

The role of experience and trustworthiness on perception sustainable touristic destinations

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to analyze the influence of tourist experiences on the perception of the sustainability and trustworthiness of a destination. A questionnaire-based survey was conducted through Qualtrics to collect responses from a sample of 450 subjects with recent tourist experiences. The proposed model was assessed by PLS-SEM analysis. All the relationships were supported, demonstrating that perceiving a greater experience in the sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual aspects, as a whole, influences the economic, cultural, and sustainable aspects of a sustainable tourist destination, and these different aspects of sustainability have a direct effect on tourist destination trustworthiness. Thus, this research allows an understanding of the way in which tourist destinations should focus their policies and strategies to achieve a better experience for tourists and thus be perceived as a sustainable tourist destination and, as a consequence, trustworthy.

1. Introduction

There is a consensus that tourism has experienced great development worldwide (Dłużewska, 2019), and more specifically, sustainable tourism has been no exception (Tsai & Lo, 2020). While in its beginnings, sustainable tourism was centered on the relationships among tourism, the environment, and long-term development (Butler, 1991, 2003), focused mainly on ecology (Ruhanen et al., 2019), with time, it was possible to see that people had greater awareness of the care of the tourist destinations they were visiting. This includes the environmental perspective, as well as the culture and economy of the location, which connect with tourism and its inhabitants (Dłużewska, 2019).

This new scenario has made tourism management more complex. In fact, the new challenges contemplate achieving an equilibrium between the objectives aimed at the development of sustainable tourism and the long-term results (Bramwell et al., 2017). It is hoped that these effects will be long-lasting and significant for both tourists and the local

population (Buhalis, 2000).¹

From the perspective of the tourist, the actions carried out in the tourist destination must have repercussions on their own experience there. A tourist destination could avoid declaring itself sustainable, but if the experience of the tourist there is memorable (centered on sensorial, behavioral, intellectual, and affective aspects), the tourist might be more predisposed to positively perceive aspects of sustainable tourism in that tourist destination. The lived-through experience generates, in the tourist, positive associations through cognitive and affective aspects (Del Bosque & San Martín, 2008), as well as a greater identification with the tourist destination (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). The experience of the tourist could influence a more positive perception in terms of the economic, cultural, and environmental aspects of the tourist destination. On the other hand, the perception that a tourist destination is sustainable could, in turn, influence whether the destination is perceived as more trustworthy to visit, that is, more benevolent, with more integrity, and with the ability to develop tourism.

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¹ In terms of the effects of tourism on the local population, one of the most common objectives sought by authorities is to diminish the poverty of local communities (Flavián et al., 2005) by allowing the sale of their traditional products in places where tourists frequently circulate (Lee, 2013; Lepp, 2007).

While sustainable tourism has been analyzed from different perspectives, even to the point of speaking of sustainable tourism experiences (Steg et al., 2014; Lu et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2019; Breiby et al., 2020), there are scarce antecedents in the literature of studies that analyze how the experience lived through by the tourist could influence the perception of the tourist destination as sustainable. At the same time, there are no antecedents of how the perception of a tourist destination as sustainable could influence the perception of the tourist destination as more trustworthy to visit. In addition, the literature has not studied the understanding and perception of sustainability from tourists' perspectives (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2019; Lee & Xue, 2020; Lee et al., 2021). The literature has focused on the perception of sustainability from the perspectives of managers (Garay et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021) or residents (Lee et al., 2021; Lee & Jan 2019; Lee & Xue, 2020).

This study develops a model in which destination experiences predict the perception of tourist destination sustainability and the perception that the tourist destination is trustworthy to visit. This model will allow an understanding of the way in which tourist destinations should focus their policies and strategies to achieve a better experience for tourists and thus be perceived as a sustainable tourist destination and, as a consequence, trustworthy.

From the point of view of the contribution to the tourism literature, this study first seeks to broaden the knowledge in terms of experience, sustainability, and trustworthiness in the context of tourist destinations. These variables seldom have been analyzed in this context. Second, this study seeks a better understanding of the relationship experience sustainability, considering experience as a multidimensional construct made up of sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective dimensions, and sustainability represented by cultural, environmental, and economic aspects. While sustainable tourism studies that analyze tourists mostly assess their pro-environmental attitude or behavior (Lee & Xue, 2020), none has focused on the effects of experience on the sustainability dimensions. In addition, no study in the literature has examined the effects of each of the dimensions of sustainability on trustworthiness. Finally, this study seeks to extend the knowledge of each of the dimensions of experience, sustainability, and trustworthiness in the tourist context, as well as the relationships that could exist among some of these dimensions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Sustainable tourist destinations

Sustainability has not had the expected level of development, despite the efforts that have been made to define the guidelines for its implementation in the context of tourist destinations (see WCED, 1987). This topic has begun to be researched in more depth in recent years because of an increase in the number of people who consider sustainability as a travel decision variable (Xu et al., 2020). In fact, an increasing number of tourists are now focusing on whether the tourist destination, the means of transport, and the accommodations are sustainable, affecting the planet as little as possible (Budeanu, 2007; Lee et al., 2021).

Tourism sustainability is understood as an advantage of the benefits gained from tourism over the sociocultural, environmental, and economic costs related to tourism development (Butowski, 2019; Butler, 2005). From the point of view of perception, sustainability is the tourist's cognitive-affective evaluation of the sustainability policies implemented at a particular destination (Sanchez-Fernandez et al., 2019). There is no consensus about the conceptualization and measurement of sustainability (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016; Buckley, 2012). Some studies use sustainability items for particular geographical areas (Cernat & Gourdon, 2012; Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016). Other authors apply multidimensional approaches (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016), contemplating different numbers of dimensions. Similarly, as a general rule, three dimensions are repeated in most studies: (1) economic, (2)

cultural, and (3) environmental (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2021; Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2014; Spangenberg, 2002; United Nations World Tourism Organization, 1992). This research adopts the three-dimensional approach for measuring sustainability since most studies have followed this approximation (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016).

