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## **Destination image gap and its predictive effect on loyalty of first time German visitors to Portugal**

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Master in Hospitality and Tourism Management

Supervisor:

Doutor, Nelson Jorge Campos Ramalho, Associate Prof., Iscte – University  
institute of Lisbon

December 2020



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**BUSINESS  
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Marketing, Operations, and General Management Department

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## Abstract

In explaining destination loyalty and satisfaction with destination image, there is plenty of research focusing on destination image before travelling, as well as on image gained from the experience itself. However, it is reasonable to infer that both satisfaction and loyalty might be better understood as the interplay between both images as only with both can one ascertain whether an expectation was realistic or not. So, image gap can be an informative variable in explaining both destination satisfaction and loyalty. To test whether image gap has incremental validity, i.e. if it explains unique variance above and beyond expected image, this study tests, with a sample of 179 German tourists, first time visitors in Portugal, a conceptual model comprehending four hypotheses pertaining to the mediation of satisfaction in the relation between expected image and loyalty, as well as the predictive capability of image gap while controlling for expected image. Findings show that image gap adds unique variance to the model, thus suggesting that it can be an important variable for future destination loyalty models.

**Keywords:** Destination image, Image gap, Destination satisfaction, Destination loyalty.

**JEL Classification System:** L83, M39,

## Resumo

Têm sido realizados muitos trabalhos de investigação focados na imagem de destino antes da viagem, bem como na imagem obtida através da experiência de viajar, como os elementos fundamentais para explicar a fidelização a um destino e a satisfação. No entanto, é razoável inferir que tanto a satisfação como a fidelização poderão ser melhor compreendidas considerando a interacção entre ambas as imagens, uma vez que apenas com ambas é possível confirmar se uma expectativa era realista ou não. Desta forma, o “gap” de imagem pode ser tomado como uma variável informativa para explicar tanto a satisfação como a lealdade com o destino. Por forma a testar se o “gap” de imagem tem validade incremental, i.e., se explica a variância única acima e para além da imagem esperada, este estudo testa, com uma amostra de 179 turistas alemães que visitaram Portugal pela primeira vez, um modelo conceptual compreendendo quatro hipóteses relativas à mediação da satisfação na relação entre a imagem esperada e a fidelidade, bem como a capacidade preditiva do “gap” de imagem controlando a imagem esperada. Os resultados mostram que o “gap” de imagem atribui uma variância única ao modelo, sugerindo, assim, que pode ser uma variável importante para futuros modelos de fidelidade de destino.

**Palavras-chave:** Imagem de destino, “Gap” de imagem, Satisfação com o destino, Fidelidade com o destino

**Sistema de classificação JEL:** L83, M39, xxx





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## List of abbreviations

AMOS – Analysis of Momentum Structures

AVE - Average

CFI – Comparative Fit Index

EFA – Exploratory Factor Analysis

EU – European Union

e-WOM – electronic Word-of-mouth

IA – Image After

IB – Image Before

IBM – International Business Machines Corporation

IC – Information Channels

INE – Instituto Nacional de Estadística

KMO – Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

MSA – Measure Sample Adequacy

RMSEA – Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

sd – Standard deviation

SEM – Structural Equations Modelling

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

SRMR – Standardised Root Mean Residual

WOM – Word-of-mouth



# 1 Introduction

Customer loyalty is one of the most valued assets for organizations, as it offers higher forecast accuracy as regards the stability of demand, as well as the consolidation of market share (McKercher & Guillet, 2011). More than being able to attract customers, it is important that the consumer experience is positive to the point of improving the chances of continuing the relation (visitor's return), in addition to spreading positive word-of-mouth (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). This is of special importance for industries characterized by strong competition, high number of players, and where improving and innovating service does not require a long time of investment or a large amount of funding. Such is the case in the hospitality and tourism industry, where customers have a vast array of alternatives, with competitive pricing and intrinsically a high potential for new experience due to not repeating the consumption (Alegre & Garau, 2010).

Amongst the factors that have been identified to explain customer loyalty in hospitality and tourism, one can highlight customer satisfaction (Bansal & Taylor, 2002; Kosak, 2003), building trust that the service is consistently provided with the same quality (Balaji, 2015), as well as the cognitive and affective image of service quality at destination, resources made available to the visitor, and guarantees concerning e.g. security, among others (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Dann, 1996; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Madden et al., 2016; Pereira, 2015). It is therefore important to ensure that incoming tourists develop not only a positive destination image, but also that this image is not truly different from reality, in the sense that potential tourists build a realistic positive expectation of the destination. Investing on promoting an unrealistic positive destination image may lead to a higher probability of first visitors but may hamper future prospects of return and also decrease positive word-of-mouth (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

The recent meta-analysis conducted by Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020) found numerous studies focused on conceiving or explaining destination image. These authors have developed multifactorial complex models that are reasonably good in explaining destination image, but most place the time focus on destination image before the experience (e.g. Gursoy & McCleary, 2004) although acknowledging that after consumer experience is also important (Ferrer-Rosell et al., 2020). Both options are valid but, as Martín-Santana et al. (2017) stated, there is a scarcity of studies that consider image gap, i.e. how the destination image after experience may differ from the one held before the visit. This is rather surprising as satisfaction is known to occur when experiences surpasses expectations (Kim & Perdue, 2011). Albeit image gap relationship with destination loyalty is now empirically supported (e.g. Martín-Santana et al., 2017), it is yet unknown to which extent image gap adds to expected image in its capacity to explain behavioral intention, e.g. intention to return or positive word-of-mouth. We believe this is a significant research gap worth exploring.

For such purpose, this study will review existent literature starting by offering a comprehensive picture of tourism in Portugal, to explain destination loyalty and satisfaction, as well as destination image. These variables conflate into a conceptual model where customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between destination image and destination loyalty, taking into consideration both the expected destination image and destination image gap. The methods deployed for data collection and analysis are then detailed. The results are shown with an emphasis on the novel hypothesis pertaining to the incremental validity of image gap, i.e. to which extent image gap explains unique variance on destination loyalty after controlling for expected image. Findings are then discussed at the light of theory and both limitations acknowledged and suggestions for future research offered.



## 2 Literature review

### 2.1. Tourism in Portugal: The bet on destination loyalty

For the last years, the tourism industry in Portugal has grown and reached the top among the hottest tourism destinations worldwide, having won numerous awards across all areas of tourism. In 2019 alone, Portugal won prizes such as the best city break destination (Lisbon), the world's leading golf & villa resort (Dunas Douradas Beach Club), the world's leading adventure tourist attraction (Passadiços do Paiva) and, most importantly, the prize for the world's leading destination in 2019 (WTA, 2019). In 2020, within Europe, Portugal has received 21 awards, namely: Europe's leading adventure tourism destination (Azores Islands), Europe's leading island destination (Madeira Islands), Europe's leading beach destination (The Algarve), Europe's leading luxury hotel (Belmond Reid's Palace), Europe's leading wine region hotel (L'AND Vineyards), Europe's leading cruise destination and cruise port (Lisbon and Lisbon Cruise Port) and two of the most important awards, Europe's leading destination and, in conjuncture with Spain, Europe's Responsible Tourism Award (Dark Sky Alqueva), among several others. The results for the world's awards 2020 had not been divulged by the time of writing of this thesis.

In 2019, it is estimated that the number of tourist arrivals to Portugal was as high as 24.6 million, corresponding to a growth of 7.9% over the previous year. This is even higher than the growth seen in 2018, which was 7.5%. The main tourism markets are Spain, the UK (United Kingdom), France, Germany and Brazil (INE, 2020; Serra, Correia, & Rodrigues, 2014). In the past couple of years, Spain held its position as the main inbound market provider, growing 8.2% and providing around 26.1% of the total number of tourist arrivals. Tourists from the UK and France increased by 7.6% and 2.1% respectively. The German market has neither grown nor decreased, recording a nil variation in 2019 and maintaining its 7.9% of the total market share between both years, while the Brazilian market grew by 13.9%, making up for 5.5% of the total arrivals.

Over the past years, Portugal has diversified from being mainly a beach destination, elevating itself to a destination with numerous attributes, such as heritage and cultural tourism, adventure and gastronomical tourism. This has been already noticed more than 5 years ago, when Serra, Correia, and Rodrigues (2014) reported an observable decrease in the Algarve of 7%, conversely to locations like the North, the Centre or the Azores Islands that have increased respectively by 2%, 4% and 9%.

According to INE (2020), "leisure, recreation or vacation" has been the main motivation to travel to Portugal in 2019, explaining 49.4% (12.1 million) of the total trips, followed by "visits to relatives or friends", accounting for 37.8% (9.2 million) of the trips and finally "professional or business" motives,

with 8.2% (2.0 million) of the total share. The average stay in 2019 were 2.64 nights, having decreased 2.9% from the value of 2018.

This growth in the sector naturally translated into a huge impact on the country's economy, and tourism is now one of its main drivers, making up 8.7% (Turismo de Portugal, 2020) of the country's gross domestic product (INE, 2020). With this growth in demand for tourism in Portugal, there was a need to strengthen, improve and multiply the tourism facilities around the country, leading to the opening of new facilities such as new hotels or hostels, new restaurants or new bus routes to ease the holiday-maker's flow. Furthermore, many destinations greatly invested in public infrastructure to give the destinations a clean look and to enhance or develop their personalities (Berens, 1999; Balakrishnan, 2008; Souiden, Ladhari, & Chiadmi, 2017; Vinyals-Mirabent, Kavaratzis, & Fernández-Cavia, 2019), to which Portugal was no exception. This also contributed to the creation of new employment opportunities for locals, further helping the national economy.

Regarding the overnight stays, 70.2 million (90.2%) were concentrated in tourist accommodation establishments, such as hotels, local accommodation or rural tourism, of which 58.0 million were registered at hotels. The next most chosen options were camping sites, with 6.9 million (8.9%) and holiday camps or youth hostels, with 2.0 million (0.9%) (INE 2020).

In 2019, Germany was the 4<sup>th</sup> biggest economy on a global level, and the biggest one in the European Union (EU). According to Turismo de Portugal (2020) it is the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest touristic outbound market and the largest in the EU, with 109 million travels made by Germans in the previous year. Regarding spending in foreign countries, Germans hold the 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the world and the 1<sup>st</sup> in the EU, and their preferred reason to travel is recreational vacations (72.5%), having spent an average of 8.9 days per trip outside of their country. Therefore, it is of great benefit for any country to possess a compatible image that matches the German tourists' desires and ideas when thinking about holiday making.

According to the same source, Portugal is not a prime market for German tourists, as it does not appear amongst the 10 most desired destinations by Germans. This is mainly due to the fact that nearly 45% of German tourists prefer to travel by car when visiting foreign countries, meaning that bordering countries benefit most of this market. Nevertheless, 44.7% of Germans travel by plane, allowing for journeys of greater distance, making Portugal a viable, low cost option among competitors with similar characteristics.

In 2019, the German market was responsible for the arrival of 1.5 million tourists in Portugal, accounting for 5.9 million overnight stays and €1983.3 million income (10.8% of total income from tourism).

In an extensive empirical study conducted in all Portuguese airports in 2012, Correia et al. (2017) report a sample of over 4500 repeat tourists in the previous consecutive couple of years, where 35%

of the sample was of German origin. Per se, this finding may suggest that German tourists tend to repeat visit destinations.

Like any business, tourism markets benefit from customer loyalty and Portugal has been betting on creating conditions to favour destination loyalty as some indicators seem to suggest. This objective has been explicitly made in the Strategic Plan 2027 made by Turismo de Portugal (2017), that not only elected the German market as a strategic one, as it also stated the need to establish customer loyalty mechanisms targeting new German visitors.

## **2.2. Destination loyalty and satisfaction**

Customer loyalty is defined as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service provider consistently in the future (...) despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (Oliver, 1997, p. 392). It has been linked to two behaviors, expressing loyalty as an intention of returning to a destination or reusing a service, as well as the active promotion of that experience by word-of-mouth (WOM) (Chi & Qu, 2008; Ozdemir et al., 2012; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Yoon & Uysal, 2005), both online and offline (in person). One cannot study destination loyalty without reference to customer satisfaction.

