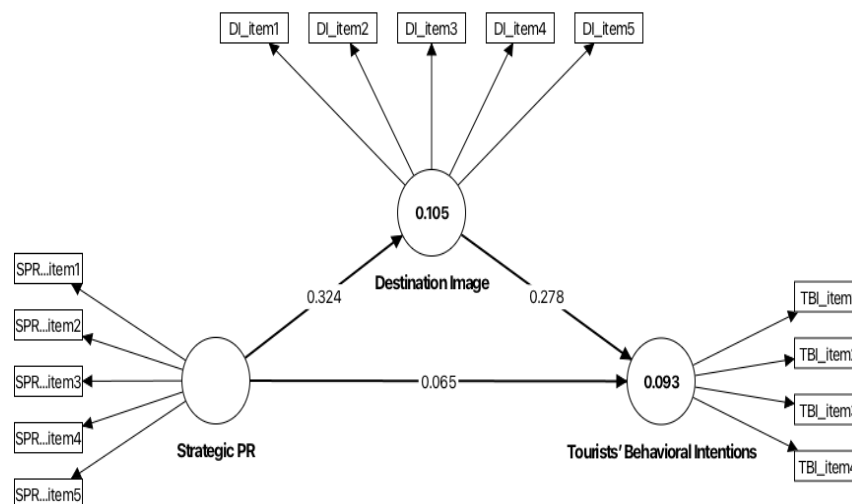


Figure 2. Structural model with path coefficients

In order to evaluate the statistical prominence of the hypothesized associations, a nonparametric bootstrapping process with 5,000 resamples was utilized, since it is suggested for the testing of hypothesis as well as mediation analysis in PLS-SEM as suggested by Hair et al. (2022); Preacher & Hayes (2008). In Figure 2 it is presented the structural model along with the standardized path coefficients and the endogenous constructs' explicated variance (R^2). Strategic public relations communication, as presented in the figure, elucidates a significant variance proportion in destination image ($R^2 = 0.105$), whereas strategic public relations communication and destination image together expound variance in behavioral intentions of the tourists ($R^2 = 0.093$). While these derived R^2 values show their appearance as being modest, such kinds of explanatory levels generally exist in perception-centered and behavioral tourism research, presenting the characteristically intricate and multi-driven feature of tourism-based decision-making process, in which intentions are formed by many contextual, psychological and situational dynamics beyond the constructs of communication field (Hair et al., 2019).

According to the results of Table 3, strategic public relations communication shows a statistically and positive important impact on the destination image ($\beta = 0.324$, $p < .001$), offering empirical sustenance to H1. The conclusion

highlights that practices at institutional communication, emphasizing transparency, credibility and relationship orientation, play an important role in forming overall perceptions of tourists regarding the destination.

Additionally, destination image leaves a statistical and positively prominent impact on behavioral intents of the tourists ($\beta = 0.278$, $p < .001$), providing support to H2. This result confirms that acceptable cognitive–affective assessments of a destination arise tourists’ inclination to be engaged in upcoming travel-based behaviors like visiting or recommendations of the destination as visiting places. In comparison, the direct impact of the strategic public relations communication on tourists’ behavioral intents is not statistically noteworthy ($\beta = 0.063$, $p = .182$). In accordance with it, no support is observed for H3. Such result recommends that strategic public relations communication reflect no direct interpretation into behavioral intentions as destination image of tourists is taken into consideration.

Mediation Analysis

In the perspective of this study’s mediation-grounded conceptual framework, the destination image’s mediating role in the connection existing between strategic public relations communication and behavioral intentions of the tourists was investigated while utilizing bootstrapping techniques. Bootstrapping can be largely considered as a strong approach to test indirect impacts in PLS-SEM, since it does not depend on suppositions of normality and thus offers more precise confidence intermissions for mediation impacts (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

In Table 4, it has been shown that strategic public relations communication’s non-direct impact on behavioral intentions of tourists through destination image remains positive and statistically prominent ($\beta = 0.090$, $p < .001$). As the concluded result is measured along with the insignificant direct impact described in Table 3, the statistical outcomes manifest that destination image completely mediates the relationship existed between strategic public relations communication and behavioral intentions of the tourists. The design of these results corresponds with existing mediation rationality, which identifies full mediation though there exists no noteworthy direct impact (Zhao et al., 2010). In this context, there remains support for H4.