Economic sustainability considers the distribution of benefits to the entire population (Martínez et al., 2013), management of the tourist destination from the viewpoint of improving the standard of living of its inhabitants (Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2019), and prosperity throughout society (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017), such as increasing business and employment opportunities, developing local facilities/infrastructure, and promoting local products and services (Lee & Xue, 2020). Specifically, it considers whether the local authority makes investments for tourism, if the tourist destination has good basic infrastructure, if tourist services offer good value for the money, and if the benefits of tourism are greater than the costs (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016). According to Lee and Xue (2020), destination infrastructure is very relevant for tourist behavior with the destination, and at the same time, more efforts and investments are necessary to achieve sustainable development. In this sense, they suggest actions such as improving the infrastructures and facilities of destinations, promoting services and products to tourists, and offering more employment and business opportunities to residents in the tourism industry. At the same time, destination accessibility, tourism offerings and facilities, and prices of goods and services in the destination have been found to influence tourist sustainability perception (Chen & Phou, 2013; Lee & Xue, 2020; Qu et al., 2011; Wu, 2016). Although tourism contributes to the economic growth of destinations and produces negative effects, such as increases in the prices of goods and services, the economic benefits of tourism should be greater than the economic costs of tourism to contribute to sustainability (Lee & Xue, 2020).

Cultural sustainability is associated with the valuation and preservation of historical and cultural heritage and sociocultural resources such as festivities and traditions, which could accentuate the cultural interaction of the local community with tourists, producing cultural exchange in the tourism context (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016; Lee & Xue, 2020). More specifically, it refers to the preservation of traditions, conserving the authenticity of the culture of the communities at the tourist destination, and understanding the intercultural contributions and tolerance between different cultures (Martínez et al., 2013; Agyei-waah et al., 2017). This dimension is even concerned with the exploitation that could occur between different social classes and cultures (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017).

Environmental sustainability is focused on the maintenance of natural capital (Goodland, 1995; Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2014) and is associated with the level of pollution, noise, crowding of people (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016; Lee & Xue, 2020), biodiversity, protection of essential ecological processes, and use of renewable and nonrenewable resources (Martínez et al., 2013). The key factors are the management of solid waste, the use of energy, and the volume and treatment of water (Agyei-waah et al., 2017). In this sense, Lee and Xue (2020) suggest that destination managers should address pollution and congestion in the destination and preserve the destination's natural areas, such as parks, lakes, and rivers. Tourists' main environmental concerns are (1) environmental degradation risks, such as biodiversity loss, deforestation and soil erosion because of climate change, and water and land pollution (Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2014; Sheth et al., 2011), and (2) ecosystem resource constraints (Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2014; Speth, 2008).

2.2. Destination brand experience

Experience is one of the most explored and projected marketing variables in recent years (Andreini et al., 2018). In fact, its significance relates to important marketing variables, such as brand attachment,

brand love, and brand personality (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). However, research on its relationship with variables such as trustworthiness and the perception of sustainable destinations has been rather scarce.

Brand experience has been conceptualized as “sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments” (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53).

Experience is an important variable that encompasses the cognitive and affective evaluation that a tourist makes of a specific tourist destination (Bigné et al., 2005). Some studies have delved into the theory of structured experience (Duerden et al., 2015), others have studied it as a liminal phenomenon (Zhang & Xu, 2019), and still others have specifically studied it from a sensory point of view (Chua et al., 2019).

Experience in the tourism context is considered a multidimensional factor that goes beyond entertainment and hedonism (Cetin et al., 2019). In fact, the experience of a tourist considers those aspects they expect to find in the tourist destination that are different from those of daily life (peak tourist experience). This includes the services offered in the tourist destination (supporting consumer experience) (Quan & Wang, 2004), which do not necessarily focus on pleasure. An example of this is the free and basic breakfast that some hotels offer to attract more guests. This is how the tourist destination acts as a stimulus that allows this experience to be formed (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018) through the different pleasant and common interactions experienced by the tourist in the tourist destination (Mossberg, 2007).

These interactions form the experience, from an intellectual perspective, to which sensing, feeling, and doing are added (Brakus et al., 2009). From this perspective, the view of experience from Brakus et al. (2009) is the one that best meets the condition of being applied in all its magnitude to the tourist context (Bogicevic et al., 2019). This has been endorsed by different authors. On the one hand, there is the study developed by Barnes et al. (2014) and later by Kumar and Kaushik (2018), who applied the proposal of Brakus et al. (2009) to the tourist destination and called it Destination Brand Experience (DBE). On the other hand, there is the study developed by Nysveen et al. (2013). They analyzed the dimensions used in different studies, concluding that the scale proposed by Brakus et al. (2009) is the one that best meets all the dimensions proposed by other authors. Therefore, it is proposed that the main sources of the tourist experience should be their sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual experiences (Cetin et al., 2019).

Sensory experience is related to the most tangible aspects of the physical environment. It awakens aesthetics, pleasure, emotion, satisfaction, and the sense of beauty (Gentile et al., 2007). It is constructed from a strong impression on the visual or other sensory aspects of the consumer (Chan & Tung, 2019), such as the gustatory, auditory, olfactory, and tactile (Brakus et al., 2009). Therefore, this idea includes color, materials, shapes, lighting, music, temperature, and noise (Chua et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the affective experience is the ability of the tourist destination to leave a strong impression on the consumer and induce sensations and feelings (Brakus et al., 2009; Chan & Tung, 2019; Gentile et al., 2007). It is built from perceived benefits, aesthetics, ease of use, customization, and connectedness (Rose et al., 2012).

