THE IMPACT OF AGROTOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE ON TOURIST'S LOYALTY IN ZAGHOUAN, TUNISIA: MODERATING ROLE OF VISIT'S EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: This study tests the influence of destination image on loyalty. It also examines the moderation effect of visitors' experiences in the link between the two main components of destination image and loyalty. For this reason, responses from 302 visitors at Zaghouan, Tunisia were collected using a pre-examined questionnaire form. The collected responses were analyzed with SmartPLS SEM and Multi-group analysis. The findings showed that destination image significantly and positively affected visitors' intention to revisit and recommend agrotourism destination to others. The results confirmed that destination image dimensions (cognitive and affective) influence visitors' loyalty. These influences are significantly moderated by tourist's experiences. New visitors with new experiences have less influence on the link between image and loyalty than regular visitors. The findings have some propositions for tourism destination marketers and scholars.

Keywords: affective image, cognitive image, intention to revisit, intention to revisit, visitor's loyalty, visitor experience

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INTRODUCTION

Research on destination image (Aliedan et al., 2022; Artuger and Cetinsoz, 2017; Chew and Jahari, 2014; Maldonado-López et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024) has confirmed that it is a key concern for scholars and tourism leaders alike. These studies confirmed that it critically affects visitors' decision to visit destination as well as their experiences and satisfaction. A consensus was clearly established between both scholars and practitioners that destination image shape the success or failure of tourism in such destination (Avraham, 2016; Stylidis and Cherifi, 2018; Khaydarova, 2024). Destination image draws on many factors such as service quality provided, which positively affect visitors' experiences (Aliedan et al., 2022; Lv et al., 2024; Ramadhani et al., 2024; Gursoy et al., 2014). Tourism destination image has paid special consideration from tourism specialists, especially its significant impact on behavioural intention of visitors (Bigné et al., 2001; Melo et al., 2024; Ghaderi et al., 2024). Hence, it is important that destination image properly developed to ensure visitors' satisfaction and loyalty as well as its generation of revenues (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015; Tsounis et al., 2024; Wafa et al., 2024). Studies (Zhang et al., 2014; An et al., 2024; Mbira, 2024) showed that destination image significantly affect visitors' behavioural intention. It was also well documented that consumers' loyalty is considered to be an antecedents of business competitiveness (Gursoy et al., 2014, Yen et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024), which are all critical for today's business survival.

Agrotourism is a subgroup of rural tourism that encourages visitors to undertake their tourism activates at farms. It is an agriculturally-based tourism that promotes the involvement of local communities. Agrotourism has many positive economic and social impacts, especially with the development and involvement of small farmers (Ana, 2017).

It has become an important and constantly growing global industry (Mastronardi et al., 2015; Giaccio et al., 2018; Melović et al., 2024). Research on Agrotourism (Ana, 2017; Nurlaela et al., 2021, Romanenko et al., 2020) has focused on its importance, value and positive impacts, whether from economic or social aspects, including rural development.

However, there is a limitation of studies that addresses the perspective of visitors, particularly the impact of these agro-tourism destinations on their behavioural intention, which will be addressed in current research in an effort to bridge this knowledge gap. The purpose of current study is to test the impact of destination image, both affective and cognitive images,

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on tourists' loyalty, e.g. their intention to recommend and revisit these destinations. The research investigates the moderation influence of tourism experience of tourists or visitors in this relationship. The next parts of current paper is organized five parts. Following the introduction, part 2 presents studies related to tourism destination image and develop the study hypotheses. In part 3, we discussed the methodology adopted in this research. Part 4 shows the data analysis and results of the study. Part 5 section is devoted to the discussion of the findings and the last part (6) concludes the research

REVIEW OF CONCEPTS AND HYPOTHESES BUILDING

1. The concept of agrotourism

Agrotourism refers to a mixture of tourism with agriculture that accrue in the same rural setting (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997; Yuristia and Sumantri, 2024). Belliggiano et al (2020) have indicated that agrotourism empower local community, particularly small farmers. At the same time, agrotourism best use the agricultural resources in the countryside to provide a unique experience for visitors (Mastronardi et al., 2015, Susila et al., 2024). Furthermore, Dubois and al (2017) found that agrotourism is linked to local development and aims to ensure sustainable development. Joyner and al (2018) stated that agrotourism offered a direct marketing opportunity from agronomist to visitors. Agro-tourism is an important global industry that is still growing (Giaccio et al., 2018; Masaleva and Nabiullina, 2024). Agrotourism is a tourism activity that complements agriculture. It brings together agricultural producers and tourists or day-trippers, enabling the latter to discover the farming environment, agriculture and its production.