Table 3. Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Strategic PR -> Destination Image	0.324	8.847	< .001	Supported
H2	Destination Image -> Tourists’ Behavioral Intentions	0.278	6.635	< .001	Supported
H3	Strategic PR -> Tourists’ Behavioral Intentions	0.063	1.334	0.182	Not supported

Table 4. Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects)

Indirect Path	B	t-value	p-value	Mediation Type
Strategic PR -> Destination Image -> Tourists’ Behavioral Intentions	0.090	5.309	< .001	Full mediation

Effect Size (f^2)

Along with the examination of the path importance, effect sizes (f^2) were measure for the evaluation of the relative effect of each exogenous concept on the endogenous factors (underlying variables). The derived results highlight that strategic public relations communication depicts a low-to-moderate impact on destination image, though destination image exhibits a small influence on tourists’ behavioral intents. These impact-based sizes remain consistent with prospects in perception-related tourism research indicating that the perceived associations, though statistically important, exercise modest utilitarian impact (Hair et al., 2022).

Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Model’s predictive relevance was tested by using the blindfolding process. For both tourists’ behavioral intentions and destination image, the Q^2 values were greater than zero. These values highlight that the prescribed model depicts satisfying predictive relevance having the capability of predicting endogenous concepts away from mere expounding power (Hair et al., 2019).

Model Fit

Ultimately, the model fit was assessed by employing the standard-based root mean square residual (SRMR). The derived value of SRMR was under the suggested verge of 0.08, recommending a satisfactory inclusive model fit for analysis of PLS-SEM and providing support to the appropriateness of the suggested structural model as prescribed by (Hair et al., 2019).

DISCUSSION

The current study’s findings offer theoretically noteworthy perceptions into the institutional communication role in tourism decision-building practices. The present study began by investigating the way strategic public relations communication builds behavioral intentions of the tourists by clearly placing destination image as an interceding cognitive–affective process. With the incorporation of public relations theory into destination image-based research and empirically assessing a mediation-grounded structural model in Jordanian context, the current study contributes to long-term calls regarding more process-oriented and theoretically based clarifications of tourist decision-making action. Instead of just reinforcing accepted relationships, findings of the study provide in-depth understanding into *how* as well as *which way* institutional communication affects behavior of tourists in reputational and sensitive digitally mediated tourism environs.

Findings reveal that strategic public relations communication leaves a robust and statistically prominent impact on destination image, and provides strong favor to H1. Such kind of assessment corresponds intimately with in vogue public

relations academia, which theorizes strategy-centered communication as an institutional mechanism having an aim to construct trust, credibility as well as legitimacy with the help of relationship-focused and explicit interaction with the shareholders (Valentini, 2021; Ki et al., 2021). Similarly, in tourism background, where potential tourists often depend on mediation-oriented information instead of direct involvement experience, such kinds of communication come on the scene to play a determinative role in framing the way destinations are explained in a cognitive and affective way.

Notably, this finding plays a vital role in extending prior tourism-based research that has largely handled communication as a practical or promotional effort. Although, the studies in the past have shown focus on content quality, message disclosure, or labeling usefulness (Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020), the current results recommend that tourists tend to respond healthier to communication considered as institutionally reliable and relationship-centered. Following this, this study empirically backs current concept-based argumentation that destination image is not just affected by promotion-grounded stimuli but is also dynamically formed with the help of institutional communication practices that indicate trustworthiness and legitimacy (Tasci et al., 2022). The derived finding, from a theoretical point of view, strengthens the pertinence of public relations theory for the research related to tourism; it also addresses the consistent dominating edge of marketing-oriented communication models. With the clarification that strategic public relations communication works as an important antecedent/predictor of destination image, the present study provides support to a more comprehensive insight of image formation that focuses on institutional trustworthiness not on persuasive messaging only.

Destination image, having consistency with H2, was observed in exercising a prominent constructive impact on tourists' behavioral intentions. The same result corresponds with the current outcomes highlighting that destination image functions as a strong explanatory component of tourist loyalty-based results, despite the fact that contextual and experiential factors are taken into consideration (Sobaih et al., 2024). This derived result validates a significant body of tourism research. Moreover, it specifies destination image as a core-determining factor of intention-oriented results, containing inclinations to visit and suggest travel destinations (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Styliadis et al., 2020). The findings confirm by claiming that tourists' behavioral willingness is motivated initially by their collective cognitive-affective assessments not through objective destination qualities. In addition to validating this determined relationship, the current study shares to the destination image theory by strengthening its role as an explanatory framework instead of a static insight.

Similarly, in the digitally facilitated evaluation-judgement background, tourists repeatedly face split, and occasionally contradiction-based information. Additionally, destination image performs as a cognitive-affective framework incorporating these indications into an intelligible assessment-oriented decision making, thus making intention formation able to be formed (Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020). Such explanatory role adopts itself especially as significant in destinations in which reputé-base accounts and alleged risk build prior travel assessments.