Affective experience is an exceptionally personal and changing experience from the client's point of view. A person can experience different qualities with the same product or service at different moments in time (Mascarenhas et al., 2006).

Behavioral experience is related to doing something. It involves clients' actions and behaviors (Brakus et al., 2009; Chan & Tung, 2019) that are motivated by the tourist's connection with certain attractions within the tourist destination. This experience is connected to people's values and beliefs regarding the consumption or use of a tourist offering (Gentile et al., 2007).

Finally, intellectual experience is related to cognitive experience and conscious mental processes. It involves the use of the tourist's creativity and problem solving (Rose et al., 2012). Therefore, it involves the

thoughts of tourists when they think of or find the tourist destination they were looking for (Brakus et al., 2009; Chan & Tung, 2019). This kind of experience can also lead the consumer to review their preconceived ideas about her or his knowledge regarding a specific offering (Gentile et al., 2007).

The experience the tourist lives through is very important when selecting a tourist destination to visit, especially when it is about a tourist destination that is sustainable (Hanna et al., 2018). More and more, there is environmental awareness that drives changes in the intentions of tourist travel, and for this reason the previous experience that the tourist has had in a specific tourist destination is essential (Chen et al., 2011).

In this relationship between the experience and perception of a sustainable destination, attitude and emotions play key roles. In fact, in both the interaction and in the moment of deciding to vacation in a sustainable destination, positive emotions, such as pride and happiness, are experienced (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). In this way, a positive attitude is generated that has an influence on having a better experience and, thus, perceiving the tourist destination as more sustainable (Zhang et al., 2019). As proposed by Liu et al. (2015), sustainable tourism is a final “experimental” product based on past experiences related to knowledge, feelings, and emotions that connect visitors with tourist destinations.

In this way, experience could influence the perception of a sustainable destination through each of the dimensions that make up the perception of a sustainable destination. From a cultural point of view, for example, the experience of walking, being submerged in scenery and discovering new places contributes to memorability (Gombrich, 1995; Porteous, 1996). A similar situation happens with authentic gastronomic experiences that contribute to the perception of a sustainable tourist destination from the point of view of cultural authenticity (Zhang et al., 2019). Furthermore, the experience of visiting cultural and historical attractions, monuments, festivals, arts, and traditions (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Lee & Xue, 2020) could influence cultural sustainability. In addition, the perception of the conservation of local culture and cultural and historical resources could affect cultural sustainability (Choi & Murray, 2010; Fong et al., 2017; Lee & Xue, 2020).

In contrast with other dimensions, the impact of experience on the cultural dimension could depend to a greater extent on the intrinsic characteristics of the community where the tourist experience is developed (Kastenholz et al., 2012).

From the environmental perspective, experience related to the care for and beauty of the natural surroundings (Butcher, 2002) influences the perception of a sustainable destination more significantly (Powell et al., 2012), especially in the case of tourists who have the inclination to protect the environment (Liu et al., 2015). When a tourist destination generates amazement (Lu et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2015) and can be experienced freely (Cavagnaro et al., 2018), the happiness generated by this type of experience could have an influence on sustainable, pro-environmental behavior (Nawijn & Biran, 2018). Furthermore, if tourists experience overcrowding in the tourism destination, they could have a low perception of environmental sustainability (Jin et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2021). In addition, if a destination reduces pollution, the tourist experience with the destination could influence the perception of environmental sustainability (Le et al., 2019).

Finally, the experience of the tourist destination contributed by the perception of the standard of living of its inhabitants (Sanchez-Fernandez et al., 2019), the infrastructure of tourism destinations (Chen & Phou, 2013; Lee & Xue, 2020; Qu et al., 2011; Wu, 2016), the relationship between the quality/price of goods and services (Chen & Phou, 2013; Lee & Xue, 2020; Qu et al., 2011; Wu, 2016), income distribution (Martinez et al., 2013), and the prosperity of the tourist destination (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017) could influence the perception of a tourist destination as economically sustainable.

Considering everything mentioned above, it is possible to propose the following:

H1. The better the experience that a tourist has in a tourist destination, the better his or her perception will be that the tourist destination is sustainable, by positively influencing its three dimensions: cultural, environmental, and economic.

H1a. The better the experience of the tourist in the tourist destination, the better his or her perception will be that the tourist destination is sustainable from a cultural point of view.

H1b. The better the experience of the tourist in the tourist destination, the better his or her perception will be that the tourist destination is sustainable from an environmental point of view.

H1c. The better the experience of the tourist in the tourist destination, the better his or her perception will be that the tourist destination is sustainable from an economic point of view.

2.3. Destination trustworthiness

Trustworthiness seldom has been studied in the context of tourist destinations, despite its importance for tourists with regard to making decisions. In fact, trustworthiness could act as an antecedent to diminish the uncertainty present in this decision process that involves a set of intangible offerings that need to be experienced to test their quality (Zeithaml, 1981).

Trustworthiness has been defined as “an objective characteristic of the trustee that makes him worthy of having the trustor’s trust placed in him” (Van Der Merwe & Puth, 2014, p. 143).