Tourist or customer satisfaction is defined as an evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between expectations of the destination before the visit and the actual perception of the destination’s different attributes (Chen, 2010; Tse & Wilton, 1988). In other words, it is the outcome of a person’s feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing the product and service quality that a customer expected to receive to the perceived performance (or outcome) of the destination (Kim et al., 2013; Kotler, 2000).

Satisfaction, resulting from the positive perception of the destination, will bring about an affection toward it, which, in turn, will lead to a positive diffusion and promotion of the destination. This active promotion of the destination is called word-of-mouth (WOM), which is defined as “informal advice shared between people about goods, services and social issues” (East et al., 2007; Huang et al., 2011). WOM is both capable to persuade a customer’s behaviour and attitude (Huang et al., 2011) and to generate a ripple effect able to complement and further the influence of advertising (Hogan et al., 2004). Therefore, it is one of the biggest influencers in captivating potential tourists to visiting a destination. According to research on destination loyalty, satisfaction with the previous stay(s) is one of the pivotal factors in determining positive WOM and future visit intentions. (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Appiah-Adu, Fyall, & Singh, 2000; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001; Caneen, 2003; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Kozak, 2001, 2003).

In a service industry, such as hospitality and tourism, the willingness of customers to share positive experiences as word-of-mouth is the best available advertising one can get, especially with the rise of digital media (Litvin et al., 2008). As holiday travel is performed willingly in people's spare time, the tourist is expected to be motivated and more likely to participate in value creation, thus motivating the right customer and involving them in the co-creation of value through the process of planning, buying, enjoying and remembering a journey can enhance the customer value perception. This process will improve the levels of satisfaction and loyalty, future intention of re-visitation and spread of positive WOM (Prebensen, Woo, & Uysal, 2014).

Regarding the intention of returning to a destination, the main antecedent of loyalty in tourism is satisfaction, which arises when expectations are exceeded (Chon, 1991; Kim & Perdue, 2011; Lee, Jeon, & Kim, 2011). Stokburger-Sauer (2011) suggests that a country has its own brand identity and that the congruence between a traveller's personality and a country's brand personality strongly influences its visit intentions. So, a positive experience could encourage consumer favourable attitudes and behaviours like emotional brand attachment (Malär et al., 2011), which could ultimately lead to an intention to return. Furthermore, a destination personality has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction and on revisit intentions (Hultman et al., 2015; Souiden et al., 2017).

In the travel industry, the intention to return to a specific destination is not always considered an important behaviour, as tourists seek for variety (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). However, if the experience does not match the previously generated expectations, the resulting evaluation may turn out to be very negative. It may even produce negative word-of-mouth (WOM), which negatively affects the destination's image both for the person who experienced it and for potential visitors (Martín-Santana et al., 2017)

All these behaviours are of utmost importance for highly competitive industries such as hospitality and tourism (Kandampully & Bilgihan, 2015) where products and services have been co-developing to become remarkably similar and comparable, appearing merely as commodities (Victorino et al., 2005). Customers became aware of this and therefore expect hospitality and tourism corporations to offer them superior value experience (Helkkula et al., 2012).

Building loyalty is a process and, as such, it builds progressively towards higher forms of loyalty. Kandampully and Bilgihan (2015) propose a layered model from a potential customer to an emotionally loyal customer, where companies are faced with the challenge firstly to attract consumers, and then to develop the relationship and bonding them to the company, which matches a phase of assurance. With increasing positive experience bonding becomes commitment which matches a phase where customer retention is achieved. At a higher level, commitment turns into customer support and advocacy, which expresses attitudinal loyalty. The overall loyalty building process culminates in emotionally loyal customers, where experiences are described as delightful and trust levels are high,

which turn customers into business partners. This same idea translates the evolution of the role of customers in hospitality and tourism, from being simply users to becoming co-producers of the value and co-owners of the brand, due to their active engagement in social media WOM as they become brand ambassadors (James, 2013).

Before the trip, the tourist builds up certain expectations, desires and needs (Mai & Ness, 1999) towards the travel destination, which are hoped to be fulfilled during the travel experience. If they are fulfilled, it will lead to an overall level of pleasure perceived by the consumer, ultimately resulting in satisfaction. Some studies indicate that tourists, who have a higher regard to specific attributes connected to personal and emotional factors, are more inclined to giving them a better evaluation (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Oh, 2001). After the travel experience, the post-experience destination image and the destination image gap are well defined. This allows the tourists to compare their expectations to the perceived reality, cementing his levels of satisfaction and building up to loyalty.

Taking into consideration the revised literature until now and existent findings, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1): Satisfaction with destination is positively associated to customer loyalty.*

The concepts of tourist satisfaction and a tourist's intention to return (or tourist loyalty) are in great part determined by the tourist's evaluation of the destination's characteristics. This is proven by numerous studies that analyzed the expressed satisfaction by the tourist with different aspects and images of the destination (Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Alegre & Garau, 2010; Crompton & Love, 1995; Danaher & Arweiler, 1996; Kozak, 2002; Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000; Pizam & Ellis, 1999; Pizam, Shapoval & Ellis, 2016; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

### **2.3. Destination Image**

The subject of destination image has already been discussed by many authors, each proposing their own definition of destination image (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Crompton, 1979; Echtner, 1991; Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006; Grosspietsch, 2006). Having analysed the appropriate literature on this subject, there is a wide consensus among authors that destination image can be described as the representation of what a tourist knows and feels about a destination, consisting of any belief, idea, feeling or attitude associated with the place. According to Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou, and Andronikidis (2016: pp. 6), its definition is "a set of impressions, ideas, expectations and emotional thoughts" that tourists have when visiting a destination, and it plays an essential role towards people's travel decision-making.

The concept of destination image is relatable to the one of a brand image, which comprises all associations linked to a brand in the consumer's memory (Aaker, 1991). Applying this concept to a country, it represents "the picture, reputation and stereotype that consumers have of a specific country" (Nagashima, 1970, pp.68). A brand is most often associated to features such as tangible quality, brand reputation, functionality or overall value. The same is valid for a destination image, which can be linked to different characteristics, such as weather, culture, hospitality or gastronomy.

The most popular approach to destination image consists of three components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a, 1999b; Gartner, 1994; Pike, 2009): The cognitive, the affective and the conative (or overall) components. The cognitive component, also known as the perceptual component, relates to the beliefs and knowledge about the physical attributes of a destination that attract tourists (Papadimitriou et al., 2015; Prayag, 2009), such as the attractions to be seen, the weather to expect or to the public transportation system, and is therefore a true and more realistic image. Numerous factors influence the cognitive perception of a destination, including the tourists' nationality (Kayat & Abdul Hai, 2014; Kozak, 2002), socio-demographic factors (Jenkins, 1999) or even events taking place at the destination (Kim & Morrison, 2005). Because the cognitive component is based on pre-acquired knowledge, they last longer. Also, in tourism research, it is thought that the cognitive component is an antecedent of the affective one (Vogt & Andereck, 2003), as emotions are influenced by rational elements (Pike & Ryan, 2004).

The affective component is an important, intangible quality of a destination, made up by feelings and emotions expressed towards it (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Hallmann, Zehrer, & Müller, 2014) and it can develop before, during and after the whole experience (Klenosky, 2002; Loureiro, Stylos, & Miranda, 2020). It can explain and predict behavioural intentions of travellers (Russell & Pratt, 1980) and leave traces in their memory (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). Feelings can range from joy, surprise or sadness to ones like regret or compassion. In fact, some cities like Torino (Italy) or New Orleans (USA) have invested in the affective component by lessening their industrial image to a charming city with beautiful and historical monuments (Souiden, Ladhari, & Chiadmi, 2017). This component is the primary one that ensures positive attitudes and word-of-mouth behaviour (Hosany, 2012), functioning as a better predictor of intention to recommend (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). Because the affective component relates to emotional situations or conditions, it is more volatile than the cognitive one and tends to fluctuate more easily (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999 a).

For example, the information about monuments, history or culture delivered in a guided tour by the tour guide will affect the cognitive component of the image, as they help visitors to locate, perceive and understand the different features of a destination. On the other hand, the tour guide's friendliness, knowledge about the destination and communication competences are relevant to the affective component, as they provide an enjoyable experience (Pereira, 2015).

Though the difference between both components is significant, one must not view them as if they were not interrelated (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). Their interaction leads to the forming of the third component, the conative (or overall) (San Martín, 2006). The conative is considered as the most important component, because it displays the tourist's overall behaviour towards or impression of a destination, positive or negative (Pike, 2009), and is associated with desires and idealisation of future situations (Dann, 1996; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2004). Before the trip, it is considered to be a behavioural component, demonstrating a tourist's active consideration of a destination as a potential travel destination (Agapito et al., 2013; Loureiro, Stylos, & Miranda, 2020) and serves therefore as a predictor of future buying/travel intention (Kim et al., 2017). During the trip, it represents the overall evaluation of the destination and predicts the perceived value of the travel experience more accurately than the other two components (Stylos et al., 2016). As this component represents the overall image of a destination, it is important that the tourists enjoy and actively involve themselves in the destination, so that they leave with a positive and enhanced image and recommend it, with the intention of spreading positive WOM (Kang & Gretzel, 2012).

Expectations play an important part in the development of destination image, as they will be used as a basis for comparison when the holiday is realized. In the process of building the first image of a destination, both the sources (Gassiot & Coromina, 2013) and time spent on information research about the destination have a significant role. This can be divided into the organically formed image via newspapers, official websites, the opinion of family and friends or electronic WOM (e.g. Tripadvisor) and the induced image by means of promotional advertising or social media (Gunn, 1988, Xu, Chan, & Pratt, 2018), forming the expectation about the experience to come (Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Wang, Zhang, Gu, & Zhen, 2009). If the expectations are low, the more likely they are to lead to a satisfactory experience. However, if the expectations are high, the more likely they are to lead to disappointment (Pereira, 2015). Therefore, destination marketers must strategically manage the destination image to achieve a competitive position (Souiden, Ladhari, & Chiadmi, 2017) and provide information that is stimulating enough to increase the potential tourists' desire of visiting (Martín-Santana et al., 2017), yet it is important that the expectations do not exceed the reality.

Destination image is an important concept in the travel industry, because it helps to understand the tourists' preferences and selection processes, and evokes two of the most important behavioural consequences of destination image, which are visiting intentions and recommendations (Bigné et al., 2001; Kim & Lee, 2015; Kladou & Mavragani, 2015; Nadeau et al., 2008; Qu et al., 2011). Nowadays, most tourists seek for the same attributes in a destination, such as beautiful scenery, beaches, friendly locals or high quality accommodation (Qu et al., 2011; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), resulting in an intense competition among tourism destinations (Alcañiz et al., 2009; Hildebrandt & Isaac, 2015). This leads to the reality that 10 countries in the world attract 70% of international tourists, leaving the other

countries to compete for the remaining 30% (Pike, 2009). So, in order to attract tourists, destinations must have features that render them unique (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006; Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007; Qu et al., 2011; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

The above-mentioned comparison between a brand image and a destination image can be extended when it comes to value creation. There are numerous reasons mentioned by Aaker (1991) that brand/destination image creates value for the brand/destination. The destination image allows consumers to process information about a specific destination, meaning they can learn what there is to offer, as well as differentiate the destination and identify its positioning among other competing destinations. This provides information and reasons to visit it and tends to develop a positive feeling towards the destination. So, the perceived image of the destination before the visit is a determinant factor in the decision-making process of the potential tourist (Buhalis, 2000).

Considering the revised literature on customer satisfaction and destination image, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 2 (H2): Expected destination image is positively associated to satisfaction.*

By acknowledging that satisfaction is simultaneously a predictor of destination loyalty and an effect of expected destination image, one can integrate both hypotheses into a process that highlights the mediational role of customer satisfaction. Thus, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 3 (H3): Satisfaction mediates the positive relation between destination image (expectation) and customer loyalty.*

In this mediation, the consideration of Hernández-Lobato et al. (2006) pertaining to a differential effect between cognitive and affective elements of image may be relevant. The authors state that the main antecedents of satisfaction are the cognitive elements (enabling the comparison of expectation and experience), while the most important antecedents of loyalty are the affective elements (associated to pleasure).

Alongside with expected destination image, there is evidence in literature that some authors (Bigné et al., 2001; Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012; Martín-Santana et al., 2017) opt to focus on experienced destination image. The rationale is that after visiting a destination, the perceived image of the tourist of the destination may have changed, becoming now clearer and more accurate. This is designated as post-experience image. It is considered as a key factor in understanding tourists' post-purchase behaviour, such as WOM or revisit intentions (Bigné et al., 2001).