2. The concept of destination image

The image of a tourism destination has been widely studied in earlier studies (Sio et al., 2024; Zhan et al., 2024). This concept is very important for understanding the behavior of tourists in the procedure of choosing a destination. It is at the heart of the concerns of professionals and academics (Liu et al., 2024). It is one of the most widely addressed themes in academic research and accounts for a large proportion of the work and research undertaken in the tourism context (Aliedan et al., 2022). Many researchers have also suggested that the destination image is a group of feelings, impressions, ideas and expectations that a potential or current visitor has of a precise place (Baloglu and Mc Cleary, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Zhao et al., 2024). Moreover, Jalilvand et al. (2012) have defined the destination image as "an individual's overall perception or a set of impressions of a specific place". Several researchers have found that the destination image is composed of three main aspects: cognitive, affective and conative image. The first main aspect refers to an assessment of the recognized features or aspects of the destination. The second aspect deals with emotional state towards a place. The third main aspect refers to analogue to behavior as it assesses the action aspect. Nevertheless, other studies, such as Gartner (1993), and Baloglu and McCleary (1999) postulate that the destination image is based entirely on the first two main components: cognitive and affective.

3. Destination image and intention to revisit

It has been argued that destination image significantly affects tourists' intention to revisit a place (Chew and Jahari, 2014; Li et al., 2018; Elmas et al., 2024). Earlier studies have confirmed that the destination image positively affects intention to revisit (Lee et al., 2008; Wei et al., 2024; Dewi et al., 2024). In fact, if tourists strongly appreciate a destination where they feel anticipated feelings, find a correspondence in their self-congruity or attain a positive overall perceptions, they are probable to make the decision to revisit the place (Lee et al., 2014; Zhu et al., 2024). Likewise, Sharma and Nayak (2019) empirically argued that image positively influences intention to revisit a destination. Hence, we argue that:

H1: Agro-tourism destination image has a positive impact on visitors' intention to revisit
H1/a: Agro-tourism cognitive image has a positive impact on visitors' intention to revisit
H1/b: Agro-tourism affective image has a positive impact on visitors' intention to revisit

4. Destination image and destination recommendation

Visitors' loyalty has some major aspects. The visitors' intention to recommend is one of these main aspects. There is no doubt that positive a tourist's destination image encourages visitors to endorse it to others. Positive relationship was confirmed between visitors intention to recommend and overall image components (Bigné et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2024), affective component (Lee et al., 2005) and cognitive component (McDowall and Ma, 2010). It was also found that new visitors seriously rely on recommendations from regular visitors (Stylidis et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014; Guo et al., 2024). Thus, the next hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Agro-tourism destination image has a positive impact on its recommendation to others
H2/a: Agro-tourism cognitive image has a positive impact on its recommendation to others
H2/b: Agro-tourism affective image has a positive impact on its recommendation to others

5. The moderating effect of tourism experience

It was acknowledged that visitors experiences, whether new or regular, has role between tourism destination and visitors loyalty, in particular intentions to revisit (Tosun et al., 2015; Jeong, 2024). When visitors repeat their visits, they are more willing to recommend this place or destination to others (Chi, 2012; Mou et al., 2024). This is because they perceive the place or destination more positively and would like to share their experiences with others. Therefore, their cognitive evaluations of the place could vary from new visitors (Tosun et al., 2015). However, converting new visitors into regular ones needs a unique experience, treating them in professional and unique way as well as meeting their expectations (Gursoy et al., 2014). Following the theoretical and empirical developments discussed above, our hypothesis regarding the moderating role of tourism experience is as follows:

H3: The visitors' experience (new versus regular visitors) has a significant moderating effect on the impact of the components of the destination's image on loyalty to the destination.

H3a: The visitors' experience (new versus regular visitors) has a significant moderating effect on the impact of cognitive image on loyalty to the destination.