Trustworthiness is directly related to the reputation of the trustee (Sekhon et al., 2014). For trust to arise, the trustor carries out a subjective evaluation (Caldwell & Clapham, 2003) of the trustworthiness of the trustee (Flores & Solomon, 1998) based on a judgment that the trustor makes from the strategies, values, and prior behaviors of the trustee (Sekhon et al., 2014). However, this reputation is not always a guarantee of trustworthiness. In fact, even though the offering has attributes of trustworthiness, consumers could equally not manage to trust in this offering (Levi & Stoker, 2000).

Trustworthiness has been addressed in different study contexts. However, it has not been analyzed as one would expect in the context of tourist destinations. The few studies that have measured trustworthiness, considering it as a three-dimensional variable, are those developed by Yanbo et al. (2013). Studies in this sector have been mainly carried out from the point of view of trust (Liu et al., 2019). A case to be highlighted in the measurement of trustworthiness is that of Choi et al. (2016), who developed and validated trustworthiness measurement scale properties with more dimensions than are commonly used. In fact, they measured shopping destination trust with nine dimensions (i.e., benevolence, product, predictability, reputation, competence, integrity, transaction security, ability, and liking). Of these, they found “ability”, “integrity”, “benevolence”, and “liking” to be the major influential dimensions that drive shopping destination trust.

Both in tourism (Yanbo et al., 2013) and in the context of organizations (Mayer & Davis, 1999), trustworthiness has been considered a multidimensional variable that involves integrity, ability, and benevolence.

Integrity is related to the perception that the provider acts ethically, of good will, and fulfills its promises. Specifically, it is associated with honor, ethical requirements, keeping of the word, fair treatment, and values that guide behavior (Mayer & Davis, 1999). For Caldwell and Clapham (2003), the key elements are fairness, credibility, and character.

Ability is related to the perception that the supplier has the competencies to achieve what the counterpart needs. In concrete terms, it is focused on the perception that the counterpart has the capacity and the knowledge to do the work. Specifically, it is based on the reputation of being successful (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Mayer & Davis, 1999), that is, the capacity to achieve excellence and good results for the

counterpart. The key factors are skills, competencies, and expertise (Maxwell & Levesque, 2014).

Benevolence is related to the perception that the provider seeks the benefit of the user beyond his or her own interests or self-centered motives. Benevolence materializes in the search for solutions and concerns about wellbeing, where nothing damages one’s counterpart (Mayer & Davis, 1999). It is focused on long-term emotional relationships (Moloney, 2005). The key factors are intentions and the desire to do good (Caldwell & Clapham, 2003).

The perceptions of sustainability and trustworthiness are directly related. In fact, sustainability strategies directly influence the trustworthiness that companies want to show (Hengst et al., 2020). This could occur because sustainability is a value of organizations and could send signals that are positively evaluated by stakeholders (Greening & Turban, 2000).

In this vein, organizations that practice and/or generate reports of sustainability (Perloff, 2010; Hsueh, 2016) could be perceived as more trustworthy and thus positively influence clients, as well as current (Bauwens & Eyre, 2017) and future members of the organization (Viswesvaran et al., 1998).

From the point of view of the tourist, the cultural dimension that forms part of sustainability could have an important impact on the trustworthiness of the tourist destination. The perception that, in the tourist destination, there is concern for the preservation of the historical-cultural heritage (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016) and local traditions (Martínez et al., 2013; Agyeiwaah et al., 2017) could influence the perception of a more benevolent destination. At the same time, the perception that a tourist destination has the capacity to carry out these actions could have repercussions on the perception that the place has the ability to manage them (Lee & Xue, 2020). Finally, the fact that a fair deal is given to all stakeholders could be included in the perception that the tourist destination has more integrity (Caldwell & Clapham, 2003; Mayer & Davis, 1999).

From the environmental perspective, sustainability could have an impact on the dimension of trustworthiness ability, to the extent that it is perceived as having the capacity to maintain low levels of pollution (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016; Lee & Xue, 2020) and manages to have recycling as part of its culture (Martínez et al., 2013). For example, in Shanghai, the government since 1990 has inverted environmental protection in the city, increasing green spaces, parks, and roadside trees to manage pollution (Lee & Xue, 2020). A positive effect is supposed to increase the perception of environmental sustainability and thus increase the ability to do so (Lee & Xue, 2020). On the other hand, the environmental dimension could influence the perception of integrity, since it is perceived that the environmental actions done by the tourist destination are ethical and form part of the values that guide the behavior of the tourist destination (Mayer & Davis, 1999). In turn, the effect of the concern for the environment on the dimension of benevolence could manifest itself when it is perceived that this concern from the tourist destination is genuine and done with the desire to do good (Caldwell & Clapham, 2003; Lee & Xue, 2020). At the same time, this relationship is presented when it is perceived that tourist activities are carried out without affecting the environment and with the intention of conserving it for future generations (Budeanu, 2007; Lee & Xue, 2020).

Finally, economic sustainability could positively affect trustworthiness, to the extent that it is perceived that the authorities of the tourist destination have the ability to invest in basic infrastructure for tourism and generate more benefits than costs with the tourist activity (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016; Lee & Xue, 2020). In turn, it will be perceived as more benevolent to the extent that the tourist destination is capable of distributing the benefits equally (Martínez et al., 2013) and generating prosperity for all of its population (Lee & Xue, 2020; Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017). In terms of the impact of the economic factor on integrity, this could materialize when the tourists perceive that the tourist destination fulfills its promises, both in relation to the investments made in tourism and the equal distribution among the inhabitants of the benefits

generated by this activity. Thus, economic sustainability could positively affect the perception of tourist destination trustworthiness. Considering all of the aforementioned information, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. To the extent that a tourist has a more positive perception of the tourist destination, from cultural, environmental, and economic viewpoints, the better his or her perception will be of the trustworthiness of the tourist destination.