It is in the best interest of destinations that travellers leave with a good post-experience image of the destinations, as they are now able to share their experience offline via friends and family and online via social platforms. According to Yoon and Uysal (2005), the most reliable source of information is



word-of-mouth, which has a significant effect on the evaluation of the destination and its overall image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a)

In many studies, the destination image is considered to be a static one. However, Smith, Li, Pan, Witte, and Doherty (2015) indicate that the image is dynamic and continuously evolving during the different stages of the trip (before, on arrival, during and after). As mentioned above, the first information and impressions of a destination are built and collected in different ways (official websites, friends & family, electronic WOM), which are a key factor in the decision-making process of organizing a trip (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). As the experience takes place, the image becomes more realistic, complex and differentiated (Gartner & Hunt, 1987), it reduces preconceptions and leads to a change in the perceived image. At the end of the trip, the traveller is left with a post-experience image. This discrepancy between the pre- and post-image is called the destination image gap (Martín Santana et al., 2017), to which there are three possible outcomes: the image becomes simpler, the image becomes more complex or it remains the same (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991).

The image one has of a destination may change, to a more or less significant degree, while travelling, as well as before the experience or after it is concluded. The destination image gap consists of 3 moments: before, during and after the trip (Kim, McKercher, & Lee, 2009; Yilmaz et al., 2009); and 5 stages: the decision to travel, searching for information, choosing a destination, the travel experience and the feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the holiday (Martín Santana et al., 2017).

In line with Gunn (1988), the gathered information before the trip forms the potential tourist's idea about a specific destination. The expected cognitive image is shaped by the tourist's own motivations, preferences, needs and further personal attributes (Kayat & Abdul Hai, 2014). Throughout the trip, the tourist's image changes while being subjected to various "inputs" from the environment around. The perceived service quality, juxtaposed to personal factors, can affect and shape the image (Kayat & Abdul Hai, 2014). Thus, tourists compare their expected image with what they see and feel at the destination (Chon, 1990), leading to a specific behaviour and perception of the place. After the trip and based on the actual experience, a more realistic and complete post-experience image is formed (Almeida, Miranda & Elias-Almeida, 2012) and weighed against the expectations prior to the visit, resulting in a stronger perception of the destination.

The relationship between the effect of the gap on the image and the level of tourist satisfaction and loyalty is confirmed in previous studies (Kim et al., 2012; Ross, 1993). Consequently, a positive experience leads to a positive destination image gap, resulting in a high impact on satisfaction and loyalty (Kim et al. 2012, Martín-Santana et al., 2017). In the same way, a negative evaluation of the experience is possible when there is a distinct difference from the generated expectations. Apart from cancelling out the effect on loyalty, this produces negative WOM that can greatly damage the image of the destination (Martín-Santana et al., 2017).

The revised literature is clearly suggestive that the expected image would more closely explain destination attractiveness rather than destination loyalty. However, expectations are modulating subjective memory and thus it is but natural that the experienced destination image cannot be fully understood without expectations. Most importantly, research is suggesting that experienced image adds uniquely into understanding the intention to revisit and thus may be critical into understanding destination loyalty. We thus hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 4a (H4a): Destination image gap has incremental predictive validity over and above destination image (expectation) in explaining satisfaction with the destination.*

*Hypothesis 4b (H4b): Destination image gap has incremental predictive validity over and above destination image (expectation) in explaining destination loyalty.*

The integration of all the hypotheses is depicted in Figure 2.1 as the conceptual model.

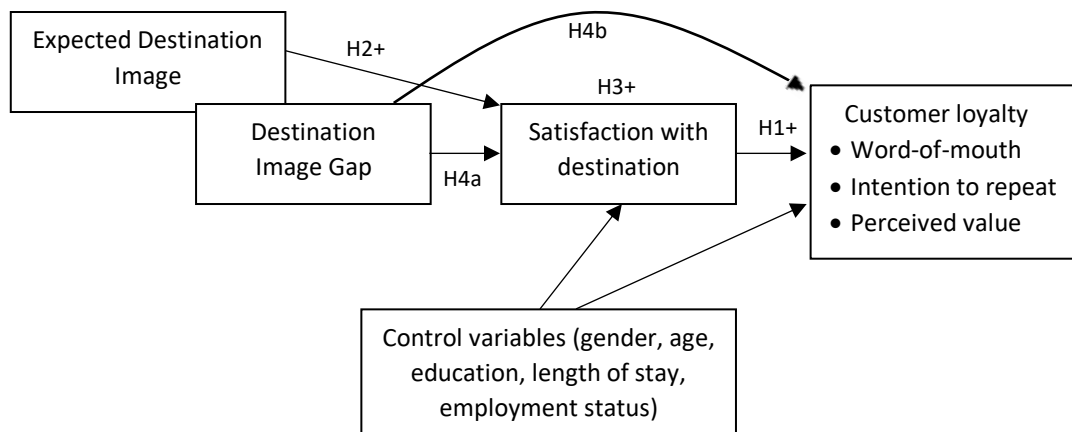


Figure 2.1 – Conceptual model

*H1: Satisfaction with destination is positively associated to customer loyalty.*

*H2: Expected destination image is positively associated to satisfaction.*

*H3: Satisfaction mediates the positive relation between destination image (expectation) and customer loyalty.*

*H4a: Destination image gap has incremental predictive validity over and above destination image (expectation) in explaining satisfaction with destination.*

*H4b: Destination image gap has incremental predictive validity over and above destination image (expectation) in explaining destination loyalty.*

## **3 Method**

### **3.1. Research approach**

This study was conducted with a quantitative cross-sectional design (Bryman, 2006) as the extant body of knowledge is sufficiently structured to allow for hypothetical-deductive testing (Lawson, 1995).

### **3.2. Procedure and sample**

The main criteria for selecting valid participants to answer the survey were the German nationality of the respondents and the experience of having travelled to Portugal within the past 24 months, with purposes other than business. These criteria stem from the options made as regards the target population (Germans) and the time frame was selected so to avoid measurement errors due to the changes that occur in any Hospitality & Tourism system across time, such as outdated information.

Originally, the survey was meant to be conducted at the Lisbon International Airport, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was rendered impossible. It was therefore conducted on an online platform (Qualtrics) and deployed on different German travel websites and online forums, namely Facebook touristic travel groups. The data was collected from 5 June 2020 to 23 June 2020 via snowball sampling. This data collection strategy is most suitable when targeting hard-to-reach population via a randomized procedure (Heckathorn, 2011) as German tourist that have visited Portugal within the last 24 months are but a scarcer set of German population.

This procedure allowed for the collection of 206 responses, 27 of which were removed either due to missing values or showing low quality answer (inconsistency or monotonous choices), thus leaving a valid sample of 179 respondents. The sample is mostly feminine (67%) and no respondent signalled the “diverse” option in the “gender” category. It comprehends individuals from all age ranges, from 18 to 61 years-old or older (Table 3.1). More than half of the sample reported being at least 51 years old.

The sample is mostly comprised of married (71%) or single (21%) individuals with a diverse array of educational levels, ranging from high-school to university degree, with a quite balanced distribution per category (with the exception of the high-school of 9 years that has proportionally less individuals) (Table 3.2). The German educational system is quite different from the British or American systems, which makes an exact translation more difficult. Therefore, the German terminology was kept in the table 3.2 below, with a tentative translation and the indication of the duration of each graduation cycle. Access to the polytechnic or university education is generally granted through the “Abitur” (Education System in Germany, 2019).

Table 3.1 – Age group distribution

	N	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
30 years old or younger	28	15.6	15.8	15.8
31-40 years old	23	12.8	13.0	28.8
41-50 years old	35	19.6	19.8	48.6
51-60 years old	60	33.5	33.9	82.5
61 years old or older	31	17.3	17.5	100.0
Total	177	98.9	100.0	
System missing	2	1.1		
Total	179	100.0		

Table 3.2 – Education distribution

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid %	Cumulative %
Hauptschule / Highschool (9 years)	5	2.8	2.9	2.9
Mittlere Reife / Highschool (10 years)	39	21.8	22.3	25.1
Abitur / Highschool (12/13 years)	28	15.6	16.0	41.1
Berufsschule / Vocational (12 years)	21	11.7	12.0	53.1
Fachhochschule / EVT-Polytechnic	39	21.8	22.3	75.4
Universität / University	43	24.0	24.6	100.0
Total	175	97.8	100.0	
System missing	4	2.2		
Total	179	100.0		

The largest part of the sample reported being full-time employed (61.4%) with the second and third larger situations being pensioners (17.6%) and self-employed (9.1%). A fourth group of participants chose the option “other”, which were found to be mostly students. Respondents came from all *Bundesländer* (Table 3.3) with Bavaria (21.8%), North-Rhine-Westphalia (20.7%), Lower Saxony (13.8%) and Hesse (12.6%) cumulating about 2/3 of the sample.

When inquired about the information channels / sources (IC) that were used to gain knowledge about Portugal as a touristic destination, most participants reported using electronic word-of-mouth and social media, followed by travel guidebooks (Table 3.4).

Regarding specific destinations in Portugal, Algarve was the most visited destination (58.7%), followed by Lisbon (54.2%). Since the categories are not mutually exclusive, the sum of frequencies does not total 100% (N=179). The specific findings for these regions are depicted in Table 3.5.

Table 3.3 – German federal states of residence / *Bundesländer*

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid %	Cumulative %
Baden-Wuerttemberg	16	8.9	9.2	9.2
Bavaria	38	21.2	21.8	31.0
Berlin	9	5.0	5.2	36.2
Brandenburg	1	.6	.6	36.8
Bremen	2	1.1	1.1	37.9
Hamburg	4	2.2	2.3	40.2
Hesse	22	12.3	12.6	52.9
Lower Saxony	24	13.4	13.8	67.2
North-Rhine-Westphalia	36	20.1	20.7	87.9
Rhineland-Palatinate	7	3.9	4.0	92.0
Saarland	3	1.7	1.7	93.7
Saxony	4	2.2	2.3	96.0
Saxony-Anhalt	2	1.1	1.1	97.1
Schleswig-Holstein	4	2.2	2.3	99.4
Thuringia	1	.6	.6	100.0
Western Pomerania	1	.6	.6	53.4
Total	174	97.2	100.0	
System missing	5	2.8		
Total	179	100.0		

Table 3.4 – Information sources

	Min-Max	Means	stdev
IC1_Destination-specific brochures	1-5	2.39	1.22
IC2_Official websites of the travel destination (hotels, museums, etc...)	1-5	2.85	1.23
IC3_Friends & Family	1-5	2.82	1.47
IC4_Newspapers & Magazines	1-5	2.20	0.97
IC5_Electronic WOM (Tripadvisor, Social media, ...)	1-5	3.33	1.16
IC6_Travel guide books	1-5	3.02	1.33
IC7_Travel agency	1-5	1.26	0.69
N valid (listwise)			

The participants mostly reported staying in Portugal for 10 or more days (71.2%) followed by 6 to 9 days (16.4%), 3-5 days (11.3%) and only 1.1% staying for 2 days or less. This shows that the sample is mostly comprised of longer than shorter tourist stays.

Table 3.5 – Destinations visited in Portugal

	Frequency	%
Algarve	105	58.7
Lisbon	97	54.2
Porto	43	16.0
Center	19	10.6
Alentejo	14	7.8
Coastal Area	10	5.6
North	9	5.0
Madeira	5	2.8

### 3.3. Measures

This section presents a description of all measures used in the study, both the ones comprehended in the conceptual model, as well as those used for description or control purposes. The variables included in the model are: destination image (both before and after visit), destination image gap (the difference between after and before visit destination image), satisfaction with destination, and destination loyalty. The variables used for description and/or control purposes are: Information sources, length of stay, visit destination, and socio-demographic variables namely gender, age, education, German federal state of residence, marital status, and employment status. Control variables were chosen based on research evidence of significant associations with some core constructs in the conceptual model. Such is the case of information sources (Hahm & Tasci, 2019), length of stay (Boto-Garcia et al., 2019), gender (Chi, 2011; Tasci, 2017; Yasin et al., 2017), age (Rice & Khanin, 2019), education (Chi, 2011; Valle et al, 2006), marital status (Tasci, 2017), employment status (Ruzzier, 2010).