Contrary to H1 and H2, on tourists' behavioral intents the direct impact of strategic public relations communication could not appear as statistically significant element, thus guiding to the H3 rejection. Although, communication's direct effects on intention formation have been testified in some tourism studies, especially within marketing efforts and branding the frameworks, the non-existence of a prominent direct path in the current model is hypothetically expressive instead of being problematical. Findings of the study recommend that strategic public relations communication have no proof to function as a direct convincing prompt of behavioral intents. Rather, its influence looks depending on the way tourists cognitively and affectively process the communication. This perception corresponds with direct-effect models' contemporary critiques in the research of tourism behavior, which claim that these kinds of models overgeneralize the process of decision-making by ignoring perception-based mediation processes (Li et al., 2025). The insignificant direct impact, when observed from a mediation-based logic lens, shows total consistency with contemporary perceptions of non-indirect impact. Additionally, the non-existence of a direct impact is unable to make theoretical relevance weak especially when there exists a prominent indirect source as claimed by Zhao et al. (2010). In the present study, the outcomes highlight that strategic public relations communication shows impacts on behavioral intents merely insofar as it frames destination image, highlighting the importance of perceptual explanation in tourism decision forming.

A strong empirical support is offered for H4 by managing mediation analysis. It also demonstrates that destination image serves entirely as a mediator for the relationship found between strategy-centered public relations communication and behavioral intentions of the tourists. The derivative result signifies one of the study's most significant theoretical implications. This study, by empirically authenticating a model of full mediation, goes beyond expressive relations providing a process-focus clarification of the way institutional communication interprets into behavioral results.

The current finding corresponds with contemporary tourism research, which accentuates mediation-oriented interpretations of a tourist behavior, specifically in the backgrounds categorized by perceived risk, ambiguity as well as reputation related feelings (Hassan & Soliman, 2021; Gorji et al., 2023). In order to build tourists' intents, strategic public relations communication comes ahead. It does not frame by directly inspiring action, but through affecting the emotions, meanings, and even assessments that construct destination image. While performing this, destination image serves as a cognitive-affective channel, which connects institutional indications to behavioral willingness. On theoretical level, this finding appears challenging for the consistent dependence on attitudinal frameworks like the Planned Behavior Theory in tourism backgrounds in which institutional communication leads to the formation of attitude. When strategic public relations communication is place as a pre-attitudinal construct, while destination image and exogenous construct as the key explanatory contrivance, the study provides a substitute illustrative framework, which depicts present-day, communication-guided tourism atmospheres in a better way. The current study overall provides a number of significant theoretical insights.

Firstly, it empirically and theoretically differentiates strategic public relations communication from marketing-centered when related to communication held in tourism research. Additionally, it signifies its exceptional role in the formation of destination image. Secondly, it develops the theory of destination image by replacing image as a mediating explanatory

process instead of a simple behavior antecedent. Thirdly, through empirical validation of a full mediation model, this study facilitates an expanding volume of research supporting process-centric and theory-led interpretations of a tourist judgement. Lastly, this study, while concentrating on the Jordanian background, increases the context-based strength of tourism communication theory by ranging it beyond the destinations of West and East Asia.

In the present study, there have been provided a number of significant theoretical implications regarding the research based on tourism communication and destination image. Firstly, it provides insights to the expanding volume of literature that advocates going away from marketing-focused conceptualizations of tourist-centered behavior by empirically incorporating strategic public relations communication into a destination image theoretical framework. Whereas prior studies conducted on tourism concerns have mainly theorized communication as promotion-based experience or marketing activity, the present results validate that communication is grounded on transparency, credibility, and similarly, relationship orientation has to play an influential role in building tourists' perceptions instead of directly encouraging behavioral intents. Peculiarity of such nature makes theoretical clarity advanced by specifying strategic public relations communication as the antecedent of an institution instead of a normative purpose-driven approach.

Secondly, this study validates the theory of destination image by experientially substantiating its vital role as intermediary thought or emotional-affective mechanism instead of a simple behavior determinant. Similarly, finding based full mediation specifies that destination image performs as an explanatory channel by which institutional communication is interpreted into behavioral promptness. Such process-centered interpretation offers a respond directly to contemporary assessments of tourism behavior frameworks and models, which attach excessive emphasis to direct impacts however ignoring perceptual and meaning-making processes (Tasci et al., 2022; Li et al., 2025).

The third point is that the nonexistence of a remarkable direct impact found between strategy-based public relations communication and behavioral intentions of the tourists reflects significant theoretical contributions. Instead of putting communication theory into contradiction, the current finding corroborates existing mediation reasoning, which accentuates that the institutional directives or guidelines are surely cognitively and affectively managed before persuading intention building as argued by (Zhao et al., 2010). It interrogates the persistent dependence on linear, direct-impact presumptions rooted in attitudinal framework like the Planned Behavior Theory, especially in the context of tourism in which communication occurs to the attitude formation and development.