H2a. To the extent that a tourist has a more positive perception of the tourist destination from a cultural viewpoint, the better her or his perception will be of the trustworthiness of the destination.

H2b. To the extent that a tourist has a more positive perception of the tourist destination from the three environmental viewpoints, the better his or her perception will be of the trustworthiness of the destination.

H2c. To the extent that a tourist has a more positive perception of the tourist destination from the three economic viewpoints, the better her or his perception will be of the trustworthiness of the destination.

Based on the hypotheses presented here, which are derived from the findings of previous research, this study proposes the following conceptual model (see Fig. 1).

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

The interviews were conducted through Qualtrics and sent to different databases during the months of June and September 2019. The final questionnaire was sent to individuals in Latin American countries, primarily Chile and Ecuador. Despite the existence of some previous studies related to consumer environmental behavior in the tourism context (Penagos-Londoño et al., 2021), the literature still highlights the scarcity of knowledge relating to consumer environmental behavior in developing countries in the tourism context (Penagos-Londoño et al., 2021; Torres-Moraga et al., 2021). In addition, most of the studies in developing countries have been carried out in Asia and Africa, while destinations in South America have gone unnoticed (Bianchi et al., 2017).

Both countries, Chile and Ecuador, have very similar values for Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2021). Other studies have also used a pooled sample from both countries in the past (Torres-Moraga et al., 2021)”. Before analyzing the reliability and validity of the scales of measurement, we proved that group differences in the model estimated do not result from the differences in meanings of the latent variables across groups. The measurement invariance of the composite models (MICOM) procedure was applied (Henseler et al., 2016) through the permutation test (1000 permutations; stop criterion = 7). Full

measurement invariance is confirmed (configural invariance, compositional invariance and equal mean values and variances), which supports the pooled data analysis.

Atypical cases, repeated answers, and incomplete questionnaires were controlled. A sample of 450 valid cases was generated. The respondents had to be at least 16 years of age and had to have gone on vacation during the last two years (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018). After showing their consent according to the ethical norms of our institution, participants were asked to respond to a survey regarding the last tourist destination they had visited (Marinao et al., 2017). In the online questionnaire, the participants were asked to check again the age, the name of the last destination visited in the past two years, and they were asked to specify how many trips they had been on the last two years. The participants indicated a mean of almost 5 destinations visited in the last two years. Of the last tourist destination visited, Ecuador was the most visited, which represented approximately 33%. The next most visited tourist destination was Chile, with approximately 28%, and in the third position were other American countries such as México, Perú, Argentina, United States (Table 1).

The motive of their trip to this place had to be tourism. In the case of the participant who was on vacation in that moment, he or she could respond about this tourist destination only if his or her trip was about to end (Zhang & Xu, 2019).

The items were drafted as declarative statements (no questions were used as items) and worded carefully to ensure that all items could be understood and responded to by all interviewees. The response instrument was a seven-point Likert scale, and those surveyed graded the answers from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

Of this sample, the average age of the participants was 31 years; 46% (207 individuals) were women, and 54% (243 individuals) were men. A total of 15.8% (71 individuals) had secondary education, 8% (36 individuals) had technical education, 57.7% (260 individuals) had university education, 17.6% (79 individuals) had a master’s degree, and 0.9% (4 individuals) had a doctorate. Twenty-nine percent (131 individuals) were either students or unemployed, 18% (81 individuals) had nonspecialized employment, and 53% (238 individuals) had specialized employment.

Table 1
Last tourist destinations visited.

Tourist Destinations Visited	Number	%
Ecuador	147	32.67%
Chile	124	27.57%
Other American countries	123	27.33%
European countries	16	3.54%
Other countries	40	8.89%
Total 450		100%

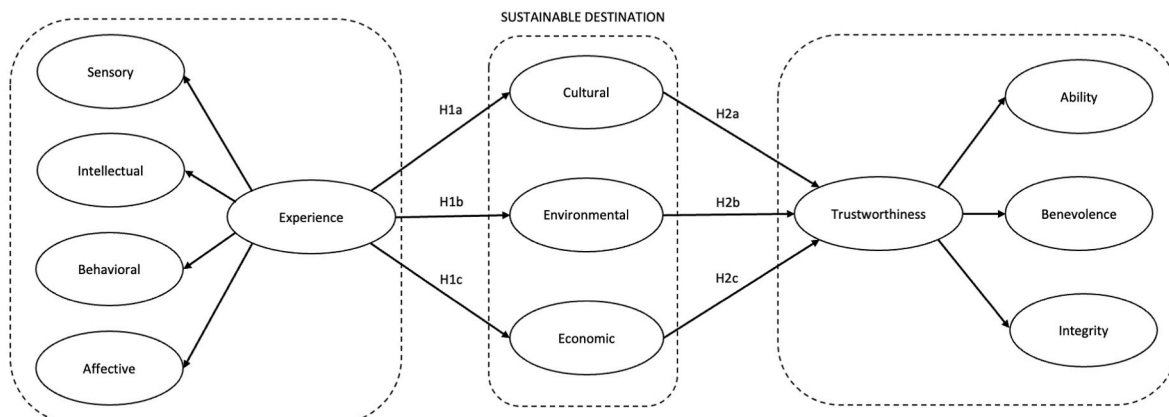


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

3.2. Measures

The following work of previous researchers served as the basis for the development of the scales: in the case of the destination sustainability dimensions (three dimensions), the works of Sanchez-Fernandez et al. (2019) and Iniesta-Bonillo et al. (2016); for the destination brand experience dimensions (four dimensions), the studies of Barnes et al. (2014) and Kumar and Kaushik (2018) (both scales adapted from Brakus et al., 2009); and for the trustworthiness dimensions (three dimensions), Mayer and Davis (1999) and Baer et al. (2018).