Destination image before traveling (expectation image) can be measured by an array of scales that vary (Madden et al., 2016) and, considering the Portuguese context where the study is developed, we have opted for Pereira (2015) 10-item scale that comprises a wide array of dimensions suitable for the Portuguese touristic offer (e.g. “existing infrastructures”, “beaches”, “gastronomy and wines”, etc.). Additionally, an item concerning “shows and entertainment” was included to account for tourists that travel to attend mega-events or other hedonic directed activities, such as music concerts, sports, or theatre. Considering the recent disruption that COVID-19 created worldwide and its deep impact on the Hospitality and Tourism industry, it was timely to add a specific item concerning health safety. Consequently, we have added such an item to comprehend the image that experienced tourists have regarding the overall health risks that local conditions pose, as well as the health support in case of need.

The items of the destination image in the survey comprise: 1) Hospitality (how welcoming are people in the country), 2) Tourism information (how much reliable and useful tourism information is

locally available), 3) Existing infrastructures (e.g. the quality of airport, accommodation, restaurants), 4) Landscapes (natural beauty), 5) Beaches (natural beauty, cleanliness, and support infrastructure), 6) Gastronomy and wines (food and wine quality, hygiene, and service), 7) Monuments/museums (organization, assets, and overall cultural experience), 8) Activities in nature (e.g. hiking, nautical activities, sports, well-being), 9) Value for money (average costs compared to the experience outcome), 10) Security (perception of criminal activities and law and order in Portugal), 11) Shows and entertainment (accessibility and quality of entertainment, e.g. concerts, sports, theatre, street artists), and 12) Health safety (food safety, general hygiene conditions, and support in case of illness). Participants were invited to signal their opinion on a 7-point scale, where perceptions concerning their expectations were registered from 1 (very negative expectations) to 7 (very positive expectations).

Destination image after traveling (experience image) was measured with exactly same items based on Pereira (2015) 10-item scale plus the two items added, asking the participants to signal their opinion after the visit. For such purpose, the response scale was adjusted to 1 (very negative experience) to 7 (very positive experience).

Image gap is measured as the simple difference between the expectation and the experience values for each image item.

Satisfaction with destination was measured with Neal and Gursoy (2008) subscale of satisfaction with the destination, comprehending 3 items: satisfaction with service quality at destination, satisfaction with efficiency at destination, and satisfaction with cost at destination. Participants were invited to signal their opinion on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). An exploratory factor analysis showed a valid single factor solution ( $KMO=.606$ ,  $.572 < MSA < .597$ ; Bartlett  $\chi^2(3)=114.195$ ,  $p < .001$ ) accounting for 63.1%. The solution matrix is depicted in Table 3.6. The factor is reliable ( $CR=.836$ ) and has also convergent validity ( $AVE=.632$ ).

Table 3.6 – Matrix for satisfaction with destination

	Satisfaction with Destination
Sat2 Efficiency at destination	.873
Sat1 Service quality	.811
Sat3 Costs	.689

Extraction method: Principal component analysis.

a. 1 extracted component.

Destination loyalty was measured with an adaptation of Kim, Holland, and Han (2013) two-item measure, to which a third item was added in similar way that Huang (2015) did. The items were: Repeat intention (If there is a chance in the future, I will revisit Portugal), WOM (I will recommend Portugal to others as a tourism destination), and Perceived Value (I think it is always worthwhile to visit Portugal).

Participants were invited to signal their opinion on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An EFA showed a valid single factor solution ( $KMO=.628$ ,  $.594 < MSA < .699$ ; Bartlett  $X^2(3)=81.822$ ,  $p < .001$ ) accounting for 59.9%. The solution matrix is depicted in Table 3.7. The factor is reliable ( $CR=.816$ ) and has also convergent validity ( $AVE=.598$ ).

Table 3.7 – Matrix for destination loyalty

	Destination Loyalty
Loyal2_I will recommend Portugal as a travel destination	.832
Loyal3_I think Portugal is always worth visiting	.780
Loyal1_I will revisit Portugal as a tourist	.703

Extraction method: Principal component analysis.

a. 1 extracted component.

Information sources were measured with seven items selected from crossing Hahm and Tasci (2019) and Kandampully et al. (2015) destination information sources, namely: 1) travel brochures, 2) official tourism related local websites, 3) friends and family, 4) newspapers and magazines, 5) electronic word-of-mouth, 6) travel guidebooks; 7) travel agency. Participants were invited to signal their option for each item by using a 5-point frequency scale comprehending 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (occasionally), 4 (frequently), 5 (most frequently).

Length of staying was measured with a single item where participants were able to choose between: 1 = Less than 2 days, 2 = 3 to 5 days, 3 = 6 to 9 days, and 4 = 10 or more days.

Visited destinations was measured with a multiple choice where participants could choose between 1 = Lisbon, 2 = Porto, 3 = Algarve; 4 = Other. Which one(s)? The last category opened a text entry that was *a posteriori* classified into one of the following categories: Alentejo, Algarve, Center, Coastal Area, Lisbon, Madeira, North, and Porto. These classifications reflect the written information respondents gave and, therefore, some geographic areas are not represented (e.g. Azores).

Socio-demographic variables comprehend gender (1 = Masculine, 2 = Feminine, 3 = Diverse), age group (1 = 30 or less ; 2 = 31 - 40 ; 3 = 41 - 50 ; 4 = 51 - 60 ; 5 = 61 or more), state of residence (all the 16 states were ordered alphabetically from Baden-Wuerttemberg to Western Pomerania), civil status (1 = single, 2 = married/union, 3 = widowed; 4 = divorced; 5 = other), education (1 = less than 9 years; 2 = 9 years; 3 = 10 years; 4 = 12 years; 5 = professional degree; 6 = technical degree; 7 = university degree), employment status (1 = employed, 2 = self-employed, 3 = unemployed looking for a job; 4 = unemployed not looking for a job, 5 = pensioner; 6 = other).



### **3.4.Data analysis strategy**

Following Hair et al. (2014) data was firstly screened for missing values and low-quality answers (inconsistent or monotonous), which lower the psychometric quality of variables and, consequently, the reliability of the analyses. Once the database was workable, we conducted formal psychometric quality testing of all variables to assess its validity and reliability. Latent constructs were subjected to factorial analysis, which is considered valid when Keiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic (KMO) is .500 or above, and the minimum Measure Sample Adequacy (MSA) for all items also achieves that threshold. Likewise, Bartlett's Chi-square is expected to have a significant p-value ( $<.01$ ) to conclude that there is enough shared variance in the scale to extract a factor. After this step, the factor analysis is interpreted and expected to include items that show facial validity (the overall set of factors and items is interpretable as qualitatively sharing the same identity) and the factor solution is expected to account for approximately 60% or more of the total variance. Lastly, convergent validity is judged on the basis of Fornell & Larcker (1981) Average Extracted Variance (AVE), which should attain the minimum value of .500, meaning it is able to account for at least 50% of variance of the items. Lastly, composite reliability is judged on Joreskog's rho that should reach .700 to indicate items consistently measure the same latent construct.

To test hypotheses, we used covariance based Structural Equations Modelling (SEM) with IBM SPSS AMOS 25 software. The option for this data analysis technique considered its capability of testing simultaneous relations between variables while running a bootstrapped analysis that increases the chances of not having results biased due to measurement error. We have set the bootstrapping to extract 5000 repetitions and judge the significance of each coefficient on a confidence interval of 95%. Model fit was based on Hu and Bentler (1999) thresholds, namely, chi-square ratio to degrees of freedom below 3 with a non-significant p-value (although this can be overridden by the remaining indices), CFI over .90 and both RMSEA and SRMR below .08.

Because AMOS does not allow to test for incremental validity, we have used hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis to test for the unique variance explained by image gap after controlling for the variance accounted by the socio-demographic variables as well as expected image. In the case of explaining destination loyalty, customer satisfaction was added to the equation in the last hierarchical step.



## 4 Results

The results firstly concern descriptive and bivariate statistics, followed by the hypotheses testing. Due to the large number of variables included in the conceptual model, for clarity sake, we will show bivariate and descriptive statistics splitting variables by their socio-demographic nature (Table 4.1) and those pertaining to the hypotheses testing (Table 4.2).

Information channels were reported as having been used, although in different frequencies. The most used channel is e-WOM (ave=3.33, sd=1.16), followed by travel guidebooks (ave=3.02, sd=1.33) and by the official websites (ave=2.85, sd=1.24). Participants resorted the least to travel agencies (ave=1.26, sd=0.69), newspapers (ave=2.20, sd=0.97), and destination brochures (ave=2.39, sd=1.22).

Reports concerning destination image before travelling also indicate some heterogeneity as regards its composing items. The best rated item before travelling is landscapes (ave=5.82, sd=1.33), followed by beaches (ave=5.73, sd=1.40) and hospitality (ave=5.55, sd=1.32). The relatively worst rated are entertainment (ave=3.87, sd=1.54), health safety (ave=4.32, sd=1.36) and, ex-aequo, infrastructure (ave=4.47, sd=1.30) and local information (ave=4.47, sd=1.27). Considering that the midpoint of the scale is 4, only entertainment was rated tending to the negative side of the response scale.

As regards destination image after the touristic experience, the findings are somewhat stable, but the magnitude of the values changes substantially. All average values are above the expected destination image and the most positively reported are landscapes (ave=6.17, sd=1.26), hospitality (ave=6.12, sd=1.06) and beaches (ave=5.92, sd=1.33). The items that deserved the worst evaluation are entertainment (ave=4.29, sd=1.51), followed by health safety (ave=4.72, sd=1.33) and local information (ave=4.92, sd=1.36).

The satisfaction with the destination averaged 4.31 (sd=0.60) on a 5-point scale, with the lowest and highest values reported being 1 and 5 respectively, meaning all levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction could be found in the sample. Lastly, destination loyalty averaged 4.86 (sd=0.30), which is a remarkably high value on a 5-point scale and the lowest value found in the sample is already above the scale midpoint (ave=3.67).

Socio-demographic correlations with destination and core variables in the conceptual model show that younger German tourists tend to choose Lisbon as a destination while older ones opt for Porto and mostly for the Algarve. Alentejo is the only destination that shows a significant, albeit modest, correlation with gender, indicating male respondents tended to choose this option more than female respondents.

As regards the length of stay, the only socio-demographic variable to show differences is age, thus indicating that older tourists stay longer at the destination. Age also plays an important role in understanding information channels used to and gather information about the chosen destinations.

Older German tourists tend to opt for more formal sources, namely destination brochures, newspapers, and travel guidebooks. Conversely, they tend not to rely much on friends and family to learn about destinations, which is a preferred source for younger German tourists.

The specific destination choices suggest different profiles of tourists as regards length of stay, with the shortest ones visiting Lisbon and those staying longer visiting the Center of Portugal, but mostly Algarve. As for the crossing of information channels with specific destinations, the Center of Portugal stands out due to the many significant correlations that suggest friends & family as a source that relate to this location, while most of the formal information channels go in the opposite direction, namely travel guidebooks, official websites, electronic WOM, and destination brochures. Madeira island also tended to be negatively associated with informal information channels.

Information channels themselves also tend to co-associate in three large clusters where the first one, formal information channels, comprehends travel guidebooks, newspapers, destination brochures, and travel agencies. The other group is restricted to family and friends, thus highlighting an informal information source. A third cluster, although closer to formal rather than informal, is made of official websites and e-WOM.

Pertaining to the relationship between socio-demographic factors, destination, length of staying and information channels with destination image (before and after travelling), satisfaction with destination, and destination loyalty, table 4.1 depicts all correlations found.

Some socio-demographic variables (mostly age and gender) show significant correlations with some of the core variables in the model, namely destination image value for money, where male respondents tend to signal lower values both concerning expectation and experience, as well as lower perceived hospitality and security. Older German tourists tend to report lower entertainment expectations, which is not echoed in the entertainment experience. Likewise, they tend to signal higher values in beach experience. More highly educated German tourists signaled lower expectations concerning infrastructure and security, as well as lower values for experienced entertainment and, most importantly, destination loyalty.