H3b: The visitors' experience (new versus regular visitors) has a significant moderating effect on the impact of affective image on loyalty to the destination (Figure 1).
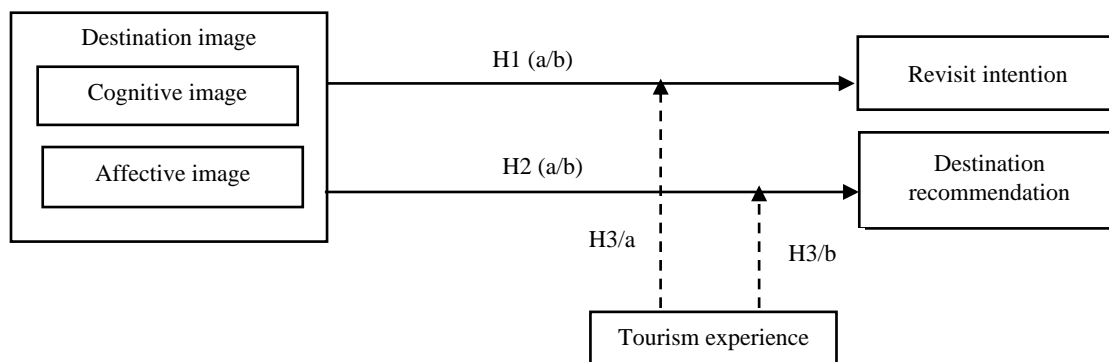

Figure 1. The conceptual model

METHODOLOGY

1. Data collection

This research undertook a quantitative approach using a convenience sample of 302 domestic and foreign tourists who visited Zaghouan as agro-tourism town and agreed to participate in this questionnaire. The survey is administrated online on an official page of Dar Zaghouan, which offers agro-tourism products. A summary of steps is presented in Figure 2.

We were fortunate in this research that our questionnaire was distributed not only through a well-known influencer on Instagram who presents content on rural tourism, hikes, camping and open-air activities, but also through popular pages in the field of tourism and agro-tourism. Table 1 presents the sample profile using demographic variables such as gender, age, socio-professional status and nationality. Our sample consisted of 302 respondents, 57.6% of whom were men (174) and 42.4% women (128). Moreover, the mainstream of responded visitors were aged between 30 and 39, which can be explained by the fact that this age group is most interested in visiting rural regions and practicing agro-tourism activities. The large part of participants was from Tunisia, more than 89.4% (270 participants). This is explained by the fact that the questionnaire was drawn up outside the tourist season. The majority of respondents were employees (34.8%).
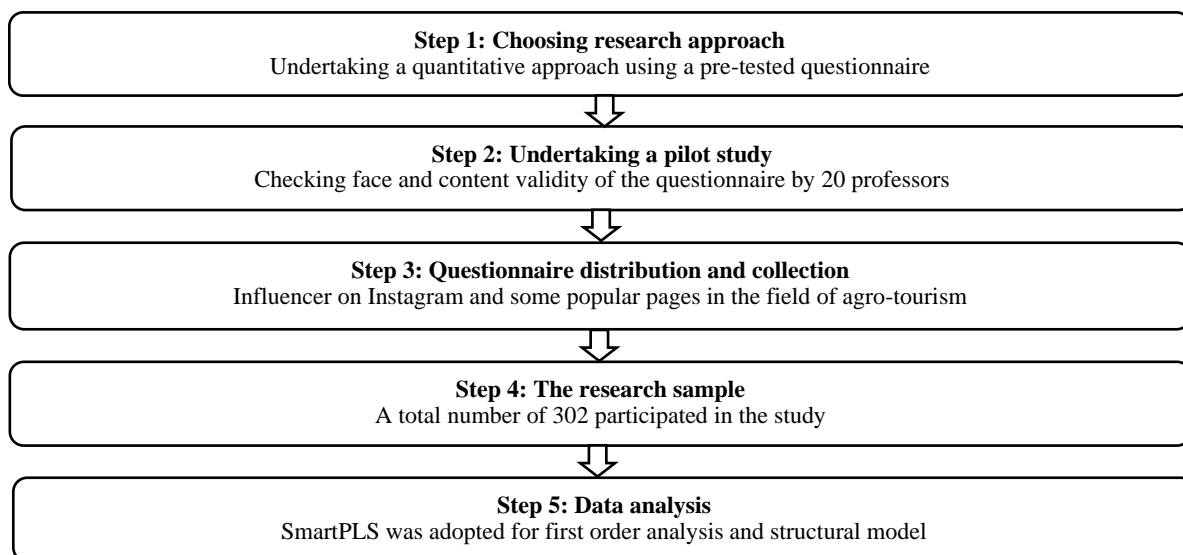