4. Results

The procedure employed follows the seven-step structure of confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) (Hair, Howard, & Nitzl, 2020) to assess the measurement quality by applying partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and considers the specification of a high-order reflective-reflective construct (Sarstedt et al., 2019): (1) the factor loadings were all significant and greater than 0.7, (2) the value of the square of the individual loadings of the indicators was greater than 0.77 in all cases, (3) the Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR) indicators were also greater than 0.7 in all cases, (4) convergent validity was analyzed using average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.5, (5) the indicators had a heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations value lower than 0.85, (6) nomological validity was tested by analyzing the cross-loadings and assessing the correlations of the constructs with the nomological network, and (7) predictive validity was analyzed by calculating Stone-Geisser's Q² value and the Q^{2predict}. The economic and cultural constructs have large predictive accuracy. In addition, to examine whether multicollinearity is an issue, we conducted a variance influence factor (VIF) analysis. The VIF value for all cases was less than 1.6 (<3) (Hair et al., 2019); thus, we can conclude that multicollinearity is not present. These data are available in Table 2.

According to Sarstedt et al. (2019), the reliability and validity of high-order constructs are determined through their relationship with low-order constructs. We calculated the coefficients manually, following the recommendations, for the reliability (loads are significant, composite reliability, Cronbach's α and metric reliability ρ_A above .707) and the convergent (AVE > .5) and the discriminant validity (HTMT < .85) that finally support the model's predictive power.

In terms of the contrast of the hypotheses, Table 3 shows the standardized coefficients and their significance. All the hypotheses are supported. In the same vein, Fig. 2 includes the factorial loads of the relationships among all of the constructs of the model. According to the limits established by Benitez et al. (2020), the magnitude of the effect of the environment on trustworthiness is weak, the effect of the economic construct on trustworthiness is strong, and the rest of the effects are medium. These results are typical in research into social sciences, where it is unusual and unlikely that the constructs have a large effect size in the

Table 2
Evaluation of the measurement model. ρ_C = Composite reliability; ρ_A=Dijkstra-Henseler's ρ_A.

Construct	Cronbach's α	ρ _A	ρ _C	AVE	Factorial loads
Sensory	.930	.932	.955	.877	.929*** - .947***
Intellectual	.820	.824	.893	.736	.842*** - .878***
Behavioural	.807	.849	.885	.721	.737*** - .903***
Affective	.891	.892	.933	.822	.884*** - .938***
Economic	.748	.749	.857	.667	.762*** - .870***
Cultural	.889	.893	.931	.818	.883*** - .923***
Environmental	.771	.780	.868	.688	.753*** - .879***
Ability	.920	.923	.940	.759	.809*** - .909***
Benevolence	.880	.882	.918	.736	.835*** - .894***
Integrity	.905	.908	.929	.724	.802*** - .893***
Experience	.938	.943	.947	.759	–
Trustworthiness	.954	.955	.959	.627	–

Note: Italics used for higher-order construct values.

Table 3
PLS-SEM results.

Hypothesis Testing	Direct Effects	Path	f ²	R ²	Q ²	SRMR
H1a	Experience → Cultural	.383***	.172			
H1b	Experience → Environ	.431***	.228			
H1c	Experience → Economic	.432***	.229			
H2a	Cultural → Trustworthiness	.264***	.126			
H2b	Environ → Trustworthiness	.226***	.097			
H2c	Economic → Trustworthiness	.464***	.355			
Economic				.186	.112	
Cultural				.147	.118	
Environmental				.186	.124	
Trustworthiness				.626	.379	
Common factor model						.045

Note: Bootstrapping = 5000. *ρ < 0.10; **ρ < 0.05; ***ρ < 0.01.

model (Benitez et al., 2020, p. 11). The degree of variation of the variance of the trustworthiness construct is very high (R² = 0.626), which shows the high explicative capacity of the model.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This research develops a theoretical model that relates the experience lived through by the tourist with the perception of sustainability of the destination and with the perception that the tourist destination is trustworthy to visit. Here, any tourist destination the tourist has visited within the last two years is considered. This approach is due to the desire to show how the experience had by a tourist affects the perception of whether a tourist destination is sustainable, independent of whether the tourist destination declares itself sustainable or not.

This study extends previous research in different ways. First, the study demonstrates that the sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective aspects are representative dimensions of the general concept of perceived destination experience, in line with previous research that supports the multidimensionality of this construct (Brakus et al., 2009). Second, the theoretical model is based upon a sustainability scale consisting of three aspects, cultural, environmental, and economic, and few studies examine the three aspects together (Iaquinto, 2015; Lee et al., 2021). However, although studies (Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2016) adopt the variable sustainability as a multidimensional construct made up of cultural, environmental, and economic aspects, this is the first study to analyze the relationships among the three dimensions of sustainability and their antecedents (experiences) and the influence of the three dimensions of sustainability on the perception of tourist trustworthiness. This is relevant because of the extent to which this study demonstrates how sustainability dimensions work in the relationship between destination experience and trustworthiness. Third, this is the first study to analyze the relationship between perceived destination experience and perceived sustainability. This is important because the extent to which perceived destination experience measured by sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective dimensions contributes positively to each dimension of sustainability. Finally, this is the first study to examine the relationship between perceived destination sustainability and perceived trustworthiness to visit. Thus, this work extends the research stream on the outcomes of perceived sustainability, demonstrating how each dimension of sustainability contributes positively to tourist destination trustworthiness.