Local destinations have some significant correlations that are suggestive of differentiation in touristic experience. Namely, Lisbon and Porto have the highest positive correlations with expected museums and monuments offer, although experience does not echo this for Lisbon. Algarve, quite unsurprisingly, showed a positive association with beach, both as expectation and experience. Madeira deserved the opposite evaluation with a negative association of beach, both as expectation and experience. The sample also associated Madeira negatively with museum experience.

Table 4.1 – Descriptive and bivariate statistics for socio-demographic variables

	ave.	stdev	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1. Gender	-	-	1																				
2. Age	3.24	1.32	-.075	1																			
3. State residence	-	-	.049	.106	1																		
4. Civil status	-	-	-.005	.463**	.118	1																	
5. Education	5.02	1.59	-.075	-.139	-.040	.056	1																
6. Employment status	-	-	-.010	.191*	-.026	-.105	-.029	1															
7. Lisbon	0.54	0.50	-.033	-.157*	-.138	-.119	.107	.013	1														
8. Porto	0.24	0.43	-.005	.149*	.016	.044	.060	.036	.176*	1													
9. Algarve	0.59	0.49	-.034	.364**	.083	.188*	.049	.066	-.203**	-.006	1												
10. North	0.05	0.22	-.057	.055	.024	.054	-.036	.157*	-.045	.230**	-.066	1											
11. Center	0.11	0.31	-.068	-.078	.018	.002	.064	-.025	-.011	-.109	-.337**	.087	1										
12. Alentejo	0.08	0.27	-.151*	-.038	-.118	.113	.010	-.032	.017	.031	-.093	.123	-.033	1									
13. Madeira	0.03	0.17	.047	-.006	.166*	-.034	-.046	.039	-.048	.063	-.133	-.039	-.058	-.049	1								
14. Coastal area	0.06	0.23	.015	-.064	-.060	-.015	.012	.006	-.069	-.023	-.142	.055	.074	-.071	-.041	1							
15. Length of staying	3.58	0.74	-.015	.238**	.025	.138	-.011	.033	-.252**	.094	.260**	.134	.151*	.133	.006	.075	1						
16. IC1_Destination brochures	2.39	1.22	.185*	.328**	.064	.199**	-.120	.095	-.091	.131	.185*	.010	-.170*	-.042	.029	-.158*	.209**	1					
17. IC2_Official Websites	2.85	1.24	.060	.077	.056	.049	.098	-.136	.087	.079	.090	.070	-.178*	-.133	-.007	-.108	-.116	.221**	1				
18. IC3_Friends & Family	2.82	1.47	.087	-.231**	-.118	-.075	-.010	.009	.098	-.134	-.221**	-.041	.253**	.065	-.163*	-.038	-.076	-.131	-.391**	1			
19. IC4_Newspapers	2.20	0.97	.073	.270**	.133	.146	-.085	.022	-.017	.166*	.080	.031	-.071	-.039	.035	-.050	.177*	.292**	.184*	-.076	1		
20. IC5_e-WOM	3.33	1.16	.148	-.082	.198**	-.045	.002	-.189*	.010	.066	.033	.023	-.177*	-.047	.128	-.027	-.029	.114	.248**	-.207**	.205**	1	
21. IC6_Travel Guidebooks	3.02	1.33	.164*	.264**	.065	.155*	.114	-.093	.020	.160*	.275**	.016	-.263**	-.019	-.053	-.131	.094	.495**	.226*	-.158*	.339**	.080	1
22. IC7_Travel agency	1.26	0.69	-.003	.050	-.144	.074	-.005	-.008	-.096	-.020	.066	-.012	-.128	-.018	.133	-.055	-.094	.218**	.078	-.140	-.002	-.085	.201**

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Length of staying tended to be longer with expected hospitality, landscapes, activity in nature, value for money, security and health safety. However, reports about experience suggest destination image items that are associated with longer stays to be: Landscapes, Activity in nature, Security, and Health safety.

Information channels also show some association patterns. The most relevant seems to be between electronic media (official websites and e-WOM) and expected destination image items. Official websites have a negative correlation with hospitality, landscapes and security. Likewise, e-WOM shows negative correlations with hospitality, landscape and gastronomy & wines. This negative expectation linked to electronic media, seems not to endure after experience, as none of these correlations subsist. Most interestingly, friends and family do not show a single significant correlation with any of the destination image items, both in the expectation and the experience domains. Additionally, satisfaction with the destination is positively correlated with both destination brochures and e-WOM.

The correlations observed within expected destination image items as well as experienced destination image items are of a much stronger magnitude than any of those reported so far. This suggests that destination image tends to be highly consistent with some items, apparently playing a more central role. Expected landscapes tends to show the highest correlations namely with beaches and activity in nature. At the experienced image destination, local touristic information is mostly correlated with infrastructures, as well as with entertainment. Interestingly, the highest correlation of infrastructures is found with health safety.

Overall, expected and experienced destination image tend to correlate positively with the higher consistent values (those indicating higher alignment between reported experience and initial expectations) found for health safety, museums and monuments, infrastructures and activity in nature.

Concerning satisfaction with destination and destination image, the expectation is not strongly associated with the satisfaction, as only three cases were found with a significant correlation, and of a modest magnitude. These are: value for money, health safety, and infrastructures. As for the experience, there are many more cases comprehending almost all items to the exception of landscapes and beaches. The most signaled are local information, value for money, infrastructures, hospitality, gastronomy, and health safety.

Lastly, destination loyalty, as expected, shows a positive association with destination satisfaction ( $r=.318$ ,  $p<.01$ ) as well as many positive correlations with experienced destination image, mostly hospitality, value for money and gastronomy, and infrastructures. Again, the exceptions are landscapes and beaches to which security was added. All others show positive associations, although of a lesser magnitude.

Table 4.2 – Descriptive and bivariate statistics for core variables in the conceptual model

	ave	sd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1. Gender	-	-	1																					
2. Age	3.24	1.32	-.075	1																				
3. German Federal State	-	-	.049	.106	1																			
4. Civil status	-	-	-.005	.463**	.118	1																		
5. Education	5.02	1.59	-.075	-.139	-.040	.056	1																	
6. Employment status	-	-	-.010	.191*	-.026	-.105	-.029	1																
7. Lisbon	0.54	0.50	-.033	-.157*	-.138	-.119	.107	.013	1															
8. Porto	0.24	0.43	-.005	.149*	.016	.044	.060	.036	.176*	1														
9. Algarve	0.59	0.49	-.034	.364**	.083	.188*	.049	.066	-.203**	-.006	1													
10. North	0.05	0.22	-.057	.055	.024	.054	-.036	.157*	-.045	.230**	-.066	1												
11. Center	0.11	0.31	-.068	-.078	.018	.002	.064	-.025	-.011	-.109	-.337**	.087	1											
12. Alentejo	0.08	0.27	-.151*	-.038	-.118	.113	.010	-.032	.017	.031	-.093	.123	-.033	1										
13. Madeira	0.03	0.17	.047	-.006	.166*	-.034	-.046	.039	-.048	.063	-.133	-.039	-.058	-.049	1									
14. Coastal area	0.06	0.23	.015	-.064	-.060	-.015	.012	.006	-.069	-.023	-.142	.055	.074	-.071	-.041	1								
15. Length of staying	3.58	0.74	-.015	.238**	.025	.138	-.011	.033	-.252**	.094	.260**	.134	.151*	.133	.006	.075	1							
16. IC1_Destin. brochures	2.39	1.22	.185*	.328**	.064	.199**	-.120	.095	-.091	.131	.185*	.010	-.170*	-.042	.029	-.158*	.209**	1						
17. IC2_Official websites	2.85	1.24	.060	.077	.056	.049	.098	-.136	.087	.079	.090	.070	-.178*	-.133	-.007	-.108	-.116	.221**	1					
18. IC3_Friends & Family	2.82	1.47	.067	-.231**	-.118	-.075	-.010	.009	.098	-.134	-.221**	-.041	.253**	.065	-.163*	-.036	-.076	-.131	-.391**	1				
19. IC4_Newspapers	2.20	0.97	.073	.270**	.133	.146	-.085	.022	-.017	.166*	.080	.031	-.071	-.039	.035	-.050	.177*	.292**	.184*	-.076	1			
20. IC5_e-WOM	3.33	1.16	.148	-.082	.198**	-.045	.002	-.189**	.010	.066	.033	.023	-.177**	-.047	.128	-.027	-.029	.114	.246**	-.207**	.205**	1		
21. IC6_Travel guidebooks	3.02	1.33	.164*	.264**	.065	.155*	.114	-.093	.020	.160*	.275**	.016	-.263**	-.019	-.053	-.131	.094	.495**	.226**	-.158*	.339**	.080	1	
22. IC7_Travel agency	1.26	0.69	-.003	.050	-.144	.074	-.005	-.008	-.096	-.020	.066	-.012	-.128	-.018	.133	-.055	-.094	.218**	.078	-.140	-.002	-.085	.201**	1
23. IB1_Hospitality	5.55	1.32	-.134	.050	-.006	-.009	-.121	.170*	.054	.062	-.069	.000	.075	-.043	-.148*	.009	.206**	.063	-.240**	.139	.070	-.174*	-.028	-.137
24. IB2_Local information	4.47	1.30	-.051	-.037	.029	.010	-.077	-.063	.037	-.043	-.071	-.221**	.042	-.042	-.062	-.088	.070	.171*	-.017	.141	.053	-.143	.031	-.042
25. IB3_Infrastructure	4.47	1.27	.002	.113	-.014	.108	-.164*	-.003	.093	.079	-.021	-.046	-.015	-.027	-.037	.005	.108	.048	-.096	.052	.092	-.131	.104	-.037
26. IB4_Landscapes	5.82	1.33	-.056	.064	-.073	.019	-.114	.042	.020	.085	-.019	-.046	.087	-.023	-.054	.014	.161*	.022	-.173*	.120	.175*	-.158*	.103	-.059
27. IB5_Beaches	5.73	1.40	-.116	.087	-.111	.052	.008	.120	.004	.068	.151*	-.030	.039	-.064	-.235**	.028	.146	-.025	-.107	.031	.101	-.109	.068	-.028
28. IB6_Gastronomy	5.32	1.36	-.078	.023	-.033	-.004	-.114	.031	.079	.049	-.083	-.036	.131	-.069	.009	-.076	.046	.025	-.127	.138	-.058	-.167*	-.061	-.064
29. IB7_Museum	4.65	1.56	.040	-.034	.035	.038	-.067	-.059	.206**	.193**	-.167*	-.064	.051	-.095	-.115	.002	.038	.095	.024	.051	.182*	.010	.115	-.114
30. IB8_Nature activity	5.10	1.58	-.011	.036	.048	-.005	-.112	-.007	.005	.012	-.008	-.015	.092	-.059	-.011	.030	.221**	.042	-.112	.107	.139	-.084	.114	-.035
31. IB9_Value for money	5.15	1.30	-.202**	.134	-.032	.100	-.089	.050	.107	.106	.019	-.066	.086	-.034	-.072	.047	.185*	.118	-.049	.012	.167*	-.011	.089	-.049
32. IB10_Security	4.92	1.56	-.133	.082	-.030	-.069	-.151*	.168*	-.101	.010	-.054	.011	.086	.014	-.057	.058	.292**	-.006	-.190*	.085	.183*	-.099	.022	-.040
33. IB11_Entertainment	3.87	1.54	.013	-.221**	-.033	-.062	-.094	-.088	.043	.020	-.133	-.081	-.031	-.071	-.075	-.123	.004	-.031	-.045	.081	.115	.004	-.015	.004
34. IB12_Health safety	4.32	1.36	-.078	.032	.027	.065	.029	-.071	.024	.079	-.036	-.054	.039	-.007	-.090	.086	.229**	.050	-.045	-.017	.103	-.034	.117	-.034
35. IA1_Hospitality	6.12	1.06	-.162*	.023	.019	-.035	.012	.071	.043	.046	-.074	.046	.114	-.034	.012	.018	.078	-.016	-.058	.090	.052	-.015	-.001	-.164*
36. IA2_Local information	4.92	1.52	.011	.037	-.012	.094	-.110	-.079	.081	.070	.005	-.023	.028	-.082	-.125	-.052	.067	.174*	.101	.114	.100	-.040	.102	-.035
37. IA3_Infrastructures	5.15	1.24	-.072	.031	-.031	.035	-.097	.079	.124	.076	-.049	.074	.000	-.020	-.076	.106	.091	.019	-.010	.022	.057	-.078	.059	-.059
38. IA4_Landscapes	6.17	1.26	-.020	.113	-.079	.030	.078	.057	.077	.034	-.025	.008	.095	-.008	.030	.081	.156*	-.035	.010	-.040	.144	-.010	.048	-.033
39. IA5_Beaches	5.92	1.33	-.063	.173*	-.024	.102	-.026	.049	.017	-.018	.167*	-.045	.032	-.031	-.220**	.086	.133	-.020	-.051	.073	.093	-.028	.064	.002
40. IA6_Gastronomy	5.71	1.28	-.004	-.023	.009	-.011	-.002	-.005	.067	.003	-.142	-.029	.119	-.033	.038	-.022	.056	-.047	-.020	.144	.095	-.061	.029	-.106
41. IA7_Museums	5.03	1.42	.003	-.063	-.016	.009	-.038	-.015	.073	.150*	-.153*	-.042	.003	.007	-.148*	-.007	.075	-.006	-.019	.111	.096	.047	.006	-.078
42. IA8_Nature activity	5.67	1.43	.016	.128	.053	.098	-.045	-.026	-.083	.118	-.016	.070	.027	.037	.062	.072	.231**	-.046	-.107	-.020	.128	-.010	.088	-.091
43. IA9_Value for money	5.46	1.28	-.159*	-.020	.086	.023	-.057	.053	.030	.151*	-.038	-.004	.086	.023	.044	.025	.148*	-.049	-.008	-.007	.108	.054	-.011	.015
44. IA10_Security	5.49	1.47	-.151*	.084	-.022	-.048	-.060	.002	-.055	.050	-.071	.096	.019	.072	-.011	.050	.161*	-.049	-.033	.009	.114	-.087	.073	-.098
45. IA11_Entertainment	4.29	1.51	.009	-.088	-.012	.099	-.178*	-.074	.087	.030	-.101	.023	.030	-.028	-.077	-.143	.040	.005	.008	.099	.044	-.036	-.044	-.002
46. IA12_Health safety	4.72	1.33	-.095	.080	-.041	.073	-.035	-.054	-.063	.017	-.036	.028	.016	.044	-.067	.105	.241**	.052	-.073	.031	.056	.033	.018	-.045
47. Satisfaction	4.31	0.60	-.102	.053	.006	.037	-.136	-.167*	.097	-.005	.014	-.204**	-.046	.059	-.011	-.030	.025	.164*	.116	-.105	-.020	.152*	.132	-.038
48. Destination Loyalty	4.86	0.30	-.024	.022	.111	.072	-.197**	-.084	-.052	-.092	.002	-.004	.043	.046	.042	-.071	.144	.120	-.082	.012	.022	.133	.115	.016