Lastly, testing the model through observation-based data in the Jordanian context, this study expands the geographical as well as context-centered space of the theory of tourism communication. Similarly, much of the contemporary literature focuses on East Asian and Western designed destinations, possibly restricting the generalizability of in vogue models. However, findings of the study recommend that in repute-based sensitive and institution-level facilitated destinations, the strategy-centric public relations communication tends to play a specifically prominent role in building destination image, thus supporting to a more context-oriented strong theoretical knowledge of tourist decision-choice.

The current study's findings provide a number of practical insights for destination management organizations (DMOs) and the policymakers of tourism industry. First, findings of the study highlight claims that strategic public relations communication in a sense must not be handled as a supplemental or peripheral activity; instead, it should be considered as an essential constituent of the destination management tactic. Communication efforts that prioritize transparency, credibility, and relationship building appear more effective in shaping favorable destination images than purely promotional messaging. Secondly, the nonexistence of a direct impact between the strategic public relations communication and behavioral intentions of the tourists recommends that DMOs should reconsider and adjust their prospects concerning communication results. Instead of trying to encourage for visit intentions with the help of advertisement-based campaigns, practitioners must concentrate on building trustworthy and coherent destination descriptions that increase collective cognitive-affective assessments of tourists. Regarding this, destination image appears as the main influential idea with which investments in communication produce behavioral outputs.

Thirdly, findings depict relevancy especially for destinations working in the environments categorized by highly observed risk, repute related sensitivity, or even geopolitical complication. Strategic public relations communication, in such kinds of environments, can perform as a legitimacy-framing process, which alleviates uncertainty while strengthening trust on the institutions. It emphasizes the significance of consistent, harmonized and institutionally trustworthy communication in all official tourism platforms, media relations, and digital channels.

Lastly, tourism related management should identify that the usefulness of communication strategies rests not merely on message content but on how communication related performances are observed on institutional level. Investing in interactional involvement, response tendency, and fairness may as a result give long-standing paybacks by reinforcing destination image, and indirectly, behavioral intentions of tourists.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the research in future may have the capacity to extend the suggested model by integrating extra moderating or mediating variables like anticipated risk, trust, or media trustworthiness. Such kinds of extensions in research work would further increase perceptions of the multi-layered underlying processes with which institutional communication shows effects on tourist behavior in existing digital based mediated tourism contexts. The present findings further indicate that strategic public relations communication is relevant to the formation of destination image, while destination image plays an important role in explaining tourists' behavioral intentions. The absence of a significant direct relationship between strategic public relations communication and behavioral intentions, together with the significant indirect relationship through destination image, highlights the importance of considering the perceptual process through which institutional communication influences

tourism-related behavioral outcomes. In this regard, the study contributes to tourism communication research by positioning destination image as a mediating mechanism linking strategic public relations communication with tourists' behavioral intentions. Overall, the findings support a process-oriented understanding of tourism communication in which institutional communication influences behavioral intentions through the destination perceptions formed by tourists.

Limitations and Future Research

In spite of this study's support and contributions, it goes under a number of limitations that paves the avenues for research to be conducted in the future. Firstly, the study used a cross-sectional research pattern, which has the ability limitations in drawing general implications concerning the vigorous advancement of destination image as well as behavioral intentions with the passage of time. The studies in future can adopt experimental or longitudinal designs to engage changes in tourists' understandings following publicity to strategic public relations based communication.

Secondly, it may happen that due to the usage of online self-managed surveys there may emerge self-chosen bias; it reasons that individuals having higher digital engagement levels and keen interest in tourism-oriented content are more probable to show their participation. Additionally, the dependence on self-diagnosed perception-based measures may become under social desirability propensities, possibly manipulating respondents' assessments.

Such kinds of methodological restrictions should be brought under consideration while explaining the inferences and generalizing the findings to larger population of tourism. Thirdly, whereas the present study made strategic public relations communication conceptualize as a unidimensional concept to improve parsimony, the research in future may go to search its multidimensional structure with more deep-digging effort. While investigating particular communication-based practices such as two-way interaction involvement, transparency gesturing or crisis communication might offer more substantive and detailed understandings into which public relations communication perspectives perform most persuasively in building destination image. Finally, this study concentrated on a single destination context.

It may bound the generalizability of the study results. Studies, having comparative nature, throughout various political, cultural or institution-level contexts would support in evaluating the strength of the suggested model and recognizing the potential peripheral situations. Specifically, future research could be able to compare reputation-based sensitive destinations having well-known and strongly established tourism marketplaces.

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