The results did, in fact, show that the relationship experience sustainability is highly significant, supported by the fact that the experience directly and significantly affects each of the three components of the perception of a sustainable destination. That is, perceiving a better experience in sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual aspects,

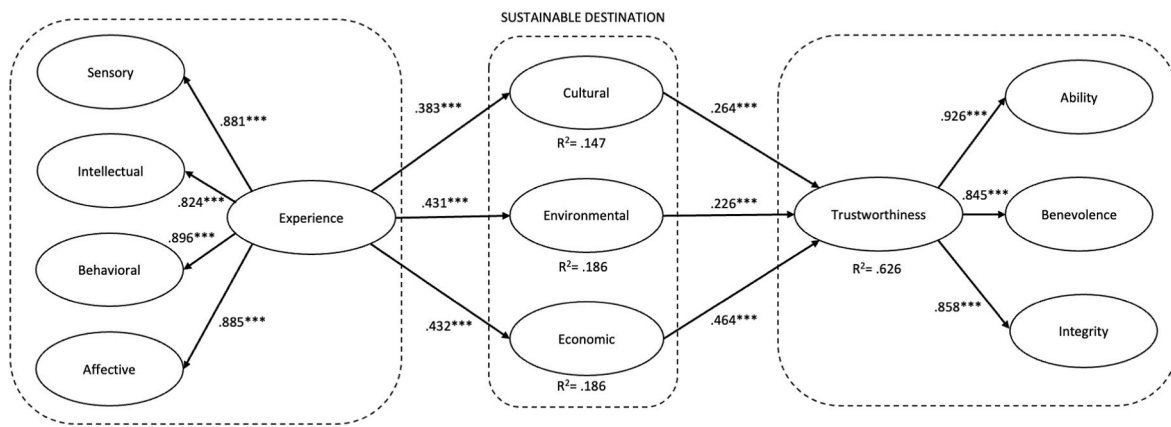


Fig. 2. Path coefficients and R square of estimated structural model

*** significant to level 0.01

together, influences the economic, cultural, and environmental aspects of a sustainable tourist destination. In this vein, the destination experience has a greater influence on the economic dimension, followed by the environmental and cultural dimensions (Fig. 2).

This result implies that the better the experience perceived by the tourist is, the better his or her attitude will be (Holbrook & Batra, 1987) toward perceiving positive associations (Del Bosque & San Martín, 2008) in relation to the sustainability of a tourist destination. In fact, tourists in these conditions will place more attention on elements that are not considered in habitual situations, such as basic infrastructure, the quality-price relationship of services, environmental and acoustic pollution and acceptable levels of overcrowding in tourist destinations (Jin et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2021), the perception of the authenticity of tourism destinations (Lee et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019), and the valuation and preservation of historical heritage.

On the other hand, we analyzed how this perception that the tourist destination is more sustainable influences the perception that the place is trustworthy. In this case, the results showed that this relationship is direct and highly significant. In fact, it was possible to observe that the economic, cultural, and environmental factors of a sustainable tourist destination influence the perception that the tourist destination is trustworthy or, in other words, has greater integrity, ability, and benevolence. The economic dimension was the strongest predictor of trustworthiness, followed by the cultural and environmental dimensions (Fig. 2). The relevance of the dimensions obtained confirms the results obtained by Cottrell et al. (2013).

This finding shows, for example, that the perception that the services offered in the tourist destination are reasonably priced for the quality that they offer, that a tourist destination values its historic heritage, and that a tourist destination maintains acceptable levels of pollution influence the perception of the tourist destination as more trustworthy.

The leading role of the economic dimension in these results is found in direct relationship with that proposed by MacKenzie and Gannon (2019) and Cottrell et al. (2013), in the sense that the economic aspects are an important part of the antecedents that are necessary to develop sustainable tourism. Additionally, this dimension contains the most tangible aspects that tourists can perceive when visiting a tourist destination (for example, investment in tourism, infrastructure, and the price-quality relationship of the services).

It is necessary to mention that, from the viewpoint of the contribution to the literature, this study first broadens our knowledge by presenting a model that integrates two seldomly analyzed variables in the tourist context. In fact, both experience and trustworthiness are very relevant variables within the marketing and analysis of organizations. However, antecedents of studies in tourism do not exist that consider both variables in the same analysis.

On the other hand, this study allows us to explore with more depth

the effect of the experience of the tourist on the perceived sustainability of the tourist destination. This analysis can contribute to the knowledge of the importance of this relationship but considers them as two independent variables and not as one and the same, as can be found in some studies in the tourism context (e.g., Lu et al., 2017; Steg et al., 2014).

Last but not least, from the point of view of each of the components of experience, sustainability, and trustworthiness, this study contributes to our knowledge by providing some additional antecedents that allow for an understanding of the role that each plays, separately and together, in tourism marketing.

6. Managerial implications

The findings of this study allow us to visualize a set of actions that the authorities that manage tourist destinations, as well as the organizations and companies that form parts of it, could consider for the tourist destination to be perceived as more sustainable and thus a more trustworthy place to visit.

The success of these efforts should be part of a series of strategies and policies coming from the authorities and should be designed together with the relevant stakeholders of the community (Duerden et al., 2015). In this way, it would be possible to achieve the commitment of all involved to face the challenge of generating consistent actions and having them perceived as such by the tourists.

As mentioned at the beginning of this study, the tourist destination does not necessarily need to “declare itself” as sustainable to be perceived as such, but rather needs a series of coordinated actions that make the visit a great experience for the tourist, from the sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective points of view.