Figure 2. Steps undertaken for data collection and analysis

2. Measurements

This survey includes five constructs: cognitive image, affective image, revisit intention, destination recommendation and tourism experience. The cognitive image scale was evaluated with fifteen items on five main dimensions adapted from Artuger and Cetinsoz (2017). The affective image was assessed with four items obtained from Artuger and Cetinsoz (2017). The destination loyalty as a bidimensional construct containing revisit intention and destination recommendation were assessed using 7 variables undertaken from Prayag (2009) and Sun et al. (2013). The questionnaire was checked for face and content validity by 20 professors. The latter measured a scale of tourism experience used in Ragb et al., (2020). All variables were developed on a 5-point Likert kind scale (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree).

Table 1. Respondents' demographic

		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	128	42.4%
	Female	174	57.6%
Age	From 18 to 29	111	36.8%
	From 30 to 39	130	43.0%
	From 40 to 49	48	15.9%
	Over 50	13	4.3%
Nationality	Tunisian	270	89.4%
	Moroccan	12	4.0%
	European	18	6.0%
	American or Canadian	1	0.3%
	Others	1	0.3%
Socio-professional status	Student	52	17.2%
	Agriculture	2	0.7%
	Employee	105	34.8%
	Executive	59	19.5%
	Worker	30	9.9%
	Liberal profession	45	14.9%
	Retired	7	2.3%
	Others	2	0.7%

Table 2. Discriminant validity

	Destination image	Destination recommendation	Revisit intention
Destination image	**0.773**		
Destination recommendation	0.553	**0.972**	
Revisit intention	0.607	0.793	**0.953**

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This current research utilized SPSS 25 for analyzing data. In addition, the study used Smart PLS-SEM adopted "partial least squares structural equation modeling" for testing the hypotheses and developing the structural model.

1. Exploratory factor analysis

The findings obtained via EFA "exploratory factor analysis" indicate that the KMO index is greater than 0.5 or even close to 1 (Cognitive image=0.912 / Affective image=0.823/ Revisit intention=0.842/ Destination recommendation=0.779) and Bartlett's sphericity test is significant at the 5% risk indicating that data are appropriate for factorial analysis. Furthermore, the reliability of the measurement scales reflects good internal consistency amongst variables with Cronbach's Alpha values over 0.7 (Cognitive image=0.952/ Affective image=0.823/ Revisit intention=0.842/ Destination recommendation=0.779).

2. Confirmatory factor analysis

To check the validity and reliability of the measurement scale for each variable, we undertook a CFA "confirmatory factor analysis" via Smart PLS. The findings of CFA revealed that the reliability was evaluated using the coefficient of Composite Reliability (CR) for the overall constructs, which is above the threshold of 0.7, confirming internal consistency (Destination image= 0.966/ Revisit intention= 0.975/ Destination recommendation= 0.981). In addition, we computed the convergent validity through the indicators of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which are satisfactory because they are over the threshold of 0.5 (Destination image= 0.598/ Revisit intention= 0.908/ Destination recommendation= 0.945). To test discriminant validity, we used the approach of Fornell and Larcker (1981), which is based on the square of convergent validity that has to be higher than the relationship of the other constructs. In light of the results in Table 2, the square root of the convergent validity of each construct is higher than the inter-constructed correlations. Therefore, supporting discriminant validity.
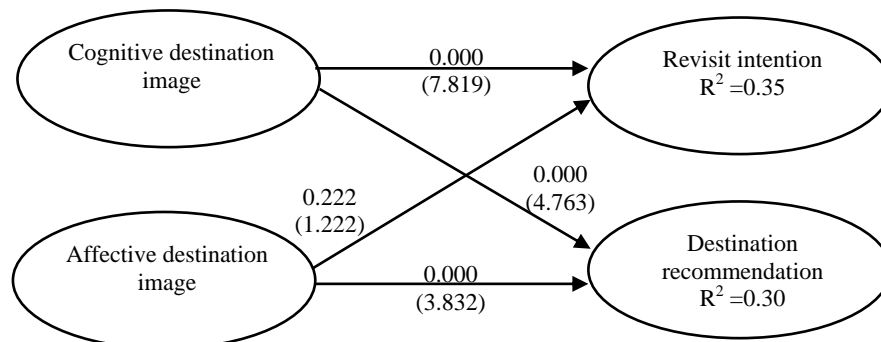