23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	
																									1. Gender
																									2. Age
																									3. German Federal State
																									4. Civil status
																									5. Education
																									6. Employment status
																									7. Lisbon
																									8. Porto
																									9. Algarve
																									10. North
																									11. Center
																									12. Alentejo
																									13. Madeira
																									14. Coastal area
																									15. Length of staying
																									16. IC1_Destin. brochures
																									17. IC2_Official websites
																									18. IC3_Friends & Family
																									19. IC4_Newspapers
																									20. IC5_e-WOM
																									21. IC6_Travel guidebook
																									22. IC7_Travel agency
																									23. IB1_Hospitality
																									24. IB2_Local information
																									25. IB3_Infrastructure
																									26. IB4_Landscapes
																									27. IB5_Beaches
																									28. IB6_Gastronomy
																									29. IB7_Museum
																									30. IB8_Nature activity
																									31. IB9_Value for money
																									32. IB10_Security
																									33. IB11_Entertainment
																									34. IB12_Health safety
																									35. IA1_Hospitality
																									36. IA2_Local information
																									37. IA3_Infrastructures
																									38. IA4_Landscapes
																									39. IA5_Beaches
																									40. IA6_Gastronomy
																									41. IA7_Museums
																									42. IA8_Nature activity
																									43. IA9_Value for money
																									44. IA10_Security
																									45. IA11_Entertainment
																									46. IA12_Health safety
																									47. Satisfaction
																									48. Destination Loyalty



## 4.1 Hypotheses testing

To test hypotheses, a structural equations model was designed incorporating customer satisfaction and destination loyalty as latent constructs, as well as image expectation items to test H1, H2 and H3. Moreover, image gap was added as a concomitant predictor of image expectation to test H4. All items from image expectation and image gap were included in the model as observed variables predicting both latent constructs (customer satisfaction and destination loyalty). All these models were controlled for age, gender, education, length of stay, and employment status.

Although structural equation modelling is mostly used for latent constructs, it also allows for the inclusion of observed variables which must be carefully designed, in order not to misrepresent their potential relations. Thus, we draw covariances between all predictors (image before and image gap), as well as within all control variables. In this way, there is a risk of variance inflation, but the possible relations are all accounted for in the measurement model.

The first model has good fit indices (CMIN/df=1.869,  $p < .001$ ; CFI=.91; RMSEA=.070 CI90[.056; .083], PClose=.009; =.065) and is depicted in Figure 4.1 showing all standardized coefficients.

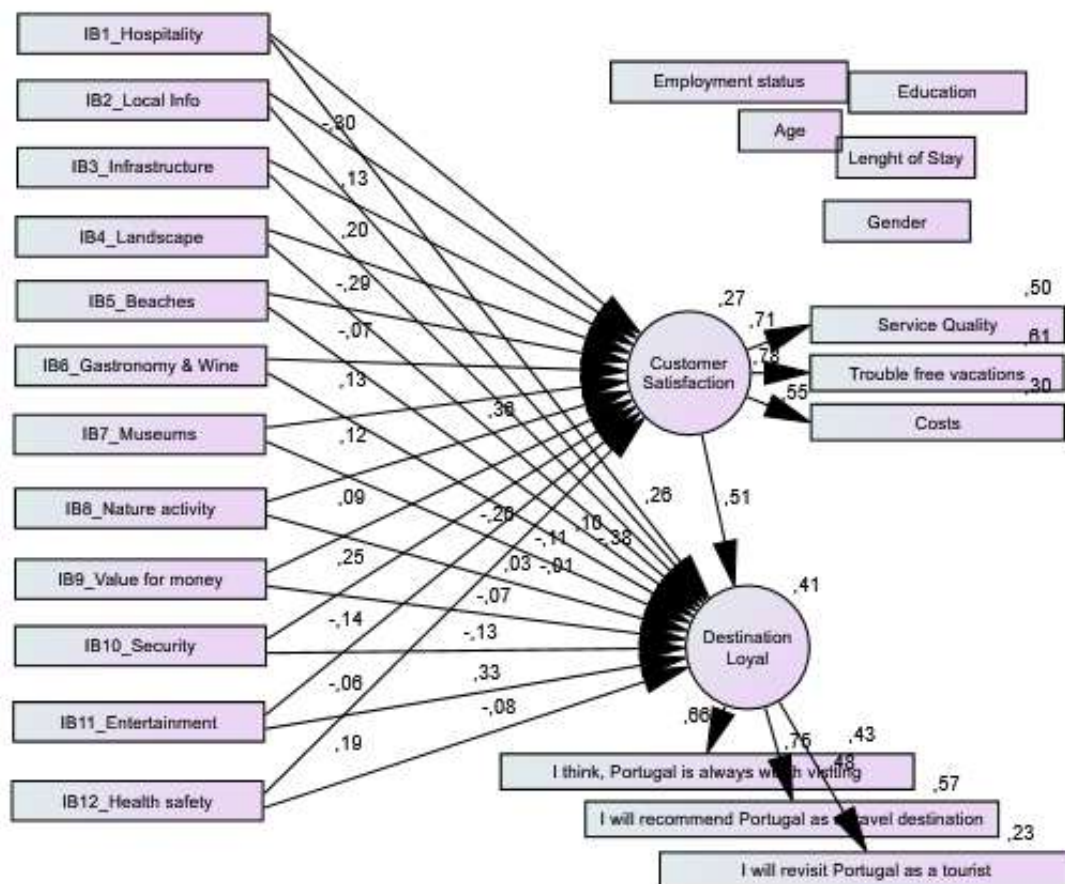


Figure 4.1 – Model for expected image

Table 4.3 shows the effects for the model where, as predicted, customer satisfaction has a positive direct effect upon destination loyalty (Beta=.505, p<.001), thus supporting hypothesis 1. Additionally, the indirect effects were tested for each of the image expectation items, showing a single case where the effect was found to be significant for a confidence interval of 95%, where the lower and upper bounds of the bootstrapping did not cross the value zero. Such was the case for Hospitality -> Customer Satisfaction -> Destination loyalty path where the effect is -.154 CI95 [-.579; -.019] thus supporting H3a.

Table 4.3 – Direct and indirect effects for expected image model

Variable 1 Predictor	Variable 2 Mediator	Variable 3 Criterion	Effect (beta)	p	CI90 Lower bound	CI90 Upper bound	Hypothesis	Observ.
R <sup>2</sup>	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.505	<.001	.240	1.113	H1	OK
		23%						
Hospitality	CustSatisf		<b>-.304</b>	<b>.009</b>	<b>-.526</b>	<b>-.048</b>	H2a	Exaggerated expectations
Local_Info	CustSatisf		.134	.177	-.051	.311	H2b	X
Infrastructure	CustSatisf		.196	.085	-.021	.361	H2c	X
Landscape	CustSatisf		<b>-.288</b>	<b>.035</b>	<b>-.546</b>	<b>-.025</b>	H2d	Exaggerated expectations
Beaches	CustSatisf		-.074	.487	-.270	.146	H2e	X
Gastr&Wine	CustSatisf		.132	.254	-.152	.368	H2f	X
Museums	CustSatisf		.120	.280	-.072	.376	H2g	X
Nature Act.	CustSatisf		.086	.448	-.083	.304	H2h	X
Value-for-€	CustSatisf		.253	.013	-.031	.438	H2i	X
Security	CustSatisf		-.143	.164	-.370	.030	H2j	X
Entertainment	CustSatisf		-.064	.532	-.247	.117	H2k	X
Health_Safety	CustSatisf		<b>.188</b>	<b>.074</b>	<b>.002</b>	.407	H2l	OK
R <sup>2</sup>								
		27%						
Hospitality		DestLoyalty	.257	.044	-.074	.590	-	-
Local_Info		DestLoyalty	<b>-.381</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>-.647</b>	<b>-.189</b>	-	-
Infrastructure		DestLoyalty	.101	.390	-.077	.363	-	-
Landscape		DestLoyalty	<b>.358</b>	<b>.018</b>	<b>.103</b>	<b>.766</b>	-	-
Beaches		DestLoyalty	-.106	.335	-.332	.127	-	-
Gastr&Wine		DestLoyalty	-.012	.918	-.308	.206	-	-
Museums		DestLoyalty	<b>-.256</b>	<b>.034</b>	<b>-.482</b>	<b>-.023</b>	-	-
Nature Act.		DestLoyalty	.029	.799	-.200	.247	-	-
Value-for-€		DestLoyalty	-.069	.518	-.359	.126	-	-
Security		DestLoyalty	-.128	.233	-.361	.094	-	-
Entertainment		DestLoyalty	<b>.329</b>	<b>.005</b>	<b>.149</b>	<b>.563</b>	-	-
Health_Safety		DestLoyalty	-.079	.467	-.346	.200	-	-
R <sup>2</sup>								
		21%						
Hospitality	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	<b>-.154</b>		<b>-.444</b>	<b>-.033</b>	H3a	Exaggerated expectations
Local_Info	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.068		-.012	.232	H3b	X
Infrastructure	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	<b>.099</b>		<b>.007</b>	<b>.266</b>	H3c	OK
Landscape	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	<b>-.145</b>		<b>-.475</b>	<b>-.028</b>	H3d	Exaggerated expectations
Beaches	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	-.038		-.171	.066	H3e	X
Gastr&Wine	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.067		-.016	.243	H3f	X
Museums	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.061		-.024	.315	H3g	X
Nature Act.	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.043		-.026	.234	H3h	X
Value-for-€	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	<b>.128</b>		<b>.011</b>	<b>.443</b>	H3i	OK
Security	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	-.072		-.306	.006	H3j	X
Entertainment	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	-.032		-.175	.046	H3k	X
Health_Safety	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	<b>.095</b>		<b>.009</b>	<b>.411</b>	H3l	OK
R <sup>2</sup>								
		41%						

Although not predicted in the hypotheses, the direct effects of expected image on customer satisfaction and destination loyalty may deserve attention. It is noteworthy that only a single relation (hospitality) was found to be significant when one considers the 95% Interval Confidence lower and upper bounds generated by the bootstrapping procedure. Curiously, the effect is negative which means that the higher the expected hospitality, the lower the resulting consumer satisfaction. It is important to consider that the expected hospitality departs from a relatively high value (ave=5.55, sd=1.32) although the experienced hospitality is even greater (ave=6.12, sd=1.06) which was found to be statistically different ( $t(178)=-5.933, p<.001$ ). As regards the direct effect of expected image on destination loyalty, findings show four cases of significant relations, namely: local tourism information ( $B=-.381, p<.01$  CI95 [-.697; -.133]), landscape ( $B=.358, p<.05$  CI95 [.024; .776]), museums ( $B=-.256, p<.05$  CI95 [-.600; -.003]), and health safety standards ( $B=.329, p<.01$  CI95 [.100; .609]).