For this, it is necessary for the authorities, together with the service companies and the inhabitants, to be concerned that their actions, whatever they may be, do not cause any type of negative sensation in the tourists. In contrast, from the viewpoint of urban space, it is expected that streets and parks will be clean, well decorated, and free from bad smells and annoying sounds. Furthermore, access to tourist attractions, as well as services, should be as efficient as possible. All of this must include sufficient security personnel, to keep the tourists and the inhabitants of the place safe.

From the point of view of service companies, they should prioritize a good delivery of services, pleasant aromas, and decoration that is both harmonious and contains elements characteristic of the place. Additionally, they should design spaces that avoid crowding of people, which is a problem for tourists (Lee & Xue, 2020), and that have memorable music that evokes the attractions and landscapes of the tourist destination. In this sense, it is recommended to employ procedures to redirect tourists to less crowded places in the destination, such as creating real-time crowd-tracking mobile applications that tourists can use while

visiting the destination (Lee & Xue, 2020). The idea is to reduce tourists' inconvenience while visiting the destination (Jaapar et al., 2017; Lee & Xue, 2020).

All of this will mean that the tourist can activate all of his or her senses in a positive way through good service, as well as pleasant flavors, sounds, and sights. At the same time, it is expected that these actions will stimulate the tourist's curiosity and make him or her think positively, allowing emotions and feelings to flourish and thus inspire him or her to do new things in life and even improve the place that he or she is visiting.

On the other hand, to be perceived as a trustworthy place to visit, the authorities should center their concern on those actions that allow the place to be perceived as sustainable from the economic, environmental, and cultural points of view. They should focus on making a good basic infrastructure available for tourism in which the benefits obtained from it are greater than the costs involved, and at the same time the services offered in the tourist destination should have a good quality-price relationship. In addition, they should focus on maintaining good conditions in the historical-cultural heritage and attractions, including traditional festivals and celebrations that preserve the customs and traditions of the place and conserve the authenticity of the place. Finally, they should be concerned about the levels of pollution, recycling, and crowding of people in public places so that they can be enjoyed with tranquility and without a sensation of insecurity.

7. Limitations and further research

While this research makes important contributions, we recognize

some limitations that must be taken into account with regard to interpreting the results. First, it must be considered that this study deals with a small sample and includes only Spanish-speaking people. For this reason, care must be taken when extrapolating these results to samples composed of people from other cultures.

Second, to interpret the results in relation to the effect of the experience of the tourist on the perception of a sustainable tourist destination, it is necessary to consider that other variables could be involved, such as familiarity and the reputation of the tourist destination, as well as cognitive and emotional attributes (Marinao et al., 2017). Thus, it is suggested that future research include this type of independent variable to achieve a more complete interpretation of how the perception of the sustainable tourist destination is formed.

On the other hand, exploring the causal relationships included in this study with other moderators is suggested. For example, this can be done by the type of destination (sun-beach, mountain, culture, gastronomy, etc.) or by the type of companion (friends versus family).

Additionally, it would be interesting to extend this study from the perspective of the inhabitants of the place; that is, how they contribute, with their attitudes and actions, to a better experience in the tourist destination and thus to the destination being perceived as more sustainable, for example, through the decoration of the façades of their houses, visible recycling activities, their treatment of tourists, valuing of tourism, and the predisposition to receive more tourists in the future.

Finally, in future studies, it would be possible to research how art fairs and the sales of local handcrafts (sales in conventional shops versus at art fairs) contribute to the experience of tourists and sustainable tourism.

Appendix

Destination brand experience

Sensory

This destination makes a strong impression on my senses, visually and in other ways.

I find this destination interesting in a sensory way.

This destination appeals to my senses.

Affective

This destination induces feelings and sentiments.

I have strong emotions for this destination.

This destination is an emotional area.

Behavioural

I engage in physical activities and behaviours when I am in this destination.

This destination gives me bodily experiences.

This destination is activity oriented.

Intellectual

I engage in a lot of thinking when I am in this destination.

This destination makes me think.

This destination stimulates my curiosity and problem-solving.

Sustainable tourist destinations

Environmental

I think the level of pollution in the municipal area is acceptable

I think odours in the municipal area are acceptable

I think crowds are acceptable even at the height of the tourist season

Cultural

I think the heritage resources (monuments, etc.) in the municipal area are valued

I think the cultural resources (festivities, traditions etc.) in the municipal area are valued

I think that they are conserving local culture, cultural and heritage resources, and authenticity due to tourist activity

Economic

I have observed that the municipal area is investing to attract tourists

I consider that the municipal area has good basic infrastructure

I consider that there is a good relationship between quality/price of tourist services in the destination

I think that the economic benefits of tourism in the municipal area are greater than the economic costs of tourism

Destination trustworthiness

Ability

The destination is very capable of developing tourist activities

The destination is known to be successful at tourist activities

In the destination people have a lot of knowledge about how to develop tourist activities

The destination is known to be successful in the tourism activities developed

(continued on next page)

(continued)

Destination brand experience

I feel very confident about how competent they are in the tourist destination regarding the tourist activities developed
Most people working in the destination are well qualified in tourism

Benevolence

People at the destination are very concerned about my welfare
People at the destination would not knowingly do anything to hurt me
My needs and desires are very important to people at the destination
People at the destination really look out for what is important to the tourist
People at the destination will go out of their way to help the tourist
People at the destination take into account the repercussions that their actions could have on the tourist.

Integrity

I do not doubt that in the destination they will keep their word regarding tourism.
People at the destination have a strong sense of justice regarding tourism
I like the values of the people in the destination
People at the destination try hard to be fair in dealings with others
The actions and behaviours of people at the destination are consistent

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