Figure 3. Structural model

3. Structural model

We used the SmartPLS to develop the structural model and test the significance of the hypothesized relationships, measuring the coefficient of determination or the explained variance (R2) (Figure 3). With regard to the explanatory power

of the model, the coefficient of determination (R2) for the overall model is more than 0.35, i.e. the structural model has a satisfactory explanatory power of 35%. Thus, the results have a high degree of predictive accuracy.

4 Hypothesis testing

As can be seen in Table 3, all the research hypotheses are confirmed and significant. The findings presented in Table 3, show that most of the research hypotheses are confirmed. In addition, the student test is higher than 1.96 and the P values are significant for a 5% error risk. The link between affective image and revisit intention was not significant (T=1.222, P > 0.05). Multi-group analysis "MGA" was conducted to test the moderation influence of tourism experience on the link amongst image and tourists' loyalty (i.e. their intention to revisit and destination recommendation).

In fact, the visitors are categorised into two groups, first-time (n =125) and regular (n =177). Destination's image (both cognitive image and affective image) has a significant influence on loyalty to the destination especially the destination recommendation for the second group of visitors (regular ones) (Table 4). Such effect was significantly greater for regular tourists than for new ones. Therefore, this finding suggests that when regular visitors hold positive perceptions toward a destination, their likelihood of recommending it is high.

Table 3. Research hypotheses

Paths	T value	P value	Result
Cognitive destination image → Revisit intention	7.819	0.000	Supported
Affective destination image → Revisit intention	1.222	0.222	Not supported
Cognitive destination image → Destination recommendation	4.763	0.000	Supported
Affective destination image → Destination recommendation	3.832	0.000	Supported

Table 4. The moderating effect of tourism experience

Paths	Path coefficient difference (first-time visitors vs regular visitors)	P value original one tailed (first time visitors vs regular visitors)	P value (first time visitors vs regular visitors)
Destination image → Revisit intention	-0.162	0.876	0.248
Destination image → Destination recommendation	-0.257	0.980	0.039

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper explores the interrelationship the two-core components of destination image: cognitive and affective on visitor's loyalty, i.e. their intention to revisit and recommend with moderation influence from visitors' experiences. The results revealed a positive impact of the destination's image on the intention to revisit and recommend the destination. In particular, the cognitive image has significant effects on revisit intention and destination recommendation. In addition, affective image was also found to have a significant effect only on destination recommendation. Such findings corroborate the findings of previous research that have revealed an important role for destination image as an antecedent of tourist behavior. These results supports earlier research (Tan and Wu, 2016; Girma and Singh, 2019), which also found that cognitive and affective images have significant effects on revisit intention. Furthermore, the results coincidence with the findings of Papadimitriou et al. (2015) who also confirmed significant impacts of cognitive and affective images on intention destination recommendation. Additionally, the results confirm the argument of Pektaş et al. (2019) who urged that cognitive image of a destination supports affective image and lead to intention to recommend this to others.

The results interestingly showed that tourism experience has a moderation effect in the effect between the two components of destination image and revisit intention and destination recommendation. The results confirmed that the effect of destination image on visitors' loyalty is increased when tourism experiences was introduced. This means that this impact was significantly greater among regular tourists than first-time ones. These results are in line with previous studies (e.g. Beerli and Martin, 2004; Morais and Lin, 2010; Tosun et al., 2015) that destination image has more impact on visitors' loyalty for returning tourists than first-time visitors. The results of this research have many theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study adds to the growing studies on destination image and tourist's behavioural intention, especially in the context of agro-tourism in Tunisia or similar environments, where there are few studies on this issue. As highlighted earlier, studies on agrotourism often focus on certain issues its importance, development, value and positive impacts, whether from economic or social aspects, including rural development (Ana, 2017; Nurlaela et al., 2021; Romanenko et al., 2020).