As a preliminary analysis of hypothesis 4, it is worthwhile to contrast the expected image with the experienced image. Figure 4.2 shows the comparative means and table 4.4 the t-test for paired means.

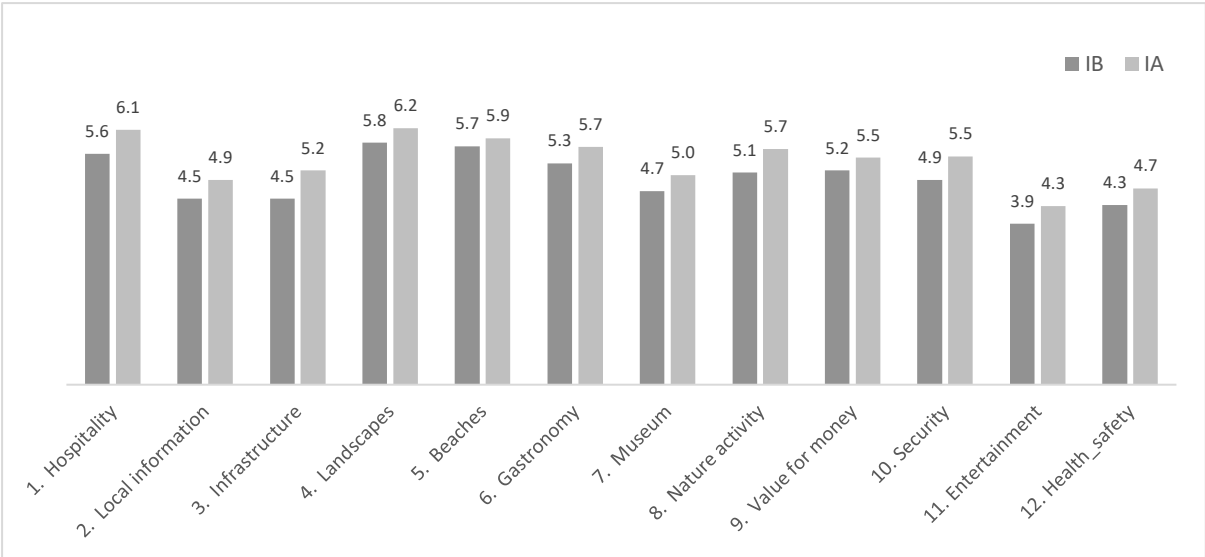


Figure 4.2 – Means for expected (IB) and experienced image (IA)

The tests show that all experienced images are more favorable than the original expectation, with higher reported means. Having this in mind, we will show findings pertaining to H4.

Table 4.4 – Expected vs. Experienced Image comparison

		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	Hospitality	.56983	1.28491	.09604	5.933	178	.000
Pair 2	Tourism Information	.45546	1.36407	.10196	4.467	178	.000
Pair 3	Infrastructure	.68185	1.15943	.08666	7.868	178	.000
Pair 4	Landscapes	.35754	1.32631	.09913	3.607	178	.000
Pair 5	Beaches	.18994	1.27980	.09566	1.986	178	.049
Pair 6	Gastronomy & Wine	.39106	1.35461	.10125	3.862	178	.000
Pair 7	Museums	.38742	1.28858	.09631	4.023	178	.000
Pair 8	Activity in Nature	.56983	1.39396	.10419	5.469	178	.000
Pair 9	Value for Money	.31844	1.30868	.09782	3.255	178	.001
Pair 10	Security	.57024	1.46512	.10951	5.207	178	.000
Pair 11	Entertainment	.41410	1.38980	.10388	3.986	178	.000
Pair 12	Health safety	.40603	1.09543	.08188	4.959	178	.000

The measurement model that comprehends all image gap items and the control variables has acceptable fit indices (CMIN/df=1.746,  $p < .001$ ; CFI=.93; RMSEA=.065 CI90[.054; .075], PClose=.011; SRMR=.052). The image gap model is depicted in Figure 4.3 showing all standardized coefficients.

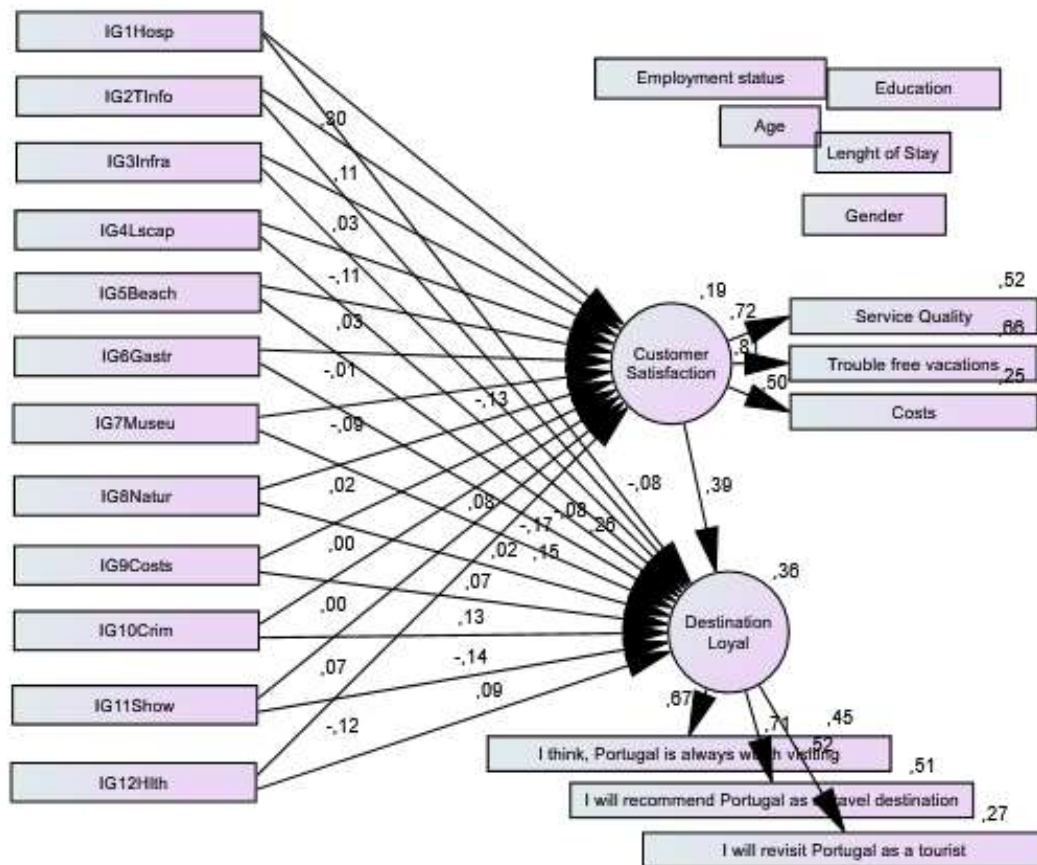


Figure 4.3 – Model for image gap (IG)

Table 4.5 shows the indirect effects for the model, where only two of statistically significant cases were found. As predicted, hospitality gap has a positive indirect effect on destination loyalty via customer satisfaction (.118, CI90[.032;.310]) thus supporting hypothesis 3a. Health safety showed a negative indirect effect (-.047, CI90[-.140;-.004]), which albeit being negative, also supports hypothesis 3l. However, health safety supports hypothesis 3l.

Table 4.5 – Direct and indirect effects for gap image model

Variable 1 Predictor	Variable 2 Mediator	Variable 3 Criterion	Effect (beta)	p	CI90 Lower bound	CI90 Upper bound	Hypothesis	Observ
	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	<b>.388</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.147</b>	<b>.731</b>	H1'	OK
R <sup>2</sup>		23.4%						
Gap_Hospitality	CustSatisf		<b>.303</b>	<b>.010</b>	<b>.007</b>	<b>.586</b>	H4a1	OK
Gap_Local_Info	CustSatisf		.113	.232	-.098	.303	H4a2	X
Gap_Infrastructure	CustSatisf		.027	.768	-.127	.189	H4a3	X
Gap_Landscape	CustSatisf		-.112	.258	-.260	.083	H4a4	X
Gap_Beaches	CustSatisf		.033	.730	-.135	.238	H4a5	X
Gap_Gastr&Wine	CustSatisf		-.012	.907	-.229	.211	H4a6	X
Gap_Museums	CustSatisf		-.094	.319	-.257	.065	H4a7	X
Gap_Nature Act.	CustSatisf		.023	.811	-.177	.178	H4a8	X
Gap_Value-for-€	CustSatisf		.003	.976	-.204	.214	H4a9	X
Gap_Security	CustSatisf		.000	.999	-.159	.163	H4a10	X
Gap_Entertainment	CustSatisf		.068	.438	-.065	.205	H4a11	X
Gap_Health_Safety	CustSatisf		<b>-.120</b>	<b>.173</b>	<b>-.270</b>	<b>-.001</b>	H4a12	X
R <sup>2</sup>		19.7%						
Gap_Hospitality		DestLoyalty	-.077	.527	-.423	.191	H4b1	X
Gap_Local_Info		DestLoyalty	<b>.256</b>	<b>.012</b>	<b>.080</b>	<b>.527</b>	H4b2	OK
Gap_Infrastructure		DestLoyalty	-.079	.401	-.292	.087	H4b3	X
Gap_Landscape		DestLoyalty	-.135	.187	-.414	.112	H4b4	X
Gap_Beaches		DestLoyalty	-.174	.086	-.386	.007	H4b5	X
Gap_Gastr&Wine		DestLoyalty	.154	.152	-.014	.408	H4b6	X
Gap_Museums		DestLoyalty	.081	.400	-.047	.261	H4b7	X
Gap_Nature Act.		DestLoyalty	.017	.860	-.199	.169	H4b8	X
Gap_Value-for-€		DestLoyalty	.072	.456	-.087	.255	H4b9	X
Gap_Security		DestLoyalty	.126	.208	-.024	.350	H4b10	X
Gap_Entertainment		DestLoyalty	-.141	.122	-.346	.002	H4b11	X
Gap_Health_Safety		DestLoyalty	-.086	.343	-.072	.265	H4b12	X
R <sup>2</sup>		24%						
Gap_Hospitality	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	<b>.118</b>		<b>.032</b>	<b>.310</b>	-	-
Gap_Local_Info	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.044		-.020	.206	-	-
Gap_Infrastructure	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.011		-.043	.096	-	-
Gap_Landscape	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	-.043		-.181	.011	-	-
Gap_Beaches	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.013		-.049	.107	-	-
Gap_Gastr&Wine	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	-.005		-.085	.101	-	-
Gap_Museums	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	-.036		-.155	.011	-	-
Gap_Nature Act.	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.009		-.073	.083	-	-
Gap_Value-for-€	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.001		-.078	.115	-	-
Gap_Security	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.000		-.063	.081	-	-
Gap_Entertainment	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	.026		-.013	.137	-	-
Gap_Health_Safety	CustSatisf	DestLoyalty	<b>-.047</b>		<b>-.140</b>	<b>-.004</b>	-	-
R <sup>2</sup>	19.4%	36.3%						

Note: Although the indirect effects involving image gap are not stated as hypotheses, we opted to show them for the sake of comprehensiveness.

As regards the direct effects, not previewed in the hypotheses, the positive association between hospitality gap and customer satisfaction (Beta=.303,  $p \leq .01$ , CI90[.007; .586]) is worth mentioning. In the case of health safety gap there is contradictory information as the confidence interval upper bound is barely close to zero and indeed the p value is well above the maximum acceptance level ( $p = .17$ ). Therefore, we have opted for a conservative decision and consider this a non-significant case. In predicting destination loyalty, a single case was found significant, namely local information gap which showed a positive association (Beta=.256,  $p < .05$ , CI90[.080;.527]).

As stated in the data analysis strategy section, hypothesis 4a and 4b was tested with hierarchical linear multiple regression. Findings are shown in table 4.6 for customer satisfaction and table 4.7 for destination loyalty.

Table 4.6 shows that image gap adds significantly to explained variance when accounting for customer satisfaction ( $F(12, 149) = 2.498$ ,  $p < .01$ ) with an increment of 12.6% over the previously explained variance. As there is no indication of variance inflation due to multicollinearity (all image gaps items'  $VIF < 5$ ), this finding supports H4a.

Table 4.6 - Hierarchical regression models for Destination Satisfaction

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
					R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change	df1	df2		
1	.248 <sup>a</sup>	.062	.034	.58965	.062	2.272	5	173	.049	
2	.497 <sup>b</sup>	.247	.167	.54755	.185	3.303	12	161	.000	
3	.611 <sup>c</sup>	.373	.251	.51932	.126	2.498	12	149	.005	2.019

a. Predictors: (Constant), Length, Education, Employment status, Gender, Age

b. Predictors: (Constant), Length, Education, Employment status, Gender, Age, IB7\_Museums, IB2\_Tourism Information, IB9\_Value for money, IB5\_Beaches, IB12\_Health safety, IB10\_Security, IB11\_Entertainment, IB6\_Gastronomy & Wines, IB8\_Activity in nature, IB3\_Infrastructures, IB1\_Hospitality, IB4\_Landscapes

c. Predictors: (Constant), Length, Education, Employment status, Gender, Age, IB7, IB2, IB9, IB5, IB12, IB10, IB11, IB6, IB8, IB3, IB1, IB4, IG12, IG7, IG5, IG4, IG2, IG10, IG11, IG3, IG9, IG8, IG6, IG1 (note: all gap variables match the corresponding IB number)

d. Dependent Variable: Destination Loyalty

Table 4.7 shows that image gap does not add significantly to explained variance when accounting for destination loyalty ( $F(12, 149) = 1.717$ ,  $p = .068$ ) which does not support H4b.

Table 4.7 - Hierarchical regression model for Destination Loyalty

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
					R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change	df1	df2		
1	.251 <sup>a</sup>	.063	.036	.30229	.063	2.333	5	173	.044	
2	.388 <sup>b</sup>	.150	.061	.29840	.087	1.379	12	161	.181	
3	.504 <sup>c</sup>	.254	.108	.29074	.103	1.717	12	149	.068	1.830

a. Predictors: (Constant), Length, Education, Employment status, Gender, Age

b. Predictors: (Constant), Length, Education, Employment status, Gender, Age, IB7\_Museums, IB2\_Tourism information, IB9\_Value for money, IB5\_Beaches, IB12\_Health safety, IB10\_Security, IB11\_Entertainment, IB6\_Gastronomy & Wines, IB8\_Activity in nature, IB3\_Infrastructures, IB1\_Hospitality, IB4\_Landscapes

c. Predictors: (Constant), Length, Education, Employment status, Gender, Age, IB7, IB2, IB9, IB5, IB12, IB10, IB11, IB6, IB8, IB3, IB1, IB4, IG12, IG7, IG5, IG4, IG2, IG10, IG11, IG3, IG9, IG8, IG6, IG1 (note: all gap variables match the corresponding IB number)

d. Dependent Variable: Destination Loyalty





## 5 Discussion of results and conclusions

The motivation for this study originated from the diverse options of researchers as regards using expected image (before) or experienced image (after), as predictors of both customer satisfaction and destination loyalty. Both options are acceptable, as they are based on different reasonings as regards to what matters the most in choosing a destination: expectations (that attract) or experience (that retains and may diffuse image). However, there is a research gap concerning their relative value because an over-expectation may indeed attract customers, although it can be counter-productive in terms of loyalty if the experience falls short from initial expectation. Thus, the study was designed to answer the following question: does destination image gap have a predictive capacity, above and beyond expected destination image, in explaining both customer satisfaction and destination loyalty? Our reasoning was that, in case image gap is able to account for variance in both customer satisfaction and destination loyalty over and above the variance explained by expected image, then image gap would have incremental validity, i.e. it accounts for unique variance and thus should be taken into consideration in this line of research.

The survey of German tourists having visited Portugal for the first time in the last 24 months was successfully conducted and significant results were obtained, which were considered adequate for answering the question that was established as the purpose of this work. This answer has an empirical nature by targeting a sample of German tourists, that represent a strategic touristic inbound market for Portugal.

The preliminary analysis of the results revealed several findings worth mentioning. The even distribution in education levels shows that Portugal can attract tourists with distinct education backgrounds. The sample was mostly answered by people from Bavaria, North-Rhine Westphalia, Lower Saxony and Hesse. This can be explained by the fact that these are among the most populated federal states of Germany. The Algarve was noted as the most visited destination in Portugal, followed by the two largest cities of the country, Lisbon and Porto. This denotes that Portugal is considered mainly as a beach and cultural destination by Germans.

The high number of respondents that stayed 10 or more days may be explained by the fact that Germans do have longer holidays than many other countries, and that German tourists who had a positive satisfaction in Portugal felt more inclined to answer to an online survey. Also, more than 50% of the surveyed people were over 51 years old, who tend to vacate longer.

It was found that, when intending to learn about a possible destination in Portugal, German tourists resorted mainly to non-printed (i.e. online) and non-official information sources than to traditional and more official ones. This is certainly due to the rise of the influence of digital media and, in particular, of social media in tourism (Királ'ová & Pavlíčka, (2015) on people's everyday lives.

As regards image gap, the first relevant finding was the consistent positive difference between experienced image and expected image, meaning a positive gap and therefore a positive experience in Portugal. In Figure 4.2 it is possible to note that German tourists arrive to Portugal with a higher than average expectation but leave the country with an improved image of it in each of the 12 analyzed components. This is worth noting and means that Portugal is not “over-sold” by online and offline media, therefore attracting tourists with a fair amount of expectations. Allowing a positive image gap is vital, so that dissatisfaction has low chance of damaging the experience of the tourist, with the goal of rendering him a loyal one.

The contrast found for correlations between e-WOM in creating negative expectations as regards destination image (hospitality, landscape and gastronomy), with absent correlation with any destination experience items, together with the positive correlation between expected destination image and satisfaction, may be attributed to the negative bias in leaving electronic evaluations online.

The country can profit from leveraging the already positive association between experienced infrastructural quality and health safety, as it is now gaining a critical role in destination choice due to the COVID-19 crisis, and not forgetting the average age most German tourists.

The conceptual model that was implemented reflected this rationale by incorporating four hypotheses, namely: i) the positive relation between customer satisfaction and destination loyalty (H1); ii) the positive relation between expected destination image and customer satisfaction (H2); iii) the mediator role of customer satisfaction in linking expected image to destination loyalty (H3), and; iv) the incremental validity of image gap controlling for the variance accounted by expected image in both variables implied in the conceptual model, namely customer satisfaction (H4a) and destination loyalty (H4b). This model was also controlled for socio-demographic variables.

Findings fully supported the first hypothesis, meaning that satisfaction directly and positively affects destination loyalty, which is in line with many studies, e.g. Alegre and Cladera (2006), Alegre and Garau (2010), Appiah-Adu, Fyall, and Singh, (2000), Baker and Crompton (2000), Bigné, Sánchez, and Sánchez (2001), Caneel (2003), Kozak and Rimmington (2000), Kozak (2001, 2003), and Yoon and Uysal (2005). This is quite an expectable finding, which echoes knowledge almost taken for granted.

A more surprising result concerned the second hypothesis, as it was only supported in the case of health safety expected image. Findings show two cases that have negative coefficients, namely, hospitality and landscape. We interpret these cases as results from too high expectations formed before the visit. Offering support to this interpretation, both hospitality and landscape are among the highest three values for expected image. Still, these same elements have the highest means for experienced image. To further discuss these findings, one should mind the nature of averages when comparing expected with experience image. They will show an overall figure, but they should not be interpreted without consideration for variable dispersion. Therefore, the same mean difference can

be found for a homogeneous pattern as well as for a heterogeneous pattern where individuals holding the less favorable expectation could be those that change the most their evaluation when reporting experienced image. Thus, the standard deviation should be considered when interpreting these results. The obtained values of the standard deviation are relatively high in all destination image elements (e.g. confront the 1.20 - 1.50 range with the 0.30 of destination loyalty), thus precluding certainties about a possible effect of unrealistic expectations (Pereira, 2015). Future studies may benefit from segmenting individuals into low or high expectation-experience groups.

The third hypotheses received partial support from the analysis done, with five, out of the 12 possible effects, found to be significant. Such was the case of infrastructure, value-for-money and health safety, and this is corroborated by Mandić (2018), Williams and Soutar (2009) and Richter and Richter (1999). From these results we concluded that the higher the expected image of German tourists regarding these three factors, the higher the satisfactions, ultimately leading to loyalty towards Portugal. Because data collection for this study in the literature took place before the COVID-19 crisis, this particular finding pertaining to health safety is of special importance. In line with Moreno-González et al. (2020), health safety must now, more than ever, be seen as a critical element of quality service. The COVID-19 outbreak is already having severe consequences for international tourism. Therefore, countries whose economy heavily depends on tourism must adapt and improve their health standards. This has already started in Portugal in order to guarantee safe tourism establishments. Alongside with these findings, a replica of previous negative indirect effects occurred, as was found for the second hypothesis. The previous discussion about such effects applies in this hypothesis, and so will not be repeated.

Hypothesis 4a received support for only 1 item, namely hospitality, where the direct effect of hospitality image gap on customer satisfaction is confirmed. This means that a positive gap in hospitality image corresponds to a positive satisfaction. Therefore, the more the hospitality of the country positively differs from the expected, the higher the level of satisfaction by German tourists. Hypothesis 4b also received support for only 1 item. In this case, the available local tourism information image gap has a positive direct influence on destination loyalty. This means that, if there is more local tourism information available on site, the levels of loyalty from German tourists for Portugal will increase.

Besides the tests done to the four hypothesis, additional analyses of the results were done. In testing the image gap capacity to explain destination loyalty via customer satisfaction, only two cases were found to match the expected hypothesis 2. Such was the case of hospitality, which returned a positive indirect effect together with a positive direct effect, thus suggesting mediation is a partial one, because both variance paths are significant. This can be interpreted as a positive consequence of tourists being positively surprised by the hospitality they experienced when contrasted with their

initial expectation. Indeed, the mean for experienced hospitality is statistically higher than the expected hospitality.

A surprising result occurred for the indirect effect of health safety gap to destination loyalty via customer satisfaction. The negative effect can be explained by the fact that the indirect effect is the product of both direct effects of image gap upon customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction upon destination loyalty. However, coherently with the initial decision to rule out the eventual significance of the direct effect of health safety gap in customer satisfaction, due to contradiction between p-value and bootstrapped intervals, it was concluded that this finding for the indirect effect was an unreliable, precisely for the true magnitude of the relationship of the aforementioned direct effect not being clear. Still, in the unlikely case that such an effect is not a coincidence, we would interpret such negative effect as nonsensical, especially because the mean gap is positive.

This study denotes that destination image gap is an important variable to consider. There are destination image items worth to analyse separately, given that some significant correlations were found.

Finally, it can be concluded that the study provided results with some robustness and that it is a contribution to the theoretical approach to the impact of image gap on destination loyalty. Despite the temporal coincidence of the survey with COVID-19 and the potential impact it will still have for a long time on the hospitality and tourism industry, this study will also contribute to enable this industry in Portugal, to identify the aspects in which an improvement can maximize satisfaction and, consequently, the loyalty of German customers.

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