Additionally, this study is, unlike earlier studies on destination image and its linkage with behavioural intentions (Zhang et al., 2014); comprehensively integrate the multi-component of destination image. This study examined the impact of both components (cognitive and affective image) and found that the impact of cognitive image loyalty was the strongest than the impact of affective image on loyalty. This research is a first step towards examining the interrelationship between destination image and visitors' loyalty moderated by tourists' experiences in rural tourism. The present research examined the effect of the cognitive image and the affective image of an agro-tourism destination in the context of visitor loyalty processes. Furthermore, the current research examined and analyzed the moderation influence of the tourism experience on the link between the image of agrotourism destination and visitors' loyalty.

The results offer some implications for decision-makers and tourism marketers. The destination image scale developed and validated could be a good instrument for managers to assess their destination to understand the characteristics from tourists' perceptions (Table 5). In addition, the scale developed identified five dimensions that add positively to the creation of cognitive image: natural attractions, infrastructure, atmosphere, social environment, and value for money. These dimensions are very important when developing improving cognitive image. Given that the findings showed that, the image of the

agrotourism destination is an important for shaping and strengthening visitors' loyalty. It is therefore important that destination marketers embrace proper strategies to improve and differentiate their destinations. Additionally, they could respond by developing the appropriate strategy for managing their destination image. The development of the destination's image should gain more attention and prioritized by managers in order to ensure positive behavioural intention of their visitors.

Table 5. Destination image scale adopted in the study (Adapted from Artuger and Cetinsoz, 2017)

1. Cognitive image
Natural Attraction: There are several natural parks in Zaghouan; Zaghouan offers much in terms of natural scenic beauty; Zaghouan has many historic sites and farms; Zaghouan has beautiful scenery.
Infrastructure: Zaghouan has good quality infrastructure (roads, airport, and/or utilities); Zaghouan has good quality accommodations; Zaghouan has a good network of tourist information. (Tourist Centers); Zaghouan has a good standard of hygiene and cleanliness.
Atmosphere: Zaghouan has a good nightlife; Zaghouan is an exotic destination; There are many sports and recreational opportunities in Zaghouan
Social Environment: Local community is friendly and helpful in Zaghouan; In general, Zaghouan is a safe place; Zaghouan is a clean and organized place
Value for Money: Zaghouan's accommodations are reasonably priced; Zaghouan is an inexpensive city; Zaghouan offers good value for my travel money.
2. Affective image
Zaghouan is a vivacious destination; Zaghouan is an exciting destination; Zaghouan is a pleasant destination; Zaghouan is an interesting destination.

CONCLUSION

Visitors' loyalty is crucial for any tourism destination. However, limited studies have addressed the influence of destination image on loyalty in the context of agro-tourism, particularly in counties such as Tunisia, despite the significance of agro-tourism to national economy. This study adds to knowledge and tourism industry in Tunisia by examining the moderation effect of visitors' experiences in the link between the two main components of destination image (affective and cognitive) and loyalty. Responses from 302 visitors at Zaghouan, Tunisia, collected via a pre-examined questionnaire and analyzed with SmartPLS SEM and Multi-group analysis, showed that destination image significantly and positively affected visitors' intention to revisit and recommend agrotourism destination to others.

Both dimensions of destination image: cognitive and affective were found to have significant influence on visitors' loyalty. These influences are significantly moderated by tourist's experiences. New visitors with new experiences wer found to have less influence on the link between image and loyalty than regular visitors. The findings provided some implications for tourism destination marketers and scholars with relation to the development of destination image to achieve visitor's loyalty in agro-tourism, particularly in developing countries, i.e. Tunisia.

Limitations and directions for future research

The findings of this research are related to the city of Zaghouan. The majority of study participants were Tunisian. Therefore, further studies could be undertaken to duplicate the current study on international visitors. Furthermore, the current research only tested Tunisian visitors, who had visited Zaghouan. Further research could also consider other factors that affect visitors' behavioural intention such as visitors satisfaction, perceived value, place attachment and novelty seeking. The study could also be duplicated on other countries contexts. The research did not examine the influence of respondents' profile (gender, education and family income) and travel characteristics (e.g. destination chosen, time of year) on the link between destination image and loyalty, so it would be interesting to add this type of variable in future research.

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